

*The* American  
Fly Fisher

*Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*



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FALL 2007

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# The Niche of It



Winnie Dette and Mike Valla in Winnie's kitchen, 1994, on the day Walt was laid to rest in a private family burial.

THOSE WHO FLY FISH are many; those who care about fly-fishing history are relatively few. Some days fly-fishing history feels like a niche sized to about the eye of a #24 hook.

But when one takes a look at, say, this issue of the *American Fly Fisher*, one is reminded that there are people out there who do care about the sport's history and are tending it in varying and particular ways.

Take, for instance, Mike Valla. As a young boy, he saved his pennies and took a bus to Roscoe for a day's fishing, only to meet Walt and Winnie Dette and begin a life-changing friendship. Mary Dette Clark—Walt and Winnie's daughter and the one who carries on the Dette fly-tying tradition—recently shared family files with Valla, giving him access to years of correspondence, as well as to the recently recovered *Diary of Winifred Ferdon: 1928*. Winnie Dette was a real-life heroine to Valla, and "Winifred Ferdon Dette: Diary of a Catskill Fly Tier" is Valla's personal tribute to her. The article includes old family photos and quotes from Winnie's letters and diaries. You can find it on page 8.

Then there's Clarence Anderson, who pieces together facts of the life of rodmaker Hiram Leonard from the limited sources available, reviewing both what these sources are and how reliable or useful they may have been. As Anderson aptly states, "to tell the story of Leonard and his apprentices is to tell a very large part of the story of split cane in America." Leonard introduced industrial-age manufacturing methods, thus revolutionizing rodbuilding. "Hiram Leonard: A Review of the Published Biographical Evidence," begins on page 2.

Darin Kinsey tells us, "Harvard Yard may not be the best place to catch a trout, but the nearby Houghton Library must be counted among the erudite angler's finest winter haunts." He's referring specifically to the collection of Daniel Butler Fearing (1859–1918), whose large and important collection is housed at Harvard's Houghton Library. Kinsey was the 2006 Joan Nordell Fellow there. His article about this collection begins on page 16.

*Ogden M. Pleissner: The Sporting Grand Tour* is scheduled to open at the museum in May 2008. This will be the first museum show to ever focus solely on the painter's sporting art. The

exhibition is being curated by Robert Shaw, an independent scholar and art historian and the former curator of the Shelburne Museum, who also will edit the exhibition catalog. Read more about Pleissner and this exciting event on page 18.

Museum volunteer librarian Gerald Karaska notes that an important book was recently donated to the museum: Charles Thacher's *Angling Books: A Guide for Collectors*. It describes more than 15,000 "collectible" angling books that have been offered for sale from 1999 to 2006. Karaska reviews this important catalog on page 24.

May 2007 brought with it one of the biggest events of this year for us: the Heritage Award dinner honoring reelmaker Stan Bogdan. Friends of Stan gathered at the Yale Club in New York City to pay tribute to one of the finest reelmakers in history. It was a wonderful evening and a wonderful party, and you could feel the love in the room. In fact, there was *so* much love in the room that a particular rodmaker, who shall remain nameless, became engaged to his dinner companion the very next day. Stan, I'm told, will be fishing in Canada the day of the wedding. Coverage of the Heritage Award event begins on page 20.

We're sad to announce that Bill Bullock recently resigned as the museum's executive director (see his farewell message on the inside back cover). He's off to the land of academia, and we wish him the best.

So, we have the personal memoir of someone who grew up around fly-tying greats; an historian wanting to get to the bottom of Hiram Leonard's past; a scholar alerting us to an important angling library; a librarian reviewing an important book for angling book collectors; announcement of an exhibit of one of the finest sporting artists of the last century; and coverage of an event honoring a reelmaker making history with every finished reel. The fly-fishing-history niche may be a small one, but there are all sorts of amazing people to be found within it.

KATHLEEN ACHOR  
EDITOR



THE AMERICAN MUSEUM  
OF FLY FISHING  
*Preserving the Heritage  
of Fly Fishing*

# The American Fly Fisher

*Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*

FALL 2007

VOLUME 33 NUMBER 4

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ON THE COVER: *Winnie and Walt Dette in the 1930s. From the collection of Mary Dette Clark.*

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# Hiram Leonard: A Review of the Published Biographical Evidence

by Clarence Anderson



*A young Hiram Leonard poses for the camera. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

**H**E DOTH bestride the narrow world [of rodmaking] like a Colossus,” to paraphrase Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. Notwithstanding such crucially important predecessors as Ebenezer Green and Samuel Phillippe, nor such talented successors as Ed Payne, Hiram Hawes, and his other apprentices, this great truth about Hiram Leonard cannot be gainsaid by any honest student of the craft. His workmanship was irreproachable, his rod designs advanced for the period, but most significantly (as A. J. Campbell has argued convincingly), Leonard revolutionized the venerable craft of rodbuilding by introducing manufacturing methods appropriate for the industrial age. Yet to anyone who has examined his past more than superficially, these technical and commercial accomplishments—the ones that brought him international celebrity—seem hardly more than a coda to a life his contemporaries considered extraordinary long before he first split cane.

Leonard kept no diary, so far as is known, nor, save two brief documents (hereinafter described), has any body of correspondence survived that might reveal his private feelings about his life and accomplishments. He left, however, a statement in stone that seems to tell us where his heart truly lay: his grave monument in Highland Mills, New York. No emblem of his worldly success adorns this imposing sculpture—not the expected panoply of rods, tackle, and trout—but rather a poignant evocation of his life as the “great hunter” of the North Woods: a Maine canoe.<sup>1</sup>

The romantic—indeed, quasimythical—incidents of Leonard’s early manhood appear, with good reason, to have seized the imaginations of every angling historian who has taken up his story, beginning with Sparse Grey Hackle in 1942. Subsequent chroniclers, Marty Keane and A. J. Campbell, most notably, have related details apparently derived from the same ambiguous sources—an

“old friend,” or “old hunter,” for example—and when informants are identified by name, the specific location of the reference is seldom provided. To get to the bottom of who, exactly, these informants were, and where, exactly, their testimony was originally recorded, will be the limited purpose of the following paragraphs.

## SOURCES AND “OTHER” SOURCES

Every Leonard biographical sketch commences, fittingly, with the ur-document of Leonard studies: Henry David Thoreau’s celebrated account of his chance encounter with the locally famous professional hunter on a stagecoach bound for Moosehead Lake in 1857. This remarkable coincidence—that one of America’s most profound and original thinkers just happened to board the same crowded conveyance with the thirty-year-old Leonard—would probably be dismissed as apocryphal had not



Thoreau himself confirmed the incident (in *The Allagash and East Branch*, published in 1864, retitled *The Maine Woods* in subsequent editions). Because any perceptive reader of Thoreau recognizes at once that an observer of his penetrating insight could not be swayed by superficial appearances, his assessment of the disarmingly mild-mannered “great hunter,” as Leonard was called by Thoreau’s Indian guide, is as unforgettable as it is telling.

Thoreau’s modern reputation magnifies the significance of his remarks about Leonard, whereas the present obscurity of the “other” source universally quoted by Leonard biographers, Manly Hardy, a professional fur trader from Brewer, Maine, may detract from the perceived value of his observations. In the latter decades of the nineteenth century, however, Hardy, as a frequent and highly regarded contributor to the nation’s premier sporting periodical, *Forest and Stream*, probably enjoyed a wider audience than Thoreau. His sober, dependably factual accounts of hunting and trapping in Maine had earned him a reputation as the North Woods’s foremost authority on those subjects, but it was as an amateur naturalist respected by professional scientists, with whom he often collaborated, that he most distinguished himself from others in the sporting press. Hardy’s recollections of his old “woods-mate” form the backbone of our knowledge of Leonard before fame (in the guise of William Mills & Son) sought him out.

In the fall of 1857, Hardy and Leonard traveled by canoe up the West Branch of the Penobscot River, a journey of twenty-five days. Hardy referred to this trip as a “fur hunt,” but as it was impossible to pack out more than a fraction of the skins and game the two collected, there can be little doubt that love of sport and adventure—all that is symbolized by Leonard’s monument—was the true incentive. True to his reputation as the great hunter, Leonard slew four moose in the course of the excursion, which consisted of far more paddling and portaging than hunting. And on their expedition of some fifty-six days into New Brunswick the following year, Leonard’s legendary six-shooter rifle (three revolving barrels, each firing two shots, and made lock, stock, and barrel by Leonard himself), tallied three moose. The day-by-day details of these excursions were recorded in Hardy’s unpublished journals, now in the Fannie Hardy Ekstorm Collection of the Fogler Library at the University of Maine.

Whether Hardy and Leonard hunted or traveled together after Leonard settled in Bangor (by 1864, the date of his earliest

appearance as a gunsmith in the Bangor business directory, but possibly earlier) just across the Penobscot from Hardy’s home in Brewer is not known, and no documentary evidence exists to show that the two even saw one another again following Leonard’s departure for New York in 1881. That the warmth, however, of Leonard’s feelings for his old “woods-mate,” and for the “dear old Maine woods,” remained undiminished by the passage of twenty years is made manifest in an obviously heartfelt letter written to Hardy in 1900,<sup>2</sup> by which time Leonard’s health seems to have been in steady decline. After Leonard’s death on January 30, 1907, at the age of seventy-six, Hardy was the “authority” most often quoted in the numerous obituaries written for his now world-famous friend. These included the February 11, 1907, edition of the *Bangor Daily Commercial* and the February 23, 1907, edition of *Forest and Stream*.

At least one more of Leonard’s hunting partners composed a postmortem remembrance of him: J. E. Libbey in the April 1907 issue of *Maine Sportsman*. These recollections by his aging companions—subject, one must acknowledge, to whatever distortions a half-century’s passage of time might have engendered—constitute the raw source material for almost all that has been written about Leonard’s early life. Libbey informs us that Leonard was “by profession, a civil engineer,” a woodsman whose “powers of endurance were beyond belief,” and “was the best still hunter I ever knew.”<sup>3</sup>

Hardy also described Leonard as a “civil engineer” (which at this time implied little about formal education, as many engineers, like many lawyers, learned on the job), and added, more specifically, that he “had charge of the machinery department of the Pennsylvania Coal Co.”<sup>4</sup> (The latter ambiguous statement has inspired speculation that exposure to coal dust caused Leonard’s later health problems; possibly, but the machinery department would certainly have been located above ground.) After returning to Maine from Pennsylvania in 1853 at the age of twenty-two (as reported, but not explained, in his obituaries), Leonard “engaged in the fur trade, employing 30 men as trappers,” according to Hardy.<sup>5</sup> Hardy seems to be the principal source for two of the most cherished articles of Leonard lore: the story of his passion for campfire flute playing (“many is the night I heard him wake the wilderness . . .”) and that of his belief that “no man who did not love music, and who could not play at least one musical instrument, could make a good fish rod.”<sup>6</sup> The heroic account of

Leonard packing a 135-pound moose quarter a distance of 7 miles through the forest likewise originated with Hardy. Although Hardy’s credibility as a painstaking observer and truthful reporter is so well attested that nothing he related of Leonard’s life in Maine can be subject to serious doubt, his knowledge of Leonard’s life in Pennsylvania and elsewhere may be less reliable.

If we care to understand the experiences that shaped Leonard’s character and personality long before his success in the early 1870s, Hardy’s fragmented reflections are thus the starting point (and, almost, the ending point). But what little Hardy had to say about Leonard as a rodbuilder (“He was the first man in America to make a split bamboo rod the way it should be made.”) was, shall we say, naive.<sup>7</sup> If, therefore, we care to understand the beginnings of his career in rod work, the starting point almost certainly must be Dr. A. G. Wilkinson’s broadly discursive travelogue, “Notes on Salmon Fishing,” published in the October 1876 issue of *Scribner’s Monthly* (republished in 1883 in Alfred Mayer’s massive anthology, *Sport with Rod and Gun*).

The record of Leonard’s early life, what little we know of it, displays few examples of good luck, and certainly his unexplained bouts of ill health do not fall into that category. But beginning with the good fortune of his famous encounter with the Bradford & Anthony sales representative in (probably, by Keane’s reckoning) 1871, as recounted by Leonard himself, the tide seemed to turn, and the national attention focused on him and his work by Wilkinson was truly the gift of a lifetime. Scribner’s was at the time of Wilkinson’s piece one of the most popular and respected periodicals in the country and would have brought Leonard directly to the attention of the upper-middle-class sportsmen who could afford to buy his costly gear.

Wilkinson’s commendation of Leonard was actually restricted to only a few lines, but it was disproportionately telling, identifying him as one “to whom every angler in America owes thanks for what he did as a pioneer in this art, and for what he is constantly doing in perfecting these excellent rods.”<sup>8</sup> “Perfecting” meant, among other things, the development of six-strip construction, which Leonard sincerely, but mistakenly, believed he was first to introduce. Accompanying these remarks was a wonderful engraving of the wiry-looking “pioneer” standing at his bench. Wilkinson’s enthusiastic endorsement, coming as it did so near the beginning of Leonard’s career, had to have been of incalculable publicity value.

## NEXT, HISTORICAL RESEARCH

The documents previously cited constitute most of the published source material for what may be considered the earliest “historical research” into Leonard’s life and career: Sparse Grey Hackle’s expansively titled “The Father of the Fly Rod,” which appeared in the June 1942 issue of the *Anglers’ Club Bulletin*. “Historical research” I arbitrarily construe to mean investigations carried out after the deaths of all the principals—Leonard, his wife, and his earliest apprentices—as distinguished from, for example, Dr. James Henshall’s seminal research into split-cane origins, published in 1881 in *Book of the Black Bass*, when Leonard himself was available to be interviewed.

S. G. H. (Alfred Miller) opens this influential (as will be shown momentarily) essay with a quotation from Hardy’s *Daily Commercial* obituary, but rather surprisingly, for a professional reporter, identifies this crucial informant only as “an old friend.” Although written for the Anglers’ Club, a knowledgeable and sophisticated

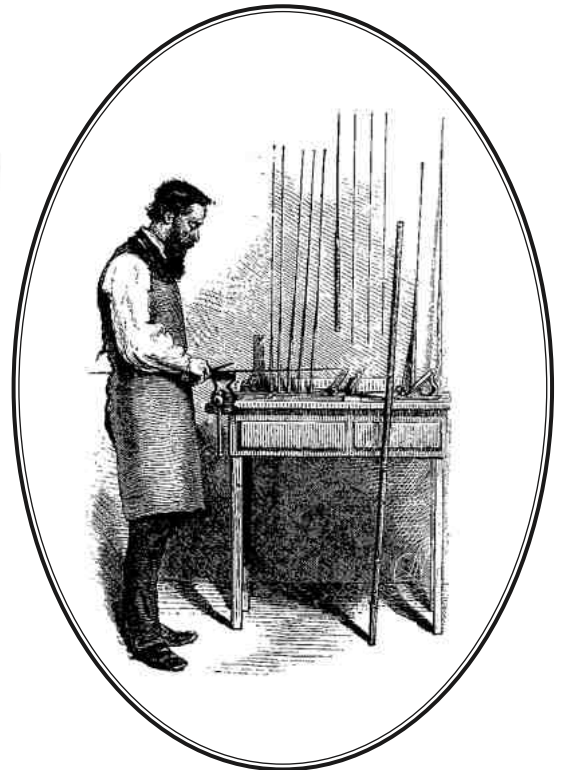
audience, Miller’s tone is decidedly casual; he was telling a story, not composing a scholarly treatise. (The charming insouciance reflected in most of his other work seemingly made Miller temperamentally ill-suited for the latter undertaking, but it’s unfortunate he did not try, as some people who had known Leonard intimately were, in 1942, still alive.) Not only is Leonard’s reputed invention of “the modern fly rod” adduced as evidence of his “genius,” he was “also a genius in several other fields: . . . hunter . . . woodsman . . . musician . . .,”<sup>9</sup> for example.

Miller was the investigator who discovered Leonard’s “autobiography,” that brief narrative thought to have been dictated by Leonard to his wife, Lizzie, which, along with much other memorabilia now in the museum’s collection, was inherited by his only child, Cora Leonard Hawes, Miller’s principal informant. Critical as this autobiography is in understanding Leonard’s own beliefs about his contribution to the craft, it would have behooved Miller greatly to evaluate those convictions in the light of Dr. Henshall’s findings, a *sine qua non*

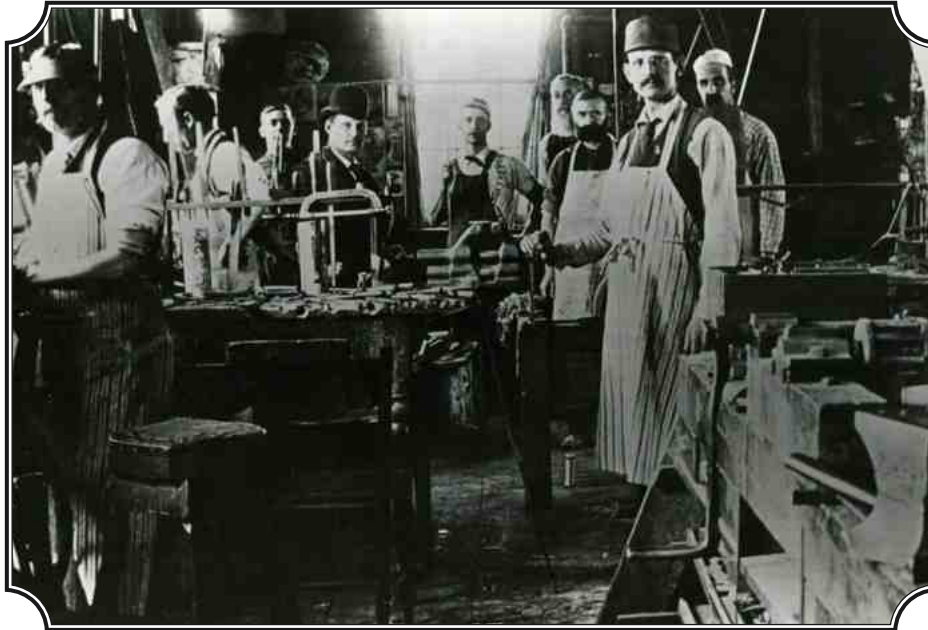
(as, frankly, he should have known) for anyone writing about the subject of early American rodmakers.

Although Miller’s article featured a reproduction of the historically invaluable photograph from which the Scribner’s engraving was derived, he did not mention Wilkinson’s work and may not have known about (or chose to dismiss) Henshall’s research. (Henshall himself *did* refer to Wilkinson, but politely ignored—as if it were not worthy of refutation—Leonard’s claim for priority in six-strip construction.) Miller’s use of the information gleaned, unquestionably, from Hardy is paradoxical; some quotations were indeed sourced to Hardy, but most were attributed to the old hunters and friends previously mentioned, who, years afterward, would again have their say in the work of Keane and others. Likewise, quotations extracted from Libbey’s remembrance are attributed to an “old timer in Bangor.”<sup>10</sup>

Miller rewrote this piece for the June 4, 1956, issue of *Sports Illustrated*, retaining the original title (far too fetching to abandon!), but dumbing it down for an



A photograph of Alfred Miller, aka Sparse Grey Hackle, the first two pages of his *Anglers’ Club Bulletin* essay on Hiram Leonard, and the Scribner’s engraving derived from the photo featured with Miller’s article. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.



*The Leonard workshop. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

audience of general sports fans. He chose, in this major revision, to introduce the colorful, but almost certainly apocryphal, tale of Loman Hawes's "discovery," in 1877, of the superior properties of Tonkin cane in the ribs of an umbrella imported from China. His source for this demonstration of the value of what is now denoted "oral history" (once regarded as mere hearsay) was again Cora, wife of Loman's brother Hiram Hawes, who, having been born in 1869, would have been a child in 1877.<sup>11</sup>

Miller's research, composed in large part, it can be deduced, of family anecdotes provided by Cora Leonard Hawes, supplied most of the biographical background for Dwight Demeritt's 1973 examination of Leonard's career as a gunsmith in *Maine Made Guns and Their Makers*. This exhaustively researched, carefully documented (including acknowledgments to Miller) work concentrates, of course, on detailed examinations of the few surviving examples of firearms attributed to Leonard, but includes such staples of Leonard lore as Thoreau's encomium and some of Hardy's recollections. Of greater interest, because it had not been reproduced previously, was a colorful description of Leonard by former business associate Francis Philbrook, inventor of Leonard's 1877 patent reel (as reported by his son, Rev. E. B. Philbrook): "Leonard was one of the greatest hunters who ever lived. He shot many hundred moose . . . furnishing

the lumber crews with meat. The Indians acknowledged that he was a far better hunter than any of their people."<sup>12</sup> (As Philbrook, before he turned reelmaker, was another highly regarded Bangor gunsmith, Demeritt provides much additional information about Philbrook's career.)

The many superb photographs in *Maine Made Guns* show Leonard's rifles to have been workmanlike, sturdy, and in some cases quite complex, but a good deal short of Miller's assertion that their "workmanship could [not] be excelled by Neidner, Adolf, Howe, or any other of our top-notch gunmakers."<sup>13</sup> The three men cited were consummate artisans who produced luxury goods for the urban carriage trade, not guns for hard service on the frontier, the only market available to Leonard during his years in Maine. Based on the photographic evidence, it clearly appears that Miller's enthusiasm clouded his judgment.

#### KEANE, SCHWIEBERT, AND KELLY

The most thorough examination of Leonard's life to date remains, as all should know, Marty Keane's 1976 *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, now itself a classic commanding prices of \$200 and up from collectors, even though several other good reviews of the subject have been published since that date. Keane's portrayal of Leonard's formative years

before settling in Bangor, although elaborated with the author's characteristic verve, is, essentially, a recapitulation of the tale told by Miller (whom he does not mention), complete with the roster of unidentified "old friends." As Miller had relied upon Cora Leonard Hawes to provide family history, Keane turned to her daughter-in-law, Elsie Hawes, wife of Cora's only child, Merritt. However, Keane significantly expands upon Miller's account with an engaging character portrait of Leonard's wife, Lizzie, and more importantly, tries to piece together—in far more detail than the earlier work—the complicated story of Leonard's many apprentices, the men who would influence the course of American rodbuilding for decades after Leonard's death.

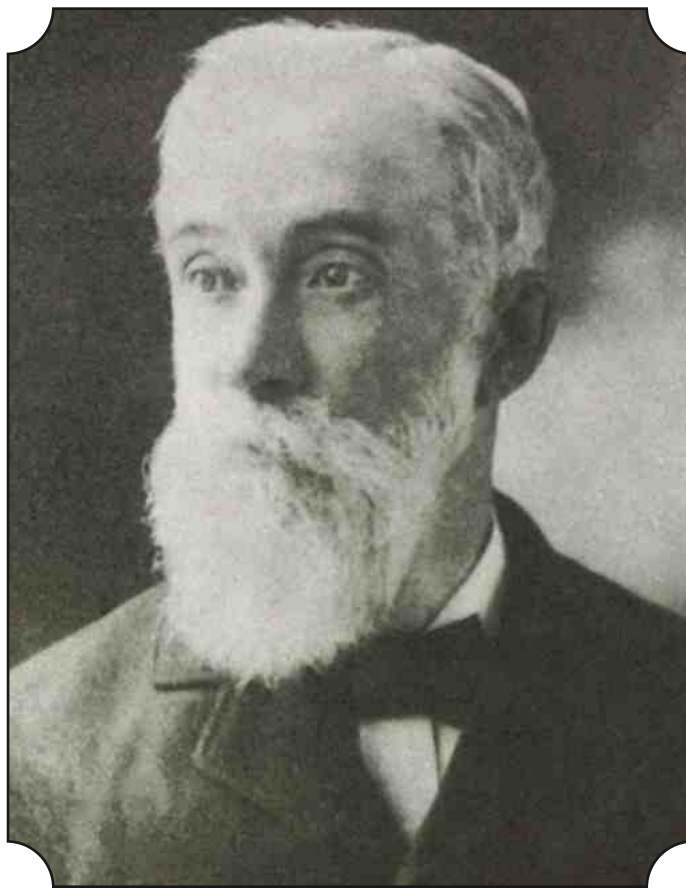
However much importance one attaches to the pioneering work of Green, the Phillippes (Samuel and his son Solon), and other early builders, the fact remains that no one but Leonard founded (inadvertently, to be sure) a "school" of rodbuilding. His competitors undoubtedly trained many apprentices who rose to proficiency in the trade, but it was the peculiar genius of Leonard to recognize and recruit men possessing talent on par with his own. And without slighting the many important builders who perfected their craft free of any association with Leonard, to tell the story of Leonard and his apprentices is to tell a very large part of the story of split cane in America.



Two years after Keane's iconic volume appeared, students of American fly-fishing history were treated to an unprecedented literary event: the publication of Ernest Schwiebert's epic *Trout*. As would be expected from such an indefatigable investigator, the author plunged headlong into the lore and legend of the Leonard "dynasty," assisted in this undertaking by none other than Arthur Mills, great-grandson of the man who had been instrumental in Leonard's rise to eminence.

Although published in 1978, one can assume the research for such an ambitious project had commenced many years previously, and thus it is perhaps not entirely surprising that Schwiebert's otherwise dauntingly thorough bibliography fails to include *Classic Rods and Rodmakers* (nor was it added to the second edition of 1984). Rather more curious is the omission of Miller's *Anglers' Club* piece, especially because the attentive reader seems to hear faint echoes from that piece in Schwiebert's language, which even refers to Leonard as "father of the modern fly rod."<sup>14</sup>

But the similarity is probably no more than coincidence, because Schwiebert presents findings that appear neither in Miller nor in any subsequent investigation. Two of the most difficult to reconcile with other research data are his assertions that both Thomas Chubb and Fred Divine were numbered among Leonard's original band of apprentices. The source for that intelligence, we must assume (because, regrettably, Ernie does not tell us), was Arthur Mills, to whom it had been passed, presumably, by older family members. But any involvement of Chubb, "the Machine Man," with Leonard is chronologically inconsistent with the well-documented establishment of his own factory in Post Mills, Vermont, in 1869. And angling historian Mary Kelly's intensive research into the identities of Leonard's earliest workmen has uncovered no trace of the presence of Divine, who was building rods in Utica, New York, at least as early as 1879. Proof that, notwithstanding the long association of Leonard with the Mills family, facts can become muddled as they are transmitted through the generations is



*A copy of this photograph was personally presented to Manly Hardy by Hiram Leonard; reproductions of the image also appeared in several Leonard catalogs.*

provided by the identification of Reuben Leonard as Hiram's son, rather than another of his nephews, along with the Hawes brothers.

Exactly *which* of the extraordinarily talented Hawes brothers, Hiram or Loman, collaborated with Leonard in the design and construction of the historic first beveler is a question as fascinating as it is controversial. Miller did not address the issue directly in either of the "Father" pieces, although a comment in the 1956 iteration actually hinted at cousin Reub.<sup>15</sup> Keane was and remains convinced by the tradition in the Merritt Hawes household that Leonard's "silent partner" had been Hiram Hawes. Schwiebert, probably articulating the beliefs of the Mills family, confers the honor upon Loman. The debate, at this late date, is unlikely to be resolved, but it might be useful to observe that in the year of the beveler's construction, 1876, Loman was twenty-seven years of age; Hiram, eighteen.

Because Schwiebert's prodigious industry, awesome erudition, and manifest brilliance is capable of lulling some readers into relaxing their critical faculties, it is unfortunate he was unable to compare the inherited traditions of the Mills family with the more recent and reliable

findings of Marty Keane. On the other hand, J. I. Merritt's characterization of Ernie in the Spring 2006 issue of this journal ("the first draft was invariably his last—and he resisted editing") suggests that such a comparison might have proved irrelevant.<sup>16</sup>

Mary Kelly, as noted above, continued working on the puzzle of how and when Leonard assembled his family of craftsmen in "Early Leonard," published in the Winter 1979 issue of this journal. By a painstaking examination of period references, such as business directories, Kelly confirmed and clarified most of the chronology first presented by Keane, but her careful documentation of each of the sources she consulted to arrive at her conclusions is dramatically different from the ex cathedra manner of Miller, Keane, and Campbell.

A meticulous analysis of Leonard's advertising copy in *Forest and Stream* allowed Kelly to identify with greater precision than had been previously achieved the changes in his retail marketing arrangements with such firms as Abbie & Imbrie. Unfortunately for those more interested in Leonard's earlier life—as an engineer, as a hunter, as a gunsmith—Kelly says little, and regrettably, that little ("tasted liquor, learned to smoke, tried women"), was perhaps better left unsaid.<sup>17</sup>

## CAMPBELL'S EXAMINATION

It should not be construed as any slight to Keane to acknowledge that the most influential—not among serious collectors, but among the general fly-fishing public—examination of rod-building in America yet published is A. J. Campbell's 1997 *Classic & Antique Fly Fishing Tackle*. Influential not because of its inerrancy (for unwarranted speculation, coupled with a disdain for documentation, is the author's besetting sin), but because of its audacious comprehensiveness, lively style, abundant and well-chosen illustrations (many of them quite rare), and not least importantly, its modest price (it's been recently remaindered for less than \$10!). For thousands of flea-market and Internet traders, this book has served as a crash course in American fly-tackle history. Campbell provides, in

effect, an economical alternative to Keane's now-expensive work, because he has borrowed so freely from it, as well as from Demeritt (according both the "legal minimum" in credit).

But Campbell's book is very much more than a compendium built on the work of others. His conjecture that another former gunsmith, Charles Wheeler, of Farmington, Maine, probably designed a beveling machine at almost the same time Leonard was constructing his first machine in 1876 came as a rude awakening to many confident in the belief they knew all about this phase of rod-building history. Keane doesn't even mention this once well-known maker, although, according to Campbell's investigations, he built his first split-cane rod (a six-stripper, at that) in 1868 and continued in the business until his death in 1916. Amazing!—that another Maine builder who, before 1880, might have been regarded as Leonard's rival, or at least a very serious competitor, almost vanished from history while the latter's name went on to become synonymous with *bamboo rod*.

The attention Campbell focused on a figure even more obscure than Wheeler—Brooklyn rodmaker John Landman—is so important (and so controversial) as to almost make one forgive his blithe indifference toward identifying his sources. His treatment of Leonard's life and career, however, is entirely conventional, an abbreviated retelling of the gospel according to Keane. And though he contributed nothing really new to Leonard's vita, his emphasis on the profound change "the machine" made in the craft of rodbuilding *was* something new: "The year 1876 . . . marked the birth of the production split-bamboo rod industry. Without the Leonard beveler . . . we collectors would have few rods to pursue."<sup>18</sup> "In 1876 . . . Leonard built 200 rods—half of Murphy's lifetime production—in just one year."<sup>19</sup> The implications of Leonard's machine had, of course, been there for all to see, and although others may have hinted at them, Campbell was first to articulate them with force and clarity.

The works and authors discussed above by no means exhaust the roster of angling writers who have had something



Hiram Leonard's grave marker.  
Photograph courtesy of Dr. William B. Krohn.

to say about "the father of the fly rod," because my severely circumscribed intent was only to review those investigators who have materially advanced our understanding of the events and circumstances of Hiram Leonard's early life. Even this limited undertaking is probably incomplete.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Although North American Indians built birch-bark-covered canoes wherever large-enough white birch trees could be obtained, the tribes inhabiting Maine and northeast Canada developed what are now considered the most hydrodynamically sophisticated and aesthetically pleasing designs. And when canoe-quality birches became scarce in Maine in the mid-1870s, white sportsmen conceived the idea of substituting waterproofed canvas for the (high-maintenance) bark. The latter type of craft apparently served as the sculptor's model for Leonard's monument, but during his professional hunting career in Maine, *birch* and *canoe* were synonyms.

2. William B. Krohn, "A Fall Fur-Hunt from Maine to New Brunswick: The 1858 Journal of Manly Hardy," *Northeastern Naturalist*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2005), 45.

3. "Doctor" (pseudonym of David S. Libbey's nephew, whose real name is unknown, quoting his father J. E. Libbey), "Hiram L. Leonard," *Maine Sportsman* (April 1907), 155.

4. "Hiram L. Leonard," *Bangor Daily Commercial* (11 February 1907), 1.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. A. G. Wilkinson, "Notes on Salmon Fishing," *Scribner's Monthly* (October 1876), 773.

9. Sparse Grey Hackle, "The Father of the Fly Rod," *Anglers' Club Bulletin*, vol. 21, no. 2 (June 1942), 3.

10. *Ibid.*, 8.

11. It would appear that Miller was not entirely sold on this story, either, because in his editorial notes to *Great Fishing Tackle Catalogs of the Golden Age* (New York: Crown, 1972), page 216, he remarked that importation of Tonkin cane to this country began in 1910.

12. Dwight B. Demeritt Jr., *Maine Made Guns and Their Makers* (rev. ed.), (Augusta, Me.: Maine State Museum, 1997), 159.

13. Sparse Grey Hackle, 8.

14. Ernest Schwiebert, *Trout* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 2nd ed., 1984), 932.

15. Sparse Grey Hackle, "Father of the Fly Rod," *Sports Illustrated*, vol. 40, no. 23 (4 June 1956), 79–81.

16. J. I. Merritt, "Reflections on an Angling Legend," *The American Fly Fisher*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Spring 2006), 25.

17. Mary Kefover Kelly, "Early Leonard," *The American Fly Fisher*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Winter 1979), 12.

18. A. J. Campbell, *Classic & Antique Fly Fishing Tackle* (New York: Lyons & Burford, 1997), 50.

19. *Ibid.*, 57.

#### ADDITIONAL SOURCES

William B. Krohn, comp. and ed., *Manly Hardy (1832–1910): The Life and Writing of a Maine Fur-buyer, Hunter, and Naturalist* (Orono, Me.: The Maine Folklore Center), 2005.

Patricia Miller Sherwood, ed., *An Honest Angler: The Best of Sparse Grey Hackle* (New York: Lyons Press), 1998.



# Winifred Ferdon Dette: Diary of a Catskill Fly Tier

by Michael E. Valla



*The Dette home/shop in the early 1950s, before the highway Route 17 was constructed.*

**T**HE OLD HOUSE at the end of Cottage Street, in Roscoe, New York, is strangely quiet and still. Aside from a small desk that I moved into the front room to write these words, the house is entirely empty now. And if it were not for the memories I have of the house, and of the times I stayed here, it would be hard to imagine that the small room was ever anything other than just a living area. But it was this room that served as a fly shop for many years when noted Catskill fly tiers Walt and Winnie Dette dressed their hallmark trout flies for hundreds of fly fishers who made pilgrimages to the storied Catskill rivers. This is the place of the Beaverkill and the Willowemoc, two of the most famous trout streams in America, and it is the place where I first met Winifred Dette.

All photos from the collection of Mary Dette Clark.

The old sign still hangs across the entire side of the home, although it is hidden now by poplar trees and growth: WALT DETTE FISHING TACKLE-FLIES. It is the sign that caught my eye from across the highway nearly forty years ago.<sup>1</sup> And to a boy of fifteen who was wandering the area alone on a day's fishing adventure, it spelled Mecca. I ran across the highway from the bus depot—fly rod, boots, and vest in hand—toward the house.

I had immersed myself in fly-fishing books and articles at the town library, reading about the Catskill rivers and their famous fly tiers.<sup>2</sup> It was just a question of somehow getting to Roscoe and those rivers. A simple solution was to secretly save school lunch money and collect the few dollars needed to take a bus trip from my home in Binghamton, 65 miles to the west, to live my dream for at least a day.

"We have an extra bedroom if you would like to stay a week," Walt offered

when he tracked me down, on orders from Winnie, and found me fishing that evening along the Willowemoc a short distance from the back of their house. I had stopped in the fly shop early that morning, and Winnie seemed a little bewildered and wondered how and why I had come to the river alone. Later in the day, she directed Walt to look for me for fear I would miss my evening bus back home.

That meeting resulted in a friendship that lasted until Walt and Winnie passed away. I stayed with them many times over the years, particularly during my teenage and college summers. The Dette home in those days was somewhat of an empty nest. Winnie and Walt's children, Mary and Walt II (called Clay), were well into adulthood. Mary lived on Long Island raising her own family, and Walt II (an engineer) was raising his out of state. I was offered Clay's room. Clay dabbled in fly fishing during childhood (he caught

a 14-pound Atlantic salmon, to his credit, from the Margaree River), but his interests were more in the sciences, engineering, and hobbies focused on those activities. Walt died in 1994, and we lost Winnie in 1998, but they both still live in my thoughts, and their matchless Catskill style lives on in the talent of others who follow their traditions.

In the years when I stayed with them, this was the scene in the fly shop: Winnie tucked in her fly-tying cubby on the right, Walt tying in his little domain to her left. I usually squeezed in between them, intently watching Walt and persistently tugged at Winnie for historical discussion. Walt instructed me at the fly-tying vise, directing my fingers through the motions that made the Dette flies so uniform and beautiful. Winnie would interject comments as we all tied, and I listened as she offered details about the history of fly fishing in the Catskills.

Daughter Mary Dette Clark, a superb tier in her own right, still ties flies at the home her parents moved into in the early 1970s, a couple of doors down from the old place I so fondly remember. In the spring of 2006, I sat at Winnie's bench (it appeared as if she'd never left it) and did some tying for Mary—not for money, but simply because I wanted to. There were envelopes and old cigar boxes stacked here and there, still filled with hackles she had organized. The small



*Winnie Dette, later in life.*

glass jars in which she placed her stripped hackle quills were there, just as if she was preparing to tie a dozen Red Quills. She loved tying Red Quills, and I can still remember her instructing, "You have to soak your quills when you tie Red

Quills." It was easy to recall the discussions we had, and sitting at her place brought on a flood of memories of her tying style, methods, and the array of Catskill patterns that emerged from her vise.

Winnie spoke often about the economy of motion in fly tying. When the Dettes tied a dozen classic dry flies, they would neatly lay out on the bench twelve wing pairs, twelve sets of measured hackle, twelve hooks, and the appropriate body material. Then they would systematically assemble the dozen flies in a most efficient manner. Winnie, as well as Walt and Mary, preferred this method to repeatedly picking up a hackle cape to pluck hackles fly by fly.

Efficiency was one concern, but not at the expense of uniformity, durability, and function. The uniformity of their flies resulted from an eye for material selection and an exacting sense of proportion. Winnie frequently mentioned that material recognition and selection was the hard part in precision tying, next to proper measurement of the fly components. As for her insistence on proper measurement, I recall an incident from the summer of 1971, when I was seventeen. Walt and Winnie's grandson, Mary's son Gary, was my age, and they thought it would be nice for the two of us to meet and fish together. Gary came up from his home on Long Island, and we fished together for a couple of weeks. The idea was



*Winnie and Walt Dette in the 1930s.*





Walt Dette

*Mary, Walt II, and Winnie in the 1940s.*

to do some night fishing, and Gary decided he needed some Light Cahill dry flies and wanted Winnie to tie a few. Gary pleaded with his grandmother: "We need Light Cahills, and we need them right away!"

Winnie was in the middle of cooking dinner and couldn't be bothered right then with the request. Gary persisted, and Winnie, somewhat riled at this point, shuffled her pots, then made her way into the tying room. She grabbed some wood duck flank feathers for winging, reached for some ginger shade hackle, and proceeded to measure every single hackle against her gauge to ensure they were the proper size for a size 10 hook. In a hurry or not, she still measured the hackle for uniformity of size (from that moment on, I have always measured my hackles to hook size).

Who was this woman who tied those famous Catskill style trout flies for more than sixty years, this caring person Winifred Dette? Eric Leiser, in his book *The Dettes*,<sup>3</sup> did a wonderful job of shedding light on the family, but as Leiser commented to me in a letter shortly after the book was published, it was sometimes hard to get information from them. "They simply won't

brag or even talk about the good things they've done." He reflected, "It was in fact quite tough getting what I did get."<sup>4</sup>

It is true Walt and Winnie were considered a fly-tying couple (and later Walt,

Winnie, and their daughter Mary were regarded as an inseparable fly-tying family), but Winnie did not receive the level of recognition she deserved in both the evolution of fly tying in the Catskills and in the history of fly fishing in America. Although it would be common to see the both of them mentioned together as an indivisible pair, the significance of her own historical contribution was infrequently described in any detail.

This may have been the result of a combination of things. I never sensed from Winnie a feeling that she sought, or felt entitled to, recognition that was separate from Walt (or from Walt, Winnie, and Mary). Their relationship was certainly synergistic, and they generally insisted on being considered an entity. Moreover, she viewed her craft as simply providing trout fishers with a means to catch fish; she minimized its importance. She generally did not hover around writers (who may have been interested in her story), although she was very fond of a few, like famed artist and writer William Schaldach,<sup>5</sup> of whom she often spoke. The Dettes, as a rule, simply were not out to promote themselves in any fashion. Then there's the hard

ineluctable fact that women in those years were often marginalized when it came to their own accomplishments in male-dominated sporting activities, such as fishing. However, Walt himself commented in his later years that he wished he had made more of a point of describing how much Winnie did in the beginning and how important her role was in the development of their craft.

A careful examination of the evidence of the past indisputably shows that Winnie had an important role in the history of fly fishing in America. The Dettes saved virtually every letter and piece of correspondence they received, as well as copies of letters they had written to others. Mary graciously allowed me to go on sort of an archeological dig through the records and files. There are hundreds of letters, and I recently spent days poring over what I found.

I had been aware of the existence of the files for many years, ever since my boyhood days with the family, and I often thought that they were



*Walt and Winnie on the Beaverkill River in the 1930s.*



*The Riverview Inn.*

stashed away for posterity's sake and with time would surface. But later I was told of the discovery of the *Diary of Winifred Ferdon: 1928*. Once I read the diary, I arrived at a new level of appreciation for the role Winnie played in the Dette fly-tying legacy. She often stated that the only reason she tied flies was because Walt was interested in tying, something he first started to try in 1927.<sup>6</sup> What is clear from the diary is that Winnie had a genuine interest herself in fishing, enjoy-

ing the outdoors on the rivers, and learning to tie flies.

Great-grandson Joe Fox, who now ties flies alongside Mary, commented that some written information that the family was unaware existed had been discovered among Walt and Winnie's stored belongings. The family had not yet gone through it themselves. One of those items was the diary. Talented West Coast fly tier Jim Slattery, who bunked with me during a recent stay in Roscoe, thought

that finding the diary was significant and felt strongly there was some history to be had from its pages. We spent time into the wee hours of the night reading over this and other documents and letters.

Winnie had her beginnings as a Catskill fly tier in 1928 at age eighteen.<sup>7</sup> Her parents operated a summer hotel, the Riverview Inn, on the Beaverkill River close to Roscoe. In letters written in the mid-1980s, Winnie explained her beginnings in fly tying and the early relationship she had with Harry and Elsie Darbee, another well-known Catskill fly-tying couple. It was sometimes assumed that the Detttes and the Darbees started out together before the two couples went their separate ways and operated independently of each other. But this was not the case.

Winnie first had the idea of selling flies, and she has said that selling flies was the furthest thing from Walt's mind in those years.<sup>8</sup> Walt loved tying, but he experimented as a hobby only. And the two of them, in the midst of their romance, would meet often at Walt's house to tie flies. Even during their budding and developing relationship, fly tying, fly fishing, and an interest in these diversions created a strong bond between them.

My parents ran a summer hotel near Roscoe and had a large clientele of fishermen every spring. I tied and sold flies to them, before I married Walt in the fall of 1928. It was from the hotel that Walt and I sold flies for the first two years, but Harry (Darbee) did not join



*The Riverview Inn.*





Walt, Winnie, and Harry Darbee.

us until 1933 as he was doing other things than tying. When the Depression hit this area, and things got pretty hard, we went into fly tying commercially (wholesale) to make a living. We moved into a small house in Rockland which was tied up in my maternal grandparents' estate, and worked from there. Walt went to New York City and obtained such large orders we had to have help and it was in late 1933 that we invited Harry (who was living in New Paltz) to join us as a third partner. The following year we moved into a larger house in Roscoe on Academy Street, across from the Bivens house, where Elsie lived. She was younger and Harry had not met her until we hired her to help out, sorting hackle. After they were married in 1934 or 1935 we split up and they went into their own business. Elsie did not tie in the few months she worked for us, but learned from Harry after their marriage.<sup>9</sup>

It is true that Winnie, Walt, and Harry did spend a significant amount of time with each other fishing the Beaverkill, and there are numerous entries in the diary that capture in detail their forays

on the river and of some large trout that were taken. There are descriptions of the three of them hunting down the elusive Andalusian roosters at area poultry farms in search of hackle.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that

Winnie was involved in those experiences—as well as ones on the river, fly casting, and taking trout—right along with the boys.

Winnie's first attempts at fly tying were as frustrating as those any fly tier has experienced, and it appears from her diary she struggled at first. All tiers have a learning curve, and Winnie was no different. She writes: "At the rate & quality which I tie I might earn 10c a week. About the only thing I can do right is put the hook in the vise & that's the least."<sup>11</sup> Another entry bemoans: "I came home and tied up half a dozen split wings but none of them seem to be as good as the first two I tied. I either get them too large or too small."<sup>12</sup>

But her skills gradually improved, and she became more confident in her tying. There is not a fly tier around who cannot remember that magic day on the river that he or she caught the first trout on a self-tied fly. That day for Winnie was May 5, 1928.

Went fishing all afternoon. Caught my first trout on a fly I tied myself. I was tickled to death too. I went out with Paul and he didn't get anything at all. Got mine on a Cahill. Mr. Hendrickson and Mr. Steenrod came up. Mr. H says he'll bring me up a rod. I sure wish he would. Steenrod showed us some of his wet flies. All tied on #6 hooks and they sure are whoppers. I bet they kill the fish though. I've changed some of my ideas.<sup>13</sup>

Roy Steenrod is a significant figure in the history of fly fishing in America. Steenrod and his pal A. E. Hendrickson, along with George Stevenson, were regulars on the Beaverkill in those years. It was Steenrod who, after a significant fishing episode at Ferdon's Pool on the



Walt Dette

Winnie in 1951 with a 16-pound Atlantic salmon caught from McDaniel's Pool on the Margaree River.



Beaverkill, created and named the Hendrickson fly. More importantly, Steenrod was a very close friend of Theodore Gordon, long labeled the father of dry-fly fishing in America. Gordon, often called a southern gentleman, came to the Catskills in 1882 after a financial disaster involving a Georgia railroad.<sup>14</sup>

Steenrod worked at the post office in nearby Liberty and got to know Gordon when he stopped by to mail his flies to customers. Gordon was known as a loner, but Steenrod was one of the few who tied flies with him, and they regularly fished together. Gordon corresponded frequently with British fly tier and chalkstream fisherman Frederic Halford, another historical figure. Around 1890, Gordon received forty-eight dry-fly patterns from Halford, and Gordon experimented with adapting the dry fly to his beloved Catskill waters. When Gordon died, he left the original Frederic Halford flies to Steenrod, and they eventually ended up with the Anglers' Club of New York.<sup>15</sup>

Winnie frequently visited with Steenrod, and there are diary entries that give us insight into their interaction. This relationship clearly shows, as Eric Leiser

so aptly points out, that the Dettas are an important link in the chain of fly tiers that reaches back to Theodore Gordon. It might be argued that the link with Steenrod puts Winnie Dette in the chain all the way back to Halford. Entries such as these tell the story best.



Winnie and Al Dowling on the Beaverkill River in the early 1940s. Dowling was a regular at the Dette shop during those war years.



Author John McDonald, Winnie, and Walt in 1986.

Joan Stoliar

I drove down to Liberty and called on Roy Steenrod. We showed him the samples we received from England and he thought them pretty good. He showed us a lot of his things. Such a mess as his material seems to be in! I don't see how he finds anything. His tying vise is just like Walt's. He sort of kidded us—still he didn't act as though he thought we were a couple of foolish kids. Some professionals would.<sup>16</sup>

Well, I went fishing today but all I caught was a miserable little chub which I threw up on the bank. Mr. Steenrod got 8 beauties. We got talking on the subject of flies and Mr. Hendrickson gave me about \$20 worth of flies. Mr. Steenrod gave me a couple of flies he tied (those he uses himself). I showed him some of those I tied and he and Walt were discussing methods of obtaining material etc. Altogether we had a large evening. I'm going fishing tomorrow with Mr. Hendrickson and Walt will meet

us on the river. Mr. Steenrod has to attend a meeting in Liberty in the afternoon.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Steenrod went down to the room tonight and tied a couple of flies. He sure is quick at it. He told us where we could get material. Says he ties about 500 dozen a year. He was awfully nice about it. I was afraid he might think we were just a bunch of crazy kids.<sup>18</sup>

Winnie, and no doubt Walt, must have received some degree of inspiration from Steenrod as it was only one year into their enterprise that they sold significant numbers of flies. In 1929, Winnie's meticulous records indicate they sold more than 200 dozen (including some to Steenrod), and a year later they sold more than 500 dozen, reaching Steenrod's bar themselves. A dozen flies went for \$3 in 1929.<sup>19</sup>

Their customers in those first couple of years included Preston Jennings, Corey Ford, Ed Hewitt, artist Jack Atherton (who later painted the color plates of Catskill trout flies for John McDonald's piece in the May 1946 issue of *Fortune* magazine<sup>20</sup>), and Steenrod himself. These fly fishermen, and others of no particular pedigree, were well known in their day; many were writers.<sup>21</sup>

Preston Jennings, for one, wrote *A Book of Trout Flies* (Derrydale Press, 1935),



*Left: Mary and Winnie, 1940s.*

*Below: Mary and Walt II, 1940s.*



a work that is considered a classic. He often recommended the Detttes to others, and Winnie welcomed his recommendation. “I want to express my appreciation for the kind recommendation of Mr. Jennings” was Winnie’s response to an inquiry letter from an angler in Michigan seeking out Dette flies.<sup>22</sup> And those first years were just the beginning. Once the big wholesale orders came through, there were orders in the several hundred range. Even single orders of more than 720 dozen were not unusual.<sup>23</sup>

What is most astounding is that Winnie, in the 1930s and 1940s, continued to tie a significant number of flies while raising a family and working in a position at the local bank, a job she held for more than thirty years. “Mom was definitely a

very hard-working woman,” Mary recently said to me. “When you consider all she was trying to hold together—her two children, Dad’s needs, and her job—it must have been very tiring and difficult for her to also spend many hours at the tying vise. But she wasn’t a complainer.”<sup>24</sup>

It is true Winnie was a particularly talented fly tier, but my personal admiration for her rests in the belief that she was an extraordinary person as well. I have fond memories of her outside of the fishing and tying arena, when we both watched the evening baseball game, or shared in a crossword puzzle clue, or discussed news events over a slice of breakfast toast.

Winnie had a way of putting the joy of fly fishing into realistic perspective, and I found solace in the words she offered me

when I mentioned to her, in the early 1990s, that with trying to raise a family, I just couldn’t seem to find enough time for the river. In a letter to me, she wrote:

There are times for family and times for pleasure, such as fishing. But the times for your children growing up are all too short, and too precious. There will be plenty of time later for your fishing when they are grown.<sup>25</sup>

To those of us who knew her well, we miss her first as a dear friend. And we know that she has earned her place in the unique and fascinating history of fly fishing in America.





## ENDNOTES

1. Michael Valla, "Walt Dette," *Fly Fisherman* (September 1994), 16, 20–23.

2. Included in my reading were pieces by Cecil E. Heacox, such as "Charmed Circle of the Catskills," *Outdoor Life* (March 1969, vol. 143, no. 3), 50–53, 88, 90, 92, 94. Heacox was a Cornell University-trained fisheries biologist in the then-called New York State Conservation Department and avid fly fisher who wrote an extensive two-part piece for *Outdoor Life* about the famous Catskill trout streams and the region's fly tiers. He was a personal friend of the Dettets. He also authored *The Complete Brown Trout* (New York: Winchester Press, 1974), as well as "The Charmed Circle Completed," *Outdoor Life* (April 1969, vol. 143, no. 4), 80–81, 177–180.

3. Eric Leiser, *The Dettets* (Fishkill, N.Y.: Willowkill Press, 1992).

4. Personal correspondence, Eric Leiser to Mike Valla, 29 August 1994.

5. William J. Schaldach was an avid outdoorsman, artist, and writer who was employed as an editor of *Forest and Stream* magazine (later named *Field & Stream*) until the late 1930s. Schaldach, in his classic *Currents and Eddies* (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1944) wrote about the Beaverkill River. He stayed with the Dettets on many occasions.

6. "Roscoe Fly Tying Team," *The Walton Reporter* (Walton, New York), 31 May 1946, 9.

7. Personal correspondence, Winifred Dette to Miss [Judith] Dunham, 9 October 1987.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Personal correspondence, Winifred Dette to Barry Lewis, 6 October 1986.

10. Winifred Ferdon, *Diary of Winifred Ferdon: 1928*, 8 January 1928.

11. *Ibid.*, 9 January 1928.

12. *Ibid.*, 17 April 1928.

13. *Ibid.*, 5 May 1928.

14. Cecil Heacox, "The Catskill Fly Tyers," *Outdoor Life* (May 1972, vol. 149, no. 5), 66.

15. *Ibid.*, 67.

16. Winifred Ferdon, *Diary of Winifred Ferdon: 1928*, 29 October 1928.

17. *Ibid.*, 8 May 1928.

18. *Ibid.*, 10 May 1928.

19. Dettets, Record Book, 1929.

20. John McDonald, "Fly Fishing and Trout Flies," *Fortune* (May 1946, vol. 33, no. 6), 126–33, 150, 152, 155, 156, 158, 160, 162. This classic piece features a number of noted fly tiers, including the Dettets.

21. Dettets, Record Book, 1929.

22. Personal correspondence, Winifred Dette to W. A. Daniel, 14 March 1960.

23. Dettets, fly sale to Folsom Arms, Record Book, 7 January 1934.

24. Mary Dette Clark, interview with author, 20 August 2006.

25. Personal correspondence, Winifred Dette to Mike Valla, December 1990.



Mary, Winnie, Walt II, and Walt, 1940s.

# An Angler's Literary Paradise

by Darin S. Kinsey

ANGLERS ARE ALWAYS on the lookout for places off the beaten track to practice and enjoy their craft, whether these places are found on some hidden brook in the woodlands of Canada in springtime or in a dusty alcove of a library in December.

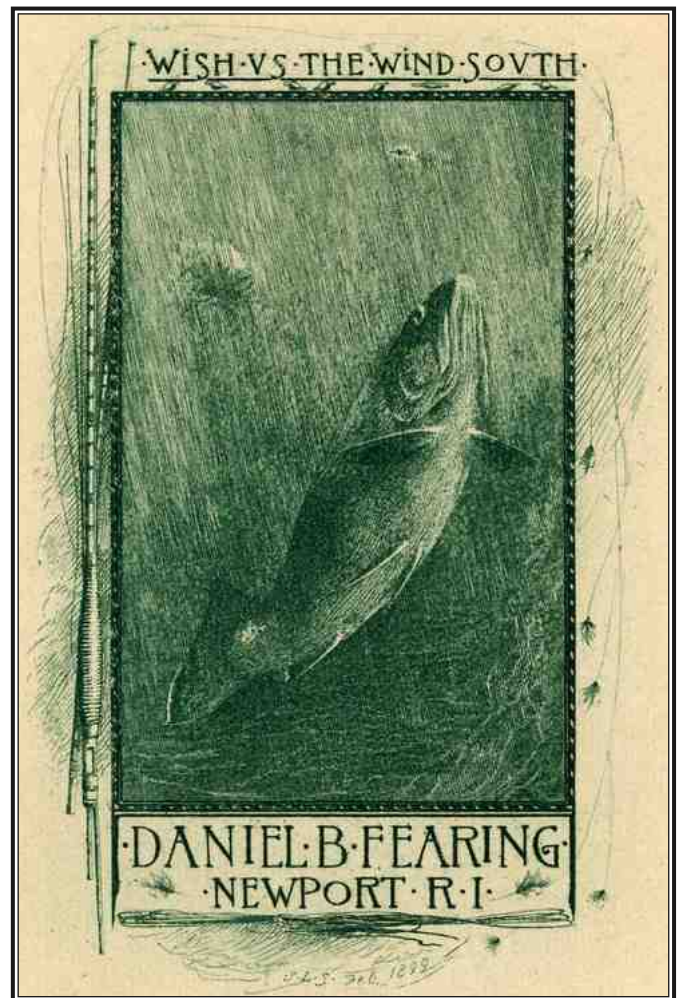
Harvard Yard may not be the best place to catch a speckled trout, but the nearby Houghton Library must be counted among the erudite angler's finest winter haunts. This is not just due to the fact that it houses so many original and unique works from across the whole temporal and cultural spectrum of Western civilization, but because among the classic texts by Copernicus, Dante, and Lewis Carroll, the angling antiquarian can also cast his or her line into the Daniel B. Fearing collection, one of the largest and most important (if also little known) pools of texts, manuscripts, and journals on angling, fish culture, fisheries, and whaling logs in the entire world.

During the nineteenth century, this unique collection belonged to the once internationally renowned library of Newport, Rhode Island, millionaire Daniel Butler Fearing (1859–1918), whose wealth, research skills, and talent at the auction house permitted him to amass a library of more than 12,000 volumes of interest to the angling scholar in twenty different languages and spanning the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

What makes Fearing's collection unique, however, is that many of the angling monographs and journals contain miscellaneous materials, such as clippings, notes, and letters. Exemplary of the miscellanea is a warm and personal letter from Grover Cleveland, crisply folded and left to repose for a century within the covers of his thin volume *A Defense of Fishermen* (1902). In the letter, the former president humbly apologizes for a contribution he felt to be "a very insignificant appearance among the . . . volumes in your library devoted to the gentle art."<sup>2</sup> In addition to such fascinating ephemera, Fearing's own notes left in reddish-orange grease pencil can be found throughout many of the works, revealing the man an ardent scholar of the works he so voraciously collected.

In 1915, Fearing donated most of his enormous library to his alma mater, perhaps to make more room for new passions. At any rate, he lost no time in starting a collection of rare Japanese prints and what would become a magnificent collection of angling bookplates (the latter can also be found in the Harvard collection at the Houghton Library). Fearing was compulsive in all of his favorite activities, whether collecting, angling, or eating. Charles Goodspeed described the ruddy-faced, moustachioed man as "heavily built," and a "true epicure in all that

pertained to the good things of the table."<sup>3</sup> That was most likely his downfall. On 26 May 1918, while organizing a Red Cross singing event for the war effort, the corpulent collector was said to have simply fallen over dead from "apoplexy."<sup>4</sup>



From Daniel B. Fearing, Check list of books on angling, fish, fisheries, fish-culture, etc. in the library of D. B. Fearing (New York: The DeVinne Press, 1918), facing title page.



From Daniel B. Fearing, *Check list of books on angling, fish, fisheries, fish-culture, etc. in the library of D. B. Fearing* (New York: The DeVinne Press, 1918), cover.

Although today his full library has been dispersed throughout the various and numerous Harvard libraries, archives, and depositories, nearly all of the works from his collection are immediately recognizable by the distinctive light-green bookplate with the image of a rising trout done by the well-known Boston bookplate designer and engraver, Sidney Lawton Smith.

As Fearing's collection was constantly growing, even up to his death, no definitive list of the full collection exists. Nevertheless, one of his lists—the *Check list of books on angling, fish, fisheries, fish-culture, etc. in the library of D. B. Fearing* (1907)—

is readily available in reproduction and gives a good, if incomplete, aperçu of the collection.<sup>5</sup> A detailed search of the holdings can also be accomplished using the Harvard online library catalogue, HOLLIS (<http://lib.harvard.edu/catalogs/hollis.html>), which also provides important details about visiting and conducting research in this impressive and little-known collection that remains one of the most valuable tools for all scholars interested in studying the long and ever-evolving heritage of fly fishing and angling.

Darin S. Kinsey is a doctoral candidate at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières and the 2005 Joan Nordell Fellow of Harvard's Houghton Library. His most recent work is "Seeding the Waters as the Earth: Epicenter and Peripheries of a Western Aquacultural Revolution," *Environmental History* (2006, vol. 11, no. 3): 527–66. For more information about the collection, feel free to contact him at [dskinsey@sympatico.ca](mailto:dskinsey@sympatico.ca).

#### ENDNOTES

1. Little is known about the source of Fearing's wealth, but some indication of it can be found in his book, *The Making of an Angling Library and a Short Account of Its Treasures* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: D. H. Schauer, 1915), in which he details the prices paid for many of the works in his collection.

2. President Grover Cleveland, "Letter to Daniel B. Fearing" (Princeton, N.J., 7 March 1905), found in Grover Cleveland, *A Defense of Fishermen* (Princeton, N.J.: private printing, 1902), Daniel B. Fearing Collection, Harvard University, Houghton Library.

3. Charles Eliot Goodspeed, *Angling in America: Its Early History and Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939), 340.

4. Will Wildwood, "Brief Memoir of Daniel B. Fearing," *American Angler* (December 1918), 162.

5. Daniel B. Fearing (compiler), *Check list of books on angling, fish, fisheries, fish-culture, etc. in the library of D. B. Fearing* (New York, 1901). This work was privately printed and only twenty-five original copies were made. It is available in reproduction from Martino Publishing, [www.martinopublishing.com](http://www.martinopublishing.com).



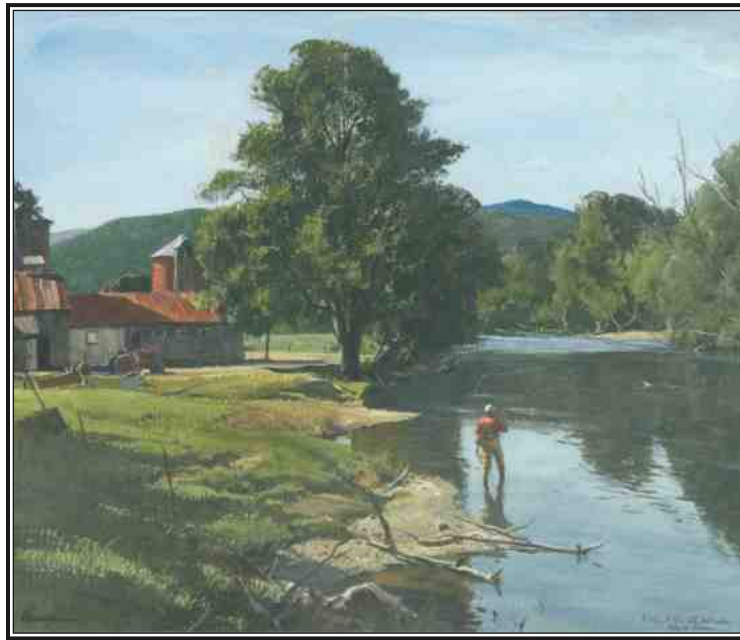
From Charles Eliot Goodspeed, *Angling in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939), facing page 340.



# Ogden M. Pleissner

THE SPORTING GRAND TOUR

## Exhibition Opens in May 2008 at the American Museum of Fly Fishing



*Ogden M. Pleissner. Battenkill at Benedict's Crossing.  
Watercolor on paper. Collection of Leigh Perkins.*

**I**N THE YEARS following the end of World War II, Ogden Minton Pleissner (1905–1983) produced a series of paintings and etchings that became icons of American sporting art. In the process, Pleissner created a distinct vision of a sporting world rich in places, traditions, artifacts, and personalities. Because his clients included the aristocracy of the American sporting world, Pleissner visited some of the most hallowed fishing runs and hunting grounds of his time. Few sportsmen or artists have ever enjoyed access to the extraordinary places and circumstances he experienced, and, as a result, Pleissner's collected works amount to what could be called a "Grand Tour" of sport fishing and hunting across North America and beyond.

Ogden Pleissner's genius lay in his ability to edit down the universe of information of any sporting moment to only those gestures, situations, light conditions, and aspects of the landscape that defined the essence of the experience. He once said, "The mood of the picture, that is most important"<sup>1</sup> and likened this skill to the painting of a portrait in which each shift of the planes of the face was recorded in changing values of light. As a result, his evocative depictions of both the serene elegance and lightning excitement of salmon and trout fishing and the anticipatory and explosive moments of waterfowl and

upland hunting have become some of the most admired and influential images in the sporting genre.

Through the skills of his highly trained and disciplined hand and his keen eye for nuance, Pleissner set a standard for seeing and depicting the sporting world that has few equals. He ranks among America's greatest sporting artists, standing in the elite company of such other masters as Winslow Homer, Frank Benson, A. B. Frost, A. F. Tait, and Aiden Lassell Ripley. Since his death in 1983, Pleissner's style has often been imitated by other artists, but his ability to hold time still and capture the light of the moment in paint has rarely been matched.

To better understand and fully appreciate Pleissner's highly developed powers of observation, editing, and design, and to celebrate the pleasures and glories of his art, the American Museum of Fly Fishing is planning a cataloged exhibition, *Ogden M. Pleissner: The Sporting Grand Tour*. The exhibition, which will open at the American Museum of Fly Fishing in May 2008 and run through October of that year, will be the first museum show ever to focus on Pleissner's sporting art. It will explore the artifacts, people, and places of Pleissner's world and art, bringing together oil and watercolor paintings, studies, and sketches from the extensive permanent collection of the



Ogden M. Pleissner. *Catch of the Day*.  
Watercolor on paper. Collection of John W. Dreyer.

Shelburne Museum in Shelburne, Vermont; finished works from a large number of prominent private collections around the country; and related photographs, fishing equipment, journal entries, artifacts, and other ephemera to offer an unforgettable chronicle of the sporting life and painting career of one of America's greatest twentieth-century artists. The exhibition will be complemented by a full-color catalog published by the American Museum of Fly Fishing, which will include every work on view and serve as a lasting document of Pleissner's extraordinary body of work.

The exhibition is being curated by Robert Shaw, an independent scholar and art historian and the former curator of the Shelburne Museum, who also will edit the show's catalog. In addition to his work at the Shelburne, Shaw has curated exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, the Dallas Museum of Natural History, the University of Michigan Art Museum, and many other institutions in the United States, Europe, and Japan. He is the author of such critically acclaimed books as *America's Traditional Crafts*, *American Baskets*, and *Quilts: A Living Tradition*; has written articles for the *Magazine Antiques*, *Sports Afield*, and other periodicals; and has contributed to and edited numerous books and exhibition catalogs.

*Ogden M. Pleissner: The Sporting Grand Tour* will guide museum visitors through the arc of the artist's life, from his early career in Brooklyn and his travels during World War II as a war artist for the U.S. Army Air Force and correspondent for *Life* magazine to the masterworks inspired by his visits to legendary locations across North America and Great Britain. It will explore the key periods in which Pleissner painted and the many geographic regions that influenced his work. Starting with the western landscapes stemming from his years at the CM ranch in Dubois, Wyoming, where his passion for fly fishing developed at an early age, the exhibition will then turn to his northeastern roots and the many eastern landscapes and trout fishing scenes he created in his studios in West Pawlet and Manchester, Vermont, where he worked from 1947 on. These include depictions of his beloved Battenkill and trout fishing in Maine streams as well as paintings capturing the thrill of fishing for sea trout among Scotland's western isles.

Pleissner's magnificent Atlantic salmon fishing scenes from eastern Canada will compose the largest portion of the show, one that combines more than a dozen of his finished oils and watercolors with studies, sketches, personal photographs, fishing equipment, and writings. This segment of the exhibition will also highlight the legendary rivers and salmon camps of Québec's Gaspé Peninsula and the Maritime Provinces—including the Grand Cascadepedia, the St. Anne, the St. John, and the Restigouche—seen in many lights and under a variety of water conditions. Guides paddling and poling canoes or holding a boat steady as everyone anticipates a rise, sportsmen casting to and battling with big fish, and the final anxious moments of netting or gaffing a prize are all part of the story told here.

Finally, the *Pleissner* exhibit will include a fascinating study of Pleissner's passion for upland and waterfowl shooting, taking visitors on a whirlwind tour of some of North America's most coveted shooting grounds, including scenes of quail, pheasant, and duck hunting that have been matched by few other artists.

Materials from Pleissner's studio—including tools he used to paint many of the works featured in the exhibition—will be on display, and studies and sketches will give insight into his artistic process. In addition, visitors will see the American Museum of Fly Fishing's collection of Pleissner's fly-fishing tackle, including his prized Atlantic salmon rod, 13-foot, 3-inch E. F. Payne bamboo rod, and 9-foot H. L. Leonard bamboo trout rod.

The American Museum of Fly Fishing is proud and excited to present *Ogden M. Pleissner: The Sporting Grand Tour* to its diverse audiences, and hopeful that the exhibition will bring new appreciation to this great artist and the sports he loved both to practice and paint so much. Stay tuned for more information about the exhibition and the many outstanding works of art it will include in future editions of this journal.

#### ENDNOTE

1. Quoted in Peter Bergh, *The Art of Ogden M. Pleissner* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1984; reprinted Shelburne, Vt.: Shelburne Museum, second printing 1992), xxi.



Ogden M. Pleissner. *Wind Clouds*. Watercolor on paper.  
Collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

# Stanley E. Bogdan Receives 2007 Heritage Award

On 9 May 2007, the American Museum of Fly Fishing honored Stanley E. Bogdan with the Museum's highest honor, the Heritage Award, for his unwavering commitment to quality in producing the world's finest salmon and trout fly reels.

The museum established the Heritage Award in 1997 to celebrate individuals whose commitment to the museum, the sport of fly fishing, and natural resource conservation sets standards to which we should all aspire. In honoring Stanley E. Bogdan, the American Museum of Fly Fishing recognizes one of the twentieth century's great fly reelmakers and one of the most engaging and respected fly-fishing personalities of our time for his contributions, energy, and devotion to the sport, culture, and conservation of fly fishing. Past recipients of the award include Leigh H. Perkins, Gardner L. Grant, Bud Lilly, Nathaniel Pryor Reed, George W. Harvey, Lewis W. Coleman, Foster Bam, Yvon Chouinard, Nick Lyons, and Mel Krieger.

The festivities began with a makeshift Bogdan family reunion on Vanderbilt Avenue in Manhattan as Stan, son Stephen, and daughter-in-law Sandy Bogdan met up with Stan's daughter Cheryl Doughty and her husband Carl Doughty, who flew up from Florida.

The event started with a cocktail reception and live auction preview in the Tap Room at the Yale Club in New York, where guests visited with Stan and the many friends in attendance. Stan and author Graydon Hilyard autographed copies of the recently released *Bogdan* for many in the crowd.

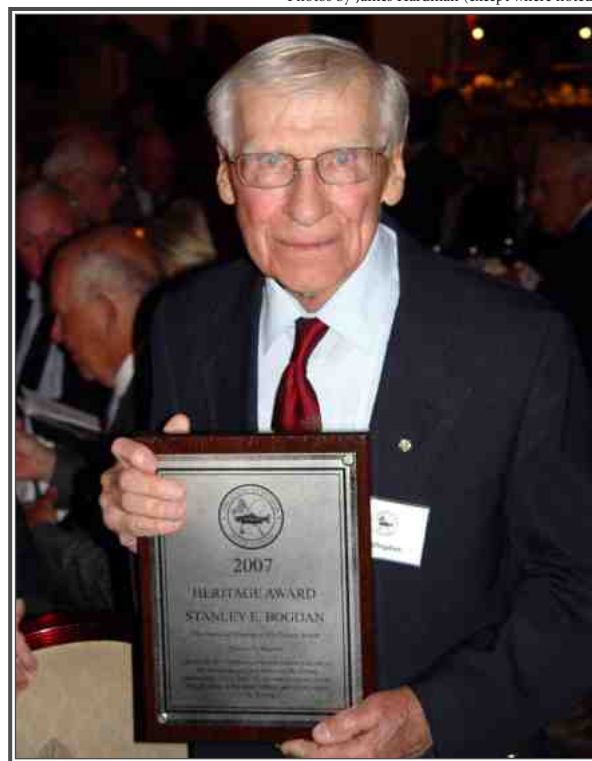
The group then repaired to the grand ballroom to preview the magnificent exhibit that Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama created to honor Stan and his illustrious career. Using artifacts from the museum's permanent collection and an amazing array of materials from Stanley's shop, Yoshi created a comprehensive display that dazzled our guests. This exhibit will be featured at the American Museum of Fly Fishing this fall. We're accepting loans and donations of key Bogdan artifacts to help build this exhibit.

After a sumptuous feast from the remarkable crew at the Yale Club, our attendees were treated to remarks from two of Stan Bogdan's best friends and angling companions. Joe Wells, a longtime museum supporter and former trustee, opened the event with some touching remarks about Stan as his dear friend, angling companion, and reelmaker. Joe and Stan have fished all over the world together. Earl Worsham, another longtime museum supporter and former trustee, offered the crowd a slide-show presentation featuring photos and anecdotes of his friendship and angling exploits with Stan and their travels together throughout the world. Our thanks to Joe and Earl for the personal touch that made this dinner such a success.

Upon receiving the Heritage Award, Stan addressed the audience, thanking them. He likened himself to Lou Gehrig, "the luckiest man on the face of the earth," for all the great friends he has made over the course of his reel-making career.

After Stan's moving words, Lyman Foss, our auctioneer, kicked off the auction, which raised significant dollars for the museum's collections work. The museum offered an exquisite set of five S. E. Bogdan reels, elegantly engraved by master engraver Frank Conroy with scrollwork designed by our own

Photos by James Hardman (except where noted)



*Stanley E. Bogdan, reelmaker extraordinaire, was the recipient of the American Museum of Fly Fishing's 2007 Heritage Award. The plaque reads: "2007 Heritage Award, Stanley E. Bogdan. The American Museum of Fly Fishing honors Stanley E. Bogdan, one of the 20th century's great reelmakers and one of the most engaging and respected fly-fishing personalities of our time, for his contributions, energy, and devotion to the sport, culture, and conservation of fly fishing."*

Yoshi Akiyama. Also on the block were a fantastic heli-fishing trip along the Chilean fjords, a sensational Thomas Aquinas Daly original oil painting of Stan Bogdan fishing the Grand Cascapedia, a wonderful commission by noted fish carver Stephen Smith, and a remarkable Atlantic salmon fishing trip to Norway on the Gaula River. The museum would like to thank Stan, Stephen and Sandy Bogdan, Francisco Ruiz-Tagle and the good people at Nomads of Seas, Tom Daly, Stephen R. Smith, and Manfred Raguse and the Norwegian Fly Fishers Club for their contributions to the auction.

Our thanks also go out to those who sponsored and supported the event: Gardner Grant, Foster Bam, Stephen M. Peet, E. Wayne Nordberg, Art Kaemmer, Richard J. Warren, Earl Worsham, Peter Kellogg, C. Austin Buck, Carl R. Kuehner III, David H. Walsh, and Joe and Rose Wells.

Finally, we'd also like to thank the members and friends who attended this dinner to celebrate the life and career of Stan Bogdan. It was a special night.







*Left: Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama put together a beautiful traveling exhibit of Bogdan reels for the Heritage Award dinner.*

*Below: Tom Woodbury, Barbara Jaffe, event benefactor and Trustee Gardner Grant, and honored speaker Earl Worsham meet at the Yale Club to toast their friend Stan.*



*Auctioneer Lyman Foss, who was in his usual fine form, and Board of Trustees President Nancy Mackinnon.*



*Above: The artist Thomas Aquinas Daly and the writer Graydon R. Hilyard were among the many guests at the 2007 Heritage Award dinner. Daly's oil painting, Bogdan in the Sun at Big Curly, was auctioned during the event. Hilyard is author of the new biography Bogdan and was on hand to sign copies.*



*Left: Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama (center) schmoozes with American Museum of Fly Fishing trustees (left to right) Chris Garcia, Peter Corbin, John Rano (member of the dinner committee), and Steve Peet.*

*Right: The auction at the Heritage Award Dinner featured five very special Bogdan reels. Master engraver Frank Conroy teamed with the museum's Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama to create the ultimate collector's item: Bogdan salmon reels engraved along the rims with Yoshi's intricate original scrollwork design. Among the reels were a #0, a #1, and three #150s (two all-black anodized).*



*Below: Guests filled the ballroom and milled around the stunning Bogdan reel exhibit.*



*Joe Wells opened the evening's celebration with stories of Stan.*



*Above: Earl Worsham honored his good friend Stan Bogdan and entertained the crowd with stories and slides from some of their infamous trips together.*

*Right: Stan Bogdan thanks his friends, gathered together in his honor, for even considering doing such a crazy thing.*







*Left: Stan (as usual) surrounded by women, this time including Nancy Delekta and the museum's Rebecca Nawrath.*

*Below: Trustee Jim Hardman (left), who also happens to be a beloved museum volunteer and a darn fine photographer, visited the Anglers' Club of New York the day after the Heritage Dinner with Bogdans Stan, Sandy, and Stephen.*

Yoshi Akiyama



*Rose Wells traveled from Ontario to honor her longtime friend.*



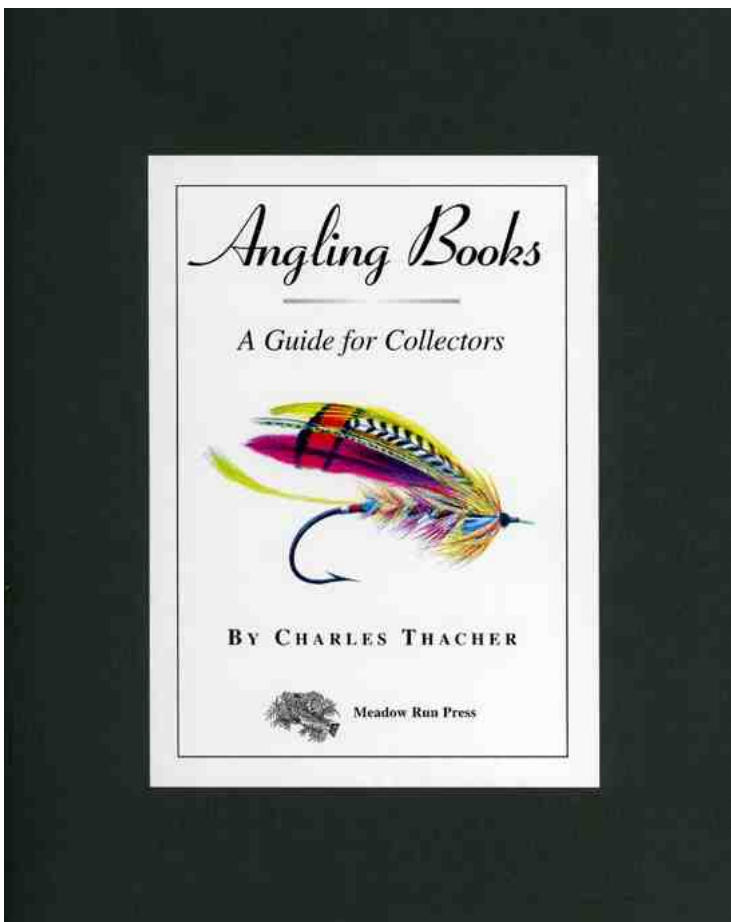
*Above: Bogdan: The next generation: Stan's son Stephen Bogdan, Stephen's wife Sandy Bogdan, Stan's daughter Cheryl Doughty, and Cheryl's husband Carl Doughty.*

*Left: After a successful Heritage Dinner the night before, these guys relax the next day at the Anglers' Club of New York: Executive Director Bill Bullock, Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama, and reelmakers Stan and Stephen Bogdan.*



# A Vade Mecum for the Angling Book Collector

by Gerald Karaska



**A**N IMPORTANT BOOK was recently contributed to the museum's library. Its interest is appealing to most anglers, but it is especially invaluable to an angling book collector. The book, *Angling Books: A Guide for Collectors*, was compiled by Charles Thacher.

The volume describes more than 15,000 "collectible" angling books that have been offered for sale over the seven-year period from 1999 to 2006, their prices, and details about each book affecting its value. Information is provided that is of particular interest to collectors, such as

binding and dust jacket variations, issue sizes, conditions, inscriptions, and more.

The author estimates that there are more than 25,000 different angling books in existence and many more if each unique edition is counted. Moreover, this guide is not an attempt at a complete bibliography. The emphasis of the selection is on a book's value. If a book could not be found for sale, then it was not listed. The sale price of each book/edition is stated in U.S. dollars, and the collection covers sales from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries using the euro.

Many collectors may be surprised to learn that there are in excess of 1,500 dealers who have sold angling books list-

ed in the book, but fewer than fifty of these specialize in angling books.

Just a few tidbits:

- Listed are four copies of the first edition (1653) of *The Compleat Angler* by Isaac Walton, one of which may be the first in existence: it sold for \$226,000 on 10 October 2001. The other three have values of \$109,600 (27 June 2000), \$81,750 (29 November 2001), and \$51,750 (22 May 2001). Twenty-two copies of the second through fifth editions (1655–1676) are listed, and a total of more than 650 copies of other important editions are included.
- Also listed are the first and third editions (1496 and 1518) of *The Booke of St. Albans* by Dame Juliana Berners, the earliest of all English-language angling books. The 1496 edition sold for \$155,800 on 8 July 1998. The 1518 edition sold for \$260,200 on 15 June 2005: "The only complete copy known . . . with the iconic image of an angler being the earliest ptd illust of a fisherman" (p. 50). The impeccable provenance of that book is listed, starting in 1864.
- The guide highlights two of the twenty-five copies of the first deluxe edition (1912) of *A Book of Trout Flies* by Preston Jennings, perhaps the most valuable American angling book: #25 of 25 sold for \$23,750 (29 November 2001); #24 of 25 sold for \$43,125 (2 December 2004), being signed by Jennings, Spieth (foreword), and Connett (afterword).
- My favorite book, *Little Rivers* by Henry Van Dyke, is recorded as having thirty-two editions/printings for sale, the first edition in 1885 and the latest in 2004. The "prize" is the 1885 book that has a poem written in ink on the first three blank pages, signed by Van Dyke: "The Maryland Yellowthroat. A Bit of Bird Magic."

Thacher's *Angling Books: A Guide for Collectors* is only available in a slipcased limited edition of 600 copies. The price is \$190.



Gerald Karaska is the volunteer librarian at the museum.

*Angling Books: A Guide for Collectors*  
Far Hills, N.J.: Meadow Run Press, 2006  
620 pages





# Museum News



*Above: Attendees of the Napa event gather for dinner in the Martini Barrel Room.*

*Right: Napa dinner guest Brian Stranko of CalTrout tries his hand at wine blending with an assist from his wife Michele.*

Photos by Bill Bullock



## Napa Dinner/Auction

Our annual Napa Winery Dinner and Sporting Auction was held June 2 at the Louis M. Martini Winery in St. Helena, California. Executive Director Bill Bullock, Membership Director Becky Nawrath, and auctioneer extraordinaire Lyman Foss made the journey west for this fun-filled fund-raising event.

Museum Trustee Roger Riccardi and his committee outdid themselves with this year's gastronomical program, which featured cabernet sauvignon and prime, naturally raised beef. Our hosts—the Gallo Family Vineyards and Carolyn Martini and Barry Cox—welcomed our guests to the Martini campus with a wine reception and hors d'oeuvres in the lovely Martini Park. The group then assembled in the elegantly decorated Barrel Room, where they viewed a beautifully arranged traveling exhibit on Zane Grey designed by Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama. This exhibit featured artifacts from the museum's permanent collection, many of which related to California's most famous fly fisherman.

Roger led our guests in a wine-blending seminar featuring four Bordeaux varieties (cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, merlot, and petit verdot). Each guest had the opportunity to bottle and label a blend to take home courtesy of Roger and the Gallo Family Vineyards. With many seasoned winemakers in attendance, the competition was fierce, and many excellent blends were produced.

Chef Dave Katz offered us a tasting that featured the fantastic prime beef supplied by California's own all-natural Brandt Beef. Brandt is renowned for the quality, flavor, and tenderness of their all-natural, dry aged steaks, and Chef Dave described his slow cooking over low charcoal heat to achieve maximum

flavor and tenderness. Roger treated us to select wines to accompany the meal, including Martini's acclaimed Lot 1, their Napa Valley Cabernet.

Guests enjoyed a spirited live auction featuring a wide array of wines, artwork, gourmet meals, fishing tackle, and fishing and hunting trips. Lyman did a great job, and we raised significant dollars for our ongoing programs.

After the auction, the evening concluded in Martini's historic underground cellar, where guests were tempted with the season's first cherries flamed with cabernet sauvignon, Scharffen Berger chocolate desserts, and, of course, some Martini moscato.

We owe a great deal of gratitude to Roger Riccardi and his dinner committee for their wonderful support. Thank you Ed Beddow, Cheryl Hoey, Nancy Mackinnon, Lisa Pavageau, and John Regan.

In addition, we'd like to recognize the following sponsors and auction donors, without whom we could not have had such a successful event: Joe and Matt Gallo and the Gallo Family Vineyards, Carolyn Martini and Barry Cox, Fernando Bautista, Stacy Love, Frank Mirenda of Andretti Winery, Tim Berg and Tim Berg's Alaskan Fishing, Marc Mondavi and the Charles Krug Winery, Paul Saviez of Saviez Vineyards, Dave Vella of Chateau Montelena, Reuben Katz and the Culinary Institute of America, Bob Hurley and Hurley's Restaurant, Joe Gennaro, Jay Burgin and Five Rivers Ranch, John Regan, Estancia Tecka courtesy of Federico Ochoa, Estancia Caleufu courtesy of Douglas Reid, Robin Williams and the Crocodile Bay Resort, the Orvis Company, Chef Tom McAliney and the Brandt Beef Company, California Trout, Johnny Ribeiro, Dave Van Winkle and Frank Lloyd, artist Adriano Mannoia, Stone River Outfitters, and outfitter Bill Lowe.

## Museum Hosts Book Signing for Newly Released Edition of Schwiebert's *Nymphs*

The American Museum of Fly Fishing celebrated the newly released edition of the late Ernest Schwiebert's groundbreaking book, *Nymphs*, with a public reception and book signing by Ernest's son Erik Schwiebert on July 2. Ernest Schwiebert was a devoted trustee of the museum and one of the most important authors and figures in the sport of fly fishing in the twentieth century.

Before he passed away in 2005, Schwiebert wrote and illustrated this new edition of his important book. The two-volume set, published by the Lyons Press, is now wholly revised and expanded. In it, Schwiebert offers exacting details of every major mayfly species for the sake of identification, along with recipes for dozens of fly patterns to imitate them. The new edition also includes numerous stories and anecdotes from his travels, some never set down in writing before, which further add to the understanding of how to choose, cast, and fish nymphs.

## Collections Coordinator Joins Staff

Nathan George joined the museum staff in July in the role of collections coordinator. In his new role, Nathan will assist Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama in overseeing the professional care, preservation, storage, and organization of all artifacts in the museum's archives and exhibits. In addition, he'll manage the collections database and assist in registrar duties and design of collections-based projects.

Nathan most recently held the position of collections coordinator at the Adirondack History Center in Elizabethtown, New York. He was also a collections management intern at the Rocky Mount Museum in Piney Flats, Tennessee. Not that it remotely matters to those of us who work at the American Museum of Fly Fishing, but it turns out he took up fly fishing about a decade ago. We're happy to welcome him aboard.

## Correction

The Summer 2007 issue of the *American Fly Fisher* reported in *Seeing Wonders: The Nature of Fly Fishing—An Exhibition* (page 20) that a cooperative event between the museum and the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History would include guided access to the collection of angling books housed at Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. In fact, the Beinecke does not grant this type of access. We regret the error.

## Recent Donations

**Erik Schwiebert**, PhD, of Birmingham, Alabama, donated several items that belonged to his father, the late Ernest Schwiebert: a landing net inscribed *Ernest Schwiebert*; an insect-collecting net; a pair of Simms waders; a pair of Simms wading boots; a photograph of President Ronald Reagan with Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser of Australia and a Thomas & Thomas Fly Rod, along with the sister rod to the rod given to the prime minister, which belonged to Schwiebert; a photograph of the rod given to the prime minister of Australia; and a Wheatley fly box with sixteen flies.

**Jennine Dickey** of Rangeley, Maine, donated four line dryers and "The York" bait-casting reel. **William Van Benschoten** of Dorset, Vermont, gave us a Wilby fly reel. Dr. **Charles A. Woods** of Easton, Connecticut, sent a "Futurist" Weber fly reel, a metal fly box with flies and leaders, a fly wallet, and two fly wallets containing twenty-two flies each.

## Upcoming Events

October 26–27

Annual Membership Meeting and Trustees Weekend  
Manchester, Vermont

January 18–20, 2008

Fly-Fishing Show  
Marlborough, Massachusetts

January 25–27, 2008

Fly-Fishing Show  
Somerset, New Jersey

March 13, 2008

Annual Dinner at the Anglers' Club of New York  
New York City

For more information, contact the museum at  
(802) 362-3300 or via e-mail at amff3@amff.com.

**Ted Sypher** of Chenango Forks, New York, donated five shadow display frames of personally tied soft-hackle salmon flies. **Robert H. Miller** of Tucson, Arizona, gave us a Browning Silaflex rod owned by actor William Conrad, a Ross Peak Silver Zenith rod owned by Joe and Mary Brooks, and a Hardy Gold Medal Palakona rod.

**Thomas J. Rice**, MD, of Marshfield, Wisconsin, donated a 1936 catalog from the Weber Lifelike Fly Company. And **Graydon Hilyard** of Ashland, Massachusetts, sent a 17 February 2007 article from the *New Brunswick Telegraph-Journal* about the late fly tier Warren Duncan.

## In the Library

The museum has received several additions to our library, from both donors and publishers.

**James Carstairs Collins** of Pottersville, New Jersey, donated a copy of his *Bright Creek's Major Pools and Dams* (privately published, 2006). **John Eggleston** of Stowe, Vermont, sent us Lissa Fox (ed.)'s *One Hundred Years at Lake Mansfield* (Stowe, Vt.: Lake Mansfield Trout Club, 1999). And **Hoagy Carmichael** of North Salem, New York, sent us his *The Grand Cascapedia River: A History, Vol. 1* (North Salem, N.Y.: Anesha Publishing, 2006).

**Erik Schwiebert** of Birmingham, Alabama, donated a first edition of Ernest Schwiebert's *Nymphs* (New York: Winchester Press, 1973); a first edition of Ernest Schwiebert's *Death of a River Keeper* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980); a first edition of Ernest Schwiebert's *The Travelling Angler: 20 Five-Star Angling Vacations* (New York: Doubleday, 1991); a first edition of Ernest Schwiebert's *A River for Christmas and Other Stories* (New York: S. Greene Press, 1988); Ernest Schwiebert's *Trout Tackle, Part I* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1983); and Ernest Schwiebert's *Matching the Hatch* (New York: Macmillan, 1955).

And **Charles G. Thacher** of Chappaqua, New York, donated a number of angling books (please contact the museum for complete list).

Thanks also to Frank Amato Publications, Inc., who sent us Allen McGee's *Tying & Fishing Soft-Hackled Nymphs* (2007) and Mark Mandell and Bob Kenly's *Tube Flies Two: Evolution* (2007). And to Stackpole Books, who sent us the first two titles in a series of classic fly-fishing writings selected by series editor Paul Schullery: *Theodore Gordon on Trout: Talks and Tales from a Great American Angler* (2007) and *Halford on the Dry Fly: Streamcraft of a Master Angler* (2007).



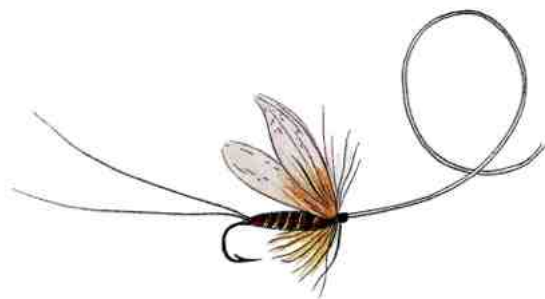
## FFF Urges Anglers to Take Clean Angling Pledge

Would you ever dump toxic waste into your favorite fishing spot? Of course not. Unfortunately, many of the same people who would never dump chemical pollutants into the water are spreading biological pollutants to those same waters. Invasive species are a biological pollution, and they can have devastating effects on our favorite waters and native species.

To combat this problem and bring awareness to this important issue, the Federation of Fly Fishers is promoting two simple pledges for anglers and boaters. The Clean Angling and Clean Boating Pledges ask anglers and boaters to commit to cleaning their equipment to prevent the spread of invasive species. "This very simple action by anglers and boaters to clean their gear will help protect our rivers and lakes from harmful invaders," explains Leah Elwell, conservation coordinator of the Federation of Fly Fishers. "This pledge campaign not only helps bring awareness to the problem of invasives, but also empowers water users to engage in this very important ecological issue."

Aquatic invasive species are plants, animals, or microscopic creatures that when introduced to new waters can outcompete native species and harm natural habitats. Aquatic invasive species are the single greatest threat to the integrity of our natural resources—both economically and biologically. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Center for Environmental Economics, it's estimated that the U.S. government spends millions to billions of dollars per year controlling species once they have been introduced. They also cite evidence that more than 400 endangered or threatened species are at risk because of competition or predation from nonnative invaders. Preventing introductions will help alleviate the economic and biological threat on our native species and natural resources.

If you want to help protect our fisheries resources for the future, the logical step is to engage yourself in preventing the spread of these nasty invaders. The Federation of Fly Fishers asks you to join them in the Clean Angling Pledge and the Clean Boating Pledge. A commitment to inspecting your gear and equipment, cleaning your gear with fresh water, and then allowing it to dry is simple. We can all help prevent the spread. Take the next step in protecting our resources for the future: Take the Clean Angling Pledge at [ww.cleanangling.org](http://ww.cleanangling.org) or the Clean Boating Pledge at [www.cleanboatingpledge.org](http://www.cleanboatingpledge.org). For more information, contact Leah Elwell, Conservation Coordinator, Federation of Fly Fishers, 215 East Lewis St., Suite 302, Livingston, MT 59047, (406) 222-9369, ext. 102, [conserve@fedflyfishers.org](mailto:conserve@fedflyfishers.org).



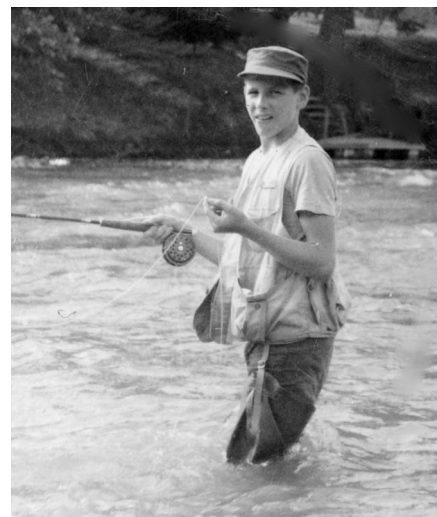
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## CONTRIBUTORS

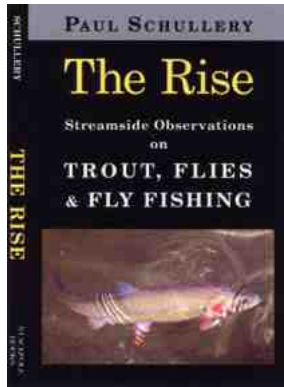
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Clarence Anderson but rarely strays from the West Branch of New York's Ausable River, his retirement refuge after a life grilling under the Texas sun in a family oil-field service company. From youth more entranced by old ways and old things than by the ephemeral new, the course his anachronistic propensities would follow after falling under the spell of the long rod was inevitable, leading to membership with the American Museum of Fly Fishing in 1981. A boyhood fascination with antique firearms has resulted in papers for *Man at Arms*, *Gun Digest*, *Gun Report*, and others.

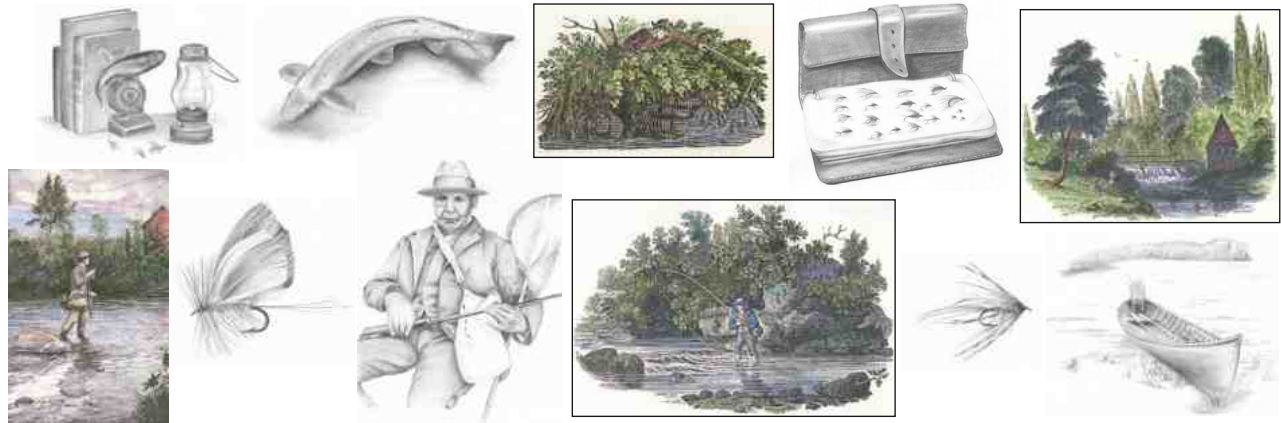
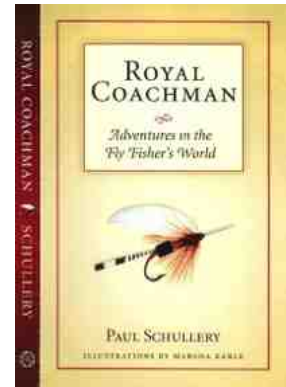


Michael Valla received his B.S. degree from Cornell University, where he studied fisheries biology and natural resources under noted coldwater fisheries biologist Dwight Webster. For several years, he was employed by the department of entomology at Cornell before entering Georgetown University, where he received his doctor of dental surgery degree. A boy from a disadvantaged background, he was greatly influenced by his love for fly fishing and his experiences staying with the Dette family during boyhood years. Today he still wanders the countryside throughout the Adirondack region of New York state, working as a public health dentist for indigent children through Glens Falls Hospital.



## Original artwork from two modern classics...

Marsha Karle's original pencil drawings and watercolor-tinted historical illustrations were featured in Paul Schullery's highly acclaimed books *The Rise* and *Royal Coachman*. Thirty-two of these unique pieces are available from the artist. For a full catalog and price list, contact Marsha Karle at 1-406-586-5916.



## Unique Gifts for Anglers

### The Brookside Angler at the American Museum of Fly Fishing



The Brookside Angler offers an extensive collection of fly fishing gifts and collectibles.

Shoppers may browse a unique assortment of fine art, glassware, antique home décor, stationery, and quality books (both new and used), as well as exclusive AMFF logo merchandise and many other wonderful items sure to please the discriminating angler.

*Our online store is up and running, and features a sampling of our most popular sellers.*

Open daily 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Route 7a South, Manchester, VT  
802-362-3300 [www.amff.com](http://www.amff.com)



# A Maine History; a Massachusetts Future

IN JUNE I HAD THE pleasure of being invited to participate in a fly-fishing seminar sponsored by *American Angler* and *Fly Tyer* magazines at the historic Lakewood Camps at Middle Dam on Maine's Lower Richardson Lake. Editors Phil Monahan and Dave Klausmeyer have been wonderful supporters of the American Museum of Fly Fishing, and I was thrilled to receive their invitation to present a brief lecture on the history of our sport to a great group of anglers.

Having grown up in Bangor, I was well versed in the rich history of fly fishing in the state of Maine. By the time I was in high school, I was fortunate to have fished all over the state with my dad. We had fished the Penobscot, Kennebec, Allagash, and Kenebago drainages, and I felt like I knew where all the best fishing could be found.

My fly-fishing life in Maine changed in high school when I read an article in *Downeast* magazine about Louise Dickinson Rich. Her 1942 best seller, *We Took to the Woods*, chronicled her life in the wilderness at Middle Dam, where she and her husband raised their son in the wilds of a remote Maine outpost. I found the book and devoured it. Although the story of her persevering in this harsh remote environment of Maine was compelling, I was, of course, drawn to her brief snippets of fishing for huge brook trout and landlocked salmon. She planted a Rapid River seed in my fishing world, and I started to gather information about this remote area.

Although it took another seven years to actually fish the Rapid, I started to learn more about the history of the Rangeley Lakes region. I began reading about Cornelia "Fly Rod" Crosby, the legendary writer, adventurer, and spokeswoman for the state of Maine who captured the imagination of the sporting world with her dispatches from the *Phillips (Maine) Phonograph*, called "Fly Rod's Notebook." Soon her articles were picked up by newspapers in Chicago, Boston, and New York City. In 1895, she approached the head of the Maine Central Railroad to have them underwrite the costs of exhibiting at the renowned Sportsmen Show in New York City at Madison Square Garden. He agreed, and soon this remarkable woman was attracting sportsmen by the thousands to the Rangeley region to sample the wonderful brook trout fishing. She coined the phrase "Playground of the Nation" for the state of Maine. Commercial success as a spokeswoman for the state aside, she received her biggest honor in 1897 when she was asked to champion a bill in the Maine Senate creating the Registered Maine Guide Program, for which every guide would act as a protector for fish and game. The bill passed almost unanimously, and she was awarded with Registered Maine Guide License #1!

Carrie Stevens was next, as I learned of her exploits at the famed Upper Dam separating Mooselookmeguntic Lake from Upper Richardson Lake. Her famed 6-pound, 13-ounce brook trout caught at Upper Dam Pool on 1 July 1924 on her newly created Gray Ghost, which took the sporting world by storm, won second place in the 1924 *Field & Stream* Fishing Contest. She was asked by *Field & Stream* to submit an article detailing her brook trout

battle, and soon requests from fly fishermen throughout the world came flooding in for her flies. She became one of the most famous fly tiers in the country and helped to make the Rangeley Lakes region a legendary fishing destination.

I gave my presentation on Saturday evening after fishing, and it was exciting to watch the group—young and old, experienced anglers and novices—take an interest in the history of the sport. I could feel the energy from their interest in the rich history of the very area they were fishing, and I sensed there would be a new appreciation for their surroundings as they laced up their waders the next day to try their hand in the very waters that these three famous women fished.



It is with mixed emotion that I announce my resignation from the American Museum of Fly Fishing. This was a very difficult decision for me, as I have absolutely loved my experience and will cherish the two years I spent here. I am so proud to have been involved with this institution, and I look forward to remaining a member, supporter, and volunteer in the coming years. My wife and I have been offered the opportunity to teach and raise our children in the rich academic and athletic environment of a boarding school in the Berkshires of western Massachusetts. I look forward to bringing my history students to this remarkable museum to experience the rich history of this sport that is so uniquely American.

I would like to thank the membership and trustees of the American Museum of Fly Fishing for your wonderful support over the past two years. It has been a great honor to serve as your director. I look forward to keeping in touch with you all.

BILL BULLOCK  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Members of the museum family gathered together to wish Bill all the best. Standing: Jim Becker, Yoshi Akiyama, Laine Akiyama, Mike Nawrath, Meghan George, Mary Claire Karaska, Rose Napolitano, Jackie Becker, Bob Parisi, Jerry Karaska, Marci MacNeur, Kathy Hall, and Tim Achor-Hoch. Seated: Sara Wilcox, Kathleen Achor-Hoch, Nathan George, Tish Russell, Bill Bullock, and Becky Nawrath. Photo by Bebe Bullock.



## The American Museum of Fly Fishing

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Tel: (802) 362-3300 • Fax: (802) 362-3308  
E-MAIL: [amff@amff.com](mailto:amff@amff.com)  
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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.

### JOIN!

Membership Dues (per annum)

Associate	\$40
International	\$50
Family	\$60
Benefactor	\$100
Business	\$200
Patron	\$250
Sponsor	\$500
Platinum	\$1,000

The museum is an active, member-oriented nonprofit institution. Membership dues include four issues of the *American Fly Fisher*. Please send your payment to the membership director and include your mailing address. The museum is a member of the American Association of Museums, the American Association of State and Local History, the New England Association of Museums, the Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance, and the International Association of Sports Museums and Halls of Fame.

### 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.