

## The Kosmic Rod Years:

In the winter of 1890, Loman Hawes had designed and built an "improved" version of Leonard's bamboo-tapering machine, and soon the men began tooling up with the intention of making high quality rods for the trade. Their work caught the eye of one Albert Goodwill Spalding, a fine baseball pitcher with the Chicago White Stockings, who in 1876 started his own sporting goods outlet in Chicago, A. G. Spalding & Bros. By 1889, Spalding's business was a huge success, yet because he was still not competitive in the lucrative area of fishing tackle, the new startup rod making company, known collectively as Thomas, Edwards, and Hawes, was approached by the Chicago retailer (he had just opened a store in New York) within months of branching out on their own. Spalding agreed to bankroll a rod concept unlike anything seen to date; exotic in design, eye-catching in appearance, with tapers that, for the period, were cutting edge. He made an "exclusive" deal with the trio of makers, calling their output "The Kosmic Rod." Spalding had the name trademarked by March 1890, and the boys were very much in business.

Their new line of Kosmic rods, well advertised by Spalding at a price of \$25, were an immediate triumph. They carried a new, unmistakable, swaged ferrule design, with a waterproofing sleeve (Leonard still had the patent on his soldered water tight ferrule, patented October 26, 1875) made of a newly discovered product called celluloid, or "xylonite," and a celluloid reel seat filler that had the appearance of ivory. Spalding wanted a complete line of rods, bait, salmon, trout and boat rods, and the boys produced numerous models, some with nickel silver reel seats, yet all at an extremely high level of excellence. For reasons that are still not clear, Loman Hawes decided to leave the company within a year. Some have suggested poor health, but his departure may have been part of the reason that Ed Payne scurried back to the Central Valley-Highland Mills (the homesick Hannah Payne did not like the harsh Down East winters) area from Bangor. It is clear that Payne fortuitously had many of the machinist skills that also distinguished Loman Hawes, and when he was hired on, the name of the firm then changed to Thomas, Edwards and Payne. It may have been a case of good timing for Ed Payne, for when he moved back to New York State in late 1891, his employment now relatively secure, he built a house on Pine Hill in Highland Mills, in anticipation of a family

Business was booming. The men designed an eye-catching array of finely knurled, distinctive reel seat hardware, with the celluloid filler, and an art nouveau styled logo, all of which gave a fresh look to the Kosmic rod, born of a sense of style and genius. Albert Spalding proudly entered his Kosmic line of rods, some with highly ornate silver and gold fittings, in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (the buildings covered over 600 acres), winning the Award of Highest Merit, beating out an impressive line of Leonard rods that were also on exhibit. It is the high point for the Kosmic name, this just weeks after the first ominous signs of trouble in the banking industry in early 1893 due to rampant speculation and the over-building of railroads. It was the beginning of a crippling depression. Soon, few members of the angling public were in a mood to

buy expensive fishing rods, and a year later Mr. Spalding, who had had his fun, sold the company to U. S. Net and Twine Co. (which was financed by oil magnate, Charles M. Pratt) that had recently opened a retail store on lower Broadway in New York City, also with a factory in Brooklyn. The new owners insisted that the Kosmic rod shop be relocated to their large Brooklyn facility at the Self-Winding Clock Co.<sup>i</sup> Ed Payne's house was less than 500 yards from the Highland Mills train station, but it remained an arduous trip to Brooklyn for the rod makers who traveled for over two hours each way before they could begin work. It would not be many months before the Kosmic Rod Co. would be felled by events.

By the summer of 1895, Eustis Edwards left the now struggling Brooklyn rod-making firm for points west. It was certainly not the time for Ed Payne to run away from responsibility. His first child, Tula Elsie Payne, was born in 1892, and his second, James Arthur Payne was due in February of 1894. Payne needed the work, so he continued to commute to Brooklyn almost every day on a spur of the Erie Railroad to make the Kosmic line, and the less expensive "Walton" models that had been produced almost from the beginning. To his credit, Payne rode the train to Brooklyn until well into 1897 when he lost his last original partner, Fred Thomas, who was thankful to be returning to Maine. It was over, and Ed Payne knew it. He too left the daily grind of the train ride to Brooklyn to others, but not before buying the Kosmic Rod Co., and the key piece of machinery, the beveler. The demise of the Kosmic Rod Co. signaled a new beginning for Edward Payne and his family.

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