

**Name:** Verplanck Colvin

**Years:** January 4, 1847 to May 28, 1920

**Residence:** The Elms, Albany, New York

**Brief Biography:** Pioneer conservationist, forester, and surveyor, Verplanck Colvin was born in Albany on January 4, 1847, to Andrew James Colvin, a wealthy lawyer, and his second wife, Margaret Crane Alling, in the family home, “The Elms”, in Albany, New York. He was educated at home, at Albany Academy, and then by private tutors. He began law practice in his father’s firm but during his studies had already begun leaning toward the sciences, especially topography. He organized a series of free scientific lectures in the State Geological Hall in the Albany Institute; continued his topographical and geological studies in 1865 and began exploring the Adirondack wilderness. In 1869 he made a critical topographical survey of New York’s Helderberg Mountain that he illustrated with his own sketches. An abstract of the survey was published in the *Harpers Magazine* and this led to Colvin’s introduction to and association with the great New York State Geologist, James Hall, and to the mathematics of meteorology and astronomy of Professor George W. Hough. During 1871 Colvin traveled extensively throughout the Southern States and made pen and ink drawings to illustrate the accounts of his journeys. He was the first to ascend and map the highest peaks in the Rocky Mountains and wrote an article about the project for the *Harper’s Magazine* entitled “The Dome of the Continent”. In 1871 Colvin urged the creation of the Adirondack Park and forest preserve. In 1872 the New York State legislature gave him the authority to begin the Adirondack Survey, which he conducted from 1872 to 1900. He was given authority by the State over the surveys of all state lands and the relocation and restoration of any boundaries that might be found to be in dispute between the State and private parties. His surveys were made by law *prima facie* evidence in the courts of New York when certified and sealed with his signature. Verplanck Colvin never married. He died on May 28, 1920, at a Troy hospital following a three year illness.

**Major Achievements:** Verplanck Colvin’s understanding of the correlation between the Adirondack Mountains timber clear-cutting and the water flow in the state’s rivers and canals led to the creation of New York’s Forest Preserve of the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains which are to remain “...forever wild...”. In 1872 Colvin discovered Lake Tear-of-the-Clouds, the source of the Hudson River, during the first year of his Adirondack Survey. He was instrumental in the creation of the Adirondack Forest Preserve in 1885. His survey findings contributed to the ratification of the “Forever Wild” amendment to the New York State Constitution on November 6, 1894, by the vote of the people of New York State. The New York Forest Preserve lands, consisting of a major portion of the Catskill and Adirondack Mountains, were now to be “...*forever kept as wild forest lands. They shall not be leased, sold, or exchanged, or to be taken by any corporation, public or private, nor shall the timber thereon be sold, removed, or destroyed.*”

**More Information:** Adirondack Park Agency (APA) at:  
[http://www.apa.state.ny.us/about\\_park/history.htm](http://www.apa.state.ny.us/about_park/history.htm) ;

New York’s Forest Preserve at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4960.html>

**Sources:** 1894 New York State Constitutional Convention at:

<http://www.adirondack-park.net/history/political/convention.html> ;

Famous Americans.net at: <http://www.famousamericans.net/verplanckcolvin/> ;

Colvin Family Geneology (1911) at: <http://www.schenectadyhistory.org/families/hmgfm/colvin.html>

By Steve Grim