

Mr. P. L. Drake of Richfield, Utah recently acquired a surveyor's vernier compass made by B. PIKE & SONS of 166 Broadway, New York, about which he requests information. The glass cover and bezel are missing and the silvering of the dial is worn, and he wishes to restore it.

Mr. Vernon R. Peterson of Sun City, Arizona also has a surveying compass, this one inscribed BENJAMIN PIKE, JR. of 294 Broadway, New York. Inside the cover of the Mahogany case is the label of "Benjamin Pike, Jr., Optician, Importer and Manufacturer of Mathematical and Philosophical Instruments."

Members of the Pike family of instrument makers and dealers were active in New York City for over a century. The firm is believed to have been founded in New York by Benjamin Pike, Sr. (1777-1863) an English-trained optician who migrated to New York City in the final years of the eighteenth century and established himself in business. His name first appeared in the city directory in 1807 with a shop address at 12 Wall Street. Two years later a son, Benjamin Pike, Jr. (1809-1864) was born, who joined his father as a partner in 1831 at which time the firm name was changed to Benjamin Pike & Son at the same address. The shop was later moved to 166 Broadway. A second son, Daniel Pike (1815-1893) joined the business in 1841 and the firm name became Benjamin Pike & Sons. In 1843 Benjamin Pike, Jr. left the family firm to establish a separate optical shop of his own which he continued until about 1857. He died in 1864, a year after the demise of his father. In about 1850 a third son, Gardiner Pike (1824-1893) had joined the family firm, which continued after the death of the senior Pike until 1867. In that year Daniel Pike went into business for himself using the firm name of Benjamin Pike's Son with an address at 518 Broadway but it was short-lived and lasted only until 1870. In 1881 the firm name was changed again, to Pike, Benjamin &

Son & Co., with an establishment at 960 Broadway which became Pike, Benjamin Son, Opticians at 23rd Street in 1881. In 1886 Gardiner Pike was listed in the city directories at 331 The Bowery as a restorer and from 1888 to 1891 as an optician. In 1900 the firm of Benjamin Pike & Son moved to New Providence, New Jersey, where it continued until 1916. The firm names, dates, and street addresses are important because they serve to establish the approximate dates of manufacture of specific instruments. Mr. Drake's compass was made between 1841 and 1855, while the compass owned by Mr. Peterson was made between 1843 and 1857.

The Pike's were among the largest



*(Courtesy of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution).*



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importers of mathematical and optical instruments in the United States, purchasing instruments abroad and selling them under their various firm names, in addition to other instruments they manufactured. In 1848 Benjamin Pike, Jr. issued a two volume cloth-bound illustrated descriptive catalogue of the instruments sold by the firm with prices. It was reprinted in 1856. This work is an invaluable reference for instruments of this period.

Following are instructions for restoring the silvering on Mr. Drake's damaged dial. Any remaining lacquer must first be removed, and then the dial plate must be rubbed thoroughly and vigorously with cream of tartar, and carefully cleaned to ensure that no grease or oil from the hands remains. The surface is then rubbed with pure sodium chloride (table salt) and then the dial must again be cleaned. A silvering compound, such as is readily available from clock and watchmakers supply houses, is applied with the fingers, rubbed vigorously until the silver surface is even throughout. The surface is then washed off with cold water, and cream of tartar is again applied with the fingers to brighten the silvering. The surface is washed one more time and dried with an absolutely clean cotton cloth. In order to preserve the silvering in bright condition, the surface should be lacquered within one or two days.