

**Summer Camps in the Belgrade Lakes Region:
Historical perspectives**

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CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION	3
ORIGINS	4
THE GUNNERY CAMP	
YWCA AND YMCA CAMPS	
THE AMERICAN CAMP ASSOCIATION	
BELGRADE BEGINNINGS	
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TENSIONS	7
THE TRUE COSTS OF CAMP	
LAKEFRONT STATUS	
DISTINCTIONS IN USE VALUE	9
BACK TO NATURE	
CONTRASTS AND SIMILARITIES	
FROM BELGRADE TO ALL POINTS SOUTH	12
PINE ISLAND CAMP	14
CAMP RUNOIA	18
CONCLUSION	24
BIBLIOGRAPHY	26

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of millennia, massive environmental factors such as glaciers and tectonic shifts have dramatically shaped the landscape of the Central Maine region. As a direct manifestation of this geological history, the Belgrade Lakes represent the fruition and intersection of numerous processes. Out of these physical evolutions and transformations, the Belgrades are today synonymous with pristine wilderness and timeless aesthetic beauty. While local residents, settling in the region primarily around the middle of the eighteenth century, have long appreciated the lakes and surrounding land for their resource value, the turn of the twentieth century and the rise of automobility brought with it an entirely new set of environmental values and residents. The rise of non-local, seasonal visitors to the Belgrades would greatly influence community dynamics and development, nature consciousness, and the region's unique inception into American culture. Over the course of a century, the significance of the Belgrade Lakes shifted dramatically

The entrance of the summer camp marked perhaps one of the most significant historical moments for the Belgrade Lakes over the region's two hundred year existence. For better or worse, summer camps have had a profound impact on society and the environment, and subsequently stand as effective indicators for such change across the history of the Belgrades. By contrasting general history with particular case studies, analysis of youth summer camps illuminates a variety of interesting relationships within the bounded context of the Belgrade region while simultaneously serving as a lesson in environmental history for similar environments beyond Central Maine.

ORIGINS

The Gunnery Camp

The first summer camp in the United States originated on Long Island Sound in 1861. The goals of this endeavor were to introduce a small group of privileged, private school-educated boys to the great wilderness through activities such as hiking, boating and fishing. The experiment, facilitated by William Frederick and Abigail Gunn of the Gunn School in Connecticut, proved to be a highly successful one. While removing highly influential youth from familiar surroundings and the comforts of modern civilization was extremely radical for the time period, the Gunnery Camp, as the program came to be called, challenged the prevailing dichotomy between nature and culture. American society soon regarded the summer camp as an opportunity to escape the burdens of responsibility and technology. The camping lifestyle differed dramatically from that of nineteenth century urbanization, thereby appealing to the affluent elite and desires to depart from the socially detached hustle and bustle of their every day lives.

YWCA and YMCA Camps

In 1672, George Fox brought Quakerism out of the chapel and into the wilderness, preaching to crowds of up to 25,000 in perhaps one of the earliest 'camping' settings in America¹. While participants lived out of non-permanent, makeshift tents, the impressive scale and novelty of these camp meetings clearly foreshadowed a trend in organized summer camps that would develop centuries later. As camp meetings grew in popularity across a variety of

Protestant denominations, activities expanded beyond worship and religious education to include recreation and leisure. Greatly influenced by mounting interests in the promotion of childhood development and health through physical activity in non-traditional settings, religious camps soon realized the ideological and economic potentials of encouraging youth worship in the great outdoors. “By the mid-nineteen twenties, many denominations were seeing a vision of youth ministry suited to their needs, following in part the popular patterns set by private camps and youth agencies.”¹

Soon after the Gunnery Camp’s success in 1861 along the shores of Long Island Sound, similar institutions began to appear across the country, with the highest rates of growth within the Northeast and Midwest United States. In 1874, the Philadelphia chapter of the YWCA catalyzed a major trend that would effectively secure the place of summer camps in American culture. Camp Sea Rest, located in Asbury Park, New Jersey, was the first of many camps to be founded by and structured around religious affiliations. As a renowned Christian organization for women, the YWCA strove to provide valuable opportunities for rest, recreation, and religious education. Interestingly enough, it would take over ten years before the first YMCA camp formed for men: Camp Dudley was founded in 1885 in Newburgh, New York. While activities differed between YWCA and YMCA camps, both served to encourage less affluent individuals to seek refuge in the wilderness. The development of religious summer camps was crucial to the proliferation of this cultural phenomenon across socioeconomic groups. While the intentions of religious camps were certainly more rigidly established than those of a more general nature, they succeeded in increasing accessibility to nature for a greater number of individuals.

The American Camp Association

By the turn of the twentieth century, the number of camps in the United States had reached an impressive peak. While camping had by then become normalized in American culture, there remained a perception of risk and uncertainty in trusting one's children in the hands of strangers for several weeks at a time. In response to these hesitations, the Camp Directors Association of America formed in 1910 to enforce strict regulations for the operation of youth summer camps. Since changing its name to the American Camp Association, the organization certifies the legitimization of camps by conducting rigorous investigations into camp practices. The ACA awards accreditation exclusively to camps that meet their strict standards. Since the development of the organization's original charter over a century ago, the definitions for model camping practices have evolved to reflect the changing social climate and to address new environmental concerns associated with outdoor recreational activities. The ACA has consequently adopted six documents since its inception, the first of which was drafted in 1910 and the most recent in 2006. These standards, to which all accredited camps must prove compliance with, have included everything from safety procedures and environmental education curriculum to the inclusion of campers of all ethnicities, races and religious affiliation.

The creation of the American Camp Association was a significant moment in the history of summer camps in that it defined how generations of youth would utilize and respect our nation's natural resources and beauty. The ACA recognized early on that camps have a profound and lasting influence on those directly *and* indirectly involved, as well as on the surrounding environment. Shaped out of these considerations, the ACA is currently responsible for facilitating positive, safe camp experiences for over three million children across the country.

This organization has directly contributed to the quality and character of summer camps in the United States, thereby encouraging the growth and eventual prevalence of such spaces in the Belgrade Lakes region.

Belgrade Beginnings

The legacy of summer camps in the Belgrade Lakes region began in the 1870s. On average, summer camps in the Belgrades reached their peak capacities immediately following both world wars. Today, at least twenty-one camps remain in the greater Belgrade Lakes region, most of which are situated on Great Pond. These camps span a wide variety of missions, programming and demographics, reflecting the unique history of organized camping in the Belgrades. A handful maintain strong religious affiliations, while others focuses on rugged outdoor adventurism. Some camps are still single sex and many cater to a more affluent crowd.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TENSIONS

The financial disparities between seasonal inhabitants and permanent residents are very much evident within the Belgrades, and particularly in areas surrounding summer camps. For many locals, seasonal visitors represent a level of economic wealth they may never experience.

Summer guests display their disposable incomes through engaging in recreational activity, further complicating social distances between the two groups. Yet the greatest factor that differentiates between locals and non-locals is that the former depend on the lakes for both sustenance and culture. While seasonal residents define the Belgrades solely by their beauty and recreational potential, locals recognize that the essence of the region is far more complex and significant. What is at risk, then, in identifying this region by the influences of its seasonal residents rather than by its local culture? Although summer camps have greatly impacted the development of the Belgrade Lakes, these spaces have always remained very much separate from actual communities in the region.

The True Costs of Camp

Leisure is a privilege that affluent and upper middle class youth constantly take for granted in attending summer programs in the Belgrade region. Even taking inflation into account, the relative cost of attending camp has increased immensely since the turn of the twentieth century. The camp lifestyle therefore remains out of reach for many Belgrade residents. In 1907, an eight-week session at Pine Island Camp cost \$150 while today, six-week sessions cost nearly \$7,000³, which represents nearly 18% of median household income. (U.S. Census Factfinder) Since summer camps are traditionally located on highly desirable, lake front properties, many residents feel additional resentment toward campers and other seasonal visitors. What's more, many lake-front properties lie fallow in the off season, yet permanent residents of the region are still denied access by the construction of social and physical boundaries such as private roads and gates.

Lakefront Status

Numerous external factors facilitate the uneasy relationship between locals and seasonal guests. Within most communities of the Belgrade Lakes watershed, socioeconomic distinctions are based on residential proximity to the lake. Many inhabitants with shore access received their property from kin who settled in the area around the turn of the twentieth century. Some can trace their connections to the Belgrades as far back as the 1700's. Consequently, families with generational ties to lakefront property hold a higher status within the social fabric of the region. The ever-increasing flux of seasonal inhabitants therefore challenges the very structure of Belgrade society. Individuals with no historical or kinship ties to the region occupy some of the most desirable properties on the lake. This trend reveals the patterns of social hierarchies within the Belgrade Lakes Region and beyond.

USE VALUE

Contrary to popular belief, the Belgrade Lakes are not static entities. Biological and chemical processes are constantly in flux, much like society itself. Over the course of two centuries, changing patterns of use have caused a sort of “cultural eutrophication”⁵ of the

lakes. While a lake's healthy lifespan may span thousands of years, anthropogenic influence may damage the ecosystem to such an extent that centuries reduce to mere decades. The dichotomy in use value between summer camps and local communities represents how levels of environmental consciousness have shifted since the early twentieth century.

Back to Nature

A curious trend at many summer camps in the Belgrades, as well as across the country, is the adherence to notions of primitiveness. Both structure and activity demonstrate the extent to which camps represent a manifestation of the rejection of contemporary society. In the attempt to embody a more simplistic lifestyle that is both dependent on and respectful of the natural environment, many summer camps consequently confront perceptions of Native American culture. The normalization of teepee tents, campfire community building, and canoes as fundamental aspects of camp essence demonstrates the extent to which camps unconsciously mimic Indian heritage. While numerous Native American settlements existed around Central Maine up until the middle of the nineteenth century, their influences endure within contemporary summer camps in the Belgrades.

The embodiment of this Native American primitiveness was often regarded as perhaps the most desirable aspects of organized camping, particularly within the context of the rugged Maine wilderness. In a 1911 publication of Harper's *Camping and Scouting*, Pine Island Camp director Eugene L. Swan articulated the importance of the 'back to nature movement' for adolescent development. "Young man, get out into the open. Do not, oh, do not, spend your vacation time in a hotel or Pullman car. It will do you more good at twenty to sleep under boughs

aslant, by a mountain lake with the trout boiling, than to see the Congressional Library or Niagara Falls.”²

Contrasts and Similarities

Across the Belgrade Lakes region, summer camps represent the tension between distinct environmental use values. While permanent residents depended on the plentiful water sources and fertile soil as a way of life, seasonal inhabitants experience these natural features in a very different way. For summer campers, lakes provide aesthetic solace and reflection, as well as a chance for recreation. Locals and summer inhabitants subsequently hold very different attitudes on approaches to environmental preservation and conservation.

The Belgrade Regional Conservation Alliance is one organization that represents the productive intersection of local needs with seasonal activity. The BRCA has a fairly short but highly successful legacy. In 1988 the Watson Pond Conservation Trust formed in response to a proposal for development in the mountains of the Kennebec Highlands.⁴ This event marked the first land trust in the state of Maine, and would eventually catalyze the establishment of the BRCA in 1991. Since then the BRCA has conserved seven thousand acres of land around the Belgrade Lakes Watershed. In 2004, the BRCA worked with Pine Island Camp to conserve 207 acres on Mt. Phillip to be enjoyed by campers and Belgraders alike.⁴ The BRCA relies on the support and cooperation of both local residents and seasonal guests, encouraging all who value the lakes to recognize their role in promoting a healthy future.

FROM BELGRADE TO ALL POINTS SOUTH

While for most of its history the Belgrade Lakes have remained relatively isolated from the urban centers of southern New England and New York, summer camps have served to connect these regions through the development of transportation. Although many camps were founded during the rising age of automobility, few families had the financial resources to drive up to Maine. As a result, many youth embarked for the Belgrades via railroad. By 1849 a line had been constructed from Portland to Bangor, linking the Belgrade region to the dense populations along the southern Maine coast and into Boston. In 1904, the fare for round trip passage from Boston to Belgrade was \$4.25.² This form of transportation would transfer campers and their luggage, as well as capital, goods and ideas. The flow of seasonal visitors into the Belgrades by train, and eventually by automobile, challenged the region's rustic timelessness and isolation from markers of modernity and industrialization.

In a personal account titled "To and From: Recollections of Camp Inwood," a young boy describes his journey from Marlboro, Massachusetts to Belgrade, Maine. After excitedly packing his trunks for the summer, the boy boards a train in his hometown and begins the long, arduous trip north. His familiarity with this ride, combined with his pleasant demeanor in accepting the inconveniences of frequent depot stops and transfers, speaks positively to the role of summer camps in encouraging travel to the Belgrades from much greater distances.

Once under way, Ward, who had a timetable, began to check off the stations – Hudson, Stow, Maynard, South Acton – until we arrived at the North Station in Boston, the old one, dingy and

gloomy. There we waited for the Portland Train. It could not have been too long a wait, although it doubtless seemed long.

On the middle part of the railroad trips I seem to have little recollection, except that if the train was on the Dover division we had a glimpse of the sea and surf at Old Orchard. After the train had passed Lewiston, however, interest began to mount and once more we checked off the stations – Winthrop; Annabessicook; Maranacook – glimpses of water along here – Readfield; and finally Belgrade. We were there.”⁵

In the course of a few hours, this young boy experiences nearly two hundred miles of scenic beauty across three states. His anxiousness to arrive at camp suggests his relief at leaving the suburbs of Boston for the pristine woods of Belgrade. In transitioning between these two environments, campers bridged social and physical gaps between two very different worlds. At the time of this historical record, Belgrade was nearly inaccessible to non-locals. While several options existed, each was only slightly less time consuming than the last. At first, rowboats and eventually motorboats served to deliver camp-bound youth from the train depot. During the early 1900's, hired taxicabs and the “Stanley Steamer Bus” transported seasonal visitors across the unpaved roads that linked the lakes. In the 1920's trolleys made their emergence in the Belgrade Lakes Region, yet did little to cut down on the duration of travel from the Boston area to the Belgrades. In “To and From: Recollections of Camp Inwood, our young narrator again shares the details of his passage:

“We took the train to Lowell, then by trolley to Haverhill, Salisbury, Hampton, Portsmouth; again by trolley to York Beach, where we spent the night at the Hiawatha House. The next morning we took one car to Biddeford, and another from there to Portland, by way of Old Orchard. At Portland we took the Portland-Lewiston interurban, whose cars were more like railroad cars than

ordinary street cars; and at Lewiston a trolley took us to Winthrop, the end of the trolley lines, where we took the train to Belgrade.”

PINE ISLAND CAMP

“A place where a boy of good intentions can spend his vacation time to the best advantage, free from all undesirable influences.” Clarence Colby

In 1892, Florence Colby purchased a three-acre tract of land on Great Pond from the State of Maine.² At the time the narrow island and surrounding shoreline had sparse vegetation due to extensive logging, yet Florence aptly recognized the potential for the land. A decade after the acquisition of Pine Island, her Harvard educated son, Clarence Colby founded a boys camp under the same name. That summer, Clarence would erect the first structures on the property, plant dozens of young saplings to replace what was cut, and welcome the very first camper, Sidney Lovett. By the next season, Pine Island Camp had expanded its program to an eight-week session and had attracted campers from across New England and New York. While PIC represented the fulfillment of Clarence’s greatest ambitions, he sold the camp to Dr. Eugene L. Swan for \$6,000 after only five years of operation, following Florence Colby’s death in 1907 (PIC: First 100 Years).

Quite fortuitously, Pine Island Camp was founded at the peak of an extremely formative era in the development of youth summer camps. Across the country, debate raged as to whether youth should spend their summers learning in a traditional school setting, or by exploring the

great outdoors. This controversy shaped the aforementioned summer camp movement at the turn of the twentieth century and was a topic of much discussion in the Maine Woods newspaper, published by Mr. and Mrs. Vincent York in the Belgrade Lakes Region. Yet before Pine Island established itself on Great Pond, another camp had long been instructing boys from wealthy backgrounds in conventional subjects of study; the Richards School. While the latter institution reached a notable level of both success and recognition, Clarence Colby's camp, where boys "would not study books, but would indulge in other amusements suitable to a summer outing place," (Marriner Talks 9:20-1) would appeal to a greater social demographic, thereby enduring for generations to come. As such, the model of "alternative education" has truly persisted as a guiding principal at Pine Island Camp: campers, counselors and directors alike revel in the qualities of non-structured time for providing the kinds of experiences that encourage independence and personal growth far beyond the limitations of a confined classroom and curriculum. The motivation for this form of education is best expressed in a speech delivered in 1982 by John Gardner, a copy of which the third generation Swan family camp director carries at his side every day. The closing line of this speech is as follows: "Trust youth, give them room, permit them to develop as whole persons; ask, and set no upper limits in asking, and they will rebuild the world."

Dr. Eugene L. Swan continued Colby's mission to "give boys a healthful and beneficial summer outing, to clarify their minds and reinvigorate their bodies, to give them new life and new strength- in a word, to afford them an opportunity for re-creation." Swan transformed Pine Island Camp into a highly reputable place for growth, fraternity and the development of life

skills by employing Ivy League medical students as his counselors. Just after WWI, PIC expanded onto the mainland with the construction of a junior camp in 1929.² Like many camps, however, Pine Island would suffer great economic losses after the Great Depression and WWII. In the early 1960's, Dr. Eugene L. Swan proudly handed over charge of PIC to his son, Jun Swan. The camp has remained under Swan family care since its foundation, and is now operated by the third generation: Ben Swan and his wife, Emily.

Pine Island Camp has remained a picture of rugged primitiveness since Clarence Colby started it all with one camper in 1902. While the island itself is physically isolated from the mainland – located some 2000 feet from Hancock Point – the camp is also completely separated from modern, technological progress. After a fire in 1996 forced the camp to rebuild according to health and safety codes, the first electric cable finally connected Pine Island to the mainland and to the twentieth century. Yet this electricity would only run a few necessary appliances, maintaining the camp's legacy of rusticness. Campers still have no access to electricity or running water, and live in fabric tents on cement platforms.

Pine Island Camp stands as a fascinating case study for environmental history, in that its legacy contradicts the normal development of the summer camp industry. While PIC embodies an extreme sense of primitiveness, the camp has always held a genuine respect for the Belgrade Lakes, and to all that they represent for the surrounding communities.

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Isolation is a crucial component of the Pine Inland experience. Since it's very beginning, the island has defined a sense of community that is both disconnected from and indifferent to the

outside world. It is a space of independence and dependence in that each camper is entirely responsible for their own actions yet integrated into the group. Reinforcing its mission of alternative education by “trusting in our youth,” the island gives what current director Ben Swan calls an “illusion of freedom”: children can be wholly unsupervised while exploring their surroundings and their interests. While this is generally regarded as a luxury that underscores the camp’s sense of “other worldliness,” Pine Island must now defend its isolation against a modern technological invasion. Personal music devices and communication technology threaten to diminish the camp’s very essence: disconnection from the conventional encourages profound self-discovery and lasting social connections.

The first of these is Pine Island Camp on Great Pond. From its founding in 1902 by Clarence Colby, the camp has exemplified the traditional camp model – serving as a “place where a boy of good intentions can spend his vacation time to the best advantage, free from all undesirable influences.” When Dr. Eugene L. Swan bought the camp in 1907, he started a legacy of environmental consciousness that would affect campers and locals alike. Under Swan family leadership for over a century, Pine Island Camp has remained a picture of rugged primitiveness. While the island itself is physically isolated from the main land – located some 2,000 feet from Hancock Point – the camp is also completely separated from modern, technological progress. After a fire in 1996 forced the camp to rebuild according to health and safety codes, the first electric cable finally connected Pine Island to the mainland and to the 21st century. Yet this electricity would only run a few necessary appliances, maintaining the camp’s legacy of

rusticness. Campers still have no access to running water, and live in fabric tents on cement platforms.

While Pine Island Camp may embody the illusory timelessness of the Belgrade Lakes Region by upholding an aesthetic that suggests primitiveness or a Native American culture, it does so in a way that benefits the surrounding community. For example, in 2004, Pine Island Camp joined forces with the Belgrade Regional Conservation Alliance to purchase Mt. Phillip. This project allowed the camp to continue its traditions of communing with King Kabbaba, a mythical camp figure, while conserving the land for public use. The camp maintains trails on the mountain every year, and is extremely active in invasive plant prevention measures. By valuing nature and its preservation above destructive recreational activities or infrastructure, Pine Island Camp maintains a more synergistic, productive relationship with the Belgrade Lakes Region than some less-traditional camps.

CAMP RUNOIA

Camp Runoia is another effective case study for environmental history in the Belgrade Lakes Region. Like Pine Island Camp, Runoia was founded around the turn of the 20th century and therefore has enjoyed a long history on the Belgrade Lakes. Camp Runoia represents a unique hybrid between the traditional camp model and a more modern one.

I sit pouring over a mass of logbooks, photographs and letters in the lodge at Camp Runoia on a sunny morning in mid July. Several junior campers hurriedly form a line to “tag up” for afternoon activities. They excitedly discuss tennis, drama, and the winds across the lake that have prevented both sailing and swimming. While enjoying the well-practiced compositions of a senior camper playing the French horn in her cabin, a younger girl begins to play Taylor Swift’s “Love Story” on the piano in the lodge. Between the camp bell ringing to signal the end of the first “minors” period and the sound of laughter emanating from the lake shore, her tune is the only thing that interrupts a feeling of rustic timelessness and forces me to recognize that Runoia’s present campers are likely more interested in pop than vaudeville. Yet, just as I begin to feel nostalgic for summers past and my own experiences at a lakefront camp in central Maine, the pianist begins to play Frank Sinatra’s “Fly Me to The Moon” and Doris Day’s “Tea for Two.” Perhaps Camp Runoia suggests that time in the Belgrades is moving forward as it is simultaneously holding still.

In 1906 Lucy Weiser and Jessie Pond founded a camp for girls on the northeastern shore of Great Pond to provide opportunities for growth, recreation and friendship. Miss Weiser was an industrial designer, and Miss Pond a recent graduate of Columbia University. A mere decade later, the two women bought an 80-acre tract of farmland on the southern shore of the lake, upon which Weiser would design a lodge, several cabins and a handful of small buildings. A 1935 camp logbook recalls the details of this change and of Camp Runoia’s development throughout the following decades. “When the camp was moved across the ice, the flooring of the two shacks was used for the flooring of the dining room and kitchen. The junior shacks and boathouse were

used first; then finally the senior shacks. There were no trees at first, for the campsite was a cow pasture and the trees sprung up later. In 1918, 70 girls were in camp and tents had to be used for the oldest campers and some of the counselors. No bed spreads were used – just blankets – and a counselor slept at each end of the shack. The tennis courts were built in the early seasons of the new camp, but baseball was played by the kitchen until 1928, when the diamond was used. Down at the shore a slide went from the boathouse roof to the lake with a little cart in which you'd sit and slide down into the lake with a splash." Similarly, a 1914 brochure highlights some of the camp's finer qualities during its early years: "the camp properties consist of a mile of lakeshore, wooded with pine, spruce, hemlock and white birch. The shore forms a sheltered cove with gradually sloping sandy bottom and making an unusually safe place for swimming and canoeing. The buildings are on high ground in the open near the lake. The main building, the Lodge, has an open fireplace and large floor space for dancing and indoor games" (9).

After establishing its legacy on Great Pond and becoming a national model for youth summer camps, Runoia sold in 1960, and it has been run by the Cobb family ever since. Today, director Pam Cobb Heuberger represents the second generation of her family's legacy at Camp Runoia. Following in the footsteps of her parents' fifty-year dedication to running the camp, and putting a master's degree from the College of the Atlantic in human ecology to use, Pam Cobb took over directing Runoia in 1996. Despite changes in leadership, the camp's mission has remained true to its roots: camp, like life, should not be about an end result, but about the journey or process along the way. Likewise, Runoia strives to challenge girls beyond their comfort zones to encourage development of life skills and personal growth. At Runoia, having a

sense of achievement is a sign of a productive summer.

In a stark contrast from Pine Island Camp, campers at Runoia enjoy most of the comforts of the 21st century, or at least of the 20th. By emphasizing the importance of conservation amidst furnished cabins, rock climbing walls, clay tennis courts and waterskiing; Runoia demonstrates that it is indeed possible to enjoy nature in a manner that is not detrimental to lake quality or lifespan. Each week, campers, counselors and directors gather for an "appreciation fire" to express just that. Coming together to recognize the delicate beauty of their surroundings reinforces Runoia's focus on conservation.

Yet Camp Runoia's efforts to value and protect nature extend far beyond the weekly campfire. Through activities such as recycling, water conservation, water quality testing and farming, campers gain an awareness of what it means to live in a watershed and the extent to which everything is interconnected. Over the last two decades, environmentally responsible projects have become increasingly visible. Rain gauges, rain barrels, compost buckets and a garden all encourage environmental consciousness, whether campers recognize it or not.

Extending its reach beyond the shores of Great Pond, Camp Runoia is an active and direct supporter of conservation efforts by groups such as the Belgrade Regional Conservation Alliance. While it does not embody the same rustic primitiveness as Pine Island Camp, Runoia encourages environmental responsibility along its own shores and serves as an example for its neighbors in the Belgrade Lakes Region. For example, in 2008 the camp became LakeSmart certified and was the first on Great Pond to do so. This certification entails runoff management

through lake-conscious development and landscaping. While Runoia was required to make a few minor changes to pass all areas of inspection, the camp achieved a LakeSmart award because of existing infrastructure and established erosion control zones. Perhaps recognizing the fragility of their environment, Runoia's founders built the lodge and surrounding buildings at a safe distance from the shore, while the natural beach acts as an effective buffer between lake and land.

By interacting with its environment in a manner that encourages greater integration into Belgrade society, Camp Runoia serves to deny all truth to the illusory timelessness of the region. Now operating for well over a century, Runoia's legacy continues to reestablish and reinvent itself. Former campers, reflecting upon the profound experiences of their youth on the shores of Great Pond, now return to the Belgrade Lakes Region. Many Runoia alumni now own property and homes in the area, or visit for vacations. The camp serves as a magnet in drawing people back, which benefits the local economy and increases environmental consciousness. Defined by its place on the lake, Runoia encourages its campers to value nature and its beauty. For some alumni, this means supporting efforts by the Belgrade Regional Conservation Alliance, while for some it extends to winning a LakeSmart award. Regardless of their impacts on the Belgrade Lakes Region, returning campers maintain a sense of loyalty to Camp Runoia that is unparalleled.

To understand why many campers revisit the shores of Great Pond, it is helpful to look back upon the nostalgic memories of a summer at Camp Runoia. The handwritten pages of the 1910-1913 log book at Camp Runoia recall memories of friendship forged along the lake, on the

long train ride to North Belgrade, through day trips to points of interest along Great Pond, and during countless campfires, picnics and other such outdoor activities.

An account by a senior camper in 1910 tells of a special trip led by Captain Curtis on a sailboat to get ice cream sundaes. The junior campers remained at camp for a half hour of "drill" followed by dancing in the lodge with Mrs. Weiser. Upon returning to Runoia around dusk, the seniors joined the juniors around a fire to toast marshmallows. Another "uneventful" day involved basketball in the morning, a "lovely paddle" around the lake and then hymns in the lodge to escape a passing afternoon shower. On the 24th of July of the same year, Sunday brought the excitement of a boy in Camp Runoia. After an appetite rousing paddle on the lake, the entire camp bid a cheerful adieu to Miss Elizabeth Eyre, who was returning home for the summer.

Although pictures from Camp Runoia in 1910 depict girls in long white dresses or bloomers as perhaps unfit for outdoor recreation by modern standards, campers enjoyed taking extensive walks around the Belgrade lakes. One such group enjoyed a hilly, tiresome walk around Salmon Lake and McGrath Pond with Miss Watson. While it is hard to imagine hiking on a hot mid-July day in traditional, turn-of-the-century ladies' attire, this account proves that Camp Runoia has provided opportunities for the true enjoyment of nature since its beginning. An entry in the 1935 camp logbook recalls that knee length stockings were adopted in 1917-18 to accommodate such outdoor adventure. The resulting quantity of exposed skin was considered very shocking, and local residents called the girls "Camp Knee-oia." After a group of counselors

dressed in shorts for the 1928 summer masquerade, fashion at Camp Runoia reached an unparalleled level of progress amidst a society of gendered inequality, yet the motivation for this daring attire was undoubtedly related to the camp's values and nature-focus.

Further defying conventional standards, Runoia's earliest campers took advantage of their surroundings at every opportunity - even sleeping on the ground by the lakeshore on a clear evening to observe the stars and listen to the loons. Most girls abandoned the comforts of home in pursuit of this enjoyment, as one camper notes in an entry in the 1912 log: naively bringing a hand mirror to camp to fix her hair, the girl became the subject of numerous jokes and teasing. Since its very beginning, Camp Runoia has truly provided a unique opportunity for young girls to adventure into the wild beauty of the Belgrades, and to learn about nature while discovering much about themselves.

CONCLUSION:

Summer camps in the Belgrade Lakes Region are vibrant sites of memory: they tell a story of annual pilgrimages to a land untouched by time; of friendships and self discovery; of preservation and conservation; and of our enduring love for the great outdoors. Though the illusory timelessness of the Belgrades is just that, we mustn't forget the rich history of Belgrade camps, and the legacy that they have left on the region. Places like Pine Island Camp and Camp

Runoia not only introduce youth to the unmatched splendor of their surroundings, but also to their vulnerability. Imbedded in the summer camp tradition is the lesson that lakes provide not just a source of aesthetic beauty and recreation, but a delicate resource that deserves care and respect. As such, these camps have served to maintain the original character of the region while creating lifelong stewards for the environment.

There is much to learn about the ecological, social and economic history of Central Maine that lies buried within the dusty archives and camp photos at places like Pine Island and Runoia. This research only begins to delve into the rich history that is bound to summer camps in the Belgrades, but it should serve to identify these spaces as integral to the fabric of the area, and as valuable mechanisms for conservation efforts in Maine. Belgrade summer camps represent a truly unique juxtaposition of past, present and future.

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