

Introduction to the work

Knots, Splices, and Rope-Work: A Practical Treatise was written by Alpheus Hyatt Verrill and originally published in 1912. No information is given on the title page in Project Gutenberg concerning the publisher other than it is the second revised edition. However, the original book does list the publisher as the Norman W. Henley Publishing Company, NYC. This publishing company also published numerous other technical works. In addition to the 1912 1st edition, Knots, Splices, and Rope-Work also went into a 2nd edition in 1917, had a 2nd revised edition published in 1922, a 3rd revised edition in 1924, and a 5th edition in 1946 edited by E. Armitage McCann (master mariner). There are also some independent publishers reformatting the Project Gutenberg text and reselling the book for their own company. At this time no information can be found concerning the 4th edition. The book's intended audience is listed very plainly on the title page as "Adapted for the use of travelers, campers, yachtsmen, Boy Scouts, and all others having to use or handle ropes for any purpose." The 2nd edition seems to be the edition that is most readily available for purchase and is also the first edition in which an introduction by the author was included. This edition will be the edition that I will be working from. The current audience for the book remains the same as the original intended audience. The treatise is a "how-to" on knot and splice making with approximately 156 illustrations showing steps and completed images.

Description of the Work

The book Knots, Splices, and Rope-Work: A Practical Treatise is comprised of a Table of Contents, an Introduction, seven chapters, and finally an Index , bringing the

page total to approximately 72 pages in Project Gutenberg and 100 pages in the original 2nd edition. The cover of the book is hard back with a woven cloth covering. The lettering and knot work on the front appear in black ink and of a more creative font face. The introduction was written by the author, Alpheus Hyatt Verrill in January of 1917 in which he discusses the importance of knots and rope work on the development of mankind and civilization. Before jumping into the how-to's of making knots and such, Verrill discusses in the first chapter the rope itself. He describes in great detail, while not making it hard to understand, cordage and how ropes are made. The chapters are arranged from the simplest knots, "Simple Knots and Bends", to the more difficult, "Fancy Knots and Rope Work". The book, according to the original title page is "Illustrated with 156 original cuts showing how each knot, tie, or splice is formed and its appearance when complete." The images, I believe, are drawn by A. Hyatt Verrill since he was also an illustrator and did all of the artwork for his multiple adventure book series. The images in the early chapters are a bit hard to follow, but the written directions help to clarify how to form the knot or splice. The later chapters with the more difficult workings contain multiple images of how to form the knot, splice, or working. The font face on the front cover of the 2nd edition appears to be various forms of Times New Roman, such as small caps. The table of contents is unique in that in addition to a chapter title, it also lists each knot or rope working that is covered in the chapter. The index located at the back of the book isn't so much an index as a listing of key terms. The terms are listed alphabetically, but there aren't any page numbers listed for finding the terms in the Project Gutenberg online text; luckily the original version contains page numbers for the index.

The book itself tells its purpose and content on the title page and in the introduction by the author. “Giving Complete and Simple Directions for Making All the Most Useful and Ornamental Knots in Common Use, with Chapters on Splicing, Pointing, Seizing, Serving, etc. Adapted for the Use of Travelers, Campers, Yachtsmen, Boy Scouts, and All Others Having to Use or Handle Ropes for Any Purpose,” is listed as the purpose of the book with the people that might find the book useful. In the introduction, Verrill expounds on the importance historically and the utility of knots. He states his belief of the importance of knots and rope work in the sentence “Few realize the importance that knots and cordage have played in the world's history, but if it had not been for these simple and every-day things, which as a rule are given far too little consideration, the human race could never have developed beyond savages....No cloth could be woven, no net or seine knitted, no bow strung and no craft sailed on lake or sea without numerous knots and proper lines or ropes; and Columbus himself would have been far more handicapped without knots than without a compass.” Verrill points out that something as simple as a knot had an origin and is something that modern society takes for granted. The importance of knowing how to form various knots in multiple professions is undoubtedly important and prompted Verrill to write an entire book illustrating how to form these figures. The arrangement of the chapters leads a reader through the composition of a piece of cordage, to the simpler formations, and on to the more difficult formations separated by uses.

Importance of the Work

Knots, Splices, and Rope-Work is an important piece of technical literature due to the fact that it is one of the early technical documents of the 20th century that was really

geared towards teaching a skill. The book apparently was popular with a wide variety of consumers considering that it went into at least five editions. Modern readers of the book herald it as a must have if you are going camping or just interested in knots or rope-work. The book itself doesn't consist of many words, but they are very direct in the instructions they give when accompanied by the illustrations. Today's modern technical communicators also try to adhere to the more concise, direct, and simple way of explaining or directing. Being published in 1912, this was one of Verrill's early technical documents produced for the Norman W. Henley Publishing Co. The Norman W. Henley Publishing Co. was one of the first (if not the first) to focus on producing technical documents to explain a concept to the everyday person on topics covering gasoline engines to electricity. Later revised editions of this book cleaned up some spelling and grammar mistakes made by Verrill in the original. Today's technical communicators can learn from Verrill that the most simple and direct language can sometimes be the best to use when explaining an idea to a layperson. Illustrations (when appropriate) are also key to producing a well-rounded technical document.

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