

FEATURED IN CATEGORY

The 'Caddy Camps' of the North Country

By Chris Jensen, InDepthNH.org May 8, 2017



Bill Faria, who was at the caddy camp in Bethlehem, listens to oral histories at Plymouth State University's Museum of The White Mountains. Photo by Chris Jensen

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Museum photo

PLYMOUTH – For more than 130 years boys and girls – typically from relatively well-to-do families – have been going to summer camps in The White Mountains.

But there were also children recruited from the poorer neighborhoods of Boston to go to “caddy camps” in towns such as Bethlehem.

They lived in a barn, earned money as golf caddies for wealthy vacationers and say they loved it.



In the early years of the caddy camps a time capsule was buried near where the boys lived in Bethlehem. Keith Mara of The Granite State Treasure Hunters Club for Historic Preservation, searched for it while Frank “Sonny” Piazza waited and kept his fingers crossed. It was not found. Photo by Chris Jensen

that was disconnected from a school” where campers stayed in a location where they were encouraged to feel a sense of ownership and connection, he said.

“And Squam Lake and Newfound Lake were really the epicenters of where these programs started off and then rippled off around the world,” Hutchinson said.

The boys for the caddy camps were often recruited from the North Bennett Street Industrial School in Boston.

One of them was 11-year-old Louis Cavagnaro, who in 1949 was thrilled with the idea of going to New Hampshire.

“Growing up in the North End, the furthest we went was 500 feet, so going somewhere with a group of kids to spend the summer – to me – was fantastic,” said Cavagnaro, in his oral history for the exhibit.

He says his mother cried at the train station, but he doesn’t remember ever being scared.

“We were happy, happy,” said Cavagnaro, who now lives in Revere, Mass. “We got 75 cents for 18 holes in my era. Then it increased and you would get a dollar if you carried two bags.”

Their stories are among those told in a new exhibit at Plymouth State University’s Museum of The White Mountains. “Summer Camps: The White Mountains Roots of an Iconic American Experience” opened May 3rd and continues through September 13th.

The idea of summer camps started around 1861 in The White Mountains, said Paul Hutchinson, who shared curating duties with Cynthia Robinson and Marcia Schmidt Blaine. A few schools had outdoor programs in the summer, but what happened in The White Mountains – starting with Camp Chocorua on Squam Lake in 1881 – was different, said Hutchinson.

It introduced the idea of “a summer experience

They had to do chores,
go to church, saluted the
flag every morning,
swam in the
Ammonoosuc River and
had three meals, a day,
something that didn't
always happen at home.



Keith Mara. Photo by Chris Jensen

Hutchinson said what
summer camps
demonstrated was “a
common shared belief
that kids learn best and
communities are built

well when you are in this kind of environment. When you are connected to nature. When you are out together. When you are sharing doing the dishes. When you are sharing the nervousness of a lightning storm. When you have common shared experiences.”

Oral histories of those who attended the caddy camp – and other camps – are available at the museum.

Some of the oral histories are available here:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=caddy+camp+museum+of+the+white+mountains (https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=caddy+camp+museum+of+the+white+mountains)



The exhibit is open until September 13th at Plymouth State University's Museum of The White Mountains.
Photo by Chris Jensen

