

The Residue of United States Net & Twine

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United States Net & Twine (USN&T) was established about 1881,¹ and its location first listed in a city directory was 210 Fulton Street, New York City. Within a year or perhaps simultaneously, United States Twine & Net (UST&N) was established, and one of its two listed addresses also was 210 Fulton St. The company, on the top floor of a five-story building, got off to a rough start. In late 1882, it advertised that it had “Lost—a quantity of reels; rubber, German silver and brass, and fish rods...”² Two years later, it lost \$23,000-worth of machinery and goods in a fire.³

LOST—A QUANTITY OF REELS, RUBBER, German silver and brass, and FISH RODS, taken from the subscribers. A reward will be paid for their return or for information that will lead to their recovery. UNITED STATES TWINE AND NET COMPANY, 210 Fulton St., N. Y.

An 1882 announcement that UST&N was missing some reels.

In 1888 or 1889, Charles M. Pratt became the president of USN&T. Pratt, the son of the founder of the Pratt Institute, eventually would become vice-president of Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. His father's company had become part of the Standard Oil Trust in 1874. One of C.M. Pratt's several offices was located at 219 Fulton, which would become USN&T's address. I believe USN&T was probably acquired by Pratt or by his father's other, later company, Pratt Manufacturing Co., in which the son was a partner. The acquisition would have occurred before the father's death in 1891.

During the early 1890s, John Kopf was making reels at a USN&T-owned plant in Whitestone, Long Island. In 1891, the company advertised that USN&T were the “Sole Agents” for Kopf's reels.⁴ At about that time, William Albert Augur became a manager at USN&T.

In early 1894, USN&T had factories at Whitestone, Long Island City, Brooklyn, New York City, Central Valley, N.Y., Pawtucket, Conn., and Lawrence, Mass. In April of that year, the company headquarters were moved from Fulton St. to 316 Broadway, where both the wholesale and retail businesses were to be conducted in a remodeled establishment. In addition, USN&T acquired the Kosmic-branded tackle business from A.G. Spalding & Bros.⁵

By 1895, when USN&T had addresses at 316 Broadway and 553 Pearl St., UST&N had an address

at 23 Fulton, and William Augur was the manager there. The proprietor was William J. Hooper. USN&T would make its own reels at its factory at 163 Grand Avenue, Brooklyn. It is difficult to understand the relationship between the two companies, as they had shared some addresses earlier but appear to have traveled on separate paths from the mid-1890s on.



Charles M. Pratt, as shown in Romance of American Petroleum and Gas, Vol. I, Crum, A.R., ed. New York: Romance of Amer. Pet. & Gas Co., 1911, facing pg. 287

In 1898, the officers of USN&T, 316 Broadway, were Charles M. Pratt, president, Alfred C. Bedford, secretary (and president of the Self Winding Clock Company, founded by Pratt's father), and George A. Vaughn, treasurer. The three also comprised the board of directors. Bedford had been treasurer as early as 1889, and in 1897, he was treasurer with an office at 163 Grand Ave., the location of both the reel factory and the Self Winding Clock Co. Vaughn was a treasurer located at 316 Broadway in 1897. Bedford eventually would become president of Standard Oil of New Jersey.

Enter William Barbour, who was president of the Linen Thread Company, Inc., at the turn of the century. Barbour had built a business established in Ireland by his great-grandfather in 1784 into what would be



William Barbour, in a portrait from Textile World Journal, Vol. 52, Mar. 10, 1917, pg. 25

considered a virtual monopoly today. Linen Thread was incorporated in Paterson, New Jersey, on December 29, 1898. It was formed to act as the selling agent for a huge number of thread, twine, and net-making companies both here and overseas. Essentially a holding company, Linen Thread held those companies, which, by 1910 or so, controlled around 80% of the country's net and twine production. Barbour was president of many of the companies; in 1905, he and at least seven of them had an office address of 96 Franklin St., New York City.^{6,7}

During disingenuous testimony at congressional hearings in 1901, Barbour explained "that the Linen Thread company was formed for the purpose of distributing more economically the product of 4 different linen-thread mills...It did not purchase the separate mills, and the original owners have the same relative interests in the properties which they had before the Linen Thread Company was formed."⁶ However, the company took over a number of net & twine companies, including USN&T.⁸

For years, Barbour testified in hearings regarding tariffs and importation of skilled labor. One respondent to his testimony stated, "To show that the Linen Thread Company occupy a very strong position, we may say that in the past five years [since 1904] they have compelled the various manufacturers of fish nets to become

Special Sale of Fishing Tackle.



Stock of U. S. Net and Twine Co. at one-fourth usual prices. Don't miss the chance to equip cheaply.

A portion of an 1899 Robert H. Ingersoll & Bro. ad announcing the sale of USN&T's remaining stock.

a part and parcel of the Linen Thread Company. Fishermen on this side have generally demanded nets made out of Knox's thread, and the Linen Thread Company, which controls this thread, has been able to use this as a club over the heads of the netmakers refusing to supply Knox thread to anyone outside the combination."⁷

Linen Thread's acquisition of USN&T appears to have been one of its earliest takeovers, and it resulted in the breakup of the netting company. After 1899, USN&T no longer was included in New York City directories. Much of its remaining fishing tackle was sold at clearance prices by Robert H. Ingersoll & Bro., sporting goods dealers best known for their "dollar watch." Some of its equipment was sold to Enterprise Manufacturing Co., Akron, Ohio. The split-bamboo rods were sold to H.H. Kiffe Company, another sporting goods dealer.⁹

W. BARBOUR ARRESTED.

Head of Big Company Taken for Spitting—Is Discharged.

William Barbour, of No. 11 West Fifty-third-st., president of the Barbour Linen Thread Company, was arrested yesterday on the downtown station of the Sixth-ave. elevated railroad at Franklin-st. on a charge of spitting on the platform. When arraigned in the Tombs police court, Magistrate Flammer recognized Mr. Barbour and asked how he came to be arrested. Mr. Barbour said:

"I don't suppose a similar thing ever happened to me before. I am president of a company that makes millions of handkerchiefs a year, and yet I came downtown this morning without one in my pocket."

"Ever hear about a shoemaker's wife going barefoot?" asked Magistrate Flammer as he discharged Mr. Barbour.

Well, at least it wasn't chewing gum. (New-York Daily Tribune, Jan. 10, 1905)

The Linen Thread Company

**96-98 Franklin Street
New York**

<i>Boston</i>	<i>Chicago</i>	<i>St. Louis</i>	<i>Oakland</i>
<i>Philadelphia</i>	<i>Baltimore</i>	<i>Cincinnati</i>	<i>Rochester</i>

**Linen Threads,
Twines, Yarns**

This 1909 ad in The Sun [N.Y.] hints at the extent of Linen Thread's tentacles.

Montague City Rod Company moved into the reel factory of USN&T at 163 Grand Ave., Brooklyn, by 1899. Surprisingly, Brooklyn directories listed *both* Montague and USN&T at that location for several years afterward. In the U.S. census of 1900, George Vaughn labeled himself as Treasurer of USN&T. In 1902, he was listed as a treasurer at 163 Grand Ave. in a Brooklyn directory, and he was still there in 1906. Adding to the confusion, Barbour was named as president and director of USN&T as late as September 20, 1905, in an article in the *Paterson Morning Call*. An odd notice was published by the U.S. Patent Office in 1909. The Office noted that another company's trademark application might "interfere" with a trademark of USN&T. The notification letter was sent by registered mail to USN&T's Brooklyn address but was returned with the statement "Unknown."¹⁰ Most surprisingly, as late as 1913 Vaughn was listed as Treasurer and Director of USN&T and Assistant Treasurer and Director of Self Winding Clock Company, both firms at 163 Grand Ave.¹¹

The strange mix of personnel from both Pratt and Barbour companies that appears to have remained involved with USN&T for so long leaves open questions as to the precise ownership and longevity of the company after 1899.

UST&N suffered a different fate. Its directory-listed address in 1900 was 50 White Street, and William Hooper, who had been the proprietor at the 23 Fulton address, remained as the proprietor. William Augur continued to manage the 23 Fulton shop, but that was no longer listed as a UST&N location. By 1902, Augur was no longer named as a manager, though he continued to sell nets at that location. I believe he acquired the shop from Linen Thread.

Barbour and others incorporated UST&N in New Jersey in 1901,¹² and the company's New York

location moved to 96 Franklin St., where Linen Thread and umpteen of its associated companies also had headquarters. The company was dissolved in 1914. I don't know if USN&T was somehow dissolved simultaneously.

Meanwhile, Augur continued his business, but by 1908 his address was 33 Fulton, where he would remain. Subsequently, he expanded the business, selling "fishing tackle" as well as nets. In 1927, he leased the building next door¹³—35 Fulton—and he would buy the building in December, 1929.¹⁴ Whatever plans Augur may have had were never brought to fruition. He died only two months later, leaving his over-\$20,000 estate to his widow, sister, and other family members.¹⁵

Augur's shop represented the last vestige of what had been a major manufacturer of reels, rods, nets, and other fishing equipment for a couple of decades. I hope that additional research will uncover some of the many missing details of USN&T's enigmatic history.

Notes

1. An odd paragraph in *American Mail & Export Journal*, Vol. 18, Dec., 1886, pg. 167, said that USN&T had been in business "for the past twenty years." A predecessor company, A.A. French & Co., had been at that location earlier.
2. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 12/22/1882
3. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 3/27/1884
4. Vernon, S.K., *Antique Fishing Reels*. Havertown, Pa.: Stue Publishing, 2018, pg. 275
5. *The Iron Age*, 3/22/1894, pg. 583
6. *Report of the Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor Employed in Manufactures and General Business*. Wash., D.C.: Gov't Printing Office, 1901, pp. 128, 147-148
7. *Tariff Hearings before the Committee on Ways and Means of the House of Representatives*, Vol. V. Wash., D.C.: Gov't Printing Office, 1909, pp. 4686
8. *Dry Goods Guide*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Feb., 1905, pg. 7
9. Kelly, M.K., "Spalding and the Kosmic Connections" in *The American Fly Fisher*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Summer, 1984, pg. 5
10. *Official Gazette United States Patent Office*, Vol. CXXXIX, Feb., 1909, pg. 734
11. *Directory of Directors in the City of New York*. New York: Directory of Directors Co., 1913-4, pg. 666
12. *American Wool and Cotton Reporter*, Vol. XV, No. 52, Dec. 26, 1901, pg. 1654
13. *New York Sun*, 11/2/1927
14. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 12/29/1929
15. *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2/27/1930



William Augur's expanded shop on Fulton Street, ca. 1929. The original shop at 33 Fulton is on the right. (www.oldnyc.org/#719939f-c)