



A few of Halpenny's 12 spittoons. He finds them at antique shows and flea markets.

PRESERVING A JUICY PART OF HISTORY

Spittoon Collection Provides Gobs Of Fun

"I've never really studied the history of them so I can't say what the most valuable one is or the most unusual," says E.J. Halpenny, 88, Ottawa, Ontario, who started collecting "spittoons" five or six years ago and now has 12 in his collection. "They're all probably about 75 years old and many may have come from hotels in Quebec, where

'chawing' was a real popular pastime." He finds spittoons at antique shows and flea markets. Prices range from \$2 to \$40 (Canadian). He'd like to hear from other collectors.

Contact: E.J. Halpenny, 616 Kirkwood Ave., Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1Z 8M3 (ph 613 798-2080).

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Hill Sheep Catch On Fast In Rough Country

An obscure sheep breed that may date back to the early days of Spanish exploration is catching on fast among North American farmers and ranchers who graze flocks in rough country.

Little known "Hill" sheep are unusual because the two legs on one side of their bodies are longer than the legs on the opposite side. This leg length difference enables them to stand upright on slopes of up to 50 percent.

There are left and right Hill sheep depending on which side of the body the dominant, longer legs are on. Righties graze counterclockwise around a hill, while lefties graze clockwise. To ensure complete hillside grazing, farmers and ranchers mix flocks evenly between lefties and righties.

Hill sheep are popular in at least two niche markets, according to breeders. For ex-

ample, diners pay premiums for the longer legs of lamb at restaurants, while short leg wool is popular in the clothing industry for making short sleeve sweaters.

There are a few precautions to keep in mind when considering the breed, however. For example, Hill sheep can't survive long on flat ground, where they have a tendency to fall over and starve to death when they can't get up. In fact, animal rights advocates in several "flatlander" states are considering legislation that would ban importing Hill sheep altogether.

Some believe Hill sheep evolved from sheep lost by shipwrecked Spanish explorers along the hilly Upper Mississippi River banks as far back as the 1,500's. Many doubt that. (**Spoof submitted to FARM SHOW by Lonnie Stauffer, South Wayne, Wis.**)



High Clearance Tractor

FARM SHOW recently spotted this high-clearance 1946 John Deere B in the "letters to the editor" section of "Polks - The Antique Tractor Magazine". We phoned publisher Dennis Polk to get more details.

"All we know about the man is that his first name is Leonard. We couldn't read his last name, and he didn't leave an ad-

dress or phone number. I sure hope he's not afraid of heights or he wouldn't be able to drive the tractor." He told us that to his knowledge only 25 of the high-clearance tractors were ever built.

For a sample copy of Polks, contact: Polks, 72435 SR 15, New Paris, Ind. 46553 (ph 218 831-3555).

CONTAINS HISTORIES AND ANECDOTES OF HUNDREDS OF SEED CORN COMPANIES

Book Documents History Of Seed Corn Business

A new book that documents the history of the seed corn business and provides a fascinating look at how many companies got their start, has been published by a retired corn breeder, Curtis Norskog of Willmar, Minn.

The 250-page book, "Hybrid Seed Corn Enterprises: A Brief History" traces the origins of more than 500 seed corn companies (past and present) and lists over 3,000 producers of certified hybrid seed corn.

Norskog was a breeder with Pioneer Hi-Bred International at Willmar, Minn., for almost 35 years. After he retired in 1986, he continued to pursue his hobby of collecting corn memorabilia and was president of the Corn Items Collectors Association for three years.

"I wrote the book to preserve some of the history of the seed corn industry before it gets lost," says Norskog.

"Many seed corn companies were started by farmers who sold open-pollinated seed corn. Companies got their 'foundation' seed from state universities that were conducting corn research. A lot of companies were started by farmers during the Great Depression to supplement their incomes. Hybrid seed corn became popular in the 1930's because yield and standability were better than open-pollinated varieties. When you had to pick corn by hand, you didn't want to have to bend over and pick ears off broken-over stalks. It was quite a change."

Here are some seed corn company stories from Norskog's book:

• DeKalb Genetics: Researchers Tom Roberts and Charles Gunn began their inbreeding experiments in secret because they weren't sure DeKalb's farmer board of directors would agree with the concept. In 1933, DeKalb's first hybrid was introduced and it outproduced the company's popular Gunn's Western Plowman by 35 percent. Farmer demand for the seed was immediate. The drought of 1934 destroyed almost all of the first seed crop and only ingenious efforts to irrigate the research plots saved the precious inbred lines. The next year a successful hybrid seed corn crop was raised, and farmers got their first widespread look at hybrids.

• Beegly's Hybrid: Milford Beegly started producing hybrid corn in the 1920's after Henry Wallace had given him about a peck of hybrid seed corn to plant. He planted his first field in the back part of his farm so people couldn't see it and wonder "what he was up to". In 1994, when Milford was 96 years old, he was still planting a few inbreds in his garden and making crosses to see "what they would look like".

• Chester Hybrids: In 1936, George F. Chester started producing hybrid seed corn under the name Kankakee Valley hybrids. Charles Bowman and Orville Redenbacher purchased the company in 1951. At that time Redenbacher was manager of a large farm operation that produced hybrid seed corn and commercial popcorn under the name of Redbow Popcorn Hybrids (Red for Redenbacher and bow for Bowman). Because Redbow Popcorn Hybrids became

known for their quality, experts were hired for marketing the product. They recommended using Orville Redenbacher's name, which later became a household name for popcorn eaters.

• Henry Field's Seed & Nursery:

Henry Field sold seed corn on the ear instead of shelled corn. He called his corn Mule Hybrid Seed Corn. Field said his hybrid corn, like the mule (which is harder than the horse) "has more vigor, yields higher, and stands drought better" than either of the parent purebreds. Henry also introduced and popularized alfalfa. He would send along a few free alfalfa seeds with his orders and asked the housewives to plant them in their gardens where their husbands could see the plants grow and then could feed the alfalfa to cattle. Before long, alfalfa caught on and is now one of the main forage crops in the U.S. He also convinced farmers that sweet clover was a beneficial legume - not a weed - as was once thought.

• Funk Seeds International: Funk Seeds International was first called Funk Farms and was started in 1901 by E.D. (Gene) Funk and 12 members of various Funk families. In 1937, in Illinois state yield tests, Funk Farms had hybrid corn entries called the "B" series and "G" series. The "G" series performed better so "G" was selected as a prefix for each number and was incorporated into the company logo, Funk's "G" Hybrid Seed Corn.

• Garst & Thomas Hybrid Corn Co.: The friendship of Henry Wallace and Bob Garst resulted in an arrangement in which Pioneer furnished the foundation seed for Garst & Thomas until 1983.

• Gurney's Seed & Nursery: This company was a pioneer in promoting early open pollinated corn which extended the Corn Belt many hundreds of miles to the north. It had a seed corn variety in the early 1900's that would "absolutely mature" within 90 days in North and South Dakota. In 1927 Gurney's purchased the radio station in Yankton, S. Dak., and listeners all over the country could tune in to "Station WNAX, Voice of the House of Gurney", where Lawrence Welk, a farm boy from North Dakota, got his start. The station featured live talent and folksy commentary, all the while advertising Gurney's products.

Norskog's book sells for \$10 including postage. Make checks payable to Corn Items Collectors (CIC).

The Corn Items Collectors Association, Inc., promotes the collection and exhibition of corn memorabilia and prints a 20 to 30-page newsletter four times a year. For membership information write to Eloise Alton, 613 N. Long St., Shelbyville, Ill. 62565.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Curtis Norskog, 2901 S.W. 15th St., Willmar, Minn. 56201 (ph 612 235-0644).