

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild



GAZETTE

Volume 12, number 6

December 2009

The December meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Saturday, December 19, 2009, at 2:00 P.M. at the Rockland House on Route 206 in Roscoe, NY. Dave Brandt will tie a March Brown and will demonstrate a nuance that makes his flies special. The wood-duck feather he uses for the wing is from a mature duck, not from a young wood duck. Some may quibble that making such distinctions is splitting hairs, but it's details such as this that make some tyers' flies look better than others'. Come and learn one of Dave's secrets.

If you wish to tie along with Dave bring:

Hook: Mustad 94840, Daiichi 1180, etc., size 10 or 12

Thread: Tan 8/0

Tail: Medium to dark ginger hackle

Body: Orange-tan dubbing

Wing: Wood duck

Hackle: One medium or dark ginger, one medium grizzly

The January meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild on January 16, 2010, at 2:00 P.M., will be a tying session for flies to donate to Casting for Recovery. This has become an annual event and has supplied our past president, Hank Rope, with flies for the women in the program come spring. If you are not be able to attend the meeting, tie some flies at home and send them to Hank Rope, P.O. Box 122, Big Indian, NY 12410. The meeting should be at the Rockland House, but check the notice that is sent out in January to confirm this information.

—Paul Murphy

Catskill Fly Tyers Guild DVD ***Fly Tyers, Volume 2: A Guild Sampler***

The new guild DVD, *Fly Tyers, Volume 2: A Guild Sampler*, will be a two-disk set featuring twelve tyers, each tying one fly. The total running time for the two disks is about three hours and twenty minutes. Finished copies will be available at the December Guild meeting. Final pricing has not been determined, nor have the details of payment and distribution been finalized. More information will be available at the December meeting, in the January meeting notice, and in the February 2010 issue of the *Gazette*. After December 19, you can also contact a member who attended the December meeting, the guild secretary, Erin Phelan, or the *Gazette's* editor, using the e-mail and phone numbers found elsewhere in this issue.

The cast of the DVD is Larry Duckwall, Agnes Van Put, Bob Osburn, Bill Leuszler, Ralph Hoffman, Dave Brandt, Tom Mason, Dave Pabst, Ralph Graves, Keith Fulsher, Allan Podell, and Ken Zadoyko. Don't miss this.

—Ken Kobayashi

Tyers Needed

The guild's free fly-tying class will be held this year at Gander Mountain, Route 211, Middletown, NY. The class will be held each Saturday from March 6 to March 27, from 1:00 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. If you can help with this project, please contact Bill Leuszler at (845)733-6759 or Bob Osburn at (845)294-5813.

Danbury Show Report

The guild's table at the Arts of the Angler Show in Danbury, CT, on November 14 and 15, 2009, was visited frequently, with many visitors who made multiple visits during the show hours.

We signed five renewals and one new member. We also sold \$90.00 worth of raffle tickets for the beautiful fly plate that was so well made by Ted Patlen.

We had quite a number of people who took advantage of our setup of vises on the visitors' side of the tables. We have to thank Pete Peterson, our resident instructor, for this idea. Over the last number of years, it has been a big hit, especially with the young people. Pete walks people through the fly-tying procedure, and whoever takes advantage of his teaching walks away with a fly that they have tied and that will catch fish.

It was good to see so many return visitors who have visited our tables over the years and who get something new from the guild members every time they stop by.

I would like to thank everyone who assisted in making the guild's part of the show a success. A special thanks to our tyers, Pete Peterson, Andy Brasko, Leonard Cowles, Bud Bynack, and Hank Rope, who made my job easy.

—Ed McQuat, *show chair*

Somerset Symposium Show Report

The 2009 International Fly Tying Symposium was a fun time and productive event for the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. Both long-standing members and some of our newest members participated to represent the guild.

The show on Saturday was well attended, and we signed up five new members. Six long-standing members renewed. The impressive and exquisitely made fly plate prepared by Teddy Patlen was an eye-popping attraction and generated just over a hundred dollars in raffle tickets sold.

Our tyers tied various great Catskill-style patterns, with some of the tyers generously donating their flies to passersby and attending children. This was a hit with the attendees. It never hurts to be generous.

On Sunday, attending guild members made a generous donation to Jack Gartside, who appears to be having a relapse of his medical problems. This donation was well received by the show's

promoter, Chuck Furimsky. We all certainly wish Jack the best and a speedy return to what he enjoys best.

I'd like to give our volunteer tyers a big thanks for an outstanding representation of the guild. Good job done, fellow tyers. They are Elmer Hopper, Mike Stewart, Al Landheer, Chally Bates, Brian McKee, Mike Romanowski, and Jessica Lettich.

I hope to see all of you again at Somerset in January 2010, which should be as good a show, if not better.

—Joe Ceballos, show chair

President's Message

I suspect that any group such as the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild continually struggles to find able and willing help to keep the wheels smoothly turning. In the case of our gang, we've had the good fortune to have in our midst two of the more important helpers any club could ever hope for. We have a volunteer to create and distribute a fine newsletter, a good trick by itself for many organizations, but the CFTG has been extra lucky in that we have had, for all of our years, someone to do the rest. We've had many members step up do join in this or that project or program, but one charter member in particular has been here from the beginning to help in many ways beyond what the title of secretary would seem to suggest. I'm writing about Judie DV Smith, who has been working either at the front counter or at least from behind the scenes since our inception.

As many of you know, she tried, quietly at first, to more or less retire from having actually to run things. We inquired for a couple years to find from within our ranks someone who might be at least willing to try to serve as our secretary. We were hoping, I think, to find a member who would accept the challenge of being chief cook and bottle washer for the group.


Just when the idea of finding a suitable replacement for our much-overworked scribe and doer of whatever needed doing appeared hopeless . . . up stepped Erin Phelan. Erin agreed to be nominated to run for the position of secretary, and in an amazingly short election process, we found ourselves once again functioning with a full crew.

Now we need to make Erin welcome in this important—no, indispensable—position. I hope that we all can make her contributions (not to mention the inevitable tribulations that come with the post) a little easier. If, or rather when you need to contact Erin about guild matters, you can reach her at jphelan@hvc.rr.com or at (845) 754-7456 (home) or (845) 665-3009 (cell). I know that with Erin as secretary, the guild is in good hands—or at least it may be, if we now can find a good candidate for the office of president!

—Dave Brandt

December is the holiday season, and I would like to wish all of you happy and safe holidays and a prosperous new year. I look forward to writing the columns for "The Wet Fly Corner" in 2010 and wish nothing but the best of health and happiness to all guild members.

There is one fly that catches my eye like no other, and in fact, it is not like all the other wet flies. Unlike the others, this fly is actually a realistic imitation. Back in the old days, bait anglers would

<p><i>The Wet-Fly Corner</i> With Andy Brasko, a Genuine Wet-Fly Fisherman</p>	
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run out of bait and clip the fins off a brook trout to use for bait, and they'd continue to catch fish. Hence tyers created the Fontinalis Fin.

This fly is a special fly to me in lots of ways. It was the first married-wing wet fly that I ever learned to tie on my own. It was the first married-wing wet fly on which I ever caught a fish. And it was one of the married-wing wet flies that Don Bastian showed me how to improve upon. When I finished tying it in Don's class, I was left in awe at how beautiful this fly is.

During Bug Week in the Catskills in 2004, I was fishing a section on the upper Willowemoc and was not sure what fly to try. I looked at my fly box and figured I might as well give the Fontinalis Fin a chance. I made a cast and saw a yellow nose and mouth rise and slowly sink back into the water—it was a brown trout, but it had missed the fly. I cast again, but this time allowed for just a little more distance in the swing down the lane that the trout was occupying. Again I saw a yellow nose and mouth, but this time I had the fish hooked. I could not believe how this fish was fighting. When I finally brought the fish to net, it could barely fit. I grabbed the fly, the brown start flopping, and then it jumped right out of my net, landing back into the stream and splashing water into my face. I have never have seen another trout with such a strong will to live. I was glad I had smashed down the barb on my hook, making it easy for the hook to come out. And yes, the fly was a size 6.

This fly has been productive for me in several types of water conditions and throughout the season. It has worked for me in high, muddy waters after a rain, in fast-moving waters when fished with an intermediate sinking line, and, in the case of that big brown, in clear streams. The fly has produced for me from the spring to the fall.

The Fontinalis Fin is not what I would call a steady producer, but it's a fly I go to when it seems as if nothing else is working. Friends have informed me that this fly has produced quite well on the East Branch, and I will be investigating that report further in 2010 with my own field trials. This fly is truly beautiful and fun to tie and fish. It deserves a place in every fly fisher's fly box.



Photo by Annie Brasko

Fontinalis Fin

Hook: Mustad 3906, size 6

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

Tail: White hackle wisps

Body: Orange wool

Rib: Gold Mylar tinsel, size 16/18

Beard/false hackle: Furnace

Wing: Two segments of white duck quills over (married to) two quill segments of gray duck quills over (married to) thirteen quill segments of orange duck quills.
Head: One good soaking coat of Griff's Thin, two coats of Griff's Thick, one coat of black Pro Laq.

Tying Notes

The pattern listed above is for the fly depicted in Ray Bergman's *Trout*, plate 10, according to the recipe in the back of the book in the patterns section. However, the color plate itself shows black in the wing instead of the gray that is listed in the recipe. I have found numerous discrepancies such as this in *Trout*. The improvements that I mentioned above and that are depicted in the fly in the photo include tying the fly with white over black over orange. For the beard/false hackle, I also use a mix of brown and black schlappen. For the tinsel, I prefer to use Lagartun small gold oval tinsel, I feel this makes this fly just a little classier. On this fly, I prefer to use black Pro Laq for the head, whether it's a fishing fly or show fly. A shiny black head on this fly makes it look complete.



Does Anyone Remember Dave O'Neill?

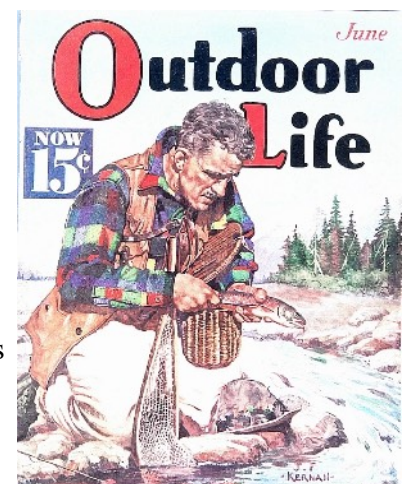
By Alan Mark Fletcher

I was fortunate to grow up in Carmel, New York, a small town near the Connecticut state line. Carmel is the county seat of Putnam County, the smallest county in New York State, sandwiched between Westchester and Dutchess Counties. Carmel is situated along the east shore of Lake Gleneida, a gorgeous little deep kettle lake, ground out by some ancient glacier. Gleneida holds some lovely rainbow trout. A couple of miles up Seminary Hill is another kettle lake, Lake Gilead, which contains both rainbows and lake trout. Two miles to the west of Carmel is Reservoir D, the outlet of which is the West Branch of the Croton River, a fine trout stream

That was quite an environment for a boy to grow up in, but it gets even better. In the 1930s and 1940s, a twelve- or thirteen-year-old kid could safely hike the two miles along the road for a day of fishing on the West Branch with his best buddy. Mom would put sandwiches in a brown paper bag and give us the simple instruction, "Be home in time for supper." No responsible parent would give a young person that kind of freedom today, alas.

(My buddy, by the way, was S. Barrett Hickman, who became a New York State Supreme Court justice. He came to national fame when he was the judge in the Tawana Brawley case, in which a teenage girl falsely claimed that she had been raped by several men, including a police officer and a district attorney. The Reverend Al Sharpton gained negative fame at that trial when he came forward to support the teenager. Barrett and I have kept in touch over the years, but it has been a very long time since we fished together.)

Across the street from our house was a feed store, which was something of a hangout for us kids. A local man named Dave O'Neill had gained a considerable reputation the area of New York City and its suburbs for his fly-fishing and fly-tying skills. Dave would sometimes set up his fly-tying equipment in the feed store and give us kids instructions in tying. Dave was what might be called a "man's man," even down to his rugged appearance. He had a foul mouth, however, and I am sure my clergyman father would never have allowed me to hang out with him if he had known the language Dave O'Neill used. But I don't recall ever



hearing a word that I didn't already know.

In a doctor's office a number of years ago, I happened to pick up a copy of the centennial issue of *Outdoor Life*. In it they had thumbnail reproductions of every cover of the magazine. There was an editorial comment that most of the covers of *Outdoor Life* during the 1930s and 1940s were paintings by an artist named J. F. Kernan. It went on to say that Kernan frequently used the same model for many of his paintings, but they did not identify the model. One of the covers—this one is from June 1938—is pictured here.

I sent a letter to the editor stating that the model's name was Dave O'Neill and that he had taught me to tie flies. That letter got me featured in a subsequent issue.

I wonder if anyone else among the guild's membership knew Dave O'Neill or knows anything about him. I would like to know whatever happened to him. I owe him a debt for getting me into a wholesome recreation that still absorbs me after more than seventy years.



The Memorial Ceremony for Fran Better's

I missed the Saturday Fran Better's ceremony at Monument Falls on the Ausable, but attended the Sunday private ceremony for family and close friends, which concluded with the spreading of Fran's ashes on the water behind his home.

They brought what was left of him down to the river in a plastic-lined antique creel, across the log-and-plank bridge that had years ago been built just wide enough for a wheelchair. It spans from the shore over perhaps eighteen feet of water to a long, slender, grassy gravel bar of an island where Fran would cast a fly on good days. The creel had been his father's, then his, back in the days when everyone kept trout. At some point it became a wall ornament and remained so until this day, when it was called on for one final duty.

There was a wall-less tent set up toward the far end of the island, and just beyond it a log fire burned within a circle of river stones. Plastic chairs were set up under the tarp and around the campfire.

They hung the creel on the end post of the bridge. Little plastic cups stuck out of the hole in its lid. Later, his stepson dipped them into the ashes and passed them out to those who wanted to take part in the send-off.

At one point, with nine large relatives on the bridge, there was a loud cracking noise, and people scrambled back to the island. I had pictured in my mind a handful of nephews and nieces dropping into the river beneath a snowy spray of Uncle Fran, but when the first crack startled them, only a little dust flew, then settled as gently as a bather's toe testing the water. Then they reassembled, mixing children with the adults, and got it done. I participated in the second wave and went to the far side, where the bridge met the shore, for should the center of the bridge plunge, I'd be on the best end of it. The bridge cracked again as a hefty husband-and-wife team walked to midspan. They quickly separated. A few others joined us, and somehow the bridge held and the ceremony (all caught on tape) became part of history.

A fellow with a metal guitar strummed and sang from beneath the tent, and someone brought down a platter of snacks. It had been kind of quiet, a bit subdued, with just a few hushed conversations going on while the guitar man played. A few of us, at the upstream end of the island, silently cast Ausable Wulffs onto the surface of Fran's Pool.

There had been a mix of light sprinkles and sunshine all afternoon. Then someone noticed a bright rainbow at the downstream end of the river, where it disappeared around a bend, about where we estimated the leading edge of Fran would be, and the chatter began to drown out the music.

I left just as it was getting dark, stopping in Keene at the Stewart's shop to grab a cup of coffee. When I walked inside and into the light, a friendly clerk mentioned there was a bit of ash on my shoulder. "It's from my pipe," I said, craning my neck to look at it, but just in case it was a hitchhiker, I didn't brush it off.

—Bob Mead

Book Review

Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies

By Mike Valla. Published by Headwater Books/Stackpole Books, 2009; \$49.95 hardbound.

If you're a member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and haven't bought this book yet, you should. That's pretty much a no-brainer, but if anyone actually needs convincing, here's why.

For starters, guild member Mike Valla is uncommonly qualified to have written a book like this. Bitten by the fly-fishing bug in the mid-1960s, in the middle of his teen years, Valla journeyed by a bus all by himself to Roscoe, determined to fish the Beaverkill and Willowemoc. He was immediately taken under the wings of Walt and Winnie Dette in the sort of warm, open-hearted gesture characteristic of both the Dettas and the Darbees. He learned to tie at the Dettas' side and at their tying bench, and from then through his college years, he frequently spent summers staying at their home. Since then, in addition to a trove of flies tied by classic Catskill tyers, he's accumulated photographs and documentation covering pretty much the entire history of the dry fly as it was fished in Catskill waters. That includes a chapter on current tyers, from Ralph Graves and Dave Brandt and beyond, that reads like a list of guild members.

Whether you came to the guild because it represents your heritage or because you want to learn more about the Catskill tradition, *Tying Catskill-Style Dry Flies* has a lot to offer. Valla devotes a separate chapter to one of the toughest Catskill-style techniques to master: tying upright and divided feather wings and quill wings—that is, wings that fan elegantly and that actually look like wings, not clumps of bedraggled feathers or broken helicopter tail rotors. And in the chapters that follow on tying specific patterns—the Quill Gordon, Red Quill, March Brown, Light Cahill, Pink Lady, Adams, Queen of Waters, Gray Fox Variant, Tups Indispensible, Brown Bivisible, and Quack—he uses each to articulate the proper way to tie elements that were developed in the Catskill tradition, but that are useful in tying a whole range of dry flies—elements that range from quill bodies to palmered body hackle.

History and technique aside, Catskill-style dries are just plain beautiful—elegant in a way that a Chernobyl Ant could never hope to be—and in the end, I find that the real appeal of this book is aesthetic. I keep coming back to the photos of flies tied by classic tyers, because these examples of the fly tyer's art possess a definite "Wow!" factor in and of themselves. There's just something about these flies, something that the philosopher Walter Benjamin called "aura"—a sense of uniqueness that stands out with particular salience in an age of mechanical reproduction, when iterations without an original abound. The limits of the Catskill dry-fly style—just four elements, after all, not counting the hook and thread—seem to have worked as an enabling constraint on the talents of the classic tyers in the same way that the limits imposed by the form of the sonnet or sestina worked to produce the characteristic styles of the poets who employed these forms. The flies produced by these tyers are not just beautiful, but strikingly and visibly different from tyer to tyer. These photos alone make the book a must-have for serious fly tyers.

However, in one sense, the book is probably an exercise in futility. Just as in baseball there are endless, enduring discussions of the effects, disastrous or trivial, of a trade that a team made fifty years

ago, in some fly-tying circles, there is an endless, enduring debate over what a Catskill-style dry fly “really” is. Valla would like to bring that debate to an end—but not by settling it: “Having examined hundreds of Catskill dries made by old-school tiers,” he writes, “I’d say there is a whole range of standards in the Catskill dry-fly genre. small heads, larger heads, turle knot space, no space. Some hackle is double the width of the hook gap, some double and a half, or even triple. Hackle length even varies with a particular tier. . . . In many ways, it’s much easier to categorize trends and style of a particular tier than to generalize a ‘Catskill dry fly.’” That’s *way* too sensible a claim to put an end to such discussions, even for a minute. They’re too much fun.

—Bud Bynack

☞ The Rockland House ☛

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild wants to express its appreciation and thanks to Tom and Marea Roseo, proprietors of the Rockland House, for making the facilities at that establishment available for the guild meetings and for their continued support. Please reciprocate with your patronage.



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 Fly Fishing Show

The Garden State Convention Center

January 22, 23, 24, 2010

Show Hours

Friday: 10:00 to 6:00

Saturday: 8:30 to 6:00

Sunday: 9:00 to 4:30

Admission

Adults: \$15 for one day

\$25 for two-day pass

\$35 for three-day pass

Children under 5 free, under 12: \$2

Scouts under 16 in uniform: Free

Uniformed Military: \$10

Family Day Sunday: Two adults and one or more kids, \$25