

[00:00:00] **Brett Barry:** The Jerry Bartlett Angling Collection presents "Sporting Legends of the Catskills: The Quest for Ed Sens: The Forgotten Catskill Fly Tyer," presented Sunday, March 30, 2025, at the Phoenicia Library.

[00:00:18] **Beth Waterman:** I'd like to introduce Ed Ostapczuk who is an author, an angler, who's been fly fishing in the Catskills his entire life and has written two books about it.

[00:00:32] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Yes.

[00:00:33] **Beth Waterman:** Alright, Ed.

[00:00:34] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Thank you.

[00:00:35] **Ed Ostapczuk:** So the program's called "The Quest for Ed Sens: The Forgotten Catskill Fly Tyer." I'm just getting over a cold, so my voice may be a little funny. I did test for COVID earlier in the week because I wanted to make sure I didn't have that. Anyway, I first did this back in 2017 at the Neversink Rondout Stream Program. Tony and I went over to do that, and I've done many variations of this since then. Alright, I did this as a result of being a member of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild.

The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild was formed in '93 by Floyd Franke and Matt Vinciguerra, and the library had the guild here last May. They had our president, Joe Ceballos, and Phil Street, and they talked about the guild and its purposes and stuff like that, but I've been a member of the guild since 2010, and they have a newsletter called "The Gazette," and I've been writing an article for them. It's called "Up on the Esopus." I write about different flies, so what happened over the years I did a search on Ed Sens, a two-part search that started in 2013, and it's taken a number of years. I first got interested in Ed Sens by reading a book by Ernest Schwiebert, "Matching the Hatch." He was one of my mentors only through written word. I met him a few times—a very interesting guy, large in life—and I can say a lot of things about him, but I'll leave it at that. I mean, he's an interesting guy [well-written], and he wrote about Ed Sens in his book, "Matching the Hatch," and he listed a giant stonefly, and I was always interested in stoneflies because when he talked about stoneflies in his book, he talked about them being only found in the most pristine, clear water, so that excited me. I grew up in New Jersey, so when I first moved to the Catskills to see all these wild fish that you didn't rely on a hatchery truck to come by and put them in there for, that was a revelation for me, so he wrote about this giant stonefly and he wrote about some other caddisflies. As a guild member, I eventually started writing an article, several articles about Ed Sens. As I said, I

met Schwiebert a couple of times, and I have several of his books, and I was impressed that he autographed that for me. There's Ed Sens on the left, and almost a half century went by since I first read about him in "Schwiebert's Matching the Hatch," and then in 2013, I started doing a couple articles for "The Gazette" on Ed Sens. Now it's kind of inspiring.

Two people inspired me to do that. One was Roger Menard, and Roger Menard was involved in the March 2016 podcast on Frank Mele. Roger passed away a couple of years ago, but I'd see him at the different fly-tying events when Hank Rope was still alive, and every time I saw Roger, he'd always ask me, "Well, what'd you find out about Ed Sens? What'd you find out about Ed Sens?" Roger always egged me on. They got more information on the guy, and he gave me one of his flies, and the other guy was Wade Burkhart. Wade is somebody I know. I've known from the mid-seventies [a member of the Frost Valley Fly Fishing Club up in Claryville], and he worked for the New York Times, and he did some research for me when I was doing this online.

Well, the first person that I found a lot of information about Sens in was Ray Ovington. Ovington was an author for, or he was a columnist for, "The World-Telegram & Sun," and he wrote some 30-odd books, and he fished the Esopus quite a bit, so if you're interested in reading about the Esopus, you could pick up some of Ray Ovington's books and find out about what he wrote. One book in 1962, by the way, along this journey, because it was a literary research, I ended up buying a lot of used books to see what they actually said. You know, I found—I did online research and they said this book mentioned him, so I buy the book for a couple of dollars, and I did some research, so its first book was published in '62. He said, "Many anglers have come up with killing patterns—those invented by Eddie Sens—I give my wholehearted approval. They've taken many fish for me." That's what he said in '62. Then in '52 and '74, he wrote a book, "How to Take Trout on Wet Flies and Nymphs," and there's an interesting story we'll get to on that, and he called Sens—one of the most successful nymph fishermen in the United States, right? And then in '77, he called, and Trout in the Flies said, "My mentor's responsible for many of the patterns, features in my books." Ovington has a lot of information about Sens' patterns. If you want to see about Ed Sens' patterns themselves, Ovington's the place to go, and he initially said a lot of really nice things about Ed Sens. He really sung his praises, and there's Ernest Schwiebert, and he's the best source of information in his book called "Nymphs Volume I." He has two versions of this book, but this is volume one [that was published in 2000]. Oh, I guess this is—I take that back. This is the second version published in 2007 because it talks about volume one. He had volume one and volume two, and he said that Sens was another solitary genius who fished the Catskills, and his work resulted in a superb series of nymphs, key for our better-known mayflies. His nymphs traced their lineage

almost directly Skues. Now, Skues was a well-known English nymph fisherman. I mean, in England there was a controversy between fishing for trout with dry flies if you were a Halford kind of guy or fishing for nymphs, fishing for trout with nymphs, if you were a Skues kind of guy. Either way, they only fish for fish that were actively feeding, not like Tony and I, who pound the water looking for anything else. Take our flies? No, but these guys had ethics, so they only fished for feeding fish. We didn't ask anything. They eat our flies, right, Tony?

[00:06:17] **Audience:** The fly in the water.

[00:06:17] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Right, so then you also wrote that knowledgeable anglers left to wonder what a wonderful original manuscript might have been written had Sens understood the potential of these theories and fieldwork and elected to prepare a book himself. I talked to his son-in-law later on when I got to meet him about that. Schwiebert's the only guy who actually knew his first name, alright, and there was much more on. I'll follow what some other people wrote where Gary LaFontaine, he was a pretty well-known fly fisherman from the West who passed away maybe 20 years ago, and he wrote a book. His first big book was "The Caddisfly." In "The Challenge of the Trout," he said, "The initial attempt to identify specific imitations of caddis pupae was the innovation of Ed Sens," so here you have a guy who's well-known, Gary LaFontaine, who's pointing his finger back to Ed Sens. In his book, "The Caddisflies," he said that Sens was a tyer for Jimmy Darren and created some of the best-known early pupae imitations and was a serious student of entomology, so you have a well-known fly fisherman who's well respected pointing back to Ed Sens, so I think that carries some credence.

Then Len Wright, who owned a place on the Neversink, I know his son Alex. Len wrote a book on caddis himself, "Caddisflies." He said, "Ed Sens' pupae imitations represent one of the few American attempts to deal seriously with caddisflies in any form," so you have a guy who's known for caddisflies pointing his finger back and praising Ed Sens for his caddisfly work, and then I bought this book only because he was mentioned.

I should say that. I had two Gary Borger books, and he mentions Sens, but not in any way that I could really quote, but he talks about Sens, and then I ended up buying his book because I read that he mentioned him too. It was just something to have because of the literary research. He said, "Ed Sens is an important fly tyer." England and Catskills developed a set of new patterns designed to compliment each other, best known as so on and so forth.

[00:08:14] **Audience:** Right.

[00:08:16] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Al McClane was a fairly well-known author. He wrote the encyclopedia on fishing, that big thick book if some of you remember, and also he wrote the fishing column for Field & Stream Magazine years ago, so he was a well-respected author in his time. McClane wrote in the book by Ray Ovington, "How to Take Trout on Wet Flies and Nymphs," which concerns, in large part, the patterns of Ed Sens, or a fine reference for any serious new fisherman. Plus, it takes a patient research of Art Flick so he's comparing him to Art Flick. Here you have a guy who's really well-known and highly respected in the fishing world, who's saying Sens, made major contributions. A friend of mine, by the name of Mike Valla, he pointed me, he had Terry Lawton [contact me]. He's an English guy, and he just wrote a book in 2020 about nymph fishing, and he quoted a lot of my stuff on Ed Sens, so it's kinda like it was an Englishman who was writing about our American trout fishing, our American nymph fishing, which I thought was pretty neat.

Initially it was a consensus of angling research and online stuff and help from Wade Burkhart and things like that, alright, and his legacy is probably best known as one of the most important in fishermen ever to fish the Catskills. That's what I came up with at that time based on the angling literature I looked at, and then it's interesting in the 1952 version of "How to Take Trout on Wet Flies and Nymphs." Ovington, you know, he's got a nice picture there, and there's some Sens' flies on the right-hand side, and there's a picture of trout that Sens caught with, you know, using his patterns, and he writes, "Oh, how did that happen?" Well, he writes that '52 edition said, "Special Appreciation." He talks about special appreciation going to these people with sincere respect for the greatest angler I know, Ed Sens. That's what he wrote in '52, right? There's Ed Sens fishing in 10 Mile Creek. Now I don't know if that's Dutchess County or Albany County. There's a 10 Mile Creek in both of those, but okay, Sullivan? Okay, okay, so here Sens is fishing with some trout now, and this is really interesting. This is the first book I had: the '74 edition of "How to Take Trout on Wet Flies and Nymphs" by Ovington, so this is the 1974 edition. It's the first one I own by Freshet Press, and the forward says the first edition has since become a classic. It deals with insects common to the trout streams in a manner somewhat similar to those of Preston Jennings and Art Flick, and, like them, Ray offers many trail-taking flies. That's the forward, but interesting enough, there's no more mention Ed Sens. He's dropped. He's not mentioned at all in this book, alright, so I thought that's very interesting, and then later on when I got to meet his son-in-law, his son-in-law sent me this, so this is for the book, and this is what Ed Sens wrote in that book. Sorry, he is not my pattern, so there was some fallout between Ovington, who we originally sang his praises, and Ed Sens, right? Ovington basically took a lot of Ed Sens' patterns and put his own

name on them, so that caused a little bit of a rift, to say the least. That's why he didn't talk about him as the best fisherman he ever knew anymore, so there was a fallout, right?

The caddis pupae: now this is my interpretation. That's a fly-eye tie dark caddis. This is from Schwiebert's book, the interpretation of his pattern. Now I don't think they had curved hooks when Sens was tying. That's the green caddis pupae that I tied, right? It's an interpretation of what the pattern looks like, and I fished that last year up on the Upper Neversink West Branch in Neversink. That was a 16-inch rainbow. I think that was a—I'm pretty sure that was a reservoir fish. That's my opinion. I shared that with your folks in Region 3, and I toured them that day. Two 16-inch rainbows: there are rainbows up on the West Branch of Neversink, not as many as like on the Esopus Creek, but there is a rainbow run up there, and I took that on the green caddis. Both Ovington and McClane talk about how to tie it. It's built up with floss, and then you spin muskrat hair out and just pick for translucency, and that's key, alright, and I think that's an important impetus to what Gary LaFontaine talked about in his patterns. He's picking out the fur and making it translucent makes it look like it's alive and breathing. That's his giant stonefly. That's one that actually Sens ties alright. I got that one day. Well, I'll tell you more about that later on. I was a giant stonefly.

That's Ed Sens. Edmund Williams Sens. That's the young Edmund Williams Sens. He was born in 1914 and he died in 2003. He lived his whole life in the Bronx. He was married to one lady there. He passed away before him. He worked. His father owned a restaurant down in the Bronx, down in New York City, and when the depression came, the restaurant went under, but he worked in a restaurant there. He was a Catskill guy. He tied for Jimmy Dern, who had a place in the Chrysler Building. He worked at Abercrombie & Fitch and he was an entomologist. His family owned a farm near the Neversink [the Neversink above the Neversink Reservoir], so not below the reservoir but above the reservoir below the branches of East and West Branch, near Claryville. I could never find out where that was. He disappeared off the trout fishing scene and eventually morphed into an equally famous striped bass fisherman. I never knew why that happened either based on the information I had, so I wrote these two articles in June and July/August 2013, and it took several months of research, and Wade Burkhart was a big help to me, and, you know, there was some information I was able to find, and I came up with some preliminary conclusions, but there were still unanswered questions like, you 'why did he disappear from the trout fishing scene?' You know, why was this guy, who... everyone sung his praises? Why was he all of a sudden no longer around for trout fishing, and, you know, where was this farm? I was really interested in knowing that. Where did this farm exist? And I thought maybe I reached the

dead end, the proverbial dead end, because I did all the research I possibly could. I had some people help me, and it's sheer luck. I knew Sens was a striped bass fisherman, so I went online to StripersOnline. I joined that and posted some questions about Ed Sens, and I also—Joe Fox is Walt Dette's great-grandson, and he has a website, Sparse Grey Matter, right, and I posted some questions out there, and Kim Borger Bohart contacted me. She's Sens' granddaughter, alright. She contacted me. We exchanged PMs [private messages and emails], and I sent her both my articles. I wanted her to read my articles. I wanted to see if what Roy wrote was actually factual or not, and she confirmed my research. She said, "Yes, that's factual," so for me that was a big plus. I was really excited about that, and then we lost contact, and she—this is where PM... I'll let you read it, but basically she talks about her grandfather. Alright, I'll leave that up there. Well, I could read it, but let you read it.

[00:16:02] **Beth Waterman:** Read it to us.

[00:16:03] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Okay, hi, I'm joining the discussion a little late so she knows I wrote the two articles. Ed Sens, my grandfather, died in 2003 of a kidney infection. We miss him very much. His first name was Edmund, but people call him Ed already. Growing up, he instilled in his children and grandchildren a love of fishing. He started as a fly caster, fishing mostly the rivers in Upstate New York and in Lower Catskills. Early on, he was good friends with a guy named Al Reinfelder and was written about in Al's book, "Bait Tail Fishing." Now, Al was a famous striped bass fisherman in and of his own right. He was like the Babe Ruth of striped bass fishing, alright, so he wrote about Ed Sens, and, you know, Al wrote a chapter about Ed in Saltwater Angler. My dad, Ed's son-in-law, Bob Hutton, was also in bait-tail fishing. He later switched the salt. Now he's talking. She's talking about her grandfather. He later switched to saltwater. Mostly Long Island Sound became known as one of the best stream... best bridge fishermen around. He was president of the Long Island Surf Fishing Club for many years. He had a boat docked that on the city island and took me out. My brother took me, my brother, out very often, much to the chagrin of my mother. People at the docks always flocked around him, wanting to know how many fish he caught... what type of rod and reel and bait did he use? Bait was always his secret. Mostly he had an uncanny way of being able to tell where the fish were. He'd study the tides, the moon, the weather, and other factors that he thought influenced where the fish were. As a young girl, I remember he fought tirelessly with his letter-writing campaign to get the state to impose legals... a limit on the catching of striped bass. He asked, he said to me, if we don't do this, the bass will be gone. He was right. He knew their numbers were dwindling. He was a great man, someone who understood that the joy of living was more than making money. A good summary of his early life can be found in "Nymphs I," which I talked about, a book that can be found on

Amazon. He was also mentioned predominantly in "Ovington's How to Take Trout on Wet Flies," so for three years the research project just sat.

In 2016, the search was reinitiated. I met a lady by the name of Pat Wellington at the time. She was president of the Neversink Association. She has a place up on the Neversink. She has a place on East Branch. If you know where the bridge is on the East Branch right in Claryville, her property's upstream in it. She owns, I don't know. She owns several hundred acres... several hundred yards of the Neversink East Branch. Her husband did quite a bit of fishing there, so she was president of the Neversink Association. She directed me to a lady by the name of Carol Smythe, the Time in the Valleys Museum and town historian. Kim emailed me again, and she put me in touch with her dad, Bob Hutton [Ed Sens' son-in-law]... That really answered a lot of questions because he and I had a lot of dialogue between emails and phone calls. I mean, he was like, giving me insight into stuff that nobody else knew. Carol Smythe looked at some old tax maps, and we found out where Sens' property was, and approximately when they owned it. It was 200 acres that bordered the Neversink, and the Sens family confirmed what she told me, so they said that's correct, so that was great. I had two sources tell me that, so one day Tony and I were out there driving. I forgot where we're going. We might have been going to the Neversink or around at Neversink. I went and took a picture. This is where Ed Sens' property was and it's right upstream of the property [folks just acquired a while ago]. The Pine, I think it's the 4-H Pine property on the Neversink. I was always curious so it's upstream of the Big Bend Club that Ed Hewitt was involved with and downstream of the Halls Mills or upstream [Halls Mills Bridge] and downstream of the [white] Claryville Reformed Church, where Theodore Gordon's funeral was held, so this is really historic in the Catskill fishing area, you know, so that's where they owned the property along Claryville Road [Route 19] in the very heart of what Cecil Heacox. another DEC guy originally from Region 3. Then he went up to Albany and became the Assistant Deputy Commissioner up there, and I guess he retired in Dutchess County somewhere before he passed. He wrote a book or several articles on Charmed Circle, and you remember the Charmed Circle that appeared in Outdoor Life, alright, so this is interesting. I'll read this. This is what Ernie Schwiebert wrote about Ed Sens. This is from "The Neversink Story," and this is in "Nymphs Volume I." His father stumbled upon his acreage by mere chance.

Shortly before World War I, after spending a fish-less holiday on the Esopus. hatchings been four poor, a series of storms left the river high and discolored. Now we all know about that, right? We're Esopus fishermen, so... he ventured south through the core of the Catskills, filled with trepidation. The unpaved road was poorly maintained. In that time I think it's '47 that was unpaved. The unpaved road was poorly maintained. The West Branch Neversink was quite

beautiful. The Sens family marvels at its utter clarity. As night fell in Claryville, the little hotel was full. There is no other place to stay. Father stopped at a farmhouse to ask the farmer if they might pay him for supper and spend the night. The farmer took him in, and after the meal, the man described the Neversink in glowing terms. The family went fishing together in the morning. Sens' father fell hopelessly in love with the river. Their benefactor was ultimately persuaded and sell 'em the farm, so that's how they came upon it in Neversink. The 200 acres. I think that's a really interesting story, you know that, so now in McClane letters, this is something that was shared to me by Bob Hutton. Al McClane said, "You know, he wrote for Field & Stream Magazine and wrote some books also." He contacted Sens in 1947, and he said, "You know, I'm doing this article, one for the books." He was doing this article in Field & Stream, one for the books, and he was on flies [top-notch tyers would like to add your work to the list], so he singled them out. He singled them out as a top-notch guy. I want some facts about yourself. Tell me about a pattern or two, you know, and send it to me, and he used, interestingly enough, he used a quill, Craig's Quill by Elizabeth Craig, as an example. This is very interesting, right? Well, that's Ed Sens on the left, and on the right is Elizabeth Craig, and they're tying at a sportsman showdown in New York City, so Sens already knew who this lady was as a fly tyer, and McClane kind of dappled that bait in front of him saying, "Hey, she's written for me." How about, you know, you joining in too, you know, so he knew her, so he sends a response, so he got—I wrote—he wrote this four-page letter to his wife [typed it for him]. Unfortunately, the date on his letter is confusing and is not in sync with some of the other stuff, but this letter's a gold mine of information. Alright, really, it's four pages of a gold mine. Sens mentioned it. His wife, Helen, typed it, and he wrote some handwritten notes. See, it's dated. The date's wrong, but everything else is correct. He included the crane fly [dry] and a Quill Gordon nymph. He assumed that McClane wanted his dry fly. He talked about his career. He began fishing at four years old, worm fishing on the Beaverkill. He and his dad would stay at Ferdon's Boardinghouse on the Beaverkill, known as Hillside Summer Home. They initially fish with wet flies, and he learned the fish. He learned to tie flies by watching some guy by the name of Judge Severn. I don't know where he is from. I tried to look him up. I couldn't find any more [a Neversink angler from a fly fisher from Middletown]. His downstream neighbor was no less than Ed Hewitt, whom he knew, right, so if you're gonna be taught by somebody, might as well. His first attempts he called "whodunits," you know. I've been there. If you've tied flies for any length of time, you start tying your own creations that turn on the hook. They don't catch you anything except dust and rust, you know, and he started collecting insects with a guy by the name of Ernie St. Claire, a stage actor, and he also tied for Jimmy Darren. Over time he developed a series of Catskill mayflies and stonefly patterns, right, and they're listed in other books, and he learned to night fish by helping this guy, Bob White, a friend of

his father's. Eddie Sens' job was to keep [White] supplied with bait. He bait fished at night, and he talked about hair-raising experiences and catching these enormous trout, so he learned. He learned to night fish, you know, alright, so he tied flies at New York State and New York City Sportsman shows. There was a hint of the lure of striped fishing in his letters. It was a hint of it, you know, a little bit, just like there, so when working at Abercrombie & Fitch, he met this guy called Stretch, a striped fishing... a surf fishing fanatic who invited Sens to fish with him, catching 20- to 30-pound fish, instead of a six-inch brook trout. A little bit of a difference, you know, so he said up to that time, saltwater didn't mean anything to him. He had no interest in it, right, so he invited McClane to fish for stripers also. At the time his father was 74, alright, and Sens was also Atlantic salmon fishing, and he responded to McClane. This is where the dates McClane's dates make sense. McClane responds back to his letter and says, "Thank you very much." Flies are beautifully tied, worthy of production. They were putting it in the Field & Stream, but he was also included in McClane's book, "The Practical Fly Fisherman." If you look in here, some ascending patterns and McClane asked for a number eight [Quill Gordon] for reproduction purposes. He said, "I'd like to keep these for the source and practical fly fisherman, and I'll keep the little one to keep fish myself, as I got the one fly fish himself," so this is my interpretation of what Sens Quill Gordon looked like and I don't think that's exactly right. That's my take of it, based on stuff I read, and what I read said that his wing pads were new and unlike anything else, and they were quill and they folded over and so on and so forth, so that was my interpretation. Now there's a New York Times from 1940, and this—I forget who the author was at the time, but he talks about Ed Sens in the New York Times catching big trout up on the Neversink, right, but he's fishing after dark, and he's talking about a 23-inch brown and a small or 16-inch brown, so Schwiebert wrote in his book, there were traces of these trophy trout bodies on the boards of the barn. Now, if anyone's ever been out west to remember when Dan Bailey owned his shop out there, they put traces of big trout at the shop, so I thought it was pretty interesting that they had traces of these trout on the Sens' barn. You know, in "Matching the Hatch," he talks about the eastern trout streams. On eastern trout streams, the giant stonefly was created by Ed Sens' as a night fishing wet fly. That's what he used.

Now this guy, Fred Geist, he was a founding member of the DeBruce Club. He, I think, was a banker. I'm not sure exactly what his title was, but he also wrote articles for the newspaper down there, and he's talking about the National Sportsman Show and talks about Sens as not only an important expert angler but one of the most interesting characters I've ever met, right? He's a founding member of the DeBruce Club, so he is a man of some perceived wealth, what have you... He's talking about Sens, one of the most interesting and expert fishermen he ever met, talked about for a new fisherman who has been ignored,

and after talking with Ed Sens, I'm convinced that my opinion is justified. Ed is a practicing entomologist as well as a splendid angler. Alright, he talks about his stuff on display, talks about the things he had mounted, shows me some awesome rod work he's done, and he calls him a great admirer in Theodore Gordon. That's interesting, so there's a guy who's been around, wrote about people... known people. That's what he said about Ed Sens, and there he was down at one of the sportsmens shows. Alright, that's where we met Ovington, by the way, the first time they met Ovington, alright, when they were getting along well.

I don't know how many people know James Leisenring. He's from Pennsylvania. He was a guy who helped develop in this country what was called nymphs or soft tackle before people fished soft tackle flies in this country. He was from Pennsylvania, and he and Ed Sens exchanged information, and he called Ed Sens a nymph specialist. Now, Leisenring is well-known among soft tackle fishermen and people fish that, and he's a very respected angler himself. Here's a letter, and they talked about how to preserve the insects and tie different nymphs and stuff like that, so another person who's calling out Sens' abilities. I remember growing up, I don't think there was much written about Theodore Gordon or known about Gordon until the book came out. The Complete Fly Fishereman that John McDonald wrote, is the notes and letters of Theodore Gordon. He took off like wildfire, you know, Babe Ruth baseball, and this is what McDonald wrote about Ed Sens. To Ed Sens, the next Theodore Gordon, best wishes.

[00:30:57] **Audience:** Nice, wow, yeah.

[00:31:04] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Now, what was confusing to me in my online research—Ed Sens' father's name was Edmund Sens also, so when I found birth dates and death dates, I got confused about who was born when, who died when, what have you. This is Father. Father was born in Germany around that time. He owned the Oyster Bay Restaurant until the Depression. He fished the Esopus, Beaverkill, and Neversink. He personally knew Theodore Gordon, Ed Hewitt, Herm Christiansen, and Roy Steenrod. He knew all. He knew all the people. He knew all the right people at that time in history, you know, in the early twenties. He purchased that 200-acre farm. He sold it in the late forties due to ill health, right, and that farm sale impacted Sens' future trout fishing. He didn't have a place to come anymore. Plus, I don't think the freeway was built back then, so it was a long journey to get up here; not like today when you come up here for a few hours and go home. You know, it was an effort to get here, so there's Pop Sens fishing in Neversink, and there's young Ed Sens on the left and his father on the right, and hunting attire. Outdoor Life had an article on Pop

Sens and talked about his ill health and talked about him as quite a good fisherman too. He was at that time, his health was declining, and that's why I think they sold the farm.

Now let's talk about saltwater striped fishermen. So this is the other guy. This is the bait. I was—I didn't buy this book because this book was selling for between \$6 and \$100 used, so I just took what I could find online based on what they told me. Alright, that was an expensive ad for this, my research, but this is a notebook for striped fish, striped bass fishing, and this is what Sens' copy is. For Pappy, who showed the kid how, [so] this guy is renowned for striped fishing, and he's going back and telling people that Sens was the guy who taught him everything. There's Ed Sens on the right. There's his son. I think that, I think, no, that's his son. That's not his son. That's his Ed Sens on the right pole in a big striped bass, right? That's his son-in-law. There, Bob Hutton, whom I met later on, and then in Outdoor Field & Stream in 1973, when what's-his-name died, this was a memoriam written about him. He said, "Under the tool is Ed Sens, a fabled Catskill fly guy who switched his allegiance to saltwater and striped bass just before World War II. Al became the leading bridge and shore fisherman of his generation. Here's another guy saying, "Everything this expert knew came from a guy by the name of Ed Sens, the trout fisherman," so Sens was a member of the Long Island Surfing Club. He was known as Pappy. I think what's really pretty interesting is his ability to convey instruction and become an expert in two different types of fishing, trout fishing and striped bass fishing, in such a short amount of time—not just become good at it, but become like an expert at it. And Larry Koller, he used to write for the Middletown Record. He fished Emerson quite a bit, and in his book, "The Complete Book of Saltwater Fishing," he wrote, "It's unlikely that a striper is responsible. See, quite unlikely a striper is responsible for more saltwater converts in the last few years than any other species." Well, he didn't know. He didn't spell Sens' name right correctly, but he said Eddie Sens is probably the best-known fisherman ever to wade the Catskill streams. The top-notch all-around trout fisherman has completely forsaken the inland streams to fish for stripers in the surf. The striper really must have something to... affect the change in the trout fishermen, rightthh? So here's some of Ed Sens' flies. These are some of the flies he tied. That's what they look like.

[00:35:01] **Audience:** What are they? What are some of them?

[00:35:02] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Well, this is a hairwing coachman up there that's probably a brown bi-visible. That's a nymph of some sort that might be his Quill Gordon. That's a caddisfly there. Yeah, crane fly, probably. That's probably one he sent in, so there's some that he tied. There's a crane fly, and there's his brown

bi-visible again, and here's his caddisfly up there. That's what he's talking about: the translucency. You see how that first picked out right through there, right? You see all that, and I think that might be his Quill Gordon, if I could be wrong, or that's the Quill Gordon, if I think that was his quill, so I didn't tie it quite like that. I didn't have the picture of that when I tied him, so his fishing tackle—I put Sens in touch with a guy by the name of Bob Selb, who is with the classic fly fisherman, I think. He's in Pennsylvania and so went down and met Bob Hutton a few years ago, and he bought all of Sens' stuff, and when he came back at a summer fest [2017], Selb graciously gave me 18 of Sens' flies. I should have taken more, but I have them, alright, so Sens and his father, you know, they had a host of legendary angling connections. Theodore Gordon, Herm Christiansen, Hewitt, Steenrod, and Clarence Roof, who was the first person to ever post property—he owned property up on the West Branch of Neversink. That's Wyntoon. Bruce LeRoy, Labranche, Bergman, Denny—the list goes on, right? They knew all the right people. He was a talented and serious Catskill fly fisherman, ahead of his time. I mean, back when he was fishing nymphs, nymphs were really unusual. When I first started fishing myself in the sixties and seventies, you had to look hard and long to find something... somebody write something about nymph fishing. It wasn't much written about it back then. He was doing it way ahead of his time, and probably due to selling the farm and lack of Catskill housing, he developed an interest in striper fishing and, gave up trout fishing, although he did fish occasionally. I was told he was acknowledged by fly experts, you know, for both his trout fishing and striped bass influence. You know, he is quite a well-known fisherman, so that's Bob Hutton there. That was May of 1960 or '68. I exchanged a lot of emails with him over time, and I talked to him. I don't think I've talked to him since 2022. Perhaps at the time, he was about six or eight years older than me. He was in his eighties, and he was battling kidney problems, and his wife had just passed from COVID, and my wife was just diagnosed with cancer, and his daughter was working for Sloan Kettering, and he was telling me, you know, to contact his daughter and so-and-so. I never did that, but so that's the son and the daughter and, you know, grandchildren. Ed Sens, you know, their help was insurmountable in terms of the information they gave me. You can't find it anywhere else, so a special thanks, as I said, to Wade Burkhart and Roger Menard. Roger was— if you go back and look at the very first podcast the library ever did in 2016, you'll see Roger there talking about Frank Mele. Thanks especially for Pat Wellington and the Neversink Association and Carol Smythe. Without their inspirational help, without Roger really pushing me, I probably would've given up on this a long time ago. He really pushed me, alright, but I want to comment on that, so this is Roger. The photo that Jamie took a while ago. That was Roger. He passed away in 2018.

[00:38:45] **Audience:** So, Roger knew Ed Sens was dead.

[00:38:48] **Ed Ostapczuk:** I'm gonna get to that, yeah, so here's Ed Sens and Roger Menard. Look at the letter, right? Look at the letter. There's Roger, who gave me an F-fly. Ed Sens tied that. Roger had it and gave me an F-fly before I had any flies from Bob Selb, right? That was, like I said, a wet fly that Roger gave me. There's some wet flies that Roger tied from me years ago that I had mounted with a brook trout. Roger, he loved fishing the Upper Rondout before the blue hole became such a problem, but he fished there all the time. I'd see him up there. I'd fish up there. I mean, he was quite a brook trout fisherman. He wrote this book. I heard it was pretty hard to come by, and somebody at the fly-tying class told me you only paid \$18 for it. I'm surprised, but he wrote that book on fishermen and a lot of Catskill stuff. He had a friend, a mutual friend of Ed Sens, Harry Shane, right? He was a mutual friend of Ed Sens and lived in the same building that Ed Sens did, so he got to meet Ed Sens. He went down to the Bronx and met Ed Sens. He talked to him. He got to fish on Ed Sens' property, but he couldn't remember where it was. He did it years ago, alright, and he said this is what Roger and Ed's book said. We had good conversations on several occasions about fly-tying and Catskill fishing, particularly a stretch of water. You know, his father maybe that might not be from his book. He mentioned Sens in his book that may be to an email for me, I forget, and this is from an email. It says, because Ed was such a, you know, skilled fly tyer in imitating natural insects and because of his ability to choose the right fly-tying materials and doing so, it makes him an important contributor to the Golden Age of the Catskills. I believe his contribution should be recognized and preserved with the Catskill angling history, and his name should be included [a long list of Catskill fly tyers]. He wanted to see him inducted into the Catskill Fly Fishing Hall of Fame. Alright, here's a book I wrote. I wrote this. Really, there's five chapters on Ed Sens [dedicate the memory of Ed Sens]. I thought there was so much about this guy rather than just these newsletter articles. I wanted to put a book out there that people could find and reference, and there are five chapters on it. The painting on the book—the painting was a—that's the East Branch in the Neversink across from the farm up by the farm on East Branch on the YMCA property. My goal was to get this book published where my wife passed. She did the painting, and I wanted her to see that, and I got it. I got a hard copy a month or so before she passed, so she got to see it. That was a goal of mine, so there are several patterns—Ed Sens' patterns in there, and if anybody wants a copy, it is \$17, and any books I sell, \$5 will go to the library, to the Jerry Bartlett Collection.

I just wanna mention one day I'll tell you about this. When I was done with the last article, the fifth article for "The Gazette" in 2017, I just said, "You know what? I got these 18 flies that Sens ties." It'd be wrong if I didn't take a couple of them and go back up and fish the West Branch of the Neversink, so I fished the Frost Valley property. Is anyone familiar with Frost Valley, West Branch of

the Neversink? There's a logging bridge on a lower end of the property—the logging bridge there. I got in there at the lower end of the property, and I fished a brown bi-visible, and I caught a brook trout, and I was thinking I should take it off. Nah, keep fishing. I keep fishing, so, you know, I kept fishing. The brook trout there are small, and I hooked this brown [between 13 and 15 inches]. I struck too hard. It's a 5x tippet. I left the damn flying fish, and I said, "Oh, that was awesome, so I had a royal coachman. I said, "I'm gonna put that on too." I ended up catching, like, a dozen brook trout, and the fly was all chewed up. It was a little dumb, but I just said, you know, this man tied him for this river, wrote the articles about him... so I did and caught fish on his flies. That's the story on Ed Sens. Thank you for listening. So, any questions you might have?

[00:42:59] **Audience:** I have a question.

[00:43:00] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Sure.

[00:43:00] **Audience:** You mentioned it really isn't about him so much, but you mentioned Abercrombie & Fitch a couple of times.

[00:43:05] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Mm-hmm.

[00:43:05] **Audience:** What kind of place was that back in the day?

[00:43:08] **Ed Ostapczuk:** It was like, I guess, what I would call like the L.L. Bean in New York City in terms of they had all kinds of supplies. I mean, they carried the top of the end of bamboo rods. They carried Leonards down there, the top of the end of fly fishing stuff, and I guess anyone from the city who was a trout fisher has a place to go and hang out and get information, so, I mean, that's my—I never went there. I mean, it was...

[00:43:28] **Audience:** I'll only get it later.

[00:43:29] **Ed Ostapczuk:** I think there's still a few around, but they're like outlet stores. Yeah, they're not like they were.

[00:43:35] **Audience:** There's now a clothing store, just for example. Abercrombie & Fitch was the outfitter for Teddy Roosevelt when he went to Africa to populate the Museum of Natural History with all the species that he collected from Africa. It was Abercrombie & Fitch that outfitted that, so it was well-known as a high-end outfitter for these exotic lion hunting expeditions and so on and so forth. They did specialize in fly fishing, and they did market, like,

Leonard fly rods and stuff like that, and the Fitch family is originally from Kingston. They went to bluestone.

[00:44:17] **Beth Waterman:** Well, I really want to thank you, Ed, for bringing Ed Sens to our attention. There's so many examples of folks who were very famous in their own time whose memory is obscured by history.

[00:44:33] **Audience:** Yeah.

[00:44:34] **Beth Waterman:** John Burroughs being one of them, who was rockstar famous in the early 20th century and then disappeared from view until recently, and Carolyn Wells, for example, who was a mystery novelist, published hundreds of books [very, very popular], and then she just vanished, so it's great that you've brought him back for our series on "Sporting Legends of the Catskills."

[00:45:00] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Glad you folks are going to have it in there because I think it's important to recognize his work and contributions.

[00:45:06] **Beth Waterman:** And I also just want to say that of all the books that you referred to, we have them down the hall, even Skues, and some of these kinds of, well, they look antiquated if you see them, you know they're historical books about fishing in England, and you think, why do we have this? Well, now I know, yeah, but Ovington and McClane and Leonard Wright and, you know, all the people that Ed mentioned, their books are down the hall, so I hope you'll take a look before you go.

[00:45:44] **Audience:** You know, let me think I'm a pain in the neck here.

[00:45:47] **Beth Waterman:** Cliff, No, you're not.

[00:45:49] **Audience:** I think because, you know, I'm at age 91 right now, and, you know, knowing guys like Harry and Elsie Darbee and Eric Leiser, they happen to be good friends of mine. Well, I've got a limited number of years left right now. I know that, but there's a lot of other people that knew these people. I, again, encourage you, whenever you can finance it and be able to do these things, to have some programs like you have on Art Flick and people like that have programs like Harry and Elsie Darbee and Eric Leiser before people like myself aren't around here any longer to tell you their stories they may know about these people.

[00:46:39] **Beth Waterman:** Yes.

[00:46:40] **Audience:** Mm-hmm.

[00:46:40] **Beth Waterman:** That's great, and I'll talk to you about it so that we can find a speaker. You know, I'm always looking for subjects and speakers.

[00:46:48] **Audience:** Well, right now we have a speaker right here in the house.

[00:46:50] **Beth Waterman:** Yeah.

[00:46:51] **Audience:** We have Ed Sens, and we have Ed Ostapczuk, and I'll tell you he's been on this stream forever, and his books and his writings and his friendships will be a legacy for the Catskills and especially for the Esopus.

[00:47:06] **Beth Waterman:** That's true, we have a sporting...

[00:47:07] **Audience:** He's a mentor of mine, not only a mentor and a friend, and it's been a pleasure, and it keeps going. I mean, he's not, he's not done.

[00:47:18] **Beth Waterman:** No.

[00:47:19] **Audience:** His curiosity and his love of history for the Catskills and the Esopus is just amazing.

[00:47:26] **Beth Waterman:** And his perseverance— Ed does have copies of his book if anyone would like to purchase one.

[00:47:32] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Cliff is a—I just mentioned Cliff. Cliff was a founding member of the Catskill Mountain Chapter back in the sixties.

[00:47:37] **Beth Waterman:** Yeah.

[00:47:38] **Ed Ostapczuk:** The first Trout Unlimited chapter in New York State, so...

[00:47:41] **Audience:** Wow!

[00:47:41] **Beth Waterman:** Yeah.

[00:47:41] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Cliff helped spread a seed that's growing and growing and grown.

[00:47:46] **Audience:** Yeah, you know, I just want to say, I mean, this is just a small example of the rich, rich historical patrimony that we have in the Catskills. If you're a fly fisher, a lover of the sport, a lover of the history, we're living in Disneyland here. We are so gifted just from living here that it's often easy to lose track of that perspective, but this is just one small example of how rich this patrimony is that we're all sharing here. The other thing I wanted to mention about caddis is this: it seems that the romanticism behind fly fishing is often caught up with the mayflies, and especially here in the Catskills, where these mayfly hatches are world famous, people come from all over the world to fish them. There are 1,200 known species of mayflies in North America. There are 2,000 known species of caddis in North America, so really, if you want to catch fish, you should probably be concentrating more on the caddis species than the mayfly species, to be perfectly honest. I'd just like to thank you for your fine library. I've used it many times, and I really, really enjoy it.

[00:48:54] **Beth Waterman:** Thank you. Yes, it's a wonder. If any of you are not on my mailing list, I'm curious to know how you've heard about this presentation. If anybody read about it in the newspaper, let me know because we sent out press releases, and I never know if they are worth the effort unless someone raises their hand.

[00:49:19] **Audience:** The Freeman today.

[00:49:20] **Beth Waterman:** Oh, great, thank you. Thank you, Mike. I'm glad to know that. I will keep sending out press releases. There's very little press left, but yeah, so we'll have a look down the hall if you haven't been here before, and I do have one other question, though. What about night fishing? How do you—what's the secret?

[00:49:50] **Ed Ostapczuk:** I'm too old to do it now, so all I can do is go day fishing so I don't worry about night fishing.

[00:49:59] **Audience:** Stand in one place and hope they come to you. He had a lot of the sound. You can't see the strike, so you have to hear the splash and then set the hook.

[00:50:11] **Beth Waterman:** Oh!

[00:50:14] **Audience:** Yeah, I'm curious, and this might sound silly, but you mentioned rainbow runs, so I hadn't thought about it. It's common sense that there would be a run, but, you know, I've fished up here a few times, mostly down by the rivers where I live in Passaic, the Farmington and 10 Mile [those

rivers down there]. There isn't a huge body of water where they may actually run from or run to, but up here you have runs of species of trout.

[00:50:48] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Rainbows and browns.

[00:50:49] **Audience:** Rainbows and browns, and they're in the Esopus. Where are they running from into?

[00:50:54] **Ed Ostapczuk:** From the Ashokan Reservoir up until the mainstream and the tributaries.

[00:50:59] **Audience:** And in seasonal?

[00:51:01] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Yeah.

[00:51:01] **Audience:** The way salmon would run?

[00:51:03] **Ed Ostapczuk:** For the most part, I think the rainbows are wintertime, and some former fisheries manager here can comment on that, but rainbows can be found anywhere from probably February through Mother's Day running up the river, and browns are depending on the water flows in the fall and the temperature, and, you know, last summer was so dry, like the fishery you asked me about Traver Hollow. I used to see sporting browns up there. I didn't see any sporting browns in Traver Hollow or the Bushkill last year. I didn't see them run off from the Ashokan, and it was just too low, yeah.

[00:51:34] **Audience:** Trout, rainbow trout, or salmon and species and a rainbow trout that is sea-run because they have the trait of anadromy, they are anadromous. They will run down to, like, the ocean if they can and fatten up and then run back up to where they were spawned. In the case of, like, some of these Alaskan rivers, that's, like, that's a journey of a thousand miles. They'll come up to Columbia and then up to Snake River and into, so technically steelhead salmon is a rainbow trout that is sea-run. Here they can't run into the ocean, but they can run into the Ashokan Reservoir, so for years, when I was fishing here, Ed, correct me if I'm wrong about this, but the conventional wisdom was that the rainbows had run up and spawned in the springtime, and now they've run back to the Esopus Creek. I think historically we're catching more large rainbows year-round, so it seems like—are you finding this? It seems like in the fishery, the habitat is stabilized or is attractive enough to keep these large rainbows upstream and not running down to the other thing, which is that since there's no official season now, people can fish year-round for these rainbows, and so people are out on the creek. I'm not personally. I'm too old for

this, but in February and early March, they're catching these freaking rainbows, so we're learning that this, the rainbow spawn, is starting earlier in the season than anybody expected.

[00:53:00] **Beth Waterman:** Surely, April 1st is still opening day somewhere.

[00:53:03] **Ed Ostapczuk:** Well, yeah, it's opening day, and you can kill fish from from April 1st through October 15<sup>th</sup>.

[00:53:10] **Beth Waterman:** Okay.

[00:53:10] **Audience:** There you go.

[00:53:11] **Ed Ostapczuk:** I think we have [interesting] enough. I think the rainbows are better this year because our man Tony used to have discussions with our man Mike down in New Paltz about stocking this fish, and ever since DEC stopped stocking the Esopus, I think the rainbows have taken off, but we won't go there.

[00:53:30] **Audience:** Jimmy had to retire first. Watch that, Mike. I had to retire first, and then it got better, right? Well, you're still involved. You're still involved, thankfully. You still are because he knows so much about the Esopus. It's incredible how much he knows. He was a longtime advocate for 20 years, and he's still active, right? Mike, you're still, yeah, he still consults, which is great.

[00:53:54] **Ed Ostapczuk:** The Uppeer Esopus Fisheries Management Program. There's a meeting Monday, you know, right?

[00:53:57] **Audience:** Right, that's, ooh, that's right.

[00:54:01] **Beth Waterman:** Thank you, thank you all for coming.

[00:54:03] **Audience:** Thank you again.

[00:54:04] **Beth Waterman:** It's been a pleasure.

[00:54:11] **Brett Barry:** "The Sporting Legends of the Catskills Series" is made possible by a grant from the Catskill Watershed Corporation. Audio production by Silver Hollow Audio.