

Percy Haver 62-8 Lake St. Clair, Michigan – 1940



Field & Stream received an undated letter and affidavits from Haver (spelling, capitalization and wording as written).

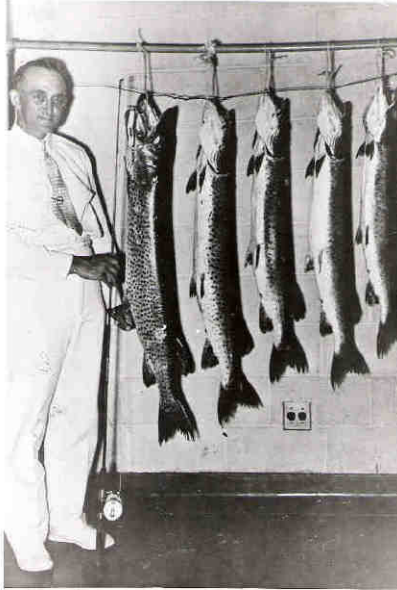
*Fishing Contest Editor
Field & Stream.
515 Madison Ave
New York*

Dear Sir

inclosed is affidavits concerning fish taken by myself in lake St Clair the 56 lb is for a matter of record only. it was one of 5 taken on this day. for a total of 186 lb. the whole catch were presented to the Detroit Tigers after the game June 21 – 40 will send story of catch and pictures as soon as possible.

*Yours truly
Percy Haver*

With the letter there was a contest affidavit for a 56-pound muskie with a length of 56 ½-inches and a girth of 29 ¼-inches that Haver caught on June 20, 1940 and a second contest affidavit for his 62 ½-pound muskie and eventual world record.



Haver standing next to his 56-0 from 1940, one of five totaling 187-pounds he caught on June 20th

Next was a letter from a line manufacturer to Dan Holland, a writer for *Field & Stream* magazine. I discovered this letter in the *Field & Stream* file. It was as follows.

October 15, 1940

*Field & Stream
515 Madison Ave.
New York, N.Y.*

Dear Mr. Holland:

With further reference to muskies caught by Louis Spray of Hayward, Wisconsin and Paul Haver of Detroit, I have heard quite a bit of unfavorable criticism on the Haver musky catch.

But the last word from Karl Kinnear would indicate that while it was caught on very heavy tackle and was not looked upon as a sporting proposition in Detroit, the newspaper was going to recognize the catch, and we are all quite anxious to know whether or not Field & Stream is going to officially accept either or both of these catches in your contest.

As soon as you come to a decision, Mr. Holland, we would appreciate your advising us as we are keenly interested in both of these catches. Would also appreciate it if you would let us know what tackle is shown as being used on both of these catches.

With much appreciation, we remain

*Yours very truly
(Line Company unnamed)
(Signatory unnamed)*

At the bottom of this letter was an internal office note from Bob Bush, the person in charge of the fishing contest, to Mr. Holland. It read.

RPH: The tackle on which Haver took his musky would not disqualify him in our contest, even tho it was heavy trolling stuff. But since receipt of this letter, I have received an anonymous letter from a guy in Detroit stating that Haver buys his fish from trappers on the Canuck side of the lake.

I don't like the smell of the Spray affidavit at all, and will declare the entry ineligible if it's OK with you. I don't believe we are obligated to accept an entry. BB

I found this last comment an interesting sidebar regarding Spray's 1940 entry.

That above mentioned undated anonymous letter from Detroit, also in the *Field & Stream* file said the following.

Detroit Mich

Editor of Prize fishing contest.

Here is a tip to you. Don't let Mr. Haver of Detroit put another one over on you and all the muskie fishermen. He don't catch them. He buys them from the Net fishermen on the Canadian side of Lake St. Clair.

He also sells the lures and has a good income from cheap advertisement.

Yours truly,

I am no muskie fisherman but like to see them play fair.

As a result of that letter, Bob Bush of *Field & Stream* sent the following letter to Mr. Haver.

November 7, 1940

Dear Mr. Haver:

Since receipt of your letter and affidavit by this office in connection with your big muskalonge, we have received correspondence questioning the validity of your catch.

This thing is apt to occur when anyone makes an unusual catch, but such complaints must be accepted at their face value. Should your fish turn out a prize winner in our competition – a logical assumption – and if any charges of this nature were to hold up, there would be a possibility of serious repercussion. As you know, our contest is supervised by the United States postal regulations.

This statement was signed by eight people, several of which were with the *Detroit News* and several with *WWJ* radio. That seemed to end it, as Haver's fish was accepted as the new world record.

In 1975, I was following up a lead I had gotten from the late muskie legend Homer LeBlanc and Capt. Hank Bradley on the possible whereabouts of the mount of Haver's record fish. I received the following undated and excerpted letter from a person that did not wish to be exposed.

(Unnamed) *Tackle Co.*,
(Unnamed address)
Detroit, Michigan

Mr. Larry Ramsell,
World Records Sec'y
(Address at the time)

Dear friend,

...First of all I do not have Percy Haver's musky or muskies. I have fished with Haver 4 times and never saw him catch a fish. I never fished with a so-called expert who knew less about fishing.

I had learned more about Haver from the Province of Ontario Canada game warden who had a personal confrontation with Haver. (Unnamed) told me to ask Haver how he liked (unnamed). I have been out fishing in Lake St. Clair several times and watched anglers buy muskies from the commercial netters who were not allowed to keep muskies but sold them out in the lake to the anglers at \$1.00 apiece. The netters were after fish legally netted such as walleyes, carp and other rough fish. I think thousands of fishermen knew the story but libel laws being what they are hesitated to pursue it further. I question that the so-called 62 pounder went near that figure either even if legally caught. (Unnamed game warden) claims he stopped Haver's musky methods. I was not personally a witness to Haver's acquisitions. He claims he caught 3,000. Leave the zeros off and there is a remote possibility...

Sincerely
(Unnamed)

So we have two anonymous letters, basically hearsay, that provides no proof of wrongdoing on Haver's part. Perhaps it was just a case of "sour grapes."

John Dettloff, in his article, *In Defense of Louie Spray* in the Dec. 1991/Jan. 1992 issue of *Musky Hunter* magazine had the following statement about Spray.

What you can't take away from Louie is the fact that he was a diehard musky fisherman, a real musky addict. After listening to a one-hour taped interview with Louie, as well as reading things he has written on the sport, it is obvious that he was no phony because the tips and advice he gave only could have come from a real musky fisherman.

That quote can also apply to Haver and others. When you consider that I had the same thoughts when I reviewed the accounts of many other record holders including Haver's accounts of the captures of his record fish, Dettloff's taped interview with Cal Johnson's son Phil regarding Cal's record catch and Lawton's accounts of his fishing days including the story of his world record catch. Apparently, in Dettloff's mind only Spray's stories were valid! When he set about trying to discredit Haver's 1939 and 1940 world record catches in 1995 and Lawton's 1957 record in 1992 he obviously disregarded their stories.

In the January 1996 issue of *Musky Hunter* magazine, John Dettloff took it upon himself, as *Musky Hunter* historical editor, to personally "disqualify" Haver's 1939 and 1940 muskie records in *The Saga Of Percy Haver & Louie Spray, Spray really did catch three record muskies in his day!* The article attempts to bolster the claims of Hayward and Dettloff's "hero", Louie Spray. Dettloff identifies Spray's 1940 muskie as a world record and claims that Spray should be credited with three world records! The fact is that Louie Spray's 1939 catch was never listed as the 1939 world record because it was beaten by John J. Coleman in October, 1939. It was, however, the world's largest angler caught muskie for 68 days during 1939. In 1940, Percy Haver broke Coleman's record and only the disqualification of Haver could possibly gain Spray the 1940 world record. If Haver's 1940 muskie were disqualified by an official sanctioning body, Spray's muskie could only be considered a record if the fact that it did not receive world record scrutiny by **Field & Stream** is overlooked! Remember, Spray's 1940 muskie was in second place in the 1940 annual contest when entered, beaten by Haver. To set the record straight, **Field & Stream**, the record keeping body at the time of Haver's records, reviewed and accepted Haver's applications. Since then, the record sanctioning bodies, including **Field & Stream**, the FWFHF and the IGFA, have not reviewed or disqualified the Haver records.

It appears that the primary purpose of Dettloff's article was to elevate Louie Spray to Babe Ruth status. His article was mostly about Louie and how he was cheated out of two of his world records; one by Haver in 1940 and the other by Lawton in 1957. He begins with a folksy story about Haver's life before he makes his claims in the last portion of the article.

Dettloff, as he did in his Lawton investigation, used amateur photo analysis to determine the size of Haver's fish. After spending considerable time analyzing photographs using precision measuring instruments, I've found that direct scaling of fish size from photographs is generally inconclusive and not repeatable because direct scaling relies on "assumptive points of measurement" and ignores or inadequately addresses perspective. As will be discussed thoroughly in the Lawton section, detailed photo analysis is best left to professional photogrammetrists and their computers.

Dettloff did a bit more work on Haver's 1940 world record from Lake St. Clair, Michigan than he did on the 1938 and 1939 Haver fish, as evidenced in the copy of a report that he sent to me in 1995. It was based on yet another amateur photo analysis, no better than the questionable work he did on Lawton's fish. He made many assumptions regarding distances in photographs and numerous estimates, including, camera height and angle and angler height.

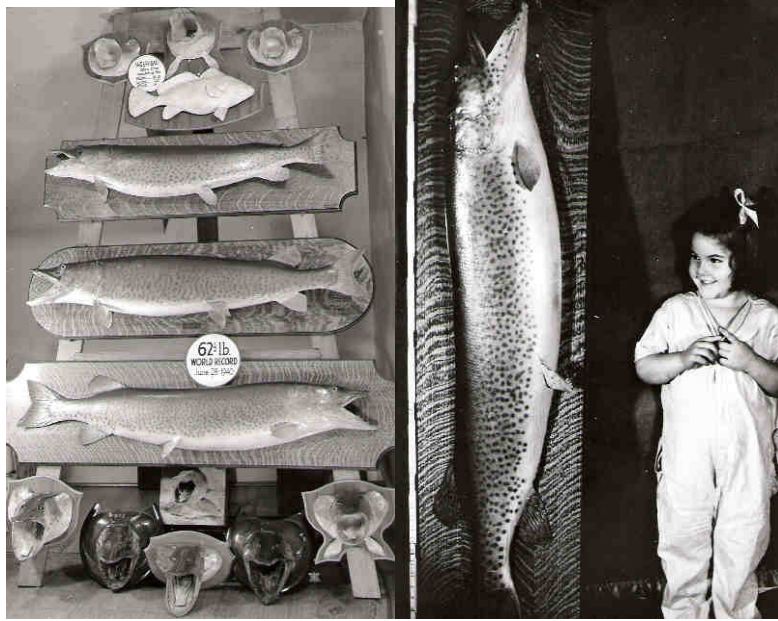
He “determined” Haver’s height from a photograph and even used comments from Haver’s niece as to her “recollections” about Haver’s height. Incredibly, he made a determination of Haver’s height by scaling a photograph to his estimates of the size of various items in photographs! He then pronounced that ...***Now we can calculate Haver’s height. Knowing that (Haver’s height) = (height of the bottom edge of the first block is above the floor) referring to concrete blocks in the photograph of Haver with the five muskies; + (height of eight blocks and mortar joints) + (the approximate 2 additional inches that Haver’s head is above the last mortar joint) tells us that Haver indeed was about (3”) + (64”) + (2”) or 69” tall...***

Dettloff used his estimate of Haver’s height to scale fish lengths in the Haver photos starting with Haver’s 58-pound 14-ounce record caught in 1939. He stated that ...***A careful study of the various photos of this fish provides us with adequate evidence illustrating how this musky could have been at most, 54 inches in length. The photos of this musky clearly show the fish to not be nearly as girthy as it would have to be to weigh almost 60 pounds.***

Amazing! By scaling a photograph Dettloff was able to make a determination that this fish was ***54 inches at most.*** This despite the following facts; he had no real knowledge of Haver’s height and he had no idea of the claimed length of the fish that he crudely scaled because the application is not part of the ***Field& Stream*** file. Also, I am at a loss to understand just how Mr. Dettloff could determine that ...***The photos of this musky clearly show the fish to not be nearly as girthy as it would have to be to weigh almost 60 pounds*** from a one-sided view?

For the most important fish to him and Spray, Haver’s 62 ½-pound 1940 record, Dettloff chose not to use his previous methods.

Dettloff was confident that he had found a Haver “smoking gun” when he discovered the mount photo of Haver’s 1940 record contained a “builder’s ruler” alongside the mount’s left side. He determined from this that the “mount” of Haver’s fish was ...***approximately 53 ½-inches long,*** knowing full well that scaling the mount of a fish is not a valid determination of true length of a fresh fish, he made the quantum leap that since Haver had claimed the fish to be 59-inches long, therefore ...***this constitutes a considerable length falsification on Haver’s part.*** A “rush to judgment and shallow at best!



Left mounts of Haver's three largest muskies. Right the mount of the 1940 world record 62 ½-pounder

Interestingly, similar comparisons between the Spray mounts and fresh fish were dismissed when the WRMA's Spray protest was considered (detailed later)! He ended the Haver analysis segment with the following.

...While he was no doubt one who made the sport of fishing an important part of his life, when it came to his musky fishing, Percy Haver often had a tendency to stretch the truth. Numerous old timers from his home area seemed to know the score, long suspecting Haver of telling tall tales. When Percy made the comment that, "I have caught over 300 muskies of better than 30 pounds apiece in the last four years," in a magazine article, it should have tipped off most musky men that Percy wasn't being straight. For such a feat – for any man – is basically impossible.

Excuse me! *Numerous old timers* I guess is two, as that are the number of anonymous letters. And to accuse Haver of *stretching the truth* is a biased, un-provable and unfounded attack on Mr. Haver's credibility and integrity and that of his affidavited witnesses, which was obviously something Dettloff was trying to accomplish. I find it ludicrous and unbelievable that Dettloff could make a statement like this about Haver while at the same time ignoring similar truths about Louie Spray's records. And as for his claim that it, *is basically impossible* for *any man* to catch *over 300 muskies of better than 30 pounds apiece in the last four years* shows his tunnel vision and utter lack of knowledge of what goes on in the rest of the muskie world outside of his home water, the Chippewa Flowage. All of North American muskie fishing simply cannot be gauged by what is caught there. I will prove that this sort of production is indeed possible in Volume II in the chapter on release.

In one his columns, the late John Husar had a few things to say about Dettloff's erasing of historical muskie records in a December 1995 column entitled *Dusty muskie records hit dust* in the *Chicago Tribune*. Some excerpts.

Those scary purges in muskieland continue as self-appointed “historians” run amok through the sport’s most hallowed lore and records.

The latest deceased-and defenseless-icon to bite the dust is Percy P. Haver, who back in the 1940’s claimed four of the heaviest fish in history.

According to a lengthy article by amateur historian John Dettloff in “Musky Hunter” magazine, Haver does not deserve recognition for any of those fish. Dettloff says Haver did not catch muskies of 62 ½ pounds, 58 pounds 14 ounces, 56-7 and 56 flat from Lake St. Clair, Mich.

At the time they were caught, the larger two were world records. But having eyeballed some old photos of Haver’s fish, Dettloff says he has determined the weights were exaggerated. He said the biggest one mainly served to deny the late Wisconsin angler Louie Spray a third world record. Dettloff happens to own a lodge on the Chippewa Flowage near the spot where Spray is said to have caught one of his record fish.

Adding fuel to the flames of controversy was Ted Dzialo of the National Fresh Water Fishing Hall of Fame, which is located near Spray’s lair in Hayward, Wis.

“There were a lot of crap records in the 40’s and 50’s,” Dzialo declared bluntly. “A lot of them were phoned.”

Dzialo said none of Haver’s fish would crack the current list of records maintained by his organization.

“It doesn’t really affect us,” he said. “That’s why we haven’t said anything about it. But based upon the photographic evidence, they probably would be disqualified if they were records.”

He said the main effect will be the scrubbing of Haver’s fish from any recognized list of 50-pound plus muskies-as if they never existed.

Dettloff said of Haver’s 56-pounder caught in 1940 prior to his record catch that, it ...*proved to be falsified to the same degree after the photo of that fish was analyzed in exactly the same way as with the previously mentioned fish.* I guess by the time he got to Haver’s fish, he felt that he need not go into as much detail and work as he did in his earlier Lawton record investigation.

Importantly, Haver’s 1939 fish was never subjected to world record scrutiny by the American Museum of Natural History because the Spray and Coleman fish pushed it into third place in the 1939 *Field & Stream* annual contest.

Professional photogrammetry has not been commissioned to analyze any of Haver’s muskies.