

REMEMBRANCES OF A CAMP SQUANTO ALUMNUS 1948 – 1953

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The year 2000 not only commemorates the 75th anniversary of the establishment of Camp Squanto but also commemorates the 50th year of its location on Fawn Pond in the Miles Standish Reservation in Carver, Massachusetts. The year 2000 also commemorates my having reached full retirement age. Needless to say, as I write a new chapter in the 'Book of Ben', I find myself reminiscing about the various stages of my life. Clearly my experiences as a Camp Squanto Camper played an important part in my early growth and development.

I first arrived at Camp Squanto in the Summer of my twelfth year. Camp Squanto was then located at Bloody Pond south of Plymouth, Massachusetts. I was assigned to the Erie Tribe. The Senior Counselor: Ronald ('Uncle Ronnie') Mansbach welcomed me to the Erie Tribe and showed me to a two man wall tent that was to become my home for the next two weeks. I shared the tent with a boyhood chum and fellow Plymouthian: Donald Taub.

The Erie Tribe was some distance from the Dining Hall and was the only tribe that did not have adirondack lean-tos and whose site did not overlook Bloody Pond. We were the last unit to arrive at the assembly point in front of the dining hall both for the flag raising prior to breakfast and as well as the flag lowering (retreat) ceremony that proceeded the evening meal. Our late arrival always seemed to trigger a derisive (albeit good-natured) laugh from the other tribes namely the Apaches (Senior Counselor: Donald Porter), Commanches and Dakotas.

The camp was relatively small land area wise. The dining hall, affectionately known as the mess hall, was the central building and the first one to be seen as you drove in to camp via an access road off of Long Pond road. The dining hall building included the kitchen, the camp office and a canteen (which dispensed snacks, beverages etc.). A large covered porch circled the building on three sides. There were three cabins known as Cub Cabins located behind the dining hall. The cabin closest to the dining hall served as the Crafts Lodge.

William McClaughlin, Squanto Council Scout Executive, was the camp director in 1948. The assistant camp director was Charles ('Uncle Charlie') Medford who became the camp director the following season. I can see 'Uncle Charlie' now as he strode through the mess hall at the end of each meal leading all of us in a spirited communal song songfest. He was a soft-spoken kindly man who always wore moccasins and parted his hair right down the middle. I remember being duped by the older, veteran campers who told me to ask 'Uncle Charlie' for 'the key to turn the flag pole'. He told me to report back to them that the key was in a tool chest next to the 'left-handed monkey wrench'.

On Tuesday and Friday evenings, we would lay in our cots (Note: The lean-tos had bunks, the wall tents had cots), too excited to sleep as we awaited the arrival of the Squanto Braves. The Braves represented a local Honor Group (pre-dating the Order of The Arrow) which, after Taps had been blown, would march through the entire camp, hands across their chests, in single file, to the beat of a 'Tom Tom' drum. I can still hear that haunting cadence: BOOM-BOOM-BOOM...BOOM-BOOM-BOOM.

On Tuesday nights the Braves would stop opposite the lean-to/tent of those scouts who had been chosen to endure a three day ordeal in order to become a member of the Squanto Braves. The scouts would be called out by name and asked to: 'Join the ranks of the Squanto Braves' following which, the group continued its solemn march through the camp. The

following day it became obvious who the candidates were in that they were required to wear a dot within a red circle, marked in mercurochrome, upon their forehead. The members of the Braves wore similar markings but did so their chests.

All units were assigned daily work details associated with keeping the camp clean, safe and healthy. The latter being associated with Green House maintenance. When passing by these structures on a warm day, it became patently obvious as to the purpose these buildings. Needless to say, the sanitary facilities were spartan at best. We used to sing a song in those days: 'From the Mess Hall, to the Greenhouse (there were two of them) to the Funnel white with foam, God Bless Camp Squanto, My Home Sweet Home'.

The Squanto Letter program was a way of encouraging scouts to perform some aspect of camp service above and beyond that required by the daily details. The letters: red, gold or silver 'S' sewn on a blue tepee background were awarded every two weeks at closing campfires (Note: The camping season was delineated by three segments each of which was two weeks in duration.). The color was an indication of how much effort went into qualifying for the award. Red being the lesser and Silver being the greatest. During my first two seasons at camp, I was awarded all three letters. How proud I was to wear them, arranged in pyramid fashion, on my scout shirt.

Access to the water front whether it be for boating or swimming was strictly controlled via the use of a Buddy Board where one had to place his color-coded swim tag (designating either a non-swimmer, known as a 'sinker', an intermediate swimmer or a advanced swimmer) along with that of a buddy (of equal ability) before being allowed to enter the water front area. If you had passed your advanced swimmer's test then you were permitted to use the raft otherwise you were confined to areas bounded by the dock configuration.

Periodically, a member of the water front staff would blow his whistle and yell: 'Buddies Up'. At that point you would grab

your buddy's hand and hold it aloft. The Number of buddy pairs in the water was then compared against the number of paired buddy tags on the board. Every one was responsible for his own buddy tag and had to remove it from the active area of the board and place it within the non-active area of the board prior to leaving the water front area.

Row boats and canoes were tied-up adjacent to the swim area. One could not take out a row boat and/or canoe (two to a canoe) unless one was an advanced swimmer. As I recall, Jack Hubbard was in charge of the water front staff which incidentally was housed in a cabin located on top of the hill overlooking the lake.

The camp cook was a rotund, jovial man known to us as 'Uncle Wally'. I believe that he was a minister who spent his summers as a camp chef. I can see him now walking toward the water front after the evening meal had been served. He carried a large inner tube with him. Occasionally we would run down to the waterfront to see Uncle Wally floating in his inner tube, his rather large belly extending well above the inner tube. He was quite a sight. We loved him and he loved us.

Thursdays provided the kitchen staff with a 24 hour respite. Their 'day off' began after breakfast and ended prior to lunch on Fridays. Before leaving the mess hall on Thursdays, the kitchen staff assembled sandwiches and other food items to enable each unit to have lunch and prepare supper and breakfast on its own. Most units went on overnight hikes on those days. I began to fully appreciate the hiking experience during the six weeks I spent at camp during the summer of '49.

Two particular hikes stand out in my memory. One of them involved a over-nighter south to the Bourne Bridge (Cape Cod Canal) during which we camped out on the flats adjacent to the bridge. The second noteworthy hike, a day hike, took us westward to Fawn Pond, at which time I met Mr. LaBaron R. Barker the man who, in a public ceremony, gave the land to Squanto Council upon which the new Camp Squanto was to be

built and which ultimately became the LeBaron R. Barker Boy Scout Reservation. It was the first time that I had ever seen a Polaroid Land Camera. A number of pictures were snapped to record what was indeed a major event in the history of what was then known as Squanto Council.

The summer of 1950 heralded a new camping experience with the relocation of Camp Squanto to the land generously donated by Mr. Barker. Arriving at the new location was truly an 'eye opening' experience. The sheer size of the place relative to the former location at Bloody Pond was incredible. The units were distributed throughout the camp, separated by considerable wood land. Indeed, everyone had plenty of private, quiet space. In fact one unit, the Iroquois was located so far into the woods that they had to begin their trek to the dining hall twenty minutes prior to scheduled meal times in order to arrive on time. Water lines snaked through woods to every unit site, providing it with washing stations and FLUSH toilets. No more rudimentary sanitation. Wow, That was great!.

A large cruciform dining hall was located in what I would refer to as the central complex. Included in this complex were the kitchen crews quarters, a small tented area known affectionately as Skid Row, a small building housing the canteen and the staff lounge, the camp directors cottage, the infirmary, a building containing a brush-breaker fire engine, housed there as a contingency against forest fires within the Camp Squanto environs, a building designated as the ranger's (caretaker) quarters, and a large visitors parking lot.

This central complex was at higher elevation than the lake. It was a long walk from the dining hall downhill to the water front area and an even l-o-n-g-e-r walk back up unless of course you were assigned to the Pioneer Unit (Senior Counselor: Robert Bowler) which was sited very close to the water front. The Pioneer campers were housed in tepees and had access to a large screened-in (activities) building next to their site. This building like all the rest of the buildings was built on a concrete slab.

The walk to the water front area passed by a natural amphitheater which was used for camp-wide camp fires usually on Friday nights. Located next to the amphitheater was the chapel, a marvelous place to sit and contemplate the natural world.

Adjacent to the water front area was a section known as the Pine Grove. It was here that the annual corn festival known as the 'Feast of Mondarmin' was held prior to the end of the camping season. A large pit was dug within the center of the pine grove. The pit was lined with rocks and a fire was built on top of the rocks and kept burning for some time. When the rocks were good and hot the fire was removed and the rocks were covered with hundreds of ears of corn. Radiating out from the pit were pyramidal-shaped 'altars' previously built by each unit. A No. 10 tin can was recessed within the top of each altar. A roll of toilet tissue was placed within each can and the can was then filled with kerosene. Parents and family friends were invited to the 'Feast of Mondarmin' ceremony which began shortly after sundown.

The units sat around its altar. The Squanto Braves were in attendance with a Brave assigned to each altar site. The parents and friends stood in the background. All was quiet. Soon a light appeared from across the lake. The light got larger and larger and it soon became apparent that it was a canoe being paddled toward us. Standing up in the canoe was a Squanto Brave holding a lighted torch. The canoe reached the shore and the Brave got out and proceeded toward the center of the pine grove. Each Brave standing guard over a unit altar would then walk toward the center, take the torch, return to light his altar (i.e. set ablaze the kerosene soaked roll of toilet tissue) and return the torch to the center. Following a brief ceremony during which the Chief of the Squanto Braves would verify that all was in order, the corn would be distributed to everyone. I was quite a memorable experience.

During my first summer at the NEW Camp Squanto, the third year of my camping experience, I was a member of the Apache Unit (Senior Counselor: Alfred Boni). Our unit was located on a hill just beyond the upper/lower ball fields. We had a commanding view of the surrounding countryside.

Starting with my fourth year of summer camping (1951), I became a Counselor-In-Training (CIT) which although it was a non-paid staff position, provided me with a free summer of camping. My fifth year (1952) saw me as a Junior Counselor ('Cousin Ben') and my sixth and final year (1953) at Camp Squanto saw me as a full-fledged Senior Counselor ('Uncle Ben'). Those years as a camp counselor provided me with wonderful opportunities to learn to work with people and in the process develop leadership skills which over the years have served me in good stead.

During the year that I served as a CIT, I received my Sachem award. It was the highest form of camp service and was represented by a silver 'S' on a red tepee. To qualify for this award, I had to identify a need that would serve as a camp improvement, plan the project and enlist and supervise the help of my fellow campers. The project that I chose was to build a road to the waterfront. I had the brush-breaker fire engine pave the way so to speak. Then I had the scouts who volunteered to work for me (thereby earning time toward their own red, gold and silver letters) remove the brush and trees knocked down by the brush breaker. This road was then known as Sachem Road.

During the year that I served as a Junior Counselor, I became of a member of the Squanto Braves. In my mind I can still relive that three day ordeal. One day I had to carry around a deer skull and antlers. Another day I had to eat a square meal which meant forming the geometry of square every time that I picked up food off of my plate. Another day I was not allowed to eat any of the WHITE MAN'S SUGAR. Every night I was assigned a special place to sleep. One night I slept on the upper ball field. Another night I slept in the activities room adjacent to the Pioneer Site (boy was that concrete hard). Quite frankly I don't

recall were I spent the third night. Every day I was required to BATH IN THE SACRED WATERS OF FAWN POND before reveille. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to become a Squanto Brave, it was a character building experience. Upon successfully passing my ordeal I became known within the circle of the Squanto Braves as CAUTIOUS BEAR.

Attending summer camp provided one with an excellent opportunity to advance along the Eagle Trail. What better place to acquire and demonstrate proficiency in outdoor skills than at a summer camp. Over the course of my residency at Boy Scout Camp, I was able to obtain all the merit badges required to become an Eagle Scout. How proud I was when in the fall of 1952, my mother pinned The Eagle Scout Medal on my uniform.

As a Eagle Scout as well as the holder of the Sachem award as well as being an officer of the Squanto Braves (I was the Drummer) I was permitted to wear a Headdress. Robert ('Uncle Bob' Bowler was a very talented individual. He drew a bear on my loin cloth. Properly attired, I led my fellow Braves through the wood lands of Camp Squanto for two seasons.

As I bring to a close these remembrances I am left with an image of myself sitting at a campfire on a beautiful summer's night looking up at full moon shining through a pine tree and joining with my fellow campers in the campfire's closing song: 'O MR. MOON, MOON, MR. SILVERY MOON HIDING BEHIND THAT TREE. NOW THIS BOY SCOUT IS TELLING YOU THAT TO OLD CAMP SQUANTO HE ALWAYS BE TRUE. SO MR. MOON, MOON, MR. SILVERY MOON WON'T YOU PLEASE SHINE DOWN ON, PLEASE SHINE DOWN ON ME, PLEASE SHINE DOWN ON ME'.