Making the Adirondack Park c.1895

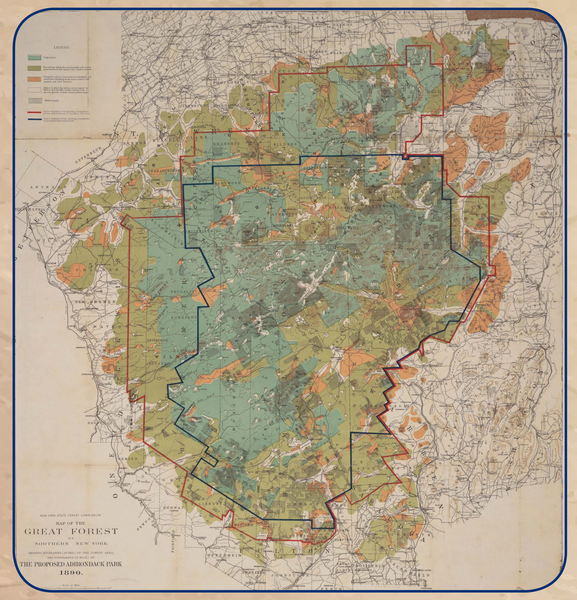
The Adirondack Preserve was created on May 15, 1885. Consisting of 681,000 acres across 11 New York counties, it would take another seven years before legislation established the Adirondack Park as we know it today.

"The lands of the state, now owned or hereafter acquired, constituting the forest preserve as now fixed by law, shall be forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold or exchanged, or be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed or destroyed."

- Article VII, Section 7, (now Article XIV, Section 1) of the New York State Constitution (1894)

The Forest Preserve

The Adirondack Park is larger than Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island combined and is the largest protected wilderness east of the Mississippi at 6 million acres. 130,000 residents call the Adirondacks home across 105 towns and villages.



The proposed Adirondack Park, 1890.

Lands sold to the state of New York in Herkimer and Hamilton Counties, 1895. Near present day Lake Lila.

Getting There - The Railroad

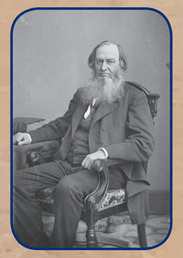
The Ne Ha Sa Ne Park Fire Service train on the banks of Lake Lila, 1903.

Built in 1892 by William Seward Webb, the Mohawk & Malone Railway crossed through this northern portion of the Adirondacks as part of tracks that connected Utica and Lake Placid. Acquired by the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad in 1913, it was renamed the Adirondack division and is today part of the Adirondack Scenic Railway.

Lake Lila and the Ne Ha Sa Ne park with the New York Central Rail lines visible on the western shore leading north toward Lake Placid, 1895.

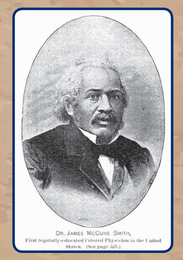
Land Grants to African Americans - North Elba

In 1846, New York philanthropist Gerrit Smith advertised that he would divide up his 120,000 acres of land near North Elba, NY into individual farming plots for free black residents of New York State. The community at North Elba failed after only a few years due to the difficulty of farming in the unforgiving terrain of the Adirondacks.



Gerrit Smith

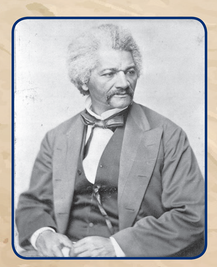
Gerrit Smith was an abolitionist, philanthropist, and social activist who founded the free black community at North Elba. Smith supported universal suffrage and made women's suffrage a pillar of his campaign for president as the nominee for the Liberty Party in 1848. His estate in Peterboro became a stop on the Underground Railroad, and Smith was known to use his wealth for the legal expenses of those charged under the Fugitive Slave Law.



Dr. James McCune Smith

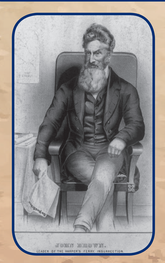
James McCune Smith was the first African American to hold a medical degree and the first to run a pharmacy in the United States. He frequently corresponded with Gerrit Smith, Frederick Douglass, and John Brown, with whom he helped found the Radical Abolitionist Party.

Topographical view of the land near North Elba, NY, 1896.



Frederick Douglass

After escaping slavery in Maryland, Douglass taught himself to read and write and has been described as the most influential African American of the 19th century. As a captivating orator and eloquent writer, he campaigned tirelessly for the abolition of slavery, women's rights, universal suffrage, and public education. Douglass worked with Gerrit Smith and John Brown to establish the community at North Elba.



John Brown

John Brown was a radical abolitionist made famous for his raid on the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He purchased 200 acres of land from Gerrit Smith near North Elba in order to help the free blacks residents to farm and survive off the land. The John Brown Farm State Historic Site in North Elba, NY is a national historic landmark and is open to the public.

John Browns Tract in Herkimer & Hamilton counties (1895), highlighting parcels to be acquired by the state. Although they share the same name, this land did not belong to the abolitionist John Brown.