LEROY “ROY” M. APPLEGARTH (1910-2000):  
Lee (a.k.a. Abenaki) Spinner Company  
South Berwick, Maine

Leroy “Roy” M. Applegarth was born on August 4, 1910 in Oshkosh, Nebraska. As an adult he lived on Vine Street in South Berwick, Maine where he started the Lee Spinner Company in the late 1940s. Roy was a tool and die maker who was a long-time employee at the General Electric (GE) plant in Somersworth, New Hampshire. He made the blades and other parts for his lures. During the peak of the Lee Spinner Company, 1951 through 1957, up to 4 people were employed to assemble, pack, and ship Abenaki spinners from the garage at the Applegarth’s residence. The business was named for Roy’s only child, Lee Applegarth, who died in 1976 when only 39 years old. Lee was a cabinet maker. No advertisements in periodicals for the Lee Spinner Company were located, but an advertisement for Abenaki spinners was published in a tackle catalog (see Gallery below). Thus, it seems likely that Roy sold most of his product directly to the sporting goods dealers and general stores in southern Maine. Lee Spinner Company operated until the late

Lee (a.k.a. Abenaki) Spinner Company made a great variety of metal fishing spinners, especially large trolling spinners constructed with aluminum blades (a few were made of copper). Their trolling spinners were made with one, two, and three blades mounted on wired leaders. Each blade-configuration came in at least six sizes, and the blades were either fluted or dimpled. The single-blade trolling spinner was the fundamental unit of a Lee Trolling Spinner. Two single-bladed spinners were linked together to make the two-bladed spinner. Similarly, a single-bladed spinner was joined to the two-bladed spinner to make the three-bladed spinner. H & J Fishing Tackle, a contemporary of Lee, used a similar modular construction to make complex, multi-bladed trolling spinners. Lastly, Lee Spinner Company also made minnow trolling rigs and various arrangements of hooks tied on cooper wire (i.e., gang hooks) to be used with their spinners. Both of these products were sold on the Company’s card.

While trolling spinners were clearly the main product of the Lee Spinner Company, they also made the two classic spinners invented by Henry O. Stanley: the Cupsuptic Spinner and the Rangeley Spinner. This later spinner was made both with one and two blades, with blades surfaced either in nickel or gold. Lee Rangeley Spinners come with no stamping, a stamping of just “RANGELEY,” and – most commonly – stamped with the company’s Abenaki logo. While this last variant is easy to identify, the first two variants of the Lee Rangeley are

*Maine Fishing Lures* by Wm. B. Krohn - 117
problematic to identify unless found on an unaltered card.

Abenaki spinners can be found in the bright, florescent packages of COJAC Tackle Company, Caribou, Maine. Apparently, when Lee Spinner Company ceased operations some of their stock was sold to COJAC.

References


Anonymous. 2001 (Sept. 3). Eunice R. Applegarth [obituary]. Foster’s Dailey Democrat, Dover, New Hampshire. [This obituary is also online at Seacoastonline: http://www.seacoastonline.com/].

Harold F. Porter. Hal shared with me the two conversations he had about Lee Spinner Company with Roy Applegarth in the mid-1980s.

There is a photograph of Leroy M. Applegarth as a member of the York County [Maine] Superior Curt Grand Jury published on page 12 in the Bidderford-Saco Journal of May 11, 1965.
The above advertisement was published in the 1950 spring catalog of the Casco Bay Trading Post (BCTP), Freeport, Maine. A similar advertisement was also published in the CBTP’s 1952 catalog, making these ads the only examples the author found of the Lee Spinner Company advertising in a publication.
In addition single spinners clipped together in multi-bladed trolling spinners, Lee Spinner Company also sold single spinners that came in a number of sizes and finishes. These spinners were sold on cards (left above) and in envelopes (right above). Lee Spinner Company envelopes are often stamped and hence the spinner can be compared to this stamping to see if the proper lure is enclosed. For example, the envelope on the right is stamped “8 D,” meaning that the spinner in this envelope should be a size 8 with a dimpled fished (which it is).
Above is a sample of Lee Trolling Spinners, mounted on 14 X 14 inch advertising placards (card on the left is complete, one on the right is partial). These placards once belonged to Lee Spinner Company and were used to display and sell their products. Note the fluted blades (designated “F” on these placards) on the left placard, and dimpled blades (designated “D”) on the right placard. These were the two major blade types made by Lee Spinner. Also, note how the single spinners are clipped together to make a complex, multi-bladed trolling spinner.
Close-up of a section from a 14 X 14 inch advertising placards used by the Lee Spinner Company. The red-edged tags are labeled as follows: # number (blade size), F or D (blade is fluted or dimpled), and price of each spinner (presumably wholesale). This was one of six placards once used by the company. Based on a date written on the back of one of the placards, these display units date from 1946.
A group of Lee’s Rangeley Spinner. The two Rangeley Spinners on the far right (uncarded) have the company logo stamped on the blades, making reliable identification easy. In contrast, the Rangeley Spinner on the far left (on blue card) has no markings, and if found uncarded would be difficult to identify. Similarly, the middle two spinners on green cards lack the Abenaki logo, instead having “RANGELEY” stamped across the blade. Again, if found uncarded these two spinners would be problematic to identify as to maker. The two green cards measure 1 ¼ X 10 inches.
Two Cupsuptic spinner blades made by the Lee Spinner Company. The blade on the left is colored and rigged as a traditional Cupsuptic Spinner whereas the copper Cupsuptic blade on the left is rigged as most spinners made by Lee, and could be clipped to other spinners to make a large attractor rig for trolling. Most, but not all, products made by the Lee Spinner Company are readily identifiable from the large Abenaki logo stamped on the upper half of the blade.
A variety of Abenaki spinners can were sold on labelled cards (above) as well as in labelled envelopes (see illustration below). The card on the left is 2 ½ X 4 1/2 inches whereas the card on the right is 5 ½ X 4 inches. These spinners were designed to troll dead minnows.
Abenaki Spinners were sold on cards (see above) as well as in many different envelopes, a sample of which is shown above. Collectors should not assume that the lure found in an envelope is the original as people move lures between envelopes. For positive identified of unstamped lures, examples in unaltered condition mounted on cards are the “gold standard.” Luckily for Maine collectors, most early fishing lure makers in the Pine Tree State had enough pride in their work to take the extra effort and time to stamp their products.

*Maine Fishing Lures* by Wm. B. Krohn - 126
An advertising card that was displayed in retail stores selling fishing lures made by Lee Spinner Company. Lee advertising cards came in at least three sizes: 9 X 11 inches (the above card), 14 X 15 inches, and 15 X 15 inches. The card shown above was signed by Roy M. Applegarth, the company’s founder, on the back in the upper left corner. (The signature shown here is enlarged).