

The Reel Connection Between Lawson Machine Works and Burlington Metal Products

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The Actors

Holger Laurits Lawson was a very capable mechanical engineer who immigrated to Canada from Denmark, traveling on the SS Orduna that arrived in Quebec City on May 22, 1924. Canadian Secretary of State records show he pledged allegiance to Canada on January 19, 1931. He was born September 20, 1902 to Dorthea Larsen who resided in Fredericia, Denmark. At the age of 44, his physical appearance was described as 5'9" tall, fair complexion, brown hair, and blue eyes. On February 11, 1933 Holger Lawson had a son, Francis¹ (Frank) Wilfred Lawson in Montreal with Elizabeth (nee) Fuhr². Elizabeth, later called Elaine or "Ely" was a German-speaking housewife also born in 1902 but in Wintherthur, Switzerland³.

Holger was the main inventor named in 3 US patents, but none relate to fishing reels or tackle. In one patent, he designed complex, high volume production machinery to assemble cigarettes (1933 US Patent 1,969,180). This work was done for Specialty Engineering Co. registered in Montreal. The company directors were Meyer J. Goldstein, Lester Goldstein, Holger L. Lawson and Joseph Stampfli. Holger Lawson also invented a machine to make pom-poms (pompoms) (1936 US Patent 2,062,183) and an automatic cooker, similar in concept to a modern counter-top deep fryer (1953 US Patent 2,639,657).

Holger was first listed as an engineer in the 1934 edition of the Montreal Lovell Directory. In the 1935 Census of Canada, his address was 222A Monkland Boulevard in Ville St. Laurent (now Montreal), where he lived with his wife. This address was the same as for one of his partnerships, Stampfli & Lawson. Monkland Boulevard no longer exists, and for those that know Montreal, it was not the same street as Monkland Avenue (Av de Monkland) in present day Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) but rather in a different section of the city in the vicinity of Vanier College. The 1942 City Directory shows a new home address for Holger Lawson, 2391 Mariette Ave, which remains as an understated duplex in Montreal West.

Lawson Machine Works Limited

The Montreal City Directory listing of Lawson Machine Works appeared for the first time in 1942. Holger Lawson operated Lawson Machine Works Limited as its sole owner⁶ and proprietor. "Trading as Lawson Machine Works", on November 3, 1944, Holger Lawson registered the name LAWSON⁴ as a Canadian word mark for "Wares:

Fishing reels and rods; frying pans; aluminum pots, die casting machines; diesel engines; air compressors; motor generator sets; electric welding machines; water pumps; [and] refrigerators.”

The trademark registered in Canada immediately prior on the same date was for the word mark “S.I.L”, by Seven Industries Ltd. in Montreal⁵. Curiously, the description of wares for S.I.L is *identical* to that in the LAWSON trademark. One can surmise from this that Seven Industries Ltd. was intended to be the distributor for *all* products made by Lawson Machine Works.

Lawson Machine Works was first located at 1070 Bluary St, Montreal, a landmark ten story building with highly ornamental facade (not very conducive to machine shop operations). The building was constructed around 1916 during WWI. It was more popularly called the Southam Press Building and has been recently refurbished and turned into luxury residential condos.

Also in 1942, from the Drouin-Pepin genealogical files, there is a notarization record of a mortgage through Montreal Trust Company. Holger Lawson, “Elaine” Lawson, and Lawson Machine Works are all named, so this mortgage was likely related to the manufacturing facilities versus the personal Lawson residence.

“Holger Lawson, trading as and sole owner of Lawson Machine Works, Montreal, Quebec, Canada” first registered the word mark LAURENTIAN⁶ in Canada on June 23, 1944, declaring first use of that mark on June 6, 1944. This is the familiar mark seen on Lawson fly reels and their boxes. The trademark was registered for use on fishing reels, fishing rods and *frying pans*. He subsequently registered the LAURENTIAN word mark with the USPTO for use in the US on just fishing rods and reels. The 1945 US trade-mark registration certificate references the earlier Canadian trade-mark “folio” and stated LAURENTIAN was already in use in Canada since June 24, 1944, one day later than shown in the Canadian Patent Office Record.

This is the first sign we see in the documentation of an initiative to get into the fishing tackle industry, subsequently confirmed by a May 1946 Lawson Machine Works display ad⁷ in Rod and Gun in Canada illustrating 3 different fishing reels: the “1946” level-wind, the Laurentian Fly Reel, a model No.900 Junior Bait Reel, a landing net (with 12 ½” opening) and casting style fishing rods of 4 ½’ and 5’ lengths.

In 1945, Lawson Machine Works bought some additional commercial property along with unspecified objects in an auction. Several adjacent addresses were acquired in a multi-unit 2-story building fronting onto ‘de Gaspé Street’ in downtown Montreal. This was a clear indication of Lawson gearing up operations; however, things really changed in 1946, foreshadowed by a Lawson commercial advertisement in the August 28th, 1946 Montreal Gazette:

FOR MANUFACTURERS

We have purchased existing manufacturing buildings in Burlington, Vermont, with several floors, each 4-5000 feet area, to let to other Canadian manufacturers. Sprinklered and heated, elevators. Rental 40-50c per foot per year, Lawson Machine Works. PL. 2513.

Furthermore, in 1946 Lawson Machine Works Limited set up shop at 949 St. Dominique St., which is the address most often associated with the Lawson fishing reels made in Montreal. This business was subsequently listed at several locations in the Montreal area over time. Note that they held both the Bluery Street and St. Dominique St. addresses for some time, so it is likely that one location was for production and the other for administrative or design engineering activities.

Burlington Metal Products, Inc.

According to a Canadian Press article⁸, the commerce departments in several US states actively recruited Canadian investors, including manufacturers. They provided incentives to set up in their states in order to improve local economies. Making products within the US instead of Canada eliminated import duties and made selling prices more competitive. Holger Lawson really pursued that idea as he not only set up business in Burlington, VT but in the same year he became a permanent US resident¹. He and his wife (then shown in INS records as “Emy”) lived in a quaint 2-story house at 62 Brookes Ave, Burlington, VT, complete with white picket fence (at least as it looks today).

After the aforementioned initial 1942 Lawson mortgage transaction, the records show 5 more Montreal Trust documents notarized in short succession during 1946, probably relating to the Lawson purchase of the manufacturing buildings in Burlington, VT.

In the 1946 Burlington Directory, Lawson was shown as “president-treasurer” of Burlington Metal Products but he was also listed as a “resident of Montreal”. This explains why the Lawson “46” level-wind reel looks the same as the reel marked Burlington Metal Products, Vermont, as discussed several times at the orca-online website⁹. The reel box paper¹³ for the Lawson “46” and “47” reel shows common parts, lists unique parts for the “47” and it lists both Lawson Machine Works Ltd in Montreal as well as Burlington Metal products, in Burlington, VT. It seems that these reels were made with the same design, from factories on one or both sides of the Canada/US border, but by different companies under a common principal: Holger Lawson.

The rental space in large buildings that Lawson Machine Works advertised was likely located at 110 Main St., Burlington, VT the same street address as Burlington Metal Products, Inc. The Burlington city directory showed president-treasurer Holger Lawson was supported by “clerk” Clark E. Brigham and the assistant treasurer-accountant E. Roy Anderson; however there were 2 other Burlington based partners, D. Arnold Skelly and Howard A. Allen shown in the Articles of Association¹⁰ of Burlington Metal Products, Inc. That company, with \$50,000

authorized capital was incorporated on December 6, 1945. It operated a span of five and a half years before its charter was revoked on July 31, 1951.

Although Holger Lawson and his wife moved to Burlington in 1946, two years later Holger also held a secondary residence at 406 Pine Ave, an apartment within a seven-story residential building in the Mount Royal district of Montreal. It would appear that he was doing business simultaneously in Montreal and Burlington and furthermore, making trade-reels at one or both locations.

A 1946 article in the French language Waterloo (Quebec) Journal discusses the relocation and appointment of a business executive, "Geo-C Dubois", who took a senior post with Lawson Machine Works in Montreal, probably to backfill Lawson who was spending time at the US operation. This was not long before the beginning of "The Quiet Revolution"¹¹ in Quebec, a time when French-Canadians began to identify as Quebecois and the business and social culture of Quebec began to change. A 1947 commercial ad in the Montreal Gazette promoted the generic die casting capabilities of Lawson Machine Works, showing that their core business of non-fishing tackle metal works was still essential for the business.

In 1958 there was a US Department of Immigration and Naturalization passenger arrival record that showed that Holger eventually moved to South Haven, Michigan. Like his father, Frank Lawson went on to become an engineer¹².

The Fly Reels

There are several versions of the Lawson brand Laurentian Fly Reel with different model numbers, finish colors, grasp colors and boxes. For example, Dry Fly Reel model No.1 and No. 2 have the same diameter and width but the No. 1 is finished in smooth black enamel and the finish of the No. 2 reel is a shade of green with a mottled enamel finish. The No.2 Dry Fly reel has a counterbalance integrated into the faceplate and its rear bearing-hub is rounded whereas the No.1 has a shaved-off bearing hub shape and no counterbalance at all.

There is also a bare aluminum fly reel with S-shaped 2-grasp handle made by "Laurentian Manufacturing Co., Montreal". Given the Laurentian trademark, it is assumed that this is also a product of Lawson Machine Works.

There are at least two known trade-models of Lawson's Laurentian fly reels. One is a clone of the Lawson No. 1 Dry Fly model marked LEIGHTON FLY REEL, MADE IN CANADA. The other is a clone of the Lawson Dry Fly model No. 2 reel marked CANADA'S BEST FLY REEL, MAJOR ROD MFG CO, LTD, MONTREAL, CANADA¹³.

Major Rod Manufacturing Co.

Major Rod Mfg. Co.¹⁴ of Montreal was set up in 1949 as a Canadian federal corporation. The principal, Fred Major, established operations in Tupper Lake, NY

around 1950. Note that Tupper Lake, Burlington and Montreal are all within a few hours drive of each other. Major acquired a plywood factory in Tupper Lake covering 65,000 square ft. and recruited some 60 local employees. When announcing their venture into New York, Major Rod claimed they supplied 75% of all rods sold in Canada. Major had plans to make extraordinarily large volumes of fiberglass rods e.g. 10K units per week plus other fishing tackle, but they “folded” in Tupper Lake after 7 years¹⁵. A third party registered the Trade-Mark MAJOR ROD just a few years before Major Rod was dissolved¹⁶. One has to wonder if the Lawson marked bait-casting rod with cast aluminum reel seat is an assembly made by Major Rod with Lawson parts or vice-versa? It is assumed that Lawson made the fly reel marked Major. The Lawson Laurentian No. 2 and its look-alike marked MAJOR fly reels are identical, other than the name marks.

The Bait-Casting Reels

In addition to the Lawson Montreal “46” level-wind reel and its twin, marked Burlington Metal Products, Vermont, mentioned above, there is another reel of identical shape and size marked “Hudson, Reel-Master, Casting Reel”. Lawson model “47” is the same size as Lawson model “46” but the example examined does not have the level-wind assembly of the “46”. Rather, a factory made solid cross pillar is installed where the level wind mechanism would be, purposefully making the example studied of model “47” a non-level wind. Only one of several Model #46 reels examined was marked “MADE IN CANADA” under the foot crossbar.

All four of these reel cages (Lawson “46” & “47”, Burlington and Hudson models) have the same outer dimensions and have consistent tool marks which would suggest that they all came out of the same mold. Some examples of these aluminum reels have a smooth finish, either satin or shiny, whereas others have a jeweled (damascene) finish. Since “46” and “47” model numbers refer to the year they were released (as indicated by the magazine advertisement), it may be a sign that a cost reduction was attempted in 1947 after some experience making and selling the 1946 generation level-wind reel and its predecessor that was a larger diameter level-wind casting reel with a Lawson Machine Works Montreal diamond shaped logo¹⁷. One version of that larger reel has a 2-grasp handle and another version has a single-grasp unbalanced handle as seen on some early Kentucky Reels.

[The example at hand of the reel with the single grasp handle was examined closely to see if the handle was made that way or if it was simply half of a broken 2-grasp balanced-handle. The surfaces are machined perfectly smooth and the material thickness is consistent in all aspects. It is therefore assumed to be a factory original, but it would be useful in the future to compare several such examples for assurance or to find a catalog or cut sheet showing all possible factory options.]

Conclusion

Lawson, their affiliates and partners made a variety of fishing reels covering several styles, models, and finishes. Some of the designs are common with only the names being different. This is a great example of trans-border commerce to take advantage of a growing sporting goods market in North America, long before trade agreements like NAFTA were conceived. Now that the “reel connection” between Lawson Machine Works Limited and Burlington Metal Products, Inc. has been more thoroughly examined, varieties of related reels and their boxes will be even more interesting to discover and collect.

See more information and Lawson related reel pictures at-
<http://reelyoldreels.weebly.com/lawson-machine-works-limited-montreal.html>

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- ¹ Dec 3, 1946 manifest record of US Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization.
- ² Based on the April 7, 2007 death record of Frank Wilfred Lawson aka Frank W. Lawson, Francis Lawson.
- ³ New York Arriving Passenger List, Feb 25, 1937, SS Europa from Cherbourg, France. Ancestry.com
- ⁴ N.S. 19325 LAWSON- Word mark, by Holger Lawson, Date of first use: 20th Oct 1944, Registered 3rd Nov 1944, The Canadian Patent Record, January 16, 1945, Cornell, Hathi Trust Digital Library.
- ⁵ N.S. 19324 S.I.L. – Word mark, by Seven Industries Ltd. Date of first use September 20, 1944, Registered Nov 3, 1944. The Canadian Patent Record, January 16, 1945, Cornell, Hathi Trust Digital Library.
- ⁶ N.S. 19093 LAURENTIAN - Word mark. The Canadian Patent Record, November 14, 1944, Cornell, Hathi Trust Digital Library
- ⁷ <http://ontariolures.com/reels/lawsonreels.html>
- ⁸ Americans Seek Canadian Funds, by David Gersovits, Canadian Press, August 2, 1975
- ⁹ For example:
<http://reeltalk.orcaonline.org/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=16364&p=74686&hilit=burlington+metal+products#p74686>
<http://reeltalk.orcaonline.org/viewtopic.php?f=1&t=10326&p=46227&hilit=burlington+metal+products#p46227>
- ¹⁰ Articles of Association of BURLINGTON METAL PRODUCTS, INC., File 1593, and Index Card, Record Series: A-214, Container Number: A-00034 (microfilm), Vermont State Archives.
- ¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quiet_Revolution
- ¹² 1962 Burlington City Directory, per Ancestry.com
- ¹³ Glenn Grady collection
- ¹⁴ MAJOR ROD MFG. CO. LTD., Federal Corporate Number: 512150, 901 Lenoir Street, Montreal QC, H4C 2Z6 Canada, 3 directors, Incorporation: 1949-12-29, Dissolution: 1980-12-16
- ¹⁵ Tupper Lake Free Press, Oct 1, 1970
- ¹⁶ Canada Trade-Mark Registration Number: TMA322356 1987-01-02
- ¹⁷ N.S. 19501, “A pair of concentric spaced diamond-shaped parallelograms... [by] Holger Lawson, Trading as and sole owner of Lawson Machine Works...”, Registered: Nov 17, 1944, First Use: Oct 20, 1944, The Canadian Patent Record, March 6, 1945, Cornell, Hathi Trust Digital Library.