

Early Boy Scout Camps at Garvies Point, Glen Cove, NY (1915-1920)

Two Boy Scout camps operated at “Appleby’s Grove” (aka “Appleby’s Woods,” now the Garvies Point Museum and Preserve, in Glen Cove, New York) in the early 20th Century. The earliest, started in 1915, was known as “Camp Coogan,” and served boys from New York City. The second, called “Camp Gra-Mor,” was constructed by Boy Scouts from Glen Cove in 1919.

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Camping has been an integral part of Boy Scout activities since the inception of the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. Period luminaries like Theodore Roosevelt and Daniel Carter Beard promoted the importance of outdoor activity for a healthy lifestyle, and “roughing it” was and is a valuable tool in teaching youth self-reliance and confidence. It was also recognized as an excellent method of inculcating a respect for nature in America’s youth.

To fulfill the needs of Scouts for a site on which to camp, at least two different camps were established in Glen Cove. Both camps were located inside an area called “Appleby’s Grove,” a large wooded parcel of in what is today the Garvies Point Museum and Preserve. The earliest of the two camps, established in 1915, served a troop of Boy Scouts from the Hell’s Kitchen area of Manhattan. It is possible this camp also served other scout units, as information on its activities is scant. The second camp, constructed in 1919, served both Boy Scouts from Glen Cove as well as the Hell’s Kitchen troop.

Appleby’s Grove – also known as “Appleby’s Woods” – was part of the sprawling waterfront estate owned by Charles Edgar Appleby, one of Glen Cove’s early “Gold Coast” millionaires. Although he had trained as an attorney, Appleby had made his fortune as a real estate speculator. He purchased a sizeable tract of land south of the Glen Cove steamboat landing (which was located at the western terminus of Landing Road) on a high bluff overlooking Hempstead Harbor. The bulk of the estate was located between modern-day McLoughlin Street and Garvies Point Road, with Appleby’s summer mansion be-

ing located near (or, apparently, under) McLoughlin Street.

It is clear that “Appleby’s Grove” was used as a camping ground prior to the establishment of the Boy Scouts of America. In 1906, a 12 year old boy named Edward Airey was accidentally shot to death with a rifle by a 14 year old boy named Hugh May “at a camp in Appleby Woods.” The article mentions “the other members went on a cruise yesterday and left May in charge of the camp” but fails to identify what group or organization the “other members” represented. (NY Times 1906) The article notes that both boys were residents of Manhattan’s infamous Hells’ Kitchen area... an area dominated by overcrowded decaying tenements packed with impoverished families. It was an extremely violent area, controlled by gangsters and racketeers of the basest order. American journalist Herbert Asbury called Hell’s Kitchen “most dangerous area on the American Continent,” and did so without exaggeration. Regretfully, none of the Glen Cove newspapers of that era have survived to provide additional information on the use of Appleby’s Grove as a campground during this early era.

“Camp Coogan”

To date, the earliest reference found to Boy Scouts using Garvies Point as a camp ground dates from July 1911 – a mere year after Scouting was organized in the United States – when 32 boys from Troop 2, Mount Vernon, NY spent a week camping there. The Scoutmaster was Rev. Harry Baettis of the Chester Hill Methodist Episcopal Church., (NY Times, 1911)

In July, 1915, a troop of Boy Scouts affiliated with the Holy Cross Church, under Scout Master Rev. John J Coogan, journeyed to Glen Cove to spend a month camping under the trees of Appleby's Grove "through the kindness of Mr Appleby". In addition to Scout Master Coogan, an assistant Scout Master, and 35 out of 40 boys enrolled in the troop, they brought with them a trained nurse and a matron. (GC Echo 1915)

Coogan was described by the New York Times as "the first Catholic priest in the United States to receive the commission of scout-master in the Boy Scouts." (NY Times 1924). After attending St Francis Xavier College, St Charles College, and St Joseph's Seminary, Coogan had been ordained a priest in 1905. He served as Chaplain of the New York Catholic Protectorate, then served at the Church of the Annunciation and St Jerome's Parish before being transferred to Holy Cross Church on 42nd Street, in the heart of Hell's Kitchen. There he served as assistant to Father Francis Patrick Duffy, the famed priest who had served as chaplain to the Fighting 69th Regiment during World War One and who, as pastor of Holy Cross Church, was fighting the poverty of Hell's Kitchen. Coogan also served as Roman Catholic Chaplain for the New York City Police Department.

The Glen Cove camp was (at least informally) referred to as "Camp Coogan," a name which even appears on a period postcard of the camp area (see Figure 1, below). To date no description of the physical camp and its layout has been uncov-

ered. Newspaper reports state that "the boys were provided with a launch, and have been taught to familiarize themselves with seamanship. They also have a fife and drum corps. The boys are from 12 to 15 years of age and every boy in the troop could swim. Regular orders were carried out every day in military style. Field mass was held every morning in the camp." (GC Echo, 1915) They broke camp and returned to Manhattan about the 21st of August. The Glen Cove newspapers make no mention of Coogan's troop returning to camp at Glen Cove during of summers of 1916, 1917 or 1918. While it is possible that the local press simply ignored mentioning the camp, major events may simply have prevented the return of the Scouts. A major epidemic of poliomyelitis ("infantile paralysis") was sweeping the New York City area during the summer of 1916. It was not uncommon during that July to find newspapers reporting more than 100 new cases of polio each day in New York City. At its peak, the disease killed 39 people a day. The mechanism by which polio was transmitted was still poorly understood; public health authorities urged parents to avoid allowing their children to congregate together in large groups. (NY Times 1916). The Town of Oyster Bay (of which Glen Cove was still a part) passed a series of draconian measures in an attempt to stem the epidemic. One law – similar to laws enacted by many communities to prevent New York City from shipping thousands of possibly contagious children into the countryside - prohibited anyone under the age of 16 from entering the town of Oyster



A circa 1915-1920 postcard showing three boys at "Camp Coogan" standing on the bluff at Garvies Point overlooking Hempstead Harbor. The Glen Cove Breakwater, located at the western end of Landing Road, is seen towards the horizon. (Courtesy of the Glen Cove Public Library Robert R Coles Long Island History Room, Warren Griffen Collection)

Bay without a written health certificate from New York City health officials.

The summers of 1917 and 1918 appear to have been similarly inauspicious for Coogan and his boys to return to Glen Cove for a month of camping. As the United States entered World War One, the Boy Scout movement across the nation concentrated its activities on supporting the war effort, especially devoting great energy to selling war bonds and war savings stamps.

“Camp Gra-Mor”

With the end of the war, regional scouting units were able to return to some semblance of normalcy. By the summer of 1919, the scouts could turn their thoughts from raising funds for the Liberty Loan to camping. Permission was secured to build a camp in Appleby’s Grove for the use of the Glen Cove scout troops. It was decided that the camp should have more than merely tent sites in the woods for the boys, and a dining hall, kitchen and store-room were designed into the construction.

The camp was constructed by the boys themselves. The primary “build team” of Scouts who worked full time on construction of the camp buildings consisted of Joseph Reynolds, Joseph Stanco, Fred Miller, Augustus Wheeler, P. Taylor, Robert Borum, Fred Sandfort, and John Czick, with numerous other Scouts assisting in their spare time. (GC Echo 1919a)

By the second week of July, the Glen Cove Echo could report that

The Scouts have finished building their camp at Appleby’s Woods and are now ready to enjoy the fruits of their labor... The camp site is a beautiful one and the boys who have seen it are all enthusiastic about starting the camp. The entire work has been done by the Scouts themselves who have labored diligently during the past week. The kitchen, store room and dining room are all completed and four tents are ready to receive visitors. (GC Echo 1919a)

Boys would be allowed to camp out at the new camp whenever they wanted during their summer vacation. Boys who had full-time summer jobs – which was not uncommon in that era – could stay overnight at the camp during their weekends off.

The newly constructed camp was officially dedicated at 2:30 on the afternoon of Sunday, 13 July 1919. (GC Echo, 1919a). It was christened “Camp Gra-Mor.” (Local attorney Robert P. Lynch wrote in to answer on the meaning of Camp Gra-Mor’s name: “No great mystery there at all. The words gra mor are Irish Gaelic and mean ‘Great Love’. ‘Gra’ is the Irish word for ‘love’, and ‘mor’ is the word for ‘great.’”)

“The band played, the flag was raised, speeches were in order and the Scouts defeated the [Boy Scout] Council in a game of baseball.” (GC Echo 1919b) [At the time, all of the

Boy Scout troops within the City of Glen Cove were administered by a Glen Cove Scout Council. Within a few years, however, administration of the troops would be transferred to a county-wide Council, and eventually the county-wide organization would be broken up into district councils.] There was also a drum and bugle competition among the scouts, with Fred Miller winning the drum competition and Duane Wagnell winning the bugle competition.

The editor of the Glen Cove Echo observed that “everything is arranged for the comfort of the boys.” Tents and cots were provided to the boys free of charge, although boys overnighing at the camp had to provide their own blankets. While the boys were permitted to bring their own provisions and cook them over an open fire in true Boy Scout style, the camp also provided a camp cook to prepare meals for any of the scouts who desired it. Prepared meals were offered at cost; breakfast cost 15¢, lunch 20¢, and dinner 25¢.

The camp was offered at no cost to the boys, except for whatever meals they purchased while at camp. In addition to serving as a tradition summer camp for the scouts, it was planned that the new camp would also serve as a “summer headquarters for Troop meetings”. During the remainder of the summer of 1919, all of the Glen Cove troops gathered together every Wednesday night at 8 p.m. at Camp Gra-Mor for a mass meeting followed by a “special entertainment at the camp fire.” (GC Echo, 1919b)

While the boys who attended camp were allowed to come and go as they pleased, the daily life at camp was fairly structured. A typical day’s schedule would be as follows:

7:00 a.m.	Reveille
7:15 a.m.	Exercise and Morning Dip
7:30 a.m.	Breakfast
8:15 a.m.	Camp Inspection
8:30 a.m.	Assembly – Fatigue
9:30 a.m.	Recall – Scout Activities - Recreation
11:00 a.m.	Swim
12 noon	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Rest Period
2:00 p.m.	Instruction
2:30 p.m.	Games
4:00 p.m.	Swim
6:00 p.m.	Dinner
7:00 p.m.	Free Play
8:30 p.m.	Campfire Entertainment
9:45 p.m.	Tattoo - Quarters
10:00 p.m.	Taps – Lights Out

Rev. Coogan and his troop did return to camp again at Appleby’s Grove in 1920. By that year, the Hell’s Kitchen troop had burgeoned, and he was able to bring 75 scouts to Glen Cove to camp for a month. The Glen Cove Echo reported that

the scouts “are living in true Boy Scout style and they tell us they are having the time of their lives” (GC Echo, 1920a) For boys who only knew the squalor of New York City’s tenements, a summer in the clean air and sunshine of Glen Cove must have been a memorable experience. They were not the only New York City troop to use Appleby’s Grove for a summer camp; in August 1920, Boy Scouts from Troops 73A and 73B from Our Lady of Victory Church on Throop Avenue in Brooklyn were encamped at Camp Gra-Mor. Their Scout Master was James A

Lamb.

Rev. Coogan died suddenly in August, 1924 after being hospitalized for a few days with “abdominal trouble” (GC Echo, 1924) As the Roman Catholic Chaplain of the New York City Police Department, Coogan was accorded a Police Inspector’s funeral. More than 5,000 spectators crowded the streets to glimpse his funeral procession, which was escorted by 400 New York City Mounted Police and 400 foot patrolmen. Father Duffy delivered his eulogy.

It is not known when “Camp Coogan” and “Camp Gra-Mor” ceased operating. Research is continuing on the use of Appleby’s Grove as a summer camp.

Bibliography

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GC Echo 1919a	Scout Camp Finished Glen Cove Echo, 12 July 1919	NY Times 1906	Boy Killed Playmate New York Times, 17 July 1906
GC Echo 1919b	Formally Dedicated – Camp Gra-Mor Goes Into Commission Glen Cove Echo, 19 July 1919	NY Times 1911	Glen Cove New York Times, 23 July 1911
GC Echo 1920a	Seventy Five Boy Scouts in Camp Near Landing Glen Cove Echo, 24 July 1920	NY Times 1916	39 Die of Paralysis; Highest Day’s Toll New York Times, 23 July 1916
GC Echo 1920b	Boy Scouts Find Glen Cove an Ideal Camp Ground Glen Cove Echo, 21 August 1920	NY Times 1924	400 Police Cavalry in Coogan Cortege New York Times 30 August 1924

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