



# Fishing History

Keith Bell

## Biff Bait Company

One of my favorite Wisconsin lure companies to collect is a short-lived company out of Milwaukee with a quirky name. The Biff Bait Company was only in business briefly from around 1925 to 1926, but in that short time produced around 30,000 lures in ten different models. (I'll cover some of the more popular ones here.) These lures are some of the most collected Wisconsin baits to this day. Quite an accomplishment for a small company with a couple of short years of production. What makes these lures even more interesting is how ahead of their time these baits were.

Albert Bayer formed the Biff Bait Company at 4101 Meinecke Ave. in Milwaukee in 1925, applying for his first patent in May of that year. In November of that same year, he applied for a patent on his Master Biff bait—one that would become quite famous with collectors and really help his young company take off.

### Revolutionary lures

The Master Biff is a 2 1/2-inch-long wooden conical-shaped bait. This bait is designed as a surface bait with a hollow front center and two side holes for water to exit. This would create a surface splashing/aquasonic action that was new for its day. It was a very simple yet effective design. Later, a smaller 2-inch, one-belly-hook version called a Whoopee Biff Plug was made.



Biff Godevil in Swirling Red/White finish with box.



Whoopee Biff in Yellow/Black Spotted color.

The "Spiral" lineup was a metal lure line developed by Biff Bait. It's quite an interesting design that required a special machine to make. It's an all-metal, fully twisted spiral body with a nose-hanging lead weight attachment and a feather-dressed treble hook on back. It's a design all unto itself and not one I've ever seen copied. The design came in three sizes—a 6-inch total length Muskie Spiral (3-inch spiral body), Pike Spiral measuring 3 1/2 inches overall (2 1/2-inch spiral body), and a Bass Spiral measuring 2 1/2 inches overall (1 3/4-inch spiral body). Keep in mind, all of these were hand machine made, so measurements can vary slightly. These are very effective baits for gamefish if you dare fish one of these antiques.

The last lure I want to mention by the company is the Godevil. It's yet another lure unlike anything in the market before or after.

The Godevil is a cork body lure with an aluminum belly. The body would swing side to side when worked on the surface. It is a very delicate lure and tough to find in excellent condition today. An additional version of the Godevil lure was available with a deer hair tail and called Mickey the Mouse.

It was often wondered why the Biff Bait Company was so short-lived given the apparent quick success of the lures. Collectors have discovered in the long-defunct Paw Paw/Moonlight



Master Biff in Red Head/White color with box.



Biff Metal Spiral bait.

Bait Company archives some written correspondence that has shed some possible light on this. In October of 1926 Albert Bayer had written to Moonlight and asked if they would be interested in purchasing his company, or the rights to the baits. He had concerns over his health and caring for his mother, and his time was becoming too limited to attend to the needs of the company. Moonlight wrote back the same month and asked for more information including a possible royalty deal. History shows us nothing ever became of this, and the Biff Bait Company closed down shortly after, but this correspondence may help explain why.

### Colors and packaging

The Master Biff and the Whoopee Biff came in red head/white, yellow/black spotted, all red, all black. The lures were painted with only one coat of paint, and they are usually found with wear to them. Additionally, it wasn't the highest quality of paint compared to other lure makers of the day. Be suspicious of an all red or all black lure in too good of condition.

The Godevil and Mickey the Mouse lures only came in two colors. They were swirling red and white finish and swirling green and white finish. The "Spiral" lines were all metal in polished silver with feathered bucktails.

### Boxes

Given the short history of the company, there was only one version of boxes. They were white two-piece cardboard boxes with red and black print. They are quite rare, as is the paperwork that came in them.

### Collector's value

All vintage baits are about condition, but it is especially true on these baits. A vintage Master or Whoopee Biff with matching box can sell in the \$100 to \$150 range in excellent condition. A "Spiral" would be about the same, except for a Muskie size that would be about \$100 more. A Godevil in the same condition with matching box would be in the \$150 to \$200 range. A very nice collectible for sure, but be aware, without boxes and in average condition, these values plummet.

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*Keith Bell and his family live in Neenah, Wisconsin but spend a lot of time fishing northern Wisconsin. Keith has been an avid angler and outdoorsman his entire life. His passion for fishing is matched only by his passion for fishing history and preservation. He is the founder and owner of MyBaitShop.com, the world's largest online vintage tackle and history website. You can reach Keith at his website or at keith.bell@mybaitshop.com*

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