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From the Selected Works of William B. Krohn

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EARLY SPINNER MAKERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

William B. Krohn, *University of Maine*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/william_krohn/77/

Early Fishing Spinners of Massachusetts: The Producers and Their Products



by William B. Krohn

Cover — A sample of the turn-of-the century fishing spinners made in Massachusetts. Note that many of these spinners were equipped with colorful, high-quality flies, making the collecting of these spinners especially interesting. The labels in the upper left are from John Shields (father), the spinners in the center and upper right were made by John W. Shields (son), spinners in the lower left were made by George H. Burtis, and the spinners in the lower to upper right were made by Edward A. Grout. Photo by Bill Krohn.

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NOTE

Introduction to a series about Massachusetts’ early fishing spinners and their makers	June 2017
John, and John W., Shields	Sept. 2017
George H. Burtis	Dec. 2017
Edward A. Grout	March 2018

INTRODUCTION

Outdoor activities such as canoeing, camping, fishing, hiking, and hunting support a wide array of cottage industries, such as the making of flies, lures, and spinners (i.e., terminal fishing tackle). The small-scale production of terminal fishing tackle, mostly flies and spinners, has long been a part of the rural economy of northern New England as documented by William B. Krohn in the e-book, *The History of Maine's Early Fishing Lures and Their Makers*.

In this 58-page e-book, Krohn shifts south from Maine to Massachusetts and discusses four turn-of-the century fishing tackle makers from the Bay State. Before discussing these tackle makers and their products, however, we must ask a basic question: Why did the early tackle makers of New England concentrate on producing metal baits (i.e., spinners) versus plugs and larger lures? To answer this question, consider the fish species that were available to New England anglers.

The inland waters of northern New England, in terms of game fishes, were historically populated by brook trout, lake trout, and land-locked salmon. In the northern part of the region, chain pickerel and black bass (large- and small-mouth) were initially absent, being introduced into Maine during the 1800s. Because of this mix of game fishes, all of which readily bite spinners, it's not surprising that the early makers of artificial baits in New England produced primarily spinners and spoons (both casting and trolling), as shown by the following:



From: *Forest, Lake and River: The Fishes of New England & Eastern Canada* (Johnson 1902, Vol. II).

The Massachusetts makers that are featured below are as follows: John, and John W., Shields of Brookline; George H. Burtis of Worcester; and Edward A. Grout from the Boston area. While the lives of these three makers overlapped in time, and J. W. Shields and E. A. Grout lived within 10 miles of each other, there is no indication that they knew each other. In fact, each of these spinner makers used a different business model: the Shields (father and son) mainly sold their products to the large Boston tackle houses, including Iver Johnson and J. B. Hunter; George Burtis advertised extensively in outdoor sporting publications and sold directly to customers via mail and his Worcester store, and through selected dealers (e.g., T. B. Davis in Portland, Maine); and Edward Grout apparently made sporting goods for only one Boston sporting goods dealer, Wm. Reads & Sons.

Each of these three craftsmen made high-grade, spinners with stamped blades that today's collectors can easily identify. While the spinners made by these makers are similar, there are differences between their products. For example, one of Grout's baits was so unique it was awarded a U.S. Patent. The materials available to these tackle makers improve through the years, and the influence of new materials on the construction of their spinners is readily apparent (e.g., silkworm gut to stainless steel leaders). Some of these spinners date to the late 1800s, but most to the early 1900s. All of the spinner baits made by the three makers pre-date the Great Depression (i.e., 1930; see below). Even though some of these spinners were made in the late 1800s, none of the Massachusetts makers covered in this book are mentioned in Arlan Carter's (2000) well-research book, *19th Century Fishing Lures: A Collector's Guide to U.S. Lures*

Manufactured Prior to 1901. In addition to spinners, both George H. Burtis and Edward A.

Grout sold bamboo fly rods stamped with their names and addresses.

The following chart is provided to help readers date these early Massachusetts spinners.

The lifespans of the spinner makers, and the years when the makers were in business, are given

below in chronologically by the manufacturers' birth years:

<u>Tackle Maker</u>	<u>Born</u>	<u>Died</u>	<u>Tackle Business</u>	
			<u>started</u>	<u>ended</u>
John Shields	~1832	1900	~ 1865	1900
John W. Shields	1862	1939	1900	~1930
George H. Burtis	1844	1917	1893	~1916
Edward A. Grout	1867	1941	~1910	~1929

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ron Goddard, a long-time collector of Maine fishing spinners (and other items), was instrumental in getting me interested in antique, metal fishing baits. Thank you Ron for turning a part-time hobby into a retirement passion.

I thank Gary Smith for permission to use his photograph of an early John W. Shields spinner, and for providing information that led me to Bob Rifchin. In 1980, Bob Rifchin worked with John W. Shields' daughter, helping her to disperse the remnants of the Shields' family tackle business. Bob was exacting in answering my many questions, and the information he provided made the last years of the John Shields & Co. a little more real. Bob also provided helpful comments on the Shields chapter.

Jeff Knapp and Jerry Girard, both experts on early bamboo fly-rods, shared with me their copies of *The Burtis Rods and The Burtis Flies*. The American Antiquarian Society of Worcester, Massachusetts, graciously made the author a copy of their Burtis's catalog. Jeff also helped me to locate outstanding examples of spinners made by J. W. Shields and E. A. Grout. Others who helped me to locate early Massachusetts-made spinners, and related materials, include Jerry Girard, Dan Leroux, and Bill Kennedy.

The Public Library of Brookline, Massachusetts located for me the J. W. Shields' obituary. The Oak Grove Cemetery in Medford, Massachusetts confirmed certain information about E. A. Grout and his wife. A digital copy of Burtis' trademark was provided by Alan Baracco.

Ellen, my wife and best friend, deserves my sincere thanks for the many ways she supports me, and for reviewing and improving drafts of the following chapters prior to her all-to-early death in April 2019.

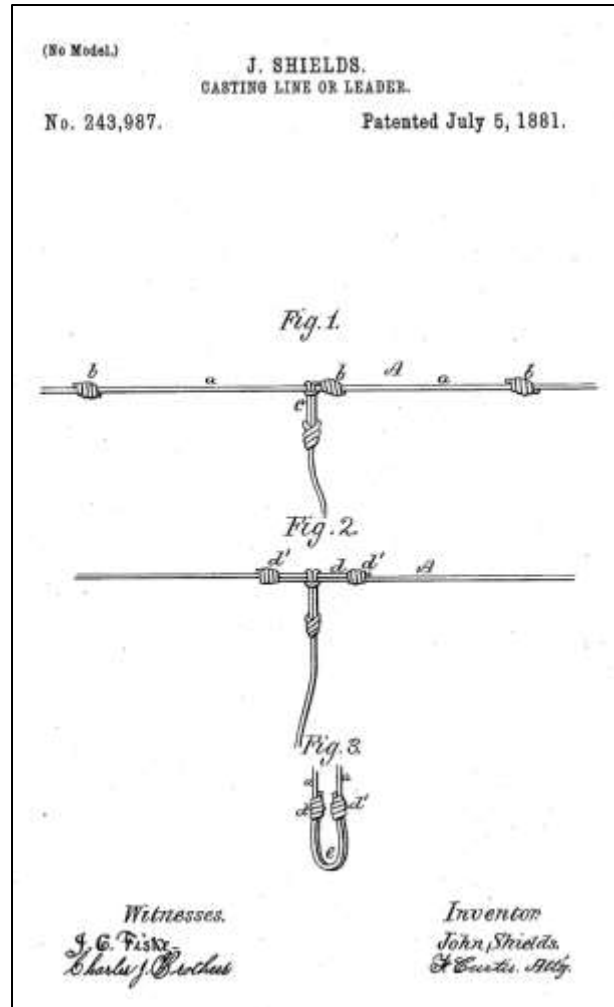
Shorter versions of the following information were published between June 2017 and March 2018 in the *National Fishing Lure Collectors Club* (NFLCC) *Gazette*. I thank the NFLCC for giving me permission to published expanded versions of this series.

CHAPTER ONE

Tackle Maker to Downtown Banker: The Story of John W. Shields

John Shields (~1832-1900), and his son John William Shields (1862-1939), manufactured fishing lines, leaders, flies, and spinners for approximately six and a half decades in Brookline, Massachusetts. Today, collectors of pre-1900 flies or silk lines know the name of John Shields. John W. Shields, in contrast, is unknown to all but a few contemporary collectors who specialize in early flies and metal baits.

In the preface to his classic book entitled *Fishing in American Waters* (1869), G. C. Scott thanked John Shields (the father) for providing him with “Specimens of excellent trout-flies” to examine. John Shields was one source of information used by Mary Orvis Marbury when she wrote *Favorite Flies and Their Histories* (1892). Specifically, the elder Shields is credited with originating the Moose wet fly (p. 189-140), the Oquossoc (p. 171), and the Saranac (p. 203). In the late 1870s, John Shields won an international award for his flies during exhibitions held in Philadelphia (1876) and in Paris, France (1878). On 5 July 1881, he received a U.S. Patent for tying flies to lines and leaders in such a manner as to reduce wear. So while the father’s tackle accomplishments are fairly well documented, the work of his son, who continued the family’s tackle business for almost three decades after his father’s death, is essentially unknown.



John Shields' 1881 patent states that "the object of the invention being to enhance [reduce] the wear of the leader at the point where the upper flies are attached, as well as to enable the attachment and removal of such flies to be readily and expeditiously effected." John Shields, and his son John W. Shields, were both respected for the high quality gut leaders, and other fishing tackle, they made and sold. (Courtesy U.S. Patent Office).

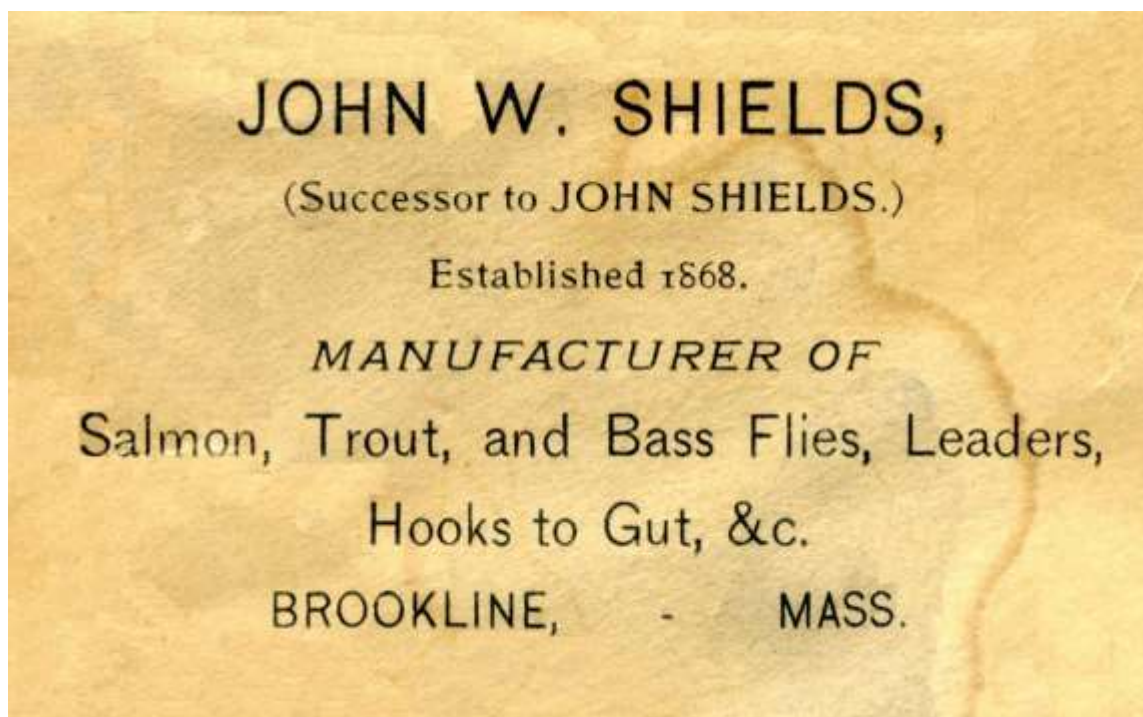
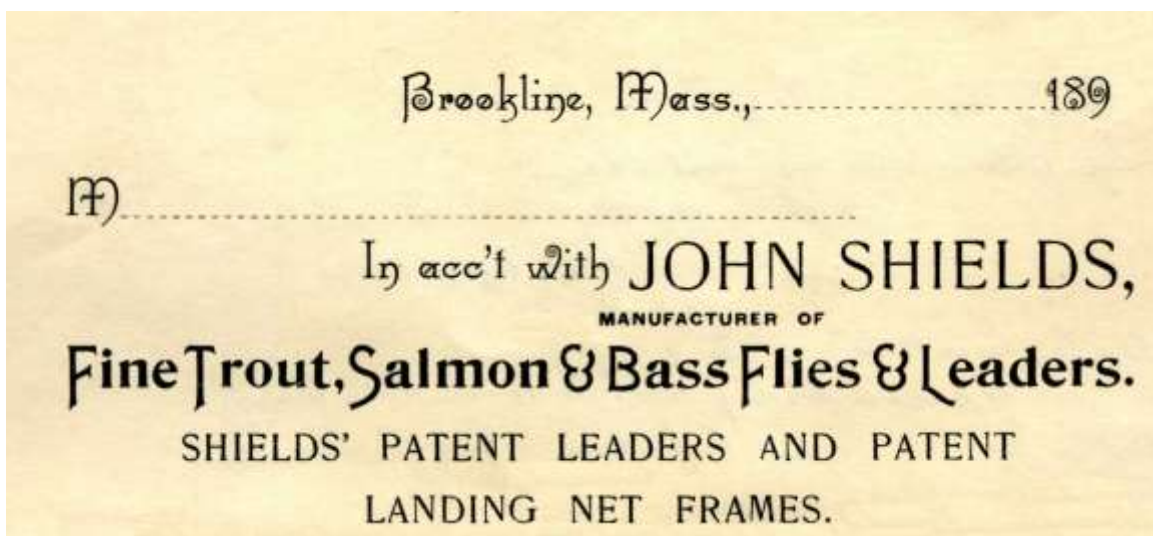
The purpose of this article is tell the story of the Shields & Co. Fishing Tackle, giving special attention to the younger Shields, and his claims to fame – boldly stamped, turn-of-the century fishing spinners and exceptionally high-quality fishing flies. In addition to discussing the business and its products, this article also includes biographical information about both Shields. We start with a discussion of when the Shields arrived in America.



In addition to flexible, waterproof fly lines, leaders, and flies, the John W. Shields also made high quality spinners. These spinners are easy to accurately identify as the fluted blades were stamped with the maker's name and town. The front of John W. Shields' blades are deeply stamped (left), whereas the back sides are painted bright red at the top (right). (Author's collection).

John Shields was born around 1832 in County Monaghan, in the northeastern part of Ireland.

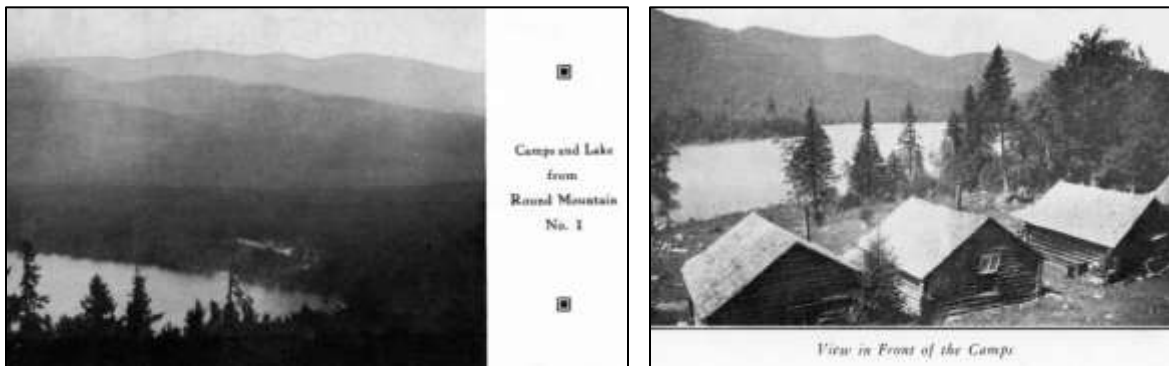
John Shields's first son, John W. Shields, was born in Dublin, Ireland, some 30 years after his father. In contrast, John William's mother – Jane Doherty – was born in New York City. In February 1862, when John William was still a baby, the family emigrated from Ireland to New York City. Two years after arriving in the U.S.A., the Shields moved again, this time from New York City north to Brookline, Massachusetts. When the Shields arrived in their new home southwest of Boston, they found a prosperous town expanding into a city. The 1865 census shows John Shields living in Brookline with his wife Jane and their three year old son, John William. In 1868, John Shields was making tackle in an apartment located over a flour and grain store at the corner of School and Washington streets, Brookline. Three years later, according to the 1870 U.S. Census, John and Jane Shields had a second son, Joseph. Sometime after 1870, Jane apparently died (or the couple divorced), because on 24 April 1877 John Shields married Edith L. Trowbridge. At the time of their marriage, John was circa 42 whereas Edith was 25 years old.



The top illustration is a letterhead from John Shields & Company Fishing Tackle. (Courtesy of Jerry Girard). Note that in addition to patented leaders, this company also sold a patented frame for landing nets. The lower illustration is of a John W. Shields address from a water-stained envelope. (Author's collection). While spinners were a large part of the tackle made by John W. Shields, this envelope does not specifically mentioned spinners while listing flies, leaders, and hooks.

John W. Shields was educated in Brookline schools, and after graduating went to work in his father's tackle business. On 14 May 1888, when 26 years old, John W. Shields married Annie (a.k.a., Anna) Finstein in Brookline. The groom was 26 years old, and the bride two years his junior. The couple raised one daughter, Alice L. Shields.

Like his father, John William was not all work and enjoyed fishing in Maine. In August of 1907, an issue of *Forest and Stream* announced that: "Mr. and Mrs. John W. Shields and daughter, of Brookline, Mass., will leave next week for a month's stay at Round Mountain Lake, Maine, one of the most beautiful spots in New England. Mr. Shields is an earnest and devoted fly-fisherman and will there have a chance to follow the sport each day, and the trout, though small, are both plentiful and gamy."



Both John, and John W., Shields enjoyed fly-fishing in Maine. John W. Shields took his wife and daughter fishing to Round Mountain Pond Camps in western Maine. While many (if not all) of the Camps' original log cabins are gone, the forest-covered mountains and trout-filled ponds are still there. (Post cards from author's collection).

But let's move on from the Shields' family life and fishing hobby to a discussion of the fishing tackle business, and finally to a description of the John W. Shields' various spinners. The chronology that follows was condensed from 40 Brookline city directories published between 1868 and 1934. These directories, when viewed as a whole, give a running year-by-year account

of the Shields' business, as well as the locations of businesses, residences, and family members.



J. Shields & Co. Fishing Tackle Company located on Cypress Street in Brookline, Massachusetts. In his book, *Brookline: The History of A Favorite Town*, Bolton (1897: 110) wrote that in this factory "fishing tackle is made in large quantities." (Courtesy of Jerry Girard).

From the mid-1860s to the early-1880s, John Shields' fishing tackle business was located at the corner of School and Washington streets in Brookline. During the late 1870s, Shields had a second manufacturing site, located at Harvard Square, near Davis Avenue in the downtown part of town. This property apparently stayed in the Shields' hands for a long time, as suggested below. During the 1870s, the family lived at Thayer Place, near Washington Street. The 1885 Brookline directory lists "John Shields & Co., fishing tackle manufacturer" located at 118 Cypress Street. At this time the Shields lived at 47 Waverly Street. The house at this address

would remain the elder Shields' life-long residence. Either in the late 1800s or early 1900s, John W. Shields became the companies' salesperson. Maintaining a home at 31 Brook Street, the younger Shields travelled to promote and sell the company's silk fishing lines, gut leaders, flies, and spinners. On 19 March 1900, John Shields died suddenly. Three days later, his funeral was held at his Waverly Street home.

An obituary of John Shields published in a trade journal mentions that he made high quality tackle, and that his factory employed "a large number of operatives ...by whom he was highly esteemed." As reported in an 1892 safety inspection (which the Shields passed), John Shields & Co. Fishing Tackle employed 10 men and 2 women. In contrast, when John W. Shields was operating the Cypress Street factory, *Industry in Brookline* reported that plant was "staffed almost entirely by girl operators." This report also stated that "Mr. Shield [i.e., John Shields, the father] developed a patented process for waterproofing fishing lines. He sold the right to use his process to New York concerns. His business was carried on by his son for some years and was ultimately discontinued."

Hooks imported from England were essential to Shields' business, but importing these hooks meant a tariff had to be paid to the Federal government. Even over 100 years ago, international trade was a contentious issue. In a letter Shields sent to the U.S. Congress, dated 2 December 1908, John W. Shields asked for trading equity for snelled fishhooks made in the U.S.A. (See the end of this chapter for a transcription of the complete letter). After stating that he was "a small manufacturer of fishing tackle" who imported hooks from Redditch, England, he went on to explain: "One branch of the business is the tying of hooks to silkworm gut by hand, commonly

known as snelled hooks.” Shields pointed out that the duty he paid to import English hooks was higher than the duty on snelled hooks imported from England (45 vs. 25 *ad valorem* [i.e., according to value]). “All I ask is an equitable or fair rate, so I can compete better with my competitor on the other side. As things now exist he has much better if it.” Shields went on to observe that “I have and my father before me spent the best parts of our lives in this business, and I consider myself an expert in matters pertaining to it.” I failed to determine whether or not American snelled hooks received the equity Shields requested.

With the passing of his father, John W. Shields – now living at 34 Perry Street – cut-back on travel and sales, and instead focused on managing the company’s Cypress Street factory. He continued making high quality gut leaders and flies. Shields seemed to sell most of his products wholesale to large dealers. For example, a full-page advertisement ran in April 1904 in *Forest and Stream* by Iver Johnson Sporting Goods of Boston promoted “ ‘Shields’ Extra Quality Lake Trout Flies.” To buy the raw materials needed for his flies, Shields ran an advertisement in *Forest and Stream* from the fall through winter of 1908. The advertisement read:

**DUCK HUNTERS, POULTRY AND
GAME DEALERS, ATTENTION!**

I will buy for cash large or small quantities of duck feathers,
body and wing, especially wood duck, brown and gray mallard.

Two years later he ran a similar advertisement in the *St. Louis (Missouri) Post-Dispatch*. Shields was serious about keeping his fly tiers supplied with feathers.



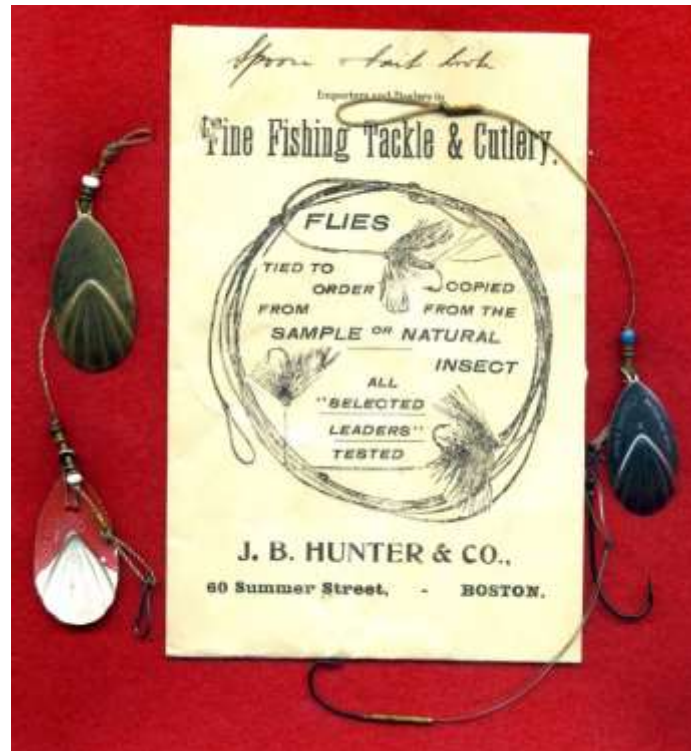
Labels for flies, hooks, and silk lines found at the time the last of the Shields' fishing tackle was being disposed of in 1980. Because John W. Shields did not make silk fishing lines after his father's death, and none of these labels bare his initials, these labels are believed to date to the elder John Shields (i.e., pre-1900). (Courtesy of Bob Rifchin).

In the early 1900s, John William closed the tackle factory on Cypress Street. Downsizing his tackle business, a smaller operation was relocated to the third floor of his residence. Half of the space on the third floor was for storing the work materials (e.g., feathers, hooks, thread, leaders), whereas the other half was work space. The work area had fly-tying stations for five people, and about of a quarter of this space was taken-up by a massive, cast-iron press. This press, some 4 X 5 X 5 ft., was capable of forming and cutting-out spinner blades, and stamping into these blades the Shields' name and home town. By changing stamping dies, the blades could also be imprinted with the names of Shields' wholesale customers. Contents of the third floor showed

that one of Shields' main wholesale customers was J. B. Hunter & Co. of Boston. Blank blades in G. M. Skinner boxes were also present, suggesting that John William's latter spinners may not have been fitted with Shields-made blades.



Hooks and leaders made by John W. Shields for the J. B. Hunter & Company of Boston, Massachusetts. These items were found in 1980 when the last remnants of the Shields' fishing tackle was being disposed of. The leaders on the hook, and the packaged leaders, were made from silkworm gut. (i.e., pre-1930). (Courtesy of Bob Rifchin).



Two John W. Shields fishing spinners sold in an envelope by J. B. Hunter & Company. On the left is a double-bladed spinner and on the right is a single blade spinner equipped with two hooks (front hook is a bait holder). The three blades on these two spinners carry John W. Shields' standard stamping, and are made with twisted silkworm gut leaders. (Author's collection).

John William developed new business interest around the time he was downsizing the tackle making. Specifically, in addition to being shown as in the tackle business, the 1903 Brookline directory lists John W. Shields as the President of the Brookline Cooperative Bank. His office was located at 1 Harvard Square (also 5 Harvard Sq.) in downtown Brookline, and he continued residing at 31 Brook Street. After 1925, the Shields fishing tackle is no longer mentioned in Brookline directories, although John William continued to be listed as bank president. According to the annual reports published by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Banks, and his obituary, John W. Shields served as President of the Brookline Cooperative Bank from 1903 until his death in 1939 (except in 1905-06 when he was the bank's Secretary and Treasurer). The U.S.

Censuses of 1920 and 1930 make no mention of Shields' tackle business but noted that he was a real estate agent. After his father's death, John W. Shields clearly changed his business interests from fishing tackle to banking, real estate, and insurance. Shields was also interested in civic affairs, and was a leader in the development of downtown Brookline (i.e., the "Village"). In January 1939, John W. Shields died after fighting pneumonia for two weeks. Shields was characterized in his obituary as a "best-known and most outstanding citizen and business men." His wife, Anna, had passed seven years earlier.

BROOKLINE — BROOKLINE CO-OPERATIVE BANK

Incorporated March 13, 1895. Began business May 2, 1895

John W. Shields, *President*

Anna N. Patten, *Treasurer*

Board of Directors: C. A. Bowditch*, C. A. Delano*, Dennis Driscoll*, F. W. Files*, C. A. Leavitt, E. B. Moore, W. D. Paine*, J. W. Shields*, H. A. Varney.

Regular meeting for receipt of moneys the first Thursday of each month.

STATEMENT OF CONDITION AT THE CLOSE OF BUSINESS, OCTOBER 6, 1927

Assets	
Loans on real estate	\$2,009,625 00
Loans on shares	50,850 00
Bonds and notes	25,000 00
Unpaid interest	2,267 47
Unpaid fines	216 38
Due from trust companies and national banks	87,285 80
Cash and cash items	185 01
	</

After his father died in 1900, John W. Shields' down-sized the fishing tackle business and shifted his commercial endeavors to banking, real estate, and insurance. This illustration is from page the 1927 *Report of the Commissioner of Banks of Massachusetts*. The Brookline Cooperative Bank clearly had sizable assets as the Great Depression approached in the late 1920s. (Courtesy the State of Massachusetts).

While John Shields is known today for his high quality silk lines, gut leaders, and flies, his

son's claim to fame are high quality fishing spinners and flies. The John W. Shields spinner was essentially the same as the Rangeley Spinner invented in the late 1800s by H. O. Stanley of Dixfield, Maine, and while it featured a fluted blade(s), it lacked the box swivel and longer leaders found on the Stanley Rangeley Spinners. Shields simply referred to his spinner as "The New Single-Hook Trolling Bait," considering it "The most killing trolling device for all fresh-water fish on the market." As can be seen in the illustrations accompanying this article, Shields spinners came in various configurations: (1) single blades and double blades (I have even seen a three-bladed example but am unsure that it's original); (2) with blades that are plated with nickel and other metals; (3) with flies and with no fly nor hook; and (4) with long leaders and without leaders. Regardless of the specific configuration, however, features are common to Shields spinners: (1) blades, painted bright red on top part of their underside, stamped with Shields' name and hometown; (2) high quality gut or silk line leaders; and (3) metal collars to protect the leaders. The stamping on these baits is diagnostic of John W. Shields spinners (see illustrations below).

As mentioned at the start of this article, John Shields is recognized for the high quality flies and silk lines produced under his supervision. Hopefully, this article will help to give Shields' son, John William, similar recognition among collectors of metal baits, early flies, and gut leaders. Because the spinners made by John W. Shields are rare and varied, it's doubtful that the illustrations in the article include examples of all of John William's works. Thus, should a



A boxed, John W. Shields spinner tipped with a Silver Doctor wet fly. The twisted gut leader on this spinner is 33 ½ inches long. The Shields, according to an advertisement for improved gut leaders and casting lines published in *Forest and Stream* (summer of 1883), made leaders that were 3, 4, and 9 feet long. (Author's collection).



Three single-blade John W. Shields fishing spinners. Shields' spinners are either equipped with wet flies (these examples) or are without hooks (see below). Note how tightly the gut leaders were twisted and the whipping used to secure knots. Both of these features are characteristic of John W. Shields' works. (Author's collection).



Two double-bladed John W. Shields fishing spinners that were hookless. To prevent wear to the gut leader, the Shields used metal collars on which the spinner blade would rotate; the beads also helped to prevent leader wear. (Author's collection).



Additional examples of John W. Shields spinners with no hooks (upper side on bottom; lower on top). Note that John W. Shields' spinners were made with blades of different sizes, and different metals. Unlike the original H. O. Stanley Rangeley spinner, J. W. Shields' spinner did not include a box swivel at the front. (Author's collection).

reader know of John W. Shields spinners in addition to those shown herein, I would appreciate learning about these baits.



This John W. Shields spinner, mounted on a John Shields mailing label, was found in this condition in the home of a Shields' relative almost four decades ago (i.e., ~1980). Because John Shields died in 1900, and his son probably started to stamp his spinners with his name shortly thereafter, it's likely that this item was made in the early 1900s. (Courtesy of Gary Smith).

Tariff Hearings Before the Ways and Means Committee Sixtieth Congress 1908-1909

SNELLED FISHHOOKS

BROOKLINE, Mass. *December 2, 1908.*

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS,
Washington, D.C.

GENTLEMEN: I ask your kind consideration of the following matter: I am a small manufacturer of fishing tackle and located in Brookline, Mass. One branch of the business is the tying of hooks to silkworm gut by hand, commonly known as snelled hooks. Now, I import these hooks from Redditch, England, on which there is a duty of 45 per cent ad valorem. The gut which I tie on the hooks is a raw material to me and there is no duty on it.

Now, my competitor on the other side sends into this country hooks tied on gut and the duty is but 24 per cent. Now, I protest against the existing state of affairs, and have for the past few years, but can get no redress. As the majority of the fish-hooks used in this country are made in Redditch, England, I can not understand where my protection comes in.

All I ask is an equitable or fair rate, so I can compete better with my competitor on the other side. As things now exist he has much the better of it.

I have and my father before me spent the nest part of our lives in this business, and I consider myself an expert in matters pertaining to it. Hoping you will consider my great interest in this matter, I am,

Very truly, yours

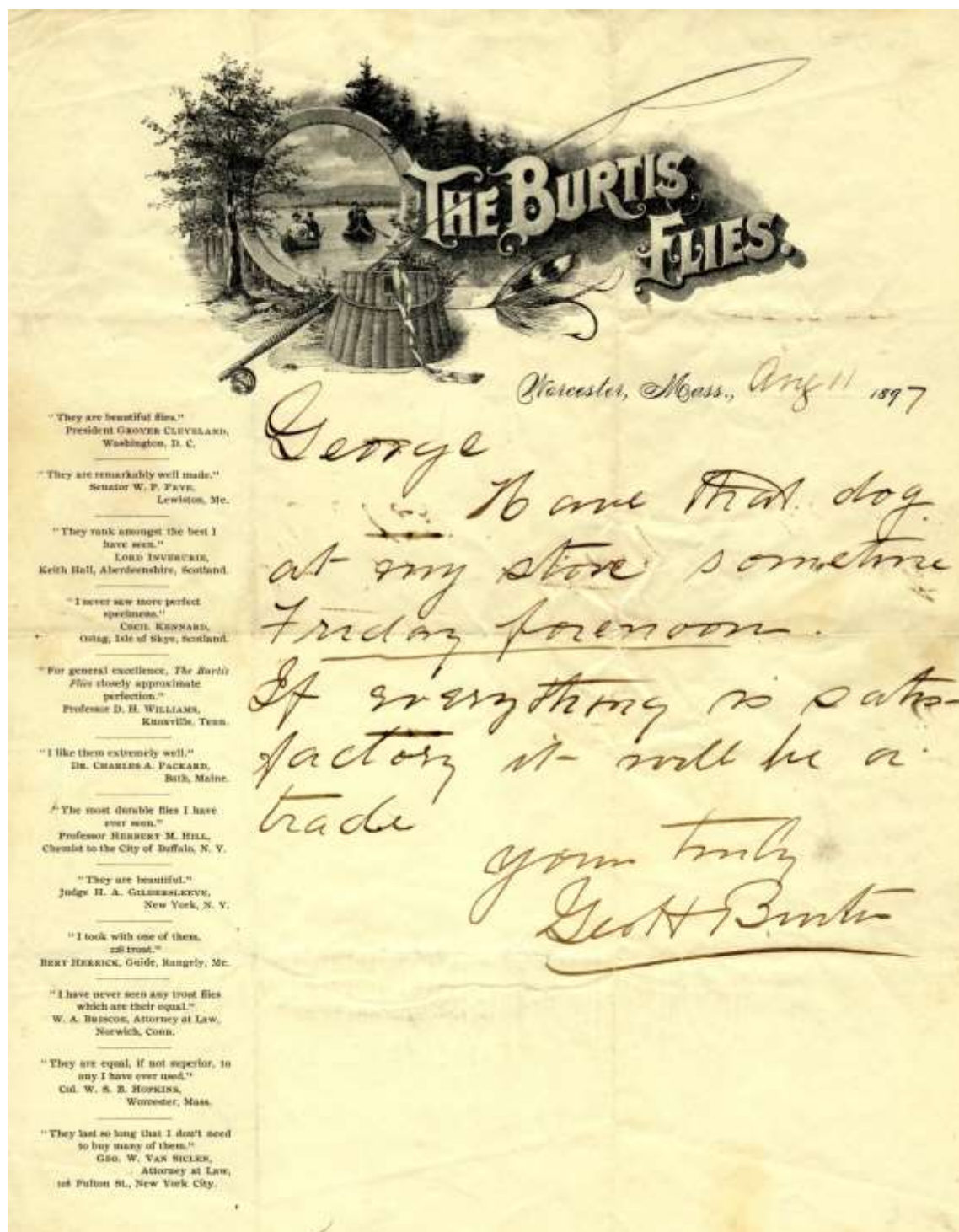
JOHN W. SHIRLDS.

CHAPTER TWO

George H. Burtis and His Highly-Touted “Irresistible Trolling Bait”

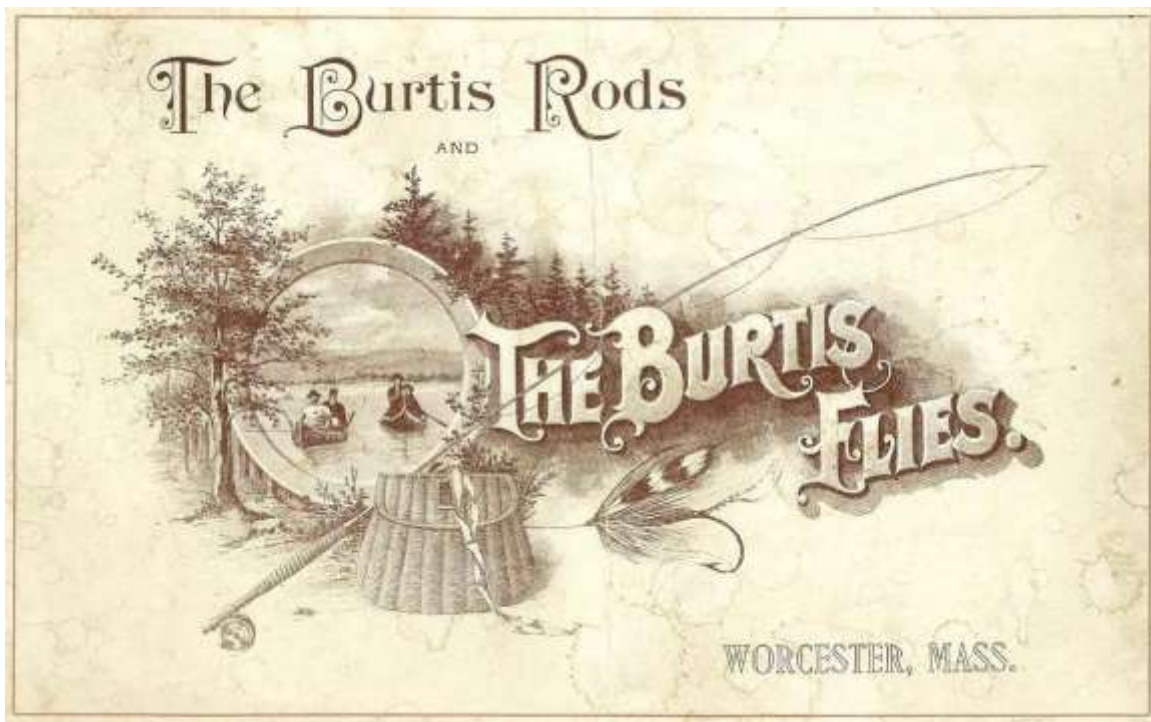
The testimonial (a.k.a., endorsement) is a classic advertising method. Testimonial advertising relies on positive statements about a product from a well know person, such as a knowledgeable expert or a highly respected public figure, to sway potential customers to purchase the item being touted. George Henry Burtis, a turn-of-the century tackle maker who labored in Worcester, Massachusetts, was a master of testimonial advertising. For example, consider Burtis’ custom printed stationary. In addition to his signature “The Burtis Flies” logo at the top of the page, the left side of his stationary had a dozen testimonials, including a President of the United States and a fishing guide from Rangeley, Maine. Burtis’ fishing tackle catalog, entitled *The Burtis Rods and The Burtis Flies*, did not features descriptions and illustrations of his products and their prices. Instead, Burtis’ catalog is a series of one-page descriptions of a major type of product followed by another page of praises from satisfied customers who were fish and game commissioners, business leaders, and other widely known public figures. Similar to many other tackle catalogs, the back section of Burtis’ booklet featured advertisements for sporting journals (e.g., *Maine Woods*), sporting gear (e.g., axes, reels, nets, and guns), and railroads (e.g., Maine Central, Portland & Rumford Falls, and Bangor & Aroostook).

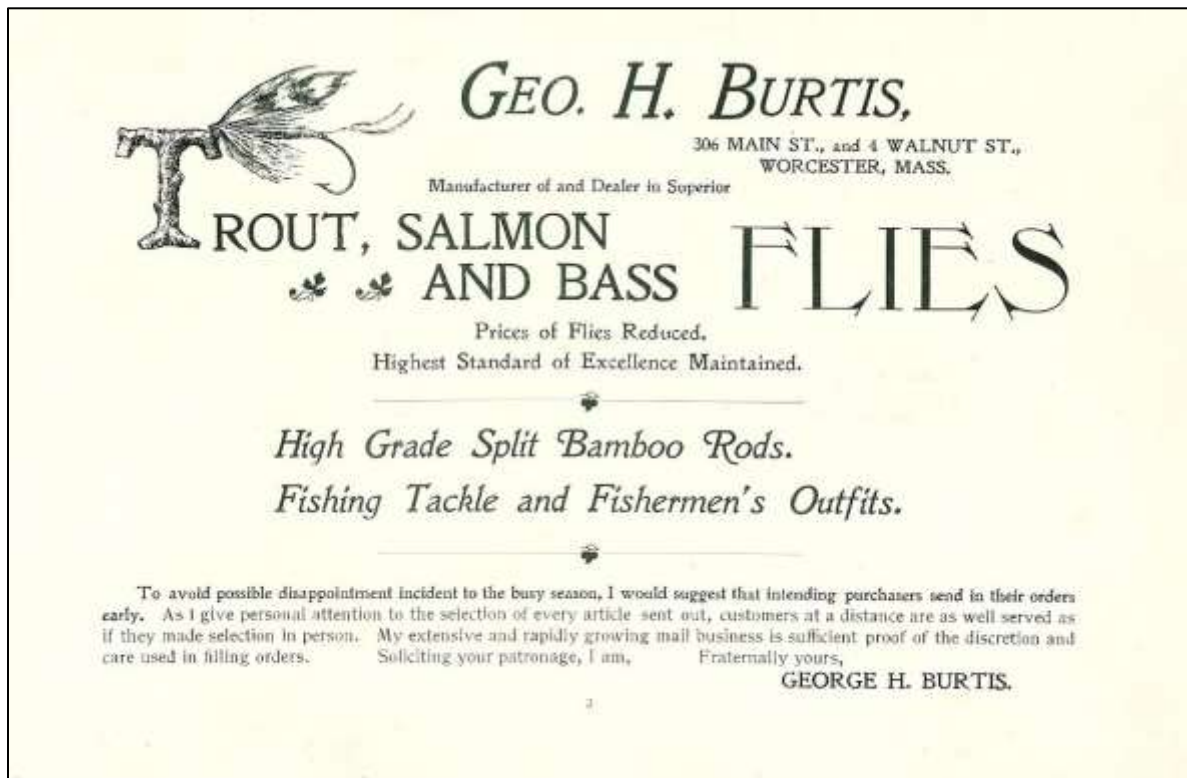
Even though Burtis fishing tackle booklets were undated, I was able to assign a year to one



A letter signed by George H. Burtis dated August 11, 1897. In addition to the widely used Burtis logo, note the quotations running down the left side of the stationery. Burtis made extensive use of testimonials to promote his fishing flies and bamboo rods. (Author's collection).

of his catalogs based on a gun advertisement containing a specific year. I have seen two versions of Burtis' booklets that could be date to circa 1902 (from a hand-written date on cover) and 1912 (from a letter printed inside). These two editions were different demonstrating that Burtis revised his catalog over time. So when did Burtis first publish his catalog? Burtis advertisements, published in the 1896 issues of *Recreation* magazine, do not mention a catalog. However, the Burtis advertisement on the top half of page 125 in the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad's 1898 booklet states that one can "Send for catalogue." Thus, Burtis likely first issued his tackle catalog in 1897 or 1898. In what year was his catalog last published? The most recent Burtis catalog I have seen, mentioned above, was from 1912. This was approximately three years after he left his downtown locations to operate his business from his home, and some four years before George H. Burtis retired from the making of rods and flies.





The time-worn and water-stained cover (upper) and title page (lower) from the 1902 George H. Burtis' fishing tackle catalog (date base on the date written on cover and in a Parker gun advertisement). Note that in 1902 (see title page, upper right), Burtis had two business locations in downtown Worcester. Copies of Burtis' fishing tackle catalogs can be found at the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, MA), Harvard University (Cambridge, MA), and Yale University (New Haven, CT). (Author's collection).

Who was George H. Burtis, and what is his claim to fishing lure history? George H. Burtis was in the fishing tackle business from 1893 until circa 1916. He made and sold superior bamboo rods for fly fishing and trolling. Today, Burtis rods are readily identified as the metal butt end is clearly stamped "GEO. H. BURTIS/ WORCESTER, MASS." (see photo at Chapter's end). Burtis also made high quality flies for trout, salmon, and bass; President Grover Cleveland, a fly fisherman, considered Burtis flies "beautiful." Burtis also produced one named spinner, the main subject of this article, that he called The Irresistible Trolling Bait. In February 1902, Burtis received a registered trademark from the U.S. Patent Office for the words "The

Irresistible” and “Irresistible” (No. 37,821). In his trademark filing Burtis claimed that the trademark had been continuously used in his tackle business since May 1898.

The blades of Burtis’ Irresistible Spinner, like the butts of his fishing rods, are boldly marked, making identification of Burtis baits and rods both easy and reliable. The Burtis Catalog description of “The Burtis New Single-Hook Trolling Bait” is followed by quotations from Irresistible users testifying to the spinners performance. When touting his Irresistible Spinner, Burtis was especially fond of using testimonials from state and federal fisheries personal, and notable public figures such as Presidents, Senators, and Governors. The Irresistible was one of Burtis’ best sellers, and with good reason – it was a high quality spinner internationally recognized as a superior product.



Close-up of an Irresistible Spinner made by George H. Burtis of Worcester, Mass. Apparently, Burtis sold The Irresistible without a swivel. Note also that the leader is made from two strands of relatively thick gut, and a metal collar was used to protect the leader from chaffing. (Author’s collection).

In November 1904, according to an article published in the *Worcester Telegram* newspaper, George H. Burtis received notice that The Irresistible received the Gold Metal Award at the St. Louis Exposition (a.k.a., St. Louis World’s Fair). Burtis had entered into a competition with 122

fishing tackle entries from around the world, and the committee judged his fishing tackle, including The Irresistible Spinner, to be of “superior merit.” Around the time of this notice, Burtis also received a letter of praise from James A. Henshall, leading authority on the black bass and superintendent of the federal fish hatchery in Boseman, Montana. The letter read, in part, “I am very glad to hear by your letter that you have been awarded a gold metal at the St. Louis exposition, which I am sure is well merited. Your goods are not excelled by any other manufacturer. Accept my sincere congratulations.” Burtis would go to display this prestigious award for all to see, using the term “Gold Metal Award” every chance he had.



A collection of Irresistible Spinners (left). George H. Burtis was an expert fly tier and all of his Irresistible Spinners are equipped with single hook, eyeless flies (right). The Irresistible was made with either a silver- and gold-colored fluted blade, and always tipped with a high quality fly. (Author’s collection).

The Irresistible, according to Burtis’ Catalog, was “put on the market season of ’98.” I am unsure why Burtis called his spinner the “new” trolling bait for it must be noted that The Irresistible is basically a Rangeley Spinner with a different name. The Rangeley Spinner was invented approximately two decades earlier by Henry O. Stanley of Dixfield, Maine (for details,

see Krohn 2013). I found no evidence that Stanley ever patented the Rangeley Spinner so apparently Burtis felt safe in making and selling his own version of this American angling classic. Key features of both the Rangeley and the Irresistible are a high quality fluted blade that revolves around a metal collar through which runs a silkworm gut leader made of multiple-strands. While the back end of a Rangeley was armed with a fly or various hook arrangements, the Irresistible was tipped with a Burtis wet fly. George H. Burtis wrote in his catalog that “All [fishing] devices with gang hooks should be discarded as barbarous and unsportsmanlike. Possibly you may kill more fish with the ‘grappling irons,’ but if fish is all you are in pursuit of, why not purchase them at the nearest market and thereby save the expenses incident to a trip to angling waters?”

While the Irresistible Spinner almost always came with a fluted blade, there are also Burtis stamped blades that are not fluted, but similar to W.T.J. Lowe’s buffalo blade. This buffalo blade also occurs on a spinner with a metal shaft, and because the Burtis fly attached on this spinner was made with a large loop appropriate for attached to an in-line spinner. Finally, Burtis used a buffalo blade on a gut leader and like The Irresistible, this spinner was tipped with a single wet fly (photographs of these spinners accompany this article). Burtis may have made spinners with metal shafts as well as gut leaders. However, I could find no mention of metal shafted spinners in either of the two Burtis catalogs that I examined, nor did I locate any Burtis advertisements that described in-line spinners. Finally, it must be noted that at least some of the metal shafted spinners with Burtis stamped blades could be “after-the-fact” adaptations made by

anglers re-using Burtis blades after the original gut leaders broke.



While not mentioned in his fishing tackle catalog, George H. Burtis also produced in-line, size 3 spinners like the two shown here. Note that the upper blade is not Burtis' usual fluted blade, but instead a blade similar to the buffalo blade manufacturer by William T. J. Lowe of Buffalo, N.Y. (Author's collection).



A buffalo (left) and a fluted (right) blade spinner, both size 2, with George H. Burtis' stampings. The spinner with the buffalo-type blade is apparently unaltered whereas the spinner with the fluted blade appears to have been modified. While I have not seen a Burtis spinner other than *The Irresistible* in his catalogs or advertisements, the unaltered spinner in this photograph is evidence that Burtis made more than one type of fishing spinner. (Author's collection).

Burtis sold his Irresistible Spinner in a high quality, paper box that measured 7 ½ by 1 ½ X 11/16 inches. The box was covered in a wax-type paper and the top lid had half-moon notches in the middle of both sides, to facilitate opening of the box. This box came in at least three varieties based on fonts used on the outer top lid and quotes printed on the inner side of the top lid. The top of the lid of the oldest does not mention The Irresistible's award, dating this version to 1903 or earlier (see also the T. B. Davis advertisement in this article). The two newer boxes, however, proclaimed that the spinner received the "Gold Metal Award," dating these boxes to 1904 or later. Of the latter two versions, the oldest has a quotation on the lid's underside from the outdoor writer and editor James A. Cruikshank, whereas the underside quotation on the newest version is from the fisheries biologist, and black bass expert, James A. Henshall. In addition, the top of the lid of the Cruikshank version reads "The Burtis [only first letter capitalized] New Single-Hook Trolling Bait" whereas the newer Henshall version reads "The BURTIS [in capital letters] New Single-Hook Trolling Bait." The top of the lid of all three versions includes the same quotation from Maine Inland Fisheries and Game Commissioner, Leroy T. Carleton. Today, testimonials for a commercial product like the Irresistible from government officials like Henshall and Carleton, because they represent a potential conflict of interest, would be frowned upon (or even illegal under some circumstances). But in Burtis' day, praise for products from knowledgeable and respected experts was highly coveted by many manufacturers.

Burtis not only used testimonials to promote his products, but he also promoted his products



The Irresistible Spinner was sold in an eye-catching box with red lettering. These boxes are approximately 100 to 113 years old based on the facts that Burtis received the Gold Metal Award in 1904 and died in 1917. The lettering style (i.e., font) is slightly different between the two boxes (note especially the upper-most line). The label also provided a testimonial from Maine's turn-of-the century Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Game, Leroy T. Carleton. (Author's collection).



Not one to let advertising space go to waste, George H. Burtis even used testimonials on the inside of The Irresistible's top lid. The testimonials shown were written by James A. Cruikshank (upper), and James A. Henshall (lower). Both names would have been familiar to most, if not all, of Burtis' customers. Cruikshank was an outdoor sports authority, author, and lecturer; Henshall, at this time, was a federal fisheries biologist stationed in Montana. (Author's collection).

with advertisements. In addition to publishing a substantial booklet touting his fishing tackle, Burtis regularly published advertisements in sporting journals, newspaper, and booklets. I found Burtis advertisements for The Irresistible in *Forest and Stream*, *Maine Sportsman*, *Maine Woods*, *Recreation*, *Shooting and Fishing*, *The American Angler*, and *The National Sportsman*. (See the end of this chapter for example advertisements). As for of sporting booklets, an advertisement for The Irresistible appeared in Carleton's (1899, p. 87) *Pathfinder and Gazetteer of the Hunting and Fishing Resorts of the State of Maine*, and the early years of the annual publications of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad entitled *In the Maine Woods*, 1898 and 1900-1911. A. J. Campbell, in his *Classic & Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle* (1997: 75), gives the earliest and latest years for Burtis advertisements as 1895 (2 years after starting his business) and 1916 (one year before his death), respectively .

Now that we know about The Irresistible, who was the person behind this award-winning spinner? George H. Burtis was born on 19 August in 1844 in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada. His parents, William B. M., and Harriet E., Burtis were both Canadians. Because Canada was still a colony under British rule at this time, Burtis family members were technically citizens of Great Britain. As a young man George moved south and ended-up working near Worcester, a railroad hub and manufacturing city in east-central Massachusetts. Here, he met Ida Louise Belyea from Clinton, a small town 15 miles northeast of Worcester. The couple was married in Ida's home town on 14 October 1873. At the time, George was 28 years old and Ida was three years his junior. At some point after their marriage the couple moved to Canada where their first child, Helen Louise, was born in July 1875. George and Ida also had twin sons, Albert and

Fred, born in St. John, Canada. Tragically, the twins died within two weeks of being born.

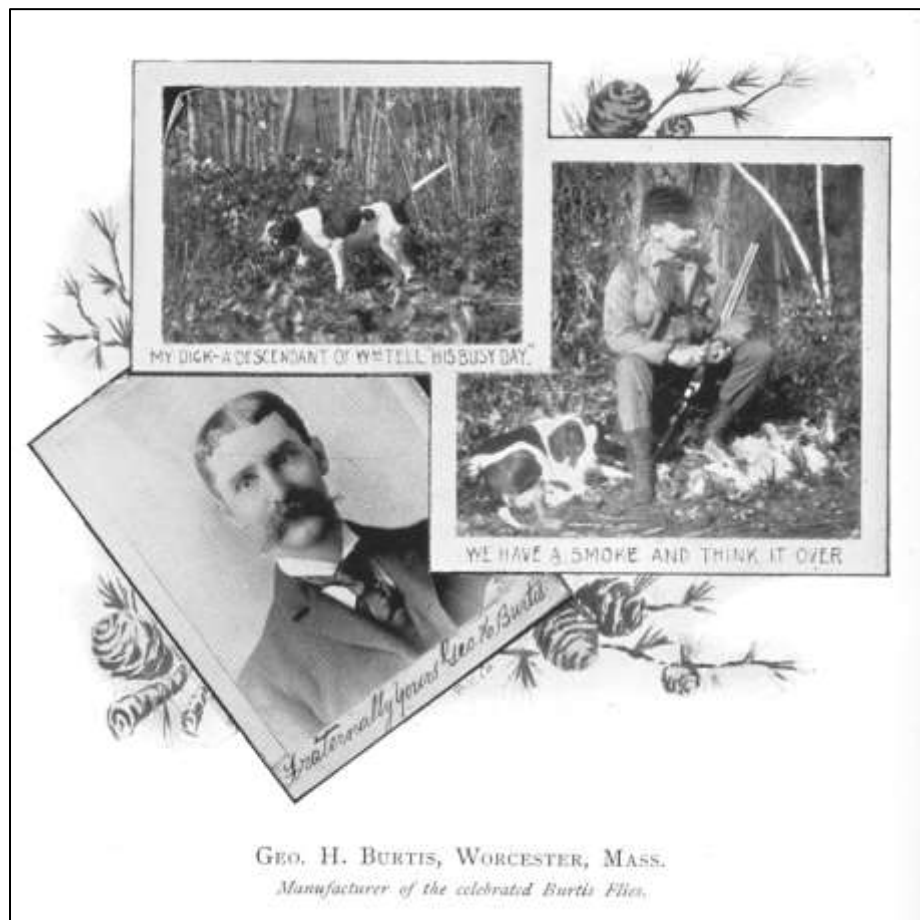
I could not determine exactly when the Burtis family moved back to Massachusetts, but in 1878 George was a book keeper in Clinton, Ida's home town, and the next year he worked as a clerk for Boston and Albany Railroad (B&A RR) Freight Company in Worcester. The railroad's Head Clerk, who was George's immediate boss as well as his brother-in-law, was Otis S. Hammond who, by one local account, "was much respected." According to annual Worcester directories, George worked as a B&A RR clerk for 13 years, 1879-1892.

Up to this point, despite living in the U.S.A. and being married to a U.S. citizen, George remained a citizen of Great Britain. But this was to change when George; his wife, Ida; and his daughter, Helen went back to Canada. George returned from this trip as an immigrant, and some two years later, on 18 October 1892, George H. Burtis – now 47 years old – became a naturalized citizen of the U.S.A. One year later, in 1893, Burtis opened his fishing tackle business with an office on Worcester's Main Street.

Burtis, in addition to spending time with his family and business, enjoyed training hunting dogs and travelling to fish and hunt. According to one Worcester newspaper (quoted in Burtis' catalog):

Mr. Burtis does not confine his whole attention to the manufacture and sale of fishing tackle, as his game bag frequently attests when he takes a day or two out in the fall with his celebrated pointer "Dick," a worthy descendent of "Wm. Tell." He is not trout hog or pot hunter, and he finds time to denounce both in occasional contributions to the sportsmen's journals, on these and other topics relating to field and stream.

Burtis not only made day-trips to hunt and fish, but he also travelled to Maine regularly to fish Moosehead Lake in spring and fall. Occasionally, he took sporting trips to more distant locations, including Nova Scotia (see photos in his booklet), and a four-week expedition to Saskatchewan to bird hunt with his nephew (published in *Forest and Stream*, Feb. 1915). This later trip took place only some two years before George's death.



A collage of Burtis photographs from Edward A. Samuels' *With Rod and Gun in New England and The Maritime Provinces* (1897, p. 516). George H. Burtis was an avid angler and bird hunter. Maine and eastern Canada were among Burtis' favorite fishing and hunting destinations. (Author's collection).

The Burtis family's economic status must have been fairly secure because not only did Burtis travel to fish and hunt, he had enough disposable income to invest. According to the *Electrical World* of 26 November 1892, George H. Burtis was one of three persons each investing

\$200,000 to form the Elwell Sliding Blind Company. This company, located in Berwick, Maine, was formed to “manufacture and deal in mechanical, electrical, and other devices.” The family also lived in a substantial house in an upper class neighborhood, residing at 4 Germain Street in Worcester.

In 1899, with the family’s residence still on Germain Street, Burtis’ sporting goods business – called the “Angler’s Den” – was located in downtown Worcester at 431 State Mutual Building. Today, the address for the Old State Mutual Building is 240 Main Street. This building was constructed in 1870 to house the offices of the State Mutual Insurance Company. In 1897, the building was used for rented office spaces. Interestingly, the building still stands and is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places. With a growing reputation (recall his 1904 Gold Metal Award), and a growing demand for his products, Burtis needed to expand his fishing tackle business. According to his 1902 tackle catalog, he re-located to two downtown sites in Worcester, 306 Main Street and 4 Walnut Street. The two offices were on the opposite sides of the same block, one block south of the State Mutual Building. In 1905, Burtis relocated the Angler’s Den office to 246 Day Building (= 306 Main St.), remained there, and at 4 Walnut until around 1909. From 1909 until ceasing business in 1916, Burtis apparently operated out of his home at 7 Haviland Street, southwest of downtown Worcester.

By 1912, the number of Burtis advertisements in sporting journals declined, suggesting he had cut back on his business activities. In his 73rd year, on 14 June 1917, George H. Burtis died.



George H. Burtis' residence at 4 Germain Street, Worcester, Massachusetts. The house was located only a few miles west of downtown Worcester where Burtis' had his offices. This photograph is from page 443 of Franklin Pierce Rice's *Worcester of Eighteen Hundred and Ninety-eight: Fifty Years a City* (1899). Strangely, this book makes no mention of Burtis, his tackle business, nor of his family.



Worcester's downtown business district in circa 1910 was a busy place with people on bikes, on foot, in automobiles, and in horse-drawn carriages. Angler's Den, one of two downtown offices that George H. Burtis had for his fishing tackle business, was located at 431 State Mutual Building. This address was on the left side of the street, at the end of this long block shown here. (Post card from author's collection).

Based on the real estate listed in city directories after George's death, he left his wife a sizable inheritance. Despite being able to financially maintain a household by herself, Ida moved out the house on Haviland Street and resided with her two unmarried cousins on her mother's side, Alice and Ellen Hammond. On 4 July 1921, at 74 years of age, Ida died. The couple's only surviving child, Helen Louise Burtis, had married Otis Converse White, Jr. on 19 June 1900. White was an 1896 graduate of Harvard, and took over his father's highly successful lighting company, O. C. White Company.

A. J. Campbell, in his pioneering research entitled *Classic & Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle* (1997, p. 74), states that regarding George H. Burtis: "We need to know more about this mid-Massachusetts maker ... For instance, who gave him the Gold Metal?" While this article has answered this, and many other Burtis questions, there is undoubtedly more to be learned about this turn-of-the-century tackle maker. Clearly, Burtis cared deeply about what his customers thought and said about the quality of fishing tackle products. Based on the large number of testimonials he featured in his catalogs, and used in his printed advertising, one could even argue that he was obsessed with these statements of praise. But whatever drove Burtis the human, there is no denying that in the short time he was in the fishing tackle business, a period spanning slightly more than two decades, he created a stellar legacy of high quality bamboo fishing rods, artful artificial flies, and superior spinners. Considering that all Burtis spinners are distinctly marked, and today are a minimum of one century old, they clearly make a fine addition to any collection of North American metal fishing baits.



The outside label on the top of The Irresistible's box boldly displays Burtis' registered trade mark – a brand name that spoke for itself. Burtis' trade name says that inside the box you'll find a spinner that is enticing, tempting – simply too attractive to be resisted. The Irresistible was apparently too similar to the earlier Rangeley Spinner, invented by Henry O. Stanley of Maine, to be patented. However, by using a trade name Burtis was able to protect his version of the spinner from duplication. (Author's collection).



Stamping on the bottom-end of a bamboo fly-rod made by George H. Burtis of Worcester, Massachusetts. Burtis' rods have long been collected whereas his fishing spinners have been less well known to fishing tackle collectors. (Photo courtesy of Bob Moran).

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Order one of the



BURTIS
\$15.00
Hand-
made
Split
Bamboo
RODS.

ANGLERS! It will contribute to the pleasure of your angling hours to own the

BURTIS Hand-made Split Bamboo
Rods and the Burtis Flies.

Rods are provided without any name or butt cap. TROLLING DEVICE, also a specialty. This is a very killing lure for large fish. Good for coarctation.

GEO. H. BURTIS, Worcester, Mass.

Once a Purchaser

Geo. H. Burtis Worcester
Mass.


THE BURTIS CELEBRATED RODS, FLIES AND
"IRRESISTIBLE" SINGLE-HOOK SPINNERS
AWARDED GOLD MEDAL
ST. LOUIS WORLD'S FAIR. BURTIS PRO-
DUCTS KNOWN IN EVERY SPORTING CAMP.
ILLUSTRATED BOOKLET FREE TO ANGLERS

Always a Customer

The advertisement on the left is from page 125 of *A Big Game and Fishing Guide to North-Eastern Maine*. This promotional booklet was published in 1898 by the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad, and continued to appear annually for decades from 1900 on under the name of *In The Maine Woods*. The advertisement on the right, printed in 1911, was the last Burtis advertisement that appeared in these annual, Maine railroad booklets. (Author's collection).

The "Burtis" Spinner

The Burtis New Single-Hook Trolling Bait.



"I CAN CATCH SALMON WITH THE 'IRRESISTIBLE' WHEN NO ONE ELSE CAN GET AT THEM." WITH ANY OTHER TROLL. — L.T. CARLETON, SEASIDE, ILLINOIS, AND CANAL.


A successful Spinner for Salmon and Trout.
Jock Scott, Dusty Miller and Silver Doctor. Each, \$1.25
Parmachenee Belle, Col. Fuller, Ibis, Montreal and
Brown Hackle. Each, 1.00
Packed 1 in box

George H. Burtis sold his products directly from his own store in Worcester, through the mail, and indirectly through selected dealers. Shown above is a circa 1900 advertisements from a T. B. Davis fishing tackle catalog. Note that "Gold Metal Award" is lacking from the top of the box, dating this box to pre-1904. T. B. Davis was a large retailer- wholesaler located in Portland, Maine. (Author's collection).




**FOR RELIABLE FLIES, WRITE TO
GEO. H. BURTIS, WORCESTER, MASS.**

THE BURTIS SINGLE-HOOK TROLLING BAIT
"THE IRRESISTIBLE"
 (Trade-mark registered.)



Is the most killing bait ever invented. \$1.00, \$1.25 each
 Sent to any address on receipt of price. Those at \$1.25 are best
 for salmon and large trout. See that my name is on every Bait
 as well as on the Box. Every success is limited. Accept no
 substitutes. The BURTIS Hand-made SPLIT BAMBOO RODS and the
 BURTIS FLIES have a National and International reputation.

Send for Illustrated Booklet. **GEO. H. BURTIS, Worcester, Mass.**



Send for Illustrated Booklet FREE.
GEO. H. BURTIS, Worcester, Mass.

George H. Burtis clearly knew the value of advertising. Shown here are Burtis advertisements published in the *Maine Sportsman* of 2 April 1898 (top), *Shooting and Fishing* in 1901 (middle), and the April 1903 issue of the *National Sportsman* (bottom). (Author's collection).

CHAPTER THREE

Edward A. Grout: Maker of the “Electric Bait” and Other Fine Spinners

In the late 1880s through early 1900s, eastern Massachusetts was a national center for the manufacturing and selling of fishing tackle. In his monumental book *Classic & Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle* (1997), A. J. Campbell discussed the following Boston tackle houses: Bradford & Anthony (later Dame, Stoddard & Kendall); John P. Lovell (later Iver Johnson Company); Lane & Read (later William Read & Sons, Inc.); J. S. Trowbridge & Company; Prouty & Appleton (later Appleton & Bassett, etc.); H. A. Whittemore & Co.; J. B. Hunter & Co.; and Bob Smith Sporting Goods. Almost half of these companies, at one time or another, were located on Washington or Summer streets in downtown Boston. One sporting goods dealer not mentioned in Campbell (1997), was E. A. Grout & Co. of 111 Summer Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

In addition to selling snowshoes and tennis racquets and other sporting goods labelled E. A. Grout & Co., Grout also made and sold fishing tackle; including bamboo fly rods stamped With his company's name and address (Author's collection):



This article documents the tackle made by this company, focusing on their metal baits. But before discussing Grout tackle, especially his spinners, let's briefly look at the life of the company's founder, Edward Arthur Grout. The information about Grout's life and work came mostly from my examination of 34 city directories, covering the years 1885 through 1941. The directories studied were for the cities of Boston (8), Medford (7), and Cambridge (18). U.S. Census records were also studied to confirm directory findings, and to better understand Grout's family life.

Edward A. Grout was born on 1 August 1867 in Medford, a small city 5 ½ miles northwest of Boston. His parents, John M. and Sarah A Grout, were originally from Vermont. John Grout and his wife had four children, with Edward being one of two sons. Edward was educated in Medford schools, and when 18 years old worked as a salesperson for Wm. Read & Sons. In 1905, Grout lived with his brother and sister at 91 Dudley, Medford. Three years later, on 8 October 1908,

SPORTSMEN'S OUTFITS.
Fine Trout and Salmon Rods,
 FLIES, LINES, and everything in FISHING TACKLE, TOUR-
 ISTS' KNAPSACKS, TENTS, RUBBER BLANKETS, etc.,
 WINCHESTER, COLT, MAYNARD, and all
 makes of RIFLES.



Rushton's Fine Cedar Light Boats and Canoes,
 For rowing or with sails. Can be carried by two.

OSGOOD'S FOLDING CANOE,
 Packed in a trunk.

— — —

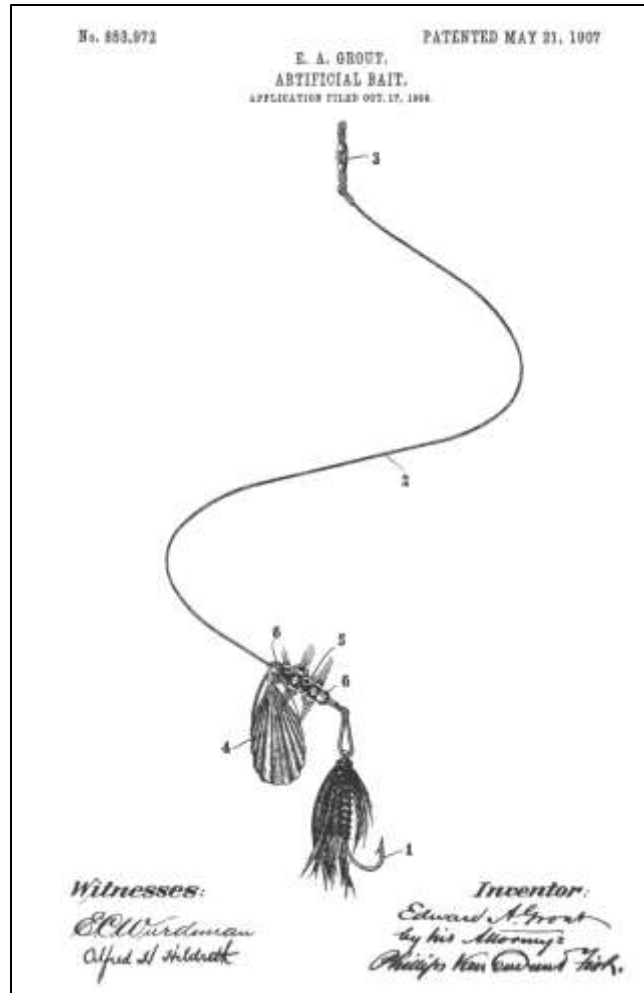
Send for Illustrated Catalogue.

WM. READ & SONS,
 107 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON.

Wm. Read & Sons was one of Boston's early, major dealers in sporting goods. This advertisement is from the last page of the 1889 edition of *Hubbard's Guide to Moosehead Lake and Northern Maine*. At the time this guidebook was published, Edward A. Grout was 22 years old, and working in sales for the Reads. Later, E. A. Grout would make fishing tackle, including high-quality spinners, sold by Wm. Read & Sons. (Author's collection).

Grout married Lizzie Mabel Spencer. Grout was 41 years old, and Mabel was 31; the couple were to raise one daughter. The marriage ceremony was conducted at the home of Grout's in-laws home, 19 Garfield Street, Cambridge. This house, located in the city adjoining Boston's northwest side, was Grout's residence for life.

The year before Grout's marriage, on 21 May 1907, he received a U.S. patent for his Electric Bait (E. A. Grout also held a 1912 patent for ice creepers). This lure patent may have given



The patent drawing for the artificial bait that became Grout's Electric Bait. Edward A. Grout filed patent papers on 17 October 1906, and obtained his patent a little over seven months later on 21 May 1907. (Courtesy U.S. Patent Office).

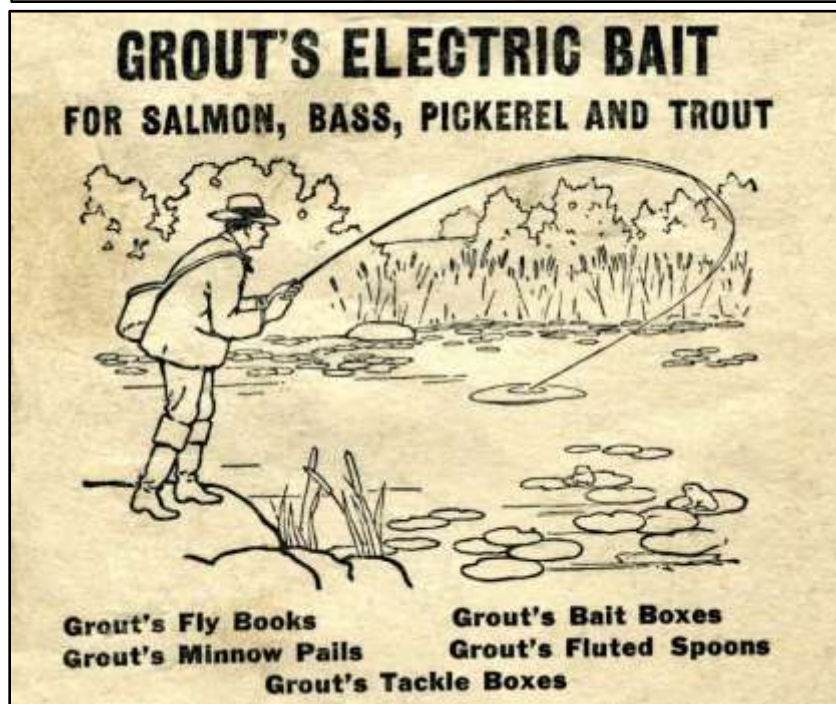
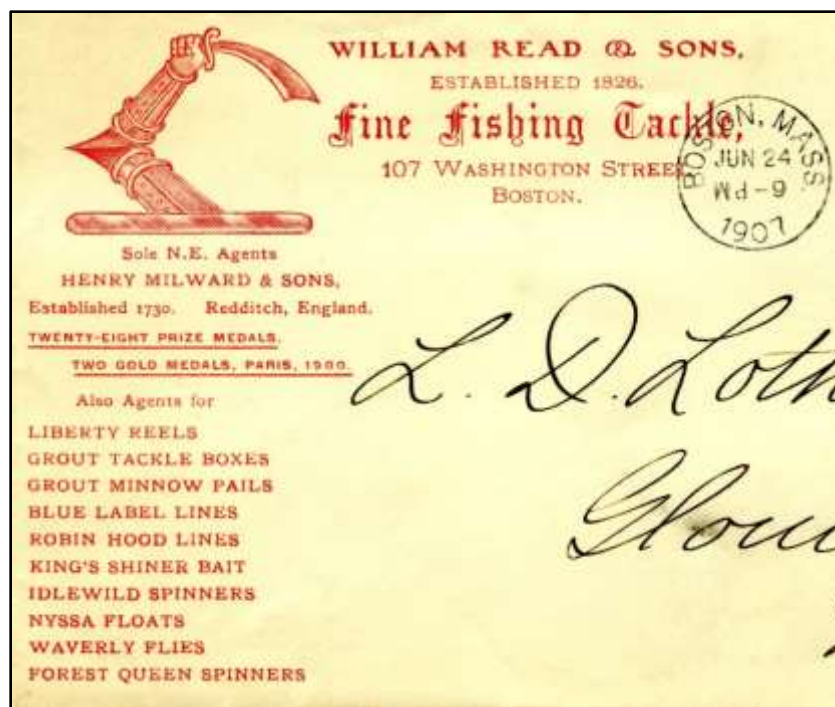
Grout the confidence to strike-out and create his own business. The 1910 U.S. Census lists him as a "proprietor" of a sporting goods company. The 1911 and 1912 Cambridge directories do not list Grout as working for the Wm. Read & Sons; instead, he is self-employed at Edward A. Grout Sporting Goods (a.k.a., E. A. Grout & Co.) as located at 111 Summer Street; this would remain his company's address until it ceased business.

E. A. Grout & Co., as mentioned above, made and sold a variety of sporting goods including fishing tackle. Types of tackle manufactured by, or manufactured for, Grout included fly books,

minnow pails, tackle boxes, bait boxes, and fluted spoons. Even after his departure from Wm. Read & Sons, Grout maintained a close working relationship with this large sporting goods dealer. Specially, Edward E. Grout assigned the patent for his Electric Bait to Wm. Read & Sons, and the Reads sold fishing tackle made by Grout (see folio illustration). An advertisement ran by Wm. Read & Sons in *Forest and Stream* during June 1908 features Grout's Electric Bait under the "Fishing Tackle."

E. A. Grout & Co. continued operating until 1928-29, when the Cambridge directories lists Grout as selling stocks; there was no mention of his sporting goods business. What effect the start of the Great Depression had on Grout's decision to get out of the tackle business is unknown, but as the economic downturn of this period intensified, selling stocks could not have been too lucrative. By 1941, Grout was fully retired. He had become a life member, starting in 1894, of the American Missionary Association. E. A. Grout died on 28 September 1941 at the age of 74 years. His wife, Mabel, died at age 70 on 4 July 1947. They are buried together in the Oak Grove Cemetery, Medford, Massachusetts.

Now that he have an outline of Grout's life, and know when and where he operated his sporting goods business, let's focus in on his fishing spinners. Clearly, his fishing tackle claim-to-fame was "Grout's Electric Bait." This patented spinner was essentially a Rangeley Spinner with three unique characteristics: (1) fluted blade(s) stamped with the makers name and city where made; (2) glass beads were polyhedral (= many sided), and not round; and (3) blades mounted on a wire, not a gut leader. The fluted blade on Rangeley Spinner rotates around a metal

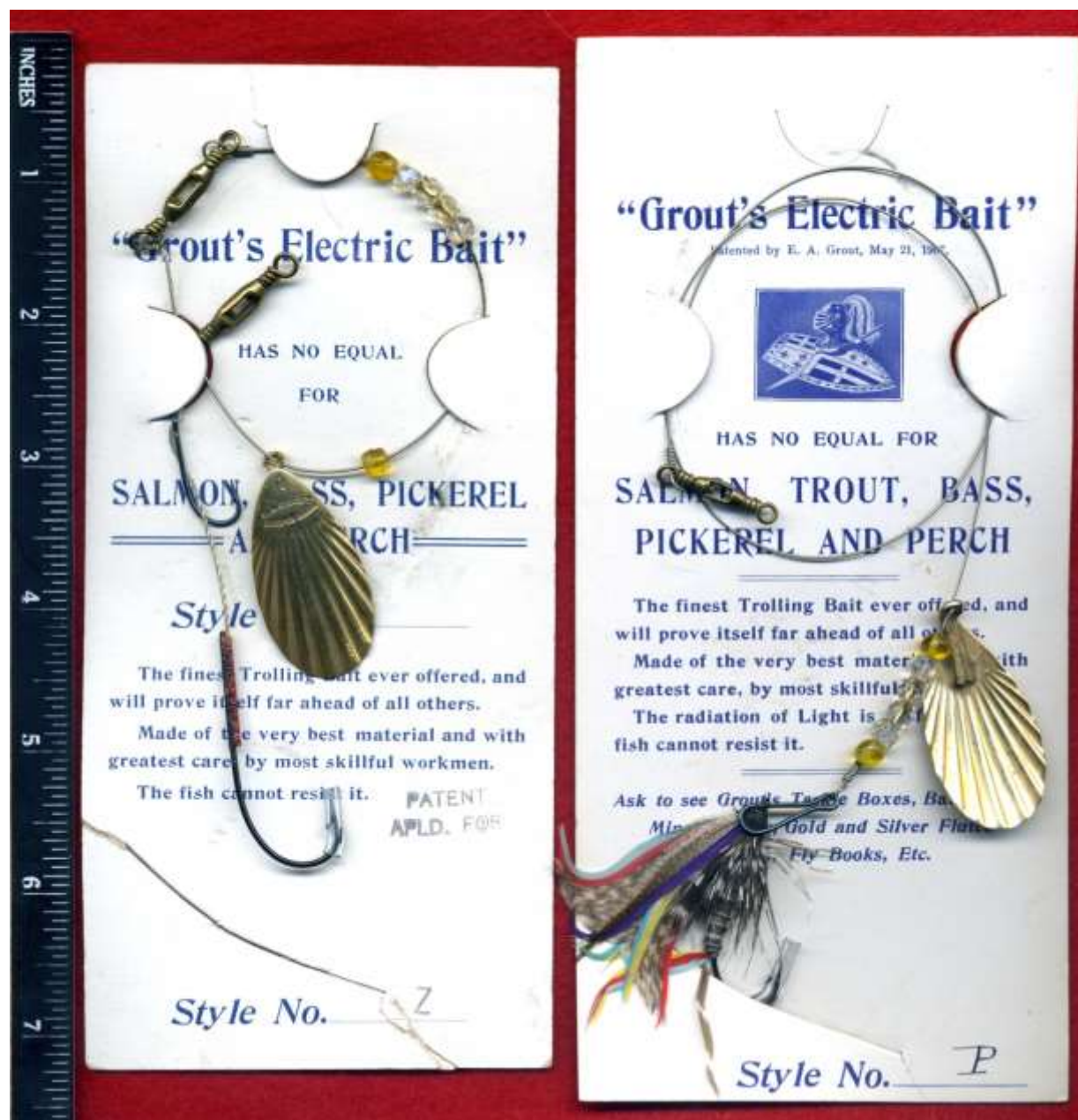


The upper illustration is the left-front of a William Read & Sons letter envelope dated June 24, 1907. Note that at this time the Reads were selling Grout's tackle boxes, minnow pails, and Forest Queen Spinners. The lower illustration, from the center section of an envelope used by Wm. Read & Sons to package items sold to customers at a later date, shows that the Reads later sold a greater variety of E. A. Grout products. (Author's collection).

collar, necessary to prevent wear on the spinner's fragile gut leader (but unnecessary on Grout's wire leaders.). According to the lure's patent, the specially shaped beads "sparkle and flash and thereby render it visible to the fish at the greater distance" than other spinner. The importance of these glass beads to the baits' uniqueness was also emphasized in the patent's abstract, describing Grout's invention as "An artificial bait, comprising a hook and a lure consisting of an iridescent glass bead of polyhedral form to emit opalescent gleams from its facets, substantially as described." Note that the four inner beads on this spinner are clear; the outer two are colored.



Edward A. Grout's spinners are easy to identify because, as show here, his name and the manufacturing city are deeply stamped into the baits' fluted blades (left). A close-up of the 6 polyhedral-shaped beads on a Grout Electric Bait (right). Note the hard-wire leader and the many-sided (i.e., polyhedral) glass beads; these features are characteristic of Grout's Electric Bait. (Author's collection).



Two examples of Grout's Electric Baits mounted on original cards. Note that the bait on the left has stamp reading "PATENT APLD. FOR". Assuming that this bait was made shortly after Grout applied for his patent, then this example was manufactured between October 1906 and May 1907, making this bait at least 110 years old. (Author's collection).

Grout's Electric Bait, which came in varying leader lengths and hook configurations, was not the only spinner made and sold by Edward A. Grout. He made a spinner on a hard wire leader with the fluted, stamped blade that was essentially an Electric Bait except for one key feature:

instead of the six many-sided glass beads, this spinner had six round, solid-colored beads. The outer two beads were pink whereas the inner four beads are white. The Grout-stamped spinner with round beads can be found on wire leaders of varying length. This spinner can also be found



Grout's Electric Baits can be found tipped with a fly, various hook arrangements, and without a fly or hook. Note the characteristic stamped blades, heavy wire leaders, tight wraps on the leaders, and six polyhedral glass beads. (Author's collection).



Grout Electric Baits come in various lengths. The bait on the far right in the first group, because it has six round, solid beads instead of six many-sided translucent glass beads, is not an Electric Bait (left grouping). This Grout spinner can be found with the typically stamped and fluted Grout blade, as well as with a buffalo blade stamped “RANGELEY” (right grouping). (Author’s collection).

without the Grout-stamped blade, and instead features a buffalo blade stamped “RANGELEY.”

The “RANGELEY” stamping on a fluted blade, in earlier years, denoted a Rangeley Spinner

invented and made by Henry O. Stanley, and his immediate successors. Why Grout used this

near trade-mark stamping is unknown. Grout’s finest, and perhaps his rarest, spinner is the Forest

Queen, which Grout declared was “The Finest Casting Spoon made.” (See the photograph at the

end of this chapter.). This spinner is built around a heavy metal shaft, and features a high-quality

fly at the back end and a box swivel at the front. In the middle is a fluted blade with the

characteristic Grout stamping. Examples of the above spinners can be found in the photographs

accompanying this article.

Edward A. Grout started to make and sell his Electric Bait in 1906, four years before he left Wm. Read & Sons to start his own sporting goods business. Grout’s business existed for almost

two decades, 1910 to ~1929. During this period, Grout sold his sporting goods wholesale to the much larger and better known Boston tackle house, Wm. Read & Sons. Edward A. Grout's fishing spinners (and some of his other sporting goods; e.g., bamboo fishing rods tennis rackets, snowshoes) are clearly marked, providing collectors a means to reliably identify his metal baits. Grout's spinners and casting spoons can be found mounted on cards, although these are quite rare in the author's experience. In addition to quality and identifiability of Grout's spinners, his works are fun to collect as they represent one of three spinner makers working in Massachusetts at the turn-of-the century and shortly thereafter. Anyone interested in Massachusetts metal should also be on the lookout for the earlier works of George H. Burtis (1844-1917) of Worcester, and John W. Shields (1862-1939) of Brookline.



E. A. Grout also made an in-line spinner built around a heavy duty wire shaft. Note that the underside of the blade on this spinner was painted a bright red. These two spinners appear to have never been fished. (Author's collection).



Close-up of Grout's Forest Queen Spinner. While the label states that this casting spoon is for "Salmon, Bass, or Pickerel," it undoubtedly could also catch trout. This carded bait originally came packaged in a labelled, manila envelope. (Author's collection).