



Bamboo rods such as a Payne, Garrison or 1900 era Orvis (left to right at the left) are valuable collectables. Old catalogs and magazines (above) are useful to identify antique equipment. Reels from E. Vom Hofe, Mills, F. Vom Hofe and Bradford & Anthony (left to right at bottom) are valued by collectors. Be sure of an item's real value before you buy.





# Collecting Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle

BILL ANDERSON

**A**LMOST EVERYTHING IS collectable, from baseball cards to railroad lanterns. And fly fishing, with its rich history and tradition, is fertile ground for the serious or compulsive collector. Over the years some of our nation's finest craftsmen have plied their skills in the field of rod and reel building. Early split-cane rods and brass reels are examples of the finest craftsmanship of that era.

Collecting fly-fishing tackle in a way resembles fly fishing—some collectors are more serious about it than others. Among the more serious is Jack B. Eschenmann of Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. I first met Eschenmann several years ago as we followed a fast-moving Pennsylvania Fish Commission sampling crew working Big Spring Creek near Newville. Since then he has often let me browse through his extensive collection. He also agreed to share his secrets of collecting tackle for this article.

## Getting Started

JACK ADMITS TO BEING a compulsive collector. As Eschenmann puts it, "Some collect for the love of collecting, and some collect for prestige." Since boyhood he has been a collector of all types of fishing equipment, stamps and coins. As a fly fisherman, he naturally moved into collecting classic fly rods and reels, and he is an avid collector of fishing books.

The most important thing for the beginner is to define his objectives, Jack advises. "Most people specialize in one form or another. But before you start spending your money, you should decide what you want your collection to include. For example: some collectors specialize in rods built by certain builders—Paul Young or Leonard—while others may only collect reels by Hardy or the Vom Hofes. Over the years, your goals or interests may

change, but you should have a plan of where you're going before you start."

Eschenmann describes himself as a general, overall collector of old tackle, interested in the history of fly fishing. His goal is to own at least one rod built by each major builder in the country. "I'd hate to see these beautiful old works lost for future generations. I've been lucky enough to find rods from most builders, so now my needs are pretty specialized. I can be selective. I wanted to trace the history of the sport by the types and quality of the tackle built during each period."

Once you have decided on your goals, Eschenmann recommends reading all the literature you can find on the subject. Books he recommends include *Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, by Martin J. Keane, and *The American Sporting Collector's Handbook*, by Allan Liu. Magazines dedicated to collecting antique and classic fishing tackle are listed at the end of this article. A list of dealers specializing in fly-fishing tackle is also included.

Your research makes you familiar with the types of tackle you will collect. By reviewing the literature you learn what is collectable and what the going price should be, especially important when buying from sources who may not know the value of their collectables. You must know the buy of a lifetime when you spot one, or if the piece is grossly overpriced.

## Finding Collectable Tackle

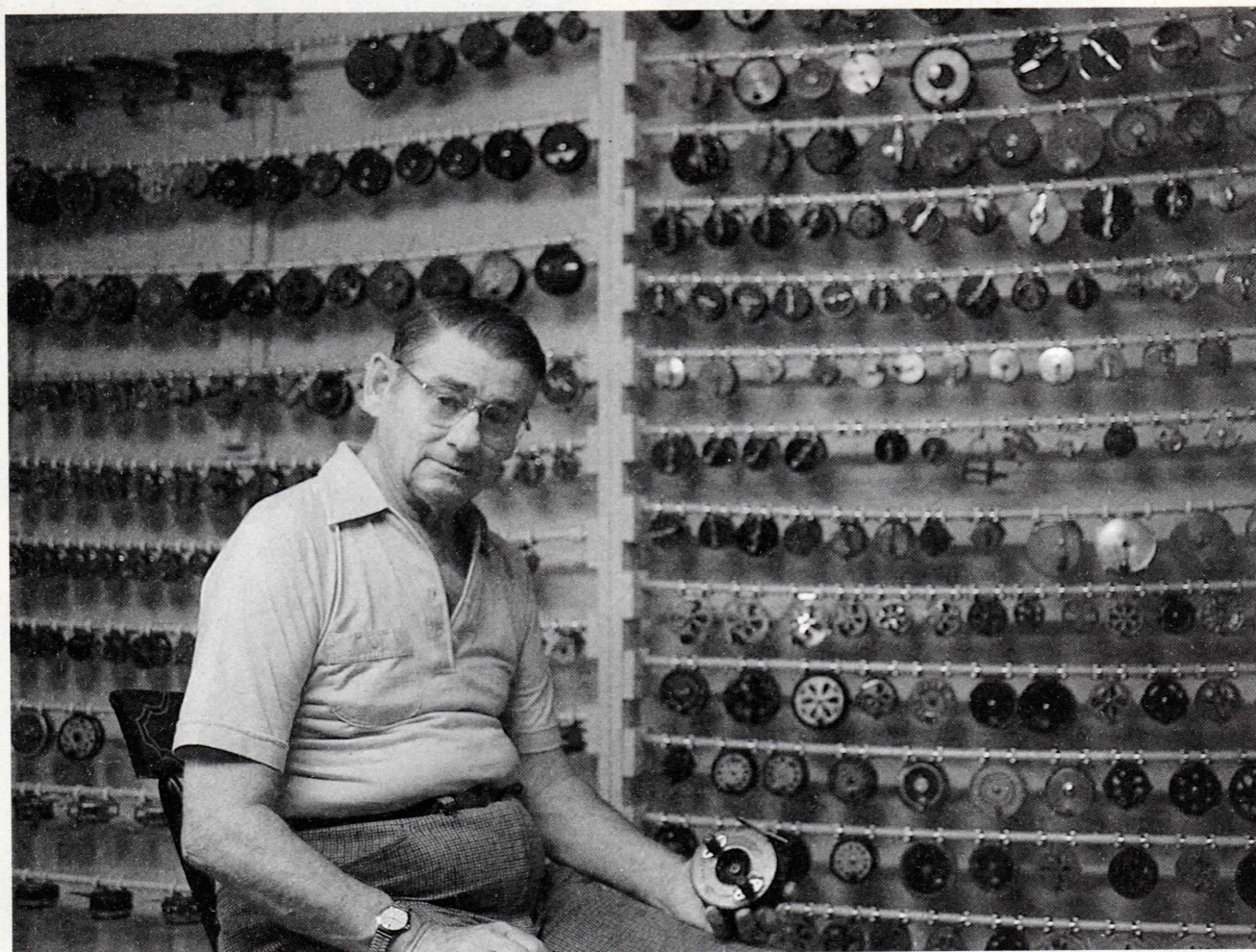
ESCHENMANN SEARCHES OUT goodies at flea markets and yard sales, and he follows up on leads provided by friends. He suggests starting with friends. If they are old enough to have fished during the cane-rod/silk-line era, they may have treasures stashed away in an attic or garage.

Since he retired in 1975 Eschenmann has combined fishing trips with tackle hunts, following secondary roads

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LEFTY KREH PHOTO

instead of the interstates, and nosing through antique shops and flea markets along the way. Experience tells him antique dealers are often good sources: Many times the antique shop owner will know only that a rod or reel is old, but he will have little idea what its value may be.

If you are getting started, or have a limited budget to work with, your best buys will come from individuals rather than dealers. But if you have reached a point where you need a specific piece to round out your collection, you may be forced to turn to a dealer for hard-to-find items. Although you often must pay top dollar to a dealer, there *are* advantages. For one, the dealer usually knows how to value the item and will ask a fair, if not low, price. And he will usually offer a limited return period on a piece bought sight-unseen through the mail, an important stipulation in any mail transaction. Always ask for this return option.

Other sources recommended by Eschenmann include newspapers that cater to antique collectors, the classified ads of fishing magazines and sales lists put out by other collectors. Getting to know other collectors and dealers in your area, may also produce items you want.

### What Affects Values

SOME COLLECTORS and antique dealers assume any old cane rod is valuable. It's tough telling someone who

found grandpa's "heirloom" Heddon in the attic that it's worth just \$75 or \$100.

Factors that affect the desirability and value of an old rod or reel include:

- The builder: who built the rod or reel is a primary collector concern, perhaps the most important in establishing value. Some craftsmen are known for the superb beauty of their work, and a rod by a builder like Phillippe can be worth a king's ransom. Some collectors seek only rods built by these legendary craftsmen. Consequently, the value of such a collection can be measured in tens of thousands of dollars.

- Condition: It's judgement that requires experience, but primary considerations are obvious. Are all the parts there? On a split-cane rod, are the seams tight, or has the glue dried and cracked, leaving gaping seams. Is the rod all original, with original hardware, or has it been repaired, with replacement guides or a shortened tip?

The decision on whether or not to refinish a rod is a tricky one. Eschenmann notes there is disagreement on exactly what effect refinishing has on the value of a classic rod. The only time he recommends refinishing a classic is when it is needed to protect



the rod (if the finish is gone, or the seams are gaping).

Collectors much prefer original rods in excellent condition to refinished rods in excellent condition, although the refinishing job may be first-rate.

And if you *do* choose to have a classic reworked, go for the best craftsman available. Contact an experienced collector or dealer who can put you in touch with a company or builder who can do a good restoration on your make of rod.

When valuing reels, collectors use the same criteria: Who built it, how many were built (the relative scarcity) and the item's overall condition.

## Other Collectables

IN ADDITION TO RODS and reels, other valuable fly-fishing collectables include: snelled flies, silk lines, gut leaders, line driers, landing nets and wicker creels, all symbols of a simpler time when life's pace was slower and craftsmanship was highly esteemed. Even in this age of high technology many fly fishers still prefer the high quality, split-cane rod over a rod built of any other material. Although by today's standards the older equipment—reels, lines, flies and accessories—may seem primitive, for Jack Eschenmann and others the evolution of the tackle used by fly fishermen is a record of fly-fishing history and heritage.

Like all antiques, the value of classic fly-fishing equipment has appreciated greatly over the years. If you own a classic rod, it will only increase in value. Most serious collectors, however, are fishermen more interested in the sport than in acquiring investment property, as opposed to collectors of art or coins, who often buy collectables as an inflation hedge. Collecting antique fly-fishing equipment is a relatively new and fast-growing field. It could provide you both satisfaction and profit.

## Recommended Reading

### Books

*Classic Rods and Rodmakers*, by Martin J. Keane, published by Winchester Press.

*The American Sporting Collector's Handbook*, by Allan J. Liu, published by Winchester Press.

*Fly Reels of the House of Hardy*, by Glenn Stockwell, Adam & Charles Black, London, United Kingdom.

### Magazines

*The American Fly Fisher*, a publication of the American Museum of Fly fishing, Manchester, VT 05254.

*Antique Angler*, P.O. Box K, Stockton, NJ 08559.

*Sporting Classics*, P.O. Box 1017, Highway 521 South, Camden, SC 29020.

## Dealers in Antique Fly-Fishing Tackle

Allan J. Liu, Arden Drive, Amawalk, NY 10501

Bob Lang, 771 Matianuck Avenue, Winsor, CT 06095

Hoagy B. Carmichael, Guard Hill Road, Bedford, NY 10506

Fredrick E. Grafeld, 297 Born Street, Secaucus, NJ 07094

Martin J. Keane, P.O. Box 888, Stockbridge, MA 01262

## Collectable Fly-Fishing Tackle

THE FOLLOWING LIST of fly rods and reels are some of the models most sought after by collectors. For the purposes of this article, they will be listed as classic and collectable. Some collectors may not agree with the classifications some of the rods and reels, and some works by important craftsmen are not included. But this is not intended to be the definitive list on the subject, rather a general guide for the beginning collector.

The dollar values in the average value column are also given as general guidelines only. There are a great many things that affect the value of a rod or reel, and the list is intended to show that certain rods and reels, by certain makers, command a substantial price from the serious collectors.

Fly Rods			
Classics	Average Value	Collectable	Average Value
Phillippe	very rare, very valuable	Winston	\$300-\$500
		Heddon	\$100-\$175
Garrison	\$1200-\$3000	Winchester	\$100-\$250
Payne	\$600-\$1500	Folsom	\$90-\$175
Leonard	\$200-\$1000	South Bend	\$60-\$120
Gillum	\$800-\$1600	Granger	\$90-\$175
Halstead	\$600-\$1200	Shakesphere	\$90-\$175
Hawes	\$600-\$1000	Montague	\$50-\$120
Thomas	\$250-\$800		
Edwards	\$200-\$700		
Orvis	\$150-\$700		
Kosmic	\$1000-\$2000		

Fly Reels			
Classic	Average Value	Collectable	Average Value
Vom Hofe	\$200-\$800	Early Pfluegers	\$20-\$50
Early Orvis	\$300-\$600	Cozzone	\$75-\$150
Early Hardy	\$100-\$1300	Hendryx	\$5-\$50
Kosmic	\$1200	Pennell	\$10-\$50
Chubb	very rare, very valuable	Meiselbach	\$15-\$80
		Winchester	\$40-\$100
Early Gayles	\$800	Shakespeare	\$20-\$75
Follet	\$200-\$600		
Bogdan	\$200-\$600		
Billinghurst	\$400-\$900		

