

# Jack's Rod & Fly Shop

## By Neil M. Travis

Every fly fisher, with any years under their belt, has visited a number of fly shops. Modern fly shops no longer just contain flies and tackle. Interspersed among the flies, rods and reels are designer clothing, objects d'art, and other items, some only remotely connected with fly fishing. Waders no longer only come in olive drab canvas, vests are available in colors other than tan, and hats, well that's another story in itself. Fly fishing is no longer a bastion of male chauvinism, therefore some shops have entire sections containing angling equipment especially designed for the lady angler.

For those of us old enough to count our years of angling in terms of decades, we remember when fly shops were precisely that and nothing more. Jack's Rod and Fly Shop in Roscommon, Michigan, was specifically that kind of fly shop.

In the '60s, Jack's Rod & Fly Shop was the only fly shop near the south branch of the Au-Sable River in Michigan's lower peninsula. Many local businesses carried a few flies and assorted other fishing items, but Jack's was the place to get it all. Situated just off the main highway on the outskirts of Roscommon, Jack's place was nothing like the modern fly shop. An unassuming building, it housed both the fly shop and the family residence, and except for a sign on the front, you would never guess it was a business.

There were only two people associated with Jack's place: Jack Schweigert and his wife Ann. When you stopped at the shop you rarely found Jack, but you always found Ann.

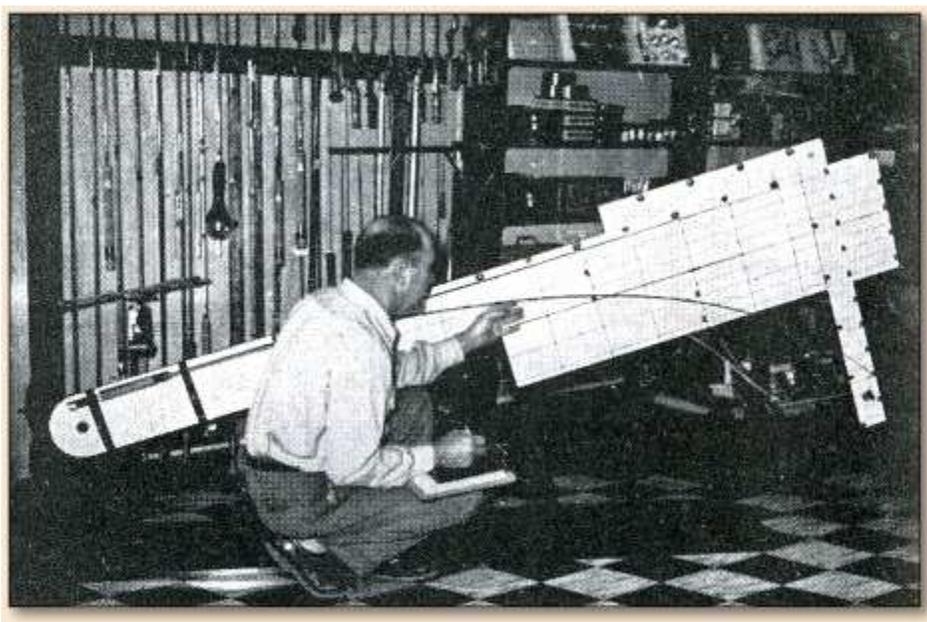
You would not find any "foreign tied flies" at Jack's place. All of the flies were tied by Ann, and she was usually busy tying whenever you happened through the door. There were bins of flies of every description, most of them dry flies, with only a few nymphs, streamers and bucktails. If you could not find exactly what you wanted, Ann would tie it for you.

Jack's fly selection, even by modern fly shop standards, was impressive. The entire back wall of the shop was devoted to the fly section. In addition to all of the standard dry flies, they had a number of "specialty" flies. Parachute flies were called "glider flies," and there were over 20 different "drake" patterns.



They tied flies called "See-Easy" flies. These were dry fly patterns tied with a single up-right wing of Impali hair which made them easier to see in dim light. There were "Buzz Saw" patterns, double hooked flies, tied in streamer, marabou and large squirrel tail patterns.

In addition to flies they sold rods, reels, lines, hand-tied leaders, nets, fly boxes and vests. In those early years most of the rods were bamboo with names like Orvis, Granger and Young. In the later years an occasional fiberglass rod could be found among the bamboo sticks.



*Jack and the unique rod tester to graph proper line weights*

Jack sold a concoction he had cooked up which he simply called "Dry Fly Dope." He claimed it would not discolor the fly, that it dried instantly and that it left no oil rings on the water. It smelled like carbon tetrachloride and kerosene but it did make your dry fly float. It was sold in small, wide mouth bottles which normally leaked out on your vest, imparting a distinctive odor which remained with you from season to season. It guaranteed, that if you fell in while fishing, your vest would serve as a flotation device. Modern flotation vests had nothing on an old cotton vest soaked with Jack's "Dry Fly Dope."

Most of what Jack sold was directly related to fly fishing, but they sold a few lures, and for ice fishing on the local lakes they produced a series of handmade pearl spoons. You could find a box or two of bait fishing hooks, split shot and snelled hooks. I don't believe they sold worms, but I never inquired.

Over the years that I traded there, nothing ever changed much at Jack's place. No trip to northern Michigan was quite complete without a stop at Jack's. However, time and tide wait for no man, and the lure of other waters drew me away from the tannin stained water of the Au Sable.

A few years ago I drove back through the town of Roscommon and down the road to Jack's place. The weathered sign still hung outside the building, but the place was empty. Staring through the dusty window glass I could almost see Ann sitting behind the counter tying just one more fly. The smell of Jack's "Fly Dope" filled my nostrils and for a moment I was young again. Wherever Jack and Ann went, they took with them a piece of angling memorabilia, the likes of which will not likely come again.

~ *Neil M. Travis*

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