

Designed on the Miramichi – Early Featherwing Flies

Miramichi River Atlantic salmon anglers have a vast array – thousands, really – of flies they can employ to try and hook a fish. Most of those flies have been developed wherever salmon swim. Very few, however, were developed hard by the Miramichi. Early featherwing flies led the way before hairwings came into vogue. Following are four featherwing wet flies, developed by men who made fly fishing and fly tying for salmon their passion; for some, their vocation, on the Miramichi.

The Grant Special

Fred Grant (1901-1971) was an artist, fly tyer and salmon guide on the upper reaches of the Miramichi River in the mid-twentieth century. He came to my attention via Facebook recently. Juniper, a small town at the headwaters of the Miramichi, has a community centre (check that Canadian spelling!) which recently erected a monument to one of Fred's creations, the Grant Special (photo from the Centre's facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/JCC506/>):



There is a wonderful resource for information about New Brunswick fly tyers, both past and present: <http://www.flyfishingnb.com/index.html>. I googled and googled trying to find information about Fred Grant and his Grant Special - flyfishingnb was the only place I could find anything about the man and his fly. I combed through all of my salmon fly books...nada. Flyfishingnb has a great little biography of Fred, and I have taken the liberty of reprinting what the site had to say about the development of the Grant Special:

In the mid 1930's Fred Grant originated a fly pattern that proved to be successful. He named the fly the "Grant Special." The fly evolved in this way. Fred was asked to tie the "Reliable" but he didn't have the Bronze Mallard feather for the wing. He decided to use grey mallard instead and during the tying process also added a second tail of Golden Pheasant crest just in front of the yellow butt. Fred tied the "Grant Special" in this presentation, and used florescent green floss for the butt. The original Reliable pattern calls for yellow floss to be used for the butt. Fred and a lot of other fishermen used this pattern with much success. It is one of a few flies that is a good salmon catcher, and it even earned him a few good dollars. The "Grant Special" was his favourite feather-wing fly. In June 1940, while

fishing on his favourite river, the Miramichi, he caught a 20-pound salmon on it. Fred Grant's favourite hair-wing salmon fly was the "Cosseboom." Of all the flies he tied, and liked, Fred Grant never tied or fished with "bugs."

Here's my tie of a Grant Special. The wing is problematic - in the text above, it's listed as topped by slips of gray Mallard, but in the recipe, also from flyfishingnb, it's listed as teal. In light of the fact that, on that website, there is a photo of a Grant Special tied by Fred that definitely sports a mallard wing, I tied it with a mallard wing.



The Grant Special:

Head:	Black
Tip:	Oval silver tinsel
Tail:	Red floss or red hackle fibers
Butt:	Florescent lime green floss
Second Tail:	Golden Pheasant crest
Body:	Black floss or wool
Rib:	Oval silver tinsel
Throat Hackle:	Reddish brown
Wing:	Strands of Golden Pheasant tippets topped with grey mallard

The Reliable and the Oriole

Text and Photo From the Atlantic Salmon Museum's *Miramichi Memories – the River People* Hall of Fame Inductees (http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/histoires_de_chez_nous-community_stories/pm_v2.php?id=story_line&lg=English&fl=0&ex=00000364&sl=2000&pos=1&pf=1)

Ira Gruber was one of the earliest fly fishermen on the Miramichi River. His retired status enabled him to spend long hours during all kinds of weather on this river. His devotion to angling instilled a desire to discover a method by which salmon would take a fly during periods of low water, when angling normally ceased. Learning the art of tying flies from Everett Price, Ira painstakingly

developed his own detailed feather wing flies. His creations were effective and enabled fish to be taken in all water temperatures or any type of weather. "He was responsible for developing the Miramichi type of salmon fly with its short cigar shaped body and short wing which hugged the body." Ira's most popular flies were the Oriole, Reliable, Green Drake and Hermit. Joseph Bates Jr. states in his book Atlantic Salmon Flies and Fishing "Ira Gruber made a lasting mark on North America salmon fishing."



Ira Gruber (1882-1962)

The Reliable



Tip:	Oval silver tinsel
Tail:	Fibers of a Golden Pheasant red body feather
Butt:	Florescent lime green floss
Body:	Rear third yellow floss; forward two thirds Black floss
Rib:	Oval silver tinsel
Throat Hackle:	Black Hackle
Wing:	Underwing: two matched sections of Golden Pheasant tippet. Overwing: bronze mallard as a veil

The Oriole – Bates and Richards, in *Fishing Atlantic Salmon; the Flies and the Patterns*, suggest that the Oriole is “...probably the most famous of the patterns associated with Gruber and is still a standard favorite on the Miramichi.



Tip:	Oval silver tinsel
Tail:	A few fibers of Golden Pheasant red body feather
Body:	Black wool
Ribbing:	Oval silver tinsel
Throat:	Brown hackle
Wing:	Underwing – fibers of brown-red Golden Pheasant body feather
	Overwing – Gray mallard dyed Green Drake color
Head	Black

The Blackville (or Blackville Special):

The Blackville was originated by Doaktown, NB's Bert Miner. Again, text and photo from the Atlantic Salmon Museum's *Miramichi Memories – the River People*:

"Bert" Miner was born and lived all his life in Doaktown, N.B. Of necessity, he worked at various occupations during his lifetime but his heart was always in the woods and on the river. He was an expert angler and boats man which, together with his friendly manner, contributed to his becoming an excellent guide. He was known to the local population and visiting sportsmen alike as an authority on location and time to fish the various sections of the Miramichi.

Bert was one of the pioneers of fly-tying. He was an expert at producing the most difficult patterns and instructing others in the art. Research indicated that he designed the "Copper Killer", a productive fly to this day, and widely used on the Cains River.



Bert Miner (1907-1969)

Blackville:



Tag:	Oval silver tinsel and yellow floss
Tail:	Golden Pheasant Crest
Butt:	Peacock herl
Body:	Embossed silver tinsel
Ribbing:	Oval silver tinsel
Throat:	Bright orange hackle with guinea hen veiling the orange
Wing:	Four sections of grey mallard; two on each side
Head:	Black