

Eleanor's Vignettes



Eleanor P. Eells is known internationally for her work in organized camping. She is one of the founders of the Fund for Advancement of Camping located in Chicago.

George Louis Meylan

The name of George Louis Meylan first appears in camping annals in April 1903, as leader of the YWCA-Boys Brigade Section of the first camping conference. This meeting, attended by 98 men and two women, opened communication between private and agency camps, as well as forging a link between camping in its formative years and the liberal New England Protestant establishment. Participants and speakers represented a cross section of lay and professional men prominent in law, medicine, religion, YMCA personnel, heads of Boston settlement houses, Eastern private schools, and camp faculties. There were over 100 YMCA camps at this time and from 75 to 100 private camps.

"Open Air Gospel for All" proclaimed the headlines in Boston newspapers. The speakers and leaders had throughout their lives hiked and camped out in the woods and had spent family summers in the country where they could live simply and find

respite from the "evils and pollution of city life," and renewal through nature. They believed in the value of manual labor, physical endurance, moral standards, and responsibility. Organized camping was an innovation compatible with their ideas and experience and a movement they were happy to support.

YMCA men outnumbered private camp people. But there was interchange and recognition of common purpose. The YMCA workers emphasized physical education, practical skills, work with boys, and "making manly Christians." They talked about recreation, sports, municipal parks and playgrounds, and institutional churches as new avenues to be explored. The private camp directors stressed camping as education, a renewal and antidote to urban life, with a strong flavor of the Protestant work ethic.

Meylan had recently received a bachelor's degree from Harvard and was working on a master's at Columbia. Born in Switzerland in 1874, he moved to New York at the age of 14. Four years later he was employed by the Bangor, Maine YMCA, and met the Rev. George W. Hinckley, director of the nearby Good Will Camps. He worked there for a period, greatly influenced by Hinckley's philosophy and personality, and acquired a firm belief in camping's value for boys.

His life as a boy in Switzerland had instilled a deep love for nature and introduced him to Rousseau's philosophy, "Let nature be your teacher." Maine reminded him of Switzerland, and he knew Maine would somehow later be his home. In 1897 he took a group of young men from the Boston YMCA on a two-week camping trip near Lake Sebago in Maine. This trip was so successful that by the following year the board established an outing department and purchased an island in Lake Winnepesaukee, NH as a permanent campsite. He worked there for four years. In 1904 he received his master's

degree and accepted the post of medical director at Columbia, which he held until his retirement in 1929. (Harvard University refused to accept a degree in physical education.) He received an M.D. degree from New York University in 1906. The story goes that he sought professional training and status to gain acceptance and credibility for camping as a profession.

While living in New York City, Meylan bought land and a summer cottage at Lake Sebago, Maine, and in 1907 founded White Mountain for Boys. The Gulicks purchased land from him for a summer home, later locating the Gulick camps there. Soon a congenial colony of like-minded colleagues developed and the acceptance of camping as education. He had joined the Camp Directors Association of America (CDAA) soon after its founding in 1910, and in 1914-15 was elected president. In 1924-25 he again served as president of the newly merged Camp Directors Association. His prestige in the health field brought him the presidency of the American Physical Education Association.

In 1929 he retired from Columbia to devote more time to camping and his various interests. He was an effective advocate and interpreter of camping through personal contacts, speeches, writing, and teaching. He believed in Dewey's philosophy of learning by doing and in Gulick's emphasis on the sound, well-trained body and the education of the whole man. He wrote articles for *Camps and Camping*, the *Playground Magazine*, and medical and other journals, always linking camping with education and physical fitness. The camp director was an educator and camping a contribution to education. Camp life was ideal for inculcating the social and moral virtues, and developing responsibility and self-reliance, as well as offering an experience in democratic living. He was very hard on luxuries in a boys'

(continued on page 29)

of Private Camps, Inc.
 Camp Directors
 Association, Inc.
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 Maine Camp Directors' Association
 members— Agawam, Alford Lake
 Camp, Bendito, Four Winds, Great
 Oaks, and Hidden Valley Camp
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 New Hampshire Camp Directors
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 The Salvation Army
 Vermont Camping Association
 Wayne County Camp Association
 Western Massachusetts Camp
 Directors Association
 ACA Sections—Eastern Pennsylvania,
 New England, New Jersey, New
 York, Southeastern, and St. Louis
 ACA Camps—Alleghany, Kehonka,
 Mishawaka, Mohawk, Naticook,
 Thunderbird, and Winape
 American Camping Association

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As Congress neared the opening of the new session, Sen. Ribicoff (CT) and Reps. McKinney (CT) and Hatchford (CT) announced plans to reintroduce the Youth Camp Safety Act. However, the administration staff indicates that they have no plans for introduction of an administration bill.

Christian Camping International and Boy Scouts of America have joined in the support of ACA's new position asking that such an act not be introduced and that HEW mandate state collection of statistics for camp-related injuries/deaths. □

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camp and ridiculed the excesses of marble baths, servants, fancy food, candy stores, and city entertainment. Camp was to be education and simple living.

When World War I broke out, he took a leave of absence to become director of recreation for the French Army. On his return he purchased Camp Arcadia, where his oldest daughter Juliette was head counselor. Now the sisters of White Mountain boys could attend camp, too. Increasingly, the operation of Arcadia was in Juliette's hands. Today Juliette Henderson and her two daughters are the directors of this remarkable third generation camp.

Several Maine directors of third generation camps met at Camp Arcadia in 1975 to tell of the early days of private camping in Maine and the New England "greats." Here I

realized the great contribution Dr. Meylan made to his students, to quality camping, and to the field. Joel Bloom told of a scholarship at Columbia for his father Ira, the support and later help in founding Camp Powhatan. The site was selected, laid out, and the water and sewage systems designed, (Joel insisted that to this day no repairs were needed!) with local credit arranged through friendly merchants. Appleton Mason was similarly assisted in founding Camp Agawam in 1919, as were several others. Halsey Gulick told of the long and close friendship and camp "trading of children" between the two families. (The Meylans had six girls and one boy, the Gulicks four girls and one boy.)

Soon after his retirement Dr. Meylan developed the 200-acre Arcadia farm near Casco as an experimental agricultural center. By selection of varieties and the use of hot beds and hot caps, he produced fruit and vegetables by July 1. His herd of purebred jerseys won regional and national awards. He was thus able to supply 80 percent of the food needed for the two camps and Powhatan as well. Meylan considered the camp

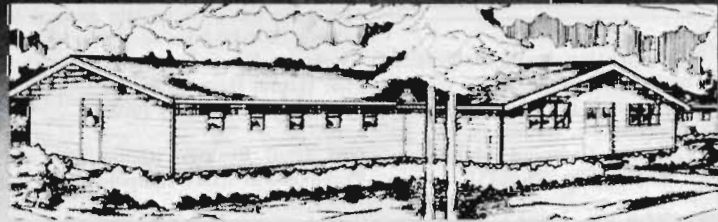
staff of prime importance; he carefully selected and trained them. During World War II when his son went into the service and men were in short supply, he closed White Mountain. The property was sold to Halsey Gulick for his home.

Dr. Meylan was active in camping until 1952 when he moved to New York. The *New York Times* of February 16, 1960 printed a long appreciative obituary of this "celebrated youth leader." Dr. Meylan's continuing service to camping is his lasting memorial. What a privilege it must have been to know him! □

Acknowledgement

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