

FROM THE ARCHIVES

## A History Mystery! Solved!

*All of the objects in the Historical Society collections are kept in a basement room in Conant Hall.*

*Kerry Sclafani, our Archivist, and Susan Grissom, our Collections Manager, are carefully photographing and researching each item before each object is entered into our Past Perfect software program.*

*Unfortunately, they often find objects with no identification or information on who made the donation.*

*Here is Susan's description of a mysterious, unidentified recent find.*

It was an object that looked like a crop duster with two metal circles, covered with a screen on one side of the metal canister, but how the heck would you even use it, was a mystery. Kerry and I researched it to no avail but upon more examination we found it had a tarnished brass plate with "Rex - Patented - New York."

We researched patents and still met a wall. Finally, we discovered the "Rex,"



on a couple of antique auction sites, which finally gave us the clues we needed. (I was relieved to see I wasn't the only one who thought it was a, not very efficient, crop duster!) The Rex was an early hand-pumped vacuum cleaner or sweeper



and the date for one of them was estimated to be 1910. The original patent was issued to Charles Boyer of Marengo, Illinois, in 1860, for "new and useful improvements in vacuum cleaning machines." His invention included an improved method of removing dirt from the air filtering bag and a method for keeping the bag in an expanded position. Hand-pumped vacuum cleaners were first used in the 1860s and continued through the 1930s. Remember, even then, many homes had no access to electricity. You had to work up quite a sweat to push and pull the pump at the same time as it operated like a tire pump.

Still on the information trail I connected with Vacuum Cleaner Historian, Tom Gasko of the Vacuum Cleaner Museum in St. James, Missouri, whose motto is: "We hope you GET SUCKED IN to learn about the history of vacuum cleaners on your next adventure through

America's heartland!" Who knew there could be a Vacuum Cleaner Museum?! Tom was a great source, and had a Rex in his museum. He confirmed this was the same patent by Boyer and said that the Rex had been used since 1860s and was intended for the average person, as there was already an invention of an electric sweeper powered by electric motor in 1901 and available by 1907. You could find The Rex advertised in publications like Good Housekeeping and newspapers.

Eventually, the "Rex" became electrified and became known as the *Dust Killer* and the *Dirt Devil*.

Now we know just about everything there is to know about this odd looking object. (Who would have ever guessed its use?)

It will be photographed, get a catalog number, and I will enter it into Past Perfect with its entire provenance.

The quest to digitize all of our collections takes time, but it's worth doing.

*By Susan Grissom*

**New Invention!**

**FOR THE HOME**

**Air Now Does All the Work**

*Cleans Carpets, Rugs, Matting, etc. on the floor, by the Vacuum Process*

**The Home Vacuum Cleaner**

**WEIGHS FOUR POUNDS**

Operated by child or weakly woman. Air is drawn through body and fibre of carpet at terrific speed. Carries all dust, dirt, grit, germs, etc., into the Cleaner. No dust in room. It all goes into Cleaner. Super-sedes broom, brush, sweeper, dust pan and dust cloth. Cleans, Sweeps and Dusts in one operation. Keeps house clean, does away with housecleaning. Portable, dustless, always ready. Adapted to every home—rich or poor—city, village or country. Does same work as expensive machines. Costs nothing to operate—costs nothing for repairs. Light, neat, well and durably made—should last a lifetime. Saves time, labor, carpets, curtains, furniture. Saves drudgery, saves health, saves money. Saves taking up and beating carpets. The Home Cleaner is truly a wonder. Astonishes everybody; customers all delighted and praise it. They wonder how they ever did without it.

**\$6.00**

Not Sold in Stores

**Lady had matting too old to take up—Home Cleaner saved it—Cleaned it on floor.**