Summer Camps: **Charles Alexander Eastman**



Charles Alexander Eastman (Ohíyesa) was many things—physician, eyewitness to the massacre at Wounded Knee, renowned lecturer, author of eleven books and numerous articles, government inspector of reservations, organizer and early president of the Society of American Indians, and a pivotal figure in the early history of summer camps and scouting.



"Our sports were molded by the life and customs of our people; indeed, we practiced only what we expected to do when grown. Our games were feats with the bow and arrow, foot and pony races, wrestling, swimming and imitation of the customs and habits of our fathers. We had sham fights with mud balls and willow wands; we played lacrosse, made war upon bees, shot winter arrows (which were used only in that season), and coasted upon the ribs of animals and buffalo robes."

Indian Boyhood

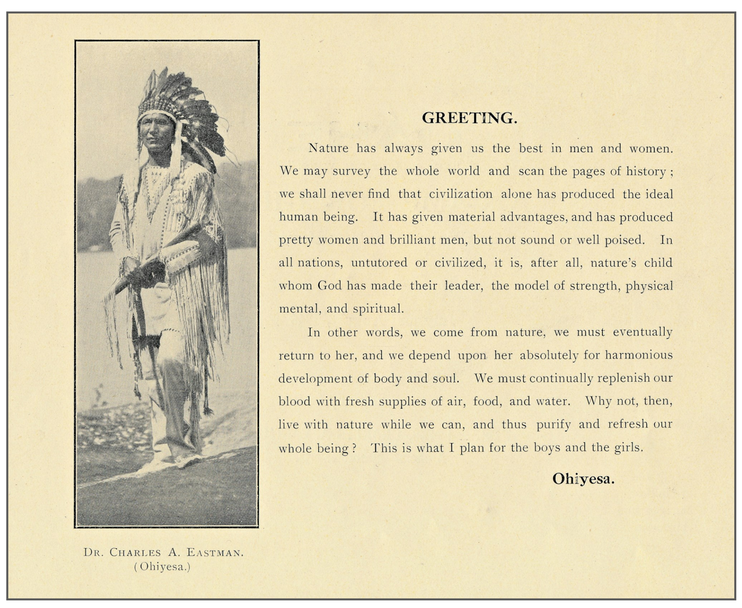
"What boy would not be an Indian for a while?"

Eastman's tales of growing up were serialized in the popular children's magazine, *St. Nicholas*, in 1893. These later formed the basis of his 1902 book, *Indian Boyhood*. The memoir portrayed a childhood both idyllic and fraught, where boys learned that true manhood, was one of physical activity, endurance, patience, and self-control. The articles and book, targeted to young white readers, provided a positive depiction of Native Americans and served as a rebuke to the stereotypes popular in the media of the day.

Progressive white reformers, worried about the decline of American youth, pampered by the comforts and materialism of modern life, turned to the idealized version of Native American childhood depicted in *Indian Boyhood*. Eastman would work with Ernest Thompson Seton and Daniel Carter Beard to establish the Boy Scouts of America, with Charlotte and Luther Gulick on the Camp Fire Girls, and the YMCA to create an Indian Scouts program for working-class boys.

Eastman would later write, "I feel that I was a pioneer in this new line of defense of the native American, not so much of his rights in the land as of his character and religion. I am glad that the drift is now toward a better understanding, and that he is become the acknowledged hero of the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls."

His 1914 book, *Indian Scout Talks: A Guide for Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls*, provided lessons in archery, canoeing, building shelters, sports for boys and girls, Indian names, story-telling and more for would-be campers and scouts.



DR. CHARLES A. EASTMAN.
(Ohiyesa.)

GREETING.

Nature has always given us the best in men and women. We may survey the whole world and scan the pages of history; we shall never find that civilization alone has produced the ideal human being. It has given material advantages, and has produced pretty women and brilliant men, but not sound or well poised. In all nations, untutored or civilized, it is, after all, nature's child whom God has made their leader, the model of strength, physical mental, and spiritual.

In other words, we come from nature, we must eventually return to her, and we depend upon her absolutely for harmonious development of body and soul. We must continually replenish our blood with fresh supplies of air, food, and water. Why not, then, live with nature while we can, and thus purify and refresh our whole being? This is what I plan for the boys and the girls.

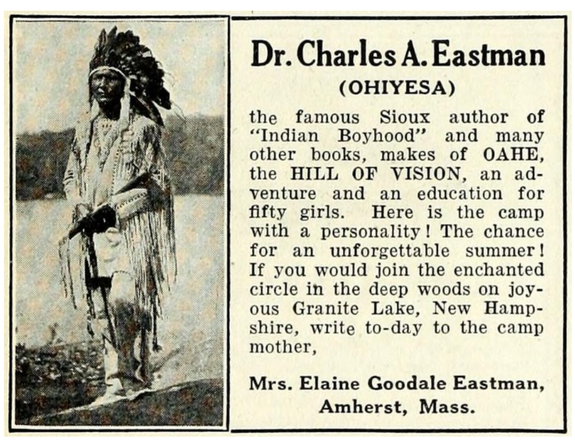
Ohiyesa.

Oahe, School of the Woods

In 1915, Charles Eastman and his family opened up Oahe, a summer camp for girls in New Hampshire. The following year they opened a camp for boys, Ohiyesa.

The camp ran from July 1st to September 2nd and cost a then hefty $200.

According to scholar Kiara Vigil, "At Oahe, Eastman aimed for campers to embrace Dakota beliefs and practices to a deeper extent, so that they might come to appreciate Indian society but also, ideally, work as adults to better the living conditions and political circumstances of Native citizens in the United States." They served as an extension of Eastman's "other political projects to center indigenous peoples in the making of America and push back against assimilationist politics related to deracination, dispossession, and erasure" and create "new attitudes about the future place of Natives in America."

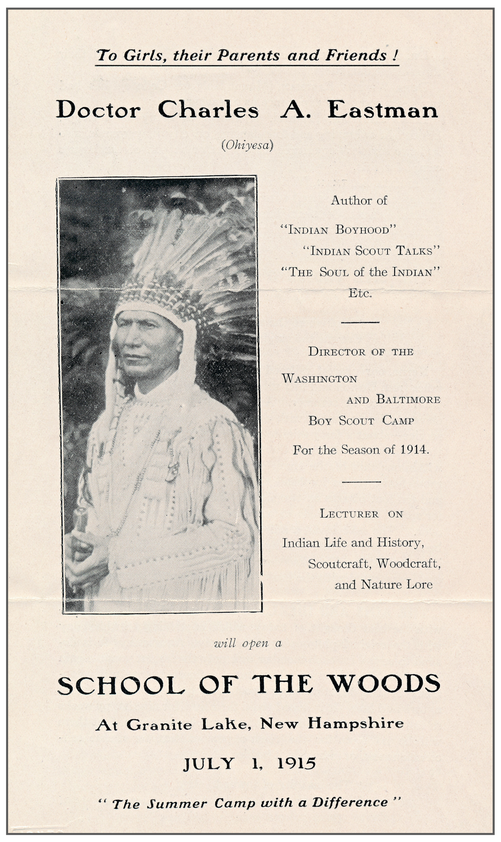


Dr. Charles A. Eastman
(OHIYESA)

the famous Sioux author of "Indian Boyhood" and many other books, makes of OAHE, the HILL OF VISION, an adventure and an education for fifty girls. Here is the camp with a personality! The chance for an unforgettable summer! If you would join the enchanted circle in the deep woods on joyous Granite Lake, New Hampshire, write to-day to the camp mother,

Mrs. Elaine Goodale Eastman,
Amherst, Mass.

1919 ad for Oahe in *St. Nicholas* magazine.



To Girls, their Parents and Friends!

Doctor Charles A. Eastman

(*Ohiyesa*)

Author of
"INDIAN BOYHOOD"
"INDIAN SCOUT TALKS"
"THE SOUL of the INDIAN"
Etc.

DIRECTOR OF THE WASHINGTON AND BALTIMORE BOY SCOUT CAMP
For the Season of 1914.

LECTURER ON
Indian Life and History, Scoutcraft, Woodcraft, and Nature Lore

will open a

SCHOOL OF THE WOODS

At Granite Lake, New Hampshire

JULY 1, 1915

"The Summer Camp with a Difference"

Learn more about Charles Alexander Eastman:

- Eastman, Charles A. *From the Deep Woods to Civilization: Chapters in the Autobiography of an Indian*. Little Brown, and Co., 1916.
- Dykema-VanderArk, Tony. "'Playing Indian' in print: Charles A. Eastman's autobiographical writing for children." MELUS, vol. 27, no. 2, 2002, pp. 9-30.
- Kelsey, Penelope Myrtle. "A 'Real Indian' to the Boy Scouts: Charles Eastman as a Resistance Writer." *Western American Literature*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2003, pp. 30–48.
- Vigil, Kiara M. "Charles Eastman's 'School of the Woods': Re-Creation Related to Childhood, Race, Gender, and Nation at Camp Oahe." *American Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 1, 2018, pp. 25–53.