

# The American Fly Fisher

*Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*

WINTER 2002

VOLUME 28 NUMBER 1

## Who's Your Daddy?



*These George LaBranche dry flies are currently on display at the Museum.*

**W**HO IS THE FATHER of the dry fly? Of dry-fly fishing? Can one candidate among several be chosen? Why do some of us need to bestow this title or assign paternity to a single person? Is there harm in our admiration of the highly visible contributors to our sport?

Our three authors in this issue agree that the question of paternity in the sport of fly fishing is a false one and that the phrase *father of* is one to be avoided. This avoidance pays respect to all those anonymous fly fishers who were a part of the evolution of the sport. It may also avert a kind of historical laziness—one that happily categorizes in order to bring a simplicity to understanding.

The three are taking on the question of myth versus history, and they may ruffle a few feathers in the process—as their own have been ruffled by previous authors. But as Paul Schullery so aptly states in his piece, “. . . fly fishers disagree about everything else; why shouldn't we disagree about our history?”

In “History and Mr. Gordon” (page 2), Schullery reviews the work he presented on Theodore Gordon in *American Fly Fishing: A History*. He believes that Gordon is not a mythic figure, but therefore is a more interesting one. In “Frederic M. Halford: The Myth and the Man” (page 12), Andrew Herd

offers that Halford became mythic not because of his skills as a fisherman, but because he was a great communicator. And in “Rigor Without Mortis” (page 18), Ken Cameron argues that myth and history exist on a continuum, and “keeping the two separate is a difficult but essential undertaking.”

In addition to our features, John Betts has reviewed Frederick Buller and Hugh Falkus's *Dame Juliana: The Treatise and Its Mysteries*, a new release from the Flyfisher's Classic Library. That review appears on page 26.

The Museum has had a busy fall, what with hosting the first in what will become a series of oral history summits attended by some of fly fishing's movers and shakers (page 32), presenting the Heritage Award to Lewis W. Coleman at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco (page 27), and holding a run of dinner/auctions. We had an exciting meeting of the Board of Trustees in November. Our traveling exhibit, *Anglers All*, has just returned to the Museum for the winter, and we encourage those of you who haven't yet seen it to come take a look. Check out a listing of upcoming events in Museum News, and drop by if we're in your neighborhood.

KATHLEEN ACHOR  
EDITOR



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ON THE COVER: *On the steps of the Royal Hotel, Winchester, about 1800.*  
See "Frederic M. Halford: The Myth and the Man," beginning on page 12.  
*Courtesy of the Flyfishers' Club, London, with permission.*

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# History and Mr. Gordon

by Paul Schullery

Frontispiece from Louis Rhead's *American Trout Stream Insects*



In 1916, Louis Rhead's *American Trout Stream Insects* unsuccessfully proposed an entire angler's entomology to go along with the burgeoning interest in dry-fly fishing. Rhead reached too far and ignored scientific taxonomy in creating his own complete original set of flies. But at the same time, he acknowledged George LaBranche's prominence as an expert American dry-fly angler by portraying and honoring LaBranche (above) in his frontispiece illustration. Rhead, like LaBranche, Gill, and Camp—who had already published books on dry-fly fishing—revealed no debt to or awareness of the writings and contributions of Theodore Gordon, who died the year before *American Trout Stream Insects* appeared.

In 1987, when the first edition of my book *American Fly Fishing: A History* was published by Nick Lyons (with the sponsorship of the American Museum of Fly Fishing), I was uncertain how fly fishers might respond to such a reconsideration of their history.<sup>1</sup> I was realistic enough to know that most fly fishers don't care about history, but a few fly fishers do. What would they make of this reconsideration?

At the time, the revisions that I thought were most important involved the sport's early days. For example, many fishing writers still seemed to believe that the *Treatyse of Fyshynge wyth an Angle* (1496) more or less constituted the origin of the entire sport.<sup>2</sup> But through a series of terrific scholarly papers published in the 1980s, medievalist Richard Hoffmann introduced anglers to a whole world of new historical sources and demonstrated

that fly fishing was widespread in Europe for centuries before 1496.<sup>3</sup> It was my privilege, in *American Fly Fishing*, to bear this good news to a wider audience.

For another example, I was especially pleased to be able to clarify the nature of recreation in colonial and early national America. For most of the twentieth century, it was a matter of common knowledge among fishing writers that Americans did little or no sportfishing before

## TO ANGLERS.

Hand-made Greenheart Trout Rods, 2 tips, partition bag 3-4. Carriage paid to any address in the States. Boyton Floating Flies, Trout size. 12cts.; Bass, 25cts.; Salmon 40cts. each; our English Trout Flies, a sample dozen for 50cts. Price list gratis.

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*Kewell, a tackle dealer on the west coast, was advertising dry flies in 1888.*

the Civil War. These writers usually explained this lack of interest in sport in terms of the rigors of frontier life—people were too busy fighting apparently endless Indian wars and wresting their cornfields away from bears and wolves.<sup>4</sup>

I knew this story was wrong. Whenever Euro-Americans settled in a new region, they tended to slaughter the dangerous wildlife pretty quickly, and they treated the local Indians about as badly. When they weren't busy raising a new nation on the ruins of the old native ones, these people fished, hunted, skated, swam, danced, sang, drank, and entertained themselves in many other ways. Professional historians of the period had always known this, but it somehow eluded fishing writers.<sup>5</sup> In *American Fly Fishing* I explained it. I hope that I also encouraged other writers to study these many generations of forgotten anglers. I still suspect that this was the most important reinterpretation of American angling history in the book.

It has been a little disappointing, then, that the most notable response to the book's new view of American fly-fishing history should involve not these major revisions, but what I still regard as a somewhat less significant midcourse correction: my reconsideration of the famous fishing writer Theodore Gordon (1854–1915). Disappointing, yes—but not surprising. After all, few modern American anglers feel any particular or personal connection to the story of the sport's earliest known days, either in Europe or America. But many do feel a stake in the more recent past, especially those parts involving their ancestors (biological or philosophical), cherished traditions, and home waters.

### SIMPLE STORIES, COMPLICATED HISTORY

Gordon is first and foremost a wonderful presence in American angling history. In my book, I went on at some length about his gifts as a thinker and writer. His writings, affectionately gathered in various editions of *The Complete Fly Fisherman* (1947, 1968, 1989) by the late John McDonald, are still a delight to read—thoughtful, humorous, sympathetic notes and letters that many modern anglers have enjoyed.<sup>6</sup> To me, he has always ranked with Roderick Haig-Brown, G. E. M. Skues, Arnold Gingrich, and Robert Traver as among our most companionable (to use a term of Gingrich's) fishing writers.

But a host of later fishing writers elevated this man to messianic stature as the premier figure in American angling history. In his introduction to the 1947 edition of *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, McDonald established the tone of later praise by asserting that Gordon "introduced and adapted the dry fly to the U.S.," maintaining that it was Gordon "who developed much of what we now do."<sup>7</sup> But the praise grew ever more expansive, so that by 1983, Austin Francis, in *Catskill Rivers*, could announce that "Gordon fully deserves to be known as 'the father of modern American angling.'"<sup>8</sup>

This is breathtaking hyperbole. It is a long way from fatherhood of the specific practice of dry-fly fishing to the abrupt single-handed Americanization of all kinds of fishing: deep-sea big-game fishing, trolling for lake trout, trot-lining for catfish, bait fishing for arctic grayling, plug-casting for muskies, snagging paddlefish, and all the

rest. But Gordon's stature among fishing writers increased with each generation, so that by the close of the twentieth century it was pretty easy to give this man credit for everything that all American anglers do.

Gordon's actual accomplishments, as splendid and admirable as they were, in no way approach this great-man view of American angling history. In my book, I explained why this story—or legend, or myth, or whatever we should call such a bald-faced distortion of reality—was not accurate history. Great fun, satisfying folklore, happily uncomplicated campfire tale—it was indeed all of these. But it wasn't true. The real events of Gordon's life were more complex and, therefore, more interesting.

### DID GORDON ACT ALONE?

McDonald shouldn't be blamed for all this excess, but he did start the ball rolling. In the introduction to the first edition of *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, McDonald attempted to establish one specific aspect of Gordon's role in American fly fishing. McDonald described Gordon's 1890 letter to the already-famous British dry-fly writer, Frederic Halford, whom Gordon asked for information about dry-fly fishing. According to McDonald, Halford answered Gordon's inquiry about dry flies, "enclosing a paper into which he clipped a full set of his dry flies, each carefully identified in pen and ink, and the dry fly winged its way to the New World."<sup>9</sup>

Various other writers picked up on the story of this apparently momentous day when the dry fly first reached our shores. What I objected to in *American Fly Fishing* was not merely that the story is



Mary Orvis Marbury's *Favorite Flies and Their Histories* (1892) featured a full-page chromolithograph of Halford dry-fly patterns. The Museum collection includes the original flies (right) from which the illustration was made. It is unknown if these flies were tied in England or America, but they demonstrate Orvis's acquaintance with the style and construction of Halfordian dry flies.

erroneous, but also that it is quite simplistic.

It is erroneous because by 1890, quite a few articles and books had already been published in America describing dry-fly fishing. These included writings by Halford himself, serialized from his 1886 book, *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them*, which were published in the popular periodical *The American Angler* in 1889.<sup>10</sup> Halford's first two books could be purchased in the United States before 1890. Mary Orvis Marbury pictured a full-page color set of Halford's flies in her enormously successful 1892 book *Favorite Flies and Their Histories*.<sup>11</sup> Gordon could hardly be given credit for bringing the first dry flies to America when so many other writers preceded him, and the flies were already commercially available (William Mills of New York and Charles Orvis of Vermont were already selling Halford-style dry flies

when Gordon wrote his letter to Halford).

It is simplistic because it removed Gordon from his historical context. He was only one of hundreds, even thousands, of inventive fly fishers who were well able to read the British and American press and experiment with new ideas. In my book I included some amazing illustrations from the published works of John Harrington Keene, who in the 1880s and early 1890s provided his American audience with a sound introduction to dry-fly theory and practice. Keene's *Fly-Fishing and Fly-Making* (1891), for example, featured drawings of a spent-wing spinner dry fly, extended-body dry flies, and the basics that you needed to know to tie and fish the Halford-style dry fly that Gordon was just then learning about.<sup>12</sup> Keene and Gordon were part of a movement in American angling, but were not the only ones.

## WHAT GORDON DIDN'T DO

Gordon wrote his articles, notes, and letters over a twenty-five-year period. He had no intention of producing a polished, whole "code" of fly fishing. I suspect that he may have had a greater influence on his contemporaries by appearing regularly in the sporting press year after year rather than just writing a single book, but neither he nor his readers could have perceived his writings as anything more cohesive than they were. Many of his notes were written for the *British Fishing Gazette*, and many others were never published; these would have had less of an effect on an American audience.

On the other hand, when McDonald expertly packed all this great reading and wisdom into one book, he gave the reader a whole different impression. When Gordon's writings were thus rediscovered



*Mary Orvis Marbury's Favorite Flies and Their Histories (1892) provided American fly fishers with their first full-color look at Halford's newly famous series of dry flies. The Marbury book went through several printings in the 1890s, and no doubt exposed many anglers to the Halford flies at the same time that Theodore Gordon and others were experimenting.*

ered by later generations of readers—all at once in one luscious big book—the material had a very different impact than it had on his original audience. Rather than being exposed to an occasional short piece by Gordon over the years, the new readers got a whole blast of Gordon at once, and it was pretty impressive.

But part of the reason it was so impressive was that these new readers knew little or nothing about the world in which Gordon wrote. Through much of its life, *Forest and Stream* was a biweekly, newspaper-format periodical, heavy with short notes such as Gordon's. It was not so much a magazine as a huge, complicated conversation among many sportsmen. And its conversation was complemented by similar dialogues in the other sporting periodicals, as well as in books. And of course for every published conversation there were no doubt thousands of casual unpublished ones along streams, in bars, and in sportsmen's clubs. Gordon was one voice amidst very many. I personally regard him as among the most productive, thoughtful, and eloquent of those many writers and talkers. I suspect he wrote more on the dry fly in the American press than any other writer of his time. But he was not alone.

In 1947, the new readers of Gordon had little or no feel for that history. The implication of *The Complete Fly Fisherman's* publication was that this man Gordon stood alone—surrounded by unthinking,

primitive anglers who dully flogged the water with silly, ineffective wet flies.

Of course American dry flies are not the only "first" with which Gordon has been credited. Since the 1947 publication of Gordon's writings, various authors have acclaimed him as the original hatch-matcher and angling entomologist; as the inventor of the first American nymph patterns; as the originator of the streamer; as a pioneer trout-stream conservationist; and as the originator of the entire American tradition of dry-fly tying, or at least the influential "Catskill school" of dry flies.<sup>13</sup>

None of these claims are true. Gordon was, indeed, a participant in all these angling enterprises; in some cases he may even have had a meaningful influence. But with the exception of dry-fly theory, he was never a leading force in these matters. In fact, other anglers, including quite a few angling writers, were experimenting with all these things at least as energetically as Gordon.

Let's consider the achievements that have been attributed Gordon, mentioned a moment ago.

His contribution to angling entomology consists almost entirely of informal observations of bugs he saw. He never claimed any distinction in this field (or any other, for that matter; I think he would be stunned by the modern adoration of him), though he probably inspired other anglers to study entomology more formally.

His contribution to nymph theory

seems to consist of slight experiments resulting in no recognizably new or different fly patterns, fly styles, or fishing methods passed on to later fly fishers. Almost all of Gordon's written comments on nymphs occur in his correspondence with the British fishing writer G. E. M. Skues; these letters had no American audience until *The Complete Fly Fisherman* was published. Judging from his correspondence with Skues, he appears to have been interested in nymphs for at least the last three years of his life (it is impossible to know who all Gordon talked to about any angling subject not included in his writings; it is risky to assume that his only potential influence was through his writings).

His contribution to streamer development was one minor regional fly pattern created several generations after British and American writers had begun describing forage fish imitations, and contemporary with more far-reaching developments in streamer design on other North American waters.

His foremost contribution to conservation was to complain energetically in print on several occasions about the problems facing trout streams. But he did this half a century after other American anglers began making similar complaints in print, and at a time when thousands of American anglers were already banding together in organizations to promote better management of natural resources. As a twenty-five-year student of American conservation histo-

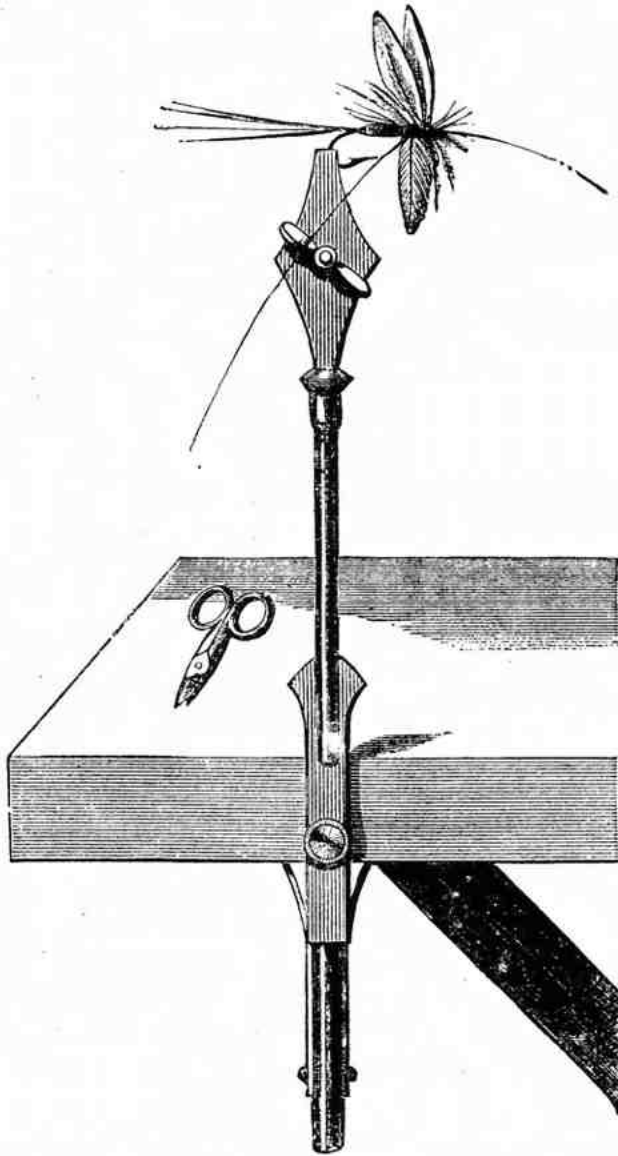


Fig. 26.—FLY VISE.

An engraving of what Keene referred to as "the best form of vise" as it appears on page 65 in his book, *Fly-Fishing and Fly-Making*, published in 1891.



Engraving of John Harrington Keene from the October 1888 issue of *Wildwood's magazine* (vol. 1, no. 6, frontispiece).

ry, it is especially irksome to find Gordon being given this credit. At a time when so many people were devoting significant parts of their lives and energies to conservation, giving Gordon great credit on the basis of such a minor contribution is almost willfully unkind to historical reality and to the people who were doing the real work.

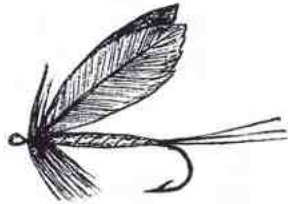
Gordon has been called the father of a distinct style of fly tying that grew into the well-known Catskill style of dry flies,

which is perhaps the most defensible of the contributions that have been attributed to him. But as I explained in *American Fly Fishing*, there are problems even with this claim. In summary, the Catskill style is typically portrayed as a bigger and more ambitious break from the British dry-fly tradition than it was.<sup>14</sup> The differences between fly styles are often subtle, and I think that Gordon's champions have overstated how much Gordon actually achieved in

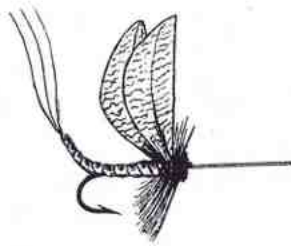
modifying some Halford-style patterns to meet American needs. The Catskill dry fly is indeed a splendid aesthetic statement, as well as being a fine fish catcher, but I suppose we have to ask ourselves just how important these changes were. To some they are obviously very important, but I remain uncertain about it. Moreover, as I explained at length in my book, the modern Catskill dry fly seems at least as much the product of later creative tyers as of anything Gordon did. He seems only to have started the style on its way to what it became.

When I read Gordon's lively, thoughtful little ruminations on fly tying, I am struck especially by how flexible his concept of the fly pattern was. He was always experimenting, and he seems to have regarded some individual fly patterns as quite variable. Thus I suspect that to him a pattern like the Quill Gordon was only a start—he would reshape or repropotion it as needed. This is of course a looser, and perhaps more demanding, approach to the whole idea of fly pattern than is suggested by the more rigid

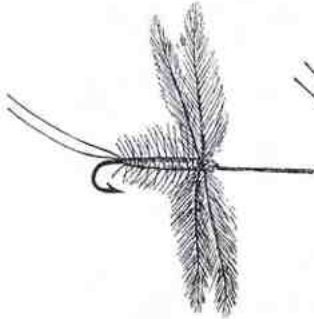




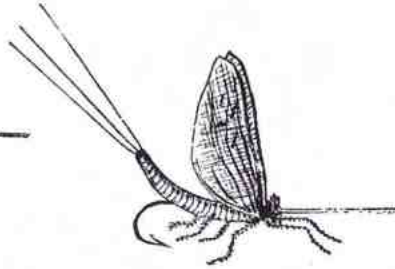
The straw-bodied fly.



The extended-cork body fly.

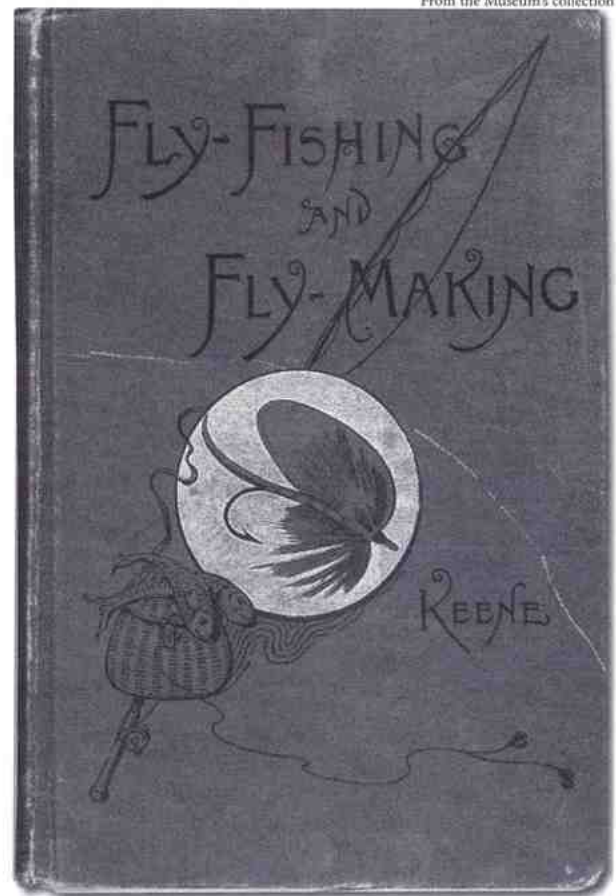


The hackle-point spinner.



The exact imitation fly.

In *Fly-Fishing and Fly-Making* (1891), John Harrington Keene illustrated several styles of floating flies, including an extended-cork-body fly, an "exact imitation" fly, a straw-bodied (possibly raffia) floating fly, and a hackle-point spinner with a palmered body. Keene and other writers of the 1880s and 1890s exposed American angling readers to a variety of approaches to the dry flies just then being popularized in England.



approach of later generations. Commerce, fashion, and our need to get something just right—to be certain we had the pattern *exactly right*—all worked against such flexibility, and within a generation of Gordon's time his favorite flies, if they were still for sale, were standardized. I'm not sure that was what Gordon always intended, and I'm not sure it was an improvement. Some local Gordon expert could do some good work by exploring this question of Gordon's approach to flexibility versus standardization in fly tying. Were there flies he seemed to think he had "just right" and others that he saw as more elastic in their design or components?

I think it can be successfully argued that Gordon might represent an intermediate stage between Halford's flies and the Catskill style of fly so beautifully interpreted by the later works of Reuben Cross, Preston Jennings, Walt and Winnie Dette, Elsie and Harry Darbee, Art Flick, and others. At the same time, it does seem clear that Gordon did at the very least inspire

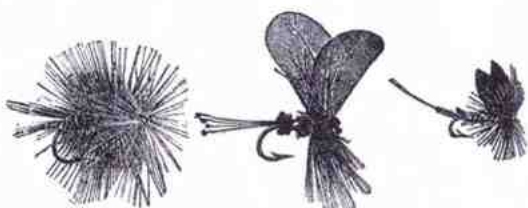
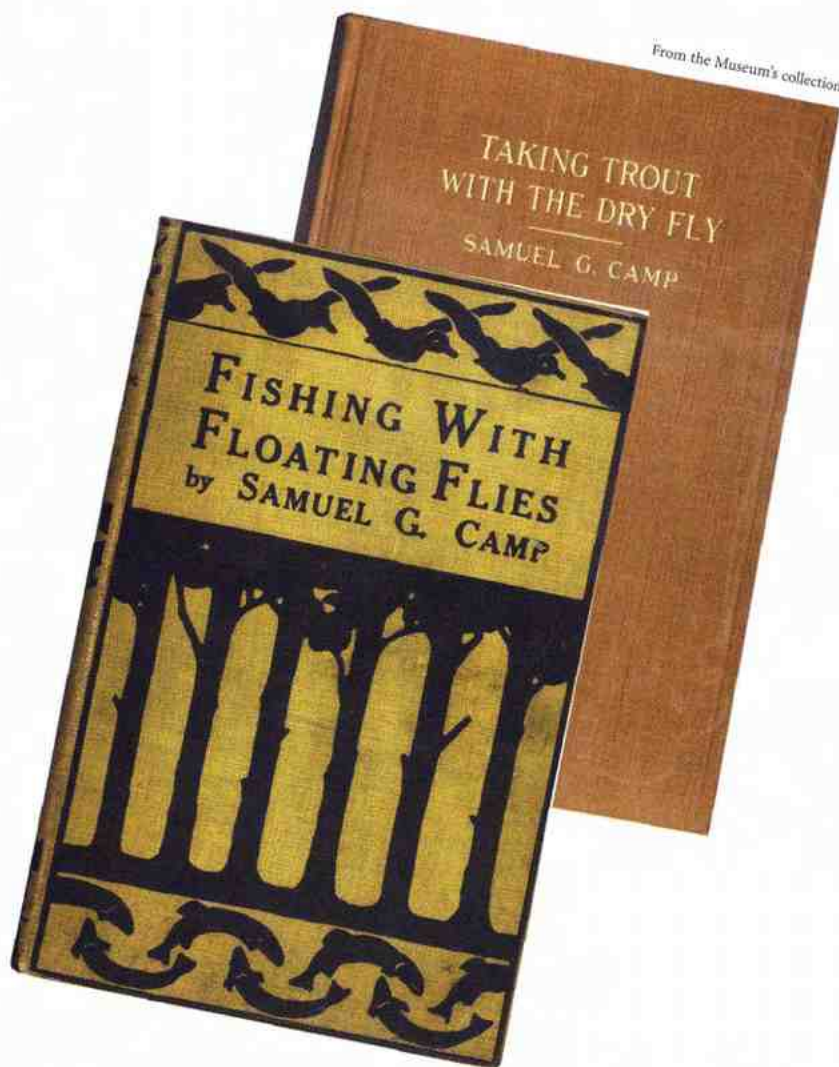
some gifted tyers to firm up the specifics of this style. But the Quill Gordon dry fly you buy in a modern tackle shop isn't necessarily what Gordon had in mind.

Even if we give Gordon credit for the Catskill-style dry fly, it's a long way from that to his somehow being "the father of the American dry fly." The variety of dry flies available to today's anglers show a great range of influences. The "traditional" style flies, like the "Catskill" versions of the Light Cahill and the March Brown, seem to owe much if not most of their form and structure to British styles. And other American patterns—such as the original Adams (from Michigan), the various down-wing caddisfly and stonefly imitations, the haystacks and comparaduns, the parachutes, the bivisibles, the humpies, the Wulffs, the "thorax" style dries of Vincent Marinaro, and the no-hackles of Doug Swisher and Carl Richards—are pretty far removed from the direction that Gordon wanted to take the dry fly. It is difficult to find the line of thought or theory that connects all these fly styles to Gordon, and it

seems a parochial error to assume that Gordon's flies somehow influenced all these others just because his style predated them. The traditional Catskill dry fly's greatest influence on most of these other fly styles may be that they were reactions against it—they were attempts to overcome its perceived failures. Now there's an ironic legacy for you.

That's it. That is how I see what Gordon didn't do. In all but one of the claims made for him, Gordon was clearly a minor player in a big show. He was certainly more important in regional dry-fly development, but exactly how important is still in question.

For the most part, the revisions of the Gordon story that I offered in my book seem to have gone uncontested. As far as I know, at least, none of the more egregiously spurious claims on behalf of Gordon—the nymphs, streamers, and all of that—have been defended against my analysis. I guess that's progress, but frankly I admire Gordon so much I wouldn't mind having been proven wrong on some of these things. He has an



Bivisible hackle, fanwing, and conventional dry flies.

*Samuel G. Camp (above) published two of the first American books on dry-fly fishing, Fishing with Floating Flies (1913) and Taking Trout with the Dry Fly (1930). His practical advice, like that of other early dry-fly authors, such as Emlyn Gill and George LaBranche, revealed little or no debt to the works of Theodore Gordon, suggesting that the American dry-fly tradition has been more complex than typically portrayed.*

irresistible folkloric heroism about him.

### FINALLY GETTING PAST THE SIMPLE VIEW

Gordon as the father of American dry-fly fishing is a deeply felt notion, and there has been extreme sensitivity to any attempt to reconsider it. In *The Henryville Flyfishers* (1998), Ernest Schwiebert defended the old view of Gordon as the true wellspring of American dry-fly fishing, citing Charles Wetzel's *American Fishing Books* (1950).

Wetzel clearly anticipated the allegations of later historians, who have argued that the dry-fly method was well-entrenched in American trout fishing circles before Theodore Gordon. Wetzel clearly refutes such arguments with such artifacts as a catalogue supplement, in which William

Mills & Son introduced its first dry flies with considerable fanfare in 1888. The venerable New York firm had begun with English ownership, and still prided itself on its old ties to the United Kingdom. There is little likelihood that William Mills & Son would have waited until 1888 to introduce dry flies in the United States, with such excitement and panache, had the method been commonplace on our waters.<sup>15</sup>

Schwiebert mounts an intriguing argument. It is impossible to tell from this passage whether he is aware of the many other pre-1890 published mentions of the dry fly in America, because he only refers to the Mills announcement. But the Mills announcement is a nice start. It came only two years after the publication of Halford's first book, of course, and the "fanfare" would have

been associated with providing American anglers with a handy source of Halford's suddenly famous flies.

But Halford's flies, as Andrew Herd abundantly demonstrates in his article (page 12), were hardly the beginning of the dry fly in England. And of course dry flies, and less formally defined floating flies of other types (I considered many of the latter in my book), were mentioned in the American press well before the 1888 Mills announcement.

But let's deal with Schwiebert's argument in light of McDonald's 1947 claim that the dry fly came to America in 1890, when Halford sent some to Gordon. Thankfully, Schwiebert overcomes the McDonald claim by demonstrating that dry flies were known and available in the United States in 1888, two years before

the Halford letter was sent. This is good progress; it admits that the dry fly could not have “winged its way to the New World,” as McDonald put it, with Halford’s 1890 letter. The dry fly was already here, and had been for some years. Having as distinguished and influential a fly-fishing writer as Ernest Schwiebert demonstrate that point is very helpful.

But Schwiebert’s comments raise another issue. I don’t know which other “later historians” Schwiebert was referring to, but I’m not one of them. Anyone who reads my book will see that I did not suggest that “the dry-fly method was well entrenched in American trout fishing before Theodore Gordon.” Neither did I say it was “commonplace.” Quite the contrary—though I pointed out much evidence that floating flies, as well as the more formally defined “dry flies” of Halfordian fame, were known and used for years in the United States before 1890, I specifically stated that the actual popularity of these patterns is difficult to determine.<sup>16</sup>

The greatest limitation of a New York-based fishing-publishing industry, and of a likewise New York-based angling writing society, has been that the Catskills tended to be treated as the center of the angling universe to the exclusion of what was going on elsewhere. So, as I explained in my book, it’s hard to know what to make of various claims that the dry fly was or was not popular in Gordon’s time. Nobody was doing real surveys; these were just fishing writers, talking about what their acquaintances were up to.

It is also encouraging to see that McDonald himself, in a new introduction to the 1989 edition of *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, backed away from the simplistic view of the dry fly arriving here with Halford’s 1890 letter to Gordon. In response to the writings of British angling historian Jack Heddon, McDonald actually reviewed a few of the pre-1890 sources that I had mentioned two years earlier, in *American Fly Fishing*.<sup>17</sup> This was a big step, too. Gordon’s contemporaries and predecessors in dry-fly theory—people whose existence McDonald seemed to deny in the earlier editions—were at least acknowledged in the 1989 introduction.

Oddly, this 1989 edition of *The Complete Fly Fisherman* also retained the introduction to the 1947 edition, with its insistence that the “dry fly winged its way to the New World” as an enclosure in Halford’s 1890 letter to Gordon.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the earlier introduction was

kept in the book for historical completeness; the book is, after all, nearly a historic document itself. But the effect of internal disagreement between the two introductions is kind of messy.

That aside, in the 1989 introduction McDonald also appeared to be arguing along the same lines as Schwiebert in that he seemed to want to make the case that these pre-Gordon American flirtations with the dry fly, even if they did happen, were of no consequence. He attempted to disregard Keene, for example, as a failed pioneer who gave up on persuading Americans to use dry flies.<sup>19</sup>

Well, that’s not an irrational argument. I think it causes McDonald to underestimate Keene’s actual and potential influence, but on the other hand, those of us who have studied and written about Keene (David Ledlie has done the best work) have never claimed that he made great progress in convincing American anglers to take up the dry fly.<sup>20</sup> We only established that Keene was, like Gordon, part of a complex process of change in American angling (Gordon, after all, owned a copy of Keene’s book, and it seems certain that Keene must have influenced Gordon more than Gordon influenced Keene). Keene wasn’t the only writer to claim that the dry fly would never “take” in America.

Considering how determined Gordon’s promoters have been to believe that he operated in a vacuum, I’m just grateful that McDonald acknowledged the existence of people like Keene. At least now we all agree that the dry fly didn’t flap its little wings across the Atlantic Ocean in 1890. That’s a start. Later, maybe we can all admit that Gordon wasn’t the only American bright enough to like dry flies in the 1880s and 1890s.

## THE PATERNITY PROBLEM

But there is still this whole matter of calling someone the father of something as diffuse as dry-fly fishing (I’m simply discarding all broader claims that have been made for Gordon—such as his being “the father of American fly fishing,” or “the father of American angling”—as absurd). To get at this difficult concept, it helps to look back at what happened at the end of Gordon’s career.

The first three books on American dry-fly fishing were Emlyn Gill’s *Practical Dry-Fly Fishing* (1912), Samuel Camp’s *Fishing with Floating Flies* (1913), and George LaBranche’s *The Dry Fly and Fast Water* (1914).<sup>21</sup> In other words, by the time of Gordon’s death in 1915, three

books on dry-fly fishing had already appeared.

But none of the three acknowledge, or in any way reveal, the slightest debt to Theodore Gordon’s lifelong accumulation of writings on dry flies. In fact, the most important and enduring of these first three books, LaBranche’s little masterpiece, was defiantly opposed to Gordon’s approach to dry-fly fishing. If Gordon was the sole center of this movement, why such an omission in print? Of course it could only happen because Gordon was not the sole center, and because he was not the only person thinking creatively about the dry fly. Some of the others took dry-fly fishing in directions he didn’t even like. Let’s consider LaBranche.

In *The Henryville Fly Fishers*, Ernest Schwiebert says “[Edward Ringwood] Hewitt and LaBranche often stopped to visit Gordon in the years before his death.”<sup>22</sup> According to LaBranche, however, writing in a manuscript fragment I quoted in my book, he met Gordon “but three times.”<sup>23</sup> It is risky to equate acquaintance and mutual admiration between these men with agreement on how to fish. Though LaBranche did correspond with Gordon for years, and praised Gordon generously (in an obituary letter he wrote at the time of Gordon’s death, he said that Gordon was “perhaps, the greatest student of fly-fishing in this country, and without exception the best fly tier I have ever known”), the two men disagreed strongly about how to fish dry flies.<sup>24</sup> Here, for example, is what LaBranche said of his theoretical differences with Gordon, from the same unpublished manuscript fragment quoted above.

We discussed fishing naturally—and when I told him that I was fishing a dry fly on any part of the water rather than confining my efforts to the still water of pools, or slow running currents, he told me that I was belittling [*the manuscript is unclear on this word, but this seems the most likely choice*] the theory of dry fly fishing. He agreed with G. A. B. Dewar and Halford that what I was doing was an affectation and that the dry fly should be used on slow flowing water over rising fish only. I was upset more than a little, but persevered with my idea.<sup>25</sup>

Despite LaBranche’s affirmative assessment of Gordon’s importance in American fly fishing, other authorities of the time believed that LaBranche himself was even more important, at least when it came to dry-fly fishing. When LaBranche serialized *The Dry Fly and Fast Water* in *Field & Stream* in 1912,

the editor of that magazine said this.

If any man in America deserves the title The American Halford, it is without doubt Mr. George LaBranche, who has been for many years the foremost champion of the dry fly in America. What Mr. LaBranche has to offer is not a re-hash of the writings of Dewar, Halford and other British authors but his own practical dry fly experience on American trout streams.<sup>26</sup>

The editor went on to reveal that he knew (or admitted to knowing) about very few other expert dry-fly fishers in America (*Field & Stream* had already published a series of articles on the dry fly by Gill, which the editor saw as introducing LaBranche's more advanced work). It is hard to know to what extent the editor was thumbing his nose at his competitors, especially *Forest and Stream*, where Gordon regularly published. Perhaps the editor was in fact criticizing other American dry-fly writers, including Gordon, for too slavishly following the lead of British anglers. Or it could have been that Gordon's writings just hadn't made that big a splash for the editor of another magazine to know about him. In any case, here we have LaBranche, not Gordon, being treated as the foremost American dry-fly expert—as the father figure for the movement.

Preston Jennings, whose *A Book of Trout Flies* (1935) finally provided an angler's entomology for Gordon's waters, was annoyed and unconvinced by the bing of adoration that arose from the 1947 publication of *The Complete Fly Fisherman*. He couldn't understand what Gordon contributed that justified so much attention.<sup>27</sup>

So even in devising American approaches to the dry fly Gordon was not acting alone, and was not universally recognized as a leader. Does this prove that Gordon was unimportant? Of course not. He had his admirers and promoters too. Fishing history, like other history, is complicated. What we have here is a diffuse, involved movement that cannot be characterized as simply as many writers would prefer.

What we also have here is a case of very confused patrimony. If we have to name a "father" of the American dry fly—and it goes against my historian grain to participate in such a superficial exercise—it appears to me that the only possible approach is to follow the example of the nation itself, which celebrates many founding fathers.

Dry-fly fishing today is a blend of the contributions of many people. Most of us who fish with dry flies, however much

we may have personalized our approach, are hugely indebted to Halford, which means we are indebted to all the people Halford learned from. The dry flies we use today come from many overlapping traditions, including the Catskills. LaBranche's "fishing the water" is as widely practiced as the "fishing the rise" approach espoused by Halford and Gordon. The dry fly is still a work in progress, much too rich in variation and opinion for us to replace it with some cardboard-cutout version in which one or two people dictated the whole thing to a grateful world.

Gordon was a part, and sometimes an important part, of this process. I doubt that a majority of American fly fishers would agree with Gordon Wickstrom's recent assertion that Gordon's namesake dry fly, the Quill Gordon, "remains essential to any well-appointed fly box," but Wickstrom's greater point is valid—the Quill Gordon is a permanent part of our fly-fishing tradition.<sup>28</sup>

So, for better or worse, is the Gordon mythos. In one form or another, it will probably endure, for reasons well explained in Ken Cameron's essay on history and myth (page 18) and exemplified in Andrew Herd's article on the correspondingly simplistic myth that has grown up around Halford (page 12).

## WHAT WE OWE

We owe it to our history to think about it more carefully. We owe it to each other as enthusiasts of history to discuss it from a basis of information. As cynical as I sometimes become about the way we have treated our fishing history, I am still surprised at people who are willing to disagree with my positions based solely on secondhand reports of those positions. They owe it to themselves, if not to me, at least to read what I have said before rushing to disagree. They may even discover that we do not disagree at all. Besides, fly fishers disagree about everything else; why shouldn't we disagree about our history?

But at some point, if you find this debate interesting, you simply have to stop reading our wranglings. You owe it to Gordon to read him. See what he said and what he did. Get to know an American original. Follow him up and down his little rivers. Puzzle with him over the tough casts, the failed fly patterns, the mysteries of trout behavior. The company has never been better or the fishing more fulfilling.

Then, if you still haven't had enough, read Gordon's contemporaries and pre-

decessors. Search out the books of Francis Francis, Frederic Halford, John Harrington Keene, David Foster, Thaddeus Norris, and other British and American writers who dealt with the dry fly in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> Find the periodicals in which others wrote on the subject. It's a fascinating, informative, and lively conversation.

We owe Gordon something else. It's time for some insightful, informed fisherman—familiar with Gordon's world and his rivers—to remake his book. The McDonald edition of Gordon's writings, for all its pleasures, is the raw material for another, more accessible book. John McDonald correctly said that "Gordon produced no system, no manual, no treatise, and indeed no book," but what he did leave us has a great deal more coherence than we have perhaps been willing to acknowledge.<sup>30</sup> Someone should reorganize the relevant portions of *The Complete Fly Fisherman* by subject: the fly patterns (this was done years ago in *Fly Fisherman* magazine, so a start has been made), the insects, the fishing techniques, the stream lore, the tackle advice, and so on.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps a different expert could be recruited to compile each of these chapters and to provide helpful commentary.

This "new" book would not replace the McDonald book. Indeed, it would probably be much smaller and less "complete" because it might leave out a lot of Gordon's less technical conversations. But it would complement the bigger book in an important way. It would honor the instructional and theoretical legacy of one of American sport's most singular characters. It might also give us some new insights into our own need for heroes, legends, and rivers where a lonely, gifted angler could somehow, beyond all odds and expectations, wade quietly into immortality.



*AUTHOR'S NOTE: I thank Ken Cameron and Andrew Herd for conversation, insights, and advice on the matters of history, myth, and fly-fishing heroes, and for reading the manuscript. I again thank the American Museum of Fly Fishing for supporting the writing of my book American Fly Fishing: A History.*

## ENDNOTES

1. Paul Schullery, *American Fly Fishing: A History* (New York: Nick Lyons Books, 1987). All royalties from this book go to the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

2. The reigning edition of the *Treatyse* for some years has been John McDonald, *The Origins of Angling* (New York: Doubleday, 1963). I made an effort to summarize the current state of knowledge about the *Treatyse*, and the mythology that has grown up around it, in *Royal Coachman: The Lore and Legends of Fly Fishing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 33–41.

3. Richard Hoffmann's scholarly output on medieval fly fishing, fisheries management, and fish culture, which seemed unparalleled even in the mid-1980s when I was writing *American Fly Fishing*, now almost defies summary. A few representative and very useful items include "A New Treatise on the *Treatyse*," *The American Fly Fisher*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1982, 2–6; "Fishing for Sport in Medieval Europe: New Evidence," *Speculum*, vol. 60, no. 4, 1985, 877–902; *Fisher's Craft and Lettered Art: Tracts on Fishing from the End of the Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); "The Craft of Fishing Alpine Lakes, ca. 1500," *Offa*, vol. 15, 1994, 308–12; and "The Evidence for Early European Angling III: Conrad Gessner's Artificial Flies, 1558," *The American Fly Fisher*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1995, 2–11.

4. The late Joe Bates, surely the foremost fly-fishing encyclopedist, as well as author of many acclaimed books, also took this view in *Streamers and Bucktails: The Big Fish Flies* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1979), stating that "Sport fishing in America is a development of the nineteenth century. Before that fish were caught only for food, and refinements in tackle were almost unknown" (p. 20). Austin McK. Francis, *Catskill Rivers: Birthplace of American Fly Fishing* (New York: Nick Lyons Books/Winchester Press, 1983), in discussing the early history of fishing on the Esopus in the Catskills, said, "In 1830, as sport fishing was just beginning to catch on in this country, the Esopus already had a boarding-house, run by Milo Barber in Shandaken, which catered to anglers from the city" (p. 187). It seems clear from the context that Francis was referring to the nation when he said "this country."

5. In *American Fly Fishing*, pp. 13–17, I cite historians who deal with this subject, as well as providing numerous examples of colonial fishermen. For a recent scholarly perspective on colonial fishing, see Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995). Daniels said that "Fishing immediately became—and remained through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—New England's most popular sporting pastime. . . . All males seemed to have fished in seventeenth-century New England" (pp. 168–70). He made it quite clear that these were recreational anglers, even though some were also commercial fishers of one sort or another, a fact that apparently just strengthened the respectability of sport angling.

6. All three editions of the Gordon book—Scribner's 1947, Theodore Gordon Flyfishers' 1968, and Nick Lyons Books' 1989—were published in New York.

7. McDonald, *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, 1989, xliii. All subsequent quotations from McDonald will be from the 1989 edition, which contains the texts of the earlier editions, as described, as well as new material. Among its outstanding features, for which serious readers will be ever grateful, is a large and very helpful index.

8. Francis, *Catskill Rivers*, 46. Ernest Schwiebert, *The Henryville Flyfishers: A Chronicle of American Fly Fishing* (Far Hills, N.J.: Meadow Run Press, 1998), 8, claimed for Thaddeus Norris the title of "father of American fly fishing."

Assigning the parenthood of as complex an institution as a sport to one person is a deeply problematic exercise in the first place. In angling writing, such paternity announcements appear to be more the result of personality cults than of any attempt to establish evidence that such a grand claim could be made for any one individual. Why Norris, rather than any of several other writers who preceded him (some of whom made more substantial contributions to fly-fishing theory than Norris) should be accorded this distinction is not clear, but then it is also unclear what "fatherhood" is meant to include. Every attempt to create such simplistic "lineages" in theory, from, say, Norris to Gordon to Jennings, or any similar line, leaves out much more than it includes and encourages a shallow view of a complex history.

9. McDonald, *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, liii.  
10. The Halford excerpts in *The American Angler* began in January 1889. Among the many other earlier published American references to the dry fly was British writer and editor Robert Marston's essay, "Dry-Fly Fishing," which appeared in *The American Angler* on 27 June 1885.

11. Mary Orvis Marbury, *Favorite Flies and Their Histories* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1892). Plate V, entitled "Frederic M. Halford's Floating Flies for Dry-Fly Fishing," is discussed generally by Marbury on pages 379–82. Marbury also briefly mentioned dry flies on page 37, near the end of the 38-page introduction that reviewed her understanding of angling entomology, and included many extended quotations from various British fly-fishing authorities. Judging from the somewhat distant tone of her narrative, I suspect that Marbury had, as of 1892, little personal experience with dry flies. But her book was enormously popular and exposed many anglers to the existence of dry flies.

12. David Ledlie, "Dry Flies on the Ondawa: The Tragic Tale of John Harrington Keene," *The American Fly Fisher*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1986, 8–17. Ledlie's research on Keene was outstanding and resulted in a much more complete and understandable portrait of this interesting figure in American fly fishing.

13. Thomas Capstick Jr., in "The Gordon Legacy" (*Fly Fisherman Magazine*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1980, 24–25), wrote that Gordon "was the principal architect of American fly fishing. Gordon first matched American natural insects with furs and feathers. He was the first to suggest angling for salmon with the dry fly. He was an innovator, and originator, a master angler, our leading fly-tier, and the undisputed father of dry-fly fishing in America" (p. 24). Richard Eggert, "the Gordon Heritage," *Fly Fisherman*, Spring 1974, 60–61, exemplified the extremes to which angling writers stretched their adoration of Gordon with no regard for historical reality. Eggert said that "Gordon brought dry fly development to a level very near its current state, played around with Skues nymphs, revitalized the traditional downstream wet fly and developed the streamer (his Bumblepuppy)." On page 57 of the same work, Eggert devoted several paragraphs to explaining the breadth and strength of Gordon's work in angling entomology. On page 63, Eggert claims for Gordon a pioneering role as a conservationist and ecologist: "Gordon was perhaps the first popular writer to realize that the river is just the circulatory system of the watershed, and that if the pulse is weak it is the watershed itself that is sick."

Only someone with literally no acquaintance with the rest of angling literature in Gordon's era could make these kind of hyperbolic claims. My favorite among them, for sheer absurdity, must be

that Gordon somehow "revitalized" the wet fly, which was at that time enjoying a glorious and universal popularity, and had never been more vital.

14. Schullery, *American Fly Fishing*, 117–19.  
15. Schwiebert, *The Henryville Flyfishers*, 37.  
16. Schullery, *American Fly Fishing*, 109.  
17. McDonald, *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, xxxvi–xl.

18. *Ibid.*, liii.  
19. *Ibid.*, xxxix–xl.  
20. Ledlie, "Dry Flies on the Ondawa."  
21. Emlyn Gill, *Practical Dry-Fly Fishing* (New York: Scribner's, 1912); Samuel Camp, *Fishing with Floating Flies* (New York: Outing, 1913); George LaBranche, *The Dry Fly and Fast Water* (New York: Scribner's, 1914). Henry Bruns, *Angling Books of the Americas* (Atlanta, Georgia: Angler's Press, 1975), 381, lists a small book by Louis Rhead, *How to Fish the Dry Fly* (Brooklyn: privately printed, 1912). This 31-page work could be included as a fourth early dry-fly book, though I have never seen a copy and have no way, so far, of knowing the size of its audience. Certainly Rhead's much-maligned *American Trout Stream Insects* (New York: Frederick Stokes, 1916) had much use to dry-fly anglers, at least in its portraits of the actual insects being imitated. Rhead's failure to follow conventional nomenclature, and his unusual series of imitations, have often been blamed for the lack of respect this book apparently received, and it is largely forgotten today. This may or may not be entirely fair, because the insect illustrations are vivid and relatively convincing for the time. I have long said that some knowledgeable eastern angler should attempt to match Rhead's insect illustrations with known hatches to see just how far off base, or on target, he might have been.

22. Schwiebert, *The Henryville Flyfishers*, 23.  
23. Schullery, *American Fly Fishing*, 119.

24. McDonald, *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, 549; Schullery, *American Fly Fishing*, 119.  
25. *Ibid.*, 120.

26. "Editor's Note" at the beginning of George M. L. LaBranche, "The Dry Fly in America," *Field & Stream*, June 1912, 133. Francis, *Catskill Rivers*, 46–47, described the falling out and rivalry that developed between LaBranche and Gill after the publication of their books. He also pointed out that Gill had, in his book, noted that H. B. McClelland, a British writer, had introduced the notion of creating an "artificial" hatch by repeatedly casting over a fish before LaBranche popularized the idea. LaBranche was later to also have a debate and rivalry with Louis Rhead.

27. Schullery, *American Fly Fishing*, 120.  
28. Gordon Wickstrom, "The Presence of Theodore Gordon," *The American Fly Fisher*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2001, 4.

29. Schullery, *American Fly Fishing*, 266–73, is a succinct bibliography of important works on American fly-fishing history, and of important American fly-fishing books and British books that were especially influential in America.

30. McDonald, *The Complete Fly Fisherman*, xix.

31. Eggert, "the Gordon Heritage," 58–59. The Eggert article is his revised reprint (thus I prefer to cite it, as the author's most considered version) of a three-part article that had appeared in *Fly Fisherman* in 1969. Someone reorganizing Gordon's writings should probably go back to the originals in *Forest and Stream*, the *Fishing Gazette*, and other publications. I have the impression that McDonald may necessarily have edited out extraneous material from some of the articles; if so, then a new editor will need to look at the full texts.

# Frederic M. Halford: The Myth and the Man

by Andrew Herd

Courtesy of the Flyfishers' Club, London, with permission.



*This picture was taken about 1880 on the steps of the Royal Hotel, Winchester. It shows the sort of attire and tackle that we know Frederic Halford chose for his first venture in fly fishing. Note how long the rods are and the narrow-spindle, large-arbor reels that were still in favor at the time. This photograph is of interest because Francis Francis is standing in the back row, second from right. John Morgan of the Flyfishers' Club, 69 Brook Street, London, would be grateful if anyone could identify the other fishermen present.*

UNTIL RECENTLY, you could walk into any British tackle shop and find a box full of extraordinary looking little mayflies, with vaulting mallard fan wings and dumpy little raffia bodies. They stick in my memory because they are hell to cast on anything but the most rigid tippet, and I have spent many happy hours undoing the stubborn leader twists they encourage. Two still rest on the very far left corner of my tying desk among a pile of other junk, and I am curiously reluctant to move them. I began my dry-fly fishing career with those patterns, and in so doing, I unwittingly stood in line at the end of a long queue of anglers at whose head stood Frederic Halford. The odds are that unless you tie only with synthet-

ics and hair, you stand in that queue, too, a beneficiary of the legacy of a man who has become a myth. The question to address is exactly what that legacy was. Nearly a century after Halford's death, fact and fable are so densely intertwined that some of our most informed fishing writers consistently fail to distinguish between the two.

Halford was born in 1844 into a wealthy Midlands family that moved to London when he was seven years old. He began fishing at a very early age, and an account of his first catch—a two-ounce perch on a worm—is told with a wry candor that sets it apart from the Olympian tone of his later writing. From that undersized perch he graduated to fishing over the banisters for his parents'

housemaids' caps and then to bait fishing on the Thames and central London lakes such as the Serpentine. These were happy years in which he pretty much devoted himself to his sport—and knowing the obsessional sort of character he was, we can be pretty certain that he was good at it.<sup>1</sup>

In 1868 came a turning point when a friend invited him to fly fish the river Wandle, then a crystal-clear stream with excellent hatches. Halford was absolutely bursting with enthusiasm to try something new, and he purchased the latest angling technology: an eleven-foot, four-piece, single-handed trout rod with a hickory butt and cane top, a plaited silk and hair line, and a large box full of wet flies. On his first visit he fished down-

Courtesy of the Flyfishers' Club, London, with permission.



*Frederic Halford (left) and William Senior relaxing on the banks of the river. Senior was the angling editor of *The Field*. I can only speculate why they were making such a mess of the place.*

stream and failed miserably, but, typical of Halford, he asked for advice.

The local anglers at once impressed upon us the necessity of "fishing dry," and very little explanation sufficed to teach us the crude meaning of this expression. We gradually worked out approximately the number of false casts required to free the fly from moisture, and were soon converted to the doctrine of waiting for rising trout, spotting them and fishing them; and before the early part of the season was passed had killed some fair fish, and were exceedingly keen for this form of fly fishing.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of Halford playing Venator to an unnamed dry-fly expert will come as a surprise to those who think of him as the originator of the technique, but it

is indisputably true that dry-fly fishing was well established by the time Halford first came to use it. The term, complete with hyphenation, was first used in a much-quoted paragraph written by George P. R. Pulman in 1841.

Now, it is impossible to make a soaked artificial fly swim upon the water as the natural flies do, so that, when cast by the angler to a fish thus occupied, it most commonly escapes his notice, engaged as he is with "things above," by sinking in the water beneath him. This is plain, because if a wet and heavy fly be exchanged for a dry and light one, and passed in artist-like style over the feeding fish, it will, partly from the simple circumstance of its buoyancy, be taken, in nine cases out of ten, as greedily as the living insect itself. We admit, however, that to ensure this, imita-

tion of the predominant species, at least as regards colour and size, is required; opining that if the dry-fly be widely different in these respects, the fish will be *surprised and startled* at the novelty presented, and suspend feeding until the appearance of its known and familiar prey.<sup>3</sup>

This early version of the method, despite the difficulty of fishing a dry fly on a wet line, became very popular, and it will surprise many American readers that the much-neglected Thaddeus Norris described it in 1864.<sup>4</sup> Francis Francis described the dry fly as being "greatly used" in southern England in 1867.<sup>5</sup> The first detailed and complete description of the method that I can find was made by Harry Cholmondeley-Pennell in 1870—only two years after



*George Selwyn Marryat: one of the greatest fly fishermen who ever lived, and Halford's companion and mentor in the early years.*

Halford met the first dry-fly fisherman he had ever seen and sixteen years before he published his first book on the subject.

Some fishermen who use the dry-fly consider it is not properly dried without a little crack or "flick" taking place at the end of the spread; but this "flick" though doubtless very artistic, often whips off the fly. A stiff rod with a tolerably pliant top is best for the purpose. The dry-fly being presented to the fish in the same way as the natural fly, is most killing when the particular natural fly imitated (which is commonly the May-fly) is on the water. Smaller flies are made, but it is found difficult in practise to "float" them; and, indeed, the whole process is cumbersome, and is only worth practising on rivers where the fish are very large and wary, or cannot be taken in any other way.<sup>6</sup>

Note that Cholmondely-Pennell describes paired, upright quill-slip wings, tied with the convex surfaces of the feather together, an invention which is often credited to Halford and George Selwyn Marryat; and that with the exception of greasing the line, Cholmondely-

Pennell describes all of the features that we associate with the dry-fly method Halford learned to favor, right down to the desirability of only casting to rising fish.

So if Halford did not invent the dry fly, who did? One self-professed claimant is James Ogden, who was tying pioneering patterns as early as 1839, which fits closely with Pulman's account. On the fourth page of his book, he gave the first instructions for tying a modern dry-fly hackle, advising that it should be wound "well on the edge"—precisely the style we use today for building a collar. Two of Ogden's patterns are included in Aldam's peculiar volume, *A quaint treatise on 'Flees and the Art 'a Artyficiall flee making*, which was published in 1876.<sup>7</sup> The pair of detached-bodied mayflies that Ogden tied for this work are very definitely dry flies, and furthermore, they are dressed on eyed hooks, one of them having a rather interesting vertical eye. Another tackle dealer, David Foster, was selling upright split-winged floating flies in his shop as early as 1854; he pub-

lished a series of patterns in 1882.<sup>8</sup> With the exception of their tall split-rolled wings and gut snells, Foster's patterns look very much like modern dry flies, and the anglers Halford encountered on the Wandle were almost certainly using patterns like them.

Ogden and Foster were not alone in tying dry flies. H. S. Hall designed a series that ran down to a modern size 17, which were dressed on eyed hooks of his own design. Most of his dressings appeared in the *Fishing Gazette* before they were published as a series in 1885.<sup>9</sup> Like Ogden's flies, many of Hall's patterns were tied with detached bodies, but they did not float at all well, so they never became popular.

The credits for dry-fly development do not end with Ogden, Foster, and Hall. Even a casual perusal of *The Field* and the *Fishing Gazette* will impress on the reader what a hotbed of development dry-fly fishing was in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. These people took the floating fly, improved upon it, and produced the dry-fly that



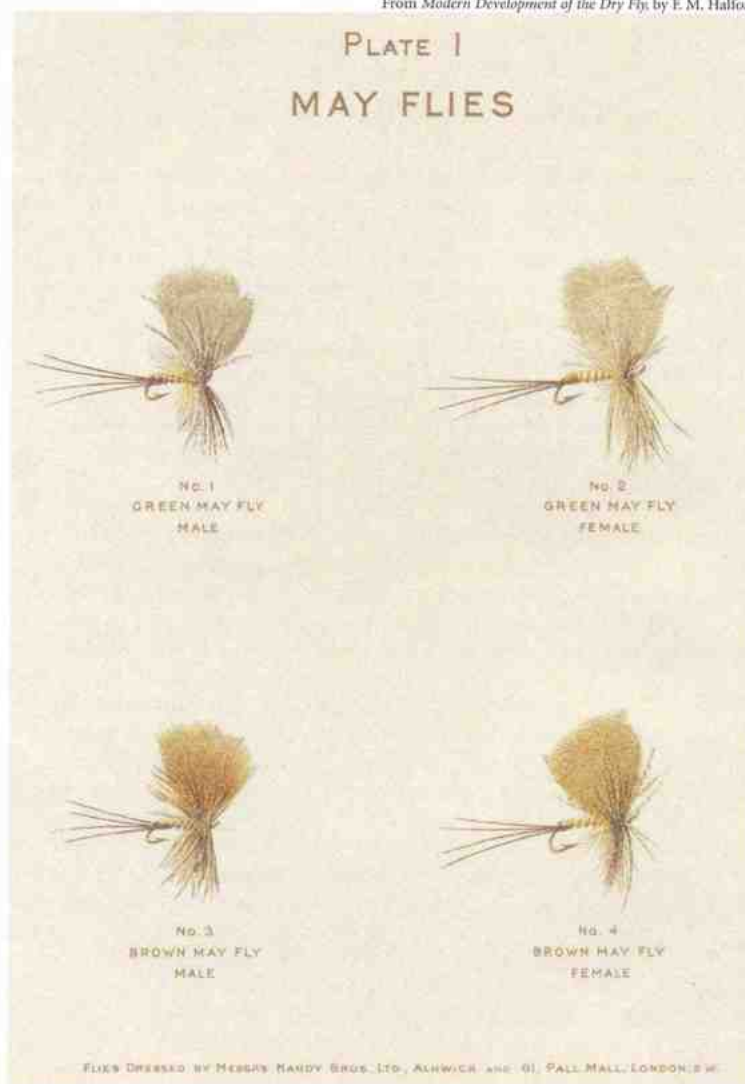


Plate I from *Modern Development of the Dry Fly*, showing the fan-wing mayflies that Halford and Marryat designed and which caused me so much grief in my early days as a dry-fly fisherman.

we use today. The reason Halford became the most famous of them all has more to do with the quality and quantity of his writing than with any talent he might have had as an innovator. In this respect, he has much in common with Theodore Gordon, although as Paul Schullery points out in his companion article ("History and Mr. Gordon," page 2), Gordon's influence on his contemporaries was far less than Halford's.

It is extraordinary to think of it, but it's quite possible that Halford might have remained unknown but for a meeting with Marryat in John Hammond's tackle shop in Winchester on 28 April 1879. Marryat is a shadowy figure, of whom we know very little. He was born

in either 1840 or 1841 and was schooled at Winchester. After a period of military service in India, he returned to England in 1870 and quickly built up a reputation as a skilled dry-fly fisherman. Halford and Marryat quickly became firm friends, and in 1880, when Halford took rooms at Houghton Mill, they systematically began to set down everything that was known about the theory and practice of dry-fly fishing.

Halford's first work, *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them*, was published in 1886. Halford was keen for Marryat to be joint author, but the latter declined, perhaps out of modesty. The extent of Marryat's influence on *Floating Flies* must have been immense, given that

Halford had probably only been tying flies for six years at that stage and that he had very little experience fishing the mayfly. I should point out that the term "mayfly," when used in the U.K., refers to *Ephemera danica* and *E. vulgata*, the *Ephemeroptera* being colloquially known as "olives"; I shall use that terminology here. Although he was becoming a competent dry-fly fisherman, Halford learned a great deal from his friend in the early eighties, and their collaboration seemed set to last for many years, but Marryat died tragically early on 14 February 1896.

Great though the blow of his friend's death was, Halford continued with what had become his life's work. His final selection of thirty-three flies was pub-

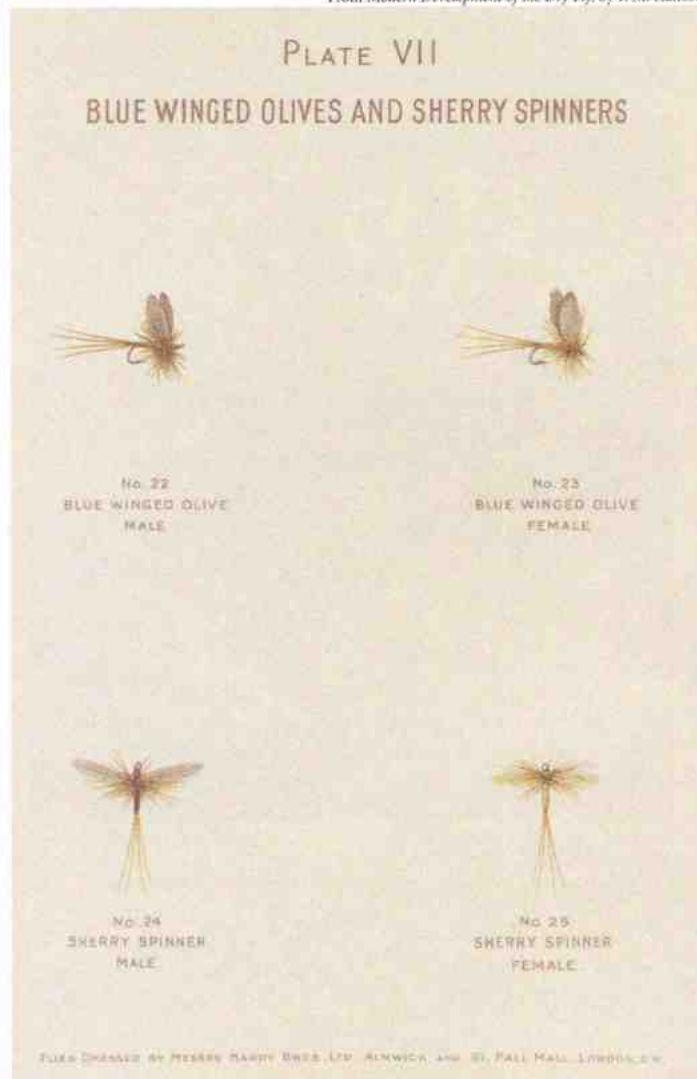


Plate VIII from *Modern Development of the Dry Fly*, showing Halford's Blue Winged Olive and Sherry Spinner patterns. It was these small flies that made his patterns so popular.

lished fourteen years later in *Modern Development of the Dry Fly*,<sup>10</sup> and commercially tied versions of the patterns were marketed by Farlow's and other tackle suppliers. Six patterns imitate mayfly duns and spinners, and there is a clearly identified artificial for every common olive, with three sedges, the black gnat, and the brown ant included. By comparison, the weaknesses of Hall's artificials are obvious; the series is much less inclusive, and his spinner patterns only differ from the duns in name, whereas Halford's are dressed with "spent" wings, just like the naturals. Halford's flies became so popular that it was even possible to buy fly boxes specifically designed and labeled to accommodate them.

Halford was no superman. He could never have been described as an "all-round" fisherman, the way Francis Francis or John Bickerdyke (C. H. Cook) were, and despite being an expert on nymphs, Halford abandoned nymph fishing purely and simply because he couldn't get the hang of it.<sup>11, 12</sup> But his influence casts a far longer shadow than either Francis or Bickerdyke. For example, it was Halford's work that inspired the popularization of dry-fly fishing in France, Germany, and America. By 1888, *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them* could be purchased for twelve dollars from *Forest and Stream* in the United States, and it is a measure of Halford's status that his flies became available

from William Mills of New York in the same year, despite the fact that the patterns were actually designed for specialized limestone streams on a completely different continent.

There was a downside to Halford. Despite the great care he took over his work, it was shot through with intellectual flaws caused by his reluctance to think laterally. He came in for a great deal of criticism in later years over the details of his dressings, largely relating to whether the colors he had so obsessively chosen were as close to those of the naturals as he believed they were. In addition, it is hard to see how Halford persuaded himself that his fan-winged mayfly duns, or the opposed quill slip

wings he used elsewhere, were accurate copies of the wing of the originals.

In keeping with his character, Halford attempted to devise a set of rules that defined dry-fly fishing. In 1886, his definition of dry-fly fishing was "... presenting to the rising fish the best possible imitation of the insect on which he is feeding in its natural position."<sup>13</sup> He broke this definition down to five conditions:<sup>14</sup>

1. Finding a fish feeding on winged insects.
2. Presenting to him a good imitation of the natural insect both as to size and color.
3. Presenting it to him in its natural position, floating and "cocked."
4. Putting it lightly on the water so that it floats accurately over him without drag.
5. That the four previous points should have been fulfilled before the fish has caught sight of the angler and his rod.

Although they seem a bit constipated now, these five rules were broadly derivative of Cholmondely-Pennell's 1870 account, and they would have raised few eyebrows at the time. But by 1913, Halford had begun to compare the upstream dry-fly rule to the St. Andrew's "Etiquette of Golf."

If a member of a golf club is unsportsman-like, or possibly only careless, and habitually commits the grave indiscretion of disregarding the etiquette of the game, he will find difficulty in persuading his fellow-members to make a friendly match with him. I would suggest that the ethics of the dry-fly on a fishery where dry-fly only is permitted should be regarded in the same light.<sup>15</sup>

At first glance, there is little to cause offense here. The key to Halford's thinking was expressed in the final sentence of the quote above: *dry-fly where only dry-fly is permitted*. It is very important to realize that Halford didn't object to wet-fly fishing *per se*, though he viewed the wet fly as a dubious method on chalk streams, because he was convinced, largely as a result of his own experience, that it could be used to make large bags of undersized fish. But many of his readers mistakenly assumed that Halford was opposed to the wet fly and cited his writing as sufficient reason why the method should be completely banned. The "Halford school," which grew out of this misconception, was still active long after his death; their convictions led to an

incredibly acrimonious debate in the Flyfishers' Club in 1938 and can still be seen today in the form of petty limitations on nymph fishing on stocked English chalk stream fisheries. The school was also responsible for a kind of sporting elitism that still dogs the dry fly, and although Halford may never have intended it, a key part of his legacy is that many devotees have forgotten that the whole reason for inventing dry-fly fishing was that it makes it easier to catch trout.<sup>16</sup>

When I began to write this, I amused myself by speculating what would have been lost had Frederic Halford never existed. The impact on tackle and techniques would have been pretty minimal; but clearly Halford did *something*, or he would never have become the revered figure that he is today. My personal view is that the source of Halford's fame lies in the enormous authority he commanded over his chosen subject. In oracular terms, he occupied a position that few angling writers have ever held before or since. In the final analysis, Halford was, above all, a great communicator, but to see him as the inventor of the dry fly, or even as the father of dry-fly fishing, is wrong. Much of the blame for this lies within the understandable desire of twentieth-century writers to simplify their task by crediting developments to individuals rather than a wider community of fly fishers working through ill-defined networks. Saying that a method was discovered by a group of people whose names we don't know, over a period of time that we can only loosely define, is the type of statement with which many historians are uncomfortable—and yet that is exactly how the majority of the techniques we use today evolved.

When I wrote *The Fly*, I came across repeated examples of individuals who were held to be the originators of methods that had clearly been in use for decades before their birth, but this type of error isn't specific to fly fishing; it is widespread. The best example I can cite of this desire to create "discoverers" is the oft-related tale of the discovery of America itself, which would have caused the native people who had lived there for so long to roll about on the ground shedding tears of mirth. Although I have tried to eliminate this kind of thinking from my own writing, I have no problem understanding why people use it, as sometimes it is helpful to state that someone discovered a particular technique on such-and-such a date. But we

should beware of generalizations, and my message is that it pays to look long and hard at some of the conventions we use, not least the use of the term "father of," which really should be deleted from the lexicon of fly-fishing literature.

And now we come to Halford as I see him. By all accounts he was a diverting companion, and I would have liked to have fished with him, but his major talent was as a writer. Whether one reads his articles in *The Field* and the *Fishing Gazette* or his books, it is impossible to come away without a very clear picture of what dry-fly fishing is about. The measure of Halford the man, rather than the myth, is that he put dry-fly fishing on such a firm footing that its future was assured, and that above all, he achieved what so many of us would love to do: retired early and spent all his days in pursuit of the sport he loved best. We should be so lucky.



#### ENDNOTES

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3. George P. R. Pulman, *Vade Mecum of Fly Fishing* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1841), 49.
4. Thaddeus Norris, *The American Angler's Book* (Philadelphia: E. H. Butler & Co., 1864), 332–33.
5. Francis Francis, *A Book on Angling* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1867), 131–32. There is a slightly more detailed explanation on pages 151–52.
6. Harry Cholmondely-Pennell, *The Modern Practical Angler* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1870), 96–97.
7. W. H. Alham, *A quaint treatise on 'Flees and the Art 'a Artificiall flee making* (London: John B. Day, 1876).
8. David Foster, *The Scientific Angler* (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1882), plate IV, facing p. 167.
9. Harry Cholmondely-Pennell, *Fishing, Salmon and Trout* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1885), 362–79.
10. Frederic Halford, *Modern Development of the Dry Fly* (London: George Routledge and Sons, Limited, 1910), 29–44.
11. Frederic Halford, *The Dry-fly Man's Handbook* (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1913), 126–27.
12. Frederic Halford, *Dry-fly Fishing in Theory and Practice* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington Ltd., 1889), 122.
13. Frederic Halford, *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1886), 117.
14. Halford, *Floating Flies*, 117–18.
15. Halford, *The Dry-fly Man's Handbook*, 76.
16. John Hills, *A Summer on the Test* (London: Philip Allan and Co., Ltd., 1930), 23.

# Rigor Without Mortis

by Ken Cameron



*Chromolithograph after an oil painting (1789) by George Morland, A Party Angling. Fishing history is history, social history most of all—here, the complex history of women in supposedly male worlds. How many women fished in the eighteenth century? Did some classes of women fish, others not? Did women fly fish? Why have so many angling clubs been all male? How reliable is visual art as historical evidence?*

**I**SIT HERE with a bandaged hand, unable to fish because of tendinitis from casting too long with a 12-foot hickory rod. I am reminded that when we can't fish, we read about fishing or we write about it—a poor but acceptable substitute. Austin Hogan, the Museum's first curator, said to me once that fishermen don't read, but I can't agree with him. We read a lot. Mostly, we read how-tos or accounts of some luckier angler's fishing; some of us read or write angling history. So, unable to fish, I am writing about angling history.

Now, angling history *is* history—history first, I think, and angling second. It has to be that way or it collapses into something quite different. Fiction, probably. In order to be history, angling history has to do its informing and instructing and delighting within the rather strict confines of what Aristotle called “that which has happened,” a tight squeeze of a definition that doesn't allow much wiggle room. *That which has happened*—the way things were, truly told. History doesn't offer us a choice, revered as choice is in our culture, at least not at the nuts-and-bolts level that one historian called the “framework of fact,” by which he meant the irreducible cinders of things that can be readily proven and checked.<sup>1</sup> You can't choose, for example, to make Izaak Walton a fly fisherman; “that which has happened” was that he didn't care piss-all about fly fishing.

Bummer.

When the Disney film *Pocohontas* opened, a reviewer quoted a fan who said, when told that Disney's film was historically inaccurate, “Oh, well, I like this way lots better!” Fair enough—Disney's film was entertainment, not history, with the goals only of delighting and making money, so “that which has happened” is not a restriction. On the other hand, when Disney some years ago planned an American-history theme park near Washington, historians went bananas—for understandable reasons.

## MYTH AND HISTORY

History has a beloved cousin who has the family eyes and nose but is a rather different creature—*myth*.

One theory of the origins of Greek tragedy has it that the then-ruler of Athens, to inspire morality in the *polis*, created an occasion for the telling of the heroic stories we call Homeric myth.<sup>2</sup>

The idea underscores what is most important about myth and what separates it from history: myth embodies a community's best idea of itself. It is not “that which has happened,” but *that which expresses us*. Yet it is like history in finding its characters and its stories in the past, and so, willy-nilly, it more often than not looks like history. Keeping the two separate is a difficult but essential undertaking.

Myth and history exist on a continuum. They touch, overlap, blend. In rare cases, they are identical. Mythmakers and historians also exist on a continuum; they, too, can blend, although that blending is sometimes deliberate and is now seen as “bad history”—Parson Weems's Washington, for example (the cherry tree, etc.).

At their extremes, however, myth and history are different breeds of cat. Myth, to tell its story, can ignore some events, emphasize others, choose its heroes, create its villains. History should not choose, should deal with all events, all characters, should not demonize or romanticize. Myth has a special vocabulary to serve its claims: *father* (of his country, of the dry fly, of American fishing); *patron saint* (of angling, of true sport); *birthplace* (of democracy, of the split bamboo) and the related *cradle* (of American fly fishing, as a recent book about the Catskills had it). History uses a vocabulary that verges on the insipid—*perhaps, likelihood, maybe, suggest, unproven*. Myth starts with conclusion (“foregone conclusion”) and moves to celebration. History starts with evidence, moves to tentative conclusion. History tries to be fair; myth is by definition *not* fair (my myth, not yours). Where myth cannot prove, it asserts; where history cannot prove, it tries to persuade through analysis and argument, moving from data to conclusion, or it says, “Insufficient evidence.” Not very sexy.

HISTORY	MYTH
questions	asserts
challenges	pleases
stimulates	inspires
checks all	receives old
sources	wisdom
is tentative	is final

I encapsulate these differences between myth and history as *rigor*—the disciplined attempt to be accurate, fair-

minded, and comprehensive. Rigor acknowledges and takes account of all (as in *all*—not some) relevant work by others. Rigor tries to make no conclusion that is not justified by the evidence offered.

Needless to say, people prefer myth. Rigor is a pain in the neck.

Popular as I know myth to be, however, I have two difficulties with it. First is its inflated claim for its heroes and their doings, which obscures the many others who were, arguably, equally important (Hammond as well as Halford, Barker as well as Walton). The second difficulty with myth I'll get to shortly: its petrification into a wall that separates us from the more distant past.

History sometimes seems bent on debunking myth, but the apparent debunking is usually a by-product of rigor. Myth itself gets debunked, too, when it becomes the subject of history, as when, for example, a historian might examine why people insist on repeating the myth that the floating fly was a Victorian invention long after that myth has been disproven.

## QUI BONO? WHO GAINS?

“Why, indeed?” the historian asks. The myth persists; historians disprove it; the myth still persists. An interesting problem in social history, this: why do we go on insisting?

*Qui bono?* was a challenge flung at the Roman senate: *Who gains?* Or, in current language, whose agenda is advanced? The “gain” in cultural clashes is not usually financial; it is spiritual, intellectual, social. It has its roots in cultural and social power. Much as many fisherpersons dislike it, even fishing is subject to such cultural clash and the advancing of agenda: because myth expresses our best idea of ourselves, there is an inherent gain in its perpetuation—self-expression, self-identification.

At the same time, I think that most mythmaking is born of something no more sinister than love, often love of place—many myths are national and/or parochial. (I wrote about Sara McBride, the pioneering angling-entomologist, because our farm was ten miles from her home waters.) Sometimes it's love of a way of fishing or of what we take to be somebody like us—“our crowd.” But, as you learn sometime between twelve and twenty, love can be blind, and myths



*Restruck etching, Anglers in 1611, by Henry Bunbury (c. 1811). Why is there an apparent reference to the milkmaid sequence of *The Complete Angler* here? How accurate is the tackle shown for 1611? If the figure in the background is fly casting, how accurate is this as a depiction of fly casting in 1611? Does the drawing style itself have social content here?*

born of love can blind us to uncongenial or unassimilable data.

It is when mythmaking is combined with power, I think, that it has a potential for harm. Then, it can impose its blindness on the entire culture. Then, in particular, we need to ask who profited, and why.

### THE VICTORIAN WALL

To show the blinding effects of myth when combined with power, let me offer a somewhat detailed example, an English one that I could call "the Halford myth" but that is really more general: the Victorian myth of the fly-fishing urban gentleman. Because this myth has petrified into an opaque set of beliefs that blocks the more distant past and preempts questions about it, I think of it as the Victorian Wall. I am talking about the period circa 1875–1915; about London; about men (not women); about affluent people close to the centers of financial, legal, political, and above all cultural power; and about the idea of themselves that they propagated. Several underlying assumptions (some of them much older but greatly magnified) were in play, and these ideas and the answers

to *qui bono?* were in a sense aspects of each other, and it is these that have petrified. These assumptions were:

- At a subbasement or unconscious level, that distinctions with social resonance were desirable—better/worse, higher/lower, etc.
- At a slightly higher, conscious level, that history is progressive and the present is superior to the past, which was "quaint" or "primitive" or "crude." This assumption ignored or suppressed the circularity, for example, of English angling history—e.g., the floating fly.
- At an entirely conscious level, often stated in print, that fly fishing is better (coded as more sporting, more challenging, more graceful, etc.) than other kinds of fishing. This idea was not new in 1875, had in fact become fairly common by 1810, but it increased in importance over the century.
- Again, conscious and loudly stated, that dry-fly fishing is better (coded as more sporting, more challenging, etc.) than other kinds of fly fishing.
- And, so obvious as to be the subject of humor, that the gentleman angler did not fish in the city (although anglers

as diverse as Walton and Admiral Nelson had). Pollution, urbanization, and upstream dams had ruined the salmon fishing in the Thames by 1820, trout fishing somewhat later.<sup>3</sup> The railroad and then the car made weekend fishing excursions possible for those with the cash; city waters were left to the middle and working classes, as were the remaining "coarse" fish. (We might add one more assumption, one of piscatorial verticality—that fishing standing up was better than fishing sitting down, because city fishers did the latter [see W. Dendy Sadler's painting, *A Pegged-down Fishing Match*]. In American urban prints, peripheral black fishermen were often shown *lying down*—lower and lower.)

It should readily be seen what such convictions do to thinking and then mythologizing about the past—what they do to the wet fly, for example, which, not being the dry fly, must be inferior, therefore can conveniently be said to be crude and primitive, thus old; therefore can be said to be the primordial fly type and so associated with tackle that is crude and primitive (heavy, coarse, indelicate). Now, the wet fly, so



Colored etching, *Anglers in 1811*, by Henry Bunbury (c. 1811). This and the etching on page 20 invite comparison as a pair—same creators, related titles. What does such comparison yield? Why are the styles different? How are the roles of women different? What social history is implicit, for which fishing is mostly a vehicle?

far as we know, was in fact a nineteenth-century creation, but the myth says otherwise. *Qui bono?*

It should readily be seen, too, what these assumptions do to kinds of fishing and the people who practice them—what they do to the British concept of “coarse fishing” and, after 1875 or so, to the social stratification of fishing for trout as compared with roach or tench or barbel or carp, and the social stratification of methods (fly, lure, bait, paste). Westwood and Satchell, for example, retrospectively called John Baddeley’s *The London Angler’s Book, or Waltonian Chronicle* (1834) “Coarse and Cockney,” managing thus to turn an angling term into a social insult.<sup>4</sup> *Qui bono?*

These ideas coincided with and were made culturally permanent by the triumph of the central city (London) and its place as cultural capital. Increasingly after circa 1870, writing about fly fishing for trout, as published by London publishers, focused on the geographical areas accessible to upscale London anglers (the Hampshire chalk). When myth-historians in London wrote for the same publishers, they produced parochial works with errors of omission and commission that served their parochial-

ism (e.g., J. Waller Hills’s progressive view of angling history, culminating in the dry fly). *Qui bono?*

Curiously, social change has cracked the Victorian Wall in Britain as it has not in America. So far as I can make out, the angling world there has turned upside-down since 1960 because the social world did. The most sporting British fish are now thought to be the carp, the tench, and the barbel, with trout—especially stocked trout—ranked somewhere in the pack.<sup>5</sup> If you’re really with it, you don’t talk about fly rods and reels; it’s Avons, Aerials, bread-flake, and storm kettles. You sit down to fish as often as you stand. If, on the other hand, you want to wear breeks and tweeds and schmooze with the punters who also shoot driven birds, you spend a bundle and fish the Hampshire chalk, but you’ll be engaging in a dated myth of “conspicuous leisure,” not sportfishing as the Brits now understand it.

#### MEANWHILE, BACK IN AMERICA

The Victorian Wall also rears itself between Americans and the past. We take a lot of our angling history from

British sources—most of the primary stuff is theirs, after all—and we still accept the Wall as true. In part, it is the acceptance of the Wall that gives us the Theodore Gordon myth; indeed, in a sense, the Gordon myth *is* the acceptance of the Wall. To try to explain how I think this works, I have to describe two ideas that I think have dominated American fishing. They weren’t themselves myths; they were beliefs, passionate convictions:

- An egalitarian, nationalistic one that worked at separating American fishing from European and especially English fishing. It emphasized democracy and an innate American moral superiority. It is seen in John Brown (*American Anglers Guide*), James A. Henshall (*Book of the Black Bass*, with his claims for Samuel Phillipe as originator of split bamboo, for the Meeks and the multiplying reel, for the bass itself), and on through the nineteenth century into the twentieth and writers like Ray Bergman.
- An elitist, anglophile one that emulated British methods and mores and worked to separate its chosen form of fishing—usually fly fishing—from the



*Oil on canvas, Trout Fishing in the Highlands, by John Petrie R.A., 1881. Is there historical importance in the fact that the painter was a member of the Royal Academy? Does that membership have anything to do with the location? The posing of the figure? What does the hand in the pocket say about line control? Why no waders? Where is the angler's gear—fly boxes, gadgets, knife, etc.? Is there social content here—in the figure's isolation, for example? In his expression? Courtesy of the John L. Wehle Gallery of Wildlife and Sporting Art, Genesee Country Village & Museum, Mumford, New York.*

methods of the majority. (I confess to being sometimes of this persuasion.) It is seen powerfully in the expat Brit "Frank Forester" and his snob references to "Cockneys," and it carries forward in such writers as Henry van Dyke and Dana Lamb, the Derrydale Press, and perhaps Ernest Schwiebert; it emphasizes privilege (often gently, as in van Dyke) and species and locations of fishing (salmon, the Ristigouche) closed to most Americans.

These two beliefs were vital to different groups of Americans from at least 1800 through at least the middle of the twentieth century. They became more or less regional—the nationalistic, democratic one midwestern and western; the elitist, anglophile one northeastern. They served the purposes of a new nation that was forming itself, wrangling over its similarities and differences. The two might seem to have come together in the Gordon myth—democratic American adopts British method—but I think the clinker here is "democratic," because the belief that triumphed in this case was the anglophile, elitist one, and Gordon doesn't seem to me to have been much of a democrat. Gordon (*my* Gordon myth) was what the Doctor Bernardo's

ads used to call a "decayed gentleman," but one who recovered his lost social status by hitching his wagon to Halford's star. Poor he may have been, but in print he made himself the equivalent of Halford and Skues, both English gents. It is this Gordon, I think, whom his mythmakers have adopted, and they have thus prolonged in this country the hold on our consciousness of a myth of superiority of one kind of fishing over another, of one class over others, and of a parochialism that places one part of the country—the northeast and especially New York—over the others. I think it is not accidental, for example, that his principal proponents have been New Yorkers and gents, and that his shrine is now apparently the Anglers' Club of New York.

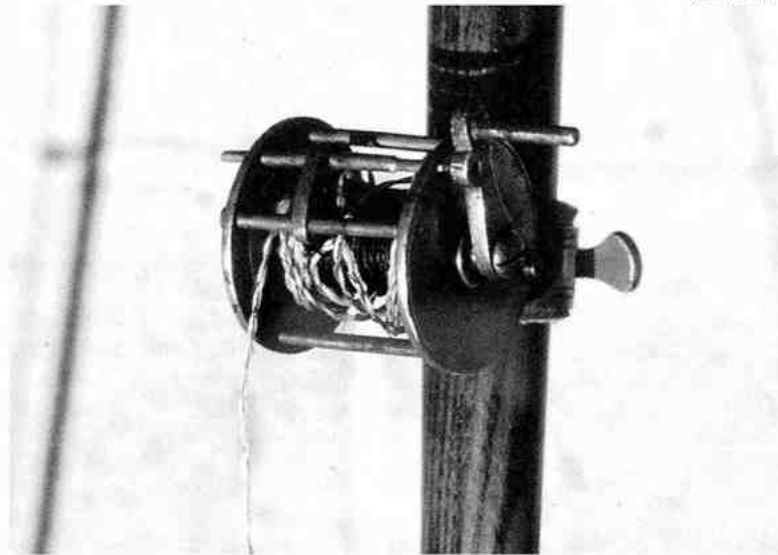
### RIGOR'S TRACKS

All that said, let me return to history and its essential rigor. If rigor works properly, the Victorian Wall and myths like it should not block us from our past—but mythmakers, as I've already said, don't apply rigor. Historians do. However, for their rigor to work properly, it has to leave a trail for us to follow. This trail is made, not of bread crumbs, but of notes.

Endnotes and footnotes and bibliographies and booklists are the unavoidable dither of history—I hate them. Trying to keep up with what Kate Turabian (see Works Also Mentioned, page 25) says about footnote form is like trying to listen to a lecture on the Monophysite heresy. *But it has to be done.* Acceptance of an argument depends upon evidence that can be revisited and checked so that the argument can be replicated (the equivalent of repeating a scientific experiment). No notes, no trail; no trail, no replication; no replication, no confirmation and no established accuracy. (Myth also uses notes on occasion, but sparingly, as if they cost a lot, so replication is seldom possible. Myth's sources, too, are typically few and secondary. Myth-readers don't read for rigor, remember; they read for reinforcement of received ideas—they are the choir of "preaching to the choir.")

Now, that part of rigor that I have called comprehensiveness requires that the historian know and deal with every source relevant to his subject. Academics talk about a "review of the literature," which is a boring part of things like dissertations that often gets left out of more elegant writing but that has to be there





Brass reel, circa 1760–1820, with reproduction horsehair line and 12-foot hickory rod. The outfit weighs about a pound and casts 45 feet one-handed. This was cutting-edge tackle in 1800. Was the next generation of tackle better, or was it simply made to seem so? Who popularized new tackle before the age of catalogues? How? Was there social content in newer tackle vis-a-vis that seen as “primitive,” “crude,” and “quaint”? Were more fish caught as tackle “improved”?

in spirit. “Have you read X?” the instructor asks the student, meaning, *Have you read and taken account of—agreed with or refuted—the relevant work?* This agreement or refutation is part of the body of any historical argument, and it has to be properly footnoted or endnoted along with all the other nit-picking. Rigor’s tracks have to lead us through such other relevant work to prove that history has done its homework and has not finessed an awkward fact or idea by leaving it out. (Myth, on the other hand, is allowed to finesse the awkward—one of its appeals for writers and for already convinced readers. The practice, however, can become in some hands a way of blowing by unpleasant evidence by acting as if it doesn’t exist.)

“Reading X” is, therefore, a good part of what’s called research (the other part being poring over primary materials). It is not always fun—indexes, bibliographies, dissertations, journals, note cards, questions, questions, questions—but there’s no avoiding it, and the result makes it worthwhile.

A few cases of tracks, faulty comprehensiveness, and myth, then (in chronological order).

J. Waller Hills’s *A History of Fly Fishing for Trout* has taken on the mantle of

authority, perhaps because it was for so long the only game in town. Using a form of in-text reference rather than footnotes or endnotes, it is nonetheless trackable. It also relies, however, on assertion, and you must too often take Hills’s word for it that he has got things right. Take, for example, Hills’s statement about the origin of the split-bamboo rod: “The four-sectioned rod is first mentioned by Snart in 1801.”<sup>6</sup> (“Section” here means a split of bamboo, not an entire rod part.)

Charles Snart’s *Practical Observations on Angling in the River Trent* (1801) is a rare angling title, and Snart was and remains a minor angling writer. Hills didn’t quote him directly but simply asserted that this otherwise obscure figure gave us the first mention of split bamboo (and in four sections, at that) several decades before any other hard evidence for even three-sectioned cane. If, however, you follow Hills’s tracks and go to Snart himself, you find that what he said was, “The [bamboo cane, cabbage wood, brier, and elder] are cut into joints and thick enough when divided lengthways into four pieces to form the top [part of a rod] of the substance required.”<sup>7</sup> Fair enough—bamboo, cabbage wood, brier, and elder were all cut

into billets and were then split lengthwise to make four tops from each billet. “These [woods] for the tops are cut in joints or lengths, of eight or ten inches, spliced and glued together. . . .”<sup>8</sup> Fair enough, again—the splits are cut into lengths (presumably to improve taper, perhaps by combining woods, and to cut out knots and, in the case of bamboo, the nodes) and are *spliced and glued* end to end, just as rod-tops had been made for more than a century. This is not four-sectioned split bamboo. It is composite, spliced construction. (Note that Hills didn’t deal at all with what Snart said about brier, cabbage wood, and elder, because it didn’t fit his assertion.)

Hills followed this error with a tortured attempt to show that Higginbotham might have been making split-bamboo rods in 1805, and he didn’t get on firm ground until Aldred in the 1840s, for whom there is actual evidence. The reason for this mix of errors and illogic? Hard to say, but Hills was writing a British-oriented history of fly fishing, and some Americans were arguing for an American origin of split bamboo.

Nonetheless, there is a moral here: tracking works, even if it doesn’t conform to Turabian.

Charles Eliot Goodspeed’s *Angling in*



*A fly from the Museum's collection, dated 1789, tied by Thomas Cummess, long before the dry fly. Is it, therefore, a "wet fly"? If so, why does it have upright wings? How was it fished? What was it supposed to imitate? Was it designed for different conditions than the dry fly? The wet fly?*

America is one of our more collectible titles, having been originally printed in a limited edition of numbered and signed copies. Far more about angling in the northeast by well-to-do men than about the broader subject the title suggests, it is nonetheless full of good stuff. Well footnoted, it is a good probe into early American fishing.

Comprehensive, however, it is not. Goodspeed was more antiquarian than historian, more interested in data than in their meaning. His principal evidence was found in books, and so books define and limit the work: four of eighteen chapters are about books, a fifth about book collectors, a sixth about the first American editor of Walton. Nor was Goodspeed, apparently, much interested in angling outside New England, unless it was in Philadelphia, for which he had some particular yen, or unless it was genteel and got into a rare book, e.g., the Cincinnati Angling Club.<sup>9</sup> His Philadelphia penchant brought to light the eighteenth-century angling advertisements of Pole of Philadelphia, a worthwhile contribution, but overlooked the ads in New York's *Rivington's Gazette* during the Revolution. The result was to give perhaps undue emphasis to Philadelphia as an eighteenth-century angling center, an emphasis increased by a chapter on the upscale State (or Colony) in Schuylkill, America's oldest fishing club (1732). The effect has been perhaps to restrict our picture of American fishing before 1800, both as to region and as to class.

Nor did Goodspeed ask hard questions. In his reading of William Milner's 1830 book on the State in Schuylkill, Goodspeed apparently noticed that there is no mention in it of women, either as members of the club or as guests or cooks or laborers, but then he cited a contradictory account by an eighteenth-century English traveler who

visited the club and found women having a hell of a time there. Yet Goodspeed did nothing with this except to opine that "one wonders if he is not describing the brother society of Fort St. David's, at whose feasts ladies were admitted."<sup>10</sup> Thus, he failed to ask questions about all-male angling clubs. (Were they or weren't they all male? Were they all male in Milner's time but coed earlier? Were they all male in theory but not in practice? Did Milner sift his evidence through a perhaps unconscious sexism? Did Goodspeed?) And he hardly mentioned angling women, although we have evidence of them elsewhere—from visual art, for example (e.g., Morland's *A Party Angling*).

At this point, readers will be objecting that I'm asking too much of an antiquarian of the nineteen-thirties. Okay, but there is a moral here, anyway: antiquarians turn up great stuff, but lacking comprehensiveness, they don't always write great history.

Gordon Wickstrom's "The Presence of Theodore Gordon," a fairly pure example of myth, first appeared in *Gray's Sporting Journal* and then in this journal.<sup>11</sup> Like all good myth, it was pleasant to read; typically, too, it had only six endnotes that cited only two sources, both by John D. McDonald. All citations were for direct quotations, two of them the tags that introduced the article, so most of the article's statements were untrackable. Unsupported by evidence were such assertions as "the most significant movement in American fly tying: the Catskill School"; the idea that wood-duck imitated a "mayfly's wing" better than any other feather; statements about what Gordon liked or thought; the idea that the 1880s were "a watershed of development for fly fishing in America and England"; a statement about the relationship among split bamboo, oil-impregnated lines, and dry-fly fishing;

the designation of Halford as "the father of the dry fly"; and the calling of Gordon "the American Walton" by some unspecified "those." As we would expect in a mythmaking article, there was romance and sentimentality—the female "chum," the lonely death—and much inflated claim. There was, to be sure, no comprehensiveness or tracking—nothing written in the last twenty-nine years in the areas touched on above was acknowledged or dealt with.

Michael Scott's "Theodore Gordon and Bamboo Rods" first appeared in this journal in the same issue as the Wickstrom article.<sup>12</sup> It was, I think, a good piece of history for most of its length, dealing realistically with the Gordon myth and acknowledging at least the principal recent revisionism, Paul Schullery's *American Fly Fishing: A History*. My only reservations are its acceptance of the assumptions of the Victorian Wall and the resulting lack of comprehensiveness, evident in its small number (four) of sources. (This is somewhat deceptive of me to say, however; McDonald's *The Complete Fly Fisherman* is, in fact, a compilation of many Gordon pieces and letters and so is many sources in one.) Had a proper search of recent work and pre-1880 sources been done, however, the number of sources would have increased but the Halford section would have matched the rest in quality. A search of this journal, for example, would have provided not only several corrective articles by Jack Heddon and others that cracked the Wall's assumptions, but also a recent article by John Betts, "Fly Lines and Lineage," that would have blown the Wall to bits.<sup>13</sup>

I'll take Scott's word for it that Gordon was enthusiastic about split bamboo, but I suspect that the relationship among weight, length, action, angling style, casting style, and line were rather more complex than the Victorian



*The history of the gaudy salmon fly is as much social and economic as piscatorial. This fly from the Museum's collection is "full-feathered" in a "classic" pattern. What is its relation to the Industrial Revolution and the British empire? How did it and others like it, after 1850, drive out the plainer flies that came before it? In what ways was it, in salmon fishing, an analog to the dry fly in trout fishing? Why do we so rarely fish such flies now?*

Wall makes out (see Betts). My suspicious *Qui bono?* also whispers that extolling the split-bamboo rod as revolutionary and with-it and part of the urban gentleman's kit leads back via Leonard to New York, stratification, and parochialism.

### ARE WE HAVING FUN YET?

Paul Schullery said in a recent e-mail, "The older I get, the more I think how under-appreciated fun is." I think that goes for history and myth, too—if they aren't fun, what good are they?

Myth is good fun. It's like the movies, but without the sex (a lack I've always thought a pity; surely there's a connection somewhere between sex and fishing—look at some of Rowlandson's work, for example). It's got romance, sentiment, heroes, and ideals, and it isn't burdened with a lot of endnotes and bibliographies.

But I think that history should be fun, too. I love the chase; I love the working-out of answers, both other people's and my own. My view isn't widely shared these days, I know; history has fallen on hard times, especially with many people born after about 1965, for whom history has only two eras: Since I Was Born and All That Other Stuff. Nonetheless, I think people exist out there who can see the intellectual fun in it. The problem—at last I come to my title—is to keep history's rigor from turning into rigor mortis, to be disciplined without being deadly, to keep rigor alive without killing fun.

The solution is good writing—intelligent, clear, graceful, amusing—and interesting questions. I think that Michael Scott's piece has these qualities, and I think that it works, with the single reservation noted above, as historical fun. And I know angling historians who have lots of questions that interest me, but until we break down the Victorian Wall,

it's going to be hard to make them interesting to most people, who are acculturated now to an angling history that has only two eras: Since the Dry Fly Was Born and All That Other Stuff. And we have to work at broadening the scope of our questions so that we aren't writing "tunnel history," but history with context.<sup>14</sup>

Fly fishing doesn't exist in a historical vacuum. It is affected by great issues and it expresses great forces. I said, for example, that many myths are nationalistic and parochial; they are also racial and deserve historical attention in that context. I mentioned Goodspeed's failure to follow up on women anglers in the eighteenth century, an oversight hardly limited to him, and this needs historical attention. I'd say that most aspects of the economic side of angling have yet to be examined. One of the things I found most interesting in the Scott article was a quotation from Gordon about local fishermen who used homemade rods that apparently were holdovers from at least the eighteenth century, and an angling technique that's worth examining in itself; this opens a whole range of questions about survivals of techniques and technology, about angling at the bottom of the economic ladder instead of the top, about how most fishing is done as compared with how some angling is done, and so on. There's tons of fun out there!

The problem is to be rigorous about it without being deadly.

### ENDNOTES

1. G. Kitson Clark, *The Critical Historian* (New York: Basic Books, 1967), 42.
2. Gerald Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 47.
3. T. C. Hofland, *British Angler's Manual* (London: Bohn, 1848 [1839]), 237.

4. T. Westwood and T. Satchell, *Biblioteca Piscatoria* (London: Dawson, 1966 [1883]), 20.

5. See, for example, current articles in *Waterlog* magazine (with which I have to point out that I have a connection).

6. J. Waller Hills, *A History of Fly Fishing for Trout* (London: Allan, 1921), 92.

7. [Charles Snart], *Practical Observations on Angling in the River Trent*, By a Gentleman Resident in the Neighborhood . . . (Newark, England: Ridge, 1801), 84.

8. *Ibid.*, 85.

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11. Gordon Wickstrom, "The Presence of Theodore Gordon," *American Fly Fisher*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 2–7.

12. Michael Scott, "Theodore Gordon and Bamboo Rods," *American Fly Fisher*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 8–17.

13. John Betts, "Fly Lines and Lineage," *American Fly Fisher*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Fall 2000), 17–21.

14. J. H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 258.

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- Morland, George. *A Party Angling*. Oil, 1789.
- Rowlandson, Thomas. *A Snug Angling Party*. Watercolor, n.d.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Anglers Near a Watermill*. Watercolor, n.d.
- Sadler, W. Dendy. *A Pegged-down Fishing Match*. Oil, c. 1876.
- (All but the Sadler are reproduced in W. Shaw Sparrow's *Angling in British Art*, London: John Lane, 1923.)

# A New Look at Dame Juliana

by John Betts

Courtesy of the Flyfisher's Classic Library

THE FLYFISHER'S CLASSIC LIBRARY (FFCL) has recently published *Dame Juliana: The Angling Treatyse and Its Mysteries* by British authors Frederick Buller and the late Hugh Falkus. Mr. Falkus is as well known as any angling writer; his book *Spey Casting* is the definitive work on the subject. Frederick Buller is an author and historian of singular ability and a frequent contributor to this journal. His articles rank among the best published herein.

Their book on the *Treatyse* and Dame Juliana has been developing for thirty years and is, at the very least, unique in our literature. Unlike the majority of angling books of the past five hundred years, this one is beautifully published. The paper is warm, heavy, and smooth, and the typeface (Garamond, with heads in Old English) handsome, clear, and easy to read. The overall effect of the design is reminiscent of fine quality publishing before the computer intruded. The illustrations are useful and well placed in a book that is nicely bound and slipcased. It is typical of FFCL publications that nothing in this area is left to be desired.

That this book is a surprise would be an understatement. It could have easily been constructed to be an echo of *The Origins of Angling* by McDonald, Kuhn, and Webster published by Doubleday in 1957 and 1963, and in 1997 by Linden Publishing. Although parts of *The Origins* are included, as they should be, there is also new work by people prominent in our literature such as Malcolm Greenhalgh, David Beazley, Denys Ovenden, Professor Stephen Downes, and the late Jack Heddon. The careful combination of established efforts with the introduction of new work defines *Dame Juliana* as free-standing and individual.

As one who has been very interested in the *Treatyse* of 1496, I have a number of my own opinions about the various interpretations of the original text and its author[ess]. Not one of my opinions has been left unchallenged by either disagreement or reaffirmation. The Buller/Falkus text compelled me to examine whatever ideas I have held and come down on one side or the other of an issue, or move off in a new direction altogether. Very few angling books—or books in any other subject—have ever provided an opportunity like that, and it cannot happen unless many points of view are presented with an even hand.

There are several interesting ideas in the design of the book that are very useful. One is the all-in-one-place table and text on the various ideas several people had regarding which insects the flies represent. Another is the “pony” some of us may remember from grade or secondary school Latin. A “pony” was a *highly* desirable book in which line by line Latin



sentences were over or under an English translation of that sentence. The entire text was glued into the book we were supposed to be using from which the proper pages had been removed. In my school, getting caught with a “pony” was an automatic F for the day, week, or month, depending upon the teacher. Spotting a “pony” wasn’t that hard now that I look back. Amateurish “bookbinding” created an object that was decidedly misshapen. Having the old English text of the *Treatyse* “translated” in this manner is much easier to learn from than a page of the original alongside that of a modern transcription. Reading the 1496 book this way exposes it as a truly exceptional work displaying considerable technical knowl-

edge and expertise. The effect in this reader is a new appreciation of an early work that goes far beyond any that I had held previously, and I’ve read the *Treatyse* in both the original and modern versions at least a half dozen times. How could I have overlooked as much as I did?

A valuable addition and introduction to future work is the history of Sopwell. It appears here for the first time in any angling book. By itself this is worth the price of the book, especially because it includes the astonishing sequence found on pages 28 and 29.

Does the book settle the question of the authorship of the *Treatyse* or change my consideration of it? No, at least not yet. Rather, it showed me a whole new area for investigation that I had no idea existed. Was I caught off guard? Completely. For me, the Buller and Falkus book ranks as one of the most thoughtful angling books published in the last hundred or more years and is the best ever published by FFCL. Anyone interested in English or angling history, fly fishing, or fishing in general will find something to consider here, be it fly patterns, bait, technical procedures, books, the use and development of the English language, or the period itself.

The interesting coordination of so many sources and ideas into a single unit is a credit to the editors, designers, publishers, and authors. Their thoughtful persistence, coming from a genuine love of the subject, is evident throughout the work. It has been my privilege to review *Dame Juliana* for these pages.

*Dame Juliana: The Treatyse and Its Mysteries* can be purchased from the Flyfisher's Classic Library, the Old Police Station, Pound Street, Moretonhampstead, Devon, TQ13 8PA, England; telephone 01647 441046; fax 01647 441074; e-mail sales@ffcl.com; web <http://www.ffcl.com>. Published October 2001. Standard edition, 350 copies, \$115; special edition, 100 copies, signed by Frederick Buller, \$275.



# Museum News

## The American Museum of Fly Fishing

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### SUPPORT!

As an independent, nonprofit institution, the American Museum of Fly Fishing relies on the generosity of public-spirited individuals for substantial support. We ask that you give our museum serious consideration when planning for gifts and bequests.

### VISIT!

Hours are 10 AM to 4 PM. We are closed on major holidays.

### BACK ISSUES!

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- Volume 24, Numbers 1, 2, 4
- Volume 25, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4
- Volume 26, Numbers 1, 2, 4
- Volume 27, Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4



Trustees John Mundt, David Walsh, and Gardner Grant at the cocktail party.

## Trustees Meet

Thirty-one trustees attended the Museum's fall trustee weekend November 2 and 3. It was the largest turnout in our recent history of board meetings, which take place biannually.

On Friday evening, the Museum hosted a cocktail party for some sixty guests who enjoyed terrific food, grog, and conversation. The Friday event is a welcoming party for the trustees and their significant others, giving them a chance to socialize before the meeting on Saturday. The trustees are an exceptional group of individuals hailing from all over the United States.

Committee meetings, the annual members meeting, and the main trustee meeting were held the following morning. With such large attendance, some committees met at the Museum and others at the Wilburton Inn in Manchester Village. They joined forces for the board meeting at the Inn, the venue for the superb dinner and silent auction on Saturday night.

At the annual members meeting, Trustees Michael Osborne, E. M. "Pete" Bakwin, Tom Davidson, Pamela Bates,

John Swan, Richard Tisch, David Walsh, and James Woods were reelected for three-year terms. Duke Buchan III of Wassaic, New York, was elected as a new trustee. At the annual trustee meeting, which followed immediately, the following officers of the board were elected: David Walsh (president); Pamela Bates, Michael Osborne, and James A. Spendiff (vice presidents); James Carey (treasurer); and James Woods (secretary).

## Coleman Honored with 2001 Heritage Award

Lewis W. Coleman was chosen as the Museum's 2001 Heritage Award honoree for his long-standing record of personal involvement in environmental and educational matters, as well as his abiding interest in fly fishing. The Heritage Award was established in 1997 to honor individuals whose commitment to the Museum, the sport of fly fishing, and natural resources conservation sets standards to which we all should aspire. The following is an excerpt from comments made by friend and colleague, Dr. John McCosker, at the dinner hosted on



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*The Heritage Award is presented to Lewis Coleman by Executive Director Gary Tanner.*

October 11 by the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco.

“Lewis Coleman is a remarkable human being. He can explain and digest information better than anyone I know. He suffers fools like me that are accused of being experts in a variety of fields, and after asking a series of thought-provoking questions can assimilate and explain in a novel way most anything, ranging from international banking, to the human genome, to how a nuclear reactor should operate, or why salmon should be saved.

“A lifetime Californian, he was educated in economics at Stanford, and since that time has educated economists and bankers and the rest of us about new ways of doing business, including debt-for-nature swaps and recognizing the risks and rewards of international loans that can be used to conserve and sustain the world’s dwindling natural endowment.

“Lew’s meteoric career began at Wells Fargo, where he soon held key management positions before joining the Banc of America, where he ultimately became CFO and the chair of Banc of America Securities. And, at the beginning of this year, he became the CEO of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation. Since that time, he has initiated new thinking around the world in the business of philanthropy. He has also found time to serve on several conservation boards, including Conservation International, Trout Unlimited, and this Academy of Sciences. And he is a great sportsman.

“I can think of few as appropriate as Lew to receive this Heritage Award. He helped to convince the Academy to make

this lovely exhibit [*Anglers All*] possible, he has been extremely beneficial to life on earth through his conservation activities, and he is a hell of a fly fisherman. And, as the plaque above the fireplace in our fishing lodge reminds us, there is more to fishing than fish.”

Many people helped to make this Heritage Award event a success. The Museum would like to express our sincere thanks to the following contributors: the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (at the benefactor and sponsor level); Foster Bam and Sallie Baldwin, and Lewis and Susan Coleman (at the sponsor level); and Michael and Stacia Balog, Jenny and Richard Emerson, Peter and Mardine Sibley, Jerry Tone, the Thomas and Pauline Thusher Family Fund, and Holly F. D’Annunzio (at the donor level).

We would also like to recognize the following auction donors: Richard and Angie Theiriott, Pine Ridge Winery, Stonefly Vineyards, Turnbull Cellars, Corley Monticello Vineyards, von Strasser Winery, Richard Guggenheimer, Leigh H. Perkins Sr., Frontiers International and the Pono River Company, the Orvis Company, Rock Springs Ranch, Dr. Arthur Kaemmer, Henry’s Fork Lodge, Ridge Vineyards, and Dr. John E. McCosker and the Steinhart Aquarium.

On a parting note, we could not have had such a successful event without Judy Prokupek, director of development at California Academy of Sciences, and her able staff, who assisted us on site. They were a joy to work with, and we hope we have a chance to work together again.



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## Dinner/Auctions in Hartford and Philadelphia

Eighty people attended the **Hartford Dinner/Auction** November 1 at the Marriott Hotel in Farmington, Connecticut. The evening was not only fun, but a success for the Museum. We would like to thank Dinner Chair John Mundt Jr. and his committee—Jerry Bannock, Phil Castleman, David Egan, David Foley, Larry Johnson, R. Tracy Page, Bill and Marie Pastore, Vincent Ringrose, and Ed Ruestow—for their contributions to the evening.

We offered some new and different day trips, both within the state of Connecticut and beyond, and our angling friends responded well. Jeff Northrop of Northeast Saltwater Flyfishing offered a trip for two to fish the Norwalk Island chain; Jack Smola donated a day for two to fish the rivers of Connecticut or Massachusetts; and Richard Bell offered to act as guide at the Walton Club in Cornwall Bridge, Connecticut. Trustee Mike Osborne donated a day for two at the Potatuck Club in Sandy Hook, Connecticut; Captain Dan Wood, owner of Connecticut Woods & Water Guide Services, offered sunset fishing for two; and Jack Coyle will play host at the Limestone Trout Club for the lucky bidder. Our live auction was a great success thanks to these donations.

We would like to thank our dinner sponsors, Kip Allardt and John Mundt Jr., who gave that little extra to help the evening be such a great event. Also, our regards and thanks to our other auction donors: Phil Castleman, Peter Corbin, David Foley, Tony Lyons and the Lyons Press, John Mundt Jr., Paul Rossman, John Soward, and Mr. and Mrs. Stan Zecher.

Thanks to **Philadelphia** Dinner Chair Lynn Hirschler and her committee—Leonard Busby, Ted McKenzie, Lee Pierson, and Eleanor Peterson—the annual Philadelphia dinner/auction was smoothly run and raised important funds for the Museum. Sixty guests attended the November 9 event at the Merion Cricket Club in Haverford.

A special thanks to our sponsors; to the Anglers' Club of Philadelphia for providing the table wine; and to the Delaware Valley Women's Fly Fishing Association, Curtis Hill, Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Hirschler, and Dr. James Specter for their extra efforts to ensure the success of the evening.

Our live and silent auctions would not have been so successful without the generosity of the following donors: John Affleck; George Angstadt; John Betts;

Cakebread Cellars; Eylers, Inc.; Far Niente Vineyards; the Lyons Press; Theodore McKenzie; Dr. David Meirs; the Orvis Company, Philadelphia; and Ernest Schwiebert.

The Cricket Club did a superb job of organizing the event, which always makes our job easier on arrival. The dinner was expertly prepared and served, and our kudos to the staff! Mike Tomasiewicz, our auctioneer at both the Hartford and Philadelphia events, dazzled the crowd with his sense of humor and fund-raising talent.

## Conservationist Leigh Perkins Honored at University of Minnesota

Museum founder and Trustee Leigh H. Perkins Sr. received an honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Minnesota on October 8. The university recognized his long work as a conservationist as well as his connection with its College of Natural Resources.

Perkins purchased a century-old flyrod manufacturer, the Orvis Company, in 1967. Its sales rose from \$500,000 that year to \$200 million by 1999, and Perkins directed that five percent of pretax profits—more than \$5 million to date—be contributed to organizations that protect fish and wildlife habitat. As president of the board of the Ruffed Grouse Society in the late 1970s, he led its reorganization into a national forest wildlife conservation force with an annual income of \$2.5 million today. Through it, he became friends with the late Gordon Gullion, a professor in the university's College of Natural Resources, who was a world authority on ruffed grouse and woodcock. Perkins was instrumental in creating the new Gordon W. Gullion Chair in Forest Wildlife Research and Education at the college.

Perkins helped the Nature Conservancy acquire the 504-square-mile Gray Ranch in southwestern New Mexico. He supported local ranchers in forming a conservation group, the Malpai Borderlands Group, which has prevented the area from breakup and subdivision by allowing ranchers to graze cattle there (while resting their own pastures) in exchange for conservation easements.

In northern Florida and southern Georgia, Perkins, as a member and officer of the Tall Timbers Research Station near Tallahassee, Florida, helped protect large parcels of critical habitat for many threatened species. He persuaded media magnate Ted Turner to place an easement on his property in the area to protect it from development and followed

suit with his own land. Farther from home, he recently gave funds and organized other donors to help the Nature Conservancy acquire Palmyra Atoll, a 15,000-acre complex of atolls and pristine coral reefs a thousand miles south of Hawaii.

And very importantly, from our perspective, Leigh Perkins took an idea of the late Herman Kessler and in 1968 founded the American Museum of Fly Fishing. We are pleased and proud to congratulate Leigh for receiving this well-deserved honor.

## Anglers All Returns

*Anglers All*, the Museum's immensely popular traveling exhibit, has returned to Manchester, Vermont, for a limited showing in the Museum's home galleries.

The exhibit, which features some of the finest artifacts in the Museum's collection, has been a hit with appreciative audiences in Bozeman, Salt Lake City, and San Francisco over the past eighteen months. Visitors to *Anglers All* have enjoyed seeing tackle belonging to such notables as Herbert Hoover, Babe Ruth, Daniel Webster, and Bing Crosby, as well as rare angling artifacts, such as Theodore Gordon—and Carrie Stevens—tied flies, Charles Murphy rods, and Birmingham reels. The displays also include a rodmaker's workbench; tributes to Edward Hewitt, George LaBranche, and Mary Orvis Marbury; a timeline of fly-fishing history; and a look at the science behind why flies work.

*Anglers All* will only be in Manchester for a few months, so we encourage everyone who is in the area to stop in and enjoy this amazing exhibit.

## In the Library

Thanks to the following publishers for their donations of recent titles that have become part of our collection (all were published in 2001, unless otherwise noted):

Coch-y-Bonddu Books sent us a copy of Fred Buller's *Angling: The Solitary Vice* (2000). Stackpole Books sent us a copy of Ed Mitchell's *Fly-Fishing the Saltwater Shoreline* and Don Holbrook and Ed Koch's *Midge Magic*.

The Flyfisher's Classic Library sent us a copy of Frederick Buller and Hugh Falkus's *Dame Juliana: The Angling Treatise and Its Mysteries* and a reissue of Edmund W. Davis's *Salmon-Fishing on the Grand Cascapedia* with an introduction by David Zincavage. And Wilderness Adventure Press, Inc., sent us a reissue of Edmund W. Davis's *Woodcock Shooting*.



## Tony Lyons Donates Books to the Museum

Tony Lyons of Westport, Connecticut, donated nearly two hundred books to the Museum's collection (and, when appropriate, to our fund-raising programs), including first editions, signed copies, limited editions, and advanced uncorrected proofs. We usually provide a complete list of these donations to readers, but given the length of this list, we ask that anyone interested in reviewing it contact Sara Wilcox for a copy.

## In Memoriam

Trustee **Roy D. Chapin Jr.** died on 5 August 2001 of heart failure in Nantucket, Massachusetts. He was eighty-five years old.

Before retiring in 1987, the Grosse Pointe Farms auto executive worked thirty-three years for American Motors, including eleven years as chairman, ten as chief executive officer, and ten as a director. His father was Roy Chapin, a founder of the Hudson Motor Car Company. In 1970, Chapin Jr. bought Jeep Corp. from Kaiser Industries. It was an unpopular decision at the time, but by using his own experiences as a hunter and fisherman, he saved Jeep and marketed the vehicle successfully to people like himself. He was often quoted as saying, "Be ready when opportunity comes. Luck is the time when preparation and opportunity meet."

Besides providing leadership to AMC at a crossroads in its development before the company was acquired (first by Chrysler Corp. and later by Daimler-Chrysler AG), Chapin served on the board of directors of corporations that included Whirlpool, Gould, Coastal, and American Natural Resources.

He also was a conservationist and belonged to Ducks Unlimited, the Atlantic Salmon Federation, the Ruffed Grouse Society, and Trout Unlimited. He served as a trustee for many years at the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

Chapin is survived by his wife, Loise; three sons; a daughter; a stepson; three stepdaughters; two brothers; two sisters; six grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

**Lewis M. Borden III**, former trustee of the Museum, died in his home on 26 October 2001 of a heart attack. He was sixty years old.

At the time of his death, Borden was a fund-raising associate for Kellner, DiLeo & Co., a New York-based firm specializing in merger arbitrage. In 1992, he established Belford Partners Inc., which

purchased United Mortgage Co. from Norwest Banks (now Wells Fargo). He was also a founding director for VectraBank, Denver. In the 1970s and 1980s, he was vice president and manager of real estate investments for Denver-based St. Mary Land & Exploration Co., an oil and natural gas exploration firm.

Borden was the great-great-grandson of Gail Borden, who founded the Borden Milk Co. and invented condensed milk.

Mr. Borden served as a trustee of the Lowry Foundation, Colorado Public Radio, the Children's Museum of Denver, and the Denver Art Museum. He was a trustee of the American Museum of Fly Fishing for many years and was especially important in developing the Museum's strong dinner/auction program. His passion for fly fishing, in part, prompted his move to Colorado in 1971.

Borden is survived by his wife, Jane, two sons, and a granddaughter. At the time of his death, his family requested that contributions be made, in lieu of flowers, to the American Museum of Fly Fishing and the Denver Art Museum.



## LETTERS

I was interested to see G. William Fowler's "Brothers of the Angle: The Flyfishers' Club" in the Fall issue, but I was disappointed to find that it was such an instance of "tunnel history." Too, I wish I had had it to hand when I was working on "Rigor Without Mortis" (see page 18), because it illustrates so well the Victorian myth of the urban gentleman-angler.

Anybody who would question how a combination of power and myth "propagates" itself need look only at this club and its access to media (mostly publishing). As Fowler points out, its founders included the editors of Britain's two most powerful fishing journals, and in its first fifty years its very limited membership produced "more than two hundred books on fishing." As well, its highly defensive rules, no doubt conceived of by the members as "natural" (that is, no more than any right-thinking person would make), barred precisely those people who were threatening the Victorian upper classes from below: manufacturers and skilled craftsman. (It was gentlemanly and okay to work with your brains writing books, or with your buns waiting for the rents to come in, but not with your hands or your entrepreneurship). This rule against "manufacturers or dealers in angling equipment . . . [interpreted as] all traders or businessmen supplying anglers" would have barred, in this country, Mary Orvis Marbury (also barred because she was a woman, I suspect), Theodore Gordon, Ray Bergman, and Leigh Perkins. I suspect the membership would also have barred Izaak Walton, who was neither a fly fisher nor a gentleman. This was, then, less an exercise of the right of private association than the exercise of the exclusion (from the club's access to publishing, for example) of everybody on the wrong side of a glass ceiling.

Articles on the Flyfishers' Club and others like it are part of fishing's history, but, like the other parts, I believe that they should be given the context that shows how fishing, like underwear and manners, is a product and a symptom of its times.

*Ken Cameron  
Forestport, New York*

## Upcoming Events

### February 7

Dinner/Auction  
The Anglers' Club  
New York, New York

### March 14

Heritage Award Dinner/Auction  
Yale Club  
New York, New York

### April 25

Dinner/Auction  
The Chagrin Valley Hunt Club  
Gates Mills, Ohio

### May 4

Board of Trustees Meeting  
Manchester, Vermont

### May 4

Dinner/Auction  
Manchester, Vermont

## Fly-Fishing Shows

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Denver,  
Colorado . . . . . January 4-6  
Marlborough,  
Massachusetts . . . . . January 18-20  
Somerset,  
New Jersey . . . . . January 25-27  
San Rafael,  
California . . . . . March 2-3

# History Makers' Circle: A History-Making Day



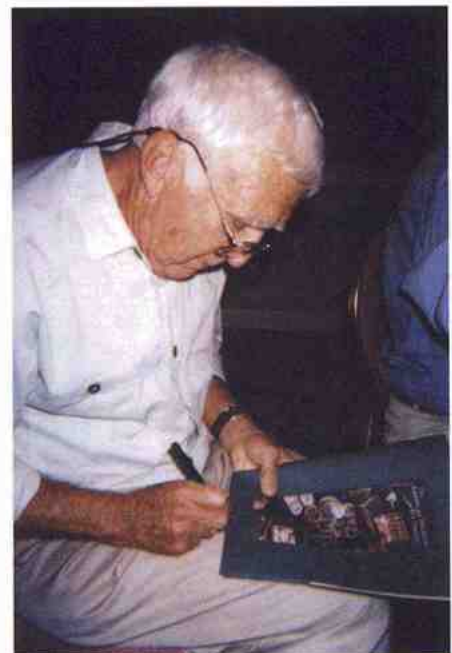
*Participants in the Museum's first oral history event: hosted by Executive Director Gary Tanner (left) and attended by (left to right) Leon Chandler, Lefty Kreh, Paul Schullery, Dave Whitlock, Bud Lilly, Stu Apte, and David Ledlie.*

On 5 September 2001, a small group of fly fishing's history makers met in Salt Lake City to make more history. They gathered to record, on videotape, the American Museum of Fly Fishing's first oral history report. Moderated by Trustees Emeritus Paul Schullery and David Ledlie, with assistance from Museum Executive Director Gary Tanner, the group included Leon Chandler, Lefty Kreh, Bud Lilly, Stu Apte, and Dave Whitlock. Also very much a part of the group but unable to attend for health reasons was Trustee Emeritus Leon Martuch. The group gathered as a result of Leon's efforts, and he generously supported the cost of the video production company and the facility rental.

The Museum is deeply grateful to all the participants for spending an entire day with us, making history. The event will stand as the foundation for our continuing efforts to document modern fly fishing through oral histories.

*Preserving our rich fly-fishing heritage for future generations.*

Photos by Paul Schullery and Gary Tanner



*Spontaneity ruled the day. At day's end, everyone signed each other's Museum notebooks, as Dave is doing here.*



*Lefty, Paul, and Dave share one of the day's many light moments.*



*During a break, Gary gets some advice from Bud on fishing the Madison.*



*Leon spent fifty years with Cortland Line Company. Lefty is one of fly fishing's most prolific authors.*



*Paul enjoys the banter between Dave and Bud about the "good old days" in West Yellowstone.*



*Stu and Dave sharing thoughts on Kay Brodney who, among her many fly-fishing achievements, was one of the Museum's earliest supporters.*



*Lefty gets wired for sound.*



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## CONTRIBUTORS



**Ken Cameron** has written about history and myth in the award-winning *Africa on Film: Beyond Black and White* and *America on Film: Hollywood and American History*. His latest contribution to the journal, "Standing on the Shoulders of Giants"—coauthored with Andrew Herd—appeared in the Summer 2001 issue.

**Andrew Herd** was born in London and has lived in the north of England for many years, within a few miles of the beck on which Canon Greenwell learned to fish. He has had a lifelong interest in history, which has led him all over the world. His first book, a monograph on medieval fly fishing, was published by the Medlar Press in 1999, accompanying a facsimile of *The Treatyse of Fishing with an Angle*. He maintains a web site devoted to the history of fly fishing (<http://www.flyfishinghistory.com>), and his second book, a history of fly fishing, was published by the Medlar Press in November 2001, with an introduction by Fred Buller (<http://www.demon.co.uk/medlarpress/>) and a preface by John Betts. Dr. Herd fishes for almost anything, but trout and salmon are his main interests. He is a member of the Flyfishers' Club, London. His latest contribution to the journal, "Astræus: The First Fly-Fishing River"—coauthored with Goran Grubic—appeared in the Fall 2001 issue.



Historian **Paul Schullery** was executive director of the American Museum of Fly Fishing from 1977 to 1982 and editor of *The American Fly Fisher* from 1978 to 1983. He is the author, coauthor, or editor of more than thirty books on history, nature, and sport, and has contributed chapters to twenty others. He is an affiliate professor of history at Montana State University and an adjunct professor of American Studies at the University of Wyoming. For his work as a historian and nature writer, he has been awarded an honorary doctorate of letters by Montana State University and the Wallace Stegner Award from the University of Colorado Center of the American West. He most recently contributed a book review, "A Crop of Classics," to the Fall 2001 issue.

## Museum Bookshelf



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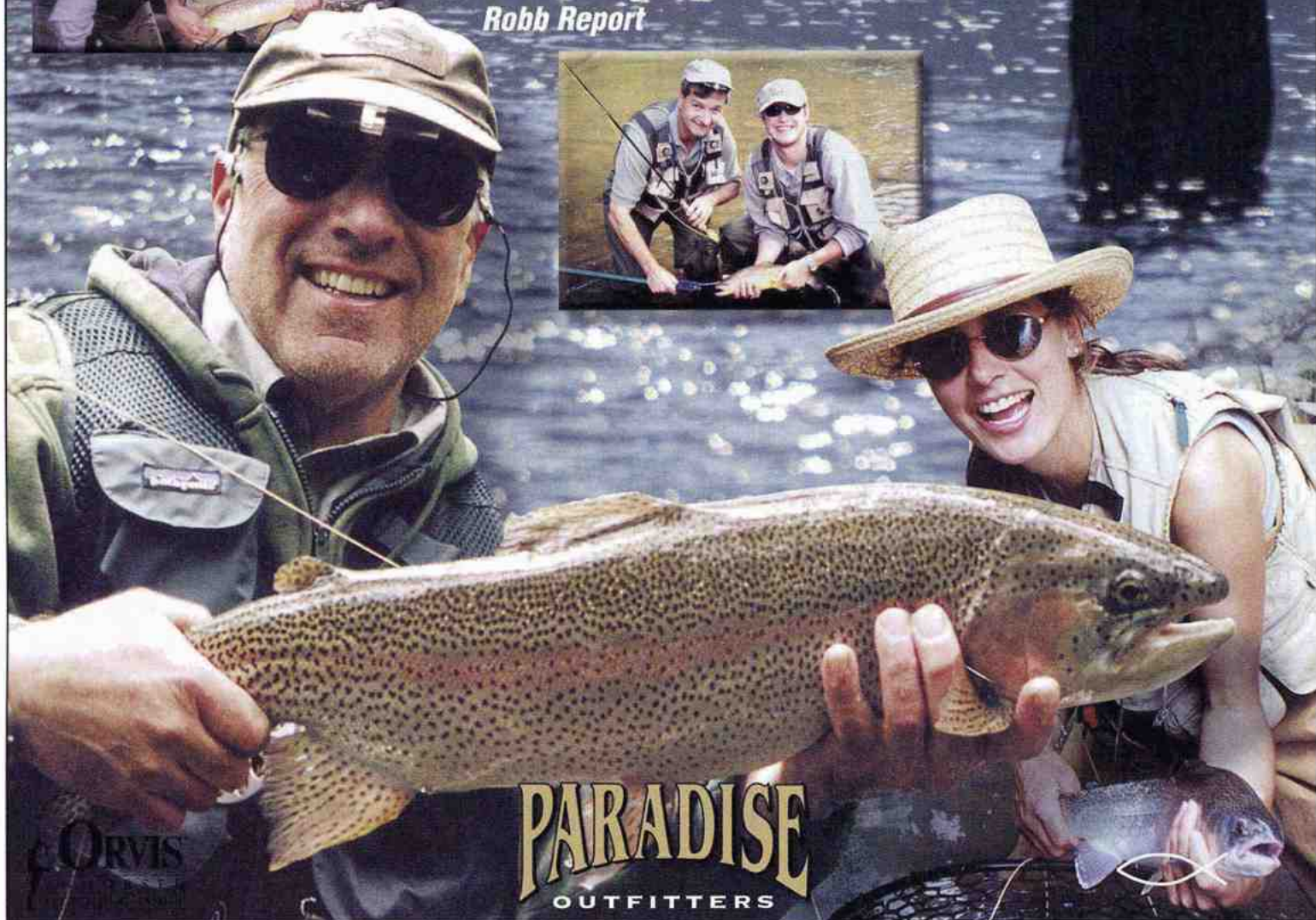
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# A New Chapter in the Museum's History

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*Conceptual drawing of the Museum's new home at the Brookside property.  
The inset shows an enlargement of the proposed new front entrance.*

As an institution accredited by the American Association of Museums, the American Museum of Fly Fishing is obligated to maintain the highest degree of professional care to its collections and to present to the public that same degree of professionalism in its educational gallery exhibits. Key to this ability to care for collections and exhibit them is space.

The Museum, dedicated to preserving and celebrating the rich heritage of fly fishing, has been at maximum capacity for storing its growing collection of artifacts for some years. There is no space to house new acquisitions. In fact, there is only the barest minimum of space to care for the collections we currently house, and no work space whatsoever to create and curate new exhibits. Exhibition space has always been at a premium; as the collection has grown, the percentage of it on display has dwindled.

The Museum's location, on a quiet corner in Manchester Village, limits its ability to attract visitors as well. It has been said that even people who know the Museum exists and are looking for it cannot find it. Potential donors of artifacts and funds may well ask, "Why give to a hideaway?"

In light of these facts, we are acquiring the Brookside Properties in Manchester Village, located immediately adjacent to the new Orvis flagship store. This property will increase at least threefold our gallery space, our storage space, and (we predict) our annual visitation rate, as well as enhance our ability to attract new members and donors. Stay tuned for more details about the project and how you can help!

GARY TANNER  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF FLY FISHING, a nationally accredited, nonprofit, educational institution dedicated to preserving the rich heritage of fly fishing, was founded in Manchester, Vermont, in 1968. The Museum serves as a repository for, and conservator to, the world's largest collection of angling and angling-related objects. The Museum's collections and exhibits provide the public with thorough documentation of the evolution of fly fishing as a sport, art form, craft, and industry in the United States and abroad from the sixteenth century to the present. Rods, reels, and flies, as well as tackle, art, books, manuscripts, and photographs form the major components of the Museum's collections.

The Museum has gained recognition as a unique educational institution. It supports a publications program through which its national quarterly journal, *The American Fly Fisher*, and books, art prints, and catalogs are regularly offered to the public. The Museum's traveling exhibits program has made it possible for educational exhibits to be viewed across the United States and abroad. The Museum also provides in-house exhibits, related interpretive programming, and research services for members, visiting scholars, authors, and students.

The Museum is an active, member-oriented nonprofit institution. For information please contact: The American Museum of Fly Fishing, P. O. Box 42, Manchester, Vermont 05254, 802-362-3300.

