

Adrian Clarence Edmonds

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Keene — Adrian Clarence Edmonds, builder, real estate developer, civic leader, author, historian and lifelong resident of the Town of Keene died at home on Aug. 23, 2005, at the age of 96. Mr. Edmonds was a visionary who shaped the home of the high peaks.

Born in Keene Valley on Feb. 5, 1909, to Clarence and Beatrice (Tryon) Edmonds, Adrian was the eldest of three children. He, his brother Elmore and sister Dorothy, were the fifth generation of the Edmonds family born in the Town of Keene. Their great-great grandfather William and his wife Amy (Law) settled by the Cascade Lakes (long known as Edmonds Pond) at least 200 years ago.

From a long line of Adirondack men and women was born a man who loved the forest, streams and mountains he called home. From the earliest years, his father instilled in him a strong work ethic, teaching Adrian to do chores and carpentry and how to hunt, trap and fish to provide food for the family. His father also instructed him in the value of character, which emphasized support of one's family and service to the community. He began this service in 1927, while a junior in high school, by joining the Keene Valley Fire Department. He was Chief from 1951-52 and remained a member throughout his life.

As much satisfaction as Adrian derived from his work and service, he remained an avid hunter and fisherman who traversed the local mountains and those of Canada. The multi-generational friendships made and maintained on these excursions were important to him. He also loved baseball — an important sport in the Adirondacks of his youth. From 1926-28 Adrian was the captain of the Keene Valley Baseball Team. During the years 1926-29 the team only lost one game. For four straight years, the first three of which were under Adrian's guidance, the team won the Mountain and Valley Championship. Adrian watched little television (and the last film he saw starred Will Rogers!), except for the news and of course, the baseball season. In his later years he became a fan of the St. Louis Cardinals, particularly of the player named Jim Edmonds.

Adrian, at a younger age, had given some thought to becoming a hermit like Mel Hathaway; a trapper, hunter and fisherman like Seward Russell and his uncle Will Owens; a guide like one of the Lambs, Ishams, Trumbulls, Hales or Beedes; and last, but not least he considered becoming a carpenter like his father. By the time Adrian graduated from high school in 1928 he had saved \$700 by working for 15-50 cents per hour. He had considered buying two lots offered by the Notman family on which to build. One day, however, while working for the Dr. and Mrs. Paul Sachs, Mrs. Sachs said Adrian, you're not going to college? No, Adrian replied. Mrs. Sachs told Adrian to speak to her husband about this, which eventually he did.

It was through the help of the Sachs family and the Weston family that Adrian's \$700 found another use. The pastor of the Congregational Church administered a college entrance exam and Adrian was admitted to Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio in 1928. He was the first in his family to attend college.

Adrian was able to attend Antioch because of its principle of combining book knowledge with work experience. Adrian's knowledge of construction served him well and he was chosen to act as the student foreman for construction projects. Just a few days after Black Tuesday in 1929 his economics professor lectured the class. Dr. Leicherson exhorted: You young people, go back where you came from or wherever you may settle and you buy land! Furthermore, you buy land to which you can contribute to the value of by your own training and experience! By 1932,

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the Great Depression would force Adrian to leave Antioch and return to his hometown. It is impossible to say where his path would have led had he been able to remain in school. He would have liked to become a teacher of English literature, a Christian minister, or perhaps pursue a career in an area of the social sciences. He found ways to express all of these interests, and remained a lifelong learner.

Shortly after his return to the valley, Adrian, his brother Elmore and his father Clarence founded C.E. Edmonds & Sons Builders. He also remembered Dr. Leicherson's advice and in 1934 he began to buy land, much against the counsel of many friends and family who thought he was crazy. Yet Adrian saw that Keene Valley was changing. The rise of the automobile was slowly decreasing the business of the great hotels. The advent of electrification and oil heating left many families with large wood lots they no longer needed. He had met many people who wished to have homes in the valley, but were not able to purchase land from the more established summer residents. Adrian's recognition of these factors was to lay the foundation for his life's work.

From 1934-35 Adrian once again returned to higher education, this time in New York City. He lived at International House in Manhattan and attended night classes at the New School for Social Research and Columbia School of Architecture. During this year he worked from midnight to 8 a.m. in a wholesale bakery. City life was not for Adrian. While in New York he wrote: I'm going back to Keene Valley to build a business and a home. For the accomplishment of these express purposes, I'm far better qualified and prepared than the average man. In these conquests I'm going to excel!

Excel he did. Returning to work with C.E. Edmonds and Sons, Adrian, his father and brother built a business which grew to rival more established companies. Notable buildings built or improved by the Edmonds family include: the Keene Valley Hospital (now the Neighborhood House); the Library, Fire Hall and Congregational Church additions; construction of the Fire Hall in Upper Jay; the Congregational Parish Hall and Johnson's Garage in Elizabethtown and the telephone building in Keene Valley.

In the summer of 1939, he met Lora Pratt. They married on Dec. 24 of that year. Lora's abilities rivaled those of her husband and she pursued her own career as a teacher and school administrator while supporting his endeavors. After her retirement she worked with his businesses until her death on Sept. 24, 2004.

Adrian formed Adrian's Acres West, Inc., Adrian's Acre's East, Inc. and in 1967 set forth on his own as Adrian Edmonds and Associates, Builders. For much of his life he worked well in excess of the standard 40 hour week and continued working until just before his death. Rarely, if ever, did a day pass in which Adrian was not advancing his cause. By the time he was done, over 1,800 acres had passed through his ownership. He had created nine subdivisions and located 250 superb building sites. He had caused miles of roads, water lines and power lines to be laid. With either C.E. Edmonds and Sons or Adrian Edmonds and Assoc., he had built more than 100 new homes, most of which were designed by Adrian himself. Including structures which were improved by these companies, the list approaches 300 buildings. Even as he built upon the mountainsides, Adrian remained a conservationist. Long before the advent of the APA or town planning board, Adrian imposed his own restrictions upon the use of land which he developed. At each site he considered carefully how to cut the trees to offer the best view yet shield the home from others' sight, how to ensure that the wilderness nature of each site remained. William Glover, a client and friend of Adrian's had this to say about his work in 1972: ...the unbelievable capacity which you have displayed, in bringing the element of the untouched

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'wild' to every dwelling which you have constructed. If anything ever deserved a medal — diamond-studded at that — your contribution in this respect certainly qualifies.

At the age of 18, Adrian wrote I maintain that only those who are willing to sacrifice themselves to uplift humanity have true virtue. He pursued this vision. He became a Mason in 1944, and was a Grand Master of his lodge. He served the Town of Keene as a member of the Town Board from 1941-1961; Keene Valley Fire Chief, 1951-52; Justice of the Peace, 1951-61; and as an assessor, 1964-90. Adrian was a man with clear ideas about what he thought ought to be done. Even in the face of adversity he remained committed to these principles. In the 1950s he wrote Having great confidence in the future potential of the Town of Keene, with all its natural charm and beauty; loving its people, both native and non-resident; I shall continue untiringly to work and promote the welfare of all concerned to the best of my ability.

Even as he walked the mountainsides, designed houses and served his community, Adrian Edmonds fed his passion for local and family history. He was an accomplished storyteller, a repository of information about the town he loved. Adrian remembered who married who, the names of their children, grandchildren, uncles and cousins. He remembered and sought from others, stories about the great hunters, the funny incidents, the sad tales and information about the way of life which defined the character of the Town of Keene. Not only did he remember these tales, but he told the stories and then he wrote it all down. He leaves behind an amazing archive of genealogy, history and lore collected throughout his 96 years. This summer, just prior to his death, his book Recollections of an Adirondacker: Vol. 1 was published by the Keene Valley Library.

Adrian Edmonds is survived by his daughter and son-in-law, Martha Lee and Frank Owen; his granddaughter Kate Owen; and great-granddaughter Alejandra Bendezu Owen, all of Keene Valley. He is survived as well by his many relatives, friends and business acquaintances, by the homes he built, by his stories and by the beauty of the mountains, streams, and forests he loved so well.

A funeral service will be held at 4 p.m. on Friday at the Keene Valley Congregational Church, followed by a reception.

In honor of Adrian's memory, donations may be made to one of the following organizations: High Peaks Hospice; Keene or Keene Valley Rescue Squad or Ambulance Fund; the Keene Valley Neighborhood House; the Keene Valley Congregational Church; the Methodist Church in Keene; or, the Keene Valley Library Association.

Arrangements are with W.M. Marvin