



*THE "ARTS"  
OF  
FLY FISHING*

Annotated Guide

**Inaugural Exhibit**  
*The Paul and Mary Ann Ford  
Fly Fishing Collection*

**December 2003—January 2004**

*Mabel Zoe Wilson Library*  
**Western Washington University**

## A Guide to the Exhibit — Annotations by Paul Ford

1

If effective and beautiful flies are to be tied, then certain materials must be acquired. Paul Schmookler and Ingrid Sils researched these materials and produced the book, *Rare and Unusual Fly Tying Materials: A Natural History: Volume 1, Birds* (1994). The book shows domestic and exotic birds in full color and how feathers from these birds are used in tying flies. Birds and flies are exquisite. Very rare 1st edition, 1st printing.

2

Schmookler's and Sils' work continued in *Rare and Unusual Fly Tying Materials: A Natural History: Volume 2, Birds and Mammals* (1997). It traces the use of plumage and furs from birds and mammals for the use of lures and flies from about 200 AD. Its photography is magnificent and its prose instructive. 1st edition, 1st printing, signed.

3

In *Forgotten Flies* Schmookler and Sils capture the magic of American fly tying during the first half of the twentieth century. The work of five illustrious tyers is highlighted to illumine the "golden age" of American tying. The five honorees are John Raymond Bergman, Charles DeFeo, Preston Jennings, Mary Orvis Marbury and Carrie Gertrude Stevens. Each made particular contributions and the authors have caught those contributions with glorious photography and lucid prose. No lover of the fly tying art should be without this 1999 1st edition.

4

*Steelhead Fly Fishing and Flies* (1976) by Trey Combs, with illustrations by Jeff Dayne, is very difficult to find in this 1st hardback edition, though it has been reprinted in soft cover many times. And for good reason. It was the first comprehensive description of Northwest steelhead fly fishing and fishers as well as techniques and flies used to catch the fish. Combs' later book, *Steelhead Fly Fishing* (1991), is a greatly expanded version of the display book and was issued in a standard edition and a deluxe limited edition of 250.

5

James Prosek is a painter of trout. His first book of paintings titled *Trout*, displayed here, was published in 1996 when he was a junior at Yale University. *The New York Times* has referred to him as the "Audubon of the fly fishing world." Since *Trout* appeared, Prosek has published several other books about trout and trout fishing. His latest is *Fly-Fishing the 41<sup>st</sup>* (2003) in which he describes fishing for trout along the 41st parallel from his home in Easton, Connecticut, to the far corners of the world and then back home. Prosek is a very special artist from whom we shall, no doubt, hear more. The display book is a signed 1st edition, 1st printing.

6

George Grant was the father of fly-fishing in Montana. He lived in the Butte area in the early half of the twentieth century. The Big Hole, Madison, Beaverhead and Jefferson were among his haunts, though the Big Hole came first and he was a key supporter of the Big Hole River Foundation (see also exhibit 11). Grant was an environmentalist before the word entered our dictionaries! He created flies special to Montana as compared with those used in the East. His two important book-length publications, both issued in editions of 1,950 copies, were *The Master Fly Weaver* (1980) and *Montana Flies* (1981), which is displayed here (1st edition, 1st printing).

7

Tom McGuane's *Live Water* (1996) in its deluxe limited edition displayed here is elegant in design and execution. Its thoughtful stories take us all over the world to learn that there is more to fly fishing than the fishing. The book has a drop spine case and is quarter bound in goatskin. It is letterpress printed on handmade paper and its colored illustrations by John Swan are laid in. This is copy 6 of an edition of 67 and is signed. McGuane is famous for his movie scripts and such works as the *Bushwhacked Piano*, *Panama*, *The Sporting Club*, and most recently, *The Cadence of the Grass* (2002).

8

Ralph Wahl's *One Man's Steelhead Shangri-La* (1989) is the story of how Wahl discovered and fished a secret place on the Skagit River—an area of magical attraction and fish. We all need our secret places and Wahl found and treasured his. Then it disappeared like some mystical ephemera and Wahl was led to wonder if it ever existed. This is copy 62 of a limited edition of 200 copies and is signed by the author.

9

Roderick Haig-Brown came to Washington State from his native England in 1926 to work in logging ventures. Early on, he fished the Stillaguamish North Fork and Deer Creek, its then-fabulous steelhead tributary. Eventually he settled on the Campbell River on Vancouver Island where he pursued outdoor writing, served as a Magistrate and, for one term, as Chancellor of the University of Victoria. A fly fisher to the core, he was a vigorous proponent of wildlife habitat protection for all of nature's creatures. Haig-Brown is internationally regarded as one of finest writers ever to touch on sport fishing (see also exhibit 15). His friend and sometime illustrator, the gifted Tommy Brayshaw, invented the steelhead flies shown alongside this copy of *Return to the River* (1946, 1st Canadian edition, illustrated by Charles DeFeo)

10

Gary LaFontaine, a transplanted Easterner, lived in Deer Lodge, Montana, for many years and until his death two years ago, much too young, of ALS. He was the consummate student of aquatic life and created flies from materials no one else had used—Antron (a nylon) and Creslan (an orlon). His “sparkle emergent pupa” pattern was a major breakthrough in tying creativity. He knew Montana's waters and those far beyond. The deluxe limited edition of *Trout Flies* in the display case features flies Gary invented for various Montana waters. This edition is quarter bound in goatskin with hand-marbled endsheets. This is copy 3 of 250 and is signed.

11

The pamphlet *Big Fly/Big Fish* was authored by George Grant (see also exhibit 6) in support of the Big Hole River Foundation headquartered in Butte, Montana. A major figure in fly-fishing in the state, Grant dedicated profits from his writing and fly tying to the Foundation. His prowess in fly tying artistry is showcased here by examples of his woven flies created especially for use in Montana waters.

12

The 1st American edition of Izaak Walton's and John Cotton's *The Complete Angler or the Contemplative Man's Recreation* was published in 1847. It was annotated and edited by the Rev. George Washington Bethune. The edition is noteworthy for three reasons. It was the first edition of the *Angler* published in America. Its long introductory bibliographic essay is comprehensive and scholarly. But most important of all, a well-buried footnote describes American fly fishing in Bethune's day and discusses the question of whether a fly should imitate a living creature or, should it be an “attractor.” That argument continues today. The display book is a 1st edition, 1st printing, profusely illustrated and about 157 years old in a new hand-made drop spine box. A copy of this edition is not often found.

13

Ralph Wahl of Bellingham was a master steelhead fly fisher and a master photographer. He teamed with Roderick Haig-Brown to produce the display book *Come Wade the River* (1971). Wahl has been called “the Izaak Walton of the camera.” The display book shows Wahl at his best with many of the photographs taken, no doubt, on his beloved Skagit River. Prose excerpts that accompany the pictures are from Haig-Brown's *A River Never Sleeps*.

14

Sparse Grey Hackle was the pen name of Alfred W. Miller, a prominent New York City businessman. His books *Fishless Days* (1954) and *Fishless Days, Angling Nights* (1971) describe how well-to-do Easterners fly-fished in the first half of the twentieth century—often with flies tied by the Dettas (see exhibit 20) or their contemporaries. Sparse's writing is clear and witty and stands as a centerpiece of modern American fly fishing writing. Illustrated by Charles DeFeo, the display edition is a 1st edition, 1st printing published in 1954 by the Anglers' Club of New York City. (To this day, membership in the Anglers' Club is limited to a select elite).

15 Roderick Haig-Brown's *The Western Angler* (1974, 2nd edition), illustrated by Tommy Brayshaw, describes his experiences fishing for Pacific salmon and western trout in British Columbia. As is the case with his *Return to the River* (see exhibit 9), this work speaks to the author's deep concern for salmon steelhead and other fish that were his sport and the world's rich resource.

16 In 1971, Steve Raymond of Bellingham published the first book ever written about British Columbia's feisty Kamloops trout. Called *Kamloops*, with color plates by Alan Pratt, the book is a remarkable study of the fish, its environs and how fly fishers pursue it. The book is of particular interest to local area fly fishers who make many trips north in search of the lively fish. The copy on display is from the 1st printing of the 1st edition.

17 John Gierach, who has written a dozen fly fishing books, builds bamboo fly rods and, as an artist, illustrated his *Where Trout Are All As Long As Your Leg* (1991) using the ancient Japanese Gyotaku technique. The display book, *Fishing Bamboo* (1997), is of Gierach's romance with the art and craft of building and fishing with bamboo. The book's cover is of unique design because a piece of bamboo fishing rod is imbedded in its spine. The cover is quarter bound in leather and the book is letterpress printed on mouldmade paper. A page of Gierach's original manuscript is laid in at the book's conclusion. This is copy 5 of a deluxe limited edition of 55 copies. A work of art.

18 *Hemingway on Fishing* (2000), 1st edition, 1st printing, is a collection of the great man's writing about fishing. His short story, "Big Two-Hearted River" with its main character, Nick Adams, is considered by many to be world-class writing. Hemingway graduated to fish of great size such as marlin and swordfish. *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) won him a Pulitzer Prize and later he became a Nobel laureate but gave his acceptance speech *in absentia*.

19 Charles E. Brooks retired from the Air Force in the 1950s and settled in West Yellowstone, Montana, not far from the Henry's Fork of the Snake River. At that time the Henry's Fork was wonderful fly fishing and it is to this day—classic fly water with big fish. Brooks wrote and published much about the river and that, of course, brought hordes of less fortunate Easterners to fish it. Not Brooks' intent at all, but nevertheless the truth. *The Henry's Fork* (1986) tells the history of the Henry's Fork country and is must reading for one who would understand the development of fly fishing in the West. 1st edition, 1st printing.

20 American professional fly tying originated on the East coast. *The Dettes, A Catskill Legend* (1992) by Eric Leiser tells the story of the Dette family, Walt, Winnie and Mary. They lived in the Catskills region of upper New York State close upon the Beaverkill and Willowemoc Rivers. The Dettes were innovative tyers—inventors as well as production tyers. A good portion of this book is devoted to tying technique. The display copy is a deluxe limited edition, quarter bound in almond leather with imprints in the leather and enclosed in matching slipcase. The slipcase windows show three dry flies tied by the Dettes. Signed by the Dettes and the author.

21 During the early twentieth century and even to this day, many well-to-do eastern fishers, ladies as well as gentlemen, made their way north to eastern Canadian provinces where they cast flies to what many call the king of game fish—the Atlantic salmon. They fished rivers with exotic names—the Margaree and Miramichi and Restigouche. And they fished in a tradition inherited from England. Joseph D. Bates, Jr., in his *The Art of the Atlantic Salmon Fly* (1987), with color plates by Henry McDaniel, describes the history of Atlantic salmon flies and their use in several countries. 1st edition, 1st printing.

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