



# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

Volume 23, number 6

November 2020

## **Secretary's Report** **By Nicole March**

February 2021 will be the election month for all positions on the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild board, including president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. The nominating committee is currently putting together names for nominations. All voting will be done via email. More information will be sent out early November.

As you'll read in the President's Message, the guild has an addition to our Zoom subscription and will be using it to conduct meetings.

It has never been easier to join the guild. You can click on the following link: <https://cftg.limitedrun.com> and submit your information and dues. The yearly cost of dues is still only \$10.00. As has always been our practice, anyone joining during the months of November, December, or January will not have to renew dues until February 2022.

## **Featured Flies**



Ginger Quill Tied and photographed by Tom Mason

Featured in this issue of the *Gazette* are three beautiful flies tied by the guild's own Tom Mason. The first, a Ginger Quill, is a classic Catskill-style dry fly from the time of Rube Cross, using divided, double-slip quill wings. Look on page twelve to begin viewing all of the flies and their patterns.

## **President's Message** **By Joe Ceballos**

The fall season has arrived. It seems just yesterday that I was preparing September's message, and November is already upon us. As mentioned before, I'm hoping that all guild members and your families are doing well and have been going outdoors as much as is safely possible.

Fall fishing is as much about enjoying the changing seasons, as it is the fishing. Autumn colors are spectacular, and when you find rising fish, the saying, "You never can go too small of a fly" takes on real meaning. Fish size 20 and 22s using 7X tippet: then, fish on!

The guild has started paying for a Zoom account that provides the length and capacity needed for the purposes of holding meetings, fly tying, and doing presentations. Because we are still in the throes of Covid, face-to-face meetings are not safe and practical at this time. Later this month, an email will be sent to all of our members regarding the date and time of our first virtual activity.

Sadly, there will be no show season for us, but the guild's Zoom account will allow members to join in for over an hour at a time for our own events. Thus, the plan is to have our own fly tying and presenters to create a virtual event. This is in the planning stage right now, and as more details are worked out we'll share the latest information with you. There will also be time available for just fly tying, and additional programs can happen and be subject to member requests. Along those lines, Patrick Cook, who some of you know as the day-to-day affairs person of the White Tail Fly Shop in Shehawken, has volunteered to demonstrate some of his fly patterns during future Zoom events.

To view and participate in virtual activities, you'll need an Internet connection and email address to receive links and instructions for joining in. This should not be an issue if you are already receiving the *Gazette* and the guild's emails.

As 2020 draws nearer to an end and we think about supporting organizations that align with our interests, I ask you to consider joining the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, because our missions surely overlap and have a mutual interest and involvement.

Lastly, guide and author Matt Supinski has come out with an angling magazine called *Hallowed Waters Journal*, which is published and purchased online. The current issue includes an article regarding the origins of Catskill-style flies that was authored by the guild. Matt will in future issues feature the guild with articles pertaining to Catskill history and fly tying, and a link to the guild's website will be added. You can go to <https://hallowedwaters.com> for more information about Matt's magazine.

Wishing again for all of you to stay safe and to enjoy the rest of the fall season.

## Rehabbing a Horrocks-Ibbotson Black River

By Ryan Dykstra

It's 7:00 A.M., and mist is rising off a very calm Sacandaga Lake. My two boys, three and one, are engaged in breakfast for the time being. I sheepishly ask my wife if I can run down the sandy path and make a few casts and see if I can entice a smallmouth. I was eager to fish an old bamboo rod with a few poppers that had finished drying on our car ride up the thruway.

It's the first morning we are here, on a long weekend with my wife's family, so my constant fishing hasn't annoyed anyone yet. She graciously says okay, and when my oldest son, Sammy, sees me take the fly rod from the porch, he yells, "Daaaaaad, I want to go fishing," and holds out his arms to demonstrate his eagerness. I grab him too and hustle down the sand to the dock. I string up the rod, an old Horrocks-Ibbotson Black River, eight and a half feet long, that I've paired with a Martin 77S and a seven-weight line, tie on a neutral-toned popper and begin working the weedbed adjacent to the dock.

Half a dozen casts in and I land a small, red-eyed rock bass. Sammy doesn't even notice. A few more casts with slight kisses from too-small sunnies, and I suddenly see a v-shaped wake on the far edge of the weedbed cruising toward me.



The author's son with a smallmouth

When I took my first, bumbling steps in the world of fly fishing, I kept reading about the joys of casting split cane. At that point, I had only a clumsy, box-store graphite six-weight and my dad's old, nondescript fiberglass Kmart special. I wouldn't describe casting either of those rods as joyful. But fine, I thought, let's see what this stuff is all about. cursory Internet searches revealed thousand-dollar price tags. A year married, and a baby on the way—not possible. My continued research and a few more stumbles led me to a beat-up Horrocks-Ibbotson Black River fly rod on an auction site. The sole tip was bent, a guide was missing, and the finish was cracked and chipped. A small amount of white paint had been spilled on it. Most importantly, though, it cost thirty dollars. Bingo.

When the rod came, I strung it up with a five-weight line and took it outside. It felt enormous and weighed a relative ton to the graphite rod I typically used. My initial casts felt so different from the graphite rod that it felt like I was casting for the first time. The thing was clumsy and beefy, compared with the graphite rod, and way less sexy than the new Orvis rods I dreamed of owning. Oh well, a pretty cool office decoration. A few days later, I hung it up on some nails.

The following October, my wife and I welcomed our first son, Samuel, and actual fishing largely disappeared from my life. It was never far from my thoughts, a passion sustained by reading and collecting, but I made it to water maybe once a month, if I was lucky.

This past summer, after a few minor fly-fishing accomplishments and a growing vintage tackle collection, I was struck with an idea while fidgeting with a recently acquired fly reel. What if I paired a vintage rod and a vintage reel manufactured in the same region and then fished them in that region? The question had all of the indulging elements of history and natural history that I find myself drawn to. I scanned my collection for any complete New York “sets” and came up with the old H-I Black River and a Martin 77S. I experimented with different lines. Of the lines I had, a weight-forward seven worked best: enough rod load at short distances without compromising the backbone for longer reaches. Actually, I could cast nearly the whole line.



H-I Black River and Martin 77S

Over the next few days, I worked to make the rod fishable. When I had first bought the rod, I removed the finish. Now it was time to replace a missing guide. My new thread, a shiny red, didn't exactly match the original wraps, but this rod was never going to be a beautiful restoration anyway. I replaced some missing intermediate wraps, reset a loose ferrule, and applied a few coats of spar varnish. The bland blank suddenly shone, and the color of the bamboo became noticeably richer. For forty dollars, I had a fishable split-cane rod, and, with a trip planned to the Adirondacks in a few weeks, I was able to examine the merits and satisfaction of my small project.

On the dock at Sacandaga Lake, I am on the verge of accomplishing this tangible historical inquiry into a minor aspect of fly-fishing manufacturing. Here I am, fishing for one of New York's most sought-after game species, using a rod and reel both manufactured in the Empire State. And to top things off, my three-year-old is standing next to me on the dock. What I hope is a smallmouth bass is cruising toward me. I gently lift my popper out of the water and into a back cast. One false cast extends enough line to place the popper comfortably in front of the wake. The popper plops on the water, and the wake disappears. I let it sit for an agonizing few seconds. Now that I am still, I notice the slight burst of adrenaline coursing into my hands that had begun with the sudden emergence of the fish's wake a moment ago. *Pop*. Agonizing rest. A second pop and the fly immediately disappears,

engulfed in roiling water and the glimpse of a bronze nose. I set the hook and the smallmouth dives downward before taking off toward deeper water. As the fish pulls farther away from the dock, it climbs the water column, emerges, and walks along the surface, shaking on its tail for ten feet, like a torpedo that can't quite reach the air. Sammy, still beside me, begins exclaiming, "It's huge! Daddy caught a huge fish!"

After a minute or two, I bring the smallmouth to hand and lift him from the lake—Sammy still amazed and exclaiming about the fish's size. It isn't huge, around fifteen or sixteen inches, but fairly fat after a summer of feeding, and sporting the famous deep stripes along its eyes and body. I hold the fish out to Sammy who gently touches it and then "helps" release it.

Those first fifteen minutes on the dock with Sammy turned out to be the highlight of my fishing moments from that weekend. I continued fishing the rod after the trip. At the end of the summer, the rod suffered a split ferrule and damaged tip, rendering it unfishable. Unfortunately, the cost of repairs far outweighs the cost of purchasing another rod secondhand. It now permanently hangs, once again, on its nails in the office.

Later, I told a close friend and dedicated fisherman of the small journey I had taken with this split-cane fly rod, and he made the ubiquitous vintage tackle comment: "Man, the stories that rod could tell." The statement is a bit trite, but it holds truth, as well. How many individuals had found solace and enjoyment, connection and revitalization, by tossing poppers to greedy smallmouth bass? How many quiet men and women had saved a few dollars to buy a rod, reel, and line manufactured by an unknown neighbor? Their stories may not have been recorded in the fly-fishing canon, but their lives were no less remarkable or passionate.



## Redd Alert

A few weeks ago, my daughter Carina and I participated in a stream cleanup in and around the Beamoc drainage. This was my second cleanup in this area. It's amazing what gets dumped, tossed, discarded, and left behind to

litter our beautiful mountains and streams by careless visitors and, to some degree I suppose, local residents.

It was unusual to drive 145 miles, put on waders, and walk a trout stream with one goal—to gather trash. When you're not actually looking for fish to cast to, you see a trout stream with new eyes and notice things that you wouldn't normally see. You feel the outdoors in a different way. You also walk away knowing that the cleanup was one of the most rewarding things that you could do.

As I waded downstream, looking left and right in search of things to pick up, I did a lot of thinking. Picking up garbage is not as mindless a task as one might think. I thought of trout feeding lanes and structure, varied currents and seams, bubble lines and shelter holds, undercut banks, and riffled water. Riffles are something that I look at and think of often.

Near the middle of summer there was some buzz going around that the Department of Environmental Conservation



Carina Bonasera helping the streams

(DEC) was updating the current trout-fishing regulations regarding openings and closings, creel limits, and reclassifying the streams according to their ability to sustain wild reproduction.

On all of our Catskill streams, we have become accustomed to opening and closing dates. We look forward to the “opener” like we look forward to the day we retire, the day our mortgage is paid in full, and possibly the day our children finally leave to go off on their own. In other words, it’s a date we relish and a date we make damn sure that we have to ourselves to head upstate and celebrate the first day of the new season.

In some regards, the new proposed regulations aren’t all bad. They include a few things that I think are in the trout’s best interest. Some of the creel limits were tightened up, and on some streams, they won’t even stock at all if the water’s trout are deemed wild and self-sustaining.

What I didn’t like seeing, to the point that when I first read it I got a lump in my throat and felt physically sick, was the year-round open season. This change gives anyone, at any time of the year, the ability to legally wade, wallow, stomp, and tread through *any* Catskill stream.



A spawning redd on Willowemoc Creek

I hadn’t paid much attention to trout redds, riffled spawning water, or the size of gravel best suited to trout nests until the very moment I heard “year-round open season.” You see, we didn’t *need* to know much about those things. It all just took place when no one was around, because it happened when the tributaries were *closed*. Some tributaries were even closed earlier and opened later, and they were all closed *because of spawning fish*. For decades, these small, clean, cold, and sensitive natal waters were lovingly protected by the DEC from anglers, because everyone knows that when trout are in their spawning mode they are vulnerable, a little dumb, and extremely easy to target and catch by any method—ethical or not. I’m left wondering how we could possibly go from protecting trout in their reproducing environment to a full-on open season.

The new regulations have not yet been released, although it was initially stated that we would know by September 1, 2020. I’m still hopeful that things will stay as they are, that the trout will remain unmolested

in the late fall and early spring, and that we can enjoy the opener as we have throughout the years. However, if regulations change to an open, year-round season, my wish is that even if it’s legal to fish in spawning tributaries, people will be aware of trout redds and avoid wading near them. If an angler sees two trout sitting on a nest, that angler should just keep on walking, knowing that the future of trout fishing starts or ends right there.

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*Note:* You can follow and participate in this issue on social media:  
#nostompingonredds and #catskillconservation are both active hashtags on Instagram.

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## Noll Fly Tying Kit memories

With winter holidays only weeks away, it is time for my second season: the time of year that I while away cold days tying flies close to our woodstove. This all started with a humble enough beginning. The good Lord willing, in a few short weeks, I'll hit the seventy-third mile-marker on this life's highway. Thus, it was sixty years ago this coming Christmas that I asked my parents for a Noll Fly Tying Kit, No. 20 Special. If memory serves me correctly, it sold for \$4.95 back then, which has since led to thousands of dollars being "invested" on this feathery pastime, bolstering that initial meager outlay.

That kit contained everything a wet-behind-the-ears, thirteen-year-old wannabe fly tyer could ever want. It included a cheap stamped vise, oversized wet-fly and bass hooks, various cellophane packets of bright chenille, floss, and yarn, and not to forget vividly colored feathers with thick stems and soft barbs. I was in my glory, but was also a student of the school of hard knocks. Back then, there was no Internet, and there were no DVDs and no YouTube videos to learn from. J. Edson Leonard's *Flies* was one of the first books I purchased. However, this fine reference was mostly composed of words with few visual aids. In some ways, it was akin to reading a math text—complicated and hard to understand at times. For visuals in color, I treasured *Family Circle's Guide to Trout Flies*. At that time, I thought that slim reference contained the recipe for every trout pattern I would ever need to tie. Imagine that!



I remember a few of my first creations, which were wet flies tied with thick chenille bodies and fat heads. The finished flies could rotate about the hook shank, because I had no concept of anchoring the tying thread to create a foundation to build upon. Seeking additional help on this matter, I went to the Union Public Library and its limited stack of fishing books, containing the works of William Blades, Donald DuBois, and Charles Wetzel. There, I sought to expand my knowledge base, as there wasn't anyone I could learn from firsthand. Sadly, sometimes these visits also affected the development of my moral fiber, because not far from those fishing books was a stack of black-and-white photography books—a few containing nudes. This caused me to spend a number of Saturday afternoons going to confession.

Confession lines were much longer then, perhaps there were more sinners roaming about, but I recall one parish priest who would yell at penitents in his booth. I avoided him like the plague.

With time, my flies looked better, good enough that even fish might like them. Thus, I began fishing with them instead of purchasing flies to use. I started the ongoing process of acquiring tools and better materials. From my mother, I borrowed a sharp pair of scissors that I still use to this day. I quickly purchased a Chase bobbin and a pair of hackle pliers that didn't have heavy rubber tips. I guess my biggest purchases included a Thompson Model B vise, and before too many years went by, I upgraded to a Thompson A.

In those early days, I supplemented my materials by going to Huff's Sporting Goods, located on Stuyvesant Avenue in Union. For a quarter, one could purchase a cellophane pack of a dozen decent dry-fly feathers. And for five dollars each, a thick-stemmed Indian or Chinese neck was had. I knew of no other hackle sources back then. I still have piles of those feathers, which were last utilized when I instructed fly-tying classes at the middle school where I taught. Plus, while still living in New Jersey

### *Up on the Esopus*



With Ed Ostapczuk

and just old enough to drive, my buddies and I would venture forth to Reed Tackle on U.S. 46 in Caldwell for major tying purchases. Those were really the days.

I wonder how many guild members started their tying journey with Noll. We all had our fly-tying beginnings; my tying started humbly, with a Noll Fly Tying Kit.

One common thread shared by most tyers I know is that we never seem to get rid of anything. I still have all of the aforementioned stuff and many more items purchased that were never used, such as a large magnifying lens, a bobbin cradle for my vise, assorted modern miracle materials, an expensive dubbing spinner, and a whip finisher that I've never mastered. These days I tie on an HMH Standard vise, have a good supply of Charlie Collins necks, am proud to be a member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, prefer using natural materials, rather than synthetics, and I still tie most of my flies on Mustad hooks. Some things just never change for us Noll Kit kids.



### *Looking Back Upstream*

## **Share Your Passions (and help the economy) By George Wilkinson**

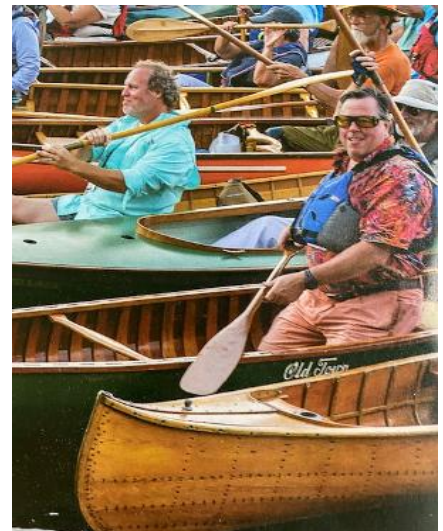
I'm fortunate to have a number of things that I'm passionate about, but I recognize that sharing these passions has cost my sporting partners a good deal of money over the years.

One of my beloved pursuits is fishing for wild trout in small streams using bamboo fly rods. My friend Chuck was principally a big-river fisher when we met. Our first fishing trip together was to a small wild-trout stream in New Jersey. When I got him to leave his graphite rod in the car and put a six-and-a-half-foot bamboo rod with a Hardy reel in his hands to try, I could see that he was hooked.

While I often get Chuck to fish my small streams, he still fishes the big rivers, but he does it now with one of his many new or classic bamboo rods. He has even started to restore and build bamboo rods, attends the rodmakers gatherings, and has amassed a long list of rod tapers he intends to build or purchase in the future. In fact, he's now got bamboo fever so bad that when discussing the cost of something, I have often heard Chuck break down the expenditure into the number of used Orvis Battenkills that the sum would equate to.

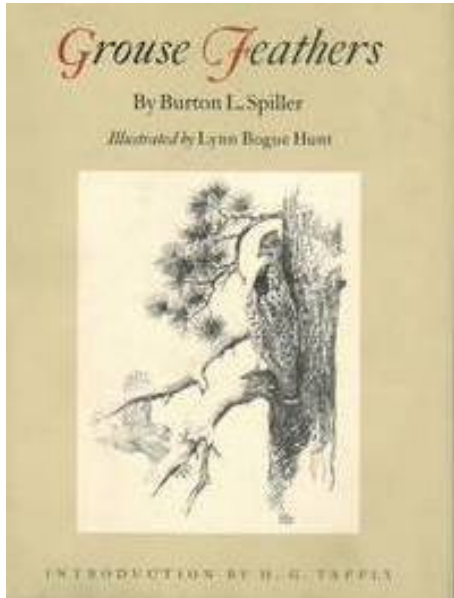
Another passion of mine is wood-and-canvas canoes, which I restore, build, and paddle. One of my fellow builders has a bumper sticker that reads: "Life is too short to paddle an ugly boat." It's always a great thrill to get someone into a beautiful wood canoe for the first time and see his or her reaction.

I first met Barclay Foord at a Pequannock River Coalition hike and paddle. Barclay's eyes lit up when I put one of my solo fifteen-foot wood-and-canvas canoes into the water. He asked where I had bought it. I explained that I was a member of the Wooden Canoe Heritage Association (WCHA), and I had built the boat. Barclay mentioned that he had an Old Town canoe that he was starting to work on. When I visited him the next week, we determined that what he thought was an Old Town boat was really a Penobscot of 1919 vintage. After a few weeks of work, we had it in good enough shape to paddle. Since that time, Barclay has acquired two genuine Old Towns that I have helped him restore, and he is now not only a member, but on the board of directors for the WCHA and attends most of the chapter events and annual assemblies.



A smiling Barclay Foord (lower right)

Unlocking a passion is sort of like the modest sculptor who maintains that the work of art was in the block of marble all along. The sculptor merely exposed what was already there for all to see. As to the cost, I'm sure a good accountant could come up with the amount of money that I've cost Chuck and Barclay over the years, but that number would pale in comparison to what I've cost my friend Ken Carlson.



I first met Ken when I commuted to Chicago to work on the construction of that city's convention center. When he mentioned that he had a family camp in upper Wisconsin where he hunted deer, I asked if he ever hunted grouse (another of my passions). Ken admitted that he didn't know anything about grouse, so during the winter, I brought him a new book on grouse hunting every week, starting of course with Burt Spiller's great *Grouse Feathers*. By the end of winter, I had exhausted my grouse library, but Ken was already enthralled.

Spring came, and Ken bought Otto, a German wirehaired pointer, and proceeded to train him. By fall, Ken had accumulated all of the necessary equipment to go upland hunting, including a new Beretta over-and-under 20-gauge shotgun.

Over the next few autumns, it was my great pleasure to hunt with Ken and Otto one weekend each year and watch them develop into a great team. Otto was, I must admit, the best grouse dog I ever hunted over, and far better than my own Brittanys.

When I spoke with Ken by phone a couple of years ago, he brought me up to date. He was by then on his second German wirehair and also bought a German shorthair for pheasant hunting. His daughter and her husband were training a Brittany pup, and both his son and daughter had just purchased new Beretta over-and-under guns. I stated with a bit of guilt that I felt partly responsible for all of this, and Ken quickly corrected me by saying, "George, you're *fully* responsible!" After a pause, he added, "And I thank you for it every day."

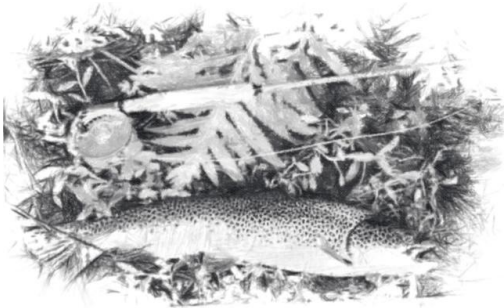
Now, it's not often that you can share your passion and make a life-altering change in someone, as what happened with Ken and grouse hunting, but even a little assistance can make a big impact. A few years ago, I met a younger fellow while fishing the Willowemoc near my camp. We came off the water together, and I commented to him that he must have had some good instruction, because he was a fine caster. He replied that he had, and in fact, it turned out that I gave him his first lesson. Years earlier, when he was just starting to fly fish, we met a little downstream by the island. He was having a tough time, but after I gave him a few casting pointers, he was able to catch some fish that day. I had almost forgotten the incident, but it sure made an impression on my young friend as he described in particular detail how he learned to roll cast on that long-past day.

In our first encounter, if I had just said hello and walked past the young man, I might have had time to catch a few more trout, but judging by our later meeting, my change in plan was time well spent. I'd made a positive impact on him, and that always feels better than landing a few extra fish.

So share your time, knowledge, expertise, and especially your passions, and it will be you who is rewarded. Of course, your friends have ways of getting even with you. Barclay heard me spouting off about my fondness for sports cars, but noticed that I always had the same excuse for not buying one. Namely, I couldn't find a car that was just right. Barclay did a thorough online search and found a car that I couldn't refuse. Every time I drive that car, I know that Barclay is responsible for draining my bank account. And I thank him every day for it.



## *Casting Catskill Cane*



With Mark Sturtevant

## **The Joys (and Sorrows) of Angling Vintage Bamboo**

My inclination to fly fish with vintage tackle began innocently enough thirty years ago, when I had my grandfather's old Horrocks-Ibbotson fly rod refinished. It was no collector's treasure, but that rod nevertheless had meaning for me, and I enjoyed those times it accompanied me to the river, particularly when I fished the Deerfield River in the Berkshire Hills of Massachusetts. The Deerfield was Pap's river. I took a few trout fishing a size 18 Royal Coachman I had tied for the trip. Pap's favorite fly, fished on his rod; it was

my simple way to connect the generations so many years after his passing.

As I became more interested in bamboo fly rods, I guess it was natural for me to be drawn to vintage tackle, though my interest came too late for my means. Collectors had unfortunately turned *old fishing poles* into highly desirable objects of great value, and I could no more fondle a Payne than I could drive a Bentley. Eventually though, I learned of Granger rods.

I bought my first Granger on impulse and got burned. Learning of my folly came when I tried a little research on the web and The Classic Fly Rod Forum. People like Michael Sinclair and Dana Gray led me to discover what I had actually bought, and Michael's wonderful book brought me a lot of knowledge and enjoyment. His history of Goodwin Granger and his bamboo rods also led to great admiration for the man and the fine fly rods he made available to anglers from all walks of life.

My first real Granger rod was an eight-and-a-half-foot Victory model, and it fully opened my eyes to the grand pleasure of fishing vintage tackle. There is truly something magical about fishing for trout with a rod made before I was born and wondering about its history, who fished it before me, and where it was fished.

The Granger Specials have become my favorites. Easily recognizable with their brilliant spring-green wraps on Granger's distinctive caramel-colored cane, the Specials were the classic "working man's fly rod." Built with the same quality as all Granger rods, their performance is impressive, and a person earning a worker's wage can still afford to fish one in today's collector-influenced vintage tackle market, the same as when these rods were factory new. Memories make my Specials truly special to me.

This summer, heat and low water came early and lasted. I quickly turned to my four-weight rods for gentler presentations to suit the conditions. There were times that I wished my seven-and-a-half-foot rods were just a bit longer, and curiosity led me to my model 8040 Granger Special. While the original Granger recommendations called for a five-weight line, I had never been thrilled when fishing this rod with a five. I took it out in the yard, ran a four-weight line through the guides, and began to cast—a smile spread across my face with each flick of my wrist. I had found my eight-foot four-weight.

The Granger was crisp and smooth, making it easy to present my fly delicately at twenty feet or eighty. As with any fine bamboo rod, fighting a fish was perfection, and the 8040 proved itself, landing a number of wild Catskill trout in excess of twenty inches. Life was good until one beautiful summer morning.

It was a typical misty Catskill summer morning, a bit cooler than usual, with a welcome fifty-eight degrees in Hancock at five o'clock. The mist hung along the sides of the mountains, and the

strong July sun was still unable to burn it off as I waded the river at eight. I had swung a wet fly at the top of the riffle to no avail, then gladly knotted up a new 5X tippet and changed to a dry fly as the sun began to dispel the gloom.

The rushing riffle and the rocks along the bank made me reach for the Halo *Isonychia* on the fly patch inside my vest. Isos are popular with the trout all summer, and though they were an afternoon hatch that I hadn't seen on the water this season, I simply had a feeling that my big and juicy Comparadun might tempt a lurking brownie looking for leftovers.

I worked the foam lines thoroughly with a downstream drift, then turned and made long casts upstream and across to try the bankside run from a new angle. Trying hard to follow even a size 10 dry fly in the myriad bubbles and foam, I saw just a little bump in the ruffled surface and knew a trout had taken my fly. As the Granger bent into a heavy arch, the Bouglé reel sang its hymn to the morning as a heavy trout streaked full tilt into the rushing current. The fish didn't stop until my backing was spinning from the reel. It turned the tables abruptly, heading back down and slightly toward me as I wound the reel frantically. Failing to get slack with that tactic, it turned again and headed toward me, forcing me to abandon the reel and strip armfuls of line as fast as I could.

There are many things on the front of a fishing vest ideally positioned to tangle a fly line: a lesson learned the hard way more than once in my life. Despite my haste, I managed to dump all of that line—nearly an entire fly line—to my right in slack water and get untangled. He took some of it back more than once, but the net was in his future.

It was a gorgeous fish: dark-backed and deeply golden across the flank, crimson spots twinkling with flame, and spanning twenty-three inches from nose to tail. I slipped the fly from its jaw and pushed the net deeply into the water while fumbling one-handed for my camera. I lifted the net, snapped a photo, hung the camera strap from my teeth, and sent the trout on its way.



The author's Granger 8040 poses with a guild hat

The cool morning air and the excitement of that hard-running brown had me energized, and I worked my way down the riffle in search of its brethren. Perhaps twenty minutes later, I turned upstream once again and cast the longer line to cover that same water at an up-and-across-stream angle. The sun, now peeking around the mountainside, was in my eyes as I squinted trying to follow the fly. Half an hour after I released that fine brown trout, I thought another tiny disturbance could be a take. I lifted the rod, heard and felt a gentle snap, and my rod tip fell to the water.

I couldn't believe the turn in my luck as I grabbed for the trailing line and rescued the tip, finding a clean break in the precious cane beneath the silk at the ferrule. The Granger had lasted seventy years, but at least for that tip section, that brown was to be its final trout.

Back in Hancock, I took my wounded rod to visit my friend, rod maker Dennis Menscer. Removing the silk where the cane met the ferrule, Dennis showed me a tiny crack and the discolored cane that betrayed the presence of old moisture. My trophy brown had not weakened my rod—water and time had done that job.

Dennis agreed to make two new tips, and the rod will battle trout for another sixty to seventy years. The remaining original tip I will preserve: fishing the new ones. This is not a collector's rod. It is a fisher's rod that was a worker's rod in its day, and a fine casting, fish-fighting tool, deftly crafted by skilled workers who likely have passed away. It has endured, and it will continue.

By September, the new tips were finished, and with them my Granger was back on the river. Late in the month, my best friend, Mike, was finally able to come up for a few days of *fishing apart*: two

old guys' best effort to stay alive and well during the pandemic. I took him to a special place, figuring the natural beauty would put him at ease. Fishing had been difficult as the end of our dry-fly season neared, and I cautioned him not to expect a great deal of opportunities.

I carried the Granger, adorned with the smallest Hardy Perfect reel, and found myself fishing to a good trout sipping sparse Trico spinners from the surface, despite the windy morning. My size 24 spinner and 7X tippet finally allowed me to fool that wary fish, a splendid brown of nineteen inches. My fine old Granger was truly reborn, casting as beautifully as it did before that fateful July morning. We enjoyed a gorgeous day as autumn graced the Catskills, and Mike's patience and skill were rewarded with the best fish of the day, a strong, beautiful Delaware River rainbow stretching the tape to twenty inches!

Such are the joys and trials of fishing classic rods. There may be hidden damage, and a break might happen, but as long as Dennis Menscer occupies his shop on the West Branch, I know a wounded old rod can be saved. Classic rods should not be relegated to roles as museum pieces. They were carefully crafted by good men and women to provide pleasure to anglers, cast flies on bright water, and take trout. They, and their departed makers, deserve the opportunity and the honor to continue.

Should you acquire a rod that you are fearful of subjecting to the rigors of angling, have it looked over by a skilled rod maker. They can assess the condition of the rod and assure you if it is safe to fish. New varnish is sometimes required, or perhaps a full restoration. A sound finish is imperative to protect the bamboo. Don't try to "horse" large fish with any fly rod, particularly a bamboo rod. Fish them as they were intended, with beauty and finesse, and you will find the power in the cane.

A classic bamboo rod may be old, but it is not overly delicate if maintained in good condition. I am fortunate to enjoy a lovely F. E. Thomas Dirigo, restored by Dennis, that is 102 years old by our best estimation. The second time I fished that rod, I hooked a tremendous brown trout, two feet of bronze and gold energy that would test any piece of fly tackle. I fought that fish in strong current, through several long runs, before finally getting it in the net. The ancient Thomas was still arrow straight when I held it aloft in celebration of that brown's release. Even now, I wonder when that rod caught its first trout, who the angler might have been, what fly was used, and what water was angled.

A great deal of our Catskill fly-fishing history is tied to bamboo, and the dry-fly rod was born in the hands of makers that include Leonard, Payne, Thomas, Edwards, Hawes, Garrison, and Gillum. Many great rods were designed to fish our Catskill rivers with the dry fly. If you are lucky enough to own one, give it the reverence it deserves, out there on the water, and live a piece of that continuing history.



A 1918 F. E. Thomas Dirigo rod and a 1930s Hardy perfect reel

Mark Sturtevant can be followed at <https://brightwatercatskill.art.blog/>

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## October Whiteface By Lois Ostapczuk



Whiteface Mountain, in New York's Adirondacks, is the fifth-highest peak in the state at an elevation of 4,865 feet. Recently, I spent several days in Wilmington with my husband, Ed, and our family. On one gorgeous fall morning, our son and granddaughter set off with Ed on the Flume Trail to fish the West Branch of the Ausable River. Being the only nonangler of the group, I traipsed along with my paint bag and chair in tow, finding a beautiful pond with a mirror

reflection and Whiteface Mountain as the backdrop. I set up and enjoyed some peaceful hours trying to capture the warmth of this October day. Upon leaving, I took a few photos and finished painting the landscape, titled *October Whiteface*, at the kitchen table that afternoon.

Lois Ostapczuk's paintings can be viewed at <http://catskillwatersart.blogspot.com/2014/02/blog-post.html>

## A Trio of Flies Tied by Tom Mason

### The Ginger Quill:

Hook: Allcocks Model Perfect 04991, size 12  
Thread: Tan  
Wing: Mallard primaries  
Tail: Ginger rooster  
Body: Peacock quill dyed ginger  
Hackle: Ginger rooster



Photo: Tom Mason



Photo: Tom Mason

### The Light Spanish Needle:

Hook: Daiichi 1480, size 12  
Silk: Pearsall's Gossamer scarlet #11a  
Body: Scarlet silk  
Hackle: Jack snipe over covert feather  
Head: Peacock herl

### 'Tis the Season, Fall Olive:

Hook: Partridge K14ST, size 20 (Olive Edwards emerger)

Thread: Olive 16/0

Tail: EP Trigger Point brown

Body: Thread

Thorax: Olive dubbing

Wing: Light dun CDC



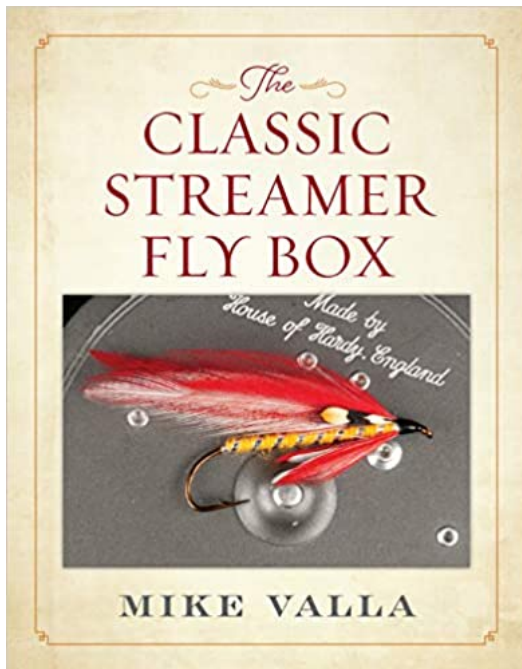
Photo: Tom Mason

The guild extends its appreciation to dedicated Catskill-style fly tyer Tom Mason for submitting these exquisite flies.

### Book Review:

#### *The Classic Streamer Fly Box*

*By Mike Valla. Published by Stackpole Books, 2020; \$21.95 softbound.*



At long last, Stackpole Books has published Mike Valla's *Classic Streamer Fly Box*, part of a series that began with *The Classic Dry Fly Box* (Whitefish Press, 2010) and *The Classic Wet Fly Box* (Whitefish Press, 2012). *The Classic Streamer Fly Box*, as the title says, is devoted almost entirely to streamers whose origins date back as far as a century or more, though it also includes a few patterns that Valla says he "developed while fishing for trout, landlocked salmon, and bass during my teenage years."

That wasn't a century ago, but it wasn't yesterday, either. During those teenage years, Valla learned to tie flies in the 1960s at the knees of legendary Catskill fly tyers Walt and Winnie Dette, who took him under their wings when, as a kid crazy for fly fishing, he spent as much time as he could fishing the waters in the cradle of American fly fishing, the Beaverkill, Willowemoc, and Neversink. After college at Cornell, which he chose because he could fish there, and since retiring from a career as a pediatric dentist, Valla has become a major chronicler of American fly tying,

both on the East Coast, with books such as *Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies* (Stackpole, 2009), and across the nation, with *The Founding Flies: 43 American Masters, Their Patterns and Influences* (Stackpole, 2013).

Mike is a traditionalist when it comes to fly tying. He recently proposed a kind of antiquarian fly-tying cosplay in which people get together and tie only classic patterns using only materials and tools available before 1970. It's unclear whether long hair (or for some, just hair), bell-bottoms, and

tie-dye T-shirts are also required. He also has recently decided to tie solely on the same kind of jeweler's vise used by Reuben Cross. That's just Mike being Mike, but he also has a fundamental respect for the past, evidenced here, for example, in his refusal to include the band of red tying thread on the Carrie Stevens streamers that he ties, because that was her personal trademark.

Better than anyone else currently writing, Mike Valla knows traditional tying, the patterns it produced, and the sources to consult in order to understand them today. The format of *The Classic Streamer Fly Box* is deceptively simple: there's a large photo of a feather-winged or hair-winged streamer, all beautifully tied by Valla, a quote about streamers from some source, usually a book or article by a major fly tyer or an angling writer of the past, such as Joseph D. Bates, Jr.'s *Streamer Fly Tying and Fishing* or A. J. McLane in *Field and Stream*, and a short text by Valla (with source notes in the back) about that particular fly. At the end of the book, there are tying recipes for each streamer. That's it, but that's not all.

Classic streamers are like trees: most of them look alike. If you just page through *The Classic Streamer Fly Box* looking at the pictures, you won't get what this book really is about. In the interaction between the pictures, the quotes, and what Valla has to say on each page, you end up with having a pretty good short history of the fly-fishing streamer in the United States. You can see that deeper understanding of fly-tying history if, instead of listing the patterns that the book presents, I list the tyers who originated them and some of the sources he cites: Carrie Stevens, Sam Slaymaker, Reuben Cross, Lew Oatman, Walt Dette, Keith Fulsher, Joe Brooks, Theodore Gordon, Herman Christian, C. Jim Pray, Charlie Fox, Helen Shaw, H. G. Tapply, Don Gopen, and Dan Bailey.

That's a *Who's Who* of American fly tying. If you have any interest in the development of the sport, *The Classic Dry Fly Box* will be something that you'll want. And if you don't recognize some of those names, it's something that you need.

—Bud Bynack



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Your articles, cartoons, photographs, reports of information, and bits of whatever else is interesting and fun are vital to this newsletter. Send submissions to Chuck Coronato, [coronato3@verizon.net](mailto:coronato3@verizon.net) or 412 Highland Avenue, Wyckoff, NJ 07481 (201) 723-6230.



## Where's Waldo?

A brown trout from the Delaware River system blends with shadows and cobble as it rests near the streambed after being released.

Photo: Chuck Coronato