
Campgrounds by Sandra Jewett

As the tourism of the early 1900's burgeoned, bringing ever more visitors to our region, the *necessity* of locating near a waterway, so essential in our earliest times, was giving way to the *desire* to be there. As a natural progression, acquiring land on the lake for a seasonal second home came into vogue. Building proliferated, though a slower pace in Potton than on our opposite shore where the topography is more favourable.

William Bullock's *Beautiful Waters devoted to the Memphremagog region* (Volume One), published in 1926, provided interesting glimpses into that phenomenon in a chapter entitled 'Camp life and directory of owners of summer camps and estates'. The introduction to the chapter begins: *'From its infancy half a century ago, this mode of recreation has expanded its girth to encircle the Lake, the number of summer camps approximating 200 in 1926.'* He includes a listing of the names of proprietors along the entire lakeshore from Georgeville on the eastern shore to Knowlton's Landing on the western shore, including Newport, and those camps or estates on the islands of Memphremagog.

In Potton, thirty-seven properties of varying sizes, with camps, were arrayed from Perkins' Landing to the Mountain House. It is of interest to note that thirteen of these were owned by six local families among which the Boright (2), Oliver (2), Bailey (1), Willard (2) families from Mansonville, and the Perkins (6) family. The majority of other cottagers lived in the Northeastern United States: Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Vermont – a testament in itself to advertising and the mobility provided by steamers and railroad development.

Because of the nature of family summer camping, and the lack of campsites dedicated to the vacation camper, it is hard to determine when 'camping out' became popular as an autonomous family pastime. Certainly the development of a roads network throughout the region led to less dependence on the formality, schedule and itineraries imposed by rail and boat travel. Independent travel vacations rose in popularity and in frequency.

According to Bullock *"the pioneer in the 'camping out' idea among city people while visiting the lake was the Rev. Samuel J. Barrows, editor of the Christian Register, of New York, who began coming to the Lake during the summer of 1877... and continued to do so regularly for 10 years. In 1887 a book, The Shaybacks in Camp was published, humorously relating the Barrows' experiences about Lake Memphremagog."*

Bullock counts some five summer camps for children, noting only that of Col. F.B. Edwards, (boys camp), Northfield, Vt. in our Township, though he mentions others established on the other side of the Lake.

The question of how Colonel Edwards from Northfield, Vermont, or Ross Knox from Savannah, Georgia, or E.W. Hildreth from Melrose, Massachusetts, and others, came to learn of the charms of the Memphremagog region is indeed intriguing. But whatever prompted the interest, these people somehow discovered the region and eventually owned property here (in 1926)! In fact, descendants of several of the families indicated in Bullock's list have maintained ownership of lakeshore properties or visit the area annually.

Owl's Head Camp for Boys

What has been historically referred to simply as Col. F.B. Edwards' Camp, was actually called Owl's Head Camp for Boys. And until recently, few verifiable facts were known. It is the research of Potton resident Gisèle Bonin that allows us to flesh out the history of this, the first summer camp for boys established in this Township. It operated for over a decade from 1925.

It is known that Colonel Frank Burch Edwards (1875-1959) spent most of his active life in the Army and taught military tactics at Norwich University, also known as the Military College of Vermont. He is also known to have trained students in polo and fencing as well, and was considered accomplished in both. He was married, apparently well established in his career, and the father of adult children, when he decided to found a camp in the comparative wilderness of Owl's Head.

According to papers from the Perkins family, confirmed by land registry records of 1924, Colonel Edwards first rented a parcel of land at the foot of Owl's Head on Lake Memphremagog from W. C. Perkins. By 1929, Colonel Edwards and his partner, H.B. Salman, from St. Johnsbury, Vt, had completed the purchase and in fact, had expanded their holdings. Those records do not reveal the reason for the purchase, but actions quickly confirmed the intention to create a summer camp for boys. Edwards began construction of the buildings, and had possibly begun some primitive camping on his land, in 1925.

Advertisement appeared early in 1926 in *Redbook*, a popular American publication, and billed the Owl's Head Camp for boys from 10 to 18 years, as '*a camp that is different*'. As an expert polo player himself, it is unsurprising that Colonel Edwards emphasized horsemanship as a drawing card.

This is substantiated by the fact that Canada Excise duties were paid in July 1925 by Edwards to bring two Morgan horses into Canada from Northfield, Vt. These animals were evidently on loan from the polo team at Norwich. The ledgers of the Edwards' camp confirm the return not only of the horses to Vermont on August 27th, but also the total refund of the \$80 deposit paid earlier! This arrangement with the polo team seems to have continued for at least 2 years, after which the Camp rented horses annually from the Blackburn Horse Farm in Knowlton. Hay was bought from W.C. Perkins, and grain from Magog.

One can well imagine that the boys were responsible for the care and feeding of the horses and quite likely, for themselves! But surely not all was work and no play! In addition to learning responsibility and survival skills, the relaxation and fun of swimming, diving, and canoeing on Memphremagog must also have been part of the summer curriculum, to say nothing of the type of rustic activities likely to fascinate boys. It is said that overnight expeditions were popular with the campers.

Owl's Head Camp for Boys continued in existence until the end of the 1936 season, when Colonel Edwards, then approaching retirement, sold the facility to Nova Scotia born Miss Daisy L. Gass, 47, a B.A. graduate of Mount Allison University, a champion tennis player and an avid basketball player-coach, with teaching credentials that included Trafalgar School for Girls in Montreal, among others.

Miss Gass, who in 1936 was listed as "Director of Girls Camp of the City of Montreal", purchased the Owl's Head Camp for Boys. The name was changed to *Memphremagog Camp for Girls*; which is arguably the best known

and most fondly remembered of summer camps for children in Potton. *Memphremagog Camp for Girls* is still affectionately and simply called 'The Girls' Camp'



Dormitory for young campers

Lorraine Soden's Collection

It was operated by Miss Daisy L. Gass from the summer of 1937. It was a "*most fashionable girl's camp*", very well advertised in the American press: "*the camp director, Miss D. (Daisy) L. Gass is a Canadian University woman with a wide and varied association with girls in Boarding Schools and Clubs (...).*" This reputation, coupled with "*healthy farm food supplied daily*" and "*drinking water from Pawnee Rock Spring*" (...) drew young ladies from well-to-do families on both sides of the border; although it seems that most girls actually came from families in Montreal and Quebec City. It was not unusual for girls to return year after year to the Girls' Camp, which operated until 1960.

For a time at the beginning, the Girls' Camp offered some equestrian training. It is said that Colonel Edwards 'helped with the horses during the first summer' as a girls' camp.

This indicates that Colonel Edwards may have retained his own cottage perched high on the rocky shore.

From pictures on file, it seems the camp capacity was over 50, and that the girls

attended camp for the summer season. Their belongings were sent ahead in trunks, by train, to Highwater the week before the girls were scheduled to arrive. Generally, the girls also arrived by train at Highwater, although some parents delivered their daughters to the camp personally. All the girls were expected to write to their parents on Sunday afternoons. Church service took place each Sunday, predominately for members of the United Church. However, over time, as the language and religious mix of the summer campers reflected the demographics of Quebec, young French speaking Catholic ladies were driven to Sunday mass at St-Benoit-du-Lac. Later, Miss Gass arranged with the Abbey for a priest to be sent to the Camp to conduct Sunday mass in the gathering hall.

Meals were prepared by staff, and served in a mess hall, where the tables were properly laid, and the girls were seated. Manners mattered! Once a week, the young ladies were permitted



Girl's Camp, circa 1950

Lorraine Soden's Collection



Girl's Camp, circa 1950
Lorraine Soden's Collection

to walk to the nearby store in Vale Perkins, to buy special treats with their allowance.

We are told that the youngest (6 year) and intermediate girls were housed in small cabins, each cabin having a distinct identifying name.

The most senior campers lived in tents installed on platforms. Some of the original girls' camp buildings exist, including Miss Gass' private cabin and dormitory cabins, the library, the infirmary, as well as some storage sheds. The largest of these is located to the side of the Marina parking, and served as a common room for gatherings as well as for arts and crafts.

The camp included on site nursing staff. Cooking, laundry and maintenance personnel were hired from the local community. Ed Coté and his son, Andrew Coté, of Vale Perkins, were both employed at the Camp.

Before 1949, there was no electrical service along the lakeshore, thus necessitating the regular delivery of milk and supplies to the camp. Generally these essentials were shipped in by train from Montreal to Highwater Station, since it was unlikely that any of the area's grocers were able to supply or store the

quantities needed by the camp on a daily basis.

In 1959, after two decades and more, it appears that Miss Gass began winding up the affairs of the camp. She was 70 years at the time. On September 3, 1960, Daisy Lillian Gass sold the assets of her precious girls' camp to the United Church of Canada, who had registered the name of Upward Trail Camp. A new chapter had begun in the history of the region.

Miss Gass – or Kolah, as she was fondly called by her many campers, died at the age of 77, in February 1966, and was buried with her parents in the place of her birth, Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia.

The road name of Chemin Girls' Camp memorializes this very popular camp for young ladies and certainly allows it to live in the fond memory of many who enjoyed their youthful experiences and came to treasure the lifelong bonds created at the Memphremagog Camp for Girls. In fact, some of the former campers also returned to the area to build or buy homes in the area.



Girl's Camp, circa 1950
Lorraine Soden's Collection

Upward Trail Camp

For most of its short existence, Upward Trail Camp, under the direction of Bill Osterman, catered exclusively to boys, from 9 to 15 years of age, and specialized in Christian leadership. For a short period, girls were also welcomed at the Upward Trail. Little research has been done on the subject of Upward Trail Camps to date and few statistics are known. This camp closed in 1968.

In 1971, the land and former camp buildings on the lake, source of fond memories for so many over generations, were sold to Fred Korman, owner of Owl's Head Development. The location was ideal for eventual use as a private marina, exclusive to Owl's Head owners.

As the roads network throughout the Townships improved, the notion of more modest and less organized family vacations also took root. Camping became popular and Campgrounds proliferated. Lake Memphremagog in Potton knew the birth of two very popular registered campgrounds.

It should be noted that Church and civic groups, such as Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and Universities organized wilderness camping expeditions for small numbers of their members. These were generally under private arrangement with a land owner and were primarily short-term or weekend expeditions.

One such arrangement led to the development in South Bolton, our neighbour to the north, of Baturyn, a summer camp founded by members of the Ukrainian community, which has persisted for a number of years.

Mount Owl's Head Campground – located on Chemin Carlton Oliver

The first of these was the Owl's Head Campground, which was developed on lake front property purchased in the early 1900's by William Oliver of Mansonville, and later devolved to his brother Carlton Oliver, and sister, Mattie, from Mansonville. Their parents, William and Mary Ann, were merchants and operated a general store there from the late 1860's, where the *EuroDeli* is located.

William and Carlton Oliver both, were elected as Liberal members of the Legislative Assembly of Quebec from Brome County. William R. sat as MLA from 1917 until his untimely death in the typhoid epidemic in Mansonville in 1923. His brother, Carlton J., fulfilled the remainder of his brother's elected term, then sought election and held the seat from 1923 until his death in 1931.

The property on which the Owl's Head Campground was eventually established, extended from Chemin du Lac to the lakeshore itself and included an ideal beach front. The original holding was acquired in 1911 from one Alexander MacFarlane, about whom little is known. He may have been a resident of Knowlton's Landing. William Oliver likely commissioned a summer residence to be built shortly after he purchased. Access to the property, located at the bottom of a steep escarpment, was by means of a foot path, or by boat!

From 1911 until 1962, this prime land stayed in the Oliver family through a succession of heirs, including C.J. Oliver's widow, Bessie Tolhurst, who later remarried to Harold Sullivan of Mansonville, a lumber dealer and mill operator.

In 1962 however, the Oliver family sold this prime property to Harry Hay and Rudy Palme, who thought to convert the property to a campground – and managed to do so on a modest basis. Initial site preparations were arduous and incremental due to the steep topography. The pair acquired additional acreage from Ivan Telishewski, who had established a popular residential settlement called *Vorokhta* nearby, popularly known as the Ukrainian village.



Oliver summer home, circa 1918
APPHA Archives

In 1973, after acquiring half interest from Mr. Palme, John and Thérèse Lutzmann opened the Campground to a wider public. Eventually the Lutzmanns became full owners, and operated Owl's Head Campground very successfully for a number of years, until Mrs. Lutzmann's death.

This historic property was later acquired by a developer. The vocation as a campground accessible to the public at large was extinguished, in favour of its development of a three-season residential domain not open to the general public.

Camping Château Ruisseau – Chemin Chateau Landing

For several years, the family of Albert and Irene Korman operated a very popular seasonal campground on the shores of Lake Memphremagog – near the site of the historic Chateau da Silva or Revere Hotel. The campers were loyal and formed a closely knit little community, returning year after year. However, as the requirement for stringent shoreline protection became a prohibitive expense for a seasonal business, this campground was absorbed by the same proprietor-developer as the Owl's Head Campground and the property is now a private three season residential complex – the beach accessible by invitation or to property owners only.

With property values increasing steadily on lakeshore properties, the enforcement of stringent shoreline protections and so on, seasonal camping sites on Lake Memphremagog now are no longer profitable ventures due to comparatively short seasons. However Potton still boasts two sites, both located on the bucolic, serpentine, and often temperamental Missisquoi River.

Haven Isles Camping, or *Le Camping Havre des îles*, is situated on 80 acres of typically beautiful property at the foot of Peavey Mountain on the Missisquoi River, at the northern extremity of Potton. In fact, most of the campground is situated in Bolton-Est. It has existed for decades. Here, the campsites are particularly well spaced, well-established and open, yet each offers a certain quiet privacy. Surrounded by forested and mountainous territory, Havre des îles is true to its namesake, and boasts small islands in the Missisquoi, a lake, the River itself fed by smaller brooks, rapids and falls – there is something for everyone!

At the very southern extremity of Potton, and also on the Missisquoi River, is the Campground formerly known as the *Carrefour des Campeurs*, and now as *La Station O'kataventures*, owned and operated by the Fordham family. This facility offers 150 camping sites on 180 acres bordering the Missisquoi on route de la Vallée Missisquoi, before Dunkin. It offers simplicity and adventure, specializing in river kayaking, fishing, and hiking.

Just outside our borders to the southwest, the newest trend in leisure, called 'glamping', is beginning. Glamour camping! Upscale, innovative, yet with amenities included and in most cases, discreetly provided, – this type of experience is definitely gaining a foothold in the territory.

Sources :

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- Website *Camping Havre des îles*.
- Website *O'kataventure*.
- Website *'The Shaybacks in Camp'* was published, humorously relating the Barrows' experiences about Lake Memphremagog. <https://archive.org/details/shaybacksincamp00barrgoog>.



Tent – Colonel Edwards' Camp for boys
APPHA Archives