

COLD RIVER CAMP A.M.C. 1919 - 1969

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A.M.C. Cold River Camp is in an area opened by British colonists from Massachusetts (Maine) and New Hampshire only after bloody ambushes and fights. Captain John Lovewell in 1725 first succeeded in overcoming Indian ruses, but later, in May, 1725, lost his life in an expedition designed to rout the Indians at Pequawket. Massachusetts offered £100 per Indian scalp delivered, so great was the fear of Indians under such a leader as Paugus.

In 1727 the family of the late General Joseph Frye was granted some six square miles vaguely located either side of the Saco, as reward for Indian fighting. Terms of this grant included annual payment of an ear of corn to the Crown on December 25th, building a road through the grant, and planting of all land feasible to the growing of hemp and flax. Fryeburg was named in honor of Chaplain Jonathan Frye who was mortally wounded in the "big fight" with Paugus.

Captain Vere Royce (Royce Mountains) was an Irish nobleman and Indian fighter who commanded a British regiment. He was also a surveyor, laying out subdivisions near his Fryeburg home.

John Evans (Notch) was one of seven grantees, a lusty Indian fighter and one of the first settlers in the Fryeburg area in 1763. Between 1767 and 1869 a variety of grants annexations created the Town of Chatham, where Camp is located. It is named in admiration of William Pitt, "The Great Commoner," First Earl of Chatham.

Height of land clearing in this area appears to have been in the latter half of the 19th century. The Eastman School, south of Camp, dates from 1837. Farms near Lord, Pine, Harndon and Stiles Mountains were clear and raised good horses. Such pioneers as Stiles (buried at age fifty-one within his carefully walled graveyard - Olive Stiles also having been buried at the site), cleared and walled many acres of land and built the walls skillfully, earning an arduous living on these remote acres between Camp and Horseshoe Pond.

Families like the Bricketts, Chandlers, Charles, Eastmans and Wymans came into Cold River Valley over a century ago. Millard Chandler's grandfather, in 1867, bought the farm now known as Royce House from Jonas Wyman, who at that time owned the farm opposite Camp, the present Charles farm, and north through Royce House land. Millard Chandler recalls hearing accounts of his great grandfather bringing grain to the Baker grist mill near our present Camp pool. Stones from this mill are at the Camp gate, the bird bath and at the pool.

The easiest and earliest approach to the North Chatham area was from the south, and a wheel road was developed to the Brickett Place. From Gilead south, a crude wheel road led to Colonel Hasting's Location (near present Hastings camp-ground). Gradually these two wheel roads were connected by a very rough and often impassable cart path following Cold River rather closely. When the railroads were seeking routes through mountain notches, Millard Chandler's great great grandfather Brickett (who built Brickett's Place), was hired to survey a possible rail route through Evans Notch. But it is said Brickett took a dim view of a railroad crossing his acres and did not reveal favorable grades, if any existed.

Appalachian Mountain Club members began to become interested in the area before the turn of the century. In 1879, Raynor Edmands, Counsellor of Explorations, urged "continuous path from Dundee Road to Mountain Pond" as a route into Evans Notch. In 1881 the editor of Appalachia appealed for more information on the less known peaks such as the Royces and Speckled. Osgood's 1882 White Mt. Guide reads: "Mt. Royce is rarely ascended, the slopes being terribly rugged. The west peak is said to be 2600 feet but is probably higher... Blanchard's Basin is a sequestered pool on this mountain, famous for its many trout... Speckled Mt., east of Royces, is but rarely visited." Evans Notch had been traversed by wagons and sleighs but no roads, however.

The "Chandler Farm" or "Hill Farm" south of Camp is in 1969 owned by N. W. Hill. Mrs. Hill is an Eastman (Mountain and School).

Benjamin Osgood of Chatham told A.M.C. member Miss Martha M. Pychowska and Explorations Counsellor E. B. Cook of "a new house built for lumbermen and fishermen" at Colonel Hastings Location, and of good accommodations at Asa and Charles Chandlers' in North Chatham. So, in 1883, Miss Pychowska wrote up for Appalachia their experiences on the Royces and of the luxurious ferns on the banks as they descended the valley of "The Great Cold River." They found two trails up Baldface from Chandlers, one worn by the carriage of stone from the face of the mountain -- Walter Sharp's doorstep being a probable sample of this quarrying.

"Stone House" was built from yield of a quarry still to be observed behind that house. Chatham had quarried on the Robbins Hill Road, also.

In 1885 A.M.C. members were actively encouraging the construction of Hurricane Mountain Road from Intervale to South Chatham. The right of way on the Conway side was decided, in part at least, by 1850 for a road.

Dr. Wilber B. Parker, Councillor of Explorations A.M.C., from Boston, is quoted in Appalachia 1896 (Vol. V, P. 78): "There are numerous logging roads both on Chatham and Conway sides (of Hurricane Mountain). For many years there has been talk (ending in same) of a carriage road through to connect North Conway with Chatham by a shorter route... In August last (1885), after repeated exploration, Mr. Eliot Fette and the writer (W.B.P.) started opening up a foot path connecting the logging roads, but so many people seemed interested it was decided to make a bridle path of it. It was opened up as such August 23rd by a lady (a member of the club) going through on horseback from North Conway. The road started at Mc-Intyr's boarding house in upper Kearsarge Village and comes out in Chatham at Holmes Weak's farm. The distance is about 4 miles - difficult to measure as this is very uneven wheel track... emerging from the woods on the northern slope of Hurricane Mountain a new view opens up. Here is a chalet from which we see Pleasant Mountain and numerous hills and lakes in Maine. On the day of the public meeting, September 2nd, a party of fourteen ladies and gentlemen went through, several walking, while others went on horseback and some in carriages. The road can hardly be recommended as desirable for fast driving, however. The cost was \$45.00, which was contributed by Appalachians."

A.M.C. Cold River Valley contacts must have been kept intact, for in 1902, Carolin Clay (the widow of Ithiel) gave A.M.C. ten acres atop South Baldface in Chatham. It is understood that A.M.C. had an interest in additional acreage west of the Baldface ridge for a time, including a wildlife preserve, before the National Forest was established. Crude trails led from upper pastures to the blueberry patches which were then, as now, an attraction for both men and bears.

In May 1903, a great fire spread from Wild River Valley over the Baldfaces, consuming trees and duff on 10,000 acres, opening up ledges but at the expense of water-retaining forest cover. Fire did improve the blueberry crop.

Folks like the Endicotts, Allen Bent, Howard Jackson and Frank Mason explored the area to discover its charms for themselves.

Brick houses in the Valley were built of locally made brick from a yard at the present Olsen place, as well as at the present Charles place and others.

In 1913, August Camp came to Cold River. We read how campers advanced their watches two hours, arising at 4:30 A.M. suntime, the better to traverse the Royces, Baldfaces, Moriahs, and even the Presidents from Cold River in shortening daylight hours of the late summer.

Howard Jackson followed this up with an August 21st to September 5th, 1917, excursion based at Chandlers for fourteen members, including Frank Mason. Mr. Chandler's topaz specimens were admired. There was a repeat excursion in 1918. On these ventures the unused camp "The Ledges" of Dean W. L. Robbins, Albany, New York "General" Episcopal Theological Seminary, was viewed critically.

"The Ledges" camp was for sale. With the aid of Mr. Edmund Smith and Mrs. Smith, presently of West Bethel, Maine (whom Miss Elisabeth Weeks, Mrs. Charlotte Allen, Miss Margaret Currier, Miss Ailene Lynde and Miss Polly Wood visited while on a "Wander" from Cold River Camp), we have been able to secure more detailed information on early beginnings and development at the present A.M.C. Cold River Camp site. Mr. Smith came to "Ledges" camp as a 15-year-old student invited by Dean Robbins. When the Dean was forced to retire and give up the camp, Mr. Smith accompanied him to the Bethel farm and remained there after Dean Robbins' death.

Reverend Robbins and Mr. Smith (a Columbia student) visited the Chandler Farm for a vacation. The Dean bought "The Ledges" campsite from Mr. Charles Chandler, who built the buildings with the assistance of help he could find in the Valley. The "Main Bungalow," now Conant Lodge, was first, followed by the cottages, now the office and Cox. These were begun in 1909, with tents being used for living quarters during their construction. We now quote from a 1969 letter from Mr. E. F. Smith:

"In 1909 no one in the valley had a car. The trip from Fryeburg took three hours by team in the mountain wagon over the gravel road. Clearing and dragging brush took much time and then on a rainy day a big brush fire. The field across the road from camp was famous for Parasol mushrooms and it seems we gathered and ate bushels of them.

"The valley families were independent. They were wonderful folks and they seemed to welcome us.

"When they sought some timbers for the ceiling of the bungalow they called on a neighboring farmer who had some standing trees. After some hemming and hawing he declined to sell them saying, 'he guessed they weren't doing harm where they be.' So the timbers came from Brown & Co. in Berlin.

"The building southeast of the Bungalow (Lodge) was the cook's and for a carpenter's shop.

"I may in a way have been responsible for the Tower. I was about 15 at the time and kept saying I would like a tree-top house and so the idea of the Tower was born. The fieldstone building was built as a chapel and used as such by the young men college students or seminarians whom Dean Robbins wished to help financially. They helped with the chores."

From other sources we learn that the original blue spruce trees at Camp were imported by the Dean from Norway at a reported cost of \$1200. The present blue spruces are seedlings from those originals.

The admirable stone work in most of Camp was done by William Sanborn, a local stone mason. He was secured later to do the charming fireplaces in the cabins.

Frank Mason recommended purchase of "The Ledges" camp which by 1918 included the Main Bungalow with kitchen L, three 18' x 36' cottages (Headquarters, Cox, present Library), the Tower, Chapel (Barracks), tennis court and cold spring on 38 acres of semi-cleared land.

The A.M.C. Council at first turned down the idea but Phillip Ayers, who followed Frank Mason as president, expressed a desire to see the project through and appointed a Cold River Camp Committee to look into the possibility of raising funds if a favorable price could be arranged. The Committee: Theodore S. Conant, Chairman, Frank Mason, William May, Minnie C. Noyes and Mabel Chester. All these committee folk donated to the purchase fund and when R. B. Lawrence, founder of Three Mile Island A.M.C. Camp, subscribed \$500. to the Cold River Camp fund, all hesitancy was removed. Dean Robbins gave all the furnishings in the buildings (his personal property worth \$1740.). When Mr. Conant found from Frank Mason that the Camp could be secured for \$5000. he wrote a check for the entire amount so that any balance of contributions could be used to equip and expand camp.

On May 31, 1919, Frank Mason secured an Agreement of Sale from Dean Robbins and papers were passed June 27th, by which time Mr. Mason had moved swiftly enough to invite and receive campers. With a capacity of 18 beds in six buildings and 4 tents, telegrams and letters indicated 24 people requested to be there for the July 4th weekend. Mrs. Henrietta (John) Chandler secured enough beds and bedding so Frank Mason as manager could accept all registrations and Mr. Conant advanced funds to get needed equipment so Mrs. Chandler could house and feed the 1919 population which reached a height of 37 guests during this first season.

Amont the first registrants were an auto load of visitors brought from North Conway by Mr. Conant on June 29th, including Katherine S. Snyder, Carolyn O. Snyder, Carris S. Osgood, Vesta E. Tibbetts and Bertha E. Hanson. First campers were Nelson and Beatrice Wood, Boston; Grace Robbins Brooks, Belmont; Henry and Bertha Greene of Worcester; Fred and Helen Rust, Newtonville, Mass.; Mr. and Mrs. J. R. Viets and C. L. Parsons of Lynn, Mass.; Mr. and Mrs. William S. Felton, William Sidney Felton and John T. Felton of Salem, Mass.; Nina A. Adams, Stamford, Conn.; J. C. Whitney of Newton, Mass.; Ernest N. May, Cambridge, Mass.; Mabel C. Chester, Brookline, Mass.; William T. May, Newton Centre, Mass.; F. D. and F. B. Maynard Hattie E. Barker and C. E. Woodman of Boston; Mr. and Mrs. H. H. Walley and son of Newton, Mass., Walter K. Munroe of Cambridge, Mass. signed in as crew man and Frank Mason's sixteen-year old daughter, Dorothy, served the bountiful meals Henrietta Chandler prepared.

The chapel was turned into a dormitory (chairs in the present dining room still have prayer book racks) and the double cabin used by Dean Robbins's two

sisters, Miss Emily Elizabeth and Miss Carrie Faulkner, was remodelled into prime living space. Mr. and Mrs. George Hyde of Boston used to board at Wellington Chandlers, a mile north of camp, and join in the Camp Activities.

In the fall of 1919, one hiking group of eight took the Boston to Portland boat, then train to North end of Evans Notch, buckboard 4 miles to Hastings, hiked through logging roads 12 miles to Bricketts, thence by car to camp.

Campers reported enthusiastically and plans were made to expand capacity from 19 to 27 to 50, perhaps sixty.

The 1919 Cold River Committee was Theodore Conant, Chairman; Frank Mason, Mr. W. J. Bicknell, William T. May and Adelaide Meserve. They served for fourteen years until 1934.

In May 1919 the White Mountain National Forest had been established and became an immediate "big neighbor".

It had been made clear that A.M.C. Cold River Camp must cost nothing to the A.M.C. treasury during the three "probation years" as Frank Mason called them. Generous donations made this possible as Camp grew rapidly.

In the 1920 season, May Cottage (present Library) became the cook's cabin and so served until 1954.

In 1921 a trip to the Chandler Farm via Portland was run in winter. It took two days to get to Camp from Boston. Snowshoeing and hiking were thoroughly enjoyed. That summer the water supply which had been piped by gravity from far across the road became inadequate, so a 7 x 14 reservoir was stoned up to meet needs. Water was run to a wooden tank over the men's lavatory building. The summer was a big one with "472 of an extreme possible 650" camper weeks full. "Capacity" levelled off at about fifty. And the report that year read: "since 1919 seven ravine-side cabins have been built", the first being Big Birch, planned and built by Frank Mason and then bought by Mr. and Mrs. C. L. Carpenter. Camp fee, including food, was \$18.00 per week in cabins for two, \$16.00 for those in tents. Treasurer Mason was confident the \$3400. owed by the Camp could be liquidated within the probation years, and they were!

Cold River Camp entertained August Camp in 1921. An electric plant permitted improved lighting of the Lodge and central facilities.

To further develop the area, Chatham Trail Association was organized on November 10, 1921 by forty people. Officers were: President, Walter Edmands; Secretary-Treasurer, Nathaniel Nichols, also Eugene Pettee and Ralph Larabee. Dues were \$1.00 yearly, \$5.00 for life. A fishing boat on Horseshoe Pond and Blue Brook Shelter, as well as extensive trail work were early projects.

Professor Walter O'Kane gave the area a boost by an enthusiastic lecture on the Baldfaces area at the 20th Century Club in 1922. A.M.C. President Kelsey deplored conditions which permitted publication of an A.M.C. map of the area omitting the A.M.C. Baldface reservation! He felt coordination was needed. Three-Mile approval of crew tipping, Cold River outlawed tipping. Perhaps the newly acquired Joy Street Club House would bring folks together more to harmonize such matters.



One of the original and striking buildings of "The Ledges" built for Dean W. L. Robbins of the Albany, N. Y. General Episcopal Seminary in 1909 was this Lawrence Tower renamed by its A.M.C. owners in appreciation of the substantial interest shown by Three Mile Island's Roswell B. Lawrence in the new venture at N. Chatham. This picture reveals the openness in 1925. Some of the blue spruce imported from Norway are visible. Seedlings from these are still thriving at Cold River A.M.C.



The Tennis Court, improved greatly at A.M.C. take-over with funds donated by Charles M. Cox, is one of the few playable clay courts left on mountain playgrounds. The "Two Sisters" cabin was renamed "Cox" in his memory.

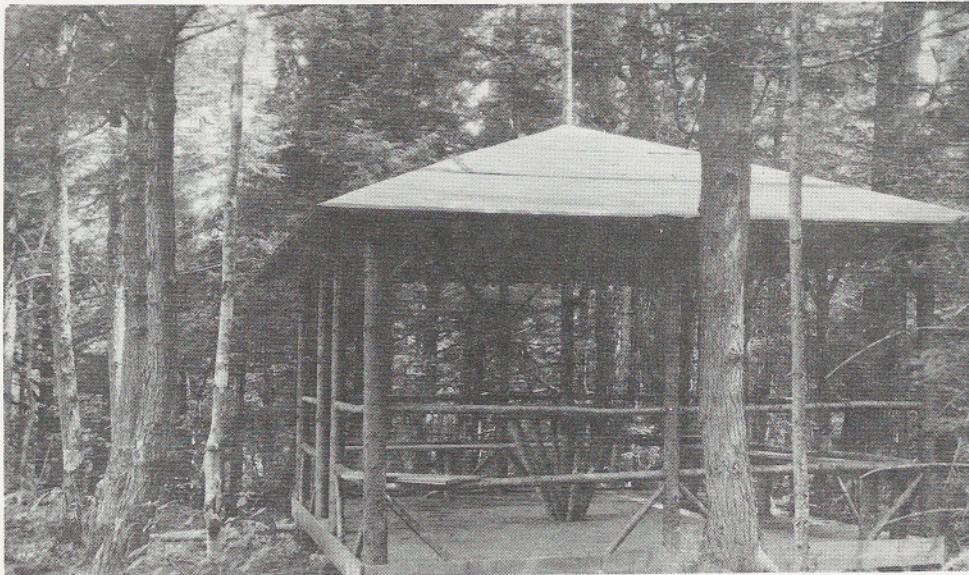


Purple Mountain Cabin was a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Harry R. Sinclair. Nearly all buildings at Camp have been gifts.



Artistry of mason and ingenuity of individual donors is revealed in the interiors as well as the general design and location of cabins.

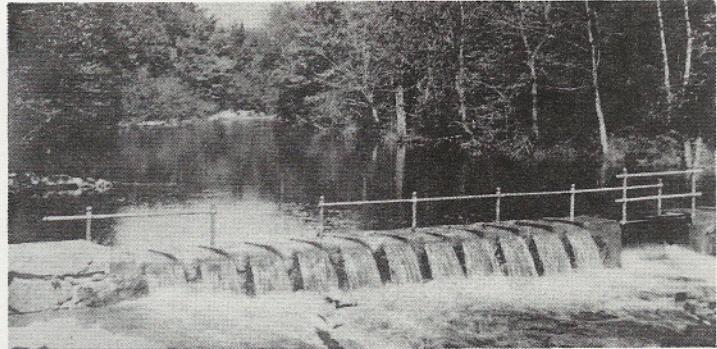
Conant Lodge and The Recreation Hall were five decades ago, as now, central camp features, commemorating the vision and generosity of Theodore S. Conant, who gave the original "Ledges" Camp and added the Recreation Hall for A.M.C.



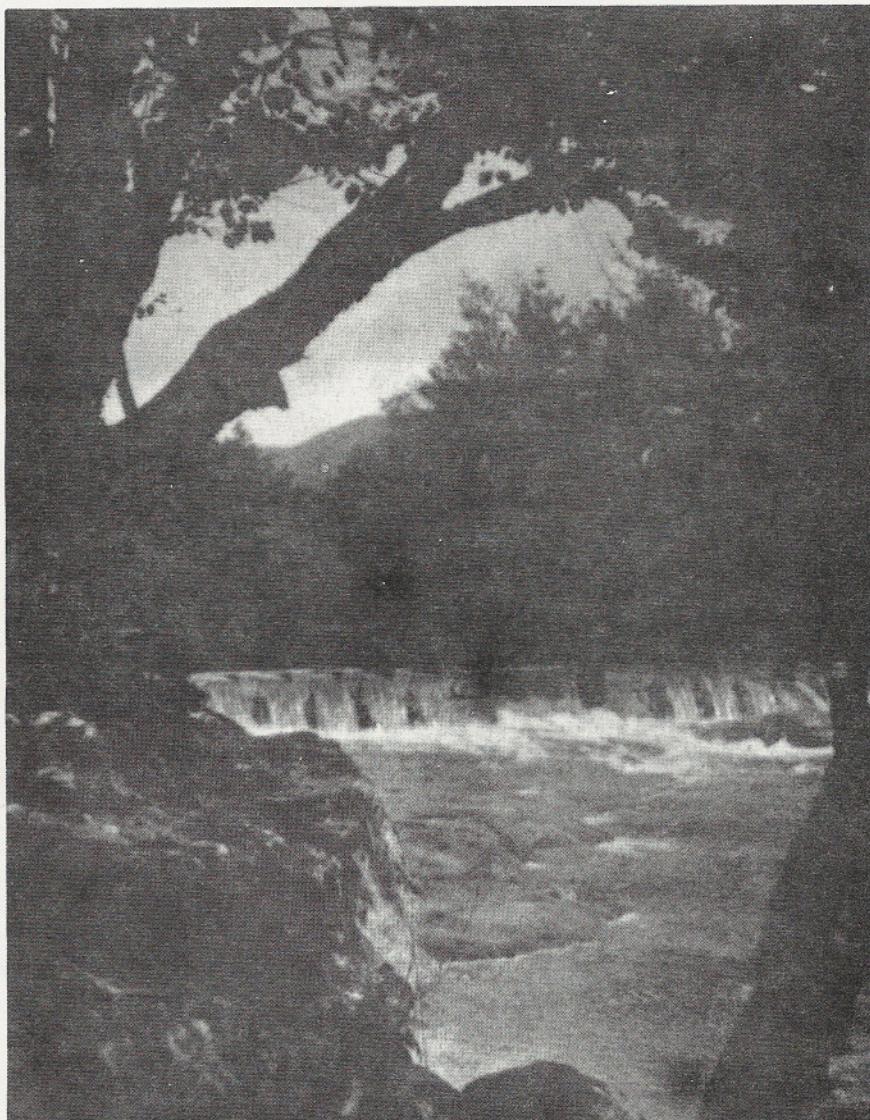
The Tea House in the ravine near the pool provided a cool afternoon spot. All traces of this rustic structure had vanished by 1969.



The 1920's at Cold River A.M.C. revealed far more open spaces. Here men campers dressed in women's clothes, romped at a ball game, with Cox cabin and a tent in the background.



An early A.M.C. improvement was Chester Memorial Dam, given by W. R. Chester in memory of Miss Mabel C. Chester, one of the original enthusiastic founders of the A.M.C. Camp here. The beautiful pool is flanked by millstone from the Baker grist mill at this site in earlier days.

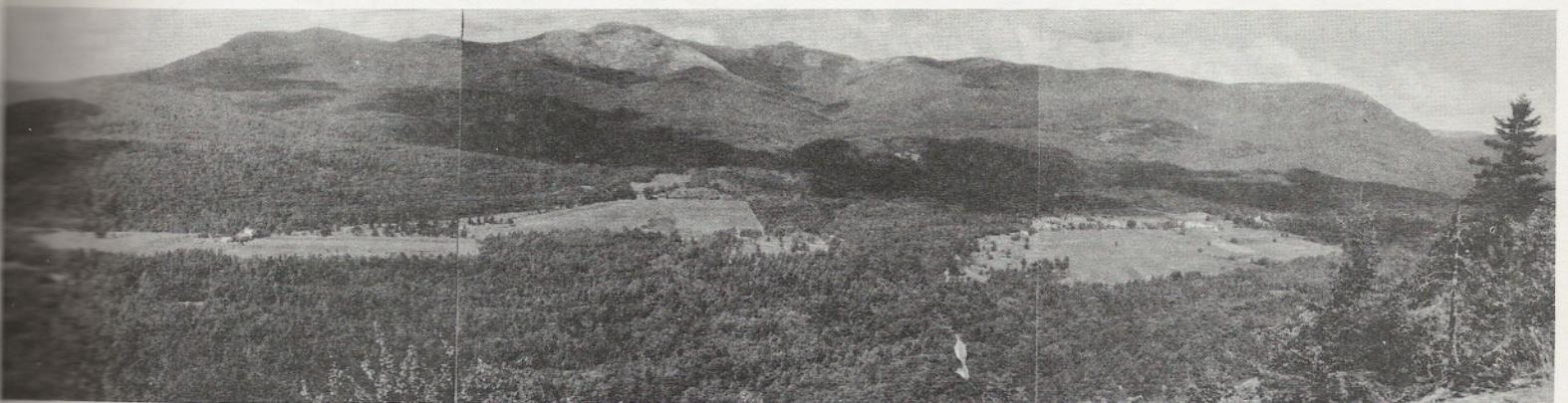


Cold River at Chester Memorial Dam from the "Court House," now vanished. Ida Pritchett took this view in 1925.

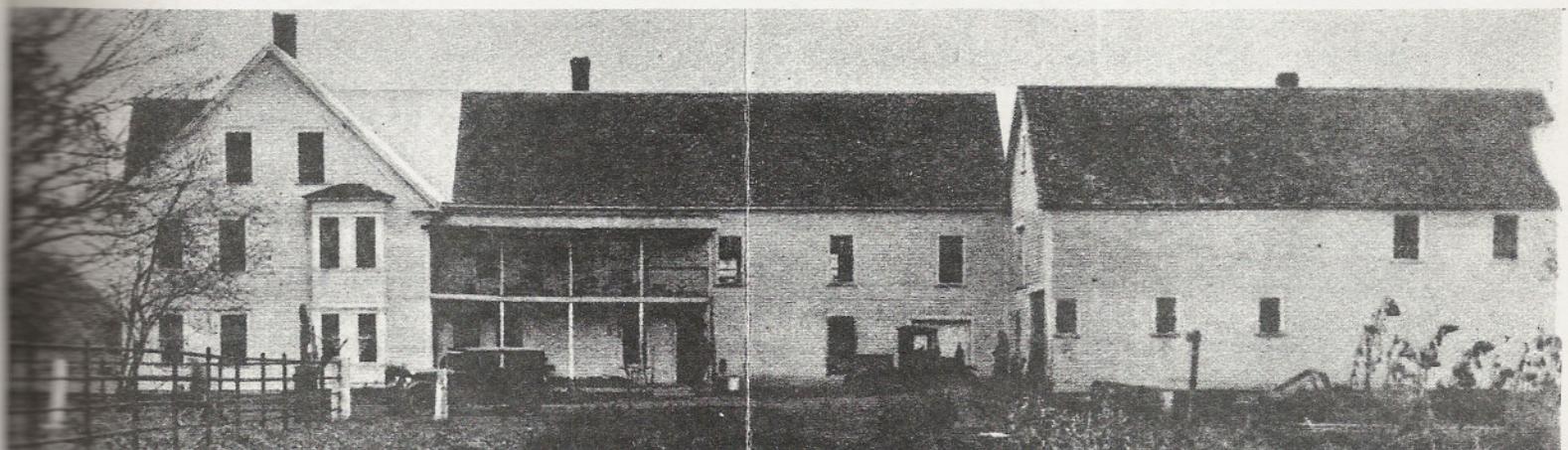


August campers urged selection of this site for an A.M.C. Camp; camping in the area several years as in 1925, shown here when tenting was "the other side of the fence on the Conant Path." They were fed by Cold River Camp on the side porch, not then covered in.





Cold River Valley in early 1920's as photographed by Bill Leonard from Little Deer shows the larger clearings and upper pastures where fringes of blueberries attracted bears that threatened the grazing sheep. The great 1903 fire burned to the summit, leaving Bald faces indeed.



The "Charles" Residence, just south of Camp by two miles, has an interesting location on the New Hampshire-Maine line.