

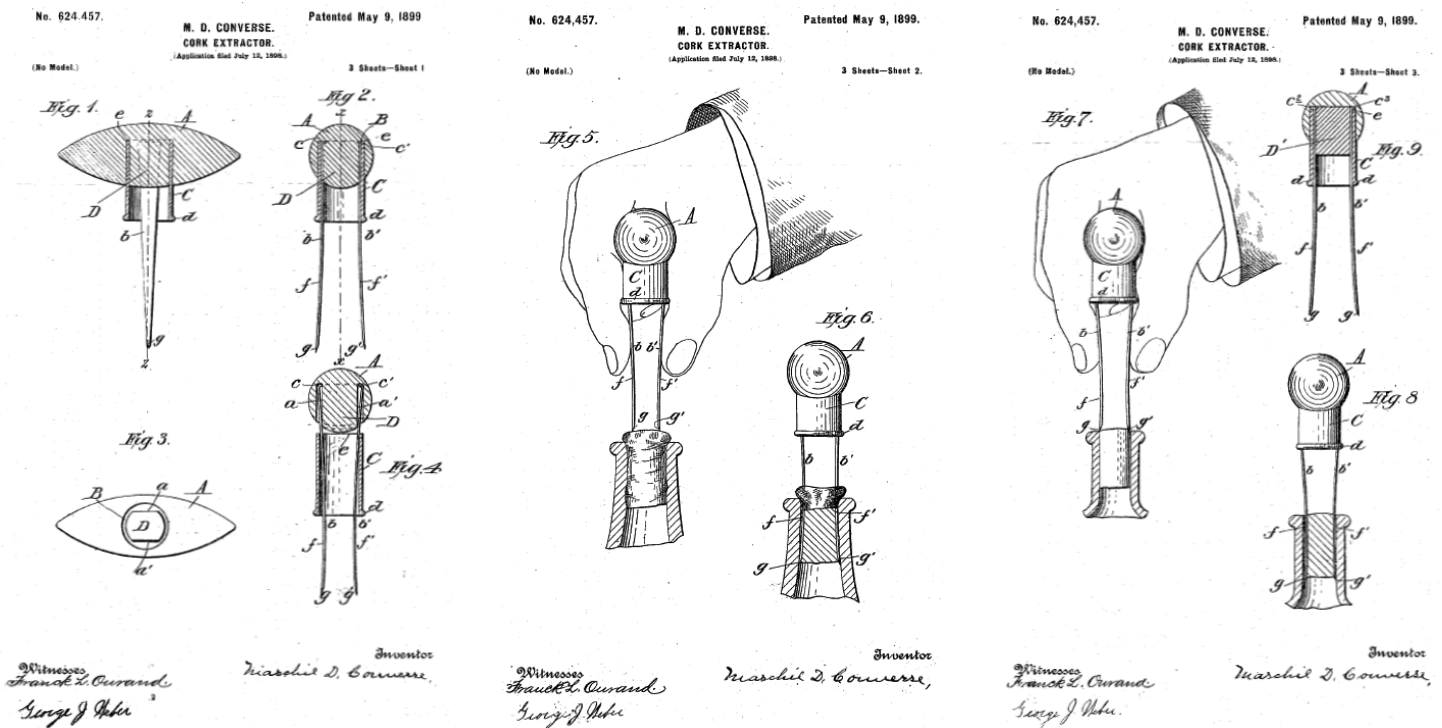
Just For Openers January-December 2025 1

Patent Poaching 1899 Style Maschil D. Converse By Don Thornton

Maschil D. Converse was a New York City patent attorney and prolific inventor, being granted at least 28 patents from 1875 to 1903. He was awarded seven different patents for nail extractors or pullers, three for monkey wrenches, three for improvements in wood planes and four for jar lids or caps.

There also were a couple of miter boxes, a boring tool, a rivet and a plumb bob, among others. But he is best known for his non-worm "cork extractor," Patent No. 624,457 dated May 9, 1899 which, to put it indelicately, he poached from one of his clients.

Seven years earlier, Converse represented Lucien C. Mumford of New York City in Mumford's application for a two-prong "cork extractor." Mumford was awarded Patent No. 474,480 on May 10, 1892 with the patent papers identifying Converse as his attorney.

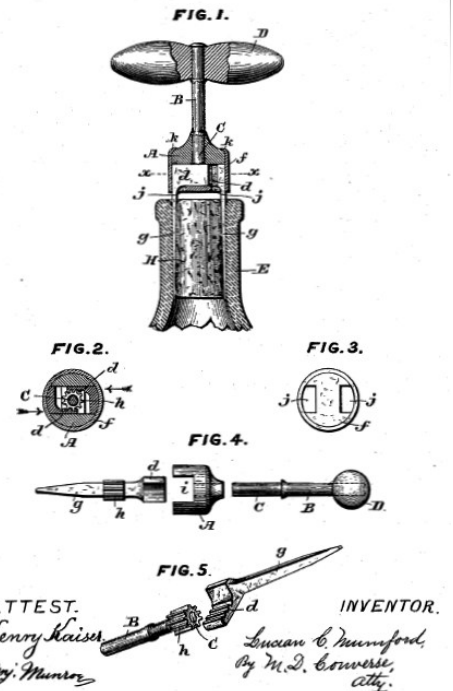


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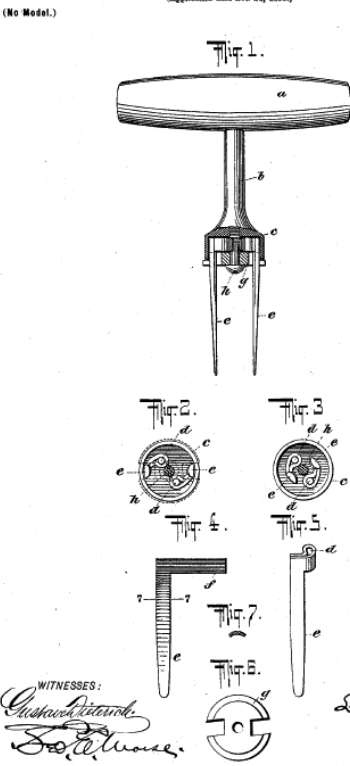
(No Model.)
L. C. MUMFORD.
CORK EXTRACTOR.
No. 474,480. Patented May 10, 1892.



Mumford obviously was aware of Converse's transgression but it is not known why there was no infringement action. However, when Mumford applied for a new, improved extractor patent in 1900 he hired a new attorney, in effect firing Converse. And Mumford let Converse and any other potential cork extractor inventors know that this style of cork extractor was his idea.

No. 655,725. Patented Aug. 14, 1900.
L. C. MUMFORD.
CORK EXTRACTOR.
(Application filed Dec. 20, 1899.)

"My invention relates to cork extractors, and has for its object to improve the Mumford type of cork-extractor," he stated in his papers for Patent No. 655,725.



WITNESSES:
Cluskey & ...
W. A. House

INVENTOR
Lucian C. Mumford
BY *Brisson & ...*
ATTORNEY



Another bit of potential infringement evidence: Mumford's 1892 patent was two pages long, one for drawings and one for text. By contrast, Converse's 1899 patent was a whopping six pages long, three for drawings and three for text – raising the question of over compensation to obscure the poaching?

Going cork to cork with the Mumford extractor, the Converse model is easily the sales leader, based on how many appear on the collectibles market today. But it would be of little consolation to Converse, who only seven years after getting his extractor patent filed for bankruptcy.

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The *New York Herald* reported on March 16, 1906:

Maschil D. Converse, merchant expert of No. 141 Broadway, has filed a petition in bankruptcy, with liabilities \$2,921 and no assets. Mr. Converse began business in this city in 1870 as a dealer in machinery specialties, was afterward in the publishing business and then agent for manufacturers. He is the inventor of a number of specialties in his line.

Two years later Converse went mail order. In a series of five different small classified ads appearing in dozens of newspapers, mostly in the East, Converse touted American Active Artisans' Company, New York City, of which he was president.

Readers were told that if they wanted to make money, contact American Active Artisans' Company. "Positively many chances to make a fortune and no risks incurred," said one ad. It also promised "large cash awards ... for inventions, improvements and discoveries of every sort, wanted by hundreds of responsible clients." There was one catch: "member investment \$10."

Are You Ingenious?

Then we offer you opportunity to compete for large cash awards we are paying all the time for inventions, improvements and discoveries of every sort, wanted by hundreds of responsible clients. We tell you what to work on, how much cash will be paid for it and when you will get it. Only organized business of the kind in the world. Positively many chances to make a fortune and no risks incurred. Membership investment \$10—larger investments accepted. Any investment, large or small, may, at your option, draw interest at 4 per cent. per annum besides dividends and be redeemable at par in cash through bank. Membership limited. Write to-day, **AMERICAN ACTIVE ARTISANS' COMPANY** (M. D. Converse, President), Hudson Terminal Buildings, New York.

In a 1913 catalog from the *Shapleigh Hardware Company*, they illustrate the Quick as a Wink (Converse patent) but also provide detailed instructions for use:

"QUICK AS A WINK"

Does not Injure the Cork

Directions



Take the Puller into the hand so that the handle rests in the palm, putting the thumb on one tine and the forefinger on the other. Adjust the tines to size of Cork by pressing thumb and forefinger together, insert the tines each side of the cork between Cork and Neck of Bottle, work the tines carefully below the bottom of the cork by pushing one tine then the other (a rocking motion). When the tines are well below the bottom of the cork turn the Puller around and around, at the same time pulling very gently. Around goes the Puller, Cork and all, and out rides the Cork on the tines and drops from the Puller without labor injury to cork or spilling contents.

Note: This ad, list (right) and pictures next page courtesy of Josef L'Africain

The ads, appearing in July and August of 1908, were a one shot deal running only once -- indicating there was little or no response.

WANTED—Wide awake inventors and skilled men with \$10 saved and brains to sell for cash. American Active Artisans Co., Hudson Terminal Bldg., New York. (3)—M662 19x

WANTED—Ingenious mechanics and others who read, observe, think and work and wish to make money. No matter where you are, whether employed or not, write for free information. American Active Artisans Co., Hudson Terminal Bldg., Church St., New York.

A GOLD MINE IN YOUR HEAD
Why Don't You Work It?
If you are ingenious and have \$100 or only \$10, or if not ingenious but have money to invest and want steady income, write to-day for free particulars. American Active Artisans Co., Terminal Building, 54 Church Street, New York.

CAN you invest things? Have you \$10 spot cash or more? Will you invest it to get 10% to 50% dividends with opportunities to earn money or make a fortune investing besides? If your answer to each question is yes, then write for free information; otherwise inclose 10c postage. Be fair and prompt, please. Full particulars mailed to anyone on earth sending postage. AMERICAN ACTIVE ARTISANS CO., Hudson Terminal, 54 Church St., New York.

List of Advertising Converse Cork Extractors

- ALAMEDA COMPANY, WINE AND BRANDIES, 104 TREMONT STREET, BOSTON, MASS.
- CH RITTER, DETROIT, MICH, SOLE PROP'RS, WESTMINSTER RYE WHISKEY (marked across the handle--wooden sheath)
- COMPLIMENTS OF GOPHER GULCH WINE CELLARS WALNUT CREEK CAL. (marked across handle, a more recent production, I am guessing 1960's)
- COMPLIMENTS OF FRIEDMAN, KEILER & CO., DISTILLERS OF BROOK HILL
- COMPLIMENTS OF MISSOURI WINE & LIQUOR CO.
- CW GRIFFING, WHOLE SALE LIQUOR DEALER, FARRELL, P.A.
- FRANK RIPLEY WHISKEY BEST FOR FAMILY USE, L. HEINEMAN JAMESTOWN N.Y.
- GREEN VALLEY WHISKEY, CASEY BROTHERS, SCRANTON, PA
- HOLIHAN BROS, WHOLESALERS TO THE PEOPLE, LAWRENCE, MASS
- ELMORE BOURBON - ARTHUR LEHMANN & CO. - PEORIA, ILL
- JERSEY WHISKEY - ARTHUR LEHMANN & CO. - PEORIA, ILL
- LEHMANN'S RYE - ARTHUR LEHMANN & CO. - PEORIA, ILL.
- MC CORMICK'S STRAIGHT WHISKEY
- MURRAY HILL CLUB WHISKEY, JOS. A. MAGNUS & CO, CINCINNATI, O.
- THREE RIVERS - BONDED-IN-BOTTLE - H. WEIL & SONS, PADUCAH, KENTUCKY

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