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**From the Selected Works of William B. Krohn**

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March, 2015

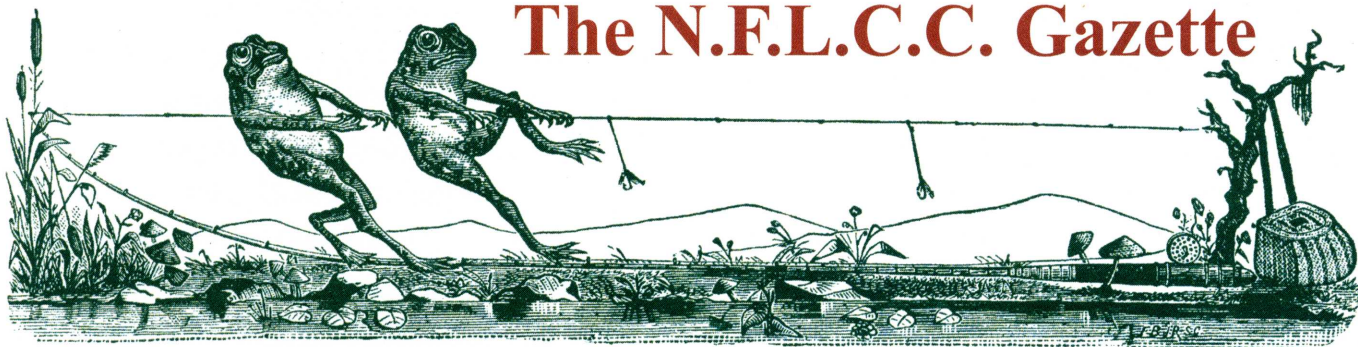
# The Lucerne Lure – an exceptionally rare Maine bait.

William B. Krohn



Available at: [https://works.bepress.com/william\\_krohn/58/](https://works.bepress.com/william_krohn/58/)

# The N.F.L.C.C. Gazette



Spring Issue © Copyright 2015

Volume 37 , No. 142 - March 2015

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# An Exceptionally Rare Maine Bait

William B. Krohn

In the past decade or so, numerous reference books about American fishing lures have been published. While the list is too extensive to reproduce here, it's easy enough to search the Internet to uncover many useful titles. These references are organized in many ways, including books that focus on defined time periods, individual manufacturers and specific lure types. Despite an impressive array of reference books about American fishing lures, one can still find lures—even patented lures—that are not mentioned in these books. One of these apparently uncatalogued lures (but as noted above, with so many lure books, I may have missed it) is the subject of this article—the Lucerne Lure.

The Lucerne Lure is named for Lucerne Lake, today called Phillips Lake and in earlier times known as Fitz or Fitts Pond. The Phillips family, the lake's modern namesake, built a home overlooking the lake in the early 1800s. The land had been granted to John Phillips for his military service in the Revolutionary War. Situated in a valley approximately 12 miles southeast of Bangor, Maine, Phillips Lake is some three square miles in size. It has a mean depth of 40 feet and a maximum depth of 98 feet, providing excellent habitat for cold water fishes, specifically lake trout, brook trout, and landlocked salmon. The lake has almost a dozen islands, and enough shallow water and edge habitat that it's also



Franklin W. Hobbs

inhabited by warm water fishes, including small-mouth bass and chain pickerel. All of these species readily strike spinner-type lures.

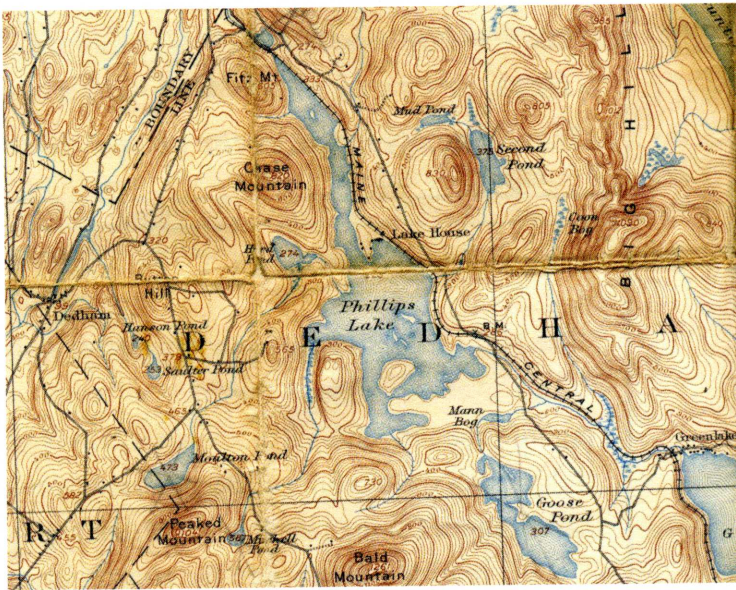
In the mid-1920s, a few years prior to the Great Depression, one of the nation's first recreational developments was established on the lands surrounding Phillips Lake. The developer apparently concluded that invoking images of Lucerne, Switzerland would sell better than the local name of Phillips because his promotional post cards proudly proclaims:

*Lucerne-In-Maine is the new all-year playground being developed by the Lucerne-In-Maine Community Association, embracing 7,000 acres of woodland and five smaller lakes in addition to Phillips Lake, with its 12-mile shoreline. Authors and artists unite in pronouncing this the most beautiful region in the Pine Tree State.*

The New York Times declared:

*America's 'Lucerne' differs from Switzerland, where prices are almost prohibitive, in that it offers a vacation home for the man of fair circumstances who enjoys hunting and fishing.*

The development included a large inn overlooking the lake, a member's swimming beach, tennis courts, a



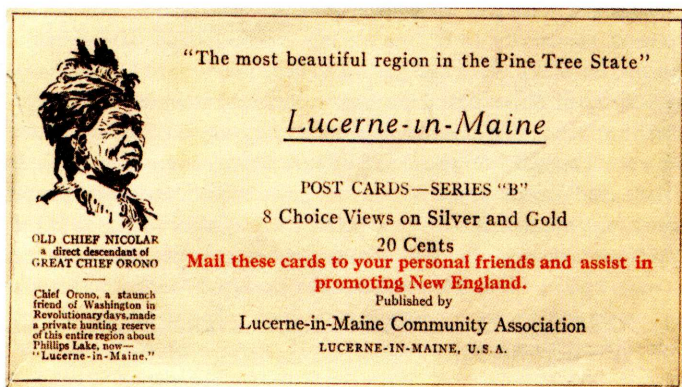
This 1900 U.S. Geological Survey map of Phillips Lake shows the area's hilly terrain along with the area's many ponds, swamps, and streams. In the mid-1920s, the lake became known as Lucerne Lake. (author's collection)

golf course, and individual ownership of a lakeshore cabin. It was at this time that Phillips Lake, a favorite fishing destination for Bangor citizens as well as tourists, received its alternative name of Lake Lucerne.



The lure is generally found equipped with a box swivel at the front and a feathered trebled hook on the back. (courtesy of Dan Leroux)





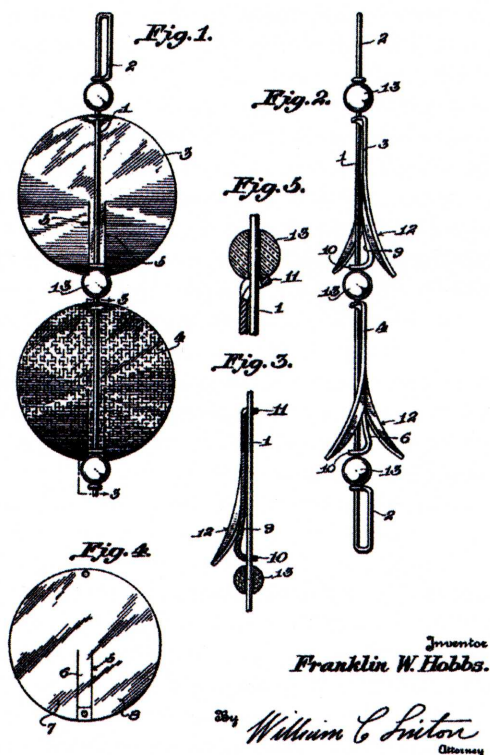
To help promote their development, the Lucerne-In-Maine Community Association published a series of silver and gold post cards. These cards touted the area's outdoor opportunities, including canoeing, fishing, and hunting. (author's collection)

Around the time the Lucerne-In-Maine development started, Franklin W. Hobbs invented and patented the Lucerne Lure. Hobbs, known simply as "Frank" to family and friends, was born in in Bangor during 1872. His father was Wellington R. Hobbs, a respected Bangor blacksmith and wheelwright. Franklin's brother, W. R. Hobbs, went into the family business while Frank developed his own metal working skills,

March 15, 1927.

F. W. HOBBS  
FISH LURE  
Filed April 22, 1926

1,620,972



The drawing that accompanied the patent application submitted by Franklin W. Hobbs.

becoming one of Bangor's first electroplaters.

In the 1890s, Bangor was a thriving manufacturing center because it had direct access to sea transportation via the Penobscot River, and electric power generated from the dam across the Penobscot just north of the city. Bangor was home to factories that made stoves, measuring tapes, pots and pans, pipes, and a variety of other metal products. Many of these metal goods could be enhanced via metal plating, ensuring a secure niche for craftsmen like Hobbs. In 1897 Hobbs and a partner formed an electroplating business. By the 1910s, Hobbs was at the top of his profession, regularly publishing articles in metal plating trade journals. For example, in 1913 he published a technical article entitled "The filtering, agitating and heating of nickel plating solution" in *The Metal Industry*, a prestigious trade journal published in New York City. In the 1910s-20s, Hobbs was an electroplater foreman for Wood & Bishop, a Bangor company that made furnaces, stoves, and tin and iron ware. The camp cooking products made by this company were used all over the U.S.A. After Hobbs ceased working at Wood & Bishop, he was employed by Crogan Manufacturing in Bangor. This company specialized in making high quality steel measuring tapes. During the last eight years of his life, Hobbs returned to a private practice contracting out to whomever needed his services.

In January 1898, Franklin W. Hobbs married Alice M. Roberts. Alice was from Waldo, a small town approximately 20 miles southwest of Bangor. The couple owned a house on Lane Street in Bangor, and apparently never had any children. After a prolonged illness, Franklin W. Hobbs died at age 64. Hobbs and his wife lie next to each other at Mt. Hope Cemetery in Bangor, Maine. But enough of the inventor; what about his Lucerne Lure?

On 22 April 1926, Hobbs applied for a U.S. patent for a "Fish Lure." His application argued that he had designed a "fish attractor [with] variable speed sliding attractor blade." The thin, metal blades can be easily bent by hand at a sharper angle to increase the rotation speed, or flattened to decrease the speed of rotation. Blades were of two different metals and according to the patent application, provided "a variety of optical effects will be had by reason of the intensity and reflection of light upon the same, providing different and changing colors upon the units and hence, lending to its attracting qualities." This design was judged to be unique enough because on 15 March 1927, almost a year after applying, Hobbs received his patent.

(continued on page 20)





The Lucerne Lure on the left has a copper upper blade vs. the one on the right that is equipped with an upper blade of brass. Both lures had nickel-colored bottom blades. (author's collection)

(continued from page 13)

According to the label on a box for the Lucerne Lure, it is "A Multiple Spinner Lure For Casting, Trolling, Or Plug Fishing" and was "Always Alive." The two circle blades of the lure are designed to rotate in opposite directions, causing turbulence when the lure is moved through water. To obtain a contrasting optical affect when the blade rotated, the bottom blade was nickel-plated whereas the top blade was either copper or brass. The upper blade is always stamped "LUCERNE / PAT. APPLIED FOR"; sometimes the lower blade is also stamped with this inscription. I have only seen the Lucerne Lure in one size, with a shaft of 4 ½ inches. The lure was equipped with a box swivel on the front end and red and white feathers on a treble hook at the back.

Few Lucerne Lures were apparently ever made as I know of only a half dozen in the hands of collectors, but surely more are out there. Rice & Miller Company, a Bangor-based dealer in hardware and sporting goods, was incorporated in 1908 and continued operating well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rice & Miller sold both wholesale and retail and while Lucerne Lures were known to be sold retail in their downtown Bangor store, and it's unlikely that they ever sold this lure wholesale because, as mentioned, few examples are

known. While limited distribution would have decreased sales of this lure, there are apparently other reasons why so few Lucerne Lures were made. As noted above, Hobbs applied for his patent in April 1926 and received it the following March. All of the Lucerne Lures I have examined are stamped as "PAT. APPLIED FOR." I have never seen a Lucerne Lure stamped "PATENTED," although we know that in fact Hobbs did receive a patent. The fact that Hobbs never stamped his lures as "PATENTED" suggests that all of his lures were made (or at least stamped) between April 1926 and March 1927. Of course, he might have assembled lures after March 1927, using blades stamped at an earlier date. However, recall that Hobbs died in March 1936, and according to his obituary, after "a long illness." In addition to failing health possibly interfering with the production of his lure, the Great Depression smothered the U.S. economy from late 1929 until the middle to late 1930s.

The Depression likely resulted in a rock-bottom demand for recreational products like fishing lures (and properties like Lucerne-In-Maine), probably making it impossible for Hobbs to sell a large number of his lures. Hobbs, like almost all lure inventors, never sold his fishing spinners in large enough quantities to become wealthy. While he clearly had a novel spinner design, Hobbs had to contend with advancing age, poor health, and a massive economic downturn. These forces were beyond his control, and conspired to end any dream of selling massive numbers of lures. Nevertheless, Frank Hobbs left us with a legacy of a novel and rare spinner that is worthy of collecting and being discussed in fishing lure reference books.



Examples of the stamping found on the Lucerne Lure (heavy stamping—left photo and light-stamping—right photo). The top blade is always stamped, the bottom blade is usually, but no always unstamped. (author's collection)

I wish to thank Ron Goddard and Dan Leroux for permitting me to examine their Lucerne Lures, and a special thanks to Ellen Conant Krohn for reviewing this article.