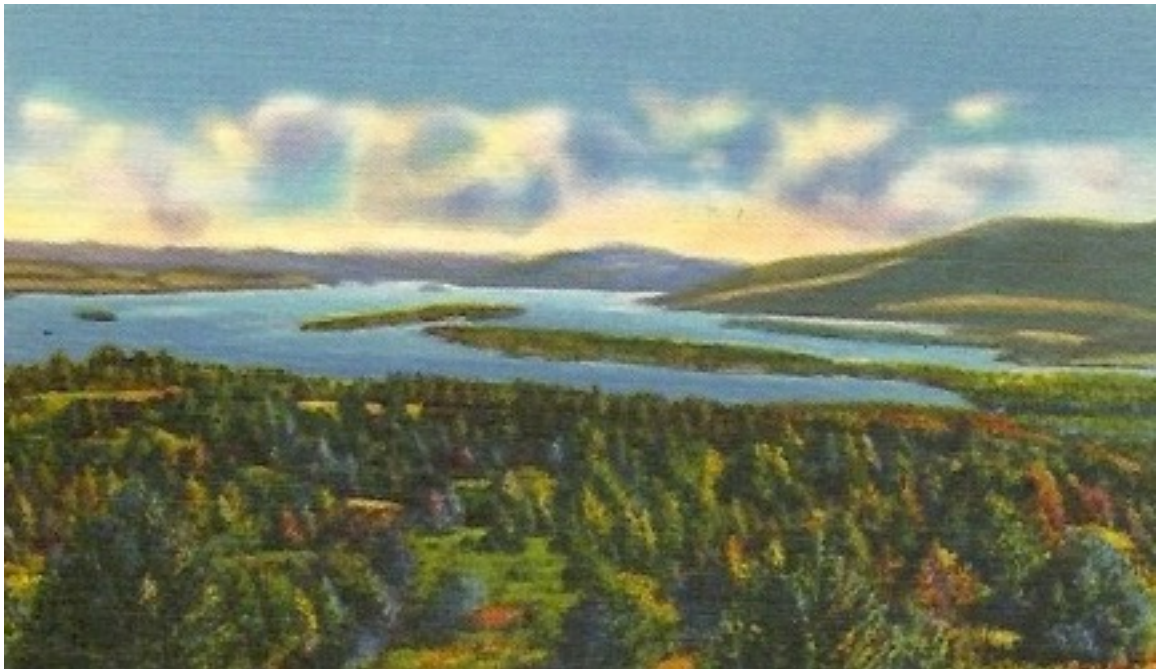


ASSEMBLY POINT

IN THE 20TH CENTURY



BY ROBERT W. ADAMSON

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Dedicated to Bob Holmes

*whose constant and gentle encouragement inspired me to proceed with this
book*

With special thanks to my wife, Katharine, who has not only been my companion for well over 55 years, but also doubles as my editor.

And with gratitude to my daughter, Judith, who compiled materials and designed this book.

Foreword

The *Assembly Point Water Quality Coalition* (APWQC) gratefully thanks the Lake Champlain Basin Program for its support in re-publishing this book by Dr. Robert Adamson for inclusion it in a welcome packet for newcomers to Assembly Point. By renewing this publication and making it available to area residents we hope to inspire a reversal of a two-fold loss presently occurring in the southern basin of Lake George . I refer to the *loss of original Adirondack values* and the *loss of our pristine Adirondack nature and water quality*. We aim to create awareness and preservation of the exquisite and fragile nature still around us, inherited as a gift to contemporary generations from centuries of careful stewardship from the original Indians and forward up through many of our parents. We hope to promote that *vibrant community and friendliness* at the root of 19th and 20th century Assembly Point history as described by Dr. Adamson in this book. These are foundation values of this precious sliver of land on one of America's two most pristine lakes.

Preventing the further decay of nature and community is the responsibility of all who live alongside the shores of this Lake. Our natural and cultural environments and their histories are really *one*. We are neither city nor suburb. We are unique! That uniqueness is vividly displayed not only in our lovely Lake, its mountains and trees but no less impressively by the type of people who have taken care of our peninsula, from the Sanfords and the Coolidge brothers to all the other families and their descendants who, in the spirit of public service,

benevolent neighborliness and care for and enjoyment of nature have made a difference. That spirit of stewardship is at the heart of the “Otyokwa” concept which runs through Bob Adamson’s fanciful but thoughtful book. We enthusiastically support all activities that promote the quality of Lake George as well as its human community.

Dr. Rolf Ahlers, Knox Road, Assembly Point

Introduction

*I may have had the most idyllic summers of any child on the planet. Until I was sixteen, I spent every summer on Lake George. Well, to clarify, I spent summers **in** Lake George.*

My father's mother, Ernestine Fowler, had acquired a tract of lakefront property sometime in 1917. It was ten miles from Glens Falls where she had been born, raised, and in turn, raised her four children. The family went to the lake every summer, a couple of goats tied to the back of their car for fresh milk to help my father's anemia. By the time her children were grown with families of their own, my grandmother split the land and gave each of her children 130 feet of magnificent lake front property."

So begins my own reminiscence about my love of the Lake. It goes on to talk about our lives during those perfect summers on Assembly Point in the 50's and 60's, our extended family and its idiosyncrasies. *I knew every root, rock and curve on the path. We lived in each other's houses and on each other's docks. Even if you had had breakfast, if you wandered over to my Aunt Emily's house and she was cooking breakfast for her children – who were*

allowed to sleep much later than we were – you just had another breakfast.

The adults often convened for cocktails around 5 pm. You knew the party had begun when Emily arrived. She preferred to swim the four-dock distance, rather than take the lakeside path. From our dock we watched her approach, her bathing cap, covered with rubber roses, riding high on her French twist, big sunglasses and bright red lipstick. She swam one-handed; in her other hand, held high above her head, was a plastic cup with clinking ice cubes chilling her gin and tonic. Alongside, practically on top of her, swam Tartuffe, a huge black standard poodle, dog paddling like he lived his life – frenetic, out of control – almost drowning Emily as he tried to save her. She thought it was hilarious and laughed as she swam. (see the rest of the text at www.assemblypt.com)

My father, in his late eighties at the turn of the 21st century, wanted my help and support in compositing and intertwining his own treasured memories of family and lake with a history of Assembly Point, and I agreed to edit this unlikely combination into this short book. It is not truly a history of the Point itself. It rests on the shoulders of my father's Assembly Point mentors and friends, Robert Ervien II and Robert Holmes, who both wrote area histories that go into much more detail of the area before the 20th century. My father's, as you will note, includes occasional references to their research and gives a nod to local historian Howard Mason who wrote the iconic *Backward Glances*, but in an attempt not to repeat their excellent research, my father concentrates on his own memories of parents, family and those who took the Point into the 20th century. It is a folksy, simultaneously historically accurate and reimagined interpretation through the lens of his own experience as a boy, teenage speedboat aficionado, Assembly Point realtor, and family man. My father in his professional life went on to work as senior edi-

tor for Cambridge University Press, obtaining during that career his long sought PhD. in philosophy of religion. In his sixties he founded Fordham University's still extant "College At Sixty" for adults returning to university.

Upon reflection what really is history? It is both so-called fact but often, subject to new information suppressed or unearthed, reconfigures into something of a different dimension. Both personal experience and an oral tradition become significant in piecing together the past.

In the spirit of the truth in storytelling, my father blended his passion for local history with his palpable love of his own life on the Lake, and, using imagination and conjecture he imparted this to his children from the vantage of the west side of our Assembly Point cottage.

Archaeologists agree that Assembly Point was never home to permanent Indian settlements but was a seasonal hunting and fishing ground with encampments from prehistory through Woodland, then Iroquois presence. During this time, the Algonquin word for the Lake was *Andia Te Roc Te*, meaning "between the mountains." In the 18th century book, *The Travels of Peter Kalm*, botanist Kalm writes of an encounter by early whites with Indians most likely off the end of Assembly Point, possibly Mohawk, Mahican or Algonquin.

My father and his friend Bob Ervien used to find arrowheads on the shorelines of the west side of Assembly Point and imagined the possibility of small hunting longhouses or *wigwams* where their cottages stand.

Through my father's eyes we saw beyond our southern view of the village an overlay of major battles at the head of Lake George, Bloody Morning Scout, the fall of Fort William Henry, and the consequent sinking by the British of their own war bateaux and radeaux, some still preserved in their watery graves, over which we later established our own water skiing

routes. He led us to envision the improbable beauty and drama of Abercromby's 1758 failed attempt to navigate thousands of troops in bateaux, so thick "you could walk across the lake on them," down the Lake to attack Ft. Carillon (Ticonderoga), and, in disgrace, return rowing past Assembly Point up the Lake in defeat.

Through his eyes we watched Henry Knox in 1775 floating fifty-nine massive cannon and mortars from Ticonderoga on rafts, past Assembly Point to Lake George Village and overland to Boston to bombard the British, a revolutionary war battle off Diamond Island, Benjamin Franklin in 1776 on his way to Canada to negotiate an alliance,



General Washington in 1783 on to inspect Ticonderoga. My father knew that Governor DeWitt Clinton had been given a land grant for partial ownership of Assembly Point. All this history as it relates to Assembly Point is documented in Robert Ervien's book about early Assembly Point and can be found at www.assemblypointassociation.org/ervien. Other local historians such as Bob Holmes also wrote about the Point. Tom and Paul Weinmans, archaeologists who undertook the digs at the narrowest part of the Point have provided invaluable clues to early history, and early 20th century chronicler of Queensbury history, Howard Mason's book is available through the Warren County Historical Society. My father's book was his last labor of love before he died in 2003. The Lake was his passion, and this is his tribute, part scholarly, part whimsical and subjective. He himself was a mix of so many parts.

We have included an afterward by my sister and her colleagues who in 2016 created the nonprofit water quality coalition (APWQC) to address progressing degeneration in the famously admired purity of our Lake George drinking waters.

My father and my uncle Charlie lived here and loved the water as young men and sportsmen. They were mindful of the history that preceded them from Native American forward, and they were cognizant of their great privilege in living on the Lake, which both felt as a magnificent, living, breathing animate being. They were outspoken advocates for lake preservation. I like to think that they would have been proud of current activism and the idea of “seven generations out” around the Lake.