



Camp Wawenock, Camp Walden Aggasiz Village, Pine Tree Camp, and Camp Micah Celebrate Milestones

By Henry Paul Johnson

Maine Summer Camp Historian

The wonderful history and traditions of Maine Summer Camps were prominently on display this past summer as Camp Wawenock (1910-2025), Camp Walden (1915-2025), Camp Micah (2000-2025), Agassiz Village (1935-2025), and Pine Tree Camp (1945-2025) celebrated milestones.

Camp Wawenock (115 Years)

Camp Wawenock was originally organized as Camp Wawenock for Boys through the efforts of Dr. William C. Kendall who first came to Sebago Lake in 1907 for the United States Bureau of Fisheries. Thereafter Camp Owaissa for Girls was established as a girls camp in 1910.

From 1919 to 1929, Dr. Elroy LeCasce directed the boys and girls camps. In 1924, the Boys division was discontinued and the girls camp became Camp Wawenock/Owaissa. From 1929 to 1948 Eloise Vest and Mary Parkinson (“Parky”) came to Wawenock and became the Directors of what came to be known as Camp Wawenock. During their tenure, a dining hall and kitchen were built, stables and a health center were built, and several cabins were enlarged and archery and riflery ranges were built.

From 1949 to 1997, the Camp Wawenock spirit continued under the Directorship of Lillian and Syd Ussher according Camp Wawenock’s website. The Usshers devoted themselves to “the ideals of Wawenock while continuing to refine the camp program and facilities.”

It is noteworthy that June Gray worked at Camp Wawenock from 1956-2011 and by all historical accounts, was a Director at Camp Wawenock from 1979-2011. For 55 years Ms. Gray was an instructor and camp director to hundreds of young women who enjoyed their summers as campers and Wawenock staff. Pat Smith began as a staff member in 1968 prior to becoming a full-time Director at Wawenock in 1985. She was a member of the faculty at Bates College for 10 years where she coached varsity sports.

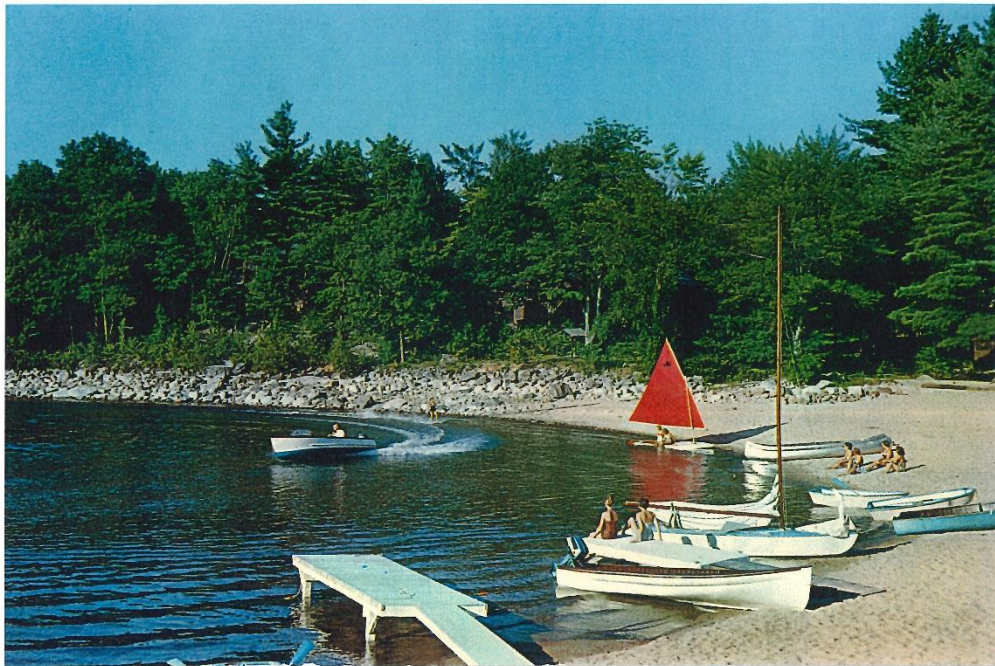
Today, the spirit of Camp Wawenock continues under the skillful directorship of Andy and Catriona Sangster. It is noteworthy that Mrs. Sangster holds her Masters in Education and taught at the high school level before becoming a full-time director. Mr. Sangster has a degree in Physical Therapy and has worked as a full-time camp professional since 1992. He has an extensive background in sports instruction, coaching and refereeing.

This Maine Historian had the opportunity to visit Camp Wawenock, spend time at the camp during the Summer of 2025 and to be treated to lunch in a scenic outdoor setting. It is clear to this Historian that Camp Wawenock is a special place for campers and staff alike. Geographically, it enjoys a beautiful extended Sebago lakefront where water activities abound. This Historian specifically observed at his visit of the camp a sailing regatta hosted by Camp Wawenock with other neighboring Maine camps.

One unique experience offered at Camp Wawenock is the potential leadership opportunities built into the camper experience. Camp Wawenock provides a camper with both roots and wings. Roots create steady trees that are able to weather any storm and wings to give the opportunity to explore and soar. Wawenock offers campers a vast variety of water activities as well as archery, riflery, tennis, drama, and crafts.

During my time at Wawenock, I was presented with a paperback book titled “Songs from Camp Wawenock” with 107 pages. The songs included creative lyrics, songs such as “Our Wonderful Place” and “The Undeniable Love”.

Below is a vintage photo from Camp Wawenock.



Camp Walden (110 Years)

Camp Walden for Girls in Denmark, ME, celebrated this past summer its milestone of continuous operation for 110 years. I visited Camp Walden this past summer and was greeted by Director Marnie Cerrato who allowed me to have lunch in the Walden Dining Room complete with a welcoming cheer and a song-filled experience. We salute Camp Walden for Girls as examined by Denmark Reflections published by the Denmark Society in its April through June Newsletter:

“In 1916, two determined young women from New York, Blanche Hirsch and Cara (Clara)Altschul, traveled to Denmark, Maine to purchase 45 acres for a girls’ summer camp, with the vision of providing a supportive environment for girls to grow and achieve their goals, a tradition. The traditions of honesty, believing in oneself, respecting others and not accepting failure became, and continue, to be the essential elements of Walden’s philosophy”

During a tour of the camp, I had the opportunity to visit the waterfront which is fittingly named “Walden Pond”. Director Cerrato explained to me that Walden was inspired by the Henry David Thoreau's book, Walden, which is part of Camp Walden’s desire to connect campers with nature.

By all accounts, Camp Walden started with some 30 campers and now enrolls approximately 140 campers each summer. Director Cerrato explained to me the Camp Walden tradition has continued from generation to generation. She specifically explained to me that many Walden campers are children or grandchildren of former campers. Camp Walden, it was described to me, aims to provide campers a happy and vigorous summers and ample opportunity for various camp activities; to stimulate a love and appreciation of nature through hiking, canoeing, and camping, to foster cooperation with others and to develop “just and democratic standards” based on the principal of self government, which campers refer to as Honor System.

Camp Walden offers campers a variety of aquatic and land based activities including swimming, boating, water skiing, horseback riding, tennis, gymnastics, archery, arts and crafts, basketball, canoeing, dance, a ropes course, and drama just to name a few.

Below is a logo for Camp Walden which in many ways embodies the Camp Walden commitment to the relationship of camper experience and nature.



Agassiz Village (90 Years)

Agassiz Village celebrated 90 years of continuous operation this past summer. Founded to give children the opportunity for a transformative overnight camp experience, it welcomes campers between the ages of eight and seventeen, with a focus on the underserved child. Its programs are led by a caring staff and feature traditional Maine camp activities and teen leadership programs.

Agassiz Village was founded in 1935 by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Burroughs. It provides children with the opportunity to escape the hardship of their daily lives. The camp originally served newsboys and other street vendors from the Boston area, where Burroughs had founded the Burroughs Newsboys Foundation. The boys learned real job skills, practical school subjects, and experienced outdoor living and developed outdoor skills. The camp opened its doors to an adoptive program for physically disabled campers in the 1950s and girls first joined the camp in 1973. Primarily, campers come from throughout New England to experience this most unique camp setting.

The mission of Agassiz is “to prepare kids for life’s journey.” Specifically, the camp offers its campers the opportunity to develop and practice critical leadership and life skills.

I had the opportunity to visit Agassiz in July 2025. I was provided with a tour of the camp, which helped me understand the rich history and unique programs offered by Agassiz Village. Judy Emmert, Director of Communications and Grants at Agassiz, explained that Agassiz programs are an investment in the future, designed to inspire children to dream big and engage in activities so that they can reach their full potential as adults. The camp is under the direction of a prestigious Board of Directors that includes two Massachusetts judges, including Harry Burroughs’ granddaughter, an attorney, and prominent business leaders.

Agassiz Village offers four summer sessions from June to August. This past summer, it hosted members of the Maine Celtics, who taught the kids about basketball and led them in ball-handling drills. In the past, the camp hosted then-First Lady Nancy Reagan. President John F. Kennedy financially supported the camp in the 1960s.

Agassiz Village sits on what once was Camp Maqua, a YWCA camp, and has retained three original Maqua buildings. According to Ms. Emmert, it is “a safe place where kids can forget the struggles of daily life and just be kids.” For many of them, it is a second home.

Agassiz has two miles of waterfront on picturesque Lake Thompson in Poland. On a clear day, one can see Mount Washington in New Hampshire from the camp dock.

Agassiz Village has served as a beacon of hope for many children throughout New England as it works to instill basic life-changing values, including leadership and responsibility. Below is a picture of the Agassiz Village’s logo.



Pine Tree Camp (80th Season)

Pine Tree Camp located in Rome, Maine on North Pond sits on the site of what was once an old fishing and hunting camp. Pine Tree Camp was unique as it is a medically modeled base camp that provided the opportunity for its campers to “get outside and get moving”. Last summer, during its 80th season, Pine Tree Camp hosted both youth and adult campers aging from five years old to eighty years old. Approximately 95% of its campers are from Maine.

Pine Tree Camp has a significant medical staff with on site nurses and a camp doctor as well as an overall camp staff to camper ratio of one to three. Pine Tree offers various activity including water sports, swimming, paddling, and land sport activities such as adaptive biking, archery, a challenge course coupled with arts and crafts and theater to its campers who have a range of physical and intellectual handicaps.

Pine Tree Camp has a unique “open door” policy. Director Dawn Willard-Robinson explained to this Historian that Pine Tree camp receives no state funds and privately fundraises. Fundraising activities include winter snow mobile ride and an egg ride.

The Pine Tree website states that the camp was originally known as the Pine Tree Society for crippled children located on property upon which presently sits the Hyde School in Bath, Maine. It was following the school property acquisition, that the then Pine Tree Society believed that the North Pond property would provide an opportunity for children with disabilities to experience nature in a way previously unavailable to them. Thus, Pine Tree Camp came into being.

At Pine Tree Camp “children and adults with developmental and physical disabilities experience freedom, independence and life-changing experiences through barrier-free access to the outdoors.” According to the Pine Tree Camp website, “the camp is an American Camp Association accredited camp for people with disabilities. Parents love our 3:1 camper to counselor ratio and the way we seamlessly accommodate individual campers’ needs so they can fully participate in anything they would like to try.”

As Ms. Willard-Robinson explained to me via a Zoom interview, Pine Tree Camp has never turned away a camper due to inability to pay tuition. Pine Tree Camp offers an array of options for children and families. A copy of the options matrix is displayed below.

Program Name	Day	Overnight	Individual Camper	Families	Camper Ages	Tuition Assistance Available
Adult Overnight		●	●		19+	●
Children's Overnight		●	●		8-18	●
Camp Pine Cone	●		●		5-13	●
Family Camp		●		●	8+	●
Adventure Day Pass	●		●	●	5+	●
Dirigo Experience		●	●		5-15	●
Leadership in Training	●	●	●		14-18	N/A

Camp Micah (25 years)

Camp Micah enjoys a Peabody Pond setting in Bridgton, Maine. The Camp has been operating continuously for 25 years on property which in the past, was the site of Camp Accomac and the Moose Cove Lodge Camp. Specifically, Camp Micah was established as a “traditional Jewish co-educational overnight summer camp for campers between the ages of 7 and 17”.

During July of 2025, I had the opportunity to visit at the camp with Director Mark Lipof. He provided for me the opportunity to visit the camp, in the words of Mr. Lipof has “built from scratch facilities” including summer camp cabins, a large dining hall, an outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts, Ninja course, and significant fields.

Camp Micah was established with a goal to making certain that all campers could come to camp and do the things they love and try the things they have never done before. – Camp Micah’s goals include keeping a safe and nourishing environment with top notch instruction and positive reinforcement and encouraging all campers to succeed and become more resilient. The history of Camp Micah according to Director Lipof began with building a camp from the ground up: “The vestiges of what was the prior camp and were dismantled “in order to give rise on or about the year 2000 for a new camp.” The 25 year history of the Camp Micah shows a trajectory of growth which, during the summer of 2025, had in residence some 280 campers and approximately 165 staff members to enjoy the Camp Micah experience.

During my time at Micah, with Director Lipof, he explained that Camp Micah was able to conceive a culture from its beginning and to create such a culture to nurture and grow. Mr. Lipof emphasized that it is all about growth, acceptance, and getting along with others who share the same experience. Director Lipof personally has enjoyed a rich camp history having served in the past as a Camp Counselor and Assistant Director both at camps in both New Hampshire and Maine.

The website for Camp Micah indicates that “campers typically live in a bunk with “8-9 campers and 2-3 counselors”. Bunks are equipped with two hot showers, two sinks, two toilets. The bunks are “the most comfortable camp beds you will ever sleep in”.

Judaism is woven into the fabric of Micah life as Camp Micah appreciates the importance in connecting its campers to its Jewish heritage while understanding its collective responsibility to make the world a better place. Camp Micah offers a spirited Friday night service, coupled with hands on shabbat programs, while making “Jewish fun”. According to Camp Micah’s website, Jewish connection and spirituality through community is strengthened at Camp Micah. Shabbat is special at Camp Micah. On Friday evenings, campers and staff welcome the Sabbath with a Shabbat dinner with homemade Micah challah and chicken soup. The meal is followed by a spirited song session which leads into shabbat service at the chapel on the hill led by Rabbi Lipof and the camps music staff. Mark Lipof’s mother, Rabbi Emily Gopen Lipof, the first senior female Rabbi or a major congregation in the U.S. teaches campers by “taking life lessons and turning them into unique and entertaining stories.”

Camp Micah participates in inter-camp activities with many neighboring camps including Camp Wigwam and others in the greater Bridgton area.

During its 25 years of operation, Camp Micah has staked its place in the Maine camp tradition as a special place steeped in a Jewish cultural tradition. Below is a Camp Micah banner, which was provided to me by Director Lipof during my visit to Camp Micah.

Below is a photo of Camp Micah's logo.



Conclusion

To this historian, while camp milestones are measured in years, the great qualities of camp experiences are in so many ways, immeasurable. Maine Summer Camps as exemplified by the milestones reached by Wawenock, Walden, Agassiz Village, Pine Tree, and Micah, demonstrate the vastness of the Maine Camp Experience and its wonderful compliment to ones life course.

Editor's Note: This article is written by noted author and Maine Summer Camp Historian, Henry Johnson, who attended Camp Powhatan in Otisfield, Maine from 1966 through 1979 as a camper, counselor, and, ultimately, program director. Mr. Johnson is the author of numerous articles and publications relating to the history of Maine summer camps. If you wish to submit information to Mr. Johnson relating to the history of any Maine summer camp, you may do so at the following email: hjohnson@henryjohnsonlaw.com.