

From the Collections



In the last issue of *The Tustenegee* I discussed the Society's collecting process. This time I thought I would share a recent interesting accession, the David Lett collection of pioneer-era gadgetry.

A native New Yorker, David Lett retired to Palm Beach County and began collecting gadgets

manufactured from the late 1880s through the turn of twentieth century. Scouring second-hand and antiques stores from Miami to Titusville, David built an impressive collection of things, especially those that crank by hand.

Pictured at right, the 'American Meat and Vegetable Chopper,' circa 1890, is an early version of the food processor. Unlike a meat grinder that tears and rips what is fed into it, the bowl rotates while the chopping blade moves up and down dicing the bowl's contents.

An advertisement card for this device claimed that the ingredients for a Christmas mince meat pie could be prepared in only four minutes. The same product card stresses its 'indispensable' functionality for hotels, restaurants, and others in the food service business. The manufacturer is not identified.

The 'chopper' has no manufacturer's markings or patent numbers. Identification was made by comparing it to similar devices in the online collections at other institutions. The sole known distributor was *Jackson and Sons*, located in Bath, Maine. Bath at that time was an important ship building center.

How this food chopper made its way to an antiques store in South Florida is a mystery.

This "New England" style sewing machine is typical of those manufactured during the 1870s. A number of companies produced slightly different versions of this very popular design characterized by a "walking pressure foot," which moved fabric along from above rather than from below.

While this particular sewing machine has no manufacturer or other markings, its open face design and floral paintwork most resemble *The American* model created by James Galloway Weir and manufactured by Charles Raymond in Guelph, Canada, beginning in 1871.

These and more than a dozen other pieces were included in this accession. We thank David Lett for his unique collection and its donation to the Society.

Steven Erdmann is Curator of Collections and Exhibits. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in cultural anthropology and an Master of Arts in museum studies. Mr. Erdmann has worked with museum collections, both in the private and non-profit sectors, for over twenty years.



The American Meat and Vegetable Chopper, ca. 1890. Top: side view; bottom: top view of chopper. #2009/062.004



New England style Weir sewing machine, ca. 1870s. #2009/062.002