

# 5 Killer Fish Traps from When They Might Have Meant Your Survival

by William Blauser

It is only a relatively recent phenomenon whereby people go fishing just for the sole enjoyment of doing so, but it is estimated that today sport fishing is enjoyed by over 60 million souls.

The 5 fish traps which are the subject of this article are in no way related to the enjoyment of catching the fish, especially to the members of the finny race, but rather the necessity in early America to put food on the table for your family and self.

The first spring-loaded fish hook and trap in America was invented by George Washington Griswold in 1846, with its design then patented that year by Engelbrecht & Skiff, and so became the 1st invention patented in the United States expressly for the purpose of catching a fish. When J. J. Brown discusses Griswold's invention in his 1857 book *The American Anglers Guide*, he writes that "Immediately after this 1<sup>st</sup> patent, the mechanical genius of the country was put into motion, and presto! at least a dozen inventions of other striking hooks of various descriptions were made to facilitate the taking of our scaly friends".

These following 5 mechanical traps illustrate some of that genius.

## Brass Curved Pitch Fork Trap

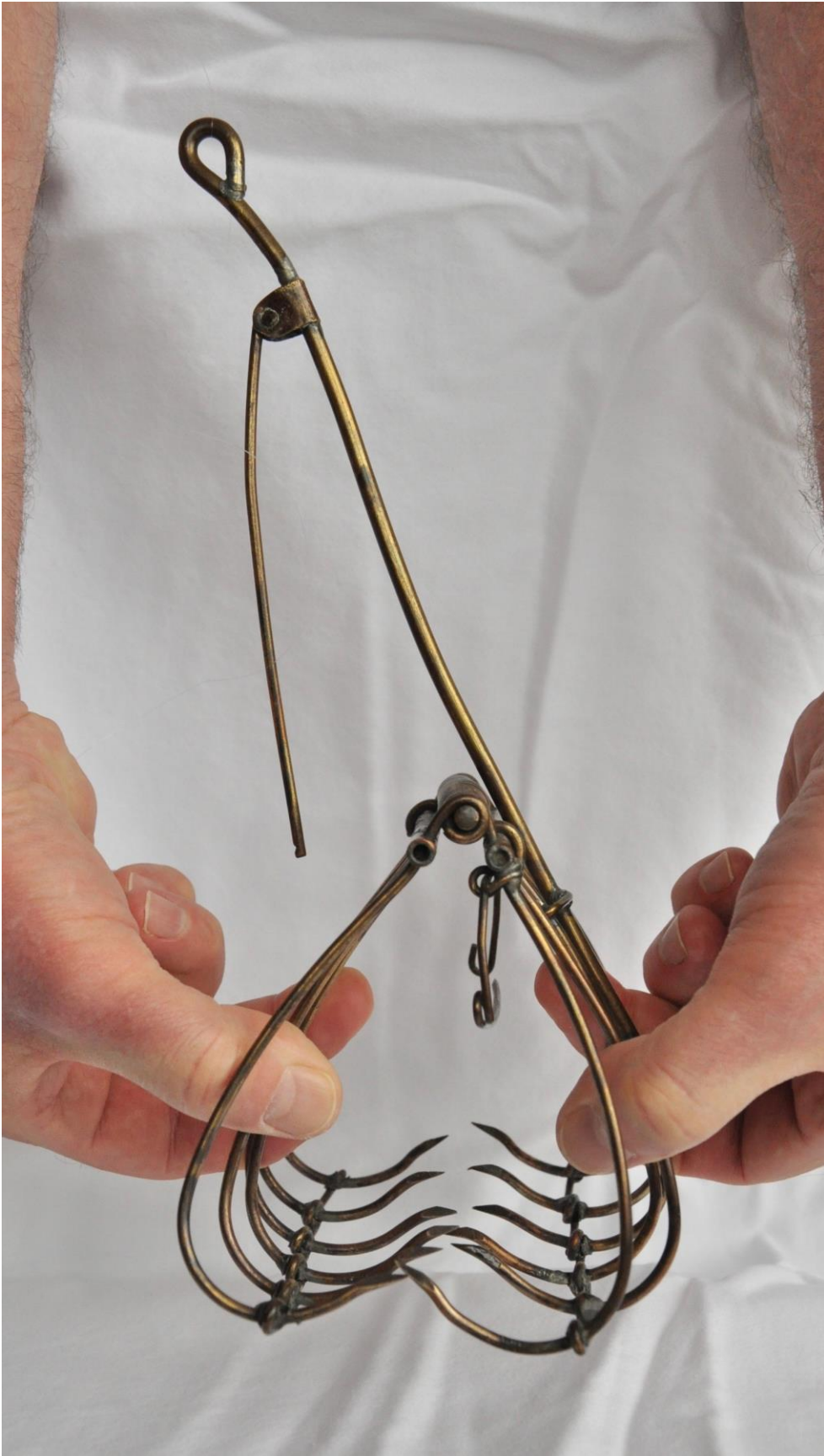
Found in a California antique store 30 years ago.....Factory made..... Entirely brass.....Needle sharp teeth.....Cool large safety-pin type bait holder.....Letters of Patent have not been found.....The scariest trap to set that I've ever seen.....and I will not do it.....but have seen it set.... Circa 1880's?.....



Shown in the Sprung Position



Shown sprung in the orientation it would hang in the water.



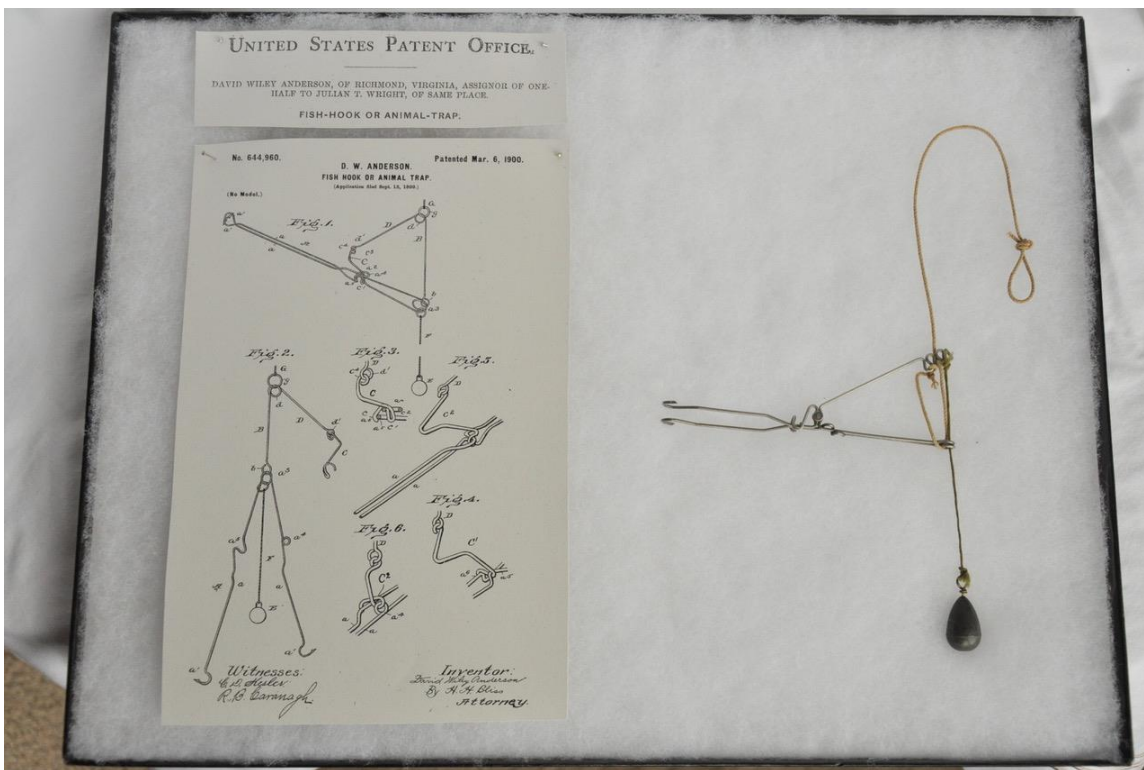
When set these jaws would be 180 degrees apart.

# Anderson Fish Hook or Animal Trap

The Anderson Fish Trap, patented on March 6, 1900, is a relatively simple device, but the way that it works, and the way that the line-tie cord (which must even be of a specific diameter) and lead weight are attached and wind through it is really quite involved and ingenious, and must be done exactly right, or it does not operate properly and doesn't hang correctly in the water or air with the jaws being horizontal.

The few collectors that have seen this trap agree that if the first Anderson had not been found already "strung-up" correctly, then there is no way that anyone would have been able to figure out how to string up one with the exact and correct arrangement of the line-tie cord and the lead weight, especially since it does not comply at all with the patent drawing nor patent text.

<https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/53/3e/8d/3a20450ed1b0cd/US644960.pdf>



Shown in the set position next to the patent drawing





Set position

quarter for scale



Anderson Fish Trap shown in the sprung position.

# Impaling Spike Style Fish Trap

Hand-Forged Flat Spring Spike Hook Trap.....circa 1840's-1870's?.....Found in the Adirondack Mtns. of upstate New York, .....copper line-tie..... striking hook has groove cut across its base which serves to lock the flat spring in place in the sprung position so that it cannot open back up unless you squeeze the spring..... this trap is about 4 inches in length....no markings...a nearly identical trap to this was found behind the boards of a boathouse from the mid-1800's that was being dismantled in Germany many years ago (from the collection of William Blauser)



Note quarter for scale

Shown in the sprung position.





Shown in the set position.



Other side shown set....note copper line-tie.

# 1868 Beach Fish Trap

The Beach Fish Trap is cast from iron and has a brass spring which surrounds the trap's "spindle" and has the patent date caste into its base. It has a very slick self-setting mechanism, whose operation is based on an elongate counter-weight ("a lever upon a fulcrum") built into the shaft, so that when the circular "metallic ring with teeth upon its lower edge" is raised (which compresses the brass spring), the bottom of the counterweight, (that serves as the "dog" of the trap) rotates inward while the top potion of the counterweighted piece simultaneously rotates outward, thus propping the elevated circular toothed member above the counterweight, and thus setting the trap.

E. B. Beach Fish Tap....Patented Dec. 22, 1868.....Patent # 85,199.....New Haven.....(animal is also mentioned in the patent text)

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<https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/ea/56/79/cf02d747215a4d/US85199.pdf>

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Beach Fish Trap in the sprung position

The Diet Coke can is 12 ounces



Beach Fish Trap shown in the set position





Patent date shown caste into the iron

PATd DEC. 22, 1868

# Isaac Walton Hook

This is the earliest spring loaded fish hook known to exist, originating in England, and is pictured and described in Isaac Walton's 1760 edition of *The Complete Angler*. In this book, it is referred to as a "Pickerell Spring Snap Hook", which is generally just shortened to "Spring Snap Hook", and was later advertised to come in 5 sizes. Although it is stated in J.J.Brown's 1857 New York edition of *The American Angler's Guide* that these hooks were in common use in England for many years, British collectors tell me that they are exceedingly rare to find, in any size.

Job Johnson, who emigrated to Brooklyn, New York from Reddich, England prior to 1845, and who advertised himself as a "professional hook maker", must have been very familiar with the style of spring snap hook as described by Isaac Walton and in use in the British Isles, and in 1849 he applied for and was granted a U.S. patent for this exact design, which he called "The American Spring Snap-Hook" in his patent text. Although identical in almost every way, Job Johnson's patent shows a very distinctive line tie in his Figure 13, which may be used to differentiate his American version from the English spring snap hook. Job Johnson's spring snap hook is even more rarely found than the version across the pond.....(from the collection of William Blauser)

Patent # 6,207.....Job Johnson.....March 20, 1849.....Brooklyn, New York.....made of brass, steel and spring-steel

<https://patentimages.storage.googleapis.com/65/47/05/3cab3e77ff1024/US6207.pdf>

This example was found in a pre-1900 tackle box by a picker in the Adirondack Mountains of New York.



Isaac Walton Snap Hook shown set



Isaac Walton Hook shown sprung

note distinctive line tie



Other side shown sprung

quarter for scale



# The Wicked Trap

Maker unknown..... circa 1900-1920.....Found in Michigan.....none others known

This trap was designed to hang upside down under the water (it sinks), with the wooden cross piece facing up toward the surface.....and the dual bait hooks facing down toward the bottom.....and the 2 spring-loaded steel jaws lying horizontally under and against the wood cross member.....The 2 red cork pieces (possibly repainted) would have been painted red to act as a attractor.....in addition to whatever was on the bait-hooks.....and in addition they would add buoyancy to that part of the trap, and would help to keep it oriented correctly in the water.

The 2 jaws, with tacks acting as teeth, can be set independently...a very unique feature.....and there has been a period repair to one set of the dual springs.....(From the collection of William Blauser)



In the sprung position

note 12 ounce Diet Coke and quarter for scale





A different view sprung



other side sprung

To the best of this author's knowledge, only 1 of these 5 fish traps which are the subject of this article have ever been documented in the literature, and so there's a lot of unknowns about them, and I would very much appreciate anyone who has knowledge or information such as old advertisements in old outdoor magazine ads, etc.....or even has one..... ( or any other oddball spring-loaded hooks or traps)..... contacting me at 412-373-8203 or by email at [springhook@comcast.net](mailto:springhook@comcast.net)