



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild GAZETTE



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September 2015

The September 2015 meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be a meet-and-greet at the **Partridge Fly Tying Days** event held on Saturday, September 19, from 10:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum's Wullf Gallery, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY. The day celebrates the art of fly tying, and the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will have a prominent presence.

Stop by the guild table and say hello, then visit the many guild members who also will be there, tying on their own. And at 11:30 A.M., Ed Ostapczuk, the *Gazette's* "Up on the Esopus" columnist, will be making a presentation, "Catskill Flies: Beyond the Dry" and will be available to sign your copy of his *Ramblings of a Charmed Circle Flyfisher*.

Partridge Days Tyers Needed

The Partridge Days event is almost here, and we are working to line up fly tyers for the guild table. This is our first year at the show, and we want to focus on presenting traditional Catskill fly patterns. If you wish to sign up to tie, contact Nicole Seymour by e-mail at hulapopper223@aim.com to find out which shifts are available. Please have a pattern in mind so we can have handouts made for the specific pattern and its history. We will make these available to anyone who is interested.

Joe Fox is also looking for a few volunteers who would be interested in assisting with the kids' fly-tying table at the show. Please contact him at joe@dettetroutflies.com.

—Nicole Seymour

Hats!

They're back by popular demand, and the wait is finally over. A new batch of Catskill Fly Tyers Guild hats has arrived. They're made of the same great fabric as the previous hats, and they will be for sale at upcoming shows and meetings. The price is \$15 for members and \$20 for nonmembers. At this time, we aren't set up for mail orders, but the next show where they will be available is the Partridge Days event on September 19 at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. We hope to see everyone there. It's going to be a great event, with a full house of excellent tyers, interesting presentations—and now, hats!

—Nicole

Seymour



The 2015 Guild Picnic

The annual Catskill Fly Tyers Guild picnic was held on Saturday, August 15, 2015, at the Elsie and Harry Darbee and Matthew Vinciguerra Memorial Pavilion at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. We shared excellent food, compared notes about the fishing season, and competed in the annual casting “contest,” such as it is. The results? Accuracy with hoops at 20, 30, 40, and 50 feet: first, Bud Bynack; second, Dick Smith, third, Peter Gosselink. Casting through a vertical hoop at 30 feet: first, Gary Sweet; second, Dick Smith; third, Elmer Hopper.

The picnic also was graced by an apparition that bore an uncanny resemblance to Theodore . . . Patlen. It had put in an appearance to promote the idea of reenacting scenes from the classical era of the Catskill fly-fishing tradition, with cane rods, silk lines, and historically appropriate garb, in the same way that aficionados of the American Civil War reenact its classic battles. If you’re interested in this project, buttonhole Ted Patlen the next time you see him. He’s serious about this.

—Bud Bynack



Looking Back Upstream



The Real Man of Mauch Chunk

By Chuck Coronato

“So why isn’t the town called Thorpe’s Corpse?” asked my friend. He certainly had a point. After listening to my plans to visit Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, and the details of how the town acquired its name, it was absolutely fitting that the town should be known as Thorpe’s Corpse.

Jim Thorpe, the Native American who is often credited with being the greatest athlete of the twentieth century, never set foot in the town that bears his name. He left his mark in 1912, winning both the pentathlon and the first Olympic decathlon (sixty-four years before Bruce Jenner), completely dominating the field. He played professional football and baseball in the 1920s, and while still a player, was the first president of the National Football League, when it was known as the American Football Association. Fame did not equate to a cushy life for the young man, who originally hailed from Oklahoma, and it was revealed that prior to the Olympics, he briefly played semiprofessional baseball for a meager two dollars a day. Although many college athletes did the same, using an alias, Thorpe lacked their sophistication in such matters, used his real name, and was subsequently stripped of his amateur status. The International Olympic Committee forced him to return his Olympic medals and declared the second-place finisher the champion. Although the IOC posthumously awarded replica medals to his descendants in 1982, Thorpe is officially recognized only as the cowinner of the events. We can imagine the money that an athlete of Thorpe’s magnitude would earn today, but in the first half of the twentieth century, he was having trouble maintaining employment, troubled by alcoholism, and died in 1953, two years before another famous Native American, the war hero Ira Hays.

Thorpe’s third wife at the time of his death, Patricia, was looking for a suitable place to bury her husband’s remains. It appears that “suitable” would be defined as a place that would honor him with a monument and also pay cash (claimed to be \$500 by Thorpe’s sons) to the widow in exchange for the privilege of accepting his remains. The last Mrs. Thorpe interrupted the Sac and Fox Indian burial ritual that was in progress and transported her husband’s body from Oklahoma to Pennsylvania, where

she set up a meeting with newspaperman Joe Boyle. Boyle had a vision of uniting the economically depressed old coal towns of Mauch Chunk and East Mauch Chunk, renaming them after the famous athlete and even eventually establishing a national football hall of fame in the newly minted town. An agreement was reached to erect a monument to Thorpe, place his remains in a marble crypt, and call the joined towns Jim Thorpe. A new city was born, located not just on Route 903, but in the intersection where the Venn diagram overlaps regions of *town needs a new image*, *widow wants money*, and *legend of disgraced athlete needs reconstitution . . . even in death*.

Jim Thorpe's final rest was not destined to be glorious or even peaceful. The decision to move his remains from Oklahoma was fraught with controversy and disgrace. Thorpe's children made several unsuccessful attempts to challenge the decision legally, and there even seems to be a curse surrounding key people involved. The NFL commissioner, Bert Bell, was reportedly in agreement with founding the Football Hall of Fame in Jim Thorpe and had plans to make the announcement after game on October 11, 1959, between the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Philadelphia Eagles. Instead, Bell died of a heart attack during the game, and the plan never reached fruition. Joe Boyle, the mover and shaker who fervently believed that the deal he brokered would improve the lives of people in his hometown, tragically died in 1992 from a freak Memorial Day parade accident when the float he was riding struck a tree.

A town with such an ill-fated narrative sounded like a delightful place for a small vacation, so, many summers ago, the grand plan was to stay at the Jim Thorpe Inn and put in some serious fishing time on the Lehigh River. I was looking forward to big trout from large water, a romantic long weekend with my wife, and the hope of establishing distance from some personal demons. Upon arriving in town, it became clear that those demons had been unionizing. Several days of hard rain had rendered the Lehigh River a mad torrent that would result in my body being fished out of the water downstream in Trenton if I was foolhardy enough to take a single step in. The fishing gear stuffing the car seemed useless, and I was working on starting a very indulgent downward spiral of self-pity—pretty unattractive stuff for a man my age, but I've never claimed to be a bona fide grownup. A well-adjusted person would have looked at the menu of positive opportunities that were still present, the basic "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade" approach. Not me. When life gives me lemons . . . I get a paper cut.

Late in the afternoon of a day spent sleepwalking through the usual tourist attractions, lumbering up and down steep hills, and scarfing down platefuls of pierogies at the Sunrise Diner (which is now physically located in Ohio . . . just like the Football Hall of Fame), we noticed a small sporting goods store that sold some fly-fishing equipment. While I was browsing the items and picking up a couple of new leaders, a conversation in the store led to the suggestion that Mauch Chunk Creek just down the road might not be blown out like the bigger waters. The moth was informed of a flame, and we all know how that ends.

The next morning found the creek a touch on the high side, but this stream with the clumsy name seemed fishable, and as a bonus, I appeared to have this location all to myself. My spirits should have been lifted, but the decision to try this spot was driven more by rote fishing behavior, as opposed to noble intentions to explore new water. The small creek ran through wooded level ground, and although it seemed rather secluded, any promise of a wilderness experience was betrayed by what looked like a brick pumping station and the appearance of large cast iron manholes interspersed along the waterway's path. A couple of quick slashes on a streamer got my juices flowing, but I was disappointed when the first couple of fish were brought to hand. These were not wild trout, but stockies—the cheap bottom-shelf liquor of the watering hole. With low expectations even lower, I fished on and hooked a brook trout that appeared close to twenty inches. I felt no thrill holding the large trout, just dispassionate capture. My attitude was that a counterfeit bill is a counterfeit bill, no matter how large the denomination, and I refused to extend respect to this drably colored char that attained its girth in a hatchery raceway.

I was alone, finally fly fishing as I had wanted, but I'd provided myself with the worst possible companion, one who had just sampled the best of what the stream had to offer and still threw a

tantrum. I wanted nothing to do with this guy. It takes a special kind of ingrate to get the best handed to him and still not appreciate it. I was truly fishing ugly . . . until better company arrived.

The old man first appeared as a distant white image moving so nimbly that he appeared to be floating ghostlike through the streamside scrub and earthen mounds that provided the borders of the creek. When our distance narrowed, I felt relieved to realize that he wasn't actually a ghost, but was wearing an oversized long-sleeved white dress shirt, buttoned up very high on the collar, with untucked shirt tails obscuring a good portion of his baggy shorts. He was tall, well over six feet, and with his spindly legs and long-billed cap, he was looking less like a ghost and more like a heron standing patiently in shallow water. Busy processing this unlikely image, it took me a few moments to realize that the old guy wet wading the stream was even carrying a fly rod and in the act of fishing. While I'm not usually pleased when discovering another fisherman on water that I consider a secret or valued spot, this dreary little creek was clearly neither, and I was curious about this person who looked not only out of place, but also a bit out of time.

I tossed out a simple "How's it going?" for my usual streamside conversational opening gambit. The old man didn't reply immediately, but instead took the time to control his line, then reached his fingers to his throat before he spoke. "Nice to see you. What a beautiful day it is out here on this stream," was his reply. His words were wrapped in pure sincerity, with their even-paced mechanical sound resulting from his voice prosthesis. That high-buttoned white collar was there to keep the hole in his throat cleared and clean, so he could speak after an illness that I never asked about. He would have to cover his stoma with a finger throughout our conversation, but never acted like the effort resembled labor . . . and he had much to say.

The old man explained how he always casts a size 12 Patriot pattern with oversized white calf tail wings, even if it is probably the wrong fly to be fishing, because it was the only fly that he could still see. I expected this old-timer to be using more of an old-timey fly, such as a Rat-Faced McDougall, but he reported catching several fish that day, and I thought it a comforting notion that the gods of trout fishing seem to grant special big-fly dispensation to us when we're too old to see the diminutive stuff.

The old man had a great love for this place that seemed out of proportion to the fishing it had to offer. I found out why when I was given a more serious look, and he recounted how he'd lived a misguided life full of deceit, drinking, carousing, and fornicating. It was the first time that I'd ever heard someone use "fornicating" in a conversational sentence. Although he was clearly serious on these matters, his tone was more informative than penitent, and if any bitterness was once linked to his regrets, it seemed to have long since dissolved. He was embracing a new path that involved coming to this stream nearly every day, and the more he spoke of fishing here . . . for these trout . . . the stronger and more vibrant his voice became.

Ultimately, all paths are just paths, but the old man had chosen one that, for him, had purpose and heart, and if he was the pastor of a church that was preaching forgiveness through fishing, I'd gladly attend and drop a few flies into the collection basket every week (and maybe steal a particularly well-tied one). The creek that I had so thoroughly maligned and the trout that it contained were getting the old man through his condition. As we said our goodbyes, I felt fortunate for having met him and knew that in an unforeseen way, I'd gotten a significant piece of what I wanted when I came on this trip.

There was a lot to think about as I walked down my own streamside path. I was still fairly young and healthy, but it was difficult not to experience the encounter without a sense of premonition. I also thought about this strange place . . . where the rehabilitation of one man's legacy was constantly elusive, while another had reconstituted himself in the cool, flowing waters where I was also now standing. I snipped off the worn, old streamer and cinched the knot on a freshly tied tan Comparadun. The dry fly touched the surface of the water, but it wasn't the same water as before. I was soon holding a rainbow trout, but it wasn't the same trout as before. I released the 'bow with the utmost care and watched it blend into its aquatic surroundings and disappear. After that, I handled every trout with the same reverence. These were no longer stockies . . . they were the old man's fish.



CJ's Flies
With "Catskill John" Bonasera

Five Favorites for Brookies

This year's weather has been unusual—unpredictable and downright poor for trout fishing. The last three weeks have been the worst of it, with much of the East in a rainless heat wave. The temperatures go up, the flows go down, and the only reasonable thing to do is to leave the freestone streams alone, at least until some rain falls.

When my normal streams need to be rested, I head farther up to higher, smaller water, where the trees shade the stream, the water stays cold, and the small speckled beauties live.

Brook trout are one of nature's ways to ensure human happiness. When the fishing is difficult or even impossible on "normal streams," we can still have some good sport and fun targeting these colorful fish. Many of the streams where they thrive are not affected nearly as much as the larger streams and rivers by drought, heat, and high-water events. I have driven around the Beamoc area after a few days of rain to find the big streams so high and off-color that fishing is actually dangerous, but the smaller brook trout water is just a little higher and faster than normal. During drought conditions and heat waves, the flows in the small streams that run through the woods may be lower, but they stay cold from groundwater making its way out of the mountains and from the lack of sunlight heating the water and stream edges.

Above all, though, the single best thing about brook trout is their appetite for things that fall into the stream. They don't just rise to a potential meal—they race to it. Many of us at one time or another have witnessed a V wake heading at high speed toward our dry fly the instant it touched the water. It's that kind of effort by these trout that makes fishing so much fun.

It is said that brook trout will "hit anything," and in some instances, that is true, if the stream is remote enough. I know from experience that if properly fished, many standard dry flies will do just fine on small streams. However, I have found that there are some patterns better suited for brook trout fishing because of their design and durability. I have caught brookies on almost every kind of dry fly that I carry, but since brook trout fishing is to me the most fun of all trout fishing, making it easier also makes it even more fun. Constant fluffing of waterlogged flies, drying them in chamois, puffing them up with desiccant, dressing them with ointment—all that takes away from good old-fashioned carefree casting and catching. Give me something that can take five trout in a row and still bob on the surface after a quick false cast.

Here is my list, tried and tested on Catskill brookies in the area celebrated by Cecil Heacox in his 1969 "Charmed Circle of the Catskills" articles in *Outdoor Life*.

1) The Royal Wulff, size 12 and 14. A heavily hackled fly with bright white hair wings and a peacock-and-red body . . . could there be a better choice for small-stream brook trout? Except for the occasional peacock herl coming undone and trailing alongside the tail, this fly is almost bombproof. Its contrasting light and dark colors make it visible in almost every midstream lighting scenario, and its bulk keeps the really tiny brookies from getting hooked when they try to eat it. This fly in its wet version is also excellent. Another offshoot of the Royal Wulff would be the Ausable Wulff, maybe a little easier to tie, but not quite the fish getter the Royal Wulff has proven to be for me.

2) The Bivisible, size 12 to 16. The Bivisible has been taking Catskill trout for around a hundred years, thanks to E. R. Hewitt, and while it most likely was not designed to be exclusively a brook trout fly, it sure does a fine job catching them. It's probably a better choice in slower water, where it can be gently set down, thanks to its fluffy design, and it's another fly that can take fish after fish without soaking up too much water. Remove it from a brookie's jaw, blow a puff of air on it, and it is good to go.

3) The Humpy, size 12 to 16. Why is the Humpy is a great brookie fly? Its bulky body represents many of the land-dwelling insects that fall into the water around brook trout streams. Since these tiny streams don't have the numerous or frequent hatches that larger streams do, much of a brook trout's diet consists of the odd bug that flies around the stream and falls in. An added bonus is you can build

these in colors that represent anything you imagine would be trout food. Black, green, yellow, red . . . all will take trout at various times and sometimes all the time. It's not the easiest fly to tie, but Humpies don't have to be show quality to work.

4) The Black Gnat, size 14 to 18. I caught my first Catskill brook trout on a Black Gnat wet fly and have been a fan ever since. I never considered the Gnat in its dry-fly form to be an imitation for the tiny black flies and gnats we loathe so much while fishing, but there is something about an all-black fly, either dry or wet, that brook trout love. It's not the best choice for maximum floatability in rough water, but it is a trout magnet in small streams.

5) The Stimulator, size 12 to 18. One thing I love about brook trout water is the pureness of it. Only the cleanest and clearest streams hold native populations of brook trout, and where there is clean, healthy water, there are stoneflies. Lime and Yellow Sallies are a staple food for brook trout in these mountain waters, and there is rarely a time when I don't see at least a few of them. I usually tie the imitations in bushy larger sizes and make them sparser as they get smaller. Yellow, green, and orange are all good colors. I used to wrap them on the curved dry-fly hooks that are so popular for stonefly patterns, but I switched to straight-shanked dry-fly hooks a few years ago. I found my hookup ratios to be very poor with the curved hooks.

Tread lightly when fishing brook trout streams, because they are the most fragile of our waterways. Some of the most beautiful scenery is found on small water, and the trout that live there are certainly proof of that. For dry-fly fishing, these five patterns are really all that you need.

Perry Ehlers and the Chambers

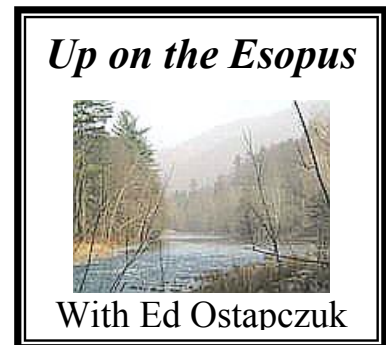
In the May 2015 *Gazette*, I reported on an Adirondack fly-fishing legend, Ed Bendl. Here once again, readers will be guided beyond the Catskills, to the Adirondack Mountains. Perry Ehlers, an Adirondack guide with a Catskill connection, was Bendl's mentor.

The April–May 1951 issue of New York State's *Conservationist* included an article titled "For New York Waters." The two-page article devoted several paragraphs to Catskill fly tyers and their favorite patterns: Harry and Elsie Darbee, Roy Steenrod, Walt and Winnie Dette, Ray Smith, Art Flick, Larry Koller, Lee Wulff—and Perry Ehlers. Ehlers's favorite fly was the one I'll feature here—the Chambers.

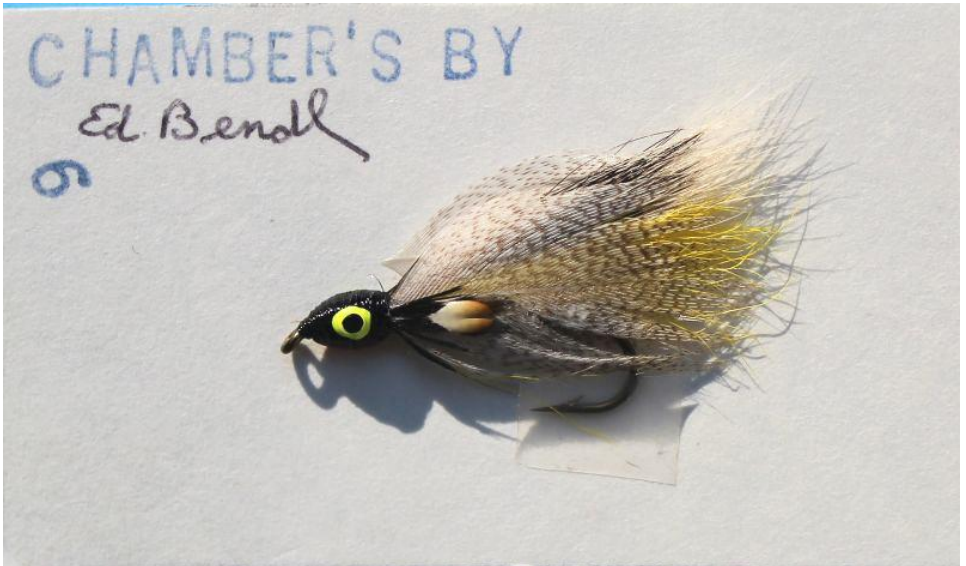
Not much is known about Ehlers, and my sources have told me he was a loner. However, this much is known. He was born on April 3, 1902, died on March 14, 1967, and is buried in the North River Cemetery in North River, NY. During World War II, he served with the U.S. Army's Tenth Mountain Division, where he endured frozen lungs while fighting Germans in the Italian Alps. In his home Adirondacks, his outdoor skills were held in such high regard that a set of whitewater rapids in the Hudson at North River bears his name—Perry Ehlers Rapids.

Sources told me that Ehlers participated in the famous New York City Sportsmen's Shows with prominent fly tyer Lew Oatman of Battenkill fame. Ehlers taught Ed Bendl how to tie flies, and a chapter in Bendl's autobiography, *Decent Man . . . Lucky Man: The Life and Times of Ed Bendl*, was dedicated to his mentor. Bendl wrote, "Perry Ehlers, Adirondack fly tier extraordinaire, was a very good friend of mine and owned the Perry Ehlers' Fishing Tackle Shop in North River. His shop was a 12' x 14' log cabin located on the banks of the Hudson River." There is a picture of Ehlers sitting with a dog in front of his shop. The building still exists, but has since been moved and is currently used by a Hudson River whitewater rafting company.

Regarding Ehlers's tying style Bendl wrote, "He was of the opinion the rougher north river required less delicate flies. . . . Adirondack flies are a mix . . . lighter than those heavy hackled western flies yet heavier than the sparse Catskill ones."



The 1951 *Conservationist* article noted of the Chambers, Ehlers's favorite fly pattern, "It was first tied late in 1936 and was designed to be fished deep for big browns, as all of the materials used in this fly sink rapidly. It has worked remarkably well all over the East." Ehlers said the pattern went nameless for several years until Bob Chambers of Broadalbin, NY, caught a large trout on it. He added, "As Bob is one of the best streamer fishermen I know I have called it the Chambers since then."



The Chambers

Hook: Mustad 9672 or equivalent, size 6
Thread: Black
Body: Flat silver tinsel or Mylar
Rib: Oval gold tinsel
Wing: Yellow calf tail topped with gray squirrel
Shoulder: Mallard breast feather
Cheek: Jungle cock
Head: Painted red throat or line under head, yellow eye with black center

The Chambers pictured here was tied by Ed Bendl, Ehlers's protégé. For their help with this article, I want to thank Vic Sasse, a retired Adirondack Department of Environmental Conservation forest ranger who resides in North River, the Johnsbury Town Clerk's Office, and the Johnsbury Historical Society.

Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Essay Contest Winners, 2015

March 28th 2015

Dear Members of the Fly Tying Guild,

There have been many local fly fishing people in our area. Namely the Dette's, The Darbee's and Joan and Lee Wulff, to name a few. These people always tried to be available to help young people in our area to learn the art of fly fishing and fly tying. It's important to keep this heritage alive for ever. This can easily be done by teaching younger people the art of fly fishing and fly tying.

Harry Darbee, as I was told by my grandfather, was concerned and has pushed for preserving our streams and rivers, by keeping them pollutant free. The Willowemoc river is notoriously known for fly fishing. Which passes right through Livingston Manor and also Roscoe NY which is known as trout town USA.

It is meaningful to be out on the stream, casting a fly rod with the chosen fly that was hand tied on your line. Also it is a great feeling to be totally relaxed, in your own world fishing clean streams and rivers. many people help keep our fishing waters preserved and clean. It is very important to do this. Fly fishing is an art that takes patience to learn and hopefully this knowledge stays with you to pass the heritage on to others.

My grandfather taught me how to cast a fly rod when I was seven years old. It took some time to learn how to cast properly and how to set the hook, but I was willing to learn and now I love it. All through the long winter months I am anxious for April 1st to arrive. I wonder why?!

Thank you for your consideration of my essay to the Fly Tyers Guild.

Sincerely,
Frank A. Kuttner

The History of Fly Fishing in the Catskills

People say that fly fishing was “born” here in the USA not necessarily with a cast of the first fly but with the events mostly in the Catskills from 1865 to 1915. They don’t know where the first fly was cast. Fly fishing is a very old and private sport, and events such as where the first dry fly was cast may never have been recorded by anyone.

Fly fishing grew out of the Industrial Revolution and before 1850 in our agricultural economy, fishing in our country was probably done as a source of food rather than for recreation. After the Civil War, people got out of the city, staying at hotels and boarding houses in the Catskills, for vacations and weekends to get back to nature. Some of their pastimes included hiking, picnicking, etc. and for some it was fishing and hunting. Fly fishing became more popular as well-to-do people used English equipment and came to the Catskills rather than Maine, the Adirondacks or Long Island because they could get here more easily. There were hordes of trout in the streams of Orange and Sullivan counties. Transportation, especially the railroads, was critical to the development of American fly fishing. The trains brought fishermen to our rivers and provided transportation for hatchery trout. The main railroads that ran through our region were the Erie Railroad, the Ulster & Delaware line, and the Ontario & Western line.

With the railroads arriving, this helped to show the peak days of Catskills brook trout fishing. Wealthy New York fishermen had mountain retreats and private trout preserves, other wealthy fishermen began forming clubs in the Catskills. One of the local ones was the Fly Fishers Club of Brooklyn that was incorporated, and set up headquarters between Roscoe and Beaverkill in Ben Hardenburg’s log cabin. The American style of fly fishing evolved from bass, to brook, to brown trout, and the “lure” went from bait, to wet to dry flies.

Some of the more “famous” fishermen and fly tyers of our area include: Thaddeus Norris, Theodore Gordon, George LaBranche, Herman Christian, Roy Steenrod, Rube Cross, AE Hendrickson, Ed Hewitt, Harry and Elsie Darbee, Walt and Winnie Dette, Art Flick, and Lee and Joan Wulff.

On a more personal note, I started fishing the Beaverkill from about the age of 8 and even had a small “business” selling nightcrawlers. I also helped members of the Chamber of Commerce to set up tables for opening day at Junction Pool when I was younger, and several years ago I won the “contest” for naming Roscoe’s mascot Hatch for Ultimate Fishing Town USA. My dad, Eric, taught Stacy Keach how to fly fish in a river for a movie in Sun Valley, Idaho. He also taught me how to fly fish and I love fly fishing with my Dad, as I have taken up this hobby.

Everett Kunz



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.