CLEMENT CLAWSON

A unique grave marker, a Newark inventor, and a family drama.

by Gordon Bond

The H.T. Clawson monument as it appeared in 1897, complete with now-missing statue of a child atop the granite sphere.

Old Newark Facebook Page

If you have ever dropped a coin into a vending machine, video game, telephone, slot machine, or even the air-pump at a gas station, you were using technology with Garden State roots—and a rather fascinating backstory.

I first became aware of it thanks to a Facebook page called "Old Newark," that regularly posts all manner of historic images and ephemera from New Jersey's largest city—which, by the way, is marking the 350th anniversary of its founding this year. Back on March 25, 2016, they posted a "now and then" comparison of a curious grave monument at Newark's Fairmount Cemetery. The "then" image was from 1897, showing a huge granite sphere atop an ornate base, with what appeared to be a small child perched atop the ball! As someone who has an interest in historic cemeteries, I was intrigued. Did someone *really* sit their toddler on top of the monument for the picture? The child was not in the "now" image from 2007.

After some back and forth posting in the comments section, it seemed that the child was actually a statue, removed or lost at some point. But who was the family and what was the story behind this amazing marker?

The name on the walkway apron read "H.T. Clawson." Some quick Google searches turned up Henry T. Clawson of Newark, whose name was associated with a coin-operated machine manufacturing company in the late 1800s and early 1900s. My

The H.T. Clawson monument as it appears in 2016. The statue of the child is gone. The inset shows the name. Below is what appears to be the anchor for the statue.

Images by the author

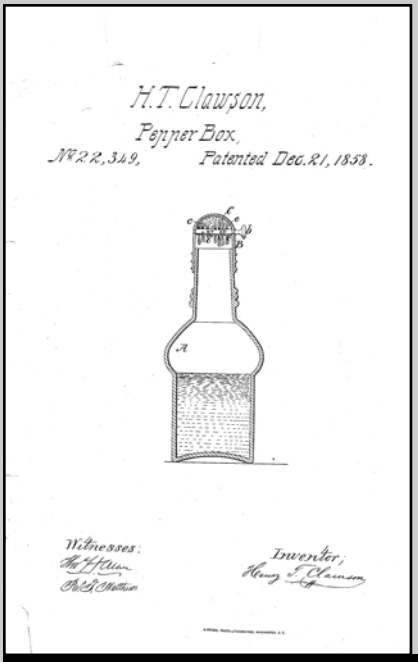
wife and I made a trip to Fairmount that weekend to look for it. In person, it is a magnificent piece of work, a bit darker than appears in the old picture. Standing far enough back, it is possible to just make out what was likely the anchor for the statue of the child atop the sphere.

So who were the Clawsons? And, who was the child?

The first definite hit I found for this particular Henry Clawson was in the 1850 U.S. Census. He shows up as a 26-year-old "mechanic" living with his 29-year-old wife, Mary, in Franklinton, North Carolina. Also living with them was Martha and Mary Green, 11 and 13 years old, respectively. How they came to live with them isn't clear. Henry's birthplace was listed as Massachusetts, while all the rest were born in North Carolina.[1] Henry Clawson had married Mary W. Wilkins on June 27, 1850.[2]

On the 20th of August 1850, in addition to that year's Census, a "Slave Schedule" was also enumerated. Clawson is recorded as owning seven slaves, identified not by any names, but by age and sex: two 5-year-old girls, two 12-year-old girls, one 16-year-old boy, one 18-year-old woman, and one 38-year-old woman. A William W. Green also appears, owning 37 slaves, perhaps marking another possible connection between Clawson and the two Green girls living with them[3]

In order to afford slaves, Clawson must have been reasonably well-off. In addition to whatever manufacturing he engaged in, he



Henry T. Clawson's 1858 U.S. patent US22349 for a pepper box.
Google Patents Search

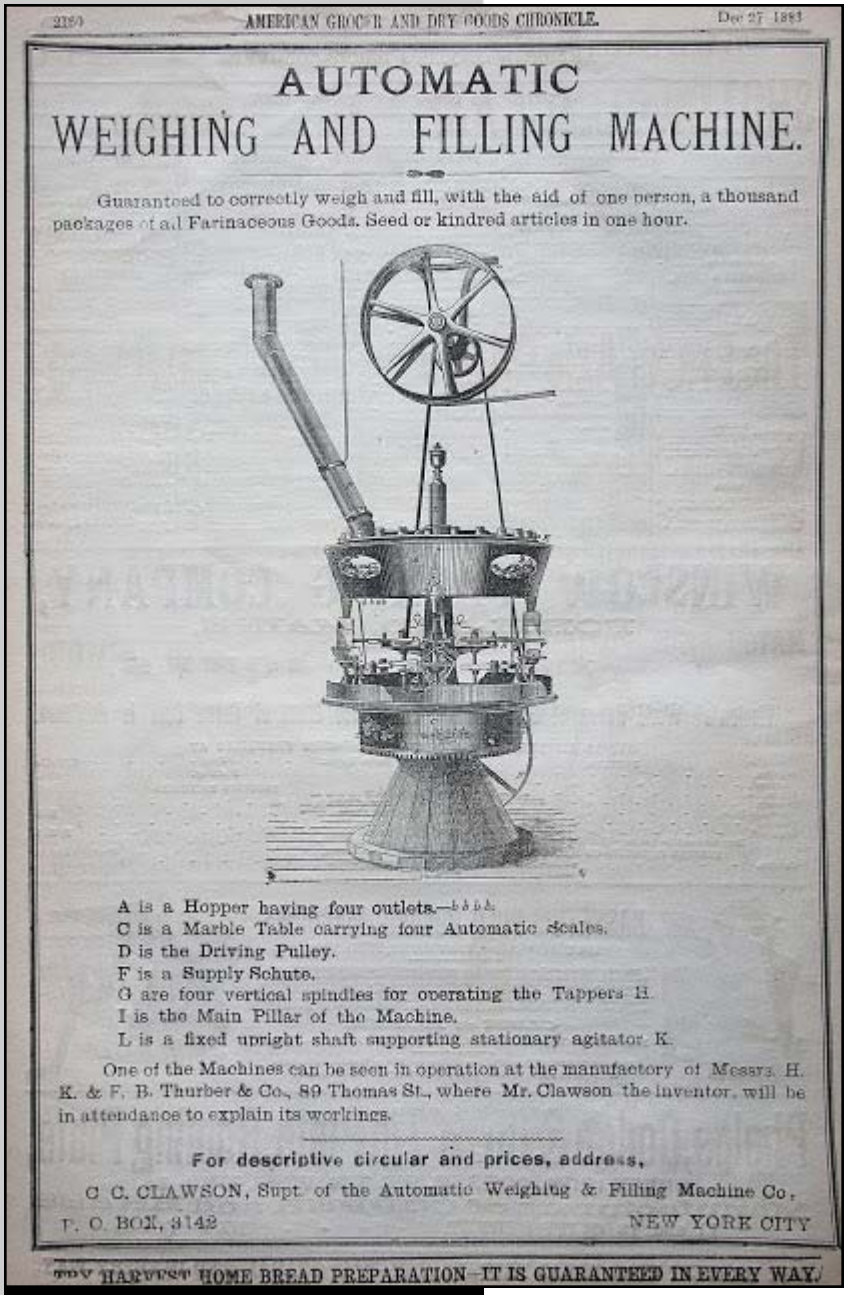
evidently also tried his luck as an inventor. In December of 1858, he patented "a new and useful Improvement in Pepper Cruets and Boxes." As he described it: "This invention consists in placing within the top of the pepper cruet or box a rotating or semirotating brush . . . whereby the perforations of the top of the box or cruet are prevented from becoming choked or clogged and a free discharge of pepper insured at all times when the box or cruet is used."[4]

By the time of the 1860 Census, Clawson was listed as a "Master Mechanic." Mary A. Green was still living with them, as was a 12-year-old Susan C. Wilkins. But there was also 1-year-old Clement Clawson, the only son of Henry and Mary.[5]

Considering Clawson owned slaves, it will come as little surprise that he sided with the Confederacy during the American Civil War. He manufactured tools and other items for them[6] and on March 28, 1863, received a receipt for $48.00 paid by a Confederate States Quartermaster at Raleigh, NC, "For the Services of 8 Negro Laborers for 4 days (loading stationary engine on carts)" and noting that the "services rendered" were "necessary for the public service."[7]

The war years appear to have changed Clawson's fortunes. According to the 1870 U.S. Census, the then-44-yeal-old was making his living not as a master mechanic, but a "Painter & Paper Hanger." His personal estate was estimated valued at $1,500. By then, Mary was dead and he had remarried 34-year-old Aurelia (spelled "Arelia" in the Census) as his second wife. Clement, at age 17, was working as a "Clerk in Store." Their exact living arrangements is unclear—also listed at the same address was a Lewis Gulley, age 24, identified as a "General Merchant" worth $2,000 and with a black cook, 20-year-old Carey Parham, and house servant, 12-year-old Victoria Parham. Whether they were all living together or happened to have rooms in the same building is uncertain.[8]

A later 1903 newspaper article about Clement claimed that Henry Clawson had "failed in business in 1874."[9] When the census taker again came knocking in 1880, Clawson's lot seemed to have improved. They were living in Raleigh, NC, where Henry worked in the upholstery business and Clement was in "Mechanics." The 1880 Census also recorded a little more detail about the family's ancestry. Henry's father has come from England to Massachusetts, where he evidently met his mother. Aurelia's parents were both North Carolina natives. But it is when one scrolls down to the rest of the occupants of the address that things become interesting—there are four "Servants" listed. If we can assume they all worked for Clawson, as opposed to living in the same building, it would suggest he was well-enough off to afford them. Three were the Field family—Isham, 40, carpenter; presumably his wife Calla, 30, "Wash & Iron"; and a 2-year-old girl named Hessie. Isham was listed as black and the rest "Mulatto." Lastly a 38-year-old black woman, Eliza Gill, was listed as the cook.[10]



2180 AMERICAN GROCER AND DRY GOODS CHRONICLE. Dec 27 1883

AUTOMATIC
WEIGHING AND FILLING MACHINE.

Guaranteed to correctly weigh and fill, with the aid of one person, a thousand packages of all Farinaceous Goods, Seed or kindred articles in one hour.

A is a Hopper having four outlets.—b b b b.
C is a Marble Table carrying four Automatic Scales.
D is the Driving Pulley.
F is a Supply Schute.
G are four vertical spindles for operating the Tappers H.
I is the Main Pillar of the Machine.
L is a fixed upright shaft supporting stationary agitator K.

One of the Machines can be seen in operation at the manufactory of Messrs. H. K. & F. B. Thurber & Co., 89 Thomas St., where Mr. Clawson the inventor, will be in attendance to explain its workings.

For descriptive circular and prices, address,

C. C. CLAWSON, Supt. of the Automatic Weighing & Filling Machine Co.,

P. O. BOX, 3142 NEW YORK CITY

TRY HARVEST HOME BREAD PREPARATION—IT IS GUARANTEED IN EVERY WAY.

Ad for the Automatic Weighing & Filling Machine Co. 1884.
http://cnhillsborough.blogspot.com/2012/09/clement-clawsons-capitalism-part-one.html

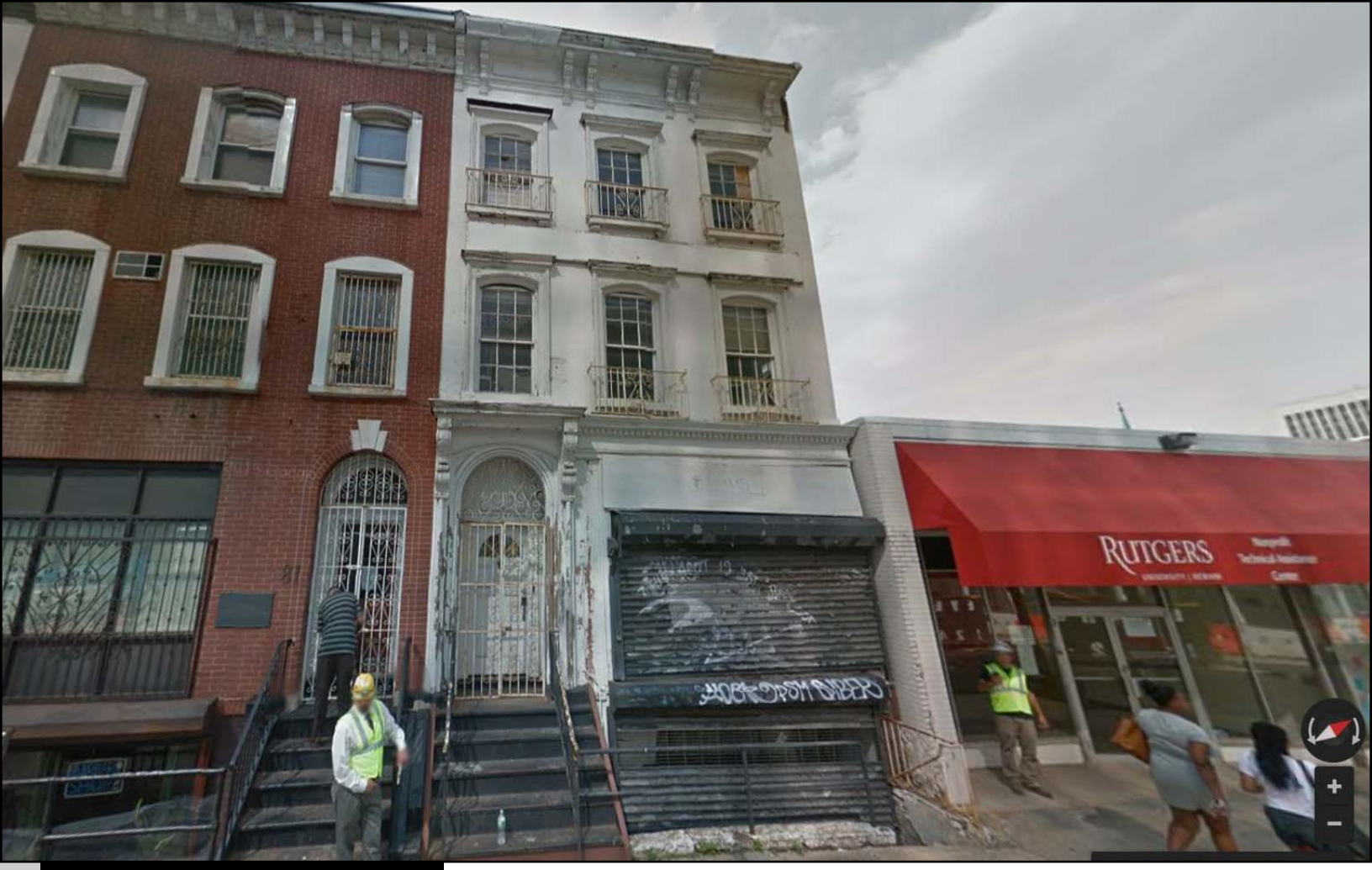
Whatever success the Clawson family was enjoying seems to have been thanks in no small measure to the inventive prowess of Clement. One of his first successes was a machine that automatically measured and cut paper in a single step. But what really put the Clawson name on the map was a mechanical contraption that automated the process of weighing and filling a thousand packages of "farinaceous goods, seeds, or kindred articles in one hour," all overseen by just one operator.[11] Clement Coleridge Clawson filed for a patent on October 18, 1880. Though it would take until April 5, 1887 to be granted,[12] the success of the machine resulted in the formation of the Automatic Weighing and Filling Machine Company and a move to New York City.[13]

But that was just the beginning. Clement Clawson saw the potential of automatic, coin-operated mechanisms in all manner of modern commerce and formed The Clawson Slot Machine Company. The family moved across the Hudson River to Newark.[14]

The rapid growth of the business is reflected by two city directories found by the Old Newark Facebook page. One from 1884 listed both father and son as machinists living at 29 Clay Street. Just six years later, the 1890 directory listed their business at 21 Hackett Street and home at 79 Halsey Street.

The short dead-end Hackett Street still exists off University Avenue, but now serves as access and parking between Rutgers University's Blumenthal Hall and a soccer field. Back around 1890, however, it was a largely industrial area on the Morris Canal. The Sanborn Fire Insurance map from 1892 show number 21 as a long brick factory. The front half was three-stories and the back four, making for what must have been quite an impressive structure.[15]

None of it survives today, but the three-story building the family called home still stands on Halsey Street, about two blocks northeast of the factory. It's seen better days and the bottom floor and basement have since been converted into retail space. The Halsey Street Methodist Church that stood next door is now a parking lot for the modern Rutgers Technical Assistance Center and Child Care Center. Across the street is the back of the recently-constructed



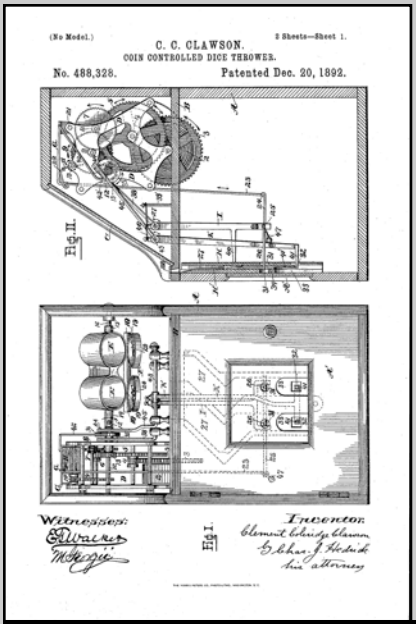
79 Halsey Street as it appears today (the white building).

Google Maps

Prudential Insurance building. Hopefully, it will all benefit from the current revitalization efforts of Newark's downtown.

Clawson was capitalizing on the emergence of what were generally known as "nickel-in-the-slot" machines in the 1870s. At first, the concept had been employed mostly for amusements. A model of a steam locomotive, a steamboat, or other engine would be set up and by dropping a nickel into a slot, would spring to life with wheels spinning, pistons pumping, and maybe even a music box accompaniment. More sophisticated contraptions followed—mechanical horserace games, scales that would print your weight and fortune, etc. It didn't take long for the idea to evolve into vending machines, dispensing small items like gum and candy, cigarettes and cigars, pencils, postage stamps, etc.[16]

Clement Clawson—identified in newspapers as C. C. Clawson—developed something called "the music box weighing machine" that proved especially popular. In the late 19th and early 20th century, home scales were luxuries, so most people didn't know their weight unless they went to the doctor for a checkup. There was great novelty value in coin-operated scales that might be difficult to understand now. The customer would stand on the scale, drop in their coin and be entertained by a music box while they waited for the dated ticket to be printed with their weight. Clawson left the intricate mechanisms visible through glass, so they could watch the gears churning as an extra attraction.

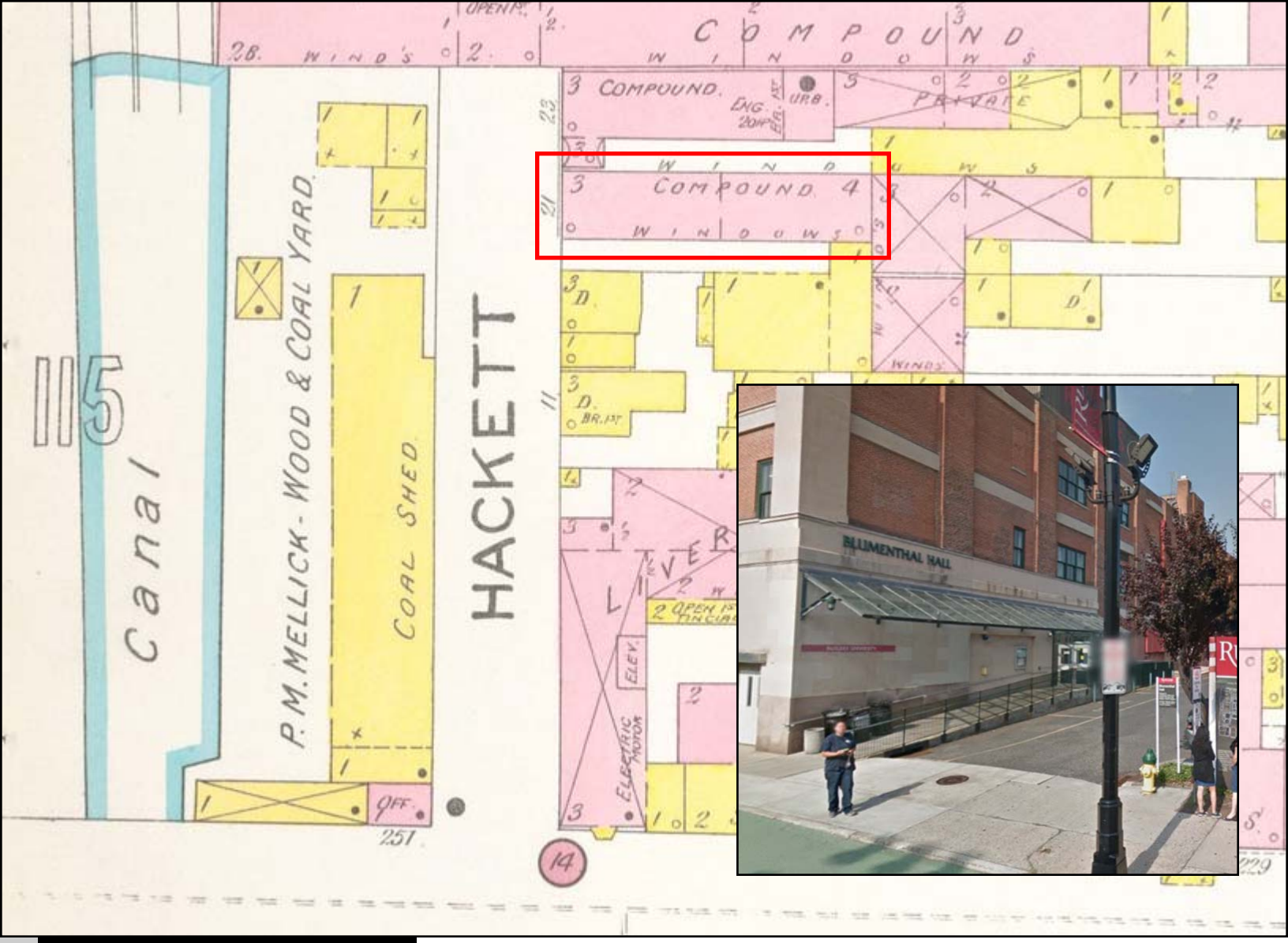

(No Model.) 2 Sheets—Sheet 1.
C. C. CLAWSON.
COIN CONTROLLED DICE THROWER.
No. 488,328. Patented Dec. 20, 1892.
Fig II.
Fig I.
Witnesses:
Inventor:

C. C. Clawson's 1892 U.S. patent US488328 for a coin-operated automatic dice-throwing game.
Google Patents Search

Invented and manufactured by Clawson in Newark, they were said to be among the most-inventive and appealing of the type. When Clawson ceased production in the 1890s, they cost $250—no small sum. Nevertheless, they were still in enough demand that other manufacturers tried to buy the rights to make them. Clawson refused, however, when they proposed to make cheaper versions to sell below what he felt was fair. With no new machines being produced, by 1895 there was an estimated 600 still in use throughout the U.S.[17]

The lure of easy money has made gambling an ancient pastime, and soon this new technology was being employed to create mechanical games of chance in the shape of early "slot machines." In their simplest form, the patron would drop their coin in the slot where it would fall into sort of a maze. If it hit just right and fell down the most difficult track, it would hit a trigger and release three nickels, billed as a prize of "two for one and your money back." It made enough profit for the manufacturer and buyers that soon imitations and variations began popping up. Here too, Clawson innovated, putting Newark at the fore of a burgeoning slot machine industry. He created what was called a "Three-Jackpot" machine. The nickels from unlucky patrons gathered in a pocket behind glass as a growing jackpot, luring customer after customer, emptied periodically to the profit of the operator. But every so often, the odds ran against "the house," and a nickel would fall onto the trigger and empty the entire cache into the hands of the fortunate gambler. It was wildly popular with sales in the thousands. Soon other companies bought machines just to they could take castings of the parts to make their own copies. With two months of introduction, there were a dozen knockoffs on the market. The obvious opportunities for fraud from rigged machines attracted the attention of police throughout the country who interfered enough that manufacture was brought to a halt.[18]

A simple yet effective idea drove the success of Clawson's contraptions—they were designed to let the patron see the coin dropping inside, tripping levers, activating the clockwork mechanisms, the spinning of the wheels, etc. With games of chance, having everything seemingly out in the open must have added a sense that they were on the level. His coin-operated dice-thrower game sold over 6,000 machines alone. Indeed, the design principle of allowing the player to see the action set in motion by their coin was patented by Clawson and he received royalties from other companies who employed the concept. When Thomas Edison came up with his phonograph, he saw it as an arcade amusement where he could maintain a revenue stream after the initial sale through franchise type agreements and supplying recordings. His arcade phonographs included a glass-covered aperture where the patron could watch the coin drop and activate the recording. Edison resisted paying royalties to Clawson and



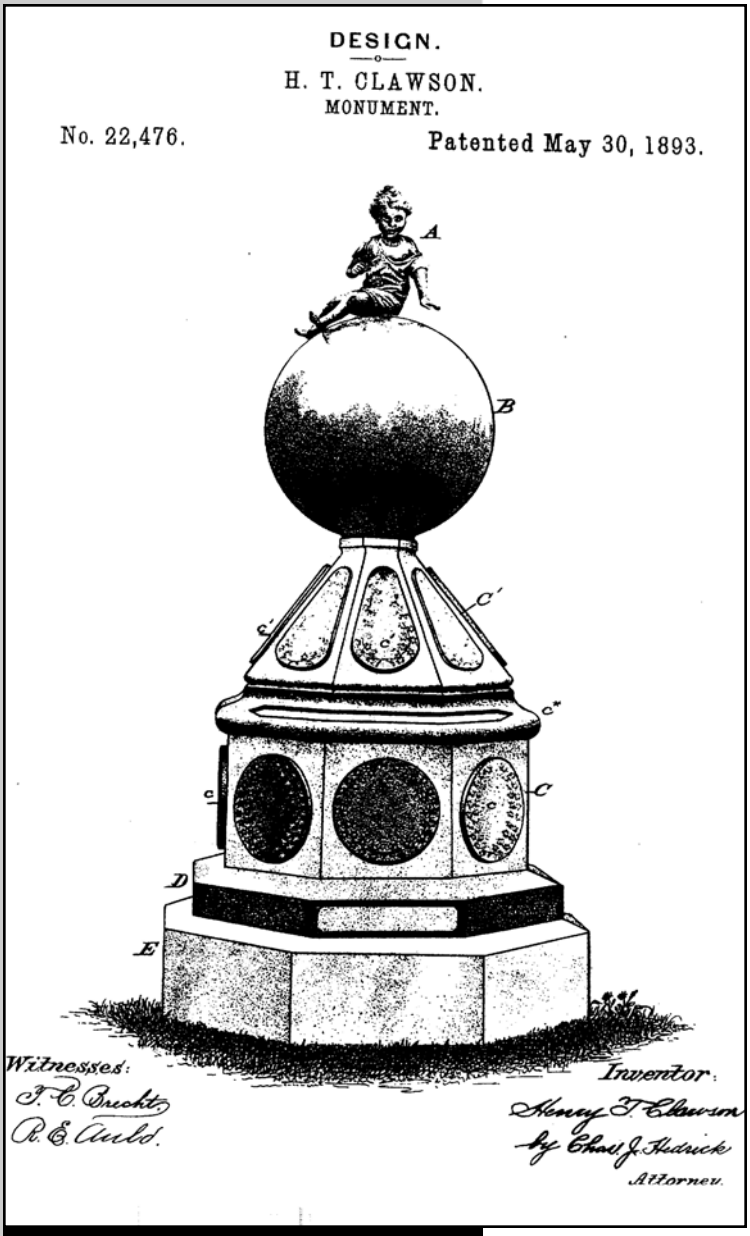
21 Hackett Street (red box) from the 1892 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Newark, Map 116.
http://map.princeton.edu/mapviewer/#/nv935483d

The inset shows the view today from around where the "14" icon is located on the map.
Google Maps

lost. Instead of relenting, he covered over the openings.[19]

The dice-throwing machine caught on as a promotional gimmick for shops. At the very least, if a patron dropped a nickel they would automatically receive a "check" for five cents—a coin-like brass token redeemable only in that shop. The rules varied, but if the dice thrown added up to, say, anything below 29 or above 13, the customer got nothing more than the five cent investment back in the form of the "check." If the thrown dice added up to higher than 28 or lower than 14, they would win some additional premium. Cigars were popular items. Between the visible mechanisms and the suitably randomness of the roll of the dice, the games were fair and brought in customers. In one week, a dozen or so of these machines were installed in shops throughout Newark.[20]

While Clawson was successful, it could still be a tough business. The popularity of some coin-operated games could be fickle. A "three pot" machine had record-breaking sales for the company, but only remained popular for a season.[21] Games, however, was only part of the picture. Over the years, Clement Clawson patented vending machines (1908, 1912), an ice shaver (1888), curtain rollers (1883), a star-shaped kite (1910), an electric



C. C. Clawson's 1893 U.S. patent USD22476 for a grave monument.
Google Patents Search

power distributor (1898), a recording pen for chart recorders (1908), a coin-operated air pump (1899), a machine for measuring tobacco (1880), even a kaleidoscope run by a clockwork mechanism that also played a music box (1889)!

If it feels like the son was more prolific than the father, well . . . he *was.* Henry and Clement Clawson came up with a joint agreement for building up their Newark enterprise. They split the cost of leasing the Halsey Street residence at around $6,500 apiece. Clement put up $3,000 for them to obtain the lease on the factory in 1889 which still had four years left on it. On paper, the son then bought the machines at a fixed price from his father and resold them at a profit under his Clawson Slot Machine Company. The revenue Henry made selling the machines to his son gave him his share of the funds to buy the building outright when the lease ended. The cost was $9,400, $8,000 of which was mortgaged. In February of 1895, Clement paid off the $2,991 balance on their mortgage on the factory. In 1892, Clement had advanced $3,200 so his father could purchase the Halsey Street home.[22]

With both properties, the title was in Henry Clawson's name, with the understanding that Clement would inherit them when his father died. Though Clement bought the machines from his father's H. T. Clawson Company under this arrangement, he was actually the one who invented the products, oversaw production, and devised the sales plans.[23] Father and son were evidently close enough that Clement would allow his father to benefit to such a degree from his industriousness and talents, essentially deferring some of his own rightful rewards until after Henry died. Not that Clement failed to benefit from the arrangement. He and his wife Lillie, son Henry C., and a nanny, Ella Hood, all shared the Halsey Street home with Henry and Aurelia.[24]

Henry C. Clawson was born to Clement and Lillie in 1884, but died on October 8, 1885 at just over a year old.[25] In 1893, Henry T. Clawson filed for a patent for a grave marker—the marker now in Fairmount Cemetery that inspired my research. The statue of the child atop the sphere was evidently intended to represent his grandson, whose name is engraved on one of the medallions on the sides of the base.[26] The elder Clawson's interest in designing a grave marker, however, was likely occasioned by his own sense of mortality. At the time he applied for his patent, he was turning 70 and suffered from what was called Bright's disease, named after the English physician, Richard Bright, who described it in 1827.

C. C. Clawson's son (top) and first wife, memorialized on the family monument at Fairmount Cemetery.
Images by author

These days it is called "chronic nephritis" and encompasses several forms of kidney disease.[27] On August 15, 1897, Henry T. Clawson passed away from the ailment at age 73. Obituaries identified him as the inventor of the "nickel-in-the-slot" machines.

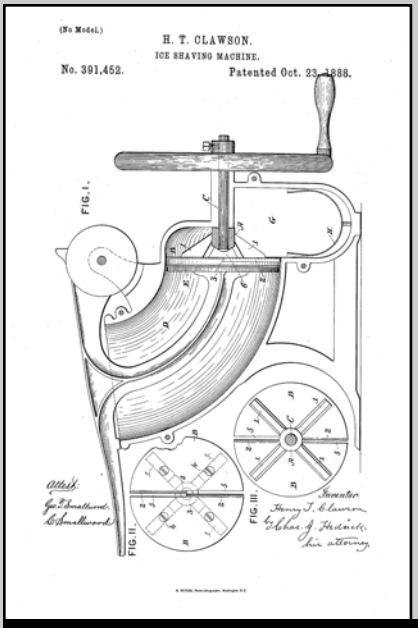
According to the agreement he had with his father, Clement Clawson should have inherited title to the Newark properties. His father had reaffirmed as much on several occasions. One can imagine his shock, therefore, when the will was read and he learned his father had left everything to his second wife, Aurelia! It was said that as soon as the will was read, the outraged Clement refused to leave the lawyer's office, where he immediately threatened to contest the will and to sue for a settlement of all the money owed him from their business dealings. He managed to come to an agreement with his stepmother—in return for not contesting the will, she would leave him everything when she died. By March of the following year, she had made good.[28]

Over the following year, the contentiousness seems to have been put behind them. Aurelia Clawson's grandniece, Aurelia Lee, moved in with them on Halsey Street during the period and Clement was doing well enough to buy a country house for himself and his wife in Flagtown, NJ, a sleepy unincorporated rural hamlet in Somerset County's Hillsborough Township on the Lehigh Valley Railroad line. Aurelia and her grandniece remained in Newark.[29]

Tragedy struck Clement Clawson again when his wife Lillie died March 10, 1899 at just 42 years old. In the prior fifteen year period, he had lost his son, his father, and his wife.

There is a gap in the information I have been able to find at a critical juncture in the story. Ella Hood had been hired by Clement and Lillie Clawson to take care of their son, Henry C. When the boy died in 1885, it is not clear what happened to Ella. The 1890 U.S. Census is the "missing year," having been largely destroyed by fire. The nearest New Jersey State Census from 1885 was taken before the child's death. I am, for now, unable to say if Clement and Lillie had any other children, though it does not appear that they did. That leaves Ella Hood unaccounted for, though there is some indication that she remained living with the Clawsons. In the 1900 Census, she was living with them in Flagtown as a "lodger." Her whereabouts became important after Lillie's death because she and Clement became romantically involved.

The widow Aurelia was rather unhappy that her stepson was taking up with the former nanny, though her exact reasons remain unknown. Had Clement started the relationship with Ella before his wife's death? Did she view Hood as being beneath his station? Regardless, Clement and his stepmother became estranged over it. What he evidently did not know was that she had her will


(No Model.)
H. T. CLAWSON.
ICE SHAVING MACHINE.
No. 391,452. Patented Oct. 23, 1888.
FIG. I.
FIG. II.
FIG. III.
Witnesses:
Inventor
Henry T. Clawson
by Edmund J. Fitzgerald
his attorney

C. C. Clawson's 1888 U.S. patent US391452 for an ice shaver that would be the foundation of the modern incarnation of his business.
Google Patents Search

changed on July 7, 1900. Along with other minor bequeaths to her family, she stipulated that Clement would have full use of the Halsey Street home for life, provided he did not marry or live with Ella Hood, and permitted her grandniece to live there. If he should not meet the conditions, the property and her estate was to be divided between her nephews and nieces. In short, she was reneging on her agreement with Clement to leave him the property on her death in return for his not contesting his father's will. Clement had no idea of this consequence when he indeed did marry Ella Hood in February of 1901 and the couple moved permanently to Flagtown.[30]

Though he did occasionally visit her in Newark, Clement and his stepmother remained estranged. Family friends tried to orchestrate their reconciliation. As 1901 turned into 1902, the relationship had thawed enough that in February Aurelia had agreed to travel to Flagtown to meet. A few days before the planned meeting, however, Aurelia died of heart disease. The hoped for reconciliation precluded, her will was never changed. One can only imagine the feelings Clement must have had as he sat in another lawyer's office listening to a will being read that once more cheated him out of his due.[31]

This time, however, he would contest the will, filing suit on May 15, 1903 in Newark's Chancery Court against Aurelia Lee (by then Aurelia Brewer) for property valued at $60,000.[32] On June 28, 1904, the decision came back in his favor—after seven years, Clement Clawson would get everything his father had left him.[33]

Clement and Ella Clawson remained in Flagtown where they raised their family. Clement junior was born in 1902, Robert in 1903, and Mary S. in 1908. The 1910 Census shows a Minnie Hasselbach also living with them, a 31-year-old servant from Germany. Clement's occupation is entered, fittingly, as "Inventor & Mfger."[34] Clement moved the Clawson Machine Company to Flagtown, where it became one of Hillsborough's first modern factories.[35] (As an interesting aside, when the township's Volunteer Fire Company No. 1 received its charter on May 27, 1938, their fire trucks were housed in a garage on the Clawson Machine Company property until 1946.[36])

Clement C. Clawson died on November 7, 1928 and was buried beneath the amazing marker at Newark's Fairmount Cemetery with his father, son, and both his wives. Missing is Aurelia. I have as yet been unable to discover where she was buried.

Today, the Clawson Machine Company still exists in Franklin, NJ as a division of Technology General Corporation. According to their website, "Clawson Machine has been manufacturing Ice Crushers, Ice Shavers and Block Ice Shavers for the restaurant, hotel, amusement, food service and related industries since 1883."[37] Interestingly, of all the many innovative inventions of Clawson's, the one that survives in the family name to this day was his simple ice shaver!

1 www.Ancestry.com
2 https://familysearch.org
3 https://familysearch.org
4 https://www.google.com/patents/US22349
5 www.Ancestry.com
6 http://cnhillsborough.blogspot.com/2012/09/clement-clawsons-capitalism-part-one.html
7 https://familysearch.org
8 www.Ancestry.com
9 ---. "Son Says Step-Mom Stole Money." Duluth News-Tribune (Duluth, Minnesota), Sunday, May 17, 1903, p6., via www.genealogybank.com
10 www.Ancestry.com
11 http://cnhillsborough.blogspot.com/2012/09/clement-clawsons-capitalism-part-one.html
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13 http://cnhillsborough.blogspot.com/2012/09/clement-clawsons-capitalism-part-one.html
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17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
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22 ---. "The Atlantic Reporter." Volume 58, July 7-December 1, 1904. West Publishing Co. St. Paul, 1904. p.599.
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29 Ibid; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagtown,_New_Jersey
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33 http://cnhillsborough.blogspot.com/2012/10/clement-clawsons-capitalism-part-three.html
34 www.Ancestry.com
35 http://cnhillsborough.blogspot.com/2012/10/clement-clawsons-capitalism-part-three.html
36 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flagtown,_New_Jersey
37 http://www.clawsonmachine.com/about.html