

## SNEC Visits Old New-Gate Prison and Noble & Cooley Drum Company

On May 14, approximately fifteen members of SNEC SIA visited two sites near the “tooth” that bites down from the Bay State’s border into northern Connecticut: Old New-Gate Prison and Copper Mine in East Granby, Connecticut and Noble & Cooley Drum Company just up the road in Granville, Massachusetts.

Site supervisor and museum assistant Lance Kozikowski served as our guide through the copper mine and prison, located on a beautiful bluff overlooking 475 acres of wildlife refuge. First developed as a mine in 1705, the site proved economically unsuccessful; the obligation to ship the

excavated ore to England for further processing undermined the commercial viability of the operation. After the Revolution, the lack of a water source for power made large scale smelting operations impossible.

In 1773, the warren of underground tunnels was selected as an “enlightened” punishment alternative (to severed hands and such) for convicted criminals. The original intent was for the prisoners to earn their keep through mining -- in fact, their sentences were often extended so that they could earn enough to cover keep plus court costs. But the mining tools at their disposal also proved to be handy instruments for escape; in later years, prisoners made nails instead.

Today, the sandstone mine walls are streaked with tell-tale signs of copper. Navigation is tricky, requiring sure feet on wet ground that slopes at steep angles to follow the copper veins. Despite slick floors, narrow passages and continued reminders of the risks of radon poisoning, we pressed forward. Lance noted that the constant 52° F temperature discouraged the growth of viruses and bacteria, so we, like the prisoners who preceded us, were exposed to little risk of contracting TB.

Noble & Cooley Drum Company was born in 1854; the current location has been in operation since 1889. Jay Jones, who owns Noble & Cooley with his mother, Joyce, walked us through different yet complementary processes: the construction of world-class professional-quality snare drums and the creation of toy drums for the retail market.

The snares begin life as hard sugar-maple logs that are cut into planks which are scarfed (tapered) at each end then steamed overnight in what looks like an oversized autoclave. (Jay had to stomp on the door wheel with both feet to open it!) The steamed planks are put on a bending machine; the resulting circular drum bodies dry for 3 - 4 days within appropriately sized forms before completing their drying within wax-lined sections of Sonotube for 8 - 12 weeks. In all, a Noble & Cooley snare drum requires 37 distinct operations before completion.

Jay demonstrated a number of unusual and

interesting tools, including an 1890 rotary veneer cutter -- belt driven -- that can handle a log as long as 42" and as much as 36" in diameter, and a E.W. Bliss guillotine cutter. But the star of the show was the 1926 8-color litho press with automatic inking used to print patterns on the tin bodies of toy drums. A unique and advanced tool in its day, the press uses pattern rolls that date back to 1914.

Once printed, the metal sections are embossed, curled, locked into a circle then placed in a vertical roll former to roll back the sharp edges before receiving their Mylar drum heads. While the company maintains an inventory of toy drums, competition from China, combined with price pressures from large retailers like Wal-Mart and Toys-R-Us, makes future toy drum manufacturing uncertain.

Jonathan Kranz