

Historical Society of the Township of Chatham

Newsletter

May 2015

The Historical Society of the Township of Chatham was established to increase knowledge, awareness and preservation of Township history.

Officers

Co-Presidents: Pat Wells &
Martha Wells
Vice President: Sarah Stanley
Secretary: Linda Pitney
Treasurer: Ken Hetrick

Museum Co-Directors

Debbie Bucuk & Sheila Goggins

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From our Co-Presidents:

We recently watched the PBS *Treasures of New York* program on the New York Historical Society. One of the things that impressed us was that beginning in its earliest years the museum asked people to donate not only historical items, but also current documents and artifacts that would become historical items. Having done this for more than 200 years, you can imagine the vastness and breath of their collection.

Our collection is certainly more limited and its intent is not as broad as that of the New York Historical Society. But we also need to continue to collect, especially photographs and remembrances. The Red Brick Schoolhouse Museum has captured the everyday life in the Township from a while before to about halfway through the twentieth century. We would love to have more photographs from that period and all the way into the 1970s. What kinds of photos? Photos of everyday life, special events, houses and buildings (especially those that are gone), school activities, social activities, all of the things that make a community what it is.

We can scan your photos and return them to you. Or you can make us prints or electronic copies. We would like to have as much information about your photographs as you can provide. Feel free to share your remembrances with us.

So, if you have a little time this spring or summer and you are moved to rummage through your boxes of photos, please think about sharing them with the Chatham Township Historical Society. You may not think that your photos and remembrances are worth much, but in another 25 or 50 years they will be revealing the Chatham Township of today to someone who will be thrilled to see it.

You can contact us through the website to make arrangements to share your treasures. You can also leave a message on the Museum answering machine, which is checked on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Please help us record our own generation of history.

Pat and Martha Wells

FISHAWACK FESTIVAL

Saturday, June 13

Stop by the Chatham Twp.
Historical Society tents!

PROGRAMS

Sunday, May 17 2 PM

Chatham Township Municipal Building
58 Meyersville Road

Edgar Holden, M.D.
of Newark and Chatham:

Local Physician on a National Stage

Speaker: Sandra W. Moss, M.D.

Upon graduation from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, Edgar Holden entered the Union Navy as a medical officer. He witnessed the Battle of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack (Virginia)* and participated in other engagements during the war. Following the Civil War, he became a prominent Newark physician. His summer residence was at 55 Southern Boulevard in Chatham Township.

All Welcome

Sunday, June 7 5 PM

Red Brick Schoolhouse
Corner of Fairmount Ave. & Southern Blvd.

Picnic

Please bring a main dish, salad or dessert to share with others. The Historical Society will provide Kentucky Fried Chicken and drinks.

CTHS Members and their Guests

Saturday, June 13 10 AM—4 PM

FISHAWACK

A fun day for Chatham residents!

Stop by the Chatham Township Historical Society location—view the historic 1845 Littell map of the Chatham area—play the artifacts guessing game—see a large array of antique farm equipment.

Sunday, September 20 2 PM

Bottle Hill/Hillside Cemetery
158 Main Street, Madison (entrance gate located across Main St. from Madison Junior School)

Rain Date: Sunday, September 27 at 2 PM.

***Tour of Madison's
Bottle Hill/Hillside Cemetery***

Tour Guide: Robert Garman

Established circa 1749 by the original Presbyterian Meeting House, many of the area's earliest residents lie in this cemetery including nine Revolutionary War veterans and various Noe family members.

Robert Garman is an Elder and Trustee of the Madison Presbyterian Church and administers the Hillside Cemetery. At the time the cemetery was begun, the town was known as Bottle Hill becoming Madison about 100 years later.

CTHS Members and their Guests

Wednesday, October 21

Annual Meeting and Dinner

Meyersville Inn

632 Meyersville Road, Gillette

6:00 PM Cocktails—6:30 PM Dinner

7:30 PM Program

***The Forgotten Revolution:
New Jersey Places of the American Revolution
Neglected by History***

Speaker: Robert Mayers

Mr. Mayers' talk will focus on the battlefields, encampments and sites of many critical events of the American Revolution that have been lost or neglected by history. Many of the sites were places where our forefathers fought and died, but are unmarked, shrouded in mystery, distorted by mythology or unknown to local residents. Mr. Mayers is noted for his book, *The War Man*, which follows an ancestor who fought all eight years of the Revolutionary War.

CTHS Members and their Guests

In Memorium

by Pat Wells

Last February we lost a long-time leader and friend, Don Engesser. Don was a great lover of history and a happy man. He and his wife, Sylvia, were associated with the Chatham Township Historical Society for decades, with Don serving as president or vice-president from 1996-2009 and trustee from 2010 to 2012. He was an avid researcher and promoter of history and helped start the historic marker program. Don supported the Historical Society in another very important way. He donated many hours of volunteer time. At the end of each year the total hours were added up and submitted to his former employer, Exxon. A few months later the Historical Society would receive a check for \$2000. This annual corporate donation was a major source of income for our organization.

Don's health forced him to retire from activities in 2013, but he left the Historical Society in excellent shape. Of particular importance, he made sure we had the recipe for the "holiday punch" which Martha and I have been making for the holiday party in his absence. I'm sure he would be tickled to be remembered that way.

In March, Peter Fondaco passed away. He had been a member for a number of years. We send our condolences to his wife, Celeste, and his family.

We learned in December that another of our long-time members, Roland Johnson, had passed away. Roland was a member for decades and served as a trustee from 2002 to 2007. He served on the program committee from 2004 to 2011 and helped to provide the membership with a terrific array of speakers. Our sympathies go out to his wife, Nancy Vroom Johnson, and his family.

Thank You to Museum Docents

Thank you to these members who have been docents on Sunday afternoons at the Museum: Pat Wells; Sally and Jerry Walker; Kathy Havens; Caroline and Bob Knott; Gibson Knott; Sue Moore.

Edgar Holden, M.D. Of Newark and Chatham: Local Physician on a National Stage

Our speaker on May 17th is Sandra W. Moss who is a retired internist and has a masters degree in the history of medicine from Rutgers University. Her interests center on 19th century medicine and the medical history of New Jersey. She recently completed a new book, *Edgar Holden, M.D. of Newark: Provincial Physician on a National Stage*.

Upon graduation in 1861 from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, Edgar Holden entered the Union Navy as a surgeon during the Civil War. He witnessed the Battle of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimack (Virginia)* and subsequently served as medical officer on the *Passaic*, the Union's second monitor-class ironclad.

Later he became a prominent Newark physician. Dr. Holden was an early specialist in laryngology, served for 39 years as the medical director for a national life insurance company, used his wide-ranging talents in writing, sketching and painting and, in retirement, summered at 55 Southern Boulevard.



Helen and Dr. Edgar Holden in the garden of their Southern Boulevard house, circa 1900. William B. Birdsall Collection

Willie Meiele and His "School Buses"

by Pat Wells

While researching the history of the Red Brick Schoolhouse in our archives, several names kept coming up: several teachers, George Osborne (the supervising principal) and Willie Meiele, the driver of the "bus".

Willie was a life-long resident. His father, Fred Meiele, had come to Chatham Township not long after he immigrated from Germany in 1872. His mother, Katie Piker (or Peucker in German), was born and raised in Chatham. Her widowed father and brothers still lived in the area.

Katie and Fred married in 1879 and their marriage certificate hangs in the museum. It is interesting to see that in the early days names (especially those with non-English sounds or letters) were prone to variable spellings. The couple spelled their name Miley on the certificate and on early New Jersey and Federal Censuses. But they also spelled it Meiele, which in later years they settled upon.

Willie was the oldest of six children. He was born in 1880 and baptized in the German Presbyterian Church in Meyersville. On his baptismal certificate, which hangs in the museum, he has been named Heinrich Wilhelm Meiele. Although on the 1880 Federal Census, the four-month-old baby was called Henry and then by the 1885 New Jersey Census he was called William and a younger brother was named Henry Frederick. Willie's siblings included: Lulu (1881-1917); Henry (1886-1974); Rudolph (1890-1969); Alfred (1893-1909); Elise (1895-1976).

The family originally lived on Livingston Farm at the foot of Cedar Lane in what became Country Club Estates (*see also the article in April 2014 newsletter*). According to a caption on the back of a photo donated by Elsie Meiele, the family moved "up the hill" in 1896 and built a large house. Notes on another photo indicate that during some period of time the family took in boarders.

The family's property lay near the corner of Meyersville Road and Fairmount Avenue (originally called Long Hill Road). Both Fred and Willie were farmers their whole lives, farming until a few days before they died, each in their

80s. Katie lived into her 80s as well, but was wheelchair-ridden for the last 20 years of her life as the result of a carriage accident. It was a daughter, Elsie, who would have taken over running the house after the 1921 accident. The elder daughter, Lulu, had died in 1917 and all of the boys, except for Willie, were gone from the house. Alfred had died at age 15 in 1909. Henry and Rudolph had married in 1914 and 1915 and moved into their own homes. Neither went into farming.

Beside farming, Willie was involved in another enterprise. For many years he provided transportation for students who lived at the far southern reaches of the Mount Vernon School District. According to a letter from a former student, Elsie Rohrig Sheldrick who attended the Mount Vernon School from 1918-1923, she first rode to school in a horse-drawn wagon. This was a surprise, she wrote, "since I had previously attended a city school" before moving to the Township in 1918. In his oral history, Gus Furneld, another Mount Vernon student, said "to start off you had a team of horses and that's how you got to school. So if you got a little bit cold, you jumped off and ran a little bit." Elsie Rohrig wrote, "I think it was the following year [1919] that the wagon was replaced by a truck—a plank down each side provided seating."

Gus Furneld gave the museum two photos that his mother took of the "bus" in 1920. He wrote, "This truck was a Maxwell 4-cylinder engine, no starter, solid rubber tires, oft time stuck in the mud en route." These photos can be seen at the museum in the Red Brick Schoolhouse display on the second floor. In her oral history, long-time teacher Margaret Belcher said the "bus" could be heard coming from half a mile away because of the hard rubber tires and the flapping curtains.

Gus Furneld also recounted that the truck had "a canvas over it, open in the back and open in the front." He noted that the mud in the

(*Willie Meiele and His "School Buses"*
continued on p. 6.)

*(Willie Meiele and His "School Buses" continued
from p. 5.)*

springtime became nearly impassable along Long Hill Road (Fairmount Avenue south of Southern Boulevard). The hard rubber tires and a two-wheel drive vehicle made it worse. Often the truck would bog down en route and the students would get out and walk the rest of the way. "Willie would go back afterwards and he'd bring his horse team back and they'd pull the thing out and that was it."

Eventually a real bus was purchased and Willie picked up high school students at Harry's Store (where Fairmount Deli now stands) and at the Red Brick Schoolhouse and he took them down to Chatham Borough to the high school. The students had to walk up from River Road to those points to get picked up. Elsie Rohrig wrote, "We were greeted by some of our Boro classmates especially in the early years with 'Here come the farmers.'"

In Fred Meiele's obituary in the *Chatham Press* newspaper of November 3, 1939, it noted that "As chairman of the road committee he supervised the construction and repair of the Township roads for many years before the advent of the automobile." The mud along the Long Hill Road appears to have been a force of nature, that was only beaten into submission with plenty of modern pavement.

Willie married late in life, at age 53, to Helen Hand of Summit who was 43. They wed in 1933 and in 1935 were blessed with a daughter, Fredericka, known as Freda. They shared the family home with Willie's parents and sister, Elsie. Fred died in 1939 and Katie in 1942. In October 1939 they had been honored as the oldest living couple in Morris County and had ridden in a special car in the "Pageant on Parade" for the 200th anniversary of Morris County.

Willie died at home in his sleep on July 11, 1961, having lived his entire life on the corner of Meyersville Road and Fairmount Avenue. Helen died in 1968. Elsie was the last of Fred and Katie's family in the Township. She shared many family pictures with the Chatham Township

Historical Society.

We have recently received a box of documents from Ruth Schoenleber, Charlotte and Herman de Haan's* daughter. Included in the box are several unmarked photographs mixed in with letters belonging to Elsie Meiele. Using other photographs, we have been able to identify several of them as Meiele family members.

Elsie died in 1976. The Meiele Farm is gone, but thanks to Elsie's generosity we have many pictures of the family and property. Letters and oral histories from many donors bring us memories of the past.

* See page 10 for more about the de Haans .



Willie Meiele and an unidentified woman and baby. Does anyone recognize this woman as Helen Meiele, Willie's wife? Please let us know if you know who she is. Photograph from the estate of Herman de Haan.

The Red Brick Schoolhouse: Over 150 Years of Service to Chatham Township

by Betsy Manning

According to the 1845 John Littell map, a schoolhouse was already part of the landscape at the corner of Fairmount Avenue and Southern Boulevard well before our 1860 Red Brick Schoolhouse was built. Who built this early school? When? Who did it serve? Is the Littell map accurate? These are some of the mysteries uncovered in our recent research into the Red Brick Schoolhouse.

We do know (or think we do) that the Red Brick Schoolhouse was erected in 1860. At the time the Township residents in their scattered farms needed a community center to meet their educational, spiritual, and social needs. What they built was a simple, rectangular, two and one-half story building without the vestibule entrance we are familiar with. The first floor was a one-room school and was entered by two front doors, one for girls and one for boys. The second floor served as a nondenominational Sunday school that was reached, we believe, by an exterior stairway where the fire escape is located today. While we can glean the facts about construction methods by examining the foundation, windows and walls, we need to learn more about who authorized and paid for this combined primary and Sunday school known as the Mount Vernon School and the Mount Vernon Union Sunday School.

By 1899 Chatham Township had achieved its present size due to the succession of Madison and Chatham Boroughs as well as Florham Park. Its population was 620. The one room was proving too small to educate the growing number of children. Around 1902-1904 the current vestibule and cloak room with interior stairs to the second floor was added to the front of the building. This eliminated one of the original entrance doors and opened up the second floor to be the classroom for the fourth through eighth grades. The Mount Vernon Sunday School also continued to flourish. These educational and religious functions distinguished the Red Brick Schoolhouse as a lively community center with winter plays, Christmas services, and other events.



Artist's conception of original configuration of the Mount Vernon School circa 1860. Martha Wells.

“The strawberry festival always attracted a large crowd and was brightened by hundreds of Chinese lanterns, brightly colored and hanging from the various trees. Tables, adorned with the housewives’ best linens and silver, were scattered under the trees. Huge bouquets gathered by the children added color to the scene. Groups of entire families soon gathered to enjoy ice cream, cake and generous helpings of strawberries. Lemonade, popcorn, peanuts, candy and a grab bag also held the rapt attention of the many children. Little girls wandered in and out of the happy crowd, selling tiny bouquets to the young men for their ladies to wear in their hair.” *(From a newspaper article of unknown date.)*

By the 1920s motor transport meant that the one-room school that had been the basis of rural education for over a century could be consolidated. In September 1929 the new Southern Boulevard School opened its doors for grades 1-8 and the Red Brick Schoolhouse was closed.

(The Red Brick Schoolhouse continued on p. 8.)

(The Red Brick Schoolhouse continued from p. 7.)

Chatham Township's population at this time had grown to 1,115 and continued to need a social center. In 1930 the Averett family purchased the schoolhouse from the Board of Education and opened it up for the use by community and religious groups. The Chatham Art Club, Red Cross, DAR, Woman's Group and others all found a home. We have a wonderful photograph of the Woman's Group meeting with the windows framed by long chintz curtains. And, in another photograph, the Chatham Art Club is hosting a show with the potbelly stove still being used to heat the building.

The Long Hill Gospel Fellowship, now the Long Hill Chapel, held its church and Sunday school classes at the Red Brick Schoolhouse before they moved across the street to what is now the Church of Christ building and subsequently moved again to their present location on Shunpike Road. The schoolhouse also served as a voting location until 1956 when the new voting machines proved too heavy for the floor.

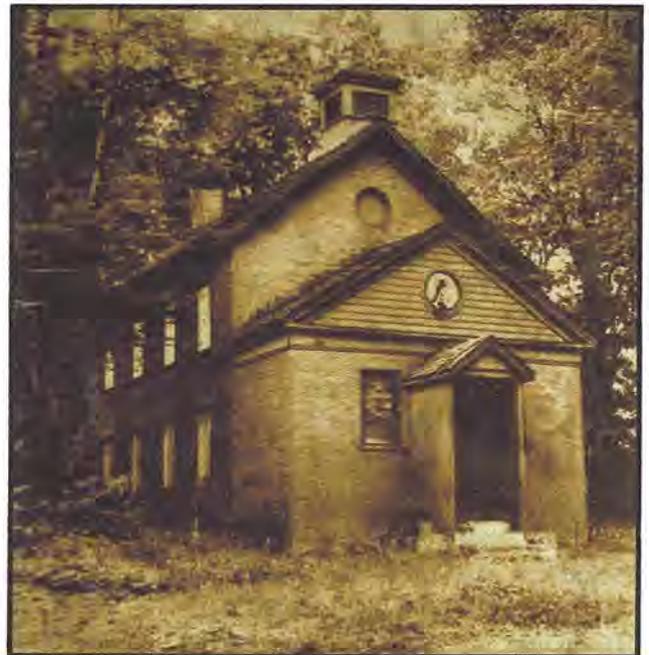
But many questions remain. What else happened to the Red Brick Schoolhouse? What other groups met here? What was the interior like? Are there photographs? If you have any information at all (photographs, documents, stories) about the Red Brick Schoolhouse, please get in touch with the Historical Society.

During Chatham Township's 150th anniversary in 1956, Martha S. Averett deeded the Red Brick Schoolhouse to the Township for civic uses. With her approval the building was remodeled to convert it to a Town Hall. Floors were reinforced, the interior stairs rebuilt, walls put up on the second floor and a new addition replaced the shed on the back to include two bathrooms, a kitchen and a vault. In 1960, the new Town Hall was a busy place serving the 5,931 residents. It was open weekdays from 9 to 4 and almost every evening when there were meetings of the various boards and commissions. By the 1980s suburbanization and its attendant population growth (now 8,883) made the Red Brick Town Hall inadequate. So in 1988, after remodeling the newly

vacant Mountainview School, the town offices were moved out, leaving the Red Brick Schoolhouse building vacant once again.

Stipulations in the Averett deed required that Chatham Township had to use the schoolhouse for civic purposes. To this end the Historical Society of Chatham Township was given the responsibility of creating a museum in the school. The museum opened on May 4, 1991 and has been in continuous operation ever since.

So the Red Brick Schoolhouse has come full circle and returned to its earliest functions: education and community service. Housing the Chatham Township Historical Society's second grade enrichment programs, monthly lecture series and Sunday afternoon museum tours, the Red Brick Schoolhouse is still a vibrant civic resource for Chatham Township and, as of the 2010 census, its 10,452 residents



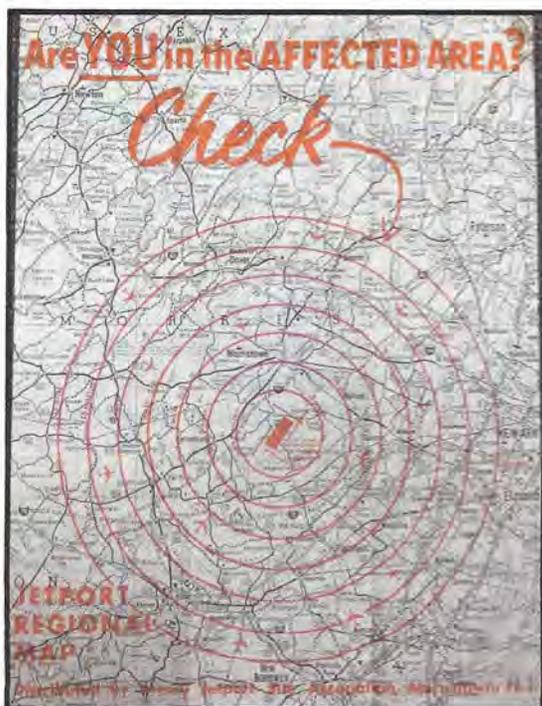
Bill Styple, Historical Society Trustee, recently found this photograph of the Red Brick Schoolhouse in the Newark Library. Date is unknown but perhaps in the 1930s. The Chatham Art Club sign is in the window.

Saving the Great Swamp and the Battle to Stop the Jetport

Highlights from the Nicholas Platt Lecture
Summarized by Pat Wells

On February 22, the Chatham Township Historical Society was treated to an excellent presentation by Nicholas Platt called *The Great Swamp and the Battle to Stop the Jetport*. Nick's talk was too full of information to reproduce here, but I have provided some interesting bites below. For a thorough history of the subject, I suggest reading *Saving the Great Swamp: The People, The Power Brokers and An Urban Wilderness* by Cam Cavanaugh. It is available at the Library of the Chathams.

The jetport was to occupy 10,000 acres of the Great Swamp, which of course, would extend beyond the swamp itself. The Port of New York Authority played down the negative effect on surrounding towns, but a map produced by a residents' group demonstrated the extent of the impact, showing how many towns would be subjected to deafening noise, pollution, and life under the flight path. The map shows that the impacted area stretched from north of Dover, south to New Brunswick, and from Newark to Long Valley.



Jersey Jetport Site Association

Suddenly this wasn't just an issue for the small towns around the Great Swamp. Activists were able to mobilize tens of thousands of volunteers in 286 towns and 462 organizations to fight the Port Authority.

► The DC-8 and the Boeing 707 that were the jetliners of the time were much louder and much more polluting than the jets of today. The noise level in the affected towns would have been extremely high and pollution from the aircraft exhaust would have been significant.

► Farmers were asked not to allow Port Authority engineers onto their land to do soil testing. Some did. When asked why, they said they knew the soil would fail the tests. That the soil could not support runways and multi-ton aircraft. The farmers figured, if the Port Authority knew that, they would give up.

► A little known figure in the fight was Sister Hildegard Marie Mahoney, president of the College of St. Elizabeth in Madison. She collected 94,000 signatures on petitions that were presented to the New Jersey State legislature in favor of a bill to prevent the jetport.

► Marcellus Hartley Dodge secretly acquired 1000 acres within the Great Swamp and donated the land to the North American Wildlife Foundation. An additional 2000 acres were needed to have the area designated a National Wildlife Refuge. It took more than four years to acquire enough contiguous acreage. More Dodge money (from both Mr. and Mrs.) played a part. Dodge died several months before the feat was accomplished and the land donated to the Department of the Interior in 1964.

Had the Port Authority not threatened the Great Swamp and inspired people to save it as a refuge, it probably would have gradually suburbanized into a fraction of its size with few safe guards to protect its wildlife and water.

The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge recently celebrated its 50th anniversary.

IN THE MUSEUM

RECENT DONATIONS

Thank you so much to each of our donors. Each donation broadens our collection and enriches our understanding of our past.

Chatham Township Mayor Kevin and Cindy Sullivan recently donated a Schwartz



milk bottle that they dug up from their property in Wickham Woods, once the site of the Schwartz Dairy. This bottle is older than the printed label bottles we have in our collection. The Schwartz name and hobnail pattern around the neck of the bottle were embossed into the glass when the bottle was blown into a mold.

Historical Society member Linda Kimler has donated a dinosaur footprint, of unknown provenance, but probably found in a New Jersey quarry. Also included in her donation was a copy of the *History of Chatham, New Jersey* by Ambrose Vanderpool. Linda also gave us 42 press negatives most of which were taken by her. Linda was first a writer for and then editor of the *Chatham Courier*.



Included in the donation was this photograph taken by Linda Kimler of Helen Fenske with her famous Rolodex in post-jetport flight days.

A number of documents and photographs were received from Ruth Schoenleber on behalf of her parents' estate—Charlotte and Herman de Haan.

Charlotte and Herman de Haan were among the founders of the Chatham Township Historical Society and were instrumental in establishing our museum almost 25 years ago. They attended classes about museum design and how to archive collections. Included in this donation are the original plans for the layout of our museum, including every display, as well as their notes on the decision-making process. The de Haans served as co-directors for many years.

Also in the donation were a number of Meiele family photographs and a few personal letters. Unfortunately most of the photos are not labeled. We have been able to identify a few people based on pictures in our archives.

In addition there are photographs by Horace Sanford at the May 1976 Arbor Day Celebration when a hickory tree was planted at Nash Field to commemorate the original hickory tree at the corner Southern Blvd. and Shunpike.

Answer to: What Is It?

This is a corn planter, one of many models invented during the second half of the 1800s. The red box contained the corn seed and the wire apparatus at the bottom was attached to a bird bill-like structure that opened at the bottom of the seed box. The farmer would jab the bill into the ground, as he tipped the planter forward the wire rocker on the front caused the bill to open and release a few seeds into the hole. The farmer pulled the planter out and kicked dirt over the hole as he stepped to the next planting spot.

According to Sam Moore of www.farmcollector.com, these tools were also known as corn jabbers or bill picks. They could allow a single farmer to plant almost two acres in a day, twice as much as a farmer using a hoe or a dibble would achieve.