

Sept. 3, 2014

**TOURING SULLIVAN
COUNTY'S MUSEUM
. . . while dusting**



Fred Newell, a past editor of the Sullivan Review, operated the newspaper from 1885 to 1906. In the issue of Jan. 18, 1894, he writes “We made a brief inspection of the clothes pin factory at Lopez the other day and learned how to make clothes pins.” Today with electric washers and dryers, you’d think that this article wouldn’t hold much interest. But, back then this would have been a much

appreciated explanation about the manufacture of a simple every-day commodity that was in fact made locally.

Mr. Newell begins with “first we watched them saw a chunk off a birch log with a little circular saw.” These chunks were then conveyed by a toothed belt to the upstairs of the facility, the chunks were squared up and sawed into strips. They thus became a pin five inches long and three-fourths of an inch square. A “girl sits on a stool and places the sticks on a revolving belt, whence they are carried to the turner. This turner goes zit, zit, zit, as fast as you can count, and if you are not careful it throws a handful of shavings down the back of your neck. . . Mr. McCartney will oblige us by discharging that girl who laughed when we shook the shavings out at the bottom of our trouserloons.” Not yet split down the middle, it is next placed in the teeth of a big cog wheel which then routes out the split for the clothes pin. Dropping out of these teeth, they are gathered up for packing and shipping. It isn’t unusual to see laundry hanging out today, but not nearly in the numbers you’d have seen in this 1894 writing.

Another point of interest comes in the closing of the article, which states: “When the hired girl takes in the wash she drops them (the clothes pin) in grass and they have gone where Charley Mitchell will go when Jim Corbitt gets a good wack at him – if that Florida fight ever comes off.” This reference is to James John “Gentleman Jim” Corbett (1866-1933) who was an American professional boxer and a former World Heavyweight Champion, best known for the man who defeated the great John L. Sullivan. Despite a career spanning only 24 bouts, Corbett faced the best competition his era had to offer; squaring off with a total of nine fighters who would later be enshrined alongside himself in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. “Gentleman Jim” stood 6 feet, 1 inch with a reach of 73 inches. This height for the time would have seemed quite tall. His only successful title defense occurred on Jan. 25 of 1894 [one week after the clothes pin article] against Charley Mitchell of Great Britain. Jim knocked Charley out in three rounds: so, Mr. Newell wishful prediction did come true. “Gentleman Jim” eventually lost his title to British boxer Bob Fitzsimmons in an hour and a half, longest filmed (at that time) fight, to end in the 14th round with Jim not being able to regain his footing.

Photo: From the museum's main building in Laporte, the 1900's Kitchen Room on display, with clothes pins utilized that were made in Sullivan County