

the
Bamboo Renaissance

by Don Zahner

Photo by Bill Cheney



THE WINDS HOWL LONG AND HARD off the Gulf of Tonkin, and the annual rainfall, goaded by the monsoons, rises into the several hundreds of inches. Whether the climate tests the coastal cane fields, or the Tonkin cane itself is the test of the winds and rain, we cannot be certain, although we would like to think the latter. Regardless, we do know that some dark alchemy is wrought in this beleaguered soil and that the great shoots of cane, or bamboo, which rise against the wind and the rain and reach toward the sky and an eventual immortality, have drawn the best from man which he has to offer, just as he has drawn the best from it.

For this is the source of the cane — a species called *arundaria amabilis* — from which springs the bamboo fly rod, a vestigial remain from earlier days when craftsmanship was still in flower and men had learned to love that which was natural and living. In fact, it must have been a fly-fishing taxonomist who classified and christened our cane, for if we translate *arundaria amabilis* we find that it means “the lovely reed.”

The lovely reed. How true this is as we hold life in our hands, the rod full of spring and tension and expectant release. And yet how difficult it is to tell someone about this,



EVERETT GARRISON

H. L. LEONARD ROD CO.

THE ORVIS CO.

E. F. PAYNE ROD CO.

WALTON POWELL ROD CO.

ED SISTY ROD CO.

THOMAS & THOMAS ROD CO.

R. L. WINSTON ROD CO.

PAUL H. YOUNG ROD CO.

(For information on Howells and Usan, see following text.)



Section of the workshop of the Thomas & Thomas rod firm. Co-owners Tom Dorsey (left) and Tom Maxwell are examples of new breed of quality cane rod-makers in their 20's, 30's and 40's who are filling the "Tonkin gap" created during the 1950-60 era by lack of cane, the introduction of fiberglass rods and the apparent lack of interest in traditional craftsmanship. Photo by Dick Friz.

someone who cannot or has not himself felt this touch with life and immortality. How difficult it is, in those times when we are rational, to explain it to ourselves!

For, although many men of sensibility have owned them, there is probably nothing sensible about owning a bamboo fly rod. The reasons are various, and to the reasonable man, obvious.

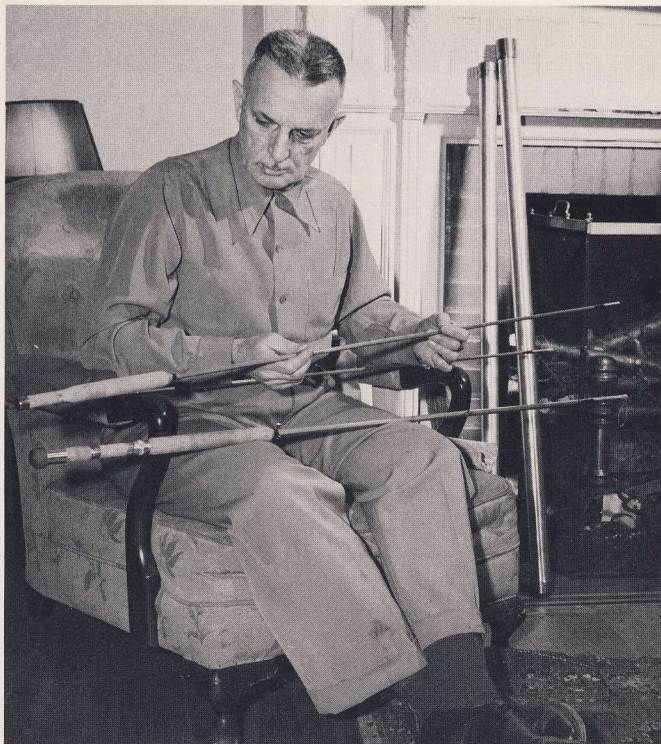
- Bamboo fly rods are difficult to make, and few people can make them well.
- They are very expensive when compared even to first-class modern fiberglass fly rods; or to a flagon of 20-year-old Chivas Regal; or to practically anything else.
- As one would, of course, wish to, cane rods must be treated with a certain care and respect — especially if they have not been treated with impregnating resins.
- Most friends and neighbors, when they find that your rod is made of "bamboo," will look on you as a hardship case and feel sorry that you couldn't afford a real one "like we use down at the lake in summer."
- And finally, it is impossible to own *one* bamboo rod,

just as it is for an alcoholic to take "just one drink." Show us a man who has but one fly rod and we'll show you a man who was just sold four of them and is on his way to buy two more.

If we add to these logical arguments several political and economic facts of life, we may sit in wonderment as we contemplate that which is going on about us today. By the 1950's, we had isolated ourselves from mainland China, and from the cane fields of the Tonkin Gulf. Supplies of selected bamboo began to run out, or run low. At the same time, fiberglass fishing rods were being introduced, first stiff and girder-like, then gradually improving to the point that many top fly rodders are using nothing else today. Add to this the fact that, in the affluence of the last 25 years, few young men were ready or willing to apprentice for many years at \$40 to \$50 per week in

No wonder, then, that fly fishermen were ready to read the handwriting on the wall when faced with two other events of the 1960's. We remember well our first two visits to the hallowed halls of the Wm. Mills & Sons tackle shop in lower Manhattan. The Mills family, which had been operating the

Garrison examines two completed rods. See pages 18-19 for close-up view of Garrison rod.



(Continued from page 17)

own mark of perfection. He warns that today's amateur rod maker is up against serious problems when trying to find the proper fittings, good cane, cork, and high quality tools to do the job. With the scarceness now of the old Super Z ferrule, Garry, at the ripe old age of 80, has begun to turn his own fittings out of solid Everdur bronze to his own specifications. "Ferrules are the biggest problem," Garry laments, "I don't understand why somebody doesn't take the time to build them right."

Building them right has always been Everett Garrison's goal. He has never tried to build rods in quantity, preferring, as an example, not to assemble a rod during the humid months for fear of getting undue moisture locked in the cane during glueing. He has spent the time to learn to build them with the action and precision that few rod makers have ever been able to attain, a fact to which those lucky enough to have had the opportunity to stand in a stream with a Garrison will readily attest. ■

Mr. Carmichael has produced and directed a 45-minute film entitled "The Garrison Rod" for the Angler's Club of New York —featuring the building of a Garrison trophy "from culm to cast." The film is available to interested groups; contact Fly Fisherman Magazine for details.

shop since 1826, had also owned the H. L. Leonard Rod Co. since the early days of the century. We recall too clearly the word given us in the summer of 1964 by resident dean Bill Buckley — “Haven’t you heard? The Leonard factory burned down last week, and the milling machine was destroyed. We don’t know if they’ll ever make rods again.”

It was some five years later, we suppose, that we made our second visit to this out-of-the way shrine of American fly tackle, only to learn that aging Jim Payne, the last functioning second-generation blood-line leading back to the spawning of the modern split-cane rod, had sold his plant to a large tackle firm and was dying of cancer. The Leonard shop, with struggling gasps, had rebuilt, but this later news became a symbol for many of the ultimate passing of the bamboo rod.

A CENTURY HAD PASSED since Hiram L. Leonard, in his original shop in Bangor, Maine, had put together the first commercially successful six-segmented bamboo fly rod. In his busy shop, apprentices soon became masters, and such artisans as Ed Payne, Fred Thomas, W. L. Edwards and Hawes had left the Leonard fountainhead by the early 1890’s to begin their own shops and make rods under their own names. For nearly a century, these names and those of their sons or apprentices remained in the forefront of American rod-building until forces seemingly beyond human control seemed to toll the death knell of the bamboo fly rod.

Apparently, however, the bells did not toll for some. Several ripening artisans remained at their benches, rooting for cane wherever they could find it, paying the high prices from the British and Continental sources, and continued by the momentum of habit and years to make rods. But, inexplicably, younger men in their 20’s and 30’s, most of them with college educations and high potential in any number of remunerative and acceptable pursuits, began their quiet protest marches against the dying of the bamboo rod and the pride in authorship that it represented in the plastic world around them.

This was an event spread over just a few years, an event such as the journalist could understandably not notice but which the historian, with his perspective, could record. Today, as we approach the mid-1970’s, we find that there are some dozen American companies now making high-quality cane rods on a regular basis. Many other small tackle shops wrap and fit out their own rods made from finished blanks, and a number of British and European firms export cane rods to this country — although this last category will be the purview of another article in an ensuing issue.

Thus, in America in 1974, we estimate that some 10 to 12 thousand cane fly rods will be manufactured — *and* sold, almost a redundancy, with the back-orders which most makers face.

This news will hardly create a stir in the well-established and flourishing fiberglass rod market, but it does indicate that these American rod-makers have struck a sensitive nerve which defies all laws, both logic and economic, and have found a small market of men who are once again reaching out for the brass ring as the merry-go-round of this troubled century returns full-cycle to earlier, and perhaps, more comfortable days. For these are the anglers who have found something which can’t be totally built-in to the tool of their arcane pursuits — that limber, that lively, that “lovely reed,” the split-cane fly rod.

In the next pages, we will find what manner of men would do this strange thing at such a strange time, each of them oddments of a sort who have somehow bested the tides of the sordest of times.

IN BEGINNING THIS SURVEY of the American rod-making scene there is only one place to start . . . where it *all* began . . . with the H. L. Leonard Rod Company. We’re certain that Gary Howells, the California rod maker, who would ordinarily come first in our alphabetical listing, would elect to defer to the senior cane-splitters from Central Valley, New York.

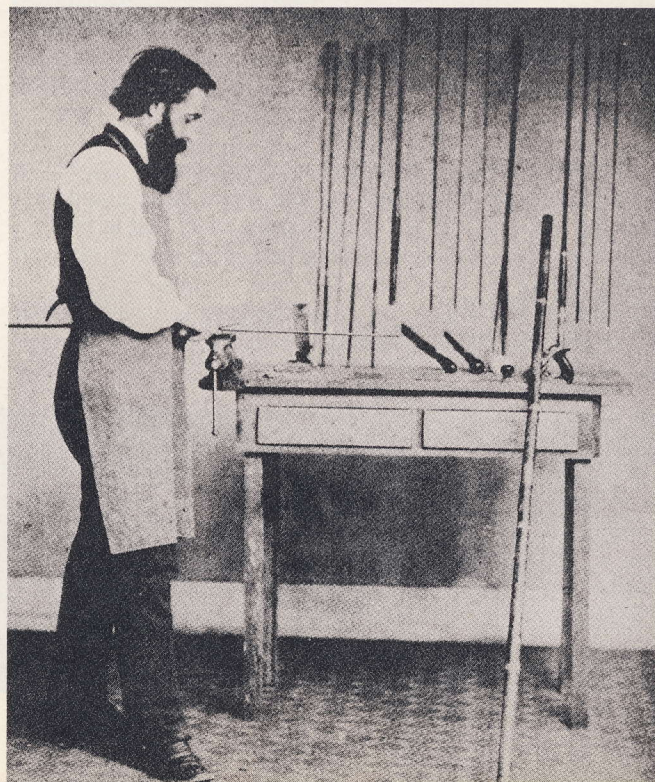
The H. L. Leonard Rod Co. Central Valley, N.Y. 10917

Since we have already touched rather heavily on the history of the H. L. Leonard Rod Co. of Central Valley, N.Y., we’ll not dwell in the past. Actually, no matter how old or reputable the name, today’s bamboo artisans are no more secure than last week’s production, be it two rods or 200. Even today, not many citizens will shell out money by the century note to put a down-payment on nostalgia. No one knows this better than Arthur C. Mills III — happily known as “Hap” — and his associate, Ted Simroe. Although Leonard was recently purchased by a New Jersey firm, the University Society, with principals who are fly fishermen and old friends of Hap’s father, Hap and Ted still have full responsibility for the rod-making activities which remain the backbone of the 105-year-old firm.

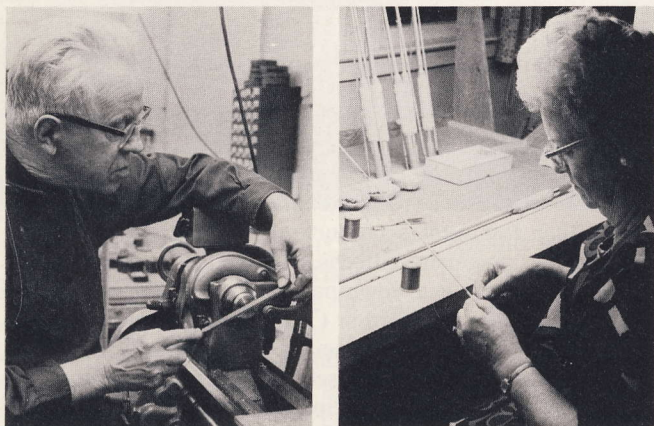
Surrounded as he is by the ghosts of Hiram Leonard, Ed Payne, Fred Thomas, W. L. Edwards and the others who trod the boards of the shop, Hap Mills is mindful of his heritage but not bogged down by it. Like the venerable Satchel Paige, Hap believes the adage, “Don’t look back — someone might be gaining on you!”

Of course, there are those anglers who feel that no acceptable rods can be made by anyone not eligible for Social Security payments, and Hap and Ted Simroe have several decades ahead of them before they can look forward to such luxury. However, Hap began working in the Leonard shop in the summer of 1957 under the tutelage of Harold Reynolds,

Hiram L. Leonard, the fountainhead of modern cane rod-making, photographed at his bench in the late 19th century. Courtesy of the H. L. Leonard Rod Co.



their master rod maker until his retirement in 1965. Harold learned the craft from his father, George Reynolds, who tutored in the pre-World War I days under Reuben Leonard, the son of Hiram, who, if it sounds as if we're falling into Biblical prose, begat the whole bit. So, maintaining the flavor of the Testaments, we can see that there has been a perpetual "laying on of hands" at Leonard since 1870.



Leonard ferrule-maker Tom Bailey, who returned recently after 20 years with the Payne Rod Co. Bailey, had been with Leonard for 20 years prior in the 1930's and 40's. Ron Kusse photo.

Ethel Frauson, an employee of the Leonard firm for 52 years, wraps a line guide on one of the company's fly rods.



Leonard rod-maker Ted Simroe, a former college professor but now a key man in the Leonard rod operation. Photo by Ron Kusse.

But Hap is even more deeply involved, for he assisted in rebuilding the milling machine and other basic equipment after the fire, and it is also a little known fact that in his first apprentice years Hap spent at least half of his time working at a neighboring rod shop down the road — under a fellow by the name of Jim Payne, for whom he later served as a pall-bearers. So Hap Mills did not exactly learn his rod-making in the gutter.

The basic line of Leonard rods has not changed significantly in the past 20 years — dry- and wet-fly actions, two- and three-piece, the dainty Baby Catskills and one- and two-handed salmon rods, all these covering a price range from \$290-485 (two tips). An important addition, and a nice way of acquiring a Leonard without losing a wife, are the recently developed Leonard Duracane rods in the \$135-190 range.

Today, with the business and expanding mail-order segment of Leonard in the hands of the new owners, Hap Mills and Ted Simroe can concentrate totally on making rods — not like Hiram used to make, but like Hap and Ted, with a century of know-how behind them and modern techniques and processes at their fingertips, can make them in 1974.

The G. H. Howells Rod Company

655-33rd St.
Richmond, California 94804

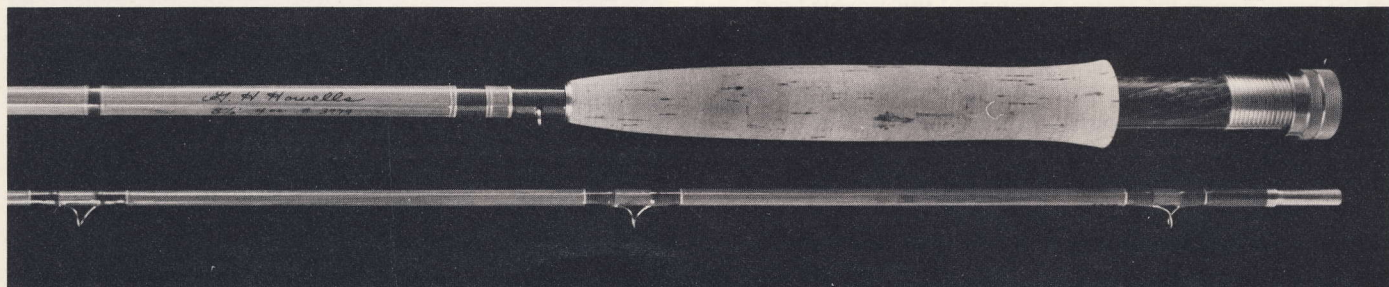
The G. H. Howells Rod Company in Richmond, California, is probably the most recent of the cane rod fabricators, but the name of Gary Howells, Proprietor, is certainly not. Gary began making rods in 1947 while a high-school student, followed by several years of part-time bench privileges under Lew Stoner, the late and highly respected rod maker who owned the Winston Rod Co. (see below) in San Francisco. When Stoner passed on in 1957, Gary walked into the shop the next day and Doug Merrick, who had bought the Winston firm from Stoner a few years before and knew Gary's potential as a craftsman, hired him on the spot — "at \$40 a week," Gary adds wistfully.

He began on the "ground-floor" but exacting assignments of grading cane, matching nodes, splitting culms, sanding and other work basic to making fine fly rods. Doug Merrick and Gary Howells got along well together and the apprentice quickly developed under this master craftsman — to the point that, in 1969, Gary left to start his own rod shop. As Doug Merrick told us recently, shaking his head and staring off into the distance — "I think he just wanted to fish more."

Since Gary is a compulsive angler, and a student of angling lore and literature with one of the country's finest angling libraries, there was probably some truth in this, but he had also developed his pride of craftsmanship that he wanted to make his own rod with his own name — to his own specifications. He wanted a rod with "the grace and appearance of a Payne, but with the lightness and casting ability of our Western fly rods."

Gary feels that he has achieved this. He makes all the rods himself, using a fluted-hollow butt (inherited from his Winston days), heat-tempered cane of a warm brown tone, and

A typical Howells rod, illustrated here because an example of his rod was not available for the color spread on pp. 18-19.





Gary Howells examines a finished rod in his Richmond, California, shop. Gary was with the Winston rod firm in San Francisco for nearly 15 years before beginning his own business.

ferrules hand-made and polished to a tolerance of 1/10,000th of an inch — “they pop like vintage champagne,” comments Howells. He uses skeleton cork reel seats on his smaller rods and upward-locking reel seats with African zebra wood on his larger models (he makes 37 models in all; two-tip rods range from \$195-210). Wrappings are a dark brown, and guides are trimmed in pale yellow. (We are giving these details here because we were unable to obtain a Howells rod in time for the pp. 18-19 color photo in this issue.)

The Orvis Company

Manchester Village, Vermont 05254

For 35 years, Orvis rods have been synonymous with one man, despite the fact that the Vermont firm has developed many top rod craftsmen to produce and maintain the volume and quality of the estimated 5,000(?) rods it builds each year. Wes Jordan came to the then reorganized Charles F. Orvis Co. in the late 1930's, already with a substantial career behind him. He had built up his own reputation as a rod maker with the Cross Rod Co., beginning in 1919, and when it was sold to the South Bend Bait Company, Wes went along as manager of the entire rod-making division.

Meanwhile, the 80-year-old Orvis firm, a dynamic force in the tackle business since 1856, had dwindled considerably as the Orvis family spread its interests into other areas. D. C. “Duckie” Corkran, a successful Philadelphia businessman who summered in the Manchester area, bought the business from the Orvis family and began to build it to its former stature. Wes Jordan, working with Corkran, obtained a license from the Bakelite Corporation to impregnate cane rods with that firm's newly developed resin, and eventually obtained a patent on the process. Before, impregnation had been carried out before cementing the cane segments — and the cement would not hold. Wes found that impregnation could be accomplished *after* joining the segments of bamboo, and the modern impregnated Orvis rod was born.

Besides being a rod craftsman of the first order, Jordan was able to bring some production methods to cane rod building without sacrificing quality. The acquisition of the firm nearly ten years ago by angler and marketing expert Leigh Perkins and the ensuing expansion of its already burgeoning Orvis mail-order business was not allowed to affect the quality



Wes Jordan, recently retired as director of the Orvis rod-making operation for 35 years, was able to mix successfully quantity production and quality construction, making Orvis a leader in both areas. Jordan also developed the impregnation process for cane rods. Courtesy the Orvis Co.

standards of their rods. Orvis has never felt that the fact that they produce more bamboo fly rods than other companies should be any measure of their standing in the angling community. Orvis has its rod production limits, and also has the back-orders to prove it.

Until last year, the rod factory still operated on three floors of the original Orvis building on Union Street just off of the main road through Manchester Village. Now the shop has moved into more spacious and efficient headquarters in a new one-story building behind the Orvis retail store. The firm's new catalog shows the relatively modern new quarters of the rod-building facility, but Wes Jordan's friends wonder what he thinks of the uncluttered spaciousness when he wanders in occasionally from his recent retirement. However, he does know that he trained his craftsmen well, and if they don't mind all this new nonsense, he's not too worried.

The Orvis line of Battenkill, Madison and specialty rods range in price from \$105-260, and there is one for every cast you will ever make to a fish. Their top model is, not surprisingly, the “Wes Jordan.”

The Phillipson Rod Co. of Denver was recently purchased by the 3M Co. from owner Bill Phillipson, who is presently setting up a new fiberglass rod operation for the Minnesota firm in nearby New Richmond, Wis. After this, Bill, who was long-time manager of the famous Goodwin Granger rod company, will return to making top-quality bamboo rods in Denver — about 700 per year in the \$200-250 price bracket.





It's a tough act to follow, but Dave Decker is doing a fine job of keeping the famous name alive by making Payne rods at the firm's long-time shop in Highland Mills, N.Y.

The E. F. Payne Rod Company
Highland Mills, N. Y. 10930

It was just over five years ago, on June 12, 1970, that Jim Payne, one of the major forces in the continued survival of the bamboo fly rod, died after a long illness. There were quick rumors that the Payne Rod Co. was no more, and of course, Jim, the last active second-generation delegate from the original convention of 1870 at the first Leonard plant in Bangor, Maine, was gone.

But a stewardship was in force quickly after Payne's death. Actually, Jim Payne had sold his firm to the South Bend-Gladding complex early in the 1960's, and shortly after Payne's passing had authorized young rod-maker Dave Decker and long-time Leonard and later Payne master rod-maker Tom Bailey to continue to make Payne rods, using the cane, blanks, equipment, techniques and processes belonging to Payne — "so long as they maintained the former quality."

For a time, the firm operated as the Decker Rod Co., still at the same Highland Mills location, "sole licensee and makers of the Payne Rod," as the agreement read. Later, Tom Bailey returned to Leonard and Dave Decker continued to make the Payne Rods, more recently returning to the name of the Payne Rod Co.

"We admit that Jim Payne was a tough act to follow," says Decker, "but we're still on the same stage with the same routine. We're putting out several hundred rods a year, plus making repairs on old ones, and we're having a hard time supplying the demand. In fact," he added, "we can't keep up, but we have mixed feelings about that. Jim Payne had the pickiest clientele in the business, and the fact that we can't meet the demand is the only thing besides our own pride in the rods we make that tells us we're keeping the faith."

Recent customers say that the current rods of the Payne Rod Co. look, feel and cast like the Payne of old, and they bear the familiar trade mark on the butt cap. Others point out that South Bend-Gladding, even though they are not actively concentrating on the fly fishing market today, have a name and a vested interest to protect, and that they wouldn't allow sub-standard rods to tarnish either.

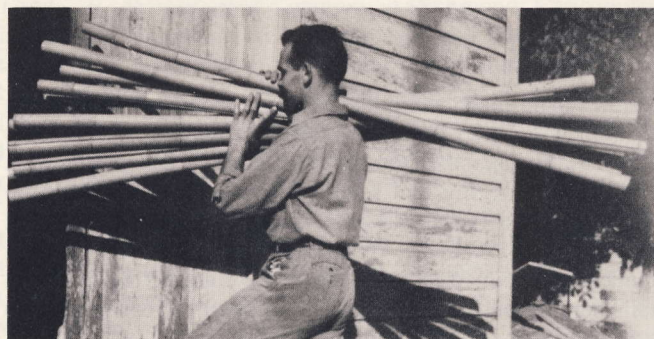
Regardless, Dave Decker and the current Payne Rod Co. have more than a thousand rods behind them, and hopefully, many thousands ahead of them. Now, in his late 20's, Decker is the youngest operator of a bamboo rod firm in the country. He is certainly a symbol of the interest in pride of craftsmanship being exhibited increasingly by a very savvy younger generation.

The Powell Rod Corporation

848 West 9th St.
Chico, Calif. 95926

In the years after World War I, an angler-turned-rod-maker named Ed Powell began to make quite a reputation from his little shop in Marysville, California. He had made his first rod in 1912 — from cane obtained from a local Chinaman who was growing Tonkin bamboo in his backyard! As his skills developed, he designed a unique "combination" fly rod with two tips *and* two butts of varying lengths and actions. The Powell semi-hollow-built rods made a big splash, both in angling and tournament casting circles on the West Coast, even building a national reputation for him despite his isolation from the "Eastern angling establishment" deans and doyens.

In the 1920's, he took on a seven-year-old apprentice, his son Walton, who today, with cane now available again, works at preserving the tradition of the Powell rod. Walton

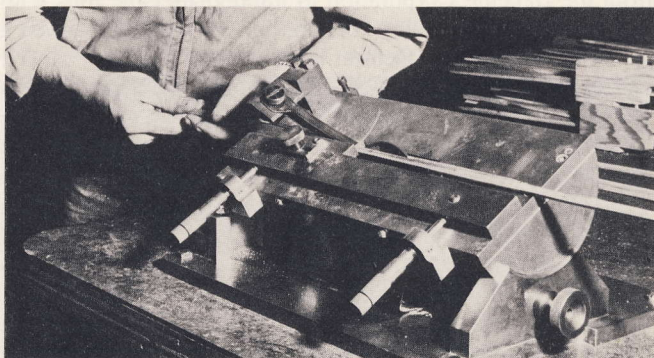


Young Walton Powell carrying cane culms into the Powell shop, circa 1935. Walt later graduated to more responsible activities.



Ed Powell at work in his shop shortly before his death.

Special saw for cutting cane designed by Ed and Walton Powell. Photo by Elwing Studios.



Powell, still in his 50's but with nearly a half century of rod-making behind him, much of it at the side of his father, is his own man with his own ideas. College-educated and an assistant professor of recreation at California State University in between rods and fishing trips, teaches courses in casting, tying and fishing flies. Like most other bamboo rod-crafters, he has strong ideas about what's good and bad and right and wrong in rod-making, as well as other facets of the angling arts, but unlike most of them he's quite verbal about his ideas and ready to spar over them at the slightest excuse. And, say Powell customers, he literally puts these ideas into action — the action of his rods.

Walt impregnates his rods with an exclusive gum and oil formula which gives the rods a dark, rich cast. His prize rod, based on the two-butt, two-tip combination rod his father created, is the Walton Powell "Golden Signature Companion," which delivers for \$400 and a 3-to-9-month cooling-off period. His standard "Signature" rods, with two tips, are priced at \$200.

Ed Powell died nearly 20 years ago at the fine old age of 80-plus, and his rods are now collector's items, ranking with early Paynes, Leonards, Thomases and Gillums. Walton Powell is one of the few sons carrying on the traditions of their fathers in today's cane rod field. If we can accept the idea that fathers hope to improve the breed, Walt Powell certainly has a leg up.

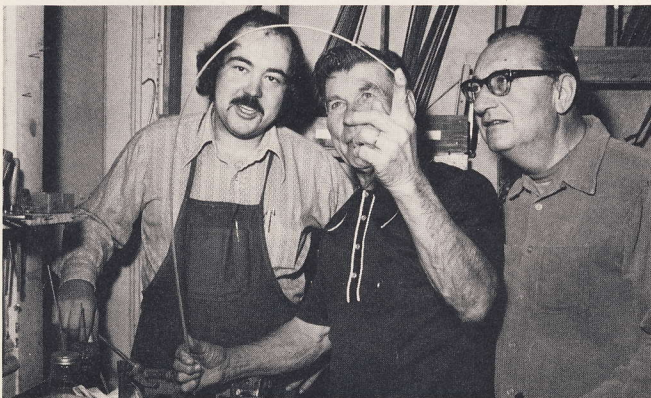
Ed Sisty Rod Company

P.O. Box 12176 (Alcott Station)
Denver, Colorado 80212

The Sisty Rod Co. may sound like a recent addition to the world of Tonkin bamboo, but this is hardly the case. Ed Sisty, a Colorado angler already known to many readers for his innovative developments in flat-bodied nymphs and unique fly-tying courses, has joined with one of the fine old names in rod-making, Fred DeBell, to form an expanded version of DeBell's long-time Denver-based rod operation.

Sisty has been a long-time angler and amateur rod designer, having come into the latter through his experience in building archery bows. Fred DeBell has long been known as a first-rate rod-maker, and started building his own machinery for rod-making in 1937; he had earlier built rods from pre-assembled blanks, but was not satisfied with the actions — "too willowy or too stiff," he said. His custom-built equipment now includes machinery for splitting cane, removing the outside nodes, another for removing the inside nodes, a complex tapering machine to cover all of his rod designs, and an equal-tension wrapping machine.

Associate John Cramer, Fred DeBell and Ed Sisty test the flex in a rod-tip blank before adding fittings. FFM photo.



SPRING SPECIAL / 1974



Ed Sisty and Fred DeBell checking over completed rods in retail shop before shipment. FFM photo.

Fred DeBell's name would have been even better known than it is if it weren't for his location — if Colorado could be considered off the beaten track for anglers — and for the fact that a good percentage of his work has been in repair and rebuilding of rods for his own customers and for other larger rod companies in the Denver area.

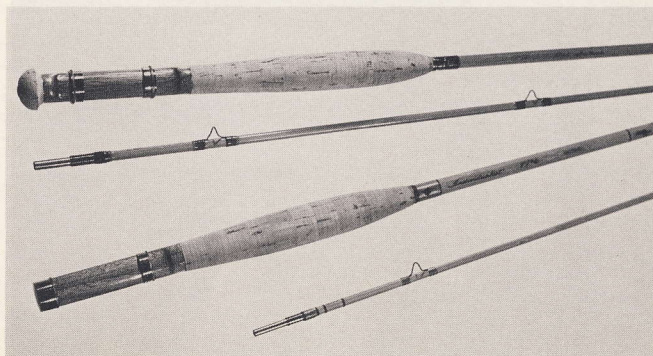
Now, with the addition of Ed Sisty, and his background in rod design, angling and business development, the Sisty/DeBell combine should make its operation a force in the cane market. New catalogs for this recently reorganized firm are now available, and prices for the impregnated bamboo "Autographed" series of rods are in the \$125-135 range — including an extra tip.

The Thomas & Thomas Co.

4 Fiske Avenue
Greenfield, Mass. 01301

If the rod firm of Thomas & Thomas has a problem — besides keeping up with the orders — we don't know about them . . . unless it's one of image. The name itself immediately conjures the thought of old Fred Thomas, one of the first Leonard spin-offs at Bangor, Maine, and his son Leon, both fine old rod-makers of the dim past — no relation, but the firm comes by its name quite honestly. Thomas Dorsey and Thomas Maxwell were close high school friends when they were first taught

Two current examples of Thomas & Thomas rods of different design than their 1970 rod shown in color section.



rod-making 20 years ago by the latter Tom's grandfather, himself an accomplished rod-maker.

Also, the shop's address may seem fuzzily familiar to old Tonkin hands, for it was until recently the headquarters of Sewell Dunton & Son, long-time rod-maker and the former superintendent of the old Montague Rod Co. The two Toms bought out Dunton last year and moved their operation from College Park, Maryland, to Greenfield, Mass. Both had been philosophy professors but had been making rods professionally for 15 years as a part-time business before they began their full-time venture about five years ago.

The two Toms pursue their art with the militant fervor of religious crusaders, knowing deep inside that they have somehow been singularly chosen to propagate the faith, keep the flame and preserve the realm of *arundinaria amabilis*. In fact, they seem to have been able, perhaps through their good works, to implant this same gem-like flame in the hearts of many of their customers. A description of one of their rods several years ago in FFM as being wrapped in burgundy windings immediately brought a vehement letter from a thoroughly satisfied T&T customer who argued that the hue was actually a claret or something and was ready to do battle over the vintage!

Regardless, they are now armed to the teeth for any forays they may wish to make for, in acquiring the additional equipment from Sewell Dunton, they also fell heir to one of the largest supplies of aged and selected cane in the country. T&T makes some 40 models of their "Classic" line of rods (\$165-180 with two tips), plus an unlimited range of lengths and action in their custom "Individualist" line, many made to customer specifications (\$200 and up); they just completed

Thomas Dorsey adjusts milling machine in the Thomas & Thomas Greenfield, Mass., shop. Photo by Dick Friz.



Thomas and Thomas partner Tom Maxwell puts finishing touches on a nearly completed fly rod. Dick Friz photo.

5-foot and 7-foot one-piece custom rods. Until recently, all of their rods were impregnated with a polymer resin, giving a warm, light-brownish tone, but they are now making both the impregnated rods and the traditional varnished rods in the a light natural-tone finish — and in the same actions. Tom Dorsey calls the "old fishwife's tale" that impregnation affects rod action a myth — "anglers were comparing rods of different actions and from different companies," he explains, adding that "many anglers have compared our impregnated and natural rods of the same action and found them exactly the same."

With a ten-year supply of vintage Tonkin cane and a good 30 years supply of age ahead of them, the Thomas & Thomas Co. can look ahead to a long and fruitful future before the principals become eligible for Social Security — and perhaps for the immortality that doesn't come until rod-makers leave.

Uslan Rod Manufacturing Corporation

18679 West Dixie Highway
North Miami Beach, Fla. 33160

Nearly 75 years ago, an amateur rod-maker and mathematician, Dr. Robert W. Crompton, contributed, among many theories and designs, the theory and formula for a five-strip bamboo fly rod. His work was based on the premise that a five-strip rod would be stronger than a standard six-strip because there would be no continuous glue-line through the diameter of the rod, only five radial glue-lines. This, he theorized, would transfer the stress of the constant flexing of the rod from the glue to the bamboo itself, strengthening the rod and increasing the casting distance with no weight increase.

Half a century later, rod-making Nathaniel Uslan took him up on it, and his rods became very popular among discriminating anglers. Uslan was an excellent cane artist in his own right, and the unique pentagonal profile, with its suggestion of more power, attracted much attention. However, Uslan was one of the first victims of the shortage of cane during the "Tonkin crunch" of the 50's and in 1958 he moved from Spring Valley, N.Y., to the Miami area where he and his son Jimmy have been building glass rods and turning out high-quality nickel-silver ferrules for other rod makers.

Now, with Tonkin cane again available, Nat Uslan will resume making his five-strip bamboo fly rods again, and expects to produce between 400 and 500 each year — primarily two-piece rods from 7- through 8½ feet, plus a limited number of salmon rods. All rods will be waterproof, adds Uslan, with his original resin-impregnation finish.

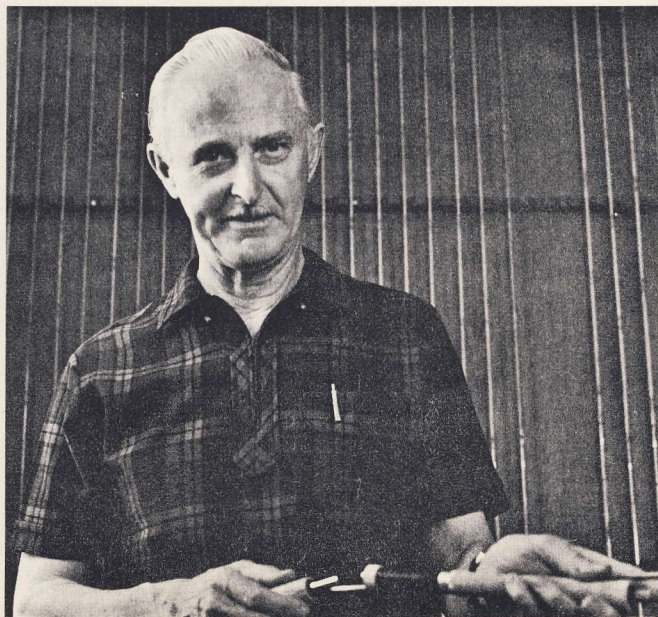
We're certain the return of Uslan to the rod-making scene will be of considerable interest to many anglers, old and new.

R. L. Winston Rod Co.
475 Third St.
San Francisco, Calif. 94107

For nearly half a century, the name of Winston has been synonymous on the West Coast with top quality fly rods, and thanks to Doug Merrick, the same holds true today. In fact, their reputation has spread over the years to the Midwest and East — many anglers have said that, if Winston had been located in the East, the magic names of Payne and Leonard would long ago have been made a trio by the addition of Winston. Actually, this could be said of a number of rod-makers who didn't have long and heavy distribution in the Eastern states where the writers and publishers did their fishing and their writing.

Winston was started early in this century by two partners, Robert Winther and Lew Stoner — hence the name, a contraction of the two owners' names. Winther later left the firm and was replaced by Red Loskot, but in 1953 Loskot left and Doug Merrick joined Winston and trained under the highly respected Stoner. In 1957, Stoner died, and Doug took over the business. Recently, Doug sold the business to two well known Western anglers, Tom Morgan and Sid Eliason, Jr., but he's still at the bench every day and carrying the tradition of quality that has been the Winston hallmark from the be-

Winston's Doug Merrick, dean of West Coast rod artisans.



Cross-section of a Winston rod, showing fluting of walls.

ginning. The late and feisty Peter Schwab, prominent West Coast angler and caster, begrudgingly allowed as how Winston was as good as any place around, and spent much of his time fighting over new rod designs at the old Harrison Street shop with Stoner — out of which evolved the light "Leetle Feller" rods which Winston still makes.

Winston — under Stoner — developed their distinctive "fluted-hollow" rod design, in which the apex of the triangle formed by each segment of their cane rods is milled away in a circular cut. This forms the pattern — in cross-section — of a six-petaled flower, but not for esthetic reasons. The technique both lightens the rod, by removal of extra internal bamboo, and strengthens it through realignment of the forces of compression within the rod when it is flexed. Just after Stoner developed the fluted-hollow design, Winston rods immediately took all honors in West Coast distance-casting tournament events.

Winston's cane rods sell for \$165, or \$225 with extra tip. Like most quality rod-makers, Winston is often back-ordered. Because, we suppose, "Winstons cast good, like a fly rod should!"

The Paul H. Young Company
14039 Peninsula Drive
Traverse City, Michigan 49684

Paul Young began making rods 60 years ago in Duluth, Minn., but later moved to the Detroit area. During this time, Young developed his own technique for heat-treating cane which gave the rods a look and feel which anglers felt were distinctively that of a Young rod.

Paul Young's reputation was at its height in 1960 when he died, but he had long before trained his son Jack to build rods — "he was born with bamboo in his blood," he once said. Young's East Coast evangelist, Arnold Gingrich, who seems to own a substantial portion of both Youngs' output over the years, states in the chapter on Young rods in his *Well-Tempered Angler* that there is no difference between the two generations of Young rods. Gingrich also continued his eulogy to the Youngs in his new book, *The Joys of Trout*.

Young is probably most famous for his "Midge" rods — 6'3" and 1-¾ ounces — which created quite a vogue in the 1950's and which continues today. However, the firm makes rods up to 9'6" and 7-¼ ounces, but most customers feel that the Young name was made in its shorter rods, the Driggs, the Perfectionist and the Martha Marie (named after the senior Young's wife).

Jack Young tells us that he completed this year's limited supply of rods in January, but indicated that he is taking orders again. Interested readers should send for his complete catalog, which covers many details of the firm's design and construction techniques. Rod prices range from \$140 to \$185 (one tip); \$190 to \$235 with two tips. ■