

The Naples Creek Rainbows

by Robert Vierhile

Naples Creek is known throughout the East as one of the best spring rainbow trout streams in the United States. Few people realize, however, that there wasn't a single rainbow trout in Naples Creek until 1936.

Prior to 1936, rainbows had been stocked successfully in Seneca and Keuka Lakes, and many Naples fishermen wondered how the fish would adapt to Naples Creek and Canandaigua Lake. Lowell G. Richardson, who operated a boat livery (now owned by John Clark) at Woodville from 1930 to 1947, discussed the possibility of rainbow trout plantings in Canandaigua Lake with personnel at the State Fish Hatchery at Powder Mill Park. The fisheries men told Richardson that they thought the rainbows would do as well in Canandaigua Lake as they had done in the two other Finger Lakes.

Richardson discovered that, to get rainbow fingerlings from the state, there would have to be some Naples organization backing the effort. Richardson talked the project over with several local sportsmen and they formed the Naples Valley Fish and Game Association to engineer the

rainbow project. Some members of that first association included Jim Long, Leon "Skip" Pierce, Otto Eckert, Stanley and Ellis Keith, Len Folts, William J. Meredith, Lyman Smith, Sr., Jack Stafford, Ed Dinzler, and Henry Miller.

The sportsmen needed a spot to raise the rainbows so they restored the Old Mill Pond known as Strowbridge Pond at the end of Vine Street for the purpose. The pond was fed with cool water from Grimes Creek by a short raceway.

In the spring of 1936, the Powder Mill Park Hatchery put 10,000 rainbow trout fingerlings into the reconstructed pond. Canandaigua Lake, which had an abundant supply of smelt at the time, was the source of feed for the rainbows. Because the Naples Fish and Game Association had such a small budget, its members caught smelt during the spring months on Canandaigua and put 25 bushels of them in storage at a freezer plant in Geneva. Through arrangements with the Star Route mail carrier, the mailman brought a bushel of smelt to Naples whenever needed.

The Meyer Market, then located in what is the Naples Library Building, was the processing plant. Mrs. Meyers, who operated the store at that time, let the game club members use an old grinder to chop up the smelt for feeding to the rainbows.

That June in 1936, a summer flood broke the dam gates at Strowbridge Pond, and all of the rainbow fingerlings were prematurely stocked for the first time in Naples Creek. After the flood, the pond was completely drained, restored, and trout were raised in it again in 1937 and 1938.

The rainbows were from 2 to 3 inches in length when placed in the pond. After two year's growth, they were

stocked in Canandaigua Lake at a size that went from 6 to 9 inches in length. This stocking procedure went on for three consecutive years under the Naples Fish and Game Club sponsorship.

In just eight years, Canandaigua Lake was teeming with rainbows. But it wasn't until 1961 when the first Naples Rainbow Trout Derby was held that area fishermen were awakened to the many beautiful rainbows making their spring spawning runs in Naples Creek.

The largest rainbow trout known to be caught from Naples Creek weighed 15 lbs. 5 ozs. and was caught by James Grove, Sr. of Naples in 1963.



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