



ADIRONDACK WEATHER

Noah John Rondeau, Ray Falconer and North Country Life

By William J. O'Hern
SPECIAL TO THE LAKE GEORGE MIRROR

Puddles of water have ice sheets

Covered with frost and

Morgan Mountain is Show of Snow

Br-rr-r-r it's cold!

By the fall of 1956, when Noah John Rondeau wrote “Br-rr-r-r It’s Cold,” he was among the 573 people living in Wilmington, N.Y.

Morgan Mountain is a small peak behind the amusement park, Santa’s Workshop. Rondeau frequently hunted south of Morgan Mountain and often commented on its beautiful woods— “nice grounds... Not much game. Predominantly trees.”

Rondeau’s observations foretold feeling the coming winter. He knew the cold weather would soon be locked in. His free verse poetic lines were an attempt to capture nature’s sights which he had so often described in his diaries during his fays living as a hermit in the Cold River country wilderness.

Perhaps his primitive lifestyle influenced his sensitivity or gave special meaning to the daily adventurous changes the weather brought.

Weather changes such as when he woke on September 10, 1956 to record “Coldest yet; Not a Honey Bee in sight; Lighting Board wet and froze.”

His unique wording gave rise to an identification with the land that went down deep into his primal well of awareness as evidenced in a later September diary entry: “I listened to just enough rain drops on the roof to play Yankee Doodle” as he thumbed through a large wicker basket that held a sizable amount of fabric scraps he planned to cut into quilt blocks as he “counted” his riches and took in the Autumn colors that were “climaxing on Morgan Mountain.”

Noah’s imaginative descriptions to describe an everyday happening such as “I shot a partridge with my cartridge,” and “I hear a woodpecker knock his Pipe on a dry limb in the forest,” or weather-related occurrences:

“My cabins look like snow mounds—one with a smoking Stove Pipe; The Trees and Wigwams, well decked with Snow. The Mountains are accordingly- wintery. I shovel snow a bit and watch the effects of the snowstorm in the forest as when

I was a boy.”

And “Over 3 feet of hard-packed snow prevail over this mountainous region and it’s a nice hardset, tough winter. Feeble sunshine through dense atmosphere. Mountains bluish, smoky as if insinuating a thaw.”

His phraseology was a unique characteristic of the man once known as the Mayor of Cold River.

Noah once claimed, “I believe that I have learned ninety-five percent of what I know by myself.” With a formal education, he could have easily become a scientist, since that field was his major interest. He read about various scientific theories including evolution, geology, biology, mathematics, metaphysics and astronomy and studied the skies with his home-made telescope. He often remarked on the “Adirondack clear”—an atmospheric condition that offered visibility for many miles. He probably never visited the Atmospheric Sciences Research Center at the summit of Whiteface Mountain, opened in 1961, but one can easily imagine how he would have soaked up every bit of information provided in a tour of the field station and observatory.

In 1977 Raymond E. Falconer was a research associate with the Atmospheric Sciences Research Center at the State University of New York at Albany and directed the field students at Whiteface Mountain, Lansing Manor in Schoharie Valley and at Lake George.

While Noah John Rondeau religiously began each daily diary entry with a weather-person-like capsule description



of the day’s meteorological conditions, Falconer’s “Weather in the Adirondacks” provides a science-based, yet understandable description of the climate of the Adirondack Mountains.

As interesting as the description is, what is most exciting is that this thorough article was never printed until now. A little history explains why.

In 1946, George Glyndon Cole founded, acted as editor, and privately printed a 5 ½ x 7 ½ inch quarterly North Country Life magazine. He published the popular little magazine for 28 years, until 1974. Sometime following the release of the last issue, Robert F. Hall became the new owner. Hall said of Cole and the now rare and sought-after magazine, “During those years Cole collected and through the pages of the magazine presented the history and historical memorabilia of an entire region, New York State from the Mohawk

A: Adirondack hermit Noah John Rondeau after he moved to Wilmington, NY. Photo courtesy of William J. O'Hern.

B: North Country Life founder Glyndon Cole, far left, in 1969, when serving as SUNY Plattsburgh’s associate librarian and director of its North Country Historical Research Center.

C: Robert F. Hall at the Lake George Historical Museum in 1972, a few years before he bought the rights to resume publication of “North Country Life.”

D: William J. O'Hern.

River to the St. Lawrence. When his passion for history and folklore made these boundaries feel cramping, he expanded his horizon to cover the state as a whole and changed the magazine’s name to York State Tradition.

“The fact is that Glyndon Cole is himself a tradition. As curator of the North County Historical collection of the State University library at Plattsburgh he was friend, guide and helper to everyone—writers, students and merely interested readers—who probed for sources of the region’s past.”

Hall planned to “continue to focus on the history and folklore,” but also planned “to add enough pages so that we may deal with the problems of those who now live and work or who vainly seek work in this region. As this parenthetical phrase suggests we are disturbed by the depressed state of the economy of the North Country, by the proportion of our families who exist on incomes below the poverty level, by off-season unemployment, and by the abandonment of small farms.”

Hall went further, listing what he saw as other pressing problems

such as maintaining environmental excellence, preserving open space, protecting wildlife, and protecting air and water from pollution.

The new North Country Life, its original name restored, had lofty, worthwhile goals that went well beyond it being, Hall emphasized, “a magazine for history buffs.”

The Summer 1977, Volume 29, No. 1 was prepared for printing. Falconer’s article was going to lead the line-up. Unfortunately, according to Hall’s son, Anthony F. Hall, the revived NCL “didn’t go forward because of lack of funding—the fate of many good ideas.”

The prototype of Vol. 29 No. 1 is preserved in the New York State Museum archives along with other Robert Hall papers. Factually, Falconer’s science holds true today.

Ray Falconer’s North Country Life essay, “Weather in the Adirondacks,” can be found on page 16 of this issue.

William J. O'Hern is the author of the forthcoming “Adirondack Seasonal Observations From a Hermit’s Perspective: Noah John Rondeau’s Wilderness Days,” from which this essay is excerpted.

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