

Jester L. Layfield and Floyd H. Layfield

(As nominated by Jackie Hewlett of Austin, Texas)

Jester L. Layfield was a farmer, who designed, made and sold his Layfield lures starting in 1935. He applied for and received a patent #2,179,641 in 1939. His lures were small wooden crank baits with glass eyes, a metal lip and a figure eight handmade snap attached to the line tie.

The earliest models were about 2-1/8" long and they were later slimmed down to 1-3/4". Jester hand whittled the lure bodies out of Boxelder and Cedar wood blocks with a pocket knife.

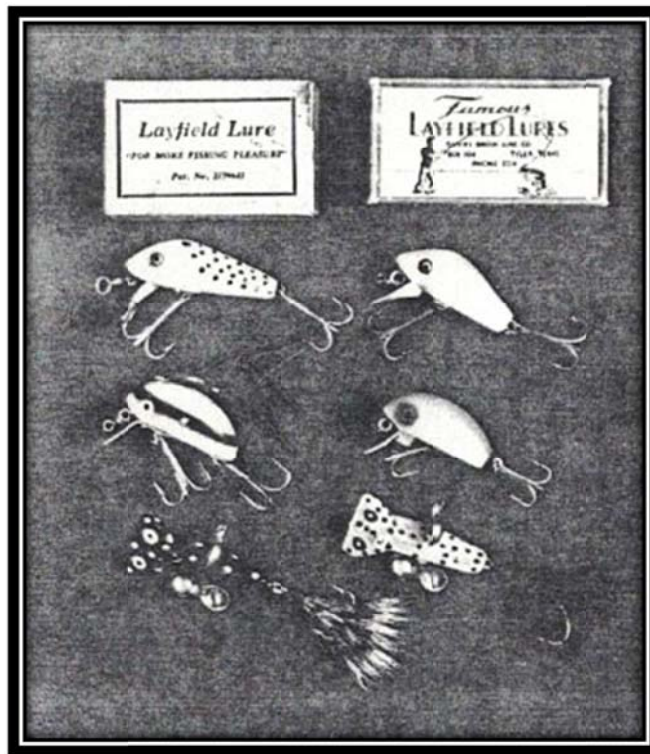
The metal bills for the earliest lures were cut out of chrome or brass headlight bends from Model-T Fords. Later he used a lip with a keel. The keel resembled the keel on the Keeling Tom Thumb lure. He used a punch to punch them out by hand and cut groves in the keel for the hooks with a hand file. Since he hand whittled the lure bodies, he could only make about eight a day. He said the lures were selling then for 65 cents.

Another characteristic of his lures were that his wife Beth, who painted most of the lures, would paint the back of the lip halfway up. Beth also designed the early cardboard boxes. They were white with black lettering and had the Layfield lure logo "For more fishing pleasure" and the patent number on them.

He made two different models of his lures, the original and the skirt bait which had a small rubber skirt attached by a metal holder indented in the top of the lure.

Mr. Layfield sold his patent in the late 1940's for \$1,000 to Lee B. Smith, a preacher in Tyler, Texas. Mr. Smith called his company the Sunnybrook

Lure Company. They began making the lures out of plastic. Smith hired Jester and his longtime fishing partner Ed Gowan to run his plant. Jester worked at the Sunnybrook plant for about two years and then went back to farming.



Layfield Lures

The Layfield lures were definitely a forerunner to today's modern plastic crank baits. They were very similar in size and shape to the Bomber Lure Company's Model A's.

Jester and his brother Floyd, along with Ed Gowan created lots of attention in fishing circles in east Texas. Jester claims the local town folks of Kerens accused them of cleaning out the city lake! Ed caught the largest bass, weighing in at 10 lb. 1 oz. Another time he was fishing on Trinidad Lake behind a Mr. Conden who made a competitive lure called the "Dynamite" in Dallas and Jester caught so many bass behind Conden that the man went to the house in disgust.

His best quote when talking about making lures was that "I lived so far back in the woods that they used hoot owls for chickens."

Floyd "Cotton" Layfield helped Jester with his early lure making until he went into the service during World War II. After getting out of the service, he designed and made a small wood 2" long triangular headed top water lure. The lure was equipped with small metal cups, two on each side which would turn or walk when the lure was pulled through the water. The lure was called the "Flipper." Cotton applied for a patent on his lure on October 15, 1945. The patent was not granted until October 18, 1949.

Cotton built a machine which would cut and shape Jester's and his lures during the 1940's He made and sold his lures for a few years but was never able to afford to put them on the market on a commercial basis. He sold quite a few to friends and fishermen in east Texas.

Both Jester and Cotton along with their wives are still living in the small east Texas communities where they were raised. They are both still fishing but on a much slower pace and shorter days.



From right to left: Ed Gowan, Jester Layfield, Floyd Layfield

All of the preceding information was obtained on Sunday, May 6, 1990 from personal interviews with Jester, Bess, Floyd and Vera Layfield, and Ed Gowan in Kerens and Trinidad, Texas.

These gentlemen are real 'down home' old country boy characters and would make great additions to our Honorary Member program.

Editor's note: At the time of this writing, according to the author that Jester was age 83, living in Kerens, Texas and Floyd age 80 of Trinidad, Texas. The author noted that Kerens and Trinidad are small towns five miles apart on highway 31, in east Texas between Corsicana and Tyler. Pictures shown are courtesy of the author.

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