

The American Fly Fisher

Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing



FALL 2019

VOLUME 45 NUMBER 4

Lost and Found

ONE DAY IN July 2018, a large clasp envelope arrived in my mailbox. It was from book author/angling editor Art Scheck. “While winnowing the contents of back-of-the-closet boxes,” he wrote, “I came across a pile of correspondence from my magazine days. Most of it went into the trash, but the enclosed materials from Angus Cameron might be of interest to readers of the *American Fly Fisher*.”

Said enclosed materials included a seventy-year-old typed manuscript that the well-known book editor and publisher had sent to several outdoor magazines, only to be rejected each time. Cameron had filed the piece away, found it a half century later, and sent it to Scheck in 1996. “I liked the essay the first time I read it,” writes Scheck, “and I wanted to find a reason to run it in *American Angler*. But it was nothing like the sort of practical how-to articles that had become our stock in trade. It didn’t fit our editorial format. . . . Something similar happens to every editor, I’m sure—he or she just can’t figure out what to do with or about a nice article.” Agreed.

Scheck suggested I read the photocopy of the article before handling the crumbling typescript. So I did. Then I carefully handled the crumbling typescript, because *this was a crumbling typescript from the files of Angus Cameron*.

“Try Nymphs—They Won’t Bite You” turned out to be a delightful article (Scheck appropriately called it “swell”) about the typical progression from worm to plug to dry fly to nymph as well as learning to ignore experts. I immediately agreed that it belonged in the pages of this journal, and we set about getting it done. There was one line—at the bottom of the penultimate page—where the typewriter’s carriage return had slipped, and Art and I had to decipher the overlapping sentences. I think we got it right.

Happily for this editor, the rediscovered Cameron manuscript arrived hot on the heels of another: one by Vernon S. Hidy. During research into his father’s papers, Lance Hidy found, tucked into a forgotten manila folder, an essay about wet-fly expert James Leisenring. V. S. Hidy had attempted a personal tribute to his friend before, but the editors of *Sports Illustrated* had transformed that piece into an instruction manual on fly casting, stream strategy, and fly tying. This second attempt never found a publisher.

The *American Fly Fisher* is thrilled to present these two rediscovered manuscripts, complete with introductions by their respective rediscoverers. Art Scheck, in “Nice Serendipitous Experience: The

Tale of a Rediscovered Manuscript” (page 10), introduces Angus Cameron’s “Try Nymphs—They Won’t Bite You” (page 12). Lance Hidy, in “Lost and Found: V. S. Hidy’s Unpublished 1961 Tribute to James E. Leisenring” (page 2) introduces Vernon S. Hidy’s “Tribute to a Miracle” (page 6). You’re in for a treat.

From the published-at-last, we move on to the published-rather-recently. John Mundt, who finds winter the best time to hunker down and go fishing in print, reviews three books he received last year as holiday gifts, all of which have a connection to this museum. In “An Angling History Trifecta” (page 21), Mundt tells us about Austin W. Hogan’s *Austin S. Hogan: Fly Tyer & First Curator of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*, Steve Woi’s *Fly Fishing Treasures: The World of Fly Fishers and Collecting*, and Graydon Hilyard and Leslie Hilyard’s *Herbert L. Welch: Black Ghosts and Art in a Maine Guide’s Wilderness*—all beautiful, collectible works.

We have a longer review essay as well: Paul Schullery’s “William Blacker and the Atlantic Salmon Fly as ‘A Framework for the Imagination’” (page 16), in which he discusses the impressive three-volume set by Andrew Herd, Hermann Dietrich-Troeltsch, and Alberto Calzolari, calling it “the grandest, most comprehensive book-length treatment of any fly-fishing subject I’ve ever seen”—and this guy’s seen a lot of books. Here Schullery offers some helpful Blacker background and walks us through each lushly illustrated volume, which the most lucky among you may someday see for yourselves.

May you find yourself lost in some excellent reads.

KATHLEEN ACHOR
EDITOR



From Genio C. Scott, *Fishing in American Waters* (New York: The American News Company, 1875), 367.



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ON THE COVER: *Jim Leisenring and Pete Hidy looking at Leisenring's wet-fly wallet made of felt pages with a soft pigskin cover, 1940. Taken while they were working on The Art of Tying the Wet Fly, this is the only known photograph of Leisenring and Hidy together. Lance Hidy collection.*

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Lost and Found: V. S. Hidy's Unpublished 1961 Tribute to James E. Leisenring

by Lance Hidy

Vernon S. "Pete" Hidy had a breakthrough as a journalist in early 1960 when *Sports Illustrated* published his three-part article on wet-fly fishing, as chronicled in the Winter 2018 issue of the *American Fly Fisher* ("Vernon S. 'Pete' Hidy: The Chronology of a Reluctant Fishing Icon"). Originally envisioned as a personal tribute to Leisenring, it was transformed by the SI editors into an instruction manual on fly casting, stream strategy, and fly tying. Not giving up, Hidy wrote a new tribute to Leisenring two years later, but failed to find a publisher. During research into his father's papers, Lance Hidy discovered that essay, "Tribute to a Miracle." It had been tucked into a manila folder and forgotten. During his lifetime, the *American Fly Fisher* published two of Hidy's essays ("A Salute to Leisenring and Skues" [Fall 1979, vol. 6, no. 4] and "The Flyfisher's West" [Spring 1980, vol. 7, no. 2]), so it is fitting that this article makes its debut here, fifty-eight years after it was written.

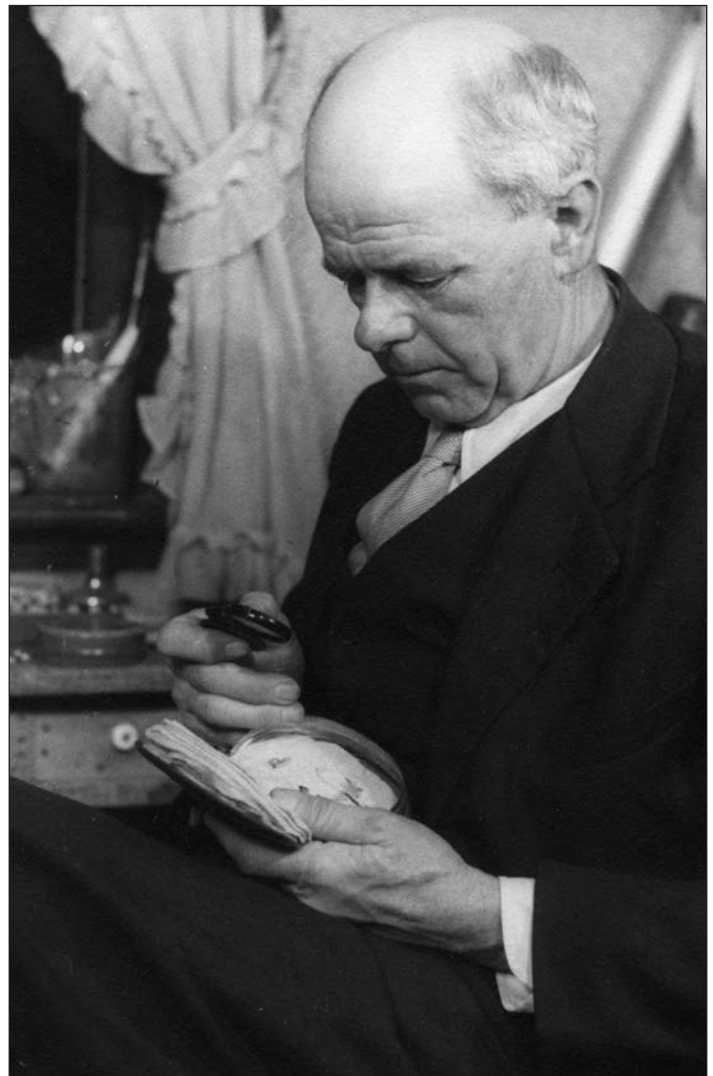
—Editor

AN AUSPICIOUS EVENT on the opposite side of the country occurred shortly before Vernon S. "Pete" Hidy and Elaine Hidy moved to Portland, Oregon: on 16 August 1954, the magazine *Sports Illustrated* (*SI*) made its debut, and from the first issue, it contained articles about fly fishing. In the magazine's bylines, Hidy recognized names from his fishing days in Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountains and in the Catskills of New York, including Ed Zern and Sparse Grey Hackle (the pseudonym of Alfred W. Miller). In the 6 April 1959 issue, there appeared a 6,000-word article by Sparse, "The Perfect Angler." The piece was amusing, full of insights about the sport, and sprinkled with names of the great fly fishers of the Northeast, but with one glaring omission: Jim Leisenring. As an aspiring journalist and avid fly fisher, Hidy had helped Leisenring create a milestone in American angling literature, *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly* (1941)—the first book on American soft-hackle flies, adapted from the British tradition. Seeing how easily Jim Leisenring was being forgotten, Hidy decided to try once more to argue the case for Leisenring's rightful place in the pantheon of American fly fishing. What happened next marked the start of a new phase of Hidy's fly-fishing career—and his return to journalism.

During the next three weeks, Hidy channeled his disappointment into positive action, crafting a letter on April 28 to the managing editor of *SI*, Sidney L. James. Hidy proposed an article about Leisenring—a long shot, to be sure.

A quarter of a century ago I met an unknown, uncommunicative yet remarkable fly fisherman on the Brodhead at Analomink in the Pocono mountains. Together we wrote a book, *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly* (Dodd, Mead & Co., 1941), and shortly thereafter several of his deadly trout flies were on display in the Flyfishers' Club of London.

The man's name was James E. Leisenring. In America his fame as a great fly-fisherman should rank with Thaddeus Norris, Theodore Gordon, Ed Hewitt, and George La Branche. In the tying of trout flies and painstaking selectivity of hackles, hooks, thread and fur he has no peer.



James E. "Jim" Leisenring, circa 1940, holding a fly wallet in his left hand and a magnifier in his right. Lance Hidy collection.

As one who loves fly-fishing, angling literature and lore, my responsibility for writing up my experience and knowledge of Mr. Leisenring is clear. In retrospect the significance of his skills and techniques increases in importance. This can be done in the manner of John McDonald's "Gordon's Fly Box," if you like, or treated as a crisp analysis of the special qualities and techniques he possessed. Perhaps you have a better suggestion.

On May 4, Richard W. Johnston, assistant managing editor, wrote back to Pete, proposing an illustrated profile of Leisenring of 3,500 to 4,000 words.

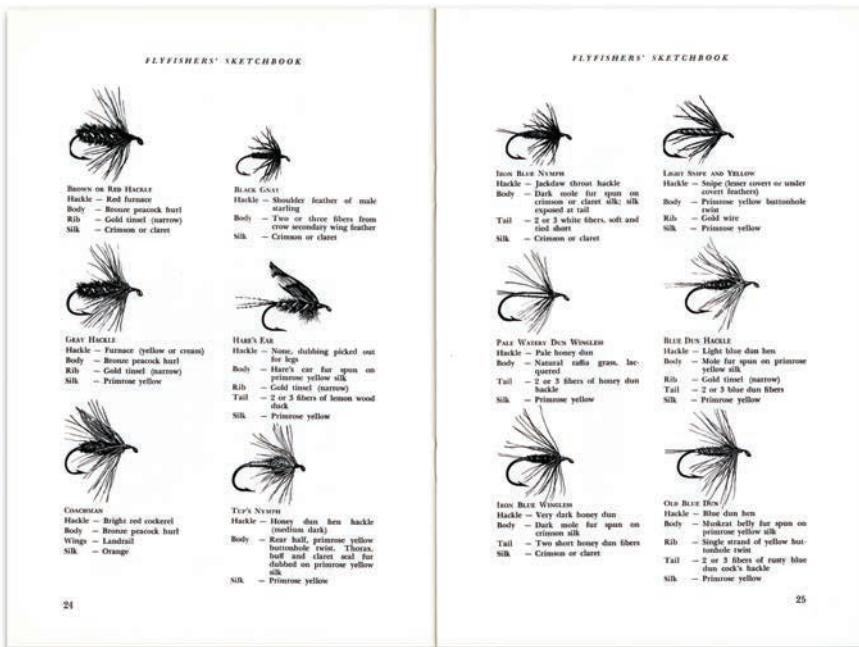
We would very much like to see your recollections of James E. Leisenring. I must confess that the name is not familiar to me, but evidently it should be. . . . In the event the material proves acceptable, which seems likely from the quality of your letter, *Sports Illustrated* will pay you \$750 [as much as \$6,500 in 2019 dollars] for first North American serial rights.

The editors likely consulted the *SI* fishing writers, including Sparse Grey Hackle and Ed Zern, as men who could vouch for Hidy and for the veracity of his claims about Leisenring. They had all fished the same water and either knew, or knew of, each other. And Sparse, it turns out, had included Leisenring in his April article, but the editors cut him. Richard Clark, who was a fishing companion of Sparse Grey Hackle and fellow member of the Anglers' Club of New York, recounted the story in a letter to Hidy (18 July 1959): "As a matter of fact Sparse had included Jim in his article (I furnished ten thousand pics), but the soandos cut Jim out along with some other pretty big names. Now Jim gets an article all to himself, and I'm very, very happy that it turns out this way."

Possibly chastened by their editorial slip, the *SI* editors worked with Hidy over the summer, getting to know him and hearing his insights about Leisenring's style of wet-fly fishing. Like author/tiers Reuben Cross and Leisenring¹ before them, they grew confident in Hidy's abilities. The project expanded to a three-part

Above right: Rachel S. Bray's portrait of Jim Leisenring hanging over the desk of Richard G. Clark in Philadelphia. Photographed by Lance Hidy in 1968.

Below right: Richard G. Clark donated twelve of Jim Leisenring's favorite flies, tied by Clark to Leisenring's specifications, to the Anglers' Club of New York in 1959. These reproductions of those flies, drawn by Charles DeFeo, appeared in the October 1959 (vol. 38, no. 3) issue of the Anglers' Club Bulletin.



May 12, 1959

Charles Rethoret
Kunkletown, Pennsylvania

Dear Charley:

You will remember me, I feel sure, as the Pete Hidy who used to fish at the Hotel Rapids with Jim Leisenring. Mr. Martin has given me your address and tells me you are "as healthy as ever!" I trust the same is true of your fine wife.

A great many miles have been covered since we last met but few memories can compare with those good old days at "Charley's Place" on the Brodhead. I often think of them. That wonderful food! And the drinks and the bull sessions. Also, I'll never forget the afternoon I came in drenched from a cloudburst and you and Amelia insisted on drying my clothes for me by the big stove in the kitchen! Incidentally, I have always envied you and unforgettable ways---As Skues would say...."the way of an innkeeper with his fisherman!" Your patience and kindness with us were far more than we deserved.

Since Big Jim's death in 1951 several requests have come to me to write of him again explaining more about his personal qualities and the features which made him such an outstanding fly fisherman.

So I am going to do it and try to get across the idea that during the 1930's dry fly purists seemed destined to exterminate the wet fly and nymph men but when the day was over and they gathered at your bar they seldom produced the fish expected of their method and manner. Do you recall this situation? Also, do you recall the anxious requests to see Jim's own trout flies.....and, sometimes, his trout? I can remember some of those sessions at the bar, on the porch, and even in the parking lot.

Your memories of those days, Charley, would lend authenticity to a little article and if you would care to remark about these matters I would be pleased to include your statements with full credit, of course. I understand the portrait of Jim still hangs in the bar and they talk about him still even tho the hurricane hurt the Brodhead. Your gesture of the portrait pleased Jim very much. It was a wonderful gesture on your part.

I understand that Mr. Skues presented a set of Jim's flies to the Fly Fishers Club of London where they are on display along with other memorabilia of angling greats.

I would love to hear from you, Charley, and promise to answer your letter promptly.

Immediately after receiving Richard Johnson's 4 May 1959 letter agreeing to an article about Leisenring, Hidy wrote to Charles Rethoret, asking for any memories that he might have of Leisenring. Rethoret replied on June 2. His letter appears on the opposite page. Lance Hidy collection.

Compliments of
CHARLIE'S HOTEL RAPIDS,
ANALOMINK, PA.

Analomink Charley

Innkeeper Charles Rethoret signed his name "Analomink Charley" on the souvenir poetry broadside reproduced on page 7.

article that would later be consolidated into a hardcover book—the tenth volume in the *Sports Illustrated Library*. Happily for Hidy, the fee went from \$750 to \$3,000—roughly \$26,000 in 2019 dollars.

With the stakes raised and a readership that was rapidly approaching the one million mark, the editors assigned their A-team to work with Hidy: associate editors Ezra Bowen and Coles Phinizy, as well as scratchboard illustrator Anthony Ravielli. I was thirteen when Phinizy and Bowen came to our home to finalize the text and layouts with my father. On two-page, blue-line grids, Bowen and Hidy counted characters, fine-tuned paragraphs, and rewrote long captions so that the last lines would extend the full measure of the column. Watching this process firsthand and then seeing the beauty of the resulting publications were factors when I chose a career in the graphic arts.

This three-part fishing tutorial appeared in March and April 1960, with Ravielli's exquisite illustrations. Leisenring's portrait appeared in the cover montage and on the opening page. In the midst of this success, one disappointment lingered: that the original idea of a personal tribute to Leisenring had been lost.

Hidy had sketched out that idea in a letter to Charles Rethoret (12 May 1959): "Since Big Jim's death in 1951 several requests have come to me to write of him again explaining more about his personal qualities and the features which made him such an outstanding fly fisherman." However, the success of the *SI* series, and the generous fee, were enough to keep Hidy from complaining. He would seek other opportunities to honor Leisenring.

Richard G. Clark, fishing companion of both Leisenring and Hidy, was candid in expressing his own disappointment to Hidy (9 April 1960):

The original draft of the article . . . was a sentimental tribute to Jim, warm, affectionate and in spots, tender. What *SI* has printed is . . . the same old "How to do it yourself" type of article, with Jim dragged in by the heels to give an illusion of authority to something that has already been printed numberless times in the regular sports mags.

Two years later Hidy would try again. He wrote to Sparse (1 March 1962) that "during the holidays I wrote a modest piece of sentiment about fly fishing called 'Tribute to a Miracle.' One of the magazines that pays well has had it now for two months."

Evidently the piece was turned down. Forgotten among Hidy's papers, it remained unpublished—until now.

THE RETHORET LETTER



Letter from Analomink Charley Rethoret, 2 June 1959, addressed to Vernon S. Hidy, 3120 S.W. Sherwood Place, Portland 1, Oregon. Lance Hidy collection.

Dear Pete,

You must have wondered what happened that I did not answer your letter before this.

We had a lot of company and we were also busy with our garden. We just built another pond on our farm, so we can almost catch brook trout from our porch. I am 72 years old and I can not navigate our mountain streams like years ago. I have my younger brother Paul which lives in Eugene, Oregon—3980 Donald Street. He is an engineer with Pierce Irrigation and he is quite a fisherman. He used to live a Vida on the shores of the McKenzie for about 25 years before moving to Eugene.

For years I tried to locate you but none of our eastern friends seemed to know what became of you.

Well now to our friend Big Jim Leisenring.

When Jim passed away we lost one of our real old timers a true blue sportsman in all that these words imply.

While Jim was a specialist (trout) wet fly man he was always learning and observing other methods of snaring the large cannibals that inhabited the lower Broadheads.

Lou Schauer and Jim used to try to beat each other. Lou with his own dry flies and Jim with his small wet flies. There was also a gang of Scotch descent worm fishermen from Wilkes-Barre. They used the finest tackle and worms that they raised in the cellar. But Big Jim beat them all. Jim used to release more trout than all the rest of them caught. When Jim used to go down to the creek he would ask Amelia [Charley's wife] if she would like a couple of trout for lunch and that's all he would keep.

Broadheads Creek is completely washed out. There won't be any good trout fishing for years to come. All you can see now is bare rock and no insect life. We went to Analomink the 5th car

that got in and it was unbelievable. You can imagine what damage was done at the junction of the Broadheads and Paradise the bridge went out and the famous Wooley cabin. There was no more railroad bank from the R. R. pool to fifth street.

I have some photos before and after the flood [Hurricane Diane, 1955, which caused record floods in eastern Pennsylvania and killed thirty-seven people at a camp on Broadhead Creek] it is unbelievable. They are still working on the streambed and bridges but do not seem to make any headway.

Here in the East there seems to be a loss of interest in dry or wet flies, everybody seems to be spin fisherman. Even our old farmers that used to be wormers are spin fishing.

One little story Jim told me one day, when he came in for his usual lunch of brandy and scrambled eggs. Going to the stream for a little observation he met a lady fishing dry fly and she said it looked like the fish had all been caught by the native worm fisherman. Jim just grinned and when the lady left Jim fished the same spot wet and caught trout after trout. Coming back to the Inn Jim found out that the lady he had met was a well-known expert Scotch fly tyer from New York City. Jim had another brandy and kept on grinning.

I have quite a nice collection of trout & bass fishing books, magazine articles on the Rapids, one of which appeared as late as January 58 in the fisherman mag. Richard Clark send me the article. He writes one a year.

When in Eugene call on my brother Paul he will be glad to see you and he may be able to give you some fishing dope on the McKenzie.

Hoping to hear from you again soon.

As ever

Analomink Charley Rethoret

Tribute to a Miracle

by Vernon S. Hidy



HOTEL RAPIDS TAP ROOM, WHERE SPORTSMEN MEET ANALOMINK, PA

Imagine Jim Leisenring sitting there having his lunch of brandy and scrambled eggs. Or Ed Zern taking off his waders there while Charley Rethoret tells Jim that Ed caught fish out of a hole where Jim got nothing. This is the room where Jim's portrait hung, with the framed flies. Lance Hidy collection.

This is a memory of Charles Rethoret and James Leisenring at Hotel Rapids on Brodhead Creek during the Great Depression, c. 1934.

THE WORLD APPLAUDS excellence in sports. Shouts of spectators delirious with the drama of championship play echo in every home. Each breathtaking flight of a ball, every brilliant play of athletes destined for a hall of fame is telecast.

One sport, however, is beyond reach of zoom lenses. One player cares not for fame. And yet, his sport is centuries old; it is popular today as well. Who is he? What is his game?

He is the angler: a solitary matador in a river who need not kill, as the bull-fighter must, to please himself or a crowd. He is the artist-fisherman who pleasures trout with a fly. His sport is sensuous as love.

The angler's glory is a graceful line whispering its pleasure to a wand of vibrant bamboo, currents surging at his thighs. Birdsong bursts upon him mixed with fragrances of mint and honeysuckle. His tranquility is shattered only by flashes of trout-lightning.

Kipling praised the strike of a trout by saying, "I have lived. Ah, the pride of it, the regal splendor of it—the thrill that ran down from fingertip to toe."²

Later an obscure angler, a countryman of Kipling's, defined the splendor. "The way of a trout with a fly," wrote angler Skues, "combines the poise of the eagle in the air, the swift certainty of a serpent upon a rock, and the mystery of a ship in the midst of the sea, with the incalculableness of the way of a man with a maid."³ Earlier wise men had wondered at all of these marvels but only an angler could know they are all possessed by a trout.

Do these delights tempt you? Be warned. Pause to consider what God has done. He has endowed the trout alone, among all fishes of Creation, with a miracle of virtue which enables it to destroy the vanity of the proud as wondrously as it measures the rectitude of the humble. Poseurs dare not search for trout with a fly. The miracle vanishes before those who lust for meat alone. Only the pure of heart and those blessed with serendipity (the gift of finding unsought treasure) may see the miracle plain.

Even the crude serendipity of a novice fly fisher can be full of surprise. After col-

lege I moved from the creeks and lakes of the Middle West, haunts of bass, perch, and pickerel, to the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, habitat of anglers and trout. Only small fish accepted my offerings at first. I was shaken, but determined to try again. Who could resist the charms of Brodhead Creek there in the thirties?

Anglers used to rendezvous on the Brodhead at an old inn named Hotel Rapids. They called it, fondly, Charley's Place because a delightful French chef, Charles Rethoret, owned it. The river there, though hard-fished public water, harbored trout and pools so challenging that anglers came from the private clubs upstream. Moreover, Charley's Place radiated an atmosphere of genial expectancy and imminent angling achievement for you from the moment of your arrival.

Charley smothered his anglers, young and old, with affection. "Vot vly veeshermen vee haf here already! Now YOU!" To all he gave encouragement and, if needed, sympathy. A storm could drench you or you might fall in the river. No matter. Charley and Amelia, his wife, would put a hot drink in your hand beside the aromas on the wood-burning stove in the

Herman To His Grandchildren

Listen my children and now you will hear,
'bout fishers incarnate and all their proud gear.
When I was a lad only six inches long,
I was anxious and hungry and very head strong.
My father was big and as keen as a fox,
He told me to feed only under the rocks.
But one day I swam to the head of the pool,
And jumped and cavorted according to rule.
When all in a sudden I saw in a flash,
A luscious brown bug so I made a big splash.
I opened my mouth and sucked the bug in,
Good Heavens, I found I had bit on a pin.
I tried running for home but it was of no use,
My mouth was held fast like the grip of a noose.
My thoughts they were terrible, alack and alack,
When all of a sudden I found I had slack.
I jumped in the air with very much glee,
I shook my head hard and found I was free.
So back home I swam a much wiser child,
Resolving right then to no more be wild.
Each year I have staid in this very nice pool,
Watching good friends depart while I remain cool.
I've learned about Gordons, Cahills and Duns,
Of Leonards and Schaurers and Thomas Mills Sons.
Of waders and jackets, hobnails and chains,
I also tell time by the roar of the trains.
I've heard about Wetzell, Bergman and Ried,
So take my advise when you go to feed.
Stay down near the bottom and under a stone,
You will find luscious nymphs you need never roam.
I, THE GREAT HERMAN, in this my back yard,
Weigh ten pounds six ounces and in length am a yard.
I some times go out in the evening and night,
To give some poor fisher a terrible fright.
I have even taken a flip at his fly,
And watched the death look appear in his eye.
But being so big and terribly mean,
I have little trouble the fisher to clean.
For then there's the Doctor from Penn's western end,
Who comes on each season for days he will spend.
Trying hard as he can every fly in his book,
Defeated he departs defeated his look.
He has rods by Hardy, Leonard and Schaurer,
His wife she picks water cress and now a flower.
His Hardy best reels are jewelled very fine,
A Corona Superba is his tapered line.
He's really a sportsman and a good angler too,
But I prefer to live, now truly wouldn't you?
Then there is Sib from Rhode Island far away,
Who with Kitty and Spooky comes on for a stay.
Sib has a new rod—a Thomas I've guessed,
Ha, Ha, Old thing Sibley I'm still on my nest.
But Kitty with her Coulson casts a beautiful fly,
She hit me a smack right close to my eye.
Am sorry for Kitty, I wouldn't be cause,
Distressed was her manner, her nerves very wrought.

Compliments of
CHARLIE'S HOTEL RAPIDS,
ANALOMINK, PA.

Analomink Charley

But I the GREAT HERMAN do not feel very meany,
They both calm themselves with a DOUBLE MARTINI.
Then, too, we find Butterwick a faithful young soul,
Always parking himself at my restful hole.
He tries very hard, but alas and alas,
He gives up in disgust and goes out for bass.
There's also a guy I frequently see,
That knows all the answers from A down to B.
Tells all about flies, their body and hackle,
And wisely criticizes the fondest tackle.
If Bill uses a twelve, he'll say use a ten;
If Lou's fishing wet, now change again.
The leader is four X, the fly a sparse twenty,
"Change now to a fan wing and you will catch plenty."
"The water's too high, the water's too low;
The fish are in fast runs, why cast in the slow."
The barometer says do not stray very far,
You generally find him right close to the bar.
This fellow's name—Oh, what does it matter,
He wades in the stream with a terrible clatter.
But he is the fellow, don't laugh what I mean,
That keep us poor fishes alive in the stream.
He's on every creek, come the first opening day;
With two dollar license many fish he would say.
But only a bite from a sucker he gets,
So back to his car he sits down and frets.
"The stream is fished out, I'm out just two dollars,"
We all hear his raves, his cries and his hollers.
I'll tell you his name, it's as old as the moats,
Some call him John Doe, others say it's Joe Doaks.
There's one expert fisher many times I have curst,
Never fishes for me till July thirty-first.
He raises his rabbits, his pigs and some barley,
This sportsman's name is An'lomink CHARLEY.
For this Charlie I've mentioned, would have you believe,
Is a purist so pure he would never deceive.
His flies must be tied very sparse and so thin,
The hooks very light, the wings Mandarin.
But out where the hens and his roosters do cackle,
He digs for himself some wriggly hackle.
He sneaks down the bank with rod, worm and spinner,
In hopes he can have me for his biggest dinner.
Or perhaps after Summer and then in the Fall,
To hang me up high on the Liars' Club wall.
But I, the GREAT HERMAN, am still here to state,
I never will meet that horrible fate.
And after the Winter and late in the Spring,
When trees are in bud and flowers will bring—
Our good friend the Doc, also Joe Doaks and Bill,
They'll all exchange greetings by old Stokes' Mill.
The season has opened for us once again,
So on the alert and from flies let's refrain.
Just stay on the bottom, little fishes, my dears,
And grow into HERMANS thru the years and the years.

DON BROOKS,
111 Fairview Road,
Springfield, Pa.

This souvenir poem, signed by innkeeper Charles Rethoret, was found among Hidy's papers. Written by Don Brooks, a frequent guest of Hotel Rapids, it memorializes what Hidy described as Rethoret's "mythical monster of a trout who defended a nearby Brodhead pool against all comers, including the Wilkes-Barre minnow and worm fishermen. (Herman splintered fly rods and received credit for every rod broken by any trout in the river.)" Lance Hidy collection.

kitchen where you dried. Another drink? Dry clothes? Their guest was a king.

Your host's eyes would twinkle darkly, his black mustache would twitch at the sight of anything which gratified the inner man: a beautiful lady, a handsome trout, an angling book or a box of flies. His eggs *en cocotte* would be ready for you at dawn with wild strawberry jam on Amelia's own bread.

Upon your arrival Charley would show you to your room. On the old stairway he would pause to bring you up to date on Herman, his mythical monster of a trout who defended a nearby Brodhead pool against all comers, including the Wilkes-Barre minnow and worm fishermen. (Herman splintered fly rods and received credit for every rod broken by any trout in the river.) Then he briefed you on stream conditions, fly hatches, desirable patterns and anglers on the river that weekend. You, in turn, reported your luck, good or bad, according to an unspoken law of the inn.

One of life's golden moments awaited the young angler whose catch for the day impressed Charley. He might permit you then, privately, to view his collection of trout flies or browse through his first editions of books on angling. He had brought many such books with him when he fled the cities for an atmosphere of trout and he took pride in using them to nurture the interest of a novice in the miracle of trout. He would loan you a book or leave you there alone in the corner to study the color plates of mayflies, one of the ephemeral insects anglers imitate with feathers and fur.

The prose, too, would catch your eye. "Innocent stranger! Thou who readest these lines! perhaps you never caught a trout. If so, thou knowest not for what life was originally intended. Thou are a vain, insignificant mortal! pursuing shadows! Ambition lures thee, fame dazzles, wealth leads thee on, panting! Thou are chasing spectres, goblins that satisfy not. If thou has not caught a trout, this world is to thee, as yet, a blank, existence is a dream. Go and weep."⁴ So wrote Thaddeus Norris in America before the Civil War.



Very rare guest card from Hotel Rapids, granting fishing permission. Rethoret was an early advocate of catch and release: "If you want to catch more fish . . . kill less." Lance Hidy collection.

On the wall, framed boldly for all, lettered in Charley's beautiful calligraphy, were Walton's words: "O, sir, doubt not but that Angling is an art; is it not an art to deceive a trout with an artificial fly?"⁵⁵

One day in June a quarter of a century ago, I met an old angler there above Signal Tower Flats. He possessed a wondrous way with a fly. All the elixirs of trouting filled the air. It was a proper stage for meeting this trout-stream Ty Cobb, versatile and bold of technique, yet generous and kind.

About noon, a poor hour to catch trout, I was wading along casting a Royal Coachman. My creel was empty and most anglers there that morning complained of their luck. Suddenly a trout jumped by the far bank. Upstream a rod arched and quivered from a fist half-hidden by a giant boulder. Who had hooked one of these wise fish? At noon! I hurried around a log jam to see the man play his prize.

A tall gentleman wearing a fishing hat weathered by many seasons on trout rivers was leaning forward there, rod poised against a

fish possessed by a fury to gain the freedom of his rhododendron root sanctuary beneath the currents. Finally the angler's skill prevailed. He brought it to net and waded ashore. Bronzed and weathered as his hat, the man's face had the integrity of the pure in heart. His brown eyes pierced mine and crinkled with friendliness at the sight of a novice. He kept the fish. As he lifted the lid of the creel to cover the newcomer with moist fern I saw three or four more heavy trout in there.

"They'll take this fly, as you can see." A tiny dark pattern unknown to me glis-

tened on his forefinger for me to examine. Then he disappeared after trout downstream where I had been.

That evening I described the incident to Charley.

"Zat vud be Beeg Jeem, zee best vee haf." That was all; no one seemed to know his last name. I sensed, however, that "Big Jim" was a name of distinction.

A year later I met him on the river and he recognized me. It was late afternoon, an hour when fishermen love to chat. We sat on a log, had a smoke, and talked of trout. Soon he was sharing with me his

treasure of lore. From the depths of his fishing coat he brought a box of dry flies he had tied with the care amateurs bestow on their sport.

"Before long the Blue Dun will start to hatch. Try these." The three flies in my hand were beyond price for they were tied with the rare natural blue dun hackle. Awed by such fisherman's luck, I thanked him. Then I assured him I would fish each fly carefully and prepared to start for a pool I knew of upstream.

"Wait."



Set of flies that Leisenring tied and gave Rethoret to hang next to the portrait. Collection of Bernie Pociask. Photographs by Lance Hidy.





*Jim Leisenring and Pete Hidy looking at Leisenring's wet-fly wallet made of felt pages with a soft pigskin cover, 1940. Taken while they were working on *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly*, this is the only known photograph of Leisenring and Hidy together. Lance Hidy collection.*

There was more! He was bringing out a fly book now. Between the pigskin covers was a wealth of small wet flies. From one of the pages he removed three. They were tied simply, with great restraint, using only a turn of partridge feather, a bit of fur from an English hare, and a wisp of gold wire.

"Tomorrow the little brown sedge will be on the water. Fish these deep out there around the boulders. You will catch trout." There. In my hand now were the secrets needed to put big trout in my creel under moist fern. I was to learn, however, unless my luck ran high indeed, that I would need far more than these flies. For as few players achieved the brilliant play of Ty Cobb, so few anglers could possess Big Jim's devotion to the way of a trout with a fly, his stream strategy and knowledge of the river.

The hour before dark was always a memorable time on the Brodhead. Upstream that evening swallows, bats, and trout were pursuing mayflies across the water with a frenzy of excitement. Other sly hunters, the gnats, were there too, and this was their hour to attack fishermen. Assaulted by the gnats, I lost a Blue Dun in the jaw of Herman's cousin

trying to hurry him toward the net. Then I fled for my life to Charley's Place.

Big Jim usually left the stream well ahead of the gnats. By sundown he sought refreshment and talk with his friend Charley. Rod, net, and creel were left on the porch while he rested at the bar. He usually departed before any of the battle-scarred fishermen stomped in from the stream.

There were times, however, when they arrived before he left. Smitten by the gnats and frustrated by the trout, some observed critically that the Brodhead was overrated as a trout stream. Fiercely proud of the river's reputation, Charley would smile and lead them to the porch. There in Big Jim's creel would be fresh evidence. The trout would reward the skill of the pure.

In later years the old angler taught me many of his secrets. He did not teach so much by words as by his example on the river. About all he would say was, "Fish your fly so the trout may enjoy and appreciate it."

He believed time was very important. "Haste is usually the downfall of the angler instead of the fish. You cannot rush a fish. A big trout knows and sees as much as you, probably more." Such was

his humility, such was his empathy, two qualities every angler does need.

You will need a sense of strategy too, and the skill to make your fly come alive in the water. And a certain self-control as the trout follow your fly and search it with suspicion. Then, in the instant of its escape from the water, they may take it with a swirl and a splash of satisfaction, a sight equal to the thrill of watching Cobb or Robinson steal home from third base.

Go to the river, then. Adventure there with your rod of bamboo. Keep your fly hooks sharp. Bend them out a trifle at times when trout come "short," as they say, and swerve at your fly in play. Let such clowns hook themselves on the *outside* of their jaw.

Accept the vagaries of Nature as they are: too fugitive for any neat classifying in a book. Watch the yellow jacket strut on the lupine at your knee, study the drowning of an iridescent beetle in a trout pool, note the struggle of a dragonfly nymph in a backwater eddy.

Tread softly, the serpent may be about. Pause in faith as the hummingbird sips nectar from a foxfire; perchance a vagrant young song sparrow will flutter to a rest on your fly rod as they have been known to do when an angler is quiet.

One day as you lean forward in the river and smell the mint, the trout-lightning will flash at your fly. You alone will see it; you alone will feel the shock from fingertip to toe. That is part of the miracle. Another part you will find in old angling books . . . still another when you share some trout flies with a novice on a log.



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Nice Serendipitous Experience: The Tale of a Rediscovered Manuscript

by Art Scheck

TWO DAYS AGO while looking for something else,” the letter begins, “I had the nice serendipitous experience of finding the attached article that I wrote sometime in the 1940s.”

The date atop the letter is 10 May 1996, making the article nearly half a century old when it first landed on my desk. At the time, I worked for Abenaki Publishers in Bennington, Vermont. We had recently revived *Fly Tyer* magazine as a freestanding title, and for a while I had been serving as editor of both that periodical and *American Angler*. Article proposals, some of them pretty strange, made up a goodly portion of my mail in those days, but the arrival of a fifty-year-old unpublished typescript still counted as a rarity.

The author of the letter and the Truman-era article was Angus Cameron. Earlier that year, he had sent a short note asking me to forward a letter to two *American Angler* contributors whose work he had enjoyed. En passant, his note said, “I think your magazine is the best fishing journal I have ever read.” High praise—heady praise—considering the source. Although I’d never met him, I knew of Angus Cameron. Everyone in the trade knew of Angus Cameron. He was a giant in American publishing, admired for both his skills as an editor and his integrity and courage during a dark period of American history. Most people in outdoor publishing also knew of Angus Cameron as a lifelong angler and hunter. And here the great man, then eighty-seven years old, had sent me an article—an essay, really—to consider.

The topic is nymph fishing for trout, more or less, although like most good essays the piece rambles a bit. But let’s return to Cameron’s typescript and how it came to be published in the *American Fly Fisher* after a short biographical sketch of its author.

Don Angus Cameron (1908–2002) had his first big success in the publishing business when he helped bring the original edition of *The Joy of Cooking* to market in 1936. Two years later, Cameron went to New York to work for the Little, Brown publishing house, where he



*Angus Cameron in his later years. A giant among American editors, Cameron had his first big success with the publication of *The Joy of Cooking* in the 1930s, endured persecution by red-hunters after World War II, returned to mainstream publishing in the 1950s, and continued writing into his early nineties at the turn of the twenty-first century. Photo courtesy of Kevin Cameron.*

became editor in chief and worked with both fiction authors and historians.¹

Cameron’s own politics leaned left, and during his time with Little, Brown he published the works of left-wing authors. In the late 1940s, as fear of communism and communists led to persecution and blacklists, Cameron’s editorial choices became a liability for him and his employer. According to the author Jonathan Coleman, who is writing his biography, Cameron was “the first editor in American book publishing to be targeted by McCarthyites.”² He was a target “because of the books he was publishing,” Coleman said when we spoke by telephone.³ The historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who was published by Little, Brown at the time, denounced Cameron for his editorial decisions and pushed for his firing. The publishing house refused to fire its editor in chief, but eventually the pressure, including Congressional pressure, became too great, and Cameron resigned in 1951.⁴ Like other literary figures, and like their coun-

terparts in the movie business, Cameron was blacklisted during the McCarthy era.

Those were literally years in the wilderness. Cameron and his family lived in a borrowed cabin in the Adirondacks and for a while in Alaska.⁵ He started his own firm and published works by blacklisted and controversial authors. Among the books Cameron published was *False Witness*, by Harvey Matusow. In his autobiographical book, Matusow, who had been a paid informant for the government and a witness against alleged communists, admitted that he had repeatedly lied as both an informant and a witness before Congress.⁶

Throughout the McCarthy period, Cameron refused to betray his principles or his insistence on the liberty of authors to express ideas, however controversial or unpopular. According to Coleman, “Howard Fast [the author of *Spartacus*] considered Angus a hero.”⁷ Fast served prison time for defying the McCarthyites; yet he looked up to Angus Cameron as a hero.



"Aug 18, 1993. AC & trophy with Eric Leiser at John Posh's shop" are the details noted on the back of this photo from the collection of Kevin Cameron. Eric Leiser, of course, was the author of *The Complete Book of Fly Tying*, *The Book of Fly Patterns*, *Fly-Tying Materials*, and other books. During his time with the Alfred A. Knopf publishing house, Angus Cameron edited the work of Leiser and other fly-fishing authors.

Angus Cameron returned to mainstream publishing when he was hired by Alfred A. Knopf in 1959. In 1961, Knopf published the first edition of Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, and although Cameron himself did not edit the book, "Knopf would never have published Julia Child without Angus having given his blessing," according to Coleman.⁸

Alfred Knopf let Cameron choose manuscripts on topics for which he had a passion, and Angus added titles on hunting and fishing to the firm's list. The great fly-tying author Eric Leiser, for instance, was edited by Cameron; Leiser's *The Complete Book of Fly Tying* and *The Book of Fly Patterns*, both Angus Cameron editorial projects, are among the most successful and respected fly-tying books ever published. Combining three of his loves, in 1983 Cameron cowrote the *L. L. Bean Game and Fish Cookbook* (with Judith Jones).

Sometime during the years when he was a target of red-hunters and McCarthyites, Angus Cameron wrote an essay about trout fishing with nymphs. He couldn't sell it. "I sent it to three outdoor magazines, one after the other, and the rejection letters I received sounded as if the same man had written all three," the letter he sent me in 1996 explains. "The line was 'It's a nice article but the expert is our stock in trade and your piece takes too big a fall out of them.'" (Little has changed in seventy years.)

The homeless essay lay idle in Cameron's files for years and then decades, until he came across it while looking for something else and sent it to me on a

whim. I agreed with the editors who had returned it nearly half a century earlier: it's a nice article. And I agreed with their next word, too: *but . . .*

I liked the essay the first time I read it, and I wanted to find a reason to run it in *American Angler*. But it was nothing like the sort of practical how-to articles that had become *our* stock in trade. It didn't fit our editorial format. But it was an essay by Angus Cameron. But by 1996, no one needed to urge trout fishermen to try nymphs; we were all using them, and using them with techniques and tackle that anglers of the 1940s couldn't have imagined. The piece was dated, in both its advice and language. But the language and sentences were wonderful. But if I ran the piece, surely some readers would ask, "Who cares about this antique advice?"

Something similar happens to every editor, I'm sure—he or she just can't figure out what to do with or about a nice article.

Time passed, issues passed, the company acquired another title and launched yet another, more issues passed, we dabbled in book publishing, I worked to the point of burnout, another editor took the helm of *American Angler*, the company changed hands, one title folded, time and issues passed, the company changed hands again, I left the company and eventually became a freelancer, life happened, and Angus Cameron's essay "Try Nymphs—They Won't Bite You" lay idle in *my* files for years and eventually decades.

I hadn't ever meant to keep the typescript and I had forgotten all about it until my own nice serendipitous experi-

ence while winnowing old correspondence and other treasures this year. When I came across the by-now-seventy-year-old essay, I knew I had to do *something* with it, because the piece is historically interesting for several reasons. This journal seemed the obvious venue, so I mailed the typescript and a few of Angus's letters to Kathleen Achor, the editor. The results lie before you.

"Try Nymphs—They Won't Bite You" has some fun with experts and snobs. Its author seems to have had little use for purists and self-proclaimed experts. In the letter that accompanied the typescript, Angus describes himself as "this angler who has become so bored with purists that he's almost ready to quit reading about fishing." As late as 2000, when he was ninety-one years old, Angus contributed a short piece titled "What Burns My Ass: Screw the Purists. It's Just Fishing" to *Outside* magazine.⁹ It's a splendid little rant against angling purity and pretension.

Angus's leisurely introduction also traces an angler's progress, from cane pole and worm to revolving-spool plug-casting rig to fly rod and eventually to the subtleties of nymph fishing. (Spinning and spin-cast gear were unknown when Angus wrote the piece.) That one begins with simple gear and methods and grows into progressively more challenging and sophisticated techniques, and that one does it not so much to kill more fish as for the pleasure of acquiring knowledge and skill, is an idea as old as Walton's and Cotton's writings. The first couple of pages of Angus's typescript follow an oft-waded stream, although in this case, a distinctly American one.

A handwritten note atop the first page of the typescript says, "It should have been titled 'Sixth Sense Striking with the Nymph.'" When Angus wrote the essay in the 1940s, trout fishermen really did think like that about nymph fishing. It was a dark mystery, a sport for sorcerers. No such thing as a strike indicator existed. Decades ago, a good nymph fisherman just *knew*, through some preternatural or maybe supernatural sense, where his submerged fly was and when a trout had taken it, and he wouldn't or couldn't say *how* he knew. Angus Cameron's essay is a glimpse into a way that fly fishing used to be. I remember my dad, in the 1960s, whispering, "He's *nymphing*!" as we watched the local expert follow the mysterious drift of an invisible fly with his droopy fiberglass rod (for some reason, a nymphing rod *had* to have a super-slow action). And when the old guy lifted his slow, limber fly rod and we saw it buck and dance against the strength of a trout, Dad would say something like,

"Damn, *that's* fishing," and I heard the admiration in his voice. (Of course, Angus also implies that all the mystery really boils down to blind luck.)

Angus's cover letter concludes with, "It seemed to me that with the proper introduction setting the stage this old article might at last have become current. In any case, I think you will enjoy reading it."

And I bet you will, too.

My deepest thanks to Jonathan Coleman, Angus Cameron's biographer and the author of the biography-in-progress *What He Stood For: The Courage and Many Worlds of Angus Cameron*, and to Kevin Cameron, Angus's son. Mr. Coleman provided valuable biographical information,

and Mr. Cameron gave his blessing to the publication of his father's seventy-year-old essay and provided photographs of Angus. This project would not have been possible without these two gentlemen.



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Try Nymphs—They Won't Bite You

by D. A. Cameron

THIS BUSINESS OF FISHING has a hierarchy all its own, a caste system that begins to exert its powerful influence on a guy that day many years ago when, as a kid with a can of worms and a cane pole, he sees his first bait caster plying his mysterious way along a favorite stream. That untouchable from the netherworld of artificials starts a process inexorable that metamorphoses the barefoot boy from still fisherman, lowly cocoon-wrapped worm, through the pupa stage of plug caster, until he finally emerges the glittering butterfly that the fly fisherman is supposed to be. (With apologies to the bait caster, but even he will admit that the process is usually in this order.)

And in a way this is as it should be. But, darn it all, it's awful tough on the novice. When at fourteen or so you get up the nerve actually to acquire your first casting rod and reel, and begin to search about for information on what to do with the crazy complicated outfit, you're probably doomed to feel a swine among pearls. The experts just won't have much to say that you can understand or use, and if they do, they'll *seem* at least to make proficiency seem a will o' the wisp

unattainable to the lout you feel yourself to be. And unless you're lucky enough to cut your casting eye teeth on an Ontario lake or some other surefire paradise, you'll soon wonder if you shouldn't have stuck to sunnies and rock bass. At least you did catch fish in those good old times.

But if you're able to winnow a bit of the grain of what the experts say from the chaff of how they sometimes say it—and if a bass (or two) does at last actually hook himself on that plug you've battered and splashed around for a couple of seasons without so much as a strike—well, then you're hooked more deeply than the fish and doomed to the exquisite torture of becoming an angler.

One day, when you've gotten to the stage where you can match a little experience with the experts' advice and read what they say with some of the sangfroid of a bumbling adolescent on his, say, third date with a girl—when you've just begun to add a modicum of confidence to what was so recently rank temerity—well, *then* you'll probably run across a fly fisherman in action!

Now you've heard about these mythical creatures in your favorite outdoor

magazine, but you probably haven't had the sheer gall to read an article by one, not you, poor fumbler of a bait caster, for you're certain that their mysterious and delicate ways just ain't for the likes of you. You've confined your reading to such mundane matters as "The Weedless Lure on the Largemouth" or "Popping for Bronzebacks." You've probably left strictly alone such esoteric and forbidding titles as "The Relative Light Reflection of 4x versus 3x Leaders in Midday Brook Trout Angling, and Its Effect on the Refusal Rise." Somehow an article with a topic sentence something like this, "It was more than forty years after I first began to angle with the fly that I really learned, etc., etc.," has an odd tendency to make the novice cast a baleful eye at insurance actuarial tables and wonder momentarily just what a guy's chances are of living long enough to catch a trout with a fly rod.

But back to your first fly fisherman. The closer he gets, the louder your plug splash sounds to you. Your formerly trim-appearing wooden minnow takes on the general size and shape of a scow anchor. When you can no longer bear the odious contrast, you erase yourself in

the bushes and watch him ply his noble way upstream. In your mind's eye his sensitive nostrils seem to twitch with disgust as he notices the condition of the pool you've left for him. It even seems to you a bit of a cesspool when you see how you've muddied the weed's edge with a tangled plug. But amidst this abject situation you do notice something as he passes. He is human just as you and I. And it sets the wheels in action again, and before long you're stealing a glance inside the paragraphs of those articles and stories on fly fishing instead of passing them by with a sigh. Next thing you know you've got a fly rod and outfit, and the whole dirt-eating, humiliating process begins anew. So you catch a couple of trout, and again you're hooked, and again the experts begin to belabor your ego.

But if you think you've eaten humble pie from the experts, wait until your fly-

fishing butterfly wings begin to tarnish when the experts start to tell you about nymph fishing. The full-blown nymph expert's talk about the niceties of nymph fishing makes dry-fly fishing seem like gill-net work in comparison. And as for bait casting—well, dynamiting might fit the case. Just read an article called, say, “The Psychic Factor in Angling with the Nymph” or one titled “The Balanced Outfit and Sixth Sense Striking with the Nymph.” Just do it and see—see if your dry-fly rod doesn't begin to feel like a gig in your hands and a nicely cocked fanwing doesn't take on the delicacy of a leathery old night crawler. Again you cast your eyes heavenward toward the never-never land of the nymph expert.

Now don't get me wrong. Part of this dissatisfaction with some of the experts is self-flagellation, the old inferiority complex whipped up to fever pitch.

Some of their advice is written as if it were from one expert to another—I won't back down on that—but, if you don't try for trout with the nymph, it's your own fault. Nymph fishing is both fun and productive for the dub. I ought to know: I am distinctly in this category and I think the following will prove me right on both counts. I'll bet a lot of them would be surprised to learn that this poor fisherman actually took their collective advice, garnered painstakingly from here and there, discounted some of the seemingly insuperable obstacles such as “sixth-sense striking” and what not and took a nice mixed bag of nine rainbows and browns the first day he ever attempted to take trout with a nymph.

I was fishing the Croton with my wife, Whit Burnett (of *Story* magazine fame), and Guido D'Agostino, the novelist, and just wasn't doing any good at all. Whit and Guido had each taken fish on spinners and streamers—the latter had disappeared downstream from me toward a favorite spot of his own. I was floundering about, changing from dry flies to spinners and back again without much idea about what I was trying to accomplish, when I suddenly remembered that I had a half dozen nymphs in my box. Furtively casting an eye upstream where Whit was fishing and then glancing hither and yon to make sure that no other real fisherman was grinning at my temerity—I knew that any expert watching me could tell at a glance that I had no business indulging in such artistic work—I tied on a bright orange and black number and laid a cast upstream.

Now I swear by all the candor of St. Izaak that I caught a trout on my very first cast with a nymph. The line rolled greasily downstream and slightly away from me, following the current toward a shallow riffle just below my position. When I estimate that the leader and nymph were just about ready to swirl into the fast water, I lifted the rod tip and accelerated the retrieving of the slack. But there wasn't any, and the throb I felt wasn't the current; it was a fish. He was an undersized brown, but in my book he'll always occupy a special place alongside other cherished “firsts.”

I was simply goggle-eyed jubilant. During the next few casts I congratulated myself on the sixth-sense striking ability that the experts are always writing about. There was only the faintest twinge of conscience that told me that I had not the foggiest notion that a fish had been on when I lifted the rod tip. Even this prickling of dishonesty disappeared when the same thing happened above the fast water below the dam. This was a 9-inch rainbow. It was the easiest thing in the



*Sheila and Angus Cameron on New York's Ausable River, 1941.
Photo courtesy of Kevin Cameron.*

world to convince myself that just the veriest twitch of the line had caused me to lift the tip and again be rewarded with a fish. Teeming with self-congratulation at my intuitive skill, I spent the next hour *trying to pound up fish!* I finally gave up the nymph and resorted to the “cruder” but more familiar and time-tried dry fly.

It was a half hour after this that D’Agostino appeared from downstream with eight or nine trout in his creel and the report that he’d taken them all on spinners.

“Any luck?” he queried.

I displayed my lone fish and explained loftily that I had taken it on a nymph. He was duly impressed—or at least he gave a good imitation of a fisherman with fish deferring to the moral superiority of his comparatively fishless, but more skillful “betters,” and suggested that I try the nymph in the same waters he’d just left below the bridge.

Vaguely depressed by my look in his creel and by the look on his face, I crossed the road. Two boys were fishing the other side of the bridge. Carefully exhibiting what I hoped was just the proper balance between the camaraderie I felt for two barefoot kids, respect for their *two* trout, and the fears I had that they’d taunt me for a “sport,” I slipped downstream past several pools and little rapids until I came to a setup inviting both for its seclusion and its promise.

I’ll spend a moment describing the spot for the conditions are probably important to what follows. I came out across the stream from a deep, dark debris pile—sheltered hole. The opposite bank was clay and gently sloping and decorated by a couple of sticks abandoned by some bait fisherman who, I surmised ruefully, probably didn’t know the torments of artificials. For a moment I was assailed by a nostalgia that wasn’t lessened by my memory of my meeting upstream with my young friends.

But my reverie was only moments long for just upstream from the hole was a most inviting set of conditions. A gravelly rapids, broken here and there by larger rocks, cut across the stream. Above this was a long glide, shallow on one side, deep and inviting on the other. Toward the head of the pool on the deep side, and not many feet below another rapids, was a large outjutting snag and below it two large boulders.

I decided for no good reason to try the nymph again. I decided that I’d give Dumb Luck another chance and tied on one of the three remaining nymphs that had survived my maladroitness earlier tactics. From a position near the tail of the pool, I cast upstream and across and watched the leader sink just a foot or two above the snag. The line floated down-



*Angus Cameron many years ago, with a small-bore rifle and a woodchuck.
Photo courtesy of Kevin Cameron.*

stream rapidly and kept me busy staying ahead of the slack. When I thought it was too near the tail rapids, I lifted the rod and repeated the process. As I lifted the rod on the fourth or fifth cast, I felt a fast, slashing resistance, and a moment later the fish had streaked through the gravel rapids. I played him out in the bait fisherman’s pool below and soon netted a nice 11-inch rainbow.

My feelings were mixed between elation and disgust. I retired to the bank to think it all over and incidentally to open my catch to see whether my nymph was a vagrant fancy or a part of a steady diet. Sure enough he was full of nymphs, which I think now were probably alderfly larvae. My artificial looked nothing like the natural, but this didn’t worry me at the moment. I realized now that they were feeding on nymphs. But what explained my unaccountable luck in catching them sight unseen? I felt somehow as if I had been cheating someone, for I knew now that neither in the instance of the last fish, nor in the case of the first two, had I struck because of any evidence of a taking fish. In all three cases I had not been striking; I had been lifting to keep line, leader, and lure from fouling in the rapids.

I smoked two cigarettes, ate a sandwich, and grubbed around in my mind amidst the accumulated debris of my short expe-

riences and my reading on the subject to see if I couldn’t turn up something of use to me in my present crisis. The sum total of my cogitation was that the fish were lying just above the rapids waiting for the potluck of the current, which, from the look of the rainbow’s belly, was very nutritive and plentiful indeed.

Well, if they were lying just upstream from the rapids, I’d shorten my casts and drift the nymph right to them, I thought. I did this for a full fifteen minutes without a nudge and finally concluded that I had taken the pool’s only fish or that my not-too-adroit casting had chased the trout to cover. Somewhere about this time my subconscious mind turned up something after all. I remembered a conversation I had once had with my friend Lou Henderson. He had told me how, from the vantage point of a high bank, he had watched a big trout lurking behind a rock follow downstream Mrs. Henderson’s drifting nymph every time it passed him; how the wily fish would look the morsel over all the way down to the tail rapids, think better of it, and then with a contemptuous reversal return each time to his ambush upstream without taking.

It suddenly sank into my thick skull that the fish in this pool might be doing the same thing—lurking above near the boulders or snags and following floating

nymphs down to the tail rapids. My next cast settled just above the snag, close alongside. I then followed exactly the same formula that had taken the rainbow—a downstream drift to the fast water, careful taking up of the slack to be sure I'd be in control when ready to lift the leader and lure as they neared the tail rapids. On the third blind lift I was fast to a 9-inch brown. Three casts later I hooked another.

Between that pool and the two above I took five more legal-size trout and a couple that were too small, and then, as a final gesture, another rainbow just below the rapids that led into the bait fisherman's hole. Interestingly enough I didn't see a single rise, not a line twitch, not a tremor; every fish was taken sight unseen with a rod-tip lift, all but one I think just above the riffles. Dumb luck? Mostly without question. But the experience made me very suspicious of this sixth-sense business for I knew damned well I was no intuitive striker, and yet I had caught fish.

That first luck and successful venture with the nymph gave me the necessary confidence to break out the tiny lures on subsequent trips without feeling too much like an interloper. I caught trout on the nymph, using the same method on two out of the three remaining weekends. But the time I missed—that's the important one!

I stood in a long, quiet pool on the Beaverkill and cast dry flies over the second-most-hectic rise of trout I ever saw in my short trout-fishing experience—without taking a single fish. A few days later I took the cause up with my mentor, the same Lou Henderson referred to above. I described my frantic efforts to match the tiny fly I had seen emerging from the pool and had just about come to the conclusion that the no. 18s I had finally resorted to were not small enough to imitate the naturals. Lou waited me out with a kindly twinkle in his eye that had just a shade of indulgence and perhaps a soupçon of smugness in it. Then he asked me one of those pertinent questions the old hand—the expert, if you please—always seems to have deep down in the bag of tricks to confound the novice and make his previous diagnosis seem so inadequate and ineffectual.

"Yeah? Now tell me—what did the rises look like? Just describe the rises . . ."

I knew it was coming. "Well, they were just plain rises, a kind of bulge and little splash—"

"Uhhuh. Maybe with a little tail or fin showing now and then?"

I looked blank, tried my best to submerge the thought that was struggling to the surface of my mind, and then broke

out in disgust, "All right, I suppose they were feeding on nymphs, but how in the hell do you expect me to remember *everything* you've ever told me?"

Well, I don't know. I still contend the experts make nymph fishing seem harder than it actually is. Try nymphs anyway. At least they won't bite you and the trout often reverse that process.

Oh yes, I'm becoming a little more charitable toward the experts. When I read advice in a book or magazine that seems a little high flown and intramural, I just curb my annoyance and remember Sir Izaak's words:

Now for the art of catching fish, that is to say, how to make a man—that was none—to be an angler by a book; he that undertakes it, shall undertake a harder task than Mr. Hales, a most valiant and excellent fencer, who, in a printed book called "A Private School of Defence," undertook to teach that art or science, and was laughed at for his labour—not but that many useful things might be learnt by that book, but he was laughed at because that art was not to be taught by words, but practice; and so must angling.



Although he was a widely traveled and skilled angler, Angus Cameron never had much use for experts, particularly the self-styled variety. In a letter written in 1996, Cameron describes himself as "this angler who has become so bored with purists that he's almost ready to quit reading about fishing." Perhaps he'd been reading the work of a purist or expert before this photo was shot. Photo courtesy of Kevin Cameron.

William Blacker and the Atlantic Salmon Fly as “A Framework for the Imagination”

by Paul Schullery

Andrew Herd, Hermann Dietrich-Troeltsch, and Alberto Calzolari [Calzolari listed as an author only in Volume III; the sequential listing order of authors Herd and Dietrich-Troeltsch varies from volume to volume; see below].

Blacker/Phantom of the Past, three volumes.

Ellesmere: The Medlar Press Limited, 2017.

Sewn hardbacks in slipcases, 340 mm x 245 mm.

Indices, appendices, bibliographies, color photography and other full-color images throughout, historic engravings.

£350

I

[front cover title] *William Blacker/Blacker, Ephemera & Bell's Life*

[title page title] *Blacker/Phantom of the Past/Volume I/Blacker, Ephemera & Bell's Life*
Andrew Herd & Hermann Dietrich-Troeltsch
298 pages

II

[front cover title] *William Blacker/The 1842 & 1843 Editions*

[title page title] *Blacker/Phantom of the Past/Volume II/A Descriptive Bibliography*
Hermann Dietrich-Troeltsch & Andrew Herd
427 pages

III

[front cover title] *William Blacker/The Salmon & Trout Flies*

[title page title] *Blacker/Phantom of the Past/Volume III/The Flies*
Andrew Herd, Hermann Dietrich-Troeltsch & Alberto Calzolari
252 pages



WILLIAM BLACKER'S mid-nineteenth-century book on fly tying is known to most of us today, if at all, by the occasional facsimile reprint of its 1855 edition titled *Blacker's Art of Fly Making* (followed by an accurate but interminable subtitle). Long ago, when as a young hick from the West I began to explore fly-fishing literature, Blacker's was perhaps the first of several older books to surprise me with the delightful feature of actual flies and fly-tying materials attached to the pages—providing me with the liveliest possible direct connection to the book's author and publisher. For at least a few years, the novelty of that probably overwhelmed my limited ability to place each book and its author properly in what Arnold Gingrich used to refer to as the pantheon of angling giants and their books. I eventually imagined I'd gotten a tolerable handle on Blacker's place in our sport's history and literature, but it turns out I hadn't.

Andrew Herd, Hermann Dietrich-Troeltsch, and Alberto Calzolari's huge (*vast* might be a better term) oversized three-volume set on Blacker and his work is the grandest, most com-

prehensive book-length treatment of any fly-fishing subject I've ever seen. It is magnificent, an astonishing achievement. The research—in which the authors are eager to acknowledge the help of many people but most especially John Austin, the leading authority on everything to do with the North Country fly-fishing tradition—now stands as the foremost model for those with ambitions of doing an exhaustive job of studying any aspect of fly-fishing history. The flies—most tied by Calzolari (who is also listed as a coauthor of Volume III) and Robert Frandsen—are gorgeous and historically fascinating. They have been photographed and reproduced brilliantly.

Perhaps most important for those of you who are inclined to study the tradition of which Blacker was such an influential part, after reading this book you will never view the whole colorful, quirky, charming, politically complicated, and occasionally lurid history of Atlantic salmon fly tying the same way again. The authors have accomplished no less than a thorough and much needed reordering of the received wisdom about the development of the Victorian Atlantic salmon fly.

Having begun my review with such a fearful adjectival onslaught, I feel compelled to back up a little and clarify my connection to this work.

I came to fly fishing at the dawn of the Swisher and Richards *Selective Trout* era, about the time that the appearance of newly published or freshly revived books on the sport turned from a trickle to a flood. My big brother Steve, who introduced me to fly fishing, was the first of us to notice how ingrown the promotional side of this booming little industry appeared, pointing out to me that a relatively small circle of famous fly-fishing authors constantly exchanged forewords, reviews, and jacket blurbs for each other's books.

This made us nervous. It seemed to take the sport's famous fraternalism to a suspicious if not unwholesome level. Of course it didn't stop us from buying every tasty new volume as soon as it appeared, but it did make us wonder about a system in which judges and judges were so cozily interchangeable.

I am reminded of this as I sit down to review the Blacker volumes. I know one of the authors well. Andrew Herd and I have been good friends, research and writing collaborators, and even fishing pals for a long time, sharing great trout waters both in northern England and in southwestern Montana. So grateful have I been for his historical insights and generosity with the painfully obscure information that is the stock-in-trade of angling historians, friendship, and hospitality that a decade ago I dedicated one of my own books, *Fly-Fishing Secrets of the Ancients* (2009) to him.

Recognizing the possible awkwardness of my reviewing a book by a good friend, *American Fly Fisher* Editor Kate Achor and I exchanged e-mails agonizing about the possible conflict of loyalties that might thus arise. Obviously, we have decided that on balance, it's a good thing for me to go ahead. Having admitted my friendship with one of the book's authors, I ask readers to trust my ability to keep loyalties straight. If there is worry about any appearance of compromised reliability as I review this book, you should frankly be more concerned about the harsh reality that I have never personally caught an Atlantic salmon (landlocks aside), much less tied any of the more challenging Atlantic salmon fly patterns.

On the other hand, having devoted a significant part of my adult life to the study of fly-fishing history and its literature, I can assure you that this book is perhaps the easiest to praise of any of the hundred-plus books, from several scholarly disciplines and popular pursuits, I've reviewed before it.

With all that in mind, and offering my promise that I'll be careful, here goes.

Volume I, *Blacker, Ephemera & Bell's Life*, is a biography of the man and a documentary chronicle of his career during the troubled times of mid-nineteenth-century Britain. It traces Blacker's rise to prominence through his early success as a fly tier in Ireland to his eventual renown in England, and provides by far the most complete account ever of the welter of editions, revisions, and variants of Blacker's book that appeared between 1842 and 1855.

First, to explain the title: "Ephemera" was the pen name of Edward Fitzgibbon, a prominent journalist and angling writer (*Handbook of Angling*, 1847; *The Book of the Salmon*, 1850), to whom the authors (with much justification and perhaps a touch

BLACKER

invented (or at the very least, improved) himself. By 1847, though, Blacker must have been acutely aware of how reliant he and the other small tackle dealers of London had become on the nationwide publicity that Ephemera's column gave them and this alone would have predisposed him to help the columnist. Fitzgibbon, on the other hand, knew nothing of salmon fishing, nor very much about fly dressing, and so he had little choice but to rely on the advice that tackle dealers like Blacker gave him. For the next two years the relationship between Blacker and Fitzgibbon was a very fruitful two-way street, and the journalist always kept his end of the bargain and promoted Blacker's business whenever he could. Later in the same column, after giving a list of trout patterns, Fitzgibbon continued:

I strongly recommend those gentlemen who wish to have the above flies dressed to perfection to apply to Mr. Blacker, of 54, Dean-street, Soho. My reason for this strong recommendation is that I have seen

him at work this week, and was astonished and delighted at his wonderful manual dexterity and rapidity, and his judgement in colour. I tested his powers by two extremes; first, by a jointed salmon fly, the most difficult of all large flies to be dressed. He began by placing before him feathers, silk, and other substances of all colours, and in less than an hour finished a fly equal in beauty to the most beautiful hummingbird. The second test I put him to was the dressing of the smallest trout flies. He set to work, and in about twelve minutes perfected two of the smallest and best midge flies I ever saw. His fingers, save a small pointed scissors, were the only instruments he used. The flies thus dressed I pronounce sure killers.

This is a fabulous find, given that it is the only description we have found of Blacker at work, and it shows why his salmon flies were so much better than everyone else's. As far as the Blacker-Ephemera chronology is concerned,



A selection of Blacker hatches of the type he would have laid on his desk the day he tied flies for Fitzgibbon.

[210]

A look at page 210 from Volume I, discussing the relationship between William Blacker and Edward Fitzgibbon.



The frontispiece of an 1855 edition of Blacker's *Art of Fly Making* that can be found online at the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/blackersartofflyooblacrich/page/n9>. Accessed 28 March 2019.

of hyperbole) refer as “the greatest angling journalist of all time” (Vol. I, 123). Among his other claims to historic fame in angling circles, Fitzgibbon became a great champion and promoter of Blacker and his work.

Then: *Bell's Life in London* (1822–1886) was a popular weekly newspaper. Its focus and subject matter underwent great editorial changes of direction during its existence but it became a leader in reporting on sport, especially “the turf” (horse racing). *Bell's* is prominent in the subtitle of Volume I for its place in Blacker's literary biography; Fitzgibbon frequently praised and promoted Blacker's work in his own column in *Bell's* and helped Blacker publish a number of important pieces there, many of which are reprinted at length in Volume I.

William Blacker was born near the village of Redcross, County Wicklow, Ireland, in 1814, which, the authors assert, was “precisely the right time” for him to appear in order to grow up “to introduce the cream of British salmon fishing society to the Irish mixed wing salmon fly” (Vol. I, 156). Volume I tells this story in fulsome and absorbing detail.

Before continuing, however, it is necessary to pause briefly to deal with a vexatious terminological difficulty that will plague anyone studying salmon-fly books of the 1800s and early 1900s: what was meant by terms such as *mixed wing* and *married wing* (we'll ignore other terms here, e.g., *built wing*, or this review will become much too much longer than it already is). Today we use *married wing* to describe wings with fibers of different feathers teased into smooth and often very beautiful combinations, whereas *mixed wing* refers to wings that are constructed of a number of distinct feathers and fibers that, although arranged in specific and equally beautiful ways, are not married. Unfortunately, writers back then did not make the same distinction and often used the terms interchangeably. So please keep in mind that as I refer to these two types of wings below, I do not mean to suggest that the writers of the late 1800s/early 1900s made the distinction as clearly as we do today when we talk about them; e.g., their *mixed* often meant our *married*.

Volume I's story of Blacker and his immense contribution to fly tying defies summary beyond what I have just said, so here I will settle for two telling examples of how the present authors have reinterpreted and celebrated this lively period in fly-fishing history.

Example 1: Fly-fishing books published well into the early 1800s featured only a handful of Atlantic salmon patterns, if they showed any at all. Blacker's life and career spanned the period in which that changed, in large part because of his influence. By the time of the 1855 edition of his book, Blacker, Fitzgibbon, and

others were busily multiplying the salmon fisher's inventory of patterns and were producing them in elegant and colorful mixed-wing patterns.

The authors point out that although the married-wing technique rose to prominence some time in the two or three decades following Blacker's 1855 edition and soon took the fly-tying fashion world by storm, the fly patterns of the generations immediately following Blacker owed all the rest of their form and tying techniques to his mixed-wing era. It is one of the important messages of this new book that even those of us who are deeply immersed in admiration for and production of the grand late-Victorian married-wing salmon fly patterns are insufficiently aware of the long and vibrant century of talented and largely Irish experimentation that led up to the widely admired patterns so beautifully illustrated at the close of the nineteenth century in George Kelson's sprawling *The Salmon Fly* (1895) and other turn-of-the-century books.

Example 2: It is another crucially important message of Volume I that until Kelson's day, the Atlantic salmon fly seems to have been viewed by its most creative tiers as a dynamic work in progress, much the way we have long viewed our trout flies. Blacker was an excellent example of this state of the craft during his time. Throughout his career he kept growing and evolving as a fly tier. Thus his flies also evolved, often from one edition of his book to the next (the authors illustrate this repeatedly in Volumes II and III, showing the repeated modifications of some important patterns).

Blacker was thus the antithesis of the religiously intense standardization that by Kelson's time locked most of the famous fly patterns into the “classic” prescriptions that a subsequent century's worth of fly tiers have spent large portions of their lives and fortunes on precisely replicating. Blacker would have found such behavior bewildering, as that sort of stylistic rigidity neither satisfied his own powerful creative impulses nor made any difference to the salmon.

Who's right? Who knows? One man's standardization is another man's stagnation, and these are deep and subjective matters. But take a moment to imagine if some of our most popular trout flies—say the Gold-ribbed Hare's Ear, the Pheasant Tail, the Royal Coachman, or the Adams—had not been susceptible to the countless reinterpretations that have been visited upon them by successive generations of tiers. Who can say with any certainty which of those changes mattered to the fish nearly as much as they mattered to the anglers?

BLACKERS GALORE

This journal's serious acquaintance with William Blacker and his historic book began quite a long time ago. In 1982, during my final year as the *American Fly Fisher's* editor, I was pleased to publish a long and carefully considered article by angler-bibliophile-historian Alec Jackson, “Blacker's *Art of Fly Making*, 1855” (Summer 1982, vol. 9, no. 3). In this article, to which we lavishly devoted three of the journal's four carefully hoarded color pages, Jackson compared and contrasted four different copies of the 1855 edition of Blacker's book, which after considerable effort he managed to examine in what at the time seemed a rather important if not far-reaching analysis. Looking over that article now, I recall how surprised I was to learn that even within the relatively modest press runs of that time, so many of a book's production details could vary so extensively from copy to copy. And even having learned that, I still, really, had no idea.

Jackson was only one of many in a long, sincere line of bibliographer-bibliophiles attempting to sort out one or more elements in the tangled publication genealogy of Blacker's book, but none of them approached the present volume for thoroughness or erudition. Volume II improves on Jackson's inves-



Page 137 of Volume II shows pages from an 1842 edition of Blacker's book. This copy is "presented in its original black morocco envelope style fly wallet with pockets front and back and is held shut with a ribbon tie, and includes copies of all 31 trout flies attached with paper seals" (122).

tigations by an order of magnitude; it is a spectacular bibliographical and photographic showcase of the evolution of Blacker's book. Starting with Dietrich-Troeltsch's personal collection of twenty-four (!) different copies of the book, the coauthors reached out to a variety of institutional and private collections until they had studied and photographed more than forty copies of various editions, allowing them to devise a greatly improved publication history.

The first edition, *W. Blacker's Art of Angling*, dated 1842, enjoyed three bindings. The second edition, *W. Blacker's Catechism of Fly-Making, Angling and Dyeing*, was published in late 1843 and also had three different bindings. Finally, the third edition, *Blacker's Art of Fly Making*, appeared in 1855 with "a number of minor binding variants" (Vol. II, 13). It would be nice to be able to report that *that*—and it's a lot—is all there was to it, but it wasn't. Blacker was as enthusiastic about tinkering with

his book as he was about revising his fly patterns. Being a savvy marketer, he offered unique variants of the book, such as copies featuring more, different, or fancier flies placed in them as preferred by the buyers. The most famous example of a unique copy of his book may be the one owned by Prince Albert himself (whose copy the authors show and describe, courtesy of Her Majesty the Queen). This sort of behavior results in a huge amount of additional work for the conscientious bibliographer and no doubt will continue to provide such people with happy surprises if and when more variants pop up here or there.

For fly tiers, the best thing about Volume II must be that this wealth of fine photographs of various pages from so many different copies of the book shows us oodles of the original fly patterns attached (either complete or shown partly finished for instructional purposes). That is to say, thanks to Volume II, I can get an unprecedented look at how William Blacker himself tied not only his wonderful salmon flies but dozens of his trout flies.

Invariably, whenever I get such a rare good look at the trout flies tied so long ago, I find myself mentally reaching for an order form. These are very exciting flies, and I would eagerly abandon my trendy multipoly-conehead, CDCed, Z-lonned, cripple rubber-legged, tungsten-headed wonders if I could instead cast Blacker's products (replicas of them, of course) into favored stretches of the Firehole.

But my enthusiasm in this regard reaches even greater levels in Volume III.

BLACKER REVIVED

Among fly-fishing historians much remains to be discussed about how our sport evolves. The until-now-obscure fate of William Blacker's fame and historical stature provides us with a telling case study in that often mysterious process. The Victorian anglers enjoyed an unprecedented flowering of the sport, with rapid developments in its tackle, its techniques, its society, and—especially important in the

case of the Atlantic salmon fly—its publications. With so many people joining the fun and thus generating growth in all the sport's associated trades, the demand for expertise and the need to dispense that expertise widely increased swiftly.

Certainly there had been commerce in fly-fishing tackle for centuries, as there had been debates over the right way to do everything associated with the sport, including tying flies. But nineteenth-century anglers found themselves caught in the prop wash of the greater Industrial Revolution. For just one example, the rise of startlingly beautiful chromolithography printing soon took the illustration of fly patterns out of the cottages of the hand-colorists. In America, for example, the chromolithographs of the hundreds of flies shown in Charles Orvis and A. Nelson Cheney's *Fishing with the Fly* (1883) and Mary Orvis Marbury's *Favorite Flies and Their Histories* (1892) accomplished many things, among them establishing a milestone

standardization of those very fly patterns. Marbury was outspoken in her hope that her book, besides being a stellar promotional catalog of the flies Orvis offered for sale, would reduce public confusion over just the right way to tie these patterns whose virtues were being promoted in the proliferating sporting press.

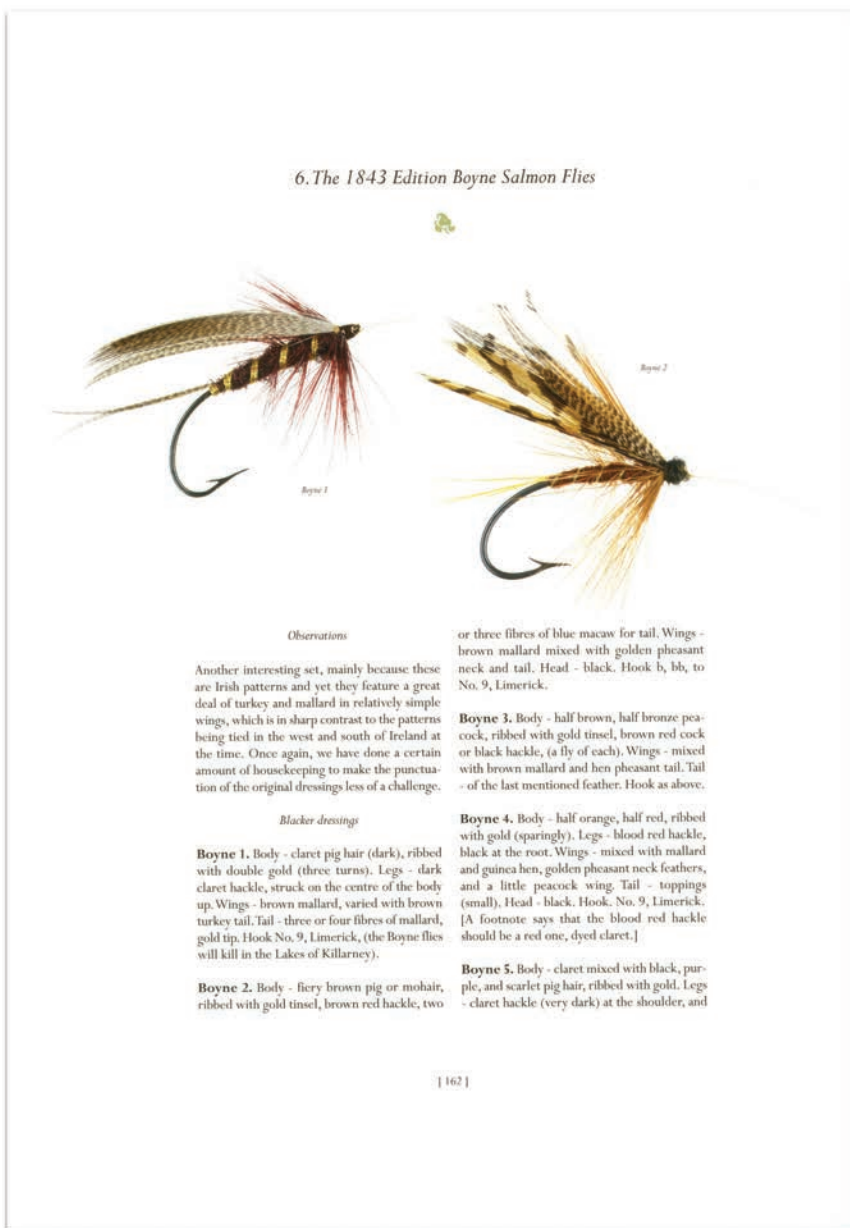
In this new and ever more accessible realm of fly-fishing information, it was probably inevitable that Blacker's mixed-wing patterns—no longer the latest thing in a sport in which latest things were becoming a consuming element of anglers' attention and in which printing technology offered anglers so many fresh glories—may have seemed quaint, out of date, and by implication not as good at catching fish.

Volume III goes a very long way to dispel these erroneous notions. By portraying a rich array of modern replicas of Blacker's patterns as they were described, illustrated, or actually included in the 1842 and 1843 editions of his book (and offering us hope that an eventual fourth volume of the present work will do the same for the flies in the 1855 edition), the authors demonstrate beyond question that there is nothing quaint, unsophisticated, or uninviting about the Blacker flies. In fact, if the authors have a single most important message for modern fly tying, it is their eloquent invitation to modern tiers to dive right in. Volume III shows you how it was all done, and how fine the results were and are.

The portrayal of Blacker's patterns is a serious and demanding challenge because, as I've already mentioned, he changed them so often. And here the casual reader might wonder if there is some irony in this book's beautiful portrayals of his flies—that is, if Herd, Dietrich-Troeltsch, and Calzolari's grand celebration of Blacker's flies is just adding more "finished" or "classic" patterns that must be tied as shown in a book, à la Kelson. But Herd et al. are doing nothing of the sort. Besides reviving the flies of Blacker and his contemporaries, they are advancing an adventurous approach to tying that the Kelson school had little or no room for:

We don't believe that Blacker intended his dressings to be anything more than a framework for the imagination. This is where these [i.e., Blacker's] patterns do become incredibly exciting—a complete change of ethos is needed if you want to tie them, because William Blacker's generation thought about salmon flies in a completely different way than George Kelson's (Vol. III, 10).

For the modern purist tiers of Victorian-era salmon flies, this is indeed a revolutionary idea, that the *real* "tradition" of salmon-fly tying in the century before Kelson was one of constant tinkering and invention—of fly patterns, many not even named, undergoing modification in multiple directions simultaneously at the hands of various professional and amateur tiers. I don't doubt that some poor souls back then who really just wanted to get a pattern "right" were driven nuts by this sort of creative free-for-all, but what fun it must have been,



Page 162 of Volume III, featuring modern replicas of two of Blacker's salmon flies.

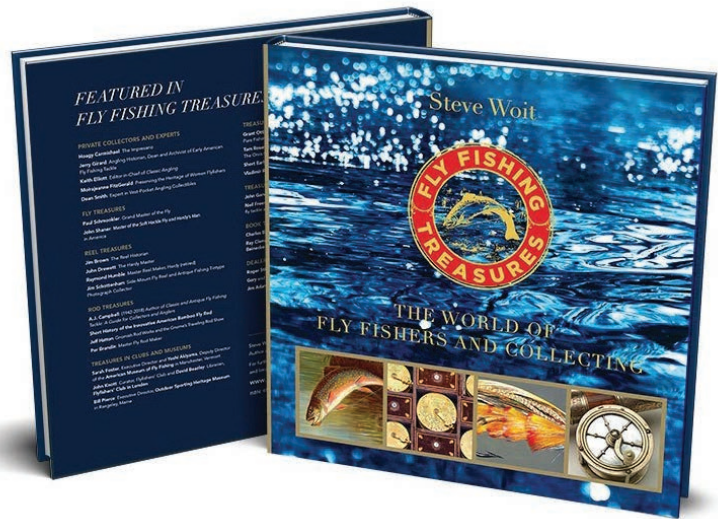
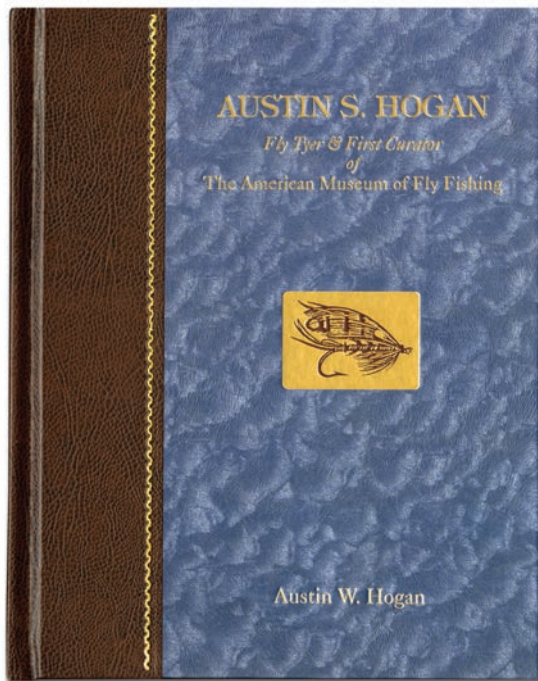
and how much it sounds like almost all aspects of fly tying as we enjoy it today!

The authors are embarked on a noble enterprise in these three volumes. They have illuminated a much longer and considerably more vital tradition in salmon-fly tying than the one most of us have heretofore appreciated. And having achieved that so definitively and elegantly, they have invited all of us to explore it in our own thinking and fly tying. Time will tell how today's Atlantic salmon fly tiers, especially those with an almost felonious allegiance only to the tail end of the great Victorian adventure in salmon-fly tying, will respond. But thanks to Herd, Dietrich-Troeltsch, Calzolari, Frandsen, and their other collaborators, the invitation stands. The historical record has been greatly refined and corrected. And William Blacker and his times are now a vivid and compelling part of our history as they never were before.



An Angling History Trifecta

by John Mundt



TO ME, WINTER is the best season for reading. Shorter days and colder nights encourage many to seek the comforts of light and warmth indoors. When fishing in print, an angler can sit back and reflect on prior seasons while growing wide-eyed with anticipation for the next.

This past Christmas, three great titles were found waiting for me under the tree! All have direct connection to the American Museum of Fly Fishing, and the trio definitely helped my winter pass more quickly. They are presented here in alphabetical order by title, as each is a stand-alone achievement representing the work of its inspired author(s) and publisher.

Austin S. Hogan: Fly Tyer & First Curator of the American Museum of Fly Fishing by Austin W. Hogan is the largest of the three. Its 497 pages comprise insightful text with more than 500 color photographs and illustrations. Designed and published by Daniel Philip Coté and Joanna Lynn Coté of the *Double Gun Journal*, the production quality is first rate. Austin W. Hogan (1936–2013) began preparation of the book in 2008 with the goal of honoring the legacy of his father, Austin S. Hogan (1909–1985) and “to catalog the provenance” of his father’s work (vii). The title sums it up succinctly; Austin S. Hogan was a lifelong angler and a founding member of the museum in 1968. He established the museum’s journal, the *American Fly Fisher*, in 1974 and served as our first curator from 1972 until his passing. The museum continues to confer the Austin S. Hogan Award “in recognition for exemplary contributions to the *American Fly Fisher*.”

The book’s twenty-three chapters are nicely arranged and make for easy reading or detailed study, as the text is complemented with related photographs and illustrations throughout. For museum members, the story is invaluable; it chronicles the life and fly-fishing exploits of Austin S. Hogan to the point at which his career with the museum began. The book concludes with Austin W. Hogan encouraging the reader to learn more about his father by visiting the American Museum of Fly Fishing, “where his work from 1972 to his death in 1985 is archived. There this story continues with his instructions to me on tying, patterns he provided me, and his paintings and sketches” (495).

Sadly, Austin W. passed away before the book’s 2017 release, but we can rest assured that he would have been pleased with the result of his efforts and the quality of the tome that presents it. Our membership is fortunate that Austin W. was inspired to preserve his father’s legacy; he leaves us with what is now a near-complete record of the extraordinary life of a museum pillar. There were 1,127 hardcover copies produced, with 127 of those being a signed limited edition. Copies are available through the *Double Gun Journal*, P.O. Box 550, East Jordan, Michigan 49727, and standard editions are presently being listed by them on eBay for \$138 with 10 percent of the proceeds benefiting the Wounded Warrior Project.

Fly Fishing Treasures: The World of Fly Fishers and Collecting by Steve Woit covers wide ground in its 348 pages, which includes a 10-page section about the American Museum of Fly Fishing. In

promotional material, Woit states that his book includes more than “800 color photographs, the largest collection of images of antique and collectible fly rods, fly reels, flies, ephemera and accessories currently in print.” A bold pronouncement, but with 300 more photos than the Hogan book above, I can attest that it’s a delightful volume to thumb through or study.

Woit’s undergraduate literature degree from Yale, his passion for the sport, and his thirty years of related collecting all served him well in this effort. Readers of this journal’s Keepers of the Flame column will enjoy the format of the book, which celebrates the people and institutions that are keeping fly-fishing history alive today and preserving its artifacts. More than thirty people from the United States and Great Britain were interviewed by Woit, and their major fields are neatly arranged by area of interest: private collectors and experts, flies, rods, reels, clubs and museums, tackle houses, treasures at auction, books, and dealers and traders. Half of the individuals featured are museum members or affiliates, and it is likely that a majority of our membership know many of them personally.

The “Treasures in Clubs and Museums” section begins with the American Museum of Fly Fishing feature, in which readers are greeted by the wide smiles of Executive Director Sarah Foster and Deputy Director Yoshi Akiyama. Woit then takes us on a pleasant tour through the museum and the highlights of our collection, with photographs prepared by Art Director Sara Wilcox. This book is a grand tribute to the sport, its people, and its heritage. Released in 2018, copies are available at www.flyfishingtreasures.com in a deluxe signed edition of 150 copies at \$175 and the standard hardcover edition at \$80.

Herbert L. Welch: Black Ghosts and Art in a Maine Guide’s Wilderness by Graydon Hilyard and Leslie Hilyard rounds out this fabulous trio. Its 180 pages are the culmination of years of research by this father-son duo (both contributors to the *American Fly Fisher*), and they deliver a highly informative and entertaining read. As seasoned historians, the Hilyards’ biographies of Carrie

Stevens (Stackpole Books, 2000) and Stanley Bogdan (Frank Amato Publications, 2006) are widely acclaimed, and like those works, no stone was left unturned here.

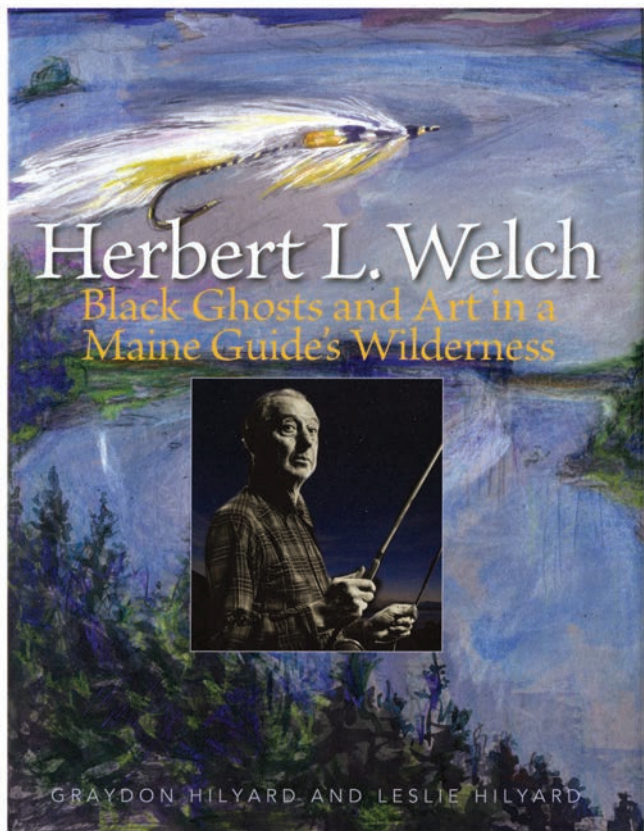
Many will recall Herb Welch as having been a famous taxidermist and the originator of the Black Ghost streamer fly, but early on the reader discovers that the Welch story is a fascinating and intriguing one, with the golden era of sport in Maine’s Rangeley Lakes region as the backdrop. The text is interspersed with more than 130 photographs and illustrations that help chronicle Welch’s life from birth in 1879 through a promising baseball career; formal art study in New York and Paris; forays into taxidermy, guiding, and hospitality; and testifying in the first murder trial in the region. Welch was one of the first angling celebrities who toured the country as a major attraction at regional outdoor shows. The book’s dust jacket claims, “He was the Lefty Kreh of his day.”

I found it interesting to learn what an accomplished artist Welch was. The numerous examples reproduced in the book showcase Welch’s skill in working with varied subjects and media. Museum member and artist John Swan provides descriptive commentary on many of Welch’s pieces, and Swan’s own paintings and illustrations add a warm touch.

This comprehensive book—as great a read for students of art or U.S. and Maine history as for the angler—is arranged in two main sections. “Part I: From Dark Forest to City Lights” is a guided tour through Welch’s captivating eighty-one-year life. “Part II: To the Tiers” will appeal greatly to fly-tying and collecting aficionados with numerous photographs and detailed patterns honoring the region’s fly development and traditions. Published by Stackpole Books in 2018 in hardcover with a glossy full-color dust jacket at a cover price of \$49.95, copies are available for purchase through numerous online sources.

It was wonderful to see three recently released excellent publications that have ties to the American Museum of Fly Fishing. My hat’s off to the authors and publishers whose passion for the sport inspired them to produce such works for the benefit of the fly-fishing community as a whole. Despite declarations that printed matter is now on the verge of extinction, my luggage scale hit the 14-pound mark when all three volumes were placed on it. The 1,025 combined pages in the set will stack proudly to a height of 4 inches on your coffee table, leaving you with attractive showpieces and plenty to wade through when snow or rain is swirling outside your window. Enjoy!

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



Austin S. Hogan: Fly Tyer & First Curator of the American Museum of Fly Fishing by Austin W. Hogan, incorporating research notes by Austin S. Hogan
The Double Gun Journal, 2017
\$138, hardcover
Signed limited edition, price on request
497 pages

Fly Fishing Treasures: The World of Fly Fishers and Collecting by Steve Woit
Steve Woit—Fly Fishing Treasures, 2018
\$80, hardcover
\$175, author’s signed limited and numbered edition with deluxe cover and slipcase
348 pages

Herbert L. Welch: Black Ghosts and Art in a Maine Guide’s Wilderness by Graydon Hilyard and Leslie Hilyard
Stackpole Books, 2018
\$49.95, hardcover
180 pages

The Guides

by Brett Crawford

They had more commonalities than differences.
I learned to spot them from a distance,
driving vehicles littered with fishing-brand stickers,
self-inflicted tattoo artists intent on painting their entire bodies.
Their trucks were filled with flies and smelled of
cigars and wet dogs.
Their boats and boots, conversely,
were pristine and washed and shined daily.

My hands are large
but were consumed by theirs when shaken,
a symphony of muscular contractions that I found intimidating
but trustworthy enough
to place my life in their hands wading through whitewater.
Their shoulders carried a broadness
built by paddling clients against the river current each day.
Those who chose to wet wade in mountain runoff
displayed calves chiseled as by a marble sculptor.
Keeping pace for a single day
eliminated any wonder I had about the maintenance of
such a physique.

Their ruggedness was observable through their physicality:
clothing colors that blurred with the surrounding landscapes,
decipherable only by movement and patches displaying
conservation commitments.
They moved with quaint walking sticks,
not for stability on land
but for navigating the rocky, slick, and unforgiving riverbeds,
sometimes visible,
oftentimes buried under whitewater.

They stalked trout with elegance,
mountain lions seeking their prey on boulders,
even crawling like soldiers taking fire on a battlefield.
Movements seemed symphonic and practiced.
They slithered through thick tree stands on riverbanks,
scaled large boulders,
paddled through rapids,
willingly ready to jump into rushing water,
acting as human anchors,
always portraying an obsession,
making the most acute and intuitive adjustments,
perpetually pursuing a perfect presentation.



They taught with endless patience,
oozing a willingness to critique only for the sake of efficiency.
When their verbal instruction failed them,
the rod became an extension of their soul,
a tool filled with energy,
confronting the resistance of flowing river water,
authorizing them to defy the laws of physics,
throwing line in handsome loops to impossible targets
only to have it disappear
against currents that had given friction seconds prior,
mimicking the trout's natural food sources,
delighting with the creativity as an executive chef.

Their conversation skills were on display,
developed during practiced listening
of guiding the elite
(United States presidents,
senators,
governors,
CEOs,
attorneys,
physicians,
beneficiaries of trust funds),
all solo.
They were entomologists, botanists, and limnologists,
but in their own minds,
keepers of their local rivers.
More than ruggedness, grace, and spirit,
they embraced quiet, color, and camaraderie,
all at the most appropriate times.

*Brett Crawford is a conservationist, fly fisher, professor,
and writer. He enjoys exploring northern Michigan's
rivers with his family and a fly rod.*

Fly-Fishing Festival

Photos by Sara Wilcox except where noted



Vendors, visitors, and tents filled the museum grounds.

Mike Rice



AMFF ambassador Rich Strolis (left) helped visitors tie various saltwater flies.



A crowd gathered to listen as AMFF ambassador Pete Kutzer shared his angling insights.



Chris and Neil Acoustic Duo performed classic songs to entertain visitors throughout the day.

ON AUGUST 10, AMFF celebrated its twelfth annual Fly-Fishing Festival. More than 650 visitors stopped by over the course of the day to enjoy the unique collection of vendors, including painters, appraisers, industry artisans and professionals, and other angling-related nonprofits.

Special events included the opening of *Side Effects: William Billingshurst and Early Fly-Reel Culture*, with a short presentation by guest curator/exhibit lender/reel expert Jim Schottenham. AMFF ambassadors were on hand as well to share their expertise. Mike Rice, Rich Strolis, Mark Dysinger, and Scott Biron tied flies and taught visitors the finer points of creating fur and feather masterpieces, while Pete Kutzer demonstrated his extraordinary casting prowess by the pond. Orvis hosted the

casting competition, and Steve Voit was in the museum signing copies of *Fly Fishing Treasures: The World of Fly Fishers and Collecting* (see page 21 for a review of this impressive book).

A special thank you to our sponsors and raffle donors: the Orvis Company, Mulligans of Manchester, Mud Dog Saltwater Flies, Rich Strolis, the McBride Company, R. K. Miles, Express Copy, Yeti, Costa, Why Knot Fishing, the Image Loft, the Taconic, Deerfield Fly Rods, the Vermont Country Store, the Crooked Ram, Langway, Mrs. Murphy's Donuts, and the Works.

It was a great day and a great turnout. Thanks to everyone for supporting the event and making this year's festival a great success. See you next year on August 8!





AMFF ambassador Mike Rice mentors a participant in the fly-tying competition.



Two sisters try their hand at a supersized version of Jenga® thanks to the Better Buzz truck.



A young lady making a strong showing at the casting competition.



Guest curator Jim Schottenham discusses the history of side-mount reels at the opening of the new exhibit Side Effects: William Billinghamurst and Early Fly-Reel Culture.



Trustee Fred Polhemus (left) chats with George Van Hook (center) as Harley Bartlett (right) works on a new painting.



Museum Adds Ambassador

Scott Wessels, proprietor of the family-owned and -operated Bear's Den Fly Fishing Co. in Taunton, Massachusetts, has joined the museum's ambassador program. Scott's been fly fishing since the 1980s, when his dad first introduced him to the sport on Maine's Roach River. In 1989, his father opened the sporting goods store that Scott and his sister now run. "We find the fly-fishing community to be an incredibly good group of people," says Scott. "They are concerned with the environment and preserving its wildlife for the next generation, as well as with passing on a love of the sport."

The museum's ambassador program was created in 2012 to expand our outreach and augment membership nationwide by raising awareness of the museum, its mission, and its programs. We are happy to have Scott Wessels on board.



Photo courtesy of Scott Wessels.
Scott Wessels.

Summer Kids Clinic

Once again we hosted our kids clinics on Thursdays in July. Kids ages six through twelve join museum staff for a look into the world of fly fishing. Each week explores a different aspect of the sport.

First was "All Tied Up" with fly tier Paul Sinicki, who taught the kids how to tie a woolly bugger. Paul had a great time instructing the kids, and he returns every year to help us out. (Thanks, Paul!) Next we offered "Tackle & Casting About," with Yoshi Akiyama and Sara Wilcox as casting instructors. The kids made a practice rod and learned how to cast. There were first-time casters in the group as well as those who'd been at it awhile. Everyone did an amazing job. We were impressed!



Kelsey McBride

Yoshi Akiyama uses diagrams, flies, and bugs cast in resin to give these kids clinic attendees a close look at what trout like to eat and which flies are used to emulate the various stages of the insects' life cycles.

"Go Fish & Bugged Out" was our final offering. Yoshi taught the kids the life cycle of caddis flies and mayflies. He brought out insects cast in resin to show the kids what the fish really like to eat. Next came the hunt for nymphs in the stream. Yoshi took the kids to the water to look under the rocks for insects. Who doesn't like a chance to be in the water on a summer's day?

The clinic was a great success, with many kids showing up every week. We can't wait to do it again next year!

Recent Donations to the Collection

Royce Stearns of Oregon City, Oregon, donated a Carrie J. Frost fly portfolio containing 336 samples of her flies. The **Estate of Bernard Lefty Kreh** gave us a Renzetti vise with shaft extension used by Lefty.

Robert DeMott of Athens, Ohio, brought us a deluxe edition of his book *Astream: American Writers on Fly Fishing* and a collection of correspondences between himself and Nick Lyons, himself and Gordon Wickstrom, and Kate Fox and Nick Lyons. An anonymous donor gave us a collection of early fly-fishing publications.

Chris McLaughlin of Stillwater, Minnesota, sent us three Scientific Anglers reels and three Scientific Anglers reel spools. And **Len Jekanowski** of Williamsburg, Massachusetts, donated a bamboo fly rod, the Amherst, made by Amherst Fishing Rod Co. of Amherst, Massachusetts.

Upcoming Events

Events take place on the museum grounds in Manchester, Vermont, unless otherwise noted.

October 29

2019 Heritage Award honoring President Jimmy Carter and the late President George H. W. Bush
The Racquet and Tennis Club
New York City

December 7

Hooked on the Holidays
1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.

December 7

Members holiday reception
Presentation of the 2018 Austin Hogan Award to Lance Hidy
4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.

February 21

Izaak Walton Award honoring Flip Pallot
Ocean Reef Club
Key Largo, Florida

March 7

Tie One On & Iron Fly Contest
2:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.

March 21

Frequent Fly Tier: multilevel fly-tying instruction
10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

May (TBD)

Council Members Outing
Potatuck Club, Connecticut

July 9, 16, 23, and 30 (Thursdays)

Kids Clinics
10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

August 8

13th Annual Fly-Fishing Festival
10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Always check our website (www.amff.org) for additions, updates, and more information or contact (802) 362-3300 or kmcbride@amff.org. The museum's e-mail newsletter offers up-to-date news and event information. To subscribe, look for the link on our website or contact the museum.

Announcing AMFF's 2020 Izaak Walton Award Recipient Flip Pallot

Members, mark your calendars: Flip Pallot will receive the American Museum of Fly Fishing's 2020 Izaak Walton Award in Key Largo, Florida, this winter. We hope you will join us for a special celebration at the Ocean Reef Club on February 21.

Izaak Walton's book, *The Compleat Angler*, helped establish that "a good Angler must not only be an inquiring, searching, observing wit, but he must bring a large measure of hope, and patience, and a love and propensity to the art itself."

The Izaak Walton Award was founded in 2014 to honor and celebrate individuals who live by the *Compleat Angler* philosophy. Their passion for the sport of fly fishing and involvement in the angling community provides inspiration for others and promotes the legacy of leadership for future generations.

Flip Pallot joins distinguished recipients Tom Rosenbauer (2019), Rachel Finn (2018), Jim Klug (2017), James Prosek (2016), Tom Davidson (2015), and Ed Jaworowski (2014).

For more information, please contact Samantha Pitcher at spitcher@amff.org, 802-362-3300.



CONTRIBUTORS



Corey Davis

Lance Hidy is a graphic artist and educator, best known for his poster design and his ongoing work as the designer for the official series of Ansel Adams books for the Ansel Adams Trust and Little, Brown & Company. Hidy designed three U.S. postage stamps and Penumbra, a typeface family for Adobe. He is currently working in the Massachusetts state college system to make education more accessible for people with disabilities. Hidy's many essays for scholarly books and journals have primarily been about design history and theory, but this is his second contribution to the *American Fly Fisher*. An enthusiastic cyclist, he lives in Merrimac, Massachusetts, near the estuary of the Merrimack River.

Art Scheck is a former editor of *American Angler*, *Fly Tyer*, *Saltwater Fly Fishing*, and *Scientific Anglers Fly Fishing Quarterly*; the author of *Fly Rod Building Made Easy*, *Tying Better Flies*, *Fly-Fish Better*, and *A Fishing Life Is Hard Work*; and a recently retired college English instructor. He lives in Williamston, South Carolina.



Mary Jo Scheck



Marsha Karle

Currently scholar-in-residence at the Montana State University Library, **Paul Schullery** was the first executive director of the American Museum of Fly Fishing, from 1977 to 1982. He is the recipient of numerous awards for his work as a writer and conservationist, including honorary doctorates from Ohio University (2013) and Montana State University (1997); the Wallace Stegner Award from the University of Colorado Center of the American West (1999); a Panda award for scriptwriting from Wildscreen International for the PBS film *The Living Edens: Yellowstone* (2002), which he wrote and narrated; and induction into the Fly Fishing Hall of Fame (2014). The author, co-author, or editor of some four dozen books, Schullery's recent titles include a fly-fishing memoir, *The Fishing Life*; the Yellowstone historical monograph *Nature and Culture at Fishing Bridge*; and the novels *The Time Traveler's Tale* and *Diamond Jubilee*. He is married to the artist Marsha Karle, with whom he has collaborated as author and artist on seven books.

Community and Beyond



As I WRITE THIS, it's mid-August and I'm listening to the soft summer breeze as it gently rustles the leaves, the horses nickering in the background, and my horse rhythmically pulling hay from the hay bag as he waits his turn to make a run at a local barrel race. As Zen as the moment is, my mind shifts to AMFF and how the busy summer months came to the museum like a freight train: steadfast and strong.

We celebrated the opening of two new exhibitions: *Commemorating the Catch: Fish Carvings by Stephen R. Smith* and *Side Effects: William Billingshurst and Early Fly-Reel Culture*. Each offers a unique look at a craftsman and work that has touched the fly-fishing world. Our kids clinics brought families to the grounds for several weeks of fly-fishing-related programming, and our doors have been open to the many visitors who traveled near and far to experience the rich history of our sport. As always, the Fly-Fishing Festival brought together hundreds of like-minded people to enjoy a day filled with conversation, friendly competition, and lots of camaraderie. Several of our

ambassadors were on hand to lead casting and fly-tying demonstrations while effortlessly supporting the connection between our sport's history and its future. These are the moments that allow the feeling of community to reverberate and inspire us to plan for the next season and beyond.

It's important to note, though, that our community is not limited to those who set foot on the grounds in Manchester, Vermont. We have organically grown a diverse and immersive social media community that allows access to the historical milestones of our past through photographs and stories. Our followers are treated to information that helps them piece together the past, enjoy the present, and plan for fly fishing's future. I share with you here two of our most popular posts from 2019 and invite you to join us online, onsite, or on the road. There are countless ways to engage with—and enjoy—the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

SARAH FOSTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Catch and Release the Spirit of Fly Fishing!

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MISSION

THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF FLY FISHING is the steward of the history, traditions, and practices of the sport of fly fishing and promotes the conservation of its waters. The museum collects, preserves, exhibits, studies, and interprets the artifacts, art, and literature of the sport and, through a variety of outreach platforms, uses these resources to engage, educate, and benefit all.

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 amff@amff.org 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 Samantha Pitcher at spitcher@amff.org to tell us how we would benefit from your skills and talents.

SUPPORT

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

JOIN

Membership Dues (per annum)

Patron	\$1,000
Sustainer	\$500
Contributor	\$250
Benefactor	\$100
Associate	\$50

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 Samantha Pitcher at spitcher@amff.org.

We welcome contributions to the *American Fly Fisher*. Before making a submission, please review our Contributor's Guidelines on our website (www.amff.org), or write to request a copy. The museum cannot accept responsibility for statements and interpretations that are wholly the author's.



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