

QUALITY SPORTSMEN'S TOOLS LIKELY TO PROVIDE USE FOR GENERATIONS

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In every field there are time-honored traditions and quality products that invoke visions of the best in its group. To the sportsman, there are none any better known or respected than that of Marble.

Webster Lansing Marble started the business from his home in 1892. He called it the Gladstone Manufacturing Company. His first product was the "Safety Axe," and like all of his products, it was designed with the sportsman in mind. The emphasis was always on quality, an aspect that is signified in the company's motto: "If it's Marble, it's quality."

This column was prompted by a conversation I had with my partner Steve Bick recently. We were brushing out a boundary line and I was using one of my most cherished possessions to sharpen stakes. It is a pocket safety axe my father left to me. They were last produced in 1959 and are one of the most sought-after collectibles around today. Intrigued by the quality and usefulness of the little axe, our talk perused the many other fine Marble products I grew up with.

The solid brass case vest compass was my first purchase when I started hunting deer. I still have it today, but have retired it for fear I will lose it. It was followed by the waterproof match case that I have carried for years. A practical tool, you could always depend on it to provide dry matches in any emergency. It never let me down. Called the match safe production, it was started in 1990 and was stopped in 1969.

Marble knives are one of the best known products and the owners were not likely to ever need another if they did not lose it. I believe it would be safe to say there are more of them passed down from generation to generation than any other brand.

Mr. Marble held over 70 patents on products for sportsmen. His company supplied products to servicemen from World War I to Operation Desert Storm. Charles Lindberg carried a Marble compass and knife on this trans-Atlantic flight. Teddy Roosevelt and Admiral Peary were other famous Americans who relied on the famous gear.

The company is still going strong and the motto still holds true. One of the most important lessons I have learned in my outdoor quests is that there is no substitute for quality.

Questions about the present status of the company were answered when my computer-wise young friend cast about for answers on the Internet. This is the 100th anniversary of its incorporation. His query was answered with interesting highlights covering each of those years.

Not exactly sure of where the firm is headed in the next 100, it was reassuring to learn they plan to carry on the tradition. This portends the likelihood that my grandchildren will have some still useful mementos to pass on to their grandchildren. In a time when many of our values are being denigrated and cheapened, it's heartening to know some of our old mores are being preserved.

To the outdoorsmen, hunters, trappers, foresters, fishermen, surveyors and construction professionals, quality is the watchword. Filson, L.L. Bean, Woolrich, Helly Hanson and Orvis are but a few of the institutions that have supplied generations of sportsmen with gear and clothing.

When your work or sport takes you to the outdoors and your success, pleasure or health depends on your equipment, quality does matter. Much of my present equipment has been handed down to me from my great uncle and father. I will be passing it on to my grandchildren.

I am rethinking my use of the pocket safety axe after finding out what they are worth today. Collectors are shelling out up to \$300 for any they find in good shape. Mine is in excellent condition and very serviceable. It would not seem right to me not to use it for its intended purpose. I will; but it will be with a rekindled respect and reverence.