

REPORTER

Spring/Summer
1999

The End of an Era — Departing with a Legacy

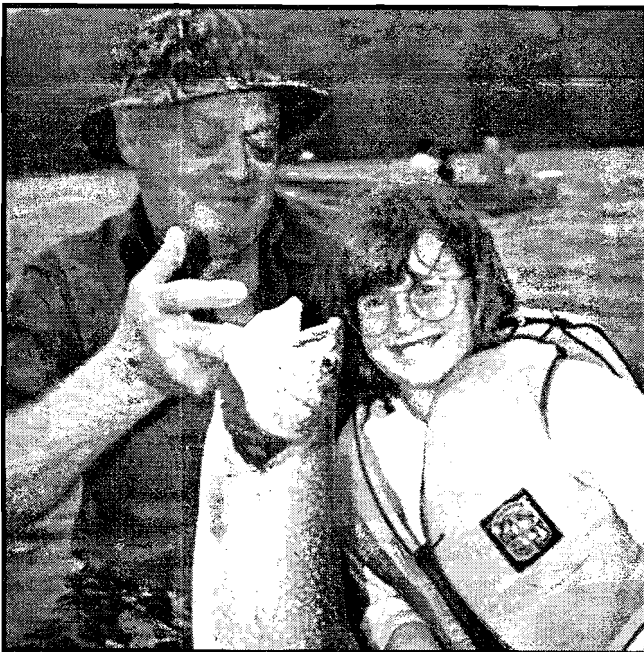


Photo by Barbara Harman

Rufus Thayer and Jessie Harman, 1994

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Rufus J. Thayer, the last of three generations intimately associated with and totally devoted to Otsego Lake and the country surrounding it, passed away May 21st. The Thayer family spent the entire span of the 20th century and part of the 19th engaged in agriculture in the Town of Springfield at the north end of the Lake. William Thayer, Rufus's older brother, operated the largest boat livery on the Lake from the 1940s until his death in 1984 while Rufus ran the family farm.

The Thayer farm was typical for Otsego County with a few head of cattle, pasture, field crops and a maple syrup operation. The woods were actively used for firewood and lumber. This devotion to agriculture, silviculture and the lake, and a recognition of the pressures of residential devel-

opment in the surrounding area, caused the Thayer brothers to nurture concepts of land and lake stewardship that have benefited all of us.

As an avid, lifelong fisherman, Rufus witnessed the introduction of the Greenbacks (cisco) as a teenager in the 1930s and, after the alewives invaded in the late '80s, their decimation along with the Otsego Bass. He watched burbot (fresh-water ling) and walleye disappear. And, as a keen observer, he noticed changes in the abundance and distribution of non-game species — things that even those with considerable experience on the lake would simply miss. Furthermore, he intuitively recognized the complex relationships between what's on the land and how the lake responds to our activities there.

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Located in Cooperstown and founded in 1968, the Biological Field Station is a unique facility serving the Upper Susquehanna Watershed, Otsego County and the immediate Cooperstown area. It is primarily a teaching and research center for undergraduate and graduate

students from across New York, the United States, and Canada. Directed by Dr. Willard Harman and staffed with talented, experienced professionals, the Biological Field Station is presently the focal point for information about issues affecting Lake Otsego and the Susquehanna River.

Do we have your correct address?

Acting Locally and Thinking Globally

Why, a visitor to the BFS must wonder, does the first exhibit I see at the foot of the stairs contain horseshoe crabs and star fish? After all, I'm a couple of hundred miles from the ocean and I've come to learn about Otsego Lake, not look at a salt-water aquarium.

This display serves as a reminder that our lake is the source of the Susquehanna River which wends its way for 444 miles to Chesapeake Bay which, in turn, mixes with the Atlantic Ocean. So how we treat Otsego Lake has an

influence on oceanic pollution — a concern to all of us.

The Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) on the Chesapeake mirrors for that Bay what BFS does for the lake: teaching, monitoring and assisting in remediation efforts. Their scientists remind us that the ocean's productivity is mostly near shorelines, with 10% of the world's oceanic area accounting for 30% of its productivity. And it is these shorelines that are most polluted.

SERC is alarmed about:

- Nutrient loads in the Chesapeake
- Shoreline habitat loss and
- Biodiversity reductions

Sound familiar? It certainly should if you've been reading the Reporter as well as local newspaper articles. The community has a daunting task to undertake what is necessary to solve these problems. While the Susquehanna is the largest fresh water source for the Chesapeake, there are other rivers such as the

Rappahannock, York and Potomac along with countless streams that dump their suspended and dissolved loads into the Chesapeake.

What we do here and what others do in their areas should follow the admonition from the 1970s environmental movement to "think globally and act locally." We can make a difference and what we do for the greater Otsego Lake community we will do for the community of the world's oceans and all of mankind.

Walleye

Stocking Otsego Lake with walleye to reduce alewife populations should increase water clarity and improve oxygen concentrations. That's what's currently under discussion among local fishermen, the BFS and the Department of Environmental Conservation. Walleye are normally stocked as fry, fish so small that they may be sim-

ply eaten by the alewives. To prevent this problem larger walleye fingerlings should be stocked. There are two ways of obtaining them:

1. The DEC can provide fry, free of charge when available, that can be placed in local ponds to be cared for by volunteers until large enough to put in the lake, or
2. With local funding, we can buy the larger fingerlings and stock them immediately. In either case walleye may have to be stocked for several years to better the

chances for the development of a self-sustaining population.

Our lake trout, brown trout and salmon remain in the colder deep waters when the lake warms up. Bass and pickerel remain in the plants near shore seldom venturing into open water. None of these predators can control the size of alewife populations because they do not occupy warm open surface waters. Walleye are potentially better able to reduce the number of alewives because, like the latter, they move throughout the entire open water of the lake. Some may be concerned

that if the walleye stocking is successful they will reduce the numbers of alewives to the point where the salmonids will not find enough to eat. The chance of that happening is of much less concern than the present oxygen stress on those same fish and the cascade of water quality/nutrient problems that now prevail in Otsego Lake.

*To protect your lakes,
protect your rivers,
to protect your rivers,
protect your mountains.*

*—Emperor Yu of China
1600 BC*

*The Nation behaves well if
it treats natural re-
sources as assets which it
must turn over to the next
generation increased, and
not impaired, in value.*

—Theodore Roosevelt



The End of an Era, cont. from p. 1

He was concerned, as was his brother William, by what was happening, and he wanted to do something about it. They started by giving a substantial forested area to the National Wildlife Federation to be kept forever wild.

At the time of William's death, Rufus and his cousin Janice Whipple dedicated over 300 acres of lands on Rum Hill to the Biological Field Station to be protected in perpetuity as well as to protect Otsego Lake.

Rufus also wanted that land to be used for research and education and, in the process, expose young people with interests in conservation biology to the uplands. He hoped that those students would subsequently participate in providing solutions to local land use and lake problems. Rufus established "Thayer Family Scholarship Trust" at Cooperstown High, providing monies to students pursuing careers in conservation and related fields. He also estab-

lished the "Rufus J. Thayer Otsego Lake Research Assistantships" for college student interns. In 1993 the OCCA gave Rufus the "Conservationist of the Year Award" for those efforts.

Rufus's generous contributions provide a living legacy protecting the lake and its environs that will forever impact on the quality of Otsego Lake country. But, perhaps his most important legacy is that of a role model for those who benefited from knowing him, as

well as those students whose careers have been or will be assisted by his generosity. He was the most gentle, caring person I have ever met. I never heard him raise his voice or utter an obscenity. He never criticized or denigrated. He was always optimistic, and above all, he loved Otsego Lake and the lands around it with the intensity of an individual who was an integral part of it. This country was as much a part of Rufus Thayer as he was part of the country.

Updates, cont. from p. 4

● **Lawrence D. Herring III** from SUNY Environmental Science and Forestry at Syracuse, has been modeling nutrient processes in the Shadow Brook drainage basin. He intends to use the Otsego Lake Watershed Geographic Information System (OLWGIS) to develop his models.

● **Andrew Fetterman**, an Oneonta State Earth Sciences M. A. candidate whose field work involved ground water in the Otsego Lake watershed, is now employed by HydroScience, an environmental consulting firm near his home in Boyertown, PA.

● **Dave Warner** received his MS in Biology degree this spring. His research involved alewife population ecology in Otsego Lake. He will be staying on this summer to conduct follow-up work in Otsego Lake and Moe Pond.

● **Matt Albright, Dave Warner** and **Paul Lord** presented the following papers at the NYS Federation of Lake Association's annual meetings at Moraine Lake this spring: "An update on the Moraine Lake aquatic plant management plan implementation", "Impacts of alewife introduction in Otsego Lake" and "Contrasting case stud-

ies on the impacts of selective herbicides used in Eurasian Milfoil control". **Bill Harman** presented a session on "A basic limnology of New York State Lakes" for lake managers. He worked closely with **Dean Long**, from a consulting group in Saratoga Springs, and **Martha Frey**, the Executive Director of Otsego 2000 and the Otsego Trust, to coordinate and present the meeting.

● Many thanks to volunteer **Doug Hamilton** who, among other valuable tasks, keeps the salt water aquarium, as well as all the others, working in tip-top condition. He has recently

returned after wintering in the Florida Keys.

● A compendium of articles titled "Scientists on Biodiversity" has been donated to the BFS by Cooperstown's **Lake and Valley Garden Club**.

News from Oneonta

● The College at Oneonta has been credited by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities for developing a national "best practice" in its Center for Social Responsibility and Community. The Center now serves as a module for establishing similar programs at other colleges.

Updates

Alumni

- **Dr. Joann (Ingulli) Fattic** '71, worked 22 years for Eli Lilly and Company. She is now the Director of Human Resources for Greater China, which includes mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. She now resides with her husband Richard and son Richie in Shanghai.
- **Chris Vatovic**, a 1992 summer intern sponsored by the Village of Cooperstown and a recent graduate of Cornell University, has worked for us over the winter curating macrobenthic invertebrates.
- **Abigail Ellsworth**, who volunteered at the BFS during the summer of 1998, has been awarded the 1998-99 Jan Kee Ang Award, the

SUNY Oneonta Biology Department's most prestigious student honor. She is a member of the class of '99.

- **Darcy King**, a 1998 summer intern, sailed the Caribbean aboard a 125 ft. schooner for 6 weeks. She will return to the BFS this summer and then plans on entering the Peace Corps in the fall where she will be working with fisheries in West Africa.
- **Mead McCoy** just received his MA in biology degree and is now working at the USGS Great Lakes Science Center in Ann Arbor, MI. He will be presenting a paper on "Moe Pond Fish Population Dynamics" at The Ecological Society of America meetings in Spokane, Washington in August.

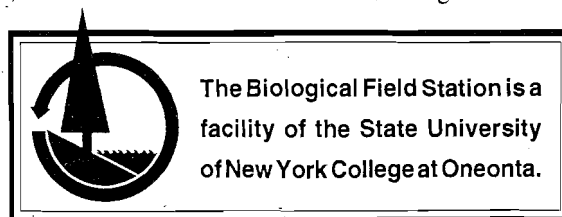
Happenings

- Thanks to **Mike Manno** of Greystone Manufacturing for a recent gift of four large aquaria. They are now being used by BFS adjunct faculty member **Dr. John Foster's** Fisheries and Aquaculture program at SUNY Cobleskill.
- **Thomas Smith**, a SUNY Oswego graduate student, visited Rum Hill to collect some red oak seedlings. He is working on a project involving symbiotic associations between fungi and the oaks.
- **Sol Betancourt**, BFS webmaster, and **Dan Rosen**, volunteer, have been updating our webpage. Visit us at www.oneonta/~biofld.
- **Paul Woodell**, a graduate student in the MA in Earth Sciences program, has been working in the analytical laboratory at the BFS conducting research for his dissertation on groundwater flow through karst terrain.
- **Bret Smith**, an Oneonta undergraduate pre-med biology major, has been studying fresh-water bivalves here this winter.
- **Paul Lord**, graduate student at Oneonta State, our divemaster and technical advisor, has enlisted the help of Bassett Drs. Larry Barnowski MD, and Robert Moglia, MD, to be our local dive-medicine team. They are the gatekeepers for the national Diver Alert Network (DAN) for diver medical emergencies. Paul has also recruited a cadre of SCUBA divers to assist our research efforts.

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Fiscal challenges in recent years have constrained the work of the Biological Field Station. Private gift support from individuals, foundations, and corporations is essential and an investment in the Biological Field Stations' continued success and services to the community. For more information, call or write:

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The College at Oneonta Foundation receives and manages gifts for the Biological Field Station. All gifts are used expressly for the purposes for which they are given and they are tax-deductible. Information is available through:

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