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Article Summary: In 1876 Nebraskan John Morris patented the first design for a multi-catch mouse trap that enjoyed great commercial success. Its most innovative feature, widely copied, was a hinged outer door that allowed the trap to function repeatedly before it was emptied.

Cataloging Information:

Names: John Hutchinson Morris, Thomas M Morris, William M Morris, Henry M Morris, Claudius Jones, David Jones, Melvin Lovell

Nebraska Place Names: Seward

Morris Mouse Trap Models: "Delusion," "Cyclone," "Ideal," "Clown"

Manufacturers of Morris Mouse Traps: Smith and Egge Manufacturing Company (Bridgeport, Connecticut); Lovell Manufacturing Company (Erie, Pennsylvania); F F Adams Company (Erie, Pennsylvania)

Keywords: mouse trap, John Hutchinson Morris, Thomas M Morris, Claudius Jones, patents, keyless locks

Photographs / Images: Seward, Nebraska, 1879; (Fig 1) patent application drawing of the earliest mouse trap design with "Delusion" mechanism, 1876; (Table 1) US Patents of the Morris Brothers; (Fig 2) drawing of actual "Delusion" trap, patented 1877; Claudius Jones; (Fig 3): sketch of "Delusion" trap label, Claudius Jones & Co; (Fig 4) London advertisement for "Delusion" trap, 1880; (Fig 5) advertisement for "Delusion" trap, Baker & Hamilton, San Francisco and Sacramento, 1889; (Table 2) names of traps and their makers, with directions for use as printed on "Delusion" and "Delusion"-type mouse traps; (Fig 6) label of "Delusion" trap, Lovell Manufacturing Company; (Fig 7) advertisement for "Bonanza" trap, A Baldwin & Co Ltd, New Orleans, 1899; (Fig 8) sketch of "Bonanza" trap showing "Delusion" mechanism housed within modified surrounding structure; (Fig 9) "Family" mouse trap; (Fig 10) advertisement for "Catchemalive," Animal Trap Co of America, Lititz, Pennsylvania, 1920s; (Fig 11) "Clown" trap; (Fig 12) large cage trap; (Fig 13) advertisement for "Ideal" trap, 1890s; (Fig 14) drawing of "Cyclone" trap; (Fig 15) Morris Lock Co advertisement for keyless lock boxes, about 1887

“The Delusion”

John Morris

A Better Mouse Trap and its Makers

By David Drummond

Although numerous remedies are available for commercial and domestic sufferers, the house mouse remains today a widespread pest throughout the world, and the search continues for ever better control methods. No doubt such a search has been proceeding slowly over the centuries, but it noticeably gathered pace in the last half of the nineteenth century, especially in North America. An important aspect of this increased activity at that time was, in some of the words generally attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, “to build a better mouse trap.”

A better mouse trap clearly implied one that caught more mice at a time and required little attention from the user. The race was on, and neither entrants nor their inventiveness were lacking, as can be discovered from the contemporary reports of the United States Patent Office. New trap designs varied, from those with quite simple trap doors through which mice fell into a container below, to those with complex, windup mechanisms that propelled mice into adjacent, escape-proof receptacles. No doubt many others never reached the stage of being patented.

The immense difficulty of the task can perhaps best be appreciated by revealing that of more than 250 patents for multi-catch traps registered in the United States prior to 1876, only three resulted in the production of mouse traps, and, as far as we can tell, none

of these was particularly successful.¹ In 1876, however, the situation changed dramatically when a citizen of Seward, Nebraska, patented the first design of a trap that was to enjoy great commercial success. His name was John Hutchinson Morris, and it is with him and his associates that our story really begins.

In the 1870s Seward, the county seat of Seward County, was already a thriving community of some 1,500 inhabitants largely concerned with servicing the recently settled surrounding agricultural area. Situated on the banks of the Big Blue River, it also gained considerable benefit from being closely connected with the Midland Pacific Railroad, which reached the town on March

1, 1873.² It was here or hereabouts that three families of Morrises made their home at this time, all having come from Ohio, by way of Illinois, as determined by entries in the 1880 census.

William Morris and his family, including his younger brother Thomas, lived in the town of Seward, while John H. Morris and his family lived in neighboring South Seward Village. Somewhere in the vicinity lived Henry Morris and his family. In 1880, according to the census, William and Thomas were listed as inventors and Henry as a harness maker, while John described himself as a “trap maker.” In addition, John had a grown son, William, who was also a harness maker.³



Seward, Nebraska, 1879. NSHS-M78290-F786-1879

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A Better Mouse Trap

Although the census itself reveals little about the relationship between the three families, it is clear from this and other evidence that John, William, Henry, and Thomas were brothers. Furthermore, the two oldest, John and William, had previously worked together in their own hardware business at Elkhart, Illinois, before settling in Seward in the fall of 1874.⁴

The later Nebraska State Census of 1885 reveals that the Morris brothers' eighty-year-old father, Silas, was staying with John. At this time, too, John was describing himself as an inventor rather than a trap maker and Thomas had acquired a wife, Emma, and set up a separate household. Sadly, only William's family remained; he had died of cancer in July 1880.⁵

Another resident of Seward at this time was Claudius Jones, a nearby farmer, who later played a key role in bringing to production the mouse trap designed by John Morris. Jones, however, was not just a farmer as the 1880 census would indicate. After settling in Seward in 1873, he founded the State Bank of Nebraska, and due to his financial skills, eventually became the largest landowner and stockraiser in Seward County.⁶

Because we know little about John Morris, the man, it seems worthwhile to consider some of his other activities before dealing with what appears to be his first major invention and most outstanding and lasting achievement. Between them, the Morris brothers registered some thirty-four patents over a thirty-year period from 1876 to 1908 (Table 1). Of these John figured in twenty-eight and Thomas in twenty, while William and Henry had only three each to their credit. Furthermore, when acting alone, Thomas tended to concern himself with improving relatively simple items, such as book supports, door checks, and snap hooks, while John, whether collaboratively or working alone, was always dealing with much more complex mechanisms. Thus there can be no doubt that John played the most active

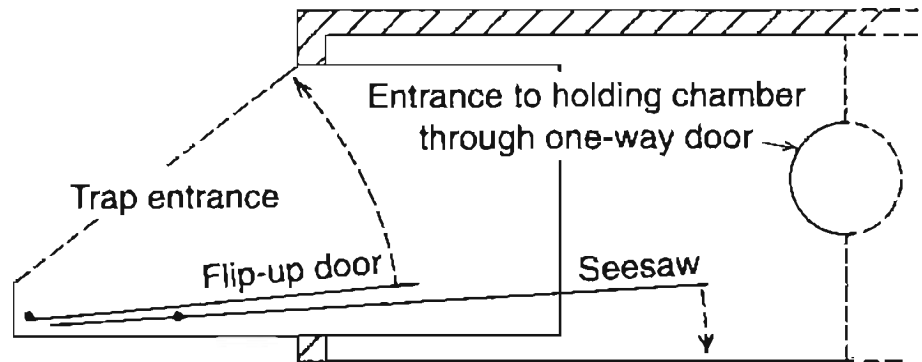


Fig. 1 The earliest mouse trap design with "Delusion" mechanism, redrawn from 1876 patent, showing one-half only of two-entrance trap. All drawings courtesy of author

and innovative role of the four inventive Morrises. It is worth noting, too, that virtually all of John Morris's patents were concerned with fairly complex metal objects with moveable parts and therefore, when he came to register his first patent in 1876 at the age of forty-three, he must already have had considerable experience in working metal. William's small output was undoubtedly due to his early death; in fact he preceded John in registering the very first Morris trap patent as early as 1867 (No. 63,651) for a windup rat trap, while he was working at Elkhart, Illinois.

John Morris filed his first application for a patent on June 6, 1876, and it was granted on July 18 of the same year (Patent No. 179,940). The patent was titled simply, "Improvement in animal-traps," and John Morris stated that "the object of this invention is to furnish an improved trap for catching animals, for the entrance of stock-yards, for the chutes through which cattle are loaded upon cars, and for other similar uses." Like many patentees of animal traps, he carefully avoided mentioning in the patent the particular animal for which the trap was intended, presumably in case the design might also prove to be effective against other animals. We know from hindsight, however, that the trap eventually produced was a mouse trap. It is clear, therefore, that Morris was motivated to invent a better mouse trap in order to reduce the house mouse problems associated with cattle rearing

and transport. And who was more likely to encourage his interest in finding solutions to such problems than his cattle-rearing neighbor, Claudius Jones.

Basically, the trap that John Morris first developed (fig. 1) consisted of a narrow tunnel, which was shown with a door at each end (though one door only was also an option indicated in the patent description), and which on its side had an animal-holding chamber entered from the center of the tunnel through a one-way door with an overhead hinge. The most important and innovative feature of the trap, which set it apart from all earlier mouse trap designs, was the unique nature of the outer door and the mechanism that closed and reopened it.

Each outer door was hinged at its base and opened so as to lie flat along the floor of the tunnel. Beneath the open door lay one end of a seesaw that was pivoted close to the trap entrance, the other end extending into the tunnel and well beyond the end of the horizontal open door. A mouse entering the trap trod first onto the door and then onto the far end of the seesaw. This last move caused the inner end of the seesaw to descend, while the other end was raised and flipped up the door to close the trap. If the mouse then attempted to return, it found itself trapped below the slanting closed door. On the other hand it could step off the end of the seesaw and allow the door to reopen, thereby resetting the trap.

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Year	Number	Title	Inventors
1867	63,651	Cage trap	William Morris (WM) Elkhart City, IL
1876	179,940	Improvement in animal traps	John H. Morris (JHM)
1877	195,632	Improvement in animal traps	JHM
1878	203,361	Improvement in animal traps	JHM/WM
1880	225,628	Animal trap	JHM/WM/Thomas D. Morris (TDM)
	235,553	Animal trap	JHM/WM/TDM
1883	269,954	Combination lock	JHM/TDM
	287,387	Animal trap	JHM/TDM
	288,182	Animal trap	JHM/TDM
1884	301,345	Support for books	Jos. W. Dupin/TDM
1885	320,157	Water elevator	JHM/TDM
1886	344,977	Permutation lock	JHM/TDM
	349,168	Combination lock	JHM/TDM
	351,995	Permutation lock	JHM/TDM
1887	368,414	Permutation lock	JHM/TDM
	368,543	Permutation lock	JHM/TDM
1888	380,266	Lock strike	JHM/TDM
	386,544	Latch	JHM/TDM
1889	414,985	Permutation lock	JHM/TDM
1890	437,658	Combination lock	JHM/Henry M. Morris (HM)
	442,989	Door check	TDM
1891	451,334	Combination lock	JHM/HM
	452,887	Combination lock	TDM
1892	466,420	Combination lock	JHM/HM
	469,825	Door check	TDM
1893	495,100	Permutation lock	JHM
	501,525	Vehicle wheel	JHM
	510,514	Permutation lock	TDM
1894	525,299	Permutation lock	Wm. B. Ward, Seward/JHM, Lincoln, NE
1895	547,444	Snap hook	TDM
1898	601,975	Permutation lock	JHM
1899	632,735	Permutation lock	JHM, Fremont, NE
1900	643,724	Vehicle wheel	JHM, Fremont
1904	771,383	Animal trap	JHM, Omaha, NE
1908	876,214	Vehicle wheel	JHM, Omaha

Data from patents published by the U.S. Patent Office

Table 1 U.S. Patents of the Morris Brothers, Seward, Nebraska

A Better Mouse Trap

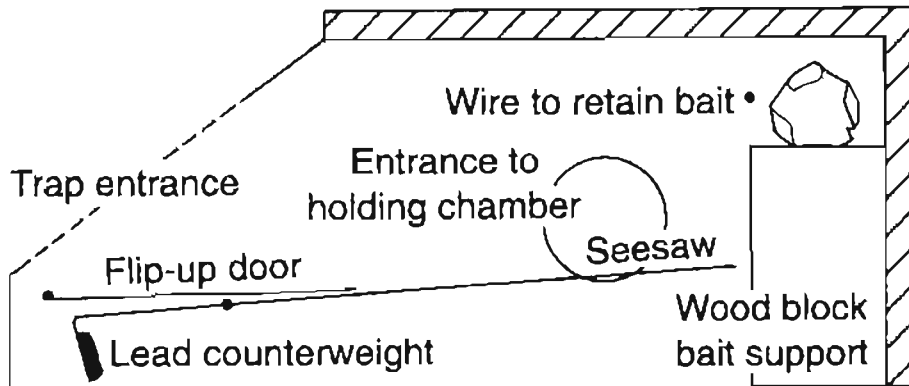


Fig. 2 Drawn from actual "Delusion" trap, based on 1877 patent.

This first design was quickly put to the test and found wanting in a number of important respects. But in only a little less than twelve months, John Morris had redesigned the trap (fig. 2) and filed on August 4, 1877, an application for a patent for his improved design. The patent (No. 195,632) was granted on September 25, 1877.

The second patent made clear what were considered to be the main deficiencies of the first design. It did away with one of the entrances and replaced it with a bait container. The top of the trap was no longer transparent and was provided with a hinged lid, giving access both to the tunnel and the mouse holding chamber. The frame of the one-way inner door was made so the door was less easy for a mouse to open from the inside. But perhaps most important, an incoming mouse could now only step from the end of the seesaw directly through the inner door, and had no chance to see that the outer door had reopened and might provide a possible means of escape. Presumably this modified version of the trap was thoroughly tested before being patented, since over many years it subsequently went through only minor changes by its eventual manufacturers.

Having perfected his first mouse trap in 1877, John Morris apparently lacked the capital to manufacture and market his invention and assigned his patent to Claudius Jones who, astute business-

man that he was, had already recognized the trap's commercial potential. Indeed, it was Claudius, who even before the modified design had been patented, had registered on September 4, 1877, the trademark "Delusion" that was to become the name of the manufactured trap and, in fact, the first U.S. trademark (No. 5,116) ever applied to an animal trap.

There is little doubt that the name of the trap was intended to indicate its ability to delude mice into being caught and was not intended to refer to the possible delusion of inventors of better mouse traps that the world would beat a path to their doors. As Chester Woolworth, the president of America's largest trap manufacturer, put it almost a century later at the time of the demise of one of his better mouse traps, "Fortunately Mr. Emerson made his living as a philosopher, not as a company president."⁷

Although in October 1876 the Morris brothers were reported to be turning out from thirty to forty of their patent mouse traps per day and large numbers some two months later, they were soon looking for them to be manufactured in even larger numbers elsewhere.⁸ William Morris went to Bridgeport, Connecticut, in the fall of 1877 to oversee the initial manufacture of the improved Delusion, probably on behalf of Claudius Jones who, having bought their interest and patent, took over responsibility for trap production. In part-



Claudius Jones. Courtesy of Cattle National Bank, Seward, Nebraska

nership with David L. Jones (possibly father of Claudius) he contracted with Smith and Egge of Bridgeport, Connecticut, to manufacture 10,000 traps and later, on January 1, 1878, Jones contracted for two million to be made at the rate of one thousand per day or two thousand when demand warranted. To help advertise the trap F. W. Smith of the firm wrote a sixteen-verse poem in its praise and some of the more memorable lines from this rather undistinguished composition were used again by a subsequent manufacturer to promote the trap's sales.⁹

In the Bridgeport City Directory for 1877 Smith and Egge advertised the trap: "The Delusion Mouse Trap—catches more mice than any other trap in the world; is always set and never out of order." By 1881, however, the Smith and Egge Manufacturing Company, now of 188 Lafayette Street, had displaced The Delusion with its own Rapid Transit Mouse Trap, which was then advertised in identical terms. Interestingly, the Rapid Transit, of which patent (No.

207,406) was assigned to his company by Frederick Egge in 1878, had perforated metal external panels similar to those of The Delusion. Its internal mechanism was more or less identical to that of the French Perpetual Mouse Trap patented in Britain in 1867 (No. 1,080) and made in France by Henri Ferdinand Serrin. It evidently did not prosper as nothing more is heard of it.

But what happened to The Delusion in the meantime? It seems that Claudius and David Jones had to resort to the manufacture of the trap themselves. The 1878-79 Bridgeport City Directory included the following entry: "Jones, David L., mouse trap manufacturer, 114 South Ave." In addition, the only known example of the trap that appears to have been made in Connecticut bears a label with the legend "DELUSION Claudius Jones & Co., Proprietors Bridgeport, Conn." The first five letters of Claudius are lacking on the label and the name of Bridgeport is rather indistinct (fig. 3).

Unlike the later Delusions made by the Lovell Manufacturing Company, the floor of the holding chamber is made of perforated metal, the large elongate holes being similar to those of the front grill. Also unlike the pale yellow label of the Lovell Delusion, the pale green label of the Jones trap features an illustration of an earlier trap with a wire mesh grill and the date of only the first patent printed on its end (perhaps the trap made by Smith and Egge). An even earlier trap made by Morris Brothers of Seward might have had the floor and grill made of woven wire cloth as featured in the second patent.

The only known illustrated advertisement (fig. 4) for The Delusion during what is assumed to be the Bridgeport production period of about ten years, ca. 1877-87, is that of H. A. Knox and Co., of London, importers of American hardware.¹⁰ In addition to a picture of an unlabeled trap with the legend, "The Delusion Mouse Trap," this 1880 advertisement includes a rhyming couplet: "The mice go in at a rapid rate, and each one sets it for its mate." Clearly the

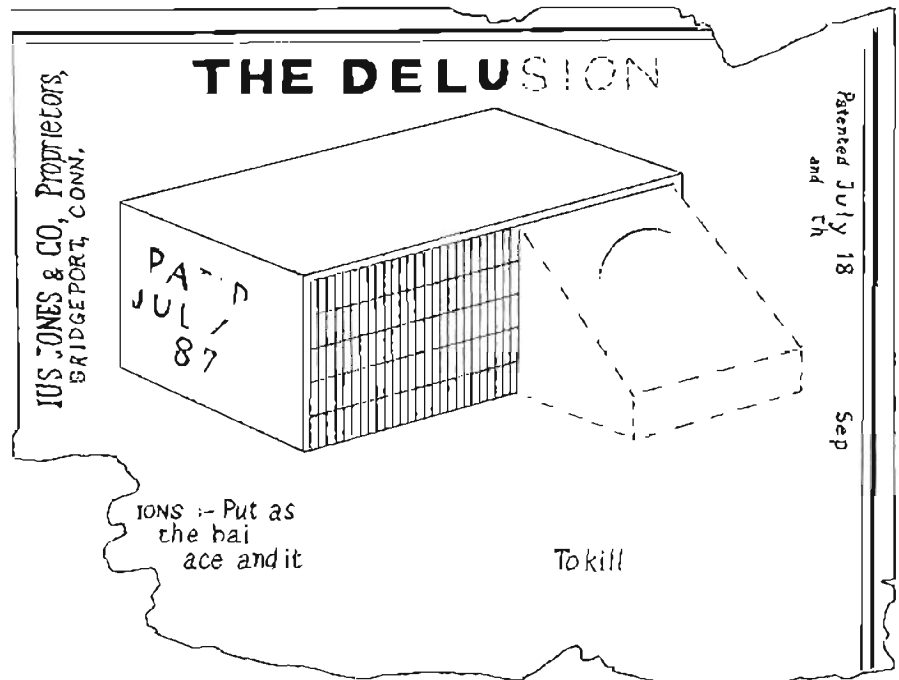


Fig. 3 Sketch of "Delusion" trap label, Claudius Jones & Co.

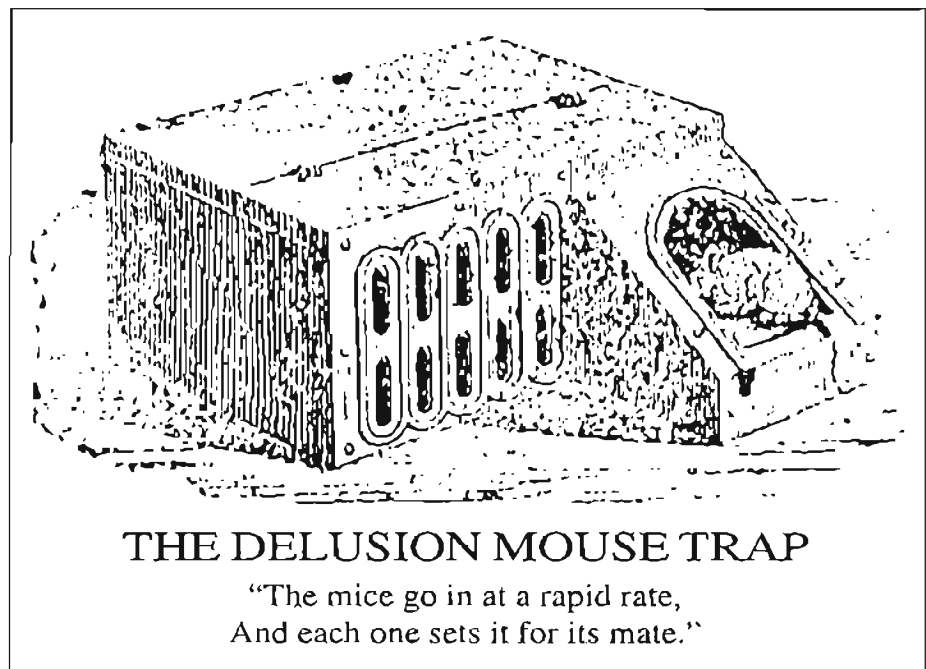


Fig. 4 Advertisement, H. A. Knox & Co., London, 1880.

A Better Mouse Trap

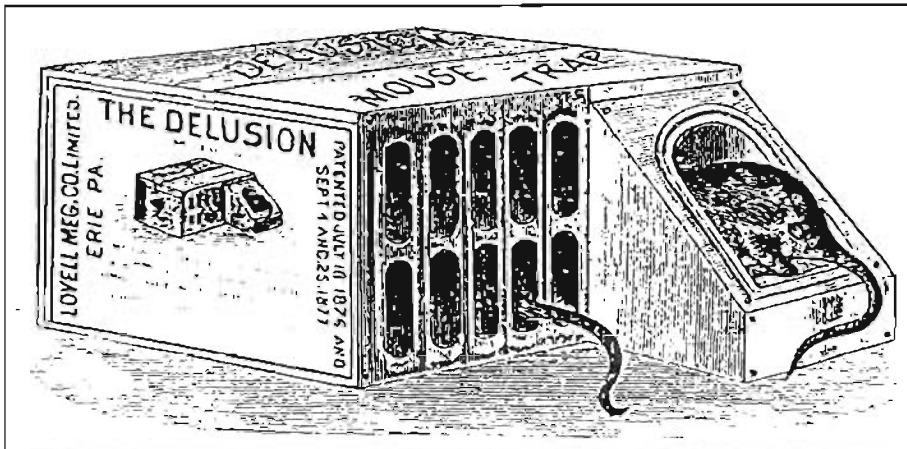


Fig. 5 Advertisement, Baker & Hamilton, San Francisco and Sacramento, 1889.

trap in its very early days survived a series of vicissitudes and it was not until its production was taken over by the Lovell Manufacturing Company that its future became more assured.

Melvin N. Lovell of Erie, Pennsylvania, was an even more productive and varied inventor than John Morris and between 1872 and 1893 his patents ranged from step ladders to cash registers and spring beds, to mention just a few. He started assigning his patents to

his own company in Erie in 1883, so it seems likely that it was at about this time that the Lovell Manufacturing Company was founded. Melvin Lovell did not, himself, patent any traps, but later advertisements suggest that the company seemed to specialize in making rat and mouse traps and clothes wringers.

Exactly when, how, or why Lovell acquired the manufacturing rights for The Delusion we do not know. Clearly there was some association between him and

John Morris, because Lovell also produced Morris's later Cyclone Mouse Trap (patented in 1883) and was closely associated with the F. F. Adams Company, to whom Morris had assigned the 1883 patent for his Ideal Mouse Trap.

The first we know of Lovell manufacturing The Delusion is an advertisement for the trap in the 1889 illustrated hardware catalog of Baker and Hamilton of San Francisco and Sacramento. Exactly the same illustration (fig. 5) showing "Lovell Mfg. Co." on the trap label was used in various hardware trade catalogs over a period of some twenty years, the last known being that of the Marshall-Wells Hardware Company of Duluth, Minnesota, in 1908. The label with directions for use that was pasted on the rectangular left-hand wooden end of the trap is shown in figure 6. Because the labels on most surviving traps are often torn, disfigured, and hard to read, what is known of the somewhat varied directions on The Delusion and Delusion-type traps of different manufacturers is summarized in Table 2. Most such directions reminded the retailer or user to place the traps upside down (i.e. with

Delusion, Claudius Jones & Co, Bridgeport, Conn.

Judging from words on incomplete label (fig. 3), the directions were much the same as those on the Lovell label below.

Delusion, Lovell Mfg. Co., Erie, Pa.

"Put as large a piece of cheese or cake as you can crowd into the bait box; shut and fasten the lid; place the trap in a desirable place and it never fails. To kill the mice let them out in a pail of water. Traps on sale should be inverted when placed on the shelves; otherwise the mice will be caught and die in the trap."

Mascotte, Lovell Mfg. Co.

Same as for Lovell Delusion above.

Household, Lovell Mfg. Co.

Better than for Lovell Delusion, but only one very incomplete label known.

Bonanza, Lovell Mfg. Co.

No label known, but advertisement (fig. 7) shows label with what appears to be instructions

Family, Abingdon Trap Co., Abingdon, Ill.

"TO SET" - Place cheese, cake or smoked bacon in bait box; fasten the

lid and put any place where mice are bothering. The trap does the rest. EASY TO KEEP CLEAN."

Catchemalive, Animal Trap Co., Abingdon, Ill.

"Place a piece of smoked bacon, cheese or cake in the bait box. Close down and fasten lid. Place the trap where the mice use and it is a sure catch. To kill the mice turn them out into a pail of water. Traps on sale should be turned up side down when placed on the shelves to avoid mice being caught and dying in trap."

Catchemalive, Animal Trap Co., Lititz, Pa.

As above, or following shorter version - "Place a piece of cheese or bacon in bait box. Close down and fasten lid. Place trap where mice use. To kill mice turn them into a pail of water. Turn trap upside down when not in use."

Catchemalive, Oneida Community, Ltd., Lititz, Pa.

"Place a piece of cheese or bacon in bait box. Close down and fasten lid. To kill mice turn them into a pail of water. Turn trap upside down when not in use."

Catchemalive, Animal Trap Co. of America, Lititz, Pa.

As above for Oneida Community.

Table 2 Names of traps and their makers, with directions for use as printed on Delusion and Delusion-type mouse traps.

the door closed) when not in use to avoid catching mice that would die in the unattended traps. The exposed wooden parts of the trap were frequently stained red, apparently to preserve them, while the metal front grill and door frame were enamelled blue.

One full-page advertisement to promote the Lovell trap incorporated those six lines of F. W. Smith's earlier poem that succinctly and amusingly described the mechanism:

The Mouse goes in to get the bait,
And shuts the door by his own weight,
And then he jumps right through a hole,
And thinks he's out, but bless his soul,
He's in a cage, somehow or other,
And sets the trap to catch another.¹¹

The same advertisement, in extolling the trap's speed and efficiency, likened it to the "Vigilance Committee of Leadville," presumably the mining town in Colorado.

But what of the work force who made this splendid and successful trap? They included no less than thirteen boys with an average age of twelve years, much the same composition as Colin Pullinger's trap-making employees in England.¹² During that period child labor was still quite common in both countries.

Later, the Lovell Manufacturing Company produced two cheaper versions of The Delusion, named The Mascotte and The Household. Their mechanism and appearance were identical to The Delusion, except for the name on the label. Thus their relative cheapness was almost certainly due to a reduction in the quality of materials with which they were made. Judging from their known advertisements, The Mascotte was available from 1894 to 1918, and The Household from 1899 to 1908.¹³

As well as making the Mascotte and Household versions of The Delusion, the Lovell Manufacturing Company also produced the Bonanza, another trap with the same Delusion catching mechanism, but with the outer casing modified so the metal panel containing a circular trap entrance was a continuation of the front grill (fig. 7). This change was made



Fig. 6 Label of "Delusion" trap, Lovell Mfg. Co.

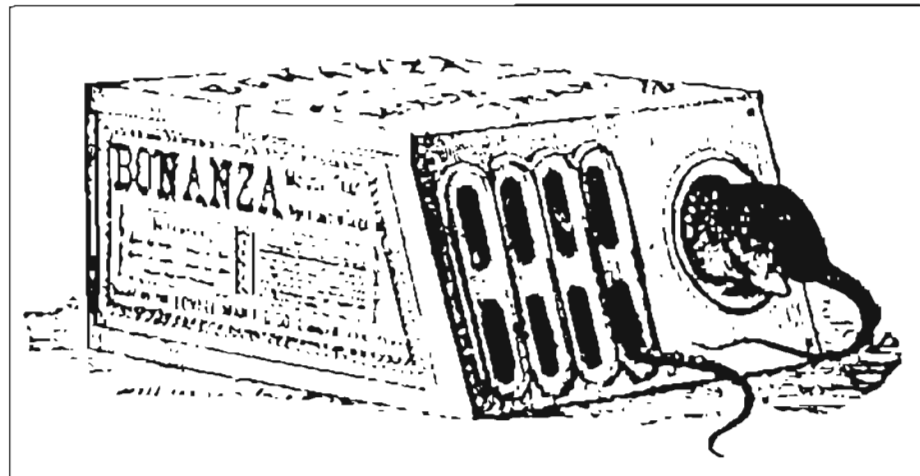


Fig. 7 Advertisement, A. Baldwin & Co. Ltd., New Orleans, 1899.

possible by removing the block of wood below the bait, and placing the bait in a special metal bait container at the end of the tunnel and above the seesaw, which could now be moved towards the end of the trap (fig. 8). Despite the improved ease of manufacture that such changes would apparently have made, the Bonanza seems to have been produced only between 1899 and 1903.¹⁴

The Family Mouse Trap is another copy of The Delusion trap. It differed from the original only in having no lead

weight attached beneath the door end of the seesaw and in having the front grill and base of the holding chamber made from tin perforated with many small, round holes and coated with black enamel paint. The wood was stained red and the printing on the left hand end was applied directly onto the wood and not on a paper label, and unlike all similar traps, contained no illustration of the trap (fig. 9).

The Family Mouse Trap was made by the Abingdon Trap Company of

A Better Mouse Trap

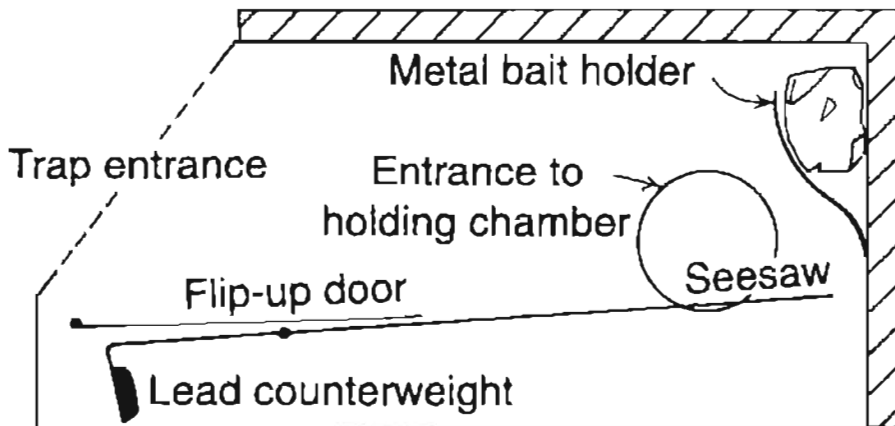


Fig. 8 Sketch from actual "Bonanza" trap showing "Delusion" mechanism housed within modified surrounding structure. Compare to fig. 2.

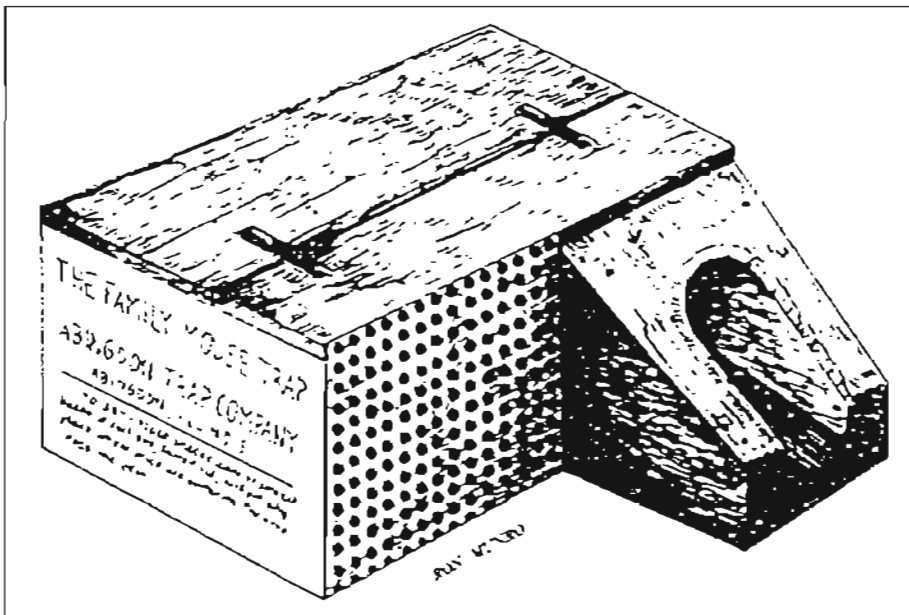


Fig. 9 The Family Mouse Trap. Drawing by Ron Munroe

Abingdon, Illinois. The company was founded by William Chauncey Hooker, another notable inventor of animal traps, and it is a tribute to John Morris that Hooker chose the Morris design of a multi-catch mouse trap to include in the product line of his company. The Family Mouse Trap never seems to have been advertised, so there is no firm information about its period of production. The company that produced it was founded in 1899 and was still in existence in 1912.¹⁵

Prior to setting up the Abingdon Trap Company, William Hooker had sold his rights in the Animal Trap Company of Abingdon that he had previously helped establish. This company also produced a Delusion-type trap named the "Catchemalive" that externally looked even more like The Delusion than did The Family Mouse Trap, though like the latter, it also had no lead counterweight and the printing was made directly on the wood. The name "Catchemalive" was originally the trademark for a differ-

ent design of tin, multi-catch mouse traps and was registered in 1878 by Robert E. Dietz of New York. The trademark registration was not renewed in 1898, however, and became available to other manufacturers.

The Delusion-type Catchemalive continued to exactly the same design through several changes of labeling as the company changed its location and ownership (Table 2). After the Animal Trap Company moved from Abingdon, Illinois, to Lititz, Pennsylvania, the trap continued to be made by the Animal Trap Company, Lititz, Pa., Oneida Community, Lititz, Pa., and the Animal Trap Company of America, Lititz, Pa. Its manufacture seems to have been discontinued sometime in the 1920s. The last illustration of the trap in a 1920s catalog of the Animal Trap Company of America (fig. 10) shows it bearing the label of the Animal Trap Company of Abingdon, underlining the continuity of its production, and no doubt bearing witness to the expense of arranging for new engravings.

The demise of the Delusion-type Catchemalive was not, however, the end of John Morris's invention. In the 1940s the Animal Trap Company of America (it later changed its name to Woodstream) acquired the trap department of the Lovell Manufacturing Company and its line of products. What, then, could be more appropriate than Woodstream's incorporation of John Morris's flip-up door into a new tin, multi-catch mouse trap first produced in 1976, the centennial year of John Morris's original Delusion patent. This new trap, named "The Victor Tin Cat Repeating Mouse Trap," remains in production today, especially for use by commercial pest control operators in places where they need to catch a lot of mice.

Although John Morris sold his Delusion patent for manufacture by others, the Morris brothers continued as inventors of animal traps and other useful devices. The first of the other Morris traps that followed The Delusion was the so-called Clown or Black Man Mouse Trap

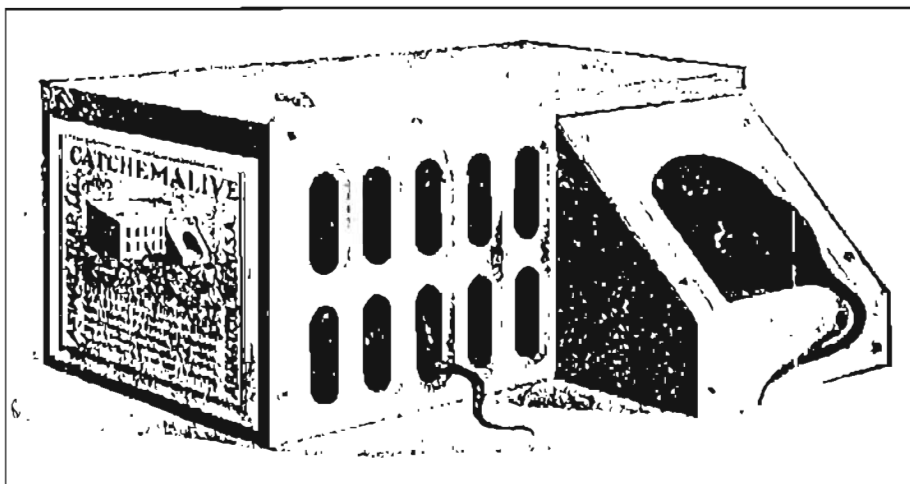


Fig. 10 Advertisement, Animal Trap Co. of America, Elitz, Pa., 1920s.

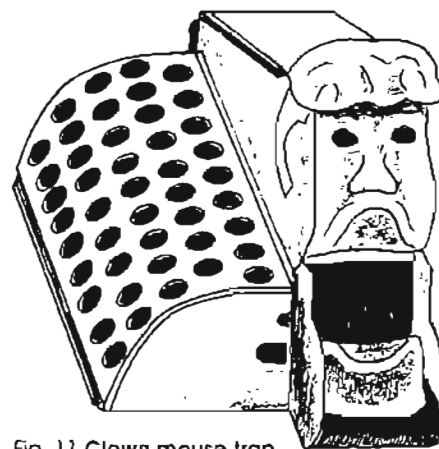


Fig. 11 Clown mouse trap. Drawing by Ron Munroe

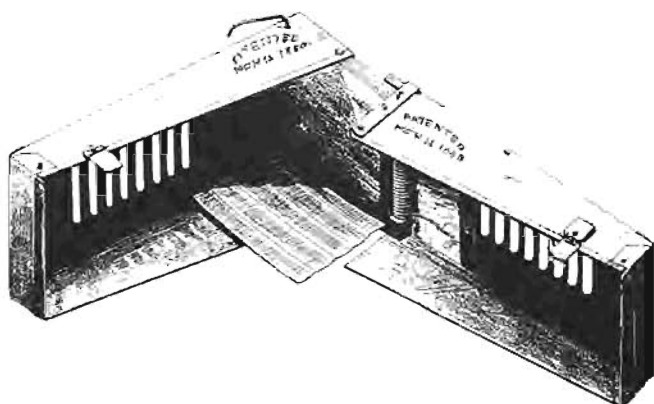


Fig. 12 Large cage trap. Drawing by Ron Munroe

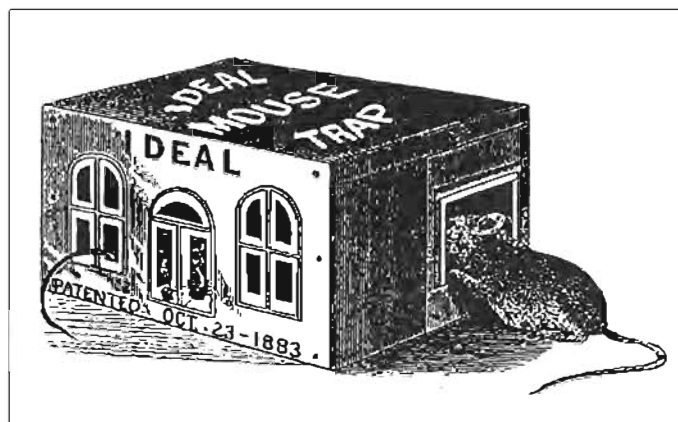


Fig. 13 Advertisement, Ideal mouse trap, 1890s.

(fig. 11), a multi-catch trap invented by John and William Morris and patented in 1878 (Patent No. 203,361) that was so configured that the whole trap took the form of a comical human head, whose eyes rolled and whose mouth closed when a mouse entered it, and reopened to reset the trap when the animal had gone into an adjacent holding chamber. The brothers designated this trap "The 15th Amendment."¹⁶ The analogy between a mouse-munching black man and the constitutional amendment providing voting rights for African Americans is not immediately obvious. Perhaps the Morrises envisaged some politicians as mice who were likely to be ensnared by the new amendment.

The next rodent trap to follow was a large, apparently single-catch cage trap (fig. 12) that was patented jointly by John, William, and Thomas Morris in 1880 (Patent No. 225,628). Its two halves were drawn horizontally together by a strong spring, when a broad treadle between them was pressed down. The trap was certainly large enough to catch a rat, but only mouse-sized rodents are depicted on the patent drawing, so it was probably designed to catch mice, perhaps more than one at a time when a sufficient number had gathered together to depress the treadle. Since no advertisements for these two traps have been located, they may only have been produced in small numbers by the

Morris brothers in Seward.

In contrast, two following mouse traps, the "Ideal" (Patent No. 287,387) and the "Cyclone" (Patent No. 288,182), patented by John and Thomas Morris in 1883, were advertised and manufactured commercially in another city. The Ideal (fig. 13) was another multi-catch trap, with a door that closed vertically downwards and reopened automatically when the mouse entered the adjacent holding chamber. Its patent was assigned to the F. F. Adams Company of Erie, Pennsylvania, which presumably manufactured it. It was the Lovell Manufacturing Company, also of Erie, that made and marketed the Cyclone, a snap trap with two overhead striking frames

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that struck downwards simultaneously when a mouse moved the coiled wire bait holder (fig. 14).¹⁷

Very few examples of these four Morris traps seem to have survived. In addition there is no evidence that an 1880 design (Patent No. 235,553) and a much later one of 1904 (Patent No. 771,383) were ever produced or sold commercially.

Overlapping slightly with their mouse trap development period, the Morrises turned their attention in 1883 to permutation and combination locks with which eventually about half of their patented inventions were concerned. An advertisement of about 1887 (fig. 15) provides evidence that at least some of the Morrises founded a lock company in Seward to exploit their patents in the manufacture of post office lock boxes. The company was very successful, and later combined with the L. B. Williams Lock Company, also of Seward, to become the Keyless Lock Company that in 1892 was reorganized and relocated in Indianapolis, Indiana.¹⁸

During the latter part of his lock-

making phase John Morris began to interest himself in carriage wheels and moved to Lincoln, then to Fremont, and finally to Omaha, where he died on July 30, 1908. A brief death notice in the Seward newspaper noted, "He was quite a genius, having invented the keyless lock now in use in our own post office," but the paper never mentioned his Delusion, the "better mouse trap" Morris contributed to the world.¹⁹

Notes

For being so free with their genealogical and historical materials, my thanks to the staffs of The Family History Group of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; the Erie Society for Genealogical Research, the Erie County Historical Society, the Illinois State Historical Library, the John Mosser Public Library of Abingdon, Illinois, the Nebraska State Historical Society, the Connecticut State Historical Society, the Bridgeport Public Library, and to James Mundy, postal historian. For information on their Delusions and Delusion-type traps, I am indebted to Carl Brandt, Chuck Clift, Reinhard Hellwig, Jim Koch, Bob Kwalwasser, Tom McCandless, and Tom Parr. My special thanks to Rex Marsh for information on trap advertisements and for reading the manuscript, and to Ron Munro, who not only provided vital information, but for permission to use some of his splen-

did sketches of John Morris's mouse traps.

¹ Reinhard Hellwig and David Drummond, *Trap Patents* (Meerbusch, Germany: Eigemverlag Hellwig, 1994).

² W. W. Cox, *History of Seward County, Nebraska* (Lincoln: State Journal Co., 1888), 46.

³ 1880 Census, Seward County, Nebraska, Enumeration District 138: 4,7; E.D. 148: 10.

⁴ Cox, *History of Seward County*, 239. The 1850 census of Mill Township, Tuscarawas Co., Ohio, lists Silas and Elizabeth Morris and sons James, William, Albert, Henry, Thomas, and Andrew. John Morris, who would have been seventeen, was not living at home. Data furnished by the Ohio Genealogical Society.

⁵ 1885 State Census of Nebraska, Seward County, E.D. 728: 17, 25, 39; Cox, *History of Seward County*, 239.

⁶ Cox, *History of Seward County*, 260.

⁷ Chester Woolworth was president of the Animal Trap Company of America and the quote from him appears in his article, "So We Made a Better Mouse-trap," *The President's Forum* (Fall 1962): 26-27.

⁸ *Nebraska Reporter*, Seward, Nebr., Oct. 26, Dec. 21, 1876; Mar. 15, 1877.

⁹ *Ibid*, Jan. 17, 1878.

¹⁰ Advertisement of H. A. Knox & Co., 151 Houndsditch, London, importers of American hardware and sundries, *The Ironmonger*, Dec. 11, 1880, 30.

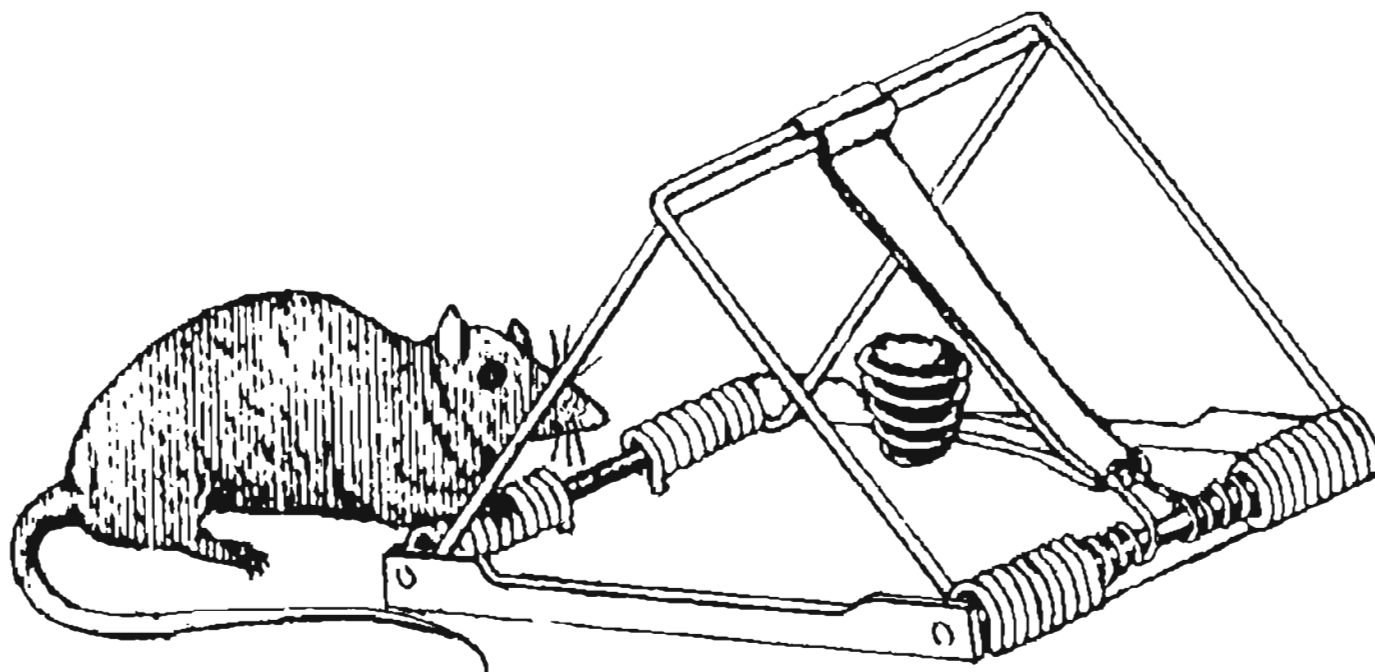


Fig. 14 Cyclone mouse trap, redrawn from patent.

¹¹ Advertisement reproduced in *American Heritage, The History Magazine*, 20 (1969): 112. The full poem as written by Smith appears in the *Nebraska Reporter*, Jan. 17, 1878.

¹² *Erie (Pa.) Sunday Times*, Oct. 28, 1951. David Drummond, "Colin Pullinger and his Perpetual Mouse Trap," *Sussex Industrial History* 24 (1994): 2-9.

¹³ The Mascotte was advertised in 1894 by Baldwin, Robbins & Co., and in 1918 by the W. Bingham Co. of Cleveland. The Household was ad-

vertised in 1899 by Sidney Shepard & Co., and in 1908 by Freeman, Delmater Co. of Detroit.

¹⁴ Advertised in 1899 by A. Baldwin & Co., Ltd. of New Orleans, and in 1903 by Holbrook, Merrill.

¹⁵ K. L. Keller, *The History of Abingdon* (Abingdon, Ill.: Abingdon Pub. Co., 1968), 36; A. J. Perry, *History of Knox County, Illinois* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1912), 422.

¹⁶ *Nebraska Reporter*, May 23, 30, 1878.

¹⁷ Frank Adams and Melvin Lovell tended to

make rather similar items and collaborated by marketing their products in different geographical areas, as reported in "Lovell Manufacturing Company and Its History," in the archives of the Erie County (Pa.) Historical Society.

¹⁸ Figure 6 and information on the later changes to the Morris Lock Company come from ephemera in the possession of James R. Mundy, postal historian of Eaton, Ohio; Cox, *History of Seward County*, 164.

¹⁹ *Seward Independent-Democrat*, Aug. 20, 1908.

For Postmasters.
THE MORRIS KEYLESS P. O. LOCK BOX
THE STRONGEST AND HANDSOMEST.
NO KEY TO LOSE, OR KEY DEPOSIT TO ANNOY.
TEN THOUSAND COMBINATIONS,
Wherever our box has been used the demand for call boxes changes to Lock Boxes,
thereby increasing receipts and also saving clerk hire.
MORRIS LOCK CO., Seward, Neb.

Fig. 15 Morris Lock Co. advertisement, about 1887.