

# Valley Angler Auction Blues by Bill Thompson

Well I've managed to break the bank, or to borrow a line from Brittany Spears, "Ops I've done it again". You would think by now I would have learned; never attend an auction with your Mother especially my Mother. A week ago my Mother read an ad, in this very paper, about an auction to be held over in Keyser Falls in which several bamboo rods were to be sold. These rods, according to the auctioneer, had once been the property of "Valley Legend" Joe Dodge. There were several rods in the group that caught my interest and so the decision was made to attend the auction.

The plan was for me to skip out of the shop early and pick up my Mom and get to the auction early enough to view the items previous to the auction's start. Janet was to close the shop, run Summer and then meet us at the auction house. Do to the fact that Janet and I had an appointment with one of our sales reps I was we were running late, but my Mom and I managed to get there with a little time to spare.

Two of the rods that I was interested in turned out to be fiberglass which is why it is wise to view the items in person and not rely on a picture on the internet. Auctioneers are always careful to have a disclaimer as to the authenticity of any item that they put up for sale. Two other rods did however, capture my attention. One was a Heddon Deluxe and the other was an Edwards. There were a great deal of other fishing related items displayed as well and several of them also caught my eye. There were three old Pflueger reels, one of which had the sculptured pillars and an interesting line guide that I had not seen before. The problem was that they were so beat up that they were all but worthless except for parts. Again it is wise to examine the carefully before bidding.

While I was looking over the sale items my Mother was registering us and getting an auction number. At the same time I was sizing up the competition. It didn't take long to figure out who I would be bidding against. Serious collectors and dealers of antique tackle give off an unmistakable aura.

The crowd did seem light and I had a faint hope that prices would remain on the low end.

When the auction finally got underway it was obvious that it was going to be a slow night for the auction house. My hopes were high when the first rod came up for auction. It was a bamboo spinning rod and I had no interest, but the rod should have brought at least a hundred bucks. It went for a mere thirty-five dollars. When the Heddon rod came up a few minutes latter I was trying hard to control myself. The auctioneer, as they usually do, started it off way over its value, but when he got down to twenty-five bucks several hands went up including mine. The bidding soon came down to me and another gentleman, a fellow I had earlier picked out as a contender. The bidding quickly exceeded my limit and the other guy won the rod. No worries, I thought, the

Edward's would be up soon and maybe I would have a better chance at it.

Some other tackle items came up and they all went pretty cheap. When the Edwards came up I was ready with my auction number firmly grasped in my sweaty hand. Again the auctioneer stared it high and no one bid until it hit fifty and then the hands went up. There was some pertly spirited bidding for a few moments and then my principle rival dropped out. I thought I was in the clear when one of the runners spoke up that he had a phoned in bid. The phone bid was over my limit and I put my hand down. At this point my Mother started to elbow me, keep going she urged in a stage whisper that could be heard by everyone including the auctioneer. The Auctioneer looked at me and I raised my number one more time and everyone else including the phone bidder was all in. The runner came over and handed me the rod. I was still shaking as I put it back in the bag and placed it into its tube. All I could think was "what had I just done?"

To make matters worse a few minutes later I raised my hand again and brought an old salmon taylor. I know I got it cheap, but what the heck did I need a salmon taylor for. Truth be know my mother had nothing to do with buying the taylor, but I am going to blame her any way.

The next day I took my prize to the shop. I fully intended to cast the rod, but it was such a foul day that I let stay snug in its case. The next day was much better; however the wind was blowing a little to strong for testing a light rod. However, I couldn't wait any longer and I strung it up with a double taper six weight line and went out to the green area in front of the shop.

It took a little to get used to, but after a few casts I was throwing some pretty tight loops. It was at that point that I breathed a sigh of relief the rod was every thing it thought it was going to be. At least now I could sort of justify the cost.

By this time I had also started to research Edwards's rods in depth. I knew a little and as they say, "enough to be dangerous". In my search of the internet I came across the name of a book entitled, Casting A Spell The Bamboo Fly Rod and the American Pursuit of Perfection by George Black. The title seemed familiar as well it should have as there were two copies setting on the shop's bookshelf. They had been there since before last Christmas and I had never taken the time to pull one off the shelf and read it. Turns out the book is all about the Edwards story and one man's quest to understand the roll of the bamboo rod in American angling history.

Turns out Edwards was from Maine and a contemporary of Hiram Leonard, Fred Thomas, Loman Haws, and Hiram Hawes. Eustis Edwards and the before mentioned gentlemen were the nucleolus of the Leonard Rod Company of Bangor Maine. The stories of these men and the various rod companies that they founded are the very roots of American angling history. If you are unfamiliar with their stories you owe it to yourself read this book even if you have never fished in your life. The development of the bamboo fishing rod goes far beyond just another fishing story. Here you will find the genius of American inventiveness in the machine age and a part of the State of Maine's history as well.

As for me I am just pleased to own a small piece of angling history as well as a link to Joe Dodge and our "Valley". However, the best part is that I have a sweet casting rod to fish with. Next summer I think I take that rod up to the Ellis or maybe the Peabody and when I fish it I will

think about Joe and how he might think that it's a good thing that his old rod is back on the water once again where it belongs.

See you on the river.