

Just For Openers January-December 2025 1

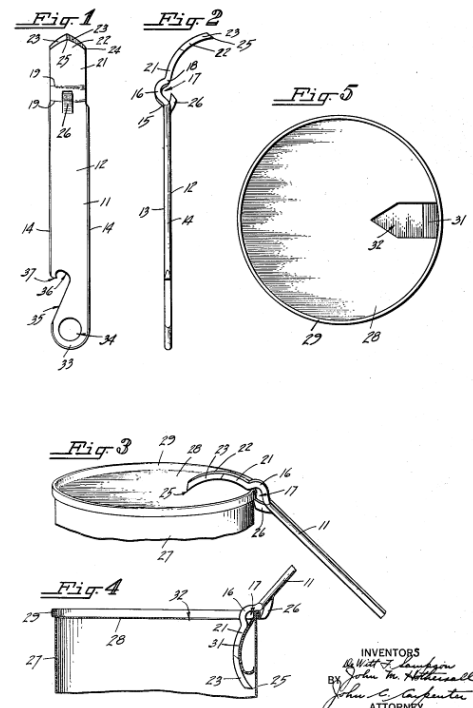
Peli-Can-Opener Message:

“Give Dad The Bird” By Don Thornton

First off, there are no pelicans in the Atlantic waters off Connecticut. So the naming of the PELI-CAN-OPENER is just a catchy tag. And there are other facts related to this cast aluminum can/bottle opener with a big bite that don't make sense. The 6 ¼-inch combo opener with a pelican-like head and an iron punch beak is marked: **MFD. G. HARRAH ESSEX CONN. PELI-CAN-OPENER PAT. 1,996,550**. On some models **ESSEX** is replaced with **CANNONDALE, CONN.**, which is a historic neighborhood in Wilton, Connecticut, about 60 miles from Essex.



April 2, 1935. D. F. Sampson ER AL 1,996,550
CONTAINER OPENER
Filed April 13, 1933



A look at Patent No. 1,996,550 and it's obvious there is no connection to the Peli-Can-Opener, other than it is a punch opener. It is likely a humorous tribute to No. 1,996,550 granted to Dewitt F. Sampson and John M. Hothersall on April 2, 1935, considered America's first can punch opener or "church key." (See *Bow To The Church Key* JFO News 2025).

Just For Openers January-December 2025 2

Peli-Can-Opener Message:

"Give Dad The Bird" By Don Thornton

Advertisements for the Peli-Can-Opener appeared in a few newspapers in 1948 and 1949, fading away in 1950. One ad, with the headline, GIVE DAD *The Bird*, listed the price at \$1.95.

GIVE DAD *The Bird*



This All Purpose *Peli-Can-Opener* IS A

- Beer Opener
- Ice Crusher
- Cap Lifter
- Fruit Jar Opener

GIVE DAD **THE Bird**
SO THE WHOLE
FAMILY CAN USE IT!

ONLY
\$1.95

Halifax Package Store
324 Seabreeze Blvd. Dial 5254



Something new and different in household gadgets.

PELI-CAN-OPENER

This all-purpose *Peli-Can-Opener* is a

- Beer Can Opener
- Cap Lifter
- Fruit Jar Opener
- Ice Crusher

\$1.95



Peli-Can-Opener Message:

“Give Dad The Bird” By Don Thornton

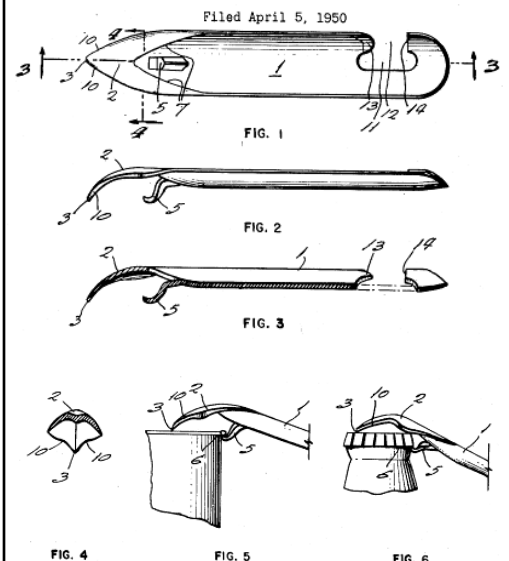
The **MFD. G. HARRAH** refers George R. Harrah, a longtime resident of upscale Essex. Harrah applied for a patent for his “combination can and bottle opener” on April 6, 1950, two years after it first appeared on the market. For unknown reasons, the patent was not granted until December 11, 1956. The handle of the opener in the patent drawing does not come close to the Peli-Can handle, but the punch opener is a match – “a can opener ... in which the hook extends downwardly sufficiently to permit hooking under a bottle cap with the cutting up on top of the same.”

There is one thing about the patent that does make sense – it made it to market as a true “combination can and bottle opener.” One example, at 4 ¼-inches long, is marked: **USE ON CANS OR BOTTLES PIEL'S LIGHT BEER** and in tiny type on the bottom: **HARRAH PAT. PENDING**. According to *Advertising Openers*, 2014, some models are also marked: **PAT. 1,996,550**. As with the Peli-Can, the tongue of this opener is large enough to hook under the bottle cap.



Harrah died December 6, 1985 at the age of 78. His obituary in the *Hartford Courant* said he was “a prominent Essex yachtsman” who “was instrumental in the building of the New Essex Yacht Club where he had been a commodore.” The obituary also give this sorrowful news: “Harrah’s body was found Friday in a wooded area of Middletown, where he apparently wandered in a disoriented state. He had been missing three days. A medical examiner reported he died of hypothermia.”

Dec. 11, 1956. G. R. Harrah 2,773,272
COMBINATION CAN AND BOTTLE OPENER
Filed April 5, 1950



INVENTOR.
GEORGE R. HARRAH
BY
James J. Kennedy
ATTORNEY.

