

# 'To rough it in the outdoors...would not have been becoming to a young lady': Gender Ideology and Private Girls' Camps in Ontario, 1920-1960

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**Abstract:** The first private Ontario summer camps for girls' were established in the Algonquin region shortly after the First World War. At a time in which the out-of-doors was not considered an acceptable place for a young woman, these institutions may have represented a shift in socially-appropriate behaviour in the sphere of recreation and leisure for women. In an effort to shed light on this particular hypothesis, this study explores the ways in which private girls' camps conformed to or diverged from the gender ideologies of the period; however, it also considers the factors, which may have facilitated the development of such institutions. As little academic work has been done on the subject of camping, my research relied almost exclusively on primary source material, namely memoirs, brochures, and prescriptive literature, from the Camping Collections of the Trent University Archives. That said the writings of gender and recreation theorists provided important tools for comparative analysis. I found that the ideal of womanhood promoted in private girls' camps in this period was decidedly ambiguous, as it at once reflected and resisted contemporary notions of femininity. Furthermore, I argue that the emergence of girls camps in this period can be linked to developments within the socio-political contexts of Canadian society, such as the emergence of maternal feminism, the success of the women's suffrage movement and changes in fashion, in addition to concurrent changes in boys' camping.

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*'As for girls, no one in their right senses would have thought of asking a girl to rough it in the outdoors; that would not have been becoming to a young lady at the end of the Victorian era. In fact, the ability to swoon at the right moment was considered more of an asset than the capacity to endure hardship or stand on one's own feet'.<sup>1</sup>*

In August of 1924, Mary Hamilton, the Director of Physical Education at the Margaret Eaton School, and graduate Norah MacLennan, boarded a train in Toronto and began the long journey northward to Algonquin Park. The purpose of their trip was to find a space that could be used for educator training during the month of September and as a summer camp in July and August. Hamilton had envisioned 'a place where [the students] could go for counsellor training, learn the theory of camping skills and put it into practice on the spot'.<sup>2</sup> After disembarking from the train at the Algonquin Park Station, Hamilton and her companion continued their journey by canoe. They paddled across Cache Lake and up the Madawaska River to their destination on White's Lake, where they spent the afternoon exploring the area before returning to the lodge.<sup>3</sup> The following day they returned with a tent and supplies and made camp. Hamilton would return to the Park several times before deciding to pursue the acquisition of the land. On the final trip she marked out the perimeter of the future lodge with wooden stakes before returning to Toronto, where she applied for a lease to the land. The granting of the lease in the fall of 1924 marked the

beginning of Camp Tanamakoon.<sup>4</sup>

From the beginning, Tanamakoon was a gamble. As Mary later admitted in the camp's biography, she had little experience in camping and few resources. Furthermore, Tanamakoon was to be a private camp for girls.<sup>5</sup> While it was not the first institution of its kind in Ontario, girls' camps were still an anomaly in the 1920s. The first private girls' camp in Ontario, Northway Lodge, was established in 1905 by American Fannie L. Case at Ahmek Lake on the Magnetawan River.<sup>6</sup> Despite its Canadian location, however, Northway Lodge catered exclusively to girls from south of the border.<sup>7</sup> It was not until 1922 and the establishment of Glen Bernard Camp in Sundridge, near to Huntsville, by Mary S. Edgar that girls from Ontario could attend a private camp in their own province. In 1924 and 1925 respectively, Camp Wapomeo, the sister camp to Taylor Statten's Camp Ahmek, and Tanamakoon became the first private girls' camps within the bounds of Algonquin Park.<sup>8</sup>

Early private girls' camps, as recreational and educational wilderness institutions, played an important role in shaping notions of gender, albeit an ambiguous one. On the one hand,

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Anne H. Lathrop, 'Elegance and Expression, Sweat and Strength: Body Training, Physical Culture and Female Embodiment in Women's Education at the Margaret Eaton Schools (1901-1941)', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto (1997): 136-137.

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Camping Association, *Blue Lake and Rocky Shore: A History of Children's Camping in Ontario* (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., 1984): 4. Northway Lodge was relocated to Cache Lake in Algonquin Park in 1908.

<sup>7</sup> Meg Stanley, "The Not So Lazy Days of Summer: The Ontario Camping Association and Accreditation, 1933-1980" in Bruce E. Hodgins and Bernadine Dodge (eds.) *Using Wilderness: Essays on the Evolution of Youth Camping in Ontario* (Peterborough: The Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, 1992): 32.

<sup>8</sup> Hamilton, 10; Donald Alexander Burry, 'A History of the Taylor Statten Camps', M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan (1985): 30. Tanamakoon was the first private girls camps in Ontario run by a Canadian women.

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<sup>1</sup> C.F. Plewman as quoted in Kristopher Churchill, "Learning about Manhood: Gender Ideals and "Manly Camping" in Bruce E. Hodgins and Bernadine Dodge (eds.) *Using Wilderness: Essays on the Evolution of Youth Camping in Ontario* (Peterborough: The Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, 1992): 18.

<sup>2</sup> Mary G. Hamilton, *The Call of Algonquin: A Biography of a Summer Camp* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1958): 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

these summer camps perpetuated traditional female stereotypes and gender roles.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, they offered opportunities for female empowerment through participation in non-traditional leisure and sport activities such as canoe-tripping and archery, and involvement in an all-female community. The purpose of this article is two-fold. First, it will chronicle the history of girls' camping in Ontario between 1920 and 1960, paying particular attention to the factors that contributed to the establishment and development of girls' camps. Second, it will explore the paradoxical impact that private residential camps had on gender ideologies.

I was unable to acquire detailed information on the socio-economic class or ethnicity of the girls who attended the private camps of the Algonquin region participants.<sup>10</sup> That said, there is little doubt that these girls were primarily white, and middle- or upper-class as there were two distinct types of camps in Ontario in this period: agency camps and private camps. The former, which were operated by organizations, such as the YMCA, or by churches, primarily offered 'fresh air' opportunities to working-class youth from urban centres. Private camps, on the other hand, were owned by an individual or group, and were run for-profit. As such, they catered to the privileged classes.<sup>11</sup> Further evidence of the class and ethnic-bias of private camps can be found in the close connections between the private camping movement and the private education system, which was itself homogenous.<sup>12</sup> A large majority of the individuals responsible for establishing and managing private camps for both boys and girls were educators or administrators at private or independent schools in southern Ontario. Thus, many of the campers were drawn from the same ranks.<sup>13</sup>

Academic literature concerning camping is sparse. The publication of Bruce W. Hodgins and Bernadine Dodge's *Using Wilderness* in 1991 was an important step in establishing a body of literature within this nascent field, especially as it addressed a wide range of topics within the domain of camping.<sup>14</sup> Kristopher Churchill's article on gender ideology and camping, which is included in *Using Wilderness*, was one of the first papers to address gender within the context of camping; however, it focused almost exclusively on boys' camping. While girls' camping in the United States has received more attention, there is much room for further research. Nonetheless, Americanist Leslie Paris' article 9 "Residential", in this context, refers to camps that provided living accommodations and food for participants, such that they could spend a week or more on-site. The converse of this would be a day camp, which would provide programming for children for a specified number of hours each day.

10 There has been little written, thus far, on the topic of race and class in camping, aside from Sharon Wall's work on Aboriginality in this same period (See Sharon Wall, "Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: 'Playing Indian' at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955," *Canadian Historical Review* 86, 3 (September 2005)). Further research is necessary if we are to understand the ethnic and socio-economic make-up of participants, counsellors and administrators.

11 Sharon Wall, "Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: 'Playing Indian' at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955," *Canadian Historical Review* 86, 3 (September 2005): 515-6.

12 Churchill, 6.

13 Churchill, 6. Independent schools are not-for-profit corporations operated by a board of governors. Private schools, on the other hand, are established by individuals or groups of individuals and managed as a profit-making venture.

14 Bruce E. Hodgins and Bernadine Dodge (eds.), *Using Wilderness: Essays on the Evolution of Youth Camping in Ontario* (Peterborough: The Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, 1992).

on girlhood within the context of summer camps provided some valuable comparisons and tools for analysis.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the multi-faceted nature of residential youth camping, involving as it does sport, recreation, education, and wilderness, permitted the use of historical works on canoeing, sport, leisure, recreation, and the construction of gender, for contextual and comparative purposes.

Due to the limited academic literature, this article relies heavily on archival material. While the Camping Collection of the Trent University Archives is extensive, there is a lack of 'reflective material' such as memoirs and interviews directly related to girls' camping experiences.<sup>16</sup> As such, research also required the reading of brochures, promotional material, and programming guides, as well as contemporary prescriptive literature in order to re-create girls' experiences of camp.

Residential youth camping became established in Ontario in the late-nineteenth century; however, it was not a significant component of the provincial landscape until the early-twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Camping historian Sharon Wall argues that the emergence of the 'summer camp phenomenon' was a reflection of 'middle-class unease with the pace and direction of cultural change'.<sup>18</sup> Immigration, industrialization, urbanization and increasing secularization, were not only transforming Ontario's physical landscape, but its social landscape as well. Camping, through its recreational focus and proximity to wilderness, was thought to counter-act the physical, moral and social ills of modernization.<sup>19</sup>

Prior to the First World War, camp was a place reserved almost exclusively for male adolescents, as is evidenced by the following comment made by Charles Plewman, an important figure in the early days of the Ontario Camping Association (OCA) and founding director of Kilcoo Boys' Camp in Minden:

'Camping in these early days was restricted to boys, and then only to boys over twelve years of age. As for girls, no one in their right senses would have thought of asking a girl to rough it in the out-of-doors; that would not have been becoming to a young lady in the Victorian era.'<sup>20</sup>

While there were a number of youth-agency camps started in the late-nineteenth century, the first private boys' camp in Ontario, Camp Temagami, was established by A.L. Cochrane, an instructor at Upper Canada College, in 1903, followed by Camp Kagawong, founded in 1908 by Ernest Chapman.<sup>21</sup> Taylor Statten, the original director of the OCA and an active member of the YMCA, started the first private Algonquin boys' camp, Camp Ahmek, in 1922.<sup>22</sup>

The gender-exclusiveness of camping can, in part, be attributed to the dominant gender ideologies of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The philosophy of 'separate spheres' signified that men occupied the public sphere and were responsible for the

15 Leslie Paris, "The Adventures of Peanut and Bo: Summer Camps and Early-Twentieth-Century American Girlhood" in *Journal of Women's History* 12 (Winter 2001): 47-76.

16 The majority of personal experience literature was drawn from the Inawendawin Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

17 Stanley, "The Not So Lazy Days of Summer". 29. Hodgins and Dodge, ix. As Stanley, Hodgins and Dodge note, although there are residential camps throughout Canada, they are primarily concentrated in Ontario. The same was true historically.

18 Wall, 514.

19 Churchill, 5-6.

20 C. F. Plewman, "The Pioneering Days of Ontario Camping", Ontario Camping Association Paper, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

21 Upper Canada College (UCC) is an independent school located in Toronto.

22 Ontario Camping Association, 3-5; Lathrop, 140.

economic stability of the family, while women inhabited the private sphere and were in charge of domestic matters. While the ideology of 'separate spheres' was, in many ways, an ideal rather than a reality, it demonstrates the potential ideological and social constraints experienced by women attempting to participate in recreational and sporting activities during this period.

The exclusion of girls' from camping can also be ascribed to contemporary constructions of the female body. The early philosophies of camping emphasized participation in sport and the experience of wilderness, two activities believed to facilitate social and physical development and to build character.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, during this period camping celebrated a form of passionate masculinity defined by aggression, physical strength and athletic skill that pitted man against nature, an adversarial relationship that reflected the 'pioneering ideal'.<sup>21</sup> Opponents of women's involvement in recreation claimed that participation in such activities had the potential to harm women's reproductive systems, as well as challenge their femininity.<sup>22</sup> As one observer noted, 'physical development coarsened a woman'.<sup>23</sup> Collectively, these pervasive beliefs prevented the participation of young women and girls in the early years of the camping movement. Yet, in the 1920s private girls' camps began to appear in the Algonquin, Muskoka, and Temagami regions of Ontario. If women were thought to be inappropriate candidates for the camping experience, how does one explain the presence of residential camps for girls in the near North in this period?

The emergence of girls' camping can be linked to developments within the socio-political contexts of Canadian society, in addition to changes in boys' camping. M. Ann Hall, a feminist sport historian and sociologist, cites the political success of the suffrage movement in the early part of the twentieth century as opening the door to women's participation in the public sphere. This in turn precipitated the increasing participation of women in sport and leisure activities.<sup>24</sup> Equally important to women's increased involvement in recreation was a revolution in women's fashion in the late-nineteenth century characterized by the development of more functional clothing.<sup>25</sup> This stylistic change was especially important for camping and canoe-tripping as it eliminated the bulky dresses and restrictive garments such as corsets to allow women more freedom of movement.

Women's increased participation in leisure activities also reflected new ideas about motherhood. The suffrage movement of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century was driven by maternal feminism, a moral philosophy that used women's roles and responsibilities as wives and mothers to promote 'positive' social change. In particular, maternal feminism challenged contemporary 'medical theories' that physical activity was detrimental for women's health, by arguing that improvements

20 Churchill, 6-7.

21 "Ibid", 6-7; Adie Nelson and Barrie W. Robinson, *Gender in Canada* (Second Edition) (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2002): 78. Nelson and Robinson refer to the gender ideal described here as 'passionate masculinity'.

22 M. Ann Hall, *The Girl and the Game: A History of Women's Sport in Canada* (Orchard Park: Broadview Press, 2002): 18.

23 Jamie Benidickson, "Women and Wilderness," in Jamie Benidickson (ed.) *Idleness, Water, and a Canoe: Reflections on Paddling for Pleasure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997): 81.

24 Hall, *The Girl and the Game*, 3; Karla A. Henderson, M. Deborah Bialeschki, Susan M. Shaw, and Valeria J. Freysinger, *A Leisure of One's Own: A Feminist Perspective on Women's Leisure* (State College: Venture Publishing, 1989): 32.

25 M. Ann Hall, "Rarely Have We Asked Why?: Reflections on Canadian Women's Experience in Sport" in *Atlantis* 6 (Fall, 1980): 53.

in women's physical health would have positive consequences for their children.<sup>26</sup> Considering the importance of race improvement and survival to Canadian society during this historical period, it is not surprising that their call was heeded. It is important to remember that while these philosophies encouraged women's participation in sport and recreation, there remained a narrow range of activities deemed appropriate for women; activities, which was delineated based on the degree of exertion required. Less physically invigorating activities such as croquet, archery, and bowling, were seen as preferable to competitive sports such as track-and-field or baseball, because it was inappropriate for a woman to sweat. Even when team sports such as basketball became more acceptable for women, men were not also allowed to be spectators for this same reason. Ultimately, regardless of the activity in which they were involved, it was important that women retain their femininity.<sup>27</sup> This will become especially apparent during our examination of canoe-tripping.

The other factor, which contributed to the development of girls' camps, was the changes underway in boys' camping. Like any endeavour in its infancy, boys' camping was not a static entity following its establishment in the first decade of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most important transformation that occurred, however, was an ideological one. In the post-World War I period, boys' camping experienced a shift from a recreational focus to an educational focus.<sup>28</sup> Despite the inroads being made by women in sport and recreation, camping as an educational tool may have seemed a safer endeavour considering the contemporary debate over women and recreation. As evidence of the importance of this specific influence, the founding directors of the first private girls' camps in Ontario placed much emphasis on the educational functions of their nascent institutions. This was especially apparent at Tanamakoon, which as mentioned earlier, was an extension of the Margaret Eaton School's programme of education. Director Mary Hamilton sought out counsellors who could *teach* moral and physical values. At the same time, however, she also insisted that her staff be proficient in a variety of activities including sailing, riding, canoeing, tennis, lacrosse, field hockey, archery, and track and field, suggesting that recreation remained a central component of the programme in girls' camps.<sup>29</sup>

Not surprisingly, social barriers challenged the success of the early camps. For example, Marie Cortell, a girls' camp director in the United States, recalls the importance of regular home visits in order to persuade parents to allow their daughters to participate in camping.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, girls' camps did relatively well. As Donald Burry notes in his history of the Taylor Statten Camps, Camp Wapomeo flourished such that in 1927, three years after its founding, there were over a hundred campers and the operation was forced to move to a larger space.<sup>31</sup> The success of girls' camping was also reflected in the wider world. For example, in July 1949, a picture of a female counsellor and two female campers engrossed in a nature activity appeared in the *Globe and Mail* with the following caption: 'Every year more girls from Ontario's towns

26 Hall, *The Girl and the Game*, 20.

27 Shaw and Freysinger, 38-9.

28 Churchill, 18.

29 Lathrop, 146, 165. Hamilton placed much emphasis on the role of the counsellor in camping. Her dedication to counsellor training would significantly influence the broader world of Ontario camping, eventually leading to the development of formal counsellor training in camps.

30 Marie Lafferty Cortell, *Camping With Purpose* (New York: Women's Press, 1950): 3.

31 Burry, 31.

and cities spend all or part of their summer at Camp'.<sup>33</sup>

How did these new camps affect the lives of the girls that attended them? Americanist Leslie Paris argues that girls' camps in the United States 'afforded unique opportunities for exploration and personal transformation', as well as 'unparalleled opportunities to become skilled athletes, learn leadership skills and be at the centre of attention'.<sup>34</sup> It seems that this was also the case for Canadian girls who attended summer camp in Ontario; however, in some instances camps reinforced the stereotypes and gender restrictions of the dominant culture. The sphere of influence of camps can be understood in two separate, but related contexts: on-site and on-trip. The former refers to activities undertaken while at the residential site of the organization, while the latter refers to experiences had while away from the residential site on canoe-trips. The nature of the activities, the supervision, and the schedule were markedly different within these two arenas. While most early private girls' camps spent longer periods of time on-site than on-trip, as organizations dedicated to almost exclusively to canoe-tripping were developed, such as Temagami's Camp Wanapitei, this dynamic changed considerably.<sup>35</sup>

Recreation historian Anne Lathrop suggests that the on-site activities of boys' and girls' camps in this period were similarly structured; however, former girls' camp director Marie Cortell, writing in 1950, claims that while the 'primary function of organized camping' as a whole was to bring 'individuals to appreciate and understand nature as they learn to use its resources for living more simply, healthfully, adventurously and creatively', the aims and emphases of boys' and girls' camps were different.<sup>36</sup> It is not entirely clear if Cortell is being descriptive or prescriptive in her assessment of boys' and girls' camping. Camps for boys, she argues, emphasized 'primitive camping and long trips', while their camp craft programme tended to include projects such as 'clearing land and building shelters' and 'perfecting skill in sport'. Camps for girls on the other hand, emphasized social activity, as girls were most interested in acquiring skills that would improve their social status. Furthermore, she states that 'while [girls] seldom request training in the skills of real camping, they usually show great interest when such appearances are available'.<sup>37</sup> While there is some evidence to corroborate Cortell's statements of the differences between boys' and girls' camps, there is also evidence to the contrary.

According to camping brochures from 1910 to 1952, boys' and girls' camps offered similar activities, including swimming, canoeing, camp craft, archery, horseback riding, sailing, singing and theatrics, suggesting that differences in ability and gender appropriateness were not emphasized. In some cases, however, the specific activities undertaken in a given programme were different. For example, in Arts and Crafts as it was often referred to in girls' camps, the campers created items such as purses, bracelets, and small dolls. In boys' camps, however, Arts and Crafts, referred to as Handicrafts, tended to involve woodworking and 'Indian craft models'.<sup>38</sup> These disparate activities reflected and

reinforced broader ideas of gender and gender roles through the production of material goods.

Not surprisingly, some activities were undertaken in boys' camps that were not available at girls' camps, such as boxing and wrestling.<sup>39</sup> There were likely two reasons for this. The first relates to contemporary views of the female body as a vessel of reproduction. Secondly, such activities were perceived as contradictory to a women's docile nature. There was a fear in Canadian society that participation in contact or violent activities would make women more aggressive, which in turn threatened dominant gender ideologies, or more specifically, the stronghold of masculinity.<sup>40</sup> Finally, camps often believed it was their responsibility to encourage various moral standards, especially those related to sexuality. This is visible in the lack of coeducational institutions in the early period of camping; however, it was also evident in counsellor training programmes and literature. In 1940, Tanamakoon counsellors attended a seminar delivered by JD Ketchum, in which the presenter stated that the function of a camp program was 'to establish heterosexual attitudes'.<sup>41</sup> Also, Dimock and Statten's guide for counsellors that was directed at Ahmek and Wapomeo staff, but was used at other camps as well, made it exceptionally clear that homosexual behaviour was not merely inappropriate, but deviant.<sup>42</sup> Thus, through their training, camps outlined proper physical and emotional behaviours as they related to sexuality, which in turn reinforced prevailing gender ideologies.

Despite the numerous instances in which girls' camps promoted dominant ideologies regarding gender and sexuality, the residential sites of most camps also offered opportunities for empowerment. First, girls were members of an exclusively female community that encouraged participation in all aspects of camp-life. As a result, they were often involved in non-traditional activities. For example, at Tanamakoon, campers were responsible for the construction of various camp buildings, as well as trails and campsites.<sup>43</sup> At Northway Lodge, the daily programme involved a morning work hour, during which time the girls would perform various repairs and maintenance tasks generally reserved for the 'handy-man' in addition to more 'appropriate' tasks such as cleaning and washing.<sup>44</sup> World War II precipitated even more opportunities for girls' involvement outside of the traditional female sphere. During the war, some Tanamakoon campers were given 'ranging' positions by the Park authorities. The responsibilities of these 'rangers' included monitoring the movements of park visitors, checking permits, fire protection, the construction and repair of docks, shelters, fireplaces, and campsites, and the maintenance of portages and trails.<sup>45</sup> Finally, there were opportunities for older campers and staff to participate in the development of camp projects and programmes through participation in focus groups

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through an examination of 'playing Indian' in Ontario summer camps in her paper, "Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: 'Playing Indian' at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955," *Canadian Historical Review* 86, 3 (September 2005).

33 *The Globe and Mail*, July 8, 1949, Camp Inawendawin Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

34 Paris, 49.

35 Interview with Bruce Hodgins, February 2006. Camp Wanapitei was initially a private boys camp, however, in the 1950s it became coeducational.

36 Lathrop, 143; Cortell, 7.

37 Cortell, 102.

38 Camp Brochure Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough. Sharon Hall explores ideas of racialism, ethnicity, creating an Other

39 Burry, 32; Camp Brochure Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

40 Hall, *The Girl and the Game*, 18; Shaw and Freysinger, 38.

41 J.D. Ketchum as quoted in Lathrop, 166-7.

42 Hedley S. Dimock and Taylor Statten, *Talks to Counsellors: As Given to Counsellors at Camp Ahmek for Boys and Camp Wapomeo for Girls* (New York: Association Press, 1939): 31.

43 Hamilton, 34-38.

44 Camp Brochure Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

45 Hamilton, 68-71.

and meetings in the winter months.<sup>47</sup>

Second, camps encouraged girls to be physical and to develop their skills in various sport and recreational activities.<sup>48</sup> The emphasis on the advancement of abilities was an anomaly in the wider world of sport, where women were not only dissuaded from participation, but also proficiency.<sup>49</sup> At camp, however, girls were encouraged to participate and to excel in such activities as swimming, sailing, and canoeing. In her memories of Camp Inawendawin, Kim Russell Taylor recalls the introduction of the Master Canoeist course in 1950. The distinction, which was already an important component of the waterfront programmes at the Taylor Statten Camps, encouraged girls to expand their knowledge of canoeing and further their abilities as paddlers.<sup>50</sup> Similar programmes were developed in sailing. Off-site canoe trips also provided girls with opportunities to practice their newly acquired knowledge of canoeing and camp craft in earnest.<sup>51</sup>

The importance of canoe-tripping in camp-life and in the physical and social development of the participants cannot be overemphasized. In 1992, a call went out to alumni of Camp Inawendawin, a private girls' camp located in Algonquin Park, to provide memories of their time at camp in preparation for a reunion. While they recalled dining hall antics, crafts, swimming across the lake, the musical productions, flag raising and Sunday chapel, the unifying thread of their responses was canoe trips. Furthermore, the women consistently listed canoe trips as one of their top two memories.<sup>52</sup> How does one explain the allure of these wilderness adventures and what benefit, if any, they had for female participants? A general answer can be found in the writings of Alister Thomas, who has authored a number of books on paddling and camping. Thomas observed that 'canoeing as self-propelled travel' is by its very nature 'self-powering and empowering'.<sup>53</sup> Environmental lawyer Jamie Benidickson offers further insight into the attraction and rewards of canoeing in a paper on women and wilderness. He suggests that canoe-tripping was beneficial for women because of the collective experience, the environmental connection, and the potential for achievement.<sup>54</sup> There was a degree of intimacy on canoe-trips between the participants and with nature, which Benidickson alludes to, that could not be recreated in the residential setting. Furthermore, canoe-trips offered a degree of freedom not available while on-site. The nature of recreational canoeing and canoe-tripping, as activities that take place outside of the restrictive bounds of an institution, ensures a 'relaxation of norms, and opportunities to depart from traditional

expectations'.<sup>55</sup> While on-trip the schedule of the day is dictated by, amongst other things, the distance to be travelled and the weather, rather than an established schedule. Also, there is less emphasis placed on proper behaviour and dress, as is evidenced by Inawendawin camper Margot Findlay Maedel's recollection of a canoe-trip in the summer of 1941:

'One year my parents came to visit with friends...I was away on a canoe trip. After a meal with Mrs. Anderson, probably breakfast at noon, they left and stopped in at Dorset. They were greeted by a group of scrubby bedraggled campers coming home from canoe trip on Lake of Bays. I was one of the campers. My mother was rather embarrassed by the whole situation as these friends had no children and seemed non-plussed by the whole situation.'<sup>56</sup>

Yet, while canoe-trips offered girls opportunities to participate in a non-traditional activity, exhibit more relaxed behaviour, and challenge themselves physically and mentally, they also reinforced contemporary stereotypes about women's physical abilities and strength. The portage is perhaps the best example of the paradoxical nature of canoe-tripping during this period. Portages, which involve the movement of the equipment and food from one body of water to the next over a land-based trail, are inherently challenging.<sup>57</sup> For participants who successfully complete a portage, they are generally rewarded with a sense of achievement. For example, one Inawendawin alumnus recalled the satisfaction of carrying her own canoe and food-pack over a long portage, while a Tanamakoon camper Mary Williamson wrote home that, 'The trip was super. We carried 30 lb. packs on hilly portages.'<sup>58</sup> During the period in question, however, the vast majority of girls' camps hired male guides to take responsibility for the carrying of canoes and heavy packs. The female participants, on the other hand, were expected to carry light packs or paddles.<sup>59</sup> By denying the girls and their counsellors the opportunity to fully participate in the experience, it not only diminished the potential for achievement, but also reinforced women's 'dis-abilities'.

In the 1940s, staff and campers from Inawendawin petitioned the camp director, "Mrs. A", for permission to canoe-trip without male guides. While the success of their appeal was in part due to the shortage of available guides in the park during those years, it was also a reflection of the manner in which girls were incorporated as participants in the development of the camp. Furthermore, it demonstrates the desire on the part of the girls to have a more involved role in canoe-tripping. As a result of this decision, Inawendawin became the first girls' camp in Algonquin Park to trip without male guides.<sup>60</sup> While such major alterations were rare in the 1940s, during the sixties and seventies, girls' camping underwent radical changes, which reflected more subtle shifts in philosophy and practice between 1920-1960.<sup>61</sup>

While this article has focused almost exclusively on the experiences of female participants, women's involvement in camping was not limited to their role as campers. On the contrary,

<sup>55</sup> "Ibid.", 93.

<sup>56</sup> Memoir of Margot Findlay Maedel, Camp Inawendawin Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

<sup>57</sup> Benidickson, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Correspondence, Mary Williamson Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

<sup>59</sup> Stanley, 'More Than Just a Spare Rib', 59.

<sup>60</sup> Liz Russel Taylor's Memoirs, Camp Inawendawin Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

<sup>61</sup> Bruce Hodgins Interview, March 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>48</sup> Paris, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Benidickson, 82.

<sup>50</sup> Memoirs, Camp Inawendawin Fonds, Trent University Archives, Peterborough. Inawendawin was an all-girls' camp established in 1933 by Helena Anderson. Made a member of the OCA in 1956, it was closed in 1964.

<sup>51</sup> Meg Stanley, "More Than Just a Spare Rib But Not Quite a Whole Canoe: Some Aspects of Women's Canoe-Tripping Experiences, 1900-1940" in Bruce E. Hodgins and Bernadine Dodge (eds.) *Using Wilderness: Essays on the Evolution of Youth Camping in Ontario* (Peterborough: The Frost Centre for Canadian Heritage and Development Studies, 1992): 55.

<sup>52</sup> Memoirs, Camp Inawendawin Fonds. Trent University Archives, Peterborough.

<sup>53</sup> Alister Thomas, "Paddling Voices: There's the Poet, Voyager, Adventurer and Explorer in All of Us" in John Jennings, Bruce W. Hodgins, Doreen Small (eds.) *The Canoe in Canadian Cultures* (Winnipeg: Natural Heritage Books, 1999): 176.

<sup>54</sup> Benidickson, 88.

most private girls' camps were founded by women. As Lathrop notes, these women were pioneers at a time when 'it was unusual for single women to run a business', let alone establish and oversee a camp.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, women were involved in all aspects of camp life as counsellors, support staff and administrators. Women also played a significant role in the broader world of camping. They were key players in the founding and development of the Ontario Camping Association (OCA) in 1933. In fact, four of the seven original members of the OCA were women (Ethel Statten, Mary S. Edgar, Mary Hamilton and Fern Halliday), and the second president, appointed in 1940, was Mary S. Edgar, founding Director of Glen Bernard.<sup>62</sup> Women were also instrumental in shaping the nature of camping during this period.<sup>63</sup> For example, Mary Hamilton was responsible for the introducing the idea of formal counsellor training, while Dr. Mary L. Northway made a number of academic and scientific contributions to the social aspects of camping.<sup>64</sup>

As Charles Plewman's quotation at the beginning of this article illustrates, the out-of-doors was not seen as a place for 'young ladies' in the 1920s. Yet, in spite of social and philosophical opposition, Mary Hamilton and her contemporaries persevered and were successful in establishing the first private girls' camps in Ontario for Ontarians. In many respects, the camps that these pioneering women developed were a product of their time. By avoiding 'aggressive' sports and activities, hiring male guides on canoe-trips and dictating 'proper behaviour', they played to the pervasive gender stereotypes of the period. Yet, these private girls' camps also challenged contemporary notions of femininity, through the creation of physical and ideological spaces, which encouraged campers to participate in non-traditional sport and leisure activities and to develop related skills. As such, girls' camps represent an important development in the social history of Ontario.

This article is only a small piece of a broader narrative that remains largely untold. As a result, there are myriad possibilities for further inquiry. That said, there were two topics in particular that captured my interest in researching and writing this article that I think would make excellent future projects. The first topic is one that I drew attention to in the final paragraphs of this piece (albeit briefly). That is, the extraordinary women responsible for the establishment and development of these camps. We catch glimpses of them in the memoirs of former campers and in the opening pages of brochures, bidding parents to send their daughters for a summer. In the case of Mary Hamilton, we have an autobiography of the institution she founded. That said, little has been done to bring together this various fragments; to answer the questions that linger once has leafed through brochures or rifled through photographs. Questions related to their backgrounds, their motivations and ultimately, the journeys they undertook to bring their dreams to fruition. The second topic, the environment, sat at the periphery of this particular article, as it so often does. In retrospect, I wish I had been able to explore how perceptions of environment - natural and constructed, wild and tame - influenced the actions of the founders and directors and the experiences of

61 Lathrop, 146.

62 Ontario Camping Association, xiv-xv.

63 Originally, the purpose of OCA was to act as a forum for the discussion of various issues related to camping; however, it has evolved to become the governing body for Ontario camping.

64 Lathrop, 144-5; Interview with Bruce Hodgins, March 2006. Northway's publications include Appraisal of the Social Development of Children at a Summer Camp, Camp Counsellor's Book, Charting the Counsellor's Course and A Primer of Sociometry.

the campers. Then again, if I had, I would nothing to research for my forthcoming Master's project.

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