

James Golcher, Reel Manufacturer

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In December, 1839, James Golcher, a thirty-two-year-old gun maker, arrived in New York City on the ship *Napier*, which had sailed from Liverpool, England. By 1841, he was listed as a gun smith in a city directory of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In August of that year, an advertisement in *The Republican Compiler*, a newspaper in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, announced that Golcher had established a gunsmith shop and could offer various firearms, gun locks, and gun repairs to the citizens of Gettysburg. A similar ad in 1842 added a request for an apprentice. Despite the apparent success of the business, the Gettysburg post office advertised for the next two years that it was holding undeliverable mail for Golcher.

**JAMES GOLCHER,
GUN-SMITH,**

RESPECTFULLY informs the citizens of Gettysburg, and the Public generally, that he has taken the Shop formerly occupied by Mr. Wm. Holtzworth, on West York street, a short distance from Mr. Heagy's (late Thompson's) Stage Office, where he has on hand, and intends constantly to have, for sale,

Rifles, Shot Guns, Pistols, &c.

He has also a large Assortment of **GUN LOCKS**, of different kinds, which he will dispose of on reasonable terms.

Flint locks altered to Percussion, and all kinds of repairs done on the shortest notice.

Gettysburg, Jan. 24, 1842.

AN APPRENTICE to the above business is wanted immediately.

Golcher ran this advertisement in 1842 issues of Gettysburg's Republican Compiler. The same ad from 1841 had lacked the request for an apprentice.

At some point, Golcher returned to Philadelphia, where he opened a gunsmith shop by 1846 at "G T road above 2d." Although his business location would change a couple of times, it was included in city directories until at least 1868.

Fishing and Sporting Tackle.

Bronson J., 29 South
Golcher James, 2d and New
Heyberger George W., 50 N 3d
Heyberger John M. & Bro., 47 N 2d
Krider John, N E 2d and Walnut
Spang & Wallace, 94 N 3d
Tryon Edward K., 134 N 2d
Wurfflein Andrew, 122 N 2d
Wurfflein John, 98 S 3d

By 1855, Golcher's shop appeared under "Fishing and Sporting Tackle" in a Philadelphia directory.

Golcher's name is well known to gun collectors. Some of his weapons are marked not only with his name but with "Eagle Rifle Works" and "Philadelphia." Several online sites state that this company was opened with partner H. Elwell and was in business in Philadelphia from 1833 to 1851. I have not found a single mention of that company name in the city records I have seen, and the only H. Ellwells in city directories were not associated with gun making. I suspect that Golcher may have opened a business in England before he came to New York. Especially in his later years, he traveled to England frequently, perhaps to keep an eye on the business there, which specialized in gun lock manufacturing. He may have marked his products with the Eagle name, regardless of where the company was located.

Fortunately, we reel collectors need not concern ourselves with the Eagle company history. All we need to know is that, in 1857, Golcher and his current partners advertised "Fishing Tackle made to order, such as...reels...sold wholesale and retail."

SPORTSMAN'S DEPOT, PHILADELPHIA.

T GOLCHER & CO., 158 North Second Street, corner of New Street, Manufacturers and Importers of Guns, Rifles, and Pistol and Gun Locks. Powder, Shot, and Caps of every variety, Cuck Spurs, &c. always on hand. Fishing Tackle made to order, such as Rods, Reels, Lines, Artificial Flies and Baits, Silk Worm, Gut Soods, and best quality of Hooks—sold wholesale and retail.

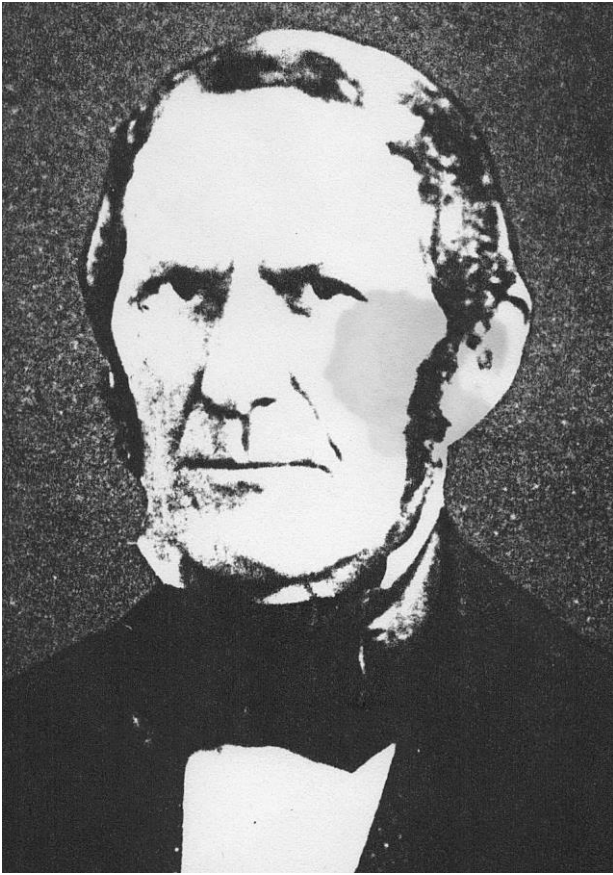
N. B.—Pigeon Guns cast. Steel Rifles, with increased twist, made to order, of the best material and workmanship.

Repairing done in the best manner and at the shortest notice.

JAMES GOLCHER
JOSEPH BUTLER
SAMUEL BIRCH

51-3m

This advertisement in an April, 1857, issue of the New York Clipper shows that Golcher and his partners manufactured reels.



James Golcher (Photo courtesy of Joyce F. Menard)

At least as early as 1855, Golcher's shop had been included among Fishing Tackle dealers in classified directories, which suggests that the company was increasingly emphasizing its tackle manufacturing. What kind of reels it may have made is not known.

Golcher died in 1883 and was buried in Philadelphia's Franklin Cemetery.

We collectors can add Golcher's name to our list of early American fishing reel manufacturers. If anyone has ever seen a reel marked with Golcher's name, I hope he or she will let us know about it.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Joyce Fletcher Menard for Golcher's portrait and important information about his history.