

Two camps on Osgood Pond

PART TWO OF TWO

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Earlier this month, we went along on an Adirondack Architectural Heritage tour of two distinctive Great Camps on Osgood Pond: White Pine Camp and Northbrook Lodge. Adirondack historic-preservation expert Howie Kirschenbaum, who has guided the restoration of White Pine Camp since purchasing it in 1993, led the AARCH tour.

We have had to divide our story about Kirschenbaum's tour into two parts. Last week, in the first part of our story, we walked through the history of White Pine Camp, including the tale of its design by architects William Massarene and Addison Mizner and its construction by legendary Great Camp builder Ben Muncil.

This week, in the conclusion of our story, we'll walk through White Pine Camp itself. We'll also visit nearby Northbrook Lodge, possibly the first private camp established on Osgood Pond.

White Pine Camp

Visitors to White Pine Camp enter the 35-acre retreat at the *Caretaker's Complex*, just inside the gate at the end of White Pine Road off state Route 86 in Paul Smiths.

The acre upon which the Caretaker's Complex stands was leased in 1907 from hotelier Paul Smith by White Pine's original owners, Archibald and Olive Moore White. The buildings standing there today, however, were not built until the early 1920s, when the camp was bought from the Whites by Irwin Kirkwood.

Among the buildings at the Caretaker's Complex is the *Gate Cottage*, where caretaker Oscar Otis and housekeeper Amy Otis lived and raised their family.

The other cottage at the Caretaker's Complex is the *Gardener's Cabin*. It was later known as the Rough House Cabin because, in the 1930s and 1940s, the children of the camp's owners stayed there — a quarter mile away from their parents in the main camp.

Before it became the Rough House Cabin, the Gardener's Cabin was the home of French-born horticulturist

Frederic Heutte, White Pine's gardener in the mid-1920s. One of his creations was an expansive *alpine rock garden* that has only recently been rediscovered, after 50 years or so of neglect, buried between the Caretaker's Complex and the main camp. Heutte's rock garden so impressed President Calvin Coolidge when he summured at White Pine Camp in 1926 that he gave the 27-year-old gardener a Presidential Commendation. Several years later, Heutte parlayed that commendation into a position as Norfolk, Virginia's superintendent of parks.

Following a trail from the rock garden to the shore of Osgood Pond, one arrives at the 'new' boathouse, one of two boathouses on the property. According to Kirschenbaum, the New Boathouse was in the worst shape of any of the buildings on the property when he first acquired the camp. Probably designed in 1911 by Addison Mizner, White Pine's second architect, the boathouse was sinking into the boggy Osgood lakeshore by 1993, and the roof was near to collapse.

Kirschenbaum had the entire building hoisted into the air while two 10-



The well at the Caretaker's Complex, White Pine Camp.

foot culverts were dug beneath it and filled with concrete. After a pair of huge support beams was laid on top of the new concrete foundations, the boathouse was lowered back down and the roof was rebuilt. Kirschenbaum said that he had budgeted \$15,000 for the building's restoration, but the cost turned out to be twice that.

Another Mizner addition was White Pine's enclosed *bowling alley*, one of the camp's five winterized buildings. Finding a 1911 bowling alley in such a remote site may seem odd, but the fact is that bowling was a popular vacation pastime in the Adirondacks. In Lake Placid, three late 19th century hotels had alleys, and two more were built on Main Street — one at the Episcopal Parish House, the other at the Masonic Building — before World War I.

The White Pine bowling alley sits along the Osgood Pond shoreline between the new boathouse and the *Japanese bridge and teahouse*. The teahouse is built on what was once a point projecting into the two-mile-long "pond"; a channel was cut to set the teahouse off onto its own little island. When Kirschenbaum first came to White Pine Camp, the bridge's stone facing had fallen off and was lying in the muck below. A mason was able to restore the bridge to its original appearance by using old photographs.

A 300-foot-long *boardwalk bridge*, which crosses the neck of an Osgood Pond inlet, connects the tea-house island with White Pine's main boathouse. Though an old wedding picture from 1908 shows some kind of a boathouse here, no one is sure whether it's the current boathouse that was standing then; Mizner may have built this one, or reworked an earlier one, in 1911.

Up an outdoor staircase from the main boathouse is White Pine's *main camp*, including:

- the owners' cabin, where the Coolidges stayed in 1926;
- the imaginatively named Cabins One, Two and Three;
- a clay tennis court with accompanying teahouse and bar building, and
- a 1911 cabin called "Hermit's Hut," where Kirschenbaum said that Mizner

had "out-Massarene Massarene."

Kirschenbaum was referring to the soaring roof lines, asymmetrical structures and extensive, unusual use of window lighting that were the architectural signatures of William Massarene's original designs for White Pine Camp. When Mizner was hired to add on to Massarene's work at White Pine, three years later, the buildings Mizner designed were remarkably consistent with the original vision of his predecessor.

There is one building, however, that today's White Pine visitors are unable to visit — and one of the most significant buildings in the main camp, at that: the *living room*. The "playroom" — which had two stages where plays and musical performances could be staged for the entertainment of White Pine's guests — would have been the first building one encountered after climbing the outdoor stairway from the main boathouse, had the building not burned in a 1970s electrical fire. The interior space in the living room measured 50 by 55 feet, without any internal posts or beams, its roof supported by a system of trusses later used by its builder, Ben Muncil, at Northbrook Lodge and again at Topridge, which is today considered the ultimate Adirondack Great Camp.

Northbrook Lodge

After finishing our visit to White Pine Camp, we drove about a mile and a half back down White Pine Road to a sign pointing toward Northbrook Lodge, which was one of the first — if

not *the* first — of the private camps to be sold on Osgood Pond.

Northbrook Lodge was built for Canadian Senator Wilfred L. McDougald by Ben Muncil. Unlike White Pine Camp, no other architects are ever mentioned in connection with NBL, suggesting that Muncil may have designed the camp himself. Another indication of Muncil's design work, suggested in a 1997 article on the builder written by architectural historian Mary Hotaling, is "that only a designer who was also the builder would create such immensely complex roofs [as the one in NBL's boathouse lounge], because no architect would have that much confidence in a builder."

Pre-McD history

The current acreage comprising the camp at Northbrook Lodge was acquired in pieces. The first bit was the five acres purchased in 1889 by Henry Wilson.

A decade later, in 1899, Basil Wilson bought Henry's acreage along with an adjacent five-acre lot, "together with buildings and improvements situated thereon" — none of which are part of the camp today.

In 1900, Basil bought a third five-acre lot from Paul Smith.

Two years later, Basil Wilson died, leaving the camp to his wife Lilia.

After perhaps remarrying several times, Lilia Sinclair Gordon Bennett sold the camp in 1919 to Wilfrid McDougald for \$21,000.



Twin cabins at Northbrook Lodge show a distinctly Japanese architectural influence.

McDougald hired Ben Muncil to build Northbrook Lodge.

Adirondack Japonesque

The Japanese Pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, held in 1893, had generated a tremendous stir in the architectural world, including those architects designing Adirondack Great Camps.

"Other people were doing Japanese in the Adirondacks at this time," said Kirschenbaum, "but not quite like what was done here."

Like the Japanese building at the Chicago exposition, the low, squat buildings at Northbrook Lodge spread out like a series of pavilions connected by open, covered walkways. The designer has used the typically Japanese "irimoya" (two-level) roof throughout the camp. And Scandinavian verge boards, placed on the inside of the angular peaks of the camp's roofs, soften those sharp angles with their gentle curves in a way that some say is reminiscent of the scale and angles of Japanese architecture.

The insides of the buildings at NBL, however, are as different from the spare Japanese style of interior furnishing and decoration as they are from the stereotypical birch bark-and-twigwork rustic style so often thought of as *the* Adirondack Great Camp mode. The library and dining room, in particular, look more like what one would expect to find in the Hudson Valley country home of some early 20th century man of means: all dark wood and built-in cabinets with beveled-glass doors.

The interiors of the NBL guest cabins are simple enough, although hardly examples of anything that might be called "Adirondack rustic":

- Marcy, the original owner's cabin;
- The main cabin, a two-unit cottage built later for the owners "after they had stopped sleeping in the same bed," according to the camp's current owner;
- Gabriels, originally called the Grandmothers' House, and
- the newest cabin, the two-unit Whiteface guest cottage, the only one built with drywall rather than plaster and lathe board walls.



The original owners' cabin at Northbrook Lodge.

Greatest 'Great Room'

The last stop on our walk through the camp at Northbrook Lodge was the climax of our visit: the NBL boathouse lounge, or "Great Room."

It is a big, two-level, open room with a bar above, tables below, and twin alcoves with card tables. Through a screen door to one side of a fireplace is a cozy porch looking out on Osgood Pond.

"The living room at White Pine was a kind of study or experiment for one of the grandest rooms in the Adirondacks, over at Camp Topridge," said Kirschenbaum. "The Great Room here was another such study.

"This room is, I think, a Muncil masterpiece, in every respect.

"The beam system ... foreshadows what would come, on a much larger scale, at Topridge a few years later," Kirschenbaum said. "He [Muncil] was excellent at creating these large open spaces without posts in the middle.

"Another unusual touch is the brainstorm siding on the ceiling, cut a lot thicker than would be typical on the exterior of a building. There are only a few rooms in the Adirondacks where you'll find this, including the Great Room at Camp Topridge.

"I think this is one of the greatest Great Rooms in the Adirondacks," Kirschenbaum enthused.

NBL ownership

As with any property that has been built upon and inhabited for more than a century, Northbrook Lodge passed through several owners before finally landing in the hands of the Schwartz family, which has held it since the early 1950s.

As we noted earlier, Senator Wilfrid McDougald bought the property in 1919 and hired Ben Muncil to build the camp as we see it today. McDougald involved himself, however, in an insider-trading scheme that ultimately forced his resignation from Parliament and led him nearly to bankruptcy. Two years after McDougald's 1942 death, his wife was forced to sell Northbrook Lodge.

The buyer in 1944 was O. Rundle Gilbert, an auctioneer — who had already re-sold it to one Anton Rost. The following year, Rost sold the camp to Rudolph S. and Eva Reese.

After one, final short-term pair of owners — Edward and George Sherman, who acquired the property in 1949 — Northbrook Lodge was sold in 1952 to William P. and Norma D. Schwartz, the parents of its current proprietor, Laura Jean Schwartz. William Schwartz was a well-known Manhattan restaurateur, and he and his family have operated NBL as a rustic, "partial American plan" resort. In return for a modest, fixed price, guests

have total run of the now-10-acre property, use of the canoes and kayaks stored in the boathouse, and two meals a day prepared by the Northbrook staff: breakfast and supper.

Operation of the camp resort is a summer job for Schwartau, an adjunct theater instructor at Plattsburgh State University, and her husband, Randall Swanson, an associate professor of forestry at Paul Smith's College — but one that they love.

"This is our summer vacation," quipped Swanson during our tour.

Howie Kirschenbaum remarked several times during our tour upon how lucky Northbrook Lodge and White Pine Camp were that they had not been

broken up in the 1950s or 1960s, as were so many other camps in the region. Subdivision, he said, would have utterly erased their character as Adirondack Great Camps.

Rentals, tours

Want to see White Pine Camp or Northbrook Lodge for yourself?

Both of them are situated on White Pine Road, which branches off state Route 86 about half a mile from the intersection with Route 30 at Paul Smith's College.

The owners of both camps welcome guests who'd like to rent cabins and stay awhile. For more information, including rates and availability, call

them, or visit their Web sites:

- White Pine Camp, (518) 327-3030, www.whitepinecamp.com
- Northbrook Lodge, (518) 327-3379, www.northbrooklodge.com

Adirondack Architectural Heritage also conducts tours of White Pine Camp at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. each Saturday from July 1 through Labor Day weekend. The cost of the tour is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children. For more information about AARCH's weekly White Pine tours, call Adirondack Architectural Heritage in Keeseville at (518) 834-9328, or visit them on the Web at www.aarch.org.



Northbrook Lodge's library and dining room, at either end of this group of buildings, are joined by open, covered walkways, at the center of which stands a distinctly Japonesque entry pavilion.