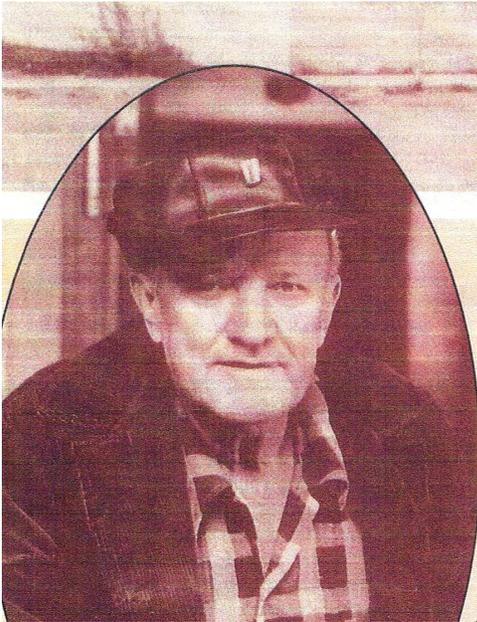


# *Jack & Ann Schweigert*

*~A Michigan Legend~*

By Tom Deschaine

**John C. “Jack” Schweigert (1906-1985)** was born the son of a minister. The family immigrated to America from Germany and first settled in the town of Pigeon, Michigan. As a young man he worked in Saginaw as a foundry foreman for General Motors. While working and living in Saginaw he met and married his wife Ann, in 1929.



Due to health problems, Jack left his foundry job. He and Ann then opened their first tackle shop in Luzerne, Michigan in 1939. It was here that Jack perfected his skills as a river guide and fly tier on the Au Sable River.

In 1949 Mr. Duane McWilliams, from Roscommon presented Jack and Ann with an opportunity to rent part of his barber shop as a fly fishing store. Jack took him up on the deal because he was looking for a location that would provide an abundance of fishing traffic. Within just a short period of time Jack and Ann raised enough money to acquire some property on S. Fifth Street. They lived in a trailer on the property while they completed their combination fly shop and family residence. This would become the permanent location of Jack’s Rod & Fly Shop.

During his 46 years in the fly fishing business Jack became very renowned as both a fly tier and river guide. In the late 50’s and early 60’s he picked up the nickname “Saginaw Jack” by giving weekly fishing reports for a Bay City radio station. He developed a popular fly pattern called the “Doodle Bug.” He also developed a series of ice fishing lures affectionately dubbed “Jack Hooks,” by his customers. People came from everywhere to purchase his hand made, extra strong leaders and his ‘infamous’ fly dope. In Jack’s last will and testament it was stipulated that the formula for making his strong leaders and the formula for the fly dope were to be destroyed.

As a new business man and member of the community, Jack sponsored fishing contests for children and even started the Junior Conservation Club in Roscommon, to help kids learn about the outdoors. In the 50’s he started a conservation organization (prior to the existence of any national organization) called Jack’s Fly Fishing Circle, which boasted of over 2000 fisherman, with members from all over the world. He also, started a service for fly fishermen, notifying them when the “Hex hatch” would first appear on the Au Sable. He was constantly critical of DNR policies and battled against commercial canoes, litterers and poachers.

This “crusty old fisherman, wise-cracking outdoorsman, and master story teller” was often not in the shop; he would be preoccupied with other things like mixing up his fly dope or tying his special leaders outback of the fly shop. Ann was the one usually in the store.

The shop on S. Fifth Street was often cluttered with signs about fisherman, liars, tiers and smokers. His famous “fishing barometer” sign was mounted outside. In 1984 he was planning for retirement and posted a sign stating that only “old customers were allowed to enter” --- business became better than ever!

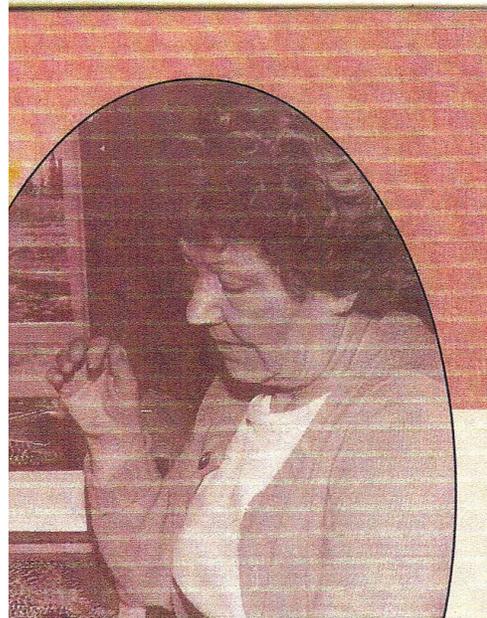
Jack Schweigert was a river guide, fly tier, rod builder, inventor, storyteller and all around sportsman. He died on April 9, 1985 after a long struggle with cancer. The shop was permanently closed a few months later.



**Ann M. Schweigert (1910-2005)** was born Ann Marie Popp, in Saginaw, Michigan. It was here she was raised and here she met and married Jack in 1929. They honeymooned in a tent, on the banks of the Au Sable River.

Ann, under Jack’s tutelage, became the shops fly tier, while Jack guided fishermen on the river. Although Ann did most of the tying, Jack also did some tying during the winter months.

Ann was a modest, well liked woman who did not socialize a lot, but her prowess as a tier went unchallenged. Some even said that she “was the best tier in the United States.” She had regular customers from as far away as Japan. Her flies were highly respected for their durability. In the 70’s Ann was charging as much as \$2.00 for some of her flies, much more than the surrounding shops, but her public gladly paid the price. The patterns she tied were a little fuller than the typical fly dressings of the area. She used only natural materials and scoffed at the idea of using any artificial materials that were rapidly becoming popular in the 1970’s.



Ann has been credited with tying upwards to a million flies during her some 40 years as a tier. She was an innovative tier who always wanted to please her customers. She modified many patterns to fit their needs, tying over 62 variations of the standard Hexagenia patterns alone.

There is a lot of controversy surrounding the patterns that Ann has been given credit for creating. Over the years the sports magazines, newspapers and other publications were more than generous to Ann, attributing her with the creation of many different fly patterns: Hansen's Drake, the Au Sable King, the Herring Drake, the Houghton Lake Special and others. One source even credits her with the creation of 'glider flies' (parachutes) and also claimed that she was the first to tie with deer hair.

The problem is that other people lay claim to some of the same patterns. Hansen's Drake was named after Esbern Hansen of Grayling, Michigan. That much we know. A *very* similar pattern called Borchers Special is claimed by the Borchers family while Ann's family is claiming the Hansen's Drake. Hansen himself was a tier --- did he create it? Credit for the Au Sable King has been given to Frank Cupp, Clem Thompson, and Ann. The Houghton Lake Special is also claimed by Bob Jewel. The Herring Drake looks very much like a Robert's Yellow Drake only ribbed with yellow silk instead of yellow thread. This is not meant to detract from Ann's fly tying ability or expertise. But, to remember that her greatest ability was in the fact that she tied so many fly pattern 'variations'.

I consulted Mr. Jerry Regan, a recognized authority on Michigan flies of the Au Sable and Manistee Rivers. Jerry knew Ann Schweigert personally. His comment to me was; "Ann was an accomplished tier but, there is nothing that makes me believe that she ever created a fly pattern." Ann, herself, was never quoted saying, "I created this fly."

Ann retired from fly tying in 1978, under doctor's orders, because of poor vision. A man by the name of Dan Rivard from the Roscommon area took over the tying in the shop.

When Jack died in April of 1985 Ann decided to auction off the contents of the store. The auction was held on Friday, July 12, 1985. She did not attend. Ann's fly tying bench sold for \$17.50. Soon after, Ann Schweigert moved in with her daughter, Dottie Little in Las Vegas. Ann passed away on May 26, 2005 at the age of 95.

Jack's Rod & Fly Shop stood vacant for a while. It is now occupied by a beauty salon at 418 S. Fifth Street.



*I owe a sincere debt of thanks and gratitude to Julia Borak, the Secretary of the AuSable River Center, in Roscommon, Michigan, where they house a permanent exhibit dedicated to Jack & Ann Schweigert. Also, a very special thanks to Jack's great nephew, Greg Schweigert, who put up with my incessant phone calls requesting information on Jack and Ann. Lastly, to Michigan Out-of-Doors Magazine for permission to reprint the portraits of Jack & Ann.*

***See you on the water.....***



*Tom is a retired biology teacher from Westland, Michigan. He has over 25 year experience on the water and at the bench.*

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