

March 2019 E-Newsletter

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For more than 100 years, the Belgrade Lakes have been known for their summer youth camps. The very first one opened in 1900 on Great Pond. That was Camp Merryweather. At the time, Camp Merryweather not only was the first youth camp on Great Pond but also the first such camp in Maine and only the third in the country. The idea of parents sending their children—boys initially—away from home to live with strangers for a month or more during the summer was a very novel one in 1900, but it was an idea that caught on fast, and within seven years, even the first youth camps for girls were being developed on Great Pond and elsewhere.

Camp Merryweather evolved in accordance with the vision of Henry ‘Skipper’ Richards (1848-1949) and his wife, Laura Elizabeth *Howe* Richards (1850-1943, daughter of Samuel G. & Julia *Ward* Howe), with the support of their four daughters and two sons. That vision encompassed a full schedule of water activities (swimming and boating) and tutoring in such diverse subjects as history, poetry, theater and vegetable gardening. The ‘educational’ component was supplemented with chores, nature hikes, competitive sports, and listening to stories around the evening camp fire. Many of the campers became prominent during their adult lives, including Kermit Roosevelt (son of President Theodore Roosevelt), the brothers Joseph & Stewart Alsop (newspaper columnists), Conrad Aiken (poet) and Laurence Rockefeller.

Many alumni of Camp Merryweather served during World War I, and 11 former camps lost their lives in that conflict. On July 3, 1921, a stone memorial on the camp’s shore along Great Pond was dedicated to memory of these men. The verse on the base of the memorial reads:

*But yet—but yet—ah! Ne’er forget
In tempest or in night,
That clear and true still shines for you
The Merryweather Light*

The memorial includes a short stone tower with a kerosene lantern on top. The BHS recently received information about this Camp Merryweather memorial and its lantern from Elijah Cobb, a descendant of the Richards. According to

him, *“The lamp - The Merryweather Light - was created as a beacon to help those who lost their lives - to find their way home to camp. It also served as a place to put up a kerosene lamp to guide home any one who was out late on the pond (Great Pond) and in need of guidance home to the dock.”* Sadly, however, *“The memorial lamp was stolen some years ago - 30? - at least 20 years ago.”* Recently, Mr. Cobb added, *“A small group of us have taken on the project to try and recreate the lamp and re install it - hopefully in time for its 100th anniversary [in 2021]. ... I am writing to ask if you have any images of the WWI Memorial that was created by Camp Merryweather to honor the campers who died in the war. ... I need good photo reference to help the folks who are trying to digitally recreate the lamp. So far I have very little that is close enough to be really helpful.”*

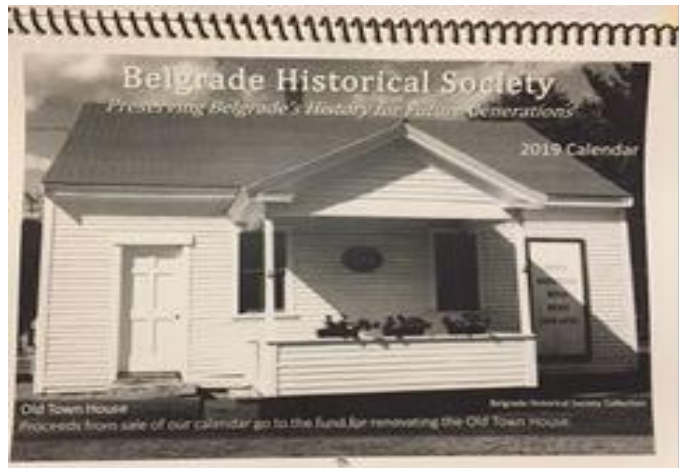


Unfortunately, the BHS did not have any photographs of the Camp Merryweather Memorial. Mr. Cobb actually sent us the pictures that you see in this newsletter, and we are grateful to him for doing so and happy to be able to share them with our readers. But also, we really would like to help Mr. Cobb and his cousins to recreate the lantern as part of their restoration of this significant World War I memorial. If any readers have or know of the existence of photographs of this memorial please contact BHS as soon as possible. BHS can make digital copies of such photographs without harming the originals. Restoring this memorial is both a respectful way to honor those 11 men who gave their lives in World War I and to preserve an important piece of Belgrade’s history.

Camp Merryweather continued to operate for many years after World War I. Its last season as a boys’ camp was the summer of 1937, and then it became a private camp for the Richards family. In 1963, descendants of Skipper and Laura Richards created Merryweather Realty Trust to keep Camp Merryweather as a perpetual summer gathering place for all the descendants, numbering close to 200 by 2019. One descendant, Rosalind Cobb Wiggins, a granddaughter of the Skipper and Laura, compiled a history of the camp in 2000 to mark the 100th anniversary of Camp Merryweather. That book, *Admirals All: The Story of Camp Merryweather*, published by Ipswich Press in Ipswich, MA, is available for purchase online.

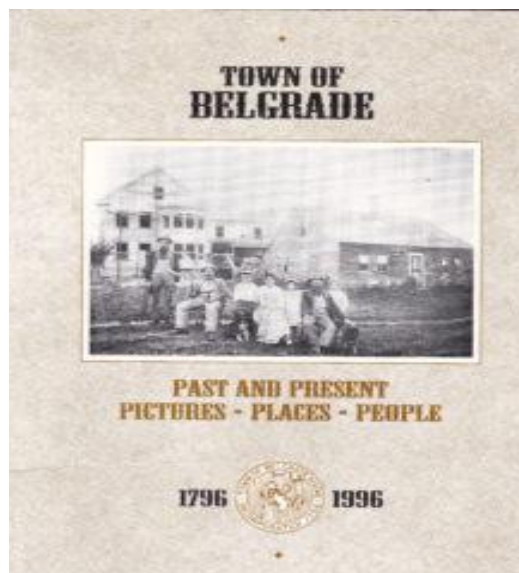
Looking for gifts, don't forget our calendars and Reproduction Past & Present Books. Available at the Center for All Seasons BHS History Room or Day's Store.

Our **2019 calendars**, with classic 8" X 10" photographs of Belgrade from the 1890s to the early 1950s. Wonderful way to enjoy Belgrade all year long! And the photos are perfect for framing as keepsakes when each month is over. **ONLY \$15, a bargain for those who love Belgrade!**



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Capital Fund Drive



Rendering of Townhouse after Renovation

Sketch by Artist Erik Johnson

The **Capital Fund Drive** is going well! We have received several thousand dollars and returns are coming in on a daily basis. A friendly reminder to those who want to give and have not yet done so. Use your return envelope or send your own to BHS, P.O. Box 36A, Belgrade, Maine 04917. Use PayPal as an alternative by going to our website belgradehistoricalsociety@gmail.com.

Thanks to those who have already donated, all donations will help the bottom line!

Don't forget that BHS is a non-profit 501 (3) 2 organization, so all contributions to its capital campaign to renovate the Old Town House are tax deductible. Any donation you make to BHS can be deducted from your income tax to the extent allowable by law. Please think of making an end-of-year donation to our worthy cause and help to preserve our history.