



photos-William Blauser

SPRING-LOADED FISH HOOKS & LURES

by Alex Zidock Jr.

The colonists found America the Beautiful was also America the Bountiful. The Delaware, Susquehanna and Ohio rivers and the lakes and ponds in between were gorged with fish of all types. As late as the 1880s, there were so many shad in the Delaware River that an angler could catch as many as 15,000 in a season, pay all his bills and still have money to spend the rest of the year.

Fishing was big business for some. For others, it meant feeding a hungry family. In any case, it didn't matter how small or how many fish were taken.

According to William Blauser, the first seven United States patents pertaining to catching fish were for mechanical spring-activated fish hooks that "guarantee the catch and keep of fish." A few of those ingenious devices were invented in Pennsylvania.

Blauser and Timothy Mierzwa authored the tome "Spring-loaded Fish Hooks, Traps & Lures," which includes historical information, value, patent drawings and photographs of many spring-activated, fish-catching devices.

"The Engelbrecht & Skiff Fish Hook is the first invention ever patented in the United States that had to do with catching a fish, on July 28, 1846. Its historical significance is profound," Blauser writes in his book.

For the most part, spring-loaded fish hooks and fish traps employed one baited hook and as many as 12 other hooks

that were spring-deployed once the fish triggered the bait holder or baited hook. Fish could not escape, and in many cases, they were killed in the process. Size didn't matter. Any



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← Made in Pottstown, Montgomery County, in 1946, the claim is that this hook will cause all kinds of fish from 1 to 30 pounds to hook themselves and stay hooked.

fish could feed a family or be sold. It wasn't until 1925 that Pennsylvania set creel limits. After that, the minimum legal size was established, making indiscriminate traps illegal.

Blauser has been collecting spring-loaded fish hooks for more than 30 years. "When my co-author, Tim, passed away 10 years ago, I purchased his collection. I have the largest collection of these devices," said Blauser.

An umbrella manufacturer in Frankford (a section of Philadelphia) patented the Evans Eagle Claw, a 3-inch and a 4-inch size for catching fish. An advertisement in the 1877 issue of *Field & Stream* magazine for that trap reads, "For fishing and all kinds of small game and animals." In his research, Blauser found a larger third size "would be available to catch bears, wolves and panthers." He said there is no record of that larger trap being built.

In a tackle box found in Pittsburgh, Blauser discovered what he calls the "Pittsburgh Rake Trap." This trap for smaller fish is little known, but that's not unusual. "There are some traps we call 'Folk Art,' where maybe only one was made, and they were never patented or mass-produced. This trap may be one of those traps. It has no marking and is definitely handmade," said Blauser.

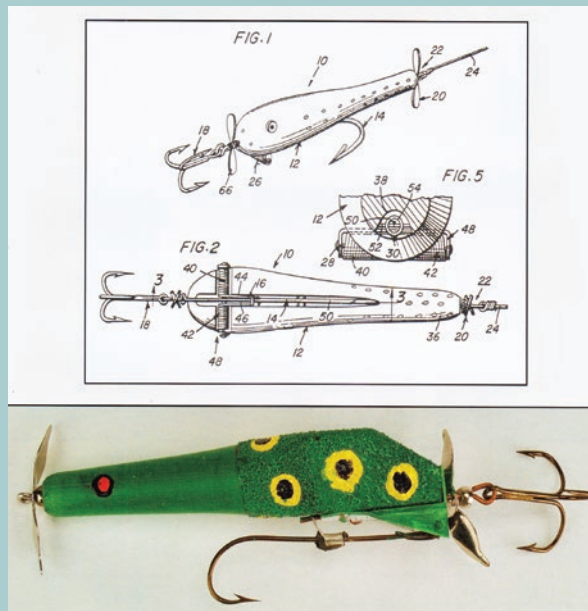
The Automatic Safety Fish Hook is a spring-loaded fish hook manufactured and sold by Schwarzer Experimental and Manufacturing Company, Pottstown. According to the paperwork, it will cause all kinds of fish from 1 to 30 pounds to hook themselves and stay hooked. This hook was patented on September 3, 1946.

One of the most interesting metal killer fish traps was patented in 1957. The "Sure-Catch Device," invented by Big Emmitt Y. Scott, Swainsboro, Georgia, fired .22 caliber and .32 caliber ammunition. It consists of a hollow brass tube barrel attached to a fish hook. Inside the barrel is a spring-loaded hammer. A fishing line is connected to the end of the barrel. When force is applied to the fishing line, a retaining pin is released, causing the hammer to strike the bullet's firing pin, sending the projectile into the head of the fish. In a newspaper article in 1956, Scott is quoted, "Blanks will stun 'em until you get them into the boat; live ammo will stun 'em until frying time." When asked if it was legal, Scott's reasoning was, "must be legal, because the fish is already caught when it goes off. Just helps you land 'em."

Since Blauser's book was published nearly 20 years ago, he's collected more unusual fish traps and is always on the look-out for more. "I continue to issue addendums to our current book, and I'm preparing the second edition. I'm happy to help identify any spring-loaded fish traps people may find," said Blauser. □



In 1877, an umbrella manufacturer in Frankford patented the Evans Eagle Claw, a 3-inch and a 4-inch size for catching fish.



Patented in 1976, this lure is a more modern style. However, when the fish pulls on the treble hook, the second hook is spring-loaded and deployed to catch the fish's jaw.

More information:
springhook.com