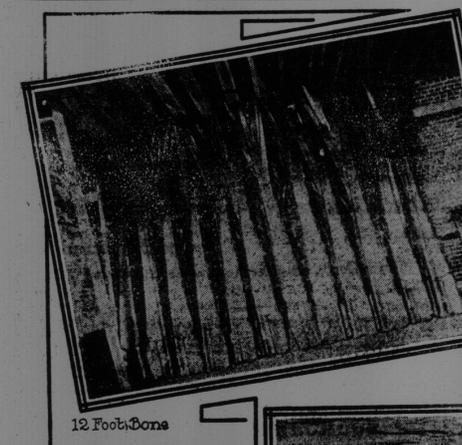


THE EVENING TIMES, ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 1908.

WHALEBONE, A FAST DISAPPEARING ARTICLE OF COMMERCE



12 Foot Bone



Edgar Lewis, the Whalebone King



Steam Whaler Frozen In



Captain George F. Tilton

The romance of the most romantic calling which men have ever pursued and the hard actuality of modern business methods carried to the development of a monopoly more absolute than that of any trust that ever accepted a rebate or demanded a drawback; the icy grip of the frozen North and the boulevards of Paris resplendent with foliage and flowers and the gay dresses of women; the fringe of the world a thousand miles beyond the point where civilization ceases and the heart of the world of grace and fashion—these are the extremes which one must bridge in the consideration of the whalebone industry.

being employed only in the most expensive articles of clothing. Since the hey-day of the whaling industry, half a century ago, the market price of sperm oil has declined, until now it is hardly more than a third of what it used to be. The reverse is true of whalebone—the product of the right whale and the bowhead. This used to sell as low as 15 cents a pound, and when a hundred or more vessels were engaged in Arctic whaling not a little of the bone failed of being sold at all. Today the market value is 30 times that. Eight or ten vessels now comprise the Arctic fleet; their catch last season was about 100,000 pounds, and every pound of that catch is worth 35 cents. Time was when whalebone was used almost universally in corsets; to-day few women feel that they can afford corsets more expensive than those in which the ribs are made of steel or some substitute for whalebone. Steel has also replaced whalebone for umbrellas ribs. One of the most curious uses to which whalebone was put was for those diving rods, by means of which charlatans pretended to be able to locate water, oil, gold and other underground riches. In these days the almost exclusive purpose for which whalebone is used are corsets, dress bones, whips and, to a very limited degree, surgical instruments. Despite the high cost, the demand for it holds good, which may be taken as an evidence of the truth of the whalemen's contention that there is nothing else just as good. In Paris a society has been organized solely for the purpose of experimenting with substitutes, but nothing has yet been discovered

which quite equals whalebone. The advantages claimed for it are that it is odorless, will not rust, will not break, and no matter how long it is kept will never lose its elasticity. Strictly speaking, whalebone is not bone at all, although that is the name by which it is known. The right whale and the bowhead from which it is taken, and which yield in size to no creature that swims the sea, have no teeth, their function being performed by the whalebone. The sperm whale or cachalot can and does devour the fiercest monsters of the deep, such as squid, cuttlefish and decapods, but the right whale subsists on the finest of fish. The latter, known as bret, are found in large quantities near the surface of the water. The whale, who hungry, opens his ponderous jaws, discharging a cavernous mouth in which a dozen men can stand and work with ease, and takes a gulp of water—enough for a small-sized reservoir, and teeming with bret. Then, closing his jaws, he ejects the water while keeping the fish inside. The whalebone enables him to do this. Hanging from the upper jaw and covered on the inner surface with a thick hair, it acts as a perfect sieve through which the water can escape, but the meshes of which are too small to admit of the passage of the bret. So far as is known, this is the only function of the "bone." That the greater of fish—some of them as large as a passenger car—should thus subsist upon the smallest, is one of the marvels of nature.

On board the whaleship, when a bowhead has been caught and killed, the bone is removed from the head in huge slabs, sometimes reaching the length of 12 feet. In this form it is shipped to New Bedford, where the gum which still covers it at the point where it was torn from the monster's jaw is scraped away and the product put up in bundles, according to quality and size. The bone is now ready for the consumer. The latter seeks it for a week or ten days in water, after which it is placed in a steam box for about a week. Subjected to this treatment, it cuts like cheese, and may be sliced into strips of any size and length that the manufacturer may desire. Each strip seems to be composed of three strata—the two outside layers being a sort of enamel, used for dress stays, and the inside layer, rather coarse and known as the grain, for corsets. No story of the whalebone industry would be complete without mention of the man who has acquired control of this commodity—Edgar R. Lewis. When a young man, Mr. Lewis entered the business of his father, William Lewis, one of the old-time whaling merchants of New Bedford. At that time the firm handled only the bone taken by its own vessels. Young Lewis saw early the possibilities in having a monopoly of the trade, and from that time on worked toward that end. His first step was to learn the business from top to bottom. Donning overalls and jumper, he put in a whole year with the workmen in his father's employ, learning to scrape and tie the bones and improving on the methods then in use. Having mastered these details, he began getting control of the catch of other vessels

found to engage in the business—the best and most fearless navigators on the seven seas. The value of the bowhead, from which most of the bone secured, was discovered by Capt. George A. Covell, of New Bedford, while fishing in the Octobek Sea. He struck one of the species and succeeded with little difficulty in killing it. Before cutting in he estimated that the whale would yield about 70 barrels, but instead it made over 150 barrels, with bone in proportion. From that time on the pursuit of the bowhead became an important part of the whaling industry. In 1848 a Sag Harbor whaler, the Superior, was the first to pass through Bering Straits into the Arctic. This was the beginning of Arctic whaling, which has been prosecuted ever since with varying success. At first sailing vessels were used, as in sperm whaling today, but the scarcity of whales and the danger of the long cruises to the eastward, whither most of the bowheads had been driven by the relentless hunters, made the work too perilous for sailing vessels and the modern steam whalers were substituted. Hardly a year passes without some disaster in the Arctic. But the most memorable occurred in 1871, when 33 New Bedford vessels, crabled to pieces or frozen solidly in the ice, were abandoned. Twelve hundred seamen were shipwrecked, but all were ultimately rescued, while the property loss in ships, bone and oil was \$1,000,000. In 1872 12 vessels were lost in the ice, and in 1885 five more were abandoned. The record of men and ships lost is appalling, but the lure of the profits which attend a successful voyage draws men into the business. One ordinary sized bowhead will yield \$10,000, and captains have come down from the Arctic in the spring with cargoes valued as high as \$25,000. That a business so dangerous should have produced heroes whose names would be famous the world over had not been Arctic explorers is but natural. Perhaps the most conspicuous example is George Fred Tilton, captain of steam whaler Belvedere. It was in 1868 that Tilton performed a feat which the more famous explorers would not have dreamed of attempting under similar circumstances. The whaling fleet of eight vessels became caught in the ice off Point Barrow, which is about as far east as the whalers ever go. Various plans were tried for getting the ships to open

water, but they all failed. Two of the ships were crushed to pulp in the night, their crews having barely time to escape in the remaining vessels. Communion with Point Barrow established the fact that there were practically no supplies there, while the vessels themselves had scanty provisions for their augmented crews. Starvation and death stared the whalers in the face unless word could be sent to civilization for relief. Then George Fred Tilton volunteered to make the attempt to summon aid. The fleet captains flouted the idea as being impossible. "Very likely it is," said Tilton, "but we have a chance if I go, and none if I remain, and if anybody can get through I can." This was conceded, and the whalermen gave their reluctant assent to the trip. With his pockets full of biscuits, with two Indian runners and a sled drawn by eight young dogs, and with the Arctic night closing in around him, Tilton started on his 300-mile walk to civilization. The crews of the fleet cheered him as he departed, and watched him until his outfit faded away in the distance. Not one of them expected to see him alive again. Space does not permit telling the awful story of that trip—how bitter cold weather endured, how Tilton's feet were frozen, how the dogs went mad, how the provisions gave out and it became necessary to kill the dogs one by one in order to subsist; how, after days of starvation, a village 60 miles from the starting point was reached, and a small quantity of food discovered; how, for many days a single frozen fish was all there was to eat, and how, at last, at St. Michael, Tilton encountered the government expedition under Jarvis headed north, and furnished it with information as to how to reach the imprisoned whalermen. Then more days of suffering and hunger until, on March 23, the Kodiak islands were reached, five months from the time that he left Point Barrow. A month later Tilton arrived at San Francisco, Elbert Hubbard has immortalized the man who carried "The Message to Garcia"; the story is yet to be written of the infinitely greater bravery of George Fred Tilton, intrepid hunter of whalebone, finest type of the race of men whose slogan was "A dead whale or a stove boat."

THE SALE OF THE SEASON Ends SATURDAY, JUNE 20th

Table with 2 columns: Item description and Price. Includes men's shirts, suits, and trousers.

Table with 2 columns: Item description and Price. Includes boys' suits and shoes.

Table with 2 columns: Item description and Price. Includes ladies' dresses, waists, and gloves.

Table with 2 columns: Item description and Price. Includes men's hats and suits.

Table with 2 columns: Item description and Price. Includes ladies' dresses and coats.

Table with 2 columns: Item description and Price. Includes children's dresses and coats.

BARGAINS IN MILLINERY ROOM TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION

WILCOX BROTHERS