

Bark Spud

The bark spud is the peeling iron or tool used to remove bark from felled timber. Most bark spuds have a steel head with a hard wooden handle. The head has a single cutting edge and is often curved or dish shaped. The sharp wedge is slid between the bark and the wood of a log and helps to peel the bark off in strips. Using the end of a metal rod pounded flat or by carving the end of a hardwood branch into a tool with a wedge shaped end made sometimes makeshift spuds.



Although a spud was a very essential and generic object in any Wisconsin lumbering operation that involved peeling bark, it was especially related to the hemlock lumbering and leather tanning industries in early Taylor County after much of the pine in northern counties had been harvested. The Shaw Family, wealthy Boston industrialists, had come to Wisconsin from New England to seek new sources for the tannic acid needed to tan the leather that was so important for harnesses and boots of that time period. They chose Taylor County with its hemlock forests for the location of several tanneries. Hides were shipped in from as far away as South America (It was cheaper to ship the hides to the source of the tannin). Communities – Medford, Rib Lake, and Perkiinstown - grew up around the tanneries. With the invention of synthetic chemicals to replace those extracted from bark, the tanneries were located elsewhere and that era ended.

People had problems clearing the land of logs left after bark was hauled away. Attempts were made to use hemlock lumber for building local barns, hotels, and other buildings. People from many cultural backgrounds helped in the process.

While the spud was important during the hemlock harvesting era, it has continued to be important in peeling poplar logs for the paper industry.

<http://www.kusemuseum-naturepreserve.org/Media/docs/Plants/TreesVinesShrubs/LindenFamily/Basswood-LindenTreeGeSm.pdf>

<http://www.kusemuseum-naturepreserve.org/Plants/Trees/hemlock.htm>

Sloane, E. (1964). A museum of early American tools. New York: Ballantine Books.

Fisher, L. (1966). The tanners. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc. (A book about tanning hides. Hemlock bark was one of the kinds of trees that supplied the necessary tannic acid for the process.)

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