

The Dream of a Lake George Park: Enlisting Women to the Cause

Although many books are available about the "great and gracious" on Millionaire's Row at Lake George, few authors have written about the social and political drama that unfolded there, starting around 1920, as automobiles and improved roads began to change the status quo, revealing the tension between commercial interests and those who wished to create a Lake George Park. Among those in favor of creating a park were several millionaires, including William K. Bixby, who donated land on Tongue Mountain to the state, and George Foster Peabody, who gave land for a campground (Hearthstone) and a park, on Prospect Mountain. Another wealthy landowner, Mrs. Stephen Loines, a widow with three unmarried daughters, contributed significantly to the cause, not only through her gifts of land, but in her efforts to influence public opinion.

The Loines property, in Northwest Bay, was targeted by state planners early on, as the best possible site for a highway (Rt. 9N) to extend from Bolton toward Ticonderoga. The family understood that a highway through their property would forever disturb their peaceful farm and summer home, yet they supported the dream of bringing the Tongue Mountain peninsula under state control. However, no one could have anticipated the problems that eventually arose, as the controversy stirred up hard feelings among their neighbors, some of whom voiced mean-spirited criticism in public gatherings and in the newspapers.

One of the Loines' neighbors at Lake George was John Apperson, who had purchased a camp in Huddle Bay and who became a frequent visitor to the Loines' farmhouse, the Quarterdeck. Letters from the Apperson collection give us glimpses into the interesting relationships that developed between him and the women of the Loines family. By 1921, he had asked Hilda Loines to keep him informed about the latest news. She sent him a letter telling of a petition being signed by some of the landowners, in favor of a road, saying she "hoped the road question will be satisfactorily settled and the petition withdrawn so that you will not be continually vexed by it." She also explained, "My brother wrote us to give no definite reply about a right of way without consulting him and his lawyer, but simply to say we would take the matter under consideration."

Hilda addressed the letter saying, "my dear chief," and referred to herself as his "first lieutenant." Apparently they were hoping to form some sort of new organization. A few weeks later he wrote, "I hope you have very definite plans completed for organizing the Lake George Shore Association. The Basin Bay situation has improved but there is still great danger of Coney Island features."

In October, Hilda reported back to her "chief" about her meeting with a bank official in Glens Falls concerning a rumor about "plans to put up a dance hall and moving picture theatre in Basin Bay," saying, "the man remarked that he did not think Mr. Loomis was such a darn fool as to do it." Hilda closed her letter by inviting Apperson to "come up on Sunday for dinner" to meet her brother and his wife.

Apperson's enthusiasm for the out-of-doors prompted Mrs. Loines to ask him to locate a small wood stove for use at the Quarterdeck. He soon reported back to her about his trip to Glens Falls, recommending a stove he saw there. In December of 1921 he wrote to offer advice about "the best and most suitable ski-rigging and ski boots" for her granddaughter, expressing his opinion that "the best ski boot is made in England and sold by Brooks Brothers."

He also recruited Sylvia, the youngest of the three daughters, to help him get access to local landowners. In September, 1921, he asked her, "Do you happen to know a favorable approach to Mr. Pliny Sexton or his heirs who own Dome Island?" He had heard that the island had been put up for sale, and worried, "some stupid man with money might secure it and put up an unsightly structure like those which ruin so many of the islands in the St. Lawrence and coast of Maine."

Scattered clues from the correspondence suggest the possibility that Sylvia and John had formed a romantic attachment. In one especially intriguing letter, Mrs. Loines expressed the hope that she might be allowed to address him as John, but that she could not do that until he becomes her son-in-law. She had just lost her only son, Russell, who died at age 40. It is hard to know how close Sylvia and John ever came to marriage, but it is easy to imagine that he worried about her feelings, especially when she and her family came under attack.

In the summer of 1925, Sylvia attended a lively meeting of the Lake George Association and afterward sent off an angry letter to the editor of the *Post-Star*, saying, "It is easy to see that you did not have a representative at the meeting of the Lake George Association on Friday, or you could never have used the ...innocuous article that appeared in your Saturday columns to portray what took place there. It was, as it were, a portrait with the features completely wiped out." After complaining about the style of reporting, she goes on to vent, "It should be news value, too, to hear that so much poison gas had been used by the enemies of the state and of state-ownership that two or more distinguished guests and speakers of the meeting were subjected to both discourtesy and insult by a majority of this gathering of otherwise well-bred people."

Whatever happened at that meeting of the LGA, it was followed up by editorials in the *Lake George Mirror* with ugly comments about the Loines family, prompting both John Apperson and George Foster Peabody to send off letters of their own. First Apperson wrote, "No one familiar with the facts could support your allegations and innuendoes against the Loines family, which have appeared in recent issues of your paper." He went on to explain, "Among several very unselfish acts of theirs was the gift to the state of two very important pieces of land for public park purposes, and sometime ago they agreed to give all the necessary land for the Tongue Mountain Road through their estate, although the damage would be extensive; destroying as it does, farm land, vegetable garden, tennis courts and several structures belonging to them. We have many generous people at Lake George, but no one could have been more generous than they."

Peabody also penned a strong letter a few days later, saying "I have to confess great astonishment and even more to being shocked at the language and the temper of your editorial reply to Miss Loines." He defended her by saying, "It so chances, however, that Miss Loines is one of our most public-spirited citizens and without any selfish instincts at all... I therefore wish to protest and most vigorously against such treatment of any correspondent but particularly against such, to my mind, an outrageous attack upon one of our finest citizens."

It is hard to say for certain what stirred up so much intense feeling against the Loines family. We do know, however, that Apperson continued to assist Mary Loines in her dealings with the state, and watched over the state crews as they cut trees and bulldozed the soil. By 1927, she wrote him a letter of thanks, commenting sadly about the destruction of the property she and her husband had always loved so well.

Hilda Loines continued to serve as a "lieutenant" and helped "Appy" win the support of garden clubs and women's groups in Brooklyn and throughout the state. In August of 1963, as a member of the board of the Lake George Protective Association, at the annual meeting held in Huddle Bay, just six months after his death, she read an eloquent tribute to his memory.

Sylvia married William Dalton in 1928, thus becoming step-mother to five adolescent boys, and moved to Dalton's home, in Schenectady. This marriage took place very soon after the death of Dalton's first wife, Ida Hill Dalton. Apperson and Dalton had been neighbors in Huddle Bay, having jointly purchased the old Lake View Hotel property in 1920, but they had a serious philosophical disagreement over the division of land. That'll be a good story for another article.