

The First Decades At Tecumseh

1903 - 1929

Tecumseh's first year of operation was 1903. The three founders, Alexander Grant, George Orton, and Josiah McCracken, recruited a total of nine boys for the first summer. Much of the time was spent fixing up camp since it was purchased in such poor condition. In 1904, camp had grown to twenty-nine boys and counselors. This number increased to 42 the next year. By 1908, camp included 70 people. Tuition was \$175 for ten weeks.

As the years went on, Tecumseh added more and more facilities. In 1906, the Dining Hall, a kitchen and an ice house were added. In 1909, a beach house was constructed. The original beach house looked much like the one in place today. There was no electricity at Tecumseh in the early years. The boys did a lot of hiking and canoeing. For many years, camp had an active farm in order to minimize costs. The annual competition with Camp Pemigewasset started around 1908 and has continued almost every year since then.

Cars were rare in the early years so people took trains and boats to get to Tecumseh. Most of the modern highways and roads had not been built yet. It took two days to get to Tecumseh from Philadelphia.

From Alex Grant, 1914 - The following is a letter written by Grant to parents of campers, before the 1914 season. This letter was copied from Fred Clark's book.

The party will leave Broad Street Station, Pennsylvania Railroad, on a special car attached to the 2 P.M. train for New York, and will go to the downtown station in New York and walk from there to the Fall River Line Pier, only two blocks away. They will reach Boston at seven o'clock the next morning, take breakfast at the Essex Hotel, and take the 9:30 train from the North Station to Weirs. Lunch will be served at Hotel Weirs and immediately afterwards the party will leave for camp on the Governor Endicott. They should reach camp about 3:30 P.M.

In the early days, much of Tecumseh's land was dedicated to farming. Sports were a big part of camp, but nothing like today. Campers and counselors helped with farming chores, whether it be in the garden or with the livestock.

From Fred Clark's Book, 1910's - Mr. Grant did the meal planning and food purchasing and hired the cooks. Usually the chief cook was a man from one of the private schools from which the boys were recruited. It is doubtful that a garden was established in 1903, but certainly a farmer was recruited. The farmer was to be a general caretaker, build needed facilities, buy cows to develop a dairy, do the plowing, and start a garden in the spring.

There were two objectives in having an active farm. One was to become as self-sufficient in food as possible to minimize costs. The other, equally important, was to enable city boys to experience some farm life with gardens and animals to which most have never been exposed.

In 1911, Grant added a silo to the Trunk Room and a side shed addition for the cows.

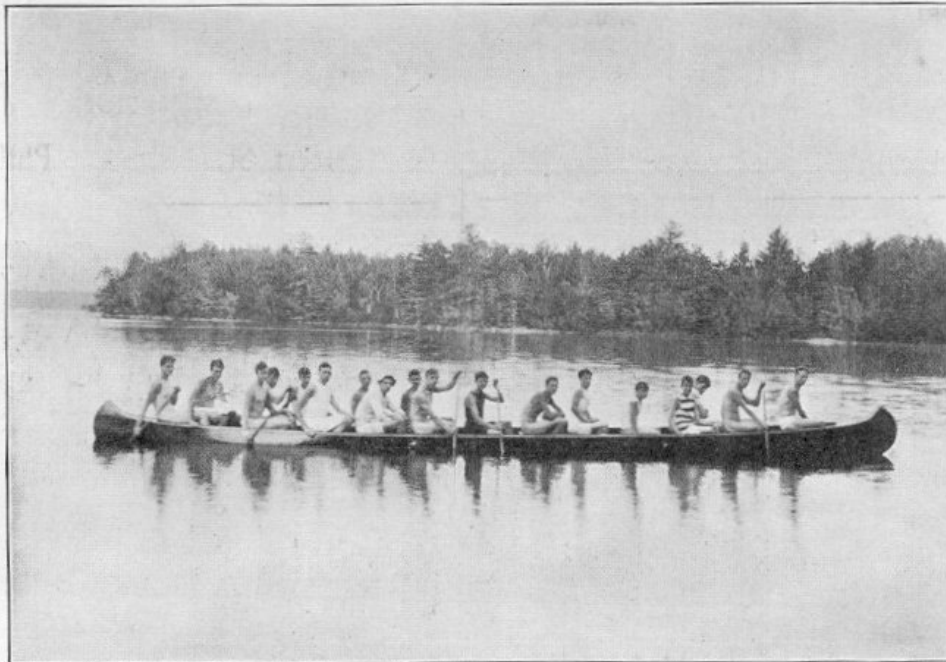
All three Tecumseh founders had a strong academic background. As a result, they made sure that a tutoring program was in place from the earliest years to help with material that the campers would see in school. The Tecumseh counsel always had several teachers who could tend to the camper's academic needs. Tutoring services cost extra. Tutoring was available in a wide range of subjects.

The annual trip to climb Mt. Washington took five days since the troops had to take a boat, then take a train, and then hike to the mountain. The 1912 trip started on August 19 and went until August 23. During that time, the troops covered over one hundred miles.

CAMP TECUMSEH

WHITE MOUNTAINS, N. H.

Camp Tecumseh wishes Penn Charter boys a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. The Penn Charter colony grows every year and a large increase is already promised for next season. Summer will soon be on us again and with it the desire for the woods, streams, mountains and all the outdoor sport connected with a well-equipped summer camp. Next to the Camp Tecumseh boys themselves, their parents are the best recommendation the camp has. Send your boy with us. He will be delighted and you will be well pleased.



THE WAR CANOE

Out for an easy spin. When fully manned, each having a paddle, the war canoe can be forced through the water like a motor boat. A second war canoe is now being built for next season.

FOR CATALOGUES AND ANY OTHER INFORMATION, ADDRESS,

GEORGE W. ORTEN, Ph. D.,

3900 Baltimore Avenue,

Philadelphia, Pa.

When answering advertisements please mention Penn Charter Magazine.

From Edward Brooks Keffer, 1913 - The following is a letter written by counselor Edward Brooks Keffer, then 17 years of age. Keffer's son Brooks would attend Tecumseh as camper and counselor in the 1940's and 1950's. Brooks would go on to be a Trustee at Tecumseh for many years. Brooks's two sons Ted and Bill were at Tecumseh in the 1970's and 1980's. The letter below shows how much different camp was back in the early days as the annual Mt. Washington trip lasted over a week and the walk was much more than just climbing up and down the mountain.

Dear Mother,

I want to apologize for forgetting your birthday. I knew when it was coming, but the excitement of the Mt. Washington trip took it off my mind. If it is not too late, I want to wish you many happy returns of the day, and many more to come. I am unable to get you anything worth while up here, but I think I know of something at home.

We got home late Friday evening. I was too tired to write (having walked 31 miles that day) and then the next mail does not go out until tomorrow morning. Today is Sunday and I did not want to go to church as I had no money. Mr. Grant said that everyone had to go. However, I got the doctor to give me a dose of salts, and in that way I stayed home.

I will tell you about the Mt. Washington trip. We left Camp on Monday in Herr Meyer's motor boat. We rode to Adams Mills and from there started our walk. Six miles brought us to Moxie Farm. Having had a little ginger ale and crackers, we started for Tamworth, a town six miles further down the road. Here we had lunch. After lunch, we walked twelve more miles to the Piper House at the foot of Mt. Chocorua. Here we camped in a field. It was a very cold night. I had bad luck on my first day, getting three blisters.

Tuesday was fair, but hot. Alfred Novis and myself started off early for Conway. He had to go to a dentist. We had not gone further than about four miles when an Overland picked us up and took us right to Conway. The dentist was not as long as we had calculated and we were soon off again. We walked about twenty miles that day. We went from Conway to North Conway, to Intervale Jackson, and then the longest twelve miles you ever saw. From Jackson to the Cascade camp is twelve miles. All of it is up hill. It seemed as though we would never get there. The Cascade Camp is at the foot of Mt. Washington where Tuckerman's Ravine trail goes up. Here we were first skinned. Every five cent cake of chocolate or soft drink was fifteen cents. And we were hungry. There we spent the night.

The next day we started up the Mountain. Talk about your climb. Tuckerman is the shortest trail, but it is steep. Up, up we went. There is no use of describing it except that it is about as hard a thing as you could imagine. Every time you think you are there, you see another cliff to go up. At last I saw the tip-top house. It sure did look good. It was very cold on top. The clouds were collecting, and we were wet to the skin with perspiration. There was a stove in the house and here we tried to get dry. Maybe we weren't hungry. And maybe they didn't charge you. They actually asked 35 cents for one egg. Here I realized why everyone spends so much money on the Mt. Washington trip. We only had a sandwich a piece as that is all we could carry up. The rest we had to buy.

From the top we started on a sixteen mile walk over the Northern Peaks of the Presidential Range. We were still wet and rain fell very soon followed by a little hail. Of course we had to go down and then up for each peak. The rain made the rocks very slippery and you would fall on about every other step. We went over Adams, Jefferson, Samuel Adams, John Quincy Adams and then the last and hardest, Madison.

Three or four fellows held back the bunch and Dr. Orton was afraid that we would not get down before dark. Going down Madison was simply fierce. We went over 12 little peaks before we even struck the woods. When we got in the woods, the fun began. You would run and jump as hard as you could until you hit a log or turned your ankle in a root. There you would fall and slide in the mud for about ten feet. It was delightful - maybe. At last we got out and camped in a field near the Glen House. It was a very hard day, especially on account of the rain.

The next day some of the fellows went up the mountain again. They went up Tuckerman's and came down the Crawford Notch. There they took a train to North Conway where they met us. We were to walk twenty two miles, but luck was with us. We walked eight, and then got a lift for nine miles. We went nine miles in ten minutes in a Hudson. We soon had another hook and this time we went all the way to North Conway.

We got there at twelve and had to wait until six for the rest of the bunch.

They arrived tired and said that they had no view. I was very glad I did not go up. We camped out at North Conway. Friday was the last and hardest day. We were tired, stiff and broke. Luckily I had saved a quarter for that day but I had to lend a nickel later on. We walked on Friday about thirty-one miles. It was fierce. When we got to Tamworth, we had gone nineteen miles. We got there at 11:30. Sometime. Here we had lunch.

From Tamworth we walked to Adams Mills, stopping at Moxie Farm and spending my last nickel on a bottle of ginger ale. We were soon in Herr Meyer's boat and then in camp. At camp I found eight letters waiting me. On the trip I wore out a pair of new sneakers. It was the rocks on the mountains that did it. Don't forget to send money for my stamps. Have father send my allowance as I had to get some shoes. Also some tennis balls. I have a trunk and sleeping bag to send down. Don't forget these.

Now I must go to dinner.

Lots of love to all,

Brooks

P.S. Today is hot. The flies are nearly killing me. Excuse all mistakes.

From Fred Clark's Book, 1916 - Music and drama were always a major part of Tecumseh. Walter Johnson arrived at Tecumseh in 1916. Walter was a creator of skits and musicals for the weekly Saturday night performances which were usually held in the Lodge. Pine branches were hung from the rafters and stage lighting was with kerosene lanterns surrounded by pine boughs. ... Walter introduced the idea of an outdoor stage which gave more room and townspeople and summer residents were invited. The outdoor theater officially opened on Friday evening, August 3, 1917:

This evening, the woodland theater was officially opened ... The stage and scenery were beautifully set off in a small grove of pine trees through which the full moon could be shining over the lake. There was an audience of three hundred people seated on chairs and benches beneath the trees. Among the guests were the girls of Camp Iroquois as well as many summer people from the lake and the country people. ...

From Fred Clark's Book, 1917 - With World War I in progress, Tecumseh offered military training courses in 1917. Rifles were obtained and regular military drills were held. During that time, Tecumseh also donated the proceeds from their potato farm to the Red Cross or other war charity.

From Fred Clark, 1919 - Tecumseh endured a major tragedy in 1919. There had been a canoe trip that was late in returning, so one of Tecumseh's boats toed some of the canoes back to camp. One of the canoes, filled with campers, tipped over. The boat included counselor Walter Johnson. It was soon discovered that a young camper named Mulford Heinz was missing. Walter dove down in the water to try and find the boy, but with no success. After a lot of searching for the boy, no one could find him. Mr. Grant was terribly upset and called the boy's parents with the terrible news. Camp then hired a group of professional divers from Connecticut to search for the boy. After two days, they finally located Heinz. An autopsy revealed that the fellow had died of a heart attack and the parents did not blame Camp. To prevent this type of lake accident in the future, the firm rule of New Hampshire Marine Patrol now requires all persons of any age in a canoe to wear life jackets.

From Fred Clark's Book, 1920 - Tecumseh changed from a ten week to a nine week camp in 1919. In 1920, with the war over, Tecumseh was in full swing. Tuition was raised to \$250. There were now twenty cows and a bull and a great need for more barn space. In November, 1920, Grant and Orton acquired the Hollingsworth Farm, about 250 acres in all. This property includes the buildings now known as the Farm House and the Barn. The sub-juniors slept on the porches with Woozie Supplee and Carlos Cardeza as counselors. The porches were fully screened.

In 1921, the two islands (Joe's and Poplar) were purchased from Dr. Hollingsworth. In 1925, Grant decided to form Camp Tecumseh, Incorporated, to which he and his distant wife Lydia conveyed all of the property, including the islands.

Farm chores, including caring for the cows and other farm animals, were assigned to seniors and junior counselors. Woozie Supplee and Carlos Cardeza handled some of the dairy work, ran the cream separator and made ice cream. After Mr. Grant's passing in 1946, Supplee would become the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

Large fields of sweet corn were planted each spring. The corn was picked 30 minutes before a meal and delivered to the kitchen when the dinner bell rang. As the season progressed, corn would be on the table at every meal. After the camp season ended, several Tecumseh people would can snapped beans, corn and tomatoes for use the following year, before that year's crops came in.

Clint Grace first came to Tecumseh in 1921. He was the main farmer and handyman for many years at Tecumseh. Assisting him over the years were George Hathaway and Horace Fife. These men tended to the camp farm year round. Their responsibilities included the dairy herd with cows to milk, hay to grow and harvest and grounds and buildings to care for.

From 1920 - The following is an advertisement for Camp Tecumseh, placed in the William Penn Charter School Magazine by Camp Directors Alex Grant and Dr. George W. Orton.

Boys, Lake Winnepesaukee is one of the finest lakes in America, and Tecumseh has one of the best sand beaches to be found on a mountain lake. The water is of the right temperature for swimming. Tecumseh has all kinds of boats and canoes, floats, etc., so that the combination affords really ideal conditions for all kinds of water sports.

Facilities for many other kinds of out-of-door recreation are at hand. The baseball fields, tennis courts, etc., fill every need, while the location of the camp lends itself to many wonderful trips to the nearby mountains, among others, Lincoln, Lafayette, Whiteface, Chocorua, and the finest mountain in the East, Mt. Washington, being climbed during the summer.

The home life at camp is full of interest. If you desire to improve in athletics, some of the best coaches in America are there to teach you. Tecumseh's Seniors, with very few exceptions, make their school letter. Many of Tecumseh's graduates are or have been famous college athletes. The fishing, the tramps, the tent life, and the varied interests that arise each summer give each boy something to do that is both intensely interesting and, at the same time, profitable.

A camp that gets back from 75 to 85 per cent of its boys of the previous year, and one of which at least 50 per cent are there each season for their fourth or fifth summer, is a pretty good one to tie to. The above, which is the highest recommendation that any camp can have, shows that the boys like the place and the recreation furnished. It also means that the parents are pleased with the results obtained.

The division into Seniors, Intermediates and Juniors gives boys of all ages an equal chance for the sports, trips and general features of the camp life. Tecumseh sees that each individual has a good time and gets something worth while out of his summer. Ask the boys who were there last year. They will tell you of the good times and the good "eats" they had.

For catalogues or other information, apply to: Dr. George W. Orton, 332 South Forty-third Street, Philadelphia, or Earl Bartlett and Donald Burke, Penn Charter Representatives.

From Pinky Shover, 1927 - (The following is an excerpt from an article written by Pinky Shover in the final issue of the *Sunbeam* in 1977.)

My initial trip to Moultonborough Neck was made in a 1924 Ford coupe with my bride of two years. On the way to camp, our first encounter occurred coming down the Palisades, anticipating our first ferry crossing between Nyack, N.Y. and Yonkers, N.Y. The transmission bands on my Ford gave way and we coasted to within ten feet of the Hudson River before bringing the car to a stop. The caretaker of the ferry station called an auto mechanic and he installed new transmission bands on the spot. Then, arriving within a few miles of camp, when we came down Schoolhouse Hill (Kona Farms Hill) on the Neck Road, a large antlered deer jumped across the narrow road right ahead of us. There were all indications of a head on collision, but, fortunately, the deer's leap was tremendous and we avoided contact.

My bride, Ruth (Mrs. "Pinky") was settled at the Grant Cottage (later the Lawless-Munger cottage moved from Grant's Point) where Mrs. Ralph Johnson, her daughter Mary K, and Mrs. George T. Davis resided for the 1927 season and that was almost a total separation for me from my bride, except on Saturday nights when women were allowed to come into camp to see the weekly theatrical show. I was placed at the Farm House to help supervise the youngest boys from five to seven years of age. In addition, believe it or not, I was put in charge of the ponies and riding as my main job! I had had no previous horse experience and knew only the head and rear of a pony. It was pathetic when with much assistance I harnessed the best of the ponies, Tecumseh, and rode him from the barn to the paddock. The gate was open and Tecumseh rather briskly started to gallop around the paddock. No sooner than we began our first show, he threw me about six feet, headed toward the barn through the open paddock gate and left me to recover from my fall in full view of Harvey Reed, head of the camp riding. From then on, Mr. Grant realized what a poor counselor choice he had made in 1927!

To replace my job as pony boy, I was given tutoring work to do in addition to coaching the young Junior C's who lived and slept on the porch at the Farm House in double-decker bunks. I really liked these new assignments and thought the Director (Alex Grant) and Assistant Director (Forrest L. Gager) knew what they were doing. The summer of 1927 was a great sunshine season and after the first week of camp, my chest and belly were so light-red that I was named "Pinky!" This followed me all through my years at Camp. After the first year, I was not invited back to Tecumseh. My first daughter, Doris Ann, was born and we went to Ocean City, New Jersey, where I tutored a boy from Episcopal for the summer. And then, believe it or not, I was asked again to return to camp as an Intermediate Counselor, coach and tutoring man in 1931. My years were consecutive from then until [1983].



The Bath House in 1903.



The Trunk Room in 1912.



The fireplace inside the Lodge in 1905. Note the lacrosse stick leaning against the bricks.



Tennis match behind the Trunk Room in 1904.



Boating was very popular in the early years of camp as this 1911 photo shows. Note the cows on the beach.



Tecumseh war canoes in 1909.



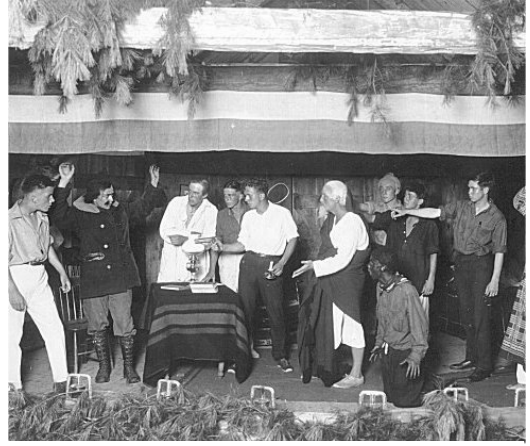
The Lodge, as seen from the waterfront, in 1905. This was the only drivable trail down to the waterfront in those days.



The back porch of the Lodge in 1904. Note that there are no stairs on the back side of the Lodge yet.



The Dining Hall, as viewed from the Lodge, in 1911.



Drama in the Lodge, 1919.



Inside of the Lodge, 1912.



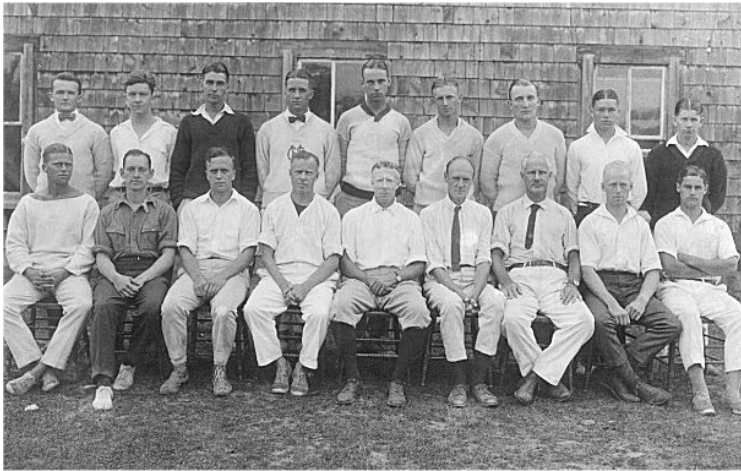
Camper's in 1926. The first two people in the top row are Dave McMullin and Bill Lingelbach, both of whom would become Trustees in future years. In the second row, second from left is Bill Weaver who donated Tecumseh's Track and Field complex in 1998.



Down at the Waterfront in 1912.



The Intermediate Cabin in 1919. To the left is Camp Director Alex Grant.



The Tecumseh counsel in 1919. In the front row, fourth from the left is George Orton. The fifth person is Alexander Grant.



Cleaning up inside of the Lodge, 1915.



In the early years, younger campers stayed up at the Farm House. This picture, taken in 1921, shows the Junior C's under the watchful eyes of Woozie Supplee, Mrs. Fred Doolittle and Carlos Cardeza. In 1946, Supplee would become the first Chairman Of The Board of Trustees.



Above: Mike Dorizas, Penn Wrestling coach, 1925.



The Trunk Room, with silo and exterior stairs, 1925.



Alex Grant driving a motor boat, 1924.