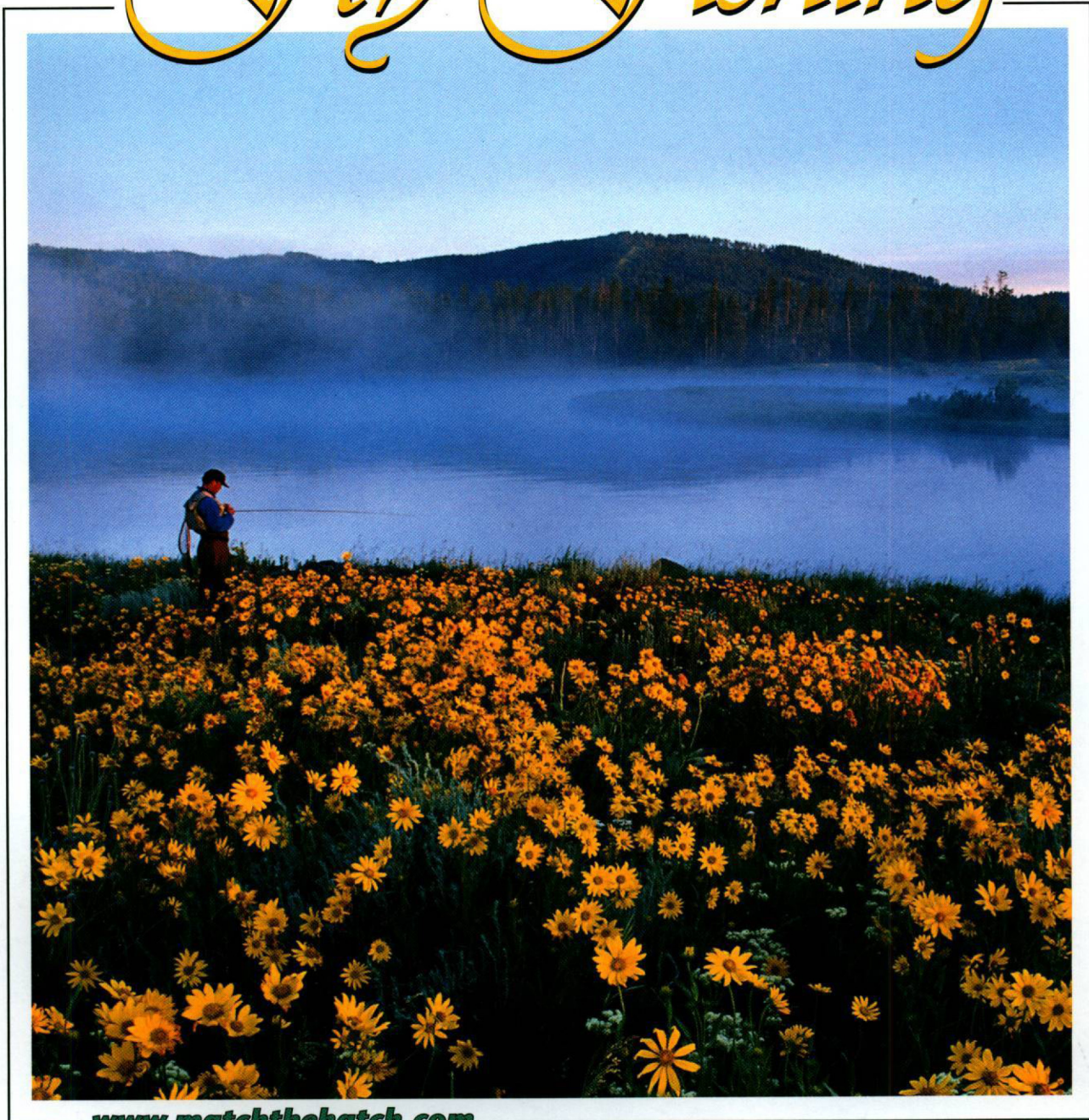


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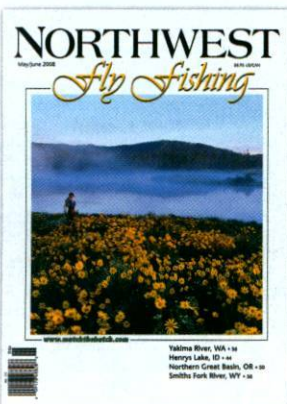
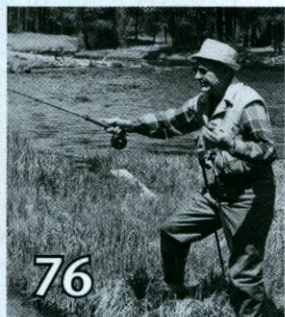
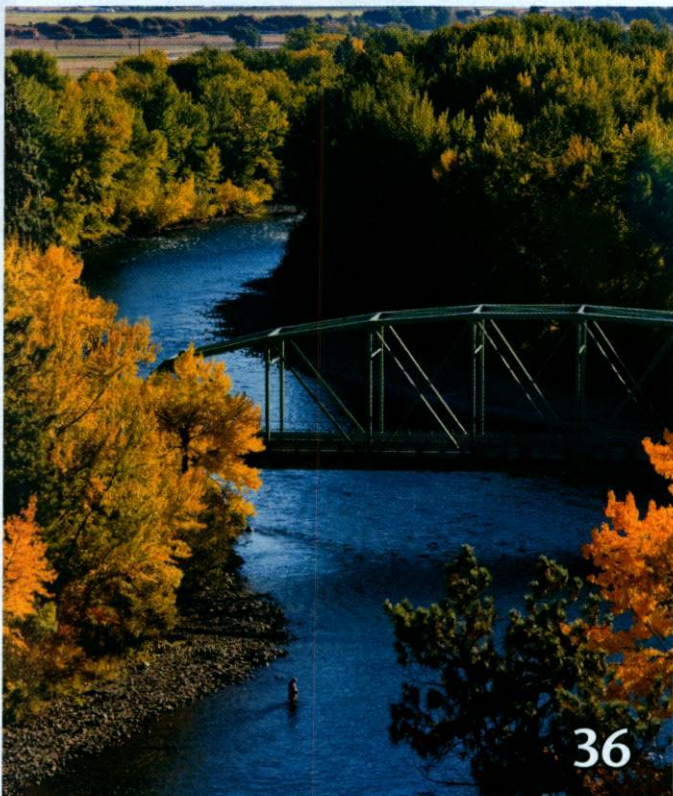
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Cover: *Morning mist drifts over Idaho's Henrys Fork on a perfect summer day.*

Photo by: *John Juracek*



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Pioneers & Legends

Vernon S. "Pete" Hidy (1914–1983):
Writer, Editor, and Photographer in Oregon
and Idaho, and Inventor of the "Flymph"

By Jack W. Berryman

Vernon S. "Pete" Hidy was born in Springfield, Ohio, on August 9, 1914, one of three sons of Albert Hidy Sr. and Annabel Stanford. Of German and Prussian descent, young Pete loved the outdoors and began fishing all the "exciting meadow streams with worms and crawfish tails for bass, perch, catfish, and carp."

After high school in 1932, Hidy enrolled in Wittenberg University in his hometown, only to drop out two years later during the Great Depression. He traveled to Pennsylvania in search of work. He remembered that it was in "the Brodhead, Paradise, and Neversink [creeks] where I learned the rudiments of fly fishing during the more leisurely days of the depression thirties." Then, in 1935, Hidy met "Big Jim" Leisenring on Brodhead Creek, a tributary of the Paradise near Henryville, Pennsylvania.

Leisenring had become a disciple of English fly fishermen H.C. Cutcliffe, W.C. Stewart, and G.M. Skues through reading their books and corresponding with Skues. He read Cutcliffe's *The Art of Trout Fishing on Rapid Streams* (1863), Stewart's *The Practical Angler* (1857), and Skues's *Minor Tactics of the Chalk Stream* (1910) and *The Way of a Trout with a Fly* (1921), and began adapting their wet patterns and tactics to the hatches and streams of eastern Pennsylvania. Hidy met Leisenring again in 1936.

Hidy and Leisenring became the best of friends, and on March 8, 1940, Leisenring presented his original "Color & Materials Book" to Hidy, who described it as "pages of colors, yarns, herls, hackles, quills, threads,



V.S. "Pete" Hidy with his fly rod and camera about 1971. Hidy always carried a camera around his neck or in his creel when he went fishing. Many of his fine photographs were published in his 1972 book, *The Pleasures of Fly Fishing*. Photograph courtesy of Lance Hidy (above). An original Hidy "Flymph" fly provided by Lance Hidy (inset)

time and would often write to pay the bills. Knowing of Hidy's ambition to be a journalist and realizing that he did not want to take his secret techniques to his grave, Leisenring decided to produce a book and asked Hidy to help him. Accordingly, in 1941 Dodd, Mead & Co. of New York published *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly* by James E. Leisenring, as told to V.S. Hidy. The introduction was written by Reuben Cross, who had previously published *Tying American Trout Lures* (1936), *Fur, Feathers and Steel* (1940), and *The Complete Fly-Tyer* (1950). Released at the outset of World War II, *Wet Fly* failed to attract much of an audience, but its contents were historic nonetheless.

Ernest Schwiebert, in his classic book *Nymphs* (1973), credited Hidy with helping "prepare and rework the rough manuscript," as well as serving "as its primary copy editor, finally shepherding the manuscript through the



and feathers from several birds...bits of fur from muskrat, mole, English hare, American rabbit, and seal spun on silk thread of selected colors to provide lifelike under-color for the furs."

He went on to say that "these are called 'spun bodies.'" He and Leisenring had observed mayflies with no wings when they examined the contents of trout stomachs and had read the new book by Skues, *Nymph Fishing for Chalk Stream Trout* (1939), as fellow fly tiers and friends, including Reuben Cross and Harry and Elsie Darby, further urged Leisenring to put his vast knowledge into writing.

Hidy was struggling to earn a living at the

labyrinthine corridors of Manhattan publishing houses.”

The recognition Hidy received from his association with Leisenring, along with his involvement with the book, gave him confidence in his ability as a writer and trout fisherman. From his home in the Buckingham Valley, about 30 miles north of Philadelphia, he traveled and fished throughout the Northeast. He became a member of the Anglers' Club of New York as well as the Flyfishers' Club of London.

Hidy served with the U.S. Navy from 1944 to 1946 and took some college classes at Cornell University. He married Elaine Williams from Philadelphia at this time, and upon his service discharge, the couple traveled west to La Grande, Oregon, where Pete became a sportswriter for *The Observer*, the local newspaper. His small-town home in Union County provided Pete with ample fishing, including the Minam River. In this beautiful setting about 250 miles east of Portland, the Hidys had a son, Lance. Hidy corresponded regularly with Leisenring and learned that Skues had died in 1949; soon thereafter, in 1951, “Big Jim” himself died.

Hidy left Oregon for Southern California in the early 1950s to work as a traveling salesman for the Crown-Zellerbach paper company. Lance remembered his father as being “handsome and immaculately groomed, with an excellent vocabulary, who was good at sales and making money.” The Hidys moved to Portland around 1960 for Pete to take a sales position with Pak-Well Paper Products.

Through Hidy's New York fly-fishing connections, most notably two staff writers for *Sports Illustrated*—Richard Alden Knight, son of one of Leisenring's other followers, who wrote *The Modern Angler* (1936) and *The Theory and Technique of Fresh Water Angling* (1940), and Virginia Kraft, who did much of the early research on Theodore Gordon—*Sports* associate editor Ezra Bowen visited Portland in early 1960 to work with Hidy on a three-part series of articles on fly fish-



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ing. The cover story for the March 28, 1960, issue was "The Art of Fishing with the Wet Fly," with Hidy, champion fly caster Johnny Dieckman, and artist Anthony Ravielli featured. Hidy wrote that the series was "based on notes & lessons learned at streamside" and were the "trout-tested techniques" he had learned from his "old friend and companion angler," Leisenring. The next two articles in the series contained material on the Leisenring Lift (a technique for using wet flies to mimic emerging insects swimming up through the water column) and drawings of Hidy fishing and tying a fly. Step-by-step instructions were given for tying three Leisenring patterns—the Brown Hackle, Leisenring Spider, and Hare's Ear—along with another "Leisenring innovation called the spun body." These articles were a major boost for Hidy's reputation and gave him and his former mentor further exposure to a national audience. The three-part series became the basis for the *Sports Illustrated Book of Wet-Fly Fishing*, published later that year.

Buoyed by his national reputation, a strong sense of the history of fly fishing, and the realization that there was no fly-fishing club in Oregon, Hidy and 51 others met at Portland's Hotel Benson on February 7, 1961, to organize a club. At the group's second meeting on March 7, Hidy was elected the first president of The Flyfishers Club of Oregon. The club, keenly aware of the much older (1939) and more established Washington Fly Fishing Club to the north, began to invite top-name speakers like Roderick Haig-Brown and to plan their own magazine. Hidy, who knew the *Bulletin of the Anglers' Club* (New York) very well, became the first editor of *The Creel, the Bulletin of the Flyfishers Club of Oregon*. The new 32-page journal, designed by talented art director Douglas Lynch, was an instant sensation in the fly-fishing community. Hidy edited the first eight issues, which preceded all the other popular fly-fishing magazines by several years.

By 1963, Hidy was a well-established Northwest fly fisherman who collected books on the sport, carried a camera in his creel, and traveled regularly to fish his favorite waters in Oregon, Washington, Montana, and British Columbia. At this time too, in a tribute to Leisenring and Skues, Hidy "coined the word 'flymph' to describe the essence of their findings." He went on to say the "word identifies for the first time in a single word, that brief but critical and dramatic stage of emergence when the aquatic nymphs are struggling to the surface to become flies... Wingless, disheveled and kicking, with a juicy, translucent body, the flymph is of profound importance to fly fishermen."

Hidy, along with a small group of other anglers—most notably Bill Nelson and other members of Eugene, Oregon's McKenzie Flyfishers—was instrumental in organizing a national fly-fishing conclave in Eugene, held June 18 through 20, 1965. He moderated a panel discussion called Reflections and Philosophies of Fly Fishing with panelists Lee Wulff and Ed Zern, his friends from the East Coast, along with Tommy Brayshaw, a friend from British Columbia. Hidy's connections with the Anglers' Club of New York and the Theodore Gordon Flyfishers, also from New York, along with his enduring friendship with most of fly fishing's notables on the East Coast, helped bring together east and west to start what was to become the Federation of Fly Fishers (FFF). He remained active in FFF activities for the remainder of his life.

In searching for content to publish in *The Creel*, Hidy came across several angling-related essays by Oregon's poet laureate, Ben Hur Lampman, that were previously published in *The Oregonian* newspaper. Bob Wethern, an ex-newspaperman himself and a *Creel* coeditor with Hidy, secured permission to access *The Oregonian's* clipping files, which were filled with Lampman's stories and editorials. After Hidy spent three years collecting, reading, and editing,

he received reprint rights from Lampman's widow and published *A Leaf from French Eddy: A Collection of Essays on Fish, Anglers & Fishermen* by Ben Hur Lampman. It was the first book published by Touchstone Press, a company Hidy and a colleague started.

In 1967, Hidy moved to Boise, Idaho, to accept a job as an editor and writer with Boise Cascade's communications department. He was hired by Robert O. Beatty, a former member of the Flyfishers Club of Oregon, who was also a fan of the late Lampman. Once in Boise, Hidy became a skilled book collector and connoisseur of angling literature. In 1970 he edited and wrote the introduction for Captain Philip M. Kerridge's *An Address on Angling Literature*, a book dedicated to Brayshaw that discussed the collection Kerridge donated to California State University, Fullerton. Later that year in *The Creel*, Hidy published "A Salute to Leisenring and Skues."

In 1971, Nick Lyons and Crown Publishers reprinted, with several new additions and an introduction by Ernest Schwiebert, *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly*, retitled *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly and Fishing the Flymph*, because Hidy added three new chapters on the Flymph. Hidy explained that the Flymph "strives to simulate the hatching nymphs of the mayfly, caddis fly, or other aquatic insects as they struggle up toward the surface film." Flymph fishing, Hidy emphasized, "equals or excels dry-fly fishing because the strike is usually visible and the fly must be placed upstream from the trout with considerable accuracy and skill." Later that year, in its May and July issues, *Fly Fisherman* published excerpts from Hidy's Flymph chapters, thereby introducing Hidy and the Flymph to legions of avid fly anglers worldwide.

In 1972, Winchester Press published Hidy's book *The Pleasures of Fly Fishing*, subtitled *Photographs & Commentary on Streams, Rivers, Lakes, Anglers, Trout & Steelhead, Including a Selection of Memorable Observations from the Classic Writings of Angling Literature*.

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Like his friend Ralph Wahl of Bellingham, Washington, who had just published *Come Wade the River* (1971), a collection of his black-and-white photographs along with passages from the writings of Haig-Brown, Hidy always carried a camera when he fished. He photographed in black-and-white as well as color and admitted that the book was “based on the dual pursuit that, over the years, has given me deep and lasting satisfaction—fly fishing and photography.”

Later that same year, Hidy and the *Sports Illustrated* editors published a revised edition of his 1960 book as part of the *Sports* library, titled *Sports Illustrated Fly Fishing*. Hidy wrote a new preface and provided several new photographs, along with a new cover.

Hidy started the International Brotherhood of the Flymph in 1973 and published 100 copies of a small booklet titled *An Open Letter to the International Society of Flymph Fishermen*. Each copy came with two flies tied by Hidy. He informed his readers that “the essential qualities that excite trout in an artificial fly that gives the illusion of an insect alive in the water are: Color, Undercolor, Natural Color, Harmony, Translucence, Texture, Size, Shape, Proportions, Delicacy, Vitality.” He also added “Mimicry,” for Flymphs that “mimic the film of air and the bubble of air that trout see during the flymphs’ metamorphosis into adult winged flies.”

Also in 1973, Hidy was named a director of the newly formed Flyfisher Foundation in Oregon, along with other notables like Wahl, Haig-Brown, Wethern, and Jack Hemingway. That same year, Winchester Press published Schwiebert’s classic book *Nymphs*, in which the contributions of Leisenring and Hidy received considerable attention.

“The Origins of Flymph Fishing” was published in 1974 in *The Anglers’ Club Bulletin*, and Hidy told readers he still took “boyish delight in the beauty of trout streams, the behavior of rainbows and browns, and the aquatic insects they eat.” The following year, Hidy released a limited edition of the

for the Silver Creek Fund.

By the late 1970s, Hidy was not working as much and wrote Wethern saying, “This semi-retirement is very comfortable for me.” Yet he was directly involved in starting a newsletter, *Fisherman’s Luck*, for the Boise Fly Fishing Club and served as guest editor for *The Creel*, in which he published an article on his friend Sparse Grey Hackle (coauthored with A.K. Severeid), along with another article titled “A Flatlander’s Report,” in which Hidy recounted many of his favorite places to fish. He also published articles in *The Anglers’ Club Bulletin* and *The American Fly Fisher*. By 1979, his health deteriorating, he had a pacemaker implanted and retired.

Hidy remained very active after retirement. A long and very interesting article, “The Flyfisher’s West,” appeared in a special 1980 issue of *The American Fly Fisher* devoted to the West, and it was later published in *The Flyfisher* as “A Flyfisher’s History of the West.” Paul Schullery, editor of *The American Fly Fisher* and the leading historian of fly fishing, praised Hidy, the Flyfishers Club of Oregon, and *The Creel*, noting the latter was “one unparalleled published source of western angling lore

and history...the voice of one of the west’s foremost angling societies.”

Also in the early 1980s, Hidy won the Rodney Adair Memorial Award, presented by the International Association of Business Communicators, and began coauthoring a book, *Conservation in Idaho, a History*. Gary Borger, author of *Nymphing: A Basic Book* (1979) and *Naturals: A Guide to Food Organisms of the Trout* (1980), visited Hidy when he did a program for the Boise Fly Fishing Club in March 1981. Borger included Hidy’s “wet/dry flymph” in his list of 12 patterns he called “The Deadly Dozen,” and at the meet-



Using a technique known as the Leisenring Lift to present his Flymph pattern, V.S. “Pete” Hidy fishes one of his favorite streams, Oregon’s Metolius River, in the 1960s. Photograph courtesy of Lance Hidy

second volume of the *Leisenring Source Book* in a loose-leaf format and edited and wrote an introduction for *Where Would You Go? Exploring the Seasons with Ben Hur Lampman*, published by Robert Beatty, his boss at Boise Cascade. Then, in 1977, Hidy was one of several fly fishermen featured in Migel and Wright’s *The Masters of the Nymph*, his chapter, titled “Soft-hackle Nymphs—the Flymphs,” included photos from Idaho’s Silver Creek. This stream had become one of Hidy’s favorite fisheries, and he was present in Sun Valley when the president of Boise Cascade donated \$100,000 to the Nature Conservancy

ing, Hidy was given an honorary life membership and the President's Award for "being a positive influence on the sport of fly fishing in Idaho."

The Flymph was becoming popular in Sweden in the early 1980s, thanks to Hidy's friendship with Gunnar Johnson. Johnson translated much of Hidy's material for the Swedish audience and asked Pete to write the introduction for his printing of *The Leisenring Color & Materials Book* for distribution in Scandinavian countries. In early 1982, after suffering a stroke, Hidy informed his friend Bob Wethern that he had "become interested in ecology and conservation, two subjects closely related to fly fishing." He wrote editorials for *The Idaho Statesman* on air quality, acid rain, and a number of other issues. He had been friends with Oregon's Dave Hughes for a number of years, and as Hughes remembered, "chided me for writing too much that was too technical" and "directed me to write something that was not just 'how to,' but recorded instead some

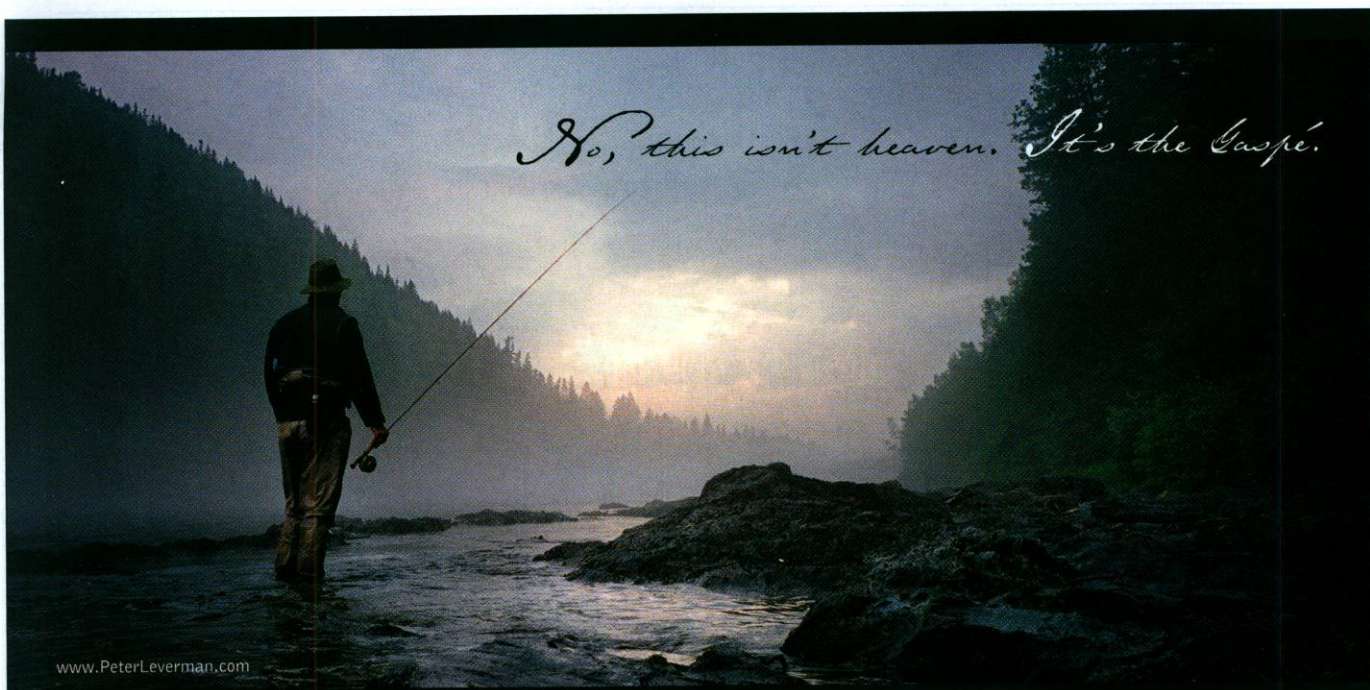
of the pleasures of fishing." That was the stimulus for Hughes's *An Angler's Astoria* (1982) and Hidy's invitation to write the foreword.

By mid-1982, Hidy was planning "The Open Letter of 1983" to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the International Society of Flymph Fishermen. Yet he was too sick to fish with his Swedish friend Johnson, who visited and fished for 20 days as Hidy's guest. On January 24, 1983, at the age of 68, Hidy died in Boise's St. Luke's Hospital. Fishing friend Clayne Baker provided a personal tribute to Hidy in which he promised "the 21st-century fly fishermen will know the name Pete Hidy—and they will compliment the trout with the best thing in their fly box—the Hidy Flymph." Concluding services were held at the Hidy Cemetery in Washington Courthouse, Ohio, halfway between Columbus and Cincinnati. Hidy's son Lance realized that fly fishing "had great meaning" for his father and that "the trout stream was his church."

Soon after Hidy's death, the Flyfishers Club of Oregon established the Vernon S. "Pete" Hidy Award for a "member in recognition of their literary contributions to the Club and the sport of flyfishing." By the mid-1990s, fly anglers learned about Hidy and his Flymph in books such as Hughes's *Wet Flies: Tying and Fishing Soft Hackles, Winged and Wingless Wets, and Fuzzy Nymphs* (1995) and *Trout Flies: The Tier's Reference* (1999). Most recently, Allen McGee, an original member of the International Brotherhood of the Flymph, included much on Leisenring, Hidy, and the Flymph in *Tying & Fishing Soft-Hackled Nymphs* (2007).

The author would like to thank Bob Wethern and Lance Hidy for assistance in writing this article.

Jack W. Berryman is an angling historian and author of Fly-Fishing Pioneers & Legends of the Northwest. He lives in Kirkland, Washington.



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