

**Once
Tried
Always
Used**

Geo. H. Burtis Worcester Mass. A.

The Burtis celebrated Gold-Medal hand-made Split-Bamboo Rods, Flies and "Irresistible" Single-hook Trolling Spinners have a national reputation. They are known in every sporting camp from Maine to California. Write for Price List.

**Nothing
Succeeds
Like
Success**

*A 1916 Burtis advertisement from Miller's **The Outdoorsman's Handbook**. If this claim was true how come we're not trading mint Leonards for nice Burtis rods with short tips.*

New England's Obscure and Odd Rodmakers

by A. J. Campbell

In the annals of rodmaking, there have been some really obtuse designs..along with some fine ones. We salute the eccentric minor league by presenting a hit-list of the 14 Most Obscure Makers to set up shop in New England, just in case a collector should run across one of their rare and generally stupid products.

E. H. Gerrish, Bangor, Maine

In an attempt to fill the void in locally-made rods, Gerrish began producing his work directly after Hiram Leonard left Bangor for "New Yawk." The E.H. Gerrish shop was located at 24 Broad Street, and the only record we have found for this business was published in the 1882 *Maine Business Register*. Many years ago, perhaps the mid 1970's, we saw a Gerrish split bamboo model offered for sale through Len Codella's listing. Probably the

Gerrish rod died because tasteful anglers of the 1880's didn't want to be caught using one. "I say, my good chap, here's a Gaudy fly to match your Gerrish rod!"

Asa Gile & Son, Readfield, Maine

The extremely obscure makers, Asa Gile & Son, appeared in the same directory listing that recorded Gerrish. The town of Readfield, located on the north end of Maranacook Lake, was not exactly a metropolis. As "fishing rod manufacturers," Gile & Son were evidently active in the 1880's, and possibly before or after that decade. I believe these guys were just obscure, although more information could prove them odd.

Clarence Smith, Norway, Maine

For the well-versed geography buff, Norway is just across the river

from South Paris. Here, from the 1880's until just after the turn of the century, Clarence Smith fashioned a small number of fly rods, thought to be made of split bamboo. In an article published in the Feb. 23, 1936, edition of the *Portland Telegram*, Smith was "remembered by older residents of Norway in particular and by older fishermen in Maine as a rod maker par excellence." Some other old residents say he also made a pair of long skinny boards, up-turned on one end..the making Norway the downhill skiing capitol of the world. Honest, that's what these old people say. Maybe, they forgot they were in Norway, Maine.

William C. Garey, Bethel, Maine

A two-fold rod maker of non-renown, William Garey was obscure and odd. He apprenticed under Clarence Smith, and built split bam-

boo rods from 1900 until at least 1936. In a particular quirk, Garey became Maine's leading exponent of the "split wild pear rod." The definitive "split pear" model, built into a hexagonal six-stripper, was not easy to make. That's because only one out of every thirty million people could recognize the wood for what it was.

Said Garey, "Now wild pear isn't the easiest thing in the world to find unless you know what you're looking for. I've had woodsmen tell me they never heard of it. Did you ever notice when you were driving through the woods in the Spring, a tree with pinkish blossoms like the cherry? That's wild pear." Funny, but we never noticed that. Subsequently, the wood never became a speculative commodity, like pork bellies.

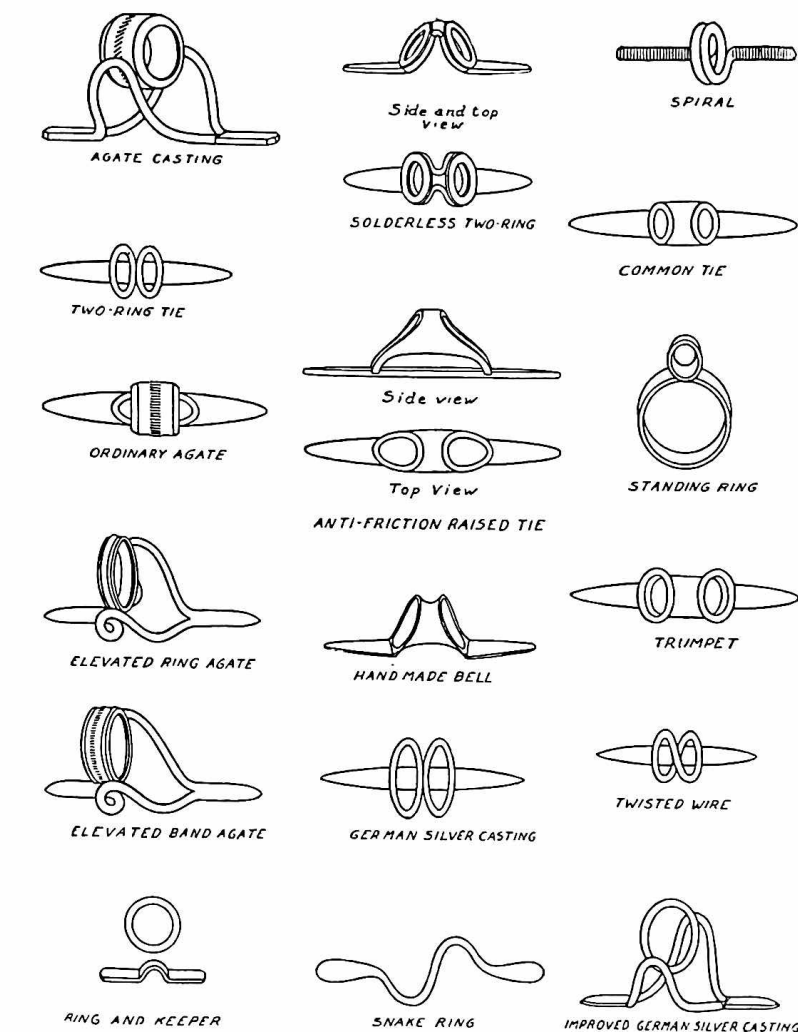
Frank Varney, Lone Inhabitant of Smith's Mills, Maine

Around 1920, Frank Varney moved to Smith's Mills from Lynn, Massachusetts. He built a number of fishing cottages on the shores of Sebago Lake, renting rowboats and operating one of the more popular campground until 1930, when the Portland Water Company condemned the village as a possible contaminant to the water supply. The hotel, movie house, general store, and town hall, were all torn down, and the village died.

Only Frank Varney remained behind, as master of a bleak and deteriorating landscape. In an attempt at revenge, he amassed a flock of 600 chickens that "shat" their way into history. In a change of occupation, Varney "received a large supply of wonderful bamboo from Tonkin, China," and began making rods in 1931. He split his culms by hand, devised his own cork-grip turning lathe, and designed a silk-wrapping machine. O.K. Frank!

Cecil Pierce, Southport, Maine

Southport's Cecil Pierce is still alive and an active plane maker, not one o' them flyin' jobbies, but



Various Styles of Line Guides.

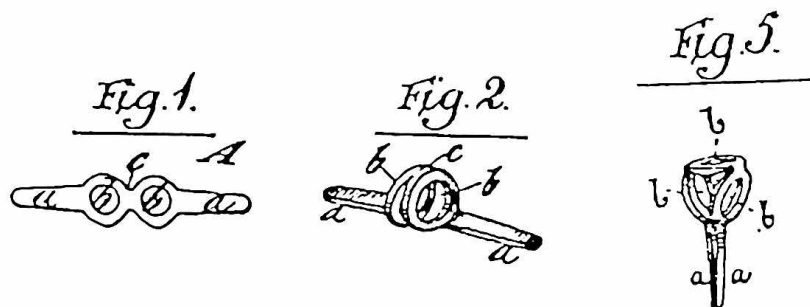
This guide chart from Harding's Science of Fishing, shows the Richardson guides top center and just below same. The guide was rather popular on inexpensive rods of the period.

wooden tools designed for cabinet-making. In the 1970's, Cecil built hollow split bamboo fly rods having six strips of graphite glued inside. This was not easy to do, especially for an old curmudgeon. And most importantly, the eccentric idea runs neck-and-neck with the "split pear" brainstorm. Wicked odd.

George H. Burtis, Worchester, Massachusetts

Evidently confident enough to advertise nationally in 1916, George

Burtis built a number of signed quality fly rods. One example, a delicate 9 1/2-footer, had a cherry reel seat with a mortised German silver foot plate, and full German silver furnishings. It was marked, "Geo. H. Burtis, Worchester, Mass." This 3-piece fly rod was built from Calcutta cane, possibly around 1900. George had quite the motto, although not exactly original..or True.



Frederick Richardson's patent 234,812 of Nov. 23, 1880

The illustration from Frederick Richardson's patent.

T. J. Manley, Brookfield, Massachusetts

Another obscure maker, Manley appears to have built wooden rods during the 1890's to post-1900 era. One of his models sports a birdseye maple handle and reel seat, plus rather Montague-esque nickel plated fittings, including ferrule plugs. These were a real chintz-decrepe production. Evidently, Mr. Manley was catering to a lower income clientele, and even one hundred years of aging can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear. Those who used his wares would speak in a masculine tone, pump iron, and say stuff like, "I USE MANLEY ROD..BUSTER!"

W. Huntington, Wilton, Connecticut

Huntington's claim to infamy was his great affinity for a native American wood. He advertised, "Hornbeam A Specialty." Now, hornbeam or ironwood, was pretty much a thing of the past in 1884..so we don't think Huntington had a hoard of anglers beating down his door. Especially the fly flipping types. Two thumbs up for Odd.

Henry Andrus, Hartford, Connecticut

Active in the teens and '20's, Andrus built a number of rather conservative rods for the period. One model, a 4-piece trunk rod, had the

three lower sections fashioned from greenheart and the tips made from split bamboo.

Another Andrus, inscription dated to 1918 and an 8-footer, had close-spaced intermediates along the cane shafts. It was a standard 3/2 model with a wooden reel seat offset by a German silver cap and ring. Henry Andrus was patronized by many Hartford area businessmen. ("We better go buy one of Henry's rods before the poor guy starves to death") Although not common, his production isn't rare.

H. R. Sedgwick, Hartford, Connecticut

A maker of excellent rods, Sedgwick remains obscure through limited production. His delicate 1920's models have been compared to the work of Jim Payne, which is as high a compliment as any maker could deserve. The last time we saw a Sedgwick was in 1992, at Lang's Spring Auction. A charming little 7-footer, the rod was built in 3 pieces, two tips, and had a German silver sliding band over cork reel seat. H.R. Sedgwick carried on the highest form of workmanship, and his rods, built for some of Connecticut's wealthiest fly fishermen, are very collectible. We have no idea what the "H.R." stands for, although if we were Sedgwick, we'd choose Herrington Ringwoldt.

Maybe with a "III" after his last name for that real High Quality Tackle sound.

William R. Wheeler, Hartford, Connecticut

Wheeler was an active Connecticut maker from 1900 until around 1915, and held a couple of somewhat obtuse patents that didn't set the world on fire. The first of these, granted on March 28, 1905, was for a criss-cross metal winding or "ribbon" which extended the entire length of each section of the rod. This idea was a re-invention of the same dorky arrangement used by the Foster Brothers of Ashbourne, England.

The only difference between Wheeler's criss-cross and Foster's was the flat copper wire. The Foster Brothers used steel. William Wheeler made rods with this configuration in split bamboo and several woods, the species rather hard to distinguish, being hidden underneath all of those X's. We cannot imagine a more time consuming and fruitless occupation than covering beautiful wood and bamboo with nice heavy metal.

William's second patent was obtained three years later, on February 11, 1908. Here we see a "new kind of wicked-odd reel seat sliding band which "travels on an interior screw". At least one W.R. Wheeler rod has come to auction. It was a 8-1/2 foot 3-piece fly model with a very old-styled Chubb-esque seat. The butt cap was reinforced with two small screws, so that it wouldn't fall off, I guess. In the long run, Wheeler's ribbing and dopey reel seat went the way of all gimmicks not acceptable to the knowledgeable angler.

Wilson J. Hubbard, Ansonia, Connecticut

On March 15, 1870, Wilson J. Hubbard of Ansonia, Connecticut, patented an odd ferrule that locked on the screw principle. This idea was also born in Britain at an earlier date. As with most "screw ferrules," the lower section held the male, tapped for a machine screw. The screw it-

W. HUNTINGTON,
WILTON, CONN.
MANUFACTURER OF
FINE HAND-MADE FISHING RODS.
HORNBEAM A SPECIALTY.
SEND FOR CIRCULAR.

*Hornbeam comes from a little swamp-side northern tree. It was also used by Dingee Scribner, of St. John, N. B., and sometimes called "logwood." We know the tree in Maine as "ironwood," a pliant yet strong material. From Colonial times until W. Huntington remained its last advocate, it was often used for the lower sections in wooden fishing rods. This advertisement is from Dr. J. A. Henshall's *Book of the Black Bass*, 1881 edition.*

self, was in the female at the end of the upper joint, so on and so forth, depending on the total number of sections.

As far as we know, there is an extreme shortage of any rod attributed to Wilson Hubbard. Perhaps he spent too much time in his wife's cupboard. The obtuse ferrule system should be a tip-off to collectors if they happen to find a circa 1870's rod that can be identified as an American one. Just wicked odd.

**Frederick Richardson,
Providence, Rhode Island**

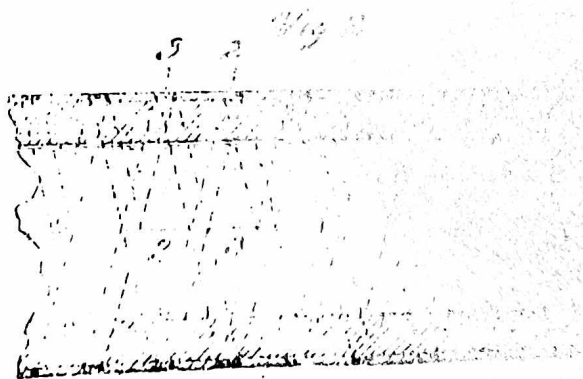
Our last New Englander of minor importance is Frederick Richardson, who may have built a few rods, and maybe not. He is almost "famous" for a very small item, a guide, but this tiny little fixture shows up on many antiques and early classics built between 1880 and 1900.

Patented on November 23, 1880, the Richardson guide was ideally suited for the production methods of the time. It was stamped in quantity from sheet German silver and then bent to its final shape. Frederick assigned the rights for this item to William Mills & Son. The guide has been found on many rods having no relation to the Mills operation, including rugged Chubbs, Conroy &

Bissett salmon rods, and in much later years, attached to a Brewer-built Thomas.

Being quite strong for its weight, Richardson's guide was ideal for salmon sticks, and actually may have been inspired by the old soldered and labor-intensive standing guides originating in Great Britain. We assume that Richardson actually made a rod. It would seem logical that a man who built at least a small amount of tackle would come up with the guide idea. Then again, maybe Fred's hobby was bee keeping.

That wraps up the dubious or rare accomplishments of the known obscure rod makers of New England. In the future, I'm sure, some other Old Guy will show up on a Rare Crumbling List, in some Odd Little Book, found in the cellar of a Friend's Uncle.. that informs us that a Waltonian geek, from Mexico (Maine, of course) made hollow 15-strippers from "northern lilac," with diamonds in the center (for ruggedness), while eating tortillas and whistling the "1812 Overture."



An illustration from William Wheeler's patent application.