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Perusing Personalities

The Adirondacks hold some sort of time transformation that makes the open area so appealing and engaging. Paul Jamieson worked the better part of his life trying to preserve this land and realized people needed to experience this feeling of timelessness in order to understand all the outdoor pleasures the park had to offer. Most people don't realize the importance of the Adirondacks, a place where, as Paul Jamieson writes in his autobiography *Uneven Ground*, "you are released from schedules and obligations. You escape into the space and liberty of the woods" (149). There have been hundreds, even thousands of people who have played large parts in shaping the Adirondacks, from park rangers to state legislators, so it is unfair to say that Paul Jamieson, a flatlander from Iowa, was the main reason the Adirondack Park is the way it is today. However his dedication to the park made him a perfect advocate for issues concerning conservation and opening waterways in the Adirondacks. This was a result of his unique personality, "a coat of quiet patience, under a suit of diligence, perseverance, and intelligent stubbornness, topped off with a hat of good humor (Pisdale, Betsy 1). Throughout this essay I will reinforce Betsy Pisdale's characterization of Jamieson and prove how the combination of these traits sculpted a man of great importance to the Adirondacks.

Though Paul Jamieson was originally from Des Moines, Iowa, he moved to Canton in 1929 (age 26), and immediately fell in love with the Adirondacks. However, it wasn't until later in his career when he realized the issues that faced the Adirondacks and the actions he had to take to stop them. As a newcomer to the North Country, which he describes in *Uneven Ground* as, "the end of the world," Jamieson was immediately intrigued by the massive amounts of wilderness that he was suddenly engulfed by (66). He became one of the typical tourists, exploring on weekends and going on preplanned routes, only tapping into a very small portion of his future endeavors. But after only a few years teaching at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY, Jamieson was drafted for the Army in the summer of 1942 and forced to leave his newfound territory (101). Because of his age and near-sightedness Jamieson was classified as a soldier of "limited service," and instead of fighting, was given the task of proctoring the necessary tests for entering the Army. "For the ambitious this was galling," and Jamieson of course, was ambitious (102). He wasn't thrilled about sitting around and proctoring tests while everyone else was out fighting for the country. This was Jamieson's life for four months. Sometimes he was forced to work straight for 14 or 15 hours at a time scoring and grading papers, but doing this type of tedious work is what ultimately began to build his patience and tolerance. After the war Jamieson was free to return to Canton where he resumed his position as an English professor and began to explore the Adirondacks in more depth, and with a larger group of people.

Paul Jamieson took pride in making new relationships and getting to know his fellow Adirondack canoeists. As he built relationships with these people, they

too became advocates of conserving the wilderness after seeing the Adirondacks and realizing the actions that needed to be taken if it was to be kept pristine. In one personal letter written to Jamieson, Walter Medwid forwards a message from the Slaughters. The Slaughters are a family the Jamieson family seems to have befriended who gave a donation to APA after falling in love with the outdoors. He writes: "Over the years the Jamiesons and the Slaughters have hiked, climbed and canoed together creating many treasured memories... their gift will be used in the company of others to secure canoe accesses and in so doing, creating opportunities for others to develop fond memories of their canoe outings" (Medwid, Walter). By some Jamieson was considered to act like a child as Betsy Pisdale wrote in a letter to him: "you are like a little boy who plays until he's exhausted!" (Pisdale 1). This playful, childlike cheeriness allowed him to become more accessible to a large amount of people; he was never feared, only looked up to as a figure of importance and an admirable friend. Because of his genuinely warm smile and helpful nature, Jamieson was seen throughout the community as a man of high status.

It was cheerfulness that led Fred Catherwood to be introduced to Jamieson's work. While travelling through Canton, Catherwood heard by word of mouth about Jamieson and his love for the environment and decided he had to become associated with this man. After arriving home he acquainted himself with *Adirondack Canoe Waters North Flow*, (Jamieson's canoe guidebook), and followed up a few years later by writing a letter to Paul Jamieson himself. Though they had never formally met, Catherwood explained that in the last few years he had become more interested and involved in the Adirondacks, partly to Jamieson's writing. Catherwood seemed to

understand and have the same values of friendship that Jamieson did for, in his letter he ended by stating: “in other words, personal contact leads to friendships that are invariably priceless” (Catherwood, Fred).

Others like Fred Catherwood read Jamieson’s guidebook, *Adirondack Canoe Water North Flow*, and became inspired to either visit the Adirondacks or do something to save them. William Sample wrote a letter to Jamieson where he wrote, “you have done great honor to the countryside... Thank you for writing a wonderful book” (Sample, William). Jamieson decided to write the guidebook as a tactic to make the Adirondacks more accessible to people across the country. Jamieson knew that getting more people involved with the Adirondacks would only promote his cause. He was intelligently stubborn. He didn’t care how much work it would take to write the book, from physically going on the canoe trips to corresponding with the editors, he knew that in order for people to become more excited about the Adirondacks, they would have to be educated about them first. “Publicity was the obvious first step,” Jamieson wrote in an article intended for *Adirondack* in 1997 (Jamieson). A letter written to Jamieson from David Thomas-Train is a perfect example of how *North Flow* got to people all over the country and had a drastic effect on their lives. He writes, “about this time of year I sit back down again with the book *North Flow* and plan the year’s expeditions both fantastical and realistic; white water season gets the blood cascading” (Thomas-Train, David). David Thomas-Train, being a man unfamiliar with the area, sent requests for maps and asked many questions about the area. Jamieson, with his kind personality and the knowledge that bringing more people into the park would create more awareness,

gladly answered David's questions. Another man, Per Moberg, another fan of Jamieson's writing through *Adirondac* wrote a letter to Jamieson where he said, "I intend to try out this summer some of the trips you describe" (Moberg, Per). People were reading what Jamieson had to say and getting excited about the wilderness through his work.

Jamieson's writing, whether it be in *North Flow*, *Adirondac*, *Adirondack Reader*, or any other professional journal had significance to it; everything he wrote, he wrote with passion, dedication and persuasion. The way he writes about nature would convince anyone that they needed to travel to the Adirondack Park. I have read many letters complimenting either books or essays written by Jamieson, but one quote stuck out to me, "I enjoy your descriptions of what's to be seen along the canoe routes, both as to scenery, historical references, and bird and animal life likely to be encountered" (Toporcer, Bill). This shows how his writing was so descriptive it allowed people to feel like they were actually in the wilderness, or, as I said before, made them feel like they *wanted* to be there. Another letter, written by an unknown man but cited in *Uneven Ground*, responded to Jamieson's piece in *Adirondac* by saying: "Anyways, I wanted to tell you that I enjoyed what you wrote. The part that made me determine to write you was the sentence, 'At fifty-five one is not washed up.' I am 55, and that sentence sounded wonderful... Now for the first time I really want to finish the 46 [high peaks in the Adirondacks]" (142).

Jamieson's writing was changing lives. In *Uneven Ground* Jamieson states "My purpose, especially in the second edition, was to make the book, [*Adirondack Canoe Water North Flow*], a mirror of the cultural heritage of the park as visitors, summer

residents, and natives have contributed to it and a reflection also of our national heritage of wilderness experience from colonial times to the present” (134).

Paul Jamieson knew that the Adirondack wilderness was unique. He knew that people needed to personally experience these Adirondacks because it would solidify relationships and create a new understanding of nature. As I have read through letters that Paul Jamieson wrote to the legislature, his autobiography, letters to various people, and articles written for *Adirondac* or other scholarly journals, it is clear that Jamieson thought the Adirondacks changed people and brought them closer together. I am also able to see his personality shining throughout all of these writing pieces. Throughout *Uneven Ground*, Jamieson shares why it is healthy for people to get out into the wilderness and explore. “Normally people’s interest in one another is rather small. But the woods creates an instant bond” (137). “Personal relations flourish there. No matter how divisive our interests are in civilian life, in the forest we have our heritage of wilderness in common. We connect” (190). Jamieson realizes that when two people are stuck together for an extended period of time, with no distractions, a relationship is going to blossom. As people experience breath taking memories together, a special sort of bond is formed. As he wrote in the introduction to Nathan Farb’s *The Adirondacks*, “[it is] turbulent or slow and meandering, this running water carves natural museum galleries through the woods and rock in which landforms and the community of plant, animal, and bird life is on display nowhere else (15). Paul Jamieson was all for creating bonding relationships to last a lifetime.

Jamieson also knew that the environment needed to be protected. Jamieson knew the park should be something cherished for years and did not want the people of his time to ruin it for other generations. In *Uneven Ground* he wrote, “a legacy of untrammled forest recreation, it seems to me, is about the best thing one can pass on to future generations” (189). Opening the Adirondack waterways to the public was a goal Jamieson deemed essential in preserving the park for the future generations. To some this may seem bizarre. It seems as though by opening the waterways to the public and allowing them to have free rein all over the forest, the land would quickly be decimated and lose the pristine quality it is known for. However, Jamieson knew that. Land in the grasp of private owners is much more susceptible to damage than publicly owned state land because private owners are free to do what they want with the land. Not only can they build houses, but they could build hotels, tourist attractions, anything that would lead a vast amount of people to one small area of land. This would virtually destroy the riverbanks, habitats, and the serenity of the Adirondacks, as he writes in *Uneven Ground* “on the sand beaches and eroded banks are pieces of lumber, boats in disrepair, rusty old drums, gasoline cans, jerrybuilt floats, pieces of tarp, and weather-beaten chairs and tables,” not *quite* the image most people think of when they speak of the Adirondacks (164).

Jamieson took action in 1969. His first letter to legislature concerning the opening of the waterways was to Commissioner Kilbourne and is included in *Uneven Ground*. It is here he explains the problems with how the law stood and how the unjust law was unique only to the Adirondack Park. The law did not even apply

anywhere in New England or anywhere in New York State, it only appeared within the Adirondack's boundary line. To Jamieson this was simply unacceptable. "Most permit camps remain unoccupied most of the year... There are no shortage of campers. What is in short supply at times of peak use is desirable lake shore sites for overnight camping," he included in his letter (164-5). Jamieson was fighting a losing battle. More people were becoming interested in the park, but at the same time, they were coming and there was nowhere for them to camp, thereby defeating the purpose of travelling to the Adirondacks in the first place. While it was not solely because of Jamieson that people were starting to visit the Adirondacks (there were many other influential people at the time), Jamieson still wanted the park to be everything people had imagined it being. He didn't want people to visit and be discouraged to return for another vacation because a lot of the land was privately owned. Thus began the reason Jamieson began to write to the legislature in an attempt to open the waterways. Jamieson was not the only person who wrote a letter to the Commissioner during this time period though. Another woman, a dear friend, Eleanor Brown also wrote a persuading letter; which shows that by making friends and discussing the Adirondacks with them, he was able to get support for the causes that were most important.

Even though Jamieson constantly wrote to senators concerning new laws in the legislature, most of the time he never heard back from them for months, (if he was acknowledged at all). However, his patience and diligence kept him motivated to continue writing. Eventually, he thought, his voice would be heard. Many people in Jamieson's position would fall into the trap of thinking that they are only one

person, and that their little opinion would not end up accounting for much. But Jamieson, with his defiant personality thought the exact opposite as he writes in *Uneven Ground*, "In a democracy such as ours the individual is not powerless. If he is courteous and persistent and has a good case, he can influence the way things are managed and get legislation passed" (166). The key to this individual power is patience. As I read through letters written to people with power in the Adirondacks, I slowly saw a change in the dynamic of the response to Jamieson's continuous letters. When he first started, people generally did not write him back for months, (if they wrote him back at all). When he did hear back, the responses were generic, consisting of a dry "thank you," without any signs they had been influenced. These were obviously not the responses Jamieson was looking for. But due to his persistent nature the lack of thoughtful responses never seemed to discourage him. As time went on, people started to respect Jamieson's opinion. There is no doubt that people were beginning to take him seriously because of the amount of time he spent writing these letters which showed his dedication and intelligence on the matter. He was not just writing to write, he was writing with a purpose. Jamieson was emerging as a knowledgeable person of the Adirondack Park.

Perhaps what shows the leverage that Jamieson eventually gained from the powerful people in the Adirondacks is shown in a letter written by an Adirondack Park Naturalist, Gary Randorf. Randorf had written a newsletter to all members of the APA, (Adirondack Park Agency), explaining a new, horrible law suggesting that the APA be removed and the Adirondacks put in the hands of the local governments instead of with the state government. Obviously this was just as big of a problem as

having the land owned by private holders. Local governments would be free to do whatever they wanted with the land in order to produce commerce in their region, not taking into consideration the effects on the environment. However, what makes this letter unique is that at the bottom there is a handwritten note to Jamieson, a personal plea from Randorf directly to “Paul,” (apparently they knew each other well enough to be on a first name basis). “Please help us Paul! We need your support!” (Randorf, Gary). People with power had begun to come to Jamieson for help, knowing he was very knowledgeable and persuasive.

Opening the Adirondack waterways was by no means a quick, thoughtless task. Very small segments were opened slowly at very steep prices, much to Jamieson’s dismay. However, there were other people who were beginning to appreciate and notice the effort Jamieson was putting into the Adirondacks. Dave Dettinger, (who appeared to be a stranger who had been following Jamieson’s triumphs), wrote a letter to Jamieson which stated: “your efforts to open up the N.Y. waterways are a godsent to everyone who loves the outdoors. Keep up the good work!” (Dettinger, Dave). So much of the land had been purchased by private owners, and was now in their hands, that it took a lot of convincing to get people to give up their prized land. In *Uneven Ground* Jamieson writes “For the next seventeen years it was simply a matter of opening a segment here and there of restricted river corridor through recommending purchase of fee title or easement by the state or the Conservancy or through persuasion of landowners” (200). Jamieson had to use his pleasing personality to persuade the landowners into selling their land, which was typically a very difficult job. Some people didn’t understand how selling their land

would make the park better; they had the preconceived notion that if it were open to the public people would constantly abuse the land. Paul did a nice job putting these theories to rest in a letter he wrote in response (included in *Uneven Ground*) to a Mr. Prud'homme, a man who had this very fear. Jamieson is able to explain that while some people maintain the land there are many others who do not: "private owners come and go, and each had whims that may or may not accord with true preservation." Jamieson also feels "it possible to educate the public" about the necessity to keep the land preserved, and, if the public could be educated, then there would be less of an issue of the public destroying the land (187).

Every one of Jamieson's traits led him to be the effective advocate he was. Without good humor, he would have never built relationships or made connections with people in the Adirondacks, and would not have been as popular among fellow outdoor enthusiasts. Without this "popularity," less people would have had excessive knowledge on the Adirondack Park, (because he would not have been published as much), and therefore there would have been less tourists attracted to the park. Because Jamieson was able to draw people into the park, both through his personality and his writing, more Adirondack enthusiasts were born. His excessive knowledge on the park is certainly one of the reasons people considered him a reliable source and listened to what he had to say. This extensive knowledge of the Adirondacks led him to question the legislature, and with the support from fellow advocates, Jamieson began writing letters to senators, the Adirondack Park Agency, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and other people with power in the Adirondacks. Fellow advocates followed in his footsteps and

wrote to these higher powers as well. Because of Jamieson's patience and perseverance, eventually the people with the power began to hear him, recognize his name, and listen to his input, sometimes going as far as asking him, "a person knowledgeable about the Adirondacks," what his opinions were before bringing the issues up to the public. His patience also allowed him to not give up hope when the state was only able to buy small amounts of land at a time. If Paul Jamieson had been missing any of these uniquely meshed traits, there is no way he could have been as successful as he was for the Adirondacks. As a final thought in *Uneven Ground*, Jamieson states, "I am at ease in the world. Time is no longer a regimen of obligations. It is a playmate, not master. It moves fast or slow or around as I will it" (231). The Adirondack lifestyle of timelessness and serenity had become Jamieson's personal "clock," something, he hoped, one day everybody would understand and appreciate.

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