

## *Taxidermy: From the Wilds to Interior Décor*

Of the [peculiar hobbies](#) enjoyed in Victorian times, not least creating art from seaweed and human hair, taxidermy is perhaps best documented in West Newbury. [One author explained](#) that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, taxidermy was everywhere from natural history museums, to home décor, fashion, art and popular culture. “Decorative objects including taxidermy elements, such as fire screens made of exotic birds, became highly coveted pieces for fashionable parlour and drawing rooms.” [Another suggested](#) that preserved animals in the living room displayed one’s educated taste and interests to visitors, establishing a connection to natural history.

Amateur taxidermy attracted all sorts. Do-it-yourself taxidermists ranged from a scion of the [Rothschild banking family](#) (collecting “for the entertainment and education of his friends”) to [Teddy Roosevelt](#) (whose White House state dining room featured members of the Cervidae family peering down from the walls) to [women](#) (who could be proficient at many things, including “wood-carving, taxidermy, ... and other employments too numerous to mention.”)

In West Newbury, the hobby often was a family affair. Brothers Frank and William Sharples, both shoemakers, were locally renowned for their taxidermy skills. The former was credited with “unusually artistic” specimens, and the *Haverhill Gazette* said that the latter had “one of the finest and most complete collections of native birds in this vicinity and as a self-taught taxidermist, he show[ed] no mean skill....” Part of his collection went to the Peabody Museum. Alonzo Jaques, who lived all of his 101 years at 87 Main Street, was known for his small stuffed mammals. In 1890 he displayed a fox squirrel and an opossum at the Farmers Fair, which that year also featured a stuffed alligator, presumably not sourced locally. His daughter Jessie Jaques developed an avian expertise. In December of 1890, she “handsomely mounted” a pair of Arctic owls whose annual excursion along the coast was cut short in Newburyport. When S.E. Emery shot an eagle with a 7’ wingspan on his West Newbury farm, he asked Jessie Jaques to mount it.

The Town’s most prolific and professional taxidermist was Charles Frederic Newell. Born and bred in West Newbury, Newell was a well-to-do polymath who began as a taxidermist in Maine and Acadian Canada. Back in West Newbury he became a florist

/nurseryman /farmer with large land holdings around Church Street, on the north side of Post Office Square, and on Pipestave Hill. In later years he could be found supervising the project to stabilize the ever-slumping [Pipestave Hill road cut](#) with a vegetative cover of willow matting, and designing and building a [hydroelectric dam](#) outside of Richmond, VA.

Newell started his taxidermy career with two stores, one in Calais, ME, and another across the Saint Croix River in St. Stephen, New Brunswick. In 1891 a local paper quoted the *Calais Times* as saying that C.F. Newell was in high demand. “The work assigned him by the Maine State College alone will require much of his time. But that is only a small part of the work he has before him. Last evening he received a caribou for mounting and to-morrow he expects a moose. Sea-birds, owls, foxes, and a great variety of other specimens he is constantly receiving.” It was in Calais that Newell stuffed [Linus](#), the highly hirsute golden palomino stallion who while alive had been exhibited throughout the country and once dead moved permanently to Maine State College.

In 1895 Newell [set up shop](#) on School Street in Merrimac. He [kept busy](#) with deer heads, “porcupines, foxes and other animals, birds of all varieties and sturgeon and other fish.” Doubtless Newell acquired some specimens by virtue of his own hunting, as did other local taxidermists. He also received animals—dead or alive. In March of [1897](#) Newell was sent a year-old bear cub and a jaguar, which apparently were alive. He resold the jaguar but kept the bear who, perhaps anticipating its fate, [escaped](#) and was recaptured in West Newbury shortly after its arrival. By [April](#) Newell had “disposed of his bear cub to parties in Hyde Park.”

In 1898, shortly before he turned to his plant nursery, farming, and engineering enterprises, Newell’s taxidermy career was at its prize-winning apex at the Amesbury & Salisbury Agricultural Fair. It was [reported](#), “The most conspicuous display one sees upon entering the building is that of Charles F. Newell of West Newbury, the expert taxidermist. He has one of the most excellent natural history collections possible to be seen. In it are the heads of deer, moose, buffalo, mountain goat, armadillo, and other animals as well as birds, shrikes and other inhabitants of the forest.”

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The golden palomino Linus, prior to his stuffing by West Newbury's Charles F. Newell *Source:* [St. Croix Historical Society](#)



owls stuffed by Miss Jessie Jaques

Richard Berkenbush collection



White House state dining room with Teddy Roosevelt's taxidermy *Source:* [Smithsonian Institution](#)

*Source:* G.A.R. Library Historical Collection



TAKE out the entrails; remove the skin with the greatest possible care; rub over the whole interior with arsenic, (a deadly poison;) put wires from the head to the legs to preserve the natural form, and stuff immediately with tow, wool, or the like. If allowed to dry after applying the arsenic, the skin becomes too stiff to handle.

Another, and, as we think, a better way for very small

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### TAXIDERMY.

birds, is, "after taking out the entrails, to open a passage to the brain, which must be scooped out through the mouth; introduce into the cavities of the skull and the whole body a mixture of salt, pepper, and alum, putting some through the gullet and whole length of the neck; then hang the bird in a cool, airy place—first by the feet, that the body may be impregnated by the salt, and afterward by a thread through the under mandible of the bill, till it appears to be sweet; then hang in the sun, or near a fire. After it is well dry, clear out what remains of the mixture, and fill up the cavity of the body with wool, oakum, or any soft substance."

*Source:* [Art recreations: being a complete guide to pencil drawing, oil painting ... moss work, papier mache...wax work, shell work...enamel painting, etc](#)