

Dick Brown holds a nice fish that he successfully speared.

Dick E. Brown

A prolific Minnesota maker of spear fishing decoys

by Don Petersen

Dick E. Brown was born on September 14, 1903 in Robinson, North Dakota. When he was still young, his family moved to the iron area in the hills a little more than three miles from Pillager, Minnesota.

Brown married several times throughout his life and fathered three


daughters. He worked in various places, as far and wide as Chicago and Panama. A veteran of World War II, he moved to Brainerd, Minnesota in the 1950s to work in the railroad shops. It was at this time that he began making spearing decoys.

After an operation for a cyst on his spine, Brown became partially cripp-

pled, forcing him to walk with a cane. The injury precluded him from performing the heavy work required in the railroad shops, so he moved to Motley, 30 miles west of Brainerd, where he went into a partnership with Fred and Maretta Hanson operating a bait store. He used this available time to make the majority of his fish decoys.

Brown would cut blocks of pine with a saw and whittle them to the desired shape. He used Prince Albert tobacco tins to make his fins. Sometimes Brown spray-painted his decoys, using the glass jar of an old-fashioned push-handle bug sprayer to apply this technique. Before the paint dried, he would place glitter on the decoy. These spray-painted decoys are distinctive because he always painted a red swatch on the front of the decoy.

Brown placed a tiny dorsal and anal fin on his decoys and the tail fin was always made of metal. Two pectoral fins were inset into each side of the decoy.

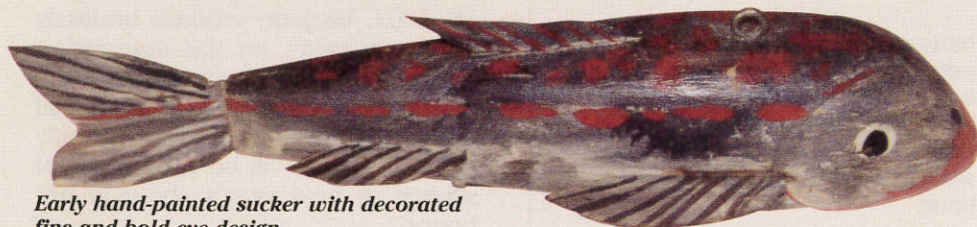
Dick Brown loved to fish and hunt. Besides making fish decoys, he tied his own flies for fly fishing. In the 1980s he went into a nursing home in Staples, just seven miles from Motley, where he continued to make decoys and flies in his remaining years. He died there on January 19, 1990. 



Green and white fish with the red swatch typically found on Brown's spray-painted decoys.



Red and white fish with typical red swatch and glitter decoration.



Early hand-painted sucker with decorated fins and bold eye design.

A special thanks to Delores Pribbenow, one of Dick's sisters, for providing the information.