

CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

ELETRIC HAT STRETCHER

Metal and ceramics
H. 34 x L. 41 x W. 25,6 cm
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This small iron device, looking like an animal, with its large head and four legs or like an automaton that carries out an action, opening and closing its four halves, came under our attention as one of those weird objects that are usually part of the old museums inventory.

Alternatively, this is just a mould or hat stretcher that has belonged to one of the headgear shops that existed in Angra since, at least, the last decades of the 19th century and integrates at present the Angra do Heroísmo Museum Ethnography collection.

Around 1867, José Félix da Costa, signalled two *hats factories* – one at Rua Direita and the other at Rua do Rego -, although José Augusto Nogueira Sampaio, a few years later, about the town economic activity, under the title of *diverse industries*, reported only the straw hat production. We also know, through newspapers advertisement, that a shop named Chapelaria Moderna existed in the 1930's, in the corner of Rua Direita with Praça Velha.

Anyway, the use of an electric gear, able to adjust to different sizes, in a local headgear shop, would be most likely after the 1920's, meaning, after the municipalisation of the town electric services and the resolution of some initial difficulties that subsisted after its inauguration, in 1908 (cf. Enciclopédia Açoriana).

It was also, most probably, around this time, in the 1920's, 1930's and above all, in the 1940's that the use of the felt hat becomes common among the male population. They were seen in bunches, in the bullfights afternoons and other social events, in the pictures of those times. The elegance and poise of the outfit, hat and shoes reached by then the commerce employee or the countryman. In fact, the latter has always used some kind of head covering – daily life, the dawn to dusk work and the social habits as well, required that – covering or uncovering the head was, indeed, part of a strict social code.

The felt hat of those times was the same still in use by a certain elegance, that was known by the nice names of *fedora* or *borsallino*, evoking mythic characters of music and movies. Its shape it is identical to the famous *panama hat*, being the difference just in the material. Contrasting with this one, that is weaved in straw, the making of a felt hat requires a heat based modelling, in this case provided by an electric resistance, assuring that the desired shape and size are obtained.