A Dean, a Baronet, and Some Other Names You Should Know

ONE OF THE FEW old fishing books I have in my personal library is a copy of Henry Van Dyke’s Fisherman’s Luck—a 1911 edition of the 1899 book. It is a copy that my grandmother gave to my grandfather on his birthday in 1920—it’s inscribed from her to him. I never had opportunity to meet Helen and David, so you can imagine how special a Christmas gift this was for me to receive from my non-fly-fishing father several years ago.

And, as many of you likely know, it’s a good book.

Henry Van Dyke—Princeton professor of English literature, Presbyterian minister at the Brick Church of Fifth Avenue, President Wilson’s minister to the Netherlands and Luxembourg—was named the Dean of American Fishermen by the Izaak Walton League in 1927. Van Dyke, who by then had published more than three dozen non-sporting books, had also seen many printings and several editions of Little Rivers (1895) and Fisherman’s Luck (1899). But, Clarence Anderson reminds us, “although fishing played a secondary part in his public persona, its role in his private life was inestimable.” In “The Dean of American Fishermen: Henry Van Dyke” (page 2), Anderson provides us with a fascinating history of the man, weaving his fishing tales throughout. (Anderson, who most recently graced the pages of this journal in Spring 2009 with “The Invisible Man: John G. Landman,” adds an important finding to his research on that subject in his contributor’s note, which can be found on page 28.)

Sir Herbert Maxwell, a contemporary of Van Dyke, was a well-known Scottish salmon angler and the author and editor of several angling books, now very much sought after by collectors. J. Keith Harwood offers us a short history of Maxwell and relays the story behind that baronet’s invention of his own salmon fly (a fly designed to prove a point). A recipe for the Sir Herbert is included in “Sir Herbert Maxwell and the Sir Herbert Salmon Fly,” which begins on page 10.

Anyone who’s fished the West Branch of the Ausable was a likely visitor to Fran Betters’s Adirondack Sport Shop on Route 86. The world lost this legendary fly tier last September; Taos fishing guide Taylor Streit remembers his friend on page 22. Another fishing and fly-tying great, Jack Garts, left us in December. His fishing buddy Dick Talleur offers up some stories on page 20.

This issue boasts a run of departments, old and new. In Keepers of the Flame, Trustee John Mundt highlights Ronald S. Swanson, a man who “has devoted more than four decades of his life to the study and collecting of fish models and researching the facts behind their origins.” For more on this unique historian, turn to page 15. Gerald Karaska reviews Mike Valla’s Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies in Notes from the Library (page 18). And we begin a new occasional column, “Telling Tails,” which will give readers a chance to tell fish stories or profile another angler. Trustee Bill Leary starts us off with his profile of Ralph Golzio in “A Century of Enjoying Life” (page 19).

In this issue’s Gallery feature, “The Fly-Mounting Techniques of William Cushner,” Cathi Comar and Yoshi Akiyama show you how to create your own beautiful displays Cushner style (page 16). In fact, there’s still time to visit the museum gallery to see Fly on the Wall: The Art of William Cushner—the exhibit will be on display through the spring season.

Each year we gratefully acknowledge the tremendous support we receive from contributors and donors to the museum (see this year’s extensive list beginning on page 25). Thanks to our members and to all of you who contribute to preserve the rich heritage of fly fishing.

Kathleen Achor
Editor
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The Dean of American Fishermen: Henry Van Dyke
Clarence Anderson

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In Memoriam: Jack Gartside

In Memoriam: Francis Betters

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E-Mail: amff@amff.com Website: www.amff.com

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In 1927, the Izaak Walton League, then at the zenith of its influence as America's first broad-based sportsmen's conservation alliance, anointed “Dean of American Fishermen” a man whose name rarely appeared in the sporting press (but regularly in the New York Times), who Charles Goodspeed said wrote nothing “at all technical” about fishing, whose discursive angling tales merited no mention at all in Arnold Gingrich's comprehensive The Fishing in Print. That man was Henry Van Dyke. A surprising and questionable choice, it might seem to some today, when 1927's roster of angling notables included Zane Grey, Ed Hewitt, George La Branche, and not least Herbert Hoover, honorary president of the league. To any well-informed American of the day, however, the league's tribute surely seemed inspired, or, rather, inevitable, because the “dean” had for more than a generation been admired by countless thousands of nonanglers who were eager consumers of his fiction, poetry, travel essays, and social commentaries, not his piscatorial narratives.

By 1927 the only two of Van Dyke's works that remain familiar to modern readers, Little Rivers (published 1895) and Fisherman's Luck (1899), had proven successful enough to have warranted many printings in several editions, paperbound to leatherbound. Goodspeed went so far, a few years later, to rate Little Rivers "one of the two most popular works . . . of all our fishing literature." But to put that assessment in perspective, Van Dyke had by then published more than three dozen nonsporting books, and—such are the vagaries of popular opinion—it was those now largely forgotten works that had earned him a "distinguished place in American life for over 30 years," to quote from his eulogy in the Times, which included the presidency of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and honorary doctoral degrees from Harvard, Yale, and Oxford universities, among a multitude of other awards, foreign and domestic.

But although fishing played a secondary part in his public persona, its role in his private life was inestimable. “Fishing was not a hobby,” to Van Dyke, “it was a passion. It irradiated his whole life.” For as likewise noted by his son, biographer, and lifelong fishing and traveling companion, Tertius Van Dyke, Henry had been "raised by a wise father, with the indulgence of a sympathetic mother, in the strictest sect of trout fishermen." Henry Jackson Van Dyke Sr., "the Governor" to his family, not only instilled his son's passion for angling, but eventually inspired, by quiet example, that son's conjugate passion: the Presbyterian ministry. Henry Sr. is lovingly described—and photographed complete with rod, cigar, and head net—in the chapter "A Leaf of Spearmint," from Little Rivers. (The
The rugged grandeur of the Adirondacks—that almost unique topography of mountains, lakes, and rivers largely untroubled, then, by urban intruders—held the Van Dykes in thrall throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Although son Henry was admitted to Princeton University, his father’s alma mater, in the fall of 1869, summer and holiday vacations proved sufficient to allow the pair, often in company with friends, to climb all the notable peaks, to complete many arduous treks by foot, and to travel hundreds of miles by Adirondack guide boat, fishing, of course, wherever possible. Descriptions of disappointingly few of these Adirondack excursions found their way into books, although both father and son wrote humorous accounts of their adventures (now lost) for various local newspapers. The trip that inspired “Ampsersand,” related in Little Rivers, occurred in the summer of 1878, immediately after young Henry’s return from a year’s graduate study at the University of Berlin, whence he had proceeded following graduation from Princeton Seminary in 1877.

But before commencing those studies, in the summer of 1877, father and son together toured Scotland (a hard-core Presbyterian stronghold, of course), where the latter experienced the strange catharsis related in “A Handful of Heather” (Little Rivers) and acquired a lifelong addiction to the pursuit of Salmo salar. His year in Berlin (where his natural gift for languages allowed him to gain a fluency in German that proved invaluable during his diplomatic career) evidently provided the touring opportunities that engendered “Alpenrosen” and “Trout Fishing in the Traun,” also told in Little Rivers. Actually, the many different European travels of the Van Dykes—beginning in the summer of 1872 when the family hiked the Rhine and Rhone valleys and parts of the Alps—coupled with Junior’s inconsistency in dating his pieces make it difficult to disentangle the chronology of his essays, all composed many years after the events in question. The characterization of him by the New York Times in 1929 tells the tale succinctly: “a citizen of two continents.”

Deep as was the Van Dykes’ love for the Adirondacks—in 1876 the elder called upon the state to “preserve this whole region as a public hunting ground,” and his son was prominent in the earliest efforts of like-minded sportsmen to control the depredations of loggers—they began to feel by the early 1890s that this scene of so many happy memories was “becoming too civilized” for their personal tastes. A discouraging visit to Nova Scotia in August 1880, where “the fishing was wonderful”—40 years ago—
suppressed further interest in the eastern provinces for the following decade, but by 1894, if not before, far more rewarding waters had been discovered: the "vast and primitive" Lake St. John region of eastern Québec. The ouananiche (Van Dyke objected to "landlocked" as prejudicial) abounding in this area he came to prize almost as much as their ocean-going brethren, and fishing the Meta-betchuan only four days that year, Van Dyke took thirty-five of the for-betchuan only four days that year, Van Dyke's Adirondack and Canadian outings never failed to include fishing, but those undertaken in the fall often included big-game hunting as well. (Curiously, that passion for bird shooting over dogs that obsessed so many gentleman-sportsmen of the time did not arouse his own interest; but then, his cup was overflowing.)

Why he chose to exclude this aspect of his sporting interests from his published writings is unknown, but it can be surmised that he was sensitive to the public's expectations regarding "proper behavior" for clergymen; this concern very nearly led him to publish his first Harper's Magazine article in 1880, a story about settlement in the Dakotas, under a nom de plume. The tradition of clergymen-anglers such as the distinguished Rev. G. W. Bethune had been long established, but the only well-known clergymen-hunter of the time was an individu-ual of somewhat questionable char-acter, Rev. W. H. Murray—the "Ad-irondack" Murray whose hyperbolic tales of hunting and fishing in the Adir-ondacks stimulated growth of the "civi-lization" that eventually pushed Van Dyke to the provinces.

In The Travel Diary of an Angler, a Derrydale edition of 1929, Van Dyke wrote, “for sentimental reasons, I gave up hunting before I was sixty. . . . What I say now is, let the younger men do the hunt-ing. I will angle.” But before reaching that maturational stage, he had hunted caribou several times, at least, in Newfoundland and Quebec with his younger brother Paul or son and comrade Tertius (both Prince-ton doctors of divinity), and taken at least one fine black moose in New Brunswick. He killed two Adirondack bucks near Tupper Lake in 1882, and either those heads, or two others, along with his black moose, he esteemed highly enough to dis-play (along with a 6-pound Nipigon brook trout) in his Princeton home, Avalon. Tentative plans for an Alaskan big-game hunt with Theodore Roosevelt were defeated by conflicting career obligations. A list of ten "greatest living sportsmen" published in the Illustrated Outdoor News in 1906, which ranked Charles Hallock first and Roosevelt third, included Van Dyke among seven others named but not ranked.

Shortly before his discovery of the Lake St. John country, his "best teacher and closest comrade" was no longer his fish-ing companion, for his father died rather suddenly in May 1891. Thereafter, for a time, that crucial role was occupied by his "Lady Greygown," Ellen Reid, whom he had wed in December 1881 after a lengthy courtship and to whom he dedi-cated Fisherman's Luck. However, Tertius observed candidly that his mother was "not by nature a camper," but rather the "model fisherman's wife," and by 1897, the care of five children largely supplanted her extracurricular duties as fishing partner. Tertius himself, born in 1886, began to accompa-nny his father as soon as his age permitted. If Van Dyke made any attempt to indoctrinate his first child, daughter Brooke, to whom he lovingly dedicated Little Rivers, into the angler's art, that effort seems to have been unfruitful. (However, "the Gypsy," an unidentified younger daughter, is revealed as a fishing partner in Days Off.)

The Bully Pulpit

At the time of his marriage, Van Dyke had for two and a half years served as pastor of a prominent church in Newport, Rhode Island, but as the result of sermons as cogently reasoned as they were eloquently articulated and, not least, a personal magnetism that usually disarmed even his critics (theological for the most part, as he opposed the strict Calvinism that prevailed within his denomination), sev-eral larger churches had taken a keen interest in securing his ser-vices, among them the venerable and prestigious Brick Church of Fifth Avenue, New York. Members of that congregation, most notably former Governor Mor-gan, persuaded him late in 1882 to accept the post that would, over the course of the following sixteen years, earn him widespread admiration and national prominence. Almost imme-diately, his compelling oratory (always dignified but seldom unmixed with subtle humor) and frank opinions freely expressed on most subjects save partisan politics made him the topic of recurrent discussion in the New York press. Every paper in New York—yes, even the Times (which promptly called him "earnest, graceful, and entertaining")—then regarded religion not only as a fit subject for serious analysis and discussion, but indeed vitally important for the well-being of civil society.
Even as a young minister on the threshold of his career, Van Dyke's manifest gifts afforded him the leverage to request, through such intermediaries as his much-respected father, a perquisite that a less impressive candidate could scarce have expected: it was “well understood,” Tertius noted, “vacations for fishing would be long.”20 His weeks-long excursions to the Adirondacks, and later Québec, were usually accomplished during the summer months, but as his need to be outdoors demanded more regular nourishing, he soon leased a Westhampton property he called Brightwater, which in due time inspired “A Lazy, Idle River” in Fisherman's Luck. The mind of anyone familiar with the maelstrom of present-day Long Island may rebel at the effort to imagine the pastoral countryside most of the island was at this time (and remained well into the twentieth century). And although the abundantly productive offshore fishing around New York Bay afforded a tremendous variety of game fish, it was the lazy, idle trout streams of Long Island that engaged Van Dyke's interest, encouraging the kind of artful presentation with light tackle that to him was the essence of angling.

Glimpses of family life in the Van Dyke household emerge in several of his stories, but the most vivid evocation of those domestic scenes is to be found in son Tertius's biography: “father was the natural leader of all expeditions and the spokesman for the dreams and nonsense that poured out of a cheerful but by no means docile family life.”21 Anyone who has read about the famously “strenuous life" of the energetic family inhabiting the home called Sagamore Hill at Oyster Bay, on the west end of the island, cannot but be struck by the similarities of the two nature-loving households. Possibly the level of strenuosity at Brightwater, where there were four daughters to only one son, was somewhat lower than among the Roosevelts, with four boys, but more significant was the fact that both families were headed by an “elder playmate," as Tertius referred to his own father, but which applied equally to the boyish laird of Sagamore Hill.22

The generous terms of Van Dyke's employment allowed him to accept an invitation to meet his boyhood literary idol, Alfred Tennyson, poet laureate of England, at his home in 1892; accompany the Andrew Carnegie family on their tour of Egypt in 1894; and, at the behest of Harvard University, spend the winter of 1898 lecturing at the University of Paris, where he “won audience by perfect diction, persuasive eloquence, and humor,” according to Le Figaro.23 These peregrinations, only a sampling of a host of others that could be cited, might suggest some slighting of his obligations to the Brick Church, but the rapid growth in church membership proves otherwise: from about 300 when he assumed his post, to some 800 (necessitating placement of chairs in the aisles), with a waiting list for seating of another 200. He planned, and secured funding for, a remodeling of the church interior by artist John LaFarge and inspired his congregation to become the most generous contributors for charitable works within the Presbyterian Assembly. When travel prevented him from occupying the pulpit, his leadership within the church assured that an officiant of prominence, such as his own father, was always available to fill that role.

**The Lecture Hall**

Given the acclaim he earned at the Brick Church, it is surprising to consider that even after receiving his D.D. degree in 1877, Van Dyke remained torn between entering the ministry and pursuing an academic career in literature; this conflict between two equally powerful impulses constituted the great, sometimes debilitating, emotional struggle of his college years. Acting upon the advice of his ever solicitous father, he accepted the offer of the Newport church as a tentative experiment, not a settled resolution of his dilemma. However, his immediate and resounding success as a preacher had the effect of “making up his mind for him” for the following two decades. Not only did he find the crafting of his “thinking-man’s” sermons intellectually satisfying (he decried “those preachers who say it all, and make no demands on the intelligence of their hearers”), but he enjoyed the pastoral side of his ministry: meeting congregants in their homes, counseling them on personal problems, consoling them in adversity (with which he was not unacquainted, having lost to illness three children of his own).24

And yet that longing to devote himself wholly to literature, so long sublimated, did not decay. By no means had the duties of his ministry prevented him from writing. By 1899, fifteen volumes had been published, along with innumerable magazine and newspaper articles; not so unimpressive for "part-time work," but not the total immersion in literature he craved. Princeton, “where the zeal of learning flourishes side by side with the leisure of field and meadow," long eager to entice him back to the university as it had his brother Paul, who became a history professor, offered him a chair in the department of philosophy in 1883, but Van Dyke, wary of “Irksome” administrative responsibilities, saw fit to decline that and similar offers from other institutions.25 Finally, in 1899, Princeton presented him with an opportunity to lecture “as free as possible from irksome forms of professional work,” an endowed chair in English literature created expressly to secure his services, which left him entirely free to teach what he wished in the manner he wished to teach it.26
And what he wished to teach, since he believed “literature cannot be taught,” was “how to read—to read between the lines, to read behind the words, to enter through the printed page into a deeper understanding of life.” The immediate popularity of his courses might have been insured by the warmth and generosity he displayed toward every conscientious student: “many were the gatherings of undergraduates by night in his library when he took . . . books from the shelves and . . . amid the fragrance of pipes, the conversation flowed easily on literature and life.” But what filled every seat in the lecture hall was undoubtedly the gift that had made his ministry so successful: his oratory. His was not, let it be noted, the florid and stirring delivery of such a one as his old friend (but theological foe) William Jennings Bryan; rather, he was “an orator of supreme eloquence” possessing a “powerful and flexible voice, enormous vitality, charm of manner, sure command of language,” who did not “believe it necessary to be dull in order to be serious.”

He Shows His Mettle

Van Dyke’s twenty-three-year tenure at Princeton facilitated the personal relationship that engendered the most unusual and unexpected interlude in his protean career: his service as diplomat in a critical post at the onset of the Great War. Despite some considerable difference in their temperaments, he established a firm friendship with Princeton’s president, Woodrow Wilson (son himself of a Presbyterian minister)—a friendship that endured even a protracted conflict over reorganizing the university in which Van Dyke’s contrary views prevailed. Nevertheless, he supported Wilson’s political aspirations with enthusiasm, particularly his commitment to the Hague Peace Conference, the eventual result of which was his appointment as minister to the Netherlands and to Luxembourg in 1913. (The title ambassador was at this time reserved for posts in larger nations.)

This appointment of course reflected Van Dyke’s intense interest in his Dutch ancestry, his direct forebears having settled on Long Island in 1652, but when European hostilities commenced in August 1914, the diplomatic importance of neutral Holland was hugely magnified: it adjoined the war’s primary battleground, “hard-smitten, ravaged, blazing” Belgium. For thousands of Americans and other foreign nationals stranded in Europe when the war broke out, for maimed British prisoners paroled by the Germans, and for hundreds of thousands of displaced Belgians, Holland became a refuge and a means of escape by sea from the conflict. The chaotic situation that quickly ensued may be imagined, but it was this very turbulence that allowed Van Dyke to display a coolness in the most trying circumstances, a veritable genius for organization and innovation, and a natural talent for negotiation among hostile parties (“heavy, continuous, nerve-wracking work”) that would likely have remained undiscovered at Princeton or the Brick Church. Passing through the ports of Holland were the shiploads of food and supplies contributed to Belgian War Relief, a national cause célèbre before America’s entry into the war. Coordinating this unprecedented humanitarian effort brought Van Dyke into partnership with another celebrated angler, Herbert Hoover, director of this program. Van Dyke’s fluency in German and French, with some Italian (not to mention proficient Latin and Greek), proved critical in all these affairs.

Neglect his tackle, his “wand of enchantment,” as he called his favorite 4-ounce rod, when departing for The Hague in 1913. Unthinkable! Van Dyke’s previous travels had allowed him to sample trout fishing in France, Germany, and Austria (he fished a German stream, in fact, only two months before the war erupted), but he was delighted to discover beautiful trout streams in mountainous Luxembourg, as well as lovely scenery and more ruined castles, he noted, than anywhere else in Europe. Although officially neutral, the Grand Duchy had nevertheless been occupied by German troops, but Van Dyke’s diplomatic credentials allowed him unrestricted passage into the principality, a story told in “Fishing in Strange Waters” from Camp-Fires and Guide-Posts (1921). By July 1916, conditions in Holland had been stabilized sufficiently to allow himself the luxury of “An Angling Furlough in Norway,” as related in The Travel Diary. (Back in 1888, while on the “Norwegian Honeymoon” described in Fisherman’s Luck, Van Dyke was compelled to content himself with trout, but this second visit of two weeks in 1916 was devoted entirely to the pursuit of salmon, as befit his ascent in the world of men and letters.)

The war itself he made his business to see firsthand (though it had nothing to do with his ministerial duties), touring devastated Antwerp in Belgium before the casualties of German shelling had been removed from the rubble, and later the inferno of Verdun while that interminable battle yet raged. What he saw convinced him that blame for the war—and particularly, the savagery of it—devolved squarely upon Germany; and by late 1916, he came passionately to believe, along with Theodore Roosevelt, that America should play an active role in ending the slaughter. Because expressing such views publicly was quite at odds with his diplomatic role, as well as Wilson’s neutrality policy, he asked the president to relieve him of his duties, which allowed him to resign in January 1917.

Even for a man who had fished so many famous waters, the experience he enjoyed in April 1917, shortly before returning to America, was extraordinary: an invitation to fish the Itchen for two days with G. E. M. Skues. The circumstances of how he became acquainted with Skues are, alas, unrecorded; Tertius, usually his constant companion, had returned separately to America in 1916 and alludes but briefly to the incident, although he did take care to note that the...
fishing was to be done with dry flies. Van Dyke himself adds in “Fishing in Strange Waters” that “my good friend . . . Skues showed me how to cast the dry fly so that two of those sophisticated Itchen trout were lured and landed,” but reveals no more. Presumably the rules of the Fly Fishers Club, which controlled this stretch of the river, required the same, but elsewhere Van Dyke was a devout disciple of the wet fly. He often identified his flies, and the great majority were classic wet-fly patterns; on his usual two-fly cast, Queen-of-the-Water is named more frequently than any other. (Has any other angler, ever, fished that fly, paired with a Royal Coachman, on the River Jordan and Sea of Galilee, as described in his Diary?)

The sole experience of fishing English waters that Van Dyke chose to write about (or rather, publish) makes explicit his preference: “Wet Fly Fishing in England” in the Diary. This rather unremarkable episode, on two rather obscure rivers, occurred in 1923, and it is curious that he preferred to memorialize it, rather than his unique outing on the storied, historic Itchen with so singular a guide. (Skues is also mentioned briefly in A Creelful of Fishing Stories.) The exuberance that wells up in tales of his favorite Canadian and American streams is not so apparent in this English account, and one might wonder if he found that the hallowed history and tradition of these tranquil English streams was not altogether a substitute for the excitement and wild scenery of North America.

When in April 1917 his country finally committed itself to participation in Wilson’s war to make the world safe for democracy, Van Dyke was not at all ready to return to peaceful Princeton, not after having seen firsthand the war’s frightful consequences. His first response was a flurry of magazine and newspaper articles, augmented by public speaking engagements, which sought to convince the many who remained opposed to American intervention in Europe’s troubles that the war, dreadful as he knew it to be, was yet a moral and humanitarian imperative. But this effort alone did not satisfy his compulsion to play some more active role in such a great national crusade, and so, although he was thirty years beyond the official age limit, he petitioned the U.S. Navy for commission as a chaplain.

For such a recruit, the Navy was willing to bend the rules, but his ambition for sea duty was thwarted, and he was assigned to touring bases all along the eastern seaboard, tending to morale as much as religious needs. But there remained, for him, a problem, one that reveals there were limits to his Christian humility: the Navy provided chaplains a uniform but no rank, although other nonmilitary professionals accepted into the service, such as physicians, were granted this military courtesy. Believing his profession worthy of an equal dignity, he therefore lobbied his superiors for the same, and after some resistance became the first, as Lt. Commander, to be so honored. At the end of his year’s active duty, he refused to accept his accrued pay, directing the Navy to convert it into a trust fund for the award of a prize to the top-ranked Naval Academy English major. The Henry Van Dyke Prize is still awarded annually at Annapolis.

**A GLOBE-TROTTING RETIREMENT**

Van Dyke resumed his professorship at Princeton in the fall of 1919; as further evidence that his literary endeavors over the years had earned a good deal more than respect and admiration, he insisted that his first year’s salary be contributed to the university’s endowment fund. The next year, at the invitation of academic friends and former students, he toured Japan for two months with his daughter Paula, fishing (need it be said?) wherever possible for transplanted rainbows and brook trout with—barring a misprint in the text of Camp-Fires and Guide-Posts—a 3-ounce rod. Had his sympathetic and flattering views on Japanese culture been published in 1941, rather than 1921, the work might have been denounced as enemy propaganda.

When he declared his intention to retire in 1923, the trustees decreed further honors added to those previously bestowed by the governments of France, Belgium, and Holland for his wartime accomplishments, but no award moved...
him nearly so much as the outpouring of affection from Princeton's undergraduates: six hundred of them who took the trouble—by packing into and around the lecture hall, clambering even up onto window ledges—to hear his last address. The event proved a trifle anticlimactic, however, as, at the clamorous insistence of students and colleagues, he returned five times over the following five years for a short series of "sold-out" lectures.

Full of years and honors, Van Dyke then retired to a quiet life at his stately Colonial mansion, Avalon, there to tend his lovely grounds and write his memoirs—or rather, to do so between fishing trips to England and New Zealand, or the coast of Florida, or the back-country of Yellowstone Park (where he had made protecting the "redthroat" trout his special concern), or the little river he cherished best and longest, the St. Marguerite in Québec. As noted, he visited England again in 1923, which would have been his twentieth two-way crossing of the Atlantic by steamship!

In January 1926, having read not only about the fabulous "Angling in the Antipodes," but of its unusual government and society—which united "progressive principles" with "conservative tastes," thus mirroring, so he said, his own personality—he made the long voyage to New Zealand. The fabulous angling proved unexpectedly elusive, although he eventually located and landed a 16-pound rainbow; the cost of this antipodal adventure, however, was a wading injury that left him lame in one leg for the rest of his life. For those contemplating fishing in New Zealand, his Travel Diary cautioned, "take your cigars with you." (To an admirer who expressed surprise upon learning that such a distinguished clergyman "sometimes smoked," he replied, "not true . . . I always smoke.")

Long before his retirement, Van Dyke's life had assumed a pattern of seasonal migrations, constrained, of course, by his teaching obligations, but when no longer fettered to the lecture hall, the scope of his movements expanded. A large part of every summer he tried to spend, with as much of his extended family as could be assembled, at the Mt. Desert Island, Maine, seacoast property he called Sylvanora; a fleeting glimpse of his fishing activity there appears in the deceptively titled chapter, "Some Remarks on Gulls," in Days Off. That same work includes his only published account of a Maine canoe trip, "A Holiday in a Vacation," a week's journey down the Machias, which evidently took place before Sylvanora had been acquired, when his companion Tertius was about college age.

A Van Dyke fishing tradition equaled in its duration of twenty-five years only by his devotion to the St. Marguerite Salmon Club was his annual outing to a spring creek in south-central Pennsylvania called Dickey's Run. Doubtless more important than the trout fishing in this unprepossessing stream was the opportunity to revisit his friends on the faculty of the Mercersburg Academy, among whom was a young poet, English teacher, and fly fisher from South Carolina, Archibald Rutledge, who matured, in the course of writing approximately as many books and poems as Van Dyke, into one of the most beloved chroniclers of the country life and traditions of the Deep South. To commemorate their long friendship, Van Dyke composed a poem, "A Bunch of Trout Flies for Archie Rutledge," and Rutledge responded, in tribute to Van Dyke's angling artistry, with "The Art of the Old Master" in 1926 for Outdoor America.

For the remainder of his life, the cause of bird protection was one he championed in meetings, speeches, and newspaper articles with a zeal equal to his concern for ethical angling. (He found time in 1907 to serve as chair of the Honest Anglers Convention, which assembled at the American Museum of Natural History to denounce what Grover Cleveland, a supporter of the event, called "fishing hoggery.") The tradition among angling authors of expatiating on the dimension that birdsong, wildflowers, and other aspects of nature add to the satisfaction of their sport was already venerable—as old as Walton—when Van Dyke began writing. So commonplace, in fact, are such effusions that they fall, in the work of many, to the level of mere convention. But no discerning reader of Van Dyke should fail to sense the authenticity of his affection, felt "in the deep heart's core," to borrow Yeats's phrase, for the woodland blossom that many an angler treads down blindly—as this writer observes done all summer long by fly fishers—or his passionate delight in the sight and sound of songbirds. "Who can explain the secret pathos of Nature's loveliness?" His bird poetry John Burroughs appraised "the best we have upon their subjects by far," an assessment shared by Frank Chapman, curator of birds at the American Museum of Natural History, who enlisted Van Dyke as principal speaker at the first public meeting of the Audubon Society in 1897. He was later elected an officer in the New Jersey Audubon chapter.

Parts of most winters found him in Florida, which he had visited first in 1877 to recover from an episode of nervous exhaustion, the supposed result of excessivity and for many years a periodically recurring affliction. In later years, he came to prefer a resort hotel in Boca Grande, on the west coast of the state, for his winter recess, and fished the surrounding area with two companions who, with himself, made up the "Three Musketeers" to whom his Travel Diary was dedicated. Tertius noted that these three old friends fished in amicable competition, but disclosed nothing specific, regrettably, about their techniques or quarry. The many occasions on which Van Dyke expressed disinterest, or disdain, toward piscatorial methods other than fly fishing leave little doubt as to how he disported himself in

Florida, but the rest is silence. At this hotel in late January 1930, he suffered a severe heart attack that very nearly ended his life then and there, but from which his recovery was as substantial as could be possible for any octogenarian.

In consideration, however, of his heart attack, game leg, and general increasing frailty, his doctor advised him to give up river wading; nevertheless, as late as May 1932, Tertius revealed that they violated those orders together in the Catskills at the Orchard Lake Club, the waters of which were richly stocked from the club’s own brook trout hatchery. Later that year he fished Tunk Lake in Maine, and as Tertius recorded no subsequent outings, this excursion, though neither could have appreciated it at the time, likely was his last opportunity to wield his wand of enchantment.

Van Dyke’s last literary effort was the anthology A Creelful of Fishing Stories, published in 1932, a book worth owning merely for his brief but memorable introductions, the sprightliness of which betrays his eighty years. The last of his words to be published within his lifetime was a poem dedicated to recently elected Franklin Roosevelt, “To Our New Pilot,” appearing in the Times on 19 March 1933; the president responded personally with a letter of appreciation. After several weeks of steadily increasing weakness, Van Dyke died 10 April 1933, surrounded by his family, his “candle of life burned to the socket.”

The last paragraph of “At the Sign of the Balsam Bough,” the concluding chapter of Little Rivers, proved infinitely more prophetic than he could have imagined when writing it at the age of forty-two: “If we can only come back to nature every year, and consider the flowers and the birds, and confess our faults . . . and hear the river murmuring our absolution, we shall die young, even though we live long.”

ENDORNOTES

3. Ibid., 281.
6. Henry Van Dyke, Days Off (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 110.
8. Tertius Van Dyke, 298.

HIS TACKLE

Van Dyke began his seventy-five-year fishing career when 12-foot trout rods of some combination of ash, Hickory, lancewood, or greenheart were the norm and a 6-ounce rod was considered a lady’s model. Split bamboo had indeed made its appearance and would remain for some time not only very expensive, but, in the minds of many anglers, of dubious durability. His first salmon rod “was a monstrous two-handed engine . . . three joints of ash and a tip of whalebone; 18 feet long and weighing . . . 4 or 5 pounds. It could fling a long line, but had a ‘kick’ in it that almost threw me out of the canoe every time I cast.” Doubtless Van Dyke experimented with rods of different specifications before settling on his ideal of 4 ounces for trout and alludes in various pieces to the use of models from 5 to 3 ounces in weight. “A 2-ounce rod,” however, “is merely a pretty toy.” Of course, weight alone is far from the whole story, as the difference in performance between rods of equal weights but differing lengths can be great.

In 1894—a time of rapid evolution in rod design—an unidentified friend of Van Dyke “made me a bamboo trout rod as a reward for some rambling verses [“An Angler’s Wish”] I wrote about fishing,” which he came to call his wand of enchantment. “This sacred rod is 8 feet 6 inches long, and weighs 4 ounces. It has three joints, each of eight [eight] strips . . . . The grip is of sumac wood, beautiful, smooth as silk, but never slippery—delightful to the hand. Just to take it in hand . . . gives me a pleasant thrill of sensation. But far beyond that is the magic by which it recalls beautiful scenes, good companions . . . and happy days.” All this we luckily know only because his English friend Hugh Sheringham prevailed upon him to contribute a chapter to Sheringham’s Book of the Fly Rod; would that he had revealed also the name of such a talented rod maker.

Owing to its light weight, sumac was often selected for reel seats, but a sumac hand grip was quite unusual; only the Orvis Company, in fact, manufactured any significant number of rods thus fitted. And without doubt, Van Dyke himself fully appreciated the distinctiveness of this material, as the phrase “with the sumac butt” he never tired of reiterating; once, in jest, he declaims, “I swear it on the sumac hilt of my old rod.”

His skill and care in using the wand of enchantment must have been extraordinary, for it lasted him the remainder of his globe-trotting life. In pursuit of sea-run trout, found himself in the perilous predicament of hooking a late-run salmon with his 4-ounce favorite. On the St. Marguerite, as related in his Travel Diary, he successfully landed after long breathless battles both a 14- and a 20-pound salmon, and on the Grand Cascapedia the same with a 25-pounder. “The Art of the Old Master,” indeed!

11. Tertius Van Dyke, 56.
12. Ibid., 158.
13. Ibid., 88.
15. Henry Van Dyke, 149.
17. Henry Van Dyke, Little Rivers, 56.
18. Tertius Van Dyke, 148.
20. Tertius Van Dyke, 95.
21. Ibid., 145.
22. Ibid., 148.
23. Ibid., 292.
24. Henry Van Dyke, Days Off, 313.
26. Tertius Van Dyke, 211.
27. Ibid., 220.
28. Ibid., 218.
29. Ibid., 291.
31. Ibid., 30.
32. Tertius Van Dyke, 301.
34. Henry Van Dyke, The Travel Diary of an Angler, 118.
35. Ibid., 136.
36. Tertius Van Dyke, 260.
38. Henry Van Dyke, Little Rivers, 211.
40. Ibid., 422.
41. Henry Van Dyke, Little Rivers, 277.
43. Ibid., 6.
44. Ibid., 5.
45. Tertius Van Dyke, 404.
Sir Herbert Maxwell and the Sir Herbert Salmon Fly

by J. Keith Harwood


Galloway in southwest Scotland is a region that is often bypassed by travelers on their way to the great cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and to the Highlands and Islands beyond. This is a great pity, because it is an area of outstanding natural beauty, of rich farmland dotted with the distinctive belted Galloway cattle, of quiet sandy beaches, of moor and forest, and of picturesque towns and villages. It is a haven for wildlife where you may see wild goats scrambling over rocks or red kites circling overhead. It is also an angler’s paradise, with seven salmon rivers feeding the Solway Firth and with numerous lochs and lochans, including Loch Ken, the home of fabled pike. It is an area that has inspired some exceptional angling literature, including Ernest Briggs’s Angling and Art in Scotland (1908), one of the finest books ever written on Scottish angling, and the more recent Fisher in the Hills: A Season in Galloway (1985) by Robin Ade. One of the great family names of Galloway is Maxwell—they came to prominence in the area in the fifteenth century. In more recent times, the Maxwell family has produced two great writers: Sir Herbert Maxwell, author and editor of several angling books, and his grandson, Gavin Maxwell, best known for his tale of otters in Ring of Bright Water.

It is hard to know how to classify Sir Herbert Maxwell (Figure 1). Angler, artist, antiquarian, archaeologist, botanist, etymologist, novelist, ornithologist, politician—he was all of these and more. Sir Herbert Eustace Maxwell, seventh baronet of Monreith, was born in Edinburgh on 8 January 1845, the fourth but only surviving son of Sir William Maxwell, sixth baronet, by his wife, Helenora. Although he was born in Edinburgh, he spent most of his childhood at Monreith House (Figure 2), near Port William in Galloway, where the family owned a 16,000-acre estate. Sir Herbert later inherited the estate, and it remains in the Maxwell family today, albeit much reduced in size. It is hardly surprising that Sir Herbert took a keen interest in angling and natural history when one considers the area where he
was brought up. Monreith House lies a couple of miles from the picturesque harbor village of Port William (Figure 3), founded by Sir William Maxwell in 1770, which today is a popular destination for sea anglers. The house itself overlooks the White Loch of Myrton, where Sir Herbert spent many happy hours fishing. After private schooling at Whitnash Rectory in Leamington in Warwickshire—a place that gave him ample opportunity to add to his collection of birds’ eggs, moths, and butterflies—the young Sir Herbert proceeded to Eton in January 1859.

Eton, situated by the Thames near Windsor, provided Sir Herbert with further opportunity to develop his interest in angling. In his autobiographical Evening Memories (1932), he recalls the capture of a very large trout by a fellow pupil.

Opposite my tutor’s house, between Barnes Pool and the mill stream that flows into the Thames just above the College buildings there was an orchard. . . . This orchard used to be rented by my tutor, and formed a delightful private recreation ground for us boys. Just where the aforesaid mill stream joins the Thames, the main sewer from the College buildings used to discharge. . . . At the mouth of this sewer there was often a big trout, taking toll of the small fry that congregated there. One of the small boys at my tutor’s named Jodrell was fishing one day for bleak, perch and such like, with a line tied to the top of a cheap rod carrying a painted float. Just as he came opposite the sewer mouth, a large trout made a plunge, scattering the small fry. Jodrell hooked a bleak to his line and flung it in the direction of the trout which, marvella dicea [amazing to say], immediately seized it and was hooked. Had this big fish made a rush into the main river, it would have made short work of Jodrell’s feeble tackle, for he had no reel on his rod; but instead of that, the trout dashed up the mill stream and got stranded on the gravel close to the fisher. Tandy (a fellow pupil), whom I have described as our evil genius, having strolled down to watch Jodrell fishing, promptly jumped into the stream, seized the trout struggling on the gravel and brought it ashore. It weighed nine pounds!25

It was during the summer vacation of 1859 that Sir Herbert was introduced to the delights of fishing for sea trout. His family was invited by a wealthy industrialist, James Baird of Cambusdoon, to join a cruise aboard his steam yacht bound for the remote Knoydart Peninsula in the West Highlands. It was here, in the river flowing out of the Dulochan, that Maxwell killed his first sea trout. It was nearly fifty years before he returned to Knoydart, and he was strangely moved by the experience. “It was a strange, bitter-sweet experience to pull salmon and sea trout out of the same pools that I had fished half a century before, when I was wanting at least eighteen inches of the moderate stature I had since acquired.”

By his own admission, Sir Herbert failed to make the best of his time at Eton, and he was removed by his parents after three years and sent to Albury Park, Surrey, to be coached for Oxford by a private tutor. He managed to gain a place at Christ Church at the second attempt and was hoping to qualify for a commission in the Scots Fusilier Guards by taking a degree. However, his days in Oxford were short-lived because he failed to pass responses (the first-year examinations), and he left shortly afterward. It is hardly surprising that he failed when, on a day off during the examination period, he preferred to go hunting rather than revise. During his brief stay at Oxford, his mathematics tutor was none other than the Rev. Charles Dodgson, otherwise known as Lewis Carroll, author of Alice in Wonderland, whom Maxwell described as “extremely dry and repellent.”26

When he did not gain an army commission, he returned to Monreith and helped his father in running the estate. He also spent much time hunting, shooting, and fishing and acquiring a detailed knowledge of the people and countryside.

Figure 2. Monreith House, Sir Herbert’s home.

Figure 3. Port William, founded by Sir William Maxwell in 1770.
around him. In 1869, at the age of twenty-five, he married Mary Fletcher Campbell, who bore him two sons and three daughters. After his father’s death in 1877, he entered parliament as conservative member for Wigtownshire. He remained in parliament until 1906, and from 1886 to 1892, he served as junior lord of the treasury. During his time as a member of parliament (MP), he contested seven elections at great personal expense; in those days, candidates had to pay their own election expenses. Indeed, the revenues from his estate did not match his expenditure, and increasingly he turned to writing as a means of supplementing his income.

Although he wrote a number of novels and several books on the history and topography of Galloway, Sir Herbert is chiefly remembered today as a salmon angler and author and editor of angling books. During his long life, he gained a wealth of angling experience and fished more than forty rivers in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Norway. He was also a devoted fly fisher who eschewed spinning and bait fishing. In Evening Memories, he recalled an occasion when his determination to stick to the fly paid off.

In February 1912, I was the guest of Henry Riviere for the opening of the angling season on the Park water of the Aberdeenshire Dee, my good friend Alfred Gilbey making up a trio of rods. The river was very full and the weather cold, but open. We fished eight days; they employed minnow whenever they considered it too cold for the fly, and counselled me to do likewise; but I stuck to my creed, using only the fly, and large at that. Result—they got twelve clean fish between them, while I got fourteen. Of all the rivers on which he cast a line, two stood out in his memory for their sheer beauty and variety: the Minnick, a tributary of the Cree (Figure 4) in his beloved Galloway, and the Kvina, between Stavanger and Christiansand in Norway.

In 1898, he published his first angling book, Salmon and Sea Trout, a volume in the Angler’s Library series, which he coedited with F. G. Aflafo. In the book, he sets out his philosophy of salmon and sea-trout fishing, liberally illustrated with tales from his own experiences on his local rivers and beyond. He was given his first lessons in salmon fishing by his father’s butler, Nicholson, and caught his first salmon on the nearby Water of Luce. He was a persistent angler and believed that salmon could be caught at any time of day and that the only time when it is impossible to hook one is that time when your fly is not in the water, as the following story illustrates.

I was fishing the Luce on the last day of the season of 1870. It is a very small river, subject to violent floods, after which it subsides very rapidly. On this occasion it was much below fishing size, the sun was bright and the air frosty. Had it not been the last day of the season, there would have been little to tempt one to the water side. I had tried some of the most likely places without avail, and wended my way with slender hopes to a place where a high cliff partially screens the water from the westering sun. Slender as they were already, my hopes evaporated altogether when, on approaching the pool, I saw the sunlight flashing on the line of some one who had anticipated me. It was a local angler, a farmer, whose personal name I forgot, but who was always known by the name of his farm, Back-o’- the-wa’. Now Back-o’-the-wa’ knew every inch of that water, and small blame to him, for, by the same token, he lived on the banks of it, and was no mean performer with his stout old hickory and lancewood. Thinks I to myself, it isn’t much use putting a fly over this in the present low state of the water after Back-o’-the- wa’ has raked it. However, the Red Brae was a favourite cast of mine; it was the place I had killed the first salmon in my life, and it was the last chance I had for the season; so as soon as Back-o’-the-wa’ took his line off at the foot of the pool, I laid mine on at the neck. There was a sharp stream running in at the top, spreading into nice dark ripples under the cliff on the far side. I had

Figure 4. The River Cree at Newton Stewart, one of Sir Herbert’s favorite salmon rivers.

Figure 5. The foldable gaff invented by Sir Herbert Maxwell. From Sir Herbert Maxwell, Salmon and Sea Trout (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1898), 58.
not travelled far down it before there came a flash and a snatch, and I was fast in a strong fish. Marry! but he flew about the pool, never still an instant, and I felt quite powerless to control him. By luck he dashed into some shallow water on the near side, where he was almost stranded on the gravel, and my attendant slipped the gaff neatly into him, before he had been in play for five minutes. It was a beautiful clear fish, such as sometimes may be got near the sea even late in season, weighing 22 lbs. and hooked by the anal fin. It is difficult to think he had not seen Back-o’-the-wa’s fly; and apparently when mine came over him he lost his temper and tried to strike it a blow with his broad tail.7

With regard to salmon flies, he believed that “the degree of discrimination between flies of different colours and patterns attributed to salmon is preposterously exaggerated.”8 To prove his point, he invented his own salmon fly, the Sir Herbert. The story of its invention is well worth the telling.

About nine or ten years ago (1889) I was so vexed by the pertinacity with which the infallible attractions of the Silver Wilkinson were insisted on by Tweed boatmen, who were dissatisfied if I pleased my own inclination in the choice of a fly, that I resolved to devise a gold-bodied fly that should resemble no other that I have ever seen, and yet prove as successful as any other.9

On its first outing in the Dryburgh water, he hooked a fish that broke him, raised another fish, and killed one of 11 pounds. However, his boatman believed that had he stuck to the Wilkinson, he would have been even more successful. The following week, the fly accounted for two 20-pounders on the Nith. As well as the Sir Herbert salmon fly, he also invented a foldable gaff, which could be carried in a leather sheath (Figure 5).

During his lifetime, he made friends with some of the most famous anglers of the day, including Sir Edward Grey (later Lord Grey of Fallodon) and Andrew Lang. While serving as an MP, Sir Herbert often fished the Itchen in the company of Grey and was greatly impressed by his fishing skills. The two shared a great interest in natural history.

Grey far excelled all of us in the craft of the dry fly. As a schoolboy at Winchester he had learnt how to beguile those highly sophisticated chalk-stream trout. His basket invariably contained twice as many fish at the end of a day as that of anybody else, or perhaps I should say—as mine. He delighted in nature study; no botanist, but a thorough field naturalist, specially devoted to birds.”

For the reader who may wish to dress the Sir Herbert salmon fly, the dressing is as follows:

**Tag:** Gold tinsel.

**Tail:** A topping and sprigs of ibis.

**No butt.**

**Body:** Gold tinsel carried on from the tag for two thirds of the length; gold twist over and a yellow-dyed cock’s hackle with a black list down the center; remaining third scarlet mohair with magenta shoulder hackle.

**Wing:** Two tippet feathers, strips of bustard, white and scarlet swan and wood duck, and a few fibers of emerald peacock herl.

**Cheeks:** Blue chatterer.

**Horns:** Red macaw.

**Head:** Bronze chenille.

Andrew Lang, author of *Angling Sketches* (1895), was one of Sir Herbert’s closest friends and literary cronies, although they had very different ideas on fishing.

We had tastes in common other than literary; rather I should say we followed different methods in securing enjoyment from the same pursuit. For instance—we were both devoted to fly-fishing; but whereas I was discontented when I did not catch fish and miserable when I lost a big one, Andrew seemed somewhat vexed when he deluded a trout into rising at a counterfeit insect; in fact, I have known him to break off the point of his hook in order to avoid the worry of landing, killing and basketing fish.11

Nowadays, Sir Herbert Maxwell’s angling books are very much sought after by collectors and command relatively high prices. Apart from *Salmon and Sea Trout* (1898), other books of interest to the angler include *British Fresh-Water Fishes* (1904), *The Story of the Tweed* (1905), *Chronicles of the Houghton Fishing Club 1822–1908* (1908), and *Fishing at Home and Abroad* (1913), published in a limited edition of 750 copies. This last volume, which Maxwell actually edited, contains a fascinating chapter on American trout fishing by the father of modern American angling, Theodore Gordon. Maxwell’s *Memories of the Months*, which ran to seven volumes between 1897 and 1922, contains much of interest to the angler and natural historian and are well worth seeking out.

Sir Herbert died at Monreith at the ripe old age of ninety-two and was buried in the little church of Kirkmaiden nearby. His grandson, the author Gavin Maxwell, gives an interesting glimpse of his grandfather’s later years.

My grandfather passed his old age between his gardens and the study he had built for himself at the end of a long corridor. At the far side of this incredibly untidy room, where books were stacked everywhere on the sofas and chairs, he would sit at a big desk between two atrocious stained-glass windows, interminably writing volume after volume, answering personally all his world-wide correspondence, and contributing papers to the journals of learned societies. The rest of the big room contained a scholar’s library, glass cases full of archaeological findings, and an easel bearing whatever flower painting he was engaged upon at the moment.12

One of the greatest tributes, of which he was most proud, was that paid to him by the millionaire philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, to whom Sir Herbert was introduced on a visit to the United States in 1914: “Sir Herbert Maxwell, the one man in Europe whom I wished to know! I consider there is only one occupation worthy of a man’s attention, and that is salmon fishing.”13

Now, nearly ninety years after his death, it is through salmon fishing and his books on angling that Maxwell (Figure 6) is chiefly remembered. However, I suspect that few people today would take the trouble to dress and to use the Sir Herbert salmon fly. His belief that the salmon’s ability to discriminate between the myriad colors and patterns of salmon flies has been widely exaggerated has certainly found favor with the modern salmon angler, and I feel that he would approve of the much simpler hairwing patterns of today.

ENDNOTES

3. Ibid., 48.
4. Ibid., 81.
5. Ibid., 299.
7. Ibid., 90–91.
8. Ibid., 111.
9. Ibid., 124.
11. Ibid., 216–17.
Ronald S. Swanson has devoted more than four decades of his life to the study and collecting of fish models and researching the facts behind their origins. This fire was first kindled when Ron spotted a carved salmon hanging on the wall of a Scottish pub during a 1969 trip to the River Spey. As an avid duck decoy collector, he saw a similarity between the skill sets of the respective craftsmen and what inspired them. The scope of his subsequent efforts uncovered numerous examples of trophy fish commemorated throughout the world. Both current and future generations of fly fishers can be thankful that Ron committed much of what he discovered to the printed page.

Ron has long been a friend of the museum. One of his first publications was a catalog titled Fish Models: An Exhibition, which was published for an exhibition held at the museum during its twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations in 1992–1993. The catalog contained Ron’s scholarly essay “Fish Models, Effigies, and Plaques” and covered the various artistic traditions established in London, Norway, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. Ron captured the essence of his avocation when he concluded his essay with the statement that “the angler has the joy of catching the fish, the artist the joy of creating the likeness. But, the real joy is felt by all the fishermen who follow . . . they see the effigy and dream of bigger fish” (p. 14).

A decade later, Ron published the body of his work in three privately printed volumes that guide the reader through more than two centuries of angling history and the exploits of numerous anglers and guides who celebrated their fish of a lifetime.

The first in the series was Grand Cascapedia Giants, published in 2005. The Grand Cascapedia has produced the largest salmon on our continent and left a legacy of remarkable fish representations in the great camps that line its banks. Ron searched diligently to uncover evidence of rod-caught salmon weighing 45 pounds or greater—those that could rightly hold the mantle of being a Grand Cascapedia Giant.

In 2008, Ron released Record Atlantic Salmon, which covered giant salmon captured throughout the world. Ron’s research uncovered 561 entries of fish weighing 50 pounds or more, and 110 of those had representations made of them. The two largest fish weighed in at exactly 79.38 pounds on their respective scales.

The most recent and final volume in the series, Fish Models, Plaques & Effigies, was released in 2009 and celebrates the various great fish that have been honored in permanent form. Therein Ron presents a clear case that many of his discoveries can be classified as folk art (defined by Dictionary.com as “art originating among the common people of a nation or region and usually reflecting their traditional culture, especially everyday or festive items produced or decorated by unschooled artists”). Irrespective of their designation, the photos and stories of some remarkable fish are recorded for posterity.

Ron Swanson is a true keeper of the flame, and his pioneering studies of trophy fish and fish models have preserved a vital part of angling history that would certainly have been diminished without his efforts.

John Mundt is a trustee of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

Additional information about Ron Swanson’s books can be found at www.meadowrunpress.com.
The Fly-Mounting Techniques of William Cushner

William Cushner was a professional framer in New York City for decades and worked with advertising agencies, art galleries, magazines, and individual artists throughout his career. Although he was never a fly fisherman, Cushner was encouraged by some of his angling friends to acquire flies of historical significance and flies tied by some of the masters in order to create a new style of art.

To construct fly panels in the fashion of Cushner, follow these directions:

1. Make or purchase a shadow-box frame with a depth of at least $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Have a mat board cut to the size of the frame.

2. Depending on the number of flies you intend to frame, the center of the mat should have an opening to the back mat board. From the same mat-board material, build walls around the opening.

3. Take a $\frac{3}{4}$-inch-diameter Plexiglas rod and cut several 1-inch pieces. Apply heat at the $\frac{3}{8}$-inch point and bend the rod 90 degrees.

4. Attach the fly to the end of the Plexiglas rod with epoxy glue.
5. Attach the rod with glue to the predetermined location on the back section of mat board.

6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 as needed for each fly.

7. Place the mat face up on mat backing, and place it into the frame.

8. Close the back of the frame using wood screws, staples, or tape.

9. Add a label to the back of the frame that lists the name of the fly tier, the date, or information about the fish that was hooked.

Visit the museum gallery to see *Fly on the Wall: The Art of William Cushner*. A selection of the Cushner fly panels, acquired in 1985, will be on display through the spring season.

Cathi Comar, Executive Director
Yoshi Akiyama, Deputy Director
Mike Valla had the rare experience of growing up and maturing in the welcoming midst of these fly dressers. As a boy in 1969, he traveled alone by bus to the region and was quickly “adopted” by Winnie and Walt Dette. He subsequently returned every summer and stayed with the Dettes, sitting side by side with them as he learned to tie. (A more detailed account appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of this journal, in Valla’s article “Winifred Ferdon Dette: Diary of a Catskill Fly Tier.”) And, of course, he fished daily, meeting all of the other tiers and becoming entranced by their stories.

The book has a great many photographs of the tiers and especially of the flies and their numerous variants. The research is comprehensive and the writing detailed. Valla pays tribute to the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, demonstrating the value that the region places on its own fly-fishing institution and the value of the museum to research.

—Gerald Karaska

Mike Valla
_Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies_
233 pp.
Available from Stackpole Books, 5067 Ritter Road, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-6921; (717) 796-0418; FAX: (717) 796-0412; www.stackpolebooks.com
$49.95 (hardcover)

**NOTES FROM THE LIBRARY**


The region is famous to all eastern fly fishers. Valla pays tribute to the mystic quality of its rivers and streams, and he especially calls attention to the fact that the region is honored by its people—in this case, its fly tiers. He reminds us that the dry flies we all use on a regular basis—Quill Gordon, Red Quill, March Brown, Light Cahill, Adams, Brown Bivisible, and the Wulff patterns—originated with those Catskill fly tiers. The pleasure of this art form rests in the very history and evolution of it, for fly tying is the history of Catskill fly fishing. Valla describes such flies as having effect on more than fish: “The Catskill dry fly itself, nothing more than some feathers and steel to the unconcerned, bonds together all of what surrounds it, and its matchless beauty and form delight all who have fallen under its spell” (p. 9).

Although the subject title of Valla’s book is the dry fly—and there is considerable content about the materials and instructions for how to tie the flies—there is a distinct emphasis on the tiers. To this region belong some of the hallowed names in the history of American fly fishing: Theodore Gordon, Louis Rhead, George M. L. La Branche, Ray Bergman, Art Flick, Preston Jennings, John Atherton, Edward Hewitt, Thaddeus Norris, Roy Steenrod, and Joan and Lee Wulff, all of whom tied flies. Valla, himself an accomplished tier, acknowledges the significance of the region’s notable fly tiers, including Rube Cross, Harry and Elsie Darbee, Walt and Winnie Dette, Ted Townsend, and many more contemporaries.

The Catskill dry fly evolved from the nature of the swift rivers, which inspired high-floating flies tied with stiff and sparsely hackled duck-quill wings, according to Valla. He clearly explains that those dry flies, even in the early twentieth century, could not be described with great certainty as they evolved into numerous variants. “Having examined hundreds of Catskill dry flies made by old-school tiers, I’d say there is a whole range of standards in the Catskill dry-fly genre. . . . In many ways, it’s much easier to categorize trends and style of a particular tier than to generalize a ‘Catskill dry fly’” (p. 4).

Valla attributes “style” to the early tiers, such as Rube Cross, Harry Darbee, Walt Dette, and Winifred Ferdon (aka Winnie Dette). Later tiers contributed their variations. Further, Valla asserts that the confusion in styles can also be attributed to the number of flies tied by the many locals. For example, Ray Smith said in a 1938 radio broadcast that he tied 12,000 flies a year at home (p. 5). Many of the noted tiers also sold flies tied by other locals.
Ralph Golzio, at age 100, prepares to cast a dry fly on a favorite New Jersey trout stream that he has fished for many years. Ralph has lived his life’s philosophy: play as hard as you work to achieve balance of mind and spirit.

When not fly fishing, Ralph studies quantum mechanics, nuclear physics, and a newly found fascination for astronomy. “I have a whole lifetime of learning ahead of me,” he says. Until he retired in 1987 at age seventy-eight, the 1932 mechanical engineering graduate of Stevens Institute of Technology enjoyed a long and prosperous career as a consulting engineer.

At a very early age, Ralph found a passion for the great outdoors. He could often be found hunting or fishing in his home state of New Jersey. “Back in the 1920s, my backyard was a paradise for pheasants,” he told me. “The woods were full of woodcock and grouse; the streams ran cold and were full of native brook trout. When the season was on, you couldn’t keep me home. I have fond memories of my days in the Catskills, Vermont, Canada, and the Italian Alps.”

Ralph cherishes his 8'/2-foot, three-piece custom Payne rod, purchased in 1953 from Abercrombie & Fitch in New York City. “I use a Hardy reel that dons a silk line,” he says. He explains that silk has mass, “and you need mass to properly cast a fly.” Ralph especially loves casting that mass during the Hendrickson hatch. “I am stubborn,” he insists. “I often only fish one fly on any given day. Many times, I do as well or better than those who change flies often. If I’m fishing a Royal Coachman dry, I stick with it.” Of salmon fishing on the Miramichi, Ralph has this to say: “You have to fish the right current. It’s a must to get the proper swing. Stay with the right fly and fish the proper current, and you will catch fish.”

On 20 October 2009, Ralph became a centenarian, an honorable milestone. Ralph soars with a few less feathers these days, but he has eloquently and enthusiastically engineered a century of enjoying life through the sport of fly fishing.

—Bill Leary
North Haledon, New Jersey
IN MEMORIAM

Jack Gartside
7 December 1942–5 December 2009

We learned of Jack Gartside’s death upon word that memorial donations in his name were to be made to the American Museum of Fly Fishing. He was an innovative fly tier and author, self-publishing such books as Fly Patterns for the Adventurous Tyer, Fly Fisherman’s Guide to Boston Harbor, Original Salt Water Fly Patterns, Scratching the Surface: Strange but True Tales and Techniques, Secret Flies (for Fresh and Salt Water), and Striper Strategies: Secrets of a Striper Bum. His flies have been featured in books by authors including Eric Leiser, Judith Dunham, Lefty Kreh, Dick Stewart, and Dick Brown.

Dick Talleur agreed to share some memories of his friend with us. As many of you know, Dick not only teaches fly fishing and fly tying, but is author of numerous books himself, the most recent of which, Trout Flies for the 21st Century, was released by Lyons Press in 2008.

Trying to describe Jack Gartside reminds me of the old story about the four blind men and the elephant. The blind men each touch different parts of the animal’s body, and thus come up with four different descriptions: the elephant is like a snake (trunk), rope (tail), tree (leg), wall (flank). And so it was with Jack; how one related to him depended on where and how one touched him—or was touched by him.

I first met Jack in 1983, but I knew of him before that, thanks to Bob Boyle’s article in Sports Illustrated (12 October 1982) about Jack hitching to Montana with nothing but a small suitcase, a single rod tube, and his cat. The cat had a funny name—Tabermorcy, or something like that. Jack told me later that this was his all-time favorite fishing cat.

Jack and I ran across each other at various fly-fishing oases, and his tales of Montana trout fishing were like heady wine. I planned to spend the summer of 1985 there—my first year of freedom post-AT&T—and Jack said he’d meet me sometime in July. Upon my arrival, Craig Mathews of Blue Ribbon Flies told me that Jack was en route. He had called to borrow $200 for bus fare, which he was to repay by tying flies for the shop, which he subsequently did.

At that time, Jack carried his fly-tying stash in a plastic supermarket bag. It looked like the remnants from Ernie Schwiebert’s Waste-Trol. Out of this bundle of fluff, Jack would create the most remarkable flies. They were—well, different. They had names like the Sparrow, the Gurgler, the Soft-Hackled Streamer, and the Evening Star. What I was to soon learn was that they worked great, especially when Jack was fishing them.

I remember asking Jack what the Sparrow was supposed to represent. He replied, “It is what you fish it as.” This was true of many of his designs. They had fish appeal by virtue of their image and behavior. They looked alive, and trout eat living things.

A Gurgler tied by Jack Gartside.
Sara Wilson
We hooked up with another friend of Jack’s who was cruising Montana in a large Suburban full of gear. Jack told us he’d found a “secret” spot on the Madison and that it was hard to reach; you had to cross the river at the Slide Inn campsite. “Secret spot on the Madison” is an oxymoron, I thought—but I’d reckoned this without Jack.

So we drove to the Slide Inn and parked. The other guy and I put on our waders and the accoutrements of the sport. Jack didn’t have any waders; he said he’d wade wet. He was dressed in an old tweed sport coat, corduroy pants, and Nike running shoes that looked as though they’d been through more than their share of marathons.

Incidentally, for those of you who didn’t know Jack, he got a lot of his clothes from the Salvation Army store. And when he got tired of those clothes, he’d go back, trade them in, and outfit himself with a new wardrobe.

The Madison was running strong, as it usually does, and we crossed the river arms linked, with Jack between us. We then hiked about a half mile up the far bank. I was beginning to see why this was a secret spot. Finally, we came to a large pool with pocket water above and below. We did pretty well; the place was full of nice-sized rainbows.

We recrossed the river in pitch dark. Jack was dripping and obviously chilled. The question now became one of where to get dinner, as West Yellowstone would be pretty much closed up by the time we got there. Jack told us of the Hebgen Lake Lodge, which was on the way, and that’s where we went.

We sat at a table and were soon attended by a waitress who gave Jack a quizzical look; after all, he was still dripping wet and creating his own private river on the floor. About the only thing he had that was dry was a pack of cigarettes—those inevitable smokes that were so much a part of his identity.

Later that summer, Jack introduced me to another of the Madison’s glory holes. It was the stretch along the Baker’s Hole campsite at the very lower end of Yellowstone Park. The rainbow trout were starting to follow the spawning-bent browns.

But Jack knew his stuff, and the fish were there. The photo of Jack on the river (above) is one I took that morning, as I studied him working a soft-hackle streamer in the leisurely current. He was very, very adept at this, and he took a fine rainbow while I watched.

Now, the deal with Baker’s Hole is this: it’s a known buffalo and bear magnet, and grizzlies love to forage there. This didn’t stop Jack from sleeping on the ground, in his wading gear, with his rod strung. He knew that Frank Matarelli—the creator of the wishbone bobbin and the Matarelli whip-finish tool—was in town and that he’d be on the water very early. But Jack was always first in the pool, and it drove poor Frank crazy, because he could never figure out how in hell Jack got there.

Once, a group of us were seated at a table near the back of the dining hall at the Doubletree Inn. It was the weekend of the International Fly Tyer’s Symposium, and the perennial Saturday evening banquet was in full swing. The venerable George Harvey was present for his ninetieth birthday. The proprietor of the show, Chuck Furimsky, had been a student in George’s fly-fishing classes at Penn State, and he held the old fellow in great reverence. Chuck was at the microphone, congratulating George on his birthday, and announced that he had made arrangements for him to attend the fly-fishing consumer show in Denver, which happens soon after the Christmas holidays.

As Chuck paused for a breath, Jack said, to no one in particular and just loud enough for those of us at the table to hear, “Yeah, they’re gonna pack him in ice and ship . . . ” and he just let it hang. We cracked up! Great comedians all have a perfect sense of timing, and Jack was no exception.

If I’ve given the impression that Jack was just a joker, let me clear that up forthwith. The guy could flat-out fish. His knowledge of, and angling success with, striped bass in and around Boston Harbor is legendary, notwithstanding the priceless photo of him floating on a big blow-up giraffe, fly rod in hand—a spoof of the booming float tube and pontoon boat industry.

Jack leaves us with these wonderful memories as well as a rich cornucopia of novel fly designs that will continue to bring us tying pleasure and angling thrills. We miss you, Jack, and we know there will not be another like you in our time.
Fran Betters—legendary fly tier; rod builder; originator of such flies as the Ausable Wulff, the Usual, and the Haystack; author of several books; newspaper columnist; fixture on the West Branch of the Ausable; nearly-five-decades owner of the Adirondack Sport Shop in Wilmington, New York; and 2008 Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum Fly Fishing Hall of Fame inductee—died last September. Taylor Streit, who in 2001 was named a legendary guide by the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame, was a friend of Betters and remembers him here.

I started in the fly-fishing business tying Ausable Wulffs for Francis Betters almost half a century ago. The pay was 15 cents each: one shiny dime and dull nickel to someone doing what he loved. I soon learned that commercial fly tying is akin to digging ditches. Only a work ethic like Fran’s could manufacture his incredible 30,000 flies a year!

But he found time to fish. One evening we hiked into a remote section of the Saranac River with our buddy Jack Smith. Jack and I waded to the other side, and Fran disappeared into the brush upstream. Occupied with a good evening hatch, I only snapped back to earth when I saw Fran’s hat float past. He had a bad limp; this fact, coupled with his severe dedication to catching fish, made me fear that he’d submerged himself. I ran upstream, searching and calling, but got no response. I had to turn back and had a hell of a time crossing the wide river in the dark.

Car lights and horns guided me into a search party that I thought had been organized for the finding of Francis—turned out it was for me. But with everyone undrowned, there was great cause for celebration, and we had a big fish fry on the beach in front of Roy’s Bar.

I took a lot of heat that night for getting lost, and Fran made up some yarn about losing his hat while fighting a big fish. Always socially generous—usually at his own expense—he recited incredibly hokey jokes and topped off the night with one of his favorite tunes.

They are digging father’s grave to build a sewer
They are digging it regardless of expense
They are shifting his remains to put in tenants’ drains
To satisfy some wealthy residents . . .

The song continues on from there—as will Fran’s Adirondack Sport Shop, his flies, writings, and the great legacy he left the fly-fishing world.

—Taylor Streit
Taos, New Mexico
Why Fly Fishing Wins Award

Why Fly Fishing, a DVD produced by the American Museum of Fly Fishing and Miracle Productions, won an honorary award at the 2009 Columbus International Film & Video Festival in Columbus, Ohio, on November 14. This thirty-one-minute DVD was created to promote and share the grace and beauty of fly fishing. Featuring stunning images and commentary by some of the most well-known names in the sport—including Joan Wulff, Nick Lyons, and John Gierach—Why Fly Fishing is the perfect way to introduce someone you love to the sport. To purchase a copy, visit our website at www.amff.com.

Recent Donations

Frank H. Skidmore Jr. of Durham, North Carolina, donated a two-piece, 7-foot, 6-inch, Montague Rapidan bamboo fly rod that belonged to the late Walter E. Masterson. Dick Cheney of Washington, D.C., donated a four-piece, 9-foot, 9-weight Sage fly rod and a 9/10-weight Hardy Sovereign fly reel. Marcia Woolman of The Plains, Virginia, gave us a fishing tackle bag, seven boxes of flies, and leader kit that belonged to the late George Griffin. Ted Sypher of Chenango Forks, New York, sent us Atlantic salmon flies of his own tying in sizes 1/S and 2/S.


Upcoming Events

April 29
Heritage Award Dinner
Honoring Casting for Recovery
New York, New York

May 11
Exhibition Opening
*Memories on the Water: A Photographic Journey through Fly Fishing’s Past*
American Museum of Fly Fishing
Manchester, Vermont

May 20
Chagrin Valley Hunt Club Dinner
Chagrin Falls, Ohio

June 19
Gallery Program: *Photography of Nature*
American Museum of Fly Fishing
Manchester, Vermont

July 17
Ice Cream Social with Fly-Fishing Activities
American Museum of Fly Fishing
Manchester, Vermont

July 31
Angling and Art Benefit Auction
Featuring George Van Hook
Manchester, Vermont

August 14
Fly-Fishing Festival
American Museum of Fly Fishing
Manchester, Vermont

September 23
Gathering with Russell Chatham
San Francisco, California

October 16
Gallery Program: Equipment Appraisal Day
American Museum of Fly Fishing
Manchester, Vermont

October 28-29
Friends of Corbin Shoot
Andover, New Jersey

November 6
Annual Membership Meeting
Manchester, Vermont

December 4
Gallery Program: Hooked on the Holidays
American Museum of Fly Fishing
Manchester, Vermont

Always check our website (www.amff.com) for additions, updates, and more information or contact Kim Murphy at (802) 362-3300 or kmurphy@amff.com. “Casting About,” the museum’s new e-mail newsletter, offers up-to-date news and event information. To subscribe, look for the link on our website or contact the museum.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1, 2, 4</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>Number 1</td>
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Manchester Discount Beverage
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Kevin McKay and maineflyfish.com
Mike Michalak and The Fly Shop
Henrik Mortensen
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Ronald Wilcox

CONTRIBUTORS

Clarence Anderson is a longtime member of the American Museum of Fly Fishing whose recent contributions to the journal include “Hiram Leonard: A Review of the Published Biographical Evidence” (Fall 2007) and “The Invisible Man: John G. Landman” (Spring 2009). Anderson’s interest in the subject of John G. Landman remains undiminished. Discovered after a long search is the following classified advertisement from the January 1921 issue of Forest and Stream (page 45), which should settle the long-running argument over the source of his rod blanks, most authorities insisting that he acquired them from other rod makers: “FOR SALE: Complete contents of my fishing rod factory, with tools and machinery, for making split bamboo rods. Large amount of raw material and hundreds of glued stock ready for mounting. John Landman, 50 Cedar St., Brooklyn, N.Y.” The notice was placed by Landman’s son and partner, John Jr., and ran only once, suggesting either a prompt sale or a change of heart.

J. Keith Harwood teaches Latin and Greek at Clitheroe Royal Grammar School, an institution founded in 1554. He is a keen angler and fly dresser and is very much interested in the history of angling. He has contributed articles to a number of magazines. He has published three books with Medlar Press, one on the history of the float (bobber), The Float (2003); one on the history of salmon flies, The Hardy Book of Salmon Flies (2006); and one co-authored with David Stanley on the history of the Swedish fishing tackle manufacturer Abu as seen through their annual catalog, Tight Lines: The Story of Abu (2007). His most recent contribution to this journal was “Charles Kingsley and Angling: A Panacea for Stupidity and Over-mentation,” which appeared in Spring 2008.
WE FULFILL OUR EDUCATIONAL mission through our many public programs. One of the finest examples of our programming is in your hands right now: the American Fly Fisher is distributed nationally and internationally. To reach an additional audience, we hold programs at our home site in Manchester. Gallery programs, special events, and exhibitions are the public programs of choice here.

All of our on-site programs allow for regional and local participation, but exhibitions give us a greater opportunity to garner participation from afar. Our feature exhibition for 2011 is A Graceful Rise: Women in Fly Fishing Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. It will focus on fly fishing’s pioneering women and how they have inspired generations to contribute to the sport. We have solicited guidance and input from women in the fly-fishing community, including Sara Low, Karen Kaplan, Rachel Finn, Kate Fox, Pam Bates, and Joan Salvato Wulff, and we will continue to communicate with them as the exhibition becomes a reality.

We were contacted by a representative from the Office of Communications and Public Affairs at Montana State University, who wanted to make us aware of some unique contributions of a Montana guide and sent us pamphlets, catalogs, and brochures about her. As the exhibition has been discussed at various museum functions across the country, several people have sent e-mails and made phone calls to suggest other names of pioneering women and organizations.

We encourage you to keep up the momentum and to participate in this exhibition process in one or more of these ways:

• Send the names of women who might be considered for inclusion.
• Send the names of contacts who might have known a pioneering woman.
• Send the names of people who can share stories about local or regional women.
• Send the names of contacts who possess artifacts associated with significant women or organizations.
• Donate artifacts associated with a particular woman.
• Contact us about artifacts that you might be willing to lend.
• Call us with some funding sources that will consider a grant application.
• Call us simply to let us know your thoughts about this exhibition theme.

We will not be able to include every name suggested, but we promise to deliver an interesting, informative, and inspirational exhibition that will ensure that women’s contributions to the sport of fly fishing are preserved for many generations. Hoping to hear from you soon!

Cathi Comar
Executive Director
The American Museum of Fly Fishing

4070 Main Street • PO Box 42
Manchester, Vermont 05254
Tel: (802) 362-3300 • Fax: (802) 362-3308
E-MAIL: amff@amff.com
WEBSITE: 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, exhibitions, and public programs provide documentation of the evolution of fly fishing as a sport, art form, craft, and industry in the United States and abroad from its origins to the present. Rods, reels, flies, tackle, art, books, manuscripts, and photographs form the basis of the museum’s collections.

The museum provides public programs to fulfill its educational mission, including exhibitions, publications, gallery programs, and special events. Research services are available for members, visiting scholars, students, educational organizations, and writers. Contact Yoshi Akiyama at yakiyama@amff.com to schedule a visit.

Volunteer!

Throughout the year, the museum needs volunteers to help with programs, special projects, events, and administrative tasks. You do not have to be an angler to enjoy working with us! Contact Sarah Moore at smoore@amff.com to tell us how we would benefit from your skills and talents.

Join!

Membership Dues (per annum)

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<th>Membership Level</th>
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The museum is an active, member-oriented nonprofit institution. Membership dues include four issues of the American Fly Fisher; unlimited visits for your entire family to museum exhibitions, gallery programs, and special events; access to our 7,000-volume angling reference library; and a discount on all items sold by the museum on its website and inside the museum store, the Brookside Angler. To join, please contact Sarah Moore at smoore@amff.com.

Support!

The American Museum of Fly Fishing relies on the generosity of public-spirited individuals for substantial support. Please contact us if you wish to contribute funding to a specific program, donate an item for fund-raising purposes, or place an advertisement in this journal. We encourage you to give the museum consideration when planning for gifts, bequests, and memorials.