I was reading email the other day and came across my occasional update from “The Art of Noticing” by Rob Walker, author of the book of the same title. His periodic blog shares ways for readers to become better at observing what surrounds them. This week, for example, Walker suggested noticing things from a new perspective – as a pet or a bird or even an ant. Get down on the ground and look at your yard from an insect’s perspective, he suggests, or at least imagine doing it.

This appeals to me. I try to be an acute observer when I visit the Adirondacks and take in the sounds, sights and smells. There is much to notice.

As part of Union’s Adirondack Mini-term, we encouraged our students to see with new eyes. This idea is not novel, of course. The 1795 story “Eyes and No Eyes” tells of two youths who report vastly different experiences on the same walk. One has keenly observed his surroundings and is excited by all that he has witnessed, and the other … has simply taken a walk. We have provided this story to our students to serve as inspiration. Their courses in the ADKs draw on the forest environment and how very different this is from their usual surroundings. In a future newsletter, I will describe the courses and the ways students learn to notice, with slow and careful consideration.

Elsewhere in this newsletter, we feature another project based on observation: our current exhibition of student work. “Layers of Autumn” showcases pieces created in a “plein air” – or outdoor – painting course taught by Professor Laini Nemett (Visual Art). The works are based on firsthand observation of nature.

Those who were lucky enough to hear the chorus of wood frogs that erupts each spring from the open water in the Reist Preserve know that the Kelly Adirondack Center is in the Capital Region yet it offers the sounds and sights of nature that too often go unnoticed. Mark your calendars for a visit next March.

We hope that our activities and programming at the Kelly Adirondack Center help you all become better noticers as you embark on your summer adventures.

Doug Klein
FACULTY DIRECTOR, KELLY ADIRONDACK CENTER
ADIRONDACK POSTCARDS: NOT MERE NOSTALGIA

ADIRONDACK RESEARCH LIBRARY POSTCARD COLLECTION
NOW ONLINE

BY MARGIE AMODEO
The Adirondack Research Library has recently digitized the Adirondack Research Library Postcard Collection and we are delighted to share these images online with faculty, students, researchers and the broader public.

The initial gift of more than 200 postcards was received in 2005 from the estate of Lowville native Judge George Davis. It was added to over the years by the Adirondack Research Center and now numbers nearly 1,400. Though the collection’s focus is on the Adirondacks, there are also other sets from Davis’ collection, including many from New York, Washington, Utica and Boston. Dating primarily from 1900 to 1940, images depict landscapes, luxury hotels, boats, camping scenes, towns and villages, and sanitariums. It is on permanent loan to Union College from Protect the Adirondacks.

It’s significant to note that many of the postcards include the word “Adirondacks” beside the title. This is significant because, in the late 19th and early 20th century, legislators and the people of New York State were deciding exactly what an Adirondack Park would look like. The region was called the “Adirondacks” as far back as 1635, but it would not become a leading tourist destination until the mid-19th century. Most of the cards depict the area as an attraction for recreation and relaxation and only a few of them refer to the area’s millennia as a home to Indigenous Peoples or the centuries of resource extraction by European settlers.

In the images, vast wild landscapes and waterways are punctuated by comfortable human references – buildings, boats, bridges and roads. The images are clearly branding the Adirondacks as a way to enjoy nature with every comfort of home. This was not unique to the park, however. The popularity of postcards climbed at tourist destinations around the world as new printing processes and inexpensive postage became more widely available. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of the American middle class, who now had both the money and time to spend on travel, created a wider market for tourism in general. Infrastructure improvements in New York State and deluxe railway accommodations made travel for leisure more convenient and pleasurable for tourists headed to the Adirondacks.

These newly digitized postcards will not only individually provide researchers with historic images of specific locations but also collectively offer a glimpse into a formative age in Adirondack history.

For more on the history of postcards, changing attitudes toward wilderness, and the marketing of place please see:


We invite you to stop in to see the Kelly Adirondack Center exhibition, “Layers of Autumn.” Curated by Professor Laini Nemett and her students, the show includes work by her plein air painting class last fall. Artists captured Lock 7, Katterskill Falls and the Kelly Adirondack Center in all their fall colors. Students also painted scenes on the Union College campus, including the Nott, Schaffer Library and Jackson’s Garden. The Kelly Adirondack Center is open to the public Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., with some exclusions for College events and meetings. Please see union.edu/adirondack for exclusions.

Margie Amodeo
Kelly Adirondack Center Coordinator