

FROM The RIVER'S EDGE

By
George MacAlevy



With the trout season upon us in just two days, we should take a hard look at Streamer flies and streamer fly fishing. There is no doubt but what streamers will get a strong play from many who fish the lakes and reservoirs by trolling. It is the stream fisherman who has not taken advantage of the fish enticing qualities of streamers and bucktails in Oregon.

Streamer Flies.
The Young Nomads

1. THE EARLY DAYS: When fly fishing first became a sport in the Western Hemisphere, no development unique to the sport had yet come from this new arena. Wet flies and Salmon flies were borrowed; fur, feather, and iron, from the

British Isles. Even the late comers such as dry flies and nymphs were imported whole after the pioneer efforts had been successfully concluded in England.

The streamer fly, at the advent of the Maine era of great fishing, had not been invented, nor yet even thought of. In fact a considerable evolutionary process would take place before it arrived on the angling scene.

The landlocked salmon of Maine and Quebec, with its sea going cousin of the Maritime provinces of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Isle, and Nova Scotia, became the prized gamefish of the North American continent in the late 19th century. The traditional Scottish and Irish Salmon flies were used for both. This was as close to a streamer fly as any fly approached at that time.

These were, in the main, very elaborately dressed wet flies. The composition and construction was such as to render each creation a work of art. Some tiers of note so impressed their own style into these flies that one could recognize the tier by looking at the fly.

In England, where tradition and a long uninterrupted history of Salmon angling persists, flies tied by these long dead masters of the art are preserved, displayed, and mounted, and priced like famous paintings. I would dearly like to own just one fly tied by the paternal grandfather of our own famous Salmon fly tier, Alex Rogan.

2. THE EARLY FLIES: These Scottish and Irish Salmon flies were veritable symphonies of feathers; Silver Doctor, Torrish, and Jock Scott, rich with color and sparkle in a major key; or Mar Lodge with its muted tonality in a minor key. The Candlestick Maker and Shooting Star are slim graceful flies which should have been a prophecy of the streamer fly to come. Durham Ranger, and The Butcher, usually large and flamboyant, contrasted sharply to the dainty Blue Charm. The smoothly tailored Silver Wilkinson offers the intipodes

to the formed formlessness of the Jock-O-Dees.

All these patterns and types are out in Maine to entice the Landlocked Atlantic Salmon in the numerous lakes. Some were successful, some weren't! But all 6)serious anglers, sooner or later, become innovators. Guide and wealthy patron alike took to improving upon what the British had long thought to be the ultimate.

3. THE FANCY LAKES: So were born the first Fancy Lake flies, as they are now known. Many of these were as elaborate and decorative as their Scottish ancestors. In form they resembled most the Old World form of Salmon fly known as the Whole wing fly, of

silver. A herl butt and a pink chenille ruff behind the hackle, and a silver twist rib complete the body embellishments. A three segment tail of red and white strips and a piece of herl plus a badger hackle complete the fly.

I have tied a few of these for people, and so made a couple for myself. I have never caught anything on them, but it is surely a pretty fly. I am about to firm up my original conclusion that it appeals more in the mystery of its origin and its beauty, rather than on any great propensity to catch fish. It is worth having, if well tied, as an art work, or as a piece of jewelry to be looked at rather than used.



George and his dog Ming.

which the Durham Ranger is a good example. The more simple ones took their cue from another British Isle type known as a Sea trout fly. This was a group of wet flies that had been developed in England and Ireland for the taking of Searun Brown Trout.

The typical Fancy Lakes had bodies of two and more sections variously ribbed, built up tails and wings using from three to a dozen different feather segments in their construction. The wings were often built over a foundation feather of quill centered spoon shape which made a stiff fly. Some simple patterns evolved which utilized these spoon wings alone with no other wing trimmings. These soon were just called Spoon-wings. Many of these Fancy Lake flies had multiple hackles of different colors.

Bass fishermen too, were developing a fly system of their own. Starting with large versions of trout wet fly patterns, this class expanded with more and more complex winging until this class had the same range of wing structures from simple to as complex as could be devised. It is no wonder the two classes lost their identities and are now considered together as one class despite their different origin. As a whole Fancy Lakes rival the Old World Salmon flies in their use of exotic plumage and complex structure.

One of the very famous Fancy Lakes is the fly called Romany Rye. This is a silver bodied fly with basic wings of Barred wood duck side feathers, shouldered with Golden Pheasant Tippets. In common with this class, it carries both a tip and a tag, the former yellow silk, and the tag

Some other Fancy Lakes that are of particular beauty are Cassard, Cleveland, Maid of the Mill, and Goldenrod. But aside from artistic beauty, this class of flies is primarily of historic interest. It is often premised that during the heyday of the Fancy Lake flies, someones hackle became undone and the first streamer was automatically born on the spot. This probably did occur on several occasions, but nothing was ever recorded on this which would give credence to this as the origin of the streamer.

4. THE FIRST EFFORTS: Contrary to what is often thought, the first streamer fly to be constructed as such was not created in Maine. Theodore Gordon, long famous as the father of the dry fly in America constructed a series of flies he called Bumblepuppies in the early 1880's. This was in Eastern New York.

As these flies used strips of wing quill for the long wings, they are not true streamers, and are very similar to some European Strip wing Salmon flies which had been around for a long time. But some of them could qualify as bucktails, so the Bucktail came before the streamer, even though its development was slower to evolve. Also, in the 1880's, another bucktail was constructed in Indiana with Bass in mind. There is also a record of a bucktail in Idaho in 1901. Made with dog hair, this Idaho fly was designed with Cut Throat trout in mind.

The first evidence of a true streamer in Maine is in 1902 on Grand Lake stream. It was here the first true New England Streamer was created. One of the very first was called Roosters Regret. This was predominantly white with some scarlet trim, but it led to a whole family of flies.

Another first was the advent of the Scripture Bucktails in Central New York about 1907. Still no bucktails had appeared in Maine. How is a Bucktail differentiated from a streamer? Its all in the wing. If the wing is primarily hackle feathers, it is a streamer. If all or most of the wing is hair, any hair, it is a bucktail. No matter what kind of hair; bear, badger, monkey, squirrel tail, polar bear, or deer hair, you still call them bucktails.

But it was in Maine that the streamer was nurtured and developed. It was there that it became stylized in several unique styles that comprise what we know today as The New England Streamer Fly. Continued next week

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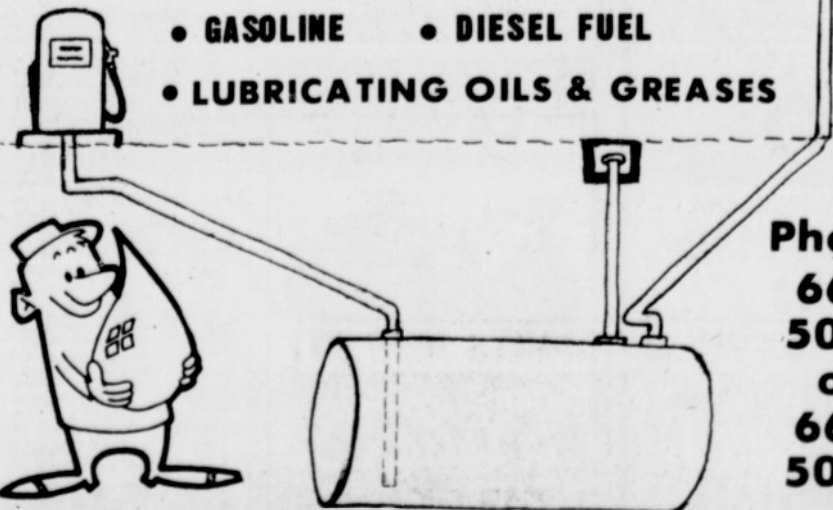


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