

The Pass Lake: *by Carl Haensel photos by the author* Classic Brook Trout Streamer

Sometimes flies have a rich history. This one abounds in stories and speculation. Rumor has it that this fly migrated south to the U.S. from the famous brook trout fisheries of Labrador. Others say that it originated in Clintonville, Wisconsin, with a minister who just wanted a good brook trout fly. It has received much praise from anglers on a famous northern brook trout stream, Wisconsin's Bois Brule River. It was there that presidents Grant, Cleveland, Coolidge, and others fished for brook trout that approached weights in double digits. Though this fly likely originated in the 1930s, today it remains a staple of many Wisconsin anglers. Like many regional flies, it gets little press here in Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, it does a fine job when cast to brook, brown or rainbow trout on our waters.

This versatile fly can be tied as a dry fly, wet fly or streamer. As one of our smallest streamer flies, this fly does a great job of imitating a black-nosed dace and other tiny minnows. Its normal sizes are 8, 10 and 12. This makes it similar to the wet flies that were popular in the not too distant past. Indeed, fishing a small streamer like a wet fly can be an effective presentation, especially for brook trout.



The Pass Lake, size 10

The materials in this fly are basic and easy to find. It has a black chenille body, brown hackle tail and throat, and a calf tail wing. The standard thread color is black. Some fly-tiers like to spice up the fly and use golden pheasant tip-pet for the tail and add tinsel to the body. Although some tiers use shorter or longer hooks, a 2x long wet-fly hook works well.

I pulled this fly out of my fly box recently on a trip to a small stream near home. It's not listed as a trout stream, and I rarely see anybody else fish there. But there are a few wild brook trout, which is enough for me. I tried casting some dry flies, but nothing wanted to come up to the top. Taking a page out of the book of yesteryear, I tied on a Pass Lake, stepped to the head of a likely run, and cast downstream across the current. The fly swung out across the current and nosed up to an underwater log. With my rod tip pointed at the fly, I held it at the water's surface for a moment. The fly swayed deep in the current and nothing happened. Keeping the rod still, I gave the fly a small twitch with the line, then another. A fat brook trout darted out from the log and smashed the streamer. I lifted the rod and set the hook. A few moments later, a healthy, large brook trout was at my feet in the stream.

Although you may lose a few flies trying this method, give it a shot. The flies are easy to tie and replace, and you never know when you might catch a trout that would make old "Silent Cal" Coolidge proud! ☐

Large, wild brook trout in Pennsylvania, like this 10.5-inch fish from Schuylkill County, can often be fooled by a small streamer. You may miss smaller fish by not offering them a dry fly, but don't pass up the chance to hook a nice one by swinging a streamer in front of a nice hole.