

The Phenix Caster Company,

FURNITURE CASTER.

ALONG in 1874 Alexander Martin, a saw maker of Hamilton, got it into his head that ordinary furniture casters wore out carpets and made too much work for the women folks. The casters rolled hard, and in turning the corner they pivoted on a single point and tended to tear holes in the carpet. Mr. Martin thereupon began to invent. He rigged up a little shop and put in two solid years in inventing casters and testing them and failing. But finally he struck the right thing and patented the celebrated Martin two wheel caster. It would move with great ease, and in turning a corner, one of the wheels would move one way and the other the other way and there was thus no tendency for it to bore holes in the floor. Mr. Martin would spread a piece of tissue paper on the carpet and then roll and twist a little truck, provided with his casters, around on the paper and show that there was no puckering tendency whatever and that the heavy load moved with the utmost ease. He showed it to all his friends who would look at it and they all admired it and smiled. He was in rather bad straits financially and finally sold the patent to William Ritchie for five hundred dollars, Ritchie caring nothing whatever for the patent, which he took simply because Martin insisted on his taking it as some sort of an exchange for the five hundred dollars which Ritchie let him have. But the next day, as hard up as Martin was, he traded back, much to Ritchie's delight.

Everybody appeared to ridicule the caster as a thing out of which Martin could make any money and Martin was looked upon as an inventor who was foolishly wasting his time. He took his models to large hardware concerns in Cincinnati and these men gave him the laugh. They let him make exhibitions with his tissue paper, &c., and then said they would not have the thing as a gift; that there never had been any demand for such a thing and never would be; that furniture casters were good enough, and that if an inventor had any sense he would set his wits to work to contrive cheaper ways of making the present casters instead of getting up new fangled ones that were bound to cost very much more than the old styles. Martin came home again with his models, thinking none the less of them however.

Messrs. Sohn and Rentschler had gotten out of the woods, and their shop was next door to that of Martin and they saw so much of Martin and his casters that some of Martin's enthusiasm began to rub off on them. Messrs. Tucker & Dorsey were in contact with the hardware trade in Indianapolis and had had many close dealings with Sohn and Rentschler. Sohn and Rentschler talked to Tucker and Dorsey about the caster and finally the four joined hands and made a royalty contract with Martin. The terms of this contract, when they became known, excited more smiles than Martin's caster ever had, for that contract obligated these four men to pay Martin a big royalty on each caster and to sell a specified large number of casters per year. It looked like a splendid thing for Martin but it was prophesied to be the ruination of Sohn and Rentschler and Tucker and Dorsey. But the prophecy was not

fulfilled. The caster business was started and George Helvey was employed as Superintendent. He built a complete line of labor saving machinery for making these castors nicely and as cheaply as possible. But the casters did not pretend to be cheap casters. They were essentially high priced. But the trade was pushed directly to the teeth of the hardware dealers and the hardware trade became finally convinced that this caster had come to stay and that it had its place in the market. The sales were pushed to an enormous extent, and they continued to grow ever since and the business has made magnificent returns to everyone connected with it. Mr. Martin died soon after the thing got fairly started but his royalty paid all his debts and left his family a competence, and the manufacturers have done exceedingly well. The firm of Sohn, Rentschler, Tucker & Dorsey was established and began making the casters in 1877 and about 1884 the concern was incorporated as the Pheux Caster Co. with the same owners. The factory is always running to its fullest extent and the two wheel casters, since copied largely, are now a staple article in the hardware market.