



# William B. Mershon Chapter of Trout Unlimited

Conservation, preservation, and restoration of Michigan's cold-water resources.

## Fishing letters

### *Diary of an 1898 Fisherman*

by Art Neumann

**H**i Fellow Angler:

I usually feel the first trouting urge along about January thaw time. I get by that trying period by cleaning my reels, steaming my flies and rewriting my fishing log. But I can bank on a relapse along about March 1<sup>st</sup> when the first warm winds blow out of the south and take with them what remains of winter's garb. But this second attack calls for more strenuous countermeasures like buying a new rod or dipping suckers or hooking "grass pike" off the back lawn. But when there's no January thaw and the south winds arrive a month late, like this year, there's no advance release of the automatically mounting fishing pressure and it builds up inside you until you swear you can't wait another minute. So saturated is your mind with fishing there's little room for rational thinking. It's just an endless dream of mirror lakes and sparkling streams, of monster fish and limit catches. Your mind wanders, not to fishing the way it is today, but to fishing fifty years ago, to fishing the way Dr. F. G. Richardson knew it, back at the turn of the century. A case in point would be Dr. Richardson's trip to the Au Sable for the first week of the season, 1898. Thanks to Walt Russell of Mt. Pleasant, here is the story of that trip taken from Dr. Richardson's own fishing diary. It begins:

#### *Season of 1898*

Trip to Au Sable: Went to Saginaw Friday morning April 29<sup>th</sup>. From there in company with C. M. Norris went to Grayling, getting there about noon or a little after. Started down the river in canoe between two and three p.m., arriving at Wakely's before supper, paddling the distance (25 miles) in 3 hours 18 minutes, last 9 miles in 18 minutes.

May 1, 1898: Went up to island and started in not very early. Took 54 before dinner. After dinner started in lower down and fished down to the house taking 63, making in all for May 1<sup>st</sup> - 117.

May 2<sup>nd</sup>: Started in again at little island with Tom for partner. Took 53 before dinner. After dinner went up to near big club house and fished down to Wakely's. Never saw it rain harder or trout bite faster. Took 66 and 3 after supper. In all - 122.

May 3<sup>rd</sup>: Cold, cloudy and wind blowing a gale. Didn't expect to do much. Went above in forenoon and came in at 11 a.m., it was cold, catching 35. After dinner went below for first time, not going out of sight of house. Got 66 - average large. 6 after supper making in all - 107.

May 4<sup>th</sup>: Went below this a.m. Wind strong and trout bit poorly. Got only 27. For a diversion this p.m. went in search of a small creek 2 miles to the north. Got a dozen more. 7 more after supper, making for May 4<sup>th</sup> - 46.

May 5<sup>th</sup>: Went above. Did not bite much to noon. Got 41. While eating dinner, trout jumped very lively in front of the house. After dinner started in front of house and fished down. Got 51. Average very large. Got 14 after supper. In all May 5<sup>th</sup> - 107. Norris got today - 129.

May 6<sup>th</sup>: Got 101 below.

May 7<sup>th</sup>: Went below taking dinner with us getting 69.

May 8<sup>th</sup>: In forenoon got 36, below house. Went below again in afternoon, got enough to make for May 8<sup>th</sup> – 89.

May 9<sup>th</sup>: Dressed and packed trout in forenoon. In afternoon I went below and got 54. Norris got 78 above. In the 8 days I took, exclusively with fly – 812 trout. For the first 3 or 4 days, while the water was high and somewhat discolored, the Cahill was the great killing fly. But later, when the water went down and sun came out and water cleared, the Slagle was by far the best fly. The Mounted Coachman, Grizzly King Gray Hackle, with orange and yellow body, were used with some success.

Now, while I'm sure none of us expects to surpass Dr. Richardson's record, I'd bet that, by today's standards, we'll have a real good opening this year. I spoke to Mrs. Frank Bond at Penrod's Cabins, Grayling, over a week ago and she advised me that the snow was gone except for a patch here and there and that while the river was above normal, it was not flooding. All we need is continued normal weather and a little warm rain to make it perfect. If it works out that way, we'll have cloudy enough water for good bait fishing and spinning, high enough water for good streamer manipulation and warm enough water to produce dry fly hatches. If I were bait fishing, I'd stick strictly to crawlers, not worms. Worms are too small for early season. In spinning, something lively and suited to fast water like the One-O-Six, the Wob-L-Rite and the Andy Reekers, should be tops. In streamers, the Roxy Special series, Royal Coachman Bucktail, Lampkin's Dace and Black Ghost will be the work horses. Just be sure they're weighted. And try, by casting cross stream on a slack line, to make them run downstream. It's the most effective trick I know. If we're fortunate enough to have a dry fly hatch, it will be one of the three flies – the Stone, the Iron Dun or the Borchers's Drake. Regardless, it will be middle-of-the-day fishing with the hatch starting about 10:30 a.m. and lasting until about 3 p.m. And don't forget nymphs, especially large, weighted patterns like Teboe's Muskrat, the Gray Creeper and the Dark Mossback. Fish them deep in the pools, with a sinking line.

That about winds it up except to wish you all the best of luck and a most enjoyable weekend wherever you go. One final admonition – mind your sporting manners, practice the golden rule and, finally, try limiting your kill instead of killing your limit. ♦