



Often called “the world’s best and greatest fly fisherman.”



Stream Blazer

Joe Brooks

1901-1972

Susquehanna River, Port Deposit, Maryland

Lefty Kreh, a close friend, in his foreword to ***Joe Brooks on Fishing***, a 2004 collection of Brook’s writings edited by Don Sedgwich, reviewed his friend’s ascension from writing a small outdoor newspaper column in Towson, Maryland, in 1945 to his role as fishing editor for ***Outdoor Life*** magazine.

Lefty wrote, “Brooks opened up the world to all those who followed.” He traveled the world fly fishing in exciting new coldwater, freshwater and/or saltwater with every conceivable fly pattern for any fish species.” Brooks fly-fished with everything from midges to dry and wet flies to

large saltwater streamers and huge bass bugs. Brooks fished for a variety of saltwater species, including bonefish, tarpon and his first permit with a fly in the Bahamas in the 1960s. Kreh said that Joe Brooks “put salt water on the map.”

Accomplishments on salt, fresh and cold waters earned Joe Brooks the title of “the world’s best and greatest angler.” His collection of magazine stories and books describe the flies that Brooks found productive. If Joe Brooks wrote about a new type of fly or a new fly-fishing concept in an ***Outdoor Life*** story, anglers scrambled to their vises – he gave his and other anglers innovations credibility.

Brooks liked his own big, colorful Blondes, yet his preferences did not leave out smaller wet flies, dry flies, and streamers. While not flies he created, he mentioned the classic patterns in his writings. In the ***Complete Book of Fly Fishing*** (1958) and ***Trout Fishing*** (1972), Brooks gave a list of his favorites. His fly boxes included classic wet-fly patterns like the McGinty, Alexandra (he thought this fly with its flashy silver tinsel body and peacock sword wings, also imitated minnows), Black Gnat, Ginger Quill, Cowdung, Coachman (his favorite), and Royal Coachman. Brooks did not abandon traditional patterns.

Reference:

Valla, Mike. ***The Founding Flies: 43 American Masters, Their Patterns and Influences***, Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, 2013.



Joe Brook's Blonde Series

Joe Brooks did not sit at a vise tying hundreds of Blondes to fill fly bins. He was not an innovator as much as a good fly angler who discovered what worked for him, and then reported his findings to the angling world.

The Blonde series of flies known as "Joe's flies," raised Joe Brooks's stature as an innovator. In "Those Deadly Blondes," an article in the December 1963 issue of ***Outdoor Life***, Brook wrote, "If I had only one pattern for all big fish in both fresh and salt water, I'd choose the Blonde." Brooks said that the big Atlantic salmon on the Aurland River in Norway "busted their spots going for the Blondes." His intriguing stories proved the fly's effectiveness on any water.

Whether he fished his fly pattern for northern pike in Saskatchewan's Middle Lake, false albacore near Paradise Island in the Indian Ocean, tigerfish on the Limpopo River in East Africa, tarpon in the Florida Keys, striped bass on Chesapeake Bay, or large brown trout anywhere, the Blondes performed for Brooks.

Brooks's ***Outdoor Life*** story led many to prefer the Blondes – all six (6) of them – as the patterns of choice for large fish, regardless of species. In 1939, Brooks's new fly was conceived while fishing his striper beat on the Susquehanna River near Port Deposit, Maryland. Brooks's Platinum Blonde remained nameless until his second trip to the Rio Grande in Argentina, accompanied by ***Toledo Blade*** outdoor editor Lou Klewer. Brooks referred to the fly, which the big Argentina brown trout hammered, as a two-winged white Bucktail. It was Klewer that suggested the name Platinum Blonde, a fly that evolved into an entire series; The Argentina Blonde, with the first wing red, second wing orange;

then the mono-colored winged Yellow Honey Blonde, Pink Blonde, Black Blonde, and Strawberry Blonde. Gold tinsel is often used for the fly bodies of the Strawberry and Honey Blondes, but silver tinsel is used for all of the Blondes.

Many writers helped popularize the Blondes. Those readers who missed reading Brooks's classic 1963 *Outdoor Life* piece may have read about the Blondes in Joseph D. Bates Jr.'s *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing* (1966). In his book, Bates included a color photograph of a Brooks Blonde, attributing the pattern to both Brooks and Homer Rhodes Jr. In describing the Blondes, Bates wrote that Rhode was "probably the father of this type" of fly. Before 1950, Rhodes had given Bates examples of Homer Rhodes Jr. Tarpon Bucktail. That same year, a sketch of the fly appeared in Bates's book *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing*. Its morphology is closely aligned with Brooks's Blonde.

Considered his signature patterns, the colorful Blondes are synonymous with Joe Brooks. Kreh added a couple more Blondes to the family: the Blushing Blonde, with white lower wing and red upper wing, the Hot Orange Blonde, with orange lower and upper wings. Joe Brooks would have nodded approval to friend Kreh's additions and added them to his fly box arsenal.

Joe Brooks said, "If I had only one pattern for all big fish in both fresh and salt water, I'd choose the Blonde."

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Joe Brooks Popularized the Muddler Minnow

Brooks popularized fly patterns he found to be productive in all types of waters, whether his creations or those of other anglers or fly tiers. Brooks convinced anglers that Don Gapen's strange, ugly-looking fly that was tied to imitate the minnow-like sculpin was worthy of their fly boxes and constantly promoted the Muddler Minnow. It was first tied in 1916 for use on the Nipigon River brookies in Ontario, Canada. Brooks carried the fly with him west to Montana where, he said in *Trout Fishing* (1972), "I caught more big trout than with any fly I had every used." A. J. McClane presented the fly in his October 1954 *Field & Stream* article "Presenting the Muddler Minnow" and Brooks built on that early article. Brooks elevated the Muddler when he wrote "Best All-Round Trout Fly," which appeared in *Outdoor Life* in October 1963. Brooks gave the fly to Dan Bailey, and it rocketed in popularity as Dan Bailey's shop commercialized many variations.

Reference:

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