

# THE TOOL TABLE

The Newsletter of the Richmond Antique Tool Society

VOLUME 15, No. 1

APRIL 2009

**Next meeting  
Friday April 17**

## **Agenda**

All times are approximate

**6:00-7:00 p.m. Tool talk & sales**

**7:00-7:15 p.m. General meeting**

**7:15-8:00 p.m. Guest Presenter**

**John Larrimore:**

**Violin Making**

**8:00-8:15 p.m. Prepare for  
auction**

**8:15-9:00 p.m. Donation auction**

**9:00-10:00 p.m. Tool  
sales/wrap-up**



VIOLIN MAKER'S PLANES

**THE TOOL TABLE is the official publication of the Richmond Antique Tool Society and is published bi-monthly, in approximately January, March, May, June, August and November of each year.**

**Editor & Layout.....Bill Taggart  
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## The President's Plane Talk

I was up by 2:30 a.m. and ready to go to PATINA. I decided to move my tool laden '94 Suburban to the front of the house, so Jim Hollins could see that I was ready when he arrived for our 3:00 a.m. departure. As I pulled forward from the back gravel drive to the front, something didn't seem right with the truck. Was my parking brake on? A flat tire? There in the cold dark morning mist, my long anticipated tool day began – with my front left tire flatter than a pancake! Damn! Jim arrived as I was pulling out toolbox after toolbox, just to access the spare tire. I kicked it into high gear. I felt as if I was a member of a NASCAR pit crew. My wife even came out to help and join the fun. She could hear me saying a few choice words as I pulled the spare tire, jack and wrench out after slamming toolboxes to the gravel. Jim offered moral support and my wife held the flashlight. I timed the pit stop. 12 minutes, ten frozen fingers and one quick pit stop to clean my hands and collect my thoughts. By the time we reached I-95, I had calmed down. We got to Damascus by 5 a.m. (no speeding tickets) to see the parking lot filling up with lots of outside dealers. Needless to say, it was a great day seeing tons of tools, old friends and fellow RATS. In my humble opinion, any day around old tools is a great day.

Changing gears (and not tires), our next meeting is Friday, April 17th. We have a great meeting planned with a return presentation (ten years ago) by John Larrimore, a musical instrument maker. John's bio is inside the newsletter. We look forward to seeing his tools and gaining knowledge about this craft. We will hold a tool auction after his presentation and members can bring up to 10 tools to auction at no fee. This should be a very well attended meeting and I hope to see all RATS there. A special shout out to Bob Ziegler and Jean-Marie for the BBQ at our last meeting. It was very much appreciated and quickly consumed. Willie Adams, thanks again for the cakes, pies, cheese and bread too!!!

RATS - a special group of folks talking, trading, selling, collecting and buying antique tools for 14 years. Thank you and see YOU, April 17th. Come and stimulate the tool economy after your April 15th tax rebate. I need a STIMULUS. How about YOU?

Plane and Simple,  
Rick Long

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Richmond Antique Tool Society  
 c/o Mike Larkin  
 9487 Williamsville Road  
 Mechanicsville, VA 23116

**Officers**

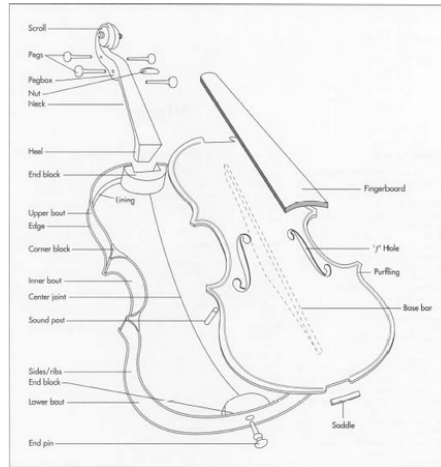
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To receive THE TOOL TABLE  
 and RATS announcements  
 via e-mail, contact:  
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**Guest Presenter – John Larrimore**

Master Violin Maker; in business 23 years.

- Apprenticed 8 years with Charles Shopland for violin family restoration and building in the Italian tradition.
- Was the subject of the 1993 book “The Master Violin Maker” published by Houghton and Mifflin, a young person’s guide to violin building.
- Clients have included members of the Richmond Symphony, the Richmond Philharmonic, Shanghai Quartet, Dave Mathews Band, Seldom Scene, Tony Rice Unit, Emmylou Harris and many other professional, students, and amateur musicians.
- Has appeared on all three local television stations, WCVE public radio, and PBS’s “Treasures in Your Attic”.
- Has given lectures and demos to many local groups and schools including VCU and University of Richmond.
- Resident violin maker for the Virginia State Fair since 1989.



**RATS Calendar 2009**

April 17th	RATS Meeting	Pocahontas Middle School, 12000 Three Chopt Rd.
June 5th	RATS Meeting	Pocahontas Middle School, 12000 Three Chopt Rd.
July 25th	MWTCA Meet	Ed Hobbs’ Farm, Raleigh, NC

H. D. SMITH & CO., PLANTSVILLE, CT  
MAKERS OF THE "PERFECT HANDLE" LINE OF TOOLS  
By Bill Taggart

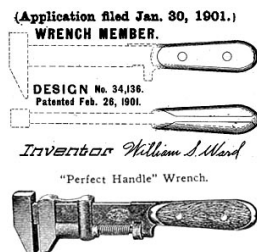
Unfortunately, "Perfect Handle" has become a bit like "Kleenex". People often describe any tool with wooden handles as a Perfect Handle tool. But "true" Perfect Handle tools were made only by H. D. Smith & Co., in Plantsville, Connecticut.

Mr. Henry D. Smith, along with G. F. Smith, E. W. Twitchell, W. S. Ward, and E. P. Hotchkiss organized H. D. Smith & Co in 1850. The company originally made carriage hardware in a factory located at 24 West St. in Plantsville, on the Eight Mile River, which provided power for the plant. This photo was taken in 1870:



The building became a landmark and the company's executives became wealthy and known in Plantsville and neighboring Southington. Booker T. Washington wrote in his diary on May 1, 1882 that he visited Plantsville and called on Mr. H. D. Smith at "8½ p.m." Mr. Washington was raising donations for the Tuskegee, Alabama "Normal School" and hoped Mr. Smith would contribute. Mr. Washington wrote that Mr. Smith "rec'd me more kindly than I had ever been by any white man" and that Mr. Smith was "a very cheerful old man" who "gives all his income for charitable objects." A New York Times article dated August 1, 1888 indicates that Mr. H. D. Smith sought the nomination of the Connecticut Prohibitionists Party for Governor of Connecticut.

Between 1900 and 1901, two employees, Amos Shepard and William S. Ward, obtained three patents: Shepard's No. D33,468 (Oct. 30, 1900) for forging the handle of a nut wrench, Shepard's 666,029 (Jan. 15, 1901), which included reinforcing within the forged handle, and William Ward's D34,136 (Feb. 26, 1901) relating to the handle. These three patents formed the basis for the Perfect Handle tools.



By 1910 the company was making high-quality forgings and tools rather than carriage hardware. Perfect Handle tools

consisted of a high-quality forging with wooden handles "riveted on, locked in under pressure [using a large press], and waterproofed."

On October 31, 1910 fire broke out in the factory building, which was constructed of wood. The fire was catastrophic and totally destroyed the entire plant.



According to one account, the president of the company, L. V. Walkley, did not even wait for the insurance adjuster, but immediately set up the company in a vacant "bag shop" down the road. He was so successful in maintaining production that the company voted its usual dividends at the annual meeting in March 1911 – only four months after the total loss of the manufacturing plant. The company then moved into a brand new building built of brick and steel later in 1911.



A reprint of the company's 1920 catalog shows a full line of tools under the "Perfect Handle" name. Other names claimed as trademarks include "SharpenEzy" cold chisels, cape chisels and punches, "Gittatit" offset slip-joint pliers, "Enchased" joint slot-cutting pliers, and the "Ultimate" valve spring lifter. The common and familiar Perfect Handle screwdriver appears first in the catalog, with the butt end of the handle marketed as a "hammer head" for starting screw points into wood. Although these screwdrivers are very common, many of the other tools shown in the catalog are more rare and all are highly sought after by collectors.

In 1930, Trimont Mfg. Co. took over the Perfect Handle line after H. D. Smith & Co. failed, an early victim of the Great Depression. Trimont produced the same wrenches for a while, but apparently did not produce the Perfect Handle screwdrivers and automotive tools.

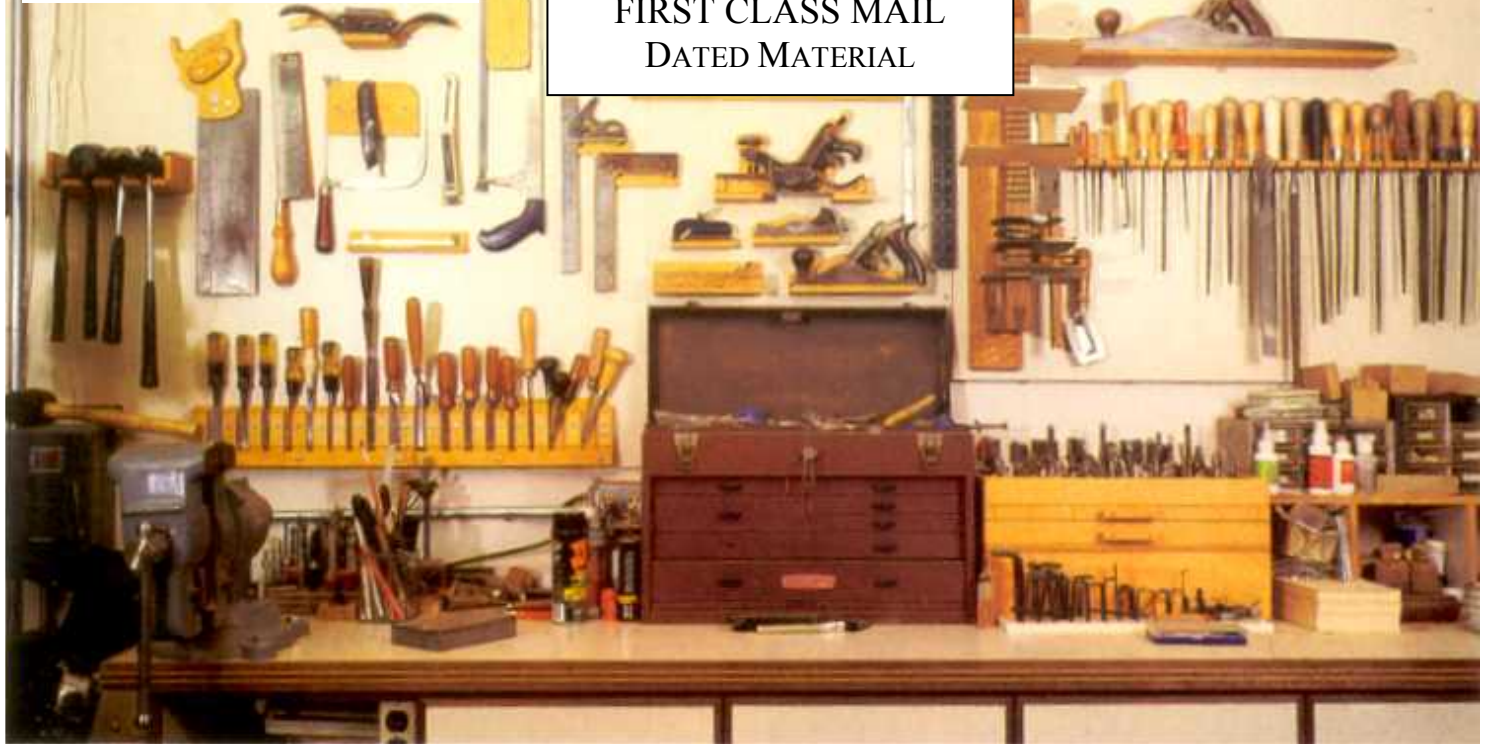
You might find more recently manufactured screwdrivers looking exactly like H. D. Smith & Co.'s Perfect Handle screwdrivers with the "Irwin" name stamped on the shank. You might also find a variation, slightly different in shape (flatter and less rounded), marked "Made in Germany". These are not true Perfect Handle tools but typically are described as such anyway.

The H. D. Smith & Co. building in Plantsville at 24 West St. was added to the National Register of Historic Places on September 19, 1977.



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