

*The* American  
Fly Fisher

*Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing*

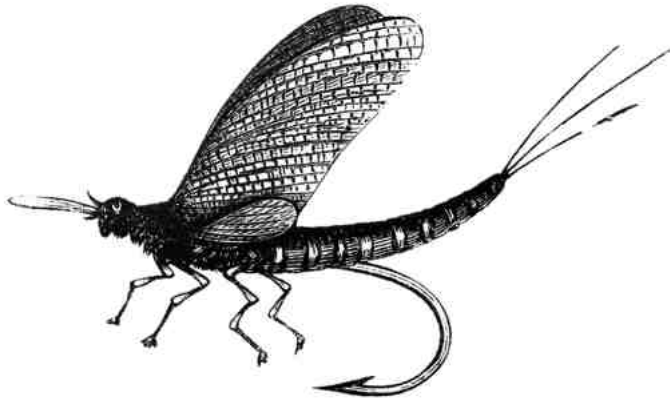


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SUMMER 2013

VOLUME 39 NUMBER 3

# Mayfly Muse



From Genio C. Scott, *Fishing in American Waters*  
(New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1869), 197.

IT'S THE END OF May in Vermont, and it's rainy, and there's a mayfly clinging to the screen of my office window urging me to write this introduction and put the summer issue to bed already.

Last summer, Jerry Gibbs, who's been working with Deputy Director Yoshi Akiyama on the museum's saltwater exhibit, began a series of saltwater history articles for us. That first installment, "Pioneers and Pioneering: The Allure and Early Days of Saltwater Fly Fishing," reviewed the sport from the 1700s through the middle 1900s. This time around, Gibbs continues with what he calls the developmental years (1920s–1940s) and the explosive years (1950s–1980s), discussing tackle developments, leaders in the field, record holders, and conservation efforts. "Saltwater Fly Fishing Comes of Age" begins on page 2.

More recent conservation efforts are featured here as well. American Rivers, the leading organization working to protect and restore the nation's rivers and streams, is one of several groups with whom we'll be working on conservation-related programs. In "American Rivers: Celebrating Forty Years of River Conservation" (page 23), Devin Dotson discusses the mission, beginnings, and success stories of this group of river conservationists as they reach their four-decade milestone. And Richard Lessner, executive director of the Madison River Foundation, reports on the recent crash of the mountain whitefish population on the Madison and the foundation's role in a multiyear study of the species in that river. To read more about it—and to be

assured that whitefish don't compete with trout—turn to "What's Happened to the Whitefish?" on page 20.

But, you may ask, what's happened to the good ol' history and tradition? We've got that too. Back in January, New York writer/publisher Nick Lyons brought to my attention the 1994 edition of fly-fishing theorist J. C. Mottram's *Fly Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries* (1915), particularly the introduction written by London publisher David Burnett. "It's the best essay I know on Mottram, who is still underread and underestimated," Lyons said. It is hard to disagree. With flies tied by Malcolm Greenhalgh and photographed by Andrew Herd, Burnett's "J. C. Mottram" (page 14) makes a fine summer addition.

Keepers of the Flame, which usually profiles a person, this time features a group of people and a place: the Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club. Having grown out of the San Francisco Fly Casting Club, which was founded in 1894, the GGACC is the second-oldest casting club in the country. Beginning on page 18, John Mundt praises its history and accessibility.

Some of our spring activities are noted in Museum News (page 26), but the biggest news is the opening of our new exhibit, *The Wonders of Fly Fishing*. Turn to the back inside cover, and let Executive Director Cathi Comar tell you all about it.

Now, back to that mayfly.

KATHLEEN ACHOR  
EDITOR



CATCH AND RELEASE  
THE SPIRIT OF FLY FISHING

## Our 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 uses these resources to engage, educate, and benefit all.

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ON THE COVER: *From bonefish to billfish, international angler Billy Pate pursued every game fish in salt water. Tarpon were his passion, and he set multiple records to prove it. Read more about saltwater fly fishing on page 2. Photo by Jerry Gibbs.*

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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. Copyright © 2013, The American Museum of Fly Fishing, Manchester, Vermont 05254. Original material appearing may not be reprinted without prior permission. 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.com](mailto:amff@amff.com) WEBSITE: [www.amff.com](http://www.amff.com)

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:  
The American Fly Fisher  
P.O. Box 42  
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# Saltwater Fly Fishing Comes of Age

by Jerry Gibbs

**T**HE SUMMER 2012 issue of the *American Fly Fisher* introduced the first of a series of articles tracing the development of saltwater fly fishing in North America. “Pioneers and Pioneering: The Allure and Early Days of Saltwater Fly Fishing” described the nascent days of the sport and the experimental angling and generative discoveries by its earliest practitioners from the 1700s through the middle 1900s. In this offering, “Saltwater Fly Fishing Comes of Age,” we turn first to the period from the 1920s through the post-World War II years, during which saltwater fly fishing enjoyed nicely paced growth, followed by the decades encompassing the late 1950s through the 1980s, when the sport experienced a spurt of unprecedented development and rising popularity. Increasingly, saltwater fly fishers broke from traditional approaches of their freshwater brethren, inventing new ways of casting, embracing the rapid advancements in tackle spawned by new technology, and adapting to new fish species and environmental challenges previously never imagined. Today, of course, freshwater and saltwater fly fishing benefit one another through a bipartisan exchange of methods, tackle innovation, and willingness to explore without bias.

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL YEARS: 1920S–1940S

Despite decades of volatility—from the ebullient 1920s through economic depression and a world war—intrepid fly fishers continued to probe the possibilities in salt waters. They were aided on several fronts. New infrastructure, such as the 1928 opening of the so-called Tamiami Trail, which connected Florida’s west coast to Miami, allowed anglers to easily access the tremendous variety of fish on both coasts of that state.<sup>1</sup> The 1929 founding of the Rod & Reel Club of Miami Beach, though initially weighted toward big-game tackle, included a fly-fishing division.<sup>2</sup> In 1930, the Islamorada Fishing Guides Association (later Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association) was established.<sup>3</sup> It furthered technical developments in marine fly fishing and helped visiting anglers locate professional guide service. The later 1930s and 1940s occasioned industrial breakthroughs with direct application to fly fishing, as

we’ll later see. Still, during the early 1920s—and even into the 1930s—there was serious need for better fly-fishing equipment.

### *The Need for Better Tackle*

Dr. Gordon Hill, orthopedic surgeon and eventually Keys flats-fishing aficionado, remembers stories of his grandfather Clifford Hewitson arriving in New York from Liverpool in the early 1900s, soon to begin fly fishing the salt waters of Long Island Sound. Hill’s father, Edmond “Pop” Hill, followed in his footsteps in the 1920s, and Gordon Hill began fly fishing there in 1938. Still without access to more modern tackle, Hill recalls numer-

ous equipment problems. The still-in-use silk fly lines and linen Cuttyhunk backing required daily stripping from the reel and drying after use. Often Hill and his father would wind the backing around chair backs at the dining room table, with his mother demanding the stuff be removed before breakfast the next day. Silkworm “gut” leaders were the rule. Fly hooks began rusting in two days. Bamboo rod finishes peeled, metal ferrules corroded, and the rods would quickly take a scoliosis-like set in the salt air if not hung vertically from ceiling hooks. One saving tool was Hill’s grandfather’s stout greenheart rod. It was stiff enough for surf use and had brass tubular line guides and an agate/brass tip-top that resisted corrosion.



From James A. Henshall, *Camping and Cruising in Florida* (Cincinnati: Robert Clark & Co., 1884), frontispiece.

With most commercial fishermen at war, there was little competition for the fishery resources, and Hill remembers the fly fishing as superb.<sup>4</sup>

### *Dawn of Synthetics*

Although new material technologies began appearing that would enable fly fishers of both salt and fresh water to solve problems limiting their sport, anglers were slow to embrace them. And despite advantages, the new synthetics were not without problems. Nylon (patented by E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company in 1937 and introduced in 1938), which would slowly replace silkworm gut leaders, was stiff, subject to holding memory, and did not form secure knots.<sup>5</sup> Fly-line improvement would wait until the 1950s. Traditional mind-set played a part, of course, when it came to new fiberglass versus bamboo rods. Bias aside, early fiberglass had its problems, too. The first fiberglass rods were simply lacking in aesthetics. They were heavy and their actions were graceless—either clublike or overly flexible. It was not until the Shakespeare Company's 1947 Howald process produced tapered tubular rod blanks that fly fishers (some grudgingly) began accepting fiberglass material.<sup>6</sup> In the main, most saltwater fly anglers of the 1920s and 1930s continued to rely on their salmon (and sometimes even trout) tackle.

### *Rods*

Although fiberglass began making inroads, bamboo was still king—especially in fly rods—despite the inherent drawbacks Gordon Hill previously noted. However, an improvement in the fabricating method kept bamboo in the saltwater game far longer than imagined. Here's what happened.

Somewhere between the mid-1930s and 1940, master outdoorsman Harold Gibbs began fishing for striped bass, mainly in Rhode Island's Barrington and Palmer river estuaries and on Cape Cod. Gibbs—who had been appointed administrator of fish and game for the state of Rhode Island in 1939 by Governor William Vanderbilt—was also a gifted miniature bird carver who sold his work to the Orvis Company of Manchester, Vermont. On one visit to the company some time in the 1940s, Gibbs spoke with owner D. C. "Duckie" Corkran about developing a rod specifically for stripers. Corkran brought in his designer/builder Wes Jordan. Jordan had been experimenting with impregnating bamboo with Bakelite (an early plastic), and here was an excellent application for the process.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Bakelite Corporation had tried impregnating bamboo strips in their test labs, Jordan found that assembling those strips resulted in a poorly performing rod. Determined, Jordan de-

veloped a process that slit bamboo cane in half, dried the pieces, tempered them over an open gas flame, then painstakingly split them into several strips that Jordan glued back together using phenolic resin-based cement. The reconstructed cane was then impregnated under controlled heat with a Bakelite phenolic resin. The next step was curing in an oven, allowing the bamboo pores to completely fill with resin, rendering it moistureproof, color fast, and resistant to extreme heat and cold. The process turned the rods a rich mahogany, which was further enhanced by sanding and buffing to a beautiful luster.<sup>8</sup>

The first rod Jordan made for Gibbs, who called it "The Original," was in all probability the first bamboo specifically designed for salt water. It was 9 feet long and designed for today's equivalent of a 9-weight line. Gibbs broke the rod in the summer of 1946 and returned it to Orvis for repair. At some point, Gibbs had Orvis build him a second rod of 8½ feet for 8-weight-equivalent. The two rods eventually led Orvis to create a series of saltwater-specific bamboo fly rods.<sup>9</sup>

Wes Jordan submitted a patent application bearing his name for his inventive impregnation process on 13 April 1946. The patent was granted 15 December 1950 and assigned to the Orvis Company. By 1954, all Orvis bamboo rods were impregnated.<sup>10</sup>



*Harold Gibbs's relationship with the Orvis Company, outlet for his hand-carved miniature birds, led to development of what was likely the first bamboo rod specifically designed for saltwater fishing. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*



*Right: Orvis rod designer from 1939 to 1970, Wes Jordan created the painstaking impregnation process that rendered bamboo rods moistureproof and highly resistant to heat and cold—desirable attributes for use in the marine environment. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*



*The headplate on this Pflueger Medalist is a conversion kit addition to make it a multiplier for saltwater use. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

## Reels

As more fly anglers explored salt water, they soon learned that the reels of the day were as problematic as most nonimpregnated bamboo rods. None of the components—from the frame and spool (except for some early brass British reels) to drags, screws, springs, and other parts—stood up to the effects of salt water. Line capacity was also lacking. Some top anglers successfully used the better salmon reels—Vom Hofes were excellent, and Joe Brooks favored the top-quality Otto Zwarg Saguenay model—but midlevel salmon reels, especially those with an abundance of moving parts, were not practical.

Although they were never designed for salt water, single-action Pflueger Medalist reels were the average angler's standby for years and were constantly modified. In the 1930s, the largest Medalist was model 1496. A 1496½ appeared in the 1940s. (It wasn't until 1958 that the largest, most saltwater-favored model 1498 was added.<sup>11</sup>) The original Medalist spool was made of fairly soft aluminum, and the simple drag

disc, along with the spool, would eventually disintegrate. Well-known Keys guide Jimmy Albright told of punching rivets in the Medalist frames to hold them together.<sup>12</sup> Californian Harry Kime took a page from Zane Grey's big-game reel design, affixing a piece of belt leather to the lower brace of the Medalist and obtaining drag by pressing the leather against the spool rim. Lefty Kreh, always the innovative tinkerer, cut out an oval-shaped opening in the side of the frame, enabling the thumb to reach in and apply pressure to the spool.<sup>13</sup>

## Flies

Salmon and trout flies were still being fished in salt water, but some anglers were beginning to create patterns aimed specifically at marine species. It had become evident that those often intricately feathered and delicate freshwater fly creations were doomed to short lives when fished in the salt, even when not ravaged by tough, often toothy fish. It seemed less necessary for patterns to closely suggest specific forage, which freshwater anglers had learned to do imi-

tating various insect hatches. Simple streamers of saddle hackle, bucktail, or a combination thereof soon became the norm, although some early tiers added favored adornments here and there—jungle cock eyes, for example—for their aesthetic qualities. Generic streamers of white or combinations of easily obtainable primary colors were good enough when saltwater fish were feeding on various baitfish, excited by chum, or prowling during low-light conditions and not particularly cautious. As the sport developed, though, astute anglers soon realized that general attractor patterns were frequently refused. Flies that were more suggestive of forage species on which game fish were or had recently been feeding were usually more effective. This was especially true during periods when fish were less aggressive. Harold Gibbs's suggestive Gibbs Striper Fly, which imitated a silversides baitfish, a bucktail fly first tied in the 1940s, is a good early example of intent to imitate key forage.

Early hooks were wanting for use in salt water. During the early 1900s, they were still non-eyed. Tiers created hook eyes as desired, first with gut, then switching to nylon as it became available, then switching to eyed hooks. During the mid-1900s, hooks used in salt water were primarily Z nickel and tin plated. They held up for awhile before stainless steel appeared, becoming the standard until high-carbon steel (alloyed with vanadium or stainless steel) models appeared in later years. Today, quality hooks are plated, commonly with black nickel, cadmium, or zinc. Carbon steel hooks tend to be stronger but less corrosion resistant than stainless steel. Carbon steel alloys allow hooks of finer diameter for the same or greater strength than high stainless composition.

## Lines

Oil-impregnated braided silk fly lines were trouble enough used in fresh water; they did not float well and required fastidious maintenance. In salt water, deterioration accelerated. Hopes that braided nylon might supplant silk faded when various oil finishes were tried on the synthetic. It took until the early 1950s for true technological breakthroughs to change fly lines forever (we'll examine this subject further). However, one significant event in the assembly of line systems occurred in 1946. It was pure serendipity.

California Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club members Jim Green and Phil Miravalle were practicing for the annual distance event of the National Association of Angling & Casting Clubs (now the American Casting Association).

The usual system among distance casters consisted of 50 feet of heavy braided-silk fly line spliced to a length of 15-pound-test bait-casting line. That in turn was spliced to a polished, size-I fly line, which acted as the working shooting line of the system. During the cast, the bait-casting line was held in coils (the holding line). Green and Miravalle, seeking to increase cast distance, decided to try nylon monofilament in place of the size-I fly line. In their first effort, the nylon mono was tied to the holding line, which broke during a strenuous cast. Next, they tied the monofilament directly to the heavy fly-line head. The next cast fired out as though rocket propelled. The small-diameter mono reduced friction and obtained greatly increased distance.<sup>14</sup>

Word of the breakthrough was shared with a few Golden Gaters, but Green and Miravalle kept the secret into competition and swept the distance fly events at the national. Refinements on the basic design are still used by tournament casters, including multiple world champion Steve Rajeff. Soon mono-backed shooting tapers would find their way into practical fishing applications.<sup>15</sup>

Tournament casting competition using those multisection shooting-head systems gives us one little-known amusing story.

It happened down on the Texas Gulf Coast where Jack Sparks, who'd been named to the All-American Fly Fishing Team in 1941 and 1948 (and who also fly fished salt water for redfish), was assisting Joan Salvato, acting as her gillie, tending Joan's shooting line. By all accounts, Jack was a glamorous character who sported a dashing Errol Flynn pencil mustache and typically appeared wearing a bandanna over his sleek black hair. "I was practicing my distance casting," Joan remembers, "and came back hard for a left-hand haul and hit Jack in the head and knocked him right over! I was twenty-one then, Jack was in his forties. I was living on the East Coast. He asked if he could court me—all the way from Waco, Texas!"<sup>16</sup>

Joan smiled sweetly, but said no.

### Development Along the East Coast: Stripers and Blues

Harold Gibbs was not the only angler fishing for striped bass and bluefish in New England. Through the 1940s, charter captain Phil Schwind of Cape Cod was using large, white-and-yellow and white-and-green bushy streamers with great success. In the late 1940s, Paul

Kukonen of Worcester, Massachusetts, designed numerous saltwater patterns and was an early advocate of using short 4- to 6-inch wire tippets for bluefish. Farther down the Atlantic coast in New Jersey, veteran outdoors writer and *Saltwater Journal* host Mark Sosin remembers fly fishing in salt water during the 1940s. His father would chum using live grass shrimp on outgoing tides along jetties at Barnegat Inlet, and once fish were in the slick, cast and retrieve a freshwater Mickey Finn streamer for both weakfish and striped bass.<sup>17</sup>

Along the North Carolina coast in the 1930s, a few anglers were catching small bluefish on trout tackle, the flies being typical wets or even bass bugs. The June 1930 issue of the *National Sportsman* carried a story on this saltwater fly sport penned by Rupert West, according to fly-fishing historian Paul Schullery, who maintains that lacking the instantaneous networking of today's anglers, the North Carolinians "thought they were the first to do it, suggesting that it was still easily possible to be unaware of other saltwater fly fishermen."<sup>18</sup> The Tar Heel State anglers hadn't a clue as to what was going on in the Chesapeake Bay.

Chesapeake Bay angler Tom Loving is best known for creating tidal-water largemouth bass flies, such as the Gerbubble Bug and Marsh Hare, but he and his friends were pioneers in fishing for striped bass and American shad in the bay in the 1920s and 1930s. Loving introduced soon-to-be-famous angling author Joe Brooks to the area's largemouths and stripers by 1928.<sup>19</sup> Brooks, who calls Loving one of his mentors, describes bay fishing with Tom like this: "[Loving] tied a big bucktail for striped bass and he also tied a two-hooked shad fly which he used in brackish water for shad. We fished the grassy flats of Chesapeake Bay, casting to the banks and islands along sandy bars. . . . In those days we had the whole place to ourselves and fish were everywhere."<sup>20</sup>

According to Brooks, Loving's simple white bucktail with hackle on the shank is believed to be the first fly specifically tied for striped bass.

### The Bonefish Question

While anglers in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic were focused on striped bass, bluefish, and weakfish, down in Florida activity was building around one of the soon-to-be glamour species for fly fishers, especially those intent on sight fishing. Early catches of bonefish were accidental, the first recorded (1924) being that of retired legislative lobbyist/conservationist Holmes Allen of Miami. Using a white crippled minnow fly in Card



In the June 1930 issue of *National Sportsman*, Rupert E. West described fly fishing for channel bass and bluefish off the coast of North Carolina.

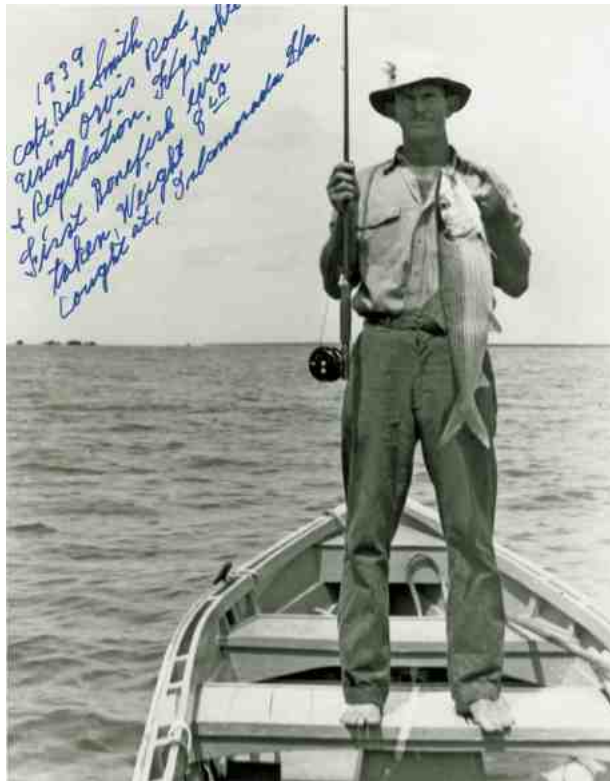


Sound, he was wading hip deep for snook. His rod was an inexpensive bamboo. The streamer, white with red hackle, was tied to a 5-foot leader of 2-pound-test gut.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, Allen's description of his fly indicates it was originally designed to float or at least remain in the surface film. Allen describes the fly as "nearly going under each time you moved it. Then this crazy fish [Allen and his fishing partner, Hayes Armstrong, routinely called them that] shot out of nowhere, grabbed the fly and took off."<sup>22</sup> Many years later, *Field & Stream* angling editor A. J. McClane would write of purposefully fishing bonefish with a dry fly despite the fish's inferior (downturned) mouth, obviously designed for feeding on the bottom.<sup>23</sup>

Colonel L. S. Thompson of Red Bank, New Jersey, was regularly fishing for bonefish off Long Key in 1926 with guide J. T. Harrod, who chummed the fish using shrimp pieces. He used both fly and bait, believing any bonefish caught on a fly at higher-tide stages was simply an accident (he concentrated on baby tarpon then) and that bonefishing consistency could only be had by fishing lower tides.<sup>24</sup>

Honors for the first specifically targeted, sight-fished fly-rod bonefish traditionally go to Keys guide Bill Smith. Smith and his wife, Bonnie, built a top-celebrity client list through the 1930s and 1940s (including baseball great Ted Williams), but the first bonefish to which Bill guided his client George Crawford (composer of the then-official Army Air Corp song) brought humiliation.<sup>25</sup>

Smith's "fly" was built using fine stainless-steel wire wrapped around the hook shank, a red-and-white hackle wound behind the eye, the ends of the wires jutting out behind. These twin wire tails were used to attach a piece of trimmed white pork rind. Crawford took two bonefish on the creation. Smith and Crawford were weighing them in at an Islamorada grocery store when George La Branche (author of *The Dry Fly and Fast Water*) happened in. La Branche was a tradition-bound trout/salmon angler who regularly wintered in south Florida and who was convinced that bonefish were far too skittish to be taken casting a proper fly. He asked to see Smith's fly pattern and instantly exploded. "You call this thing a fly?" he roared. "A fly is made from wool, silk, feathers, hair! You can't use pork rind on a fly!"<sup>26</sup> La Branche continued



Captain Bill Smith sent this photo to the museum in 1991. His handwritten caption reads: "1939 Capt. Bill Smith using Orvis Rod & Regulation Fly Tackle First Bonefish ever taken, Weight 8 lb Caught at Islamorada, Fla."

berating Smith, asking him why he hadn't tied on some of the pig's feet, too, and used the entrails for chum.

Withering under the dressing down, Smith knew there was only one way to recuperate his standing in La Branche's eyes. A couple of months later, using a proper fly he'd tied himself, Smith took a good bonefish that was witnessed by guide Bert Pinder and his client, a man named Norfleet. The year was 1939. As for George La Branche, it was after the war that Frankee Albright (Bonnie's sister) guided him, an elderly man by then, to his first bonefish on a fly.<sup>27</sup>

### The 12-Pound Curse

Although pioneering anglers had been catching (mainly small) tarpon on flies since the late 1800s, with A.W. Dimock and son Julian having double-teamed on what was surely the largest fly-caught tarpon by 1911,<sup>28</sup> as yet no standards had been established on what should be considered fair play in the saltwater branch of fly-fishing sport. On 1 March 1929, the Rod & Reel Club of Miami Beach was founded. Rules were written regulating all angling categories, including fly fishing. No leader heavier than 12-pound test was to be used. No protective wire or heavier shock/abrasion monofilament tippet were allowed.

The club was responsible for establishing, in 1935, the Miami Metropolitan Fishing Tournament (now the South Florida Fishing Tournament), which adhered to the same rules. For years, leading fly fishers would follow the club-established "book," which relegated the taking of very large or toothsome fish to extremely difficult or nearly impossible. Although many anglers ignored such self-limitations, leading traditionalists continued to stick with the regulations. Joe Brooks was one such adherent. A classic tale involves Brooks, who was fishing tarpon with Jimmie Albright in 1948.<sup>29</sup>

Brooks hooked an estimated 50-pound tarpon, and an hour into the fight, Albright suggested that the angler better bear down on the tarpon or they'd be there all day. Brooks replied that he thought he was using as much pressure as the 6-pound tippet could take. (One can imagine Albright rolling his eyes heavenward.) Of course, there was no heavier shock tippet. Albright relates that they had the fish on

for six hours, following it across Florida Bay until the skiff's motor ran out of gas. The 6-pound tippet was not up to the job of towing a boat. End of story.<sup>30</sup>

In 1955, the Rod & Reel Club's rules were amended to allow 12 inches of heavier shock/abrasion material between the class tippet and fly. The result was the establishment of two fly-rod categories: fly light (no heavy shock/abrasion tippet) and fly heavy (allowed shock/abrasion tippet). Many traditionalist fly anglers were unhappy, but a new era in saltwater fly fishing was opened.<sup>31</sup>

### Stirrings on the Left Coast

Saltwater fly fishing on the West Coast had yet to catch fire, but Joe Brooks's September 1948 catch of a 29-pound, 6-ounce striped bass in Coos Bay, Oregon, began to kindle interest. With that catch, Brooks established the 12-pound tippet record for the species, one that would stand nearly twenty years.<sup>32</sup> Brooks was "less interested in the record . . . than in the fact that he'd caught the fish on a balsa-wood popper made to order by Bill Upperman of Atlantic City, New Jersey."<sup>33</sup> At that time, Brooks would not have used a heavier shock/abrasion tippet even if the rules had already been amended, but by 1958, in his *Complete Book of Fly Fishing*, Joe was suggesting



100-pound nylon shock tippets for billfish and tarpon, and wire for heavily toothed species.<sup>34</sup>

Brooks was well acquainted with wet head lines and shooting heads favored by West Coast salmon and steelhead anglers, but it is international tournament caster Myron Gregory who is credited as first to regularly use lead-core shooting tapers in salt water. He assembled his systems incorporating monofilament shooting line, fishing them not only for San Francisco Bay striped bass but also for kelp bass along the rocks and jetties on the California and Oregon coasts, beginning in the late 1950s or very early 1960s.<sup>35</sup>

Sinking shooting tapers—initially assembled by anglers and eventually available in various configurations from manufacturers—influenced saltwater fly fishing wherever the sport is practiced. In the early days, though, they were the primary arrows in the angling quiver of West Coast anglers who took the lines inland for anadromous fish and south to Central America's saltwater venues.

### *Early Conservation Efforts*

Forward-thinking anglers like James Henshall, A. W. Dimock, Mary Orvis Marbury, and George Trowbridge were already releasing fish and speaking to resource conservation in the 1800s, but in 1930, a band of professionals struck a powerful note for marine fish conservation at what was ground zero for the sport. That year, the Islamorada Fishing Guides Association (later the Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association) was founded. Captains who would become famous in the development of the sport in the Florida Keys were already fishing there before the organization of the group, working odd jobs when they did not have

charters and seeing firsthand troubling indications of the exploitation of their fishery. The association is responsible for many conservation initiatives, including the eventual closing of Everglades National Park to commercial fishing.<sup>36</sup>

## THE EXPLOSIVE YEARS: 1950S–1980S

From the late 1950s through the 1980s, saltwater fly fishing experienced runaway development. Communication—first in print, then through electronic media—sparked new ideas. Rising-star anglers appeared: writers, educators, showmen, guides, and some who made their presence known in all categories. As they had embraced freshwater fly-fishing subjects, artists and photographers began producing beautiful and exciting works reflecting the unique world of near-shore and offshore saltwater angling with the fly rod. Exchange of knowledge led to development of new and ever-better tackle, and new ways of doing things, from tying knots to casting.

### *Rods*

Tackle continued to improve from the late 1950s onward. Fiberglass rods became the norm, but some anglers continued using their treasured bamboos. A number of the earlier fiberglass fly rods were overly parabolic for use on truly large fish. The use of stiffeners to be inserted during the fighting were tried but obviously impractical. Thankfully, designs were improved. The Great Equalizer rod made by J. Kennedy Fisher for Scientific Anglers was the first and best-for-its-time fish-fighting tool. The two-piece fiberglass rod had fiberglass

spigot ferrules and weighed in at 9 ounces. It beat fish but was an arm killer for any extended casting. The Great Equalizer was not part of Scientific Anglers original System glass rods introduced in 1969 but came several years later. Outdoors writer/TV host Mark Sosin, responsible for the rod's name, was also responsible for keeping the fighting grip above the fore grip, primarily to indicate that this was indeed a new breed of fly rod.<sup>37</sup>

In 1973, Fenwick introduced HMG—the first high-modulus graphite rods—in spinning and casting models; fly rods appeared shortly thereafter. Graphite was all the buzz when shown at the American Fishing Tackle Association's (now American Sportfishing Association) trade show that summer.<sup>38</sup>

Despite justifiable enthusiasm, it soon became evident that all was not happy in graphite land. The high-modulus carbon fiber material being used in early rod manufacture often broke under heavy fish pressure. It was even more susceptible to breakage from the angler error of “high sticking” (raising the rod to near vertical position), which put excessive strain on the tip section. A happy exception was found in the lower-modulus material from which Orvis produced its early graphite rods, making them more durable and forgiving. Better resin systems were developed and continue to be improved to this day. New generations of carbon fiber material were introduced. Together, those two factors allow using less fiber without strength reduction. The result is extremely light, yet powerful rods—ideal for saltwater applications. For some fishing, graphite (and occasionally boron) is blended with fiberglass to produce composite rods where extra strength is needed, notably in the butt sections.



*The Fenwick HMG fly rod was introduced in 1974. The company's launch of graphite rods in 1973 ushered in a new era of rod construction. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

## Reels

Reels with truly effective drags and excellent corrosion resistance and line capacities came in the 1950s: Gar Wood Jr.'s Wedding Cake reel, picked up by the Tycoon Fin-Nor Company, and Bob McChristian's Seamaster of 1953 were the leaders. These reels were expensive and usually difficult to obtain because of limited production.<sup>39</sup> More moderately priced reels came in the 1970s. The Pflueger Supreme 577 and 578 and the Shakespeare equivalents were models with good drags and spools that enabled them to stand up to large fish. The Supreme had a flip-lever switch for stripping out line, bypassing the drag, after which you again flipped the lever to fully engage the drag.<sup>40</sup>

In 1976, after Fin-Nor stopped producing the Wedding Cake design,<sup>41</sup> popular Florida guide John Emery introduced an exposed-rim, ventilated-spool, barstock reel for tarpon. It was big, heavy, and strong, with a massive drag. It was silent both going out and cranking in. Emery was encouraged to build a slightly smaller model, which he began designing with some improvements, such as the foot

attachment and fewer loose parts after the spool was removed. Emery died before the new model was finished. His son, John Jr., completed the new reel in the early 1980s, following Emery's specifications. There were plans for a bonefish-size model that never saw fruition.<sup>42</sup>

Also in 1976, Keys guide George Hommell and Billy Pate brainstormed with master machinist Ted Juracsik (the man who eventually designed the Tibor reel series) about building a reel based on Pate's concepts. Juracsik created the antireverse Billy Pate Reel in tarpon and then bonefish size. For a time, the World Wide Sportsman shop in Islamorada was the only source for them.<sup>43</sup>

Between 1977 and 1991, Frank Catino, who currently guides from Florida's Space Coast to the Keys, offered two models of excellent saltwater reels in tarpon and bonefish size. They had to be ordered in either right- or left-hand retrieve styles. The reels were made in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.<sup>44</sup>

With the Pflueger and Shakespeare reels discontinued in 1982<sup>45</sup> and anglers still tinkering with the Medalist, the market seemed ready for a simple, solid, reliable saltwater fly reel at a more reasonable

price than the top-end brands were commanding. While he was a consultant for Scientific Anglers, veteran outdoors writer Bob Stearns suggested to then-Scientific Anglers Division Manager Howard West that there was need for such a reel, one that would sell for \$100. One day West suggested they sit down and design one when the two were finished tarpon fishing. At his kitchen table, Stearns provided specifications for a simple, direct-drive reel with plenty of backing capacity, a counterbalanced spool, and a reliable drag system. Several sizes were worked up, small 4–5-weight-line models all the way to 12–13-weight-line models. To keep the price down, molded aluminum—no machining or anodizing—would be the only option. The finish would be flat black.<sup>46</sup>

The early 1980s saw the first production models, but over Stearns's objection, the company used Teflon for the drag material. If it became wet, it would hydroplane, and the drag would slip. Eventually, the material was changed. The System 2 reels were rugged and well built, and they worked. By preference, Stearns continues to use them for everything from bonefish to tarpon, billfish, and tuna. The System 2 reels continue to be produced, but prices have climbed since the 1980s. Today they run from approximately \$150 to \$200, depending on size—still a bargain.<sup>47</sup>



Sara Wilcox

*Fin-Nor's Wedding Cake reel was one of the earliest designs with truly effective drag and excellent corrosion resistance. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

## Lines

Fly lines advanced with the discovery that polyvinyl chloride (PVC) would adhere as a thin coating over tapered braided nylon line core. In 1953, the Cortland Line Company introduced the first line using this technology, marketed as the 333 and billed as the "unsinkable fly line." Still, manufacturing the tapered braided core of these lines was a slow, tedious process. To make a standard 30-yard double-tapered line, the braiding operator was required to make 96 thread changes. An operator could produce only eight such tapered cores during an eight-hour shift.<sup>48</sup> That soon would change.

With a background in chemistry from association with the Dow Chemical Company, Leon P. Martuch devised a method for tapering the PVC coat over a more easily constructed, level-braided nylon core. Martuch, throughout the 1950s, had been experimenting with cores and coatings in his kitchen. Coating durability was tested initially by dragging sections of line behind cars while driving to and from fishing waters. Martuch was granted a patent for his process in 1960. Tapered coatings, extruded through a diaphragmlike opening to specific diameters, were not only



Sara Wilcox

*Dan Blanton's Whistler fly, dubbed for the sound generated by the pinhole eyes as it sailed through the air, is typical of the more densely tied West Coast saltwater patterns. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

far more cost-efficient, they provided more flexibility in producing a broad range of specialized tapers for different fishing situations. Other manufacturers soon developed their own methods for producing tapered coatings, and through the 1960s and 1970s, line manufacturers duelled fiercely for market share.<sup>49</sup>

West Coast-favored shooting tapers, especially with the head section of lead core, led to another concept that was less complex and therefore found greater acceptance by more anglers. In the 1970s, angler Jim Teeny convinced a major line manufacturer to create a fly line that incorporated both the head and a fine-diameter shooting line as one unit. The concept became what we know today as the integrated line. These lines became widely popular on both coasts, but interchangeable looped shooting heads, both homemade and commercially manufactured, continued to be used.<sup>50</sup>

### *West Coast: Anglers and Inroads*

Sinking shooting tapers increased in use along the California coast. Angling author Nick Curcione describes outings with the earlier-mentioned Myron Gregory, who pioneered fishing from a 14-foot cartop skiff, casting the surf and swells around rocks at Point Lobos, California (now a preserve). "We took our lives in our hands," Curcione says, "It was like *Victory at Sea*."<sup>51</sup>

Dan Blanton, who also enjoyed *Victory at Sea*-style forays with Myron

Gregory and who grabbed the West Coast limelight as an innovator and communicator at the start of the 1960s, has arguably done more to popularize Pacific-side saltwater fly fishing than anyone. The Morgan Hill, California, outdoor writer-photographer and website host also pioneered Central American fly fishing, hosting trips on which fly-fishing luminaries from both coasts participated. Del Brown was one of those. Designer of what is surely the most popular permit fly, Brown only became enthralled with Keys fishing for the species after his wife asked him to find another venue less dicey than some of the Central American destinations he'd been visiting. Brown went on to take more than 500 permit before he was done. Blanton originated several fly series for West Coast needs, more densely and fully tied patterns than typically used in the East. His Whistler series is classic.<sup>52</sup>

Other West Coast anglers contributed greatly to the sport: author/painter Russ Chatham was first to break Joe Brooks's striped bass record in 1966 with a 36-pound, 6-ounce fish.<sup>53</sup> (Chatham was honored for his artistic vision and writings by the American Museum of Fly Fishing on 30 September 2010.) Chatham cut a wide swath across California salt waters and rivers for anadromous fish. Lawrence Summers and Bob Edgley pioneered fly fishing for large blue sharks (with the always possible bonus mako) in Monterey Bay. Their effective chum-

ming regimen for sharks quickly found its way to the East Coast.<sup>54</sup>

Then there was the incomparable Harry Kime, whom natives of Baja's Loreto called "Unga" after a Mexican Tarzan-like cartoon character. The Orange, California, angler became a legend from the 1960s on for his over-the-top fishing antics that put to rest any thoughts of limitations to the sport of saltwater fly fishing. For example, he successfully fished out of Escondido Bay south of Loreto, Mexico, in a float tube (belly boat) until cautioned about the area's plentiful sharks. He'd regularly fish alone for virtually any large saltwater fish from small aluminum boats in the open ocean. He once hooked and boated twelve tarpon on twelve casts. He fought his fish relentlessly, commonly on straight, extremely heavy, non-International Game Fish Association (IGFA) leaders. He caught billfish alone. Once, off Loreto, again alone in a 15-foot boat, he cast to and hooked a 13-foot, estimated 200-pound striped marlin that gave him twenty-seven (by Kime's count) leaps along with body-length wallows. He beat the fish in an hour and a half, but had it alongside the boat with no way to bring it in. He was bare-handed; billing the fish would have resulted in serious hand injury. Gaffing, alone like that, was also a bad idea, but Kime began to try it. He failed on several attempts until a piece of sargassum wrapped his leader (for once not a heavy connection because he had been fishing for dorado). The leader parted. He was sixty-five years old at the time.<sup>55</sup>

### *Angling Leaders: East Coast*

**The Teacher.** In ancient Greece, an oracle was consulted for wise counsel on all important matters: opinion, prediction, precognition. Fly fishers of every age have essentially cast Lefty Kreh into such a role, whether he likes it or not. From modest beginnings, and having survived fighting in World War II's Battle of the Bulge, Kreh's career spans that of newspaper columnist, magazine and book author, exhibition caster and shooter, lecturer, inventor, and raconteur of a seemingly endless supply of jokes. It is likely that he would prefer, above all else, to be thought of as a teacher. (Kreh was honored by the American Museum of Fly Fishing on 6 March 2013 for his iconic and innovative contributions to the world of saltwater fly fishing and the angling industry as a whole.)

Joe Brooks introduced Kreh to fly fishing, igniting a career that spans six decades, during which his unique techniques and tackle innovations quickly

advanced the sport. Ever the tinkerer searching for better ways, Kreh took issue with centuries-old casting style. In the 1950s, he began teaching a radical new approach to fly casting—one that markedly increased distance, helped counteract wind effects, and made the process far easier—all to the good of saltwater sport. Perhaps the most personal look at Kreh's career is found in his autobiography, *My Life Was This Big*.<sup>56</sup>

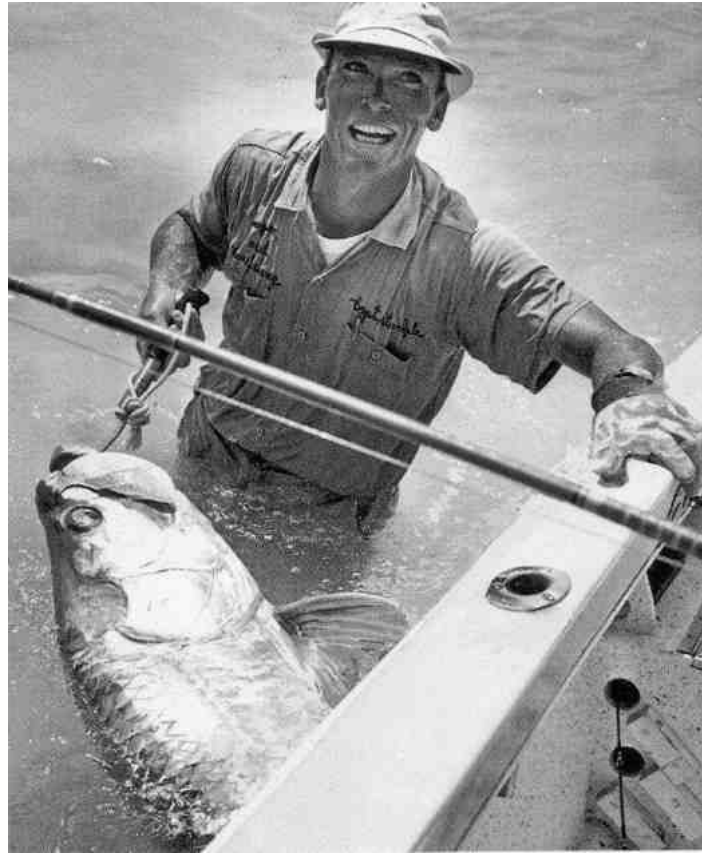
**The Bionic Poler.** In 1957, a Navy-trained jet fighter pilot and just-furloughed PanAm third officer decided to do what he loved best: go fishing—but professionally. Stu Apte, age twenty-six, moved into a one-room shack in Little Torch Key Trailer Park to launch his business. By 1962, Apte's reputation as angler and guide was soaring. He was on the water 330 days a year and fishing for himself on the days he had off.

Apte brought a fighter pilot's acumen, aggressiveness, no-quit mind-set to his fishing. Add to that the visual acuity that combat pilots like Apte (and his eventual pal Ted Williams) possess, and you have a wicked predator. Apte's growing guide reputation from the lower Keys—regularly winning the Miami Metropolitan Fishing Tournament tarpon fly division in the 1950s and 1960s with client Ray Donnersberger, and doing it on a radical new fly design—began to stick in the craws of veteran guides. "I just worked harder; I had something to prove," Apte will tell you. "I was willing to pole harder. I became known as the bionic poler."<sup>57</sup>

Apte's fish-fighting style was radical, too. Rather than typically bending the rod by raising it upward, he pointed the tip to the fish's side, sometimes even thrusting the rod a couple feet beneath the surface, pulling the opposite way from the direction the fish was headed. At close range, pulling toward the tail, attempting to move the fish backward or to roll it, increased fighting effectiveness. The method eventually became known as "down and dirty" and is used by top anglers worldwide.<sup>58</sup>

Apte's tarpon fly also became a standard. The design with hackles tied in at the hook bend to flare outward greatly reduced fouling of the feathers. It debuted in 1958. Also, Apte began using ever-smaller flies, especially in clearer waters—a trend that has continued to this day. At the time of his 2005 induction into the IGFA Hall of Fame, Apte had set forty-four light-tackle and fly-fishing world records,<sup>59</sup> but was also responsible for guiding at least one other well-known angler to his own record-setting marker.

During the week in May 1961 when the world fly-rod tarpon record was bro-



*Stu Apte was flipped three times into the water before he succeeded in gaffing Joe Brooks's 1961 world-record tarpon. A decade later, Apte took the record himself. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

ken three times and finally set by Joe Brooks with a 148-pound fish that held the mark for ten years, Stu Apte was the guide. The fish flipped Apte into the water three times as he tried to gaff it. Apte himself broke Brooks's record in 1971 with a 154-pound fish.<sup>60</sup>

**Blue-Water Trailblazers.** In the mid-1960s, the thought of taking a billfish on a fly rod seemed impossible—but not to Dr. Webster Robinson and his wife Helen, who were experimenting with flat-bottomed poppers with top guide Lefty Reagan. Reagan had developed the bait-and-switch teasing game for other species. Initial attempts on Atlantic sailfish failed. The Robinsons traveled to Piñas Bay, Panama, and on 18 January 1962, with Helen on the teaser rod, Web Robinson cast to, fought, and boated a 74½-pound Pacific sailfish, the first billfish to be caught on a fly. Robinson went on to manage a 145-pound striped marlin in 1965. Top light-tackle/fly angler Lee Cuddy took care of the first Atlantic fly-rod sailfish, catching it in 1964.<sup>61</sup>

Proving that both angling and boat-handling skills can compensate for underwhelming tackle, in May 1967, Lee Wulff, guided by the Keys' Woody Sexton,

managed a 148-pound striped marlin off Salinas, Ecuador. He used an inexpensive fiberglass Garcia rod and a reel with essentially just a clicker for drag. It was one of the longest-standing records in the annals of saltwater fly fishing,<sup>62</sup> finally being broken by Tom Evans in 2004 with a 153-pound, 12-ounce fish.<sup>63</sup>

Although tarpon were Billy Pate's all-time passion, at one point the internationally acclaimed angler launched a run to be first to take Atlantic and Pacific sailfish and all marlin species on a fly. He almost made it. A Pacific blue marlin, the last in his quest, was hooked off Quepos, Costa Rica. Pate fought it at least seven hours late into the day, when the captain demanded it be broken off or they'd never reach port in the coming darkness. The story goes that Pate offered to buy the boat in cash if they continued letting him fight, but in the end, the skipper refused.<sup>64</sup> That marlin was estimated at 400 pounds. Pate was first, however, to win all the major south Florida tarpon tournaments (only Andy Mill has duplicated that as of this writing).

**New England's Pacesetters.** Although a handful of well-known anglers were sometimes fly fishing (along with using

spinning and bait/plug-casting tackle) for striped bass, bluefish, and other inshore species, especially along the shores of Cape Cod, two anglers stand out as pioneers in fly-rod sport in the Northeast.

During the 1960s through the 1980s, Connecticut angler Lou Tabory, largely fishing from shore for striped bass, inspired countless enthused fly anglers while proving that expensive boats, guides, and exotic trips weren't needed to experience the finest kind of fly fishing in salt water. His regular two-hand line retrieve and use of a stripping basket for virtually all his fishing (many times for tarpon on occasional trips south) became almost de rigueur for saltwater fly anglers on all coasts. Tabory's 1992 book, *Inshore Fly Fishing* (Lyons Press), became the early go-to for striped-bass anglers.<sup>65</sup>

Also in Connecticut, Captain Jeff Northrop, founder of Northeast Saltwater Flyfishing, began stalking the flats of the state's eighteen Norwalk Islands as early as 1968. Based at the mouth of the Saugatuck River in Westport, Connecticut, Northrop opened the first flats-boat dealership north of Florida in 1987. His use of those shallow-water skiffs opened a previously ignored regional fishery. Northrop fishes migrating striped bass around the mouths of seven rivers flowing toward the Norwalk Islands beginning in early spring, follows up later with large bluefish, and ends his year with little tunny and sometimes bonito.<sup>66</sup>

### *Salty Fly Rodders*

Saltwater fly fishing's profile was greatly raised with the founding of the Saltwater Fly Rodders of America, launched in 1964. The brainchild of Fred Schrier (an ad sales rep for *Salt Water Sportsman* magazine) and Cap Colvin (tackle shop owner in Seaside Park, New Jersey), the organization's mission was to teach anglers and expand the sport nationally, even internationally. A motley crew from New England to Maryland, including Frank Woolner (editor of *Salt Water Sportsman*), Lefty Kreh, Mark Sosin, Joe Brooks, and many more formed the first chapter, humorously called the Choon Gum Chapter, meaning duffer or rank beginner. At a board meeting in 1965, key proposals were raised to establish rules and ethical guidelines of the sport. Mark Sosin volunteered to write rules for saltwater fly-rod world records, which were presented in April 1966 at the club's first get-together. Gentleman that he is, Sosin acknowledged input from Joe Brooks, Kay Brodney, Charles Waterman, Stu Apte, Lefty Kreh, Lee Wulff, Jim Green, mechanical wizard Louis "Bub" Church, and other members.<sup>67</sup>

Growth was remarkable. The organization sent information kits to interested anglers. It also pioneered a series of educational clinics, spotlighting celebrity anglers like Lee Wulff, Lefty Kreh, Mark Sosin, Charley Waterman, Leon Martuch, Stu Apte, and others. The group's newsletter, the *Double Haul*, ran nearly fifteen years. In fewer than eight years, the organization boasted 3,400 members from around the world. At maximum size during the late 1960s, the organization had thirteen chapters from Florida to New England (including the District of Columbia) and California. There were individual members in twenty-seven states and in Australia, Bermuda, Canada, Libya, Mexico, and the Virgin Islands.<sup>68</sup>

In 1974, Fred Schrier fell seriously ill. No one could be found to devote the time and work needed to keep the organization functioning as it had, and sadly, it disbanded. In 1986, IGFA accepted saltwater fly-fishing world records from Mark Sosin and began administering them. But the impetus of the organization continued to expand the sport in an ever-widening gyre worldwide.<sup>69</sup>

Then, in 1987, former Chapter One president and board member of the old organization began opening his home on Tuesday nights to anglers seeking to exchange knowledge, tie flies, and swap stories. Eventually, attendees at the open house session grew too large for Bob Popovics's home to contain. In 1992, Popovics rounded up those enthusiastic anglers into a newfound organization: the Atlantic Saltwater Fly Rodders, based in Seaside Park, New Jersey. In many

respects, it followed the tenets of the old Saltwater Fly Rodders of America, especially in eschewing politics and conservation battles to focus totally on the exchange of knowledge and the education of anglers in every aspect of saltwater fly-fishing sport.<sup>70</sup>

Popovics, who has been fly fishing in salt water for more than forty years, played a key role not only in founding the new club, but sharing innovative fly-tying techniques and patterns that have taken saltwater flies to a dynamic new level. The originator of both new epoxy- and silicone-based flies, Popovics is known for groundbreaking baitfish-imitating patterns like the late-1970s Surf Candy, as well as Siliclone, Ultra Shrimp, Bob's Banger, Cotton Candy, Shady Lady Squid, Pop Lip, and 3-D. Later innovations were his Bucktail Deceiver and Hollow Flies. All collectively come under the umbrella Pop Fleyes, which spawned Bob's two tying videos and a book, *Pop Fleyes*, coauthored with Ed Jaworowski. Bob is a frequent seminar speaker at national sport shows and is on the advisory staff of many top manufacturers of fly-fishing equipment. Lefty Kreh calls him the most innovative fly tier he knows.<sup>71</sup>

### *The Once and Maybe Future Tarpon Kingdom*

If there is a Camelot in the world of tarpon fly fishing, it must be Homosassa on Florida's west coast. Although the area figures in the very early history of North American fly fishing from the 1800s on, the modern era of fishing in the area

Jerry Gibbs



*Bob Popovics's innovative fly-tying techniques and use of epoxy and silicone in numerous groundbreaking baitfish-imitating patterns has cast him as one of the finest saltwater tiers of our age.*



*Billy Pate about to release a bonefish on Behring Point, Andros Island, Bahamas, March 1986. Pate was staying at Charlie's Haven, Charlie Smith's (inspiration for the Crazy Charlie fly) first lodge.*

began in the early 1970s and is as fleeting as that idealistic dreamland of Arthurian legend. Plug casters Harold LeMaster and Kirk Smith of L&S Lure Company (makers of the famed MirOLure) were probing the waters north of the area's Pine Island, where they ran into huge schools of tarpon. The duo introduced Lefty Kreh to their secret area, and Lefty became the first to take tarpon on flies there in contemporary times. Another mutual friend of the L&S anglers, rod maker Gary Marconi, became privy to the fishery and began working it with another dedicated Florida saltwater fly fisher, Norm Duncan. Guides Steve Huff and Dale Perez learned about it from Duncan. Huff brought international fly angler Tom Evans to the place. Stu Apte learned about Homosassa from his client Ray Donnersberger but says it was Kreh who really excited him over the area's potential. So enamored was Apte over the incredible numbers of truly huge fish there that he refused to guide, opting to fish and trade off poling duties with friends. The word was out, and shortly the great fly anglers and guides descended.<sup>72</sup>

Billy Pate became a regular, as did Al Pflueger, Carl Navarre, Ted Williams, and Captains John Emery, Bill Curtis, Dale Perez, Steve Huff, Jim Brewer, Cecil Keith Jr., Eddie Wightman, Hank Brown, and Lee Baker. They were joined by local guides like Captains Earl Waters, Steve Kilpatrick, John Bazo, Jimmy Long, and Billy Hampton. During the area's heydays, Apte remembers boating two IGFA-record fish in one day. Other potential records never made it to the

books as they were broken daily. Numerous 200-pound fish were swimming in the schools of thousands of fish, and of course Big Mama was the grail all the anglers sought. Many are certain they hooked such a great fish, but something always went wrong. May was the high month of the season, with the fishing extending somewhat into June.

Like other tarpon-obsessed fly anglers, Pate spent every May for years seeking the elusive 200-pound fly-rod tarpon in Homosassa, setting 16-pound tippet records there twice, the latter mark standing for twenty years. He was proudest of the fish he hooked, fought, and lip gaffed alone. That tarpon taped 2 inches wider than his then-world record, but sadly, it was slightly short to break the 200-pound mark. Pate was sixty-eight at the time.<sup>73</sup>

But the great Homosassa fishing did not last.

The 1970s saw the finest fishing. Numbers of fish caught began declining markedly in the 1980s and were terribly down after the 1990s. This is not to say big fish were absent. The gathering of the stars of fly fishing's tarpon world, the camaraderie, and the celebratory parties Billy Pate regularly threw at the Riverside Inn had gone, but hopeful anglers still came, casting their flies to what fish were there and into that wonderful part of history.<sup>74</sup> And then on 11 May 2001, off Chassahowitza, one huge tarpon was inspired to engulf a fly that had been presented by a twenty-five-year-old law student: James Holland of Vancouver, Washington. Holland, while on vacation

with his father before heading to a summer internship, was fishing from the boat of local Cedar Key guide Captain Steve Kilpatrick. When the fight with that big fish was over, so was a quest of many years. The tarpon, the Big Mama that glided so long through the dreams of so many anglers, had been caught. She weighed in at 202 pounds, 8 ounces.<sup>75</sup>

Theories abound as to why the numbers of huge fish stopped coming to the area. High on the list is reduced flows from the copious springs feeding the Homosassa ecosystem, thus reducing salt and fresh water mixing and altering forage bases—especially blue crabs. Florida's limited aquifers have been under assault by exploding human population for years. Increased shrimping along the coast could have added to the forage decline. And simple increased boat traffic in the area has certainly not been good. Could the great tarpon schools return? Fly anglers everywhere dream and keep a watchful eye. Today, more than rumor, word from those who are fishing the area again say that more fish are coming.

## SWELLING TIDES

There are some who say that saltwater fly fishing reached its zenith in inventive equipment design and technique by the end of the so-called explosive decades spanning the 1950s through the 1980s. Those years inarguably produced a blitzkrieg of equipment advancement never before seen, as well as innovative approaches to all phases of fly fishing in marine environments, but saltwater fly fishing today continues to enjoy steady refinement and occasional startling changes in every facet of the sport.

Equipment is undergoing ceaseless improvement. New fishing grounds continue to be explored—both exotic and closer to home. A new cast of young anglers—many of them women—are pushing the sport to new levels of performance: ever-larger fish are being caught on the fly, and anglers are contriving new wrinkles to improve success in the game, especially on more demanding and difficult-conditions fish. Since the 1990s and now into the second decade of the new millennium, saltwater fly anglers and the numerous organizations and businesses relying on the sport and its enthusiasts are increasingly shouldering the responsibility of conserving the marine resources and communicating the knowledge, culture, and history that will keep saltwater fly fishing thriving. The American Museum of Fly Fishing ranks high among them.



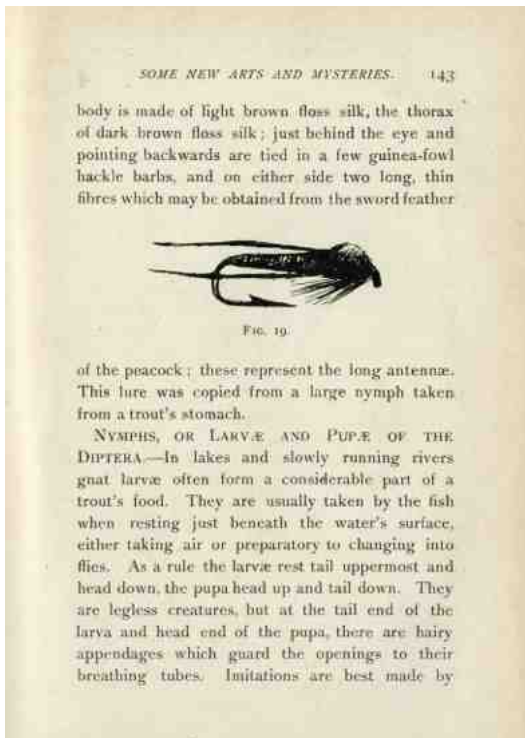
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# J. C. Mottram

by David Burnett



Caddis nymph.

J(ames) C(ecil) Mottram (1879–1945), known for his studies of cancer and radiology, also wrote four fishing books and articles for sporting journals. In 1994, the *Flyfisher's Classic Library* published a fine edition of one of those books, *Fly-Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries*, with an introduction by publisher David Burnett, which we share here. Writer Malcolm Greenhalgh tied examples of Mottram's flies for us, physician/angling historian/writer/photographer Andrew Herd photographed them, and we've paired his photographs with illustrations of the same flies from the second edition of Mottram's book.

IN HER MEMOIR *Back Casts and Backchat* (1936), Joan Clarkson describes a riverside meeting with J. C. Mottram. Already excited by her uncle's description of him as "quite the best fisherman"<sup>1</sup> he

has ever seen, the palpitating ingenue is waiting impatiently on the bank when:

My attention was arrested by the sight of a small, slight man in a disreputable tweed suit, with an ancient cap on his head and a rod in his hand coming very quietly up the stream, scrutinising the water as he came. . . . The small man was very quiet. He had something about him of the stillness, the unhurried calm of the woods and fields. Withal, he had a quiet, thoughtful eye with a twinkle lurking at the back of it. He might, one felt, be fun.<sup>2</sup>

Although I have had the pleasure of corresponding with J. C. Mottram's son, Jim Jr., this is the only personal glimpse that I have found in any book of the brilliant author of *Fly-Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries*. (My thanks to bookseller and scholar, Ron Coleby, for pointing the way.)

Jim Mottram Sr. seems to have been a retiring man. He never sought the limelight, and though his book is one of the most original contributions to fishing lit-

erature, he has remained in barely acknowledged obscurity ever since it was published. Arnold Gingrich gave Mottram a chapter in *The Fishing in Print*, but nobody seems to have paid much attention, and to make things worse, Gingrich got his name wrong. It was not John, but James.

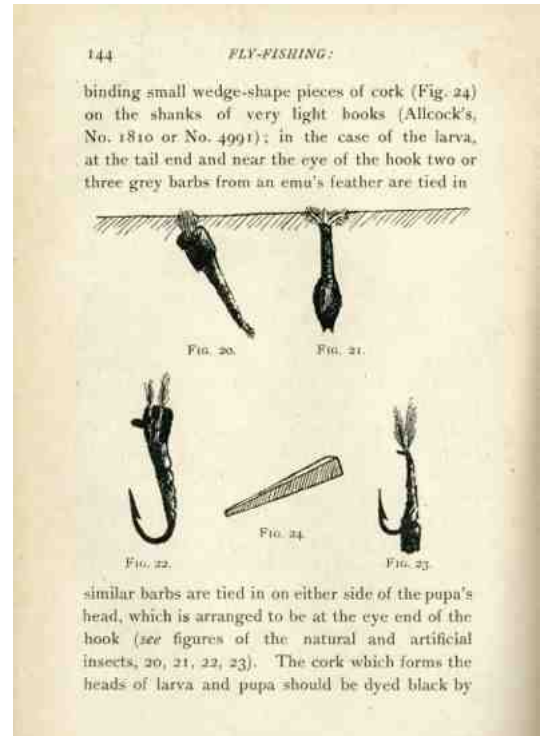
Mottram's modest approach may have been dictated by good sense as well as by his dislike of display. He had the bad luck to be born in 1879, at the absolute heyday of fly fishing in Britain. The mighty powers of George Selwyn Marryat were at their height. F. M. Halford's first book, *Floating Flies and How to Dress Them*, was published when young Mottram was six; *Dry Fly Fishing*, when he was nine. In 1910 G. E. M. Skues sounded the subversive trumpet which blew down the walls of poor Halford's Jericho with *Minor Tactics of the Chalkstream*. It was not perhaps a good time to rush into print with a theoretical fly-fishing book.

Mottram began by publishing articles in *The Field*, in the *Flyfisher's Journal*, and in the *Salmon & Trout Magazine*. He

<sup>1</sup>Flies tied by Malcolm Greenhalgh. Photographs by Andrew Herd.

<sup>2</sup>All page images from J. C. Mottram, *Fly-Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries*, 2nd ed. (London: The Field Press Ltd., 1921).





*Midge pupa.*

did not rush. He was cautious, as befitted a scientist. He was trained to examine, to experiment, and to verify. His field of study was radiology, and he worked on new cancer treatments being developed in the thrilling technological hothouse of the new century.

His first published writings appeared under the pseudonym "Jim Jam" in *The Field* in 1912. Like Skues, he does not seem to have relished writing a book from the outset, but as his pieces accumulated, he collected them for eventual publication in 1915. *Fly-Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries* seems to be the first book on trout fishing by a scientist. Years before, in the days of Jane Austen and Lord Byron, another scientist-angler had taken up the pen, but Sir Humphry Davy chose to write about salmon fishing, one of the most unscientific pastimes on earth, and furthermore, he adopted an archaic literary style based on Walton.

Of the important nineteenth-century trout-fishing books, none (so far as I know) was written by a scientist. Neither Stoddart, Stewart, Ronalds, Francis Francis, or Halford had scientific training. One of the most imaginative fly-fishing experiments of the time was conducted not by scientists, but by a Scottish laird with a sharp mind (and a great sense of humor), Sir Herbert Maxwell. He it was who demonstrated the apparent flaws in the "exact imitation" theory by catching trout using floating mayflies colored bright red and bright blue.

This was the kind of experiment that Mottram enjoyed, but he was no maverick joker (which Sir Herbert was, in part) but a serious, dedicated, and methodical investigator. He did not seek to show that the trout is a fool, but tried to comprehend its perceptions. Mottram's book is the first scientific inquiry into matters of interest to trout fishers. He discusses such

topics as the color sense of fish, the stress curves of rods, the behavior of New Zealand beetles, the way trout see, the flies of the future (a crucial chapter—turn to it immediately if you want a brilliant demonstration, years ahead of its time).

In one amazing experiment, he taught a captive roach to discriminate between the colors red and blue, proving that fish could indeed see colors, maybe not like us, but somehow.

He kept nymphs in jars and studied their lifestyle, which enabled him to produce in Chapter XXII of this book an authoritative résumé of nymph-fishing tactics which makes F. M. Halford look like an antique, although he was still alive and publishing at the time the chapter was written. (Halford kept nymphs too—but he didn't reach the right conclusions, considering them impossible to imitate.)

It takes quite an effort to accept that this book was mostly written in 1912 and

1913, and published in 1915. It is amazingly modern, and what it prefigures is not progress in the chalkstreams—but in still water. Mottram fished imitative patterns both wet and dry at Blagdon with great success from 1914 or so when the reservoir was first opened and most anglers were using salmon lures like Durham Rangers or large Scottish wet flies. His cork midge larvae and pupae imitations, his fry patterns, his smuts, his silhouette nymphs, all these pointed the way forward to the reservoir fishers of the future. But it was forty or fifty years before Mottram's lead was followed, and I have yet to meet a still-water trout fisher who has read this book. A very fine modern fisherman—entomologist, John Goddard, recently described a smut pattern he had invented, with a tiny ball of peacock herl at the head, a short black hackle, and no

body. To John's vast amusement, I pointed out to him (at a dinner of the Flyfishers' Club where I was a guest, so it was perhaps inappropriate) that this fly is illustrated in Chapter XIII of Mottram's book. So is Geoffrey Bucknall's famous Footballer, forty-odd years before it was "invented"!

Those anglers who think marabou is a modern material might be surprised by Mottram's Fry Fly. He writes:

In this, motion in particular is chosen for copying—the quivering of a little fish swimming against the current. If a very soft down feather be held in a stream or be drawn rapidly along in still water, it will be seen to quiver very like a small fish.<sup>3</sup>

And, as a last example of his futuristic mind, how about this, from the chapter on nymphs and bulgers:

At the present time I am endeavouring to imitate by means of a very soft feather the peculiar undulations of the abdomen of a swimming nymph . . .<sup>4</sup>

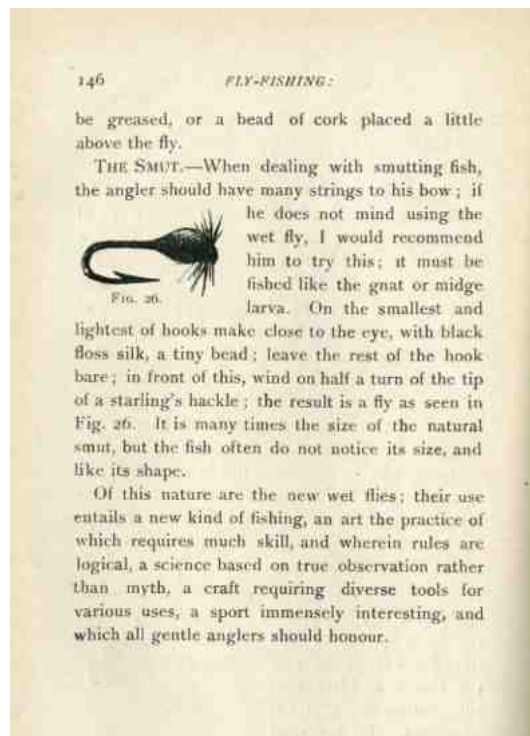
These examples will I hope be enough to persuade any fly fisherman that this neglected work is important, thought-provoking, and surely worth reprinting.



Following *Fly-Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries*, Jim Jam published three further books, none of them important. In 1923 *Sea Trout and Other Fishing Studies*, in 1928 *Trout Fisheries: Their Care and Preservation*, and finally in 1945 *Thoughts on Angling*, which has a most poignant farewell to angling, and to life, as its concluding chapter. Why he never recaptured the brilliance of his early



*Smut, long-hackle version.*



work is a mystery. Perhaps, he fell over his own fence—that challenging opening sentence to his introduction here: “It is useless to argue the question as to whether, or no, fly-fishing is worthy of serious thought.”<sup>5</sup> Maybe it ceased to be, for him. Perhaps, angling became in J. W. Dunne’s cruel phrase, a “mere recreation.”<sup>6</sup>

Mottram turns up, quietly and unimpressively, in the spiteful 1938 debate at the Flyfishers’ Club, when the ancient but formidable Mr. Skues faced his critics who claimed that nymph fishing was detrimental in chalkstreams. Jim had by then turned into a one-fly dry-fly man, abandoning his earlier eclectic approach. He spoke against nymph fishing in the debate, and found the withering scorn of Mr. Skues turned full upon him as a turncoat. The fierce old legal eagle was

eighty, but he still had sharp claws. The nymph debate (which can be found in Donald Overfield’s book *The Way of a Man with a Trout*) makes painful reading for admirers of Jim Mottram’s work. He limped away, and never wrote on controversial subjects again. His last collection, *Thoughts on Angling*, contains mostly travel stuff, Norwegian salmon, and coarse fishing episodes. He died in the year it was published.

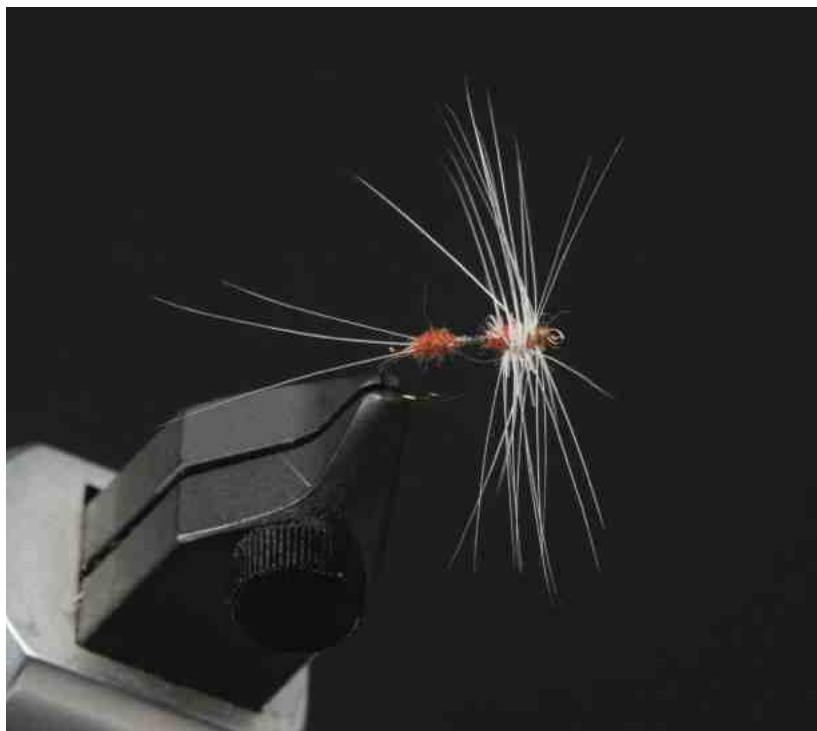
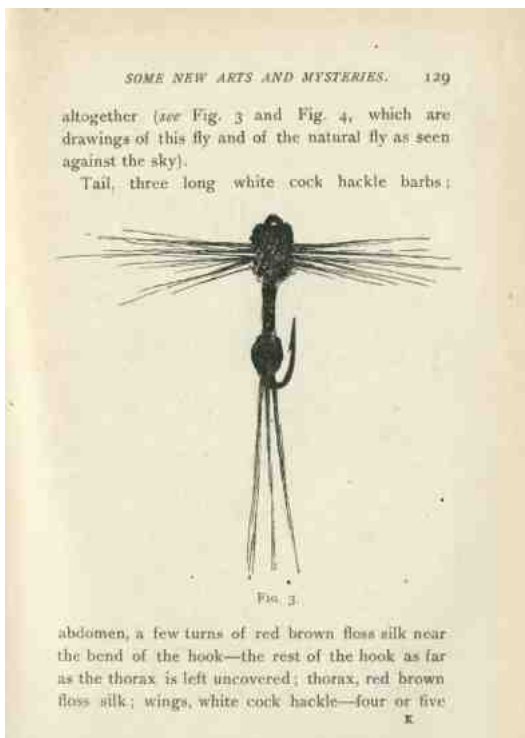
Yet, though the giant shadows of Halford and Skues hung over J. C. Mottram all his career, right to the end, his probing mind threw light into dark places which those two great figures failed to illumine, and he indicated paths to progress which have led much further than theirs. This book is his testimony. Long may it be read.



## ENDNOTES

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The fine edition of J. C. Mottram’s *Fly-Fishing: Some New Arts and Mysteries* is available from Coch-y-Bonddu Books/The Flyfisher’s Classic Library, Pentrethedyn Street, Machynlleth, Powys SY20 8DG, U.K. Phone: (+44) 1654 702837, fax: (+44) 1654 702857, www.anglebooks.com, £69 + shipping.



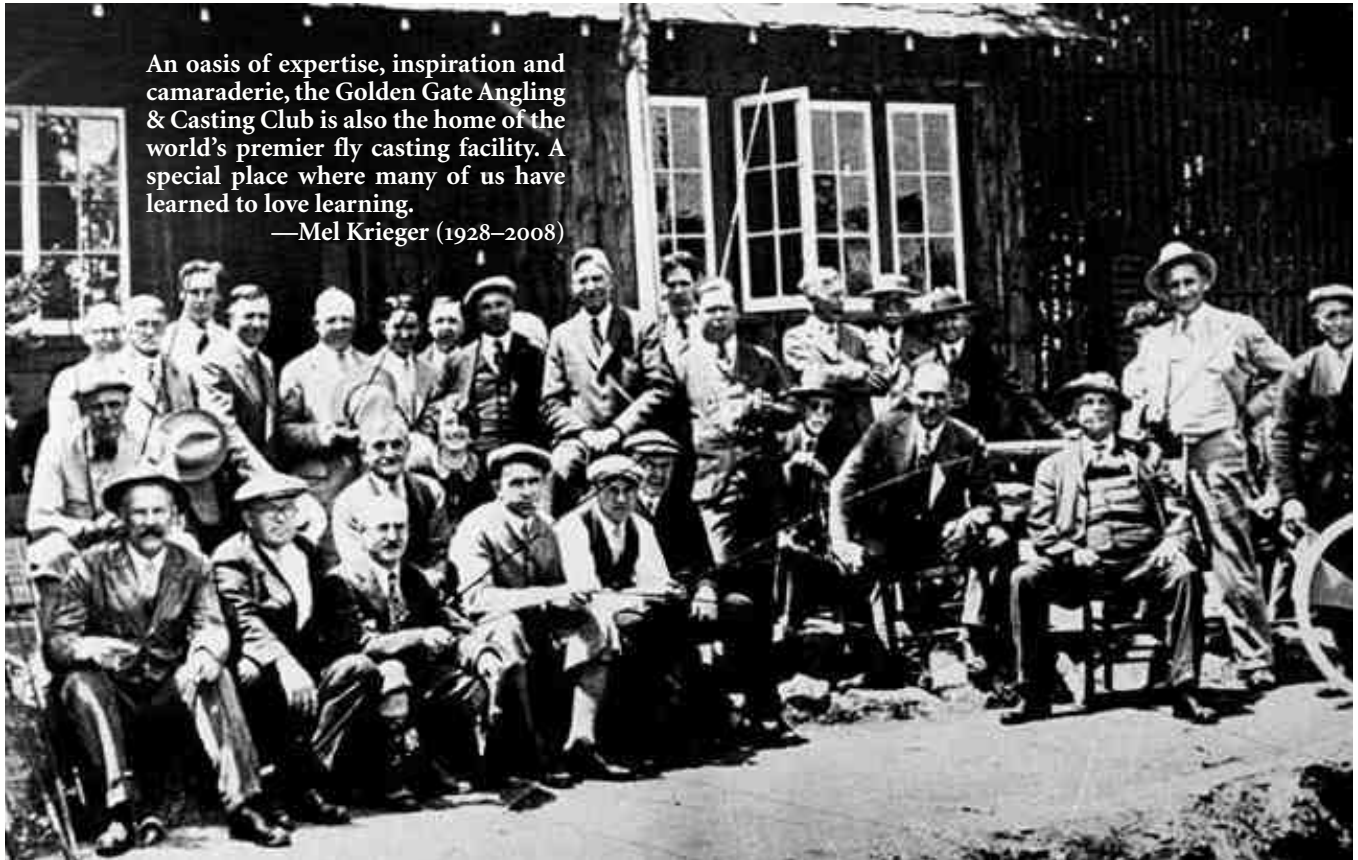
*Transparent Jenny spinner.*

# The Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club

by John Mundt

An oasis of expertise, inspiration and camaraderie, the Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club is also the home of the world's premier fly casting facility. A special place where many of us have learned to love learning.

—Mel Krieger (1928–2008)



GGACC members at the clubhouse, circa 1939. Photo courtesy of the Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club.

THE GOLDEN GATE Angling & Casting Club is a place I'd wanted to visit for some time. It's an historic institution bearing a name that is well known even to those of us who grew up entrenched in the eastern dry-fly traditions. This past October, I finally had the chance to stop by one weekday morning and was surprised to find a number of GGACC members tying flies and drinking coffee in their Anglers' Lodge, casting Spey rods in the three large casting pools, and casually kibitzing about whatever came to mind. One can immediately tell that this is a vibrant and active community that makes visitors feel wel-

come. People popped in and out all morning, and by noon, a businessman in jacket and tie was stringing up a rod for some practice during his lunch hour.

The membership criteria is straightforward. The club states that "any person evidencing an interest in casting as a sport or in sport fishing is eligible to become a member."<sup>1</sup> Initiation is a whopping \$10, and annual dues are \$40 per person or \$50 per family. Junior memberships are available for children younger than eighteen for \$6 (1.6 cents per day). Not bad for entrée into 120 years of fly-fishing history and innovation. The club offers instruction and also

publishes the *GGACC Bulletin* to keep their international membership of several hundred informed of club activities and weekend events, which numbered fourteen in 2012.

Attempting to capture the history of such a grand organization is beyond the scope of this column, but here are a few milestones to consider. The GGACC is the second-oldest casting club in the United States. It grew out of the San Francisco Fly Casting Club, which was founded in 1894 (they are preceded only by the Chicago Angling & Casting Club, founded two years before). Major tackle innovations—such as the hollow-built bamboo rods of

R. L. Winston Rod Co., numerous rod tapers, standardization of fly-line sizes, and use of shooting-head fly lines for fishing—were developed there. Legendary member Steve Rajeff won his fortieth Grand National Champion title in 2012.

The Anglers' Lodge is a gem. It was constructed along with the ponds as part of a federal Works Progress Administration initiative in 1938. The pinewood lockers were brought over from the original San Francisco Fly Casting Club on Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park. There's a communal table with vises and fly-tying materials strewn about, a small kitchen area, and a large conference room with a stone fireplace, shelves of books, and numerous framings of photographs and flies. From there, one can look out over the casting ponds only steps away. It is an inviting and comfortable place.

Author Thomas McGuane made a pilgrimage to the club in 1966 and recounted the experience in *The Longest Silence: A Life in Fishing*. McGuane exclaimed that the GGACC “had bred a school of casters who are without any doubt the finest there has ever been.”<sup>2</sup> He referred to the setting as “distinctly otherworldly.”<sup>3</sup> Nearly half a century later, that's still the case, and just being there inspired me to work on improving my casting this spring.

It is interesting to consider that tournament casting had been extremely popular on the East Coast, especially in New York City, from the Civil War era until the 1920s, when it faded into the Central Park sunset. For whatever reason, such competition continues to thrive in California, with other active clubs in Oakland, Long Beach, and San Jose. Fly casting remains one of the oldest contested sports in America.

The members of the Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club are true keepers of the flame, and the heritage of our sport is preserved and enriched by them. For more information about the club, visit [www.ggacc.org](http://www.ggacc.org), or just drop in whenever your travels bring you to the Bay Area.



#### ENDNOTES

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

Kiley Melicker



*The GGACC casting ponds and clubhouse today.*



*The interior of the clubhouse. Photo courtesy of the Golden Gate Angling & Casting Club.*

# What's Happened to the Whitefish?

by Richard Lessner



*Mighty whitey: long the object of angler disdain, the mountain whitefish is native to the Madison River and plays an integral role in the ecology of a healthy river.*



All photos by Richard Lessner

*The Madison whitefish stream team: the three-year study is a partnership of the Madison River Foundation; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; and Montana State University, all represented on this hard-working crew.*

WHITEFISH HAVE always had a problem with respect: like Rodney Dangerfield, they don't get any. Mountain whitefish were once abundant in the rivers of the northern Rockies. In fact, there were so many whitefish that anglers openly disparaged them for getting in the way of the more highly prized trout they were trying to catch. The ubiquitous whitefish were often victims of the infamous "Montana handshake"—squeeze 'em and toss 'em up on the banks!

When they weren't cursing them, trout anglers never bothered paying much attention to the lowly whitefish. Nor did fisheries biologists and managers give them much consideration. Whiteys were so numerous that they received scant attention. Much less was any limited research money wasted studying them.

Now anglers are scratching their heads and asking, "Where have all the whitefish gone?" Longtime fly fishers on Montana's Madison River have noticed for several seasons now that they're not catching nearly as many mountain whitefish as they have in years past. Some have gone several years without catching a single one.

It seems clear from anecdotal angler evidence and some preliminary electroshocking by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) that the mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*) population in the Madison has crashed. The whitefish have gone from abundance to scarcity in just a few years. They appear to be in some trouble all over Montana and indeed the Rocky Mountains. What's going on?

Whirling disease is one suspected culprit. (*Myxobolus cerebralis* is a parasite that attacks juvenile fish and inflicts skeletal and neurological damage, causing the fish to swim erratically—that is, "whirl" in an awkward corkscrew-like pattern. Of European origin, whirling disease is especially lethal to rainbow and cutthroat trout and whitefish. Brown trout, which evolved with the disease in Europe, are less susceptible.) But whirling disease has been present in the Madison since first identified in the early 1990s, and the whitefish crash seems to be a more recent development (after an initial plummet, the rainbow population in the Madison has made a remarkable and unexpected recovery). In the absence of

hard data and research, however, no one really knows for sure what is happening.

In 2009, a "whitefish summit" that included fisheries biologists from Montana, Colorado, and other western states met to share information and discuss the apparent decline in the species across the region. Montana FWP biologist Dick Vincent (since retired) reported that gill-netting data for Hebgen Lake on the Madison from 1975 to 2008 showed whitefish numbers in decline since 2000, with low numbers of juvenile fish resulting from inadequate spawning the most likely suspect.<sup>1</sup> (Vincent was the biologist whose groundbreaking research on the Madison in the 1960s and early 1970s led Montana to cease stocking hatchery trout in the state's rivers and streams and to manage solely for wild trout reproduction.)

While Montana FWP has more than forty years of electroshocking data on trout in the Madison, whitefish numbers and sizes were not recorded because the species was never the subject of research interest. Indeed, whitefish once were so abundant that the bag limit in Montana was 100 fish per day! Provisional test shocking on the Pine Butte section of the



*A Montana FWP electroshocking crew captured whitefish for the study. Because whitefish are more sensitive to electroshocking than trout, the fish were captured in early May while water temperatures were colder.*



*Montana FWP Region 3 fisheries biologist Travis Horton nets a whitefish from a holding cage.*



*Measuring a healthy adult whitefish, a prime candidate for a radio tag.*

Madison in 2008 and 2010, however, turned up very low numbers of juvenile whitefish, but relatively healthy numbers of larger, older fish. But because whitefish are long-lived (fifteen to twenty years), these larger fish represent oldsters that were spawned a long time ago. It appears the older whitefish are not being replaced and that, for reasons unknown, recruitment of young fish is slumping.

Until recently, few people cared much about whitefish. Let's face it, the lowly whitefish is not as highly valued as a game fish as trout (although catching a few whitefish has salvaged many a slow day on the river). And they *are* kind of goofy looking. There wasn't much of a constituency clamoring for whitefish research, so little was done. Even though Montana FWP has more than four decades of population data on trout in the Madison—probably the best such documented river in North America—data were not collected on whitefish during the annual trout census. Whitefish are more sensitive to shocking than trout and require different handling methods at dif-

ferent times of the year. Hence, there was little research conducted on whitefish when the annual trout census was taken.

Yet as Dick Vincent pointed out to me during an interview, whitefish are an important part of the river ecology. If their numbers have declined, then the implications for a healthy river environment must be considered. Contrary to what many anglers believe, whitefish do not compete with trout. The species occupy different niches in the river. FWP fisheries biologist Travis Horton recently told me, "If whitefish didn't belong in the river, then nature would not have put them there in the first place." Fewer whitefish do not equate to more trout. In fact, quite the opposite may be true: fewer whitefish may mean fewer and smaller trout.

Mountain whitefish, a salmonid cousin of the trout, are native to the Rockies and the Madison. They were here long before the first rainbow and browns were introduced. Whitefish are an important food source for osprey, bald eagles, heron, and otters. If their numbers are down and

these predators are not eating whitefish, then they're probably dining on trout.

Trout, too, depend on whitefish. Juvenile whitefish are an important part of the trout diet. If whitefish are not as abundantly available to trout as a food source as they have been historically, then this may account for the slower growth rates some biologists see in Madison rainbows. The whitefish's survival strategy is to reproduce in very large numbers—much larger than trout. The average female whitefish lays several times as many eggs as a similar-sized trout, and their eggs are smaller. Whitefish females produce on average 7,000 eggs per pound of fish.<sup>2</sup> Whitefish do not build redds as do trout and salmon, but broadcast their eggs over suitable gravels. Trout feed on these eggs as well as whitefish fry and fingerlings. Take this source of protein out of the river's food chain, and the larger ecological impacts could be significant.

This is why the Madison River Foundation, a nonprofit conservation organization based in Ennis, Montana, took a leadership role in a new partnership to

launch a multiyear study of whitefish in the Madison. At present, we do not have good baseline data on *Prosopium williamsoni*. What is needed is basic research into the life history of the species, population data, habitat and spawning requirements, stream flow and temperature impacts, water quality, and disease issues. The foundation is working with Montana FWP, the Cooperative Fishery Research Unit at Montana State University (MSU–Bozeman), and Trout Unlimited to undertake just such a study, the first of its kind on the Madison River.

With funding from the Madison River Foundation's Dick McGuire Memorial Fund, the C. Walker Cross Charitable Foundation, PPL Montana, and Madison-Gallatin Trout Unlimited, the study was launched in the spring of 2012. Re-

searchers from MSU's Cooperative Fishery Research Unit surgically implanted seventy adult whitefish with radio transmitters, which will track the fish over a period of two years to acquire basic information about the species' spawning habits and habitats, migration patterns, and juvenile behavior to better understand their life history. Only then can we begin to identify possible causes for their decline.

John Muir once noted of nature that "when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else."<sup>3</sup> So it is with whitefish. Their apparent decline could have unknown and unpleasant ripple effects throughout the Madison River system and beyond.

Is the lowly whitefish the canary in the coal mine? Does the apparent decline of

this species augur something disturbing? Or is this a natural phenomenon? We don't know. But perhaps the research project under way will help us learn more about this underappreciated cousin of the trout.

*Richard Lessner is the executive director of the Madison River Foundation.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. R. E. Vincent, "Whitefish Population Declines in Montana," *Conserving Cold Water Fisheries*, Proceedings of the 2009 Whirling Disease and Invasive Species Symposium, 4–5 February 2009.
2. Craig Springer, "Mountain Whitefish," *Northwest Fly Fishing* (March/April 2012), 59.
3. John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 110.



*Dr. Christopher Guy of the Cooperative Fishery Research Unit at MSU weighs and measures a whitefish before implanting a radio transmitter.*



*MSU graduate student Jan Boyer examines an adult whitefish to determine its sex. More females than males were implanted with radio transmitters to track their spawning movements.*



*Volunteers from the Madison River Foundation assisted in capturing fish and implanting radio transmitters. Here MRF volunteer Jim Van Osdell keeps water flowing over the fish's gills while Jan Boyer prepares to implant the radio transmitter.*



*Adult whitefish were surgically implanted with these radio transmitters to track their movements over a period of two years, beginning in the spring of 2012.*



# American Rivers: Celebrating Forty Years of River Conservation

*by Devin Dotson*



National Park Service

*Elwha Dam (Washington) during deconstruction, 2011.*

**N**ORTH CAROLINA'S New River is one of the oldest rivers in the world and one of our country's natural treasures. Boasting beautiful scenery, canoeing, and fishing, this unique river was threatened by a huge reservoir project in 1975. A dam would have destroyed the area's natural heritage and local farmland, and devastated fish and wildlife. It did not make economic sense and would have been an environmental disaster.

It is exactly the kind of project American Rivers was founded to fight.

## DEDICATED TO SAVING RIVERS

Just two years earlier, a group of passionate river conservationists had founded American Rivers (then known as the American Rivers Conservation Council). They met in Denver in 1973 to confront the fact that unnecessary dams were silencing many of the nation's last wild, free-flowing rivers. These river advocates were also concerned that Congress had failed to grant federal protection to any rivers since the original Wild and Scenic Rivers Act passed in 1968.

The country was losing its best rivers at an alarming rate.

"We were energized, on fire, ready to act. We just needed money," recalls Mike Fremont, founder of Rivers Unlimited in Ohio and a participant in the Denver meeting.

Somebody threw \$20 on the table. More people chipped in. American Rivers, the national conservation organization, was born.

"We had to move fast or we would lose our best rivers," remembers Brent Blackwelder, one of the cofounders of American Rivers. "[The early 1970s] was the golden age of dam building, and we needed to fight back."

Bill Painter, the organization's first president, said, "Those dams were like vampires. We would stop them, they would go into hibernation for a while, but then they would pop up again."

## EARLY SUCCESSES

Working in a tiny Washington, D.C., office, Painter and Blackwelder fought unnecessary dams and lobbied to get

rivers permanently protected. They not only killed the dam on the New River, they also succeeded in securing Wild and Scenic designation for the river. This precedent-setting success proved river conservationists could stop harmful water projects and score big wins on a national level.

In its first five years, American Rivers boosted the number of Wild and Scenic Rivers from eight to forty-three. Rivers like Pennsylvania's upper Delaware, Washington's lower Skagit, Michigan's Pere Marquette, and Texas's lower Rio Grande flow free today because of the advocacy made possible by supporters. Forty years later, American Rivers is still the leading voice for Wild and Scenic Rivers, safeguarding wild rivers and streams for future generations.

## BROADENING IMPACT

Over the past forty years, American Rivers continued to fight harmful new dams and became the leader in restoring rivers by removing outdated dams. It was not long ago when taking down a dam

was considered radical—and downright impossible. American Rivers changed that, working with partners to set free rivers like Maine’s Kennebec and Penobscot, Virginia’s Rappahannock, and Washington’s Elwha and White Salmon. Thanks to the efforts of river supporters, communities across the nation have removed more than 1,100 dams. American Rivers continues to build support for river restoration in communities every day.

In the last four decades, the organization has also advocated for clean water, the lifeblood of rivers and communities. It has fought to uphold Clean Water Act safeguards on Capitol Hill, and helped neighborhoods and businesses use rain gardens and green roofs to stop polluted runoff. American Rivers has also helped broker water supply agreements that keep enough water flowing in rivers to safeguard river health while meeting the water needs of farms and cities.

Further, American Rivers has improved river health by establishing broad-reaching programs like the National River Cleanup®, which has seen the work of more than one million volunteers remove more than sixteen million pounds of trash from more than 225,000 river miles. In addition, the organization’s national voice draws attention to its annual list of America’s Most Endangered Rivers®. This listing has helped to save beautiful fishing rivers such as the Hoback in Wyoming, the Penobscot in Maine, the North Fork of the Flathead in Montana, the Elwha in Washington State, and the Klamath in California.

### SUPPORTERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

Today, with more than 100,000 members, activists, and volunteers, American Rivers remains the nation’s leading voice

for rivers. It is stronger and more effective than ever, with a seventy-nine-person staff working out of its Washington, D.C., headquarters and in offices around the country. American Rivers is strong because of its passion for rivers. It is strong because of its dedicated partners and the scores of anglers, boaters, and families who value healthy, free-flowing rivers.

Learn more about the history and conservation work of American Rivers at [www.AmericanRivers.org](http://www.AmericanRivers.org).



*Devin Dotson is associate director of communications at American Rivers in Washington, D.C. For more information on how American Rivers helps fishing and fish habitat or how to support their work, please contact Steve White, associate director of development, the Anglers Fund, at [swwhite@AmericanRivers.org](mailto:swwhite@AmericanRivers.org) or 919-720-2901.*

Scott Bosse



*The Hoback River in Wyoming, designated Wild and Scenic.*



Laura Craig

*Fisherman on Darby Creek, Pennsylvania, immediately after dam removal.*

### Highlights from Forty Years of Success

1973: Thirty-three conservationists meet in Denver and form the American Rivers Conservation Council.

1980: American Rivers supports Wild and Scenic designation of thirty-three rivers in Alaska, protecting more than 3,000 river miles.

1984: American Rivers launches the America's Most Endangered Rivers® report, which spotlights threats to rivers and focuses public attention on the need to protect rivers.

1992: American Rivers establishes the Hydropower Reform Coalition to restore river health by improving dam operations.

1992: American Rivers helps pass the Michigan Scenic Rivers Act, the most comprehensive national river protection bill ever for a state east of the Rockies, and the Arkansas Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the most comprehensive for a southern state.

1994: American Rivers wins a U.S. Supreme Court victory, ensuring that states can require minimum river flows to protect the river's water quality and maintain the river's uses as designated by the state.

1996: American Rivers helps kill a gold mine that threatened the Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River and Yellowstone National Park.

1999: After years of advocacy by American Rivers and its partners, Edwards Dam on Maine's Kennebec River is removed, giving dam removal national mainstream attention.

2003: American Rivers serves as official conservation partner of the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Council, highlighting efforts to restore rivers like the Missouri, Snake, and Columbia.

2004: A landmark agreement is made to remove two dams and improve operations at a third dam on Maine's Penobscot River. These efforts will bring back Atlantic salmon, striped bass, and other fish and wildlife. More than

1,000 miles of river will be accessible to spawning fish thanks to this project.

2005: Arizona's Fossil Creek, a beautiful desert stream with rare travertine deposits, is brought back to life after 100 years by removal of an outdated hydropower dam.

2006: American Rivers wins a 9-0 U.S. Supreme Court decision requiring hydro dams to comply with the Clean Water Act.

2006: In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, American Rivers begins a successful campaign to close Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO), the canal that led to levee failures, killing people and destroying property in New Orleans.

2009: American Rivers surpasses its goal of designating forty rivers for the fortieth anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act with a new law protecting eighty-two rivers in the system.

2009: American Rivers "Natural Security" report is released with a congressional briefing that focuses on sustainable water strategies to prepare communities for a changing climate.

2011: After twenty-five years of advocacy by American Rivers and partners, the world's largest dam removal begins on Washington's Elwha River. Combined with the removal of a second dam on this river, the project is expected to support a population of more than 400,000 spawning steelhead.

2012: The Hoback River, named twice as one of America's Most Endangered Rivers, is permanently saved through a gas lease buyout agreement brokered by a coalition including American Rivers.

2012: American Rivers launches the Anglers Fund, a new program to connect its conservation work with the fishing community. Members have access to fish rivers we have saved with the staff that saved them. Learn more at [www.AmericanRivers.org/AnglersFund](http://www.AmericanRivers.org/AnglersFund).



*William Michael Fitzgerald.  
Image courtesy of Frontiers International.*

## William Michael Fitzgerald (1938–2013)

Longtime museum trustee William Michael Fitzgerald passed away on April 7. Cofounder of Frontiers International with his wife, Susan, he was a member of the American Museum of Fly Fishing Board of Trustees from 1982 to 1991 and was among the first six trustees emeriti recognized on this journal's masthead (Spring 1992). A former dentist, Fitzgerald is considered by many to be a pioneer of the sporting travel business, setting new standards in the industry. He was highly regarded by all who knew him, and, according to his family, "will be remembered best for his active mind, his gentle nature, his inimitable sense of humor, and his passion for Duke basketball, the Ohio State Buckeyes, and the Pittsburgh Steelers." He will be missed.

## Southern Exposure

AMFF spent some time at the end of February in Key Largo, Florida, introducing our mission and programs to a group of avid anglers at the Key Largo Anglers Club and the Ocean Reef Club. Attendees were treated to a presentation about the museum's history and exciting future initiatives, including our American saltwater fly-fishing project. The museum is appreciative of our hosts for the event, Trustee Nancy Zakon and her husband Alan.

## Spring Tying Events

Thank you to the volunteer fly tiers who helped to make our annual Fit to be "Tyed" series a great success in January and February: Peggy Brenner, George Butts, Paul Sinicki, and Kelly Bedford. This year, each tying session focused on a particular category of patterns: saltwater, streamers, trout, and terrestrials. Thanks also to Paul Sinicki for again participating in April's Spring Training to teach more saltwater patterns.



Yoshii Akiyama

*Kelly Bedford teaching a terrestrial pattern  
at our recent Fit to Be "Tyed" program.*

## Annual Members-Only Event

We welcomed members to the museum on May 4 to enjoy our second annual members-only event. Visitors were not only treated to a light breakfast and store promotions but also had the opportunity to be among the first to view our new exhibition, *The Wonders of Fly Fishing*, through a private, guided tour. The executive director and staff are grateful for the chance to thank members for their support one on one. We hope to see you at this event next year. (If you're not yet a member, join today at [www.amff.com](http://www.amff.com)!)

## Museum Receives Funds for Exhibit

We are pleased to announce that *The Wonders of Fly Fishing* exhibition has received funding from the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership (CVNHP) and the Orvis Company. *The Wonders of Fly Fishing* highlights the remarkable history of American fly fishing through the display and interpretation of the finest artifacts in the museum's extensive collection. This exhibition tells the stories of the people, events, and innovations that have shaped the sport.

The funds will help underwrite the production and installation of the museum's 2013 exhibition. CVNHP offers grants for funding research and interpretation projects of the arts and humanities, with a specific category for recreational and/or commercial fishing. The Orvis Company, whose flagship store is next door to the museum, has sponsored the exhibit as well. Steve Hemkens, Orvis's divisional merchandise manager for



Longtime museum member Pen Reed Jr. peruses one of the rod cases during the members-only event in May.

rod and tackle, noted, "Each and every day, the intricate and exhilarating world of fly fishing touches the lives of our employees and inspires them to innovate, create, and learn; this is why Orvis is proud to be a sponsor of the *Wonders of Fly Fishing* exhibit. We hope that its presence in the American Museum of Fly Fishing will bring this same sense of wonder to any and all who view it."



**ORVIS**  
SPORTING TRADITIONS  
Since 1856

## In the Library

Thanks to Skyhorse Publishing for their donations of 2013 titles that have become part of our permanent collection: Paul Schullery's *The Fishing Life: An Angler's Tales of Wild Rivers and Other Restless Metaphors*, Ronald Weber's *Riverwatcher: A Fly-Fishing Mystery*, and Nick Lyons's *1,001 Pearls of Fishing Wisdom: Advice and Inspiration for Sea, Lake, and Stream*.

## Recent Donations

**Carmine Lisella** of New City, New York, donated a Walton Powell Hexagraph fly rod. **Elise Robinson** of Denison, Texas, gave us a collection of flies in memory of her late husband, Tom Robinson, and his grandfather, Gus Robinson.

## Upcoming Events

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

### July 21

Celebrate National Ice Cream Day!  
Fly-fishing activities and free ice cream

### August 10

Fly-Fishing Festival

### September 18

Heritage Dinner  
New York City

### October 1-31

Online Auction

### December 7

Gallery Program  
Hooked on the Holidays  
1:00-4:00 p.m.

Always check our website ([www.amff.com](http://www.amff.com)) for additions, updates, and more information or contact Christina Cole at (802) 362-3300 or [events@amff.com](mailto:events@amff.com). "Casting About," 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.

## BACK ISSUES!

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	Vol. 39: Nos. 1, 2

Back issues are \$10 a copy for nonmembers, \$5 for members.

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

**Jim Heckman** of Manchester, Vermont, donated a collection of vintage fishing prints by H. M. Bateman and books illustrated by Bateman: H. M. Bateman's *The Evening Rise* (Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1960), George Brennand's *Walton's Delight* (Michael Joseph Ltd., 1953), and R. D. Peck's *Fly Fishing for Duffers* (Adams & Charles Black, 1941).

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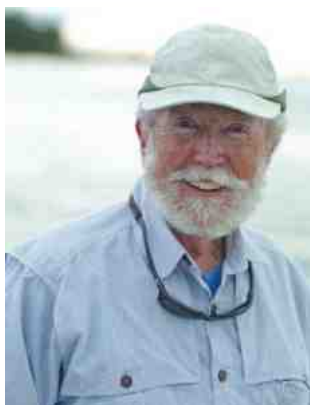
## CONTRIBUTORS

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Alison Morton

**David Burnett** spent fifty years in book publishing, starting with a stint behind an editorial desk at William Heinemann Ltd. in London. A serious interest in fly-fishing literature and practice led to friendships with well-known fishermen—authors such as Charles Ritz, Frank Sawyer, John Ashley-Cooper, Arthur Oglesby, Fred Buller, Nick Lyons, and Hugh Falkus, among many. In 1990, on the retirement of Antony Witherby, David Burnett arranged the takeover of H. F. & G. Witherby, the specialist publisher of fishing books, whose assets included Hugh Falkus's famous books *Sea Trout Fishing* and *Salmon Fishing*. He became editorial consultant to the Flyfisher's Classic Library at this time and developed further interest in the literature and history of the sport. In 1993, Burnett quit London and set up Excellent Press in rural Shropshire, publishing classic reprints of fishing and country books, as well as some new titles, such as *Speycasting* by Hugh Falkus (1994). Now retired, Burnett is hoping to continue tying flies and fishing for Shropshire brown trout and sea trout in Norway for as long as Fate allows.



Dennis Welsh

**Jerry Gibbs** served as *Outdoor Life's* fishing editor for thirty-five years, having filled the position in 1973, following the death of Joe Brooks. He is the author of several technical fishing books as well as the award-winning short story collection *Steel Barbs*. He was recipient of the American Sportfishing Association's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005 and Johnson Outdoors' Fishing Journalist of the Year in 2006. He has presented position papers to federal fisheries agencies and state fish and wildlife agencies. His work has won top honors from the Outdoor Writers Association of America, including the prestigious Excellence in Craft award in 2008. His stories and photos have appeared in most of the nation's salt- and freshwater fishing journals, to which he continues to contribute. Gibbs has fished in salt and fresh water across the United States and Canada, and in Europe, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Russia, New Zealand, and Australia. He lives on the Maine coast with his wife Judy and their French Brittany, chasing striped bass and fly rod-manageable bluefins while scheming ways to head south when the fish do.



## Second Annual AMFF Online Auction

October 1-31

Visit [www.amff.com](http://www.amff.com)  
for more details.

# The Wonders of Fly Fishing



*An iconic angling image of Maxine Atherton, wife of twentieth-century artist John Atherton, fishing the Battenkill near Arlington, Vermont.  
From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.*

**A**T THE AMERICAN MUSEUM of Fly Fishing, our mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and promote the history of all aspects of fly fishing: the equipment, people, events, conservation, science, art, wildlife, photography, literature, and more. Our current exhibition, *The Wonders of Fly Fishing*, brings all of these topics into a single, enlightening presentation.

The exhibition comprises six separate, yet associated, themed sections. The first section is the sport's timeline, from its European origins to its introduction to America. Other sections take a closer look at the evolution of flies, innovations in rod making, advances in reel design, high-profile and celebrity anglers, and the history of American saltwater fly fishing. Each section includes treasures from the museum's permanent collection, and "the best of the best" is on view. Acquisitions since 2007 have also found an important place in the exhibition.

With so much of our programming resources dedicated to the new saltwater history initiative, we decided that *Wonders* offered the perfect occasion to share some of our saltwater documentation. Deputy Director Yoshi Akiyama worked with Jerry Gibbs, retired fishing editor of *Outdoor Life* magazine, to recognize the people, equipment, events, and conservation organizations who have made an impact in the saltwater story. The saltwater section in this exhibition represents the begin-

ning stages of our major traveling exhibition, *On Fly in the Salt: American Saltwater Fly Fishing from the Surf to the Flats*.

*Wonders* has also given the museum the opportunity to continue our partnership with Vermont's President Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site (located in Plymouth) by installing a special case documenting President Coolidge's angling life. Yoshi worked with the Coolidge site staff in 2010 and 2011 to identify and catalog parts of their collection for their special exhibition, *Gone Fishin' with the President*. Many of these items are now on loan to AMFF so that our visitors can see how Silent Cal equipped himself for this pastime.

The museum is grateful to the Orvis Company and to the Champlain Valley National Heritage Partnership for their generous support of this exhibition. We also appreciate the many lenders, artifact donors, contacts, and fly tiers who readily submitted a fly for display.

Whether you want to see the 1874 Orvis patent reel, Babe Ruth's fly rod, Maggie Merriman's fishing vest, fish tags used to track migration patterns, or The Horror (Pete Perinchief's saltwater fly pattern named in fond remembrance of his daughter's behavior as a child and teenager!), plan a trip to Manchester for a look at these things and so much more!

CATHI COMAR  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## The American Museum of Fly Fishing

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THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF FLY FISHING, a nationally accredited, nonprofit, educational institution dedicated to preserving the rich heritage of fly fishing, was founded in Manchester, Vermont, in 1968. The museum serves as a repository for and conservator to the world's largest collection of angling and angling-related objects. The museum's collections, exhibitions, and public programs provide documentation of the evolution of fly fishing as a sport, art form, craft, and industry in the United States and abroad from its origins to the present. Rods, reels, flies, tackle, art, books, manuscripts, and photographs form the basis of the museum's collections.

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

### VOLUNTEER!

Throughout the year, the museum needs volunteers to help with programs, special projects, events, and administrative tasks. You do not have to be an angler to enjoy working with us! Contact Laura Napolitano at [lnapolitano@amff.com](mailto:lnapolitano@amff.com) 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. Please contact us if you wish to contribute funding to a specific program, donate an item for fund-raising purposes,

or place an advertisement in this journal. We encourage you to give the museum consideration when planning for gifts, bequests, and memorials.

### JOIN!

Membership Dues (per annum)

Friend	\$10,000
	\$5,000
	\$1,000
Sponsor	\$500
Business	\$250
Benefactor	\$100
Associate	\$50

The museum is an active, member-oriented nonprofit institution. Membership dues include four issues of the *American Fly Fisher*; unlimited visits for your entire family to museum exhibitions, gallery programs, and special events; access to our 7,000-volume angling reference library; and a discount on all items sold by the museum on its website and inside the museum store, the Brookside Angler. To join, please contact Laura Napolitano at [lnapolitano@amff.com](mailto:lnapolitano@amff.com).



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