

# Gone Fishin'

*John Q. Barrett\**

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Robert Jackson was a boy and then a man of the rural countryside who loved the outdoors. His hobbies included almost every outdoor activity: horseback riding, walking, gardening, hiking, skating, skiing and sledding. A special favorite was fishing.

Jackson was born in Spring Creek township in Warren County, Pennsylvania, in the farmhouse that his great-grandfather had built on the high bank of a small river, the Brokenstraw Creek. (The Spring Creek after which the town is named flows into the Brokenstraw, which flows into the Allegheny River—some Jackson forebears were lumbermen who piloted rafts of shaved shingles down the Brokenstraw to the Allegheny to Pittsburgh and even to Cincinnati.) The Brokenstraw was Jackson's first fishing hole and he returned to that creek, sometimes to fish and sometimes just to see it, throughout his life.

When Jackson's family moved north to Frewsburg in Chautauqua County, New York, during his boyhood, he began to range more widely. His exploring and fishing spots included many lakes and streams and, eventually, large Chautauqua Lake. As a Jamestown, New York, lawyer in the 1920s, Jackson bought 30 foot cruiser, which he named *The Alibi*, and he often took it out on Chautauqua Lake to think, read, write ... and to put a line in the water.

When Jackson moved to Washington in 1934, he continued to find time, at least during vacation breaks from work, to fish. On a few occasions, which were well publicized at the time<sup>1</sup> and which Jackson later chronicled in his memoir *THAT MAN*,<sup>2</sup> he accompanied President Franklin D. Roosevelt and others on fishing trips to Florida. On many other

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For a selected archive of Jackson List posts, see my homepage at [www.law.stjohns.edu](http://www.law.stjohns.edu). To subscribe to the Jackson List, which does not display recipient identities or distribute their email addresses, send a note to [barrettj@stjohns.edu](mailto:barrettj@stjohns.edu).

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *Roosevelt's Angler's Led By R.H. Jackson*, N.Y. TIMES, Dec. 3, 1937, at 9.

<sup>2</sup> See ROBERT H. JACKSON, *THAT MAN: AN INSIDER'S PORTRAIT OF FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT* 13, 34, 55, 122, 136-48 (2003). To order a paperback copy, [click here](#).

occasions, Jackson went fishing with friends and family—a regular group from his neighborhood in McLean, Virginia; various law clerks and other friends from the Supreme Court; his young grandsons—on the Chesapeake Bay. Beginning in 1948, his summer visits to the Bohemian Grove north of San Francisco included some fishing in the Russian River. Even earlier, and throughout his last twenty years, Jackson's northern trips from Washington included fishing breaks on Chautauqua Lake, on Lake Ontario, in the St. Lawrence River and in Canadian lakes.

In July 1944, while many Democrats traveled to Chicago for the Democratic Party's national convention, Jackson—by then a Supreme Court justice and staying away from politics—made one of his fishing trips to New York State and north. Jackson traveled from Washington to Rochester, New York, with Emil Hurja, who had been FDR's surprisingly accurate political pollster and supporter in 1932 and 1936. (In 1937, Hurja broke with Roosevelt. In 1940, Hurja forecast Wendell Willkie's victory over FDR. By 1944, Hurja was a magazine editor. This fishing trip did not restore his prognosticating skills—he soon would predict Governor Thomas Dewey's 1944 defeat of Roosevelt.<sup>3</sup>)

In Rochester, Jackson and Hurja joined up with Don Dailey, a civic leader who was one of Jackson's old friends from New York State law and Democratic Party political activity. With two other friends, county judge named James O'Connor and former New York City police commissioner Ed Mulrooney, they took a ferry north across Lake Ontario and then were driven one hundred miles farther to O'Connor's fishing camp.

For a few days, away from it all, they fished. Later, as a memento, Jackson's friends gave him a mounted fish, accompanied by this notice that describes some of the trip:

Ronnoco<sup>[4]</sup> Lodge  
Weslemkoon Ont.  
Canada

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

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<sup>3</sup> See *Dewey Sweeps Forecast*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 6, 1944, at 14; *Hurja Forecasts a Dewey Victory*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 6, 1944, at 16.

<sup>4</sup> "Ronnoco" is, of course, O'Connor spelled backward.

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*GONE FISHIN'*

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This is to certify that on the afternoon of July 20, 1944, the Honorable Robert H. Jackson, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, while fishing in Otter Lake at Weslemkoon, Ontario, felt something tugging at his line and was of the opinion that he had snarled it once again on the bottom of the lake as said line did not reel in. However, he soon found out that what he thought was a stone actually had a lot of life and whatever was on the end of his line could take the line out faster than he could reel it in. It then occurred to him he might have a fish. So, he immediately got to work and with the utmost skill, after several minutes, brought the fish to the side of his boat where it was netted by his guide.

During this interlude of excitement the Jurist's vocabulary was not the kind he was accustomed to using on the United States Supreme Court Bench and when his catch was landed he had a smile from ear to ear, his chest expansion broke the buttons off his red-flannel fishing shirt and he assumed the posture of a conquering gladiator.

All this is evidenced by said fish which is mounted on this board:

Species: small-mouth black bass.

ATTESTED

Donald A. Dailey  
No. 1 Guide (Harve)

James P. O'Connor  
No. 2 Guide and Host (Watt)

Emil Hurja  
Statistician, who is still fishing with figures and charts. His bait has had no attraction since 1936.

Edward P. Mulrooney  
All-time Champion and former prize winner of this contest.