

**A**n early maker of surveying instruments in Cincinnati, Ohio was **Hermann Pfister** (1847-1911). Born in Schaffhausen, Switzerland, he migrated to the United States at some time between 1868 and 1870, joining a brother in Missouri, with whom he lived for a time. He moved to Cincinnati, where he had established himself by 1870 on 5th Street as a maker of mathematical instruments.

In the next several years he married Mary Buchanan and a son, William Henry, was born in 1875. Pfister worked alone until 1877 or 1878, and then purchased the instrument-making business of Rasselas Prince Whitcomb (1808-1884), who had become too old to continue it and thereafter retired to Florida. Whitcomb was a native of Potsdam, New York and had worked as a civil engineer and surveyor in government employment in Wisconsin before moving to Cincinnati where he began to manufacture mathematical instruments in about 1851.

Pfister continued as a manufacturer of surveying and engineering instruments at 119 West 5th Street. By 1911 he was again working alone, advertising "Architects Levels and Inventors Models" in addition to surveying and engineering instruments. His son was also listed as an instrument maker in the city directory for 1895. In 1905 William Henry Pfister became foreman of his father's shop and succeeded to the business after his father died. The firm name was changed to his own from 1912.

Theodolites made by Pfister are included in the collections of the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, and of the Butler County Historical Society in Hamilton, Ohio.

Mr. Herbert K. Brown of Brick, New Jersey owns a brass transit bearing the inscription "**Sturm Maker Indianapo-**

lis” on the upper side and “Herm. Pfister Cincinnati” on the underside. The name of “Sturm” does not appear in available records as an independent instrument maker and presumably he was either a craftsman employed in Pfister’s shop or a contractor from whom Pfister purchased instruments. The instrument is equipped with its original oak field case bearing the trade card:

HERM. PFISTER

Manufacturer of

Engineers

Levels, Transits, and Theodolites

also

COMPASSES

Architects and Builders Levels

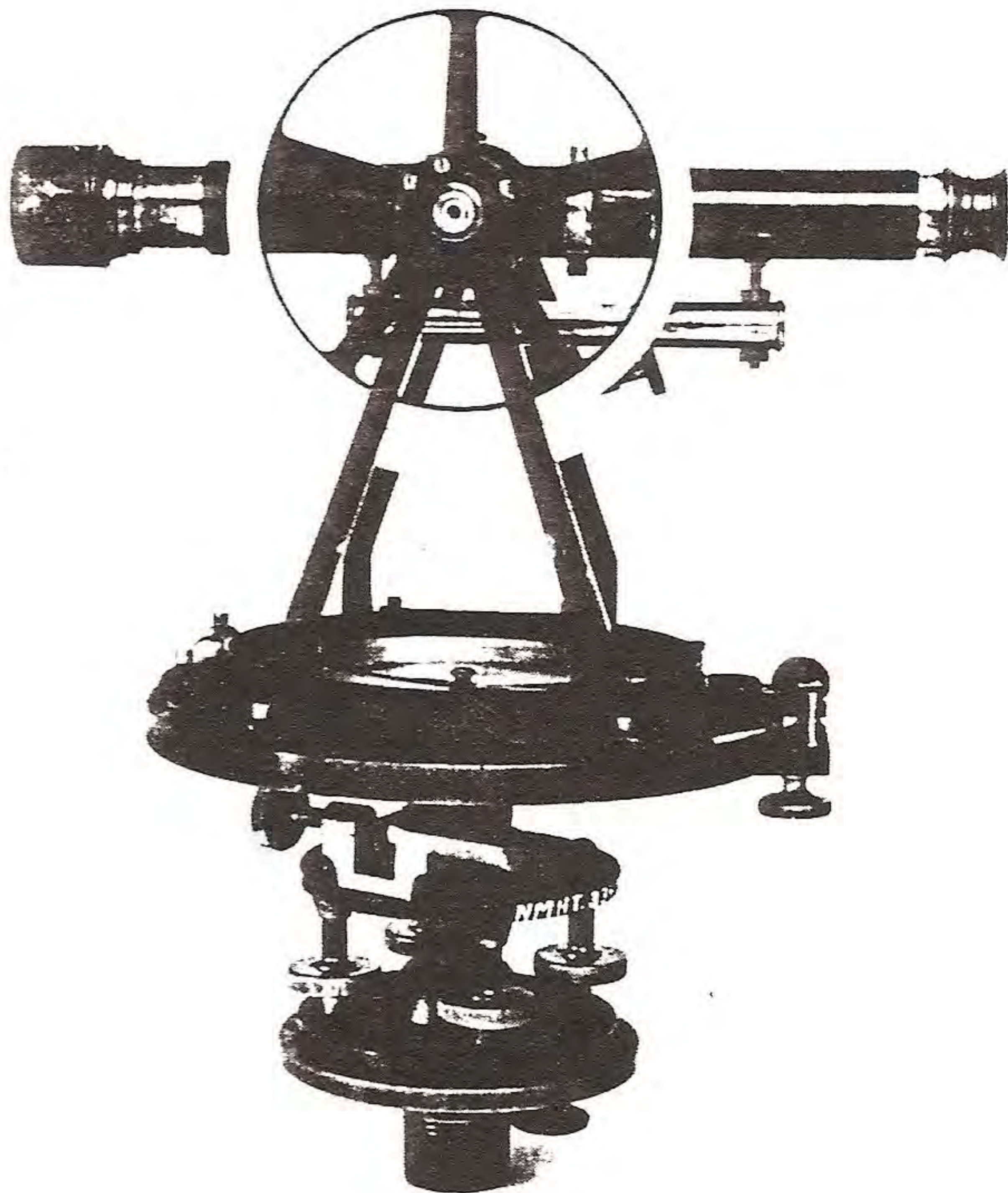
Rods, Steel Tapes and Chains

Repairing Promptly Attended to

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Telephone, Main 2819 Cincinnati

- Cooke



Theodolite made by Hermann Pfister of Cincinnati, Ohio. Dial inscribed "Herm. Pfister for L. M. Prince" and "Cincinnati, O." Natural and black oxidine finish, 5-inch silvered dial, 12.7 cm., scope 25.4 cm., 31.7 cm. overall height. Courtesy of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.