

Malleson, Moog, and the First Pflueger Reels

Steven K. Vernon

It seems that almost every day someone posts pictures of an 1890-1910ish reel on Reel Talk and asks, “Who made it?” As long as John Kopf and Julius vom Hofe are not under consideration, the ensuing threads are frequently fraught with replies naming Malleson, Montague, Pflueger, or occasionally U.S. Net & Twine (USN&T) as the makers. There is good reason for attributing a lot of these old reels to those makers: they made a lot of very similar reels.

Frederick Malleson was one of the people responsible for the manufacturing of so many similar reels by so many tackle companies. Thanks to an article by Steve Brown, he first appears on our radar in 1874, the year of his marriage, as the partner of Thomas J. Conroy, importing and manufacturing hooks and tackle at 77 Fulton Street, New York City.¹ In 1875, the two continued as the newly-formed limited partnership of Conroy, Bissett [Thomas M.] & Malleson. Succeeding J.C. Conroy & Company, the partners manufactured tackle at factories in Brooklyn while running a retail store at 65 Fulton Street. Malleson manufactured reels in Brooklyn and continued to do so after he withdrew from the partnership in 1881, four years before the partnership was scheduled for dissolution. Malleson “took” the Brooklyn factory at 136 First Street,² and his brother Theodore was a superintendent there.

While continuing a close working relationship with Thomas Conroy, Malleson expanded his business, manufacturing a lot of reels. His only reel patent, granted in 1884, described a multiplying fly reel, the basis for the “Patent Perfection Reel,” which Malleson manufactured in several styles. It bore an arrow-shaped lever that operated a click and drag and which is now an identifying feature of other Malleson reels.

By 1886, Malleson had “built up an extensive and influential patronage in the United States and Canada, while large quantities of his unrivaled fishing goods are exported to the West Indies, South America, Europe, India, and Australia...From two hundred to three hundred and fifty hands are employed, and the machinery is operated by steam power. Mr. Malleson manufactures largely fishing reels, split bamboo rods, fine wood rods, hooks on gut, and other fishing requisites...[He] has established a reputation for integrity, business ability, and enterprise.”³

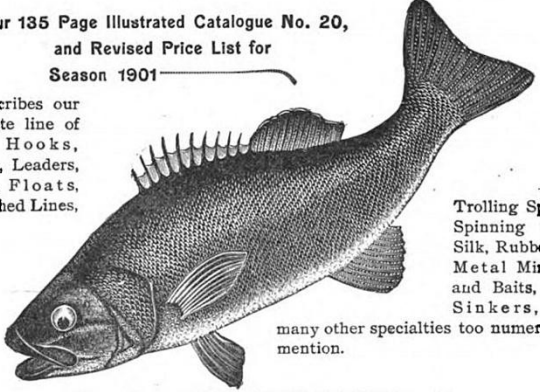
Malleson’s reputation for business ability must have suffered a blow when, in mid-1889, both he and Thomas Conroy were forced to settle creditors’ claims against their respective companies. Nevertheless, both managed to stay in business, but Malleson’s factory was taken over by a couple of creditors.⁴

Undeterred by his business failure, Malleson carried on. He had established a joint venture with Montague Rod & Reel Company when the Malleson-Bartlett Rod Company was certified in Massachusetts on July 20, 1889.⁵ The company was dissolved in 1892.⁶

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Our 135 Page Illustrated Catalogue No. 20,
and Revised Price List for
Season 1901

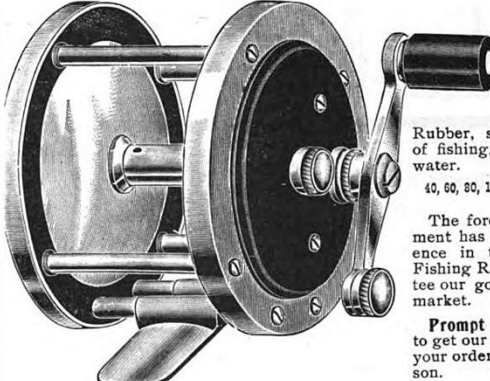
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Flies, Leaders,
Snells, Floats,
Furnished Lines,



Trolling Spoons,
Spinning Baits,
Silk, Rubber and
Metal Minnows
and Baits, Lead
Sinkers, and
many other specialties too numerous to
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The Largest Manufacturers of Fishing Tackle in the United States.
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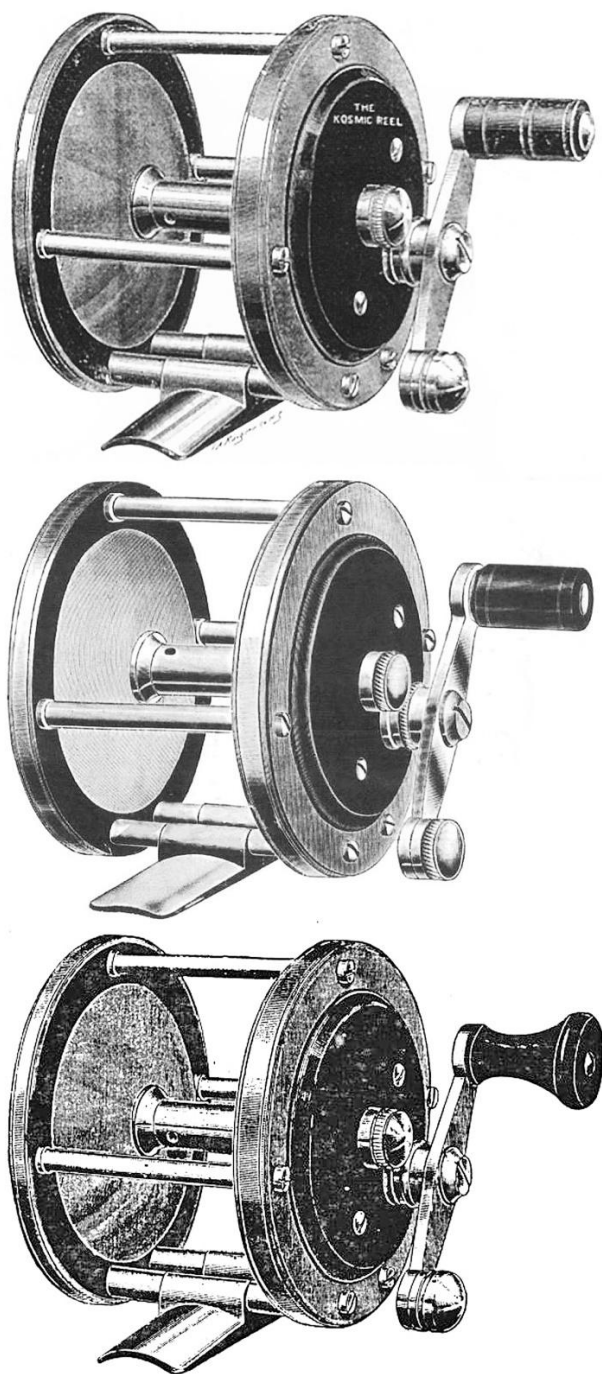
40, 60, 80, 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, 350 Yards.

The foreman of this department has had 25 years experience in the manufacture of Fishing Reels, and we guarantee our goods the finest in the market.

Prompt Shipments. Be sure to get our prices before placing your orders for the coming season.

THE ENTERPRISE MANUFACTURING CO.,
Largest Manufacturers of Fishing Tackle in the United States,
AKRON, OHIO.

Enterprise advertisements in the April 10 (top) and September 10, 1901, issues of Hardware, a trade journal.



Illustrations from three companies. (Top) Kosmic reel shown in 1891 U.S. Net & Twine ad. (Middle) Reel shown in 1904 Pflueger catalog. The same cut had been included in the 1901 Hardware article. (Bottom) Reel shown in 1904 Montague catalog. In my opinion, the differences, e.g., grasps, are too trivial to suggest that the reels were made to different specifications.

Remarkably, by November, 1891, Malleson established the Frederick Malleson Tackle Company in Trenton, New York.⁷ In addition, he established what was initially the Frederick Malleson Fishing Tackle Works, which quickly became the Malleson Rod and Reel Company in Brooklyn.⁸ Montague bought the rod business in 1893 and the reel business in 1898.⁹

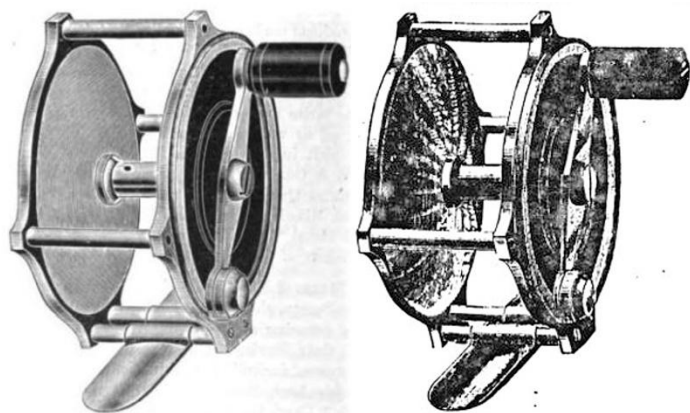
During the 1890s, Malleson's older brother Theodore and younger brother Thomas tied the family even more closely to other tackle companies. Theodore was employed by USN&T,¹⁰ while Thomas would go to work at Montague, from which he would retire around 1929.¹¹ Frederick, too, was employed by Montague about 1894, when he became a foreman at the Chubb factory in Highland Mills, New York, which Montague had acquired previously.

Later in the decade, USN&T was acquired by the Linen Thread Company and was broken up.¹² Some of its equipment was sold to Enterprise Manufacturing Company, Akron, Ohio. Montague moved into USN&T's Brooklyn reel factory. As Steve Brown informed us, citing the *Sporting Goods Gazette*, Frederick Malleson was hired by Enterprise before September, 1899.¹³ An unusual snippet of evidence that Malleson spent some time at Enterprise, albeit briefly, was a notice in the *Akron Daily Democrat*, Sept. 13, 1900, that the Akron post office was holding undeliverable mail for Fred. Malleson.

In its October 25, 1901, issue, the magazine *Hardware* announced that "The Enterprise Mfg. Co., Akron, Ohio,...have recently become interested in the manufacture of fishing reels on a large scale, and have purchased new dies and tools of the latest designs and greatest efficiency. They have secured the services of the most expert workmen in this particular line, and are now putting out all the popular styles and sizes of reels in brass, nickel, German silver and hard rubber, suitable for fresh and salt water."

An Enterprise advertisement already had appeared in the September 10, 1901, issue of *Hardware*, touting their extensive line of reels. The ad boasted that the "The foreman of this department has had 25 years experience in the manufacture of Fishing Reels, and we guarantee our goods the finest in the market." The ad was remarkably similar to an 1891 USN&T ad reproduced by Steve Brown.¹⁴ The 1891 reel, a Kosmic, and the Pflueger reel are essentially the same. Other Pflueger reels also resembled reels that had been advertised by A.G. Spalding & Bros. and, later, USN&T, which acquired the Kosmic brand from Spalding in 1894.

An ad in the April 10, 1901, issue of *Hardware* had indicated that Enterprise's catalog No. 20 for 1901 included reels, but the ad did not illustrate any. Bob Miller reproduced a brief article from the March, 1901, issue of *The Sporting Goods Dealer* with an illustration of an allegedly-planned Enterprise "Kentucky" reel.¹⁵ The crank was mounted above the spool journal, and it probably was never manufactured. The manufactured version is illustrated here.



Similar German silver and hard rubber fly reels shown in (Top) 1901 Hardware article on Enterprise reels and (Bottom) 1904 Montague catalog. The article calls the Enterprise version "The Special Reel." Note the rounded, "Pflueger-like" foot end on the Montague reel.

A brief article in *The Iron Age*, November 7, 1901, repeated the news about Enterprise's expanded reel manufacturing. It explained that "The factory...is in charge of a man who has had over 30 years' practical experience in this line." David Lehmann pointed out that in 1901, J.H. Keene had noted "that Pflueger had begun manufacturing reels the previous year."¹⁶

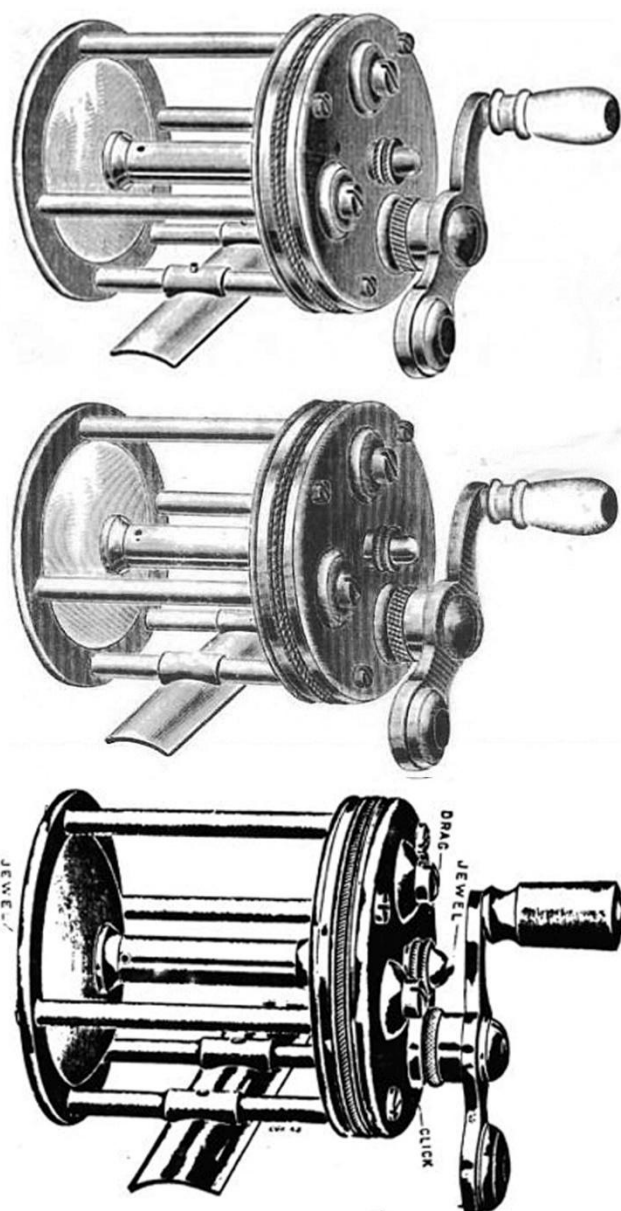
So who was Enterprise's experienced foreman? The 1901 *Hardware* article included illustrations of reels that were virtually identical to reels shown in the 1904 Montague catalog. Enterprise's 1904 catalog included even more such reels. The Enterprise "Special" fly reel was the spittin' image of the Kosmic fly reel sold by A.G. Spalding & Bros. and then USN&T. It is clear that whoever was responsible for Enterprise's first reels meant to reproduce products made by USN&T and Montague. The Pflueger boys were not averse to stealing intellectual property. In 1913, William Shakespeare, Jr., Company successfully sued Enterprise for infringement of its patent for the Rhodes Minnow.¹⁷

Malleson certainly was qualified for the Enterprise position. But he was back in Brooklyn in 1900, by the time the U.S. census was taken, boarding with his daughter Nellie at the home of Michael Malone, a grocer. He died a year later.

Frederick Moog had been making reels at Malleson's factory in Brooklyn at least as early as 1886, when he was in his early 20s. He would spend several years at The Andrew B. Hendryx Company in New Haven, Connecticut, before returning to New York around 1894.¹⁸ During the mid- to late-1890s, he worked for USN&T, to which he assigned his 1894 reel-foot patent. By 1900, he was a foreman at Enterprise in Akron, according to a city directory. Two years

later, he was specifically labeled as foreman of the reel department. He bought a property in the city in 1902 and remained with the company until 1913. By 1915, he was working for the Firestone Company.

Either or both Malleson and Moog could have provided the specifications for Enterprise's first reels. My theory is that Enterprise hired Malleson to head their newly-planned reel department. He may have proposed that the company put out a line of reels using proven USN&T and, by then, Montague designs. But Malleson's return to Brooklyn and his death a year later suggest that he may have been in ill health and decided to "go home." Or he may have acted as a consultant, rather than as a company employee. He could



Similar German silver Kentucky-style reels (Top) Enterprise reel shown in 1901 Hardware article. (Middle) Pflueger reel in 1904 catalog. (Bottom) Montague reel in 1904 catalog.

have recommended Moog to Enterprise, as Moog had intimate knowledge of the reel designs and manufacturing procedures, as well as experience with the equipment Enterprise had acquired from USN&T. And even if Malleson had not proposed the reel design plagiarism, Moog certainly could have done so. Of course, it is possible that both experienced reelmakers arrived at Enterprise at about the same time.

In light of this sequence of events, it should come as no surprise that the first Pflueger reels were essentially copies of reels that had been made by Montague and USN&T. Whether or not some of the Pflueger reels were manufactured by Montague or elsewhere before Enterprise's factory was fully up and running remains an open question, but Enterprise may have been able to make their first reels using the equipment it had acquired from USN&T.

Notes

1. Brown, Steve, Unravelling the Malleson Mysteries. *Classic Angling*, No. 81, Jan./Feb., 2013, pg. 42
2. *The New York Times*, July 31, 1889, pg. 2
3. *Half-Century's Progress of the City of Brooklyn/The City's Leading Manufacturers and Merchants*. New York City: International Publ. Co., 1886, pg. 127
4. Brown, *op. cit.*, pg. 43
5. *Report of the Tax Commissioner of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the Year Ending December 31, 1889*. Boston, Mass.: Commonwealth of Mass., 1890, pg. 89
6. *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Court of Massachusetts in the Year 1892*. Boston, Mass.: Commonwealth of Mass., 1892, pg. 81
7. *The Iron Age*, Nov. 5, 1891, pg. 806

8. *The Iron Age*, Nov. 12, 1891, pg. 852
9. Stone, Orra L., *History of Massachusetts Industries: Their Inception Growth and Success, Vol. I*. Boston, Mass.: S.J. Clarke Publ. Co., 1930, pg. 466
10. Brown, *op. cit.*, pg. 44
11. Vernon, Steven K., *Antique Fishing Reels*, Second Edition. Havertown, Pa.: Stue Publ., 2018, pg. 283
12. Vernon, Steven K., The Residue of U.S. Net & Twine. *The Reel News*, Vol. XXIX, No. 6, November, 2019, pp. 4-6
13. Brown, *op. cit.*, pg. 45. According to an obituary, Malleson was working for a Philadelphia firm when he died. At the time, there was an Enterprise Manufacturing Company in that city, which manufactured food-processing equipment. The *Sporting Goods Gazette* quotation made it clear that Malleson was hired by the Ohio tackle company, though it's possible that he would have been employed by some other Philadelphia firm, as well.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Miller Robert A., *The History of Pflueger Baitcasting Reels/1901-1982*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Whitefish Press, 2018, pg. 1.
16. Lehmann, David, Early Pflueger Casting Reels. *The Reel News*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer, 1997, pg. 3
17. *The Federal Reporter*, Vol. 211. St. Paul, Minn.: West Publ. Co., 1914, pp. 477-481
18. Vernon, Steven K., Some Real Reelmakers. *The Reel News*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3, May, 2021, pg. 5.

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