



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

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March 2020

The March 2020 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Saturday, March 21, at 1:00 P.M. in the Wulff Gallery at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY. We return to our roots with this meeting—bring your vise and materials and tie some favorite flies. Share patterns and techniques with other members, talk about fishing the Catskills, and have a good time.

The Anglers Reunion

The Anglers Reunion will be held at the Rockland House in Roscoe, NY, on March 31, 2020. Social hour, 6:00 P.M.; dinner, 7:00 P.M., \$29 per person; open bar. Call (607) 498-4240 as soon as possible to make your reservation.

—*Judie DV Smith*

Kids on the Fly at Fly Fest

Kids on the Fly at Fly Fest saw lots of happy faces as kids learned the basics of fly tying. Thanks to Mark Sturtevant, Nicole March, and Joe Ceballos for helping out. As usual, there will be a Catskill Kids on the Fly event before the March guild meeting.



Rendezvous Fly Plate?

At the Fly Tyers Rendezvous a year or two ago, we collected flies from participants and mounted them in a shadow-box fly display. The Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum is putting together a time line of fly tying in the Catskills from Theodore Gordon's day to the present, using representative artifacts, and would they like to include this display. However, it seems to have gone missing. If you have it or know who does, please bring it or have them bring it to the museum office.

—*Ted Rogowski*

An Invitation to Fish Buck Eddy

I invite any member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild to fish the private, posted quarter mile of water at Buck Eddy. You can find it on Google Earth at latitude 41°55'42.63"N, longitude 74°53'18.34"W. Please simply print out this page, then cut out and carry with you the pass below. Or just take a photo of the pass with your cell phone.

The water and the parking area will support a maximum of six anglers, and since this part of the river is best fished from the side opposite the road, it also can be reached by walking down from Hazel Bridge. Fly fishing only, of course.

—Ted Rogowski

Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Angler Pass* Buck Eddy



President's Message By Joe Ceballos

Editor's note: This will be an ongoing feature of the Gazette.

This is the first installment of a regular column discussing the present state of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and future plans for the organization. I currently have two things that I want to share with you.

The first is how, going forward, we plan to deliver on our mission statement created by Floyd Franke and Matthew Vinciguerra in 1993. As some of you know we had the first public presentation of our program entitled "Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, Past—Present—Future" at the Edison Fly Fishing Show. The presentation is designed to create awareness of who we are and what we stand for as an organization, not just to encourage new members to join the guild, but to inform all members of our origins, what we are doing today, and what we hope to accomplish tomorrow. The presentation tells that story on several levels, but the most important of these deals with the four elements of our mission statement and what we plan to do to continue to carry it out.

First: Preserve, protect, and enhance the Catskill fly tying heritage.

We have begun a formal relationship with the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum (CFFCM) to support each other. Our common interests make this an obvious direction to take. We also have improved our website, started a Catskill Kids on the Fly program, created the PowerPoint presentation that debuted at Edison for club or angling shows, and have established a presence in social media via Facebook and Instagram.

Second: Work cooperatively to promote the work of present Catskill fly tyers.

On social media and on our website, members share ideas and tying information for all our members worldwide. On a face-to-face level, we will continue to support the annual Fly Tyers Rendezvous, where tyers and the public come together for a day of demonstration and camaraderie. We will continue to invest in improving both of these outlets and look for input and ideas from the membership to make them even better.

Third: Provide a forum for the sharing of information.

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette* is without question the best newsletter of its kind, anywhere, and guild membership is the best \$10 a year anyone can spend. We consistently enjoy first-class contributions from members and will continue to encourage people to send in articles and share information relative to the past, present, and future of Catskill fly-tying heritage and beyond.

Fourth: Promote the development of future generations of Catskill fly tyers.

In recent years, our participation in the Kids on the Fly program by means of Catskill Kids on the Fly, previously led by our dear friend, the late Bob Hopken, is one way in which by which the guild has sought to develop future Catskill fly tyers. We offer this program prior to guild meetings at the CFFCM. We hope to expand this program in the future in other places, relying on our members' initiative. Resources and funding are available to support this.

Second, I want to stress the importance of our presence at the International Fly Tying Symposium and The Fly Fishing Show in Edison. It contributes to the realization of all these goals. A big "Thank you" goes to John Kavanaugh for coordinating the tyers and providing a strong presence and to Nicole March for all she does to make things happen as they should. We signed up a lot of new members at the show and had a great display. Thanks as well go to all those who volunteered to tie and demonstrate Catskill-style flies, engage the attendees, and share information about the guild. We sell hats and other things that may help pay for the booth, but upholding the Catskill fly-tying tradition and engaging people who stop by is Job 1.

**River of Silk
By Chuck Coronato**

It's a winter morning ceilinged with overcast skies, and I'm fighting for balance on slick rocks at the edges of a frigid river, working a traditional soft-hackle fly through every depth change and current break that might hold a trout. The fly choice, a Partridge and Orange, seems like a strange decision for this time of year, but the selection was made based on a hunch and for personal reasons. Everything about fishing this river is personal. This river is the reason that I am here. Not just here to fish, but here at all—existing—and on this part of the planet.

In 1920, two young adults who would eventually become my grandparents emigrated from Italy and settled in a city—America's first industrial city—many miles downstream from where their grandson presently fishes for trout. I'm sure that they knew nothing about this river's birth from the retreat of the Wisconsin ice sheet that receded at the end of the last Ice Age, and they hadn't heard of Alexander Hamilton. It was Hamilton in the 1790s who saw the manufacturing potential of harnessing

the power of the Great Falls of the Passaic River to establish a needed industrial base for the new country. My grandparents, and people from a variety of regions, were drawn to this location to find work in the mills and factories that made locomotives and Colt firearms, but mostly produced and dyed textiles. It was because of textiles that Paterson, New Jersey, became known as Silk City.

Viewing the Great Falls puts you face to face with the clashes of nature and industry. The falls are a beautiful, seventy-seven-foot-high slice of spraying water gleaming brilliant white when viewed in sunlight, but the scene must be shared with a towering red brick structure that is built into the same rock cliff as the falls. As the bubbles break from the foamy water at the base of the falls, the color bears the murky green tint of pollution. Despite the polluted water and chunks of debris that collect in the turbulence, it is not unusual to spot a cormorant diving the depths for a meal or perched on a rock with its black wings outstretched. The cormorant is a reminder that a variety of wildlife still survives in and near this water. The river has abundant carp, huge pike, and even runs of striped bass in its tidal sections, but these animals accumulate the sins of pollution in their tissue. There is an official ban on consuming fish caught from the lower seventeen miles of the river. That lower stretch of riverbed holds a toxic stew that includes dioxin, mercury, and PCBs, left behind by companies that manufactured chemicals, including the production of Agent Orange used during the Vietnam War. The latest plan from the EPA proposed the removal of 4.3 million cubic yards of toxic mud from the river. Some of the polluters responsible for funding this cleanup even attempted a strange, short-lived program to exchange farm-raised tilapia for fish that local anglers plucked from the river. When the raised fish didn't attain the needed size, the program substituted frozen fillets of tilapia purchased from Costco. Very few people traded their catch, and the program was discontinued.



I certainly wasn't expecting tilapia when I was a young boy fishing this river. When my father walked me to the river for my first attempt at fishing, the hope was to hook a carp. I caught nothing at first, but the river was just down the street from where I lived, and I continued in my early teens to make occasional trips to its banks, where I gathered with the local kids to catch carp on hooks baited with corn niblets and sometimes to share a seven-ounce bottle of Rolling Rock beer. Walking back home, I'd pass a cemetery whose headstones were engraved with the names of my grandparents and also the names of people whose families were drawn to this area because of the river. These were the same names that continued to fill the roll books of schools and were still written across the tops of punch cards in factories.

As years passed, fly fishing became a passion that I pursued in waters that had clean flows and a tradition of trout. I hadn't fished my boyhood river for many years. It took an article in *Fly Fisherman*

magazine to alert me to the fact that the river located down the street from my childhood home, the river flowing past the high school where I was teaching, and the river that was classified as one of the most polluted waterways in the country actually had wild trout thriving in its headwaters. The prospect of catching trout—and wild ones, to boot—sent me searching for ways to access spots that I didn't know existed. I found a national park, steeped in the history of the Revolutionary War, and hiked a steep trail aptly named Patriots Path to find a small stream flowing through a wooded hollow. The stream looked nothing like the waterway that I'd known for so many years, but it was in fact the same river, a little sanctuary before it gains size and changes character. This spot indeed held wild trout, and I knew that I would have to visit this place at least once a year.

This morning of fishing the Partridge and Orange marks one of the earliest times of the year that I'm returning. I need to be here today. I've retired from teaching in that high school located on the shore of what this stream will become, and I've left behind too much of the life and too many of the people that were connected to this river. The trout that I'm trying to catch today are of the rainbow and brown variety. They are not native fish, but are the descendants of immigrants to these waters, just as I am the descendant of immigrants drawn to this part of the world because of this river. I need to be here to do the fishing for my ancestors, who never saw this part of the water, but who made meaningful lives despite working difficult jobs in the towns through which it flows.

And today, for this river, the fly must be made from dyed silk, even if that silk was dyed in England instead of in the mills of Paterson. Entomology has nothing to do with the choice. I'm not trying to match the midges that are causing dimpled rises or the little black stoneflies that say hello by crawling on the back of my ear. Silk for this river is the only choice today that feels right, and a rainbow trout grabs the fly in agreement, as does three more of its kind. Yes, you could attribute this success to the fact that the Partridge and Orange is just a good fly, but I think that these trout know where they are.



Everything Old Is New Again

So many patterns. There are literally thousands of trout fly patterns, and every year new ones are “invented.” I get it, really. We as tyers love to make flies, and when someone alters or adds something to an existing pattern, it's hard not to name it and call it your own. This of course is occasionally met with rolling eyes or a muffled groan, because as we all know, nothing in fly development is really new.

Since all of my trout fishing takes place in the Catskill watershed, I tend to focus on localized patterns originated and used there. We all love to fool a fish with one of the classics, but while I'm sure wood-duck-winged and sparsely hackled dry flies are fished all over the Catskills, I see and hear about new patterns often. The tailwater rivers, especially, see new patterns developed every spring, because the likelihood of getting into big fish is better, but also because the trout there see so many flies it's perceived that they become shy to them.

The latter is something that I feel could occur, although it may not be only the fly that turns them off, but the whole series of events that happen, starting at the initial forward cast. But that's a topic for another day.

I hear a lot of interesting feedback when asking about these “new” flies. If it was developed at a fly shop, you can bet that along with a rave review of its effectiveness, there will also be a wall well stocked with the materials needed to replicate it. It's good business, and as we all know, confidence in a pattern, not its design, is often the reason it catches fish.

But is it possible that the trout are seeing popular flies too often? Can fish get fly shy when angler after angler casts the fly of the day over their heads, over and over? For a long time, *the* fly on the upper Delaware was the Comparadun. I have even gone on record stating that it likely has accounted for more upper D trout than any other fly used there, though in recent years, that declaration may no longer hold true.

The new synthetic crinkly fibers are taking the place of Microfibbets and deer hair, and I'm sure this spring there will be a few more "must have" hatch matchers guaranteed to trick that finicky bank sipper.

What I have been thinking about, however, is not inventing a new fly that the trout haven't seen yet, but instead resurrecting and using the old flies they haven't seen yet. It's so simple really, using flies such as Art Lee's High Wing Emerger when the Drakes show up, or Lee Hartman's Delaware Fox at March Brown time. You start incorporating forty-year-old flies into your lineup, and it's virtually *guaranteed* no trout has ever seen one.

It also encourages us to research and rekindle the older patterns, something that's being done less frequently with every season that passes.

I have been slowly replacing my newer patterns with old ones, and in less than a month, I'll be able to give the fish something both old and new to look at.

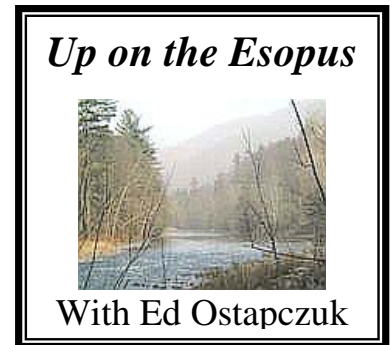
Ray Smith and the Red Fox

Shortly after my wife and I married in 1970, we moved to the Catskills, and I started a job with IBM, drawn to the region not so much by Big Blue, but by a two-part 1969 *Outdoor Life* article by Cecil Heacox: "Charmed Circle of the Catskills." In earlier 1970, during a snowstorm, I interviewed with IBM, then, based upon Heacox's articles, made a priority visit to scout the Esopus Creek. The river quickly mesmerized me by its rough-and-tumble trout waters. That sealed the deal on where we'd eventually live and work, and we've been Catskill joined for half a century now.

After relocating, I transferred into the local Trout Unlimited chapter, engrossed myself in its activities, and became friends with an acquaintance of Ray Smith. My TU colleague made arrangements for me to meet Smith, but the Dean of the Esopus would pass away before that meeting took place. Nonetheless, decades later, in 2012, I met Ray's eighty-six-year-old son, Calvin Smith, at the Jerry Bartlett Angling Collection of the Phoenicia Library. The topic of a roundtable discussion was Raymond C. Smith (1900–1975), and Calvin was there to share his father's past. I always thought of Ray as a wet-fly angler, but Calvin proclaimed his father to be a "dry-fly man."

The elder Smith was a noted local outdoorsman and baseball player, a Phoenicia guide, a man of many trades and talents, and perhaps the best fly fisher the Esopus Creek ever produced. His mounted circles of wet flies under glass are celebrated and true Catskill angling treasures. Local fishing lore has it that the famous Mother's Pool on the Esopus was named for Ray Smith's mother, Agnes Moon Smith.

In May 1972, *Outdoor Life* published another Cecil Heacox article, this one titled "Art of Deception: The Catskill Flytyers." In this piece, Heacox wrote about Walt Dette, Harry and Elsie Darbee, Roy Steenrod, Art Flick, Theodore Gordon, and Ray Smith, and he included a dry fly attributed to each noted tyer. For Smith, that was his Red Fox. Additionally, Heacox wrote the following about Smith: "When it comes to flytying, Ray Smith, a match-the-hatcher and choosy about color, is a fairly orthodox member of the Catskill School." Heacox added, "The dry-fly fisher, Ray



advises, will get action on the Esopus with a Quill Gordon in April and May, a Red Fox in June, and a small Olive Blue Dun during the summer.”

Subsequently, in Heacox’s book, *The Compleat Brown Trout*, the author wrote, “The Red Fox, a consistent brown trout taker, in its Catskill version originated by Ray, is dressed almost like a Light Cahill, except with red belly fur.” The Red Fox makes honorable mention in several other books. Mike Valla included the dry fly in his *Classic Dry Fly Box* and *Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies*, while Ed Van Put referred to it in *Trout Fishing in the Catskills*, as did Austin Francis in *Catskill Rivers*. And longtime Esopus angler and outdoor writer Ray Ovington mentioned the Red Fox as a Cahill substitute in *The Trout and the Fly*.

I tie and fish the Red Fox in Ray Smith’s memory. It still catches trout. One evening last June, while walking off the Esopus after a good outing matching the *Isonychia* hatch, I noticed a few Light Cahills. So I attached a size 14 Red Fox and immediately started catching fish. Long live Ray Smith and his Red Fox!

Hook: Mustad 94840, size 14
Thread: White
Wings: Wood duck
Tail: Wood duck
Body: Buff and red belly fur of a red fox
Hackle: Light buff ginger



By the way, in a typewritten leaflet by Ray Smith titled *Fly Patterns*, he noted that for the wings and tail of his Red Fox, he used gray mallard that was dyed with coffee.

Looking Back Upstream



The Chance of a Lifetime **By Ed Walsh**

I am guessing most of us can look back on things we would change if we had that opportunity. There are many in my life, but few are related to the sport of fly fishing, where I spend a significant amount of my time these days. But there is one I

regret every time I see a cane fly rod.

Back in my youth, I had an uncle who was an avid fly fisherman. Every year we would take the eight-to-ten-hour drive (most of it on Route 9) from Metuchen, New Jersey, to the Ausable River near Lake Placid, New York. We always camped at the Wilmington Notch Campground, which was a short walk to the river.

I had little interest in fly fishing back then, but would sit on the bank for hours and watch my Uncle Todd catch fish. What intrigued me most was that he looked just like President Eisenhower on

the TV news when he was casting. He often offered to teach me to cast, but watching him seemed like more fun back then.

My uncle was an engineer for RCA and as such was extremely detail oriented. He might have been the original “a place for everything and everything in its place” guy. I remember spending time in his workshop in the basement of his home. Nothing was out of place. I especially remember how he stored his fishing gear. Hip boots and waders were hung like dress shirts, all flies were organized and labeled, his rods were in cloth socks and aluminum cases, and reels were kept in soft felt pouches, neatly arranged in a separate, locked closet. He and my aunt didn’t have any children, so I always wondered why he locked up his fishing equipment. Years later, when I realized how much he had invested in his gear and knowing that my brother and I were, shall we say, overly inquisitive, I came to the obvious conclusion for his decision.

I do remember spending time with Uncle Todd when he was getting his equipment ready for the season and noticing that all of his rods (I think he had a dozen or so) had the same name inscribed near the cork handle: H. L. Leonard. I also remember he had a few reels with the same name, but most were made by Orvis or Hardy. He told me that he bought his first rod when he returned from the war (World War I), and purchased the others as time went on and he fished in different rivers for different fish. He also suggested that we would stop at the rod company’s headquarters near the military academy at West Point on one of our upcoming trips to upstate New York. We would have to make that trip an overnigher, because that visit would add another couple of hours to an already long day.

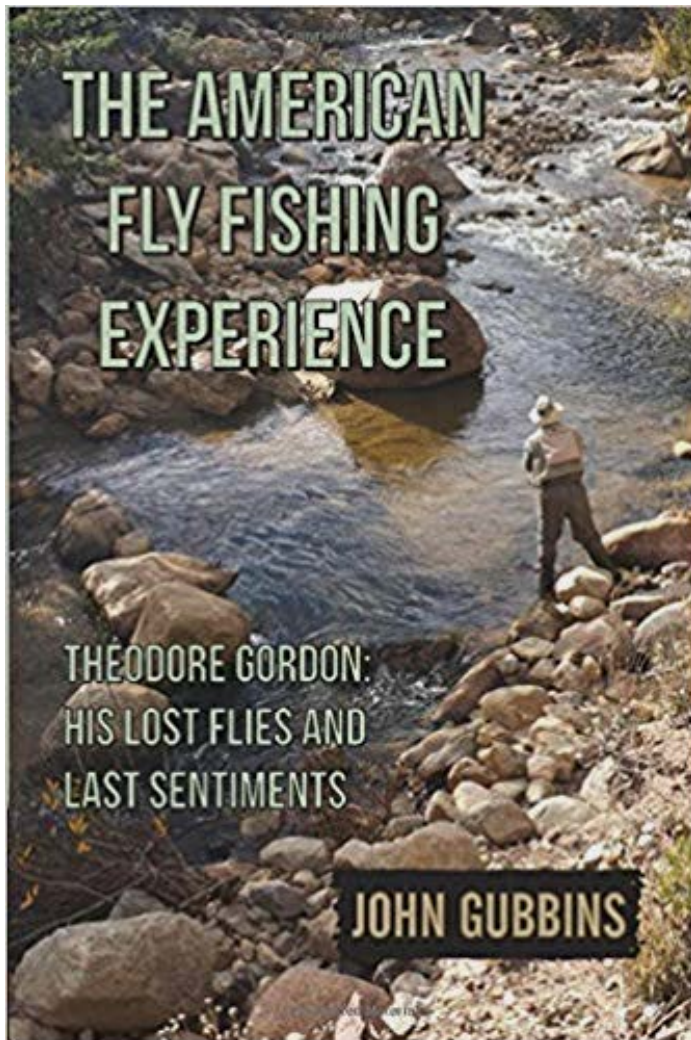
Well, we never did stop at the H. L. Leonard Rod Company in Central Valley, but in 1977, we moved our family to Monroe, which is a bordering town. I even met a guy, Mark Murphy, who worked for the company as a rod maker and who invited me to tour the facility. I wasn’t a fly fisher at the time, and I kept finding reasons to avoid his invitation until he stopped asking some months later. It’s funny how some things work out, though. Mark had worked at Leonard since he graduated from high school, and his and my kids played sports together throughout grammar and high school. Our families became good friends. I hadn’t seen Mark since I moved from Monroe in 1997, but I saw his picture in the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum’s H. L. Leonard cane rod display section a few years ago. It is a small world sometimes.

My Uncle Todd passed away at the age of eighty-nine. He was a really great man who taught me a lot about fly fishing and life, and he did it in a such a way that I didn’t realize I was learning at the time. His sister, my Aunt Jean, who was the executor of his will, asked me and my wife if there was anything in his house that we would be interested in before she had an estate sale. She specifically asked if I wanted my uncle’s fishing stuff. I figured that not being a fly fisher, what was I going to do with those rods, reels, flies, etc., and I also thought those bamboo rods were pretty old and probably not useable or worth much anyway.

At this point, it’s not hard to figure where this story was going or has gone. I missed the opportunity to tour one of fly-fishing history’s great contributors in the H. L. Leonard workshop, and more importantly, I didn’t take advantage of owning a number of vintage Leonard cane rods and what now would be antique reels.

I’ll be moving from Rhode Island to Roscoe in the next couple of months. It will be great to be near some wonderful fisheries and a lot closer to my kids and grandkids in Middletown and Goshen, New York, and Morris County, New Jersey. But one depressing thing is happening as I prepare for this move. I have already thrown out enough junk to fill a fifteen-yard dumpster and will probably need another smaller one before I move—stuff that I’ve accumulated over the years that I thought might have been useful or valuable. I am guessing that I would have had space for a dozen cane rods and a few reels when they were offered. I am getting old, so I hope I don’t make too many decisions like this again.

Book Review



***The American Fly Fishing Experience:
Theodore Gordon, His Lost Flies, and Last
Sentiments.***

*By John Gubbins. Published by Brule River
Press, 2019; \$18.00 softbound.*

Every member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild is familiar with the story of Theodore Gordon, who is said to be the father of American fly fishing and of the Catskill style of dry fly that today is the iconic image of the sport. As the story goes, Gordon adapted the dry flies of the sedate English chalk streams that he received from British dry-fly authority Frederick Halford so they would work on the more turbulent freestone streams of New York's Catskill Mountains.

Although he was a prolific writer of articles for fly-fishing and sporting journals such as the *Fishing Gazette*, beginning in 1890, and *Forest and Stream*, beginning in 1903, Gordon himself has been called "reclusive" and "secretive," and despite the publication of John McDonald's *The Complete Fly Fisherman: The Notes and Letters of Theodore Gordon* in 1947, he has remained something of an enigma, known if at all by a couple of photographs every American fly fisher probably has seen, one in which Gordon is dressed in a snazzy striped suit

and is posed with a hunting dog, the other in which he is standing ankle deep in a stream with a woman in a dress who has hooked a trout—"the Mystery Woman," as she is inevitably known. The enigmatic quality of his personal life has contributed to Gordon's mystique and mythic status.

As the late historian of fly patterns Terry Hellekson pointed out in the second edition of *Fish Flies: An Encyclopedia of the Fly Tier's Art* (Gibbs Smith, 2005), a lot of that story is indeed a myth. No single individual can be singled out as the progenitor of fly fishing in the United States, and the writings of several Americans, among them works by John Harrington Keene, author of *Fly-Fishing and Fly-Making* (1887), George M. L. LaBranche, author of *The Dry Fly and Fast Water* (1914), Mary Orvis Marbury, author of *Favorite Flies and Their Histories* (1892), Sara McBride, author of "The Metaphysics of Fly Fishing" (1876) and "Entomology for Fly Fishers" (1877), and Robert Barnwell Roosevelt, author of *Superior Fishing; or, the Striped Bass, Trout and Black Bass of the Northern States* (1865), "were already available in America when Gordon wrote for the *Fishing Gazette*, and dry flies were being offered commercially on both coasts as early as 1888." Consequently, Hellekson concludes, "To single out Gordon as being the 'Father' of any segment of this sport in America is inaccurate." In addition, Hellekson argues, if anyone should get credit for the development of the

Catskill-style dry fly, it's not Gordon, but Reuben Cross, Gordon's young friend who became a professional Catskill fly tyer before the Darbee and Dette families came to prominence.

Myths, though, have a way of surviving being busted. They are stories that fill a need, after all, and the need for an origin story is a strong one. Fly fishers are as susceptible to their appeal as anyone else. And indeed, we know very little about Theodore Gordon the man, beyond some basic data. Originally from Pennsylvania, where he began fishing, he and his mother moved to Savannah, Georgia, where they had relatives, after his father died. He worked briefly as a stock broker there and for another relative in New York City, but suffered financial setbacks and was an early victim of tuberculosis, which led him to the Catskills, since mountain air was thought to be a cure for the disease, or at least to be a palliative.

The blanks in Gordon's life offer an opportunity for a novelist to fill them in imaginatively, and that is what John Gubbins has done in *The American Fly Fishing Experience: Theodore Gordon, His Lost Flies, and Last Sentiments*. Previously, in *Profound River*, Gubbins performed a similar imaginative reconstruction of the inner life of another notable figure in the history of fly fishing, Dame Juliana Berners, the author of *A Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle* (1496), the first known work on the subject in English. For his book on Gordon, Gubbins did his homework, traveling to the Catskills, where he fished flies as Gordon tied them on the rivers where Gordon fished—the Neversink and Beaverkill and Willowemoc. Gubbins also read all the writings, and he formed a guiding idea of Gordon's character.

For Gubbins, the central fact of Gordon's life was his tuberculosis, a bacterial infection of the lungs that in the 1880s killed one out of every seven people living in the United States and Europe. Today, it really does take an act of imagination to enter into a life of someone stricken by TB, because it is one of those diseases that antibiotics seemed to have eradicated, until strains resistant to them began to show up. However, at the turn of the twentieth century, "lungers" were shunned as infectious and pitied as doomed. Gubbins's Gordon is indeed reclusive, but it's because his self-awareness as someone regarded in this way has made him so.

He's also a downright unpleasant person, and he's aware of that, too. The book is set in 1915, the year of Gordon's death, and his life appears in recollections and flashbacks that allow for both self-justifications and honest self-assessments. "I traded in deception," he says, beginning as a sickly youth who "faked" signs of "vigorous life," concealing as best he could the TB that marked him, ultimately making his living—and his mark on the world—by "fraud," "making lifeless feathers and fur appear alive," because "in fly tying, the trick is always the same: to imitate life."

He is also secretive, guarding his hard-won knowledge of fly-fishing and fly-tying techniques from the public that he courts via his writing and his commercial fly tying, withholding his real secrets, but practicing what he's learned in ways that enhance his reputation as the foremost angler in the Catskills—building his brand.

However, since we are privy to his self-confessions, we get to hear his secret theories of successful angling and imitation: "To succeed, the angler must put the right color fly in front of the trout. Color precedes all other considerations, including size and profile." And while he gives those who buy his flies what they want and what they think he fishes—well-hackled flies with upright and divided wings, supposedly the adaptation he made so that dry flies could ride America's more turbulent waters—what he fishes with real success are flies with a single, cocked-back wing and a sparse hackle tied only in front. Today, we call them "emergers."

His angling technique follows from his belief in the primacy of color in fly patterns: searching for "the effective fly" by "ringing the colors," changing different color flies until one works.

The strength of ringing the colors is that it expects failure. The overwhelming likelihood is that no one cast will produce a strike. Failure is endemic to fly fishing. If neither the first, nor the second, nor the third fly succeeds, ringing the colors will give the angler more choices above, in, or below the surface, as needed. Sooner or later, by a process of elimination, ringing the colors will put the angler into the effective fly.

A chapter lists Gordon's most frequently used flies, complete with tying recipes (and tying comments in Gubbins's own voice), but this is a historical novel, not a fly-tying book, and it is peopled with others in Gordon's life, some actual historical personages, such as Roy Steenrod, George M. L. LaBranche, and Edward Ringwood Hewitt—a chapter is devoted to a dinner with LaBranche and Hewitt, which enables Gubbins to have Gordon explain some of his angling theories. That actually is a basic strategy in the book — it is quite “talky.” Invented characters include the snooty Mrs. Henderson, who serves to put in play criticisms of Gordon and his writings, some of which he's able to rebut. And of course, there is “the Mystery Woman.”

Gubbins calls her “Gail.” She's a child of the Maine woods, the self-willed daughter of a successful logger and as vital and self-assured as Gubbins's Gordon, at his worst, is weak and weasely. It's hard to grasp what she sees in Gordon (she calls *him* “my man of mystery”), but they take up and fall in love, only, in the end, to break up when Gordon can't find the gumption to act and/or stubbornly guards his independence against her forceful personality when she proposes a life of vigor and health and financial security with her father's new logging company in Michigan, practicing the sustainable forestry advocated by Gifford Pinchot.

And yes, since this is an imaginative construction of the lives of actual human beings, there is a sex scene. It is not overly graphic, and it is conditioned by what would have to have been on the mind of any TB sufferer in such a situation: How can you even kiss someone you love when you know you have an extremely communicable and ultimately fatal disease?

Faced with the task of imaginatively constructing Gordon's consciousness, Gubbins does a good job of putting the reader inside Gordon's head at moments such as that, when his self-consciousness is at the fore. As I said, there is also some talk that is basically just an expository device, and a reader catches on pretty quickly that it's being used in that way. In addition, viewed simply as a book, a material object, it has the defects of self-publication, the lapses in proofing and layout that are characteristic of what has become a common mode of authorship. But if all you know of Theodore Gordon is the myth about that guy in the photographs, you'll find this a compelling reading experience.

That's because Gubbins's Gordon gets it. He says, “Fly fishing demands that its adherents work at being worthy of it. It demands that fly fishers develop the highest skills and greatest understanding, and only when they do will it reward them by drawing them deeper and deeper into wonder. . . . I will never understand anglers who promise to make fly fishing totally predictable. Without wonder, fly fishing becomes just one more joyless engineering project.”

—*Bud Bynack*



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Without the articles, information, for-sale or want ads, cartoons, newsworthy information, and whatever else is interesting and fun that members submit, this newsletter simply becomes a meeting announcement. Send submissions to Bud Bynack, budbynack@gmail.com or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.