

Noah John Rondeau Collection
Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society, Lake Placid, NY
Completed by J. Tufano, February 25, 2013

Volume: 3 cubic feet in 3 boxes

Acquisition: Unknown

Access: Wednesday-Friday, by appointment with the Museum Director

Copyright: See Museum Director for details

Abstract: Noah John Rondeau, a hermit of the Adirondacks and mayor of Cold River. Contains personal diaries, correspondence, and photographs.

Arrangement:

Diaries of Rondeau: Years 1953, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1965

Diaries contain a daily journal of weather conditions at Cold River, newspaper clippings, personal notes about daily activities and animal sightings. Diary written in Rondeau's symbols, as a way to ensure his journals could not be used against him by the New York Conservation Department.

Photographs of Rondeau: Headshots, Photographs of Cold River, photographs of Rondeau at Cold River.

Correspondance: Letters and Contracts to Rondeau about guest appearances. Greeting cards sent by Rondeau. Personal letters from Rondeau. Some symbols written on letters.

Personal books: Books and brochures owned by Rondeau. Adirondack Mountain Club booklet, 1957 Farmer's Almanac, fiction book.

Biography: Biography about Rondeau titled, "Noah John Rondeau, Adirondack Hermit" by Maitland C. DeSormo.

Biographical Sketch

Noah John Rondeau was born on July 6, 1883 and raised near Au Sable Forks, New York, but ran away from home as a teenager and leaving with an 8th grade education. He was, however, quite well read, and was known to keep journals filled with unique symbols and code. Rondeau also played the violin and was known to entertain welcomed visitors with his music. Before distancing himself too far from civilization, he lived in Corey's, New York, on the Raquette River in the western Adirondacks, where for fifteen years he worked as a handyman, caretaker, and guide. He also made occasional brief visits to jail for game law violations.

Rondeau frequently hunted and trapped in the Cold River area, about 17 miles from Corey's, and in 1929, at age 46, he began spending his first winters alone in the remote area, calling himself the "Mayor of Cold River City (Population 1)."

He kept extensive journals over a period of several decades, many of which were written in letter-substitution ciphers of his own invention. The ciphers progressed through at least three major revisions in the late thirties and early forties and in its final form resisted all efforts to be deciphered until 1992 (*Life With Noah*, p. 91).

In 1947, Rondeau was flown to the National Sportsmen's Show in New York City by helicopter, starting a series of appearances at similar shows throughout the country.

In 1950, the New York State Conservation Department closed the Cold River area to the public after a "big blow" leveled the forest, forcing Rondeau from his home at age 67. He then lived around Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, and Wilmington, New York. Besides the sportsmen's shows, he worked for a time at *Frontiertown* and at the *North Pole* in Wilmington as a substitute Santa Claus, but he didn't return to a hermit's life and eventually went on welfare. He died in a Lake Placid, NY hospital was buried in North Elba Cemetery, near Lake Placid, with a stone from his Cold River home marking his grave.

Scope and Content Note

The Lake Placid-North Elba Historical Society's (LP-NEHS) collection of Noah John Rondeau materials is just one small sub-set of larger collections held throughout the Adirondacks. These materials were found in the LP-NEHS collection while completing a larger collections management project from 2009-2012. The poems, photographs, letters, and diaries were found in a storage cabinet which made them inaccessible to the public.

The Adirondack Museum in Blue Mountain Lake holds a collection of Noah John Rondeau materials, some of which are located online through the New York State Archives.

The diaries are in remarkable condition considering their age and conservation to date. They document Rondeau's unique code as well as his attitude and opinions toward local governments, conventional society, astronomy, and nature. While seemingly random, the dates in which Rondeau created all his written materials, follow his life trend from before, during, and after hermitage.

While not all materials are dates, order has been created where possible with subsequent written pieces inserted according to subject matter and general identification.

Series Description

Series 1:

Diaries (1953, 1955-1958, 1960-1963, 1965)

2 boxes

Spanning from the years 1953-1965, Noah John Rondeau's diaries consist mostly of daily entries about the current weather, personal notations, and current newspaper and magazine clippings. Many days show the exact same entries with no personal observations or opinions. Noah refers to particular locations by name including AuSable Forks which he called "Hill Top."

Some diaries include natural items including bird feathers and leaves. His writing is filled with his personal symbols and secret written code which make his meaning elusive at times. Noah describes visitors to his home as well as visits he makes out into the community.

His later journal entries include quite a bit of information on his physical whereabouts. In January 1962 he describes moving from Wilmington, NY to Hazelton. In August of that year he moved to AuSable Forks, NY then in September to North Jay, NY. In October, he returns once again to Wilmington, NY.

In May 1963, Noah describes moving from Wilmington, NY to River Road in Lake Placid. Finally, in September 1963, he describes moving back to AuSable Forks and "Singing Pines Camp" which he describes as home.

Series 2:
Poems and letters
1 box

Noah John Rondeau's poems and personal letters were found in the storage cabinet along with the diaries. They are in his original hand and many have original envelopes with Noah's unique symbols on both papers and envelopes. The letters are dated but the poems are not so one could only surmise as to their origination date.

Poems, ranging in subject from babies and bars to mountains and rivers, all undated, were separated from their corresponding envelopes and each transferred into archival storage sleeves; however, they remain together in storage.

Letters, dating from 1947-1965, contain correspondence to and from Rondeau mostly discussion arrangements for his attendance at the various sportsmen's shows he attended during those years. Letters have been removed from their envelopes and each transferred into archival storage sleeves; however, they remain together in storage.

Box and Folder List

Box 1
Series 1:

Diaries 1953 – 1965

- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1953
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1955
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1956
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1957
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1958
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1960
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1961
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1962
- Noah John Rondeau diary – 1963
- Noah John Rondeau diary - 1965