This issue of Archives News focuses on Trent University’s role in preserving the records of the youth camping movement in Ontario. A substantial holding, the records represent approximately 400 accredited camps and speak to the camping experience of thousands of Ontarians over the past several decades.

Our Trent Treasures column features *Leaves of Grass* by the American poet, Walt Whitman. Trent’s Special Collections houses several editions of this masterpiece, beginning with the third, published in 1860.

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In 1968, Trent University Archives entered into an agreement to accept and preserve records pertaining to the camping movement in Ontario. Instrumental in bringing about this arrangement was University of Toronto psychology professor and Trent honorary degree recipient Mary Northway, who, from 1930 to 1939, worked as program director of Glen Bernard Camp in the Parry Sound district, and, from 1941 to 1950, as co-director, with Flora Morrison, of a girls’ camp called Windy Pine Point in Haliburton County. Important, too, in initiating this arrangement with the Archives, were Adèle Statton Ebbs and Dr. Harry Ebbs, both of whom were involved in the camping movement in Canada, United States, and India. Dr. Ebbs, a former governor of Trent University, received a Doctor of Letters from Trent in 1975. This newsletter focuses on the important legacy of camping papers, especially those of the Ontario Camps Association, which have been - and continue to be - entrusted to the Archives.

Exhausted campers, Northway Lodge, ca. 1915
(photographer unknown)
Northway Lodge was founded by Fannie Case in 1906 and has been in operation at Cache Lake, Algonquin Provincial Park, since 1908. Materials from this camping organization and numerous others are forwarded to the Archives on a regular basis.
The founding of the Ontario Camping Association

In 1900, A.L. Cochrane established the first private camp in Ontario. During the following 25 years, the number of private camps in the province increased to six or seven and were mainly for boys over the age of thirteen. After 1925, however, several additional private camps began appearing and agency camps, such as the Y.M.C.A., were opening up across Ontario. During this period, leaders and directors of these camps attended American Camping Association conventions as the Canadian and Ontario camping associations had not yet been formed. This arrangement, although helpful to the evolution of camps in Ontario, was not ideal and leaders soon began to meet informally in private homes to discuss camping matters. The first members were A.L. Cochrane, H.E. Chapman, Mary Edgar, Mary Hamilton, Fern Halliday, and Taylor and Ethel Statten. One of the main topics of discussion centered on the need for a camping association in Ontario. In 1933, this group of private camp leaders and directors formally founded the Ontario Camping Association under the chairmanship of Taylor Statten.

The interests of the founders of the Association encompassed the development and maintenance of high camping standards in the field of camping for children and an appreciation of the wider aspects of the camping movement. They believed that through discussion and consideration of common camping policies and problems, and by mutual exchange of ideas and knowledge, better camping would be achieved. The Ontario Camping Association was responsible for the development and implementation of standards for Ontario’s children’s camps, and, in 1941, in conjunction with the Provincial Department of Health, made the licensing of all camps mandatory. In 2012, the Ontario Camping Association changed its name to Ontario Camps Association.

Dr. Mary Northway and her contribution to Trent University

Dr. Mary Northway (1909-1987) made her first visit to Trent before construction had even begun. She writes that she and her friend, Flora Morrison, visited the future site with Professor Alan Wilson while it was still “a field of mud.” Northway believed in the value of Canadian summer camping and tripping and was involved in camping her entire life. In 1970, she donated her personal papers, manuscripts, indexes, and photographs to Trent University Archives. These items are all located in the Archives. The books have been catalogued as a Special Collection and appear on the library catalogue, with the designation "CP". We also preserve a complete collection of OCA News and Canadian Camping Magazine.

The archival holdings date from 1904 to the present and include photographs, pamphlets and brochures, correspondence, minutes of meetings, standards records, camp manuals, articles and reports, and audio and video tapes. We are very fortunate in that individual camps, too, participate directly in preserving their own archival materials; many do this via a Brown Bag Program through which materials are forwarded annually to the Archives by accredited camps under the umbrella of the OCA office.

Our camping records are heavily used by researchers of all sorts: undergraduate, MA, and PhD students; authors; OCA administrators; and camping enthusiasts. Indeed, according to Bernadine Dodge and Bruce W. Hodgins, “the recognition of the summer camp as an educational as well as recreational institution, and its role in the character development of male and female campers, invite an investigation into its history from a variety of perspectives.” Currently, the OCA records comprise approximately 40 linear metres, a substantial holding for our repository. The records continue to grow year after year, building on the first acquisition received almost half a century ago.

Along with the regular processing of the newly acquired materials, we are also involved in a multi-year digitization project which is funded by the OCA and which entails transferring dozens of audio tapes to digital format; the tapes, dating from the 1970s through to the present, are comprised of interviews with people involved in the camping movement. With the recent hiring of Trent students, we are well underway in year two of the project and anticipate transferring another 75 or so tapes to digital format this academic year.


In memory of her father, Garfield Northway, Mary Northway left a major bequest to Trent University. This bequest provides permanent support towards Trent University Library and Archives and the Department of Canadian Studies. Further support came in the gift of Windy Pine Point, the girls’ tripping camp which Northway had co-directed with Flora Morrison during the 1940s and which she envisioned being used by Trent to advance the study of Canada. In 1994, the Archives reading room was named the Northway Reading Room in honour of Mary and Garfield Northway.

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www.trentu.ca/library/archives/newsletterindex.htm

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Hours of Operation

Mon. & Wed.: 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; Tues. 9:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.
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