

# *The* American Fly Fisher

*Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*



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WINTER 2008

VOLUME 34 NUMBER 1

# A Fly Tier, a Rodmaker, and Some Excellent Exhibits



Photos by Sara Wilcox



A bird's-eye view of the museum's 40th anniversary exhibit.

THE MUSEUM CELEBRATES its fortieth anniversary in 2008, and to honor this auspicious occasion, museum staff worked round the clock to open *40 Years: Reflections on the Sport and Art of Fly Fishing: The Heritage of the American Museum of Fly Fishing* (for more information, see the inside back cover). I recently walked through this sleek and beautiful exhibit, and was awed by the talent that went into producing it, as well as by the history of the museum itself. A lot of determined people have kept this place going over the years, and a lot of talented people have given the sport something to call history.

Exhibits are one way that we can showcase fly fishing's craftspeople and personalities; this journal is another. In fact, this issue features a fly tier and a rod builder: Helen Shaw and George Halstead.

Helen Shaw, whom Arnold Gingrich called the First Lady of Fly Tying, was a legendary fly tier and author of the books *Fly-Tying* (1963) and *Flies for Fish and Fishermen* (1989). She had her beginnings in Wisconsin, and fellow Wisconsinite Harry L. Peterson focuses on those years in "Helen Shaw: A Quiet Pioneer," offering some quiet insight into this fly-fishing great. This article begins on page 2.

The name George H. Halstead may not roll right off the tongue of fly-fishing historians and rod collectors in the same manner as some of the rodbuilders with whom he worked and was associated: E. F. Payne and H. L. Leonard, for example. But his ferrules and reel seats graced rods the likes of these, and he was a master of bamboo in his own right. During his lifetime, he received no published credit for his rodmaking or metal-working skills. "Unfortunately," says author John Feldenzer, "with the exception of Keane's *Classic Rods and Rodmakers* and Schwiebert's brief comments in *Trout*, Halstead has been uniformly neglected in the history of classic tackle." Feldenzer

makes a thorough and impressive attempt to correct this in "George H. Halstead: Tribute to a Classic Bamboo Rodmaker," which you'll find on page 6.

We're getting ready for the Ogden Pleissner exhibit this year, so we're trying to get you ready, too. As a followup to the Fall 2007 article that announced the exhibit, Robert Shaw offers us more details of this painter's work and life in "Ogden M. Pleissner: The Sporting Grand Tour" (page 20). We hope that many of you will see fit to make the trip to this important show.

In what we hope will become a regular column, we present Gerald Karaska's "Notes from the Library" (page 22). Here the man who spends the most time with our books will report book donations—from both individuals and publishers—in one place. Karaska will also take a little time to highlight a book or two that particularly catches his eye.

It was a busy fall indeed, as you can easily conclude by reading *Museum News* (page 24). We're especially happy to be part of a joint exhibit at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, *Seeing Wonders: The Nature of Fly Fishing* (page 24), which opened September 29. You can visit us there through February 24.

We often get questions about how to donate items to the museum. Unfortunately, it's not as easy as walking in the door and handing something to us or simply boxing it up and mailing it. Historic value needs to be determined, and appraisals must be done in advance. Some helpful guidelines for donating appear on page 26.

Read, tie, build, visit, donate . . . for tomorrow is spring.

KATHLEEN ACHOR  
EDITOR



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ON THE COVER: *Work of the master, Halstead: finely knurled slide-band walnut reel seat on an unmarked 7-foot, 3/8-ounce rod (upper rod); Halstead die-stamped, slide-band walnut reel seat on a 7-foot, 3-inch, 2/8-ounce light rod (middle rod); and die-stamped, screw-locking mahogany reel seat on an 8-foot, 6-inch, 4/8-ounce trout rod (lower rod). Photo by Daaave Summers.*

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# Helen Shaw: A Quiet Pioneer

by Harry L. Peterson

Hermann Kessler



Helen Shaw.  
From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

ARNOLD GINGRICH, editor of *Esquire* magazine, upon being presented one hundred Helen Shaw flies at the celebration of the magazine's fiftieth birthday in 1983, said, tearfully: "I have never had a Helen Shaw fly: now I have a hundred. Nobody's worth that much."<sup>1</sup>

Helen Shaw made a seminal contribution to fly tying. Now in her mid-nineties, she was called the First Lady of Fly-Tying by Arnold Gingrich.<sup>2</sup> In 1963, she published *Fly-Tying*, a book named by Gingrich as one of ten of the best "modern" fly-fishing books. It was an early book on the subject, and it set a standard for dozens of other books since. In the early 1970s, Gingrich wrote:

Helen Shaw was already a legendary figure in the tight little world of fly fisher-

men when she first came to New York some twenty years ago. Before that, most anglers had known of her fly-tying only through her astonishing feat of recreating, from fifteenth century instructions, Dame Juliana Berners's original list of trout flies, for inclusion as a color plate in A. J. McClane's *The Practical Fly Fisherman*.<sup>3</sup>

In 1953, she married Hermann Kessler, the art director for *Esquire*, and moved from Wisconsin to New York City. Kessler and Shaw were part of the meeting in 1965 at which the beginnings of the Museum of American Fly Fishing were conceived, and Kessler served on the first board of directors of the museum.<sup>4</sup> After marrying Kessler and moving to New York, Shaw continued to tie flies at their East 46th Street apartment. Later

she stopped tying commercially, but as Gingrich wrote, "... as of the last decade has confined her artistry to the creation of flies meant for presentation not to fish but to fishermen—special specimens intended for collectors, and for display rather than for everyday routine use."<sup>5</sup> She published a second book, *Flies for Fish and Fishermen*, in 1989.<sup>6</sup>

## WISCONSIN BEGINNINGS

It was while she was in New York that she wrote *Fly-Tying* and associated with well-known fly fishermen and writers. Although it is known that she was from Wisconsin and that she came to New York having already established her reputation as a fly tier, her years in Wisconsin have received less attention.





*Kade Flycrafters, above Keitel's Confectionery, 816 North 8th Street, Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Photo courtesy of the Sheboygan County (Wisconsin) Historical Research Center.*

Helen Shaw was born in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1910. When she was a young girl, she moved to Sheboygan, then a city of about 60,000 on Lake Michigan. Lyla Foggia wrote that when Helen Shaw glimpsed her first trout at the age of three, it was:

... love at first sight. . . . She learned to fish from her father and began tying flies as a youngster. Though no one in particular influenced her style, she absorbed the techniques of local tiers,

thus refining her skill so early that she was already producing flies for a growing clientele by the time she graduated high school.<sup>7</sup>

The 1930 federal census, taken when Shaw was nineteen, lists her occupation as "artist." While she lived in Sheboygan, she regularly fished the Onion River, just a few miles out of town.

It was as a young woman that she met and was hired by Art Kade, owner of Art Kade Flycrafters. The inside of his cata-

log read "Art Kade Flycrafters, Designers and Manufacturers of Fine Fishing Flies." Kade's catalog announced:

Art Kade Flies are "Made in America" . . . all in our own shop. They are not "production line gadgets" knocked out to sell at a price but are created with the utmost care for discriminating anglers who appreciate a truly fine fly.

Our own expert fly tiers are not only artists in fly dressing but each is a proficient fly fisherman as well—who analyzes the handling and fish attracting qualities of our flies and tests their durability at the streamside in actual use.<sup>8</sup>

Kade also sold fly lines, line dressings, leaders, fly boxes, leader boxes, creels, landing nets, and, yes, spinning lures and stringers.

The shop was located above Keitel's Confectionery in downtown Sheboygan. There, while still in high school, Helen Shaw would tie flies and continue to develop her craft that was to receive international attention. Beatrice Visser, now eighty-nine and still living in Sheboygan, had to briefly quit her teaching job because of ill health. She was taken in as an apprentice by Shaw and trained to tie by her. She described Shaw as a kind and patient teacher. On the weekends, Art Kade would go fishing for brook trout, and Visser recalled that on Mondays they would have a trout for lunch at Art Kade Flycrafters.<sup>9</sup> Customers for their flies included Herbert Hoover and other notables.



*Helen Shaw tying with Art Kade, 20 June 1942. Photo courtesy of the Sheboygan County (Wisconsin) Historical Research Center.*

Fly photos by Harry L. Peterson



*Michigan Hopper (left) and A. K. Royal (above) tied by Helen Shaw.*

## APPROACH TO TYING

Helen Shaw was a careful and meticulous fly tier. She was provided opportunities to tie at companies that emphasized production, but she declined. Foggia wrote:

She was recruited to supervise at Webber tackle, a commercial fly tying operation in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. She described how ninety to one hundred tiers were assigned to tie the same fly pattern for a week. "The Monday-Tuesday flies were pretty fair, but by the end of the week they had gone far down-hill, as the materials got picked over and fatigue and tedium set in. Webbers' offered me the head job once, but I wanted no part of it. I was always a meticulous tyer, and speed and production are contrary to what I do."<sup>10</sup>

Art Smith, writing in the *New York Times* in 1963, described her book as "... utterly devoid of pretense or condescension, because this is exactly the sort of person she is. There is about this tall, attractive woman with the broad-spaced brown eyes something that suggests abhorrence of ostentation. In going through *Fly-Tying*, I found just three uses of the pronoun 'I.'"<sup>11</sup> While her personal demeanor was quiet and modest, her standards for tying were very high, both for herself as well as others. Paul Schullery, when he served as director of the American Museum of Fly Fishing, described a visit she and her husband paid to the museum.

She had picked up a fly—a Muddler Minnow by an unknown tier—from the worktable where it was being cata-

logued. Helen had truly earned her title of "first lady of American fly tying," but she is also a warm, kind person, and we had rarely talked about fly-tying practice. . . . I was unaccustomed to seeing her professional side, and so, just for an instant, I was absorbed in her actions. With the critical eye of an expert, a look I had not seen during our casual conversations, she automatically—almost reflexively—gave the fly a quick once-over. As she held it in one hand, a harder expression passed over her face. She scruffed the deer-hair collar and mentally measured the proportions, or whatever real masters do when they look at someone else's work. As the instant passed and she put the fly back, I thought that there was nothing in the world I would less like to be right than than a poorly tied fly.<sup>12</sup>



*Flies tied by Helen Shaw during the 1940s when she lived in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.*







*Flies tied by Helen Shaw during the 1940s when she lived in Sheboygan, Wisconsin.*



Although there were female commercial tiers during that era, and a number of fly fishers who are now being recognized and published, it was then a sport dominated by men. In the preface to *Fly-Tying*, Shaw writes, "Practice materials for the fly-tyer are always at hand, once *he* has acquired the necessary tools and a few hooks" [*emphasis mine*].<sup>13</sup> She presumed she was writing for a male audience as, indeed, she mostly was. It is fitting that the women fly fishers of today, and now there are thousands, have honored her, and she is included in Lyla Foggia's 1995 book, *Reel Women: The World of Women Who Fish*, devoted to women who have contributed to the sport.

It has been more than fifty years since Shaw lived in Sheboygan. Her family

home no longer stands. The building housing Keitel's Confectionery, downstairs from Art Kade Flycrafters, is gone. Art Kade has died. However, she has not been forgotten in that city. She was the recipient of the national Fly Fishing Federation Buszek Award, and her nomination for that award was initiated by the FFF chapter in Sheboygan, the Helen Shaw chapter. The Onion River where she fished, long neglected, has received public and private grants of several million dollars and is being restored to a high-quality trout stream.

Hermann Kessler, whom she married in 1953, died in 1993. Helen Shaw Kessler lives quietly in East Chatham, New York.

## ENDNOTES

1. Story related by Dick Talleur, quoted in Lyla Foggia, *Reel Women: The World of Women Who Fish* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1995), 111.
2. Arnold Gingrich, *The Joys of Trout* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1973), 120.
3. Ibid.
4. "Every Day Was Christmas: An Informal History of the Museum of American Fly Fishing," *The American Fly Fisher* (vol. 5, no. 4, Fall 1978), 3.
5. Gingrich, 120.
6. Foggia, 115.
7. Ibid.
8. Art Kade Flycrafters catalog 1938, 1.
9. Personal interview, Beatrice Visser, 5 July 2006.
10. Foggia, 116.
11. Quoted in Foggia, 114.
12. Paul Schullery, *Royal Coachman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 125–26.
13. Helen Shaw, *Fly-Tying* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1963), iii.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful for information, photos, and flies I received from residents of Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Konrad Testwuide, a friend of Helen Shaw and her family, loaned the Art Kade catalog, the hat of his late mother, and flies tied by Shaw. Peter Schils provided the A. K. Royal and Michigan Hopper flies. Ray Larson, active in the Helen Shaw chapter of the American Federation of Fly Fishers, provided helpful information, and Beth Dippel of the Sheboygan County (Wisconsin) Historical Research Center made available the photo of Shaw tying with Art Kade and the photo of the building where Kade Flycrafters was located.

Harry L. Peterson



*A fishing bonnet adorned with a number of Helen Shaw's Parmachene Belles and other flies. It belonged to Charlotte Testwuide (1905–1993), a good friend of Shaw's.*

# George H. Halstead: Tribute to a Classic Bamboo Rodmaker

by John A. Feldenzer

GEORGE H. HALSTEAD was a master metalworker and craftsman who produced some of the finest bamboo fly-fishing rods of the twentieth century. Yet he is rarely recognized, and his name is known only to true aficionados and collectors of bamboo rods and to those immersed in the history of fly-fishing tackle. I hope this fresh portrayal will shed new light on the man, his interest in fly fishing, and the tackle he created.

Writer Roger Menard, author of *My Side of the River: Reflections of a Catskill Fly Fisherman*, knew George Halstead personally and describes him as an unassuming man. He was a “good caster but did very little fishing.”<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 captures Halstead on one such fishing trip that he took with Menard and others in August 1959. Like other great rodmakers, Halstead understood the mechanics of a good fly rod. According to Menard, if you were a fisherman who could express what

you wanted to Halstead—for example, a fast or slow action, or a rod for a specific type of fishing—then George would “be happy to build you a fish pole.”<sup>2</sup> In his book, Menard describes just such a custom 7-foot, two-piece unmarked rod built for him.<sup>3</sup> Built by Halstead in 1959, the rod sold with two tips for \$90.<sup>4</sup>

Russ Wilson, George Halstead’s stepson, reports that Halstead was born in Washingtonville, New York, on 11 May 1900. He had two siblings: an older sister, Grace, and a younger brother, John. Virtually nothing is known of his childhood. At some point, his parents moved the family to Central Valley, New York, home of the H. L. Leonard Rod Company. As a very young man, Halstead served an apprenticeship at the Waterbury Button Company in Connecticut, where he learned the trade of machinist. He married young and had a son, Bobby, but the marriage did not last.<sup>5</sup>

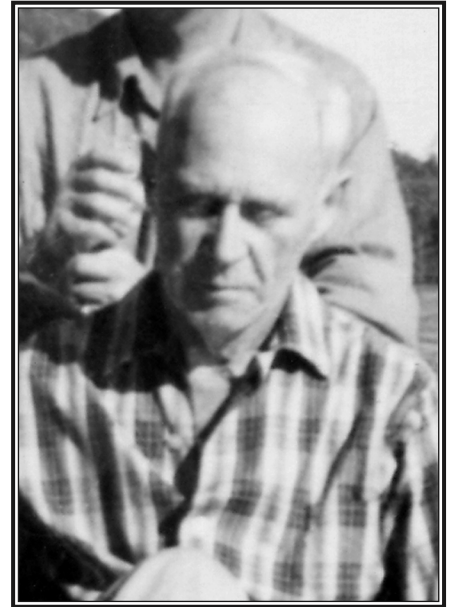


Figure 1. George on a fishing trip, Blue Mountain Lake, Adirondack Mountains, August 1959. Photo courtesy of Roger Menard.



Photographs by Daaave Summers

Figure 2. Reel seats developed by George Halstead. A (left to right): Payne’s famous downlocking (Roy Steenrod’s rod ca. early 1920s) and uplocking reel seats (model 204L ca. 1940s–1950s, model 202 ca. 1960s), Gillum’s uplocking salmon rod reel seat. B: Various concentric ring patterns on the bases of the butt caps of the corresponding rods in 2A.





Figure 3. Halstead's ferrules (female component on butt sections), left to right: pre-1925 Ed Payne style; Jim Payne ca. 1940s–1950s model 204L; Jim Payne 1960s model 202; late-model Gillum light salmon rod; Halstead 8-foot, 1-inch parabolic trout rod; Halstead 9-foot, 6-inch salmon rod; and Halstead 8-foot late model unmarked trout rod.

### THE RODMAKER'S RÉSUMÉ

Thereafter, Halstead became steeped in the Catskill history and tradition of rodmaking. In 1920, he started working at the H. L. Leonard Rod Company in Central Valley, where he made reel seats and ferrules.<sup>6</sup> In 1925, he moved to Highland Mills to work for the E. F. Payne Rod Company.<sup>7</sup> This was the year that Jim Payne formed a partnership with Frank G. Oram, a former employee of the Leonard Company. There, with Jim Payne in the new shop on Elm Street, Halstead developed the famous up- and downlocking, polished, hardened aluminum reel seats so well recognized and

appreciated by owners of Payne rods and referred to as "Payne's silver locking seat."<sup>8</sup> Figure 2A shows the downlocking seat on an 8-foot, two-piece, early Jim Payne rod, owned by Catskill legend Roy Steenrod, as well as Halstead's influence on the uplocking Payne seats of a ca. 1940s–1950s model 204L and an early 1960s model 202. For the next forty-three years, Payne never altered the reel seats that Halstead developed. Furthermore, Halstead's impact on Harold Steele "Pinky" Gillum's work is obvious on the reel seat of a late model (serial #1790) light salmon rod (see Figure 2A). Halstead also developed a new blued-ferrule system adopted by Jim Payne in the

late 1920s. Before Halstead's ferrule improvement, Payne rods were fitted with the early, Ed Payne-style "hour-glass" or so-called potbelly nickel-silver ferrules.<sup>9</sup> This new ferrule system was later used by Pinky Gillum and by Halstead on his own rods<sup>10,11</sup> (Figures 3 and 14C). In his groundbreaking work, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, Marty Keane states, "There is no doubt in my mind that Halstead was indeed a prime catalyst in bringing about the masterful metal finishes apparent on the new Paynes, for it is well known in the trade that his special ability with fashioning rod fittings was of the highest quality."<sup>12</sup> Perhaps the best description of Halstead-designed Payne hardware was given by Ernie Schwiebert in a book chapter titled "The Alchemy of Bamboo." Here, Schwiebert describes the visual, tactile, and even olfactory delight of inspecting an 8-foot, three-piece Payne rod, built by Ed and refitted by Jim many years later.

The ferrules were beautiful, each female socket sealed with a perfectly fitted German silver plug. The reel seat filler was a rich Spanish cedar, and its fittings gleamed like fine jewelry. The locking threads were exquisitely machined, and although the butt cap and locking hood were only aluminum, their weight and elegant knurling and polish seemed more like fine sterling—as beautiful as silver pieces at Tiffany's.<sup>13</sup>

As we shall see, with the exception of Marty Keane's book, George Halstead's contributions to the metal work on Payne rods and those of other rodmakers have been largely overlooked.

In 1929, George Halstead remarried, this time to a young lady, Kay Triggs Wilson (Figure 4). George, Kay, and her son, Russ Wilson, lived in Highland Mills



Figure 4. George with Kay Wilson at his home in Highland Mills, New York, 1928. This was their residence, after they married, from 1929 to 1937. Photo courtesy of Russ Wilson.



Figure 5. George H. Halstead (far right) in July 1930 with (left to right) his parents, Kathryn and George P. Halstead, and his wife Kay. Photo courtesy of Russ Wilson.

Russ Wilson



Figure 7. Halstead's Mill Plain, Connecticut, shop on old U.S. Route 6, as seen today. The early 1940s rod shop was to the left. The Halsteads lived on the right side of the building. It is currently a private residence.

just across the street from Elsie Payne, Jim's sister (Figures 5 and 6). Then, in 1937, the Halsteads moved from Highland Mills to Mill Plain, a suburb of Danbury, Connecticut, where George started his own rodmaking business. At that point, he had worked at Leonard for five years and at Payne for twelve.<sup>14</sup> He began a loose association with Pinky Gillum of Ridgefield, Connecticut, whom Russ Wilson describes as a "cagey fellow."<sup>15</sup> Halstead built Gillum's beveler in addition to his own. Wilson contends that Halstead also built reel seats for Gillum.<sup>16</sup> They became friends and shared ideas and theories on rodmaking. Halstead's uplocking reel seat and ferrules, developed for Jim Payne, were a clear influence on Gillum's rods (see Figures 2 and 3). For not quite two years, they shared a workshop in Danbury before Pinky's move to the Bailey Avenue shop in Ridgefield.<sup>17</sup>

Ernie Schwiebert, in his chapter "The Iconography of the Split-Cane Rod,"

quotes a conversation between himself and Harry Darbee on the Halstead-Gillum relationship. Darbee was a friend of both Halstead and Gillum. According to Darbee, Halstead hoped to develop a rodmaking partnership with Gillum. The plan called for Halstead to machine the ferrules, reel seats, and fittings while Gillum performed the cane work. The partnership apparently failed when Halstead reportedly delivered a supply of ferrules both late and incomplete. "Gillum never forgave George . . . It was the end of the partnership!" Darbee said.<sup>18</sup> Around 1940, while at the Mill Plain shop (Figure 7), Halstead attempted his first marketing endeavor. He printed a small, one-piece folded brochure. On the cover, Halstead advertised:

G. H. HALSTEAD  
20 Years Building America's Finest  
Fishing Rods  
Superb Browntone Grade

and concluded with:

*I am pleased to offer G. H. Halstead Rods to discriminating fishermen. These rods are produced in view of my thorough mechanical experience plus 17 years rod making with E. F. Payne Rod Company and H. L. Leonard Company.*  
Sincerely, G. H. Halstead.

Three-piece trout fly rods of 8 (3¾ oz., 4¼ oz.), 8½ (4¼ oz., 4¾ oz.), and 9 feet (5½ oz.), as well as a 6-ounce, 9-foot bass rod sold for \$50, as did his two-piece trout rods of 7½ (3 oz.), 7¾ (3¾ oz.), and 8 feet (3¾ oz., 4 oz.). Weight depended on whether a screw or skeleton reel seat was ordered. Two three-piece, dry-fly salmon rods with detachable extension butts were offered, one at 9½ feet (6½ oz.) and one at 10 feet (7¼ oz.) for \$65 (Figure 8). Photos of a three-piece trout rod with case and a three-piece salmon rod with detachable butt were shown. Halstead printed a second brochure in the early



Figure 6. Russ Wilson (age 7) and Lois Pembleton (Kay Halstead's young stepsister) at the Halsteads' Highland Mills home in 1930. Wilson reports that this property contained the "little red shop," original home of E. F. Payne Rod Company. Jim Payne moved the business to a new shop on Elm Street in 1925 (see Martin J. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers* [New York: Winchester Press, 1976], 139). Elsie Payne, Jim's sister, lived across the street. Photo courtesy of Russ Wilson.



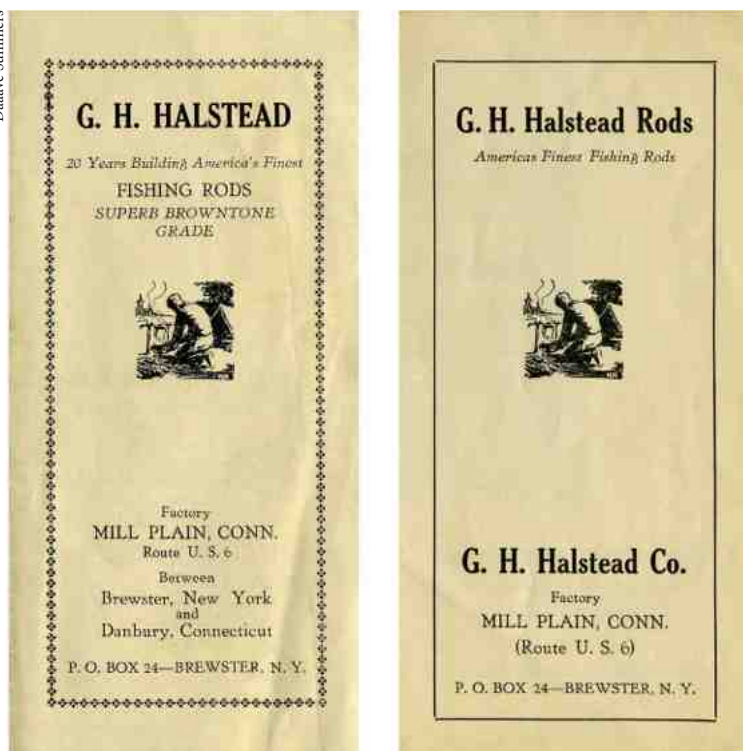


Figure 8. Halstead brochures from the early 1940s. Left: Front cover from the first brochure. Right: Front cover from second brochure. Brochures courtesy of Russ Wilson.

1940s with some variation; its cover advertised:

G. H. Halstead Rods  
America's Finest Fishing Rods

The covers of both brochures were illustrated with the scene of a fisherman preparing his catch for dinner at campsite. Interestingly, the second cover also shows, "G. H. Halstead Co.," indicating that since the previous brochure, Halstead may have incorporated his rod-making business. The "factory's" mailing address (P.O. Box 24, Brewster, New York), as well as the street address (Route U.S. 6, Mill Plain, Connecticut), are the same on both brochures. The second brochure eliminated the photo of the salmon rod. Halstead also had now devised a model numbering system for ordering. These numbers, however, are never found on Halstead's rods. The first two digits, 10, were always followed by the length of the rod, then the number of sections. A new 7-foot, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce rod, model 1072, was added, and the 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ -foot rod was eliminated. Two-piece (1072, 10752, 1082) and three-piece (10753, 1083, 10853, 1093) trout rods and a single three-piece bass (1093) model were offered, as well as two three-piece salmon rods (1095, 1010). In another change, the first brochure advertised that "reel holding devices are walnut skeleton style or walnut positive screw type," whereas the second offered that

"reel holding devices are screw type or skeleton of mahogany or walnut." The first brochure stated only, "Assorted tackle in stock." The second claimed, "We carry in stock complete tackle assortments." It is unknown what type of tackle Halstead offered in his shop. These brochures are the only known attempts by Halstead to market his rods to the public<sup>19</sup> (see Figure 8). Russ Wilson remembers delivering Halstead rods to be sold by Abercrombie & Fitch in New York on several occasions. He cannot recall if these rods ever had any special Abercrombie & Fitch marking, as did Jim Payne's rods, which were also sold by this famous tackle shop.<sup>20</sup>

During World War II, Halstead worked in various machine shops in Danbury and Brewster to support our country's war effort (Figure 9).<sup>21</sup> At this time, the Orvis Company of Manchester, Vermont, was under extreme financial pressure. Then-owner Duckie Corkran kept it

afloat with the government's ski-pole contract and orders for the old Orvis Glass Minnow Trap by commercial freshwater fishermen along the Mississippi River. The sale of these items "played a crucial role in the company's survival."<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Wes Jordan, Orvis's master rod designer and builder, who was recruited by Corkran in 1940, was developing the impregnation process for his split-bamboo rods. During this period of instability, Jordan had the assistance of Omar Needham, who was known for his varnishing expertise. In 1942, Corkran enticed Pinky Gillum to work in the Orvis rod shop to relieve some of the increasing pressure on Jordan.<sup>23</sup> In 1945, Halstead joined Jordan, Gillum, and Needham at Orvis. Austin Hogan and Paul Schullery point out that not since the 1890s, when Eustis Edwards, Fred Thomas, and Ed Payne worked for the Kosmic Rod Company, had so much bamboo-rodmaking talent been gathered under one roof. Needham left in 1946, both because the impregnation process made his varnishing skills unneeded and to build his own rods. Similarly, both Halstead and Gillum left Orvis within a year to build their own rods.<sup>24</sup> From this point, Halstead worked as a solo, mostly custom, bamboo rod-maker. In the mid-1940s, the Halsteads moved to Carmel, New York, for a short



Figure 9. George and Kay during the World War II years. Photo courtesy of Russ Wilson.





(Left) Figure 10. George and Kay Halstead in front of their shop in Carmel, New York, in 1946. Photo courtesy of Russ Wilson.

(Above) Figure 11. Halstead's Patterson, New York, shop was located on the first floor of this building from 1947 to 1950. Photo courtesy of Russ Wilson.

time and then to Patterson, New York, after the war (Figures 10 and 11). After his discharge from the Navy, Russ Wilson worked for Halstead, along with Jack Shoen, Wilson's hometown friend and a machinist, at the rod shop in Patterson for about a year in 1947. Wilson remembers cutting his hand one day while machining reel seats for Halstead. The arrangement did not last. Wilson states, "George was a good machinist and a good rodmaker but not a businessman."<sup>25</sup> Halstead moved his shop for the last time to Brewster in 1950 (Figure 12 and inset).

It is clear that George Halstead was influenced by some of the greatest bamboo rodmakers of the Golden Era, the 1930s to 1960s.<sup>26</sup> These include the Leonard staff; Jim Payne; Pinky Gillum; and Wes Jordan and the Orvis staff, including Omar Needham and others. This experience contributed to Halstead's concepts of effective rod tapers and his acknowledged superior varnish and wraps that created a beautiful cosmetic appearance. These factors—in combination with his metal-working skills, which produced functionally outstanding reel seats and ferrules—enabled Halstead to create fine trout and salmon bamboo fly-fishing rods for those who were fortunate enough to obtain one.

## AN UNAPPRECIATED LEGACY

Unfortunately, Halstead received no published credit for his contributions during his lifetime. An undated, post-1925 E. F. Payne Co. brochure, as well as two versions of the 1930s E. F. Payne Rod

Co. catalog titled "fishing?" (the cover showing a small boy fishing with a sapling pole and bobber), made no mention of Halstead's innovations. Instead, the catalogs stated that the quality of Payne ferrules was due to the fact that "he [Jim] draws his by hand through a cunningly devised machine that his father originated" and that the ferrule is "... drawn to just the right degree of hardness so as to make it fit and conform to the wood."<sup>27,28</sup> Of course, after leaving the E. F. Payne Rod Co. in 1937, Halstead became a competitor of Jim Payne's. Payne's catalogs were not the only printed material that ignored Halstead's innovations. Even after his death, Halstead's reputation as a rodmaker was largely disregarded.

Harmon Henkin's quite opinionated 1976 book, *Fly Tackle: A Guide to the Tools of the Trade*, overlooked Halstead completely in his chapter on "The Great Rod Builders." His description of the hardware on Jim Payne's rods is understated: "All the hardware on his rods is very tasteful, yet fundamentally functional."<sup>29</sup> A. J. Campbell, in *Classic & Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle: A Guide for Collectors and Anglers*, gave only token mention of Halstead in one sentence, "With the aid of George Halstead, post-1925 [Payne] rods had that ferrulemaker's oxidized fittings."<sup>30</sup>

In *Classic Bamboo Rodmakers: Past and Present*, Dick Spurr made a glaring omission of George Halstead. Although Spurr admitted in his introduction that "some fine craftsmen were bound to be left out," he goes on to list his criteria for inclusion in the book. Rodmakers whom he chose to report on were "those whose

rods have historical significance, those who have contributed subtle innovations and improvements to the craft of building rods, those who have been building fine cane rods for sufficient time that their reputation for quality and consistency has been established and those who have produced rods in sufficient quantity."<sup>31</sup> George Halstead clearly met all of Spurr's criteria. In the description of Jim Payne's work, Spurr made no mention of Halstead's contribution to Payne's "new reel seats" or the "ferrules of a regal blue-black color."<sup>32</sup> Regrettably, the only mention of Halstead in *Classic Bamboo Rodmakers* is a disparaging reference in the section on Pinky Gillum. Here, Spurr blames Halstead for the delaminating problem in Gillum's rods, mentions that Halstead rods "suffered continually from the same problem," then states, almost as an afterthought, that "both Gillum and Halstead built exceptional casting rods."<sup>33</sup> In fairness to Spurr, he did state that some rodmakers were left out because of inadequate information or lack of a photograph.<sup>34</sup>

In 1991, Dr. Gerald Stein published the results of a survey to assess "the most enjoyable, finest fishing rods and reels they [the unidentified "numerous tackle experts" he chose to survey] ever had the good fortune to use." Under the heading "Overlooked Rodmakers," Stein writes, "A number of well-known rodmakers' work is conspicuously absent in this work."<sup>35</sup> The first neglected classic maker mentioned by Stein was Halstead. "There are no Halsteads, no Hawes, no E. W. Edwards ... It is not clear that these rods' limited

production entirely accounts for their absence.<sup>36</sup> Limited production has always been a problem in assessing Halstead as a rodmaker and defining his position in the history of the bamboo fly rod.

## HOW MANY HALSTEADS?

Estimates of the number of Halstead rods made vary from 800 by Bob Corsetti<sup>37</sup> (a bamboo rod expert who publishes the tackle catalog *Rods & Reels*) to 1,000 to 2,000 by Marty Keane.<sup>38</sup> Establishing an accurate production number for rods made by Halstead is extremely difficult because of his lengthy period of solo rodmaking—approximately twenty-five years—and a total absence of known records. Halstead did not keep a ledger as did full-time, solo rodmaker Lyle Dickerson, who built approximately 1,350 rods in the same period (1931 to 1960).<sup>39</sup> There are no serial numbers on Halsteads as can be found on Orvis rods over a long period (estimated 100,000)<sup>40</sup> and no system of designating rods as to number or year built as inked on Garrison (estimated 600 to 650),<sup>41,42</sup> Carlson (estimated 375),<sup>43</sup> or Gillum (estimated 1,200 to 2,200)<sup>44</sup> rods. There are no partial records of serial numbers as can be found stamped into the butt cap of an F. E. Thomas rod after 1937 (estimated 15,000)<sup>45</sup> or for the Paul H. Young Rod Co. of Detroit, which placed serial numbers on the butt section of rods

below the stripper guide and recorded them starting in 1955 (estimated 5,000).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Halstead made many rods that were unmarked and unsigned—that is, they had no die stamp and were not signed “Halstead” in ink on the rod (Figure 13).

These factors have led experts and collectors to rely on secondary features to confirm the authenticity of a Halstead rod, especially when the provenance is unknown. Last, some have contended that few Halstead rods have survived because of a defect in rod production, specifically an inferior gluing process that led to delamination.<sup>47,48</sup> If true, this last factor would have led to an underestimate of the number of Halsteads.

In 1999, Len Codella, a bamboo rod expert, stated that:

In over 30 years as a full-time dealer in top grade bamboo rods, I’ve handled over 20,000 classic rods. During all that time I can only recall less than a dozen George Halstead rods. Nearly all were above 8 feet long with only one at 7’6” and one at 6’0” in length and never any at 7 foot. The point is, that by comparison to the number of ultra desirable Payne, Leonard, Thomas, Edwards, Gillum and Garrison rods I’ve handled during that time, the true scarcity of ANY rod made by this top grade maker really hits home. Words like scarce and rare do not suffice to describe the current availability of examples of the very small body of his work.<sup>49</sup>

On 3 January 2004, the largest cane rod auction in history occurred in Boxborough, Massachusetts. The offering was the personal collection of single owner who acquired many valuable, high-quality, classic, and historic rods over the years. Nearly 400 rods were sold, including eleven Garrisons, fourteen Gillums, thirteen Dickersons, five Needhams, and one Carlson.<sup>50</sup> Only six Halstead rods were offered, and three were designated as “unmarked Halsteads.”<sup>51</sup> I reviewed all of the offerings in Marty Keane’s *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalogs from 1983 to 2006. During this twenty-three-year period, only twenty-two original Halstead rods came up for sale.<sup>52</sup> Russ Wilson, who was as close to Halstead’s rodmaking business as anyone, estimates his production at twenty to thirty rods per year.<sup>53</sup>

In my opinion, based on Wilson’s estimate and the frequency of Halstead rods coming to market in comparison with other solo rodmakers of the same period—like Dickerson, Garrison, Gillum, Carlson, and Needham—George Halstead made fewer than 800 bamboo trout and salmon rods in his lifetime. One must remember that at the peak of Halstead’s rodmaking career, the 1950s, bamboo was extremely difficult to obtain because of the embargo on Chinese exports. This dearth of quality material undoubtedly limited Halstead’s production.



Figure 12. Halstead’s last shop in Brewster, New York, as it stood, abandoned, in 1994. Photo courtesy of Keith Fulsher. Inset: Beginning in 1950, George and Kay lived in a trailer home next to the shop. This photo is from 1969. Photo courtesy of Russ Wilson.



## IDENTIFYING A HALSTEAD ROD

Halstead rods are of uniform caramel-colored cane similar to, and perhaps slightly darker than, rods by Payne and Gillum. He called the finish “browntone” in his first brochure (see Figure 8). Node spacing varies on Halstead rods and reflects the influence of his early rodmaking experience. Some show 3-by-3 spacing, like Leonard and Orvis rods, whereas others demonstrate spiral spacing, the pattern of Jim Payne.<sup>54</sup> The most common node pattern seen on Halstead rods is the 2-by-2 spacing.

Marty Keane reports that early Halstead rods were signed in ink on the butt section of the rod. Later, Halstead used a die stamp reading G. H. HALSTEAD RODS in two lines on the locking screw band of the reel seat to identify his work<sup>55</sup> (Figure 13A inset). Keith Fulsher reports that his late-model, custom-built, 6-foot, 8-inch rod was simply signed “Halstead” on the butt section.<sup>56</sup> Halstead also used a pattern of concentric engraved rings in the

base of the butt caps on both marked and unmarked rods and on rods with sliding band or screw-locking seats. The pattern was also used on the butt plugs of his salmon rods with removable extension butts (Figure 13B). Experts have reported this as a distinguishing characteristic, but this ring pattern was not unique to Halstead rods. Other classic rodmakers, such as Payne and Gillum, used them. I believe that this reflects Halstead’s influence on the hardware of their reel seats (see Figure 2B). Leonard rods and some F. E. Thomas rods also show a concentric ring pattern. As noted above, Halstead made reel seats for the Leonard Company in the early 1920s. One may have influenced the other at that time. The concentric ring pattern is a helpful clue in identifying a genuine Halstead rod that is unmarked.

Halstead stated in his first brochure that his reel-seat fillers were made of walnut, and this was confirmed by Marty Keane in *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, which includes the only significant description of Halstead’s rods in print.<sup>57,58</sup> Several rod experts, however, including

John Gallas (who has probably restored or repaired more Halstead rods than anyone else) and rodmaker Dana Gray concur that they have seen more Halstead reel seats made of mahogany than walnut.<sup>59</sup> This is usually the highly patterned African mahogany as seen on Gillum’s rods, though a plainer Honduran mahogany was also used (see Figure 13A). Halstead’s second brochure confirms that mahogany seats were offered at a later time. The “walnut” in Halstead’s reel seats was butternut, also known as white walnut and native to the eastern United States. This coarse-grained, yellow-brown wood has a satinlike luster and was also used by the H. L. Leonard Rod Company.

Fine knurling is characteristic of Halstead’s premium metal work. A diamond pattern of knurling is consistently found on the Payne and Gillum reel seats that Halstead developed (see Figure 2A). However, Halstead rarely used the diamond pattern on his own rods.<sup>60</sup> Instead, he designed a vertical pattern of knurling in two or three rows on his own reel-seat hardware. All locking rings on his trout rods had dual rows of knurling. This



*Inset: Left: Dual rows of straight, vertical knurling on a Halstead trout rod marked with his die stamp. Right: Unmarked Halstead trout rod with the custom frosted textured finish and dual rows of fine, ropelike diagonal knurling.*

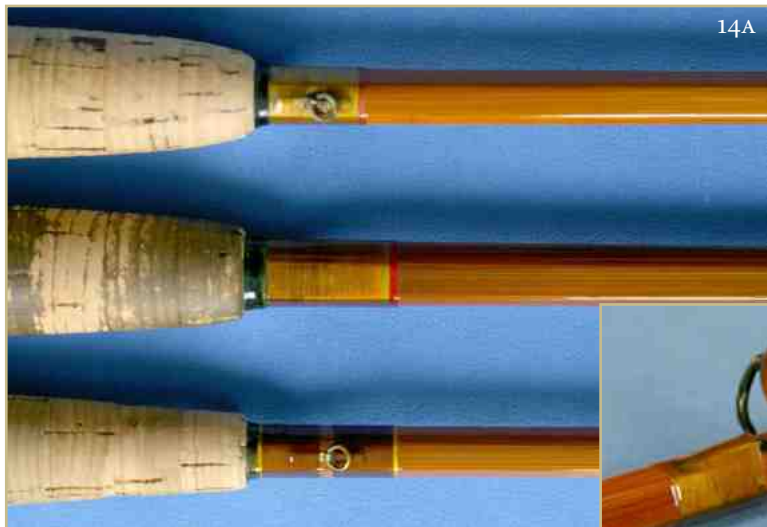
Figure 13. Reel seats on Halstead’s own rods. A, left to right: Screw downlocking reel seat on a trout rod with separate, pinned pocket hardware and African mahogany filler; screw uplocking reel seat on a salmon rod with removable butt plug for extension and Honduran mahogany filler; trout rod with skeleton all-cork, downlocking sliding aluminum ring reel seat with so-called frosted finish. Note the characteristic double row of fine knurling on the two trout rods and triple row on the salmon rod.

*B: Variable concentric ring pattern on the Halstead butt caps seen in 13A.*



Photos by Daaave Summers





14A



14B

Photos by Daaave Summers



14C

*Figure 14. Halstead's variations.*

*A: Winding checks with different wrap colors and hook keepers. Standard wraps on upper and middle rods; custom wraps on the lowest rod.*

*B: Stripping guide variations.*

*C: Male and female components of gunmetal-blued ferrules on Halstead's rods. Halstead always pinned his ferrules.*

knurling was typically a vertical straight pattern (see Figure 13A inset, left). He used a triple row of this pattern on his salmon rods.<sup>61</sup> A special "frosted" finish, as Marty Keane describes it, was placed on sliding-band or skeleton hardware that was available on custom-ordered rods.<sup>62</sup> On this hardware, Halstead placed a beautiful, double row of fine, diagonal or ropelike knurling on the sliding bands and a single row on the butt caps (see Figure 13A inset, right). These unique patterns of finely machined knurling are critical in identifying a genuine Halstead rod. Another Halstead hallmark is his downlocking-screw reel seat on which a separate metal sleeve is pinned to the metal base to form a pocket for the reel foot. Keane points out that this sleeve is made of a "different metal than the butt cap"<sup>63</sup> (see Figures 13A and 13B, reel seat at far left). "The upper portion of his inter-

rupted-thread locking seat is of flared design to hold the cork grip rings firmly in place—another Halstead trademark."<sup>64</sup> Winding checks were custom formed and deeply blued, as were the Halstead ferrules. The three unmarked trout rods sold at Lang's and mentioned above have the "frosted" finish with dual rows of knurling on the slide bands and unblued winding checks. Hook keepers were mostly of the loose-ring type, though an occasional bent-wire-loop keeper may be seen. Early stripper guides were agate, as advertised in his brochures, or metal, with both Mildrum and Perfection types seen (Figures 14A and 14B).

The wrap colors on Halstead's rods were not consistent. In the brochures, he states, "All rods are finished browntone with windings of blending color."<sup>65</sup> Brown or tan, almost bronze silk windings with red tipping at the ferrules and green

accents at the winding check were most common. Keane called Halstead's brown windings "perfect" even under magnification and "a slightly wide band of red tipping at the ferrules and top guide lend an air of quiet elegance."<sup>66</sup> Because many rods were custom orders, windings of other colors—such as clear tipped with yellow, black, or white; gold tipped with burgundy; or brown tipped with gold and black—may be seen.<sup>67</sup> Figure 14 shows standard wraps (Figures 14A and 14B: upper and middle rods; Figure 14C: left and middle rods) as well as a custom-built 1960 late-Halstead 8-foot trout rod with a Payne-style, brown-tipped-with-yellow winding pattern (Figures 14A and 14B: lowest rod; Figure 14C: rod to the far right). Marty Keane reports, anecdotally, that Kay Halstead wrapped at least some of George's rods. Apparently, he would not let her touch the silk on the rod with



14D



14E

Figure 14. Halstead's variations (cont.).

*D: Example of a rarely seen Halstead tube label on which he wrote technical information on rod length, weight, and style.*

*E: Several Halstead cloth bags and aluminum tubes. The tube on the left, as well as the one in 14D, was made by Halstead and shows his pinned brass-threaded collar.*

her bare hands, and if he walked by and saw her touching the silk, he would let her know about it!<sup>68</sup> Halstead routinely preserved the color on his wraps before varnishing, but Keith Fulsher, who owned as many as five Halstead rods in the past, reports that Halstead did not use color preservative on his 6-foot, 8-inch custom rod and that the wraps "were clear."<sup>69</sup>

In 1976, Marty Keane described the appearance of Halstead rods: "Each rod had a rich, highly finished appearance. I have inspected the finest rod varnishes in the world and must definitely state that the Halstead finish is a strong contender for first place."<sup>70</sup> Keane told me, in a phone conversation in November 2000, that he had examined approximately 45,000 bamboo fly rods over many years and that the three best varnish finishes of all were those of Jim Payne, Pinky Gillum, and George Halstead, with "Halstead's being number one overall."<sup>71</sup> Halstead was very compulsive about the appearance of his rods. He varnished his rods wearing only his underwear, believing that this reduced the likelihood of contamination with dust or lint from clothing. Having started the varnishing process on a rod, Halstead would not be interrupted, even for a valued customer such as Martin F. Emory, who had traveled some distance to see him.<sup>72</sup> Keith Fulsher remembers discussing varnish with Halstead, who always let the varnish "settle out" and only used the "top half of the can of varnish" when finishing his rods.<sup>73</sup>

Although he offered standard models described in his brochures, Halstead was truly a custom rodbuilder. This explains the variation in winding colors as well as type of fittings on his rods. He sought to build the special rod that a selective customer was seeking. For example, in Figures 13A and 13B (rod to the far right), the unmarked trout rod with a uniquely shaped all-cork grip and two stripping guides on the butt section was built for the very discerning and widely traveled angler Martin Emory. Unlike Payne, whose rods are quite consistent in appearance over many years and almost never had any inked markings, Halstead would put the owner's name on the rod if desired, as would Dickerson, Garrison, and Young. The two trout rods illustrated in Figure 13 have the former owners' names inked on them. Marty Keane told me that Chuck Connors, "The Rifleman" of television fame, had several Halsteads built for him, one of which had his name on it.<sup>74</sup> Russ Wilson reports that Halstead made six or eight rods for Robert Montgomery, the actor and one-time president of the Screen Actors Guild. He remembers Montgomery's visits to the shop. Montgomery would bring along his friend, fellow actor and business partner James Cagney, "who was not a fisherman."<sup>75</sup> Len Codella confirms that he offered a 6-foot, two-piece, 1½-ounce Halstead trout rod, previously owned by Robert Montgomery, for sale in 1994. "In all my years of working with classic tackle, this is, without doubt, the most exciting rod I've ever found."<sup>76</sup>

The colors of Halstead's cloth bags varied over the years. Brown, olive, and khaki were common. The bags were unmarked and had no hanging tag. A cloth loop was sewn in at the top. With each rod, he provided a standard brass-capped aluminum tube that he made. Most tubes are found unlabeled, but Halstead occasionally used a green paper label with cream-colored lettering and hand-written information on length, weight, and style of the rod (Figure 14D). These labels are rarely seen. Halstead pinned the brass-threaded ring at the top of his tubes (Figure 14D and Figure 14E, tube on the left). The tube for salmon rods had brass caps on both ends and a special compartment at the bottom for the detachable extension butt. Halstead also used a "Champion-style" tube, like Gillum, in later years (see Figure 14E, tube on the right). Totally unlike the consistent appearance of Payne's, Dickerson's, and Garrison's rods and less consistent than Gillum's work, Halstead's rods show variability in design, wrap colors, and reel-seat hardware. Because many are unmarked, the identification of an authentic Halstead rod remains a challenge.

## HOW GOOD WERE HIS RODS?

Today, Halstead rods are highly sought after for their casting capability, beautifully varnished finishes, and quality metalwork, especially the reel seats and ferrules. They are sought by collec-

tors for their rarity and value. So, how good were Halstead's rods?

Schwiebert states that "Halstead made a few rods of surprisingly good parabolic action in his own shop, with his own ferules and fittings. The bamboo workmanship was good."<sup>77</sup> Bob Corsetti has examined approximately a dozen Halstead rods over many years and states, "Halstead built superb casting rods."<sup>78</sup> The late Len Wright Jr., of Claryville, New York, wrote or edited twelve books on fly fishing, including *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect*. Wright had definite opinions about the sport and its equipment. In his book *Fly-Fishing Heresies: A New Gospel for American Anglers*, the iconoclast expressed his feelings about fly rods in a chapter titled "The Ultimate Fly Rod."

Men are emotional about fly rods. Men may love a salmon rod. But light, split-cane fly rods are objects of reverence. A Payne, Halstead, Gillum, Garrison, Leonard, Orvis, Winston, Young, Thomas or Edwards trout rod may well be the most cherished piece of equipment used in any sport. . . . The finest, steeliest dry-fly rod I ever owned—or ever handled for that matter—was an eight-foot Halstead.<sup>79</sup>

Roger Menard, whose custom 7-foot Halstead rod was mentioned earlier, described it as "a splendid small rod for me, excellent for dry fly fishing on small streams."<sup>80</sup> Len Codella described the action of a 1948 custom-built 7-foot, 6-inch fast dry-fly rod, previously mentioned in Keane's book, as ". . . almost mesmerizing with a depth of sweet, yet authoritative power capable of turning over the fly and leader at both short and long distances, simply lovely and exhilarating to cast."<sup>81</sup> Admittedly, Codella was attempting to sell the rod for \$5,900, and this may have affected his enthusiasm for it! Clearly, George Halstead had a following of experienced fly fishermen who sought out his custom-made rods and were well pleased by them.

## THE DELAMINATION ISSUE

Marty Keane estimates that he's handled approximately one hundred Halstead rods over many years. He does not feel that delamination has been a problem and states that he has never seen a Halstead rod that came apart.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, some of Halstead's rods reportedly delaminated along the seams at the tips because of poor glue.<sup>83</sup> Multiple

examples support this claim. Roger Menard's rod tip delaminated at one of the tips and was repaired by Jim Payne. "Some years later, after George had passed away, I brought the rod to Jim Payne to repair a tip section that had separated."<sup>84</sup> The 1948 custom trout rod that Codella described in his 1999 catalog had one tip "now repaired over wrapped with exactly matching tan color silk thread between the tip top and the first snake."<sup>85</sup> This long repair wrap suggests a reglued delamination, not repair of a simple hook dig. The salmon rod illustrated in Figures 13A and B (center rod) has one tip with multiple repair wraps between two guides, suggesting a delamination. Mark Canfield, an experienced rodmaker from Ketchum, Idaho, reports that he has

to know the extent to which Halstead's rods came apart at the tips as there are so few around to inspect. I think that it is safe to state that some Halstead rods definitely had a tendency to delaminate and required repair.

## THE HALSTEAD-FULSHER FLY SHOP

Keith Fulsher, originator of the Thunder Creek series of flies, organized a fly shop in George Halstead's workshop in the fall of 1960.<sup>90</sup> The shop sold flies, packaged fly-tying materials, reels, some St. Croix fiberglass blanks, and other equipment, like vests and waders. The inventory was purchased by Halstead, Fulsher, and later by Jack Lanese, a local osteopathic physician and close friend of Fulsher's. They set up showcases; Mattie Vinciguerra, a photographer and fly tier, built several fly-tying tables for the shop, for which Halstead made him a rod. Fulsher recalls that at one point George said, "We ought to make a fly reel!" Certainly, Halstead had the metal-working skills to do it, but the idea never came to fruition.<sup>91</sup> Halstead printed new business cards that amazingly did not advertise his rodmaking capability (Figure 15). The shop became a gathering place for a small group of fifteen or twenty avid fly fishers and fly tiers who would gather around a coffee pot at Sunday afternoon sessions. These were attended by Halstead, Menard, Fulsher, Vinciguerra,

Frank Bondatti, Jay Schafrann, innovative fly tier Herb Howard, and other dedicated fly fishers. Menard describes these sessions in his book:

We tied flies and cast rods nonstop. . . . Mattie Vinciguerra joined us and showed some of his patterns that were developed on the East Branch of the Croton River. Tragically, our Sunday meetings at Halstead's ended one late winter day when George, always thoughtful of his fellow anglers, chose to lay wood planks on a wet, mud-soaked walkway that led to his shop. While constructing the walkway, he collapsed. He died on the way to the hospital. The world lost a fine rod maker, considered by many to be far ahead of his time in rod designs and tapers. His ferrules were simply the best.<sup>92</sup>

Halstead's death occurred on a wet February afternoon in 1961. Schwiebert stated, "Halstead died at a relatively young age

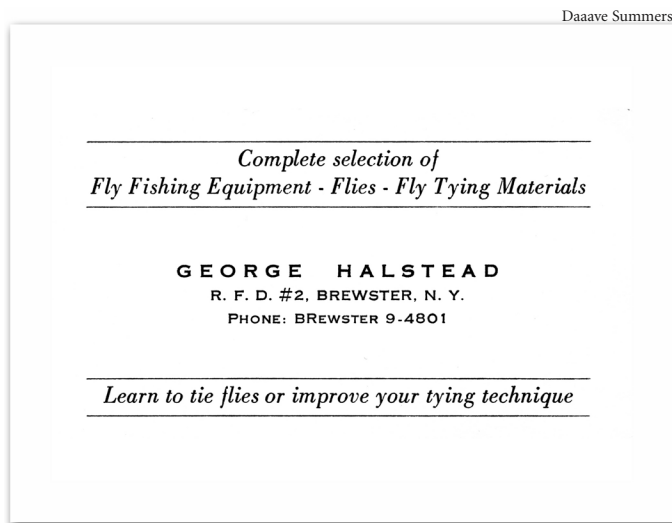


Figure 15. Halstead's last business card. Note that there is no mention of his rodmaking. Card courtesy of Roger Menard.

inspected three Halstead rods, all of which had structural problems, "mostly along the seams," causing them to be "nearly unfishable."<sup>86</sup> John Gallas, who finished the last remaining blanks from Halstead's shop (see below), noted that several blanks had separated seams at the tips that required regluing.<sup>87</sup> Ernie Schwiebert wrote, "Halstead failed to assemble his rods with first-rate adhesives. Many of his rods separated along their glue faces, both in fishing and exposure to excessive moisture, and few survive today."<sup>88</sup> Obviously, some of Halstead's rods performed well over many years and without delamination. Len Wright's "finest, steeliest rod," referred to above, simply lost its backbone: "I still own it and cherish it, but I seldom fish with it. After some seven hundred and fifty days of dogged dry-fly fishing, it's a slow, lazy parody of its former self."<sup>89</sup> Wright said nothing of a delamination problem. It is impossible





Figure 16. Paper tags that were wired to the last unfinished Halstead blanks. These contained notes on rod length and taper in Halstead's handwriting.

[sixty] and his skills and rod specifications never reached their full potential."<sup>93</sup> The decade of the 1960s was a devastating one for classic rodmakers with the loss of Paul Young in 1960, Halstead in 1961, Jim Payne in 1968, and Pinky Gillum in 1969. Everett Garrison, Omar Needham, and Wes Jordan all followed six years later, passing away in 1975. Kay Halstead died in 1998 at the age of ninety-four.

## THE LAST HALSTEAD RODS

Continuing in the tradition of bamboo fly rodmakers from Danbury, John W. Gallas has been building custom bamboo fly rods for twenty-eight years.<sup>94</sup> In 1995, the *Danbury News-Times* published an article on the J. W. Gallas Rod Company.<sup>95</sup> Shortly thereafter, Russ Wilson appeared on the doorstep of John Gallas's shop. After sharing a few anecdotes, Wilson offered Gallas the remaining blanks and some cork, all that was left from Halstead's shop after his untimely death (Figure 16). John Gallas gladly accepted and decided to finish these, the last of his blanks, in Halstead's authentic style.

I set about pairing the tips, mids and butts into potential rods. The blanks grouped into nine rods. First, I made a rod for Russ Wilson. After some research, the proper Halstead wrap colors and hardware were determined. I then contracted REC to supply and engrave the hardware. On one side it [the butt cap] read, J. W. GALLAS ROD CO. MAKER and on the other side it read, G. H. HALSTEAD ROD—the s was left off the word *Rod* by design to differentiate this set of rods built posthumously. In that way, they can never be mistaken for totally original Halstead rods, while on the other hand, they will never be perceived as frauds. I built the ferrules in his style and did everything possible to recreate the Halstead look. I decided to number the last eight remaining rods in series from "1 of 8" to "8 of 8," also in an attempt to signify their provenance and group.<sup>96</sup>

The first seven rods, ranging from a 6-foot, two-piece to an 8-foot, three-piece rod, have very fast actions, as is typical of Halstead's taper designs. I finished these seven rods all in the same (most commonly seen) Halstead style, i.e., tan

wraps with red and green accents and mahogany reel seat wood. The #8 rod was unique. As a parabolic rod, it is a departure from his standard models. Upon close examination with a micrometer, I discovered that it is very similar to the 7'1" Payne parabolic rod. George Halstead worked for Jim Payne (he made Payne's ferrules and helped design the famous Payne uplocking reel seat) and was possibly intrigued by that particular parabolic design. My guess is that the #8 rod was Halstead's tribute to Payne's influence. [Author's note: The #8 rod is not a perfect Payne clone, as Halstead made this blank with his usual 2 x 2 node spacing.] To distinguish this rod as a special variation from the standard Halstead fare, I decided to use the gold wraps with maroon tipping, which, although less common, was also an authentic Halstead color scheme. And with the idea of a special variation in mind (as Halstead had occasionally used walnut for his reel seats), I opted for a burl walnut reel seat.<sup>97</sup>

After the series of eight was completed, Gallas made two more rods, #9 and #10, with the very last of the authentic Halstead blanks. Figures 17A to 17D show details of what are truly the "last of the Halsteads": the #8 of 8 series, as well as Halstead-Gallas rod #10.<sup>98</sup> I confirmed several facts regarding Halstead, his personal history, and the "last Halsteads" in a meeting with John Gallas and Russ Wilson on 9 December 2006 at Wilson's home in Danbury (Figure 18).

In summary, George Halstead was a quiet, unassuming man who was an expert metalsmith and well trained in the art and skill of bamboo rodmaking. He rubbed shoulders with the greatest names in bamboo-rodmaking history. He contributed in a great way to many classic rods of the Golden Era through the creation and manufacturing of the Halstead ferrule and his innovative reel-seat development. Like his contemporary Pinky Gillum, he did not market himself well. He built a small number of custom trout and salmon rods that were beautiful casting instruments, and he took pride in their appearance and function. Unfortunately, with the exception of Keane's *Classic Rods and Rodmakers* and Schwiebert's brief comments in *Trout*, Halstead has been uniformly neglected in the history of classic tackle. Even now, forty-seven years after his death, anyone who is fortunate enough to inspect, cast, or possibly own a Halstead rod will understand and appreciate the exalted position he deserves in the hierarchy of great classic bamboo rodmakers.



17A

Figure 17. The “last Halsteads”: authentic Halstead blanks provided by Russ Wilson and finished by John Gallas.

**A:** Rod #8 of 8 and rod #10: Winding checks, wrap colors, hook keepers, and rod inscription.

**B:** Reel seats with Halstead stamp (the J. W. Gallas Co. stamp on the reverse of each locking ring is not shown).

**C:** Stripping guides, wrap colors.

**D:** John Gallas–made, Halstead-style ferrules on rod #8 of 8 (left). Genuine Halstead-made ferrules were used on rod #10 (right).

17B



Photos by Daaave Summers



17C



17D



Figure 18. Left to right: John Gallas, Russ Wilson, and author John Feldenzer discuss one of Halstead's salmon rods in Danbury, Connecticut, on 9 December 2006.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to Russ Wilson for providing personal information, family photographs, rare catalogs, and brochures on Payne and Halstead rods, as well for his unique insight into George Halstead and his rodmaking business. Special thanks to Keith Fulsher and Roger Menard, attendees of the Sunday afternoon meetings at George's shop, for their photographs and perspective on Halstead and his rods. Thanks to John Gallas for his technical expertise and knowledge of Halstead's work, as well as to Dana Gray for his assistance. I thank all of the above for their editorial comments on the work while in progress. A special thanks to Charles Hoffman for providing the only Halstead rod tube label I've ever seen.

## ENDNOTES

1. Roger Menard, phone conversations with author, 6 November and 11 November 2006.
2. Ibid.
3. Roger Menard, *My Side of the River: Reflections of a Catskill Fly Fisherman* (Hensonville, N.Y.: Black Dome Press Corp., 2002), 65.
4. Roger Menard, phone conversation with author, 11 November 2006.
5. Russ Wilson, phone conversations with author, 18 November and 20 November 2006; personal interview with author, 9 December 2006.
6. Ernest Schwiebert, *Trout*, vol. 2 (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1984), 1070.
7. Martin J. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers* (New York: Winchester Press, 1976), 139.
8. Ibid., 62.
9. Ibid., 57–58; see Figure 3.
10. Ibid., 116, 139.
11. Schwiebert, *Trout*, vol. 2, 1072.
12. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 64.
13. Ernest Schwiebert, *The Compleat Schwiebert* (New York: Truman Talley Books/Dutton, 1990), 369–70.
14. Russ Wilson, phone conversation with author, 20 November 2006, and G. H. Halstead brochures, n.d., ca. 1940s.
15. Russ Wilson, phone conversation with author, 18 November 2006.
16. Ibid., 18 November 2006 and 4 December 2006.
17. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 116.
18. Schwiebert, *Trout*, vol. 2, 1072.
19. Undated (ca. 1940s) G. H. Halstead brochures, courtesy of Russ Wilson. Of course, custom rods—often made with a unique taper or fittings depending on customer preference—were also available.
20. Russ Wilson, phone conversation with author, 18 November 2006.
21. Ibid.
22. Austin Hogan and Paul Schullery, *The Orvis Story* (Manchester, Vt.: The Orvis Company, Inc., 1980), 41.
23. Dick Spurr and Gloria Jordan, *Profile of a Rodmaker* (Grand Junction, Colo.: Centennial Publications, 1992), 121.
24. Hogan and Schullery, *The Orvis Story*, 41.
25. Russ Wilson, phone conversations with author, 18 November 2006 and 4 December 2006.
26. John Gierach, *Fishing Bamboo* (New York: The Lyons Press, 1997), 68.
27. The post-1925 Payne brochure is reproduced in Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 60, 62.
28. Samuel Melner and Herman Kessler, *Great Fishing Tackle Catalogs of the Golden Age* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1972),



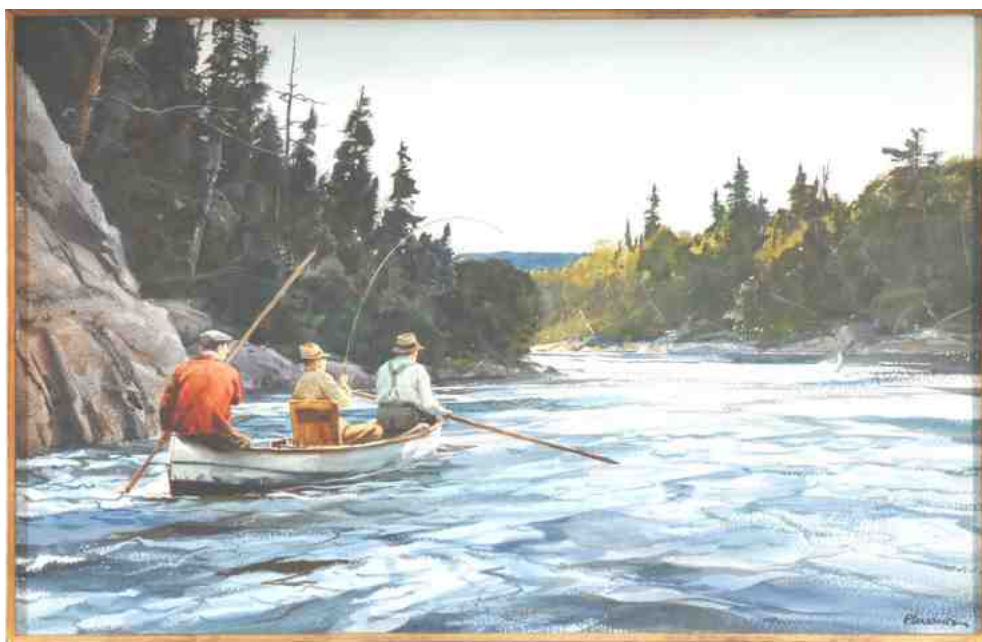
- 340–43. The 1930s E. F. Payne Rod Company catalog cover is reproduced herein. I examined my own original gray-covered copy of the catalog, as well as Russ Wilson's original green-covered copy (two different printings of the 1930s catalog) for this article.
29. Harmon Henkin, *Fly Tackle: A Guide to the Tools of the Trade* (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1976), 48.
30. A. J. Campbell, *Classic & Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle: A Guide for Collectors and Anglers* (New York: Lyons & Burford, 1997), 147.
31. Dick Spurr, *Classic Bamboo Rodmakers: Past and Present* (Grand Junction, Colo.: Centennial Publications, 1992), 3.
32. Ibid., 58.
33. Ibid., 33.
34. Ibid., 3.
35. Gerald S. Stein, "Personal Treasures: The Bamboo Fly Rods and Reels Fishermen Love," *The American Fly Fisher* (Fall 1991, vol. 17, no. 3), 22.
36. Ibid.
37. Bob Corsetti, phone conversation with author, 16 October 2006.
38. Martin J. Keane, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006.
39. Gerald S. Stein and James W. Schaff, *Dickerson: The Man and His Rods* (Grand Junction, Colo.: Centennial Publications, 1991), 106.
40. Stein, "Personal Treasures," 21.
41. Ibid., 20.
42. George Black, *Casting a Spell: The Bamboo Fly Rod and the American Pursuit of Perfection* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2006), 160.
43. Ibid., 130.
44. Stein, "Personal Treasures," 22.
45. Ibid., 18.
46. Ibid., 20.
47. Schwiebert, *Trout*, vol. 2, 1072.
48. Spurr, *Classic Bamboo Rodmakers*, 33.
49. Len Codella, *Heritage Sporting Collectibles*, Fall-Winter 1999, 14–15.
50. Dick Spurr, in *Classic Bamboo Rodmakers: Past and Present*, estimates that Omar Needham, a solo rodmaker in New England at the same period as Halstead, built approximately 400 rods in his lifetime.
51. Lang's auction catalog, 3 January 2004. Halstead rods are listed on pages 36 (two rods), 53, 61, 85, and 88.
52. Martin J. Keane, *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalogs, 1983–2006.
53. Russ Wilson, phone conversations with author, 18 November and 20 November 2006.
54. John Gallas, phone conversation with author, 19 October 2006.
55. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 140.
56. Keith Fulsher, phone conversation with author, 3 December 2006.
57. G. H. Halstead brochure, n.d., ca. 1940s.
58. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 140.
59. John Gallas, phone conversation with author, 19 October 2006; Dana Gray, phone conversation with author, 6 November 2006.
60. A diamond pattern of knurling in two rings may be seen on a marked Halstead 9½-foot "bass rod" offered at Lang's auction on 3 January 2004, Lang's auction catalog, page 88, rod #376.
61. E-mails from John Gallas to author, 27 December and 28 December 2006.
62. Martin J. Keane, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006 and *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalog, 2001, no. 82, 11.
63. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 140.
64. Ibid.
65. G. H. Halstead brochure, n.d., ca. 1940s.
66. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 138.
67. Ibid., 140.
68. Martin J. Keane, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006.
69. Keith Fulsher, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006.
70. Keane, *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, 138.
71. Martin J. Keane, phone conversation with author, November 2000.
72. Martin J. Keane, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006. Keane confirms that Martin F. Emory, the original owner of the unmarked 8-foot trout rod discussed in this article, was kept waiting for hours, drinking coffee with Kay Halstead, as George finished varnishing a rod in his shop. See also Keane, *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalog, 2000, no. 81, 5; Keane, letter to author, 7 November 2000; Keane, *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalog, 1993, no. 63, introduction; and Keane, *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalog, 2001, no. 82, 13 (here Keane gives tribute to Emory on his death).
73. Keith Fulsher, phone conversation with author, 3 December 2006.
74. Martin J. Keane, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006.
75. Russ Wilson, phone conversation with author, 18 November 2006 and <http://www.earlofhollywood.com/RMbio.html>, accessed 18 November 2006.
76. E-mail from Len Codella to author, 4 December 2006 and Len Codella, *Heritage Sporting Collectibles* catalog, 1994. This rod came with a letter of provenance from Robert Montgomery Jr., the actor's son. The rod had one original tip and a second identical tip made by Pinky Gillum after Halstead's death. The rod had typical Halstead light brown wraps with red tipping and green accent at the winding check wrap. The all-cork, 5-inch grip had an aluminum slide band with finely knurled edge and G. H. Halstead Rods stamped in two lines on the butt cap. The rod sold in 1994 for \$6,000.
77. Schwiebert, *Trout*, vol. 2, 1072.
78. Bob Corsetti, phone conversation with author, 16 October 2006.
79. Leonard M. Wright Jr., *Fly Fishing Heresies* (New York: Winchester Press, 1975), 133. This was originally published in *The American Sportsman*, 1969, and also reprinted in Leonard M. Wright Jr., *Trout Maverick: Fly-Fishing Heresies and Tactics* (New York: Lyons and Burford, 1996).
80. Menard, *My Side of the River*, 65.
81. Codella, *Heritage Sporting Collectibles*, Fall-Winter 1999, 15.
82. Martin J. Keane, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006.
83. Spurr, *Classic Bamboo Rodmakers*, 33.
84. Menard, *My Side of the River*, 65.
85. Codella, *Heritage Sporting Collectibles*, Fall-Winter 1999, 15.
86. Letter from Mark Canfield to author, 15 November 2006.
87. John Gallas, phone conversation with author, 19 October 2006.
88. Schwiebert, *Trout*, vol. 2, 1072.
89. Wright, *Fly Fishing Heresies*, 133, and letter from Len Wright to author, 4 June 2001. Len Wright died of a heart attack on 24 August 2001, near his home on the Neversink River.
90. Keith Fulsher is the author of *Tying and Fishing the Thunder Creek Series* (Rockville Center, N.Y.: Freshet Press, Inc., 1973). This book has come out in a revised edition: Keith Fulsher with Dave Klausmeyer, *Thunder Creek Flies* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Press, 2006).
91. Keith Fulsher, phone conversation with author, 15 November 2006.
92. Menard, *My Side of the River*, 84–85.
93. Schwiebert, *Trout*, vol. 2, 1072.
94. The J. W. Gallas Rod Co., 7 Mirijo Rd., Danbury, CT 06811; phone: (203) 790-4188.
95. Robert Miller, "Purists Are Hooked on His Rods," *The Danbury News-Times*, 9 July 1995, B-3.
96. E-mail from John Gallas to author, 18 October 2006: "The eight rods consist of: (1) 6 ft. 2/2; (1) 6'6" 2/2; (1) 7 ft. 3/2; (1) 7'1" 2/2; (2) 7'6" 3/2; (1) 8 ft. 2/1; (1) 8 ft. 3/2."
97. E-mail from John Gallas to author, 18 October 2006, confirming information shared in a previous letter to author, 24 May 2001.
98. The #8 of 8 series parabolic rod was sold by Marty Keane in 2001 in Keane, *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalog, 2001, no. 82, 5. Two other "last Halstead rods" from the series were sold by Keane: a 7-foot, 6-inch 3/2 (#3 of 8) and an 8-foot 3/2 (#4 of 8) in Keane, *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalog, 1998, no. 74, 5. After John Gallas had received all of the Halstead blanks, he made a rod for Russ Wilson. Then a second blank was finished as a "prototype." This 7-foot, 6-inch 2/2 blank was finished with original Halstead hardware provided by Marty Keane and sold by him in 1996 (Keane, *Classic Rods & Tackle* catalog, 1996, no. 71, 5). This project gave John Gallas the idea to finish the "last Halstead blanks" as a series of eight rods and to clearly mark them so that they would not be later mistaken for completely original Halstead rods. E-mail from John Gallas to author, 21 November 2006. After completion of the series of eight, Gallas was approached by two personal friends who asked him to finish the remaining few leftover and somewhat mismatched Halstead blanks. Two 7-foot 2/2 rods, labeled #9 and #10, were completed with Halstead-style wraps and the Halstead-Gallas hardware stamp, as in the series of eight. John Gallas, phone conversation with author, 3 December 2006 and personal interview with author, 9 December 2006. The J. W. Gallas Co. will be offering a new series of Halstead Tribute Rods, including two-piece 7-foot, 1-inch; 8-foot, 1-inch; and 8-foot, 6-inch parabolic tapers.

# Ogden M. Pleissner

## THE SPORTING GRAND TOUR

### Special Exhibition Opens June 1 at the American Museum of Fly Fishing

by Robert Shaw



Upper Camp Pool. Ogden M. Pleissner. 1940.  
Watercolor on paper. 18 x 27 1/4. Collection of John W. Dryer.

**O**GDEN M. PLEISSNER: *The Sporting Grand Tour*, a special exhibition organized by the American Museum of Fly Fishing, will open at the museum in Manchester on June 1 and remain on view through the fall season. It will feature more than thirty full-sized watercolor and oil paintings by the renowned American sporting and landscape artist, along with pencil sketches and watercolor studies, memorabilia, photographs, and three of Pleissner's prized trout and salmon rods that are part of the museum's permanent collection. This will be the first museum exhibition ever to focus on Pleissner's sporting art, and the American Museum of Fly Fishing is extremely pleased to be presenting it.

According to Peter Bergh, author of *The Art of Ogden M. Pleissner* and one of many private and institutional lenders to the exhibition, Pleissner described himself as "a landscape painter, a painter of landscapes who also liked to hunt and fish" and who wanted to be recognized and remembered for the full range of his work. To that end, this show will concentrate on Pleissner's fishing paintings, but will also include representative

examples of his paintings of grouse and pheasant hunting, his work as a correspondent for *Life* magazine during World War II, and his American and European landscapes.

Ogden Minton Pleissner was born in Brooklyn, New York, on 29 April 1905. His father worked as an importer of woolens, and his mother was an accomplished violinist who gave up her dream of becoming a concert violinist to devote her time to Ogden and his younger sister. Pleissner told Peter Bergh that his first adventure in the world of fine arts came about when he was five. "Mother had just had the stairway redecorated or repapered with scenic wallpaper that had gondolas and boats and things like that on it," he recollected. "Everything you like. This work had just been done and my mother went out one day and I got hold of a crayon and put people in all the boats going up the stairs. I got a terrific licking for my efforts."<sup>2</sup>

Pleissner's parents sent him to summer camp in Dubois, Wyoming, when he was sixteen, an experience that introduced him to the wonders of the natural world and changed the course of his hitherto sheltered city life forever. He and his first wife, Mary Harrison Corbett, spent more than a dozen summers after their marriage in 1929 at the C-M ranch in Dubois, where Pleissner guided, took dudes fishing, and painted.

*Robert Shaw is curator for this special exhibition.*



After graduating from high school, Pleissner studied for four years at the Art Students League in New York City, where he received his formal training. Working solely in oils, he painted landscapes of the West, Brooklyn Heights, and New England and supplemented the meager income from sale of his art by teaching drawing and painting at the Pratt Institute.

In 1942, Pleissner was asked by both *Life* and the U.S. Army Air Force to work as a war artist, recording various aspects of the war effort firsthand. He accepted a commission in the Army and was sent to the Aleutian Islands. Because the islands were cold and wet and he needed to work fast, he chose to paint watercolors, which had the advantage of drying far more quickly than oils. He took immediately to the medium, which he used for the rest of his life. After only three months in the Aleutians, Congress voted against more funding for war artists, but Pleissner was able to make a special arrangement with *Life* that allowed him to continue his work with funding through the magazine. He spent the remainder of the war in Europe, recording scenes of battle and destruction, as well as many villages that had not been touched by the conflict.

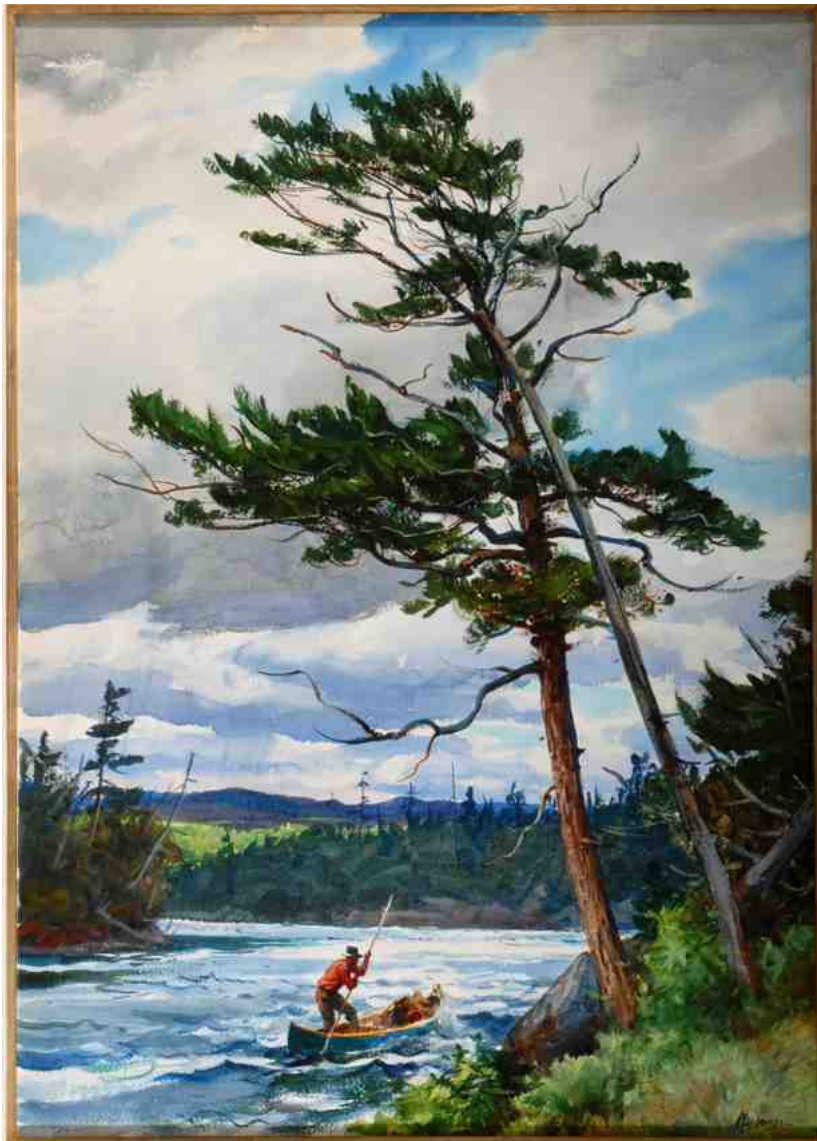
After the war, Pleissner returned to Europe almost every year for the rest of his life to paint a variety of landscapes and

to hunt and fish in Scotland. His skill as a painter gave him entrée to many of the finest sporting camps and retreats in the world. His first sportsman patron was Eversley Childs, chairman and son of one of the founders of the Bon Ami cleanser company. After encountering his work in 1932, Childs traveled to Wyoming to spend time with Pleissner, taught him how to shoot and hunt, and introduced him to other wealthy sportsmen who in turn invited Pleissner to fish and hunt with them and commissioned paintings of their activities. For the rest of his life, especially after World War II, Pleissner traveled to Québec and Nova Scotia to fish for salmon. He often cast for trout in the Battenkill and near the studio he built in West Pawlet, Vermont, in 1947; hunted driven grouse and pheasant in Scotland, woodcock and ruffed grouse in Vermont, and quail in the Carolinas; and shot ducks at exclusive retreats on Long Island and Nantucket, and in South Carolina and Long Point, Ontario. His paintings of all these places—truly representing a grand tour of the sporting world from the 1930s until his death in 1983—are among the most highly regarded of all American sporting paintings.

Ogden Pleissner was a master of the sporting moment, able to capture the most exciting seconds of the sporting life—the

instant before a big fish strikes, the anxious thrill of netting or gaffing a trophy salmon, the hush of the marsh just before birds decoy—and hold them still forever, to be savored again and again. He has had few equals in this ability and was clearly possessed of a special magic for rendering what American Museum of Fly Fishing Trustee David Nichols has called “the light of the moment.”<sup>3</sup> Author and critic Thomas S. Buechner has suggested that Pleissner’s genius was that his “one underlying true subject”<sup>4</sup> was mood, and that his consistent mood was reflective pleasure. “Catching a fish or fueling a plane may be the subject, but the picture is about an emotion the artist has; he uses these things, arranges them, colors them, lights them to convey a mood. They do not come into existence with the click of a shutter but as the result of literally millions of decisions, conscious and subconscious, spread over hours or days or months . . . it is as if all these moments held themselves absolutely still and unchanging for Pleissner—and he has held them for us. . . . Pleissner invites us to transcend our focus on action to see the whole scene—quietly and from a little distance. . . . Sharing reflective pleasure in worlds of his choosing . . . he painted what he saw, what he felt, and what he loved.”<sup>5</sup>

The American Museum of Fly Fishing is proud to present *Ogden M. Pleissner: The Sporting Grand Tour*. We sincerely hope you will come to Manchester to see and enjoy this extraordinary man’s art.



The River Warden. Ogden M. Pleissner. Watercolor on paper. Collection of John W. Dryer.

## ENDNOTES

1. Peter Bergh, *The Art of Ogden M. Pleissner* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1984), vii.
2. Ibid., 3.
3. David Nichols, personal conversation with author, 2007.
4. Thomas S. Buechner, “Introduction,” in Bergh, *The Art of Ogden M. Pleissner*, xv.
5. Ibid., xv–xvi.



## NOTES FROM THE LIBRARY



AS THE MUSEUM's volunteer librarian, I am taking over the task of reporting to you the various donations of books we receive from both individuals and publishers that have become part of our permanent collection. I'll also use this column as an opportunity to highlight some titles that have come to my attention.

First, we'd like to thank Sylvia Bashline of State College, Pennsylvania, for the donation of her husband's latest book, *Jim Bashline: One Man's Classics* (privately printed, 2007). Paul Schullery and the Orvis Company donated a deluxe edition of Paul Schullery's *The Orvis Story: 150 Years of an American Sporting Tradition* (The Orvis Company, 2006). David R. Notter of Turners Falls, Massachusetts, donated the following books: Gary Anderson's *Atlantic Salmon* (Salar Publishing, 1990); Charles Fox's *Rising Trout* (Foxcrest, 1967); Hugh Grey's *Field and Stream Treasury* (Henry Holt and Company, 1955); Vincent Marinaro's *In the Ring of the Rise* (Nick Lyons Books, 1976); Arthur Oglesby's *Fly Fishing for Salmon and Sea Trout* (Crowood Press, 1986); editor Alan Robinson's *Ode to Bass and Trout* (Smithmark Publishers, 1999); O. Rodman's *Striped Bass* (A. S. Barnes and Company, 1944); and William Schaldach's *Coverts and Casts* (A. S. Barnes, Inc., 1943).

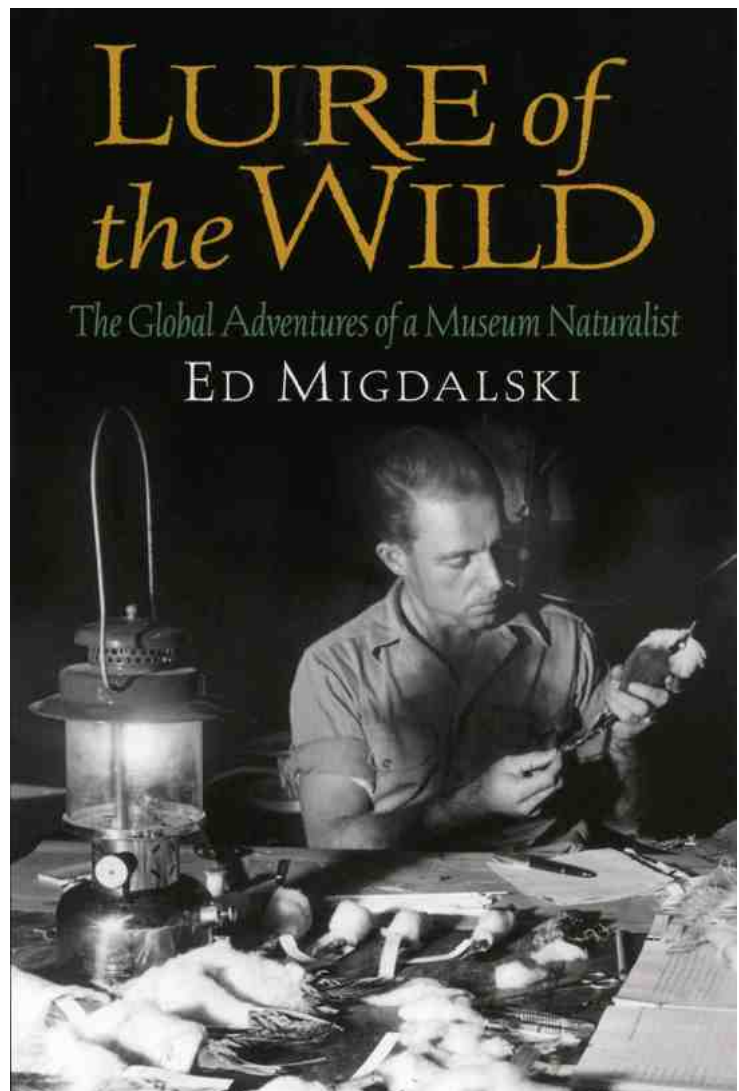
Frank Amato Publications sent us Al Beatty's *Innovative Flies and Techniques* (2005); Skip Clement's *Fly Fishing the Florida Keys* (2005); Stephen Hisey's *Fit to Fish* (2005); Harry Murray's *Fly Fishing Techniques for Smallmouth Bass* (2005); and Ron P. Swegman's *Philadelphia on the Fly: Tales of an Urban Angler* (2005). Stackpole Books sent us Simon Gawesworth's *Spey Casting* (2007).

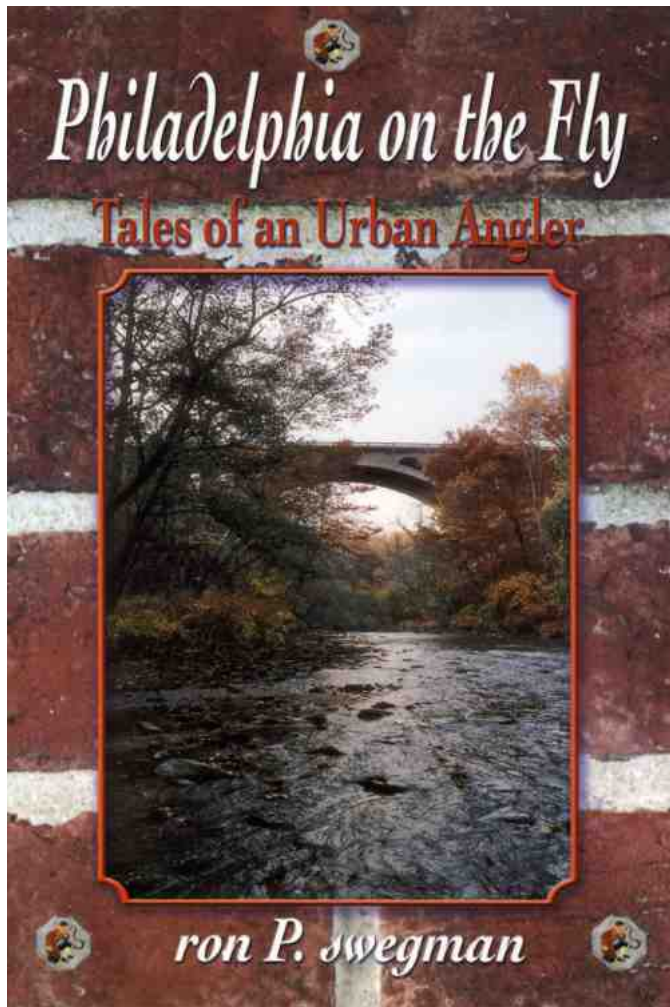
Two books that recently piqued my interest were Ed Migdalski's *Lure of the Wild: The Global Adventures of a Museum Naturalist* (New Haven, Conn.: Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University, 2006; hardcover, 294 pages) and Ron P. Swegman's *Philadelphia on the Fly: Tales of an Urban Angler* (Portland, Ore.: Frank Amato Publications, 2005; softcover, 88 pages).

Ed Migdalski spent thirty years at the Yale Peabody Museum, then more years as director of Yale's Outdoor Education Center. In 2001, he received the Yale Medal, the highest award presented by the association of Yale alumni.

Migdalski claims that this book is not an autobiography—it is instead a memoir of his worldwide adventures to collect birds, fish, and mammals for science. This he did on some twenty scientific expeditions. Among his friends, Foster Bam has called him "Yale's roving ambassador," and Angus Cameron said that he "had the naturalist's dream job of traveling and studying throughout the world's exotic lands and waters and getting paid for it" (p. ix).

The book is replete with stories of his collecting adventures: for the great hornbill of Nongpoh, India; the guan of the Biligirirangan Hills, South India; the brown bear of Unimak Island, Alaska ("I had then excised the six-inch support bone of my Alaskan brown bear's penis. When dried and polished, it transformed into a handsome swizzle stick . . . I enjoyed it as a great conversation piece, and I displayed it proudly on my bar and used it every evening to swish my pre-dinner martini" [p. 100].); the seals of Pribilof Island, Alaska; a jaguar in the rain





forest of Guatemala; and a mako shark in New Zealand. And, “after a four-hour battle and a five-hour journey, the harpooned 3,300-pound manta was brought ashore at Cabo Blanco, Peru. It measured eighteen and a half feet from wing tip to wing tip” (p. 177). On 1 April 1953, Migdalski caught a pirarucu on the Rupunumi River in Guyana. It weighed 148 pounds and was a world record for the largest strictly freshwater fish taken on rod and reel.

Migdalski, on page 251, states that “along with being a professional ichthyologist . . . my life has been remarkably enriched by an insatiable indulgence in fly-fishing—an unusual combination of academic discipline in fisheries science and worldwide sport fishing.” Later, on page 285: “The lure of the wild has drawn me, body and soul, into the wonders of the great outdoors. . . . It continues today, despite the fact that as I approach ninety, my legs encased in chest waders rebel when I try to withstand the surge of swift flowing waters while fly-fishing for trout or salmon.”

Then, there are the stories of Ron P. Swegman, a much younger fly fisherman.

Frank Amato, publisher of Swegman’s *Philadelphia on the Fly: Tales of an Urban Angler*, praised the book on the back cover by stating, “It’s not often that a really great book of essays crosses my desk, so when I read this one, I could not pass it up.”

Swegman, an urban angler, articulates that good fishing and adventure can be found a bike ride away, within the city limits of America’s first capital. Trout and bass, birds, and a variety of human characters are encountered along the Wissahickon Creek and the Schuylkill River, both within parks located very near to Philadelphia’s center. These streams, although certainly

not pristine, flow jade green through pools and riffles, bordered by steep banks and crossed by nineteenth-century bridges. One streamside marker reads:

THE FIRST BAPTISMAL SERVICE  
OF THE  
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN  
TOOK PLACE ON THIS SITE  
ON CHRISTMAS DAY  
1723

The fish can be large: a brown trout, for example, 20 inches long (3 pounds plus), stocked but now a 3- or 4-year holdover, caught on a pheasant tail nymph; a 3-pound channel catfish caught with an olive woolly bugger; a 4-pound smallmouth bass caught on a size 10 Royal Coachman.

Then, there was a frightening experience near the water works one Saturday morning. Swegman writes that the evening before, a friend asked what he would do if he found a dead body. A woman had drowned and disappeared in the river a few days earlier while trying to rescue her dog. That night Swegman had a nightmare of a woman’s voice calling to him from an open grave. The next morning, while surveying a pool on the Schuylkill for fish activity, standing on a large boulder, he saw a hand in the water, and he nearly screamed. The pale bloodless hand was waving beneath the clear surface of the channel, undulating in a slow, dead-man motion behind a large submerged stone. “I was terrified,” he says (p. 41). He had to be a good citizen and investigate:

I waded a few feet into the swift water. . . . One thing I didn’t need just then was to be toppled over, face first, onto a dead body. . . . When I reached the near end of the big stone, I was struck by how much its shape reminded me of a casket . . . and leaned over as far as I dared. That’s when I saw it—the hand was actually a white cotton glove! The stone had snagged it at the wrist, and the current had filled the fingers, making it look life-like! (p. 42)

Swegman’s imaginative writing skills are fully engaged as a fly fisherman in Chapter 12, “Fat Brown Pigskin, by F.L.Y. Linebacker.” Those of us who are Penn State Nittany Lions will surely appreciate this tall tale of a peewee league-size football as a lure.

Migdalski and Swegman remind one of the storytellers we often meet on the streams and rivers. They are thoughtful characters, and we especially appreciate them when they put their tales into writing.

— GERALD KARASKA  
LIBRARIAN



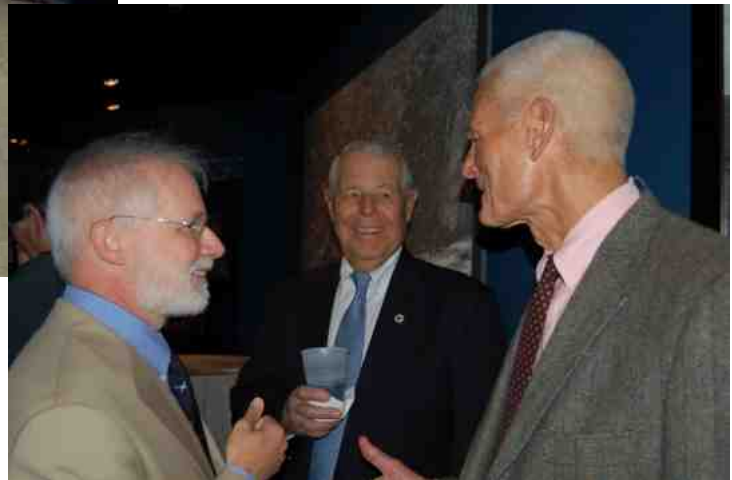
From the American Turf Register and Sporting Magazine, Vol. II (Baltimore: J. S. Skinner, 1831), 401.



# Museum News




Photos by Melanie Brigockas



Above: Joan Wulff and her husband Ted Rogowski.

Right: Yale Peabody Museum Director Michael J. Donoghue, Museum Trustee Gardner Grant, and Kem Edwards.

## AMFF/Yale Peabody Exhibit Opens

*Seeing Wonders: The Nature of Fly Fishing* opened at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History on September 29. It features artifacts and displays on loan from the museum and is complemented with items from the Peabody collection.

The exhibition presents a comprehensive overview of the sport, including a time line that reaches back to the first known reference to fly-fishing practices in third-century Macedonia. Other display highlights include celebrity equipment, such as Herbert Hoover's flies, Yale alum George H. W. Bush's fly box, and Ernest Hemingway's fly rod.

At the opening reception on October 2, more than 100 people were captivated by this inventive collaboration between two fine institutions.

Collections Manager Yoshi Akiyama commented, "People really loved the exhibit. The added dimension of Yale's expertise in entomology and the science behind fly fishing made it all the more interesting." Yale interjected displays of insects, bird feathers, and an attention-grabbing display panel showing early fly lines and leaders, made of silkworm gut and horsehair, emphasizing the importance of the natural world and its place in the history of fly fishing.

A highlight of the evening was the world premiere screening of our new short film, *Why Fly Fishing*, which artfully conveys the beauty, history, and joy of fly fishing and features animation, graphics, live action, and original music.

Trustee Gardner Grant (Yale class of '49), his wife Ellen, son Gary, daughter Laurie, and their families were on hand for the reception, joining Trustees John Mundt, Jim Heckman, and Richard Tisch. Two former trustees attended as well: Mike Osborne with his wife Debbie and Alan Poole and his wife Alice. Trustee Foster Bam also attended with his granddaughter Alison Logan (Yale class of '07), who now works at Peabody and who has just produced an iPod tour of the exhibit. Celebrity angler Joan Wulff and her husband Ted Rogowski joined in the celebration, too.

Many thanks to Gardner Grant, who was instrumental in the conception, collaboration, and implementation of combining the two collections. More than 50,000 people are estimated to walk through the exhibition during its run, ensuring increased exposure to our museum. Mr. Grant said, "To my knowledge, this is the most beautiful and most complete fly-fishing exhibit ever."

The exhibition will be on display at Yale through February 24.



## Hack and Cast

The second annual Hack and Cast Tourney was held on October 2 and 3 at the Shelter Harbor Golf Club of Charlestown, Rhode Island, and the South County Rhode Island Saltwater Fishery. Now a fall ritual for some, the original event was made possible through the generous support of Museum Trustee Steve Peet and his committee of fellow trustees: Carl Kuehner, Chris Garcia, and Blake Drexler. Special thanks to Trustee Roger Riccardi for his generous donation of eight cases of wine.

Guests arrived on Tuesday at Steve and Roberta Peet's house on the beach in Quonochontaug and received their room assignments and gift bags. This was followed by a gourmet clambake and bonfire on the beach. The competition began in earnest that evening as guests practiced their golf skills by attempting to hit the flag on an 8-by-8 raft that was floating 130 yards off the beach.

The weather for the two-day event was perfect for both golf and fishing: a bit overcast and seasonably cool. On Wednesday, following breakfast at the club, half the participants met their guides for a morning of spirited fishing while the other half hit the links. After lunch, the groups switched; the morning hackers went fishing and the casters went hacking.

That evening, an awards ceremony and sumptuous dinner was held at the club, where guests enjoyed a screening of the museum's new short film, *Why Fly Fishing*, which was produced for the exhibit currently at the Yale Peabody Museum. Also that evening, John Dietsch, who served as production manager on the fishing scenes for *A River Runs Through It*, presented a behind-the-scenes look to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the film.

We appreciate the efforts and support of all who participated in making this event a vital fund-raiser benefiting the museum. Hope to see you next year!

## Corbin Shoot

The sixth annual Friends of Peter Corbin Shoot took place on October 11 and 12 at Hudson Farm in Andover, New Jersey. The museum gratefully acknowledges Peter Corbin, event host and museum trustee, and George Gibson, event committee member and museum trustee, for their efforts. Thanks to Roger Riccardi, museum trustee, for his support, as well as Peter Kellogg for making the facility available to the museum.



Corbin Shoot raffle winner Joe Robillard (left) was all smiles as he accepted his new painting from Museum Trustee Peter Corbin.

## Upcoming Events

**January 18–20**  
Fly-Fishing Show  
Marlborough, Massachusetts

**January 25–27**  
Fly-Fishing Show  
Somerset, New Jersey

**March 13**  
Annual Dinner/Auction  
Anglers' Club of New York  
New York City

**June**  
Annual Dinner/Auction  
TBA: either Napa Valley or San Francisco

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

The seventeen participants enjoyed clay shooting and a continental pheasant shoot on 3,000 acres of landscaped farmland. After arriving, participants headed for the sporting clay course to warm up their shooting skills. Those who needed to be outfitted with a firearm were first fitted for and supplied with a double shotgun at the on-site Griffin & Howe shooting school. In spite of the evening's shooting being cut short by a torrential downpour, everyone remained in good spirits. Dinner was exquisite and enjoyed by all.

The following morning saw shooters lined up in pairs at the eight-peg flurry field. Once the clays started flying and the shooting commenced, there was a noticeable change in demeanor from the formality of the prior evening to relaxed camaraderie. The pheasant shoot gave participants further opportunity to socialize by being paired up with different partners over the course of several rotations. After the last pheasant had been collected, participants were taken back to the main estate house for a pig roast and drawing for the original Peter Corbin painting *End of the Day—Canvas Backs*. This year's winner was Joe Robillard, who luckily had turned down another participant's offer to buy his place in the drawing.

All participants thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and the museum greatly appreciates their support. We thank everyone involved in making this event a success.

## Staff News

Jim Becker, a cabinetmaker and former Orvis rod-maker who built our archival rod racks and tripod display cases, joined us on a part-time basis in February 2007 and immediately became an intrinsic member of the museum family. What he's accomplished upstairs in the archives is nothing short of astonishing, and without his help and hard work, we'd still be wending our way through a labyrinth of cardboard boxes.

Sarah Moore, our new project coordinator, joined us at the beginning of September. She has a B.A. in anthropology from the University at Albany and recently interned at the New York State Museum, working in the archaeology lab of the collections department. She'll oversee the planning and organizing of the many projects with which the museum is involved.

We're thrilled that Jim and Sarah have joined us in the pursuit of fly-fishing museum excellence.

## 100 Trees in 100 Days

On 18 August 2007, the museum had the honor of participating in Bartlett Tree Experts' 100 Trees in 100 Days event, a celebration of the company's founding in 1907. The museum was selected as one of two Vermont locations to receive a tree, and the museum staff gathered outside on a glorious summer day to witness the planting and help commemorate the occasion. The tree itself is an Autumn Blaze Maple, a silver maple/red maple hybrid, and we're told it will be providing us with brilliant fall foliage colors for years to come.

## Recent Donations

Joan Wulff of Lew Beach, New York, donated one of Lee Wulff's fishing vests; three color drawings by Mike Shiftham with a matching fly: Royal Wulff, Grey Wulff, and White Wulff; an oil portrait of Lee Wulff; a framed Christmas card drawn by Lee Wulff in 1969; five Garcia fiberglass rods owned by Lee Wulff (a 7½-foot two-piece, an 8½-foot two-piece, a 6-foot one-piece, an 8-foot two-piece, and a 9-foot two-piece); a Garcia Fly-O practice rod; a DVD, *Lee Wulff Master Collection*; and two brochures, "Lee Wulff Presents . . ." and one for Lee Wulff films.

Trustee Emeritus David Ledlie of Buckfield, Maine, donated an Atlantic salmon fly of his own pattern called Traffic Ticket for the 40th anniversary exhibit. Gordon Wickstrom of Boulder, Colorado, donated a CD of readings from his own books, *Notes from an Old Fly Book* and *Late in an Angler's Life*. And Lothar Candles of Avon, Connecticut, donated a fungus carving of a fishing scene titled *The Unseen*.

Sara Wilcox



Two of the museum's newest employees: Collections Coordinator Nathan George (featured in Fall 2007 Museum News) and Projects Coordinator Sarah Moore.



## HOW TO DONATE

When donating to a museum, information is the key. The museum needs to know who is donating, how they can be contacted, where to send the paperwork, and, perhaps most importantly, what the history is of the item donated. This history is called *provenance*, and it can be the difference between a significant donation and one that is declined. For example, a mass-produced bamboo fly rod from the 1920s, in fair condition, is of little historic value. However, if that rod can be connected with a specific owner and there is a unique story that goes along with it (used to catch a record fish, owner used in a variety of known localities, etc.), the historic value increases significantly.

Although items can be shipped to or dropped off at the museum, it is best to contact the museum first regarding any potential donations. This can save staff and donors a lot of time in the event that the item is declined. This sometimes happens if the museum already has several examples or if the item in question is in exceedingly poor condition. Occasionally, an item is not accepted because it does not "fit" with the museum—i.e., there is not enough of a connection to fly fishing to justify the museum's accepting it. The steps that should be followed to donate to the American Museum of Fly Fishing are as follows:

1. Contact the museum regarding the item(s) and give a description. Note any markings on the item (manufacturer/producer names, serial numbers, model names, patent numbers, etc.). If sending an e-mail or letter inquiry, a photograph or sketch is always helpful. If the item has a known provenance, include that, preferably in writing and with any documentation supporting it.
2. As a not-for-profit organization, the museum cannot provide appraisals. If the donor would like an appraisal, the museum can provide a list of appraisers knowledgeable about fly-fishing tackle. Appraisals must be done before donating. An appraisal is important if you plan to see a tax deduction for your donation. The museum is a 501(c) corporation, meaning that donations to the museum may be tax deductible. Please seek the advice of your accountant or tax advisor about items of significant value.
3. Leave your contact information: phone number, address, and e-mail address are preferred. Contact information is necessary for sending paperwork. This is usually done via U.S. mail, but it can be done through e-mail if necessary.
4. Museum staff will sometimes be able to accept a donation immediately. If not, the museum will contact the donor as soon as possible. Once the decision to accept a donation has been made, the details of arranging shipping, pickup, or drop-off can be finalized.
5. After the donated item(s) has/have been received, the donor will be mailed two documents: a deed of gift and a receipt of deposit. The deed of gift is the official means of transferring ownership of items to the museum. This needs to be signed by the donor and returned in the stamped envelope. The receipt of deposit serves as the donor's record of items having been donated to the museum.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Blane Chocklett



John Feldenzer is an avid freshwater fly fisher and student of the history of fly-fishing tackle. His special interest involves American bamboo fly rods and rodmakers from the so-called Golden Age, the 1930s through the 1960s. His own collection includes many fly rods from this era, and his interest in George Halstead was sparked by the acquisition of several Halstead rods. He pursues wild trout on mountain streams and tailwaters of the Blue Ridge and Alleghenies as well as smallmouth bass on the James and New Rivers (in this photo on the James, he displays a smallmouth bass caught with his Bobby Doerr 9½-foot rod with Ted Williams taper). Feldenzer is a practicing neurosurgeon in Roanoke, Virginia, where he lives with his wife, Karen, and children Kristin, Andrew, and Luke. This is his second contribution to the fly-fishing literature.

## BACK ISSUES!

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Back issues are \$4 a copy.

To order, please contact Rebecca Nawrath at (802) 362-3300 or via e-mail at [amff3@amff.com](mailto:amff3@amff.com).

David Kindig



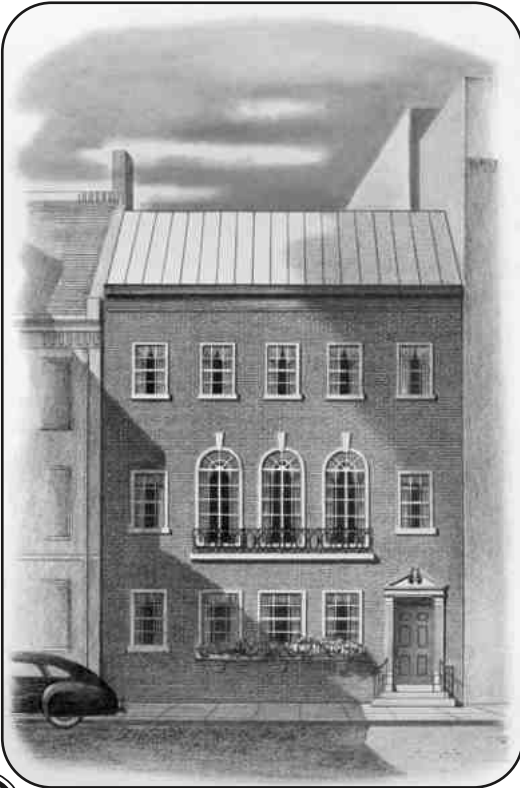
This is Harry Peterson's third article in the *American Fly Fisher*. He is an active fly fisher and ties flies, makes rods, and collects fly-fishing books.

Peterson is president emeritus of Western State College of Colorado. He was a college and university administrator for more than thirty years in Wisconsin, Idaho, Minnesota, and Colorado, all states with good trout streams. Peterson received his PhD in educational policy studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. When he is not fishing near his cabin in southwestern Wisconsin, home to many spring creeks, he continues to be active professionally and provides counsel to college and university presidents. He has recently completed a book on leadership of small universities.

Peterson welcomes correspondence from readers and can be reached at [hpeterson@charter.net](mailto:hpeterson@charter.net).



# New York Dinner



The New York Anglers' Club in New York City is once again hosting our Annual Dinner & Sporting Auction on Thursday, March 13, 2008. The proceeds from this event support our ongoing programs and operations.

The festivities begin at 5:30 p.m. with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres and a preview of our excellent auction and raffle items. Renowned chef Mary O'Malley and her staff have already planned the delicious dinner, which will be followed by our spirited live auction and raffle drawing.

The auction will feature fantastic fishing and hunting trips, premium fly rods, fine art, and many more wonderful items sure to please the discriminating angler.

The ticket price will include hors d'oeuvres, open bar, dinner, and a chance to visit with old friends and make new ones.

If you would like to attend this event and help raise funds for the museum, please contact Rebecca Nawrath at 802-362-3300 or email [bnawrath@amff.com](mailto:bnawrath@amff.com) by March 1, 2008.

*We would welcome any donations toward our auction and/or raffle. Please contact Rebecca Nawrath if you would like to contribute.*

## Pick up Robert Cochrane ad from Winter 2007 issue

# Museum Celebrates Fortieth Anniversary with a New Exhibit



IN OCTOBER, THE American Museum of Fly Fishing opened its first new exhibit since the move to our new building. Titled *40 Years: Reflections on the Sport and Art of Fly Fishing; The Heritage of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*, it marks the fortieth anniversary year of the founding of the museum.

Forty years ago, a small and devoted group of people came together to make real the idea that the history and artifacts of fly fishing deserved a permanent home. From modest beginnings and through the dedication and hard work of volunteers, friends, and employees, the American Museum of Fly Fishing has grown to become an amazing place: a repository for the artifacts and anecdotes of a magical sport and pastime.

By preserving the rich heritage of fly fishing, the museum seeks to promote an understanding and appreciation of the sport's history, traditions, and practitioners—past and present—and to share this understanding and appreciation not only with the many who love the sport, but also with the widest possible audience.

The gallery displays a time line, starting with that first passionate conversation over a drink that led to a plan to both preserve what was already at hand and to collect items from all over the world. Famous people who have enjoyed the sport include presidents, authors, celebrities, and sportsmen. Fly-fishing enthusiasts will relish treasures from Ernie Schwiebert, Lee Wulff, Wes Jordan, and John Atherton. Even the casual observer will appreciate the art and craft of “the quiet sport.” By visiting, you will discover many of the names and stories of the people who made the museum what it is today.



Above: The entrance to the exhibit;  
Lee Wulff's movie camera and tripod.

Photos by Sara Wilcox



Right: An inside look at what goes into making a Bogdan reel.



## The American Museum of Fly Fishing

Box 42, Manchester, Vermont 05254  
Tel: (802) 362-3300 • Fax: (802) 362-3308  
E-MAIL: [amff@amff.com](mailto:amff@amff.com)  
WEBSITE: [www.amff.com](http://www.amff.com)

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.