Henry Orville Stanley is better known to collectors of early American fishing lures than any other Maine maker. Because one of the lures he invented and produced, the Stanley Aluminum Smelt, is clearly marked, available, and hence widely collected. Also well known to collectors, but unmarked and hence problematic to identify, is Stanley’s Rangeley Spinner. In addition to inventing and producing these two fishing lures, Stanley also originated and made the State of Maine and Cupsuptic spinners. The former is not stamped and very rare, and while the latter is stamped, it’s rare and comes in two types. Because this spinner was made for Stanley by W. T. J. Lowe, the Stanley Cupsuptic Spinner has both Lowe and Stanley markings that requires some
specialized knowledge to identify (see Gallery of Photographs below).

Stanley served as Maine Inland Fisheries and Game Commissioner from 1872 until his retirement in 1905 (except 1880). During his 33 years of service to the State of Maine, he was appointed by 13 Governors, a remarkable achievement by any standard. While this job was considered prestigious by many, Stanley’s state salary was modest. To supplement his income, he owned and operated a number of businesses, including a general store, a grist mill, a wool processing factory, and a sporting goods and fishing tackle business. While Stanley sold sporting goods and a variety of other goods in his Dixfield general store in 1866 (and probably even earlier), he did not start making flies and lures on any scale until 1880. In that year, while at Moosehead Lake assisting with the construction of a fish hatchery, both his grist mill and wool processing factory caught fire and suffered severe damage. Stanley’s insurance had tragically expired the previous day. This same year, due to political reasons, he had not been re-appointed as Commissioner and was working for the state only on a contract basis. Apparently lacking enough funds to rebuild his factory and mill, necessity forced Stanley to start a smaller enterprise, the manufacturing of flies and lures. For 15 years he initially focused on flies and leaders, making a variety of trout, salmon, and bass flies. In 1895, George P. Stanley joined the business to form H. O. Stanley & Son (see above letterheads). In 1907, George went into the toothpick business (in the later 1800s, Dixfield was a national center for the manufacturing of toothpicks) and around this time Stanley & Son transferred the rights to the Rangeley Spinner to Phillip W. Edwards of Portland, Maine. After Stanley & Son ceased making Rangeley Spinners,
their most profitable product, they over-saw the manufacturing of the Cupsuptic Spinners. H. O. Stanley & Son at this time was known as the Cupsuptic Spinner Company even though their spinner was manufactured by William T. J. Lowe in Buffalo, New York. When Stanley died in 1913, George stopped his involvement in the tackle business and Henry’s younger brother, Frank, continued selling Cupsuptic Spinners. After a few years Frank Stanley ceased making the Cupsuptic Spinner and William T. J. Lowe and his successors, Enterprise Manufacturing Company (better known as Pflueger), continued making this popular spinner with only Lowe markings.

Henry O. Stanley was born in Dixfield, Maine on March 22, 1829. He was the first of seven children to be born to Isaac N. Stanley (1804-1881) and Susan Trask (1894-1901). Isaac and Susan were married in Dixfield on February 24, 1828, where he was a businessman and land surveyor. Henry was educated in local schools, and roamed the fields and forests around Dixfield. When a teenager, Henry enjoyed shooting the now extinct passenger pigeon, and as an adult was an avid red fox hunter. Life was not all play and the young Henry also helped his family and relatives with their work. When only 10 years old, Henry accompanied his father to the Rangeley Lakes on a fall fishing trip where they caught and preserved spawning brook trout for the family’s winter food. At age 15, Henry accompanied his uncle, Major Siles Barnard, on a forestland survey around Bemis, Maine. These early trips were the start of Stanley’s life-long association with the Rangeley Lakes of western Maine.

In April 1851, in addition to working in family businesses, Henry was appointed as a Major to
serve as the Aid-de-Camp (i.e., personal assistant) to Major General John B. Marrow of Dixfield. Marrow was the senior officer for the Sixth Division of the Maine Volunteer Militia. In October 1852, Stanley left Maine for the California gold fields. Two years later, after finding enough gold to make a modest living, but never “striking it rich,” he returned to New York and made his way back to Maine. During his two years in California Stanley was accompanied by his first cousin, Charles W. Eustis. In 1856, Eustis and Stanley formed a partnership to operate a general store on the corner of Main and Church streets in Dixfield. Stanley bought out Eustis in 1866 and ran the store until 1885, when he started his sporting goods and fishing tackle business.

In 1857, Henry married Helen Randall Sawtelle. Helen died in 1861 when only 29 years old. The couple had no children. Three years after Helen’s death Henry married Mary Elizabeth Bennett of Gorham, New Hampshire. Henry and Mary had two children, Nellie Louise (1865-1953) and George Page (1868-1955). George’s middle name came from Henry’s cousin and close friend, George Shepard Page (1838-1892), who fished with Henry and financially supported his early hatchery work in the Rangeley Lakes Region. (George S. Page’s brother, Theodore L. Page, is shown in the photograph on page iii).

Stanley was elected to the Maine Legislature in 1871 and served one year. The next year he, along with Elias M. Stillwell of Bangor, Maine, was appointed by Gov. Sidney Perham as Fisheries Commissioners for the State of Maine (in later years these positions became Fish and Game Commissioners). Stanley was appointed 11 times, serving continuously, except for 1879-80, until January 24, 1905. In 1879-80, Stilwell contracted with Stanley to continue his

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conservation work with the Commission. While Stilwell focused on maintaining passage for Atlantic salmon and other sea-run fishes on Maine’s rivers and streams, Stanley worked to develop fish culture methods and established a system of fish hatcheries for inland fishes. Both commissioners worked to improve Maine’s fish and game laws and Maine was recognized a number of times by Theodore Roosevelt for his progressive conservation work.

In 1880, Stanley’s grist mill and carding works burnt down. He had no insurance, but nevertheless started the H. O. Stanley fishing flies and leader business, located on Weld Street in Dixfield. The next year was the second year in a row of tragedies for Stanley. His father died on July 28, 1881. In August of this year his beloved wife, Mary E. Stanley, died in a Portland hospital while waiting for an operation to remove a tumor. Mary was only 39 years old, and Henry never re-married.

For Stanley, life was not all tragedies. Around 1885, the East Oxford Angling Association was formed, with Stanley as Vice President. They built a lodge on Weld Pond (now known as Webb Lake) on the southwest shore. After the association ceased operating Henry purchased the lodge, simply naming it “Stanley Camp.” This camp became a retreat where Henry frequently went to fish, and enjoyed time with his two children and three grandchildren.

In January 1905, Stanley retired as Commissioner. His health had been failing, and after more than three decades of dedicated work for the State of Maine, it was time to pass his conservation work onto a younger generation. He spent his retirement enjoying those closest to him, writing and publishing, and participating in his lifetime passion – fishing. In March 1912, the Stanley family celebrated Henry’s 83rd birthday at his Weld Street home. Stanley became ill in early January 1913 and on the 11th died after an illness of about a week. He is buried with his

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parents, second wife, and two brothers in the Greenwood Cemetery, Weld Street, Dixfield, Maine.

References


Stanley, H. O. 1906 (June) through 1910 (April). *Carleton’s State of Maine Sportsman’s Journal*. Augusta, Maine. [A series of approximately 19 articles about father, boyhood adventures, and some aspects of his professional life].


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A Gallery of Photographs of Henry O. Stanley’s Fishing Tackle Business

The retail shop of H. O. Stanley & Son’s Sporting Goods and Bicycle Shop. In addition to selling fishing tackle and other sporting goods, this shop also sold and repaired bicycles, as was common in the late 1800s. Stanley owned other buildings in Dixfield, and because he employed up to a dozen people at a time to assist in the making of flies and lures, it’s likely that lure manufacturing occurred in one of his larger buildings.

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Henry O. Stanley published the above Catalog describing the flies and lures made Henry and his son, George P. Stanley. While H. O. Stanley & Son was in business for approximately fifteen years, 1898-1913, both the State of Maine and Rangeley spinners, as well as the Stanley Smelt, were all first made before 1898 by H. O. Stanley Sporting Goods.

An advertising card (2 2/5 X 4 3/5 in.) issued by H. O. Stanley & Son. The Stanleys knew the value of advertising and, in addition to the above Catalog and card, they placed advertisements in Maine outdoor sporting periodicals (especially those published by Henry’s colleague and friend, Leroy T. Carleton.).

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The above illustration is the right side of page 79 of the T. B. Davis Fishing Tackle Catalog Number 41 (circa 1910). At this time, these three lures along with flies and leaders were the fishing tackle produced by H. O. Stanley & Son. Assuming that Stanley’s Cupsuptic Spinner was initially produced around the time it was first advertised, this lure did not appear on the market until the spring of 1909, only 4 years before Stanley died.
The State of Maine dead-bait spinner came in two sizes; shown above is the small size. This example is an extra special find for a number of reasons. First, it's the only one the author has ever seen in original condition (i.e., still attached to a H. M. [sic] Stanley & Son card). Second, the carded spinner is in the original box. Note that the treble hooks are attached to smooth, silkworn gut looped onto a metal ring (lower left photo). In contrast, after 1899 the treble hooks were tied onto a thin cable and a metal clip held together the spinner’s three components (lower right photo).
The State of Maine Spinner (upper illustration; “For “Spinning A Minnow”) and the Stanley Smelt (lower), both made of aluminum, were sold on cards (as shown). The spinner, made in two sizes, is early, not stamped, and very rare with only a few examples known to the author. The smelt is much more widely known to collectors and is clearly stamped with the lure’s name and two patent dates. (There are a few Stanley Smelts, however, marked with only the first patent date [see next illustration], making these scares and the earliest.). The Stanley Aluminum Smelt was made in at least eight sizes, ranging from 1 ¼ to 3 ¾ inches in length with the 2 ¼, 2 ¾, 3 ¼, and the 3 ¾ being the most common. Stanley Smelt came both with bare and feathered treble hooks, and are rarely found in boxes. The above illustration are from the T. B. Davis Fishing Tackle Catalog Number 41 (circa 1910, page 79).
Today, the Stanley Aluminum Smelt is well known to collectors of early American fishing lures. D. Murphy and R. Edmisten, on page 300 of their 2007 book entitled Fish Lure Collectibles – An Encyclopedia of the Early Years, 1840 to 1940, lists the Stanley Smelt as being made by “Stanley & Chapman, Boston, Massachusetts.” This listing was apparently based on an advertisement for The Stanley Smelt that appeared in Forest and Stream during the spring and summer of 1895. And while the first patent for the Aluminum Smelt, dated 24 December 1895 was co-assigned to Henry O. Stanley and L. Dana Chapman of Brookline, Massachusetts, the second patent for this lure dated 3 November 1896 was assigned only Henry O. Stanley (copy of Stanley’s original patent papers in author’s collection). From 1896 on advertisements for the Stanley Aluminum Smelt make no mention of Chapman, suggesting their partnership had been dissolved.
The State of Maine Spinner is, by far, the rarest of the four lures made Henry O. Stanley. Both of these examples were found as parts with the lure on the bottom right fully reassembled, and the lure on the top right partially reassembled. The aluminum section of the larger lure is 2 ½ inches long.

In the spring of 1897, Stanley and two companions each trolled a live minnow on one rod and a Stanley Aluminum Smelt on the other, for a total of six rods. They conducted this experiment on two Maine lakes and Stanley reported that “Every strike we had was on the [aluminum] smelt.” The lower lure has only the 1895 patent date, a very rare variant of the Stanley Smelt. The upper lure, from tip of the tail to the tip of the nose, is 3 ½ inches in length, and has both the 1895 and 1896 patent dates (see patent drawings above).
Stanley’s Rangeley Spinner was extremely popular and sold individually as well as in boxes, as shown above (Note: the above spinner is a reproduction). According to the illustration in the Stanley & Son Catalog, the blade of this spinner is stamped “RANGELEY” across the top – just above the fluting – and above this is a single number indicating blade size (generally a 3 or 4). Stanley apparently felt no need for additional markings because he was the sole maker of this spinner in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Today, positive identification of a Stanley Rangeley Spinner is problematic due to a lack of markings tying the spinner directly to Henry O. Stanley. (The Stanley Cupsuptic Spinner, in contrast, is clearly stamped “H.O.S.”; see below). The above boxes are approximately 7 3/8 X 2 1/8 X 5/8 inches.
Three lures once owned by Henry O. Stanley and his son, George P. Stanley. As mentioned above, Stanley Rangeley Spinners are not uniquely marked making positive identification impossible. Thus, this above Rangeley Spinner is the only one the author has seen that can be said with certainty to be a Stanley Rangeley Spinner. George Page Stanley, the last Stanley to have used these lures, apparently modified each one (i.e., single hook and new swivel on tail of the Stanley Smelt, nylon leader and extra swivel on the Rangeley, and wire leader and hand-tied fly on the H.O.S. Cupsuptic). The Stanley Smelt, tip of head to tail, is 3 ¾ inches in length, the longest size known.
A drawing (left) and close-up photograph (right) of the Stanley Cupsuptic Spinner. Note the star with an “L” on the bottom part of the blade; this denotes that the lure was made by W. T. J. Lowe of Buffalo, New York. Also note the upper half of the blade stamped “CUPSUPTIC / H.O.S. / TRADEMARK”; this stamping denotes Henry O. Stanley and is absent from the Cupsuptic Spinners later produced and sold by Lowe under his name only.

A Stanley Cupsuptic Spinner with an original box. A box has also been found labeled “FRANK STANLEY / ‘CUPSUPTIC SPINNER’ / DIXFIELD, ME.” Both boxes are approximately 3 3/8 by 1 ¾ inches. The Frank Stanley box is purple and extremely rare. A newspaper advertisement published by the Wells Sporting Goods Company in Auburn, Maine, declared that the angler should “Try a Stanley Cupsuptic Spinner the next time you are going where live bait is hard to get. You won’t need live bait.” (Lewiston Saturday Journal, 15 April 1911).
Stanley Cupsuptic Spinners come in two versions identifiable by their shafts. The shaft in the upper photograph is the original Stanley Cupsuctic, and the hook harness could only be attached to a hole in the lower half of the blade (and thus the functions only as a wobbler; produced 1907-08 to Feb. 1910). In the “New” Stanley Cupsuptic Spinner (lower photograph; produced March 1910 to ~1915), the hook harness could be attached to either the lower end of the shaft or to a in the bottom of the blade. With these two configurations, the later lure could be worked either as a wobbler (harness attached to blade) or as a true spinner (hook harness attached to the lower end of the shaft).
When Henry O. Stanley died in 1913, his younger brother, Frank, continued to have the Lowe Company make Cupsuptic Spinners which he sold with the “H.O.S.” stamped blade. After a few years, Frank Stanley ceased selling this spinner and William T. J. Lowe continued producing the Cupsuptic with his own markings (upper illustration). Like the Stanleys, Lowe made the lure in three sizes. Having lures on unaltered cards is useful to document the original arrangement of the hook harness (lower illustration) as anglers often customized hook arrangements.

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