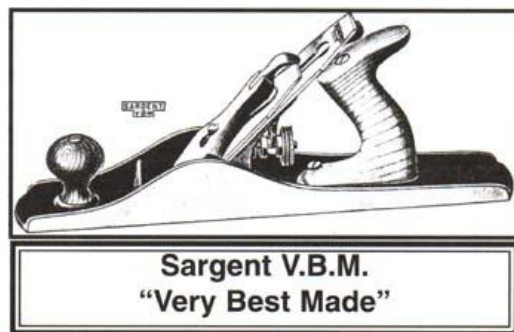




Some Historical Highlights - Sargent and Company

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Very Best Made Logo-Sargent & Co.

Sargent & Company of New Haven, Conn., produced and sold planes for an eighty year period from 1884 to 1964. They had a large production capability and made builder's hardware, locks, and other hand tools, for both carpenters and mechanics. Joseph Bradford Sargent was the impetus behind the company. He was born in 1822 in Leicester, Mass. and went to work for his father in the J.D.Sargent & Company business. His father manufactured hand cards, these were used to straighten cotton or wool fibers prior to the spinning process in the many textile mills in New England. Starting at the bottom as a factory worker at the age of 16, he worked in a dry goods business in Boston, Mass., became a partner with his brother Harry in a Georgia general store, and then took over his father's business in 1849. He

became a sales agent for Peck & Walter Co. of New Britain, Conn. in 1852, took over management of Peck & Walter in 1856 and after the business panic of 1857, renamed it J.B. Sargent Company.

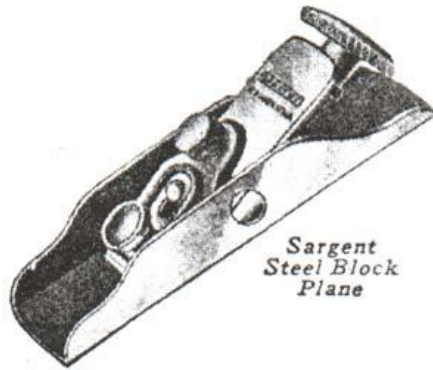
Business was excellent and the need for larger facilities became apparent. In 1863, J.B. Sargent purchased a city square in New Haven, Conn. with harbor frontage. In 1864, the plant was constructed with elevators, running water and flush toilets, all of which were very innovative for the times. October, 1864 brought the incorporation of Sargent & Company of New Haven, Conn. wholly owned by J.B. and his two brothers George and Edward. J.B. was the president until 1907, when he died at the age of 84.

The line of goods sold on a commission basis rapidly increased in 1865 when Sargent & Company became the sole sales agent for Mallory, Wheeler & Company. They were a manufacturer of locks and hardware. It was a profitable venture for both firms, but it came to an end in 1882, after the business relationship tapered off following the death of Burton Mallory in 1878.

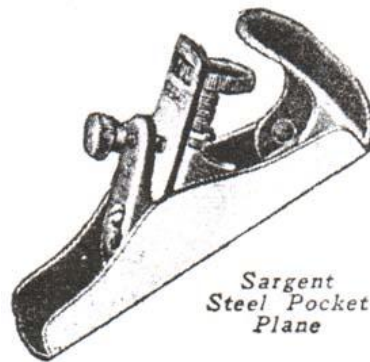
In 1871, Sargent & Company became an agent for other tool manufacturers when they offered Chapin's Union Factory of Pine Meadow, Conn., line of rules and wooden planes. Also in their March, 1877 Catalog, Sargent listed Leonard Bailey's new Victor Planes. That ceased when Stanley took over as agents for those planes.

The factory grew and in the late 1870's, it occupied 16 acres of floor space, had 1,700 workers who earned 15¢ an hour for a ten hour day, six days a week as the average. In 1879, Sargent & Company began production of the first hand tools to be offered by the company. One of the first products were awls for the shoe trade.

Plane manufacture began in 1884 and the first listings of seven sizes of bench planes and thirteen different block plane models. When the 1894 catalog was issued, Sargent had added a line of wood-bottom transitional planes and used its patented lateral adjustment feature on those and the cast iron bosom bench planes.



Two of the patents developed by Sargent around the turn of the century, lend the names of the Patentees' to the name of the plane. The Page Patent lever cap of 1897 and the Shaw's Patent frog adjustment feature of 1906. One other important event occurred after the death of J.B. Sargent in 1907. His brother George took over as president of the company, and started the marketing slogan "VERY BEST MADE" or V.B.M. This slogan had been used on Sargent scissors and pliers beginning in the 1901 catalog. This slogan was used from 1908 until it was phased out in 1918, following the death of George Sargent in 1917. World War I put demands upon the production capacity of Sargent & Company and after the return to civilian business, the V.B.M slogan was dropped.



The plane business of Sargent & Company was helped immensely in 1923, by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. They reported to their membership that the Stanley Works of New Britain, Conn. was building a new facility with non-union labor. The result was a boycott of Stanley Tools from March, 1923 to December, 1925. Sargent & Company increased their profits for those three years.

The brand name HERCULES began in 1927, probably to compete with the FOUR SQUARE brand by Stanley. The HERCULES was a low price plane, without polish, fit, or finish. It sold well and was used up into the 1950s. All business slowed down during the Depression of the 1930's, but Sargent weathered the hard times. In 1937, Sargent lost their New York, NY sales

office and warehouse, when the City of New York condemned the property to be able to utilize it for their new Courthouse. A substantial amount of records were destroyed at that time.

World War II brought war production and Sargent made military supplies and hand tools for military use. There are a considerable amount of Sargent tools in boxes with military specifications on the labels. They were produced during the war years 1942 to 1945. After the war the building boom helped Sargent get a share of the market in both building hardware and hand tools. They also purchased the William Schollhorn & Company and took over the production of BERNARD brand pliers and tools.



Sargent No. 2 Tool Cabinet
(from 1923 Popular Mechanics Magazine)

In 1950, Sargent brought out their line of HERCULES Golden Cutter Planes", a mid--priced competitor to the Stanley DEFIANCE brand. Sargent also manufactured planes for Sears, Roebuck & Company under the CRAFTSMAN and DUNLAP brands. After 1955, Sargent marked planes became quite scarce. Only the #1409 and #1414 bench planes and the #600 aluminum smooth plane bear their trademark. Just when Sargent stopped making planes is not known, but the author has a Sargent made CRAFTSMAN block plane, that is new in the box, with a catalog dated 1958, so they were still making planes at that time.

In 1957 the management of Sargent instituted plans to build a new facility in New Haven and in 1964, one hundred years after J.B. Sargent began the business, Sargent & Company moved to its new modern building, The assumption can be made that when they moved, plane production ceased. They were bought out by Walter Kidde & Company in May, 1967 and renamed Sargent Manufacturing Company. Then in 1981, Hanson, Inc. purchased Sargent and it was then purchased by ASSA Abloy AS, of Stockholm, Sweden in 1989. Today the company still manufactures builders

and security hardware. Interstate 95 now occupies the former factory site of Sargent & Company.

Dave Heckel has studied and written extensively about antique tools. He is a past-president of Mid-West Tool Collectors Association, a historian, writer and researcher on Winchester, Stanley, Sargeant and other companies. A Charter Member and past board member of The Hardware Companies Kollektors Klub (THCKK).

• THCKK is a not-for-profit organization formed in March of 1996. It serves to distribute information and provide an interactive forum about vintage hardware companies such as E.C. Simmons, (Keen Kutter), A.F. Shapleigh (Diamond Edge)and The Winchester Store (and the popular collectibles bearing their logos and associated house brands)as well as other historically interesting hardware companies such as "Our Very Best" (Hibbard, Spencer & Bartlett), Blue Grass (Belknap Hardware), Stanley, etc. are included as interest dictates(Witte, Wyeth, Lee, Sargent, etc)

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