

Hendricksons

For many anglers in the midwest and east, the Hendrickson is especially loved because it is the first hatch of importance at the beginning of the season. Hendricksons often appear in the opening weeks of the season, providing anglers with a heartwarming welcome (even in the blustery and unpredictable weather of April) after a long winter away from the water.

The origins and entomology of the fly have been traced in several books, notably Ernest Schwiebert's *Trout*, Sparse Grey Hackle's *Fishless Days*, *Angling Nights*, and Harold Smedley's *Fly Patterns and Their Origins*. It was developed by Roy Steenrod, now considered to have been the only person with whom Theodore Gordon was willing to share his fly-tying techniques. In looking over the various accounts of this pattern's development, we noticed a few small inconsistencies, and a surprise or two.

We have two stories of the fly's creation from Roy Steenrod himself. One appeared in a letter that Steenrod wrote to Harold Smedley, apparently when Smedley was working on the book mentioned above. According to that account, Steenrod first worked out the pattern to imitate a fly hatch he experienced on the Beaverkill at Roscoe, New York, in 1916. As he explained, "One day, while sitting on the bank of the stream perhaps two years after I had tied the first patterns, the matter was brought up as to what I would call or name the fly. Looking at A.E., the best friend a person could ever wish to have, I said 'the fly is the Hendrickson.'" Albert Everett Hendrickson (1866-1936) was an official with the United States Trucking Corporation, New York, and a good friend of other well-known fly fishermen besides Steenrod. Hendrickson was an especially generous patron of the Payne Rod Company, and a well-known salmon fisherman.

The other account we have from Steenrod is from two letters he wrote to Preston Jennings (these are part of the recently received Jennings Collection, from Mrs. Jennings). The first, written in December of 1931, dates the fly to 1918, not 1916: "The Hendrick-

son Fly I first tied in 1918 and named it after Mr. A.E. Hendrickson my friend with whom I fish and shoot and have had many pleasant hours in his company." The second, written the following May, was sent with a sample Hendrickson fly. Through extraordinary good fortune, that very fly is pictured on page 13. It was given, some years after Preston's death, to Arnold Gingrich by Mrs. Jennings; Arnold passed it along to the Museum during his term as President of the Museum. It is the largest of the flies, center left, in the picture. In the letter which accompanied it, Steenrod explained it as follows: "I am enclosing a true pattern of the Hendrickson as to color but hackle is much too long. It will give you a pattern to work from if you wish to tie some." Steenrod explained that at that time he was having trouble acquiring good hackles. And so, though the proportions of our original Hendrickson are inaccurate, it is instructive in other ways. For example, the tail fibers are the same as the wing — wood duck. Most modern pattern guides recommend dun hackle barbules for the tail. Even more intriguing are Steenrod's own recommendations in his letter to Smedley in *Fly Patterns and Their Origins* (first published in 1943), where he explained that the Hendrickson "is tied with the tails from the crest of a golden pheasant . . ." It appears that Steenrod, like his famous instructor Gordon, appreciated the need to change a pattern to suit circumstances. His successors in tying this fly obviously agreed, and eventually there were not only variations on this pattern, there were at least two well-known types of Hendricksons — "Light" and "Dark." Both Ray Bergman and the Darbees were tying a darker version of the Hendrickson before World War II. Like many minor variations in fly pattern, the difference between the two Hendricksons has caused some confusion; there is enough difference in color between the lightest and the darkest of the flies we have pictured on page 20 that it is not inconceivable some of the tiers would have liked to have their fly called a "Light" (we see a difference of

opinion among those who have written about Hendricksons; some even seem to think that the original was a "dark").

For example, when Art Flick refined the pattern to suit his needs he used a lighter colored fur for the body. Steenrod specified "fawn colored fur from the belly of the red fox," and Flick preferred that fur when taken from the belly of a female fox; the urine-burned fur had the faint but unmistakable pinkish tinge noticed by many anglers on the actual Hendrickson mayfly. One of Art Flick's Hendrickson's is pictured above the original.

Below the Flick fly and to the immediate right of the original Hendrickson is a fly tied by John Atherton, probably for use on the Battenkill. Though we have far more neatly tied Hendricksons in our collection of Atherton flies, we used this one because it is the only one that is faithful to Steenrod's alternate dressing; the tails are golden pheasant crests.

Below the Atherton fly is Preston Jennings' own version of the Hendrickson, and at the bottom of the page is the darkest of our Hendricksons, tied by Edward R. Hewitt. Both his hackle and his body fur are darker than the others.

It is interesting to note that Steenrod's fly illustrates a relatively common characteristic of the "Catskill School" flies by its open "neck" in front of the hackle and wings. Of the flies in the Museum Collection, only those tied by Rube Cross have quite this much space left uncovered.

The Art Flick pattern was donated to the Museum by Art, we received the Atherton pattern from Mrs. Atherton, the Jennings fly is part of the Jennings Collection, and Alvan Macauley gave us the Hewitt fly. All in all, these five flies are a study in subtlety; five gifted anglers' responses to the same need, each one a little different. It is some testament to the quality of the original fly — and this seems to be the case with each of the few really important American fly patterns that are over fifty years old — that it has changed so little at the hands of so many masters.

