

Jackson on his Hobbies

*John Q. Barrett**

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February 13, 2007, marks the 115th anniversary of Robert Jackson's birth in the Jackson family farmhouse in Spring Creek Township, Warren County, Pennsylvania.¹

Jackson rose from his rural beginnings in western Pennsylvania and his upbringing in southwestern New York State to metropolitan settings, high offices in national government, the world stage and very many accomplishments, but his spirit and style never moved far from his family's Spring Creek farmland, the adjacent Jackson Hill and the surrounding woods and streams. These are the illustrative words that Jackson, the 46-year-old Solicitor General of the United States who at the time was a much-discussed Democratic Party presidential prospect, dictated in January 1939 in response to a query from a reporter who was writing a syndicated newspaper series for boys and girls on "Hobbies of Famous Men and Women"²:

My hobbies are very simple ones.

Since my work is a continuous round of contest and competition, I prefer only hobbies which are non-competitive. I decline hobbies in which a score is kept, such as bridge or golf. They are too apt to result in watching your score instead of enjoying the game.

My hobbies vary with the season, for they are associated with the out-of-doors and with the rural environment in which I am

* Professor of Law, St. John's University School of Law, New York City, and Elizabeth S. Lenna Fellow, Robert H. Jackson Center, Jamestown, New York (www.roberthjackson.org). I posted an earlier version of this text, without the footnotes and document images that have been added here, to my Jackson email list on February 12, 2007.

¹ For a few details on Jackson's birth, see the archived version of my February 14, 2006, posting to the Jackson list.

² See Louis M. Notkin to Robert H. Jackson, Jan. 17, 1939 (photographic image included as part of this file), in Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C. ("RHJL") Box 17.

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happy to have been reared—a leisurely and rambling walk with no effort at making mileage, or long horseback rides are always enjoyed. Skiing or skating in winter and tennis in summer are pleasant exercise and diversion, although I do not excel in any of them. I like sail skating and boating and puttering in the garden, and almost anything that can be done out-of-doors without keeping any score. Scores and records and competitions are about the only thing I can't tolerate in the line of sports.³

³ Robert H. Jackson to Louis M. Notkin, Jan. 20, 1939 (unsigned carbon copy) (photographic image included as part of this file), in RHJL Box 17.

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LOUIS M. NOTKIN
COUNSELOR AT LAW
1440 BROADWAY
NEW YORK
PHONE WISCONSIN 7-7777

January 17, 1939.

Mr. Robert H. Jackson
Department of Justice
Washington, D. C.

Dear Friend:

I am completing my series of articles on "Hobbies of Famous Men and Women" which is going to be syndicated in hundreds of newspapers throughout the country the early part of next month. I also intend to use this material for a book on the same subject.

The public is intensely interested to know what your avocation or hobby is in life.

Please jot it down in a paragraph or two and mail same to me at your earliest convenience. If you have a photograph of yourself suitable for use in connection with the article, I would be pleased to receive same.

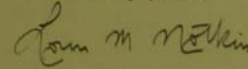
In answering this letter, please lay aside your modesty. I am writing this book primarily for the purpose of inspiring the young boys and girls of America to acquire an interesting hobby so that they too can enjoy a fuller life.

Sincerely yours,

Writing is my hobby.

L. M. N.

LMN:MF



JACKSON ON HIS HOBBIES

January 23, 1939

My dear Mr. Notkin:

My hobbies are very simple ones.

Since my work is a continuous round of contest and competition, I prefer only hobbies which are non-competitive. I decline hobbies in which a score is kept, such as bridge or golf. They are too apt to result in watching your score instead of enjoying the game.

My hobbies vary with the seasons, for they are associated with the out-of-doors and with the rural environment in which I am happy to have been reared—a leisurely and rambling walk with no effort to make mileage, or long horseback rides are always enjoyed. Skiing or skating in winter and tennis in summer are pleasant exercise and diversion, although I do not excel in any of them. I like sail skating and boating and puttering in the garden, and almost anything that can be done out-of-doors without keeping any score. Scores and records and competitions are about the only things I can't tolerate in the line of sports.

Sincerely yours,

Mr. Louis M. Notkin,
1440 Broadway,
New York, New York.