

Matthias Horst, an Early Brooklyn Reelmaker

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Old newspapers, city directories, census records, and other sources identify many people as “fishing reel makers.” In most cases, these individuals were employees of the shops and factories that manufactured reels and, usually, other fishing tackle. Examples of these employees might include Frederick Paul, a Brooklyn, New York, resident identified as a fishing reel maker, a fish pole maker, and a rodmaker in directories from 1872 through 1876. Frank Dey, another Brooklynite, was named as a fishing reel maker in 1880 and as a carpenter and builder after that. All of their directory listings included home addresses, but not locations of employment.

Matthias Horst was five years old when his family arrived from Germany in 1846. Although the Horsts lived in Chicago, Illinois, for a while, they moved to Brooklyn by 1855. Matthias became a naturalized citizen on October 25, 1864, and his Irish roommate, a liquor salesman, was a witness. Horst was soon working as a machinist. By 1868, he was a “tackle maker” living on “22d Street north of 6th Avenue.”

Horst engaged in a major extracurricular activity: in 1871, he was elected president of the local chapter of the Father Mathew T.A.B. Society, a highly influential temperance society.

Until 1872, all of Horst’s directory listings denoted his 22nd Street location as his home address. That changed in 1873, when Horst named himself as “reel

manf.,” with a business address now identified as “263 22d.” In 1874, Horst was making “fishingreels” and living at that address.

Up to this point, it was hard to tell whether Horst was making reels as the proprietor of a business or as an employee. Then Matthias Horst was named as a fishing tackle dealer in a classified 1875 New York City directory. He was running his own business at 92 Fulton Street, later the location of Edward Vom Hofe’s business. Horst probably was selling reels of his own manufacture. His name did not appear in any other New York directories, which suggests that his sales did not meet expectations.

In 1876, Horst again was listed in a Brooklyn directory as a “fishing reel manf.” at “263 22d.” Subsequently, he was named as a machinist, but reelmaking no longer was specified. In 1878, he was appointed assistant engineer of the new Brooklyn municipal building, at an annual salary of \$900.

Horst appears to have left Brooklyn about 1880, perhaps working briefly in New York City before moving to Cincinnati, but these are unsubstantiated possibilities.

Based on evidence that he was running his own business, Matthias Horst deserves to be included in any list of early American reelmakers. We can hope that a marked Horst reel will be discovered someday.

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Brooklyn city directory entries for Matthias Horst, 1873, 1874, 1876 (top to bottom)