

# CAMP ARROWHEAD – A SOCIAL HISTORY

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## ABSTRACT

Camp Arrowhead was situated on Fitch Bay, an eastward extending arm of Lake Memphremagog, and was in operation between 1946 and 1969. The primary goal of founder and educator, Ken Murray, was to provide a social environment where the boys of Montreal's Anglo elite could live out the drama of adolescence while getting in touch with a more "authentic" self than was possible on the city streets. The camp also provided vital seasonal income for local labourers, some of whom had woodland skills that were soon to disappear in an increasingly mechanized work environment. Drawing heavily on oral sources, this study focuses on the mutual dependence of the Westmount (West Montreal inner suburb) and Fitch Bay *milieux*, and on the social and cultural uses of "wilderness" for city dwellers.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Le camp Arrowhead, situé dans la baie Fitch, qui s'étend à l'Est du Lac Memphremagog, a été actif de 1946 à 1969. Le principal objectif de son fondateur et éducateur, Ken Murray, était d'offrir aux garçons de l'élite anglophone montréalaise l'opportunité d'exprimer les tourments de leur adolescence dans un environnement où l'authenticité de chacun pouvait se manifester plus aisément que dans leur environnement urbain. Le camp offrait aussi des revenus saisonniers cruciaux aux travailleurs locaux, plus particulièrement aux travailleurs forestiers, qui allaient bientôt voir disparaître leurs compétences au profit de la mécanisation. Basée principalement sur des sources orales, cette étude porte sur la dépendance mutuelle des milieux de Westmount (banlieue ouest de Montréal) et de la baie Fitch, et sur les usages sociaux et culturels des milieux naturels par les citoyens.*

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Lake Memphremagog stretches for about thirty miles across the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, extending across the border between Québec and Vermont State. About six miles north of the border, an old road runs under the covered bridge spanning the "Narrows" of an eastward arm of the lake, Fitch Bay.

Between 1946 and 1969, at the end of this arm was a little wooded settlement on the lake, intensely active for about two and a half months of every year. It was called Camp Arrowhead, and at the end of June, busloads of boys from Montreal's Anglo elite, about 150 in all, flowed into the tents and halls of the settlement. The goal of the founder, educator Ken Murray, was to create a carefully crafted social environment where boys could live out the drama of adolescence while getting in touch with a more authentic self than was possible in the streets of Montreal, and to provide a counter balance to the over domestication and artificiality of the city. The intentional community<sup>1</sup> created on the Bay embraced teachers,



*Buses arriving from Montreal  
at the beginning of the season*

counsellors, camp directors (and their families) as well as their charges.

This little colony was served by rural labourers who lived in the nearby village of Fitch Bay. At the time of the camp's foundation, the village sported a general store, four churches, several sawmills, a school and a country inn. The town's inhabitants were overwhelmingly English speaking, though a few French Canadian families had recently established themselves. Arrowhead was a vital part of the local economy,

providing seasonal work for one full time man of all trades, as well as female domestic staff who did the cleaning, cooking, housekeeping and serving.

The mutual dependence of these two worlds, Westmount (where many of the boys were from) and Fitch Bay, is the subject of this collective memoir. Much has been written about how the economy of the Eastern Townships has been captive to that of the greater urban centres in the course of the last century, but there has been little work on the social uses of "wilderness" and of "country" for city dwellers. A second, underlying focus of this study is the transformation of the local countryside between 1946 and 1969. The camp operated during a period of rapid technological and social change, which saw the electrification of the countryside, the spread of the car as a mode of transport and the increasing movement of people that followed. Looking at the microcosmic world of Camp

Arrowhead should also tell us something about the ramifications of these changes.

To begin with, I will look at the foundation and structure of the camp and the camp experience from the point of view of the boys who attended it. Secondly, I will move to the infrastructure of local labourers that sustained its operation. Thirdly, I will discuss perceptions that each group had of the other, relying heavily on oral interviews conducted among former workers, camp directors, and long-time residents of Fitch Bay.

Summer camps first appeared in Québec, as elsewhere in North America around the turn of the century, organized by social reformers seeking to counter the impact of industrialization on urban youth by giving them access to fresh air far from the city. In the early decades of the century, a number of religious and social welfare organizations ran subsidized “charity” camps.<sup>2</sup> The movement really took off during the post World War II baby boom, when a great many private establishments sprang up in the woodlands of the Algonquin region in Ontario. By this time, camp directors were selling not just escape from the city; they were promoting the idea of wilderness as the ideal site for personality development. Educators argued that provided opportunities for a more balanced, physical expression of self, and for a deeper and more egalitarian form of socialization than was possible in the city.<sup>3</sup>

In 1945, Westmount physical education instructor and guidance counsellor Ken Murray was looking for a way to launch his own enterprise, as well as to try out his own ideas about personality development.<sup>4</sup> He had under his belt several years of experience as assistant director of Camp Nominangue in the Laurentian Mountains. He had close ties to a number of teachers who would only be too happy to supplement their school year income by working into the summer. Murray’s potential clients could be recruited from the local schools with which he was already familiar. He had a work partner in his wife Velma, as well as two school age sons. He had a name for the camp,<sup>5</sup> Arrowhead. All Murray needed was a site. That was provided by Claude Alger, mayor of Fitch Bay, lumber merchant and contractor, who sold Murray and his business partner A.B. Farquhar (who soon afterwards withdrew from the project) 50 acres of wooded waterfront property on the Bay.

Over a couple of seasons, master carpenter Howard Rollins, with the help of local labourers built the structures that housed the little colony: a lodge, a dining hall, an infirmary, a craft shop, outhouses (later to be replaced by modern toilets with running water), and the

wooden platforms which dotted the site, and on which the tents were pitched.<sup>6</sup> As Arrowhead grew, the Murrays gradually purchased a number of cottages across the dirt road from the camp, where the camp directors and their families and the camp cook lived during the summer.<sup>7</sup> Some of these adults, like the Murrays, had children who attended the camp. Still others had children who were too young to attend, but nevertheless became younger members of the camp community. These households retained a degree of independence from the encampment while taking their home cooked meals from the kitchen.<sup>8</sup>

Preparing the site involved intense labour. Carpenters and workmen raced to get as much building done before the camp first opened. At the end of June they brought hand tools: rip saws, bow saws, axes and shovels, "not a chainsaw in sight."<sup>9</sup> The work of getting ready, however, started long before the summer. In the early years of the camp, a couple of men filled the icehouses during the winter months:

Of course you had to break the ice with an axe first. Then you had to get out your saw, a long one with a pointed end to it, and cut the ice one way, then the other way. Next you had to draw the pieces out, about three foot square. You pulled them out, with a tongs, or with a chain, and then you pulled them onto a sled that was drawn by a team of horses. Then you had to take the ice to the icehouse, and load it in, and cover it with sawdust, to keep it cold in the summer.<sup>10</sup>

Women's work of getting ready for the season could be equally physically challenging. Housekeeper Olive Stebennes remembered as her most difficult task doing the camp laundry by hand in a huge wooden tub.

Drawing ice from the lake, working with draft horses, using, sharpening and repairing hand tools, hand washing: these were some of the rural skills needed to establish Arrowhead. Those who practised these skills saw them as ordinary, everyday proficiencies. To educators like the Murrays, they were the living artefacts of a "pioneer" environment that gave the summer colony its flavour.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed the two decades during which the camp operated marked a sea change in the work environment in the woods. By way of illustration, in 1952, axes and bucksaws cut 80% of the pulpwood harvested in the forests of eastern Canada. By 1960 these tools had been replaced by the ubiquitous chainsaw, which cut 100 % of the harvest.<sup>12</sup>

While Arrowhead was an enterprise that provided supplemental income for labourers, counsellors, section directors, and a nurse, it was also an ideological construct. The camp was a work of the imagination that was shaped by the values of masculine self reliance. It was conceived as a response to the yearning for a means of expression of the “primitive” dimension of being human, achieved partly through the pseudo-Indian rituals that were an obligatory part of contemporary camp life. In this next section of this collective memoir, I would like to look at the Camp Arrowhead experience from an insider’s point of view. How did the boys for whom the site was developed experience Arrowhead?

### **Camp Arrowhead: the Boys of Summer**

Who were these boys? For the most part they were children of Montreal’s Anglophone middle class professional elite, children of doctors, teachers, lawyers, judges, politicians and business people. Much of the recruiting was done at Lower Canada College, Montreal’s exclusive private boarding school for boys. A 1959 listing of camp clients lists a preponderance of Westmount and Town of Mount Royal addresses (both affluent neighbourhoods), though there were many boys from other parts of Montreal and from other cities in Québec, including Sherbrooke and Lennoxville in the Townships. A small number of students were from overseas, for whom Arrowhead was a summer version of the boarding school experience that they normally lived during the school year. Certainly, only well-heeled families could afford the 70-dollar weekly fee<sup>13</sup> that placed Arrowhead in the realm of the more exclusive, but not the most expensive private camps in Québec. The children of those on staff attended without charge, as did a number of other children of parents unable to afford to send their child to camp for a second consecutive season. One parent paid his son’s fees in kind, by donating one of his own paintings in lieu of cash.<sup>14</sup> Curiously enough, Arrowhead was perceived as the cheaper alternative in some circles. Robert Leopold, for instance, claims that his parents, in difficult financial straits one year, chose Arrowhead because it was less expensive than the Jewish private camps which he usually attended. Presumably Arrowhead retained the necessary cachet, while requiring less cash.<sup>15</sup>

Arrowhead actively cultivated its reputation as having the type of boys that upper middle-class parents would want their child to socialize with.<sup>16</sup> This was a great asset for many upwardly mobile French-speaking families who sought a suitable environment in

which their boys could learn English.<sup>17</sup> In addition, contemporary literature and promotional material encouraged parents to see camp as an opportunity they gave their children not just to escape the city, but also to come to maturity through their interaction with the woods, and with each other. The supreme values of personal initiative and the opportunities for leadership promoted by this program were perfectly suited to the goals of middle and upper class parents, both English and French speaking.

An alternative world "away from the bustle and artificial living of the cities; whereby a carefully arranged programme of activities and living, the children will grow in their appreciation of nature and friendship"<sup>18</sup> was painstakingly designed by Ken Murray and reshaped by the counsellors and campers that inhabited it. The installations were intentionally minimalist: each camper had a small cot in a tent built on one of the walled platforms that dotted the settlement. Arrowhead was physically sectioned into junior (6 to 9 year olds), intermediate (10 to 12 year olds) and senior (13 to 15 year olds) sections, so that boys socialized almost exclusively with their peers, under the guidance of older boys and young men (counsellors-in-training and counsellors), who were in turn supervised by adult section directors. Activities offered included swimming (obligatory), arts and crafts, sailing and boating, baseball and tennis. Within the structure of a highly organized day of activities, the boys (both counsellors and campers) had the freedom to reinvent, to reclaim, and to rename. Former camper Peter Healey for instance, remembered digging a frog pond and building a tree house amongst the pines with his fellow campers. Like all camps, Arrowhead also had its own mythological landscape. The infirmary, for instance, was known as "Siberia," the junior section of the camp "Piddlers' Paradise," and the railing along the area in front of the phone, which distraught young campers used once a week to call home was known as the "Wailing Wall."

Intense socialization, however, took place within the confines of the tents, where the campers slept five or six boys under the close supervision of their counsellor. Living together at close quarters in an occasionally leaky tent certainly facilitated the development of what one former counsellor called "the discipline of group life," which included habits such as tidying muddy shoes and wet clothes. It also included working together to pass the daily inspections:

Every morning we had to roll up the flaps of our tent and clean the place up. Someone came around and gave us points for the

job we did. Our group always came up first. I really got those boys going! It became a kind of a game for us. One morning we hung out all our washing along the sides of the tent, just so that we could give ourselves handicap points, and still win!<sup>19</sup>

The most intense bonding, however, took place away from the site, on camp trips. Once a camper passed the test of swimming 300 yards he could participate in the canoe outings that took the boys to short excursions on Lake Memphremagog to Loons' Island and Hell's Gate, or as far away as Sherbrooke (a distance of about 30 miles), in the case of the senior campers. For the less water inclined, there were also hiking trips to the Green Mountains in Vermont. The boys brought their own food and bedding on these excursions that lasted from overnight to four nights. Led by counsellors who were sometimes as young as fourteen years old (presumably with joint leadership of a young adult), these trips were designed to foster self-reliance and to allow maximum scope for the initiative and ingenuity. And much like the camaraderie of army life, the shared experience of being stretched to one's physical and emotional limits drew teenagers together:

On one trip we hiked through streams of water so deep that we had to hang on to trees to be able to stay standing. The going was so tough that when we got to the top of the mountain, one French kid just sat down and cried. And you know what, I was relieved; because I was having such a hard time myself.<sup>20</sup>

If tripping in the wilderness provided an opportunity for the growing boys to assert their independence and to develop leadership skills, the next step in maturation was the ritual unauthorized escape from the site itself into the real wilds, town life. More than one counsellor stole away in his time off to drink with the locals at Ridgeway Inn. The Murray's own son, Bob, snuck off on his bike at night to accompany a friend who was "going out" with a girl from the dining hall staff, and yet another counsellor spoke of secret excursions to Magog, where he enjoyed "booze, parties, and girls." In the heady days of adolescence "fun" could be very innocent while still partaking of the air of the forbidden. One counsellor spoke of spending his night off in a secluded clearing with some of the counsellors from the adjacent girls' camp, where they spent the entire night talking.

Part of the pleasure was often developing an intimacy with the lake itself. "I had been around every inch of that lake at night" said one former camper, "so I'd still know exactly where I was, even in

the dark."<sup>21</sup> Former camper Robert Leopold recalled moments of ecstasy at Arrowhead in the appreciation of the natural beauty of the lake, as well as the increased scope for his imagination that these excursions offered. Describing a boat trip that provided a view of Elephant's Head and of Abbé St. Benoit he remembered thinking: "What an incredible thing that monks could live alone like that, praying all day."<sup>22</sup>

For the boys of Arrowhead, the primal experience of bonding with the natural world came with an elaborate wrapping that gave a cultural dimension to the experience. This was the "Indian lore" that permeated camp life. During the sixties, children arriving at camp were assigned to "tribes" (Mohawk, Cree, Blackfoot and Apache) and councillors planted mock Indian artefacts such as bone and arrowheads, around which treasure hunts were then designed.<sup>23</sup> But for many of the campers, the highlight of their camp experience was the Grand Council, the cathartic rite where community, ritual, the power of fire and water, and the mystery of the night forest met. Twice during the course of the summer the boys would dress in war paint, feathers, and drape a blanket around themselves. After nightfall, their counsellors would lead them in a procession through a path in the woods lit by candles placed in tin cans nailed to trees. In an atmosphere of great solemnity, the boys would arrive at a clearing, where the great chief, Ken Murray, wearing a ceremonial headdress for the occasion, would receive them. The next moment was described by more than one former camper as "magical":

The great chief would lift his hand to the sky, and say in a grave voice "O, Great Muhumba, send forth your fire from the sky!" And then we would see, out of nowhere, a flame come down from the forest into a pit in the middle of the Council Ring, and whoosh a great fire would ignite, just like that! It was supposed to be a secret, how they did that, but it was a secret that everyone knew.<sup>24</sup>

The evening would then proceed with the collective chanting of the "Omaha Indian Prayer," and with Indian dancing led by the counsellors to the beat of camp crafted drums. To twenty-first century sensibility this "playing Indian" strikes us as an act of cultural appropriation that is contrived and disrespectful of the reality of Aboriginal life and culture. How do we explain its meaning to those who embraced it?

The experience of spontaneity, mysticism, catharsis, and primitivism described by the former campers were created thanks to the



camping manuals consulted by Ken Murray, which prescribed most of the elements of the ritual, down to the method of lighting the council fire, and the words of the prayer. The Great Council responded undoubtedly, to deeply felt yearning for communion with the elemental world, for bonding rituals and for physical catharsis. Educators like Ken Murray chose a context far removed from the conventions of organized Christianity, which many contemporary intellectuals criticized as remote from the natural world, and devoid of meaning.<sup>25</sup>



*The Grand Council*

We get some insight into how Indian lore and games were associated with the coming to age of boys, by comparing it to the experience of the girls who were close at hand. For the last three seasons of Arrowhead's existence, its facilities were used by the adjacent girl's camp, Camp Nokomis, administered by the former Arrowhead nurse Janet Dimock. In contrast to the boys, who slept in tents, the thirty to thirty-five girls at the camp were housed in the lodge, a large building on the eastern edge of the summer settlement. These girls took arts and crafts with the boys, producing similar types of artefacts in the Indian style, and all in all, their Indian education tended to emphasize the literary and cultural, rather than animalistic and cathartic. One of the rituals they performed regularly was the reading of Wordsworth's "Hiawatha," while seated in a circle in a clearing in the woods. The relatively sheltered quarters of the girls, as well the literary nature of their Indian adventure tells us, through its contrast with the young males' experience, much about contemporary educators' beliefs about the needs of this latter group. The outlet for "primitive" instincts in a rough environment, it was thought, provided the balance necessary for proper personality development of overprotected urban boys.

While the Grand Council was undoubtedly the highlight of a summer of transformation, self-revelation, and comradeship, for

many who did not fit in, the summer was a time of alienation and homesickness. Eight-year-old René LaBossière, for instance, attended one season as a unilingual, French speaking boy. He could not communicate with his tent-mates, and he didn't know any of the boys, most of whom, he said knew one another from school, or from previous summers at camp.<sup>26</sup> Nine-year old Robert Leopold lived his one summer at Arrowhead as an exile: he experienced the non-Jewish environment as strange, and was happy to return to the familiarity of a Jewish camp the next year.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, camp life was undoubtedly a successful assimilation experience for the many adolescent children whose upwardly mobile francophone parents sent them to camp in order to learn English. Although up to one third of the Arrowhead clientele was French-speaking, English was the language of communication, and many francophones were fully conversant in English thanks, at least in part, to their time spent here. Among its francophone clientele, Arrowhead boasted Pierre-Marc and Daniel Johnson.

Camp life brought together people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds in closer interaction than was possible during the school year, allowing social perceptions to form and to gel. Anglophone Eugene Blanchart, for example, told how he preferred to hang out with the French boys, because "they were more fun." He told me the story of a camping trip that he went on, with a group of francophone boys. In accordance with camp regulations, two groups, a second one an English-speaking group, set off together with them and camped at the base of the mountain. As Eugene told it, his group snuck off in the morning to climb the slope quite happy to leave the staid English boys behind.<sup>28</sup>

"Send him away a boy, and he will come back a man" is one formulation offered for the mandate of private boy's camps. More than one former camper, however, described the Murray touch at Arrowhead as different from this hyper masculine formula. Here, boys were encouraged to use their natural aptitudes in leadership or in teaching roles, whether these aptitudes were physical or not. Peter Healey, for example, who had a passion for Crafts, was given the position of instructor at age fourteen, and had his fees deferred in exchange for the service.

Arrowhead was a site where upper-middle-class boys could experience a rite of passage in which leadership and individual initiative were held up as model virtues. These virtues were to be used in the context of the greater camp community, which was in turn sustained by the labour of marginal rural workers who maintained and

fed the summer colony. Local labourers contributed more than good food, clean sheets and safe buildings. They also gave images of the bucolic, and of rural life to the urban residents of Arrowhead.

### **Camp Labourers: A Group Portrait**

Most of those who serviced the camp lived in and around the village of Fitch Bay. A brief description of the family backgrounds of these people and of their work illustrates the value that seasonal employment had in local economy, as well as the importance of close networking in sustaining it, both important part of rural workers' culture. Adult labourers depended on the camp to help support themselves and their families, while to the many teenagers who worked in the kitchen and in the dining hall, the camp provided a significant social outlet, and an opportunity to reinforce the work ethic with which they were raised. The parents of many of these young people lived by farming and by wood craft, and in this transitional economic period in the life of the region, were able to use Arrowhead as a stepping stone to other kinds of work, while using the skills that they grew up with.<sup>29</sup>

Of the sample of eight labourers that I interviewed, three had families whose main source of income was related to wood, including lumber selling, carpentry, woodcutting and wood working. Three had fathers who had spent part of their working life in textile or clothing factories, two had parents who were dairy farmers, and one had a father who worked in a stone (granite) shed. Two of the younger women had mothers who "worked out," which meant paid cooking, to cleaning and to laundering, in one case for the Camp itself. Most of the women (and all of men, with one exception) who worked at the camp were anglophone, though there were a group of francophones in the early sixties who worked primarily in the kitchen. The service staff consisted of around eight workers at any given time. The cook was at the top of the camp service hierarchy. Aside from her and her two aides, three or four women (for the most part, 14–18 year olds) worked regularly as servers in the dining hall. Housekeeping was shared by the dining hall staff and by a floating housekeeper. One man worked as a full-time maintenance man. Those last two workers supported children and lived exclusively by manual skills. The following portraits give us an idea of how the camp fit into the life cycles of those who worked there.

Rosie Courtemanche was born around 1920, and worked as a housekeeper at the camp during the fifties and sixties. Her husband, who could barely read, was at first a woodcutter, who carefully

removed, using only hand tools, the bark from trees that he cut. He then worked for the textile factory in Magog, the main industrial employer of Fitch Bay labour.<sup>30</sup> In the winter Rose worked at the Lemaie General Store. Rose could not write (though she did read), and when Velma Murray befriended her, she took lessons at the Murrays' house. In the spring she opened the cottages that housed staff, removing mousetraps, washing floors and windows, putting up curtains, preparing linen. After her workday was over, she hand washed (there was no electricity in Fitch Bay when she began this job) and ironed laundry, tablecloths and children's clothing, which she brought home from the camp, in addition to washing the laundry at the Ridgeway Inn, just down the road. When Rose's daughter Annette was 14, her mother asked the Murrays to hire the girl to work in the kitchen, and the two travelled the five miles or so to Arrowhead together. Cars were much less common in the countryside than they are today, and certainly out of the reach of many of the employees, whose family car was reserved for the use of the main wage earner, almost invariably male. Rose and Annette, therefore, commuted to the camp with maintenance man Bertie Larue.

Bertie's own father had been a maker of axe handles, and Bertie lived by seasonal work, cutting wood in the winter, and doing "odd jobs" in the summer for some of the women who owned cottages by the lake.<sup>31</sup> He continued this employment even after coming to work at the camp on a regular basis. According to one former camper "Bertie could fix anything." He was everywhere, with "a chainsaw under one arm, and an axe in the other"<sup>32</sup> mending furniture, replacing rotten wood, clearing brush, and installing and repairing plumbing. He was particularly proud of one of the jobs he did at the camp, rebuilding the entrance to the dining hall to make it more serviceable. Bertie was a self-taught expert at maintaining hand tools, sharpening axes and saws, and refitting worn handles. As the "man of all trades," he was called upon to perform a job that he recalled with distaste, cleaning the cesspits, which held kitchen and human waste.<sup>33</sup>

Both Rose Courtemanche and Bertie Larue used the income they earned at Arrowhead to support their children. A younger generation of adolescent workers staffed the kitchen and the dining room. Before looking at a couple of them individually, we will take a peek into their worksite and the culture it supported.

### Feeding and Serving Arrowhead

At the top of the camp hierarchy, with the highest salary (corresponding to the longest hours) was the camp cook, who worked closely, for many years with Velma Murray. While she occupied that position, Beth Lavoie lived in one of the cottages on the edge of the camp, and her husband visited her on weekends. She lived next to section directors, the nurse and the Murrays, all of whom ate the food prepared in the camp kitchen. The cooking was home made, from scratch, the ingredients supplied primarily from wholesalers in Sherbrooke, and supplemented by local produce.<sup>34</sup> To the boys however, what made camp food distinct was its whimsicality. On trips, for instance, counsellors packed tightly compressed loaves of bread to save space, along with “bug juice,” a sweet drink prepared from diluted syrup. For some, the most memorable quality of the food was that it never ran out; one counsellor remembered with relish the great quantities that he and his fellow counsellors ate. It was no easy task to accommodate these appetites, for at the height of the season, there were about 200 boys and staff eating in the kitchen. Each counsellor doled out food to his own group after it was placed in the middle of the table by one of the three servers on duty in the dining hall.

Louise Markwell was one of these servers. She worked at Camp Arrowhead in the years 1961–64. Before working at the camp Louise worked in a restaurant across the lake (at the Baygraff Marina), earning \$10 per 7-day week, baking cookies and bread. She was 14 when her cousin, who worked part-time in the Arrowhead dining hall suffered a back injury after a fall, and Louise replaced her. The second summer she worked full time at a salary of \$20 per week for a six day week that began at 7 a.m. and ended at 7 p.m, with a long break in the afternoon. She was happy to graduate to the kitchen, which paid \$25 per week, the 5-dollar difference to compensate for a work-day that included only one short break. Louise remembered some of the more pleasurable aspects of the job: “Some of the food came packed in dry ice, which was quite hard to handle, because you couldn’t touch the stuff. We liked to pour hot water on the ice, to see the clouds of steam rise into the air.”<sup>35</sup> Louise peeled potatoes beneath a small lean-to by the brook, peeling and sometimes mashing two large potfuls every morning, using a mechanized barrel, which scrubbed the potatoes clean. Many of the “help” recalled this as a pleasant and relaxed, social time, when Velma Murray, who supervised in the kitchen, would sit and chat with them. A more onerous task was the attack on the large stacks of dishes, which took

about one hour to wash and dry by hand with the help of one other worker.

Louise's experience tells us much about the nature and the culture of work in this rural setting. Firstly, much manual labour was involved. It was not until about 1959 that electricity came to the area. Hand tools were used for construction and maintenance (the gas-powered chainsaw being a notable exception) and washing was first done near the stream behind the dining hall in a large wooden barrel. The arrival of electricity had a considerable impact. More than one kitchen worker was fascinated by the electrically powered potato washing machine. Even after the arrival of the freezer, and the machine washer, because of the volume of work, quick hands and strong backs (to lift the milk cans, or to stock the freezer, to carry heavy trays to the dining room) were needed.

Secondly, labourers' work life started very young, certainly by today's standards. Louise, as we have seen, already had a paid job under her belt before she was fourteen. Nor was she the youngest worker at the camp. Yvette Courtemanche helped her mother in the kitchen when she was only eleven.

Thirdly, social networks and work connections more than just overlapped, they were virtually identical. The older, married women who cooked, often got jobs for their younger family members and for other young women in a friendship circles that included almost the entire village. The kitchen, according to one worker, operated and felt very much like a family.<sup>36</sup> "They (the older women) took care of me, and I learned a lot listening to them talking among themselves, and talking to me."<sup>37</sup> The dining room help, on the other hand, consisted of a rotating group of peers of about 16 to 18 years old (the average length of stay was about 2 or 3 years, generally the last years of high school) who knew each other from the local schools, sometimes based outside of Fitch Bay.<sup>38</sup> In these cases cooperation outside the workplace was often essential. Carole Daviaux, for example, boarded with her friend and co-worker Louise Markwell, in order to avoid a long early morning walk from her home in Beebe. Both of them were picked up by Arrowhead handy man Bert Larue, on his way to Camp. Though workers were both English- and French-speaking, language differences were not a barrier to socialization. Francophones like cook Beth Lavoie simply expected to have to stretch to make themselves understood, and she took some teasing when, for instance, she asked her English-speaking aide for a ladder, instead of a ladle. While the main language of communication was English, she would speak French with

her francophone co-workers.

In fact conviviality was the single most attractive feature of the job for almost everyone that I talked to. As Alta Sheldon recall: "Everybody got on so well together, and that there were no complaints, each morning you got up and looked forward to working together. It was sad to leave the camp at the end of the summer, knowing that you wouldn't see counsellors that you had grown familiar with, for another year."<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, for many of these young women who grew into domestic work, there was no hard and fast line between work and socialization, which was another form of play. Doris Markwell, for instance, loved the group aspect of the job. She felt that her girlhood experience of helping to prepare, and of serving at church dinners made for an easy transition to paid work in the dining hall.<sup>40</sup>

The blurring of work and play was at least, in part a consequence of restricted mobility, and of limited opportunities for what we would now call "leisure." When asked why she would spend her summers as a young teenager working at Arrowhead, one woman quipped, "What else was there to do in Fitch Bay?"<sup>41</sup> It was a short step to a culture of work as self-validation, even for adolescents. "You weren't a person unless you worked,"<sup>42</sup> said one woman. "Arrowhead taught me the meaning of work." Of course, the benefits were more than just educational or recreational. The income provided by work at the camp was a vital part of the family economy for many. It was the only regular family income for widow Eva Sheldon, for instance, and her daughter Alta, who also worked at the camp, and who used her first summers' earnings to pay for much needed dental work.<sup>43</sup>

For the labourers who worked at the camp, Arrowhead was a source of seasonal income based on tightly knit social ties. As such it allowed for the survival of a localized economy. It also provided opportunities for local young women to be educated in the social and work ethic appropriate to their gender and their class.<sup>44</sup> Their presence formed an important part of the social education of the young boys at the camp, who also learned, through limited interaction with the locals, about class, and about "country." In the next section of this collective memoir, we will look at how the two groups, rural labourers and urban campers saw each other. Though the interaction between the two groups was fairly circumscribed, it was sufficient to allow important mutual perceptions of town and country.

"At Arrowhead, I would never confuse Fitch Bay and Westmount," one former camper said. "I was only eleven, but I knew not to expect to see someone from Montreal serving in the dining room." Who did these boys themselves identify with? When I asked former campers who their models at the camp were, and the qualities these people possessed, there were a variety of responses. For some it was an athlete whose achievements spurred on boys to imitation, to another it was creative talent as an artist, and others had as a model a suave and dynamic musician (Rad Turnbull). Two boys who attended the camp as teen-age counsellors mentioned the mentorship of section director Norval Cheeseman, who tactfully accepted their forays into the wilds of the village of Fitch Bay, while reminding them of the responsibilities for their boys that could not be neglected during these escapades.<sup>45</sup> No one cited the male workers as their models, perhaps since the contact between the two groups was extremely limited, though it was unlikely that these boys would identify with a male clearly not of their class.

Interaction between the campers and dining hall staff could also be limited. The social lives of the latter group were of course, in the village. Louise Warner, for instance, had better things to do than to partake in the Saturday night movies offered at the camp. She was off with her parents to the weekly dances in Fitch Bay, where she could dance until one, and get up for work at 6:30 the next day.<sup>46</sup> In some cases, nonetheless, there was significant contact. During their breaks some of the dining hall girls spent time on the waterfront, or in the Craft Hall, where they made baskets or gumby bracelets, and some of them were even privileged spectators of the rite of the Grand Council. A few of the young servers dated counsellors, and some visited their summer beaux in Montreal. Not all the interface was so intense, and the convivial spirit of the camp community lured some of the married workers to the site after-hours. Kitchen worker Alice Courtemanche for instance, occasionally attended musical evenings and film screenings in the dining hall with her husband.

Though there were various opportunities for mixing, to a large degree the locals were part real people, part projection of "country" for young campers. One former camper described the infatuation that he and his peers had for a particularly curvaceous server, who seemed to them an incarnation of "Daisy Mae" (a hillbilly caricature of a socially primitive and hypersexual female). Perceptions that the young campers had of the few men who worked at the camp were those of admiration mixed with trepidation.<sup>47</sup> One former camper



recalled a man who worked with horses: "He could do absolutely anything with horses, and I remember, he had one finger missing on his hand".<sup>48</sup> Bertie Larue's tools, claimed one camper, seemed to be a part of him. "I never talked to him though, or heard him talk. It seems strange now." Bertie the taciturn woodsman, the scarred drover were strong and hard working figures who became mythic figures for the boys. Their masculinity was to be admired, but their remoteness from the everyday urban reality of the boys had a scary side. We can see this slippery slope from real life people to outright figures of fright in the evocation of "Three fingered Willie" by one of the counsellors, in order to keep his young campers from wandering from the tent at night. According to his telling, Three Fingered Willy had a cabin in the woods behind the camp, and every evening he ventured forth in search of boys to eat!<sup>49</sup>

These scare tactics were frowned upon by the direction of the camp, and as far as the help went, director Ken Murray was adamant about inculcating respect with the corresponding decorum towards them. Doreen Markwell had this to say about the social education of the boys she attended:

"One day I was coming into the dining hall with a tray of watermelon, and I tripped and went sliding. Wouldn't you know it, I landed with my watermelon still in my hands, on my knees, right in front of a counsellor! And you know what? The whole hall went quiet. Not one of those boys laughed!"<sup>50</sup>

Arrowhead clearly had an important role in the socialization of both campers and staff, and it also made an impact on the village of Fitch Bay. The village played both eager audience and host and to "the boys." For these villagers, Arrowhead provided a connection to the greater world. "That was something, to see these great big buses driving here, right through town," one long-time resident told me, speaking of the annual arrival of campers at the beginning of July. The same informant was impressed as a child, to see black faces in town. "You didn't get to see that much down here," he said. He was not referring, as one might think, to ethnic diversity amongst the campers (there were few, if any black campers), but to the minstrel shows put on by them. In Arrowhead's early years, artist and filmmaker Ed Reed was staff art director. Under his supervision boys and their counsellors performed songs and skits with great enthusiasm, and were received with equal eagerness by the wildly appreciative audiences in Fitch Bay. Equally popular were the talent contests of a later era. Of course there were limits to peaceful cohabitation, and

some barriers between camp and town proved inevitable. Tensions could run high between local boys and camp counsellors, and the latter were banned from dances in Fitch Bay, on the pretext that their presence invariably occasioned a fight.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, the village often acted with gracious hospitality. Every year, the end of the summer was marked by a long procession of children and staff who walked the road to Fitch Bay, strung out, one villager told me, for more than half a mile. Upon arrival, they were served a sumptuous dinner by the Women's Auxiliary of the Anglican Church at the local church hall, which was followed by a bazaar featuring prizes for games of skill.

By 1969, rural life in the area had been transformed. Developments like the construction of the Eastern Townships Autoroute had brought country and city closer, modernization had made many rural skills redundant, and changes in agriculture were putting enormous pressure on the small farming (particularly in the case of dairy) that was one of the economic mainstays of the Fitch Bay area. Modernization came to the camp movement as well. A substantial investment in the dining area was required in order for the camp to meet new certification standards, and Arrowhead had been running on a deficit for some time. The Murrays were thinking of retiring, and especially given the financial pressure on the camp, none of the co-directors of the camp were eager to take the baton. In the spring of 1970, the decision was made to close the camp. In the years following, the buildings that served as the camp's infrastructure were sold to private individuals. The road that runs along the waterfront from the covered bridge however, is still called "Arrowhead."

By the time the camp closed, it had provided employment for two generations of local women and men. It had also provided a lakeside woodland site for boys to live an intense group experience. It had given educators a vital role in a summer colony of their own creation, providing community for them as well. While most of the clients of the camp were certainly the children of privilege, the Murrays administered the facility in a spirit of openness that gave many local residents an opportunity for enjoyment of an environment of great natural beauty. The steady increase of land values in the area, combined with the greater investments needed to maintain the standards required for certification make it difficult to imagine the future survival of summer camps on the Arrowhead model of simplicity. As this article is written, the fate of North Hatley's Québec Lodge (a camp operated roughly at the same time

as Arrowhead) hangs in the balance. Together with the controversy over the privatization of Mount Orford Park, these dossiers illustrate the fragility of access to open spaces, and a wide public awareness that the social uses of woodland and waterfront are very much public concerns.



*On the road to Camp Arrowhead*

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- Alger, Bob. Interview with the author, 12 March, 2006, Stanstead.

- Blanchart, Eugene. Interview with the author, 1 March, 2006, Montreal.
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- Courtemanche, Annette. Interview with the author, 28 February, 2006, Magog.
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- Larue Bert. Interview with the author, 24 February, 2006, Fitch Bay.
- Leopold, Robert. Interview with the author, 3 March, 2006, Montreal.
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- Murray, Bob. Interview with the author, 9 and 16 February, 2005, Georgeville.
- Phaneuf (Markwell), Doreen. Interview with the author, 7 March, 2006, Waterville.
- Sheldon, Alta. Interview with the author, 11 March, 2006, Beebe.
- West (Alger), Jean. Interview with the author, 12 March, 2006, Ogden.

## NOTES

1. An intentional community is group where membership is voluntary, and structure is planned. It is usually used with reference to communes, or co-housing projects.
2. These include camps of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish denominations. The Y.M.C.A of Montreal camp was the earliest documented forerunner. See *Historique des Camps de vacances de l'accréditation et de la certification*, <http://www.camps.qc.ca/fr/apropos.html>, March 22, 2006
3. For two examples of popular thinking about camp life from the 1950s, see Nancy Cleaver, "An Old Canadian Custom : Sending the Kids to Camp," *Saturday Night*, 19 April 1952, 16, Peter Newman, "Junior's \$10 Million Adventure in the Pines," *Financial Post*, 5 June, 5, cited in Sharon Wall, "Totem Poles, Teepees and Token Traditions: 'Playing Indian' at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920–1955," *Canadian Historical Review*, 86 (3), 2005:515.
4. For an overview of educators' ideas about camping and the personality development of boys, see Kristopher Churchill's "Learning about Manhood and Gender Ideals and 'Manly' Camping' " in Bruce W. Hodgins and Bernadine Dodge eds. *Using Wilderness: Essays on the Evolution of Youth Camping*

(Peterborough, Ontario: Frost Centre for Heritage Studies, Trent University, 1992), p.5–28. Also of interest is the work of E. Anthony Rotundo, who writes about an autonomous “boy’s culture” in nineteenth century America; a culture eventually co-opted and channelled by the Boy Scouts movement, the boys division of the YMCA and others. See his “Boy Culture: Middle Class Boyhood in Nineteenth Century America” in Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen ed., *Meanings for Manhood, Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1990, p. 9–36. On the social construction of adolescence, see Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage – Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present*, Basic Books, New York, 1977.

5. A colleague had suggested that he evoke the Indian theme that was ubiquitous in camp culture at the time, but that he avoid an unpronounceable Indian name that “no one can remember.” Interview by the author with Bob Murray, February 9, 2005, Georgeville.
6. They were actually draped over a structure which included side walls, an innovation that Ken Murray made to the standard flat platform design.
7. Some camp workers had originally been lodged in Mrs. Eryou’s boarding house, on the road adjacent to the camp. The urban personnel included a nurse, and in the early years, a nutritionist, an art director, and a waterfront director.
8. Almost every women I talked to had a favourite recipe that she remembered: they included cook Eva Pelkie’s blueberry pie and Beth (pronounced Bet) Lavoie’s “poor man’s pudding.” Interviews by the author with Janice Dimock, February 22, 2006, Montreal, and with Alta Sheldon, March 11, 2006, Beebe.
9. Interview the author with Bob Alger, March 12, 2006, Stanstead.
10. Interview by the author with Bert Larue, February 24, 2006.
11. The promotional booklet of the camp (circa 1960) mentions this “pioneer” quality.
12. C. Ross Silversides. *Broadaxe to Flying Shear, The Mechanization of Forest Harvesting East of the Rockies*, National Museum of Science and Technology, Ottawa, Canada, 1997, p.22.
13. I could not determine the exact year that this fee was established, but the opening season of 1946 seems to be a likely guess.
14. Interview by the author with Bob Murray, February 16, 2006, Georgeville.
15. Interview by the author with Robert Leopold, March 3, 2006, Montreal.

16. In accordance with the practice of many private camps of the time, Arrowhead printed, in its promotional brochure, the names of parents and guardians of campers in which a number of honorific titles (Gen., Hon., Dr., Q.C., etc.) appeared.
17. About one quarter of the camp's clientele in 1959 had French as a mother tongue, based on the names of campers listed in a list from that year, as well as estimates of associate camp director Bob Murray. Interview by the author with Bob Murray, February 16, 2006, Georgeville.
18. Promotional booklet, Camp Arrowhead, circa 1960
19. Interview by the author with John Adams, March 1, 2006, Montreal.
20. Interview by the author with John Marshall, March 1, 2006, Montreal.
21. Cultivating a relationship with the night woods, and with darkness, was a formative experience for urban boys. Eugene Blanchart told me about a game in the darkness of the hillside woods where excited boys competed to track the hoot of one of the counsellors. The trick was, unbeknownst to the boys, that there were two, not one counsellor calling. Exploring in the dark developed confidence in the natural world in the face of fascination that had a strong edge of fear. Interview by the author with Eugene Blanchart, March 1, 2006.
22. Interview by the author with Robert Leopold, March 3, 2006.
23. The contrived nature of "playing Indian," and the way in which this play consciously avoided confronting the reality of native life is documented in Wall, "Teepees," passim. The Abenakis, the group most closely associated with the region, for instance, were here not one of the assigned tribes, and Indian lore at Arrowhead was a hodgepodge of elements of geographically disparate native groups.
24. Interview by the author with John Adams, March 1, 2006.
25. The Murrays, however, were careful to honour the Christian tradition in the form of weekly meetings in the Camp's outdoor chapel, where in the sixties, Bob Murray led Protestant hymn singing and told impromptu moral anecdotes. Catholic campers were ferried to Sunday mass in Fitch Bay.
26. Interview by the author with René La Bossière, March 4, 2006.
27. Interview by the author with Robert Leopold, March 3, 2006.
28. Interview by the author with Eugene Blanchart, March 1, 2006.

29. Peter Southam, in his article on the economic history of the Townships, argues that the period 1940–1960 marks a lull in regional economic development. See his “Continuity and Change in Eastern Townships Manufacturing Industry,” *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies*, no. 18, Spring 2001, 10–11. During this transitional period, therefore, one can speculate that the manual skills that labourers brought to their work at Arrowhead would be very much valued, where elsewhere they would be beginning to be obsolete.
30. Interestingly enough, rural labourer’s life itinerary sometimes went in the opposite direction, from industrial labour to wood related work. Rose’s brother-in-law, for instance, worked at Penman’s underwear factory in Coaticook until it closed. He subsequently moved to Fitch Bay, where he cut wood for a living. Interview by the author with Alice Courtemanche, February 24, 2006.
31. In at least one case Bertie’s employer was a widow. Presumably, in other cases husbands were unavailable for woodcutting, stacking, and repairs.
32. Interview by the author with Eugene Blanchart, March 1, 2006.
33. Bertie obviously found this job demeaning. He told me an anecdote about being asked by Mrs. Murray just where he had put the contents of the pit. “I just spread it around the dining hall,” he answered. “She was real quiet after that.” Interview by the author with Bert Larue, February 24, 2006.
34. To give one example, raspberries were from Melvin Walker’s patch in the nearby village of Beebe.
35. Interview by the author with Louise Markwell, March 9, 2006.
36. Interview by the author with Annette Courtemanche, February 28, 2006. Annette, as one of the younger members of the kitchen group during her stay, described her role as that of the “baby” of the group of women.
37. Interview by the author with Annette Courtemanche, February 28, 2006.
38. Interview by the author with Jean (Alger) West, March 12, 2006. Jean mentioned as one of the pleasures of the job the opportunity to learn from and to talk to older women. The schools attended by these girls were: the Fitch Bay consolidated school (English), Notre-Dame-de-Sacré-Coeur also in Fitch Bay, (French), and Princess Elizabeth High School (Magog).
39. Interview by the author with Alta Sheldon, March 11, 2006.
40. Interview with Doreen (Markwell) Phaneuf, March 7, 2006.



41. Interview with Doreen (Markwell) Phaneuf, March 7, 2006.
42. Interview with Jean West, March 12, 2006.
43. Interview with Alta Sheldon, March 11, 2006. In this case again we see a blurring of work and play for rural adolescents. Alta told me that she used her very first pay-cheque to buy crayons and a colouring book.
44. For a discussion of the relative persistence of the model of the working young adult in the countryside (in opposition to a leisure and consumption based model of adolescence, see Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage* p. 246–251.
45. An informal replacement system, I was told, worked admirably.
46. Interview by the author with Louise Warner, March 9, 2006, Fitch Bay.
47. Ubiquitous though he was Bert was a remote figure to the campers, who invariably do not remember him ever talking. Other male workers (a slim minority of the work force, were even more remote. Gilbert Lavoie for instance worked on a part-time basis in the kitchen, with his wife, Beth, doing some of the heavy lifting, especially of the milk cans, which weighed about 100 pounds when full. Important though he was, he was not seen by the boys.
48. Interview with John Marshall. The likelihood is that the man in question, was John Elvidge, a First World War veteran who lived in Fitch Bay. According to Bob Murray, however, he was in full possession of his ten fingers.
49. Interview by the author with Janet Dimock, February 25, 2006. Willy was in all likelihood a short-lived phenomenon, since the camp direction explicitly forbade frightening the boys, and at least one counsellor was dismissed for this reason. Interview with Bob Murray
50. Interview with Doreen (Markwell) Phaneuf, March 7, 2006. This environment of respect was perhaps a combination of the culture of the time this event took place in 1956, and Ken Murray's influence on the boys. To illustrate this point, server Alta Sheldon told me an almost identical story of her slide across the dining room floor – this time to the “hoots and hollers” of the boys. Mr. Murray chastised the boys, telling them that the server could have been badly hurt.
51. Interview by the author with Bob Murray, February 16, 2006.

