

# CASTING LINES AND COLORS

By 1856 the brook trout lost their fight to survive in the Battenkill due to overharvesting, habitat loss, logging, agricultural and marble mining runoff. Stocking brook trout started in 1876 in White Creek, NY and brown trout stocking started around 1914 in the Battenkill's lower waters in NY. The first notes showing Vermont having brown trout is around 1922. In 1930, 7,500 German brown trout and 5,550 Loch Leven's Brown trout were stocked in the Green and Warm brooks, both tribs to the Battenkill. As sheep farms went out during the depression, pastures and steep cropland were abandoned. Sawmills closed and forests grew back, the lands slowly converted from eroded bare fields to sod, brush, and trees. The revision of land use allowed the trapping of eroded sediment and the capturing and cooling water to be released later into the river.

Runoff, erosion, and the sawdust from the mills, along with nutrient loading dropped. Nutrients from human activities were reduced by the Manchester sewage plant built in 1935. The river had a chance to heal and blossom once again. The aquatic bug life thrived on the reduced nutrient load. What was left

By Rich Redman

Sitting on a shoreline boulder, scanning a pool, waiting for the rise, hot black coffee in hand, I've only seen the sunrise, so far. The woods alive. In the distant hilltop a turkey gobbles, red wing black birds, cardinals, and other birds sing their songs. Procreation is their evolutionary goal. They don't think about it. It comes naturally, like the sun rising in the eastern sky, or the blossoms of a coltsfoot flower, or the rise of a trout in a river. Flickering shadows along with the sun's orange and yellow rays on the water, a misty fog floats down the valley, while deer get a morning drink. Toads bellow out mating songs, and a beaver gathers aspen branches. Cherish the moments you are alive. I am! I am fly fishing!

The Battenkill river flows on by, while I sit in awe at riparian life. Could a spent spinner draw a rise? If all of nature's signals are aligned, the hatches will start soon. Day length, water temperature and flow all determine the outcome. Maybe a Blue Winged Olive,

a March Brown, or a left-over Hendrickson will show. Up and down the river, the hatches can change just like the view. Until then, I'll sit here, drinking hot black coffee, and allow my mind to drift. It's good to be free for a while.

The trees are coming alive after a long winters sleep. The blending of brown flecked bark, grey speckles in beech, spring clover colors of aspen and willow. The darker emerald shaded pine and hemlock, mixed with the red maple flower buds, they merge into a dappled cotton ball softness in the hill and valley views. Golden browns of grass in senescence, yellow of sugar maple flower leaves, and greens of freshly growing grass. It's a painter's paradise.

For anglers, especially fly anglers, the brook trout, and browns now thrive in the waters of the Battenkill. Attending the Battenkill Fly Fishing festival this spring gave me insight into the river's fishing history and its beauty, captured by ink, paint, and the lens of a camera for years.

fed the water's aquatic bugs which in turn fed the fish.

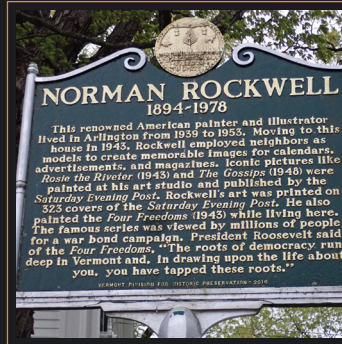
The Green Mountains drew tourists. The Battenkill Valley farms below didn't. That is what made the economic difference between NY and Vermont's Battenkill. But, the Battenkill had a twofold draw. It was and is a trout fisher's, as well as a painter's paradise. This combination of nature's beauty brought tourists, writers, artists, and anglers galore.

By the late 1930's and early forties, the Arlington area was a draw for NY City artists. In the spring of 1939 Norman Rockwell moved to Arlington. Mead Schaeffer followed, in 1940. Lee Wulff moved to Shushan, NY along the Battenkill in the fall of 1940.

Norman Rockwell invited John Atherton up to the area to fish. The Battenkill inspired the illustrator, and angler. In 1941 John "Jack" Atherton followed and built along the river in West Arlington Vt. In 46, George Hughes, an illustrator for the Saturday Evening Post settled in Arlington. At one time four painters/ illustrators who painted covers for the Saturday Evening Post all lived in the Battenkill Valley. Painters found a home and a reason along the river.

**N**orman Rockwell was not an angler, he lived near the red covered bridge down river from Arlington. He was one of the tribal members that fed off the beauty of the area.

Rockwell's paintings like the 4 Freedoms, "Freedom from Fear", "Freedom from Want", "Freedom of Worship", and "Freedom of Speech", were all Saturday Evening Post cover paintings. His paintings, done to support and aid the World War II effort, allowed the purchase of War Bonds.



NORMAN ROCKWELL MARKER in Arlington, VT.

**George Hughes** painted WWII portraits called "These Are the Generals," which led to working with the Saturday Evening Post. His first Saturday Evening Post cover was on April 17th, 1948. Vanity Fair and House and Garden, McCall's, Readers Digest, and God Housekeeping also featured Hughes artwork. Hughes painted 115 Post covers.

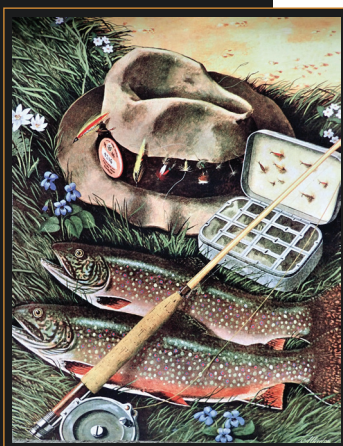
**Mead Schaeffer** was a professional who completed magazine and book illustrations. He worked with the Dodd, Mead Company which printed Moby Dick, Les Misérables, The Count of Monte Cristo plus periodicals like Women's Home Companion, American Magazine and Cosmopolitan. Fourteen paintings were cover art for the Saturday Evening Post. Along with Rockwell, Schaeffer also produced WWII War Bond encouragement paintings. He completed over 5,000 and took a piscatorial sabbatical to trout fish the Battenkill with his friends Atherton and Wulff.

“IT'S A PAINTER'S PARADISE.”

**Lee Wulff** is known more for his fishing. He produced movies and authored books about trout and Salmon. In 1926 Wulff studied art in Paris France. He left Paris and started a career in Greenwich Village, New York City. Being from Alaska, he longed for the outdoors, so the Catskills were his weekend retreats, where fishing took over from artwork. During the depression, he did freelance work. This led him to Mead Schaeffer, and John McDonald and Norman Rockwell. He started writing fishing articles and speaking at Fish and Game Clubs. Eventually he met John Atherton and started fly fishing the Battenkill, where he eventually built a home along the river in Shushan, New York.

**John Atherton** loved nature, hunting, and fly fishing. After serving in the Navy during the First World War, he attended the California School of Fine Arts. Fine art was his goal, but economic survival meant collaborating with commercial firms. The realist movement and European surrealism influenced Atherton. His americana approach led him to forty covers for the Saturday Evening Post, and exhibits at the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His December 12, 1942, "Patient Dog" cover print is my favorite. Atherton's painting style was blue collar, hardworking, and American industrial looking.

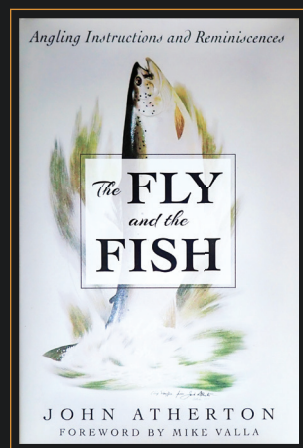
Atherton built a house on the Battenkill between Arlington, Vermont and the New York border off Route 313. He fished with Wulff and Schaeffer, at times, but their egos and headstrong ways always got in each other's way. His love of art, nature and fly fishing led him to draft a book called "The Fly and the Fish," published in 1961. John "Jack" Atherton died of a heart attack while fishing for Atlantic Salmon in New Brunswick in 1952. Atherton's ashes are memorialized along the banks of the Battenkill under a red maple tree near his property. The reprint of his book in 2016, has a new foreword written by Mike Valla, another NY Battenkill Valley writer.



SATURDAY EVENING POST COVER, April 15, 1944 by John Atherton

It was Atherton, Schaeffer and Wulff though, that took on double duty, artwork, and fishing. Those painting anglers not only cast a bamboo fly rod for trout, but they also cast colors on canvas to immortalize simple American life. Their brushes were their weapons to support the World War II effort. Those were the painters of a past era, our riverine history. The advent of photography was a death blow to painters that could not adapt.

Both painters and writers have captured the colors, hues, tones, and reflections of the Battenkill River and its valley. The tradition survives, through present day angling sculptors casting brushed colors and lines of ink, which continues Battenkill's colorful story.



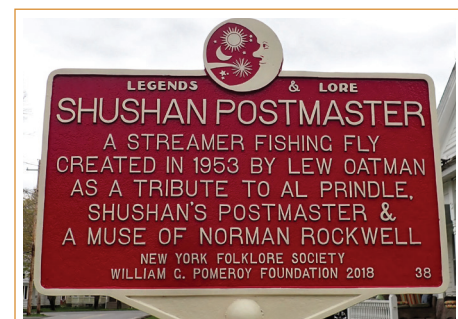
THE FLY AND THE FISH by John Atherton

John Merwin's "The Battenkill," portrays the history of the valley! Mike Valla's books, "Classic Streamer Fly Box" and "Founding Flies" notes the history of Battenkill fly tyer, Lew Oatman. While Adriano Manocchia is a photographer who flipped from film to easel, brush, and paint.

**John Merwin** learned to fish, and write, and merged his passions into angling ink art. He spent his life fishing and writing, in Dorset Vermont, near the Battenkill River. He died at 66 years old.

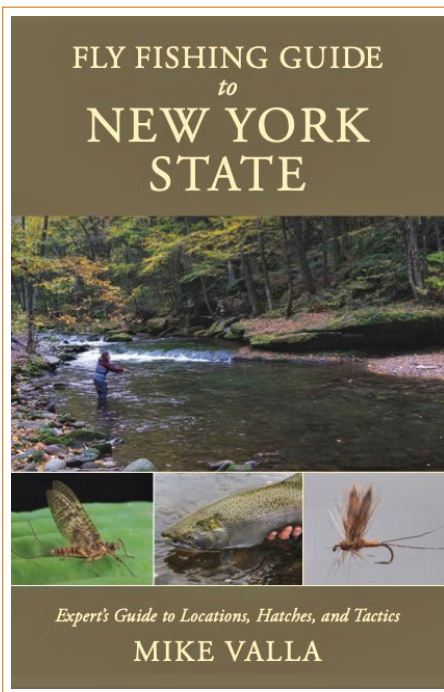
Mr. Merwin was a fly tier, cast perfectionist and enjoyed early years with the best, Lee Wulff and A.J. McClane. Mr. Merwin attempted farming to make a living farming in Vermont in the 1970s, but realized writing was his future. Merwin founded Rod and Reel magazine and became the fishing editor of Field and Stream magazine in 2003. He continued to write fishing stories and books, including "The New American Trout Fishing" book, a fishing classic until his death in 2013. The book, "The Battenkill," reached viewers in 1993.

**Mike Valla** grew up in the Binghamton, NY area and took to fly fishing at an early age. He traveled to the Catskills to fish and met the famous Dette couple, Art, and Winnie from Roscoe, New York. They took young Mike under their wing and taught him how to tie Catskill trout flies. Mike attended Cornell and studied Fisheries Science, continued to fish, but writing was his forte. He was the Northeast field editor for Eastern Fly-Fishing magazine, and a recipient of the Poul Jorgensen Golden Hook award. He has authored fishing and fly-tying books such as "The Founding Flies", "Catskill-Style Dry Flies", and "Tying and Fishing Bucktails and Other Hair Wings". Valla's the "Founding Flies" details Lew Oatman's streamer tying along the Battenkill. Oatman tied the famous Shushan Postmaster named in honor of Al Prindle, the Shushan, NY postmaster at the time, one of Oatman's fishing buddies.



SHUSHAN POSTMASTER HISTORICAL MARKER in Shushan, NY

Writing about fly fishing wasn't his career though; Mike Valla was a dental surgeon who recently retired. He settled down in Cambridge, New York near the Battenkill and enjoys life with his wife Valerie who photographs Mike's adventures for his books.



FLY FISHING GUIDE TO NEW YORK STATE, by Mike Valla

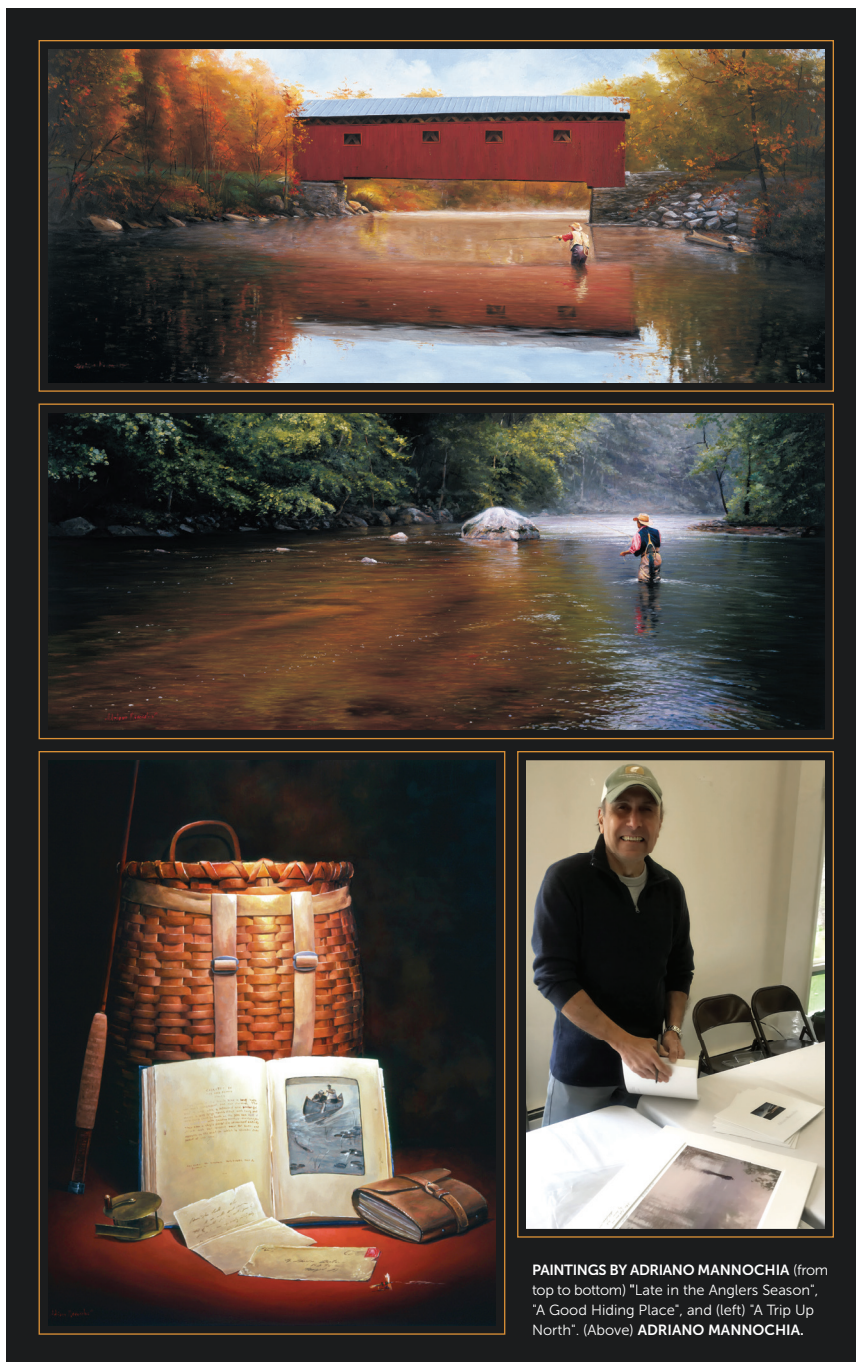
Mike Valla's latest book, "Fly Fishing Guide to New York State," with Val on the cover flyfishing, should be out this fall detailing rivers and streams to fish in New York.

Adriano Manocchia's "Justie's Set" print, hangs over my writing desk. I purchased the painting around 1990 at a Trout Unlimited banquet in Lake George. Thirty-three years later I met the man, the painter, at another TU banquet in Saratoga, and again at the Battenkill Fly fishing Festival in Arlington, Vermont weeks later. Fly fishing piscatorial fate, I guess.

Adriano started viewing the world as a teen through a camera, a Rolleiflex. His first published photo was taken of Pele, in Yankee Stadium, where the Brazilian was playing in a soccer match. From that moment on, Adriano was captured by the lens and film. As a freelancing photographer he traveled extensively photographing everything including President Carter and Mohammed Ali. It was an assignment in Phoenix that changed his future. When he witnessed the Cowboy Artists Show, the paint brush became his new focus.

He studied, experimented, and progressed continuously until he perfected his art.

From still life's to landscapes, his brush brings out color, passion, calmness, gentleness, fond memories, and future dreams about the art of fly fishing, wildlife, nature, and



PAINTINGS BY ADRIANO MANOCCHIA (from top to bottom) "Late in the Anglers Season", "A Good Hiding Place", and (left) "A Trip Up North". (Above) ADRIANO MANOCCHIA.

rivers, of course. From "Justie's Set" to "Late in the Anglers Season," his exquisite paintings have life, real fishing life. You are there when your eyes view his work. It's a memory from being in that spot, or even better, imagining being in that spot, you are there.

I know first-hand, when I view "A Good Hiding Place", I can feel the sand and gravel bottom, feel the flow of water against my legs, smell the river air and witness the colors. I also feel the anticipation of waiting for a rise, and the take. Adriano Manocchia is a fishing artist you must experience.

These Battenkill artists have taught us

history, showed us beauty, and have taken us beyond the river. I stood in the Battenkill, fly fishing, my memory in awe by the cast lines of ink and paint I have witnessed.

The Battenkill Valley was and still is home to fly-fishing anglers, artists, writers, and photographers. From the past days of John Atherton and Lee Wulff to the present of Mike Valla and Adriano Manocchia. Casting lines and colors on paper, their "talking leaves" are the traditions that will survive, until the next generation captures the essence of the Battenkill Valley. They have enormous shoes to fill. 🍂