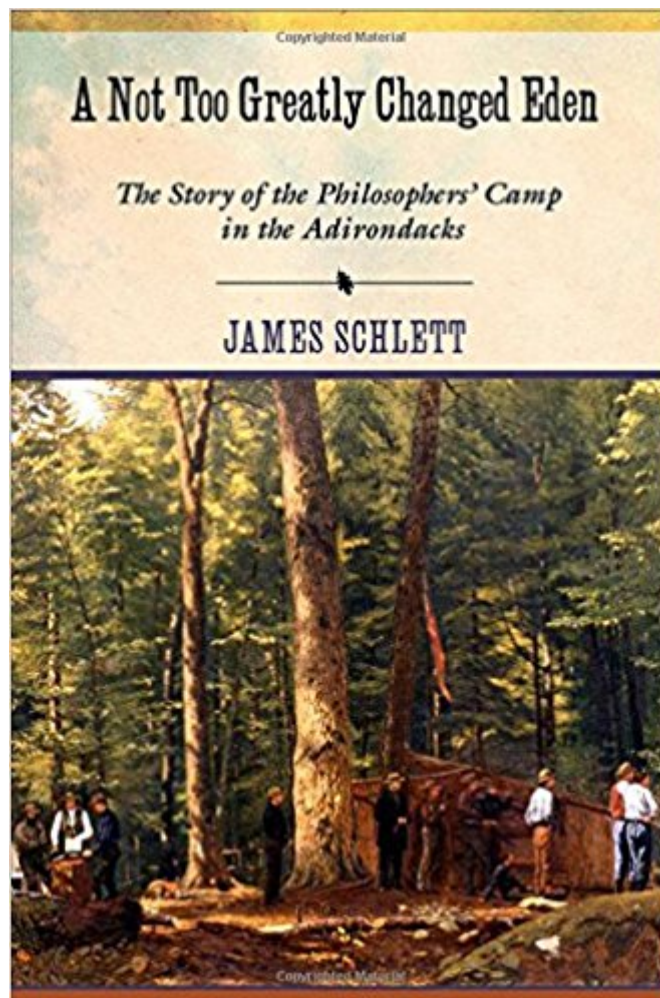




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# A Not Too Greatly Changed Eden: The Story Of The Philosophers' Camp In The Adirondacks



## Synopsis

In August 1858, William James Stillman, a painter and founding editor of the acclaimed but short-lived art journal *The Crayon*, organized a camping expedition for some of America's preeminent intellectuals to Follensby Pond in the Adirondacks. Dubbed the "Philosophers' Camp," the trip included the Swiss American scientist and Harvard College professor Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz, the Republican lawyer and future U.S. attorney general Ebenezer Rockwood Hoar, the Cambridge poet James Russell Lowell, and the transcendental philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, who would later pen a poem about the experience. News that these cultured men were living like "Sacs and Sioux" in the wilderness appeared in newspapers across the nation and helped fuel a widespread interest in exploring the Adirondacks. In this book, James Schlett recounts the story of the Philosophers' Camp, from the lives and careers of the participants to the extensive preparations for the expedition and the several-day encampment to its lasting legacy. Schlett's account is a sweeping tale that provides vistas of the dramatically changing landscapes of the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century. As he relates, the scholars later formed an Adirondack Club that set out to establish a permanent encampment at nearby Ampersand Pond. Their plans, however, were dashed amid the outbreak of the Civil War and the advancement of civilization into a wilderness that Stillman described as "a not too greatly changed Eden." But the Adirondacks were indeed changing. When Stillman returned to the site of the Philosophers' Camp in 1884, he found the woods around Follensby had been disfigured by tourists. Development, industrialization, and commercialization had transformed the Adirondack wilderness as they would nearly every other aspect of the American landscape. Such devastation would later inspire conservationists to establish Adirondack Park in 1892. At the close of the book, Schlett looks at the preservation of Follensby Pond, now protected by the Nature Conservancy, and the camp site's potential integration into the Adirondack Forest Preserve.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Other scholars have paid glancing notice at this event but have confused its details or missed its importance. The most thorough scholarly account remains Paul Jamieson's "Emerson in the Adirondacks," published in New York History over a half-century ago and largely overlooked ever since. Until now. . . . Focusing primarily on the Follensby Pond expedition, Schlett uses it to develop a series of linked themes. The response of Stillman, Emerson, and others to the untouched wilderness of the central Adirondacks invites an assessment of how American culture was coping with the dramatic and often traumatic move away from its rural past and into an urban, industrial future. This is both an American and an Adirondack story (neither urban nor industrial, the Adirondacks is nonetheless what it is today because the rest of New York was becoming both), and Schlett employs it well."

—Philip Terrie, *Adirondack Explorer* (July/August 2015) "This book offers considerable depth on an important event. Devotees of Adirondack history will find it well worth their effort."

—Richard Frost, *Adirondack Daily Enterprise* "In his meticulous new history of the Philosophers' Camp, . . . the first book to focus exclusively on the event, Schlett tackles the subject with serious diligence, lending it a new kind of weight. . . . As readers will likely learn with some regret, Follensby Pond remains inaccessible to the public. In 2008, the Nature Conservancy purchased the 14,600-acre tract that includes the lake for \$16 million from a private landowner. But after several unsuccessful attempts, Follensby has still not entered the state forest preserve, at which time the public will be permitted to visit. Neither is it a high priority. Nevertheless, it could be that Schlett's book redoubles those efforts. That is not something he intended with the book, yet he certainly wouldn't mind it either."

—James H. Miller, *The Lake George Mirror* (July 10, 2015) "Many of us have heard the story of the Adirondacks' Philosophers' Camp near Follensby Pond — that legendary getaway attended by such 19th century dignitaries as Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell. But it's always remained just that: the stuff of lore and legend rather than real tangible history. Until now. Award-winning reporter James Schlett...has shined a journalist's spotlight on this excursion." - Susan Arbetter, *Capital Pressroom* (July

2015) "A Not Too Greatly Changed Eden is a definitive account of the Philosophers' Camp that will be of great value to those interested in Adirondack and regional history." — Paul Schneider, author of *The Adirondacks: A History of America's First Wilderness* "In *A Not Too Greatly Changed Eden*, James Schlett takes a fascinating and iconic event in New York State and American cultural history and enlightens us about what happened with the motley crew of artists, philosophers, and thinkers who visited the Adirondacks in 1858. I learned much from this book and recommend it to other readers in a variety of fields, including American literature and art, New York history, and environmental history." — Philip F. Gura, William S. Newman Distinguished Professor of American Literature and Culture, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, author of *American Transcendentalism: A History*

James Schlett is an award-winning journalist whose feature and business writing has been recognized by the New York Newspaper Publishers Association and the New York State Associated Press Association. He lives in Rotterdam, N.Y.

Great book detailing The Philosophers Camp in the ADK!

An absolutely fascinating account on Philosophers Camp, a gathering of intellectuals in the Adirondacks in the 19th century. The author James Schlett has an incredible ability for giving these long deceased luminaries a personification that made their motivations and attitudes feel fresh and alive. The book is meticulously researched from personal correspondences between the subjects of the book allowing us to witness the inner workings of a who's who of important Boston area figures. A very enjoyable and fascinating read overall! Definitely recommend

A worthy book-length subject, given that the Adirondack visits of several Boston luminaries has been treated briefly elsewhere. Well researched, and an invitation to read more about transcendentalism in general and the participating philosophers themselves. The book would have benefited from copyediting, to catch typos and deal with occasional snarls in the narrative. Also, given that William James Stillman is the central figure, it's odd that his first wife's suicide gets just two sentences, and that there is no mention of his second wife for the last two decades of his life. Still, a valuable contribution.

In *A Not Too Greatly Changed Eden* — James Schlett fleshes out a

complex character of artist and entrepreneur William James Stillman. The reader gains insight into the unique flow of society before the Civil War and how social norms influenced choices and decisions that Stillman faced. Even though I knew the gathering took place I enjoyed reading how this drama unfolded and read with wonder the difficulties of travel, communication and soothing of egos required to bring this gathering about. I learned things about Emerson, Agassiz, Longfellow and other notables that I did not know before reading Schlett's book. I enjoyed it immensely! Thank you, James, for your hard work.

Excellent! Schlett writes with grace and insight on every page. A must-read for everyone with an interest in Adirondack history, natural history, and literature. Here all the threads that led Stillman, Emerson, Agassiz, Lowell, and others to camp on a remote pond in the summer of 1858 are woven into a grand story, beautifully told.

I've been intrigued by the Philosopher's Camp since I heard about it and this is probably as thorough an account as is possible. The subtitle should be "a biography of James Stillman," since that's the main focus. I personally didn't find Stillman very interesting but I guess it was necessary to fill the book. If you're intensely interested in ADK history (as I am), it's a must read. Otherwise, it's a bit dry.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It was a very educational and enlightening! A must read on topics barely discussed in history classes!

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