

# PRATT, READ & CO., IVORY GOODS.

The business history of Pratt, Read & Co. extends over a period of ninety years, and is so closely interwoven with the industrial history of the town as to be an integral part of it. It began in a small way in the manufacture by hand of ivory combs, which were made by Phineas Pratt as early as 1809. Later George Read was associated with him, continuing till 1816. Then Mr. Read withdrew and united with the firm of Ezra Williams & Co. In 1824 and 1825 Mr. Pratt was associated with Alfred Worthington, under the name of Pratt & Worthington. After Mr. Worthington's decease in 1830, the firm of U. & A. Pratt was formed. In 1844 they were succeeded by Pratt, Spencer & Co., and in 1850 the name was changed to Pratt Brothers & Co. In 1856 this last mentioned firm erected what is now known as the West factory. The first factory, a small affair, was located on Main street, near the site of the present factory of Pratt, Read & Co. So much for the early history of those firms which, with others, in time, came to be known as Pratt, Read & Co. Ivory combs were the principal product of the concerns, and in 1819 more than nineteen men were employed and 50,000 combs were annually manufactured. In 1856 the company transferred the manufacture of combs to the West factory, while the old shop on Main street was used exclusively for the manufacture of ivory keys and veneers for pianos.

Pratt, Read & Co. are really the direct successors of Ezra Williams & Co., who manufactured ivory combs exclusively at the start. In 1829 the firm name was changed to George Read & Co., who in 1839 began the cutting of piano keys also. The old factory was used for the business, with various enlargements, from 1816 to 1851, when a new factory was erected on the site.

And now for another slight deviation to bring together other concerns which were finally merged in the firm. In 1822 an ivory comb company was established in Meriden, under the name of Howard, Pratt & Co., and subsequently Julius Pratt & Co., one-half interest of which was owned by George Read & Co. In 1863 the firms of George Read &

Co., Julius Pratt & Co., who were making piano key boards, and Pratt Brothers & Co., who were making combs in the West shop, were consolidated under the name of Pratt, Read & Co., and the name has since remained unchanged. In 1800 Pratt, Read & Co. greatly enlarged the factory on Main street, to introduce the manufacture of keyboards. In 1871 the Meriden factory was discontinued and the business was removed to Deep River.



On the 31st of July, 1881, the factory on Main street took fire and was entirely destroyed. The safe, containing the records and books of the company, was practically the only thing saved. The fire came as a great disaster to the town and the people were much depressed. The prompt energy of the management soon brought order out of chaos; temporary employment was found for many of the hands in Ivoryton, and others were given work clearing up the ruins and in the West factory. In less than a year's time the present large and substantial factory of iron and brick was completed.

The company owns about 50 acres of land and operates two factories. The main factory is 154 by 50 feet, four stories in height, with an addition at right angles, 100 by 38 feet. They have a machine shop, blacksmith shop, dry houses, matching house, bleach houses, etc., also the large West factory, where all the ivory is cut. They are the only firm in

the country now making ivory combs. Keyboards for pianos and organs are made exclusively at the main factory. Tons of ivory are imported from Africa every year and hundreds of thousands of feet of the finest of lumber from the northwest are used yearly in the making of keyboards. The company employs between 300 and 400 men and is the leading industrial factor of the town, their pay-roll amounting to enormous figures monthly.

The ivory which the firm uses comes principally from the Zanzibar markets, said to be the best in the world. They are among the largest importers of this product. The average weight of a tusk is about 170 pounds, though many much larger than that are often received. In addition to making combs and piano and organ keys from the ivory, the company also manufactures various other articles, especially for the stationers' trade, also ivory billiard balls. They also use great quantities of celluloid for making piano and organ keys. The labor which they employ is, of necessity, in the highest sense, skillful and intelligent, and many of the employees have worked nearly all their lives in some branch of the business. This is especially true regarding those engaged in working in the ivory departments.

The factories are fitted with all modern appliances, especially in the line of fire extinguishing apparatus. The business office is separated by a short interval from the main factory; is roomy, substantial, and handsomely and conveniently furnished.

The present officers are: Mr. Benjamin R. Arnold, of San Diego, Cal., President, and Mr. George L. Cheney, of Essex, Secretary and Treasurer and General Manager. Mr. Cheney is in the highest sense a business man, and to his able and active management the company owes it for its present highly prosperous condition. Its product is known the world over, and the goods have a reputation in the market second to none.