

The Rare and Desirable Rollstones

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ROLLSTONE MACHINE CO. MFR'S
FITCHBURG, MASS.

Rollstone Machine Company

We know very little about Rollstone Machine Company of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, which was apparently formed in 1867 and reportedly changed its name to Rollstone Iron Foundry about 1875 according to Don Thornton's exhaustive book *Apple Parers*. However, in that same book, a company billhead from 1881 is marked Rollstone Machine Co. What is certain is that they produced two highly sought-after parers which no doubt were produced in small quantity over this timeframe. Noteworthy is that Fitchburg was also home to the Monroe Brothers company which turned out some fantastic eggbeaters, including the Eclipse, Gold Medal parers, and the elusive guillotine clamp-on apple slicer.

Interestingly, Fitchburg is located just 7 miles North of Leominster, home of the Hudson Parer Company as well as Foster and Cotton, makers of the Star. The Star is one of two holy grails sought by collectors. The Climax, its forerunner, is the other and produced just a few miles West in Greenfield, Massachusetts. by its inventor George Brokaw. The area was a hotbed of manufacturing activity when you include Turners Falls, Athol, and Millers Falls. Collections are filled with cast iron labor-saving devices made in this small area of our country shortly after the Civil War.

Rollstone Early Model

The Rollstones are small delicately cast quick return parers. Presumably the earlier model sporting an eagle with wings spread, has a very unique feature in a paring arm that swings outside of the equally unique spoked turntable, figs. 1 and 2.



Fig. 1

Rollstone Very Rare Early Version



Fig 2

Close-up of Eagle with Wings Spread

The one in my collection, acquired in the mid 1990's, is the only one I have seen and is pictured in *Apple Parers* (Thornton 1997, p. 116). Due to the fact that the turntable, shaft, and paring arm are all linked as one and controlled by a wound spring, I refer to it as a "rear engine" model, fig 3. At the base of the long paring arm and adjacent to the return action spring is the paring arm spring. On my model, between the forks and gear that drives the turntable there is a small casting on the frame, which appears to have it's very tip broken off. With no others for comparison, it is difficult to determine if this is just a casting to strengthen the frame or if it had an attachment to prevent turning the parer in reverse.



Fig. 3

Rollstone Paring Arm

Rollstone Second Version

The second version exists in a limited number of collections, possibly 4 or 5. Back in the early 1990's, I was reading an old issue of Gourmet magazine. I saw an odd parer from the back side and did not recognize it. By this time I was certain that I had seen every parer ever made if only in its patent drawing. I definitely had never seen this particular one, which turned out later to be this second model of the Rollstone, fig 4.



Figure 4 Rollstone Second Version

I eventually tracked it down but was unable to acquire it. That is until 15 years later when I was out of town and the owner left a message on my answering machine to the effect "Are you still interested in that apple peeler?" That is a nice message to get upon arriving home from your first humbling experience on the ski slopes. I had seen a couple of incomplete versions of this model but never one complete. Upon receiving the parer I was quite delighted to realize it had apparently never been used. It had the original finish and was in pristine condition. The eagle has been toned down a bit with

wings down, fig 5. Still, it is a thing of beauty and is a bit shorter and narrower than its “spread eagle” predecessor.

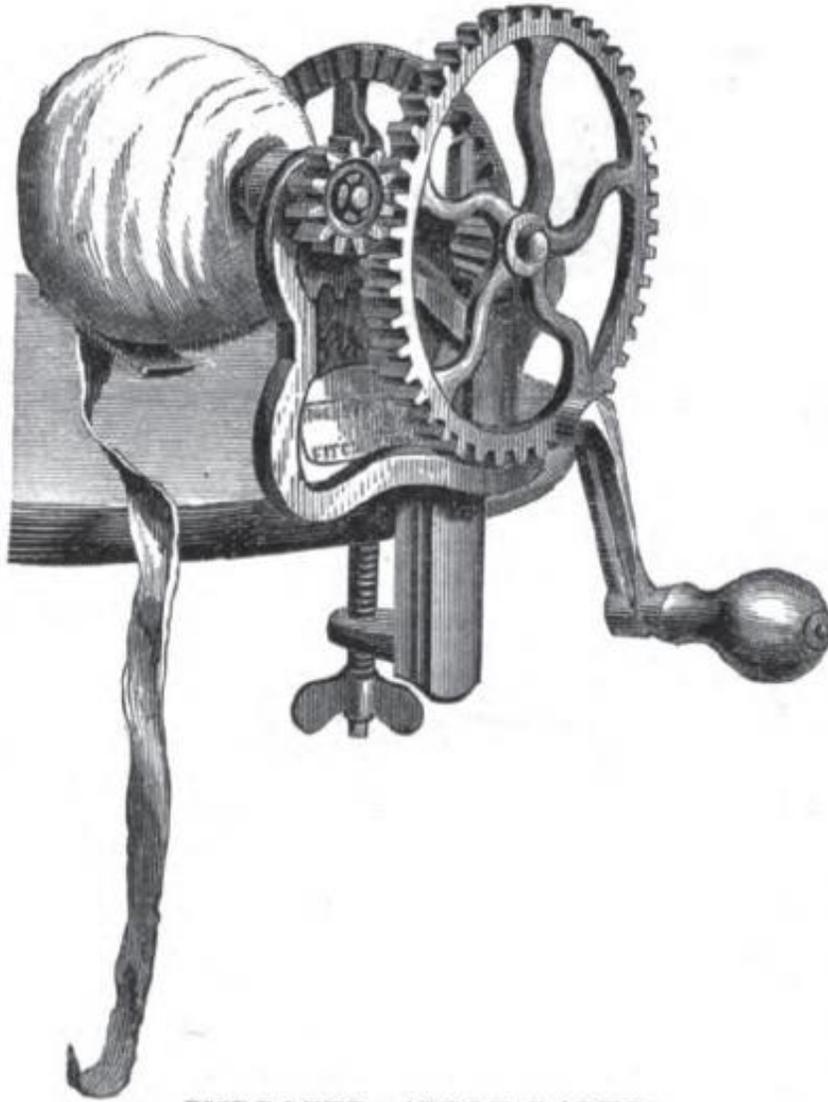


Figure 5 Eagle with Wings Down

An advertisement describing the second version of the Rollstone appeared in the June 1875 issue of *The Manufacturer and Builder*, fig 6.

Improved Apple-Parer.

We think we are not mistaken in stating that apple-parers are essentially an American invention, as well as sewing and washing machines. We represent here an engraving made after a photograph of one, which was perfected last season. The improvement consists in a reduction of the number of parts, so that it is simpler than any other machine of the kind offered in the market, and consequently cheaper, while at the same time it pares equally well, and this with only one half



IMPROVED APPLE-PARER.

the number of turns of the crank required by any other machine, while the parings fall perfectly clear of the gearings.

As it is simple, strong, durable, and cheap, and works so exceedingly well, the makers have no doubt that it only needs to be tried to convince any one that it is the best machine to buy. The Rollstone Machine Works, of Fitchburg, Mass., are the manufacturers.

Great parers seldom show up anymore, but they do show up. It behooves the serious collector to be well-schooled on the rarity of each. As always, cherish these beauties 'cause they ain't making any more of them.

Happy Collecting

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Bibliography

Thornton, D. 1997. *Apple Parers*. Sunnyvale, California: Off Beat Books

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