

## Book Review

### *The Wanderings of a Mountain Fly Fisher: Tales from a Catskill Eddy and Other Trout Waters*

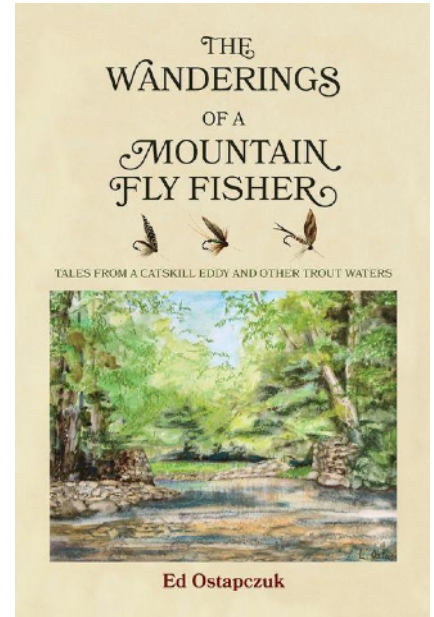
By Ed Ostapczuk. Published by Epigraph Books, 2022; \$16.95 paperback.

Ed Ostapczuk's second book tells stories gathered from more than fifty years of trout fishing, and there is much here that members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and readers of the *Gazette* will find familiar, starting with the lovely watercolor painting provided by Lois Ostapczuk on the cover of the book, and continuing with stories of adventures taking place in locations that you'll recognize:

Willowemoc Creek, the Beaverkill, the Neversink, and of course—Ed's beloved Esopus Creek. He'll also take you to places that you likely haven't been, but which will soon seem familiar. You may not fish the same tributary streams as Ed, but if you're a fisher of small streams, then you'll recognize your own favorite waters in his detailed descriptions of small-stream charms. If you've never fished small flows, check out the chapter "Catskill Hollows," where Ed's infectious enthusiasm for the wonders of fishing for "dollar-bill-sized" wild trout, deep in a mountain hollow, will get you itching to give it a try. He'll also take you to the Blue Ridge Mountains, and very often he'll show you the waters of New Jersey, from his boyhood experiences fishing urban flows, to stalking stream-bred trout in hidden locations for which he often discreetly omits names. The word "Wanderings" is in the title of this book, and with his descriptions of so many different locations, Ed delivers on what it's like to be a wandering fly fisher in the mountains.

An interesting feature of this book is the near constant weaving of history and conservation through the narratives. Ostapczuk writes about historic floods of the Esopus Creek, the establishment of the Catskill Forest Preserve, the lives of people whose names are attached to tributary streams, and the significance of the Hardenbergh Patent. He has a chapter featuring his thoughts regarding author Arnold Gingrich, and another doing the same for Edward Ringwood Hewitt. The book features many quotations, all meticulously referenced, from a wide variety of authors.

A totally unique aspect that you'll find in these pages are the four chapters devoted to Edmund William Sens, to whom the author has dedicated this book. Ed Sens is called "the forgotten fly fisher" by Ostapczuk, and he makes sure that you learn about the important contributions to fly tying that were made by Sens. Ernest Schwiebert, Ray Ovington, Gary LaFontaine, Gary Borger, Rick Hafele, and A. J. McClane are cited as well-known anglers who appreciated the work of Sens. Because Sens was never an author, his achievements haven't been recognized by a wide audience. Ed Ostapczuk makes a point in these chapters of bringing Sens to life, and he also documents many of Sens' fly patterns for the reader.



This is not one of the many “how to” books being produced for the fly-fishing market, but there’s still much to learn here if you’re paying attention, and the subtle lessons are presented in narrative form, rather than in the style of “do this, then do that.” Stories are often the best way for learning to become long lasting, and that’s exactly what you’d expect from an author who is a former teacher. You’ll pick up a lot of information on how to fish the Neversink Reservoir in the fall for huge trout, the effects of snowmelt on fish, and a wealth of knowledge regarding Esopus Creek. You’ll notice that when Ed mentions the Esopus, he often refers to it as “my” Esopus. He’s entwined with that river; it’s a love affair that he’s nurtured over the years, and this book is a product of a generation that knows how to write love letters.

Ed Ostapczuk’s writing style lets you in, without artifice, to see exactly who he is. It’s clear that for him, fly fishing is a spiritual act that’s rooted in the physical world, and he writes, “Usually I end each outing saying the prayer of Devine Mercy and then have one cold beer acknowledging my good fortune.” All of this is told in a straightforward manner that matches the genuineness of his sentiments, and the book reads as if you’re sitting across a table having coffee, or resting together on a stream-side log; and since Ed fishes more than 150 times each year—something that most of us could only dream of doing—it’s a pleasure to be taken along on the trips, even when we can’t be there in person.

Ultimately, this is a book about friendships, history, lessons learned, and always—a continual return to friendships. It’s clear that Ed knows the truth about our sport—that it’s the people who make it worthwhile—and this book is a read that will provide you with a heavy dose of good company.

—Chuck Coronato