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“Of friends and trees, tents, paths and playing fields”:¹ Nature, Gender, and Race
at Camp Orendaga

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¹ Western Archives, Western University (hereafter referred to as ARCC), YMCA-YWCA fonds, Box 5368, Orendaga summer camp newspaper (Orendaga Saga), 1936, 1.
Camp Orendaga was an all-girls camp that ran during the 1930s and 1940s near Bayfield, Ontario. Operated by the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), it catered to middle-class girls looking to partake in general camp activities and learn specialized skills in “God’s great out-of-doors.” Many girls contributed to the writing of the Orendaga Saga, a newspaper that was distributed to campers at the end of their two-week sessions. The Orendaga “scribes” wrote varied articles, stories, and poems to document their stay, often including drawings and paintings to provide visuals. Although the secondary literature on summer camping highlights the perspectives and opinions of adult reformers and camp directors, the camp newspaper offers a rare opportunity to balance their views with the perceptions of youth. This essay will examine the Orendaga Saga between 1934 and 1950 in order to shed light on adolescent interpretations of changing discourses about nature and its relationship to gender and race in the early to mid-twentieth century.

First and foremost, this essay is an environmental history, and questions what female campers thought about nature and their recreational outdoor experiences. While reformers and administrators believed that the Canadian wilderness was beneficial for children and adolescents, campers themselves were far less reflective about nature’s redemptive qualities, and typically viewed the camp setting as a backdrop against which they negotiated personal relationships and burgeoning friendships. However, as other historians have proven, notions of environmentalism are often impossible to divorce from themes of gender and race. As such, this essay also explores how adolescent girls understood their camp experience along gendered lines. It suggests that while the interwar period often saw opportunities to subvert gender stereotypes at Orendaga

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2 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1938, 1.
3 The archives at the University of Western Ontario house a sample of the Orendaga Saga newspapers that survived the 1981 fire at the YMCA archives in London, Ontario.
4 This essay broadly defines nature as natural environments
Camp, the Second World War cemented gender roles and left little room for exploration of how girls were supposed to act in nature. Finally, this essay demonstrates that Orendaga campers were not isolated from contemporary beliefs about race, despite the camp’s predominantly Anglo-Canadian ethnic composition. Orendaga’s incorporation of perceived Indigenous traditions reveals that campers at the time largely associated First Nations people with wilderness settings and natural landscapes. As such, the Orendaga Saga reveals the complex interplay between adolescent understandings of environmentalism, gender, and race, suggesting that summer camps presented opportunities to both subvert and reinforce these early twentieth century norms.

The historiography of children and adolescents in North America is limited in its scope. When minors are discussed, their voices are often relegated to studies about organized youth groups and adult-supervised activities. As a result, there is a developed body of literature concerning clubs such as the YMCA and YWCA, the Canadian Girls in Training, and Boy and Girl Scouts’ associations. Historians suggest that these groups developed as a result of middle-

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6 Although these works do not discuss summer camps, they are nevertheless useful for understanding the ‘youth problem’ in the early twentieth century, which is often referred to in the literature on summer camps. They also highlight how adolescent girls responded to the creation of these organized Christian groups, a perspective which is often ignored in studies on summer camps. This small but developing field on girls’ associations includes articles such as: Lucille M. Marr, “Church Teen Clubs, Feminized Organizations? Tuxis Boys, Train Rangers, and Canadian Girls in Training, 1919-1939,” Historical Studies in Education, 3.2 (1991): 249-67; Margaret Prang, “‘The Girl God Would Have Me Be’: The Canadian Girls in Training, 1915-39,” The Canadian Historical Review 66.2 (June 1985): 154-84; Wendy Mitchinson, “The YWCA and Reform in the Nineteenth Century,” Histoire Sociale/Social History 12.24 (1979): 368-84; Kristine Alexander, “The Girl Guide Movement, Imperialism and Internationalism in
class anxieties about the effects of rapid urbanization. Reformers believed that youths were becoming more involved with organized crime in cities, and formed associations as outlets for adolescent expression. They hoped that future citizens would learn valuable skills such as cooking, planning events, and getting along in communal settings. Historians have also been interested in the summer camping movement that emerged in the early twentieth century, as it was often organized by reformers involved in these various youth groups. American scholars have suggested that the summer camp was an important setting in the early twentieth century for constructing ‘adolescence’ as a stage of life. Although summer camping has not been given as much attention in the Canadian context, it has still been underlined as representative of middle and upper-class anxieties about urbanization and industrialization. As such, both American and


Cynthia R. Comacchio, Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2006), 190. Comacchio has suggested, the major objectives of these youth organizations was to solve the “youth problem and its wider issue, that of social order.” Middle-class anxieties about gangs and unsupervised adolescents would be mitigated knowing that youths were being watched by adults in proper Christian settings.


Canadian historians of summer camping situate it within the progressive reform movement, which saw individuals improve institutions such as healthcare and welfare, bring nature into cities as part of the City Beautiful movement, and temporarily relocate children and adolescents from urban settings as a “back-to-nature” solution for the perceived evils of modern city life.10

Despite the growing popularity of this emerging field in North American scholarship, there are several themes that have not garnered much attention in discussions about summer camping. Only two studies reveal how ethnic minorities were involved in summer camps, largely focusing on Jewish communities.11 Historians have only recently researched how Canadian and American campers incorporated and appropriated Indigenous culture in their costumes, titles, and camp activities.12 Female experiences at camps have also only merited a few studies, and, as a result, most monographs and articles study boys’ camps or co-educational outdoor recreation. However, several articles deal explicitly with all-girls’ camps in North America, highlighting the gendered differences between how boys and girls were supposed to experience recreational activities.13 In addition, despite the fact that camps were constructed and imagined to promote

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13 Two works that study girls’ camps in the US include: Susan A. Miller, “Girls in Nature/The Nature of Girls: Transforming Female Adolescence at Summer Camp, 1900-1939,” (PhD Diss., University of
childhood recreation in nature, only one article has studied summer camps from the perspective of environmental history. As such, there are many potential avenues for further historical research on North American summer camps to be conducted in the future. In particular, this essay will attempt to fill historiographical gaps in terms of environmentalism, gender, and race in its discussions about Orendaga Camp.

In addition to expanding on themes that need more historical consideration, this essay will also include perspectives that are often excluded in the historiography, such as children and adolescents. The majority of studies on summer camps examine prescriptive literature on how to run camps, pamphlets that advertised camping, minutes from meetings, and interviews with counsellors. As a result, their narratives often illuminate more about what reformers and administrators wanted camp experiences to look like, rather than how campers interpreted their overnight trips in the wilderness. This gap in the historiography has been noted by various historians. Michael Smith has pointed out that scholars cannot say whether or not campers interpreted camp differently than adults did due to a lack of sources created by youth. Sharon Wall also underlines the importance of examining camps “through the eyes of campers


14 Although most works on summer camps inevitably discuss reformers’ beliefs about nature, Michael Smith is the only historian to explicitly study how summer camp directors and administrators understood natures’ benefits for children. Michael Smith, “The Ego Ideal of the Good Camper and the Nature of Summer Camp,” Environmental History 11.1 (January 2006): 70-101.

themselves” in her study, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55*. Recent attempts to showcase campers’ perspectives includes Jessica Dunkin’s research on Glen Bernard Girls Camp in Ontario in which she also examined camp newspapers. This essay expands on Dunkin’s work by replacing an analysis of spatial practices with one of environmental consciousness in order to explore how adolescent understandings of nature were demonstrated through creative non-fiction.

Camp newspapers can shed light on the perspectives of female campers as they reflected on their summer experiences. Through campers’ articles, stories, poems, and drawings, historians can see the various ways they imagined and represented their time at camp. The “beautiful book bound with friendship” was composed, compiled, and typed by Orendaga girls, and was intended to be a repository for inside jokes and memories to be enjoyed over again, long after summer was over. Although the newspaper may have been encouraged by adults, it nonetheless represents a body of literature that was created by campers largely outside the confines of adult supervision. As such, the *Orendaga Saga* documents shared summer experiences among campers, and reflects dominant discourses that were ongoing at the camp.

Michael Smith’s “The Ego Ideal of the Good Camper and the Nature of Summer Camp” looks at how camp directors and reformers understood nature’s potential benefits for youth in the US. Like most secondary literature on summer camps and youth groups, Smith suggests that the camping movement was born as a result of middle and upper-class anxieties about

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16 Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*, 15. Although Wall incorporates youths’ voices by conducting oral interviews, she neglects to point out that their childhood memories were still articulated through the lens of adulthood, and, as such, are often more representative of how adults retroactively constructed meaning, rather than how children understood nature and camping at the time.

17 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1936, Third Camp Session, 1.
industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization. In contrast to polluted urban spaces, they redefined nature as the “locus of a simpler Arcadian past” that would revitalize Americans both physically and spiritually. Smith suggests that this nostalgic longing led reformers to “[recreate] the conditions of the wilderness frontier or the yeoman farm in recreational spaces” such as summer camps, hoping that nature’s inherent “character-building forces” would strengthen boys and girls who had been made weak as a result of their dependence on urban amenities.

Although Smith foregrounds the importance of nature for adults, he fails to consider how campers themselves perceived the wilderness. Despite the fact that most of the prescriptive literature and brochures about summer camping highlighted many supposed benefits of spending time in nature, very few campers reflected on their potential self-improvement. For most Orendaga girls, nature played a secondary role in forming their camp experiences, and their newspaper articles only mentioned their natural environment when it rebelled against them and caused annoyances, or when it could be used to advance an inside joke among friends. The weather was often only noted when it was rainy, while poems about their morning swims typically complained about the sharp rocks or “fisherman’s itch.” Rather than emphasize the “character-building” potential of constructing one’s own cooking-fire, the one camper merely remarked: “It really was worth scorching our faces to be able to have such delicious steaks and

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19 Ibid. Smith is drawing from a larger body of American literature that discusses how wilderness was redefined in order to counteract the perceived evils of industrial urban life. For example, see William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature.* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995).
20 Ibid.
21 ARCC, *(Orendaga Saga)*, 1938, 2. Campers also noted the “rough water” and the “cool weather.”
twisters.”22 The Orendaga Saga suggests that female campers largely understood nature as a backdrop against which games were played, and friends were made and gossiped about. Their lack of participation in the camping movement’s discussions suggest a general division between how reformers and youth interpreted natural wilderness environments.

Smith argues that in the 1930s and 1940s, reformers were concerned about the extent to which modern conveniences such as radios and films should have been allowed at camps. Camping advocates were disappointed to see that the “primitivism that was to be the antidote to materialistic modern life had eroded” to the extent that campers “experienced a change of scenery but not of lifestyle.”23 Some camp directors no doubt enjoyed pleasing their campers by allowing modern amenities, however, many insisted on the need to eliminate all reminders of urban life. Smith writes, “If the camping movement were to be the answer to the question of how to educate American children for the adequate use of the projected surfeit of leisure, it would have to purge the city from the camp.”24

Although there were heated debates within the summer camp movement about how recreational camping could solve urban problems, there is little evidence of disagreement amongst campers themselves during the years considered in this study. Orendaga girls seemed to see little contradiction between rustic camping and modern technology. Most editions of the Orendaga Saga include a section titled “Modern Improvements for Orendaga Camp” which provides coy advice for administrators looking to enhance the campsite’s functioning. The girls requested everything from “tent flaps which roll and unroll themselves automatically” to “at least one easy chair with a soft footstool.”25 One girl presented a passionate argument for the camp to

22 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1939, 2.
23 Smith, “The Ego Ideal,” 77-78.
24 Ibid., 78.
25 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1938, 2; ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1948, 9.
buy radios for quiet afternoon rest hour, writing: “Sleeping would be so much easier if Bing Crosby or Dick Haymes lulled you there.”

The campers showed no regret for the increasing presence of modern amenities at Ontario summer camps.

Prominent leaders in the camping movement in North America also maintained a careful distinction between urban life and camp life through their choices of camp activities. Some debated whether or not campers should be allowed off the grounds and into villages and cities for trips. Their attempts to rid the camp of reminders of the city suggest that reformers at the time understood “nature” and “culture” in binary terms. “Nature” could only act as a sanctuary from the evils of urban “culture” if the two worlds remained separate. However, campers at Orendaga did not share the same view, and seemingly saw no contradiction between traditional wilderness activities, such as hiking, and outings to various towns and settlements nearby. The girls excitedly reported on their trips to the nearby town of Bayfield in nearly every copy of the Orendaga Saga. Highlights included being “picked up on the way by Robinson’s truck,” visiting ice-cream parlors, and “[touring] around the town” before returning to the campsite.

The campers’ comments suggest that they rejoiced in modernity, and enjoyed seeing urban technological developments. In 1948, a girl commented on a notable excursion to see an impressive “new road being constructed” that could bear over “500 Tons” of weight. Another popular field trip was to the Orendaga Fair, where the girls were delighted to see foreign people and international food—all markers of globalization that were impossible to experience in a secluded camp setting. Despite camp directors’ and reformers’ attempts to eradicate all

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26 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1948, 9.
27 Smith, 78.
28 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1938, 11.
29 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1948, 4.
reminders of urban life, the campers at Orendaga never experienced a “nature” that was removed from international culture or technology.

The contrast between the importance of nature for reformers and its comparative lack of significance for campers is suggestive of a divide between how adults understood camps, and how campers experienced them. This distinction can also be seen by comparing the adult-created camp advertisements and postcards with the girls’ newspaper articles. Although the Orendaga Saga did not suggest that nature was inherently beneficial for campers’ health, Orendaga’s advertisements and postcards did. The Camp brochure from 1932 foregrounds nature on its cover by choosing to depict two evergreen trees by a lake, against a backdrop of clouds. The trees lean into each other, seemingly drawn together as a happy duo.30 On the next page, the first few lines describe the Camp as follows:

With a thickly wooded hill as background and the Catfish River forming a natural boundary in the foreground, ORENDAGA CAMP is ideally situated . . . Lake Erie, a short distance away, affords splendid swimming and diving, while the surrounding hills and winding roads prove of endless delight to all campers.31

Rather than advertise the “friendship that binds Orendaga’s campers,” which is what the girls believed was most important about their summers, the creator of the brochure chose to sell the camp based on the “natural boundary” between the river and the hill, as well as its close proximity to Lake Erie.32 This suggests that he or she believed that parents would be won over by the camp’s natural environment, rather than its activities or social climate. Furthermore, the

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30 See Appendix A.
31 ARCC, Orendaga summer camp brochure, 1932, 2.
32 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1946, 2.
postcards of Camp Orendaga also promote experiences in nature over group socialization. A postcard sent in 1947 to a “Miss Aubrey Thompson” depicts an isolated beach, closed in by wild brush. The sole evidence of human presence is a half-erected shelter in the background. Again, instead of showcasing images of friends and promoting the female bonds that camp often produced, the creator of the postcard chose to represent secluded wilderness, cut off from all amenities that were typically associated with urban settings. Postcards and brochures about the camp were created by adults, and, as such, can be said to reflect dominant cultural understandings about camp and nature at the time. The contrast between the youth-created camp newspapers and the adult-oriented pamphlets and postcards suggests that these seemingly pervasive anti-modernist understandings of nature were relegated to the adult world, while children continued to view nature as a setting for the development of social relationships.

These anti-modern beliefs about camp’s potential to “forge citizens out of ideals made clear in nature” were never divorced from their assumptions about other societal norms, including gender stereotypes. As such, it is also essential to consider how Orendaga campers were affected by contemporary expectations about the proper ways for girls to experience outdoor recreation and natural environments. The literature produced by the camping movement suggests that the majority of directors believed that boys and girls experienced the “great outdoors” very differently. Many historians have suggested that recreational camping for girls reflected gendered assumptions of how women should act in outdoor environments. While boys trekked off into the wilderness to prove their manhood and virility, girls’ activities were promoted to improve physical fitness for childbearing, leading to a situation in which girls were

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34 See Appendix B.
35 Smith, 80.
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not allowed to play certain sports that might cause reproductive harm, and were encouraged to avoid physical strain and exhaustion. Meg Stanley argues that the rugged physical settings women encountered on camping and canoe trips made it “particularly important that the feminine aspects and interests of the trippers be highlighted.” The femininity of the camper was showcased by restrictive clothing, limited opportunities for women to make decisions and lead trips, and by having female trippers avoid strenuous physical labour.

Stanley’s claim about the pervasiveness of female gender stereotypes is not fully representative of the reports found in the Orendaga Saga. Prior to the Second World War, the girls often framed their experiences at camp in masculine terms by referring to their athleticism and adventure. Stanley’s later assessment that some women found their camping experiences “liberating because they set them free from their regular routines and opened new worlds to them” more accurately describes the early years of Camp Orendaga’s operation. Outdoor recreation offered a chance for female campers to prove themselves through their sporting prowess (“she’s a very fine oarsman as we all know”) or bravery in confronting the elements (“the more daring campers braved the waves and were rewarded!”). When the campers played make-believe, they often imagined themselves in traditionally male roles. In 1934, they were “Roman soldiers” and “highway men” in a story about Caesar’s accomplishments. The following year, Orendaga scribes commented on “Sports Day” by writing: “With a toot from the

38 Ibid., 59.
39 Ibid., 60.
40 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1934, 5; ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1935, 1.
41 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1934, 2.
bugle a procession of sailors representing different countries made their way down to the lake."42 Imagining themselves in male-dominated work like sailing and soldering enabled the campers to shed the confines of stereotypical gender roles.

The secondary literature has also suggested that girls’ recreation was typically oriented toward female activities. Sharon Wall has argued that the camping movement wanted to teach skills that would be useful later in life. As such, female campers’ schedules included basket weaving and flower identification, while boys’ learned leather and wood working skills.43 Although directors may have tried to promote sports and activities that encouraged feminine expression in nature, the campers themselves were often more drawn toward recreation traditionally associated with boys’ camps. At Camp Orendaga, the girls worked with leather during their recreational time, and learning carpentry was also encouraged. In fact, the campers mentioned working with leather and wood nearly every year. In 1938, a girl wrote, “Numerous families will have their quiet interrupted by the clatter of wooden shoes. Handicraft has proved a popular interest group & Punch has spent a great deal of time & energy showing us how to make shoes, book-covers, & belts.”44

Leslie Paris has also commented on the differences between girls’ and boys’ recreation, suggesting that “Boys often swam naked; girls did not.”45 However, not one year went by without an Orendaga camper writing about swimming “a la nude.”46 Nor were Orendaga campers concerned about getting dirty during the interwar years. One girl commented on their game of “sloshing around in mud puddles,” adding, “even though when we arrived we were wet,

42 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1935, 5.
44 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1938, 8.
46 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1934, 4.
dirty, and sleepy it was tons of fun.”⁴⁷ The pages of the *Orendaga Saga* suggest that the girls saw little contradiction between “[entertaining] at a high tea” one day, and “[clambering] up the clay cliffs” the next.⁴⁸ As such, the gendered assumptions about how youth should experience nature that were noted by Stanley, Wall, and Paris do not appear to have been internalized by the female campers at Orendaga during the interwar period.

However, Wall’s claim that “notions of appropriate femininity shaped the entire experience” of overnight camping is more fitting to describe Camp Orendaga in the 1940s. Wall suggests that the postwar years were more conservative, as the “push for consumption and the rise of middle-class suburbs” both represented “a new ‘containment’ of women.”⁴⁹ This trend of increased consumerism is highly visible in the *Orendaga Saga*, beginning during the Second World War. Unlike the campers of the interwar period, who seemed content with playing in the dirt and ruining their hair, girls during and after the war were highly reluctant to break traditional gender norms. Beginning in the 1940s, the campers condemned activities that were previously considered normal for outdoor recreation. It was no longer cool to want to play sports, swim, or go hiking. For example, in 1942, an article titled “What We Would Like to See in Tribe 6” listed requests like: “Betty Mahon not telling fish stories,” and “Mackie not talking about or building a fire.”⁵⁰ The same page includes pink penned doodles of hourglass-shaped girls combing their hair, applying makeup, and pondering what outfit to wear.⁵¹ No longer did campers care about “keen competition” between the “sports brave of each tribe” at swim meets, as they did in

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⁴⁷ ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1940, 5.
⁴⁸ ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1934, 4.
⁴⁹ Wall, 188.
⁵⁰ ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1942, 5.
⁵¹ See Appendix C.
According to the girls’ discourse in the newspaper, a new relationship with nature was being formed at Camp Orendaga, characterized by urban style and feminine grace.

Female campers now expressed concern about maintaining their feminine appearances, even in the Canadian wilderness. The acceptable way to swim was to appear as dainty as possible, clad in a fashionable bathing suit. The “Thumbnail sketches” of popular campers suggest that the prettiest girls during and after the war were typically “blond,” “curvaceous,” and listed goals and ambitions like “shirking tribe duties.” These gendered stereotypes about how girls should behave at camp often extended beyond clothing and hair-dos, and into the realm of bodily health. In particular, the *Orendaga Saga* saw many references to weight gain and loss. Lorraine Campbell’s constant concerns about her weight in 1942 made the pages of the newspaper several times, as did Tent 19’s overindulgence in chocolates during rest hour. The girls also made fun of other campers whose bodies did not conform to societal expectations. For instance, Betty Mahon’s pastime was listed as “eating,” with her appearance documented as “2 Lbs. heavier.” Mahon’s favourite saying was supposedly “this porridge is good,” and her status in ten years’ time was predicted to be “still eating porridge.” References to campers’ bodies also extended to official camp activities. Their indoor track meets included traditional running events, as well as competitions for the most appropriate hip measurements, with one camper winning “by half an inch.”

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52 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1936, 3.
53 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1942, 6. Of course, many of the campers simply did not want to swim at all. One camper argued that she would like “more [free] time and less people in the lake.”
54 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1946, 6.
55 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1942, 5.
56 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1942, 4. It is unclear how the Camp director, Jerry Bollman, allowed this page to be published. Considering he wrote an editorial at the end of the newspaper, it is likely that he saw the *Orendaga Saga* before it was distributed to other campers.
57 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1948, 5.
Canadian YWCA agency camps often weighed female campers prior to each session in order to count the pounds gained or lost by the end of the summer.\footnote{Dunkin, 112. It is interesting to note that although the \textit{Orendaga Saga} only references weight gain during the war, Dunkin found references to calorie counting as early as 1924 in her study of Glen Bernard, a private Ontario girls’ camp. Although more research will need to be conducted to explain this discrepancy, it may be that concerns about body image were more prevalent in Dunkin’s study as a result of the specific culture of the camp, or due to the affluence of the girls at Glen Bernard, as their access to popular culture was likely higher than the girls’ at YWCA camps.} Studying girls’ rhetoric in the \textit{Orendaga Saga} reveals that female campers often experienced nature in a way that was informed by conventional stereotypes about how male and female youths ought to experience outdoor recreation.

However, gender was not the only lens through which campers interpreted their experiences at Ontario summer camps. Despite the fact that the majority of campers at YWCA campers were Anglo-Protestant in the early twentieth century, Orendaga campers were nonetheless also exposed to ideas of race and ethnicity. The \textit{Orendaga Saga} often recounted the stories told by international campers over evening marshmallow roasts—“Ewha, whose home is in Korea told us of the natives of that country: their customs, clothing (or lack of it) and homes.”\footnote{ARCC, (\textit{Orendaga Saga}), 1938, 12.} Even some of their counsellors were foreign-born. In an article titled “Jamaica Rum,” one of the Orendaga scribes noted how much campers enjoyed “Rummy’s” stories and folk tales about her home nation.\footnote{ARCC, (\textit{Orendaga Saga}), 1948, 4.} However, the most popular way for campers to encounter race was through their incorporation of Indigenous traditions. Indigenous culture, perceived or authentic, pervaded Orendaga Camp during the 1930s and 1940s. Most Ontario summer camps at the time, including Orendaga, incorporated Indigenous council structures to maintain order in the camps,
and differentiate campers into different cabins, or “tribes.” As such, Indigenous culture was central to the camping experience in the early twentieth century.

Sharon Wall has suggested that “going Native” was a way for campers and administrators to escape the toils of modern urban life by romanticizing supposedly antimodern Indigenous traditions. She argues that the camping movement’s interest in the perceived “primitive” and “ageless” practices of First Nations people indicates their belief that “Indian” culture was inherently antithetical to urbanization and industrialization. Also in the Ontario context, Jessica Dunkin highlights how Indigenous tribal divisions shaped “the camp’s imagined geography” and spatial boundaries. While previous historians have studied First Nations’ culture in summer camps in relation to themes of modernity and space, the environmental implications of the camping movement’s appropriation has largely been implied, but not highlighted explicitly. This section will explore how campers understood Indigenous culture in relation to the natural environment of Orendaga camp. The varied literary and visual references to First Nations’ traditions in the Orendaga Saga suggest that the girls viewed Indigenous people as inherently connected to Canadian wilderness and, as such, part of the natural landscape itself.

The girls referred to Indigenous culture in a myriad of ways in their newspaper. From appreciating their counsellor’s “Indian yodel” on an overnight hike, to “smoking the pipe of peace” during a “tribal fire,” these references suggest that the camp experience was largely built around perceived Indigenous ceremonial markers. The central event was the weekly “Council Ring,” during which campers would gather around a “sacred fire,” tell folktales and legends.

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63 Ibid., 523.
64 Dunkin, 99.
65 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1934, 7; ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1941, 4.
partake in dramatic performances, and sing songs. Sharon Wall’s conclusion that the “backdrop of nature was deemed essential in creating the desired atmosphere” of the Council Ring fits with its depictions in the *Orendaga Saga*. A 1950 article titled “Dramatic Night” is representative of the girls’ association of Indigenous culture with natural imagery and landscapes. The author began the piece by reminding her readers that the camp’s outdoor theatre was finally finished after a year of construction. To celebrate the completion of their “natural theatre,” the campers enacted a rendition of “Longfellow’s Hiawatha, telling the story of the immortal son of the West Wind” and his “message of peace to the early Indian tribes.” The camper highlighted the physical aspects of the production, writing,

The stage settings of the distant wigwam and natural trees, a camp fire, properties and sheaves of wheat, rushes, bows and arrows and simple costumes were fitting in simplicity with the outdoor theatre.

Unlike other theatre skits, which usually took place inside the Lodge and saw the *Orendaga Saga* scribes comment on the varied costumes and hair-dos, traditional Indigenous events always took place outside in “natural” environments. According to this camper, *The Song of Hiawatha* was most appropriate when staged outdoors, surrounded by “sheaves of wheat . . . and simple costumes.” The “outdoor theatre” was therefore not merely an open space that imagined settings could be projected on, as it was when plays about Anglo-Canadians were performed. Rather, the natural environment was an essential component of the staging of the play itself because the skit contained Indigenous cultural themes. The backdrop of “natural trees,” “rushes,” and other

66 Dunkin, 92.
68 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1950, 5. It is worth noting that the play was written by an Anglo-American playwright in the mid-1800s.
69 ARCC, (Orendaga Saga), 1950, 5.
aspects of the landscape were, according to Orendaga campers, “fitting in simplicity” with the First Nations subject matter.

In The Imaginary Indian, Daniel Francis argues that North Americans’ growing concern over the effects of capitalism and consumerism led them to romanticize Indigenous people for representing qualities lost to most urban-dwellers. He writes, “If civilization was artificial, frenetic and soulless, the Indian seemed to live a more authentic existence, closer to nature and basic human values.” This binary between “artificial” modernity and a perceived “authentic existence” of First Nations people can be seen in the drawings included in the Orendaga Saga. In the summer of 1941, Lorraine Campbell drew several images for the newspaper that depict this link between natural landscapes and Indigenous culture. She drew two young campers sitting and reading on the grass, two cooking over a fire, no doubt thankful for the metal pots and bag of crisps they brought to their beach cookout, and another washing her face with a towel. Campbell also included a sketch of an Indian chief. Head shrouded in a feather headdress, he gazes over the lake from where he is standing on the shore, barefooted, back erect and arms crossed.

The contrast between the drawings of the campers and the Indian is worth noting. Despite being depicted in the natural setting of the camp, the Orendaga girls clearly bear their connection to modernity. Their stylish braided hairdos, plaid shorts, and striped t-shirts are all markers of urban industrial Canada. They only require a few drawn lines of grass and ground to stand on, implying that their existence is not dependent on the natural environment. On the other hand, the Indian is inextricably tied to the physical surroundings, and is therefore, as Francis suggests,

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71 Ibid., 167.
72 See Appendix D.
“closer to nature.” The cliff he stands on, drawn in darker pencil, firmly grounds his presence in the outdoor environment. The Indian seemingly blends into the natural landscape, with the straight line of his back mirroring the tree trunk behind him, and his clothing of fur and feathers are suggestive of his ties to the animals of the region.

In comparison to the campers performing their daily routines of washing and cooking, the Indian appears to be in a different century, timeless and removed from the fast pace of urban life. As Sharon Wall has noted, “admiration for this proximity to nature was coupled with romanticization of the Indian’s presumed distance from modernity.” By representing Indians as inherently tied to natural settings and past eras, the camping movement also contributed to their exclusion from urban society and modern Canadian life. As such, examining environmental imagery and Indigenous representation can shed light on early twentieth century beliefs about the intersection between nature and race.

The Orendaga Saga reveals the complex interplay between adolescent understandings of environmentalism, race, and gender. By examining camp newspapers from the 1930s to the 1950s, historians can see that summer camps presented opportunities to both subvert and reinforce early twentieth century norms in complex ways. Although female campers at Orendaga were largely removed from the reform movement’s debates about the benefits of nature for adolescents, they clearly engaged with stereotypes about how people of various genders and ethnicities ought to act in environmental settings. Their reporting on Orendaga Camp’s use of Indigenous traditions reveals that campers at the time largely associated First Nations people as being inherently connected to wilderness settings and natural landscapes, while the girls’ rhetoric about gender during and after the Second World War suggests a cementing of those norms.

73 Francis, 167.
Although the poems and stories in the *Orendaga Saga* reflect broader themes and trends in environmental history, they also represent individual memories of outdoor experiences to be enjoyed when, “old and gray, we gather round to discuss our campfire days.”

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75 ARCC, (*Orendaga Saga*), 1937, 1.
Appendix A.\textsuperscript{76}

\textbf{Orendaga Camp for Girls}

With a thickly wooded hill as background and the Catfish River forming a natural boundary in the foreground, ORENDA CAMP is ideally situated, with ample space under the large shade trees for tennis and a splendid clearing in front of the Lodge for badminton, camp fires and general camp activities. Lake Erie, a short distance away, affords splendid swimming and diving, while the surrounding hills and winding roads prove of endless delight to all campers.

The food is excellent; the camp garden provides a bountiful supply of fresh vegetables, while fresh fruits, eggs and milk are always available. Cereal or milk, and biscuits are served each evening at bedtime.

\textbf{Leadership}

A competent staff of counselors, each one chosen for some special skill in dramatics, music, handicrafts or other activity included in the camp programme, will provide leadership in the various "interests". The camp will be directed by Miss Edith Macdonald, Junior Girls' Work Secretary, of the London Y. W. C. A., and the Sports Programme will be in charge of Miss Marion McKeown, Director of Health Education in the London Y. W. C. A.

\textbf{Equipment}

The large dining and recreation Lodge, with its beautiful stone fireplace, provides a centre for camp activities. Tents are all equipped with wood floors, beds and mattresses and each accommodates from four to six campers.

\textbf{Programme}

From a large list of activities interesting to every girl, the campers will be able to choose those interests in which she would like to become more skilled—First Aid, Dramatics, Sports, Handicrafts, Camp Craft. The general programme, including Nature, Love, Bikes, Stag, Bird and Flower Study, Discussion Groups, Music Appreciation, Story Nights, Masquerades, Camp Fire, Beach Breakfast, Story Hours, Vesper Services in the moonlight, help to fill to overflowing the days that pass all too quickly at the "Place of Magic".

\textsuperscript{76} ARCC, Orendaga summer camp brochure, 1932, 1-2.
Appendix B. 77

77 Henderson, Camp “Orendaga.”
### Appendix C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Favorite Pastime</th>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Favorite Saying</th>
<th>10 years from now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tish</td>
<td>Combing people’s hair</td>
<td>Walking advert</td>
<td>Lo and behold, the personality group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mickey</td>
<td>Broadcasting</td>
<td>Blonde</td>
<td>Pl-A-S-H -sh</td>
<td>Still broadcasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeannie</td>
<td>Whistleblower</td>
<td>Sweater girl</td>
<td>Yipes!</td>
<td>Still whistling - (at boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marg. Morris</td>
<td>Making new friends</td>
<td>Jolly</td>
<td>Oh heck! In the circus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Moses</td>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>Great</td>
<td>Heavenly day!</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jo</td>
<td>Jitterbugging</td>
<td>Hotstuff</td>
<td>He’s the handsomest thing I ever saw!</td>
<td>Teaching her kids to jitterbug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>Bathing Beauty</td>
<td>Gained 20 Lbs.</td>
<td>Nuts!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinx</td>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Sarong</td>
<td>peachy</td>
<td>Camping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lois J.</td>
<td>Talking</td>
<td>Lambie</td>
<td>Oh ma!</td>
<td>Still Gabbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Joiner</td>
<td>Housebreaker</td>
<td>Hair (dust mop)</td>
<td>Honest to piet!</td>
<td>Riding males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie Bikow</td>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>ooh!</td>
<td>Dramas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Mahon</td>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>2 Lbs. heavier; this porridge is good</td>
<td>Still eating porridge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Johnston</td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>Oh turkey! still reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn Boyce</td>
<td>Giggling</td>
<td>Hunchback Boyce</td>
<td>Oh!</td>
<td>Still laughing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Clarke</td>
<td>Hairdoing</td>
<td>Lucky</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hair Dresser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN TRIBE 6.

Lorraine Campbell not worrying about her weight.
Betty Mahon not taking cough medicine.
Nancy Hager not looking for her hairpins.
Tent 16 not fighting.
Tent 19 getting 10 marks.
Tent 19 not eating kisses all rest hour.
A Jon nearer our tents.
Lannie confessing that her drawings are smooth.
Campers inspecting the counsellors' tents; (P.S. Do it any time - they pass muster!)
Nancy Hager not saying: "Be quiet -- I want to sleep."
Pauline Hunt not worrying about her hair.
Lorraine Campbell not worrying about what to wear.
Tribe B not drinking 8 jugs of milk.
Taxi service from the Lodge to our Tent.
An elevator down to the beach. (What not up?)
Tent 19 not giggling.
More time and less people in the Lake.
Betty Mahon not telling fish stories.
Tent 16 out on time.
Lorraine Campbell not snoring.
Mackie not running out every time a plane goes over.
Birds not saying "very enthusiastically: "now, shall we do this or that".
Birds not jumping around trying to liven things up.
Jo continuing to live and sing all the time.
Mackie not talking about or building a fire.
Jinx not saying "Peachy".
Counsellors telling us what it is they laugh at when they sit together.

Lorraine Campbell
Appendix D.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{79} ARCC, (\textit{Orendaga Saga}), 1941, Third Camp Session, 3.
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