1867 Lenhart Improved Fish-Hook

by William Blauser

The spring-loaded fish-hook invented by Adam Lenhart of New Brunswick, New Jersey and patented on November 12, 1867 is a unique and clever variation of earlier spring-hook designs. It is a beautiful example of innovation and of micro-machining, and in fact was so highly thought of when it was invented, that it was featured in the November 23, 1867 edition of Scientific American, the foremost publication of scientific advancement at the time (see a copy of the original article below).

The Lenhart spring-loaded fish hook is made from brass, steel and spring-steel, and is empowered by a contractile helical spring which thrusts the lower barbed hook upward when a fish pulls on the upper baited hook, and impales the fish's jaw from underneath, and has the patent date stamped on its main shaft.

Adam Lenhart , whose occupation was variously listed in tax records as "Machinist, Locksmith and Gunsmith", obviously thought this design was an improvement over other fish hooks of the day and would be a

commercial success, but was apparently not, which would explain their scarcity and why there are only 2 examples of this spring hook known to exist in the hands of collectors, with both being the same size.

This example of the Lenhart Spring-loaded fish hook was originally found tangled in a bunch of line in the bottom of an old tackle box from Bolton Landing, New York, on Lake George, which is less than 30 miles from Schroon Lake, where the 1st patented spring hook in the United States was invented just 21 years earlier in 1846, which seems like an awfully big coincidence, but no correlation between the two is known.

Side note…The patent on the Lenhart "Improved Fish-Hook" is filed in the U.S. Patent Office under the category of "Impeoved Pish-Hooe", invented by "Lenheet", and so is a prime example of how and why some patents for spring-loaded fish hooks and metal fish traps (and other inventions) are nearly impossible to research and locate (because they have been misfiled), and probably why many have not been found to date (and may never be).

https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/e7/d7/88/8107c37fe8a2c9/US70868.pdf

Adam Lenhart also invented and patented 2 different spring-loaded "Toy Guns", patent #'s 122,122 and 123,268 in 1871 and 1872,

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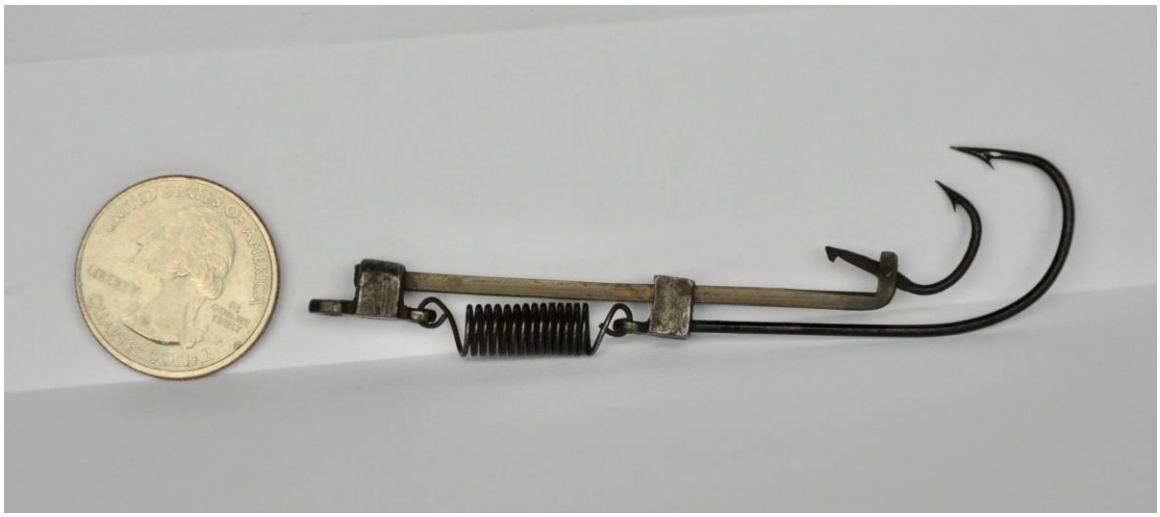
respectively….but their existence has not been confirmed.

Measures 3.5 inches in the sprung position as shown below.

These barbs and hooks are as new and still sharp enough to scratch your fingernail……..(from the collection of William Blauser).

Shown below in the sprung position with a quarter for scale.



The stamping of “PAT. NOV. 12. 1867” on the brass shaft

Shown side-by-side below in the set and sprung positions.

Japanned “spiral” spring attached to caste line-tie and caste “slide” that travels up and down on the brass shaft….shown below.

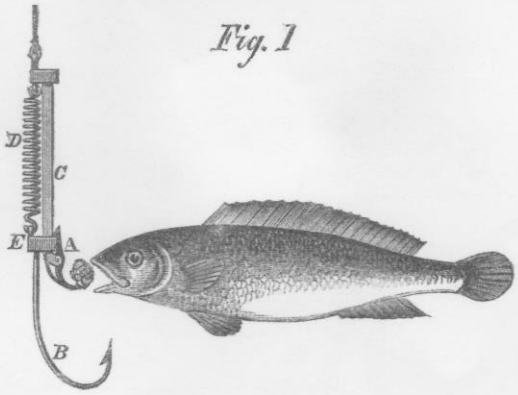
Close-up of latching mechanism in the “set” position shown below. The small bait hook merely pivots around its central pin.

The article shown below is from the November 23, 1867 edition of the Scientific American, in which not only is the purpose of the “Spring Fish-Hook” and its method of setting described and explained, but it also includes a sort of editorial comment which says….”It appears to be cruel to the fish-a consideration which probably has little force with anglers-but, unless carefully used, may also be dangerous to the fisherman”.

LENHART'S SPRING FISH-HOOK.

The engraving accompanying this description represents a device for contravening the proverbial want of success of fishermen. It is a double hook, one, A, being the bait hook, and the other, B, the securing hook. Fig. 1 shows the hook

Fig. 1



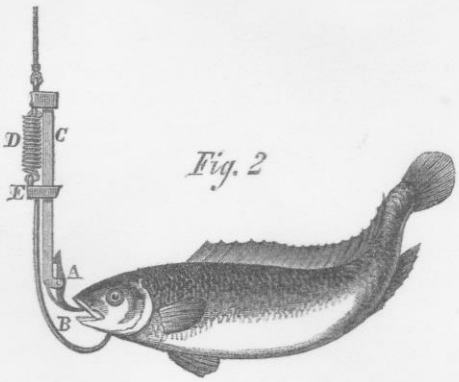


Fig. 2

ready for use and a fish about to take the bait, and Fig. 2 the hook sprung and the intended result. It is a combination of two hooks, connected in a light frame, the smaller or bait hook being pivoted to the bar, C, at its lower end, and the larger or securing hook attached to the spiral spring, D. By pulling down the large hook the slide, E, is engaged with the hook, A, which has a catch on its back and a light spring to throw the catch in place. A slight pull on the small hook, or such a disturbance as may be made by a "nibble," must disengage it from its catch and allow the spring, D, to act, when the fish is held by the larger hook, as seen in Fig. 2. To disengage the fish and to bait the hook anew, the larger hook is pulled down by one hand, while the other holds the top of the bar. It appears to be cruel to the fish—a consideration which probably has little force with anglers—but, unless carefully used, may also be dangerous to the fisherman. A patent for this device is now pending through the Scientific American Patent Agency. All communications should be addressed to the inventor, A. I. Lenhart, New Brunswick, N. J.