



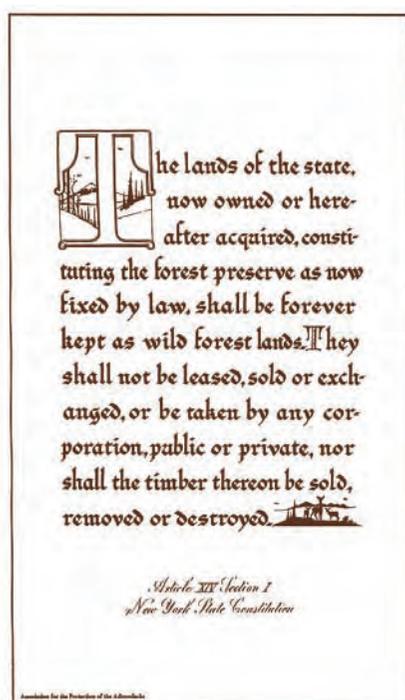
On his last trip to his Adirondack cabin, Beaver House, on July 7, 1996, Paul wrote in his log book, "Great to be here."

# Defender of the Wilderness

by Dave Gibson and Ken Rimany

Paul Schaefer was an American and Adirondack original. Born in September, 1908, and raised near the Mohawk River in Schenectady, he enthusiastically explored the outdoors with his family. They spent summers at the foot of Eleventh Mountain in the Adirondack community of Bakers Mills, where they hoped his mother Rose would recover her health. Here, as a young teenager, Paul fell in with local hunters. Soon he took up hunting and guiding “sports” from Schenectady into these Adirondack Mountains. With his brother Vincent, he bought a trapper’s cabin near a trail winding into the deep woods where many an Adirondack exploration would begin. His friendship and abiding respect for the hardworking people of this valley would remain for the rest of his life. To this day, extended family members still reside near Bakers Mills and North Creek.

At fourteen, Paul left high school to earn a living. Paul learned how to use his hands, and grew from an apprentice carpenter to become one of the finest builders and restorers of early American homes and Adirondack camps in our region. And early in life he began to write about his adventures: encounters with deer, beavers, bears, foxes, owls, mountain people and wilderness, all of which deeply sharpened his senses and fired his imagination. These encounters would, by the early 1990s, captivate readers of his three books and numerous magazine articles.



Speaking about his first book, *Defending the Wilderness: Adirondack Writings of Paul Schaefer*, Paul reflected on his father’s influence. “A book reviewer told me that my writing is consistently good from 1930 through the ‘80s; 60 years consistently good. I owe it to my father.” He went upstairs to retrieve his father’s diploma, a degree in classical rhetoric from Canisius College. “The only reason my writing is recognized today is due to my father.” And, it can be argued, Verplanck Colvin, the famous Adirondack surveyor, influ-

enced Paul’s writings, too. Paul began his collection of Colvin’s surveys (1872-1899) at a used book shop in Albany. He soaked up Colvin’s descriptions of the deep valleys, panthers, wolves and ascents of mountains and the need to conserve the “deep, soaking sphagnum moss” and watershed forests of the Adirondacks from ruination by loggers, railroads and fires. Paul’s final book, published just after his death, was devoted to his hero, Verplanck Colvin.

Paul’s role as a conservationist was firmly established early in life. At the age of 11, he publicly pledged to be a Conservationist of the Empire State before the State Conservation Commissioner at Schenectady High School. By 1932, Paul established himself as a leader in the growing wilderness movement. He met

The calligraphy of Article XIV, the “forever wild” clause of the New York State Constitution, was commissioned by Paul Schaefer.

John Apperson of the General Electric Company. "We sat on his floor, he spoke to us about the problems he was finding on Lake George, the fires burning out of control on Mt. Adams, and other places. Would we help him? Wild horses could not have kept me away." Later that summer, Paul lugged a large camera up Mt. Marcy to document for Apperson those very fires raging on Mt. Adams. Who should he meet on the summit

assembled and led the broadest, most effective coalition of advocates for the Adirondack wilderness ever assembled, influencing everyone from governors, to labor unions, to sportsmen, to garden clubs. An eternal optimist, he inspired all he met to get involved in their Adirondack Park and its legacy. As he wrote in the 1940s, "a citizen of New York State may not have title to his land, but he does have an undi-

vided deed to this Adirondack land of solitude, peace and tranquility." in 1953 to prevent the flooding of any part of the Forest Preserve for river regulating purposes. At a public hearing, Schaefer would often sit in the back of a room and choose to be the last to speak. When in the 1960s Niagara Mohawk pushed to build a dam on the Upper Hudson north of Luzerne, Schaefer rose and described how the dam would inundate a small piece of Forest Preserve along the river. "You

**"A citizen of New York State may not have title to his land, but he *does have an undivided deed* to this Adirondack land of solitude, peace and tranquility."**

but Bob Marshall, who later founded the Wilderness Society. The two talked about the problem of wilderness here and across the country, and pledged their mutual support for protecting what remained of the Adirondack and American wilderness.

With Apperson as an Adirondack mentor, and Bob Marshall and later Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society as national partners, Paul

can't do it because the Constitution says you can't," Schaefer concluded. In 1969, his efforts resulted in state legislation banning any dams on the Upper Hudson and its tributaries north of Luzerne.

Paul and his allies went on to defeat more than thirty major dams planned to inundate Adirondack river valleys, including the Upper Hudson which would have been flooded by four huge impoundments stretching from the Glen all the way to Newcomb. Thanks to this coalition, Article XIV of the New York Constitution was amended

Paul Schaefer influenced the Adirondack policies of nine Governors and countless commissioners and legislators. In 1957, fifteen years before Wilderness areas within the Forest



Paul's stories, teachings and wisdom left an impact on all who listened, such as the Cataract Hunting Club, pictured here with Paul at Beaver House.



In 1994, Paul presented Governor Cuomo with a "Beaver Gavel" at the 100th anniversary celebration of Article XIV, the "forever wild" clause of the New York State Constitution.

Preserve were designated, he persuaded State Conservation Commissioner Sharon Mauhs to, for the first time, prohibit public motorized access by jeep into what would later become the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area. In 1958, Schaefer convinced Governor Harriman not to route the Northway, I-87, through what is now the Pharaoh Lake Wilderness and the Champlain Valley. In 1972 and 1975, the Adirondack documentary film he produced with Fred Sullivan and the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, *Of Rivers and Men*, helped to convince Governors Rockefeller and Carey to respectively sign and expand the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers program. His film with Couch-sa-chra-ga Association, *The Adirondack, the Land Nobody*

*Knows* won a Cine Eagle Award in 1980. Paul was closely involved in the creation of the Adirondack Nature Conservancy in 1972. He advised both the Nelson Rockefeller and Mario Cuomo gubernatorial Commissions on the Adirondacks.

In 1995, Schaefer led a behind-the-scenes effort to persuade Finch, Pruyn and Company to donate or sell the magnificent O.K. Slip Falls above the Upper Hudson River to New York State. Although that effort failed, Schaefer was convinced that one day the falls and much of the river's shoreline would come into public ownership. Schaefer advised hundreds of young conservationists who came to him for advice that they must be patient to persevere. In 2007, the Adirondack Nature Conservancy

acquired the falls and thousands of acres near it from Finch, Pruyn for future designation as Forest Preserve.

Paul also had the common touch. In 1990, a group of young students wanted Paul to agree that NYS Rt. 30 should be torn up from the central Adirondacks because it was antithetical to wilderness. Paul said he admired their idealism, but then asked how many of them had hiked off-trail across the nearby Siamese Ponds Wilderness. None of them had. "When you take the time and effort to hike off-trail in this wilderness between my cabin in Bakers Mills and Indian Lake, a distance of about 15 miles, then you can come back to speak with me about closing major highways in the Adirondacks. Until then, you can not claim to understand what wilderness is."

As an apprentice carpenter, Paul was asked to tear down the Pierce Homestead, Niskayuna's oldest, for the Reist family in 1932. He firmly told the Reists he could never take down such a historic building, but he could restore it. This lovely home still stands today. In compensation, the Reists gave him two acres of their land, where Paul built a home at 897 St. David's Lane. Finished in 1935, the home's beams are recycled from Dutch barns and other structures that faced the wrecking ball. The stone facing is Helderberg limestone which Paul brought from the escarpment west of Albany in his Ford Roadster. Later, Paul built additions, including the Adirondack Room. Its great beams also came from a Dutch barn. Paul explained that he would pick up hitchhikers to ride on top of beams to act as counterweights, and the heavier the hitchhiker the better.

The home's cathedral ceiling permitted the construction of a 10-foot by 12-foot Adirondack raised relief map. World War II veteran Col.



Paul used photos, like this one of virgin white pines in Pack Forest, Warrensburg, to illustrate the many natural resources that would be lost if people did not protect them.

# Connect to Nature

Located at the historic homestead of renowned Adirondack wilderness conservationist Paul Schaefer, and immediately adjacent to the 110-acre Reist wildlife preserve in Niskayuna, The Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks' (AFPA) Center for the Forest Preserve serves as an Adirondacks learning center and includes a publicly accessible Adirondack Research Library, exhibit, lecture and meeting space. Following Schaefer's death, AFPA purchased Paul's home and opened it to the public in 2005.

AFPA is a non-profit, membership organization founded in 1901 to employ public education, citizen action and public and private partnerships. It is committed to instilling a strong advocacy to protect, enhance and sustain the wild character, ecological integrity and mutual well-being of the natural and human communities of the Adirondack region.

When visiting the center, people learn about the Adirondack Park, its people, wild nature and the "forever wild" policies that govern the Forest Preserve in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks. Various activities present visitors a wide array of knowledge and entertainment, whether it be researching an article, student paper or book. Visitors hear Adirondack tall tales, sing along with Adirondack folk music, view cultural arts presentations and discuss important issues with others.

The center is an icon of conservation history where environmentalists and nature-lovers alike can find something to appreciate. The center is open to the public during normal business hours. For more information, visit AFPA's website at [www.protectadks.org](http://www.protectadks.org) or call (518) 377-1452.



Paul's former home, purchased by the AFPA that opened it to the public in 2005, is now the Center for the Forest Preserve in Niskayuna.



Paul's invention, the Adirondack Cooking Crane—US Patent No. 2,740,397, can be seen in the fireplace in this photo at his camp, Beaver House.

Hannah taught Paul and dozens of volunteers how to build the map, which took 10 years to complete and paint. Its purpose was to allow the public to understand at a glance the fundamental relationships between Adirondack mountain ranges, lakes, rivers and communities. Today, the map is the educational centerpiece of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks' learning center, the Center for the Forest Preserve.

Paul Schaefer died in July 1996, still championing the Adirondacks. He encouraged the Association, for whom he served 50 years as Trustee and Vice President, to purchase his home, which the organization did from Paul's

children in 1999. In 1998, Schaefer was recognized by Audubon magazine as one of the nation's 100 top conservationists of the twentieth century.

Today, Schaefer's home is a conservation heritage site. It continues to be a wellspring of citizen-advocacy for the Adirondacks and for, as Paul would often say, "the youth of distant tomorrows."

**Dave Gibson** is the executive director of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks.

**Ken Rimany** is a photographer and the director of operations for the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks.

For more information about Paul Schaefer and his legacy, refer to pages 20-25 in the December 1998 issue of *Conservationist*.