Fred E. Bailey was a member of the third of four generations of Baileys to live and work in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine. He and his associates also set the longevity records for the early Maine makers of fishing flies and lures, being in business for 64 continuous years. Bailey started commercially making high-quality, hand-tied flies in 1884, selling his product at the Kineo House at Moosehead Lake. His business quickly expanded and soon he was selling his flies in general stores and sporting goods retailers from Greenville on shores of Moosehead Lake to downtown Bangor on the banks of the Penobscot River. Around 1899, Bailey first invented and

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produced trolling lures. Bailey was joined by his son, Carl R. Bailey, in 1903 to form F. E. Bailey & Son. This joint venture ceased operations in 1912 when Carl made photography his full-time business. After Fred died in 1940, the tackle business was run by his daughter-in-law, Mary A. Bailey. As Fred’s eyesight failed in the years before his death, Mary increasingly helped in the tackle business while at the same time running her family’s photography business (Carl was gassed during World War I and his eyesight also failed in his later years). Mary A. Bailey was assisted by Lorraine Libby, Fred and Mary Bailey’s adopted daughter. After Fred’s wife died (1930 or earlier), Lorraine moved in Carl and his wife. Both Mary A. and Lorraine continued producing and selling the Bailey flies and spinners after the founder’s death in 1940. When Mary A. Bailey died in 1948, the tackle making ceased, and so ended a fishing tackle business that had existed on the banks of the Piscataquis River in central Maine for almost six and one-half decades.

Fred E. Bailey was born on October 9, 1854. His father was Eratus W. Bailey (1825-1904) and his mother Mary C. Littlefield (1828-1895). The couple was married on April 16, 1852 in Foxcroft, Maine. Erastus Bailey operated a wood working and furniture business with his brother, Dexter. Erastus’ parents, John (1790-1898) and Clarissa (1805-1869) Bailey, had moved to Foxcroft in 1834 from Turner, Maine. In 1870, the U.S. Census shows Erastus and Mary C, along with John and Clarissa, living together in Dover along with Fred E. (15 yrs. old) and his sister Florence (age 6 yrs. old).

Little is known about Fred’s childhood and teenage years. As did many children living in Maine Fishing Lures by Wm. B. Krohn - 38
small Maine towns during the mid-1880s, it’s likely he hunted the nearby forests and fished the area’s streams, rivers, and lakes. Fred was educated “in town schools and at the academy,” and worked with relatives, doing general cabinet work and making furniture.

Fred E. Bailey married Mary H. Merrill of Foxcroft on May 15, 1875. The couple was married in Bangor, Maine and resided their entire life in Dover-Foxcroft. They lived on South Street in Dover, occupying the house lived in earlier by Fred’s parents. On July 20, 1881 their only son, Carl R. Bailey, was born. Decades later, Fred and Mary adopted Lorraine Libby, age 5, when her first adopted parents died.

In 1884, Bailey started his sporting goods business specializing in quality, hand-tied flies. During this time Bailey was half owner of a building in Foxcroft. His partner, C. M. Hoxie was a taxidermist, and in 1892 Hoxie bought-out Bailey’s half of the building in Dover, Maine, and Bailey operated out of his home. In 1899, Bailey first advertised that he was making trolling spinners. Carl R. Bailey joined his father’s business in 1903, and four years later Bailey & Son moved their sporting goods store and tackle manufacturing to 77 Lincoln Street, Foxcroft.

Over the decades, Fred Bailey invented a hook-rig for trolling baits, two spinners, and manufactured the Rangeley Spinner, originated by Henry O. Stanley. This later lure was simply named Bailey’s Improved Rangeley Spinner. His rig for trolling baits was aptly called the Bailey Trolling Gang, and the spinners he made were called the Bailey Spinner and the Bailey Moosehead Troller. The former was a general purpose lure capable of catching a variety of fish – including brook trout, landlocked salmon, bass, and pickerel – whereas the later spinner was

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primarily used for catching lake trout. Of these four products, the Bailey Spinner was by far his best seller; lure collectors most closely associate Fred E. Bailey with this spinner.

The Bailey Studio, which Carl established sometime after leaving the fishing tackle business, specialized in portrait and family photographs. Carl also sold photographs on post cards and in magazines. For example, The Northern, a monthly magazine for employees of the Great Northern Paper Company, used landscape photographs taken by the Bailey Studio on their covers (e.g., Nov. 1926; April & July, 1927; and Sept. 1928). In April 1917, Carl, who was a First Lieutenant in the National Guard, went on active duty in the U.S. Army. He served in both Mexico and in France during World War I, rising to the rank of Lieutenant. One source stated that he was attached to General John Joseph “Black Jack” Pershing” as a photographer, but because his military records were destroyed, this could not be verified. Carl was on active duty for two years to the month. While he was gone, his wife continued the photography business.

During his lifetime, Fred Bailey was widely recognized as a manufacturer of flies and spinners. In 1898, author-inventor-sportsman James Chuchward proclaimed in his booklet, A Big Game and Fishing Guide to North-Eastern Maine, that the flies “made by C. F. Orvis, of Manchester, Vt., G. H. Burtis, of Worcester, Mass., and F. E. Bailey, Foxcroft, are as good as any to be got in America.” A newspaper declared five years before Bailey died that “Mr. Bailey is known all over New England to anglers for his famous Bailey flies and spinners.” Bailey took pride in his work, stamping his name on each spinner. Of his flies, he noted in one advertisement that while “Bailey’s flies will not last forever, but they will outwear any other...
make and take more fish.”

Even though his son was a professional photographer, no photographs of Fred E. Bailey are known. However, a life-long resident of Dover-Foxcroft recalls the senior Bailey as “Having bushy, gray sideburns and untrimmed whiskers that stuck-out from his chin. I was only 8 or 9 years old at the time, and he looked scary.”

On December 20, 1940 Fred E. Bailey died at the age of 86 years. His eye-sight was failing for years and his wife had predeceased him by at least a decade. Mary A. Bailey and Lorraine Libby (later to marry and become a Govan), who had helped Fred with his business before his death, continued to make and sell flies and spinners after Fred’s death. Carl, who had been wounded with mustard gas in France, died in 1943. Five years later, on 18 November 1948, Mary A. Bailey died. Today, four generations of Baileys are buried together in the Rural Grove Cemetery, west of Dover-Foxcroft, Maine. Fred E. Bailey, in an unmarked grave, lies with his paternal grandparents, parents, wife, son, daughter-in-law, and sister.

References


Anonymous. 1908. Dover, Foxcroft, Guildford, Sangerville, Dexter, Newport, and Corinna – Souvenir of 1908. No publisher. 74pp. [Best description of Bailey’s tackle business. Also information about G. H. Hoxie, the taxidermist who was a partner with Bailey for a time].

Chase, H. 1898. *Dexter, Dover, Foxcroft and Guilford Directory for the Years 1898-9: Containing a Complete Resident, Street and Business Directory*. Published by Henry Chase, Augusta, Maine. 190 pp. [Pages 60 and 131 have Fred E. Bailey making artificial flies and living/working on South Street, Dover, beyond Pine Street].


Fred E. Bailey initially made only high-quality fishing flies. Shown here is the first known advertisement for Bailey tackle, printed in 1890 on page 22 of George H. Haynes’ *The Charming Inland Summer Retreats of Maine*, published by the Maine Central Railroad, Portland, Maine.
Early Bailey flies were sold on at least two different types of cards as shown above. Note that at the time these cards were printed (and the above advertisement published), Bailey was located in Foxcroft, Maine. Because the towns of Dover and Foxcroft were administratively merged into Dover-Foxcroft in March of 1922, the above flies were made prior to that year (the upper fly may have been made as early as the beginning of the 1890s). The above cards are approximately 6 X 1 ½ inches.
The top end of blades on Bailey’s three types of spinners are characteristically stamped with his name. Note the variation in font types, sizes, and name placement. The cooper blade on the left is from a Moosehead Troller whereas the next two nickel-coated blades are from Bailey Spinners (for scale, see Moosehead Troller blade below). The under-sides of blades of Bailey Spinners are characteristically painted bright red.

The largest (left) and smallest (right) Bailey blades the authors has seen. The large blade is made of copper with a nickel front coating (shown above), and may have been used on a Moosehead Troller (see below). The small blade may have been used on Bailey’s Rangeley Spinner.

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This is the first advertisement that Bailey ran announcing a line of trolling spinners. This advertisement was published on page 80 of Leroy T. Carleton. 1899. *Carleton’s Pathfinder and Gazetteer of the Hunting and Fishing Resorts of the State of Maine*. Observer Publications, Dover, Maine. Like all of Bailey’s advertisements over the decades, this publication had a direct tie to Dover and Foxcroft. Note use of capital letters to identify hook arrangements.
F. E. Bailey & Son, Foxcroft, Maine existed from 1902-12 making this the oldest Bailey lure box the author has ever seen. Note the red label on the top lid was put over an earlier black label and the lower box lacks in inner label used in later boxes (see illustration below). This box measures 7 3/8 X 2 1/8 X ½ inches.

 Apparently, Bailey initially called this lure “Bailey’s Spoon/ Minnow Tackle” (ad at top of previous page), but at some point changed the name to “Bailey’s Trolling Gang.” Lures boxes used by F. E. Bailey in Dover-Foxcroft were characteristically labeled inside (box on bottom) as well as outside (box on top). The above box measures 7 ½ X 1 5/8 X 5/8 inches.

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The Moosehead Troller was Bailey’s largest and most specialized fishing spinner, designed for catching lake trout. Note the “Patent Applied For” in the lower left corner. The author has been unable to find a patent for any of Bailey’s fishing lures.

Apparently, Bailey also made the single spinner from the large (left) and small (right) blades of his Moosehead Troller. These single examples are rare and appear to have been early in Bailey’s career.
Above is Fred E. Bailey’s version of the Rangeley Spinner, invented and initially made by Henry O. Stanley of Dixfield, Maine. The leaders are made of twisted gut and this spinner, compared to the Bailey Spinner, is lightly constructed. Like most Baily spinners, the blades’ undersides are red. The above box is 7 ½ X 1 5/8 X 5/8 inches.

This is the last advertisement of Fred E. Bailey tackle that the author found. Bailey’s last advertisements were printed during the spring of 1929 in Maine Recreation, a short-lived periodical distributed via mail from Dover-Foxcroft, Maine. Typically, the Bailey Spinner had detachable hooks (see below) whereas Baileys Rangeley Spinner, like the spinner shown here, had permanent hooks (see above).
An early (left) versus a later (right) Bailey Spinner. The key differences are: box versus barrel swivels, glass versus plastic beads, twisted gut versus steel leader, bottom of blade unpainted versus painted red, wide versus narrower blade, and sold in a plastic bottle with a label (later versions only). The NR4-1 on the label translates to “a blade that is nickel on top, red on the bottom (characteristic of most of Bailey’s spinner blades), size 4 (his most common), and one blade (versus 2 blades).”

Bailey Spinners were sold on cards as well as in plastic bottles (see above). Note that on the above card “F. E.” (= Fred E.) is crossed-out and replaced by “M.A.” Mary A. Bailey was Fred’s daughter-in-law who took over the business after Fred’s death in 1940. When she died in 1948, the manufacturing of Bailey tackle ceased.

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