

Just For Openers January-December 2025 1

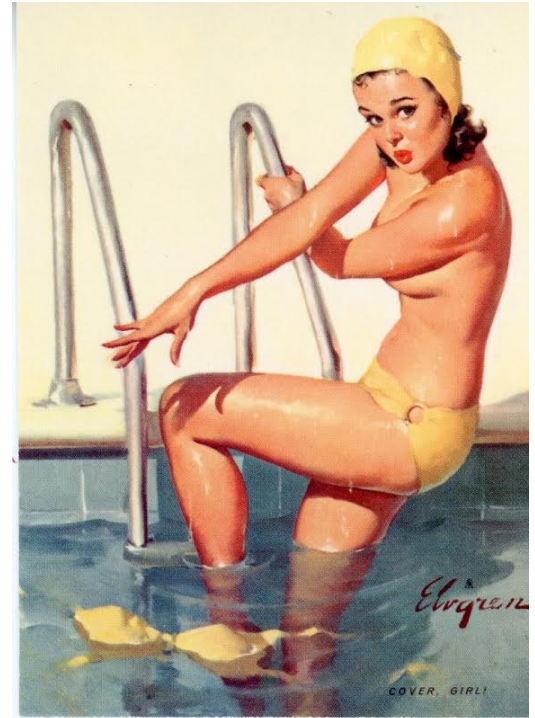
Inventor Martin E. Trollen, A Brown & Bigelow Brander By Don Thornton

Everything Martin E. Trollen patented could be branded with an advertisement -- with one exception. At the time, Trollen was, appropriately, vice president of Brown & Bigelow Corporation of St. Paul, Minnesota, one of the biggest manufacturers of branding novelties in the country.

From 1935 to 1949, Trollen was awarded at least 26 patents, all of which he assigned to B&B. Founded in 1896, B&B was first known for its branding calendars, ranging from Boy Scouts to pinups, including Gil Elvgren illustrations, before expanding its line to hundreds of items, such as bottle openers, letter openers, thimbles, playing cards, cigarette lighters, pens, pencils and leather novelties.

Trollen's first patent was awarded November 19, 1935, Design Patent 97,570, for a "combined key holder and bottle opener." As far as can be determined, this combo opener did not advance past the patent stage. However, there is a chance it was manufactured. In 1935 Trollen had clout in the company, with 15 years experience and working his way up to vice president.

Trollen's second patent definitely was manufactured and today is a prized collectible. Design Patent No. 98,486 was awarded to Trollen February 4, 1936 for a "combined bottle cap and opener." The wedge bottom had a rubber gasket to seal the bottle airtight. The broad top of the 3 1/4-inch device was perfect for advertising.



April 19, 1935. M. E. Trollen Des. 97,570
COMBINED KEY HOLDER AND
BOTTLE OPENER
Filed March 22, 1935

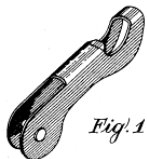


Fig. 1

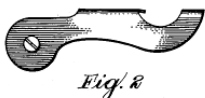


Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Inventor
Martin E. Trollen

354

Howard P. Fisher
Attorney

Feb. 4, 1936. M. E. Trollen Des. 98,486
COMBINED BOTTLE CAP AND OPENER
Filed March 22, 1935

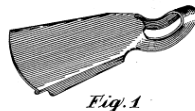


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

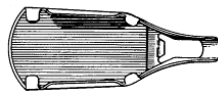


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

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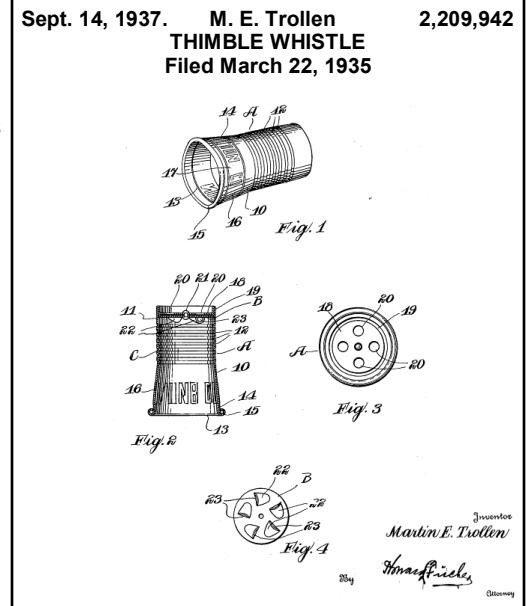


Trollen's other patents over the years included display and desk calendars (of course), a sewing kit, an ashtray, advertising thermometers, desktop cigarette lighters, a sleet scraper, letter openers, advertising pencils, and a thimble whistle.

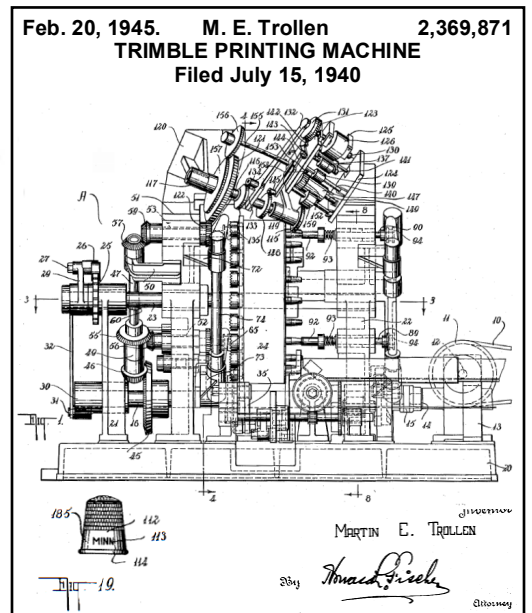
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The whistle patent was granted to Trolen September 14, 1937 No. 2,092,942. In his patent application he said the body portion of the whistle “is made in the form of a thimble” and is “designed to make a siren-like sound when air is forced through.” He also said it provides “a means of advertising having a space in the flared end upon which advertising may be embossed in any desired decorative manner.”



One of Trolen’s coolest inventions could not be branded – but it was made to brand. Patent No. 2,369,871 dated February 20, 1945 was awarded to Trolen for a “thimble printing machine.” The machine was specifically designed to print on plastic thimbles and apply “a coating of lacquer over the printing surface so that the surface of the printing will be protected.” The patent ran an astounding 12 pages long, seven pages of drawings and five pages of text, and the resulting machine(s) over the years must have produced billions of 1-inch thimbles with ads, including one marked: **PARTICULAR PEOPLE PREFER READ-BENZOL CLEANERS - HE.4154.**



Trolen went to work for B&B in 1920 at the age of 24 and over the years advancing to veep. He applied for his last patent, a loose-leaf memo sheet holder, in 1944 but by the time it was granted in 1949, he was no longer with the company.

According to a news feature in the *Minneapolis Star* on July 1, 1955, Trolen was an inventor who was able to reinvent himself. He was “a man who figured the game was up eight years ago and had resigned himself to a back seat, careerwise,” the *Star* reported. “In 1947, tall (6-foot-1), sturdy (190 pounds) Martin E. Trolen,

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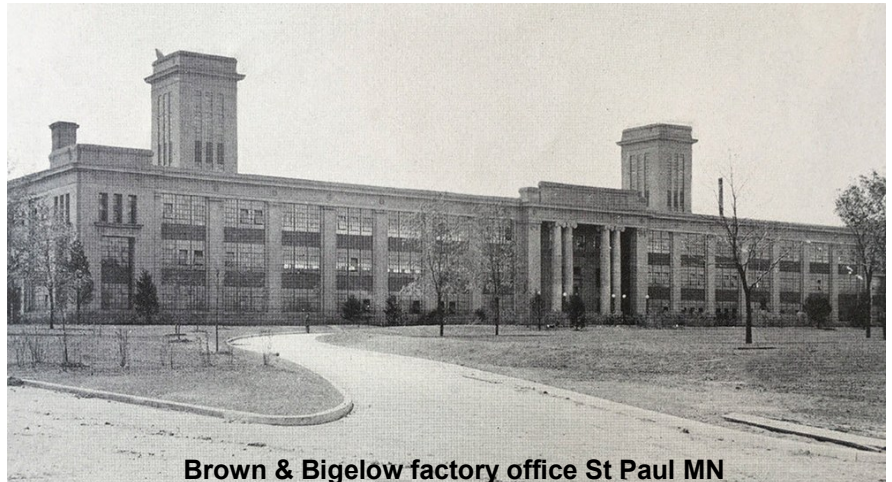
spent by the pressure of the war years, was suffering from a heart condition and nervous exhaustion. For weeks he was at death's door, was shuttled from hospital to hospital. Physicians persuaded him to resign from his \$50,000 plus a year job as vice president of manufacturing for Brown & Bigelow."

He followed their advice and for therapy took up boating on the St. Croix River. One thing led to another and at the time of the *Star* feature, Trolen was the force behind Trolen Marine Boat Works and its 4,000 feet of river frontage. "Boaters from Winona, La Crosse, the Twin Cities and as far away as St. Louis, Mo. patronize his facilities," the feature said. Trolen's new life on the river continued until his death at the age of 70 in 1966.

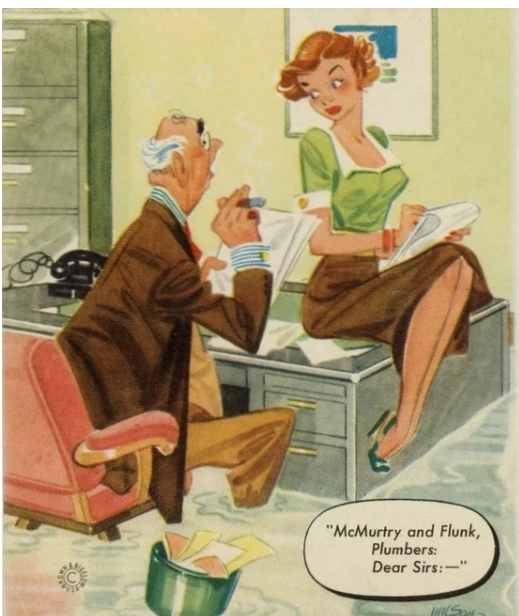
SIDEBAR

Brown & Bigelow was formed in 1896 by Hiram Brown, a printer, and Herbert H. Bigelow, a magazine and calendar salesman. Brown died in 1904 and Bigelow took full control of the company. According to one historical reference, Brown was "a man of frugal tastes and hard working habits who is said to have worn \$25 suits when he was three times a millionaire."

Bigelow also was a man of strong opinions. He was against unions and taxes, which he refused to pay. In 1924 he was convicted of evading federal taxes, fined \$10,000 and sentenced to three years in Leavenworth Penitentiary. He served the minimum eight months. In 1928, President Calvin Coolidge pardoned Bigelow, who had after his release developed a prisoner rehabilitation program at B&B, hiring hundreds of ex-cons.



Brown & Bigelow factory office St Paul MN



All Business Begins with the Sign...

You put your sign outside where all who pass may see. It tells them . . .

WHO YOU ARE WHERE YOU ARE WHAT YOU SELL

You also need your sign **INSIDE** . . . where people work, shop, eat, live and play.

You Can't BUY That Space

Only a QUALITY CALENDAR can win it and hold it for you 365 days of every year.

REPRESENTING

BROWN & BIGELOW

ST. PAUL 4, MINNESOTA

Creators of *Remembrance Advertising* Ideas