

1865 Was A Very Busy Year For Henry Disston

By Bob Garay

The year of 1865 brought many changes to the saws made by Henry Disston. It was during this year that he started to use acid etching to mark his logo and model number on his saw plates. Before this they were struck and stamped into the steel plate. This was often tricky as making sure the stamp was struck evenly and hard enough to



leave a neat even mark was often not easy. Disston was probably the first saw manufacturer to acid etch his saws. Etching allowed a more elaborate marking and in some cases very elaborate designs. Think of the "Victory Saw" etch with the eagle carrying the Liberty Bell. Thus, starting in 1865 Disston saws were etched to allow buyers and others to know who the maker of the fine saw was and model number. Other information like steel quality - attributes, (Cast Steel, Spring Steel, London Spring, Patent Ground), were added as well as warranted and his "Keystone" logo.

Along with the etch saw makers used medallions to mark their saws with maker information. Henry Disston in the mid 1840's started to use cast brass medallions with an eagle cast into the center and his name above and location below. This design was used for about twenty years until 1865.



It was also in 1865 that Henry Disston's eldest son, Hamilton, returned from serving in the Union Army during the Civil War. He had worked in the factory before this time learning saw making from the bottom up. Thus in 1865 he joined his father's company in a leadership role and the company name was changed to Henry Disston & Son. Thus the etch on the saws and the medallions had to be changed to represent this company name change. Thus the etch and the medallion now read Henry Disston & Son.

But these changes took time and there is no definitive timeline on exactly when the different etches and medallions were applied and offered to the buyer. This makes it tricky for today's collector who wants to date a Disston saw they have found. As during 1865 there were many changes made and existing inventory of saw plates and older medallions had to be used up before new ones would be used.



Photos above show a saw that is from 1865. A No. 7 saw that has a Henry Disston & Son etch but with a H. Disston eagle medallion. Thus here is a case in 1865 when they were using up the older H. Disston medallions on the newer Henry Disston & Son saws.

Sometimes I find a saw that has a Henry Disston & Son etch with a medallion that has a Henry Disston maker mark without the "Son" included. Thus here they were using up the older medallions with the newer saw plates when Hamilton joined the Company.

Now to make matters more interesting there was a short time when they added the "Son" name to the medallion and kept the eagle logo. This was a very short time frame as later in 1865 they redesigned the medallion leaving off the eagle and adding the Disston keystone logo. (See below.)

Thus as you can see for the collector who wants to date a saw to a specific time period it may not be easy. As Dis-



Above left is eagle medallion with H. Disston & Son. Right is new medallion Keystone medallion with H. Disston & Son.

ston was making many changes in 1865, as his son Hamilton joined the business. And often old stock was mixed with newer stock to use up inventory. Of course that is what makes antique tool collecting so interesting and fun.

Thanks to Erik von Sneidern and his website - The Disstonian Institute at - <http://www.disstonianinstitute.com/> for information and some photos. Early saws made by Disston and others, including this time frame and earlier can be purchased by emailing me at - Takeadip@optonline.net or at my eBay store - www.ebay.com/str/takeadiptools.