

The Magnificent Maxams of 1855 and 1857

John Lambert

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Maxam

I recently discovered an article I had written for the KOOKS (Kollektors of Old Kitchen Stuff) ten years ago on apple parers, “1854-1864—The Glory Years.” I had actually forgotten about this but reading the title revived a belief I have long held, that this decade produced some spectacular parers with a variety of designs and movements. In this article, I am going to highlight the 1855 Maxam on a board and its refined and highly prized successor the 2-arm Maxam that is a clamp-on model.

Maxam on Board

The April 10, 1855 version mounted on what appears to be a cherry base is quite eye-catching, Fig 1. The board is a full ¾” thick and has perfect beveled edges with a countersunk circular metal button (with dimple) to accommodate a clamp and prevent it from moving atop the base. Following the horizontal paring arm design of the 1853 Sargent & Foster and also the J. D. Seagraves, this model uses that basic arrangement, but presents a completely new “scroll wheel” design for imparting motion to the paring arm.



Figure 1

Maxam on Board

This parer essentially uses an inclined spiral inside a cone to push a pawl forward. As the pawl moves farther up the cone, it pushes forward against a lever that has a rack on the other end. As this rack rotates backwards, it engages a pinion above it that rotates forward, thus guiding the blade arm across the apple. When the pawl reaches the “end of the road”, it slips off the ridges and snaps back to the bottom or center of the cone, reversing the gears and carrying the paring arm back to the starting position. This return action is accomplished by way of a heavy brass spring that is nicely buried in a deep groove cut in the cherry board. Amazingly I have seen a number of these models over the years and on every one of them, this spring is still intact and still quite strong. The parer is nicely marked with “Patented Apr. 10, 1855 by S. N. Maxam”, the patent for the scroll wheel design. Noteworthy also is that the majority of these have an intact label, reading in part “Manufactured only at Shelburne Falls, Mass. by Maxam & Smith.” These are nowhere near as plentiful as the Sargent and Foster, which seemed to be the first choice of early buyers of automatic parers. My guess would be approximately 10 of the latter show up on eBay for each Maxam found there.

Two Arm Maxam

The 2-arm Maxam is an exotic paring machine. While the Apr. 10, 1855 date appears prominently on the face of the scroll wheel, the two-arm Maxam design was not actually granted a patent until Jan. 21, 1857. These were probably produced in late 1856 up to the issuance of the patent based on an announcement in the *Scientific American* dated March 22, 1856, Fig 2, (Munn, Wales, & Beach 1856, p. 217).

IMPROVED APPLE PARING AND SLICING MACHINE.

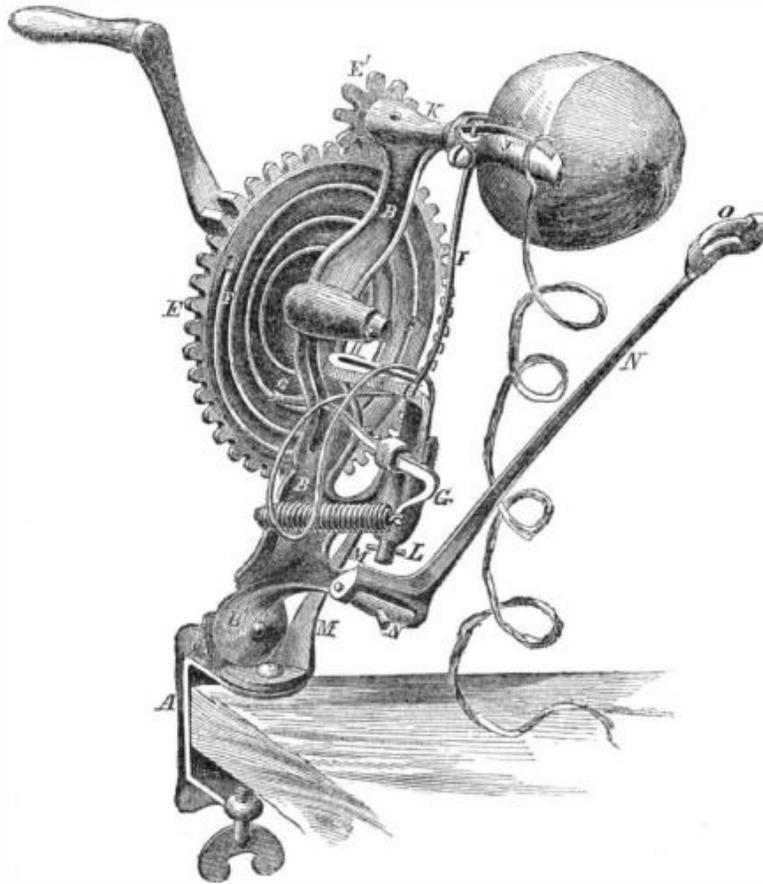


Figure 2 [Scientific American 1856](#) Illustration

It retains the scroll wheel design but has added a manual slicer to increase its appeal, Fig 3 A & B. To accomplish both tasks, the parer is hinged at the base, enabling the user to lean it to the right or the left, Fig 3 B. When it is leaned to the right with an apple on the forks, an apple is easily pared in the normal way. The paring arm snaps back to the starting position after completion. After paring, it is leaned to the left, causing the scroll wheel and pawl to be out of contact so the operator can turn the crank to the left. As it is cranked in this direction, the user pulls the slicing arm from rear to front reducing the apple into “one continuous parabolic ring” according to the patent. In

actual use, a number of rings break loose and resemble sombreros with the tops cut off. It is quite thrilling to watch. Because of their unique shape, it would be unlikely that the rings would stick together and thus would dry more easily. This feature is part of the masterful design of this prized parer.

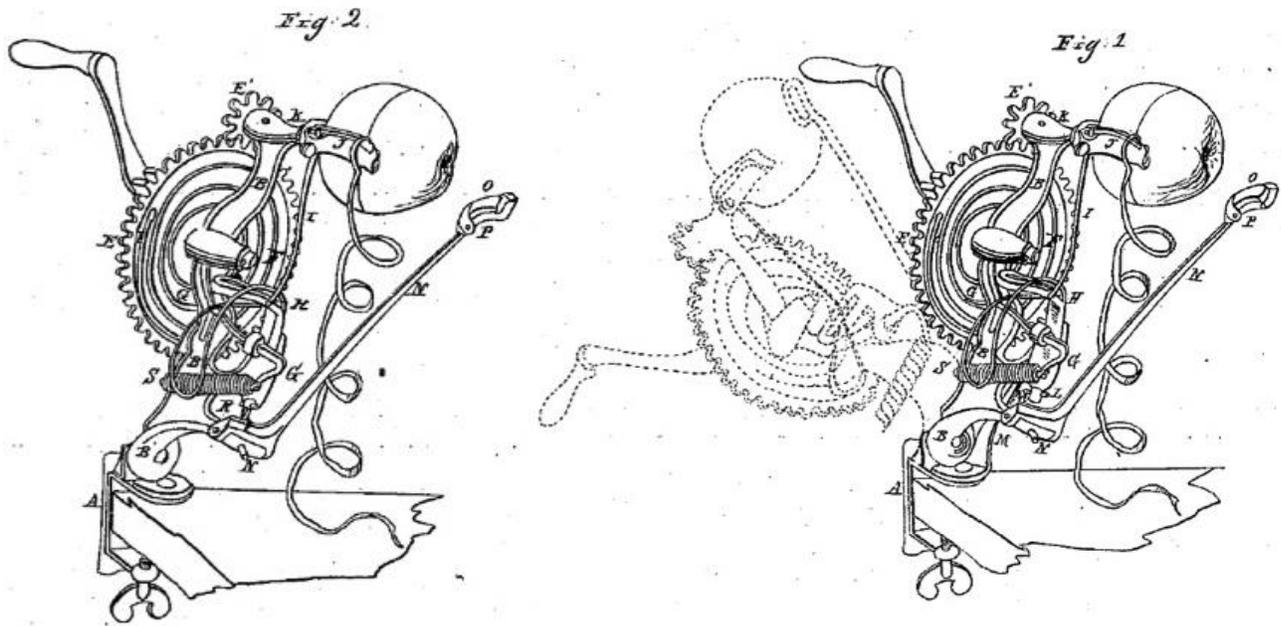


Figure 3 A. 2-Arm Maxam Patent Drawing *Fig 2* B. Patent Drawing *Fig 1*

The 2-arm Maxam is cherished by collectors due to its rarity and unique dual function, Fig 4 and 5. Sadly, they have all but disappeared on the open market and to find one today in complete operating condition would truly be a find worth reporting.

I received a letter from a dealer in 1995 asking if I knew anyone interested in a complete one of these in excellent condition for \$300. Indeed I did. I purchased my 3rd and final 2-arm Maxam sight unseen. Little did I know that this pristine example would be the last I would see for two decades.



Figure 4

Two-Arm Maxam



Figure 5 Two-Arm Maxam Side View

There is another clamp-on Maxam without the slicer or hinged frame. While it is at least as rare as its more exotic brother, it lacks appeal and would probably command only half as much money under normal circumstances. Many sellers decry this situation, protesting, "If it is rarer, it should command more money." That is just wishful thinking. Collectors are always the ultimate judge in these matters whether it be art, coins, stamps, guns, or cars. Desirability always has to be factored in and the simple fact is that the 2-arm has one of the highest desirability factors of any parer that

was produced. An ugly, unpopular Duesenberg will not bring top dollar if it is an unpopular model.

My own 2-arm Maxam was acquired way back in 1986 under special circumstances. I was trying to pull together the very few, perhaps 20, known collectors to form a club. I was being encouraged by Marion Levy, the highly respected, early contributor to our hobby and he gave me every address and phone number of any collector who had ever contacted him. One evening, I called a real gentleman, Ernie Glazer, from Texas and he said "You should give Ray Barnes a call in Illinois. I visited him a couple of years ago and he had a couple hundred peelers." I did not hear anything else he said.

The reader must understand that before *Apple Parers* was written in 1997, before Apple Parer Enthusiasts was formed in 1986, and before the Internet, it was almost impossible to locate collectors. Most of them were very low profile and few knew of their existence. There was virtually no networking as there is today. I had seen a couple of collections in the 60-80 piece range but questioned if a 200-piece collection existed. My own collection had stagnated at about 55.

A simple long distance call put me on the phone with Mr. Barnes. I explained that I was trying to form a club and we were going to have a meeting here in Ohio in a couple of months. "No, I really am on my way out" was his response. He explained that he was selling his collection and had already let one collector buy some of his best ones. Rather than recite a long list of my wants, I simple asked, "Do you have a Maxam?" He thought for a minute and then replied, "That's the one with the funny drive gear and the extra arm to slice the apple. Yes, I have one of those." After a restless night, I called him on a Friday morning to ask if I could drive out from Ohio. He welcomed me and said, "Bring cash."

That evening he took me down into the basement of his nice but not elaborate brick home and just before he unlocked a door at the foot of the stairs, said, "You are only the 4th person I have ever let in here." Needless to say, this was like tossing meat in front of a hungry lion.

Very few collectors will ever have the opportunity to "cherry pick" a collection as I did as the runner-up that day. He had three shelves along the front and side walls, many hanging from the floor joists, and a set of metal shelves running down the center of the room. I picked up a Centennial and another decent one and he said, "\$50 each but the rest are going to be at least \$100." I never questioned his prices. Whatever he said it was is what I paid. The Maxam was \$200. The perfect Thompson with original label was \$250. An early Whittemore Harrington that recently sold on eBay for \$527 was \$100 as was the Maine parer, an odd Sargent & Foster, and the Lockey and Howland with tilted turntable. I learned that had I been a month earlier I could have landed a J. J. Parker, an 1861 Hersey, a 2-arm Pratt, both a wooden and an all-cast iron Slick and several rare commercial models. But I had no complaints because I would have made the 800-mile round trip just for the Maxam. And I can say with conviction that in over 30 years of collecting, I only had one chance to make a long drive contemplating guaranteed success while 2-words kept echoing in my head. "Bring cash." I hope a few more 2-arm Maxams find their way into collector's hands while I am still around to hear their shrieks of joy.

As always, happy collecting.

John Lambert
zlambert@yahoo.com

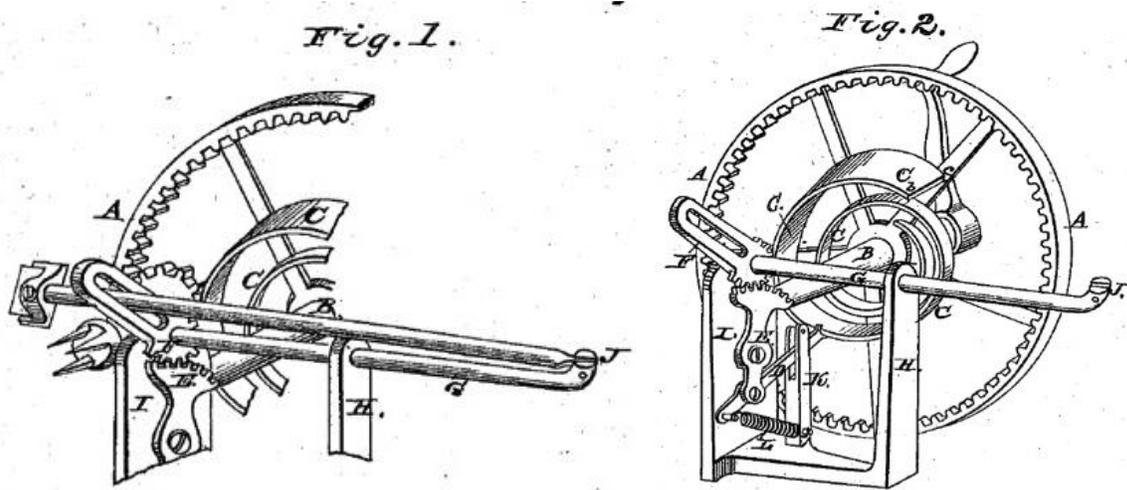
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S. N. Maxam Scroll Wheel 1855 Patent Drawings Fig 1 and 2.



G. H. Hubbard's use of the Scroll Wheel on the 2-Arm Maxam