



## GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM AND THE AMERICAN WILDERNESS:

PIONEERS IN THE 20TH CENTURY ADIRONDACK PARK CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

## DEFENDING THE WILDERNESS

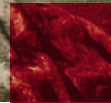
### Key Sites in the Battle for Lake George and the Moose River Plains



"A LAKE IS A LANDSCAPE'S MOST BEAUTIFUL AND EXPRESSIVE FEATURE. IT IS EARTH'S EYE;  
LOOKING INTO WHICH THE BEHOLDER MEASURES THE DEPTH OF HIS OWN NATURE."

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*





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PIONEERS IN THE 20TH CENTURY ADIRONDACK PARK CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

*Cover: An unidentified man takes water level measurements in 1944. Top right: Hiker enjoys a view of the Adirondacks.*

# WELCOME

This exhibit catalog is the culmination of a generous multi-year grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), which is funded by the Mellon Foundation. The grant provided funds for the Schaffer Library at Union College to arrange, describe, and make accessible the archives of citizen activists John S. Apperson, Jr. and Paul Schaefer, whose work is featured in the exhibit.

The roots of our national wilderness system, signed into law as the 1964 Wilderness Act by President Lyndon Johnson, run deep in the Adirondacks. Created in 1885 and constitutionally protected in 1894, the Adirondack Forest Preserve was the first wilderness area in the U.S. to be set aside as open space where resource extraction was prohibited. The vigilance and perseverance of environmental activists such as Apperson and Schaefer played a vital role in saving wilderness lands and preserving them for the future.

The materials in this catalog are a sampling of the legacy of Schaefer and Apperson. To learn more about the collections, please visit: [clir-adk.union.edu](http://clir-adk.union.edu).

## **India Spartz**

HEAD OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS & ARCHIVES

*Schaffer Library | Union College, Schenectady, N.Y.*



## ABOUT THIS EXHIBIT



*Dr. John Lamb, Jr. measures water levels from a canoe.*

"Grassroots Activism and the American Wilderness: Pioneers in the 20th Century Adirondack Park Conservation Movement" highlights the remarkable careers of John S. Apperson, Jr. and Paul Schaefer, two citizen activists who were dedicated to preserving the Adirondacks and New York's Forest Preserve. Dedicated, resourceful, and politically astute, Apperson and Schaefer prompted a national dialogue about preserving the wilderness for future generations. They are now remembered as two giants of the American conservation movement.

The majority of the materials in the exhibit are from the John Apperson and Paul Schaefer archival collections that are housed in the Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center. The antique cameras displayed in the exhibit were generously loaned by the Museum of Innovation and Science in Schenectady, N.Y. and Margie Amodeo. All featured books are from the personal libraries of Apperson and Schaefer, which are also part of the Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center.

### **Abigail Simkovic**

PROJECT ARCHIVIST & CURATOR

## ■ JOHN S. APPERSON, JR.



*John Apperson taking a photograph in 1942.  
Right: Apperson and Dr. Irving Langmuir on  
a winter trek to summit Mount Marcy.*

A Virginia native, John "Appie" Apperson, Jr. (1878-1963) relocated to Schenectady in 1899, eventually landing a job as an electrical engineer at the newly created General Electric company where he worked for 47 years. In 1900, he saw Lake George in the Adirondacks for the first time. Enthralled by its pristine beauty, Apperson dedicated his life to protecting the region, famously noting, "Lake George is my wife, and her islands our children." Adopting conservation as his "religion," Apperson rose to become the "dean of the implacable conservationist" by leading the wilderness preservation movement in New York, educating the public about conservation and inspiring future generations of environmentalists.





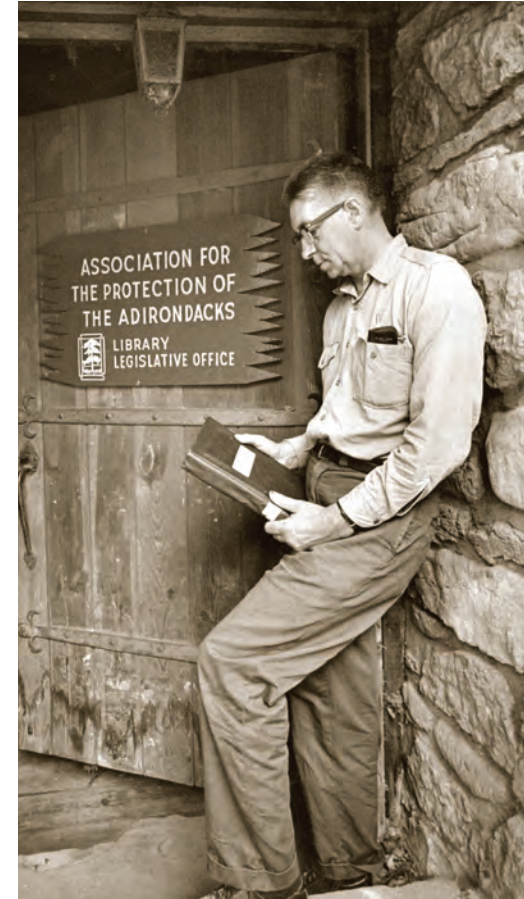
## ■ PAUL SCHAEFER



*Paul Schaefer, 1933.*

Mentored by John Apperson, Paul Schaefer (1908-1996) transformed the 20th century national preservation movement with his philosophy of wilderness as a civil right. Charismatic and capable of uniting large, diverse coalitions, Schaefer was a highly effective grassroots organizer. A prolific writer, he published three books and countless essays and articles that helped shape public opinion in favor of his philosophy of conservation. Schaefer also mentored Howard Zahniser, an American environmental activist and author of the federal Wilderness Act of 1964.

In addition to his work as an activist, Schaefer was a master builder, specializing in period homes and historic restorations in the Schenectady area. Schaefer later transformed his personal collection of Adirondack books into a publicly accessible research library that served as a resource for environmentalists. Today, this library is part of the Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center.



*Schaefer outside the offices of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, 1963.*







## ■ LAKE GEORGE SQUATTERS



*Left and above: Disassembling illegal squatters camps.*

After the establishment of the Forest Preserve in 1885, it was illegal to reside on state land in the Adirondacks, but many “squatters camps” still remained. They spanned the socioeconomic spectrum, from migrant shanties to the palatial summer homes of the rich and influential. As early as 1902, Apperson documented the locations of these squatters camps in the Adirondack region. He campaigned to remove the residences because he believed their illegal appropriation of protected, public land was an unacceptable encroachment on the wilderness experience.

Two amendments on the July schedule of the 1915 New York Constitutional Convention proposed modifying Forever Wild, the amendment that protects state land from development and resource extraction. If ratified, they would have degraded or negated the protection of the Adirondack Forest Preserve. One amendment would have legitimized the presence of the wealthy squatters, while the other would have paved the way for a sharp increase in logging.

Enraged by the prospect of legalizing the squatters camps, Apperson committed himself to protecting the Forest Preserve. He educated himself on conservation law and politics. He cultivated and mobilized a wide base of grassroots support. Many high-level conservationists rallied behind Apperson, including Conservation Committee member Olin H. Landreth of Union College, Justice Robert J. Wilkin, and famed conservationist Dr. William T. Hornaday.



When Apperson first arrived in the Adirondacks, he was a consummate backwoods loner, but over the years the circle of people around him grew steadily. He cultivated important alliances with local property owners and New York state representatives by sharing his Lake George photography and writing insightful letters about environmental issues.

At the New York State Constitutional Convention in June of 1915, Apperson distributed pamphlets filled with data against the amendments and testimonial letters supporting the protection of Forever Wild. During the public forum, he delivered a rousing speech, swaying many of the representatives to his cause. As a result of Apperson's leadership, the amendments that would have compromised Forever Wild were defeated.

In 1916, Apperson began evicting the squatters with the support of New York State officials.

*Above and right: Dismantled camps are loaded into boats by Apperson and his associates, circa 1917.*





## ■ LANTERN SLIDES



Originating in the 17th century, the first “magic lantern slides” were hand-painted on glass and illuminated by a candle on devices known as “magic lanterns.” In 1849, lantern slides began to be produced photographically. The improvement of projection methods made it possible for images to be viewed by large groups.

John Apperson was convinced that more people would join the conservationist cause if they were visually connected to both the beauty and the destruction of the Adirondack region. For that reason, the lantern slides he created from many of his documentary photographs were used to illustrate his lectures on the environment and outdoor sports.



*Lantern slides from the John S. Apperson, Jr. Collection.*



## ■ BATTLE FOR LAKE GEORGE



*On opposite page: View of Lake George, circa 1910-1925. Above: John Apperson painstakingly ripraps a shoreline. Right: An Apperson-organized riprapping party, 1910.*

In 1903, the International Paper Company replaced the naturally occurring outlet dam of Lake George with an artificial dam that allowed the company to raise and lower water levels as much as six feet. This converted the lake into a “mill pond” to power the company’s factory in Ticonderoga, N.Y. and caused dangerous amounts of erosion to the delicate ecosystems of Lake George. As a result, some of the lake’s islands washed away entirely.

In 1906, Apperson discovered the International Paper Company’s actions. In 1909, he started protecting the islands by reinforcing the shorelines with rocks, a process known as riprapping. By 1916, he had led more than 300 people from 12 countries in the riprapping effort. In 1917, Apperson helped secure \$10,000 from the state of New York to support the riprapping campaign. Eventually, Apperson, along with the state, defeated International Paper in court over their use of the dam in a 1953 case that became known as the Lake George Trespass Lawsuit.



## ■ SKATE SAILING



*John Apperson skate sailing on Lake George in 1912.  
Right: Two people skate sailing on Raquette Lake.*



John Apperson strongly believed that winter was “disagreeable and unhealthy only unto those who stay in the house.” By 1904, he was fully devoted to the exhilarating sport of skate sailing, in which ice skaters hold sails, allowing the wind to propel them swiftly across frozen ponds or lakes. Apperson and his friend, Dr. Irving Langmuir, designed, innovated, and constructed numerous skate sails and distributed them to participants. It was another way to connect people to the environment and to teach them about the importance of conservation.

## ■ SKIING



*Skiers in the backcountry crest a peak.*

In 1910, Dr. Irving Langmuir introduced John Apperson to the sport of skiing. Apperson quickly became an accomplished skier. He is credited with many skiing firsts in the Northeastern U.S. In 1911, Apperson was the first known person to summit Mt. Marcy on skis. In 1917, he summited Whiteface Mountain, and he was the first skier to tackle Tuckerman's Ravine on New Hampshire's Mount Washington. In 1912, he summited Haystack Mountain, a feat which Harold White of the Adirondack Mountain Club called impossible.

In addition, Apperson and Langmuir developed innovations in ski equipment. Apperson designed most of his own equipment, applying a crosshatch of seal skin to the underside of his skis for better traction on cross-country excursions.



*John Apperson near the summit of Mount Marcy in 1915.*



## ■ THE AUTO GRAFLEX CAMERA



*John Apperson canoes on the Mohawk River in 1902. Right: An Auto Graflex camera from 1910.*

The German-manufactured Auto Graflex camera was known for its durable construction and its ability to withstand damp conditions, making it an ideal choice for outdoor photography. In 1910, John Apperson ordered an Auto Graflex and began taking it on week-long outdoor expeditions. Many of Apperson's lantern slides were captured with an Auto Graflex during his ski and canoe adventures.



## ■ THE CINE-KODAK CAMERA



*Cameras such as the 1930 Cine-Kodak (pictured, right) helped conservationists document the beauty of the Adirondacks.*

In 1930, General Electric gave Cine-Kodak cameras to its star employees, including Nobel Laureate Dr. Irving Langmuir, who was Apperson's closest friend and conservation ally. Together, they used the camera to document the impact of industry on the environment of the Adirondack region. They also filmed their innovations in winter sports equipment.





## ■ THE CLOSED CABIN AMENDMENT



*Logs floating down Sanford Lake, 1931.  
Right: Paul Schaefer became interested in the  
environment at an early age. He took this  
self-portrait in 1925.*



In 1930, both houses of New York's legislature passed the Porter-Brereton Recreation Amendment, better known as the Closed Cabin Amendment (CCA), which would have allowed the state to develop the protected Forever Wild lands for a growing tourism industry. The amendment would then go before the citizens of New York to be ratified by a public vote. Not all conservationists saw the construction of recreational facilities as dangerous to the Forest Preserve. Many thought the addition of publicly owned closed cabins or yurts would open the Preserve to more visitors. However, after closely reviewing the bill, John Apperson saw that the amendment would also allow the state to log within the Forest Preserve under the guise of building recreational facilities. He was determined to defeat the amendment.

Apperson was joined in his cause by a 23-year-old aspiring environmentalist named Paul Schaefer. Like Apperson, Schaefer was incensed by this threat to the environment, and his search for guidance in the fight against the CCA ultimately led him to Apperson.

Apperson soon recognized Schaefer's commitment to the cause, so he deployed Schaefer and other members of the Mohawk Valley Hiking Club into the Adirondack Park with cameras to document the destruction of the wilderness for use in Apperson's films and pamphlets.

Over time, Apperson became increasingly impressed with Schaefer's abilities. Schaefer had an innate gift for bringing people together. With his enthusiasm, patience, and rhetorical skills, Schaefer convinced many influential conservationists to oppose the CCA.

By 1932, more than 150 sportsmen's groups and conservation organizations from around the Northeast were against the CCA. Their argument was simple: The CCA was unnecessary, as hundreds of hotels, boarding houses, dance halls, and ski lodges already existed on private land within the park. On November 8, 1932, the people of New York voted down the Closed Cabin Amendment by a 2:1 margin, and Apperson had adopted Schaefer as his conservation protégé.



*John Apperson and Paul Schaefer in the Adirondacks, 1947.*



## DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY



*Conservationists document a scene for the Black River Wars campaign, circa 1955.*

*Right: Associates of Apperson prepare a photography layout in preparation for Apperson's lectures.*



In the early 20th century, documentary photography and filmmaking became increasingly effective tools for shaping public opinion. John Apperson utilized documentary images to convey both the beauty and the destruction of the Adirondacks to the public. With every letter he wrote about Forever Wild lands or Lake George, Apperson included at least one photograph. This practice evolved into the production of pamphlets and then films.

Apperson's campaigns were effective. Countless members joined the cause, including Paul Schaefer, who would later become Apperson's protégé and successor. Schaefer dedicated himself to conservation at the age of 11, when he attended a film and lecture presented by two of Apperson's associates. When Schaefer later became a leader in the movement, he continued Apperson's use of images, producing magazines and full-color documentary films.



## ■ DOME ISLAND



*View of Dome Island, circa 1925.*

In the early 1900s, John Apperson first spotted Dome Island, known as the “centerpiece of Lake George.” After more than three decades of failed attempts to persuade New York State to purchase the island, Apperson acquired the property himself in 1939. In the 1950s, Apperson led a fundraising campaign to create an endowment for Dome Island and donated the property to the Nature Conservancy to be preserved as wilderness in perpetuity.

## ■ THE BLACK RIVER WARS



*Moose River Plains, circa 1955.*

For nearly three decades, plans for a series of 38 reservoirs across the Adirondack region silently slipped through the eddies of New York State's Department of Conservation. By 1942, construction was slated to begin on the first two dams on the Moose River at Higley Mountain and Panther Mountain. Together, these two dams would have flooded the Moose River Plains within the Forest Preserve. It was not until 1944, when Paul Schaefer noticed illegal logging at the Panther Mountain dam site, that the existence of this project was brought to the attention of conservationists.

From 1945 until 1956, Schaefer led the charge against the dams in one of the largest and most successful grassroots environmental campaigns in legal history. It would become known as the Black River Wars.

During this battle, Schaefer advanced a revolutionary argument. The spirit of his theories echoed the writings of environmentalists John Apperson, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Robert Marshall, but Schaefer went even further than his predecessors. In writing about the proposed destruction of the Moose River Plains, Schaefer stated that “the issue concerns [one’s] basic human rights as a citizen of New York State.” In doing so, Schaefer was espousing a new environmental philosophy: wilderness as a civil right.

Under Schaefer’s leadership, conservationists scored a number of resounding victories at a critical moment in the history of environmental politics; the New York State Supreme Court ruled in their favor, deeming the dams unconstitutional in 1949. And in 1953, the New York State Constitution was amended to prohibit future dams.

For nearly a decade, an unprecedented number of diverse individuals had worked together in pursuit of a single cause. Their achievement inspired leaders of the wilderness movement across the nation. The victory in the Black River Wars resulted in a seismic shift in 20th century national environmental policy when it inspired Howard Zahniser to write the 1964 federal Wilderness Act, in which he incorporated Schaefer’s philosophy of wilderness as a civil right.



*Howard Zahniser in the Adirondacks, circa 1960. Above: Sticker prepared by the Adirondack Moose River Committee, 1948.*



## ■ PAUL SCHAEFER'S FAMILY



*Paul Schaefer holding his daughter, Mary, in 1936.  
Right: Carolyn Keseberg Schaefer, circa 1930.  
Far right: Carolyn Keseberg Schaefer with baby, circa 1937.*

In 1929, Paul Schaefer joined the Mohawk Valley Hiking Club, an organization that promoted an appreciation of the outdoors and encouraged conservation. It was here that Schaefer met Carolyn Keseberg, an accomplished outdoorswoman and conservationist. In 1934, they married and eventually had four children.



## ■ ERNEST THOMPSON SETON



*Apperson plants trees with members of the Boy Scouts of America, an organization co-founded by Ernest Thompson Seton, circa 1930s.*

Ernest Thompson Seton (1860-1946) was an American author, wildlife illustrator, and conservationist. He published many volumes of illustrated naturalist essays for children and young adults, as well as several reference volumes on animal life and woodland craft. Seton also co-founded the Boy Scouts of America and published many scouting manuals.

Seton's work served as a primer for Paul Schaefer. Inspired by Seton's stories, Schaefer used the books as guides while exploring the wilderness by himself at a young age. Schaefer often filled his volumes with treasures from the wilderness.



## ■ JOHN APPERSON'S LIBRARY



*The house (left) was once the home of Paul Schaefer. Today, this property comprises the Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center.*

Over the years, John Apperson amassed an impressive law and environmental library. He often made notes in the front pages of his volumes, creating a "conservation issue index" that served as a reference guide for his many associates.

When Apperson died in 1963, his library was split between the Forest Preserve Association (Apperson's conservation organization), the Adirondack Museum, and the Adirondack Mountain Club, where Apperson was a charter member. Today, the portion of Apperson's library which remained with the Forest Preserve Association is part of the Adirondack Research Library at Union College's Kelly Adirondack Center.



## ■ THE ADIRONDACK RESEARCH LIBRARY



*Paul Schaefer at his Niskayuna, N.Y. home in 1978.*

Paul Schaefer published three books and countless articles and editorials. He also created many environmental documentaries about the Adirondack region. In the 1960s, he began adding the archives of conservation organizations to his vast personal collection of books about the Adirondacks. In 1979, Schaefer's library became the Adirondack Research Center. In the 1990s, the Center changed its name to the Adirondack Research Library and began publishing the *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies* with the Adirondack Research Consortium.

In 2011, Union College assumed long-term responsibility for the Adirondack Research Library from Protect the Adirondacks!, Inc. In 2013, the College dedicated the Kelly Adirondack Center, an interdisciplinary environmental research center located at the site of Schaefer's Niskayuna home. The Adirondack Research Library resides within the Kelly Adirondack Center. In 2015, the Kelly Adirondack Center began a partnership with the Adirondack Research Consortium to collaboratively publish the *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies*, transitioning it into a peer-reviewed regional publication.

# TIMELINE



**1813-1883:** Rampant, unregulated logging takes place in the Adirondacks, denuding between 915,000 and 1,830,000 acres of forest.

**1864:** George Perkins Marsh publishes the bestseller *Man and Nature*, which creates public awareness of how significantly human activity threatens the environment.

**1872-1874:** New York State lawmakers commission Verplanck Colvin to survey the Adirondacks. Colvin warns that logging poses threats to the environment.

**1878:** John Apperson, Jr. is born on April 6 in Chilhowe, Virginia.

**1885:** The Forest Preserve is formed, legally protecting state-owned land in the Catskills and Adirondacks. The New York State Forestry Commission is created, charged with the oversight, management and sale of timber from the lands using the principles of "scientific forestry."

**1892:** The Adirondack and Catskills State Parks are established, but the law creating the parks removes prior protections against the sale of state-owned land.

**1893:** Gov. Roswell P. Flower proposes the "Cutting Law," allowing the State Forestry Commission to sell trees on Forest Preserve land.

**1894:** The "Forever Wild" New York State constitutional amendment is passed, prohibiting logging on state land.

**1899:** Apperson moves to Schenectady and begins working as an electrician.

**1900:** Apperson sees Lake George for the first time.

**1903:** The International Paper Company builds a dam at the Lake George outlet, replacing natural structures.



**1904:** Apperson accepts a position as an engineer at General Electric.

**1907:** Apperson begins weekly visits to Lake George.

**1908:** Paul Schaefer is born.

**1909:** Apperson starts the labor-intensive job of riprapping the shores of Dollar Island in Lake George in order to reduce erosion.

**1910:** Apperson encourages Gov. Horace White to address the squatters problem at Lake George.

**1915:** Apperson begins work with Gov. Al Smith to fund riprapping on Lake George islands.

**1917:** New York State begins funding the riprapping of Lake George islands.

**1921:** Apperson and Warwick Carpenter expose presale lumbering practices in the park, alleging collusion between the forestry industry and the New York State Conservation Commission.

**1923:** Apperson and Dr. Irving Langmuir begin shooting documentary films.

**1931:** Gov. Franklin D. Roosevelt expands the boundary of the Adirondack Park to include Lake George, Sacandaga Reservoir and parts of Lake Champlain. Paul Schaefer meets John Apperson for the first time.

**1934:** The New York State Assistant District Attorney declares that the International Paper Company does not have the right to use Lake George as a "mill pond." Paul Schaefer and Carolyn Keseberg are married.





- **1935:** Apperson fails to convince Conservation Department Commissioner Lithgow Osborne to add Dome Island to the Forest Preserve.
- **1939:** Apperson purchases Dome Island.
- **1942:** New York State sues System Properties, Inc., owners of International Paper, charging mis-regulation of Lake George water levels. The case becomes known as the Lake George Trespass Lawsuit.
- **1945:** The Adirondack Moose River Committee is established to fight the Higley Mountain dam project.
- **1948:** The Adirondack League Club initiates court proceedings against the Panther Mountain dam. Justice Andrew Ryan decides in favor of the International Paper Company in the Lake George Trespass Lawsuit.
- **1949:** The New York Supreme Court unanimously upholds the verdict against the Black River Regulating District on the Panther Mountain dam project.
- **1953:** Apperson and New York State win their appeal against the International Paper Company in the Lake George Trespass Lawsuit.
- **1955:** The public votes against the Moose River dam project.
- **1956:** Apperson completes the transfer of Dome Island to the Nature Conservancy.
- **1963:** Apperson dies on Feb. 1.
- **1966:** Schaefer receives the Governor's Award from the New York State Conservation Council.



**1971:** The Adirondack Park Agency is created by Gov. Nelson Rockefeller to provide long-term planning and to oversee private development in the park. Schaefer receives the Nature Conservancy Award from the Eastern New York chapter of the Nature Conservancy in recognition of his work in the Adirondacks.

**1972:** The Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act is passed, categorizing and protecting rivers in the Adirondack Park. Schaefer plays a key role in convincing sportsmen and conservationists to support both plans.

**1979:** The Adirondack Research Center is founded at Union College. Schaefer receives an honorary doctorate from Union College and teaches a class on the history of the Adirondacks.

**1985:** Schaefer receives the Governor Mario Cuomo Conservation Award.

**1990:** Schaefer receives the Alexander Calder National Conservation Award.

**1994:** Schaefer receives the Governor Mario Cuomo Environmental Achievement Award.

**1996:** Schaefer dies on July 13. His papers are given to the Adirondack Research Library.

**1998:** The Audubon Society names Schaefer as one of the top 100 conservationists of the 20th century.

**2011:** Union College assumes long-term responsibility for managing the Apperson and Schaefer collections housed in the Adirondack Research Library.



*John Apperson uses a sled to riprap an island shoreline in Lake George, circa 1917.*

*Right: Paul Schaefer, second from left, watches as Gov. Mario Cuomo signs into law New York's Environmental Protection Fund in 1993.*

*Left: campaign literature opposing amendment #7.*







*Schaefer fishing with an unidentified man, circa 1930. Right: Young women on skis with a view of Lake George. Top right: campaign button.*

"OUR ENTIRE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT IS FOUNDED UPON THE THEORY THAT THE CITIZENS OF THE STATE SHALL INFORM THEMSELVES ACCURATELY REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND IF THEY DO NOT APPROVE OF THEM, WILL TAKE PROPER ACTION TO CHANGE THEIR COURSE. WE ARE LIVING NOT IN AN ERA OF THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS BUT RATHER IN ONE OF REFERENDUM AND RECALL."

—John S. Apperson, Jr.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Listed here are writings that have been used in the making of this catalog. This does not represent a complete record of all of the works and sources consulted for this project. It is intended to serve as a convenience for those who wish to pursue topics raised in the exhibit.

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*See [clir-adk.union.edu](http://clir-adk.union.edu) for additional correspondence of John S. Apperson, Jr. and Paul Schaefer.*





*An Adirondack mountainside ravaged by logging and forest fire.*

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