



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild

GAZETTE



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January 2017

The January 2017 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on January 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 will be trying flies to donate to Casting for Recovery. Bring your vise, tools, and materials to tie flies for anglers learning to fly fish and to enjoy the rewards, physical and spiritual, of the sport. (See the thank-you note for the guild's efforts from Casting Recovery in this issue.) This is also the sort of meeting on which the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild was founded—members tying together and sharing stories, tips, and fun. It's a good time and for a good cause.

Memberships Renew in February

If you receive the *Gazette* by the U.S. Mail, check the date to the right of your name on the envelope to see if you need to renew. If you receive the *Gazette* by e-mail, your renewal date should appear next to your name on the address line.

Membership is only \$10.00 per year. Couples can join at the same single-member rate of \$10.00. Send a check, your current address and phone number, and, if you wish to receive the *Gazette* by e-mail, your e-mail address to:

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

Don't wait! Do it now!

Tyers Needed for Somerset

If you'd like to tie for the guild at the Fly Fishing Show in Somerset, NJ, January 27, 28, and 29, 2017, contact John Kavanaugh at flymank@optonline.net, call his cell at (973) 219-7696 and leave a message with your contact information, or contact him via his Facebook page.

Meeting Program Demos Needed

Got a hot fly or a slick technique you'd like to share with other members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild? Have you made an interesting presentation to your local club that you would like to repeat for the guild at a future meeting? Contact the program chair, Gary Moleon, myvettech@yahoo.com or 201-921-8136. Help us make guild meetings the place to be on the third Saturday of each month.

CFTG at the Somerset International Fly Tying Symposium

As always, the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild table at the November 2016b International Fly Tying Symposium in Somerset, NJ was a popular attraction. Many thanks to all the tyers who represented the guild at the show, including John Bonasera, Bud Bynack, Alan Barley, Rick Fischer, Elmer Hopper, John Kavanaugh, John LoSapio, Nicole March, and Len Ruggiero.

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.



John Kavanaugh and Nicole March, representin'.



CJ's Flies
With "Catskill John" Bonasera

"CJ's Flies" will return.

Ed Sens, the Forgotten Catskill Fly Tyer: Part 3

Some say the Catskills are the birthplace of American fly-fishing. If so, the Neversink is its cradle. A long list of distinguished trout fishers called this river home and cast their flies upon it. The portfolio of dignities includes Theodore Gordon, Edward R. Hewitt, Herm Christian, Larry Koller, and Leonard M. Wright, Jr., plus anglers such as George M. LaBranche, Ray Bergman, John Atherton, R. Palmer Baker, Arnold Gingrich, Sparse Grey Hackle, Ernest Schwiebert, and William H.—"Catskill Bill"—Kelly. And then there was Edmund William Sens, the forgotten Catskill fly tyer.

I first wrote about Ed Sens in the June and August 2013 issues of the *Gazette*, but left readers and myself with unanswered questions. Specifically, where was the Sens Neversink family farm located, and why did Ed give up trout fishing? Armed with new information, learned as a result of good fortune, I will address these uncertainties in this and future columns. But first, a quick review.

Numerous leading angling authors credit Sens with having influenced their thinking while making significant contributions to fly fishing and to the development of nymph patterns, in particular. Chief among these were A. J. McClane, Gary LaFontaine, Ray Ovington, and Ernest Schwiebert. Al McClane compared Sens's nymphs and contributions to fly fishing to those of Art Flick—very high praise indeed. McClane and Sens traded correspondence, which will be discussed in a future column.

Gary LaFontaine and Leonard Wright, each credited Sens with laying the foundation for caddis imitations. LaFontaine wrote, "The initial attempt at specific imitation of the caddis pupal form was the innovation of Edward Sens." LaFontaine called Sens "a serious student of entomology." Though

Up on the Esopus



With Ed Ostapczuk

LaFontaine was wrong about Sens's first name, the translucent appearance of his own Sparkle Pupa patterns can be traced back to Sens's nymphs.

Both Ernest Schwiebert and Ray Ovington cited Ed Sens in their works. Schwiebert wrote, "Sens was another solitary genius who fished the Catskills, and his work resulted in a superb series of nymphs keyed to our better-known mayfly patterns. His nymphs trace their lineage almost directly to Skues and are perhaps the most popular series available." Schwiebert's utmost compliment was: "The knowledgeable reader is left to wonder what a wonderfully original manuscript might have been written had Sens understood the potential of his theories and fieldwork, and had elected to prepare the book himself."

Ray Ovington, author of numerous fly-fishing books, called Sens "one of the most successful nymph fishermen in the United States" and his "mentor, responsible for many of the patterns featured in my various books." Ovington often provided detailed patterns developed by Sens for Catskill hatches. However, with the passage of time, Ovington modified Sens's patterns, and although these men were fond of each other, a rift developed.

Edmund William Sens was born in 1914 and died in 2003, living his entire life in the Bronx, where he married Helen Elliffe. Sens worked as a maître d' at the Oyster Bay Restaurant in New York City, owned by his father, until 1940, when the business failed. He was also an Abercrombie and Fitch employee, a tyer at Jim Deren's Angler's Roost, and a Catskill guide. Sens was an innovative fly tyer, skilled amateur entomologist, cane rod builder, and an outstanding angler for both trout and striped bass. He sometimes demonstrated fly tying at the Sportsman Shows in the Grand Central Palace in New York City. His Catskill angling legacy is probably that of being one of the first important nymph fishermen ever to wet a line in their legendary rivers.



His father, Edmund August Sens, also known as "Pop Sens," owned a 200-plus-acre farm along the banks of the Neversink, upriver of where New York City was to build its Neversink Reservoir. With help from the Sens family and tax maps available at the Time and the Valleys Museum, in

Grahamsville, NY, I was able to pinpoint the location of the old Sens family farm on prime Neversink water. It was upriver of Hewitt's Big Bend Club, downstream of the white Claryville Reformed Church, where Theodore Gordon's funeral service took place, and just downstream of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's newly acquired angling access at the former 4-H Camp Pine property. Pop Sens sold the farm in the late 1940s due to advancing years and poor health. After the sale, Ed had no place to stay when fishing the Catskills, and the roads did not make travel easy back then. Currently there is a sign in front of the old farmhouse that reads "Halls Mills House 1913." As of this writing, the property is owned by the Schoenburg family and leased to Neversink Farm, an organic vegetable farm.

Ed Sens's Neversink connection is quite clear and quite strong. Schwiebert wrote that "there were traces of trophy brown trout bodies on the boards in the old barn on the Sens property." Many of these trout were taken while night fishing with his Giant Stone Fly. Even the *New York Times* wrote about large Neversink brown trout that Sens caught while night fishing with this pattern. Sens's Giant Stone Fly (see the August 2013 issue of the *Gazette*) might have been his favorite pattern, according to his son-in-law, Bob Hutton. And no one can erase from angling literature what has already been written about Sens's trout-fishing genius.

Eventually Sens would become a very knowledgeable and highly revered striped bass saltwater angler. About the same time that his parents sold the family Neversink farm, while working at Abercrombie and Fitch as a tackle salesman and special-order fly tyer, Ed met a "surf fishing fanatic" named Mike "Stretch" Olenick, who invited Sens to surf fish with him, and the thrill of catching fish of twenty to thirty pounds, coupled with the prospect of a long, hassle-ridden drive to the Catskills, became too much. Sens gave up trout fishing on a regular basis in 1951, though he would occasionally fish for trout in the years to come and always enjoyed talking about it.

Sens became a member of the Long Island Surf Fishing Club, where he won many angling contests and met Al Reinfelder, a well-known striped bass angler and noted conservationist. In a Reinfelder memorial in the September 1973 *Field and Stream*, George Reiger wrote: "Under the tutelage of Ed Sens, a fabled Catskills stream guide who switched his allegiance to saltwater and striped bass just before World War II, Al became the leading bridge and shore fisherman of his generation." Sens's ability to instruct others was celebrated: his friends among the striped bass anglers referred to him as "Pappy Sens." Various magazine articles, books, and on-line saltwater forums still mention Ed Sens and his influence on saltwater angling.

I want to thank Bob Hutton, plus his children, Kim Borghardt and Ken Hutton, Sens's grandchildren, for help with this research. I also want to thank Pat Wellington of the Neversink Association and Carol Smythe of the Time and the Valleys Museum. Without the valuable help of these folks, this article would not be possible. Future Gazette issues will touch upon the A. J. McClane letters and people who knew Ed Sens personally.

Looking Back Upstream



The State of the Guild Trout Flies Project

By Dave Brandt

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild was given a great opportunity through a donation from a generous guild member, the late Allan Liu. We were given a number of signed, numbered, and slip-cased copies of the limited edition of *Trout Flies* by Richard Salmon that had not as yet had the tiny bits of materials glued into the spaces provided for them with the patterns for the many flies listed in the book.

The completed volume is unique among pattern books in the United States because of the inclusion of the actual materials used. There have been a few similar projects from the UK, but they are usually to be obtained only at considerable expense. When *Trout Flies* was published in 1975, it sold for about \$90.00. I know, because I bought one from Allan forty years ago.

When we received these books and began to solicit members who would be interested in helping us to complete the project, the deal was, and still is, that the member would find and donate the materials required to finish three of the books, with each of the materials accurately and carefully bonded to their respective places in the text. Two of the three would then be owned (and be for sale) by the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, with the third retained by the member. Included as part of the completed book, we would tip in a nicely printed sheet stating: "The materials in this copy of *Trout Flies* were provided and tipped in by _____ for The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild."

As one who elected to take part in this program, I made a very cursory start and soon got sidetracked, putting the books on a back burner. I'm sure that I was not alone in putting off until I had more time the serious study that it turns out to take in order to hold up my end of the bargain accurately.

In the process of recently starting over, I've had several thoughts on how to make things a little easier for the individual volunteers and better for the guild.

In trying to enlist the help of an older member's wife, who at one time did a bit of calligraphy, it was suggested that we not bother to have someone laboriously create either each sheet as needed or even one master original to print copies from as required. Instead we might devise a five-by-seven-inch document on the computer and make three copies with the full name included, rather than the blank to be filled in that I show above. I would further suggest that this work be done by yet another member (good with the computer), but more like a three-by-seven-inch piece on a single sheet of card stock resembling parchment, which is then divided into three equal parts, perhaps on a paper cutter. The font selected and the size of the text, juggled just right, would provide a handsome addition to the book.

Another valued member suggested that we pool our resources to come up with good, usable examples of each material mentioned. For an individual, coming up with all the necessary pieces can be a serious challenge. I believe I can provide much of what will be needed and would agree to round up and dispense the bulk of the materials, but I would like some help from those of you with plenty of access to the less familiar bird parts and other less common materials. I'll try soon to list the things I'd like donated by members and mailed to me.

A major concern has been choosing the right adhesive for the job. Our secretary, Judie DV Smith, knows who made the cement for the originals. Her dad, Harry Darbee, had been involved with Richard Salmon in bonding the materials into the first, deluxe edition of twenty-nine of these books. That original adhesive is no longer easily available, because it is now sold only in Canada. Fortunately, we may have a substitute that could prove even better. John Shaner, another valued guild member, has experimented with bonding feathers and bits of silk, fur, and tinsels to paper for a project very like our own. He settled on using a Loctite product that is nontoxic and dries clear and that is available from many sources: Loctite Crafter's Indoor Safe Adhesive. Many stores, such as Home Depot, Lowe's, and Walmart carry it, and it is inexpensive.

I also feel it necessary to suggest that those undertaking this project make a careful study of the completed original. I've found several places in the original book where the text alone would not have steered me to the correct color or even the correct material. In one case, "mandarin" is called for, suggesting a flank feather, our old friend lemon wood duck. Looking at the finished product as put together by Richard Salmon, however, we find a gray slip of primary or secondary wing feather, seeming no different from the same feather from a mallard, wood duck, or almost any other duck. So check carefully that piece of fur or feather you are about to glue into one of your copies against what Richard Salmon has included with the original.

To help insure uniformity, book to book, we might want to have some sort of rainy-day glue fest—again, an idea from John Shaner. It might be fun, as well as very beneficial to the project, and quite doable, given that there are only nine or ten of us involved.

Call me if you might help with materials: (607) 433-2924. Let's get together and put a bow on this undertaking for the new year.

I'd like to thank all of you who have given of yourselves for the guild. I'd like to include a special thanks to all of our regular contributors to the newsletter. We sure have a great *Gazette*.

Book Review

Tying and Fishing Bucktails and Other Hair Wings: Atlantic Salmon Flies to Steelhead Flies
By Mike Valla. Published by Stackpole Books, 2016; \$29.95 softbound.

It sounds paradoxical, but histories, however much they attempt to marshal the facts of the past, are highly personal affairs. In their choice of subject matter, their conception of how events happen, and their sense of what is important, they reflect the sensibility of their authors, even when the personality of the historian is overshadowed by the history being recounted.

That overshadowing was largely the case with angling historian Mike Valla's magnum opus, *The Founding Flies*, despite Valla's own presence in the background of some of the stories he has to tell there of his tutelage as a fly tyer by Walt and Winnie Dette. In other books, such as the *Classic Fly Box* series that he published with Whitefish Press, the criterion of including only flies that would be recognized classics obviously constrained his personal choices. In *Tying and Fishing Bucktails and Other Hair Wings*, however, Valla is more clearly present, especially in the selection of patterns covered and in the tying instructions that accompany them. It is his most personal book to date.

Why bucktails? Because tying and fishing them makes him happy.

During times when surface-feeding activity isn't happening, some anglers turn to dangling bead-head nymphs through the currents of their favorite streams. Others enjoy casting giant, wet-mop strip-lures out of drift boats, using fairly heavy fly-fishing equipment. Neither of these approaches has ever appealed to me, although I fully recognize the effectiveness of such fishing tactics. I find joy in fishing traditional nymphs, for sure. However, I'm more apt to be casting bucktail flies, other hair wings, or featherwing streamers when subsurface fishing is essential for success.

There is a history presented here, of course. After a deliberation on the vexed terminology of bucktail and hair-wing streamers—"bucktails" always have been tied with a variety materials other than bucktail, from bear fur to Valla's recent material of choice, cashmere goat—the book opens with a historical survey of the development of these flies. Unlike some other kinds of flies, the story of the hair-wing streamer lacks a generally accepted beginning. Valla finds accounts of them being used traditionally among the indigenous peoples of both Tierra del Fuego and the Arctic. The real story he has to tell begins in the late 1800s and early 1900s, both on the West Coast and in the environs of Rome, New York, in the East.

Surprisingly, in the West, the story begins with the creation of the Trude style of fly. These usually are thought of as a dry fly, but they were originally tied with hair wings and fished as streamerlike wet flies. In the East, the story begins with the little-known commercial tyer Ida Wolcott, continues with the flies of William Scripture, Jr., and works through developments in the Catskill region and elsewhere up to the age of Mylar, ending with a nod to the well-documented use of bucktail flies by bass anglers.

There's a chapter on fishing bucktails, one on materials (Valla, a traditionalist, prefers Lagartun tinsel to Mylar), and chapters devoted to the origins and illustrated tying steps of twenty bucktail patterns. Some interesting tying tips are interspersed in these instructions, including how best to build the slightly tapered body that is a feature of many classic hair-wing patterns, "climbing the stairs" of the slant-trimmed hair butts to create a neat head, and "putting the diaper on" or "locking the butt" to prevent the material in front of the tag on steelhead and Atlantic salmon flies from sliding down and covering the tag when a fly is fished.

The real character of the book, however, emerges in the second chapter, on fishing bucktails in streams, ponds, and lakes. The "common scenarios" that Valla discusses are vignettes from his own angling life, and this personal approach extends to the patterns he's chosen to include and the origin stories that accompany those patterns. While there are classic pattern such as the Black-Nose Dace and

Mickey Finn covered here, and important patterns that deserve to be better known, such as Sam Slaymaker's Little Trout series, half the patterns Valla presents are flies that he devised himself using the basic principles of hair-wing streamers to create patterns to imitate a specific baitfish or to solve an angling problem specific to a time and place. In these cases, the origin stories are stories from his own angling and tying life, from his teenage years growing up in Binghamton, New York, in the 1960s to the present day.

Such is the story behind the Schmidtman-Valla Smelt, a pattern that Valla developed when a student at Cornell, along with a fishing companion who was then an assistant professor of entomology, to fish waters of Cayuga Lake warmed by the outflow from a power plant during the winter. These accounts offer the example of a fly fisher and fly tyer observing nature closely, thinking creatively about materials, and adapting basic patterns to specific needs. That includes his MV Yellow Spotted Salamander pattern, created because salamanders are available to fish in some Adirondack mountain brook trout ponds early in the year. Trout eat salamanders? Who knew? Part of the book that follows these pattern chapters is a catalogue of bucktail patterns with tying recipes.

In the section on hair-wing Atlantic salmon flies and steelhead flies, Valla gives way as a tyer and narrator to his friend Garry Tanner, an accomplished Atlantic salmon fly tyer and angler who tied most of the examples in the catalogue of these flies that follows that section. Contrary to what the subtitle suggests, it's considerably shorter than the rest of the book, but at bottom, a hair-wing fly is a hair-wing-fly is a hair-wing fly, whether it's intended to catch trout, bass, or anadromous fish. If you tie flies and you fish streamers, sooner or later, you will tie and fish bucktails and other hair-wing streamers. Both as an example of how to think about doing so and as a compendium of patterns and tying instructions, *Tying and Fishing Bucktails and Other Hair Wings* will tell you what you need to know.
—Bud Bynack


Obituary

Allan J. Liu died Saturday, June 20, 2015, age seventy-seven. Allan Liu was a longtime member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, a generous supporter of the guild, and a friend of many members. His donation of the copies of Richard Salmon's *Trout Flies* to the guild for fund-raising purposes is only one example of the many ways that he helped sustain the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and the Catskill tradition. Memorial donations in memory of Allan J. Liu may be sent to Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY 12758 or www.catskillflyfishing.org.

A Thank-You Note

A special thanks to all the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild members who donated all the flies that were used this year by fourteen women who participated in the second annual Casting For Recovery Upstate New York Retreat on the Douglaston Salmon Run in Pulaski, NY, in August. They all learned the therapeutic sport of fly fishing and shouted with delight as they caught bass!

With gratitude, Steve Olufsen, Casting for Recovery Upstate NY Program Coordinator

 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 or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.





The Fly Fishing Show

The Garden State Convention Center

Somerset, New Jersey

January 27, 28, 29, 2017

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, under 12: \$2

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!

