

Building and Opening Camp Pioneer

By Peter Collinge

By the end of September, 1951, the Otetiana Council owned the first 3000 acres of the Massawepie property. After several years of hunting for a new camp and then negotiating the purchase, the council promised its troops that the new camp would be open for the summer of 1952. But would it? There was much work left to do: raising the needed funds, building an entire camp in less than nine months over the cold Adirondack winter, and convincing Rochester-area troops to travel 220+ miles for summer camp when they were used to camping locally at Camp Cutler or Eagle Island.

Finding the Funding

While plans were being finalized for construction, the first priority was to raise the needed funds. In those days, the Otetiana Council was largely funded by the Rochester Community Chest (now the United Way), which was very influential in the local non-profit world. The Community Chest coordinated a schedule of fund-raising drives by local charities, so that they didn't conflict with each other. The Scouts had started requesting permission in 1949 to hold a campaign to meet the camping needs of their growing membership, but other organizations were ahead of them in line. Fortunately, since the camp search took longer than expected, by 1951 the Scouts were next in line. In March, 1951, Richard Miller (Manager, Rochester Community Chest) wrote to Carey Brown (President, Otetiana Council) giving approval for a campaign to raise \$408,000 (later increased to \$450,000) in Fall, 1951. Miller did indicate that some limited requests could be made of key individuals before fall, after consulting with the Community Chest, to cover the land purchase price.

A fundraising consultant that Scout Executive Frederic Wellington had used previously in the Del-Mar-Va Council suggested that about 75-80% of the total raised would likely come from larger gifts (over \$1000, the equivalent in 2025 of \$12,200+). They also estimated that the campaign costs would be approximately 6% of the total raised, including 4% for the consultant. Eventually Ketchum, Inc., of Pittsburgh was selected as the fundraising consultant. Col. Carey H. Brown, a Kodak executive who had chaired the camp search and was now council president, became the overall capital campaign chair. Other prominent local men headed various divisions of the campaign, and the Chamber of Commerce offered support and donated office space.

Before the campaign kicked off, the team's leading Rochesterians held a dinner for the presidents of Eastman Kodak, Bausch and Lomb, Taylor Instrument, and Gleason Works. Kodak President Thomas Hargrave announced a company gift of \$50,000 to kick off the campaign and set the standard. A similar dinner was held for press and radio/TV representatives to secure their help, which included taking photos of Scouts and the property for use in the campaign literature being produced by Ketchum. The Advertising Council and Speakers Bureau also provided campaign support.

A "high-powered rating committee" of volunteers identified prospects able to give over \$500 and assigned those to the Special Gifts Division, which had a goal of \$350,000. The Commercial and Industrial Division had a \$35,000 goal, and District Teams (district and unit Scouters, parents and friends) was given a goal of \$65,000. The District Teams leadership insisted that their goal be raised to \$100,000, and eventually raised \$165,000. One key to the District Teams' success was to ask for a minimum pledge of \$36 (\$400+ in 2025 dollars), which discouraged \$5 and \$10 pledges.

By early October, 120 volunteers were soliciting "Special Gifts," and several progress report luncheons of about 50 people each were held in October. The general campaign kicked off November 1 with a dinner at the Chamber of Commerce for 1200 of the 2000 campaign volunteers. About the same number attended the closing dinner on November 13.

The campaign raised \$550,000 overall, surpassing its \$450,000 goal by approximately the extra \$100,000 that the District Teams had raised over their original goal. Pledges could be paid over 18 months, starting in December, 1951, so over three calendar years. Campaign expenses were about \$45,000, of which about half was for the fund-raising consultant firm and the other half included campaign brochures and other materials and \$9000 for the kickoff and closing dinners. The consensus was that this was money well spent.

Of the \$450,000 goal, the campaign brochure showed that about \$110,000 was to build central camp administrative facilities, \$85,000 each for 3 camps, \$35,000 for an Explorer Camp, and about \$34,000 for improvements at Camp Cutler. Of course, these estimates were approximate, and there was also the land price and the campaign costs. An earlier budget had shown \$105,000 for the purchase, \$10,000 for survey/roads/clearing, \$72,500 each for 4 camps, \$56,400 for central administration, and \$40,000 for Cutler, for a total of \$501,400. The budgets would keep evolving, and in fact more funds would be needed even to finish the third camp. But at least now there was enough cash to proceed.

The looming question was, "Would it be possible to get a new camp ready for Scouts by summer?" The hotel itself had been demolished before the Scouts acquired the property but there were a few old hotel buildings that could possibly be used for program, though nothing suitable for a dining hall, and no footings for foundations could be poured until after the Adirondack winter. There were no troop campsites ready, and there were a lot of trees down in the woods from the legendary Adirondack "Big Blowdown" storm of November, 1950. Fortunately, the lengthy purchase negotiation process had given the Scouts plenty of time for planning. And they had a key asset named Harley.

Building Camp A

On September 30, 1951, shortly after the Scouts closed on the Massawepie property, the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* ran the article, "Scouting Council Names Overseer of Mountain Camp." The new Massawepie Superintendent, Harley Burgdorf, was the former Superintendent of Selkirk Shores State Park. Burgdorf (age 50) had supervised development of Selkirk Shores beginning in 1928, and had supervised a staff of 15-20 for 20 years in operating and maintaining the park, which was good preparation for his new job. Then for a few years before taking the position at Massawepie he had owned and operated a coal, oil, and gasoline supplier in Adams.

Even before the Massawepie purchase was finalized, the youngest Burgdorf son (Chuck, who himself later served as the longtime superintendent at Goshen Scout Reservation in Virginia) started attending Tupper Lake High School about September 10 as a junior, temporarily boarding with the principal's son. The rest of the Burgdorf family moved to Massawepie on Sept. 25, briefly staying in Cabin #6 ("The Big Cottage", south of the remaining hotel chimney). The family included Harley's wife Ruth, Dick (an older son living in Albany), Jim (a student at St. Lawrence University), and Chuck.

There isn't enough space here to list all of the tasks that Harley Burgdorf tackled in the next nine months. To give an idea of his schedule, this is some of what he did in his first week on the job in late September: Met with an Emporium Lumber Company representative (Vic Noelk) about a timber cruise; met with a representative of the power company about getting power connected; talked to a supplier about pre-mixed concrete; retrieved son Chuck from Tupper Lake; met with Fred Wellington (Scout Executive), Bob "Parky" Parkinson (Camp Director), and Sumner Fay about camp development; met with the game warden about posting the property, bought Posted signs, opened a checking account at a bank in Tupper Lake; met twice with many Otetiana Council commissioners who were up for the weekend to discuss camp development; moved his family into the Park House (near the current Trek Building) on Sept. 29; and helped look for a missing Tomahawk District troop of Scouts who eventually emerged in Childwold and were brought back to camp by a local man, Ansel Dorothy.

Less than a week after the lost Scouts were found, there was more excitement as a small airplane crash landed near the Park House. Tom Papa of Albany was flying a Piper Cub toward Saranac Lake when he got off course and decided to land. He chose Massawepie's long grassy field, a remnant of the hotel's golf course, but didn't notice the sharper slope near the current Pioneer archery field until too late. Papa tried to abort the landing and dodged a barn near the Park House, but his left wing hit a tree and he ended up in a chicken yard of the Lees, former Massawepie Park caretakers under the Sykes family. Papa was unhurt except for minor scratches, and Burgdorf took him to Saranac Lake. The plane was eventually lifted by a log hoist that was in use nearby, and trucked out.

When he wasn't rescuing pilots, Harley Burgdorf continued to make progress. By mid-October, he had helped Clyde Sykes to sort out the furniture the Sykes were taking, move some of it to Cranberry Lake, and assemble the rest in the hotel's casino building for a sale. He also continued working with Vic Noelk to determine trees to cut for lumber and to clear campsites and access roads for "Camp A" (eventually Pioneer). He had a helper turn off the existing water lines for the winter, and met a contractor "DeShane" who estimated \$5000 per mile to build the road to "Camp B" (Mountaineer). (The BSA National Engineering Service had created a plan suggesting Camps A, B, and C roughly where Pioneer, Mountaineer, and Voyageur ended up, plus an Explorer Camp near Boottree Pond.) Burgdorf and Wellington met with Brownlee Construction Company who offered to provide the materials for a pre-fab dining hall for \$26,000 and a pre-fab 3-bedroom house for \$10,500. The two men also agreed to allow contractor Les Price to take down several unwanted old hotel buildings and scavenge any useful lumber and supplies, for which Price paid \$250. Meanwhile Scouts and Explorer groups from Rochester continued to visit on weekends.

In late October, Burgdorf and son Jim worked on clearing a right-of-way for a power line into the camp and to the Park House where they were living. With help, they got the Park House wired, and were thrilled when the lights turned on late on October 30. Along with electricity Burgdorf managed to get mail deliveries started to their mailbox. And he posted the north end of the camp: the north property line and some of the east and west lines, plus along the town road and Russell Road and Catamount Pond. Burgdorf did issue some hunting permits upon request to reliable locals. Parky came for a visit and they looked over the location for the Camp A (Pioneer) service road and troop campsites.

In early November, Burgdorf and Wellington agreed that given the weather no concrete would be poured until spring. (There had been heavy frost by Oct. 13 and there was heavy wet snow on Nov. 16, with the temperature dropping to 0 degrees on Nov. 30.) Some of November was spent finalizing the locations of the road to Camp B (Mountaineer), and logging to clear areas in Camp A. Burgdorf's sons helped "straighten up things at" some of the remaining buildings, especially the hotel bowling alley. Burgdorf arranged with Hazelton Lumber Co. of Wilmington to deliver hemlock & pine lumber to camp for project like tent platforms, at \$90 per thousand board-feet planed, edged, and delivered. To add some excitement to the holiday season, on the day before Thanksgiving the kitchen chimney caught fire. As Burgdorf said in his diary, they were, "Lucky house didn't catch on fire." The next day, they cleaned out the chimney and kitchen stove pipe, and kept working on clearing the camp road and woods. Hopefully they at least found time to eat a Thanksgiving dinner!

December found Harley Burgdorf cutting and clearing the service road from the town road to the future Camp A dining hall site, and then contracting with Floyd Carberry to bring his team of horses to skid the trees that had been cut for the road and campsites. After they received 7000 board feet of lumber from Hazelton, Burgdorf had several men clear out the "back room" (off the kitchen of the Park House) as a workshop for building tent platforms, and eventually added an oil burner stove.

In mid-December, Harley took the train from Tupper Lake to Rochester, though there was a 2.5 hour delay in Old Forge when the train froze up due to -14 degree temperatures. He said the train was cold the rest of the way to Utica. But Burgdorf's meeting with the Development Committee (headed by Tom Lee) was a success: they approved the funding he requested, including for a tractor and Ford truck. The return train pulled into Tupper "only one hour late." Meanwhile, work continued on clearing campsites, apparently six days per week since Burgdorf noted that Ham Ferry and Roland Dorothy were cutting and clearing trees on Saturday, Dec. 28 after it had been -30 degrees overnight.

January, 1952, brought more of the same: logging and clearing campsites. Floyd Carberry was still using his team of horses for skidding, and was keeping them in the barn near the Park House. But a new Cletrac tractor had also been purchased and arrived, and was used for both plowing and logging. This was likely a "crawler" tractor (on caterpillar treads), since that was the specialty of Cletrac. An electrician from Tupper Lake came in to quote wiring the rest of the existing buildings for staff use.

February was busy, but later seemed like the calm before the storm. The tent platform construction was finished, and work began on building tables and benches for the dining hall. Nine wooden rowboats from Eagle Island were being repaired, and 20 new boats were being built in Adams Center. (Overall, three tractor-trailer loads of equipment from Eagle Island were moved to Massawepie in 1951 on trucks arranged by Kenny Kemp. One truck had boats, one had tents, and the third had everything else. Long-time Massawepie staffer, and prior Cutler staffer, Ray Meyering remembered sleeping in the 30-bed hotel staff quarters when he traveled to Massawepie with those trucks that he helped to load and unload.) Logging continued, both for sale and to clear areas. At one point, a bulldozer hauling logs off Catamount Pond broke through the ice. There was enough snow that crews were shoveling it off some of the building roofs.

In March, the tree cutting and clearing continued. The carpenters finished the tables and benches and started building cots and latrines. The contract for erecting the dining hall went to Chet Johnson of Tupper Lake, who began excavating for the foundation. Two loads of new wooden rowboats were hauled from Adams Center, with instructions to let them soak in water a few days to make them waterproof before use. A group of council "brass" visited to see progress; they were taken around camp in a sleigh pulled by the tractor, even before another significant snowstorm hit March 19.

The dining hall foundation concrete was finally poured on April 1; no fooling! By April 3 Johnson was working on the shower house foundation, and soon after that his crew began the block work on the dining hall. Muddy roads with deep ruts were making travel difficult; when several "brass" from Rochester visited, Burgdorf borrowed a 4-wheel drive army surplus "command car" from Johnson to transport them to and from their vehicles at Route 3. As work picked up, Burgdorf ran an ad for help in the Tupper Lake newspaper; by April 14 he had 20 men working at \$1 per hour on tasks like digging latrine holes and building the latrines. On April 16 Brownlee Construction, who had been hired to prefab some wooden portions of the dining hall, brought a tractor trailer load of materials. By April 23 the shower house frame was mostly up, the dining hall frame had been started, and fill around the dining hall foundation had been mostly completed, though the process of removing stumps from the service road to the dining hall was still ongoing. Logs were being hauled to Lake Bros. mill, and hemlock lumber hauled back, which was used for projects like the cooking shelters that were under construction. By one estimate, 100,000 feet of lumber was milled from the property, much of it from fallen trees. At the end of April, Joe Bishop from the BSA National Engineering Service arrived to look over the construction and review the proposed road to Camp B. He seemed to be impressed.

By the end of May, Burgdorf was feeling like they might even be a bit ahead of schedule. The dining hall exterior construction was finished, the waterfront tower was built, and Austin Lee had started building the cook's quarters. Tent platforms were set up both in the sites around the dining hall and in the hill sites north of the Catamount outlet. Gravel had been added to the dining hall service road, and they had even started work on the 1.5-mile road to "Manhattan Camp" (Camp B/Mountaineer) by

building a wooden culvert at the entrance. However, they had hit some “spring holes” along that road and had to adjust the road location in spots. A foundation was dug for the new 10,000-gallon water tank, and galvanized water pipe was being laid. Les Price was taking down a few more unneeded old buildings. Each time they took down a building, the bats living there had to find a new home! At the end of May, Howard Patton from the BSA regional office and St. Lawrence Council Scout Executive Charley Bartlett visited; St. Lawrence was also developing a camp, probably Portaferry.

June was crunch time, with camp scheduled to open June 28. The dining hall power was hooked up June 3. Kitchen equipment arrived and was installed, and the grading around the dining hall and over its tile field was finished. Austin Lee was working on the Trading Post. The water lines were finished, a pump house built and chlorinator installed, and a suction water line put out into the lake. Canoes (48, aluminum) and urinals arrived, and crews built cooking shelter tables and pier sections. Les Price took a break from tearing down buildings and bulldozed the beach clear. The staff site was finished June 19; they would sleep in Baker tents. On June 21 the kitchen was ready, the cook arrived, and Burgdorf laid off many of his temporary workers. The camp staff arrived June 22, and the first dinner was served in the dining hall that evening, though final work continued on the water system the next day. The telephone line was installed June 24. On June 28, the camp sign at the Route 3 entrance was finished about 10 minutes before the nine buses arrived. Camp was ready just in time for Scouts!

Summer Camp 1952

As Harley Burgdorf and his crew were building the camp facilities, the council was signing up troops, hiring staff, and figuring out the camp program. There was some concern about attendance at first, since the camp was 220+ miles from Rochester, over roads that were mostly 2-lane, which was a big change from Cutler or Eagle Island. Also the camp fee had increased, from \$30 for 2 weeks in 1951 to \$35.50 (\$39.50 for provisional, \$15.50 for “independent mess” – troops bringing and cooking their own food), though the 1952 fees did include transportation on Rochester Transit Company buses. But the council needn't have worried about attendance. By late February the council had to cut off additional troop registrations, raise the capacity to 300 Scouts (and eventually 330+) per 2-week session, limit provisional Scouts to 16 per session, offer summer camping at Cutler (without meal service) in 1952 to any troop shut out of Massawepie, and promise to have two camps open with a total capacity of 500 Scouts per session by the summer of 1953.

Clearly Fred Wellington, Otetiana Council Scout Executive, considered Massawepie to be a priority, because he assigned all of his professional District Executives to summer camp staff duty:

- Robert J. Young, Business Manager
- Elgin L. Deering, Commissary Director
- Joseph R. Klein, Director of Activities
- Dewey C. Sawyer, Director of Trail Camping
- Richard Hetherington, Troop Program Advisor
- Thomas C. Rowe, Director of Conservation

Other key camp staff were Wilbur Monel, Program Director, and Jim Lana and Fred Clark from the University of Rochester as Chef and First Assistant. All of these staffers would serve under Robert F. “Parky” Parkinson, the council’s Director of Camping and Activities, who had been announced earlier as the Massawepie Camp Director.

A “Massawepie Moot” was held May 10 for adult leaders going to camp, plus junior leaders like Senior Patrol Leaders and Patrol Leaders. Much would be different from previous camps, so it was important to get out information and answer questions. For example, they were told that each camper should bring a bed tick or mattress cover that could be stuffed with straw that the camp would provide, to cushion the wooden cots. Also, Scouts should bring packs and mess kits, and troops should bring small light-weight tents, since they’d be going on trail each week. They were assured that construction was on schedule, though there was much yet to do at that point.

June 28 was the big day when the first period troops would leave for Massawepie. They were told to meet at 5 AM (!) at Old University Field (now East High School) in Rochester, and to bring a lunch for the bus trip. By then, the camp was ready, with new buildings including the dining hall, shower house, trading post, cook's quarters, and pump house. However, several old hotel-era buildings were also in use: the Casino as the handicraft lodge (where a hardwood dance floor still remained), Camp Sorghum as the camp office, and another building (probably the Smith Cottage/Cottage #5) as the Health Lodge. All of the old buildings had resident bats; per Ray Meyering, the camp doctor (elsewhere described as a senior medical student) had a four-poster bed and put a sheet over the posts to keep the bat droppings off him. The buildings had burlap finish on the interior, and bats would sleep behind the burlap. Ray recalled that in addition to the troop campsites in the woods around the dining hall, there were 3 or 4 sites up the hill (north of the Catamount Pond Outlet) and 5-6 sites in the "bus field" (the grassy area), perhaps because the camp capacity was temporarily expanded in 1952 to 22 troops until the second camp was ready.

Ray Meyering also remembered being woken up one of the first nights of staff week by two bobcats fighting nearby. Another memory was when the NYS Conservation Department fire warden recruited staff one day to fight a fire in Childwold, down by the Raquette River. They couldn't easily access the fire up river, so several (including Joe Klein) swam across the river to where a boat was locked to a small tree. They chopped down the tree using stones, took the boat, and went up to the fire. After they controlled it, some men from town came back the next day to finish putting the fire out.

The basic 1952 camp schedule was:

7:30 AM	Reveille and Colors
7:45 AM	Waiters call (also 12:15 and 5:45 PM)
8:00 AM	Breakfast
8:30 AM	Camp Projects
9:00 AM	Campsite Improvement & Inspection
9:45 – 10:45, 11 – 12	Morning Activity Periods
12:30 PM	Lunch
1:15 PM	Siesta
2 – 2:45, 3 – 3:45	Afternoon Activity Periods
4:15 – 4:45	General Swim
5:30 PM	Personal Inspection
5:45 PM	Retreat
6:00 PM	Dinner
7:30 – 8:30, 8:30 – 9:30	Evening & Night Activity Periods
9:45 PM	Call to Quarters
10:00 PM	Taps

The first Saturday of each period was different, with arrival at camp, a camp tour, and a "get acquainted" campfire. The last Saturday, two weeks later, would involve cleaning up and packing for the six-hour bus ride home. Each Sunday also included a 9 - 9:30 AM church service.

Overall, the 1952 camp season was a success. Staff writer Gene Gribbroek from the *Rochester Times-Union* visited toward the end of the first period and reported meeting enthusiastic campers who even rated the dining hall food as top grade. The chefs said they might go through 50 gallons of soup, 200 pounds of potatoes, 50 pounds of ground beef, 60 loaves of bread, 24 heads of cabbage for cole slaw, and 40 gallons of cocoa for one dinner. (However, 3 of the 20 troops in the first period were doing their own cooking.) There were 1375 paid campers during the summer and 188 volunteer leaders attended for a total of 2803 weeks (3089 including camp staff). Demand was high for 1953, and work was well underway on Camp B on the other side of the lake, at the other end of an "always interesting" new road. But would two camps be enough? (And wasn't "Camp B" a clumsy name?)