

6 UNIQUELY DIFFERENT METAL KILLER FISH TRAPS

William Blauser

The 6 metal, killer fish traps that are the subject of this article are some of the author's favorites that he has collected over the previous 25 years. Three of these traps are patented, while the other 3 may have and could have been, because of their unique design, but if so, their letters of patent have not as yet been found.

THE EVANS' FRYIN' PAN TRAP

The fish trap pictured in Figures 1a, 1b & 1c was invented by John Evans of Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1899, being U. S. patent # 621,643 (Fig. 1d) and is referred to by trap collectors as the " Evans' Fryin' Pan Trap ", for the obvious reason that it resembles a conventional leg hold trap being set inside of an old Griswold frying pan. It has a very strong long spring (or V-spring) and 2 cast iron jaws, each having 2 rows of cast iron teeth. The purpose of this invention as stated by Evans in the patent papers was for it to be baited and used for catching fish and which was designed so that it would be " thrown overboard and sink to the bottom and rest on the latter without turning upside down " , due to the " metallic pan having flared edges ". The pan measures 11.5" across on this trap with the jaws rising 5.5" high, thus allowing just enough room for the jaws to rest inside of the pan's flared edges when set.



Figure 1a. Evans' Fryin' Pan Trap in the Sprung Position



Figure 1b. Alternate View of the Evans' Fryin' Pan Trap in the Sprung Position



Figure 1c. Close-up of the Evans' Fryin' Pan Trap Setting Mechanism

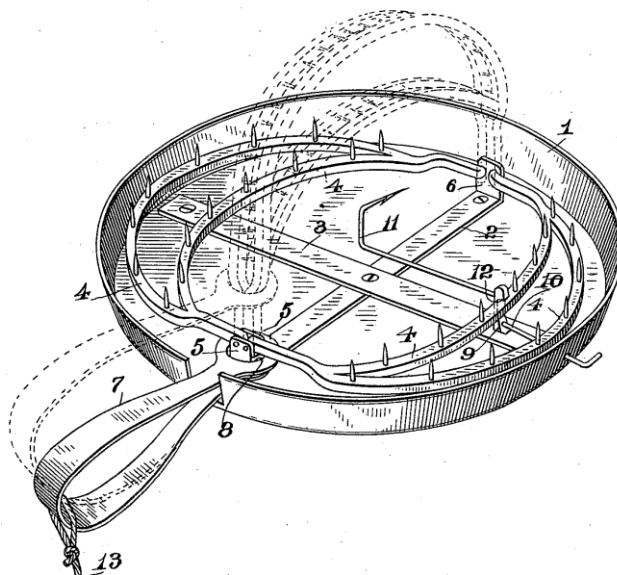


Figure 1d. Patent Illustration (US #621,643): Evans' Fryin' Pan Trap

THOUSAND ISLAND FISH TRAP

The fish trap pictured in Figures 2a, 2b & 2c is not known to have been patented, but if not conceivably still could be, due to its unique design. This trap is also meant to be lowered into and rest upon the floor of a body of water, the correct orientation being assured because of the 2 rectangular metal cross pieces which form its base, (one 5" and one 7" long) , both being made of solid lead.

The 9" high v-shaped handle is designed to rotate down and lay flat when the trap is resting on the bottom and so is then out of the way of the 2 spring activated fish hooks, which lay down flat when in the set position (Fig. 2c).

This trap was found in upstate New York along the St. Lawrence River and so I refer to it as my Thousand Island Region Fish Trap.



Figure 2a. Thousand Island Trap in the Sprung Position

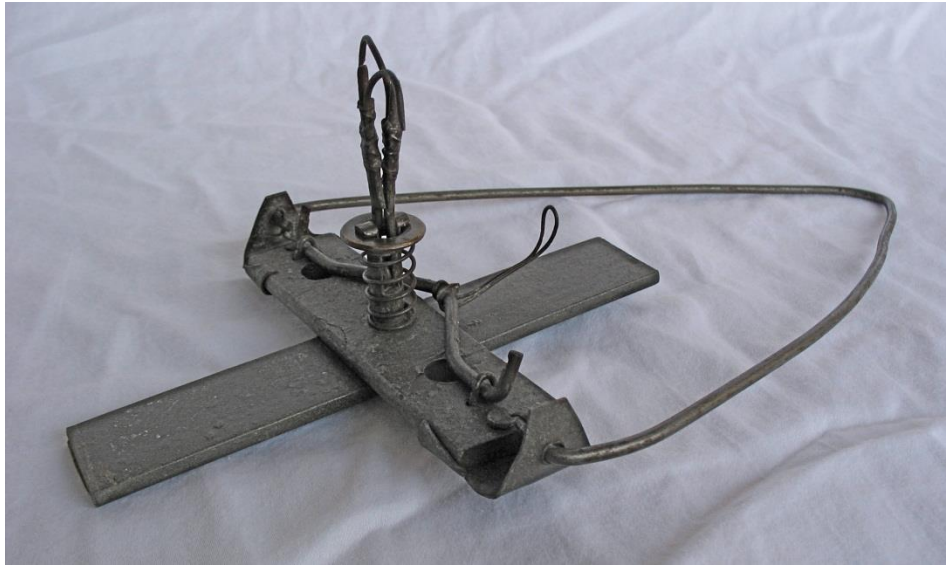


Figure 2b. Alternate View of the Thousand Island Trap in the Sprung Position

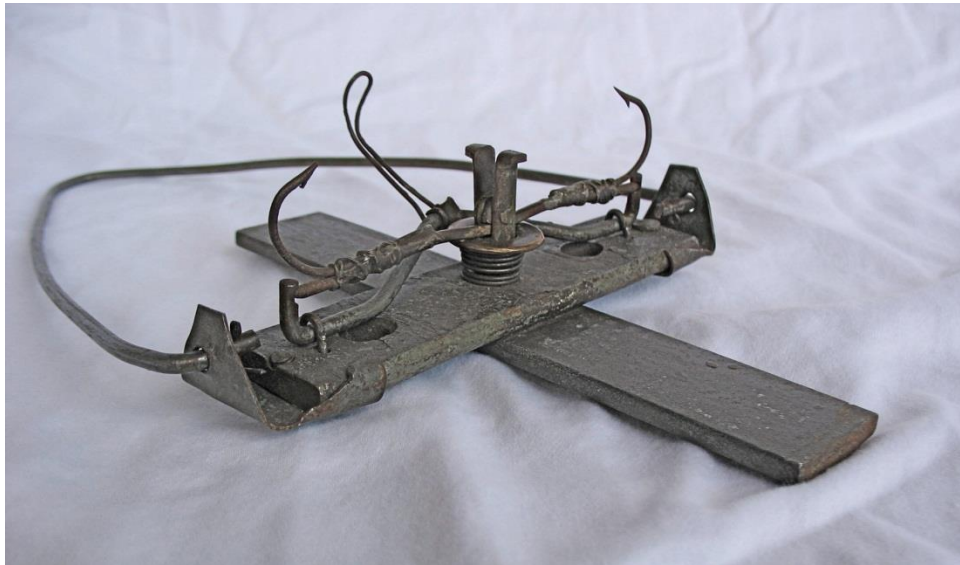


Figure 2c. Thousand Island Trap in the Set Position

STEPHEN LAWRENCE FISH TRAP

The fish trap pictured in Figure 3 was invented by Stephen A. Lawrence of Okmulgee, Oklahoma and was granted U. S. patent # 1,534,969 (Fig. 3c) on April 21, 1925. It stands 5.5" high and has an approximately 5" square steel plate base into which is stamped PAT 4 21 25 in one corner and 20 in another, which is thought to be a serial number.

The driving force of this “ Fish Catcher “, as it is described in the patent text, is a “ tapered coil spring “ which when compressed, collapses upon itself, so as to lay flat against the base when set and allows the 4 inwardly facing, barbless hooks to rotate outward and lay horizontally (Fig. 3a & 3b). The patent also states that “ rising from the base is a post to which may be attached a string for lowering the devise into the water”, with no mention of whether it was meant to be used while suspended in the water or resting upon the bottom.



Figure 3a. Stephen Lawrence Trap in the Sprung Position



Figure 3b. Stephen Lawrence Trap in the Set Position

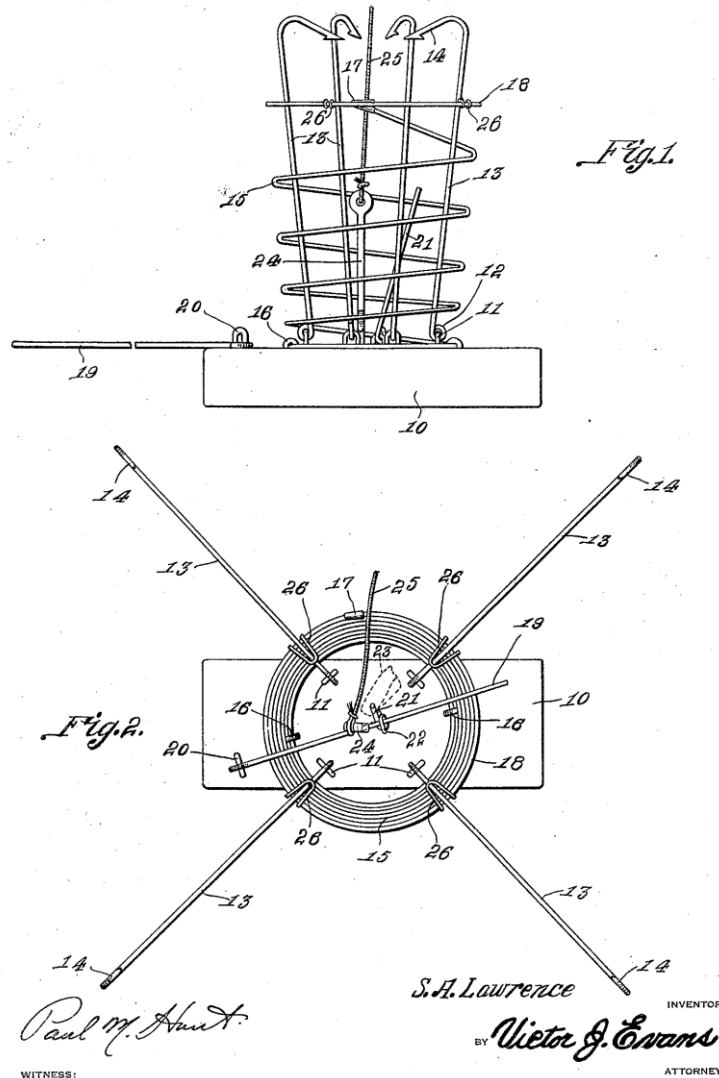


Figure 3c. Patent Illustration (US #1,534,969): Stephen Lawrence Trap

LAKE ERIE CLAW TRAP

The fish trap pictured in Figure 4 stands 7.5" high and is not known to have been patented. It somewhat resembles the 1877 Evans' Eagle Claw Fish and Animal Trap, (no known relation to the Fryin' Pan Evans), but employs an entirely different setting mechanism. Other surficial differences that set it apart from an Eagle Claw is that the metal employed is steel rather than brass (except for its central hollow tube which the spring coils around), 6 versus 8 striking hooks (Figures 4a & 4b), use of a conventional fish hook to hold the bait, and the distinctive wooden knob near the line tie, which may have served for buoyancy, and kept the trap in its desired pendant orientation when in the water.

The most fundamental and perhaps revolutionary aspect employed in the design and construction of this trap, is that should its spring break, it could be replaced, and easily so. Depending on the date of its manufacture, and this is almost certainly a factory trap, this may in fact be the very first spring-loaded fish hook or fish trap that exhibited such a fundamental improvement in design.

This particular trap was originally being found in northern Ohio, "up on Lake Erie ", and so since so little of this trap's origin and history are known, I refer to it simply as a Lake Erie Claw Trap.



Figure 4a. Lake Erie Claw Trap in the Sprung Position



Figure 4b. Lake Erie Claw Trap in the Set Position

TURNER AND FLETCHER FISH TRAP

The combination fish and animal trap pictured in Figure 5 was invented by Lewis Turner and Henry Fletcher of Los Angeles, California and was granted U. S. patent # 515,980 (Fig. 5c) on March 6, 1894 and is in the consensus opinion of both collectors and non-collectors to be just awesome.

The 19 steel “ claw wires “ of this trap, which measures approximately 10” wide and 10” high, and was designed primarily for fish, are attached to a brass frame and empowered by a torsional spring made of brass wire.

One of the most amazing and innovative features of this trap is that by the exertion of pressure by one finger, its powerful spring can be disconnected on its one end where it hooks around a claw member, thus disengaging it and allows the jaws of the trap to rotate open (Fig. 5a & 5b) with no resistance. There are several advantages of this unique design, one being that the trap can be easily and safely baited by opening the trap, and thus exposing the portion of the trap to which the bait is attached, while the spring is disengaged, and another that any creature unfortunate enough to be caught in its jaws (and presumably killed), could then be easily removed by again easily disconnecting the spring, with no danger of the fisherman’s hand also falling victim by the trap accidentally springing shut.

Another unique feature of this trap is its bait holder, which is comprised of 2 arms made of spring brass wire and connected to each other in such a manner that baits of various sizes and dimensions can be easily and securely held between them due to their compressive spring nature and construction.

This trap has a stamping of 19-----47, which may refer to it being serial # 19 out of a production of 4 dozen (48), minus the one that would have been sent to the patent office, but this is only conjecture by the author.

The whereabouts of this particular example of a Turner and Fletcher killer fish trap can be traced back through a succession of various gun and trap collections dating back to before WW II.



Figure 5a. Turner and Fletcher Fish Trap in the Closed (Sprung) Position

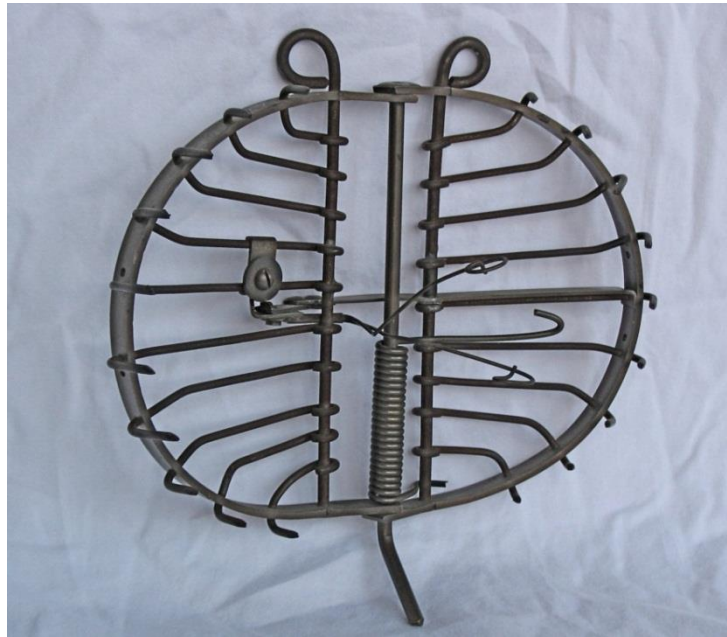


Figure 5b. Turner and Fletcher Fish Trap in the Open (Set) Position

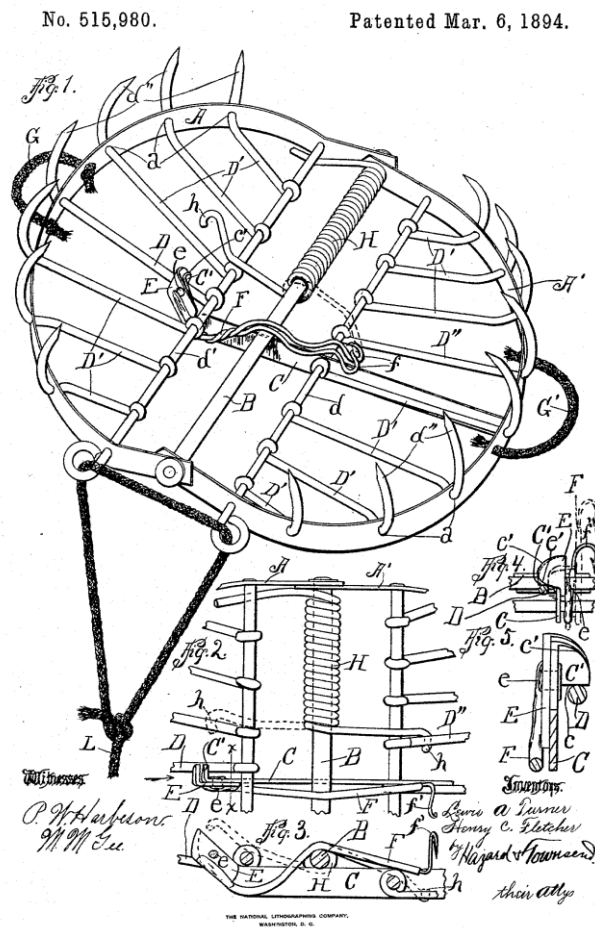


Figure 5c. Patent Illustration (US #515,980): Turner & Fletcher Trap

SOUTH TEXAS FISH TRAP

The fish trap pictured in Figure 6 stands 12" tall with the 2 rows of 4 treble hooks being soldered onto arms which measure 3.5" in length. Even though this trap's unique design and innovative construction would have qualified it to have been patented, it is not known to have been so.

This trap can be set (Fig. 6a & 6b) so that the striking arms to which the treble hooks are attached have 3 different " spreads ", depending upon which of the 3 holes the large central bait hook is inserted into which are drilled into the female sliding sleeve which the bait hook is wrapped around.

This trap also employs a shock absorbing spring attached to the rod which acts as a line tie and is located inside of the flat steel portion of the trap which goes around the coil spring.

This trap was originally located about 60 miles southeast of Austin, Texas by fellow collector and N.F. L.C.C. member Gary Jacobs, whom I acquired it from, and by all accounts seems to have originated in that area, where Gary says it most probably would have been designed and used for large yellow catfish, which have been known to go upwards of 80 lbs., and are notorious for throwing a hook because of their soft flesh. This would help to explain why this trap's designer was not satisfied with just multiple hooks on each striking arm, but rather employed multiple treble hooks.

This is a well made trap, which I refer to simply as a South Texas Fish Trap, and to quote a man from south Texas who was experienced in working with metal and had a chance to examine it said, "whoever made this trap, it wasn't their first time to a rodeo".



Figure 6a. South Texas Fish Trap in the Sprung Position

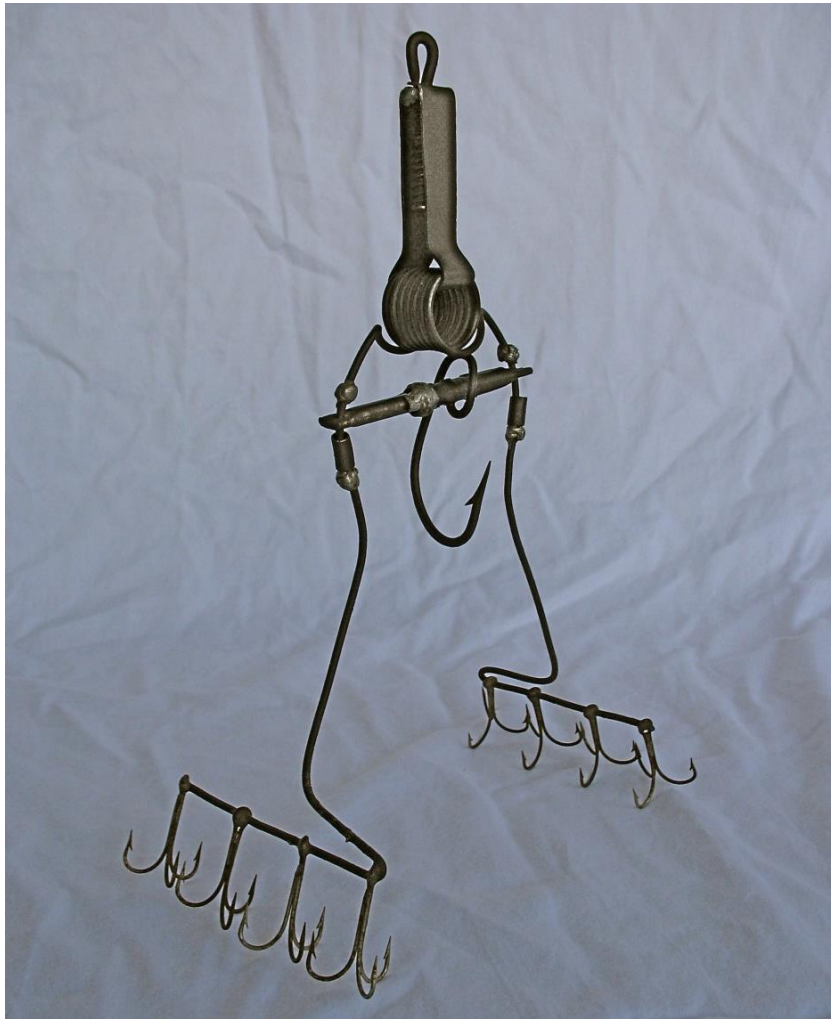


Figure 6b. South Texas Fish Trap in the Set Position

CONCLUSION

Prior to WW II, it was commonly stated in patent papers pertaining to spring-loaded fish hooks and metal fish traps, that because of the “full, clear and exact description “ that was being given, that anyone else would be able to make and use their invention who were “ skilled in the art”.

I believe it is safe to say that the inventors and makers of the 6 metal killer fish traps herein previously described, some identified and some not, would all qualify as people who were “ skilled in the art”.

Bill is always interested in acquiring additional pieces for his collection, which would hopefully be included, along with these 6 items, in a 2nd edition of his and Timothy Mierzwa’s book, ***Spring-Loaded Fish Hooks, Traps and Lures***, and is always happy to discuss and/or try to help in the identification of spring-loaded hooks and metal traps that may have been meant for fish and may be reached by e-mail at bill@blauser.org or by phone at 412-373-8203.

This article is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend Tim Mierzwa, longtime collector and foremost authority and pioneer in the field of spring-loaded fish hooks, traps and lures.