Henry O. Stanley revisited: new findings and insights

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When does one know enough about a fishing lure, or a lure company, to publish this hard-earned information? Like for many questions, there is no easy answer. But with careful consideration and a comparison of what you have to say compared to what others have already printed, an answer will emerge. And luckily for NFLCC members, we have experienced editors that are helpful to authors considering publication. But even with careful consideration and experienced editors, an author never knows everything he/she would like to know. It has become clear to the both of us in our studies of Henry O. Stanley that serious collectors should (1) never stop learning from their collections, and (2) should stay connected to others with similar collecting interests. Not only do these two activities make collecting more fun, but they are both potential sources of new information and insights that help to keep lure collecting fresh and fun.

In the Winter 2013 Issue of the NFLCC *Magazine*, we each published an article about Henry Orville Stanley (Ref. 1, Ref. 2). (For a biographical sketch of Henry O. Stanley, see Ref. 3; photographs of H. O. Stanley, his family, and his tackle store were published in Ref. 4.). Krohn’s article presented a brief history of Stanley’s life along with more detailed information about his fishing tackle business and the four lures he invented, made, and sold. Hirsch’s article documented his discovery of the Stanley’s personal fishing tackle, including a tackle box, flies, lures, rods, and reels (that were also used by his son, George Page Stanley). Krohn’s main findings about Stanley’s four baits were confirmed by the contents of Henry O. Stanley’s tackle box, which was relatively intact even after the passing of more than 100 years. However, some significant details regarding Stanley’s lures, and an advertising item, were overlooked in our two earlier articles. Thus, the purpose of this article is to document and discuss these new discoveries.

We began our reexamination of Stanley’s lures in July of 2016 when Hirsch travelled to Maine. We, along with several other Stanley collectors (see acknowledgments), met on July 6 at the Rangeley Outdoor Sporting Heritage Museum in Oquossco, Maine. After looking over and discussing the various material assembled, we started to examine one item at a time. We were both surprised at the number, and nature, of the new findings and insights made on the day, and during subsequent exchanges.

### Aluminum Salmon Advertising Piece

The H. O. Stanley & Son advertising piece is made of aluminum in the shape of a salmon and is 3 inches long. Krohn (2013) characterized this piece as a “bookmark.” While it’s clearly possible to use this item as a bookmark, based on the suggestions of one of the meeting’s participants we now believe that this little aluminum salmon was designed primarily to cut leaders (see photograph). We note that while the aluminum used in Stanley’s State of Maine Spinner and Aluminum Smelt are the same thickness, the aluminum used in the salmon advertising piece is thinner and more polished.

This aluminum salmon is about 3 inches long. The device was found to readily cut gut as well as monofilament leaders—note the short piece of leader behind the pectoral fin.

### State of Maine Spinner

At the time of Krohn’s original Stanley article only four State of Maine spinners (with a shaft made of aluminum) were known to the author. Based on these two examples, and two advertisements that had been located, this dead bait spinner has two fins and came in two sizes: 2 ¼ and 2 ⅛ inches in length. Stanley’s tackle box contained, however, contained a third example an experimental, one-fin version that is illustrated in a photograph accompanying this article.

Additionally, Krohn purchased a State of Maine Spinner that was mounted on a card, and in its original, orange-colored box. This spinner was a Size 2 (= 2 ¼ in.), and apparently had never been fished. Note that the name on the cards was misspelled: “H. M.[sic] STANLEY & SON.” The printer may have been thinking of the African explorer, and not lure maker from Dixfield, Maine.

Rare example of a carded State of Maine Spinner in an original box. Note the card states the dead bait spinner came in two sizes. (courtesy of Dan Leroux)
The two State of Maine Spinners found in Stanley's tackle box. The standard model #1 is on bottom and the experimental model #2 is on top. (Hirsch's collection)

Stanley Aluminum Smelt

In terms of new information about the history of the Stanley Aluminum Smelt, we found an article dated 20 April 1895 from Forest and Stream that contains a paragraph about the lure's early days. The article was written under the pen name “Hackle,” and the paragraph reads:

The artificial minnow as a bait for trolling is nearly as well known to fishermen as the ancient spoon itself. The celebrated phantoms, Caledonian and white bait minnows have been made in almost every shape and size, and their killing qualities have been unquestioned for years. But one thing seemed wanting to make them more effective as a lure, and that was life-like motion in the water. To accomplish this purpose, Mr. H.O. Stanley, the well-known Fish Commissioner of Maine, has devoted considerable time, and has finally produced a minnow which thoroughly covers the desired points. The new lure will be made of aluminum (minnow shape) in two sizes [we know of 8] and is well equipped with hooks. It is so built that when drawn through the water, it darts from side to side, as the same time preserving a rotary motion. It will be named the “Stanley Smelt,” as it closely resembles the favorite salmon bait when under water. Patent rights have been applied for, and the new bait will shortly appear on the market under the joint ownership and management of Mr. Stanley and Mr. L. D. Chapman, of Boston. [Chapman was formally taken off of the lure's 1895 via a second patent dated 3 November 1896.]

Krohn (2013) correctly noted that the Stanley Aluminum Smelt came stamped with one patent year (1895) and two years (1895 & 1896). What the original article forgot to point out, however, is that the one-year is much rarer than the two-years, and the one-year smelt – in addition to the year(s) – is stamped “THE STANLEY SMELT,” corresponding to the label on the only box known for Stanley Smelts (see photograph). The more commonly found Stanley Smelt with both patent years is simply stamped on the top line as “STANLEY SMELT.”

During our Stanley lure examination at the Oquossoc Outdoor Sporting Museum, we also noted that Stanley Smelts came in one of two surfaces: a smooth or a rough, lightly pitted, aluminum. While not 100 percent sure, we believe the rough version smelts were made from the original aluminum sheets, whereas the smooth version were made after the sheets were polished. Lastly, we noticed at our Oquossoc get-together that 10 percent of the Stanley Smelts examined had an extra hole through the body. These holes had beveled edges, leading us to believe they were made at the time of manufacture and thus had a purpose. But what was the purpose? Again, Stanley's tackle box provided an answer in that it contains a Smelt with an extra treble hook, held in place with one of the hooks mounted through the mystery hole. The extra hole through the body occurred in the larger sized smelts, suggesting that that to avoid hooking fish that struck the smelt's mid-body, additional hooks were needed.

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Cupsuptic Spinner

One of the surprise findings in Krohn (2013) was that Henry O. Stanley, not W. T. J. Lowe of Buffalo, New York, invented the Cupsuptic Spinner. H. O. Stanley & Son, however, apparently did not have a capability to make high-quality Cupsuptic blades so they relied on Lowes-made blades. This is supported by the fact that the stamping on the upper part of the blade clearly refers to Henry O. Stanley (= CUPSUPTIC/ H.O.S./ TRADE MARK), whereas the stamping on the bottom of the blade is the Lowe Star identified as a Registered Trade Mark.

Krohn (2013) noted that H. O. Stanley & Son made two types of Cupsuptic Spinners. The Original Cupsuptic Spinner (which was a wobbler, not an inline spinner) was made in 1907 to February 1910. The New Cupsuptic Spinner (that was both a wobbler and an inline spinner) was made from March 1910 to around 1915, two years after Henry’s death. After Henry’s brother, Frank Stanley, stopped making the H.O.S. Cupsuptic Spinner, W.T. J. Lowe made an early version with a hole in the blade, so the spinner would also function as a wobbler. This early Lowe version is rare, and today the inline version of the W.T.J. Lowe Cupsuptic Spinner is much more readily found by collectors (see illustrations). But the above are not the only versions of the Cupsuptic Spinner that exist.

Above: two Stanley Smelts with holes drilled through the bodies to provide an anchor point for an extra treble hook. The surface of the upper Smelt is polished, but the lower one is not polished. Below: a Stanley Smelt showing the attached treble hook. (Above, Krohn collection. Below, Hirsch collection.)

Shown here is the evolution of the Cupsuptic Spinner from Stanley’s original version (wobbler only) to his new Cupsuptic Spinner.
Based on an article quoted in full below, Henry O. Stanley enjoyed experimenting with lures. This trait was substantiated by the contents of Stanley’s tackle box as the contained an experimental spinner with an H.O.S. Cupsuptic blade was assembled by H. O. Stanley (or perhaps his son). (See photographs.)

The evolution of the Cupsuptic Spinner moved to the W.T.J. Lowe version (left) with a hole in the blade and finally, to the more common Lowe version (below) with no hole. (Krohn’s collection)

“RANGELEY” was understood to be a Stanley Rangeley Spinner. He was the originator of this spinner and to the best of our knowledge never patented it. Instead, Henry O. Stanley used a “RANGELEY” stamped into the fluted blade as an informal trade mark.

As Krohn (2013) noted, in 1906-07 Stanley sold his rights to this spinner to Phillip W. Edwards of Portland, Maine. When Edwards died unexpectedly only two years later, others started to produce their own version of this spinner. Some of these makers also used fluted blades stamped “RANGELEY,” making the positive identification of a Stanley Rangeley Spinner difficult, but not impossible. If a Rangeley Spinner came from the Stanley family, as was the case with Stanley’s personnel tackle box (Ref. 2), a collector can be sure he/she has the real thing. In addition, if the spinner matches exactly the Rangeley Spinner illustrated in the H. O. Stanley & Catalog, one can be confident of owning an exceedingly rare, original Stanley Rangeley Spinner. (see illustration).

Phillip W. Edwards bought the rights to the Rangeley Spinner six or seven years before Henry O. Stanley’s 1913 death (i.e., 1906-07). Edwards died in 1909, making this boxed spinner an exceptional find as it was made for only two to three years. Following Edwards’ death, the number of people making Rangeley Spinners exploded. (Krohn’s collection)

Original Stanley Rangeley Spinners are extremely rare and difficult to positively identify. Note the details (e.g., blade fluting & stamping, leader collar, front clip & knots) from the spinner in the lower illustration match those in the upper example from the H.O. Stanley & Son catalog. (upper illustration from Krohn’s collection; lower photo courtesy of Jeff Knapp).

Rangeley Spinner

In Stanley’s day, a spinner on an approximately 8-inch long, gut leader with a fluted blade stamped

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As for new information about Stanley Rangeley Spinners, we found an article published in *Forest and Stream*, dated 28 July 1900, that is noteworthy. The author of this article, “Special” (a.k.a., William K. Moody), owned at camp near Rangeley and personally knew Stanley. Moody was an established newspaper reporter in Boston, Massachusetts who regularly reported on the outdoor sporting activities in western Maine. His July 1900 article reads:

**Fish Commissioner Henry O. Stanley called on me the other day. He is much pleased with the way fishing is holding out in Maine waters this year. He has made another improvement in his Rangeley spinner, attaching a small, loose hook to the same, just above the other hook, the gut passing through an eye at the end of the hook. He has also changed the coloring of the spoon [blade], decorating the white body with carmine [rich red with a purple shade] spots and mottles.**

RANGELEY SPINNER
The Rangeley Spinner is in a class by itself and has for years been the largest sale of any Spinner on the market. Was first made by H. O. Stanley (Maine Fish and Game Commissioner) of Dixfield, Maine. These Spinners are celebrated as salmon baits.

No. 1. No. 4 Nickel Plated Spoon, one best quality hollow point Hook and a sliding Hook, on treble twisted gut. Loose hook allows adjustment of bait or minnow each $ .26

This illustration of a sliding single hook used as a bait-holder, invented by Henry O. Stanley around 1900, came from a circa 1908 Edwards & Walkers (Portland, Maine) fishing tackle catalog.

More than thirty years later, this same hook arrangement was being used on Rangeley Spinners. The “Loose Lip Hook” Rangeley was made by William H. “Bill” Burgess (1886-1967) of Minot, Maine; illustration is from Burgess’ State-O-Maine Fishing Tackle Catalog. (Krohn’s collection)

To the best of our knowledge, this makes Henry O. Stanley the first to put a sliding hook bait-holder on a Rangeley Spinner. Also note that Stanley apparently painted some the blades on his spinners. Clearly, Stanley did not view his fishing lures as static products, but constantly looked for ways to modify and improve his lures. Just consider the changes that we documented above for his Stanley Smelt, and for his Rangeley and Cupsuptic spinners.

In closing, we emphasize that getting together with fellow collectors to compare and discuss lures is not only fun, but such socializing often proves the adage that “many minds are stronger than one.” Also, fishing lure research does not yield final “truths.” Research is a process that, when done properly, leads one ever closer to the truth, but never to the final answer. The emergence of new insights when collections are combined and examined together is both an enjoyable and productive way to gain new insights. Thus, we offer our new findings as the best available at this time, and have no illusions that they are the final word about the ingenuity of Henry O. Stanley and his son. As more and more information finds its way to the Web, and additional Stanley artifacts are found and assembled, additional insights will surely follow.

**The authors acknowledge the assistance of Dan Leroux, Don Palmer, Jeff Knapp, and Nancy McReynolds. Ron Goddard, another long-time Stanley collector, has also helped the senior author in many ways over the years. Don Palmer (deceased) was the first to suggest that the Stanley Aluminum Salmon was a leader cutter.**

References:

