PETITION

OF

THE EXECUTRIX AND EXECUTORS OF JETHRO WOOD, DECEASED,

PRAYING

A renewal of their patent for an improvement in the construction of the plough.

JANUARY 12, 1846.

Referred to the Committee on Patents and the Patent Office, and ordered to be printed.

To the Honorable the Senate and the House of Representatives in Congress assembled.

The petition of Sylvia Wood, executrix, and Benjamin H. Wood and John Wood, executors of Jethro Wood, late of the town of Scipio, in the county of Cayuga, and State of New York—

HUMBLY SHEWETH:

That Jethro Wood, deceased, husband of the said executrix, and father of the said executors, was a man of limited education, but of philosophic mind, and very benevolent disposition.

About the year 1813, being a farmer, he was induced to believe that agriculture was very much hindered by defects in the chief instrument of tillage, the plough. From that period he devoted himself for six years to the improvement of that important instrument. The plough then in use in Europe and in America was constructed chiefly of unwieldy timbers, in a form which presented great resistance in its progress, and of course requiring a very great power. These ploughs had always a heavy wrought iron share, made at great expense, and requiring frequent and expensive repairs.

Jethro Wood instituted, at great expense, a series of experiments with ploughs of various forms and proportions, as to length, height, width, and curvature of the mould board, and breadth and thickness of the ploughshare. He constructed many ploughs with his own hands, and tested their forms and usefulness in various regions of the country, presenting varieties of soil.

He set before himself three objects:

First. To discover a form of plough which would perform the work desired, in the easiest and best manner.

Secondly. To produce a diminution of the cost of construction.

Thirdly. Durability of the instrument.

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He had discovered that the mould board of every plough then known presented a surface unequally worn or polished by use. He therefore spent year after year in practically trying every possible form, so as to find that which, presenting the least resistance at every point, would, of course, be most easily drawn through the earth. He tried not only models, but he caused mould boards to be cast of iron in every variety of shape, and finally succeeded in inventing a very delicate and peculiar construction of the mould board, which has, during a period of thirty years and upwards, been confessedly perfect and unexcelled.

Before Jethro Wood's invention, cast iron ploughshares were unknown. Every farmer remembers the expense and trouble of carrying the wrought iron ploughshare to the blacksmith's every two or three weeks to procure the same to be *sharpened* and *relaid*. Mr. Wood suggested to a community, who were so incredulous that it required four or five years' constant demonstration to satisfy them, the use of a light cast iron share or cutting edge, nicely adjusted, and fastened to the mould board, which was extended for that purpose. The experiment, as is known, was ultimately successful; and now, it is doubted whether a wrought iron ploughshare can be found in use in the world.

The plough of Jethro Wood contained the further improvements of a cast iron standard, (dispensing with the useless coulter,) a cast iron land side, and fastenings of the handle, the mould board, the beam, the ploughshare, and the land side, so simple, cheap, and strong, that every one of these improvements is found in use in every plough in use on either side of the Atlantic.

Before his invention, a plough cost eighteen dollars, now it costs six; then the repairs of a plough cost annually two or three dollars, now the expense is inconsiderable.

He obtained letters patent on the first day of September, 1819. A present of one of his ploughs to the Emperor of Russia, by Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill, brought to that philosopher, from his majesty, the return of a ring set with valuable diamonds.

The invention, or at least a part of it, was patented without the inventor's knowledge, in England, and Jethro Wood's plough has long been made the theme of praise by the scientific men of Europe and America.

But Jethro Wood failed to receive any adequate reward during the term of the letters patent, and therefore Congress granted a renewal of the patent, extending it fourteen years, by a law passed on the 19th of May, 1832.

The act unfortunately provided that assignees of the first term should be entitled to participate in the benefits of the extension. Large grants had necessarily been made, for very inadequate consideration, and licenses had been granted for many districts. The act, for this reason alone, was utterly insufficient to recover any adequate remuneration to the inventor under any circumstances; but Jethro Wood sickened, languished, and died, within two years after its passage, leaving to your petitioners a franchise to defend, but without any estate, real or personal, which could be used by them for this purpose. On the death of Jethro Wood, the manufacturers of ploughs, under the old licenses and assignments, combined against your petitioners, and set them at defiance. Your petitioners expended all their individual means in unsuccessful, but unavoidable litigation, which resulted in throwing one of your petitioners into prison for costs. Your petitioners were just despairing of all

relief, when in October, 1845, having, through charitable contributions, obtained funds sufficient to procure for the first time the attendance of very distant witnesses, the title of Jethro Wood to the invention was fully vindicated by a verdict in accordance with the opinion of the circuit court of the United States for the northern district of New York, at Albany.

But the extension of 1832 draws near its expiration, and your petitioners must utterly fail to obtain any benefits from it, except such small damages as they may hope to recover for infringement heretofore, and the small sums they can obtain by licenses for the four months to elapse before the extended franchise must cease.

In tender consideration of the destitute condition of the widow and the children of one whom all men acknowledge to have been a public benefactor, your petitioners humbly pray that the said patent may be extended for a further term of fourteen years, for the exclusive benefit of his personal representatives.

If every plough that has been made according to the invention of Jethro Wood had yielded him or his children only a cent, their wealth would have been immense. Your petitioners will ask only so small a charge on every plough to be made, as will not be felt at all as a burden.

SYLVIA WOOD, *Executrix*,
BENJAMIN H. WOOD,
JOHN WOOD,
Executors of Jethro Wood, deceased.

JANUARY 8, 1846.