

In Loving Memory Of “Fred”

It is with a great sense of loss that I’m drafting this letter for the Fred Betts Memorial page. Fred Betts was our founder, curator, friend and will be forever missed at the Salmon River International Sport Fishing Museum.

My first introduction to Fred was in 2012. I had found a reel with the name “South Bend – Gladding” on it. During my Google searching I discovered that there was a museum in Pulaski, NY. which was originally in South Otselic, NY. This museum was created in 1972 by the Gladding Corporation of South Otselic. The newspaper article indicated that Fred Betts was the curator of the museum in Pulaski, so I gave him a call.

This was the beginning of a great friendship and mentorship. At the time I was holding fishing seminars for families at our church. It was there that an elderly man asked me about a rod, reel and lure that he wanted to show his grandson. He was amazed at the new tackle I was presenting and wanted to show his grandson what he used to catch fish with. It puzzled me to think that I was not familiar with a *Bristol* telescoping steel rod, a *Pflueger Supreme* level wind reel and a glass eyed *Creek Chub*. This began my introduction to vintage Fishing tackle which I began collecting, then wanting to display and eventually display in my own: *Mr. Mike’s Vintage Fishing Tackle Shop*. There I could hold seminars and show my collection in Central Square.

Fast forward to my phone conversation with Fred, He never mixed words. I told him all about my collection, seminars, my idea of starting a museum etc. He said why the heck would you do that? We have the first of its kind right here in Pulaski and you need to see it. He explained that he was collecting vintage fishing tackle in the late 60’s and early 70’s as a hobby that turned into a business. He became a dealer of vintage tackle and from what I’ve heard, was one of the best. He had a great wealth of knowledge about all fishing tackle. He not only collected the items, he would research the company, he would

reach out to the families of the company to find out all he could. He explained, back then no one wanted the stuff. He would buy whole tackle boxes for just a few dollars. Needless to say, it got in his blood. For the next 50 years he would wheel and deal to buy and sell tackle. He was one of the earliest members of the NFLCC National Fishing Lure Collectors Club. He would attend shows all over the nation and eventually he would host NFLCC shows in Oswego. BTW Fred was a businessman, he bought and sold cleaning supplies for the majority of his life. His business Mainmark Facilities Supply sold just about everything for cleaning and maintenance products. So, wheeling and dealing was second nature to him. Fred found most of his items at estate sales, auctions, garage sales etc. He also loved buying and selling antiques.

When Fred and I met, I was so excited. He and I were cut from the same cloth. I loved fishing, tackle, working with people and collecting. The only difference between us was; Fred loved to make a buck and I just wanted to collect and show it off. I soon found that Fred loved fishing history. He not only could tell me the name, type, manufacture, year and value of an item, but he made it a point to know the history of the company, the owners, and even employees. If he could get hold of the names. He would research, dig and discover all that he could. Sound familiar?

Fred did have a few great stories that I will try to explain what I remember, but as I said I wish I could have recorded them.

Some of Fred's best finds and interactions:

- Makers of the Killian Neo Caster level wind reel, out of Baldwinsville, NY. He met with the family of the inventor and got the whole story. You see their father who designed this one of a kind reel would not sell the patent. He invented a removable spool on a level wind reel with a star drag. So, the reel manufacturers stole his idea and ran him out of business. Of course, Fred had a mint one in the box from the family.

- J.K. Rush makers of the Rush Tango a wooden minnow like lure. He actually bought most of the family's collection and blanks that were turned and readied for painting. He had family portraits of the people who hand painted the lures. He also purchased a Rush Telephone which was very rare. He had just about one of everything Rush made in his collection. Of course Fred sold it. It brought a large sum of money to Fred. Something like \$23,000 don't quote me. The new owner flew into Fulton's private airport in his own plane and flew off with the collection. I think that was Fred's largest sale.
- He also spoke of Harry Comstock inventor of the "Flying Helgramite" lure from Fulton NY, one of the most sought-after lure worth over \$10,000. Well he never had one of those, but he did hold dear, a memoir of Harry's world travels pamphlet.
- He also shared with me that he would loan very rare lures, creels, and tackle to be photographed for publishing historical manuals etc.
- Lastly Fred loved Creels, he collected every type known to man, wood, copper, aluminum, cloth, leather, weaved basket style, bark, etc. He loved to show and tell all about them. I have included pictures on this memorial page of photos of some of Fred's treasured creels, lures and misc. items.

I wish I had recorded all that Fred told me that day and in the years that followed. (I did several video recordings of him giving some presentations at the museum. I hope to make them available in the future.) He explained that he and a friend heard that in 1977 Gladding was going bankrupt and that there was going to be an auction. So true to form, he was there the day Gladding sold everything but the buildings and machines. Fred and his friend filled their vehicles with items from Gladding (looking to resell it and make a buck!) But Fred did not only have his eye on the auction. He wanted the items in the original museum. Which at the time, could not be sold because it was under *public domain*, and still is today.

Fred continued to follow the *Gladding International Sport Fishing Museum* collection for several years. The Museum and its collection remained in South Otselic until 1988. Then in 1991 the opportunity of a lifetime happened. Through many turns of events the Museum's collection was being looked at to be transferred to the *Oswego International Sport Fishing Collection Inc.* by the President of Gladding, as a new home for it. They contacted Fred to see if he would help assist them with the transfer and creation of a museum. He and the board of directors worked tirelessly to raise money to get the collection out of hock. (It was being held for back storage fees.) They also needed money to move the collection because it was in a warehouse in Hyannis Port MA. (The collection was moved due to the Museum's building being sold at auction.)

Fred was in his glory. He was able to handle every artifact, review and inventory the collection. He guided the group and insisted that it stay in Oswego County. (Where Fred lived most of his life) For over twenty years Fred and the Oswego team worked to find a home for the collection. In 1992 it was housed in the old *Hammermill* paper Plant in Oswego, Then in 1994 it was moved to *SUNY Penfield Library* basement in Oswego. In 2001 the *Pulaski /Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce* and the *Oswego International Sport Fishing Collection Inc.* came to an agreement that: The *Pulaski /Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce* would build a museum to house the collection. "After all Pulaski had become the Salmon Capitol of the world". That allowed the collection would be transferred to them. Eventually Fred would become the Curator of the museum.

Unfortunately, the community and *Chamber of Commerce*, that wanted the museum so badly lost interest in it once the building was built and the collection displayed in 2005. Board members and the Chamber lost their enthusiasm, the Boards dwindled and so did its funding. If it wasn't for Fred Betts and Margaret Clerkin (Past President, Secretary and Treasurer of the Chamber) The museum and

its collection would not have survived. Fred and Margaret continued to love, show and tell the stories of the magnificent collection for many years, volunteering to open the doors, as often as they could. The community, fellow collectors, fishing enthusiasts and New York State all owe a debt of gratitude to Fred Betts. Fred continued to serve as a board member and curator until his passing in February of 2019. He has left a huge void at the museum. His talent, knowledge, enthusiasm for fishing tackle and history will never be forgotten.

Fred's Obituary:

1935 – 2019

Frederick Burton Betts, a longtime resident of Phoenix, N.Y., passed away at his Main St. home on Friday, February 22nd, after a lengthy battle with leukemia. He was 84. Fred, as he was known to family and friends, was born in Phoenix and also lived for several years in Baldwinsville, where he had owned and operated an office supply store. Until retirement a few years ago, he ran his own sales and contract-cleaning businesses with customers located throughout Central New York.

Born January 1, 1935, in Syracuse, N.Y., Fred will be remembered by all who knew him for his charming smile and quick wit. Living on the Oswego River for most of his life, fishing was one of his main interests. As founder and curator of the Salmon River International Sport Fishing Museum in Pulaski, NY, he frequently gave talks on topics related to the museum's collection and the history of sport fishing in the area. An avid antiques collector, he was especially knowledgeable of antique tackle and had amassed an impressive collection relevant to the history of fishing in New York State. He was a longtime member of the National Fishing Lure Collectors Club (NFLCC) and the Onondaga County Antiques Dealers Association.

A 1953 graduate of Phoenix Central Schools, where he excelled in

high-school basketball, Fred then graduated from Paul Smith's College near Saranac Lake, NY, where he also played basketball for the school's winning team. Active in the community and in several clubs and civic organizations throughout his life, he was passionate about the history of the village that members of the Betts family have called home since 1870. Fred was also a lifetime member of the Congregational Church in Phoenix, serving as a deacon and also volunteering in various capacities on a regular basis.

Fred is survived by his children, Paula Betts Baker (John) of Derry, N.H., Stephen L. Betts of Nashville, Tenn., and Craig Betts of Phoenix, N.Y.; grandchildren Daniel Baker (Hannah) of Goffstown, N.H., Julia Baker Huffman (Timm) of Manchester, N.H. and Rachel Campbell (Ben) of Manchester, NH, great-grandchildren Jael, Ezekiel, Adah, Jace and Ruth Baker and Micah, Jonah and Leola Rae Huffman, and nieces Marta Crews and Leslie Lanier. He was preceded in death by his wife, Barbara Betts, his father, prominent Phoenix attorney Burton Luby Betts, his mother Helen Mandel Betts Gallagher and his sister Marilyn Betts Ausman. Although other family members and friends are spread throughout the country, they join together in their sorrow knowing he will be fondly remembered by all those who knew him.

A memorial service will be held at the First Congregational United Church of Christ, 43 Bridge St., Phoenix, NY, 13135, on Saturday, March 16th, at 11 a.m., with a lunch to follow. Donations to the church in his memory are welcome at the above address, as are donations to the Salmon River International Sport Fishing Museum, 3044 State Route 13, Pulaski, N.Y., 13142-0034.