

SUMMER CAMPS

Maine's extraordinary natural beauty and pristine environment have made it a summer haven for residents and visitors alike for centuries. In the early 1900's a new institution arose which would provide lifelong memories for generations of Jewish children – the Jewish summer camp.

Several factors contributed to the rise of American camping:

- The polio scare which began in 1843 and peaked in 1952, forcing frightened parents to seek “protected” environments for their children
- The influx of immigrants from 1900-1920, causing overcrowding in major cities
- The growth of urban industry, leading to an increase in pollution from urban factories
- The passage of the first federal child labor laws in 1938, freeing children from summer work responsibilities



During the first two decades of my life, the thirties and forties, poliomyelitis was a frightful scourge made all the more horrifying in that most of the afflicted were children. Summertime the disease would run rampant through urban populations, striking randomly, at times paralyzing the legs and the respiratory system of its victims. Parents sought desperately to send their sons and daughters out of cities – to summer camp.

Chaim Potok

These new realities of life meant that more and more parents wanted to find a healthy, safe summer environment for their children. Maine was considered an unspoiled paradise. By 1926, eleven Maine Jewish camps had already been opened.



Camp Powhatan



Camp Truda

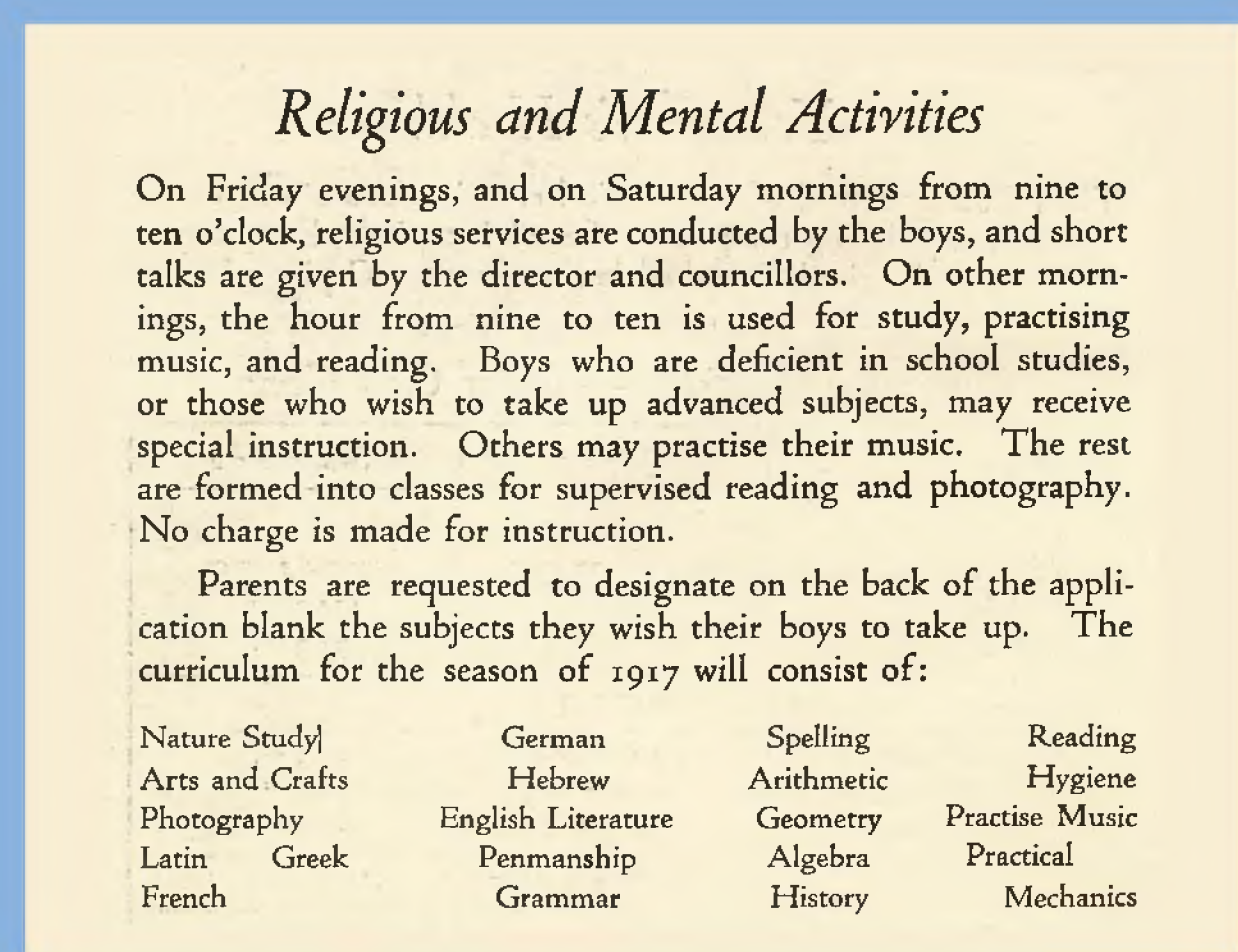
Maine's first Jewish camps were created by Jewish educators and community leaders from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania. For these founders, camp was a place where children could:

- Receive additional secular and Jewish education
- Learn to respect others
- Improve their gross motor skills
- Participate in Jewish life away from the day-to-day realities of the school year
- Enjoy themselves

The camp experience was envisioned as healthy and invigorating – and fun! Founders initially recruited campers from their own local communities. As word of the camps' success spread, Jewish families from other locations soon sent their own children to participate.



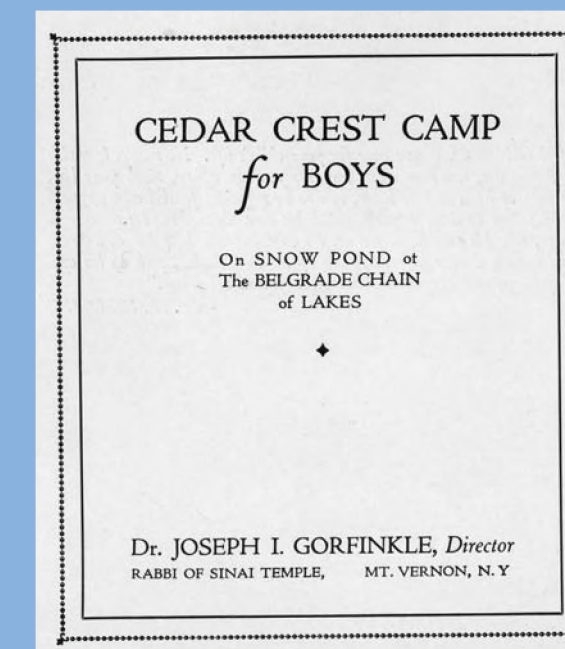
Tisha Ba' av, Camp Modin, Belgrade



A page from Cedar Crest Camp for Boys brochure

Camps Kennebec, Walden, Manitou/Matoaka, Cedar Crest/Birch Crest, and Powhatan are examples of Maine Jewish camps where almost all campers were Jewish but religion and Israel were not key aspects of camp life.

This philosophy appealed to Joseph Teller, who, in the early 1920's founded Camp Arcadia for boys, Camp Arden for girls, and Camp Winslow for boys all in the Belgrade Lakes area. His approach was to bring Jewish children to summer camp in order to help them adjust to a non-Jewish world. The focus was to build character so that in their later years the children would have the skills necessary to be successful in an assimilated society.



Generations of Jews attended Camp Kennebec, Oakland (1907-1991), during its 84-year existence. Camp Walden, Denmark (1916-present), began as an overnight Jewish camp for girls. Camp Powhatan, Oxford (1921-1996), was made up of Jewish campers and many Jewish staff members but did not actively promote Judaism. Camps Cedar Crest (boys) and Birch Crest (girls), Belgrade Lakes area, were started by Rabbi Joseph and Mrs. Rose Gorfinkle of New York.

There was no Jewish programming, Israeli culture, or Kosher food.... Each day, however, Joel [the Director] would call up a group of campers and counselors... to lead a prayer. It was a non-denominational prayer emphasizing such things as 'honoring your parents, teachers and guardians and giving thanks for the joy and beauty of a new day.' Friday night Shabbat services were held in a small, natural sanctuary carved out in the woods. It was called the Pine Grove and the area was used only for those services. The services were conducted by counselors and/or campers, and every week a distinguished member of the camp community (an administrator, a counselor, an alumnus, etc.) would be honored and invited to deliver a sermon..."



Camp Rapputak, Fryeburg

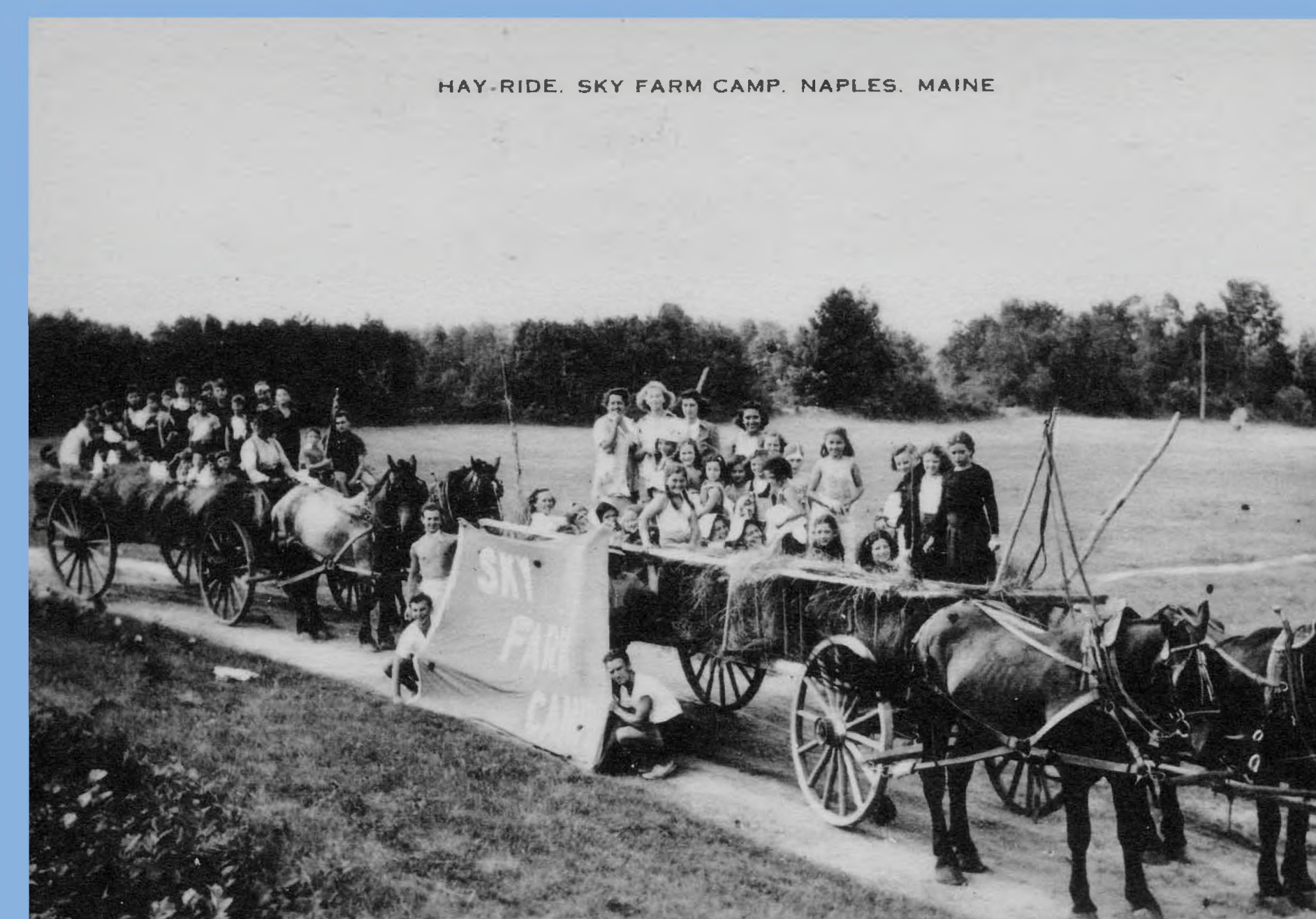
Mike Dennis
Camp Powhatan, 1966 -1983
Ambler, PA

TRANSITIONS IN MAINE JEWISH SUMMER CAMPS

Over time, some camps which in their early years had an almost exclusively Jewish clientele have evolved into more ethnically and religiously diverse camps. In earlier history Camp Androscoggin and Tripp Lake Camp advertised themselves as Jewish camps, but the word “Jewish” is no longer found on their current web sites. Camp Walden, which began as an overnight Jewish camp for girls, has also welcomed greater diversity in their campers in recent years.

I never won any awards for athletics — far from it, in fact — but having team spirit was always just as important as being a star at TLC. I'm still in touch with friends I made at camp more than 30 years ago, and as different as we may be and as varied as our lives have become, we all agree that Tripp Lake was a wonderful and critical milestone on our road to adulthood. Indeed, I've written books, produced plays, and lived all over the world, but I'd put Tripp Lake years right at the top of my list of most favorite and meaningful experiences.

Sally Rubenstone
Tripp Lake Camp, 1961-1967 camper, 1969, 1971 counselor
Northampton, MA



Sky Farm Camp becomes Camp Skylemar in 1947



Aroostook County Campers at Camp Lown, circa 1953



The Social Hall at Birch Crest Camp for Girls, circa 1935

SUMMER CAMPS

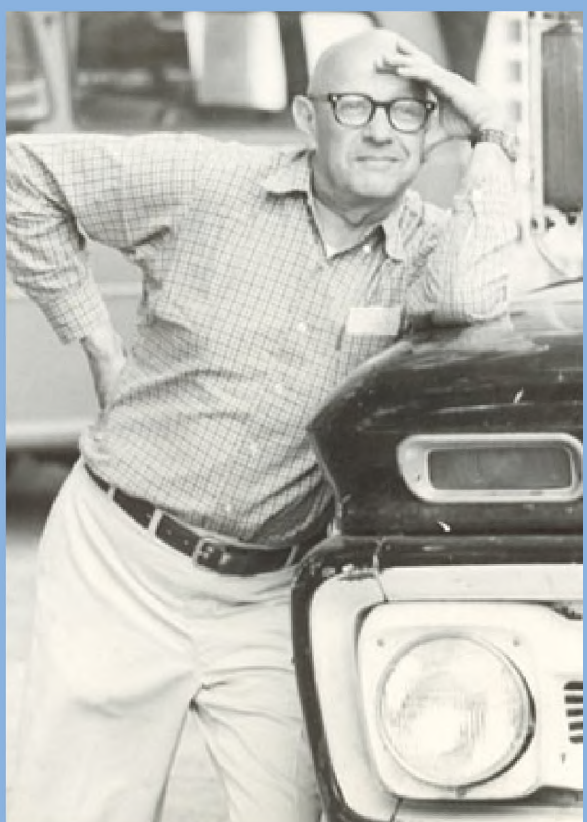
Families could choose from a wide variety of Jewish camps. Many focused on encouraging and celebrating Jewish life; Camps Kingswood (now JCC Maccabi Camp), Modin, Lown, Joseph, Naomi, Micah, and Center Day Camp were established in this tradition. Recent research has shown a correlation between later Jewish observance and early experiences of Judaism that were perceived as “fun.”



Alyson Palacci and Mackenzie Bunch of Portland at Camp Kingswood, 2003

CAMPS AS A JEWISH IDEA

Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Dushkin, along with two other couples with backgrounds in education, founded Camp Modin, Belgrade, in 1922 as “The Camp with a Jewish Idea.” It set the standard for later Jewish camps throughout the United States. Dushkin (1890-1976) was born in Poland and immigrated in 1901. He earned the first American Ph.D. in Jewish Education. Dushkin considered Judaism a communal responsibility. His philosophy of mixing fun with serious purpose, while fostering Jewish growth, was adopted by many other camps, and he remained personally involved with Modin until 1942.



Dr. Joel Bloom

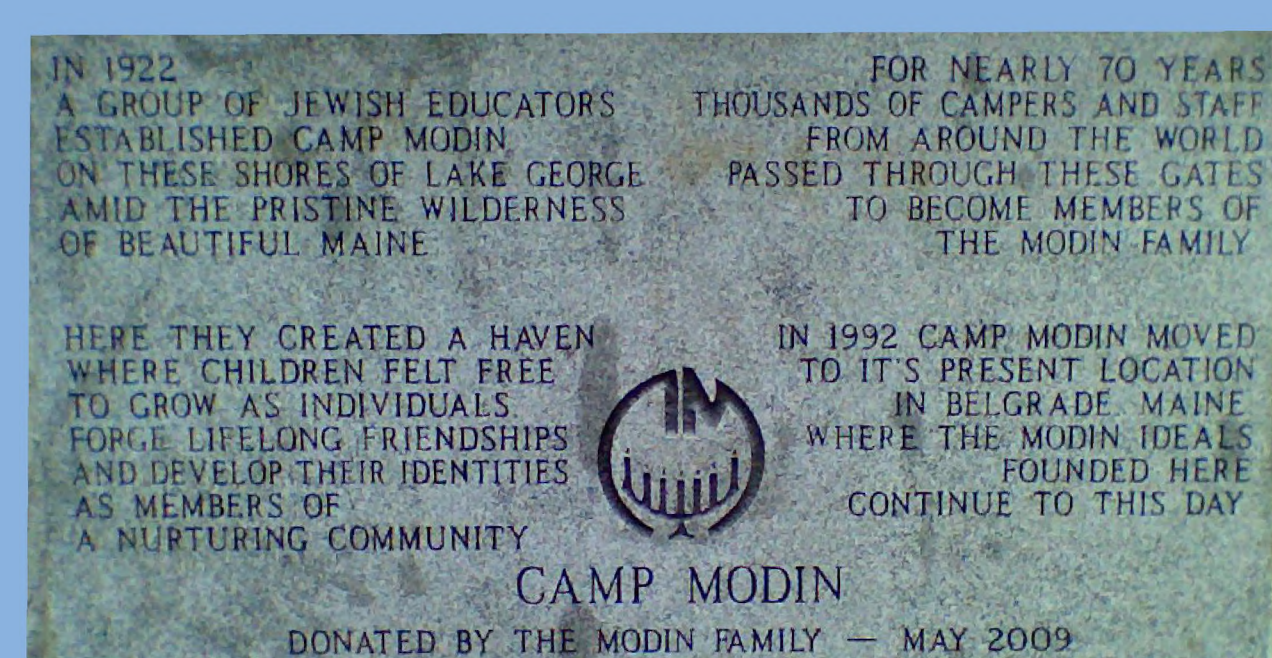
Dr. Joel Bloom (1916-2009) is another pioneer of Jewish camping. His father started Camp Powhatan in 1916 in Otisfield. After earning his Masters Degree in Education and serving in the army, Dr. Bloom succeeded his father as the camp’s director. Bloom became known as the “nation’s foremost progressive camp director” and earned the nation’s first doctoral degree in camping from Columbia University. In 1951 he hired the first African American counselor. He helped to create the Susan Curtis Foundation in 1971 to help underprivileged children attend Camp Powhatan. Since 1993 the camp has hosted the Seeds of Peace program, founded by the parent of a Powhatan camper. Teens from areas of conflict including Israel, Egypt, Northern Ireland, and

United States gather every summer to explore ways to end violence and encourage tolerance and understanding.

One of the longest running Jewish summer camps in New England is Camp Modin in Belgrade. It began as an all-boys camp with 45 campers in 1922 and is now co-ed with 380 campers. The campers themselves come from a variety of Jewish backgrounds. Modin (named after the town of Modiin where the Chanukah story took place) was created as a place for Jewish youth to explore their Jewish identities. The camp, then and now, follows kosher dietary laws, observes Sabbath, and helps young campers express themselves Jewishly through Hebrew songs and art. Each summer a Judaic Director oversees the interdisciplinary program.



Seeds of Peace International Camp, Otisfield



Camp Modin Memorial Stone Plaque 2009

...there were the Friday night Shabbat dinners, when songbooks were passed out and David [David Adler the Director] would preside over a sing-along. ...He saw himself as a modern Tevye, a good, poor man struggling to keep the faith in a rapidly changing world... And this is what we thought: Here is a Jew who has found the secret to balancing the secular and sublime. Here is a man.

Stuart Blumberg, Modin, 1983

BUILDING THE RAMAH MOVEMENT

Camp Ramah started in Maine and Wisconsin in 1947. The Maine Camp Ramah was based in York County at a camp owned by a Boston rabbi. The camp unfortunately did not re-open for its second year. Then in 1966 Camp Lown joined the Ramah Movement. The regional director of United Synagogue Youth, Abe Yanover, was also the director of Camp Lown and after it joined Ramah.

TRIP TO ISRAEL

Camp Joseph in Harrison and Camp Naomi in Raymond began as separate brother/sister Jewish overnight camps and they merged in the mid 1970’s. Hebrew blessings were chanted before and after every meal; camp food was kosher. Campers and staff led Friday night and Saturday morning Shabbat services. Counselors from Israel spent the summer teaching Israeli culture. As part of counselor training, at age sixteen campers spent one month in Israel and one month at camp. Camps Joseph and Naomi operated under the auspices of the Jewish Community Center Camps of New England.



Camp Naomi, Israel Trip 1977

COMMUNITY BUILDING FOR JEWS IN MAINE

Camp Lown, Oakland (1945-1969), was founded by Dr. Philip Lown (1890-1976). Born in Russia, Lown came to New York in 1907 at age seventeen. He attended the University of Maine and became very successful in the shoe business. Lown was dedicated to the well-being of Jewish settlers in Maine, and started the Maine Jewish Council in the early 1940’s. He helped create additional Jewish study opportunities for Jews in Maine, including Camp Lown, which held traditional Friday night Shabbat services. The buildings had Hebrew names, and Israeli culture was incorporated throughout the camp.



Forest Acres, Fryeburg

I loved every minute there and looking back I have realized that my counselor from Israel in 1960 made an indelible impression on me. Fifty years later we got together in Israel. Those two summers I spent at Camp Lown were the best of my childhood. The Jewishness of the camp was an amazing change from Brunswick where I grew up with very few Jewish families. It just felt right.

Ilana Franne Golan
Kiryat Shmonah, Israel

TIKKUN OLAM IN THE MAINE CAMP EXPERIENCE

The newest Maine Jewish camp is Camp Micah, Sebago, which opened in 2001. Its philosophy is explicitly to make being Jewish fun. Special Shabbat services, with Camp Micah challah, are held in an outside chapel overlooking the mountains and lake and are camper/staff led. On Saturdays campers have the opportunity to study and participate in *Tikkun Olam* (social action) projects. Camp Micah emphasizes that life is all about making the world a better place.



Camp Micah, Sebago

SUMMER DAY CAMPS

While many overnight camps hosted campers primarily from outside Maine, three day camps were created specifically for Maine’s Jewish youth. Camp Sasome and Center Day Camp were established by their local Jewish Community Centers in Bangor and Portland, respectively.

Camp Sasome was at Lakeside Landing on Pushaw Lake in the Bangor area. This co-ed day camp was for children ages 5-14. Center Day Camp (1949-present), located on the shores of the Sebago Lake basin, was founded by returning World War II veterans and the Jewish Community Center of Portland. Services are held every Friday, and each summer two counselors from Israel teach about Israeli culture. Campers say the Hebrew prayer before lunch and sing Hatikvah whenever they raise and lower the Israeli flag. Camp Gan Israel (1993), is a smaller day camp for young children run by Rabbi Moshe Wilansky of the Chabad House in Portland.



CENTER DAY CAMP 1972

In all, there have been at least 56 summer camps in Maine with Jewish roots. Some are Jewish only in population and others actively promote Israel and/or Jewish observance. Some are now closed; others are still open and going strong. Still others have opened their doors to campers of many different backgrounds. The common denominator is that many generations of Jews have had amazing experiences at summer camps in Maine.