



Volume 13, number 4

August 2010

The Annual Catskill Fly Tyers Guild Picnic will be held on Saturday, August 21, from noon to 4:00 P.M., at the Elsie and Harry Darbee and Matthew Vinciguerra Memorial Pavilion at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, NY.

Once again this year, we're asking that everyone bring something to share and some attendees bring a main dish—perhaps something like lasagna, baked ziti, or sloppy joes and hamburger buns. As before, bring your own plates and silverware and your own beverages. Guests are welcome, as long as we can plan for them.

Please let Erin Phelan know what you are bringing and how many are coming or if you want to know what we are short of and should bring. Erin's email is jphelan@hvc.rr.com, or call her at (845) 754-7456.

There will be a casting contest, presided over by casting-game commissioner Gary Sweet. Also, as in the past, bring a rod or two—cane, glass, or graphite—so people can play with each other's toys. Also, for the fly swap and guild fly collection, bring two flies that are alike—one to trade and one for the guild—if possible in separate film containers.

The September meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will be held on Thursday, September 16, at the Education Building of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum, 1031 Old Route 17, Livingston Manor, New York, at 7:00 P.M.

Chally Bates, who has been tying for us many years at the International Fly Tying Symposium and the January Somerset show, will show us his *Isonychia* Spinner and *Isonychia* Nymph patterns. Chally encourages you to bring a vise and materials to tie along with him. He describes these patterns as the originations of Les Shannon, who had a fly shop near the bank of the South Branch of the Raritan River in Califon, NJ. Chally rated Les as an outstanding and creative tyer.

Today, Chally ties custom orders for the current owner of Shannon's Fly and Tackle Shop. He spends much time on the Catskill rivers and finds these patterns work well there and on most rivers that he fishes. In his note to me giving the list of materials, he finished up with "I love fly fishing." Make it to this meeting and catch a bit of Chally's enthusiasm.

***Isonychia* Spinner**

Hook: Size 12 2X-long dry fly equivalent

Thread: 8/0 wine or claret Uni thread wire, Tail: Moose mane or hair

Dubbing: Spirit River Fine & Dry, Iso head

Wing: White hen neck quill

***Isonychia* Nymph**

Hook: Size 12 Mustad 9671 or

Underbody: 7 to 8 turns of .015" nonlead covered with 3/0 Uni thread, pinched flat, and covered with

Thread: Black 6/0 Uni thread

Hackle: Cream, or white and brown,
trimmed to a V top and bottom

Tail: Moose hair
Dorsal stripe: White 3/0 Uni thread, doubled
Dubbing: Iso
Rib: Black 6/0 Uni thread
Wing case: Black Thin Skin
Legs: Speckled brown hen back



Old-Timers: Ted and Fran **By Joe Watts**

As kids and then as men, one consistent thing my brothers and I knew in my family was that my father's idol was always the legendary ballplayer, the last .400 hitter, Ted Williams. Even when Dad was growing up in the Bronx and Queens as a die-hard Yankee fan, his idol was always Ted. Getting Dad Ted Williams memorabilia for any special occasion was always an easy choice. Though my father never was exposed to the wonderful sport of fly fishing, he always spoke of Ted as being a big fisherman, which was common knowledge. My father does get some credit, however, for my becoming a fly fisher, because once a year, our family came up to the Catskills on vacation, and my love of the Catskills eventually led to fly fishing.

In my second fishing season as a fly fisher, 1998, my reading led me to visit the West Branch of the Ausable River. After fishing the river for a day or two and camping at Wilmington Notch, I unknowingly walked into the Fran Betters fly shop. The next few days, I was in and out several times. I was taken in by his knowledge and presence. I was a newcomer to the sport, and it's incredible how vividly I remember his flies. I remember his Usuals, Ausable Wulffs, and Green Drakes selling like hotcakes as Fran sat behind that crowded, but neat desk and tied away, occasionally calling for more rabbit. There was unquestionably an aura around his tying area. Those Green Drakes were unlike anything I had ever seen. They were big and sure as heck green, and they caught fish, and that was that! I remember a man coming in who had bought a dozen or so Usuals from Fran for an Alaska trip, which, according to him, was the single thing that made his trip a huge success. Considering that he entered the shop just to say thanks, I tend to believe it.

I was obsessed at the time with brookies on small streams, and on the last day of my trip, Fran sent me to Black Creek, a tributary of the West Branch of the Ausable, giving me advice on how to catch fish. During this period, I purchased a fly rod from Fran, made by Fran. It was a 5-weight and a big step up from my first Battenkill 4-weight. I fell in love with it. I remember Fran and Jan, his wife, showing me some casting techniques for free out in the front yard. I recall letting the fly line land after each cast and then back casting only once while letting more line out to take the line out farther and letting it land again. Fran knew this was effective, and I was sure as heck surprised at the accuracy and effectiveness of this simple method of casting.

Sometime during my several days there, I realized that this guy was a legend and had fished with Ted Williams—that perhaps the two were good friends. In a very comfortable, joking manner, I asked Fran if next time he went fishing with Ted he would get his autograph for my father, who was a big fan. I believe Ted was already at the point

in his life where he was not getting around much. Fran wisely said something half kidding, half seriously, like “Sonny, once you’re in a wheelchair, you never fish again.”

My love for the Catskills has consumed most of my fly-fishing days, though I always have planned on going back to the West Branch of the Ausable in Fran Better's country. Last year, in late August 2009, I broke my beloved Fran Better's fly rod under the hull of my canoe—it was 100 percent carelessness on my part. Throughout the years, I had used this rod regularly. After some careful thought, I figured, “Why not look him up and see if anything can be done? There’s nothing to lose,” so that’s what I went about doing. I saw that Fran was in bad shape from their Web site and that perhaps they were looking to sell the shop to the right person. This was sad. However, I was able to contact the shop and send the rod off for repair at only cost for parts. During the communication period, in an e-mail, I told a brief story that I asked be printed out and shared with Fran at the hospital.

I told him about my father being a Ted Williams fan and reminded Fran of our conversation. Then I told him about the time in 1999 when the New York Mets and the Boston Red Sox played against each other on Old-Timers’ Day. Realizing this event was on June 11, my father’s birthday, I decided to reserve a whole box for myself, my parents, my brothers, and our wives. It seemed like a fine thing to do for Dad, a great guy.

Of course, this could have happened only in the new baseball era, during interleague play, when National and American League teams play each other. Obviously, there were some real old-timers with the Red Sox, since they are a much older club.

Before the game, Tom Seaver drove onto the field in that little vehicle they traditionally use to transport relief pitchers. He had with him a special guest. That guest got up on his two feet and like a young buck threw out the first pitch. Yes, it was Ted Williams.

Later in 2009, I finally spoke to Jan, Mrs. Better's, on the phone. She had called to brief me on the rod’s status. Fran had passed on. She mentioned that Fran indeed did read my e-mail, my little story, and it gave him a good chuckle. I guess my rod was meant to have broken that day under my canoe.



The Preston Jennings *Isonychia* Nymph

Kahil’s Rainbow Lodge, the Phoenicia Hotel, Five Arch Bridge, “the Portal”—these are all associated with only one Catskill

river, the Esopus. Running wide and fast, the Esopus has the distinction of being permanently off-color due to fine-grained red clay deposits found in and around its drainage area. Depending on the release from the Portal, it can run from slightly off-color to downright muddy, but it has one of the best populations of wild rainbow trout in the Catskills, if not the best.

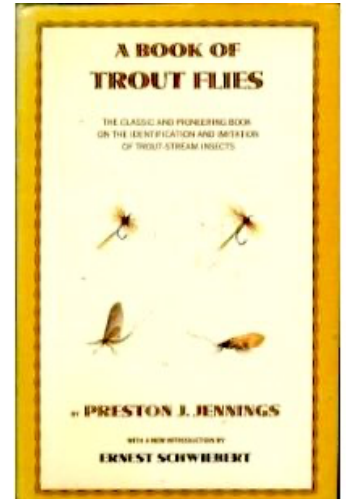
Preston Jennings was a regular in the Esopus region and stayed at the area hotels. It was likely in this area that he first tied and tested his *Isonychia* nymph, a nymph that can be “fished like a wet fly.”

The *Isonychia* is a fast-water swimming nymph that moves more like a minnow than like an insect. Iso nymphs are very prolific in the Esopus, and it’s easy to see why Preston Jennings’s imitation was called by some of the patrons at Kahil’s Rainbow Lodge the “Esopus Nymph.” Jennings once gave one to an angler staying at Kahil’s with the

advice to “fish it like a wet fly, because it’s the only nymph that swims.” The angler later caught a dozen trout in the next hour using that fly.

A friend of mine, guild member Ed Ostapczuk, has lately been using this nymph with excellent results on his favorite sections of the Esopus using the “swing and twitch” method. His success prompted me to try it, and on a recent trip, I caught my first Esopus rainbow on one.

The beauty of this fly is its simplicity. It really is a basic nymph, tied “in the round.” Since there is no wing case, it looks the same upside down as it does upright.



Photos by John Bonasera

The Preston Jennings *Isonychia* Nymph

Hook: Size 8 or size10 nymph hook. Jennings used both sproats and snecked hooks, but a 1X-long or 2X-long nymph hook is fine

Tail: Tip of a partridge feather

Rib: Round gold tinsel

Abdomen: Seal’s fur (or a substitute, these days), dark red and plum, mixed

Thorax: Peacock herl

Hackle: Furnace cock hackle, two to three turns and short

Jennings also tied this fly with a peacock sword tail (three fibers and short), a full body of dark claret seal's fur mixed with black wool, no peacock herl thorax, and one to two turns of grouse for the hackle.

This is a great fly to carry with you on almost any Catskill stream, because the *Isonychia* is a common mayfly that hatches from early summer to mid fall. Fish it in riffled water and let it swing straight down, induce a little rod-tip twitch. and hang on!

Over the years, I have had the pleasure of meeting some great tyers in the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. I have had the privilege of meeting Poul Jorgenson and

watching him tie and was honored when Ralph Hoffman took time to speak to me about wet flies. I look back at those times and realize how lucky I was, but at the same time, I feel sad that they have passed away. I had way too many questions and not enough time to speak to them.

When Helen Shaw passed away, I realized I needed to start speaking to older tyers that I looked up to. My problem was that I was afraid I did not know enough to have a conversation with them. Then I went to the other extreme. I started coming out of my shell, my tying improved, and I got cocky and felt I knew it all. Now I'm glad both those eras have ended. Since then, I have had the pleasure of meeting and enjoying tyers such as Dave Brandt, good friend and innovative tyer John Collins, and a person I love to hang around and tie flies with when I can—Elmer Hopper.

Especially, though, Ralph Graves is a tyer that I look up to. When I would see Ralph at the shows years back, he always had the most beautiful wet flies displayed for sale. I was lucky enough to be at a guild meeting where Ralph taught us to tie the Poly Stickle, a beautiful, simple fly that catches fish. I have caught numerous fish on this fly and feel privileged to have been taught how to tie this pattern at that guild meeting by Ralph.

Back when I was in my shell, I always loved Ralph's work, but was afraid to come up to him and tell him so and ask him if I could watch him tie one of his wet flies. Then, shortly after I started writing this column, Ralph complimented me on my work. I wish that Ralph had known at that time how inspiring that comment was for me. It broke the ice and allowed me to stop by and say hello and see what he was tying.

So don't be like me—go and talk to the tyers that you look up to. You will never regret that you did. If you don't, you will be missing out on some great stories and tips on tying.

Two favorite flies that I have in common with Ralph are the Grizzly King and the Parmachene Belle. At the Arts of the Angler show in November 2009, Ralph and I swapped flies, and he presented me with a Grizzly King that he had tied that day. I still have that fly and will not fish with it, because it was given to me by one of my heroes of the fly-tying world.

This month's fly, the Parmachene Belle, is dedicated to Ralph Graves. I hope I have done justice to a fly that he likes so much.

The Wet-Fly Corner

With Andy Brasko, a Genuine Wet-Fly Fisherman





Photo by Annie Brasko

The Parmachene Belle

Hook: Mustad 3906, size 8

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

Tail: Two quill segments of paired white duck quills over (married to) two quill segments of paired red duck quills

Tag: Black ostrich herl

Body: One strand of yellow wool tarn

Ribbing: Lagartun flat silver tinsel, small

Beard/False Hackle: White and red hen saddle

Wing: Paired white duck quills married to paired red duck quills married to paired white duck quills

Head: One good soaking coat of Griff's Thin, one coat of Griff's Thick, and one coat of Hard as Hull cement

Tying Notes

There are a few ways to tie this fly. For the body, you can choose yellow rabbit dubbing or a piece of yellow wool yarn, For the ribbing, you can use silver size 16/18 Mylar tinsel. Because this is a very classy classic fly, I believe that it deserves real metal tinsel and not Mylar.

While wrapping the ostrich herl for the tag, make sure the stem side is facing toward the eye of the hook while winding it around the hook for three turns.

As far as the size of the red stripe in the wing is concerned, this is a user preference. I prefer to use two or sometimes three quill segments for the red. I feel the fly looks really classy in pinstripes, rather than with a large section of red.

I have stopped using black Pro Lak for the last coat on the head of the fly. I have found that if you form a good head that is flat and smooth, Pro Lak is not needed. Finish the head using the method I describe, and it will come out shiny and black and look well formed.

The Catskill Mountains

By Alberto Calzolari

Editor's Note: This article appeared in the December 2009–January 2010 issue of the Italian fly-fishing magazine Sedge & Mayfly (<http://www.pipam.org/GEA/Default.htm>). It was translated by guild member Gian Andrea Morresi and edited by guild member Fred Lord and Marjorie Morresi.

Alberto Calzolari is an Italian angler, fly tyer (with a special interest in classic Atlantic salmon flies), fly-fishing historian, and author who has also contributed to publications such as H₂O Journal and the on-line Bamboo Journal of the Italian Bamboo Rodmaker's Association (also available in English at <http://www.rodmakers.eu>.) He has been profiled in Fly Tyers of the World, Volume 2, compiled by Steve Thornton, and has tied several times at the annual International Fly Tying Symposium in Somerset. You can view his work on his Web site, <http://www.artisticflies.com>.

The article is reprinted by permission of the author and will be serialized in this and the next issue of the Gazette. It is a welcome opportunity to see things as others see them—and an excellent summary of Catskill fly-tying history.

Sitting on my suitcase outside the Newark airport, I thought that it was very hot for the end of April. The smiling face of my friend Ted Patlen materialized in front of me, or at least what was still distinguishable behind the hat, glasses, cigar, and beard. His ever-present aloha shirt completed the picture and went well with the almost unbearable heat. Ted confirmed that the temperature was above the seasonal mean and told me that we'd be going to the Catskills the next day. Usually this wouldn't have been the best season, but the heat that was forecast for the next two days might hold some surprises.

I was about to visit the places that are the subjects of some of the most beautiful passages of the history of fly fishing in America, the Catskills. (The “kill” in the Catskill mountains means “of the streams” in Dutch—a linguistic legacy of colonial origins.) It was a small dream that, after driving mile after mile, was coming true. I had these thoughts the day following my arrival as Ted, surrounded by a cloud of cigar smoke, drove on toward the Catskills and evoked, with every area, river bend, and village that we met, a brief tale or a historic citation from those memorable times. The closer we got, the stronger was the feeling of being steeped in history. Liberty, Livingston Manor, and then, at last, Roscoe are names that bring back to mind stories of the past. The protagonists are those I'd read about and about whom I'd heard so much.

The Catskills give their name to a mountainous region in the southeast of the State of New York. This green area of stupendous valleys and noteworthy elevations has long been the destination of nature lovers. However, it was at the end of the nineteenth century that it became the focus of the pioneers of fly angling, thanks mostly to the many streams and brooks found in the area.

Villages such as Roscoe became famous thanks to the continuous peregrination of anglers from various states, as well as famous fly tyers and bamboo-rod makers (such as Dr. George Parker Holden, Garrison's mentor), writers, journalists, and entomologists. Many established themselves and lived their entire lives there. Together they wrote what is called by many the most beautiful chapter of the history of American fly fishing and, without the shadow of a doubt, brought the Catskills to be called the nation's cradle of fly fishing. Some historians, however, would rather define it more precisely as the cradle of

dry-fly fishing. Indeed, dry flies developed here have an unmistakably unique style that is still used and appreciated.

A letter and fifty dry flies changed Americans' fishing forever. They were sent by Frederic M. Halford to Theodore Gordon (1854–1915) toward the end of the 1800s. Gordon studied them and adapted them to the characteristics of the area's rivers, thus developing a series of flies that soon became the reference for other fly tyers. Among the most famous ones is the Quill Gordon. Unlike Halford's English flies, which were meant to be used in the calmer waters of the chalk streams, Gordon's flies had stiffer and denser tailing and hackle in order to float better in the rougher streams of the Catskills. Nonetheless, they maintained a unique lightness and elegance. Gordon's relationship with the United Kingdom wasn't limited solely to correspondence with Halford, but included others, such as G. E. M. Skues. Skues himself mailed him a Greenwell's Glory, the famous English fly that was very popular then.

Soon, other fly tyers in the area followed Gordon's lead, and many boasted of having learned the art from Gordon himself. Among them, Roy Steenrod is the one who most certainly kept a solid relationship with Gordon for years and who learned how to tie from him. Roy was a postal worker in the town of Liberty (which is where Gordon would go to mail his flies to Halford). Steenrod soon became the most famous fly-tying teacher of the time and was the creator of the famous Hendrickson, a fly designed to imitate the *Ephemerella subvaria*.

As an Italian, I find it interesting that Americans identify some insects with the names given by fly tyers to the flies imitating them. Today, you are much more likely to hear someone talk of a hatch as being a "Hendrickson" hatch, rather than an *Ephemerella subvaria* hatch, or of a "Quill Gordon" hatch, rather than an *Epeorus pleuralis* hatch, probably because it's easier to pronounce and to remember.

Like Steenrod, Herman Christian was a fishing buddy of Gordon's for many years and became a refined tyer as well as a promoter of this new tying style. The heightened interest in angling in Catskill streams and in the flies of these pioneers favored the development of literary works. Writers such as E. R. Hewitt (inventor of the Bivisible), Art Flick, Alfred Miller (Sparse Gray Hackle), and Ray Bergman taught millions of American sportsmen and made them through the pages of their books.

At that time, reaching Roscoe was not as easy as it is today, but the income of recreational anglers kept rising. This led to the birth of the professional fly tyer. Probably the first one was Reuben (Rube) Cross, who always maintained he'd learned the craft from Gordon himself. There is no certain proof of that, but we do know that both fished the banks of the Neversink. Rube always was quite jealous of his technique and never agreed to teach others, even when they offered to pay him, as did a young man named Walt Dette.

Walt did not give up and instead started disassembling Cross's flies in order to understand how they were tied. He then began tying flies with his friend Harry Darbee in a little room above the theater in Roscoe. Soon, two young ladies joined them, helping them select materials and tie flies: Winnie Ferndon (whose parents owned a famous hotel in the area) and Elsie Bivins. Eventually, Winnie married Walt, and Elsie, Harry. The roads of the two friends diverged, and they continued tying flies by themselves (always working with their wives). Harry is also remembered for his efforts in the raising and genetic selection of roosters for fly tying, whereas Walt was surely one of the best tyers that the Catskill School ever produced.

The typical flies tied in this style have a peacock quill body or fur dubbing, wings made with duck quill, teal, or finely barred lemon-yellow wood duck flank feathers, or hackle points, and rooster feathers for the tail and hackle. Almost always, the rooster hackle is wound around the hook, leaving uncovered the last section of the hook's shank, by the eye. This sacrificed body length, but facilitated tying the tippet (at that time made of silkworm gut) using the Turle Knot. This Catskill-style characteristic is still in use today, even though we use nylon. Many flies have become famous, thanks to the fly tyers who have tied in the Catskill tradition—the Quill Gordon (or Gordon Quill) to the Light Cahill, the Hendrickson, the Red Quill, the Delaware Adams, the March Brown, and the Queen of the Waters, just to name some. Some of the flies that became famous in this area were actually adoptive sons, such as the famous Adams, which became one of Walt Dette's favorite flies, but which was actually invented out West. (*Continued in the October 2010 issue.*)

Obituaries

Edward A. Koch, Jr., 78, died Sunday, July 11, 2010, at Claremont Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, in Carlisle, PA. He was the original owner and operator of Yellow Breeches Fly Shop in Boiling Springs, PA, authored many books on fly fishing, and guided anglers on local Pennsylvania streams. He was a member of Trout Unlimited and the Pennsylvania Fly Fishing Association and a member of the United Methodist Church, York Springs. He was a U.S. Marine veteran who served during the Korean War. Memorial contributions may be made to the Pennsylvania Fly Fishing Museum Association, P.O. Box 541, Enola, PA 17025.

Gazette Classifieds

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Preston Jennings

(From Classic Trout, <http://classictrout.com/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?f=35&t=75>)