

Lured By Time: Collecting Antique Fishing Lures and Tackle

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photos by the author

“The lure is a device made of some material, organic or inorganic, bearing a hook, a facility for tying it to a line, and made in such a way as to deceive a fish into thinking it to be a delicacy worthy of pursuit.” Carl F. Luckey, Old Fishing Lures & Tackle (1999).

From coins to stamps to vintage toys to comic books, people from all walks of life have found various things to gather and collect. Anglers fascinated with the history of fishing are no exception and have amassed their own myriad of lures, plugs, and tackle. Whether it is nostalgia, curiosity, or the search for something old or new, lure and tackle collecting in Pennsylvania has become a hobby for some anglers.

It started in my life when a family friend handed down an old tackle box to me. Among its contents, the wooden, crackle-bodied lures with glass eyes each held their own stories of time spent on the water. From manufacturers such as Heddon, Creek Chub, South Bend, Pflueger, and Shakespeare, the plugs had their own uniqueness and seemed different from the ones in my own tackle box. Then, I researched each lure and found that some had little value and some seemed to be a rare find. Thus, began my hobby of lure collecting. Bargaining at garage sales, bidding on the eBay website, and attending fishing shows, I assembled an impressive amateur collection. To this day, my lure hunt continues with the Creek Chub Gar Underwater Minnow as my relentless goal.

Getting started

The first step in collecting antique plugs is building and defining your collection. Lure collectors run the spectrum from casual to competitive. Some hobbyists enjoy



surprising finds and add cracked, damaged, and faded lures into their collections. Others prefer getting into the hobby as serious collectors to find that mint, new-in-box treasure. Ask yourself what kind of collector will you be? Will you stick to one distinct type of lure, color, style, or manufacturer? Does a particular pattern or plug grab your attention and interest?

Finding lures

Look for sources such as garage sales, estate sales, and flea markets, where you may locate vintage fishing tackle. You may ask friends or family if they have any old fishing gear that they are willing to part with for a price. Research if fishing groups and sporting clubs have fishing gear shows in your area to find secondhand lures and fishing tackle or an opportunity to swap pieces with fellow collectors. The internet is also a great place to find and purchase lures.

Decide how much you are willing to spend for a single plug or antique variety. To start, find books and information on



These Heddon “Crazy Crawlers” include two-piece surface hardware and side flapper blades, making interesting collectibles.

the values of the types of lures to that you will be searching. Lure collecting sites and clubs offer a lot of information on the history, hobby, and values of these antiques. If you become a serious collector, consider joining one of the premier lure collecting organizations. The National Fishing Lure Collectors Club (NFLCC) describes itself as a “non-profit, educational, international organization. The primary mission of the NFLCC is to promote the awareness of tackle collecting as a hobby and the preservation of vintage and collectible tackle information, history, and artifacts.” The NFLCC offers articles, membership, and even a buy/sell/trade section for its members. They also suggest numerical and monetary values and conditions of lures from the mint-in-box (MIB) to fair and poor (F/P).

The more research and information you have available, the more equipped you will be to find a reasonable price to pay for your find. You can always make an offer, and sellers can either accept, decline, or negotiate a price for the item.



The Creek Chub Bait Company created a line of pike lures, including the biggest, the Giant Pike.

Displaying your collection

Some enthusiasts simply hang their treasures from beams and ceiling rafters as they amass them. Some use wooden gun racks and rods as a means of display. Though these are easy methods, remember that dirt particles find their way onto surfaces, so be sure to dust them periodically. Also, if you have little ones around, safely guard metal tips with plastic hook guards.

For better conditioned and high-valued lures, consider a shadow box or a shelf that provides protection behind glass. Clear display windows allow the collector to observe their tackle without risking damage. Some collectors use box types with plexiglass to set upon a table. Many choices of display boxes are available at retail stores.

Pass it on

Never miss an opportunity to pass your lures on to kids you know. Give them a head start in the fascinating and rich history of fishing through lure collecting. Support the future of the hobby by involving future generations of lure collectors.

Enjoy the journey of finding and acquiring your antique lures and snag a new plug for yourself or your kid’s collection, and send me a message if you

happen to know anyone willing to part with a Creek Chub Gar Underwater Minnow. ☐

NFLCC Standard Lure Grading System Numerical Scale Description/Condition

- 10/(NIB) New-in-box. Unused with original box or carton
- 9/(M) Mint. Unused without box
- 8/(EXC) Excellent. Very little or no age cracks, very minor defects
- 7/(VG) Very Good. Little age cracks; some minor defects
- 5-6/(G) Good. Some age cracks; starting to chip, small defects
- 3-4/(AVG) Average. Some paint loss and/or chipping; showing age
- 2/(F) Fair. Major paint loss and/or defects; much chipping
- 1/(P) Poor. Parts missing, poor color, and/or major chipping
- 0/(R) Repaint. Original paint covered over in all or part

Various Lure Color Patterns (Jim Muma, NFLCC, 1990)

- *Frog - Dark green body and yellow spots
- *Green Cracked Back - Diamonds on a white body with red spots
- *Mottled - Colors blotched or overlapping
- *Natural Chub - Light green or brown scale pattern
- *Natural Pickerel - Yellow body with green, brown, or black stripes
- *Perch - Yellow body with vertical stripes
- *Rainbow Fire - Fluorescent rainbow stripes with white belly
- *Silver Scale - Silver color with decal eyes and scales
- *Snake - Green scale and yellow spots
- *Tiger - Yellow body with black vertical stripes
- *Zebra - Black and white alternating vertical stripes