



Preserving Our Heritage

By Tom Deschaine

Anyone associated with fly fishing sooner or later takes the sport beyond the weekend at the river bank. Eventually our outings start to require research. We begin to turn to guide books and topos. In due time, we start stopping at local fly shops, bars and restaurants in search of pleasant company and hatch and streamside information. As the hobby grows on us we begin to take an interest in related subjects like rod building, fly tying and the history of the waters.

It's this last item, the history, that fascinates me the most. Not only the history of the rivers and the towns, but of the people. The fisherman, the guides, the shop owners and the fly tiers. Michigan fly tiers with names like, Halladay, Roberts, Bugbee, Schwegert, Wakely, Madsen and dozens of others, creating famous Michigan patterns like the Adams, Joe's Hopper, Robert's Yellow Drake and Rusty's Spinner, to mention a few.

Just think. For just a few pennies worth of natural animal furs and feathers we can actually tie an original fly pattern that may be decades old. Some patterns, like the Adams, are so famous that it's most likely found in every fly box, and will never fade in popularity. But many of the other 'vintage' patterns are slowly disappearing from the fly shops and the tier's bench.

Each of these old 'vintage' flies carries with it a history of the river or stream it was tied for, the tier, him or herself and the specific fish or fisherman it was tied for. These old patterns are not only beautiful but are, in most cases, great producers of fish! There are literally *hundreds* of vintage Michigan patterns out there waiting to be tied and fished.

My concern is that they are slowly disappearing from the waters. Older generation tiers and fly shop owners have retired or passed on. Flies tied with natural furs and feathers are rapidly being replaced with synthetic materials. Much of today's fly fishing literature concentrates on what's new and innovative rather than on the traditional tried and true.

Help us to preserve this information so that future generations understand the history and lore of our wonderful sport. There are many fly tying clubs, magazines and internet sites, (like this one) that would be more than happy to receive any information you have on old patterns and tiers. Please share what you know before it's lost to antiquity.

See you on the water.....