

Rescuing Idle Youth

“An Ideal Life in the Woods for Boys”: Architecture and Culture in the Earliest Summer Camps,” by W. Barksdale Maynard, in *Winterthur Portfolio* (Spring 1999), Univ. of Chicago Press, Journals Division, P.O. Box 37005, Chicago, Ill. 60637.

With the approach of Labor Day each year, some four million children return home from more than 7,000 summer camps throughout the United States. Now often a way for working parents to keep their vacationing offspring occupied, summer camp once was intended to serve a more overtly character-building purpose: giving boys from affluent families an antidote, in the form of nature, to the corrupting influences of urban life. Maynard, an art historian at the Delaware College of Art and Design, explains how summer camp became a treasured American institution.

Springing from a long tradition of rural boarding schools, the summer camp was established on an entirely separate basis for the first time in 1881. Ernest Balch, a Dartmouth College student, founded Chocorua on a

small wooded island in Squam Lake, New Hampshire. This “utopian experiment in the physical and moral education of boys,” says Maynard, began with a single house and six boys, and grew to serve more than 30 boys. “Camp architecture . . . toed the line between nature and culture, wildness and civility.” In shanties that a visitor described as “pretty much all roof and piazza,” the boys had a protected view of nature, Maynard notes, while “a blazing fire in the hearth” inside “offered a reassuring, homelike ambience.” The camp operated for nine summers. In the end, however, Chocorua proved a financial disaster, ultimately costing Balch \$8,000.

But the venture inspired imitation. In 1885, John F. Nichols, a Massachusetts divinity student, founded Camp Harvard at Rindge in southern New Hampshire. Two years later, the camp—renamed Asquam—moved to a forested hilltop overlooking Squam Lake. Asquam became “the flagship of the early camping movement, a high-profile institution catering to the sons of rich and influential families,” Maynard says. At Asquam, the now-familiar title “counselor” came into use. But in 1899, the camp made the mistake of setting up a winter session to complement the summer one. “The result was financial ruin and the demise of both versions of Asquam in 1909,” says Maynard.

Fortunately, the Asquam system had spread, leading to an “explosive growth in camping, from about 20 programs in 1890 to some 500 by 1905.” The “most successful and influential” camp modeled on Asquam, Maynard says, was Pasquaney, also located in New Hampshire. Founded by Yale University alumnus Edward S. Wilson in 1895, the camp served the “scions of prominent Eastern families” and itself inspired at least a dozen other



Boys at Camp Chocorua join Ernest Balch, the New Hampshire camp's founder, in an outdoor chapel service.

institutions, including the “first girls’ camp of importance,” Redcroft, in 1900. Pasquaney continues to thrive today. In 1997, a total of 101 boys from seven countries attended.

Summer camps came into existence as part of the “back to the country” movement that grew out of anxieties about idleness and soft urban life around the turn of the century. It also produced the YMCA camps, the

Boy Scouts (imported from England in 1910), and the Camp Fire Girls. For youths who spent their summers in the rustic settings, the experience was often memorable. Diplomat William C. Bullitt, a former Pasquaney boy who attended Yale and Harvard Law School, later said that Pasquaney stood alone as “the best educational institution in the United States.”

Cooking Up Soul Food

“The Origins of Soul Food in Black Urban Identity: Chicago, 1915–1947” by Tracy N. Poe, in *American Studies International* (Feb. 1999), George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. 20052.

Soul food may be a mouthwatering emblem of African American identity, but not so long ago rib joints and chicken shacks were points of controversy among black Americans.

When African Americans journeyed northward in the Great Migration that began during World War I, they brought their rural southern culinary tradition with them, writes Poe, a doctoral candidate at Harvard University in the history of American civilization. But their “backward” ways seemed to threaten the hard-won respectability of the middle-class blacks already established in Chicago and other northern cities.

“With their sidewalk barbecue pits, ‘chicken shacks,’ and public consumption of watermelon,” says Poe, “an ugly stereotype of Southern migrants” as crude, unclean, and backward folk “soon developed, no less among the black middle class than among white Chicagoans.” The migrants, however, “could not understand what the problem was” with their traditional southern food.

Southern cuisine (eaten by both whites and blacks) was largely the creation of slave

cooks, using foods and preparations of Africa, Europe, and early America, Poe says. Besides fried chicken and fish, typical foods ranged from barbecued pork to one-pot dishes with regional names such as “sloosh,” “cush-cush,” and “gumbo.” “Most significantly, however,” she writes, “black people developed an affinity for the parts of animals normally discarded by whites: entrails, known as ‘chitterlings’ (pronounced ‘chitlins’); pigs’ heads, which were made into ‘souse,’ a kind of headcheese; [and] pigs’ and chickens’ feet.” One censorious front-page story in the *Chicago Defender*, an African American newspaper, was simply headlined “Pig Ankle Joints.”

Gradually, however, a sense of racial solidarity emerged, Poe says, and the prejudice against southern food and eating rituals faded. By 1940, the *Defender* was reporting a southern heritage celebration, complete with traditional food, sponsored by the NAACP Ladies’ Auxiliary. It wasn’t called “soul food” yet, but urban African Americans had already embraced southern cooking as a part of a common heritage.

PRESS & MEDIA

Wire(d) Stories

“What I Saw in the Digital Sea” by Frank Houston, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (July–Aug. 1999), Journalism Bldg., 2950 Broadway, Columbia Univ., New York, N.Y. 10027.

Web journalism is fast evolving—but, unfortunately, some of its best potential is being left behind, according to Houston, a freelance writer. The twenty-something jour-

nalist went to work for Fox News Online in New York in October 1996, hoping to contribute fresh news feature stories. He quit in disillusion a little more than two years later,