

*The* American  
Fly Fisher

*Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*



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SPRING 2022

VOLUME 48 NUMBER 2

# Angling for Art's Sake

IT'S NO SECRET that fly fishing lends itself to artistic representation, both visually and verbally. Ours is a storied sport. Artists and angling have a way of finding each other.

Robert Reid believes that Tom Thomson is one of those fly-fishing–finding anglers. Thomson (1877–1917) is one of Canada's best-known painters. He was a significant influence on the Group of Seven, which formed in 1920, not long after Thomson's untimely—and suspicious—death. Although early biographers noted that he was an angler, there is less certainty as to whether he was a fly fisher. Reid believes not only was Thomson a fly fisher but that he tied flies to match the hatch. In “A River Runs Through Tom Thomson” (page 2), Reid discusses Thomson's life, the centrality of fishing to his work, and evidence for his fly conclusions. (On a personal note, this journal's copy editor is a Group of Seven groupie, and the 2022 Tom Thomson wall calendar she sent me from the McMichael Canadian Art Collection hangs on my office door.)

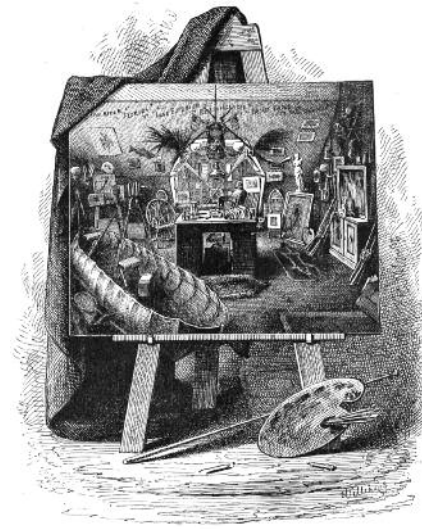
As for art in our own collection, Curator Jim Schottenham is here to tell us about a painting by H. A. Driscoll, one of his favorite artists (Gallery, page 17). Jim's written for this journal before, when he guest curated *Side Effects: William Billingshurst and Early Fly-Reel Culture* in 2019. Now that he's joined our staff, we hope he'll become a regular fixture in these pages, sharing bits of history about objects in our collection.

Other artists, of course, tell their stories with words.

After the deadline passes and submissions close, after the anonymous manuscripts are read in increasingly smaller rounds, once the last round is at hand, I get to read what judges have chosen as the final contenders for the Robert Traver Fly-Fishing Award. It's a delightful task, because all the pieces are good. It's a difficult task, because all the pieces are good.

And after the last-round judges meet and opine and make their cases and perhaps argue a bit, the decision is made. Only then comes the thrilling reveal of finalists, honorable mentions, and winner.

Writer David Van Wie coordinates both the award process and the relationship between the Voelker Foundation (who bestows the award) and AMFF (who publishes it). This year, when he told me the name of the 2021 recipient, I said, “But I know him! I'm publishing something of his in the Winter issue!”



From Thomas Sedgwick Steele, *Canoe & Camera* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1882), frontispiece.

In fact, Jody Martin had sent me a query near the end of 2019, a submission for consideration ten months later, received comments from me, and resubmitted a new draft. We had page proofs by the beginning of 2021, but the piece fell victim to the backlog of articles waiting to be published. He had to wait another year until it saw print. “Deep Waters: The Historical Role of Spirituality in Fly Fishing” appeared in our last issue.

And now, just a few months later, we're happy to present “Simon's Daughter,” the 2021 Traver Award–winning story by Jody Martin (page 13). If you'd like your story or essay to be considered for 2022, turn to page 16 now to review the call for submissions. The deadline is May 31.

We have AMFF news, too, as always. Johnny Morris, founder of Bass Pro Shops, received the 2021 Heritage Award in April at the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri, where we celebrated the opening of our gallery there (page 18). We've also named a 2021 Austin Hogan Award recipient: R. W. Hafer (page 25), who contributes to this issue as well with a review of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's *America's Bountiful Waters* (page 20). And, on pages 27 and 28, we happily welcome four new museum ambassadors.

With spring comes our annual appreciation for everyone who supported the museum's mission last year (page 21). Friends, we thank you.

KATHLEEN ACHOR  
EDITOR



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ON THE COVER: Watercolor by Robert Chamberlin.

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# A River Runs Through Tom Thomson

by Robert Reid

This is as close as I can come to being  
salmon, the river's silver soul

& as the white spray rises round me  
I know what it is to be

the object of the fisherman's desire,  
the subject of the artist's flying brush

—Bernadette Rule,  
“Canoeing the Rapids”  
*Earth Day in Leith Churchyard:  
Poems in Search of Tom Thomson*



*The Tom Thomson Memorial Cairn on Hayhurst Point, overlooking Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park, Ontario, Canada. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.*

FOR MANY CANADIANS, Tom Thomson is synonymous with art. Few, if any, Canadian artists are better known. Fewer still have been more influential across a wide range of disciplines.<sup>1</sup>

Initially celebrated as a painter associated with the Group of Seven (Canada's legendary artistic collective officially formed in 1920), Thomson's devotion to fishing was acknowledged by early biographers. Less certain is the question of whether he was a fly fisherman. The most prominent opponent to Thomson ever casting fur and feather is Roy MacGregor, one of Canada's most celebrated journalists and a prolific author of

fiction, nonfiction, and young adult novels. I devote considerable space to refuting MacGregor because of his stature as an authority on Thomson and his intimate knowledge of Algonquin Park.

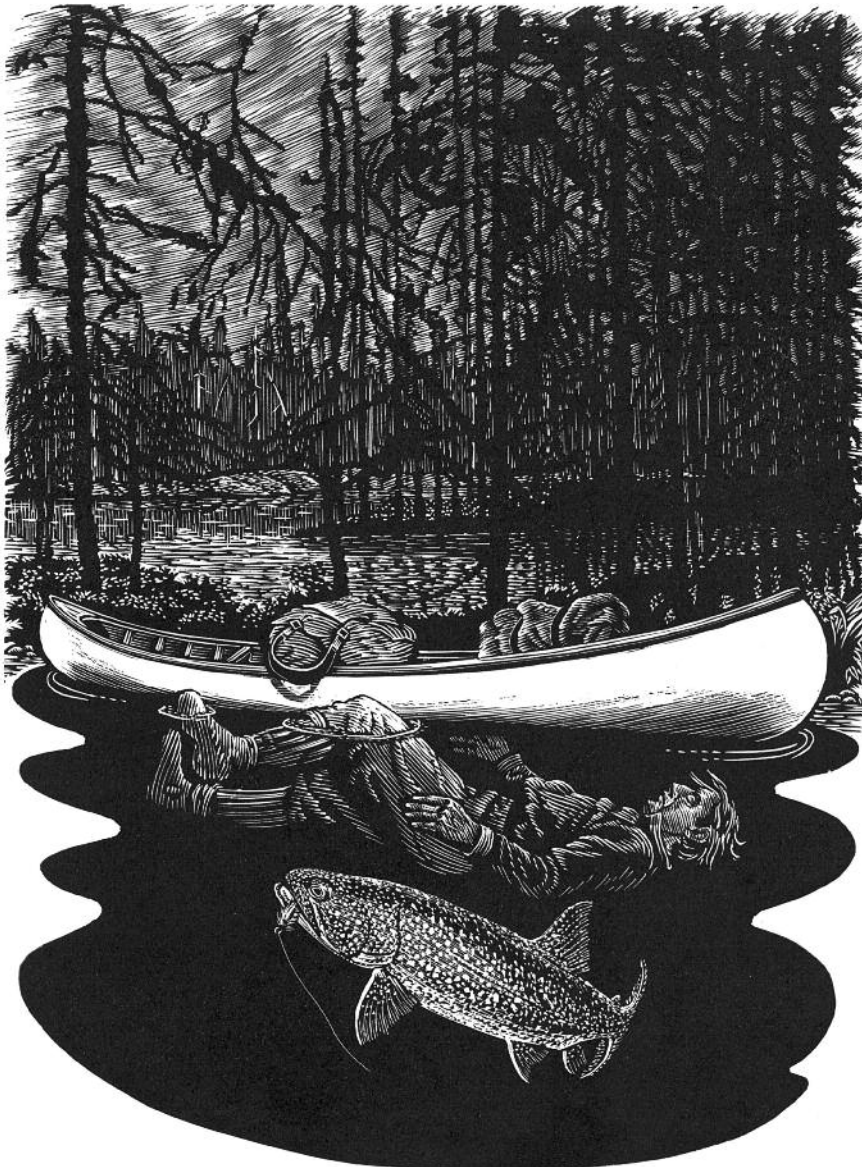
I contend that not only was Thomson a fly angler, but that he tied flies to match the hatch. I support my position by assembling archival source material and by applying my understanding and appreciation of fly fishing to the historical circumstances of Thomson's time and place.

Academics and curators have been ambivalent concerning the extent to which Thomson's avocation (fishing) influenced his vocation (art making). At one end of the spectrum, Ian Dejardin, executive director of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection and coeditor of *A Like Vision: The Group of Seven and Tom*

*Thomson*, dismisses the “mythologizing” that transformed the artist into a fabled woodsman as “romantic hogwash.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Joan Murray—a prominent art historian, author, curator, and former gallery director—ignores the significance of fishing for the artist, despite turning Thomson and the Group of Seven into a publishing cottage industry with more than a dozen books devoted to them.<sup>3</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, author Wayne Larsen and Andrew Hunter (an artist, educator, art historian, curator, and writer) acknowledge the role angling played in Thomson's artistic practice. Although Larsen notes in the introduction that his Thomson biography “is about fishing almost as much as it is about art . . . the two were so closely intertwined,”<sup>4</sup> his reach exceeds his grasp in

This article is based on “A River Runs Through Tom,” a chapter in Robert Reid's *Casting into Mystery* (Erin, Ont.: The Porcupine's Quill, 2020).



After more than a century, Tom Thomson remains Canada's most famous/infamous unsolved mystery. The many unanswered questions surrounding him have sometimes obscured the man, the fisherman, and the artist. Engraving by Wesley W. Bates. From Robert Reid, *Casting into Mystery (Porcupine's Quill, 2020)*. With permission from the artist.

developing the relationship between the two practices. In "Mapping Tom," his essay in the collection *Tom Thomson*, Andrew Hunter confirms he is one of the few fine art scholars who pay serious critical attention to Thomson's angling. He is most in tune with the subtle connections between sport and art. "Although his paintings came to define his life in the eyes of others, Thomson never abandoned his love of fishing," Hunter observes. "In fact, it seemed to be a primary determining factor in his movements throughout Algonquin Park, where he continues to be remembered equally as an artist and angler."<sup>5</sup> Although he does not examine the question of whether the artist was a fly fisherman, he acknowledges that "[Thomson's] love of fishing

[is] reflected in his work, not just in the paintings that depict fishing directly . . . but in the sites he often chose to paint."<sup>6</sup>

Hunter recognizes the intrinsically solitary elements that characterize painting and fishing, at least practiced by the artist. Although Thomson sometimes worked as a fishing guide, he did not join fishing parties. "He wasn't led around by guides and shown the best spots. He found them himself, and these places show up in his paintings—rapidly moving streams, flooded shorelines and the foot of lumber dams . . . the edge of a lake where flooded trees have died and dropped over [provides] good hiding and breeding places for fish."<sup>7</sup>

In this essay I go further than Larsen or Hunter by arguing that fishing was

not peripheral to Thomson's art making, but central. It played a significant role in shaping both the man and the artist. To paraphrase the title of a celebrated book and its famous cinematic adaptation: a river runs through Tom Thomson.

Like Vincent van Gogh, Thomson was all but obscure when he died under suspicious circumstances in July 1917 while paddling on Canoe Lake in Ontario's Algonquin Park.<sup>8</sup> Despite selling only a handful of paintings during his lifetime, his reputation has gained momentum steadily over the last century. He is now celebrated as one of Canada's most accomplished artists. His fame and celebrity extend beyond the borders of visual art. He reigns as a folk legend, heroic artist, mythic cultural figure, and icon of Canadian identity.<sup>9</sup>

Artistic achievement aside, Thomson is generally regarded as an accomplished fisherman and canoeist. Although he fished with live bait and hard lures, as was customary at the time, historical evidence confirms that he caught fish on artificial flies. By virtue of his unparalleled stature as an artist, he is ipso facto Canada's most famous fly angler. Moreover, there are tantalizing anecdotal instances recorded among early biographers that he tied his own flies, perhaps even to match the hatch, years before it became common practice in North America.

Like the narrator in *A River Runs Through It*, Thomson fished all his life. He grew up in a fishing household, following the examples of both his father and grandfather. He fished before he painted. Early biographers depict an angler who lived to fish as much as he lived to paint. He first visited Algonquin Park, before he had any inkling of himself as a serious artist, to fish as much as sketch. He fished until the day he died. He carried his love of, and devotion to, fishing to the grave—wherever that might be located.

Biographers paint Thomson as a shy, reserved introvert who preferred his own company to the company of others. The solitary ritual of fishing served his temperament, reflected his personality, and defined his artistic practice. I believe his art would have been much different had he not been a passionate and dedicated angler.

Although not known as an especially literary artist (few of his letters have survived), biographers agree Thomson's favorite books were Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. His final five decisive years of work—grounded on his visits to Algonquin Park, the greatest single factor determining the arc of his maturity as an artist—reflect the contemplative philosophies espoused by both writers.





Although an avid fisherman, Tom Thomson completed very few paintings devoted to fish or fishing. This most notable exception is unlike anything the artist painted in his last five years, at the height of his creativity. Tom Thomson, *The Fisherman* (1916–1917), oil on canvas, 51.3 x 56.5 cm, Art Gallery of Alberta Collection, gift of the Ernest E. Poole Foundation, 1975. With permission.

## PAINTING WITH FUR AND FEATHER

As both a fisherman who paints and a painter who fishes, Thomson shared much in common with American artist Winslow Homer.<sup>10</sup> Born in 1836, Homer first visited the Adirondacks to fly fish and paint in 1870. He was thirty-four, about Thomson's age when he first visited Algonquin Park. Homer visited upstate New York regularly until his death in 1910. Fishing generally, and fly fishing specifically, became an enduring theme and subject, making him one of the most accomplished angling artists in the history of the recreational sport.

As part of the generation that preceded Thomson's, Homer was a realist who was primarily a figurative painter influenced by the French Barbizon School. In contrast, Thomson was essentially a landscape painter influenced by French post-impressionism, art nouveau, the arts and crafts movement, and northern European symbolism. Despite differences in influence, both developed dis-

tinctive, highly personal styles after beginning careers as commercial artists. Both were notoriously reticent about their art. And both painted en plein air before working up canvases in the studio—Thomson in Toronto and Homer in New York City.

In *Nothing If Not Critical*, the late *Time* magazine art critic Robert Hughes—himself a fly angler and author of *A Jerk on One End* (Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999)—wrote insightfully about Homer and his influence on American sporting art.

[O]ne sees his echoes on half the magazine racks of America. Just as John James Audubon becomes, by dilution, the common duck stamp, so one detects the vestiges of Homer's watercolours in every outdoor-magazine cover that has a dead whitetail dropped over a log or a largemouth bass. . . . Homer was not, of course, the first sporting artist in America, but he was the undisputed master of the genre, and he brought to it both intense observation and a sense of identification with the landscape—

just at the cultural moment when religious Wilderness of the nineteenth century, the church of nature, was shifting into the secular Outdoors, the theatre of manly enjoyment.<sup>11</sup>

Change a few words and these observations about Homer apply equally to Thomson.<sup>12</sup>

It is inconceivable that Thomson was less enthusiastic about fishing than Homer. In contrast to his American counterpart, however, he painted few angling pictures.<sup>13</sup> One notable exception is *The Fisherman* (shown above).<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, this painting has eluded all but cursory critical commentary. Why this is so is vexing, especially as I believe it illuminates the relationship between fishing and painting *from the artist's perspective*. Completed over the last winter of his life (1916–1917), when Thomson is generally thought to have been working at the height of his creative powers, it is a mature work, combining technical skill and confidence in that skill.

Still, *The Fisherman* has evaded interpretation from the formalist critics who

assess Thomson in terms of European artistic influences and, subsequently, downplay the role biography played in the creation of his art. Is this because of its subject matter? It is unlike anything else Thomson ever painted. Should not such an outlier stimulate critical attention?

Commentators agree that Thomson was an awkward figurative painter. The figures (usually representing people he knew) that appear in paintings completed between 1912 (when he first visited Algonquin Park) and 1917 (when he died) are expressed more or less abstractly through rough, loose brushwork that appears hastily executed—more afterthought than deliberation. The figures are woven into the fabric of the landscape, becoming indistinguishable from water and rock, tree and sky.

Not so with *The Fisherman*. Here the neoclassical figure (rare, if not nonexistent, in Thomson's oeuvre) is deliberately set against the landscape. Caught in the act of landing a fish, the fly angler is frozen in an idealized form, which, I believe, is intended to be heroic, resembling a Greek frieze or a Mesopotamian mosaic.

In *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*, the late Canadian artist Harold Town denounces the painting, contending that "the drawing of the angler . . . has lost itself in the pursuit of action; the artist, by attempting an overly dramatic emphasis of the figure within the static composition, destroyed the order of his design and made the fisherman as glaringly obtrusive as a doorknob on a wedding cake."<sup>15</sup>

I argue that Town—an otherwise sensitive, sometimes brilliant, commentator on Thomson's art—misses the point. A viewer unfamiliar with fly fishing is apt to find the figure awkward. In contrast, a fly angler would view the figure differently. Based on my experience with a fly rod, the angler is portrayed accurately. He is in the process of playing a sizeable fish—perhaps a giant brook trout for which Algonquin Park is celebrated—by lifting the rod above his head to maintain a tight line as the fish darts toward some subterranean obstacle, a rock or a submerged tree trunk or limb, perhaps. Admittedly, the rod is not bent in a natural or realistic way. However, if it is intended as a symbol of a tool or instrument in the hand of a hero—a magic hazel wand (associated with wisdom and inspiration), thunderstick, lightning spear, or knightly lance, for example—then verisimilitude is not the proper criteria for evaluation. If this sounds far-fetched, ridiculous even, remember mythologies and world folk literatures brim with symbols and motifs that connect humanity to nature and enchantment.

The question now becomes what did Thomson want to say with *The Fisherman*? Although speculative, I believe he wanted to pay tribute in the best way he knew how to something that played both a crucial role in his life and a vital role in his art. This is his memorial—and epitaph—to fly fishing. It remains uncertain whether the painting was based on an actual angler. So I imagine it as a Joycean-like self-portrait: the fly angler as artist and the artist as a fly angler.

Celebrated Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye observed in *The Bush Garden*, his groundbreaking study of the Canadian imagination, that Thomson's "sense of design [was] derived from the trail and the canoe."<sup>16</sup> I believe his sense of color was derived, in part, from fish he caught in Algonquin Park. The deep richness that defines his paintings is drawn from the vermiculations and haloed spots of wild brook trout. Moreover, I suspect that many of the places he depicted in paintings resulted not from sketching expeditions, but from fishing outings. He painted where he fished as much as, or even more than, he fished where he painted.

Fishing even played a role in the mystery surrounding Thomson's death. He was reportedly going fishing on the day he disappeared. The importance of fishing in his life and work is indisputable. Most of the extant photographs of the artist connect him to fishing in one way or another. Long before catch-and-release became an ethical imperative, Thomson is often pictured with heavy strings of fish, including brook trout and lake trout. J. E. H. MacDonald—a founding member of the Group of Seven and the author of the words adorning the commemorative plaque erected in Thomson's honor at Hayhurst Point overlooking Canoe Lake—once said of his friend: "Tom was never proud of his painting, but he was cocky about his fishing."<sup>17</sup> But determining whether he cast fur and feather in addition to bait and hard lures has proven less conclusive—despite compelling historical evidence.

## A SKEPTIC IN EVERY CREEL

The leading skeptic to cast doubt on Thomson's being a fly angler is award-winning Canadian journalist and author Roy MacGregor.<sup>18</sup> Born in Whitney, Ontario, and raised in Huntsville in the vicinity of Algonquin Park, he spent his youth, and has spent his summer vacations as an adult, in the area. His father worked in the park and, over the years, he interviewed many old-timers who knew Thomson or were contemporaries. On the strength of his writing about the artist—spanning speculative fiction, crit-

ical commentary, and journalism—he is acknowledged as an authority. His opinions carry weight. However, when it comes to Thomson being a fly fisher, he proves less reliable.

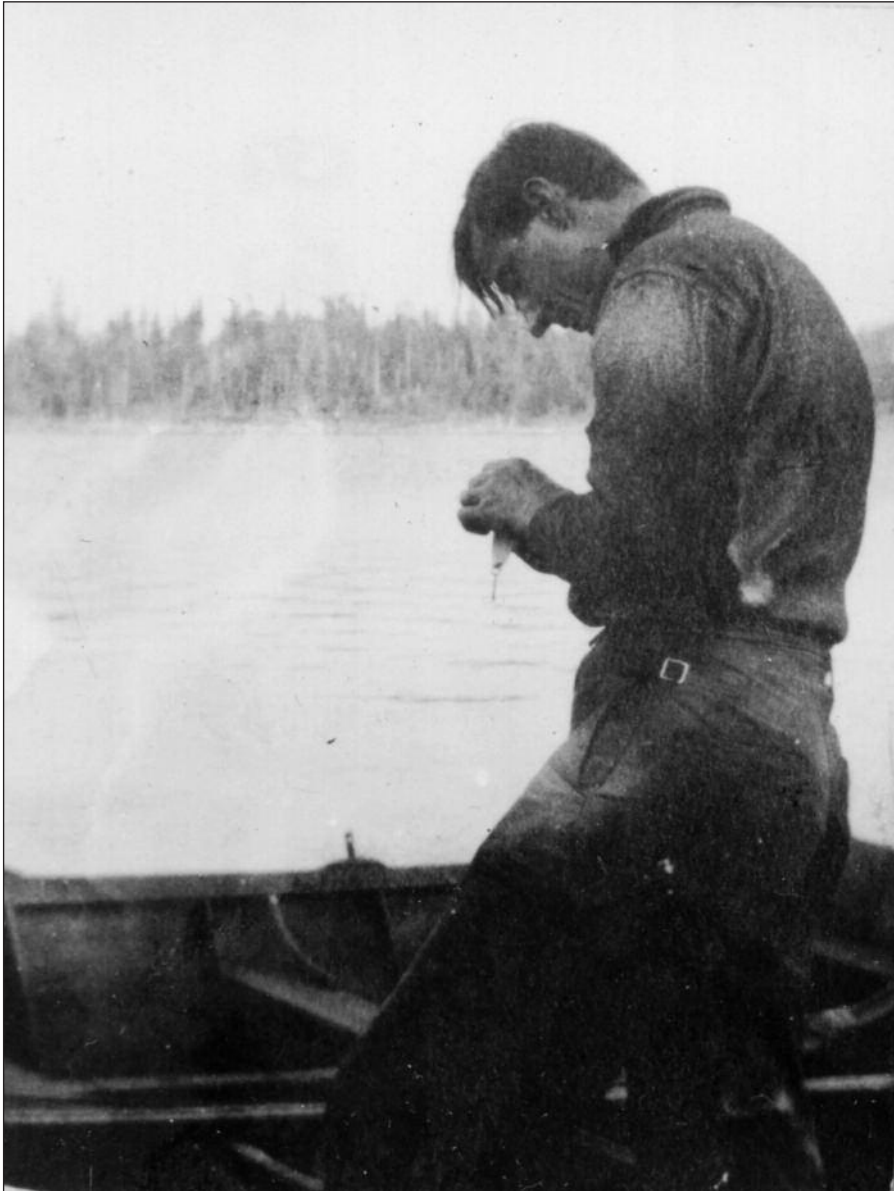
In *Northern Light*, his controversial study of the artist, MacGregor does not assert that Thomson did not fish with flies. Rather, he implies the artist did not fly fish at all on the basis of anecdotal knowledge of Algonquin Park and a superficial understanding of the recreational sport.

MacGregor seems torn in regard to Thomson's abilities as an angler and canoeist. Early on he describes a young Thomson as "a fine fisherman."<sup>19</sup> However, he later reports that some park locals "openly disparaged [Thomson's] skills with paddle and fishing rod."<sup>20</sup> His opinion remains muddled: "My own sense is that he was just fine as a woodsman and, by comparison with others moving about Algonquin Park in those years with canoe and backpack, he was an excellent swimmer."<sup>21</sup> Opinion in the park concerning Thomson's skills as an outdoorsman was divided. On the face of it, men who lived and worked in the park should have been in a position to assess Thomson's woodcraft. But this assertion is not as definitive as it might sound.

Given the time and place, it is easy to imagine Thomson being viewed by park residents as an outsider, an interloper. Although rural born and bred, he would have been dismissed as a city slicker from Toronto, an effete artist who aroused suspicion. To tough, untamed, poorly educated, unsophisticated, laborers—whether loggers, miners, rangers, guides, forest-fire fighters, trappers, hunters, hotel operators, or even poachers—his artistic temperament and habits would have been ridiculed. The fact that he was a tall, handsome bachelor would have made him attractive to women living in the park and vacationing. Hard-working men who feared him as a social threat would have happily painted a target on the artist's back.<sup>22</sup>

Thomson's abilities as an angler and canoeist were complicated by the fact that the legend of the artist as master woodsman was embellished by friends and champions soon after his death.<sup>23</sup> In *Northern Light*, MacGregor observes that Thomson has been a subject of "romancing . . . some justified, some strained, that continues to this day."<sup>24</sup> This is true. The myth-making machinery of transforming the artist into a cultural hero was initiated during World War I, a time of political turbulence and societal transition when Canada was developing a nascent "true north strong and free" national identity. The question of why





*This circa 1916 photo of Tom Thomson tying a metal spoon onto the terminal end of a fishing line has repeatedly been misidentified as the artist tying on a fly. The error in no way precludes him from using a fly rod to cast artificial flies he might have tied himself, perhaps even matching the hatch. Tom Thomson on Canoe Lake, photographs and art works collected by William Colgate, William Colgate Collection, F 1066-6, I0010309, Archives of Ontario.*

Thomson did not serve in the war, as had other Group of Seven members, remains shrouded in speculation, which complicates how he is viewed.<sup>25</sup>

However, it is MacGregor's romanticization of fly fishing that entangles his interpretative leader in wind knots. He begins by referencing a famous photograph of Thomson—reproduced on his book's cover, and shown here above—that misidentifies a spoon (likely made by the artist) as an artificial fly.<sup>26</sup> He implies that this redundant editorial error somehow proves that Thomson did not fish with flies. Of course, it proves nothing of the kind; only that the artist sometimes used spoons, which is not in dispute.

MacGregor affirms "anyone who has done much fishing in this part of the country" would recognize the terminal tackle as a spoon.<sup>27</sup> Of course, this knowledge is not confined to those who fish in the park. It would be clear to any angler who ever tossed spoons manufactured by Len Thompson, Williams, and Eppinger Dardevle, among others.

MacGregor's inference that Thomson was not a fly fisherman is covered in three sentences.

Fly fishing, with its artistic swirls and its own poetic language, is much more esoteric than simply dropping a weighted, triple-hooked, metal lure off the back of a boat or canoe and hauling it

about the deep waters in hopes of a strike. Fly fishing, however, which lends itself magnificently to the cowslip-shouldered streams of Britain and the wide, shallow rivers of Atlantic Canada, is largely a futile exercise. The small hooks of flies that must be tossed back and forth would become hopelessly tangled in the tangle of vegetation that encroaches on Algonquin waterways and surrounds the deep lakes where lake trout hide.<sup>28</sup>

General readers, impressed with MacGregor's credentials, would likely find his description of fly fishing credible. Fly anglers not so much. Although MacGregor's familiarity with the area and general knowledge of fishing are incontestable, his appreciation of fly fishing is superficial. He seems unaware that early American and Canadian streamer flies were tied for trolling on lakes as well as stripping through deep pools in streams and rivers.

MacGregor acknowledges the grace and rhythm associated with casting a fly rod. However, he is describing one classic component: casting a dry fly with a floating line upstream at rising trout. He ignores wet flies, nymphs, and streamers that are generally cast across and downstream.

Fly fishing has not always been as ethical as purists would like. Some fly anglers in Thomson's day would have had no qualms about combining artificial flies with live bait. For instance, in Ernest Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick Adams uses grasshoppers on his fly rig. On a personal note, in the 1950s and 1960s, a friend's father routinely placed the fins of the first brook trout he caught on the hooks of his flies to tip the scales of success. I doubt Thomson would have been averse to such practices, especially in an age of catch-and-eat.

Waxing poetic about trout and salmon fishing, MacGregor overlooks that fly anglers target less-revered species, including bass, pike, muskie, walleye, even panfish and carp. They also cast flies on sinking lines with tungsten split shot from canoes, kayaks, drift boats, and john boats; such classic regional adaptations as Adirondack, Au Sable, and MacKenzie boats; and motorized boats.

MacGregor insists that the small hooks used in fly dressings would get entangled in Algonquin Park's dense vegetation. Granted, fly anglers use small hooks. But they also use large hooks for streamers.

Thomson might have rigged up two or more flies by attaching dropper flies. This practice is prohibited in regulated catch-and-release areas where single,



barbless hooks are mandatory, but is permitted in Algonquin Park to this day.

All fly anglers know the frustration of getting hung up on vegetation, swimming and flying critters, and pieces of anatomy. Ouch! But this annoying eventuality is not confined to Algonquin Park. Vermont's Batten Kill, to name but one American river, is as densely overgrown as any river in the park.

W. H. Blake, a prominent Canadian angling writer, describes fly fishing during the time Thomson was regularly visiting Algonquin Park. In *Brown Waters*—Blake's classic collection of angling essays first published in 1915 about fishing throughout Québec's Laurentian wilderness—he describes the kind of fly fishing I imagine Thomson practicing. Not surprisingly, it bears no semblance to MacGregor's description. Blake writes in the chapter titled "Fontinalis":

I admit freely that extreme delicacy in casting is not essential, and, so far as I am aware, dry-fly fishing is not practiced in Canada. Not only is there no necessity for it, but I doubt whether an exponent of the graceful art would meet with much success. The most effective work is done with a drowned fly, and it appears to present the strongest allurements when brought through the water with a series of quick and almost jerky motions—suggesting to the trout, as I think, the movements of the tail or fin of a small fish near the surface. To complete the comparison, I allow that our heavier casting lines and larger flies give a better chance of bringing trout to net, though, on the other hand, we use lighter rods which are incapable of putting a very severe strain on a fish. While it is useful to be able to command a long cast, few trout are raised and effectively struck with a longer line than fifty or sixty feet from the reel.<sup>29</sup>

The area Blake is writing about in Québec is an extension of the landscape Thomson fished and painted in Algonquin Park, located in the foothills of the Laurentian Mountains.

## TWO PHOTOGRAPHS WORTH A COUPLE OF FLY RODS

Before reviewing documentary and archival material that supports Thomson being an occasional fly fisher, consideration must be given to a couple of photographs reprinted in *Northern Light*.

The first photograph (at right), taken by Thomson, depicts a well-dressed woman holding a fishing rod and a string of fish.<sup>30</sup> MacGregor argues persuasively that the woman was long mistaken for Winnifred (Winnie) Trainor, the woman

some people believe to have been the artist's fiancée. He fails to identify the mystery woman, who remains unknown to this day. Interestingly, MacGregor does not consider what the mystery woman is holding in her left hand: a bamboo fly rod. He obfuscates further by improperly identifying the object, passing it off generically as a "fishing pole." Presumably someone as knowledgeable about fishing as MacGregor would not only acknowledge the difference between a fishing pole and a fly rod, he would know that it is bad form in fly-angling circles to call a fly rod a fishing pole.

Although I have no idea of the woman's identity, I cannot resist pondering who she was and what her relationship was to the photographer. It is possible the woman caught the fish, perhaps with Thomson acting as guide, but women did not fly fish in significant numbers until after World War I, by which time the artist was deceased. Another explanation is that the photo was a good-natured ruse, a trophy shot for a holiday album. I believe the fish might well have been caught by the owner of the fly rod and the man holding the camera: Tom Thomson.<sup>31</sup>



*Long misidentified as Winnifred Trainor, who some people believe was Tom Thomson's fiancée, this mystery woman is holding a couple of brace of fish in one hand and a fly rod in the other. The photo was taken by the artist, who sometimes worked as a fishing guide. Library and Archives Canada/Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, Tom Thomson collection, PA-193567.*





*This photo of Tom Thomson at Tea Lake Dam verifies he was a fly fisherman, at least some of the time, when circumstances suited. He is clearly using a fly rod and is apparently stripping in line. Unknown photographer, Tom Thomson at Tea Lake Dam, ca. 1916, 10 x 10 cm (3 15/16 x 3 15/16 in), Art Gallery of Ontario, gift of Marjorie Lismer Bridges, 1976, LA.ALF.S5.1. With permission.*

MacGregor continues casting into a pool of irony concerning another famous photograph (shown above) reprinted in *Northern Light* that provides visual verification that Thomson fished with a fly rod—at least sometimes. The photo, long believed to have been taken by Lawren Harris, shows the artist (dressed like a lumberjack in a wool toque, wool pants, and knee-high moccasins) standing on an outcrop of rock and casting into the rushing water below the dam at Tea Lake.<sup>32</sup> Considering his familiarity with fishing generally, MacGregor should know Thomson is holding a fly rod, even if he fails to recognize that the artist is stripping in line in accordance with fly-casting practice.

Most baffling of all, however, is the caption beside the photograph—*Tom Thomson fly-fishing*—which contradicts MacGregor’s textual inference that the artist was not a fly fisher.

## FLY-FISHING TRADITION IN ALGONQUIN

What is most disconcerting about MacGregor’s assumption that Thomson was not a fly fisher is the archival documentation he either ignores or dismisses. It is hard to believe he is unfamiliar with John D. Robins’s *The Incomplete Anglers*, either the original 1943 edition or the 1998 Friends of Algonquin Park second-edition reprint.

Robins was an enthusiastic champion of Canadian art, a close friend of Lawren Harris, and an English professor (along with Northrop Frye) at Victoria College at the University of Toronto. His memoir is illustrated by Franklin Carmichael who, like Harris, was a founding member of the Group of Seven. It chronicles a fishing adventure by canoe that Robins

made with his brother Tom. Although Tom fished with live bait exclusively, John was a devoted fly angler. The memoir’s references to fly fishing are too numerous to delineate. In an early passage, Robins lists the flies he intends to purchase, including such classic patterns as Silver Doctor, McGinty, Caddis Drake, Parmachenee Belle, Royal Coachman, and red hackle. “I was prepared to worship fly fishing with a pure, exclusive devotion and leave the worms behind. I supposed that true angling aristocrats would be puzzled by the mention of worms in connection with fishing. But [brother] Tom swore that he would have nothing to do with flies,” Robins writes.<sup>33</sup>

*The Incomplete Anglers* confirms that by the 1940s, fly fishing was a well-established tradition in Algonquin Park. As we are about to discover through archival and documentary sources, it not only



took place in the park when Thomson was there, it was in fact practiced by the artist. Thomson would have been introduced to fly fishing as an occasional guide when wealthy British and Americans visited the park to enjoy a Canadian “wilderness” experience. American anglers would have been familiar with the fly-angling tradition emerging in Pennsylvania, the Catskills, the Adirondacks, and Maine, as well as salmon fishing in Québec and New Brunswick.

The summers Thomson spent in the park from 1912 through 1917 overlapped with what is celebrated as the golden age of American fly fishing: when Theodore Gordon was popularizing the sport, when Hiram Leonard and Edward Payne were designing and manufacturing split-cane bamboo rods, when Edward vom Hofe and Charles F. Orvis were setting a high bar for fly reels, and when Mary Orvis Marbury was collecting American fly patterns for her seminal book *Favorite Flies and Their Histories*.

In his 1996 pictorial history *Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park: Tom Thomson and Other Mysteries*, S. Bernard Shaw refers to Joseph Adams. The pompous English fly angler and columnist for the prestigious sporting magazine *The Field* visited Algonquin Park in 1910 for the sole purpose of fly fishing. Shaw writes that “[Adams] hired park ranger Mark Robinson, an excellent man well acquainted with the forest, to guide him on an expedition to the Oxtongue River to fly fish for brook trout. . . . He had great success . . . catching trout with his ten-foot cane-built rod and gut [line] casting [a] Silver Doctor and March Brown.”<sup>34</sup> At one point Robinson and his client met up with Tom Salmon, a “famed fly-caster” of the day.<sup>35</sup>

Audrey Saunders tells the same tale of Robinson guiding Adams in *Algonquin Story*, originally published in 1946 with subsequent editions printed in 1998 and 2003. She details an incident in which Salmon and Adams square off in a casting contest. Said Robinson: “[My] job was to float chips of wood down stream to test their accuracy. I’ve never seen anything like it—both of them could land their flies right on chips—just as neatly as you please, and at ninety feet.”<sup>36</sup>

Adams would have come to Algonquin steeped in English fly-fishing tradition, including the concept of matching the hatch, as well as the heated debate, raging at the time on both sides of the Atlantic, over the supremacy of dry fly versus wet fly, spearheaded by Frederick Halford and G. E. M. Skues. The origins of matching the hatch extend back to at least 1643, when Gervase Markham recommended catch-

ing flies that were hatching and then imitating them. The concept did not gain traction, however, until 1836, when Alfred Ronalds published *The Fly Fisher’s Entomology*. An aquatic biologist and illustrator, he applied scientific nomenclature to insects of interest to fly anglers and, in the process, established a link between entomology and fly fishing. North American fly anglers had to wait a century until Preston Jennings published *A Book of Trout Flies* in 1935.

The debate as to whether Thomson ever waved a fly rod over wily trout would have been solved had many of his personal belongings not mysteriously disappeared upon his death. A candidate for light-fingered culprit is Shannon Fraser, owner of Mowat Lodge, where Thomson routinely stayed, and one of a number of locals suspected of either accidentally killing or deliberately murdering the painter. Remnants of fly-tying material would have settled the matter. But these—if they existed—disappeared along with Thomson’s hand-painted dove-gray canoe, pair of paddles (one of which was distinctive), fishing tackle, and many of his oil sketches on small boards.

## CELEBRATED FLY FISHERMAN

Although evidence of Thomson’s being a fly tier is less conclusive, there is intriguing documentation confirming that he tied his own flies based on his observation of insects two decades before Jennings published his *Book of Trout Flies* in 1935, nearly four decades before Ernest Schwiebert published *Matching the Hatch* in 1955, and more than half a century before Art Flick published the *Streamside Guide to Naturals and Their Imitations* in 1969.

I start with a couple of biographical connections that, while admittedly anecdotal, remain intriguing. First is Alexander Young, the maternal grandfather of Group of Seven founding member A. Y. Jackson. Young was a noted entomologist as well as an avid fly fisher. His knowledge of insects could have been passed on to Thomson. Even if Thomson and Young never met, Jackson, who like most of the group fished, might well have informed his creative and angling companion about his grandfather, perhaps while sitting around the campfire after a day’s painting or fishing, glowing pipe in one hand and tin cup of whiskey in the other.

Perhaps more conclusive is a family connection. When Thomson moved to Toronto in 1905 to embark on a career in commercial art, he enjoyed the company of a relative known as “Uncle” William

Brodie. Brodie, who may have actually been a cousin, was a prominent naturalist specializing in entomology. He helped establish the Toronto Entomological Society in 1878 and, from 1903 until his death in 1909, was director of the biological department at the Ontario Provincial Museum (later the Royal Ontario Museum).<sup>37</sup> The time Thomson spent outdoors with Brodie nurtured the aspiring painter’s passion for nature. The entomology he learned from Brodie would have served him well in both fly fishing and tying artificial flies.

Thomson’s early biographers associate the painter with fly fishing. It is perplexing that MacGregor ignores these documentary confirmations. Perhaps he dismisses the biographers as “romancers.” Yet fly fishing was not romanticized when the biographies were written. Not only was the contemplative recreation viewed simply as another way of catching fish, spin casting rods and reels became all the rage following World War II.

Ottelyn Addison, in collaboration with Elizabeth Harwood, observes in *Tom Thomson: The Algonquin Years*, “Thomson was a fly fisherman of exceptional skill.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to trolling for lake trout from his canoe, he “often cast for speckled trout.”<sup>39</sup> The daughter of Algonquin Park Ranger Mark Robinson (a close friend of Thomson’s who spearheaded the search for the artist after he went missing), Addison was a keen naturalist who spent her early summers in Algonquin Park and returned often as an adult. She bases her book on her father’s diary, and she certainly would have recognized the difference between fly angling and fishing with hard lures and live bait.

Addison continues: “[Thomson] knew trout have to be down in the cold water in summer; he looked for rocky shelves where they loiter; he studied their habits, observed them feeding.”<sup>40</sup> Fly anglers will recognize this behavior. She writes that “[Thomson] made his own lures from bits of metal, feathers and beads, watched what the fish were taking and painted his own ‘bugs.’”<sup>41</sup> She confirms that Thomson made a variety of lures by hand, including spoons and plugs as well as artificial flies, based on observation of the habits of trout. This sounds very much like matching the hatch.

Addison also quotes Park Ranger Tom Wattie recalling that Thomson “could cast his line in a perfect figure eight and have the fly land on the water at the exact spot planned.”<sup>42</sup> In addition to being a park ranger who “knew [Tom] well,”<sup>43</sup> Wattie was an angler who would have been familiar with fly fishing. His description might resemble purple prose

to contemporary readers, but the bamboo rods back in the day tended to be longer and softer—“wimpy” is a word sometimes used—than they are today, which, from my perspective, makes Wattie’s observation even more credible.

Finally, an endnote in *The Algonquin Years* includes a 16 March 1913 letter from Leonard Mack, a self-described “fishing companion” of Thomson’s, who refers to a fishing trip the previous summer: “I was under the impression that we took a photo of you fly casting from a rock on Crown Lake but perhaps we used your camera.”<sup>44</sup>

The piscatorial plot began thickening years earlier with Saunders’s *Algonquin Story*. Saunders was not an amateur literary dilettante, but a pioneer in both oral history and Canadian studies who taught in Montreal at both Dawson College and Sir George Williams University (now Concordia).

She refers to the photo of Thomson at Tea Lake Dam (mentioned earlier):

Although there is no date to indicate when the photograph of Tom Thomson fly-fishing at the bottom of a lumber dam was taken, there is no doubt that this shows one of his favourite pastimes in the Park. There are many stories of the good fishing to be found near the old dams, and certainly, the intent of concentration expressed both in Tom’s face, and in his stance on that particular occasion, are eloquent of his interest in the art of angling.<sup>45</sup>

It is a stance any fly angler would recognize as his or her own.

Even more significant is her assertion that “Tom’s skill at fly casting won him the admiration of the guests at Shannon’s [Mowat Lodge].”<sup>46</sup> She concludes, “[Thomson] made his own flies and bugs, watching to see what insects made the fish rise, and painting his own imitations on the spot.”<sup>47</sup> This sentence closely resembles Addison’s subsequent observation. It is difficult to determine whether Addison drew on Saunders’s comment (without attribution) or whether both writers came to similar conclusions independently. Both may have based their statements on independent primary sources.

However a reader chooses to interpret the observations of these writers, the underlying fact is that Thomson—who fished with natural bait and hard lures when it suited his needs or when conditions dictated—not only made his own hard plugs and spoons, but tied his own flies. The reference to the artist observing insects that made fish rise and then painting pictures of them on the spot—presumably so he could tie flies later to

match the hatch—would place him at the forefront of one of the most significant developments in fly angling, not only in the twentieth century, but in the long history of the recreational sport.

The fact that Thomson was a fly fisher when it suited his purposes is verified on the basis of archival evidence. By virtue of his stature as Canada’s most famous artist, he is also the country’s most famous fly angler who might well have tied flies to match the hatch before it became common practice in North America.<sup>48</sup> Although he is justly celebrated for painting such iconic pictures as *Northern River*, *The Jack Pine*, and *The West Wind*, it seems undeniable that a river did run through Tom Thomson.



## ENDNOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the opinions expressed in this essay are mine, developed over thirty years as a professional arts writer who reviewed exhibitions; read and reviewed books; interviewed artists, curators, and art historians; and wrote about Tom Thomson, in addition to lecturing on the artist at universities, museums, art galleries, and fly-fishing clubs. My opinions have been shaped by many books (including exhibition catalogs) on Thomson. The artist has been written about more than any other single Canadian artist, irrespective of creative discipline. Selected works include *A Treasury of Tom Thomson, The Art of Tom Thomson, The Best of Tom Thomson, Tom Thomson: Trees, Tom Thomson: The Last Spring, Northern Lights: Masterpieces from Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven*, and *Tom Thomson: Design for a Canadian Hero*, all by Joan Murray; *Tom Thomson* (volume 2 in the Gallery of Canadian Art series) by R. H. Hubbard; *Canadian Art: The Tom Thomson Collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario* by Jeremy Adamson and Katerina Atanassova, et al.; *Tom Thomson: An Introduction to His Life and Art* by David P. Silcox; *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm* by David P. Silcox and Harold Town (1977, revised and updated 2017); *Inventing Tom Thomson* by Sherrill E. Grace; *Tom Thomson: Artist of the North* by Wayne Larsen; *The Real Mystery of Tom Thomson: His Art and His Life* by Richard Weiser; *Tom Thomson* by William Holmes (Vancouver Art Gallery); *The Group of Seven ReImagined* edited by Karen Schaubert; and *Tom Thomson*, edited by Dennis Reid and published in conjunction with a major retrospective exhibition organized by the National Gallery of Canada and Art Gallery of Ontario, coordinated by Charles C. Hill. Many books about the Group of Seven incorporate a consideration of Thomson, including *The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson* by David P. Silcox, *A Like Vision: The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson* by Ian DeJardin and Sarah Milroy, *The Group*

*of Seven: Art for a Nation* by Charles C. Hill, *The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson: An Introduction* by Anne Newlands, *Defiant Spirits: The Modernist Revolution of the Group of Seven* by Ross King, and *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity and Contemporary Art* edited by John O’Brien and Peter White.

2. Ian DeJardin, who was born and raised in England, made this dismissive comment during a virtual talk titled “Tom Thomson: Artist & Icon,” delivered online on 8 July 2021 from the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the gallery that houses an extensive collection of works by Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven as well as other Canadian landscape and indigenous artists.

3. See endnote 1 for selected list of Joan Murray titles.

4. Wayne Larsen, *Tom Thomson: Artist of the North* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011), 12.

5. Andrew Hunter, “Mapping Tom,” in Dennis Reid, ed., *Tom Thomson* (Toronto/Ottawa: Art Gallery of Ontario/National Gallery of Canada and Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002), 19–46, 28.

6. *Ibid.*, 28.

7. *Ibid.*, 29.

8. Tom Thomson’s death—and the suspicious circumstances surrounding it—remains Canada’s most celebrated and enduring mystery. It has laid the foundation for a publishing cottage industry, including *The Tom Thomson Mystery* by William Little, *Who Killed Tom Thomson?* by John Little, *Algonquin Elegy: Tom Thomson’s Last Spring* by Neil J. Lehto, *Northern Light: The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman Who Loved Him* by Roy MacGregor, *Tom Thomson: The Life and Mysterious Death of the Famous Canadian Painter* by Jim Poling Sr., and *The Many Deaths of Tom Thomson: Separating Fact from Fiction* by Gregory Klages. The best place for a reader to start an investigation into Thomson’s death is the website *Death on a Painted Lake: The Tom Thomson Tragedy* (<https://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/thomson/home/indexen.html>, accessed 13 May 2021), maintained as part of the Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History project sponsored by the University of Victoria, the Université de Sherbrooke, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. The mystery begins with the how, when, where, and why—not to mention who—of Thomson’s death, whether deliberate or accidental murder, manslaughter, foul play, misadventure, or accident. One theory has Thomson falling out of his canoe and striking his head while standing astern and urinating. But, like rise forms on a placid lake, the mystery expands outward to encompass where his body is buried (in the family plot in the Leith cemetery, outside of Owen Sound, Ontario, or in an unmarked grave in Algonquin Park, where he was initially buried) and the whereabouts of his hand-painted dove-gray canoe, paddle, and fishing tackle, which disappeared—along with many small oil sketches—after his body was recovered.

9. Thomson casts a long, double-haul shadow across arts and culture in Canada,



encompassing visual art, prose narrative (novel and mystery), memoir, critical commentary, cultural history, poetry, music (classical, operatic, jazz, electronica, rock, and acoustic), theater, dance, and cinema (documentary and feature film). Canada has produced many great international artists who have gained considerable fame in our age of celebrity, including Robertson Davies, Alice Munro, Marshall McLuhan, Margaret Atwood, James Cameron, Donald Sutherland, Guy Lombardo, Paul Anka, Ann Murray, Neil Young, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, David Foster, Glenn Gould, and Drake, to name a few of the most obvious. However, as remarkable as it might seem, none of these have inspired as many artists or influenced more cross-disciplinary works than Tom Thomson—and this is after more than a century since his death. It is beyond the scope of this essay to document the many ways Thomson has exerted an impact on the generations of Canadian artists who followed him, whether adopting, adapting, or challenging his vision. Rather, the following is a selective list of artists in other disciplines who have in one way or another responded to Thomson—the man, the artist, and the art. He has inspired numerous songs, including “Tom Thomson’s Mandolin” by singer/songwriter Mae Moore and “Three Pistols” by Canadian rockers the Tragically Hip. He has also provided inspiration—along with the Group of Seven—for full-scale albums: *Turpentine Wind*, an acoustic/electronica song cycle written, produced, and performed by Kurt Swinghammer; *Northern Shore* by the Skydiggers, a folk-rock band; *Sonic Palette*, a suite of song and instrumental music written and performed by the Algonquin Ensemble, a folk/classical string ensemble; *Music Inspired by the Group of 7*, a

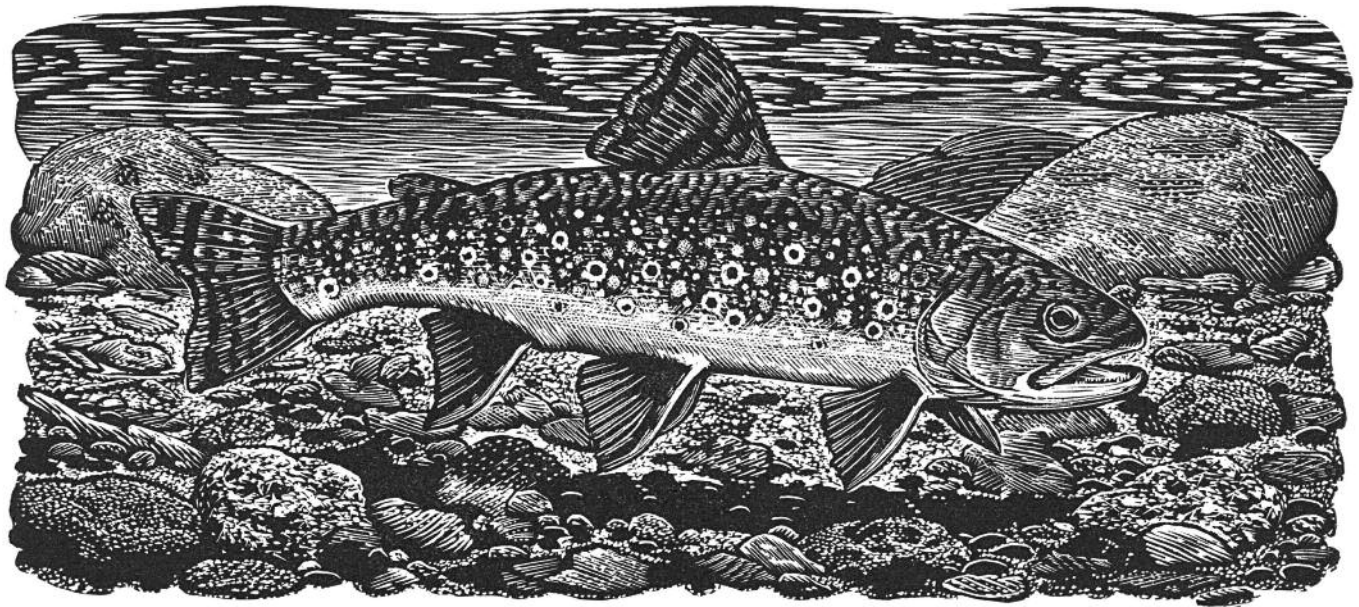
suite commissioned by the National Art Gallery of Canada in commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Group of Seven, written and performed by the Rheostatics, a popular Toronto folk-rock band since disbanded; and *Walking in the Footsteps*, a song suite celebrating Thomson and the Group of Seven written and performed by folk singer Ian Tamblyn. Thomson also left his mark on literature, including *Earth Day in Leith Churchyard*, a poetry collection devoted to the artist by Bernadette Rule; *Tom Thomson’s Last Bonfire*, a mystery by Geoff Taylor; *Tom Thomson’s Last Paddle*, a mystery for young readers by Larry McCloskey; *The Missing Skull*, a mystery by John Wilson; *Tom Thomson: My Last Spring*, a fictionalized diary by Tim Bouma; and *The Mysterious Death of Tom Thomson*, a graphic novel by engraver George A. Walker. Other writers have titled books in tribute to Thomson, including *Tom Thomson in Purgatory*, a National Book Critics Circle Award-winning poetry collection by Troy Jollimore, a Canadian-born philosophy professor at California State University; *Tom Thomson and Other Poems*, a selected works including poems about Thomson by George Whipple; and *Tom Thomson’s Shack*, a collection of short meditative narratives by Harold Renisch. Thomson’s reach extends to the performing arts to embrace *Northern River*, a one-man folk operetta written and performed by acoustic musician David Archibald; *Songs in the Key of Tom*, a folk musical written and performed by David Sereda and later expanded into *The Woods Are Burning* with poet Anne Michaels and blues artist Ken Whiteley; *The Threshold of Magic*, a one-man show of song and music created and performed by Jeffery Bastien;

*Colours in the Storm*, a folk musical by playwright Jim Betts; *Group of Seven Nutcracker*, an adaptation of *The Nutcracker* created and produced by Toronto-based Ballet Jorgen; *The Far Shore*, a feature fictionalized biopic film by visual artist/filmmaker Joyce Wieland; *Dark Pines*, a television documentary investigating Thomson’s death directed by David Viasbord; and *West Wind: The Vision of Tom Thomson*, a documentary on the artist’s life and art produced by White Pines Pictures. As recently as September 2021, the Blyth Festival, one of Canada’s great small independent theatres, premiered *Assassinating Tom Thomson*, a play by Bruce Horak. Tom Thomson continues to inspire from beyond the grave.

10. Of the academic studies devoted to Winslow Homer, the two I found most helpful in terms of the intersection of man, artist, and fly angler are *Winslow Homer: Art and Angler* by Patricia Junker and Sarah Burns, with contributions by William H. Gerdis, Paul Schullery, Theodore E. Stebbins Jr., and David Tatham, published in conjunction with the exhibition *Casting a Spell: Winslow Homer, Artist and Angler*, co-organized by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and Amos Carter Museum, Fort Worth, 2002; and *Winslow Homer in the Adirondacks* by David Tatham, published by Syracuse University Press, 1996.

11. Robert Hughes, *Nothing If Not Critical* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 107.

12. In addition to the similarities between Thomson and Homer, there are similarities between Adirondack State Park (constituted in 1892) and Algonquin Provincial Park (established in 1893), including their shared history of logging, hunting, fishing, and trapping, and recreational tourism in an era of expanding



*Algonquin Park is not only home to one the best trout fisheries in Canada, it has one of the highest concentration of brook trout lakes and streams in the world. Engraving by Wesley W. Bates. From Robert Reid, Casting into Mystery (Porcupine’s Quill, 2020). With permission from the artist.*

urbanization and industrialization when people sought refuge in a quasi-religious “wilder-ness” experience. Interestingly, another painter associated with the Adirondacks, Rockwell Kent, knew and influenced Lawren Harris, one of Thomson’s closest creative companions. Although Homer was far more famous in his lifetime than Thomson, the latter continues to play a much larger role in Canadian arts and culture today than Homer ever has in American arts and culture.

13. Thomson painted a blurry, un- specified fishing figure in *Little Cauchon Lake* (ca. spring 1916). It is impossible to determine whether the figure was intended to be a fly angler. He also painted *Autumn, Three Trout* (ca. fall 1916).

14. *The Fisherman* (oil on canvas, winter 1916–1917) is in the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of Alberta.

15. Harold Town, in David P. Silcox and Harold Town, *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1977), 143, and (Toronto: HarperCollins, revised and updated 2017), 124.

16. Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1971), 200.

17. According to Ian DeJardin, “Tom Thomson: Artist and Icon,” virtual talk delivered online from the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, 8 July 2021.

18. In addition to working as a feature writer and columnist at such major Canadian newspapers as the *Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star*, *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen*, and *Maclean’s* (Canada’s national magazine), MacGregor has written more than fifty books, including *A Life in the Bush* (a memoir built on an affectionate portrait of his dad), *Escape* (a search for the soul of Canada), *The Weekender* (a cottage journal), *Canadians* (a portrait of a country and its people), *Canoe Country* (an exploration into the making of Canada), and *Shorelines* (reissued as *Canoe Lake*), a fictional account of the alleged romance between Thomson and Winnie Trainor (a distant relative of MacGregor’s). His most recent nonfiction book is *Original Highways: Travelling the Great Rivers of Canada*.

19. Roy MacGregor, *Northern Light* (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2010), 16.

20. *Ibid.*, 302.

21. *Ibid.*

22. The impressions of Tom Thomson expressed here are based on a pair of letters written to Darcy Spencer, a former scoutmaster living in Kitchener, Ontario. In the 1970s, Spencer exchanged correspondence with Jack Wilkinson, longtime operator of Kish-Kaduk Lodge on Cedar Lake, in Algonquin Park. In the letters, which had not been made public previously, Wilkinson offers recollections of being a child in the park when the artist was alive. Spencer showed me the letters in January 2011 after I published a story in the *Waterloo Region Record* in advance of an exhibition, *Searching for Tom—Tom Thomson: Man, Myth and Masterworks*, organized by THEMUSEUM, in Kitchener, Ontario. Information related to the letters is posted as “Epistles from the Grave” on my blog at

www.reidbetweenthelines.ca/epistles-from-the-grave/. They are now in the permanent collection of the Tom Thomson Art Gallery in Owen Sound, Ontario.

23. Some posthumous champions, such as Dr. James MacCallum, a Toronto ophthalmologist and staunch supporter of Thomson and the Group of Seven, had a financial interest in enhancing the artist’s reputation. Others—including family, a few discerning art critics, gallery curators who challenged public sentiment by purchasing paintings, and founding members of the Group of Seven—were motivated by either familial love or appreciation for his artistic talent, which was still developing when he died. In 1917, members of the group erected a memorial cairn in honor of their creative companion on Hayhurst Point, overlooking Canoe Lake. The inscription, written by group founding member J. E. H. (Jim) MacDonald, reflects both heartfelt regard and mythologizing zeal: “To the memory of Tom Thomson, artist, woodsman, and guide, who was drowned in Canoe Lake July 8th, 1917. He lived humbly but passionately with the wild. It made him brother to all untamed things of nature. It drew him apart and revealed itself wonderfully to him. It sent him out from the woods only to show these revelations through his art and it took him to itself at last. His fellow artists and other friends and admirers join gladly in this tribute to his character and genius. . . .”

24. MacGregor, *Northern Light*, 302.

25. Some people who knew Thomson claimed he tried to enlist multiple times but was rejected for health reasons (he suffered a lengthy lung ailment, complicated by inflammatory rheumatism, as a child). Others who knew the artist claimed he was a pacifist. There is no definitive evidence one way or the other.

26. *Tom Thomson on Canoe Lake*, ca. 1916 (Archives of Ontario), a photo sometimes purported to have been taken by Maud Varley, wife of Group of Seven founding member Fred Varley. The misidentification in the caption accompanying the photo has been repeated by successive writers, editors, and publishers obviously unfamiliar with angling gear.

27. MacGregor, *Northern Light*, 302.

28. *Ibid.*

29. W. H. Blake, *Brown Waters* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1940), 39. Originally published in 1915, *Brown Waters* was reprinted twice, in 1925 with a preface by Vincent Massey and in 1940 with a preface by Lord Tweedsmuir (John Buchan)—both of whom served as governors general of Canada.

30. The photograph of a woman wearing a wedding band and holding a stringer of fish in one hand and a bamboo fly rod in the other, long misidentified as Winnifred (Winnie) Trainor, was taken by Tom Thomson, ca. 1916 (Library and Archives Canada).

31. Thomson was an avid photographer. There is no strong evidence he employed photos in his artistic practice as an aid to memory. Most of his extant photos are trophy shots of fish. Like many personal items, his photos disappeared upon his death. He is

known to have lost a number of rolls of exposed film in a canoe mishap in 1912 on the Mississagi River.

32. Photo of Thomson at Tea Lake Dam (c. 1916), believed by many to have been taken by Lawren Harris (Art Gallery of Ontario). Thoreau MacDonald, son of J. E. H. MacDonald and a fine printmaker and illustrator in his own right, based a later well-known drawing on the photo.

33. John D. Robins, *The Incomplete Anglers* (Whitney, Ont.: The Friends of Algonquin Park, 1998), 8.

34. S. Bernard Shaw, *Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park: Tom Thomson and Other Mysteries* (Burnstown, Ont.: General Store Publishing House, 1996), 83.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Quoted in Audrey Saunders, *Algonquin Story*, 3rd ed. (Whitney, Ont.: The Friends of Algonquin Park, 2003), 133–37.

37. This information is contained in a number of sources, including Joan Murray, *Tom Thomson: Design for a Canadian Hero* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1998), 16.

38. Ottelyn Addison and Elizabeth Harwood, *Tom Thomson: The Algonquin Years* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969), 19.

39. *Ibid.*, 20.

40. *Ibid.*, 19.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. Quoted in Addison and Harwood, “Notes,” *Tom Thomson: The Algonquin Years*, 88.

45. Saunders, *Algonquin Story*, 180.

46. *Ibid.*, 179.

47. *Ibid.*

48. I stand by my contention that Tom Thomson is Canada’s most famous fly angler, but Canada can claim other significant artists, as well as prominent public figures, committed to catching fish with artificial flies. An incomplete list includes writers Stephen Leacock, W. O. Mitchell, Ethel Wilson, Mordecai Richler, David Adams Richards, Paul Quarrington, Helen Humphrey, David Carpenter, Jake MacDonald, Wayne Curtis, and Harry Thurston; playwright Dan Needles; newspapermen Greg Clark, Bruce Hutchison, and Charles Lynch; broadcaster/storyteller Stuart McLean; sportswriter Stephen Brunt; country songwriter Paul Brant; and acoustic musician Chris Coole.





# Simon's Daughter

by Jody Martin



Watercolor by Robert Chamberlin.

LET THE TRUCK COAST to a stop a couple of hundred yards uphill from the cabin, rolling onto a wide muddy area on the side of the winding drive matted with leaves wet from last night's rain. It gives me a safe distance from which to climb slowly out of the truck, let the door close without banging, and make my way quietly on down the hill.

I always try to be quiet in case she is sleeping. The front steps, faded and worn, creak badly, so I avoid them and creep slowly around to the side window to look in on her. The dogwood tree seems a little closer to the window since last time, and I have to duck under its branches to see her.

She knows I am there. No matter how quietly I approach, she always knows I am there. It's not a look of recognition, just a slight tilting of the head that lets me know she has somehow heard me arrive, or maybe it's a smell, a change in air pressure, a premonition, I really don't know. But she knows. I've read that sometimes when some of your sensory perception is lost, other senses can kick in, compensate. Maybe that's what's going on. She's stretched out on the wood floor, paper scattered about her. Her left hand, the good one, is making slow, lazy circles on a large piece of paper with one of the oversized pencils I gave her last time. The patterns she makes are curious, sometimes

circular, sometimes ellipses, occasionally with angles and with other components that might be figures, or might not. I have several of them hanging above my desk, convinced that there is something here that she is trying to say. But I could be mistaken. Her other arm is curled under her, almost as if it's a cushion giving her support as she sprawls on the oak floor while she sketches. Or like it's something she is trying to hide.

She is waiting. I could continue watching, and if I did, she would continue with her slow sketching, head tilted slightly so that her left ear is closest to the window where I stand. It's a game we have played before. Always, she waits.

I return to the front of the cabin, walk up the three wooden steps, cross the porch and knock lightly. Amy answers the door, and it's clear that although Marcia knew I was here, Amy did not. She has forgotten how to smile, years ago, but she nods and turns by way of inviting me inside. I wipe my boots on the mat and step in, consciously avoiding looking around at the dilapidated and drab furniture, the dinginess. I walk to the doorway of the room where she is sketching.

"Ready, Marcia?" I say. Her name is pronounced *Mar-see-ah*, and not *Marsha*, I have been corrected, although not by her. She stands slowly, head still tilted, and walks slowly toward me, past

me, out the front door and down the wooden steps, her eyes pointed elsewhere while her feet travel a path she knows by heart. I look around to catch Amy's eye to let her know we are leaving, but she has retreated to some far corner of the cabin.

I walk outside where Marcia has her face turned upward toward the sun. I think she enjoys this feeling, but it also brings on slight fasciculations that I do not understand and want to stop, so I interrupt her. "OK then, let's go!" I say, and I reach down to take her hand. I try for the right hand, the crippled one, thinking that the more I try to move and exercise that hand and arm the better they will be, so that they do not continue to atrophy. Dupuytren's contracture or possibly sclerodactyly we've been told, but nobody seems to know for sure. As I reach for her right hand she sidesteps, moving around to my right side, so that my right hand will hold her left, the good one, as we walk toward the creek. I switch the fly rod to my left hand to accommodate this. I brought the 3-weight today, a sensitive little rod that I think might fit her small hand better than the 4-weight I have been bringing.

I talk nearly constantly as we walk, knowing she will not respond, but thinking she might appreciate the sound of my voice, the change in her routine. I talk about the day, the creek, the fish we might catch, the drive up into these hills, even my job, mostly just filling the silence between us. Marcia seems to know the path well, and she sometimes picks up her feet to step over rocks before I even mention them. How she does this I do not know. "Big log ahead," I say, and she stops and puts out a foot to feel for it before stepping over it. I think she could find her way down to the creek and back now without me.

The half mile path is slightly overgrown, and I guide her around stinging nettles and some plants that look a little like poison oak. Closer to the creek the path widens and merges with a narrow sandy bank, bathed in the pale green light that filters down through the canopy. Simon's pool looks perfect, and I am thankful for that. The green-black slow section of water is the result of a small cataract that spills through a tight juncture of rhododendron and laurel before opening into a wide spot that is maybe 4 feet deep in the center, 8 feet across, with a shallow tailout over a wide bed of small, smooth stones that have been carved and sculpted by Appalachian waters since long before the time of Jesus. There have been days when we caught nothing here, and she has never expressed disappointment, but when the water is right and the trout are cooperative

the miracles are unfettered and fall about us like star drops, catching in her gray eyes.

I explain to her what I am doing as I string the rod and tie on a small drab size 18 nymph and pinch on a tiny split shot. Her head is tilted and I know she is listening, but whether to me or to the odd voices of the pine siskins above us I am not sure. They are not always here, the little siskins, and I wonder if she realizes that as she listens. We've heard all sorts of birds back in these thickets, and I always stop to tell her what each one is if I know. Several times we've heard wild turkeys, and a few times even owls, the dark blue-green shadows of the mountain fooling them into thinking that night was already here. The chickadees are my favorites, but they are not here today.

I flip the line out into the middle of the pool, and as the nymph starts to sink the take is immediate, as it nearly always is. These small trout do not see artificial flies often and they are hungry and eager. There is no need to set the hook; the trout has turned its head toward home and done this for us. I say, "OK, here we go!" and hand her the rod, placing it in her good hand. And now the first miracle occurs. She has the rod in her left hand, and I know she feels the trout on the other end, the tremble, the vibrancy of life desperately trying to break free. The rod quivers, and as it does, she starts to pull the handle of the rod toward her other hand, at the same time that she moves the hand toward the rod, until both of her hands are wrapped around the cork. And at this precise moment she has two working hands, equals; she is complete. The fish has just enough power to move the rod, sending its life force down into the warm cork handle where Marcia's fingers are clasped. The rod bounces, vibrates, and Marcia's arms tremble, and there is a connection here, a lifeline, Marcia on one end, a small brook trout on the other, the great mystery borne of pain in between. I don't want to tire the trout out too much, so I say, "OK, let's give this one a break," and I take the rod from her and pull the fish into my net. I guide her left hand down to the net so that she can feel it. But I forget to watch where her feet are going and she steps into the water, getting her small tennis shoe and sock wet on that foot. She does not seem to notice, even though the water here is icy cold. She touches the trout, and her head is tilted to the side and has a look of concentration on it. We let the fish slip back into the pool. "Want to try for another one?" I ask, but she does not reply.



*A black-capped chickadee, photographed and artistically interpreted by Sara Wilcox.*





*Watercolor by Robert Chamberlin.*

We catch three more before the second miracle occurs. This one I can never count on. There have been days when it happens on the first trout, and days when it never happens at all despite catching more than a dozen. I cannot predict it and do not understand it. But for whatever reason, today it happens, and it happens on the fifth trout. As always, I hand her the rod, and she moves it so that both hands can feel the pull, the tremble, the desperation, both hands working together, miracle number one. But now comes the change. Something is different. This trout, this small glossy arc of life, has somehow reached her, spoken. With the rod raised high, the tip trembling, she lifts her head, up and up, until she is looking almost straight up to where the pine siskins flirt among the conifers above us, and her mouth opens in the shape of an O, and her eyes are wide and gray and unseeing. Her entire body begins to shudder, and her eyes fill with tears. She is not fighting a fish, she has become the fish. She cannot stop the stream of water from her eyes, and as she looks up, her hands clutched tightly around the cork handle, her body shaking, she speaks, the only words I ever hear her say. What she says is “Oh, oh, oh.”

We pull this trout in, and I look at it carefully. It is a brookie, like all the others, and it is maybe 6 inches long, again like all the others. It is beautiful, dark and colorful and shining, an alien life of grace and perfection, the world reflected in its golden eyes, but I cannot see how it differs from the others and why it might have elicited this second miracle from her when the first four did not. She lowers her head and her breathing starts to return to normal. We release the fish. I dab her eyes with my bandana and am surprised that she lets me. After catching two more, we call it an afternoon. I hold her hand again on the path back. We do not talk. It has begun to rain softly.

Amy is waiting for us on the slightly sagging porch. She asks, “Did you have fun?” and Marcia gives no answer. “Yes,” I say, “I think we did. What do you think, Marcia?” But her head is tilted another way, and she is somewhere else. “Almost forgot,” I say. I reach into my hip pack for a small box of colored pencils and press them into Marcia’s left hand. “These are different colors,” I tell her, then stop and feel stupid for saying it. “Maybe they have different textures too, like softer or harder, or even different smells,” I say. But it’s a lame attempt to cover up a thoughtless comment. “Will you draw me something for next time?” Her head is pointing down and to the side. Amy says to her, “Come on now, your food’s ready,” and turns to go back in. She does not invite me in, has not for a long time now.

I say something about coming more often, but we all know that I cannot. It’s a four-hour drive up here from Asheville deep into the Nantahala Forest, mostly because of the winding mountain roads are not paved for the last half of the drive, and with a job and family and responsibilities it’s hard to find time to get away, to drive up here to spend a few hours. But I told Simon I would, told him I would never forget, would not let him down, would always do what I could to help this girl who might or might not be his daughter. The promises and my resolve seem to weaken as the years go by. Marcia is now twelve and needs more than I can give her, more than Amy has left to offer. I will be back, but I cannot promise more than that. All any of us can do is hope for more miracles.

The tires of the truck rumble over the pitted road as I drive back down the hill, slowly bouncing over small rocks and in and out of potholes, and I wonder if this is what it is like to read braille.



## THE 2021 ROBERT TRAVER FLY-FISHING WRITING AWARD: FINALISTS

The 2021 competition drew a field of seventy-five stories and essays. Entries were judged anonymously, resulting in eight finalists. In addition to the winning entry, Jody Martin's "Simon's Daughter" (page 13), judges bestowed honorable mention recognition on three finalists:

"Pretending to Listen" by Paige Wallace of Portland, Oregon  
"Solitude" by Mike Chalmers of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania  
"Lower Squall" by Paul Kennebeck of Denver, Colorado

These three stories can be found on the museum website at [www.amff.org/traver-winners-2021](http://www.amff.org/traver-winners-2021).

The other four finalists were:

"Eider in the Silence" by Andrew Harris of Bozeman, Montana  
"Fly Fishing with God" by Jody Martin of Thousand Oaks, California  
"A Priest and a Promise" by Richard Landerman of Sandy, Utah  
"Metamorphosis" by Jim Bale of Salt Lake City, Utah



## THE 2022 ROBERT TRAVER FLY-FISHING WRITING AWARD: A CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The John D. Voelker Foundation and the American Museum of Fly Fishing are pleased to announce that submissions are now being accepted for the 2022 Robert Traver Fly-Fishing Writing Award (the Traver Award). The award is named after Robert Traver, pen name for the late John Voelker, author of *Trout Madness*, *Trout Magic*, *Anatomy of a Fisherman*, the 1958 best seller *Anatomy of a Murder*, and the historical novel *Laughing Whitefish*.

The Traver Award, which includes a \$2,500 prize, was created in 1994 to encourage and recognize "distinguished original stories or essays that embody the implicit love of fly fishing, respect for the sport, and the natural world in which it takes place." The Traver stories and essays must demonstrate high literary values in one or more of these three categories:

- The joy of fly-fishing: personal and philosophic experience
- Ecology: knowledge and protection of the natural world
- Humor: piscatorial friendships and fun on the water

The 2022 Traver Award will be granted for the winning short work of fiction or nonfiction essay in the English language not previously published commercially in print or digital media. "Short work" means 3,000 words or less. An entry fee of \$25 will offset the administrative costs of the award program. Previous Traver Award winners are not eligible.

The deadline for submissions is midnight on 31 May 2022. The submission form and additional instructions can be found on the Voelker Foundation website: [www.voelkerfoundation.com](http://www.voelkerfoundation.com).

The Traver Award winner will be notified in the fall of 2022. The winning entry will be published in the Winter or Spring 2023 edition of the *American Fly Fisher*, the journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

Since 1994, twenty-two awards have been given for the winning entry. Two anthologies of the Traver Award-winning essays were published in two volumes: *In Hemingway's Meadow* (2009) and *Love Story of the Trout* (2010).

For more information, see [www.voelkerfoundation.com](http://www.voelkerfoundation.com) and [www.amff.org](http://www.amff.org).

Al Pellicane



John Voelker at Frenchman's Pond in 1980. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.



# H. A. Driscole's *Trout Leaping for a Fly*



Trout Leaping for a Fly  
oil on canvas  
Collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing  
2019.051.074

THE WORKS OF H. A. Driscole—who is one of my favorite artists—bring to life the battles between angler and piscatorial prey.

Born in Connecticut in 1857, Henry Ames Driscole, son of John B. Driscole and Fidelity Driscole, would become one of this country's greatest angling artists. He spent his youth fishing in and around New York City, a place where he would eventually set up his workshop, near Peekskill. As a young man, Driscole began life “making wooden nutmegs” as he put it, often playing hooky from school to go fishing, then painting pictures of his catches on the family barn door.<sup>1</sup>

Although mostly a self-taught artist, Driscole had the advantage of studying under a master of technique, painter George L. Frankenstein (1825–1911) of New York. Frankenstein was known primarily as a landscape artist but is best known for his Civil War paintings, having spent four years traveling to Civil War battlefields to paint scenes using oil on paper.

With a solid understanding of his primary subjects and the training provided by his mentor, Driscole focused his attention on his favorite subjects: bass and trout. Listed as an artist at the

age of twenty-three in the 1880 New York City census, he early on understood the commercial potential of his work. As reported in *American Angler*, a friend of Driscole's sent one of his works to the shop of Thomas Conroy, a famous tackle retailer located in New York City. Conroy placed the painting in his store's front window, and before the day's end, it was sold. Thus began the commercial success of H. A. Driscole.<sup>2</sup>

Unique in that he did not use a formal studio to produce his paintings (Driscole claimed there was no other way in which to get bass and trout in action<sup>3</sup>), he used his canoe as his office, painting many of his subjects on Lake Mohegan. This practice produced some of the most lifelike piscatorial paintings during his, or any other, era.

JIM SCHOTTENHAM  
CURATOR

<sup>1</sup>“Driscole—Angler and Artist,” *American Angler* (May 1919, vol. 4, no. 1), 48–49; 49.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 48–49.

<sup>3</sup>“A Painter of Fish,” *Forest & Stream* (March 1919, vol. 89, no. 3), 142.

# Conservation Champion and Bass Pro Shops Founder Johnny Morris Receives Heritage Award Honor from the American Museum of Fly Fishing

Shelby Walters/Johnny Morris's Wonders of Wildlife



AMFF President Fred Polhemus (left) and event chair Annie Perkins present the Heritage Award to Johnny Morris.

Val Kropiwnicki



The Heritage Award fly created by Val Kropiwnicki in honor of Johnny Morris.

THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF FLY FISHING hosted its Heritage Award event honoring Johnny Morris on April 7 at the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium (WOW) in Springfield, Missouri. The event also celebrated the opening of AMFF's new gallery at WOW.

As guests gathered for a cocktail reception in the space outside the gallery, they were treated to a highlight reel of fly-fishing films included in the exhibition. They also had the opportunity to get up close and personal with a sloth, a snake, and an alligator who made special appearances. AMFF President Fred Polhemus welcomed nearly 100 guests to both recognize Johnny Morris's accomplishments and share the expertly curated gallery, which tells fly fishing's greatest stories, including its journey to becoming one of the world's most fascinating and beloved sports.

Dinner was served in the Great Barrier Reef room. Guests enjoyed a delicious meal prepared by the White River Conference Center set against the backdrop of a dazzling aquarium featuring an impressive array of underwater life. Auctioneer Chris Ward took the stage for a high-spirited live auction, which included a paddle raise to support our new Vermont exhibit *Tied Together: The Extraordinary Lives of Joan and Lee Wulff*. Captain Robert L. W. McGraw made a pre-event pledge of \$10,000, which was matched by Morris, and other generous guests brought the paddle raise total to \$39,500.

Former AMFF trustee and event chair Annie Perkins introduced the honoree. It was the combined vision of Perkins's late

husband, Leigh H. Perkins, and Morris that brought the AMFF gallery to WOW.

Perkins and Polhemus then presented Morris with the Heritage Award. Morris shared captivating, heartwarming stories about his family and his love of the sport of fly fishing. The evening concluded with Senior Conservation Director Bob Ziehmer voicing his appreciation for his friendship with Morris and his excitement around the conservation opportunities that will emerge from the partnership with AMFF.

The museum would like to thank our honoree, Johnny Morris, and his extraordinary teams at both WOW and Bass Pro Shops for making us feel so welcome in Springfield, as well as our wonderful event committee: Mark Comora, Gary Grant, Karen Kaplan, Walter Matia, Annie Perkins, Fred Polhemus, Nancy Zakon, and Bob Ziehmer. We are also so grateful to all of our live and silent auction donors: Above All Vermont, Gordon Allen, Bass Pro Shops, Scott Biron, Nicholas Brawer, Henry Caldwell, Cheeky, Mark Comora, Deerfield Rods, Emerald Water Anglers, Fishpond, James Heckman, Hemingway Inshore, Hildene, Hollenbeck Club, Kimpton Taconic, Woods King IV, Carmine Lisella, Walter Matia, Mulligans, Al Quattrocchi, Annie Perkins, Harry Peterson, Fred Polhemus, Steve Ramirez, Scientific Anglers, Rich Strolis, Taf Schaefer Design, *Tail Magazine*, Three Forks Ranch, Tin Boat Productions, Trout Unlimited, the Wild Wander, James Utaski, George Van Hook, April Vokey, and Nancy and Alan Zakon.





*The exterior of the Leigh H. Perkins Hall at the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium.*



*Rods, reels, and fly-tying artifacts on display.*



*The entry of the new AMFF gallery.*



*Guest of honor Johnny Morris.*



*Part of the exhibit's timeline section.*



*Sitting down to dinner in the Great Barrier Reef room.*



*Explore AMFF's new gallery by scanning this code.*



# USFWS's Bountiful Offering

by R. W. Hafer

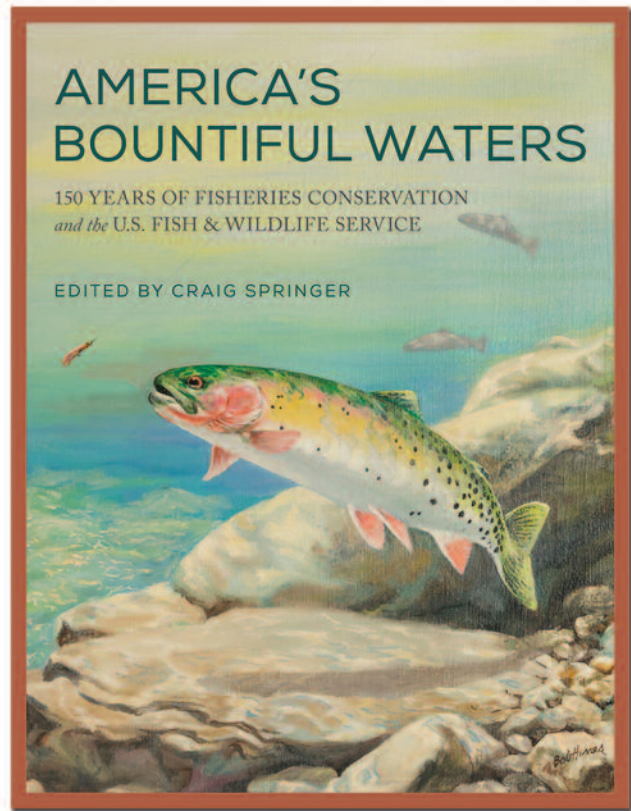
**O**PEN AMERICA'S BOUNTIFUL WATERS: 150 Years of Fisheries Conservation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to a random page and you will find photographs of a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) employee at work, pictures of old and new hatcheries, or artwork illustrating one of the dozens of species covered. It's a beautiful book. If the USFWS wanted to put its best foot forward, this book ticks that box.

The sixty-plus entries compiled by editor Craig Springer, a USFWS fish biologist and accomplished writer, fall into two categories: USFWS employee biographies and profiles of fish and other aquatic species. Biographies span from the founding of the service in the early 1870s to today. Spencer Baird, the first U.S. fish commissioner, and Marshall McDonald, his disciple and successor, are among those highlighted. The reader learns that they achieved some fame not only as heads of the U.S. Fish Commission (the forerunner of the USFWS), but also as scientists and fish culturists of their day. Fisheries scientist Emmeline Moore spent most of her career with the New York State Conservation Department, but her contributions to the field were so important that in 1927 she was elected the first female president of the American Fisheries Society. Although not an employee, Robert Barnwell Roosevelt receives recognition as well, and rightly so: he sponsored the bill in Congress that created the U.S. Fish Commission in 1871.

Other biographical entries cover a wide range of employees in the service's history, from field workers to hatchery superintendents to scientists. The approach gives the reader a sense of how and why the USFWS was created and how its mission has evolved over the past 150 years. Perhaps more importantly, it shows the USFWS not just as a government agency, which it is, but as a collection of individuals working to achieve a many-faceted objective: the conservation and preservation of the country's fish and related aquatic species.

The rest of the entries include profiles of fish and other species, including salamanders, toads, and snapping turtles. Texas wild-rice, a stream vegetation, even warrants mention. The coverage helps drive home the point that the USFWS's work isn't exclusive to fish, but encompasses the broader ecological system in which aquatic species exist. These vignettes are told with a personal touch, the authors providing recollections of catching that first brown trout or dealing with some thorny problem in their capacity as a USFWS employee. We learn the life history of each species and, when its numbers are in decline—which occurs all too often—how the USFWS is attempting to halt or even reverse the trend.

As a celebration of the service's sesquicentennial, the book highlights the USFWS's record of success and engagement. But I would be remiss if I did not comment on darker side of the USFWS's record. Based on the science of the time, in the late 1800s the U.S. Fish Commission pushed to stock carp throughout the United States. The folly of that idea became quickly apparent. Even the author of the "common carp" entry admits as much, offering the understatement that "we would probably be better off without common carp infesting our waters" (page 201). Little is made of the long-lasting and widespread damage



from that ill-fated experiment. Adding that "the fish are here to stay" (page 202) doesn't provide much solace for what turned out to be a very poor decision.

The negative consequences of the USFWS's history of experimenting with transplanting fish were not confined to carp. The often reckless stocking of Pacific salmon, Eastern shad, trout (brook, rainbow, and brown), and a number of other species outside of their native waters was thought to be a good idea and actively pursued. Such experiments in fish culture decimated native fish populations and caused irreversible changes to ecological systems. Because a goal of the USFWS is fisheries conservation and not merely populating waters with anglers' favorite fish, perhaps we should be less sanguine about the USFWS's track record than this book suggests.



R. W. Hafer is an award-winning economist, author, and trout-fishing enthusiast who lives in St. Louis, Missouri.

*America's Bountiful Waters: 150 Years of Fisheries Conservation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*  
 edited by Craig Springer  
 Stackpole Books, 2021  
 \$49.95 (hardcover)  
 278 pages  
<http://stackpolebooks.com/>





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The museum gratefully acknowledges the outstanding support of our 2021 contributors who helped to further the museum's mission. Please accept our apology if any name has been misspelled, placed under the incorrect contribution heading, or inadvertently excluded.

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*From Hardy's Anglers' Guide,  
 Hardy Brothers Ltd. catalog, 1909, 338.*

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*From Thomas Sedgwick Steele, Canoe & Camera  
(Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1882), 48.*

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Bruce Petersen



R. W. Hafer

## R. W. Hafer Named 2021 Austin Hogan Award Recipient

R. W. (Rik) Hafer has been named the recipient of the museum's 2021 Austin Hogan Award. The award, which recognizes exemplary contributions to the *American Fly Fisher*, was established in 1985 to honor the memory of Austin Hogan, who founded the museum's journal in 1974.

Hafer received the award for "How Rainbow Trout Came to Missouri (and Your State Too)," a series that ran in the Spring, Summer, and Fall 2021 issues of this journal. "Part I: The Beginnings" (vol. 47, no. 2), offers an overview of the mid-nineteenth-century conservation movement and the early fish culturist movement. "Part II: The Great Experiment" (vol. 47, no. 3) brings readers into the 1870s and 1880s, when the U.S. Fish Commission addressed the problem of a declining Atlantic salmon population by collecting and shipping fertilized Pacific salmon eggs from Northern California to the East Coast and many points in between. Transplanting salmon failed, but it set the stage for the widespread transplantation of California rainbow trout across much of the country. "Part III: Rainbow Trout from the McCloud" (vol. 47, no. 4) explains how the propagation of rainbows on a mass scale at hatcheries throughout the country quickly made redundant the collection of eggs in California, then uses Missouri's experience to illustrate how the rainbow stocking program was conducted at a more local level.

Hafer is an economist living in St. Louis, Missouri. During his career, he has worked at the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, was a distinguished research professor at Southern

Illinois University Edwardsville, and was most recently the director of the Center for Economics and the Environment at Lindenwood University. In addition to his academic publications, he has written numerous articles on the history of trout fishing in the United States. A trout-fishing enthusiast, he can often be found in one of Missouri's spring-fed streams in search of wild trout.

## Announcing the Lefty Kreh Display

Lefty Kreh (1925–2018), perhaps the world's greatest fly-fishing ambassador, now has his own space at the American Museum of Fly Fishing. After his passing, the museum was gifted Lefty's fly-tying desk, the very desk he used to tie countless flies in the basement of his Maryland home. We also received some of his tackle that represents his earliest innovations and modifications, which paved the way for much of the technology we take for granted today. Come see this display in the Selch-Bakwin Fly Room at AMFF in Manchester, Vermont.

Sara Wilcox



The new Lefty Kreh exhibit.





Clockwise from top left: Paul Sinicki, Kelly Bedford, AMFF Ambassador Mike Rice, and AMFF Ambassador Rich Strolis demonstrated their craft at our February livestreamed fly-tying event.

## February Fly Tying

The American Museum of Fly Fishing livestreamed a fly-tying event from the Selch-Bakwin Fly Room on February 12. Featured tiers were Paul Sinicki and Kelly Bedford (10:30–12:00)

and Mike Rice and Rich Strolis (1:00–3:00). Participants had the opportunity to watch, ask questions, and even join in on the fun. More than 1,700 people have viewed the fly-tying videos on AMFF's Facebook page—check them out yourself! A special thanks to Paul, Kelly, Mike, and Rich for coming out to tie.

## Recent Donations to the Collection

**Rajeff Sports** in Vancouver, Washington, donated an Echo TR2 Spey rod, which will be on exhibition at AMFF's satellite gallery at the Wonders of Wildlife Museum & Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri, opening in April. **Thomas & Thomas** in Greenfield, Massachusetts, delivered a Sextant saltwater bamboo rod, which will also be included in the Wonders of Wildlife exhibition. Curator **Jim Schottenham** of West Edmeston, New York, brought us a 1934 Elmer J. Sellers bass-reel kit and an 1880 J. Ratcliffe birdcage reel, two reels he strongly believed belonged in our collection.

**Nick Lyons** of New York City sent us some watercolor paintings and ink sketches by Mari Lyons. **Jim Heckman** of Manchester, Vermont, gave us a large collection of angling-themed cigarette cards to be featured in a new installation titled *Smoke Signals*. **Sebastián Letelier** of Santiago, Chile, donated his painting *Playing a Nice Brown Trout, Patagonia, Chile, 2013*. (This painting and Letelier's work are highlighted in an article in the Winter 2022 issue of this journal.)

In December 2021, AMFF was thrilled to receive an important collection of rare angling books donated by **Charles G. Thacher** of Keswick, Virginia. You'll have a chance to read more about this significant collection in an upcoming issue.

Samantha Pitcher

## Upcoming Events

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

### June 30

Izaak Walton Award honoring Paul Bruun  
Livestream event  
8:00 p.m.

### July 7, 14, 21, and 28

Kids Clinics  
10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

### August 13

15th Annual Fly-Fishing Festival  
10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.  
Outdoor Screening  
Influential fly-fishing films from the 21st century  
8:00 p.m.

### October 27

Members-Only Event  
Charles Thacher Book Collection

### November 3

Heritage Award honoring the 30th anniversary of the film adaptation of *A River Runs Through It*  
Award to be accepted by Producer Patrick Markey  
New York City

Always check our website ([www.amff.org](http://www.amff.org)) for additions, updates, and more information or contact (802) 362-3300 or [events@amff.org](mailto:events@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.



The Fishing Musicians recently purchased twenty-six AMFF walkway bricks to commemorate their group. Bricks are \$100 each and available for purchase at [amff.org](http://amff.org).



# AMFF Announces New Ambassadors

*Since 2012, the museum has been assembling a strong ambassador program, creating a group of individuals who dedicate their time to promoting its mission and spreading enthusiasm for the history of our great sport. AMFF is pleased to welcome four new ambassadors into the fold.*

Courtesy of Joe Cresta

**Joe Cresta**, a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, didn't discover fly fishing until he was thirty-one. Today he is the president of Malden Anglers Association in Saugus, Massachusetts. Looking for a way to give back, Joe started a local chapter of Project Healing Waters in 2013, which is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military service personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing and associated activities (ProjectHealingWaters.org). In 2018 he became deputy regional coordinator, helping to oversee the program in southern New England; in 2019, he became regional coordinator and now oversees all seventeen programs in New England. Joe is also on the pro staff of Riversmith.com.



Courtesy of Sarah Gardner



**Captain Sarah Gardner** is lifelong angler who started guiding more than thirty years ago in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and now guides off the coastal waters of North Carolina. She loves showing clients her little piece of the universe, putting them on big fish and helping them become better anglers.

Sarah is also passionate about photography, videography, hunting, and fitness—pursuits that take her away from fishing in a good way, making her a better angler. When it comes to fly fishing, Sarah believes in mindfulness, always paying attention to what Mother Nature is telling her, even when she's charging a pod of breaking fish. She fishes for everything that swims in mid-Atlantic salt water, including cobia, blues, spotted sea trout, red drum, false albacore, Spanish mackerel, and a variety of sharks. In addition to serving as an AMFF ambassador, Sarah is an ambassador for Sage, RIO, and Patagonia.

**Lynne Burchell Heyer** (aka Capt. Cowgirl) was born and raised on Nantucket Island, where she's fished her whole life and where she and her husband are now guides specializing in fly and light tackle fishing. They run two skiffs in the shallows and two center consoles for everywhere else around the island. She also ties flies: some designs similar to bonefish, permit flies tweaked to work on the flats, and bigger patterns for the rip fishery and offshore.

Lynne loves fishing because she's always challenged by the fish, the conditions, and the anglers she guides. "There is something about watching a striped bass on the flats come up and inhale your fly," she says. "It's personal in some way. There is so much that goes into fishing on the fly: the cast, getting the fly to move to entice the bite (what I call *feeding the fish*), setting, clearing the line, the fight! It can be frustrating but so rewarding when it all goes right."

Jeffrey Heyer





Courtesy of Steve Ramirez



**Steve Ramirez** is an outdoor and conservation author who lives and writes in the Texas Hill Country. An avid fly fisher, his works have appeared in many fly-fishing and outdoor journals, and his short fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction can be found in several literary journals.

Steve's first book, *Casting Forward: Fishing Tales from the Texas Hill Country* (Lyons Press, 2020) has received critical acclaim. Its sequel, *Casting Onward: Fishing Adventures in Search of America's Native Gamefish* (Lyons Press) is scheduled for May 2022 publication. He's currently writing the third book in the series, *Casting Seaward*, which focuses on the game fish of brackish and salt waters.

As a certified Texas master naturalist, Steve is involved in promoting the preservation and conservation of the rivers, canyons, forests, and grasslands of his beloved Texas Hill Country. He is an avid hiker and world adventure traveler who has explored four continents but always returns home to the spring-fed Hill Country streams of Texas.

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## C O N T R I B U T O R S

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**Joel (Jody) Martin**, PhD, is curator of crustacea and associate vice president for research at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. His work as a marine biologist has taken him from the Caribbean to the western Pacific and from tropical coral reefs to deep sea hydrothermal vents, and has resulted in more than 200 scientific papers, books, and book chapters. A lifelong fly fisher, Dr. Martin is a member of Sierra Pacific Fly Fishers, a life member of Trout Unlimited, an FFI-certified casting instructor, and a volunteer for Casting for Recovery and Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing. He has written for *TROUT*, *Southwest Fly Fishing*, *American Angler*, *The Loop*, *Strung*, *California Fly Fisher*, and *American Fly Fishing*. He is also an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church USA and the author of *The Spirituality of Fly Fishing: An Introduction* (2016), which forms the basis of annual retreats he conducts in Pennsylvania and California. He thanks Robert Chamberlin and Sara Wilcox for the original artwork that accompanies his story in this issue, Kate Achor for her editorial expertise, and the American Museum of Fly Fishing and the John D. Voelker Foundation for their recognition.

Bob Sears



Dan Kennaley



**Robert Reid** is a Canadian arts journalist. In addition to covering a wide range of arts and entertainment for more than thirty years at various daily newspapers across Ontario, he wrote two arts programs for television and was the first non-fiction writer-in-residence at the University of Waterloo. Author of *Casting into Mystery* (Porcupine's Quill, 2020), a fly-angling memoir with a cultural twist and featuring wood engravings by Wesley W. Bates, Reid was an avid reader of angling literature long before acquiring the courage to pick up a fly rod fifteen years ago. He started writing about the contemplative recreation soon afterward. When he isn't on the water, he maintains a couple of websites. He writes about art and culture, malt whisky and dining, and travel and fly fishing at [www.reidbetweenthelines.ca](http://www.reidbetweenthelines.ca) and exclusively about matters related to fly fishing at [www.castingintomystery.com](http://www.castingintomystery.com).



# Fly Fishing in Motion

THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF Fly Fishing gallery at the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium is the result of countless conversations, a contract, collaboration (with some of the best-suited professionals in both the fly-fishing and museum communities), and a connection of two friends: Leigh Perkins and Johnny Morris. As we open the doors to our 2,300-square-foot exhibition space in Springfield, Missouri, I think of Leigh and his vision for the museum. I think of the day he came to me, asking if I would lead AMFF through its next chapter. I think about Johnny's unbounded generosity, and I think about the impact this gallery will have on building an interest and appreciation for fly fishing. It's a huge step in becoming a national organization with a platform to tell our sports stories with accuracy and conviction.

One particular story that hasn't yet been featured in our museum galleries but will gleam brightly at WOW is the evolution of modern fly-fishing film. I hope that as an AMFF member, you've had opportunity to enjoy our online screening room. The way a single film can inspire a brand-new generation of anglers is compelling, exciting, and worth your attention.

I met Paul Nicoletti when he held a managerial role with the Fly Fishing Film Tour. He has since transitioned to a position with Simms, but he is still one of the most enthusiastic supporters of independent films and filmmakers in this space. Tom Bie is the founder, editor, and publisher of the *Drake* magazine and is a steadfast presence in the fly-fishing-film world. Together, they made the perfect team to provide oversight and context while we developed our film exhibit component, and I'm forever grateful for the hours of time they volunteered in support of this initiative.

To introduce the exhibit, Tom Bie offered this insight:

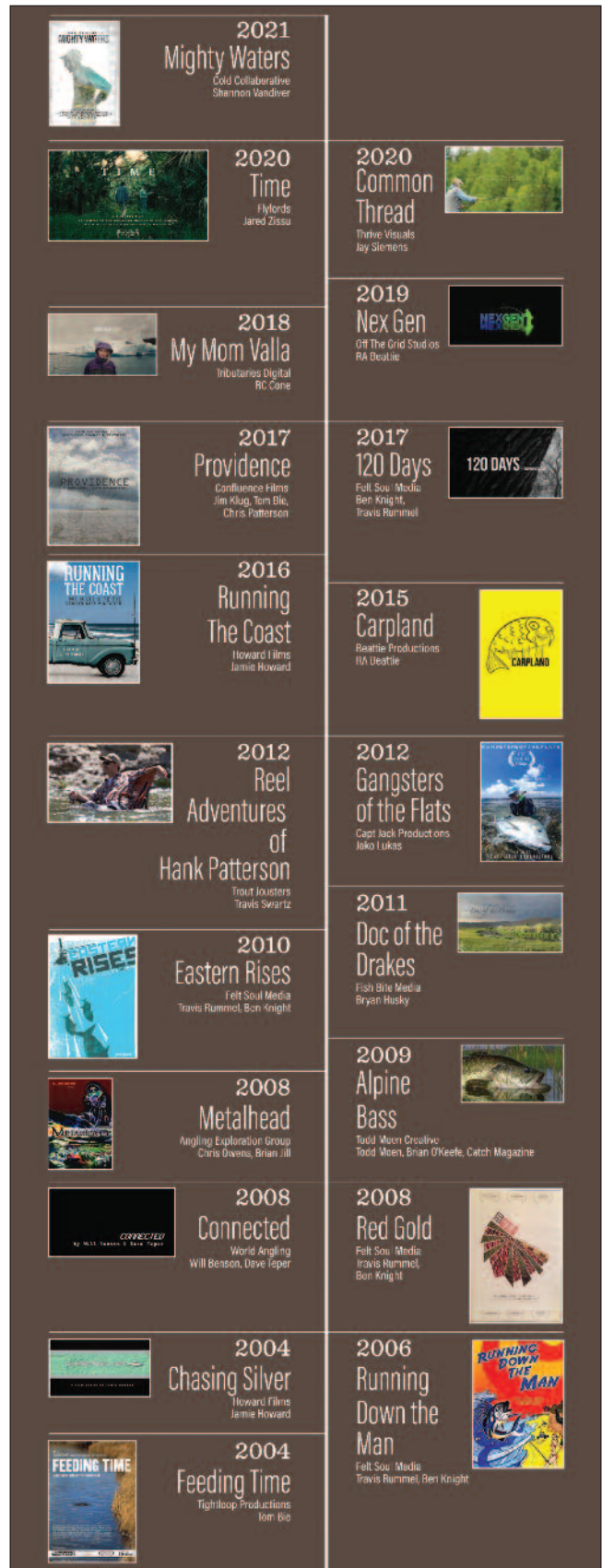
By the year 2004, when narrative fly-fishing films first appeared, director Warren Miller had been making ski movies for more than five decades. His films were shown annually to theater crowds around the world, not only inspiring generations to participate in the sport and culture of skiing, but also influencing filmmakers in other sports, like surfing and skateboarding, to start doing for their sport what Miller had done for skiing. The collection of films selected to be featured at the AMFF gallery at WOW is the result of that idea finding its way to fly fishing in the mid-2000s.

We've selected films that highlight the wide diversity of fish, anglers, locations, and storytelling, often with an emphasis on the vital importance of conservation in our sport. These movies are both inspirational and aspirational, at times transporting viewers to remote locations that many may never experience firsthand.

With the exception of Robert Redford's *A River Runs Through It*, released in 1992, the vast majority of fly-fishing media through the 1990s was still instructional in nature. And while the films presented here have been influential in a variety of ways, their biggest impact has likely been in helping shift perception of the sport from *how* a person fly fishes to *why* a person fly fishes.

Fly-fishing films and the stories they tell will continue to evolve in the future, and we look forward to documenting and sharing this growth in the coming years. I hope you'll visit us in our state-of-the-art space in Missouri, where you will have the opportunity to dive into the twenty films selected, as well as the many other traditional displays you've come to expect from AMFF.

SARAH FOSTER  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The new film timeline in AMFF's Wonders of Wildlife gallery.



## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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 fundraising purposes, or place an advertisement in this journal, contact Sarah Foster at [sfoster@amff.org](mailto: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
Supporter	\$35

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 by appointment 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](mailto: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](http://www.amff.org)), or write to request a copy. The museum cannot accept responsibility for statements and interpretations that are wholly the author's.

