

# The Flies of Roxey Roach

By: Eric Austin & Tom Deschaine



Roxey Roach Special

Wilbur "Roxey" Roach (1882-1947) was born and raised in Pennsylvania. As a young man with some boxing experience he picked up the nick name of "Rocky" which eventually evolved into "Roxey." While living in Pennsylvania "Roxey" was a successful business man owning both a bowling alley and pool hall.

At the age of 27 he broke into the major leagues as a baseball player. He played short stop from 1911 to 1915 for the New York Yankees (Highlanders), the Washington Senators and the Buffalo Buffeds/Blues. Roxey's professional career was short lived for two reasons; his age and a reputation for disagreements with baseball management.

A few years after his baseball career ended Roxey decided to move to Michigan, prompted by his deep love of the out-of-doors and his passion for hunting and fishing. He chose the Tawas City area. His original plan was to go into the gasoline business but he wound up owning a Ford dealership. While living in Tawas City he fathered 14 children.

Roxey quickly developed a reputation as an extremely proficient and talented angler. His talents extended to the vise as well. He was an accomplished and prolific fly tyer. He was not a professional guide but his fish camp on the East Branch of the Au Sable River always found room for strangers. He never sold a fly, yet everyone's fly box was full of his patterns.

According to his son Bob, "He was not interested in any trout under 20 inches." To that end, he developed several famous streamer patterns: Roxey's Fox Squirrel Tail and Roxey's Gray Squirrel Tail (also called the Roxey Roach Special). According to Bob, "He used to weight them with old coil wire from Fords." Bob also claims that his dad was the first person to come up with the idea of tapered leaders.



Roxey's Red Squirrel Tail

Roxey's vice created many original flies, most of which have been lost to antiquity, But we do still have the two famous streamer patterns mentioned above.

## **Roxey's Gray Squirrel Tail (Roxey Roach Special)**

- **Tail:** A very small bunch of fibers from a mandarin duck breast feather
- **Ribbing:** Narrow flat gold tinsel
- **Body:** Wound very thin with olive-yellow silk
- **Throat:** A narrow section of a red duck wing feather about one-third as long as the wing, over which is a Plymouth Rock saddle hackle tied on as a collar and then gathered downward. The hackle should be as long as the duck feather and should be sparsely dressed
- **Wing:** A small bunch of gray squirrel tail hair
- **Head:** Black
- **Shoulders:** Each a white duck breast feather, about one-third as long as the wing

## **Roxey's Fox Squirrel Tail**

- **Tail:** A very small bunch of fibers from a mandarin duck breast feather
- **Ribbing:** Narrow silver gold tinsel
- **Body:** Wound very thin with red silk
- **Throat:** A medium brown saddle hackle tied on as a collar and then gathered downward. The hackle is as long as the shoulder and rather sparsely dressed
- **Wing:** A small bunch of fox squirrel tail hair
- **Head:** Black
- **Shoulders:** Each a white duck breast feather, about one-third as long as the wing

**Credits:** *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing* by Joseph D. Bates, Jr.; Flies tied by Eric Austin ~ TD