Summer Camps: **Playing Indian**

Native American imagery, symbolism, rituals, and role playing have long been intertwined with summer camps and youth organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. Early camp advocates created an imaginary Indian—spiritual, natural, pure—as an antidote to modernity, culturally appropriating "Indianness" in a cloak of whiteness.

Two of the most striking examples are Ernest Thompson Seton's Woodcraft League and Luther and Charlotte Gulick's Camp Fire Girls. The appropriation of Native American culture endured for decades across the spectrum of summer camps (private, public, religious, and secular) before petering out in the 1980s. However even in 2020, a study found that 30% of summer camps still had Native American inspired names without any cultural or historical acknowledgement.



What the Camp Fire Girls Stand For

A New Girls' Movement That Promises to be as Successful as the Boy Scouts

By Mrs. Luther H. Gulick

The Hand Sign of Fire

Part of the Hand Sign

EDITORS' NOTE—Mrs. Gulick is one of the founders of the new girls' organization, "The Camp Fire Girls of America," which is likely to become as popular with girls as has "The Boy Scouts of America" with boys. Already thousands of girls are members, although the organization is only six months old. It is unlike any other movement ever organized, and it has in its purposes the most marvelous possibilities for girls that any organization has ever offered.

THE EDITORS OF THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL.

WHY the name "The Camp Fire Girls" for this organization? For the same reason that the organizers of the Boy Scouts decided on that name for the boys: because it was believed they would like it. Scouting is a masculine activity; keeping the fire burning in a camp or in a home is a feminine activity. The word "camp," symbolizes the outdoor spirit of the organization. Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls go together. But the Camp Fire Girls is not patterned after the Boy Scouts. It has been worked out for girls.

A girl in joining becomes first a Wood Gatherer, next a Fire Maker, and then a Torch Bearer. There is a natural sequence in the arrangement of these orders. Before a girl joins she must read the purposes of the movement, or have them explained to her, and she must learn and repeat the following lines: "It is my desire to become a Camp Fire Girl and to obey the Law of the Camp Fire, which is to

Seek beauty, Give service, Pursue knowledge, Be trustworthy,
Hold on to health, Glorify work, Be happy.

This Law of the Camp Fire I will strive to follow."

THE next rank, that of Fire Maker, takes three months of preparation, unless the girl is in a camp or gives her entire time to preparation. She must indicate her understanding and love of the Camp Fire ideal by learning and repeating the "Fire Maker's Desire," which is:

As fuel is brought to the fire, So I purpose to bring My strength, My ambition, My heart's desire, My joy And my sorrow To the fire.
Of humankind; For I will tend, As my fathers have tended, And my fathers' fathers Since time began, The fire that is called The love of man for man, The love of man for God.

The other requirements for Fire Maker are the following:

(1) *a.* To help prepare and serve, together with the other candidates, at least two meals for meetings of the Camp Fire; this to include purchase of food, cooking and serving the meal and the care of the fire. *b.* Two meals prepared in the home without advice or help may be substituted.

(2) To mend a pair of stockings and a knitted garment, and to hem a dish-towel.

(3) To keep a written, classified account for at least one month of all money received and spent.

(4) To tie a square knot five times in succession cor-

I desire to pass undimmed to others.

There are other things the applicant must do, similar in character to the requirements of the

Wearing the Honor Beads

Fire Maker. When she has attained to this rank she is a leader and an assistant to the Guardian of the Fire. The Guardian of the Fire is the woman in charge of a Camp Fire; she gets her certificate to become a Guardian by sending to the Headquarters of the Camp Fire Girls for her papers. This is necessary in order to guard against persons going into the work who are not fitted to lead girls.

CAMP FIRE GIRLS have an official costume, which includes a skirt and a blouse for street wear, a ceremonial costume, a bathing suit, an outing hat, walking shoes, a winter mackintosh and a sweater. All of these may be purchased ready-made with the exception of the ceremonial costume. The skirt for street wear is a dark blue serge. This material and color were chosen because nearly every girl owns a dark blue skirt. The blouse to be worn with this skirt is practical and becoming, and it is suitable for street and school wear. On the right sleeve is worn the emblem denoting the rank of the wearer. Other emblems, designed in silver, for the different ranks may be worn: a silver ring for the Wood Gatherer, a silver bracelet for the Fire Maker, and a silver pin for the Torch Bearer.

These costumes and emblems are not necessary in order for girls to become Camp Fire Girls—they are for those who want them—but they will add greatly to the interest and purposes of the organization.

BESIDES the different ranks the girl attains there is a system of Elective Honors. These are divided into seven groups: health, home craft, Nature lore, camp craft, hand craft, business, and patriotism. There are upward of two hundred honors given in this way. For instance, a girl gets an honor for being free from colds two consecutive months during the winter, or for not missing school or business for three consecutive months because of ill health. These are habit-forming tests. Honors are given for keeping well, and for doing the things that will bring this about. A girl receives an honor for doing the cooking in a home for a month: this is putting the knowledge of domestic things received in school into practice. A girl receives an honor for being able to tell five standard folk stories: this is getting practice in the art of entertaining. She receives an honor for doing the work in a successful garden, for making a shirtwaist, and so on through the seven groups. The honors for these different groups are given in the form of beads, a different-colored bead being given for each group; so that a girl may win seven chains of beads, each bead standing for a real accomplishment. The beads are worn at the council fire held once a month, and form a part of the ceremonial costume.

THE home and the school have been the great character-forming agencies for boys and girls. The Camp Fire Girls is an agency for showing girls how to form their own characters. Children in their plays do in miniature the things they will do in adult life. The girl plays with her doll, preparing herself in the spirit of play for the care of the most precious gift of her life. For making a doll's house of four rooms and furnishing it a Camp Fire Girl receives an honor. For a girl to have made a doll's house and furnished it is real preparation for the home she is to plan and furnish.

Girls must be given opportunity to rehearse in play the activities they will be engaged in later in life. Boys must play with other boys in order to be trained to deal with men when they are grown. The value of team play for boys is inestimable in developing a capacity for working together in fairness and for the good of all. Women are only beginning to play team games; and very good discipline it is, for woman, too, must learn how to work in common with others. But of more racial importance is it for woman to get training along domestic lines in a play spirit. That is the reason the Camp Fire Girls are adding romance and adventure to their program for the girls. A girl goes to the lake, to the river, to the woods, with her friends, and cooks her dinner in good, primitive style. It is just as essential for girls to cook over an open fire outdoors as it is for boys to play their team games: it is giving the girls in play the lessons they need to learn.

There are all kinds of things to be rehearsed in play; cooking and sewing, weaving and dyeing, washing and ironing; and all that is done in the home can be learned in play before the task of a real home is undertaken. To make this possible is a fundamental idea of the organizers of the Camp Fire Girls.

IT WAS important that this movement should have the most expert help possible in its formation, and this was secured.

The work has good financial backing by persons who believe in this plan for giving girls the things they so much need and want. Without this financial support the work would be hopeless.

The program has been made to meet the needs and possibilities of the girls in all parts of the country, for girls who come from wealthy homes and for those who must work for their living; it is for the city girl and the country girl; in short it is for all girls.

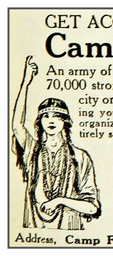
The watchword is "Wohelo," made from the first two letters of the words Work, Health and Love. The cheer is:

Wohelo for aye, Wohelo for aye,
Wohelo, Wohelo, Wohelo for aye;
Wohelo for Work, Wohelo for Health,
Wohelo, Wohelo, Wohelo for Love.

The music for this cheer is in the Camp Fire Girls' book.

NOTE—"The Camp Fire Girls" organization has a little book that tells, in text and pictures, the entire story of the movement; how to organize a club, the official costumes, the ranks, the

GET ACQUAINTED WITH THE
Camp Fire Girls



An army of earnest, fun-loving, self-respecting girls, 70,000 strong. No matter where you may reside, city or country, you are invited to join, assuming you are the right type of girl. This wonderful organization is first of all a good-times club and is entirely self-supporting. It makes for character building, promotes wholesome associations and affords highly entertaining activities, both winter and summer, for all members. A symbolic silver ring given each qualified member.

BOOKLET SENT FREE.

A postal card from you will bring our booklet telling who is directing the movement, its aims, the requirements of membership, and how you may form groups in your home community.

Address, Camp Fire Girls, 469 Fourth Avenue, N. Y.

Advertisement, Cosmopolitan, Feb. 1916.

Camp Fire Girl's Blouse With Insignia
(Page 51)

Ladies Home Journal, July 1912

> *"When people play Indian, they put into motion their assumptions about what constitutes "Indianness." They enact racial tropes or stereotypes of Indianness... Playing Indian reduces Indianness to a set of racial stereotypes at the expense of a dynamic political and cultural identity derived from the unique powers of tribal sovereignty."*
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> *David Kamper, "Playing Indian," Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*

Photos from top to bottom: Camp Fire Girls, Renton, Washington, 1918; Kamp Kitchi Kahniss, Minnesota 1947; Members of Walika Lodge, Order of the Arrow, 1957; Camp Fire Girls, Texas 1915; Indian Trails Summer Camp, California, 1965; Camp Decorah, Wisconsin, 1961; Camp Fire Girls, Wyoming, 1918.



Wohelo Maidens

The Camp Fire Girls stressed the "ideal out-of-door Indian life" with activities such as making Indian costumes, performing Indian dances, and learning Indian myths, to teach the "timeless value of female domesticity." Wohelo, an intentionally Indian-sounding word, stood for work, health and love.







"Ernest Thompson Seton's Boys," Ladies Home Journal, 1902; Seton as "Black Wolf, 1910; Manual of the Woodcraft Indians, 1915; and 1933 camp brochure.

> *"The Ideal Indian stands for the highest type of primitive life. He was a master of woodcraft, and unsordid, clean, manly, heroic, self-controlled, reverent, truthful, and picturesque always... He can teach us the ways of outdoor life, the nobility of courage, the joy of beauty, the blessedness of enough, the glory of service, the power of kindness, the super-excellence of peace of mind and the scorn of death."*
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> *Ernest Thompson Seton, The Book of Woodcraft, 1912.*





Seton Indians

Where the Camp Fire Girls appropriated Native American culture to inculcate domesticity, Seton used it to create robust, manly, and self reliant boys. Inspired by the writings of Charles Eastman, he sought his advice when creating the Woodcraft League and later the Boy Scouts of America.





Learn more about this topic:

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