

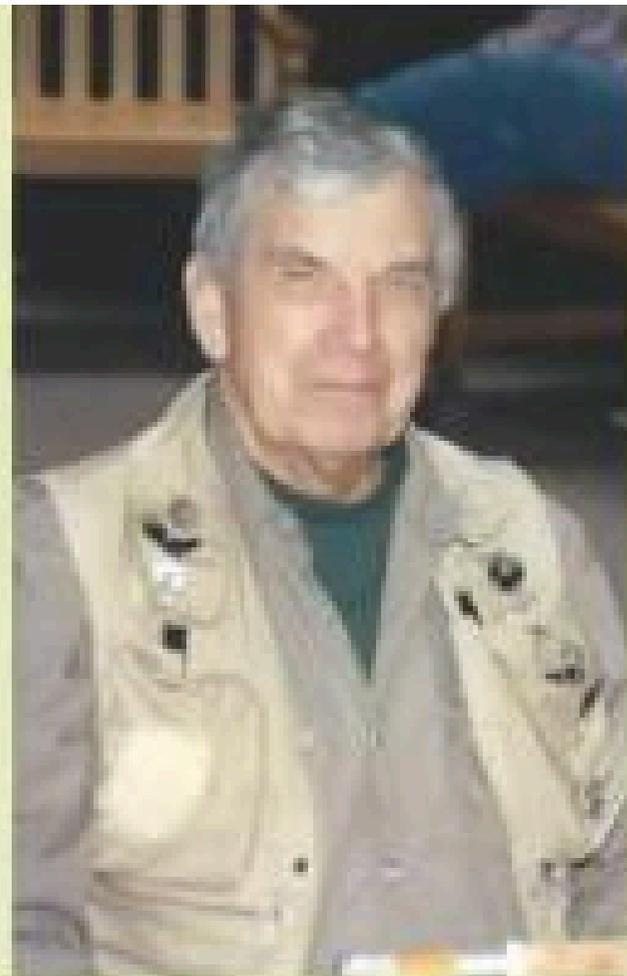
The Early History
of
KVCTU

Bob Jackson

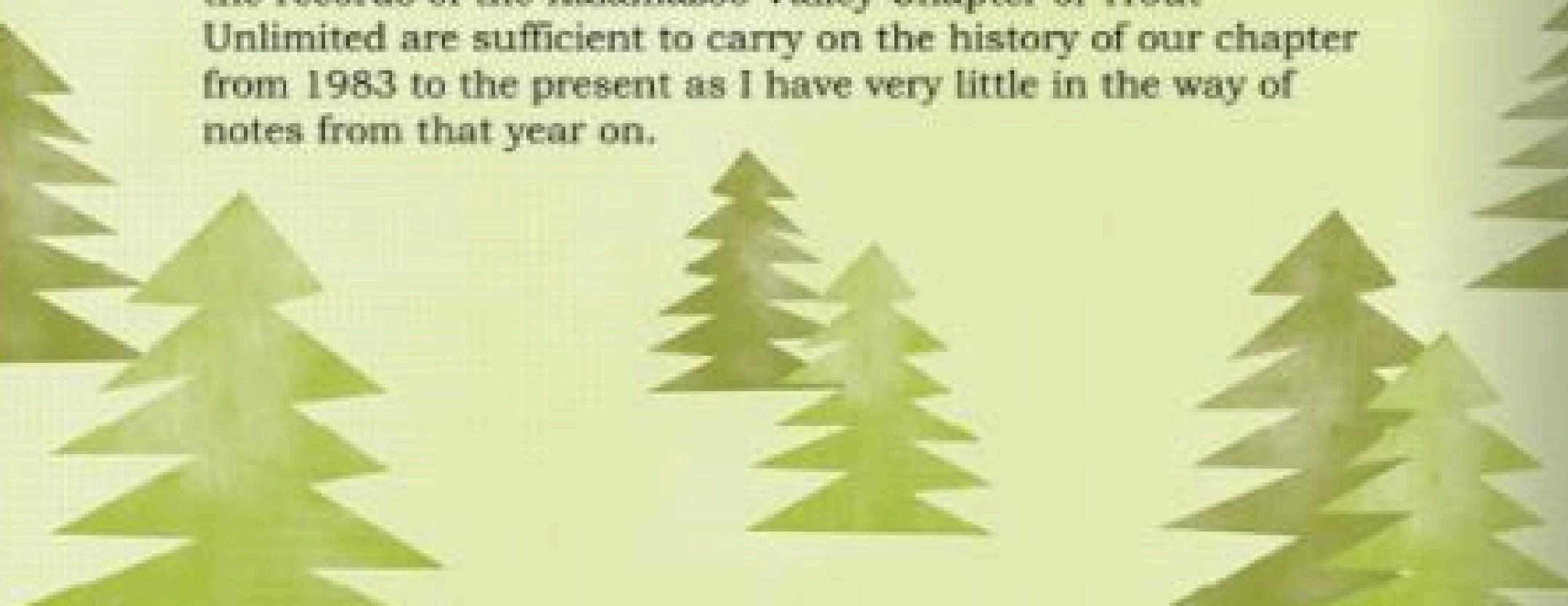
The Early History
of
KVCTU

Bob Jackson

In honor of KVCTU's 40th anniversary, long time member Bob Jackson compiled this history of our chapter's beginning.



This material covers the period from the origin of our chapter in 1965 to 1983 and is abstracted from personal appointment books and my recollections of the events at the time. I trust the records of the Kalamazoo Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited are sufficient to carry on the history of our chapter from 1983 to the present as I have very little in the way of notes from that year on.



I first heard of Trout Unlimited in 1962 or early in 1963 when Ed Sutton joined the Scientific Anglers Club of Kalamazoo. This organization was a fly tying and trout fishing club whose activities were more like the social aspects of our TU chapter. There were many members who were more interested in the fellowship of the group of anglers than in being activists in the field of conservation and ecology. There were certainly matters of conservation to be considered in those days, but not as urgent as they became a few years later.



We did attempt to raise funds to support charitable activities. This was done through an annual fish fry which was held once a year in February. This popular event usually netted about \$150 to \$200 through profits from the dinner and raffles. Many door prizes were solicited from the local sporting goods stores and a few members. The programs or activities that these funds promoted were the purchase of fly tying tools and materials for instruction at Percy Jones Veterans Hospital in Battle Creek. Later a similar service was done for Goodwill Industries here in Kalamazoo. We also sponsored teachers from the Kalamazoo County area to attend a summer school at Higgins Lake put on by the DNR. This program was designed to give natural science teachers the latest information in conservation techniques, which could be imparted as a segment of their curriculum.



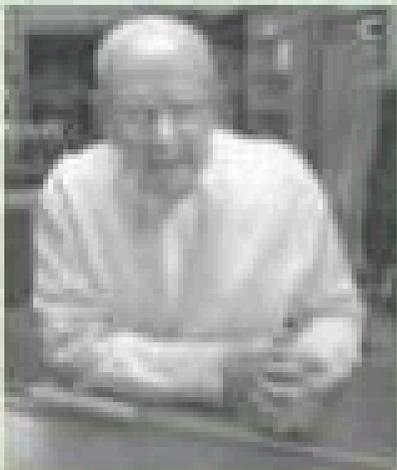
Ed Sutton joined the Scientific Anglers Club in 1963, not only to join in our fellowship but also to recruit some of us to form the nucleus of a local chapter of Trout Unlimited. This effort was somewhat hampered by the fact that this club was primarily a fly tying/social organization. There weren't many of us that were interested in becoming the activists the membership in TU would demand. Ed was already a member of TU National but there was no local chapter. He had fished the Au Sable River frequently and knew Art Neumann, George Griffith, and others who were the founding fathers of Trout Unlimited. At this time Ed worked at Brown Paper Company and through his contacts he prevailed and a date was set for an organizational meeting on February 17, 1965. It is possible this date could have been on March 17. This is not likely, as the annual election of officers was held in February for many years and this month appears to have been the anniversary of the founding of our chapter.



Ed Sutton



George Griffith



Art Neumann

At that first meeting, Ed Sutton was elected President, John Cook, Vice-President, and Jerry Clough, Secretary/Treasurer. A Board of Directors was chosen which included Floyd Eberly, Al Scott, Dr. Bill Burdick, Bob Jackson and probably Jim Warren, George Disborough and Howard "Red" Welch. We adopted a constitution based on forms obtained from Trout Unlimited National and required by them. These papers were submitted to national headquarters in order to receive our charter. I am not sure of the date that we received that charter, but it was probably some time in the spring or early summer of 1965. My notes indicate that in 1965 there were meetings held April 22, May 19, October 20 and November 17. Upon consulting Art Neumann of Saginaw, MI, who was Executive Secretary of TU National at the time, I find that he appeared before our membership on probably both April 22 and May 19 of 1965. On his first visit Art gave a talk on the aims and goals of Trout Unlimited and the type of activist organization we should become. On his other visit Art gave a presentation on steps involved in creating a bamboo rod, starting with the seasoned culms of Tonkin Cane.



Bob Hosick, Bob Jackson, Dan Crockett, Al Scott, Chuck Maribby

Art was a very knowledgeable fisherman and rod builder and ran a small fly fishing tackle business as a sideline from his home in Saginaw. The Wanigas Rod Company was well known to many as a fine source of quality rods, flies, lines, reels, etc. Art had taken a leave of absence from his job at Eaton Manufacturing Company to serve as Executive Secretary of TU from October 1, 1962 to November 1, 1965. He continued as acting or part time Executive Secretary until September 10 1966. My notes from 1966 further indicate that KVCTU held a board meeting on January 12, and regular meetings on January 19, March 16 and April 6. It was at this last meeting it was announced that Jack Cook would be leaving the Kalamazoo area, and I was elected to the office of Vice-President. It was immediately that one of my duties as Vice-President was to make arrangements for speakers and programs for our regular meetings. At this time the notice for our meetings was carried out in a rather cumbersome manner. The National Headquarters, in Denver, had a roster of our membership. We had to notify them of a meeting date and they, in turn, would send cards to our members. They insisted on this procedure as they wanted to keep track of all of our chapter meetings. We undoubtedly had to include the nature of the program so that it could be included on the card they sent out. These programs were often films put out by tackle manufacturers, i.e. makers of rods, reels, and lines.



Click to edit text

Because our treasury had no money to speak of, we invited speakers who required no honorarium. These were representatives of the DNR and other state agencies who had some administrative responsibility for providing clean water and a stable environment for our fisheries. For the showing of films we borrowed a 16mm projector from the Upjohn Company. They kindly lent us projection equipment whenever we needed it. Now seldom seen, the 16mm format was the most common medium of film communication at the time. Sales representatives from the tackle companies kept us up to date on tackle innovations, and their expenses were paid for by their employers.



Image from a
Lee Wolff Film



Consistent with our low budget programs was the April 5, 1966 meeting held at the Wolf Lake Hatchery. Here we viewed the facilities for raising steelhead smolts to size for planting in our local (Southwest Michigan) rivers.

Although steelhead were not an inland fisheries species, they nevertheless fell within the area of interest of Trout Unlimited. We still were interested in the impact the steelhead had on non-migratory trout species. As an example of an area related to the DNR, we invited the chairman of the Water Resources Commission, Carlos Fedderoff to appear before our chapter. I recall that this was a very disappointing but clarifying meeting. It appeared that this commission was nothing but a licensing agency for water pollution. They didn't seem to care whether the rivers were clean or not. All they were concerned about was that the streams were not totally polluted and that they ran downstream to Lake Michigan, Huron, Superior, etc.



Click to edit text



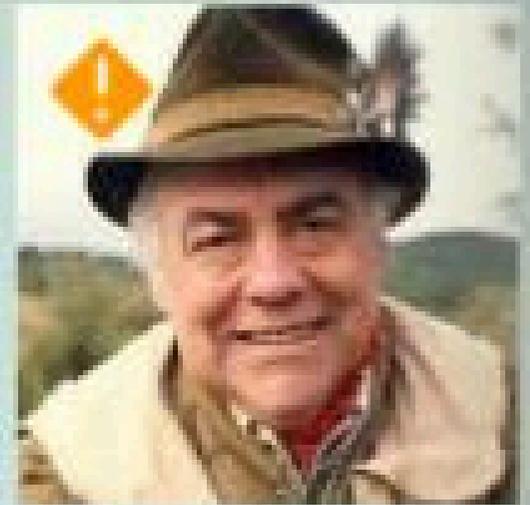
On November 15, 1966 we had a meeting at Stafford's Restaurant in which Wayne Tody was the speaker. Tody was the head of the Fisheries Division for the DNR. He was accompanied by Howard Tanner (Then the head of the Fisheries Department at Michigan State University). Tanner and Tody had been instrumental in setting up the salmon fisheries program in the Great Lakes. At this meeting there was considerable disagreement expressed by the membership to the DNR's philosophy in fisheries management in respect to the salmon snagging problem. Tody was strictly harvest oriented and didn't appear to give a damn about ethics or sportsmanship. He thought that snagging was a perfectly legitimate method of harvesting these fish as long as the bag limits were not exceeded. He didn't seem to care that other species that accompanied the salmon on their spawning runs were also being illegally taken by this activity. This was the beginning of my long standing disagreement with the DNR on many aspects of fisheries management. It sounded to me that Tody and his associates were afraid that if they clamped down on these violations of fishing ethics by these snagging "yahoos", the Michigan Tourist Council and their merchants of irresponsible behavior would be snapping at their heels.



Dr Howard Tanner

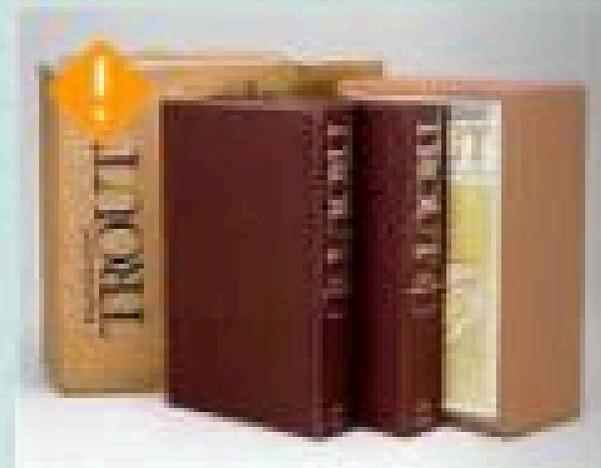


The first "big name" speaker we had from the collection of well published gurus was in 1967. We invited Ernest Schwiebert. We only had a meager \$150 in the treasury and could not have been able to pay for a speaker of that stature if it had not been for Dan Crockett and Floyd Eberly who generously provided the funds for the honorarium and travel expenses. At this time, this sum was a third or less of what name speakers would receive today. In those early years if we had \$300 in the treasury at the beginning of the program year, September, we thought that we were well off. With the programs and activities that we sponsor today, that balance would be a disaster. We would be "stone broke."



Ernest Schwiebert

Up to this time our meetings were held on Wednesday nights. In 1968 my logs indicate that we had meetings on January 24, February 21, March 20 and April 24. By then we had recruited several merchants from the Kalamazoo area to our membership. Among those who showed considerable interest in our chapter were Jim Shumaker, a jeweler, and Stan Weber, who was a partner in Lew Hubbard's mens furnishings store.



Because of the conflict with the business hours of many merchants who were active in the chapter, the meeting night was changed to Thursday nights and usually on the third Thursday as they still remain today.



In 1967, Ed Sutton, our chapter President, changed his place of employment from Brown Paper Co. to Shakespeare Company. This change was much more conducive to Ed's activities on behalf of Trout Unlimited, as he was engaged in promoting their lines of fishing tackle and attended many sport fishing shows. This advantage gave us more access to interesting guest speakers and provided more opportunities for membership recruitment. However, Ed's duties with the Shakespeare Co. also brought about many changes for us. In 1969 Ed was transferred to become the Sales Director for the northeast part of the United States. As Vice President I succeeded Ed as President of the chapter. I believe that this transfer took place in the spring of 1969. The following February I was elected President for a term of my own.

[Click to edit text](#)

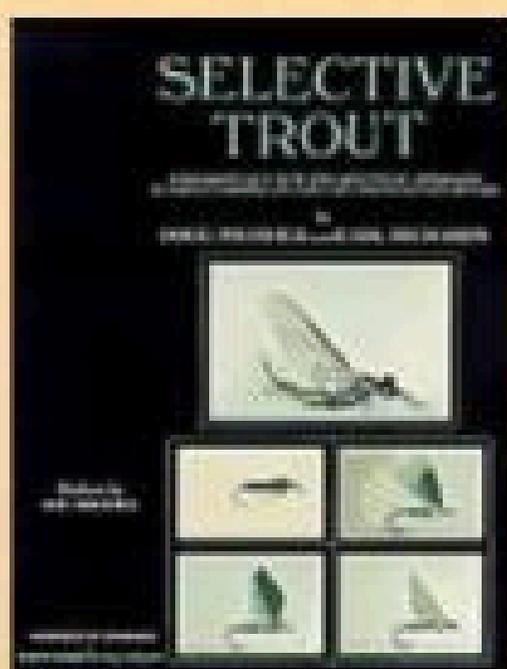


Meetings in early 1969 were held on January 22, February 12, March 26 and April 23. My notes indicate that I attended my first Michigan Council meeting on November 11 of that year. Earlier in 1969 one of our speakers had been Rod Towsley, a sales representative for the Scientific Line Company of Midland, Michigan. This was when the company was an independent manufacturer of fly lines, long before they were taken over by Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing (3M).

Towsley spoke on the history and development of the company. It had been started as a sideline by Leon Martuch, a plastics chemist or engineer at Dow Chemical Company. Martuch was an avid fly fisherman and had shared the common experiences of using unsatisfactory fly lines which wore out easily and did not float well. He used his knowledge of plastics to develop a new method of producing lines that floated better, were more durable, and cast with greater ease than most of those previously available. It was at this meeting or one shortly thereafter that Towsley attended, he brought along Carl Richards and Doug Swisher who were then working on their first book, *Selective Trout*. After the regular program, I talked at some length to Swisher and Richards about their new concepts in fly design. A future meeting was planned in which they would present a slide show on how they had gathered the material and developed the fly designs for their book. They were eager to promote this book and wanted to test some of the material on us in order to gauge its acceptance. We were also anxious to see this show, and it was agreed that they would come as soon as their program was completed.



Leon Martuch



When I attended my first Michigan Council meeting on November 11, 1969, I was immediately elected to be Treasurer of the Michigan Council. I don't know why; it was a rather poor choice, I thought. I had no knowledge of accounting procedures, although I could balance a checkbook. It was a chore for me to keep books that anyone besides myself could understand. I got along fairly well for a year until they found someone with banking and accounting experience to take over this job. At that time it was also a novel experience for the Council to have any funds to speak of in its treasury. The small balance was being rapidly expanded by funds gathered to start a legal defense fund for the North Branch of the Au Sable River. Cottage owners on Otsego Lake had been troubled by high water after foolishly built on lowlands during the dry mid-sixties. They wanted to dump their excess water into the North Branch, the result of which would warm this stream considerably and possibly ruin it as a trout fishery

All of the Au Sable below the confluence of the North Branch and the mainstream would be affected. TU was a partner with the North Branch Association in bringing suit to stop the dumping. The DNR was going to allow some dumping and TU wanted controls in place on the amount that could be discharged into the Au Sable system. TU successfully fought this action. At this time I met Joe Wilcox of Albion, MI, who was legal counsel for the Council at that time. .



The North Branch of the Au Sable River

Joe is still a member of our chapter by choice because our activist stance has always been much more evident than in other nearby chapters. He has appeared before our Chapter as a speaker on environmental law on a pair of occasions.

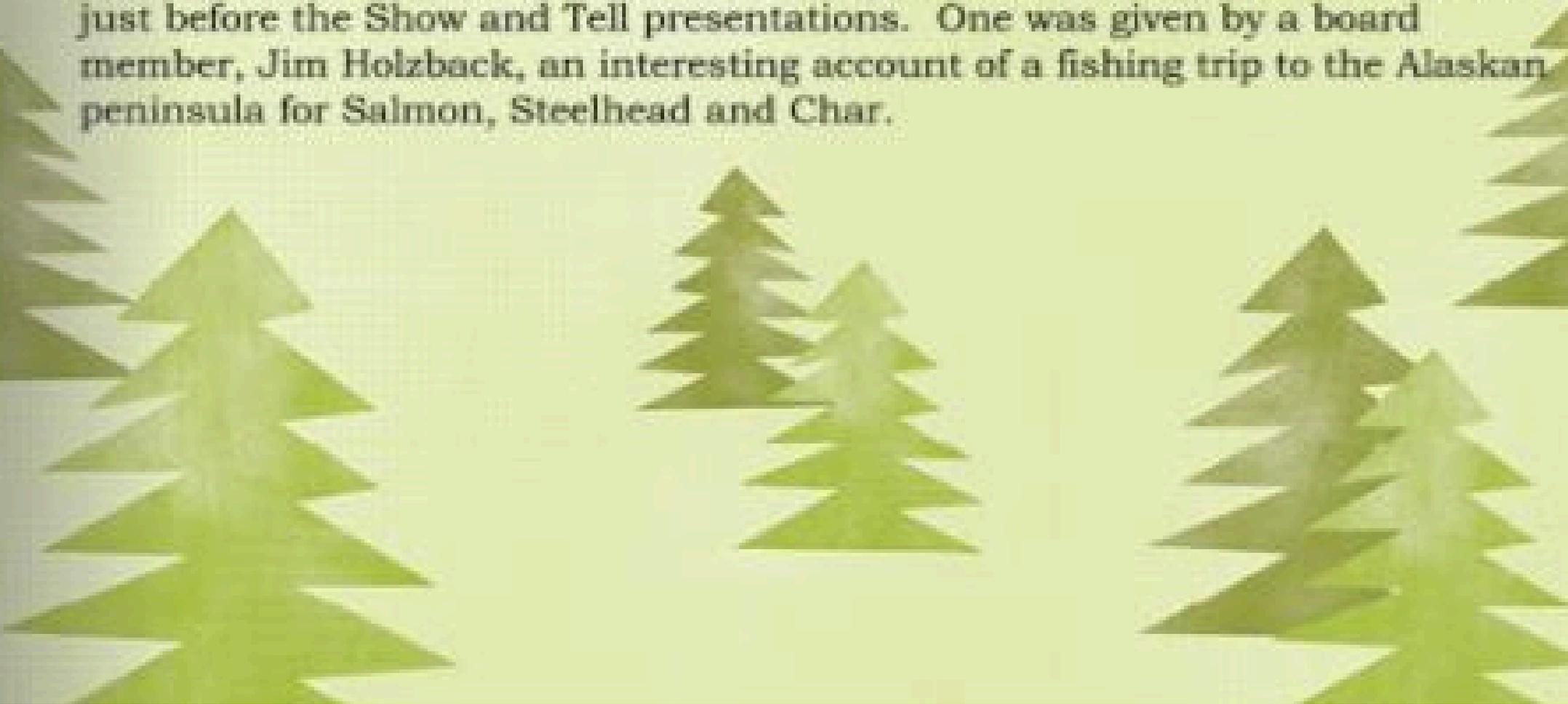
As I recall, the suit that TU filed resulted in a consent agreement where the volume of water being dumped was limited to an acceptable level to prevent over warming the stream. As usual with such water level controversies, the water level in Otsego Lake came down in a couple years and the dumping became a moot question anyway. This was the first action of this nature in which the Michigan Council was involved to my knowledge. It was an interesting experience in which to play a small part and increased my enthusiasm for TU and its aims.

My notes for 1970 start with a Board meeting on January 7, where the programs and financial plans for the year were set. On February 4, Dave Borgeson, Director of Inland Fisheries for the DNR was our speaker. This was probably the beginning of a long term disagreement in philosophy over regulations and "Quality Water" designation for our streams. It seemed that the DNR wanted virtually none of this flies and artificial lures designation at this time. What little in force was reluctantly granted because of TU pressure. There was supposed to be 100 miles of this "Quality Water" but we were never able to obtain more than seventy five miles as a permanent set aside. There was a three year experimental stretch placed on the Boardman River, which we wanted to make permanent but were unsuccessful. After several years as Fisheries Committee Coordinator for the Michigan Council, I was almost completely frustrated by the harvest oriented philosophy of Borgeson and his associates.

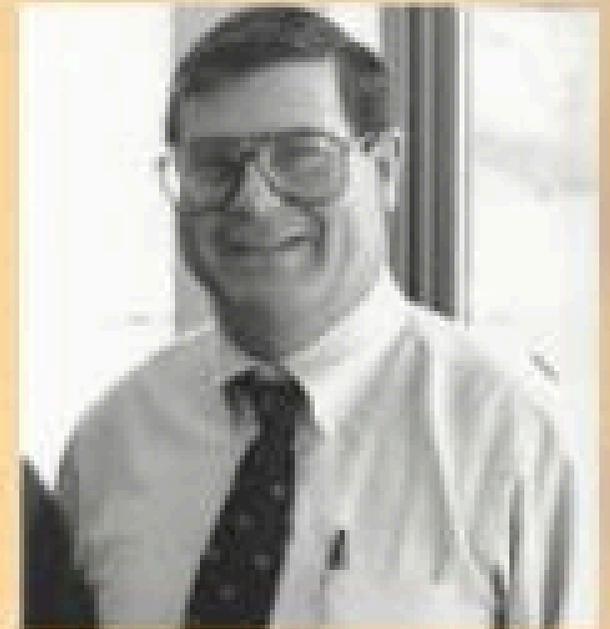


On March 19, 1970, almost a year after their first visit to our chapter, Swisher and Richards presented the slide program on which their first book, *Selective Trout*, was based. It was an educational evening and introduced the concept of their lightly dressed no-hackle, para-dun, and hen-spinner designs.

During those days of the late sixties and early seventies our fundraising efforts were strictly internal. I say internal because the money raised came from the twenty or thirty members who consistently supported and attended our meetings. They were the heart and soul of the Chapter, without whose dedication we may not have survived. At first our year end meeting was held in April, when we held a raffle or auction of items donated by our members, plus one larger item. This was usually a graphite rod and Battenkill reel donated by the Orvis Company. All we had to do was send in the opinion of three members on the performance of the reel and the winner of the raffle was allowed to keep it. Thus we were able to expand our treasury to a considerable extent over what we had previously enjoyed. This practice was later expanded to have a December raffle of smaller proportions that was held just before the Show and Tell presentations. One was given by a board member, Jim Holzback, an interesting account of a fishing trip to the Alaskan peninsula for Salmon, Steelhead and Char.



By the early seventies we had progressed to a point where the balance in our treasury in September was \$400 to \$600 instead of the \$150 we had formerly possessed at the beginning of our meetings in the fall. We now felt that we could afford one "name" speaker each year. That is, one good promotional event where an honorarium was necessary to obtain a speaker that would attract a good attendance.



Dan Crockett

By 1971 all of our meetings were held on the third Thursday of the month as they are today. By this time both Dan Crockett and Mike Jones had become very active members, and they and George Disborough were my constant companions on trips to Lansing to the Michigan Council meetings. These three were also responsible for starting a small "occasionally published" newsletter that was the precursor to SlackLines. These letters were very rudimentary at first, just a few notes on chapter activities with reports of the members fishing success or lack thereof during the summer months. Sometime in the early seventies Mike Jones became our Chapter Secretary and took over and expanded the newsletter. Mike, Dan Crockett and George Disborough met often during this time and through their effort, SlackLines came into being and was published on a much more regular schedule.

When I first became President in 1969 our Chapter Secretary was Howard "Red" Welch. He had succeeded Jerry Clough and had served for a year or two under Ed Sutton, our first President. Red served for two or three years and had the unenviable task of prodding National Headquarters in Denver to get our meeting notices out. After I had attended a few Michigan Council meetings, I found that we were the only chapter in the state that met once a month from September through April. I question whether National was accustomed to sending out notices as often as we requested. They didn't always arrive on time and we had to develop a calling system to notify our membership a few times.

Some of those who served on the Board of Directors in those early years were Floyd Eberly, A.J. Score, George Disborough, Jim Warren, Mike Jones, Jim Shumaker, Stan Weber, Ivan Pinkerton, Bob Wagner, Bob Huebner, Jim Miller, Jim Holzbach, Fred Oswald, Bob Hosick and Cough Wendzel. There may have been others but I cannot recall their names at this time.

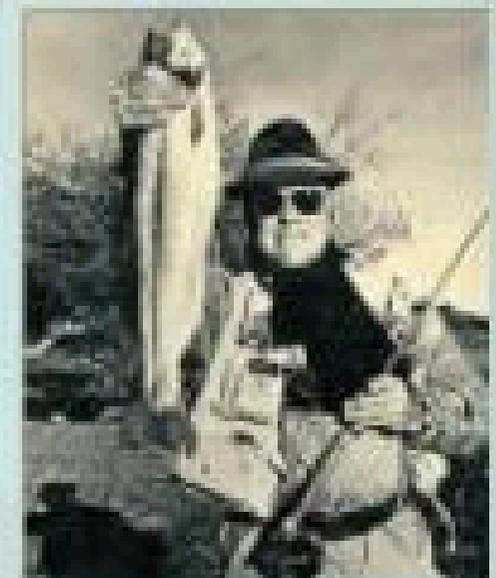
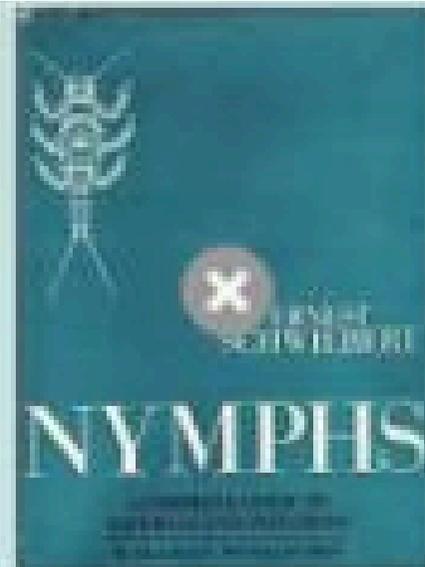
Sometime in the early seventies we were urged by National to put on a recruitment drive. We had always endeavored to bring in new members by personal contact. This time National Headquarters sent a big folder of TU brochures which we were to place in all of the stores that deal with the sale of fishing tackle. These displays were left in the stores for about two months, and I am not aware of one member that was recruited in that manner. Personal contact and persuasion proved to be more effective than any other method.

By the mid-seventies we started to do our own mailings. We now had the resources in our treasury to handle the postage, and it proved to be a much more efficient means of communicating with our members. It was an advantage to have our own mailing list, as we could notify new members long before National put them on our roster. We also found that National often deleted names by mistake and added some that should not have been there. We received a roster update from National but the most reliable list was from our own records.

When we started to have big name speakers we used the occasions as our prime money raising event of the year. However we soon separated these two activities, as it seemed unfair to bring in a speaker and use up much of the time in money raising attempts. It seemed more advantageous to use these noted guests as a drawing card for recruitment activities.

Ernie Schwiebert made his second appearance here in January of 1974. This was shortly after his book "Nymphs" was published, and his presence was mutually beneficial. Ernie could promote his new book, and we used the publicity to draw in prospective members.

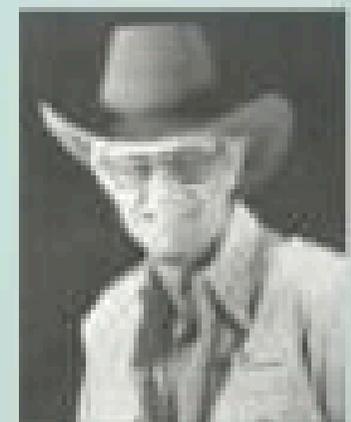
Other name speakers that appeared here during the seventies were Dave Whitlock (twice), Lee and Joan Wulff (courtesy of the Garcia Company), Lefty Kreh, and in 1979 Dave Engerbretson.



Dave Whitlock



Lee and Joan Wulff



Dave Engerbretson

We often invited as speakers, men involved in fisheries management or research. Stan Lievense of the DNR came to give a summary of the management programs on the streams in the northwest part of the Lower Peninsula. This area covered the Pere Marquette, Little Manistee, Betsie, Platte and Boardman Rivers. He also showed his patented device for a streamer fly to make it wiggle like a fish. This was a plastic scoop-like device that was tied under the head of the fly. He called it his "Stanley Streamer". I believe that this type of lure was later banned from the flies only water. Dave Borgeson, Head of Inland Fisheries for the DNR appeared several times. One of the most interesting programs of this type was presented by Justin Leonard, head of Fisheries Research at the University of Michigan. Howard Tanner appeared when he was Director of Fisheries Research at Michigan State University and Scientific Adviser to the Michigan Council.



In 1975, the Kalamazoo Valley Chapter was given the responsibility of the Regulations Committee for the Michigan Council. This committee, comprised of Doug Wendzel, Bob Hosick and myself, was supposed to gather information from several sources and make recommendations to the Council in matters regarding fishing bag and size limits, special regulations, etc. This procedure didn't last very long as it was too cumbersome a method of arriving at decisions. It was then changed to an "in council" activity, with representatives of three or four chapters with me acting as Chairman. In 1975 Dan Crockett was elected President of our Chapter. I continued on the Board of Directors and on the Michigan Council as Chairman of the Fisheries Committee. This was just a new designation for the old Regulations Committee, but a few added responsibilities were included.

I was also appointed to the Executive Committee of the Michigan Council. During this period the Council met every other month, whereas the Executive Committee met on the alternate months. These meetings were usually held in Lansing but occasionally in Grayling or Roscommon to accommodate the representatives from the northern part of the state. This called for a lot of travel on my part, and I only recall a pair of meetings where we were not represented at Council by Dan Crockett, Mike Jones, George Disborough or myself. A ten inch snowfall on a meeting date might deter us.

In 1973, the Michigan Council lacked an editor for its publication "Michigan Trout" for a year or more. The chapters were given a rotating responsibility for putting out an issue. I remember that we were very fortunate to have such people as George Disborough, Mike Jones, Dan Crockett and Ivan Pinkerton to produce our issue. I thought that it was one of the finest issues of Michigan Trout ever put together during that era of ten years or more. If there had been an award for the best issue I'm sure that we would have won it.

By the late seventies SlackLines had become a regular publication issued on a schedule. It was edited for several years by members from Battle Creek, Fred Oswalt and Pat Connelly. I have forgotten in which order they served, but I think Pat succeeded Fred in that capacity. Herb Spencer also served as editor of our newsletter, but I am not sure of the sequence of Herb's and Pat's terms of service in this capacity.



In 1979 I was elected to a second term as President and served until the end of the 1983 season. During this period our organization became much better organized not because of me but rather through the efforts of a solid core of active members whose efforts made this a much "smoother ride" than during my first tenure as President. SlackLines had become a regular feature of our chapter, our money raising efforts were much more successful, and the membership rolls were steadily increasing due to SlackLines and personal contacts.

We held two fund raising meetings a year; a major effort in December and a lesser one in April. Bob Heubner acted as our auctioneer for several of those events and raffles as well as the auction brought in increased income. Terry Mills (of Upjohn Sales) and Dan Crockett were our premier promoters of raffle ticket sales.

In January or February of 1975 Ed Sutton was invited back as a special speaker for the tenth anniversary of the Chapter's founding. He presented an interesting slide show of Atlantic Salmon fishing in northern Quebec.



Click to edit text



Michigan now has a bottle and can return program. There is still too much trash left alongside and in our trout streams that can be picked up without resorting to a massive "clean-up".

This concludes my recollection and notes on the origin of the Kalamazoo Valley Chapter of Trout Unlimited and some of its activities during the earlier years of its existence.



Bob Jackson
teaching fly tying to Boy Scouts
at Camp Rota-Kiwan