

## Gordon Allen Dills

Our 1st honorary member for 1999 is Gordon A. Dills of Williamsport, Pennsylvania now 76 years of age. He is the grandson of Henry Dills, one of the (3) founders of the Creek Chub Bait Company of Garrett, Indiana, founded in 1916. As a boy he well remembers visits to the plant when his father would tell him that one day he would be part owner of the company, which in time proved to be true. Gordon held a number of important management positions with the company. He was Secretary of the corporation, a sales representative, and he also managed Creek Chubs manufacturing facility in Ashley, Indiana. He also was responsible for designing (2) Creek Chub Company lures in the 50's. They were the #9600 "Spinning Deepster", and the #9100 "Spoon-Tail".

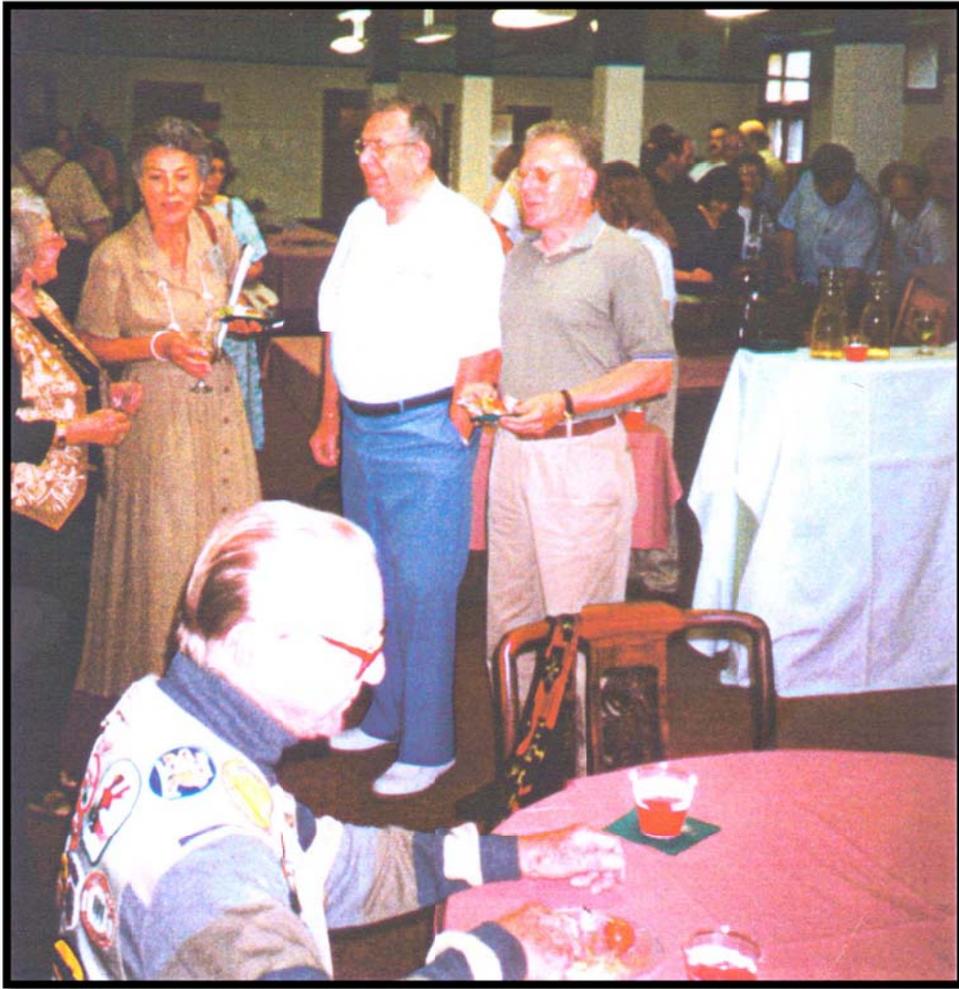


### Creek Chub Spoon-Tail

(Picture from 1955-56 CCBCO catalog)

Gordon recalls the days of the depression era when the plant was very busy. The reason being so many people were out of work and they fished for food for their table. Gordon also recalled that the Ashley, Indiana plant was opened shortly after World War II because at that time there were over one million Pikie Minnow lures back-ordered.

Gordon was very much a part of the 1st Creek Chub Company reunion in Garrett, Indiana and has a strong interest in preserving Creek Chub Company history.



**Gordon A. Dills (Center in white shirt/blue trousers)**

Gordon is our 41st honorary member. He was nominated for honorary membership status by members Dan Basore of Warrenville, Illinois and Steve Pepple of Garrett, Indiana and we agree that he very much deserves this honor. (See special article on next page).

**Honorary Member - 1999**

# CREEK CHUB MEMORIES OF GORDON A. DILLS

By Dan Basore

The Grandson of one of the three founders of the Creek Chub Bait Company recently mailed us a copy of his memories, to "use as you see fit." As our previous article reported this firm was begun in 1916 by three fishermen, Henry Dills, Carl Heinzerling and George Schulthess in Garrett, Indiana.

Gordon A. Dills is Henry's grandson and we can all thank him for so generously sharing his recollections. He has shared with participants at the Creek Chub Bait Company Reunion the original three patents for Creek Chub Baits that were filed in January, June and July of 1918.

One was for the mouthpiece that provided the action, line tie and special action that triggered strikes and sales of millions of lures for decades. Another patent was for the scale finish which resulted from spraying paint through a mesh cloth like a wedding veil.

He also has furnished a copy of a notarized document dated November 18, 1918 assigning half of the rights for these patents to Heddon for the sum of one dollar. He does not know nor have we been able to determine if there were other considerations or if this was done out of friendship.

Gordon feels that the previous reports of the CCBCO being formed in 1906 were a result of miscopying the correct 1916 date. His Father told him that Grandfather Henry was homesteading 160 acres near Moro, New Mexico then and Gordon has the deed dated 1911.

Gordon's father told him of traveling there with his father and mother to live for the required year to homestead the land. "It does not seem logical for Henry to leave a new business for that year." In addition Gordon shared a copy of the original agreement between the three partners dated April of 1916. The business was incorporated with the State of Indiana in 1919 for a life of 50 years. In 1969 the CCBCO Board of Directors was notified of this and the necessary papers were filed to make the life of the firm perpetual.

The original agreement included information on the minnow only and gave the right to Henry to own and use other patents as he saw fit. "This may tie in with a later agreement with Heddon but I have no proof," said Gordon.

Starting with the partnership, Henry was made the first President, George the Vice President and Carl was Secretary/Treasurer. Upon Henry's death in 1927 George Schulthess became President and Gordon's father Vice President. When George died in 1945 my father became President, Georges son Howard became Vice President and Carl continued as Secretary/Treasurer. When Carl passed on in 1950 his son Harry Heinzerling became Secretary/Treasurer.

These successions in the three families continued in 1958 When Gordon passed away and Howard became President until his death several years later. Then Leroy Schultess (dropping the h in his name), Georges son, became President, Harry was named Vice President, Gordon A. Dills was named Secretary and Howard's widow Julia Schultess became Treasurer. These officers remained in these positions until the business was sold. With the death of founder Henry's widow in 1989 the Dill's stock was distributed to the 5 Grandchildren including Gordon A. Dills.

### **OPERATIONAL PEOPLE**

In the 1920's Sam Davenport of Auburn, Indiana was employed as Sales Manager. He adopted a policy to sell only to legitimate jobbers a policy that remained until the end. A few large retailers were sold direct but at less of a discount. After World War II a few so called wagon jobbers were included, but Sam was very dynamic and with but one round trip to see the jobbers would have all of the business they could produce for a year. We have also observed Sam's name on some of the patents assigned to Creek Chub.

Austin "Toad" Van Houten became Sales Manager when Sam retired in 1951 but his heart remained devoted to production a position he returned to two years later. Harry Heinzerling then took over the Sales Manager's position until his retirement and the sale of the business.

The three Sales Managers contracted with sales representatives over the years. Men including Ralph Beard serviced the west coast, Phil Dawson, Ellis Kinney and Tom Hambrick served the south, Van Houten covered the eastern part of the country until returning to production and turning over these duties to George Albrecht. Gordon Dills territory was the Midwest until he left the companies employ in 1953 and Mack Shreve took over.

Gordon A. recalls the popular Pikie Minnows, Jointed Pikies, Plunker, Darter and the Injured Minnow (flat side) that were developed in the 1920s. His Father developed the Beetle and Gordon A. came up with the Deepster and Spontail lures.

The first plant was located at the corner of Cowen and Keyser the sight of the present Post Office. It later moved to 101 Keyser where it remained until its sale, the building being razed in 1989 to make a parking lot.

As a young boy during the depression Gordon remembers the factory working two shifts to supply the increased demand as people without work resorted to fishing to put food on the table. Prior to World War II they also made contracted lures for Sears and Montgomery Ward.

Creek Chub also entered into an agreement with Alcott, Laight and Westwood of Toronto, Canada for them to complete lure bodies. It was a tax duty advantaged process to ship the parts and bodies for colors, final assembly, packaging and sale across the border. Creek Chub never had an ownership position in AL&W.

## **POST WORLD WAR II ERA**

After the War, production was so far behind orders that a new corporation was formed called Lures Incorporated. It was wholly owned by Creek Chub with the same officers. The first factory was located 20 miles north of Garrett in Ashley, Indiana. When it opened they were over 1 million pieces behind for the 700 Pikie lure alone. Gordon A. managed the Lures plant for several years before Toad Vanhouten took over and ran it until his death.

The Lures Inc. business was moved to a Quonset hut building in Garrett and remained there until the building was sold to a tool and die company.

Its old Ashley location was also razed where earlier wood bodies were turned. Before that they were purchased from Jim Shreve or Harry Rosenberry of Syracuse, Indiana.

To make these bodies Northern White Cedar was purchased in northern Michigan in slabs and trucked to Ashley. There it was cut into four foot lengths, and proper sized squares. It was then kiln dried for about two weeks. Then the slabs were turned on hand operated lathes to make the bodies, hand sanded, dipped in a clear lacquer sealer, given four coats of white lacquer undercoat then another coat of clear sealer. The bodies were then sawed, drilled and punched then given another coat of clear sealer and sent to the Garrett plant for final painting, assembly and shipping.

At the Garrett plant all work was done by hand. Solid colors were hand dipped individually. Various colors and designs were added with small air brushes. In the early models the glass eyes were painted, cut, sorted and pounded in by hand as were hooks, mouthpieces, spinners, etcetera, all hand work.

Since the cost of making wood baits was so high and with the advent of spinning it was decided to add plastic lures to the line. The first ones were scaled back versions of the Pikie, Jointed Pikie, .Plunker, Darter, and Injured Minnow. Later almost all of the line was available in plastic including 118 ounce versions of the above. This made Pikie lures available from 1/8 to 3-1/2 ounce sizes.

The company remained open to ideas from the field. For example the east coast representative George Albrecht convinced the Board of the need for a salt water line. The Surfsters, Striper and Tarpon Pikies along with large Darters and Plunkers were developed and some of these became important contributors to the line. In fact, much of the success of the CCBCO can be shared with the many long time employees whose entire working careers were with the company. At its peak, Lures Inc. had 85 and Creek Chub 115 employees.

Toad Van Houten started at age 16, worked in production for years, became Sales Manager for a few years, and then returned to production

until his death. To many he is best remembered for some of the special lips and custom paint patterns he made.

Dick Detrick also started at age 16 and knew every piece of equipment well, lure bodies, all the parts, the exact locations of saw cuts, and holes by heart. He was in charge of production for years. After the sale of the company he stayed on with the new owners of Lures Inc. teaching them how to build lures.

Katie Fetters, Mary Liss and Katie Liss attached the hooks, Agnes Hollis installed mouth pieces, Nellie Rahmer was in charge of air brush painting, Katie Liss and Edith Van Houten did much of the inspecting and Edith also worked as a sander and buffer. Alice and Lela Vanhouten, Toad's sisters worked in the fly fishing lure room until that line was discontinued. Lela married local fisherman Earl "Dingbat" Weaver whose nickname was added to Creek Chub lures long before America heard of Archie Bunker.

There are many more memories than this space permits but we will share more in the future. Gordon summarized that, "The locations of the plants were a big advantage since well over a hundred lakes were within 45 minutes of Garrett. People from the factory tried out new lures and field tested others. As new baits were developed they were also tested in the YMCA pool in Auburn where the action could be readily seen."

"When I was a young boy and would go to the factory with Dad, as we walked through the office he would point to a desk and tell me that someday I would own it because I would eventually receive 1/15th of 1/3 of the business. I am proud to say I did own a part of a company which made a superior product which really did catch fish."

We thank Gordon and all the other great people that are helping to remember, document, preserve and share the history of one of the greatest lure companies the world has known. Steve Pepple and I nominated Gordon A. Dills and Leroy Schultess to become Honorary Members with Frank Baron's support. We will present their certificates at the second Creek Chub Bait Company Reunion in Garrett August 6th and 7th.