

An Experience That Lasts a Lifetime:
Building Modernity, Man, and Nation at the YMCA of Montreal's Kamp Kanawana, 1894-1967

Grace McMorris

A Thesis
in the
Department Of History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts (History)
at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2023

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

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By: **Grace McMorris**

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Elena Razlogova

_____ Examiner
Dr. Gavin Taylor

_____ Examiner
Dr. Theresa Ventura

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Peter Gossage

Approved by: _____ Graduate Program Director
Dr. Andrew Ivaska

_____ Dean of Faculty of Arts and Science
Dr. Pascale Sicotte

Abstract

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With their stunning lakefront views and pristine forest trails, summer camps have been a hallmark of a Canadian summer since their inception in the 1890s. Established out of anti-modernist and anti-urbanist sentiments among the upper-middle class, summer camps have been cemented as an important rite of passage for Canadian youth. They are also integral in the construction of national and masculine identities. This thesis takes one of the oldest summer camps in Canada and considers how the overlapping currents of religion, colonialism, and national identity practice took shape at the YMCA of Montreal's Kamp Kanawana. Located an hour north of Montreal, Kanawana has operated since the 1890s and thousands of young children have passed through its gates. From 1894 to 1967, Kanawana was open only to boys and through its varied programming, helped form distinctly masculine and Canadian young men. This thesis is divided in three thematic chapters that each look at an important phase of Kanawana programming: active Christian citizenship, playing *Indian*, and the myth of the voyageur. Drawing from archival research and personal experiences at a different YMCA camp, this thesis explores the legacy of summer camps like Kanawana in the Canadian imagination.

Acknowledgements

I would have never gone down this road if I didn't have such fond memories of Camp Stephens. To those I met on an island through the treetops - thank you.

I received an incredible amount of support within the History department during my time at Concordia. Firstly, thank you to the donors of the Keith Lowther Award and Concordia University for their financial support. I also want to thank Janet Lewis and her father for introducing me to Kanawana in the first place and showing me the original campsite, as well as a new appreciation for IPAs. To the other members of my cohort – thank you for the camaraderie required to make it through graduate school. Santé!

I must thank Olivier Bisailon-Lemay for all his help and patience at the Concordia Archives. My seminar with Dr. Max Bergholz gave me the language and tools I needed to approach the topic of nationalism, and for that I am grateful. I want to thank Dr. Gavin Taylor and Dr. Theresa Ventura for their insightful questions and valuable conversation at my defense. Finally, a heartfelt thank you to my supervisor Dr. Peter Gossage for his thoughtful guidance and encouragement throughout this process. He was incredibly understanding and supportive as I scheduled around various world tours, and it meant a lot to me.

I owe so much of my love of the outdoors and canoeing to the women of Serendipity 2014. Thank you for showing me what sisterhood looks like and the strength of women in the wild. Sydney Smith, thank you for all the extra Nutella we got on trail, and everything since. Camille Lamont, thank you for helping make Montreal feel like home.

To my dear friends Morgan McCurdy, AJ Hancock, Olivia Sims, Megan Simpson, Bronwyn Butterfield, and Braydn Matheson, thank you for all the incredible memories and

conversations over the years that inadvertently led me here. To know each one of you is a gift. Thank you for your kindness, and thank you for the day.

To Mia Kirbyson and Owen Black, thank you for grounding me with friendship in the truest sense of the word and keeping me on track over the past two years. I love you both and I can't wait to see where we go next.

I wouldn't have gotten very far without the support of my family. Thank you to my brothers Rory, Dylan, and Adrian for reading multiple versions and early drafts, for their witty commentary, and for reminding me that I'm the biggest nerd of all. To Ally, thank you for always cheering me on.

I am so fortunate that my parents Penny and Ivan sent me off to Stephens at eight years old, and then did it again every year afterwards. They have encouraged me each step of the way, and I am so grateful. Mom, thank you for answering every phone call, for your kindness, and your overwhelming patience. Dad, you're the one who drove me to camp, made me go on a canoe trip, and nudged me towards grad school. I would never have done this without you two. Thank you both for your unwavering support in all things.

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Abbreviations

CCA: Canadian Camping Association

CCC: Canadian Centennial Commission

CURMA: Concordia University Records Management and Archives

YMCA *or* Y: Young Men's Christian Association

YWCA: Young Women's Christian Association

Introduction

—
*May your paddle always pull water
May you never feel strong winds
May your footsteps never falter
Return safely to your friends.¹*
—

I heard and recited this poem countless times as a camper and staff member at YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg's Camp Stephens. It is part of the farewell ceremony performed at the beginning of every session as the wilderness canoe trips prepare to leave on their trips. This poem is like a blessing bestowed on campers about to venture off in to the wilderness, some for their very first time. As a camper, it felt like a rite of passage, to kneel with your paddle over your shoulder while the rest of camp bid you farewell. This poem marked the beginning of a new chapter.

For over a century, summer camps have been a hallmark of a Canadian summer. With their stunning lakefront views and pristine forest trails, camps were and continue to be a staple in many family's summer plans since their inception in the 1890s. There are hundreds of camps across the country that offer youth the opportunity to escape the city and their families for new experiences. Campers can learn how to properly paddle a canoe, set up a tent, and make new friends in a new environment. Thousands of Canadian children attend summer camps every year, yet there is relatively little historical scholarship on these camps, their practices, and their legacies. Some of Canada's most powerful leaders attended summer camp, like the late Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau and his son, Justin Trudeau, who both attended the private Camp Ahmek in Ontario. Summer camps help introduce youth to the outdoors and these early experiences can shape their approach to the wilderness later on in life. Camps are celebrated for encouraging youth to learn new skills and get outside their comfort zones, all against the

¹ Camp Stephens Wilderness Canoe Trip Farewell Poem, YMCA of Winnipeg Camp Stephens, "Camp Stephens Administrative Practices Manual," (2019), 23.

backdrop of stunning wilderness landscapes. Indeed, it is those very landscapes that make many of those transformations possible. Summer camps also shape and construct ideas about nationhood and gender in many ways that have yet to be fully explored.

This thesis uses one of the oldest summer camps in Canada, the Montreal YMCA's Kamp Kanawana, as a microcosm of the wider camp movement in Canada to consider how YMCA summer camps have influenced or directly shaped the construction of a masculine Canadian identity. I will argue that Kanawana's programs and activities advanced the settler-colonial project and affirmed those values in the hundreds of campers who attended each summer. Kanawana was committed to building Christian character in campers, as well as normalizing racist ideas about Indigenous people in order to support their continued oppression. In doing so, Kanawana celebrated a white, masculine history of Canada and passed these ideas on to future leaders of the camp and the country. I also suggest that Kanawana and summer camps in general have contributed to an image of Canada that celebrates our nordicity and hardiness through their use of the memory and myth of the *voyageur*.

Summer camps seem to be a very North American phenomenon, at least in terms of what we would recognize as a summer camp. I think this is largely due to the sheer size of Canada and the United States, as well as the relationships between summer camp, wilderness experiences, and nation-building. Camps were developed out of anti-modern sentiment that swept across Canada in the late-nineteenth century as industrialization and urbanization dramatically changed the lives of middle-class citizens. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA or Y) was an early leader in camp development in Canada, with the Halifax Y opening Camp Big Cove in 1889.² The YMCA of Winnipeg quickly followed, opening Camp Stephens in 1891 and then the

² "Big Cove YMCA Camp – YMCA of Greater Halifax and Dartmouth," accessed June 13, 2023, <https://ymcahfx.ca/bigcove/>.

Montreal Y camp in 1894. The Montreal camp, known as Kamp Kanawana since 1910, is the primary research focus of this thesis, in which I will explore the overlapping constructions of masculine and national identities at summer camp.

I am a product of a summer camp. For ten years, I was a camper at the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg's Camp Stephens and later a staff member for four years. I started at Stephens in 2005 as a junior camper and made my way through the resident camp program into the wilderness canoe tripping program in the 2010s.³ I worked as a counsellor, program staff, and section co-ordinator until my final year in 2018. In my time at Stephens, I paddled across Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario to experience some of the many different landscapes Canada has to offer. I helped campers learn how to sail, rock climb, and go down a zip line. I have worn outrageous costumes for camp-wide activities and sat around countless bonfires with friends and campers alike telling stories and singing old camp songs. This thesis is in some ways an homage to my foundational experiences at Stephens, as I aim to investigate the complicated and oft-forgotten history of summer camps in Canada. My own experiences at camp have shaped my understandings and attitudes towards the outdoors as well as my sense of self within a wider Canadian identity. Moreover, my time at Stephens has guided my research for this project. Throughout this thesis, I draw a number of comparisons to my own experiences in the 2000s and 2010s in attempts to demonstrate the continuity of Y camps over time and place. This has been an exercise in discovering my own biases and prejudices as well as critically examining some of my fondest memories.

³ The resident camp program was two weeks in the camp with a two- or three-day canoe trip. As a wilderness camper (2010-2014), I went on two-, three-, four-, and six-week canoe trips.

Methodology and a Note on Language

Summer camps are rooted in the belief that wilderness has a curative and restorative power.

William Cronon suggests that this idea, along with all concepts of nature, was a human construction.⁴ According to Cronon, there is nothing natural about wilderness. In order for a space to be seen as wild, it must be marked as separate from civilization. In the Western imagination, ‘pure’ wilderness is that which is untouched and unchanged by humans. This ignores generations of Indigenous movement across Turtle Island, the violent methods of removing them, as well as the contradictory nature of constructing wilderness. In order to access these ‘pristine’ places, trees must be felled, roads must be paved, and signs must be posted. These are the spaces in which summer camps are built.

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, wilderness was thought of as an antidote or alternative to the modern and industrial city. The issues plaguing the middle class in the city, like pollution or falling rates of religious observance, could be resolved in the bush. Cronon calls this “bourgeois antimodernism,” in which the population that most benefited from industrialism and modernity, sought to escape from it.⁵ These are the same people who sent their sons to summer camp, concerned about the trouble their children might find in the city, the idea being that their sons would come back better than they left.

Just as wilderness is constructed, so too are national identities. In Canada, these constructions are closely linked, as demonstrated by Bruce Erickson in *Canoe Nation* and *Politics of the Canoe*.⁶ In his work, Erickson argues that the canoe has become a quintessentially

⁴ William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, 1st ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 25.

⁵ Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 78.

⁶ Bruce Erickson, *Canoe Nation: Nature, Race, and the Making of a Canadian Icon* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); Bruce Erickson and Sarah Wylie Krotz, eds., *The Politics of the Canoe* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021).

Canadian object and icon, and that in this process, Indigenous history has been removed from the canoe. Erickson suggests that our very use and enjoyment of the canoe is rooted in colonialism. I contend that the canoe is virtually synonymous with summer camps.⁷ The boat is emblematic of the entire concept of summer camps and a Canadian summer. For many Canadians, their introduction to the canoe happens at summer camp, yet the camp is significantly under researched in comparison to the role of the canoe in the construction of Canadian identity and imagination. Summer camps would not exist without canoes, and so summer camps would not exist without colonization.

Summer camps also actively advanced the settler-colonial project, and here I draw directly from Erickson's third chapter "Regimes of Whiteness" and his use of the word "Indian."⁸ Erickson uses the term "Indian" when he refers "to the white fantasy of indigenous people," but uses 'First Nations,' 'Indigenous,' and 'Aboriginal' when he refers to actual people.⁹ I have adopted this approach because the "Indian lore" used at summer camps was not rooted in historical accuracy and I think that to use the words "Indigenous" or "First Nations" in reference to the offensive and racist practices of summer camp history is a disservice to Indigenous peoples. The word will appear in italics as a regular reminder that it is not used lightly, as it has long been used as a colonial tool of oppression, discrimination, and dispossession against Indigenous people for over a century, particularly through (but not limited to) the Indian Act. It will not be italicized when part of a direct quote or title. This is particularly important in the second chapter of this thesis which looks at the history of *Indian* lore and

⁷ There is also considerably more scholarly literature on the canoe than camps, and by comparing or equating one with the other, I am better able to draw from canoe scholarship. Moreover, most summer camps rely heavily on canoeing and canoe trips for their programs.

⁸ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 120.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 208n1.

programming at Kanawana. This is the best way I have found to sufficiently demonstrate the disparity between real Indigenous people, who are complex, varied human beings and the one-dimensional, white fantasy caricature of the *Indian* used at camp. So, as I approach the history of summer camps, I consider how Cronon's constructions of wilderness overlapped with Erickson and others' ideas about the construction of Canadian identity.

Sources

This work is based on archival research performed at Concordia University Records Management and Archives (CURMA) from Fall 2021 to Spring 2023. Concordia's YMCA of Montreal fonds covers the history of the association since it was founded in 1851. Concordia University was established in 1974 with the merger of Loyola College and Sir George Williams University, formerly a YMCA College. The university's downtown campus now bears the name 'Sir George Williams,' after the founder of the YMCA. There are approximately 125 metres of textual records, along with photos, videos, blueprints, and other media devoted to the YMCA.¹⁰ I used camp seasonal reports, general administration documents, programming, committee reports as well as the YMCA's annual general reports to support my thesis. I looked through over ten boxes in the archives as well as documents scanned online. There is a wealth of information contained in the YMCA of Montreal fonds, and my research only barely scratched the surface. The bulk of these documents were collected by two Y employees while they wrote their association histories in the late 1940s, Murray Ross and Harold C. Cross, whose books were also

¹⁰ Concordia University Records Management and Archives, "Fonds P1045 - YMCA of Montreal Fonds," accessed June 14, 2023, <https://concordia.accesstomemory.org/ymca-of-montreal-fonds>.

used for this research.¹¹ As an institutional archive, there is an inherent bias in these documents, and in Ross and Cross' respective books. By closely reading the files and using secondary sources for comparison, these documents tell a remarkable story about the motivations and values of the Y, and how the association reacted in response to changes in society. However, the archives notably lack camper-created content, a problem found in many archives that omit or ignore children's experiences. While there are some instances of camper's voices, they are extremely limited. I have done my best to read section director daily logs and reports to learn as much as possible about the general behaviour of campers, but this thesis does mainly rely on the narratives recorded by camp directors and other staff.

Historiography

My thesis is situated at the intersection of several overlapping currents of historical writing. The history of summer camps is closely tied to ideas about wilderness, which in turn speak to legacies of colonialism and Canadian history. Throughout this thesis I try to draw out the similarities and put these different works in conversation with each other to demonstrate the many ways they can be found at summer camps.

Constructing Identities

Anthony D. Smith's work on nationalism studies is a strong foundation for understanding why and how certain ideas are more powerful than others when it comes to defining the elusive concept of 'Canadianness.' In *The Antiquity of Nations* and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Smith

¹¹ Harold C. Cross, *One Hundred Years of Service with Youth: The Story of the Montreal Y.M.C.A* (Montreal: Association Press, 1951); Murray G. Ross, *The Y.M.C.A in Canada: The Chronicle of a Century* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1951).

outlines the importance of myth and memory in creating nations and nationalisms.¹² According to Smith, nations rely on memories of a ‘golden age’ to create a collective sense of national identity. We see this in the creation of summer camps which offered an opportunity to relive a ‘simpler’ and better time. The golden era of Canadian history celebrated at summer camps was most often the fur trade era, with camps like Kanawana holding up the voyageur as an icon of Canadian masculinity. The version of voyageur history used at camp tends to ignore the differences between French and other voyageurs, choosing instead to embrace a vague image of a strong, white man paddling a canoe across the country.

Determining and creating iconic Canadian images, characters, and identities was a project first started in the nineteenth century. According to Carl Berger and Gillian Poulter, an idea of Canadian national identity was formed in the mid-nineteenth century by English-speaking, Protestant, middle-class men who wanted to distinguish Canada from Britain and the United States.¹³ Berger’s work *The Sense of Power* outlines a movement led by the Canada First group that sought what he calls an “imperial nationalism.”¹⁴ Largely led by men in Upper Canada, this push for Canadian identity was intended to give the colony a stronger voice in imperial affairs. The Canada First movement and imperial nationalism predated Confederation and argued that Canada should be considered equal to Britain when it came to issues of Empire. Canada was growing and developing a sense of self, which Poulter describes in detail in her book *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*.

¹² Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986); Anthony D. Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

¹³ Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970); Gillian Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture, and Identity in Montreal, 1840-85* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

¹⁴ Berger, *The Sense of Power*, 28.

Poulter shows how English-speaking men in Montreal founded sports clubs in the mid-nineteenth century, taking Indigenous sports and activities and “Canadianizing” them by adding new rules or standards and excluding Indigenous peoples from participating. She describes this process as indigenizing Canadians, or becoming “native Canadians,” as snowshoeing, tobogganing, and lacrosse came to represent Canadian settler identities and erased Indigenous participation.¹⁵ She notes however that these activities did not entirely lose their Indigenous foundations, because it was their very Indigenous nature that allowed them to be used as markers of Canadian identity. Poulter’s central argument is that Canadian identity was built on exploiting and appropriating Indigenous cultures in order to create a long history with which settlers could connect. They were, in effect, asserting themselves as the rightful owners of Indigenous, and therefore Canadian heritage.

This practice of asserting ownership over history and heritage is also discussed in H.V. Nelles’ *The Art of Nation-Building* which examines the celebrations of Quebec’s tercentenary in 1908.¹⁶ Nelles’ work is of use here because of his analysis of pageants and commemoration at the events. He suggests that commemoration is itself an act of self-invention, and I argue that summer camps regularly engaged in commemorative activities and programs.¹⁷ The pageants Nelles wrote about were elaborate, multi-day events with hundreds of people involved, and Kanawana’s pageants were much smaller in scale. However, I look to Nelles for his observations about the selective memory at work in historical pageantry, be it a re-enactment of the Plains of Abraham or a summer camp *Indian* tribal council. Pageantry also comes up again in the third and final chapter when I compare a national canoe pageant race and a Canadian Camping

¹⁵ Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*, 12.

¹⁶ H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

¹⁷ Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 12.

Association cross-country canoe trip, both of which drew links between summer camp and the founding of Canada.

The YMCA is not among the organizations and clubs studied by Poulter. She focuses her analysis instead on winter sports clubs that were built around a specific sport, unlike the YMCA, which was not committed to a singular activity and which in the nineteenth century was more concerned with its religious mission. However, the YMCA was heavily preoccupied with instructing boys and young men in how to be the right kind of Canadian man at the same time as those sports clubs. In my own research covering the years after Poulter's research, I have found that the YMCA, particularly through summer camp, functioned in a very similar way to Montreal sporting clubs. The YMCA believed it was much easier and more effective to train young boys in good habits than to train men out of them as adults. Similarly, it was much easier to encourage or instill a sense of patriotism and national identity in youth. The YMCA was committed to training boys and young men in Protestant values that were either identical or remarkably similar to those of the sports clubs - including discipline, moral virtue, and fair play.

Berger and Poulter both argue that Canadian nationalism predates Confederation, and the history of the YMCA aligns with that suggestion. The YMCA established its first branches in Canada well before Confederation and contributed to a sense of Canadian identity that took British ideals and changed them, slightly, to create a sense of independent spirit. The YMCA believed in producing well-rounded men, who were physically fit, intelligent, community-oriented, and devoted Christians. While the YMCA was not explicitly nationalistic, the association did appropriate Indigenous cultures and practices in a very similar way as Montreal sports clubs. This practice is foundational to the development of summer camps.

Summer Camp History

The study of summer camps in Canada is relatively uneven, as most works tend to focus on Ontario summer camps.¹⁸ In Sharon Wall's *The Nurture of Nature*, the author describes how Ontario summer camps were shaped by anti-modernist thought and new ideas on adolescence and childhood in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.¹⁹ As the nation was steadily modernizing, Canadians sought out antimodern forms of recreation, in order to “find meaning in modernity.”²⁰ Wall suggests that part of the reaction to modernity was a collective romanticization of nature and a reimagining of the outdoors as a remedy for the urban population.²¹ Summer camps tapped into a “glorification of the simple life and fascination with the primitive” that helped foster a “physically and mentally tough masculinity.”²² Although not restricted to certain Christian faiths, camps often encouraged independence, discipline, and morality – all traits typically associated with Protestantism. Paired with the rising concerns over modernity in religious circles, summer camps fit into the Protestant social order and were often seen as civilizing experiences for boys. Wall separates summer camps into three types: fresh air, agency, and private.²³ Fresh air camps were created for “the urban poor” who had limited opportunities to get out of the city.²⁴ Private camps were for-profit and mostly hosted children from wealthy Ontario families, usually from Toronto and the surrounding area.²⁵ If we imagine

¹⁸ Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Anne Elizabeth Warner, “‘To Grow in the Open Air and to Eat and Sleep with the Earth’: Cultivating Character at Private Ontario Youth Camps, 1920–1939” (Ph.D, The University of Western Ontario, 2010), accessed March 28, 2022, https://www.proquest.com/cv_580429/docview/868675180/abstract/8890173968134941PQ/3.

¹⁹ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 7.

²² Ibid., 14.

²³ Ibid., 68.

²⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁵ Ibid., 20.

camps on a spectrum of associated costs and exclusivity, agency camps existed somewhere between fresh air and private camps, and this is where YMCA camps can be located. Agency camps were run by non-profit organizations like the Y or a church and as Wall says, they were for a mostly middle-class clientele who were “not wealthy enough to afford fees at upscale private camps but not disadvantaged enough to be considered for the subsidized fresh air experience.”²⁶ Wall’s work occasionally mentions one YMCA camp, Toronto’s Camp Pine Crest, but largely focuses on the more expensive and elite private camps located near Muskoka and Temagami.

In Anne Elizabeth Warner’s 2010 dissertation “To Grow in the Open Air and to Eat and Sleep with the Earth,” the author compares five different Ontario summer camps during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁷ In this study, Warner considers the influence of summer camps as she draws connections from the exclusive and privately run camps to elite private schools in Toronto. Although she does not discuss YMCA camps, Warner does include a section on the development of YMCA training programs that influenced non-Y camps (specifically the Canadian Standard Efficiency Tests and Canadian Girls in Training) thus demonstrating the influence exerted by the Y on private camps and childhood training in general.²⁸ Warner, more so than Wall, considers the role of religion in moulding character at camp which supports an overarching element of my thesis, the importance of Protestant faith at Kanawana.

The history of Canadian summer camps outside of Ontario is limited and there does not seem to be much, if anything, on camping in Quebec. My thesis is only a small example of what can be written about summer camps in the province, let alone the country. Despite provincial or

²⁶ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 20.

²⁷ Warner, “To Grow in the Open Air,” 16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

regional differences, camps were remarkably similar across the country. The same could also be said about camps in the American northeast, as written about by Leslie Paris.²⁹ Paris suggests that summer camps were generally thought of as an “antidote to modern, industrial ills” that threatened youth in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.³⁰ This is especially true of agency camps like the YMCA. In general, summer camps are an important element of Canadian culture, particularly among the middle class. They offered youth the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors in an ordered and regulated way.

Camps often relied on the natural landscape around them, or sometimes manufactured landscape, in their programs and activities as described in Abigail van Slyck’s *A Manufactured Wilderness*.³¹ Van Slyck’s work provides wider context for how summer camps utilized architecture, buildings, and the landscape itself to create a desired atmosphere. This was most common with the use of Indigenous structures such as teepees and totem poles to suggest to campers that the camp itself pre-dated colonization.

The Canoe and Canadian Summer Camps

In his books *Canoe Nation* and *The Politics of the Canoe*, Bruce Erickson describes the romantic and nostalgic narratives of Canadian wilderness and their function at summer camps, as does Liz Newbery in her article, “Canoe Pedagogy and Colonial History.”³² There is a considerable amount of scholarship available on the symbolic value of the canoe in Canadian national identity

²⁹ Leslie Paris, “The Adventures of Peanut and Bo: Summer Camps and Early-Twentieth-Century American Girlhood,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12, no. 4 (2001): 47–76.

³⁰ Paris, “The Adventures of Peanut,” 48.

³¹ Abigail A. Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

³² Erickson, *Canoe Nation*; Erickson and Wylie Krotz, *The Politics of the Canoe*; Liz Newbery, “Canoe Pedagogy and Colonial History: Exploring Contested Spaces of Outdoor Environmental Education,” *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* 17 (2012): 30–45.

and myths. I place this kind of literature in conversation with broader nationalist scholarship like Smith's work discussed earlier. In *The Politics of the Canoe*, Bruce Erickson and Sarah Wylie Krotz describe the canoe as a "vehicle of history" that is often used to connect contemporary Canadians to voyageur and pre-contact Indigenous histories.³³ In doing so however, the canoe also erases much of the reality of the colonial past. Erickson explains that the canoe took on a legacy as a "national vehicle" when canoeing became a popular leisure activity in the late-nineteenth century, and in doing so connected paddlers to the country's emerging nationalism.³⁴ Newbery observes that "both wilderness and the canoe are coded as symbols of the nation" and that "Canada, the canoe, and wilderness are... constituted or reconstituted through colonial experience – a dynamic that is rarely recognized in outdoor education."³⁵ The history of Indigenous communities using canoes for trade, sustenance, and travel became irrelevant as the boat became synonymous with *white* Canadian leisure activities.

In her essay in *The Politics of the Canoe*, Danielle Gendron considers how her family history is intertwined with the history of the canoe and inserts herself in to her research.³⁶ Gendron is Métis and one of her ancestors was a middleman for the Hudson Bay Company who paddled across the prairies and Canadian shield before settling in the Trent-Severn waterway region. Gendron makes a number of observations on the symbolism of the canoe, and I appreciate how she writes about the role of her personal attachment to her research. I gravitated toward the topics of summer camps, Indigenous exploitation and erasure, and national identity because of my own experience at a Y camp. Gendron urges us to consider how our contemporary

³³ Erickson and Wylie Krotz, *The Politics of the Canoe*, 18.

³⁴ Erickson and Wylie Krotz, *The Politics of the Canoe*, 5.

³⁵ Newbery, "Canoe Pedagogy and Colonial History," 31.

³⁶ Danielle Gendron, "Unpacking and Repacking the Canoe: Canoe as Research Vessel.," in *The Politics of the Canoe*, ed. Bruce Erickson and Sarah Wylie Krotz (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021), 215–40.

use of canoes and waterways has been shaped by and continue to uphold settler-colonial legacies.

The YMCA

There is relatively little scholarly work on the YMCA camping program in North America. Y camps are usually included in overviews of summer camps, however there is no significant body of work that looks at them specifically. There are a few association publications that provide general histories of the YMCA in Canada and Montreal. Books like Harold Cross' *One Hundred Years of Service with Youth* and Sherwood Eddy's *A Century with Youth* provide an overview of the association as it developed in Canada and the United States.³⁷ Cross' book is an account of the first century of the Montreal YMCA whereas Eddy's is a broader North American history. Their books offer insight into the Y's motivations and interests; however, they are heavily biased as they were published in-house and in honour of certain milestones such as the hundredth anniversary of the Montreal Y in 1959. Cross was asked by the YMCA to write an association history after many years of working for the Y. His name appears frequently in the archives as he was camp director at Kanawana in the 1920s.

Organization

This thesis covers a period of 73 years, bookended by the opening of the Montreal YMCA's summer camp in 1894 and the Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip in 1967, shortly before Kanawana invited girls to attend camp with boys. The text is divided into three main chapters, organized along broadly thematic lines. The first chapter is a general history of Kanawana that

³⁷ Cross, *One Hundred Years*; Sherwood Eddy, *A Century with Youth: A History of the Y.M.C.A. from 1844 to 1944* (New York: Association Press, 1944).

focuses on the use and promotion of active citizenship training and religious character building during the twentieth century. This chapter relies heavily on YMCA annual reports and Kanawana section directors' reports or daily logs, as well as secondary literature on religion in Canada. Chapter two examines the role of the *Indian* at Kanawana and how this changed from the 1920s and 1930s to the 1950s. The phenomenon of "playing Indian" has been studied extensively by scholars like Gillian Poulter, Abigail van Slyck, and Sharon Wall and their respective works are featured prominently in this section.³⁸ For the third chapter, I draw from Carolyn Podruchny, Bruce Erickson, and Misao Dean as I explore the myth of the voyageur at Kanawana and in wider Canadian society through the lens of two canoe trips that celebrated the hundredth anniversary of Confederation in 1967.³⁹

The YMCA was an early leader in boys summer camps. While there were some camps created for girls and young women, the YMCA started as an all-male organization and their camps only began to accept girls in the 1960s. As I consider the first seven decades of Kanawana, the thesis explores the masculine environment of summer camp and therefore a masculine Canadian identity. However, that does not mean that women are an afterthought, or are ignored by my work. Rather, I am exploring a distinctly masculine iteration of a national identity, or a national identity that is predicated on ideas of masculinity and manliness. A study of co-ed camps, or even of Kanawana's co-ed programming, is beyond the scope of my research since I am focusing on the kinds of masculine ideals that were being promoted by Kanawana, and how they related to ideas about Canada.

³⁸ Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*; Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*; Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*.

³⁹ Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade, France Overseas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Misao Dean, *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle: The Canoe in Discourses of English-Canadian Nationalism*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Erickson, *Canoe Nation*.

Building a Movement: The YMCA From London to the Laurentians

The YMCA was formed in London, England in 1844 by a small group of Evangelical Christian tradesmen who were concerned about the lack of support for young men in the city. The association subscribed to the popular belief that spreading Christianity was the best solution to problems caused by the city's growing population.⁴⁰ Waves of industrialization and urbanization had brought more and more people into the city, along with more temptations to stray from a Christian path. Led by George Williams, the YMCA became a popular organization for young men who were committed to a Christian lifestyle. The YMCA and similar organizations offered constructive and supervised alternatives to the "moral perils that surrounded" the city's young men.⁴¹ The Y was created with a "two-fold emphasis: (1) saving souls [and] (2) concern for fellow-men as sons of God."⁴² The association quickly grew in popularity and spread to North America within a decade.

The first YMCA in North America was founded in Montreal in November 1851.⁴³ Despite being in French Catholic Quebec, the Montreal YMCA remained true to its roots and was made up of English-speaking Protestants. The original constitution stated that the association adopted the "fundamental principles of Evangelical Christianity on which all Orthodox Churches are agree[d]," and promised to leave all "matters of faith...on which such churches differ" out of the organization, allowing for a mix of Christian faiths.⁴⁴ The early members were all young men under thirty years old, and they recognized the importance of

⁴⁰ Eddy, *A Century with Youth*, 8.

⁴¹ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 21.

⁴² Notes on the History and Philosophy of the YMCA 1949, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Histories, P145/01B, History and Philosophy, Concordia University Records Management and Archives (CURMA).

⁴³ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 22. The first American YMCA was established in Boston in December 1851.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

“mutual support and encouragement” in order to live a Christian life, and helped newcomers to the city adjust to urban living.⁴⁵ The YMCA was committed to “overcome the male indifference to religion” by creating programs designed to keep young men active, both physically and spiritually.⁴⁶

The “male indifference to religion” was considered a threat by many Christians as it was generally felt that the Church was an increasingly feminine space that discouraged young men and boys’ involvement.⁴⁷ The YMCA was part of an attempt to reinject masculinity into Christianity, largely accomplished through a re-imagining of Jesus Christ that some scholars have labelled ‘muscular Christianity.’ In his 1995 dissertation, Clifford Wallace Putney defines muscular Christianity as “a movement geared towards reinjecting manliness and physicality back into Victorian religion” and notes its roots within the social gospel movement.⁴⁸ Victorian era values like sensitivity, chivalry, and refinement were falling out of fashion as they were incompatible with the demands of an industrialized world. Putney links the popularity of more ‘masculine’ ideals to the success of British writer Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* and other similar novels about “high principle and moral manliness.”⁴⁹ Within this context, Christ was re-imagined as a strong, young man that other men were encouraged to emulate. The Y offered spaces for young men to gather, exercise, and discuss their faith in an all-masculine environment. There was a growing recognition that physical strength was “intimately connected with mental and spiritual activity and development.”⁵⁰ The new ideal Christian man was strong,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁶ Patricia Dirks, “Reinventing Christian Masculinity and Fatherhood: The Canadian Protestant Experience, 1900-1920,” in *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada, 1760-1969*, ed. Nancy Christie (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 292.

⁴⁷ Dirks, “Reinventing Christian Masculinity,” 292.

⁴⁸ Clifford Wallace Putney, “Muscular Christianity: The Strenuous Mood in American Protestantism, 1880-1920,” (PhD thesis, Brandeis University, 1995), 11.

⁴⁹ Putney, “Muscular Christianity,” 15.

⁵⁰ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 66-67.

both physically and spiritually. There seemed to be a new belief that men required an outlet or space to be physical with each other in order to succeed in a modern, urbanized world.

Institutions like the YMCA offered those kinds of activities to young men, from swimming lessons to basketball games. Instead of public brawls which were considered inappropriate and debasing, organized sports were a healthy outlet for disciplined men, who could follow rules.

The YMCA was becoming an important institution for socializing young men and molding them into the kinds of leaders many church officials desired.

As the YMCA grew, within Montreal and beyond, the organization continued to improve its programming for young men. As more members joined, the YMCA turned some of its attention to the city's young boys who were considered at risk of idleness or joining gangs. In 1884, the international association recognized that the YMCA ought to "give special attention to work for boys" and established the Boys Work Program department.⁵¹ By 1891, there were a number of programs specifically created for boys ages twelve to seventeen throughout the year, and that summer was the first time the Montreal YMCA held a summer outing, which would eventually develop into a camp.⁵² In 1894, the Y opened a permanent summer camp on Lac St. Joseph near Sainte-Agathe.

The camp reflected the YMCA's general purpose, particularly with regard to training boys for the future, as well as its commitment to physical and spiritual education. According to the organization's 1903 annual report, "because [the YMCA] deals with youth, it deals with the future."⁵³ There was a clear connection between YMCA programs and the future of Canada. The YMCA vision for the future of the Dominion included leadership by Protestant men trained from

⁵¹ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 138.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 188.

⁵³ Fifty-second Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1903, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

an early age in a Christian environment. The first few decades of camp were marked by a commitment to developing strong, masculine, Christian men. Kanawana continued to pursue this character throughout its history, although its emphasis fluctuated in response to broader social changes. With the gradual process of secularization that occurred in Canada during the twentieth century, explicit religious education at Kanawana declined, but the camp remained committed to preparing boys for adulthood and citizenship in a Christian environment. Kanawana counsellors and directors focused on camper health and physical fitness, self-discipline and control, and moulding Christian character. While the staff were certainly successful in many of these aspects, there remain a few lingering questions about how and why they pursued these goals.

Early summer camps were created with a very simple design, meant to emulate the rustic life of an unidentified ‘before’ time. In the face of a rapidly modernizing environment, an escape to nature was meant to connect boys with their natural instincts. Parents wanted their sons to have an experience that was as far removed from the comforts of urban living as possible, and camps did their best to meet those expectations. The Lac St. Joseph camp was on an island that the Y leased from the provincial government.⁵⁴ Campers took the train to Sainte-Agathe, and then a two-hour “drive by horse and springless buckboard” to the site.⁵⁵ After four successful seasons, the association bought the 33-acre property from the government in 1898, for \$1.00 per acre.⁵⁶ At first, boys used the camp for two weeks in July and then it was occupied by young men for the rest of the summer.⁵⁷ Fifty-three members used the site in 1894.⁵⁸ The setting was “simple,” with a half dozen sleeping tents, a large dining marquee, and a few “primitive boats”

⁵⁴ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 189.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Timeline written in 1932, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Histories, P145/01B, YMCA of Montreal timeline 1851-1932, CURMA. Boys were between 12 and 17 years old, and young men were usually between 18 and 30.

⁵⁸ Forty-fourth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1895, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, CURMA.

rented from local farmers.⁵⁹ The camp grew steadily and in 1903, 210 boys and young men attended.⁶⁰ Campers could play baseball and basketball or go canoeing, swimming, and fishing. The camp's popularity continued to climb, especially with the younger members. Eventually, in 1910 the Y found and purchased new land near Saint-Sauveur to develop a camp specifically for boys. This would become Kanawana.

⁵⁹ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 189.

⁶⁰ Fifty-second Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1903, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, CURMA.

Chapter One: ‘God’s Laboratory’: Training Boys into Men at Kamp Kanawana

—
*My Kanawana, Kamp of the free,
Spirit mind and body unite to proclaim democracy.
Our Kanawana - your Kamp and mine,
Lake and Hill and Sky unite to proclaim God's soul divine.
Wind thru' the pines - sunsets aglow - pals on the trail as on and up we go.
Our Kanawana - Kamp of the free,
Spirit body mind unite to proclaim democracy.¹*
The Earth is first, the other is second, and I am third.²
—

A 1993 promotional video for Kamp Kanawana opens with grainy shots of the rugged camp buildings, surrounding forests, and the view from the shore overlooking Lake Kanawana. A voiceover starts after the call of a loon echoes, and as the narrator speaks, we hear the sounds of children shouting and laughing increasing in volume. “Kamp Kanawana is quiet now, but in a few months, it will resound to the shouts of laughter and excitement of children as it has for almost a century. A tradition of fellowship, friendship, and a love of the outdoors that is a reflection of the YMCA that spawned it.”³ In their most basic form, this is the purpose of most summer camps. They are known for fostering relationships and an appreciation for nature, and this has always been one of their core purposes. Omitted from this short video, however, is the role of religion in shaping the early decades of Kanawana. The unnamed narrator suggests that the camp was started to “develop leadership skills in an outdoor setting,” which while true, fails to capture the entire story of Kanawana as a tool for religious education and citizenship training.

¹ “My Kanawana,” YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Kanawana Song Books Canadian YMCA Song books, CURMA.

² This phrase was commonly referred to as the camp motto in my time as a staff member at YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg Camp Stephens, 2015-2018. It was originally “God is first, the other is second and I am third,” but over time ‘God’ was exchanged for ‘Earth.’ I elaborate on this near the end of this chapter.

³ “Kamp Kanawana: An Experience that lasts a lifetime” promotional video 1993, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Communications, P145/12B04, CURMA.

Establishing Kanawana as a boys' camp was “evidence of progress in the boys' work of the Montreal Association,” since it demonstrated the Y's commitment to training young boys.⁴ It was open to boys from twelve to seventeen years old, and the equipment, much like that at the Sainte-Agathe site, was “simple.”⁵ Camps were intentionally designed with limited services, with the idea that doing so would ‘toughen’ boys into men. Campers slept on platforms for many years until the camp built new accommodations. By mid-century, the youngest campers had more comfortable arrangements, with walled cabins and bunks, while the oldest campers slept on cots in canvas tents on raised platforms (figures 1.1 and 1.2).⁶ Kanawana offered canoeing, swimming, baseball, hiking, nature study, and archery among other activities. The season ran for six to eight weeks depending on the year and campers could come for a few weeks at a time, or stay the entire summer. Each tent or cabin group had seven or eight campers with one counsellor assigned to them. Counsellors were mostly McGill students or YMCA members, because those were the kinds of young men that Kanawana leadership wanted around the boys.



Figure 1.1: Cabin for younger campers, Kamp Kanawana June 2023. Photo taken by author.



Figure 1.2: Tent for older campers, Kamp Kanawana June 2023. Photo taken by author.

⁴ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 222.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Kamp Kanawana Brochure 1968, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA. Now the canvas tents have bunk beds.

Christian Emphasis

For the first few decades of camp, Kanawana was devoted to the Y's mission of religious education. At camp, there were "special religious services...held not just on Sundays but during the week."⁷ These included morning devotions, bible study, and evening vespers, which sometimes culminated with boys professing their conversion to Christianity the evening before they went home.⁸ In many Evangelical churches, some form of conversion experience was a precondition for church membership.⁹ The YMCA was created by Evangelical Christians, many of whom belonged to Methodist and Baptist churches, and Kanawana was used to further the spread of their beliefs.¹⁰ These commitments to Jesus were used as proof of the value and importance of camp in helping boys. They were also a reflection of the influence of being surrounded by Christian peers in the wilderness. There was a sense that boys were closer to God at camp than they were in the city, because of their proximity to nature.¹¹ As Tina Loo observes in *States of Nature*, there was a "therapeutic power of recreational encounters with wilderness" that allowed men, and in this case boys, to return to the city "renewed" after getting in touch with themselves and God.¹² In its 1923 annual report, the Y noted that the "sturdy values which come from meeting nature on her own ground are well evidenced in the abounding health and

⁷ Fifty-second Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1903, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, CURMA.

⁸ Fifty-fourth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1905, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

⁹ Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 24.

¹⁰ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 17.

¹¹ For more on representations of God in nature, see William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69–90; Candace Slater, "Amazonia as Edenic Narrative," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 114–31.

¹² Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 27.

naturalness of our lads at Kanawana.”¹³ The camps success was reliant on the growing awareness of the importance of time spent outdoors.

Furthermore, there was an understanding that the “companionship of Christian men” and the atmosphere they created at camp “caused a marked change for the better in the lives of many of the boys.”¹⁴ In 1926, the Y’s annual report claimed that “some of the best work done in influencing the lives of our boys for good is done” at Kanawana.¹⁵ Four years later, the report stated that the camp was “filling an increasingly greater place in the life of our city’s boyhood. Camping is one of the finest experiences a boy can have, and when this experience is secured under competent Christian leadership it prepares a boy to take his place as a Canadian Christian citizen.”¹⁶ This way of thinking about camp as a place that prepares boys for leadership positions in Canada is reinforced when we consider that “summer camp groups... [were] composed of the children of the rich and urban, and contain[ed] many future lawyers, politicians and members of the business elite,” including former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, who attended Camp Ahmek, a private camp in Ontario.¹⁷ The Y had a vision for the future of Canada, and it was a Christian future.

Christian education was more than simply reading the Bible. It involved a complete immersion in a Christian way of life. This kind of attitude was repeated often in camp and

¹³ Seventy-second Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1923, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

¹⁴ Fifty-fifth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1906, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

¹⁵ Seventy-fifth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1926, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

¹⁶ Seventy-ninth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1930, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1925-1947, CURMA.

¹⁷ Dean, *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle*, 69. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also attended Camp Ahmek, founded by Taylor Statten, who started as a Toronto YMCA boys work secretary. See Wall, *The Nurture of Nature* for more on Statten’s summer camps and Dean, *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle* for a discussion on an exclusive group of government officials who regularly went on canoe trips together in the 1950s and 1960s.

association yearly reports. The 1928 annual report stated that one of the goals at Kanawana was to inspire “a true conception of Christian character, with the actual practice of religion in everyday life and conduct.”¹⁸ The camp used daily religious services, like morning devotions around the flagpole, “to give meaning to, and show values in, the experiences the boys were having.”¹⁹ In this way, Christian summer camps built on traditions established by Evangelical camp meetings, such as the one held by Adventists in Beebe, Quebec as described by J.I. Little.²⁰ The meeting was held annually in a campground in the late-nineteenth century and was considered “a refuge, a garden of spiritual and cultural renaissance to replenish depleted souls and refit them for modern society,” where many participants were not regular church-goers.²¹ Just as the Beebe camp enabled ministers to preach outside the walls of their church, Kanawana spread the word of God and encouraged conversion at summer camp.

There was a pattern in the association general reports, and camp reports especially, of claiming that the effects of camp were impossible to fully capture with numbers or statistics. In 1931, camp director Nelson McEwen wrote “[w]e can add up the weeks spent at camp, but cannot measure the changes in the lives of boys.”²² The 1933 director expressed a similar sentiment when he said it is “impossible to bring out adequately the character-building qualities of a camping experience to the boys in the camp. The character values of their simply living together cannot be shown in a report.”²³ Camp leadership argued that the influence of camp was

¹⁸ Seventy-seventh Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1928, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1925-1947, CURMA.

¹⁹ Seventh-seventh Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1928.

²⁰ J. I. Little, “Railways, Revivals and Rowdyism: The Beebe Adventist Camp Meeting, 1875-1900,” in *The Other Quebec: Microhistorical Essays on Nineteenth-Century Religion and Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006): 197-221.

²¹ Little, “Railways, Revivals and Rowdyism,” 202.

²² Boys Camp 22nd Annual Report 1931, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Kanawana Season Reports 1931, CURMA.

²³ Twenty-fourth Annual Kanawana Report 1933, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Report of the Season 1933, CURMA.

not always something that could be measured, because it had to do with the spirit of the campers, not their more obvious accomplishments. The “Kanawana Spirit” was unquantifiable.

Campers

So who were these boys who were benefiting from and contributing to the Kanawana spirit? For the most part in the early decades of Kanawana’s history, the campers came from the Y branches of Montreal. When the camp was still held on Lac St. Joseph, it was considered a “member’s privilege,” so for the first fifteen years of the Montreal Y’s camping program, it was strictly for Y members.²⁴ During the first summer at the Saint-Sauveur site in 1910, sixty-six members attended camp between June 19 and July 17th.²⁵ Of those campers, thirty-one boys “decided for the Christian life” while at Kanawana.²⁶ While it is unclear when exactly the camp was opened up to members of the general public, it appears to have been sometime in the 1920s. In 1918, the camp was commended for allowing the Secretaries of different branches to get “into closer touch with our boys and young men,” suggesting campers were all Y members.²⁷ This seems to have changed in 1922, when there were sixteen “unattached” campers out of a total of 391.²⁸ In 1929, the Y reported that campers came from much farther afield than just Montreal, with boys from Quebec City, Toronto, New Brunswick, and even Havana, Cuba.²⁹ By the 1930s, Kanawana had opened its doors to boys who were not YMCA members.

²⁴ Fifty-third Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1904, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

²⁵ Fifty-ninth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1910, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

²⁶ Fifty-ninth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1910.

²⁷ Sixty-seventh Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1918, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

²⁸ Seventy-first Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1922, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

²⁹ Seventy-eighth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1929, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1925-1947, CURMA.

In 1912, Kanawana was attended by boys over twelve years old from all of the four association branches in the city: Westmount, Point St. Charles, North, and Central Branch.³⁰ To enroll as campers, boys required the written consent of their parents and a clean bill of health from their doctors.³¹ This was just one instance of many in which the Y, and Kanawana, demonstrated concerns about boys' health. An early Kanawana application form asks for the father's business address, the church the family attended, and whether the camper could swim twenty-five yards. Asking about camper's swimming abilities was likely more of a safety concern than a selection criterion. It could also have been used as an indicator of the camp's influence on the boy.³² If he returned from camp able to swim, Kanawana could say they trained him in swimming. The other questions on the application indicate what kind of camper Kanawana was looking for. Their fathers ought to be employed and already paying the YMCA member fees, and they needed to attend church. Although I have been unable to find the exact price of a Y membership in the early-twentieth century, the association often asked members for extra donations to fund buildings, renovations, and expanded programs.³³ The YMCA was committed to the "fundamental principles on which all orthodox Protestant churches are agreed," meaning that their members would have reflected that commitment.³⁴ Most Y members would have been included in what Gillian Poulter labels the "professional and commercial middle classes."³⁵ These men were doctors, lawyers, and engineers, as well as managers, accountants,

³⁰ Kamp Kanawana Third Season Brochure 1912, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

³¹ Kamp Kanawana Third Season Brochure 1912.

³² By the time Kanawana opened, the YMCA was already concerned with water safety and drowning prevention. In 1908, the Montreal Y offered all 12-17 year old boys in the city free swimming lessons to combat the number of drownings that occurred every summer (Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 221).

³³ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 134.

³⁴ YMCA of Montreal Constitution in 52nd Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1903, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

³⁵ Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*, 26.

and shopkeepers. They would have been the kinds of men who had the spare income to pay membership dues, as well as be concerned about the risk or threat of idleness to their sons. In 1918, Kanawana cost eight dollars a week, and the average stay was usually around four weeks if not longer.³⁶

In the 1910s, the camp location near Saint-Sauveur could accommodate seventy-five campers, who slept in tents and ate in a large dining pavilion. There was canoeing, sailing, and swimming on Lake Kanawana and Lake Wilson as well as a dark room for photography and a workshop with tools. The stated aims of Kanawana were the “development of physical, mental and spiritual sides of the boys’ nature,” and to “mould character using God’s Laboratory, the great out-of-doors, with constant contact with trees, water, and other fellows.”³⁷ Here, we see the direct connection between God’s creation and the land surrounding Kanawana. Wilderness was God’s Laboratory, and Kanawana invited young boys to enter the “lab,” and learn from it, God, and each other. This is evocative of what Carolyn Merchant describes in “Reinventing Eden,” where she states that following the closure of the frontier, “there [was] an apparent need to retain wilderness as a place for men to test maleness, strength and virility and an apparent association of men with nature.”³⁸ The wilderness, in this case the lakes and forests of the Laurentians, existed for Montreal boys to learn and demonstrate their manliness, as instructed by the YMCA.

During Kanawana’s first few decades, the active programming seems to have revolved around hiking, swimming, and nature study. Hikes at Kanawana were multi-day events, with

³⁶ Kamp Kanawana Brochure 1918, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Kamp Kanawana Committee 1918-1923, CURMA.

³⁷ Kamp Kanawana Third Season Brochure 1912, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

³⁸ Carolyn Merchant, “Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 153.

campers sometimes spending four days in the bush.³⁹ The length and distance of the hike varied depending on the age of the campers. In 1942, campers remarked that they had more fun after a hike that involved both bushwhacking and sleeping in the rain because, as they said, it was “real camping.”⁴⁰ Despite there being hikes with clearly marked pathways, campers preferred to make their own way in the bush even when they did not have the proper skills. Here, we see an echo of what Merchant described as a need to test and prove maleness and strength. According to a Junior section report from 1943, some counsellors were even getting lost on these hikes. The section director remarked that counsellors could not “be trusted on hikes to unknown locations,” and that they needed to stick to marked paths.⁴¹ There was a disconnect from what boys, both staff and campers, thought they could do and what they were actually capable of doing.

During the early camp years, boys had to be twelve years or older to attend and were split into Juniors (12-14) or Seniors (14-17). By 1930, ten-year-olds were allowed to come to camp and were placed in the Juvenile section.⁴² Juveniles were 10-12 years old, Juniors 12-14 and Seniors 14-17.⁴³ Eventually, in the early 1940s the camp invited boys eight-years-old and up, and named the youngest section Bantam. Juveniles became Juniors, and Juniors became Intermediates. As Leslie Paris describes, campers who returned to camp “found themselves in a ritualized and hierarchical progression from cabin to cabin, from one bedtime to another, from

³⁹ Kamp Kanawana Season Report 1922, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1922, CURMA.

⁴⁰ Senior Program Highlights and Recommendations 1942, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1942, CURMA.

⁴¹ Junior Section Weekly Report 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1943, CURMA.

⁴² Twenty-first Report of Kanawana Season 1930 by Nelson McEwen Camp Director, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1930, CURMA.

⁴³ Kanawana Director’s Report 1927, Harold Cross Camp Director, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1927, CURMA.

Junior to Senior camper.”⁴⁴ There was also a physical progression, as returning campers would stay in different areas of the camp (see figures 2.2 and 2.6 for maps of Kanawana).

Democracy at Work

Summer camps often boast about providing campers with leadership opportunities, and some plan the programming itself around leadership development opportunities. One of the ways this occurred at Kanawana was through camp councils which promoted democratic practices and active citizenship. Since at least the 1920s, there was some kind of camp government in place in which campers elected each other to a camp council. In 1925, there were two groups, the “Kickers and Knockers” who were elected for two-week periods.⁴⁵ The councils were responsible for full camp programming on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evenings, as well as Wednesday and Friday afternoons. The camp director at the time, Harold Cross, believed that this system gave the boys more control over their experiences because it gave them a voice. The council was also used as a sort of court. In 1946, the group found a camper named Rosenthal “guilty of disobedience and thoughtlessness,” and sentenced him to two days of “fatigue duties at the Ritz,” the camp toilets.⁴⁶ Being judged by a jury of their peers likely helped to instill a sense of respect and order at camp.

This practice of voting and council elections seems to have influenced the boys in other ways at camp. In an anecdote from a 1942 report, the camp director R.H. Hanagan described a group of intermediate boys “hollering” about what game they should play on a hike when one of

⁴⁴ Paris, “The Adventures of Peanut,” 49.

⁴⁵ Report of Junior Division 1925 by Howard R. Ellis, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1925, CURMA.

⁴⁶ Intermediate Section Log Monday 8 July 1946, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA.

them suggested they take a vote.⁴⁷ In his report, Hanagan suggests “they got that device from camp training and practice.”⁴⁸ Kanawana also hosted votes for what was called “Camper Day” in which staff and campers switched roles. This was not the only camp that held ‘camper day,’ as Paris describes camps in northeastern United States doing the same thing. She explains that “these symbolic status reversals promised an escape, however temporary, from the structure and discipline of everyday camp life, including such age-specific expectations as obedience to counsellors and different bedtimes for children of different ages.”⁴⁹ These would have been an escape-within-an-escape, as camp itself was already removed from children’s typical routines. This was a unique experience to camps because of their isolated, temporary communities. Other youth organizations strove to create unique and temporary communities, removed from the rest of society like the Boy Scouts.

Boy Scouts and Boys’ Work

There are several similarities with the Boy Scouts that are worth exploring, particularly considering how much more scholarship there is on the Scouts than YMCA camping. According to Boy Scout historians, the organization was deeply concerned with boys’ physical wellbeing. The program was created because its founder, the Boer War veteran Robert Baden-Powell was disappointed with the British military’s physical fitness. He believed that British men were weak, lazy, and ill-prepared for military service; and some military training results supported this view.⁵⁰ So in 1907, Baden-Powell established the Boy Scouts in part to solve the modern

⁴⁷ Report of Kamp Kanawana 1942: 49 Years of YMCA Camping by R.H. Hanagan, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1942, CURMA.

⁴⁸ Report of Kamp Kanawana 1942: 49 Years of YMCA Camping by R.H. Hanagan.

⁴⁹ Paris, “The Adventures of Peanut,” 65.

⁵⁰ Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 19.

problems of idle and lazy young men.⁵¹ One of the very first Scout outings was a summer camp on Brownsea Island in 1907.⁵² Scouts, like the YMCA, believed that men's bodies were a symbol of their commitment: for Scouts, to the imperial power; and for the YMCA, to Christ.

Baden-Powell felt that many of the challenges plaguing British men around the creation of the YMCA in 1844 were still problems in the early-twentieth century. Boys were lazy and weak, and had been under a feminine influence for too long. In an industrial society, boys did not get the same identity shaping experiences of farming and manual labour as their fathers did.⁵³ For Baden-Powell, the frontier offered the best solution as it was uncontaminated by female influence, and was the only place left for men to be their true, masculine selves. The frontier also offered the opportunity to instruct boys and young men in how to be the 'right' kind of man. Baden-Powell stressed the importance of the colonial or frontier experience in shaping men, demonstrating the relationships between land, empire, and masculinity. His conception of the frontier was not so far from the camping movement's conception of wilderness. With their isolated locations and natural environments, summer camps were a kind of artificial frontier for boys to play out the types of fantasies that Baden-Powell and his contemporaries had about manhood.

Despite being created nearly sixty years apart, the YMCA and the Boy Scouts had more in common beyond simply offering programs for boys. Both organizations believed in the importance of control and moderation in all aspects of life, especially physical. However, there were limitations to this. The YMCA was selective about the activities it offered as the association wanted to ensure that members were still following a controlled and discipline way

⁵¹ MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire*, 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵³ Benjamin René Jordan, *Modern Manhood and the Boy Scouts of America: Citizenship, Race, and the Environment, 1910-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 5.

of life. While the Y offered swimming and basketball programs, contact sports like rugby and boxing were discouraged as an overly aggressive form of exercise. The YMCA of Montreal Board of Directors rejected a request from one of the branches to hold a boxing class because “of a fear that boxing could not be anything but a brutal and dangerous sport.”⁵⁴ The sports offered at the Y were more individual and less aggressive, such as swimming, gymnastics, and calisthenics.

As with the YMCA’s aversion to contact sports, the Boy Scouts discouraged football and boxing because they “placed an increasing premium on raw strength and physical aggression,” which were not very indicative of discipline.⁵⁵

Practicing self-control was a mark of a modern man.⁵⁶ While an important element of the masculinity pursued and idealized by the YMCA and Scouts was demonstrating *self-control*, there was also a sort of organizational control over boys’ bodies. In their pursuit of balance and moderation, the YMCA emphasized the importance of balance between spirit, mind, and body. At camp, this balance was found with regular religious services amid the active schedule of sports, games, and hiking. Spending too much time exercising and building muscle indicated men were not



Figure 1.3: Some of the badges, n.d., YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Kamp Kanawana Promotional Material, CURMA.

⁵⁴ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 237.

⁵⁵ Jordan, *Modern Manhood*, 98.

⁵⁶ John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800–1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 331, <https://doi.org/10.1086/427129>.

devoting as much time to their spiritual and mental education. However, to be lazy or physically unfit was also a failure to uphold institutional ideals about masculinity. YMCA campers and Scouts were urged to keep their bodies strong, healthy, and balanced. This was partly done with the use of badge systems. Scouts were rewarded with pins or badges for various skills and accomplishments, as were Kanawansians.⁵⁷ Campers who passed tests in certain skills received ribbons like the ones pictured above (figure 1.3).

It is remarkable how many things Y camps had in common with Boy Scouts, considering they never formally or officially partnered. Patricia Dirks suggests that the Scouting program was too imperial and hierarchical for many Canadian YMCA leaders to fully commit. Y leadership, many of whom were part of the association's youth and camping programs, "balked at the lack of initiative allowed adult leaders and the boys involved" by Scouting, and ultimately felt that Baden-Powell's program "would not provide the leaders Canada needed to fulfill its national and international destiny."⁵⁸ However, this did not mean that they did not influence each other. For instance, Montreal Y's Central branch had one of the first Scout troops in Canada in 1910.⁵⁹ In the archives there are a few songs and scripts that contain references to Scouts, or language taken directly from the Scouting program, like a fire of friendship programme that included the direction to be used "at the end of a Boy Scout day."⁶⁰ The two organizations orbited around each other, even more so once the Boy Scouts established Camp Tamaracouta,

⁵⁷ Seventy-first Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1922, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1902-1926, CURMA.

⁵⁸ Patricia Dirks, "Canada's Boys - An Imperial or National Asset? Responses to Baden-Powell's Boy Scout Movement in Pre-War Canada," in *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 122.

⁵⁹ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 222.

⁶⁰ Fire of Friendship service suggested programme, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Fire of Friendship Kanawana Show, CURMA.

southeast of Kanawana in 1912.⁶¹ In 1942, Kanawana “welcome[d] the Boys of Tamaracouta” with a programme that featured fire-lighting, hymns, and prayers.⁶² While the YMCA did have branches across the globe, their camping program was largely confined to Canada and the United States. The Y’s international branch was mostly for adult missionary trips.⁶³ One of the pillars of the Boy Scouts was its international brotherhood and fraternity, and their Jamboree events brought Scouts together from across the globe. The YMCA did not have anything on the same level, although there were occasions when Kanawana did host international campers. During World War II, there were campers from England, France, Scotland, and Poland.⁶⁴

Health and Cleanliness: An Exercise in Morality

At Kanawana, the Y’s concern with physical fitness was clear in their weighing and examination of campers. The level of observation of campers went beyond a general concern for their wellbeing. In 1943, the section director described the nurse going around the camp and offering milk of magnesia to any boys who might have been constipated.⁶⁵ This occurred multiple times, not because there seemed to be an illness in the camp, but because staff wanted to ensure boys maintained healthy bowel movements. The doctor would weigh boys when they arrived at camp and before they left to measure any changes in weight. This was not uncommon at summer camps. As Paris notes, some American camps would even place “heavier boys at “diet” tables,”

⁶¹ Dan Spector, “Scouts Protest Closure of Historic Quebec Camp - Montreal | Globalnews.ca,” *Global News*, October 5, 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5995934/scouts-protest-closure-quebec-camp/>.

⁶² Fire of Friendship Service: Kanawana Welcomes the Boys of Tamaracouta 9 August 1942, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Kanawana Song Books/Canadian YMCA Song Books, CURMA.

⁶³ Cross, *One Hundred Years*, 186.

⁶⁴ Ninety-second Annual General Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, CURMA.

⁶⁵ Bantam Section Daily Report 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1943, CURMA.

weigh them, and ask campers “to report their bowel movements.”⁶⁶ It does not seem likely that this occurred at Kanawana. In 1936, the camp director W.J.G. MacDiarmid observed that “85 [campers] neither gained nor lost weight, 195 gained a total of 585 pounds while 30 lost a total of 54 pounds. This shows a net gain in weight for this whole camp of 531 pounds.”⁶⁷ This way of recording weight changes makes it difficult to ascertain why campers were weighed, and if they were treated any differently based on their weight.

In a list of recommendations for the improvement of Kanawana written in 1940, it was suggested that counsellors should perform a daily inspection of their campers and make a weekly report to the camp that could then be made available to their parents.⁶⁸ Campers were to be seen once a week by the camp doctor. Despite the isolated environment and the atmosphere of freedom and simple living, boys were still under an intense level of scrutiny. In 1943, the Bantam section turned their daily inspection into a game and called it ‘Car Wash.’ Each boy was to cut their nails, brush their teeth, and get washed “head to toe by leaders.”⁶⁹ Since there is no mention of this kind of activity in other section reports, it is possible it was only done for the Bantams, who were the youngest campers.

As isolated as Kanawana was, the camp was not immune to the various public health scares of the early- and mid-twentieth century. There was a case of scarlet fever that put the camp into quarantine for a month in 1941.⁷⁰ In 1944, there was an outbreak of mumps during the sixth and seventh week of camp that did not close camp, it only forced the section groups to stay

⁶⁶ Paris, “The Adventures of Peanut,” 63.

⁶⁷ Report of Kamp Kanawana 1936, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Reports 1936, CURMA.

⁶⁸ Kamp Kanawana Summary of Suggestions 1940 offered by Doug Reilly, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Reports 1940, CURMA.

⁶⁹ Bantam Section Daily Report 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1943, CURMA.

⁷⁰ Ninetieth Annual General Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1941, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1939-1964, CURMA.

separated.⁷¹ In 1946, there were six cases of polio detected at camp. Despite the illness, the camp did not close; rather, it only cancelled canoe and hiking trips, as well as any planned guests or other camp visits.⁷² According to Dr. Cushing, a pediatrician who visited the camp, there was no reason to suspect the boys had picked up polio at camp, nor was there any evidence to suggest that the conditions at camp were “fostering the spread of the disease.”⁷³ The boys who were sick were sent to hospital in Montreal immediately upon diagnosis by the camp doctor. By the end of the summer, three of them had been discharged.⁷⁴ Further to his approval of keeping camp open, Dr. Cushing claimed that with the “abundant fresh air and sunshine,” campers were likely better off at camp than in the city.⁷⁵ Once again, the allure of camp’s isolation and remoteness was superior to the crowding and disease of the city.

Camp Mothers

As a YMCA camp, Kanawana had very few instances of women on the premises or mentioned in the archives. The Y was run by men for men and the camp, by men for boys. Kanawana was meant to combat the feminine influences in the church, school, and home by surrounding boys with young men. Kanawana reinforced gender roles despite the near-complete absence of women. Or rather, it was through the near-complete absence of women for the first seventy years of operation that the camp experience reinforced gender roles. By not allowing girls to attend camp, Kanawana implied that the wilderness was not a place for girls or young women. As Paris

⁷¹ Kamp Kanawana Season 1944 Running Commentary, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1944, CURMA.

⁷² Kamp Kanawana Log 1946, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1946, CURMA.

⁷³ Letter to parents 19 August 1946 by R.H. Hanagan, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1946, CURMA.

⁷⁴ Letter to parents 19 August 1946 by R.H. Hanagan.

⁷⁵ Letter to parents 19 August 1946 by R.H. Hanagan.

writes, this stems from Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory and ideas about adolescence. Hall essentially argued that the "sojourn into savagery" that camps offered were "critical to the development of white boys, providing a kind of inoculation against the effeminizing effects of modern civilization."⁷⁶ However, the reality of young boys being away from home for the first time meant they were often homesick, something the young men on staff were not always equipped to handle. In 1930, one of the newer 'innovations' at Kanawana was the presence of the director's wife. In his end-of-summer report, the director remarked that he and the other staff noticed "the refining influence of a woman's presence in the dining room and general camp department," suggesting that his wife's presence at camp made campers behave themselves better than usual.⁷⁷ He also said that it was helpful for campers to "see and talk to a woman" when they were homesick.⁷⁸

The camp repeated this later in the decade, when they hired a nurse for essentially the same reason. In 1937, the juvenile section director suggested hiring a nurse assistant for the doctor "who would give particular attention to the juveniles," after noticing that many of them were struggling with being away from home, and more specifically, from their mothers.⁷⁹ A nurse named Miss M. Rayner was hired for the 1939 season. Despite facing what the juvenile section director called a "tradition that opposed the presence of a woman," she "filled the place of nurse and camp mother combined" and contributed to the overall health and happiness of the camp.⁸⁰ In another report from 1939, the interim camp director noted that the nurse performed

⁷⁶ Paris, "The Adventures of Peanut," 53.

⁷⁷ Twenty-first Report of Kanawana Season 1930 by Nelson McEwen Camp Director, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1930, CURMA.

⁷⁸ Twenty-first Report of Kanawana Season 1930 by Nelson McEwen.

⁷⁹ Juvenile Section Directors Report 1937, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1937, CURMA.

⁸⁰ Juvenile Sectional Report 1939 by Edgar E. Smee, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1939, CURMA.

regular examinations of the boys, “particularly the youngest ones.”⁸¹ As the only woman at camp, Miss Rayner occupied both a motherly role and a healthcare role. Since this is the only named woman in a position at camp, it seems clear that these were the only acceptable roles for women at the time.

Other examples of women visiting camp were in the 1940s when Kanawana occasionally hosted visitors from the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) summer camp, Camp Oolahwan, and from the Junior League Camp. The YWCA camp was located near Sainte-Marguerite de Lac Masson and ran from 1917 to 2005.⁸² There is very little academic scholarship on the YWCA’s camping program, as most of the historical inquiry on the YWCA has been on its work for women, not girls.⁸³ Based on the newspaper advertisements displayed on the YWCA website, it is safe to say Oolahwan offered many of the same activities as Kanawana and other summer camps (figure 1.4).⁸⁴

The Junior League, an organization run by and for young and elite Anglo-Protestant women in Montreal, ran a camp for the Griffintown Girls Club that opened in

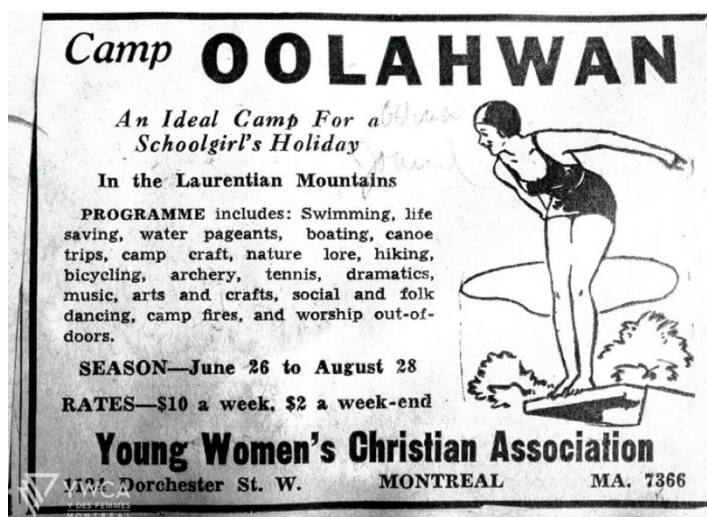


Figure 1.4: Camp Oolahwan advertisement in unnamed and undated newspaper, Y des femmes Montreal.

⁸¹ Interim Director’s Report 1939, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1939, CURMA.

⁸² Y des femmes Montréal, “Camp Oolahwan - Un camp qui a marqué la jeunesse de nombreuses femmes,” accessed May 25, 2023, <https://www.ydesfemmesmtl.org/propos-de-nous/historique/camp-oolahwan/>.

⁸³ See Yolande Cohen, *Femmes philanthropes: catholiques, protestantes et juives dans les organisations caritatives au Québec, 1880-1945* (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2010); Elaine Mary Davies, “The Montreal YWCA and Its Role in the Advancement of Women: 1920-1960” (MA thesis, Concordia University, 1991), <https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/id/eprint/6092/>. Neither work mentions YWCA camping program.

⁸⁴ Y des femmes Montréal, “Camp Oolahwan - Un camp qui a marqué la jeunesse de nombreuses femmes.”

1921.⁸⁵ The Junior Leaguers raised funds with their galas and social events to operate the camp and send poor children from Griffintown on a summer vacation.⁸⁶ This camp would have been considered a ‘fresh-air’ camp in Wall’s typology. The staff at this camp were young women, and likely in similar social classes and networks as the young men working at Kanawana. Events with Oolahwan and the Junior League were sometimes marked by the opportunity for the counsellors to mingle with the opposite sex, suggesting that it was not always about campers. This was a problem at one point, as a section director once noted in 1943 that some counsellors had snuck off to the Junior League camp.⁸⁷ This would have been problematic as the Junior League was about preparing young, elite women to enter society, and meeting up with boys without adult supervision threatened their position. From the Y’s perspective, this kind of behaviour speaks not only to ideas about proper decorum, but also to the wider anti-sex sentiment inherent in the YMCA as a Protestant organization. As with the Boy Scouts, sexual contact “was condemned since it would impede the quest to regain the curative innocence of boyhood.”⁸⁸ The homosocial environment of the YMCA and Kanawana was supposed to eliminate any sexual urges or desire, which it did not. This brings me back to the subject of restraint and discipline, both self- and organizational-, over campers.

Sex, Sexuality, and Sin at Summer Camp

The absence of women from Kanawana relates to questions of sexuality and control at the Y and at camp. Scout historian Robert MacDonald suggests that the frontier represented an opportunity

⁸⁵ Elise Rose Chenier, “Class, Gender, and the Social Standard: The Montreal Junior League, 1912-1939,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (2009): 694.

⁸⁶ Chenier, “Class, Gender, and the Social Standard,” 702.

⁸⁷ Intermediate Section Report 5 July 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1943, Concordia University Records Management and Archives.

⁸⁸ Mischa Honeck, *Our Frontier is the World: The Boy Scouts in the Age of American Ascendancy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 12.

to run away from the “complications of sex” and feminine influence to an entirely masculine space.⁸⁹ The question of sexuality in the frontier or wilderness was in some ways a continuation of the feminization of nature and how that shaped, and was shaped by, colonial expansion. By making Kanawana a strictly masculine space (with the rare exceptions of the director’s wife, female nurses, and visitors), the YMCA figured they had prevented any issue that might arise from sexual differences. The homosocial character of the organization mimicked the masculine nature of wilderness.

This idea that the absence of women meant the absence of sex was a mistake on the part of the camp’s leadership. Moreover, this belief ignores or contradicts the very feminine energy of the natural world. As Merchant describes, the concept of nature is characterized by “language that casts nature as a female object to be transformed and men as the agents of change,” affirming men’s right to dominate and possess nature.⁹⁰ It is the duty or role of men to control and dominate the disorderly, irrational, and feminine wild. This act of colonizing or controlling land evokes this kind of dominance, as Danielle Gendron shows in her work on the canoe, where she considers it an object used to physically penetrate nature.⁹¹ The framing of summer camp as a homosocial, and thus asexual, space was therefore flawed.

The emphasis on control and restraint was particularly evident at camp when it came to masturbation. One of the reasons for creating the YMCA and Boy Scouts in the first place, and developing such a robust boy’s work program, was falling birth rates which some blamed on a lack of self-control among weak men. As was expected of any Christian youth organization, the

⁸⁹ MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire*, 61.

⁹⁰ Merchant, “Reinventing Eden,” 145.

⁹¹ Gendron, “Unpacking and Repacking the Canoe,” 219. The canoe was used by early explorers (masculine) to access and control the natural world (feminine).

YMCA was opposed to masturbation because it was inappropriate, sinful, and wasteful.⁹² As previously stated, these organizations urged self-control and discipline, with rigorous activity, sexual repression, and near-constant supervision designed to keep boys from giving in to their desires. This stance on sexuality is somewhat contradictory given the basis of summer camp was entertaining their primitive nature. Evidently there was a hierarchy, or perhaps a limited amount of ‘primitiveness’ these boys were allowed to engage in.

By prohibiting masturbation and girls from camp, the threat of sexuality was thought to be removed. However, this presumed that the removal of women and their temptation meant that men, or in this case boys, no longer felt sexual desire. Would it not mean that campers, or maybe even staff, might then engage in homosexual behaviours? The emphasis within the YMCA about self-control and discipline would suggest that members would be able to control and ignore sexual urges as a defining characteristic of the association’s Christian masculine ideals. However, this in itself is contradictory since camp encouraged boys to engage with their most primitive selves, yet also to ignore or abstain from their natural desires. Furthermore, the Y was already associated with gay men, or at least gay activities.⁹³ As queer studies scholars have suggested the YMCA itself was a well-known site for ‘cruising’ since as early as World War I.⁹⁴ This was, of course, all happening in a society where homosexuality was criminalized and men caught engaging in sex with other men risked arrest, jail, and/or psychiatric hospitalization, so it

⁹² Honeck, *Our Frontier is the World*, 33.

⁹³ Valerie J. Korinek, “‘We’re the Girls of the Pansy Parade’: Historicizing Winnipeg’s Queer Subcultures, 1930s-1970,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 45, no. 89 (May 2012): 141, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1353/his.2012.0002>.

⁹⁴ George Chauncey, “Lots of Friends at the YMCA: Rooming Houses, Cafeterias, and Other Gay Social Centers,” in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, ed. Jennifer Scanlon (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 53; Ross Higgins, “Baths, Bushes, and Belonging: Public Sex and Gay Community in Pre-Stonewall Montreal,” in *Public Sex/ Gay Space*, ed. William L. Leap (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 196. As Higgins says, “[f]or centuries (if not millennia), places where men took their clothes off, and quite a few where they were not supposed to, were (and are) potential venues for public sex” (187). The Y was one of many such spaces and it was common for public sex to take place in the saunas, steam rooms, and/or change rooms.

is understandable why it would not have been acknowledged or recorded.⁹⁵ In *Public Sex/Gay Space*, William Leap suggests that publishing work that identifies public locations used for gay sex risks drawing “outside attention to these sites, and may increase the likelihood of outside disruptions” by unwanted guests such as law enforcement.⁹⁶ Although these are not the same circumstances, this risk alongside the general anti-homosexual legislation and attitudes at the time would have played a role in what was officially recorded.

There is nothing in the historical documents to suggest that campers engaged in sexual behaviours with each other. However, the senior section director was certainly concerned about masturbation at camp. In a passage summarizing how the summer of 1944 went, the director commented that the doctor spoke with the seniors about masturbating at camp, because it was well-known that it was “practised at camp.”⁹⁷ If this was common knowledge and practice, then I suggest that it is also possible campers engaged in some kind of sexual behaviour with each other. In the summer of 1943, the senior director also had a conversation with the boys about masturbation. On August 6th, 1943, the senior section director wrote that he had an “exceedingly illuminating” conversation with one of the tent groups about masturbation and answered “a host of questions” about “boy-girl” relationships.⁹⁸ All of the boys admitted they practiced masturbation, and believed it “was a great evil and was doing irreparable harm to their system.”⁹⁹ The boys also thought they were alone in doing this, and the director described a “definite

⁹⁵ Steven Maynard, “On the Case of the Case: The Emergence of the Homosexual as a Case History in Early-Twentieth-Century Ontario,” in *Queerly Canadian: An Introductory Reader in Sexuality Studies*, ed. Maureen Fitzgerald and Scott Rayter (Toronto: Canadian Scholar’s Press, 2012), 155.

⁹⁶ William L. Leap, ed., *Public Sex/Gay Space* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 15.

⁹⁷ Senior Section Kanawana 1944 by Ed Brown, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1944, CURMA

⁹⁸ Senior Section Report 6 August 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1943, CURMA.

⁹⁹ Senior Section Report 6 August 1943.

feeling of guilt” among the campers.¹⁰⁰ Of course, this story was recorded by the director, and it is possible the campers were not entirely honest with him. There was no outright mention in the records from either year that the doctor or the section director told the boys it was doing harm to their systems, however the 1944 report suggests that the senior director did remind the boys that it was sinful.

Returning to the question of sexual activity among campers, it is possible this did occur at Kanawana. Podruchny suggests that the “silence” in fur trade records on homosexuality may have been due to the bourgeois clerks “considering it an unmentionable deviance” and choosing to overlook its existence.¹⁰¹ The same could have occurred at Kanawana. In an essay in *Queer Ecologies*, Andil Gosine suggests that homosexuality was “associated with the degeneracy of the city,” so the establishment of “remote wild spaces and healthy urban green spaces [was] understood as an antidote to effeminate homosexuality.”¹⁰² Again, we see this suggestion that nature, or being in the presence of nature could help boys control their sexual urges and purify them. This is contradictory since camp was meant to be a place to act on natural, primitive desires.¹⁰³ In an essay in the same anthology, Bruce Erickson queers the history of the canoe by suggesting that the “myth of the canoe follows a pattern of homosocial activity from European roots to leisure activity” and that “the difference between male homosocial desire and homoeroticism is thin.”¹⁰⁴ Summer camp was the pinnacle of Canadian leisure activities, and

¹⁰⁰ Senior Section Report 6 August 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1943, CURMA.

¹⁰¹ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 196.

¹⁰² Andil Gosine, “Non-White Reproduction and Same-Sex Eroticism: Queer Acts against Nature,” in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 154.

¹⁰³ See Higgins, “Baths, Bushes, and Belonging” and Korinek, “‘We’re the Girls of the Pansy Parade’” for more on public sex and the criminalization of homosexuality.

¹⁰⁴ Bruce Erickson, “‘fucking close to water’: Queering the Production of the Nation,” in *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire*, ed. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 321.

boys spent weeks in close contact with each other. Erickson suggests that men, particularly white men, use outdoor activities like canoeing, fishing, and hunting (sometimes concurrently) to spend time with other men in ways that allow them to “demonstrate their sexuality in a non-sexual way.”¹⁰⁵ Podruchny briefly discusses homosexuality in the voyageur world, and asks if the homosocial environment of canoe trips may have led “to the development of homosexuality as a normative expression of affection.”¹⁰⁶ The conclusions that she comes to are not only applicable to summer camps like Kanawana, but are valuable questions about what is not formally recorded in history. While the third chapter of this thesis draws more direct parallels from fur-trade and voyageur history, particularly Podruchny’s wider work, the question of sexuality is worth discussing within the context of the camp’s Christian foundations.

At the risk of over-simplifying the fur trade industry, both the trade and summer camps existed in a temporary, remote, and liminal sort of environment. Podruchny wonders if “in the isolation and freedom of their summer” jobs, these men might have experimented with non-traditional, illegal sexual acts.¹⁰⁷ The same question could be asked about Kanawana in the early-twentieth century. She states that it is “difficult to know the extent to which the intense physicality of voyageur culture, the worship of masculine qualities of strength and physical endurance, and the scarcity of women enabled experimentation at a sexual level.”¹⁰⁸ This is an ambiguous area of study, made more difficult by the limitations of archival research and anti-homosexual legislation of the period in question. Generally speaking, the majority of examples of adolescents engaging in homosexuality in the historical record come from legal history in

¹⁰⁵ Erickson, "fucking close to water," 322. Instances of sexual acts in homosocial friendships in outdoor leisure activities is beyond the scope of this paper, but a topic well-worth researching.

¹⁰⁶ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 196.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

which men were found having sex with youth, as Maynard describes in “On the Case of the Case.”¹⁰⁹ However, I agree with Podruchny when she says that “if homosexual behaviours occurred, they likely strengthened bonds and sense of collectivity among voyageurs,” only with campers.¹¹⁰ This, of course, would have been complicated by the overarching Protestant atmosphere of camp. Paris also discusses homosexuality at summer camps, except her work focuses on girls’ camps. Nevertheless, Paris found rules in place to prevent girls developing crushes on each other, like ensuring campers slept in their own beds instead of sharing with their friends.¹¹¹ Clearly this was a concern in the wider camp community.

Conclusion: Keeping the ‘C’ in the YMCA

The YMCA remained committed to maintaining its character as a Christian organization despite the dramatic rupture between the Catholic Church and Quebec in the 1960s and the general decline of other Christian religions across the country.¹¹² This did not mean that the Y did not react or adapt to the changing perception of religion in wider society. In the 1970s, the association became “aware that a new understanding of itself as a ‘Christian institution’ [was] required,” but that did not “mean that Christian guidelines need[ed] to be abandoned.”¹¹³ This shift in the organization reflects what Lynne Marks describes as the growth of the “practical Christian.”¹¹⁴ A practical Christian believed in the general principles of Christianity, of general

¹⁰⁹ Maynard, “On the Case,” 160.

¹¹⁰ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 198.

¹¹¹ Paris, “The Adventures of Peanut,” 63.

¹¹² For work on secularization outside Quebec, see Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada since 1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017); Lynne Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches: Irreligion and Religion in Settler British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017). The focus in Quebec historiography is mostly on the decline of the Catholic Church.

¹¹³ “First Quarter of Second Century of Service to Youth of Montreal” manuscript by Fred Hubbard p. 78, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Histories, P145/01B, First Quarter of Second Century of Service to Youth of Montreal (Masters for Re-Printing) 1976, CURMA.

¹¹⁴ Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches*, 84.

concern for others, and leading a moral life but usually rejected formal religious institutions. Marks sums it up as being generally unselfish and demonstrating “concern for one’s fellow man.”¹¹⁵ Despite this being a sign of mid-twentieth century secularization, this kind of approach to Christianity appeared at the YMCA at an early stage.

In 1866, the boys’ department at the Salem, Massachusetts YMCA adopted the motto “help the other fellow.”¹¹⁶ At the Winnipeg YMCA camp, the motto was “I am third,” taken from a Bible verse: “God’s first, the other is second, and I’m third.”¹¹⁷ At Kanawana, there seem to have been two mottos that aligned with the concept of the practical Christian. In 1927, staff held a meeting with campers where they discussed the purpose of camp. They decided that camp was “an opportunity to learn to live together,” and that the camp motto was “each for all and all for each.”¹¹⁸ In the 1993 promotional video, the narrator states that the camp motto was “*non nobis solum*” meaning “not for ourselves alone.”¹¹⁹ This is still the camp motto, as seen on Kanawana’s Facebook page.¹²⁰ All of these point to a sort of selfless or community-oriented ethos.

Since these camps often held the idea of caring for others as a core value, it is not difficult to imagine that the gradual secularization of Canadian society did not in fact, have a detrimental effect on them. Individual directors might have felt that the Christian character of certain counsellors was lacking, but the general atmosphere of camp seemed to meet their

¹¹⁵ Marks, *Infidels and the Damn Churches*, 84.

¹¹⁶ Eddy, *A Century with Youth*, 63n.

¹¹⁷ YM-YWCA of Winnipeg, ‘*The Spirited Challenge*’: *The Camp Stephens’ Story – A Century of Excellence in Camping, 1891-1991* (1991), 14.

¹¹⁸ Certain Experiences in Attempting to Accomplish Democratic Program Building at Kamp Kanawana 1927, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA.

¹¹⁹ “Kamp Kanawana: An Experience that lasts a lifetime” promotional video 1993, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Communications, P145/12B04, CURMA.

¹²⁰ “Camp YMCA Kanawana | Saint-Sauveur QC | Facebook,” accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/YKanawana>.

expectations. In the wider association, there seemed to be an understanding that even with an open membership policy, Y programs “expressed something of Christian concern about the dignity and worth of life.”¹²¹ As Christianity faded from the public into the private sphere, the camp spent less time performing traditional religious activities like Bible study. Instead, the Y leadership encouraged a Christian ‘atmosphere’ of fair play, self-reliance, and concern for others. These were not traits that solely belonged to Christians, but to anyone interested in living a life of high moral value. This speaks to larger questions of secularism as explored by Genevieve Zubrzycki.

In *Beheading the Saint*, Zubrzycki claims that Christianity, particularly Catholicism, has become part of Quebec’s “cultural patrimony.”¹²² She argues that “formerly religious symbols, objects, and practices” have been recoded in a manner that actually allows for Catholic heritage to be enshrined as *cultural* heritage and therefore not subject to the same laws as other non-Christian religions in Quebec.¹²³ Zubrzycki demonstrates this with the “reinvention of the Fête [Nationale],” known colloquially as “La Saint-Jean,” a holiday that has been so disconnected from its religious origins that many Québécois do not know about the Catholic connotations of June 24th.¹²⁴ The same thing occurred at summer camp, as I experienced in the late 2000s at Camp Stephens.

At Camp Stephens, instead of saying Grace and thanking God before every meal, we thanked the cooks. Some of the ‘thanks’ were clearly modeled after or adapted from religious

¹²¹ “First Quarter of Second Century of Service to Youth of Montreal” manuscript by Fred Hubbard p. 82, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Histories, P145/01B, First Quarter of Second Century of Service to Youth of Montreal (Masters for Re-Printing) 1976, CURMA.

¹²² Genevieve Zubrzycki, *Beheading the Saint: Nationalism, Religion, and Secularism in Quebec* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 168.

¹²³ Zubrzycki, *Beheading the Saint*, 164.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 118. The holiday is named for the Saint Jean-Baptiste.

songs, like one that used a Johnny Appleseed nursery rhyme. In the original song, this is the first verse:

Oh, the Lord's been good to me.
And so I thank the Lord
For giving me the things I need:
The sun, the rain, and the apple seed;
Oh, the Lord's been good to me.¹²⁵

As a camper, instead of saying ‘the Lord’, we said ‘the Earth.’ In another example of swapping Protestant language for something more holistic or ‘natural’, let us consider the chapel at Camp Stephens, seen here in 2015 (figure 1.5).¹²⁶ When it was first built in 1925, fourteen campers “made their first public profession.”¹²⁷ The camp regularly held Sunday church services at the site. By the time I attended Stephens, chapel had been secularized. In the 2010s, the camp gathered at chapel on Sunday mornings for ‘Sunday Reflection’ where campers were encouraged to reflect on one of the Y’s core values: respect, responsibility, honesty, or caring. However, the practice of gathering as a camp community on Sunday mornings in an outdoor chapel was clearly based on Sunday mass or church service. The spot was also still known as ‘chapel,’ which begs the question of how much the camp had distanced itself from its religious beginnings. So while the Y camp I attended in the 2000s had shed its explicit Protestant origins, it was still very much governed by the same principles as it had been in the 1920s. The practice of recoding symbols, practices, and objects occurred again and often at Kanawana as we will see in the next chapter with the image of the *Indian*.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ “Johnny Appleseed - Nursery Rhyme Johnny Appleseed Lyrics, Tune and Music,” accessed May 26, 2023, <https://www.nurseryrhymes.org/johnny-appleseed.html>.

¹²⁶ Bruce Owen, *Chapel*, June 28, 2015, photo, June 28, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/49505025@N05/19507754556/>.

¹²⁷ YM-YWCA of Winnipeg, ‘*The Spirited Challenge*’, 5.

¹²⁸ For more on recoding religious symbols into secular, or ‘traditional’ symbols, see Zubrzycki, *Behanding the Saint*.



Figure 1.5: Camp Stephens chapel, photographed in 2015. Bruce Owen, Camp Stephens Alumni Flickr Account, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/49505025@N05/19507754556/>.

The shift away from explicit religious doctrine would have also been influenced by the growing diversity of Y members and campers. Throughout the years, Kanawana usually listed three religious denominations in their statistic reports: Protestant, Jewish, and Roman Catholic. After 1962, the Y stopped including religious affiliation in their reports altogether. In the previously mentioned video, when a camper was asked about their time at Kanawana, they said “it’s all about the people at camp [...] you make a lot of friends, [...] a lot of great relationships with different people. It, it adds to your personality, your character. You become, uh, kind of a happier person.”¹²⁹ As this video never once mentions religion, nor the Protestant foundations of

¹²⁹ “Kamp Kanawana: An Experience that lasts a lifetime” promotional video 1993, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Communications, P145/12B04, CURMA.

the camp, we can assume a Christian emphasis did not factor into this campers' experience at Kanawana.

Within this context, it is not so much secularization as diversification that explains the gradual decline in religious education at Kanawana. As we will see in the following chapters, there were certain periods of Kanawana's history that were marked by a heightened dedication to certain beliefs, tropes, and myths. I approach the practice of playing *Indian* at Kanawana with an understanding that many of the offensive and derogatory misbeliefs and misconceptions about Indigenous peoples at the time were informed by Protestant religious beliefs.

Chapter Two: Playing *Indian* at Kanawana: Summer Camp and Child-friendly Colonialism

—
*Have you smelled wood smoke at twilight?
Have you heard the birch log burning?
Are you quick to read the noises of the night?
You must follow with the others, for the young men's feet are turning,
To the camp of proved desire and known delight.*¹

*Adventure is not in the guidebook.
Beauty is not on the map.
Seek and ye shall find.
May the Earth watch over us as we are apart from one another.*²

—

YMCA camping in Canada seemed to step into a new phase in 1910. The Montreal Y opened the new Kamp Kanawana in Saint-Sauveur in 1910 and the Winnipeg and Toronto YMCAs established their own camps in the same year.³ Other youth organizations like the Boy Scouts were also established around this time, quickly gaining a foothold in the United States, Canada, and the British Empire. Within the association, there was evidently a new conviction that camping was important for boys, not only young men. This followed the trend across the YMCA's programming of focusing on teaching boys good habits, instead of training young men out of bad ones.

Over the following three decades, Kamp Kanawana was one of many summer camps that developed their programming to further entrench Christian and Canadian values in young boys, often conflating those ideas with each other, as discussed in the first chapter. In some ways, this was achieved by reducing the overtly Christian emphasis and opting for a more informal

¹ Kamp Kanawana Brochure 1918, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Kamp Kanawana Committee 1918-1923, CURMA.

² Camp Stephens Benediction Poem, YMCA of Winnipeg Camp Stephens, "Camp Stephens Administrative Practices Manual," (2019), 23.

³ YM-YWCA of Winnipeg, 'The Spirited Challenge': *The Camp Stephens' Story – A Century of Excellence in Camping, 1891-1991* (1991). The YMCA of Winnipeg camp was originally called the 'Lake of the Woods Institute,' and was opened to young men, women, and their families in 1891. In 1910, it was changed to only serve boys.

religious education. It was also during this period, from the 1920s to the end of the 1940s, that Kanawana committed itself to developing a strong program that relied on and reinforced the myth of the vanishing *Indian*. As discussed in the introduction, I am adopting Bruce Erickson's use of the word "Indian" when referring to the white fantasy of Indigenous peoples. At camp, historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity were not necessary. By white fantasy, I mean the idea of what an Indigenous person could, or should have become in the eyes of the white settlers. This is a contradictory settler fantasy since it is based on what could have happened if Europeans had not settled and colonized Indigenous lands.

This new wave of programming was incredibly popular with campers, and contributed to a sense of ownership and domination over the nation, thereby supporting the larger settler-colonial project. By adopting an *Indian* program, Kanawana reinforced negative and offensive beliefs about Indigenous people in the minds of the largely Anglophone, Protestant, and white campers. While these practices have largely since been abandoned, the ideas and legacies live on in some form. Many of these practices have been, to use Zubrzycki's terminology again, "recoded."⁴ This chapter is divided into three main sections: constructing, mapping, and performing. Due to the nature of summer camp and playing *Indian*, these different practices did not exist in a vacuum. The building of teepees and totem poles was often tied to programs that involved campers performing as *Indians*, and they needed a space that was distinct from the rest of camp. As a result, there is some overlap among these sections.

⁴ Zubrzycki, *Beheading the Saint*, 118.

Playing Indian: A National Pastime

Gillian Poulter has described how lacrosse and snowshoeing were changed and modernized by Montreal's elites in the mid-nineteenth century, and playing *Indian* at summer camp was a similar process.⁵ By putting on costumes and acting out fantastical and outlandish stories, Kanawana campers created a sense of white ownership over Indigenous practices and traditions, such as the medicine man, council fires, and contact with spirits known as Manitou.⁶ These traditions were based in some truth. Indigenous medicine men certainly treated community members; fires in the centre of teepees provided warmth and light; and Indigenous people did communicate and speak with spirits. Many camp alumni or leadership at the time said all of this was done with respect for Indigenous customs, or even to educate campers about other cultures. However, the various ways that playing *Indian* took shape at Kanawana reinforced the idea that Indigenous people were 'Other' and that they were part of a natural, pre-modern landscape. In putting on feathers and playing one-dimensional braves and chiefs, campers participated in the othering and degradation of real Indigenous people. The characters, or caricatures, campers played were out of time. Furthermore, white ownership and practice of Indigenous traditions meant that they were no longer Indigenous. These traditions became part of the white fantasy of the *Indian*. This is complicated still further by the treatment of actual Indigenous people in Canada at the time. In Kristine Alexander's commentary on Girl Guide camps in the interwar years, she notes that while Guides were performing *Indian* dances, the "Canadian government was in the process of criminalizing Indigenous ceremonial dancing, a legal process that resulted in the imprisonment of hundreds of Indigenous dancers during the first few decades of the

⁵ Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*. See especially chapters one and three.

⁶ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931, YMCA of Montreal fonds, KK Pageant Scripts 1931-1932, P145/12B07, CURMA.

twentieth century.”⁷ So, in the pursuit of a building a sense of Canadian identity, Indigenous cultural traditions were removed from Indigenous people, and appropriated as symbols of the national culture.

Part of the process of making native Canadians, as Poulter calls it, also involved the re-imagining of Indigenous people. As Alexander explains, many “early twentieth century educators, government officials, and social commentators represented Aboriginal peoples as part of a noble but dying race.”⁸ The vanishing *Indian* myth encouraged the development of *Indian* lore programs as a means of preserving a disappearing culture. Alongside this was the naturalization of Indigenous people. Indigenous people were thought of as part of nature, not just a people who historically lived alongside nature. This helped foster a sense that Indigenous people were primitive and unable to adapt to modernity and an industrializing society.

At camp, the *Indian* was most often depicted as a brave warrior, a great chief or, occasionally, a medicine man. These iterations of Indigenous men were used at camp as examples of an ideal form of masculinity, as warriors and chiefs were considered an honourable kind of man. These were characters built up from a number of stereotypes, misconceptions, and tales that were told about Indigenous people in Canada. At the time, many camp leaders and other similar organizations claimed their use of “Indian lore,” as they called it, was their way of demonstrating their respect and admiration of First Nations cultures.⁹ As Erickson explains however, this logic was “more likely fuelled by the service it provides the believers than by any actual significant evidence of respect.”¹⁰ There have been some changing attitudes in recent

⁷ Kristine Alexander, *Guiding Modern Girls: Girlhood, Empire, and Internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 133.

⁸ Alexander, *Guiding Modern Girls*, 32.

⁹ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 121.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

years and some of these *Indian* programs have been reimagined or changed in order to be less obviously built on these kinds of stereotypes. While this practice was certainly popularized by YMCA camps, some of Kanawana's archival documents indicate they adopted some of this programming from another youth organization, Ernest Thompson Seton's League of Woodcraft Indians.¹¹

Seton's League of Woodcraft Indians

Ernest Thompson Seton was a "naturalist, artist, master storyteller, and founder of the League of Woodcraft Indians," and was hired at the popular Camp Ahmek in Ontario to teach the campers about *Indian* lore.¹² He was also involved in the early years of the Boy Scouts, uniting imperial expansion and military training with *Indian* lore. The purpose of the League of Woodcraft Indians was to preserve and diffuse Indigenous culture through outdoor recreation such as archery and canoeing, as well as beadwork and re-enacting "Indian legends" in costume.¹³ Seton would teach his league members while dressed up as an *Indian* Chief, which was meant to instill a respect for authority and hierarchy that he felt the youth of the early-twentieth century were missing.¹⁴ He believed that the cure for modernity and over-civilization could be found in *Indian* lore and lessons. This kind of practice was also fueled by the pseudo-scientific idea that Indigenous people were "genetically unable to participate in the process of evolution" and were "the children of the human race."¹⁵ This was rooted in Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory that summer camps and youth organizers like Seton used in their work. According to Hall and Seton,

¹¹ Since this was the title of the organization, the word "Indian" will not be italicized when referring to Seton's League.

¹² Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 219.

¹³ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁵ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 191.

if white boys did not engage in primitive play and activities in their adolescence, they would not develop into mature adults.¹⁶ For Hall and his followers, Indigenous people were used as a model for their perceived “savagery” as a “useful antidote to effete modernity” and protecting manly boyhood.¹⁷ Seton did not use real Indigenous people as inspiration for his programs. Instead, he drew inspiration from his imagination of what he wanted them to be and who he thought they could have been. In this kind of work, Indigenous people were not allowed to be complex individuals, or have social problems – they existed as a model for him to aspire to, to instill aspiration in the youth. This *Indian* did not, and does not exist.

For Seton and others like him, Indigenous people were simultaneously timeless and prehistoric, vanishing and immemorial. Seton believed that white men and women could “adapt Indian skills learned in the heart of the wilderness to modern life,” but had very little faith in the ability of Indigenous people to adapt to a modern way of life.¹⁸ In the 1925 Kanawana season report, it was noted that the Woodcraft League program was “easily adapted to camp,” suggesting that some of Kanawana’s programs were inspired or even copied from Seton’s work.¹⁹ One of the ways camps like Kanawana did this was copying Indigenous structures, as Abigail van Slyck shows in *A Manufactured Wilderness*.

Constructing an Indian Presence

During the twentieth century, it was common for summer camps to have a teepee, totem pole, or other recognizably Indigenous structure. As Van Slyck explains, having a physical representation

¹⁶ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 172.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 125.

¹⁹ Kamp Kanawana Report of Summer Activities 1925. YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1925, CURMA.

of Indigenous presence enhanced a camp's sense of longevity and the surrounding landscape as "a wilderness environment untouched and untamed by white civilization."²⁰ In *A Manufactured Wilderness*, she describes a Pennsylvania Boy Scout camp that built their own version of a Delaware Long House. Traditionally, these were oriented east-west in order to "symbolize the journey from birth to death."²¹ However, the camp made no effort to follow the actual purpose of the building.²² Camp documents did not mention the ceremonial value or purpose of the building, only that it was a "ceremonial structure" and was called "the Umami Big House."²³ The importance of *Indian* buildings or imagery was "measured in their ability to enchant campers."²⁴ Kanawana did this with council rings and totem poles.

Council rings were common at summer camps in the twentieth century, and many camps still have some version of them. They were often "the symbolic centre of camp" and offered the "ritual, solemnity, and spirit of communalism that ... seemed to be lacking in modern life."²⁵ Generally speaking, the *Indian* lore program was used to teach campers anything that camp leaders deemed lacking



Figure 2.1: Totem pole at Kanawana circa 1970s, YMCA of Montreal fonds.

²⁰ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 74.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁵ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 222.

in modern life, and physical structures only enhanced the program. At Kanawana, council ring was both a location and an activity. Situated between the cabins and the chapel, Kanawana's council ring was built by the senior campers in 1922 (see figures 2.2 and 2.6).²⁶ The 1927 camp director, Harold Cross proudly noted that one of that summer's special projects was building a totem pole for council ring (figure 2.1).²⁷ The totem pole was an important part of Kanawana's *Indian* lore, even though they were not a Mohawk, Algonquin, or other eastern First Nations tradition and are only found along the Northwest coast. There was no connection, in other words, between the totem pole and the local environment. This was typical at the time, to incorporate any Indigenous symbol regardless of territory or history.

While it is unclear how many totem poles Kanawana had during the twentieth century, some of the program scripts suggest that the council ring was surrounded by totem poles. In 1939, building totem poles was a special project for campers to do themselves.²⁸ In the words of the 1939 juvenile section director Edgar Smee, "the erection of a teepee, a totem pole, and the arranging of the council circle itself" improved the overall camp program, and contributed to the "enchanting atmosphere."²⁹ These were important physical additions to the spiritual program.

In 1929, the council ring was rebuilt to seat up to 325 people.³⁰ Many summer camps were encouraged to build council rings on their property to ensure there was a spot where the group could gather around a fire for symbolic or transformative experiences. According to Van

²⁶ Kamp Kanawana Season Report 1922, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1922, CURMA.

²⁷ Kanawana Director's Report 1927, Harold Cross Camp Director, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1927, CURMA. It is unclear if this is the same totem pole, however since the photograph was taken in the 1970s.

²⁸ Schedule for 27 June – 4 July 1937, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Program 1937, CURMA.

²⁹ Juvenile Sectional Report 1939 by Edgar E. Smee, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1939, CURMA.

³⁰ Seventy-eighth Annual Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1929, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Reports 1925-1947, CURMA.

Slyck, some early camp designers believed the fire at the centre represented the “emergence of mankind” and connected campers to a “primitive past,” while evoking images of *Indian* war councils.³¹ In many ways, fire was used to demonstrate a connection between campers and ‘primitive’ *Indians* of the past. The council ring was used for weekly meetings as well as special programs which incorporated costumes and legends for *Indian* Council Ring.

Campers themselves were also involved in building an *Indian* presence at Kanawana, indicating that they enjoyed the various practices involved in playing *Indian*. In 1942, the bantam section decided to build an *Indian* village.³² The same group of campers gave their cabins *Indian* names and regularly held feather-giving ceremonies in the council ring.³³ This was the same summer that a “full-blooded Iroquois” spent three days at Kanawana teaching the boys “about *Indian* life and instructing them in woodcraft activities.”³⁴ Hiring Indigenous people was not uncommon at summer camps, however as Wall suggests, they were most often invited as entertainment, maintenance staff, or occasionally as canoeing or woodcraft guides.³⁵ Summer camps were only willing to see Indigenous people in terms of how they could enhance the camp’s *Indian* atmosphere. In 1943, each bantam tent group was responsible for building their own teepee as part of the village process.³⁶

One of the many structures van Slyck describes that camps used to create a sense of *Indian* culture was the teepee. In the previously mentioned promotional video for Kanawana, there is a shot of a canvas teepee sitting near the lake, obscured slightly by some trees.

³¹ Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 128.

³² Bantam Section 6 July 1942, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1942, CURMA.

³³ Bantam Section 30 June 1942.

³⁴ Report of Kamp Kanawana 1942: 49 Years of YMCA Camping by R.H. Hanagan, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1942, CURMA.

³⁵ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 235.

³⁶ Bantam Section Daily Report, 16 July 1943, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1942, CURMA.

Throughout the archival collection, there are offhand mentions of a teepee at Kanawana, however these comments do not indicate what the teepee was used for. In 1927, the director noted that they built one out of old canvas as a seasonal project.³⁷ On both the 1928 and 1962 maps (see below, figures 2.2 and 2.6), there are small drawings of a teepee labelled ‘Indians and Settlers,’ so it could have been a popular spot for playing the game.

Section director reports regularly observed campers playing *Indians* and Settlers around camp, sometimes as a variation like “Indians and Dispatchers” in 1936.³⁸ The reports did not describe the game, but it would have been similar to cops and robbers or another tag-like game. This was yet another instance of campers pretending to be *Indians*, with the added action of catching them or fighting them as settlers or dispatchers. In engaging in, and encouraging these kinds of games, Kanawana reinforced the settler-colonial vision of Canada. *Indians* were characters used in games, and also problems that settlers or ‘dispatchers’ had to solve. One section director log from 1946 observed that the campers played *Indians* and Settlers on a weekly hike, near the site of what used to be the *Indian* Grave. Their game apparently “revived the myth of the Indian Grave.”³⁹ Although I was unable to find the ‘myth’ of the *Indian* Grave in the archives, Wall’s research demonstrates that it was common practice, and even recommended, for camps to engage in “a little subterfuge” by pretending to have discovered an “Indian Burial Ground” and placing “bits of pottery and other evidence” around to suggest the presence of a grave or burial site.⁴⁰ This ignores the sacred and ceremonial importance of real burial grounds and further diminishes actual Indigenous cultural practices and beliefs, providing yet another

³⁷ Kanawana Director’s Report 1927, Harold Cross Camp Director, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1927, CURMA.

³⁸ Junior Section Report 1936, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Reports 1936, CURMA.

³⁹ Intermediate Section Log 24 July 1946, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA.

⁴⁰ W.J. Eastaugh, “Indian Council Ring,” booklet (Taylor Statten Camps, n.d.) as quoted in Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 222.

example of how summer camps used Indigenous traditions to create a mystical or enchanting atmosphere.

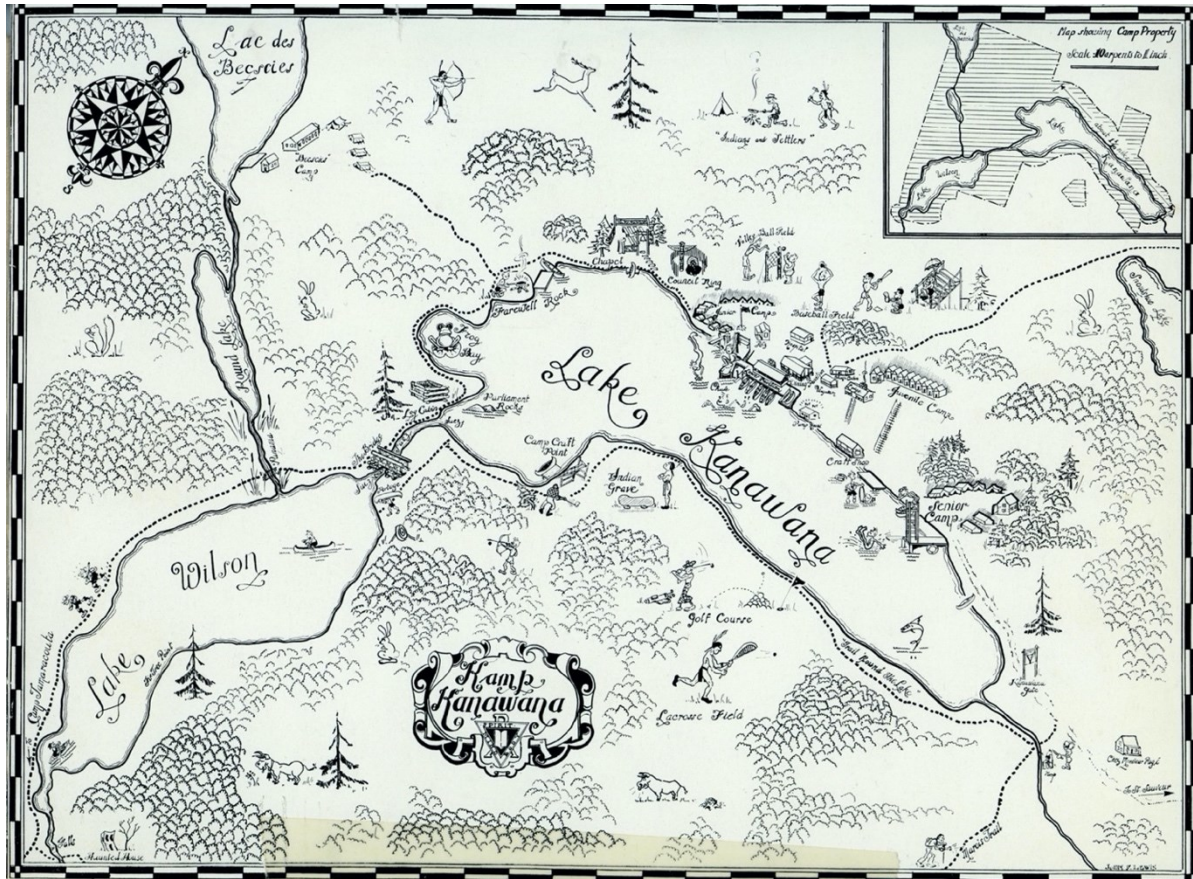


Figure 2.2: Map of Camp Kanawana 1928, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Maps of Kanawana n.d., CURMA.

Mapping Indian Presence

The *Indian Grave*, and the drawings of *Indians* and *Settlers Course* on the map bring me to the issue of the maps in general. These two maps were created by and for Kanawana in 1928 and 1962 respectively. They show the growth and changes at the camp over a 34-year period in which the number of campers more than doubled. The size of the property grew as the Y purchased land on the shores of Lake Becsies and the Pagé farm, the building just outside the camp gate. Campers got younger and the camp was reorganized to reflect the changing dynamics. In the following

pages, I pay particular attention to the characters on the maps, and what they suggest about Kanawana and the YMCA.

There are over twenty characters drawn on the 1928 map, performing a variety of camp-related activities like canoeing, swimming, and hiking (figure 2.2). What is most pertinent to the issue of playing *Indian* is the difference between the white boys and the *Indians*. There are four *Indians* and over twenty white boys

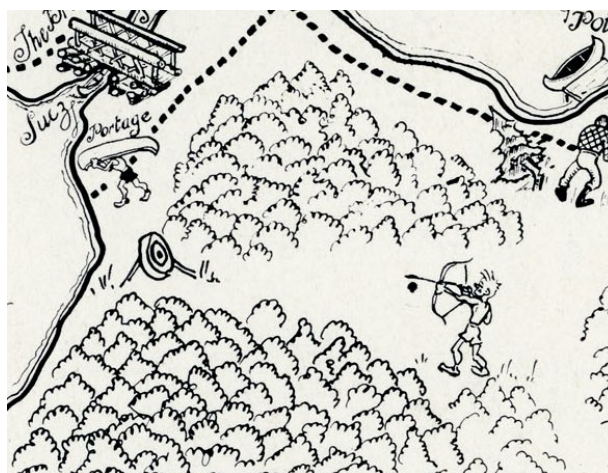


Figure 2.3: Detail showing archery range with a presumably white camper, Map of Kamp Kanawana 1928.

drawn on the map (figures 2.2-2.5). The *Indians* are depicted wearing loin cloths and feather headpieces, with strong jawlines and muscular bodies. They are each performing some kind of supposedly traditional activity: shooting a deer with a bow and arrow, playing lacrosse, standing stoically beside the *Indian Grave*, or sneaking up behind a white boy with an axe in hand.⁴¹

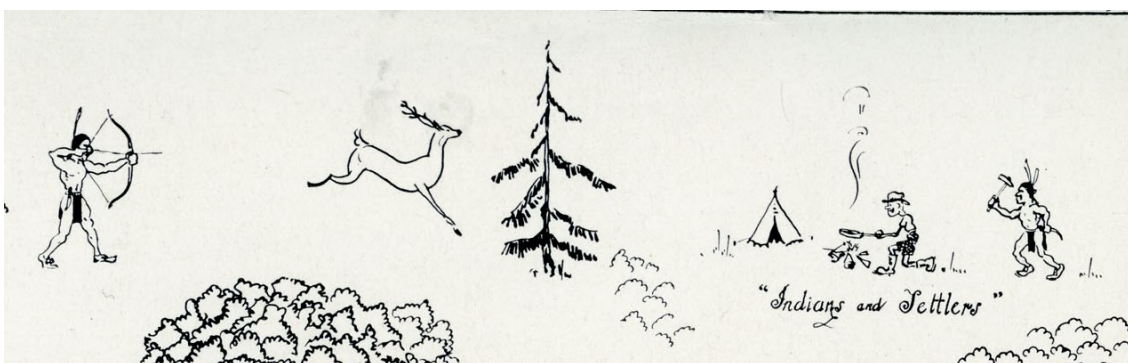


Figure 2.4: Detail showing *Indian* characters, Map of Kamp Kanawana 1928.

⁴¹ Map of Kamp Kanawana 1928, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Maps of Kanawana n.d, CURMA.

These images demonstrate the kinds of ideas Kanawana had about Indigenous people, and by extension, the kinds of ideas they were teaching campers. The other white figures on the map are engaging in typical camping activities, like swimming, baseball, and canoeing, whereas the *Indian* figures are separate. The man shooting a deer with a bow (figure 2.4) is on a different area of the map from the archery range, which has a white boy shooting at a bullseye (figure 2.3). The camper is in a designated activity spot and the *Indian* is in the wild. Benedict Anderson explains that maps “shaped how the colonial state imagined its dominion” and the “geography of its domain.”⁴² Camp maps are an example of how the Y imagined its dominion. This map of Kanawana admitted to Indigenous presence, with labels like *Indian Council Ring* and the *Indian* characters, but not the validity of their presence.

The characters, or caricatures, of Indigenous men are in tension with the white characters who are always doing what is right or what is meant to be done at camp. There is a distinction between camp activities and *Indian* activities, between campers and non-campers. The myth of the *Indian Grave* (figure 2.5), remains a mystery at this time, but it was most likely one that obeyed the pattern



Figure 2.5: Detail of *Indian Grave* and lacrosse field, Map of Kanawana 1928.

described by Wall, in that camp leadership pretended it was an Indigenous burial ground to create an air of mystery and intrigue.⁴³

⁴² Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London: Verso, 2006), 163.

⁴³ W.J Eastaugh, “Indian Council Ring,” booklet (Taylor Statten Camps, n.d.) as quoted in Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 222.

I would also like to call attention to the lacrosse-playing figure, since he exemplifies what Gillian Poulter wrote so extensively on in *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land* (figure 2.5).⁴⁴ Poulter argues that when Anglophone men in Montreal started playing lacrosse in the late-nineteenth century, they changed the rules and equipment used to reflect a more modern, or civilized, society.⁴⁵ Curiously, there is no one else playing on the lacrosse field, and lacrosse is rarely mentioned in the archives. There was in fact, a suggestion in 1927 that Kanawana should offer fewer city sports like baseball and stick to activities boys could not do in the city, like sailing and hiking.⁴⁶ This suggestion was repeated by the senior section director in his 1945

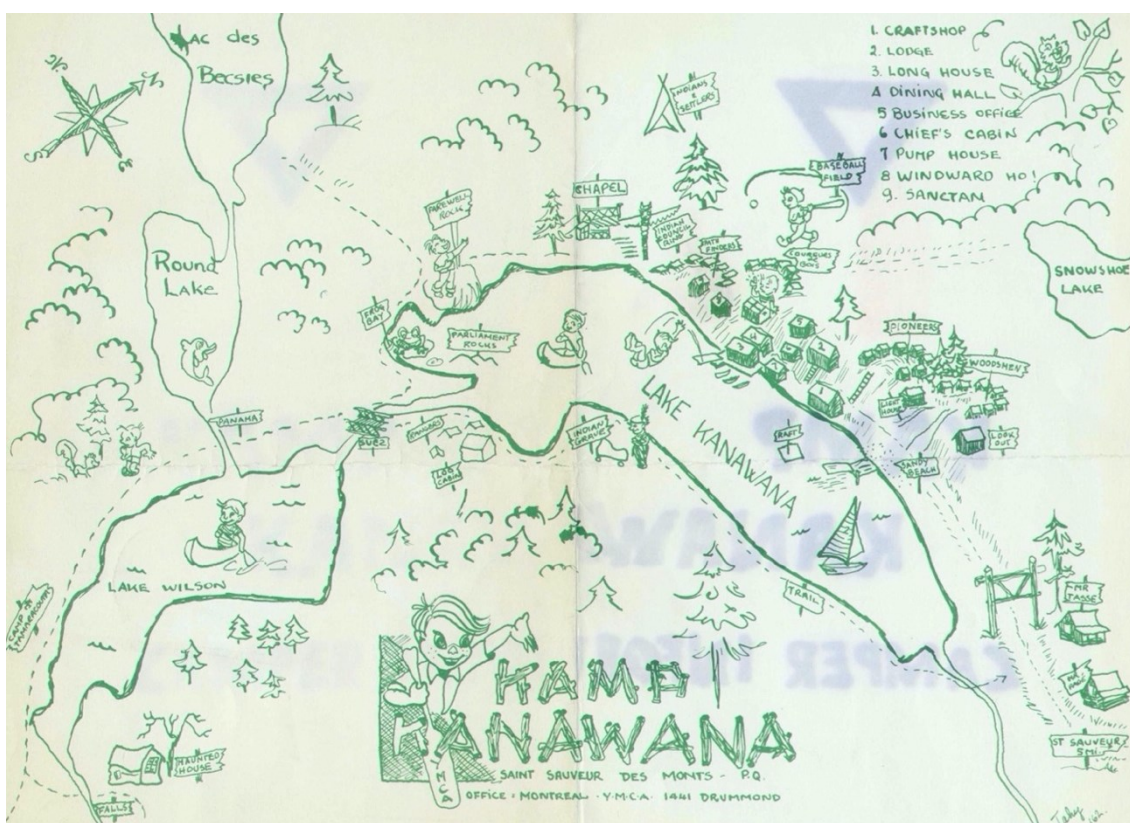


Figure 2.6: Map of Kamp Kanawana 1962, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Maps of Kanawana n.d., CURMA.

⁴⁴ Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*; see also Allan Downey, “Claiming ‘Our Game’: Skwxwú7mesh Lacrosse and the Performance of Indigenous Nationhood in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Making Men, Making History: Canadian Masculinities across Time and Place*, ed. Peter Gossage and Robert Rutherford (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 195–217.

⁴⁵ Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land*, 122.

⁴⁶ Certain Experiences in Attempting to Accomplish Democratic Program Building at Kamp Kanawana 1927, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA.

report.⁴⁷ It is interesting that a camp that used so many other Indigenous traditions felt that Indigenous sports did not fulfill their mission.

The 1962 map has a number of differences from the 1928 map, but the most immediately noticeable change is the absence of *Indian* characters (figure 2.6). There are fewer characters in general, and the only one similar to those from the 1928 map actually looks like it is a white camper, standing beside the *Indian* Grave with feathers around his head (figure 2.7). With the first map, there was an intentional introduction or placement of *Indians* by the likely white artist,



Figure 2.7: Detail of *Indian* Grave and camper, Map of Kanawana 1962.

onto land that was once Indigenous yet actively excludes and relies on the displacement of Indigenous people to exist. In order for Kanawana, and any summer camp, to exist, the Indigenous population had to be removed. The 1928 map featured them, but then the 1962 map

disappeared them. Yet, even without the small sketches,

there is still an *Indian* presence on the 1962 map. The term “Indian” appears three times on the map: at the *Indians* and Settlers teepee, the *Indian* Council Ring, and the *Indian* Grave. The Council Ring was always marked by a drawing of a totem pole.

Since there were no obviously Indigenous characters, does the 1962 map demonstrate a shift in attitudes? Does the absence of the simple characters from 1928 mean the camp no longer used *Indian* lore? Or did the camp directors remove the images because they did not want to suggest that there was a physical presence of Indigenous people at Kanawana? The continued use of the *Indian* grave and council ring indicate that the camp still actively engaged in appropriate and exploitative practices. Perhaps this was reflective of some shift in society that meant the

⁴⁷ Senior Section Report 1945 by Ed Brown, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1945, CURMA.

anachronistic images no longer served their purpose. So even though the image of *Indians* at Kanawana did not remain, the culture did.

The White Indian: Pageants and Skits

The building and mapping of *Indian* presence at Kanawana was heavily influenced, if not caused by, the practice of performing as *Indian*. This was a core activity at many summer camps during the twentieth century, and while my research suggests that it reached a peak in the interwar period, it did not disappear until much later. Summer camps today are no longer actively performing as *Indians*. But many of them still use Indigenous or *Indian* names, or programs inspired by previously successful *Indian* lore programs. At Kanawana, one of the most common and well-documented activities was the *Indian* council ring.

The council ring was often used for skits performed by campers, and many of them were based on *Indian* legends. These often had a ‘big chief’ with a number of ‘braves’, sometimes given names and tribes, or they were simply called ‘brave.’ Many of the skits had plots that involved violence, such as preparing for battle or capturing another character. They involved



Figure 2.8: Lakeshore Day Camp circa 1970s, YMCA of Montreal fonds.



Figure 2.9: Campers at Camp Oolahwan, circa 1970s, Y des femmes Montréal.

costumes and face paint and were almost always centred around a bonfire or a torch. Indeed, fire was one of the most popular ways camps linked themselves to the supposedly primitive and natural ways of *Indians*. I was not able to find photos from Kanawana of these activities, however the YMCA of Montreal fonds includes a photo from a YMCA Lakeshore Day Camp in the 1970s that demonstrates the kinds of costumes that may have been used (figure 2.8).⁴⁸ In a photo from the YWCA Camp Oolahwan that occasionally visited Kanawana, we can see again the kinds of costume and practices used by Montreal-based summer camps (figure 2.9). The face paint, outfits, and actions are all offensive and derogatory.⁴⁹ These photos also indicate that playing *Indian* did not go out of style even if it was mentioned less in camp records.

The scripts preserved in the archives are not necessarily the only ones used at Kanawana, and it is possible that they were changed when they were being performed. Some of the scripts even used language that suggests they could have been adopted from Boy Scouts programs, especially ones that emphasized an international community.⁵⁰ However, some of them include Kanawana camp songs and used titles like “Tribes of Kanawana.”⁵¹ It seems as though for the purpose of *Indian Council Ring*, the camp invented their own ‘Kanawana Indian.’ This was likely influenced by the use of the word ‘Kanawana,’ a word that resembled some Mohawk terms, as the camp name, an issue I will discuss later on. Most of these scripts were stored in folders from the 1930s, but that does not mean they were only used in that decade.

A script titled “Tribes of Kanawana in Council” featured a big chief and braves of different “tribes” who challenged each other to traditional *Indian* competitions such as *Indian leg*

⁴⁸ Photo of Lakeshore Day Camp circa 1980s, YMCA of Montreal fonds, P0145/15, Photos, CURMA. <https://concordia.accessmemory.org/ymca-lakeshore-day-camp>

⁴⁹ Y des femmes Montréal, “Camp Oolahwan - Un camp qui a marqué la jeunesse de nombreuses femmes.”

⁵⁰ Fire of Friendship Service: suggested programme 1939, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Fire of Friendship – Kanawana Show, CURMA.

⁵¹ Tribes of Kanawana in Council: a ten minute skit, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Song Sheets and Skits 1925-1927, CURMA.

wrestling, neck pulling, and crab walking.⁵² There were four “little chiefs” representing different nations: Chief Winnemucca of the Ojibways, Chief Tshut-che-nau of the Tuscaroras, Chief Teuskewata of the Algonquins, and Chief Watotopa of the Cayugas.⁵³ These Indigenous nations had no presence at camp, save for perhaps the Algonquins. Kanawana is located in what some indicate is Algonquin territory, however this would not have been relevant to whichever camp staffer wrote the script in the 1925.⁵⁴ The individual First Nations were not important to the sketch. The names could have been any Indigenous group, real or imagined. Accuracy was never the point, it was about the enchanting atmosphere that these names helped create. The use of names demonstrate what Kanawana leaders thought about Indigenous people, as they were often insulting or mocking. When you sound out Chief “Tshut-che-nau,” the name sounds like “shoot you now.” Similarly, ‘Kanawana’ sounds like Kahnawá:ke. In the same sketch, the braves had names like Brave Peewee, Brave Littleone, Brave Stillam, and Brave Oncewas.⁵⁵ The sketch would have the braves challenge another with a similar name, like Sorespot and Sunburn or Stillam and Oncewas in this excerpt:

Brave Stillam: O Big Chief, I Brave Stillam of the tribe of the Cayugas challenge
 Brave Oncewas of the tribe of the Algonquins to a crab walk.
 Brave Oncewas: O Big Chief, I accept.
 All: HOW! HOW!
 (crab walk goes on, 2 falls out of three)
 Tom Tom Beater: Brave [insert name] wins.
 All: HOW! HOW!⁵⁶

⁵² Tribes of Kanawana in Council: a ten minute skit, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Song Sheets and Skits 1925-1927, CURMA

⁵³ Tribes of Kanawana in Council.

⁵⁴ “Omàmiwininiwag (Algonquin),” Native-Land.ca, accessed June 16, 2023, <https://native-land.ca/maps/territories/algonquin/>.

⁵⁵ Tribes of Kanawana in Council: a ten minute skit, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Song Sheets and Skits 1925-1927, CURMA.

⁵⁶ Tribes of Kanawana in Council.

The script is full of these stereotypical ideas of what happened in *Indian* councils. The campers would have likely been in some form of costume, which makes the closing ceremony particularly interesting. With the practice of playing *Indian*, it is important to remember that it was always meant to be temporary. Campers put on a role or costume before returning to their actual life or self as a young, white boy. After the final challenge, one of the tribal chiefs called on the Big Chief (it is unclear if this role was left for a counsellor or if campers could play him), to “sing the song of the tribes of Kanawana [so] that [their] pale-face brothers may hear it and learn it.”⁵⁷

This kind of language occurs more than once in the archived scripts, where the campers as *Indians* mentioned their ‘pale-face brothers.’ The “song of the tribes of Kanawana,” was the in-character way of saying the Kanawana camp song,

Mine eyes have seen the glories of a thousand camps or more,
By placid inland waters and the ocean’s mighty roar.
But now I’ve seen old Kanawana, I’ll never wander more,
I’ll ever camp right here.

Glory, glory, Kanawana,
Dear old, good old Kanawana,
We the boys of Kanawana
Will ever camp right here.⁵⁸

The song was followed by the Big Chief’s concluding remarks and a final chant:

The time has come when we must close our Council Ring and retire back to our wigwams. In closing it is fitting that we invoke the aid of Wakonda the great Spirit that he may be with us throughout the coming week. Let us then sing our prayer to him as did our redskin ancestors in the far reaches of the forests.

All: WAKONDA, DHE-DHU, WAPDHIN ATONHE
WAKONDA, DHE-DHU, WAPDHIN ATONHE.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Tribes of Kanawana in Council: a ten minute skit, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Song Sheets and Skits 1925-1927, CURMA.

⁵⁸ “Dear Old Kanawana”, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Kanawana Song Books Canadian YMCA Song books, CURMA. The song was sung to the tune of the Battle Hymn of the Republic or as it says in the song book “to the tune of John Brown’s Body,” which was the same.

⁵⁹ Tribes of Kanawana in Council: a ten minute skit, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Song Sheets and Skits 1925-1927, CURMA.

Their ‘wigwams’ were canvas tents on platforms or simple cabins, and the campers would conclude their evening with a Christian prayer before bed. The final prayer or chant in the script, “wakonda, dhe-dhue, wapdin atonhe,” signified the end of their primitive, *Indian* play and their return to normalcy. This one sketch demonstrates the kinds of beliefs that shaped Kanawana’s *Indian* lore programming, however there were many more.

Another pageant script demonstrates how even when the camp played *Indian*, they still maintained the view that Christianity was superior. In a multi-page script, a group of braves are gathered to discuss the growing presence of settlers which “forebodes ill for” them.⁶⁰ A scout arrives and informs the “Great Chief of the Indians” that the Chief of the Cherokee nation was taken prisoner by the “palefaces” during an attempt to keep the settlers from “advancing into our territory.”⁶¹ In his speech to rouse the braves to fight, the Great Chief says “these settlers will let nothing stand in their way. They now take our brothers captive, soon they will have our blood upon their hands. Shall we suffer this? Shall the country, these beautiful lands, trees, rivers, which are life to us pass in to the hands of these invaders?”⁶² Here, then, is a deeply ironic narrative about fighting back against settlers to defend the land, when Kanawana exists on stolen land, and was only made possible by settler expansion and Indigenous displacement.

The second part of the script seems to draw from the story of the Canadian Martyrs, Jesuit missionaries who died among the Hurons in the seventeenth century and became Catholic heroes. As Daniel Francis suggests in *National Dreams*, Jesuits are seen in the Canadian imagination as pioneers of civilization and “special heroes because they went...armed only with a bible and a cross” against the “untamed, uncivilized essence” of the Indigenous population and

⁶⁰ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931, YMCA of Montreal fonds, KK Pageant Scripts 1931-1932, P145/12B07, CURMA.

⁶¹ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931.

⁶² Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931.

the Canadian wilderness.⁶³ The Jesuit suffering “gave the colonial enterprise a moral purpose.”⁶⁴ Titled “Coming of the White-man,” this section opens with a group of settlers sitting around a campfire, singing “French Canadian songs.”⁶⁵ The settlers sitting around the campfire are quickly attacked by *Indians*, captured, and tied to a stake. There is a “war dance around the stake” followed by an ‘Ojibway Death Song.’⁶⁶

In part three, the scouts bring in a captive Jesuit priest who shares the Gospel. He tells the story of Jesus and suggests that “the God of the White Man may be... the God of the Red Man.”⁶⁷ Afterwards, it is revealed that the Indigenous medicine man had regularly “failed to cure” sick braves, whom the priest heals quickly, insinuating that traditional Indigenous practices were inferior to the power of God and Christianity.⁶⁸ The Chief then banishes the medicine man from the “lands for evermore” due to his trickery.⁶⁹ Eventually, the priest tells the remaining group that just beyond their borders sits “many ships and men” from “across the waters” who want to “come in peace, and wish to settle peaceably. They also bring the gospel of Jesus, and believe the Red Man and Paleface can settle in the same land and be happy.”⁷⁰ At this, the Chief prays to Manitou “the great spirit” for guidance, and tells the priest and his braves that they will abandon their lands to the settlers in order to avoid any further bloodshed.⁷¹

⁶³ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 75.

⁶⁴ Francis, *National Dreams*, 75.

⁶⁵ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931, YMCA of Montreal fonds, KK Pageant Scripts 1931-1932, P145/12B07, CURMA.

⁶⁶ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931. The script does not include the lyrics to the death song, only that it was to be sung.

⁶⁷ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931.

⁶⁸ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931.

⁶⁹ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931.

⁷⁰ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931.

⁷¹ Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931.

This retelling of colonial expansion and settlement is glaringly false. It suggests that Indigenous people knowingly and graciously gave up their lands to the Jesuits and their “great White King” because it would be too difficult to watch settlers “hunt [their] buffalo and till [their] lands.”⁷² This pageant script suggested that the Jesuit priest was superior to the traditional medicine man, who was depicted as a devious trickster. All of this would have been performed by a group of white, mostly Protestant, and English-speaking boys for whom this was a standard camp activity. This is similar to the selective historical memory that was at play in the Quebec tercentenary celebrations as described by H.V. Nelles in *The Art of Nation-Building*. Nelles suggests that there was a general acceptance by the public and historians that in order to build a national character, the histories told on stage should be embellished, forgetful, and selective.⁷³ This is what occurred at Kanawana. This program demonized traditional Indigenous practices and depicted a lone Jesuit priest as a hero, passing down a settler-colonialist version of history.

Building off these pageant scripts, Kanawana also practiced playing *Indian* through costumes outside of council ring. There was at least one occasion when campers were covered in cocoa powder and sent to the Kanawana gate to greet guests as *Indians*. The 1946 intermediate section log described how a few intermediates “played the part of the Indians and were covered with” cocoa powder to welcome visitors from Camp Oolahwan, the YWCA camp.⁷⁴ This is further complicated by the mention of “minstrel shows” in the 1936 juvenile section schedule and reports. While there are no descriptions or accounts of the camp’s minstrel shows, the YMCA does have a history of performing and hosting the offensive and racist performances. In a CBC report from 2016, journalist Ainslee MacLennan wrote about the long history of minstrel

⁷² Indian Pageant: Zuni Council 1931, YMCA of Montreal fonds, KK Pageant Scripts 1931-1932, P145/12B07, CURMA.

⁷³ Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 182.

⁷⁴ Intermediate Section Log 17 July 1946, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA.

shows in Montreal and included a photo of a minstrel show cast in front of the Drummond Street YMCA around 1925.⁷⁵ It is possible that these practices were continued at Kanawana.

The juvenile section director in 1939 gave an example of a typical *Indian* programming, in which he described what boys were meant to get out of the program. His example program included a torch parade to council ring, peace pipe ceremony, an *Indian* dance, and a story on “moral nature, generally pertaining to the North American Indian.”⁷⁶ All of this would serve to “create an underlying interest in the camp activities, to put a little extra zeal in the Camp spirit and in a very impressive way to satisfy the spiritual need in a boy’s life.”⁷⁷ These programs were not about teaching campers to respect and celebrate Indigenous traditions. The section director went on to say that during these programs, campers “were under the spell of an enchanting atmosphere. To do the dances of the Indians around the fire, to listen to the wind in the trees, and to see stars peeping down upon them is a real experience for the boy.”⁷⁸ This comes back to the conception of the *Indian*, of Indigenous people, as natural and therefore, other.

Naming Practices

To return to the idea that using Indigenous culture suggests a longevity, or a connection to some unknowable past, I turn to one of the most obvious examples of it at Kanawana, the very name of the camp. As Wall explains, the “foreign nature of the experience [of camp] was announced” by the names of some of the most popular summer camps.⁷⁹ Wall’s work focuses on Ontario camps,

⁷⁵ Ainslie MacLellan, “What Is the History of Blackface in Quebec?,” CBC News, March 23, 2016 (updated September 19, 2019), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/blackface-montreal-1.3495840>. For more on minstrel shows in Montreal, see Eric H. Reiter, *Wounded Feelings: Litigating Emotions in Quebec, 1870-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 260-270.

⁷⁶ Juvenile Sectional Report 1939 by Edgar E. Smee, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1939, CURMA.

⁷⁷ Juvenile Sectional Report 1939 by Edgar E. Smee.

⁷⁸ Juvenile Sectional Report 1939 by Edgar E. Smee.

⁷⁹ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 219.

like Temagami, Ahmek, and Keewaydin, but Kanawana does fit into this category as well. According to a former campers account of Kanawana history, the word “Kanawana” “means in the Indian language “lots to eat.””⁸⁰ In a different account of camp history, an alumnus claims that this meaning was not learned until years after the name was adopted.⁸¹ It is difficult to determine how accurate this is. According to an online dictionary, the word ‘Kanawana’ does not exist in Kanien’kéha (Mohawk).⁸² There are similar-looking words, such as “kanà:wa” which means ‘swamp,’ however trying to find the word that most closely aligns with ‘Kanawana’ feels like reproducing the very practices I am criticizing.⁸³ All of this suggests that the name was not chosen because it was from an Indigenous language, but rather because the camp committee recognized the value of having an Indigenous-sounding word as their camp name. ‘Kanawana,’ does not sound so different from Kahnawá:ke, the Mohawk reserve near Montreal which was widely known as Caughnawaga through most of this period. Using a similar-sounding name would have contributed to the sense of uninterrupted history that the camp tried to create. Wall suggests that while some camps preferred to use “names that had real meanings in indigenous languages, many others were happy enough if the overall effect was an Indian tone.”⁸⁴ In my

⁸⁰ KK History 1951, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, CURMA. It is unclear where this translation came from and if it is accurate.

⁸¹ History of Kamp Kanawana by Ralph Dawson, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Committees, P145/12A, CURMA.

⁸² “Words | Kanien’kéha (Mohawk) Eng | FirstVoices,” accessed June 16, 2023, [https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/Workspaces/Data/Kanehsat%C3%A0:ke/Mohawk/Kanien'k%C3%A9ha%20\(Mohawk\)%20Eng/learn/words?letter=k&page=2&pageSize=10](https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/Workspaces/Data/Kanehsat%C3%A0:ke/Mohawk/Kanien'k%C3%A9ha%20(Mohawk)%20Eng/learn/words?letter=k&page=2&pageSize=10).

⁸³ “Kanà:Wa | Words | Kanien’kéha (Mohawk) Eng | FirstVoices,” accessed June 16, 2023, [https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/Workspaces/Data/Kanehsat%C3%A0:ke/Mohawk/Kanien'k%C3%A9ha%20\(Mohawk\)%20Eng/learn/words/f06aeaec-6da8-4a7b-838d-23d936650795](https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/Workspaces/Data/Kanehsat%C3%A0:ke/Mohawk/Kanien'k%C3%A9ha%20(Mohawk)%20Eng/learn/words/f06aeaec-6da8-4a7b-838d-23d936650795). This is also made more complicated by efforts to eradicate Indigenous languages by the state through institutions like residential schools.

⁸⁴ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 221.

own experiences, I can recall the use of Indigenous names, words, and imagery at the camp I attended.

At the YMCA of Winnipeg Camp Stephens, there were cabins named Mudjikiwi, Shigwianda, and Manitou, all of which contributed to an “Indian tone.”⁸⁵ In 1961, a staff member painted a mural in the dining hall that depicted “a dozen or so classic images of different Indian stereotypes, including a Mohawk warrior, a Cree teepee, a West Coast totem pole, and an Inuit dressed in sealskin.”⁸⁶ The mural was covered up, but not destroyed, in the 1990s because there was such strong pushback from alumni who felt that it was an important piece of camp history and ought to be preserved (figure 2.10).⁸⁷ The mural, seen here in a photo posted on an alumni website, was done with the “deepest respect for First Nations people it represented” but these stereotypical depictions can hardly be considered respectful.⁸⁸ In hiding the mural, the camp covered up but did not actually deal with its history. The mural was up for nearly forty years, at a camp whose staff and campers were almost all white.



Figure 2.10: Dining hall mural at Camp Stephens in the 1960s, YMCA-YWCA Camp Stephens Alumni Blog.

⁸⁵ These cabin names, as well as ‘Wigwam’ were still in use in 2018. Since then, however, these names have been removed and are now numbered cabins like Cabin 5.

⁸⁶ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 121. Erickson is a fellow alumnus of the same camp and used this mural as an example in his own work.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Bruce Owen, “Camp Stephens Alumni: The Dining Hall Mural,” *Camp Stephens Alumni* (blog), May 3, 2016, <http://campstephensalumni.blogspot.com/2016/05/the-dining-hall-mural.html>.

Conclusion: Is Playtime Over?

Playing *Indian* at Kanawana took different forms and served multiple purposes. By using Indigenous structures like teepees and totem poles, the camp suggested it had a long history uninterrupted by colonization. Campers could marvel at the buildings that would have seemed out of time and place anywhere else. At camp, however, they were merely part of the natural and primitive setting. This fed into the belief that camp, as an experience, was even further removed from city life than the location was itself. Kanawana was not just tucked away in the Laurentian forest, but was a space protected from the advancements of the industrial and modern age. This kind of atmosphere supported the general purpose of camp, which was to provide boys with a unique opportunity to play and act outside of their modern, civilized expectations. Putting on costumes and adopting new names enhanced this experience.

The kinds of buildings and practices that structured the camp also demonstrated a lack of cultural awareness by the YMCA boards and committees responsible for managing the camp property. The use of totem poles, teepees, and feather headdresses bundled up different Indigenous traditions from across Turtle Island with no regard or respect for their ceremonial or sentimental value. They were used for aesthetic and entertainment purposes. This speaks to larger issues in white settler society in that Indigenous people were, and continue to be, seen as a monolith. Kanawana passed this belief or approach onto campers, further continuing the settler-colonial project of assimilation. Furthermore, although summer camps are (likely) no longer dressing children up in costume and shouting war cries around a fire, there are other remnants of playing *Indian*, especially with names like Kamp Kanawana.

Many of the practices described in this chapter continue to live on but in different forms. In the next chapter, I will suggest that some of these *Indian* practices were recoded and recast as

voyageur traditions. The myth of the voyageur and its mobilization at summer camps is grounded in the same kind of selective memory as the history of Indigenous-settler relations as told by Kanawana's *Indian* pageants. The very use of the canoe at summer camps is an example of playing *Indian*. But as I will argue in the following chapter, the canoe is used much more heavily in the performance of nationalism, both in the past and the present.

Chapter Three: The National(ist) Vehicle: Camp, Canoeing, and a Centennial

There are things to be done in a bush camp that appeal to everything the boys have. Their appetites are whetted for creative and adventurous living...Not only for the sake of our individuals should there be more real experiences of this kind but for the sake of the nation, and humanity generally. We need strong resourceful men and tripping in the 'back beyond' is one very good way of making them.¹

*To those who have struggled with it,
the wilderness reveals beauties that it will not disclose to those who have made no effort.
The wilderness reserves its choicest gifts for those who undertake its challenges.²*

Camps have relied on Indigenous stereotypes from early on, and they continued to occupy space in camp programming into the late twentieth century. However, around the end of World War II, a new ideal or character gained strength in the camping movement. The voyageur became more popular as an ideal masculine image, particularly at those camps that offered not only canoeing but wilderness canoe trips. The voyageur is another quintessential Canadian symbol that, unlike the noble *Indian*, has always been white. This, of course, simplifies the history of the fur trade and those who worked in it, but for the purposes of summer camps and national identity imagery, the voyageur has always been a white man.

The image of the voyageur did not replace the use of *Indian* practices and traditions at summer camps. However, based on season reports and schedules, there were fewer blatant instances of playing *Indian* at Kanawana in the 1950s and 1960s, as compared to the 1930s and 1940s. *Indian* Council rings and *Indian* lore continued to be popular at Kanawana, particularly among the younger campers during the early 1950s, but were mentioned significantly less than

¹ Report on Canoe Tripping 1937, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1937, Concordia University Records Management and Archives.

² Camp Stephens Return Benediction Poem, YMCA of Winnipeg Camp Stephens, "Camp Stephens Administrative Practices Manual," (2019), 23.

programs that included voyageurs.³ There are a number of reasons for this, and including a rise of nostalgia in the 1930s for a “nation-forming era,” which Carolyn Podruchny suggests was the impetus for the rise of the voyageur in the collective Canadian imagination.⁴ Coinciding with this development was the decentring of the Christian emphasis at Kanawana, a trend that reflected the general shift in the YMCA and Canadian society in general as it became more secular and inclusive.⁵

The Voyageur in Canadian Mythology

The fur trade is often remembered as a heroic and romantic era in Canadian history. Summer camps capitalized on that nostalgia. The image of the brawny, bearded man paddling upriver was recreated in summer camp brochures, t-shirts, and other promotional materials. The centring of voyageurs as the ideal camper picked up speed in the 1940s, around the same time that camps like Kanawana started to build up their canoe tripping programs. So far, we have seen how the imaginary *Indian* has been used by summer camps, at Kanawana and elsewhere as explained by scholars like Sharon Wall and Abigail van Slyck.⁶ The voyageur did not replace the practice of playing *Indian*. However, it did offer camps a historically white, and therefore *more* Canadian, character to play with. That voyageurs were usually Francophone and Kanawana was largely Anglophone did not seem to matter so much as their shared whiteness.

Historically, voyageurs would often incorporate Indigenous practices and technologies into their work. Voyageurs would also compete against Indigenous men as a way of proving their

³ One-hundred and first Annual Report of the Montreal YMCA 1951, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, 101st Annual Report 1952, CURMA.

⁴ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 2.

⁵ See Clarke and Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity*.

⁶ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*; Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*.

masculinity and by extension, their superiority. The true test of voyageur strength was to beat the *Indian* at being *Indian*.⁷ While fur-trade historians suggest that voyageurs often used and adopted Indigenous practices, the camp voyageur was conceived of as wholly separately from Indigenous people and the white fantasy of the *Indian*. Instead of engaging in any of the practices that Poulter describes about indigenizing Canadians or vice versa, the voyageur was already white and ready to be used by white youth to demonstrate their national heritage. Of course, this kind of narrative ignores the complex histories of the fur trade, of relationships between voyageurs and Indigenous women, and the differences between English, Scottish, Métis, or French voyageurs. In the pursuit of national identity, these intricacies were forgotten.

In *Making the Voyageur World*, Podruchny suggests that the voyageur occupies a “central place in the mythology of nation building.”⁸ The voyageur “evokes ruggedness, joie de vivre” that are only possible while in the wilderness.⁹ This was the kind of character emulated by summer camps. The 1953 YMCA of Montreal annual report remarked that the camp’s program was about finding a balance between “desirable simplicity of camp life and over emphatic ruggedness.”¹⁰ The voyageur was a perfect candidate for camps. He was always a white man, muscular and strong, and preferred life in the bush over life in the city. Their isolated lives in the wilderness meant that masculinity, not families, was “the central social principle in their lives.”¹¹ This was echoed at Kanawana from the 1940s onwards.

⁷ Carolyn Podruchny, “Tough Bodies, Fast Paddles, Well-Dressed Wives: Measuring Manhood among French Canadian and Métis Voyageurs in the North American Fur Trade,” in *Making Men, Making History: Canadian Masculinities across Time and Place*, ed. Peter Gossage and Robert Rutherford (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 340.

⁸ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ One-hundred and second Annual Report of the Montreal YMCA, 1953. YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, 102nd Annual Report 1953, CURMA.

¹¹ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 13.

The voyageur was the type of man that anti-modernists and Canadian nationalists believed was missing from mid-century Canada, since modernity had done away with that entire way of life. The nostalgic power of the voyageur period in Canadian history, alongside the continuing waves of anti-modern sentiment propelled him into an icon of Canadian identity. Unlike the explorers whose names are scattered across our maps, the voyageur was nameless and faceless. Any young boy could take on the role so long as he could demonstrate a shared affinity for life in the forest. The most common way of doing this was to go on a canoe trip, recreating the most typical voyageur activity. Canoe tripping, or wilderness programs at summer camps, facilitated and encouraged the kind of experiences that could echo the lives of voyageurs.

The Voyageur at Kamp Kanawana

Kanawana used the history and the myth of the voyageur regularly in its programming, and built most of the canoe tripping program around the idea of the voyageur. One of the first significant uses of the voyageur, specifically in place of the *Indian*, was the creation of “Lumberman-Voyageur Week” in 1947.¹² Lumberman-Voyageur week was held the last week of each summer, and the entire camp was divided into two teams: voyageur and lumberman. The competition was popular with campers, and boys looked forward to finding out their team every year.¹³ This week-long competition still occurs today. There was a lumberman-voyageur mural in the dining hall by 1950.¹⁴ By 1958, the program and rules were well developed. Teams were decided on Friday and the team captains were picked that evening. The leaders of the voyageurs

¹² “‘Kanawana, A Place to Grow:’ A Proposal for the Future of Kanawana” by Kanawana Camping Task Force 1988, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, CURMA.

¹³ Annual Report of Kamp Kanawana 1950 by Roy D. Locke, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Annual Reports 1950, CURMA.

¹⁴ Ninety-ninth Annual Report of the Montreal YMCA, 1950, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, 99th Annual Reports 1950, CURMA.

were “capitaines” and the lumbermen were the “bosses.”¹⁵ Over the weekend, voyageurs made small model paddles and lumbermen made model axes to wear around their necks to signify their teams. On Saturday night the teams gathered on their own to “learn yells and plan [the] program for the week.”¹⁶ Sunday evening was the opening ceremony, in which the lumbermen built a floating bonfire on the lake, and the voyageurs paddled in a circle around the fire. Throughout the week that followed, campers competed in war canoe races, capture the flag, and medley relays in order to earn their team points. There were no individual wins, only team wins.

The use of the voyageur and the lumberman suggests that Kanawana was looking for a more local and familiar history to re-enact at camp. In a report from the end of the 1950s, camp leadership suggested that the week-long program was a way of bringing the “rich traditions” of Quebec to camp, stating that Quebec was the home of lumber industry and the birthplace of the voyageur.¹⁷ The lumber and fur-trade industries are both examples of “staples” trades based on the extraction of natural resources and mostly controlled by white men. In Harold Innis’ *Problems of Staple Production in Canada*, he describes the valuable relationship between waterways, canoes, and the fur and lumber industries.¹⁸ The movement of pelts and lumber on rivers undoubtedly played into the connections drawn at Kanawana between voyageurs and wilderness canoe trips. Furthermore, the voyageur and the fur-trade period is an example of what Anthony D. Smith labels a “golden age.”¹⁹ The fur trade is remembered as the economic

¹⁵ Program and Rules for the Week 1958, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, Lumbermen Voyageur Week, P145/12B07, CURMA.

¹⁶ Program and Rules for the Week 1958, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, Lumbermen Voyageur Week, P145/12B07, CURMA.

¹⁷ Program report on KK for Presentation to Metropolitan Board, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Annual Season Reports 1935, CURMA. This file was in the 1935 Annual Season Reports folder, however it was in the wrong location since the Voyageur Lumberman week was not created until 1946, so it is unclear what year this is from, however it is most likely from 1947-1950.

¹⁸ Harold Innis, *Problems of Staple Production in Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁹ Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, 19.

foundation of the Canadian nation, and its actors as Canadian heroes. Summer camp canoe trips allowed boys to act out their own nationalist and heroic epic. By celebrating the voyageur, summer camps like Kanawana celebrated a white, colonial, and masculine character and history.

Kanawana also invoked the memory of the fur trade and lumber industries when they renamed the sections in 1959. Instead of Bantam, Junior, Intermediate, and Senior, campers were now Pioneers (8-9 year olds), Woodsmen (10-11), Coureurs de Bois (12-13), and Pathfinders (13-16).²⁰ These section titles are still in use today. While the lumberjack did have his place in summer camp narratives, as evidenced by the section title ‘woodsmen’, the voyageur was overwhelmingly more popular. The voyageur, far more than the lumberman, is the ideal candidate for uniting summer camps with another important Canadian icon, the canoe. This conflation of canoeing, voyageurs, and Canadian identity has been studied in depth by Bruce Erickson.

Canada: A Canoe Nation

There are two quotes from Pierre Elliot Trudeau that are often used in canoe-related literature that succinctly sum up the link between Canada and the canoe. The first demonstrates the associations Canadians tend to have between moral goodness and comfort in nature: “What sets a canoeing expedition apart is that it purifies more rapidly and inescapably than any other travel. Travel a thousand miles by train and you are a brute; pedal five hundred miles on a bicycle and you remain basically bourgeois; paddle a hundred in a canoe and you are already a child of nature.”²¹ The second emphasizes the role of wilderness in building a Canadian identity: “I know

²⁰ Recommendations for 1959, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Annual Reports 1958, CURMA. These can be seen on the 1962 map (figure 2.6) as discussed in chapter two.

²¹ As quoted in Gendron, “Unpacking and Repacking the Canoe,” 219.

a man whose school could never teach him patriotism, but who acquired that virtue when he felt in his bones the vastness of his land, and the greatness of those who founded it.”²² Taken together, the late Prime Minister eloquently summarized how the canoe, as an object, has contributed to the practice and performance of a Canadian identity that celebrates wilderness.

The canoe, as Erickson argues, is both a tangible physical object and an intangible idea that unites people under the banner of wilderness.²³ As a historical object, the canoe facilitated trade and expansion, laying the groundwork for colonial settlement of Canada. As a leisure craft, the canoe gives the paddler a unique and ideal Canadian perspective of the world; the canoe allows you to see the landscape (to see Canada) in a way that those who have not been in a canoe cannot.²⁴ We have to put ourselves in canoes in order to see authentic and pristine landscapes, in order to feel authentically Canadian. Wilderness serves a purpose for *white* Canadians, because it is reserved for their leisure and reinforces a vision of Canada as a white nation. It is a practice that Erickson calls “recreational nationalism,” in which we use the canoe as a conduit to affirm our identity as Canadian, as well as a general principle of being Canadian.²⁵

Applying this to summer camps, and Kanawana specifically, the canoe was used as a vehicle to reaffirm Canadianness by recreating voyageur experiences for campers. This was done predominantly through the canoe tripping program which was formally established in 1959, although the camp had been sending canoe trips out as early as 1925. Since the camp’s inception, canoeing had been an activity for campers, but they usually stayed on Lake Kanawana and Lake Wilson. There are canoes on both 1928 and 1962 maps of Kanawana (figures 3.1 and 3.2). On the 1928 version, there is only one canoe in the water that actually has a person in it, specifically

²² As quoted in Gendron, "Unpacking and Repacking the Canoe," 220.

²³ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

a white camper (figure 3.1).²⁶ There are empty canoes (figure 3.3), and one being carried overhead (portaged) by another camper whose face is covered (figure 3.4), but we can assume this camper was also white because his clothing does not match that of the *Indian* characters. This suggests that canoeing was a white activity, especially when compared to what the *Indian* characters are doing on the map as discussed in chapter two: playing lacrosse or using a bow to shoot a deer. At Kanawana, canoeing was for white campers, for white Canadians.



Figure 3.1: Detail of canoeing camper, map of Kamp Kanawana 1928. See fig. 2.2 for full image.



Figure 3.2: Detail of canoeing camper, map of Kamp Kanawana 1962. See fig. 2.6 for full image.



Figure 3.3: One of many empty canoes sitting on a shoreline, map of Kamp Kanawana 1928. See fig. 2.2 for full image.



Figure 3.4: Detail of camper portaging, map of Kamp Kanawana 1928. See fig. 2.2 for full image.

²⁶ Map of Kamp Kanawana 1928, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Maps of Kanawana n.d, CURMA.

The voyageur became an especially important icon with the development of Kanawana's canoe tripping program. Canoe trips were introduced in 1925 for an extra \$3.50.²⁷ In 1928, the camp director suggested introducing a ten- to twelve-day canoe trip, indicating campers were interested in longer canoe trips.²⁸ The canoe trip program continued to grow throughout the 1930s and 1940s and it seemed that the more trips Kanawana sent out, the more canoe trips could do for campers. In 1936, Kanawana sent their trips north to the Lake Archambault region for the first time.²⁹ Archambault was more remote and offered a more 'authentic' wilderness experience for campers. The next summer, there were eight trips in the area.³⁰ The 1946 canoe trip report states that groups often worked through their differences while off paddling, and that boys who "seem to be sissies show their worth, and are more sure of themselves."³¹ This suggests that boys who were 'sissies,' which we can assume would have been weak, effeminate, or possibly gay could be made into strong, masculine men on canoe trips. Although Wall suggests that most camp literature stopped referring to boys as 'sissies' by the 1930s, the use of it at Kanawana in the mid-1940s demonstrates what traits were positively associated with masculinity at the time, namely toughness and strength.³² If a camper struggled on the trip, he would have been deemed less of a man by his peers. According to Patricia Dirks, the YMCA believed that "while religion was essential to achievement of a boy's potential, overdevelopment of the spiritual side of one's nature and underdevelopment of the body, mind, and social nature was dangerous," meaning that

²⁷ Kamp Kanawana Report of Summer Activities 1925. YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1925, CURMA.

²⁸ Camp Director's Report to Kamp Kanawana Committee 10 May 1928, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1927, CURMA.

²⁹ Report of Kamp Kanawana 1936, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Reports 1936, CURMA.

³⁰ Kanawana's Record Season of 1937, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1937, CURMA.

³¹ Report on Kanawana Canoe Trips 1946, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canoe Trip Reports 1946, CURMA.

³² Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 183.

“religion...was not for sissies; only the strong could hope to attain Christian manhood.”³³ A young boy’s ability to endure the challenges of a canoe trip was a testament to his character, his strength, and his manhood. Canoe trips helped groups resolve any conflict or tension, and allowed boys to prove themselves as men – by solving problems, demonstrating leadership, and honing their canoeing skills.

Canoe trips were not just reserved for older campers. Intermediate campers (12-13 year olds) were allowed to go on three-day canoe trips as far as Lachute, while Seniors (14 and up) were able to go on seven- or eight-day trips to Ile Perrot and Grenville or even ten-day trips to Ottawa.³⁴ By 1950, there were six canoe trips going out each week, paddling Lake Archambault and the Ottawa and Pembina rivers.³⁵ Canoe trips were regularly the most popular and well-liked activity at camp, and their rise occurred around the same time that many of the section directors felt senior campers were growing bored with Kanawana. Long-time Kanawansians were tired of the same program year after year, and directors suggested the YMCA consider establishing a separate, older boys camp. By 1956, the camp committee was searching for a more remote site further north to serve as a base for more advanced canoe trips.³⁶ The committee decided on La Verendrye Park in 1959 as a new “canoe trip base camp” which enabled the Y to develop a more robust wilderness canoe trip program for boys ages fifteen and up.³⁷ Boys spent a few days in camp preparing for a twelve-day canoe trip, and afterwards spent a day or two in camp before

³³ Dirks, “Reinventing Christian Masculinity,” 302.

³⁴ Camp Program Outline 1945, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Program Correspondence, Schedules, Scripts 1945, CURMA.

³⁵ Ninety-ninth Annual General Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1950, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, CURMA.

³⁶ One-hundred-and-fifth Annual General Report of the YMCA of Montreal 1956, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, CURMA.

³⁷ “First Quarter of Second Century of Service to Youth of Montreal” manuscript by Fred Hubbard p. 54, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Histories, P145/01B, First Quarter of Second Century of Service to Youth of Montreal (Masters for Re-Printing) 1976, CURMA.

returning home.³⁸ During that first summer, six trips went out in the area and staff noted that the campers felt more independent and developed a strong sense of self as well as better respect for the trip leaders.³⁹ The project was considered a success and the staff report suggests future campers and leaders should be those with a “high standard of leadership.”⁴⁰

The older boys’ camp served to reinforce many camp theories: the more remote or isolated the camp, the better experience for boys, and therefore the better the boys became. The more challenging the experience – the longer it was, or more grueling – the better. A fundamental goal of summer camps was the general improvement of boys as they entered into adulthood. The older boys’ camp provided them the opportunity to work and live together, resolve their conflicts and make new relationships, all against the backdrop of the northern forest. Not only were they doing all this in the forest, it was precisely because of the wilderness setting that these transformations became possible. The wilderness canoe program was named “Les Voyageurs de La Verendrye” and was set up on a twenty-five acre lease in the park on Lac Landron where groups would go on trips “ranging in 10-150 miles [...] planned by voyageurs and counsellors.”⁴¹ The program went further than just recreating voyageur experiences; it labelled the campers themselves voyageurs. It would seem that Kanawana embraced the Frenchness of the term “voyageur” when it supported the camp vision.

‘Les Voyageurs de La Verendrye’ was successful enough that it was soon adopted as a permanent part of the Y camping program, and still operates in a more modern iteration today. In

³⁸ Tentative Program for In Camp 1959, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Older Boys Camp Pilot Program Response and Correspondence 1959, CURMA.

³⁹ Report of Older Boys Camp Summer 1959, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Older Boys Camp Pilot Program Response and Correspondence 1959, CURMA.

⁴⁰ Report of Older Boys Camp Summer 1959.

⁴¹ Boys Camping Letter 11 September 1964 to Mr. H Thomas from Camp Director A. Ross Seaman, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, 68th Annual Report 1962, CURMA.

1964, the program's fifth year, there were over twenty trips sent out in the region.⁴² The base camp was near the mouth of the Ottawa River, which meant campers could paddle white water, an exciting challenge compared to the flat lake paddling offered back at Kanawana. Les Voyageurs was offered to older boys, however it did not detract from the existing canoe trip program at Kanawana.

Kanawana continued to organize canoe trips for their campers from the Saint-Sauveur location. In 1959, campers in the Pathfinder section went on eighteen canoe trips, paddling the Rouge and North rivers, Lake Kiamika, and the Taureau regions among others.⁴³ Kanawana trips were regularly forced to go further away from camp however, and within the reports and daily logs, there is an overwhelming sense that the camp felt threatened by the disappearing wilderness. By 1960, the Y had purchased the Pagé farm that bordered the camp property in order to "assur[e] Kanawana many years of camping on the site without cottage country encroaching."⁴⁴ In 1962, the cottager community had grown so large in the surrounding region that Kanawana was regularly driving their canoe trips over 150 kilometres away for trips any longer than a few days.⁴⁵ Their wilderness was at risk.

As previously stated, the very concept of wilderness is constructed by cultural and political motivations which usually further some goal of the settler-colonial project. Protecting wilderness spaces almost always includes forcing Indigenous communities off their ancestral

⁴² Boys Camping Letter 11 September 1964 to Mr. H Thomas from Camp Director A. Ross Seaman, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, 68th Annual Report 1962, CURMA.

⁴³ Kamp Kanawana Reports 1959 by A. Ross Seaman, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1959, CURMA.

⁴⁴ Kamp Kanawana Annual Report 1960, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Report 1960, CURMA.

⁴⁵ Annual Report of Kamp Kanawana 1962 by A. Ross Seaman, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, 68th Annual Reports 1962, CURMA.

homeland as was done to create some Canadian national parks.⁴⁶ In Canada, wilderness is considered a symbol of the country's goodness. As Liz Newbery says:

Nature and wilderness are typically understood as wild, unpolluted, and good: spaces outside of human history and thus unencumbered with human values like injustice or guilt... Simultaneously, though, nature parks are complicit in the history of cultural genocide in Canada. The wilderness that resides in our national identity is a fantasy of Canadian homeland created in the interplay of desire and anxiety and is used to mask implication in colonial injustice.⁴⁷

The wilderness threatened by a growing cottager community near Kanawana was a wilderness that ought to be preserved for young, white boys and their summer camps to learn what it meant to be a Canadian. As cottages and small towns encroached on canoe trip wilderness, they were encroaching on a specific kind of Canadian identity practice.

The Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant

The conflation of canoeing with Canadian national identity and heritage was perhaps best demonstrated in 1967 during celebrations in honour of Confederation's Centennial. There were two canoe trips that are of particular interest to my research. Celebrated in the national media, the Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant was a race organized by the Canadian Centennial Commission (CCC) that paddled from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta to Expo '67 over the summer. The other trip was the Centennial Canoe Trip planned by the Canadian Camping Association (CCA) and completed in sections by summer camps across Canada. Kanawana participated in the route organized by the CCA. However, the Canoe Pageant deserves some attention for its own purposes and how it relates to the histories of re-enactments.

⁴⁶ Loo, *States of Nature*, 48.

⁴⁷ Newbery, "Canoe Pedagogy and Colonial History," 37.

The Centennial Voyageur Canoe Pageant was a cross-country canoe race with teams from nearly every province and territory.⁴⁸ Each team was made up of six men, mostly white, who paddled in large, specially-made canoes from Rocky Mountain House, Alberta to Montreal for Expo '67 over the course of five months.⁴⁹ Not only were the teams all male, the organizing body behind the canoe trip was almost exclusively male as well. In Misao Dean's work *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle*, she dedicates a chapter to this trip. As she explains, "women's involvement with the pageant was almost entirely limited to feeding and providing support for the paddlers," reinforcing the idea that to be a true Canadian was to be a man.⁵⁰ The canoe trip also emphasized the inherent whiteness of Canada, both in past and present. With the exception of the Northwest Territories and Yukon teams, the canoe teams were almost entirely white, and Indigenous paddlers were not specifically sought out. In fact, Indigenous people were discriminated against at almost every turn. The NWT team, for instance, was prevented from boarding the plane to the trial race and was forced to take the train instead from Toronto to North Bay.⁵¹ Each team named their canoe after an explorer associated with their home province or territory: Alberta, David Thompson; Manitoba, Pierre Radisson; Quebec, La Verendrye.⁵² Dean points out that when Indigenous paddlers were part of the team and paddled under their province or territory's flag, their Indigenous identities were subsumed "to naturalize the political divisions of present-day Canada and to symbolically convey the legitimacy of Canadian sovereignty."⁵³ I would take this further since not only were Indigenous paddlers doing so under a provincial or territorial flag, they were also doing so in the name of an early explorer who contributed to the

⁴⁸ Dean, *Inheriting A Canoe Paddle*, 95. Only Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island did not participate.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 96. This also occurred in Canadian lacrosse leagues, an Indigenous sport recoded as Canadian. See Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land* for more.

large scale displacement and colonization of Indigenous lands. This canoe trip celebrated an exclusively white version of Canadian history. On the trip itself, despite having some First Nations paddlers and passing through reserves, treaty land, and unceded territory, the organizers and teams did very little to acknowledge the active role Indigenous people played in the history of the fur trade and the making of the nation-state of Canada. Celebrating Confederation and celebrating Canada, meant celebrating whiteness.

Kanawana and the Centennial: “the arrival at Britannia Beach was all glory”

For the canoe trip organized by the CCA, camps across the country paddled sections of a route that was remembered as “the waterways of the coureurs de bois and voyageurs of a hundred years ago.”⁵⁴ The canoe trip was meant to recreate the same experiences as those of the voyageurs during the fur trade, supporting the selective national narrative that the voyageurs built Canada. Kanawana sent a group from Deep River, Ontario to Britannia Beach on the west side of Ottawa. The links among canoeing, voyageurs, and nationalism could not be clearer. Six boys and two counsellors paddled 150 miles from August 2-9th and were greeted in Ottawa by a busload of campers singing the Kanawana song.⁵⁵ The experience was not over when their boats were pulled up on the beach. The organizers required participants to submit a historical essay documenting their trips. Keeping a daily record of canoe trips was standard practice at Kanawana, as their canoe trip leaders had kept journals since at least the 1940s.⁵⁶

The CCA asked for a trip report that included details about campsites, portages, white water rapids, as well as any special features or variations on the route from the maps. The essay

⁵⁴ Letter to Parents 1 August 1967 from A. Ross Seaman Camp Director, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

⁵⁵ Letter to Parents 1 August 1967 from A. Ross Seaman Camp Director.

⁵⁶ Canoe trip notebook 1945, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA.

itself had to include a “date and account of the first historically recognizable figure to travel the route, other early users on the route,” and any events of interest or conflict “between fur traders, Indian bands, and foreign powers” that may have occurred.⁵⁷ The report, written by Yves St. Pierre, one of the trip leaders, starts with archeological details suggesting the Ottawa River valley had been inhabited for thousands of years as evidenced by thousands year old pottery and copper. Indigenous people were only explicitly mentioned when Samuel de Champlain arrives: “later came the Algonkian-speaking peoples, including those met by Champlain in 1613. In the latter part of the 17th century many of them were slaughtered by roaming bands of Iroquois who left traces of their culture in the valley.”⁵⁸ St. Pierre then briefly outlined Champlain’s efforts to “find a northern sea at the head of the river” and that he often relied on the advice of “Indian guides.”⁵⁹ This is the last time Indigenous peoples were mentioned in the report. As soon as Champlain found a route inland, the “historical sketch” focuses on explorers who followed in his path like Radisson and La Verendrye as well as the creation of the fur trade.⁶⁰ Once voyageurs or coureurs de bois (these terms seem to be used interchangeably in the report) appeared in the narrative, First Nations people disappeared. Even as the fur trade declined, the report goes on to say, the lumber industry took over, and the men who worked this industry were “a motley crew of Frenchmen, Irishmen and Scots.”⁶¹ This narrative leaves no room, rather it actively excludes, the stories of Indigenous people from the nation-building narrative. This report also supports the idea behind Kanawana’s Lumberman-Voyageur week of these two founding industries, and therefore the type of men that founded Quebec.

⁵⁷ Centennial Canoe Trip Report Guidelines 1967, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

⁵⁸ “The Ottawa River (from Deep River to Ottawa)” Historical Sketch 22 September 1967 by Yves St. Pierre, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

⁵⁹ “The Ottawa River (from Deep River to Ottawa.)”

⁶⁰ “The Ottawa River (from Deep River to Ottawa.)”

⁶¹ “The Ottawa River (from Deep River to Ottawa.)”

Of course, summer camps and the grand national narratives that make up Canadian history rarely ever make room for the histories of Indigenous people. The direct lines drawn from fur-trade voyageurs to summer camp canoe trips did not end in 1967. These motifs continue to influence camps today, as I will demonstrate below by drawing on my own experiences. To address the ways the voyageur continues to hold a place of import in summer camps, I want to turn to a discussion on pageantry, rituals, and re-enactments by drawing from H.V. Nelles, Carolyn Podruchny, and Misao Dean. These all came together in my time as a camper and will allow me to elaborate on the language in which I was taught to think and talk about the wilderness.

Pageants, Historical Re-enactments, and Authenticity

Historical pageantry was born out of the same kind of anti-modernism as summer camps. Pageants were a way to “re-enchant” society in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶² At Kanawana, *Indian* pageants and canoe trips functioned as a type of historical pageant or re-enactment, which Nelles suggests “brought back to life a distant, romantic, chivalrous age” that celebrated a mystical and natural spirituality of the past.⁶³ Canoe trips were another form of historical pageantry or re-enactment.

The Centennial Pageant provides a perfect example of how historical re-enactments rely on a selective memory, or collective forgetting of histories. Individual voyageurs would rarely, if ever, paddle the entire journey from the Rocky Mountains to the St. Lawrence, nor did they use the same boat for the whole trip. Podruchny describes a hierarchy that existed among voyageurs in the fur trade, in which the men who paddled further north or further inland occupied a higher

⁶² Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 144.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 154.

social status than those who carried goods to and from the mouth of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers.⁶⁴ This type of historical accuracy was irrelevant in the canoe pageant, which, as H.V. Nelles explains, is typical of most historical re-enactments.⁶⁵ Nelles argues that the act of commemoration is an act of self-invention, and that what we choose to commemorate indicates what our present society values.⁶⁶ This echoes Smith's commentary on the "highly selective" myths and memories that are used to build a "particular fabric and profile of the nation."⁶⁷ Re-enactments and historical pageantry have the ability to "dissolve social issues" and make formerly political events neutral.⁶⁸ The Centennial Canoe Pageant erased the vital roles of Indigenous men and women in the fur trade, as did the summer camp's voyageur narratives and programming. This erasure reinforced the image of the ideal Canadian, whether historical or contemporary, as white. The image of the white voyageur was further elevated with the use of clothing and rituals.



Figure 3.5: Kanawana campers arriving in Ottawa, *The Ottawa Journal* 10 August 1967, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

⁶⁴ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 69.

⁶⁵ Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 155.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁷ Smith, *The Antiquity of Nations*, 3.

⁶⁸ Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 144.

On both the Centennial Commission's and the Camping Association's canoe trips, costumes fed into the pageantry of the events. The Pageant teams wore headbands and "bright red centennial sashes" as they paddled, reminiscent of the *ceintures fléchées* worn by voyageurs.⁶⁹ On their own fur-trade route, Kanawana campers paddled canoes that were brightly decorated with decals and crests, and wore "colourful plaid 'lumberman' shirts" (figure 3.5).⁷⁰ These canoe trips were a performance of what the Centennial Commission and summer camps thought, or wanted to believe, was the voyageur experience. In *Making the Voyageur World*, Podruchny only mentions voyageurs' clothing when they had special occasions, such as arriving at a trading post or celebrating the holidays, to put on their finer clothing and sashes.⁷¹ In my own camp experience, we received red plaid jackets, likely very similar to those worn by the Kanawana canoeists, after completing the exclusive invitational six-week canoe trip. These coats, embroidered with our initials and the year of our trip, are only given to the six-weekers, and are an instantly recognizable symbol within the community. The jackets themselves are rather common however they indicate membership of a group within the camp because of the embroidery detail. By associating the canoe trip with the plaid lumberman jacket, I am associating myself with the history of the voyageurs and the collective memory of their role in the building of Canada.

Canoe trips are also about the search for an authentic Canadian wilderness experience. The remoteness that the canoe allows you to access is a heightened version of what the Y offered at the Lake Kanawana site. Kanawana's approach to the canoe tripping program was about finding true wilderness areas for campers to paddle and travel through, which was made more

⁶⁹ Dean, *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle*, 82.

⁷⁰ Centenary Canoe Trip 1967 letter by Bill Pigot YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

⁷¹ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 67.

and more difficult as the Laurentians developed. The tension between “authentic” wilderness experiences and encroaching development that Kanawana started to notice in the 1930s did not disappear, and was made obvious by the 1967 canoe trips. The Centennial Pageant claimed it was re-enacting the founding of Canada by following the fur trade routes. However, the trip had spare paddlers and boats following along in trucks, and participants were “never more than two days away from a hot shower.”⁷² The route could hardly be considered isolated or remote if the participants were always near towns with the rest of their teams following along on land. There was also the narrative that the pageant travelled across the same land that their “forefathers” did, which was clearly not the case.⁷³ Over a century of settlement and natural environmental processes meant the land was radically different from what the real voyageurs had witnessed. Natural events like wildfires, erosion, and changing water levels can dramatically change the landscape, not to mention the effect of modern technology like hydroelectric dams. In order for the CCC pageant to paddle the Saskatchewan River, the Saskatchewan Power Company had to release water from the Squaw Rapids dam in order for the water levels to rise high enough for canoes.⁷⁴ These changes to the landscape, whether natural or the result of human activity, can influence canoe trips at any given moment. In 1959, the water levels on the Rouge and the North Rivers dropped so much that Kanawana stopped using them halfway through the summer.⁷⁵ Similarly, I once had to turn around mid-trip and get driven to a new route after attempting a

⁷² Dean, *Inheriting a Canoe Paddle*, 91.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 94. These rapids have since been renamed ‘Thunder Rapids’ and the dam is now ‘E.B. Campbell Hydroelectric Station.’ (Doug Cuthand, “It’s Time to Rename Lake and Honour Indigenous History,” *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, June 18, 2018, <https://thestarphoenix.com/opinion/columnists/cuthand-heres-one-way-to-honour-indigenous-history-month>.)

⁷⁵ Kamp Kanawana Reports 1959 by A. Ross Seaman, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1959, CURMA.

canoe trip on the Albany River in Ontario because the land had not yet recovered from a wildfire. There were no campsites and no portage trails, only burnout.

The question of authenticity also brings up the issue of suffering, to which I alluded in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter. Erickson suggests that by retracing voyageur routes, canoe trips like those from 1967 tried to recreate a level of intimacy with nature and nation that is only possible through suffering.⁷⁶ He suggests that suffering creates a sense of belonging and greater understanding of national history, which is then used to affirm canoeists' claims to Canadian national heritage.⁷⁷ At Kanawana, this was true to an extent. While the camp strove to build character and strengthen boys' bodies, some of the Kanawana reports suggest that there were limits to how much campers could be expected to struggle. Recalling the presence of hydroelectric dams, some Kanawana reports suggested that the dams did not necessarily take away from the experience on canoe trips as many Kanawana campers enjoyed paddling by locks and the power dam in Lachine.⁷⁸ In 1946, campers preferred the routes that took them to the locks instead of the routes that sent them to the Lake of Two Mountains because the lake was too big and windy to enjoy the view.⁷⁹ This raises the question of what campers were meant to get out of the canoe trip: was it an intense physical challenge or a scenic trip? Or perhaps, there was a happy medium in which boys could appreciate the beauty and the challenges of the Canadian landscape.

In 1937, Kanawana director W.J.G. MacDiarmid remarked that keeping the canoe trip groups smaller meant it was possible for boys to “experience a canoe trip” rather than just “go on

⁷⁶ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 78-9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷⁸ Camp Report to Camp Board of Management 14 July 1945 by R.H. Hanagan, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1945, CURMA.

⁷⁹ Report on Kanawana Canoe Trips Season 1946, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Season Reports 1946, CURMA.

a canoe trip.”⁸⁰ This language was echoed in a canoe trip report from the same season which states “to have been on a canoe trip is not good enough. To have experienced a canoe trip, that is a vital part of a boy’s life.”⁸¹ The actual experiences themselves are rarely explicitly stated, as demonstrated by the countless Kanawana reports that repeat some version of “the character values of their simply living together cannot be shown in a report.”⁸² However, the 1937 canoe trip report emphasized the importance of “life in the bush” for making “strong, resourceful men,” and that the experience of a canoe trip is good for the individual and the nation.⁸³ If campers returned from the bush muscular and tanned, and looking forward to the next time they could go out, that would have been a mark of a successful canoe trip. The reports from the 1930s and 1940s do not seem to emphasize any particular hardship, however after the 1967 Confederation canoe trip, some of the campers did mention the difficulties of the route and the trip in general.⁸⁴

The struggle of canoe trips is something to which many former campers and canoeists can attest, myself included. As mentioned earlier, I once had to turn around a week into a four-week trip because the route was too burnt out, and we had lost the majority of our food in a set of rapids. I have paddled against headwinds and camped amid clouds of flies and mosquitoes. This suffering, as Erickson described, absolutely contributed to a sense of solidarity among my fellow campers as well as a sense of pride over having gone through it all. When I read that the 1967 Voyageur Canoe Pageant was never more than two days away from a hot shower, I caught

⁸⁰ Report of the Camp Director 1937 by W.J.G. MacDiarmid, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1937, CURMA.

⁸¹ Report on Canoe Tripping Activities 1937, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1937, CURMA.

⁸² Twenty-fourth Annual Kanawana Report 1933, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Report of the Season 1933, CURMA.

⁸³ Report on Canoe Tripping Activities, 1937, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1937, CURMA.

⁸⁴ “Arrive in Ottawa” *The Ottawa Journal* 10 August 1967, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

myself thinking that was a luxury: I never showered on any of my canoe trips. The voyageurs did not have hot water in the middle of the woods. How accurate must a re-enactment be in order to be considered authentic? Can they be? Perhaps the purpose of these trips was more about the experience of searching for the authentic, than actually finding the authentic.

Rituals

The route that Kanawana took in 1967, from Deep River, Ontario to Ottawa was itself a re-enactment of voyageur history as the fur traders would paddle from Montreal to Deep River and beyond into the interior (figure 3.6). Podruchny emphasizes the role of ritual in the fur trade era, particularly as rituals contributed to the hierarchy of the industry. She notes that throughout Canada, there were sites of “baptism” that symbolically marked men’s entrances into the fur trade, and that further inland sites were in honour of their moving up the ladder of the industry.⁸⁵ These ceremonies often submerged voyageurs in the river, drawing from Catholic baptism practices. One of the first points of baptism was near Deep River along the Ottawa River. For many voyageurs, this would have been their first sighting of the Precambrian shield, marking a geographical shift from the St. Lawrence River.⁸⁶ Deep River is the “oldest and most well established site of ritual baptism along fur trades,” and it is where the Kanawana 1967 canoe trip started.⁸⁷ The centennial campers paddled from the most famous voyageur baptism site into Ottawa, the nation’s capital, dressed in typical voyageur clothing and were greeted by 150

⁸⁵ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 58.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Kanawana campers singing the camp song, directly linking summer camps to a settler-colonial origin myth of Canada.⁸⁸

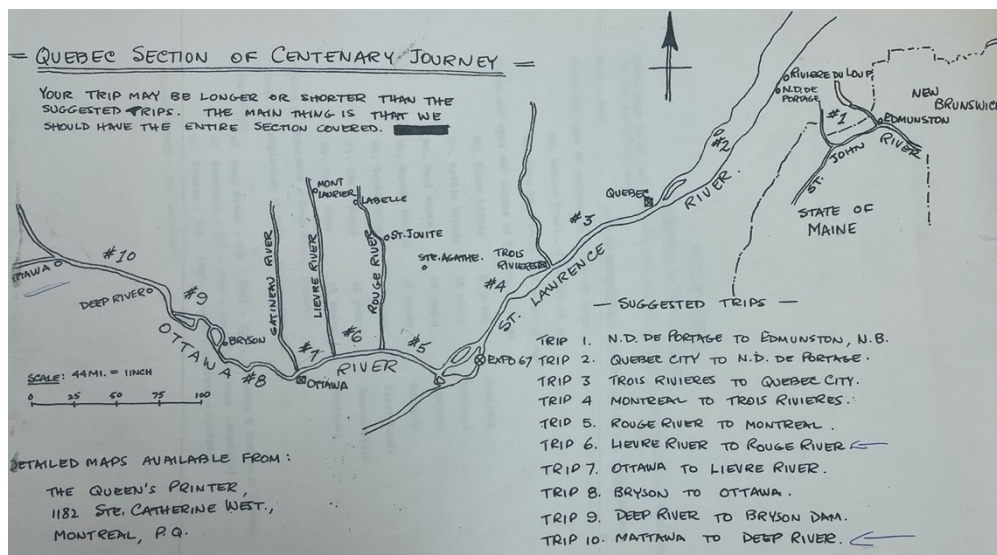


Figure 3.6: Quebec Section of Centenary Journey 1967, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

The power of baptism and ritual were not confined to sites of geographical transformation, as the voyageurs of the past and of my own experience demonstrate. The rituals described by Podruchny were often performed at points that marked a transformation of character, which coincided with dramatic geographical changes. Some of the most common sites of baptism were Deep River, with the first sight of Precambrian shield; two portages west of Lake Superior that separate the Great Lakes drainage basin from Lake Winnipeg and Hudson Bay; and the Methye Portage in Saskatchewan that marks a division between the MacKenzie and Athabasca Rivers and the Churchill River.⁸⁹ At each of these points, voyageurs entered a new level of the profession which took them further from their lives back east. The ceremonies

⁸⁸ "Arrive in Ottawa" *The Ottawa Journal* 10 August 1967, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, Canadian Centennial Canoe Trip, CURMA.

⁸⁹ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 59; "Methye Portage - Trade & Travel - Traditional Travel Routes," accessed May 29, 2023, <http://www.kayas.ca/tradetravel/travelroutes/methyeportage.html>.

themselves combined elements of Catholic baptism with First Nations customs, such as sprinkling water over their heads with a cedar branch and firing guns in “an Indian manner.”⁹⁰

The gun ritual was sometimes referred to as an “Indian gun salute,” which brings up memories of salutes I performed as I returned from canoe trips as a teenager.⁹¹

In hindsight, there was an overwhelming amount of ceremony and ritual attached to the canoe trips of my youth. We had send-off and return ceremonies replete with traditional songs, flag raising, candle giving, and paddle salutes. During my research, I have found similar versions of ceremonies as well as potential inspiration. For example, the ‘*Indian salute*’ performed as part of the mock baptisms by voyageurs likely influenced the ‘eight bang salute’ I did as I paddled into the bay of my camp, except that we hit our paddles against the gunwales of our canoes instead of firing rifles. This salute marked our triumphant return to camp and to civilization, and was followed by a performance of songs and skits that described our trip. After our performance, the wilderness program director would ask all the canoe trips to kneel for a benediction, with our paddles over our shoulders. It is a solemn moment as we reflect on our experiences in the wilderness as they recite a short poem which evokes strong emotions every time I hear it: “To those who have struggled with it, the wilderness reveals beauties that it will not disclose to those who have made no effort. The wilderness reserves its choicest gifts for those who undertake its challenges.”⁹² After the poem, we are told to jump in the lake which breaks the solemnity of the ceremony as the trips run in to the lake, our own kind of reverse baptism as we are welcomed back into camp and civilization. I consider this a reverse baptism as it marked the end of our time in the wilderness, and thus the end of our transformative experience. This is only one form of

⁹⁰ Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World*, 61.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² YMCA of Winnipeg Camp Stephens, “Camp Stephens Administrative Practices Manual,” (2019), 23.

mock baptism or ceremony I performed at camp, and it is remarkably similar to those performed by the voyageurs. These rituals are part of the transformative experience of canoe trips and summer camp in general.

Conclusion: Canoeing as Canadian Heritage

Kanawana was hardly the only summer camp that employed the image of the voyageur in its programs and activities. Many of these practices would have been repeated at camps across Canada, not just those run by the YMCA. However, Kanawana serves as an interesting focus for research as it was a predominantly Anglo-Protestant camp operating in a French Catholic (or Québécois, depending on the time period) setting, using a figure that was usually associated with the French Canadian narrative in Canadian history. The voyageur remains a popular image at camps, and in some ways, it has allowed camps to re-code some of their formerly *Indian* practices as nationalist and historical traditions. For example, Kanawana campers used to be divided into groups named after Indigenous nations. Now, they are either a voyageur or a lumberman.

The very practice of canoeing is an example of Indigenous appropriation. The canoe was introduced to early explorers by Indigenous peoples along the St. Lawrence, yet today it is largely considered the most iconic Canadian means of transport and summer leisure activity. When we canoe, we perform our national identity and prove to ourselves and others that we belong. This was introduced to campers at Kanawana, where the boats are used as a means of accessing a supposedly untouched and pristine wilderness beyond the camp.

In 1967, this manifested in the centennial canoe trips. By celebrating summer camps and Confederation with a canoe trip that passed through historically significant areas, Kanawana

inserted itself and its campers in to the nation-building narrative. Both of the 1967 canoe trips commemorated a white, masculine narrative of Canadian history that was typical of Kanawana and the general public. This kind of narrative hardly mentions the historical contributions of Indigenous people in founding Canada, or the legacies of land theft and colonialism that made these kinds of trips even possible.

Conclusion

Summer Camp? Who Needs It...

You would if you were 14 years of age. Or if you were eight, or if you were 16. If you knew the excitement of sleeping out under the metal-bright stars; the tangy smell of a wood fire. If you shared every youngster's thrill of finding a way through the bush with a compass and map; if you knew the confidence and pride that comes with new skills learned; swimming, learning how to use a bow and arrow or rifle, hiking, bushcraft, portaging a canoe.¹

Summer camps create a language and sense of community that extend beyond any geographical or temporal boundary. These networks, some formal and some not, are founded on similar experiences that are relatively unique to camps. I have heard anecdotes from family friends about their own experiences at different camps that often have some aspect I can relate to – long days on the water, camp-wide competitions, a memorable evening around a campfire. When I am asked about my research, almost every person has a story to tell about their own camp experiences. The overwhelming popularity and pervasiveness of summer camps in Canadian culture (particularly among white, upper-middle class families) indicate that these institutions are deeply woven in the social fabric of the country.

Appreciation for nature is not inherently bad, and nor are summer camps. Indeed, I think summer camps are excellent sites for youth to learn new skills and develop relationships with fellow campers, staff, and the wilderness itself. I can credit my years at summer camp for instilling in me a sense of environmental stewardship and responsibility. There is an old camping adage, 'take only photos and leave only footprints' that is still relevant today. As I wrote in the introduction, this thesis was in many ways an homage to my years at summer camp. However, I also believe that the ability and power of summer camps to bridge together notions of masculinity, wilderness, and national identity demands academic inquiry. Wall suggests that the

¹ Kamp Kanawana Brochure 1968, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana Program, P145/12B07, CURMA.

glorification of nature was more important than national cultures in shaping summer camps.² I would argue, rather, that summer camps helped to create conditions in which the glorification of nature became a crucial element of Canadian national culture. These forces do not exist separately from one another, but rather are constantly overlapping and shaping each other.

I could have told the story of Kanawana in chronological order, and it would have looked very much the same as the one that emerged from these three thematic chapters. The camp was founded with explicit religious motivations, which in time gave way and made space for boys to play *Indian* as a means to assert their own dominance and control over land and history. Then, in the years leading up to the first centennial of Canadian Confederation, the camp developed a robust canoe tripping program that found a new messenger and symbol in the voyageur, both historical and mythologized. However, explaining the history of Kanawana chronologically would have undermined the fact that many of these practices did not have obvious beginning and endings. These changes did not mean that the earlier practices fell out of use, but were either used alongside new ones or, to borrow again from Zubrzycki, were recoded. Let us reconsider one of the original purposes of the Y, to reinject manliness into Christianity in the late-nineteenth century by reimagining Christ as a capable, strong, and youthful man. The first phase of Kanawana did so by removing young boys from the potentially emasculating influences of the city and their mothers and surrounding them with other boys and young men in nature. Then, the camp adopted the image of the ‘noble savage’ or the *Indian* chief as an ideal masculine model for campers to emulate. Boys received *Indian* names and earned feathers for their achievements, linking Indigenous traditions to their own masculine development at camp.³ Particularly during

² Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 257.

³ In 1939, the Juvenile section director described how campers were awarded feathers at weekly council rings for passing tests, not unlike the badges system. Juvenile Sectional Report 1939 by Edgar E. Smee, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Kanawana General Administration, P145/12B01, Camping Season Reports 1939, CURMA.

the 1930s and 1940s, Kanawana relied on the idea of the noble *Indian* as a model for campers. Into the 1950s and onwards however, in parallel to the development of the canoe tripping program and wider use of the canoe as a Canadian leisure activity, the voyageur came to represent a white Canadian model of masculinity. This coincided with a general decline of blatant religiosity at camp and in wider society. Instead of being rooted in Christianity, the voyageur was a man rooted in a love of the outdoors. So not only has nature replaced Christianity as religion, but so too have the models used by camps like Kanawana. Instead of holding up Christ as an ideal, by the 1960s, Kanawana was relying on the image of the voyageur, a rugged man most comfortable in the bush. These models or images of masculinity that Kanawana used were loose interpretations of historical reality.

Many voyageurs were devout Catholics, particularly the French-Canadian men and with the support of scholars like Wall and Erickson, I have explained how the *Indian* at camp was made up of a combination of fact and fiction. Again, we come back to the lack of concern for strict historical accuracy at summer camps. I find this tension between reality and myth so intriguing particularly when I consider how much of camp culture is passed down through word of mouth or even ‘camp legends.’ To return to the canoe trip ceremonies from the third chapter, one of the songs that I performed as part of a ritual was allegedly taught to camp staff in the 1980s by a group of paddlers passing by the camp. How much truth is there to that story? Does it matter? It is not so far off from the question of authenticity that I asked in the same chapter. Wall states that camps represented a bourgeois yearning for authentic experiences, which in turn fed into building and asserting a sense of national identity.⁴ Are canoe trips about having an authentic experience, or are they about the experience of searching for the authentic? By what

⁴ Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 254.

metrics do we measure authenticity? There is, as I explained in the first chapter, a ‘spirit’ that exists at camp, that cannot be easily described in camp reports or master’s theses. Part of that spirit does include the stories and traditions that make each camp so unique and sometimes so integral to a person’s sense of self that they write a thesis trying to better understand the history of camp.

Summer camps like Kanawana provide unique opportunities to explore the creation and implementation of Canadian identity markers as well as the recodification of cultural practices. I am particularly intrigued by the transformation of camps when it comes to religion. Nature was once heralded as the closest men could get to God and his divine creation. Over time however, nature has been mythologized as having its own power that many camps have separated from Christian ideology. In Cronon’s words, “Nature has become a secular deity in this post-romantic age.”⁵ I agree with him, as instead of turning to the church or scripture, many now turn to the wilderness for self-discovery and transformative experiences. Cronon capitalizes the ‘N’ in ‘Nature,’ signifying its recodification as a kind of religion. It is also in a canoe in wilderness that we, as Dean has pointed out, can most effectively and dramatically perform our national identity.⁶ We find ourselves, and so we find our nation, out in the bush.

Erickson opens *Canoe Nation* by referring to a 2007 CBC list of the Seven Wonders of Canada: the Rocky Mountains, the prairie sky, Niagara Falls, Halifax’s Pier 21, Old Quebec City, the igloo, and the canoe.⁷ These were selected by and voted for by official judges and the public in a media competition based on their “Canadian-ness and their ability to inspire.”⁸ What I find most striking about this list is how these seven ‘items’ can be separated into natural wonders

⁵ Slater, “Amazonia as Edenic Narrative,” 36.

⁶ Dean, *Inheriting A Canoe Paddle*, 79.

⁷ Erickson, *Canoe Nation*, 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

or historical sites except for the igloo and the canoe. These two outliers represent an ongoing tension within Canadian society that has always interested me. How is it that the igloo and the canoe, both traditionally Indigenous, are so often used to represent a white, settler-colonial nation like Canada? Moreover, if we recall how Indigenous history has so often been considered synonymous with natural history, the igloo and the canoe could also be considered natural objects. This list of ‘wonders’ is only one example of how Indigenous cultural artefacts are so often subsumed under a ‘Canadian label,’ in yet another act of colonialism. What makes something Canadian then, can be defined by its natural beauty and its links to the colonial history of the country.

These natural Canadian ‘wonders’ have been labeled inspirational because of how we think about wild spaces like the mountains or the prairie sky as restorative, powerful, and majestic. As Cronon says, we have all had moments of reflection in nature, as inspired by our surroundings.⁹ Here we can see the presence of the ‘secular deity’ of Nature. During a walk on a university campus that has been designed with a “pastoral, parklike, Edenic” greenspace, Cronon describes sitting on a rock and working through a writing problem.¹⁰ He states that his “meditative moment...was itself a culturally constructed act [he] had learned from a long line of romantic and pastoral poets” like Henry David Thoreau and William Woodsworth.¹¹ For many youth, summer camps like Kanawana are the first opportunity to have these kinds moments in what is considered true wilderness. This wilderness, as I have explained, was often thought of as pure and untouched, despite its careful construction.

⁹ Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

Many alumni have said that their use of Indigenous clothing, names, and ‘songs’ was about honouring First Nations cultures and history. It is too easy to wave away any concerns about Indigenous appropriation at summer camps by saying it was merely a product of its time. It is not enough for us to look back at the histories of wearing headdresses, of chanting *Indian* war cries around the fire, and say it was a different time. It is not enough to cover up the murals and take the totem poles down. These actions do not acknowledge the longstanding relationships between camps like Kanawana and colonialism, between camps and the violent displacement and destruction of Indigenous communities. I do not pretend to know the right way forward, but it cannot be quietly removing lingering examples of *Indian* programming. So I do not have calls to action or directions for camp directors to take, as I do not consider this history a problem to be ‘solved.’ However, I do suggest that those of us involved in the camping movement, whether as a former camper, an alumnus, or even current staff member consider what, and who, has long been silenced at camp.

My focus on the role of Protestantism, playing *Indian*, and the voyageur at Kanawana was a result of what appeared most often in the archives as well as in the wider summer camp literature. By capping off my research in 1967, I saw a very clear image take shape of the relationship between Kanawana, masculinity, and Canadian identity. To be Canadian, was to be a camp kid. Wall suggests that summer camp reflected class differences, but also helped shape class identities. Camp also reinforced racial identities, as campers and staff were predominantly white. To circle back again to Cronon’s concept of bourgeois antimodernism, the very people who resented and sought relief from industrialization and modernization in the form of camp were those who benefited the most from it. This then reinforced the idea that leisure, that the wilderness was a space for wealthier white families. After 1967, this began to change. In 1968,

Kanawana invited girls between the ages of 10 and 12 to come to camp for the first time with the boys.¹² In time the camp eventually became fully co-ed. This would have had a dramatic effect on the camp dynamic. How did the camp's mission and programming change to reflect the presence of girls and women at camp? What stayed the same? How did campers' experiences change? Although I have explored the role of masculinity at length in this thesis, the development of femininity at and through summer camp is another area of research I am most interested in.

Perhaps the 1967 canoe trips, in celebrating the first hundred years of the Canadian state, also celebrated the beginning of a new direction for summer camps like Kanawana. Camps across Canada began to establish co-ed programming, and as discussed, slowly dropped blatant Christian and *Indian* programs. In recent years, some camps have begun to acknowledge their racist or exclusionary histories, suggesting yet another change in the culture. Some camps now open the season with a land acknowledgement, others have reached out and worked with local Indigenous elders to better understand how they can move forward together. On Kanawana's website, they ask parents to include campers' gender identity to ensure their child is placed in the cabin that best suits them.¹³ Camps have changed to better reflect their campers, their communities, and the country in general. We still however, need to continue to ask ourselves why and how summer camps hold so much weight in our national imagination and whose stories and histories we are remembering and celebrating.

¹² One-hundred and seventeenth Annual Report 1968, YMCA of Montreal fonds, Annual Reports, P145/02D, Annual Report 1968, CURMA.

¹³ "Camp YMCA Kanawana," YMCA Quebec, accessed June 29, 2023, <https://www.ymcaquebec.org/en/Find-a-Y/Camp-YMCA-Kanawana>.

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