



# The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

Volume 26, number 2

March 2023

**The next meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild is scheduled for Saturday, March 18, at 10:00 AM. This will be a virtual meeting, and Zoom links will be emailed to all members before the date.**



Here's an example of a Riffle Dun tied and photographed by Tom Mason. The Riffle Dun, originated by Walt Dette, is one of several flies that have been featured in the guild's winter tying sessions held every Thursday night. Check your email for notices and Zoom links.

## **President's Message** **By Joe Ceballos**

Here we are, less than a month away from the date that used to signify the opening of a new trout season, and I'm feeling very optimistic about the direction of the guild as I look forward to a new year of fishing, friendship, and all of the things that are special about being in the Catskills while enjoying our sport.

The guild's winter tying sessions that were started by our vice president, John Apgar, have been a great success. If you haven't been able to take the opportunity to join one of the winter tying sessions, please consider attending the next one that's coming up on March 9. We have been meeting weekly on Thursday nights since late December, and we'll be continuing this schedule until the end of March. As this has been presented as a member-driven activity, the weekly tying sessions can continue further if our membership indicates that they wish to do so.

I want to thank our guild members for their cooperation with our recent election. It's not easy to hold an election during a time of year when a face-to-face vote would be difficult to plan and implement. Because only one candidate was running for each position, we chose to do a simplified vote by email to approve the slate of candidates. This worked well, with eighty-three of our members choosing to participate and register a vote to approve the slate. As a result of the election, we have Joe Ceballos as president, John Apgar as vice president, Ed Walsh as secretary, and Chuck Coronato as editor. This year marks the thirty-year anniversary of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, and with the guild being in good shape financially, having an active membership dedicated to our mission, having a newly elected slate of officers, and with our strong connection to the Catskill region, you could understand my optimism for the guild's future.

We will have a business meeting of the guild on Saturday, March 18, at 10:00 AM. This will be a virtual meeting, optimizing the opportunity for all guild members to attend. We will have reports and

updates on membership, our financial status, and plans for future events. Look for Zoom links in your email as the date of the meeting draws near.

I want to remind everyone to renew your membership for 2023 if you haven't already done so. If you still need to renew (or if you would like to join as a new member), please do so at <https://cftg.limitedrun.com/>. If anyone prefers not to do monetary transactions via the web, and you would rather send a check to the guild for your membership, then please write a \$20.00 check that's payable to the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, and be sure to include your name and a legible email address on a separate piece of paper. Mail it to the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild, PO Box 663, Roscoe, NY, 12776. Please understand that mailed renewals require a bit more time to process, and you will continue to receive the *Gazette* and all notices from the guild via email. That is why an accurate email address is crucial.

It was great to see many of our members at Fly Fest, and I'm looking forward to seeing you at the next tying session and at our upcoming guild business meeting.

## **A DeBruce Mystery** **By Peter Leitner**

While searching with Bill Kocher through the fly-tying materials in Mahlon Davidson's attic near the banks of the Willowemoc in DeBruce, New York, we found a package of dyed, long-haired patches in a container with other fly-tying material. The dubbing appears to be angora wool. This attic previously belonged to tyer George Cooper. Therefore, questions abound. Was it George Cooper's material? Was it Mahlon's material? What do we actually know?

It has been well documented by others, especially by Ed Van Put, that George Cooper was likely the first commercial fly tyer in Sullivan County and well respected for many of his attributes by Theodore Gordon. We have some information regarding and relating to George Cooper recorded in publications from his time period:

—From the *Livingston Manor Times*, April 10, 1902: “George Cooper has opened a grocery store at DeBruce.”

—From the *Sullivan County Record*, December 3, 1903: “Last week, S Hammond of De Bruce sold to New York and Colorado parties 1,300 acres of land at DeBruce, including the tannery and acid factory flat. This property will be turned into a farm for the breeding of Angora goats. The land will be fenced in the spring and 3,000 goats brought from Colorado to stock it.”

—From the *Roscoe-Rockland Review & Sullivan County Review*, July 14, 1904: “The first installment of Angora goats for stocking Charles Ward's goat ranch arrived here last Saturday. They are innocent, harmless looking little creatures and eight in number.”

—From the *Roscoe-Rockland Review & Sullivan County Review*, September 22, 1904: “Several double decked cars with Angora goats arrived at Livingston Manor Wednesday for Mr. Ward's goat ranch at DeBruce. They are from the state of New Mexico.”

—From the *Livingston Manor Times*, September 20, 1923: “Mr. and Mrs. Mahlon Davidson of Lew Beach have bought from George Cooper his property at DeBruce and will take possession the first of October.”

—From the *Livingston Manor Times*, October 11, 1923: “Many changes have been made in the DeBruce General Store. The new manager is renovating and stocking it up.”

Based on what we understand, the goat farm did not last past the 1910s, and Charlie Ward’s brother, Robertson Ward, built the first trout hatchery on what is now the flats and ponds in front of the DeBruce Flyfishing Clubhouse around 1915 with the assistance of the Hayfords from Rangeley, Maine. The Hayfords also built the first hatchery at Hackettstown, New Jersey.

I must thank Ed Van Put, who shared notes and comments from when he was researching his books. From several letters that Theodore Gordon wrote, chronicled in John McDonald’s book, *The notes and letters of Theodore Gordon*, Ed noted:

- 1) Page 489, in a letter to Roy Steenrod dated May 26, 1914, Gordon wrote—“Will try to find time to tie some Female Beaverkills for you. It is Coopers fly.”
- 2) Page 500, in a letter to Roy Steenrod dated February 2, (presumably 1915) “Cooper never used mohair for the female Beaverkill, always wool.”
- 3) Page 520, in a letter to Roy Steenrod dated March 7, 1915, “The fly that I think Cooper took the female Beaverkill from is rather different in some respects from the imitation, but the latter kills, so it is alright.”

As material for fly tying was not always easily accessible, it is likely that Cooper was getting his raw Angora wool from Charlie Ward’s goat farm (who was also the proprietor of the old DeBruce Club Inn).

It has been well documented by others that Mahlon dyed fox belly fur in boiled willow bark to get the iridescent dubbing for his Davidson Special—but did he really do it that way? We can’t be sure if this was Mahlon’s material or material that he saved from George Cooper when Mahlon took over for him in 1923. As Mike Valla and so many before him have noted, to truly know how someone tied a fly, you need to disassemble it. With as few of the known Davidson Specials that survive, I don’t think any of us are going to take one apart anytime soon. In the photo of the material found in the attic, the gray sure looks correct to be for Cooper’s Lady Beaverkill dubbing, and the iridescent green in the photo sure resembles Mahlon’s Davidson Special. Was Mahlon really using Angora wool instead? We will never know...



Photo of the material found in the attic of Mahlon Davidson

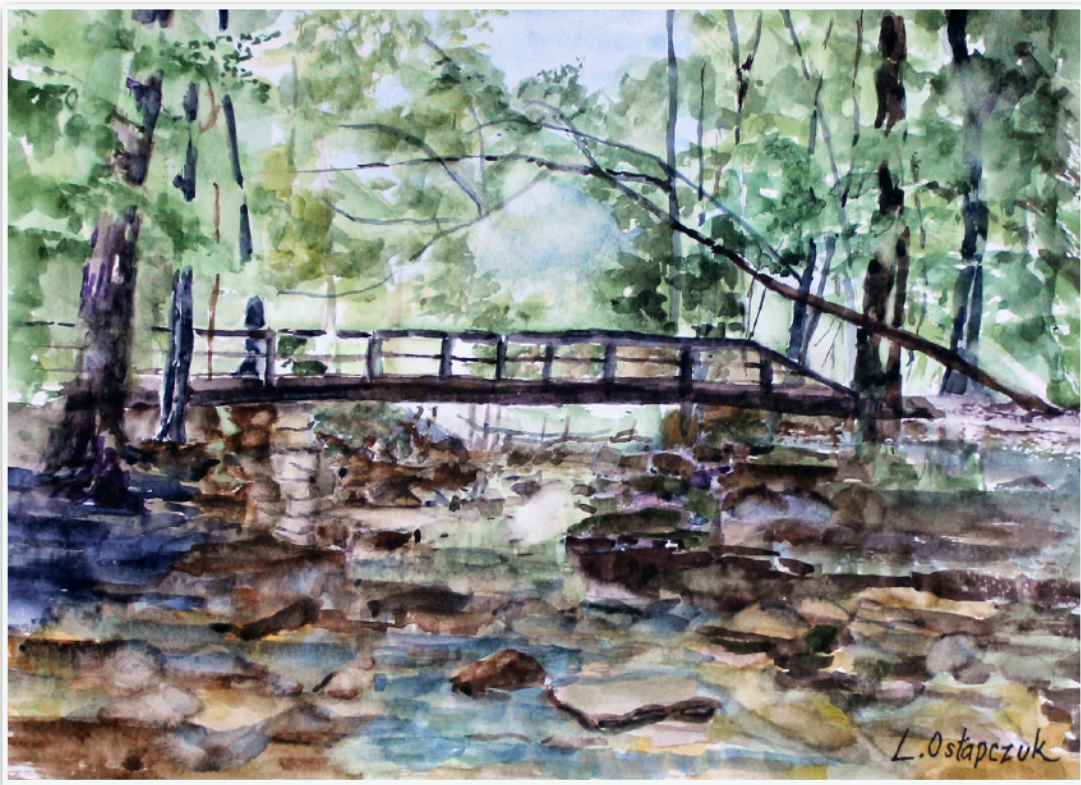


## Flugertown By Lois Ostapczuk

We relocated to New York shortly after we married. My husband used the excuse of new careers for both of us, which was true, but we did leave job opportunities back in New Jersey. Actually, it was a Charmed Circle article, in some outdoor magazine that drew us to the Catskills.

Ed is the angler in our relationship, and he is forever roaming new waters. He tells me that his “first Catskill love” was the Willowemoc—little did I know. So when he asked me to paint a primitive scene found in the Willowemoc Wild Forest, hidden along Flugertown Road, I wasn’t totally surprised.

This task was a bit of a challenge, as my hands have become increasing unsteady as I battle my illness. But perhaps that enhanced the looseness of this watercolor.



*Flugertown* by Lois Ostapczuk

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

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

*With great sadness, we have learned that Lois Ostapczuk passed away on March 2, 2023. She waged a valiant fight against cancer for well more than a year. Lois gifted us with her generosity, sharing her paintings here in the Gazette since September 2020. Our thanks go to Lois for the joy that her life brought to so many, and our heartfelt thoughts are with our friend Ed Ostapczuk and his family at this time.*

## Up on the Esopus



With Ed Ostapczuk

## Harry Murray and his Mr. Rapidan Emerger

Every now and again my *Gazette* piece wanders out of the Catskills, touching upon flies and tyers from other places. Such was the case in the November 2017 issue when I wrote about Harry Murray and his classic Mr. Rapidan dry fly. I'll try not to repeat much of that info, but I will say that I've always held Murray akin to the Adirondacks' Fran Betters. Both are distant tyers who are not widely known, but each has made significant contributions to this pastime.

I first read about Murray's Mr. Rapidan Emerger more than two decades ago in the old *The Virtual Flyshop* blog managed by *Fly Fisherman* magazine. As a small aside, nothing to do with this article, I remember when that database crashed, and I was locked out. I could no longer sign in using "Epeorus" as my handle, so I changed it to "Eperous" on all the fly-fishing websites I wandered.

In any event, I have found the Mr. Rapidan Emerger to be an effective wet fly, swung through fast, swirling Esopus Creek currents in May, when Hendricksons and March Browns are about. Typically, I fish this pattern as the point fly with a Picket Pin dropper, and they both catch trout for me.

If one Googles the Mr. Rapidan Emerger, Murray's Edinburg Fly Shop website states the following about the pattern: "I developed this Mr. Rapidan to match the emerging form of the Quill Gordon naturals, and it's the most effective fly I have found for this. Fish it upstream with a slow rod lifting motion from the riffles all the way down into the main part of the pool. I also do well with this on the large streams in Montana by fishing across stream below the riffles with a slow swimming action. The size 10 in this is a great fly for smallmouth bass on the Shenandoah River when the Hexagenia start hatching in September."

Murray eventually created a series of Mr. Rapidan patterns, representing things from aquatic and terrestrial insects to baitfish, most involving a splash of yellow somewhere on the fly.

While this pattern may have evolved slightly since I first made a copy of a printed recipe in early 2000, below is what was found on *The Virtual Flyshop*.

Hook: Mustad 3906B, size 12 to 16

Thread: 6/0 tan

Tail: Pheasant tail fibers

Rib: Copper wire

Body: Brown hare's ear dubbing

Wing case: Gray mallard

Collar: Brown speckled hen

I made minor adjustments to this, tying my emergers on size 14 and size 16 Mustad 9671 hooks, with a size 14 the preferred size. And I use Charlie Collins furnace hen neck feathers for my collar. Plus, I've always tied

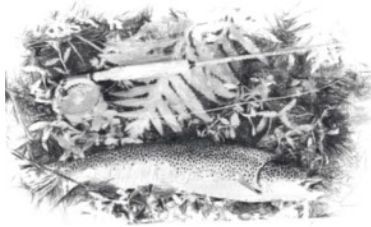


Mr. Rapidan Emerger, tied and photographed by Ed Ostapczuk

this fly as a soft-hackle, based upon the photo posted in *The Virtual Flyshop*. That said, in his book *Fish Flies: The Encyclopedia of the Fly Tier's Art*, Terry Hellekson lists a slightly modified recipe for the body, plus he sets the legs beard-style, as Murray's website does today. I prefer mine tied soft-hackle style.

As noted prior, a Mr. Rapidan Emerger is a soft-hackle wet fly of preference during May on my Esopus Creek—and that's the Catskill connection.

### *Casting Catskill Cane*



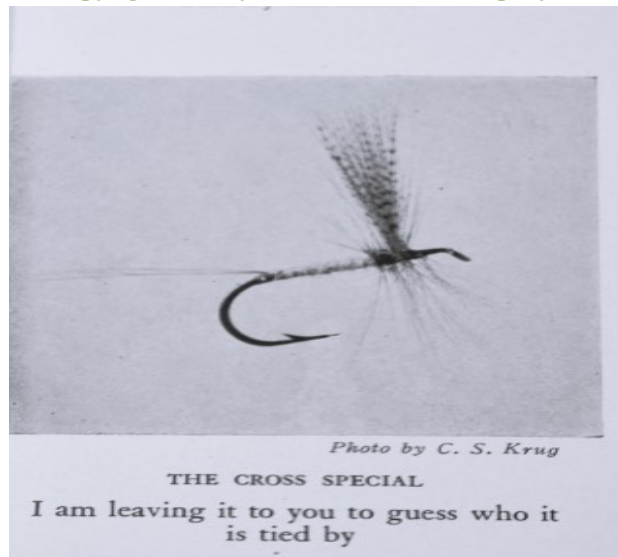
With Mark Sturtevant

### **A Question of Style**

While trying to keep my angler's mind intact through another long Catskill winter, I have welcomed the Thursday night fly-tying Zoom meetings with the guild that have been going on for a couple of months. We've attracted twenty or so tyers every week and have had a great time discussing flies and fishing and whatever comes to mind. My good friend John Apgar, the guild's new vice president, fathered the idea and has worked to make it a success. While talking about the featured fly for the first session in March, the Cross Special, we both started researching the pattern and its creator, Rueben Cross.

Though Theodore Gordon is held in high regard as the father of American dry-fly fishing here in the Catskills, it was Rube Cross who seems to have been the person who set the standard for what came to be known as the *Catskill school* of fly tying. When one looks at a Cross-tied fly, you are struck by the extreme delicacy: the flies are slender, sparsely hackled, and quite simply *ephemeral* in appearance.

**Photo of an original Cross Special from Rueben R. Cross' book, *Tying American Trout Lures* Copyright 1936 by Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc.**



The reputation of the Catskills as a trout-fishing mecca grew, and the next generation of fly tyers followed in Rube Cross's footsteps. When Cross refused Walter Dette's request to teach him to tie flies,



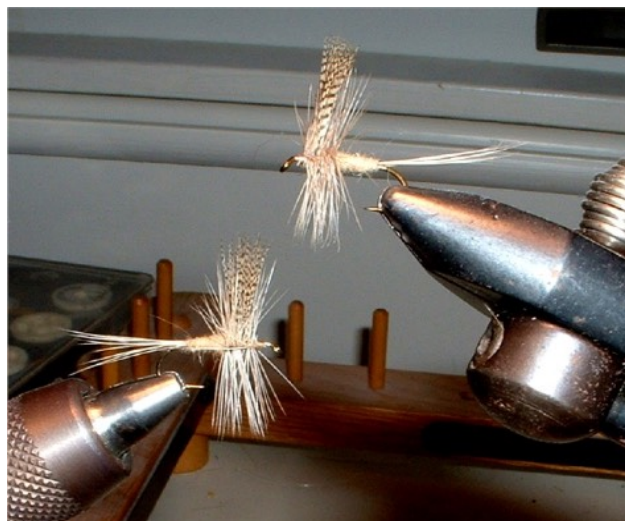
Dette used the fifty dollars that he had offered Cross for instruction, to instead buy the master's flies. Walt and his future wife, Winifred Ferdun, along with early partner Harry Darbee painstakingly disassembled those Cross flies, one wrap of silk at a time, to study their construction. The Dettos and Darbees became legends in their own right, spreading the Catskill school of fly tying further around the fly-fishing world.

Each famous fly tyer that contributed to the tradition developed their own style. Experts, such as our own Dave Catizone, can discern the origin of classic flies by carefully examining the hooks, materials, and most importantly—the tying style.

I believe that we all develop our own style of tying flies based upon our influences: the people who taught us, our own observations of trout flies and the insects on the water, and that personal something I can describe only as a group of characteristics that appeal to our eye. In learning to tie flies, I had many influences. It was the late Larry Duckwall who taught me to tie Catskill-style dry flies. Larry was taught by Elsie Darbee, though I noted that his winging technique varied from that recited in Harry Darbee's book, *Catskill Flytier*. Larry taught me his style of winging: evening the length of the fibers on a wood duck flank feather by stripping away the short ones, and then inserting the very point of the scissors to clip out the top section of the stem before folding the feather to form a single clump of fibers.

The storied Catskill fly tyers consistently tie in their hackles with the convex side of the feather facing the hook eye. The Pennsylvania group, led by the late George Harvey, tie their hackles in with the concave side facing the eye. Harvey, a man who has taught more people to tie flies than anyone else likely ever will, dubbed the hook on both sides of the fly's wings, wrapping his hackles over the top of the dubbed base. I have never seen a famous Catskill fly tyer wrap hackles over dubbing on a classic Catskill dry. They're great fly tyers all, but with differences in style.

I will be the first to maintain in any fly-tying discussion that Mary Dette's style is not only classic, but that it also produces a more beautiful fly. I splay my tails for a reason: my observations convince me the fly has better support on the water with splayed tails. My fly is hackled slightly heavier, too, because the Catskill-style flies I fish are generally reserved for riffled water and faster runs during high flows. When I want to tie a traditional Catskill dry fly, I have to consciously deviate from my established style. I learned that lesson again, just recently, while considering the Cross Special.



Two Hendricksons: my own tie on the left, and a Mary Dette fly above right. My style is to splay my tails, while Mary's have that gorgeous upsweep, complimenting the slight cant to her wings.

If you notice the body of my Hendrickson in the photo above, you will see that the diameter and taper reflects the Dette proportions, for I made many visits to the old Dette's location on Cottage Street to watch Mary tying her beautiful flies. Her friendliness and supportive comments influenced me greatly as a young fly tyer. Now look at Mary's Hendrickson, and then back to the photo of Rube Cross's Special. His style stands out for the ultra-slim dubbed body with both the wings and hackle that are tied quite sparsely. Though the Dette's learned from taking apart Cross flies, they too took what they learned during that beginning and adapted their own style based upon experience. I would take the Dette fly hands down if I was fishing a riffle, a run, or a deep pool with good current. Faced with a large trout sipping along a river's edge in flat, shallow water, I'd wager that the Cross tie would be the best choice.

I blended various colors of red fox fur to dub the body for the Cross Special for our Thursday night guild session, noting Cross's style when I looked up the pattern. I wished to honor the originator and tie his pattern as he had tied it, so I tied a couple that afternoon and then another pair at Fly Fest in Roscoe. I discovered that it can be a lot harder to mimic another tyer's style than I thought it would be.

I can see a progression in those four flies that I tied. The first fly I tied has my usual Dette influenced tapered body. I tied a second fly that's somewhat thinner, and then there are the two Fly Fest products (one is pictured to the right) where I finally got pretty close to that slender and ephemeral Cross style. Likewise, the barb count and lift to the tail ranges a little closer to the mark with each version tied. Hackle gets more sparse with each, but I still have more *stuff* on the hook than old Rube did. I guess my fingers have just gotten used to the way I do it. I will eventually get it, though.



When I tie fishing flies and my own pattern designs, I certainly tie them in my own style. When we tie for gatherings and demonstrations as guild members, I think it shows a bit of appropriate reverence to the legendary men and women who defined and refined the Catskill school if we make our best effort to honor their individual styles when we chose to tie one of their signature patterns. You might find it takes a good deal of concentration and effort as I did, but striving to honor those differing styles will make us all better fly tyers.

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

## **Cane Rods: The Builders and Collectors**

### **By Ed Walsh**

A while back, Chuck Coronato and I were talking about a new direction to take for the regular column that I write for the *Gazette*. Chuck remembered a story I had written about my not taking advantage of acquiring a number of cane rods from an uncle's estate a few years ago, and he knew that I had recently purchased my first cane beauty—a Mike Canazon 8-foot 5-weight rod—that I was falling in love with. He also knew that since moving to the Catskills nearly three years ago, I had made friends with several bamboo rod builders and many more fly fishers who collect and fish with cane rods almost exclusively. Before our discussion was over, it was agreed that cane rods would be the topic for me to pursue.



Not long after that conversation, I mentioned the decision to Mike Canazon and Tom Mason. Both suggested that I attend the Catskill Rod Makers Gathering at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum (CFFC&M). I had spent a little bit of time at the gathering over the last few years visiting with a friend from Rhode Island who attends the get-together every year, but I'd never stayed for the entire three days. Looking back, I'm glad I listened and signed up for the weekend.

The first thing I needed to do was gain some insight on the history of the event. Just as many of us would do, I turned to Google for some answers. Although there are many other gatherings of cane rod makers in the USA and Canada, I found that the Catskill group has been meeting since 1995. The first gathering was rather small, attended by fifteen to twenty cane-rod enthusiasts, but the group continued to grow. The group officially became known as the Catskill Rod Makers Gathering fifteen years ago when they relocated to the CFFC&M.

This past year, close to 100 attendees enjoyed programs and presentations that kept everyone interested and involved. Presentations covered many rod-building topics: selecting the cane, how to split and prepare bamboo, the tools and equipment you'll need to build cane rods, guide-wrapping techniques, and a wide range of experts and suppliers sharing their experiences. I especially enjoyed my conversation with Dave Serafin, owner of Anglers Bamboo Company, a supplier of the key ingredient in bamboo fly rods—Tonkin cane. Tonkin cane is a type of bamboo that comes from a specific region of China, and it is widely preferred over any other type of bamboo for rod building due to its densely packed power fibers. Dave and his son, Nicholas, were on hand with a huge load of quality bamboo sections, which are known as culms.

During the opening session, the annual Bellinger Award was presented for the gathering's rod maker of the year, which is given to the person who helps grow the tradition and passion of bamboo rod building by training the next generation of rod builders. This year's well-deserving recipient was our own Mike Canazon. Bellinger Company owner, Chet Croco, often presents this award, and he connects it to the company motto: "Quality and integrity never go out of style." Those words fit Mike Canazon like a glove. CFFC&M president, Anthony Magardino, was there to congratulate Mike on being presented this most prestigious award.

One of the more fascinating things I noticed was that many folks developed their own equipment to help make rod building a little easier. These innovators, many of them not listed on the formal agenda, were displaying their tools to interested attendees. This type of thing really underscored how knowledge for this group doesn't come only from the presenters, but is passed along through the very act of gathering.

I was really looking forward to casting many of the rods built by the attendees that were available. Throughout the weekend, there were twenty to thirty rods of various lengths and weights resting on a rack alongside the museum's Darbee and Vinciguerra Pavilion, all waiting and ready to be tested. I cast at least twenty of them. What a thrill it was to hold and cast those wonderful pieces of equipment.

Another point of interest was the annual contest called the Demarest Challenge. (So named because the Demarest family was in the business of importing high-quality Tonkin cane for rod building.) To enter this contest, you are required to build a cane rod of a predetermined length and weight that changes



Anthony Magardino and Mike Canazon



A row of bamboo rods, hand-crafted by folks at the gathering, lined up and ready for casting.

each year (a 9-foot 6-weight in this case). The rods are tested by a team of certified fly-casting instructors and scored based on their achieved casting length and accuracy. There were nineteen rods entered in this contest, and the instructors told me that was the highest number ever entered since this challenge was adopted.

To me, this was a weekend well spent. The people at the gathering were not only presenters and attendees, but also good friends sitting around sharing ideas and experiences. Walking through the parking area, you would often find folks casting a rod that a friend had built, and there was much conversation about the process of building it. There was always a free and open exchange of ideas, and the pride displayed was obvious. I came away knowing that I had learned much about this wonderful craft and the people who call cane rod building a passion.

Also on display during the weekend, was that these folks know how to have fun! There was plenty of good food, some terrific homemade beer provided by the “Maine Guys,” and entertainment by some of the people we all know. The threesome of Gerry Vickers, Chuck Coronato, and Tony DiCicco played requests on Friday and Saturday evenings, and they were good. We listened to songs—from Dylan to the Grateful Dead—with some Kingston Trio thrown in. As always, Dave Fritch did an outstanding job with his famous barbecue, and some interesting stories were shared as we all sat around enjoying the evening festivities.

What I hope to do with this experience, is to write a series of columns for the *Gazette* that will introduce our guild members to the many local and regional crafters who build cane rods. Some will be folks who’ve built many rods and can be called professionals, while others have built a few in their spare time. One thing I will say about all the people I’ve already talked to and who will appear in this column, is that they are all very passionate about building, talking about, and fishing with their creations. I’ll also include some of the fine folks I’ve met who are cane-rod collectors. Their knowledge of the outstanding builders of the past needs to be included in any discussion about the wonderful works of art that the masters of bamboo rods designed. I can’t wait to get deeper into this fascinating world.



No, not Crosby, Stills, and Nash—but close!



At left: Cane distributor Dave Serafin and his son, Nicholas, with some culms.



At right: Frank Payne demonstrates and explains some of the many tools needed to build bamboo fly rods.

## Announcements of Interest

### **Bamboo Rod Building with Mike Canazon:**

Mike Canazon will be teaching the art of making bamboo fly rods at the CFFC&M. The instruction will be in a small group, hands on, and intensive. As of now, there are a few spots remaining in the April class. More information is available here: [Bamboo Rod Building at CFFC&M](#)

### **The Anglers Reunion Dinner:**

Please spread the word—The Anglers Reunion Dinner will be on Friday, March 31, 2023, at the Rockland House in Roscoe, New York. The cost is \$36.00 per person. The social hour begins at 5:00 PM and dinner starts at 6:00 PM. Call 607-498-4240 for reservations as soon as possible.

—Judie DV Smith

### **Annual Angler's Market:**

Judie DV Smith also reminds everyone that the 11th Annual Angler's Market will be held on Saturday, May 27, 2023, at the Community Hall near the firehouse in Roscoe, New York. The hours will be from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Everyone is welcome! Tables are available for \$15.00 each and may be shared. If you have some items that you no longer need or want, this is a good way to get rid of them. Contact Manny Zanger at [beamoc@hvc.rr.com](mailto:beamoc@hvc.rr.com) or 607-498-5464 for a table or two and for any information.

### **The Fly Fishing Film Tour (F3T) is Coming To Town:**

The Fly Fishing Film Tour (F3T) is coming to the Catskill Fly Fishing Museum and Center (CFFCM) on Friday, April 14. For those unfamiliar with the F3T, it's a traveling roadshow of the best fly fishing short films in the world, featuring some of the most unique destinations and personalities in the world of fly fishing. Aside from the movie, the evening will have additional features: a live emcee, food and drinks, a raffle and door prizes from premium sponsors and local fly shops, and more. All proceeds from this fun evening will benefit the CFFC&M. So mark your calendar and get ready to kick back, drink your beverage of choice, and enjoy the cinematography that will get you fired up for the season ahead. The social hour begins at 5:30 PM, and the movie starts at 6:30 PM. Here is a link to the movie trailer: <https://flyfilmtour.com/trailers/2023-f3t-stoke-reel/>

You can purchase tickets on the CFFC&M website: <https://cffcm.com/eventscalendar>

—Don Borelli



Please write for the *Gazette*! This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Our many thanks go to our regular contributors who faithfully write, and there is also plenty of space for additional members to add their musings to these pages. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor's discretion. Your articles, cartoons, paintings, photographs, reports of information, and bits of whatever else is interesting and fun are vital to this newsletter. Send submissions to Chuck Coronato, [coronato3@verizon.net](mailto:coronato3@verizon.net) or 412 Highland Avenue, Wyckoff, New Jersey 07481 (201) 723-6230.