



Photo by Carl Heilman II

John Apperson bought Dome Island, a Lake George landmark, in 1939 to protect it from loggers and developers.

# Letter to John Apperson

By Ellen Apperson Brown

Dear Uncle John,

I found a letter from you the other day, dated 1959, when I was just eight years old. You were thanking me for sending you a homemade valentine. We were all sad to have moved so far away from you and Lake George. Perhaps you'll be happy to know that some of your kin are still thinking about you and still trying to carry on the work you started. Although my home is in Virginia now, a big

I drove north from Bolton Landing to Ticonderoga one evening, and thought about the story I've heard about your confrontation with Robert Moses. He was planning to build a parkway along the rocky shores of Tongue Mountain. What a victory you won that day, in 1923, when you and some highly placed friends "kidnapped" Al Smith, took him out in William Bixby's launch, and helped the governor see for himself the importance of protecting that beautiful shoreline.



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Other good news ... Doug Langdon's son, Chris, tracked down your Chris Craft (*Art. XIV, Sec. 1*) and has had it fully restored. It is beautiful! The "annex" to the old hotel looks much the same, as if Mrs. Christie would be coming out on the porch any minute to offer us some of her famous peanut-butter cookies.

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There is good news, to be sure! Dome Island looks as majestic as ever and remains the "centerpiece of Lake George." Local people remember how you cared for it: rip-rapping its shores (even before you owned it), finding a way to purchase it (when developers started cutting trees), and devising a strategy to preserve it for generations to come. Your decision to donate the island to the Nature Conservancy (along with an endowment fund raised by your friends) was a stroke of genius! Members of the Dome Island Committee still watch over the island, on the lookout for illegal camping or forest fires.

Thanks to you, many thousands of acres along the Lake George shoreline now belong to the State of New York and are protected under the forever-wild clause of the state constitution. Unfortunately, few people know the story of how Northwest Bay, Tongue Mountain, and Paradise Bay came to be state land or of your vigorous campaign to persuade landowners to give (or sell) their land to the state.

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 ELLEN APPERSON BROWN, *the niece of the late John Apperson, is a writer residing in Roanoke, Virginia.*

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Unfortunately, I noticed many examples of "Coney Island" development—just as you always predicted. Lake George village, for example, has motels, restaurants, bars, miniature golf, swimming pools, amusement parks, and a water slide. I kept wondering if any of those vacationing tourists would find time to swim in the lake or go for a boat ride.

As for your "Main Camp" in Huddle Bay, it seems that your dreams for the old Lake View Hotel property, as a community of landowners with mutually agreed-upon restrictions against city lawns, fertilizers, and oversized mansions, proved unsustainable. I drove to Huddle Bay Beach, walked out onto the dock, and stared over at the beloved site. The boathouse, one of the last vestiges of the old hotel, looked forlorn and precarious, making me wonder how much longer it could survive. A little farther down the shore, near "the point," I shuddered to see the huge new boathouse jutting way out into the bay. My generation really let you down when we sold off that last piece of your Huddle Bay property, and I'm so sorry. On a happier note, the seedlings you planted (seventy-five years ago) have grown into a healthy forest, and several

stately pines now stand in the clearing where you once lost so many giants in the Big Blow (nor'easter) of 1950!

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Although the Lake George Protective Association no longer exists, other groups have taken up the cause. The Lake George Land Conservancy has created a special fund—the Apperson Society—for donors who give \$100,000 or more to conservation projects at the lake, and they have managed to save many, many acres of shoreline. Another organization, the Fund for Lake George, has published an attractive workbook to teach lakeshore owners effective strategies for protecting water quality.

Your papers, including carbon copies of hundreds of letters you wrote, are safely stored in a special Apperson archive at the Adirondack Research Library in Niskayuna. They provide a thorough documentary record of the early preservation movement, telling of your activities (as an outdoor enthusiast, political activist, and leader), and about Schenectady, General Electric, Lake George, and the Adirondacks. I'll write you again soon and try to catch you up on all the news, about family (can you believe I am a grandmother now?), friends, and associates, and of our efforts to keep your dreams alive.

Love,  
 Ellen



Courtesy of Adirondack Research Library

John S. Apperson