

Horsman's Cameras

By Dan Colucci
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The story of Edward Imeson Horsman and his business endeavors, has recently been the subject of a new book* and numerous stories have been posted on the internet as of late [03/2004].

Born November 25, 1843 in Brooklyn, New York, Horsman was quite the young entrepreneur. He was known to have made and sold baseballs, after school, at the age of 14. Years later, Horsman went on to work for a NY import company called, Paton & Co., earning \$ 2.00 per week, all the while learning the import business. By the time he was 22, Horsman had set up his own business, manufacturing and selling games and novelties in lower Manhattan.

E.I. Horsman, Sr., and wife, Florence, had four children; Edward, Florence, Mary and Eliza. Edward Imeson Horsman, Junior, would go on to be a key figure in the Horsman Camera story.

The Horsman business went through its share of ups and downs, but eventually prospered and grew significantly in size by importing and selling children's dolls. The dolls, imported from Germany, were assembled and sold by Horsman from about 1865-on. Childrens dolls were to be the major focus of the Horsman business from 1870-1920.

An interesting sidenote about Horsman. Some historians believe he was the first to market, in 1906, a cute stuffed bear doll, called the "Teddy Bear."

Known to have been named after Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt, the exact origin of the term and its first commercial use is hotly debated.

Some say it was first utilized by Morris Mitchom, also from the Brooklyn, New York area. Others assert the term actually came from the German Doll company, Steiff.

The Horsman company also designed, imported and sold toys and board games, in addition to sporting equipment. In the 1860's and 1870's, Archery and Croquet were all the rage and Horsman took advantage of that by selling complete outfits to the public. Then, with the growing popularity of lawn tennis in the 1880's, Horsman began selling a tennis racquets and tennis accessories at a great clip [see <http://www.go-star.com/antiquing/tennis.htm> for an example of one such tennis kit]. Horsman sold board games such as "Tiddlywinks" in the 1890's as well as "Ouija" Boards and Kaleidoscopes into the early 20th century. In addition, Horsman advertised Bicycles, Sleighs, Spring Horses and Amateur Photographic Outfits for sale.

Author Don Jensen writes, "Though generally thought of today as a doll maker, the E.I. Horsman Co. of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries primarily was not a manufacturer. While the company did some manufacturing and assembly work, and in the 1890s maintained a "manufactory" at Valley Falls, near Providence, RI, Horsman usually described himself as a merchant. But his company was more complex. Initially, it had some retail trade, but mostly it was a distributor and a manufacturers' agent, with a rather extensive wholesale catalog of toys, games, sporting goods and novelties, sold to outlets, large and small, throughout the U.S."

In 1909, Horsman's firm reached an important milestone by signing an agreement with the Aetna Doll and Toy Company to exclusively market their line of "Can't Bream 'Em" composition dolls. These "Horsman" branded dolls were extremely popular and records show that Horsman was selling hundreds of thousands of dolls at this time. Interestingly, Horsman dolls, especially the earliest ones, are widely collected today. Although the name, "Horsman" continued to be used on dolls into the 1970's, Edward I. Horsman, Sr.'s family ceased to be involved in the business in 1927 upon the death of Edward Sr., at the age of 83.

But what about the cameras ?

In 1873, Horsman gave birth to his only son, Edward I. Horsman, Junior. Highly educated, unlike his father, Edward Junior's interests were in music and the arts. He was not only an organist and composer, but also a choir director for several New York churches. Edward Junior was also a part-time art critic with a passion for helping develop young musicians and artists.

There is no doubt that the success of Papa Horsman's business came from his ability to identify new trends and fads in the leisure industry, and quickly bring those goods to market. However, there is some speculation that Edward Junior's interest in the arts, and photography in particular, may have been the impetus for Edward Senior to get into the camera business. This would make perfect sense as amateur photography exploded in the mid 1880's, a time when the teenaged Edward Junior may have helped dad recognize this latest craze and business opportunity.

As many camera collectors know, the Horsman company sold a line of cameras known as the "Eclipse" cameras. The best known (although scarce) model is the # 2 Horsman Eclipse which was sized to take 3 1/4 inch by 4 1/4 inch images on glass plates. The second best known model, the # 3 Eclipse, was sized for 4 1/2 inch by 6 1/2 inch plates. Clearly, these cameras were marketed to children and beginners as the cameras had few features, were simply constructed, and were of low cost. By all advertising accounts, these cameras were only sold as part of an entire kit for the amateur photographer. These kits contained all the items needed for the user to take and develop their own images. Horsman's ads boasted, "A child ten years old can make a picture."

"Eclipse" must have been a favorite marketing word for Horsman as he also sold a Tennis Raquet called the "Eclipse." See <http://www.shs.d211.org/science/faculty/TJF/etext/Sportech/history%20pages/tennisrk/WebPage-TennisRackets.html>

The earliest known advertisement for cameras from Horsman is located at Ake Borgstrom's site. See <http://www.photographica.nu/hors235ad.htm>

This ad, from 1887, describes an "Eclipse" camera, with an "imitation morocco" leather covering, unlike the #2 and # 3 Eclipse mentioned above with varnished wood bodies. The simple box camera described in this ad, unknown to most collectors, has been tentatively identified. Veteran collector of rare antique cameras, Peter Schultz, notes that he has seen three of these cameras (one part of an entire kit) over the years, and is fairly certain the camera shown below is the same camera described in the 1887 ad [thanks to Rob Niederman for this lead]. The construction and build details seem to be very "Horsman-esque." Common sense would suggest this camera should be called the "#1 Horsman Eclipse."

1 Horsman Eclipse ? (image source: unknown)



More data supporting that this is the # 1 Eclipse is the fact that the better known and more thoroughly advertised # 2 Horsman Eclipse, was not seen in ads until late 1888 and the # 3 Eclipse in 1889. Rob

Niederman's Site, displays an 1892 ad regarding "Horsman's Eclipse Outfits." The camera sketched in that ad shows a camera with bellows and looks to be a # 3 Eclipse camera. See <http://www.antiquewoodcameras.com/hors-adv.htm>.

It is interesting to note that many advertisements for cameras in the 1880-1900 period were simple drawings and frequently looked differently from the actual camera being sold. I think there are a few reasons for this - but the main one being that retailers of these items might have changed the exact model they were selling over time and rather than updating their ads, which would be costly, they just showed a basic "representation" of the item and it allowed them to use the same ad. This seems especially true for Horsman as most of his ads varied, sometimes significantly, from the actual cameras sold.

An advertisement from 1890, posted on Larry Pierce's site at <http://www.fiberg.com/cam/misc/horec.htm> shows yet another "Eclipse Outfit." Interestingly this ad shows what most collectors know to be the # 3 Eclipse. However, if you look closely, the ad displays a camera with an adjustable lensboard. Most # 3 Eclipse cameras in camera collections do not have a lensboard. See: <http://www.antiquewoodcameras.com/horsman.htm> for a clear example of this, along with Horsman's smaller # 2 Eclipse model.

An original wood box for the Eclipse # 3 camera (image courtesy of www.nationalcamera.com).



Larry Pierce speculates at <http://www.fiberg.com/cam/misc/horec.htm> that there were two styles of the # 3 Eclipse. One made of cherry with no lensboard nor swing, an another model made of mahogany with swing and lensboard (as shown in his ad). Larry has discovered an important variation, however I would modify his thoughts by saying there are 3 versions of the # 3 Eclipse:

Version 1: # 3 Eclipse with no lensboard (see <http://www.fiberg.com/cam/misc/horec.htm>)

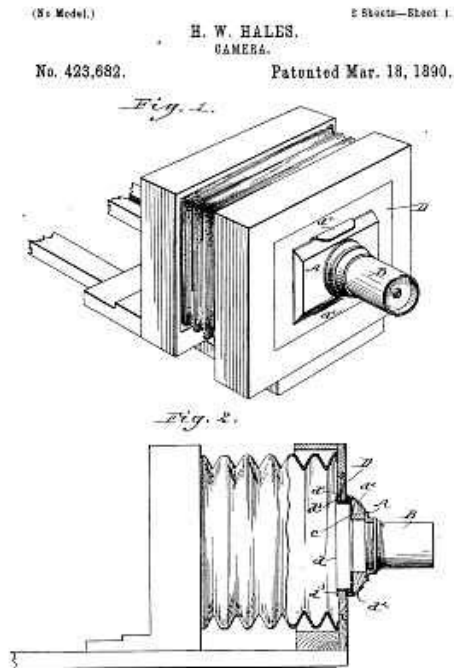
Version 2: # 3 Eclipse with lensboard (<http://www.fiberg.com/cam/misc/horecno3.htm>)

Version 3: # 3 Eclipse with lensboard and swing adjustments - PRESENTED BELOW



Recently discovered, this rare variation, which is shown in the following ad (<http://www.fiberq.com/cam/misc/horecno3.htm>) is stamped with the patent date of March 18, 1890. This refers to patent No. 423,682, which was registered to Henry W. Hales and assigned to our friend, E.I. Horsman.

The patent drawing is shown below:



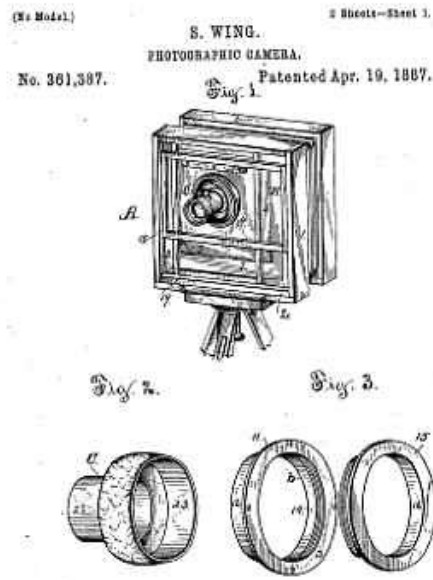
The patent describes a "universal front" lens mount to supply for cameras, "whereby the lens may be readily adjustable in any direction....at any angle."

The entire lensboard, **in the patent**, has the ability to slide left to right (as shown), or with a twist of the beveled edged lensboard-main lensboard connection, the ability to slide in any direction. This would allow for infinite incremental rise and fall lens adjustments, in all directions. What is unusual about Hales patent is the fact that the lensboard on my camera is not adjustable in every direction. The lens board slides left to right, and is infinitely adjustable along that path, but it does not rotate in all directions as described in

the patent. I can only speculate that it was either too expensive to manufacture or that my camera just doesn't have all of the patent's features.



A variation on Hales' design that was even more complicated, and certainly more expensive to manufacture, was Simon Wing's patented "ball and socket" lens mount of Patent No. 361,387. This patent was dated a few years before the Hales lensboard design.



At this point, the Horsman Camera story ends. But is the story over ?

No. Questions remain:

Can we absolutely identify the # 1 Eclipse box camera ?

Who manufactured the Eclipse cameras ?

Why the uncommon, for the U.S., image formats ?

Does a Hale lensboard exist with 360 degree adjustability as suggested in the patent ?

Why didn't Hales lensboard become more popular ? Its simple and seems to work well.

*Collector's Guide to Horsman Dolls, 1865-1950 by Don Jensen