

THE FIRST TEN YEARS: North Jersey Chapter ADK

by Betty Maury Heald with the assistance
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The late Manfred d'Elia of Ridgewood, founder of the North Jersey Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club, and of the Ramapo Chapter as well, was a musician of note in our area. A pianist, both teacher and performer, he was also for years the General Manager of the highly esteemed Valley Opera.

One day in 1959 or 1960 when Fred was coaching a pupil, the late Marjorie Wyckoff, she commented that her husband was out hiking that day. "Hey, hiking sounds interesting," said Fred. "I'd like to go with him some time." A few days later he and Jerry Wyckoff were on a trail in Harriman together, beginning a friendship that was to endure for more than 40 years. Fred soon joined Jerry in becoming a Member-at-Large of the Adirondack Mountain Club. Often they were accompanied by others as they tramped Harriman and Ramapo trails and back-packed and camped in the Catskills and Adirondacks.

One day in 1968 Fred decided that North Jersey should have its own chapter of ADK. He consulted Henry Young, recently retired from the ADK presidency. Then Fred, with Jerry's help, sent an invitation to those ADK Members-at-Large (over 200 of them) in New Jersey, and to a number of other hikers as well.¹

In September of 1968, Manfred d'Elia wrote an open letter to the Members-at-Large of the Adirondack Mountain Club (ADK) living in New Jersey. (There were over 200.) He invited them to attend a meeting on September 20th for the purpose of forming a New Jersey Chapter of ADK. Fred noted in his letter that several local members-at-large of ADK recognized the need for a well-organized NJ group to exert an influence on state conservation matters. In his letter he also mentioned the need for close contact among hikers, better trail maintenance and the study, appreciation and protection of the natural environment. A hiking club would offer opportunities to members for enjoyment and service to the state and future generations.

Several New Jersey ADK Members-at-Large were closely connected to the Catskill 3500 Club and the Adirondack 46ers Club. Frank Oliver was President of ADK; Henry Young was a past-President; Jerome Wyckoff was serving on the ADK Board of Directors. Bill Hentschell was President of the 3500 Club.

At the September 20th meeting held at the Education Building of the West Side Presbyterian Church a formal letter of application to ADK Headquarters was presented. The fourteen signers were Manfred d'Elia, Toshiko d'Elia, Paul A. Duckels, George F. Mahar, Frank Oliver, Hedwig Oliver, DeWitt Parsons, Fred Schmeltzer, John Shugrue, Gustav A. Stumpp, Halana C. Stumpp, Florence W. Young, Henry C. Young, and William Weintraub.

¹ As reported by Jerome Wyckoff.

On November 15th forty Bergen County residents gathered together for the first regular monthly meeting of the proposed North Jersey Chapter of ADK. Those attending included Jack Berg, William Bulhman, Manfred d'Elia, Aubrey Hampton, Lynn Hickey, Vic Murray, Bill Widlund, Jerry Wyckoff, Henry Young, and Carl Zwingli. Shortly afterwards feature articles appeared in two local weeklies: the RIDGEWOOD HERALD-NEWS (November 28th) and the PASCACK VALLEY COMMUNITY LIFE (December 11th). A listing of scheduled hikes appeared in The RIDGEWOOD HERALD-NEWS on January 23, 1969. In January of 1969 the Chapter was formally accepted by the parent Club

An feature article in the HERALD NEWS of March 27 notes a record snowfall (14 inches) which enticed many members to snowshoe in Harriman State Park. The first few schedules were mimeographed and numbered musically (*Opus 1, NO.3*). The first canoe trip - on the Delaware River - was held in May. In June of 1969 the Club assumed the maintenance of the Allis Trail in Sterling Forest. (This trail still serves as an access trail to the Appalachian Trail.)

In the fall of 1969 the Chapter produced a professionally printed booklet. Member Mark Kletter was associated with a print shop and supervised the publication of the schedule for over ten years. The booklet, 8 ½ X 4 inches, had the club patch as the logo on the cover. Membership had grown to 98. Fred d'Elia taught a *Hiking and Conservation* class at RIDGEWOOD ADULT SCHOOL. Frank Oliver proposed the first lobbying effort of the Chapter, cooperating with other organizations, to save the Minnewaska Tract from development. Fred organized and led two youth hikes: one for Hasbrouck Heights students and another for Girl Scout Troop #184.

By the end of the year the Club had assumed responsibility for 2 more trails. One from the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference included 8 miles of the Long Path in Harriman State Park (Rt.202 to Lake Sebago). The second was for maintenance of a High Peaks trail in the Adirondack Mountains. In December THE RECORD CALL (now the BERGEN RECORD) featured a photo/essay about a Bearfort Ridge hike led by Jerry Wyckoff.²

In 1970 Club members were active in mapping a trail system at the newly acquired Bergen County Park: Campgaw. Fred d'Elia led a hike for blind children that spring. For the first time the Spring Hike Schedule included a roster of members.³ Another canoe trip on the Delaware River was scheduled to continue what became an annual spring tradition.

Members lobbied to protect the environment from hazardous substances such as detergents with phosphorus. The first League for Conservation⁴ meeting was held in September

Early ADK members, like those to follow, were strong conservationists. About the time North Jersey Chapter was organized Fred d'Elia met Fred Ferber, a retired manufacturer who owned

² SUNDAY BERGAN CALL, December 7, 1969.

³ Among the names are **Marilyn Dimijian (Adair), Michael DeLuca, and Ed Fanslau**. Marilyn reports she attended the very second meeting of the club and joined at that time.

⁴ This is now the League for Conservation Legislation.

2,300 acres in Bearfort-Waywayanda

Area. Ferber urged Fred d'Elia to recruit hikers and urge them to lobby for state purchase and conservation of this tract, and to advocate conservation in the state generally. After meetings with Ferber, Fred d'Elia and Jerry Wyckoff framed a letter and Fred sent it to a long list of hiking club and individuals considered to be good prospects. The result was the formation of the League for Conservation Legislation. This later was renamed the New Jersey Environmental Lobby. Frank Oliver, just retired from the ADK presidency, was persuaded to head the league and did so with distinction and effectiveness in Trenton until his death a few years ago. North Jersey has supported this influential though little known environmental group for 34 years.⁵

I recall Frank Oliver speaking at every Chapter meeting on issues. He never failed to request, and receive, a donation. Frank was the keynote speaker at The NY-NJ Trail Conference's 50th Anniversary celebration at Bear Mt. (The cost of the dinner was \$7.00)

Several new activities appeared in the fall schedule. Geoff Barclay organized a trail cleanup of the Allis Trail. William Widlund led a bicycle trip in Black Rock Forest. The first annual Chapter Suffern-to-Bear Mt. (24 1/2 miles) marathon was held.⁶

In the spring of 1971 Geoff Barclay led a canoe trip on the Oswego River in the Jersey Pine Barrens. The BERGEN RECORD ran a feature story on Chapter member John Seymour's quest to hike the Appalachian Trail from end to end. It had a ¼ page illustration by RECORD cartoonist Kevin McVey, a member of the Chapter. Reimbursement for car-pooling was instituted.

The leaders of the club included Bill Widlund, Chair; Fred d'Elia, Vice Chair; Vic Murray, Treasurer; Mildred Thomas, Corresponding Sec.; Dianne Seymour, Recording Secretary; Conservation, Fred Schmeltzer; Maps, Pauline Woodlock; Canoeing, Geoff Barclay; and Programs, Jack Seymour.

There was an overnight canoe trip on the Housatonic River in early October. Hike leaders reported an overwhelming number of people showing up for hikes. (On October 3rd there were 52 people on one hike. On December 12th 60 people showed up for a C Hike.)

The Chapter's Annual meeting on November 6 was held at the Swiss Chalet in Ramsey. Elected were Geoff Barclay, Chair and Marilyn Dimijian, Vice Chair. Diane Seymour continued as Recording Secretary. Bill Widlund took over as Treasurer. Roy Messaros organized the Hiking Schedule. Doug Young became the Conservation Chair. ⁷

By 1972 8 conservation issues were very much on everyone's mind. Chapter members were encouraged to write letters to representatives in Trenton asking them to support statewide recycling.⁹ The Chapter opposed the Tocks Island Dam by supporting the *Save the Delaware*

⁵ Contributed by Jerome Wyckoff.

⁶ Hal and Mimi Cohen are included in the membership list.

⁷ Rita Boyd, Roy Messaros, Albert Rosen, Richard Sparrow, and Cyrus Whitney are on the membership roster.

⁸ Though no roster was included with schedule an addendum of 49 new members included: George Adair, Jack Morrison, Betty Maury.)

⁹ The glass industries in south Jersey were stronger.

Coalition.¹⁰ Members spoke out against development in the Hackensack Meadowlands and Adirondacks. The Club support legislation to protect open space and clean water in our state by lobbying for the *Green Acres Bill* and the *Wetlands Bill*. The Passaic River Coalition was born. The State of NJ acquired 620 acres of land in Mahwah along Ramapo River.¹¹ The Club donated \$225 to LCL (League for Conservation Legislation). The Chapter published its first summer schedule.

Late in the year Fred d'Elia initiated the formation of another ADK chapter. Membership had grown so large that participation on hikes and at monthly meetings became almost unmanageable. He and Bill Endicot¹² ran an advertisement in the Rockland County newspaper to invite parties interested in forming a hiking club to a meeting at Bill Endicot's home in Suffern. Marilyn and Ike Siskind were among those that attended. Early the following year the Ramapo Chapter was formed.

By 1973 Club records indicate that membership had swelled to 389. The Chair was Geoff Barclay, Vice Chair, Marilyn Dimijian; Secretary, Lenore Coomber; Treasurer, Alan Wilson; Outing Schedule, Mark Kletter; Canoeing, Roy Messaros; Hiking, Fred Schmeltzer; Reception, Alice Szuna; Membership, Ellie Wright; and Refreshments, Lois Tillson. Conservation Issues included supporting the newly organized *Scenic Hudson, Save the Delaware Coalition* and opposing the Storm King pump-storage proposal. Meetings moved from the West Side Presbyterian Church to Ridgewood High School.

In October the annual Suffern to Bear Mountain hike include dinner on Saturday evening followed by dancing until 1 a.m. Sunday morning participants breakfasted early and then returned to Suffern on the trail (24.5 miles each way).¹³

By 1974 conservation issues expanded to include opposition to proposed deer hunting in Harriman, the support of NJ Bills for Land Use Planning, Solid Waste Management, and Recycling. Polly Woodlock designed a North Jersey Chapter patch.¹⁴

Officers included Paul Winchell as Chair; Neil O'Kane, Vice Chair; Margie O'Kane and Ellie Wright shared the scheduling of hikes; Publicity, Polly Woodlock; Publications, Tom Millard; Programs, Jack Morrison; and Conservation, Bill Hladky.

In 1975 the Tocks Island Dam project was successfully de-authorized. This was a significant victory for Mid-Atlantic environmentalists. Chapter membership had swelled to 436 and the Treasurer reported a balance of \$1,043. Excess funds were apportioned each year for trail maintenance or environmental causes. The Adirondack Mountain Club, the NY-NJ Trail Conference, and the LCL received the greatest share of funds.

¹⁰ This effort was successful.

¹¹ This was a trade-off for approval of the construction of I-287 through the Ramapo Highlands and eventually became Ramapo State Forest.

¹² Bill Endicot was Superintendent of Schools in Suffern and an ADK 46er.

¹³ It has been reported that only Fred and Toshi d'Elia completed the round trip.

¹⁴ The hulla-hoop created at that time with the patch insignia is still in use.

Leadership positions in the Club were held by Dave Wright as Chair; Fred Schmeltzer, Vice Chair; Betty Maury, Secretary; Dick Sparrow, Treasurer; Tom Millard, hiking; Schedule, Mark Kletter; Program, Lois Hornbostel; Refreshments, Isabelle Harrington; and Trails, Tim Watters.

There was a rock climbing schedule was restricted to individuals who could prove attendance at an accredited rock climbing school or have had considerable climbing experience.

A Wine and Cheese Fund Raiser was held on April 12 at the Hohokus VFW Hall. Cost was \$5/person with monies raised going toward conservation groups.

The following year, 1976, 15 Frank Oliver helped survey the McAvoy Estate, 2335 acres, which became Ramapo State Forest.¹⁶

By 1977 Fred Schmeltzer was Chair; Betty Maury, Vice Chair; Alice Szuna, Secretary; Doug Young, Treasurer; Hiking, Cy Whitney; Conservation, Mark Kletter; Program, Elaine Wyckoff; XC Skiing, Alfred Frey; and Canoeing, Marilyn Dimijian Adair. A Square Dance Social was held on March 11 at Ridge School.

The 1978 Annual Meeting and dinner dance was held at the Bear Mountain Inn. Club membership was 250. Ron Lockwood taught a Red Cross First-Aid course which continued to be offered annually for several years. Ed Fanslau assumed the scheduling of cross-country ski events. (He continues doing this today.)

On November 18, 1979 a Tenth Anniversary Dinner was held at the Swiss Chalet in Ramsey. Frank Oliver was honored and the funds raised benefited the LCL. The organizing committee consisted of Betty Maury, Sue Morrison and Elaine Wyckoff

¹⁵ Lee Hayes Nunnally listed as a member.

¹⁶ BERGEN RECORD, November 19, 1979.

