



# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

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May 2019

**The May 2019 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild** will be held on Saturday, May 18, at 1:00 P.M. in the Wulff Gallery at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY.

John Shaner will be doing a presentation on English-style soft-hackle flies. He has been profiled in *Fly Fishing Treasures: The World of Fly Fishing and Collectors*, by Steve Voit, as “Master of the Soft Hackle Fly and Hardy’s Man in America” and has an extensive collection of British fly-fishing books focusing on the history of the wet fly and the North Country Spider, including the Swarbrick Manuscript, a list of Yorkshire Spider flies dating to 1817. Shaner says: “I enjoy experimenting with new patterns, but am a bit of a traditionalist in my use of materials and seldom incorporate synthetics into my flies, preferring natural silk, fur, and feathers. . . . My ‘library’ (which is getting out of hand!) is primarily devoted to books detailing the development of flies and tying techniques.”

There is no one in the United States more knowledgeable about the history and tying and angling techniques of the soft-hackle fly than John Shaner. Don’t miss this event.

## **Secretary Search**

**By Nicole March**

It has become necessary that I step down as secretary of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and that someone else takes over this important job. I would like to thank all of you for your continued support of our organization, whether it is through tying at our shows, attending meetings, or submitting articles to the *Gazette*, because without our members, we would not be what we are today.

We need a replacement to fulfill what is left of my term, and if you or somebody you know is interested, please send us an e-mail at [CatskillFlyTyersGuild@gmail.com](mailto:CatskillFlyTyersGuild@gmail.com). The secretary is in charge of signing the guild up for shows, answers questions from the membership, and makes sure that the guild’s activities run smoothly and in good order. I will happily discuss the job in more detail with anyone who may consider taking it over.

And while I will be stepping down, I will continue to serve as secretary until the position is filled with a replacement.

## **Catskill Kids on the Fly**

The second meeting of Catskill Kids on the Fly will meet at 10:00 A.M., Saturday May 18, 2019, in the Rod Maker’s Shop below the Wulff Gallery at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. The tying sessions are open to anyone wanting to learn to tie flies. All tools and materials are supplied. The tying session will end around noon.

At the Fly Tyers Rendezvous, over a dozen kids stopped to tie at our table as they passed through the Wulff Gallery. Nicole March and Bob Hopken had a great time teaching the kids and extend a huge “Thank you” to all of the guild members who took time out of their day to lend a hand. The kids had a blast. Future meetings: June 15; no meetings in July and August; meetings resume September 21.

## The 2019 Fly Tyers Rendezvous

The 2019 Fly Tyers Rendezvous, sponsored by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, was held on April 6, in conjunction with the Opening Day celebrations at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. As before, collaborating with the museum brought an influx of visitors, and over thirty tyers from around the Northeast demonstrated a variety of patterns and techniques. In addition, the Rendezvous lived up to its name, with old friends and acquaintances meeting at this annual event and new friends being made.

The Kids on the Fly table was a hit, too, and the entire event came off with éclat. Many thanks to Nicole March for making it all work and to the museum for making us part of the Opening Day festivities.

—Bud Bynack



## **Celebrate Ten Years of the “Made in Japan” Exhibit**

To celebrate a decade of the permanent exhibit “Made in Japan” at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, Misako Ishimura will give a presentation about Japanese flies. The event will be held on May 18, 2019, in the Wulff Gallery at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY 12758, beginning at 10:00 A.M.

About ten years ago, for the “Made in Japan” gala day, Misako invited Mr. Ishigaki to do a presentation on tenkara angling. At a time when the angling method was first becoming known in the United States, it was the first major tenkara presentation outside of Japan and a milestone in the East meets West history of fly fishing.

Come hold antique Japanese flies in your hand and examine them with a magnifying glass before they are added to the “Made in Japan” exhibit. Misako’s PowerPoint presentation will explain the cultural background of the flies and relate some interesting stories about them.

After a sandwich lunch break, she will answer questions, with responses illustrated by demonstrations based on skills that she honed fishing around the world, which may add a different perspective to your angling adventures.

### **The Purple Sky**

**By Andy Brasko**

*Editor’s Note: Andy’s back! Longtime Catskill Fly Tyers Guild members will recall Andy Brasko’s “Wet-Fly Corner” column in the Gazette. After becoming absorbed in playing and performing classic bluegrass, country, folk and old-time music, Andy has returned to fly tying and fishing traditional wet flies. We’ve missed his mastery of this angling tradition and welcome him back to the guild and the Gazette.*

It has been way too long, and I am glad to be a member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild once again, but, more importantly, I am back at my vise, relaxed and happy. The 2019 Fly Tyers Rendezvous was my second tying event of this year, and it was a homecoming for me.

Two weeks before the Rendezvous, I was working on a Hank Williams song for an upcoming performance—the classic “I’m So Lonesome I Could Cry.” There is a line in the song that says, “the silence of a falling star lights up a purple sky.” As I sang that verse, I stopped singing and thought, “What does a purple sky look like?” So I sat down at my vise and tied a very quick prototype of a fly I called the Purple Sky.

At the Rendezvous, a couple stopped by and asked about the Purple Sky. It turns out that purple is the color for Alzheimer’s awareness, and the wife lobbies Congress on that issue in Washington, D.C. She asked to take a picture of the fly and told me she’d never seen an all-purple fly before. After speaking to that couple, I was moved, and the fly came to mean more to me than it first did.

The next day, I sat down at my vise and tied three more prototype flies, finally arriving at the one pictured in this article. All the elements mean something. The jungle cock on the wing is the falling star, the gold ribbing is its sparkling trail, and the purple is the sky it lights up.

As everyone knows, I fish wet flies 99.99 percent of the time. This fly will see field trials this year, because I want to learn what time of day it works and at what time of year. I am sure that it will catch fish, because I have caught trout on purple Woolly Buggers and have taken numerous bass on purple lures. So even though the fly is as beautiful as a Hank Williams lyric and its color symbolizes a very good cause, tie this fly and then go out and fish with it.



### **The Purple Sky**

Hook: Mustad 3906, size 6

Thread: White Danville 6/0 for the underbody and black 6/0 for the head

Tag: Gold Mylar tinsel, size 16/18

Tail: Paired purple duck quills

Body: Two strands of purple Danville floss tied in at the back and wrapped forward

Rib: Gold Mylar tinsel, size 16/18

Wings: Paired purple duck quills

Cheek: Jungle cock sized to fit wings

Beard: Purple hen saddle

Head finish: One soaking coat of Griff's Thin, one coat of Griff's Thick, one coat of Hard as Hull.

Note: For a fishing fly, I would swap the beard for a full-collar hackle of purple hen cape to give the fly some animation and movement.



Full-collar fishing flies: The Yellow Sally (l.) and the Oak (r.). From "The Wet-Fly Corner" archive.



## The Atherton Number 2 Nymph

The hill I was climbing in my truck was so steep, I could feel the back end getting loose on the road's gravel. To my left was the stream, and I was staring down the mountain,

checking for undercut banks, eddys, and seams while at the same time navigating the road. It was cold out and just starting to snow.

I pulled off the road, geared up, and trekked through the woods to the water. Early season on this small stream felt raw, and before I was halfway down the hill, my hands already felt like they wouldn't move. I wasn't going to last long out here, but it had been five months since I'd fished—all winter. Wishing for spring was behind me now, though—it was time to man up.

Rod strung, I popped open the C&F clip-on box, plucked out an Atherton nymph, his Number 2, and knotted it on. In less than five minutes, there was a fourteen-inch brown in the net with that classic nymph lodged in the left corner of its mouth.

I have written about Atherton's flies in the past and have used the dries with much success over the years. The early season demands a different approach, though, and his dry flies will see action in a month or so. Right now, a slightly weighted nymph in small water was all I needed to get on the board with an early season trout.

As many know, Atherton was an artist and designed his patterns with somewhat unusual materials, blending different kinds of furs and feathers for a "mixed" look. This, he believed, is more attractive in sunlight, and by adding tinsel ribs, he gave his flies just a hint of sparkle, along with a natural look.

What I like most about his flies is that while they could imitate a variety of stream insects, they are suggestive in design. By varying colors and a few minor materials, he gave us a modest selection that can cover a major amount of bugs. His nymphs are a great example of this, because although there are only three of them, they would be enough to use all year.

Of the three, I think his Number 2 is the best. While any of them would likely work if sized correctly, the second in his series uses hare's ear and a very attractive kingfisher wing case, with soft hackle used as legs and a short tail of pheasant tail fibers, the body wrapped in gold oval tinsel for just a touch



of trigger to make a fish notice. He called it his “medium.” I sometimes vary the shades of hare’s ear, using, for instance, black for stoneflies.

I make these in size 12, 14, and 16 and believe that I could do without any other nymph patterns without suffering from being underprepared. They work that well.

### **Atherton Number 2 Nymph**

Tail: Three short pheasant tail fibers

Body: Hare’s ear, ribbed with narrow oval gold tinsel and picked out to resemble gills

Wing case: Bright blue wing feather from an English kingfisher, pulled over the thorax and lacquered

Thorax: Hare’s ear over wire weight

That’s an abridged recipe from Atherton’s *The Fish and the Fly*. About the kingfisher wing case, he writes: “My good friend Harry Darbee, the fly-tier, has suggested that the stripped quill from a large feather such as goose or swan could be dyed and used for this purpose. It should be much more nearly permanent than the rather delicate kingfish feather.”

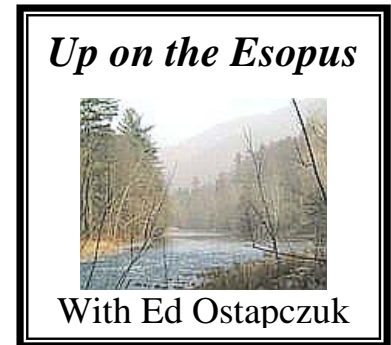
## **The *Isonychia* Hatch, Fran Betters, and the Haystack**

If there is a single mayfly emergence for which the Esopus Creek is known, it would be *Isonychia* hatch. Typically, there are two broods every season. If we’re lucky, there’s an early, but short spring hatch in late May of what seem to be larger bugs, followed by a sustained significant hatch of somewhat smaller mayflies that starts sometime in late August before finally petering out in early October.

Many Esopus Creek patterns have evolved over time to entice hungry trout during an Iso hatch: Ray Smith’s Claret Gnat wet fly and Preston Jennings’s *Isonychia* Nymph, to name but two. Mighty yarns have been spun about this bug activity. In “Song of the Catskills,” Ernest Schwiebert recalls losing a five-pound rainbow downstream of the Phoenicia bridge during an Iso hatch, while Arnold Gingrich published “Preston Jennings for President—or, There Is a Royal Coachman,” in *The Well-Tempered Angler* after Jennings gave him one of his own nymphs at Dick Kahil’s Rainbow Lodge, telling him that “it’s the nymph phase of the Royal Coachman.” No fool he, Gingrich replied, “It’s sort of like the Admiral of the Swiss Navy, then,” but after catching more fish in half an hour that he usually caught in an entire weekend, he was a convert. Yes, when it comes to the Esopus Creek lore and the *Isonychia*, they are joined at the hip.

By far, my favorite time of every trout season is during the late May Esopus Creek *Isonychia* hatch. However, this hatch is highly unpredictable and doesn’t always happen every year, at least not with the same intensity and duration. But when it does, there’s nowhere I’d rather be than casting a size 10 Chocolate Haystack over the medium to large silver bullets dropping back down to New York City’s Ashokan Reservoir, because the Fran Betters pattern is by far my choice of dry flies to fish during the spring Esopus Creek *Isonychia* hatch. Wild Esopus rainbows absolutely crush this dry fly, so one had better have tied a bunch.

I first met Fran Betters back in the late 1960s, when I young was wannabe fly fisher, a college kid who camped along the West Branch of the Ausable River with buddies. We always stopped in Betters’s shop, purchasing flies and other items and absorbing whatever words of wisdom Fran would



impart to us. It's been reported that he tied upward of thirty thousand flies a year. Better (April 30, 1931–September 6, 2009) was Adirondack born and raised, and he was the author of several books with an Adirondack flavor. I quickly became a user of his Ausable Wulff, Mini Muddler, Usual, and Haystack. Over half a century later, these patterns are staples in my fly boxes.

I don't think Fran ever quite received the recognition he earned while he was still alive, although he was inducted into the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum Hall of Fame in 2008. And I firmly believe that his Haystack series is the forerunner of our modern day Comparaduns. In *Hatches* (1975), Al Caucci and Bob Nastasi wrote, "I designed my first Comparadun in the mid '60's, adapting the basic concept from an old Adirondack pattern called the 'Haystack'. It was introduced to me by Francis Better, who runs the famous Adirondack Sport Shop at Wilmington, New York on the banks of the rugged and legendary West Branch of the Ausable River."



In *Fran Better's Fly Fishing–Fly Tying and Pattern Guide*, the author says, "I developed the haystack series of flies . . . when I was still in high school." Better credits Eddie Lawrence, a friend of his father and local noted Adirondack outdoorsman, for giving him the inspiration for Haystacks, back in the late 1940s. He wrote that he tied his first Haystack, as a high school senior, in June 1949 for a Green Drake hatch. Better created his Ausable Wulff many years later, but says, "I believe the development of the haystack to be a far greater advancement in fly fishing than the Ausable Wulff." "Its real importance in the field of fly tying," he claimed, "is that it does not require any expensive neck hackle."

The Haystack is not so much a single fly pattern as a style, or as Better called it, a "series" of flies. His book provides four different patterns that he tied on size 10 Mustad 9671 hooks. It's a great fast-water dry fly, because it's basically unsinkable and highly visible. Better noted that Haystacks have been fished on many major trout streams throughout the world under various conditions for numerous hatches and have accounted for innumerable fish.

I can attest to the fact a size 10 Chocolate Haystack is a deadly pattern on the Esopus when spring Isos are about. I prefer mine to be tied bushy and robust. Better's *Fly Fishing–Fly Tying and Pattern Guide* is a classic, but a tad pricey these days, if you can lay hands on it, yet still worth every penny.

### **Chocolate Haystack**

Thread: Hot orange

Hook: Mustad 94840, size 10

Tail: Natural deer hair

Wing: Natural deer hair, same as tail, flared into 180-degree fan

Body: Chocolate hare's ear mask dubbing

## Bob's Fly for May Day

### By Dave Plummer

Sometimes we meet strangers on the stream who are quiet and unassuming. At first, they have no particular look of expertise, but we marvel at their performances, and they sometimes share the secret of their successes with us, but only in low tones and only when nicely asked. In that moment, we have made a new friend, but then we may go separate ways, never to see them again.

It was such an unselfish man that I met on the Beaverkill over ten years ago. He and I fished next to each other in a pool that was inhabited on that first day of May of 2008 by at least a half dozen other guys whom neither of us knew. This unknown partner was having a fabulous day, taking over ten trout while I was thinking I was in heaven with my own caddis imitation catching only half that number.

Back at our cars at twilight, I chanced to speak to him, because I was curious about the secret of his success. He was elderly, not a local resident, and his clothes and equipment were old style and well used. I opened by volunteering the exact pattern that served me that day and he, in turn, unceremoniously, showed me the fly he had been using.

I was taken aback by its Plain Jane look. I wouldn't have picked it out of one of those fly shop

ice-cube-tray display units, and neither would I have recognized it as any insect emerging from the stream that day. It was a size 16, tannish-bodied deer hair slant wing with a gaudy shuck. He had tied it himself with this "little orangey thing," he said, for a tail. Then, he just handed it to me, saying, "Keep it. I have plenty."



I was immediately grateful. We humans, like our pets, instantly like people who show a liking for us. A little gift is the trigger. We introduced ourselves, first names only. He was "Bob." Unfortunately, I never shared a pool with him again.

I took the fly home and looked at it very carefully under magnification. I wrote down on a card what I thought I saw, fixed the fly to the card, and inserted both in a clear plastic envelope that I filed with all my other fly recipes.

The name I gave the little fly was Bob's Caddis. Early last year, as I was reviewing my spring assortment, I realized that I hadn't included Bob's Caddis in my box, so I tied my typical three—one for the first fish (to bust off), one for the tree, and one for me.



My fishing got underway in early May in one of my favorite pools of the upper Delaware. There was a young lady all alone fifty yards downstream from me, and I could see that she was casting to a rising fish. I saw her react to a refusal with a hand gesture, but no bad words that I could hear.

I had fish sipping just below me, with only a hint of emerging caddisflies. I tied on Bob's Caddis, which was hard to see, and hoped for the best. I let it drift naturally downstream, as I had watched Bob doing that May Day long ago, then got a tremendous tug on the line, and a brown leaped out of water. In the following fifteen minutes, I hooked and netted it and its twin, both about sixteen inches long. I yelled to the lady "Size 18 Caddis," but by that time, she was making preparations to leave. As she was climbing the bank, I hooked another the same size that thrashed all over the surface of the pool. She looked back and simply said, "Well done!" Then she was gone. I haven't seen her again, either.

Here's my formula for Bob's Caddis.

Hook: Standard dry fly, size 16 or 18

Thread: Tan

Shuck: Tuft of pale orange Antron tied short (or gold Antron)

Body: Fine tan fur dubbing

Wing: Natural deer hair, tied slant.

Collar: Brown hackle, sparse

Sometimes, it's as simple as this!

### *Looking Back Upstream*



## **Fly Tying—Enough is Never Enough**

**By Ed Walsh**

When I started tying flies, I received a lot of great advice from a bunch of guys who'd been trying for years, and I listened to the suggestions that seemed to make the most sense to me. I bought an inexpensive tying kit from Cabela's for around forty dollars and enough materials to tie the basic patterns: Woolly Bugger, Mickey Finn, Hare's Ear and Pheasant Tail Nymphs, and the Adams. All in all, I got started for around a hundred bucks.

A while later, I purchased my first instructional book: *Fly Tying for Beginners*, by Peter Gathercole, again at the recommendation of the guys whose advice I respected. Around the same time, I thought it would be wise to catalogue my purchases and develop an inventory of my tying equipment, materials, books, videos, and anything else that was related to fly tying. After all, I did that with my fishing equipment, and it seemed to be the right thing to do. I developed this as a simple Word document in which I noted the material, specifications (size, color, use, etcetera), and where the product was purchased. At the time, it seemed like a good idea, and at that time, it was—at least for a while, anyway. Keeping an inventory is worthwhile only if it's managed, with the operative word being "managed."

Of course, that collection of materials starts to grow as we start tying new flies, and almost every new fly requires new materials. If you tie with a group, as I do (the Wood River Fly Fishing Club), that's generally not a problem, because most tyers will share and exchange materials. It's when you start searching the Web's fly-tying videos and purchasing new instructional books that the inventory starts growing at a rapid pace.

At first, I was naive to think that if I examined tying instructions for a new fly, I would probably have many of the materials on hand. I wanted to tie some Blue-Winged Olives, so I looked through the sites I find most useful: Orvis, Global Flyfisher, Caddis Chronicles, and Tightline Productions. I opened the Global Flyfisher site, keyed in “BWOs,” and found eight pages related to that fly, with more than forty different video and related recipes. There is double that amount if you include articles and pictures. These recipes included parachutes, variants, cripples, and emergers with body materials of dubbing, quills, and/or synthetic materials and with wings that might be CDC, snowshoe rabbit, hackle, or synthetics. If you look at the other sites mentioned above, you’ll probably find dozens of other suggestions with more and unusual materials. Take it a step further and Google “Blue-Winged Olive tying videos,” and you’ll probably need to spend the better part of the day looking at all the options that exist and the different materials needed if you want to tie them. And we’re only talking about BWOs. There are thousands of other flies out there. My problem is, I wanted to tie most of the BWOs on the Global site, so I made a list of new materials and purchased them. The inventory was getting bigger.

And let’s face it, when you go fishing, you almost always stop at the local fly shop and ask for updates on the river. Of course, you always purchase a few flies and often enough look through shop’s fly-tying materials and pick up at least a few items. This is where that inventory I keep really comes in handy, because I wouldn’t want to buy something I already have at home. The only problem is I never, ever take a copy of my inventory with me when I go fishing. Inventory control? I don’t think so.

Last fall, before the winter tying season began, I took a close look at the stuff I actually have. I started noticing how many material packages were never opened or hardly used and how many duplicate things I had. But we all know that it’s hard to walk into a fly shop on one of your favorite rivers, or a big place like Cabela’s, or a shop you pass on a road trip or vacation, and not buy at least a box of hooks, or another pack of dubbing that you’re sure is a color or texture that you don’t have, or some CDC feathers that you’re almost out of, or . . . this list could be endless, so I’ll stop there.

At present, my inventory is thirteen pages long. It contains two and a half pages for feathers, a page for hair materials, and another for dubbing and almost two pages for synthetics. There’s more than a page for thread, floss, and tinsel, two pages for hooks, just under one page for wire and beads, and one page for miscellaneous stuff. ( It’s miscellaneous because I couldn’t figure out what other category to put it in.) There’s almost a full page for tools and half a page for books and videos.

Have I learned anything from my inventory adventure? Absolutely! I have hooks that I’ll probably never use, more feathers and synthetics than I’ll ever need, and I could give away most of my miscellaneous stuff, because, well, it’s miscellaneous, and I don’t know why I bought it in the first place.

But the most important thing I’ve learned is that I am just like almost everyone else who ties flies, and enough is never enough.

I need to end this, because I just looked at a video for Giant Stonefly Nymphs on a new website. I’ll need to tie a bunch for the gang’s spring trip to the West Branch. I will need to order some Spiky Maroon European Possum Dubbing for the body, 2XL silver tinsel (I have only XS, small, medium, large, and XL in my inventory), orange crinkle Zelon for the tail (they say the fish see it as greenish brown), and a new-to-market synthetic wing-case material that can be purchased only at this site. Thank heavens I have that inventory to manage all my purchases.

P.S. Please don’t let my wife read this. She’ll make me clean up my tying area in the spare bedroom.

## Questions → Answers

Bud—

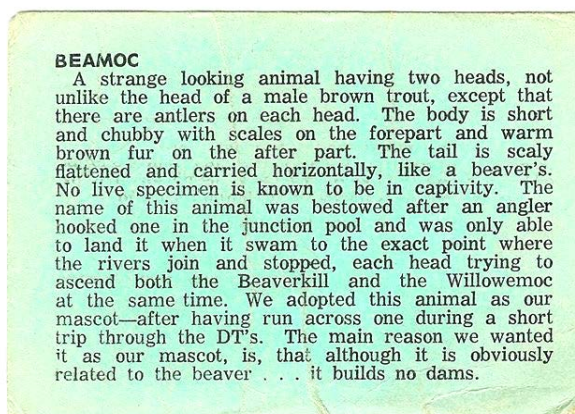
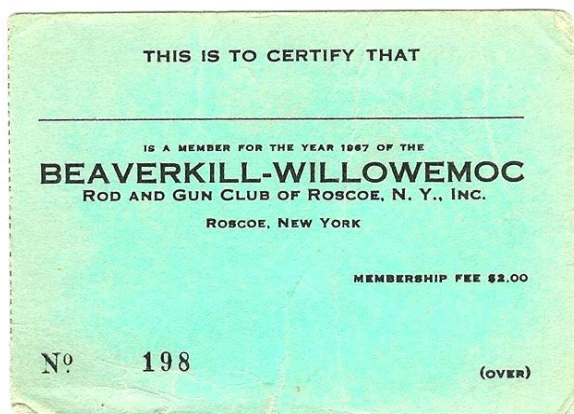
A nonfishing friend of mine asked what is the derivation of the fly-stage name “spinner.” I wasn't sure, so told him I would ask around. Would it pay for the question to be put in the next guild newsletter?

—Mac Francis, in the March 2019 issue of the *Gazette*

Bud—

Because *Art Flick's Streamside Guide* may have been the first fishing book I purchased, I knew from near the start of my fly fishing that it was the “spinning” in flight that gave the imago its common name: “During this time a complete transformation takes place, and during this stage of its metamorphosis develops breeding organs. The fly is then known as a *spinner*, so called on account of its actions in flight.” Art Flick, *Art Flick's Streamside Guide to Naturals and their Imitations* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1947), p. 14. In both the original and “new” editions of the *Streamside Guide*, Flick states that “in most cases spinners are of little value to the fly fisherman” (pp. 15 and 39, respectively).

— John Capowski



Scans courtesy of Glenn Overton

When you sit down to tie a fly, you take a seat at a very large, very old table. As you go through the magazines, books, and videos—taking and ignoring advice, learning tricks and shortcuts, discerning and taking sides in old debates, then picking and choosing a pattern, a style, eventually even an aesthetic stance—you participate in a long, complicated, and apparently endless conversation over those and many other matters. You join not merely a club, but a guild.

—Paul Schullery, *Cowboy Trout*



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