

Dr. Gordon Silver - Fishing Prowess Recognized

by Jim Gourlay

He can arrive mid-morning on the pool, walk into the midst of a crowd of luckless early birds and, as often as not, hook a fish.

With tiny flies, he can catch salmon during even the most severe summer drought conditions long after other anglers have given up hope.

He moves around the river unobtrusively and often, rarely staying very long at any one spot, for he can tell very quickly if there are fish in the pool.

And Dr. Gordon Silver's prowess as a salmon fisherman is widely recognized. Lesser men watch intently when he throws a fly or poles a riverboat with that completely effortless technique that only comes with 60 years of practice. A tall, lean individual, his* close-cropped white moustache gives him an almost military bearing. The mystique is reinforced by this reserved and private man's distaste for small-talk. A hearty "Mornin'. Anythin' doin'?" will usually be met with a nod or a grunt and the conversation ends right there.

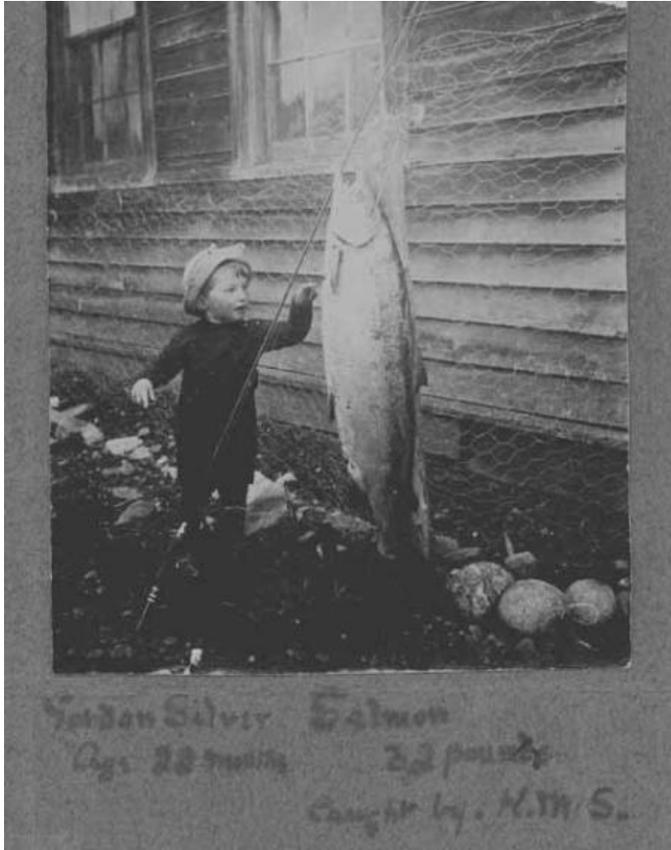
"Well, I don't know that I'm. really qualified . . . but I suppose, if you want to, it would be alright," he responds with typical humility when asked for an interview.

This willingness to be accommodating, say former patients in the Village of Sherbrooke, in Guysborough County, is characteristic of his 46 years as a country physician. He retired two years ago.

"Doc Silver," continues to live what most anglers would consider an idyllic lifestyle. His spacious home backs right on to the river. His riverboat sits ready, season-long, at the end of the yard. His presence in the tidal Bungalow Pool adjacent to the house is almost as certain as the tides.

But it's not totally perfect. Over-crowding, Silver says, seems to be today's worst problem, and there is "no politically acceptable solution." Today he tends to avoid the more popular pools choosing to sacrifice a good chance of sport in order to find relative solitude on the river. For him the quality of the angling experience involves much more than merely hooking and landing a fish.

He has no compliments for federal fish managers: "I don't think they know what they're doing."



Above we see a young Gordon L. Silver admiring a huge 32 lb St. Mary's Atlantic salmon caught by his father, Dr. Gordon M. Silver.

The West River St. Mary's this year, he says, is a good example. That branch was opened June 1 until July 31 when everyone knows the salmon don't run there until the end of June. "If it's only one month then they should say so."

Similarly, Silver is less than pleased with the late opening of salmon seasons in recent years.

In the old days, he recalls, the first fish would usually be taken in the Medway Feb. 1. Then it was changed to April 1, then May 1, and this year May 18. He believes the salmon enter the river "on the first high water after the ice is out."

He remembers fishing the big waters in mid-April when an angler could expect to take six large salmon in a day — 20 or 30 in a good year — "and not hurt anything." Anglers in those days would use very large flies, but he says he rarely found it necessary to use anything bigger than a 2-0.

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It's doubtful, he says, how many fish are actually being saved by starting the season late. If they aren't caught low in the river in April they're just caught later up-river.

For those of us who may think the concept of returning fish to the water is a new and innovative idea, Doc Silver, has some news. When it was not difficult to take six or eight fish a day, eight-pound and 10-pound salmon were regularly put back.

"What would you do with them? It got so sometimes you had trouble finding people to take them."

The fish seemed to survive alright. He recalls one particular occasion when he mistakenly gaffed a black salmon in the tail having caught it in discoloured water and assumed it was a fresh fish. Despite the wound the fish swam off when released " and Ted Macintosh caught it again later on down river."

Salmon seem to be pretty tough, he figures. They often show up in the river with terrible wounds inflicted by seals.

It's not the seals that have diminished their numbers, though, Silver contends. It's the high seas fishery.

Poaching in the river isn't much of a problem today, he says. There was much more netting in the old days. "They used to spear them at the head of the (Melrose) lake. There's a certain amount of skill in using a net. Most young fellas can't do it today."

The name Silver has been synonymous with the St. Mary's River for three generations. One of the better pools on the river, at the confluence of the East and West branches, is named for the family.

It was Doc Silver's father, a Halifax physician and ardent salmon fisherman, who built the family camp at what has become known as "Silver's Pool." His mother caught a 32-pound salmon. His two sons, Ken, a Halifax engineer, and John, a fisheries officer, are keen and capable anglers; and more recently the Silver grandchildren have been getting into the act.

But what secrets are involved in raising a salmon to a fly when others cannot?

Those kinds of questions just produce a wry smile.

He will allow, though, with some prodding, that knowing the river — under different water conditions — is terribly important, knowing where a salmon is likely to be lying.

Dr. Gordon Silver, like other fine fishermen, moves around in search of the fish, choosing not to waste time beating barren water.

Fly pattern doesn't really matter a hoot, he says, "except size maybe." Nor does he believe the water is ever too low to catch a fish. "It just gets more difficult."

A subtle glance at his watch - it's time to wind up the discussion, for the interviewer knows full well the tide will be high very shortly and the water in the Bungalow pool will be just right. - Jim Gourlay

Doc Silver Special

Type: Wet

Origin: Ted MacIntosh

Reference: Dr. Gordon Silver

Dr. Gordon Silver was the local doctor in Sherbrooke for many years. Silver's Pool was named after his father, also a doctor, who built a cabin on it and spent many summers fishing the river.

"When Doctor Silver gave me this pattern he said he got it from the late Ted MacIntosh, a guide for many years on the St. Mary's. This fly was a real killer in the old days when they fished in April and May right above the tide in Sherbrooke."

Doc Silver Special

Hook: 7957BX 1/0 - 2/0

Thread: Black

Tip: Silver flat

Tip: Orange D.M.F. floss

Tail: Golden Pheasant Crest

Butt: Black chenille

Ribbing: Silver oval

Body: Silver flat tinsel

Hackle: Black throat

Wing: Black Squirrel

Topping: Green D.M.F. floss - one strand

Cheeks: Jungle cock

Head: Black

