

Dr. Paul Abelson

The Abelson family summered in Springfield from the 1930s to around 1956, on the Bowman Road at the property now owned by the Vartan Vartanian family. The farm of Deputy Bowman, one of Springfield's early settlers, was once located there. During the Abelson period, the property extended down to Lake Kolelemook on the east side of Lake Kolelemook, near Sandy Beach. The Abelson's had a bath house located on their beach. It was a pretty sight for years, especially at night, when one could look across the lake and see the lights of the Abelson summer home on the side of the hill.

In the 1940s, the Abelson family included Dr. and Mrs. Abelson, Helen, (Nellie); three daughters who became Mrs. Robert Ness (and later lived in Springfield for awhile), Mrs. Harold Seder, Mrs. Jack Barnett, and eight grandchildren. During the summers in the early 1940s, I was invited to play with one of the granddaughters. One of my best memories was that I learned to swim at their beach. Paul Abelson was born in Kovno, Lithuania in 1881. He came to the US with his parents when he was fourteen years old. They lived on the East Side of New York City. He was a hard working young man with many interests. He graduated with honors from the College of the City of New York in 1899. He was able to attend college without a fee and for the rest of his life gave back in many ways to the college with his service. Paul Abelson taught history for several years at DeWitt Clinton High School in New York City. While there, he had prepared an exhibit in the Grand Central Palace, showing what New York City public schools were trying to accomplish. He never forgot his roots and prepared "A Yiddish English Dictionary" to help new immigrants coming to the United States.

Dr. Abelson's doctorate was granted from Columbia University in 1906 for graduate work in history. His dissertation was "The Seven Liberal Arts" which dealt with studies made in the Middle Ages by future priests. Dr. Abelson had the ability to understand the minds of people whose religion was not his own. He got his LLD from New York Law School in 1918.

As a young man, he was interested in the Ethical Cultural Society and their lectures. He and friends would walk, on Sunday mornings, from their home on the East Side to Carnegie Hall to hear speakers such as Dr Adler. He and his friends formed the Downtown Ethical Society and asked for recommendations from Dr. Adler as to how they could improve conditions in their East Side neighborhood. He later went on to become a trustee of the Ethical Society of NYC and was also co-founder of Madison House Settlement.

Dr Ableson probably became best known for his work as the dean of Industrial Arbitration and was considered a pioneer in the field. For twenty years, he was the impartial chairman of the doll and soft toy industry of America. He was respected as an arbitrator, mediator, counselor, and friend of both labor and management. He believed in "work and claim, but never stop working," Before mediating a dispute under collective bargaining, he would insist that the workers not strike. The grievances were then heard without pressure and he would give his

decision. He preferred the role of moderator to arbitrator and teacher to judge. Dr. Abelson was also the impartial chairman of many other industries such as the fur, milliners, hosiery, and motion picture. Dr. Abelson was a Renaissance man involved in many other activities to improve life and peoples' relationships. It was a loss to all when he died in November 1956.

Those of us who remember Dr. Abelson in Springfield, remember him not for his accomplishments in New York City, but as the kindly man who loved to fish on Lake Kolelemook. He died in November, 1956. He did not use a motor, but rowed his boat. He had a swivel office chair attached in the stern of his boat where he could anchor and fish in comfort. Sometimes Mrs. Abelson would join him.

(There was not much traffic on Lake Kolelemook in the late 1940s, early 1950s, but what a pain in the neck those three teenage girls in the motor boat must have been, making and riding the waves while he was trying to fish.....I apologize, Dr. Abelson !)

Patsy Heath Caswell

References: " Dr. Paul Abelson" A Tribute by David Rosenstein, President, National Association of Doll Manufactures, November, 6, 1953. and "Dr. Paul Abelson" by Dr. Henry Neumann Leader, Ethical Culture Society; the eulogy delivered in New York City, November 6, 1953.