

Valley Angler Retro Flies by Bill Thompson

On my last two outings I have been revisiting the past. Having said this, I am sure that there are some who will take this to mean that I am just having another senior moment. Fair enough, I do have my fair share of them these days. What I mean to say is that I have been using gear and tactics of a former era. To begin with I have been fishing an old bamboo fly rod and secondly I have been using old fashioned wet flies.

The rod is a nine foot six weight made by the Edward's Company sometime in the 1930's. No, unfortunately it is not a "quad", but it is a nice old Mt. Carmel made when Eustis was still the head of the company. It is a nine footer which keeps it from being too pricey and I don't feel guilty about fishing it. For someone like me, who is used to fast action graphite rods, it takes a bit getting used to. I have managed to slow down and live with it and it is a lot of fun to fish with.

In keeping with the tradition of bamboo rods I have been fishing a lot of wet flies as well. Wet style flies have been out of vogue for some time now and it is hard to find to shops that stock them. We have always stocked several different patterns and they were all tied by a fellow from New York State. Last fall he called to say that he was giving up tying professionally due to failing eye sight. We had been dreading the day for some time because we knew that we would be the end to stocking these wonderful old flies. Ed Graham was especially known for tying married wing versions like Parmacheene Belle's and Silver Doctors.

If you are old enough to have a copy of "Trout" by Ray Bergman you are no doubt familiar with the wonderful prints of wet fly patterns contained in the book. In recent years fly tiers have been recreating these flies more for the art than as practical fishing flies. Our grandfathers certainly had an eye for color and beauty when it came to fly tying. Today's fly anglers would rather fish a more realistic, if not drab, nymph pattern. Conventional wisdom would have you believe that trout in our grandfather's day were far less sophisticated than today's hatchery raised hybrids. Perhaps wild trout back in the day, especially brook trout, were more eager to take a fly, but I doubt it.

The other evening, while fishing one of the local trout ponds, I wasn't having much luck. I had been fishing the usual nymphs that generally produce well in that pond. I started rummaging around in my fly boxes looking for something different to try when I came across several wet flies tucked in one corner of the box. The one I selected was a Professor. I figured as long as I was using the old rod I might as well try an old fashioned fly as well.

This wouldn't be a fish story if I didn't tell you that within one or two casts I caught the first trout of the night. This fish was so eager to take the fly he made a wake getting to it. A second fish was taken shortly after the first one. After that it was all over for the evening.

This is not the first time that I have used wet flies. For a long time after I first started tying flies wets were the only flies I used. I had a copy of the Orvis fly pattern book, which I was using for reference, and the first section was devoted to wet flies. I reasoned that if they were the first flies in the book they must be the easiest to tie; twisted logic for sure. The thing is that these flies did catch trout for me. Of

course I went on to learn about dry flies and nymphs and somehow like a lot of today's anglers forgot about those old fashioned flies. It may be time to start looking at them as real flies not miniature works of art.

See you on the river.