

# The Hurtt Family Band of Monticello, Indiana (1879-1892)

*Gavin Holman, 9 January 2026*

Abel L. Hurtt was born in 1832, in Ohio. By the mid-1860s he was residing in Monticello, Indiana, and met and married Mary S. Lynch (b. 1845, d. 1884) on 13 Feb 1868.

It is not clear what Abel's occupation was, but it is known that, in 1869 Abel was issued with a patent for a washing machine (Pat. 90001), followed by a patent for improved springing for wagon seats (Pat. 98063), and lastly a clothes-line holder in 1870 (Pat. 102548). See the appendix for details of these inventions.

In 1878 he was a candidate for Auditor of Miami County, Indiana for the Democratic convention. This was probably unsuccessful, as he remained in Monticello and started his theatrical career the following year.



*Abel L. Hurtt*

The couple had four children - Abel Zaddock (1869-1918) Mary (1873-1940), Pearl (1874-1933), and Frank (1876-1948).

During the winter of 1878/1879 the family made their first appearances as a musical vocal group.

The first known recorded appearance of the Hurtt Family was at the Monticello Town Hall, on Monday 14 July 1879. The group, which consisted of father Abel, with Abel junior (Zeddie), Mary, Pearl and Frank, performed various vocal pieces. Later that month they sang at the nearby town of Rensselaer. A report at this time, praises Abel on the progress made by his children.

"The general verdict seems to be that the children, Pearl, Mary and Frankie are prodigies, and the character songs of the two little girls are said to be well worth the price of admission. The entertainment was far in advance of those given by them last winter, and the children show that they are making rapid advancement in musical culture. We congratulate Mr Hurtt upon his success in training such young voices to do such excellent execution."<sup>1</sup>

During October 1879 the family performed at Oak Grove, Smiths, West Point, and Chalmers, around Monticello. In December they were performing in various locations in Illinois, returning in January 1880.

A performance at the Opera House, Lafayette, IN, in early February 1880, was reported as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> The Monticello Herald, 28 August 1879

"The LaFayette Opera-house or the Blue Ribbon Club room never contained an audience better pleased then those who listened to the warblings of the Hurtt Juvenile Quartette when in our city last week. During their stay here they sang several times in the Blue Ribbon Hall, that listeners delighted beyond expression at the wonderful accuracy and proficiency of the children. At the concert given by the Crawfordsville Club in our Opera house, no part of the entertainment met with such rapturous approbation as did the "Hurtt Juvenile Quartette" These musical prodigies are Indianians by birth, and the people of our State have good reasons to be proud of such a family. They are accompanied by their father, a gentleman of considerable musical taste and culture who will give musical entertainments in this and adjoining States. Haverly's Juvenile Pinafore, with all their well-deserved celebrity, in all of their band of fifty singers, cannot find any four of them that combine so much of the marvellous as is concentrated in Frankie, May, Pearl and Zeddie Hurtt. They have a repertoire of not less than sixty of the choicest songs, each one of which they render faultlessly."<sup>2</sup>



*The Hurtt Family Quartette – Zeddie, Mary, Pearl and Frankie*

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<sup>2</sup> The Monticello Herald, 5 February 1880

The family continued to give concerts in the local area during the spring of 1880, before moving to Indianapolis in June, taking up residence, and leasing the Wesley Hall at 28½ Indians Avenue, where they gave concerts every night (Sundays excepted). The entertainments consisted of solos, duos, trios, quintettes, anthems and laughable character sketches, and were 'strictly moral'.



*Pearl and Frankie Hurtt*

They moved, once again, to Muncie IN, in July 1880, hoping to set up similarly to their stay in Indianapolis. However, although their first concert seemed to be a great success and the group was 'heartily encored', when it came to taking a collection after the concert, only 96 cents was raised.

The family is next seen giving concerts in Ohio, in December 1880, and then there is a gap in the record until February 1884, when the family gave a private concert at the residence of Mr S.W. Henry. A local reporter, who was present at the entertainment, witnessed the performance of these 'bright-eyed and handsome prodigies'. Accompanying the family was the cornet soloist, Miss Theresa Heck, of Columbus, Ohio.

At some point following this concert – perhaps influenced by the accomplishments of Miss Heck – Abel Hurtt began to tutor his younger children in the playing of brass instruments, with himself and Frankie on cornet, Mary on euphonium and Pearl on tenor horn.



A few months later, in June 1884, Abel's wife, Mary Hurtt, died in childbirth. Abel junior (Zeddie) seems to have left the performing group – possibly to take up employment of his own.



*Pearl Hurtt*

The 'new' Hurtt Family Band first appeared with their various instruments in a sacred concert at the Brunswick Gardens, Jackson, MI, in September 1885. A later appearance, in December 1885, at the Niles Rink, Niles MI, promised to be the 'musical event of the season'.

"Friday and Saturday evening, Dec. 18 and 19, the Hurtt Family Quartette, Brass and Martial Band, will appear at the Niles Rink. It will be the musical event of the season. The company comprises Prof. A. L. Hurtt, Bass; Little Pearl Hurtt, Alto; Miss Mary Hurtt, Soprano; Master Frankie Hurtt, Tenor. Martial Band - Prof. A. L. Hurtt, Fife; Miss May Hurtt, Cymbals; Little Pearl Hurtt, Bass Drummer; Master Frankie Hurtt, Snare Drum. The entertainment consists of Quartettes, Trios, Solos, Character Sketches, Dialect Comedies, Poesical Recitations, Dialogues, Imitations and Selections on the Martial Band."<sup>3</sup>

In January 1886 the Hurtt's gave performances at the Rink in Frankton, IN, where again they were praised for their playing and martial performance. Frankie, particularly, was singled out for the quality of his singing – especially his rendition of "*I ain't so young as I used to be.*"

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<sup>3</sup> Niles Weekly Mirror, 16 December 1885



*Hurtt Family Martial Band*

Towards the end of January 1886 they appeared at the Main Street Rink in Richmond, IN, and left there to attend the Royal Rink in Muncie, in February. Further performances that spring included the Rink in Greenville OH, the Indiana House in Monroeville IN, the School House in Bucyrus OH, the Casino Rink in Crestline OH, and Cline's Hall in West Unity OH.

In June 1887 the family had week's engagement at Epstein's Dime Museum in Chicago IL. Other living attractions in the museum included Madame Leroy, the long-haired lady, and the moss-haired midget.

October 1887 found the family settling in Peru IN, giving concerts from their base there. By the spring of 1888 they were performing in and around Monticello, returning to the Chicago Dime Museum in May 1888. This was followed, in July 1888, by a report stating that 'the Hurtt Family had abandoned the stage'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Monticello Herald, 12 July 1888



*Hurtt Family Band*

The Hurtt Family made a brief comeback in 1892, performing in New York at Worth's Museum, in the early part of the year through to March, with Frank Hurtt being billed as a cornetist rival to Jules Levy – no small boast!

**WORTH'S,**  
 6th av. and 30th st. Open 11 A. M.  
**ADMISSION 10 CENTS.**  
**Week of Jan. 18, '92,**  
**ERICSON'S ILLUSION,**  
 "LA AMPHRODITE,"  
 Or the Goddess of the Sea.  
 First appearance in this city of the  
**HURTT FAMILY,**  
**MUSICAL ARTISTS,**  
**MASTER FRANK HURTT,**  
**THE BOY CORNETIST RIVAL OF THE**  
**CELEBRATED JULES LEVY, Liberator.**  
**THE REED BIRDS.**  
 MR. AND MRS. DAVE REED.  
 EUGENIA. LUMAN. DAVE, JR.  
 In a new sketch.  
**BEN GILFOIL,**  
 The Black Prince.  
**HOURLY STAGE PERFORMANCES.**  
 Sacred Concert To-day.





*Hurtt Family Band*

The family's final appearance seems to be at the Wonderland Theatre, in Detroit, for at least two weeks in April 1892.

# **WONDERLAND**

**J. H. MOORE,**  
Proprietor

**SPECIAL SURPRISE SHOW ALL NEXT WEEK.**

**INTELLIGENT TRAINED BIRDS**

Under the Direction of Prof. Horne.

ONE  
MORE  
WEEK

## **THE HURTT FAMILY**

AND MASTER FRANK HURTT, THE BOY CORNETTIST.

## **MISS KATE KOON**

LIGHTNING LADY ARTIST.

★
★

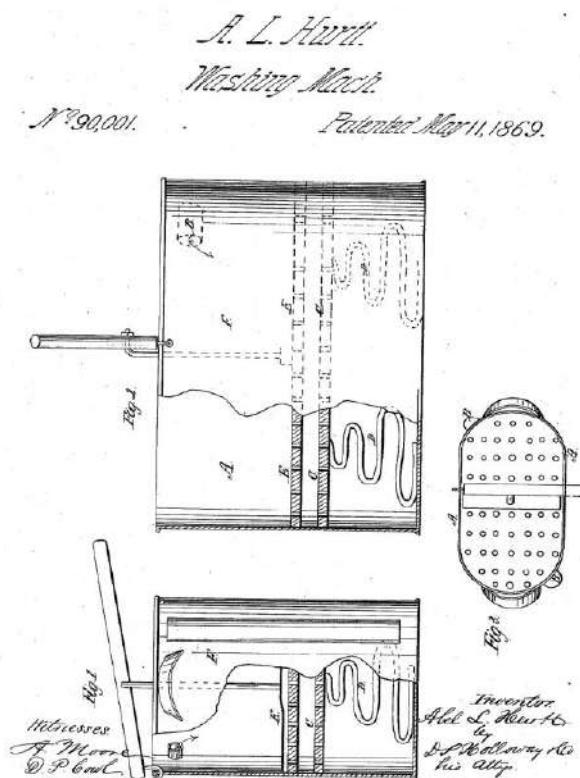
*Detroit Free Press, 24 April 1892*



*The Hurtt Family Band*



# APPENDIX – Abel L. Hurtt's patents



## United States Patent Office.

ABEL L. HURTT, OF MONTICELLO, INDIANA.

Letters Patent No. 90,001, dated May 11, 1869.

### IMPROVED WASHING-MACHINE.

The Schedule referred to in these Letters Patent and making part of the same.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, ABEL L. HURTT, of Monticello, in the county of White, and State of Indiana, have invented a new and useful Improved Machine for Washing Clothes; and I do hereby declare that the following is a full, clear, and exact description of the same, reference being had to the annexed drawings, making part of this specification, in which—

Figure 1 is an end elevation, partly in section; and Figure 2 is a side elevation, partly in section; and Figure 3 is a plan, or top view.

The same letters in all the figures indicate identical parts.

My improvement relates to either tubs or boilers for cleansing clothes, and consists in constructing the case, or shell of the tubs or boilers with pipes, which receive the water at or near the bottom, and conducting it upwards, discharge it at the top upon the clothes, and combining therewith a perforated diaphragm, resting upon springs, and another perforated diaphragm, to which a reciprocating motion is communicated, by the action of which the water may be caused to flow through the vertical pipes, as will be hereinafter set forth.

In the annexed drawings—  
A is the shell of a boiler or tub, which may be constructed of any suitable material, and in any shape desired.

To this shell a vertical pipe or series of vertical pipes, B, may be attached, which open into the bottom of the tub or boiler, and extending upwards in or about the side of the shell, either in or outside thereof, are made to discharge into the top of the tub or boiler, so that the water flowing through said pipes shall flow down through the clothes, and, by the action of its current, dissolve and carry away any impurities therein.

The clothes are placed upon a perforated plate, or diaphragm, fitted loosely within the tub or boiler, and resting upon the spiral springs D D, which support it above the bottom of the tub or boiler, so as to leave an open space for the water below said plate. Said perforations are merely for the purpose of allowing the water to escape freely from the clothes, and any formation of the plate which will permit the same flow of the water may be substituted for the perforation. This plate is intended to support the clothes.

Over the clothes is another similar plate, or diaphragm, E, to which a reciprocating motion may be given by means of the rod F and lever G, the latter being hinged to one side of the boiler or tub, or by any other convenient and equivalent means. The connecting-rod may be made or attached in such a manner that it may be made longer or shorter, as may be required, for its convenient operation with a larger or lesser quantity of clothing.

It will be apparent that the above-described machine may be used either as a wash-boiler, or as a tub for washing clothes. In the former case, the heat may be partly used to cause the circulation in the manner common in automatic boilers and washers in ordinary use, but such boilers will not perfectly perform the duty within reasonable time, and the action may be hastened by using the reciprocating plate to compress the clothes, thereby, at the same time, expelling the water rapidly upwards, and producing a consequent increased action upon the impurities therein contained, and also by pressing the clothes and diaphragms upon the water contained in the open space below the plate C, force it upward through the pipes B, in a strong current, so that it shall fall upon the clothes in increased quantities. In a wash-tub, the same mechanical action will cause the water to flow through the pipes and produce the same action upon the clothes, thereby rapidly cleansing the clothes without rubbing them.

I do not, therefore, limit my claim to the application of the principle of my improvement to either a tub or wash-boiler, as it is equally applicable to either. I do not claim the construction of a tub or boiler with vertical pipes opening from the bottom and into the top, through which a current of water may be made to flow by the action of heat only; but

What I claim as my invention, and desire to secure by Letters Patent, is—  
The combination of the case A, pipes B, plates C and E, and springs D, arranged to operate substantially in the manner and for the purpose set forth.

In testimony whereof, I have signed my name to this specification, in the presence of two subscribing witnesses.

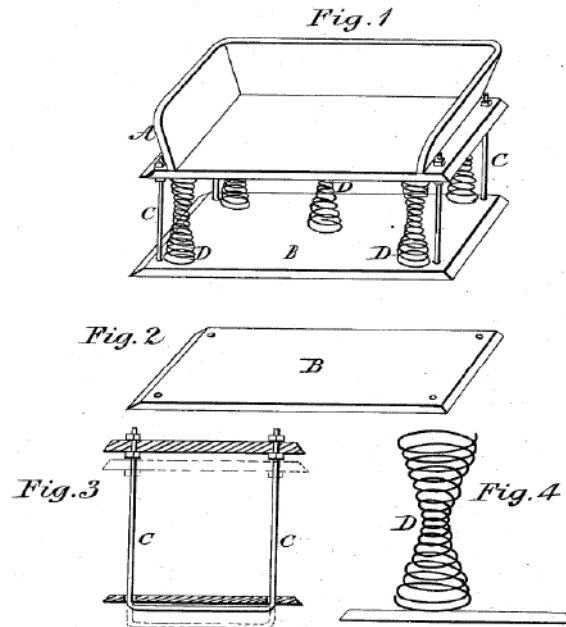
ABEL L. HURTT.

Witnesses:  
R. MARON,  
C. F. CLAUSSEN.

A. L. HURTT.  
Wagon Seat.

No. 98,063.

Patented Dec. 21, 1869.



Witnesses:

*Bud. Arto's*  
*William Kaiser*

Inventor:

*Abel L. Hurtt*  
*per Edwin Davis*  
*Attys.*

United States Patent Office.

ABEL L. HURTT, OF MONTICELLO, INDIANA.

Letters Patent No. 98,063, dated December 21, 1869.

IMPROVEMENT IN SPRING-SEATS FOR WAGONS.

The Schedule referred to in these Letters Patent and making part of the same.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, ABEL L. HURTT, of Monticello, in the county of White, and State of Indiana, have invented a new and useful Improved Spring-Seat for Wagons, and other vehicles; and I do hereby declare that the following is a full, clear, and exact description of the same, reference being had to the annexed drawings, making part of this specification, in which—

Figure 1 is a seat.

Figure 2 is a bottom for a seat.

Figure 3 is a staple with burs, and

Figure 4 is a spiral or coiled spring.

The same letters in all the figures indicate identical parts.

This invention relates to spring-seats for vehicles; and it consists in the construction of the parts comprising the same, arranged to operate as will be more fully herein shown and described.

In the annexed drawings—

A is a seat, which may be constructed of any suitable material, and in any shape desired.

To this seat, a bottom, B, similar to the bottom of the seat, is attached, by means of a staple, C, one in each end, running through the lower bottom loosely, and fastened to the bottom of the seat by any suitable means; and between the two bottoms are placed five spiral or coiled springs D, one at each corner and

one in the centre, which may be fastened by any suitable and permanent means.

The seat is to be placed on the top of the wagon-bed, with a cleat across the ends, or by any other means that will prevent the seat from sliding endwise; and when any considerable weight is upon the seat the springs will give, and cause the staples to move up and down through the holes in the bottom, thereby making a free, easy, and comfortable seat.

I do not, therefore, limit my claim to the use of my invention to a wagon, as it is applicable to any vehicle in which a seat is required or used. I am aware of the patent granted to A. Sheln, on the 25th of May, 1867; therefore, I do not claim the features of his invention.

What I claim as my invention, and desire to secure by Letters Patent, is—

The double bent vertical rods C, having a free oscillation through the bottom B, in combination with the seat A and springs D, as and for the purpose herein shown and described.

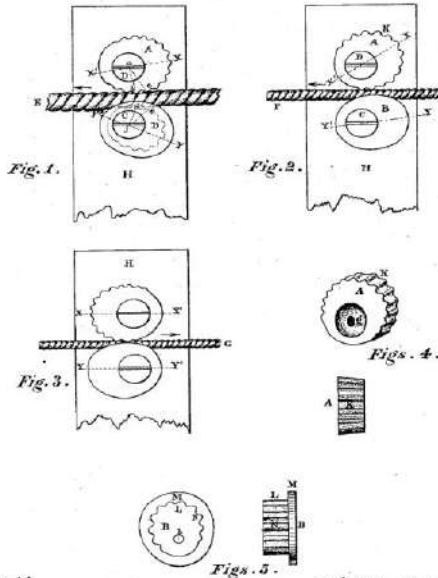
In testimony whereof, I have signed my name to this specification, in the presence of two subscribing witnesses.

ABEL L. HURTT.

Witnesses:

JOHN S. HURTT,  
F. C. DALE.

*A. L. Hurtt,*  
*Clothes Line Holder.*  
*No. 102,548.      Patented May 3, 1890.*



*Abraham*      *Witnesses;*  
*Andrew Croffin*      *Abel L. Hurtt, Inventor;*  
by *John A. Attorney.*

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

ABEL L. HURTT, OF MONTICELLO, INDIANA.

IMPROVED CLOTHES-LINE HOLDER.

Specification forming part of Letters Patent No. 102,548, dated May 3, 1890.

*To all whom it may concern:*

Be it known that I, *Abel L. Hurtt*, of Monticello, White county, Indiana, have invented certain new and useful improvements in Clothes-Line Holders; and I do hereby declare that the following is a full, clear, and exact description of my invention, reference being had to the accompanying drawings, forming a part of this specification, and to the letters of reference marked thereon, of which drawings—

Figures 1, 2, and 3 are views showing the application of my holder. Figs. 4 and 5 are rear and side views of the upper cam of holder.

Fig. 5 are rear and side views of the lower cam of holder.

My invention relates to certain improvements in the construction of holders for attaching clothes-lines to posts or buildings for hanging out clothes to dry, or for securing any rope or strap to any fixed point, and it consists in the combination of two cams, one of which is provided with an edge flange, which cam is secured to the desired point by pivot-screws or their equivalents, and act together to hold the line or rope between them at any desired point, whereby I obtain a very cheap and simple device which is easily applied and operated, and which will hold any desired size of rope or strap in a perfectly secure manner.

The advantages resulting from the use of the two cams in combination with each other consist in the obtaining of a perfectly secure holder for any size of rope, within reasonable limits, without the necessity of altering the position of the pivots of either cam, and also in the obtaining of a gripping mechanism which acts on the principle of the toggle-joint, and hence gives a much more powerful grip on the rope than could be obtained by any single-cam device, which can only act as a single-pivoted lever in producing the grips on the rope.

To enable others skilled in the art to make and use my invention, I will proceed to describe its construction and operation.

The upper cam, *A*, is a simple wheel of cast-iron, provided with the screw-hole, and having a corrugated face, *B*, and is made with a slight draft, as shown in side view, for convenience in casting. The lower cam, *B*, consists of the body *L*, provided with the corrugated face *N*, and having the screw-hole formed in

it, and the flange *M*, which is cast on the body *L*, and which serves to prevent the rope from pulling sideways out of the holder. These cams *A* and *B* are secured to the post *H* or other desired object by the pivot-screws *D* and *C*, or their equivalents, which pass through the screw-holes *g* and *h* in said cams, as shown in Figs. 1 to 3.

The positions of the cams *A* and *B* on their pivots in holding a rope will vary with the size of the rope to be held—as, for example, in holding a large-sized rope, *R*, as shown in Fig. 1, both the short ends *X' Y'* of the cam-axes *X X'* and *Y Y'* diverge toward the rope *R* on the inside of the direction of the strain on the rope, (indicated by arrow-head, and in holding a smaller rope, *r*, as shown in Fig. 2, the short end *X* of the axis *X X'* is directed toward the strained side of the rope, and the short end *Y* of the axis *Y Y'* is directed away from it, while in holding a still smaller rope, *Q*, as shown in Fig. 3, both the axes *X X'* and *Y Y'* are nearly parallel to each other and to the rope, the object being in each case to obtain such a distance between the bearing surfaces of the cams as to secure the "bite" of the cams on the desired size of the rope.

From an inspection of Fig. 1 it is evident that the action of the cams is that of a toggle-joint, the line *a b* representing one arm of the toggle and the line *d f* the other arm; and it is also evident that in case the first toggle, *f d a b*, does not prove sufficiently powerful to hold the rope, the second toggle, *f e c a*, will then come into play, and so on, so that if the cam *A* is secured on the post *H* in such a way that their surfaces *L* and *K* could be brought into contact, it is evident that they would grip any size of rope or line from the small metal clothes-line to as large a rope as could be put between them, and that there is no possibility of the rope slipping between them.

It is also readily seen that this adaptation of the holder to different sizes of ropes cannot be had by the use of a single cam, *A*, in combination with a fixed plate or pulley, for the action of the cam *A* would then depend wholly upon the pressure of the arm *a* and the friction existing between the rope *R* and the face *K* of the cam *A*; and if the rope were very large, the friction between the cam-face and rope would not be sufficient to bring the lever

ab into play. Consequently, if the cam *A* were arranged in combination with a fixed plate or pulley, so as to hold a large rope, it would not hold a small one, and vice versa, so that its application is very limited.

I am aware that single cams *A* have been before used, both in combination with a stationary pin or plate and with a pulley; hence I lay no claim to such cam, except when used in combination with a second cam, *B*; nor do I claim the flange *M* on the cam *B*, as this feature has been before shown; but

What I do claim herein as new and of my invention, and desire to secure by Letters Patent, is—

The within described line-holder, consisting of the cam *A* and the cam *B*, with flange *M*, when secured on the post *H* by the pivot-screws *D* and *C*, or their equivalents, and acting in combination with each other, as and for the purpose specified.

As evidence of the foregoing, witness my hand this 21st day of February, A. D. 1890.

ABEL L. HURTT.

Witnesses:  
JOHN ARBOTT,  
ANDREW CROFFIN.