

STORIES of New Jersey

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PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE GOLD BEATERS

The art of hammering gold by hand into thin leaves for use in ornamentation is one of the rarest and most ancient of industries. The gilding found on old relics, books and art objects was prepared for the artist in the Middle Ages in much the same manner as it is for the picture frames, signs and furniture of today. In the whole country not more than a thousand people are engaged in this highly specialized work, and these are found in only 13 of the states.

In Red Bank, New Jersey, there is a colony of these gold workers distributed in three shops that owe their existence to William Haddon, a gold leaf manufacturer of New York, who, after his retirement, kept himself occupied in a small shop in his home at Red Bank. He taught the craft to others, who have carried on the business for more than 60 years.

The manufacture of gold leaf begins with the purchase of pure (24-carat) gold from the United States Government. One ounce of gold will produce 2,500 sheets, 3 and $\frac{3}{8}$ inches square, hammered to a thinness of $\frac{1}{200,000}$ of an inch. The books are sold for about 75 cents. Each book contains 25 sheets of gold leaf packed between protecting layers of paper. It is difficult to conceive of anything as thin as these gold wafers being visible to the naked eye. One way of estimating their thinness is to realize that it would take about 400