



## **Leo C. Pachner**

One of seven children, Leo C. Pachner was born in 1908. At age eleven, his family moved from Chicago to sharecrop (sugar beets) in Michigan. There he learned to fish, hunt and trap. Although they returned to Chicago 4 years later, the outdoors had left an indelible impression which would serve him well in later years.

In 1928, after several years on the road with his brother Louie (they hobo'd on freight trains from Kansas to Canada), he became a barber, eventually opening a shop in Chicago. A group of locals began to gather at the shop, sometimes to use the horseshoe diamond on the side, and other times to bullshit, often about fishing.

### Pachner & Koller

In 1934, Mr. Pachner developed the Minnow Saver hook in the back of his shop. The following year after receiving positive feedback on his device at a Chicago sport show, he formed a partnership with Fred Koehler operating out of the barber shop to produce and market this hook.

Fred was responsible for the promotion of the new hook. He traveled for the next two years from coast to coast and by 1935, they were selling directly to dealers and jobbers. Unfortunately, the travel didn't agree with Fred and he also seemed to lack basic salesmanship skills; a change was required.

It was apparent that to succeed, Leo Pachner would have to take over promotion and sales. In 1936 he rounded up 6 or 8 investors and they bought out Fred Koehler who then left the company. The business was

incorporated as Pachner & Koller, Inc. He then sold his barber shop, reinvested the proceeds in an 18' trailer and hit the road with his wife and daughter. They wandered across country selling at sports shows and business gradually improved as sales were made to bait shops, gas stations and dealers. 1936 saw the introduction of his second product - a pole holder and soon after his Reel Thumb.

In 1937 P & K struck an agreement with Doc Deering of Antioch, Ill. to produce and market Deering's baits. The lures were Spotty 'The Wonder Frog' and Softy 'The Wonder Crab. These were followed in the near future by a variety of other "live rubber" baits.

### P & K Incorporated

In 1938 a period of consolidation and transition commenced. The trailer was replaced by new offices in Chicago and the name changed to P & K Incorporated. At this time, P & K also bought the rights to produce and market the Marvelure.

The spread of hostilities in Europe rapidly choked off the flow of hooks from Norway and England. Unable to obtain the required sizes from Pflueger, but requiring them to keep production going, P & K began manufacturing their own in 1939/1940 - first single, then double and by 1941 treble hooks. During the war, P & K not only provided other manufacturers with treble hooks but also supplied them to the government for survival kits and international trade (rubber from the Amazon).

The company again outgrew its facilities and the Momence plant was built in 1941. In order to better staff the growing company, Max Shannon (his father invented the Jamison 'Shannon Twin Spin) was asked to join the organization as Sales Manager.

In 1942 the company introduced its first plastic lure, developed but marketed without success by Mike Walsh, an Iowa fisherman. P & K acquired the rights to this lure and named it after the preceding year's Kentucky Derby winner -Whirl-A-Way. Also In 1942, another plant was constructed and soon after, they hired Pop Adams, formerly with True

Temper, for promotional work. The company added to its product line as well. They introduced the Reetrevit fly reel invented by Leo Cooper of Stanford, Conn. and the Spinning Minnie. In addition they struck an agreement with Ben Pigg of California to distribute his glass rods. (In 1947 manufacturing of these rods was taken over by P & K).

The influence of Pop Adams was felt during the period 1943-1947 as several Tenite baits were introduced which were derived from his Ponca City background: the Walkie Talkie, Bright Eyes, Deep Running Bright Eyes and Amazin' Maizie (named after Leo Pachner's wife).

During the years 1937-1950, P & K experienced rapid growth and an expanding product line. After the war, the company produced a line of unpatented wood baits using previously marketed designs. These baits served to quench a thirst by the market for wood lures.

### The Final Years

Japan began manufacturing hooks after the war and P & K profit margins were severely eroded (hook sales alone dropped from \$600,000 to \$200,000 in the two years after the war). By the late 1950's they were losing money and unable to compete. In 1959 the company sold one plant and consolidated all production at its Momence facility.

In 1966, the company was liquidated. DeWitt Plastics took over the lures, plastic stringers and Reetrevit reel. NilLacs bought the metal stringer line and the Worth Company the sinker line. Mr. Pachner retired and moved to Florida.

### Farm Pond Harvest

Eight months later (1967), Leo Pachner returned to Chicago and began a third career: publishing a quarterly magazine for "successful farm pond planning, construction, management, fishing and harvesting", *Farm Pond Harvest*. As Leo Pachner says, "I publish a magazine dedicated to youngsters and farm pond fishing."

## Conclusion

In the tackle business for over thirty years under the direction of Leo Pachner, P & K proved to be an excellent example of how a dynamic manager with roots in fishing pond conservation could bring the right ideas and personnel together to meet the needs and desires of fishing public.

**Honorary Member - 1985**