Richard W. “Dick” Murray and John Lee “Peako” Murray were the sons of William O. and Mary Hartry Murray (a.k.a. Murry). Richard was born in Randolph, Maine on September 26, 1897. John Lee was born almost two years later on August 2, 1899, also in Randolph. While both brothers were children, the family moved to Auburn where the brothers attended local schools and graduated from Edward Little High School. John Lee went on to attend Northeastern and Boston universities.

Richard William Murray was a manager for an A & P grocery store in Auburn for at least

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three years, starting in 1930. In 1934-35, Richard and his younger brother, John Lee Murray, founded the Murray Bait Company. At the time, both men were in their thirties and living with their parents at 23 Hillsdale Street, Auburn. According to Manning’s Lewiston and Auburn Directory, their company was located at 17 Fairmont Avenue, six or so blocks southeast of Hillsdale in the main part of Auburn, where the brothers resided. Two years later, Richard married and became the company’s sole proprietor. John left Murray Bait Company and became a salesperson for Wells Sporting Goods Company in Auburn. The new address for Murray Bait Company was 63 Washington Street. Richard owned and operated the company until 1943, when failing health force him to do less stressful work and he became a clerical worker. After 1944, the Murray Bait Company is no longer listed in Manning’s.

In 1947 or shortly before, the company was revived by John Lee Murray. John, now 48 or so years old, brought in Harold G. Parker (1898-1973) as a new partner, and the company’s named was changed to J. Lee Murray Company. The company was listed in the Auburn Business section of Manning’s as “Fishing Tackle and Rod Mfs,” located at 14 Main Street in Auburn. J. Lee Murray Company is listed in the 1951 Manning’s, but from 1953 on the company does not appear in this directory. In 1953, J. Lee Murray is shown in Manning’s as employed in Bath, Maine with a house on 538 Main Street, Lewiston. Around this time Harold G. Parker became the Company’s General Manager, running the day-today activities while still employed as a foreman at a local shoe factory. In 1955 or 1956, the J. Lee Murray Fishing Tackle moved from 14 Main Street to Parker’s home at 93 Gamage Avenue in Auburn. When John Lee Murray died Maine Fishing Lures by Wm. B. Krohn - 83
in the spring of 1969, Parker continued to operate the Company out of his Gamage Avenue home while also working full-time in shoe manufacturing. The J. Lee Murray Company ceased it’s Auburn operations in 1967 or 1968. Harold G. Parker died in the fall of 1973, with his obituary listing his occupation listed as a long-time foreman at Charles Cushman Company (Auburn) and Commonwealth Shoe and Leather Company (Lewiston).

After the mid-1970s, carded spinners made by J. Lee Murray Company have addresses from both Lisbon Falls and Arundel, Maine (see Gallery of Photographs below). The last tackle company to produce Murray spinners was the Murray Company of Rochester, New York. There motto was “The Original J. Lee Murray Spoon Company.”

On the earliest lures made by the Murray Bait Company was Murray’s Aluminum Minnow, patented in 1910 by William Richard Murray (1870-1933), the brothers’ father. Information about William’s life, and his artificial minnow, was published by Krohn (2015). It’s unclear when this lure ceased to be made but Murray brother tackle catalog, circa 1950, does not include the aluminum minnow. In a letter dated October 1, 1957, Harold G. Parker responded to a request for a supply of these lures. His opening sentences: “We regret to say that the aluminum minnow has been out of production with us for many years. The dies for the same were purchased by H. A. Whitmore & Co., Inc. 301 Congress St., Boston. Possible they can supply the lure.” Parker went on to explain that the company was “developing a new jointed wobbler which the tests have shown to have a very remarkable action. In fact we know of no wobbler which has the same life like action.” While I am unaware of any jointed wobbler ever produced by J. Lee Murray Company, his company developed a new wobbler with remarkable action.

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Murray Company, collectors today can find two versions of the Murray Aluminum Minnow. The first lure is stamped on the lower left fin “PAT’D,” whereas the second version looks identical but lacks the stamping. Could the first version be a genuine Murray whereas the second version was made by H. A. Whitmore & Company? Only additional research yielding relevant documentation can answer this question.

John Lee worked the year or so prior to his death in 1963 as an athletic trainer at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. Richard W. Murray, after retiring and for a few years until his death six years after his brother, wrote poems and historical articles. In the 1960s, Dick Murray (his pen name) published more than a dozen history related articles in the Lewiston Evening Journal Magazine Section. Many of these articles were lengthy and used as the leads on page one of this weekly newspaper. One of Richard’s poems (kindly provided by his son, James), written in the mid- to late-1940s when living on Turner Street in Auburn:

WEEK-END PLEASURE

When Friday comes my week in done
    Presenting wishful wishing;
I shirk the chores around the house
    My mind is full of fishing.

I make a break out to the lake
    And if it looks inviting,
I rig a rod with feathered lure
    To tempt the bass in biting.

But if I pass a placid pond
    And see a salmon rolling,
I hustle ’round to find a boat
    And try a bit of trolling.

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Or maybe I will fish a brook
With fancy fly or spinner;
And with the hope of average luck
To catch a trout for dinner.

And whether luck is good or bad
On week-ends spent at trouting,
Regardless of the fish I catch,
I’ve had a splendid outing.

After retiring, Richard also returned to making lures on a small-scale and produced Rangeley Spinners, June Bug Spinners, small trout spinners, and mackerel rigs at his home on Summer Street (see “Dick Murray’s Improved Gold Rangeley Spinner” in Gallery of Photographs).

An advertisement in the back of the March 1949 (page 56) issue of Popular Mechanics magazine reads: “SEND A dime for “flashy” trout, perch or crappie spinner and catalog. Murray’s, Auburn, Maine.” The only catalog I have seen for Murray’s fishing tackle includes photographs of the interior and exterior of the company’s building in Auburn, as well as the company’s pick-up truck (see Gallery of Photographs). This catalog lists a page and a half of lures that Murray made and sold: Three Spoon Attractors (2 sizes with brass, copper, chromium, or hammered brass blades), Trolling Spoons (4 sizes), Trolling Double Spinners (5 varieties, 2 sizes and various blade types), Pearl Brook-Trout Spinners (1 size), Pearl Kidney Trolling Spinner (2 sizes), Pearly Wobbler (4 varieties), Red and White Wobbler (2 sizes), Flashy Spinner (1 size), Duo-Min [willow-leaf] Spinner (cooper blades only, 1 size), Gold-Flute Spinner 4 blade types), Rangeley Spinner (4 varieties), and Aluminum Dorsal-Fin Rudder (1 size). In addition to their own line of lures, the catalog shows that Murray’s Tackle Shop sold a variety of lures and

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fishing tackle from many other manufacturers including Bristol, Heddon, Helin, Lowe, Penn, Percy, Pflueger, and South Bend.

Despite decades of work devoted to lure making, neither the obituaries of John Murray nor Harold Parker mention their involvement in the fishing tackle industry. Richard Murray’s obituary does, however, show him proudly holding a freshly caught fish and states that “For many years he operated a fishing tackle business known throughout the state.” His obituary also noted that “He was well-known as a writer of local history items and as a Journal magazine writer.”

Shortly after Richard’s death in the spring of 1969, Ralph B. Skinner read a tribute he wrote to Dick Murray on Lewiston-Auburn’s WLAM radio station. Skinner and Murray were boyhood friends when the Murrays lived on Minot Avenue and later in Auburn’s Goff Hill neighborhood. Of those years, according to Skinner, Richard “wrote many happily nostalgic stories.” Skinner started his tribute by noting that after his retirement, and with failing health that did not “impair the good nature of his works,” He went on to state that “Dick’s writings reflected his personality. They not only recalled the past in historical fact, but were rich in human interest and in their recollections of the rollicking days of boyhood. He will be greatly missed.”

Of the fishing tackle business, Skinner said: “Dick also kept up an extensive business in the manufacture and sale of fishing lures, which he had first engaged in with his father and his brother, Lee, well known in sporting circles, who passed away a few years ago. This undertaking

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grew out of the fact that the father, William O. Murray, was an invertebrate [inveterate] and expert fisherman, knowing all the fish lures and habitats. The sons carried on in this area of activity so prominent in Maine’s recreational appeal.”

Today, Murray fishing lures made in Maine can be found with at least five names: Murray Bait Co., Auburn Maine; J. Lee Murray Co., Auburn, Maine; J. Lee Murray Co., Lewiston, Maine; J. Lee Murray Co., Lisbon Falls, Maine; and J. Lee Murray Co., Arundel, Maine. Arthur T. Freer of Gilbertsville, New York specialized in making and selling “old fashion” fishing Lures (e.g., G. M. Skinner spinners). Freer’s five lines of classic lures encompassed “Murray’s-in-Maine” spinners and spoons, including the “Aluminum Minnows For Dumb Fish.” A. T. Freer operated from the 1950s until the 1970s. At some time after Freer, Murray Company of Rochester, New York was apparently created. This latter company labeled their large flashing spinners “The Original J. Lee Murray” trolling spoon. Interestingly, the Murray Company was located in same city where Charles H. Morse, Auburn’s first lure maker, played minor league baseball one hundred years earlier.

References

Anonymous. 1949 (est.). MURRAY’S: Manufacturers of Fishing Tackle For Over 50 Years – Auburn, Maine. [Author’s use of this 14-page catalog courtesy of Dan Leroux.].


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Freer. A. T. undated. *Fish Are Fussy About Lures – So Is Arthur Freer!* Fishing Tackle Catalog published in Gilbertsville, New York. [Top half of the back cover of this 8-page catalog is devoted to “Murray’s-In-Maine” lures. Prices are shown for each item, with an Aluminum Minnow selling for 95 cents].

H. A. Manning Company. Compiler and publisher. *Manning’s Lewiston and Auburn Directory*. [Issues of 1930 through 1968 were searched, but not every year was available, although most were.].


Parker, H. G. 1957. Letter from J. Lee Murray Company to Mr. H. Walton, Wilmington, Delaware. (October 1). [Copy of this letter courtesy of Dan Leroux].

Murray’s Aluminum Minnow was one of earliest lures to be sold by the Murray Bait Company. This lure is similar in appearance to an earlier English lure made to imitate small forage fish, the Phantom Artificial Minnow. The Phantom’s body was made of silk whereas Murray’s Minnow was more durable, being all metal. The above box measures 5 5/8 X 1 3/4 X 3/4 inches.
Drawing for Murray’s Aluminum Minnow that was published with the final patent notice on file in the U.S. Patent Office, Washington, D.C. The application took almost two years to be approved, and was held by William Murry (note spelling at the top of the drawing), father of the Murray brothers.

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As shown above, the Murray’s Aluminum Minnow can be found with either a box (upper photograph) or barrel (lower) swivels, and a rear treble or single hook. Of special interest to collectors, this lure can be found in a variety of painted colors. The Minnow came in only one size, being about 3 1/2 inches long. The lure is marked on the lower left fin “PAT’D,” meaning “patented” (On page 272 of his 2000 book, 19th Century Fishing Lures – A Collector’s Guide to U.S. Lures Manufactured Prior to 1901, A. Carter wrongly identified this mark as “Patent Pend”).

The body of the above lure is made of hard plastic and the lip made of copper. The underside of the lip clearly shows (enlargement top, center) that this plug was made by Murray Bait Company, Auburn, Maine. According to James R. Murray (Richard W. Murray’s son), this was an experimental lure that never went into full production. Thus, “Murray’s Unnamed Lure” (author’s name) is extremely rare.

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Murray Bait Company, shown above in early photographs, was located at 63 Washington Avenue in Auburn from 1939 through 1943. Today, this site is the location of the New England School of Metal Work.

In the photograph on left, John Lee “Peako” Murray (left front), Richard W. “Dick” Murray (right front), and two friends on a successful fishing trip in May 1938 at Moosehead Lake, Maine. Dick Murray is in the photograph on the right holding two brook trout caught during August 1946 in Pettingill Park, Auburn, Maine. The Murray brother’s father, William Murray, was also an avid angler.
Photograph of the Murray Fishing Tackle (a.k.a., J. Lee Murray Co.) building on 14 Main Street, Auburn. Today, this site is near the location of the Hilton Garden Inn, north of the Court Street bridge. Both the photograph (left) and the map (right) were published (circa 1949) in *MURRAY’S – Manufacturers of Fishing Tackle for Over 50 Years, Auburn, Maine*. The map does not show I-95, and because the Portland to Auburn to Augusta section of I-95 was not completed until 1955, this catalog was clearly printed sometime before that year. Note that the top of the map points to the Rangeley Lakes and to Moosehead Lake, two major fishing regions in the Pine Tree State.
On the left is a spinner display card (to go on a counter or wall of a retail store) from Murray Bait Company. This company was owned and operated by Richard W. Murray and J. Lee Murray from 1935 to 1944. The card on the right is a sales representative’s card that would have been used to sell products to retail stores. This card is from J. Lee Murray Company, owned by John Lee Murray and Harold G. Parker. This company operated in Auburn from around 1947 to 1967-68. In the early years, J. Lee Murray Company operated from a store on 14 Main Street (see above) and around 1955 until Auburn operations ceased in the late 1960s, the company was located in Parker’s home at 93 Gamage Avenue (note address on bottom of card on the right). The dimensions of these cards are 6 ¼ X 7 ¾ inches (left card) and 5 X 10 inches (card on right).
Copper trolling spoons were, along with the Aluminum Minnow, among the earliest of the Murray Bait Company lures (upper illustration). These spoons were similar to those made by C. H. Morse (i.e., both made of cooper and bottom side of both spoons were lead-lined), but lacked the glass beads and long shaft characteristic of Morse’s spoons. While the above spoon is stamped on the lower part of the blade’s upper side (lower illustration), other trolling spoons made by the Murray Bait Company are stamped on the bottom or middle part of the blade.

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The Murray Bait Company’s version of the Stanley Rangeley Spinner. This is a double-bladed Rangeley, gold and nickel, with a leader made of twisted gut. The Murray brothers also made a single blade Rangeley Spinner, and later versions of the Rangeley had steel leaders, and retained the detachable hook feature on the spinner’s lower end. Burgess Rangeley Spinners also had detachable hooks, as did the Bailey Spinner, whereas the Stanley and Bailey Rangeley spinners had hooks permanently attached to the leader. The above box is 6 3/8 X 1 7/8 X 5/8 inches.
Trolling spoons produced by J. Lee Murray Company were not stamped. These lures can best be identified when found in unaltered condition in labeled envelopes, as shown above. But collectors must be careful: anglers move lures among packages, so always look for multiple examples before making conclusions.

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Richard W. Murray left Murray Bait Company around 1943, went into clerical work, and retired in 1956. A few years later he was living on Summer Street and again started to make tackle. (This card, bottom left, reads: “Made By Dick Murray”). Note that this modernized Rangeley Spinner was purchased at Wells Sporting Goods Store. Wells was a long-time Auburn business where John Lee Murray, Dick’s brother, worked after leaving Murray Bait Company from 1939 until he started J. Lee Murray Tackle Company approximately four years later.

A series of trolling spoons made by J. Lee Murray Company. The spoon on the card with the Auburn, Maine address is the oldest where the Arundel, Maine label is probably the most recent of the three spoons. Because J. Lee Murray spoons are unstamped, it’s important to have examples of these spoons on unaltered cards for comparative purposes. Once the company moved from Auburn, neither of the Murray brothers were involved with the business.

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