



The

# Reel News

January 2017  
Volume XXVII, No. 1  
[orcaonline.org](http://orcaonline.org)

## A tale of the Gayles

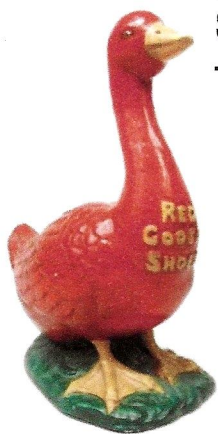
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# Clarence Gayle and the Geo. W. Gayle & Son Co.

By Ron Gast

Clarence Gayle is probably one of the most unheralded of the great Kentucky reel makers. He made high quality reels for almost 60 years, and yet we associate his work with the company his father founded – Geo. W. Gayle & Son. The reason is simple. Clarence never put his name on his reels until very late in his career. Most reel collectors would not be aware of this unless they have read the book “Fishing Reel Makers of Kentucky” by Steve Vernon and Frank Stewart. Clarence appears to have been a very resourceful, intelligent man and one who followed the traditions of a Southern gentleman. These perceptions will be born out in the following article.

Clarence Gayle’s family has a long history in Kentucky. His parents, George William Gayle and Rebecca Jones Gayle, were born in Kentucky in Frankfort and Lexington, respectively. The first digital record we find for his father George was in the 1850 US Census taken in Frankfort. George was 16 at this time. It is interesting to note he is actually listed twice in the Census. The first was on Sept. 18, 1850 under Benjamin F. Meek (listed as a “Watchmaker”) and George was listed as an “Apprentice.” The second was on Sept. 29, 1850 under his father John Minor Gayle (listed as a “Carpenter”) and George was listed as a “Silversmith.” The subsequent Frankfort Census shows George’s occupation in 1860 as “Silversmith”, in 1870 as “Repairs Jewelry” and in 1880 as “Jeweler.” This shows us that George had experience and made his living in the watch repair and jewelry business. Unlike B.F. Meek or B.C. Milam, George does not advertise reel

making. This will change when Clarence Gayle comes on the scene.

Clarence Gayle was born on Nov. 15, 1866 in Frankfort. He was the middle son of George’s three male children. Herbert Gayle was 3 years older and Leslie Gayle was 3 years younger than Clarence. Clarence and his brothers would witness their father struggling to get his jewelry and watch repair business firmly established. Kentucky was feeling the results of the Reconstruction Era following the Civil War. Reconstruction lasted from about 1865 to 1877. However, established jewelry and watch repair businesses like those of B.C. Milam or B.F. Meek seemed to be faring well and still advertising.

The earliest information we find of George Gayle working in the jewelry and watch repair business is found in the book “Silversmiths of Kentucky.” The book describes how he was employed by the Frankfort silversmith Worham P. Loomis. George and two other men worked there until Mr. Loomis’s death in 1870. The business was then closed. It wasn’t until the 1880s where we see ads for George in business for himself.

Evidence of George’s difficulty in getting established in his business can be found in the April, 1880 Frankfort Roundabout newspaper. It lists a “Sheriff’s Sale for Taxes at Auction at the Franklin County Courthouse Door.” Among the list of people in the newspaper, Geo. W. Gayle is listed as owing \$10.68 on a lot he owned downtown. However, it looks like he must have ended up paying the taxes. Later, the Frankfort Roundabout newspaper reported on Jan. 23, 1886 that he sold a 50 by 100 foot lot on Campbell Street.

**REMOVAL!**

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**WATCHES & CLOCKS REPAIRED.**

Having removed my watch and clock repair shop to my residence in South Frankfort, I am prepared to execute work on short notice. Orders left with Mr. Will Macklin, at the coal office, corner of St. Clair and Wapping streets, will receive prompt attention.

Dec. 16-17 **GEO. W. GAYLE.**

Frankfort Roundabout, Feb. 17, 1883

**Watch, Clock & Jewelry Repairing.**

**H**AVING OPENED A SHOP IN THE GROCERY of Mr. J. M. Todd, at the corner of Main and Ann streets, I am prepared to do all kinds of work in my line at reasonable prices. All work left at my shop in South Frankfort will receive prompt attention.

**GEO. W. GAYLE.**

Sept. 27-31.

Frankfort Roundabout, Oct. 4, 1884

Messrs. Hugh R. Ayres, Willoughby Rodman, Herbert, Clarence and Leslie Gayle returned Thursday evening from a trip to High Bridge in a skiff. They spent a week at the Bridge and on the river.

Frankfort Roundabout, Aug. 25, 1883

**Cuff Retainer For Ladies.**

**MESSRS. GEORGE WOLF & CO.,** FOURTH and Jefferson streets, and August Rees, 235 Fourth avenue, manufacturing jewelers, Louisville, Ky., have arranged with **MRS. A. L. FRANKLIN,** of Frankfort, Ky., to furnish her patent Cuff Retainer to ladies in and visiting the city.—*Courier-Journal.*

Messrs. George W. Gayle, corner Main and Ann streets, and W. B. George, 208 St. Clair street, have made the same arrangement.

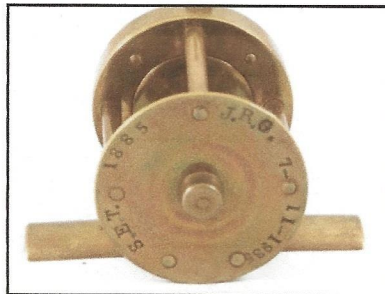
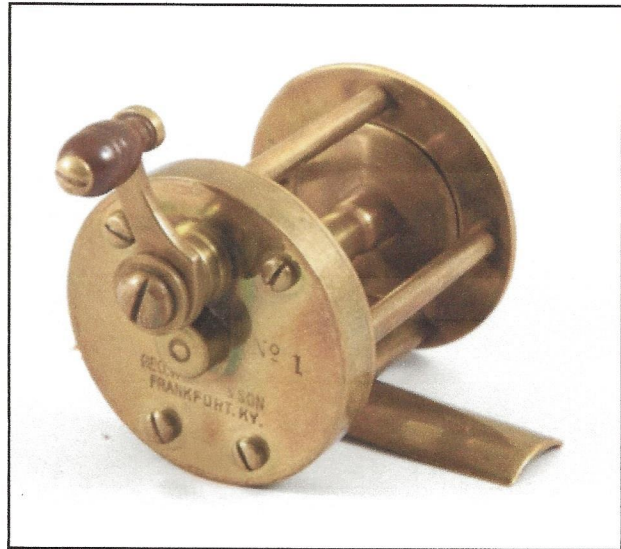
Frankfort Roundabout, Aug. 1-15, 1885, in which George advertised collar cuff retainers as a side business to his jewelry business.

Further evidence of George's apparent financial difficulties can be seen in the Feb. 17, 1883 Frankfort Roundabout newspaper. He advertised that he had moved his watch and clock repair shop to his house in South Frankfort. Everyone knows that you don't have to pay rent when you work out of your own house. Then on Oct. 4, 1884, George took out an ad in the Frankfort Roundabout informing that he had moved his business from his house to a small shop inside the grocery store of Mr. J. M. Todd at the corner of Main and Ann streets. Then in the Dec. 5, 1885 Frankfort Roundabout newspaper, George took out another add stating he was moving his business to the front of Mr. George Macklin's coal office at the corner of St. Clair and Wapping Streets.

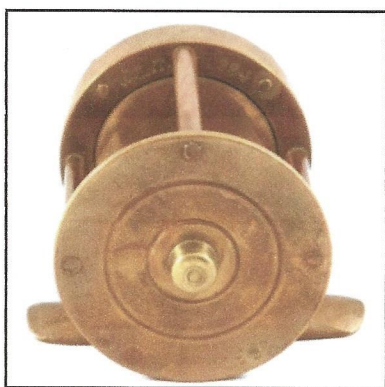
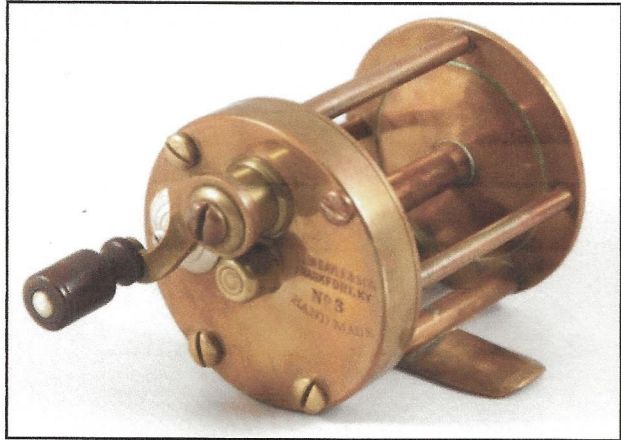
However, not everyone in the family was worried about business. It looks like Clarence, his two brothers and friends were enjoying their summer of 1883.

No evidence that George or Clarence Gayle advertised that they had started making reels as a side business to their jewelry business during the 1880s has been found. There is some insight into when they started making reels. In the May 1905 "The Sporting Goods Dealer" magazine, Clarence Gayle wrote a three-page article detailing all the intricacies of building a quality reel. In the article, he states that he helped his father George make the first "Gayle" reel in the early 1880s. He states it was a brass reel and very plain compared to his present reels. He also said, "The only market for our reels was at first purely local."

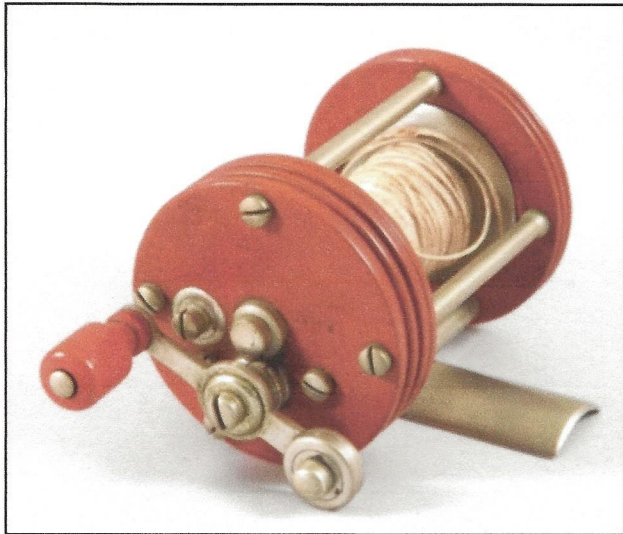
The Gayle family descendents today know of three Gayle reels that have dates during this period. One is a brass No. 3 dated 1884 and the other is a



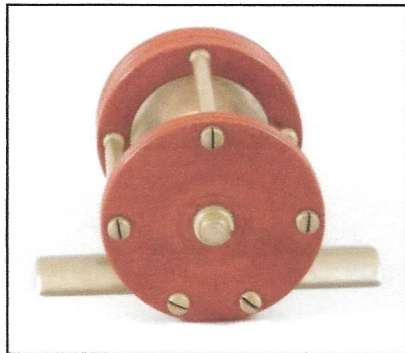
A brass No. 1 Gayle, above and left, dated 1885. Photos courtesy of Currey Gayle



A brass Gayle No. 3, above and left, dated 1884. Photos courtesy of Currey Gayle



The third reel has red hard-rubber side plates. Clarence gave this to his soon-to-be-wife in 1889. Photos courtesy of Currey Gayle



brass No. 1 dated 1885. The third reel is one with red hard rubber side plates that Clarence gave to his soon-to-be wife in 1889. In the May 1946 "Kentucky Happy Hunting Ground" magazine, there is a photo of the first reel made by Clarence Gayle that he said he made in 1885. These reels are plain, yet functional and do not carry the ornate knurling seen on the later reels. A 1935 George W. Gayle & Son catalog gives us insight into when the first reel was made by George himself. It states that "Geo. W. Gayle stayed with the Meeks only a short while, going into watch-making and jewelry business until 1882 at which time he started the making of all hand-made reels, having with him his son Clarence Gayle, then just 16 years old."

Further information on when George Gayle made his first reel can be found in the Sept. 23, 1893 Frankfort Roundabout newspaper. It refers to B.F. Meek leaving Frankfort and going to Louisville about 10 years earlier and that the Gayles started making reels at about the same time. This would have been 1883.

Mr. Geo. W. Gayle has removed his watch repair shop from the corner of Ann and Main streets to the corner of St. Clair and Wapping, in the front part of Mr. Geo. B. Macklin's coal office.

Frankfort Roundabout, Dec. 5, 1885

Mr. G. Ed. Marshall has purchased a lot 50 by 100 feet, from Mr. Geo. W. Gayle, on Campbell street, and will erect a neat frame cottage upon it as soon as the spring opens.

Frankfort Roundabout, Jan. 23, 1886

Messrs. Geo. W. Gayle and his son, Mr. Clarence Gayle, leave to-day for Brooklyn, New York, where they have secured positions in a large fishing reel manufactory.

Frankfort Roundabout, Jan. 30, 1886

Mrs. George W. Gayle and son, Mr. Leslie Gayle, left Saturday evening for Brooklyn, New York, to join her husband and make that city their future home.

Frankfort Roundabout, May 8, 1886

Mrs. George W. Gayle returned to this city Wednesday from Brooklyn, New York, and will reside here in the future, Mr. Gayle will join her in several weeks.

Frankfort Roundabout, July 3, 1886

Mr. George W. Gayle and son, Mr. Clarence Gayle, have returned from Brooklyn, New York, where they have been residing for the past 18 months.

Frankfort Roundabout, March 26, 1887

It appears as though some event must have transpired in late 1885. Within two months time, George had moved his business into Macklin's coal office, had sold his downtown lot and he and

A December 1888 ad in Wildwood's Magazine, at right.

Clarence moved to Brooklyn, N.Y., to work for "a large fishing reel manufactory." Yes, George and Clarence were moving to Brooklyn to work and learn how to make fishing reels. This was reported in the Jan. 30, 1886 edition of the Frankfort Roundabout newspaper, but there is no evidence indicating which Brooklyn reel maker they went to work for. The big four reel makers in Brooklyn in 1886 were Edward vom Hofe, Julius vom Hofe, John Kopf and Frederick Malleson. All four were large companies and any one of them would have been a good place to work and learn.

It is not known for sure why they decided to get in the reel business. We do know that George's jewelry and watch repair business was pretty fluid. He knew that having a side business making reels, in addition to watch repair, worked out well for B. F. Meek and B.C. Milam & Son. One would imagine that the Gayles had this in mind. What better way to learn the business than become employed with one of the largest and well known reel makers? In January 1886, Clarence had just turned 19 years old.

One of the things of interest occurring at this time was the Gayle family dynamics. Clarence's mother Rebecca and his younger brother Leslie followed him and his father out to Brooklyn about three months later, as reported in the May 8, 1886 Frankfort Roundabout newspaper. It appears the New York move did not sit well with Rebecca. Two months later, she returned to Frankfort and reported to the newspaper that she "will reside here in the future and Mr. Gayle will join her in several weeks." Well, it

**\*ALSO AGENTS FOR\***  
**GAYLES' CELEBRATED FRANKFORT KENTUCKY REELS.**

No. 2.                      No. 3.                      No. 4.  
 \$13 00                      \$16 00                      \$17 00 each.

With Rubber Side Plates, Lighter and more desirable than Metal.

The Driving Wheels are hard hammered Brass. The Pinions, Wheel Posts, and Pivots are of the finest Steel, hardened and tempered. The best made and finest Reels known.

*Sole Agents for John James & Sons' Fish Hooks, etc.*

ARTIFICIAL FLIES TIED TO PATTERN.

Sixty-five pages illustrated Price List of Tackle and Wood and Rod Mountings by mail, for 10 cents in stamps.

**A. B. SHIPLEY & SON,**  
 503 Commerce Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

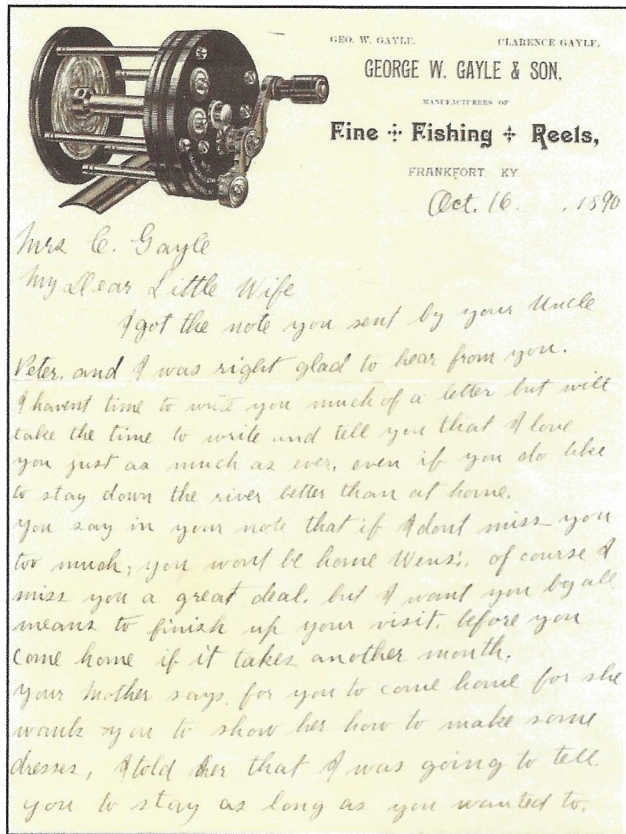


G. W. Gayle & Son No. 3 hard rubber and German silver reel

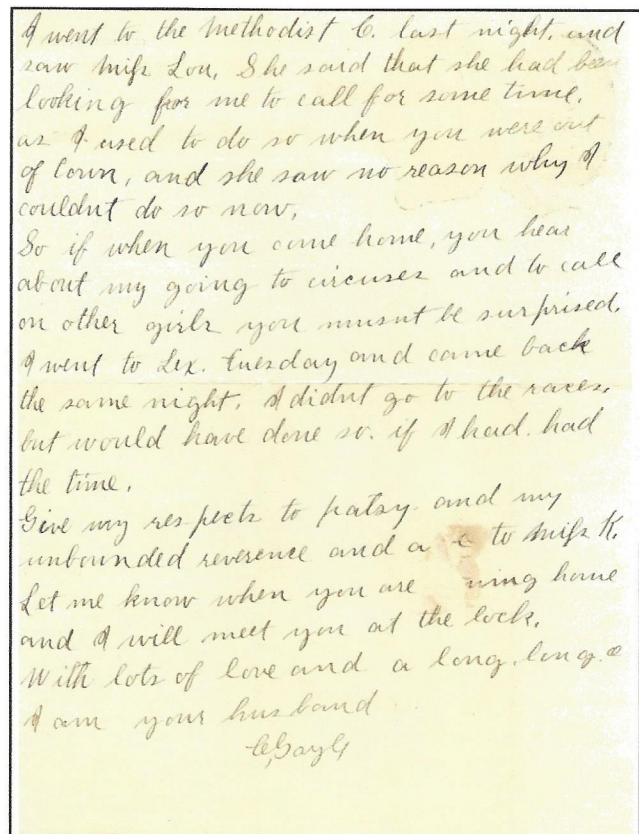
turns out George and Clarence didn't return to Frankfort until after they had been in Brooklyn for about 18 months as reported in the March 26, 1887 Frankfort Roundabout Newspaper.

Well it didn't take the Gayles long to start making and advertising reels after they returned to Frankfort. In the May 1905 "The Sporting Goods Dealer" magazine, Clarence Gayle wrote a three page article detailing all the intricacies of building a quality reel. In the article, he also gives detail on what dealers sold his reels. One of the first dealers he writes was A.G. Spalding & Bros. in New York. He also listed The Bandle Arms Co. of Cincinnati, A.B. Shipley & Son of Philadelphia, White & Wills of Chicago, and Griffith & Semple of Louisville. Only two of these dealers were still in business in 1905, according to Clarence.

A.B. Shipley & Son Company was one of the first sporting goods dealers to sell their reels. The interesting thing about their ad in the December, 1888 "Wildwood's Magazine" is that the only reel they are advertising is made with hard rubber side



Letter courtesy of Currey Gayle

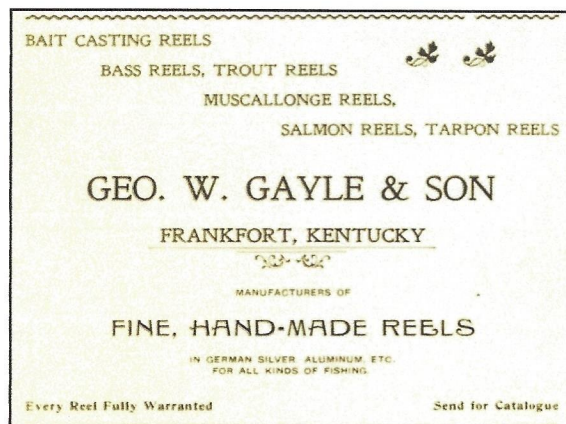


plates. The ad notes it's "Lighter and more desirable than Metal." This shouldn't be a surprise that they used hard rubber since they had just spent about 18 months working in a reel making factory in Brooklyn. Hard rubber was the primary material of choice for side plates used by the Brooklyn reel makers at this time. One could only imagine what the other Kentucky reel makers must have thought when they saw the Gayle reels being made with hard rubber end plates rather than German silver or brass. They were "thinking outside the box."

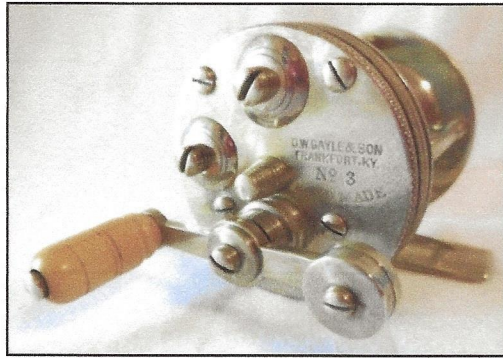
Another event would enter into the Geo. W. Gayle & Son story. This was the marriage of Clarence to Emma Kavanaugh on June 18, 1890. Clarence was 23 at this time. Four months

later he wrote a letter to Emma while she was visiting relatives in LaCompte's Bottom, which is about 16 miles north of Frankfort. The visit was reported in the Sept. 27, 1890 Frankfort Roundabout. Two things strike you about the letter. The first is the letterhead. What a great picture of the Gayle hard rubber reel. The second is the obvious love he had for his wife. The warmth and courtesy that comes out in the letter shows he is a true Southern gentleman. At this time, Clarence is now a grown man. George had recognized this and had made him a partner, as evidenced by the company name in the letterhead.

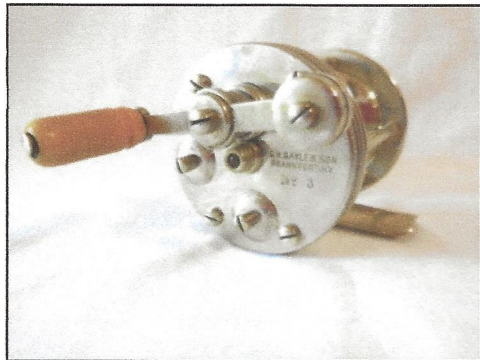
The use of only hard rubber for side plates by Gayle didn't last very long. The use of an aluminum alloy rather than hard rubber gave the same lightweight characteristics. The first evidence of the Gayle reel with aluminum end plates



1896 ad in the book "Chic and I, the Practical Training of a Dog for the Gun"



At left, a G.W. Gayle & Son, No. 3, and a Geo. W. Gayle & Son, No. 3 German silver reels



Left, a G.W. Gayle & Son, No. 3, and a Geo. W. Gayle & Son, No. 3 German silver reels



G.W. Gayle & Son single-action reel, left, and Geo. W. Gayle & Son 2:1 multiplying reel

shows up on an envelope owned by the Gayle family. The outside of the envelope is postmarked 1895 and shows the Gayle reel with the raised gear box which is usually referred to as the "Top Hat" design. Gayle referred to this design as the "New Gayle" reel. This reel was reported to be of the same quality as their standard and more expensive reel they called the "Frankfort Reel." In 1896, a Geo. Gayle & Son ad also shows that the "New Gayle" reel was offered in German silver. In another ad they also describe how they make fly reels, bait casting reels and tarpon reels.

Gayle reels have been found with two different name stamps. These are "G.W. Gayle & Son" and "Geo. W. Gayle & Son." Reels also marked "Hand Made" have been found with both Gayle markings.

The year 1896 turned out to be a bad year for the Geo. W. Gayle & Son Company. George died on Sept. 24, 1896. The reel-making business had only been in operation for about 10 years. Clarence was now almost 30 years old and would take over the operation of the business. It appears that Clarence's younger brother Leslie was also involved in the company. In the 1900 US Census for Frankfort, the occupations of both Clarence and Leslie are shown as "Reel Makers." Clarence's older brother Herbert is shown as a "Bookkeeper." All three brothers' occupations remained

the same for the 1910 US Census.

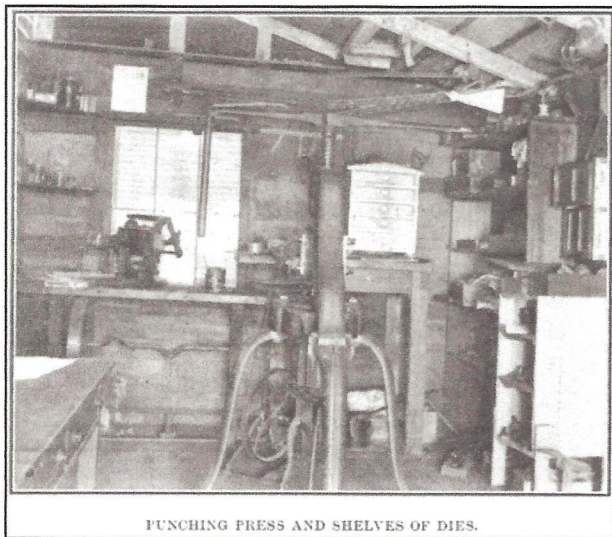
Clarence, as the head of Geo. W. Gayle & Son, was always interested in finding new business opportunities in addition to reel making. In the Aug. 15, 1903 Louisville Courier Journal it was reported that Robert L. Hunter of Cleveland, Ohio, had been in Frankfort for several days. It says he was in conference with Clarence Gayle to discuss the manufacture of a reel of Mr. Hunter's patent. An agreement must not have been met since the Hunter reel was eventually made and sold by

Chamberlain Cartridge & Target Company in 1905.

Fishing reel making was still the main business. In 1903, Clarence wrote a letter to his wife Emma. On the letterhead is listed the three "Gayle" reel models. The May 1905 Sporting Goods Dealer magazine gives us insight into the casting reel models available at the time. The "Frankfort Reel" is the heavily knurled one and sold for \$30. The "Kentucky Bait Casting Reel" had the sliding click on the back plate. The "Aluminum Bass Reel" was the reel later referred to as the "New Gayle" reel and sold for \$10. Clarence also mentions in the article that he makes a lightweight aluminum fly reel for trout and a large German silver reel for tarpon or tuna.

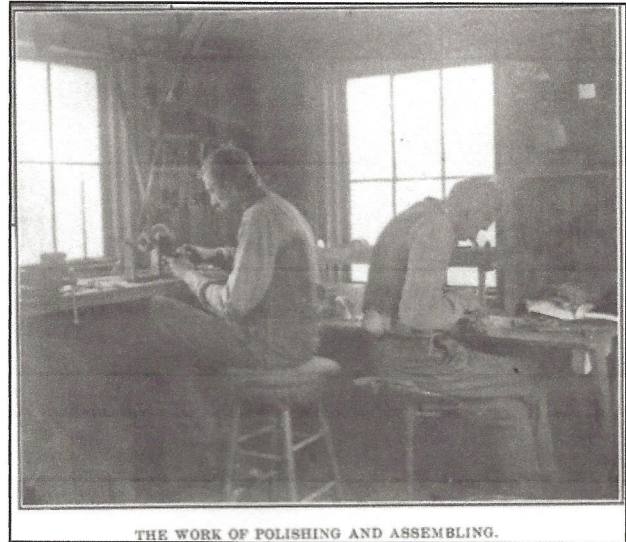
Emma and Clarence Gayle had five children. The oldest was Hubbard K. Gayle (1891-1989). It turns out that Hubbard would eventually be the grandfather of ORCA member Currey Gayle. The other children were George W. Gayle (1893), Anna K. Gayle (1896), Frank Coburn Gayle (1902-1963) and Dorothy Gayle (1908-2002). Frank Coburn Gayle would eventually become the owner of Geo. W. Gayle & Son.

In the May 1905 issue of The Sporting Goods Dealer, Clarence Gayle wrote a three-page article entitled "Hand-Made Reels." The article goes into minute detail of the processes used in making his reels. *Two photos from the article are shown below.*



PUNCHING PRESS AND SHELVES OF DIES.

In 1905, Clarence partnered with a Mr. Longmoor and a Mr. Kavanaugh to build a plant to manufacture



THE WORK OF POLISHING AND ASSEMBLING.

smoking and chewing tobacco. The company's name was KAGA for Kavanaugh and Gayle. The Kavanaugh family was Clarence's in-laws. The project was reported in the June 1905 edition of "Engineering News" magazine.

Geo. W. Gayle & Son began to work with some of the major sporting goods dealers to create customized reels. The first was with Von Lengerke & Antone (VL&A) around



A VL&A Geo. W. Gayle model reel

1900. The reel made especially for them was marked "Made for VL&A, Chicago, by Geo. Gayle & Son, Frankfort, KY." The other major dealer to have customized Gayle reels was William Mills & Son. The reel line made for them was called the "William Mills & Son, Intrinsic." There were two different German silver baitcasting reel models and a large German silver and hard rubber reel for tarpon fishing. The "Intrinsic" can be seen in the 1909 and 1912 William Mills & Son catalogs.

The year 1910 was when things changed for Clarence and his brother Leslie. Although they were listed in the Frankfort 1910 Census as "Reel Makers", they are absent from the 1910 Frankfort City



Directory. In the 1912 City Directory, Leslie is now listed as "Carrier RFD" – Rural Free Delivery. Also, his widowed mother, Rebecca is shown at Leslie's home address. Clarence is not listed that year. Clarence will reappear as a "Reel Maker" was again in the 1917 Frankfort City Directory. As it turns out, Clarence was taking a hiatus from reel making and went to work for the Buick Motor Company in Flint, Michigan. It is not known for sure why he decided to stop making reels and find employment elsewhere. One thing for sure, at the Buick plant, he would be exposed to the latest manufacturing methods and techniques available at that time.

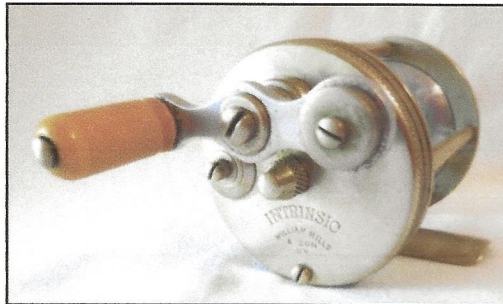
Insight into Clarence's employment at Buick Motor Co. can be seen in the following letter. The superintendent in the Tool Making Department at Buick sent a letter to the US Shipping Board extolling Clarence's extraordinary mechanical ability. The letter states he had worked at Buick for four years. Apparently, Clarence had considered going to work for the Shipping Board in support of the World War I effort. Clarence actually returned to reelmaking.

While working at Buick, Clarence was exposed to the most modern manufacturing tooling and techniques available at that time. This knowledge must have led him to the idea of manufacturing a fishing reel that could be made and sold at low cost. He could stamp out and form parts easily. Originally, three models were made and sold from 10 to 50 cents each. He named these reels "Simplicity." Clarence started making them as early as 1915 according to his later trademark application in 1945.

Clarence did not register the "Simplicity" trademark until 1947. In the trademark description,



William Mills & Son 'Intrinsic' models, above. Below, from left, a William Mills & Son 'Intrinsic' bait casting reel and tarpon reel.



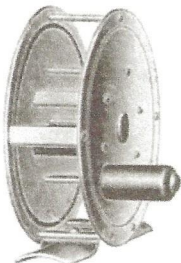
Clarence claims Geo. Gayle & Son had been used and applied to fishing reels since 1915.

In 1928, John Milam died and the remaining reels and parts in the B.C. Milam & Son inventory were purchased by Clarence Gayle. Clarence wasn't making the Gayle "Frankfort Reels" at this time and was producing only the "Simplicity" fly reels. Gayle must have seen this Milam inventory as a business opportunity. He could leverage the Gayle and Milam reputations to sell the Milam reels. Clarence sent out a flyer to all his potential customers informing them of the sale. He had parts for about 100 reels ranging in size from a No. 0 to 9. Clarence stated he would finish each one himself and sell them for \$35 apiece regardless of size.

An article in the March 1930 *Field & Stream* by Robert Lincoln Page contained an interview with Clarence Gayle. He stated that Clarence hadn't produced any hand-made reels for the last 10 years (since 1920). They were concentrating on the single action fly reel. Page asked Clarence if he thought he would ever make the hand-made Kentucky reel again. Clarence replied that "yes" he probably would.

It looks like Clarence made the decision to go back into "Frankfort Reel" production after Page's

**The "Simplicity" Fishing Reel.**



Geo. W. Gayle and Son, Frankfort, Ky., are marketing the "Simplicity" fishing reel, shown in the illustration. This, it is claimed, is a dependable reel, the result of a half-century of reel-making experience, and is placed on the market at a price which brings it within reach of every man and boy. The No. 2 reel, illustrated, is a single action casting reel with adjustable back sliding click. It is made of steel, nickel plated and polished, and holds 50 yards of line. Two other models are made, with single action and without the click. The prices range from 15c to 50c.

"We have had these reels on the market three years," the manufacturers say, "and they have been tried out in every state in the Union. They have proven their worth and will be, hereafter, the most staple low-priced reel on the market."

From "Southern Hardware and Implement Journal,"  
January 1919

interview. He had recently gotten the Milam reel inventory and had the opportunity to examine them during their assembly and tuning. This had to bring back memories to him. One of the things he had to notice was that the Milam reels used helical gears rather than the spur gears used by Gayle in the past. He also knew that B.F. Meek used helical gears. Clarence decided to do the same. Clarence made what he called the 1934 Model of "Frankfort Reel" which was marked "Hand Made", had a double knob handle and had helical gears.

Around 1930, Clarence broadened his business to include fishing lures. He made two versions – "Steelback" and "Shorty". Both lures were marked with the company name.

In 1936, Clarence decided to sell some of his excess equipment. He advertised in the June 1935 issue of Popular Mechanics classifieds that he had "punches, lathes, Swiss gear cutter" for sale. He placed a classified ad again in the August 1936 Popular Mechanics.

One would ask oneself why would Clarence sell off all this equipment? He would still need a gear cutter and the other items if he was planning on continuing hand-made reel manufacture. The answer is probably because he wanted to upgrade his old equipment and replace it with modern

equipment in line with his experience at Buick. Needless to say, Clarence did make hand-made reels in the future and would have to use equipment of this type. Some of this equipment would later be used when Clarence took on a new product line. In coming years, he would be getting a lot of publicity because of the quality of his work.

Clarence's reputation as a craftsman enabled him to receive multiple government contracts during World War II. This manufacturing activity lasted about three years and was quite profitable for Geo. W. Gayle & Son. The end of the war saw Clarence returning his business back to fishing reel making.

The Louisville Courier-Journal ran a feature article on Sept. 16, 1945 about Clarence and his business. It gave details about his business and its apparent success. The article stated that prior to that time he was making about 100,000 "Simplicity" reels a year. That stopped when the US entered WWII. Gayle began making components for various defense contractors to support the war effort. To date, he had made more than 30,000 parts of 20 different types, employing 22 men and seven women.

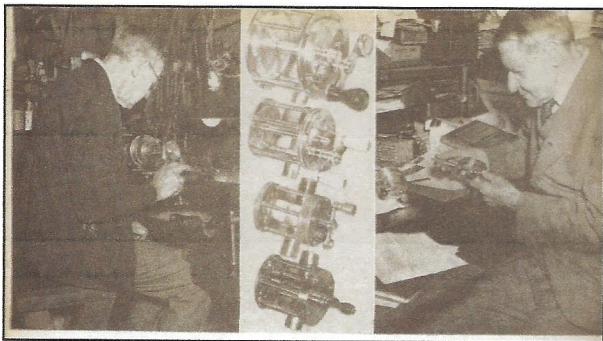
Clarence Gayle was again featured in an article in the April 1946 The Kentucky Sportsman written by D.T. Caywood. The article describes how Clarence had a grudge against the Japanese. Apparently, a company in Japan was copying his "Simplicity" reel in the 1930s and was able to sell them to retailers far below his selling price. The "Simplicity" fly reel was Clarence's bread and butter. He was making more profit from large sales quantities of his cheaper reel than from the \$100 to \$300 custom reels. So Clarence entered the war effort not only as a natural patriot, but also with a vengeance. The fact that his son Lt. Col. Frank Coburn Gayle and two of his grandsons were in the service had to also be in Clarence's thoughts. He was happy to make components under government contract and made a good living at it. The article tells about his use of a lathe, originally used by the Kentucky reelmakers more than 100 years ago. ORCA member Currey Gayle wrote an article about this lathe in the May 2005 issue of The Reel News.

Interestingly enough, another article about Clarence appeared one month later in the May 1946 "Kentucky Happy Hunting Ground" magazine written by Joe Slocum. This article also summarized Clarence

Gayle's recent activities making components for defense contractors. Clarence was now 79 years old and he and his machine shop were going strong. In the article, Slocum reports that Clarence had stopped making reels in 1942, with the advent of WWII. Due to his capabilities, he was awarded many contracts to make component parts to support the war effort. He later found out, to his satisfaction, that he had made components that were used in the A-bomb dropped on Japan. The article stated that Clarence was restarting his reelmaking business and planned to sell reels ranging in price from \$20 to \$100 and up. Clarence also stated in the article that he would be making a casting reel that would carry a click and a level winder.

Several Gayle casting reels have been found with a level winder on them. It has always been a question whether Clarence made and installed the level winder on his reel or someone else did. According to the article mentioned above, it looks like he was making reels with a level-winder.

In the picture below, Clarence stated that the top reel is his 1941 model. The second reel down with a crank handle with two knobs is the 1934 model. The



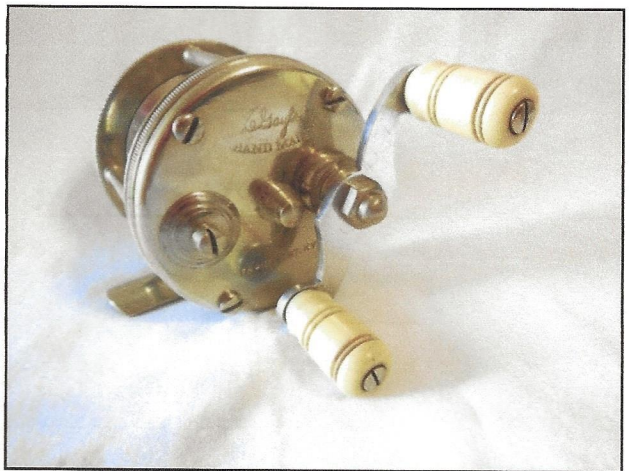
third reel is an older reel that has the hard rubber end plates. The bottom reel is made of brass and is the first reel Clarence made. Notice his first reel is plain with no fancy knurling.

Some of the last reels made by Clarence were marked differently. Instead of "Geo. W. Gayle & Son" they are marked "C Gayle" in script. It is thought that these reels were made for family and friends. The Reel Clarence called the 1941 model is shown in the photo below.

Shortly after these great articles and testimonials to Clarence and his accomplishments were

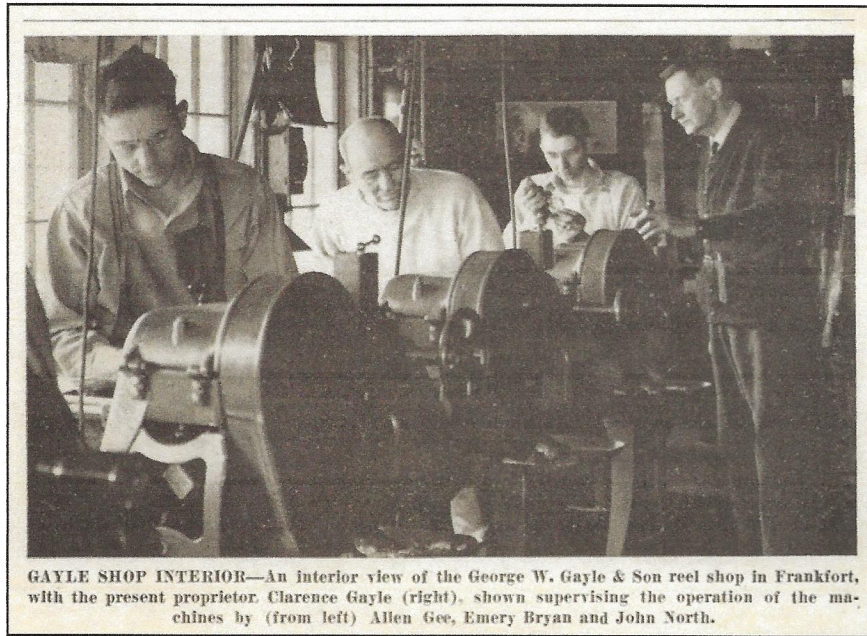


A large reel marked C Gayle, Frankfort, KY Hand Made



A small reel marked C Gayle, Frankfort, KY Hand Made

published, he died on Sept. 6, 1948. His passing marked the end of the era of great Kentucky reel makers. He was 81 years old. The Gayle story would not be complete without giving a little history of what happened to the company after Clarence died. Clarence's son, Frank Coburn Gayle, assumed the responsibility to run the business. Back in 1928, Clarence had already made Coburn the Foreman of Geo. W. Gayle & Son according to the Frankfort City Directory. In the 1932 Frankfort Directory, he is shown as the manager of the company. Coburn had been in the Army National Guard for about 20 years. He was a lieutenant colonel in the Army during the war and had the leadership and management skills necessary to run a company. When Clarence was alive, he would let Coburn run the business side of the company while he attended to the daily manufacturing activities. This was good management planning on Clarence's part to make sure he had his replacement in place in case



**GAYLE SHOP INTERIOR**—An interior view of the George W. Gayle & Son reel shop in Frankfort, with the present proprietor, Clarence Gayle (right), shown supervising the operation of the machines by (from left) Allen Gee, Emery Bryan and John North.

A photo from the May 1946 "Kentucky Happy Hunting Ground magazine.

nickname of a "Potato Masher" because it resembled the German hand grenade used in World War II. It also had this nickname.

The final ownership of Geo. W. Gayle & Son was under Frank Coburn Gayle, Jr. A Report written about the impact of a road construction project near Frankfort gives some insight to the final days of the company. "Socioeconomic Analysis for Franklin County – US 127 Anderson County Line to I-64 Interchange" report shows that Geo. W. Gayle & Son employed 16 people in 1981. Their products were listed as scraper rings, electric typewriter parts, and parachute and helicopter

something happened to him.

One of Clarence's machinists in the 1940s was Allen L. Gee. The 1951 Frankfort City Directory shows Allen as the superintendent of Geo. W. Gayle & Son Company. Coburn is shown as the owner of the Company. The Directory now lists their business as metal specialties and "Manufacturers of Metal Goods." Fishing reels are no longer listed as a product of theirs. From 1954 to 1960, Coburn is listed as the owner and Allen as the plant manager.

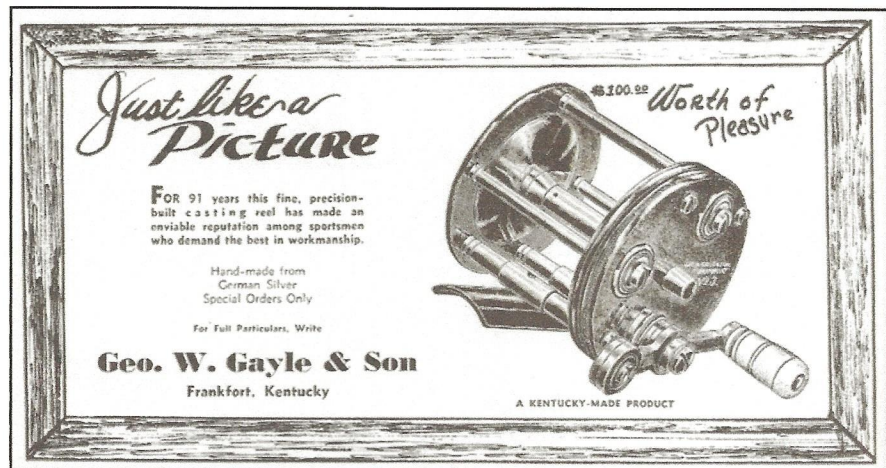
The July 1, 1951 Louisville Courier-Journal newspaper carried a feature article about Geo. W. Gayle & Son. The article focused on their main product line being "Dog Tags" for the armed forces. It states that they made 2,500,000 last year and had contracts for 1,500,000. The shop had 40 employees and turned out 40,000 tags a day.

In 1958, Geo. W. Gayle & Son made one more attempt to get back in the fishing equipment business. They made a hand-thrown Spinning Spool. It appears to have limited success, but it looks pretty cool. It had a

hardware. The company was dissolved shortly thereafter.

Company Name Markings on Gayle Casting Reels

Okay, that's all the information about the history of Geo. W. Gayle & Son. Now, let's talk about the reels. One of the things that has always been a question is the difference between the "Gayle"



A 1946 ad showing the Gayle "Frankfort Reel."

company names on the reels. Which one is older? Some reels are marked "G. W. Gayle & Son" and some are marked "Geo. W. Gayle & Son." There is also a variation to these two markings with the

addition of the words "HAND MADE." Therefore, there are a total of four possible, different markings. So, to try and answer the question of which came first, a review of all the available Gayle bait casting reel photos was made. The photos reviewed were from past Oliver Auctions, Lang's Auctions and collector photos. This is a large sample and, percentage wise, should be representative of the reel population. Below is a summary.

exception is the VL&A special reel. It's marked "Made by Geo. W. Gayle & Son" and was sold around 1900. This could be considered a one-of-a-kind marking and used "Geo." rather than "G." But let's face, we weren't there when they name-stamped these reels so we may never know for sure when they were marked or why they are marked differently.

Reel Feature	G.W. Gayle & Son "Frankfort Reel"	Geo. W. Gayle & Son "Frankfort Reel"	G.W. Gayle & Son "New Gayle Reel"	Geo. W. Gayle & Son "New Gayle Reel"	Total
Cone Bearing	6	7	15	3	31
Bearing Caps	4		11		15
Marked "Hand Made"	7	3	8		18
Total Reels	10	7	26	3	46 Reels

One observation of the results in the table is that about 75 percent of the reels were marked "G.W. Gayle & Son." Also, it looks like the "Geo. W. Gayle & Son" reels do not have removable bearing caps.

Unfortunately, there is no direct correlation between the name marking and the date when it was changed. However, there are 3 "Frankfort" reels with dates marked on them. The first is a "G. W. Gayle & Son" reel with cone bearings and not marked "Hand Made." It has an engraved date of "1910". The other two reels are "Geo. W. Gayle & Son" reels with cone bearings and marked "Hand Made." They are stamped with the dates "4-8-29" and "2-21-34." Therefore, the "Geo. W. Gayle & Son" marking appears to be the latter one. The one

#### Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank Currey Gayle for providing information and content to this article. Currey has a lot of knowledge about his great-grandfather's history. I would also like to thank Doug Carpenter, Don Kleier, Jim Garrett and Skip Brooks for information they provided. Also, thanks to Lang's Auction.

To see more photos and information concerning Gayle reels, please visit my two website pages:

<http://luresnreels.com/gayle.html>

<http://luresnreels.com/cgayle.html>