

[brands](#)[instruments](#)[features](#)[history](#)[contact](#)

Historical Timeline

The timeline below is an outline of the history of the Reynolds company and founder Foster A. Reynolds [item in *italics* are based on conjecture or unverified anecdotes].

Foster A. Reynolds (Early Career)

Foster A. Reynolds' contributions to the fine art of musical instrument manufacturing trace their roots back to the mid-1800's when renowned brassmen E. G. Wright, William Graves, Henry Esbach and Louis Hartman co-founded the Boston Musical Instrument Manufactory in 1869. In due course, they trained a very gifted craftsman named James W. York who later set up his own company in Grand Rapids, Michigan along with his brother. Established in 1882, the York Band Instrument Company quickly gained a foothold in the industry and was a major force at the turn of the century.

1884

Foster A. Reynolds was born in Ohio on December 29, 1884.

1903

Reynolds began an apprenticeship at York in 1903 at age 18. He trained and worked under the York brothers until he quickly began to make a name for himself and was approached by the [H.N. White Company](#) in Cleveland, Ohio ([5225 Superior Avenue](#)) to help design a small brass instrument line that would complement the outstanding King line of trombones.



1906

Reynolds left York in 1906 and joined H.N. White, soon becoming [Works Manager](#) and Superintendent of the factory floor. Reynolds' passion for instrument manufacturing innovation and quality was evident throughout his career at H.N. White, where he frequently consulted with physicists about improving the intonation and playing characteristics of brass instruments.

In his 30 years at H.N. White, Reynolds became one of the principal figures in the brass instrument manufacturing industry and eventually Vice President and General Manager of the H.N. White Company, helping build that company into a leading brass manufacturer.

F.A. Reynolds Company (Cleveland)

1936

Perhaps tired of answering to the White family, Reynolds left H.N. White in 1936 at age 52 and founded the F.A. Reynolds Company at [2845 Prospect Avenue](#) in Cleveland, Ohio. Operating his own company afforded Reynolds the luxury of pursuing new innovations and ideas on a much smaller scale. One goal of the new company seems to have been to find ways to make great horns that were a little more affordable; another was to develop better harmony horns and low brass instruments.

"With an established reputation in the industry and access to skilled technical assistance in Cleveland, Reynolds was able to experiment with design improvements in his own factory and to produce tubas, sousaphones, French horns, baritones and bass trombones that were rapidly recognized for superior workmanship and accoustical properties." (Richard Dundas, *"Twentieth Century Brass Musical Instruments in the United States"*)

While the new company quickly established a reputation in the brass industry for superior low brass instruments, their small brass soon became equally renowned, building on Foster Reynolds' previous experience designing cornets and trumpets for the H.N. White Company.

Late 1930s

Foster Reynolds lent his expertise along with Renold Schilke, Vincent Bach and Elden Bengt to the design of the [Martin Committee](#) trumpet, which went on to dominate the jazz trumpet market from the late 1940's to the 1960s.



1939-1945

Due to the quality of Reynolds' brass instruments, the United States Armed Forces awarded considerable contracts to the Reynolds company to provide instruments for the USAF service bands during World War II (1939-1945). These contracts allowed Reynolds to continue focusing on instrument production when many other manufacturers, e.g. Olds and Conn, switched to making wartime products.

In addition to the standard Reynolds engravings, instruments made for USAF service bands also bear a large "U.S." mark near the rim of the bell.

1940s

After selling the Ohio Band Instrument division to the recently relocated Scherl & Roth company, the F.A. Reynolds Co. expanded their instrument lineup with the budget-priced [Emperor](#) trumpet, cornet and tenor trombone in an effort to reach the high-volume student and community band markets. Foster Reynolds' personal design efforts with his company culminated in the premium [Contempora](#) instruments, which were designed and produced in collaboration with musicians from the

The Ohio Band Instrument Co.

About the same time that Reynolds founded the F.A. Reynolds Co., he also established the Ohio Band Instrument Co. as a separate division exclusively targeting dealer sales in the school band market.

With the Regent brand of band instruments, Ohio Band competed directly with the Cleveland Band and American Standard student brands of H.N. White.

Ohio Band horns were produced in the same factory as F.A. Reynolds instruments at 2845 Prospect Avenue in Cleveland. [More...](#)

Cleveland Symphony Orchestra.

To bolster horn sales, Reynolds began working with Max Pottag of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on the development of a new French horn, the Reynolds Double Horn [Pottag Model](#), which was sold until the early 1960's.

Roth-Reynolds (Cleveland)

1946

After spending over ten years building and securing his company's place in the brass instrument industry, Foster Reynolds sold his company to [Heinrich Roth](#) and Max Scherl of the [Scherl & Roth](#) company ([1729 Superior Avenue](#), Cleveland, Ohio). The F.A. Reynolds Company became known as the Roth-Reynolds Instrument Company.

1950s

Under Roth-Reynolds, the use of high-profile artist and band director endorsements significantly increased as part of the marketing literature and advertising activities. Roth-Reynolds worked with several professional artists on signature models.

In addition to Pottag, one of the highest profile endorsers was [Leonard Smith](#), one of the great band directors of the 20th century and a great playing legend on the cornet. In the 1950's, he was the director of the Detroit Concert Band as well as conductor of the Blossom Festival Concert Band during summer music festivals in Cleveland.

Roth-Reynolds also established a relationship with [James Chambers](#) of the New York Philharmonic to design and endorse a new French horn, the Contempora Double Horn [Chambers Model](#), much as been done with Pottag a little over a decade earlier.

Roth-Reynolds began working on the "Chambers" horn in the mid-1950s and announced the design in 1958. The project was short-lived as the relationship between the Reynolds company and Chambers ended in the early 1960's after a contract dispute regarding royalty payments and the company's expectations of Chambers' level of promotional activity. [More...](#)

1954

Roth-Reynolds General Manager and Abilene-native James E. Caldwell opened a band instrument repair operation in Abilene, Texas under the name of Caldwell Products. It is unclear what the full scope of this early operation was, but seems apparent that it was never as successful as planned due to the lack of experienced brass craftsmen.

Mr. Reynolds Back at Work...

In 1948, [F.E. Olds & Son](#) was purchased by its long-time distributor Chicago Musical Instrument Company (CMI), who began planning the expansion of the post-war catalog to include baritone horns, french horns, sousaphones and tubas in addition to the trumpets, cornets and trombones that Olds was reknowned for.

CMI founder Maurice H. Berlin coaxed Foster Reynolds out of retirement and sent him to Los Angeles with a directive to tool up and manufacture the full line of brass.

One of Reynolds' first projects at Olds was to design and produce the new Ambassador line of student horns [*with his brother, Harper (1892-1975)*]; later he tackled designing the premium Mendez model with Rafael Mendez.

As the plant supervisor and general manager of Olds in the 1950's, Reynolds pioneered large-scale manufacturing techniques for brasswinds and mentored Zigmant Kanstul, who joined Olds in 1953.

1955

Max Scherl retired, leaving Heinrich Roth as the President and owner of Scherl & Roth, the F.A. Reynolds Company and the Ernst Heinrich Roth Company.

1957-1959

The Reynolds catalog underwent some significant changes and introductions in the late 1950's. As discussed above, the Chambers model horn was released in the fall of 1958, as was the new Contempora "Stereophonic" bass trombone, the first commercially produced bass trombone with two valves permanently attached to the horn. The Stereophonic was designed in collaboration with Kauko Kahila (Boston Symphony, 1953-72) and Allen Ostrander (New York Philharmonic, 1946-75), who were already playing and endorsing the Contempora "Philharmonic" single-valve bass trombone.

When Reynolds passed away eight years later in 1960, Kanstul led the plant and remained at Olds until 1970 when he left to become manager of the nearby Bengel plant and eventually his own company, [Kanstul Musical Instruments](#).

After Kanstul left Olds, [Don Agard](#), a former F.A. Reynolds employee, ran operations until the company closed its doors in 1979.

The process of the design and production of the Chambers horn also led to the introduction of solid nickel silver model instruments to the Reynolds catalog. In addition to nickel silver versions of the Chambers and Pottag horns, Roth-Reynolds created the Argenta line of trumpet, cornet and tenor trombone as solid nickel silver versions of the respective standard Contempora instruments. The nickel silver Argenta lineup came out in 1959 and "was an immediate and sensational success" among band directors.

Contempora DIATONIC trumpets and cornets were rebranded "Renaissance" and the Professional label was renamed "Sterling", emphasizing the sterling silver models. The "Hi-Fi" trumpet, cornet and tenor trombone are introduced (cornet in 1957/58, trumpet and tenor trombone in 1959) as large-bore versions of the prior Professional brand instruments.

1960

Foster Reynolds died on July 18, 1960 in Orange County, California

Richards Music | RMC (Cleveland)**1961-1963**

The F.A. Reynolds Company became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Richards Music Corporation, owned by Paul Richards and financed in part by Wurlitzer. Reynolds became part of the "Roundtable of Musical Craftsmen" (RMC) along with Martin, Blessing and Flapjack Drums (all owned by Richards Music Corporation). Instruments produced by these companies during the Richards era all bear a RMC shield logo.

Under Richards Music, Reynolds introduced the [Medalist](#) line of student instruments, replacing the existing [Roth](#) student line. Some of the initial instruments were evidently produced in Elkhart, Indiana - most likely through a contract with Blessing (also part of the RMC) due to production or profit constraints in Reynolds' Cleveland plant.



It is during this timeframe that a contract dispute between James Chambers and Reynolds management over Chambers' royalty payments and expected level of promotional activity led Chambers to return to his Conn horn, forcing Reynolds to stop using his name on the Double French horn.

Evidently one of the first things Paul Richards did after forming RMC was to buy all twelve of his road reps new Nash station wagons. It was a foreboding of the problems that were soon to come, as Richards Music and the RMC dissolved in 1963 when owner Paul Richards went bankrupt.

F.A. Reynolds (Abilene)

1964

The assets of the F.A. Reynolds Instrument Company were purchased by Maurice Berlin and the Chicago Musical Instrument (CMI) company (see "**Mr. Reynolds Back at Work...**" above). At the time, CMI was one of the largest musical instrument distributors in the world and owned F.E. Olds, Lowrey Organs, Gibson Guitars and several other firms.



CMI moved Reynolds manufacturing operations from Cleveland to a "spacious ultra-modern building in Abilene, Texas. This [was] the world's newest musical instrument manufacturing facility with 90,000 square feet of plant area housing the best and most up-to-date equipment available." [1966 catalog] One report links this facility to the Caldwell Products factory established by James Caldwell and Roth-Reynolds in 1954.

The Reynolds catalog underwent dramatic consolidation at this time, with each instrument/brand listing, e.g. Contempora Trumpet, represented by a single model, TU-11, rather than many model variants previously produced.

One guess for this change is that it would have been more efficient (and profitable) for new owner CMI to train new workers on a single model horn and produce larger quantities in order to compete with the foreign horns being imported at that time into the student market.

[Serial numbers](#) were reset at 200,000 and instruments engraved with "Made in Abilene, Texas".

1969

CMI was purchased by conglomerate Ecuadorian Company Limited, a Panamanian corporation. A year later that company became Norlin Industries. Norlin was named for **Norton** Stevens, ECL president, and Maurice **Berlin**, CMI president.

F.E. Olds | F.A. Reynolds (Fullerton)

1970

Norlin moved production of Reynolds trombones, trumpets, cornets and french horns from Abilene to the Olds factory in Fullerton, California. In most cases, a basic horn would come off the production line and become either a Reynolds- or Olds-branded instrument based on detailing and finish -- compare the 1977 [Reynolds Contempora](#) trumpet to the 1977 [Olds Recording](#) model, the [Reynolds Emperor](#) trumpet to the [Olds Special](#) and the [Reynolds Medalist](#) to the [Olds Ambassador](#).



Reynolds instruments made in Fullerton are generally engraved with "Made in USA". Some low brass parts were produced in Fullerton and then shipped to Texas for assembly with other parts still being made in Abilene until the Reynolds plant was sold to Conn (see 1972).

In Fullerton, "the sales level of Reynolds instruments was maintained with emphasis on the established reputation for quality, combined with strategic introduction of special features like high-register models, first-valve trigger and even an ebony lacquer finish option on trumpets [[Onyx model](#)] at one time." (Richard Dundas, *Twentieth Century Brass Musical Instruments in the United States*)

1972

Norlin sold the Abilene plant to Conn, who moved their professional brasswind production from Elkhart, Indiana. Conn operated the plant until 1986 when production was moved to the former King plant in Eastlake, Ohio as part of the new [United Musical Instruments](#) (UMI) corporation (now Conn-Selmer). Conn historians are quite critical of the variable quality of the instruments produced during the Abilene operation.

1979

Finally unable to compete in the changing market dynamics of low-cost foreign competition and decreasing school budgets, production officially stopped at the Fullerton plant in July and all remaining equipment and parts were [auctioned off](#) in November.

At the auction, Allied Supply Corporation (now Getzen) purchased a ten year supply of all parts except for bugles. Selmer/ Bach purchased tooling for all marching brass and large horns, e.g. baritones, tubas, etc.



1980 - Present

The Olds and Reynolds trade names were purchased and are marketed by their [current owner](#) (P.J. Laplaca Assoc., Ltd.) with manufacturing based in Holland and other locations.

©2005 contempora corner -- all rights reserved