



# Michigan Fly Fishing

~Our Modest Contributions~

by: Tom Deschaine

The Great State of Michigan, historically, has been a major player and contributor to fly fishing for over a century. With over 10,000 lakes and over 36,000 miles of beautiful rivers we've established ourselves as a true fishing mecca. The natural beauty of our blue ribbon trout streams, with romantic Indian names like the Au Sable, the Ontonagon, the Escanaba and the Tahquamenon, have drawn trout fishermen from all over the world.

The romantic literature of Ernest Hemmingway with tales of the "Big Two-Hearted River," and those of John Voelker (Robert Traver) and his secret, "Frenchman's Pond," brought poetic fame, as well as fishing acclaim to the shores of "Michi-gama."

We are a state with many beautiful trout streams, the crown jewel of which is the Au Sable, and home to many famous fly patterns; the Roberts' Yellow Drake, the Griffith's Gnat, the Adams and Rusty's Spinner to name a few. A state where giant trout, salmon and steelhead literally jump into your boats. We are also home to the holy grail of insect hatches, the famous 'Hexagenia'.

Despite all of the hoop-la, the romance and the lore, Michigan has actually made more than its fair share of serious contributions to the sport of fly fishing.

The very first German brown trout (*Salmo fario*) planting in the entire country took place on April 11, 1884 in the Pere Marquette River, in Lake County, Michigan. The fry were raised at the Northville Fish Hatchery. This was the first federal fish hatchery in the nation. It remained in operation until the late 1930s.

As early as 1887 Michigan recognized the importance of conservation efforts by appointing the first salaried game warden in the United States, Mr. William Smith. Early Michigan conservationist such as William Mershon, Rasmus Hanson, George Mason and others fought for size and quantity limits, flies only waters and no kill zones. Michigan has always been in the forefront of trout fishing management.

In 1922 Leonard Halladay, of Mayfield, Michigan, created the Adams fly. The fly was created for Mr. Charles Adams, an attorney from Ohio to be used on the Boardman River, in Traverse City, Michigan. Variations of this fly are carried and used by most fishermen not only in this country but internationally as well.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Earl Madsen a famous Au Sable River guide and Michigan's first commercial tier created the 'Hatching Caddis', the first fly to ever incorporate deer hair tied parallel to the hook shank. Still later, he created the 'Female Gray Stone', the first fly to ever be tied with an egg sac.

In 1931, William A. Brush, a Detroit automotive engineer applied for a patent for a specialized style of a parachute hook to tie his 'Gyrofly' on. Mr. Brush developed this parachute style fly to be used on the Boardman River, in Traverse City, Michigan. The patent for the hook was granted in 1934. The fly was licensed exclusively to William Mills and Son, a large New York tackle dealer.

In the mid 1930s, an avid fisherman and prolific fly tier, Roxey Roach was the first to come up with the idea of tying tapered leaders. Roxey used to camp and fish on the East Branch of the Au Sable River. He owned a Ford dealership in Tawas, Michigan.

In the early 1940s, a Traverse City barber and fly tier by the name of Art Winnie developed the 'Michigan Hopper'. This was the first dry fly to ever incorporate a turkey feather wing. The fly went on to be popularized by Mr. Joe Brooks. Over the next few years the fly underwent several modifications and is now called, 'Joe's Hopper.'

Around 1950 another new fly appeared on the scene. It is known as the 'Au Sable Skunk.' The fly is most commonly credited to Earl Madsen but was most likely created by Jerry Webber who owned the Rainbow Lodge, on the banks of the Au Sable. This is the very first fly to ever have used rubber legs. Today there are literally thousands of fly variations utilizing this material.

In 1959 on the banks of the Au Sable River, sixteen sportsmen were gathered at the cabin of George Griffith. They finalized the formation of the premier organization know as Trout Unlimited, the nations leading river and fisheries conservation organization.

Michigan has always played an important historic role in the development of fly fishing. Our leadership in areas of conservation practices, trout management, and fly tying techniques has lead the nation for over a century. We were here in the past and our presence will be noted in the future.

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



*Although I have been fishing this great state for over 50 years now, I was only introduced to trout fishing some 30 years ago. I am deeply in love with the history of the rivers, the guides, shop owners, tiers, rod builders and boat builders of Michigan. I have a passion for tying and fishing the old dry fly patterns created in our state. Now, in my declining years I am desperately trying to wet my waders in all of our great rivers. I fear many of them will never be known to me.....*

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