

John J. Coleman 60-8 Eagle Lake, Ontario – 1939



Left photo shows Coleman (r) with guide George Perkins (l) and the right photo shows Coleman's fish at Storey Taxidermy in Duluth

In as much as Mr. Ellis completely missed Coleman's world record from Eagle Lake, Ontario in 1939, let us now review the only controversy that I have uncovered regarding Coleman's fish. The letter that follows was written to the American Museum of Natural History (then responsible for the sanctioning of world records) on March 18, 1940 by Karl W. Kahmann a noted Hayward, Wisconsin taxidermist *and the man that mounted Louie's first two record claims in 1939 and 1940.*

Dear Miss LaMonte:

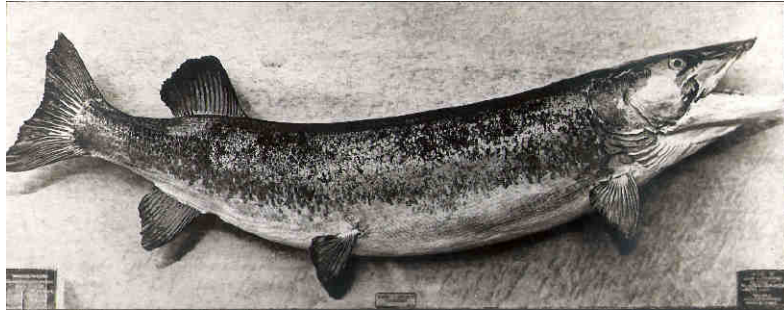
Purely as a matter of putting your institution on its guard as regards the recording of the largest fish caught on hook and line, I will try to point out several things I have noticed in my many years of mounting fish and particularly in the two large muskellunge recorded for the year 1939.

You have all data on length, weight and girth of the fish caught in Grindstone Lake, Wis. by Louis Spray and the one taken in Eagle Lake, Ontario, by J.J. Coleman, so we need not go into this except to call your attention to the fact that the girth of the Spray fish exceeds that of Mr. Coleman's by several inches - and - girth enters very largely into what a fish will weigh.

I have mounted roughly 3000 muskellunge in the past 35 years and naturally can guess the weight of a fish fairly closely, unless it has been filled with sand and gravel, rocks, steel shafting, sash weights, or just plain water, which is too often the case.

In the case of the large muskellunge a pound or two difference may depend on whether the fish was "drowned" in landing, or whether it was weighed immediately after landing or hours or days afterwards, even where the "filling" referred to above is not done.

I saw the Coleman fish at Marshall Fields Sporting Goods Dept. in Chicago and mounted the Spray fish. I am satisfied that the Coleman fish does not come up to weight or measurements, although it is a fine specimen, certainly a large one, and well mounted.



*The mount of Coleman's record muskie by Storey Taxidermy
Photo courtesy J. Peter Haupt*

I am afraid that there is too much commercialization, and too much of "Fisherman's Liberty" in these "Records" for any scientific institution to safely vouch for them. On the other hand, I cannot see how you can do more than to rely on affidavits and scaler's record stubs, but these do not show whether the specimen was "filled" before weighing.

It really makes very little difference whether the record muskie was caught in Wisconsin, Canada or elsewhere, but it evidently does make a lot of difference to the bait and tackle manufacturers and fishing resort owners.

All my life I have been interested in exact data in bird study and have belonged to just about every ornithological club including the A.O.U. - at present I am Treasurer of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology - and - I do not envy your position in regards to attempting to vouch for "Fishermen's Record Catches."

Although Kahmann's letter indicated that the girth of Spray's fish exceeded Coleman's by "several inches," the *Field & Stream* records show that Coleman's fish was only *one* inch less in girth than Spray's claimed girth measurement and Kahmann made no mention of Coleman's fish being 1/4-inch longer than Spray's.

A professional photogrammetric analysis has not been commissioned for Coleman's muskie.



Looks pretty good to me