

Cal Johnson 67-8 Lac Court Oreilles, Wisconsin – 1949



Let us now move on the Cal Johnson's 1949 record from Lac Court Oreilles, Wisconsin. This fish was never subjected to world record scrutiny by *Field & Stream* because it was beaten by Louie Spray before year's end.

Johnson was highly respected and it was so written by Tom Davis in his article *Fakes, Frauds, and Fallen Idols The Biggest Muskies That Never Were* in the September/October 1995 issue of *Sporting Classics* magazine. That article contained the following excerpt.

Cal Johnson: Muskie fishing's "Mr. Nice Guy." Well-liked and highly respected, he was a champion caster with both fly and bait tackle, a consultant to presidents Coolidge and Hoover on angling matters, and a widely published outdoor writer who was for many years the freshwater fishing editor for Sports Afield. Indeed, Johnson was one of the first to write knowledgeably – and factually – about muskies and muskie fishing techniques. He was also the first to take a hard look at the myriad anecdotal accounts of muskies weighing up to 110 pounds and conclude they were all based on "guesstimation" and hearsay.

This Johnson information and article were written as a result of information provided to the writer by John Dettloff. The main article was based on *work* by Dettloff discrediting all but the Hayward world record muskies. But all may not have been as seemed with regard to Johnson's "Mr. Nice Guy" status if any stock is placed in two confidential letters from *Sports Afield* to Ben East, March of 1940, who was being considered to replace Johnson as *Sports Afield* angling

editor. The first contained ...*confidentially, I am not satisfied with the service, from the standpoint either of copy or of correspondence, which I am getting from my present angling editor...* and the second ...*To be entirely frank with you, though confidentially,* (unnamed) *and I have for some time been dissatisfied with the work being done for us by Cal Johnson and with his disregard for his correspondence with our readers...* (Unnamed) *and I have had some long talks with him...if he can hold himself together he will probably be all right... ...if we get in a jam with Johnson it is very far from impossible that I shall wire you.* Evidently things worked out in the end. Ben East later went on to become a field editor for **Outdoor Life** magazine.

So let us begin with the Cal Johnson record controversies. Again we will quote Ellis' **True** magazine article regarding the Cal Johnson 1947 record muskie.

The resort business on the muskie lakes boomed right after the war, and then business began to fall off, until by summer of 1949 it was labeled as far from good in many areas. There was no doubt that the resort business needed a shot in the arm.

Another world-record muskie would be nice and it might do the job, so on July 24th of that summer Cal Johnson of Teal Lake accommodated by beaching a 67 1/2 pound fish. It was caught in Lac Courte Oreilles, Johnson said.

In the beginning, everybody was pretty happy about that muskie. Cal Johnson is a professional fisherman and an outdoor writer of many year's standing. It was fine to have a man who had taken thousands of muskies to be catching a world record fish.

Johnson told how he and his son, Phil, and Jack Connor, an outdoor writer for a Minneapolis paper, got out on the lake just as a thunderstorm was grumbling its way off into the distance. He told this story:

"It was still raining a little and there were some lightning flashes in the east and the thunder was still rumbling. But it was a musky morning, I said, "You can smell muskies. If we don't connect this morning, we never will.

"I took the stern position in the boat. Connor went to the bow and Phil, who was guiding, stayed at the oars."

Johnson tells of how they trolled and how the big fish latched on and how it felt as if he was tied to a log.

"For thirty minutes he stayed right down just bulldogging and then he started to tire. I knew it would be impossible to lift him on a gaff into the boat, so I told Phil to row slowly to shore. It took us another thirty minutes to coax him to shore.

"Phil jumped over the side then, raincoat and all, into waist-deep water. The big fish was rolling by this time, so Phil set the gaff beneath the gill cover and began running. The head of

the fish was under his fanned-out coat, and the big tail was churning. Phil didn't stop running until he was thirty feet back on dry land."

Johnson then told how the fish was weighed and the witnesses' statements notarized, and Wisconsin and especially resort owners around Hayward celebrated and almost everybody was dandy about the whole thing until - wham! bang! blooey! - like some of that lightning that had been playing around on the morning of the big catch - Connor suddenly announced that he had not been in the boat with Johnson and did not see the fish caught.

So another world record 'lunge became just a little tainted, because both Johnson and Connor stuck by their stories. Later, however, Johnson admitted that Connor had not been in the boat nor did he see the fish landed.

Johnson's enemies immediately said, "He had it tied out in the woods fattening it." His friends said "Johnson knew no one would believe he had caught a world record muskie, so he said Connor was with him just to bolster his story. You can't blame him, the way things have been in Wisconsin lately."

Johnson's muskie was first recognized as legitimate by Outdoors, a magazine which has since been combined with Outdoorsman, (which in turn combined with Hunting and Fishing), and the prize of a new automobile was awarded to Mr. Johnson.

The *Milwaukee Sentinel* had a vital interest and stake in the Cal Johnson fish, and went to great lengths to clear the mess up as is evidenced in Sentinel Outdoor Editor Lew Morrison's columns in 1949.

What's the low down on the big muskie? What's back of certain rumors that are bringing discredit to the state and to the Hayward area in particular? Yes, what is really behind all this fuss and what does it really amount to?

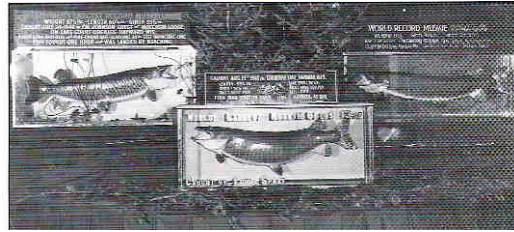
The Sentinel is vitally interested in this world's record muskie, because it represents a most valuable asset to the state's recreational interests. Any shenanigans should be exposed.

But likewise, if the catch was on the up and up, as the real facts reveal it to be, unwarranted rumors can bring irreparable harm to the entire state. In view of what transpired lately, the Sentinel moved into action, determined to get to the bottom of things. As a result of a very careful and thorough investigation, here are hard, cold facts that cannot be denied.

Facts Prove Legality of Big Catch

All of the facts, without a single exception, clearly and conclusively prove beyond the slightest shadow of doubt that the world's record muskie taken by Cal Johnson in Lac Courte Oreilles on the morning of July 24, was legally caught, accurately weighed and measured, witnessed by reputable citizens and the papers officially certified by notary John Moreland, well known member of the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, who inspected the fish personally.

It might clarify several things if it is pointed out here that the Sentinel made an agreement with Cal Johnson on the Monday forenoon following the catch whereby the Sentinel obtained the exclusive rights to exhibit the fish in Wisconsin.



Johnson's mount (l) along with Spray's 1940 (c) and 1949 mount (r) at the 1950 Sentinel Outdoor Show

The first showing of this world's record muskie in Wisconsin therefore, will be at the Sentinel Sports and Vacation show next April, except for the Hayward celebration referred to later in the story.

In the interests of clarity, let's start at the beginning of this memorable fishing trip.

On the evening of July 23, Cal Johnson, his son Phillip and Jack Connor, outdoor editor of the Minneapolis Star, drove to Moccasin Lodge on Lac Courte Oreilles to do some fishing the next day.

But when the morning alarm called them it was raining and Connor, at the last moment decided to try for bass in another boat.

Cal and his son started to troll immediately after leaving the dock. In less than half an hour the big fish hit.

The battle lasted about an hour and ended when the fish was beached.

Before returning, Cal moved out to where Connor could see him and waved him in, both boats arriving a few minutes apart.

Word Flashed of Record Muskie

The hour (6 o'clock) was early for most Sunday morning vacationists, but as word of the world's record musky spread, the place was soon overrun with people.

The first story out of Hayward, said Connor, Cal and his son were fishing together. Another had it that Connor had caught the fish. In this, all three are equally responsible for allowing this impression to remain. But before passing judgment, it might be well to consider that in the excitement, "toasts" certainly were in order for an event of this kind. They might have been coming pretty fast and things might have been said in the spirit of the moment without giving much thought to them.

And even if it might have been agreed at the moment that Connor was to share in the glory of the catch, what of it? Any way you look at it, it is trivial. But let's give Cal credit for standing by Connor when the latter later reversed his position.

Did Johnson say Connor was in the boat with him knowing that an affidavit from him would add credibility to his record claim? Did Connor tell Johnson that he would not falsify an affidavit and later say he wasn't with Johnson to prevent himself from being involved in Johnson's record claim? Johnson's son Philip confirmed and made the point that Connor was not with them in the following 1993 affidavit.

I, Philip Johnson, son of the late Cal Johnson, attest that on the 24th of July in 1949 I accompanied my father Cal and was present in the boat with him when he caught his 67-1/2 pound world record muskellunge out of Lac Court Oreilles, near Hayward, Wisconsin. I was 23 years old at the time and remember that this fish was caught early in the morning after a storm. No one else was present in the boat at the time of the catch.

I attest that my father hooked, played and landed this muskellunge fairly and by legal means and, once the muskellunge was played out and the boat was worked close enough to shore, I jumped out of the boat, gaffed the fish, and pulled it up onto the beach. Rather than shooting the muskellunge – which was legal and customary at that time – the fish was subdued with the gaff handle.

In addition to witnessing the actual catching of this 67-1/2 pound muskellunge, I was also witness to the weighing and measuring of this fish. I attest that this muskellunge was weighed in my presence on an accurate, beam-type platform scale at the Moccasin Lodge by its proprietors, Mike Solo and Serge Bagny. This muskellunge measured 60-1/4 inches in length, 33-1/2 inches around its girth and weighed in at 67 pounds eight ounces. The weight and measurements were double checked on taxidermist Karl Kahmann's scale and the two scales gave the same reading and were subsequently state inspected.

I, Philip Johnson, attest that the above mentioned details regarding my father's 67-1/2 pound muskellunge are all true and I was a witness to the catching, weighing and measuring of this fish.

(Signed) Philip Johnson

***Barbara L. Combs
Notary-Public State of Nevada
Appointment Recorded in Washoe County
MY APPOINTMENT EXPIRES APR. 4, 1994***

The Journal article continues ***Facts Available for All to Verify***

Really the only pertinent factors in this affair are whether the fish was legally taken, and whether weights and measurements were accurate and properly witnessed.

The facts are available for anyone to verify.

Here is one clinching fact that proves the legality of the record catch:

The fish was immediately turned over to Karl Kahmann, Hayward taxidermist, who is not only an expert on muskies, but is a man who bears a most enviable reputation.

Before coming to Wisconsin, Kahmann practiced taxidermy in Chicago for some 25 years. He has done work for leading museums, as well as individuals, during which time he and his staff handled close to 5,000 muskies. He, therefore, speaks with more than passing authority.



Taxidermist Karl Kahmann shown putting the finishing touches on Cal Johnson's mount

We asked Karl if, in his examination of the fish prior to preparing it for mounting, he had found any evidence of disease. His reply was "No."

That disposes of the question of whether the fish was "found" as some rumors had it.

Fish Not Penned, Netted or Trapped

We next asked him whether there were any abrasions on the nose or tail that would definitely show up if the fish had been penned, netted or trapped?

His answer was "No."

Asked whether any marks on the jaw might show that the hooks had been freshly removed, he replied "Yes."

When asked how he was sure the fish was freshly caught, he answered:

"It certainly was a freshly caught fish because rigor mortis had not set in when the fish was delivered to me about 6:30 on the morning of July 24."

Karl further stated that the weights were double checked and that two scales gave exactly the same reading...67 pounds, 8 ounces. Both scales are now being state inspected. Measurements, he said, were taken with a steel tape.

Note: It is unknown if the two scales were state inspected despite Philip Johnson's 1993 affidavit stating that they were. If inspected, their disposition is unknown and undocumented.

Now forgetting for the moment that Cal Johnson is a sportsman of national reputation, and that his writings over the years portray his character better than anything we can say about him. Karl Kahmann's statements definitely eliminate all possibility that the fish might have been speared, netted or trapped.

The fish didn't die of disease or old age. It did not carry so much as a bullet mark because the fish was gaffed. The fish was still limp when weighed and measured. With all this evidence clear and above board, just where, we ask, can there be any deception?

An article by Pete Maina in the summer 2002 issue of *Esox Angler* revealed an interesting comment attributed to Johnson. Johnson supposedly had no idea his muskie was a world record until it was weighed, however; Hayward legend says Cal "called his shot" the evening before in a Hayward area tavern saying, ***Tomorrow I'm going to catch a world record muskie.*** When I queried Pete further I learned the following with regard to Johnson's fish ***...all what I was told rather than first hand... (the dam keeper), ...who you know watched the dam (on the West Fork of the Chippewa River at the outlet of Moose Lake), said he saw a big fish below the dam himself. Didn't claim any particular size, just said "real big," and one day decided to go back, get the gun and shoot it – to see just how big it was. Was gone...anyway he (the dam keeper) said Cal had "a ...guy rowin' him around – saw that several days." SO, he was definitely fishing there.***

Of course the other thing I heard from several of the locals, old guides, was that Cal eventually took (the dam keeper's) idea, since word was Cal too, predicted his fish: in the old Shawville tavern (the) night prior (Cal said) "gonna catch a WR tomorrow..."

...I recall the prediction was supposedly pretty common knowledge, but really not certain who to even ask. All dead.

Pete's summer *Esox Angler* article was followed by a companion article in the fall issue questioning Hayward area muskies. At the time, I was quite upset. I had yet to acknowledge that the Spray and Johnson muskies have been given preferential treatment. However, the WRMA's Spray Protest, their use of professional photogrammetry to analyze the Spray and Johnson photographs, and Dettloff's unprofessional reaction to the WRMA protest collectively caused me to seriously question the sincerity of Dettloff's efforts to revise muskie record history. My questions were answered through an exhaustive review that identified numerous inconsistencies in the treatment of the Spray and Johnson muskies compared to muskies caught outside of the Hayward area. It's now clear to me that Dettloff's obsession with Hayward area muskies not only seriously jeopardized his NFWFHF responsibilities, his revisionist history is self-serving and violates his fiduciary responsibility as a muskie historian. Historic records should be left

alone! They were sanctioned, often by prestigious committees after thorough review, and at a minimum reflect record history during the era in which they were sanctioned! Accordingly, my chronological list of world record muskies is revised in Part I. Further, I apologized to Pete for any unkind things I said in the past regarding his opinion of Hayward's record muskies.

Pete presented the following proposal and a Spray and Johnson protest (excerpted) to the NFWFHF in December of 2002.

...to be fair, but yet to be able to recognize all claimed record fish for what they are (still big fish), and to protect and maintain the Hall's credibility, I propose two groupings of record class muskies...One grouping would be fish that withstand any and all scrutiny. Fish that are verified with no doubt according to FHO standards. And, these would be the official record (Modern Day) fish.

Another group would be for any fish that have any evidence against their validity. Rather than totally eliminating these fish from listing and lore, have a group called (a name that Ron Lindner coined) ..."Apocryphal records"...or just historical records. Apocryphal does best fit the bill... (Apocryphal: of doubtful authenticity; spurious; Syn. Fictitious).

As noted at the start of this Chapter, the NFWFHF chose not to go this route despite the 2003 recommendation of NFWFHF record advisor Brad Latvaitis and the strong 2005 recommendations of their two record advisors Latvaitis and Ramsell. Further, the NFWFHF, which, regrettably I was involved with at the time as World Record Advisor, rejected Maina's records protest.

Maina's protest contained a section of ***...independent photo analysis...on all fish in question, (although only the Spray final analysis was submitted) comparing fish length to known height of captors. In every case this analysis pointed to the fish being significantly shorter than claimed lengths.***

...Because there is more than sufficient evidence to-at the very least-strongly doubt the validity of these fish, and that other muskies have been taken off the official record list per similar evidence (that reference is to Dettloff's "disqualification" of the two Haver records, the Hanser record and the Lawton record), I proposed that the Spray and Johnson fish be removed from the official list.

The Journal article continued ***In his column in the Minneapolis Star, July 25, Connor writes: "So it's no wonder Cal Johnson is wearing that ear to ear smile for his world record muskellunge - 67 pounds, 8 ounces of it.***



“His feat climaxes two years of effort to nail this particular fish, which measures 60 1/4 inches long, 33 1/2 inches in girth.”

And Charles Johnson, sports editor of the Minneapolis Star, had this to say:

... “Today comes an official looking affidavit from Cal Johnson with the signature of a member of the Wisconsin conservation commission along with others as proof of the catch.



Let me have a look at this

AFFIDAVIT

SPECIES OF FISH MUSKELLUNGE (Esoc masquinongy)
 WEIGHT SIXTY SEVEN AND ONE HALF POUNDS
 LENGTH SIXTY AND ONE QUARTER INCHES
 GIRTH THIRTY THREE AND ONE HALF INCHES
 DATE CAUGHT JULY 24, 1949
 WHERE CAUGHT LAC COURT O'REILLES, HAYWARD, WIS.
 GUEST AT MOCCASIN LODGE, HAYWARD, WISCONSIN
 TYPE OF ROD
 REEL
 LINE
 BAIT USED

I hereby certify that I Personally caught the above-described fish in full accordance with the good ethics of true sportsmanship and while practicing the rules and regulations governing all-tackle sport fishing. The fish was taken on rod, reel and line legally from waters available to the general public. No assistance was rendered during the hooking and playing of this fish.

Signature of person who caught fish Cal Johnson

NAME CAL JOHNSON
 ADDRESS HAYWARD, WISCONSIN

Sworn to me before this 24 day of July, 1949

Notary's signature John Moreland (SEAL)

NOTARY PUBLIC, SAWYER COUNTY, WIS.
 MY COMMISSION EXPIRES JUNE 1, 1952

We, the undersigned, personally witnessed the weighing and measuring of the above-described fish and do hereby affirm that the weight and measurements given are correct:

Signature of Witness Robert A. Paul
 Address 2135 Barrington Ave. Springville, Wis.
 Signature of Witness Harold W. Halverson
 Address Route 2 - Hayward, Wis.
 Signature of Witness Mike, Solo & Serge Baguy
 Address Moccasins Lodge, Hayward, Wis.

What should be a note of interest from this affidavit is that the weight witnesses did not all witness weight on the same scale

“More power to you, Cal. We never had any doubts. The only thing that makes us mad is that we weren’t on the receiving end ...”

There is only one exception to the Sentinel’s exclusive Wisconsin showing of Cal Johnson’s world’s record muskie. This exception will be at Hayward when a celebration befitting the occasion is planned for around Labor Day, depending on how soon the fish can be mounted. The muskies permanent home will be in Hayward.

It is planned to have Gov. Rennebohm to do the honors, assisted by Conservation Commissioner John Moreland and other conservation and civic leaders.



Johnson (l), Moreland(c) and the Governor (r) with mount (left photo) and the mount at the Moccasin Bar (right photo)

In a July 28, 1949, *Sawyer County Record* article Johnson was making the mount of his fish available to Hayward and he was quoted as saying ... *The musky will be displayed in Hayward at all times...where it will be of more publicity value to Hayward and Sawyer County...*

Of course Johnson had no control over the mount's future disposition. In one of his books Eli Singer interviewed Bernie Tworek of Hayward and related that Tworek was the owner of the mount of Johnson's record fish which came with the Moccasin Bar in Hayward when he purchased it.

This fosters the question "why would Cal Johnson 'give away' the valuable record mount if it was legitimate? Had he "created" the record to benefit Hayward and Sawyer County tourism? In an article written by Johnson shortly after his catch in the March, 1950 issue of *The Outdoorsman* entitled *Hayward's Famed Fishing Waters* Johnson wrote profusely about the Hayward lakes area. Two-thirds of one full page within the article contained several Hayward resort ads, a Hayward real estate ad, a Hayward Lakes promotional tourism ad and a promotional tourism ad for the Indian Head Country.

Did tourism need a boost shortly after World War II? Did Cal, who knew that he was dying after a medical diagnosis, risk his life's vaunted career and reputation to help his beloved Hayward? You will have to decide for yourself.

A write-up from the Hayward paper of August 25, 1949.

Governor Rennebohm plans to unveil record muskie Sunday at Hayward.

The world's record musky will be unveiled to the public by Governor Oscar Rennebohm Sunday August 28th, 3:00 p.m. at the Hayward fairgrounds. Cal Johnson, outdoor sports writer and long-time fisherman will be the honored man, with "Old Evil Eye" the record musky.

Program

The program will start with a parade from the Legion Cabin up Main Street to the Fair Grounds led by the Hayward City Band.

An Indian Pow-wow will be given in honor of the governor. This will be the first “Musky Carnival” held in the area, and can be scheduled as an annual event (now known as the “Musky Festival”).

Headlines of the Sept. 1, 1949 *Sawyer County Record* indicated that over 7,000 packed Hayward to glimpse the world’s record musky. This write-up included a large photo of Johnson holding his catch.

The Journal article continued ***Cal will make his first Wisconsin appearance at the Sentinel Sports and Vacation Show next April in his famous bait casting act. Sports Show director, Charles D. Collins, plans also to have Cal show how he lands a world’s record muskie in the big tank in the main arena of the auditorium.***

The world’s record muskie will be on display in a special booth at the Sentinel Show and Cal will be on hand every day and evening to give anglers the benefit of his rich experience.

And here’s something else about Cal I want to clarify. He is not the “poor” boy some have pictured. Neither does he run a resort. Instead, he has a lodge and one guest cottage for his friends on Teal Lake. He writes for a number of magazines and manufacturers of outing equipment and was recently retained by the Chicago International Sports and Outdoor Show in Chicago to handle its public relations. His muskie will be exclusively shown in Chicago at the Amphitheater Show.

You don’t hire a brass band to accompany you on a muskie trip. Neither do you set up a standard to check your movements. And you don’t just snag into a world record muskie every day either.

The result is that in taking a record fish there is always a doubter. But Cal Johnson’s record breaking muskie has been documented by the most reputable men in Wisconsin’s north country. We’re completely satisfied that everything is on the level.

In photographs of Johnson with his fish it looks huge, although as in many problematic record photos, the fish is held in front of Johnson. So just how tall was Cal Johnson? In 2006 at the Minnesota Musky Expo, George Will asked Johnson historian John Dettloff the Johnson height question. He was told ***...Cal Johnson was 5-feet 7-inches tall. I’m the only one that knows and has that information and if anybody else tells you anything different they don’t know what they are talking about.***

When Will broached the subject again at the Expo in 2007, Dettloff’s previous story changed. Will had made some comments to Dettloff about some photo and measurement comparisons he had done based on the height information Dettloff had given him the previous year, when he told Dettloff he didn’t think the Johnson fish measured up based on Johnson’s height. Dettloff then said ***...He may have been 5-8 or maybe even 5-9 ...Photos are deceptive...!*** Will then, caught off guard, did a double take and changed the subject knowing Dettloff had just lied to him. He knew there was no point in pursuing it further.



This photo shows (left to right) Louie Spray, Cedric Adams, Ted Hagg and Cal Johnson



The photo above shows Adams (l), Johnson (c) and Hagg (r). Photos were sent to me by Louie Spray

When one looks at these two photographs, Johnson is clearly at least 4 inches shorter than Hagg which is particularly obvious in the second photo. Hagg was about the same 5' 11" tall as Spray. Until positive evidence surfaces with Cal Johnson's height we just won't know for sure.



This photo shows Hagg (r) beside Spray with Charlie Pastika (l) in front of Pastika's Bait Shop in Hayward, 1949

One thing that must be noted again is that Johnson's fish was never subjected to world record scrutiny since Spray's 1949 fish pushed it into second place in the *Field & Stream* contest.

To set the record straight, *Field & Stream*, the record sanctioning body at the time of Johnson's record, reviewed and accepted Johnson's contest application. Since then, *Field & Stream* and the FWFHF have not reviewed or disqualified the Johnson record. The IGFA lists the Johnson fish as their all-tackle world record in their *World Record Game Fishes, 2007 Edition*. It is also listed as the "Unlimited" line class record in the Muskie Conventional Angling Subdivision of the NFWFHF *Official World Fresh Water World Records, 2007 Edition*.

Professional photogrammetry was commissioned by the WRMA in 2006 and completed in 2007, and is conclusive. They are currently working on the balance of their report to submit to the IGFA. The final report was not completed before this book went to print.

"UPDATE NOTE: the following article and rebuttal took place during December of 2009 and January of 2010." - Click Here



*Hmmm, seems as if a few inches
are missing from that fish*