

REMEMBERING ARTHUR TAYLOR.

ARTIST, ANGLER, CONSERVATIONIST



COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF CRAIG BROOK

Arthur Taylor enjoying his favorite activity. Photographer and date of original photo are unknown.

Last Fling of the Season. Original watercolor by Arthur Taylor, painted circa 2000. Collection of Arthur's daughter, Susan Rioux. Susan, in addition to providing much information used in this article, also bequeathed to the Friends of Craig Brook a number of Arthur Taylor-related items, including a portfolio of his prints to use for fundraising or for its collection.





▶ A fly-caster set against a dark, forbidding background almost vanishes behind an imposing wall of dying ferns and grasses in one of Arthur Taylor's last watercolours. Painted when he was in his 70s, and likely a self-portrait, Taylor titled it *Last Fling of the Season*, foreshadowing the close of a year and a life. In his early professional career as a commercial artist in Boston and New York, Taylor honed his skill for revealing fine details of subjects, but after settling in rural Maine and becoming obsessed with Atlantic salmon fishing, his style became more relaxed, at times impressionistic, as in *Last Fling*, and even more so in an earlier work, *High Tide at the Duck Trap*, painted in the late 1980s (see also, Mr. Nice Guy, *ASJ* 2007).

Born November 22, 1925, Arthur Taylor was raised in South Boston. After high school, he attended the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (in Boston, now part of Tufts University) and graduated from the Vesper George School of Art (Vesper George closed its doors in 1983). While in art school, Taylor met classmate Ruth Mallet, who would soon become his wife. Taylor began his career in Boston, but in 1951 he and Ruth moved to New York, where he developed several commercial projects. One example—a painting of the NASA Lunar Probe VIII—can still be seen at the Cape Canaveral Space Center in Florida. In 1966, Arthur and Ruth—now parents to three daughters—packed up and moved to a farm in Ruth's hometown of Lee, Maine.

In that rural setting, Taylor became particularly enamoured with Atlantic salmon fishing, which in turn led him to develop an interest in crafting bamboo fly rods. Over his lifetime, Taylor crafted 37 rods, according to his close friend Steve Campbell. The salmon rod he named Nova Scotia Special is likely his most famous, appearing in some of his paintings (The Nova Scotia Special, *ASJ* 1988). During salmon fishing trips, he documented scenes with a small camera that he always kept in his fishing vest. Later, at his home studio, he would recreate angling events in paint. He continued this pattern for the rest of his life, never becoming a plein-air artist. He said in a video produced circa 2001, "I can't sit there on the bank and make sketches all the time. I'd never have time to do the fishing."

For a while, Taylor continued with commercial art contracts, working for several Maine ad agencies—even producing a portrait of Steven King's gothic-style home, unveiled May 9, 1984, at a Bangor reception for the original movie adaptation of King's *Firestarter*. But as time passed, he dreamed of merging his interests in art and angling and becoming a sporting artist. The shift was gradual as he made contacts among salmon anglers and sporting-camp owners in Maine, New Hampshire, the Canadian Maritime provinces, and Quebec. Not incidental to his pondering, of course, was whether his sporting art would find enough advocates to financially support his family. The transition may have been a bit rocky, but his talents and dedication won out.

As Taylor witnessed the decline in Atlantic salmon runs in Maine and New Hampshire rivers during the 1970s and 1980s, especially in the nearby Penobscot, he became increasingly concerned. Working with one of Maine's most passionate river restoration advocates, Clinton "Bill" Townsend, and a small group of like-minded conservationists, Taylor wrote newspaper op-eds and, with James E. Butler, co-authored *Penobscot River Renaissance: Restoring America's Premier Atlantic Salmon Fishery*. The book featured the efforts of anglers, conservationists, legislators and biologists working to restore the Atlantic salmon of the Penobscot River. Fifteen watercolour paintings and three pen-and-ink drawings by Taylor complement the text.

In the 1980s, a dedicated group known as the Penobscot River Community Coalition took on Bangor Hydro Power Co. to halt the rebuilding of the breached Bangor Dam. After succeeding in that effort, they mounted a campaign to thwart the construction of a proposed Basin Mills dam just upriver from an existing dam in Veazie. That campaign was also successful, and during the 1990s set the stage for Facilitators Improving Salmonid Habitat (FISH), with Taylor elected its first president. Members of FISH helped launch the Penobscot River Restoration Project, a coalition that eventually negotiated the removal of the Great Works Dam in 2012, the removal of the Veazie Dam in 2013, and the construction of a bypass channel around the Howland Dam in 2016, opening 2,000 miles (3,219 kilometres) of the Penobscot River to salmon and other sea-run fish. Taylor, who died in 2010, did not live to see the culmination of his conservation efforts, but he was honoured several times in his life with conservation awards, including the prestigious Atlantic Salmon Federation Roll of Honour award in 1988.

As Taylor became well known as an artist and conservationist, his connections expanded. His talents were in high demand. He produced commissioned art prints to raise funds for organizations like ASF, New Brunswick Salmon Council, and New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. Other commissions included magazine and book illustration contracts for publications like Gerald S. Stein and James W. Schaaf's *Dickerson: The Man and His Rods* and Graydon R. Hilyard's *Bogdan*. In a letter to Taylor dated April 27, 1992, Stein wrote: "Jim and I are just blown away by how much your watercolor adds to the book. Your artistry and your ability to capture so much of how Jim and I feel about Dickerson are just wonderful. If this were Japan, we bamboo rod lovers and fishermen would make you a national treasure."

One of Taylor's better-known commemorative prints is that of angler and baseball great Ted Williams, commissioned by the Miramichi Salmon Association to raise funds for salmon conservation on that river. Only one limited edition was ever authorized, but the continuing sales of



Below the Brook. Limited-edition print by Arthur Taylor for the Atlantic Salmon Federation, circa 1983-1986. Courtesy of Friends of Craig Brook.

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September 30, 1989
Dinner 7:00 p.m.

Donation \$100

No 102



Bumper stickers, pins, and banquet ticket designed by Arthur Taylor in 1988 that were used in the successful effort to halt the construction of a planned Basin Mills dam on the Penobscot River, Orono, Maine. Some of Arthur's work was later used by ASF in its early work to promote live release (see "When Live Release Went Hollywood," p. 56).

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unauthorized photocopies of this and other Taylor prints on eBay attest to the perpetual popularity of Taylor's sporting art. In 2005, Joan Salvato Wulff was honoured with a Taylor portrait commissioned to support salmon restoration on the Merrimack River. Taylor created that portrait from photos Wulff sent him. A first version was redone when Taylor, always looking for artistic perfection, decided to "de-emphasize the rod and reel" by moving the rod from under Wulff's right arm to under her left arm.

Along with crafting bamboo rods, Taylor developed an interest in collecting classic angling gear, especially fly rods and reels produced by the best makers. In part, this was likely linked to his friendships with some of those makers. Eventually he produced a limited-edition print series he called *Angling Collectibles in Print*, which celebrates such notable rod and reel makers as Fred Thomas, Edward vom Hofe, Lyle Dickerson, Arthur L. Walker and Stan Bogdan. In some of the reel prints, again, he would slip in his own whimsical subterfuge, the *Nova Scotia Special*.

Lasting memories of Arthur Taylor's creativity can be found in the paintings that adorn the walls of sporting camps and private and corporate collections in North America and Europe. Yet Taylor's deeper imprint is seen in the conservation efforts he championed and the many individuals he befriended and influenced. Not least among those friends was budding rod maker Steve Campbell, of Brewer, Maine. Soon after Taylor's death, Campbell told *Bangor Daily News* outdoors reporter John Holyoke: "Twenty years ago, the whole world changed for me when I met [Arthur]. I was learning to make rods, but he introduced me to everything and everyone in the bamboo world. I wouldn't have met Sam Carlson, who is the man I bought the Thomas Rod Company from, if it weren't for Arthur. Arthur was friends with him. Arthur was friends with everybody."

A simple art piece that Taylor produced in the early 1990s for ASF may have had as profound an effect on changing Atlantic salmon anglers' practices in Maine and Canada as did progressive fishing regulations. Peter Rioux, Arthur's son-in-law, showed me Taylor's poster when I first visited his clock shop. At a time when releasing salmon was not a common practice, this poster, along with bumper stickers and pins that Taylor produced to publicize the struggle to restore salmon runs in the Penobscot, fostered a change in public perceptions about the river and its fisheries (see "When Live Release Went Hollywood," p. 56). Taylor's legacy is a freer-flowing river with much improved passage and spawning runs for anadromous fish. 🐟

Emeritus **Richard Jagels** is the Resource Center Museum Director of the Craig Brook fish hatchery in Orrington, Maine, where Arthur Taylor's artistry is on exhibit. A version of this article first appeared in the Summer 2023 issue of *The American Fly Fisher*.

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