

E.J. Lonn

More Than Meets The Eyes

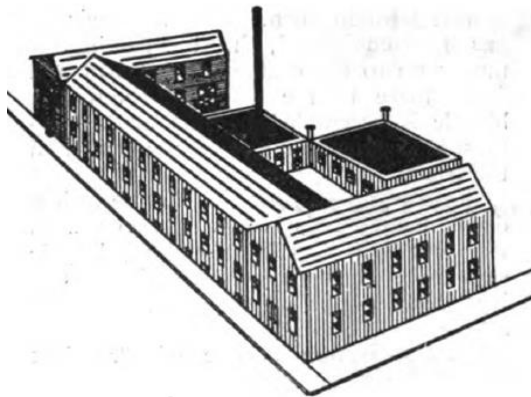
by Joe Yates

Collectors of Florida-made Dandy Lures are familiar with the slogan “the lure with fishy eyes” seen in this 1951 *Florida Wildlife* advertisement. There is very much more than meets the eyes when it comes to the man behind Dandy lures. E.J. Lonn was a highly respected civic leader and philanthropist. He was also a very successful businessman long before he became involved with fishing lures and tackle.



Edward Julius Lonn was born June 13, 1869 in LaPorte, Indiana. He was the oldest of eight children born to Swedish immigrants John Lonn and Nelly Pamola Lonn.

John Lonn came to America at the age of twenty five, locating in LaPorte, where he lived for the rest of his life. Trained as a tanner in Sweden, Lonn worked as superintendent of the Eliel Tannery before opening his own tannery. In 1871 he opened the Lonn Store at 921 Main Street in LaPorte. The store began as a wholesale hide, fur, and wool business and expanded to include harness manufacturing in 1883. The enterprise grew to become one of LaPorte’s chief manufacturing industries.



PLANT IN 1896

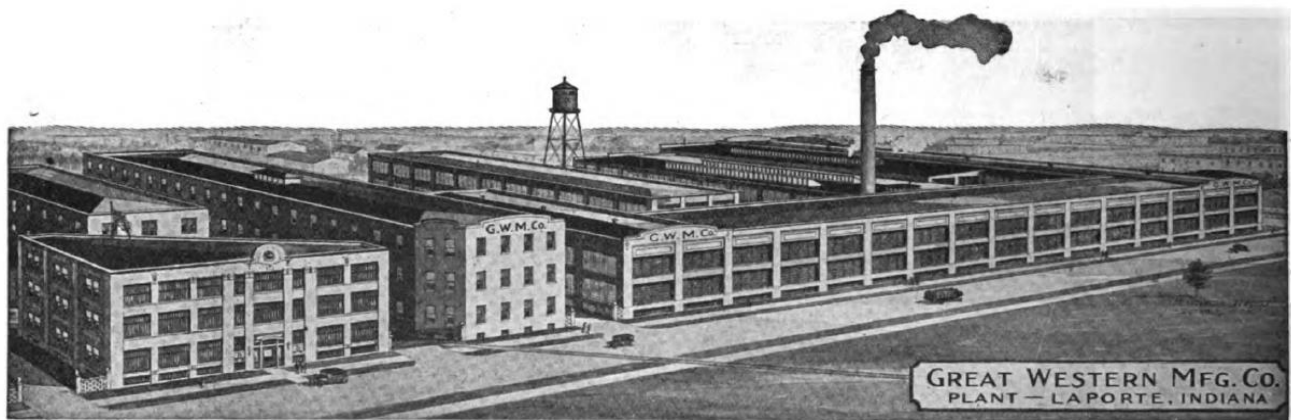
The little factory from which the Great Western grew

By 1897 John Lonn was joined by family members who had become involved with the rapidly growing bicycle business. Harness manufacturing was discontinued. Two years later the firm of John Lonn & Sons Company was succeeded by the Great Western Manufacturing Company, which became the largest independent bicycle factory in the world. In his 1919 Volume I of *Indiana and Indianans*, author Jacob Piatt Dunn attributed Great Western’s success “to the commercial energy and sagacity of Julius Lonn and also to the ability and wisdom of the late John Lonn and other members of his family.”

Dunn told the story of Edward Julius Lonn’s early career: “while he found his early opportunities for a business career in the enterprises founded by his father, his own exceptional talents have taken him into the ranks of the foremost American industrial leaders. He was educated in the public schools of LaPorte and at Professor Holmes Business College, and his first responsibilities in business came in 1890, when he was appointed traveling salesman in the wholesale saddlery and leather line. Two

years later he became an active associate with his father as secretary and general manager of John Lonn & Sons Company.”

“Julius Lonn's distinguishing success was the result of his early recognition of the opportunities afforded in the bicycle industry. In 1895 he was elected secretary of the Crown Cycle Company. Then, in 1899, he reorganized this company and by taking over the Adlake and America bicycle plants formed a new company which became the nucleus of the Great Western Manufacturing Company, with Mr. Lonn as its secretary and general manager. Later the Fauber Manufacturing Company and its patents were purchased, and twelve United States patents for bicycles and automobiles were taken out. In 1905 Mr. Lonn bought a controlling interest in the Great Western Manufacturing Company and soon afterwards was elected its president and general manager.”



The modern plant of the Great Western Manufacturing Company, where efficiency and standardization are twin watchwords

The illustration above appeared in the May 25, 1922 issue of *Motorcycle Illustrated*. By that time Great Western Manufacturing Company had become what Jacob Dunn described as “the largest exclusive bicycle plant in America. The business is international in scope, and with LaPorte as the manufacturing center there are distributing agencies and branch offices in the leading commercial centers of America, New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Boston. The company owns and controls more patents on bicycles, bicycle construction and designs than any other similar enterprise.

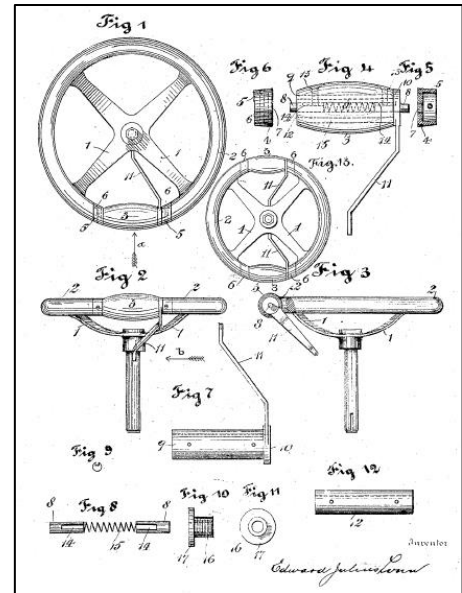
Its factory at LaPorte, the largest and most completely equipped of its kind in the world, has a daily production of 500 complete machines, which are sold under the registered trademark. Obviously it is a business which is regarded as one of the most vital, in fact one of the corner stones of LaPorte's permanent prosperity. The pay roll amounts to over half a million dollars annually, and the volume of business runs into the millions.”

1,000,000 NEW BICYCLES FOR 1916

<p>Large Colored Posters, 52 x 46 for Outside Advertising Furnished Free</p>	<p>Colored Poster-Cards, 8 x 5 for Mail Advertising Furnished Free</p>	<p>Write Us for Information on Our Dealers' Advertising Campaign</p>
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BICYCLES EXCLUSIVELY If You Wish to Make Money and Satisfied Customers Write Us. **CAPACITY 500 BICYCLES DAILY**

Many of the bicycle patents controlled by Great Western Manufacturing Company were for E.J. Lonn's own inventions. He held at least half dozen patents for bicycle frames, forks, and various parts and pieces from 1905 – 1925. His earliest known patent was for a *Steering Wheel for Motor Vehicles* as seen here.



Edward Julius Lonn interests and activities extended well beyond the world of bicycle making. According to Dunn “Mr. Lonn is also known in the LaPorte community as a banker. In 1912 he was one of the organizers of the People's Trust and Savings Bank of LaPorte, and was elected its vice president. Like his honored father before him, he has made business not the supreme interest of his life, but largely a means and instrumentality of broad and effective service to his community and to humanity. These interests and his public spirit have found expression through the medium of a long list of organizations. For six years he served as president of the board of education of LaPorte. He is a member of the National Chamber of Commerce of Washington, D. C., the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Association of Credit Men of New York City, of the LaPorte Chamber of Commerce, the Indiana Manufacturers Association, the Society of Mechanical Engineers, the Society of Automotive Engineers of New York City, the Alexander Hamilton Institute of New York City, and is vice president of the Bicycle Manufacturers' Association and chairman of its war service committee in Washington, D. C. For over a year his time and his business were at the disposal of the government in behalf of any patriotic undertaking. He is a life member of the American Red Cross Society of Washington, served as chairman of the LaPorte County Chapter of the American Red Cross, and is a member of the Indiana State Executive Committee at Indianapolis of the Red Cross. He was also a member of the Executive Committee of LaPorte in the Liberty Loans and other war campaigns. He also served as a member of the County Council of Defense.”

“Mr. Lonn was one of the organizers and vice president of the LaPorte Country Club, is a member of the Columbia Club of Indianapolis, South Shore Country Club of Chicago, American Academy of Political and Social Science, the LaPorte Historical Society, and the Amateur Musical Club of LaPorte. He is a member of the First Presbyterian Church and a charter member of the LaPorte Lodge of Elks, B. P. O. E. No. 396.”

Despite his many business and civic activities, E.J. Lonn frequently found time to travel to Florida for vacations with his wife, Jennie Miller Lonn and sons Julius Miller Lonn and Earl Wendell Lonn. Returning home from several weeks vacationing in Miami in 1916, Lonn wrote to a friend “spring is just beginning to show and there is snow and ice around the sides of the streets, but it is beginning to melt. I expect another February will find me going right straight to Miami. That looks like the best place for me during the months of February and March.”

It was not long until Lonon found parts of Florida that he liked better than Miami. In the early 1920's E.J. Lonon began spending his winter months either in Tampa or in the Polk County town of Babson Park. By the end of the decade it was time for Lonon to retire and he and his wife made Babson Park their new permanent home. Lonon's timing was good: the stock market crash and great depression were not kind to the bicycle business and the Great Western Manufacturing Company and related businesses were taken over by creditors.

"Retired" is really not a good word to describe Edward Julius Lonon. Though he had no great need for money, Lonon was as driven in retirement as he had been his entire life. It is possible that the death of his wife in 1932 left a void in his life that he needed to fill by staying busy.

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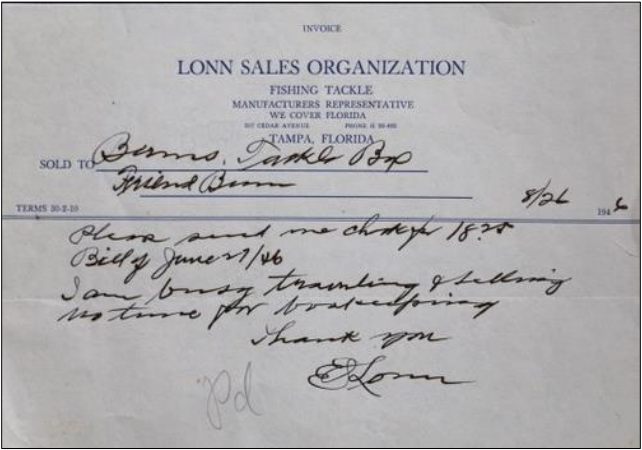
E.J. Lonon moved to Tampa, Florida and began pursuing a variety of business opportunities. This advertisement appeared in the October 29, 1933 edition of *The Tama Tribune*.

The ad below appeared in the February 6, 1936 edition of *The Tampa Times*.

2 SALESMEN for Tampa to sell an automatic water saver to garages and filling stations; pays for itself quickly. Quick seller, liberal commissions. E. J. Lonon, Bay View Hotel, 9 to 4, February 8th.

It was not long after this venture that Edward Julius Lonon began his career in the fishing lure industry. When he celebrated his 70th birthday on Jun 12, 1939, Mr. and Mrs. William F. Eger were among his guests at a luncheon party in the Lafayette Room of the Tampa Terrace Hotel.

Most readers already know that Lonon went to work for Eger Bait Company in Bartow, Florida in the 1930's and served as Florida Sales Manager. He sold lures for Eger and also for Florida Fishing Tackle Manufacturing Company in the mid 1940's.



At that time Lonon Sales Organization of Tampa, Florida was representing any number of different lure makers. Lonon stayed very busy traveling the state of Florida selling lures. In this 1946 invoice requesting payment from a customer, Lonon made it clear that he was “busy traveling and selling – no time for bookkeeping.” Keep in mind that E.J. Lonon was 77 years old at this busy time of his life.

Most readers also know that E.J. Lonon started his own lure company in the 1940’s. His line of Dandy Lures was made in St. Pete, Florida by Florida Fishing Tackle Manufacturing Company. For the sake of brevity, I suggest that readers who want to know more about E.J. Lonon’s lure company refer to the story in Volume I of *Florida Lure Makers and Their Lures*.

The picture below will serve to fill in a few blanks in the Florida Lure Makers story. This salesman sample of Dandy Lures is from the Lloyd Jett collection and resides in the Tallahassee Automobile Museum. It provides definitive information about some of the Dandy Lures model and color numbers.



Edward Julius Lonn passed away on May 5, 1953 at the Daytona Beach home of his son Julius M. Lonn. His obituary described him as "former winter resident of Babson Park and a resident of Tampa for approximately 20 years...He was 84. He was formerly associated with the Eger Bait Co. of Bartow and represented the Penn Reel Co. in Florida until his son took over several years ago on his retirement."

It is not altogether fair to say that Lonn ever really retired. He was a tireless worker his entire life and his story is much bigger than those fishy little eyes.

