

# Valley Angler Then And Now by Bill Thompson

With the New Year right around the corner it seems appropriate to take a look back and remember what once was. A few weeks ago, in a fit of madness, I made a feeble attempt at cleaning up my den. My mother was coming home from Florida to spend Christmas with us and so was my son, girlfriend and future Mother in Law. Although Janet had been kind it was very clear that something had to be done before the Board of Health didn't step in and condemn the place.

In the process of bulldozing out one corner of the room I came across a few thousand old fly fishing magazines. Like a lot of anglers I had saved these rags of the industry over the years thinking that one day I would find the time to go back and re-read them. Of course this never happens and over the years great stacks begin to accumulate in dark closets of anglers all across America. I would wager that most dictated fishermen have similar collections in their own dens. After all who among us the will to throw away an outdated copy of "American Dangler" or Hook and Bullet Digest? Well certainly not me and I had the proof. Like I said I was in a state of madness and I decided to box them up and throw them all out. At the moment of no return another fit of insanity hit me and I decided that this vast collection of American fishing literature was too good to throw out and maybe there just might be another like minded angler who just might like to have them and actually be foolish enough to buy them. So I boxed them up and brought them to the shop and offered them to the public at a mere quarter a piece. To date I have been only fairly successful in my quest to peddle them, however I have found one or two willing to anti up and purchase a piece of angling history.

As I walked by the box in the shop the other day one of the old magazines caught my attention. I bent down and picked it up and began thumbing through it. The magazine was an a copy of "Fly Fisherman" from 1980. It struck me that the magazine was almost 27 years old. I guess what also struck me that I had been fly fishing for over three decades. The other thing of note was how much had changed in the fly fishing world in that period of time and also what had not changed.

As I perused the ads in the magazine it was evident that there have been a lot of changes in the companies that supply the industry. The advertising contained in this issue gives a lot of insight into what fly fishers were buying in those days. Judging by the size of their ad it was very clear that the fly rod of choice in 1980 was those manufactured by the Fenwick Rod Company. Fenwick fiberglass rods ruled the roost and the company was one of the very first to introduce graphite to the market. There were ads from other rod companies as well, significantly not of them were from overseas. Fenwick rods are still being made, but their popularity at least with fly fishers has diminished to the point that they have stopped advertising in fly fishing magazines. Ironically, it may well have been the companies decision to have their rods made out of country that led to their demise.

The Pflueger reel company had a full page ad featuring the Medalist reel. In 1980 if you were not fishing with a Fenwick rod and a Medalist reel you were out of the loop. If you had money you might own a Hardy reel, but the Medalist was by far the reel of choice of the common man. Scientific Anglers did offer the System Series of reels which were made by Hardy and sold for a lot less than the same reel in their line and in the Orvis line. The Martin Reel Company had a pretty good size ad and so did Valentine Reels both popular in the day, but rarely heard of today even though both companies are still in business. Another reel company represented was Parrine. Most anglers probably remember Parrine more for their metal fly boxes than their reels. However the company made an automatic fly reel that some of you may remember. The automatic reel is another idea that has gone by the wayside. There was an ad for Marrayat reels which in a way was prophecy of things to come. The Marrayat was one of the first reels to be machined from aircraft aluminum. The reel was manufactured in Japan and probably the first reel from the far east to gain acceptance in the U. S.

Scientific Angler and Cortland lines were featured, but two other line companies also had large ads. Berkley and Gudebrod were still well known line companies. Neither of these companies have much prominence today as line manufactures. Berkley is still in business, but is better known for monofilament line and inexpensive spin rod and reels. Gudebrod is around and is well known for quality fly tying and rod building thread.

As for waders Ranger and Red Ball were all the rage. Neoprene was just coming on to the market and breathable waders were still a few years off. In my opinion the introduction of breathable waders is the greatest advance in fly fishing gear to come along in several decades.

The big name in fly tying vices was D. H. Thompson. HMH vices, which were the first to be made of high quality materials, were not represented. Today we have so many quality vices to choose from: Rensetti, Dyna-King and Regal to name only a few.

Fly tying materials have come a long way too. Those of us who have been tying for a while no doubt will remember Universal Vice.

The ads for fly shops is quite telling in the number of shops advertising in 1980 compared to today. So many of the great names are now among the missing. It is comforting to know that it was possible to find a listing for the North Country Angler in an ad for Cortland Lines. It is even more comforting to know, at least from my perspective, that the NCA is still alive and well.

It is possible that the 1980's represented a "Golden Age" of great fly shops that we may never see again. Some of the great names that appeared in this magazine included: The Artful Angler, Kettle Creek, Angler's Retreat, Lew Childre and Sons, Donegal, Joe's Tackle Shop of Danforth, Maine, Yellow Breeches, The Fly Fishing Shop of Burlington, Vermont, ( this was Farrow Allen's shop who some may remember from the North Country Angler ), The Frustrated Fishermen, The Rangeley Region Shop, then owned by Dick frost and Eddie's Flies of Bangor, Maine. It is sad to note that all of these great shops are all gone now.

Amazingly enough tucked in between all the advertising there were a few articles on fly fishing. At least fly fishing magazines have not changed that much. The names of the authors are

as familiar today as they were then. John Betts, Ed Engle, George Harvey, Lee Wulff and Ernie Schwiebert were the featured writers. Lee and Ernie are, of course, no longer with us.

Despite all the changes in technology and the changes in the industry the sport of fly fishing has not really changed that much. We cling to an old fashioned way of fishing and as much as we embrace new technology we revel in still doing it the hard way. No new fangled spinning reels for us. Today's fly reel may be made of space age metals and have a drag that will stop a freight train, but it better be single action. Lord forbid that one of us is ever found with an electronic fish finder. As much as we love plastic rods we still love wooden landing nets. The use of motor boats is OK, but a wooden drift boat has a whole lot more romance and that is the way we like it.

See you on the river.