

# Kimball Union, a War and a Different World, 1940 – 1970

In 1935 Kimball Union Academy came to Bill for help. The school was in serious financial trouble and enrollment had shrunk to a dozen students. The Brewsters' move to Meriden, New Hampshire began a period of leadership at Kimball Union that would see enrollment rebuilt and the school newly successful under William Brewster as Headmaster – "Chief Brewster wasn't just a man, he was an era," writes a lifelong friend and Kimball Union colleague. When Chief retired in 1952, he left a thriving 200-student institution.

The Kimball Union job opened new connections for Birch Rock, with KUA faculty, students and families. The camp would draw campers and staff from Kimball Union for many years, while members of the Birch Rock family took up jobs at the Academy. During World War II Birch Rock held its 1943 session at Kimball Union, with Navy cadets enrolled.



George Howe, Jean Hard, Pat Brewster, about 1930 from Buck to become a fine trip leader. When Pat married in 1953, he brought his wife Carol to camp, where a new cabin was built for them on the shore next to the library.

Along with Pat, the post-war years saw a new generation of young counselors at camp. The widening postwar world brought Chief and Onie international friends, too, and brought other new faces to camp. Kisuk Cheung, who had left his native Korea after the Korean War, was at camp for several seasons, and became a close friend to Pat and Chief.

At least one familiar face reappeared, and was to be important in helping the camp to adjust to the loss of its founder in 1973. Harold Denault had been a basketball player with Buck Hard in Vermont; and in 1936 Buck recruited him as a Birch Rock counselor. Immediately nicknamed Mike for no apparent reason by Charlie Downs, the Head Counselor, Mike worked at Birch Rock until the Army took him in 1941, then returned during 1946 and 1947. After some time in other professions, he returned to teaching in 1966, and came back to Birch



60's Canoeists

By the end of the war a second Brewster generation had grown up. William Junior completed medical school and became a researcher, with a son and a daughter who spent their early years at Birch Rock. Pat went to Dartmouth, graduated, and taught briefly at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts before going on to law school and a professional life that drew him away from camp. While he was able, however, he assumed a major role at Birch Rock, beside his father. In the late 40's and early 50's he and Jean Hard continued the strong Birch Rock swimming program; and when the Hards were no longer at camp he used what he had learned



Pat Brewster and Jean Hard, late 40's

Rock, where he remained through the 1979 season, from 1975 through 1979 as Director.

In spite of post-war changes outside the camp, things remained much the same within Birch Rock. Programs changed, but slowly. The horses and the riding program were phased out. Some of the old emphasis on traditional outdoor living gave way to more developed activities like baseball. The original log library was replaced with a new building



Fred Rawson at rifle range, probably 1950's

open fires. During a camp season that was still eight weeks long, these trips were an important experience. Dave Weeks, later Birch Rock's Director, says, "The three or four day wilderness adventures on the Grand Lakes, the West Branch of the Penobscot, and in the Richardson Lake region were among my favorites. Along with local trips on the Crooked and Saco Rivers, they gave me the chance to enjoy treats like wild blueberries and raspberries, to see grazing moose, otters sliding on a stream bank, osprey diving for fish, and hear loons wailing in the night."



A canoe trip on its way circa 1960 - Chief, campers and Pontiac



Tennis serves, 1960's

convenient to the Lodge, with better facilities for Onie's tutoring work, which remained as busy as ever. Beginning in 1955 a four-week half season option was added.

Ambitious trips continued to be an important feature of camp, however. Chief, who often ended up acting as a sort of full-time chauffeur, found locations in remote areas and shuttled campers there in groups that gave everyone a chance to experience the back-country for a few days, canoeing and fishing. Rump Pond, near the New Hampshire and Canadian border, featured a log cabin and other amenities; other campsites were set up from scratch with tents and

# Passings

In the summer of 1973 loss and change would come to Birch Rock. But it hardly seemed so as camp started again, with its old routine of arrivals and introductions. Here is one camper's memory of his introduction to Birch Rock; it is an experience that will be familiar to every camper who remembers his first season:

It was a hot June morning. My anticipation was overwhelming. I put on my new cap with the maroon "BR" on it. Packing was complete: trunk, sleeping bag, back pack, duffle bag, tennis racket. Birch Rock, here we come. And though I could never have suspected it, this is where I began a very special lifelong learning journey.

Up Route 26, then the McWain Hill Road and the Birch Rock entrance. My excitement was intense now. We turned into the driveway and were struck by the beauty of the view. This was finally Birch Rock, my new summer home away from home.

We bumped down the camp road to be greeted by counselors in white t-shirts and khaki shorts.



Grinning swimmers, attentive counselors, about 1970 (Jim Marion, Center)

Pease, arrived and claimed the bunk opposite. Our parents were chatting; but John and I were anxious to see the camp. Chris told our mothers not to touch a thing. "We'll learn to make up our beds as a cabin during rest period," he said.

Next we walked to the Lodge to meet Chief and Onie. We ascended those steep steps to the porch, where we were greeted by Chief, seeming emaciated and frail to me. He moved gingerly toward us, looking immensely tall, to give me a firm handshake and a direct look with his piercing eyes. I stood erect, suddenly feeling a powerful connection between us. Fellowship. Synergy. Perhaps it was a moment of feeling genuinely welcomed into the community, by a man I instantly felt to be an extraordinary gentleman. How sad it is to think now what none of us knew that day - that this opening day would be his last.

Chief turned to shake my parents' hands, and then we were summoned to a corner table by Mrs. Brewster. Onie called our names regally, as if awaiting our arrival. As we exchanged greetings, she stopped us in mid-sentence to recite our home address and ask what my two older sisters were doing for the summer. I was amazed by her knowledge of my family. She seemed like a sorceress to me, or a new grandmother I was meeting for the first time. Her sharp mind intrigued and astonished me. Her verbal embrace was heartfelt, and her spirited charm touched us.

My parents were talking with Chief and Onie; but I was looking at the names on the walls. So many names, so many Birch Rockers. What a legacy of the boys who have come to this camp. I



Onie in new library, about 1960

As I stepped out of the car Head Counselor Dave Weeks extended his hand and said, "Welcome to Birch Rock, we're happy to have you join us this summer." Two, then three, then a half dozen others came to greet us enthusiastically. Directors Mike & Phyllis Deneault finished greeting another family, then came to us with a warm embrace for my mother and handshake for my father and me. The whole introduction was overwhelming.

Then, before I knew it, my trunk was whisked away by my cabin counselor, Chris Carney. I followed Chris into Hilton B, impressively clean and neat. I picked a bunk, and moments later my first new friend, Jonathan

# The Depression and After

For a new camp, the Depression must surely have had an impact. But Maine summer camps generally weathered the crisis, and most survived. Certainly Birch Rock grew, seeing changes before and after 1930 that would help shape the camp for many years. Purchase of the rest of the camp land was completed. Bart Boyden went to teach in New Jersey, and left the partnership - we remember him today in the songs he wrote for Birch Rock, some to familiar tunes from his alma mater, Harvard. New buildings included the Uncle George Howe Museum, the Allen Kearns Memorial Library on the lake shore, an infirmary near the museum, and more cabins. The camp bought horses, and built a stable for them down the road.

But the most memorable legacy of this time was the people who joined the Birch Rock staff. In 1929 Bill recruited the remarkable Albert Bryan from Country Day to cook. Albert was Jamaican by birth, with a stutter that was never an impediment to him; his wide grin and greeting "M-M-M-Monsieur!!" were unforgettable, as were his legendary brownies, popovers and other treats. Campers and neighbors alike remember him as the owner of a succession of spotless Chevrolet convertibles in which he squired female acquaintances on his nights off. Evenings in camp he frequented the tennis court, playing an excellent game and remarking "S-S-S-Sorry!" (but not very...) after making an especially adept point.

That same year Elizabeth Sheehy came as the camp's nurse, professional and competent, enough of a traditionalist to administer weekly doses of milk of magnesia to one and all to encourage digestive health.

1929 was also the year that Milton L. "Buck" Hard began a 25-year association with Birch Rock. A



Buck and Florence Hard, 1931

friend of Bill's from Middlebury, Buck became a Navy boxing champion, then Director of Athletics and coach for the Burlington, Vermont Public Schools. His wife Florence came with him, pregnant with their daughter Jean, who would grow up at Birch Rock and become a counselor. Buck was the consummate outdoorsman, a Maine Guide who took campers north on extended fishing trips, or canoeing, fishing and camping nearby. Pat Brewster remembers him:

While Chief kept his eagle eye on those in camp, Buck provided the excitement of wilderness adventures. It seemed to us that he could do anything in the woods; I remember watching him remove the hook of a bass plug from the eyelid of his son George, for example. On canoe trips we were always equipped for anything, although I do remember a trip to Richardson Lake where someone forgot to pack the silverware, and I wonder now if Buck wanted us to have the challenge of making our own wooden utensils! We lived well in the woods. I remember returning from a day of fly fishing on the Megalloway to our base camp on Aziscohos Lake as a hard rain began, to a comfortable camp with wall tents and cook and dining tarps. Buck's homemade doughnuts were special treats on those rainy days. It was amazing what that Navy boxing champion could do....

The Hards' son George was born in 1933, joining what Jean calls "our Hard summer family" at Birch Rock. "Chief and Onie decided we should be counselors at Birch Rock," she says. "So George became counselor of riding and tennis, and I was in charge of the waterfront. I remember many evenings - music and singing, skits, mixed with old-fashioned football, capture the flag, softball. Both George and I entertained at the piano regularly." Jean's early exploits created the Seal and Whale swimming awards: "Although swimming across the lake and back were firmly established, the first time the length of Lake McWain was attempted was by Jeanie; and the first time the entire circumference of the Lake was followed it was done by Pat Brewster, Pete Rounds, and Jeanie." Jean's last season at camp was 1950; after that the demands and expenses of graduate school led her in new directions.



Uncle George Howe

That first season was announced for July 1 to August 27, 1926 - the standard eight weeks, fee \$300. The brochure that was prepared had to present a facility that did not yet exist, creating an interesting recruiting task. The text is striking, however, in the very clear fashion in which it expresses the thoughts that were in the founders' minds. "The center of our daytime activities," the brochure says, are "one hundred and fifty acres of glorious woodland...for the boys to roam and enjoy" - Burton Sanderson's woodland east of the McWain Hill Road. The brochure continues:

Birch Rock Camp proposes to teach boys how to camp; that is, how to derive the greatest benefit from an experience in the open. In so doing it cannot fail to develop a boy physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. His growth physically will be achieved not by participation in sports to which he has access during the school year, but by...indulgence in the real outdoor sports of swimming, canoeing, riflery, fishing, hiking, and camping, the aim being...the normal condition of physical fitness. ...his mental growth will result from a departure from the usual textbook subjects to the study of natural sciences by...first-hand observation and practical experimentation. The boy, being with others of his own age...under the guidance of refined leaders, will develop socially so as to be better fitted to take his proper place...in the world and its work. Intimate association with nature and the resulting true appreciation of it will do far more than anything sectarian to bring about that spiritual growth so essential to true and honorable living.

These are words that echo John Muir and many others, ideas familiar to advocates of wilderness recreation today - the key is the experience of the natural environment, and the development of a relationship with it, "real outdoor sports," not the usual school activities.

Burton Sanderson's diary records events of that spring and early summer. The first lumber was delivered on April 3, 1926; the Brewsters and Bart Boyden were at camp by mid-June. Campers were housed in "tents" - screened platforms with wooden walls and canvas roofs. Burton seems to have helped with overseeing the construction, and built tables and benches for the Lodge. This was the beginning of a relationship that saw Burton performing most of Birch Rock's maintenance for a number of years, including seasonal tasks like filling the ice house and cutting and splitting firewood.



Though facilities might need to be imagined, the staff was real, and it showed just how quickly Bill and Onie had created links with the community. George Robley Howe, "Uncle George" to everyone, was a Norway man with an immense knowledge of natural history, especially mineralogy, and an equally strong affection for young people. Howe was already at Camp McWain, so a Birch Rock connection was natural. Also from the Camp McWain staff was Dr. William R. P. Emerson, who was advertised as physical fitness advisor, scheduled to examine the boys at the start of camp and periodically thereafter.

Head Counselor was Henry Cullinan of Norway, then at Bates College in the class of 1929. He was a notably talented wood carver whose work can still be seen at camp. 13 boys attended that first season; 26 registered for 1927. To Bill, Onie and Bart it must have seemed a modestly successful beginning, even when compared to camps that were much larger and decades older.

The carved names, the stuffed animals, the smell of freshly brewed coffee, popovers with jam and brownies that tasted like fudge, everybody saying hello and introducing themselves to me - those are my memories of my first hour at camp. I do not remember my parents leaving, but I do remember the bell ringing loudly, calling us together. My first summer at Birch Rock had started.

Polar bear swims. Hot cocoa in the morning. The ringing bell. Hot cereal. Inspection. General swims. The Midnight Phantom. The Crooked River. Badges.

Camper-Counselor Hunt. Campfires. My Duck. Reading *The Mixed up Files of Mrs. Basil E.*



*Frank Weiler* with Onie. Albert's brownies. Eggs a la Golden Rod. Signup. Homemade bread. Capture The Flag. Million Dollar Infield. Cabin Competition. Sunday chapel. Popovers with jam. And Chief's sudden passing. And Onie's talk of moving forward. And the unique cast of counselors, campers and others who were part of my first experience at camp. This was my Birch Rock in 1973. Little did I know that those first moments would mark one of the great changes in my life - it was my introduction to the Birch Rock community and the blessed return each summer that has changed my personal journey, and those of so many others. I call it the magic spell of Birch Rock Camp.



Albert Bryan, 1978

This is Birch Rock Director Rich Deering's account of his first impressions of Birch Rock. His experience echoes the experiences of others who have arrived as strangers, and found that their lives were changed by Birch Rock, the camp become a permanent part of them.

Mike Denault tells what happened next: "shortly after the camp opened, Chief had a Doctor's appointment. The Doctor advised him to have tests done and admitted him to the hospital. It was very difficult to leave him there, and the drive back to camp was a long lonesome one. Everyone at camp was very concerned. Their concerns became grief five days later when he passed away."

William Brewster was buried where he most loved to be, there at camp, his ashes interred in front of the Infirmary. But the summer was not over. Some weeks later, the life of William Brewster Junior also ended, and Pat found himself settling his brother's ashes next to those of his father.

In the face of these losses, the camp community showed its strength. Dave Weeks, Head Counselor that summer, describes his own response: "Like others at Birch Rock I did what I could to support Mike, Phyllis and Onie. Besides my duties as Head Counselor, I assumed the responsibility of carving '1973' on a title board, the activity group boards and the Whale and Seal plaques. Then the boys carved their own names for display on the wall. For many years Chief had done the carving, and we all felt that having the boys share in perpetuating this tradition helped the community pull together to sustain the spirit of Birch Rock after the loss of its founding champion."





# Another Generation

The real work of adjusting to Chief’s loss began after the 1973 camp season. An advisory board was created which later became the Board of Trustees. Bill Allen became Director for 1974, with Dave Weeks as Head Counselor, and many veteran staff members. When Bill could not return in 1975, Onie turned to Mike Deneault, who served as Director during 1975, 1976, 1977 and 1978. By 1978 Mike was retiring from teaching, and asked Dave Weeks to take over. Mike remained Director during 1979 while Dave learned the job, then Dave took over in 1980. By this time Onie’s age and health prevented her from participating at camp, so other changes were coming as well.

Dave talks about his time as Director :

Except for Albert in the kitchen and Omar Moxcey doing maintenance, my staff was mostly young that first summer. Head Counselor Jim Tsouvalos was new to Birch Rock; Lisa Pompeo was our nurse. Our reading specialist was Lisa Solferino; I intended to maintain Onie’s fine tutoring program. I found myself busy with all kinds of issues - programs, maintenance, health, finance. When camp ended I was exhilarated at our accomplishments, and exhausted from the constant pressure.

By 1981 I had developed some recruiting momentum. The contagious BR spirit at regional meetings, along with personal referrals, increased enrollment for 1981 and 1982. Referrals started coming from other camps and international camp placement agents. In 1981 Doug Dickey and his family first came to Birch Rock. Doug was a trip coordinator and guide; his wife Debbie became our nurse. Toby Brewster and Doug began a friendship that led them to combine their talents later as co-Directors.



Dave Weeks, Toby and Ben Brewster, about 1981

Birch Rock had a great energy during 1982. Programs ran smoothly, and I was able to spend time getting to know local people. This is how I first met Don Munn and Janice Walker, who owned Springer’s Store then. We began a friendship that led to them becoming a part of the Birch Rock community, handling camp maintenance now for twenty years.

In 1982 Pat Brewster’s oldest son Ben, who had much interest in environmental education, was teaching at Waynfleet School in Portland. That fall it seemed natural for him to assume the Directorship. But if Ben’s taking up his grandparents’ legacy was good news, Onie’s death on December 10, 1982 was a reminder that change can bring grief as well as happiness. The camp community joined again in mourning, and Onie came home to camp to lie beside her husband.

Ben’s love for the outdoors and his enthusiastic leadership gave Birch Rock successful seasons in 1983 and 1984. But it was not to be; Ben’s sad death in April 1985 was a loss that Toby describes as "gasping for air." Again the camp community did as Chief and Onie had done - it marshaled its resources and continued moving ahead. Toby and Doug Dickey became co-Directors. Toby says: "During 1985 and 1986 we led a small but fiercely loyal staff whose combined energy maintained the camp’s momentum after Ben’s loss. For 1986 our enrollment was 22 campers, the lowest since 1926. Rising costs had closed 14 camps in Maine alone, but Birch Rock held on with a thin budget and extreme frugality."

Doug had to leave after 1986, so Toby continued alone. During 1987 and 1988 he led a young staff and worked to rebuild enrollment. In September, 1989, he was married, and after that Toby and his wife Becca directed camp for three more seasons. But by the summer of 1992 Toby’s job at Harvard was taking up most of his time, and he was relying more and more on co-Director Bob Van Dyk and his Assistant Director Matt Bagger. In the fall of 1992 Toby stepped back, and Brad Smith, the Athletic Director at Bridgton Academy, was hired as Director; Brad managed the camp during 1993, 1994 and 1995.



Dave Weeks with nature study group

# Early Days

The 1920's was a period of rapid growth for summer camps. There had been camps in the Adirondacks and northern New England since before 1900, but the combination of economic prosperity, improved transportation and increasing urbanization after World War I made summer camping possible for many more children. At the same time, the growth of a society increasingly removed from its rural past created a desire to renew connections with traditional ways of life, so that the activities and skills the camps emphasized, along with the outdoor, open-air environment, became an experience that was seen as increasingly important in a world of offices, cities and suburbs.

Western Maine benefited from this trend. A 1927 Bridgton Academy brochure - "In the heart of the summer camp region of America," says its headline - maps 75 children’s camps in the area, with a total capacity of some 5000 campers. The map shows five camps on McWain, including Birch Rock.

By 1925 the Brewsters were living in Newton, Massachusetts, where Bill had been teaching math and coaching at Country Day School for Boys of Boston since 1921. Their first son, William Jr., was born in 1922; Seward, always "Pat," would come in 1927. Like other school teachers the Brewsters sought summer work at children’s camps; in 1922 Bill started as a counselor at Camp Chewonki, in coastal Wiscasset, Maine, where he became Head Counselor in 1923.

Their Chewonki experience gave the Brewsters a taste of summer camps, and seems to have left them with some clear ideas about what such a camp should be. Chewonki was on the coast, where swimming and other aquatic activities in frigid ocean water were difficult. The camp emphasized competitiveness, which the Brewsters felt was a mistake in training young people, Bill’s coaching work notwithstanding.

Characteristically, Bill and Onie acted. Along with Bartlett Boyden, an English teacher who joined Country Day after his 1921 Harvard graduation, and who had also been Head Counselor at a summer camp, they determined to start their own camp. In the summer of 1925 they began searching for a location. Perhaps Western Maine drew them by its reputation; but they were ultimately guided by a friend, Clarence Morton, of South Paris, Maine. Clarence was a friend of both the Brewsters and of Helen Sanderson, a nurse originally from East Waterford, who in 1923 expanded her summer cottage on McWain Pond into a girls camp, Camp McWain. Helen’s partner was another nurse, Mary Marshall; the pair combined their nursing skills to create a camp which they announced as "for the delicate girl."



1926 Staff L to R - Chief, George Hubbard, Henry Cullinan, Onie, Uncle George, John Cowin, Bart Boyden

In 1922 Helen’s brother Burton left a teaching career to return home and take over the family farm from his aging father. In 1924 Burton’s wife Minnie began teaching at the one-room schoolhouse at Waterford Flat. Camp McWain was a short walk from the farm; three other camps shared the pond.

Like the Brewsters, Burton and Minnie had a deep commitment to education and to helping young people, so when Helen introduced the Brewsters and their plans to her brother they must have found a ready audience. By the end of 1925 an agreement had been reached to purchase an eight-acre portion of the pasture and maple grove that sloped steeply to McWain Pond, and to lease the rest of it. An informal agreement allowed the camp to build a tennis court on Burton’s upper hay field, and to use that field and the woods across the road for activities.

A unique feature of the new camp’s land was a birch tree that had seeded itself atop a large boulder near the shore. It appears that Bill went to talk with Hugh Pendexter, a Norway author of children’s adventure stories, about a name for the new camp. Rejecting the convention of Indian names for camps, Pendexter suggested naming it for something like a unique natural feature of the place. The choice was obvious, and Birch Rock Camp it became.



First flagraising, July 4, 1926

# Introductory and Dedicatory

This history is as much as anything else a memorial to two remarkable people, William Russell Brewster (1893-1973) and Leona (Wright) Brewster (1895 -1982). It is the first attempt to write an account of Birch Rock’s past. As part of the project, a camp archive has been started. That such an archive was not begun earlier was characteristic of the Brewsters. Both approached people directly, with an open hand and a warm greeting; they approached life in the same way, always moving towards the next encounter and leaving the past behind.

We now try to remember them, and find that much of what we have is personal memories, along with some photographic images and documents. The history is also the story of hundreds of people who have been part of Birch Rock, and we try to tell some of their stories as well.

To understand the camp it helps to know something of the life of its founders. Both were born and brought up in Vermont, Bill in West Windsor, Onie in Weybridge. Both found themselves without a parent early in their lives. Details of Bill’s early life are sketchy; but we know that his father died and his mother later remarried. So Bill must have faced adult responsibilities early, as farm children often did in those days. Onie’s mother died when Onie was young, and her father sought work in the West. Onie and her sister were raised by a great aunt, whose affection and care created a relationship nearly as close as mother and daughter.

Both grew up between 1900 and 1920, a time when education was seen as immensely valuable to personal and intellectual growth, and also as the key to moving from the drudgery of traditional occupations like farming to the respect and economic benefits of a new professional, urbanized middle class. The opportunity to attend college was the key to these goals; smaller New England institutions like Middlebury, Bates, Bowdoin and others helped move thousands of young rural men and women to the city.



Bill in 1930

Both Bill and Onie brought immense personal force to their commitment, reaching out to young people with support and encouragement that was not to be denied. Their Birch Rock motto "Help the Other Fellow" was as much the way they lived, and a basic principle that they regarded as a key to a worthwhile life, as it was a motto to guide Birch Rock campers. They created in Birch Rock a remarkable institution, where their legacy continues to guide, motivate and inspire campers, former campers and friends decades after both have gone from us.



Onie in 1931

William Brewster graduated from Kimball Union Academy in Meriden, New Hampshire in 1914, then from Middlebury College in 1918, at age 25, not unusual at a time when the need to work and save often delayed higher education. Surely Bill’s own early experiences laid the foundation for the rest of his life, because after his graduation from Middlebury he became a teacher, and a dedicated, tireless advocate for personal growth through education and training in the skills and principles required to lead a good life. His personality commanded respect; he was usually "Bill" to his Waterford neighbours, but always simply "Chief" to campers, students and colleagues.

Onie shared her husband’s principles. She had taught before their marriage in 1919, but had not attended college. Then in 1933, she entered Boston University, where she studied education, specializing in the teaching of reading. Later she took advanced courses at Columbia, using her knowledge to help the students she tutored with such dedication at Birch Rock.

# New Beginnings

Cris and Marcia Miller were invited to join the Board in 1989. Cris was a former camper and counselor, and his son Doug was now at camp. Returning to camp after his absence, Cris was deeply concerned at what he saw. Enrollment was rising from a low point in 1986, as Toby and Becca Brewster rebuilt the camp’s recruiting organization. But the financial pinch had left the facilities badly in need of help. In spite of the problems, Cris could still feel the spirit of the camp he knew - "the essence, the soul of Birch Rock, was alive," he says.

As other Board members, staff and alumni began talking, it seemed as though the camp might be approaching a life-or-death situation. But no one was willing to accept the loss; "we believed the place was worth saving so that others could have the same experience we had. More than nostalgia, it truly made a difference in our lives," said Tom Miller. Dick Penley joined the discussion; Rich Deering, Toby Brewster and Peter Herzig contributed their knowledge of current operations; and Harry Cleaves joined maintenance chief Don Munn in looking at the physical state of the camp.

While this was happening, two more seasons passed; then in October 1991 a crucial decision was made. The Board proposed to the Brewster family that they lease the camp to the nonprofit Birch Rock Camp Corporation, and the family agreed to begin the process. This step would free the family from primary responsibility for the camp, and allow the corporation to make the needed investments in it. Much effort and commitment had been required to reach this point; but it was now that the really substantial investment began - "financial, intellectual and physical capital," Cris calls it..

To prepare for what was now seen as a major turnaround for Birch Rock, a formal strategic planning process was begun in 1992. A group that included Toby Brewster, Becca Brewster, Harry Cleaves, Rich



The Lodge, Fall 1994 - Foundation and addition complete

Deering, Peter Herzig, Cris Miller, Marcia Miller, Dick Penley and Wendy Penley came together to work on the plan. In July of 1993 a ten-year Strategic Plan was presented to the Board and accepted. By August work had begun on the Brewster agreement, and on a lease for long-term camp use of the Sanderson family’s field.

In February of 1994 Dick Penley and Peter Herzig took over from Cris Miller, as co-Presidents. Almost immediately a new problem appeared. By May of 1994, Dick Penley was explaining to the Board that the Lodge was shifting on its wooden post foundation, moving at a rate that demanded immediate action. Under Harry Cleaves’ direction, this project became the most complicated construction work the camp had ever done - jacking the building, pouring a full concrete foundation, excavating and installing underground drainage, and enlarging the building. Work started in the fall of 1994, and continued through a snowy winter. By an extraordinary effort the work was completed in the Spring of 1995, and camp opened with a fine facility, the new construction blended carefully with the old. The dedication ceremony that summer came as a sign not only of the reconstruction of the building, but of the revival of the camp itself, inspired by the spirit of the Birch Rock community.



Tree Talk, part of Birch Rock since 1926

# A Future

Children’s camps like Birch Rock are a uniquely American phenomenon. In remarkable ways experiences at these places create a store of happy memories, and make connections that last a lifetime. Mike Apicelli, who came as a camper first in 1950, renewed his connection to Birch Rock after Chief died, and continues to spend part of the summer as a counselor 50 years later. Of his return in 1973, he says "When I walked down that hill almost 20 years after I was a camper, it was as if I never left."



Richard Deering, Director since 1996

Summer camps may be the only place in our society whose fundamental purpose is to bring children together in a special environment and help them have a good time. Physically removing them from the daily world of family, school and urban cacophony is a way of freeing them, so that they can join the camp society as themselves, and learn to live in the camp community without the pressures and distractions that pursue them the rest of the year. It is no wonder that summer camping experiences affect people so deeply, or that they preserve them as such a vivid and important part of their lives.

If there is a spiritual center to these experiences, Birch Rock surely has always had it in very special ways, and the decade since the camp’s renewal began has been spent finding that center again and introducing hundreds of new campers to it. From an enrollment of 29 campers in 1990, attendance has grown to a total of 125 in 2001, in 3, 4 and 7-week sessions.

In the summer of 1996 Richard Deering returned to Birch Rock, as Director, first part-time and then full-time. In 1996 Mike Mattson became Assistant Director, then in 1998 joined Rich as co-Director. Under their joint leadership, the camp is now certified by the American Camping Association, and has built a reputation as one of Maine’s finest small summer camps. At the same time the help of an active Board and generous donations have created a place whose appearance and facilities match its spirit.

But summer camps are also remarkable in the ways they preserve their past; because so much of what the camp represents is



Mike Mattson

based on the continuity of the experiences of decades of campers, camps resist rapid change and strive to preserve their traditions. This is nowhere more true than at Birch Rock. So though there is another different world outside the camp, as there has been with each series of social, economic and political changes that has occurred over the past 75 years, the camp continues to value what it has been as well as what it might be.



Senior Staff, 1996 Lto R: Rich Deering, Pam Stock, John Leighton, Val Dorjets, David Jenkins, Christian Dickenson, Mike Mattson

With the new century the Board has once again taken up discussion of Birch Rock’s future, and created a new Strategic Plan to help guide the camp’s next decade. The camp is working to expand its programs, with a Family Camp, the Maine

Wilderness Adventure program, and pre-camp training clinics for camping professionals from all over Maine part of the 2001 schedule.

Anniversaries are usually seen as celebrations of the past, and surely the experiences of 75 years are worth celebrating; but after a decade of transformation at Birch Rock, this anniversary surely is as much a celebration of the future.

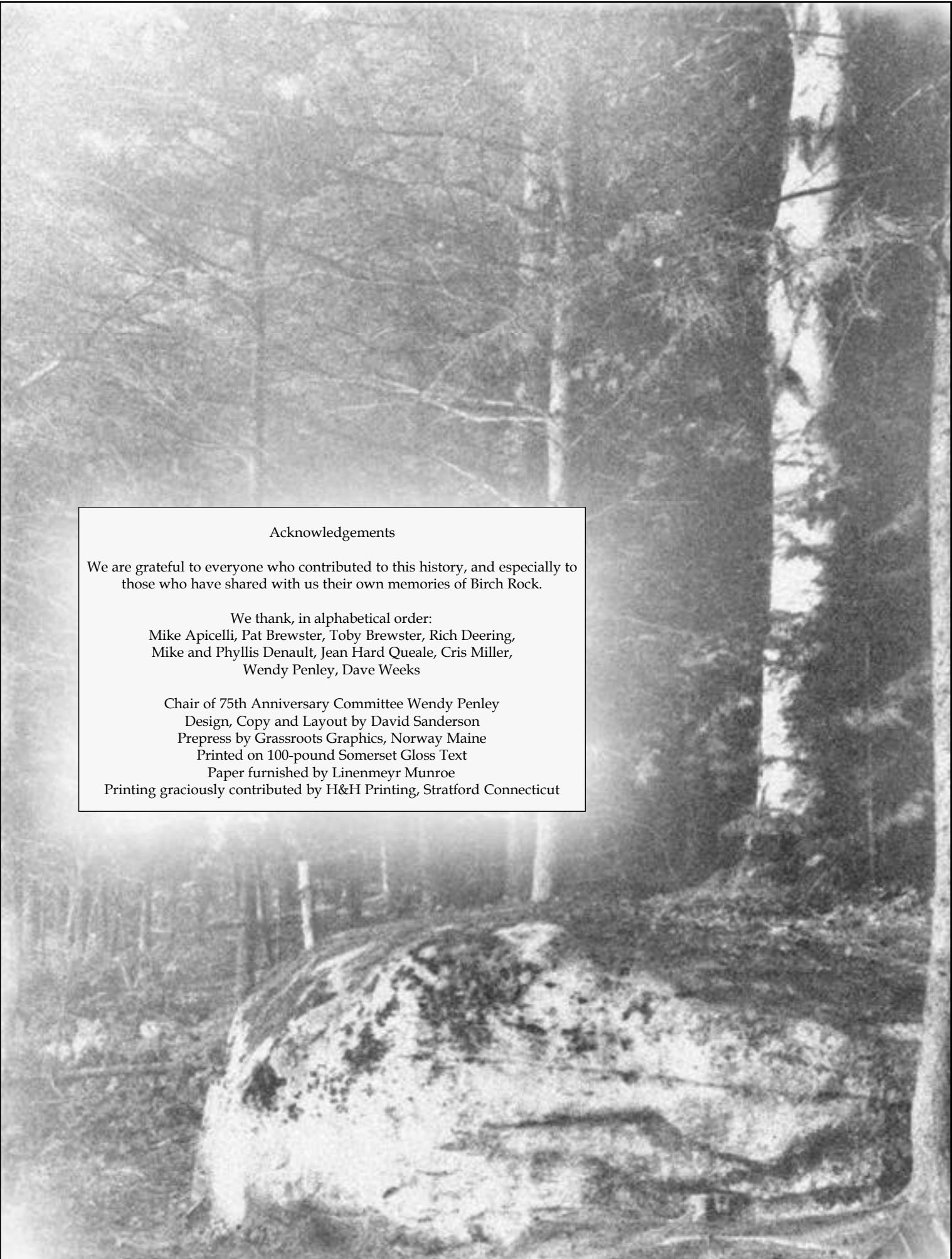
# Birch Rock Camp, 1926 - 2001

## A Short History

Prepared  
as part of the observance of  
the 75th anniversary of the camp

Birch Rock Camp  
East Waterford Maine



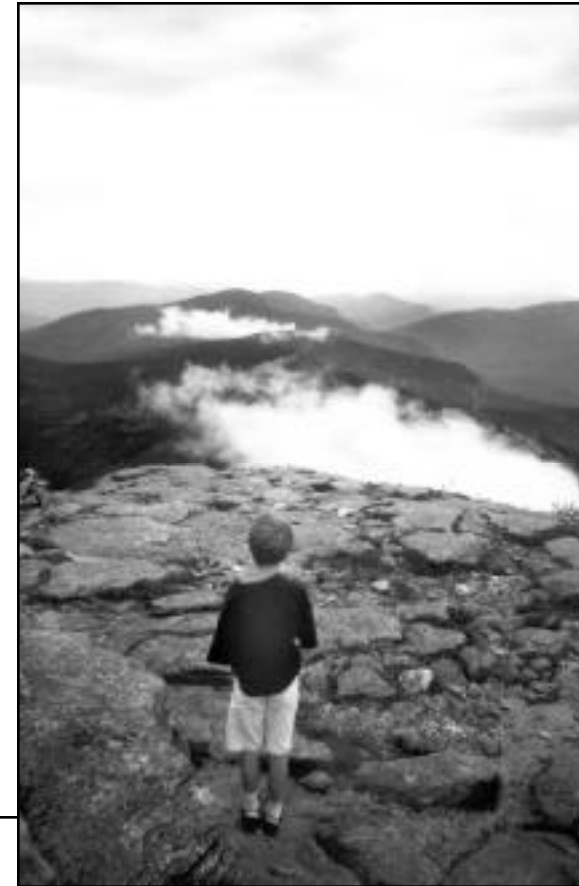


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# Birch Rock Camp

1926 - 2001

## A Short History

Birch Rock Camp  
McWain Hill Road  
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