



# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild GAZETTE



Volume 22, number 1

*Twenty-Fifth Anniversary*

January 2019

**There is no January meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild.** Stop by the guild table and say hello at The Fly Fishing Show on January 25, 26, and 27, 2019, at the New Jersey Convention and Expo Center in Edison, NJ. See the ad at the end of this issue of the *Gazette*.

## **February Membership Renewals**

Catskill Fly Tyers Guild memberships renew in February. Your renewal date should appear in the address line of your e-mail or envelope. If you've already renewed, many thanks. If you renew on an annual basis, it's time to get out the check book. Send \$10.00 to:

Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Membership  
P.O. Box 663  
Roscoe, NY 12776-0663

## **An Era Ends, Another Begins**

This issue of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette* is the last to be published in the form of a printed copy mailed to members via the U.S. Post Office. The newsletter is what knits the geographically diverse members of the guild together, and what has been the practice since the 1990s has been continued on that basis for those who have preferred it, even as an increasing majority have preferred to receive the *Gazette* as a PDF file via e-mail.

However, printing and mailing the newsletter has been by far the guild's largest expense, and because e-mail has become ubiquitous and a common way to unite communities of interest such as the guild, that expense has become hard to justify when the resources could be devoted instead to furthering the organization's mission to preserve and carry forward the Catskill fly-tying tradition. In addition, because the hard-copy version of the *Gazette* must be produced in grayscale, rather than in the full color of the electronic version, and must be commercially photocopied, a process in which the quality is degraded and is difficult to control, the hard copy is of necessity a considerably inferior product, while in the future, publishing just one version electronically may make improvements possible, such as the inclusion of live links to videos as parts of articles, possibilities that publishing a hard-copy version ruled out.

Consequently, a year ago, the guild decided to follow the practice of many other similar organizations and produce and distribute the *Gazette* solely in electronic form via e-mail. In the interim, we have urged members who have been receiving the hard copy to supply an e-mail address. If you received this in printed form and still have not done so, it's time to send a working e-mail address to Nicole March at [catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com](mailto:catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com).

## **Tyers Needed**

If you'd like to tie for the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild at The Fly Fishing Show on January 25, 26, and 27, 2019, at the New Jersey Convention and Expo Center in Edison, NJ, call John Kavanaugh on his cell at (973) 219-7696 and leave a message with your contact information, or contact Nicole March at [catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com](mailto:catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com).

## Tony Ritter to Speak at the February Guild Meeting



The February 2019 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Saturday, February 16, at 1:00 P.M. in the Wulff Gallery at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY. He will be discussing his experiences as a guide on the Delaware River and how his flies evolved over the years.

Tony Ritter has operated a drift-boat fishing guide service on the upper Delaware River for over twenty years. He specializes in wild trout—browns and rainbows. He is licensed by the National Park Service, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Tony's snowshoe rabbit fly patterns also have been sought after for many years.

Tony is a trustee of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum and has served as chairman of the Water Use/Resource Management Committee of the Upper Delaware Council, Inc., in which local, state, and federal governments and agencies join together to manage the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River. Tony's websites can be accessed at <http://www.delawariverfishing.com> and <http://www.gonefishingguideservice.com>.

## Kids on the Fly Northwest New Jersey

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild opened the new year with a standing-room-only class at Kids on the Fly Northwest New Jersey. We had a large group of tyers, including some father-and-son tyers. Fun was had by all!

Kids on the Fly Northwest New Jersey had its first anniversary this month, and the program is growing, with the winter months having our best attendance. We wish to thank Greg Becker at Whitewater Flies for his support and the use of his facilities, along with all the other supporters of our group.



—Bob Hopken



## CFTG at the International Fly Tying Symposium

As always, the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild table at the November 2018 International Fly Tying Symposium was a popular attraction. The new venue at the Sheraton Hotel in Parsippany, NJ, was a hit, and the show was well attended. Many thanks to all the tyers who represented the guild at the show: Gary Baron, Scott Fisher, Elmer Hopper, John Kavanaugh, Joe Apuzzi, Rich Fischer, Len Ruffian, Chuck Coronato, John Losapio, Brian McKee, and Nuno Figuerido. Also to show chair John Kavanaugh, as always, for ramrodding the event for the guild.

The International Fly Tying Symposium provides the ideal occasion to connect the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild with like-minded individuals from around the Northeast and around the world. It's always a pleasure to tie there. Consider volunteering next year.



*Talkin' tying at the Symposium.*

### Guild Questions? Contact Nicole

If you or someone you know has questions about receiving Catskill Fly Tyers Guild e-mails or about receiving the *Gazette*, the person to contact is the secretary, Nicole March, at [catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com](mailto:catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com). She also can fill you in on guild participation in upcoming events, issues related to social media, hats and patches, and anything else you may want to know about guild meetings, policies, and offerings.



### Tying Season

It's January 2019, and while the winter season has been mild for the most part, I am at the midpoint between the 2018 fishing season's end and the start of a new one in April. There are steelhead to be found way up North, and I still see where guys are getting out and landing a few of those gigantic browns that live most of their lives in reservoirs as big as oceans, but for me, winter has been and will likely always be tying season.

It's also show season, although I'm having a tough time getting to the usual ones, mostly because of family stuff that just fell on the same dates.

But tying—it's always what gets me through. And not just the tying, but sorting, cleaning, and dying materials. I've said it before: if I had to choose between tying or fishing, I think I would give up fishing, since you can tie all year, anywhere. Of course, I'm glad that's a decision I don't have to make.

Looking back at last year's fishing, I would rate the 2018 Catskill fishing as good to very good. The year before was in my opinion better—excellent, I would have said, simply because of the conditions being slightly more favorable compared with 2018. But after wandering in various waterways all spring and summer, I would say that despite the hatches not coming off at the “normal” times, the numbers and quality of trout were good.

And my little streams, ever changing and cold, fared well all year long. Major flooding is the bullet we always look to dodge, and we did so in 2018. Let's hope for a repeat of that this year.

We still have three months until the opener, which sadly for me is on a Monday this year, but I still have time to fill the boxes, come up with some plans, and prep the gear before April. Fly Fest is February 2, so we will converge at the Wulff Gallery and start the season that way. For now, I will be wrapping hooks, dreaming of standing streamside, and counting the days till April First.



*Editor's Note:* CJ is so modest that he makes it sound like he's just tying a few Woolly Buggers while sitting at the vise and dreaming of Opening Day, but this is the sort of thing he ties on long winter nights: a Nelly Bly.

### *Looking Back Upstream*



### **Fly-Tying Books: The Movement of Thought A Review Essay, Part 1 Bud Bynack**

“Try thinking,” my physics professor wrote on the midterm in the only physics course I took in college. That has rankled ever since, because it was his job to teach me how to think like a physicist, and he hadn't done it. But later, as a professor myself, in a discipline as far away from physics as I could get, I had an inkling of why he had said it. When students asked me what I was looking for in a paper that I had assigned, I wanted to say, “The movement of thought across the topic in hand.” I knew it was my job to try to teach them how to make that happen, which means ultimately, I was grading myself at the same time I was grading them, and I always tried to come up with a more helpful response keyed to the particular student and situation, but I had to admit that when it came right down to it, that's what I was looking for: the movement of thought across a topic.

That's still what I look for when I'm reviewing books, chiefly fly-tying books, for a magazine I help edit, *California Fly Fisher*. And even in the relatively delimited domain of fly-tying books, the movement of thought can manifest itself in a variety of ways. In addition to looking for creative thinking about patterns, materials, and techniques, which any tying book that has merited publication ought to exhibit at least to some degree, I also am alert to intelligent and useful accounts of the origins and development of the craft, because as is so often remarked, a lot of innovations in fly tying are reinventions of older innovations, and there are only so many ways to bind stuff to a hook. In addition, that means that anyone who can teach me useful and illuminating techniques and skills gets my attention. Finally, there are a few books in this domain in which the movement of thought occurs at the

“meta” level of the “philosophy” of fly design. “Philosophy” gets scare quotes, because this ain’t phenomenology or logical positivism, but just an effort to claim what’s fundamental in the construction of an artificial imitation of an insect or other food item that will, you know, *catch a fish*.

Among the books that best represent the movement of thought across the topic of fly tying, one of the standouts is the late Jim Cramer’s *Becoming a Thinking Fly Tier: The Way to Rapid Improvement* (No Nonsense Fly Fishing Guidebooks, 2013). I used the anecdote about my physics professor when I reviewed the book, with good reason: Cramer, an engineer who used to work at Lawrence Livermore Labs, which designs nuclear weapons, doesn’t just tell you to think like a creative fly tyer, he explains to you how to go about doing it and then exemplifies the results with a series of stunning ideas about how to go about tying flies.

Another tying book remarkable for the movement of thought across its topic is Allen McGee’s *Fly-Fishing Soft-Hackles: Nymphs, Emergers, and Dry Flies* (Stackpole Books, 2017). Although soft-hackle flies were popularized for modern American anglers by Sylvester Nemes in a series of books starting in the mid-1970s, they are as old as fly tying itself (it’s an obvious way to mate a hook and a feather to imitate a bug underwater) and have a long history in the British Isles. Such a venerable tradition can induce veneration to the point that it stifles creative thought. Not so for McGee. The subtitle says it all: beginning with the basic soft-hackle design and techniques, he’s worked up an array of patterns that even include dry flies and spinners. An articulated extended-body soft hackle is just one result of this process. McGee is an innovative fly-tying thinker.

So are Mike Mercer and Scott Sanchez. The West has a long history of improvisation in fly tying, and as I put it in a review of *Creative Fly Tying*, by Mercer (Wild River Press, 2005) and *A New Generation of Trout Flies: From Midges to Mammals for Rocky Mountain Trout*, by Sanchez (Wild River Press, 2005), over a decade ago, Mercer and Sanchez were “the Miles Davis and Dizzy Gillespie” of their generation of fly tyers. Both had access to full-service, trout-oriented fly shops, and they could employ the latest innovations in materials to conceive more effective flies. Since then, materials have continued to evolve, but the patterns they developed suggest ways in which these can be employed to carry their smart improvisations forward.

But if we’re considering tyers in the relatively recent past whose works exemplify the movement of thought, we can’t leave out Gary LaFontaine. Prior to his path-breaking *Caddisflies* (Lyons and Burford, 1981), caddisflies had only recently begun to be treated as a major hatch of interest to fly fishers, thanks to books such as Leonard Wright’s *Fishing the Dry Fly as a Living Insect* (E. P. Dutton, 1972) and Larry Solomon and Eric Leiser’s *The Caddis and the Angler* (Stackpole Books, 1977). In a monumental work of both entomological research and fly-tying innovation, LaFontaine produced both a systematic survey of caddis species in the United States and a system of patterns to imitate them in all of their life stages. And not content with the research in scientific journals, LaFontaine donned scuba gear and went to see for himself how the bugs and the fish and the flies behave. What he learned informs the patterns in *The Dry Fly: New Angles* (Greycliff, 1990) and *Trout Flies: Proven Patterns* (Greycliff, 1993), tying books featuring many patterns that are at once loopy in appearance and founded on rigorous observation, substantiated by angling success. The cliché is that people like LaFontaine “think outside the box.” Gary LaFontaine didn’t see a box — he just looked and saw what’s there.

Most of us, though, have to muddle through with what we learn from books, even if it’s books with the kinds of insight I’ve been discussing. We may be trying to solve contemporary angling and tying problems, but knowing what was done in the past not only forecloses the possibility of reinventing the Quill Gordon, but supplies techniques and ideas with which to move forward, though looking backward. Years ago, in a book I picked up at a sale, *Poul Jorgensen’s Modern Fly Dressings for the Practical Angler* (Winchester Press, 1977), I discovered and fell in love with a technique for making extended mayfly bodies with split tails simply by stroking down the body of a something like a mallard breast feather, snipping out all but two barbs of the tip to form a V, and treating the bottom part with cement to hold it together. But Jorgensen had learned the technique from Harry Darbee, who, I then found, discusses it in the book he published “with” Mac Francis, *Catskill Flytier: My Life*,

*Times, and Techniques* (J. B. Lippincott, 1977), where he also will tell you how to skin a chicken for its cape. And then on the Internet I found the technique being used in a new way by the innovative Swedish tyer Ulf Hagström.

That's how the movement of thought across a topic has momentum that carries from the past though the present to the future, and that's why books dealing with past fly-tying achievements are of more than historical interest—they're resources for the thinking fly tyer. Mike Valla's *Tying Catskill Dry Flies* (Headwater Books, 2009) is the definitive current work on that subject, and Valla's *The Founding Flies: 43 American Masters. Their Patterns and Influences*, covers pretty much the entire history of American fly tying from the early nineteenth century to the early twenty-first by focusing on those select historical figures. But because during that long time span fly fishing was developing largely on the East Coast and then the Midwest and because Valla himself is an East Coast guy, who learned tying from Walt and Winnie Dette, his account is both limited to those few figures and slanted away from the Left Coast. Californian Terry Hellekson's *Fish Flies: An Encyclopedia of the Fly Tier's Art*, second edition (Gibbs Smith, 2005) lists myriad patterns and variations and pays special attention to West Coast tyers, giving fly recipes and often supplying mini essays on who created what, one of the most difficult issues to settle. It's a useful reference tool.

*Part 2 of this essay will discuss how-to fly-tying books and the so-called "philosophy" of fly design.*

## **The Untied Way Lending Library**

We've all got books we keep around just because we have them, not because we use them. A book is like a capacitor: stored energy, and it discharges it every time it's opened, but it never needs recharging. Here's an idea from a bibliophile guild member: put that energy into circulation. If you have a book that you don't use and know someone who could, give it to them—with the proviso that they do the same or with another book when they're done with yours: pay it forward. We've all lent books that were never returned, but this isn't that—quite the opposite: you don't want it back, and neither will the person who passes it on: no strings. It's the Untied Way Lending Library. Give it a try.

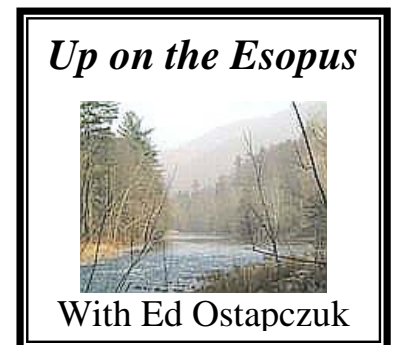
## **Vic Sasse and the Midnight Ghost**

In past *Gazette* issues, I wrote about two Adirondack fly-fishing legends, Ed Bendl (May 2015) and Perry Ehlers (September 2015). This piece is dedicated to a longtime cherished friend and North Country outdoorsman who knew both these men, Victor H. Sasse.

Vic was born on July 10, 1928, in Englewood, New Jersey, but his family eventually moved to Tappan, New York, where he grew up. He played soccer and football at Nyack High School, where the late Bucky Sterns was a younger member of the football team. Vic's education was interrupted by World War II and a two-year U.S. Navy stint; afterward, he returned to graduate from Nyack High. Then he attended college via the GI Bill before eventually taking a job at the Mahwah Ford plant. There he developed a friendship that led to a twenty-seven-year career as a forest ranger.

Initially, he worked in Harriman State Park, but on April 13, 1967, he passed the Department of Environmental Conservation's tests and soon reported to their Warrensburg District office as a New York State forest ranger. His long and distinguished career with the DEC found him relocating to North River, New York, where he still resides with his wife and operates the North Country Sports Shop, one of the region's few fly-fishing shops.

In the early 1980s, the first time I stopped in his shop, located off Thirteenth Lake Road, I couldn't help but notice a number of displays and other items that once belonged in Emil Grimm's Esopus Fly Fisher store, formerly located in Phoenicia, in the Catskill Mountains. I came to learn that Emil Grimm and Vic Sasse were very good friends, and Vic had purchased a number of Grimm's items after his Catskill shop closed.



Vic knows the central Adirondacks like the back of his hand—the many ponds, lakes, and streams, such as the upper reaches of the wild and remote Hudson River. In the July/August 2014 issue of *Eastern Fly Fishing*, Mike Valla wrote a wonderful article, “Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area, NY,” that touched upon the many trout-angling opportunities there and on Sasse himself. As a DEC forest ranger, Vic’s labors of dedication are also mentioned in several other publications and books. He is old school, as honest as the work day is long, and a great source of regional angling information and history.

One of Vic’s favorite fly colors for probing Adirondack still waters is black. He once told me, “With so many insects of countless sizes being black and so many of the streamers being really colorful, I decided to create a really dark one,” a streamer he named the Midnight Ghost. For years, he had a fly tyer from Amsterdam, New York, tie these for him, a pattern that he sold by the hundreds in his shop’s heyday, especially for Thirteenth Lake brown trout. It’s a streamer fly that should interest trout wherever it might be fished.

### **The Midnight Ghost**



Hook: 6 Mustad 9575, size 6

Thread: Black

Tail: Sparse yellow bucktail

Rib: Flat silver Mylar

Body: Black floss

Wing: Four black saddle hackles over five peacock herl strands

Throat: Short, sparse yellow bucktail tied over longer white bucktail

Shoulders: Silver pheasant

Cheeks: Jungle cock

In later years, I received an e-mail from Vic that modified the pattern slightly, substituting red bucktail for the yellow. Perhaps the original yellow bucktail was fashioned after the distinguished Black Ghost streamer.



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@verizon.net](mailto:budbynack@verizon.net) or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.



# The Fly Fishing Show



**The New Jersey Convention and Expo Center**

**Edison, New Jersey**

**January 25, 26, 27, 2019**

## **Show Hours**

Friday: 9:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.  
Saturday: 8:30 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.  
Sunday: 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

## **Admission**

**Adults:** \$18 for one day  
\$28 for two-day pass  
\$38 for three-day pass

**Children under 5 free, 6–12: \$5**

**Scouts under 16 in uniform: free**

**Active Military with ID: \$10**

**Cash only at the gate**

**Regardless of the weather, the show will go on!**

