

Servos Flour Mill Branding Iron

From the collection of the Niagara Historical Society Museum
Niagara on the Lake, Ontario

Review by Robert J. Miller

Wording on the iron: *J Servos 196lbs. U. Canada*

Dimensions: 64.5cm (handle) 11.4 x 7 x 3.2cm (circular branding head)

Among the many artifacts photographed at Palatine Hill by *Canadian Homes & Gardens* magazine in 1927 was a display of tools which had been used in the Servos grist mills (c.1783-1911). One of the largest tools was a branding iron used to mark the heads of wooden flour barrels to validate the weight, miller's name and mill location. The Loyalists brought many iron tools with them from the United States but it is clear that the Servos branding iron was made by an Upper Canada blacksmith.

There were three Servos grist/flour mills and they all functioned as merchant mills selling flour and other mill products to the British army, and to various agents. The first was a banal mill built and owned by the King in 1783 on Four Mile Creek near Lakeshore Road in what is now Niagara-on-the-Lake. The mill was operated by a retired soldier named Daniel Servos who eventually acquired it and the surrounding lands where he developed a large business grinding grain, milling lumber and supplying provisions to Fort George and local settlers. The mill was burned by the US army in 1812, rebuilt and burned again by accident in 1820. Rebuilt again, and automated at some expense, this third Servos mill continued operating until around 1906 and finally collapsed during a storm in 1911.

Daniel Servos' first son, John Dease Servos, was born at Palatine Hill in 1784. Daniel died in 1803 and John, still a teenager, took over the family businesses with his younger brother. The miller "*J Servos*" on the branding iron is John Dease Servos.

The first Upper Canada Flour Inspection Law was enacted on July 9, 1801. An amendment in 1820 required every miller selling flour to brand his barrels with the name of the mill that packed the flour and the initials "*U.C.*". Further, all flour barrels were to be "*good sufficient casks, made of staves well seasoned and bound with ten hoops . . . the tare marked together with the net weight of flour contained, each cask to contain 196 pounds.*"¹

A completely new Flour Inspection Law in 1841 dealt with the United Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada and repealed all other such laws. The barrel branding regulations were changed dramatically and the brand mark was thenceforth to occupy a space 14 inches long and 8 inches broad. This large standard ushered in the era of painting

¹From the Statutes, quoted in Felicity L. Leung, **Grist and Flour Mills in Ontario: From Millstones to Rollers, 1780s-1880s**, Parks Canada, National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Ottawa, 1976, p. 134.

brands on barrel heads using brass templates. In later years, colourful paper labels were stuck on the barrel heads to display required information along with mill advertising.

From the information on the branding iron we know that it was created to certify flour in barrels packed at the third Servos mill under the ownership of John D. Servos (*J Servos*) 1784-1847. We know his flour packing was subject to the provisions of the Upper Canada Flour Inspection Law for branding which was passed in 1820. We also know that the subject branding iron failed to meet the dimension requirements of the 1841 Law.

The branding iron is therefore the instrument used at the Servos mill during the period 1820-1841 when the miller was John Dease Servos.



Mirror View

