

LISBON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
MOMENTS IN HISTORY - OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2020

OGONTZ CAMP



Ogontz Camp is located around the shores of Ogontz Lake in Lyman. It was founded and built in 1923 by Abby Sutherland and her husband William Furby Brown after they purchased 700 acres around Young Pond, the original name of the lake before it was changed by the State after the founding of the camp. Sutherland at the time owned and led Ogontz School and Junior College in Pennsylvania. Ogontz Camp has had several lives, first as an elite all-girls' camp, then as a horsemanship camp, and lastly as a center for specialized music and performance camps and as a venue for retreats, weddings, and other events.



Abby Sutherland (1871-1961) was born on Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia and emigrated to Massachusetts with her family when she was a child. She graduated from teacher's college in Salem and began her teaching career, receiving a further degree from Radcliffe College in 1899, an honorary PhD from Temple University in 1950, and a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in 1957 when she was 86 years old. Sutherland accepted a teaching position at Ogontz School in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania in 1902, and there she stayed becoming the owner and leader in 1909 and until the school was turned over to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1950. In 1917, she married William Brown, a cowboy from Colorado that she met on vacation. He passed away from a brain disease in 1927, four years after they started building Ogontz Camp.



On the new land in Lyman, construction of 12 sleeping cabins, a pavilion, and other buildings began immediately after purchase, and application to the camp began. That first year there were 20 campers and 10 counselors. At first, only students from Ogontz School could apply, then as word of mouth spread about the camp, students' friends were allowed to apply. The camp was

open in July and August for ages seven to 18, and in the 1920s tuition was \$375 (equivalent to \$5,674 in 2020 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) or \$350 if the camper chose not to participate in horseback riding. There was an extra charge of 90 cents a week if a camper chose to have her laundry done locally. Some campers sent their laundry home. While the camp was very exclusive, expensive, and available mostly to the daughters of wealthy families, campers were discouraged from bringing with them expensive items or victrolas, so all campers would feel equal.



Campers arrived by train at the Sugar Hill Station near Salmon Hole in Lisbon. A camp bus would fetch the girls and their trunks, and for two months the girls would live in a cabin and enjoy the country life and a multitude of activities. At the beginning of their country adventure, they had to go through the covered bridge at Salmon Hole, since it was standing until 1927.

Along with the original 12 sleeping cabins, there was a 13th cabin called the “jinx,” which was the bathroom cabin. Rows of cabins, another “jinx,” and other buildings were erected over the years. There was a little camp store with a post office and there was also an infirmary with registered nurses on call. Lisbon’s Dr. Pickwick was the camp doctor for decades.



Ogontz White Mountain Camp was a very serious endeavor, and much emphasis was put on good health, hygiene, physical activity, appreciation of nature, responsibility, self-confidence, posture, and so much more. One of the camp’s early brochures stated that it was real camp life for girls in the pines in the heart of the White Mountains. “Working with nature, we develop Health, Poise and Self-Control.” The camp also focused on camaraderie and the specific objectives communicated by

parents in each camper’s application. Offerings included archery, arts and crafts, boating, waterskiing, aquaplaning, dramatics, writing (some for the camp paper “The Fagot”) and poetry, field hockey, golf (the camp had a 6-hole course), music, dance, hiking, horseback riding, riflery, tennis (there were 3 courts), excursions, and more. Most counselors were female academic contacts of Miss Sutherland’s. There were some male counselors, and almost all the younger male counselors were from Ivy League schools. All counselors were held to a very high standard.



Ogontz horse barn



boathouse and canoes



Woodcraft circle



Local families took in campers' laundry, which included the bright white uniform blouses. Local farms supplied milk, butter, eggs, meat, and produce to the camp. Some area residents also worked at different jobs at the camp.



Emphasis was made on wholesome foods and good nutrition, and Ogontz has always been known for its excellent food and baked goods, and there was always a talented chef on staff. By the 1930s, Ogontz had its own milk pasteurizing plant. Fifty-seven chickens were needed for each Sunday dinner, and every day 500 raised rolls were consumed by campers along with 200 quarts of milk. Campers were weighed on a regular basis, and families were asked not to mail sweets and other food treats to their girls at camp. The camp in later times occasionally had its own greenhouse, vegetable garden, hens, and raised some pigs for meat.

There were many traditions followed by the campers from season to season. There was a daily flag raising and lowering. Sunday morning services of song and inspiration were held on a camp hilltop. Catholic campers could be driven into Lisbon for worship. Once a season, a lobster dinner with all the fixings and dessert could be earned by campers who were able to swim from the beach, across the lake, and back. There were many other traditions, one of the most solemn at the end of the season when each camper would set her own little candlelit boat adrift on the lake and make a wish for herself, a dear friend, and the camp. Reunions and fond reminiscing by campers and staff continue to this day.

The island in Ogontz Lake was named Oak Knoll, and the cove it is in was named Hunter Cove. A little cabin was built on the island so campers could enjoy a primitive experience if desired. The cabin and its furnishings were all made by Ogontz staff and campers, and as many as six campers could stay at a time. When Taps was played at the main camp, those on the island would yell, "good night" back to the camp.

In 1931, Sutherland began taking campers to the ocean, and that experience was known as Seagontz. The first year, Seagontz was in Rye, New Hampshire, and after that it was in Cape Small Point, Maine. Tuition to Seagontz for a two-week visit was an extra \$50.



Abby Sutherland (left) and Mary Frances “Frannie” Josey are pictured at one of the weekly Woodcraft gatherings of campers and staff held to help foster the camp spirit by singing, telling stories and having nature talks. After Abby’s passing in 1961, Frannie, who was a former Ogontz School student and Abby’s close associate for over 40 years, became director of Ogontz Camp until her passing in 1965, when the camp was sold by Abby’s brother and heir, Donald Sutherland.

Campers came to Ogontz from almost every state in the U.S., as well as from Canada, South America, Europe, and the Middle East. Girls from rich and famous families were no strangers to Ogontz Camp. JFK’s sisters, Eunice, Jean and Kathleen were campers in the 1930s, as were Walt Disney’s daughters. Famous composers, doctors, and major league athletes also sent their daughters to Ogontz. Anna Elizabeth Huber of Pennsylvania, and her sisters, attended Ogontz School and were also among the campers at Ogontz. They were the granddaughters of Charles Sumner Woolworth, who with his brother Frank Winfield Woolworth, founded the F. W. Woolworth Company. It only seems fitting that one of the campers from wealthy backgrounds would one day own the camp, and that is what happened. The person Abby Sutherland’s brother and heir, Donald Sutherland, sold the camp to in 1965 was former six-season Ogontz camper, Anna Elizabeth Huber (1921-1999), who became known at the camp and locally as “Miss Bette.”



Miss Bette was a lover of opera and traveled all over the world to hear her close friend, Luciano Pavarotti perform. She also loved horses and incorporated that passion by making Ogontz into more of a horsemanship camp. New stalls were built in the barn at Ogontz, and an equestrian center was built up the road from the camp. At one point, Ogontz had as many as 40 horses. During the camping season, Miss Bette and her Ogontz horses and their accomplished riders were fixtures at all area horse show competitions. In 1970, Miss Bette built her own home “the White House” on a hill overlooking the camp. To those who did not personally know Miss Bette, she and Ogontz Camp had a certain mystique.

Those who did have a closer relationship with her, knew Miss Bette was very generous and kind. She took local youth on trips to special dream destinations where the children were allowed to pick out gifts for themselves, and Miss Bette also hired many to work at the camp or attend camp for free. Her generosity inspired some of the youngsters to emulate her kindness and give back when they became adults.

During Miss Bette’s tenure, The Chorus of Westerly from Westerly, Rhode Island, began renting Ogontz. The Chorus was founded by George Kent in 1959 and made up of students from the New England Conservatory. The Chorus has traveled all over the world and is now 196-members strong, including children as young as eight years old, the only chorus in the U.S. that includes

children year-round. The Chorus's performance home is the George Kent Performance Hall, the former Immaculate Conception Church in Westerly ([www.chorusofwesterly.org](http://www.chorusofwesterly.org)).



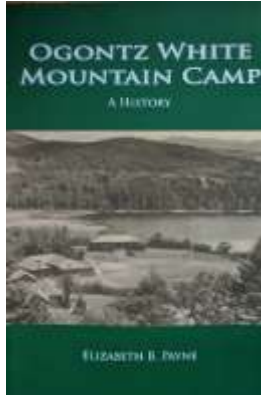
George Kent and his wife, Lynn, eventually entered into a formal lease with Miss Bette through which the camp was opened up to other choral groups and camps for specialties such as dancers, storytellers, horn players, and Suzuki camps where children as young as three years old came to play string instruments under teachers who were world-class musicians. In 1993, the Kents purchased Ogontz Camp from Miss Bette, and the Kents have worked to develop it into a summer destination for campers and artistic groups. Others, including locals, began renting the premises for weddings, reunions, special meetings, retreats, etc.

In the summer of 2009, for the occasion of the Chorus's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, a special gala was held for Ogontz's annual choral symposia. Six scholars from Trinity College in Cambridge, England were invited to accompany their director, Dr. Richard Marlow to the event. Also in attendance was Sir Richard Willcocks, one of England's most famous organists and chorale conductors. The event featured chorale music, acrobatic dancers, fireworks, and much reminiscing. The centerpiece of the gathering was the gigantic feast prepared on site in the camp bakery under the direction of Ogontz Chef and then Director, Andrew Lidestri, who had also been a member of the Chorus and an Ogontz Chorus camper since he was seven years old.



The newest structure at Ogontz is the massive pavilion named "Ogontz Hall." It is on the shore of the lake on the site of the original pavilion, which was razed in 1987 by Miss Bette. Throughout the typical "summer" season from Memorial Day to Columbus Day, Ogontz is a flurry of activity. Campers have also taken part in the day-to-day operation along with the regular staff of Ogontz. Even though the special camps for 2020 were canceled due to COVID, there were still some vacationers renting cabins throughout the summer, and as usual the campus grounds were well-manicured and there were flowers in gardens, boxes, and barrels.

So, why is the camp named Ogontz? According to the camp's website, [www.campogontz.com](http://www.campogontz.com), Chief Ogontz was a Sandusky Indian who had taught Jay Cooke, a banker in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, wilderness skills when Cooke was a child. Cook leased his mansion to a female seminary from Philadelphia that needed more space. The new campus was named Ogontz School after Chief Ogontz. That was the school that Abby Sutherland led, and she named her beloved girls' camp in Lyman the same.



Information and images for this Moments in History comes from our collection and from *Ogontz White Mountain Camp, A History*, by Elizabeth B. Payne © 2013. Elizabeth “Libbie” Payne was herself an Ogontz camper, counselor, and assistant director and continues an active involvement in the camp today. Libbie is also a member and supporter of the Lisbon Area Historical Society, and her 223-page book with over 350 pictures is available for purchase locally and through the Society.

*We hope you appreciate receiving these Moments in History from our historical society. We welcome your comments as well as suggestions for possible topics for future Moments. Please feel free to share any of our Moments in History with relatives and friends, and have them email us if they would like to receive them in the future. Our e-mail address is [info@lisbonareahistory.org](mailto:info@lisbonareahistory.org). For more about us go to [www.lisbonareahistory.org](http://www.lisbonareahistory.org). We are also on Facebook. Thank you.*