

# WHO'S WHO HEREABOUTS

FRANK PEREZ—Surfman . . . pie-maker . . . reel builder extraordinary.

Long Island waters have fostered many surf-fishermen—that strange species that thrives on solitude. Here's the story of one of them. He's 72 years old, weighs 118 pounds wringing wet, and can still cast into the surf for 14 hours on no more fuel than a pint of coffee!

It was the year 1904, and too many weakfish were being lost by surfmen at Coney Island. The weaks would enjoy a good meal then get away pretty much undetected. The usual routine was to bemoan the loss, put another meal on the hook—and repeat.

But to Frank Perez, a 25-year-old Navy Yard machinist and occasional surf-angler, that didn't make sense. He studied the matter for awhile, then came up with a bicycle bell rigged to tell him when Mr. Weak was on the line. And so began a history of tackle-tinkering and inventing.

## SERENADE OF THE BELLS

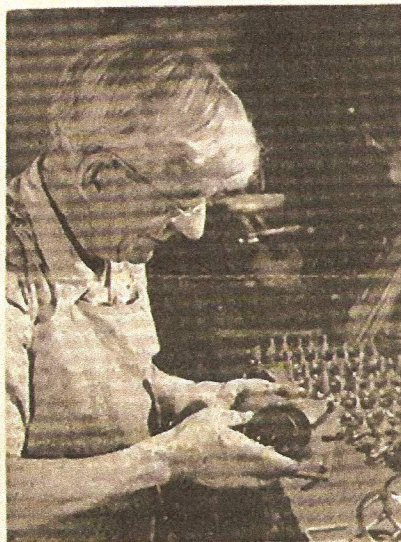
For the next few weeks the Perez household would find itself roused at all hours of the night by bells ringing. The bicycle bell signal system was developing, and orders from distraught surfmen were coming in.

Frank (after five minutes with him the "Mr. Perez" is lost) chuckles as he recalls those days—the crude rods and reels in vogue, and the amazing assortment of terminal tackle used. Each avid surfman had his own pet rig and his own theories about what would and what would not catch stripers, blues, weakfish, and what not. Sound familiar? That trait in surfmen is as pronounced today as it was then.

Anyway, with the immediate success of the bicycle bell rig, Frank was sought out to help develop a weird assortment of tackle items. He was fascinated, and seized every chance to tear down and overhaul or rebuild anything used in surf-fishing. In 1915 he repaired a Holzmans Reel. It was the first one he had seen and a beautiful bit of workmanship. But he sensed several possible improvements and started tinkering. From that day to this, Frank has not stopped analyzing surf tackle.

What justifies the title "Expert Surf-Fisherman?" To catch one big fish in the surf? To get a diamond, gold, or silver pin from the club for having beached the first, the most, or the largest fish one season? Hardly! But to win award after award—year after year—well, it takes a bit of doing.

Frank won his first award in the



No mass production here! Every PEREZ reel is subjected to careful testing, checking and fitting—all by Perez himself.

old United Anglers Club in 1917, and with the exception of two years when he was out of action because of illness, and two years during the late war, he has been a consistent winner, sometimes as many as five different awards in one season. He has earned the title "Expert Surf-Fisherman."

## A TECHNICIAN IS BORN

But how does a man get that way? Back in 1904 Mr. George "Pop" Tilyou, builder of the famous Steeplechase Pier at Coney Island, induced Frank to take a whirl at this comparatively new sport. Together they trudged along the south shore of Long Island, often spending an entire day without encountering any other surf-fishermen. There wasn't a foot of beach from Coney Island and the Rockaways to Montauk Point that did not get their attention. Well . . . as any surf-fisherman knows, just the briefest sort of an introduction is all that is needed to launch a man on a real career in surf-fishing. That first strike—and another incurable is in our midst! So, it was with Frank, thanks to "Pop" Tilyou.

Then came the bicycle bell episode . . . then general tackle repairing . . . determination to do something about it. Holzmans and Vom Hofe were the names to be reckoned with, and were

the craftsmen to study. They were studied. The star drag was unknown in those days—at least to Frank and his contemporaries. The need for some sort of friction device was recognized, though, and he went to work on it.

Then, along about 1922 or 1923, late in the fall, Frank ran afoul of a whopper that just couldn't be taken. He ended up with sore fingers, bruised knuckles, and a determination that by next season the problem would be licked. It was, too. The first PEREZ Reel made its appearance the next spring. The basic design was so completely satisfactory that it has been modified but slightly right up to now. As with the bicycle bell rig, friends wanted duplicates. That first season perhaps four or five reels were made. After all, this was an extra-curricular activity, and couldn't interfere too much with Frank's fishing. Next winter, though!

It was not long before the fishing population started growing by leaps and bounds. Production of serviceable, reasonably inexpensive reels suitable for surf-fishing also spurted. However, there was always that discriminating group that would not be satisfied to use a reasonably good reel. These surfmen wanted precision, and turned to Frank for it. He made reels as fast as he could—without sacrificing any of the precision that made the PEREZ different. There was always a customer waiting for a reel when it was finished—and at \$75, and \$85, depending upon whether or not certain trim was put on. All in all, perhaps eight hundred PEREZ Reels were seeing service when World War II intervened.

After the war, with the availability of production plants geared to real precision work, and looking for products to manufacture, it seemed natural to turn in this direction to make PEREZ Reels at an ever-increasing pace. In 1945 this was tried, and in 1946 the first reels produced on an assembly line were distributed. They were a disappointment to the old friends of the PEREZ Reel, and the manufacturer elected to go out of the reel business.

## NOTHING STOPS A GOOD MAN

So past seventy, but as enthusiastic as ever about surf-fishing, and about fine reels, Frank took over