

## **This Week in Saratoga County History**

### **It could have been Sargent: The naming of Sacandaga Reservoir**

**Submitted by Dave Waite July 3, 2024**

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*Edward Haynes Sargent*

In April of 1930, the gates of the Conklingville Dam closed for the first time, beginning the process of flooding 27 miles of the Sacandaga Valley to create a new body of water that would provide both recreation and power to the region. While it was already being called Sacandaga Reservoir, there was another name being considered, one that would honor the chief engineer of the project, forty-five-year-old Edward Haynes Sargent. A graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Sargent had started working for New York State as a surveyor in 1911. He had been involved with the reservoir project since its beginning and oversaw the construction of the Conklingville Dam.

It was a reasonable proposal to have his name attached to the body of water he had created. In an interview years after this project was completed, Sargent's son, Edward H. Sargent, Jr., reminisced that one of his father's favorite stories was of a state legislator who jokingly suggested that he would "be glad to see the name stick" if the engineer would cooperate by passing away. Though his name was never used, Edward Sargent lived another 20 years, passing away at the

age of 69 in 1954. Engraved on his gravestone in the Edinburgh Cemetery there is a map of the reservoir he helped create.

In the months before the closing of the dam, local newspapers had been reporting the growing controversy over a name for the reservoir. During this time thousands of suggestions had been proposed, some good, and some of questionable merit. Here are some examples from Letters to the Editor published in the *Gloversville Morning Herald*:

I would like to suggest Hudsonadaga Lake as a name. Earl Davis

Why not name it "Lake Adirondack"? A.P.W., Gloversville

"Memory Lake." Mrs. L. W. Cole, Johnstown

For a name with a higher sounding, I suggest "Greater Sacandaga" Mrs. W. Sprung, Gloversville

"Sir William Johnson Lake" Miss Lucy J. Sinclair, Summer-house near Fish-House

In February of 1930, Tracy R. Howard of Ormond, Florida, a subscriber to the *Morning Herald* with property on the newly created shoreline, brought up the idea of having a formal vote for the new name. At first, the newspaper rejected the idea, pointing out both the extra work it would put on their staff, as well as the fact that naming the lake was not a decision local citizens were being offered.

When the newspaper saw that the controversy over Sargent Lake was not diminishing, on June 24<sup>th</sup> they began printing a voting coupon each day that could be sent into their office to be tallied. Offering only the choice of Lake Sacandaga or Sargent Lake, the votes that came in on the first day were 118 for Sacandaga, and none for Sargent.

At the same time as the ballots were being distributed, Frank Rogers, the manager of the paper filed an application with the state submitting "Lake Sacandaga" as the official name of the lake created by the impounding of the Sacandaga River. While the Hudson River District Regulating Board was pushing for Sargent Lake, the decision was in the hands of the New York State Department of Education's Committee on Geographic Names. While a state law had been passed giving the Education Department authority "over the naming of mountains, and other natural features," there were questions raised if that included artificial bodies of water such as a reservoir.

To establish the public interest in the naming of this new lake, Rogers accompanied the application with a letter to committee secretary Arnold van Laer, and also published in the June 23, 1930, *Gloversville Herald*, that concluded with this obvious preference for a name:

I am sending part of the clippings of communications sent to our newspapers during the period when the whole countryside took an interest in offering suggestions for names. You will find a large variety, the majority, I believe, favoring "Lake Sacandaga." You may have noted that newspapers in Ballston, Amsterdam, Albany, Troy, and Schenectady, gave

editorial comments upon the fact that "Lake Sacandaga" is the most fitting name for this body of water, Yours sincerely, The Leader Republican Herald, Frank L. Rogers, General Manager.

At the end of the first week of voting the voice of the people was clearly calling for Lake Sacandaga. Each day hundreds of ballots were coming into the newspaper office, with the tally so far being 2136 to 12. The voting closed on July 3<sup>rd</sup> with a final 380 votes placed into the hands of the *Leader Herald*. Soon headlines like this one from the *Glens Falls Times* were proclaiming "**Almost Unanimous for Lake Sacandaga.**" While it was certainly written to catch the reader's eye, it expressed the truth as Lake Sacandaga amassed 3177 votes to only 19 for Sargent Lake.

It would take the State of New York six months to make a final decision, announcing in February of 1931 that the name would be Sacandaga Reservoir. With all of the talk about an Education Department committee making the decision, it seems that in reality, the final say was always in the hands of the Hudson River Regulating Board, with clear proof given in their announcement of this decision when they stated "the new reservoir will remain Sacandaga reservoir, as it has been known ever since the reservoir project was proposed." For the next 30 years, everyone settled into calling this new body of water "Sacandaga Reservoir," with the next proposed change again coming from the group that had chosen the first name.

On June 5, 1960, the Albany Times Union ran an article with the headline '**Reservoir' Name Scares Vacationers: Sacandaga Name Change Eyed.** The Hudson River Regulating Board now merged into the Black River-Hudson River Regulating Board, proposed making the name "Great Sacandaga Lake," removing the often-misunderstood designation as a reservoir. They hoped that through this change boaters, fishermen and others looking for recreation would not assume that this body of water was closed to the public like many similarly named bodies of water across the northeast.

This new name, Great Sacandaga Lake, became official in 1968 through a bill signed by Governor Nelson Rockefeller. In the announcement, the Great Sacandaga was called "one of the last and most popular unspoiled vacation lands in the Northeast.

In the 56 years that have passed since this change, this body of water has provided countless thousands with opportunity for swimming, boating, and many other forms of outdoor recreation, and through the work of so many now and in the future the Great Sacandaga Lake will continue to hold its place a premiere attraction for many generations to come.

Illustration: Albany Times Union, 1959, photo of Edward H. Sargent

Resources used for this article included [fultonhistory.com](http://fultonhistory.com), [nyshistoricnewspapers.org](http://nyshistoricnewspapers.org), [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) and [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com)