

Bookshelf

Art Flick

Art Flick: Catskill Legend by Roger Keckeissen. Clark City Press, 2015, 198 pages, \$40 hardcover, ISBN: 978-0944439609.

There was a time when nearly all American fly fishers knew Art Flick's name. He was one of the most important, innovative fly fishers of his generation. It's difficult to imagine today, but information about mayfly hatches, and how to fish them, used to be hard to find or nonexistent. Then Art Flick wrote his little book.

Flick's *Streamside Guide to Naturals and Their Imitations* (1947) long preceded the entomological works of Caucci and Nastasi, Swisher and Richards, Meck, Hughes, and a host of others. My own recently published *Pocketguide to Pennsylvania* (with Charlie Meck) and *Pocketguide to New York* simply follow Flick's outline at their core. But though fly fishing has produced more literature than all other sports combined, the story of Art Flick, his family, and his book would have been lost forever if not for the work of two men—Roger Keckeissen and Russell Chatham—and their new book, *Art Flick: Catskill Legend*.

The book begins with pages from its editor and designer, Russell Chatham, who tells the brief, tragic story of author, Roger Keckeissen, a talented writer and history buff who had never written anything before this book. Keckeissen battled with alcoholism and as a result, died an untimely death, and never saw his only book. In the process of relaying Keckeissen's story, Chatham reveals some of his own demons that also nearly ended the book's life before it ever reached the public.

Keckeissen was a fishing guide in Livingston, Montana, and by coincidence Art Flick's son, Bill, lives nearby along the Yellowstone River. Most of the information in the book comes from firsthand stories and original photographs from Art and Bill Flick, recorded by Keckeissen.

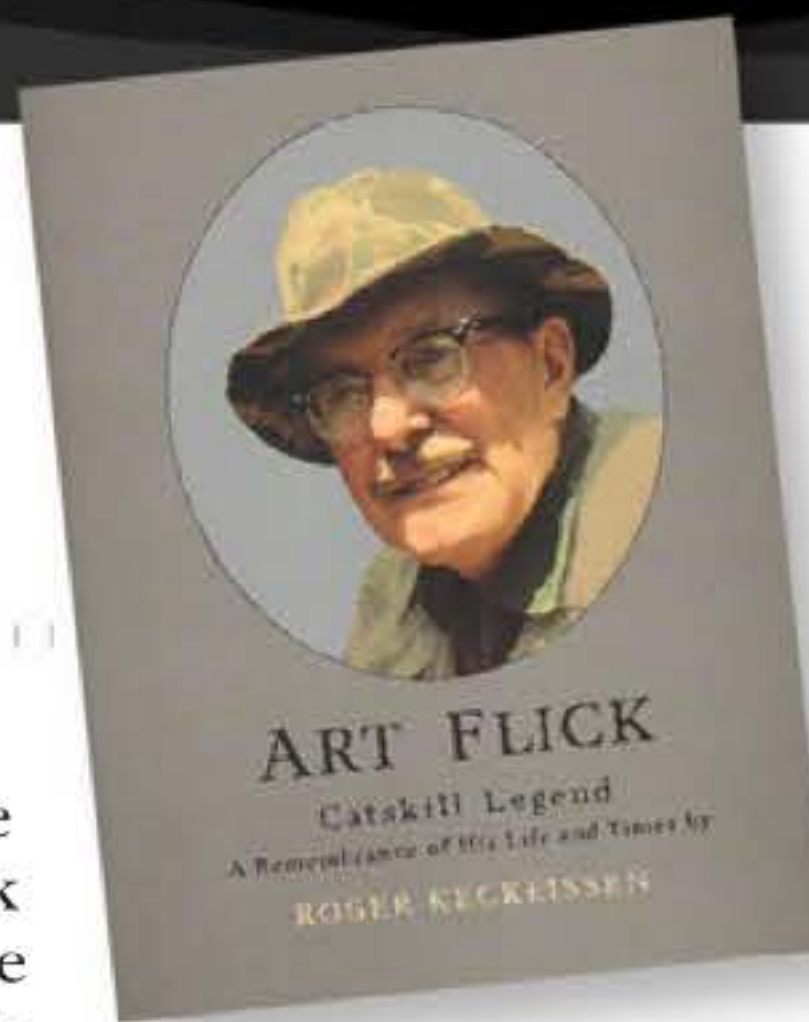
The Flick family spent many years in the Catskill Mountains along the Schoharie River running their West Kill Tavern—the perfect breeding ground for fly-fishing history.

The Catskills' close proximity to New York City ensured that the region's great trout rivers, and the people who based their life around fishing them, would be recognized by big-city writers who had an outlet for their stories. And it was Ray Camp's "Wood, Field, and Stream" column in *The New York Times* that gave Art Flick his first acclaim. It was also Camp who pushed Art to write the *Streamside Guide to Naturals and Their Imitations*, even calling him from Europe during World War II, threatening to end their friendship if Flick didn't write it.

But well before Art Flick thought about writing his own book, a sea change occurred when Preston Jennings asked him to help collect mayflies from the Schoharie for his project, *A Book of Trout Flies*. Jennings's book was a success. But by asking for Flick's help, Jennings created two unintended consequences: Flick began to pay extra attention to what was hatching on the Schoharie, and Jennings began to view Flick as a subordinate, someone he would later learn to dislike when praise for Flick's book greatly surpassed his own.

Flick's Schoharie mayfly studies continued after the Jennings project, but it wasn't until he was prodded to share his findings at a meeting of the Angler's Club of New York that a groundswell began for Art Flick to write a book. He was a reluctant author, always belittling his achievements, and voicing concern about competing with Jennings.

One of the things I found most intriguing about Keckeissen's book is that it fixes Flick in a historical narrative. Biographical works often focus so heavily on main characters that readers become lost in the story's bubble, as if the person existed in a vacuum. But Keckeissen tells us what the Dettas and Darbees were accomplishing during the same period; what John Voelker (aka Robert Traver) thought about Flick's book; the concurrent undertakings



of George LaBranche and Dana Lamb. I can better understand and appreciate the greatness

of Art Flick when I see him side by side with his equals.

Art Flick is one of fly fishing's seminal figures. Fly fishing is always evolving, pushing forward with new fly patterns, targeting new fish species, exploring new waters. But you can't really contribute to the progression if you don't understand the accomplishments of the people who came before you. It's a lack of historical appreciation that makes the Internet seem full of new tiers who think they just invented the Woolly Bugger.

Read Keckeissen's book. Learn what Flick accomplished and why he did it. If you really want to add to fly fishing's future, or to understand the full purpose of the flies in your box, make certain you have a firm foundation in the past.

—Paul Weamer

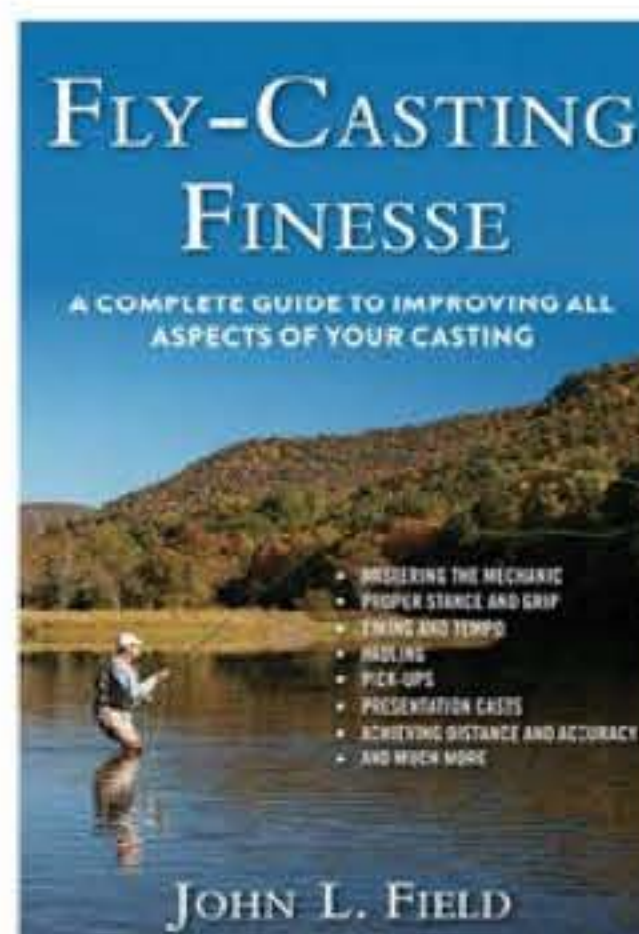
Fly-Casting Finesse

Fly-Casting Finesse: A Complete Guide to Improving All Aspects of Your Casting by John L. Field. Skyhorse Publishing, 2015, 160 pages, \$30 hardcover ISBN: 978-1632204882.

John L. Field may be the best caster and casting instructor you've never heard of. Although he's spent the past 40 years teaching with and fishing alongside many of the biggest names in fishing, much of his effort has been under the radar as president of the American Casting Association, or as president of the New York City Chapter of Trout Unlimited, where he spent countless weekends in Central Park teaching teenagers how to cast.

With this book, the rest of the fly-fishing world—those of us between novice and competitor—benefits from Field's experience and expertise. Written for people who already know how to cast, this book is about fine-tuning all the details that mark the differences between a mediocre caster and a true master.

There are those who will





wag their fingers and say they don't need this book because "casting isn't fishing." To them I say "hunting isn't shooting either, but the best hunters make the shot when they need to." This book will help you make the best shots over and over again.

—Ross Purnell

The Bug Book

The Bug Book: A Fly Fisher's Guide to Trout Stream Insects by Paul Weamer. Headwater Books and MidCurrent, 2015, 152 pages, \$10 ebook. ASIN: B012PUKTVM.

Hatches by Caucci and Nastasi, *Selective Trout* by Richards and Swisher, and *Western Mayfly Hatches* by Hafele and Hughes are just a few of the great books that have laid the foundation for generations of hatch-matchers, but they are all outdated due to taxonomic

shifts, and changes to the environment and our rivers (some good, some bad).

As a result, the fly-fishing world was in need of a modern, comprehensive aquatic food guide.

FLY FISHERMAN contributing editor Paul Weamer answered the call with this: the most up-to-date match-the-hatch guide fly fishers have available today and it's all digital in a full-color, transportable, convenient format that costs just \$10. More important, Weamer breaks down the barriers between amateur and entomologist in a conversational tone, and explains when and why identifying insects can be both fun and practical.

This is no snobby "upstream, dry-fly-only" book about just aquatic insects. Weamer starts with the limnology of rivers and stillwaters, helps

you understand the characters of everything from spring creeks and free-stone rivers to reservoirs and ponds, and from there extrapolates to how the food base thrives and supports diverse trout populations.

From scuds and sow bugs to aquatic worms and crane flies, you'll learn how to identify what you're seeing on stream, and the best options for imitating it. Weamer—as we know from his many years as a guide on the Delaware River, his eloquent essays in FLY FISHERMAN (most recently "A Century of Fishing the Hendrickson Hatch" in the June-July issue), and his many previous publications—is one of the brightest minds in fly fishing today. Let's hope he's got more books like this in store. 🦋

—Ross Purnell



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