Defending Democracy on the Home Front

By Ellen A. Brown

During World War II, while Eleanor Roosevelt was reminding Americans about the importance of civil rights, of affordable housing, and of adequate childcare, another lesser known champion was hard at work in New York State in an effort to defend one very important clause in the New York State Constitution. This short statement, written in 1885 as the New York Forest Preserve was created, provided a unique legal tool for protecting the Adirondack wilderness, and John S. Apperson had become one of its staunchest and most energetic supporters. The "Wilderness Clause" reads :

> ...the lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed. (Art. VII, Sec. 7, N.Y. State Constitution)

As war broke out in Europe, John Apperson had already completed forty years of work as an engineer at the General Electric Company, in Schenectady, New York. His career had been a remarkable achievement for a man who had come north in 1900, from Southwest Virginia, with no college degree to his credit. His intelligence and determination helped him get an extraordinary education "on test" and on the job. By 1940, Apperson had risen to a management position in Engineering General, with primary responsibilities in reviewing patents and in coordinating the details for contracts. The job required him to stay informed about new products being developed in some seventy engineering divisions. He had to analyze plans to anticipate production

problems, many of which could only be smoothed over with considerable tact, persuasion and diplomacy.

There are not many records which indicate what specific assignments John Apperson had during the incredible war-time expansion at GE. As their slogan (G. E. – The Sleeping Giant Awakes) stated, General Electric underwent a tremendous war-time growth and transformation. The average number of GE employees (in Schenectady) between 1926 and 1939 had been 15,737. In 1943, the employment reached 45,000 (fifty-five percent of Schenectady's population.) By the war's end, twenty-seven million horsepower of turbine propulsion equipment had been delivered to the Navy. Here is a listing of some of the GE plants' manufacturing assignments which were undertaken between 1940 and 1945:

> ...aeronautical devices, aircraft gas engines, generators, gun-fire controls, hydraulic synchronous converters, turbines & turbine generators, voltage regulators, welding equipment, wire and cable, glyptal solutions, insulation materials, silicones, electric tubes, and radar & radio communications equipment. (~~Scheneetady : A City Transformed by War, by William L.~~ Pelotte p. 18)

John Apperson must have participated in the planning for many of these production miracles. Once the draft was in place and young men began going off to war, the work load increased for everyone, especially for those with considerable management experience. Despite the long hours and extra work, though, Apperson still managed to continue to pursue his avocation, a second career, as a preservationist & defender of Lake George and the Adirondack Park. Ever since his first visit to Lake George (1901), there was no question that young Apperson had found a treasure – something to explore, to share with friends, and to protect. A confirmed bachelor by the 1940's, he had chosen a different sort of lifetime commitment, saying, "Lake George is my mistress, and its

islands are my children." (Apperson Papers, Adirondack Research Library, Schenectady, New York)

In Virginia, young John had spent most of his time out of doors, as a surveyor and as a foreman for the Marion & Rye Valley Railroad. At seventeen he had registered for classes at V.P.I. in Blacksburg, but his temperament and restless energy kept him from doing well in the classroom. His father, a medical doctor and entrepreneur, had little patience or sympathy for John's lack of discipline, and soon John was forced to work for a living. Father and son may have reconciled eventually, for John found employment as a surveyor and foreman for the local branch railroad, an enterprise founded and managed by his father, Dr. Apperson.

The railroad experience was an ideal preparation for John's later careers – both at GE and as a conservationist. From the railroad he learned about road construction and engineering, about mining and mineralogy, and about effective management practices. It must have been hard for such a young man to command respect from men who were older and bigger than he, but he was self confident, honest and fair. He discovered the value of getting thorough and accurate information. His methodical approach served him well years later when he needed to convince legislators about conditions affecting the forests or lakes. He had seen these places himself and had studied all the pertinent facts. He also practiced and perfected the art of persuasion, making use of his lively sense of humor and a generous dose of Southern charm.

Apperson soon made a reputation for himself around GE as the man who knew all about camping, hiking and skiing in the Adirondacks. For many years, Appy (as he came to be called) introduced people to the rigors and pleasures of camping, canoeing, ice

skating and skate sailing, at Lake George and throughout the High Peaks region north of Schenectady. Many of these hiking friends caught the enthusiasm from Appy and began to get interested in his efforts to protect state lands. Appy was constantly inviting people to come and enjoy the natural wonders, but he also invited them to contribute to its preservation – by rip-rapping the shores of islands (piling stones to make a protective wall), by writing letters to influential people, or by taking pictures of island shores being washed by erosion. Often these enthusiastic friends were able to introduce Appy to politicians and legislators who could help pass or defeat important legislation. Appy's personality and style led him to be a grassroots activist, and when he needed help in a fight, he had an organization which could spring into action.

Frank Graham, Jr. (The Adirondack Park, A Political History) refers to this (p. 173)
grassroots association as "the Schenectady force," and describes how :

> ...preservationists like Apperson forged strong ties with the men at the top [in Albany or New York]. Appie was friendly with all the governors, especially with Al Smith... When Smith was first sent to Albany as a young assemblyman from the city, he found out he had been assigned to 'the committee on forests..' (After he got over his disappointment he decided to find out something about them [the forests]. Well, he did, and he became a great supporter of the preserve. Appie could always go to him with a complaint or a suggestion and Smith would listen because he realized that Appie knew what he was talking about. Appie had the same relationship with Roosevelt, Lehman, and Harriman when they were governor. 189 (p. 189)

During the many battles waged between 1915 and 1940, Appy earned the respect of many prominent and well placed people, among them millionaires (with estates at Lake George), mayors, governors, senators, and civic leaders. He had also made some enemies, especially among those who were motivated by their own self interest and who stood to lose (money or influence) as a result of Appy's efforts. Many people suspected his motives and assumed that he must be interested in gaining something for himself –

perhaps power, money or property. The evidence suggests, however, that he and his friends were simply trying to protect what they loved.

One way to get a glimpse of a man's character is by examining the relationships he forms and the sorts of friends he has. Since John Apperson was not only a prolific letter writer but also rather compulsive about saving copies of all his correspondence, his correspondence provides a surprisingly complete record of his life. Volunteers have sorted and organized by chronological year the thousands of letters, which are stored in a small library in Schenectady, and are available for anyone to read. [Unless otherwise indicated, all the letters in this paper come from the Apperson papers in the Adirondack Research Library.) Here are some quotes from letters written to him during World War II, which shed some light on his relationships – with family members and with friends. His nephew, Jim Apperson, a metallurgist working in the GE plant in Lynn, Massachusetts, writes (Dec. 1942) :

> Your work through the years on so wonderful a subject has always been a great source of family pleasure and at the same time one of regret for me that I have not gotten from life equal pleasure that you no doubt have divined in such accomplishments. Forget the duff –

And this excerpt from a letter written by Paul Schaefer, one of Appy's supporters, on April 15, 1944 :

> Dear Mr. Apperson :
>
> Just a word of appreciation for your inspiring enthusiasm and artistry in your conservation work, as evidenced again Friday night at the meeting of the Adirondack Mountain Club. You are better than you were fifteen years ago when I first met you, and that is saying a lot.
>
> The job you have accomplished for the Adirondacks is as basic as Verplank Colvin's and much more intricate and difficult than his was.
>
> Your wonderful example has implanted in us an ideal, as well as a clear picture of the job which must be accomplished on through the years. Each of us will ultimately find his special work which we will push forward to the best of our individual ability.

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One of Apperson's most frequent correspondents was Alvin Whitney, Assistant Director of the New York State Museum (in Albany). This letter, from January 11, 1942, provides a good sampling of the interests and concerns of these two public-minded citizens, and a taste of their personalities, too. (Whitney, by the way, helped found the Nature Conservancy in 1954.) :

Dear Mr. Apperson :

We are glad to have the clipping you sent about the proposal for the establishment of a "park district" at the outlet of Lake George. Mrs. Whitney and I have just re-read it carefully, and are delighted with your (as always) masterful rejoinder to a tricky proposition. Whoever is at the bottom of the sly suggestion, it gives one more opportunity to hammer home the facts of the situation, and publicly.

Well, I see the all-out war has not diverted you completely from the problems of peace. Mrs. Edge, too, I notice, is watching conservation interests with a critical eye. For the devil never sleeps; he is omnipresent, indefatigable.

On the front page of the Society Section of the *Sunday NY Times* today is an article describing the $236,000 mountain ski center at North Conway, its "skimobile," snow-conditioning machines, etc., its present huge popularity with attendant snow-trains from New York and Boston; and the local realization that "skiing has become a big industry."

The popularity of the aerial tramway on Cannon Mountain in Franconia Notch, is turning the heads of the New Hampshire people. They are now about to install one on Mount Sunapee reservation, and others are pretty sure to follow. Therefore we must expect a campaign for similar contraptions in the Adirondacks and Catskills, so our skiers will require a minimum of exertion. Think how much more they will enjoy the scenery!

Just in case the World War should take a turn and prove to be short, our promoters and the Conservation Department can be depended upon to speedily carry out the "people's mandate" with respect to the ski center on Whiteface. Meanwhile, what is being done to make that impossible?

It was a great pleasure to receive your greeting from Virginia, in the form of native holly and mistletoe. What a wealth of berries they bore this season. I think a good deal about Huddle Bay and Dome Island, and skate-sailing, and the flying squirrels at your camp these mid-winter days; and hope you're enjoying the sports of the season, at least on Sundays. I'm getting a little more active, slowly but steadily, and by next spring I hope to be back to normal, or nearly so.

With kindest regards from us both.

Sincerely yours,
Alvin S. Whitney

Whitney and Apperson were both very conscious of the various groups which threatened to chip away at the protections provided by the "forever wild" clause in the Constitution. They feared that developers would be allowed to build ski slopes and toboggan runs on state property, and they were convinced that there would be no limit thereafter to the construction of ski lodges, roads, and gasoline stations on property which is constitutionally protected. Apperson had formed The Forest Preserve Association in the thirties to encourage the coordination of efforts to maintain a vigilant watch on legislation and illegal activities. During the war, the Forest Preserve Association had to curtail its activities and cut back on its scheduled meetings. Gas rationing and work pressures made it impossible for many of its members (who lived throughout the metropolitan and upstate region) to travel to a designated meeting place. Some of its younger members had enlisted and were scattered over the continent at various training camps. Here are some letters they wrote to Appy. A private Tom Malone wrote, from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina :

June 4, 1941

Dear Mr. Apperson :

As you will note from the above address my next year, ending April 15, 1942, will be spent over the transits and aiming circles of the 3rd Field Artillery Observation Battalion, newly formed, which in mid-summer will transfer either to Fort Bending, Fla., or Ethan Allen in Vermont.

On a weekend furlough over Memorial Day spent in Troy, I read the Forest Preserve Association notice of its annual meeting. Sorry to have missed it, and more than anything will miss the summer meeting up in the Lake George paradise. We have sand-dust storms – and rainless months here!

Mr. Eugene Bamforth of Glenwood Road, Menands, is the hiking club's new conservation chairman and a very good one. He has hiked all the way from Katahdin in Maine down to New Jersey over the Appalachian Trail & has done the entire Long Trail in Vermont – is very quiet, but fights for his beliefs in conservation.

If you want the trail club's cooperation at any time, he, or Ed Kapalka (who is getting married this week) would be best to contact.

Sincerely,
Pvt. Tom Malone

And here is a letter written from a weather station in Westhampton Beach, New York :

March 7, 1944

Dear Appy,

I have thought of you many times since getting into the army last July, but found it hard to write much except to my wife. I went through Camp Upton. There we were outfitted, given shots in one arm, took classification exams, and had generous doses of kitchen police – from 3:30 am until about 7:00 pm. I was assigned to the air corps, and sent to their basic training center at Greensboro, NC. There we took further exams for classification. My eyes barred me from any work connected with flights, but I was eligible for any of the technical schools. Not knowing one from the other, they eventually sent me to the weather school at Chanute Field, Illinois. Before being sent to school, we had our basic training. This consists in drilling and physical training for the most part, but there were incidental lectures, on various military subjects, and a week's bivouac, sentry duty, scouting, swimming with clothes on, rifle and sub-machine gun practice. The physical training course was 2 hours a day. It included conditioning exercises, cross country running, obstacle course running, and combative or contact sports. Due to not being used to the heat, it was not easy. We were out in the sun all day, marching for the balance of the day. However, I stood it all as well as the next fellow, and was in pretty good shape by the time I was sent to school in September.

[omit 5 paragraphs about weather forecasting]

....When I went into the army we had to rent our home, and Helen and the youngster are living with her parents in Albany. I was very lucky to be sent here for a while as it enabled me to get home occasionally since January 1, to see the family. We are sometimes sent to some pretty isolated posts in either the arctic or the tropics, so I am particularly glad to be home now because my mother is going to have an eye operation in a couple of weeks.

I know that you have been working hard, as usual, and I hope that you have been well. Incidentally, McRae is now Commanding Officer of Camp Dix. Please remember me to Mr. Whitney if you see him. With best to you.

Sincerely,
George Wenger

In July, 1941, a newsletter (written by Appy) was sent out to the members of the Forest Preserve Association, in hopes that the membership would stay involved Here is the text of that publication :

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It is now generally recognized that real conservation is vital to national preparedness and that our annual informative meetings have been highly beneficial both directly and indirectly in this field of endeavor. Unfortunately, we are now so fully occupied with special problems that our meeting will have to be delayed until autumn or

possibly postponed until next year. Some of the more important problems deserving attention by those who can and will take action are :

1) The proposed amendment to Art. XIV, Section I of the New York State Constitution to permit the construction of twenty miles of 80 ft. wide ski runs on White Face Mountain which will be voted on by the electorate this fall.
2) After much effort a soil conservation districting law similar to the law in forty states was adopted by New York State. Ten counties have formed districts under this new act.
3) 1941 has been another year of destructive forest fires, as usual, the most damage occurred where the debris from tree-cutting operations was left on the ground....As long as the State Conservation Department sides with the opponents of fire slash disposal legislation there is little chance that this much needed law will be enacted, but it should be kept fresh in the minds of all conservationists and in New York State. Fire is still the greatest enemy of vegetation and wild life.
4) The opening of the old iron mines at Tahawus and the building of a new road along the shores of Sanford Lake, the southern entrance to the high peaks, has caused much apprehension on the part of mountain lovers. The development of a village and the encouragement to a highway north possibly through Indian Pass, constitute a real threat to the high peaks region...
5) The only sizeable and unspoiled area on Lake George constituting the most famous lake scenery in eastern America is the region commonly known as the Narrows. After many years of effort, the western half of this masterpiece of nature was acquired by the state in 1924. This acquisition comprises about ten miles of shore, 13,000 acres of land and one large island. The state legislature of 1941 appropriated funds to acquire the opposite half of the Narrows, the east side, including Paradise Bay shore land, Elephant, Black, Erebus, Sleeping Beauty and Shelving Rock Mountains, and numerous bays and natural scenic points along this rugged shore. Negotiations for its purchase are now underway and the owner's lawyer wishes to reserve a mile of shore at the terminus of the public road which constitutes the land entrance to this state park. People well acquainted with the neighborhood and the owner are very apprehensive that the retention of any land at this entrance would lead to inharmonious developments and encourage a through highway along the shore.

   [reasons why this would be a bad idea are omitted here]
6) Rather incidental to this larger problem but still in the minds of many is the preservation of Dome Island which serves as a centerpiece of this famous scenery. Reduction of the very serious fire hazard on this island has been done by individuals intermittently for two years and part of the shore has been protected by stone. It is hoped that some way can be found to retain the wild character of this landmark permanently.

Apperson had purchased Dome Island in 1939 to prevent the previous owners from their construction plans. Appy did not have enough money to buy Dome Island at that

time, so he had gone to his friend Irving Langmuir (Nobel Prize winner in Chemistry) and asked him to loan part of the money. Appy must have enjoyed taking on the responsibility of caring for the beautiful tree-covered, perfectly symmetrical island, but he was concerned about how it could be kept safe for future generations. Judging from the papers in Appy's files, Dome Island and some of the other Forest Preserve problems, though important, had to take a back seat to a big new challenge. Appy's attention was diverted to a new cause in 1941, to be known as the Lake George Trespass Case.

For nearly three years much of Appy's time and energy was directed in an effort to win a legal battle between the NY State Attorney General and the International Paper Company, owners of a dam at the north end of Lake George. The State wanted to prove that the dam owners had no right to use Lake George as a mill pond. The dispute became very heated and very personal, and the arguments and issues became more and more complicated.

People who lived in Ticonderoga and were employed by the paper mill and other industries which had sprung up around it were convinced that the region would lose jobs and suffer economically if the courts were to rule in favor of the state. There was, however, a considerable amount of misinformation which was being circulated by the mill owners. Apperson belonged to a club called the Lake George Association, the membership of which was composed of a large number of landowners at Lake George. There was increasing tension between the Apperson supporters and the officers of the Association, with Appy, Langmuir and others feeling that the LGA was not doing enough to protect the shoreline from erosion.

This battle over the Lake George water rights dragged on for fifteen years in the courts. The slides, films and brochures which Appy and his friends produced showed docks under water and docks stranded many feet away from water. They showed the erosion on islands over successive years, including some which had altogether disappeared. The most controversial argument Appy tried to make, however, was his insistence on having the man-made dam removed, restoring the natural stone dam. Even if the public and the courts could understand that the mill owner was trespassing on the rights of shore owners (and doing harm to the state forest preserve,) people could not be convinced that the natural dam should be restored. Appy gave speeches, wrote letters, took photographs, and consulted experts in an all out war, at some personal risk. By 1945 he decided to resign his membership from the LGA.

April 13, 1945

Mr. W. B. Woodbury, President
Lake George Association
Diamond Point on Lake George, NY
Dear Sir :

When the Lake George Association became a party to the so called gentleman's agreement with the mill owner to hold lake levels favorable to the mill owner, the association by that act sanctioned the use of Lake George as a Mill Pond. This procedure also discouraged the efforts then being made to have the State establish the shore owners' rights and thus settling the long dispute. A number of shore owners, many of whom were members of the Lake George Association, sent protests against the agreement to Governor Lehman. Your sympathies were emphasized by your shameful treatment of the distinguished scientist, Dr. Irving Langmuir, when he tried to make known the truth about the lake levels at the annual meeting in 1941.

In 1942, after much effort, the State was finally encouraged to file a formal complaint with the court to establish the rights of the shore owners, but the Lake George Association opposed the State action and they became a co-defendant with the mill owners.

The recent act of the legislature, which if approved by the Governor would have legalized the use of Lake George as a mill pond, was also supported by the Lake George Association. Fortunately for the shore owners the measure was vetoed by Governor Dewey.

This amazing record of the Lake George Association on lake levels, impels me to direct my future efforts and contributions through a new organization now actively engaged in establishing the shore owners water rights. Accordingly this is written as my resignation from the Lake George Association to take effect immediately.

Very Truly,
J. S. Apperson

Dr. Woodbury wasted no time in making his response :

The Lake George Association
April 23, 1945

Dear Sir,

Your typically characteristic letter by registered mail just received and personally, as I think I can safely say, 99+9/10 percent of our membership will welcome this action, which in view of your strange activities over the years, IS MUCH BELATED!!

It goes without question that I shall recommend to our executive Committee that your resignation be accepted as of this date.

The association has lived over the years, long before you or I were even heard of, and I rather think it will continue to live, despite you and yours.

W.B. Woodbury, President

With so many people angry, Appy had to worry that someone might set fire to his camp. In 1942 he wrote this letter to his insurance agent :

Confidential August 11, 1942

Dear Mr. Condict :

During a brief discussion today noon at the Mohawk Club with Speaker Heck and Dr. Pillsbury, Mr. Heck said a threat was made to him during the last session of the legislature, the substance of which was that unless Dr. Langmuir and I stopped our efforts on the Lake George water problem, our camps would be burned down. Of course, I dismiss this as idle talk but after reading a letter written by the President of the Lake George Association dated July 22nd to Mr. Kenneth Reynolds containing a more veiled threat, it had occurred to me that possibly this should be brought to your attention since your company have insured this property, though it must be treated in confidence. It is a fact that people in Ticonderoga have been unduly frightened and incensed with misinformation concerning the proposed restoration of the natural dam in the outlet of Lake George. It is also true that the mill owner is now a defendant in the suit recently brought by the State to settle the old controversy over water rights, but none of this may warrant any action on your part. I am not losing any sleep over this and hope you will not feel unduly alarmed.

Sincerely yours,
J. S. Apperson

The mill owners and their supporters were able to set up a joint hearing on the topic of the water levels. Appy recognized that if he were to testify before this legislative body, most of his testimony would thus be revealed to his opponents and become worthless in the long-delayed court battle. When the subpoena was served, requesting that he attend the hearings, he noticed that the subpoena had no date. He managed to successfully evade the officials and never did hand over his photos and notes. He kept the following record of the events :

Memorandum

The defective subpoena issued by Hon. Richard J. Sherman, Chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Lake George Water Conditions, was served on me Thursday, August 18, at about 6:00 p.m. Among the other questionable features was the absence of any particular day which I was to attend.

The next morning I went to work as usual, lunching at the Mohawk Club as usual, returning to work after lunch as usual and visiting the dentist after which later in the afternoon I drove to Lake George.

Saturday I discussed with several members of the committee who have intervened on the side of the State in the pending suit to determine the water rights on Lake George the evidence and the possible adverse effect on such testimony if they appear before the Investigating Committee.

Sunday I lunched with Solicitor General Judd and his family at Silver Bay. In the afternoon we climbed Deer Leap where we spent much of our time discussing the various angles of the pending suit over the water question and the evidence pertaining thereto.

Monday I spent much of my time around camp and with my near neighbors, the weather not being particularly good for pictures.

Tuesday I started on a picture taking expedition of the damaged shores on State Islands, returning Friday afternoon to my camp.

Part of Saturday and Saturday night I spent with Dr. Irving Langmuir returning Sunday night to my home in Schenectady.

I was surprised to learn later that no action was taken by the Governor to prevent the interference by the Legislative Committee with the preparation of the suit as suggested would be taken in Mr. Cohan's letter to me dated May 4, 1943. J.S. Apperson, August 24, 1943

Family history has it that Appy was literally "in hiding" for that week, and at one point he had to crawl onto a rock ledge and squeeze into a crevice there, just above the head of the official who was searching the island trying to find him. Appy had learned

over the years to be as clever and sly as a fox. He had to be, for he was fighting against people of wealth and influence, some of whom had no scruples. There are many interesting comments scattered throughout Appy's correspondence which reveal his awareness of the shady tactics of his foes. Here is a good example:

August 30, 1943

Dear Mrs. Christie :

Since after I left our entrance on the highway possibly 100 feet I observed a red rag tied to the limb of a tree and about 100 feet south of our entrance, another rag was tied to the limb of a tree and probably 100 feet south of the public road about opposite the south line of Dr. Langmuir's property The Castle was another rag tied on a tip of a limb. It was quite plain that these rags did not indicate any designs on your estate or peace and tranquility. It very definitely took in all of Dr. Langmuir's lake shore property and the greatest part of mine. Whether this is a threat of reprisal or some local or commercial or so-called civic-minded person desiring to create a public campsite is of course a possibility but in any event I would appreciate it if Mr. McCutcheons could with the aid of your key enter my camp and secure my very valuable shotgun upstairs to the extreme right after you reach the upper floor and a new metal tripod behind the cot downstairs on the north side; also equally important, consume all the food including the precious butter which I left with you last night. I will be disappointed unless you enjoy this food in its entirety after having harbored and nourished a fugitive from justice.

Sincerely yours,
J. S. Apperson

Appy was very resourceful in recruiting friends to help. He wrote old friends and asked them to look through their old photographs to provide evidence, and he asked favors from anyone who might be in a position to help. His niece, Martha Apperson, was working in Washington, DC, so Appy asked her to look for a property deed in the Library of Congress. He turned to experts and specialists and asked them to provide their professional opinions, especially with regard to water levels and dam construction. He and his associates wrote letters to various publications, such as this one which appeared in the *Knickerbocker News* in Albany (March 8, 1945).

No Good Politics

The attorney general is suing a North Country dam owner for lowering the level of Lake George. A bill has been introduced in the Legislature giving a state official discretion on the lake level, which is now fixed by law at a point properly protective of conservation aims.

Some Erie County hunters were irked at restrictions on bagging of deer in the Allegany Mountains. A bill was introduced forbidding the Conservation Department from interfering.

The attorney general quite properly objects to the Legislature interfering with an action begun in the interests of all the people of the state.

Many sportsmen, who understand the need and value of proper control of the hunting of deer, quite properly object to the Erie County bill.

So long as politics is what it is, some special bills will clog the calendar at every legislative session. But bills which would interfere with the faithful performance of duty by state officials and departments in the interest of the whole people carry special political favors too far.

Both these bills should be defeated. We suspect they will be.

The slides and data which Appy collected proved to be very effective in convincing legislators and the general public. Appy called on the most influential people he could reach, including Robert Moses, the man who had written many of the New York laws and who knew how to "get things done." Moses chose to steer clear of the controversy, writing this letter to explain :

December 19, 1944

Dear John :

I looked over the data which you left with me regarding the Lake George water level problem, and have discussed this matter with several engineers.

While my basic sympathies are always with you as to Lake George matters, I really cannot in this instance and with the limited time I can give to it figure out the best solution of the problem. There are obviously two plans in the controversy, each advocated by reputable people, namely those advocating retention of the present Paper Company Dam with the water level regulated by the state Superintendent of Public Works and those advocating that the State acquire the title to the outlet and mill dam, restore the natural dam, and regulate the water. My suggestion is that you work on this with Orrin Judd.

With best wishes for a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, I am

Cordially,
Robert Moses

Appy gave talks and showed his slides throughout the forties. In February of 1943 he gave this talk to the Mohawk Valley Hikers :

> Mr. Chairman, hikers, and guests:
>
> Hikers are supposed to see more and talk less than other people, but your chairman asked me to come here as a hiker to talk on conservation.
>
> We all seem to agree that everything we do now must help win the war and the peace. Hiking saves gas and rubber and makes us physically and mentally fit; therefore, hiking and efforts to encourage hiking definitely help to win the war and the peace.
>
> We also seem to agree that we should utilize our talents and natural resources in a way to obtain maximum benefits with a minimum injury to our resources. If we act wisely it is believed there will be enough left to support our way of life, including the cultural features.
>
> During the last war the enormous loss of one vital resource, top soil, could have been avoided by better methods of land cultivation. The loss of top soil by wind and water erosion is now minimized by contour plowing and strip cropping and other methods now used in many sections of our country.
>
> The affect of soil erosion has been known for generations, but it is only in the last ten years that substantial progress has been made in solving this serious land problem... Soon after the Mohawk Valley Hikers were organized, they became very helpful in our conservation work and the film to follow will show some of them at work trying to save the most famous scenery in Eastern America, famous largely because of the beautiful trees on numerous islands which form the main features of this scenery. A place to rest physically and mentally and a place to dream of better things to come. A place to enjoy and preserve for those who return from the war and those who deserve a rest from their work at the home front.

The war years brought many changes to John Apperson's personal life. His nephew, and namesake, John Apperson 3rd, graduated from V.P.I. in 1940 and came to Schenectady to work for GE that summer. Appy was glad to invite his nephew to share his home, on Teviot Road, and that arrangement worked well until the fall of 1942, when young John decided to marry and move into an apartment with his new wife. Not long afterwards, Appy took in another graduate of V.P.I. Housing was tight in wartime Schenectady.

Appy enjoyed having some of his family in town, and they all enjoyed spending time at the lake. When rationing prevented them from going south to Virginia in 1943,

they celebrated Christmas at Lake George, and Appy must have been pleased to watch the younger set have a go at skate sailing, a sport he had enthusiastically promoted for so many years. John's wife, Katharine, may have had a difficult adjustment to Schenectady's cold climate, to the wartime rationing, and to the expectations imposed on her to enjoy the great outdoors, but she was a good sport. She became fond of Uncle John and appreciated his thoughtfulness toward her. This letter she wrote to Mr. Apperson, two years before she married into the family, expresses well the nice relationship which had already begun to develop :

> Dear Mr. Apperson,
>
> To be awakened by a shrill alarm clock is quite a come down from the lapping water of your Lake George. However, you know better than I that one cannot linger long at Paradise Island, French Point, or any of the lovely spots you pointed out to me. Eventually you have to come down to earth, or work.
>
> Thank you for your wonderful hospitality and the grandest weekend I have ever had anywhere.
>
> Remember me to your friends at Lake George. So many ladies and one attractive bachelor; tell your nephew to follow in your footsteps in every respect but not to cultivate friendships with more than five at a time.
>
> The best of luck with your "nine mile plan." I agree with you entirely on your conservation ideas. Please leave Hotel Sagamore – the rest can go.
>
> Mother and Daddy also wish to thank you for having me at Chilhowie.
>
> Come back to Richmond before or by egg nog time.
>
> With best regards,
> Katharine Hill

Appy extended his hospitality on many occasions to brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and other more distant relatives from the south. He had a close relationship with each of his siblings, but especially with his older brother Hull. Before the war the Apperson siblings had gotten into the habit of spending Christmas together in Florida, but this custom ~~began to be affected by the~~ gave way to the pressures of gas rationing and by deaths in the family. His sister Georgis's husband died in 1941, Harvey (a half brother) died in 1943, Hull in 1944, and Kent (another half brother), in 1945. On a brighter note, Appy 's nephew John and his

wife, Katharine, had a son, in August of 1944, and named him John (the fourth). Only a few of Appy's relatives were called into military service. Nephews John and Jim had deferments since they were both employed in engineering jobs which were considered vital for production.

There were several women, long-time friends, who helped him with his causes. Florence Christie, a widow whose camp bordered Appy's, was a willing hostess whenever there were people to entertain, as were Dorothy Mersereau and Edith Clark. Kathryn Starbuck (Skidmore College – Saratoga) and Hilda Loines (Brooklyn) dropped him notes from time to time to let him know what people were saying about his various causes.

The Forest Preserve Association held another summer meeting at Lake George in August of 1945. John Apperson was still the president and still had much to say, but some of the newer items of business were introduced by a new generation of leadership. Paul Schaefer reported on a mining amendment, a Mrs. Benedict reported on a lumbering proposal being sponsored by the Society of American Foresters, and Mrs. Ed Hudowalski reported on a recreation amendment being proposed in Albany. There was an interesting comment recorded in the minutes of her report :

> A group is backing an amendment for closing shelters, and Mr. Robert Moses is said to favor a similar provision. Mrs. H. to give Mr. P. S. Miller copy of report on the plan. Mr. Apperson reviewed arguments that won against closed shelters in 1915; chiefly 'keep the public land public.'

John Apperson had gotten to know Robert Moses decades earlier, as Moses was involved in the plans to create a state park, having Lake George property owners donate or sell their land to the State. Mary Loines, one of these owners, had been very supportive of the plans to protect the shorelines and forests by turning them over to the

State. She had always understood that she and her daughters would be allowed to continue to use a portion of their land, but her dealings with the state conservation officials turned unpleasant. Appy must have been very upset to learn, from Mary Loines and from Hilda, her daughter, of the rude treatment they received :

June 9, 1927

Dear Appy,

I am writing to ask if you will use your influence to keep the conservation people from bothering Mother this summer about the land in lot 11. She has not been well lately, and Sylvia has been so badly on edge that Mother was nearly exhausted when she left the lake. The state road has turned our place upside down, as you know, and for the state to force us to give up our one or two good sized remaining pieces of arable land is, I think, carrying things too far. Wilson Powell thinks we have done enough for the state at present, and if Mother can have a comparatively peaceful summer at the lake, I shall be thankful. As you know, the land is as safe in our hands for the present as in the state's and we need it more than they do. As for the boundary – it is only the land in lot 11 east of the brook, whose boundaries and title are uncertain, and that land we have given to the state at their request, in order that they may settle their questions.

When we endorsed the State Park and gave our efforts and also the land on Tongue Mountain we did so in the belief that the policy of the State Parks was to protect the private owners as well as to afford the public a place for recreation and sport. The feeling has been rather general that this promise has not been kept.

In consideration of all that Mother has done, do you not think that the State in turn owes her consideration, and can wait until we have time to readjust the farming which has been so much upset by the road construction.

I am sure that you will want to do all that you can for her this summer, and not make her feel that it is impossible for her to take any comfort in the Lake George place anymore.

Sincerely,
Hilda Loines

There is little doubt that Robert Moses was responsible for the inconsiderate behavior, and even less doubt that Apperson was keenly aware of the dark side of Robert Moses – of his ruthlessness and of his power. In March of 1943, George Bainbridge, a member of the Forest Preserve Association, wrote a letter to Governor Thomas E. Dewey, saying :

Doubtless you have had many suggestions concerning the appointment of a Conservation Commissioner. I do not assume to recommend any individual. However, I was much disturbed the other day to hear that Robert Moses is being

seriously considered. I appreciate the work which Mr. Moses has done on City Parks and Playgrounds. In fact, all reports indicate that he is apparently just the man for dealing with metropolitan problems of this sort and even in establishing some of the State Parks where the landscape is to be changed and accommodations provided for large crowds. But from several sources which confirm my impression, Mr. Moses has never been sympathetic with the Forest Preserve and its multiple purposes, which are best served by following a hands-off policy as required by the Constitution. We who use the "wild forest land" and enjoy it in its natural state realize that it serves its greatest purpose, especially on the upper watersheds, when left in its natural state. While I have great admiration for Mr. Moses, I am sure that anyone having his City Park viewpoint and experience would have serious difficulty in trying to administer the Forest Preserve if appointed Conservation Commissioner.

Robert A. Caro, the author of an 1,100+ page biography entitled Robert Moses the Power Broker : Robert Moses and the Fall of New York, reveals in every chapter how this man amassed and abused power. Moses' image – "of the man who Gets Things Done, who produced for the public tangible, visible dramatic achievements," (p.633), was belied by his methods – "of Getting Things Done [which were] dictatorial, peremptory, arbitrary, arrogant and authoritarian" (p. 632).

While Americans were fighting for Democracy in Europe and the Far East, John Apperson and his friends put up a good fight with tyrants at home. Just as Eleanor Roosevelt stirred up controversy and spoke out about things that some people did not wish to hear, John Apperson, too, kept on writing letters, holding meetings and giving speeches, never tiring of the effort. He was one of those fortunate few who discovered his calling early in life and persistently heeded the call. He died in Schenectady on January 31, 1963, at age 84. Dome Island, now a memorial sanctuary, was his gift to the Nature Conservancy in 1956.

Here is an "Appersonian" speech (from October of 1936) that captures well his clear-headed thinking and his contagious common sense :

As strange as it may seem, when our ancestors settled this State, the land was covered with luxuriant forests and there were no foresters. Now we have a host of foresters and very little forest. There was an abundance of game, and no game management. Now we are told we cannot have game without game management. There were plenty of fish and no fish culturalists. Now we have fish culturalists and very few fish.

Many explanations are made for these conditions, but the outstanding and important facts are that nature's way of providing these important resources has been successful and man's methods have failed to provide these resources or even to use them properly. Why we continue to boast of our accomplishments in face of these facts is not easy to explain. Fortunately our New York State Constitution recognizes the superiority of nature's processes by requiring that the State-owned lands containing the Forest Preserve shall be forever kept as wild forest land.