

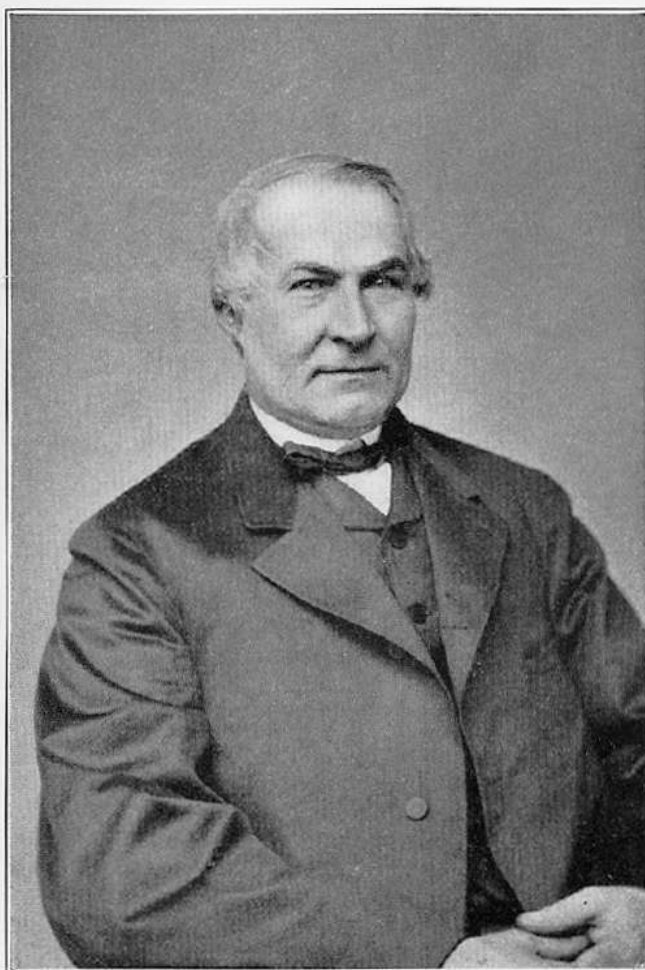
# Fishing Tackle from Eastern Pennsylvania: John Krider and the Sportsmen's Depot

*Steven K. Vernon*

When William Penn first set foot in what is now Philadelphia, his boat allegedly landed at the mouth of Dock Creek where it entered the Delaware River. At the side of the creek, just before it disappeared into the woods beyond, stood the Drinker cottage, one of fewer than twenty cottages located within the area that would become Penn's major city. It was there that Edward Drinker had been born on Christmas Eve, 1680, two years before Penn's arrival. After the first muddy town streets were laid out in accordance with Penn's plan, the cottage found itself near the intersection of Second and Walnut Streets. At the age of twelve, Drinker was apprenticed to a cabinet maker in Boston. Returning to Philadelphia in 1745, he would remain until his death at the age of 102 years. In 1751, he acquired the lot on the northeast corner of the intersection from the current owners and built a brick house on the site.<sup>1</sup> Within the next decade, Second became the first regularly paved street in the city.

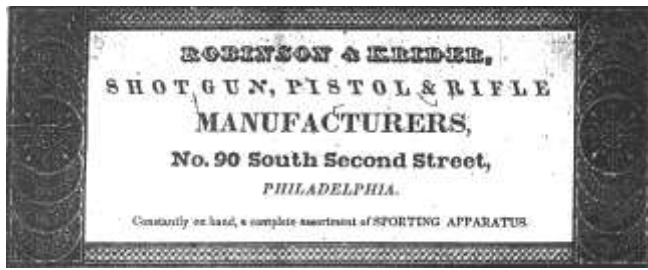
Robert Fulton, silversmith, miniature painter, and steamboat inventor, is believed to have boarded at the Drinker house around the turn of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Between 1816 and 1820, Prosper Vallee established a gun maker's shop in the building, which then had an unofficial address of 101 S Second St. and was owned by members of the McCalla family. I suspect that it was 1826 when Vallee took on an apprentice named John Krider. Born in West Philadelphia in 1813, Krider developed an early love for the outdoors in that wooded area west of the Schuylkill River. Eventually, he moved with his parents to the Southwark section of the city, an area about a mile south of Second and Walnut that had undergone significant development during the later eighteenth century.

An enterprising young man, Krider was listed in McElroy's 1837 city directory as a gunsmith, working at Washington below 6th St. and living at S 2nd below Wharton. Desilver's directory of the same year named only 581 S 2nd as his address. Working at the same Washington St. location was William Robinson, gunsmith, who, like Krider, was making his first appearance in city directories. An advertisement for "Robinson & Krider, Shotgun, Pistol & Rifle Manufacturers," appeared in J.R. Savage's *Philadelphia Circulating Business Directory for 1838*.



*A portrait of John Krider, probably taken in the late 1870s. It illustrated the article cited in Note 7.*

Krider and his partner offered "a complete assortment of SPORTING APPARATUS" at 90 S Second St. The partnership proved to be short-lived, however, as Krider was listed alone as a gunsmith at 101 S 2nd above Walnut in McElroy's 1839 directory. Robinson would continue to work at 90 S 2nd until 1845, after which he disappeared from city directories.<sup>3</sup> Krider had bought the business of his mentor, Prosper Vallee, who continued to manufacture guns at other locations until at least 1846. Thus, Krider founded what would become one of the most successful sporting-goods houses in the eastern United States by the age of twenty-six.



An advertisement in an 1838 commercial directory. The partnership name did not appear in subsequent directories.

The quality of Krider's products was recognized early, and his business prospered. In 1840, he received his first of thirteen awards at the Franklin Institute's Exhibition of American Manufactures. His three rifles "of great merit" were awarded a Certificate of Honorable Mention, and he continued to win similar and higher premiums over the next thirty-six years at both Philadelphia and New York expositions.

Outdoorsman Krider seems to have had a great deal of leisure time, much of which he devoted to hunting

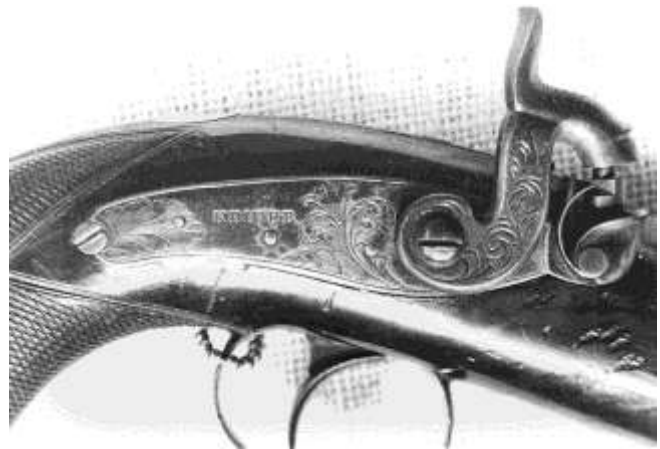
Year	Exhibit/ Judges' comments	Award
1840	3 rifles/ "of great merit"	H. M. <sup>1</sup>
1842	2 cases of pistols	-
	Case of guns/ "admirably made"	H. M.
1843	5 rifles/ "noted with approbation"	-
1844	Case of guns, rifles, and muskets/ "deemed to be the best ever exhibited"	Silver medal
1845	Guns and pistols	-
1846	Case of guns/ "believed to be the best ever exhibited"	First Premium
1847	Guns and pistols, including a double-barrel rifle and shotgun	First Premium
1848	Guns and pistols/ "The pistols in particular are a masterpiece of work."	First Premium
1849	(Unspecified entry)	-
1850	Guns and rifles	First Premium
1851	Double barreled guns and rifles/ "really very superior specimens of American manufacture"	First Premium
1852	Invoice of rifles, guns, and pistols/ "Having received the First Premium at a former exhibition"	Recall First Premium
1854	Guns, rifles, and pistols	Second Class Premium
1856	Stuffed birds, summer duck, partridges, and cedar birds	Third Class Premium
1858 <sup>2</sup>	Guns	First Class Premium
1874 <sup>3</sup>	Fowling pieces/ "no new features"	H. M.
	Fishing tackle	-

<sup>1</sup> Certificate of Honorable Mention

<sup>2</sup> George W. Burgess won a First Premium for his tackle at this same exhibition.

<sup>3</sup> No exhibitions were held between 1858 and 1874.

The awards won by Krider's products at the Exhibition of American Manufactures sponsored by the Franklin Institute.



Krider's stamp on a pistol equipped with an octagonal barrel. Ornate engravings adorn most of the metal work on the Krider guns. (Collection of Ronald G. Gabel)

birds and to his special version of "ornithology." The wisdom gleaned from his experiences, as well as his advice on raising and training dogs, was summarized in *Krider's Sporting Anecdotes*, an "as told to" book edited by H. Milnor Klapp and published in 1853. Tales of killing 63 or 100 birds in a single day were intermingled with quasi-scientific observations of such subjects as nesting behavior and the microscopic morphology of the woodcock bill. Though not scientifically trained, Krider had a deep interest in ornithology, not unlike that of his older contemporary, John James Audubon. Audubon found his calling when he developed a love of the wildlife around his father's farm overlooking the Schuylkill River, about twenty miles west of Philadelphia. Krider, too, traveled widely in pursuit of avifauna, but his targets were mounted and presented to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, where they were added to the museum's then-unequaled bird collection. He was elected to membership in the Academy in 1859, presumably for such service.



An engraving accompanying Krider's catalog for 1853



*Krider's advertisement in the April 17, 1873, issue of Norristown Herald and Free Press*

One indication of the success and growing influence of Krider's shop was the creation of the Philadelphia Sporting Club during the early 1840s. Defunct by 1853, the club's membership consisted entirely of Krider's customers. The gun maker became active in non-hunting activities, as well, serving as a school director in his district before 1854 and representing his ward in the city's Common Council in 1858. Over the years, he joined a number of societies, both secret and otherwise, including the Freemasons and the International Order of Odd Fellows. In 1860, he was listed in city directories as both treasurer and trustee of the "Progress Manuf. Mech. Loan and Build. Asso.," 148 S 4th St. Even as he manufactured rifles under contract to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania during the early Civil War,<sup>4</sup> he served on the Committee of Gentlemen of the Union Volunteer Refreshment Saloon, one of two U.S.O.-like organizations established in Southwark for the refreshment of Union soldiers and care of the wounded. In 1856, he bought the house in which his shop was located for \$12,000.<sup>1</sup>

At this point, one might reasonably ask why John Krider is the subject of an article in a magazine about fishing tackle collectibles. In his 1853 catalog, Krider labeled himself as a "MANUFACTURER OF SHOT GUNS, RIFLES AND PISTOLS, ALSO, IMPORTER OF GUNS AND ALL SPORTING APPARATUS, FISHING TACKLE AND FINE CUTLERY." Though the catalog provides the earliest hard evidence I've encountered for Krider's sale of fishing equipment, it describes a full line of tackle, suggesting that he had been offering such wares for some time. Of course, the "sporting apparatus" advertised by Robinson & Krider fifteen years earlier may have included tackle. The 1853 catalog included a full line of hooks, both plain and snelled, "BRASS FISHING REELS, multiplying and plain," various artificial baits, lines, and ancillary equipment. The choice of rods was impressive: Three lines of "Walking Cane Rods," hazel rods with

whalebone tips, "bamboo rods," "trout rods," "trunk rods," and "a large assortment of common Rods always on hand."


We should note that Krider called himself an "importer" of fishing tackle and made no claims for its manufacture. I believe that the sources of imports were not necessarily foreign countries in every instance and that some equipment was "imported" from American manufacturers. The phrase "always on hand" implies that the catalog's "common rods" were available locally. As we suggested in an earlier article of this series, George Burgess may have played a role in the construction of some of Krider's rods.<sup>5</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that Burgess also might have made the dog whips listed in the same Krider catalog.

By 1859, Krider's shop was organized as John Krider & Co. His home address had been identified as 304 Wharton after the 1854 city consolidation. The firm included John T. Siner, gunsmith, who had been working at his home at 1038 Lawrence St. only two years earlier. They were joined within a year by John Krider, Jr., who seems to have been a son who predeceased his father or who was omitted from his father's will for some other reason. McElroy's 1860 directory located John Krider & Co., guns and general sporting store, at 135 Walnut, which was the latest street address of the "NE corner of Second and Walnut" usually provided in Krider's advertisements. Krider, Jr., was listed variously as gun maker, clerk, bookkeeper, and salesman at that address through 1871. His home address was the same as that of Krider, Sr., in 1860 and 1871, but he lived elsewhere between those dates. His name did not appear again in subsequent directories, though a John Krider, shotmaker, 709 Christian, appeared in an 1881 listing.



*An 1867 ad for a short-lived firm that may have had an association with Krider, as it also called itself "Sportsmen's Depot." The firm succeeded George Burgess's sole distributor, Philip Wilson & Co.*

**Sportsman's Depot.**  
 (ESTABLISHED 1836.)  
 First premium at World's Fair at New York and Centennial Exhibition.



**JOHN KRIDER,**  
 N. E. Cor. Second and Walnut Sts., Phila.  
**GUNS, RIFLES, PISTOLS.**  
 Fishing Tackle, Rods, Reels, Lines, Hooks, Flies, Leaders, Snoods, Artificial Bait, Fly Books, Etc., Etc.  
 Salmon, Bass and Trout Flies Made to Order.  
 ALSO  
 "Krider's" Celebrated Center Enamel Spill and Glued Bamboo Rods.  
 Birds' Eggs and Birds' Skins in Great Varieties—Taxidermy in all its branches.  
 Spratt's Patent Dog Biscuits. mar-ty  
 Repairing of all kinds.

*An advertisement in Forest and Stream, Dec. 6, 1877*

In 1873, an advertisement for Krider's "Sportsmen's Depot" appeared in the Norristown Herald and Free Press, touting fishing tackle as well as guns, pistols, and ammunition. It also mentioned repair service for both firearms and tackle. Exactly when the name had been adopted is uncertain, but it had been in use for at least nine years, and it has been considered synonymous with Krider's shop by patrons and collectors to this day.

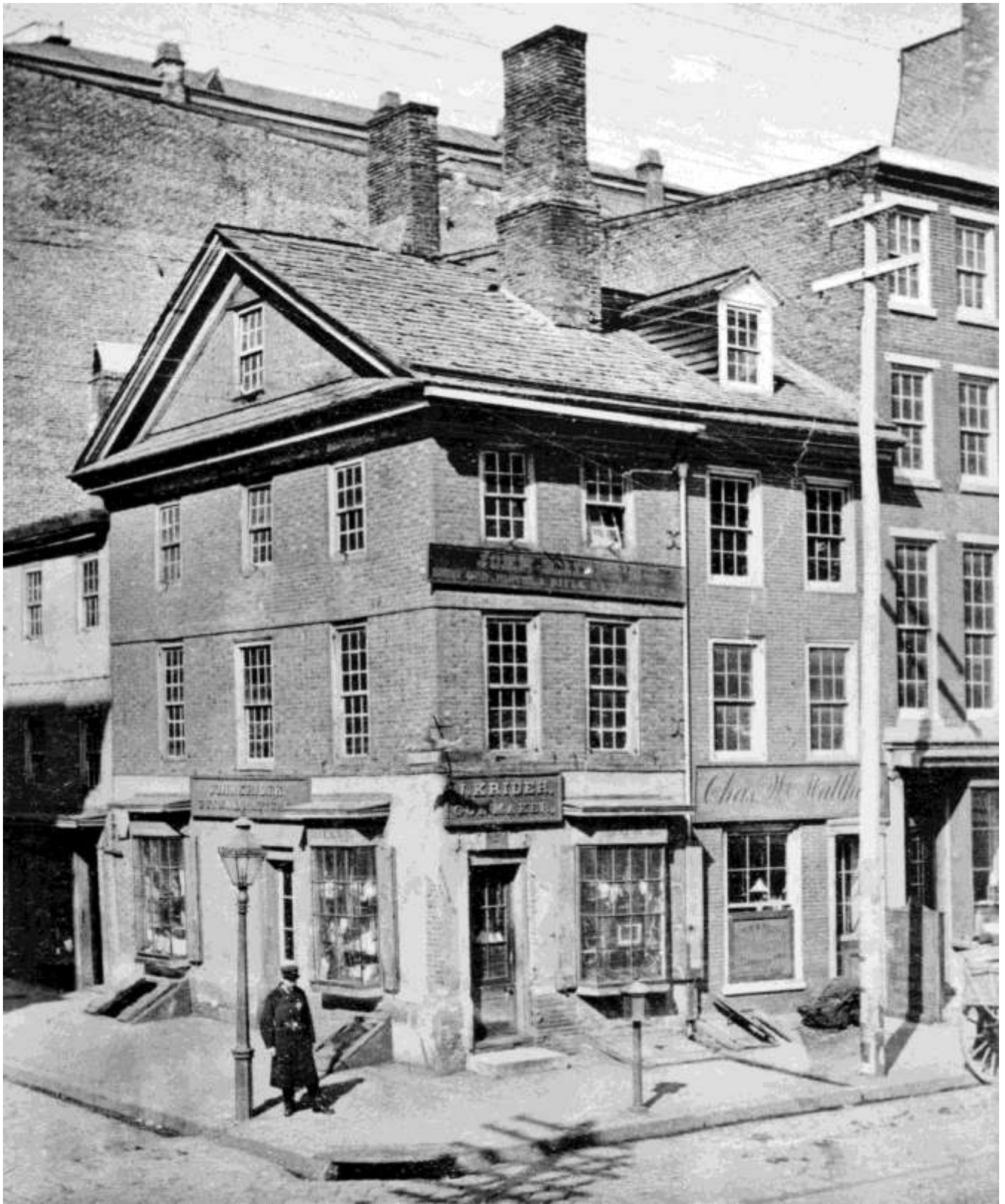
By 1875, when both Siner and William H. Brooks were associated with his company, Krider moved to the upscale address of 4407 Spruce St., where he would live for the rest of his days. Brooks may have been an apprentice, as he lived at Krider's home before moving to 1033 S 4th by the following year. By 1876, Siner was managing the firm. "Fishing tackle" was first added to Krider's business directory listings in 1875, but "Sportsmen's Depot" did not appear there until 1879.

An advertisement for the Sportsman's [sic] Depot in the Dec. 6, 1877, issue of *Forest and Stream* claimed that it had been established in 1836, which could have been the year in which Krider and Robinson had decided to go into business. The firm's exquisite trade card, also printed during the 1870s, claimed 1826 as the founding date. I believe that, unless the date was misprinted, it refers to the year in which Krider began his apprenticeship.

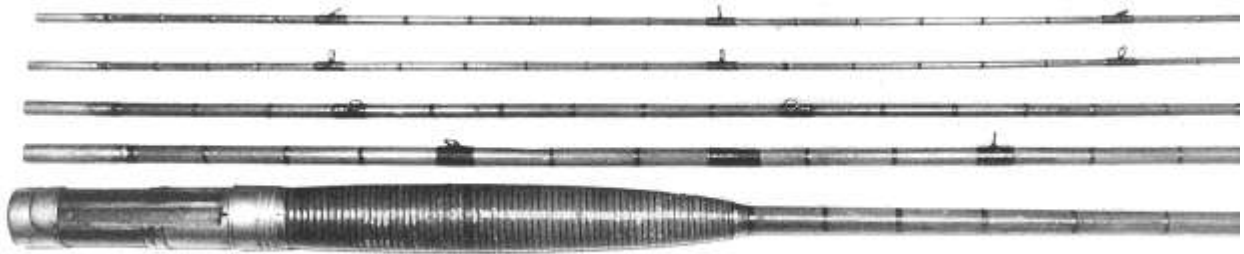
At some point early in his career, John Krider had taken up taxidermy. In his book, *Forty Years Notes of a Field Ornithologist*, copyrighted in 1878, Krider described "only those species of birds of the United States that I have myself collected and mounted." He also published *Ornithological and Oological List of North America*, an undated pamphlet by "John Krider, Taxidermist." Joseph C. Krider, the gun maker's son, debuted in an 1876 directory as a taxidermist living at his father's address and working at the shop. Thus, either father or son could have been responsible for the stuffed birds entered in the 1856 Franklin Institute Exhibition. The two collected together. According to a personal recollection published in 1915,<sup>6</sup> the Krider shop had been "an ancient landmark of local ornithology" and a gathering place for "ornithologically inclined sportsmen." Taxidermy later was practiced by Charlie Wood on "the second story—a dingy cubbyhole."



*A broadside advertising Krider's firm, probably printed during the 1870s. One expert considers it to be the finest example of contemporary American copper engraving that he has seen.*



*Krider's shop on the northeast corner of Second and Walnut Streets, ca. 1880. (Photo by National Park Service, Library of Congress no. HABS PA,51-PHILA,186-[83(HABS):118]2)*



*A Krider convertible, three- or four-section fly rod, which was sold in a fitted case. The second section can hold either a heavy-duty tip or another mid-section, which, in turn, holds a finer tip. A second fine tip was omitted from the photograph.*

In his catalog of fishing tackle for 1878, Krider labeled himself as both "Manufacturer and Importer" of tackle, in contrast to his catalog of twenty-five years earlier. Advertisements mentioned Flies Made to Order, and it is certain that he manufactured rods. A number of rods labeled "John Krider/Maker" reside in collections. Krider's 1877 ad mentioned his Center Enamel Split and Glued Bamboo Rods. The 1878 catalog listed a wide variety of rods probably made elsewhere, but it also offered several lines of "Krider's Celebrated Spliced Bamboo Rods." "Rod Tops" of hazel or lance-wood, ash or lance-wood pieces, and assorted brass fittings also were available. Furthermore, the inventory of his estate included four finished Krider rods, over three gross of other finished rods, and a large assortment of unfinished rods and tips. Two gross of assorted reels remained, but no parts, evidence that reels were not made in the shop. I believe that Krider, about the age of sixty, relegated the day-to-day responsibility of running the firm to Siner, leaving himself free to begin manufacturing fishing rods. For all we know, the inspiration for this change may have been provided by George Burgess, who had taken up rod making at a similar age, but whose output was undoubtedly minimal in the last years of his life.

The Krider rod illustrated here is a convertible fly rod that can be assembled into a three-section, 7-foot-3-inch rod or a lighter action, four-section rod of 9-foot-8-inches. The butt section is made of ten strips of bamboo, but the other sections have six-strip construction. The rod has folding-ring guides, maroon wraps, and German silver fittings. The reel seat features alternating strips of what appear to be bamboo and cedar, and the handle is wrapped with rattan. Though Krider's 1878 catalog advertised a 3 & 4 piece rod, the shortest length described for any rod was 12-

feet. Therefore, the rod illustrated probably is one of his later products.



*The butt-cap of the Krider fly rod*

John Krider died on Nov. 12, 1886, of paralysis, or what probably was a stroke that ended three years of failing health. His estate was left to his wife, Elizabeth W. Krider, or, at her death, to his four daughters and his son Joseph. John Siner continued to manage the firm for the estate, purchasing the building in 1897<sup>1</sup> and continuing the business into the twentieth century. The building was razed in 1955.

For almost fifty years, Krider had supplied some of the East Coast's finest sporting equipment from his shop at Second and Walnut. As the lists of bills receivable in his estate inventory attest, his clientele

included members of many of Philadelphia's wealthiest families. Others of somewhat more interest to collectors also were in his debt, including George Fox, A. B. Shipley & Son, and, yes, George W. Burgess, who had died four years earlier. It is regrettable that the extent of Burgess' and Krider's influence on tackle manufacturing in eastern Pennsylvania will never be fully documented.

#### Notes

1. "The Krider Gun Shop (The John Drinker house)," in *Historic American Buildings Survey*, Library of Congress call no. HABS PA,51-PHILA,186-[83(HABS):118]. Philadelphia, Pa.: National Park Service, undated
2. Putro, Joseph H. *Philadelphia Fishing Tackle Manufactories*, 1987, p. 5
3. Before the 1854 city consolidation, unofficial street numbers often were assigned by the compilers of business directories, who followed no standard methods for applying them. Thus, 90 S 2nd and 101 S 2nd could have represented the same building in different years or in different directories. Robinson and Krider may have continued their partnership until 1845 or maintained separate businesses at one location.
4. Flayderman, Norm. *Flayderman's Guide to Antique American Firearms...and Their Values*. Northbrook, Ill.: DBI Books, Inc., 1987, p. 489
5. Vernon, S.K., & Vernon, S.B., "Fishing Tackle from Eastern Pennsylvania Part I: The George W. Burgess Rod," *Fishing Collectibles Magazine*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Fall, 1996, pg. 6
6. Trotter, Spencer. "Some Old Philadelphia Bird Collectors and Taxidermists" in *Cassinia/A Bird Annual: Proceedings of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club of Philadelphia/1914*, Vol. XVIII, 1915, pg. 5

#### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following for their help in writing this article:

Hoagy B. Carmichael  
Bill Cooke  
Charles Fleischmann  
Ronald G. Gabel  
Dr. Harold G. Herr  
Bob Hujsa  
Tom Kerr  
S. A. Neff, Jr.  
Joseph H. Putro  
Leo Vernon, Esq.  
Suzanne B. Vernon  
Eileen C. Mathias and Carol Spawn, Ewell Sale Stewart Library, Academy of Natural Sciences  
Virginia Ward, Library, Franklin Institute Science Museum  
Archives, Register of Wills, County of Philadelphia  
Free Library of Philadelphia  
Philadelphia City Archives