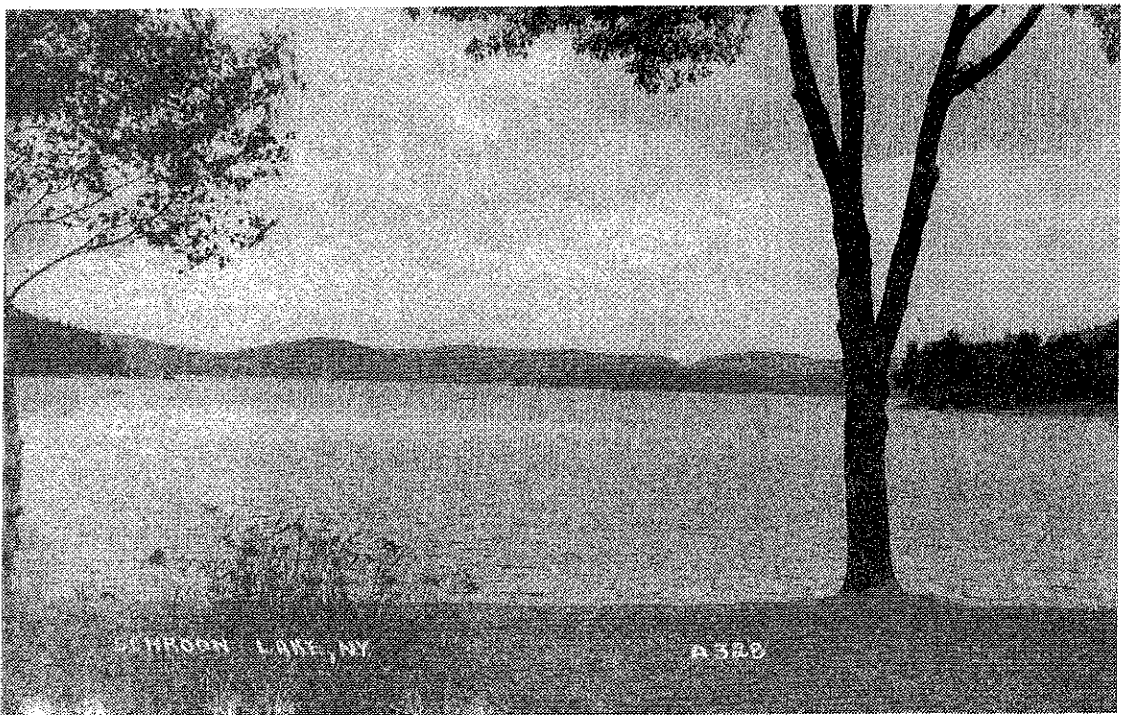


THE RESCUE OF A LAKE CALLED SCHROON



Lester Speiser

**Vice President,
Schroon Lake Association**

SCHROON LAKE ASSOCIATION

2004 - 2005 OFFICERS

| | |
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Vice President, Schroon Lake Association

The lake was slipping through their fingers. George Welwood Murray was worried. He was the first president of the Schroon Lake Association, founded and incorporated in 1911 by thirty-six members concerned about the life and purity of Schroon Lake. On October 7, 1929, Murray wrote to Mr. William M. Acheson, Division of Engineering (NYS), about the condition of the Starbuckville Dam:

The Dam was built many years ago at a point designated on the maps as Starbuckville....It was originally built primarily to facilitate the Schroon Lake drive of logs in late spring. There had been no drive for a number of years....During the last few years the dam has been allowed to fall into great disrepair. In my judgment it is now in a really dangerous condition. The past summer...has been very dry...In fact, it leaks so grievously that the whole flow of the river passes through without reaching the lip of the dam by several feet....

I write as President of the Schroon Lake Association an incorporated body made up of permanent residents and summer visitors of the Lake...They have been greatly disturbed by the unparallel lowering of the water level producing not mere inconvenience but real danger to the communities and people along the lake.

The problem was that the owners of the dam, Finch Pruyn and Company and the Schroon River Pulp and Paper Company, had no further use for the dam. They had ceased to maintain it for a number of years. Available records indicate that the SLA had been looking into the matter of the dam at least since 1926. A letter that year from Murray to a member of the SLA Board, Mr. Philip E. Rice, of the Brown Swan Club (today's Word of Life Inn) indicates that (they) "must let the matter rest..." But the matter of Starbuckville was not dropped. Letters, telegrams, and meetings persisted between Mr. Murray and Finch Pryun (and others) throughout 1929 and 1930.

Murray encountered many obstacles. He wrote on Feb. 21, 1930, to A. H. Harris, a member of the SLA Board and an ally in the enterprise.

I do not think that we shall get a better opportunity than the present. You and I have always believed it essential that the summer level of the lake should be safely in the hands of the Association. Assuming that we have to raise six or seven thousand dollars, I incline to think it could be done.

The activities resulted, finally, in Finch Pruyn and Schroon River Pulp and Paper leasing the dam and its property for one dollar a year to the SLA on October 1, 1930. Now the fun began. The SLA, through membership subscriptions and donations, undertook to fund re-construction of the dam. Donations included \$1000 from Miss A. L. Clarke of Garden City, Long Island. Mr. Murray contributed \$1000 on Oct. 14th, 1930. Other names are mentioned in a Murray letter of October 1, 1930:

...As I understand it, with the Eck and Keppler subscriptions you have \$4,200, and I reiterate what I said in a telegram yesterday that if you believe that Cornell can and will put the job through for \$5,000 I should think it safe to go ahead. There are a number of others who ought and probably will subscribe, like the Leland House and the Hotel Adirondack. I think, too, that Dr. Shaw and Mr. Taft will come in for moderate amounts and possibly Mrs. Parsons...

As work on the dam was about to commence, A. M. Harris and J. T. Cornell (SLA treasurer) cautiously measured water levels at different properties to try to determine the changes in level that would result when the dam was rebuilt (Harris letter, 10/3/30): They concluded that an additional three feet would give a Mr. Emerson "a good beach." Water would be 34 feet from the front of the Leland House. The level at Murray's dock would rise to 3 feet...etc. etc. Of particular interest is a comment in the same letter that a Dr. Beer is "going about telling the local people that, depending upon water level, Schroon Lake is either to be a health resort or an illness breeder."

The Schroon Lake Association obviously took the high road to the "health resort" vision.

Work commenced. Records include a penciled sketch of the new dam, bills for supplies and services, and signed pay vouchers for "labor"... all dated 1930-31. The names and signatures on these documents identify the people who lived and worked in the area during that period. In the Bicentennial Year of the Town of Schroon (2004), a sampling of these names echoes dramatically: Arthur M Harris, George N. Ostrander of Finch, Pruyn, W. J. Eck, Harry A. Reoux, Emerson National Bank, Warrensburgh.

SLA records contain some pay vouchers from the Association signed by the men who worked on the dam, all issued by J. T. Cornell, then treasurer of the Schroon Lake Association. The workers were paid between \$3.20

and \$7.00 per day. Records show that the amount of \$3,377 was disbursed in 1930. The following names appear on these vouchers or other records. Do any of these names mean something to you?

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Howard Allen | Leslie Evans |
| Martin Baker | Lester Evans |
| Steve Baker | Earl Gregory |
| B. E. Barton | Raymond Lorimer |
| H. W. Benson | Donald Mundy |
| Geo. W. Boles | Charles Rawson |
| J. T. Cornell | Harry T. Richardson |
| Clarence Cole | John Rooney |
| F. Combs | R. Z. Smith |
| Hubert Cornell | Ben Taylor |
| Ray Cornell | Fred Vetter |
| Percy B. Culven | Edward Wimett |

The Schroon Lake Association obtained supplies and services from area businesses, including some whose names also make a Bicentennial statement: Fred Vetter (Hardware-Plumbing, Chestertown) proffered a bill for nails; Arthur Jenks (Schroon Lake, Hardware and Building Materials) sold 100 sacks of cement; D. L. Weeks, insurance agent, presented a number of bills involving workman's compensation. The Association also bought supplies from T. C. Murphy Lumber Co. of Wevertown and purchased more bags of cement from W. R. Waddell.

The vision of the SLA, combined with the work-a-day efforts of ordinary local citizens, finally produced a dam that transformed the condition, described by George Welwood Murray in that Oct. 1929 letter, as an "unparalleled lowering of the water level," to the sparkling diamond among the Adirondack lakes today.

But the Schroon Lake Association was to face more problems because of its take-over of the Starbuckville Dam.

A resolution designed to retain the lease of the Starbuckville Dam was adopted unanimously by the SLA at a "mass meeting" on July 18, 1940 held in the auditorium of Schroon Lake's Central School. The ten-year lease obtained in 1930 had lapsed. The SLA would not be able to renew it, because back taxes were owed by Pruyn and Schroon River Lumber. The members agreed "to give at once the sum opposite our respective names in the first column (of specially prepared subscription lists) and to give each year for the term of ten years the sum opposite our names...for the purpose of renewing and maintaining said lease...."

The amounts on these pages range from \$2 to \$115. Four separate subscription lists contain approximately 100 names of members committed to

protecting the dam. Their signatures also provide a Bicentennial echo: another Richardson, Clara, appears, mother-in-law of Mrs. Lillian Richardson, chairperson of Schroon Lake's Bicentennial Celebration (2004). W. J. Eck...the grandfather of Nancy Harste, a SLA member and author of the Bicentennial volume, *Greetings From Schroon Lake*, an Adirondack history told through postcards; Joe Giannini, founder of Terra Alta and of the Schroon Lake Department Store; Oliver Bachrach, the first owner of Camp Idlywold, Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Seagle, the founders of Seagle Colony, and many other names that are still with us today.

None of this makes for spectacular chariot-race, shoot'em-up screening, but those subscription lists reflect the philosophy and activity that can be traced back to the thirty-six names listed for the Association's opening year, 1911. Some of those names appear in our phone book today, or are vividly remembered: Whitney, Tyrrell, Richardson, Keppler.

Only nineteen years after its quiet beginning, the group that called itself "The Schroon Lake Association," under the leadership of George Welwood Murray, managed to overcome difficult legal and financial obstacles and rebuild the Starbuckville Dam.....Thus, a lake called Schroon was rescued.

George Welwood Murray and the SLA members never let their guard down, before the Starbuckville campaign and afterward: a May 8th, 1917 letter to the membership warns of white pine blister disease, offers some remedies, and also alludes to "the proposed road on the east side of the Lake." Murray's remarks on "water storage problems" also record dramatically a concern for the possible flooding of Chestertown, Pottersville, and Adirondack and, in part, Schroon Lake and the hamlet of Severance...." as a result of plans afoot," to construct certain dams:

"...Now the trouble lies before us in dead earnest. In October last, the Chamber of Commerce of Glens Falls filed a formal petition for the creation of the Upper Hudson River regulating District. The petition set forth the desirability of a great dam at Conklingville on the Sacandaga and another great dam at Tumblehead Falls on the Schroon. The latter if erected would raise the waters of Schroon Lake thirty-three feet and would throw into one Brant, Schroon and Paradox Lakes.

A letter, some four years later, dated August, 1921, comments with satisfaction on the completion of the East Shore Road. Murray also, in that same letter, anticipated the association's future efforts to preserve the forest. He noted "with special pleasure that the Conservation Commission" has made additional purchases of forest land.

Referring to problems that continue to haunt us to this day, the minutes of the Association on September 24th, 1928 report the adoption of a resolution recommending "the establishment and enforcement of rules for the regulation of motor boats preventing undue noise..."

That same resolution also "viewed with concern the possibilities of contamination of our beautiful lake and consider it vitally important that a strict scientific sanitary inspection be instituted . . . It was voted that the sum of \$150.00, be appropriated toward the expense of the sanitation inspection for the year 1928-1929." Arthur Harris and George Welwood Murray then announced that they would contribute an additional fifty dollars each.

An ecological outlook and pattern of activity had apparently established itself in the Association, traceable to 1911, when this group of "property owners and vacationers" formed an organization to preserve and protect Schroon Lake in the Adirondacks. After remarkable efforts from 1911 to 1929, true to their self-appointed task, and by dint of clever maneuvering, politicking, perseverance, and generosity, they literally saved that lake by rebuilding the Starbuckville Dam, continuing through the years that followed to keep a watchful eye on that body of water, a tradition upheld by today's active Schroon Lake Association.

There is no difference, basically, in purpose and outlook, between the Association of the earlier years and the SLA of recent history. The focus has always been on the purity of the lake and, as a result, the welfare of the town. The Association has been active in issues such as maintaining the integrity of the Adirondack Park, campaigning for legislation to eliminate acid rain, power-boat regulation etc. Its Annual Arts and Crafts Fair raises funds to help finance lake surveillance, water testing, and the control of aquatic exotic nuisance plants, such as Eurasian water milfoil.

George Welwood Murray and the original 36 members in 1911 would consider these activities to be rescuing the lake.

**MEMBERS OF THE
SCHROON LAKE ASSOCIATION
1911 - 1916**

(listed alphabetically)

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| John Adriance | George W. Murray |
| S. L. Blood | George N. Ostrander |
| W. J. Bohrmann | Samuel Parker |
| George H. Brickwedel | J. D. Platt |
| George Burwell | William L. Porter |
| Miss A. L. Clarke | Albert Pron |
| William Forbes Cosley | Elizabeth Pron |
| M. L. Cushman | Sidney F. Rawson |
| Dr. Carrol Dunham | Arthur Richardson |
| Frank Dupuee | E. T. Richardson |
| James A. Emerson | George Rilatt |
| F. C. Ford | Emil Schenck |
| John J. Freedman | F. W. Schneider |
| Mrs. Helen Fried | Dr. Albert Shaw |
| Samson Fried | E. B. Shaw |
| Joseph Giannini | John R. Stanton |
| Lewis S. Goebel | Edward A. Stokes |
| W. H. Cranberry | Charles H. Swan |
| Arthur M. Harris | Alfred A. Taft |
| Carl M. Herrmann | G. W. Taylor |
| Edward Herrmann | C. H. Teeter |
| J. C. Kennedy | L. Thompson |
| Charles F. Keppler | F. N. Tyrrell |
| M. F. Keppler | I. W. Tyrrell |
| C. T. Leland | Helen M. Warner |
| F. F. Locke | Rev. U. G. Warren |
| W. A. MacKenzie | Charles L. Weeks |
| Jennie Misch | C. C. Whitney |
| Moses Misch | J. C. Whitney |
| Rev. Isaac S. Moses | John W. Wolf |

Schroon Lake, Oct. 18 1930

Received of J. T. Cornell.

Thirty five-----Dollars
₁₀₀

For 5 Days labor on Starbuckville Dam.

\$35⁰⁰

Ray Cornell

Schroon Lake, Oct, 24th. 1931. 19

Received of J. T. Cornell.

Twenty four.....Dollars

For 6 Days labor on Starbuckville Dam.

\$24⁰⁰

Ben Taylor

Pay vouchers for Stephen Baker, \$3.20 per day, and for Ray Cornell, \$7.00 per day, for labor on rebuilding the Starbuckville Dam, 1930.



Schroon Lake Association, Inc.
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