

Rough Camp

One spring morning in 1902, a party of five men set out from Michigamme to travel by compass to the interior wilderness of Michigan's Peshekee River Valley and on to Lake Superior. Arrayed along the trail, in careful acknowledgment of rank and status, were a guide, a cook, a "land-looker," and two gentlemen from Chicago. The country through which they traveled was, in places, virgin forest. In other parts the terrain was muddy, burned over, and rutted from recent logging. While the Peshekee River was a natural watercourse to float pine to the mill at Michigamme during spring floods, the valley itself was difficult to penetrate because of its rocky and hilly terrain. Primitive roads and trails, slashed out during the summer, provided access to various dams and lumber camps along the river, and to the many small lakes that dotted the wild country. The men followed these trails, and an abandoned railroad grade constructed for the defunct Iron Range and Huron Bay Railroad, on their explorations. They spent the nights in lumber camps or pitched their tents on the high ground between creeks and marshes, sleeping on balsam branches. One of the men, a Chicago lawyer named Cyrus Bentley, kept a diary of the trip:

10 May 1902—Last night was not so cold as the night before at 30 degrees. We were up at 4:30 and after drinking a cup of coffee with a cracker we started to get through a bad place in the road covered with water, which might become impossible to cross, if the flood from the upper river arrived before we got past. (The dams were to be opened early this morning.) We got through all right on a raft, but the wagon box floated off at the high water point, carrying all our food supplies and much of our baggage which finally were submerged.

11 May—The sun has been warm and the air cool—a delicious morning for a walk. We first waded through a cedar swamp, then walked over ridges of hardwood which must be beautiful in leaf. We came upon a pretty lake in Section 31 and crossed an awkward dam

at the foot of the lake. Such beauty! But McCormick seems intent on challenging the forest, conquering it. So we kept moving.

12 May—Cloudy day with mist and rain—We camped for the night near a deserted cabin in a swamp in section 1-50-30—We have no bread since day before yesterday and are out of jam, condensed milk, and coffee...

Despite the hardships, perhaps even because of them, two members of the party—the Chicagoans—were enjoying themselves. Bentley, the diarist, was an attorney for the expedition's nominal leader, Cyrus McCormick Jr. The weeklong trip had a purpose: the establishment of a site for a permanent camp in the area.

Cyrus McCormick Jr. was the son of the man who had invented the reaper, a machine which had dramatically altered farm production methods and America's place in both world trade and world history. The younger McCormick had first come to the Upper Peninsula in 1885 accompanied by naturalist William C. Gray, one of his professors at Princeton. Gray had wanted to visit the Peshekee River area as much for its geological interest as for its abundance of wildlife and rugged scenery. Its lakes and swamps contained the headwaters of several rivers, some flowing north into Lake Superior and others south to Lake Michigan.

The younger McCormick was a serious, reserved man who knew enough about the farm machinery business to exhibit the new reaper all alone in England at the age of 18. At 26, on his father's death, he became president of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Co., the largest manufacturing concern of its kind in the world. In 1902, with William Deering and other leaders in the industry, he was successful in engaging John D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan to underwrite the International Harvester Company. The merger of the various farm equipment manufacturers brought industrial peace to a branch of commerce where intense competition, lawsuits, countersuits, and claims of patent infringement had been raging for decades.

Cyrus Bentley had been McCormick's attorney in the tough and protracted negotiations toward the merger. After the formation of the Harvester Company, McCormick became its president and Bentley its general counsel. The two men were longtime friends as well. Now McCormick was showing the lawyer his version of the North Woods. The corporate jungle of mergers and acquisitions had neither dampened their enthusiasm nor diminished their energy for

similar adventures in true wilderness—or whatever approximation of it the Upper Peninsula could provide. McCormick had established a summer tent camp on an island in one of the backwoods lakes, hiring local guides and woodsmen to act as caretakers.

Seeing the island for the first time, Bentley recalled:

The island is covered with blueberries. I rowed around it and saw that its shores were quite rocky with mud bottom here and there. Two large platform tents stood near the easterly extremity of the island, with views down the lake toward a high, rocky escarpment.

The two men would return to the island many times over the next quarter century, as the tent camp grew to a wilderness retreat and secluded private estate of close to twenty thousand acres. Even with its seventeen massive log lodges, boathouses and outbuildings scattered across the island and throughout the surrounding woods, the men would always refer to the place as the “Rough Camp.”

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About eighty years later, in 1984, a young man named Richard Hendricksen stood facing McCormick’s island from the lakeshore. Hendricksen, who called himself a “failed real estate developer,” was from Manistee in Lower Michigan. He had been lured to the Upper Peninsula by sympathetic friends who wondered, nevertheless, how big a failure Hendricksen could be. He was twenty-nine years old, healthy, and a big dreamer. They figured “failed real estate developer” was a self-dramatization more likely describing someone who sold subdivision houses, didn’t like the work, tried to pick up a few lots, and couldn’t get the financing to build. But whatever he was, he was coming to love the country—its plants, wildlife and especially, its history. Working for a seller of recreational land, he had become an expert with the compass, skilled in finding obscure landmarks and corners when showing property to prospective buyers.

With his friend, Fred Rydholm, a local historian, Hendricksen hiked into the same forest, along the same abandoned railroad grade, that Bentley and McCormick had explored almost a century earlier. By now the woods were a rough assortment of pines and hardwoods with little evidence that lumbering had ever occurred, a land restored to forest. Hendricksen had heard of

the McCormick camp, of the abandoned buildings, of the summer visitors who used to come from all over the country, and he wanted to see for himself. At his friend's urging, he tore off his clothes, splashed into the lake, and swam the quarter-mile out to the island.

When he got there, naked and wet, he dried himself off as best he could with his hands, then set about exploring. He first encountered a spongy woodland path that led over some roots to a tunnel of trees. Through this tunnel, with the rim of the lake at his right, he moved alertly. He saw small animal tracks in the mud, and miniature forests of club moss and ground pine under wide skirts of spruce.

His bare feet were suddenly surprised by a smooth feel on the forest floor; slate. Ahead of him, a pathway curved gracefully up to a clump of conifers, beyond which was a small meadow filled with blueberry bushes. From the meadow, off in the woods to his left, weathered wooden steps and a railing showed through the trees.

Keeping to his right, he followed the path to where he could see a grayish wall of chinked logs ahead, and then another cabin perched low on the lake shore. Reaching the highest point of the island, it seemed that he could now see cabins and lodges in every direction.

It was an autumn day of racing clouds, with just enough wind to scrape branches across the roofs of the buildings. Hendricksen explored them, one by one, moving through knee-high ferns. Standing before one structure, he stared at a door that was the only smooth surface in a rippled wall of logs. The door looked as if it hadn't been opened for years, rusted shut and splotched with lichen. A plank walk led along the edge of the cabin, turned a corner, and became a porch 50 feet deep, that looked over the lake.

Peering in the window, he could see the unfinished wood on the walls and ceilings that had mellowed, over the years, to a rich whiskey color.

There was a moose head on the wall, with a fragile hairpiece of cobwebs between its antlers. Cupboards hung open with a look of mice and strangeness. Hewn log posts framed a circular stairway that disappeared up to dark rafters.

Horizontal and palisaded log walls, as well as the stone chimney, set off small endearing touches, fanciful ornamentation of roots, antlers and twisted saplings that formed the handrails of stairs or served as door latches. The deserted camp seemed to have a quality both forlorn and romantic.

The sky and the lake were opening up to him, and he wondered if he had ever felt more alive.

Somewhere in the woods a bird auditioned a song it seemed unable to fully recall. A screen door banged in the wind. He turned suddenly as if expecting someone to appear.

Returning to the mainland, he questioned his friend about the island. He was sparked and ebullient, but the friend quickly informed him that the buildings were scheduled to be burned to the ground by the U. S. Forest Service in a few months.

“You could have bought the whole works a month ago,” the friend said.

“Why can’t I bid now?”

“You’re too late. They had a deadline. Nobody bid. Bureaucrats can’t maintain it. And so, in a couple of months, that island, them cabins, and all the history ... it’s gotta go. Good-bye. Anyway,” his friend continued, “what would you do with the buildings? If the Forest Service can’t do anything with them, what would you do?”

“Yeah,” Hendricksen said, feeling crushed.

“How would you get all that stuff off the island? How would you get hundreds of logs weighing hundreds of pounds over to the mainland, up the hill, and around the curve of the road? Where would you store them? You’d be crazy.”

“I already am crazy,” Hendricksen burst out. “I’m a failed real estate developer. I’m going through a divorce. Business is slow My dog, Fatso, just died.”

After a while, the two men began the long hike back to where their truck was parked. They walked in silence the entire three and a half miles. Occasionally Hendricksen would mutter something, a word that sounded like “fulcrums.” He repeated the word over and over and over as he walked, like a mantra from some ancient religion. Time itself seemed like the woods he was walking through: infinitely renewable.

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In 1903, a men’s cabin and a ladies’ cabin were the first buildings to be constructed. Then in 1905, Bentley and McCormick built an immense lodge to house their families. The foundation and chimney were made of native stone. For the next few years, the Rough Camp grew, log by log, stone by stone, building by building. The two men continued to buy land from the lumber companies once logging operations were completed, paying \$10 to \$15 an acre. Other parcels, virgin forest, were assembled from whatever source was available, using local land dealers as

front men. Both were vigorous hikers, hacking out miles of trails along streams, across swamps, and to various lakes and lookout points. One trail stretched dozens of miles to a fishing camp where the Big Huron River met Lake Superior. Two more trails crossed swamps, hills, hardwood forests, waterfalls, and sand plains—a thirty-five-mile distance to the Huron Mountains. An overnight cluster of cabins was constructed on one of these trails for the less hardy who did not wish to complete the entire walk in a day.

Camp entertainments were simple, from stalking an albino deer (they named their paradise White Deer Lake) to long hikes through the countryside, naming the uncharted lakes after friends, relatives, or natural features that struck their fancy. Sometimes McCormick and Bentley worked shoulder to shoulder with the men they had hired to clear the trails, or assisted in hauling stone, mixing cement and mortar for the immense chimney of their new cabin. In the mornings, an icy dip in the lake; in the evenings they would read aloud by kerosene lantern—twenty pages from Trevelyan's *History of England* - or listen to grand opera from a hand cranked gramophone with a horn shaped like a huge morning glory.

The wilderness they had claimed was both rustic and romantic. Theodore Roosevelt, that advocate of “the strenuous life,” was in the White House. Roosevelt personified an American tradition that reached back to the Puritans who found “sermons in brooks, morals in stones,” with the wilderness as a metaphor for our uncorrupted, vigorous young nation. After refinement over several generations, this idealistic view of nature became part of the Puritan background that would produce Emerson and Thoreau. In the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, natural man, existing in his idyllic woodland environment, was an ideal. Although young Theodore Roosevelt probably slew more wild animals, personally, than Cooper's legendary Deerslayer would have deemed believable, Roosevelt's vision of the great outdoors spurred the glory days of concern for the environment at the turn of the century, leading to the establishment of the first National Parks.

This muscular outdoorsmanship merged with an earlier, more sentimental tradition. Rustic furniture and summerhouse architecture were part of the fanciful scenery of the eighteenth-century English landscape garden. Jefferson's plans for a gothic temple at Monticello (never completed) show his interest in the picturesque. Jefferson and John Adams made extensive tours of “nature parks” when they were together in England in 1786, dreaming perhaps of the wild physical landscape of the new nation they had inherited and whose political and cultural life they

intended to invent from the traditions of Locke. By the 1840s, rustic summerhouses, gardens and grand hotels could be found along the East Coast. Cyrus Bentley's grandfather owned and operated one such establishment, Columbia Hall, a spa in Lebanon Springs, New York, which Lafayette visited during his American tour in 1824-25.

Many families attempted to escape the formality and rigid social structure of these resorts by opting for more remote places. Beginning in the 1880s, a rebellion against the constraints of the "society resorts" led people to such places as the Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence River, the narrows around Desbarats, Ontario, and the Adirondack Mountains, as well as parts of Michigan and Wisconsin. Camp craft, Indian lore, hunting and fishing, survival in the wilderness were the emblems of the revolt. The camps that were established in truer wilderness were also, the captains of industry noted, physically removed from reporters, social climbers, salesmen, extortionists, and the social hierarchies created by women.

The beauty of these wilderness areas, their healthy atmosphere, and their dependable hunting and fishing, inspired the industrialists to hire local craftsmen to build lodges of native materials on a scale matching the "cottages" of Newport and the spas of Saratoga. As ownership of wilderness lodges became fashionable, the magnates built camps in isolated areas surrounded by hundreds, sometimes thousands of acres. Owners would visit for a few months, weeks, or sometimes only a few days. For the rest of the year the camps—in some cases virtually small villages—were residences for the caretaker staff. At the same time, clubs were formed to buy up large tracts of land and create private preserves. These clubs typically might have had a central lodge and private cabins, each member sharing in equal privileges. Collectively called "the Great Camps," they reflected rustic designs compatible with their wilderness environment. Local craftsmen and jacks-of-all-trades developed a vernacular architecture that evolved from available lumber and stone put together with basic tools. Giant logs for structure and design, massive pieces of stone accented with filigrees of twigs and roots. Interior decoration might include light fixtures made of deer antlers, primitive artifacts, Indian baskets, hand woven rugs and blankets, animal pelts as wall hangings, crossed skis and snowshoes. The camps expressed a complex blend of assertiveness over the natural environment and submission to it, reflecting contradictory attitudes of the nation itself as the wilderness was opened and tamed. Generally, a "great camp" was a collection of rustic buildings conveying the character of the forest in their log construction, even if guests dressed formally for dinner and were served with silver and crystal.

These islands of wilderness inspired an extraordinary body of writing and art. Despite the reality of the Industrial Revolution, the dominant flavor of the age remained rural and romantic. The “picturesque” was a major conceit of the nineteenth-century sensibility, attracting the curious with rifles, fishing gear, and notebooks and sketchpads in hand. *Wild Scenes in the Forests; Adirondac, or Life in the Woods: Sporting Adventures with Rifle and Rod* were best-sellers. Arthur Fitzwilliam Tate celebrated the call of the hunt in northern settings, and his scenes of masculine adventure in the woods were frequently lithographed for popular Currier and Ives prints. The encampment known as the Philosophers’ Club, inspired by the back-to-nature works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Russell Lowell, became legendary and gave an aura of romance to camping in the woods.

But there was a less romantic strain in the thinking of McCormick and Bentley. Bentley’s diaries chronicle thirty years of the life of the camp, from its founding in 1902 until the Great Depression. The diary is a practical catalogue of temperature readings, barometer pressures, lists of supplies, construction chronologies, guest lists, and time elapsed to row lakes or walk sections of trail. Despite the calculated appearance of the simple life, the camp seems to have been built to prove that it could be done. Difficult in accessibility, difficult to provision, staff and maintain; that very difficulty may have motivated the builders: personal satisfaction in taming an unpromising environment and creating a civilized mode of living exclusively by their own means.

By the 1920s the “Rough Camp” had begun to assume a distinctly epicurean flavor, its roughness abraded by the refinements of entertaining. When Henry Ford or Harvey Firestone came for a visit, a solicitous host could not simply hand him an axe and send him out into the woods. Electricity and plumbing were introduced, and a French chef joined the crew of woodsmen and guides, followed by an English butler. Next came a sous-chef, followed by a valet named Charles Donald Benjamin Hakin Edward Stevens. Motorcars were acquired, and the camp harbored a fleet of them, including a Model T coupe and a Dodge touring car. Arriving guests were furnished with a trail map in a folded leather case, each guest’s initials embossed in gold on the cover. An initialed, gold-lined, collapsible drinking cup served as a similar souvenir. A supply of gear, clothing, and fishing equipment kept on hand for often unprepared guests, included hobnailed boots of all sizes manufactured in England. No longer did McCormick and

Bentley work side by side with the men. Instead, they received regular reports of the crew's hourly activities delivered to their offices in Chicago.

One hiker from the Huron Mountain Club, a family retreat on the shores of Lake Superior, thirty-five miles away was greeted on arrival by a valet who offered to press his dinner jacket before the evening meal. Since the visitor was traveling light that day, equipped only with a trout rod, a toothbrush, and a copy of *The Compleat Angler* in his tackle bag, he waved the valet aside with a reverse air of *lese majeste*, indicating his democratic preference to dine with the men in the bunkhouse.

Margaret Bush Clement, President Bush's aunt, visited the camp in the early 1920s. She recalls:

"It was fabulous. There was an immense dinner table with a lazy Susan in the middle for condiments. During dinner, you would order your picnic lunch for the next day. If something you wanted wasn't on the menu, you were told not to worry they could provide it. They prided themselves on being able to get you anything you wanted. Just to be funny, just to test them, I ordered a caviar sandwich. Sure enough, the next day when I opened my picnic basket, that's what I got."

The lavishness was tempting, and not just to *invited* guests. A 1927 heist, in the middle of the Prohibition era, netted seventy-two bottles of imported whiskey and fine French wines from a cabinet next to the billiard room, all that five men could carry off on foot through miles of woods. "We had to leave a lot of it behind," one of the thieves remarked ruefully, many years later.

Emily Post's 1928 book of etiquette devoted an entire chapter to proper behavior at a woodlands camp, while unconsciously revealing the kind of feminine social tyranny from which the men were trying to escape. The camp, in Mrs. Post's imagined account, resembles a collection of wooden packing crates dumped in a clearing. Guests are implored not to bring personal servants, "This isn't Newport, you know." In the dining camp, each participant is provided with a birch-bark napkin ring, which one of the diners regards "as though it were an insect." (In a previous chapter, Mrs. Post had vigorously condemned the use of napkin rings of any description.)

"Let no one think, however, that this is a simple form of entertainment," Mrs. Post exclaims.

“Imagine the budget! A dozen guides, teams, and drivers. Natives to wash and clean. Food for two or three dozen people sent hundreds of miles by express.”

Mrs. Post admonishes:

Well-bred people never deteriorate in manner.... With the very best dissimulation at your command, you must appear to find the food delicious. You must disguise your hatred of red ants.... Though you feel starved, exhausted, mosquito-bitten until you resemble a well-developed case of chicken pox or measles, by not so much as a facial muscle must you let the family know that your comfort lacked anything that your happiest imagination could picture—nor must you confide in anyone afterwards how desperately wretched you were.

The fact that hired help and guests lived in close proximity could sometimes cause inadvertent breaches of etiquette. George Baker, the “island boy” in the summer, would arise every morning at five o’clock. He would go down to the raft which connected the mainland to the island. The raft was guided by a cable, and he would pull his way over to the island, hand over hand, the quarter-mile distance. Having reached the island, George, working very quietly so as not to disturb the sleeping guests, went about his chores in the various cabins—picking up glasses, coffee cups and ashtrays, cleaning the outhouses, setting the fireplaces, filling the woodboxes, sweeping the porches.

Working in one of the cabins one morning, George suddenly felt the need to relieve himself. There was no time to go down to the raft and pull himself back to the mainland. George was forbidden to use the toilets on the island; he was a working man, and they were for the guests. In his rush to meet an emergency he grabbed a newspaper he was about to use for starting a fire. Spreading it out on the ground beneath the front porch, he accomplished his task there. Without much forethought, George wadded up the paper and threw it out into the lake, expecting it to sink. The matter taken care of, George went about his chores.

Later in the morning, he was splitting some wood by the boathouse. He could hear McCormick, Bentley, and an Illinois senator who was visiting, doing their sitting-up exercises on the porch. Looking up, he saw they were still in their pajamas. Something white out on the lake seemed to have caught their attention.

“What’s that out there, McCormick? A piece of birch bark?” asked the guest.

“No, it’s probably a seagull. He’s always sitting out there in the morning,” came a voice.

“It looks to me like a blob of white foam formed by the waves during the night; the morning’s change of winds often takes them out,” commented a third.

“Nonsense, Bentley, it’s a seagull.”

“Well, my eyes are rather keen when it comes to distance, and it certainly looks like a piece of birch bark to me,” said the first.

“We should make a wager. Here’s fifty says it’s a seagull.”

“I’ll raise you fifty Gyms. It’s birch bark.”

“Foam.”

“Let’s get in the boat, then, and take a look at it before breakfast.” George Baker froze. As the men continued their exercises, George waited beneath the porch in terror. It seemed to him they would never go inside. As soon as they did, however, George sprang into action. He dashed furiously into the boathouse, hopped into a boat, and rowed out to the drifting paper, which still floated, bearing its ominous cargo. He whacked at it with an oar. He flailed at it repeatedly until it began to disintegrate. Years later he could still exclaim, with a frightened but relieved look, “I sunk the goldarned thing. They never found out. They never found out.”

As the years wore on, with Bentley and McCormick approaching their late sixties, their temperaments hardened and their rustic Camelot began to come apart. Bentley’s eccentric perfectionism demanded that his one hundred miles of trail be forever widened and smoothed—he wanted the trails wide enough so couples could walk through the wilderness two abreast, with the brush cut back far enough to accommodate a lady’s parasol or a man’s umbrella in the rain. The trails had to be smooth enough for a bicycle, too. Every small jagged rock or inconvenient tree root had to be cleared or flattened, and the smoothly hewn log walks across wetlands constantly upgraded. But Bentley’s miles of wilderness trail, upon which every detail demanded improvement, could somehow never make his world—even this somewhat unreal and forgiving version of the world—a masterpiece of his unrelenting vision of nature crafted and contained.

McCormick, on the other hand, became more withdrawn and contemplative. His wife died and he married his secretary, to the consternation of the international social circles in which he traveled. Then came a series of family embarrassments culminating in his brother’s well-publicized and medically avant-garde experiment with a gland transplant operation. The procedure

was intended to improve the brother's sexual prowess while he pursued a Polish opera singer. The donor was a monkey from Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo.

The wistful McCormick, contemplating human sadness and fatuity, liked to stroll short distances to favorite spots on the property and sit for hours as an observer. One day, his eyes were captured by a glacial boulder, covered with moss and sprouting oak ferns and wildflowers in its crevices. He remembered how his first wife, Harriet, liked to sit by this boulder, looking out across the lake, in the early days of the camp. It had been one of her favorite places. He decided to have the boulder moved to the family cemetery plot in Chicago as a memorial to her.

The rock weighed 24 tons. Nine bridges had to be shored up with temporary pilings as the boulder was dragged by a fleet of International Harvester supertractors down the Peshekee River grade to the town of Champion. From there, a special train hauled the boulder, now wrapped in wet burlap to preserve its delicate flora, to Chicago. The monument now rests in Graceland Cemetery, mossless, fernless, flowerless—mostly buried—and barely noticeable beneath a thicket of yews. A few hundred feet away, on an island in the middle of an artificial pond, surrounded by willows, stands a Grecian temple with the name “McCormick” inscribed on its entablature.

Bentley, having served for a quarter century as McCormick's legal adviser at work and his chief executive officer at play, used a characteristic hiking metaphor as he observed sourly, “[McCormick] is wont to follow the direction and devious paths of least resistance, which may take him one direction today and the opposite direction tomorrow.”

One day, in October 1926, the “adventure” became real. Bentley and his wife set out on the familiar trail to the Huron Mountains. They followed the usual routine of 25 years—5 AM departure, lunch at a halfway cabin, then hike across sand plains to where the rising granite knobs of the Huron Mountains surrounded inland lakes, including the three-mile-long Mountain Lake. A guide from the Huron Mountain Club would meet them toward evening at the end of the trail, then row them down Mountain Lake and accompany them for the last seven miles to the club's cabins on the Lake Superior shore.

The day began crisp and sunny—a delicious autumn morning for a walk—but by mid-afternoon a cold and driving sleet storm took them by surprise. Because of the weather, the guide, assuming the trip had been canceled, neglected to meet them at Mountain Lake. The sixty-six-year-old Bentley having already walked twenty-eight miles, had to clamber slowly across

exposed and slippery rocks around the edge of the lake, working his way the three miles to the opposite end. There he found a rowboat, and rowed back the length of the lake to pick up his drenched and exhausted wife. He then set out again, in choppy waters and against the wind, toward his destination. The October storm lashed cold spray across the bow, blowing them back toward the tossing woods. His hands were blistered, his back burned, and his body ached.

They arrived the next day around noon, in falling snow. Both took to their beds, Bentley for several weeks. The following spring, he sold his share of the partnership to McCormick and never returned to White Deer Lake. He died in 1930, but his wife survived him by two decades, returning summer after summer to the Huron Mountain Club with her children and grandchildren.

As the 1930s advanced, Cyrus McCormick's son Gordon, a Beaux Arts-trained architect, became the centrifugal force at the Rough Camp. Prohibition ended, and Gordon greeted Repeal with a whoop worthy of his Princeton classmate, F. Scott Fitzgerald.

It might be well for the Camp account to include enough stimulant for emergencies—these emergencies coming no oftener than cocktail hour every afternoon. For we must remember that it's fun to be young and hilarious and do foolish things.

Gordon hired Nestor Kallionen, a skilled craftsman who had built other log structures in the Upper Peninsula, including the graceful Granot Loma Lodge on the Lake Superior shore. Together they went to work building, from Gordon's designs, an \$80,000 boathouse and another lavish structure whose sole purpose was the storage of firewood. Central heating was installed, along with insulation and vapor barriers. Roof beams were raised, chimneys torn out and rebuilt, stories added, plumbing modernized, interiors repanelled, roofs and porches extended, and balconies moved from here to there and back again.

Fanciful bridges and rustic gazebos crowned stream crossings and scenic spots with names like "The Acropolis" and "The Crow's Nest." Curiosities included gnarled furniture, a floating tennis court, and a driving range where guests whacked golfballs out into the floodlit lake.

The "Rough Camp" now encompassed 17,125 acres that included sixteen inland lakes, many waterfalls, and miles of trout stream. A special dam constructed at one end of the lake raised and lowered its level to protect the lodges from winter ice damage. Ice was made in the winter at a

spring deep in the woods, then hauled to a special place of honor in the icehouse for guests' cocktails. To assure the preservation of large trees, lightning rods were attached to the tops, while wire skins around the base of others protected them from beaver damage (trapping and hunting were forbidden). Trails led to lakes and waterways, where boathouses sheltered light, swift Rushton rowboats that awaited the guests' pleasure. Some of the pathways around the main lake became boulevards three feet wide and level, with hewn log walks at the water's edge equipped with pole railings. The farther-flung trails, however, began to deteriorate from disuse.

As Gordon McCormick grew older, health problems diminished his enjoyment of the property, but he continued to keep the camp fully staffed. For the last twenty years of his life, he would plan visits, and word would come to the camp of his impending arrival. Supplies would be ordered, and everything made ready. Then, invariably, he would fail to appear. For the most part, the camp stood from the 1940s until the late 1960s as a sort of museum, its forests untouched, its lakes and wild rivers home to the moose and the wolf, the fisher and the martin, the lynx and the cougar long after these species had disappeared from the rest of the Upper Peninsula. When Gordon died in 1967, the U.S. Forest Service assumed control as specified in his will.

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Richard Hendricksen stepped into the huge warehouse the way a religious man might enter a cathedral, with reverence and familiarity. There were piles of lumber of every width and height, pilasters and buttresses of logs piled on the floor, stacked in racks through which dim corridors meandered. The piles started on the floor, reached belt height, then chest height, then angled away overhead as the eye moved upward, disappearing into the vast overhead expanse. The lumber was mostly pine logs and hand-hewn hardwood, but at the tops of the stacks were patrician strips of cedar shakes and finish wood. Dunnage and tarpaulins shrouded scores of doors, windows, copper flashing, and plumbing fixtures.

“Welcome,” said Hendricksen, “to the world’s largest log cabin kit.”

The double doors at the entrance to the warehouse were open, and daylight reflected off the irregular edges of the piles. In places, the contents evoked the rich mystery of a vast, silent forest at evening. In other places, the logs were laid out in a semblance of structure suggesting full height and mass, like dinosaur skeletons in a museum.

Hendricksen stepped carefully over piles of slate and loose material, peering into dark recesses to the left and right. “The Birch Cabin’s back in there, each log numbered,” he told me, and a little farther on, “That’s the upper section of the boathouse.” He walked on determinedly, in the manner of a proud man who had his own destiny in hand. “There’s the flagship of the fleet. They called it the Chimney Cabin with its double porch.”

“I stole it,” he told me. “Just like the robber barons. It was a steal. Are you writing all this down?”

I wrote it down.

The Forest Service had been pleasantly surprised and somewhat relieved by Hendricksen’s late bid. For \$50 he became the owner of all the cabins that remained, and he was given a year to remove the buildings from the island. Hendricksen, at the time, had a pickup truck, \$500 in the bank, a mountain of debt, time, and himself. He had never undertaken any construction work, either alone or with others. The task seemed to call for communal activity, a sort of family labor of love, but it was difficult to find people willing to help for little pay, for enjoyment of the activity or as a speculative venture with uncertain rewards. A few helpers appeared from time to time, occasional volunteers and one or two men who worked with him in exchange for room and board. He set up housekeeping in one of the cabins, and with advice from Emil Larsen, who had worked at the camp forty years before, he began to form in a wordless way a strategy for the disassembly. If the Forest Service demanded the structures’ removal, he was betting his life that the whole camp could be reassembled on another site as a historical curiosity.

Perched high on the roof of the first cabin, having removed its shingles, he suddenly realized he was going about everything in the wrong way. Larsen had advised him to undertake the steps of log cabin construction in reverse, so he started with the roof. He shrugged at his error after the first day of rainfall, and from then on always began with the removal of the interior finish work. For transportation, he had a canoe to carry materials to the mainland. He would return with wood to burn to keep himself warm at night. Above all, he wanted to disturb the island’s fragile woods as little as possible.

He thought of dragging the logs behind horses across the frozen lake in winter but the road to the camp, rutted and washed out in summer, was impassable in winter, and some of the logs were fifty feet long, weighing seven to eight hundred pounds each. Animal husbandry in subfreezing temperatures had little practical appeal. He began to talk to the cabins occasionally, imploring

them to give him advice, and then began to worry about himself for doing so.

He devised a plank raft that rested on eight fifty-five-gallon oil drums he found abandoned behind a shopping center. He locate some steel cable and extended it between trees on the island and mainland. Now he could hand-over-hand his cargo on the raft.

Next, he borrowed a chain binder hoist, the kind used to lift engines out of automobiles. With one end of the cable wrapped around the chimney of the lodge, and the other secured to a large white pine, he was able to lower a snatch block attached to pulleys to lift and ease the logs down from the upper stories of the buildings. As he gained experience, he began to develop an intuitive sense of levers and fulcrums, blocks and pulleys, those ageless mechanical devices in use since the construction of the pyramids.

A friend told me, “We didn’t think at that point he’d ever finish, because everyone was telling him the job was too big for one person. At first he seemed to agree. He’d say, ‘So I get the stuff off of the island and I find a place to put it, what then? Maybe I’m not smart enough to put it all back together, with basements and foundations and financing.’ Then, as weeks went by, the more he’d agree with us that it was impossible, the more we’d try to encourage him. That’s how he finally got some financial backing and credit and credibility. We formed a committee to help him out—as much for his sake as for the buildings. He’d be going over to the island day after day and there would be nobody there, nothing but trees and cabins and his equipment strewn around where he’d left it.

The more Hendricksen concentrated on his task, the less concerned he became about its ultimate result. He began to admire the artistry of the cabins’ designs. The Canadian style, or V-notch, marked the construction of the earliest, simple buildings. The more sophisticated saddle notch, a scribed technique of assembly was used during the 1920s. The chinking between the logs was secured with galvanized iron wire mesh screening and six penny nails that held together a mixture of pulp plaster, cement, and lime putty. When Hendricksen tried to pry the logs apart, the chinking would stick to them in great dangling globs. A third phase of construction, the Norwegian chinkless notch, was the legacy of the great Nestor Kallionen. The complexity of design, considering that many of the early builders could barely read or write, absorbed him. Each building, with its logic of curves and notches, lines and stresses, seemed as abstract and beautiful as a musical score, involving him in a chorus of calculations in which each theoretical measure led to the next in a work at once simple in theory yet intricate in execution.

Hendricksen told me stories of his hardships as if he had fought a war. Once, while standing on a ladder holding one end of a larger log on his shoulder, the other rotten end suddenly tore loose from the building. The crash and roll as the log tumbled down flipped him off the ladder, and the bouncing log, skipping over his head as he landed on the ground, missed by inches two opportunities to crush his skull.

He did not work with a peavey, the lumberman's legendary metal-tipped pike used for sorting logs, for fear of damaging the intricate carving that was part of the interior detail of the cabins. All his calculations and actions were expressed in multiples: one man, two hands, one point of support, step by step, over and over. In the process, he felt he was being afforded a glimpse of a tantalizingly different way of living in the world, a new means of achieving personal authority. He did not miss the crushing feeling that had accompanied his divorce, the waking up each morning with a heaviness in the gut. Defiance mingled with pleasure as he pursued his solitary enterprise, just as builders often find in the hands-on construction process a rediscovery of creative resourcefulness. But he found deconstruction a psychological as well as a physical challenge. Would the nature and loneliness of the work spur a different kind of inner disorientation and disassembly?

He had taken to sleeping outdoors on a rusty iron bed. One morning he awoke to find himself covered with several inches of snow. Suddenly, he heard a loud scream. Realizing that the screaming was his own voice, and that he was stretching backwards from sleeping on his stomach, chest up, and arms extended, he fought to face his terror. It was not necessarily a dream in which he had heard voices crying over and over, "Spirits are here." Or it did not seem so.

Hendricksen rushed, barefoot through the snow, to the edge of the lake. He splashed water on his face, trying to force the power of the perception from his mind, something which had seemed to involve a triangular relationship between his quiet and solitary island, the still graves of those who had once been there, and an ineffable, cosmic third force.

Although shocked, he convinced himself that the episode was normal woods-craziness. It took most of the morning to force the voices and the memory back into the distant forest. Around noon, with melting snow dripping from eaves and branches, the Spirits-are-here became less insistent, almost friendly, and no more threatening than the small breaths of waves lapping at the shore. A few days later, he hired someone who would help him lift occasional lumber, but whose main reason for being there was that Hendricksen wanted someone to keep an eye on Hen-

dricksen.

The Forest Service extended its deadline, and by the spring of 1986 he could see that the work would be completed. Two more buildings remained, but he had developed a rhythm and routine that was purposeful and pleasurable. He felt that the months spent on the island were the achievement of his life up to that time, the most demanding and unheralded work he had ever done. For the final transportation of logs to the warehouse, he was able to interest members of a fraternity at Northern Michigan University and two young men from the town of Champion with logging trucks.

In August, Hendricksen returned to the island for the last load of small items. It was raining, and he stood by the lake for an hour or more watching a family of great blue heron as it settled in to succeed him.

A month later, the Forest Service burned the last remaining scraps of lumber, in accordance with its legislative mandate to keep its forests “forever wild.” The fire spread, engulfing portions of the island woods and giant pines that Hendricksen and his predecessors had worked for years to protect.

The decision of the Forest Service to burn the camp, while deplorable, was not without precedent. The Catskill Mountain House in New York State, famed in the paintings of Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, and other Hudson River school artists, was acquired by New York in 1962 and burned the next year. A similar retreat, the Laurel House, featured a two-story Greek portico facing the Hudson River with architectural elaborations carried out in various styles through later periods. The Department of “Conservation” burned it in 1967. In the 1970s fires set by government agencies leveled such historic establishments as the Seward Webb estate in the Adirondacks and Foxlair, a wilderness retreat owned by Richard Hudnut. In recent years, historic preservations have tried to save the great camps and grand hotels from excessively literal interpretations by authorities of “forever wild” provisions in wilderness legislation. Santanoni, a camp at the headwaters of the Hudson River, was explicitly excluded from “forever wild” restrictions by intensive lobbying, but under state ownership remains unused and boarded up. When Sagamore, an Adirondack camp, came on the market in 1975, the New York Preservation League managed to rescue some of its 29 buildings and lodges, and they now house the Sagamore Institute, a museum and conference center that operates programs to underscore the role of the great camps in creating and sustaining an indigenous regional culture. Camp Pine

Knot, also in the Adirondacks, is operated by the State University of New York as an environmental education center.

Some of the camps have been maintained in private hands, although with less elevated uses than environmental education. Camp Echo has been subdivided for vacationers and condominium time-sharers, while William Avery Rockefeller's Camp Wonundra serves what's left of the carriage trade at \$1,000 per night.

The future of McCormick's "rough camp" may ultimately be best served by nonprofit ownership for historic and educational purposes. There is some support for reassembling it on the waterfront in the nearby city of Marquette for mixed commercial and educational uses, along the lines of Boston's Faneuil Hall and historic waterfront projects in other cities. Marquette's scenic coastline offers an unusual opportunity for the city under Michigan's 1988 Harbor Development Act, but Marquette's master plan has designated the only available waterfront parcel as a parking lot. "I love the McCormick cabins," says Marquette mayor Robert Berube, "but not there. They are an important part of Marquette and the county. The cabins would be a wonderful asset at the Dead River Tourist Park."

Howard Kirschenbaum director of the Sagamore Institute, would welcome the buildings to upper New York, where they could find a home near their Adirondack cousins. He cites the widespread renaissance of great-camp architecture. Several resorts and private residences have recently been built incorporating variations of the elegant motifs, and the town of Hague will build its new municipal offices in great-camp style. The form-follows-function design, with exposed beams and structural elements, is appealing to modern architects. Indeed, the great French modernist, LeCorbusier, whose glass, steel, and concrete creations attempted to define a modern building as a "machine for living," actually preferred, for himself, a rustic American-style log cabin, which he erected in the south of France and where he spent the last twenty years of his life.

Hendricksen himself, while unsure of the best possible reuse for the buildings, is unable to bide his time.

His lease for the warehouse space will expire in a few months. The logs will have to be moved again, in their search for a new site—a terrestrial version of the legendary ship, the Flying Dutchman, ever searching for a home port.

"I won't give up," says Hendricksen. "I'll move this camp wherever it has to go. It's mine."

It's part of me. It's more than me.”

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