

Holiday Home Camp



Holiday Home Camp circa 1905. Photo credit: J.J. Bransby

The Lake Geneva Fresh Air Association was founded in the summer of 1887, funded by a group of Chicago industrialists whose families had summer homes on Geneva Lake. The group wanted to expand on the Fresh Air Movement that was taking place on the East Coast. Their initial contributions of \$13,000 (the equivalent of approximately \$ 17,100,000.00 in today's dollars) provided the seed capital to purchase lakefront acreage and begin construction of a retreat for the poor children from the Chicago urban area. One year later, in July of 1888, the organization welcomed the first summer residents. By the end of that summer, Holiday Home Camp had served 263 disadvantaged children. Today, Holiday Home Camp is a member of the American Camping Association and is the oldest accredited summer camp still operating in its original location.

The wives of the Chicago industrialists, most of whom had some connection with Chicago's Social Settlements or organizations working with city's underprivileged and had first hand information about the need for an organization that would benefit a tired mother, a boy of the street, or a little girl who had been forced to grow up too soon caring for her younger brothers and sisters. The women gathered at a meeting hosted by Mrs. S.W. Allerton to discuss the creation of The Lake Geneva Fresh Air Association. Some of the women at the meeting included Mrs. Edward E. Ayer, Mrs. J.S. Rumsey, Mrs. John R. Wilson, Mrs. Thomas Withrow, Mrs. Buckingham Sturges, Mrs.

Charles French, Mrs. N.K. Fairbank, Mrs. W.S. McCrea, and Mrs. George Parker.



Mrs. Edward Ayer

were deeply committed to The Lake Geneva Fresh Air Association. While the main dormitory was being built, the Ayers made frequent trips across the lake to view the progress.

Another early supporter was Richard Teller Crane, who owned the estate Jerseyhurst on the north shore of Geneva Lake. Over the years, the Crane family continued to support Holiday Home Camp through the contributions of Dorothy Crane Maxwell and Augustus K. Maxwell. A cabin was named Maxwell in their honor.

Through the years there have been many others who have supported the efforts of The Lake Geneva Fresh Air Association and social occasions to benefit the camp. One of the finest was the dance to celebrate the opening of Holiday Home. In 1904, the first Mid-summer Fair was held at the Levi Leiter estate to benefit Holiday Home. The Leiter estate is now the location of Lake Geneva Manor. After Horticultural Hall was built in 1912 in Lake Geneva, the fair was held there for many years.

The association purchased a 12-acre strip of land, 275 feet wide on the shoreline northeast of Forest Glen Park for \$4,000. A three story building was built to accommodate 75 children. The first building was finished in July 1888. Also built were a caretaker's house and a cottage for the summer staff. Financing came primarily from families whose summer homes were on the lake. Dedication services were held on July 5, 1887, with Professor David Swing officiating.

One of the early supporters was Edward E. Ayer, whose summer home The Oaks was located east of the area known as Harvard Club on South Shore Drive. Both Mr. and Mrs. Ayer



First Mid-Summer Fair 1904. Photo Credit: Lake Geneva Newport of the West

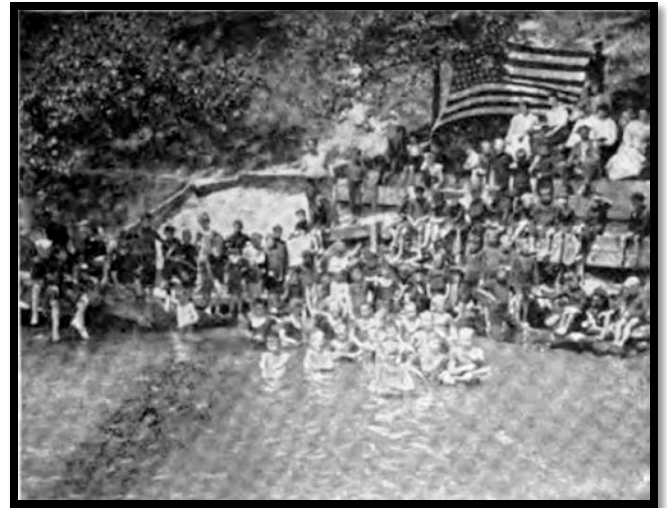
economically disadvantaged communities.

Today the camp is open to boys and girls ages 7-13. In the early years, young working women attended special camp sessions and mothers often attended camp with their children.

Throughout a typical summer, Holiday Home Camp provides age-appropriate six and eight day sessions for over 500 boys and girls from



Girls at camp circa 1905. Photo credit J.H. Pratt



Boys Camp circa 1905. Photo credit: J.H. Pratt



Holiday Home Camp pier circa 1915

Camp activities include optional swim lessons, daily water games, rowing, fishing, daily free swim, art, recreational sports, archery, handcrafts, campfires, dances, and more.



Boys water activities circa 1907

Girls water activities circa 1919



Today the camp includes 20 building on 26 acres of natural forest that include two hundred and eighty six feet on the shore of beautiful Geneva Lake.

Holiday Home Camp© by Michelle Bie Love

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