

REFLECTIONS ON CREAMTON THEN AND NOW

by Ed Jaworowski

A fishing journal that I kept religiously from the mid 1960's until the late 1980's records my first visit to Creamton. Tom Atherton had invited me to share a couple of days at his club. Though not ideal, conditions were tolerable the afternoon we arrived, Sunday, May 8, 1966: somewhat raw, cloudy with drizzly rain, air in the low 40's, water 48 degrees. At 5:30 p.m., Tom started me at Cook's Pool, now known as Fitze's. Nymphs produced nothing there or in the Willow Pool, which back then little resembled today's pool, and actually did have a huge willow overhanging it. My first Creamton fish, an 11" brookie, came to a marabou muddler cast alongside the big rock where Hankins Creek enters a short distance upstream. A twin of this fish came a short distance above Bill's bridge. I then reversed my tracks, worked downstream, and took three or four more on the same fly before dark. That was the beginning of my love affair with the Lackawaxen's West Branch.

We slept in the cabin. Since I had no sleeping bag, I curled under a blanket on the floor in front of the wood stove. A cold rain fell all night, the temperature dropped to the freezing mark, the fire went out, and I awoke shivering violently. A nasty cold from the experience lasted several weeks. On Monday, conditions were bleak. Hail, sleet, and rain fell until noon; the water temperature dropped, and the river rose dramatically and discolored. I walked across the field from the cabin and entered the water just above Mead's. With my back pressed against the bank, water came to within a few inches of the top of my chest waders. Fish were hard to come by, and I was discouraged. I tried upstream. Every decent hole from the first bridge up the dirt road (no golf course then) to what is now called The Meadow stretch, which was one long, flat stretch back then, seemed devoid of fish. The "Big

Water” proved no better. Snow started at three o’clock and fell for the next two hours. However, my spirits lightened when Bill Shaefer stopped by Cook’s to say hello and report that he had taken several decent fish on “long-bodied Cahills”. Suspecting that he had cracked the fly code, I happily reported this to Tom, who said, “Him and his damned nightcrawlers!” Fortunately, we did crack the code before day’s end. At Tom’s suggestion, I cast a weighted cream-colored Honey Bug upstream, allowed it to sink, then checked it as the line tightened and the fly began to rise. Four browns under Bill’s bridge showed their appreciation. By the time we pulled out that evening, the woods were carpeted in three inches of snow. I recall salt trucks and snow plows on the last few miles of the turnpike. And this was May 9th!

Subsequent journal entries from ensuing years attest to many other changes in the watershed. The Slot, Gate, and Doc Bell’s Pools have faded into history. The Bowl Pool, in addition to morphing its name to the Bull Pool, has changed shape numerous times, like many other holes. The bend in the stream where it turns south to parallel the road, below the Picnic Pool, was once waist deep. Now it is a gravel bar. Hemlock Pool, downstream from Bezek’s (Worum’s) Bridge, was at one time 40’ long and 15 to 20’ wide. Today, it’s a mere shadow of what it once was. And my memory also goes to wonderful fishing well up the dirt road, right to the .30-06 Club water. The old Fox Crossing Pool was a consistent producer for me, and I recall Tom taking the same 18” rainbow at least four times (!) from one deep pool running alongside the road. A photo I took in the early 70’s shows a bulldozer sitting crosswise in a much wider stream, moving rocks into Bill’s Pool. The church that gave the Church Pool its name had long vanished, but one of the outbuildings was still standing, and the pool was far larger then. The stretch from the entrance to the Meadow up to Loomis’s Bridge was posted “No Sunday Fishing”. In those earlier decades, the club stocked more, though smaller, fish.

They spread out and inhabited every fishable riffle and glide, allowing an angler to walk several miles and, without exiting the stream, pick fish from nearly every pocket and run.

While I cherish my memories of an earlier Creamton, I recognize that its history isn't all about loss. There are positive aspects. Most major holes remain, albeit in different form, and these do provide good holding water for the larger fish we now stock. The two new bridges, at Bill's and Mead's, assure some measure of stability. The same goes for the various log and jack dams, willow plantings, and other bank stabilization projects, as well as stream improvements on the Baird property, at Mead's, and Delbert's Road Pool, which promises before long to become once again a decent fishing hole. Stream improvement today can still reclaim other ravaged stretches and provide us with additional productive water, although the changeable nature of the watershed makes permanent repairs a real challenge. And remember that back then bait and spin fishing were permitted. In the face of often difficult challenges, and albeit with mixed results, the various officers, boards, and river keepers have done a wonderful job in maintaining a great club for the 40-plus years that I've been privileged to fish it as guest and member.