

***Just For Openers* January-December 2025 1**

Turtle Power Follows Brush With Law Le Emmette de Fee By Don Thornton

The headline in the October 28, 1947 edition of the Minneapolis Star read:

Artist Claims he Was Unaware of Check Procedure

The newspaper went on to report with a hint of skepticism: "Le Emmette de Fee, 29-year-old artist for a calendar firm, explained in Ramsey district court he was unaware of the procedure which brought him a liberal increase in income without much effort.

"He told Judge Royden S. Dane he had received four checks by mail. He cashed the checks, he said, and split the cash with Martine C. Lane, 38, manager of The Golden Rule's grocery department.

"Until he read of Lane's arrest, de Fee said he didn't understand the manipulations. De Fee, who pleaded guilty to first degree grand larceny, will be sentenced Nov. 10."

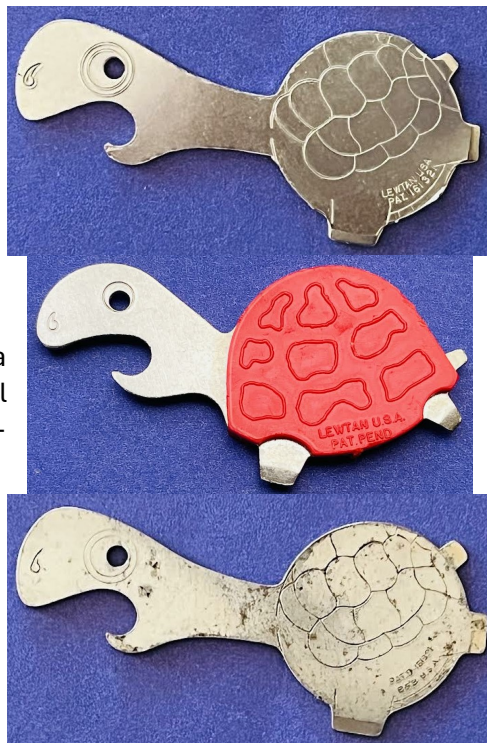
Lane was accused of having defrauded the St. Paul, Minnesota store of about \$15,000 by pocketing refunds for returned merchandise and receiving payments from bogus invoices, according to the newspaper. The judge apparently believed de Fee, sentencing him to only probation while imposing a one to 10 year prison stretch for Lane.

De Fee left his brush with the law behind him and went on to success as an artist and inventor for Brown & Bigelow, the St. Paul, Minnesota calendar advertising and branded promotional items manufacturing company.

De Fee put a turtle on the map for pocket-size novelty items with his Design Patent No. 161,321 dated December 16, 1950 for his "combination bottle opener, screw driver and lid opener."

The 3-inch device, with a king sized head and neck measuring 1 3/4-inches, a key chain hole eye and screw-driver legs, was an instant success in straight to customer sales and ever more in branding by imprinting a firm's name on the shell for promotional purposes.

One side is marked **PAT'D 161321 B&B U.S.A.** On the other side was the advertiser, in this case **SAYER FIRE-AUTO-LIFE IN-**



Dec 26, 1950 LE EMMETTE V. DE FEE Des. 161,321
COMBINATION BOTTLE OPENER, SCREW
DRIVER, AND LID LIFTER
FILED APRIL 29, 1950

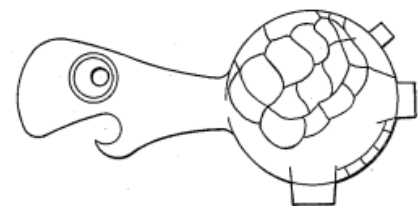


FIG. 1



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

Inventor
LE EMMETTE V. de FEE

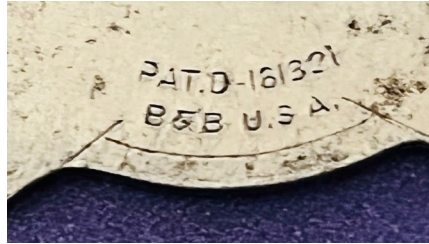
Howard Fischer

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SURANCE AGENCY KE 1-5443. Another one, same size, is marked: COTATI AUTO SALES 7981 OLD REDWOOD HWY. COTATI, CALIF. 795-34534 and on the other side: LEWTAN U.S.A. PAT. 161321, showing a change in manufacturers.



There are other, smaller turtles made by Lawten Industries of Hartford, Connecticut, measuring 2 3/4-inches (shorter neck) some with a plastic covering. One is branded: **COMPLIMENTS OF SEVEN MILE INN OUR TOWN U.S.A.** on one side and **LAWTEN U.S.A. PAT. PEND** on the other.



De Free also came up with a “combination can opener, bottle opener and spoon” that turned out to

be a major branding success. He was granted Design Patent No. 160,695 on October 31, 1950 for his sleek 8-inch polished metal bar tool.

Its broad appeal included hotels, bars, beverage makers and even funeral homes. One is marked in tiny letters at the base of the bottle opener **B&D ST. PAUL MINN. U.S.A.** The advertiser on this one: **ORTMANN FUNERAL HOME** and below that repeated **ORTMANN FUNERAL HOME**.



Oct. 21, 1950 **LE EMMETTE V. DE FEE** Des. 160,695
COMBINATION CAN OPENER, BOTTLE
OPENER, AND SPOON
Filed Feb. 10, 1949

FIG. 1.

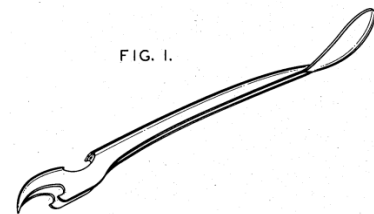


FIG. 2.



FIG. 3.

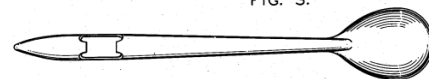


FIG. 4.



INVENTOR.
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