

Arthur Savage: An Adirondack Conservation Champion

By Dave Gibson

Jan 17, 2013



Arthur Savage, far right, with (l-r), Wayne Byrne, Paul Schaefer, Paul Jamieson, c. 1974. Courtesy of Tim Barnett

Arthur V. Savage of Elizabethtown, Keene, and points south died on December 26 and belongs in my pantheon of Adirondack conservation champions. Judging from the flow of email following his death, that also holds true for many others. He was a man of varied interests, commitments, and for all seasons. I am hoping this short post will stimulate others who knew Arthur better than I to share their thoughts.

Arthur's obituary was in many regional papers as well as *The New York Times*. His importance as an early leader in environmental law circles can't be overstated. I knew Arthur principally for his work on the boards of the not for profit Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks (AFPA) and NYS Adirondack Park Agency. When Arthur joined these boards, the former through the recruitment of AFPA's long-time chairman Arthur Crocker in the 1960s, and the latter thanks to his nomination to the APA by Governor Hugh Carey in 1979, he gave a complete effort. In the late 1970s, Arthur Savage was poised to succeed Arthur Crocker as president of the Association when his nomination for APA came through, and he stepped

aside sensing a potential conflict of interest. Yet, in his deliberations at the APA over the ensuing 18 years he maintained the same sense of ethical obligation to the Park's environment and beauty that he would demonstrate with the nonprofit groups he helped.

My colleague Dan Plumley and I observed him for a decade on the APA, and remember the difficult votes he occasionally had to cast, including "no" votes on subdivision or other development permits which he felt violated the spirit and letter of the APA Act (permit denials are a rarity at APA because by law APA can only turn down a permit after an adjudicatory public hearing has been held). Arthur felt a large responsibility to care for the Park's environment, but also for applicants that came before the Agency – part of a larger regard he had for the overall welfare and opportunity of people living in the Park. He championed scholars in the Park through his diligent work each year at the Bruce L. Crary Foundation in Elizabethtown, but as we learned at his memorial service he fulfilled many other commitments to help people in need, to support social services, and educational institutions, including the New York Theological Society in the greater New York City area.

When Arthur left the APA in 1997, he returned to the board of the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks while maintaining his other commitments as well. There were important internal matters facing the Association in the late 1990s and Arthur had his opinions about many of them. Whether his views prevailed or not, his overall support for the organization did not waiver.

Arthur was a principal actor in the founding of the Adirondack Chapter of The Nature Conservancy in 1972. What a consequential decision that was for the Adirondack Park! Arthur went on to handle the legal side of many of the Adirondack Conservancy's important early land acquisitions such as Camp Santanoni in Newcomb, which was quickly transferred to the NYS Forest Preserve.

Arthur was also a member of the Adirondack Mountain Reserve/Ausable Club; in 1978 he played a major role in the AMR's sale of 9,000 acres to the state which incorporated the summits of the following mountains into the Forest Preserve's High Peaks Wilderness Area: Armstrong, Basin, Blake, Colvin, Dial, Gothics, Haystack, Lower Wolf Jaw, Saddleback, Sawteeth, Upper Wolf Jaw – these being the last of the 46 mountains 4000 ft. or higher not yet in public ownership. Photographs (including the one shown here)

show Arthur transferring the deed to these wild mountains to then DEC Commissioner Peter Berle on the summit of Noonmark Mountain.



*Handing over the deed for 5,000 acres in the High Peaks at the top of Noonmark in 1978 (l-r) Norman J. Van Valkenburgh, Directory of Lands and Forests, NY State Dept. of Environmental Conservation; Anne La Bastille, Commissioner of the Adirondack Park Agency; Peter A. Berle, Commissioner of the Dept. of Environmental Conservation; Morgan K. Smith, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, AMR; and Arthur V. Savage, Secretary of the Adirondack Mountain Reserve. The photo appeared in Edith Pilcher's *Up the Lake Road: The First Hundred Years of the Adirondack Mountain Reserve*. Photo courtesy the Centennial Committee for the Trustees of the Adirondack Mountain Reserve.*

Tim Barnett, the man hired to be the Adirondack Nature Conservancy's first executive director (and for the ensuing 23 years at least) kindly sent me this photograph of a youthful Arthur Savage with other "druids," as Tim put it – key individuals who helped with the founding of the Adirondack Chapter, Wayne Byrne, Paul Schaefer, and Paul Jamieson. Tim says the photo was taken in 1974. Tim was present at the recent memorial service for Arthur, and my partners in Adirondack Wild sat with him and a very large throng for Arthur's memorial service at his local church in Pelham, NY. It was a beautiful service organized by his wife Harriet and her children. There were many of Arthur's favorite hymns. We sang long and lustily in his memory.

Arthur had a distinctive flair for writing and for speaking which those who

knew him will instantly recognize. He was also, as I have learned, a deeply spiritual man. I close with this salute that Arthur Savage wrote to his friend and colleague at the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks, Arthur Crocker, on the occasion of Crocker's 90th birthday in 1999. The words could just as easily apply to Arthur Savage himself:

“Resolved, that this Association, by its Governing Board, extends its most sincere congratulations at your obtaining your great age with utmost dignity, grace and good humor, tact and prestige, and with facilities keen and judgment supreme. Past Chancellor and Redeemer, Savior, and Friend, Trustee, longtime President and ultimately Emeritus Chair of our Association, you remain in all our minds our signal and most illustrious Champion of Forever Wild! A hero of Tahawus, at least since 1909, a Satyr of the Blue Line and a Scourge of acid rain. A generous benefactor in our hour of need. Vox clamantis in deserto. Save the Timber of our Park. May we hail you as our Adirondack Man for Many Seasons and watch you making light of Four Score Years and Ten.”