

## **History**

by Doug Kokkeler

### **In The Beginning...**

*The formation of the McKenzie Flyfishers and the FFF*

### **Forward**

The purpose of this narrative is to record the formation and early history of the McKenzie Flyfishers and the Federation of Fly Fishers. The events and happenings here written are those as recalled by the people who helped form those organizations. Numerous national publications have included articles by misinformed people on the origins of the FFF. However, not all published information was erroneous and this is not the first attempt to set the record straight. Attendees at the first conclave wrote articles on the subject for newsletters, personal correspondence, etc. It is my intent to record an accurate account, including those articles. This book with accompanying photo copies of those articles comprise that accurate account as best I can determine.

Over the years, the McKenzie Flyfishers have participated in issues beneficial to fly anglers. The primary objectives or purposes of the Club are to promote fly fishing, to protect and increase fly fishing resources, and to enjoy contact with other persons interested in fly fishing. In the following pages, I will outline some Club achievements. However, just listing Club accomplishments would over look the contributions the Club has made to the personal lives of its members. While I can not speak for all members, I believe my positive experience with the Club to be the norm rather than an exception.

During my short membership in the Club, I have gained a wealth of information about fly angling. The range of this information includes fly patterns (some of which have saved fishing trips), fisheries (several I've never heard of), tackle tips (that saved both time and money), and entomology (those bugs come out of the water?); this list is far from exhaustive. However, the truly great treasure the Club has to offer, any club has to offer, is the people comprising its membership. Whether on the water, sorting hackle, or swapping lies at our monthly meetings, I have made friends that share my passion and have enriched my life. I believe most of us have similar experiences.

"Thank you Bill Nelson, Stan Walters, Mike Starr, Skip Hosfield, Bill Laing, Gib Kingsbury, Monty Rounds, and all charter members for the foundation you laid some thirty years ago, that has brought joy to the lives of so many."

*Doug Kokkeler*  
*1997 President*

### **Contributions and Support**

Cliff Adams, long time member and former club President, provided photography.

Sarah Anderson-Sprague matted and framed photos. Founding members tied accompanying flies.

Special thanks to Bob Rasmussen and Daryl Jameson for their help and support with this project.

*Right: Cliff gives camera last minute tune-up*



## **The Founders**

In 1963, Bill Nelson's business caused him to move to Eugene, Oregon from Everett, Washington. He left behind an organization he loved and took with him a dream yet unfulfilled. The organization was the Evergreen Fly Fishing club; Bill was president prior to his move. His dream was to form a national flyfishing organization. The idea, though shopped around, had not received much support from other clubs.

Because Bill missed the camaraderie he had enjoyed in the Evergreen club and because he wished to pursue his dream, he decided to start a club in Eugene.

In 1964, Bill placed a classified ad in *The Eugene Register Guard*. That ad invited all men interested in forming a fly fishing club to meet at his home. Eight people showed up at that first meeting and became the "founders" of the proposed all male club. The eight were Bill Nelson, Larry Killian, Gib Kingsberry, Phil Koplín, Bob Peterson, Mike Starr, Stan Walters, and Riley Woodford.

They agreed to hold the next few meetings in one of the Eugene Register Guard building conference rooms in downtown Eugene.

During the next couple meetings, the founders formed the corporation and wrote the by-laws and a statement of purpose. They set annual dues at \$10 and each of the original eight contributed an additional \$25 toward a bank account for the infant club.

Bill recalls that Emerald Flyfishers was among other names considered for the Club. He believes that Mike Starr came up with the name, McKenzie Flyfishers, or at least lobbied hard for it; the group approved it with little opposition. That was in May 1964. The McKenzie Flyfishers was born. The membership selected the first Club officers and Board of Directors shown listed below.

### **May 1964 Club Officers**

Bill Nelson, President

Riley Woodford, Vice President

Gib Kingsberry, Secretary Treasurer

## May 1964 Board of Directors

Stan Walters  
Mike Starr  
Larry Killian  
Bob Peterson  
Phil Koplín



*Bill Nelson*  
*First President*



*Riley Woodford*  
*First Vice President*

Following the May 1964 meeting, the McKenzie Flyfishers placed an ad in *The Eugene Register Guard*. The ad inform the public that a men's fly fishing club had formed and that the club would hold its next meeting in the Register Guard building. At the June meeting, the founders informed the attendees that, if they joined in June or in July, they would be charter members. Bill recalls about 15 people in attendance in June. The Club decided the July meeting would be a dinner meeting.

A number of the founding members of the McKenzie Flyfishers have passed away. Club founder, Bill Nelson, believes the individuals in the photo below with former Club president, Daryl Jameson, are the founding and charter members of the McKenzie Flyfishers who are still alive.



*Monty Rounds, Gibson Kingsbury, J. Michael Starr, Stan Walters, Bill Laing, Bill Nelson, and Skip Hosfield meet with Cliff Adams and Daryl Jameson for "The Founders" shoot.*

The McKenzie Flyfishers' held their first dinner meeting downstairs at the Eugene Hotel. Hotel staff prepared dinner for about 15 people. When 25 showed up, management scrambled to find tables, chairs, and food. The dinner meeting was a great success. Bill explained to the crowd his vision of the Club, activities they would undertake, and the national organization he visualized them forming.

### **The Dream**

Charter member, Skip Hosfield, recalled the following in the 1990 winter edition of *The Oregon Flyfisher*. "...He (Bill) was a combination of carnival pitchman and revival preacher, alternately enticing us with visions of benefits to be gained, or appealing to whatever sense of selfless moral obligation lay dormant in us..." Bill impressed all, some not favorably. Skip went on to say, "...But the brand of snake oil he (Bill) was selling was strong stuff. It either killed you outright - about half the club members rejected the idea and quit the club over the next few months; or it made you a believer - an apostle of the faith..." Nevertheless, the Club formed a Conclave committee and planning for the national organization began. Some thought the goals of this infant club were crazy, too unrealistic, too much work, or a combination of the three. Some left only to return when it looked as if the Club would realize its goals.

Bill recalled that some of the returning detractors became some of the FFF's greatest supporters. He said the Club welcomed all who returned with open arms. He added, "Hell it probably did sound crazy. "

Pete Cornacchia, sports writer of *The Eugene Register Guard*, was present at the second dinner meeting in August. Cornacchia wrote an article (copy enclosed) on the topics covered that night.

Those topics included a fishing trip for youngsters (who might have little or no opportunity to catch trout with flies); a club quest of Atlantic salmon in Mud lake; plans to acquire a casting pool for clinics and practice; a conclave of other fly-fishing groups; fly-tying clinics; and yearly club awards for the largest rainbow, German brown, cutthroat, and steelhead trout. Fifty seven people attended that meeting.

By the third dinner meeting in September, Bill had secured Lee Wulff's commitment to support the formation of a national organization of flyfishers. That spark gave Bill's dream credibility and gave the young club the spirit to seek broad support from other clubs and individuals.



*Lee Wulff*

Lee Wulff gained the support of Gene Anderegg of the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers of New York. This added East coast support to the organization giving it a "national" rather than the "West coast" flavor it had had up to that time.

To outline the events leading to the first Conclave in 1965 and the subsequent formation of the FFF, I quote the remainder of Skip Hosfield's article:

*"Somehow over the next 12 months it all came together. Gene Anderegg came on board in September and became deeply involved in the planning and promotion. Between Nelson's wide contacts throughout the Northwest and Anderegg's in the East, they were able to line up an attractive slate of program speakers. The format established in the 1965 Conclave set the pattern which has been followed, expanded but is essentially the same, in all subsequent Conclaves.*

*In focusing on Bill Nelson as the élan vital behind the 1965 Conclave, I must add that many others played very important parts in making it a success. Stan Walters as Conclave Chairman and Riley Woodford, McKenzie Flyfishers vice-president, did most of the organizational work while Nelson was on the road selling the idea. The contribution of Lew Bell, Bill Nelson's close friend and mentor, who would eventually succeed Anderegg as FFF President, is worthy of more than the passing mention given here.*

*Ed Strickland signed on early and did much to insure great support from the California clubs. Ed went on to serve the Federation as Treasurer and also ran the Membership Service Office out of his home for the first five years. In 1970 he was the first recipient of the Lapis Lazuli Award.*

*In 1985 the McKenzie Flyfishers hosted the Northwest Regional Conclave in Eugene which was billed as a 20th Anniversary Celebration. We attempted to locate as many people who attended the 1965 Conclave as were still living, and many of them did attend. We shall again make an effort to attract as many "Old Timers" as we can find to our Silver Anniversary Conclave, not just from 1965 but from all past years. Help spread the word and make this another unforgettable event."*

Skip did a wonderful job of recording the footsteps of the FFF's early days. It is for this reason I chose to reprint his text in this book rather than "wing it" on my own. Thanks Skip!!

### **Photos from the early days**



*A young Bill Nelson and close friend Lew Bell*



*A youthful Stan Walters  
scrutinizes a Conclave comment*

The efforts of the organizers scheduled a Conclave for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday; June 18, 19, and 20, 1965; at the Country Squire in Eugene, Oregon. The list of speakers was quite impressive. We have listed them here in order of their appearance:

**Friday, June 18, 1965**

Riley Woodford, David Hurn, Rick Miller, Lewis Bell, Don Myrick, J. Michael Starr, Ed Zern.

**Saturday, June 19, 1965**

Gene Anderegg, Lewis Garlick, Richard Thompson, S. B. Smith, John Rayner, David Hurn, Lewis Garlick, Ashley Cooper Hewitt, Jim Green, Cliff Wyatt, Dub Price, Polly Rosborough, Russ Colliander, Lee Wulff.

**Sunday, June 20, 1965**

Gene Anderegg, Ed Strickland, Lee Wulff, Ed Zern, Gene Anderegg, S. B. Smith, Pete Hidy, Ashley Hewitt, Tommy Brayshaw, Bill Nelson.

For a detailed account of the topics discussed, please refer to the original *1965 Flyfishers Conclave* program which accompanies the hard copy of this book.

In the forward, I mentioned that misinformed writers had printed numerous accounts regarding formation of the Federation. The most frequent error credits Lee Wulff with founding the Federation of Fly Fishers. While Mr. Wulff's contribution to the FFF and to flyfishing in general was substantial, he was not responsible for formation of the FFF. That responsibility belongs to Bill Nelson and his fellow McKenzie Flyfishers who breathed life into the dream.

Walt Johnson, famed northwest Steelheader, supported a Bill Nelson award nomination in an October 15, 1993, letter to the Evergreen Flyfishing Club. He states, "*As an addendum to the foregoing I might mention that several months ago an article was published in the American Flyfisher, the journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester, Vermont written by Joe Pizarro which credited Lee Wulff for the founding of the FFF. After reading same I hastily sent a letter to Margo Page the editor informing her that in spite of all the fine accomplishments and contributions Mr. Wulff made to fly fishing over the years, the credit for the inspiration and foundation was Bill Nelson's and his alone because I personally was present that historic evening after the Evergreen Fly Club meeting where it took place. Ms. Page graciously accepted my letter stating that the correction was noted. She also thanked me and appreciated getting the story "directly from the horse's mouth" and said she would include my letter in the next "Letters to the Editor" column which she did. So now the fly fishing world knows to whom the real credit belongs, our own Bill Nelson, true sportsman, fine angler and friend. Tight lines and all our best always!*

**W.J.**

At the first Conclave, there were about 200 attendees representing 11 fly fishing clubs. The McKenzie Flyfishers organized, administered, and hosted that Conclave. By the end of the Conclave, attendees had generated the preliminary plan for the Federation of Fly Fishers and a bankroll of nearly \$1,000. Most of the bankroll came from the auction of items donated by represented manufacturers, dealers, and artists.

Member delegates decided to wait one year for formal organization. They knew it would take time to present the plan to potential member clubs. By the end of 1965, twelve clubs had

announced support. By the 1966 Conclave at Jackson Lake Lodge, Wyoming, 29 clubs and 1,220 individual members had joined the FFF. Organizers presented a preliminary Constitution and Bylaws, a proposed reel emblem, sample jewelry and patches, and a proposed letterhead at this Conclave.

During 1966, some members registered concern about the use of the word "Federation" in the name. The word had collected some adverse connotation associated with the Federal Government. The name, however, survived.

By the end of 1967, 40 clubs and 2,000 individuals had joined and members had planned a magazine. Jackson Lake Lodge was also the site of the 1967 Conclave.

By spring of 1968, members had published the first issue of *The Flyfisher* and, by year end, FFF counted 50 club and 2,700 individual members. Organizers selected Jackson Lake Lodge again for the 1968 Conclave.

By the end of 1969, membership included 59 clubs and about 3,500 individuals. By this time, 20 percent of the member clubs of the FFF had formation dates which post dated the formation date of the FFF. By this time, members had formed and were operating 3 councils. Sun Valley, Idaho, was the site of the 1969 Conclave.

Sun Valley, Idaho, was also the site of the 1970 Conclave. Here members created the order of the Lapis Lazuli to honor the member who had given distinguished service over a long period of time. They also created the Buzek Memorial Award to honor notable contributions to fly tying.

By 1971, club membership had grown to 70. Two new councils had taken form. FFF members had identified fly fishing issues of concern as early as 1967; this year they formed 20 semi permanent committees to deal with those issues. The Conservation Committee was the first to take affect. Snowmass-at-Aspen, Colorado, was the site of the 1971 Conclave.

By the time of the 1972 Conclave in Sun Valley, the Wyndham Anglers Club of New Zealand was one of the 82 club members. By the 1973 Sun Valley Conclave, FFF had 100 club members. The 1974 West Yellowstone, Montana, Conclave, boasted 120 club and over 7,000 individual members. Attendance in 1974 set a record at 500. Members unveiled the first volume of FFF history.

What has happened with the FFF since? To the credit of the founders of the organization, it is not necessary that I document that here. The FFF is a well established and well-known international organization. It serves fly fishers the world around. We, as fly anglers, owe a debit of gratitude to Mr. Nelson and his associates for their efforts and foresight.

### **Fly fishing and the McKenzie Flyfishers then, and now**

I asked Bill to look back to the early days of the club and point out some of the similarities and differences with the Club of 1995. He first recalled the differences in fly angling then the differences in the Club.

The first of the major differences was the difference in the equipment. Most people fished a Norwegian made Konkorannse bamboo fly rod and a Gladding oil-silk fly line. Everyone went nuts when Fennwick came out with their first glass rod.

The second major difference was in obtaining equipment and supplies; that was a little more involved than it is now. In 1964, one needed a little ingenuity to locate fly fishing needs. In Eugene, there were only a couple of small garage fly shops. Ernie Danner had a shop on 7th where the Fisherman's Market is now and Bill Hunt had a shop on Hayden Bridge Road. The old Sears building downtown was also a source of fly fishing equipment.

However, more often than not, ingenuity was the source of most gear and of nearly all service needs. Now, we have the luxury of living in a time when fly-fishing is the rage. In Eugene, we have three fly fishing pro shops and several department stores with fly-fishing departments.

The Club's appearance in the last thirty years has changed little. Club meetings have pretty much the same format. The main difference according to Bill is that in the early days the meetings seemed to be less formal, but required more group participation. For example, each member was required to present a fishing report; without one, you would be fined or would have to don the "Skunk Cap." The lack of formality may have sprung from the fact that adult beverages flowed much more freely in 1964. I have no evidence to support Bill's claim, but he maintains that booze was the effective lubricating agent before the meeting came to order(?).

Another major difference was that the Club was an all male club. Members changed that bylaw in 1988 or '89. The Club now has about 7 female members.

Outings have always been important to the Club. However, outings in the young Club seemed to attract a greater portion of the membership than now. "Everyone fished together back then," says Bill. "Davis Lake was the hot spot at the time, and everyone went." Among his more vivid memories Bill recalls

- (1) Bob Peterson bringing a four post bed to camp in,
- (2) frog races (yes, frog races!), and
- (3) outings shared with the Evergreen club.

It seems that, as the club grew, people became more reclusive, possibly scattering to their own "secret spots" to avoid the crowds that now enjoy the sport.

Numbers of members still attend certain outings, notably Gold Lake and Crane Prairie. However, the club has a long way to go if it wants to return to the glory days of outstanding outing participation. Club membership in 1995 including associates is about 140. Our Crane Prairie outing attracted 18. Our Gold Lake outing attracted 29. Sometimes the "good ol' days" really were the good ol' days!



*Past President's gather at the 1993 Gold Lake outing*

It is my hope that this book, along with the enclosed documents, will serve as a permanent record and a thank you to those responsible for the organizations we enjoy today. One drawback in compiling a work such as this is that I may not have mentioned someone. I would like to mention the names of a few people, other than members of the McKenzie Flyfishers, who contributed substantially to the Federation of Fly Fishers that we enjoy today.

*They are:*

Lew Bell  
Rick Miller  
Ralph Wahl  
Walt Price  
Dick Thompson  
Don Myrick  
Jim Green  
Dave Carlson  
Tom Brayshaw  
Gene Anderegg

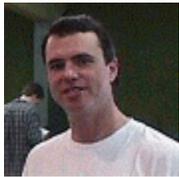
I am certain that there are others who deserve credit, but, over the past 35 years, documents vanish, memories fade, and people slip into obscurity. My apologies to those deserving folks I may have overlooked. However, though I may not have listed the names here, the legacy they have left flourishes.

In closing a list of some of the historical highlights, club involvements, of the McKenzie Flyfishers:

- Invited the world of flyfishing to Eugene in 1965 to form an association of flyfishing club's, now known as the FFF-The Federation of Fly Fishers.
- Led the fight to re-establish "fly only" regulations on Davis Lake in the 1970's.
- Fought for and obtained "fly only" and no hatchery planting on the North Fork of the Willamette River in 1971.

- Led fight to stop a series of hydroelectric dams on Waldo Lake and the North Fork of the Willamette River.
- Helped pass a legislative bill to preserve Waldo Lake and the North Fork of the Willamette River as a state scenic waterway in 1983.
- Led the crusade to establish catch and release fishing for wild trout throughout the McKenzie River.
- Obtained year-round fishing on the McKenzie River below Hayden Bridge.
- Led coalition to establish boat landings at Hayden Bridge and Harvest Lane on the McKenzie River.
- Fought for increased streamflows on the McKenzie River, approved by EWEB in 1994.

McKenzie Flyfisher members have a long history of involvement in not only local issues, but state and national issues as well. Bill Neel and Jim VanLoan have served as Commissioners for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife. Jim Williams served four years as President of Oregon Trout. Greg Pitts has served as President of the FFF.



*Doug Kokkeler*