

Bunyan Bugs *by George Grant*



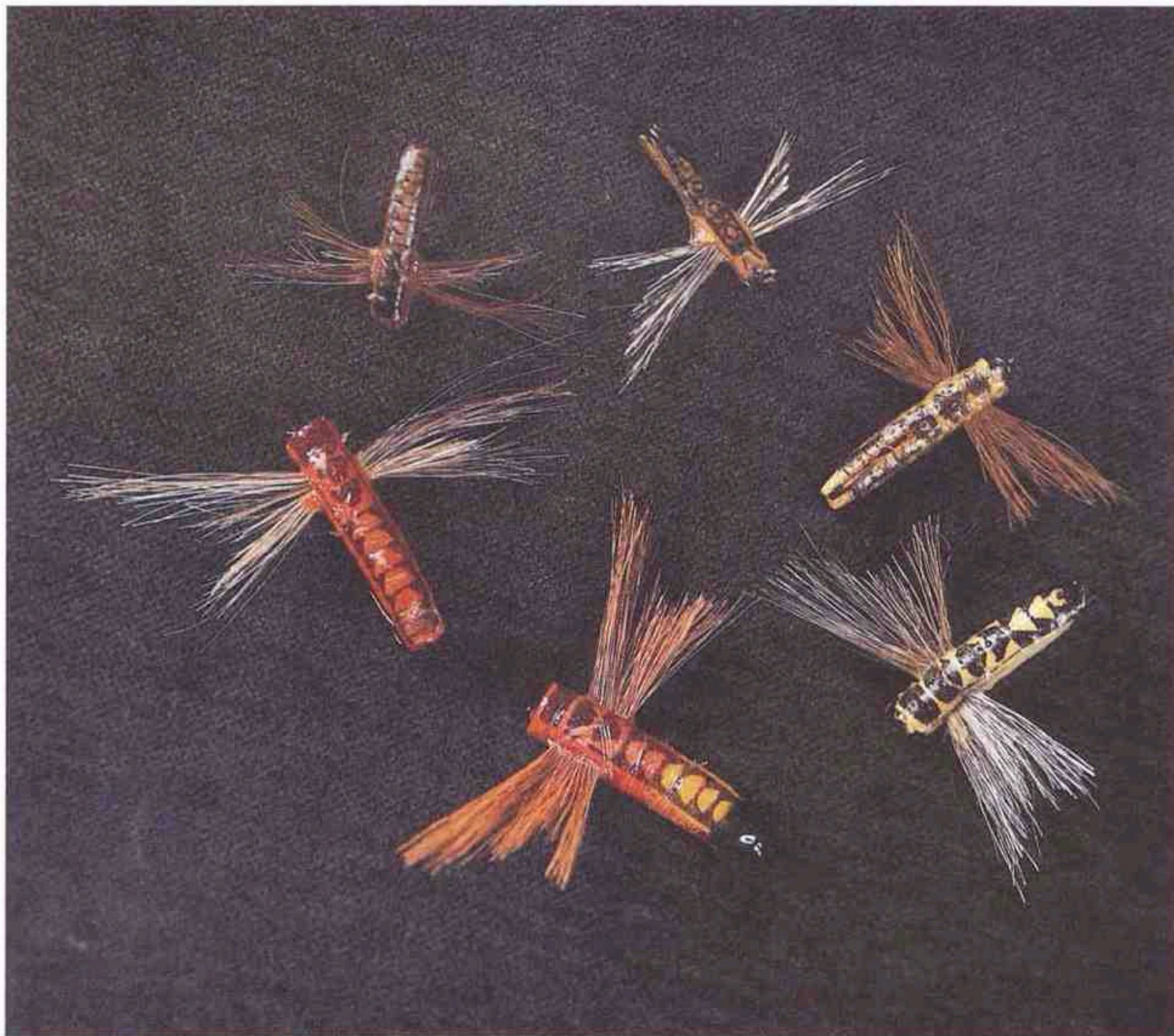
Norman Edward Lee Means is the name of a man who was born in Davis, West Virginia, on October 11, 1899. He came to Montana in 1921 and spent the next four years studying Forestry at the University of Montana. There are not many people in Montana, or elsewhere, who know this man by his true name, but there are few fishermen in this state or most of the West, who have not heard of Paul Bunyan and his famous Bunyan Bugs.

These unusual flies were first tied by Paul about 1927, and now, over fifty years later, they are as popular with fly-fishermen and as effective in taking trout as they were when first offered for sale to the public. While most fishermen are familiar with the very large Bunyan Bug that imitates the giant stonefly (*Pteronarcys californica*), commonly called "salmon fly", there are only a few who are aware that the series consists of a wide variety of insects—at one time there were about thirty-five distinct artificials.

Because of his education at the University of Montana, plus his own curiosity as an amateur naturalist, Paul Bunyan was able to study the aquatic and terrestrial insects of western Montana and develop patterns to imitate those that he considered important as fish food. He gave them names that fishermen could understand, pronounce and remember, and he also provided anglers with a short summary showing the months of the year that each fly was most effective. Such names as Big Orange Salmon Fly, Rusty Stone Fly, Very Pale Green Caddis, and Grey Wing Brown Drake were typical Bunyan designations.

The construction of the Bunyan Bug is unique and has no parallel among other Montana or western trout flies. It is a reflection of the ingenuity of its originator. All of the "bugs" were and are intended to be used as floaters, and the bodies of all

There seem to be very few photographs surviving of Paul Bunyan; the only portrait-size image George could locate was irreproducible. We asked artist Georgine MacGarvey to reproduce the photo as a drawing, which we show here.



patterns are made with hand-shaped cork. The wings are inserted into a slit in the body near the eye of the hook so that they protrude at right angles to the body, a position which fly tiers usually describe as "spent-wing".

The wings of the Bunyan Bug are made with hair taken from a horse mane. This hair is rather coarse and stiff, but not nearly as much so as the tail hair of a horse, which is not suitable for this purpose. For many years the hair was inserted into the cork so that it would lie flat, but in the early 1940's a curve was cut in the end of the cork, which made the wings have an upward swing and gave them a more lifelike appearance. A patent (#2,754,612) for this improvement was granted in 1952.

On some of the larger imitations there are attractive and very lifelike designs, which, at first, were painted on by hand. Later, drawings were prepared from var-

ious insects, engravings were made, and the designs were printed on fine tissue paper. When these designs were affixed to the bodies and varnished the paper seemed to disappear.

No history of Montana trout flies or fly fishing could be considered complete without a discussion of the "Bunyan Bug". It is a prime favorite throughout the year on the Blackfoot River and Rock Creek in the Missoula area. During the "salmon fly" season on the Big Hole, Madison and Yellowstone Rivers, the pattern representing the large female "salmon fly" is widely and effectively used by those who float these rivers. The fame of these great flies has spread into every corner of Montana and they are well known throughout the west.

Paul Bunyan, like most of Montana's early fly tiers, is an expert fly fisherman. It is said that he was using dry flies in his

Author George Grant donated these Bunyan Bugs to the Museum when he submitted the article to us. All are authentic ties, and some were tied by Paul Bunyan several decades ago. The bottom fly is a Female Salmon Fly (the black tip on the body represents the egg sac). Above it to the left is the Male Salmon Fly, and above that is a Trout Fly. Upper right is an Olive Stone, below it is a Brown Stone, and below that is a Large Yellow Stone.



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Left: a poster advertising an appearance of Paul Bunyan at a sportsman's show some years ago. Above and below: two pictures of Paul Bunyan fishing in 1929. These were taken by Enos Bradner on his first trip west from Michigan that year and were loaned to us by Enos.



native West Virginia at the age of ten. He was so accomplished in his mastery of the roll cast that he was often requested to demonstrate his skill at sportsman's shows.

That he was a rugged individual is attested to by the fact that well into his fifties his wading equipment for the icy waters of Rock Creek and the Blackfoot consisted of shorts and tennis shoes. Holding a fly rod in one hand he often swam from one side of the river to the other as the occasion demanded. The father of six children, he found it necessary to work hard, yet he often closed his shop to take a visitor to a difficult-to-find fishing spot. In Missoula he is often referred to as "Mister Fishin".

In addition to his talent as a fly tier, Paul was also a skilled maker of split bamboo fly rods, and those who were fortunate enough to own one would not have traded it for a Leonard or a Thomas.

Several years ago he turned his business over to his son, Norman Means, Jr., who often finds it difficult to meet the continuing demand for Bunyan Bugs. It is interesting to note that most popular flies are copied by other commercial tiers, but the "Bugs of Bunyan" have been produced only by Paul and his immediate family in a manner that is satisfactory to the discriminating fly fisherman.

The name of the elder Norman Means is probably useful only for the legal authenticity of deeds, wills, lease and similar documents, but to the fishermen of Montana, and to a good part of the entire fishing world, the name of Paul Bunyan is more important and will be remembered as long as there are trout in our streams, and even longer. He has long since become known to his intimates as Paul Bunyan, and even signs his personal checks with that name.

Paul Bunyan

Paul Bunyan is a true pioneer in the art of flytying in Montana and must be recognized and honored as an individual who contributed substantially to the sport of fly fishing in the West. He lived in an era when trout were wild, streams were clear and cold, and fishing was an exhilarating adventure that seldom knew the restrictions of encroaching civilization. It is a pleasure for me to write about him while he is still among us and able to participate in what still remains of a great trout fishing heritage.

George Grant is a long-time advisor of the Museum, and a frequent contributor to the magazine. His most recent book is The Master Fly Weaver.