

# Saltwater Classics

(# 19 in a Series)

## Catching Up with Jack Woolner

by Frank Pintauro and Ed Poore



Whether used in the Cape Cod Canal or the Cape's outer beaches, eel skin rigs were deadly and the Woolner Bros. obliged their clients with a rig of their own design. This is another rare and unique package.



Rare and unique Woolner Bros. swimmer. Designed by Jack, it featured a folding swimming lip that created less drag when cast. When it hit the water, the lip folded back down.

**T**hey were World War II heroes, sportsmen, conservationists, publishers, producers, television personalities, editors, wildlife film producers, photographers, fishing lure manufacturers, tackle shop owners, writers, and great all-around outdoorsmen! A.J. Campbell referred to them simply as "The Fabulous Woolner Brothers," and it would take a book to tell their story. Sons of Martha M. Matthews and Frederick L. Woolner, the Woolner Brothers were Ted (Frederick), Frank (Francis), Jack (Ralph) and Dick (Richard); together they blazed new trails during a time when surf fishing was in its infancy, a magical time referred to as The Golden Age of Surf Fishing.

**Peter O'Neill**, an avid Massachusetts collector and fisherman, recently had the chance to sit and talk with Jack Woolner, the last living Woolner brother. We're

thankful that Peter shared his interview with our *H&F Collectibles* readers. Enjoy!

**Peter O'Neill:** Hello, Jack; thanks for having me over to interview you.

**Jack Woolner:** Glad to have you.

**PO:** How old are you now, Jack?

**JW:** 86 years old; I was born in 1920.

**PO:** God bless you.

**JW:** I cross my fingers every time I say it. (Laughs)

**PO:** What year did you open the sports shop in Shrewsbury?

**JW:** After the war ended in 1945, Dick and I opened the shop.

**PO:** Was Frank involved?

**JW:** No, Dick and I opened the sports shop.

**PO:** Who turned the lures?

**JW:** We did it two ways; we did some ourselves, and we also had the blanks sent out, then we would paint and decorate them up.

**PO:** How did you package them?

**JW:** We used cardboard boxes most of the time.

**PO:** Did you have a catalog?

**JW:** No, we only had flyers at sport shops.

**PO:** How many different lures did you make?

**JW:** We made many different and experimental lures and eel skin jigs. We also did fly tying for both fresh and saltwater.

**JW:** I am guilty of that. But the idea of it was to make it more streamlined so when you cast it out the lip would fold up against the body and have less wind resistance. When it hit the water the, lip would flop down and give the lure a nice wiggle. Captain Bill's and Atom plugs had a stiff lip that would give you less range.

**PO:** Did you make the folding lips?

**JW:** No, we had a machine shop in Worcester make them.

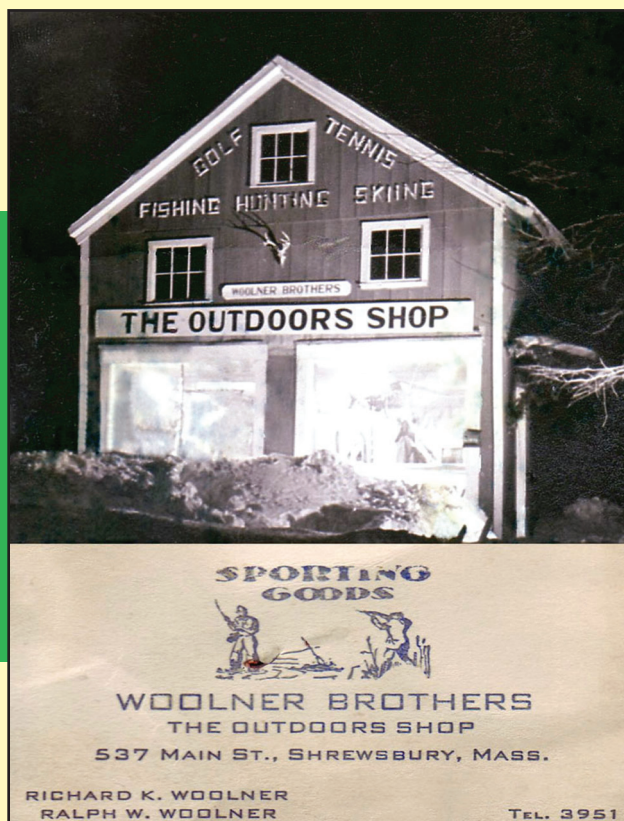
**PO:** Who would order your plugs?

**JW:** That was years ago; I don't remember. Other sporting goods stores carried them.

**PO:** Did the Goose Hummock shop on the Cape have them?



*Jack and Frank compare early morning striped bass catches on one of the Cape's outer beaches.*



*The Woolner Brothers Outdoor Shop was run by Jack and brother Dick from 1945 to 1950. Also pictured is the Woolner Bros. calling card.*

**PO:** How did you paint them?

**JW:** We had no standard way; brush or spray. Depended on how many were on order. We would do them all the same way.

**PO:** What colors did you use?

**JW:** Blue, green, red, white; and there was a period when black was popular. We would dip them in lacquer because we found out lacquer was the best. We then let them dry and that would be the base.

**PO:** What kind of wood did you use?

**JW:** White pine as, I remember. You had to be careful because some would split after being in the water.

**PO:** Who came up with the idea of the hinged front lip?

**JW:** No doubt about that. That was Frank Sargent's shop! He was the Governor and a great guy who got a lot of votes. It was almost an annual event, taking the Governor out fishing for trout.

**PO:** Who was the most famous person you fished with?

**JW:** Probably Curt Gowdy.

**PO:** What did you drive on the beach?

**JW:** The Model "A" Ford was mine. I bought it after WWII and painted it camouflage. I still have the registration for it.

**PO:** What was your favorite fishing spot?

**JW:** I don't think there was a favorite location. We fished all over the Cape. Nauset and Race point were the





For years, Jack hosted a popular New England Outdoor Show. He's seen here with his brother and special guest, Frank.

Frank and Jack after a successful deer hunt. Jack helped develop what is now called "hunter orange" while working with the Fish and Game Department.



most popular spots. We started fishing after the war down on the canal.

**PO:** Did you fish in RI and NY?

**JW:** Very rarely; we fished the Cape the most.

**PO:** Did you fish with eels?

**JW:** Not very much; Frank did.

**PO:** Did you fish more during the day or night?

**JW:** Both, a great deal at night.

**PO:** Did you go back and forth from Shrewsbury, or did you stay over?

**JW:** Both. We had a standing joke. One time going to the Cape, we took Route 140 down; and at the railroad crossing one guy came just as the train was coming so he stopped and blew his horn at the train. Then, as a standard joke, we would all stop before the tracks and beep for good luck!

**PO:** Did you fish with Stan Gibbs or Bob Pond?

**JW:** We knew them all very well, I don't know why, but we fished with our buddies as a group, as did Stan, and other groups of people. We fished with Arnold Laine from Phipston and Bob Williams from Worcester. He was one of the best striped bass fishermen I have ever known. Also fished with J.W. Townsend and Rosa Webb from Shrewsbury. I was a member of the Worcester Striper Club. Mostly fished with people from Shrewsbury and Worcester; we would all meet at a gathering point.

**PO:** What was the largest fish you ever beached?

**JW:** Probably in the neighborhood of 40 pounds.

**PO:** You got a fifty?

**JW:** Damned if I ever did! I don't think Frank or I ever got a fifty.

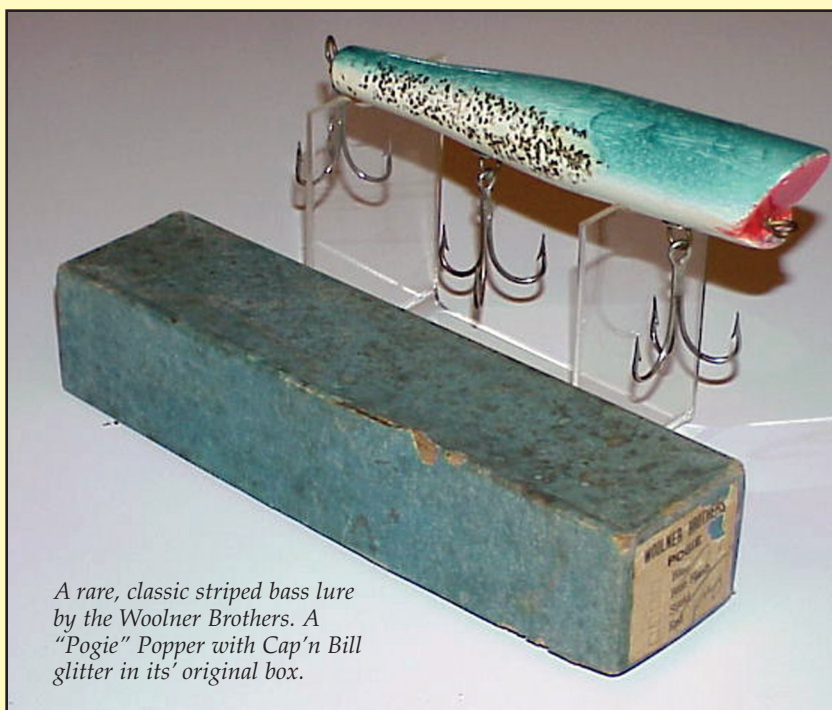
**PO:** Frank never landed a fifty?

**JW:** I think it escaped him by an ounce or two.

**PO:** Did you also make your own rods?

**JW:** Yes — if you don't have this you should. Right after WWII, saltwater rods were not available anywhere. So what we would do is go through piles of blank Calcutta sticks and build rods by winding guides on them. Bamboo sticks did very well, but they did not last long. When we built them, you would look for any tiny holes; and you could be sure these worm holes would be where the rod would break when you cast it.

**PO:** Was fishing very competitive between the brothers?



A rare, classic striped bass lure by the Woolner Brothers. A "Pogie" Popper with Cap'n Bill glitter in its original box.





Jack with a neighbor's son after a night of fishing from the tin boat "Miss Dateline", an obvious reference to the television show he produced for 13 years called "Dateline Boston".



Master striped bass fisherman Arnold Laine, who died in 1992, was a "Cape regular" who fished with the Woolner Bros. surf crowd.

JW: No, not really.  
 PO: Did Frank fish more then you?  
 JW: Yes, Dick and I worked for a living; Frank wrote.  
 PO: When did you close the shop?  
 JW: Around 1950 it drifted out; we ended it on a positive account. □

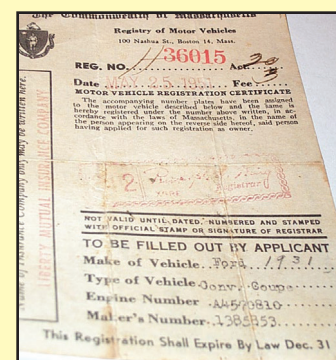
Special thanks to Peter O'Neill, Roy Curley and Bob Hart for their help. Readers wishing to contact Frank Pintauro may do so by calling (516) 741-7044 or emailing Masterlure@aol.com



Jack in his living room with an original Woolner Brothers "Pogie" Popper.



From the Ed Poore collection comes six lures from the estate of Frank Woolner. It includes the "classic knit squid" found on a Cape beach, a rare baby Gibbs frog colored casting swimmer and a Woolners Brothers "Pogie" Popper.



The original registration for the Woolner Brothers beach buggy still in Jack's possession.