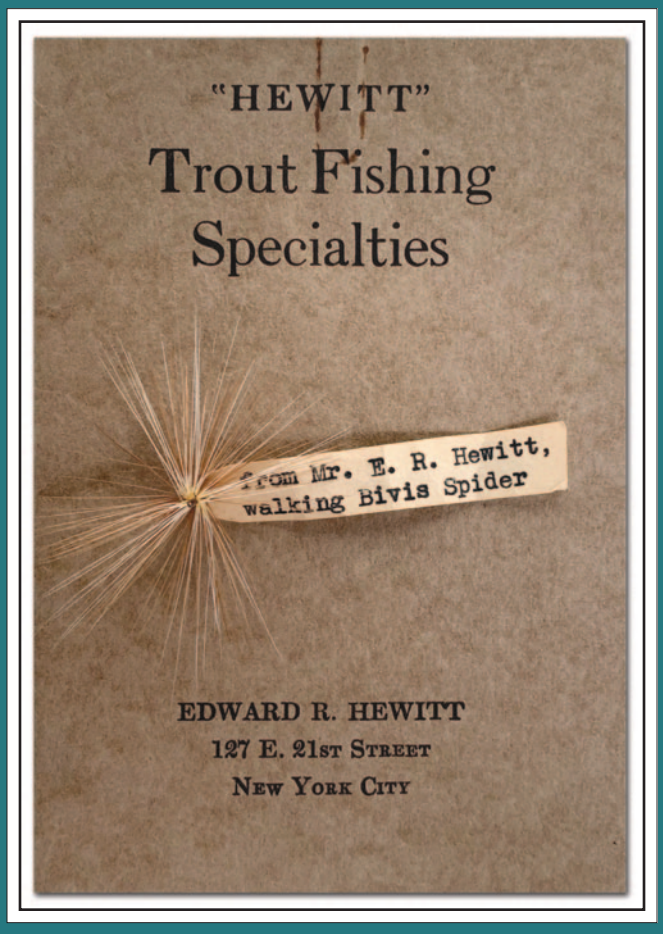
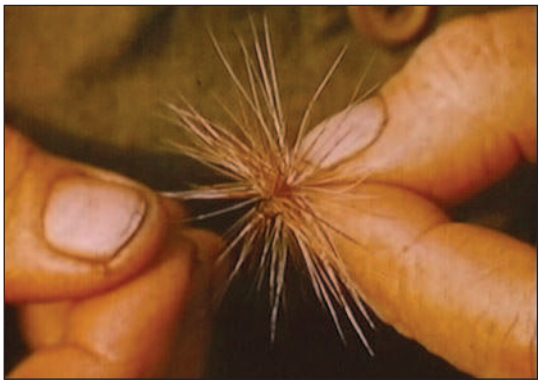
The American Fly Fisher

Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing



SPRING 2023 VOLUME 49 NUMBER 2

Spring's Skitter and Skate



A Hewitt Neversink Skater in the hands of Edward Hewitt. Film still from Hewitt on the Neversink, *1939. Produced by Martin Bovey. Courtesy of Ted Bovey.*

"The butterflies did not rest on the water; they sometimes touched it but were always moving. When they did touch . . . they only did so very lightly and were away again." Thus spake Edward Hewitt, inventor of the Neversink Skater.

And so it is with me, attempting to sit desk-still these spring-tease days so that there might be a timely issue of the *American Fly Fisher*.

Hewitt wasn't so much concerned about what his flies looked like as the way they moved, how they skittered or skated across the stream's surface. His Neversink Skater was never sold by any retailer—you had to order it from Hewitt or figure out how tie it yourself. After Hewitt died, only that second option was available, but articles describing the fly failed to fully explain how to tie them. "The fact that Neversink Skaters are not available commercially even today adds to their enduring mystery," says Joseph Grigely in "Edward Hewitt and the Neversink Skater" (page 2). Two recent discoveries—a copy of Martin Bovey's film *Hewitt on the Neversink* and letters from Hewitt to Harry Darbee in the late 1930s—provided Grigely the opportunity to offer this more detailed history of "one of the most perplexing flies in American angling history."

As a high school student, Jim Bale began studying Michigan's Rogue River, encouraged by his biology teacher to analyze water samples and temperature. What he discovered was factory pollution that warmed water and lowered oxygen content. It wasn't until after the passage of the Clean Water Act that the Rogue's water quality improved to the point that Bale caught sight of brook trout feeding behind the paper mill where he worked. He decided he wanted to learn how to fly fish. In "Metamorphosis," Bale writes about the changing river that inspired him and how fly fishers' brains change too, evolving with time spent and experience gained on rivers and creeks. His story begins on page 12.

Sometimes it's worth drawing attention to a book, even if it's tough to find a copy. The Flyfisher's Club of Oregon has published a sixtieth-anniversary collection of select articles from their journal, the *Creel*. "Only a few fishing clubs are fortunate enough to have such a thorough informal chronicle of their doings as this," notes historian Paul Schullery, "especially one with such an array of talented chroniclers." The book was published for club members with a very limited number available to other anglers, but I'm happy to report that AMFF's library boasts a copy. To read more about this treasure trove of West Coast flyfishing history and lore, turn to Schullery's review, "A Full Creel," on page 16.

And Jan Brunvand, who took on that most-quoted of fishing quotes in our Winter 2022 issue—"Many go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after"—is back with "The String of (Fake) Pearls of Fishing Wisdom Continues" (page 17), in which he shares more finds of the phrase wrongly attributed to Thoreau.

It's been busyness as usual at the museum, with staff travel to New Jersey for the Fly Fishing Show, Missouri for casting and tying demonstrations at Wonders of Wildlife, and Florida for presentation of the 2023 Izaak Walton Award to Nancy Zakon. Curator Jim Schottenham debuted his "Reel Talk" series via Zoom. The 2022 Austin Hogan Award was given to both Henry Hughes and Robert A. Oden. More details about all these happenings can be found on pages 24–27.

Of course, our physical and virtual presence couldn't happen without your support. A big thanks to our members and (beginning on page 19) to our 2022 contributors for making it all possible.

Kathleen Achor
Editor

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

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ON THE COVER: *Helen Shaw's Walking Bivisible Spider, gifted to her from Edward Hewitt. Undated. From the collection of Joseph Grigely. Photo by Joseph Grigely.*

The American Fly Fisher (ISSN 0884-3562) is published four times a year by the museum at P.O. Box 42, Manchester, Vermont 05254. Publication dates are winter, spring, summer, and fall. Membership dues include the cost of the journal ($50) and are tax deductible as provided for by law. Membership rates are listed in the back of each issue. All letters, manuscripts, photographs, and materials intended for publication in the journal should be sent to the museum. The museum and journal are not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, drawings, photographic material, or memorabilia. The museum cannot accept responsibility for statements and interpretations that are wholly the author's. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be returned unless postage is provided. Contributions to *The American Fly Fisher* are to be considered gratuitous and the property of the museum unless otherwise requested by the contributor. Periodical postage paid at Manchester, Vermont 05254; Manchester, Vermont 05255; and additional offices (USPS 057410). *The American Fly Fisher* (ISSN 0884-3562) EMAIL: amff@amff.org WEBSITE: www.amff.org PHONE: 802-362-3300

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
The American Fly Fisher
P.O. Box 42
Manchester, Vermont 05254

Edward Hewitt and the Neversink Skater

by Joseph Grigely

These photos of Edward Hewitt enjoying lunch on the bank of the Neversink (above) and fishing one of the pools he made in that river (right) were taken by his good friend John Atherton c. 1940. Both from the American Museum of Fly Fishing Atherton Collection.

Edward Hewitt occupies a unique place in American angling history. He was a sportsman and inventor rolled into one, and through his writings and his catalogs devoted to trout-fishing specialties, he provided generations of anglers with tackle innovations and strategies for stream improvement and fish rearing. He invented several fly patterns, and each of them—the Bivisible, the Neversink Streamer, and the Neversink Skater—was based on a practical approach to engineering and fly design. Hewitt was less interested in matching the visual appearance of insects than he was interested in matching the dynamic properties of their stream lives. The Neversink Skater is perhaps his most enigmatic creation and remains so despite well-known attempts by Vince Marinaro and Ed Shenk to unlock the secrets of how to tie it. The fact that Neversink Skaters are not available commercially even today adds to their enduring mystery. With the recent discovery of a copy of Martin Bovey's film *Hewitt on the Neversink* and letters from Hewitt to Harry Darbee in the late 1930s, it is now possible to piece together a more detailed history of one of the most perplexing flies in American angling history.

Some background: Hewitt (1866–1957) was for decades at the center of the Catskill world of tying and angling. He was the grandson of Peter Cooper, and the family estate provided him with resources to indulge his passions. Along with George La Branche and Richard Hunt, Hewitt was a member of the Anglers' Club of New York and counted among his associates the notable figures who populated its membership rolls.

After a long day of fishing with Hewitt, and an evening of confabulating with him, Sparse Grey Hackle (Alfred W. Miller) observed, "Fishing was to Mr. Hewitt what whisky is to a drunkard."[1]

In 1918, Hewitt established a fishing camp called the Big Bend Club, 4½ miles on the Neversink River surrounded by 2,700 acres of forest. His estate included a hatchery and rearing ponds. Hewitt was also invested in stream habitat improvement: he developed wood drop dams as a way of increasing oxygen content of slower stretches of the river. According to Hewitt, large pools in trout streams typically have 8 to 10 parts per million of dissolved oxygen content. By adding a dam 1 foot in height, the oxygen content could be increased by 1 ppm; and if the weir edge was shaped like a sawtooth, the oxygen increased by almost 2 ppm.[2]

Hewitt was prolific as an author, albeit a particularly opinionated one. He noted in one of his early books, *Telling on the Trout*, that there was no fly that will catch as many trout as his beloved Bivisible. He continued: "A recent poll at the Anglers' Club in New York showed that other anglers do not agree with me; the favorite flies were the Quill Gordon and the Whirling Dun. However, this is not my experience."[3] This is vintage Hewitt: not just opinionated, but ornery and stubborn as well. He pursued science as art and art as science, and as Sparse Grey Hackle said of him, "He was a master of making scientific things comprehensible to the layman, and he had a gift for the unqualified statement, flat as a board and just as unvarnished."[4] Hewitt's other books included *Secrets of the Salmon* (1922), *Better Trout Streams* (1931), *Hewitt's Handbook of Fly Fishing* (1933), *Hewitt's Handbook of Stream Improvement* (1934), *Hewitt's Nymph Fly Fishing* (1934), *Hewitt's Handbook of Trout Raising and Stocking* (1935), and *A Trout and Salmon Fisherman for Seventy-five Years* (1948). By the time Hewitt called it quits (he died in 1957 at age ninety-one), his beloved Big Bend Club was inundated by Neversink Reservoir, which was completed in 1953 and provided drinking water for the city of New York. Hewitt's camp was, as Sparse Grey Hackle wrote, "the last of the Golden Age."[5]

The Skater and the Spider: Theory and Design

Hewitt introduced the Neversink Skater to the public in an article in the *Sportsman* magazine in 1937. Charles K. Fox recounted his surprise at discovering the article while visiting his doctor's office one day.

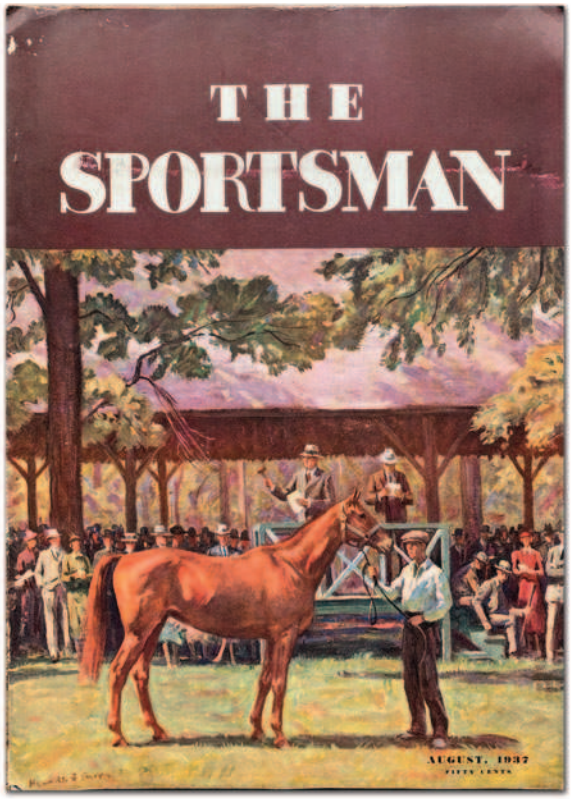
> I was idly paging through a magazine. It was not a hunting and fishing magazine but it was a most elaborate publication dealing for the most part with subjects such as: golf, horses, aquaplaning, and skiing, none of which happens to be down my alley. Imagine my surprise and pleasure when I turned to the beautifully illustrated article on dry fly trout fishing written by E. R. Hewitt and entitled, "Butterfly Fishing."[6]

He remembered the title wrong—Hewitt's essay was actually titled "A New Way to Catch Big Trout"—but otherwise, butterflies indeed played a key role in the development of the Neversink Skater.

In a revised version of the article that Hewitt published in *A Trout and Salmon Fisherman for Seventy-five Years*, he described the Neversink Skater's origins.

> Many anglers have seen large trout leap for small white or yellow butterflies and have been unable to interest these trout in any fly they could present to them. It became evident to me that large winged flies in some way did not appear like butterflies to the trout, and they therefore ignored them. I studied this problem

Photographs by the author unless otherwise noted

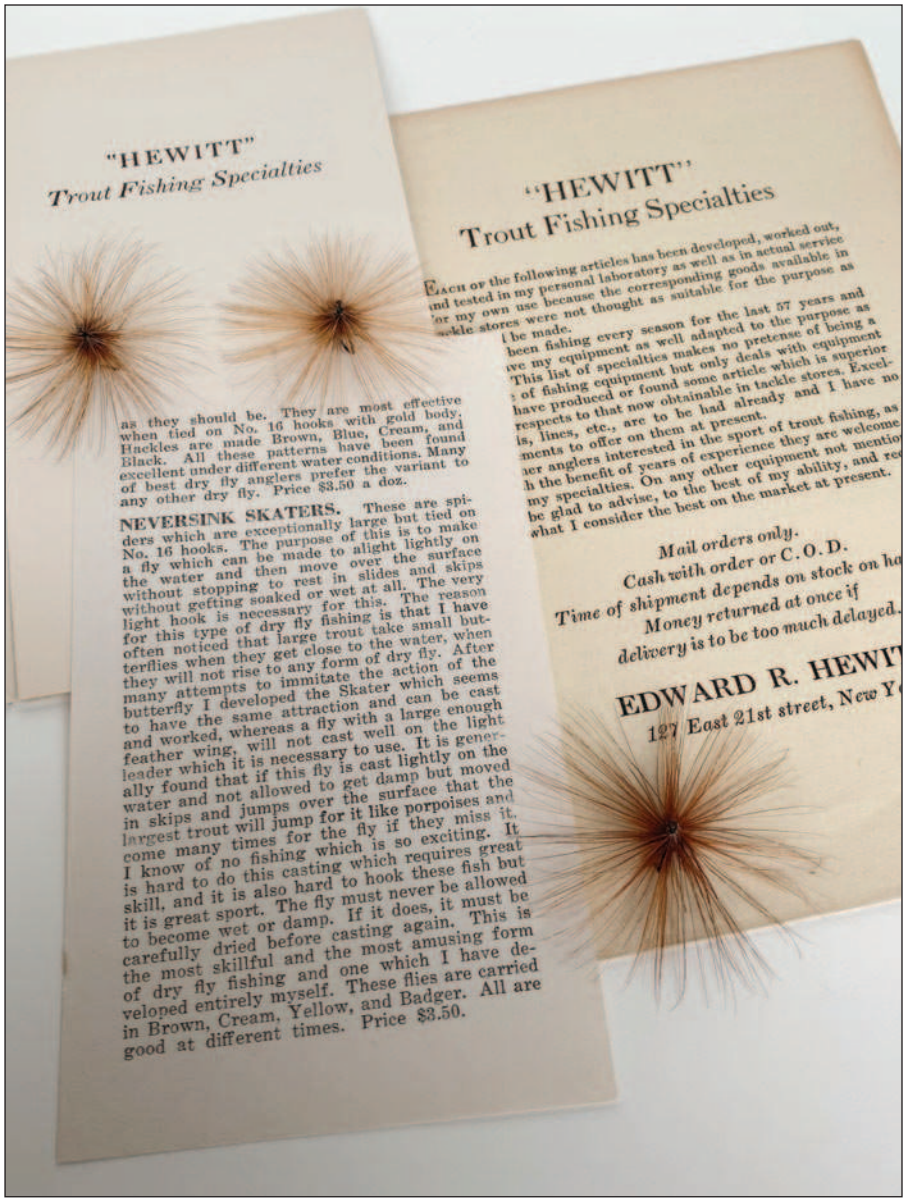


Hewitt introduced the Neversink Skater to the angling public with the article "A New Way to Catch Big Trout," which appeared in the Sportsman *magazine in August 1937. Pictured here are the cover of the issue and the opening spread of Hewitt's piece.*

carefully and came to the following conclusions. The butterflies did not rest on the water; they sometimes touched it but were always moving. When they did touch the water they only did so very lightly and were away again. I could not imitate this procedure with any flies I had in my box. How was I to do this? I went back to my camp and tied several flies, finally making what is now known as the Neversink Skater. This was tied on a No. 16 light Model Perfect hook, which is the lightest hook I know that will hold a big trout. The big fly was tied as a hackle[d] and not winged fly because large winged flies do not cast well on the fine leaders which it is necessary to use in large, still pools. The fly had no tail, because this would interfere with its movement over the surface of the water. It was tied sparsely because I wanted it to cast easily and not have too much air resistance. It was made in as large diameter as possible, with the longest hackles I had. The outside diameter of some of these flies was two inches while some were slightly smaller. Even then, they were really not as large as the butterflies the fish were taking.[7]

Reflecting on the situation at a later date, the Catskill tier Harry Darbee was apprehensive of the pattern's ability to imitate a butterfly. "Now I happen to think his skater looks as much like a butterfly as a goose looks like God," he wrote.[8] But what the fly "looked like" was not as important as how it moved. Hewitt was essentially an analytical thinker. Both the Bivisible and Neversink Skater are attractor flies; their appeal is in their hydrodynamic properties, primarily their ability to be skittered or skated across the surface film. Anglers are especially attracted to visual analogies because they are readily performed when holding and looking at a fly. But performance dynamics cannot be tested the same way—only under the conditions of being fished.

Over the years numerous anglers and authors have addressed the importance of the behavior of the fly, as opposed to visual similitude. Leonard Wright, in *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect* (1972), made an impassioned argument for imparting action to the fly. The dead drift, without any sign of drag, was for years a mantra for dry-fly fishing. But the key thing Wright focused on was the erratic flight habits of the caddis (the legendary tier Fran Betters used to say that you could tell a mayfly from a caddis fly by watching them fly: the caddis flew as if it was drunk). The basic idea involves treating the fly not so much as a noun, as a thing, but as a verb—as an object in motion. In the history of fly design, there are many tying innovations that affect fly behavior in a way Wright made so emphatic. Carrie Stevens tied her large featherwing streamers with large cheeks glued to the hackle so that the fly would waver in the currents of Upper Dam Pool. Betters tied his Haystacks so that they would sit in the surface film and could be skittered across the surface. And then there is Hewitt's Neversink Skater—a fly so unusual that it entirely redefined what it means to skitter or skate a fly across the surface. Although Hewitt's article in the *Sportsman* had a lot of information about how to impart action to the Skaters, one detail was missing: how to tie them. Like Louis Rhead, Hewitt sold patterns he developed through his own mail-order catalogs, *"Hewitt" Trout Fishing Specialties*, which were issued in 1932 and 1937.

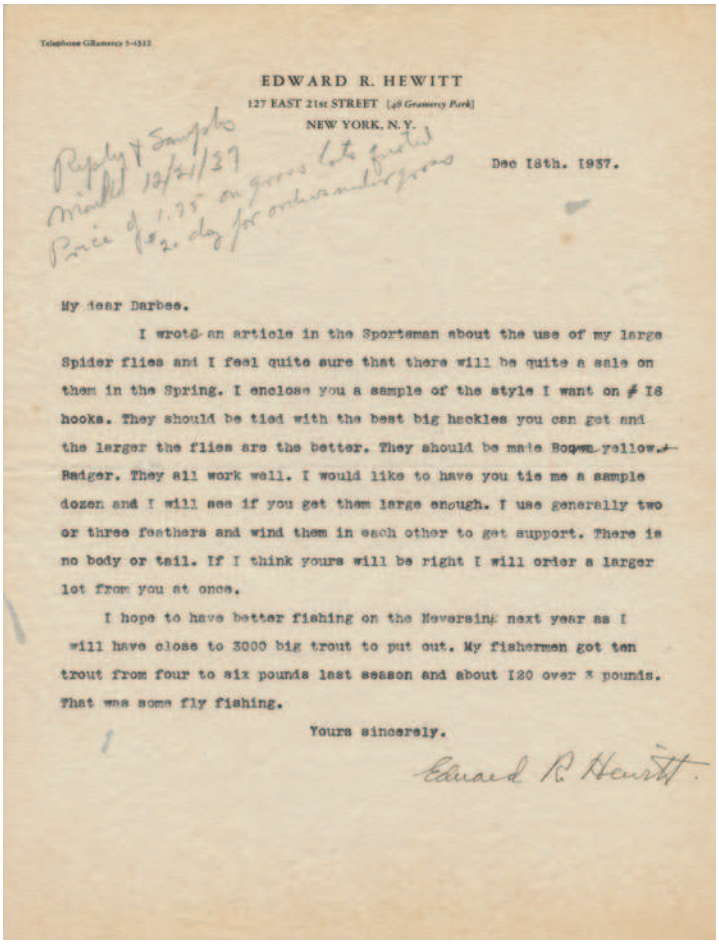


Two "Hewitt" Trout Fishing Specialties *catalogs, issued in 1932 and 1937, and Neversink Skaters tied by Harry and Elsie Darbee. Author's collection.*

Tying the Skater

The Neversink Skater is an experiment in extremes. No other fly has such large hackle on such a small hook. It is one of the most difficult flies to tie and get right, and this is evident by the scarcity of the fly: it is not sold by any retailer today. If you want Neversink Skaters, you have to tie them yourself. Even in Hewitt's day the story was similar: "You won't find it on sale in any tackle stores," wrote Hewitt, "as few suitable feathers are available."[9] The only place to buy them was from Hewitt himself.

Hewitt rarely tied his own flies or the flies that he sold through his catalogs in the 1930s. He would typically place wholesale orders with Harry and Elsie Darbee, and Harry himself wrote in 1977,



EDWARD R. HEWITT
127 EAST 21st STREET [38 Gramercy Park]
NEW YORK, N. Y.

Dec 18th. 1937.

My dear Darbee.

I wrote an article in the Sportsman about the use of my large Spider flies and I feel quite sure that there will be quite a sale on them in the Spring. I enclose you a sample of the style I want on # 16 hooks. They should be tied with the best big hackles you can get and the larger the flies are the better. They should be made Brown-yellow-Badger. They all work well. I would like to have you tie me a sample dozen and I will see if you get them large enough. I use generally two or three feathers and wind them in each other to get support. There is no body or tail. If I think yours will be right I will order a larger lot from you at once.

I hope to have better fishing on the Neversink next year as I will have close to 3000 big trout to put out. My fishermen got ten trout from four to six pounds last season and about 120 over 3 pounds. That was some fly fishing.

Yours sincerely.

Edward R. Hewitt.

Edward Hewitt, letter to Harry Darbee, 18 December 1937. Courtesy of Judie Darbee Vinciguerra Smith.

Light badger spade hackle used to tie Neversink Skaters. Courtesy of Scott Krosch, Kingsley, Iowa.

"Elsie and I tied most of Hewitt's skaters. We saved our longest, stiffest hackle for him."[10] But the details were lacking until recently, when Darbee's daughter, Judie Darbee Vinciguerra Smith, uncovered in the family archive several letters Hewitt wrote to Darbee in the 1930s and 1940s. In one letter, dated 18 December 1937, Hewitt explained to Darbee that his article on Skaters had just come out in the *Sportsman*, and he was anticipating a rush of orders for the flies to come in toward the spring.

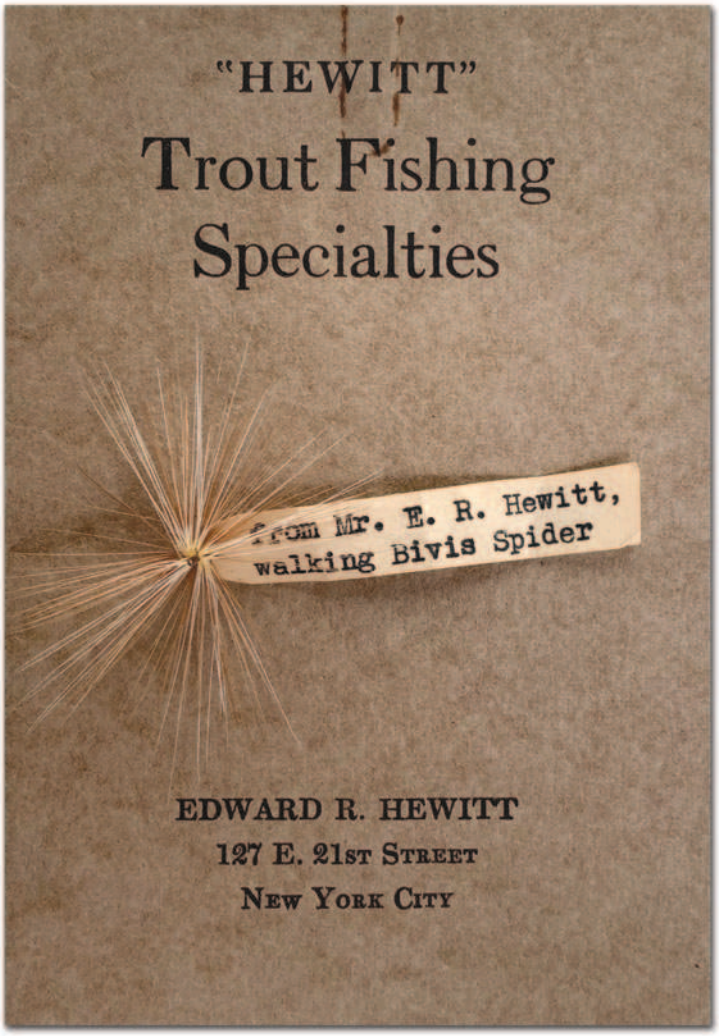
> I enclose for you a sample I want on #16 hooks. They should be tied with the best big hackles you can get and the larger the flies are the better. They should be made brown-yellow-badger. They all work well. I would like to have you tie me a sample dozen and I will see if you get them large enough. I generally use two or three feathers and wind them in each other to get support. There is no body or tail. If I think yours will be right I will order a larger lot from you at once.[11]

Darbee responded three days later with a sample, and quoted Hewitt $1.75 per dozen on gross lots and $2.00 per dozen for orders less than a gross.

Hewitt must have been happy with the results, because he kept returning to Darbee for both Skaters and the smaller Spiders. On 10 March 1938, Hewitt wrote requesting "six dozen spiders with no tails or bodies like those you made me for the Neversink skaters but not so large."[12] Curiously, the Darbees did not list the Skater among the flies in their own catalog, although they did sell "Extra Large Spiders" in Catalogue 2 in 1950. This may simply have been a tacit way of not competing openly with Hewitt. Nor were Skaters listed in catalogs by two other major East Coast tiers: the Dettes and Ray Bergman. Hewitt had essentially cornered the market for the pattern.

The relationship between Skaters and Spiders requires some clarification. The terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but they designate, for Hewitt, different flies with different proportions. Spiders are generally smaller and sometimes have bodies and tails. As Hewitt described the Spiders in his 1937 catalog: "Diameter of fly from ¾" to 1¼." Tied without tails or body unless specially ordered. I found this design works best. Color, Brown with white wisp like Bivisible, Cream, Ginger, Badger, Only the best hackles are used in these flies."

Hewitt's 1937 catalog has a tipped-in sheet that describes the Skaters in different terms: "These are Spiders which are exceptionally large but tied on No. 16 hooks. The purpose of this is to make a fly which can be made to alight lightly on the water and then move over the surface without stopping to rest in slides and skips without getting soaked or wet at all. . . . These flies are carried in Brown, Cream, Yellow, and Badger."

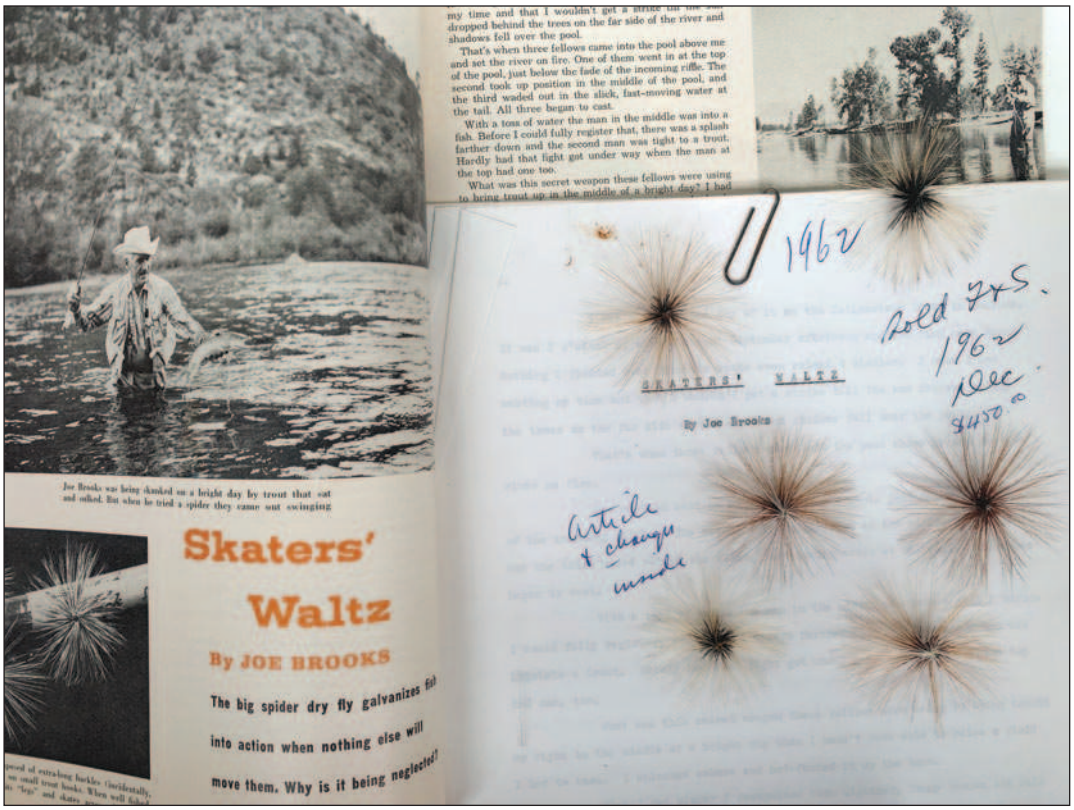


In the same 1937 catalog, Hewitt does not describe the precise diameter of the Skaters, which has been subject to much speculation. He attempted to resolve this late in his career in *A Trout and Salmon Fisherman for Seventy-five Years* by explaining, "The outside diameter of some of these flies was two inches while some were slightly smaller."[13] Existing samples of Hewitt's Skaters, including one owned by Helen Shaw and the many dozens in the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing, confirm this observation. It seems to me that 2 inches is the benchmark, and anything bigger is an exceptional fly.

There have been a number of essays and articles over the years that described Skaters without fully explaining how to tie them. The first were probably Charles Fox's articles in the *Pennsylvania Angler* in 1942 and 1943.[14] Two decades later Joe Brooks wrote an article called "Skaters' Waltz" that was published in *Field & Stream* in 1964. Like Fox's articles, Brooks's created intrigue and added to the mystery about the fly, but Brooks went one step further toward revealing the secret: "Vince [Marinaro] figured out the tie and years later when he showed it to Hewitt he found that it was exactly the same as Hewitt's own. Vince ties his skaters with slick nylon instead of silk and wax. He ties the hackle, advances the tying thread, wraps the hackle, then jams everything towards the bend."[15] Brooks's article lacked tying illustrations; it was left for the reader to interpret his brief verbal description.

Left: Helen Shaw's Walking Bivisible Spider, gifted to her from Edward Hewitt. Undated. Author's collection.

Below: Typescript for Joe Brooks's article, "Skaters' Waltz" (1962), author's collection, and opening spread to the article in Field & Stream *(May 1964). Skaters tied by the author in 2019.*



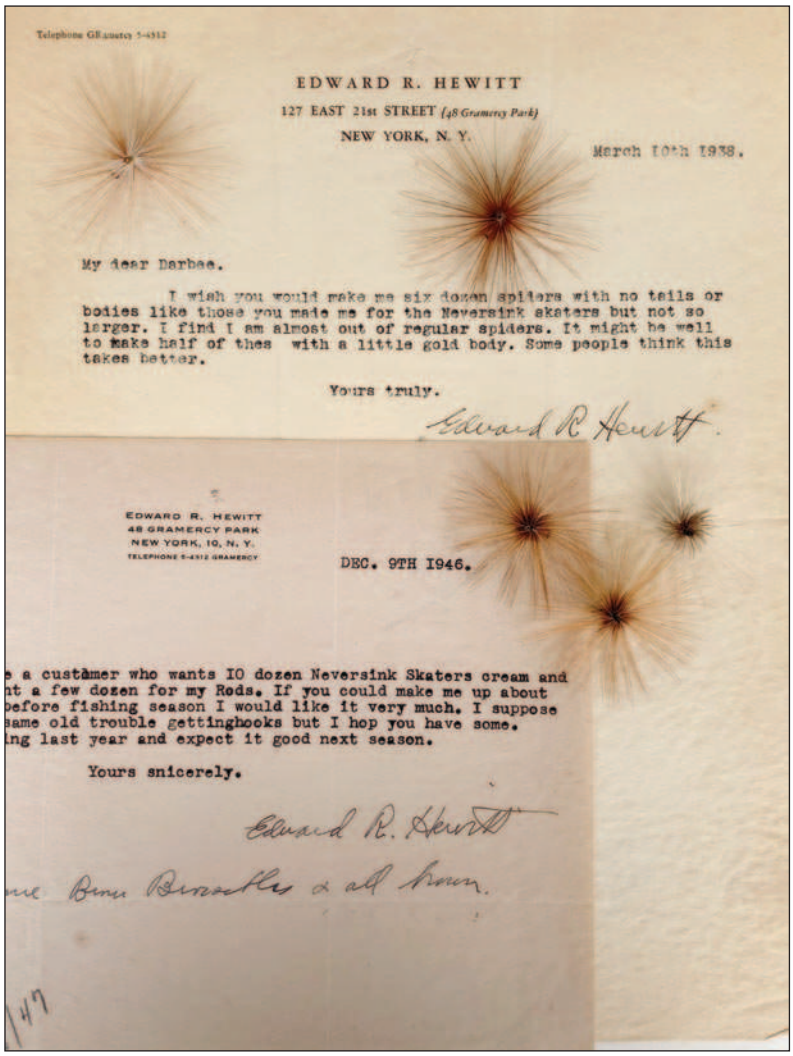
Later it was Marinaro, in an essay in *Outdoor Life* (June 1976), who finally explained everything that needed to be said about tying the fly and provided detailed drawings showing how to do it.[16] Decades earlier, Fox had given him two Skaters obtained directly from Hewitt; Marinaro dissected them and discovered the big secret was in the unwaxed thread, which allowed the hackle wraps to be jammed into each other and create the uniquely dense, stiff, and narrow hackle edge. But he kept all this to himself, sharing it with close friends who, like Brooks, slowly leaked out bits and pieces of the process. In addition to Marinaro's article, Chauncy Lively (in *Pennsylvania Angler*, January 1978) and Ed Shenk (in *Fly Fisherman*, March 1988 and *Fly Tyer,* Winter 2009) both provided detailed instructions for tying the pattern.[17]

Harry Darbee's instructions for tying the fly are perhaps the most succinct, and Darbee should know the routine well because he and Elsie tied most of Hewitt's Skaters. In a letter Hewitt sent to Darbee in December 1946, he asked Darbee to tie for him 1½ gross Skaters—an epic order, considering the required hackle was so hard to source. Two months later, the flies were done. Darbee's dressing, which he described in *Catskill Flytier*, is as follows:

> To tie properly, the extra wide and stiff spade or saddle hackles of the required color are tied in just forward of the hook point, but far enough forward to clear the hook point when they are wound in. The front hackle has its bright side forward, the back has its bright side to the rear. The center hackle may face either way. The tying thread is carried forward leaving room to finish off with plenty of room to clear the eye. When hackles are wound and finished off with a whip finish, apply thin spar varnish to head cement to the base of the hackles from front to rear. Be careful not to allow the varnish to be soaked up into the hackles. This would stiffen the fly and make it almost useless.[18]

Over the years, various tiers have inflected this basic design in different ways. Shenk would apply flexament to the tips of the hackle to cement them together to create a "knife edge" that Marinaro favored. Charles DeFeo tied them much like Darbee did. Fran Betters tied his smaller, like the spiders—which both John Atherton and Joe Brooks preferred, as they were easier to cast and manage.

The enduring conundrum is that we have no example of a Skater that was indisputably tied by Hewitt himself—not even Shaw's Skater, which has a tag marked "from Mr. E. R. Hewitt, walking Bivis Spider" and on the verso: "his sample." There are many Skaters attributed to Hewitt, but these are often oddly overdressed (Hewitt repeatedly stressed the pattern is to be tied sparsely). On the other hand, we have the concrete evidence of Bovey's film of Hewitt holding, grooming, and fishing the pattern, and showing the unique way he propelled the Skaters to dart across the surface of the Neversink.



EDWARD R. HEWITT
127 EAST 21st STREET (48 Gramercy Park)
NEW YORK, N. Y.

March 10th 1938.

My dear Darbee.

I wish you would make me six dozen spiders with no tails or bodies like those you made me for the Neversink skaters but not so larger. I find I am almost out of regular spiders. It might be well to make half of thes with a little gold body. Some people think this takes better.

Yours truly.

Edward R. Hewitt

EDWARD R. HEWITT
48 GRAMERCY PARK
NEW YORK, 10, N. Y.
TELEPHONE 5-4312 GRAMERCY

DEC. 9TH 1946.

a customer who wants 10 dozen Neversink Skaters cream and
t a few dozen for my Rods. If you could make me up about
before fishing season I would like it very much. I suppose
same old trouble gettinghooks but I hop you have some.
ing last year and expect it good next season.

Yours snicerely.

Edward R. Hewitt

Above: Edward Hewitt, letters to Harry Darbee, 10 March 1938 and 9 December 1946, and Neversink Skaters tied by Harry and Elsie Darbee. Author's collection.

Below: Edward Hewitt, Neversink Skaters, detail from his fly reservoir in the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

Sara Wilcox

season. Everybody interested will be welcome.

clean.

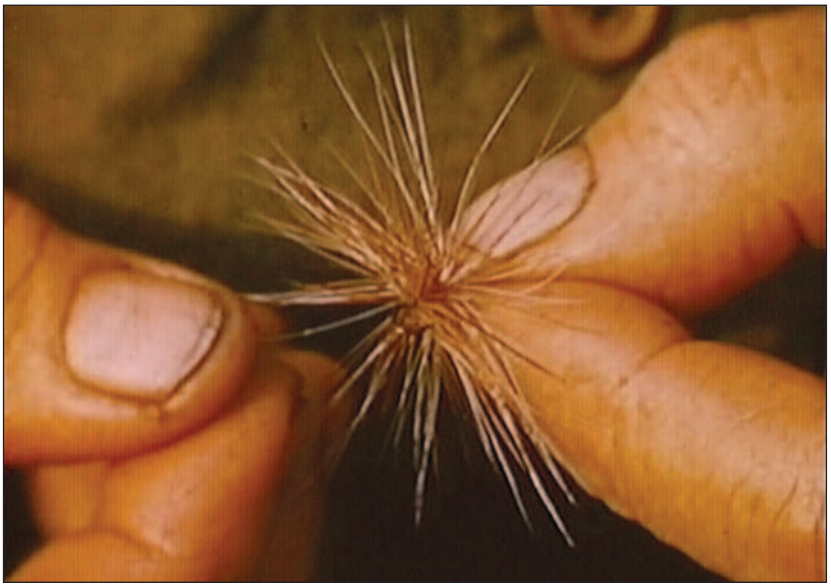
Westchester Sportsmen Plan 20th Anniversary

The Southern New York Fish and Game Association is planning a special motion-picture meeting to be held in the East View High School, White Plains, on Wednesday evening, April 17. Martin Bovey will show colored pictures of hunting and fishing in Canada and also trout fishing on the Neversink River, with George La-Branche, Ed Hewitt and Dick Hunt in the role of actors. This trio is among the best fly-casters in America. Ed Hewitt will be there in person and talk in connection with the Neversink film.

The association will celebrate its twentieth anniversary with a big dinner at Playland on April 26. There will be exhibits of interest to sportsmen and Commissioner Lithgow Osborne and Lowell Thomas will be among the guest speakers. A souvenir booklet, describing many of the association's ac-

Announcement for a screening of Hewitt on the Neversink *in the* Brewster (N.Y.) Standard*, 4 April 1940, page 3. Courtesy of Charles Fleischmann.*

George La Branche and Dick Hunt at Hewitt's cabin on the Neversink. Film still from Hewitt on the Neversink*, circa 1939. Produced by Martin Bovey. Courtesy of Ted Bovey.*



A Hewitt Neversink Skater in the hands of Hewitt. Film still from Hewitt on the Neversink*, circa 1939. Produced by Martin Bovey. Courtesy of Ted Bovey.*

Fishing the Skater

On 4 April 1940, the *Brewster Standard* printed a brief news article noting that on April 18 the Southern New York Fish and Game Association was hosting a special "motion picture meeting" that would include Martin Bovey's new colored picture films of hunting and fishing in Canada, along with "trout fishing on the Neversink River" with Edward Hewitt, George La Branche, and Dick Hunt. The three were described as being "the best fly-casters in America."[19]

Hewitt on the Neversink is a period film, shot in Kodachrome—a color reversal film that produces deeply saturated colors. The film stock was first introduced in 1935, and producers like Bovey were quick to take advantage of its possibilities. The production history of *Hewitt on the Neversink* is unknown, but it was probably filmed during the summer of 1939, following Hewitt's article on Skaters in the *Sportsman* and his collaboration with Ashaway Line Company, which sponsored and distributed the film. Films like these were typically loaned to fishing clubs for private viewings, and over the years copies of the film alternately appeared and disappeared. Although the Ashaway Line Company still exists today, their entire angling archive has been lost.[20]

Hewitt on the Neversink is a brief film, only five minutes long. It focuses on Hewitt (who was then seventy-three and still spritely in waders), La Branche, and Hunt fishing a stretch of the Neversink that was part of Hewitt's Big Bend Club. Early on we see them gearing up at the camp, then onstream we see Hewitt pulling broad-hackled Neversink Skaters from his fly box. The detail of the flies is remarkable. Equally remarkable is the detail of Hewitt's hands as he holds a Skater between his fingers: they are the hands of someone who appears to have spent a life engaged in manual labor, like a bricklayer. Hewitt was no slouch, and no armchair angler: there is the dirt of experience under his fingernails. The film was apparently shot in midsummer; the water levels are low and the Neversink is crystal clear. Theodore Gordon had once written that the Neversink water "is lucid as air,"[21] and it

shows in the film. All three anglers appear composed and totally in their element. La Branche cuts a figure in his sporting jacket; Hunt is circumspect, taking time to fidget with his pipe; and Hewitt, as might be expected, is all business. All three proceed to fish for—and catch—brook, brown, and rainbow trout, some of them leviathans. At one point Hewitt misses a fish, and you can almost hear him curse as he gives the cameraman a you-didn't-hear-that look.

What makes *Hewitt on the Neversink* an especially important film is that it shows Hewitt fishing the Skater—stripping and skating the fly at a very high rate, while a rainbow slashes at the fly—missing the first time, but not the second. This all takes place downstream from one of Hewitt's plank dams, which had the dual function of both oxygenating the water and creating holding refuges for larger fish. Hewitt casts several times across stream a few feet in front of the dam, and then, with his Garrison rod upright at 12 o'clock, strips the line quickly while lifting his rod even higher. When Darbee wrote, "The fishing method, as prescribed by the master, required great casting precision to keep the fly moving on the water, high—and dry—at all times,"[22] he was not being ungenerous. The precision of the technique of the retrieve is very different from any other stripping technique and effectively keeps the fly from being dragged down. It's not clear from the film how long Hewitt's casts are, but they seem to be at least 30 feet or more, and the fly is skated a good 10 feet in a few quick seconds. Everything is very fast: the cast, the retrieve, the rise, the strike. In his 1937 catalog, Hewitt wrote, "It is generally found that if this fly is cast lightly on the water and not allowed to get damp and moved in skips and jumps over the surface that the largest trout will jump for it like porpoises and come many times to the fly if they miss it. I know of no fishing which is so exciting. It is hard to do this casting which requires great skill, and it is also hard to hook these fish but it is great sport." But elsewhere, the same year, he cautioned that this takes a particular effort: "The constant attention required to keep the fly moving just right and at the proper rate becomes quite fatiguing after a short time. One longs to return to the old dry-fly fishing where the fly cast easily floats downstream with no effort on the part of the fisherman."[23]

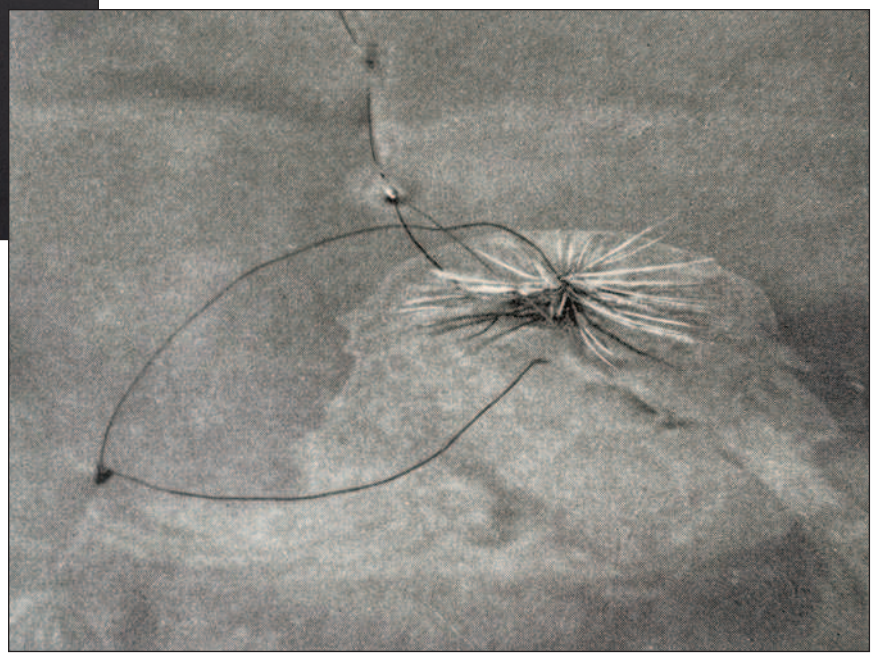
It's no understatement to say that it's hard to hook fish on Skaters: a size 16 Model Perfect hook, even with a large gape, is confoundedly shrouded when wrapped with 2-inch hackle. But this did not deter Hewitt. Nor did the fragility of the flies put him off. In his 1937 article on Skaters, Hewitt explained, "the flies are not very durable and are a lot of trouble to keep in proper working order."[24] And Marinaro cautioned that you need a special box to carry them so the hackle tips do not get squished or bent. The film shows Hewitt used a clear Perspex Dewitt fly box filled with Skaters so that they supported each other in a way that prevented them from being crushed.

Edward Hewitt. Film still from Hewitt on the Neversink*, circa 1939. Produced by Martin Bovey. Courtesy of Ted Bovey.*

Edward Hewitt's Dewitt fly box, filled with Neversink Skaters. Film still from Hewitt on the Neversink*, circa 1939. Produced by Martin Bovey. Courtesy of Ted Bovey.*

Left: A profile view of a Darbee-tied Neversink Skater. Undated, probably 1950s.

Below: A photograph of a Skater from Hewitt's 1937 article in the Sportsman*, showing the fly as it sits on the water before it is stripped, or skated, across the surface.*



Skaters are not just hard to tie but hard to carry and hard to cast and hard to love when you're missing so many strikes. Yet, they still had their fans.

One of them was John Atherton, who counted himself among Hewitt's friends. The dust jacket portrait of Atherton on his book *The Fly and the Fish* (1951) shows him holding a Gillum rod with one of Hewitt's rare reels (he reportedly made only twenty-two of them, for friends mostly). Although Atherton lived in Vermont alongside the Batten Kill, he regularly ventured to the Catskills to fish Hewitt's private water from the early 1930s until 1944. Maxine Atherton wrote an essay about how Atherton and Hewitt would spend their time fishing together, and the strategies Hewitt employed when fishing Skaters.[25] In 1946, John Atherton did an experiment using Spiders and Variants as his only flies for the entire season. His flies varied from 1 inch to 2½ inches in diameter on size 14 and 16 hooks.[26] In the end he concluded, "If I had to be limited to one dry fly it would be the spider, without any doubt. It can be used in so many more ways that the conventional fly; it is effective whether the water is high or low, colored or clear; and best of all, it brings up the large fish."[27]

Even with the added knowledge of new historical documents—like Hewitt's letters to Darbee and Bovey's film—it remains a challenge to document the entire history of a fly like Hewitt's Neversink Skater. By definition, history has gaps, and flies are especially problematic because it is so hard to establish who tied a given fly. Authorship is based on a variety of factors, and all of them—including provenance—have their failings. In the case of the Neversink Skater, we are fortunate to have a revealing trove of information: Hewitt's own descriptions in the *Sportsman* and his catalogs from the 1930s; Skaters tied by Harry and Elsie Darbee; Hewitt's box of Skaters at the American Museum of Fly Fishing; descriptions of tying the fly by Darbee, Brooks, Marinaro, and Shenk; and, above all, Bovey's exceptional documentary of Hewitt, La Branche, and Hunt fishing on the Neversink. Together, these combine to make a revealing portrait, not just of the Neversink Skater, but also the ever-inventive mind of the man who designed it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My research on Hewitt and his Neversink Skaters has been assisted by a number of people to whom I am greatly

indebted: Ted Bovey, Tom Browne, Jorge Carcao, Steve Crandall, Judie Darbee Vinciguerra Smith, Charles Fleischmann, and Scott Krosch.

ENDNOTES

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2. Edward Hewitt, *A Trout and Salmon Fisherman for Seventy-five Years* (New York: Scribner's, 1950 [second printing of first edition, 1948]), 73.
3. Edward Hewitt, *Telling on the Trout* (New York: Scribner's, 1930), 61.
4. Sparse Grey Hackle, "Ed Hewitt—The Later Years," *The Anglers' Club Bulletin* (June 1957, vol. 36, no. 2), 23.
5. Sparse Grey Hackle, *Fishless Days, Angling Nights*, 70.
6. Charles K. Fox, "Skater Dry Fly Fishing," *Pennsylvania Angler* (May 1943, vol. xii, no. 5), 9, 20; p. 9.
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8. Harry Darbee, *Catskill Flytier: My Life, Times, and Techniques* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1977), 45.
9. Hewitt, *A Trout and Salmon Fisherman for Seventy-Five Years*, 135.
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11. Letter from Edward Hewitt to Harry Darbee, 18 December 1937. Collection of Judie Darbee Vinciguerra Smith.
12. Letter from Edward Hewitt to Harry Darbee, 10 March 1938. Collection of the author.
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15. Joe Brooks, "Skaters' Waltz," *Field & Stream* (May 1964), 60–61, 109–12; p. 110. The 1962 typescript is part of the author's collection.
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17. Chauncy Lively, "Hewitt's Venerable Skater," *Pennsylvania Angler* (January 1978), 26–27; Ed Shenk, "The Skater Spider," *Fly Fisherman* (March 1988), 53–56; Ed Shenk, "Hewitt's Skater Spider," *Fly Tyer* (Winter 2009, vol. 15, no. 4), 60–65.
18. Darbee, *Catskill Flytier*, 46.
19. "Westchester Sportsmen Plan 20th Anniversary," *The Brewster (N.Y.) Standard* (4 April 1940), 3.
20. E-mail correspondence from Steve Crandall to author, 5 May 2019. The Ashaway Line Company, founded in 1824, has been managed by six generations of Crandall family members; it no longer manufactures fishing lines.
21. Quoted by Sparse Grey Hackle in *Fishless Days, Angling Nights*, 69. Gordon actually wrote that the Neversink was "limpid as air, the smallest object can be seen distinctly at a depth of many feet" (Theodore Gordon, "Fly-Fishing in New York," *Forest and Stream* [19 March 1904], 232); reprinted in John McDonald, ed., *The Complete Fly Fisherman: The Notes and Letters of Theodore Gordon* (New York: Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, 1970), 54.
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25. Maxine Atherton, "The Neversink River, New York," in Catherine Varchaver, ed., *The Fly Fisher and the River* (New York: Skyhorse, 2016), 57–66.
26. John Atherton, "Fishing with Spiders and Variants," in *The Fly and the Fish* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 52–57.
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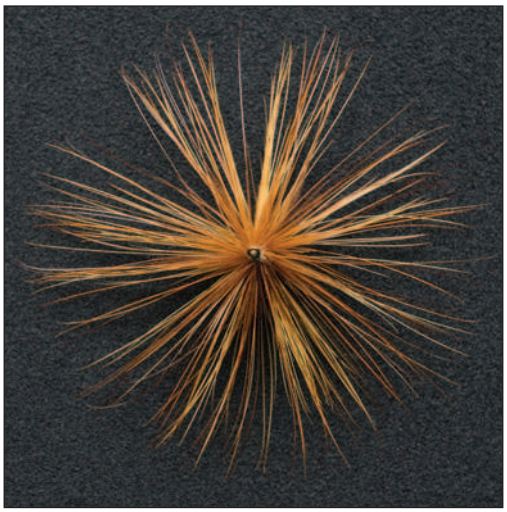


A Darbee-tied brown and ginger Skater. Undated, probably 1950s.

Neversink Skaters tied by the author, 2019.

Metamorphosis

by Jim Bale

Photographs and artwork by the author

Dam and spillway, Rockford, Michigan, circa 2019.

For teenage boys living in Rockford, catching trout in the spring was a rite of passage with nearly as much significance as bagging whitetail deer in the fall. The only difference I could discern was the school policy of excusing all absences during the first week of deer season. Had the opening of Michigan's trout season not fallen on a Saturday, however, it too would have been a school holiday, for when the snow finally melted and the robins arrived, our priorities turned from completing homework to trout fishing in the Rogue River.

The Rogue, one of Michigan's southernmost trout streams, begins at the confluence of several canals near the Kent and Newaygo County lines. Dug near the turn of the last century, the canals drained an ancient, ice-age lake, known as Rice Lake, and opened the fertile land to farming. Onions grew exceptionally well there, and their sweet aroma permeated the air during the annual late-summer harvests. Not far from the river's headwaters, the farm fields yield to swamps and rolling uplands thickly covered with mixed pine and hardwood forests. The land seems wild and virgin, and the Rogue benefits from this pristine quality. Before entering a wide valley north of Rockford, the river traverses the Rogue River State Game Area, a forested wetland so dense that black bears can still roam there, despite the area's proximity to Grand Rapids, Michigan's second-largest city.

The name Rogue suggests a raging, untamed river, but the appellation was actually a cartographer's mistake. James Morrison, a young man who helped survey northern Kent County in 1837, intended to name the river Rouge to honor Detroit's River Rouge, but with an errant pen stroke, *Rouge* became *Rogue*. Although the river occasionally leaves its banks and floods the farm fields north of town, Michigan's Rogue is mostly a gentle, meandering stream not unlike Vermont's lower Batten Kill.

The most roguish incident attributed to the Rogue was not entirely the river's fault. During a sudden spring thaw in the 1940s, the river swelled, and the operators of the Rockford Dam feared that the rapidly rising river would burst the dam, a modest wood and concrete structure that once supplied electrical power to the community. The operators hurriedly raised the gates and released torrents of muddy water. In their haste to save the dam and avert flooding in Rockford, they failed to alert the keepers of another dam 2 miles downstream at the Rockford Paper Mill. The mill pond rose abruptly, and the rushing flood waters swept over the dikes, inundating the mill and sending workers scurrying to higher ground. No lives were lost, but the mill sustained considerable damage, and the costly cleanup lasted long into the following summer.

With the encouragement of my biology teacher, I began to study the Rogue while in high school, measuring oxygen content, temperature, and pH at various locations on the river. Not only did I learn the basic principles of freshwater biology, my time on the river brought new and sometimes painful experiences. While hurrying to complete a water sampling before dark on a muggy July evening, I carelessly spilled concentrated sodium hydroxide, a potent chemical used to stabilize

An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Pilgrimage to Spring Branch Creek*, a memoir written by the author and published by Kindle Direct Publishing in 2021.

the water samples, onto the skin of my left leg. Before I could dilute the spill with river water, the viscous alkali bored a painful, dime-sized crater into my thigh just below the frayed edge of my cutoff jeans.

A second incident would trouble me even more than my injured leg. During an early-morning visit to the Rogue in the summer of 1967, I met a Wolverine Shoe Company employee who was also taking water samples. When I asked about his findings, he replied that the river looked good that morning with the dissolved oxygen content in the six-parts-per-million range.

"What if it goes lower?" I asked. Trout, I knew, needed at least five parts per million.

"When it gets down to four," he replied, "we'll probably cut production back a bit."

As I learned that summer, a river's oxygen content reflects many factors, including water temperature, the photosynthetic activity of aquatic plants, and the presence of pollution. When production at the Wolverine tannery increased during the warm summer months, pollution and water temperature rose simultaneously, and the river's capacity to hold oxygen fell. If the capacity fell too far and the oxygen content dropped, the river and its fish could suffocate. To cut production "a bit" when the oxygen level reached four parts per million threatened the Rogue's survival.

Cold, relatively unpolluted streams in northern Michigan, such as the Au Sable River, contained generous amounts of dissolved oxygen, typically between seven and twelve parts per million, and tolerated human intrusions reasonably well. By contrast, southern Michigan trout streams, like the Rogue, were considerably more fragile. My days on the Rogue taught me that four parts per million was dangerously low. Trout might tolerate such levels temporarily, but the river's fish would survive only if they left the Rogue and migrated into the well-oxygenated feeder streams. If they did not leave, the trout would die.

When I began to study the river, the paper mill dumped minimally treated liquid wastes directly into it, and the effluent warmed the water, diminished the oxygen content, and stifled aquatic life downstream. In places, the Rogue flowed a milky green, and few trout could be found. The river suffered, but only the fishermen seemed to notice.

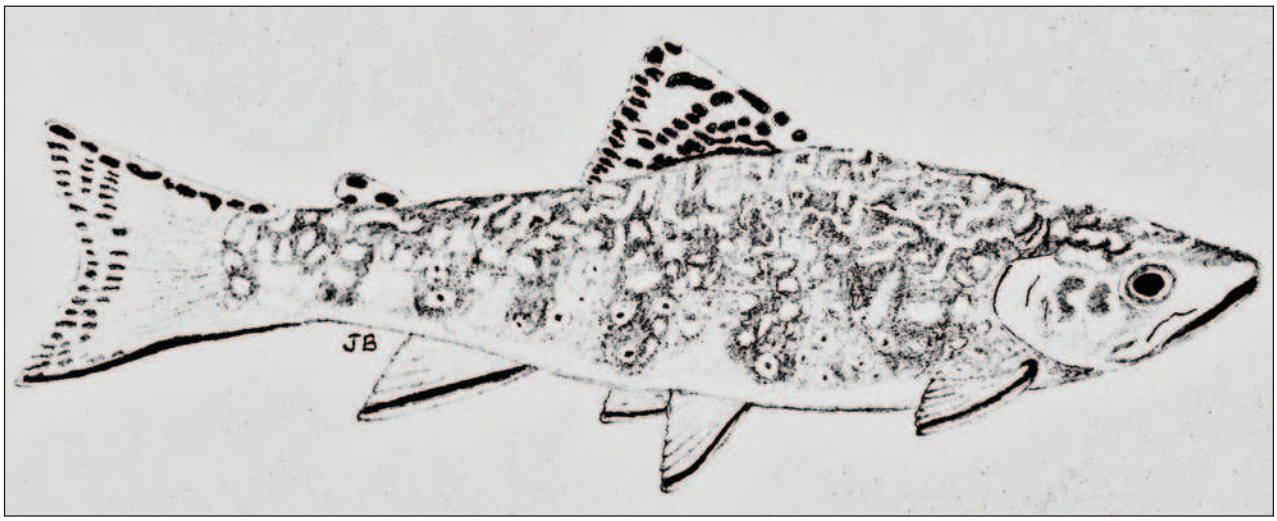
After Cleveland's Cuyahoga River caught fire in 1969, attitudes about pollution slowly began to change. The state of Michigan and Rockford's Kent County finally began to understand the threat that the ongoing factory pollution posed to the Rogue. With the passage of the federal Clean Water Act in 1972, the Wolverine tannery and the paper mill ceased dumping crude wastes directly into the river and constructed settling ponds for their liquid wastes. In the 1970s, they joined a county-wide disposal system that diverted many damaging pollutants away from the vulnerable watershed. Michigan's Department of Natural Resources removed the carp and other trash fish from the Rogue and stocked the river with brown and rainbow trout. The fingerlings thrived, and trout populations rose.

As the water quality in the Rogue improved, aquatic insects, key components of a river's food chain, also flourished. Fishers who examined the riverbed's larvae-encrusted rocks marveled at the diversity of the river's insect life. Doug Swisher and Carl Richards, well-known fly fishermen who once called Rockford home, wrote in their popular 1971 book *Selective Trout*, "[S]ome (rivers), such as the Rogue in Michigan, are almost embarrassingly rich. On a warm May afternoon, it can have stone flies, two species of caddis flies, midges, two or three species of mayfly, and a couple of crane flies, all at once" (p. 54).

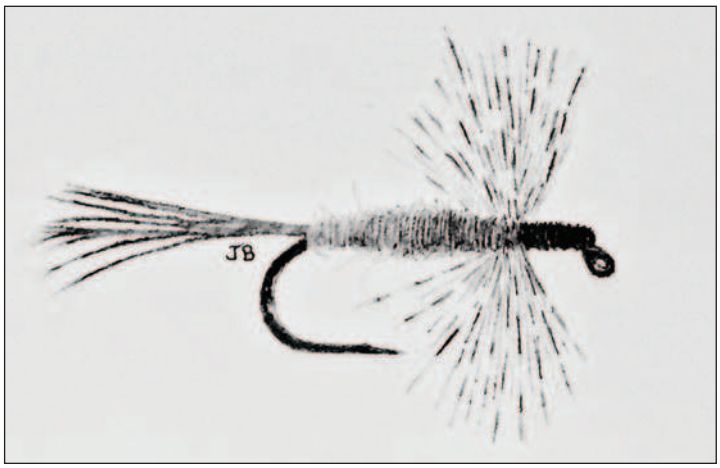
While working at the paper mill during summer breaks from college in the late 1960s, I'd sneak away in the early morning to stand on the walkway of the Childsdale Dam and watch life awaken along the river. Deer, their white tails twitching nervously, drank at the Rogue's edge, and great blue herons found morning repasts in the shallows of the mill pond. Now and then trout would rise, sending ever-expanding ripples across the pond's glassy surface.

Despite the Rogue's recovery, I did not fly fish. Although I wanted to learn, the occasional fly fishermen I met on the Rogue near the paper mill were reluctant to share their knowledge. And the sport seemed awfully expensive. The Orvis catalog that I ordered from Manchester, Vermont, confirmed that the cost of fly fishing, or at least the Orvis version, greatly exceeded the meager resources of a struggling college student.

One morning, while awaiting the day's work assignment at the paper mill, I glanced down at the clear waters of the concrete millrace that flowed beside the building's foundation. There to my amazement swam an 8-inch brook trout. Mesmerized, I watched the small trout rise repeatedly as it fed on tiny insects hatching in the cold, well-oxygenated waters. Brook trout, a fish that I had associated with the streams of northern Michigan, actually lived in the Rogue. The fish were indeed here, and I needed to learn how to catch them.



Brook trout, Salvelinus fontinalis.



Adams dry fly.

The Rogue's flats and riffles near 12 Mile Bridge.

With the next paycheck I began to save for fly-fishing equipment, and by early August I had enough money to buy my gear. At the bait shop on Plainfield Avenue I found a fiberglass, Wright-McGill Sweetheart rod, 8 feet long; a dark-blue Pflueger Medalist 1494 reel; a 7-weight, double-taper fly line; and some leaders. I also purchased a few flies, fuzzy gray Adamses in sizes 12 through 16, and delicate, light-blue duns in sizes 16 and 18. Although my rod and reel were the Chevy and Ford of fly fishing, they had a satisfying, utilitarian feel. Besides, they were all that I could afford.

Taking West River Road as it hugged the Grand River, I headed next to the hardware store in Comstock Park. Operated by the same family for more than fifty years, the store stocked a bit of everything: candy, ladders, paint, tools, small appliances, toys, garden fertilizer, and sporting goods. Because of the many fishermen who parked their vehicles on Comstock Park's side streets and walked to the nearby Grand River, the store had a generous inventory of fishing equipment located near the back of the store between the tools and the paint supplies.

Like the young children who lingered at the store's candy counter, I studied the fishing equipment for more than an hour. Even though I had already purchased my fly rod, I carefully evaluated each of the store's selections. I decided that medium-action rods, such as my Wright-McGill two-piece, suited me well and would unload the line, I imagined, like a vintage Orvis bamboo rod. Convinced that I had chosen my rod well, I found an imported, wood-framed net; a pair of rubber hip boots; a drab-green, multipocketed fishing vest; and a few more dry flies that had been hand tied in India. I paid the clerk for the items and then bought my first fishing license. I was finally ready.

Or so I thought.

Despite the information I had gleaned from the methodical approach to my purchases and the guide books that I borrowed from the small Rockford library, I quickly discovered that I was dreadfully inept. During my first outing, I stumbled noisily along the streambank only to see fish swimming for cover whenever I approached. And when my presence didn't spook the fish, my poor casting ability invariably put them down. Even after some practice in my parents' backyard, my flies consistently overshot their targets or became hopelessly entangled in the bushes on my backcasts.

Unless a person foregoes fishing entirely, such experiences can transform us. The fly fisher's brain evolves, I now believe, as we acquire practical knowledge through our experiences on creeks and rivers. As my metamorphosis continued, I gradually began to see the undercut banks and the runs where trout hide, and I eventually learned how to avoid creating shadows and sudden vibrations. I started to read the water and view the world from a trout's perspective. Eager to catch fish, but still not ready for the fly rod, I borrowed my dad's steel bait-fishing rod and South Bend casting reel and set off again, armed this time with night crawlers.

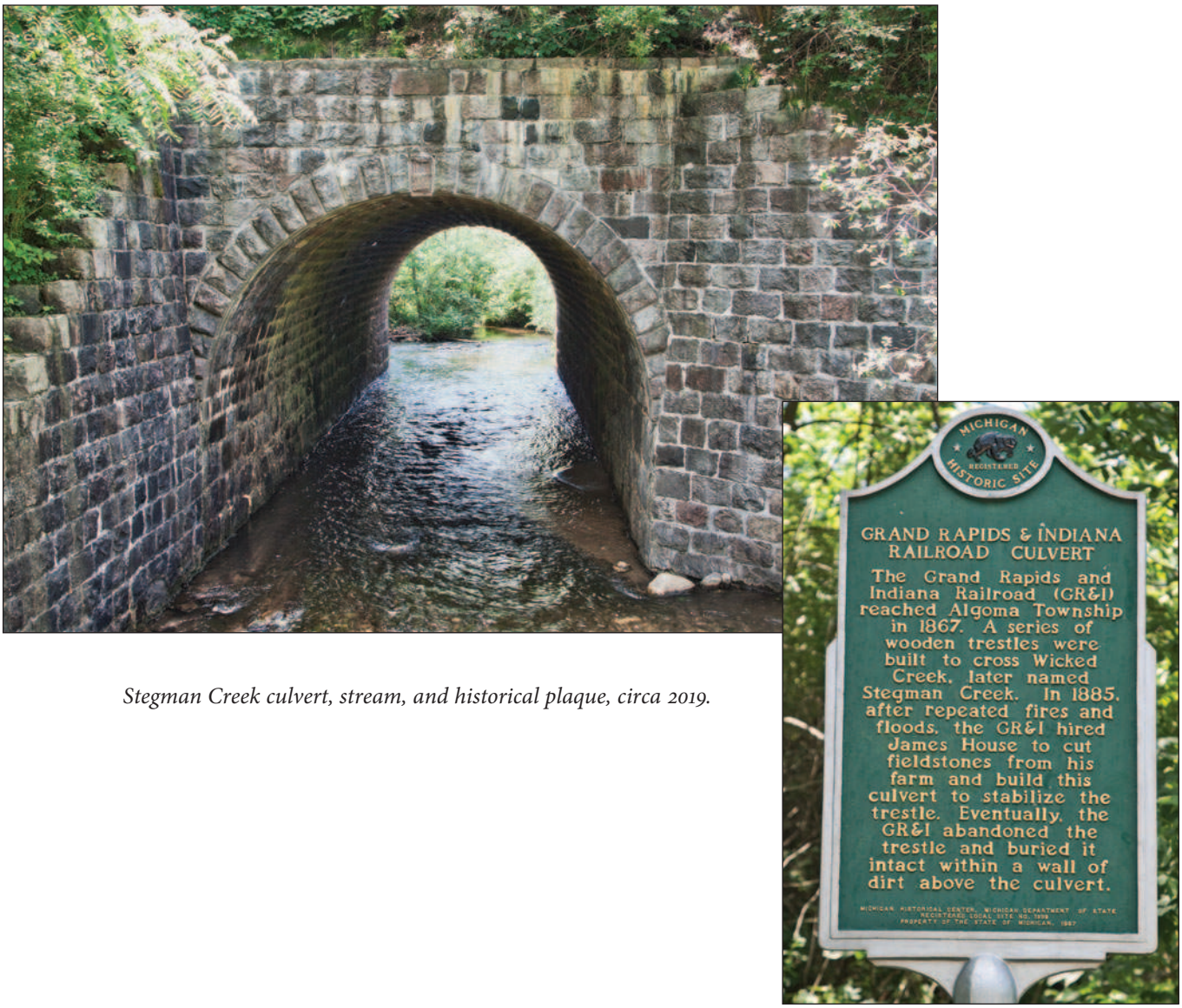
The day of my first trout began far worse than most. Carrying the bait rod and reel in one hand, I tried to climb a rickety barbed wire fence without first setting my rod aside. While straddling the fence, I lost my balance and fell. One sharp barb tore my jeans and pierced the skin of my right leg, and another stabbed the index finger of my left hand as I flailed to catch my balance. For several minutes, I hung from the fence, entangled in the jagged wire. To make matters worse, I remembered that I was overdue for a tetanus booster.

I eventually disentangled my leg and hobbled to the stream, where I washed my wounds; my bleeding finger and thigh throbbed as I rinsed them in the chilly water. Limping slowly downstream, I found a promising spot where a small, grassy island bisected the rushing water. Casting the night crawler upstream of the island, I deftly slid the worm into the current. The crawler, spinning circles in the cold water, drifted only a few feet before it was engulfed aggressively by a trout that had emerged suddenly from an undercut bank. The battle, though intense, was brief, and my first wild trout of the Rogue River watershed—a 12-inch, golden-yellow brown trout with brilliant red and black spots—soon lay in the soft, wet grass beside me.

Confidence restored, I returned the bait rod to the closet and began to fly fish once again. Armed now with midges and Adamses, I fished the Rogue's flats and riffles north of the 12 Mile Bridge, where casting was easier, and consistently caught and released small but healthy browns and rainbows. I explored the Rogue's tributaries and discovered deep holes that held brown trout nearly 20 inches long. In Rum and Cedar Creeks, two of the Rogue's spring-fed feeder streams, brightly colored, foot-long browns would emerge cautiously from undercut banks to investigate my offerings. And in Barkley Creek, a tiny stream that flowed into the Rogue a mile or so north of the paper mill, I finally found the brook trout that had been the impetus for my journey.

While fishing late one evening on Stegman Creek upstream from where it entered the Rogue, I was startled by the sound of an approaching animal. Not knowing whether it was a skunk, a badger, or perhaps a small black bear, I stood motionless, heart pounding. The animal drew ever closer, and finally a chocolate-brown weasel emerged from the underbrush and stopped just 2 feet away.

The weasel looked first at my boots, then at my legs, and finally, it gazed up at my face. Our eyes met briefly, and in that moment, I knew that I had arrived. Our instincts had drawn us to this place at the same time and with the same purpose. We had come to catch trout.



Stegman Creek culvert, stream, and historical plaque, circa 2019.

BOOK REVIEW

A Full Creel

by Paul Schullery

My first trips to fish the rivers of the Pacific Northwest about fifty years ago were a revelation of many parts. Besides the overwhelming beauty and wild grandeur of the rivers and landscapes, I was especially impressed by the region's society of fly fishers. Up to then my reading about fly-fishing culture had been limited to a few books about the East's long-established fly-fishing communities and their rivers, of which it seemed that every reach, pool, and run on every river had a name, and often quite a historic name at that. For some reason, I hadn't imagined that the same would be true along the great steelhead rivers of Washington, Oregon, and California. The very first streams I visited, and the first anglers I met, quickly disabused me of that presumption, and soon I was as immersed in the lively history of these long-cherished waters as I was in their well-known pools. By 1977, when I became executive director of this museum, I was as eager to celebrate West Coast fly fishing's rich heritage as I was to celebrate the East Coast's more widely known traditions.

Besides doing what I could (which, I confess, often wasn't much) to enlarge the museum's collection of western angling memorabilia, I sought out knowledgeable western anglers—both from the Rockies and the coast, of course—willing to write about their region's history and lore. It turned out that there were quite a few of them, some of whom were already involved in the museum. The most concentrated product of my efforts came in the spring of 1980, when we devoted Volume 7, Number 2, of the *American Fly Fisher* entirely to the West, our first issue ever so intentionally focused on a single region of the country. Contributions by Pete Hidy, Steve Raymond, George Grant, and other important western writers, as well as features highlighting our collection of western tackle, make it still one of my favorite issues in the magazine's long career.

By then I'd realized that the foremost place to start in understanding West Coast fly fishing's traditions was the handsome publication of the FlyFisher's Club of Oregon, the *Creel*, first published in 1961. The issues of that little journal were a treasure trove of history, lore, and remembrance and would be of value to me in writing *American Fly Fishing: A History*, which the museum and Nick Lyons copublished in 1987. It seemed a shame to me that more people didn't get to enjoy this club's output of great stories and thoughtful ruminations on everything to do with the sport.

That problem has now been solved by the club's publication of *The Creel 60th Anniversary Edition: A Selection of the Best Literature Published by the FlyFisher's Club of Oregon*, which generously reprints many articles, not only from the original editions of the *Creel* but also from its monthly successor, *Flyline*. This book contributes a generous assortment of vital, entertaining historical and historic material to the growing number of excellent book-length works relating to Northwest fly-fishing history. Readers are likely to recognize many of the better-known authors—Ben Hur Lampman, Roderick Haig-Brown, Pete Hidy, and Dave Hughes among them—and will enjoy meeting a host of others they'll wish they'd known—indeed, wish they'd fished with.

Only a few fishing clubs are fortunate enough to have such a thorough informal chronicle of their doings as this, especially one with such an array of talented chroniclers. The entire book is essentially an anecdotal miscellany, but some order is provided by its organization into eight themed sections: significant authors, the Deschutes River, home waters, fishing outside of Oregon, club history, fly-fishing history, the craft of fly fishing, and the art of fly fishing. It is all profusely illustrated, often with reproductions of whole pages from the original *Creel*, which was also distinguished among club journals for its artful design.

Although originally published exclusively for members of the club, coeditor Mark Metzdorff tells me that a limited number of the book is available to other anglers, as noted below. But I imagine that before long the book, like so many others, will also begin to appear on Amazon, eBay, Abebooks, and others. If you want to know more about the Pacific Northwest's fly-fishing traditions and lore, this book will give you a great start.

~

The Creel 60th Anniversary Edition: A Selection of the Best Literature Published by the FlyFisher's Club of Oregon
Selected and edited by the FCO 60th Anniversary Committee: John Pyrch (co-chair), Mark Metzdorff (co-chair), Rich Fitterer, Paul Franklin, Lisa Hansen, Jim Hillas, and Robert Sheley
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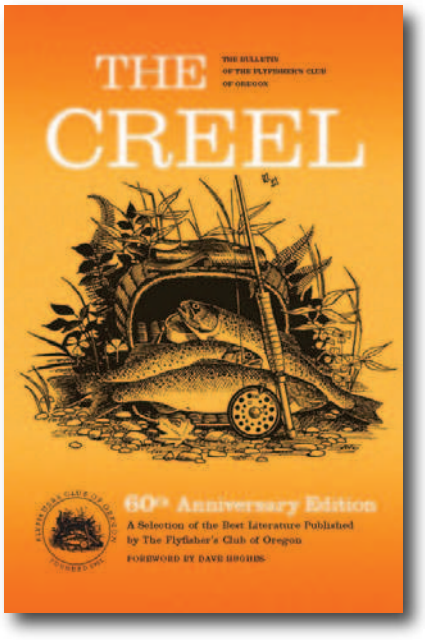
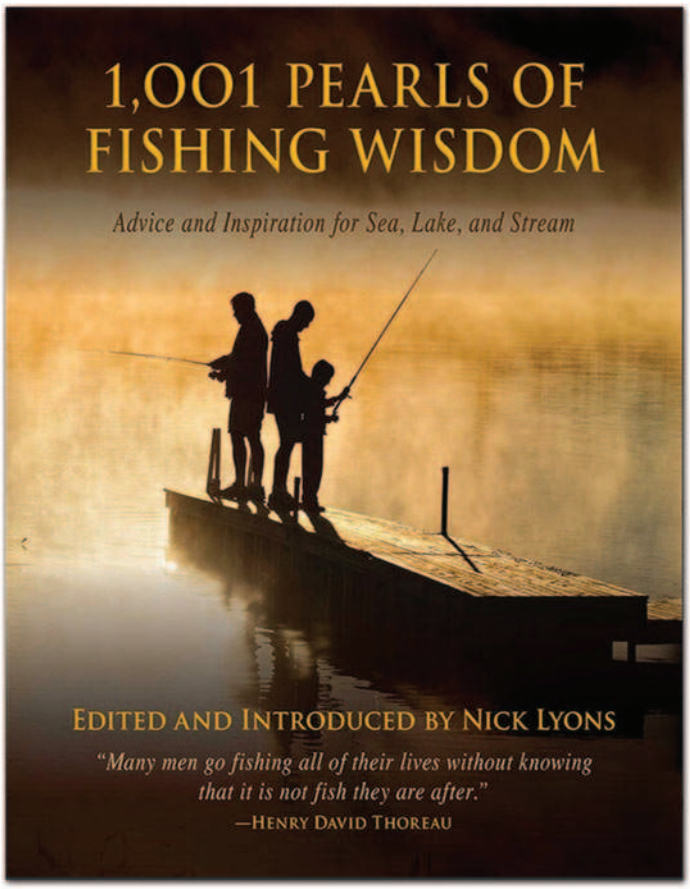


The String of (Fake) Pearls of Fishing Wisdom Continues

by Jan Harold Brunvand



I DISCOVERED *1,001 Pearls of Fishing Wisdom*—a handsome little 2013 book of fishing-related quotations—after the publication of my article in this journal debunking the very quotation that is featured on its cover (and used as an epigraph facing the title page).[1]

Yikes! There it is again, and in a book compiled by no less than well-known fly-fishing author and publisher Nick Lyons.[2] I'm guessing that the quotation, which does not appear in the book proper, was added to the cover and facing title page by the book's marketing staff. In any case, this is the sort of appearance in a respectable source that encourages belief in the quotation's authenticity.

Besides numerous sources cited in my article, there are others from recent years that I either missed or that have appeared since it was published. Robert J. Romano Jr., for example, is responsible for three instances of the fishy quotation. In his 2017 novel *The River King*, Romano's character, a Maine fishing guide, muses:

> Just about every angler I've ever guided has said it wasn't the fish, but the fishing that was important. Some repeat the old adage that a bad day of fishing is better than a good day at work. One of my more literate clients likes to quote Thoreau's famous words, something about men fishing all their lives without realizing that it isn't fish they are after.[3]

Again in *River Flowers*, a 2021 collection of stories, Romano, in the chapter that provides the book's title, quotes an old-timer's thoughts about the wisdom of "Good ole Henry David":

> *The guy had a million sayings. Must have driven his friends crazy. What was that other one?* After a moment, the man broke the silence of the noiseless forest when he said out loud, "Many men go fishing all their lives without knowing it's not the fish they're after."[4] [italics in original]

And yet again, in a 2022 article posted on the fly-fishing website Midcurrent, Romano begins an essay titled "Close

Encounters of the Natural Kind" thus: "Seated here beside the woodstove, rain mixed with hail pinging against the windows, I've been thinking about Thoreau's statement that 'Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.'"[5]

Two more examples of this fake pearl of fishing wisdom occur in respectable sources that further imply that some reliable authority lies behind the citation. A beautiful 2018 volume featuring high-quality images of fishing flies and gear and sponsored by the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, with text by Tony Lolli, has a foreword by President Jimmy Carter, who is shown in a photo wading wet and casting admirably. Lolli concludes his introduction: "When all is said and done, perhaps a quotation by Henry David Thoreau might best explain the Zen of fly fishing. 'Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after.'"[6]

Surely not the last, but only the latest fake pearl I have encountered is in the Spring 2022 issue of Trout Unlimited's magazine *Trout*, with the cover line "What Are You Really Fishing For?" No surprise that editor Kirk Deeter, in a piece with the same title, features this boxed quotation on its opening page: "'Many go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not the fish they are after.' — Henry David Thoreau."[7]

Psychologists sometimes refer to instances of false memories as "the Mandela effect."[8] The term refers to references that began circulating on the internet in 2010 stating that Nelson Mandela had died in prison in the 1980s. People claimed to recall such details as his widow's comments, images of the funeral, and demonstrations in South Africa, none of which, of course, had actually occurred. Examples of false memories of quotations include the line from the movie *Casablanca*, "Play it again, Sam" (not quite), and from *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back*, "Luke, I am your father" (same meaning, different words).

Will this string of fake Thoreauvian fishing wisdom ever end? Jeffrey S. Cramer, curator of collections of the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods, thinks not. "Like Moby-Dick," he e-mailed me, "Thoreau misquotations are ubiquitous and cannot be stopped."[9] I agree, at least for the items rampant on the Internet in the category that I call "T-shirts and tchotchkes." But like some crazed whaling captain on a daunting quest, I intend to keep trying to disabuse the serious fly-fishing community of the idea that Thoreau ever uttered or wrote this fishy quotation. Things did not end well for Captain Ahab, but I'm hoping for the best.

~

ENDNOTES

1. Jan Harold Brunvand, "Famous Thoreau Quotation Is Pretty Fishy," *The American Fly Fisher* (vol. 48, no. 1, Winter 2022), 20–24.
2. Nick Lyons, ed., *1,001 Pearls of Fishing Wisdom: Advice and Inspiration for Sea, Lake, and Stream* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).
3. Robert J. Romano Jr., *The River King: A Fly-Fishing Novel* (Grand Island, N.Y.: West River Media, 2017), 41.
4. Robert J. Romano Jr., *River Flowers: Tall Tales about Wild Fish, the Places They're Found, and the Men and Women Who Seek Them Out* (Grand Island, N.Y.: West River Media, 2021), 196.
5. Bob Romano, "Close Encounters of the Natural Kind," Midcurrent, 12 January 2022. https://midcurrent.com/stories-essays/close-encounters-of-the-natural-kind/. Accessed 13 September 2022.
6. Tony Lolli, *The Art of the Fishing Fly* (New York: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 2018), 7. With photography by Bruce Curtis, preface by Glenn Pontier (executive director of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum), and foreword by President Jimmy Carter.
7. Kirk Deeter, "What Are You Really Fishing For?" *Trout* (Spring 2022), 33–35, 33.
8. Massimo Polidoro, "The Mandela Effect: How False Memories Are Created," *Skeptical Inquirer* (vol. 46, no. 4, July/August 2022), 28.
9. E-mail from Jeffrey S. Cramer to author, 12 September 2022.

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2023 Heritage Award to Be Presented to Andy Mill

Andy Mill. Photo courtesy of Andy Mill.

On the evening of October 19, the 2023 Heritage Award will be presented to Andy Mill at Chelsea Piers in New York City.

Andy Mill has led a sporting life with few contemporaries. Beginning his outdoor career as a downhill ski racer, Mill was a member of the U.S. Ski Team from 1969 to 1981, competing in two World Championships and two Olympics. He was internationally ranked as the number-one American downhiller six separate times and launched this success into a prolific broadcasting career, first in ski-racing coverage and later in fishing.

He brought the competitive spirit born on the mountain with him into a fishing life. No angler has won more tarpon tournaments than Mill, who has twelve first-place finishes, including five Gold Cups. His dedication and athletic mindset were a novel approach to competitive fly fishing, and he is famously known for lifting weights in his garage with a fly rod to check knots, rod strength, angles, and approaches for quickly fighting and landing fish.

Throughout these accomplishments, Mill has been a storyteller. It is for this work especially that the American Museum of Fly Fishing is honored to present Andy Mill with the 2023 Heritage Award.

As the host of *Sportsman's Journal* on the Versus Network, Mill produced and hosted ninety-one fishing programs, which have been aired in dozens of countries worldwide. His book *A Passion for Tarpon* ignited the hearts and minds of tarpon anglers worldwide and set the stage for countless contributions to the conservation of this special fish.

Most recently and importantly, Mill has been cohosting *Mill House Podcast* with his son, Nicky Mill. Flip Pallot comments that, "It takes the likes of Andy to recognize and to connect with individuals who have woven the fabric of the outdoors mantles . . . and to draw from them the experiences and tales that kindle the spark of adventure in all of us. When the narrative is led by a person with Andy's credentials, the effect of a *Mill House Podcast* is a foregone conclusion . . . and the long list of such podcasts represents a stellar report card."

With more than eighty episodes released to date, Andy and Nicky have memorialized some of the great fly-fishing guides, luminaries, and figureheads across the country and the world. Their podcast preserves stories not just of how things used to be, but how we got to where we are now. *Mill House* tackles issues of conservation, innovation, and strategy both on and off the water, all with the classic style and grace that has come to define Andy Mill.

We anticipate a sold-out event. Tickets are now on sale at amff.org.

Please contact amff@amff.org with any questions.

Nancy Zakon Receives the 2023 Izaak Walton Award

Clockwise from top left: Panelists Mary Bloom, Joan Wulff, Fanny Krieger, Lori-Ann Murphy, and emcee Sara Low gathered online to pay tribute to AMFF 2023 Izaak Award honoree Nancy Zakon (lower left).

Photos by Carol Ellis

Honoring Nancy Zakon with AMFF's 2023 Izaak Walton Award was a two-day celebration. On March 13, a livestream event featured an extraordinary panel of women who gathered to discuss their experiences as anglers and share wonderful stories about Zakon. Emcee Sara Low was joined by Mary Bloom, Fanny Krieger, Lori-Ann Murphy, Joan Wulff, and, of course, our honoree. Zakon's accomplishments and inspiration to women in the sport were illustrated with humorous and touching recollections by the panelists, including one funny tale of Low and Zakon saltwater fishing in waders. In closing, Zakon said, "Going (fishing) with other women is so supportive. . . . When one catches a fish, it's as though we've all caught that fish." The full recording is available at amff.org/iwa-2023.

The following evening, guests gathered at the beautiful Key Largo Anglers Club for a celebratory reception and auction. Attendees included family, friends, and members of the Bonefish Bonnies, a local women's fishing club founded by Zakon. Everyone there had an anecdote to share about Nancy's kindness to others, generosity as a mentor, skill as an angler, graciousness as a host, and patience as a teacher.

AMFF would like to thank the Leadership Circle Donors of the event: Joan Birsh, Mary and Geof Bloom, the Bonefish Bonnies, Charlotte Curry, Tom and Sally Davidson, Gary and Sulu Grant, Misako Ishimura, Capt. Robin L. W. McGraw, Rod and Christine Patton, Helene Peddle, Fred Polhemus, the Saunce Group, Richard Tisch, Laura Wilson, and Joan Wulff. We also appreciate the support of our auction and raffle donors: Paul Dixon, Rachel Finn, Ed Jaworowski, Miss Mayfly, Orvis Flagship Store, Flip Pallot, Tom Rosenbauer, and Nancy and Alan Zakon. Additionally, we would like to express our gratitude to AMFF Trustee Richard Tisch for conducting the auction and AMFF President Fred Polhemus for his remarks on both evenings.

AMFF President Fred Polhemus presents the Izaak Walton Award to Nancy Zakon.

A few of the Bonefish Bonnies: Laura Wilson, Mary Bloom, Nancy Zakon, Mona Brewer, and Christine Patton.

Nancy catching up with friends Helene Peddle and Chico Fernandez.

Vanessa King and AMFF Anglers' Circle member Woods King IV.

Nancy and AMFF Advisory Council member Andy Mill.

AMFF Executive Director Sarah Foster with the evening's honoree.

AMFF Trustee Richard Tisch and Alan Zakon.

Museum News

AMFF was back in Edison, New Jersey, January 27–29 for the Fly Fishing Show. AMFF staff Sarah Foster, Jim Schottenham, Alex Ford, and Sam Pitcher were joined by AMFF President Fred Polhemus, who, as a gift to new members, spent the day signing copies of his book Arthur Shilstone: A Lifetime of Drawing and Painting. *We enjoyed chatting with many old friends and meeting new angling enthusiasts and experts of all ages.*

Al Quattrocchi

Hughes and Oden Named 2022 Austin Hogan Award Recipients

Henry Hughes and Robert A. Oden Jr. have each been named a recipient of the museum's 2022 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.

Hughes received the award for "Images Run through It: Illustrating Maclean's Masterpiece," which ran in the Summer issue. A review of the artwork created for Norman Maclean's *A River Runs Through It*, his article features three illustrated editions referred to among scholars as the "Little Blue Book" (1976), the first edition designed and illustrated by Robert Williams; the "Picture Book" (1983), with photographs by Joel Snyder; and the "Pennyroyal" edition (1989), designed and illustrated by Barry Moser. Hughes teaches literature and writing at Western Oregon University.

Oden received the award for "The Charles Thacher Collection of Antiquarian Fly-Fishing Books and Angling History," which ran in the Fall issue. The nearly 400-volume collection includes many of the oldest and rarest angling books in existence. Oden's article not only walks the reader through some of the collection's most important titles but also promotes an understanding of the significance of the collection, both to our library and to the potential scholarly research of angling historians. Oden, who served as president of Kenyon College and Carleton College and as headmaster of the Hotchkiss School, now lives in Hanover, New Hampshire.

Recent Donations to the Collection

Robert Demott of Athens, Ohio, shared with us a copy of his latest book, *Steinbeck's Imaginarium: Essays on Writing, Fishing, and Other Critical Matters*. **Richard Landerman** (Salt Lake City, Utah), **William Leary** (North Haledon, New Jersey), **Robert Smith** (Glen Rock, New Jersey), and **Neil M. Travis** (Livingston, Montana) all provided us with new titles for our library.

Alanna Dore of Ely, Minnesota, gave us a charcoal sketch by Chet Reneson. **Barry Mayer** of Shaftsbury, Vermont, donated art by Vic Erickson, Darrell Davis, Lee Stroncek, and Al Agnew, along with some flies tied by Roderick Haig-Brown.

William Flick of Livingston, Montana, donated an L. L. Dickerson Model 810510 bamboo fly rod from 1959 that belonged to his father, Art Flick. **Andy Longacre** of Dorset, Vermont, donated a collection of rods made and used by his grandfather, Frederick Van Duzer Longacre, an engineer who was instrumental in the early stages of impregnating bamboo rods.

Upcoming Events

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

April 20
Reel Talk with AMFF Curator Jim Schottenham
Virtual event on Zoom
3:00 p.m.

April 27
In partnership with the National Sporting Library and Museum Book Club Event: *The Feather Thief: Beauty, Obsession, and the Natural History Heist of the Century* by Kirk Wallace Johnson
Virtual event on Zoom
6:00 p.m.
NSLM and AMFF Members Only

May 18
Members Fishing Outing and Reception
Equinox Pond
Manchester, Vermont
2:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.

June 3–4
Creative Fly Tying with Val K
All-day event June 3; premium level June 4

July 6, 13, 20, 27
Kids Clinics
10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m.

August 12
Fly-Fishing Festival
10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

October 19
Heritage Award Event honoring Andy Mill
Chelsea Piers
New York City

Always check our website (www.amff.org) for additions, updates, and more information or contact (802) 362-3300 or amff@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.

Chris Miller

Chris Miller

Above: Reel Talk with Jim Schottenham *made its debut January 19 via Zoom from the museum's Gardner L. Grant Library in Manchester, Vermont. Jim shared some of his favorite reels, including a Vom Hofe Peerless Trout Reel and a Charles Orvis 1874 Patent Reel with removable spool. The replay is available on the blog section at amff.org. Keep an eye out for more episodes of* Reel Talk*!*

Left (top and bottom): On February 18, AMFF partnered with the Southwest Missouri Fly Fishers Club to host a free program of fly-tying demonstrations and fly-casting lessons at our gallery at the Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri. In addition to the numerous tying demonstrations, Curator Jim Schottenham offered guided tours of the exhibit while volunteers Chris and Amanda Miller assisted with fly casting. We wish to thank all the volunteers and visitors who joined us onsite and online through Facebook live.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jim Bale, MD, a Michigan native, received undergraduate and medical degrees from the University of Michigan and completed residency training in pediatrics and pediatric neurology at the University of Utah and fellowships in virology at the University of Utah and the VA Medical Center, San Francisco. He held faculty and leadership positions at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, and the University of Utah, Salt Lake City. Since retiring from academic medicine in 2018, he spends his time writing, hiking, fly fishing, volunteering, and photographing nature.

Martha Bale

Judith Brunvand

Jan Harold Brunvand describes himself on his business card as "Folklorist, Author, Skier, Fly Fisher." He has a PhD in folklore from Indiana University and taught at the University of Idaho, Southern Illinois University–Edwardsville, and at the University of Utah for thirty years until his 1996 retirement. Brunvand lives in Salt Lake City, convenient for pursuing his devotion to downhill skiing and fly fishing. He is the author of numerous articles in the field of folklore, of the standard textbook in American folklore, and of a series of books about urban legends. He has completed the Utah Cutthroat Slam twice, catching (and releasing) all four of Utah's native cutthroat trout.

Amy Vogel

Joseph Grigely is an artist, writer, and lifelong angler. His art is in collections that include the Tate Modern, London; the Stedelijk, Amsterdam; Kunsthaus, Zurich; and both MoMA and the Whitney in New York. Grigely grew up in Western Massachusetts, where he regularly skipped school to fish the Farmington and the Swift Rivers. He now fishes primarily in the Adirondacks and Maine, as well as in Wisconsin and Michigan. He has a DPhil from Oxford University and is professor of visual and critical studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Another Angle: Women Who Tell Our Stories

Max Erickson films Rachel Finn during production of After You've Gone. *Photo courtesy of Flylords.*

The National Women's History Alliance, which spearheaded the movement for March being declared National Women's History Month, announced "Celebrating Women Who Tell Our Stories" as its 2023 theme. AMFF enthusiastically joined the celebration with several female-focused initiatives.

For the first time in AMFF history, we assembled an all-female panel to celebrate the accomplishments of our 2023 Izaak Walton award recipient, Nancy Zakon. Panelists shared fishing stories and—for many women who have entered this historically male-dominated sport—relatable experiences. Sentiments of support, encouragement, and confidence crossed generations and disciplines, and the panelists reflected both on how inspiration can take different forms and the importance of empowering others. As Joan Wulff said, "The difference between Nancy and me is that my bringing women into the sport was always from a distance. I wrote about it and made films about it. I did teach it, yes, but Nancy was right out there taking each woman personally by the hand and teaching them to fly fish." You'll find the full recap of the event on page 24.

On March 2, the Fly Fishing Film Tour (aka F3T) kicked off in Salt Lake City. Among the ten incredible films selected for the 2023 tour is a story about our dear friend, ambassador, and earnest angler Rachel Finn. *After You've Gone* showcases the uplifting journey of healing from the pain of loss, honoring memories, and moving forth with optimism and a fresh perspective. Rachel brings her authentic warmth and humor to each scene as she travels from the Adirondacks to Argentina. In her words, "I'm so proud of Flylords for taking a chance and making a powerful film that everyone can relate to"—and we are proud to play a small role in telling this story. To learn more about this film and watch the trailer, visit amff.org/after-youve-gone.

Our second season of *Fishing the Collection* is underway and will include a 1960s Paul Young Martha Marie rod, the T&T Sextant rod, and an E. F. Payne Rod from the 1950s. This film series supports our effort to help bridge the gap between past and present and bring our collection to life. We carefully select rods from our collection and put them in the hands of trusted anglers. As we travel to various locations, bamboo rods of yesteryear are put to the test in both salt and fresh water, and our anglers share their take on what it's like to fish with classic equipment. If you've watched season 1 (currently available in the film section at amff.org), you know that every episode also includes a short educational bio for each rod from AMFF Curator Jim Schottenham. What you may not know is that the filming and editing is done solely by female filmmaker Meris McHaney.

If you've been a member for any number of years, you likely know that I'm a believer in the importance of storytelling—the capturing of a moment in time. Each year we endeavor to share fly fishing's greatest stories through exhibitions, films, and in the pages of this journal. Since 1996, Kate Achor has been the driving force behind the publication of the *American Fly Fisher*. Often (and rightfully) referred to as our estimable editor, Kate has worked with scores of (volunteer) authors and leading historians in our field to uncover and eloquently disseminate fly-fishing history to our readers and beyond.

You see, I've shared only a few examples of how women are telling our stories—everlasting fly-fishing stories with depth and purpose. If that isn't cause for celebration, I don't know what is.

Sarah Foster
Executive Director

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