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## Justus Roe & Sons, Est. 1876 Second Oldest Pat. Business

Next to The Long Island Advance, now celebrating its 100th Anniversary, the oldest business in Patchogue is known as Justus Roe & Sons, Inc., manufacturers of steel measuring tapes.

In 1943, the New York State Historical Association acquired for its museum at Cooperstown a model of the device that constituted the major part of the foundation of the business that has prospered since the "hoop skirt" era.

The company was established by Justus Roe in 1876 and like so many businesses and properties in the Patchogue area, the name "Roe" stands out. Justus was the great-grandson of the famous Captain Austin Roe, who has gone down in history as Long Island's most famous spy during the Revolution in 1776.

Born in 1837, Justus Roe was a surveyor by profession. Prior to his development of the steel measuring tape, land measurement was made with the use of a chain. The chain consisted of 100 links or 7.91 inches per link that equaled four rods or 66 feet.

The reel for tape measures, fishing lines and such articles, was patented by Mr. Roe in 1888. The same type reel, its principle unchanged through 95 years, is still manufactured by the Patchogue firm. The first one was developed for his own use several years prior to 1876. Other surveyors requested that he make similar tapes for them, and when the demand for them became so

great, he decided to establish a company for this purpose.

A native Patchogue, born in the old Roe's hotel, when it occupied a site at the northeast corner of Main Street and Ocean Avenue, Justus Roe studied civil engineering and surveying in a college in Connecticut, and returned to Long Island to make this work his career.

His surveying business grew with the years, and there was no job too great for him to tackle. He served the Long Island railroad as chief civil engineer for the project of extending the railroad from Hicksville to Babylon.

He afterwards told on many occasions of the way the Babylonians laughed at the extension, and how some predicted the railroad would never get more than "four or five passengers a week."

When the railroad forged further eastward, from Babylon to Patchogue, Mr. Roe again was selected as chief civil engineer.

A Supreme court decision paved the way for one of the greatest surveying jobs of Mr. Roe's career. Great South beach, from the Fire Island lighthouse to Tangiers, was then the property of many share owners, whose holdings had never been accurately determined. Each share represented anywhere from several lots to a small fraction of one lot, extending between the bay and ocean.

Under a court decision handed down in an effort to remedy this condition, three commissioners



### A sign of the times

were appointed to direct the surveying of the beach. Mr. Roe, appointed one of these commissioners, was selected to do the work.

While the Justus Roe plant stood less than a stone's throw from Main Street for almost a half-century, leading an existence inwardly active but outwardly quiet, the average transient going through Patchogue was unaware of the organization.

Justus Roe's name today is a memory. He died in 1900 at the age of 62 years that were packed full of industry and hard work. He left four sons to carry on the institution he founded. They looked upon him as nothing short of a "genius" who revolutionized one of the main elements of the surveying profession.

The firm of Justus Roe and Sons was established on the second floor over McBride's Corner Drug store. The business clicked from the start. Larger quarters were needed, so the firm moved to the second floor of an

East Main Street building.

Much of the work of filling orders, which continued at a prosperous pace, had to be done in Brooklyn and New York. Then came the building of the Roe factory on Roe Court where orders could be handled from start to finish. Afterwards, another building was constructed on the court, where the Terry Street Parking lot is located now.

In 1960 the firm moved its offices to 217 River Avenue on the Patchogue River. The original market for tape measures was to the domestic surveying trade. Today, in 1971, the marketing emphasis is on world-wide distribution through the hardware and building supply trades.

The combined patents of rule and reel gave the Roe firm something that no other manufacturer had to offer. These patents continued in force for many years, but at their expiration three other firms adopted them and have since been manufacturing similar

devices.

The Roe firm, as the years went on, took up the use and manufacture of other patented devices, but notably steel tape measures with the numbers and marks applied by a secret process, and special type awning rollers.

The product line now includes many styles of tapes in lengths up to 300 feet or 100 meters and are sold under the Roe Brands as well as many other brand names.

His sons, now all deceased, who carried on the business were: in order of age, G. Howard, J. Austin, Henry K. and Nathaniel. Howard had no children. Henry had one daughter, Margaret Hellmuth now of Tenafly, N.J. and Austin had one daughter, Virginia Marshall who lives on North Ocean Avenue, Patchogue. Nathaniel however, had three sons, Nathaniel, Alfred, and Justus. The control and management of the company is now in the hands of this third generation of young men with interests in four overseas operations.

These are joint ventures with private groups in each of the countries. These companies are: Roe Measuring Tools, Australia; Eufomet Tools Ltd., England; International Measuring Tools, Israel; and Lal-Roe Tools, India.

During World War II the firm had many government contracts and today the name "Roe" is known throughout the world as it once was in just the Patchogue area.