

# The Great St. Lawrence River War

Abbie Hoffman

March 1981

I was introduced to the St. Lawrence River in the summer of '76, approaching via the Thousand Island Bridge from the Canadian mainland twenty miles north of Kingston, Ontario. It is the best approach, for rising to the crest of the bridge a passenger's vision is completely filled by hundreds of pine-covered islands. Scattered as nature's stepping stones across the northward rush of the river's swirling waters. Here and there you can pick out a summer camp hidden among the trees. Its location betrayed by a jutting dock and shiny boat. A few islands even boast "Rhineland" castles and mansions, rising in testimony to an opulence that existed a century ago. But for the most part the islands remain wild, inhabited only by rabbits, foxes, badgers, skunks, and deer who had crossed the frozen river some winter before. In the wetlands feed ducks, geese, loons, and the great blue heron. While nesting on land are scores of whippoorwills, woodpeckers, bluejays, martins, swallows, robins, cardinals, orioles, hawks, and hummingbirds. Virtually every northern bird pictured in a guide book can be found here. The waters, considered among the choicest fishing spots in the world, host varieties of bass, perch, carp, and northern pike as well as salmon and occasional sturgeon. Highest on the list: the prized muskellunge or "mus- kie," fished on long trolling expeditions in the fall. The world-record size for freshwater fish is a 69\*/2-pound muskie boated here just down river from Chippewa Bay near the American mainland. In winter migrating bald eagles, wolves and coyotes can be found feeding at the water pools.

A wonderland of beauty, indeed, it's something of a mystery that such a scenic region, not part of any national park, has endured the ravages of development and pollution.

The river has seen eons of history. It began with the scraping of ice glaciers for millions of years. About twelve thousand years ago a huge gorge 1,200 miles long, in places 10 miles wide and SOO feet deep was created. At first the waters rushed in from the North Atlantic, forming a vast ocean inlet where hordes of whales came to migrate. Gradually the slope of the riverbed shifted and the ocean water rushed out leaving the river as the drain flow for all the Great Lakes. Making it, by volume, the largest river in North America. Indians were, of course, the first inhabitants of the region and attributed great spiritual powers to the river and islands. The Great Spirit, after having given the Indians everything, gave them paradise on the shores of Lake Ontario near the river's source. Upset with constant tribal warfare he gathered up paradise, rose into the sky, but just as the Sky Curtain parted, his blanket opened and paradise tumbled back into the river. This created the "pieces of paradise" known as the Thousand Islands. In Iroquois legend Hiawatha paddled his canoe up this river on his last sojourn to heaven.

The river has always been a great transportation route, although only specially built barges and steamers could make it downriver to Montreal. The chief obstacles being two long stretches of rapids considered among the most beautiful on the continent. One, the LaChine, so named because the early trappers thought it pointed the way to China, supposedly created the illusion of a bubbling wall of water rising straight up into the air for twenty feet. One can only rely on past descriptions because the great rapids along with other "obstacles," including many river towns and islands, are now gone forever.

Our story really begins in the 1950s. At the apex of the American empire, when politicians and engineers allied to steamroll through any public works project that was thought to contribute to the country's imperial power and glory. Corporate need was equated with people need. "What's good for General Motors is good for America," and "Here at General Electric progress is our most important product" were two of the decade's most famous slogans. Flags waved when we bulldozed a swamp. Progress was the bitch goddess of the fifties and to stand in the doorway left one open to charges of heresy or, worse, of giving in to the Russians. The Army Corps of Engineers, by swapping one boondoggle for another stockpiled more than enough congressional votes to firmly stamp its imprint on the landscape.

No project excited the corps more than the idea of connecting the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean. The political machinations both here and in Canada took years and years. Eastern states felt their economies would be ruined; railroad and trucking industries joined them. In all these battles no one mentioned obvious damage to the river, the complete destruction of the unmatched LaChine Rapids, or the threat to fish and wildlife. Such a thing as an environmental impact statement was not even

known. The argument was geographical and as the corps and the Midwest industrialists vote-traded with western mining and lumber interests, a formidable coalition built up. The time-tested argument that finally swayed Congress was the claim of “national security.” The corps argued that with the St. Lawrence Seaway in place, ocean-going vessels could be built on Great Lakes ports and utilized in the cold war with the Russians. (Needless to say twenty-five years after the fact no such industry ever developed.)

The seaway was no small feat. Herbert Hoover, himself an engineer, watched over the project as would a patron saint. “Without doubt,” he once explained, “this project is the greatest engineering accomplishment in the history of man.” It was called upon completion “the Eighth Wonder of the World.”

The figures are staggering. Twenty-five thousand workers employing specifically designed giant earth loaders moved 250 million cubic yards of earth and rock. That’s enough to cover all of Manhattan with about twelve feet of dirt. Twenty miles of earth dikes, some fifty feet high, were constructed. Water basins, the largest of which covered 44,000 acres, were dug out. The Eisenhower Locks at Massena were built as were two giant dam-power plant complexes. One, the Moses-Saunders Dam, being the third largest in the world. In addition there were bridges, highways, and completely new communities.

Of course, a price was paid. Towns were destroyed. Whole islands demolished. In all ten thousand people were forced off their land. Indians fought land agents. Bulldozers caved in kitchen walls, while families, believing it would never happen, were eating at the table. A fisherman, seeing that a favorite fishing hole had been destroyed, threw himself into the river to die. Disappointments were many.

The seaway was sold to New York under false pretenses. River towns of just a few thousand were assured aid that never materialized. Economic growth was expected to occur from the increase in ship traffic. There were predictions that some towns would increase one-hundred-fold. Of course, the contrary took place. But almost the entire work force was from out of state. When the project was completed, the workers returned home. Ocean vessels or “salties” proved capable of traversing the full length of the seaway without pulling in for repairs or fuel. The project single-handedly bankrupted the rail industry in northern New York. The population of the towns decreased as unemployment rose and became chronic. Massena, which was touted as a future “Pittsburgh of the north,” today has but a few thousand people.

Yet New York wasn’t the only loser. The American taxpayer also took a loss. The plan was to charge shippers tolls that would pay the complete bill. Department of Transportation officials repeatedly assured Congress the seaway would pay for itself within ten years, thereafter showing a continuous profit. But there were no profits. Midwest shippers still seemed to prefer the cheaper Mississippi-Gulf route while Canada made it attractive for the grain industry to use its nationalized railroad system.

In twenty-one years of operation the seaway has appeared in the black only once. In the past five years the overall tonnage increase has been a dismal .05 percent. Last year a 10 percent decline occurred. Recently Canadian Parliament canceled an \$841 million debt and a similar bill sits in the U.S. House to defray \$122 million in unpaid loans. Last year a staunch supporter of the seaway in the fifties, the *Chicago Tribune*, was reluctantly forced to conclude, in an editorial titled “The Seaway’s Unmet Promise,” that things had not gone according to plan, and Chicago had been one of the ports expected to reap the greatest benefits. Of course, the Army Corps of Engineers is not an organization prone to admitting mistakes. Prodded on chiefly by U.S. Steel, which does benefit by the waterway, the corps reasoned that the seaway did not turn a profit because it closed down for four months a year due to ice conditions. This interruption of service caused huge stockpiling, making seaway transportation undesirable. The answer lay in a program called winter navigation, breaking up the ice by means of a variety of as yet untested mechanical means. This would be no mean accomplishment. The St. Lawrence-Great Lakes transportation system is some 2,400 miles long. The winters are bitter cold. Today, as I write this, the ice in front of our house is frozen two feet solid, the temperature is below zero. At Tibbets Point, where the river begins, the ice during spring breakup can get thirty feet thick.

Of course, the corps *really* had another project even closer to its heart than winter navigation. Once year-round traffic could be guaranteed, the Eisenhower locks, already antiquated, could be replaced

with larger chambers and twinned to allow two-way traffic. Then when the river was channeled even deeper, the whole system could handle supertankers. The corps thinks not small potatoes. They are unquestionably the most gung-ho, can-do organization in the entire federal bureaucracy. If the money were there, the corps would move mountains from Colorado to Iowa. Theirs is not to reason why, theirs is to submit the bill and try. The bill for winter navigation—a cool \$2.5 billion. For the supertanker project about \$20 billion. In other words, about \$500 per American, with Canadians kicking in even more. Then the first fifty years of maintenance would equal this initial outlay, making this easily the most expensive engineering project in history—fifty times the cost of the entire original seaway. The corps moves like a Supreme Being. It doesn't build, it creates. Its 45,000 public relations experts, lawyers, and contractors directed by a few hundred army brass at the top are almost unbeatable in the field. Almost.

Of course, back then in '76 I knew nothing of all this. Being a city boy *river* was just a word in a banjo song. Thousand Islands was a salad dressing. And the Army Corps of Engineers just went around rescuing flood victims. Johanna, my running mate since almost the beginning of my underground odyssey, had brought me here from Montreal. Her family had, as the DAR certificate on the wall attested to, lived in the region for seven generations. Their cottage, right on the riverbank, had been built by her great-grandmother. Wellesley Island, about the size of Manhattan, has but three thousand residents, only seven hundred in coldest winter. Fine view, our town, boasts all of eighty-seven people, with only thirty of those toughing out the coldest four months. We live in downtown Fineview, diagonally across from the post office. The place where townfolk gather each morning to talk about the weather. An important activity because forecasts from the distant TV and radio stations rarely applied to the islands. Island weather is unique and often troublesome. Windstorms with gales up to sixty mph. Torrential rains. Waves up to six feet. Fog so dense it's impossible to navigate a boat. In winter there are white-on-white snowstorms where you cannot see your extended hand. Snow piles fifteen feet high and helicopter airlifts of food are sometimes needed. Weather is accepted here even more than death and taxes. The islands have made the people individualists. The weather has made them rugged. For eight months each year the air is filled with the sound of rebuilding. They say nothing lasts forever; up here they say nothing lasts ten years. So you learn how to use a hammer and saw, to lay in a foundation, or recrib a dock. It is part and parcel of river life. The people are hard-working and extremely conservative. Democrats are practically an endangered species.

It fit my purpose to busy myself on badly needed house repairs. The work kept me away from a great deal of socializing. I needed so much help in my carpentry apprenticeship, I asked far more questions than I answered. Slowly I was becoming absorbed into a world unto its own. Of course, I never forgot the great secret of my life when each morning I'd walk past the town's Hall of Justice. Here, rowdies who had disturbed the peace over at the state park or would-be smugglers bringing who knows what in from Canada were brought for booking. Judge Kleinhans would be summoned to hold court and set bail. Serious offenders were packed off to Watertown in state trooper cars affectionately dubbed "Tijuana Taxis" because of the gaudy blue and yellow colors. I always felt someday I would be handcuffed and dragged across the road, dogs barking; kids, including my own, screaming; Mrs. Jerome, our next-door neighbor, having a heart attack on the steps we share. That image burned in my mind a thousand times. The law was literally across the street, so I never forgot what it would mean to make a mistake.

We were not actually "natives" of Fineview, since we fled the cold to hunt up jobs, but on the other hand we were not summer residents either. As soon as the ice broke we returned to the house, staying at times well into December, huddled around the fireplace in our long johns, rigging up heat lamps and insulation so we could still pump water from the river. The first two years I built new steps, reshingled the roof, installed a new water heater, and built a counter in the old-fashioned kitchen. The most ambitious project was a mammoth floating dock, which the river took all of fifteen minutes to sweep from its mooring. Determination and neighborly help combined in the construction of an even more permanent dock. Dick- Dock II. Massive rock cribs were sunk in the river and every inch of Johanna's forty feet of shoreline used to create an L-shaped dock and harbor. Hardly an ornamental plaything, a

good dock is essential to island life. We traveled by boat more often than car—to do laundry, shopping, and to party with our fellow river rats at the local bars and dance halls. Returning in the summer of '78, I began to work to correct for winter ice shifting and to finish off the staving and decking. The residents of Fineview, prizing hard work, began to accept me, but still after more than two years I had yet to even volunteer a last name. I was just Johanna's friend Barry. I worked in the movies as a scriptwriter or something equally exotic. After four years of being a fugitive I had learned how to make friends without having to explain much.

In July, just as I was nailing down the last of the decking, Steve Taylor boated by and called out that I could forget about the dock, everything was going to be destroyed—the islands, the shoals, the boathouses. “Read this,” he said, tossing a little-known government report my way.

I retired inside and plunged into the study. Local scientists of the New York Department of Environmental Conservation had drawn up an estimate of the environmental impact rising out of a demonstration test being proposed for the coming winter. Through a combination of ice breakers and log booms, an ice-free corridor fifteen miles long would be maintained. This test would demonstrate the feasibility of winter navigation. Plowing through the data it was easy to determine that something sounding so simple and harmless on the surface was, in fact, spelling out a second and final step of the river's destruction (the first being the seaway itself). Watering pools for the endangered bald eagle would be destroyed. Aquatic life chains and wetlands would be ruined. The waves of the test ship passing under ice would magnify, ripping apart shorelines, causing great erosion. The river's fast current would be deliberately slowed to maintain a stable ice cover. This would cause great flooding all the way back and into Lake Ontario. Increasingly the lake has become a chemical dumpsite for PCB, mirex, mercury, and other toxic wastes. Mechanical intervention on a scale the test proposed would release great quantities of imbedded chemical wastes into the water. Most river towns drew drinking water from the river. A 15 percent loss of hydropower was predicted. One didn't have to be a genius to project these findings to a winter navigation program up and down the entire river. Corps figures showed 94 million cubic yards of river bed were to be drained or dynamited from the U.S. side alone. The river would end up little more than a year round barge canal. A disaster!

I called Johanna upstairs. “Unless *we* act, the river is doomed,” I said. “The Army Corps of Engineers will bully their way in here. The people are not ready to fight the system.” I told her what it was like taking on segregation in the South, organizing against the Vietnam War. The enemies one made attacking the power structure. I was convinced joining this battle would mean I would be caught. Yet the arguments against the project seemed so strong. How could I stand on the shore and watch corps engineers wire up the small islands across the way for demolition? I had listened to old-timers in the bars talk of how they had heard the explosions and watched whole islands float downriver during the fifties. They had watched and cried; now they were alcoholics. “A six-thousand-year-old river,” I thought, “and the last twenty-five years have been its worst.” My fate was fixed. The rest of the night we spent shaping our identity. Of the twenty or so names I had used as aliases not a one had significance— wallpaper names I called them, easily forgotten. No stories. Mr. and Mrs. Barry Freed sounded respectable. At first I missed the significance of the name.

In August the corps would come to nearby Alexandria Bay for a public hearing; we would use the occasion to announce the organization to the community. We began with small meetings on the front lawn. I remember it well. “Bring back the sixties,” someone exclaimed. “Gee, it would be great if we had Rennie Davis here,” said another. Inside, way inside, I nodded agreement. We named the group Save the River! Names were very important. Best verb first. *What* you want people to do. “Shouldn't we have the word *committee*?” *Committee* is a bore. People want excitement, charisma. “What about St. Lawrence?” No, keep it simple. Everyone knows the river. Better for a name to raise a question than give an answer. Questions encourage involvement and involvement is what makes a citizens action group. I wrote an ad for the local paper, *The Thousand Island Sun*. In time I would be writing weekly articles for them. People made sails announcing: No To Winter Navigation, and boats toured the islands. We formed telephone trees. When someone complained about how high our first phone bill was, I lectured

how our allies as well as enemies were “out there.” When the bill got ten times as big we would be on the road to winning. Skepticism ran high. Either “it wasn’t going to happen here” or it was inevitable” were the prevailing attitudes. Oddly, there are people who can entertain both positions simultaneously. The committee pushed ahead.

That first public hearing was quite historic for our community. Usually these hearings draw thirty to forty people who have nothing better to do that day. The corps, which legally is supposed to be gathering facts and sentiment, instead uses the occasions to propagandize for its projects. We packed an overflow crowd of six hundred into the school auditorium. There were signs saying “Ice Is Nice” and “Army Go Home” but in general the tone was polite.

After the army slide presentation showing winter navigation in a positive light and the ease with which it was being introduced on the upper Great Lakes, the audience had their turn. The corps was quick to learn it was trying to sell iceboxes to Eskimos. People were extremely articulate, as farmers, marina owners, bartenders, school teachers, teenagers, folks out of work rose to the challenge. Economic-environmental battles are usually lost in a maze of complicated data and terminology. To successfully oppose winter navigation we eventually had to become proficient in subjects like water-resource economics, cost-benefit analysis, water level prediction, aquatic life cycles. It would take twenty minutes alone to describe just how the corps intended winter navigation to work. Within a few months we would have work-study sessions in which we searched for corps errors in a stack of literature at least three feet high. But in this our first confrontation the arguments came from the heart. The people of Grindstone Island, certainly one of the most rugged communities in the United States, wanted to know how they were to drive their pickup trucks across the river with an open channel. The corps’ answer just about said their community was finished. Someone had taken the trouble to study the corps’ predictions of water level changes over the past one hundred years and found they had been wrong 85 percent of the time. One of the slides showed a man standing next to a ship traversing a channel in the ice. “See how calm that man is,” said the army PR guy. Much to his surprise the man was in the audience. “Calm? I was never so scared in my life. It was like an earthquake.” He went on to detail the tons of vegetation, dead fish, and debris the ship’s wake had hurled on the riverbanks.

Probably our biggest concern was oil spills. U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Office statistics count fifty-six oil spills in our waters since 1973. The worst happened in the summer of ’76, when 300,000 gallons of crude oil poured out of a broken NEPCO tanker. Damage ran to the millions. Piles of dead fish and birds were everywhere. Ugly scars can still be seen along the river. The corps was now trying to assure us this would never occur in the winter but there were no believers. No technology to clean up an oil spill locked under ice exists, and none is likely to be developed.

After that hearing, Save the River was on the map. People meeting in the street would say just that: “Save the River!” like you’d say “Right on!” or “How’s it goin’?” Barrooms carried donation jugs. Snack shops put up posters. Everybody sold the popular blue heron T-shirt Johanna designed. In all we relate to thirty-two river communities spread out along a fifty-mile course. Ten percent of our membership is Canadian. Early opponents who saw us as radicals or obstructionists were blown away by our overwhelming support. Renegade scientists long suspicious of the project let us know they would help. At Syracuse University, Steve Long, an economist, explained how the corps used and misused figures to prove feasibility. In the end predicted economic losses would help us win valuable allies. We constantly fought the label “an environmental group” in an effort to gain more legitimacy. We published an eight-page booklet breaking down the material into layman’s terms. The booklet was discussed in classrooms, at Bible study groups, in bars and pharmacies, everywhere.

The first office was right in our back room. I was venturing into the domain of the northern Wasp. A soft-spoken conservative bird appreciative of good manners and highly respectful of institutions. We had to convince people it wasn’t rude to protest. The harshest curse to cross my public lips was “Chrimis!”

I gave speeches at fishermen’s banquets, church suppers, high schools, universities, just about anywhere I’d get invited. I was a guest of several radio shows and even a few television spots venturing as far as Syracuse to stage a press conference. Once there was a scare as one of the scientists told a close

friend Barry might be Abbie Hoffman. Within an hour, I was out on Route 81, hitchhiking out of the area. A later telephone conversation convinced me it was a lucky hunch and I returned. But still a lucky hunch by a former marine captain in Vietnam.

Probably the most awkward speech I gave that year was to the Jefferson County Board of Supervisors. I was slotted in between the American Legion Post and the Boy Scouts. We failed in getting their support, but several local Chamber of Commerce people heard the speech on radio and drew up endorsements for Save the River. Support also came from the St. Lawrence County Board and several town councils. Our group was quickly gaining a broad-based respectability. We sent delegations to monitor Winter Navigation Board meetings in Baltimore and were quick to point out that not a single decision maker lived closer than within five hundred miles of the river. We lobbied the railroad and trucking industries and established contacts with conservation groups along the Great Lakes.

With all this local support, it was time to pressure Albany. By playing one department against another we were able to break through the bureaucratic crust, and within a few days of contact our material was on the governor's desk. A telegram of support followed, which I read to a panel of startled corps officials at a meeting in Ogdensburg. Hugh Carey's endorsement had given our group some real clout. He was to watch over our development during the next few years. You can imagine my surprise when later I received a personal letter from him saying, "I want to thank you for your leadership in this important issue, and for your sense of public spirit." I never showed the letter to anyone, but I didn't throw it away.

The only time I used Abbie's contacts was in the search for the ideal lawyer. Environmental law is a relatively new course of study and it's still far easier to find lawyers willing to alibi chemical dumping or other industrial atrocities than to find advocates for citizens' groups. The search for competent counsel narrowed to the East, finally settling on Irv Like from Babylon, New York. He had successfully fought attempts to build a road through Fire Island, had represented Suffolk County in an off-shore oil drilling suit, and had authored New York State's Environmental Bill of Rights. Suffolk County was almost as conservative as our neck of the woods. It had the same tensions between summer and winter people. It had high unemployment. After several meetings and phone calls, I realized we had lucked out by snaring a brilliant strategist.

Late that year a delegation of us went to Albany and got a \$25,000 commitment from the Department of Transportation to hire John Carroll of Penn State, one of the four experts on water resource economics willing to bite the hand that feeds them.

Carroll's colleague Robert Braverman, at the University of Wisconsin, had just uncovered a \$1.5 billion error as well as fictitious reporting in developing the cost/benefit ratio of the Tennessee-Tombigbee Canal project. He fed us the valuable information that the same Chicago accounting firm, A. T. Kierney Corp., had worked up the figures for winter navigation. *Sports Illustrated's* staff ecologist, Bob Boyle, wrote an expose regarding the promise of \$50 million in award grants for U.S. Fish and Wildlife to monitor the project if they would drop their major arguments. If you're battling a boondoggle, you are safe in assuming a scandal lurks in the weeds. We raised such a holler.

The winter tests were postponed but work still intensified on the upper Great Lakes. Steering committee members went to Washington to testify before Congress. Rick Spencer carried most of the weight, parrying the thrusts of Representative James Oberstar, U.S. Steel's pointman. Congressman Robert McEwen introduced me and I added to the testimony. Later there was the ritual picture-taking by the congressman's photographer.

That spring and summer '79, a Clayton activist, Karen Nader-Lago, became our office manager as we moved to Alexandria Bay, then to Clayton. Housewives; carpenters; Fran Purcell, then teacher at one of the few one-room schoolhouses left in the country; Rick Spencer, a merchant seaman; small businessmen; farmers; landowners; boat builders were the type of people most active. Our first River Day was a big success, with marathons, hot-air balloon races, and some 3,500 people lighting candles in a night vigil celebrating the river.

Carroll's report was completed and after boiling down the essence winter navigation warranted no tax money from New York and would end up costing the state \$100 million to \$150 million in lost revenues annually. We now had the ammunition we needed, and we lobbied for Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who held the pivotal seat on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, to hold field hearings in our area.

Up to this point we had been extremely successful. The postponement of demonstration tests resulted after a record number of Save-the-River inspired letters had been received at the corps district office. Publicity in the *New York Times* and on ABC's *20/20* had gained national attention for a project difficult to justify to a national taxpaying audience. Moynihan could prove to be our greatest ally.

We chose from a flotilla of antique boats to guide visitors around the islands. We spent hours deciding the boat to fit each personality. Moynihan was outfitted to a turn-of-the-century paddle boat. That night I worked on my speech. It would take about twenty minutes and be aimed at the people who attended, as much as at Moynihan. His staff predicted about one hundred would attend but we knew the community by now. We had established the river as a deeply personal cause for everyone who used it. We were not surprised when close to nine hundred people showed up. After a string of local politicians had their say, it was my turn. I was sweating right through my shirt and jacket. There was polite applause and TV cameras up from Syracuse whirled away. I was sure the police would charge up the aisle and drag me away. But that was not to be the day. The speech went well. The crowd rose to its feet and applauded. Moynihan, sitting directly opposite, not more than twenty feet away, looked at me and said, "Now I know where the sixties have gone." Way, way inside where Abbie lived I fainted. Then he said, "Everyone in New York State owes Barry Freed a debt of gratitude for his organizing ability," and complimented other committee workers as well.

We stayed on good terms with Moynihan's office. By now we felt pretty secure along the river; what troubled us was the work being done on the upper Great Lakes. "Someday we'll be surrounded," we reasoned. Congress had already spent \$30 million on winter navigation. That fall and the next year we tried to expand the scope of the committee. Nuclear wastes were being transported from Canada across the bridge. We protested. The shippers chose a bridge farther downstream with less resistance.

In the spring of 1980 the corps, at the insistence of Congress, deleted all requests for authorization and funds for work on the St. Lawrence River.

Environmental groups from all over the country called to congratulate us. They said the corps had never before been beaten without a long court battle. River Day was succeeding in resurrecting a love for the river not seen since the twenties. We uncovered chemical dumping sites leaking into nearby tributaries. We joined the Akwesasne Native Americans living on Cornwall Island in their protest over excessive fluoride dumping by the aluminum companies that use the river as a sewer. We sponsored a congressional debate on river-related issues and the statements made it apparent we had become a serious political force. We began to fight local power brokers insistent on building an amusement park at the river's gateway. On the last issue, we were a house divided. When we finally decided to fight, the horse had already left the barn.

After a speech against the amusement park to the town zoning board last summer we adjourned to the sidewalk. Chairman Vincent Dee of the Bridge Authority, Ralph Timmerman, our town supervisor, board members like Buggy Davis, who lent me his roller for the lawn, were there. So was the sheriff's patrol. About thirty people milling about. John Quinn, a customs agent on the border was telling me how much he agreed with the speech. . . . "Okay, Barry, so we lose this battle, tell me one thing, what the hell are we gonna do when everybody finds out you're *Abbie Hoffman*." "Oh, John, you really got a sense of humor," I said making light of what he had just said. Inside I keep thinking how loud it sounded. I was convinced everyone had heard. Maybe they didn't. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe they don't know Abbie Hoffman. Maybe. Maybe. Fugitives can "maybe" themselves into the nuthatch.

I decided that night to return and face the charges. The kid was packed off early. We rushed to complete the ongoing house repairs. I would have rather kept the story quiet but as soon as I hit New York City my face would have been recognized and broadcasted to the world. Better to tell it to as many



people as possible up front. The choice was between 2% and *60 Minutes*, and for a variety of reasons ABC seemed the best choice. A team of about twenty-five local friends and five city friends worked with me. Telling Barry's friends was quite an experience. One guy cried. Karen, the office manager, just kept saying, "Nope, nope, nope." She had once quoted Abbie Hoffman to me. Karen's husband, Greg, kept saying, "Is that you? I've been wondering where you were for years." Dege, the young businessman who was inches from swinging the deal to have Woodstock II up here, was stunned. Of course, to some people J had to explain who Abbie was. It didn't matter, to them I'd always be Barry.

Well, Barbara Walters came and went. As did the hundreds of newsmen who followed in her wake. One of our neighbors counted thirty-seven interviews. The tour boats now point out the house and tell the story on loudspeakers. Tourists take photos and like to sit on the bench where Barbara Walters rubbed her tushy.

Nothing quite like this has happened in Fineview since the glaciers hit town. I've been back five times since. Frankly, I don't like being anyplace or anybody else. The committee's membership has grown to 2,200 members. The New York *Post* sent a reporter to find locals willing to bad-mouth me. After two days he came up empty-handed and went home. The local newspapers still call me Barry Freed, though I fear that may change.

In July we're sponsoring a national conference for all river lovers, with workshops, singers, speeches. We hope to have the St. Lawrence River included in Phillip Burton's (D. Calif.) protective legislation for scenic rivers. Of the fifteen largest rivers in the entire world, the St. Lawrence is the cleanest, and one glimpse of its beauty will convince even the most cynical of urban dwellers that here is a treasure not to be surrendered without a fight.

The Army Corps of Engineers has halted working on the lakes for a year of tests and study. They've invested a lot in this program and procorporation cabinet appointments like James Watt are bound to encourage them. Look at any map and you'll see we're the bottleneck in some engineer's grand fantasy. The corps is not an agency that rolls over and dies. For sure, they'll be back. When they do, they'll find us alive and well. Twice as strong. Twice as smart. And twice as many. For me the war has just begun. I can't wait to return home.



Abbie Hoffman  
The Great St. Lawrence River War  
March 1981

Square Dancing in the Ice Age

[stealthiswiki.com](http://stealthiswiki.com)