

Augustus D. Shepard - Architect

1868-1955



A. D. Shepard photo – from The Adirondack League Club Archives

Part II

Augustus Dennis Shepard grew up in the late 19th century in a world of privilege when affluent captains of industry and members of the elite society escaped the misery of city life during the stifling heat of the summer by sojourning to fashionable seaside and mountain resorts. The Shepard family followed suit and enjoyed pleasant visits to the Blue Ridge foothills in Asheville, North Caroline at Kenilworth Lodge – the home of his Rees grandparents. Other summer excursions were spent on Long Island where sailing and golf were popular pastimes or in the Berkshires for hunting and fishing.

By the 1890's, the Shepard family had discovered Upstate New York's magnificent Adirondack wilderness likely due to improved railroad connections from major eastern metropolitan centers. Dr. William Seward Webb, married to William Vanderbilt's youngest daughter Lila Osgood Vanderbilt, began construction of a railroad in 1891 from the Mohawk Valley northward along the western corridor of the Adirondacks to the St. Lawrence River and the Canadian border. Webb's railroad, nearly 200 miles in length, was completed in October of 1892. It connected to the Vanderbilt's New York Central lines that operated from New York City through Albany and Utica to Buffalo and beyond. Scores of resort communities sprang up along Dr. Webb's rail corridor to accommodate all the tourists who came to enjoy the pristine lakes and lush forests in the Adirondacks.

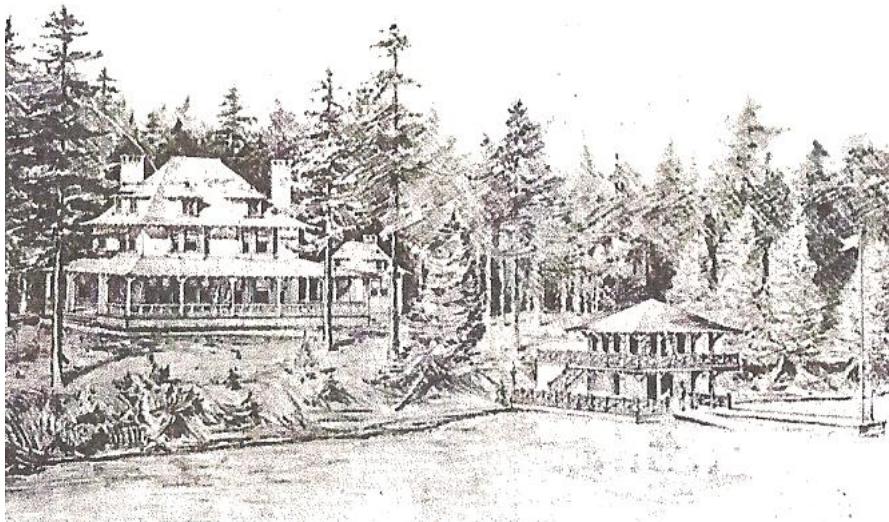
The Adirondack League Club:

At the southern end of the Adirondacks in 1890, a group of influential sportsmen incorporated The Adirondack League Club (ALC) and purchased a 91,000 acre stretch of wilderness adjacent to the Old Forge region in what was know as the Anson Blake Tract. The Tract, primarily in northern Herkimer County, straddled the south branch of the Moose River and included some seventy-five virtually uninhabited lakes and ponds. The ALC merged with an adjacent private group called the Bisby Club in 1893 and purchased 12,000 acres in the Wagner Tract the following year. With 128,000 acres owned outright and lease agreements on another 70,000 acres, it was the largest

private preserve in the Adirondacks.¹ Augustus Shepard Sr. and his brother Elliott F. Shepard became members of the Club in the early 1890s. Elliott was married to William Henry Vanderbilt's eldest daughter Margaret and was Dr. Webb's brother-in-law.

Rustic lodges, accommodating from 75-125 members and their guests, were built on the Club's three principle lakes; Little Moose, Bisby, and Honnedaga. Members were also entitled to purchase lakeside cottage sites following regulations established by the Club. The first known Shepard family member to purchase property in the preserve was Elinor and her husband John Doull Miller. According to the deed filed in 1894 at the Herkimer Co. clerk's office, the Miller's bought Lot #29 on 1st Bisby Lake that was conveyed by the Bisby Club to the Adirondack League Club on May 12, 1893.²

Augustus D. Shepard Jr. purchased property on Honnedaga Lake in 1897, described as Lot #3 formerly conveyed to the Adirondack League Club on August 1, 1890 by Mark M. and Emma I. Pomeroy.³ Access from the Dr. Webb's railroad stations to both of these lakes was still a rather arduous affair in the late 1890s. Neither built cottages on their lots at Bisby or Honnedaga. The Shepard family rented the Mallinckrodt camp on Little Moose Lake in 1901 for the summer season. Augustus, now a member of the Club's Committee on Admissions, joined his parents there in late July. Still single and in his early thirties, Augustus had landed what is believed to be his first commission for a cottage at the Club for John Urban Fraley – a dry goods merchant from New York City. Shepard hired a local Old Forge contractor, George Goodsell, to build the Little Moose Lake camp which was completed in 1902.



Fraley Cottage photo from The Adirondack League Club's 1902 Yearbook⁴

¹ Comstock, Edward Jr. & Webster, Mark C., Editors, *The Adirondack League Club 1890-1990*, private publication on file at the Town of Webb Historical Association (TOWHA) in Old Forge, NY.

² Herkimer Co. deed filed in Liber. Bk. 148, p. 534.

³ Herkimer Co. deed filed January 25, 1897 in Liber. Bk. 151, p. 514.

⁴ Fraley Camp photo reprinted in *The Adirondack League Club 1890-1990*, p. 281.

The Utica Daily Press reported on June 20, 1902:

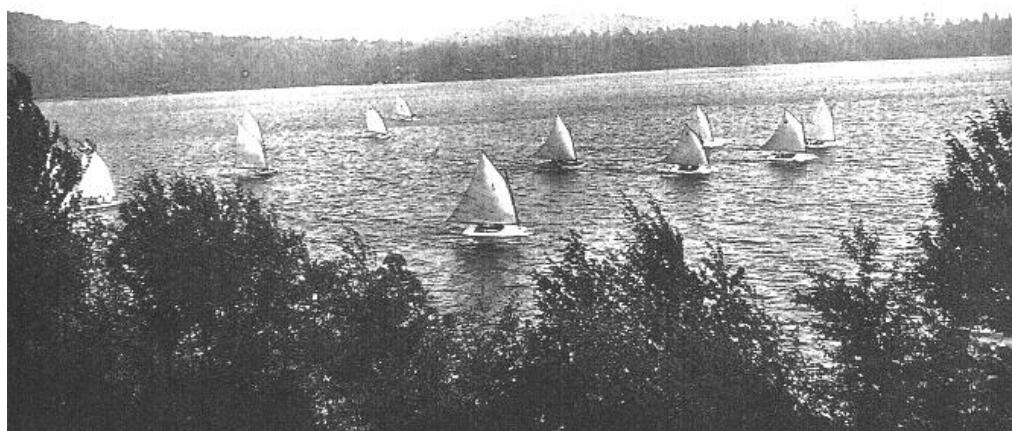
"One of the most elaborate and handsome summer places in this part of the mountains is that owned by J. C. Van Blarcom of St. Louis and situated on St. Louis point, Little Moose Lake. Mr. Van Blarcom is a member of the Adirondack League Club and expects to occupy his new summer home this season. This adds another to the colony of fine summer homes built by St. Louis people on this point, among them being that recently built by Samuel Dodd. John U. Fraley of New York is also having a very fine cottage built on Little Moose Lake, near Mountain Lodge, the club house, which will be ready for occupancy this summer."

The Utica Daily Press, "Palatial Summer Homes," July 14, 1902:

"Three cottages have just been completed in this vicinity which if they were town residences would be dignified by more pretentious names. They will be occupied before the close of July. The cottages have been built by George Goodsell, the contractor of this place. They are a credit to his skill and are generally admired. On First lake, at the upper end about opposite the Harrison cottage, is the summer home built for J. C. Soper of Chicago. It is built of the rustic style, well finished and is to be handsomely furnished."

"In the Adirondack League preserve fronting Little Moose lake are two other cottages. Just east of the Adirondack League club house is J. U. Fraley's cottage. Mr. Fraley is from New York and his home is built after plans by Architect Shepard of Broadway. It is 96x50 feet and three stories high. There are 36 rooms. Baths and gas lights are featured. On the lake, a boat house is being built. The second floor will be fitted with a billiard room. . . The house exterior is painted green and red."

"Just across from the Fraley cottage is that of J. C. Van Blarcom of St. Louis made after plans by a St. Louis architect. It is three stories high, 40x50 feet, and finished in the rustic style. It is the finest cottage on the lake, with furnishings that will cost \$60,000."



Nancy Wilson photo of Little Moose Lake
from *Our Forest Home – The Adirondack League Club*⁵

The "very fine cottage" Shepard designed for Fraley sparked a burst of requests from other club members for new cottages and additions or remodeling projects to existing camps. Little Moose Lake became a premiere vacation destination for Shepard family

⁵ From a copy of *Our Forest Home* at the New York State Archives, Albany, NY, published Old Forge, NY ca. 1940, the date noted at the Archives. The date for this publication is listed as c. 1949-1952 in The Adirondack League Club's 100th Anniversary publication bibliography.

members over the next several years. Augustus' brother Burritt purchased Lot #40 on Little Moose Lake in 1902. Augustus and his sister Elinor Miller bought adjoining Lots #97 and #98 respectively in 1903. Brother Rutherford M. Shepard purchased two lots in the preserve including Lot #16 on Little Moose Lake in February of 1906.

Augustus and Marie Rees Shepard returned to New York immediately after their wedding in Asheville, North Carolina in April of 1908 and took up residence in a Park Avenue apartment. The next few summers were spent in the Adirondacks where he built a camp in 1909-1910 for his own family on Lot #137 adjacent to his sister Elinor Shepard Miller's camp on Lot #136.⁶ Other commissions were completed for Club owned cottages and a boathouse at Little Moose, renovations to Forest Lodge at Honnedaga, and for private camps, guide houses, and boathouses at all three lakes.⁷

In September of 1912, while George Goodsell was constructing a boathouse at Augustus's own camp at Little Moose, the Shepard siblings gathered in Plainfield, New Jersey to celebrate their parents' 50th wedding anniversary. Augustus Jr. and his wife Marie and baby daughter came to the party from their home in Lawrence, Long Island. Marie gave birth to their son William Bradford in late October.

Mountain Lodge Fire:

On April 14, 1913, a massive fire destroyed the Adirondack League Club's Mountain Lodge, the ice house, laundry and storehouse at Little Moose Lake. Local firemen were able to save the Club's boathouse and several adjacent cottages. The Directors met two days later in New York City and a decision was made to have Augustus D. Shepard design the new clubhouse, known today as the Little Moose Summer House. A large force of men gathered that month to clear the debris and prepare for the new building. By June, Augustus and Marie had rented out their winter home on Albro Lane in Cedarhurst, Long Island and headed north to Little Moose Lake for the summer.

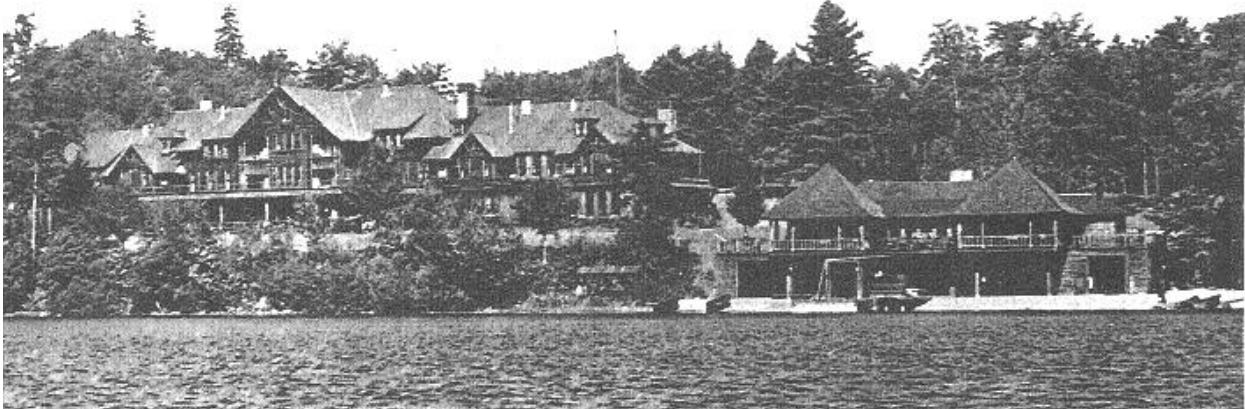
According to the Adirondack League Club's 100th Anniversary Book, George Goodsell built the foundation under the supervision of the Club superintendent Lewis L. Grant. Branch and Callahan of Saranac Lake were awarded the contract for the construction of the lodge, estimated to cost around \$90,000. The contract also specified a completion date of July 1, 1914.⁸ Branch and Callahan underbid Goodsell for the construction project. Shepard urged that stones for the piers and chimneys be quarried over the winter. Augustus Shepard was to be paid \$5,000 for his designs which included the new clubhouse, an ice house, a stone pump house, and an addition to guide's house.⁹

⁶ Rutherford M. Shepard paid taxes on Little Moose Lot #137 in 1907 which he later deeded to Augustus. Deed purchases noted by the Shepards from the Grantor and Grantee lists and deeds on file at the Herkimer County clerk's office, Herkimer, NY.

⁷ Comstock, Edward Jr. & Webster, Mark C., Editors, "The Adirondack League Club 1890-1990," published a chronology of known Shepard designs at ALC – pp. 248-250.

⁸ Utica Herald Dispatch, "Old Forge," February 5, 1914, p. 13.

⁹ Comstock, Edward Jr. & Webster, Mark C., Editors, *The Adirondack League Club 1890-1990*, private publication on file at the Town of Webb Historical Association (TOWHA) in Old Forge, NY. Shepard's fee is noted in Footnote #127. George Goodsell (1859-1924) was assisted for many years by his son Robert Goodsell (1894-1994). The Town of Webb Historical Association is located in the George Goodsell home on Main St. in Old Forge, NY – donated to the organization in Robert's will.

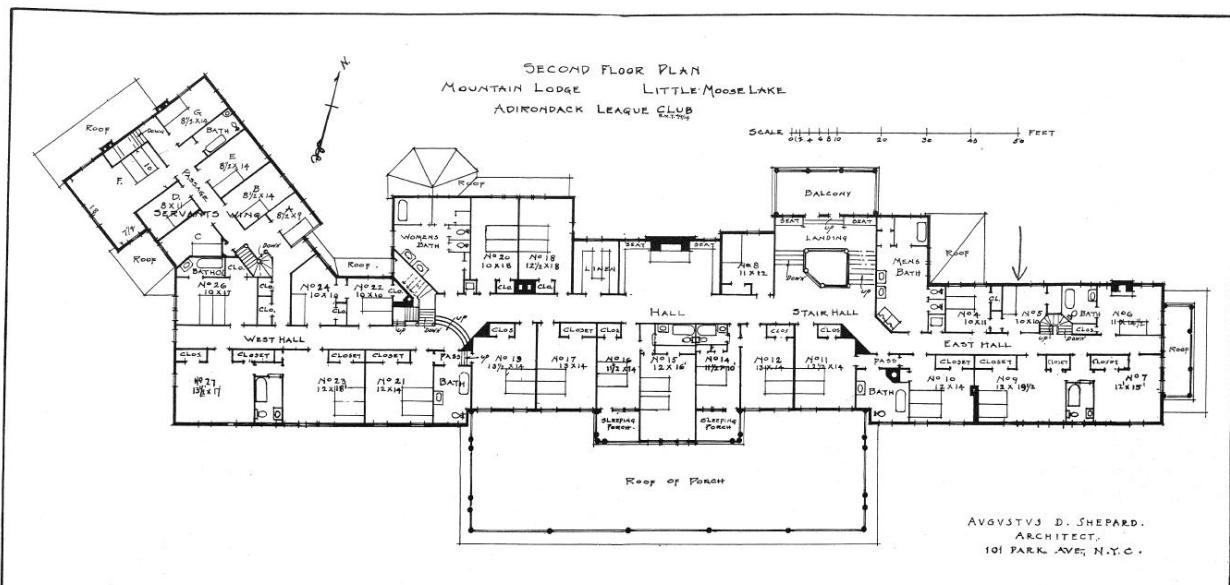


Mountain Lodge and Boathouse at Little Moose Lake

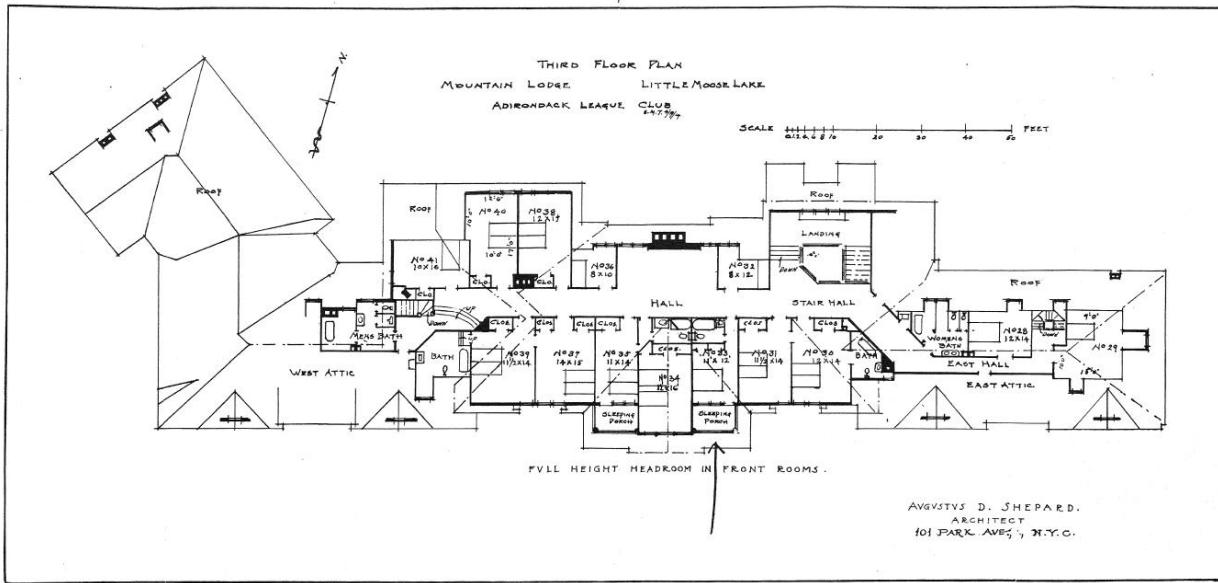
Edward P. Ellis photo from *Our Forest Home – The Adirondack League Club, Old Forge, NY*¹⁰

In spite of the major architectural commission for the Club, Augustus was personally having a difficult year. He was called to his childhood home *The Gables* in Fanwood, New Jersey in late September of 1913 on account of the unexpected death of his father Augustus D. Shepard Sr. A decision was made for their mother to move to North Carolina to live with her daughter Joanna Bright in Gibbonsville. After helping her get settled, Augustus and his family returned to their winter home at Cedarhurst, Long Island in November following a brief visit with the Rees family at Kenilworth, Biltmore. Just after the holidays on February 3rd, 1914, he received the sad news from North Carolina of the unexpected death of his mother Joanna Mead Shepard.

Mountain Lodge Floor Plans: from *Our Forest Home*



¹⁰ From a copy of *Our Forest Home* at the New York State Archives, Albany, NY, published Old Forge, NY ca. 1940.



Shepard's Adirondack Architectural Style:

An Adirondack Camps National Historical Landmarks Theme Study was submitted to the National Register of Historic Places in March of 2000, later updated in 2007. The study was prepared by Historic Preservation Consultant Wesley Haynes and National Historic Landmarks Program Historian James Jacos. Central to the theme study was the argument that the wilderness camps in the Adirondacks "represented the first and fullest application of a rustic aesthetic in American buildings." "They appealed to some of the country's most prominent and wealthy families, who were attracted to the idea of traveling to the mountains to experience nature and outdoor activities in extremely private yet luxurious surroundings."¹¹ This document credits architect William S. Wicks, an Adirondack League Club member and designer of the 1892-1893 clubhouse at Little Moose Lake, as the earliest voice on the subject. Author of *Log Cabins: How to Build and Furnish Them* (1889), Wicks emphasized the importance of selecting a site with commanding views while cutting as few trees as were necessary for the construction of camps. In Wicks' words, "Study it as you would a painting."¹²

According to the theme study -

"Shepard continued this tradition but did so with some intervention. Unlike Durant, Wicks and Coulter, who raised their buildings above the undulating terrains, often requiring expansive areas of skirt railings to screen drastic changes in grade, Shepard excavated into the natural slopes and built retaining walls at his building sites. This better integrated his camps into the woods and made buildings, 'appear to grow out of the ground' according to Shepard's own words."

¹¹ *Adirondack Camps National Historical Landmarks Theme Study*, the 57-page document is available online at the US Dept. of the Interior's National Park Service website: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nhl/themes/Architecture/2camp.pdf>. This document includes a list of nearly two dozen works by Augustus D. Shepard in the Adirondacks.

¹² *Adirondack Camps National Historical Landmarks Theme Study*, p. 15. Reference to William West Durant – designer of Adirondack Great Camps in the Raquette Lake region and William L. Coulter, senior architect of the Coulter & Westhoff firm in Saranac Lake, New York.

*"Terraces, walls, and curving stairways further integrated the buildings and sites and created viewpoints where scenery could be enjoyed. Shepard further introduced flagstone walks and stepping stones, foundation plantings and native stone walls to Adirondack camps."*¹³

And from Augustus D. Shepard's book *Camps in the Woods* (1931):

*"The style of these buildings, if we must use that word, is a style inspired by the woods. . . these camps make their strongest appeal in the fact that their designs are so definitely based on structure. This is evident in the roof trusses, the peeled log and pole beams and split pole studs, so frequently used. . . Little has been added merely to lend decorative interest. . . Simplicity is the keynote of the design as it is of nature."*¹⁴

The fireplaces, mostly of native stone, dominated the interior living spaces. Sportsmen adorned the walls with trophies of the gun and skins upon the floors. Shepard appears to have felt equally comfortable advising clients on how to furnish their rustic camps and lodges. His work was featured in an October 1931 magazine article on camp interiors, the same year he published *Camps in the Woods*. According to the author of the magazine article:

"The idea of combining beauty and extreme luxury in camps, while retaining rustic charm, is due principally to the work of Augustus D. Shepard, an architect who devotes his time for the most part to this form of architecture. Though the designer of many important buildings, office buildings, churches, and institutions, Mr. Shepard was led into this particular field by his love of the mountains and outdoor life."

*". . . this architect not only designs camps, but its furnishings and setting as well, lest some discordant note should creep in. . . Paint or plaster have no place in these camps de luxe. Only natural wood is used for walls and ceilings, hempen rope for molding, peeled poles for decorations as well as useful purposes. And he twists them into unbelievable beauty."*¹⁵



Augustus D. Shepard Camp Interior - from "*Furnishing the Camp Cabin*"

¹³ *Adirondack Camps National Historical Landmarks Theme Study*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Shepard, Augustus D., ed., *Camps in the Woods*, New York Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1931.

¹⁵ *Brooklyn Eagle Magazine*, "Furnishing the Camp Cabin," by Lorine Letcher Butler, Oct. 11, 1931, p. 12.

Shepard Estate Syndicate:

In July of 1915, the Shepard Estate Syndicate was formed with headquarters in New York City. The charter was filed, however, in Dover, Delaware with a capital fund of \$60,000. The purpose of the new corporation was to take over and acquire real estate of all kinds, and dispose of the same. Incorporators of the company were: Burritt H. Shepard, Joanna S. Bright, Augustus D. Shepard, Rutherford M. Shepard all of New York and Elmer S. Miller of Plainfield, New Jersey, and Frederick M. Shepard of Philadelphia.¹⁶

Where the bulk of the company's transactions took place is unknown, but the several parcels were bought and sold by the Syndicate at the Adirondack League Club. Augustus continued to get commissions at the Adirondack League Club for at least a decade following his wife's death in 1921. In addition, the Shepard siblings, especially Augustus - bought and sold lots at the Club well into the 1940s.¹⁷ Although he sold his own camp at Little Moose Lake in 1923 to a Utica insurance man, Merwin K. Hart, his address in social notes and recorded deeds during the 1930s-1940s was often listed as Augustus D. Shepard of Old Forge, NY.¹⁸

Augustus outlived all of his siblings. In 1947, he served as best man for his son William Bradford Shepard whose wedding took place in New York City. William worked for the Hoosac Mills Corp. at that time. His daughter, (Marie) Beatrice Wright who lived in South Orange, New Jersey, married a Mr. Dave Coddington Jr. in 1956, a year after her father's death. Her brother William escorted her down the aisle and Beatrice's daughter Sandra served as her attendant. Augustus spent the last years of his life at his son William's home in Darien, Connecticut. His burial place is unknown.¹⁹

Many of the Adirondack League Club cottages and the Mountain Lodge at Little Moose Lake have survived.²⁰ While this report focuses on Shepard's work here in the Adirondacks, additional designs, photographs, and historical information on this noted American architect for our Historical Association's files would be most welcomed.

April 2009 - by Town of Webb Historian Peg Masters – historian@masterpieces.com
c/o The Town of Webb Historical Assoc., P. O. Box 513, Old Forge, NY 13420

¹⁶ New York Times, "Delaware Charters," July 27, 1915, p. 15. It seems odd that their sister Mrs. John Doull Miller (Elinor Shepard) was the only sibling not listed but that a Mr. Elmer S. Miller (unknown) was a Trustee. Elinor did live in Plainfield, New Jersey for many years.

¹⁷ Grantor and Grantee indexes at the Herkimer County Clerk's office, Herkimer, NY recorded Augustus' last transaction in the county occurred in 1944 when he sold Lot #16 to his sister Joanna S. Bright, recorded in Liber. Bk. 357, p. 349.

¹⁸ Herkimer Co. deed from Shepard to Merwin K. Hart in 1923 filed in Liber. Bk. 148, p. 534.

¹⁹ Darien, CT Historical Association researcher, Susan Bhirud, found Augustus D. Shepard listed with his son William at 102 Rings End Rd. in the 1953 and 1954 telephone book directories.

²⁰ The firm of Davis, McGrath and Shepard are credited with the design of an Adirondack log lodge on Little Simon Pond, Franklin Co., NY for William A. Read – well illustrated in Henry Kaiser's book on Adirondack Great Camp. Competitive design by the firm Davis, McGrath and Shepard were listed in The Architectural League of New York Exhibition Catalog for 1904. Their office location was at 203 Broadway in NYC. Augustus Shepard's address was 156 Fifth Ave., NYC in 1904. There were two Davis architects listed, both members of the Architectural League since 1894: Albert E. Davis, and Irving P. Davis. More research is needed on this firm which became Davis, McGrath & Keissling by 1910.

Additional Reading/ Sources:

- Biographical information obtained from ancestry.com including the Hayes, Vanderbit and Mead family genealogies, census records, social security indexes & passport applications.
- Newspaper sources: www.fultonhistory.com & Historical newspapers online at the NYS Library with society, wedding and obituaries notices and other sources as noted in the footnotes.
- King, Moses, *Notable New Yorkers (1896-1899)*, Bartlett & Co., New York, 1899.
- Hooker, Robert Moreton, "Plainfield, New Jersey Illustrated," The Plainfield Daily Press, 1895.
- Cabot, Mary R., *Annals of Brattleboro, 1681-1895*, E. L. Hildreth & Co., Volume 1, 1921.
- Shepard, Augustus D., *Camps in the Woods*, Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc., 1931; compiled and edited by R.W. Sexton. Illustrations from original drawings prepared in the office of Mr. Shepard, and from photographs by John Wallace Gillies.
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- *Our Forest Home* at the New York State Archives, Albany, NY, published Old Forge, NY ca. 1940, the date noted at the archives.
- Architectural League of New York, Yearbooks and Catalogues – available online at <http://books.google.com/>
- Grady, Joseph H., *The Adirondacks, Fulton Chain—Big Moose Region: The Story of a Wilderness*, Little Falls, NY, 1933.
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- Kaiser, Harvey H., *Great Camps of the Adirondacks*, David R. Godine, Boston, 1986 (softcover edition)
- Augustus D. Shepard. Architectural drawings, MS 89-1, at the Adirondack Museum Library, Blue Mountain, NY.