

## Neekaunis: The First Fifty Years, 1932-1982

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### **The Beginning: Acquiring the land**

With Neekaunis having celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, we look back on the history of the camp and the vision which led to its creation. Those who have had the privilege of being associated with Camp Neekaunis are part of a long history which goes back to the early twentieth century. Fred Haslam, a prominent Canadian Friend, worked with Albert (A.S.) Rogers with a boys' club in Toronto, beginning in 1924. Seeing the need for city children to have the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors they showed great foresight in seeking land for a camp.

In 1930 Haslam found the ten acres of woodland 90 miles north of Toronto which eventually became the first parcel of land to form part of the Neekaunis property. He took two other men with him to look over the proposed property with a view to deciding if it met the needs of the boys' and girls' clubs. In a letter dated April 11, 1992, Albert Field wrote, "Fred Haslam, Harry Brandwood and I went and looked over the property now known as Camp Neekaunis and we all thought it would make a good camp site for the boys camp and for the girls camp if the Carol girls, one of whom was a Public Health nurse, was interested."<sup>1</sup>

Haslam began negotiations on his own and eventually the property was acquired by Friends when it was purchased from the Tanner family in 1931. Camp was enlarged by the purchase of three acres from the neighbour on the east in 1940 and by an additional five acres on the west which was bequeathed by Fred Haslam on his death in October 1979, bringing the size to 18 acres. In the early 2000s a further addition was

made when the adjoining property which included a winterized house was purchased.

The land bequeathed by Fred Haslam to the Canadian Yearly Meeting stretched alongside the earlier parcel from the road at Highway 12, to the shore of Sturgeon Bay, an inlet of Georgian Bay, interrupted only by a railway right of way near the beach where campers bathe.

Among the many Friends who attended camp in the early years was Chester Brown of the Coldstream Meeting. In speaking of the camp history, he recalled being present when the cement pillars on which Nelson-Hall stands were being poured. In the early years, the camp acquired its name and a camp song. The camp was given the Indian name *Neekaunis*,<sup>2</sup> as suggested by Professor and Mrs. Firth (the former Ella Rogers) of the Toronto Meeting and in 1933 William H. Willson wrote the words to the Neekaunis Hymn, words which describe the building of the camp. The hymn is sung to the tune of "The Old Rugged Cross."

On a hill far away, overlooking the bay  
A part of the Georgian expanse  
There's a view that is grand  
Both of lake and of land  
A scene which all souls must entrance.

So we'll go to this beautiful place  
And together we'll dig up the sod  
And we'll lay the foundation space  
In the fear and the love of our God.

For it seemed a wise thing, our material  
to bring  
And to build a fixed camp on this spot  
Through the love of kind friends

Who subscribed to these ends  
We've a structure adorning the spot  
Thus we build on the basis of love  
For it stands when all others shall fall  
And our unity came from above  
When His image was found in us all.

From this place we'll go forth, realizing  
the worth  
Of the spirit of love which makes free,  
And we'll join heart and hand,  
Length and breadth of the land,  
Forever untied to be.

In the pathway of love we will go,  
By the ways that our fathers have trod,  
In agreement with faces aglow,  
As we image the spirit of God.

*Neekaunis Hymn, William H. Willson, Welland,  
Ontario composed on the hill overlooking Georgian Bay,  
1933*

The Willson family has had a long involvement with Neekaunis and the cabin named Willson has been named for the family, including William H. Willson, writer of the hymn, Raymond Willson in whose memory a donation was made, a donation which led to setting up the Meeting House fund to construct the Meeting Centre, Mable Willson, who served on the Neekaunis Committee for a number of years, and her daughter Anne Keffer nee Willson.

The hymn, in a few lines, tells the story of the building of the camp, its reason for being and of the beauty of the place on which it stands. In later years, the word "care" has sometimes been substituted for "fear" in line 8. No camper can ever leave without having been touched by the physical surroundings, as well as the spirit of the camp.

### Historical Background

The lake and the land had its beginnings in the ages long ago when the glacial lakes of Al-

gonquin and Nipissing covered this area. The beaches of these lakes remain as the slopes on the way to the swimming area. The Neekaunis property has a long association with the geological history of the area. This affords great opportunity for the student of geology. The geological history of the area has been recognized by the provincial government and the neighbouring farm property, known to campers as Second Hill, was acquired by the province. Named Waubaushene Shores Provincial Park, its use by the camp is permitted, provided that access is only over the stile, and every care is taken not to damage the environment.

In the 1950's and 60's sunsets were viewed from this vantage point almost every evening. At that time it was used as a cow pasture and the grazing of the animals kept down the growth of shrubs, bushes and trees. Campers simply had to be careful where they sat down. It was not unusual to have the company of nice brown cows as campers watched the sunset, and sang vesper songs.

Although the provincial park is official, there is no active use of this land. As a result, cows no longer pasture there, and growth has gradually been sprouting up. Second Hill has a very different appearance from what it had been in the 1950's when the camp was being actively developed.

The name Neekaunis comes from the Huron Indian Ouendat Language and means "The Meeting Place of Friends." This name was chosen as the whole area was once inhabited by the Huron Indians. There have been other suggestions as to the origin of the name. George Sotiroff Jr. tells the following about the name. "I was about 12 at the time. There was a small group of Ojibway (something like 2 carloads - maybe 8 people altogether - mostly men but I seem to remember at least 1 woman involved in some discussion with Stirling. I think they met in Haslam but of this I am not sure. Two of the men (maybe three) were not involved in the meeting with Stirling but waited

outside and spoke with me. One told me that Neekaunis was the Ojibway word for “sister.” Later I mentioned this to Stirling. This was when he said ‘that may be but in the Huron language it means “Meeting place of friends.”’

The Indian capital for this area, Cahaigue, is assumed to be about six miles from Neekaunis and the writings of the French explorer, Champlain, indicate that he spent the winter of 1610 on this site. Although the Hurons and Iroquois had a blood relationship, the activities of Champlain, and the rivalry of the fur trade between the French and British, led to wars between these nations. Some of the rivalry found expression in the area near Neekaunis. The Jesuit missionaries, Lalement and Brebeuf, were massacred by the Iroquois at St. Ignace, an Indian village on the Sturgeon River only a mile and a half from Neekaunis. A historic plaque on Highway 12, on the way to Midland commemorates this event.

The Huron Indians, for the most part, lived at peace with their neighbouring tribes. Like other North American Indians, they had no metal tools or utensils. Nevertheless, the Hurons had managed to make the difficult transition from nomad hunters to settled agriculturalists. Corn was their main crop and the mainstay of their diet. They also grew beans, squash, sunflowers, and hemp. The fibre from the hemp made their fish nets. Even before the French came, the Hurons had developed an extensive trade with the Algonquins. They exchanged corn for the furs and hides and meat which were more plentiful in the thinly populated country to the north.

The name Huron, by which this nation became called, was in reality a nickname. The Indians wore their hair in a single high ridge, and the French referred to them as boar heads. “Hure” in French mean boarhead. Their real name however, was Wendats, and their home land Wendake (the island or the land apart). Where they came from, or why they came, we do not know. Archaeologists have found clay

pots in this area that indicated that there were people living here as much as 2500 years before the birth of Christ.

There was a port on the shore of Sturgeon Bay known as Tay Port and this was the eastern terminus for Great Lake ships. Tay Port was on the point just to the west of the Neekaunis property and with the advent of lumbering became known as Tannerville. The present road which leads down to the water's edge was built by the Hudson's Bay Company and brought travellers by stage coach from Coldwater. This road was built and Tayport was established about 1845. One of the steamships was known as “The Gore.” Tannerville became the site of the most modern sawmill in the area.

### The 1930's

In addition to the Boys' Club operated by the Toronto Friends' Meeting, there was also a Girls' Club, and each of these groups held camps on the Neekaunis property. *The Canadian Friend* has been a rich source of information about camp activities over the years. Reports which have regularly appeared about various camps held at Neekaunis reveal that the camp has consistently provided inspiration, opportunities for discussion and personal growth. Sunset services have always been a favourite.

In 1932, the Young Friends of Canada were in session for the first time at Camp Neekaunis. From those earliest days the camp proved to be a means of binding together young Friends in Canada. As well young Friends learned about Quaker beliefs and the need to live out our beliefs in day to day life. The same approach was taken in the leadership training class offered the following year. More detailed information about the books studied are found in editions of *The Canadian Friend* from those years. The detailed log book of this leadership training group demonstrates that the training was a long and intensive one focused on spiritual growth, religious education and how these impact on our everyday lives.<sup>3</sup>

Also in 1932 a group of young girls from Newmarket spent a week at Neekaunis at a camp organized by Newmarket Friends. The ride from Newmarket to the Camp took three and a half hours. The Bible story was under the leadership of Margaret McSkimming and Mrs. Harden, Newmarket Friends. In later years, Margaret McSkimming was a beloved camp Cook. She was one of the camp's best-known cooks, with her soft quavery voice and Scottish brogue. Cooks Cabin was named in memory of these special persons who served in that important capacity. As well as Margaret, were Pearl Jones, Bonnie Hall and Katie Winger who were named on a plaque placed on the wall of the cabin named Cooks.

Once again at the 1933 girls' camp leaders took the opportunity to teach the young girls in preparation for their places in the home and community. Lulu Cleland of Newmarket was mentioned as one of the leaders. In the 1950's she returned to Neekaunis as our beloved "Aunt Lu" teacher, leader and friend. In 1933 some wiring was done at camp, making it possible to use an electric refrigerator given by Beatrice Carroll who also donated a piano.

Reports from those early years provide information about the campers and the programs offered. There were boys, girls, and women, especially mothers and their children. We also learn about the names of some who served as leaders and general information such as the cost of running camps. The camp was seen to provide a break from the demands of everyday life. Sometimes, there was no program planned, but even then, there was a worship period each morning. At other times, the program was much more structured and included courses to assist campers in their spiritual growth. These includes courses on the Bible such as the "Work and Teaching of the Prophets" presented by Clara VanEvery of Pelham or "Christian Faith and Conduct" led by William Reagan of Poughkeepsie, N. Y. which were presented during the Young Friends Conference.

Several Young Friends Conferences were held at Neekaunis with many participants from all parts of the United States. Raymond Booth proposed that a dynamic religious character of some period in history be studied each day such as John Frederick Oberlin and John Bright who were Quaker Statesmen. Eugene Forsey of McGill University, who later became a respected senator, gave lectures on economics. Camp was a place to grow spiritually, not just a place where one could enjoy the outdoors. Young Friends had the opportunity to learn what a Young Friends' camp might be and what a Young Friends' should not be.

According to Stuart Starr, among the young women campers was his sister, Harriett. He remembers his first visit from "about 1936. My sister Harriett was a camper and my brother and I went on a Sunday afternoon to bring her home. At that time the driveway came straight up over the hill and across the area now used as a playing field. It was quite a few years later that it was shifted to the left to its present location. The building now known as Nelson Hall was much as it is now except the dining room was smaller and all the rooms at the back were used for sleeping. There were tennis courts where the playing field now is."<sup>4</sup>

In 1937 thirty girls from Toronto boarded a special car at Union Station en route to Camp Neekaunis for Girls' Camp. For some of the girls it was a first camp experience and a first train journey. This camp saw the visit of Gurney and Elizabeth Binford who gave a talk on "The Children of Japan and their Customs."

There is an interesting article in the May 1939 issue of *The Canadian Friend* by Arline Booth. She starts by stating that she was asked to define the purposes and aims of Camp Neekaunis and, according to her it has served two very fine purposes:

1. Fellowship and greater understanding has developed between individuals and local groups of all three Yearly Meetings, [Note:

this was prior to the uniting of the three yearly meetings in 1955] thus aiding individual spiritual awakenings, and increasing the sense of unity among Friends as a whole.

2. The educational advantage has always been of the finest order and Young Friends have never hesitated to think on vital and profound subjects, such as religious faith, economics, co-operative philosophy and race prejudice... At this year's Young Friends Conference the discussion will be under the leadership of Dan West, who belongs to the Dunkard, one of the historic peace churches and who represented the American Friends Service Committee in the service of peace and love for some time in war-torn Spain. The discussion will be "Basic Faith of the Historic Peace Churches, and methods of implementing that faith in the next decade."<sup>5</sup>

Below are a few lines from a dedication song for the first Canadian Young Friends Conference -- Yearly Meeting of Young Friends.

"High upon a hilltop, beautiful to see,  
Lovely Camp Neekaunis nestles peacefully,  
And into her shelter, may our Young Friends come,  
Fired by high endeavour, each and every one."<sup>6</sup>

### **The War Years, 1939-45 and the 1940's**

There is a paucity of material concerning Camp Neekaunis in the pages of *The Canadian Friend* between 1939 and 1945 because the camp was not used much during the war years. There was, however, some use of the camp and in his recollections about Neekaunis, Stuart Starr writes, "My first and only time as a long-term camper was in 1941. It was Young Friends Camp, and I think it lasted two weeks. I had been quite sick in the early summer and wasn't much use on the farm, so went to camp to recover my health so I could go home and have my tonsils and adenoids removed. At that time there were four cabins, two by the path to the

bay [White Feather and Amitie] and two behind the main building [Welcome and Wetaskiwin]. None of the buildings had names at the time, except the pumphouse. I shared a cabin by the path with David Willson, Paul Zavitz, Jamie Bycraft and Gordon "Spike" Brown. I think that was the first year that Sterling [sic] and Mildred were on staff. They were called "Host and Hostess." Burton and Lillian Hill were camp directors. Errol Elliot of FUM, Richmond, Indiana, conducted a study session each day. Being a farm boy, I was used to getting up early, so every morning I went for a solo swim at 6:00 a.m. Obviously people were not as safety conscious as they are now; No one objected that I, a non-swimmer went to the water unaccompanied. The only water that I had access to at home was a little creek, so I wanted to take advantage of my opportunities.

Milt Keffer had loaned the camp an old Essex car, and my sister Huldah (now Stanley) was the "chauffeur", going to Waubauskene for groceries, meeting the train when needed, or taking injured campers to the doctor. One afternoon a large boat was rented and the whole camp went for a cruise up the Severn River. At that time there was a large L shaped wooden dock. Some years later it was destroyed by the ice, and was never replaced."<sup>7</sup>

In the early years, the camp was used by Toronto Young Friends who would make day trips to Neekaunis. Violet Petrie, who with her husband Andrew, was for a time Resident Friend at Toronto Friends House, recollected travelling to camp in the rear of a pick up truck, in the days before safety belts. After spending social time with other young people, they would climb back in the truck and return to Toronto.

At the end of the war, use of the camp resumed. However, repairs were urgently needed and in the summer of 1945, "A group of nearly fifty people have been meeting together at Camp. One object has been to repair the ravages of the past few years during which it has not been possible to use the camp fully." While

doing physical work the group “considered again the implications of Friends’ ideals in the life of today and the future of the Society in Canada”.<sup>8</sup>

Stuart Starr’s recollection fits in with the preceding paragraph. He writes, “Sometime around 1945, in early May, Fred and Maude Haslam, Maude’s nephew Brian Boughton, and I went to camp to plant trees. We stopped at the Midhurst Forest Station to pickup the trees. We had a picnic lunch with us, and had a very pleasant day. The large evergreens beside the playing field and behind the meeting house are the results of our efforts.”<sup>9</sup>

Even in 1946 the camp period was a short one. “Young Friends Camp lasted only a week but they were able to hold their Yearly Meeting during a combined work-study period. . . in our morning period of worship we have tried to bring out the urgency of the “now”<sup>10</sup>

In 1947 there was Young Friends camp again with Young Friends from Norwich, Coldstream, Sparta, and Pelham Meeting represented. “Virginia Holden’s course in puppetry turned out to have more to it than had been suspected, and some of the boys learned to handle their needle -- we wonder if their mothers have discovered this and their prowess in dishwashing yet.”<sup>11</sup> Young Friends held their Yearly Meeting again that year. It was also the year that 150 trees were planted,<sup>12</sup> but there is no information as to where these trees were planted or by whom.

During the winter of 1948 the main building was severely damaged by heavy snow. The rafters on the shore side of the building were broken and the roof had to be largely removed and restored. Melting snow and rain caused further damage to the interior furnishing and the mattresses. It was at this point that the Elizabeth Fry Society donated 11 blankets to the camp.<sup>13</sup>

About the snow damage Stuart Starr writes, “I think it was about 1947 that the snow collapsed the roof of the main building. Around May 2 a group of us went up to make repairs.

An elderly carpenter named Jack Beswick was in charge. Others were Fred Haslam, Brian Boughton, a chap from Rochester whose name I forget, and me. We stayed at the Waubaushene Inn, and had our meals there. One day the three young guys went for a swim in the bay. Yes, the ice was all gone: But that night we had three inches of snow. We had only gotten part of the damaged roof removed, and it was very slippery trying to work until the snow had melted. Anyway, we got the walls pushed back into alignment and the new roof on, and we felt justifiably proud of the nice straight roofline we achieved. We made a system of props to support the roof in winter. These could be taken out for the camping season. I believe that since then trusses have been installed so the props are no longer needed. This was about the time that The United Nations Relief and Reconstruction Administration was in the news, so I named our crew “The Camp Neekaunis Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Administration”, which I duly noted in the guest book, and had everyone sign it.”<sup>14</sup> The camp guest book and photographs recording the snow damage are found among the camp archives stored in Rogers on the camp premises.

Already in the July August 1949 edition of *The Canadian Friend*, funds were being solicited for a building fund. Nelson Hall has always been the heart of the camp and over the years has served in many capacities including dining hall, kitchen, sleeping quarters, storage, tuck shop, laundry facilities, workshop, art room and showers. Those with foresight saw that there was a need for a quiet place, particularly for leaders who needed a place to plan programs. The building erected was at first called the Leader’s Cottage. Subsequently it was renamed Haslam for Fred Haslam who was known as Mr. Canadian Friend. This building, consisting of four rooms, was planned and finished, with the exception of the fireplace, in 1949 at the cost of \$1800.00.<sup>15</sup> The stonework on the out-

side was the work of Carl Winger who spent many weekends over the summer of 1956 to complete the chimney. In 1957 Stirling Nelson referred to the work done "last summer." The stones for the fireplace had been accumulated for some time, and left sitting near the cottage until such time as Carl was able to work on the project. Campers watched him as he carefully chose the stones one at a time. They had to fit in size and shape, but before they could be cemented in, Carl had to split them. Thus, the flat side could be placed towards the inside while the rounded side faced the outside. As always, construction at camp was a learning experience for campers.

1949 also marked the first year that the Nelsons took charge of the camp, a task which they carried on for the next 30 years. Mildred and Stirling brought with them their son Calvin who was five years old that summer. They travelled to Neekaunis by train, having sent their trunk ahead and stayed throughout the summer despite the relatively rustic situation. For a number of years, they attended Neekaunis without owning a vehicle, spending the summer in a picturesque setting without modern toilets and without bathing facilities except the lake. Although being without a car was not the hardship it would be today, as most necessities were delivered to the camp, the simple amenities would have been more challenging for leaders with a lengthy stay at Neekaunis.

## The Building Years - The 1950's

### Programs

The 1950's were the so-called "baby boom" years when there was growth all over North America. Neekaunis also experienced this phenomenon of growth, as well as many changes in the operation of the camp. Not only were physical changes made to the buildings and property, but many programs were also introduced and expanded. Neekaunis was then, as it still is, a means of sharing and spreading the

message of Friends, not only from one part of the country to the other, but also from Friends to those who do not know Quakers.

In 1953 Anne Willson wrote an article for *The Canadian Friend*: entitled Impressions in which she expresses the following: "I don't think a boy or girl attending Camp with any degree of seeking can come away without being touched in some measure by the inspiration so abundantly present in the sunset services, the games, the swimming, the study groups - the talks around the fire-place -- or just the fellowship of a rainy afternoon."<sup>16</sup> And the following year, another benefit of spending time at camp was expressed as follows: "Canadian Friends are beginning to awaken to the value of a few days spent in fellowship with other Friends in the freedom of the camping atmosphere."<sup>17</sup>

For a number of years, a seminar was held for adults. Commentaries arising out of the program held August 20-28, 1955 are reflected in the report published in *The Canadian Friend* from which the following extracts are taken:

Gordon McClure of Toronto:

*When I came to it I would have said that I knew some of the Friends there very well indeed. I had been associated with them in the work of the Meetings and on various committees for anywhere up to three years. Many have been in my home and my family has been in their home. I thought of them as close and dear friends.*

*But after those nine days at camp I realize how shallow our acquaintance was through the years. It is so easy to keep ourselves constantly busy with committees and the mechanics of doing good that we have no time to listen to and answer that of God even in our fellow Quakers.*

Susan Wilmer of Galt, Ontario:

*It was indeed a time of refreshment of body and spirit in great measure. Impressionable too was the kindness and sincerity of my associates, re-*

*ceiving inspiration from those I conversed with. I felt I had many good friends.*

Alan Hutcheon of Hamilton, Ontario:

*It would be inappropriate to say anything specific about the friendships made at camp; for me the evidence for the richness of our experience together was made manifest in the genuine warmth of the "au revours." Perhaps it is because, as one Friends suggested, we had come to know one another "in the things which are eternal.*

Howard E. Brown of Welland, Ontario:

*Yes, we hold our Yearly Meetings and Service Committee meetings, and all the other meetings, but these are so filled with comings and goings, and the reportings and recordings, so that there is no time to just sit and meditate. The Seminar lacks all this formality and need for decision. It is a time of exploration.*

*A religion or a faith must be an experience, and one who tried to preach the Good News without experiencing it is an impostor trying to sell a second-hand article he knows nothing about. This, I fear, has been mostly the position of Friends for the past few generations. We have been living on the spiritual experiences of those who have gone on before but they are not a part of anything we ourselves know experimentally.<sup>18</sup>*

Another interesting camp held for several years was the Canadian-American Family Camp with equal numbers of American and Canadian Families joining together at Neekaunis. This was arranged in part through the Dayton, Ohio office of the AFSC. At the 1955 Family Camp there were five Canadian and five American families. Unique, too, was the fact that while the Canadian families were all members and attenders of a Quaker meeting, the American families were, without exception, members of other denominations. Actual Quakers were outnumbered by a strong contingent of Methodists, backed up by the Churches of Christ

(Disciples) and two families who professed no affiliation. There were two ministers, three teachers, one scientist, one builder, two businessmen and one engineer among the parents. Of great and far-reaching importance in a family camp such as this is the spiritual experience which it can provide for the children.

### Activities

Getting up in the morning was difficult for campers. Every morning Stirling would blow the whistle, indicating that he was going to the beach for his swim and that campers could join him if they so wished. Rarely were there any takers. It was all they could do to get out of bed. The cabins were not insulated and it was very cold. The ringing of the gong signaled time to get up and campers would drag themselves out of bed, hustling to get there in time for the breakfast crew if it was their turn, or to arrive before the silence which preceded breakfast, as it did each meal. Following breakfast, campers were expected to do a cabin cleanup before moving to the hill for a short worship period prior to the scheduled programming.

Mornings were usually devoted to quiet programming such as discussions. However, it might also be a hike during which campers learned about various plants. We also learned what to do if we had walked through a patch of poison ivy. We were instructed that upon our return to camp, we were to wash with sunlight soap. While this would not guarantee avoiding poison ivy, it was often efficacious. These activities took place in the morning because the water tended to be cold until later in the day. So, upon getting up after hearing the gong we would dress in layers which could be removed as the day progressed. After breakfast, there would be cleanup followed by a short meeting for worship usually held outside on the hill, weather permitting. Following lunch, there would be a quiet rest time followed by a one hour work period.

Work period included helping with kitchen



chores, cleaning the stones on the beach, cutting firewood, transplanting saplings from the woods to elsewhere on the property, or cleaning or repairing things. The tasks were distributed based on the ages and abilities of the campers.

After work period, campers had free time until supper. Swim period fell into this block of time, once the whistle was blown to indicate that the lifeguard was ready, but it could also be spent otherwise. Sometimes this could be a walk into town, to Waubashene, when it had stores and later to Duffys. Campers might choose to sit on the hill and write letters or just relax.

When Stirling ran the camp, he provided a variety of crafts for rainy days. A favourite was leather work from very simple items to quite elaborately worked wallets, belts and ladies' purses. Work on aluminum pieces such as trays was another option.

One summer during the 1950's, Delores McKee, who with her family came from Highland Park, Michigan, brought copper enameling equipment to camp. This provided a new and different craft for campers and a new experience. Within two years, Stirling had acquired Delores' equipment and the copper enameling became another of his, and the campers' crafts. With these many options, campers were able to make gifts to take home to their parents or items to keep as a remembrance of camp.

Sometimes these crafts would be continued in the evening. A craft of a different nature was the hooked picture made out of a potato sack, old rags and nails which had been converted to hooks by putting a cut in the four-inch nail. A picture of the scene showing the bay, a white birch and Amitie and Welcome was sketched on the potato sack and people took turns hooking the different coloured rags through the holes in the sacking. The picture remains to this day, evidence of a cooperative effort by many hands.

### Vespers, Tuck and Bedtime

After a busy day, it was customary to gather on the hill to watch the sun go down. It was a way of settling the campers. People would gradually move to the hill, often with blankets on which to sit. The colours were always amazingly beautiful. There would be some singing, rounds or songs like Jacob's Ladder, until the sun reached the horizon. Then, in the silence of the evening, campers watched as the sun sank behind the horizon.

This was followed by a mad dash to Nelson-Hall, a short period of Tuck shop and then campers were shooed to bed. During Stirling's tenure, he would make the rounds of the cabins, checking up on everyone, responding to queries, with a bug repellent squirter in hand. We would ask him to spray for mosquitoes, something he always did in those days before we worried about insecticides. It was only later on that I realized that this was Stirling's way of checking up on young people to make sure they were where they were supposed to be. Because he seemed to be dealing with mosquitoes, we never thought about his "ulterior" motive!

### Outings

It has always been a tradition at Neekaunis for campers to go on a variety of excursions. Some outings have remained the same, while others have changed over the years.

One favourite outing for a number of years was a trip on the train, an experience many young campers had never had. Because there were always campers who wished to go to Midland, to shop for items not available in Waubashene, or for a break from the camp routine, one or more carloads of campers would drive to Midland. Those who wanted the train ride would then get on the train and ride back to Waubashene while the others would continue with their shopping. On its return trip the train would pass through the camp property, announcing its arrival by blowing a whistle as it rounded the bend from the Tannerville road.

This would be a signal for campers at the beach to run up to the train track and wave to their friends. Campers would frequently wave to passengers, even when they were strangers, but it was always special to recognize the familiar faces of friends. Along with the excitement of waving to passing trains, campers would also put pennies on the tracks to see them be flattened by the fast-moving train.

Today, the railway service no longer exists and even the tracks themselves have been removed. It is hard to believe that many campers, along with the family of Stirling Nelson, would travel by train to camp, and remain for the summer, without benefit of a car during the duration of their stay. In later years, when the Nelsons had a car, Stirling would drive into Waubaushene to meet the train and pick up campers.

Outings to the Huron Indian Village at Midland, and the Martyrs' Shrine were the usual excursions in the early years. Later, with the construction of Sainte Marie Among the Hurons and the nature centre at the Wye Marsh, other possibilities opened up. As well, with the advent of more numerous vehicles, campers were able to participate in a greater variety of excursions. These included trips to Christian Island with campers having an opportunity to meet Indians who lived there and to enjoy a game of baseball together. Whole day excursions to Beausoleil Island first required a ride to Honey Harbour to obtain water transportation to the island. Campers thus had boat trips to and from the island, a day at the beach, a chance to hike and a picnic to finish off the day.

Another favourite included a trip to the Big Shute Marine Railway. One such trip culminated in Doug Barclay breaking his neck during a dive. Fortunately, Gerard Gosselin, the Quebec lifeguard who had come to improve his English the summer of 1982, was able to put his first aid skills to good use and stabilize Doug until he was airlifted to the hospital. This

accident which could have had tragic consequences, had a happy ending thanks to the quick thinking of the trained lifeguard. Doug was safely transported back to Toronto where he received treatment. Doug, who walked out of the hospital with a halo attached to his shoulders, was back at camp later that year, thankful for his good fortune.

But, in all of these excursions, campers have enjoyed the pleasures of participating in activities which are not available at home, activities which, by and large are not only pleasurable, but educational.

### Talent Night

It has become a tradition to have a Talent Night at the conclusion of each camp. The entertainment is varied and campers are encouraged to participate in and enjoy the program. Talent Night provides an opportunity for musicians to perform before their friends and family, for children to demonstrate what they have done or learned at camp, and for everyone to have fun and to laugh.

Since the late 1950's, a skit which has become a camp tradition is the "Heffalump" which usually closes the program and is the final skit of the evening. It was introduced to the camp by Jeanne, Pat, and Sue McKee, three Michigan sisters who came to Neekaunis for a number of years, and whose parents also attended during the Canadian-American Family Camp. When the Young Friends were looking for a skit for Talent Night, Jeanne suggested the Heffalump. The first time the skit was performed, it was done with considerable finesse. Huge ears were made out of large cardboard boxes and the "animal" and "trainer" prepared. For the highlight of the evening, a "volunteer" was required. As the success of the skit depends upon the "volunteer," it is important to select the individual ahead of time. Jeanne decided that Leroy Jones would be the ideal choice. And so, Leroy became the first heffalump. Needless to say, the skit was a huge

success.

### **The 1950's - Site development**

During the 1950's many changes were made to the physical premises of the camp. Several new buildings were erected, changes were made to existing buildings, and some amenities were added to make life more pleasant or easier, especially for those who spent long periods at camp, or worked in a staff capacity at Neekaunis.

Nelson-Hall has always been the heart of the camp, and in the early years, it provided sleeping quarters as well as housing the kitchen and dining hall. In this period, it was the girls who were accommodated in the rooms at Nelson-Hall, while the boys stayed in White Feather and Amitie. Because there was no place for adults to congregate after the young people had been sent to bed, they were relegated to the kitchen, where all doors were closed and where, in crowded quarters they visited for the remainder of the evening. Among the old photographs is a picture of a group of adults crowded into the old kitchen which existed before it was enlarged.

Improvements during the summer of 1954 included the construction of a new Isolation Cabin, now known as Jordan, which was built during work camp with the help of hired carpenters, putting in a new water line to the leader's cottage (Haslam), and the installation of a drinking fountain. Canadian Young Friends undertook the purchase of a new stove as their project toward the improvement of the kitchen.

Stirling Nelson had plans to move sleeping quarters out of Nelson-Hall, but new cabins would be needed in order to do so. Thus, in 1957 two new cabins, now known as Green Garth and Green Oak, graced the premises. Suddenly there seemed to be many buildings on the grounds, and it became more difficult to identify which building was being referred to when campers were giving each other direc-

tions. There was talk of naming the cabins and campers were given the opportunity to think about names. The younger campers joked about John 1, 2, 3 and 4, or 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th John, but the naming of the outhouses came only much later!

And so, one evening during the summer of 1957, gathered in Nelson-Hall, at the end of the meal, campers were asked to suggest names for the various buildings. Campers began with the smaller buildings. Elaine Horst Wood who, with Helen Lawson, had been one of the first inhabitants of these cabins, suggested Green Oak for one of them, pointing out that there was an oak tree growing near the cabin. Green Garth was suggested for the other cabins. (Note: I seem to recall the comment that one of these was the home of Elfrida Vipont Foulds who attended Neekaunis one summer). This suggestion was unanimously adopted. For the two original cabins behind Nelson-Hall, others put forward the names of Welcome, a name which speaks for itself, and Wetaskiwin, a Cree Indian name, also in the tradition of Friends, meaning hills or place of peace. These were accepted. The old cabins previously referred to as the "boys'" cabins were named White Feather and Amitie. The story of White Feather had been shared one summer when Sarah Swan read from the *Friendly Story Caravan*, and young Friends knew that the white feather symbolized peace. Amitie also reflects the philosophy inherent in the very name of Neekaunis.

Moving to the larger buildings, someone suggested Haslam, in honour of Fred Haslam for the building which had been called the "leader's cottage." This was enthusiastically accepted, leaving only the main building to be named. "Nelson!" was called out. To this there was a thundering response of clapping, pounding on tables and yells. It seemed appropriate, and even in that form of a single name, it was endorsed by campers. Someone then asked "How about Nelson Hall?" This too was

greeted with enthusiasm. When the noise had died down, George Sotiroff Sr., called out, "Why not call it Nelson-Hall, with a hyphen. This would indicate that the building is a hall, and also pay tribute to Leonard and Zula Hall."

Leonard and Zula Hall were leaders at Young Friends' camps for several consecutive years, and happened to be there when the naming took place. And so, the suggestion to hyphenate the name was greeted with a positive response and Nelson-Hall it became. It seemed an appropriate decision at the time given the presence of Leonard and Zula Hall and all the more so with the most significant contributions made by two other Halls, namely Bonnie and Eric Hall, who served as cook and general builder and handyman respectively. With the passage of time, it is unlikely that new campers will notice the hyphen in the wood carved name of Nelson-Hall, nor will they know of the history behind the hyphen. Stirling Nelson, who had been a shops teacher for many years and a skilled workman, made beautiful wooden names for many of the cabins. These were affixed to the buildings to mark them.

As other cabins were added in later years, the naming of these new buildings was done by the Neekaunis Committee, honouring the contributions of those who helped to build the camp or choosing a name with a special meaning. And so came Willson, Rogers, Jones, Zavitz, and King.

### **The 25th anniversary and more!**

In 1957, the Camp celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. To mark that special occasion a number of symbols were developed to commemorate that historic year. For the first time, a camp crest and logo appeared. Campers are familiar with the cluster of white birches seen against the background of the lake. These birches could be seen from "first" hill, the place where outdoor meetings for worship were held in 1957, not quite as far east or as high up as the Meeting Centre. The first sign of these symbols was the

hanging of the large wooden camp crest which was placed over the fireplace in Nelson-Hall. The design was also printed on sweatshirts and T-shirts which were introduced that summer, in a royal blue background with a white circle enclosing the birch design. Such a design also appeared on the letterhead which Eileen Gardiner designed and which has been used ever since. It is easily recognizable on crests, button, and the usual attire of shirts and sweatshirts. In later years the button was given to welcome new campers to Neekaunis.

A full program was planned that year and again included Young Friends Yearly Meeting, Quaker Seminar, Young Friends camp, and the Canadian-American Family Camp.

Neva Zavitz prepared a summary of the seminar that preserves much that Elfrida Foulds poured out from her rich knowledge and the sensitive recollection of her experience from childhood up to the seminar itself. Elfrida Foulds also visited Junior Young Friends Camp and provided the young people with the opportunity to meet a "real live author."

It was also the year that it was hoped to add two new cabins, Green Garth and Green Oak, referred to in the preceding chapter, for sleeping accommodation. In the same year Carl Winger of Newmarket donated many hours of labour in building the fireplace for Haslam, formerly referred to as the "leader's cottage."

### **1958-59**

The 1958 Seminar conducted by Norman Whitney from Pendle Hill dealt with a Quaker Approach to Religion and Life. It was pointed out that "there is an important distinction between Quakerism and the Religious Society of Friends. Of the latter it may be said that it is in a state of spiritual anarchy." Once again, those in attendance stressed the importance of meeting people, getting to know each other on a deeper level because of the closer contacts achieved by living together and having their lives enriched by the experience. Then, as today,

those in charge had to give long consideration of the ways by which the upkeep and running expenses of the camp should be met. Many of the services offered by Neekaunis have been made possible by funds left by an earlier generation.

Some of the expenses being considered at the time included replacement of the boat, the old wooden rowboat christened the Neekaunis Tub was leaking beyond repair and was replaced by an aluminum craft required for safety reasons. Renewal of the electric wiring by a professional was imperative. Other needs included painting of roofs, cabin foundations, cement steps, a washing area, and a beach house. The challenge then, as now, is to find the balance between comfort and simplicity, and self-help and equipment.

In 1959 there were a fairly large number of friends of other denominations, and some even without church affiliation, present at the seminars and other camp activities. The 1959 seminar, with 15 friends present, had as its main subject, "Some Aspects of Quaker Discipline", with subtopics including Discipline and Worship, Discipline of Waiting, Listening, and Watching, Discipline of Sensitivity, Discipline Defined, and Discipline and Young People; Discipline of Concern and Service. The growing together in loving fellowship enabled participants to share their deepest spiritual experiences and brought them to a level of relationship in which they felt they had, with God's help and guidance, deepened the level of their friendship, which would be a source of inspiration and strength in the group and daily life after they had separated. That seminar was a responsibility not of the CFSC but of the Yearly Meeting through a sub-committee of the Religious Education Committee.

In June, 1959, *the Canadian Friend* published the essay which appears below, written by student Jeanne McKee, from Highland Park, Michigan. It is included here because it expresses the thoughts and feelings of many

campers who have attended Neekaunis over the years.

#### THE SPOT THAT IS THE CLOSEST TO PARADISE FOR ME

*Camp Neekaunis is a spot as close to paradise, for me, as any place on earth. It is a Quaker camp up in Canada, situated on a hill overlooking Georgian Bay. I have been going there each summer since 1955. The camp has three main periods: work camp, family camp, and Young Friends. The latter is the one I enjoy most. It is a two week period planned for young people of any age. Our leader comes up from the American or Canadian Friends Service Committee to lead our group in the morning. There are usually only a few adults up there: our cook (she's one in a million), the leader, and Stirling and Mildred Nelson, the two wonderful people who run the camp. We have no counsellors and do all the jobs ourselves except the cooking.*

*Neekaunis is like paradise to me because it is so beautiful and peaceful. Everyone loves one another and it seems the kind of place you might find up in heaven. Once in a while when a bunch of the kids walk into town (a mile away) and I read the papers from home, I often wonder how there could ever have been any wars, disputes, or testing of nuclear bombs. These things seem to be in another world when I'm at Neekaunis and I never even think about them. Another reason I like Neekaunis is that I feel close to God there. He seems to be everywhere -- in the woods, fields, bay and even the people. This is my paradise and I wouldn't trade it for the world.<sup>19</sup>*

#### The 1960's

In the 1960's the programming was much the same, with Work Camp, Young Friends Camp, Family Camp and Seminar. According to a report by Stirling Nelson,<sup>20</sup> there were again

Work camp, Young Friends Camp, Family Camp, and Seminar in 1962. The Seminar had an average attendance of 21. The total number of campers this year remained about 185, but the number of persons who came for part of a day was greatly increased to 192. This gave a daily average of 38 campers. All programs continued in routine duties as well as special assigned projects. The Beach House started in Work Camp was well completed under the capable direction of Eric Hall. Other projects completed during the summer were hot water heaters installed in the kitchen and Haslam Lodge, kitchen cupboard doors put on, two sinks and a bath tub installed, and areas levelled around the Beach House, "White Feather" and "Amitie" cabins.

The report which follows tells of camp during the summer of 1964.

*On the first visit to Neekaunis a camper can feel and respond to the atmosphere. It is only after a number of visits and a fairly regular association with the place that its far-reaching influence and its great importance to the Society can be realized.*

*No religious instruction is imposed, but here children see without realizing it Christianity being lived, and absorb it without knowing it some understanding of the methods of non-violence. Here older children assume responsibility for younger ones without becoming impatient with them; here younger children play together without their problems and air their grievances with an astonishing frankness and feel no embarrassment in doing so.*

*None of this would be possible without an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for individuality which envelops the whole community, and this we owe to the character of its leaders over the last 15 years or more. They provide among them a genius for handling youngsters, a capacity for hard and skilled manual work on construction and maintenance of the camp, an adaptability and good humour in the kitchen which produces excel-*

*lent food at a nominal cost. (What camp cook anywhere else would permit so many intruders for the odd cup of tea, or the nightly raid of 15 or 20 hungry mortals for toast and cheese and coffee at 11 p.m. when the kitchen has been cleaned and tidied ready for the morning?)*

*As with teaching the results are not evident for many years, but assuredly there are results; and as I contemplate the effect on my own family, I can only wish that other children could have these particular opportunities for growth as mine have. Quakerism flowers in different ways in different countries. As an immigrant from England it has taken me a long time to realize this. Neekaunis has sprouted out of the Canadian soil and climate and Friends here should make quite sure that it is well nurtured and continues to flourish. For it is unique.*

*I am not much interested in statistics myself, but for those who like details: Neekaunis provided this year a work-camp attended by a dozen or so teenagers; a two-week Junior Young Friends camp for over 40 ten-to-twelve year olds; another two week period for Senior Young Friends of 13 and over; a Family Camp attended by five American and seven Canadian families and a weekend seminar with an attendance of over 80.*

*Among the work projects completed this year a play-house was built, a rustic seat constructed, a trail was cut through the woods and part of the beach house was repainted. The weather was both good and bad (depending on which week you were there and what kind of weather you like) and hundreds of campers had a wonderful holiday.<sup>21</sup>*

However, despite all the good things which are said about camp, "We are again reminded that Camp Neekaunis is only possible if we are willing to share the heavy load of supporting and operating it. We need staff for program and kitchen, and we need more room, which we are hoping to get in the form of the Neekaunis Meeting Centre."<sup>22</sup>

The Seminar of the summer of 1967 was held Aug. 9-13 after the return of delegates

from Friends World Conference. The attendance was small but there was the opportunity to consider in some depth the problems and implications of the Conference for Canadian Friends. There was a general feeling that study should go on, not only of the Conference but also of the reports from it and the possible third study book that may emerge from the Conference reporting committee. It is hoped that perhaps HYM will devote some time to this subject in addition to any efforts being made by MM and local groups for winter study.

On evaluation night it was decided to send out a questionnaire to all campers asking them to state their wishes regarding Neekaunis program and activities. The need for a program director is so vital that it seems imperative that such a person be found if Neekaunis is to offer Senior Young Friends program in 1968.<sup>23</sup>

### The Meeting Centre

For many years Neekaunis strengthened the life of the Society of Friends through the spirit which prevails. The average attendance during the 1950's and 1960's reached just over forty persons a day through July and August. This strained the facilities for meeting and study. The only places which could be used for these purposes were the dining hall (Nelson Hall), the director's cabin (Haslam cottage) and the leaders' cabin (Rogers cottage) and the outdoors in good weather. In rain or cold overcrowding was a serious problem. Additional meeting space clearly had to be provided. The Neekaunis Committee and campers gave much thought over the years to a Meeting House on the hill. Gradually came the idea of a "Meeting Centre" – a place to serve the daily needs of worship, discussion groups and other meetings or informal chats. The proposed design would accommodate at least 100 people, either in one group or divided into smaller groups by movable partitions. It was hoped to raise \$10,000 which was the estimated cost of this project including voluntary Camper labour. The cover

of the April-May 1966 issue carries the sketch of the proposed Meeting Centre drawn up by John Leaning of Ottawa.<sup>24</sup> A letter requesting donations to the project went out, showing the proposed sketch.

The idea of a Meeting Centre was not lost but grew in every sense of the word. Many Friends and volunteers under the guidance of Eric Hall worked during the seasons of the years 1967 and 1968. The construction began with the building of the back wall from stones gathered on the camp property. Much of that work was done during a work camp held in the summer of 1967. My job, as a young person helping during that camp, was to keep the little ones away from the building lest they be hurt and so that they would not impede the laying of the stones. This was heavy work and could have resulted in injury to a small child. Stirling instructed us to go to the beach and bring back a stone to be inserted among the others. This was done, and the walk to and from the beach took time, as well as carrying back a stone of about 8 inches in diameter, heavy enough for young campers. The stone, small in relation to the others used for that back wall, is seen just over the fireplace and Stirling referred to it when he spoke at the Reunion several years later.

The roof was put up during the work camp in July of 1968. It was also the year of the erection of a 19-foot telephone pole into a totem pole that includes such carvings as an owl representing Stirling's wisdom and watchful eye and a wolf representing the constant hunger of campers.

In the April-May 1969 issue of *The Canadian Friend*, we read that, the Neekaunis Meeting Centre which was not so very long ago a mere idea, is now a reality and stands near completion on the hill overlooking Georgian Bay.<sup>25</sup>

The close association with the history and pioneer efforts in the Waubauskene and Midland area which Neekaunis has had is further seen in the construction of the Meeting Centre.

The materials used in the new Meeting Centre are also of historical significance. The lumber came from EDGEHILL a home that had been built in Midland about 1870 by the British Columbia Lumber Company. Edgehill had at one time been the home of James Playfair, a man whose name will always be associated with lumbering, ship building, flour milling, and shipping on the upper Great Lakes. James Playfair was a liberal in his charitable gifts and acts for the welfare of the community. This home was given to the town of Midland and served as the Huronia Museum for a number of years. It was torn down in 1967 and some of the material purchased to be used in the Meeting Centre. Friends may readily see that lumber in the Meeting Centre has an association of time and growth related to the surrounding area. In 1967 Eric Hall worked all summer on the Meeting Centre that has progressed successfully. He was helped significantly by Russell Zavitz, Vic Basewitz and John Leaning.<sup>26</sup>

The summary for the 1969 season during which there were Junior, Intermediate, Family, Community Camp, and Young Friends Thanksgiving weekend reads as follows:

*The newly built Meeting Centre was in daily use (many thanks to Eric Hall). The newly acquired film projector was well used and an Intercom system was installed between Rogers cabin, Nelson Hall, and the Meeting Centre under Rolf Blatts' supervision. Camps were rewarding and happy but there was a definite feeling of imminent change. Pearl Jones (Toronto), who has been our head cook, spent her last month in such a position during August. She has been responsible for the fine reputation of Neekaunis for good food and we know Bonnie Hall will keep up the good work. During the Camp Committee Meeting, Director Stirling Nelson announced that he would be gradually stepping down during the next two years. Yes, Neekaunis has begun a major reshuffle, and while it is sad to realize that people who have dedicated so much labour and love to*

*the "Meeting Place of Friends" will be playing a smaller role, I cannot help feeling that exciting things are beginning. A multitude of thanks to the Nelsons especially, and the countless others who have made Neekaunis the place that it is. Now let's look forward -- there's plenty to do.*<sup>27</sup>

At that 1969 Thanksgiving Weekend of Young Friends at Neekaunis "Young Friends are in the process of organizing a week's holiday at Neekaunis next summer (1970) for a number of underprivileged children from 'Cabbagetown'" (Remember that the camp was originally used for underprivileged children from Toronto.) Another interesting reflection in the same article on the same weekend:

*I thought of all the heart-searching argument and discussion that has taken place in the past about smoking at Neekaunis, I thought especially as I saw young Friends smoke in the kitchen, in Nelson Hall, in the Meeting Centre, and anywhere else they happened to feel the need to smoke. About a third of the campers smoked cigarettes and at times as I watched the volumes of smoke rise, I felt as if I was attending a sort of brand-tasting convention and further we read "I observed great diversity of character and outlook among the young Friends present and indeed some found it has hard to relate the others of their own age group as they would to much older people. Nevertheless, there was a tendency to mix freely at mealtimes. But some fragmentation, caused largely by a non-participating group soon became evident. To my knowledge this small group made not a single appearance at any of the meetings, discussions, films, etc. nor more regrettably, did they show up for kitchen duties. A messenger, sent from the wind-up evaluation meeting, failed to bring any response from the separatists. However, there were many at the meeting who felt that even the non-participants enjoyed the weekend. From my viewpoint, a fully participating, non-chaperoning adult, it was a gas."*<sup>28</sup>



## The 1970's

The 1970 Junior Camp was considerably enriched by the presence of Florence Laming with three Indian children: Barbara, Sophie and Robert who began their journey to Camp Neekaunis about 475 miles south and east of Hornepayne. The train was crowded and they had to sit in separate seats for a while, but later managed to get together to play "mill", which had been sent to them by Friends in a parcel, some time earlier. They stopped at Capreol for half an hour, and spent something on pop and comic books. Florence Laming tells the rest of the story as follows:

*Stirling and Mildred Nelson met us at Orillia. Sophie and Robert had never seen a town like this; trees, big ones, all along the streets and stores on both sides of the street!*

*After we were bedded down, Sophie said to Barbara "It's just like we were at home! I like it here! Everybody is so friendly!"*

*About 60 campers were there from as far away as Ohio and New York, but our group were the only Indians, so beginning with our introductions at breakfast, and all through our holiday, we had special attention. It is difficult to put into mere words, the sensitiveness of the Friends to our needs, and the tenderness shown our young people of a different culture. When they were too shy to go swimming with so many strangers, practically the whole camp devoted itself to gentle love and kindness, until finally the great moment came, that they could dare to join in with the rest – and then all rejoiced together! In a day or two, strong friendships developed and our group were playing and swimming and taking part in all the other activities, quite indistinguishable from the rest of the gang.*

*The trips we took included one to Christian Island by ferry and car, to visit the Ojibway Reserve and talk to the Indians there. We had much laughter and banter over paying for our passage on the Indian owned ferry, as our 3 Indians travelled free while everyone else had to pay!*

*We also visited and were guided around the Indian-owned, co-op charcoal plant.*

*We were so very fortunate to have a professional artist from Toronto at camp, who made beautiful portraits of the children for them to bring home. Also, we had a couple of fine folk singers with guitars and banjo, on their way to the Mariposa Festival.*

*At the close of camp, we had a fair or exhibition of over 200 items made by Handicrafts. Each one in our group won an award—but Robert was exceptional in winning three! The judges had no knowledge of whose work they were judging, so this was not one of the special attentions which I spoke of earlier. It is interesting to note that when we came home and he made portraits of all his friends, his style had changed, and he now used the large sweeping strokes that the artist had used—and his pictures were very much better—the portraits were quite recognizable.<sup>29</sup>*

1970 also brought Camp for Kids to Neekaunis. At the end of the summer, Neekaunis was the scene of a camp for inner city children run by Canadian Young Friends, the culmination of several months planning. Twenty-one children aged 10-12 years, came to camp.

*We hope they felt our concern for them, and our respect and liking for each other. For the staff, it woke us up to the reality behind what we knew intellectually, that there are some people less fortunate than ourselves. Many of us had visited some of the homes, and we felt what "crowded living conditions", "sole support mothers", "alcoholism", all words we knew, really meant.*

*Our program was very similar to that of the junior program. "The major task of this project was the organizing and planning of it. Preparations began just before last Christmas when Toronto Young Friends began raising money.*

*In February, some of the Young Friends met with Jim Steele, a community worker who has worked with youth in Cabbagetown. This was followed with Mark Abbott and myself making*

*several trips down to Winchester Public School, where the kids came from. With the help of the V.P. of Winchester, by April all the kids had been selected. The kids were chosen on the basis of family and financial situations; therefore, most of the kids had only one parent and some lived in just one or two rooms under the most depressing conditions. At the end of May, the Young Friends involved in the project and all the kids got together at Toronto's Centre Island to get to know one another. It wasn't until then that we really knew what we were in for!*

*Yes there were tensions among us but nothing that couldn't be ironed out. Because of our inexperience we had to play things by ear a lot of the time. We made several mistakes but we will benefit from them if we decide to have another project of this sort.<sup>30</sup>*

The following year, Neekaunis again held a Camp For Kids in 1971 once more offering a camping experience for inner city children from Toronto from August 25 to September 3, 1971. It was attended by 22 children between the ages of 9 and 13.

*We had been in touch with many of the children from the previous summer's camp (1970) and new children were reached through the area's public school. Two-thirds of last year's campers came again this year and new-comers made up the other third.*

*"Between the past Christmas and the summer holidays we had been in touch with many of the children. Some accompanied us on short excursions, others joined in our square dance at Friend's House and even helped us in our fund raising projects, such as window washing and bake and rummage sales. In June, two weekends were held to prepare for the camp. The first was an orientation weekend with the children and proved to be rather hectic but valuable. We got to know many of the children much better and it gave us a small idea of what to expect at camp.*

<sup>31</sup>

Another account of the Camp for Kids also reflects the same concern which led to the creation of Neekaunis in the beginning.

*It was my first glimpse of 'Kids Camp' in action and it struck me that I was among a group of counselling Young Friends wrestling (sometimes in the literal sense) with a bunch of unruly street urchins who owe their behaviour to a concrete jungle in which sex, cheating, loss-of-temper and the liberal use of four-letter words are freely applied. They heckled during announcements, were slow to co-operate and thumped the piano endlessly. Was I witnessing chaos? an absurd attempt at instant reform which was resulting in a kind of desecration of the Neekaunis fabric.*

*Whatever my initial thoughts, I'm sure now that I've shared in the delight of a group of children from poor, often culturally-deprived and unstable homes, experiencing the goodness of Neekaunis; children who in spite of rude exteriors, were becoming aware of the Neekaunis spirit through the examples set.*

*So many have been succoured by the warmth and spirit of Neekaunis, few perhaps more than these children. It may be a fleeting encounter but supremely worthwhile.*

*That wonderful Neekaunis spirit is like the Olympic flame, carried undimmed from the seventeenth century awakening of George Fox and his followers and disseminated through time and distance. I often feel that it hovers on the Hill and that the Neekaunis trees are imbued with it. But whatever its mode of existence and transmission, I believe it touched those downtown kids.<sup>32</sup>*

## The Nelsons

No history of Camp Neekaunis would be complete without a chapter devoted to Mildred and Stirling Nelson, and to their work at the camp for a period of over thirty years.

Mildred and Stirling Nelson were members of the Wooler meeting. They eventually settled in Niagara Falls where Stirling taught what was

then called manual training or shops to boys in the Niagara Falls public school system. Stirling was an accomplished carpenter and knew much about building, creating and repairing, all much used skills at Neekaunis. Mildred was a “host-ess” who made people feel welcome and at home at camp. Both of them were cheerful persons who led by example.

They first started attending Neekaunis in 1949, when their son Calvin was five years old, and for the next thirty years attended every summer. When they began to come to Neekaunis they travelled to Waubaushene by train, in the days before they acquired their first automobile. This was a task that required long and careful planning. A trunk, containing the various items required for the entire summer, had to be packed and sent ahead about ten days before the Nelsons made the trip.

Stirling was the camp director, a position which entailed looking after diverse matters at the camp, but leaving the program aspects to someone else. Mildred was the gracious camp hostess, meeting visitors, assisting the cook, pouring tea and coffee, and always available to talk to the teenagers who wanted to share something with her. She peeled many potatoes on the hill overlooking the bay as campers did their part in the work period, peeling potatoes in good company.

The schedule for the camp program throughout Stirling and Mildred's tenure never varied. On one occasion when we discussed this, a comment was made that there were reasons for this fairly rigid program, and Stirling merely smiled. He was always a man of few words, allowing his deeds to speak for him.

Stirling was not one to sit idle and for many years he did leatherwork as a hobby. Mildred had beautifully tooled purses, and other leather items. On those rainy days when campers were confined to indoors, Stirling would set up his leatherwork equipment and campers made wallets, change purses, purses, etc. depending on their age, pocketbooks, available time and skill.

Other crafts included aluminum work which allowed campers to produce trays and platters.

Calvin Nelson, who became known as “Cal” only after he had graduated from university, was a fixture at camp, and joined in the many activities of others his age. He was best known for his piano playing and on talent night he would always play a piece as his contribution. But above that, he would play every day, allowing others to stand around the piano and sing songs including: A capital ship, I'm called little Buttercup.

Stirling was the consummate teacher, using every opportunity to pass on a lesson, to show a method of doing something. Sometimes messages were given during meeting. Sometimes they were informal lessons as Stirling worked on a project and explained what he was doing and why. At other times, it was an impromptu occasion during which he seized the opportunity to teach something. I recall one such time when we looked out of the window from our bunks in Nelson-Hall seeing flashing red lights on the bay. We were convinced that someone was in distress and that someone had to go help. Obviously, the person to whom we should appeal was Stirling. But, we did not want to awaken Mildred so after whispered deliberation, deeming this enough of an emergency to risk reprimand, we crept over to the Haslam porch which was not screened at the time, over to the window of the bedroom and whispered through the open window, “Stirling!”

He got up, quietly came out and listened to our excited voices and accompanied us to the hill overlooking the bay. We looked at the lights and he assured us that they were not signals from someone in distress but probably buoys or other markings on the bay. He then gave us a lesson about stars, one which I remember to this day. He pointed out Cassiopeia and how we could find it in the night sky. Stirling accompanied us back to our rooms and then returned to his own bed. He never scolded us or reprimanded us for awakening him in the middle of

the night.

Every morning, at 9:45 a.m. during regular camp periods, campers would gather on the hill looking over the bay, and have a fifteen minute Meeting for Worship before proceeding to the regular program.

During non-programmed periods, between camps, instead of having a meeting on the hill, Stirling would stand up after breakfast, read a passage selected carefully for the occasion, make a comment on the reading, or not, as he saw fit, and then several minutes of silence would follow. When the quietness was over, the in-between camp work would start. These morning devotional periods were never in addition to the Meeting for Worship, but instead of the meeting.

In all of the meetings which I attended, I never heard Mildred speak, but Stirling used to say a few words almost every day. Campers remember his words. Stuart Starr writes:

*I think the nicest Meeting House I have ever attended is outside the hill at Neekaunis. Just about every time Sterling [sic] would quote a scripture verse and give a little "sermon". One in particular has remained with me ever since and I think of it every time I settle into worship. He quoted "What doest thou here, Elijah", and went on to point out how important it is to think seriously of why we are here, whether it be in meeting, at school, at work or at play.<sup>33</sup>*

### **Camp Neekaunis Re-union Weekend**

Stirling and Mildred Nelson devoted many years to the building of Camp Neekaunis. They spent 30 years directing the camp. This meant, among other things, being in attendance on the premises to ensure that the property was looked after, arranging for leadership of individual camp programs, overseeing the day to day operation of the camp, and dealing with the registration of numerous campers.

Today the camp boasts both a bathtub in Haslam, and a shower, with hot water, behind

Nelson-Hall. But, in the early days Neekaunis had very few amenities. For example, living at Neekaunis meant doing without the luxury of a relaxing bath, and having to wash one's hair in cold water. One washed in the bay, with bio-degradable soap, if at all!

Stirling and Mildred wanted to have time to enjoy their retirement and felt the time had come to pass the responsibility of Neekaunis to others. From July 31 to August 1, 1971 there was a special Re-union Weekend to celebrate the Nelsons' 25 years of service to the camp. It was at this reunion that Stirling introduced the Adamson family, who were taking up the camp directing role. Stirling and Mildred felt that Jim and Bobi Adamson were well qualified and capable of fulfilling this challenging task.

Following the retirement of the Nelsons, Jim and Bobi devoted many years of hard work and commitment to the camp. They trained new people to take on leadership roles, they spent hours doing much physical labour on the premises and Bobi became famous for her struggle with the eradication of poison ivy. The Adamsons shared special times with their family at camp and showed endless patience in carrying out thankless administrative tasks. Even when they "retired" they continued to work selflessly for the good of the camp. Neekaunis has been blessed with good people who have given much in order for the camp to continue to provide such a loving and warm welcome to all.<sup>34</sup>

It was believed to be the largest gathering of Friends ever held in Canada. The youngest was two months, the oldest eighty-one years of age. Some had played a large role in the life of the Camp and were present at its birth in 1930--others were recent arrivals to the Camp. Most of the time was spent in rediscovering and renewing old friendships and meeting wives, husbands and children of playmates of yester-year. The highlights of the week-end were the presentation of gifts to Stirling and Mildred on Saturday evening in the Meeting House, and the

Sunday Meeting for Worship on the Hill in front of the Meeting House overlooking Georgian Bay.

The book presented as a gift to Stirling and Mildred is a collection of short writings by former campers on the theme "What Camp Neekaunis means to me". It is a unique book that will grow in value and importance with the passing of years and will, as Fred Haslam said: "Last well after the lifetime of their recipients." It was on display at the Memorial Service held at Toronto Friends House following Mildred Nelson's death in 2007. The binding is the best material in leather and craftsmanship that exist and the work of art and love of our friend Robert Muma. A sterling silver brooch, designed by Eileen Gardiner, had been fashioned for Mildred. The brooch, with a stylized N for Neekaunis, also portrayed the silver birches seen on the camp crest.

One can express many thoughts and ideas in connection with Neekaunis and camp life as was done by so many Friends in the book. Two main ideas that are valid for all times have been reaffirmed. The success of the week-end and the large number of Friends who came was the result of years of systematic hard work and of building on a firm foundation. Without the solid foundation and the continued hard work of many concerned Friends over the years, there would be no Neekaunis.

### Changes

Over the years there have been many changes at Neekaunis. Improvements have been brought about because of the vision of those involved with the camp. Other changes occurred about through no action or fault of campers. These changes were not necessarily improvements and were not for the better but came about as the result of outside events which definitely have affected the camp and in some cases caused leaders some consternation, and sometimes problems, plain and simple.

A prime example is the difficulty of coping

with garbage. In the early years the camp did not generate the piles of garbage that are seen today. But then, milk was delivered to the kitchen door and came in bottles which were returned to the dairy, leaving nothing more than a few cardboard bottle tops. Groceries were brought daily from Waubauskene and delivered to the kitchen door in large cardboard boxes. The boxes were emptied and returned to the grocer for reuse. Because of the problem of garbage the job of "chore boy" has evolved. Not only is garbage unsightly and a form of pollution, it can also cause health problems. Neekaunis wants to recycle, but our society does not make the job easy.

As for transportation, many campers used to travel to camp either by train or bus because the service was available. Consequently, parking was not the problem it has sometimes become. It was not unusual for the camp director to go to Waubauskene to pick up campers arriving by train. Those who came by bus were dropped off at the roadway and had only to walk from the road into camp. Today there is no passenger train service to Waubauskene and virtually no bus service. For all practical purposes, campers have no alternative but to drive or carpool with others.

In the early years "Fresh milk is delivered twice daily and the electric refrigerator makes it quite convenient to provide food for the younger children. A neighbour has presumed to pasture his horses and cows on camp grounds and --presumptuous as this may be -- his livestock has trampled down a great deal of poison ivy.<sup>35</sup> In the 1950's and 1960's the cook ordered groceries on a daily basis and they were delivered not just to the kitchen door but right into the kitchen itself, by Thiffault's, a grocery store then on the main street of Waubauskene. Today, life has become more complicated for the camp's cooks and directors who must make frequent trips to obtain provisions. Planning ahead is a must just to meet the basic needs of the camp. The Neekaunis Committee has had

to plan for new refrigerators and freezers and it has been necessary to seek out suppliers of food and other needs of the camp.

Other changes include the increasing invasion by the outside world. In the early years, there was little or not communication with the outside. Once campers and visitors arrived at Neekaunis, they lived in an isolated world of their own unaware of happenings outside their world. There was no telephone and no way to reach anyone outside without either traveling directly there oneself or appealing to a neighbour. In the 1950's the closest neighbour was "Mrs. Albin" who lived in a yellow frame house in the property adjoining Neekaunis to the southeast. On rare occasions, her telephone was called upon for an emergency. Similarly, there was no radio, no television or any other technological devices. Campers made their own music and their own entertainment. Noise was restricted and the surroundings generated peace and calm.

The nearest doctor was in Coldwater and very rarely called upon. Minor medical problems were dealt with on a first aid basis. Serious incidents were rare. The nearest hospital was in Midland, some 12 miles away.

### Conclusion

The camp committee has seen fit to set aside the many albums and camp memorabilia dating from before 1980, in a safe place, away from the prying fingers of little campers. This is a recognition that these are valuable documents, attesting to the history of this special place. It is appropriate to take good care of these records because they are in fact of great historical value. At the same time, campers are usually interested in recalling their own visits to previous camps and there is no need to subject these fragile papers to handling by eager, happy campers looking for more recent photos of their own experiences. In this way, the history of the camp is being preserved for future generations.

The builders of the camp have left us a variety of legacies: bequests, physical improvements to the camp, donations made in memory of the deceased, but most importantly of all, memories of times shared, lessons learned, and spiritual growth.

The Neekaunis committee has ensured that there is a memorial to each of those who has contributed to the camp. In some cases it is the naming of a building, in others, a tree is planted in remembrance of someone. Each of these is marked on the various maps of the premises, so that all can see. This is indeed appropriate as new campers enjoy the benefits of the work and commitment of their predecessors.

The camp is enjoying a renewal as the next generation attends Neekaunis. These are the children of those who themselves came here as children and who participated in the building years. One of the wonders and miracles of Neekaunis is the fact that the camp holds special meaning for each camper, and that the camp belongs to each camper in a special way. Every individual feels a sense of belonging to this place, a feeling which is all the more important in a world full of stress, family breakdown with change on all sides.

Neekaunis is not only a Friends' camp, but also provides a place and a means for Friends to share their message of peace and good will. It continues to offer a meeting place for friends where one's "cares and woes do not follow," as stated on the sign the entrance to the camp.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated April 1992 from Albert Field to Svetlana MacDonald.

<sup>2</sup> *Quaker Seed*, July 1964, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, Oct. 1933, pp. 5,6.

<sup>4</sup> Recollections of Stuart Starr, 1992.

<sup>5</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, May, 1939, pp. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, July 1939

<sup>7</sup> Recollections of Stuart Starr.

<sup>8</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, August 1945, p. 12.

- <sup>9</sup> Recollections of Stuart Starr.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, September 1946, p. 12.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, 1947, p.9.
- <sup>12</sup> Canadian Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1948, p. 32.
- <sup>13</sup> Canadian Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1949, p.47.
- <sup>14</sup> Recollections of Stuart Starr.
- <sup>15</sup> Canadian Yearly Meeting Minutes, 1949, p. 47.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, 1953, p. 6.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, Oct. 1954, pp. 16, 17.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, Oct. 1955, pp. 14,15.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, June, 1959.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, April-May 1963.
- <sup>21</sup> Janet Martin, Ottawa Meeting, *The Canadian Friend*, October, 1964.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, Dec-Jan 1966-67, p. 8.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, October-November 1967 pp. 12,13.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, April-May 1966, pp. 6, 7).
- <sup>25</sup> Pages 8-9.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, Oct-Nov 1967, p.13; *The Canadian Quaker History Journal*, No. 66, 2001.
- <sup>27</sup> Written by Sylvia McMechan, Dunnville Young Friend.
- <sup>28</sup> Gerry Balcombe, Toronto, *The Canadian Friend*, Dec.-Jan 1969-70, pp. 10-11.
- <sup>29</sup> Florence Laming, Hornepayne, Ontario, in *The Canadian Friend*, April-May 1971.
- <sup>30</sup> Ellen Smith, in *The Canadian Friend*, Dec. 1970-Jan.1971
- <sup>31</sup> Rolf Kreher, Toronto in *The Canadian Friend*, Feb-March 1972, pp. 18-19
- <sup>32</sup> Gerry Balcombe, Toronto, *The Canadian Friend*, Oct.-Nov. 1972, pp. 10-11.
- <sup>33</sup> Recollections of Stuart Starr, May 1992.
- <sup>34</sup> A special chapter should be devoted to the contribution of Bobi and Adamson family.
- <sup>35</sup> *The Canadian Friend*, 1934.