

# Camp Meenahga

(Compiled by Ann Thorp)

It seems an extraordinary undertaking for two women with small children to have established a girl's camp in the remote wilderness of the new Peninsula State Park in 1916. The girls, the camp itself, the park and the village of Fish Creek went through many changes in the next thirty-two years. From bloomers and braids to shorts and short curls, the campers spent their summers in the sun and the water, taking canoe trips, learning archery and horsemanship, putting on pageants and plays. The park acquired good roads for the burgeoning number of automobiles. The village became electrified, horse-and-wagon rigs disappeared, and tourists came in ever-increasing crowds to fish, shop and eat.

But in the beginning the setting was primitive, and the task of organizing a camp required perseverance and hard work. The memoirs of the camp's founders reflect their dedication and their love for the camp and campers.

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## Camp Meenahga 1916 - 1948

*The girls' camp in Peninsula State Park was founded and managed by Mrs. Alice Orr Clark and Mrs. Fannie Woodward Mabley, both of St. Louis, Missouri.*

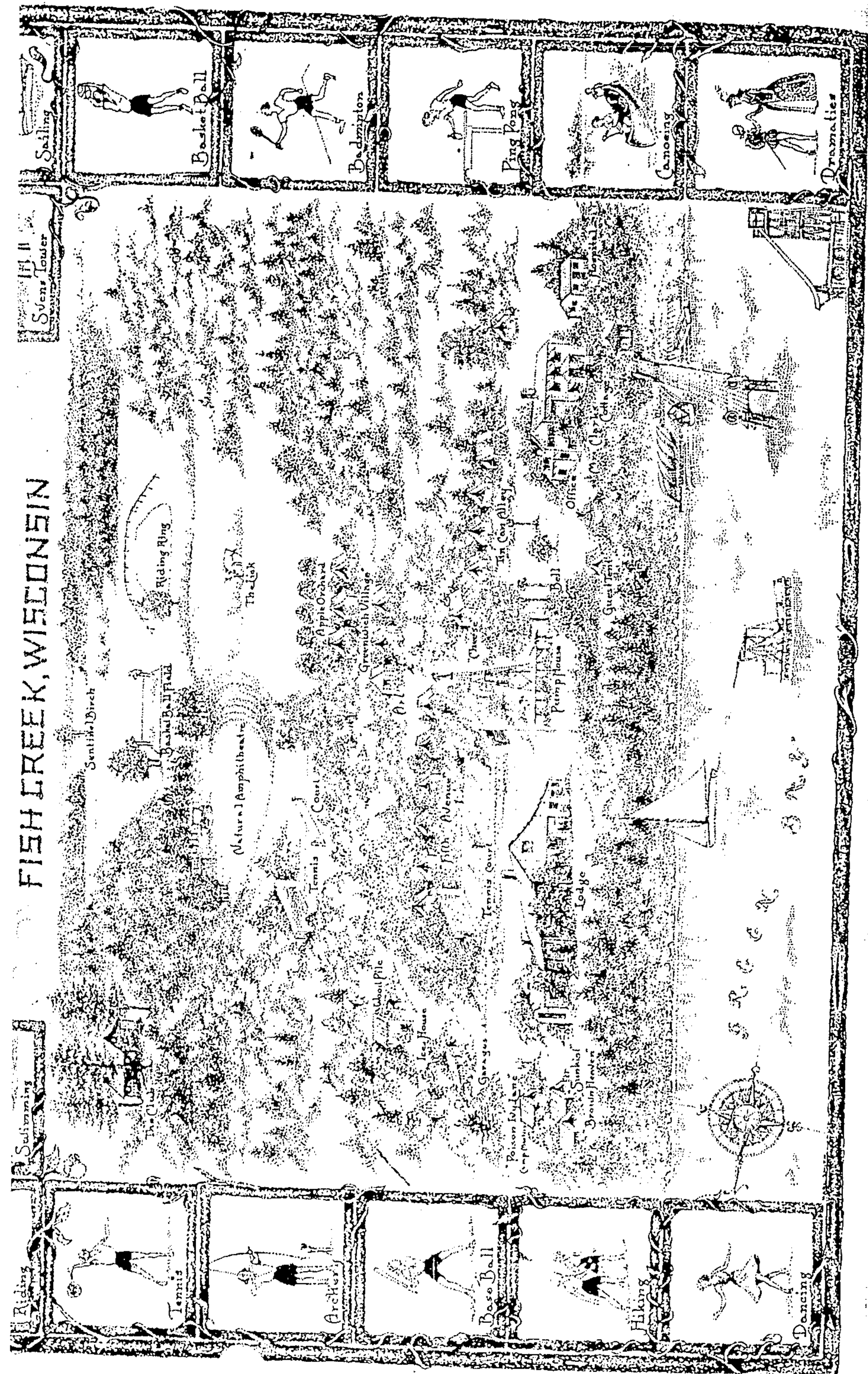
*The following history is excerpted from an address presented by Mrs. Alice Clark Peddle, daughter of Alice Orr Clark, at a 1976 meeting of the Door County Historical Society.*

**J**une of 1916 I set foot for the first time in Door County, Wisconsin. From the top of the Fish Creek hill I saw the lovely harbor, its big wooden dock and boat house, and the dear little village of Fish Creek of less than 200 souls. The Peninsula State Park was then but a few years in existence. About two miles north of Fish Creek, on the shore road was the location, in this wild and wonderful park, I was to know best. It faced west, the sunset side where the Wisconsin and Upper

Peninsula of Michigan border line was the background of the always changing, always beautiful sunsets. Chambers Island and the Strawberry Islands were clearly seen from our deck, our Lookout, our porch. This was to be my summer home for thirty-five years. It was named Camp Meenahga and was a summer camp for girls.

My mother, Alice Orr Clark, and Mrs. Fannie Woodward Mabley were the founders of Camp Meenahga. Both widows with young children, they had joined forces

FISH CREEK, WISCONSIN



in a gargantuan undertaking - a summer camp for girls.

Though it hardly seems possible now, Camp Meenahga was established in the park on the invitation of the State of Wisconsin.....No rent was paid in 1916. Later on a minimal rent was asked, then a more substantial amount with leases arranged.....

Now you may be interested in just how we came to be in the park.....It was through friends of my mother's family, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Crunden of St. Louis, who also had a house on Cottage Row in Fish Creek. I quote from my mother's notebook dated June 26, 1947:

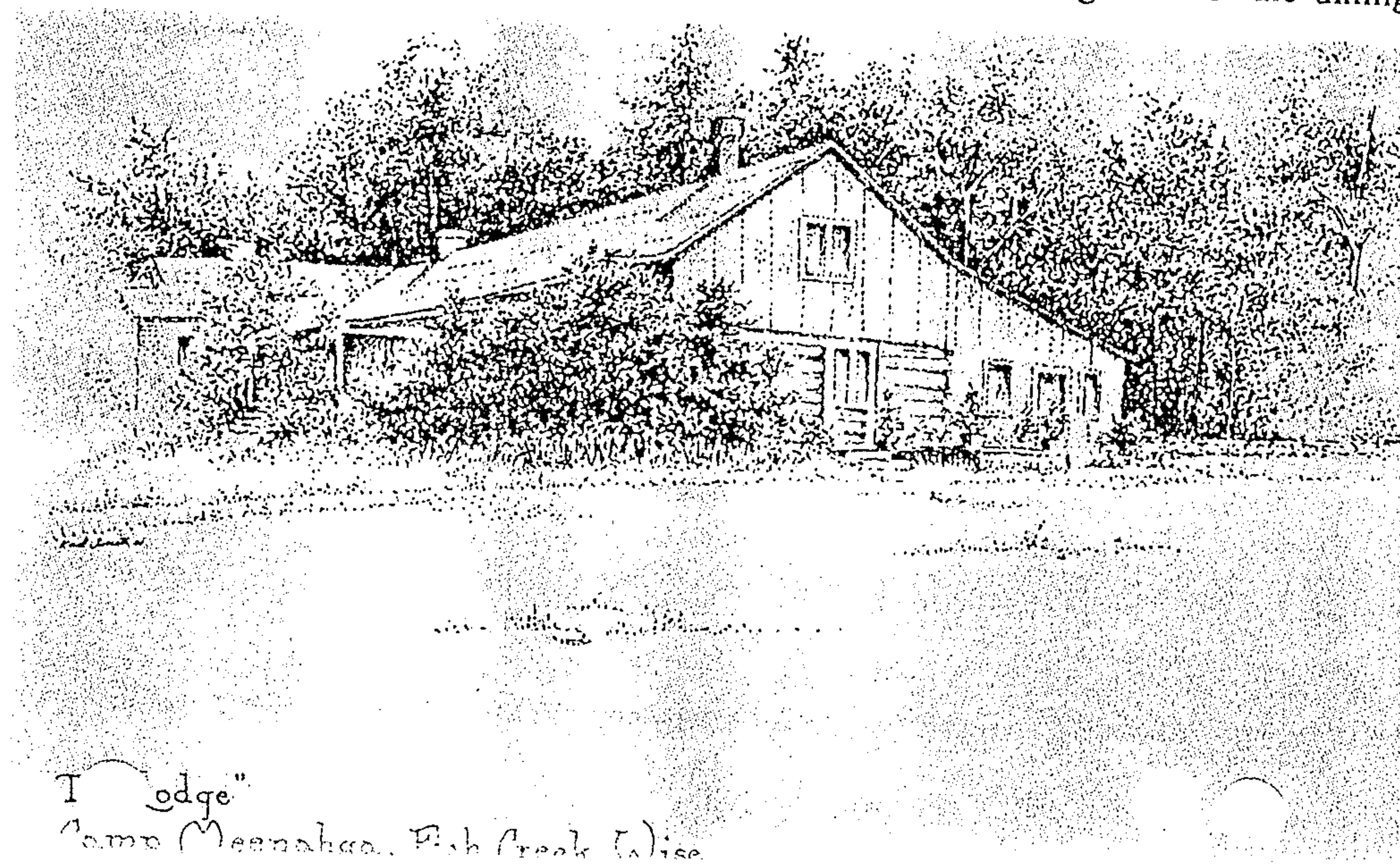
"In 1916 I conceived the idea of a girls' camp.....It came to me there was so much I didn't know. Who did know for instance about food? Fannie Woodward Mabley came to mind. She was then head of the cafeteria at McKinley High School.....When I told her that I was going to start a girls' camp imagine how surprised I was when she said, "How did you know that I was trying to get into a camp?"

From then on we had a marvelous time....everything was fun. We ordered things from Sears-Roebuck from kerosene stoves to small granite potties ... when we unpacked at camp we found the potties were baby size ... we never stopped laughing over

those!"

Mrs. Crunden, upon hearing that Sawyer, Wisconsin had been the location considered for this camp, had other ideas. From Mother's notebook: "She wanted me to look into the possibilities of a place in the Peninsula State Park, and said she and Mr. Crunden wanted me to go to Fish Creek, see Mr. Doolittle, Park Superintendent, which I did the very last of April.....Mr. Doolittle was a man of vision and immediately saw that having a girls' camp in the park would be an advantage. It remained for Mr. Doolittle to put it up to Mr. Moody who was head of the Wisconsin State Park Commission. Mr. Moody was very enthusiastic so everything went smoothly... In making the trip to talk to Mr. Doolittle I found that Mrs. Crunden had oiled all the wheels. She gave me money for the (train) ticket, wrote to a Mr. Vorous to meet me at the station in Sturgeon Bay to take me to Thorp's Hotel in Fish Creek, Mr. Doolittle to meet me there, and Mr. Vorous to drive us any place we wanted to go. Mrs. Thorp of the hotel was kindness itself....Mr. Doolittle, Mrs. Thorp and myself were driven over the park for two days. (I) would always say, 'Let's go back to the Evenson place.'

"That old farm seemed to have everything I could imagine a camp would need. A huge threshing barn for the dining



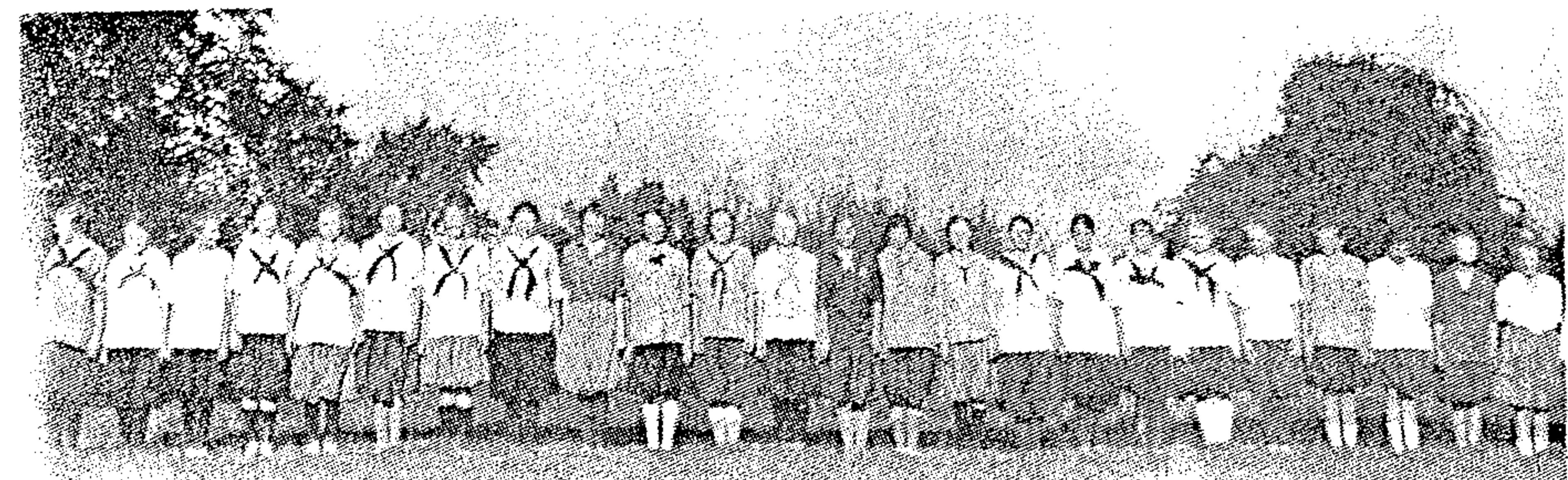
"Lodge"  
Camp Meenahga, Fish Creek, Wis.



Alice Orr Clark  
Director of Camp Meenahga

recreation hall, with cow sheds, wood shed all connected to the ss the lawn was the farm cottage, ned adequate for the living quar- two families, except for the camp would live in tents. Also there was an office, a nice sitting room and rooms upstairs, the smallest bed- er imagined."  
he Clark and Mabley families 1 in number, three Mabley daugh- rother and myself... In 1916 the no transportation of any kind. We he tradesmen to make deliveries, w family to drive their horse and

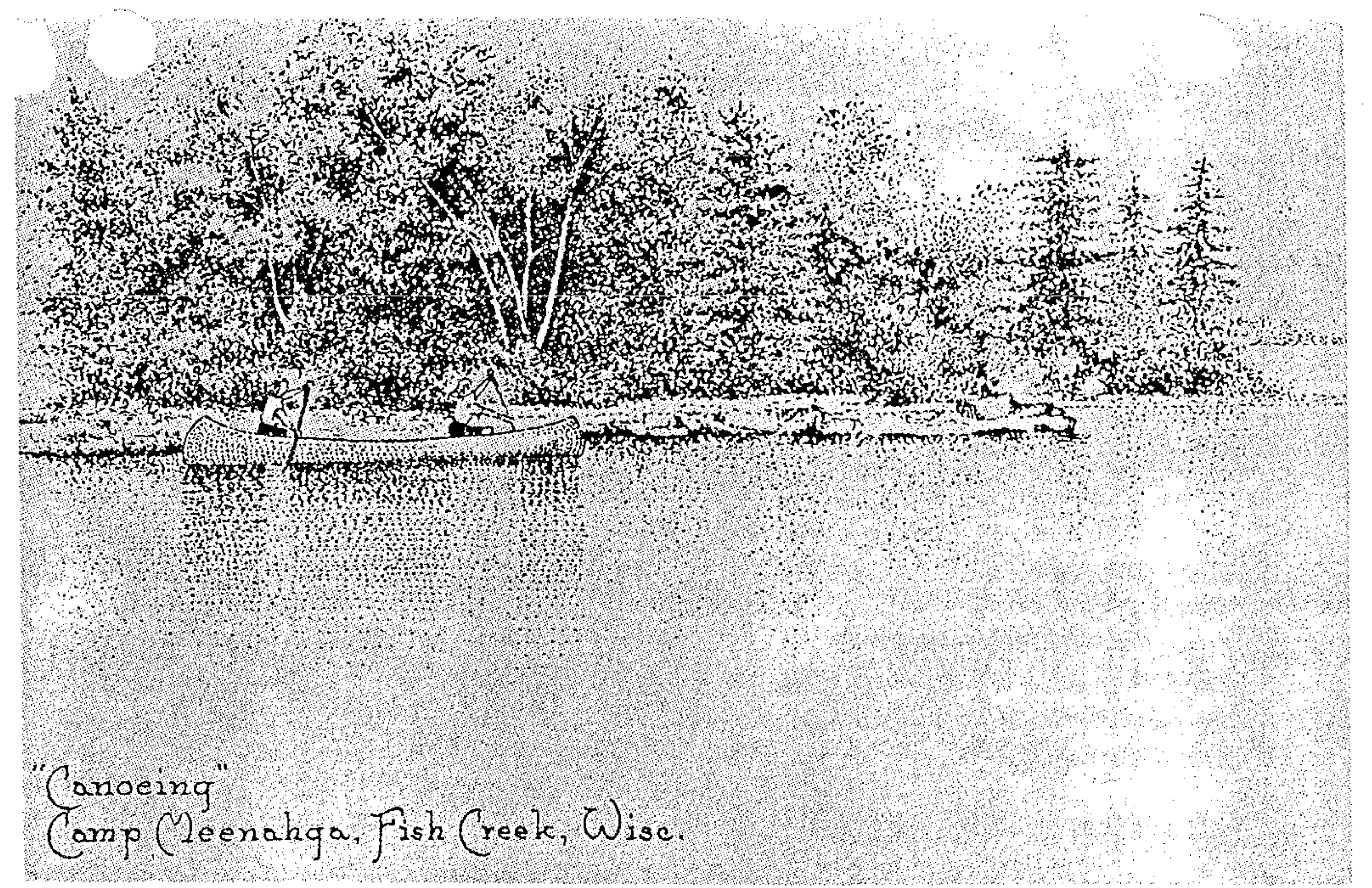
of Camp Meenahga in 1916 on the grounds between the Lodge and the cottage with Green e background. The girls are wearing Middies (Middie Blouses) & Ties & Bloomers with Stockings. Some girls rolled their stockings down - very daring of them.



wagon to the kitchen door to obtain fresh vegetables and fruit. The mail was brought to us by kind souls, or some of us would walk over two miles to Fish Creek with nary a passing car picking us up - for no car passed...

From where did the camp name come? "Meenahga, the blueberry, and the wild rice, the Menominee" - straight from Longfellow's Hiawatha. Having first selected Sawyer as the camp site, it was learned that blueberries abounded there, so Meenahga seemed appropriate. Then too, Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Mabley had quite recklessly gone ahead and purchased lots and lots of dishes from a perhaps defunct Lake Michigan shipping line, and it was all decorated with the letter "M". Thus Meenahga it was, to accommodate the initial on the china and the blueberries at Sawyer.... I must not leave out Folda's Island. You know this now as Horseshoe Island, across from Ephraim. Many summers during the 1920's the whole of Camp Meenahga, girls, counselors, every- one, would be invited for an afternoon at the Island. We would line up at the Anderson dock and be taken across the bay in small groups, the son and daughter of the Folda's often aboard, Mr. Folda or Jepson, his skipper, at the helm. We would on arrival explore the two attractive houses and Mr. Folda would tell us about the days this region was inhabited by Indians, show us prehistoric pottery and petrified wood, and the many curios the Folda's had collected on their foreign travels. They were dear gentle people from Omaha, Nebraska and so generous in sharing the beauty of their Island with others....

To close this recounting of yesteryear, I will read the announcement my



"Canoeing"  
Camp Meenahga, Fish Creek, Wise.

mother sent out upon her retirement in 1948:

"Dear Meenahga Girls All, from 1916 through 1948:

There is always a beginning and by that same token there must be an ending. So after thirty-three years of running Meenahga, many of them with my dear friend Mrs. F.W. Mabley as my partner, I feel that it is time to close and have our camp a very happy memory.

"I hope all the girls and counselors who have passed through its paths and forests will look back and feel, as do I, that Camp Meenahga has given them a wealth of joy, growth and progress. I am sure that no one woman has gleaned as much solid satisfaction and happiness as I have. Each girl in the many years has given me more than she knows.

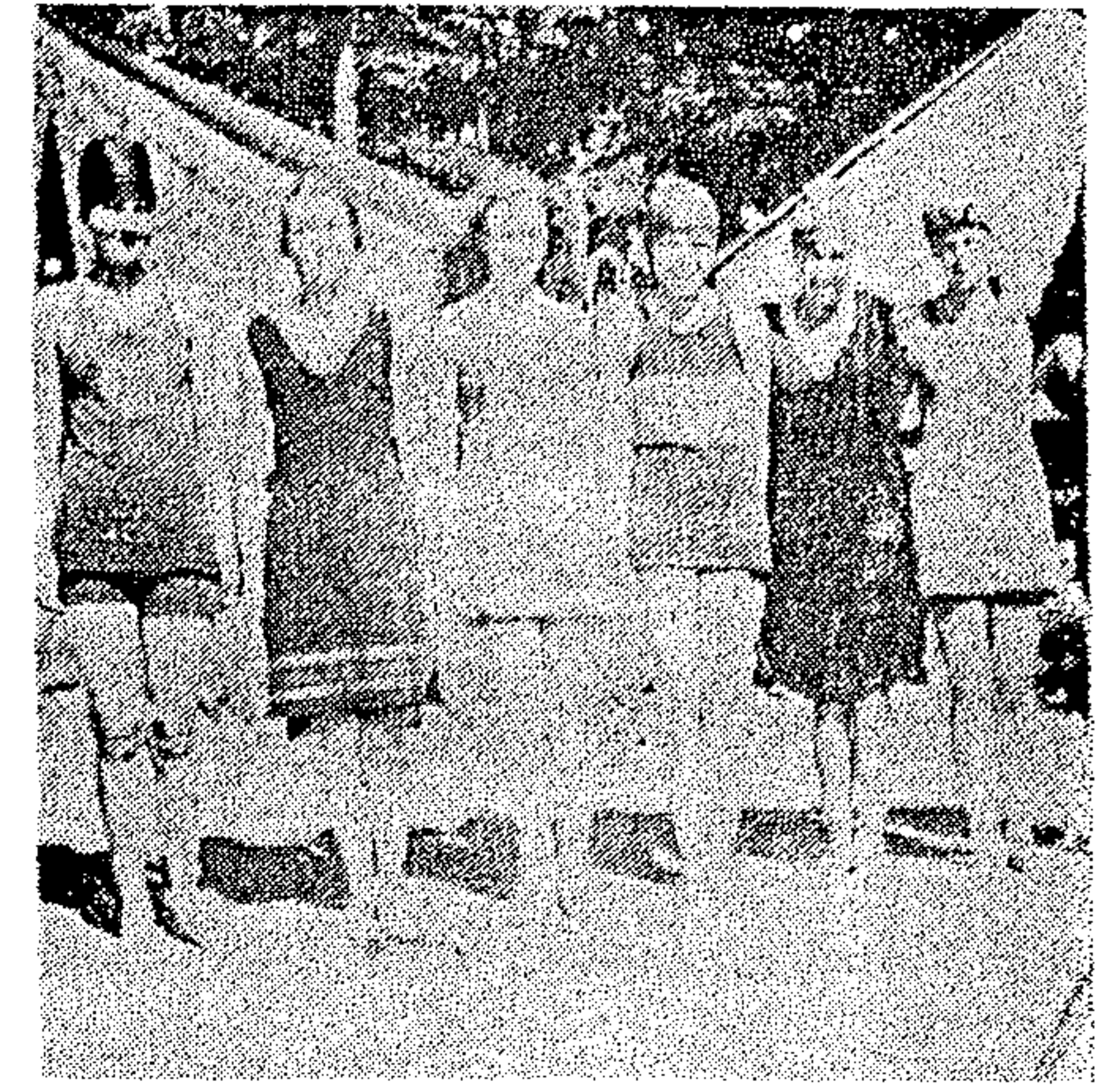
"Thanks to you all from the very first Meenahga-ite in 1916 to the very last one in 1948. My love and undying interest follows each one.... Yours in happy days, Alice Orr Clark."

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Mrs. Elaine Mabley Schramm, daughter of Fannie Mabley, wrote these memories in 1976.

ine today, when the resorts of this area have acquired a high degree of sophistication since those beginning years of Camp Meenahga. I remember well the first trip over the rough little primitive road from Fish Creek to the chosen camp site, a park road full of holes and bumps which literally clicked our teeth and made us hold on. The first thing the Clark and Mabley families did was to explore the grounds, and with squeals of joy we fell to picking wild strawberries, "oh-ing" and "Ah-ing" over their sweetness.

Campers ready for swimming



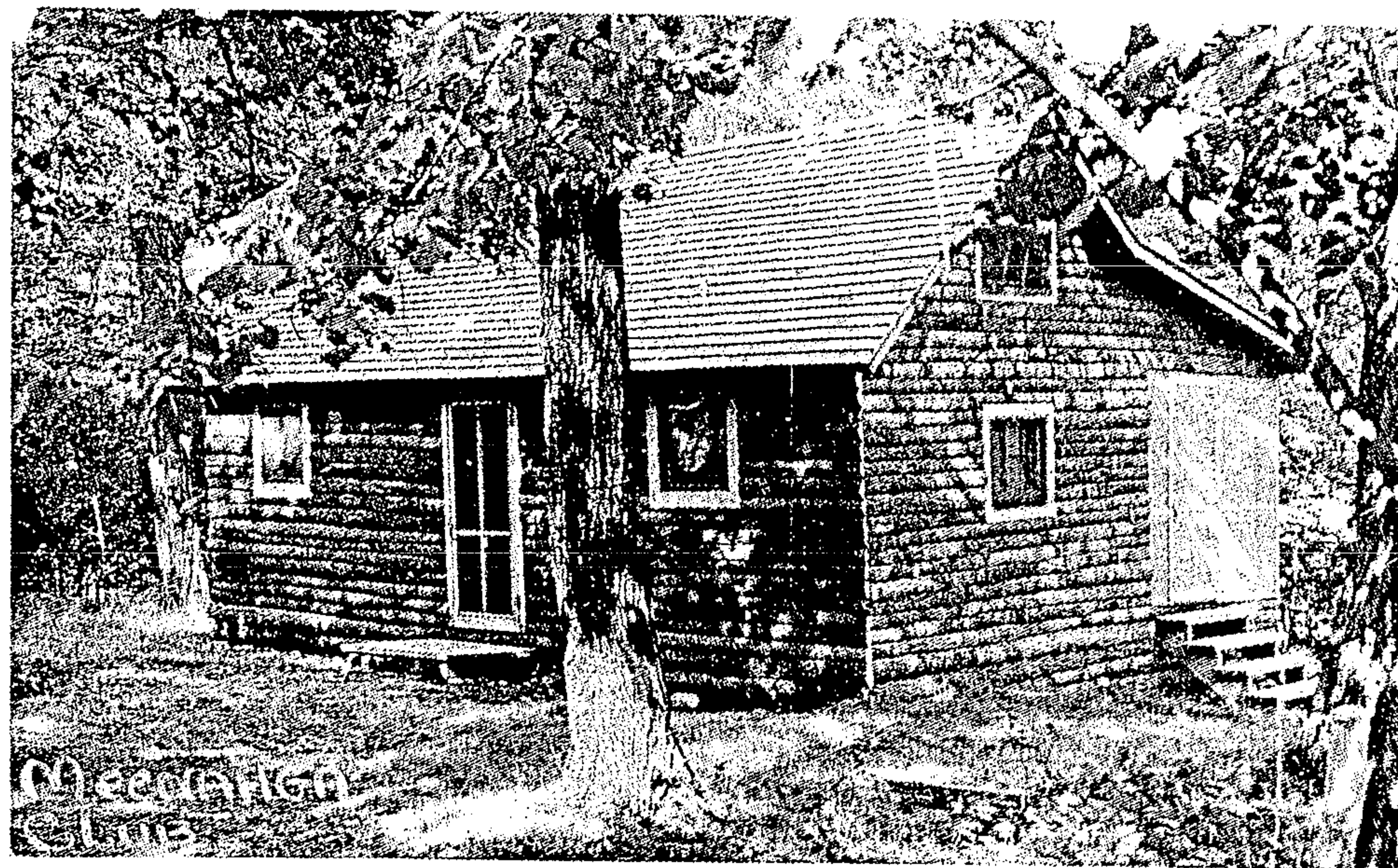
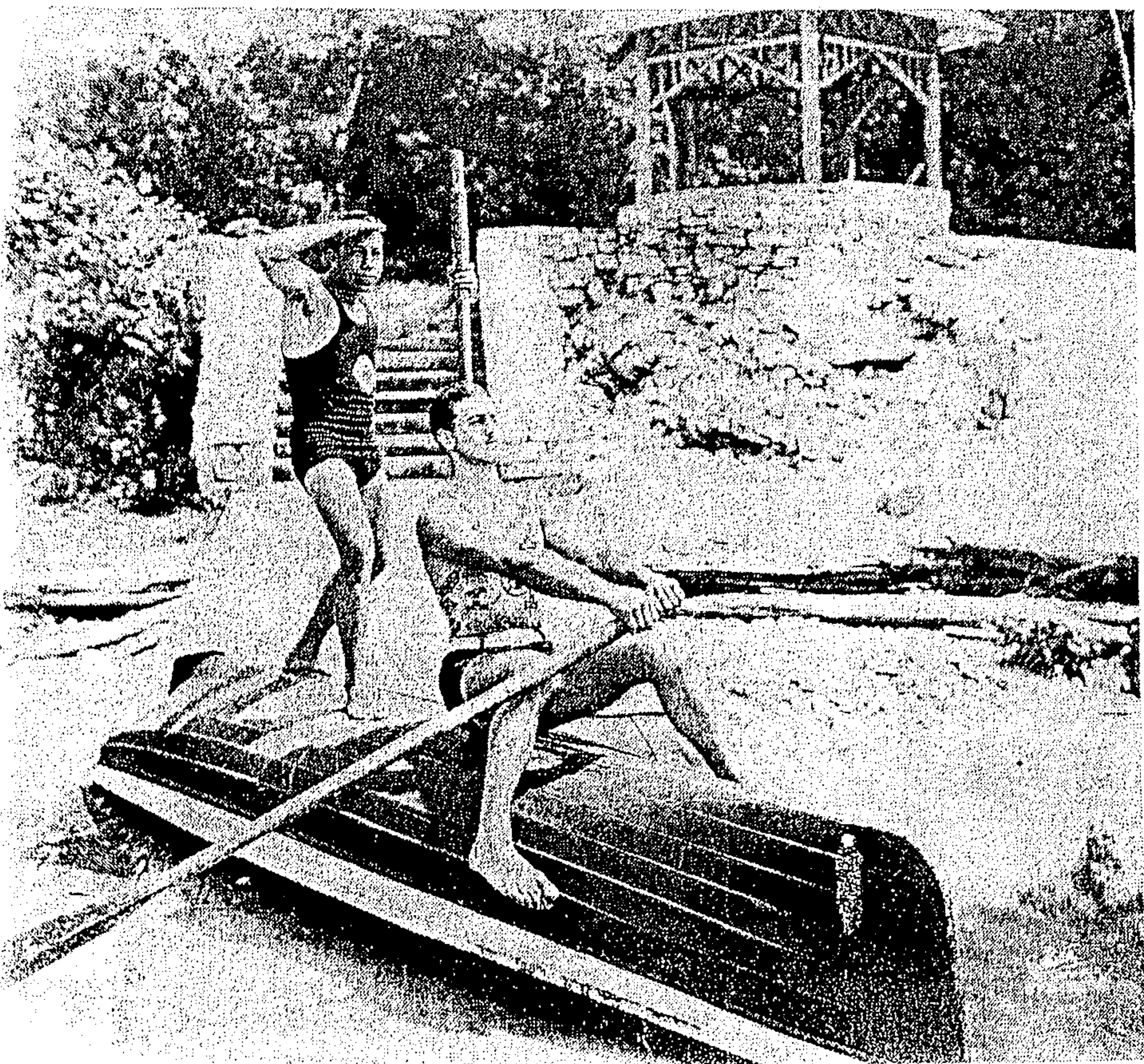
girl, had never encountered them here they grew soon became a basketball, a dancing green, and a riding beginnings of change in this wild State Park.

Another delight I especially remember these first summers was our freedom, swims, hikes, and canoe over-nights, to "trip" in Green Bay waters -- far from the eye. We quaintly called this going "on a mission", and how we loved the feel of the moonlight on the water. In later years this had to stop because of the increasing numbers of people, whom, of course, we scorned. We were to blame for not being able to roll our bloomers way up as high as they would go, on a ride into town for a food shopping off our various shades of green. Meenahga girls of that era had the

unique experience, from today's point of view, of spreading their bed rolls on the top - or near the top - of Sven's Tower and the higher Eagle Tower for hilarious "sleep-out" night. Sleep certainly was out, on those occasions, but the wind, and the close-looking stars were exciting, and watching the sun rise out of the mists below us was a rare experience. We were pleased, too, with the idea of spending the night on a fire lookout tower. My mother, Mrs. Mabley, although she liked to "rough it" and was the pilot for this event at times, had a special "thing" about high places, so had to go to bed on the first landing.

The canoe trips, sometimes paddling at least fifty miles around the Green Bay shoreline - as far as Gill's Rock and back - were a great experience, even if a few times we were forced by the elements to leave the stormy bay to be driven back to

#### Camp Counselors



Meenahga Club - cabin for mothers and older girls. \$21.00 per week, \$4.00 per day. Riding and sailing optional and extra. Sleeping quarters in adjoining tents

camp by car. That in itself was exciting and made a good story to tell the safe, pampered ones back at home base. I can't forget the delicious feeling of superiority that flashed over us, near the start of the trip, when we'd beach our canoes on the shores at Ephraim and pile into Wilson's for ice cream sundaes or banana splits.

I wonder if the atmosphere above Northern Wisconsin still permits the glorious displays of Aurora Borealis which we often had at Meenahga. When this happened after "lights out", there was an unwritten agreement we could all go down to the pier and lie on our backs to watch the show, with no penalties attached. To most of us city girls, this was awe-inspiring to say the least, and filled us with wonder.

Another thing I shall never forget was the way we all, more or less, fell in love with the Camp Masters - usually two young men of notable out-door skills. What really saved them was the number of girls!

One more lasting memory of Meenahga - the gorgeous purple and yellow bouquets of wild flower (our camp colors) which we picked for decoration at the Banquet, the closing event of the summer season and the happy-sad tears of the soon

to part camp girls

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(Note: Mrs. Alice Clark Peddle of St. Louis, Missouri, has given a collection of Camp Meenahga photographs, written recollections, and other memorabilia to the White Nature Center in Peninsula State Park, Fish Creek.)

