

THE HAGGERS, BALTIMORE INSTRUMENT MANUFACTURERS

by Dale R. Beeks

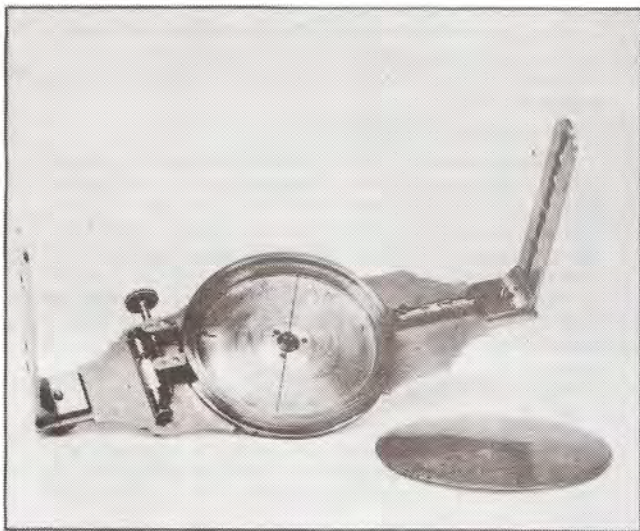
This family of Baltimore instrument manufacturers began with workings of Benjamin King Hagger (1769-1834). First listed in the Boston directory in 1789 as a mathematical instrument maker, Benjamin moved to Baltimore around the year 1816 or 1817. At least two of Benjamin King Hagger's instruments are known in private collections. One is a wooden semi-circumferentor signed, "Made & sold by Benjamin K. Hagger, Boston". Another later instrument that dates after 1816 is a brass plane compass signed, "Benjamin K. Hagger, Baltimore".

One of his two sons, William G. Hagger was born in Boston in the 1800. His other son, John W. Hagger (1806-1858) was taken into partnership with his father around the year 1824. The Baltimore directory lists "Benjamin K. Hagger and Son" from 1824-1838. No listings for a partnership arose between the two brothers after the death of their father in 1834. From 1842 to 1861 the Baltimore directories list, "Hagger & Bro", as mathematical instrument makers.

Sometime during the short span of years between 1834 and 1842, John W. Hagger was probably in business for himself. A surveyor's vernier compass was located with an internal vernier and decoratively engraved face signed, "J.W. Hagger, Baltimore". No listings or instruments signed by the elder brother, William G. Hagger, are known to exist. Listings for various other Haggars, including a James S. listed in the Baltimore directories until 1875, may represent yet another generation of Hagger instrument makers in Baltimore.

A Hagger Bro's vernier compass is located at Cornell University School of Civil Engineering, Ithaca, N.Y.

A surveyor's vernier compass with an internal vernier, signed, "J.W. Hagger, Baltimore". 1834-1842. Private collection.



Benjamin King Hagger

Benjamin King Hagger (c. 1769–1834) was the scion of two well-known families of instrument makers in New England, so it is not surprising that he worked in the same craft.

It is believed that Hagger was born in Newport, Rhode Island, about 1769, the son of William Guyse Hagger and of a sister of Benjamin King. Although his father made instruments—at first in partnership with Benjamin King, and then working alone—in Newport at least as late as 1776, the family appears to have moved after the Revolution. William Guyse Hagger's name did not appear in the 1790 census of Newport, and it is presumed that he moved with his family to Boston.

Benjamin King Hagger was listed in the first city directory of Boston in 1789 as “a mathematical instrument maker” with an address on Ann Street; he was only 20 years of age at this time.

On November 10, 1793, Benjamin King Hagger, “mathematical instrument maker,” purchased land with buildings on Prince Street near Snow Hill Street from one Peter Greene. Two years later, on December 1, 1795, Hagger, now listed simply as a “merchant,” purchased a brick house, a wooden house, and a shed with land from William Ballard, a tailor of Framingham and an heir of Samuel Ballard. The property was located on the east side of North Street, south of Mill Creek. At the time of purchase, Hagger mortgaged the property to Ballard, and also mortgaged to him the house and land previously purchased from Greene.

Hagger was listed as a ship chandler in the following year when on March 24, 1796, he deeded part of his land on Prince Street to William and George Hillman, minors.

On June 22, 1796, three months later, Hagger, now listed as “mathematical instrument maker, and ship-chandler” deeded to a mariner named Thomas Wallis a house and land that formed part of his original purchase near Copp's Hill from Peter Greene. Then on July 21, 1796, he purchased from William Ballard all his right to the brick house and land on North Street (Ann Street), at the same time mortgaging the property to William Ballard, Jr., of Framingham. This mortgage was cancelled on April 11, 1798.¹¹²

These negotiations took place before marriage. A report of the Record Commissioners of Boston, states that “William King Hagger of Boston and Mehitable Ballard of Framingham were

¹¹² Land records on Benjamin King Hagger listed in Thwing Catalogue, Massachusetts Historical Society.

married October 6, 1796.” The entry appears to be in error because the marriage intentions had read “Benjamin King Hagger.” It is presumed that Mehitable was the daughter of William Ballard, the tailor of Framingham, from whom Hagger had bought his house on Ann Street, south of Mill Creek.¹¹³

Benjamin King Hagger is listed in the city directory of Boston for 1798 as a “mathematical instrument maker” on Ann Street. This, however, is the last listing for his name in Boston, as his name does not appear in the 1803 or subsequent directories.

Shortly after 1798 Hagger appears to have left Boston together with his wife, and it is probable that he established himself as an instrument maker in another Massachusetts community, at present unknown. In about 1816 Hagger moved with his family to Baltimore and continued his instrument-making business.

The records of the 1850 Federal census of Baltimore indicate that two of Hagger’s sons, John W. and William G. Hagger, had been born in 1800 and 1806 respectively, in Massachusetts, presumably in the community to which Hagger had moved from Boston before moving once more to Baltimore.

According to Matchett’s Baltimore directory for 1824, Hagger was a “mathematical and optical instrument maker” with a shop at 57 South Street. His advertisement in the directory stated that he

Respectfully acquaints his fellow citizens that he executes all orders in the line of his business with punctuality and confidently professes to give satisfaction to his employers, from the experience of a regular apprenticeship and 37 years practice.

This indicates that Hagger completed his apprenticeship in 1787, when he was 18, and since then had been established in his own business or had worked for another as a journeyman instrument maker. His first advertisement in the Boston directory appeared in 1789, wherein his shop was listed as being on Ann Street.

Hagger died in Baltimore on November 8, 1834, at the age of 65, after a residence of 18 years in that city.¹¹⁴

Thus far only one instrument by Hagger has been found—a wooden surveying instrument or semicircumferentor (fig. 59). It is in the possession of the writer.

¹¹³ Marriage Document no. 101, Report of the Record Commissioners of Boston, p. 298.

¹¹⁴ *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, November 9, 1834.

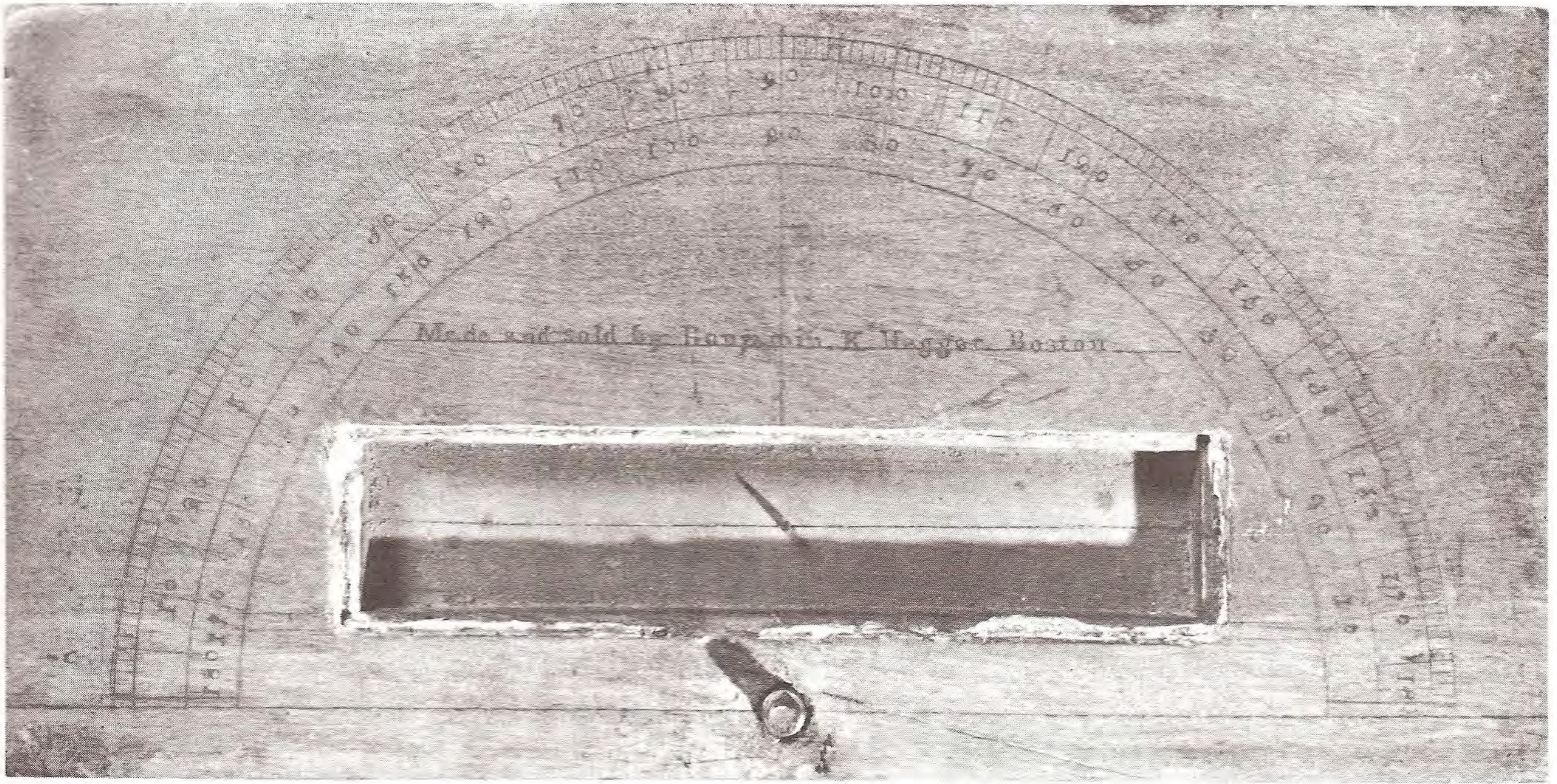


Figure 59.—Wooden graphometer made by Benjamin King Hagger (c.1769–1834) of Boston and Baltimore. Made of yellow birch, with the name and gradations and lines incised into the wood by means of tiny punches, and filled. Trough compass; sighting bars mounted on a swivelling brass bar; collapsible tripod made of maple. In collection of the writer.