J.S. WOOLEY
Adirondack Photographer

(detail) J. S. Wooley (American 1867-1930) Lake George from the Ft. Wm. Henry Hotel French Mountain, no date, vintage negative, contemporary print, Collection of Matt Finley
JESSE WOOLEY (1867-1943) was both a savvy entrepreneur, quick to embrace new technologies, and an artistic photographer. While his business model was similar to that of other Adirondack village photographers, Wooley distinguished himself from his peers in the emerging photographic market, in large part, by his aesthetic sensibilities and his business acumen.

Jesse Wooley had an artist’s eye for identifying picturesque qualities to make photographic compositions. This natural talent, along with his ardent love for taking pictures and fascination with the technology of photography, assured his success. His views of Lake George and its environs memorialized moments of natural beauty and happy times, and constitute an impressive body of work.

Living in a time of great social and technological upheaval, Wooley had a reporter’s instinct for the details of his changing world. He captured the civic and social life in the towns around the lake: its camps and their events and activities, especially the Silver Bay YMCA; its hotels and clubs, their interiors and exteriors, grounds and structures; and America’s middle class, at work and play.

That vacation world was overwhelmingly white, but its functioning was facilitated by an army of behind-the-scenes workers, many of them minorities, often African American. They cleaned hotel rooms, served at dinner, and entertained guests at night. Yet, it seldom occurred to either Wooley or his contemporaries to record their presence, and thus they are largely missing in this exhibition. A counter-narrative attempts to ask: Who’s not in the frame of Wooley’s photography?

In presenting this exhibition, we showcase an artist and businessman who kept abreast of, and even initiated developments in, the new technology of photography while working in the Adirondacks. He may be seen as a model for the entrepreneurs of our regional creative economy. Yet, we must also acknowledge that he was as much a man of his times as we are of ours. As current events have harshly exposed, it is all too easy for us to overlook those whose hard work makes possible our comfortable lives in the beautiful setting of Lake George, memorably captured, in his time, by J.S. Wooley.

Exhibition organized by Richard Timberlake and Caroline Welsh.
Lake George from the Northern End of Tongue Mountain Trail

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Lake George from Fort William
Henry Hotel with View of
French Mountain

Duotone panoramic print made from a
high-resolution digital scan of an original
5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Guide Boats, Sabbath Day Point

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Bloomer and Deer Leap Mountains from Sabbath Day Point

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
At Hawkeye Inn
Uncas on Lake George

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
The Narrows and Hundred Islands, Lake George

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Blair’s Bay, Glenburnie, Anthony’s Nose in Background

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
“Irresistible Charm” of Lake George the Beautiful

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection

J.S. Wooley’s eye and aesthetic decisions are evident here. The woods and wall in the foreground and the mountains in the distance, frame our view. Compositionally, the dark woods, breakwater wall, and strong angle of the dock drive the eye across the lake to the mountains and sky in the background. Wooley carefully balances the mass of the woods and stone, the calm expanse of the water, and the visual interest created by the boats and dock. He employs contrasting lights and darks to dramatize moments such as the sun peeking through the clouds, and details like the light sculpting the birch trees, the seats sheltered under the trees, and the empty boards and docks reflected in the still water. From these elements, Wooley creates an image of peace and tranquility—the “irresistible” beauty of a moment in time on this storied lake.
D. & H. Railroad Station, Steamboat Landing and Fort William Henry Hotel Pergola, Lake George

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Fort William Henry Hotel, Lake George

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Fort William Henry Hotel on Lake George from the Air

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
At Hawkeye Inn Uncas on Lake George

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Flying Boats at Fort William Henry Hotel, Lake George

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Lake Front Hotel Fort William Henry, Lake George

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
The Famous Sagamore Hotel of Years Ago

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Interior of the Lake George Club

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection.
Lake George Club

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Glenburnie Club and Golf Links at Glenburnie-on-Lake George

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Fourteenth Annual Conference of Sanitary Officers of the State of New York, September 15, 1914

Cirkut camera print

Courtesy of Richard Timberlake
City YWCA Picnic, Silver Bay, 1917

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
View of Lake George Looking North from Inspiration Rock

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Silver Bay Association Theatrical
1913

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection.
Camp Life on Lake George
“Evening Pastimes”

Duotone print made from a high resolution
digital scan of an original glass plate
negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
The F.A. Goodrich Vaudeville Company

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Annual Silver Bay Circus “Slivers” the Famous Clown

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
The Mountain Climbers
Lake George

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Fort Ticonderoga

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Fort Ticonderoga from Place d’Armes

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Ethan Allen Gate
Fort Ticonderoga

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
President Taft Leaving Hotel Champlain to Take Part in the Tercentenary Parade, July 1909

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
The Famous Zitenfield Twins Swam the Hudson River at the $10,000 Lake George Swimming Marathon July 12, 1927

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
Presidential Party on Board the Valcour

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
The Lake George $10,000 Swimming Marathon—Boats Leaving and Swimmers About to Enter the Water at Hague, ca. 1927

Duotone panoramic print made from a high-resolution digital scan of an original 5-inch roll film Al-Vista camera negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection
New Lake Champlain Bridge at Crown Point

Duotone print made from a high resolution digital scan of an original glass plate negative

Courtesy of Matt Finley Collection