

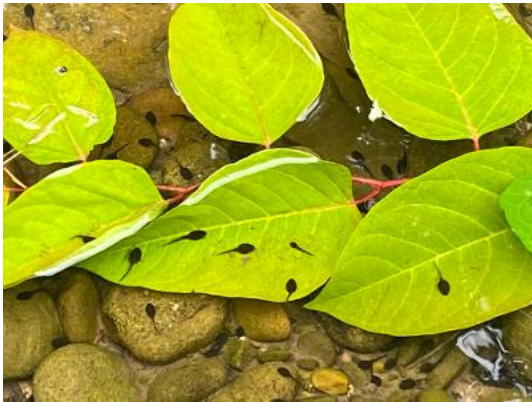


The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

Volume 25, number 4

July 2022

There is no meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild in July. Instead, we are looking for members to assist with the guild's activities at Summerfest. Please see the President's message for details.



Tadpoles, as if anticipating the color they will become, swim over submerged leaves in Willowemoc Creek.
Photo: Chuck Coronato

President's Message **By Joe Ceballos**

Summer 2022 is here, and as always, I hope this message reaches all guild members in good health, and with happy, productive fishing. As the temperatures climb, be mindful to avoid trout fishing when the water is above sixty-five degrees. Recommended options would be to consider fly fishing for warm-water species: bass, pike, and others.

One of our current officers, Nicole March, who has contributed strongly for several years and helped the guild become what it is today, will be moving away from the duties of secretary. I sincerely thank Nicole for all that she has done to bring innovation and much positive change to

the guild. I hope that members will step up and inquire about becoming the new secretary of the guild. We are also missing a treasurer, so with two officer positions vacant, the remaining officers may have to be busy with extra duties, and one possible solution would be to compensate for our loss of time by cutting back on the issuance of communications, such as the *Emerger*. We of course would like to avoid that. To offer your vital service to the guild as the new secretary, please contact me at sajefu@aol.com.

The Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum will be hosting its annual Summerfest on August 6 and 7. We've reserved a table at the event, and volunteers are requested to help the guild with demonstrating tying, membership, and helping with Kids on the Fly if needed. Please advise availability for which day you can help, and send your info to the guild email: catskillflytyersguild@gmail.com.

The June 18 in-person meeting of the guild was quite successful. The members present (more than an established quorum for voting) gave their approval to streamline the duties of the secretary position to being responsible for maintaining a current membership list and sending the guild's email to members. We had an informative open discussion regarding what makes a good Sulphur pattern, with much agreement on the effectiveness of parachute patterns. Following parachutes were upright hen-hackle



Jose Venalanzo at the vise.

wings, sparsely tied Comparaduns, and soft-hackle flies. Materials agreed upon to be the best were CDC, followed by hen hackle, and EP Trigger Point fibers. What became apparent during the discussion was the effect of weather while fishing, particularly bright sun or shade, as those variables, along with water clarity, effect a trout's visual ability to discern a pattern. Materials recommended for tying wet-fly Sulphur patterns included orange or yellow thread for bodies (preferably silk thread), or the use of dubbing for the body with light partridge feathers for hackle.

As is the case for every meeting of the guild, tying flies was the feature, and members present were dazzled by Jose Venalanzo's tying of a unique ant pattern. He generously gave out materials to tie the pattern. Chuck Coronato tied a Dette Beetle, and I wrapped up the tying portion of the meeting by showing tips on using EP Trigger Point fibers.



Esopus Creek Silver Bullet by Lois Ostapczuk

image. Well, he finally convinced me to do a watercolor of a large Esopus rainbow lying in the gravel next to a prized bamboo rod, just before the fish's release. To complete this task, I purchased silver watercolor paint—a new color for me to try. Shadows add to the composition of the painting. I submitted the *Esopus Creek Silver Bullet* to a local juried art show titled "Fresh Air," and it was accepted.

View more of Catskill artist Lois Ostapczuk's paintings by visiting:

<http://catskillwatersart.blogspot.com/2014/02/blog-post.html>

Of Mice and Mentors

This past weekend, I started splitting a twelve-foot culm of bamboo to start a new rod. It's been about eight years since I last

Esopus Creek Silver Bullet By Lois Ostapczuk

My husband, Ed, prides himself on the underwater photographs he frequently takes of trout that he's caught. Frequently, I've utilized these photos for paintings, as they make interesting subject matter. I know enough about trout to distinguish a brook from a brown from a rainbow. And I know that Ed often affectionately refers to wild Esopus Creek rainbows as "silver bullets," but I didn't fully understand his lack of underwater photographs of these fish.

The vast majority of his underwater photos are of brook and brown trout, and I've now learned that wild rainbows won't remain still long enough for him to capture a digital



pulled one out of a dip tube, and though I haven't worked with raw bamboo in that long, it surprised me how I remembered everything that I needed to remember. Rodmaking isn't especially difficult, but it is tedious, and the more effort you expend on the little things, the better the rod looks when completed.

Many old memories came back to me as I went through the early stages of preparing the culm. There are hundreds of ways to do any of the steps required to build a blank, with just as many resources available to learn them all, but I was most fortunate to learn from a Catskill guy who to this day is still making them in his cellar shop—the place that I got my start in rodmaking.

We, and when I refer to “we” I mean anyone who was anyone in the Beamoc area, still call this place the “Catskill Whitehouse.” It's called that mostly because it is in fact white, and it also is perfectly situated near everything that is good and wholesome in the area. It's right next door to the Catskill Fly Tying Center and Museum, it's across the street from the VanPut home, it's a left turn and a few minutes drive to the main street in Roscoe, or you can turn right and be in Livingston Manor even sooner. Part dwelling, part library, and part rod shop, the Catskill Whitehouse has hosted in the twenty years that I've know its owner, Mike, many authors, fly tyers, rodmakers, anglers, movie stars, and politicians as well. It's the place where I first saw bamboo split in strips, reel seats spinning on a lathe, nickel-silver tubing to make ferrules, agate guides, silk thread—everything in its pre-applied state to make bamboo fly rods.



Mike Canazon with a cane rod in front of the museum.

The day I first met Mike Canazon happened to be the very first Flyfest get together at the Reynolds House in Roscoe. It was February, and a mild, sunny day. Mike wasn't tying with us; he just stopped by to check things out. One of his good friends, Tom Mason, introduced me to him. I was invited to Mike's house after the event was over. I didn't know it then, but it was literally a life-changing visit for me.

I didn't know about the basement rod shop during that visit, or even the next few following ones. Mike was, like most rodmakers, a bit standoffish about his craft, and not real talkative about it, but he would answer any questions that I would later ask him. I like to think that he was waiting me out, to see if I was worthy of his knowledge. I did tie a mean fly, though, so we had that to talk about a lot. As time went on, I would stop there more often. In the summer, he was frequently guiding, but people would gather at the Whitehouse at night to talk about fishing, rods, flies, and anything angling related. He never locked his door, and before long I had an open invite, even to stay overnight on the couch in front of the wood-burning stove. I'd choose a book from his library, read until I couldn't keep my eyes open, and in the morning, I'd slip out like I wasn't even there.

Mike spent a lot of time at the museum. He had a key to it, which to me meant he was a God. Mike was always either spearheading anything that went on there, or he was right in the middle of it: Summerfest, the Rodmakers Gathering, dinners, fundraisers—he was involved in it all. He started getting me involved in it, too, first tying flies on Saturdays, then helping at the events. It seemed to me that the place didn't work without him.

Of all things he is to me, though, the rodmaking is what I remember most. It already seemed like an impossible thing to do, taking a golden-yellow stick of bamboo and turning it into a limber fishing tool.

He is the keeper of the old ways, preparing rod parts as they did it 100 years ago, by hand, rather than by machine. He makes ferrules in the Leonard tradition, and he replicates Leonard's tapers exquisitely. But, like many experienced makers, he makes his own tapers as well. Since I first held his 9-foot 4-weight, it has been the most enjoyable rod that I've ever cast. It's actually the one I'm making now. Mike provided me with the taper years ago, and he added a warning not to ever show it to anyone.

I'm making decent progress on this model 94, though this one is going to be a three-piece rod, not a two-piece like I cast years ago on his lawn at the Whitehouse. It's very satisfying to make your own rods, but even more satisfying when you can replicate one from a taper that was given to you from the guy who showed you how to make one in the first place. I can't wait to show it to Mike when it's done, and to tell him again how much he means to me.

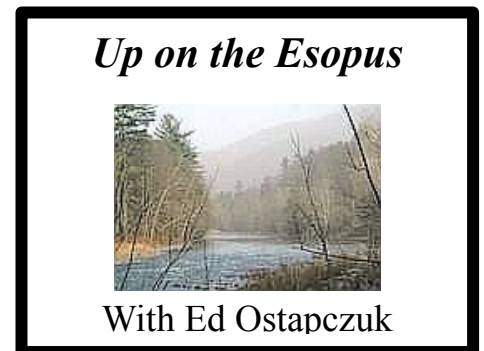
John Hoeko and Esopus Creek Recreational Water Releases

On May 28, John Hoeko received much-deserved recognition from the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum when he was honored as a Catskill Legend. John grew up in Fleischmanns, New York, and though he graduated from the University of Denver, he remained an important Catskill fixture, deeply involved in local environmental issues and our trout waters. Among other organizations, John is currently on the board of directors of the Ashokan-Pepacton Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited.



John Hoeko

But flash back to the 1970s, and John, along with the late Frank Mele, became spark plugs and leaders in a lobbying group known as Catskill Waters, formulated in July of 1975, with their regular meetings held at the legendary Antrim Lodge. Trout kills on the Esopus Creek and other stream issues downstream of New York City (NYC) Catskill reservoirs, brought together this loosely knit group of anglers, sportsmen, and others who were held together tightly by a common cause—the poor management of water releases from NYC Catskill impoundments. John Hoeko became president of Catskill Waters, and Frank Mele vice-president, while I assumed the minor role of secretary-treasurer of an ad hoc group that had no money. Ed Van Put's excellent book, *Trout Fishing in the Catskills*, recalls the battles fought and eventually won by the strong wills and leadership of Hoeko and Mele, so there's no sense recounting all of that here, but I do want to include an important quote from Ed's book: "Pete Skinner of the attorney general's office was 'invaluable to the success' of Catskill Waters yet he gave much credit to the passage of the legislation to John Hoeko, who virtually lived in the offices of legislators. 'People will never know just how much they owe John.' reported Phil Chase in his *Times Herald Record* column of August 1, 1976." Chase spoke those words weeks after water release legislation passed New York's assembly by a single vote!



For anyone interested in conservation issues, chapter twenty of Ed Van Put's aforementioned book is an excellent recounting of many critical battles won to preserve trout fishing in the Catskills.

In general, the legislation for Parts 670 (Schoharie Reservoir/Shandaken Tunnel), Parts 671 (Cannonsville, Pepacton, and Neversink Reservoirs), and Part 672 (all other NYC reservoirs) established water release standards from these reservoirs as part of the official compilation of codes, rules, and regulations of the State of New York. And while some anglers might not see these as perfect, they govern how and when NYC releases water from their reservoirs in concert with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC).

Without a doubt, Peter Skinner of the attorney general's office was a very important cog in this wheel. What Ed's book doesn't mention is that Skinner was also a kayaker with influential kayaking friends in New York City. When it initially appeared that the proposed NYS water release legislation might fail in the assembly due to heavily weighted NYC representation, Skinner involved the big city's kayaking community to weigh in on the side of anglers, which brought about more votes to the eventual slim margin of victory. However, this alliance did not come without a cost. Part 670.5 of these rules allows for up to four recreational water releases per year on the Esopus Creek between May 1 and October 31 for the purpose of kayaking, canoeing, and tubing. The requested dates for such events are submitted each year to NYS DEC's Division of Water for review and approval.

From a pure water-use viewpoint, holding these events on the Esopus Creek makes sense, because the Schoharie Reservoir/Esopus Creek/Ashokan Reservoir is a release and recapture water supply system, and NYC would not necessarily lose any of their drinking water during an event. However, the Schoharie Reservoir is the smallest of all NYC Catskill Reservoirs, with the least amount of cold water available for diversion—cold water which historically has supported the Esopus Creek wild trout fishery. Trying to create white-water events on the Esopus Creek during dry, hot summer months might not be the best use of that water from a pure environmental viewpoint. DEC's Division of

Water does review each event prior to the requested date to evaluate potential issues to the fishery, and events are sometimes cancelled if there's not enough water available. That said, Esopus Creek anglers (myself included) don't always agree with the timing and economic benefits of these releases, but let's not forget how this legislation passed by just one vote back in 1976.

For 2022, the recreational water release dates requested are: June 4–5 (already happened), July 9–10 (which has been cancelled, due to an effort to preserve cold water for the fishery), September 3–5, and October 1–2.

Once again, let us congratulate John Hoeko, to whom all Catskill trout anglers owe much.



Photo from the Phoenicia Library of Chuck Schwartz holding 216 trout from a fish kill.



The flow from the Shandaken tunnel entering Esopus Creek.
Photo: Ed Ostapczuk

The Davidson Special

By Tom Mason

Davidson's General Store has reopened in DeBruce, giving us a fine reason to remember the Davidson Special. Mahlon Davidson created this beautiful fly in the 1920s. During that time period, Mr. Davidson purchased his store from George Cooper, who was a blacksmith, storekeeper, post office keeper, maker of solid wood rods, and considered to be the first commercial fly tyer from the Catskills. Mahlon continued the tradition of the store, and it was a popular meeting place for fly fishers who wanted to know the same things that we want to know today: what's hatching, which flies to tie, and where to fish while on the Willowemoc or Mongaup Creek. He raised his own hackle: mostly reds and blue duns. The store



and the people who owned it are a part of the local legends of Catskill trout-fishing lore. Mahlon Davidson was quite successful running the store until closing it in the early 1960s. In its present form, the store occupies the exact same location as the original, and it is worth a visit to enjoy a quaint country store in a museum-type setting.

Davidson was famous for dyeing his materials with birch bark, which imparted a lovely olive hue. In my own personal collection, I have some of his fox fur and mallard flank that was treated that way. The original dressing called for fox fur dyed light green, but I left my small supply untouched and used a blend of fur dyed olive, mixed with natural cream.



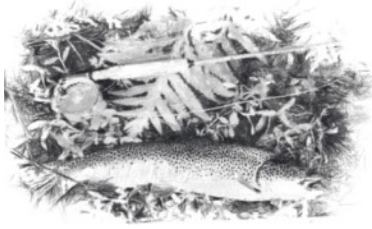
The Davidson Special

Hook: Daiichi 1180, size 12
Silk: Pearsall's gossamer, light olive
Wing: Wood duck flank
Tail: Wood duck flank
Body: Fox mixed with light olive
Hackle: Light ginger rooster



Display hanging in the Davidson General Store with flies tied by John Bonasera and Pete Leitner.

Casting Catskill Cane



With Mark Sturtevant

Remembering The Past

It is late June now, and the peak of the dry-fly fishing season has passed once again. It has been a difficult spring for those of us committed to the magic of the dry fly. High water and frequent cold fronts robbed us of the best that spring has to offer in many cases, though I expect that a few of you found moments of nirvana.

The Hendricksons have always held a special place in my heart, but the peak of the season for me has always been its grand finale: the wondrous hatch of the Eastern Green Drake. Having been initiated into “the cult of the Green Drake” three decades ago, I have seen wonderful things transpire, as well as sad, bleak moments of despair. The horrible floods between 2004 and 2006 seemed to wipe out the hatch, yet nature’s grace returned them in numbers a few seasons later.

Their return was announced to me with a miraculous day, the great drakes hatching everywhere, with huge brown trout slashing the surface all over the pool. I spent that damp, chilly afternoon taking short steps between long casts, finding control of my excitement and the discipline to cast to one trout at a time. That was not an easy thing to do given the number and ferocity of the spectacle before me. I landed a number of trophy browns that day, lost some, and missed hookups with others as I angled with my nerves in a state of hyperactivity. I was emotionally spent as the pool quieted at evening.

Long ago, I stood beside a reach of river covered with Coffin Flies and Brown Drake spinners in the last hour of daylight. The rings of rising trout glimmered as far as I could see. One step into the water shut down the rises within casting range, and each careful step farther touched the same switch. No trout came to hand that night, but the grandeur of that twin spinner fall haunts me still. All of an angler’s best memories need not be those of success!

Since retirement, my days and nights with the Green Drakes have left me wanting—dreaming of days past. The flies have been sparse when encountered at all, and I must admit that my fate may have a lot to do with my own failure to keep up with nature’s changes. Others addicted to the drug of the dry-fly fisher’s bacchanalia have told sad stories much like my own. Both nature’s cycles and man’s manipulations of the environment affect everything in the fly-fisher’s world.

In 2019, I encountered the hatch a month later than normal. I enjoyed one exciting afternoon when enough duns appeared that I braved rising water to land four gorgeous wild brown trout in excess of twenty inches. The following season, I took but two trout on Green Drake imitations, seeing the slightest handful of flies, which I believed to be the advance guard of a hatch that never materialized. One of those trout does stand out in memory. Taken on a new variation of my 100-Year Drake, it was my largest Delaware River rainbow to date, a wide-flanked, heavy brawler measuring twenty-three inches! I stalked



The much-anticipated Green Drake.
Photo: Mark Sturtevant

that trout from 100 yards away on flat water, and will never forget the sizzling runs into the backing it delivered.

I found no late hatch of Green Drakes from the 2019-year class in 2021, casting my flies to just a pair of trout that rose to the extremely sparse duns that I encountered on the rivers in early June. Though I always retain hope in nature's miraculous powers of renewal, I did not have high expectations that I would encounter the most addictive hatch in the east this season.

Still, my passion required that I design and tie a new swimming emerger last winter. I researched ancient English soft hackles, corresponding with sages Tom Mason and John Shaner. I tied the pair of patterns these gentlemen revealed to me, and combined these efforts with an inspiration for a very special crippled emerger. I believed that these four flies would tempt the most difficult trout—those that refuse the live duns!

In the past, I have fished the hatch as early as May 20, and as that date approaches each year I stalk my favorite haunts searching for the ghosts of Green Drakes past. Sadly, if there was a substantial hatch in 2022, I missed it, though certainly not for lack of effort. I felt the loss deeply, being ever more fearful that we will never see the multitudes of the great drakes that memory has recorded; there'd be none of the huge, fluttering duns lifting haltingly from the surface, nor the majestic Coffin Flies dancing over the riffles.

One evening in early June, I slipped into a quiet pool to say goodbye to the wonders of the halcyon



The author's 100-Year Coffin Fly: 2XL dry-fly hook, size 10, tails are dark pardo Coq-De-Leon, body is a natural javelina quill, wing is teal flank, hackle is Collins badger.

days of the Green Drake. I wish I could tell a tale of finding a marvelous and unexpected hatch, but such an evening was not to be. I was not left without hope as I left the water that evening, for I enjoyed some fishing, recapturing for awhile the memories of those great days in the past. The taste of that evening was bittersweet, a tale of of both gain and loss, for the drakes and Coffin Flies appeared—not many—but just enough to bring the trout on the rise.

It was not the wild, slashing abandon witnessed during those days of heavy emergences, but more the careful feeding of wild trout on the alert for danger. My 100-Year Drake was the foil, beginning with a new variation of a Coffin Fly when the first, early flight alighted upon the current after five o'clock. The first taker shed the hook at the end of its initial run. The second fish left a sweeter taste; two-foot brownies writhing in the mesh will do that. Bittersweet? Indeed, for I had the hook pull out while battling five large trout that evening.

Of course I returned the next day; I could not stay away. Rather than a four-hour mixture of spinners, then duns, each repeated after half-hour lulls in activity, the next evening's fishing was condensed into the last half hour of daylight. I landed one high flier early on a tiny Sulphur, managing three hookups in that magic half hour. Browns of good size visited my net, but the last, a leviathan, catapulted from the dark water like a missile launch and shed the hook in mid air. It was a fitting end to a brief, but rewarding adventure.

I left the river slowly that night, enjoying the serenity as all became quiet and serene, with the last heavy rises seeming to echo against the sheltering slopes of the mountains. All was still when I climbed the bank. The picture of that great trout against the backdrop of the mountains and the darkening sky will haunt my memories as long as I draw breath.

I left the river with hope in my heart; a hope still tempered with concern from a run of years featuring fewer moments like these. Three decades of thrilling hatches, of victories and defeats, may well be coming to a close. I still marvel at Mother Nature's resiliency, and I will maintain my faith that she will continue her inevitable cycles of starkness and of plenty. Next winter, I will tie new dry flies once more, seeking answers to the mysteries of our greatest hatch!



Brown trout at rest. Photo: Mark Sturtevant

Mark Sturtevant can be followed on his blog, *Bright Waters Catskills*: <https://brightwatercatskill.art.blog>

Meet Our Local Catskill Guides By Ed Walsh

Pat Crisci started fishing in his early twenties, finding solace on Westchester County reservoirs, where he fished with a spin rod for bluegills and sunfish. He had always been an avid reader of *Field & Stream*, particularly Ted Trueblood's and Ed Zern's columns on fly fishing. Seeing pictures of beautiful rainbow and brown trout caught on a fly rod piqued his interest, and after purchasing Ray Bergman's book *Trout*, he knew that fly fishing would become an obsession.



Pat Crisci

Pat wanted to learn more about our sport and was encouraged to join the Croton Watershed TU Chapter, located a short drive from his home in Peekskill. Around this same time, he purchased his first fly rod and reel: a Vince Cummings 7-foot 6-inch 5-weight rod and a Hardy light-weight reel (he still has both). He caught his first trout on a fly (a Sulphur) on the Amawalk River near his home.

Pat credits many of his TU chapter members for guiding him through the learning curve as a new fly fisher, but suggests his greatest influence came from Eric Leiser, who owned the Fly Fisherman's Bookcase in Croton-on-Hudson. He would spend hours in the shop asking questions and became a regular observer at their Thursday night fly-tying sessions.

It wasn't long before Pat purchased his first fly-tying kit and enough materials to tie the standards: Adams, Woolly Bugger, Hare's Ear, and Prince

Nymphs. He again credits Eric Leiser with teaching him the correct way to tie flies. Pat said, “Here’s a man who had written numerous books on fly fishing and tying, who had the patience to guide me into this wonderful sport. I will be forever grateful for Eric’s support.”

While he was becoming an avid fly fisher, he was also attending Manhattan College, majoring in English with a minor in special education. His first job after graduation was as a writer for the Gannett Newspaper Group. He then took a position with IBM in communications and public relations and was transferred to Raleigh, North Carolina, soon thereafter. When IBM started downsizing in 2000, Pat’s position was eliminated, and he returned to his former home territory and accepted a position as a special education teacher in the Poughkeepsie school system. He retired from teaching in 2019.

Upon relocating to Dutchess County, Pat transferred his TU membership to the Mid-Hudson Chapter and became an active participant in chapter activities. He was elected to their board of directors and became chapter president in 2015—a position he held until 2019. Pat continues to support TU and now serves as the Region III vice president for the New York Council. He works with veterans in Trout Unlimited’s Service Partnership and youngsters in their Youth Camp programs.

As his love of and skills in fly fishing grew, and with retirement nearing, Pat took a part-time position with the Orvis Fly-Fishing School in Millbrook, where he taught all aspects of our sport and guided customers on local waters. Although he enjoyed that experience, he says he jumped at the opportunity to become a guide in the Catskills on the rivers he knows and loves.

Pat and his wife, Regina, live in Lagrangeville, New York. He maintains a camper trailer at Butter Nut Grove Camp Grounds on the Beaverkill River, and spends most of his weekdays in the Catskills fishing and guiding. The only deviation from this schedule is when he umpires baseball games back in Dutchess County. I got the feeling that his love of baseball is a close second to his love of fly fishing.



Pat giving a casting lesson in downtown Roscoe.



Guiding on the upper Beaverkill

I ask each guide I interview what they might suggest to folks they works with. Pat’s response:

- Love the Catskills; there may be only a few places as beautiful.
- Learn about the various hatches you’ll encounter if you’re serious about the sport.
- Learn to read the water that you’re fishing.

One interesting point Pat shared during our conversation is that he always contacts his clients the day before he guides them. He wants to know if they have any special needs or if there are any physical limitations that would limit where they fish, and he asks what their expectations might be during the visit and time on the water.

Pat concentrates his efforts as a wade guide only. You can get in touch with him at: (845) 489-6883 or Pat.crisci@midhudsonTU.org. He can also be reached through Trout Town Flies: (607) 290-4107.

Looking Back Upstream



Ralph Graves and the Flag Fly **By Gary Moleon (with Bob Mead)**

I was thinking back on how I acquired Ralph Graves' famous Flag Fly, which is also known as Old Glory. I recall being at the guild's September 2017 meeting at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. I was sitting with Dave Brandt and "Catskill John" Bonasera, and a conversation started about—what else—flies! John mentioned that a Ralph Graves Flag Fly was for sale on eBay, so days later, when I was on that site looking for fly-tying material, I remembered our conversation, loved what I saw when I found the fly, and I purchased it from Bob Mead.

I view Ralph's Flag Fly as a sort of mascot for the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, and for it to be looked at and continually admired by only one person seems extremely selfish on my part, so I want to share the fly and Bob Mead's words with everyone. I hope this resolves some of the guilt that I feel in owning such an important Catskill fly from a beloved tyer.

Bob gave me permission to share the following letter and photos that he sent along with Ralph's Fly. I'm sure that this will bring back many memories of Ralph for those who knew him. Here is Bob's letter in its entirety:



The Ralph Graves Flag Fly:

Ralph Graves was the first to create a US flag salmon fly. Many years ago I saw one in a little dome at Poul Jorgensen's cottage. I asked Poul if he tied it. He said, "No, Ralph Graves tied it. He also makes one that has the US flag on one side and the Canadian flag on the other side. He charges \$100."

I went up to see Ralph at his Old Glory Fly Shop behind the Rockland House restaurant, went in and talked to him about making me one. Ralph was his usual self; "Not making any right now."

“Let me pay you now and just call me when it’s ready,” I said. Ralph wouldn’t take money and simply said, “When I get around to making one, I’ll let you know and you can pay me then.”

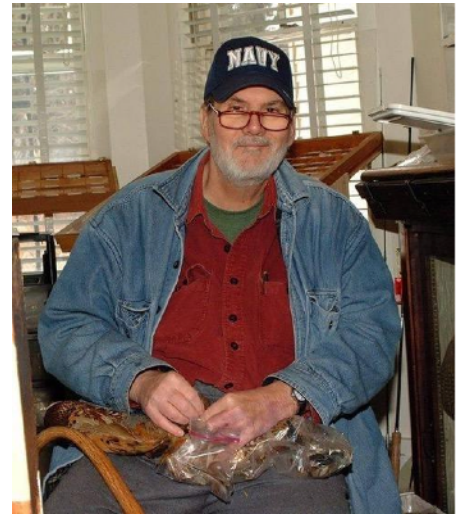
Can’t remember who wrote it, but a nice article on Ralph and his Flag Fly appeared in one of the FF magazines. It had pictures and mentioned he charged whatever the price was and that he lived in Roco. Ralph got more than a dozen letters wanting to order a fly, and some even had a check in them. I don’t know how long they sat on his fly-tying desk in his shop, but one day Judie Darbee came in the shop, saw all the letters, and asked Ralph if he had made the flies. When Ralph told her that he hadn’t, and he didn’t know if he would, Judie told him he had to reply to the letter writers and send back the checks. A couple of the dates were two months old. A month later, the letters still unanswered and still on his tying desk, Judy took it on herself to answer the letters and return the checks.

Years went by, and whenever I’d stop over at his house (he’d closed the shop) and I’d see his personal Flag Fly in the dome sitting there I’d always ask if that was the one for me. I knew it was his personal fly, but I just wanted to keep poking him in hopes one day he would actually tie one for me.

A few more years went by, and we were at a Jim Krul show at Western Connecticut University gym. Ralph was in the wheelchair he used sometimes, and he came across the aisle to where he was tying. I heard that Teresa (his wife) had cancer, and asked how she was doing. “She’s doing...” was all he said. I picked up one of my Lady Bugs and offered it to him for Teresa. “For good luck,” I said. He wouldn’t take it, saying, “She wouldn’t care about that.”

It was a little strange as I’d never had anyone turn one down. I don’t know if she had heard us from across the aisle, but Ralph wheeled back a few minutes later and said, “She would like that Lady Bug if you still got it.”

Ralph would tie with our Mayfly Club half-day free tying clinic at the Riverside Cafe (the old Silver Fox), and a couple times Teresa had brought him. She was doing pretty good with her cancer fight, and always liked to look at everyone’s flies. That late fall, she called me and told me how much Ralph liked my Mosquito, which I set in a dome on a little beveled mirror which is double-sided tapered to a nice rosewood base. She wanted to order one for Ralph for Christmas. She had seen one i had on my tying table and the little price tag. I said, “certainly,” and I’ll bring it down before Christmas as



Ralph Graves



Ralph tying at the Riverside Cafe

I don't want to mail it. The Mosquito sits on the mirror and I do not glue its feet down, it just sets there. I don't glue the dome down either.

My wife and I drove down to the Riverside Cafe for dinner a week before Christmas, ate, then drove the seven miles back to Roscoe to Ralph's house. It was dark, of course, and I rang the bell and Teresa came to the door and I gave her the already Christmas-wrapped box holding the 4 by 4 dome, base, and the fly in its separate, just-the-right-size container and quickly explained how to lift it out and just set it on the mirror. She wanted to know how much, and I said "no charge." Teresa protested, saying, "I know these are expensive." Ralph yelled from the other room, "Who's there?" Grace and I went in to visit for a while. He was in

his usual chair fussing with a fly box and half-watching TV. We chatted for a while, then explained we had a 120-mile trip back home and wanted to get on the way.

I didn't see Ralph again until spring when I went down to Roscoe to fish and stopped in to see him. Teresa, who wasn't home at the time, had been doing well with her treatments. He told me what bugs were on the water and suggested a stretch to fish. Then, as I was about to leave he said, "I have something I want to give you. But I don't want to give it to you."

"Well, don't then," I laughed.

"No," he said again. "I want to give it to you," a pause, then again, "But I don't want to give it to you."

I just stood there shaking my head. It reminded me on one early June day when I stopped into his shop to buy some Green Drakes. I picked up the eight flies that were in the little cubical, and Ralph sees that and says, "You can't take all them." I said, "Ralph, I'm buying them, not 'taking' them. he said, "If you take all them I won't have any left to sell! You can buy three!" That was Ralph, a lovable character who often said Ralphisms like that.

After yet one more, "I want to but don't want to," I say to him, "Just tell me what it is. It is the thought that counts."

He turned to a little table and picked up a small cardboard box and handed it to me. "Here," he says. It was his personal Flag Fly.

I started to say, "Ralph, I can't..." then changed what I was going to say and instead continued, "Thank you enough."

Best of regards,
Bob Mead

Book Review

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

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

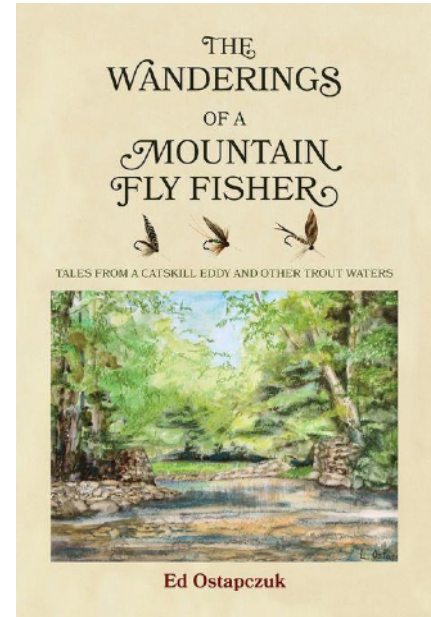
Ed Ostapczuk's second book tells stories gathered from more than fifty years of trout fishing, and there is much here that members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild and readers of the *Gazette* will find familiar, starting with the lovely watercolor painting provided by Lois Ostapczuk on the cover of the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

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

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

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

This is not one of the many "how to" books being produced for the fly-fishing market, but there's still much to learn here if you're paying attention, and the subtle lessons are presented in narrative form, rather than in the style of "do this, then do that." Stories are often the best way for learning to become



long lasting, and that's exactly what you'd expect from an author who is a former teacher. You'll pick up a lot of information on how to fish the Neversink Reservoir in the fall for huge trout, the effects of snowmelt on fish, and a wealth of knowledge regarding Esopus Creek. You'll notice that when Ed mentions the Esopus, he often refers to it as "my" Esopus. He's entwined with that river; it's a love affair that he's nurtured over the years, and this book is a product of a generation that knows how to write love letters.

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

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

—Chuck Coronato



Bob Colson, John Shaner, and Tom Mason lead a presentation regarding rare materials at the guild's Rendezvous, which took place on May 21. Approximately twenty-five people attended the annual event.



Joe Ceballos gives some pointers on fly casting to guild member Aaron Miller, who is seen here swinging a sixty-five-year-old Orvis Battenkill cane rod on the museum grounds. Aaron, who is known to tie a mean fly, was soon laying out some beautiful loops.



Please send your submissions for the *Gazette* to Chuck Coronato, at coronato3@verizon.net.



Remember to volunteer to help the guild at Summerfest.