

On Secret Pond

In 1985, I was privileged to guide Oscar and Joan Strauss while they were fishing in Alaska. We became friends, and over the course of the week, they mentioned the Megantic Club several times, suggesting that I should visit them there, at Camp Menuchah on Big Island Pond in Maine.



Oscar said he would send me a collection of flies he used on these waters for brook trout and suggested I render a drawing of them for display in his camp or, perhaps, the dining hall.

Several months later a box containing a collection of flies arrived at my studio in Minnesota, each carefully tied and labeled with its name. Many were used and fish-worn... and it made the collection even more special for me to know that they'd been fished by my new friends, and that they had taken fish with them.

The life of a fishing guide is often more complicated than one might suspect. Balancing a marriage and a family with guiding in Alaska during the summer months and traveling to Argentina to explore and guide in the

winters left me with little spare time to travel to Maine and fish. I never made the promised trip, and over the years lost touch with Oscar and Joan. Although the flies were safely squirreled away in the studio, I never completed the proposed drawing.

During the many years that followed, Megantic was occasionally mentioned by my fishermen. One, in particular, whom I'd guided several times both in Alaska and Argentina, revealed to me that he was a member of the club, and invited me to join him there for a week of fishing.

I was delighted by the prospect of visiting a place that has meant so much to so many of the people I've fished with over the years and gladly accepted. The first day, while having lunch in the dining hall, I opened the box of flies sent to me so many years before and passed them around while I told the story of how they came to me. An older fellow who was walking past stopped to listen and sat down to examine the flies. "Why, I picked these very flies out of Oscar's fly wallet myself," he exclaimed, "and sent them along to you almost 20 years ago. My name is Freddy."

The circle had been completed, and a well-traveled box of flies had come home, to the very man who had created them, tied them on the end of my friend's leaders, and helped release the fish they caught.

During the week that followed, I had the opportunity to visit many of the ponds on the property and took a number of photographs. As the trip ended, I was commissioned to create a painting of my friend's grandson and son-in-law fishing on the property and chose to paint them on Secret Pond with their guide, Del LaBelle.

A print of the painting was donated to the club, where it hangs today, in the dining hall where countless stories have been told of fish landed and lost.

The flies remain in their box, on my desk, waiting to be drawn. 

