

An Early Reelmaker from Vermont

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While doing some research on a New York reelmaker, I learned that an exhibit at the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations—better known as the New York Crystal Palace—featured “silver and plated fishing and trolling-spoons” made by a company I’d never heard of—Brinsmaid, Brother & Co., Burlington, Vermont. The Exhibition opened in 1853 and closed in late 1854. Curiosity aroused, I began to look into the company history.

Trout and other Fishing Rods
in Canes, and Hooks, and an additional assortment of Fire Works, just received at the Variety Shop.
PANGBORN & BRINSMAID.
June 23.

An advertisement in the June 23, 1836 issue of the *Burlington Weekly Free Press*. This is the earliest Brinsmaid ad I’ve found that mentions fishing equipment.

In 1793, Abram Brinsmaid, a jeweler/watchmaker/clockmaker, set up shop on Church Street in Burlington. His oldest son, James Edward, was born in 1812, was apprenticed to his father, and established a partnership with Amos Pangborn in 1833.

New Goods, Reels &c.
WE have this day received some Reels for Fishermen; Powder Flasks, 400 Limerick Hooks, 1 2 Gross Flies, 200 Silk Worm Guts for the ends of Trout Lines, several kinds of rosewood, and other finest quality hair brushes. Tooth Powder. Diamond cement. Shell side combs, fine Tooth Brushes. Otto of rose. Rowland’s Maccassar Oil, and a lot more of cheap Looking Glasses; wide and narrow white Satin Stocks, wide Bombazine do; Flutes with patent lined joint and screw and 4 silver keys; 5000 Torpedoes; Feather Dusters, a nice article for dusting Furniture and fanning the Sick; Thermometers; Music Boxes; German Alarm clocks, and a variety of Goods, at the Variety Shop.
June 18. PANGBORN & BRINSMAID.

Pangborn & Brinsmaid advertised fishing reels as early as June 18, 1838.

Pangborn & Brinsmaid advertised frequently, especially in the *Burlington Weekly Free Press*. It was a variety store, and the shop would place separate ads for different classifications of wares, e.g., watches and jewelry, household items, military goods, medicines, et al. Sedgwick Swift Brinsmaid, Abram’s second-oldest son, served an apprenticeship in New York City, worked as a watchmaker there for a couple of years, and acted as a buyer for his father’s firm. On June 23, 1836, the firm advertised “Trout and other Fishing Rods in Canes, and Hooks...” This was the earliest Brinsmaid ad I have found that mentioned fishing equipment. By June, 1838, the shop was advertising that it had received reels for sale.

J. E. BRINSMAID & BROTHERS,
Successors to
PANGBORN & BRINSMAID,
IMPORTERS OF
WATCHES AND JEWELRY.
Manufacturers of GOLD & SILVER WARE; Repairers of
Watches, Clocks and Jewelry.
JANE EDGAR BRINSMAID,
SEDGWICK SWIFT BRINSMAID,
17 WILLIAM BLISS BRINSMAID.

The new Brinsmaid partnership is announced in this ad of October 13, 1843.

Pangborn died in August, 1843, and James would establish another partnership with his younger brothers Sedgwick and William Bliss Brinsmaid. J.E. Brinsmaid & Brothers continued to do business as importers of watches and jewelry, manufacturers of gold and silver ware, and repairers of timepieces. The firm’s name was changed quickly to Brinsmaid & Brothers. By the summer of 1844, the “Successors to Pangborn & Brinsmaid” included “Fishing Tackle” in large advertisements of their remarkable variety of stocked items, and they continued to do so. In August, 1844, they placed a separate ad in the *Burlington Weekly Free Press* for fishing rods, “some in canes and some *not* in canes.”

Fishing Rods.
A FEW more, some in canes, and some *not* in canes,—also hooks, lines, sinkers, &c.
BRINSMAID & BROTHERS.
Aug. 30, '44. 13

Fishing rods are touted in an ad first published on August 30, 1844.

HUNTERS AND FISHERMEN.
FISH BASKETS, Multiplying Reels, Lines, Poles, Hooks, Swivels, Flies, Fish, Bugs, Spoon and other Bait, Drinking Flasks, 1 and 6 Barrel Pistols, Rifles, Double and Single Guns, Caps, Powder Flasks, Gun Cotton, and other fixings.
 52 **BRINSMARD & BROTHERS.**

Multiplying reels are featured in this ad of June 25, 1847.

An advertisement in June, 1847, announced that the shop had multiplying reels for sale.

In 1850, Sedgwick sold his house and returned to New York City to act as an agent for his brothers, and he would establish his own partnerships. Chester Hildreth, a local goldsmith, replaced him in the Burlington partnership, which was renamed Brinsmaid, Brother & Company, the firm whose exhibited spoons would prompt this investigation. The new firm held a clearance sale before rebuilding their store. An advertisement first appearing on May 23, 1850, mentioned "American and English reels."

To Sportsmen.
FISHING RODS, Lines, Hooks, Reels, Flies, Bait, Spoons and other Fishing Tackle.
 Pistols, Guns and Gain-twist Rifles; best Caps and Wadding, Gun Cotton, Powder and Liquor Flasks, Shot Bags, Canes, &c., in great variety, sold by
BRINSMARD & BROTHERS.
 June 7 '49. d85

Published initially in June, 1849, this may be the last Brinsmaid Brothers ad that mentioned reels. It was reprinted as late as January 25, 1850.

The new partnership did not advertise much during 1851, but on May 28, 1852, Brinsmaid, Brother & Co. began to run an extraordinary ad in several issues of the *Middlebury Register* and in the *Burlington Free Press* that mentioned "American Reels of our own make." These American reels are to be distinguished

FISHING TACKLE.
AMERICAN AND ENGLISH REELS, FISH
 Poles, Swivels, Spoon Bait, Fish Bait, Lines, large and small Flies, Fish Hooks of most kinds used, Flasks, with and without Caps, Leather caps.
HUNTING, &c.
 Rifles, Guns, Wads, Revolving and other Pistols, Flasks, Shot Bags, Water-proof and other Caps, Drinking Flasks, &c., sold low by
BRINSMARD, BROTHER & CO,
 Burlington, May 23, 1850.

Both American and English reels are featured in this Brinsmaid, Brother & Co. tackle ad of May 23, 1850. The new company's first ad had been published only two days earlier.

FISHING AND HUNTING,
 they keep Flies, Rods, Reels, Nets, Hooks, Sinkers, Swivels, Gut, Gimp, &c, Rifles, Guns, Pistols, Drinking and Powder Flasks, Shot Pouches, Richard's, Walker's, Starkey's and common caps.

A portion of a large Brinsmaid, Brother & Co. ad published on October 10, 1851.

from the American reels in the 1850 advertising, which almost certainly were acquired elsewhere.

The Brinsmaids probably made reels for a brief period. Any evidence of their reelmaking is based so far on only a few newspaper advertisements published during 1852. The Brinsmaid companies did not include their own "American Reels" in earlier or later ads that mentioned reels and/or tackle.

FISHING AND HUNTING.
 Rifles, Guns, Pistols, Wads, Caps, Flasks, &c.; Rods, Flies, Spoons, Swivels, Hooks; American Reels of our own make and treble Hooks of our own importation.

The Fishing and Hunting portion of a large ad first published in the Middlebury Register on May 28, 1852. This is the earliest mention of Brinsmaid-made American Reels that I have found. The ad also ran in the Burlington Free Press from July to September, 1852.

The following year, 1853, must have been turbulent. Brinsmaid, Brother & Co. split, advertising on May 17 that it was "selling off their entire stock" of many listed goods. By September 1, Brinsmaid & Co., a partnership of William Brinsmaid and Hildreth, was advertising watches, jewelry, etc., at No. 2 Maiden Lane, New York City. James Brinsmaid remained on Church Street as "Late of and successor to the firms of Pangborn & Brinsmaid, and Brinsmaid, Brother & Co." His advertising from then on featured mostly his jewelry, gold and silverware, and even tackle on occasion.

The last New York City ad was published in April, 1854, and William Brinsmaid and Chester Hildreth continued their partnership as Brinsmaid & Hildreth, located at 1 Bank Block in Burlington. By September, 1854, they were advertising fishing reels again.

Brinsmaid & Hildreth continued to advertise tackle, even reels, at least as late as 1864, but I've seen no hint that they continued to make reels. William Brinsmaid died on November 27, 1889, and Chester Hildreth carried on the business until his death in June, 1902.

I have a gut feeling that it was William Bliss Brinsmaid who was largely responsible for the reelmaking. Pangborn & Brinsmaid sold reels, but after William joined his brothers in Brinsmaid & Brothers, the shop's line of fishing equipment was expanded. He was there after Sedgwick left, when the shop offered its own

Sporting Goods.

JUST RECEIVED BY BRINSMOID & HILDRETH, No. 1 Bank Block, a large assortment of Double and Single Barrel Guns, Rifles, Colts, Allen & Thurbers, and Leonards Patent Revolving, Hammer Pistols, Shot Pouches, Flasks, Curtis & Hawley's Diamond Powder, &c. Fishing Rods, Spoons, Lines, Reels, Hooks, Flies, and everything in the line constantly on hand.

A fine assortment of Shell, side and back, Combs, of superior patterns and finish, just received at No. 1 Bank Block.

Sept. 2.

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Brinsmaid & Hildreth continued to sell reels after their return to Burlington in 1854. By this time James was advertising his own competing wares.

American reels. It's conceivable that Hildreth provided the inspiration for the reelmaking, but he was primarily a goldsmith and jeweler. William, with his varied training, may have decided to make reels himself. As the saying might have gone: "Reelmaking ain't clock science." James and William split up, perhaps partly as a result of the new venture.

Brinsmaid, Brother & Company has a place in the pantheon of the earliest reelmaking shops in the United States—and it was located in Vermont, not New York or Kentucky. They followed the earliest Kentucky makers and the Conroys, Crook, the Rodgers, and Karr

in New York. They began their reelmaking at about the same time as R. & L. Lewis and John Warrin. All of these craftsmen were manufacturing reels before the Vom Hofes.

FISHING TACKLE.

A COMPLETE and full assortment of Rods, Reels, Spoons, Lines, Hooks of all kinds, (Treble and single), Fly Hooks, large and small, Fish Baskets, Swivels, Gimp, Gut, and everything in the line, at No. 1 Bank Block.

BRINSMOID & HILDRETH.

Sept. 8.

This ad, published until mid-December, 1864, may be the last Brinsmaid & Hildreth advertisement for fishing tackle.

In many cases, it is difficult to prove that the person or company whose name is stamped on a reel actually manufactured it. Newspaper ads or other printed claims of manufacture are extremely helpful in that regard. In this case, we have the published evidence of reelmaking without evidence from the reels themselves (to my knowledge). It would be very interesting to learn if anyone out there has a marked Brinsmaid reel.

Many questions remain about Brinsmaid American reels. What kinds of reels were they? How long were they made? A year? Will we ever see a marked example? For the moment, we must be satisfied knowing that some may be out there, waiting to be identified.