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Abigail A. Van Slyck. *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. xxxvii + 296 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8166-4876-4.

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Nature as Preparation for Culture

In this liberally illustrated volume, Abigail Van Slyck explores how changing ideas of childhood were manifested in summer camp settings and building designs. By examining sources such as site plans and photographs, Van Slyck, the Dayton Associate Professor of Art History and Director of the Architectural Studies Program at Connecticut College, finds evidence of the ongoing social construction of childhood between 1890 and 1960. She argues that the primitivism and natural settings of camp life, though changing in form over time, reflected a continued belief in the ability of temporary outdoor living to prepare children for the demands of modern life. With its wealth of photographs, maps, and plans, this engaging book illustrates a largely unexplored element of architectural history, the cultural landscape of summer camps.

The summer camp was just one of a large number of new (or reformed) institutions intended to shape the lives of children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Connected philosophically to such activities as scouting and the playground movement, residential summer camps were initially developed for middle-class, native-born white boys, whose daily lives kept them at a distance from outdoor life. After 1900, separate girls' camps were increasingly prevalent, and Van Slyck analyzes the effects of gender ideology throughout the book.

Van Slyck asserts that her study contributes to architectural history in two fundamental ways: first, through its analysis of the "cultural landscape" of summer camps, or "the intersection of the natural landscapes with built forms and social life"; and second, through its focus on "architecture as a process in which institutional priorities are translated into material form" rather than on the work of individual architects (p. xxxi). From these perspectives, Van Slyck examines how six areas of summer camp life–camp layout, activities, housing, mealtime, hygiene, and the use of Native American cultural motifs–reflected changes in societal views of middle- and upper-class childhood. She combines visual evidence, such as photographs and site plans, with descriptions of camp goals from brochures and other sources to elucidate both the stated aims of camp organizers and the resulting camp landscapes. She studies a range of camps, particularly those in three popular summer camp regions in the United States, to give a varied look at camp life and its reflection of views of childhood over the seventy years of this study.

In chapter 1, Van Slyck describes changes in camp layout and design as summer camps became established. While camps initially included a range of settings, including some by rivers or the ocean, lakeside camps soon set the standard for residential summer camps for reasons of both hygiene (from the availability of fresh water) and desired isolation from urban areas. Van Slyck describes the transition from ad hoc camp layouts to military design by the early 1900s, then the movement toward a more naturalistic design in the 1920s. While camping organizers initially intended to "counteract" what they viewed as the "softness of the modern home environment," Van Slyck finds a change to less rustic surroundings after World War II (p. 35). She argues that camping professionals began to replicate the comforts of home and suburbia in order to appeal to both children and their doting parents as ideas about childhood changed. Van Slyck next describes shifts in camp activities. Camp leaders attempted to maintain "really 'camp-y' camps," rather than merely "schools or playgrounds transferred to the woods," in the words of the Girl Scouts Camp Committee in 1926 (p. 41). While individual camp leaders disagreed about the fitness of particular activities (such as baseball) for camp life, Van Slyck finds that they tended to agree on the increasing need for greater supervision and control of camp recreation, supporting Brian Sutton-Smith's argument about the "ever-increasing domestication of children's play" (p. 42). Van Slyck shows how this shift occurred both temporally (with more focus on

schedules and guided activities) and spatially (as in the redesign of waterfronts for swimmer safety). Postwar camp programs varied, with some adopting a more child-centered and less structured approach.

In a chapter on camp housing, Van Slyck shows that camp leaders had a sustained interest in providing healthful sleeping and domestic conditions. Over the decades they changed their views of what was healthy, eventually abandoning tents (praised before 1920 for bringing campers close to nature and being economical) for dryer and better-ventilated cottages and tent-houses. After World War II, she argues, cabins with domestic touches were seen as an ideal setting for counselors to address the psychological health of their campers.

Van Slyck uses Elizabeth Cromley's idea of the food axis to discuss the various stages and sites of preparing, eating, and cleaning up from meals. Although some early camp mealtimes were rather fancy, the military mess hall, with long tables and less focus on etiquette, became the norm. Both male and female campers participated in meal preparation and clean-up during the early twentieth century, but for boys, Van Slyck argues, such tasks were analogous to temporary KP duty in the army, whereas for girls, they were intended as preparation for later life. By the 1930s and 1940s, technology in camp kitchens improved and campers were simultaneously removed from the adult realm of domestic duties. Food was increasingly served family-style, with campers and counselors replicating and adapting the mealtime habits of family life.

In the area of hygiene, camp leaders tried to "carve out a space for themselves somewhere between sanitary and fastidious," in Van Slyck's words (p. 149). She describes the increasing acceptance of germ theory and the use of new technology, from chemical and flush toilets to incinerators. While campers became further removed from earlier tasks of camp sanitation, they were increasingly expected to keep their own bodies clean. In particular, Van Slyck describes how camp leaders tried to "manage" girls' bodies through their perpetuation of "menstrual etiquette," using Rebecca Ginsburg's terminology for the discretion expected of menstruating girls (p. 162).

The last topical chapter investigates summer camps' use of Native American cultural motifs. While some camps had begun to highlight the "association between Indians and wilderness" before the First World War, campers at that time were not expected "to play Indian," in Philip Deloria's words (p. 174). The increasing appropriation of Native American culture resulted from the efforts of Ernest Thompson Seton, who founded the Woodcraft Indians in 1902. In addition to influencing Luther and Charlotte Gulick, who founded the Camp Fire Girls in 1910, Seton spread the use of Indian pageants and the employment of Indian guides during his travels among camps in the 1910s. By the 1920s and 1930s, Indian motifs were no longer used by camps merely to show "the conceptual distance between the camp landscape and the civilized realms of campers' everyday lives" (p. 212). Instead, camps adopted Indian names, featured architectural elements such as wigwams or Big Houses, and instituted the ritual of the council ring, at which participants played at being Indian. Van Slyck acknowledges the good intentions that participants in such activities might have had, but she emphasizes that "the Indian campfire nonetheless reinforced white privilege" (p. 208). After World War II, Indian motifs were still present at many camps, though to a lesser degree than previously.

Van Slyck ends the book by describing how modernism was seen by architects as an appropriate style for buildings intended for the primitivism and natural settings of camp life. While camps exhibited clear tendencies toward antimodernism, which emphasized the perceived ills of modern life, they also "implicitly worked to support and maintain modern culture," Van Slyck argues (p. 224). She concludes that children were purposely moved from their homes and daily lives to a temporary life at summer camp in the hopes that their time in the outdoors would prepare them for later urban and suburban life.

The wealth of illustrations, 113 total, including photographs, plans, and paintings, enrich this book immensely. Historians of childhood have argued for greater attention to the geography and material culture of childhood, and Van Slyck meets this aim well. While the book sometimes seems a bit thinly argued, no doubt because it covers six subtopics over a broad swath both temporally and geographically, Van Slyck connects this study firmly to the historiography of childhood, providing the important context for her analysis. Although other book-length works on the summer camp are few, interested readers might find supplementary readings to be of use. Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, for example, might want to read W. Barksdale Maynard's work on the architecture of early boys' camps.[1] The work of Leslie Paris can also offer complementary insight into campers' social experiences and the impact of ideas about gender on camp life.[2]

Because of the book's thematic organization, one might wish that Van Slyck had pulled together chronological arguments more explicitly across sections. For

example, she suggests that post-World War II decisions about housing reflected a critique of the family, yet, at that same time, family-style meals were seemingly intended to emulate campers' home life. Further discussion of camp organizers' ideas in particular eras, such as their complex reactions to the post-war family, would concretize the chronological arguments interspersed throughout the six subtopics of the book.

Van Slyck's approach of studying the cultural landscape and the goals of camp organizers makes this work an interesting, approachable read. It contributes usefully to our understanding of the social construction of childhood between 1890 and 1960, while drawing readers visually into the settings of camp life.

Notes

[1]. W. Barksdale Maynard, "'An Ideal Life in the Woods for Boys': Architecture and Culture in the Earliest Summer Camps," *Winterthur Portfolio* 34 (1999): 3-29.

[2]. Leslie Paris, "The Adventures of Peanut and Bo: Summer Camps and Early-Twentieth-Century American Girlhood," *Journal of Women's History* 12 (2001): 47-76.

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