

Kimble Brick &
Tile Company kiln
& yard



A Whale of a Find

By: TOM WELCH

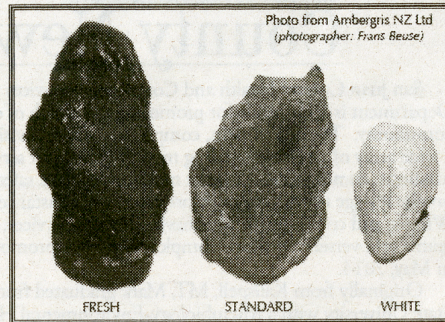
When M.L. Kimble walked the beach on the West Side of Orcas Island, he paid attention. In the summer of 1912 Kimble found a large lump of a waxy substance on the beach. Weighing 47 pounds, the stuff was like a brittle wax, grayish yellow in color and formed into an oblong cake about six inches thick and eighteen inches long. It had no odor, but seemed slightly oily.

Consulting with his brother-in-law, Leonard Dixon, they moved the seaborne lump to higher ground, then into the barn at the Kimble brick works.

Inquiries locally got no clear identification of the find, but eventually M.L. Kimble contacted the Arctic Club in Seattle, sent them a sample which they forwarded to a firm in Germany for analysis, and word came back that the 'lump' Kimble had found that day on the beach was ambergris.

From wiki-What is ambergris? Ambergris occurs as a bile duct secretion of the intestines of the sperm whale and can be found floating upon the sea, or lying on the coast. It is also sometimes found in the abdomens of whales. Because the beaks of giant squids have been found embedded within lumps of ambergris, scientists have theorized that the substance is produced by the whale's gastrointestinal tract to ease the passage of hard, sharp objects that the whale might have eaten. The sperm whale usually vomits these, but if one travels further down the gut, it will be covered in ambergris.

By 1914 the ambergris had been stored in the barn for two years. Rats had eaten their share of it, and more had been used to grease the skids when the Kimples brought in more timber. The original 47 pound lump had



become 27 pounds. At this time, ambergris was worth about \$15 per pound in its raw state, so the remaining 27 pounds of ambergris on Orcas were worth about \$400. Not a fortune, but potentially a tidy windfall for the Kimples. In 1914 the 27 pounds of ambergris was shipped to the firm in Germany for refining, but after a brief time a problem arose. It grew difficult to learn any news from Germany, and increasingly so as the Kimples sought news of their ambergris. The beginnings of World War One were underway, and no word could be learned of the whereabouts of the Orcas Island ambergris. It was lost in the war, and never heard of again. Today, ambergris is valued at \$25 per gram, making Kimples' original 47- pound find at modern value worth over half a million dollars! All that remained, in 1946, of the original find was a small lump of ambergris kept in an envelope at M.L. Kimble's home. If the family still has it today, they might want to move it to a safe place!

Tom Welch
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