

Early Fishing Spinners of Massachusetts

Part III

Edward A. Grout: Maker of the “Electric Bait” and Other Fine Spinners

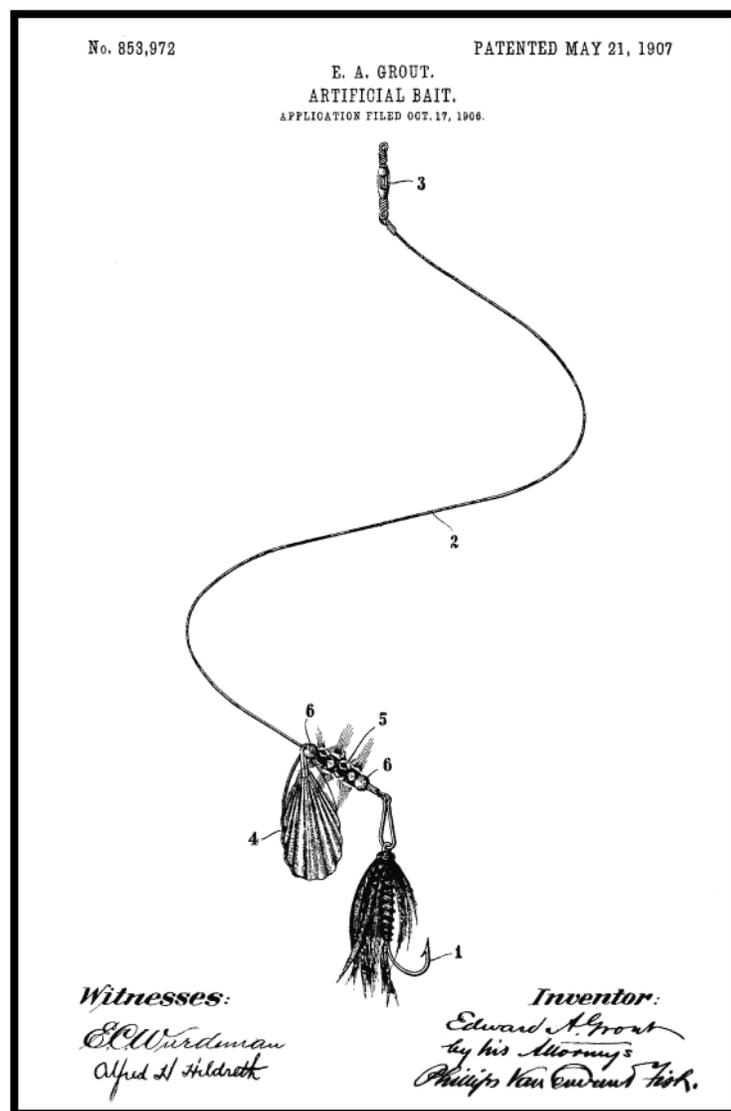
William B. Krohn

In the late 1880s through early 1900s, eastern Massachusetts was a national center for the manufacturing and selling of fishing tackle. In his monumental book *Classic & Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle* (1997), A. J. Campbell discussed the following Boston tackle houses: Bradford & Anthony (later Dame, Stoddard & Kendall); John P. Lovell (later Iver Johnson Company); Lane & Read (later William Read & Sons, Inc.); J. S. Trowbridge & Company; Prouty & Appleton (later Appleton & Bassett, etc.); H. A. Whittemore & Co.; J. B. Hunter & Co.; and Bob Smith Sporting Goods. Almost half of these companies, at one time or another, were located on Washington or Summer streets in downtown Boston. One sporting goods dealer not mentioned in Campbell (1997), was E. A. Grout & Co. of 111 Summer Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

In addition to selling snowshoes and tennis racquets and other sporting goods labelled E. A. Grout & Co., Grout also made and sold fishing tackle (including bamboo fly rods stamped with his company's name and address). This article documents the tackle made by this company, focusing on their metal baits. But before discussing Grout tackle, especially his spinners, let's briefly look at the life of the company's founder, Edward Arthur Grout. The information about Grout's life and work came mostly from my examination of 34 city directories, covering the years 1885 through 1941. The directories studied were for the cities of Boston (8), Medford (7), and Cambridge (18). U.S. Census Records were also researched to confirm directory findings, and to better understand Grout's family life.

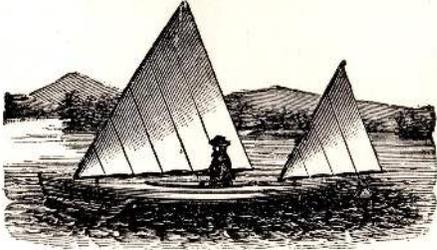
Edward A. Grout was born on 1 August 1867 in Medford, a small city 5 ½ miles northwest of Boston. His parents, John M. and Sarah A. Grout, were originally from Vermont. John Grout and his wife had four children, with Edward being one of two sons. Edward was educated in Medford schools, and when 18 years old worked as a salesperson for Wm. Read & Sons. In 1905, Grout lived with his brother and sister at 91 Dudley, Medford. Three years later, on 8 October 1908, Grout married Lizzie Mabel Spencer. Grout was 41

years old, and Mabel was 31; the couple were to raise one daughter. The marriage ceremony was conducted at the home of Grout's in-laws home, located at 19 Garfield Street, Cambridge. This house, located in the city adjoining Boston's northwest side, was Grout's residence for life.



The patent drawing for the artificial bait that became Grout's Electric Bait. Edward Grout filed patent papers on 17 Oct 1906, and obtained his patent a little over seven months later on 21 May 1907. (courtesy US Patent Office).

SPORTSMEN'S OUTFITS.
Fine Trout and Salmon Rods,
 FLIES, LINES, and everything in FISHING TACKLE, TOUR-
 ISTS' KNAPSACKS, TENTS, RUBBER BLANKETS, etc.,
 WINCHESTER, COLT, MAYNARD, and all
 makes of RIFLES.



Rushton's Fine Cedar Light Boats and Canoes,
 For rowing or with sails. Can be carried by two.

OSGOOD'S FOLDING CANOE,
 Packed in a trunk.

Send for Illustrated Catalogue.

WM. READ & SONS,
 107 WASHINGTON STREET, BOSTON.

Wm. Read & Sons was one of Boston's early, major dealers in sporting goods. This advertisement is from the 1889 edition of *Hubbard's Guide to Moosehead Lake and Northern Maine*. At this time Edward A. Grout was 22 years old and working in sales for the Reads. Later, Grout would make fishing tackle, including high-quality spinners, sold by Wm. Read & Sons. (author's collection)

The year before Grout's marriage, on 21 May 1907, he received a U.S. patent for his Electric Bait (more about this below; E. A. Grout also held a 1912 patent for ice creepers). This lure patent may have given Grout the confidence to strike out on his own. (See illustration of the letter envelope showing Grout tackle being sold by the Reads in June 1907). The 1910 U.S. Census lists him as a "proprietor" of a sporting goods company. The 1911 and 1912 Cambridge directories do not list Grout as working for the Wm. Read & Sons; instead, he is self-employed as the founder and owner of Edward A. Grout Sporting Goods (a.k.a., E. A. Grout & Co.) located at 111 Summer Street. This would remain his company's address until it ceased business.

E. A. Grout & Co., as mentioned above, made and sold a variety of sporting goods including fishing tackle. Types of tackle manufactured by, or manufactured for Grout included fly books, minnow pails, tackle boxes, bait boxes, and fluted spoons. Even after his departure from Wm. Read & Sons, Grout maintained a close working relationship with this large sporting goods dealer. Specially, Edward E. Grout assigned the patent for his Electric Bait to Wm. Read & Sons, and the Reads sold

fishing tackle made by Grout (see illustrations). An advertisement ran by Wm. Read & Sons in *Forest and Stream* during June 1908 features Grout's Electric Bait under the "Fishing Tackle."



Top left: a well-used manila envelope in which Wm. Read & Sons would package the smaller fishing items sold to their customers. Note that the center part of the envelope features Grout's Electric Baits, and lists the specific Grout-made tackle sold by the Reads.

Top right: left –front of a Wm. Read & Sons envelope dated June 25, 1907. Note that at this time the Reads were selling Grout's tackle boxes, minnow pails, and the Forest Queen Spinners. (authors collection)

E. A. Grout & Co. continued operating until 1928-29, when the Cambridge directories lists Grout as selling stocks; there was no mention of his sporting goods business. What effect the start of the Great Depression had on Grout's decision to get out of the tackle business is unknown, but as the economic downturn of this period intensified, selling stocks could not have been too lucrative. By 1941, Grout was fully retired. Earlier in his life, at age 27 (= 1894), Grout had become a life member of the American Missionary Association. Edward A. Grout died on 28 September 1941 at the age of 74 years. His wife, Mabel, died at age 70 on 4 July 1947. They are buried together in the Oak Grove Cemetery, Medford, Massachusetts.

Now that we have an outline of Grout's life, and know when and where he operated his sporting goods business, let's focus in on his fishing spinners. Clearly, his fishing tackle claim-to-fame was "Grout's Electric Bait." This patented spinner was essentially a Rangeley Spinner with three unique characteristics: (1) fluted blade(s) stamped with the makers name and city where made; (2) glass beads were polyhedral (= many sided) – not smooth and round; and (3) the blades were mounted on stiff wire, not a flexible gut leader. The fluted blade on Rangeley Spinner rotates around a metal collar, necessary to prevent wear on the spinner's fragile gut leader (but unnecessary on Grout's wire leaders). According to the lure's patent, the specially shaped beads "sparkle and flash and

thereby render it visible to the fish at the greater distance" than another spinner. The importance of these glass beads to the baits' uniqueness was also emphasized in the patent's abstract, describing Grout's invention as follows: "An artificial bait, comprising a hook and a lure consisting of an iridescent glass bead of polyhedral form to emit opalescent gleams from its facets, substantially as described." Note that the four inner beads on this spinner are clear; the outer two are colored.



Edward A. Grout's spinners are easy to identify because, as shown here, his name and the manufacturing city are deeply stamped into the bait's fluted blades (left). A close-up of the six polyhedral-shaped beads on a Grout Electric Bait (right). (author's collection)

Grout's Electric Bait, which came in varying leader lengths and hook configurations, was not the only spinner made and sold by Edward A. Grout. He made a spinner on a hard wire leader with the fluted, stamped blade that was essentially an Electric Bait except for one key feature: instead of the six many-sided glass beads, this spinner had six round, solid-colored beads. The outer two beads were pink whereas the inner four beads are white. The Grout-stamped spinner with round beads can be found on wire leaders of varying length. This spinner can also be found without the Grout-stamped blade, and instead features a buffalo blade stamped "RANGELEY."



Grout Electric Baits come in various lengths. The bait on the far right, because it has six round, solid beads instead of six many-sided translucent glass beads, is not an Electric Bait. This Grout spinner can be found with the typically stamped and fluted Grout blade as well as with a buffalo blade stamped "RANGELEY." (author's collection)



Two examples of Grout's Electric Baits on original cards. Note that the bait on the left is stamped "PATENT APLD FOR." Assuming that this bait was made shortly after Grout applied for his patent, then this example was manufactured between October 1906 and May 1907, making this bait at least 110 years old. (author's collection)

The "RANGELEY" stamping on a fluted blade, in earlier years, denoted a Rangeley Spinner invented and made by Henry O. Stanley, and his immediate successors. Why Grout used this near trademark stamping is unknown. Grout's finest, and perhaps his rarest, spinner is the Forest Queen, which Grout declared was "The Finest Casting Spoon made." This spinner is built around a heavy, inflexible metal shaft, and features a high-quality fly at the back end and a box swivel at the front. In the middle is a fluted blade with the characteristic Grout stamping. Examples of the above spinners can be found in the photographs accompanying this article.



Close-up of Grout's Forest Queen Spinner. While the label states that this casting spoon was designed to catch "Salmon, Bass or Pickerel," it undoubtedly could also catch trout. This carded bait originally came packaged in a labeled manila envelope. (author's collection)

Edward A. Grout started to make and sell his Electric Bait in 1906, four years before he left Wm. Read & Sons to start his own sporting goods business. Grout's business existed for almost two decades, 1910 to 1929. During this period, Grout sold his sporting goods wholesale to the much larger and better-known Boston tackle house, Wm. Read & Sons. Edward A. Grout's fishing spinners (and some of his other sporting goods; e.g., tennis rackets, snowshoes) are clearly marked, providing collectors a means to reliably identify his metal baits. Grout's spinners and casting spoons can be found mounted on cards, although these are quite rare in the author's experience. In addition to quality and identifiability of Grout's spinners, his works are fun to collect as they represent one of three spinner makers working in Massachusetts at the turn of the century and shortly thereafter. Anyone interested in Massachusetts metal should also be on the lookout for the earlier works of George H. Burtis (1844-1917) of Worcester, and John W. Shields (1862-1939) of Brookline.

I thank Jeff Knap for helping me to find some fine E. A. Grout spinners and related materials. The Oak Grove Cemetery in Medford, Massachusetts confirmed certain Grout information. My wife, Ellen, deserves a sincere word of thanks for the many ways she supports me, and for reviewing and improving a draft of this manuscript.



Grout's Electric Baits can be found tipped with a fly or with various hook arrangements. (author's collection)