

Purchase of Massawepie by the Scouts

By Peter Collinge

How did the Rochester area Boy Scouts end up with a summer camp far away in the Adirondacks? For the answer, let's go back to 1947. At that time, the Otetiana Council (which had been formed in 1943 by a merger of the Rochester Council and the Monroe County portion of the Red Jacket Council) owned two camp properties: Camp Cutler in Webster and Eagle Island in Sodus Bay. Camp Cutler consisted of 6 acres donated by Amy Jenkins (Mrs. Warren) Cutler and 272 acres purchased in 1938, while Eagle Island contained 98 acres and was donated in 1942 by Mrs. Helen Rivas (daughter of the Jell-O Company founder and later donor of \$3.2 million to build Strong Memorial Hospital's "R" Wing). By 1947, it was clear that these camps did not have the capacity to host the growing Scout membership and that expected from the "baby boom." Furthermore, Cutler was seen as a better short-term than long-term camp, with its limited waterfront and its proximity to Rochester.

At the June, 1947, Annual Council Meeting a resolution was adopted to search for a new long-term camp of at least 1000 acres, with adequate waterfront, adventurous terrain, and sufficiently remote location to provide a feeling of having "been off on a trip." During the winter and spring of 1948, a council Long-Range Plan was developed by a committee under Carey Brown (council VP and manager of the Kodak Service Department), after consultation with over 60 unit and district Scouters. The final plan, approved at the 1948 Annual Meeting, repeated the call for a new summer camp.

A flyer was drafted in 1948 saying "Scout Camp Needed" and mentioning as desirable qualities: at least 1000 acres, more unless property adjoins State land, with some hilly land and 4 areas for 200 boys each adjacent to swimming areas; sand and gravel soil desirable; and on or near a good public road a maximum 225 miles from Rochester. A letter with similar information was sent on April 12, 1948, to several large Adirondack landowners, including William (sic) Sykes, Emporium Lumber (sic) Company. W. Clyde Sykes replied on April 23 offering Massawepie as a possibility. Fred Wellington wrote to George Shields of Oval Wood Dish Company in Tupper Lake on June 2 asking about Mr. Sykes and Massawepie, saying "it sounds large and expensive but we hate to miss any good bets." George Shields replied that, "I do not think there is any other site that compares to it in the Adirondacks for your purpose."

On July 17-18, 1948, Sumner D. Fay (council Camping Committee) and Fred Wellington drove a group (including W. Stanley Macklen - Camping Chairman and VP of Curtice Burns, Carey Brown - now chairman of the Camp Search Committee, P. Austin Bleyler - Camping Committee and by 1952 Camping Chairman, Harry Feil - Camping Committee, Al Kittelberger - Tomahawk District Commissioner) on a "road trip" to visit various sites. Massawepie was the clear favorite. Other areas visited were: Tract owned by Clayton Winn north of Oneida Lake (500 acres, too small), Piquet Tract (2000 acres near McKeever, lakes too small) and Sunday Lake (2000 acres near Stillwater, lakes needed damwork and restoration). Also considered was repurchase and expansion of the former Camp Pioneer on Seneca Lake (now Camp Seneca Lake of the Jewish Community Center).

By October only Sunday Lake, the Seneca Lake site, and Massawepie were being actively considered. Movies of the Massawepie site were shown at the October 21, Executive Board meeting. Soon Fred Wellington had made up his mind, and wrote a four-page letter to William Fay on October 27 enthusiastically supporting a purchase of Massawepie. Scouters began visiting Massawepie. Tomahawk District Commissioner Alfred Kittelberger, representing a group including a number of Scoutmasters that visited Massawepie, reported "The site is ideal."

A November 8 letter from Joseph Bishop, Director of the BSA Engineering Service stated that, "the property would make an admirable camp for up to 1000 boys," and, "The aquatic possibilities are particularly good." He had some concern about the distance from Rochester, and about the deteriorating buildings, which he recommended be razed as soon as possible. Bishop also suggested keeping Camp Cutler for short-term camping, and selling Eagle Island.

On December 1, the council Camping Committee held a meeting for unit Scouters, to discuss the camp search and the Massawepie site. At the end of the meeting, each unit in attendance completed a questionnaire which asked their opinions about Massawepie, its distance, whether they were receiving a fair opportunity for input, whether it was time for the council to make a decision, and whether their unit would use Massawepie. The tally sheet shows overwhelming unit support for proceeding in an attempt to purchase Massawepie. However, the actual purchase would not be so easy.

Clyde Sykes had mentioned a possible price of \$150,000 for Massawepie, which was then owned by Massawepie Park, Inc., a private corporation entirely owned by the heirs of W. L. Sykes. However, various estimates obtained for Otetiana Council put the value considerably lower. In late December, Sykes obtained a letter from A. Augustus Low, VP of Con. Edison and Adirondack landowner, estimating the Massawepie value at \$150,000 based on the sale of 4000 acres around Big Trout Lake (near Sabattis) in 1925 for \$125,000. The council then decided to obtain an independent appraisal. Meanwhile, in February Carey Brown wrote Roy Sykes to indicate that the Scouts would be continuing to use their existing camps for 1949. Also, Fred Wellington received a March letter from Wes Klusman, national BSA Director of Camping and Special Events, questioning whether the distance from Rochester would make the transportation costs prohibitive for many boys. There was also some hesitation from former Otetiana Council officers who had second thoughts after the sale of Camp Pioneer on Seneca Lake and were concerned about making an even more costly mistake.

On April 12, John MacDonald of Utica submitted an appraisal of \$65,200 for the Massawepie property (\$45,00 for buildings, \$11,200 for land, and \$9000 for soft timber on shores). Perhaps due to the wide difference in estimates of Massawepie's value, by late April the Scouts were investigating other Adirondack properties including Nick's Lake near Old Forge and Bear Pond near Sabattis. But by July, Fred Wellington was taking an influential group to Massawepie: George Todd (former council president, and president of Todd Company), Howard Cumming (also a former council president and president of Curtice Canning), Joseph Hockenos (council Finance Chairman and VP of Lincoln-Rochester Trust Co.), and Marvin Forster (of Forster Services, Inc. and a District Chairman). George Todd came away enthused about Massawepie and unconcerned about the distance, if the property could be purchased at a reasonable price.

Marv Forster wrote an insightful letter praising the property despite the distance as offering "outlet for the spirit of adventure". He also suggested gradually developing the different camps while using the existing buildings temporarily (which is exactly what was eventually done), setting aside the Catamount Pond area for staff and families (also done), and keeping one hotel building as a museum of the earlier era (unfortunately not done).

On August 10, 1949 the Otetiana Council Executive Board voted to offer \$65,000 for Massawepie, with \$10,000 down and the rest payable over five years. This offer was conveyed to Clyde and Roy Sykes on August 11. In September, George W. Sykes wrote to Fred Wellington to emphasize the uniqueness and value of the Massawepie property. Meanwhile, Fred Wellington was working to convince B. Emmet Finucane (of Security Trust Company, also on the Community Chest Board), whose support would be crucial, to visit Massawepie. Finucane still supported further developing the existing camp at Eagle Island. Finucane was council president when the former Camp Pioneer was sold to purchase Camp Cutler, a decision partly "sold" to him by the information from the national BSA

citing Cutler's proximity to Rochester. Needless to say, he was concerned that purchasing an Adirondack camp seemed to contradict that rationale for the earlier decision. Wellington arranged for Charles Heistand, Regional Scout Executive, to both write to and meet with Mr. Finucane and explain that Eagle Island was simply too small and that the acceptable distance for a long-term camp was much more than for a short-term camp.

In late September council president William Fay wrote to Richard Miller, Director of the Rochester Community Chest seeking tentative approval for a \$400,000 capital campaign during the fall of 1950 to purchase and develop Massawepie. In late October, Clyde Sykes (on behalf of the family) counter-offered to sell all but the Townline Pond area for \$125,000, which was promptly rejected by the Scouts, who also made the decision to begin looking a property in Canada on either end of Lake Ontario. In February, 1950, the Community Chest granted tentative approval for a fall 1951 capital campaign. (Apparently the Boy Scouts were "in line" behind a hospital campaign and a planned Salvation Army campaign.) In July, Carey Brown wrote to Clyde Sykes following a meeting with Roy Sykes, and stated that the council would only consider purchasing the entire property (with no exclusions) and that the personal property in the various building could be retained by the Sykes family.

While the wide gap in price between the council's \$65,000 offer and the Sykes' \$125,000 counteroffer had drastically slowed the process, there were still discussions going on. In September, 1950, there was correspondence with John MacDonald (the Utica appraiser) about the possibility of selling Massawepie timber (hardwood and softwood where removal wouldn't "spoil the shoreline") for \$10,000 to offset the purchase price. MacDonald urged speed, since the timber market was strong that year. On October 25, a special meeting of Carey Brown, M. Herbert Eisenhart, Herman Cohn, Richard Miller, B. Emmet Finucane and Fred Wellington discussed the mounting "pressure from the field" for new and larger summer camping facilities. Mr. Finucane stated that he was willing to support the Massawepie site and to bring together "a group of the most influential business men and industrialists" to urge their support. The group agreed to try to purchase Massawepie for \$85,000, but didn't disagree with a suggestion that the eventual price might be \$100,000. Since the Salvation Army had postponed its capital campaign, Mr. Miller now indicated that the Scouts were "next in eligibility" for a campaign, but would need detailed purchase, development, and equipment schedules.

Part of the delay in reaching a final price for Massawepie was due to the resistance of Richard Sherwood of Buffalo, the owner of a 20% stake in Massawepie Park, Inc., as the widower of Ruth Sykes Sherwood. In November, 1950, Sherwood sued George, Clyde, and Roy Sykes on behalf of his daughter (Ruth Larene Sherwood), presumably to block the sale until he agreed to the terms.

By December, 1950, Fred Wellington had developed a 10-year cost schedule of \$377,909 for purchasing (at \$90,000) Massawepie and developing (based on other councils' experiences) four camps there. Each of the six District Committees had also submitted, at council request, a statement of their understanding and approval of the plan to sell Eagle Island in order to purchase Massawepie. In January, 1951, an Otetiana group met with professional fundraiser James Trostle of Aderton-Johnson Associates. Trostle indicated that over 75% of the total would come from big donors of \$1000 or more, "rated" in advance by a committee and approached by 25 to 50 solicitors. Then, another 6000 prospects for gifts of \$100 or more should be approached by approximately 400 workers in the "general" campaign. He estimated a campaign cost of 6% of the total: 4% for his firm and 2% for literature and other expenses, and suggested hiring a fundraiser as soon as possible for a fall campaign.

On February 7, 1951, B. Emmet Finucane hosted a special meeting at the Rochester Club, attended by Council President Carey Brown; past presidents M. Herbert Eisenhart, William Fay, and George L. Todd; Finance Chairman Joseph Hockenos; Community Chest Director Richard Miller; and Scout

Executive Fred Wellington. The group agreed to seek to purchase Massawepie immediately in hopes of at least limited use of the property that summer. They also agreed to propose formally a fall capital campaign using a cost schedule of \$408,000 (from Wellington's earlier estimates but decreasing the purchase price to \$85,000 and deleting the income from the sale of Eagle Island), to request United Way permission to seek a limited number of immediate contributions for a down payment and initial development work, and to seek Executive Board approval for the capital campaign and to increase the Massawepie purchase offer.

The next day, Wellington informed the field staff and secretaries of the overall plan (without exact dollar figures) but implored them not to spread this information for fear of "the let-down that will be experienced in the field" if the purchase offer does not go through. He also wrote to Clyde Sykes hinting that a new offer would be forthcoming, but indicating awareness that the Sykes were exploring other options. Carey Brown wrote to the Community Chest on February 19 asking permission for a fall capital campaign for \$407,909, and citing the need for additional camping facilities due to an increase in membership of Scouts and Scouters from 9250 in 1948 to 13,150 in 1950. Brown explained that most of this growth was still in the Cub Scout age group, but would soon be entering Boy Scouts. On March 14, the Community Chest gave its formal approval of a \$408,000 fall capital campaign.

Also in March, Regional Scout Executive Charles Heistand urged Fred Wellington not to rush into offering camping at Massawepie until the facilities were ready, because hosting Scouts before the camp was ready had caused a serious backlash in several other councils. Wellington replied that only a provisional Explorer camp was now being considered for 1951. In April, Jack Merrell and Fred Wellington visited Newcomb Lake, where the price had recently dropped, as a possible alternative site for Otetiana Council or another council. They also stopped by Massawepie to see the extent of the timber damage from recent storms, in hopes of using this as bargaining leverage with the Sykes. Wellington reported to Carey Brown that, "No buildings were damaged (alas!)."

In June, 1951, Richard Sherwood called on Fred Wellington to express his opposition to the sale, complaining that he could see no advantage to himself. Wellington referred this information to attorney Byron "Bunny" Johnson who was working on the sale. Sherwood also claimed that 60% of the stock interest in Massawepie Park was against the sale, but that any two brothers could force the sale by also voting Mrs. Wheaton's trustee share. In later years, Clyde's daughter Virginia Sykes Dreby would tell that when the family was split over whether to sell to the Scouts or to look for a more lucrative deal with a developer, her father asked her opinion and she encouraged him to sell to the Scouts as likely better stewards of the land.

On June 12, Clyde Sykes wrote to Carey Brown to accept his verbal offer of June 4 to sell the property for \$95,000, but Sykes included as conditions possession in the fall and exclusion of about 60-70 acres by Townline Pond and the personal property and all mineral rights. After a council Executive Committee meeting, Carey Brown countered on June 15 with a formal offer of \$105,000 for the entire property with no reservations other than personal property. (Brown and George Todd were so eager to finalize this process that they woke attorney Byron Johnson near midnight to draft the formal purchase offer!) On June 30, Clyde Sykes again proposed his offer of June 12, gave the acreage as between 2848 and 2911 acres, and suggested being allowed to sell the personal property in the fall after the cottages had been vacated. On July 6, a special breakfast meeting of the Otetiana Council Executive Board was held at the Hotel Rochester, at which the council accepted an agreement with the Sykes family following the terms of Carey Brown's June 15 proposal. The long purchase process ended with closing on the Sykes' property in September, 1951. But the work of raising funds and developing Massawepie had just begun!