

“We All Aspired to be Woodsy”: Tracing Environmental Awareness at a Boys’ Camp

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In 1945, my grandmother went to work as a secretary at Trinity College School (TCS), a private boarding school for boys in the small town of Port Hope, Ontario. She was an experienced secretary, and she needed the job: she had been widowed only a few months before, with my father barely a toddler, and they had moved back in with her parents, in a tiny house on the east side of town. At TCS, Sylvia Campbell met Birnie Hodgetts, a history teacher who wanted to establish a summer camp for boys in the Thirty Thousand Islands of the Georgian Bay. The next year Hodgetts purchased some land at the end of Twelve Mile Bay, due west of the town of MacTier, and asked my grandmother to manage the business side of the camp, which he was calling Camp Hurontario. In the summer of 1950, the second summer of the camp’s operation, she came up to the camp island for the first time, bringing her six-year old son. My father would stay with Hurontario for the next thirty years, as a camper, counselor, and director. The camp, he said once, was the great love of his life. “But,” he added, “maybe don’t tell your mother.”¹

In some ways, this serendipitous meeting of half a century ago, of a young widow and an outgoing high school teacher, has framed my entire existence as well. My brother and I spent our first summers up in the Georgian Bay, at Hurontario; my brother was later at the camp for nearly a decade as a camper and counselor; and I became an environmental historian largely because I wanted to study this place that I found so beautiful and intriguing, a place that so wholly commanded the loyalty of people like my father. (My mother, for the record, never really liked the Georgian Bay. They remain married). When I undertook an oral history project of Hurontario, I found that other camp alumni shared this attachment to the distinctive physical qualities of the Bay. Among the baby boom generation who summered in the Bay, there appeared to be a strong correlation between this shared place attachment, an awareness of local environmental issues, and the framework of Hurontario in its first forty years. For an historian, the timing is intriguing, because this generation also witnessed – and indeed, led – the unprecedented wave of popular environmentalism in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹ Interview with Neil Campbell (Toronto, 15 June 1997). I am very grateful to Alan MacEachern, Ryan O’Connor, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments which improved an earlier draft of this article.

If “nature deficit disorder” among urban children has become a topic of public concern in recent years,² it is worth asking what effect summer camp in this particular landscape might have had in cultivating an audience sensitive to environmental change and sympathetic to environmental protection. As scholars Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo have argued, support for wilderness must be learned; a protected place represents both political achievement and cultural education.³ Hurontario invoked well-established ideas about the Canadian relationship to wilderness, but also a more localized conviction that the Georgian Bay represented an exceptional and superior kind of wilderness – and that any threat of degradation accordingly represented a keener and more serious concern. The camp drew its practices and its politics from its immediate environment, and so became deeply invested in the Bay’s ecological health. John Wadland has suggested this may be the best means of locating ourselves in both a national narrative and a global environment: starting with the bioregion “in which we are practicing participants,” and with our sense of place “on the ground, and at the root.”⁴ Whereas environmental issues are often framed by a distancing language – global in scope and scientific in tone – place attachment is a conduit, a point of identification for a wider audience. Local knowledge and local issues, and perhaps localized affection, too, “offer the only accessible entry to the political struggle for ecological sustainability.”⁵

Controlled Nature? Reading Children’s Camps

In 1997, I was working toward a master’s degree in public history at the University of Western Ontario. As part of this, I had taken a course in oral history, and was also required to complete a summer internship. Most of my classmates opted for stints in small museums, but that year Camp Hurontario was marking its fiftieth anniversary,⁶ so I proposed an oral history of the camp. I began with one major and pretty fundamental disadvantage: there was relatively little scholarly

² A term coined by Richard Louv in *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005).

³ Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo, “Imagining nature and erasing class and race: Carleton Watkins, John Muir, and the construction of wilderness,” *Environmental History* 6 (2001), 556-557.

⁴ John H. Wadland, “Great Rivers, Small Boats: Landscape and Canadian Historical Culture,” in *Changing Parks: The History, Future and Cultural Context of Parks and Heritage Landscapes*, eds. John Marsh and Bruce W. Hodgins (Toronto: Natural Heritage/Natural History Inc., 1998), 20-1.

⁵ Christopher Rootes, “Acting Locally: The Character, Contexts and Significance of Local Environmental Mobilisations,” in *Acting Locally: Local environmental mobilizations and campaigns*, ed. Christopher Rootes (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 19.

⁶ The camp was built over the course of two summers, 1947 and 1948, and hosted its first campers in 1949.

research available on either the Georgian Bay or the informal cultures of children's camps. In Canada we can still really only point to two camping histories, both based in Ontario and nearly twenty years apart.⁷ (Ironically, my father began an M.A. in Canadian Studies at Carleton University in 1966, because he wanted to write a thesis on boys' camps in the Ontario northland. His supervisor, however, instructed him to write about logging in the Ottawa Valley, at which point he dropped out of school). There are some studies on camps in the United States, particularly those in the Adirondack region of New York State, where youth camping dates to the 1880s and which sustains what Leslie Paris calls a "national camp culture."⁸ But the Canadian tradition of nationalist wilderness rhetoric remains anchored, like much of the nation's political and cultural power, in southern Ontario, which suggests that our "national camp culture" is as regionalized and as symbolic.

But even this material on camps did not talk about what I was interested in: the effects of the physical location and the environmental discourse of camp, particularly in the postwar period. Scholarly studies have been weighted to the first half of the twentieth century, and tend to rely on the prescriptive literature authored by camp directors, "the voices of the adults who theorized, created, and evaluated summer camp experiences for children."⁹ As a result, they focus on how camps were scripted to redress adult anxieties amid the dramatic changes wrought by urbanization and industrialization, and to middle- and upper-class school children – society's future leaders – in gender-appropriate and morally respectable behaviours. In this reading, camps represented a strange hybrid: an antimodern, anti-urban community in which to apply the most up-to-date theories of educational and developmental psychology to a captive audience of expatriate urbanites. Scholars also traced the use of "wilderness" – as a counterpoint to the city, and a place to "play Indian," reinvigorate physical and moral health, and

⁷ Here I refer to *Using Wilderness: Essays on the Evolution of Youth Camping in Ontario*, eds. Bruce W. Hodgins and Bernandine Dodge (Peterborough: Frost Centre, 1992) and Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009). Leslie Paris notes that camps were relatively unregulated, and few directors kept detailed records, in *Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 10.

⁸ Paris makes this argument in both *Children's Nature* and "Pink Music": Continuity and Change in Early Adirondack Summer Camps," in Hallie E. Bond et al, "*A Paradise for Boys and Girls*": *Children's Camps in the Adirondacks* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 1-12. See also W. Barksdale Maynard, "An ideal life in the woods for boys': Architecture and Culture in the earliest summer camps," *Winterthur Portfolio* 34 (1999), 3-29. On the other hand, Patricia Jasen points out that a romantic view of wilderness and a comprehensive tourism infrastructure was well established in Ontario by the end of the nineteenth century, in *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (University of Toronto Press, 1995).

⁹ Michael B. Smith, "'The Ego Ideal of the Good Camper' and the nature of summer camp," *Environmental History* 11 (2006), 72.

introduce the conservation ethic expected of the sporting gentleman – to ideas dating to the early twentieth century, ideas such as those of Ernest Thompson Seton and his Woodcraft Indians. But at the same time, camps were carefully arranged spaces of “controlled nature,” where safety and comfort permitted energies to be directed toward building character.¹⁰

Camp Hurontario fit some of these characteristics, especially in its elite demographic and emphasis on healthy masculinity. But it seemed off the mark to read camps as sites of socialization simply dropped into any suitably green setting, where the physical environment was often relegated, literally, to the background. By focusing on programming, we have had little sense of the host environments and campers’ relationship to it. In Margaret Atwood’s short story “Death by Landscape,” about a girls’ camp in this part of Ontario, the narrator of the story recounts, “Girls of her age whose parents could afford it were routinely packed off to such camps, *which bore a generic resemblance to one another*. They favoured Indian names and had hearty, energetic leaders. . . . At these camps you learned to swim well and sail, and paddle a canoe, and perhaps ride a horse or play tennis.”¹¹ The idea of fitting a riding circle or tennis courts on the jumbled granite of Hurontario’s island is ludicrous, but more troubling is the implication that we are not recognizing the diversity of local landscapes across the near north. If children’s camps “arose in response to the social and cultural ecology”¹² of the twentieth century, they also evolved in response to *natural* ecology.

Doing Oral History: The Challenge of Proximity

Why, then, an oral history? I was used to learning about the Bay through stories; to distract me on canoe trips my father would tell me about canoeing over to Manitou Dock for the steamer’s mail drop, or playing football on the unusually

¹⁰ Paris, *Children’s Nature*, 9. In Canada, Camp Ahmek in Algonquin Park has been the subject of more of this kind of analysis than any other, partly because of the literature on childrearing based on that camp, notably Hedley S. Dimock and Charles E. Hendry’s *Camping and Character: A Camp Experiment in Character Education* (1929). See Abigail A Van Slyck, “Shaping Modern Boyhood: Indian Lore, Child Psychology, and the Cultural Landscape of Camp Ahmek,” in *Depicting Canada’s Children*, ed. Loren Lerner (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 27-48. Tellingly, Ahmek staffer Ronald H. Perry, who authored popular manuals like *The Canoe and You* (1948) and *Canoe-Trip Camping* (1953), recommended reading for counselors under the heading of “Books on Camp Problems and Handling Young People” in the latter (131).

¹¹ Margaret Atwood, “Death by Landscape,” in *Wilderness Tips* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1991), 111. Emphasis added. David. S. Churchill suggests that director Taylor Statten, who added things like a pirate ship to his Camp Ahmek, was “a showman who was trying to attract children to his camp so that he could teach values and develop character,” in “Organized Wilderness: The Algonquin Camps and the Creation of the Modern Wilderness,” in *Using Wilderness*, 111.

¹² Kristopher Churchill, “Learning about Manhood: Gender Ideals and ‘Manly Camping,’” in *Using Wilderness*, 26.

wide and flat island named American Camp. More importantly, oral interviewing would allow me to flesh out an under-examined historical and generational stage of the Canadian experience. Oral history is often presented as a means of reaching those previously excluded from the historical narrative, a way of accessing the voices of “ordinary people.”¹³ Middle-class Anglo-Saxon boys from Toronto have hardly been marginalized in the national narrative, but as the dominant demographic in modern Canada they have played a key role in shaping what we think of as “ordinary.” Baby boomers from central Canada have normalized their own rites of passage (such as summer camp), and elevated certain images of their northland (loons on a lake, Muskoka chairs on a dock) into icons of Canadiana, but we know little about their formative years in that northland. Studying this childhood requires looking beyond conventional written sources to material objects, physical spaces, visual records, and oral testimony.¹⁴ At a camp, oral history also provides the voice of adolescent experience rather than that of adult agenda. It allows us to assess environmental awareness, especially in a place where environmental change can be marked and measured within a lifetime. Many elements of regional environmental history, such as sensual memories of the outdoors and local practices or adaptations, are not recorded well in documents and rarely found in official archives. Oral histories are “situated in time and place,” grounded in the specifics of locality.¹⁵ Yet oral testimony can also act as both cue and complement to archival research, as I would discover.

Over the course of three months I spoke with forty-three people including staff, campers, and counselors from the 1950s through the 1990s, up to Hodgetts’ grandson, the presumptive heir to the office of director. A majority of the narrators were middle-class men between the ages of thirty and sixty-five, living in southern Ontario, and more than happy to reminisce about their adolescent years. That several alumni also came from cottaging families with a multigenerational history in the Bay, sometimes stretching back to the turn of the twentieth century, would prove useful.¹⁶ The relative homogeneity of the group meant that many of the narratives corroborated each other – helpful since I had no

¹³ Steven High, “Sharing Authority in the Writing of Canadian History: The Case of Oral History,” in *Contesting Clio’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, eds. Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009), 36.

¹⁴ Lerner, Introduction, *Depicting Canada’s Children*, xvii.

¹⁵ Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, Introduction, *Oral History and Public Memories* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), xiv.

¹⁶ A few of the older cottage communities in the area had published their histories, relying heavily on oral history and cottagers’ memories. See the accounts of the Madwaska Club at Go Home Bay, in 1923, 1948, and 1973; Paul MacMahon, *Island Odyssey: A History of the San Souci Area of Georgian Bay* (San Souci and Copperhead Association, 1990); and *Wind, Water, Rock and Sky: The Story of Cognashene, Georgian Bay* (The Cognashene Book Corporation, 1997).

written history of Camp Hurontario to confirm or contextualize what I heard. Given my particular interest in environmental history, I asked the narrators to comment not only on their experience at the camp, but also on their memories of the Bay and the camp's place in it. While many of the stories dwelt on the (mis)adventures of youth, reflections on the environment were generally quieter, lengthier, and more contemplative, providing wonderfully rich source material.

But in hindsight, I should have been more aware of the implications of my relationship with the camp, and the privileged position which *I* enjoyed as an interviewer. Although separated by age and gender, I was embedded in my community of study. I understood the language and mental geography of my narrators, but I had learned that language in a familial narrative along with nostalgia for the Bay. The "sense of intimacy and trust" that an oral interviewer needs to cultivate¹⁷ I had inherited by virtue of my family name, and thus took for granted. Most of the narrators had known my father and grandmother for years; they acted as though Neil's daughter and Sylvia's granddaughter was the sensible choice for any project on the camp's history. My father is famously undemonstrative; my grandmother died when I was fourteen, and would likely not have answered the kinds of questions about her that I began to have that summer anyway. (How did she cope with being a young single mother? What was her role in the worlds of boys, at TCS and Hurontario? What was the nature of her friendship with Birnie?) Even when I did not ask specifically about my family, alumni facing me across their office or living room or porch felt prompted to talk about them. In the interviews my grandmother approaches something of a saint – "so unselfish and so quiet and so good"¹⁸ – and my shy father the ultimate realization of Birnie Hodgetts' vision of the Hurontario camper. Such a flattering picture was, naturally, lovely to hear. More precisely, for someone raised in a large city, whose family had moved every generation since emigrating to Canada, the idea that the camp was indivisible from the Campbells – that my family was integrally linked to *a* place – was incredibly appealing. In short, I was invested in the story, and my proximity warred with my perspective.

Birnie Hodgetts, Camp Hurontario, and the Georgian Bay

At first glance, Birnie Hodgetts would appear a typical camp director and Hurontario a fairly typical camp. As Sharon Wall has shown, private camps in Ontario were founded by charismatic, "independent minded" individuals with roots in the private school system, like Taylor Statten (Pickering College and

¹⁷ Neil Sutherland, "When you listen to the winds of childhood," in *Histories of Canadian Children and Youth*, eds. Nancy Janovicek and Joy Parr (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2003), 28.

¹⁸ Interview with Tom Lawson, Port Hope, 2 June 1997.

Camp Ahmek, 1921) and Mary Hamilton (the Margaret Eaton School and Camp Tanamakoon, 1925).¹⁹ Hodgetts was an athletic teacher and coach, employed at one such prestigious private school, and a former counselor at Ahmek in Algonquin Park. Like many of the private camps – recently dubbed “the Havergals and UCCs of campdom,”²⁰ a reference to Toronto’s leading private schools for girls and boys respectively – Hurontario was in many ways an extension of central Canada’s private school system, headquartered in Toronto. As Monte Hummel, past president of *World Wildlife Fund Canada*, and self-styled “northern Ontario boy,” noted dryly in our interview, “Drop a bomb on that camp and [you] wipe out half the Canadian establishment.”²¹ Older narrators indicated that Hodgetts secured start-up money from TCS alumni (and start-up staff among TCS students) as well as wealthy Georgian Bay neighbours like John David Eaton. Hodgetts’ gruff demeanor, booming bass voice, and rule of authority in the camp became legend; nearly all the narrators had enormous affection toward this father figure.

But he departed in some key ways from the established interwar model of youth camps. Hodgetts resisted joining the Ontario Camping Association (and is conspicuously absent from much of the literature, including the OCA’s history of Ontario camping).²² Other directors published on the value and techniques of camping, and the romance of the north; Hodgetts wrote about teaching and Canadian history. He authored textbooks like *Decisive Decades: A History of the Twentieth Century for Canadians* (1960), and as director of research for the National History Project and later of the Canada Studies Foundation, presented an influential and highly critical account of the state of history education in *What Culture? What Heritage? A Study of Civic Education in Canada*, published by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in 1968. In 1976 he was awarded the Order of Canada for “his contribution towards a better understanding of Canada.” More directly, at his camp Hodgetts deliberately rejected the prevalent approach to programming. Whereas other camps would set out an hour for swim lessons and an hour in the craft shop, or series of badges to earn at the archery range, Hurontario used the “small group philosophy” whereby each cabin decided, essentially autonomously, how to spend each day. Narrators agreed this felt “very

¹⁹ See Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, especially pages 18 and 46.

²⁰ Joe O’Connor, “Campfire confidential: The dirt on summer camps,” *Toronto Life* 37 (2003).

²¹ Interview with Monte Hummel (Toronto, 29 May 1997), who grew up in Whitedog Falls, north of Kenora. On the camp’s start-up, interviews with John Band (Toronto, 3 June 1997), Robert McDerment (Toronto, 15 July 1997), Ian McLeod (Toronto, 22 May 1997) and William Somers (Toronto, 22 July 1997) were particularly helpful.

²² *Blue Lake and Rocky Shore: A History of Children’s Camping in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Camping Association, 1984). In his academic interests, Hodgetts resembled instead Bruce Hodgins, director of Camp Wanapitei on Lake Temagami and faculty at Trent University; and perhaps also Bruce Litteljohn, a former teacher at Upper Canada College.

natural.”²³ While not unique to the period,²⁴ it departed from Hodgetts’ experience with Ahmek, as he suggested unobtrusively in the camp brochure which featured Andy of Hurontario talking to his friend about camp:

“To camp! I’d sooner loaf around the cottage. I’m sick of playing camp games and dressing up like Indians and going to pow-wows. That’s kids’ stuff.”

Andy agreed. “That’s kids stuff all right, but even the younger boys at my camp don’t waste time on such things.”

The other boy shook his head. “Camp is too much like school for me, anyway, having to do everything right on time, with a whole bunch of other fellows.”

Andy looked at his friend, surprised. “Why, my camp is not like that at all. It’s not in any way like school and it’s quite different from the way you’re talking.”²⁵

This difference of approach was fundamentally linked to *where* Hodgetts chose to have his camp. In program and in landscape, Ahmek was “tightly controlled,” designed to manage children’s “psychological troubles” and scrutinize their behaviour through a host of adult-run activities. Accordingly, there “was no empty or uninhabited space at Taylor Statten camps” – the camp property was filled up with facilities for group activities.²⁶ A camp in the eastern Georgian Bay, on the other hand, would not attempt such control, of either boys or place. The archipelago known as the Thirty Thousand Islands stretches over two hundred kilometres along the Georgian Bay’s eastern shore. It forms a ragged border between the maritime world of the Great Lakes system and the jumbled mixed forests of the Algonquin highlands stretching to the Ottawa River.²⁷ Scoured by glaciers to expose the granite of the Canadian Shield, the islands are home to white pine bent by winds blowing west from across the “Open.” In 1946 Hodgetts

²³ Interview with Dave Hanna (Toronto, 22 May 1997).

²⁴ In the years following World War I, there was some discomfort with the militaristic evocations of tightly regimented camps, camper uniforms, and soldier-style badges. This prompted a nostalgic enthusiasm for “pioneering” camps and a “rustic, intimate, and experimental” lifestyle (Paris, *Children’s Nature*, 234 and 247). Mary Northway and John Passmore recall an American camp director “caused a stir” by suggesting this approach to the OCA in the 1940s (“Camping and Outdoor Education,” in *Blue Lake and Rocky Shore*, 57).

²⁵ “Hurontario,” undated camp booklet (ca. 1954?), in the possession of the author.

²⁶ Van Slyck, “Shaping Modern Boyhood,” in *Depicting Canada’s Children*, 44-45.

²⁷ There is new interest in defining the inland area which now constitutes the “near north.” Formerly known as the “Ottawa-Huron Tract,” it stretches from the Georgian Bay to the Ottawa River, from the height of land above Lake Ontario to the French River. Interest in the southern edge of this territory has spawned “The Land Between” project; see, for example, *The Land Between in 50 Scenes*, ed. Thomas McIlwraith (forthcoming).

purchased shoreline and a couple of islands in a sheltered, inland-facing bay just north of Twelve Mile Bay and O'Donnell's Point. The vast majority of the archipelago remained accessible only by boat, and was considered relatively remote. Cottagers therefore liked to compare their rustic cottages built with shore rocks and scrap lumber in proximity to wild nature with the more luxurious summer homes lining the Muskoka lakes. Despite the dramatic increase in real estate prices in the past thirty years, this oppositional identity has managed to survive largely intact.²⁸ Camp Hurontario relied on this microregional difference for its own identity, and encouraged its campers to see the archipelago as both environmentally and socially distinct. Nearly everyone I interviewed invoked Muskoka as a point of (unfavourable) comparison, against which the Bay appeared bigger, wilder, stormier, more isolated, and less social. The Bay meant canoes and fishing and solitude, not golf courses and cocktail parties. Even men who had been at Hurontario as late as the 1980s, and were describing the Bay in its present state, upheld this difference:

Muskoka's too busy, everything seems a bit more fast-paced. You get dressed to go out to dinner...the cottages are back to back, there's one after another, and there's no blank land in between them. And I think that's different from the Bay, where you can get in a canoe and paddle somewhere in 5 minutes and there won't be any cottages...I've always seen the Georgian Bay as more secluded, wild...Having a massive body of water which can blow up, huge waves crashing in – you don't get that in Muskoka...You get more of an appreciation for the area, and you know, the power of nature.²⁹

The rocky shoreline and open water was thought to have preserved a degree of wildness, and thus an authenticity of nature, which had been lost inland where “civilization” took root more easily. As Tim Stinson remarked, “I don't feel that you're in the outdoors when you're in Muskoka.”³⁰ Campers at Hurontario adopted the local mythology, and continue to insist on the distinctiveness and superiority of the archipelago.

²⁸ This “new” version of Georgian Bay society is perhaps best represented by Sarah Richardson, a Toronto interior designer, whose efforts to transform her (reluctant) husband's family cottage on a Georgian Bay island into something more stylishly chic formed the basis of a television series, “Sarah's Cottage,” in 2009. See <http://www.hgtv.ca/sarahscottage/> .

²⁹ Interview with Andrew Hall (Toronto, 11 June 1997).

³⁰ Interview with Tim Stinson (Toronto, 5 June 1997).

Woodsiness, Innocence, and Loss: Remembering Environmental Change

In this, Hodgetts had the support of Canada's cultural establishment. As Birnie, Andy Hamelin, and the first crews set to work building the camp in the summer of 1947, the rocky islands and twisted white pine of the eastern Georgian Bay had been presented as the quintessential Canadian wilderness for half a century. This landscape embodied the unexpected "beauty of dissonance" and "beauty of strength" by which poet A.J.M. Smith described the northland in 1926.³¹ Precisely for that reason it suited Hodgetts' nationalist, intellectual leanings and his plans for a boys' camp. Certainly the camp absorbed and, in turn, relayed the distinctive nationalism of southern Ontario, which celebrates the Canadian Shield as Canada's national landscape. Narrators invoked the standard roster of Shield icons and heroes, such as Champlain, the *voyageurs*, and the Group of Seven; several mentioned A.Y. Jackson visiting the camp ("He sat at our dining room table," shrugged John Wood. "It wasn't like it was a big deal or anything").³² In other words, Hurontario campers were taught to think of this particular place as not only a more powerful site of nature, but as a site profoundly important to their Canadian identity (a message likely amplified by the popular spirit of the centennial decade). Many alumni went on to become teachers – again, the influence of the charismatic Hodgetts, but also a likely choice for a camp counsellor – and to disseminate this mythology in the classroom. Thomas Hockin took it one step further: "It became my definition of what I love about Canada... When I was Minister of Tourism for Canada [1989-93] I was trying to describe it... I went all over Canada and the world and I never saw a place more beautiful than O'Donnells."³³

In addition, Hurontario cast the rugged landscape and the "natural" quality of decentralized programming as avenues to achieving a heroic kind of manhood. "My father set the camp up in that environment realizing that [it] produced challenges that were good for young men to meet," said Hodgetts' eldest son. "It was never his purpose that camp should simply be fun."³⁴ In this, Hurontario tapped into longstanding ideas about the relationship between healthy masculinity and the outdoor life – ideas which had renewed support in postwar North America. Popular and political culture celebrated male leadership with a physical grace in nature, while private schools upheld strict expectations of masculine behaviour. From their earliest days, then, boys' camps combined these "elements

³¹ A.J.M. Smith, "The Lonely Land," in *Selected Writings: A.J.M. Smith*, ed. Michael Gnarowski (Dundurn Press, 2006), 53.

³² Interview with John Wood (Toronto, 22 May 1997). Wood won a silver medal in flatwater canoeing at the 1976 Olympics at Montreal.

³³ Interview with Thomas Hockin, Toronto (31 May 1997).

³⁴ Tape submitted by Dr. Ross Hodgetts (from Spruce Grove, Alberta; received 6 August 1997).

of the boarding school and backwoods” in an all-male preserve aimed at creating “solid little citizens.”³⁵ For Hurontario, the landscape of the Georgian Bay was prized partly because it appeared unusually “masculine” and thus a better place to get boys wrestling with wilderness. As Keith Townley explained, again invoking the language of microregional difference, “the Georgian Bay was always, to me, very wild, slightly dangerous, quite isolated...It was not like Lake Muskoka, or Lake Rosseau, Lake Joseph, the Kawarthas or anything like that. It was a little bit, well, macho, basically, because it had all these uncharted rocks and everything.”³⁶

Since facilities were difficult to build here, on rocky terrain when all supplies were boated in, this favoured the unregulated, non-mechanized activities like fishing or canoeing that simply immersed campers in the physical environment. “We would actually go out in these rowboats when we shouldn’t have, to go into the waves, and to roll,” said Michael Willoughby. “We were strong, we were tall, we were athletic...we wanted to be more of it, part of it, so we would go out and challenge the environment.”³⁷ Even Willoughby’s comment – on the surface, a statement of masculine ego in its “challenge” – reflects the nascent sense of place empathy (“we wanted to be more of it, part of it”) that appeared throughout the interviews. This was one element of the model of manhood that lay at the heart of the camp’s culture: a model of “woodsiness.” This was a universally recognized and revered quality, one which signaled in equal parts place-based ecological knowledge and camping skill:

[I]t was really important to be “woody,” and that was a term we all liked to use. What makes a kid woody I guess is learning how to single, and sail properly, fish, and identify all these species, appreciate the nature you’re around, all that sort of stuff. It was important for us to instill that woody value idea into kids. And we all aspired to be woody. It was cool to be woody.³⁸

Prominent Canadian authors Margaret Atwood and David Macfarlane spent time at Hurontario, and later drew on memories of the camp in their fictional

³⁵ Christopher Dummitt, *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), especially chapter 4, “In the Mountains”; John Lienhard, *Inventing modern: Growing up with x-rays, skyscrapers, and tailfins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69; Churchill in Hodgins and Dodge, 14 and 19; Ronald H. Perry, *Canoe-Trip Camping* (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1953), 6.

³⁶ Interview with Keith Townley (Toronto, 22 May 1997).

³⁷ Interview with Michael Willoughby and Wendy (Baskey) Willoughby (Toronto, 27 May 1997).

³⁸ Hanna interview, 22 May 1997. John Lord was more honest: “I may have been cool but not woody. [John] Sewell and Monte Hummel and people like that were far woodsier than I. There was a great deal of value placed on that; but not all of us were.” Interview with John Lord (Toronto, 28 May 1997).

treatments of adolescence. Atwood's short story "True Trash" (1991) and MacFarlane's novel *Summer Gone* (1999) are set in camps that closely resemble Hurontario, and feature young men achieving sexual liberty in the unrestrained environment of the Bay. In fact, former campers seemed to remember their coming of age in relation to nature rather than to girls. (There were perhaps a dozen waitresses at the camp, so the odds were better for catching a fish than a date).³⁹ There is a narrative of a loss of innocence, but the innocence belongs to the Bay: "I was just so lucky to have caught, in my very young age, a virtually virgin Georgian Bay... The whole area was still all open to us, to move around and camp on."⁴⁰ Consider Hummel's elegiac comment on the state of the Bay:

It was a remarkable place naturally, and I underline was...It's not a wild place, anymore. It's not a beautiful place in my mind. It's an overdeveloped place. The Bay itself, and those wilder days of the Bay, are still very close to me. But...they kind of went with Birnie. I would have loved to have been at the camp in the forties [when] there were only a couple of cabins, the place is full of fish, and there weren't cottages up and down Twelve Mile. It has a sad, inevitable quality to me. The Bay is not what it used to be....there's this kind of nostalgic, it's a looking back. It's very much a black and white, sepia image of the past that I have. It's a historical record that we're talking about. I don't see a big future for Georgian Bay.⁴¹

Such a description of the Bay may be depressing, but two other aspects of Hummel's statement are far more so. First, here was one of the country's foremost environmentalists essentially abandoning any hope for the place; and second, there seemed to be no historical awareness in the language of his environmentalism. Hodgetts may have found the camp bay suitably remote, but it was no primeval wilderness. The archipelago had been subject to intensive, exhaustive industrial logging and fishing; the Bay's commercial fisheries for lake trout and whitefish were in the 1940s still among the most profitable on the Great Lakes. For Hurontario campers, an historical memory of the industrial landscape was far less appealing than one that fit with their own plans for a "wilderness,"

³⁹ Margaret Atwood, "True Trash," *Wilderness Tips* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); David Macfarlane, *Summer Gone* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1999). In his study of the myths surrounding artist Tom Thomson, Ross D. Cameron suggests that any women in Thomson's life later were written out of the narrative so as to make Nature "the female lead." "Tom Thomson, Antimodernism, and the Ideal of Manhood," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 10 (1999), 204. At Hurontario, however, the absence appears to have been more demographic than deliberate; several Hurontario narrators enjoyed recounting attempts at courting.

⁴⁰ Interview with Clark ("Knobby") Noble (Toronto, 8 July 1997).

⁴¹ Hummel interview, 29 May 1997.

such as the *voyageurs* after whom they patterned their canoe trips: “You could picture yourself in the days of eighteen hundred and whatever, then coming down through the Open from the Magnetawan River.”⁴²

Hurontario narrators did construct an historical narrative, but one that began during their time at the camp. Men who reached adulthood in the 1960s and 1970s thought of the Bay as a wilderness lost in their lifetime, as though the clock of modernity had begun ticking while they watched. There were undoubtedly significant physical changes. Rob Thomson remembered “regret about the passing of an era, as they blasted rock and put up the poles” to bring hydro-electric power onto the camp island; others recalled driving down Twelve Mile Bay in a launch in 1963, “cursing the guy that was responsible for putting the road in.”⁴³ With roads came more parks and picnic grounds, more boats, more cottages, less open space. This was confirmed by Hodgetts’ decision in 1965 to establish a north camp near Chapleau in the Lake Superior watershed, as a base for canoe trips. Until that point, trips followed rivers draining into the Bay, like the French or the Magnetawan, giving campers a good sense of the regional extent of the archipelago. But these “were becoming crowded. We could see the perimeters narrowing in. So we looked north.”⁴⁴ The pattern is a familiar one in North America; flee west, or north, to the new frontier, or new camping grounds. Ahmek, for example, began exploring Quetico Provincial Park and Temagami at the same time (although their interest in the north was prompted by fears that the provincial government was about to cancel their lease in Algonquin Park).⁴⁵ But for Hurontario, so invested in the Georgian Bay, this meant cutting a tie to its signature landscape in order to preserve some tie to the wild.

⁴² Michael Willoughby, 27 May 1997.

⁴³ Email from Rob Thomson (Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, dated 12 July 1997); interview with Dave Dawson (Aurora, 6 June 1997). Hummel remembered a distraught Birnie making the decision to allow hydro onto the camp island over a bottle of Silk Tassel. To give some sense of the speed of development at this point, consider that five provincial parks (Killbear, Six Mile Lake, Sturgeon Bay, Grundy Lake, and Oastler Lake) opened along Highway 69 in the space of six years (1958-64). Interestingly, it was the *oldest* narrator – Andy Hamelin, the camp builder and handyman – who was most blasé about change, or lack of it: “It hasn’t changed that much. It’s hard to change the rocks.” Interview with Andy and Jean Hamelin (Midland, 16 June 1997).

⁴⁴ My father, Monte Hummel, and Hodgetts’ second son David were the first up to the area to choose a site for the camp. Interview with David Hodgetts (Hamilton, 26 June 1997); interviews with Neil Campbell (Toronto, 19 and 25 May 1997).

⁴⁵ *Fires of Friendship: Eighty Years of the Taylor Statten Camps* (Toronto: The Taylor Statten Camps, 2000), 153. There was a parallel growth of canoe tripping in the Adirondacks, prompted partly by a new ecological interest after the first Earth Day (1970) and partly out of a belief that the area, protected by park or reserve legislation since 1885, had bequeathed “an area symbolic of an untouched natural world.” Hallie E. Bond, “‘A Paradise for Boys and Girls’: Children’s Camps in the Adirondacks,” in “*A Paradise for Boys and Girls*,” 73-80.

The sense of loss here is twofold: of the isolation which was an important quality of the archipelago, and of the environmental commons. “Since they have gone from him, years ago, into the lap/of the rich who can buy anything/he has to imagine them, the islands/of summer,” poet Douglas LePan (whose sons attended Hurontario) wrote wistfully.⁴⁶ Even Hurontario alumni, a privileged group on the whole, felt alienated from the Bay amid rapid escalation of property values in recent decades. “The true spirit of Bay people is being diluted,” said Gregor Beck, fifth-generation Cognashene resident, former camp biologist, and now conservation and science director for the Federation of Ontario Naturalists. “You get people moving in and they don’t have the family history in there... people buy in and think they can do anything.”⁴⁷ Nostalgia colours the story of privatization and environmental degradation, but it also provides an ecological yardstick, a way of measuring cumulative changes in the local ecosystem. Narrators noted poorer water quality, changes in bird populations (the rise of the predatory cormorant at the expense of more delicate species like the loon and the whip-poor-will), and habitat loss (especially weed beds for pike, a popular game species).⁴⁸ There was also dismay over related changes at the camp itself, where climbing walls had replaced cedar carving, implying that equipment had become more important than setting. For these men, the golden age of youth was also the golden age of the Georgian Bay, and they felt the loss of both keenly.

Ferociously Protective: Modeling Environmentalism

Environmentalism in North America has a long tradition of nostalgia for untrammled wilderness. Writers and activists lamented the loss of wild places well before the turn of the twentieth century. In the 1910s and 1920s, cottagers in the Georgian Bay lobbied for protection of scenic and recreational elements, including fishing habitats, water sanitation, and parks on Beausoleil and Franklin Islands.⁴⁹ Theirs were the “environmental” concerns typical of the early twentieth

⁴⁶ Douglas LePan, “Islands of Summer,” in *Weathering It: Complete Poems 1948-1987* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987) 19.

⁴⁷ Interview with Gregor Beck (Toronto, 7 June 1997).

⁴⁸ Ross Hodgetts was a biologist at the University of Alberta, so his account was rather detailed in this regard.

⁴⁹ For an extended discussion of environmental change, management, and politics in the archipelago, see Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004). “Resolution passed by Georgian Bay Association at the Annual General Meeting,” Toronto, 1 April 1922, in MNR Lands File 16089 (Franklin Island Provincial Park); R.B. Orr to J.B. Harkin, 1 September 1921, NAC RG 84 A-2-a vol. 487 File GB2 (U325-9-6). On a similar chronology, Hodgins has argued that youth camps led a “protective impulse” in Temagami from the start of the twentieth century. See “Contexts of the Temagami Predicament,” in *Temagami: A Debate on Wilderness*, ed. Matthew Bray (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 1996), 127-8.

century. But in the postwar period, this nostalgia fueled a grass-roots mobilization that, Janus-like, used the language of past wilderness to engage to an unprecedented degree in contemporary political debates. As more and more land was subdivided for cottages in the 1950s and 1960s, and canoeing and camping grew in popularity, older cottage communities in the near north became more active in local politics.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the cause of environmental protection gained purchase with a wider population which endorsed the liberal, interventionist agenda of a post-war state, and which was increasingly concerned with questions of air pollution, toxic waste, and biodiversity. By the mid-1970s, in the judgment of one historian, “No longer could critics claim that wilderness protection was the pastime of a few elitist, male, Toronto-based canoeists.”⁵¹ This new generation of environmental issues grafted onto the serious feeling of investment – emotional, familial, and financial – in the near north, among both cottagers and residents. This turn appeared unusually strong in the Georgian Bay. Government studies repeatedly remarked, as one report concluded in 1969, on the unusually “passionate conviction in the region of the vital importance of the landscape, and of the environment itself, as a factor over-riding all considerations of development. This concern for the quality of the environment is widespread and deeply felt.”⁵² John Hartman, who lives on the Penetanguishene peninsula at the south end of the Bay, explained this was a point of commonality between seasonal and permanent residents: “Georgian Bay people are very, ferociously, protective about the Bay. They really don’t want it to get screwed up, they don’t want it to change, they feel very strongly about this.”⁵³ The concept of wilderness also had very real meaning in the Georgian Bay, as formal wilderness areas and nature reserves were established in the archipelago from the 1950s onward. Moreover, the Bay was located literally at the axis of the debate over wilderness designations in provincial parks: between Algonquin to the east, Killarney to the north, and Quetico to the west.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Peter A. Stevens, “Cars and Cottages: The Automotive Transformation of Ontario’s summer home Tradition,” *Ontario History* 100 (2008), 52-3; B.W. Hodgins and Jamie Benidickson, *The Temagami Experience: Recreation, Resources and Aboriginal Rights in the Northern Ontario Wilderness* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); also Greg Halseth, *Cottage Country in Transition: A Social Geography of Change and Contention in the Rural-Recreational Countryside* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998).

⁵¹ Adam Rome, “Give Earth a Chance”: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *Journal of American History* 90 (2003), 525-554; on the transition within Ontario, Gerald Killan and George Warecki, “The Algonquin Wildlands League and the Emergence of Environmental Politics in Ontario, 1965-1975,” *Environmental History Review* 16:4 (1992) 16.

⁵² Georgian Bay Regional Development Council, *Regional Plan 1968-1972* (University of Guelph Centre for Resources Development, 1969), 14.

⁵³ Interview with John Hartman (LaFontaine, 16 June 1997).

⁵⁴ The two most thorough albeit rather institutional accounts of the park system are Gerald Killan’s *Protected Places: A History of Ontario’s Provincial Park System* (Toronto: Dundurn

We know very little about the relationship between the camping tradition and the emerging popular environmentalism in this period. Scholars have established that camps in the first half of the twentieth century sought to respond to *social* change; a camp located in “nature” provided a relief valve or counterweight to urban life, and an opportunity for healthful socialization. But Hurontario responded explicitly to perceived *environmental* change, and especially from the 1960s onwards. Invoking the ecological and historical importance of the archipelago, and drawing on the “woody” sensibility of its leadership, the camp mobilized its program and its political connections to campaign for (or against) certain policies which might affect it and its surrounding territory. In this place-based activism Hurontario had a marked effect on the postwar generation, some of whom became active in environmental organizations, others who formed a sympathetic audience for their message.

Introducing several hundred people into the archipelago was bound to have an adverse impact, so Camp Hurontario itself could not claim an unblemished environmental record. Over the first few summers Hamelin cut down trees for the dining hall, poured boatloads of concrete for a permanent dock, and ripped up dozens of alder bushes to clear the bay for swimming and canoeing.⁵⁵ Hodgetts regularly used a defogging machine with DDT before campfires to kill mosquitoes, and cabins were also sprayed.⁵⁶ Boys cleaned their clothes by scrubbing them with Sunlight soap on the shoreline. Rifle shooting, a popular activity for boys, deposited lead shot on the bay floor. Garbage was burnt in an incinerator or dumped across the bay, which inevitably attracted bears (“That was part of the biology program that the kids never complained about: going over to the dump and climbing trees and we’d all sit and watch the bears”).⁵⁷ Former biology instructors winced to remember past practices, like jumping on – and through – sphagnum carpet in the inland bogs. Interesting specimens were captured and caged for the season at the “bug building.” And, of course, there was no greater trophy than the size of a fish catch. Hummel, of all people, brought to our interview one of his fondest possessions: a 36-pound muskellunge that he caught while at the camp, now stuffed and mounted on a five-foot board (hiding it from the other staffers at the World Wildlife Fund headquarters, as well as one can hide a 36-pound fish mounted on a five-foot board). Such attitudes, of course, were typical of the era, and of the area. For that

Press, 1993) and George Warecki’s *Protecting Ontario’s Wilderness: A History of Changing Ideas and Preservation Politics, 1927-1973* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000).

⁵⁵ Interviews with John Hughes, Toronto, 1 June 1997; and Andy and Jean Hamelin, 16 June 1997.

⁵⁶ As John Lord remembered, “It probably killed every mosquito in a two-football-field radius. I always wondered what we were breathing.” (Lord interview, 28 May 1997).

⁵⁷ Interview with Gerry Bird, and Mike Chellew (Lakefield, 23 June 1997; email correspondence, 31 August 2000).

matter, management practices at Georgian Bay Islands National Park on Beausoleil Island were arguably worse.⁵⁸

That said, Hurontario highly valued its biology program. Nature study had been a staple at children's camps since the turn of the century, tied closely to Ernest Thompson Seton's idea of woodcraft, and with a particular emphasis on species identification. But Hurontario moved beyond this into thinking about place and habitat; and even made fun of the traditional approach in its brochure:

"You'll never guess what I like best of all about camp," Andy said with a twinkle in his eye. "It's the nature program."
"Nature study!" the other boy snorted. "I went on a nature hike just once. The leader would jump up on a rock or a stump, hold up something and say, 'this is a bunch berry' or 'this is a quaking aspen, notice flattened petiole.' No, Andy, you can have it."
... "The Georgian Bay is such a wonderful place [said Andy], with so many different kinds of animals and fish and reptiles and amphibians, that you can't miss."

As Hartman, now one of Canada's foremost landscape painters, remembered it,

We were brought to an understanding that the natural world was a series of systems, that there was an ecological system and we were part of it, and it was a system that maintained a certain balance. And I don't think in the late '50s, early '60s, anybody was talking about that kind of thing... [Now] you have wildlife centres sprouting up all over the province that teach that kind of thing – but that was very unique to Hurontario at the time. And Birnie hired full-time biologists, real, trained biologists to run the program.⁵⁹

These biologists ensured that the program was rather more sophisticated, and engaged with professional research. Camp Hurontario collaborated with Parks Canada, the Toronto Zoo, and different universities in tracking vulnerable populations like the Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake, Spotted turtle, and Monarch butterfly. Such research dovetailed with a series of life science inventories which identified the habitats of endangered species like the Massasauga in the future Massasauga Wildlands Provincial Park, and helped reorient park plans away from campground development to something resembling an ecological reserve.⁶⁰ Camp

⁵⁸ See Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, p. 173.

⁵⁹ Hartman interview, 16 June 1997.

⁶⁰ Interview with Gary Higgins, Superintendent, Massasauga and Oastler Lake Provincial Parks (25 January 2000).

groups explored the shores and the nearby mainland in search of interesting species, sometimes bringing back specimens for the camp's terrarium (or "turtle pond"). This activity clearly had a long-term effect on the adult narrators. Stinson was somewhat embarrassed to admit how much he enjoyed "being able to tell my kids what certain things are, how to tell different trees from each other. My wife kids me about 'Tim's Nature Walk.'" Historically, newcomers found the Georgian Bay a difficult landscape to understand or to like. But Hurontario alumni felt more at home here because they knew something about its biology and geology: "...whether it was snakes or birds or bird calls or plants or fish...Just to have that knowledge really connects you with the whole natural environment."⁶¹ The result was more than academic; indeed, the very premise of much environmental education is that it generates popular support for environmental protection. The influential Thompson Seton believed that "if man were reacquainted with the subtleties of woodcraft in childhood, he would carry an ecological perspective with him for the rest of his life."⁶²

Hodgetts and the assistant directors also incorporated environmental references into presentations to the camp as a whole, whether in the dining hall or at weekly chapel. Here the ecological details served to reinforce the message that this was an extraordinary place. "He would say we were really fortunate to be in the Georgian Bay because we have things that are unique to the Bay, like the blue-tailed skink and the cardinal flower, and of course the west wind shapes the pine," said one alumnus. "We became very aware [that] nature controls you in Georgian Bay, to a much greater extent than anywhere else."⁶³ Adult narrators agreed that such homilies, in their local relevance, were appropriate rather than dogmatic: "exactly what you should do in the spiritual realm with young people."⁶⁴ As Hummel pointed out, this nurtured a belief in the unique status of the Georgian Bay, and a fierce loyalty to it:

It was impossible to be in the camp bay, on a quiet June evening, without the sheer reverence of the place descending on you... This is what, apart from the skills, he wanted to impart: this reverence for how

⁶¹ Stinson interview, 5 June 1997; Hanna interview, 22 May 1997. Bernard Mergen reviews some of the literature on the relationship between childhood, environmental exposure, and environmental(ist) consciousness in "Children and Nature in History," *Environmental History* 8 (2003), 643-669.

⁶² John Henry Wadland, *Ernest Thompson Seton: Man in Nature and the Progressive Era, 1880-1915* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), 353.

⁶³ McLeod interview, 22 May 1997.

⁶⁴ Hockin interview, 31 May 1997. There were, of course, some homilies on other topics. "He was always giving the correct path. He was not in any way evangelical about any of this, but he was highly principled. This was the correct way to do things, and this way – well, we'll just stop right here." Townley interview, 22 May 1997.

beautiful the Bay could be, and the Bay of all places. This thing you hear in their [alumni] voices, they don't talk about it like any other place.⁶⁵

Jamie Bendickson has argued that the camping movement in mid-century believed outdoor life should foster a sense of social responsibility, and it appears Hodgetts made the most of his opportunity to instruct the young men he believed to be society's future leaders.⁶⁶

These young men learned not only from listening to Hodgetts, but from watching him. Tina Loo has shown that while the twentieth century generally marked an expansion of state authority in environmental and wildlife management, there were still notable instances of dynamic individual and local initiative.⁶⁷ On at least two memorable occasions, Hodgetts wielded the power of both his personality and political connections to protect the privacy and integrity of the camp's environment. First was the battle over Loon Portage. Motor boats coming down Twelve Mile Bay have to follow the full length of the peninsula and circle around Moose-Deer Point, crossing the exposed Starvation Bay, before they can return to more sheltered water. But north of the camp island, a short portage crosses the peninsula which separates Twelve Mile Bay from Moon Island and the Sans Souci area. In very high water, this portage was navigable by canoe, so boaters proposed blasting it into a channel which would give them an inner route to Sans Souci and from there to Parry Sound. This would have substantially increased traffic through the camp bay, and from the camp's point of view "would have been *terrible*," so Hodgetts "fought tooth and nail to keep Loon Portage from being blown open."⁶⁸ In the end, the portage was straightened and leveled, but left as a footpath. Hodgetts then convinced the Ministry of Natural Resources to establish a fish sanctuary on the southern side of the camp bay, between it and Twelve Mile Bay. Aided by the camp's biology program, the MNR began monitoring fish populations in the area in 1984, and shortly thereafter declared the area a sanctuary – a designation that persists to this day. But the biologists with whom I spoke tacitly agreed that the issue was manufactured at least in part to protect the camp's privacy, and boys who were at the camp at the time also seem to have recognized that this was as much about

⁶⁵ Hummel interview, 29 May 1997.

⁶⁶ Jamie Benidickson, *Idleness, Water and a Canoe: Reflections on Paddling for Pleasure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 47.

⁶⁷ Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

⁶⁸ Dave Hodgetts testified that my father proposed "nude gunnel bobbing" in front of a man who tried to set up a cabin on the camp bay. Along the same lines, Gerry Bird implied that Birnie arranged to have the entire junior section out skinny-dipping whenever fishermen tried to approach.

tactics as ecology. With Loon and the fish sanctuary, the alumni frankly – if somewhat ruefully – acknowledged Hodgetts’ ability to “muster the resources of all the Establishment people” and take “whatever tack it would take to get those kinds of protective policies in place.”⁶⁹

As Patricia Jasen has said of Ontario wilderness tourism, “All of this sounds very bourgeois, and so it was.”⁷⁰ Many of North America’s older “protected places” owe their origins to the influence of well-to-do sportsmen who desired wilderness reserves for recreational hunting or fishing. As early as 1907, for example, a federal commission investigating the state of the Georgian Bay fishery heard from “prominent citizens of the province, who are interested from the sportsmen’s point of view in the protection and repletion of the game fish” (and ultimately recommended the creation of a game fish reserve – but, unlike Hodgetts’ sanctuary, this was never implemented).⁷¹ Environmental action based in recreational wilderness has often had an uncomfortably proprietorial quality: people who got there first keeping *other* people out in the interests of “nature,” or at least establishing themselves as the “arbiter of appropriate conduct in the bush” positioned between the bush and the masses. As a result, wilderness advocates have been vulnerable to charges of privilege and elitism.⁷² Certainly there was an element of this at Hurontario, not only in the status accorded the “woody” in their knowledge and ease in the environment, but in the physical boundaries of Hodgetts’ property. His partner remembered the deliberate quality of his acquisition: “Once he’d gotten the assurance that he could control the entrance [to the camp bay], then he bought the camp island, and then he started buying some of the other islands around there.”⁷³ Several Hurontario alumni applauded Hodgetts for having the foresight to buy adjacent shoreline at the outset and thereby buffer the camp against cottage development. And yet, there is a nuanced difference between territorial and ecological protection, between seasonal self-interest and larger concern. This difference is evident in the story of Massasauga Wildlands Provincial Park, created just north of Camp Hurontario in the 1970s.

⁶⁹ Hummel interview, 29 May 1997; interview with Bird and Chellew, 23 June 1997, and email from Bird, 31 August 2000.

⁷⁰ Jasen, *Wild Things*, 20.

⁷¹ “Interim Report: Proposed Georgian Bay Fish Preserve” (17 January 1907) in *Report and Recommendations of the Dominion Fisheries Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Fisheries of Georgian Bay and Adjacent Waters* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1908), 12-13.

⁷² See, for example, Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*, second edition (Washington: Island Press, 2005), especially 64-5. Christopher Dummit describes how the British Columbia Mountaineering Club sought to regulate hiking trails in order to both protect the mountain environment and ensure new hikers adopted the club’s definition of a “respectful attitude toward the wild”; the parallel with attitudes throughout Ontario’s near north, in canoe and cottage country, is striking. *The Manly Modern*, 78-87.

⁷³ Interview with Ulla Elliot (Port Hope, 2 June 1997).

Indeed, had it not been for Hodgetts and other “Establishment people,” it appears this park would not have been created at all. This story is also a reminder of the peculiar value of oral history, for it was a brief mention in an interview which led to a closer reading of archival sources, and in the end, a fuller account of the park’s history.

In 1973, the province of Ontario announced the creation of a new park in the Thirty Thousand Islands. Blackstone Harbour Provincial Park was to stretch over 15,000 acres from Parry Island and the South Channel down to and including Moon Island, making it – with French River and Killarney – one of the biggest parks in the region. During the Hurontario interviews my father had mentioned, as an example of the camp’s conservation ethic, a “Cowper Conservation Authority”:

There was an area of land owned by a mining company that the camp had a tie to ...Ramsay & Duncan Derry were at the camp, and their father was with this company. The company had the rights to the land along Spider Bay and Spider or Cowper Lake, the whole north side of the bay... Birnie got hold of this land and [with] others in the San Souci area...formed this organization to protect this land...Eventually a deal was worked whereby the land was given to the government of Ontario on the condition that it would never be developed for cottages or whatever. That land is now part of the new provincial park.

Mike Chellew referred to island landowners protesting the structure of municipal boundaries (which neglected the islands in favour of the mainland) but no-one else spoke of this (self-titled) Conservation Authority.⁷⁴ Years later, I was in the provincial archives reading through files on provincial parks in the Georgian Bay. Pinned to the very back of a file folder stuffed with mimeographs on the Massasauga – clearly the earliest document to be filed on the proposed park – was a land transfer dated 1974. A Cowper Conservation Authority deeded to the province 22 lots in two concessions, with their associated mining licenses, on the understanding that the land would be left undeveloped for activities like canoeing, hiking, and “casual environmental appreciation.”⁷⁵ This loosely corroborated the

⁷⁴ Campbell interview, 19 and 25 May 1997; Chellew interview, 23 June 1997. Chellew’s uncle was a prominent Sans Souci cottager and another member of the CCA.

⁷⁵ D.F. Hewitt, *Geology and Mineral Deposits of the Parry Sound-Huntsville Area, Geological Report 52* (Ontario Department of Mines, 1967), 31-3; A.R. Sawh, Solicitor, to J.R. McGinn, Lands Administration Branch, 24 June 1974; J.S. Ball, Regional Director Algonquin Region to Park Planning Branch, 14 March 1975, MNR file # 10-5-1; McGinn to K.H. Stahl, Financial Management Branch, 4 October 1974, file PS#19/L.O. 463. All AO RG 1 IB-4 PS 19 1974-76 Box 33. Also “Land Acquisition History: Blackstone Harbour,” 2 November 1976, AO RG 1 IB-4 PS 19 Box 35 1976-77.

oral testimony, but it was the documented controversy over the mining licenses that confirmed the players involved. The Division of Mines lobbied for several years to keep the area open to mineral exploration, insisting there was copper and zinc potential along the north shore of Spider Bay and that this was an inappropriate (ab)use of the licenses.⁷⁶ But the Parks Branch remained adamant that the park should go ahead, pointedly citing pressure “from influential ‘Bay’ interest groups” and the “commitment by the Minister to a community whose enmity he would not wish to invite.”⁷⁷ Clearly this was a reference to the CCA, its membership of landholders, and their particular vision for the area. The Parks Branch, too, conceded to such pressure. While the earlier proposals for the park included roads and up to 1500 campsites, eventually the Deputy Minister announced that 95% of the park would remain “natural, undeveloped and inaccessible” except by boat or on foot, to “preserve the environment values that have been ensured on this section of Georgian Bay by the past vigilance of permanent and seasonal residents in the area.”⁷⁸ The park was renamed accordingly, and “Blackstone Harbour” became “Massasauga Wildlands.”

Close to Home: Place and Hurontario

Private summer camps carry connotations of privilege as much as associations with blue lakes and rocky shores. And the rights to those rocky shores have been very much a matter of privilege. But the class critique can detract from the effect of outdoor summer camps on developing ecological knowledge, an attachment to place, and a valuation of the natural world. When we ask how and why

⁷⁶ In the words of a former district geologist, the Mining Act stipulates that mining licenses of occupation are to be held only for mining purposes, so that “a Minister of the Crown had collaborated with a conservation group to contravene legislation which his Ministry [of Natural Resources] was entrusted with enforcing.” Email correspondence from Jim Trusler, 14 June 2000.

⁷⁷ “Review of Material to be Presented to the Provincial Parks Council,” 25 May 1976; R.A. Beatty to J.W. Keenan, Executive Director of Parks, 1976, draft; Park Planning Branch, “Response to W.T. Foster’s options and recommendations for Blackstone Harbour Provincial Park,” 1976; J.A. van der Meer, Regional Parks and Recreation Coordinator, to L.H. Eckel, Executive Director of Parks Division, 6 April 1977, AO RG 1 IB 3 Box 37.

⁷⁸ J.K. Reynolds, Deputy Minister, MNR, to John Sweeney, MPP, 27 February 1978; Park Planning Branch, “Response to W.T. Foster’s options...” (1976) AO RG1 1B-3 Box 37. On the original development plans for the park, see “Blackstone Harbour Provincial Park Proposal: Project Review Highlights” (n.d./1976), presented to Provincial Parks Council June 1977; Park Planning Branch, “Response to W.T. Foster’s options...” (1976); “Blackstone Harbour Provincial Park Project Review,” 13 October 1976, AO RG1 1B-3 Box 37.

Although the park might be seen as a modern version of an Edwardian fishing reserve, in fact the inverse is true: the area – in the heart of some of the prettiest, and most expensive, cottage country – is now accessible to people who could not otherwise afford to visit. Regardless, my father resents it, in that he doesn’t think he should have to reserve space on islands he remembers as being open, available, and uninhabited.

environmental issues entered the mainstream of North American popular and political culture – and how we are to keep them there – a place like Camp Hurontario assumes a particular historical interest. Although only a few became professional “environmentalists,” camp alumni attributed to Hurontario their strong affection for the Georgian Bay, some understanding of its complex ecosystem, and an awareness of the political dimensions of its sustainability. Why was this camp able to have such an effect? I suspect it was a combination of when it was founded, where it was located, and the attitude it adopted toward its surroundings. Hurontario heroized a “woody” model of manhood for a generation poised to enter a climate of activism and environmental interest. As recreational activity in the near north intensified in the 1960s and 1970s, the correlation between place and politics became concrete. At the same time, boys were taught to see the powerful landscape of the Georgian Bay as physically distinct, historically significant, and aesthetically ideal: “That particular spot which in its own way is as perfect a spot as you can imagine on the face of the globe.”⁷⁹ Camp “environmentalism” was partly a *defence* of place, but also an *assertion* of its importance. Respecting, even encouraging, such localized convictions is a way of implementing more broadly-based environmental protection: if every place is considered exceptional, then none are expendable. So we may not be able to replicate precisely what happened at Hurontario, but it is worth asking how we might try.

[We] got on the *Midland City*, and Dad was staying up to do the final closing... And I can remember thinking that he was probably the luckiest guy in the world, to be able to be up there. Because it was wild and woolly – I always felt it was wild and woolly.

- David Hodgetts, 1997

⁷⁹ Lawson interview, 2 June 1997.