# Summer Camps: Girls Just Wanna Have Fun

Formal summer camps for girls developed a couple of decades after those for boys—Camp Kehonka, established in 1902, is credited as the first camp for girls. As those for boys, camp experience was viewed as an antidote to modern life. The general purpose: to increase health, build character, and instill joy.

In 1923, the National Association of Directors of Girls' Camps touted three major benefits of summer camps:

1. Superior health and the knowledge and will to preserve it.
2. Mastery of the body. Joy and skill in its use, both on land and in water. Keenness of eye and ear, deftness of hand, senses alert in observation, hearts responsive to beauty.
3. Social consciousness and responsibility, modesty in victory, and graciousness in defeat; resourcefulness and reliability; contentment with simplicity and readiness to serve and to endure hardness.

*"To get close to the primitive life, get away from things ladylike, be uncivilized, get a coat of tan, swim like a young seal, dive like a porpoise, climb like a goat, sail a boat like a pirate, ride like a Valkyrie, is what most girls want in camp."*

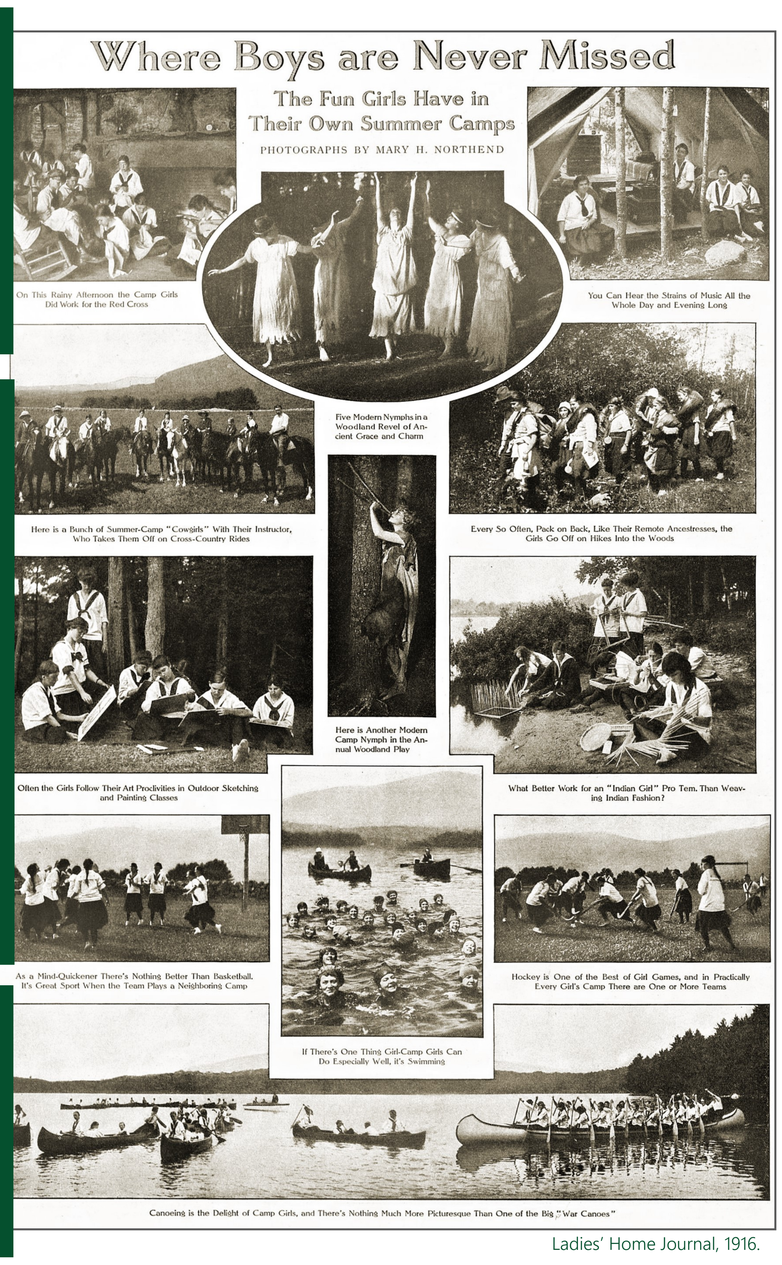
*Handbook of Summer Camps: An Annual Survey, 1935.*

*"In camp a girl learns to work with others, to cooperate, to know the value of time. Here she is emancipated from the age-old tradition that she is entitled to be indisposed whenever she wants to be, that indisposition is a feminine grace... To live happily in a well-conducted camp, a girl must learn how to work with others. Rowing a boat, paddling a canoe, playing all sorts of team games, teach her this. She learns to be responsible for a certain thing being done at a certain time."*

*Luther G. Halsey and Grace Potter, "The "Why" of the Summer Camps for Boys and Girls." Good Housekeeping, 1912.*

*"A camp girl is not taught theories, but how to do things. At camp she is taught to meet the real issues of life."*

*Anna Worthington Coale, Summer In the Girls' Camp, 1919.*




Ladies' Home Journal, 1916.

Joy Camps promotional photos from the early 1940s



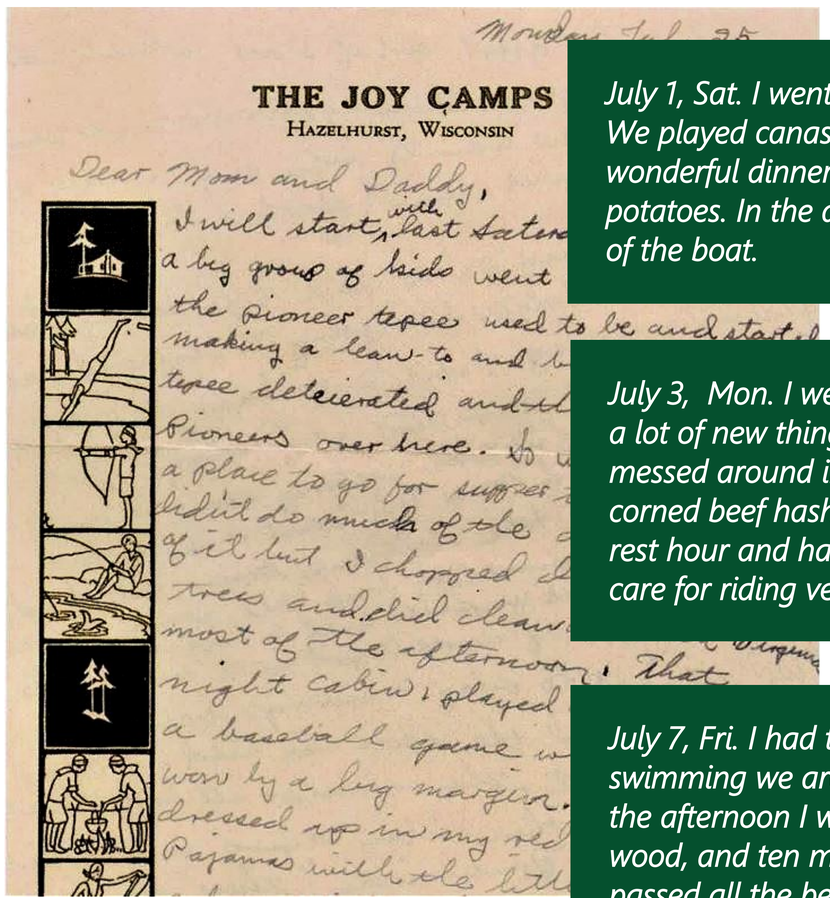
## Sue Ann's Summer of 1950

Sue Ann Hackett, an inveterate letter-writer, was 15 years old in 1950 and attending her second summer at Joy Camps in Wisconsin. Her letters, fortunately saved and now available via the Wisconsin Historical Society, provide a rare, first-hand glimpse of summer camp in the early 1950s.

Joy Camps was established in 1930 and was open to girls ages 7 to 17. Activities ran the gamut from archery to theatrics. One unique aspect was campcraft—learning the camping skills such as chopping wood and making fire—girls then would go on overnight camping excursions via hikes and canoe.



Sue Ann Hackett as Daniel Boone, 1950




*July 1, Sat. I went canoeing in the morning. It is still raining. We played canasta until noon on some trunks. We had a wonderful dinner. We had meatloaf, corn, mashed potatoes. In the afternoon I went sailing I learned all parts of the boat.*

*July 3, Mon. I went to sailing theory this morning. I learned a lot of new things. And then since it was raining we messed around in the cabin until dinner time. We had corned beef hash and salad. I went riding first period after rest hour and had a difficult time with the horse. I don't care for riding very much this year.*

*July 7, Fri. I had to sort out the laundry this morning... In swimming we are working on our leg and arm strokes. In the afternoon I went to campcraft and passed my splitting wood, and ten minute fire. Then I went to tennis where I passed all the beginners requirements. I took a sunbath during the five o'clock swim. We had potato salad and fish for supper. The fish was really good. The counselors show was tonight. It was kind of corny but everybody liked it.*

Learn more about summer camps for girls:

- Lesieutre, Susie Seefelt. "Joy Camps: The Camp Craft Camps for Girls." Wisconsin Magazine of History, vol. 98, no. 4, 2015, pp. 36–49.
- Paris, Leslie. "The Adventures of Peanut and Bo: Summer Camps and Early-Twentieth-Century American Girlhood." Journal *of Women's History*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2001, pp. 47–76.