



Lest We Forget

by Bob Roger

Lest We Forget is a series of short articles, each about a tool or implement that was once a common household, farm, or trade necessity, but whose use or existence may soon be forgotten.

Plasterer's Tile Marker

You will not see this little hand tool very often unless you are in the home restoration business. It is quite similar in size to several of my race knives/timber scribes, but it is a plasterer's tile marker. The 'blade' is 2 3/8 inches long and cuts a groove 1/8 inch wide. The shank is stamped "GOLDBLATT TOOL CO. KANSAS CITY MO."

The H. Goldblatt Tool Company has been in business since 1885, making masonry, cement, tile, and wallboard tools. Goldblatt began advertising in the monthly journal of the Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers' International Union of America at least as early as 1910, and continued advertising there through 1917. From January 1914 thru January 1916, they ran a large ad that showed several of their tools including this Plasterers Tile Marker for imitation tile work. But in February 1916 they changed the ad and did not show the tool anymore. This would indicate that the tool probably dates to the 1914 – 1916 time frame.

I found two patents for replaceable-blade tile markers (959,269 on May 24, 1910 and 1,062,945 on May 27, 1913) but none for this fixed-blade marker. Because of its similarity to the blades used on race knives and turpentine hacks (which were in common use then), there probably is no specific patent for this marker.

Many walls in early homes were finished with plaster-of-Paris, a fast-setting compound consisting mostly of gypsum rock combined with several additives. However, when a really hard and highly polished surface was desired, the finish coat was Keene's cement. Keene's cement is similar to plaster-of-Paris without additives, but is soaked in an alum solution and then recalcined, resulting in a slow-drying plaster that is very hard, glossy, and can be washed or painted without injury. It is especially suited for the lower part of bath room walls. It was in use as early as 1842.

Well-to-do folks often had their bathrooms tiled but that was too expensive for most people. Another approach at only a fraction of the cost of tile was to apply Keene's cement, wait 12 to 14 hours after completing the plastering, and then cut sharply defined lines into the plaster to resemble the edges of tile. This faux tile approach for lower cost walls in bathrooms was quite popular during the early 1900s.

The tile marker was used to cut the 'tile' lines in the Keene's cement. Some older homes still have these faux tile bathrooms, so let us not forget the tool that created them.



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