



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild *Gazette*

Volume 26, number 6

November 2023

The next meeting of the the guild will be the start of our winter tying meetings, on Thursday, November 30, at 7:00 PM. Look for more details on page number two of this *Gazette*.



Harry Darbee's Spate Fly, tied by Bob Colson. Go to page thirteen of this issue for Bob's thoughtful article on the development of Catskill Salmon flies.

President's Message **By Joe Ceballos**

It's the middle of November, and many of us may put our fly rods away and reflect on the past season's fishing successes or failures, but we always keep our tying vises ready and contemplate flies that worked, as well as those that did not do what we'd hoped. It might be a bit soon to think about next year, but the guild has recently been a presence at the International Fly Tying Symposium, and we will be starting our winter tying sessions on Zoom with the first session on Thursday, November 30. Before you know it, the guild will be at the Edison Fly Fishing Show in January, it will be a new year, we'll eagerly anticipate our early spring fishing, and the cycle and seasons of our special sport will continue.

Just like me, I'm sure that there are others who will still fish when the weather permits for a while longer, as there still can be fairly good fishing to be had if you carefully pick your spots. As mentioned in the past, to those who still go to the water and wade, always be on the lookout for trout redds. We limit our future fishing if we carelessly damage spawning areas.

For those who missed the last meeting—it was quite good—maybe one of the best. The meeting drew a large crowd, and centered around the question of whether or not the color of flies that we fish matters. The consensus for the most part was that the color does not matter much. A brief takeaway was that considering colors that fall into the general categories of light, medium, and dark has its place. The meeting was recorded and will be made available at a much later date, giving everyone the opportunity to hear the excellent discussion in depth. In the future, we hope to address all aspects of flies with regards to light and weather, in the hope of gaining a better understanding of how those factors effect our flies while fishing. At the conclusion of the meeting, we all had a fine lunch of sandwiches, side salads, and dessert. Judy Van Put's wonderful tortellini salad alone would've been reason enough to make the drive worthwhile. It was a fitting way to put a wrap on our in-person meetings until they resume in 2024.

Winter Tying and Guild Hats

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild will resume winter fly tying nights starting on Thursday, November 30, at 7:00 PM. These winter tying sessions are informal, with members tying flies of their choice and chatting about whatever comes up. Zoom links to access the meeting will be sent via email to all guild members. Whether or not you choose to tie, all guild members are invited to attend.

We haven't had an official November meeting of the guild due to the Catskill Fly Tyers Roundtable and International Fly Tying Symposium. Therefore, at the start of the meeting on November 30, we'll have a very brief official meeting to update members on a few happenings and to listen to any questions that people want to bring up. One order of business is that we need to reorder a supply of guild hats. We have found a vendor to make a very nice all-cotton-twill hat (no mesh in the back) that will feature our familiar logo of the beakless chicken. The words "Since 1993" will be written across the back of the hat's adjustment band to recall the guild's beginning. The vendor's price is good, and we'll be able to offer what is surely an improved hat at our current price of \$15.00 when purchased in person. Our bylaws state that expenditures exceeding \$500.00 must be approved by the majority of members present at a guild meeting, so we will be asking attendees to approve the money needed to place the hat order.

Our tying meetings were very popular last winter, and we are looking forward to the start of what should be many rewarding sessions.

The Guild's Lunch and Meeting

On October 21, the guild had a very well-attended meeting in the Wulff Gallery of the CFFCM. As mentioned in this issue's President's Message, the theme was a discussion on the aspects of color, and whether the color of your flies changes their effectiveness. The discussion explored the many factors to consider regarding questions about color: light, translucence, weather, water clarity. There was excellent participation and interchanges between our members and the panel leading the discussion. Thank you to everyone who attended. After the meeting, we had lunch in the Wulff Gallery and stayed until nearly 3:00 pm. The indoor lunch was planned to replace the guild picnic that had to be cancelled due to weather conditions. We'll be sure to have next year's picnic scheduled for a much earlier date, so if weather cancels us again, we'll have plenty of warm days remaining on the calendar to schedule a rain date and enjoy a true picnic.



Guild members at the meeting



Ed Van Put and John Shaner sharing their perspectives.

Kelly Galloup and the Yellow Madonna

Back in the 1960s, as a teenage wannabe flyfisher, Art Flick's *Streamside Guide* and Ernest Schwiebert's *Matching the Hatch* were my piscatorial bibles. And of course, who can forget a real classic, Ray Bergman's *Trout*. I must have read those three books many times over, especially *Trout*. I was plain thirsty for knowledge on how and where to fish flies, and *Trout* provided more information than just matching a hatch. And I needed all the help that I could get, since my best cast back then was a tailing loop. I mostly fished dry flies, wets, and nymphs, but streamers always fascinated me. Often, the largest trout I observed caught was taken by a skilled minnow angler. I always wanted to fish streamers and bucktails, and was especially inspired by words that Bergman used regarding these flies: "I am somewhat surprised to note how many anglers have the idea that flies of this type are adaptable only in the case of high and discolored water or in the early season before good fly fishing starts. As a matter of fact, frequently they produce during low and clear water conditions, and there is hardly a day's fishing that can't be made a bit better because of the wise use of such flies in some particularly baffling situation." But I never really fully accepted this sound advice.

The favorite color for a streamer that you'll find most often attached to my tippet these days is black: either a size 10 Black Leech or a black size 8 Cone-head Woolly Bugger. But there's a major caveat to this bold statement. Sometime back in the mid-seventies, while representing my TU chapter at a New York State Council meeting in Plattsburgh, the late Bruce Handley told me that yellow was a great color in autumn for brown trout and landlock salmon fishing. That always stuck with me, especially given my many autumn Adirondack outings on Thirteenth Lake, watching our oldest son catch big fish after big fish on his Mickey Finn with its wing of yellow and red, while I practiced casting with my Gray Ghost. I've come to believe that the color yellow just aggravates, really provoking big browns come those short days of autumn.

However, I never truly embraced long flies until reading *Modern Streamers for Trophy Trout* by Kelly Galloup and Bob Linsenman. That read was a game-changer for me. I liked everything about the book, highlighting many sentences of particular note. When discussing effective patterns, the authors grouped their streamers into four categories, including a Muddler group, baitfish and original streamers, leeches and crayfish, and attractor flies. They noted that attractors do not imitate a specific food source. When queried why fish response to attractors, the authors replied, "We do not know... what we do know is that big trout respond to one or more of the components of attractors."

One of the streamers included in their attractor series was a Madonna, but I'm not sure who was the creator of this pattern. The authors wrote, "This fly is an absolute must-have pattern." That caught my eye! In addition, they noted, "The Madonna, with its dual swimming tails, has a wild, erratic motion." Yellow was one of their colors of choice, which supported some prior thoughts of mine on this matter. And finally, the authors ended this section of the book with the following: "Our measured opinion is that a big trout takes a streamer in response to one of two triggers—either territorial aggression (defense) or hunger. A pattern's built-in action, color, shape, and size all play a part in pulling the trigger."

Since reading this book, come autumn, a Yellow Madonna is a standard pattern in my streamer box. But I find it serves me best in low-light conditions. Brown trout will often explode off the bottom to

Up on the Esopus



With Ed Ostapczuk

attack this fly. Typically, I either have a very good day fishing it, or hardly ever move a trout—the fish let me know quickly how it’s going to be. In his book, *Favorite Flies for The Catskills*, Mike Valla was gracious enough to include my submission of this pattern among those listed.

I tie my Madonnas in one size only, on a size 6 hook. When fishing a Yellow Madonna, I chuck it as far as I can and stripped it back to me as fast as I can. Thus, it’s fished high in the water column with an erratic motion. Noted above, normally I only utilize this pattern in October and November fishing for Ashokan Reservoir spawning-run brown trout in Esopus Creek. However, late season it also served me well on other Catskill waters: the Willowemoc, Beaverkill, and East Branch Delaware, but Neversink tailwater browns seem to be offended by its presence. When conditions are right, I’ve caught more large browns during October and November on a Madonna than any other two flies combined. There’s been many a year, when my last trout of the season tasted a Yellow Madonna.

Yellow Madonna

Hook: Size 6 Mustad 9575

Thread: Black

Body: Gold mylar

Underwing: Three strands of pearl Flashabou, extended slightly beyond the wing

Wing: Fluorescent-yellow rabbit strip

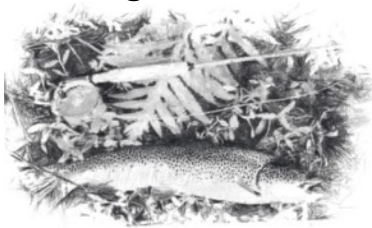
Collar: Deer hair

Head: Deer hair clipped Muddler Minnow style



When you tie this streamer, it is important to use a razor to cut the rabbit strip from beneath the hide, creating a tapered-tail appearance. Do not cut the rabbit strip’s fluffy fur; plus, make your cut about one quarter of an inch from the hook bend. Any longer than this will cause issues when fishing the streamer, because a longer rabbit strip will often wrap about the hook. I’ve also read about a cone-head version of this pattern, but that is not how I tie it, nor was that option referenced in the 1999 version of the Galloup and Linsenman book. The authors did suggest when tying this streamer on hooks larger than a size 6 to use two rabbit strips, instead of a single one as noted in the pattern above.

Casting Catskill Cane



With Mark Sturtevant

Essence of A Season

It is past mid-October as I write this, nigh upon the end of my fifth full Catskill season since retirement. Often, during my working years, I expressed my dream of fishing one full season here upon the rivers of my heart. I have been blessed to continue and to enjoy this life longer than I expected, and now look forward to each new season with bliss. The guild has become a cherished part of my fly-fishing life in these mountains, and I appreciate the chance to share it with you.

The end of a dry-fly season on our beautiful rivers is always a time of mixed emotions for me. There is a sense of melancholy, as well as a celebratory feeling, because my passion for the dry fly is so strong that I would fish the entire year if nature permitted. There is a special energy as I head out to the river at this time of year, and I catch myself watching the fallen leaves fly from the roadway in my rearview mirror with childlike joy. This season is coming to a close—and what of next year? I will have five months of winter to ponder that question.

Spring came early in 2023; at least it most certainly felt like spring. I found myself on the river on the first day of that season, and felt the March air warm to sixty degrees, though no trout showed themselves to join the celebration. I begin searching for mayflies and rising trout during the second week of April each year. Encountering another sixty-degree day, I wandered the lower Beaver Kill with my eight-foot Leonard rod and a freshly tied Catskill Quill Gordon dry fly. I found three trout rising and took them all; the best being a muscular brown of good length. Truly, the Catskill anglers' spring had arrived!

I continued like a whirlwind, fishing ten days straight as daily temperatures soared into the seventies and beyond, though I did not find another rising trout to catch until the fifteenth of the month. How can spring stutter despite steadily warming rivers? Well, Mother Nature can do what she will, now can't she? It was seventy-five degrees on April 16, then dropped to forty-three degrees on the eighteenth, and the hatches that had begun fitfully were stopped cold.

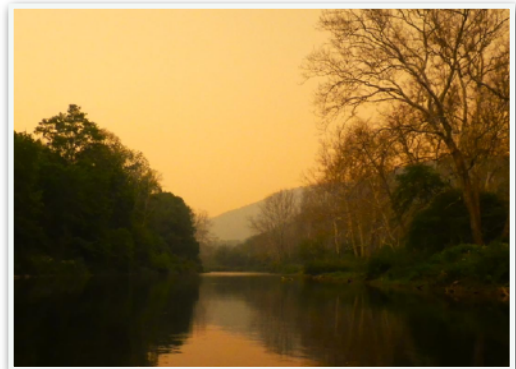
The Hendricksons eventually brought springtime in earnest, though my best catch during that spree took a little olive 100-Year Dun. That brown taped just more than twenty-four inches as it graced my Dennis Menscer fly rod with a terrific battle in a fast run.

After the bounty of the Hendricksons, I found the hatches to be rather lean for another season. Yes, there were Blue Quills and March Browns, Olives and Sulfurs, and a few Green Drakes, but none nearly so heavy as thirty years of memory recalls. There was one epic evening with a handful of Drakes, and a brown whose dimensions became a personal record, leaving me shaking in the evening air as I slipped it from the meshes of my net. It was a fitting finale for spring.

Another Catskill summer, my favorite season for stalking trout, lasted forever it seemed. I ventured forth with a lovely old classic, the Mills Standard version of Leonard's 50 DF. When friend Dennis Menscer showed me his gorgeous restoration, I simply had to have it, and it was, after all, my birthday! The smooth and delicate old rod found perfection with a four-weight line, and brought some heavy browns to my trembling hands.

Summer brought spells of low, clear water as it always does, featuring angling with light-line rods, long, fine leaders, and sparse little flies. Just when it seemed that drought was upon us, high summer brought frequent rain storms that kept me changing tactics and locales. Perhaps the strangest days were those when Canada was burning, and northwest winds sent the smoke our way. Those fiery afternoons on the river were surreal, with heavy smoke in the air and a deep orange glow in its haze.

I savored the last draughts of endless summer wistfully as always, and welcomed autumn by fishing Isonychia hatches with 100-Year Duns. There is a spark in memory for one bruiser brownie. He powered



Haze and orange glow from Canadian wildfires

straight down to the boulders when he felt the steel and cut my tippet like a spider's web. I returned two days later with vengeance in my heart, making one cast to his lie to elicit an explosion of spray. This time, the tackle held and I won the day.

October has been spare, while in most seasons I have enjoyed some truly thrilling angling right up to the end of dry-fly days. I still search for those subtle rises in the hidden reaches, the ones that cause me to quiver with excitement as I check my tippet and work stealthily into position. My belief is that the larger browns took advantage of the first chill of late September to head to their spawning sites, and to my eyes they have not returned.

Mid-October has evaporated, and I write this just days away from Halloween. The fish I live to battle have still eluded me. They are somewhere, though not in the haunts where I am wont to find them. In the middle of a late run of warm days, the theme of this spare October continues. Dry-fly season has ended right under my searching gaze.

The long chill of winter awaits, complete with plenty of time at the bench. It is a time I use to experiment with ideas and concepts to enhance the effectiveness of my dry flies, to keep my mind fresh, and the fire lit upon the long journey to springtime. Guild activities will be highlights as always: November's Roundtable, February's Fly Fest, and our evenings at our vises on Zoom. Before we know it, we will gather for the Angler's Reunion Dinner at the Rockland House to begin another season.



On The Delaware
Photo courtesy of Dr. Andrew Borya

Five Catskill seasons lie behind me, with no two the same. Nature brings endless variety, and I witness new things each year. I examined a pale, tannish *Isonychia* late this summer, blended some dubbing to craft a 100-Year Dun, and enjoyed a banner day. There are more of nature's puzzles to explore. I want to explore new patterns following the late John Atherton's theme, thrilled by this past spring's success with my A.I. (Atherton Inspired) Hendrickson. Perhaps my 2024 will be the year of the "buggy" fly.

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

Family Treasures By George Wilkinson

Looking Back Upstream



My Aunt Mary, whose maiden name was Wilkinson, was married to my Uncle Charlie. Aunt Mary was my father's sister and the youngest child he grew up with. Aunt Mary and Uncle Charlie lived in Montgomery, New York, right on the boarder of Montgomery and Walden, in a house with twenty-eight acres of property that went all the way down to the Wallkill River. I remember being an usher at their wedding when I was sixteen years old.

Aunt Mary was an excellent cook, and pies were her specialty. She'd routinely ask what she could make for family gatherings, and I always requested pie, of which she'd lovingly make three or four delicious ones to the delight of everyone at the table. During one holiday celebration, I put one of Aunt Mary's pies on a stack of my son's record albums. The albums shifted a bit, and the pie was a casualty. My brother-in-law Steve asked in a panicked voice if it was her banana cream that we'd lost. I seem to recall that he loved her banana cream so much that he had tears in his eyes as he asked that question. I consoled him with the fact that it was a lemon meringue that bit the dust (not that her lemon meringue wasn't also great), and he exhaled a great sigh of relief.

Lest you get the impression from her cooking skills that Aunt Mary was a stereotypical, domesticated woman from the middle of the last century, you should know that she was actually a very free-spirited character. She was a music major with a masters degree who taught music and brought the gift of song to students and many a family event. Once, on a vacation with a group in the Swiss Alps, she got into a snowball fight with a pack of youngsters who were a fraction of her age. In the ensuing barrage of snowballs, she nearly struck a nun, who quickly dressed her down for actions unbecoming "a woman of her age." I think Aunt Mary was proud to not act like a woman of her age. She was seventy years old at that point, but she was always youthful, full of fun, and would tell risqué jokes whenever the spirit moved her. That spunk served her well and kept her determined to live on her own, long after Uncle Charlie passed. She loved going to casinos, playing bridge, and golfed into her eighties. She was a live wire who was always at the center of good times.

When aunt Mary reached her early nineties, she needed more help, especially with transportation when her driver's license was taken away. She loved to drive, so when she moved into an assisted living facility, I'd pick her up in my red sports car, and we'd ride with the top down and take curvy roads in the mountains. She loved it!

Aunt Marry passed away at age ninety-five. I was the executor of her will, and it became my job to square away and clean out her house that had an accumulation of more than sixty years of treasures—and other assorted junk.

On one such visit to her attic, I found an old Chubb bamboo fly rod that my research dates as being from the 1920s, and later a wet-fly book of flies tied on snelled hooks. This made sense, as Uncle Charlie's uncle was an angler and likely passed on some equipment to him, which Uncle Charlie didn't use, but stowed away in the house.

The last place that I was cleaning was the basement, and I came upon a dark metal box on the workbench. I moved the latch, expecting to find screws, nails, or other such hardware bits. When I opened the box, I saw the name Wm. Mills & Son written on the inside cover of the box. That certainly



caught my eye. I went through the contained items very carefully. I first found a fly reel—an automatic Martin reel with patent date 1923. When I pushed the activation button, the reel spun! I'd released some energy that had likely been wound into that reel more than eighty years ago. I found a permission card dated July 1941 to fish a landowner's private property, and the box also contained gut leaders, and a wealth of old flies. There were many flies, likely purchased from William Mills & Son, several tied in the style of the then popular Fan-wing Coachman, plus a few parachute

patterns that I was surprised to see in such an old collection. The parachute flies were particularly interesting, as they didn't have the type of parachute post that we've come to expect on that style, but instead had the hackle wound around an upright *metal post*. The hooks used were specially designed for parachute patterns and had that metal post built in. I was later informed that these early versions of parachutes were marketed as "gyro flies" by William Mills & Son in the 1930s. It was clear that this box was a valued family keepsake, and also an education and peek into a bygone era of angling.



I've long been attending the gathering of bamboo rod builders who meet every year at the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. I took the box and its contents with me to see if anyone had any other comments about the flies, and showed it all to John Bonasera. He immediately fell in love with the box. John got back to me with an online photo showing that the box was the exact kind that Theodore Gordon owned.

It's sure nice to have this keepsake from my family. It's as if my aunt and uncle stowed it away as a connection to the past, knowing that someday there'd be someone who will appreciate its meaning. Open those old boxes carefully, folks. There's often treasure in there, with voices from past generations telling us their story.



A Fan-wing Coachman. Tails on all of the boxed flies seemed rather short.



Early version of a parachute pattern. Look closely to see the top of the metal post.



With “Catskill John” Bonasera

Revisiting Travel Kits

It happened quite by chance. Wandering the grounds during the Catskill Rod Makers Gathering, I walked by the open hatchback of another attendee’s car and saw a well-worn steel tackle box. I was fortunate that the attendee is a close friend of Chuck Coronato, so I could get the full history on it.

The box was old. The original finish was faded and worn, like a car in the back row of a salvage yard: forgotten and weathered. After striking up a conversation with George, the owner of the box, he informed me that it was rescued from the basement of his aunt’s house. He was very willing to let me look through it, as it held some antique treasures that haven’t seen daylight in a really long time. I fumbled with the sticky latch for a moment, when George, seeing my inability to open it, deftly popped it open for me. The inside as expected was in much better condition—almost new, in fact. It was breathtakingly well designed, with clever latches that held swinging doors and compartments in different configurations to hold the odd-sized trinkets that we as fishers carry on trips. But when I saw the stenciled logo of Wm. Mills & Son-makers-New York, I was in shock. This box wasn’t just old, it was ancient!

George let me take a few photos of it. Looking back afterward, I wished I’d done an hour photo shoot of the box. But I did get enough good angles to give me an idea of the way it was made and assembled, and its appropriate size. My goal was to try to reproduce one, but first I wanted to do a bit of research on it.

There were only a couple of pictures of the same box online. The interesting part was that one had sold at auction some time ago that belonged to Theodore Gordon. That likely put the age of George’s box to be more than 100 years old, I surmised, because even if Gordon bought his right before he died, that would have been in the very early 1900s. Another clue as to the age was that the box was not riveted, crimped, or welded together, but rather it was leaded together. Using lead to assemble boxes is a slow, labor-intensive process, compared to stamping and spot welding. It’s also classier, as there aren’t any seams or edges to be seen or touched. It was trimmed in brass, and striped with red and gold to give it a very handsome, elegant look.

I acquired the materials that I needed to get started in an attempt to reproduce this gem, as I knew the likelihood of me finding one on eBay was not good. I bought sheets of .022 flat steel, rolls of lead, acid, and brass tubing of 3/16s in various lengths. After a couple of weeks of on-and-off time in the shop cutting, shaping, bending, and leading together the bottom and top halves, I made all the trim pieces and a simple latch to keep the box closed, a handle for carrying it around, and then got started on the internal parts. Hinges, dividers, doors, and trays were made and fitted, leaded fast, and checked for fit, and when I was satisfied with it, everything got a good scrubbing with soap and water to rid it of acid residue.

While the Mills box was likely japanned—a type of finish that originated as a European imitation of East Asian lacquerwork—I opted to paint mine gloss black. Honestly, I was so excited to get this project completed, that I didn’t want to delay it to learn a new craft





of applying japanning solution to metal. I may try this in the future if I make another box, but the oil paint is both easy to purchase and gives great results in a much shorter time. I bought a can of gold and red also, to do the striping.

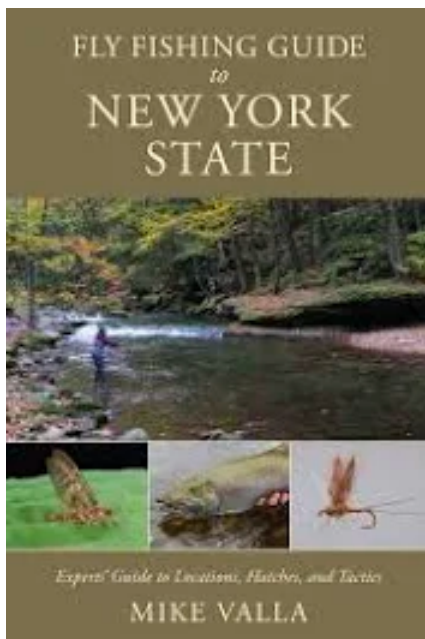
My previous tying kit has logged thousands of miles in my vehicles over time, as I've been using the same one for around fifteen years. This steel one is a little smaller, and that works out well for me, because I find that I really don't make that many flies when I attend the events where we tie flies. With this box, I spend less time searching for things and, I can organize it easier, as it's all in a smaller space. It also has a bit more class, and I enjoy using something made entirely from raw materials.

I'll still keep my eyes open for a genuine Mills tackle box, but for now, I'm getting some real enjoyment using this new one that's made to look old.

Book Review

Fly Fishing Guide to New York State: Experts' Guide to Locations, Hatches, and Tactics

By Mike Valla. Published by Stackpole Books, 2023; \$39.95 paperback.



A fishing guide that provides a good representation of the expanse of fresh-water fishing opportunities in a state as large and varied as New York is an ambitious undertaking, and in his latest book, Mike Valla shows that he is up to the task. Valla's *Fly Fishing Guide to New York State* is a first-hand account of visiting and fishing every waterway that is included in his guide, comprising nine regions of New York State, plus a section on warm-water fly fishing. You'll find detailed directions to each location, what to expect when you get there, which hatches you'll likely encounter, recommended fly patterns, and snips of historical context and points of interest written in the clean prose and personal narration that we've all come to expect from Mike Valla.

The nine regions covered are mainly geographically based, but also seem to be chosen to highlight the unique fisheries that each region offers. For example, you may not think of Great Lakes Tributaries as a geographical region, but Valla includes that as one of the nine to highlight the special opportunities, mainly steelhead fishing, that exist in that region. You'll get an extensive listing and exploration of brook trout ponds in the Adirondack/Saint Lawrence region, a rundown on the fisheries of New York City Watershed properties in Westchester County, and an exploration of the spring-creek fishing available on Long Island. Each region is subdivided into smaller categories to help you organize the fisheries.

Along with the formidable amount of written information presented, the book is a feast for the eyes, with barely a few pages going by without color photos capturing images of waterways, landscapes, fish, flies, historical markers, and of course, practitioners of the long rod working the water. Mike's wife, Valerie, deserves much of the credit in this area, as she is the photographer for more than seventy of the photographs. In addition, there are several black and white photos that give us glimpses into Mike's earlier years as a Cornell Fisheries major.

This is a Mike Valla book, so you're going to see a lot of flies—flies tied by people who fish these waters. It would be understandable if a tyer of Mike's skill level chose to tie all of the patterns in the book, but instead, he made the more interesting choice of tapping into the vast network of fly tyers he's come to know over the years—a nice nod to the joys of relationships formed in our sport—to bring us the patterns that these tyers use for their favorite waters, tied the way they tie them. You'll find many unique patterns with names that many of us have likely not heard: the Woodruff (a Catskills pattern from the 1920s), the Genny, Tom Daly's Kurland Midge, Ed Ostapczuk's Elk Hair Stonefly, Ralph Graves's Big Fish Fly, Ted Patlen's Fluffy Nymph Emerger Thingy, the Yellow-spotted Salamander, the Missoulian Spook Muddler, the Dynamite Harry, and many others that will pique your curiosity and get your tying juices flowing.

This book is a modern guide, but it contains something special in my eyes that also make it a throwback to a bygone era—directions! Giving good, solid directions seems to be becoming a lost skill, as people now just want to know an address or the GPS coordinates to put into their phone. The author gives very detailed directions to the streams, lakes, and ponds in his book, including where you can expect to find parking. He favors pointing you toward the places where public fishing rights exist, but he also includes some spots where you'll have to ask property owners for their permission to access the water. In doing this, Valla is bringing back something that we've lost in the modern habit of relying on our navigation systems to assure our arrival. Perhaps this is a generation-related judgement on my part, but I believe that the sharing of directions forms bonds between anglers as we share our own way of how to get to places that we treasure, complete with all of the little details that accompany the descriptions of how to get somewhere. There was more speaking, listening, and trust going on between people when we had to rely on each other for directions, and it's a pleasure to see Mike Valla valuing what I hope never becomes a lost art.

In sharing directions, the author also creates a strong sense of place, and an appreciation for being in spots that are more than just great places to fish. When discussing Spring Creek in Caledonia, Valla points out that Caledonia was the site of the first fish hatchery in the entire Western Hemisphere. Read about Wassaic Creek in Dutchess County, and you'll be informed of the New York Condensed Milk Company that operated on the banks of that stream and innovated the process of producing condensed milk that was able to be transported to the Union Army during the Civil War. Valla notes that this company, founded by Gail Borden, later became known for "Elsie the Cow" and Elmer's Glue. If you're heading for the stretch of the East Branch of the Delaware River that is above the Pepacton Reservoir, he directs you to—saying that "it would be a sacrilege to pass by"—Hardscrabble Road off Route 30 to visit John Burroughs Memorial Park, and to see the famed naturalist's "Thinking Boulder" and burial location. There are numerous other worthy places to notice that are noted in the pages of this book. It is as if Valla is saying, *Yes, you came here to fish, but don't forget to look around.*

Addressing the completeness of his guide, the author acknowledges that it would be impossible for one book to include every possible stream, river, pond, or lake in the state. Valla writes, "I'm sure some

will wonder why such and such stream or pond wasn't covered. I'm equally certain some will lament that such and such a stream, pond, or lake *was* mentioned." Such is the dilemma of every writer when deciding what to leave in and what to leave out, and although the author's fifty-five years of fly-fishing experience throughout the state must have left some places in the leave-out category, the book is more than thorough enough for even well-traveled anglers to be introduced to new locations of all sizes and levels of popularity. You won't find an avalanche of details for any one location, but rather enough information to get you there and started, which is exactly what we are all looking for in a well-constructed guide. The pages of this book will stir up the itch to travel, and at the very same time hold your interest while you're still sitting in one place.

—Chuck Coronato

Cane Rods: Builders and Collectors **By Ed Walsh**

John Shaner's passion for fly fishing has always been a big part of his life. After graduating college, he spent some time in the wine and dairy industries, but he worked a part-time job at a fly shop in Syracuse, New York, that became a full-time position within a year.

In the early 90s, John moved to West Yellowstone, Montana, where he took a job at the Madison River Outfitters working in the shop and guiding the local waters. He was learning about the industry and networking with customers and suppliers, gaining valuable experience.

He came back east in 1999 to work for the Orvis Company as a regional manager and then to the Cortland Line Company in that same capacity. In 2008, he joined Hardy North American as a sales manager, and he also worked on new products with the development team. John retired from Hardy in 2021.

John has always been a lover, and user, of bamboo rods and, being in the business, he came across opportunities to purchase vintage cane, often at reasonable prices. He never thought about becoming a collector but couldn't pass up a good opportunity to increase his inventory. Over time, his collection grew and started to include many more items related to this wonderful sport.



When I first visited John at his home in Deposit, New York, I was introduced to a library that included more than 1,500 books about fly fishing. He opened a book published in the 1830s showing both the insects and flies tied to represent them. The illustrations had all been colored by hand. He then asked if I had ever seen a "specimen book," which I hadn't. He showed me another book that was published in the latter part of the same century and was even more beautiful and explained that only about 200 copies were produced. The book contains not only patterns for trout flies but also the actual flies and the materials to tie them.

We then looked at his cane rod collection. John is quick to suggest he's not necessarily a collector but an acquirer of items related to the history of fly fishing.



His cane collection is not extensive by any means, but it does contain “low production rods” that are considered the best quality products made by the various builders. Rods in his collection were made by some well-known makers: Leonard, Payne, Hansen, Powell, Brandin, Bolt, Young, Gray, Pezon et Michel, Taylor, Robbins, and Aroner. His favorite is a rare Tom Maxwell era Leonard 50 FF/4.

John then showed me his collection of reels and fly fishing artifacts. For obvious reasons, Hardy’s were a big part of that reel collection. Also, some beautiful Walker products were seen and even a few reels made by Leonard.

John’s collections of miscellaneous artifacts are way too vast to mention, but the most interesting part of this visit was that John had a story behind almost every book, rod, reel, and artifact in his possession. The one that sticks in my mind was him showing me a handmade fly-floatant holder made by a jeweler. It was a beautiful



brass piece with a tight-fitting lock cap and an attached pin for fastening to the fishing vest. He knew that only a dozen or so were made and enjoyed sharing that story.



We spent time discussing John’s many theories on fly fishing, and he even showed me how to properly care for my Hardy Reels. I am hopeful that I’ll get to spend more time with him and learn even more about the history of the sport we all love.

For anyone who wants to learn more about John Shaner, I suggest acquiring the documentary *Chasing the Taper*, in which John and six of the best cane rod makers of the last half century talk about their craft. The film was produced by Tin Cup Productions and is available from many online sites.

Editor’s note: *Bob Colson wrote the following essay in preparation for the Catskill Fly Tyers Roundtable held at the CFFCM on November 4. While at the Roundtable, Bob tied many of the patterns that he’s listed here and shared his expertise. Bob’s list of patterns is much longer than the six flies shown in this issue. The additional patterns will be featured in the January 2024 Gazette.*

Note on Catskill Salmon Flies **By Bob Colson**

Many fly tyers and anglers associated with the “golden era” of Catskill fly fishing also shared a passion for Atlantic salmon angling. They created Atlantic salmon patterns that became widely used, often reduced angling versions of older British classic salmon flies. Such reduced versions arose because American fly dressers could not always obtain the materials for “full-dress” flies, but they also knew the difficulty of being compensated for the time required for a full-dress salmon fly and sought shortcuts to enhance the economic returns from their efforts.

In addition, Atlantic salmon runs in North America differed considerably from those in the UK, leading to alternative tackle, techniques, and flies. Most of the “classic” flies and techniques in the UK developed during a time when anglers pursued spring-run and fall-run fish, rather than summer-run fish. The netting practices in the UK, starting about 1850, became so effective that summer-run fish were only abundant enough to keep the species going. High, cold water reduced netting for the spring-run fish, and the nets were taken off in mid-August by statute. Most fly angling for spring-run and fall-run fish is deep and slow, which meant a large fly with a distinctive silhouette. All North American Atlantic salmon are summer-run fish, with very few remaining fall-runs. Water temperatures are higher, and water levels lower in this fishing, leading to smaller flies intended to ride high in the water column with much slenderer profiles.

While wealthy “sports” fished in the Miramichi River system, often owning camps, less well-off devotees made the trip to Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, where the rivers are public, and foreigners can fish unguided. The Margaree River was then, and remains today, a popular destination for such salmon anglers. I asked Ted Rogowski about his recollection of the most popular fly reel in the Catskills during the post WWII period. He immediately responded: “The Medalist 1495. Many Catskill trout anglers also fished for Atlantic salmon. Few had tons of money. We had a five-weight rod for trout and a seven- or eight-weight rod for salmon. We could use the 1495 on both!”

Among the many Atlantic salmon flies created by Catskill-centric anglers and tyers, I will be tying some from the following list and discussing the rationale for the fly and the techniques used fishing them, which reflect considerable innovation to suit North American conditions in contrast to traditional salmon fishing in the UK. I have omitted the many nymphs for salmon angling created by Charles DeFeo, because they did not gather the following that they perhaps deserved. Nor have I included the many hair-wing versions of the classics that Keith Fulsher and Charles DeFeo so carefully cataloged. In keeping with the spirit of substitution that so characterized these flies, I have chosen to deviate from time to time from the pattern prescription to take advantage of modern materials or to reduce the search for the original materials to something manageable, a practice the originators would surely admire.

This session contains my “informed musings” rather than authoritative history. Fly fishing and the various crafts associated with it arose from “oral communities,” where knowledge was not recorded or documented: It was transmitted orally through personal associations with knowledgeable individuals. It’s frequently difficult to unequivocally determine where something originated, because sources rely on documentary evidence, which is often far removed in time and place from origins and recorded by a literate observer who is not necessarily highly competent in the craft.

The principal sources for the following flies are *Atlantic Salmon Flies & Fishing*, by Joseph D. Bates, Jr, Stackpole Books, 1970, and personal interactions with people connected to Atlantic salmon in New Brunswick and on Cape Breton Island.

Bumble Puppy Salmon Fly: Theodore Gordon (circa 1890)

Gordon tied Atlantic salmon flies for William Neyle Habersham, a shipping magnate and Madeira wine importer from Savannah and, more relevant here, a passionate and long-term member of the Restigouche Club (Habersham fished there from the late 1860s until his death in 1899). A pool on the Matapedia River just above the Saint Alexis bridge bears his name. Habersham carried on a correspondence with Gordon and supplied him with feathers from the import markets in Savannah. Gordon adapted his

Bumble Puppy streamer for Atlantic salmon fishing. The only contemporary pattern I am aware of was published by R.B. Marston in the *Fishing Gazette*, taken from his visual inspection of a streamer Gordon sent him. John MacDonald included a pattern for the Bumble Puppy salmon fly in his book on Gordon that he evidently also took from visual inspection. Herman Christian and Roy Steenrod both had versions of the streamer. My impression is that there are many versions with a similar color scheme: basically red and white. Here is my speculative guess, informed by MacDonald, on how Gordon may have adapted the streamer for Habersham's use as an Atlantic salmon fly. Gordon likely tied it differently over the years. He liked change and new ways of doing things.

Head: Black

Hook: 4 – 1/0, up eye

Tag: Silver oval tinsel

Tip: Red silk floss

Tail: Red ibis or red feather fibers, somewhat long

Butt: Red or yellow chenille, ostrich herl, or wool

Body: White wool or chenille, dressed full

Rib: Medium silver flat tinsel

Throat: Badger hackle, long. Some tyers wrap red and white feathers as hackles.

Wing: White hair (bucktail or substitute) under slips of brown turkey

Shoulders: Widgeon as long as throat

Topping: Peacock herl

Cheeks: Jungle cock, somewhat long and tied along hook shank



Black Dose (Reduced): Roy Steenrod (1930)

Head: Black

Hook: Size 2 to 12, Wilson dry fly

Tag: Oval silver tinsel

Tail: Golden pheasant crest

Body: Black silk floss

Rib: Oval silver tinsel

Throat: Black hackle, two or three turns, collar style, pulled under the hook

Wing: Strips of black crow, set to curve upwards to meet the tail

Cheeks: Jungle cock, very small



Spate Fly: Harry A. Darbee (1946)

As an interesting aside, Harry caught his first salmon on this fly at Hart Bridge Pool on the Margaree. So did I!

Head: Red
 Hook: 1 – 1/0
 Tag: Oval gold tinsel
 Tail: Golden pheasant crest
 Body: Dark brown seal or polar bear fur, picked out
 Rib: Oval gold tinsel, medium
 Throat: Black hackle, collar style, pulled under hook to the point of the hook
 Wing: Brown bucktail to meet tail. Hair from near the roots flair, providing a broader silhouette and more movement to the shoulders than hair from near the tip of the tail.
 Shoulders: Wide strips of black and white wood duck, two-thirds length of wing



Dusty Miller (Reduced): Harry A. Darbee (1950)

Head: Black
 Hook: Size 2 to 12, Wilson dry fly
 Tag: Fine embossed silver tinsel
 Tail: Golden pheasant crest
 Body: Embossed silver tinsel rear two-thirds, pink floss front third
 Rib: Fine oval silver tinsel
 Throat: Grey Guinea hen, small, short, underside
 Wing: Narrow strips of bronze mallard, to touch tail
 Cheeks: Jungle cock, small size and short length



Bastard Dose: John Atherton (1950s)

Head: Black
 Hook: Size 2, 4, 6, or 8
 Tag: Fine oval silver tinsel
 Tip: Yellow-orange or medium yellow silk
 Tail: Golden pheasant crest
 Butt: Black ostrich herl
 Body: Rear quarter, light blue seal's fur or wool; front three-quarters, black seal's fur or wool
 Rib: Oval silver tinsel
 Throat: Claret, beard style
 Wing: Underwing, matched golden pheasant tippetts; veiling, dark teal, two strips each side
 Topping: Golden pheasant crest



Parr (Reduced Silver Doctor): Charles DeFeo (1950s)

Head: Black
Hook: Sizes 2 to 8
Tag: Silver thread or fine oval silver tinsel
Tip: Golden yellow silk floss
Tail: Golden pheasant crest
Butt: Scarlet Berlin wool
Body: Flat silver tinsel
Rib: Fine oval silver
Throat: Blue, collar style, pulled down. In front; short, sparse widgeon
Wing: Red, blue, and yellow strands of fluorescent floss under strips of barred black and white teal or wood duck
Topping: Golden pheasant crest
Cheeks: Jungle cock



With the exceptions of the Salmon Bumble Puppy and the Darbee Spate Fly, all of these uniquely American creations reflect adaptations for North American summer-run Atlantic salmon in normal and low water conditions with ideal water temperatures. Rather than running deep and slow with massive silhouettes designed to absorb light as most traditional UK Atlantic salmon flies, these flies are dressed to ride high in the water column with a slim silhouette or on the surface, in many cases with materials that reflect light, including neon flosses and threads. Although they have been displaced by more recent fashions in fly dressing, I realized in preparing this note that they likely would work well today if given a try!

The Fly Tyers Roundtable **By Chuck Coronato**

On Saturday, November 4, the Fly Tyers Roundtable event took place in the Wulff Gallery of the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum. This well-attended gathering featured many of the best fly tyers in the region—a Catskills all-star lineup—featuring many guild members among the tyers. It was a great way to spend the afternoon, chatting with tyers as they skillfully applied their craft. Pete Leitner served as the master of ceremonies, introducing the day's speakers.

The speakers certainly held the room's interest. Bud Weiler talked about his father, Milton C. Weiler, who was an artist and member of the DeBruce Club. Cliff Schwark reminisced about founding both the Catskill and the Mid Hudson chapters of Trout Unlimited. Mr. Schwark also shared some of his memories of Art Flick, and he treated the crowd to a few comical stories from his past. Museum events coordinator Todd Spire spoke of various ways to support the Catskill Fly Fishing Center and Museum.

One of the day's highlights was the showing of a color film produced by Martin Bovey in 1939, titled *Hewitt on the Neversink*. Ed Hewitt and friends, including George LaBranche, are shown fishing

the legendary waters of Hewitt's Big Bend Club, which is now below the surface of the Neversink Reservoir. If you ever get a chance to see this short film that's packed with wonderful scenes, it's worth it just to see Ed Hewitt skate one of his famous Spiders across a glassy pool (and yes, a large trout explodes on it).

Throughout the afternoon, raffle tickets were drawn, and many lucky attendees won items that were rare and historical, including books that are extremely difficult to find and shadowboxes of flies tied by the masters of fly tying.

Let's hear it for Pete Crisci, Pete Leitner, Tom Mason, Dave Catizone, and all of the other organizers, tyers, speakers, and donors who made the Roundtable a special event that benefitted the CCFCM.

Here are some photos from the Roundtable:



John "Catskill John" Bonasera tying a Bumblepuppy



CJ's Bumblepuppy is looking good!



Seth Cavarretta at the vise



Aaron Miller tied amazing flies, and he's wearing a great hat.



Bob Colson and Frank Payne



Ted Patlen



Joe Ceballos and Dave Catizone talking things over



John Apgar



Mark Sturtevant



Aaron and Henry Sanders



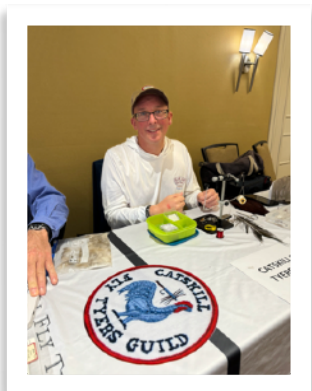
Museum board president Anthony Magardino and Tom Mason enjoying some wood duck flank feathers



Cliff Schwark telling one of his engrossing stories

The International Fly Tying Symposium

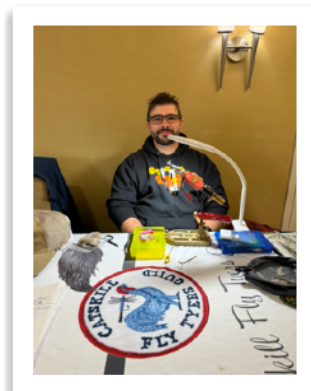
This past weekend (November 11 and 12), the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild had a booth at the International Fly Tying Symposium in Somerset, New Jersey. Many thanks go to our members who generously volunteered their time to staff our booth and demonstrated their skills at the vise: John Apgar, Steve Caviasco, Laura Colangelo, Bob Colson, Nuno Figueiredo, Michael Gaines, Werner Hasenpusch, John Maddox, Craig Mazur, Lee Rutkowski, and Joe Ceballos.



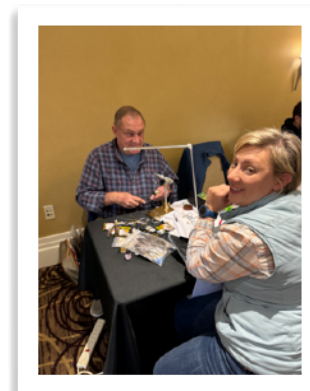
Craig Mazur




Lee Rutkowski



Nuno Figueiredo



Laura Colangelo and Tom Mason

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