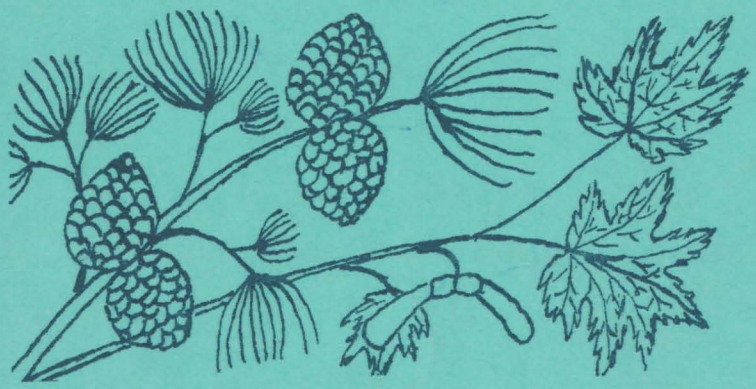
Carmen White - Filler
& Michelmans varnish

The Violin Makers' Journal

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE VIOLIN MAKERS ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Devoted to the development and encouragement of the art of violin making in Canada.

THE VIOLIN MAKERS' JOURNAL

Officers of the Association:
President: Geo. Friess - 2724 Yale Street
Vice President: Gilson Heyworth, 1683 Renfrew Street
Treasurer: Floyd Holly, 2636 West 6th Avenue
Secretary and Editor: Don White, 4631 West 14th Avenue
Meetings held the second Saturday of each month at 4360 Main Street

VOL..2...No.5.....March, 1959

EDITORIAL

The PROBLEM OF PROGRESS:

On March 21st the Violin Makers' Association of British Columbia will enter its third year as an organized unit.

Much progess has been made since its inception. The continuance of this progress demands the attention of each member.

The annual meeting and election of officers takes place on March 14th. At this meeting you will choose those who will, as an executive, direct the policy of the Association for the coming year. This is an important occasion and it is to be hoped the membership will use careful judgement in their choice of officers.

The Journal feels that there will be many pertinent decisions to make during the coming year, let us suggest a few.

There is the matter of our entering an exhibit at the Hobby Show. If a decision is made against such an enterprize then what is to be the nature of our Annual Competition. To have no Violin competition at all would seem to be a step backwards.

Another important subject is the initiation of some method of selling our instruments This subject has been brought up many times and must, in the near future, absorb our full attention.

Some more definate system of organizing our knowledge so that all may benefit by any improved technique must be devised. Can more rapid progress be achieved by group participation in say experimental work. At present each member is carrying on his own experiments, most of us doubling up on many points. Cannot we as a group do this work more efficiently?

We need a leader in this matter.other problems will present themselves, as the year progresses and must be met and delt with, not only by your executive, but by the attention of the full membership. We have a democratic organization but it is only democratic as long as all have their share of responsibility.

.....

Genius unexerted is no more genius than a bushel is a forest of oaks.
...Beecher

.....

LOCAL MEMBERHSIP NEWS:

Our next meeting wil be held March 14th. This is our Annual Meeting--full attendance please. There will also be a film shown on Violin Making. Rev. Geo.Wright will be in charge of the projector.

LOCAL MEMBERSHIP NEWS cont..

We are glad to hear that Cpt. McDonald is quite recovered from his recent illness. Hope to see you at our March Meeting Malcolm.

Floyd Holly and Ragnor Helin are having a race building cello's. They are both doing lovely workmanship.

The orchestra have had a few practices lately and are showing marked improvement. They hope to prove this by playing a few pieces at our next meeting.

We hope to establish this as column each month under the pen of Harold Briggs. Hope you like the job Harold.

At our last meeting we had the pleasure of a talk by Mrs Howard Goodwin. Her subject being the Work and Nature of The Community Arts Council in British Columbia. Mrs. Goodwin described the valuable Province. She illustrated how many of the crafts aged. When we realize that it was The Arts Council that was directly responsible for the instalation of The Chair of Music at the University of B.C. we begin to realize their worth to the Community. The Vancouver Arts Festival, now favorably compared to the Edinborough Festival was also started by the Community Arts Council.

Thank you Mrs Goodwin for coming out to speak to us.

.....

You've got to hand it to the income tax people or they'll come after it..

.....

NOTES ON THE OLD MASTERS

I recently had occasion to spend a few days in Victoria, and while there, I discovered in the reference library at the Parliament buildings four wonderful books on violins. These books could not be taken out, but I spent most of three days there and was able in that time to read and take many notes.

These notes I thought might be interesting to those who cannot read the books for themselves.

To begin with, Strad became known, fairly early in his career as the world's best living violin makers so that his instruments were never for sale at bargain prices. Even so, he apparently had a marketing problem even as the present day makers have, for during his lifetime Stainer violins were the most highly valued, being priced about four times that of a Strad. Some of the Amati violins were twice the price of a Strad. At the time of his death, Strad had in his possession 91 violins, 2 cellos and several violas in addition to a set of highly inlaid instruments that I will mention later. These all passed into the hands of his son Francesco, who doubtless sold some before he died in 1742. The rest of the instruments passed on to Francesco's brother Paolo, a cloth merchant, who gradually disposed of them.

The inlaid instruments mentioned consisted of 2 violins, 2 violas, one of them a "tenore" (large size viola) and a cello which Strad made with the intention of presenting to Philip V of Spain on the occasion of that monarch's passage thru Cremona. However he was dissuaded from making the presentation and they were finally sold by Paolo along with 2 more violins in 1775 to a priest named Padre Brambilla for the sum of 125 giliati who took them to Madrid and sold them to the Spanish monarch. This purchase was thought to be due to the Infate Don Carlos who played the violin and ascended to the Spanish throne in 1788 as Chas IV. Later Antonio, son of Paolo Stradivari, tried to re-purchase these instruments but without success.

NOTES ON THE OLD MASTERS cont..

At this time there lived in Madrid, a priest - Dom Vicenzo Ascensio who also had a passion for violin making and enjoyed the patronage of the principal musicians of the Spanish Court.

Hill found in Madrid a gentleman who owned the minutely kept recoreds of this priest and found the following - "On March 5, 1873 Don cajetano Prunetti, custodian of the Royal instruments, brought me, by order of H.R.H. the Prince, a Strad violin of the year 1709 and requested me to improve the quality of the tone, which was bad." The priest took the violin to pieces and after enumerating various more or less injudicious alterations, he adds, "If after this work, the violin is not improved, I think it hopeless unless I put a new back and belly on it, but then no one could say it was by Antonio Stradivari." Fortunately this treatment was averted and the tone was rendered excellent according to the court musicians. He was then given the other violin to work over and the entry terminates as follows, "For this exact and extensive restoration, taking all circumstances into account, and seeing especially that the violins were intrac repairs to each to be worth 700 reals (about £7 at that period)".

He later worked on the violas and then took the cello to pieces and made extensive alterations - replaced the neck - took the back off, inserted a piece in the center as it was too thin - replaced the bar and re-graduated. He then adjusted the instrument and the tone was rendered excellent. It took 3 months to do this work and he charged 1000 reals.

It is generally understood that all the old Italian violins had to have their necks lengthened. Apparently this was not so however as Hill found several Strad instruments with the original necks. These included some of the most famous instruments, the "Allard", the "Blunt" dated 1724, the "Sarasate" dated 1724, also the "Messie" has the original neck. The original necks were not mortised in as we do now but were simply glued onto the ribs and held by hand made nails, usually 3 in number, being driven thru the top block and into the end of the neck. Necks were originally set at a very flat angle and were flush with the belly instead of being $\frac{1}{4}$ inch above as now. Fingerboards were wide - being 1 inch to 1 1/16 inch wide at the nut and 1 5/16 to 1 3/4 inches wide at the edge of the belly and were very short - around 8 inches. They were wedge shaped and usually of maple, sometimes faced with ebony.

In many models the belly has fuller arching than the back. In the "Dolphin" the reverse.

The "Boissier" 1713 has a one piece belly with the broader grain on the treble side. It is customary to be the other way around.

In most two piece backs the curls of the grain form a V pointing upward but at least one of the most famous, the V points down instead. I failed to note which instrument it was but believe it was the "Allard".

Re sound holes. One book states that he seldom found two instruments with identically shaped sound holes. As to the location of the holes. He states that "repeated scruting and comparison notwithstanding, we are at a loss to discover either a fixed starting point or a guiding rule in any of them".

A instruments, more frequently in those dated after 1720. The right sound hole was sometimes higher than the other often as much as 1/16". It is believed this was caused by an optical illusion because of failing vision.

Re bass bars - most of the original bars were about 3/16" wide and 4 or 5/16" high and $8\frac{1}{2}$" to 10" long but one Gagliano - 1789 had a bar 1 1/16" high and 9/16" wide.

Now finally in regard to varnish. In one of the only 2 letters written by Strad and known to exist, he apologizes for delay in delivery of a violin because of the non drying of the varnish and states "The violin cannot be brought to full perfection without the strong heat of the sun". It does not seem to be sufficiently known or recognized that in a great measure Stradavari instruments owe to the varnish their superb quality of tone; in reality the future of any perfectly constructed instrument is known by the coat it ~~clothed~~ wares. Fine varnish will not compensate for bad material or faulty construction, but that it makes or mars the perfectly formed instrument, is beyond dispute.

Features are rated in the following order in importance. First varnish, second construction and dimensions and third material. "Even with faulty material, if construction and dimensions are right and good varnish is successfully applied, a fairly good instrument will result. But if the wood, construction and dimensions be perfect, the result will be astonishingly bad if the instrument be badly varnished."

The violins of Chas Bergonzi, Strads pupil, were made to Strads dimensions and model but the varnish and tone quality were those of Guarnerius.

A story is told that Strad recorded the formula for making his varnish and instructions for applying it in the family bible, but apparently these Italians didn't read their bibles much more than we do. Some generations later the family then in possession of this bible were moving and while packing up to move, a young man of the family discovered the precious formula. He realized its importance and without consulting the older members of the family he copied out the instructions and burned the bible. Many good violin makers, including Vuillaume offered fabulous sums for this recipe but he refused to see and the secret was lost when he died.

Harold Briggs, 3367 N. Bluff Road,
R.R.#1, Whiterock, B.C.

.....

ANOTHER TEXAS COW

"Oh, what a funny looking cow," the chic young thing from Texas told the Canadian farmer. "But why hasn't it any horns?"

"There are several reasons," replied the farmer. "Some cows do not have horns until late in life. Others are dehorned. Still other breeds are not supposed to have horns. But this cow does not have horns because it is a horse."

.....

Dear Mr. White:

Please find enclosed $3.00 for your Journal. It is a pleasure to read the fine articles you have in the Journal. The condensed valuable information you publish is of value not only to Violin makers but to people who like music and instruments that produce same.

Your efforts are appreciated by all who value music. Good luck!

Alex Smelski, 543 East Hastings Street
Vancouver 4, B.C.

.....

The following seven advertisers are all members of The Violin Makers Association of B.C. . . . All have won prizes at the P.N.E. Hobby Show, against the keenest competition.

For complete satisfaction your patronage is solicited.

PEDER SVINDSAY

3914 MAIN STREET, VANCOUVER EMerald 5022

VIOLINS — VIOLAS — REPAIRS

Hand Made Bows for the Discriminating Artist

FLOYD HOLLY

2636 WEST 6th AVENUE, VANCOUVER

CEdar 9314

VIOLINS AND VIOLAS

Pupil of the Late "Doc" Porter

DON WHITE

VIOLINS

With the Accent on Tone

STUDENTS AND ARTISTS INSTRUMENTS

4631 West 14th Avenue, Vancouver ALma 1523L

HIGH ALTITUDE ARIZONA AGED TOP WOOD

Reddish Brown or Clear White

USED BY LEADING VIOLIN MAKERS

Fine or Wide Grain

$5.00 Each Plus Charges

PLAIN OR INLAID COWBOY VIOLINS

MADE TO ORDER

Satisfactory Repairs

BOB WALLACE & SON

Box 367, Gilbert Arizona, U.S.A. Phone WO 4-6977

OLD ITALIAN

CEMONA VARNISH FOR VIOLINS

Made from Fossil Resins

ALL COLORS INCLUDING NATURAL

Oil or Spirit

Prices Postpaid 2 oz. $1.50

4 oz. $2.50 8 oz. $4.50

S. KUJAWA

1958 East Hawthorne St. Paul 6, Minn., U.S.A.

GEORGE FRIESS

2724 Yale Street, Vancouver HAstings 6462R

VIOLIN MAKER AND REPAIRER

Violins — Violas — Cellos

Also

FINE OLD VIOLINS WITH REAL TONE

HERBERT MARTIN

755 Foster Road, Richmond, B.C. CRestview 8-1378

VIOLINS

To Accommodate the Concert Performer

MARTHA KOZAK

Careful Repairs to All String Instruments

BOWS EXPERTLY REPAIRED

VIOLINS — MODERN AND OLD

1598 West 16th Avenue, Vancouver CEdar 5293

R. W. HELIN

3751 Venables Street, Vancouver GLenburn 2969R

VIOLINS — VIOLAS — BOWS

Highest Quality Tone Consistent With Good Workmanship

FRANK G. WARD LTD.

Sales and Rentals of All Instruments

EXPERT ADVICE ON REPAIRS

FULLY QUALIFIED INSTRUCTORS ON ALL

STRING INSTRUMENTS

A Complete Line of Parts for All

Needs in the String Field

Accessories and Instruments for Sale or Exchange

FRIENDLY COURTEOUS SERVICE

THE VIOLIN MAKERS JOURNAL

A periodical published monthly on a non-profit basis.

Subscription rate $3.00 per year. Remittance payable at par Vancouver. Address Don White, Editor 4631 West 14th Avenue Vancouver 8, B. C. Correspondence Invited.

For advertising space apply to the Editor. "The Journal goes right into the Violin Maker's Home."

FIDDLE FALLACIES by Carmen White

1. A new violin is no good until is is "played in".

False: There is no such thing as "playing in" a violin. It takes only about four or five days of playing for the violin to reach its permanent state of equilibrium, and any change after that is due to the player's ear becoming more accustomed to the sound of the violin--also, he learns how to touch it with the bow to get more out of it, and gets himself used to the "feel" of the instrument. The violin itself does not change. A good new violin will proclaim its superiority after the first hour of playing--if not, there isn't likely to be any at all. The violins of Stradivarius were sought after while they were NEW. Our new violin must be also, and if they are good, the player will not have to wait 40 to 50 years for the ton

2. A violin gets better with age and playing.

Also False! There are plenty of weak, poor and useless OLD violins; why didn't age and playing help them also? How is it that age and playing helped the Old Italian masterpieces but did not help the old German, French, or English violins? If age and playing have any effect at all, that effect is probably detrimental, not helpful, but no one has ever proved that there is any effect one way or the other. A poor violin simply remains poor, or gets worse.

3. The Old Italian Masters had some sort of mathematical "curve", "formula" or "proportion" which accounts for the superiority of their violins, and if we could just discover it and satisfy its conditions, we could make better violins than they did.

False. The old Italians made masterpieces with ALL SORTS of arching, contours, models, sound holes, and thicknesses. However, more masterpieces have been made with the archings and models of Stradivarius and Guarnarius than with the other makers, so how can we hope to improve on their beautiful patterns?

4. We can make violins as fine as the old Italians if we can just get the right kind of wood.

False. They do not seem to have worried too much about the "right kind of wood". They made violins of all sorts of wood, plain, figured, and of fine and wide grains. It seems that they just used whatever was at hand at the moment. On the other hand, modern makers using more beautiful wood and finer selection than the old masters ever had often fail and make poor and weak instruments. How could there have been any real differences in the maple and spruce they used and the same woods today? Has nature changed her methods of growing wood?

5. The old wood is superior to new wood.

False. Age can only do one thing to wood--that is, partially decay it, or start process of decay, which merely weakens the fibers and the general ability of the wood to carry vibrations. It is much more important to get the water out of the wood and replace it with something permanent than it is to use old wood. Many violins have been carefully made from very old wood, but when finished, they sound as sour and raw as any other new violins. Healthy wood seasoned four or five years is as good as any.

6. That all Italian violins are good.

False. Some of the worst fiddles are Italian in origin. However, we are more likely to overlook the faults of an Italian violin than we are to overlook the faults of our own instruments. If an Italian makes a bad looking fiddle as to purfling, F holes, etc., we say, "That is the individual style of the maker, and very quaint indeed--very interesting. If we do that, or if a modern maker makes a mistake in purfling, F holes, or arching, we say, "Well, really, old fellow, you should be driving a truck instead of trying to make violins."

7. If we could just duplicate the Old Italian varnish, we would be able to enjoy real old Italian tone!

False. Many old Italian violins have been completely stripped of their original varnish, and even revarnished, yet, they still sound fine. On the other hand, many Old Italian instruments with original varnish still intact do not sound good at all! The superiority of the better Italian instruments does not lie in the varnish alone--there are other and more important factors involved.

FIDDLE FALLACIES cont..

8. Perfect workmanship makes a fine violin!

False. Some of the worst looking specimens sound the best; on the other hand, some of the most perfectly made instruments sound poor and weak. Some of the higher priced German violins are far more perfectly made than any Italian violin, and of finer and more beautiful wood--yet, they sound like cigar boxes!

9. A weak, soft tone under the ear often carries better in a hall than a strong brilliant tone under the ear.

False. If a violin is going to carry in a hall, it must sound strong and brilliant under the ear. If your violin sounds weak, dull, soft, and dead under the ear, face the music, it is going to sound that way in the hall, only more so! Many uninformed persons use this silly argument to try to sell poor fiddles. They hand you a dead fiddle and say with a smile, "Oh, but it carries beautifully in a hall--of course, it sounds soft under the ear". This is like saying that the report of your little 22 rifle will carry farther than the report of your favorit 12 guage shotgun!

10. To test the carrying power of a violin, take it to an open field and see how far it can be heard.

False. The instrument which can be heard farthest away may be the poorest instrument musically. Violins are not to be played in open fields, they are to be played in auditoriums with four walls, or in orchestras or ensembles and quartets. Thus, we test them! Hand your violin to an artist, along with a known good violin, go back in the hall, with four of your musical friends and listen objectively. Repeat on three occasions, with a different artist each time. Ask the artists their opinions as to the feel, response, ease of playing and general expressiveness of the instruments. You do not need an open field. What can the open field tell you about the beauty, quality, expressiveness, timbre, evenness, and response of your fiddle? These are much more important than mere carrying power.. You can get carrying power with an amplifier, or by using steel strings on a cheap factory fiddle! On the other hand if a violin has all the above qualities, it will have carrying power! The right kind of tone carries--and is beautiful to listen to after it gets to your ear!

.....

When a wife buys things on credit she is merely displaying confidence in her husband...

.....

VIOLIN VARNISH by Sczipan Kujawa

Varnish is made with as little as 3 gals. of oil to a high of 60 gals. of oil to 100 lbs. of resin. You temper the gums with the amount of oil put in. All fossil resins have properties in them to dry oil if cooked right and not cooked out, so you see there can be a wide difference in the hardness of your varnish.

Did anyone ever tell you that they made a violin top out of spruce, but did not thin the inside at all or we'll say left it $\frac{1}{4}$" thick and then tell you spruce is no good, of course not, but the above statement is in the same category as saying that all fossil gums make a varnish that grips the plates as tho held in a vise.

Another thing. I believe all different kinds of varnish that you want to know about must be tried on a violin that you know it's tonal qualities or better still on the same violin or how else are you going to tell whether the varnish has improved tone or not. I have a trial horse violin for just such a purpose. I've said I would never take varnish off again, but I still keep on doing so.

VIOLIN VARNISH cont..

About oil that is fixed fatty oil.

FIXED FATTY OILS:

A good linseed oil is pressed out, not started with heat and then pressed out. All our linseed oil today is started with heat that I know about. Linseed oil is a coarse oil much coarser than china wood oil, and a lot of other oils. Don't take my word for it. Go to your library and get a book on fixed fatty oils.

Filter a gallon of your linseed oil thru french filter paper and see what you get out of it. Also linseed must be treated with heat. Boiled oil today is not treated with heat, just a drier added to it to help it dry. Take some dried linseed oil that you find on your can of oil and crumble it. It helps to know something about oil.

The old Italian varnish was not the best looking varnish in the world, it does not compare with japaness laquer work, a Japanese laquer chest has brought more money than a Strad has ever brought, but that isn't saying that it is the best for violins. What about the varnis on the old Egyptian mummy cases that has stood the test of time for over 2000 years. It still is not hard but very beautiful. They say its a 60 gal. varnish made with the same gums that are fossil resins today.

I have studied 300 on up until today. Up to the year 1700 or about they did not use a thinner, but warmed up their varnish, and put it on with the hand or a flat stick. Who would buy a varnish like that today. That is one reason why their varnish took longer to dry. It went on heavier, it was not thinned out with turpentine or other thinners, and the thinner does make a difference in th varnish, for as it evaporates, the rest of the varnish does not always come completely together Also during Strad's time varnish was made under pressure, not much but some, which resulted in a totally different action in producing the varnish. Probably at a later date I'll give their method.

Research work is very good if knowledge is wanted, old dictionaries are very valuable for this. For instance, "What is Dippel's oil?" In the old chemistry an oil distilled from bones and other animal substances. Another what is "Gallipoli oil?" It is an oil formerly made at Gallipoli Italy, from fermented olives, and used in dyeing. I could go on for ever. Don't worry too much about fooling anybody, but be sure the last man to fool will be yourself.

.....

A violinist stopped in a London music shop and asked for an E-string. Placing a large bunch of strings before the customer, the storekeeper remarked, "Ere they are, sir. Select what you want --I cawn't tell the 'e's from the she's."

.....

PORTER'S CURVE by G.R. Wright

I have heard several of our members using the phrase, "Doc.Porter's Curve" and I know what they are referring to, but I would like to pass on exactly what Mr. Porter said to me, only 2 weeks before he passed on. I knew Mr. Porter for over 30 years and was very friendly with him.

I had made a violin in 1920, with this same curve, under the fingerboard, it proved satisfactory, so I made one in 1955 with this same curve and was showing it to him. He turned to his rack and took one of his own and showed me it, of course I had seen others of his previously. He also confessed to me that he was not the originator of that curve. Then he took one of his books. (Italian Violin Makers by Karel Jalovec) And showed me a Joseph Guarneri, on page 222 - the same curve. He further added, "My eye happened to be sharp enough to detect it one day, as I was looking over these pictures" so I tried it out and it greatly improved my violins.

That is what Doc Porter told me.

.....

"THE LATE JUSTIN GILBERT" by Don White

The mention in the Journal a few months ago of the name Justin Gilbert brought a flood of letters to my desk. He appears to have had both critics and admirers in ma y parts of the world.

I would seem that we in this country should be honored by the fact that he was a Canadian, for many affirm that he was one of the few makers of modern times to give a very definate contribution to the art of Violin making.

Justin Gilbert resided at Victoria, B.C. His musical background was of the very highest standard. Few makers could play the violin as he could. He held the position for many years of Viola player in one of the high class String Quartets in London, England, and played in Symphonies in this country. He knew his instruments and the tone he was striving for.

Gilbert seems to have had that rare gift of absolute pitch. He could tell if a note was 1/15 of a tone out of truth.

But the strange fact appears, that despite this musical background, his keen ear - his general knowledge of violin making and a distinct intelligence, the violins he turned out were not of outstanding merit. They sounded good at first but soon "pettered out".

You will naturally ask how such an unsuccessful man (as we may call him) could have contributed so much to violin making.

It was not so much what he did as the theories he built up. Theories which definetly seem to point to the methods used by the old masters. Theories - the application of which he had by no means perfected but which have since been followed with outstanding success.

Gilbert seems to have seized upon the fact that the old masters did in some manner treat their violins in the "white" before varnishing. A pre-treatment which hardened the plates, filled the cells, and preserved the wood.

He also decided, quite early in his career, that both plates should be tuned in some definate system. Here again he seems to have gone astray in the attunement of his plates. His insistance, however, that some method must be worked out is another contribution of great importance.

One cannot, perhaps, get a closer insight into the character of the strange, almost eccentric individual than by an imaginary visit to his shop. For the details of such a visit I am indebted to my friend Burt Hatfield of Comox, B.C.

The shop is in complete and absolute disorder, 20 or 30 tops and backs in various states of completion scattered around everywhere - Gilbert would match up different plates till he was satisfied they were the correct mates. The walls and ceiling are charred black for Gilbert, the week before, had set fire to his shop when heating his plates. This time they had caught fire, igniting turpentine which was close by.

The smell of fire, resin and turps still fills the air. He displays several violins which he claims are his best and declares them equal to any Strads. Burt Hatfield proceeds to try them, himself an accomplished player, but finds them only fair. Burt admits that he was impressed with this unusual person and his methods but the results produced in no way encouraged one to follow in his steps.

Justin Gilbert wrote a book outlining what he called "The Old Masters Methods", but there is no information as to how many were sold.

"THE LATE JUSTIN GILBERT" cont..

Such then is a sketch of this strange man, a voice crying in the wilderness, a forerunner of things to come. A man not to be laughed at, but admired for his scientific approach and above all for his persistance in trying to pass on his knowledge to all - Gilbert kept no secrets.

One can do no better in closing this article than by quoting words attributed to Mr. Walter Jacklin, when speaking of Gilbert. "God rest his soul, he did his best".

.....

See on promontory, one mountain, one sea, one river, and see all.
- Socrates

.....

THE APPLICATION OF MICHE MAN'S VARNISH by Carmen White

I think the February issue of the Journal was excellent. Thanks for running my little article, which I hope will make some of the boys do a little thinking.

However I made one or two mistakes which I would like corrected: You quote me as saying, about Michelman's varnish: "The actual weight of the varnish will be 8 to 14 grams--about three times as heavy by actual weight". This is a mistake. What I was trying to say was that Michelman's varnish is much lighter in weight than any gum-in-oil varnish, and that the gum-in-oil varnish is about three times as heavy as this Michelman's varnish. I consider this an important point and it can be verified by anymaker who wants to weigh the violins before and after varnishing - with the resulting conclusion that the varnish weight can "varnish bind" your new fiddles so you can't stand them after varnishing (if you have used gum-in-oil varnish).

Now about the application of Joseph Michelman's theories on wood treatment and varnishes.

The average maker, when varnishing, makes two mistakes. First, he assumes that if the wood is ten years old and "seasoned", it is all right and needs no further treatment. He does not know that 10% of the weight of the wood of a seasoned plate is water. Yes! I mean water--the kind that runs under bridges! Now water is fatal to resonance, to vibration, to tone, to reserve power, to glorious ringing bell-like violin quality, and to performance.

So when your plates are finished, you just heat them gently with dry heat, weighing them frequently on delicate gram scales until the top loses about 2½ to 4 grams of weight, and you may lose from 3 to 6 grams. It takes an hour or two of slow heat. Now, while dry and pretty hot or warm, you apply to both sides of your plates a hot solution of boiled linseed oil turpentine and resin, all dissolved together and heated so that it burns the bristles of the 15¢ brush you use to apply it. Soak in all the plates will take - dry spots will appear - put on more there, quickly! In ten seconds this solution will strike right through a hard maple back!

Allow to stand for ten minutes, then wipe off surplus with a rag and turps, finishing with alcohol and a rag--then right out into the sun with these plates - the hotter the sun the better. One or two days in warm sunshine matures this "foundation". Then take and rub your plates with raw linseed oil and very fine steel wool, following with a rag, rubbing by friction until the plates actually get hot from rubbing. Then for the first time in your life you see a real surface on a wood plate.

You are now ready for the varnish. But first a few words of intoduction: -

THE APPLICATION OF MICHELMAN'S VARNISH cont..

Do you remember when your mother and grandmother used to make "lye soap"--beginning with lye-water which had been made by pouring water through a barrel of strong wood ashes? Lye water dissolves common resin; so now, you have a clear amber or whitish colored solution of res resin in water. The old masters could have done exactly this, we think they did. Next, they colored every particle of this resin by adding a tincture of madder root extract, which turns purple when it is added to a lye-water solution, and dyes every particle of that resin while the resin is in solution! The color, yellow, orange, red, depends on how much dye is used.

Next, the resin is precipitated from the solution by adding a 5% solution of plain alum in water--by the pouring of the two solutions together, the resin-alum acts exactly like butter when you churn milk--it coagulates heavily--you filter this with a cloth and you get a colored mud, which looks something like modeling clay. This is dried for several days, then it dissolves in turpentine, add boiled linseed oil, and you are ready to apply it to the fiddle! Dry in the sun if possible. This, in brief is the process employed by the old masters of Italy. As you see, it is lengthy, troublesome, and takes experience and practise to make it "go".

I feel Mr. Sangster is wrong about his varnish. Chemical analysis of the old Italian varnish has proved the presence of alum, iron, and their related compounds, also a small amount of silicates (sand)--tell me, How are you going to get iron and alum in a varnish by boiling some gum in linseed oil? His varnishes cannot be colored except by addition of anilines, which are fatal to transparency and permanence. For brown varnish, the old Italians used common copperas (ferrous sulphate) in water solution.

You will see that Michelman's process puts the color in the gum itself, the color is not dissolved in the varnish to make your varnish opaque. Now, if you will think a moment, you will see why France, Germany, England, and other countries could not use the above process. Did you ever study the climate of France? You know it has lots of rain, and very little sun. Beside, the Vuillaumes, Lupots, Boquets, Salzards, and other French boys were in a hurry--hence they developed gum-in-oil and shellac varnishes which dried quickly and sounded good during the first two or three months of life of the fiddle.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Potassium Carbonate, Resin, lump, Alizarin paste (20% paste, to be diluted with 9 parts of water, to make a 2% alizarin suspension in water), Calcium Chloride, Aluminum Chloride, measuring graduates in cc, scales which weigh in grams, distilled water, a large aluminum or stainless steel vessel, bottles for solutions, a large jar for filtering, filtering cloth, closely wove, a strong source of heat--you are ready to go. These chemicals must be pure and fresh, contact your chemical supply house. The alizarin paste will cost you about $5.00 for a large jar, but that will last you indefinitely!q

1st solution: Put 300cc distilled water in your large aluminum vessel and 300 cc distilled water aside in a bottle. Weigh out 40 grams of lump resin and powder it up and put in the water. Weigh out 13.8 grams of your Potassium Carbonate and put it in, heat to a boil, stir constantly and boil five minutes--then add the 300 cc of distilled water to chill it--then pour the whole into a bottle. You now have 600 cc resin solution dissolved in water!

Next, make 5% solutions of the Alum and Calcium Chlorides in separate bottles, just add 100 cc distilled water for each 6 grams of the chlorides--they dissolve readily. Label and place aside.

Now, in a clear quart jar, measure out 200 cc of your resin solution prepared above and add 2cc of your 2% alizarin for a yellow, 4-6 cc for an orange, and 12 to 14 cc for a red. You will see this alizarin turn purple at once when you add it to the resin solution, stir it up a little so the color does its job! To this colored solution, add 120 cc of a solution made as follows: 100 cc of the Aluminum Chloride solution above and 35 cc of Calcium Chloride above --mix the two chloride solutions together and add 120 cc of this mixture to your resin solution

THE APPLICATION OF MICHELMAN'S VARNISH cont..

--your gum will instantly coagulate--so now, pour all this into a cloth stretched over a wide mouthed jar, filter it, adding clear distilled water to it several times to wash the gum as it filters, and stir it as it filters--this takes time! When washed, take the gum (wet mud) and spread it out on a clean plate or glass , a board or anything, and forget about it for about a week or ten days. Finish your fiddle!

Now, to make your varnish, take 2 grams of this dried colored gum and add it to 6 or 8 cc of turpentine--stir and dissolve, take about an hour or so--then add 2cc of Fine good boiled linseed oil, stir in, and apply to the fiddle!

By using the chemicals as mentioned, the process can be somewhat controlled. The old masters did not know the strength of their chemicals and could not control the process--hence their varied results, but all showing the same characteristics. I challenge any person to show any other method that will explain these variations in the old master varnish! This will do so.

For a brown, use 5% solution (120 cc) of Iron Chloride instead of the alum, and calcium chlorides above--you need no alizarin for a brown. The earliest violin varnishes were Brown--meaning that Gaspar de Sale probably had copperas, but no madder root as yet! If you have studied chemistry, you will know that the chlorides are better than the sulphates in the solutions, but the old masters evidently used plain alum, which is aluminum sulphate--and ferrous sulphate, which they knew as "green vitriol".

Carmen White, 1022 Caddo Street,
San Angelo, Texas.

.....

The Prof: "W en I get close to nature it makes me feel like a little grub."
The Other: "A little? It makes me feel like a lot. I eat like a horse when I'm in the country."

.....

WOOLF NOTES by Chibiabos

Apology - We ran short of covers to our last issue and quite a few subscribers no doubt queried our suggestion that the Journal had "taken another step forward". This will be rectified in this issue and we hope the new covers will prove just as attractive as the last.

MICHELMAN'S VARNISH:

In this number Carmen White has described the Michelman process. To those seriously considering using the method of varnishing I would suggest they first obtain Joseph Michelman's book. You will, however, notice that Carmen White's process is somewhat different to that described in the book. Carmen has perhaps experimented with Michelman's method to a greater extent than any other maker. The technique given by Carmen is the result of his experience and can be followed with confidence.

ARTICLE ON STEPHEN KUJAWA:

We regret that no credit was given in this article (appearing last month) to the writer. His name Oliver Towne. Mr. Towne is a columnist for the St. Paul News, and a good friend of Stephens. The retirement of Stephen Kujawa was a theme that could not be passed by. Happy days Stephen and good luck Oliver Towne.

"WOOLF NOTES" cont..

PATENT PEGS:

I would like to start an argument on the use of Patent Pegs - any takers? I myself have used "Beckers" non-slip pegs for as long as I can remember, and on my own "playing fiddle" will use no other.

With these pegs you can tune your fiddle while in playing position, bowing two strings together and getting them absolutely in tune. How many fiddles can you do that with? Yes, I know you will say this can be done if the pegs are properly adjusted - but how many are? I have had many a maker ask me to try his violin. I pick it up - it's out of tune - I try to turn the pegs, they are either stuck tight or slip on turning - I try to turn the stuck peg and for fear of breaking off the scroll I give up and ask my friend to tune it. He tries but the A is still sharp - the E is flat. Few realize that a violin sounds best when the strings vibrate in tune.

Some of you will answer that the regulation peg is so much more handsome, yet you put horrible looking steel contrivances attatched to the tail piece which you call string adjusters. I have seen as many as three on one violin. Do you think that handsome? (Say I'm really getting worked up!)

The non-slip pegs are so easy to move during playing that should you find one string getting a little flat you can in the period of a short rest give it a slight turn. Everything O.K. again!

Why then do violinists and makers insist on the regular pegs? Just tradition - they've always been that way, why change? It reminds me of the story of the man who was asked why he was a Liberal. "Because," he replied, "my grandfather was a Liberal and my father was a Liberal". "Then I suppose" said his companion, "thats why you are a bachelor".

OUR ADVERTISERS:

I still have one more local Merchant to put in a "plug" for. "The House of Hardwoods" is a firm somewhat out of the ordinary. They supply wood mainly for the hobbiest. Upon visiting their shop (and you are always welcome) you see almost every variety of wood that can be used for decorative or utility purposes. Boarding or Ply-wood. If you want to start that cupboard the wife has been begging for, go and look over the ply-wood displayed by "The House of Hardwoods" 2321 Granville Street, Vancouver, B.C.

MORE FROM MR. BERT SMITH:

Mr. Gibson Heyworth has shown me another letter received from Bert Smith, well known violin maker of Coniston, England. In this letter Bert acknowledges the receipt of some Canadian Engleman Spruce which Mr. Heyworth had sent to him. Bert is quite delighted with the quality of this wood and firmly believes it equal to European wood. We appreciate this opinion as many of us have always declared that we should have as good wood right here in B.C. as any in the world.

.....

Did you hear the one about the Texas Oil man who was so rich he got his dog a boy to play with.

(From Bob Wallace)

.....