



Antique

What to do
with the old fly
rods found in
your attic

MY FRIEND STEW HOAGLAND telephoned the other day and asked, "Do you remember the antique rod dealer who was selling my old bamboo fly rods? Well, I just got a letter and a nice check from him, and he still has a rod or two of mine to sell."

Stew had contacted the dealer to appraise a small collection of fly-fishing gear that dated back to his father's time. The collection also included tackle from his in-laws, as well as a few items of his own. Getting the tackle appraised and into the hands of a dealer took some time and effort, but it was worth it for Stew. He had written to three or four dealers who advertised in fly-fishing magazines, received two responses, and sent his collection to one of those. The rest of the story you know.

[The Internet has opened doors to buyers and sellers all over the world and has revolutionized the way used, collectible, and antique fly-fishing equipment is bought and sold. In the Virtual Flyshop's Marketplace Auction and Classifieds sections you can buy equipment and post your own items for sale—with pictures. Visit the site, www.fly-shop.com/marketplace, for more details and instructions. THE EDITOR.]

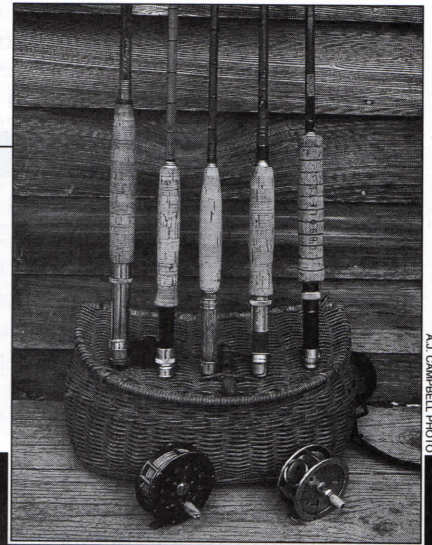
Assessing Hidden Treasures

STEW'S PHONE CALL STARTED me thinking about others who might have old or antique bamboo fly rods, and whose children are only interested in new-fangled equipment. For those anglers and others who might find an old rod hidden in an attic or basement, I offer the following information.

In my capacity as a custom rod builder and editor of *RodCrafters Journal* (444 Schatz Road, Allentown, PA 18104, fax: [610] 398-2580), a small bimonthly magazine, I receive numerous inquiries from custom rod builders who ask, "How much is an old bamboo fly rod worth?" The callers usually provide reasonably good descriptions, although the rods rarely bear any legible identifying marks.

BAMBOO RODS

CANTWELL CLARK

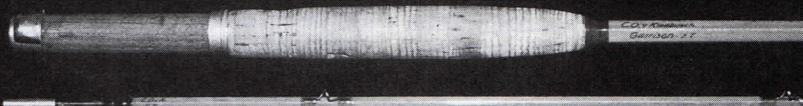


A.J. CAMPBELL PHOTO

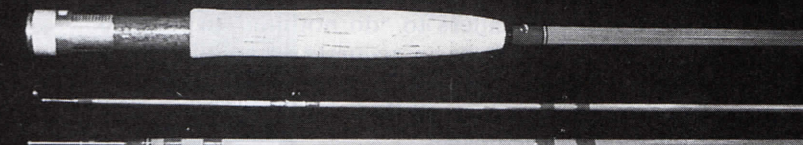
JOHN PRICE/AMERICAN MUSEUM OF FLY FISHING PHOTO



E. F. Payne Rod—circa 1940, \$1,500



Garrison Rod—1936, \$8,000



Gillam Rod—circa 1950, \$6,000–\$7,000

An old bamboo rod found in your attic could be a hidden treasure. The first thing to do is assess its value. Left: (left to right) a Fred E. Thomas Dirigo rod (approximate value: \$400), an older Thomas Dirigo (\$400), a Thomas "Isaak Walton" (\$350, made from Calcutta cane), and a Thomas & Edwards (\$400–\$600). Top inset: (left to right) an E. W. Edwards Mt. Carmel rod (\$225), a Hardy "Deluxe Palacona" (\$300), a Thomas Dirigo (\$300), a Montague Red Wing (\$200), and a South Bend #359 (\$125).

When a rod builder asks this question, the odds are good that a friend or customer has shown him a rod and asked him to assess its value. The request for an appraisal is usually followed by questions about what it would cost to have the rod "fixed up" or "made like new again." Thus, many of the inquiries we receive are for cost estimates and information on how to repair or restore old bamboo rods.

It's easy to understand why the rod owner might think his old rod is a valuable antique. We all dream of finding such undiscovered gems. Surely there must be a great old rod somewhere, maybe in the attic or cellar of some benevolent relative, just waiting to be handed down. It could be a rare Jim Payne rod, or a Pinky Gillum, or maybe a Garrison, or an early Leonard. What a thrill it would be to discover such a classic fly rod! It

our modern graphite rods. By putting owners in touch with reputable appraisers, we help to preserve this heritage. We can also acquire valuable information on how to repair and restore this equipment.

The list of dealers at the end of this article can help you determine a rod's value. You can also search through fishing magazines and the Internet for advertisers who express an interest in old fishing rods. Of course, I leave it to you to select the dealers with whom you do business.

Since it is nearly impossible to provide an accurate appraisal without seeing the tackle, most appraisers will require that you send it to them, and they may charge you a fee (about \$30) in part to cover return delivery with insurance. When sending any rod or other tackle through the mail, pack it carefully in a box or protective tube. Don't rely on the rod's tube for protection. If it is damaged, it will lose value.

Options for Old Rods

WHEN DECIDING WHAT TO DO with an old rod, you have several options, including sell it, fish with it "as is," display it as is, repair it to fishable condition, or restore it authentically for display. If you choose to repair or restore a valuable old rod, make sure the restoration work meets guidelines that ensure the rod will hold its value.

APPROXIMATE PRICES FOR ANTIQUE RODS			
MANUFACTURER	MODEL	CONDITION	PRICE
Leonard	4099 / 8'0" • 2-piece	good	\$850
Hardy Wye	13'6" • 3-piece 2-hander	superb	\$400
Pezon & Michel	6'4" • 2-piece	very good	\$300
Montague Valise	6' • 8-piece	fair	\$100
Shakespeare	10'6" • 3-piece	poor	\$ 50

would be especially thrilling to have a classic rod that was used with loving care by a close relative and to have the heirloom arrive with its history and value identified clearly. No wonder people ask about old rods.

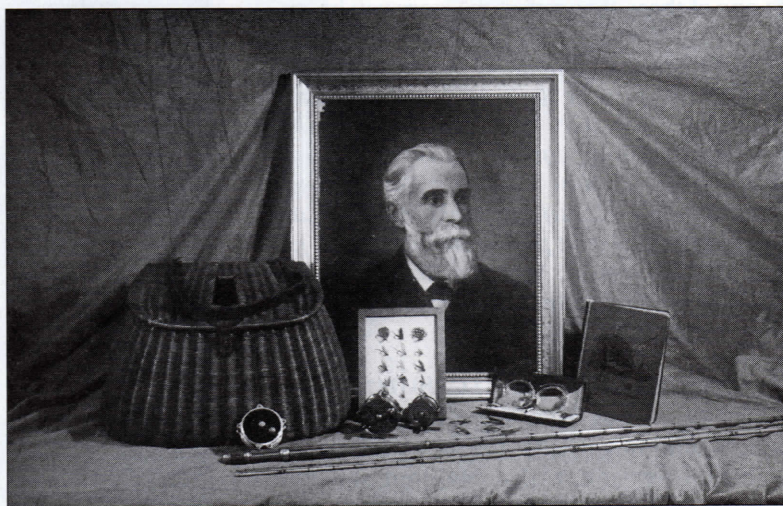
Valuable rods do exist; however, they are getting scarcer. To give you a feeling for the potential value of an old rod, I've listed the approximate prices being asked for some that I took to two appraisers near my home.

Catalogs of old rods list Leonard rods in the \$600 to \$1,300 range, Paynes between \$1,000 and \$4,000, Gillums between \$2,000 and \$7,000, Hardys ranging from \$400 to \$1,300, Paul Youngs at \$700 to \$2,600, several Thomas and Thomas rods between \$700 and \$1,600, Heddens in the \$100 to \$500 range, South Bends down to \$85 to \$130, and various familiar Orvis rods from \$350 to \$1,200.

With potential values as high as these, it is important that you don't do anything to a branded rod that would decrease its value. That's why we usually advise callers to "do nothing" to the rod until the owner receives an accurate appraisal. This is particularly important, because any inappropriate repair or restoration work done on an old rod may destroy its dollar value.

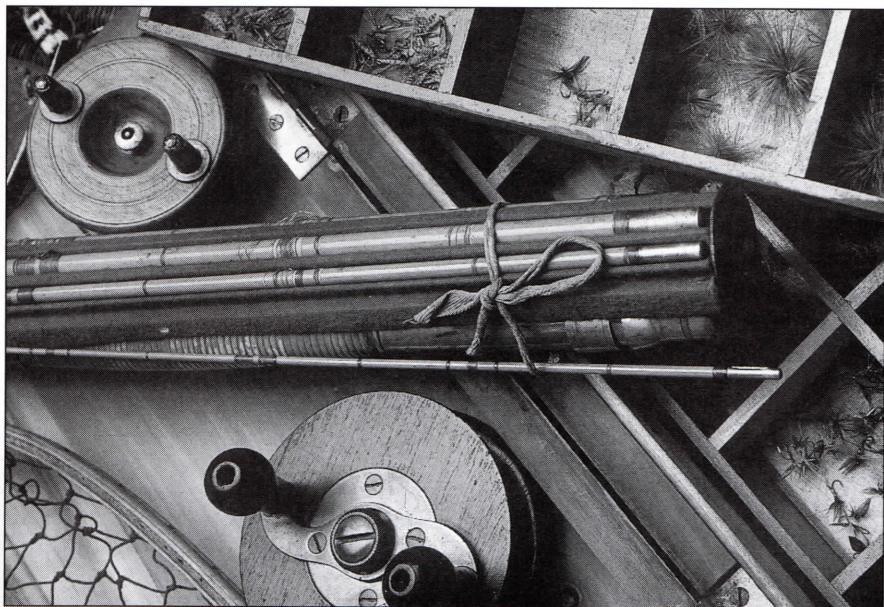
While this is good advice, surely we can be more helpful. After all, we custom rod builders are heirs to the rod-building legacy of the Leonards and Gillums. That's why the conversation with Stew rang a bell with me.

Custom rod builders, and fly fishermen in general, appreciate the importance of the cane forerunners to



A display from the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester, Vermont, shows a portrait of Hiram Leonard with a Leonard rod and some of his other tackle. Visit the museum to view this and other historic fly-fishing tackle.

The first thing to do is establish its value. Only then can you make an intelligent decision about what to do with it. Despite our dreams of instant riches, the reality of the marketplace suggests that our heirloom won't have an astronomical monetary value. The high end of dollar values is \$1,500 to \$4,000, and that's for scarce rods in good original condition. There is, however, a plentiful supply of high-quality, unbranded, fishable bamboo fly rods that were made a generation or two ago and which sell for from \$100 to \$200. But price may not be the most important factor. Sentimental value may govern your decisions. Many people just enjoy



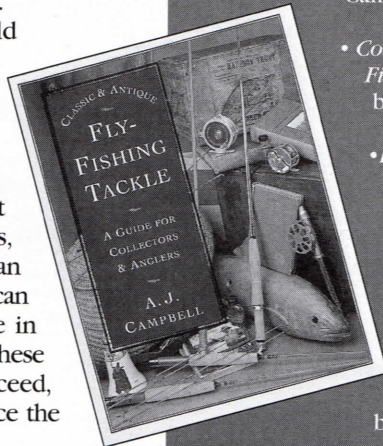
The sentimental value of your heirloom fly-fishing tackle may outweigh its monetary value. Before you sell an antique rod or other old tackle, let a professional dealer appraise it for you.

using or displaying an old rod that was used by a relative or friend.

If you're one of the fortunate ones who finds yourself suddenly owning a rod of real or sentimental value, the earlier caveat on repair or restoration work is extremely important. To protect your heirloom, be as careful in choosing someone to restore your rod as you were in finding someone to assess its value.

The appraiser you choose will probably have valuable opinions on rod restoration. I have no first-hand experience with restorers of classic old bamboo rods and cannot name any, but I have talked with enough appraisers to know that each of them deals with one or more specific restorers in whom he has confidence. Certainly the choice of a restorer is up to you, but the recommendation of a reputable appraiser can be very helpful. At the very least, you should know and have seen the quality and authenticity of the restorer's work.

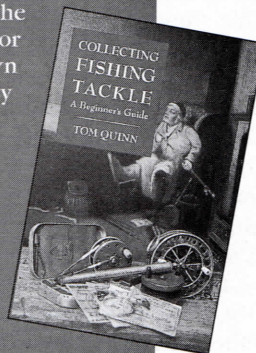
Furthermore, you should know what criteria must be met to qualify a restoration as fully authentic. Thread color, thread fiber, spacing and placement of wrappings, finishes, what to do about missing guides, and other considerations can arise. A reputable appraiser can be of invaluable assistance in protecting your interests in these matters. However you proceed, be sure that you don't reduce the value of the rod.



Books for Collectors

THE FOLLOWING BOOKS can help you determine the value of an old rod, or help you build your own collection of antique fly rods and other tackle.

- *Lawson's Price Guide to Old Fishing Rods*, by George S. Lawson, Jr.
- *Classic and Antique Fly-fishing Tackle*, by A. J. Campbell
- *Collecting Fishing Tackle*, by Tom Quinn
- *Bamboo Rod Restoration Handbook*, by Michael Sinclair
- *Classic Bamboo Rodmakers Past and Present*, by Dick Spurr



With old rods of lesser value, however, your interest is more likely to be in making the rod suitable for fishing. You can fish it as is, or have it repaired to fishable condition. Again, the appraiser can help you determine who to use to make the repairs and how much to spend.

If you find a hidden treasure in those old rods in the dark recesses of a family attic somewhere, I'll cheer for you. I've already searched my own set of family attics, and while I didn't find anything that will make me wealthy, I did find two bass rods of medium antiquity that my father used when I was growing up. Although low in dollar value, they rate highly on the sentiment scale.

Antique Tackle Dealers

THE FOLLOWING DEALERS can provide information on antique bamboo rods and their restoration. There are also many bamboo rod builders throughout the country who can provide information or restoration service. Your local fly shop can also help and should have contact information. Dick Spurr's Internet site, The Classic Angler (www.gorp.com/bamboo.htm), includes prices for antique bamboo rods, historical perspectives, and more.

If you can't find an old bamboo rod and just have to have a classic, you can get one from a custom bamboo rod maker or several major rod

companies, including Orvis, R. L. Winston Rod Company, Thomas & Thomas, Hardy, Sharpes of Aberdeen, and Powell. New bamboo rods typically start at about \$700 and can cost much more.

- Dick Spurr
Centennial Classic Sales
(970) 243-8780
- Martin J. Keane
(413) 229-7988
- Len Codella's
Heritage Sporting Collectibles
(352) 637-5454
- Bob Corsetti
(603) 595-2458
- Kane Klassics
(510) 487-8545
- Fred Moran
(413) 743-4030

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