

# Housing the Happy



**SUMMER CAMPS FOR CHILDREN** are familiar strangers on the American landscape. On one hand, we feel we know them well. Films like *The Parent Trap* and songs like “Camp Granada” would fail to entertain if we were not already acquainted with the joys and miseries of the camp experience they evoke. On the other hand, our grasp of camp history is limited. Perhaps because of

camping’s association with recreation—and recreation for children, at that—historians have paid little attention to this institution that Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot in 1922 dubbed “the most important step in education that America has given the world.”<sup>1</sup> One way to approach this multifaceted topic is to examine how the camp landscape changed to



# Camper

ABIGAIL A. VAN SLYCK



accommodate evolving theories of childhood and child rearing. Minnesota, with its great variety of public and private camps, provides an ideal setting for this kind of study.

Summer camps began as one component of a back-to-nature trend that developed in Anglo-American culture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Like urban parks, residential suburbs, camp meetings,

resort hotels, and national parks, summer camps offered urban dwellers contact with nature, which was believed to be an important antidote to the evils of the industrialized city. For children, such contact was considered particularly important. Indeed, Victorian ideology held that the city threatened the very physical health of children and their mothers. At the turn of the century, both the

*Canvas wall tents form a backdrop for early morning exercises at Square Lake Boy Scout camp, ca. 1925*



Colonial Revival style and the Arts and Crafts movement further celebrated the simple life, close to nature, for its patriotic and aesthetic qualities, and progressive educational theory argued that contact with nature was crucial to the child's social development and psychological health. Reformers experimented with a wide range of activities aimed at helping city children of all classes experience nature. They tried nature-study classes, school gardens, and day trips to recreation piers or swimming barges but came to favor the summer camp as the best means of immersing children in nature.<sup>2</sup> The conditions that attracted so many Victorian families to Minnesota's grand summer resorts in the nineteenth century made the state an ideal setting for this new kind of experience in which children lived apart from their families for periods ranging from a few days to ten weeks.

Twentieth-century summer camps quickly moved away from their Victorian roots. Early in the century, the Victorian triad of home, health, and nature began to unravel as two scientific fields helped convince camp organizers that a natural setting—while beneficial—was insufficient to guarantee good health. First, in the 1910s and 1920s, the new field of public health highlighted the dangers associated with bringing together any group of people for extended periods of time—even in camp—and focused concern on the transmission

of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and, later, polio. Then, in the 1930s and 1940s, child psychology had an even bigger impact on the camp environment, shifting concern away from the ills that affected all modern children and toward specific behavior problems caused, it was believed, by the unscientific parenting that campers received at home.

These developments had important gender implications. The critique of the home also censured late Victorian motherhood; by coddling their sons, mothers had undermined vigorous manhood and created what many middle-class men perceived as a crisis in masculinity. As historian T. J. Jackson Lears has pointed out, male observers at the turn of the century became increasingly anxious about “a decline of vital energy in art and life . . . they traced enervation to feminization because they equated masculinity with forcefulness.”<sup>3</sup> Along with camping, a number of turn-of-the-century cultural phenomena—a renewed interest in Arthurian legend, Theodore Roosevelt's *Rough Riders*, a new mania for football—can be seen as attempts to reassert the importance of robust masculinity in American life.

These concerns were simultaneously focused on younger boys and given scientific currency by psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who envisioned child development as the recapitulation of human evolution. Childhood,

in his view, was a series of natural stages, each crucial to health and well being. Young children, he argued, were still savages—quite literally—and should not be forced to adopt the civilized demeanor expected of them at home and at school, feminized institutions that were a particular threat to the healthy development of boys. In 1908 Hall decried “the undue influence of women teachers” and stated flatly that “the callow fledging in the pin-feather stage of the earliest ‘teens whom the lady teacher and the fond mother can truly call a perfect gentleman has something the matter with him.”<sup>4</sup> The summer camp as a modern institution was called into being by anxieties about boys. Although camps for girls existed in the early part of the century, the needs of boys dominated public discussion about the form and role of camp.

Although camp directors may have been wary of Hall's direct attacks on mothers, who often made the camping arrangements for their offspring, they certainly knew his work and often quoted him directly. Organizers commonly promoted camp as the antithesis of the ordinary, tradition-bound school and celebrated camp as a site where life and learning were entirely integrated, where the curriculum was set by the campers themselves, where synthetic learning was not artificially postponed until individual elements had been analyzed, and where connections between academic subjects became self-evident.<sup>5</sup>

In short, however much the summer-camp idea was driven by a back-to-nature sentiment, the camps

---

*Abigail A. Van Slyck is the Dayton Associate Professor of Art History at Connecticut College and the author of *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890–1920* (1995). Her article on mealtime rituals at American summer camps will appear in *Technology and Culture* in Fall 2002.*

themselves never provided a simple, unmediated outdoor experience. At any given moment, their planning and architecture, their program and activities, and their self-promotion, especially photographs and brochures, were closely related to changing perceptions of children and their needs. Since these perceptions often went unarticulated, a closer look at the camp landscape can offer insights into modern childhood that cannot be gleaned from written sources alone.

**MINNESOTA'S CONTRIBUTION TO** the summer-camp movement may not be immediately apparent. Initially, New England played the key role. The earliest camps were there; in fact, until 1905 only a handful of the country's 700 private camps stood outside the region. By 1920 the New York area had become an important center for agency camps, thanks to the number of youth organizations—Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, YMCA, and YWCA—that established headquarters in Manhattan. Thus, whether we look to articles in *Association Boys*, the YMCA's journal about "boys' work," or to seminal books like Henry W. Gibson's *Camping for Boys*, most of the early-twentieth-century literature described the philosophy and management of East Coast camps. Even publications that promised national coverage gave only scant attention to Minnesota and other areas of the Midwest and West. Henry Wellington Wack, for instance, touched on Minnesota camps in his 1925 eugenicist tract, *The Camping Ideal, The New Human Race*, but only after ignoring the Midwest entirely in his



*Manly camp skills, drawn by Gordon Grant for the Boy Scouts of America's Handbook for Boys, first published in 1910*

earlier volume, *Summer Camps—Boys and Girls*. As late as 1930 a member of the Midwest section of the Camp Directors Association bristled when his eastern colleagues "came out to tell us what was what. The insolence of that position—that New York had the sophistication and that the country bumpkins from the West should automatically adhere to the New York lead greatly antagonized the Midwest group."<sup>6</sup>

Minnesotans in particular had every reason to resent this treatment. Summer camps of all kinds have dotted the state's landscape since the early decades of the twentieth century and have served campers from a wide range of situations. There have been YMCA camps, like Camp Icaghowan, begun in 1908 on Green Lake, near Chisago City, and now operating on the shores of Lake

Wapogasset, near Avery, Wisconsin; private camps, like Camp Lincoln, a boys' camp established on Lake Hubert near Brainerd in 1909; camps organized by the Boy Scouts (like Camp Wilderness established on Bad Axe Lake near Park Rapids in 1946), Girl Scouts (like Camp Lakamaga on Big Marine Lake near Marine on St. Croix, established in 1927), and Camp Fire Girls (like Camp Ojiketa, established in 1926 on Green Lake). Minnesota has also had religious camps of all sorts, like Camp Tikvah, established on Long Lake, Aitkin County, in the 1930s by the Minneapolis Jewish Community Council (no longer extant); the Lutheran Camp Emmaus, established on Morgan Lake, Cook County, in 1934; Cass Lake Episcopal Camp, established in 1935; and Catholic Youth Camp on Big Sandy Lake,





*Large, airy Boy Scout dining hall, about 1925*

Aitkin County, established in 1946. Finally, there have been settlement-house camps, like Wells Memorial Camp, established on Lake Minnetonka's Tonka Bay in 1922 (no longer extant); health camps, like the Visiting Nurse Association camp for children with tuberculosis that operated in Glenwood Park in Minneapolis in the 1920s; and, more recently, camps for children (and adults) with special needs, like Camp Courage, established in 1955 on Cedar Lake in Minneapolis.

What is more, geographical distance from New England and New York was never synonymous with ignorance of current camping debates. Some of Minnesota's camp

organizers lived in the East. George F. "Doc" Green, for instance, who founded Camp Mishawaka on Lake Pokegama near Grand Rapids in 1910, was the athletic director of St. Alban's, the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., and maintained a winter address in the federal capital until his death in 1933. Other directors, like Green, belonged to the Camp Directors Association (CDA) and, later, to its successor, the American Camping Association, and thus were part of the nationwide professional networks that became increasingly common in the camping world during the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> The buildings and landscapes of Minnesota camps

reveal that the state's camp organizers were neither oblivious to larger debates that engaged their eastern counterparts, nor blind followers of New England or New York ideas. Instead, they confronted national issues in their own way.

**MANY ELEMENTS OF THE CAMP** landscape played a role in producing healthy campers. From the beginning, advice literature emphasized the importance of good drainage, an ample supply of potable water, and careful attention to camp sanitation. The need for abundant, wholesome food made the kitchen and dining hall important sites for maintaining and improving a camper's physical



condition, while the infirmary became an expected feature of a healthy camp landscape in the 1920s. Yet, in many respects, camper sleeping accommodations were seen as the most important element for securing good health. Given inherited Victorian convictions about the vulnerability of the sleeping body, the tent or cabin was potentially the most treacherous site in camp.<sup>8</sup> It is the element that was transformed most dramatically by changing ideas about what constituted a healthy camper.

In the earliest decades of organized camping, tents were the rule. They were relatively cheap, particularly if procured from military surplus. They were movable, an important consideration for summer

encampments that often began on borrowed land. And, as far as early camp leaders were concerned, even small, crowded tents posed no threat to the campers' physical well being. In 1902, when George Peck reflected on "Things Learned in Seventeen Consecutive Seasons in One Boys' Camp," he recommended "small tents, holding from five to ten in all [because] this plan provides for the best control and care of the boys." Henry W. Gibson, the director of YMCA Camp Becket in Massachusetts from 1903 until 1927, concurred. In his 1911 book *Camping for Boys*, he recommended wall tents, rectangular tents with a ridge pole supported by upright poles front and back and having low side walls of canvas secured by guy ropes. He

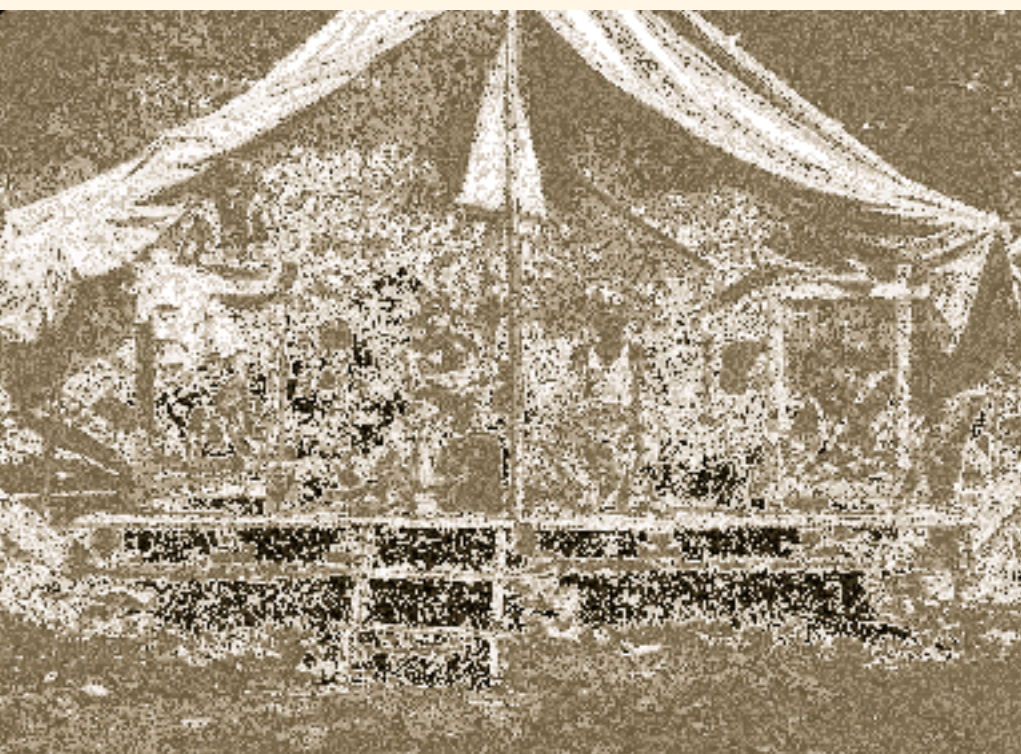
also described in detail how to erect them, commenting on guying the tents, trenching around them, the right and the wrong ways of driving stakes into the ground, and other elements of what he called "tent wisdom." But nowhere did he address the tent as a potential health hazard. On the contrary, the caption to one illustration, "'The Sardines'—Eight Boys in a 12 x 14 Tent," suggests that he looked with a fond eye on tents crowded with happy campers.<sup>9</sup> By providing an imitation of a military encampment, the tent was a natural choice for camp organizers bent on introducing middle-class boys to a masculine world denied them in feminized homes.

Period photographs reveal that tent camping was commonplace in Minnesota, whether at early YMCA camps like Camp Red Top, organized by the Minneapolis chapter, or at private camps like Mishawaka. In Mishawaka's first seasons, campers slept in tents that lined the parade ground, colloquially called "the campus." In 1916, Green established a separate sleeping area, the Junior Camp, for younger boys (between 9 and 11 years of age), but tents were still the rule. Older boys slept two to a tent, while the juniors were deemed "so little that it is necessary that a counsellor sleep in each tent with the two boys."<sup>10</sup>

#### ATTITUDES TOWARD THE TENT

began to change in the 1920s as camp directors found their professional aspirations thwarted by regional differences and the tensions between private and agency camps that undermined the success of the

*"The Sardines," a tent full of happy campers at YMCA Camp Becket, Massachusetts, about 1910*





national CDA.<sup>11</sup> Reorganization as the American Camping Association in 1935 helped overcome these factional differences, but throughout the 1920s camp directors looked to other means of asserting their claims to professional status. Most expressed a heightened concern with camper health, simultaneously giving their vocation a scientific basis and equating camp directing with the profession of medicine.

Many directors, like Doc Green of Mishawaka, turned their attention to quantifying the positive impact of camp on the camper's health. As described in 1925 by L. G. "Pop" Schneller (who would become director of Mishawaka in 1938), "The matter [of developing boys' bodies] is gone about in a most systematic manner":

On the second day in camp, every boy is given a very careful physical examination by men experienced in this kind of work. Approximately twenty measurements are taken, of all important parts of the body. These are recorded upon cards

which are kept accessible to those having charge of the physical side of camp work. A photograph is also taken of each boy, and which is kept on hand, unretouched, to show the general condition of the boy.

Then, on the very last days of the season, all of this work is duplicated, so that a comparative record is made of every boy, showing his condition and measurements at the beginning and at the close of the season.<sup>12</sup>

These before-and-after photographs were so important to Mishawaka's self-presentation that they were appended to a 1935 brochure.

This concern with objectively demonstrating a camp's health-giving qualities also had a great impact on the camp landscape. As directors began to scour public-health literature for guidance, the tent was an early casualty. Having reviewed both U.S. Army regulations and those of the California Commission on Immigration and Housing, the Playground and Recreation Association of America recommended at least 50

square feet of floor space and 500 cubic feet of air space per capita, which became the often-invoked camping-industry standard. Equally important, the study revealed that, of the 163 camps surveyed, only 31 met the standard while another 32 housed campers in half the recommended amount of space or less. While it might have been possible to continue to use tents by housing fewer campers in each, there were other hazards. Tents were difficult to keep dry; they dripped during storms wherever campers touched them on the inside. Camp directors who staked their professional reputations on keeping campers healthy, warm, and dry needed something more foolproof.<sup>13</sup>

The advice literature that emerged in the 1920s offered a number of alternatives and often presented detailed plans of even the most rudimentary structures, presumably to lend the cachet of scientific exactitude. At this time, the tents at Camp Mishawaka were gradually replaced by "cottages . . . built along plans approved by the National Camp

*Tents in the junior camp at Mishawaka, Itasca County, about 1918*







*Before-and-after photos from The Improvement Shown in Eight Weeks at Camp Mishawaka, a brochure from 1935*

Directors' Association." According to Pop Schneller, not only did these cottages "allow opening of almost the entire side and rear for ventilation purposes," but they were also "easier to keep clean . . . more stable in high wind, and . . . drier in case of rain." Housing three campers, the cottages were "proving popular with the boys."<sup>14</sup>

Another common alternative was a structure variously called the tent-house, tent-cottage, or canvas cabin, which retained canvas walls but facilitated ventilation by expanding the building's dimensions. These tent-houses appeared in the early 1920s at the YMCA's Camp Icaghowan on Green Lake and were undoubtedly still in use when Minneapolis landscape architect Charles H. Ramsdell redesigned the site in 1927. Rife with military symbolism, Ramsdell's plan centered on a "camp parade" with tent-houses arranged so that "Head-quarters" at the reception lodge "should command every situation

by day and by night."<sup>15</sup> Tent-houses also resembled the makeshift lodgings common at mines in the late-nineteenth century, and perhaps their association with the manly work of taming the West appealed to camp organizers.

Other variations on the tent-house model attest to its popularity. Henry W. Gibson, who, in 1913 had cheerfully described crowded tent conditions, published his own version a decade later. Called the Strader-Becket tent-house, it had a 14-by-16-foot wooden floor supporting a light frame of dimensioned lumber and canvas walls that could be rolled up in good weather. The entire thing was topped by a hipped roof covered in red rubberoid; readers could secure blueprints by sending Gibson \$1.00. The next year the Playground and Recreation Association of America published a similar scheme, drawn by Maj. William A. Welch, for the Palisades Interstate Park in New

York. This version measured 18-by-18 feet and called for covering the pyramidal roof with canvas. This design was reproduced (without attribution) in a 1927 publication of the Boys Scouts Department of Camping.<sup>16</sup>

In the 1930s the discussion about sleeping quarters still turned on preventing the transmission of disease, but overall building dimensions became less important than the spacing between beds. Working under the auspices of the New Deal and with the blessing of the U.S. Public Health Service, National Park Service planners built a series of small wooden cabins at organized camps in Recreation Demonstration Areas (RDAs). These structures mimicked the proportions of the beloved tent; indeed they were called "wooden tents" by Albert H. Good, the Park Service architectural consultant. Those at Norway Point Group Camp in the St. Croix River Area (now





*Cottages in the intermediate camp, Mishawaka, about 1923*

*Campers posed before a tent house at Camp Ichagowan, Chisago County, 1920*



St. Croix State Park) were approximately 12-by-18 feet. All of them featured a double-deck bunk in each of the four corners with closets placed in between. According to Good, the wooden tent was also an aesthetic improvement over the tent-house of the 1920s, which seemed to him “a cross between a corncrib and a cricket box of heroic proportions.”<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the interwar period, however, tents still had their advocates. Even park service architect Good admitted that “the [canvas] tent stands as an inherited symbol of high adventure, especially to youth.” His sympathy was with the “youthful reincarnation of Daniel Boone or Marco Polo [who] finds to his horror that he is expected to sleep in other than a tent . . . and . . . is forever convinced that [he] was born too late.” “Some camping leaders,” Good noted, “will not lightly sacrifice the psychological advantage of the tent,” despite the high cost of maintenance or replacement and the difficulty of “screening them against insects.”<sup>18</sup>

By the 1940s, however, the tent-versus-cabin debate had faded into the background. Camp-planning manuals published just after World War II either reduced the decision to a question of preference or ignored tents altogether. Even more significant, the tent-house and the simple “wooden tents” popularized by the National Park Service had also disappeared from YMCA literature.<sup>19</sup> In their place were relatively elaborate cabins, often with a room for counselors as well as a social area for campers. With their more substantial forms, porches, fireplaces, and accommodations for one or more



parental figures, these cabins are more reminiscent of domestic architecture than earlier camp structures. Yet, these cabins did not seek to emulate homes; instead, they were integral to a critique of modern parenting fueled by camp professionals' deepening involvement with child psychology.

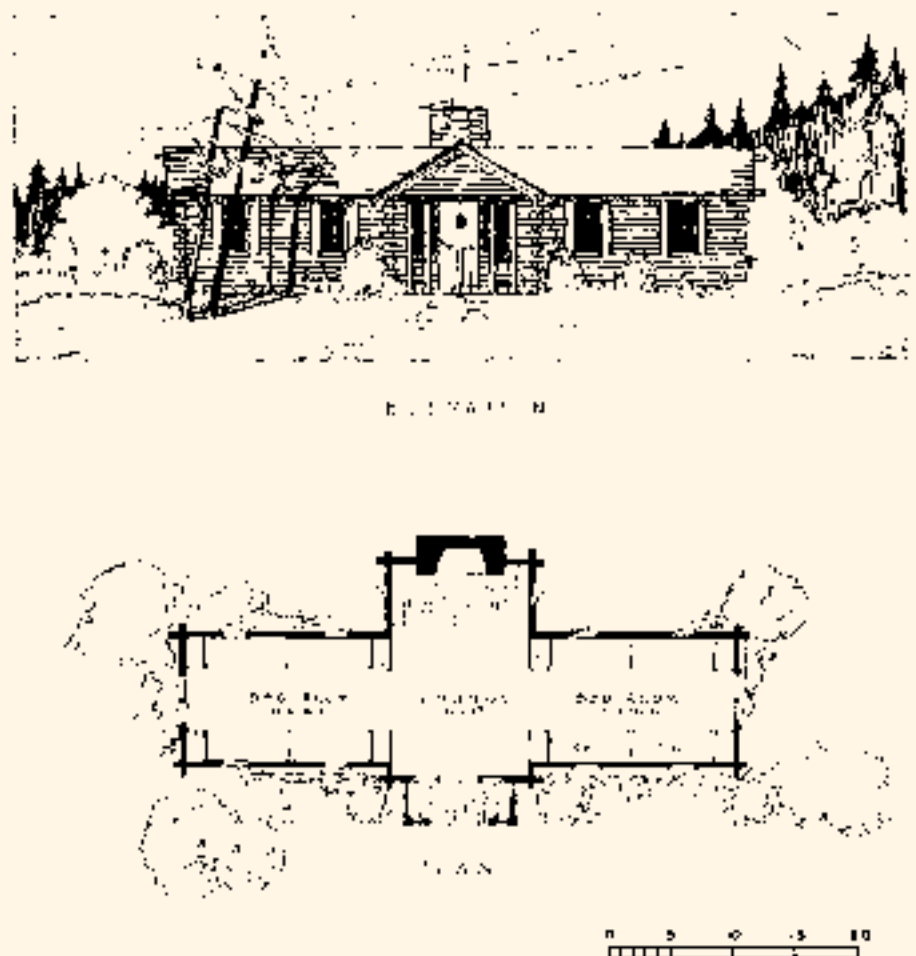
**A KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD PSYCHOLOGY** was not new to camps in the 1940s. The very notion of organized camping for children had been spurred on early in the century by G. Stanley Hall's theory that child development recapitulated evolution. By the 1930s child psychology and progressive educational theory were responsible for the introduction of what was called the unit plan, which reshaped the entire camp landscape, breaking it down into a number of smaller cabin clusters, each of which could accommodate campers in distinct and scientifically predictable phases of development. Typically, the administration building, dining hall, craft facilities, waterfront, and infirmary were used by all the units, while sleeping quarters were dispersed. The regimented layout of the military encampment also disappeared at this time, replaced by what park service architect Good referred to as "dice-throw planning," which he hastened to explain was "a conscious effort to avoid geometric formality and take full advantage of favorable site factors."<sup>20</sup> As it had with the wooden tent, the National Park Service again helped popularize this innovation; in federal Recreation Demonstration Areas in the late 1930s, each unit included seven cabins, one

toilet and shower structure, and a new camp building—the unit lodge. The lodges at Norway Point at the St. Croix River RDA consist of a single large room with a fireplace at one end and a smaller screened-in kitchen. Here, each unit could hold rainy-day activities and evening programs.

In some private and YMCA camps, the cabins themselves often incorporated the social function of the unit lodge. Such was the case at Camp Lincoln, the oldest boys' camp in Minnesota.<sup>21</sup> For the first two decades after it was established as Camp Blake in 1909, it housed campers in

long, narrow tent-houses, a few of which are still extant and used for storage. Around 1930, however, Lincoln shifted to large, two-story chalet-like structures. On the ground floor, the core of the building was a social room with a corner fireplace. This was flanked on either side by sleeping rooms, each of which housed a counselor and seven or eight

*Below: Sleeping cabin for older boys, complete with a social area, from Layout, Building Designs, and Equipment for Y.M.C.A. Camps, 1946*







*"Wooden tent" designed by E. T. Walley and built by the WPA at Norway Point Group Camp, St. Croix State Park, 1937*

campers. Another sleeping room was located on the second floor.

A comparable arrangement was instituted in 1928 at Camp Warren, a YMCA camp on the shores of Half Moon Lake in St. Louis County. There, each of the original six cabins contained "a living room with a fire-place, and an airy sleeping room" and was intended to house eight boys and a counselor "who will preside over the cabin family." In 1936 Camp Warren added a Cub Camp, a unit for younger boys from 8 to 11 years of age. Although these one-room log buildings did not allow for separate living rooms, they each had a fire-place and live-in counselor to complete what brochures called "the family unit."<sup>22</sup>

**THESE CAMPER CABINS DID NOT** simply adopt a new look; they were also planned to accommodate a new counselor-camper interaction. Earlier in the century, counselors at boys' camps had often been selected for their athletic prowess, and their job performance was defined primarily by their activities on the camp's playing fields or at the waterfront.<sup>23</sup> While they sometimes lived with campers in their tents or cabins, they were largely seen as a passive force for good: 24-hour role models of robust manliness that—it was assumed—took little special training or extra effort on their part.

By 1930 camp literature began to articulate a much more active role for counselors. A good example is

*One of Camp Lincoln's original tent houses (left), built about 1910, and the Gopher Cabin (right), added about 1930*



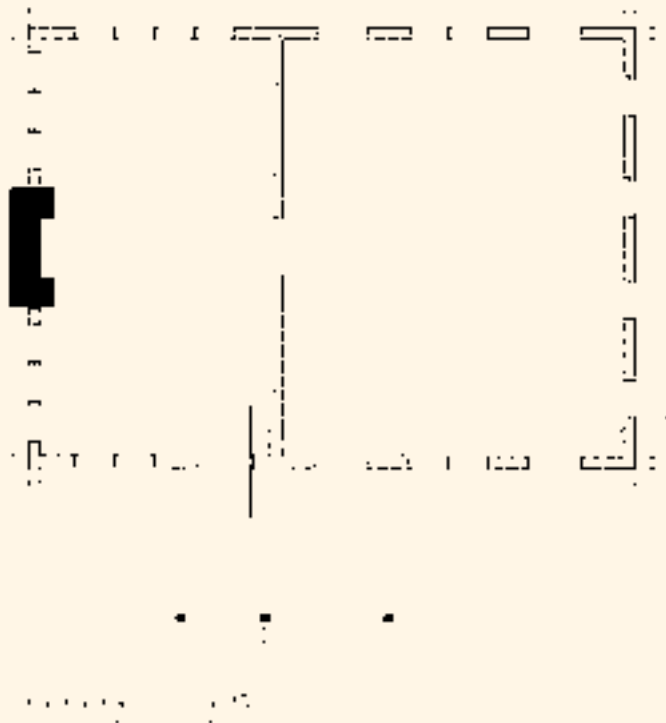


*Camping and Character*, a popular book first published in 1929 and reprinted twice in the 1930s and again in 1949. It described the program at Camp Ahmek, a private boys' camp on Canoe Lake in Ontario. Camp Ahmek functioned something like a child-study laboratory, introducing a number of innovations that would put the traditional character-building mission of camp on a more scientific footing.<sup>24</sup>

In one significant change, Camp Ahmek inverted the customary counselor-camper relationship. When the counselor had served as a role model, he had been on display for campers, who were meant to look at him even as they looked up to him. At Ahmek, the camper became the object of the counselor's scrutiny, and counselors were required to



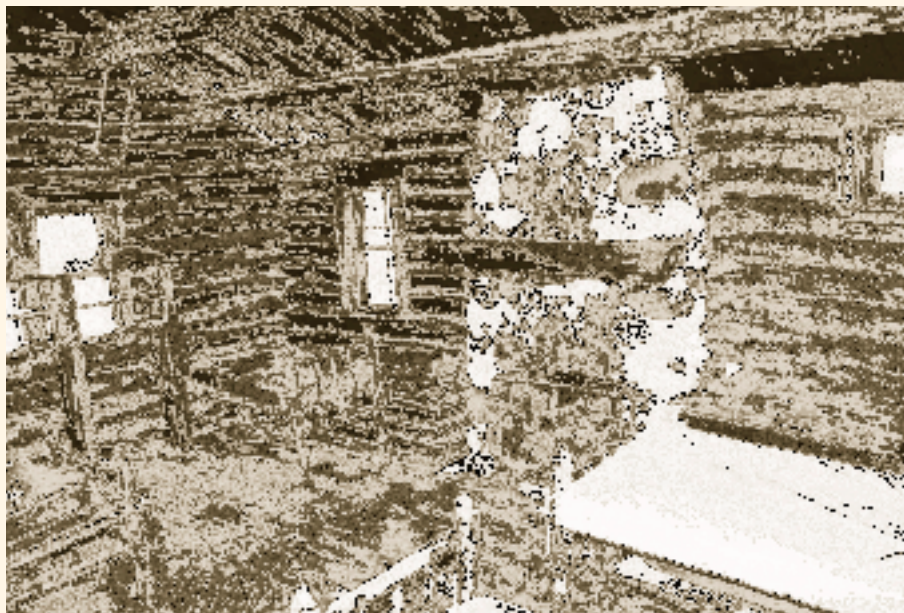
*Intermediate cabin at Camp Warren, built about 1928, and (below) a modern-day plan showing its interior spaces*







*One of Camp Warren's cub cabins, built about 1936. As the interior view shows, younger campers got less space and privacy than older boys.*



produce detailed reports on the behavior of each of their charges. A key tool was the Behavior Frequency Scale, which asked the counselor to assess each camper on 54 separate forms of behavior, noting for each whether its occurrence was Never, Seldom, Occasionally, Fairly Often, Frequent, or Extreme. Although the paperwork could be used to identify boys needing consultation with the camp psychologist, Ahmek did not cater particularly to problem children, nor did parents send their sons there specifically for behavior modification. In many ways the cumulative impact of these forms was of greater importance, giving camp staff a large body of empirical data that they could use to quantify “normal” boy behavior at each stage of development.

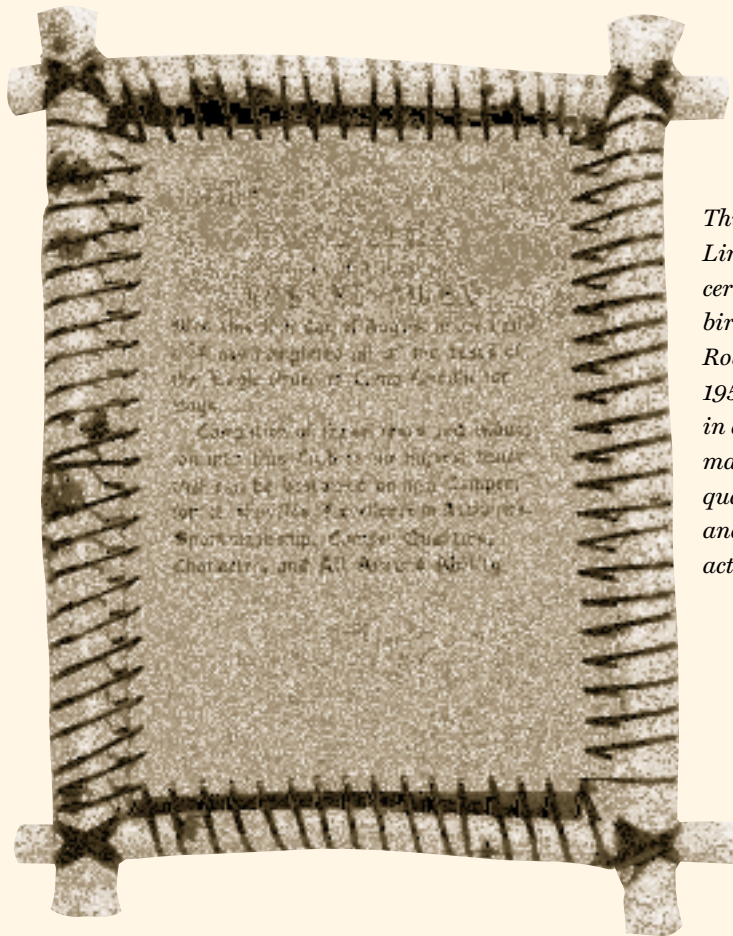
Although problem cases were few, those documented in *Camping and Character* all pointed a finger at poor parenting as the root of campers’ behavioral difficulties. Tom suffered from hysterical homesickness because parental control had not been consistent. Albert and James, two restless, untidy, irresponsible brothers, came from a family with “four bosses”: their mother, a woman of culture who was frequently away; a grandmother, who looked after them in the mother’s absence; a housekeeper, who was responsible for the boys at meal time; and their father, a successful stockbroker who returned home only on weekends and lavished on the boys gum, candy, toys, and clothes. Martin, who became enraged upon slight provocation, was “badly pampered in his eating at home.” While these case studies



made it clear that fathers often had a hand in creating troublesome boys, the book's summary chapter, "Objectives of the Summer Camp," emphasized "the desirability of getting the boy away from the female when there is evidently too much 'petticoat' government. Housekeepers, maids, and governesses in too great an abundance are not the best means for developing the social abilities and attitudes of the boy."

Not every camp adopted Ahmek's Behavior Frequency Scale, but the popularity of *Camping and Character* suggests that professionally active camp directors were familiar with its methods and sympathetic to its aims. Indeed, the widespread shift to bunking campers and counselors together in larger cabins in the 1930s suggests that camp professionals sought to provide a setting in which counselors had the opportunity to observe their charges closely.

Seen against this backdrop, the elaborate cabins at camps Lincoln or Mishawaka speak to the uneasy relationship that developed between camp and home in the first half of the twentieth century. With their porches, fireplaces, and spaces for social interaction within the cabin "family," these buildings incorporated many of the trappings of domestic architecture. Yet these cabins were not meant to emulate the home; instead, they were intended to serve as surrogates, making up for the failings of conventional, unscientific home life. More than the result of a simple evolution in camp facilities, they were the products of changing perceptions of boys' physical and psychological needs.



*This leather Camp Lincoln Eagle Club certificate framed in birch recognized Robert Owen in 1954 for "excellence in activities, sportsmanship, camper qualities, character, and all around activity."*

*Campers answer the mealtime bugler's call at St. Croix Boy Scout Camp's sturdy log dining hall near Hudson, Wisconsin, 1937*





It is worth noting that while these elaborate camper cabins are still in use in many camps, today they are inhabited somewhat differently. At Camp Lincoln, for instance, counselors assigned to first-floor units now sleep apart from their campers in what was originally the social room. Judging from camp-planning literature of the 1950s, this shift seems less connected to changing perceptions of camper needs and more related to a heightened awareness of the developmental needs of the young adults who worked at camps.

These teenagers—the term itself was still relatively new in the postwar era—enjoyed a greater degree of autonomy than their prewar counterparts, and camp-planning professionals increasingly called for the “provision of some measure of privacy for the counselor.”<sup>25</sup>

**SUMMER CAMPS ARE COMPLEX** institutions. While their buildings seem rudimentary and were often built without the help of professional architects, they were never simple and rarely erected without serious reflection.

Sleeping cabins—ostensibly the most modest buildings in camp—were the focus of sustained debate, much of it informed by a range of new theories. Initially built upon Victorian notions that contact with nature was inherently salubrious, camps increasingly challenged the Victorian conviction that the mother-centered home was the best setting for raising boys. In Minnesota and throughout the country, summer camps sought to play a more significant role in shaping American manhood than we might have suspected. 

## Notes

Research for this article was supported, in part, by a grant from the Minnesota Historical Society with funds provided by the State of Minnesota. Many of the Society's staff offered assistance, chief among them Debbie Miller, Michael Koop, and Heather Koop. I would also like to thank Steve Purdum of Camp Mishawaka, Fred Rogers, an emeritus director of Camp Lincoln, and Dagmar Getz and David Carmichael of the Kautz Family YMCA Archives, St. Paul. Finally, I am enormously indebted to Annmarie Adams, Peter Gossage, and Harris Sobin for comments that were instrumental in helping me refine my thinking.

1. Eliot, quoted in Herbert H. Twining, “Camps of Fifty Years Ago,” *Nation's Schools* 21 (Apr. 1938): 18. The few scholarly works to give serious consideration to American summer camps include David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 233–47; Eleanor Eells, *History of Organized Camping: The First 100 Years* (Martinsville, IN: American Camping Association, 1986); and W. Barksdale Maynard, “An Ideal Life in the Woods for Boys’: Architecture and Culture in the Earliest Summer Camps,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 34 (Spring 1999): 3–29. Summer camping has also been treated in museum exhibitions, including *A Worthy Use of Summer: Jewish Summer*

*Camping in America* at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, 1993 (see also catalog by the same name, edited by Jenna Weissman with Karen S. Mittelman) and *Summer Camp* at the Museum of Our National Heritage in Lexington, MA, 1999.

2. For progressive approaches to nature and the simple life, see David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 175–214.

3. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 104.

4. G. Stanley Hall, “Feminization in School and Home,” *World's Work* 16 (May 1908): 10,237–10,240. For more on the critique of mothering and the crisis in masculinity, see Macleod, *Building Character*, 48, 268; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

5. For direct quotes of Hall, see John L. Alexander, “The Opportunity for the Extension of Boys’ Work to a Summer Camp Headquarters,” *Association Boys* 10 (June 1911): 140. For a sustained comparison between camp and school, see William Kirkpatrick's foreword to Hedley S. Dimock and Charles E. Hendry, *Camping and Character: A Camp Experiment in Character Education* (New York: Association Press, 1929), vii–xi.

6. Henry Wellington Wack, *The Camp-*

*ing Ideal, The New Human Race* (New York: Red Book Magazine, 1925) and *Summer Camps—Boys and Girls* (New York: Red Book Magazine, 1923); camp director quoted in Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 112.

7. L. G. Schneller, “The Complete Story of Camp Mishawaka,” [1925?], 1–3, bound typescript in Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) manuscripts collection, MHS Library, St. Paul. Green was probably attracted to the area during his four-year tenure as a coach at Racine College in Wisconsin. Sparse details of Green's biography have been gleaned from the forewords of Mishawaka brochures for the 1913, 1919, and 1932 seasons, archived at Camp Mishawaka.

One of the earliest organizations for camp professionals was the YMCA, which in 1901 appointed an international Boys’ Work Secretary and began publishing *Association Boys*. By 1906, the Y had a professional organization of YMCA boys’-work secretaries, whose duties increasingly revolved around the summer-camp program. For an historical overview of the YMCA, see C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951).

In 1910 the male directors of private camps established the Camp Directors Association of America, an organization that excluded women, who in 1916 joined with male colleagues to establish the National Association of Directors of Girls’ Private Camps. By 1924 the two groups



merged to create the Camp Directors Association (CDA). The CDA was reorganized in 1935 as the American Camping Association, which in the early twenty-first century is the only nationally recognized body to accredit all types of camps throughout the United States; see Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 83–92, 101–15.

8. Elias G. Brown, “The Sanitary Care of a Boys’ Camp,” *Association Boys* 1 (Apr. 1902): 48–51; H. W. Gibson, *Camping for Boys* (New York: Association Press, 1911), 26–27. For Victorian concerns about the health risks posed by the body asleep, see Lady Mary Anne Barker, *The Bedroom and Boudoir* (London: Macmillan, 1878).

9. George G. Peck, “Things Learned in Seventeen Consecutive Seasons in One Boys’ Camp,” *Association Boys* 1 (Apr. 1902), 51–53; Gibson, *Camping for Boys*, 42–48.

10. Schneller, “Camp Mishawaka,” 14, 26–27.

11. Eells, *History of Organized Camping*, 101–02, 110–13.

12. Schneller, “Camp Mishawaka,” 59–60.

13. Playground and Recreation Association of America, *Camping Out: A Manual on Organized Camping* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1924), 58–59. This formula was cited as “the generally accepted standard” by the camp-planning advisor to the Girl Scouts and the National Park Service; see Julian Harris Salomon, “Space Requirements in Sleeping Cabins,” *Camping Magazine* 8 (May 1936): 14.

14. Schneller, “Camp Mishawaka,” 28. Publishing detailed architectural drawings in order to boost claims to professional status is a longstanding tradition, particularly in the building trades; see Dell Upton, “Pattern Books and Professionalism,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 19 (Summer/Autumn 1984): 107–50.

15. Charles H. Ramsdell, “Designing a Boys’ Camp in the Minnesota Woods,” *Parks and Recreation* 15 (Mar. 1932): 413–15, quote, 414.

16. Henry W. Gibson, *Camp Management: A Manual for Camp Directors* (Cambridge, MA: Murray Printing Co., 1923); *Camp Site Development Plans* (New York: Boy Scouts of America, 1927).

17. Salomon, “Space Requirements,” 14–15; Albert H. Good, *Park and Recreation Structures, Part III: Overnight and Organized Camp Facilities* (Washington, D. C: National Park Service, 1938), 173.

18. Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, 173.



*Campers and counselors at Camp Lincoln on Lake Hubert, near Brainerd, 1935*

19. Young Men’s Christian Association, *Layout, Building Designs, and Equipment for YMCA Camps* (New York: Association Press, 1946).

20. Good, *Park and Recreation Structures*, 4.

21. For the early history of Camp Blake, see Earl C. Leslie, *Centennial History of Nisswa* (Centennial Committee, 1986), 57. For a somewhat breathless appreciation of Camp Lincoln’s rustic furniture and fittings, see Elaine C. Platou, “The Lure of an Ideal Camp,” *Keith’s Beautiful Homes Magazine* (Aug. 1926): 78–81.

22. *Camp Warren on Half Moon Lake*, 4, brochure, 1928, and *Camp Warren: A Boy’s World*, 4, 14, brochure, 1941, both in MHS Library. See also S. Wirt Wiley and Florence Lehmann, *Builders of Men: A History of the Minneapolis Young Men’s Christian Association, 1866–1936* (Minneapolis: [YMCA], 1938), 310.

23. Many camp directors with professional aspirations decried these hiring criteria, but their repeated complaints suggest that the practice continued.

24. Here and two paragraphs below, Dimock and Hendry, *Camping and Character*, 21.

25. Willis W. Miller, “Camp Housing as

a Factor in Good Camping,” *YMCA Business Administration* 108 (Apr. 1951): 22. For the development of postwar youth culture, see Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 199–201.

*The photos on p. 68–69, 71, 72, 81 (top, by Peter Latner/MHS), 81 (bottom), and 83 are from the MHS collections; p. 73 is courtesy Camp Becket; p. 74, 75, and 76 (top) are courtesy Camp Mishawaka; p. 76 (bottom) and 77 are courtesy the YMCA of the USA and the Kautz Family YMCA Archives, St. Paul; p. 78, 79 (top), and 80 are from the author. The cabin plan was drawn by Allison Park, based on measurements by the author.*





Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).