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LAST WHALEBONE CUTTER QUILTS

Once Thriving and Important Industry Is Ended.

DUE TO CHANGING FASHIONS

George Messmann Worked at One Table in New York for 56 Years—He Was the Third Owner of the Business—Product No Longer Used for Many Purposes for Which It Was Once Popular.

With the retirement from business recently of George Messmann of New York, the business of whalebone cutting in this country terminated. At one time this was a thriving and important industry, but of late years, what with changing fashions the introduction of substitutes for "bone" and the frank use of metal in its place as distinguished from the substitution of some similar appearing substance, the whalebone trade has fallen upon evil times. Also the catch has grown constantly smaller and smaller.

According to Mr. Messmann, there is no whalebone now in the market, although there is some slight expectation of a little coming in in the fall. "What right whale fishing has been done lately has been from the West Coast, Frisco, Seattle and altogether in Pacific waters and toward the Japanese coast," said Mr. Messmann. "The long famous New Bedford, Nantucket and Vineyard whale fishing has been out of existence for some time."

Mr. Messmann, interrupted in the winding up of his business affairs, admitted that he was chiefly preoccupied at the moment with deciding what souvenirs to retain or send to those interested in the business before his time. Mr. Messmann pleads guilty to seventy-one years, although he looks as hale and hearty as any man of fifty could wish, and, looking back to his predecessor, and his predecessor's predecessor, who ran the same business in the same spot, he explained why he felt that he was the youngest, as well as the oldest, cutter-up of whalebone left in the United States.

"I was born in 1849, although everybody says I don't look it," said he with a hearty laugh. "In New York City, and since 1904 I have been working right here in this shop. That is fifty-six years.

At One Table Fifty-Six Years. "In 1890 I took over the business from A. J. Vetter, who retired, just as in 1893 Mr. Vetter took it over from William Forster, the owner at that time. Mr. Vetter worked for Mr. Forster, as I worked for Mr. Vetter, only I worked for Mr. Vetter twenty-four years—a long time, eh? I worked two years for Mr. Forster before that. I came here as a boy of fifteen years. For almost fifty-six years I have worked, cutting bone, at that table," continued Mr. Messmann, indicating a heavy, rough cutting table.

Those were the good old days, according to the veteran whalebone cutter, when Saturdays meant 5 o'clock, just like any other day, and there were no vacations. "I worked for A. J. Vetter twenty-four years with never a day's vacation," he said. "It was all day on Saturdays, and I never missed a day. In those days we worked for our money."

The quaint brick building at 161 Duane street, which has housed the whalebone-cutting business with never a break since the year 1890, was originally built as a private house. Then it was used as a schoolhouse, and later descended to a trade level, being used for a coffee mill.

"There is an extension out at the back which you can see, where they used to roast the coffee," said Mr. Messmann.

In 1890 the building was taken over for the then flourishing whalebone business, which, with successive years, has been pushed up, until recently it has occupied only the two upper stories, reached by almost perpendicular old stairs. Over the street entrance to the building hangs a plain sign with the word "Whalebone" in large white letters on a black ground. This sign is old, but new in comparison with the one that is nailed up over it, which displayed the name of A. J. Vetter until time obliterated it and the old rough board above that which at one time told the world that William Forster was in the whalebone business.

Reminders of Old Days. "I am going to send this," indicating an old mahogany desk, "to Mr. Carl Vetter in North Andover, Mass. He is the son of A. J. Vetter. He will like to have the old desk at which his father sat, and the old clock, too," he added, nodding to an old-fashioned wall clock.

"That clock is still going just the same as ever, and I personally can vouch for the fact that it has had only two springs since the year 1864. Once in a while lately it stops, and I just take it and put it in the steam box, let it get warmed up a little, and it goes right on. You can't beat that." Mr. Messmann admitted that he would feel lost without the business. The old office safe is dated 1852 and has been used continuously in this one business. It is provided with "a wonderful lock," said Mr. Messmann, "no combination."

In this day of strictly monetary transactions, the manner in which this

whalebone business was handed down from successor to successor, as told by the veteran whalebone cutter, might be considered startling.

"I had nothing when I took over this business," said Mr. Messmann, "or almost nothing. Mr. Vetter wished to retire, and he gave me everything. I did not pay him for the business—what you call the good-will—or for any of the equipment. All I paid him for was the actual stock of raw whalebone in the house. The tools, the safe, the machinery, the furniture, the good-will—everything—he gave me."

When asked what would become of the business, Mr. Messmann indicated that his foreman, John Martel, had been with the concern since 1871, and the inference was that history might repeat itself in a limited way.

Sixty Years in One Building. In speaking of the interesting and now vanishing business of whalebone cutting and dressing, Mr. Messmann said:

"Since 1860 this whalebone business has been continuously in this building. When we—I mean the business—first came here we sold a great deal of bone for hoop skirts. We sold it for umbrella ribs, too. That was before the time of the metal umbrella rib." Diving into a drawer, Mr. Messmann fished out a very old rib, a strip of whale bone, with square-finished sides, about one-eighth of an inch thick, terminating in a well-shaped tip, the prototype of the modern umbrella's bone or horn tipped metal rib.

"We sold the ribs squared off, the umbrella makers tapering the ends. It was '68 before they used steel ribs in umbrellas."

"Automobiles have caused a large decrease in whalebone sales. You don't need a whip for an auto. Formerly carriages and turnouts were numerous and whips were needed. We sold a great deal of whalebone for whips."

Sixty years ago, when closely set whalebones stiffened ladies' basques and bodices, and corsets, then known as stays, were formidable affairs, close-set with boning, the whalebone business flourished. Sales have been getting scarcer lately. More recently whalebone has been sold to felt hat manufacturers, who place a thin, slender strip inside the sweatband to keep the hat in shape.

The whalebone comes in what are technically known as "slabs"—thick, flexible strips, running to about ten feet in length, broad at the base and tapering to a blunt point. These big slabs of whalebone are sometimes variegated, so-called "white" bone being found here and there in streaks. "When we encounter a light streak we cut that out and lay it aside," said Mr. Messmann. "In this way we assemble a quantity of whalebone of a light tone. It runs about the shade of manila paper."

Mr. Messmann showed a box of this bone, such as he had sold to dry goods stores and dressmakers' supply houses. The bone, cut in lengths of thirty-six inches, very flexible and almost as thin as heavy note paper, was part of a lot which he used to sell to a department store, where it was used in ball dresses, according to Mr. Messmann.

Whalebone Bullet Probes.

During the war whalebone probes were used to search for bullets, the strip of whalebone about 14 inches long being rounded like a child's old-fashioned slate pencil and then cut away to an exceedingly fine and flexible thickness, terminating in a slightly rounded end. The whalebone is all cut by hand, with knives, and later shaped and smoothed by machinery.

Whalebone is obtained from the right whale or cachetot, the bowhead and the humpbacked whale. These must not be confused with the sperm whale, from which sperm oil is taken. The whalebone of the humpbacked whale is not considered desirable. The whalebone or baleen, as it is called, is so placed within the jaws of the whale that he uses it for straining the small living organisms on which he feeds.

Mr. Messmann treasures a slab, found tossed in with a large lot of bone, on which some member of a whaler's crew had evidently put in a lot of time. Graven on its polished surface is a panorama, showing heaving billows, a full-rigged ship, whales and more whales, some of them "sounding," with just their tails sticking up like a cliff, with a whaleboat neatly bitten in two by his gigantic jaws. The decorations include a shore, with lighthouse, cottage and trees, and decorative emblems—eagles, flags and patriotic inscriptions such as "E Pluribus Unum," "Liberty" and "Columbia."

The last whale known to have been caught off New York, according to Mr. Messmann, was taken by Captain Joshua Edwards, of Amagansett, L. I., fifteen years ago.

"I got there as fast as I could, but another man beat me to it," said Mr. Messmann. "Sorry," said Captain Edwards, "but I have sold it to a man from the Museum of Natural History. He paid 10 per cent more than your price. How much is it worth?"

"In other words, I had to set the price for them. But I had no chance, as, no matter what I offered, they would go 10 per cent higher. Captain Edwards said the next one I should have, no matter what happened; but they never got another one."

King's Valet Wealthiest Man Servant. An inheritance of \$50,000 from a relative, a fish merchant in New Zealand, makes James Dickson, first valet to King George of England the wealthiest man servant in the world.

CLERGYMAN DEFENDS FEMINE FASHIONS

Preacher Denies Slackening of Morals as Result of New Designs.

Clergymen, financiers and leading women of London unite in defending the new feminine fashions of low necks and short skirts.

Their upholding of the emancipation of women from hampering garments comes on the heels of the tirades against feminine fashions which have emanated from leading church dignitaries in London and Paris.

The Roman Catholic bishops of Ireland have recently joined hands in an attack on the extravagant and immodest character of woman's dress.

"The changes in the character of woman's dress are one of the results of our successful fight for freedom," said a woman prominent in the suffrage movement.

"Fashions which hampered every movement and made us pictures have been done away with for good. We can now breathe the pure air of heaven, free from the restraint of straitjackets and early Victorian impedimenta. The athletic girls love the new fashion."

A leading physician, seeing nothing immodest in the new fashions, declared they were of the greatest advantage from a viewpoint of health.

A well-known clergyman denied that there was a general slackening in feminine morals as a result of the new designs.

He declared that women were stronger in every way than they were before the war and entitled to freedom in dress.

POSSIBLE RIVAL TO HELEN KELLER



Should the world-renowned Helen Keller ever have a rival it would be in the person of eighteen-year-old Oma Simpson, now under teaching of Miss Sophia Alcorn of Danville, Ky., where she attends the Kentucky School for Deaf and Dumb. Totally blind and deaf, she has been educated orally, one of the few instances in medical history where this has been accomplished. She reads lips in the ordinary method used by the blind, placing her thumb across the lips with fingers beneath the chin. She can also tell what is being said from throat vocal vibrations, a remarkable method. She can hear over the telephone by placing her fingers over the diaphragm.

HID HIS ROMANTIC LIFE

Carpenter One of Few Who Survived Shipwreck Adventures.

Romance and adventure entered into the life of Fred Krusemark, a carpenter, eighty-two years old, who died recently at Atchison, Kan., but few Atchison people knew it until his death.

He was born in Denmark, and after fighting Germany with the Danish army in the sixties he left that country and traveled in Europe, Asia, England and other countries, working at his trade. The boat on which he came to America became helpless in a storm and drifted many days, grounding near a Central American port after the food supply had become exhausted and several passengers and members of the crew had died from starvation. Krusemark came to Atchison forty years ago. A widow and six children survive.

REGISTER ALL WORKERS

Russian Bolshevik Government Plans to Eliminate "Parasitic" Elements. The soviet government of Russia is taking steps to eliminate all "parasitic" elements by ordering the registration of all males between 16 and 50, and all females between 15 and 40. Every person between these ages must obtain identification cards, giving full details of their employment.

Four-Day Week in Textile Trades. The adoption of a four-day week schedule by textile manufacturers in Lawrence, Mass., is likely, according to reports, as a result of overproduction, reduction of demand and inability of railroads to deliver goods.

Women Apply for Work on Farms. The state-city employment bureau at the city hall in Cincinnati, Ohio, has received applications from more than a dozen women who desire to work as farm laborers.

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