

HISTORY & PHILOSOPHY OF CAMP CHICKAWAH

Camp Chickawah for Boys was a summer camp on Island Pond in Harrison, Maine, just 60 miles northwest of Portland, nestled in the beautiful Lakes Region of southern Maine. For 65 years, from 1920 – 1985, Chickawah provided a unique camping experience for boys and men from all over the world.

Chickawah's beautiful and serene setting was what made her a unique haven where boys experienced a variety of activities. Year after year campers returned to Chickawah, reuniting in active athletic competition and achievements in land sports, swimming, boating, canoeing, sailing, woodcrafting, nature and campcraft, and more. Here, friendships were forged that would last a lifetime. Often, Chickawah's boys returned as young men to become staff counselors.

Time is inevitable, and although changes have been made by new owners, Camp Chickawah's tall, valiant pines continue to whisper in the warm summer breezes as they remain the guardians of children's laughter and cheers that echo from the past through to the present and surely will, for many more years to come—as they will forever in our hearts.

~ The Saltman-Steinberg Family

Joseph C. Saltman was a product of the New York City Schools, attending Townsend Harris High School in an honors program that sent graduates to CCNY—College of the City of New York, now simply known as City College. A math major and physical education/recreation minor in the School of Education, he planned to become a teacher.

While in college, he would earn money playing the piano down in front in darkened movie theatres, to accompany the silent movies. Upon graduation in 1915, he secured a job as recreation director at the Hebrew Orphanage and School in Pleasantville, New York, where students lived in cottages with house mothers. There, he met Celia Applebaum, secretary to the director and herself a house mother.

They fell in love, but not long afterward he was drafted into the U.S. Army and served his country during World War I as an already experienced fitness director, training troops for combat at a U.S. Army base.

In 1918, the war over, he and Celia were married, and the following summer they took a job living and working at a summer camp for boys— Camp Harley Mitchell. They lived in a tent, and Joseph, now nicknamed “Chick,” played piano and was director of activities. At the end of that summer he pronounced, “Next year I will have my own camp.”

In the summer of 1920, that, he did! He searched in New England for a property by a lake, and secured a farm on Island Pond in Harrison, Maine. Using his nickname, he named his camp “Chickawah,” and with a recreation hall built onto the existing farmhouse and 12 used army tents, he opened with “32 boys and 3 nephews.” Early campers were recruited from the after-school rec program he ran during the school year.

In 1922, three weeks before the camp season was to begin, his partner's wife—who was living in the farmhouse—kicked over an oil lamp, causing a fire that burned down the farmhouse and recreation hall. Chick was quickly summoned right off the gym floor where he was teaching, and rushed up to Maine to assess the situation. Always an eternal optimist, he immediately declared, “It's a good thing that happened! Now I can see all the way up the hill to the apple orchard.”

With the kind of fortune that followed him all his life, the twelve tents had been stored all along in the first cabin he'd had built on the lake. So in three weeks, 40 carpenters built a new dining hall on the hill. Camp Chickawah opened on time with its tents ready, and the dining hall was used for meals and as a “social hall” in the evenings.

During that summer, building on a new social hall began on the site of the original farmhouse. Each year thereafter, two tents were replaced by one cabin, and eventually a line of bunks replaced the tents.

“Uncle Chick,” as he was affectionately called, had a creative camping philosophy. He said that “camp should fit the boy,” meaning that whatever a boy's interests might be, they could be developed in camp. He believed in achievement—that learning new skills, whether on the field, on the water, in the crafts-shop, or in outdoor camping—would build self-esteem.

from the website: <http://www.campchickawah.com>