

Eleanor's Vignettes



Eleanor P. Eells is one of the founders of the Fund for Advancement of Camping located in Chicago, IL.

Ernest Balch and Camp Chocuroa (1881-88)

Chocuroa occupies an important spot in camping history quite out of proportion to its short life of eight years. This was a small specific purpose camp founded by Ernest Balch out of strong convictions and a missionary zeal, but with little money.

Balch was concerned with the miserable existence of wealthy adolescent boys in the summer when they must accompany their parents to fashionable resorts and "fall prey to the evils of life in high society." Even worse was their fate if left alone in the family mansion "with only servants or low stable boys for companions." This was in sharp contrast to his own life in New Hampshire where he and his brother were free to explore the countryside and master the lake. Something must be done, and he could and would do it!

By midwinter of his sophomore year at Dartmouth, Balch knew he had the answer. He would found a camp for boys aged 12 to 16 years ("not too plastic, and not too rigid") in the New Hampshire area he knew so well. The basic principles were clear in his mind and his plans well thought-out. The indifference and ridicule of educators to whom he talked did not deter him. In late May Balch, his brother Stephen, and a friend set out to find a site in New Hampshire. Burnt Island in Lake Asquam seemed ideal, so they immediately occupied it and started building a lodge. (Fortunately they were able to buy the island for 40 dollars when discovered by the startled owner.) Balch later reported that those June days were flat, while waiting for the first rush of boys to appear. By mid-July a boy from Washington arrived soon to be followed by his cousin. In late July three Boston boys joined the group. "We had a camp! My ideas were sound."

A young graduate student, C.E. Applegate, with whom Balch had camped, joined the faculty, and the plans began to be implemented. The aim was to develop hardy, responsible, independent, resourceful youth. There would be no servants, no class distinctions, no snobbery, in this little, democratic, sharing community. An ad in the *Churchman* brought more boys the next year, and the camp grew steadily. Students were divided into four rotating teams, supervised by faculty, who incidentally were expected to do more than their share of the work. It was a busy life, with meals to be cooked in primitive fashion, dishes to be washed on the white sandy beach, waste to be fed daily to the fish, and grounds and quarters to be kept clean. Paths had to be cleared, and more huts built. A daily boat trip had to be made to town. Every boy had to master the lake so as to move freely in safety, in any weather. There was

always time for athletics, games, and water sports.

Balch was a deeply religious man, and most of the boys came from Episcopal schools. A simple woodland chapel area on a hilltop was used the first year and enlarged as the camp grew and the townspeople came to the vesper services. An acolyte program and vested choir were formed the second year with Balch as leader. A library and stories by the campfire were popular. The relationship between student and faculty was close and to the quality of the faculty must be attributed much of the success of the camp.

Many years later Balch commented that he could not remember which ideas were his original ones and which came out of his experience. Plans for teaching these boys the value and use of money were of paramount importance in a capitalistic society. Each boy had a 25 cents weekly allowance, but beyond that he had to earn whatever he needed. The older boys formed a Goodwill Contracting Society, which handled the laundry, canoe building, and assignment of menial tasks to willing "slaves," with fees regulated by supply and demand. A bank with a checking system (recognized in the town) was developed, as well as a law court to settle disputes. The camp newspaper and stories in such magazines as *St. Nicholas* spread the word, but educators remained indifferent.

The camp closed in 1888, three years after Balch graduated, not because of the \$8,000 capital deficit, but because he had proved his point and had demonstrated a new type of education. It was not his responsibility if educators failed to see the light. A few camp directors did listen and follow to some extent his theories in camps established in the next 10 years. Camp Harvard (1882-Rev. W.E. Nichols) came closest, but they had a chef! Balch had no doubts about the

(continued on page 38)

are involved in a decision to give up actual ownership. However, such acquisition may be a major vehicle for eliminating taxes, raising capital, and perpetuating an organized camp.

Economic impact of tax alternatives. The manual provides a professional discussion and analysis of the economic principles to be considered in evaluating land tax alternatives. It identifies the relevance of "opportunity costs, variable and fixed

operating costs, capitalized value," and provides a formula for estimating the relative economic impact of each of the land tax options referred to above. In addition, the manual details step-by-step procedures by which the land owner can implement the findings and recommendations.

Miscellaneous. A summary of the extent and nature of potential cooperation with Maine environmental agencies reports a substantially positive and supportive climate for subsequent efforts to align interests

and objectives. Joint pursuit of the preservation of organized camping's constructive, recreational and educational, environmentally sound use of open space is definitely recommended.

A most instructive chapter makes specific and incisive suggestions for proposing and enacting a "model law," to ensure equitable and beneficial taxation of organized camp properties.

Given the design and completion of what is the costly model phase, state camping associations are encouraged to replicate the study; and the American Camping Association is urged to undertake a concerted effort to address the full scope of the problem.

Anticipating Proposition 13, FAC has once again made a major pragmatic contribution to a strengthened future for the camping movement. Similar treatment should certainly be given to the many other economic and demographic forces that confront camp administrators. However, obtaining and retaining the vital program element of appropriate recreational land is central to the formation of new enterprise and healthy prospects for thousands of traditional organized camps. □

Frank M. Levine is coordinator of the Camping Resources Study Project at the Center for Research and Advanced Study, University of Southern Maine, Portland, ME.

Eells continued from page 9

value of the experience to his students. The site was used by alumni for years afterward and many were the words of appreciation for an education not to be found in schools of the day. □

Acknowledgement
Balch realized 40 years after Chocuroa's closing the impact he had had on the camping movement, but he never wrote his planned book on Chocuroa. Porter Sargent researched the story for more than 10 years with help from alumni. He finally traced Balch to Yucatan where he was involved in land and oil ventures and in acrobatics and the amateur circus. Through correspondence and interviews he reported the story. From these I have put together this vignette, with some gaps and inconsistencies.



Available now

A remarkable new film that could save hundreds, even thousands of lives each year

Each year approximately 8,000 Americans die by drowning. Many of these deaths are among people who know how to swim but who find themselves in situations where ordinary swimming techniques are of no use. They become exhausted and drown. Now, through the techniques shown in a superb new film, you can help reduce this tragic number. The film is titled:

DROWNPROOFING—THE PRIORITY FOR EVERYONE

Produced under the supervision of Dr. Reagh Wetmore, Director of Aquatics, Boston University, this film is especially designed for swimming instructors. It shows clearly every step needed to instruct both swimmers and non-swimmers in these **life-saving techniques.**

The superior quality of this film means that hundreds of qualified swimming instructors can now give their students the benefits of these techniques. By purchasing this film you can play a part in possibly saving hundreds or even thousands of lives each year.

For information write: **Vision Associates, Inc.**
665 Fifth Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

Circle 29 on Reader Inquiry Card