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LET IT BE

By Susan Melcher

"Please understand," writes Robert Reed, former Boy Scout and Scoutmaster who grew up in Auburn, "my passion for the camp [Gustin] goes very deep...Camp Gustin was always that close-to-home, yet wilderness location where we could go, pitch our tents and sleep out for a weekend."

Deeded to the Boy Scouts in 1948, this 100 acre forested land with roughly 300 yards of frontage on Loon Pond is a seemingly remote, pristine camping area, with towering trees, a sparkling brook, wetlands, and a just-right sized pond for swimming, canoeing, and fishing.



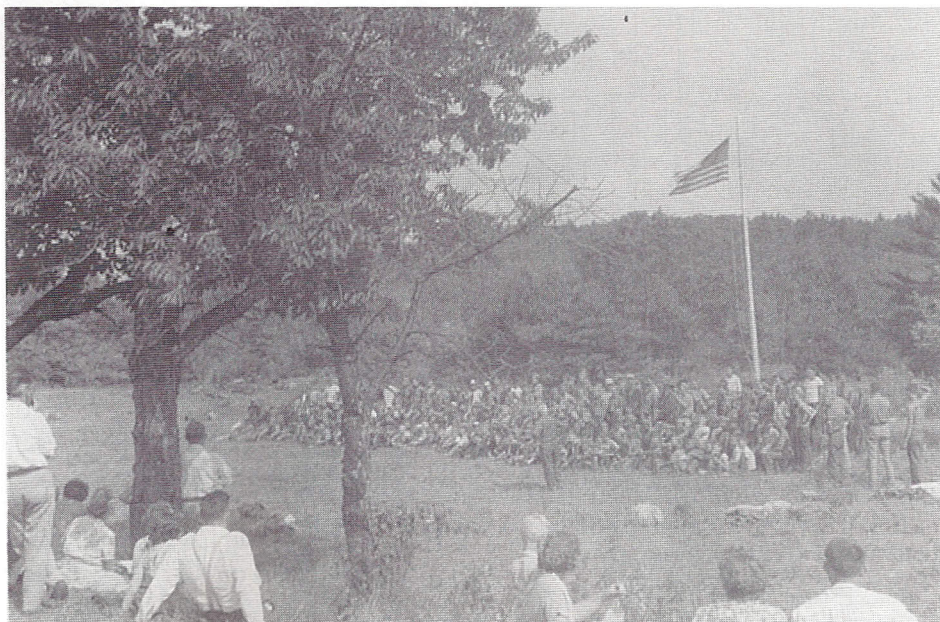
Allen Ward,
Scoutmaster Troop
109 of Lisbon



Scouts learn wilderness, leave-no-trace skills here without having to travel lengthy distances to Baxter State Park, the Bigelow Range, or to the White Mountains. Camp Gustin is located in Sabattus, conveniently accessible to troops based in Lewiston, Auburn, Lisbon Falls, and other small communities. Close to Interstate 95, just a few miles from Lewiston, Gustin has proved to be an ideal spot for camporees, skill-based lessons, and year-round camping.

Allen Ward, Scoutmaster for Troop 109 of Lisbon, describes Gustin as "a 100 acre property on waterfront that has been left essentially undeveloped. What is not to love for scouting?" For the past five years, Troop 109 has hosted a Father's Day Camporee at Gustin, a popular event, drawing anywhere from 60-100 scouts and their families. Without a mess hall or bunkhouse, this scout property simulates wilderness conditions where boys immerse themselves in nature on land bought specifically for that purpose.

The Boy Scout tradition has been around in Maine since the early 1900's, and in the early 1930's, Charles Gustin, a Sabattus resident, was highly pleased



Boy Scout Camporee at Camp Gustin, June 19, 1948. Photo courtesy Fred Huntress

with and impressed by what his two sons, George and Lewis, were learning and experiencing with the Boy Scouts at Camp Hinds in Raymond. In order to enhance his sons' and their friends' outdoor experiences, Gustin purchased 100 acres of undeveloped land around Loon Pond, expressly for the purpose of Boy Scout use, knowing that generations of boys and men would learn to appreciate and feel comfortable in nature while developing friendships, camaraderie, social skills, and important values.

This land purchase turned out to be a huge success, and since its early days as a campsite, Gustin has continuously provided memorable experiences for a variety of folks, young and old alike. Shortly after World War II, George

and Lewis Gustin, along with other members of Troop 111 in Auburn, camped overnight in January at Camp Gustin. According to George, who lives today in Wales, he and Lewis "packed a fluffy mattress on a farm sled" added a few other necessities, and hiked the three or four miles in the snow to Camp Gustin. "Supper was a peanut butter sandwich and hot cocoa...in an abandoned old house...as darkness fell, so did the temperature. We sang songs and told stories...it was near full moon and the light shimmered." After snuggling together with "wool socks, long johns, and stocking caps," the boys awoke in the cold, with "the sun coming up over Loon Pond." Today, says Gustin, this memory is recalled many times with fondness.

Today, a well-maintained dirt road winds through Camp Gustin, dotted with primitive campsites and a wide assortment of scout-created masterpieces: a wood carving of a bear, a totem pole, tables, and chairs. In a cleared area carpeted with pine needles, and a close-up unobstructed view of the pond is an outdoor auditorium, with rows of simple wooden benches, arranged symmetrically. Magnificent towering pine trees and an array of multi-sized deciduous trees populate the land,



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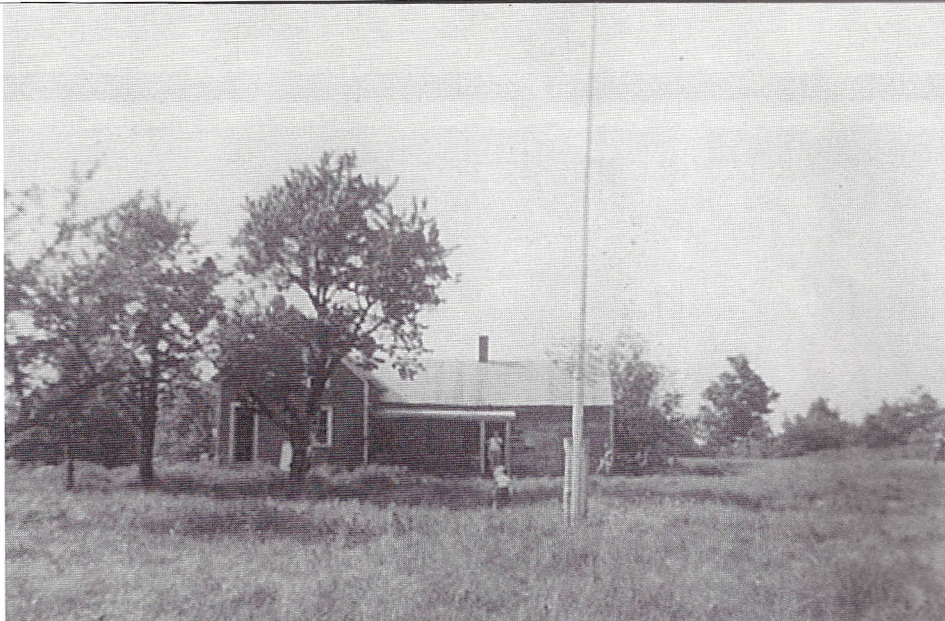
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The Gustin Farm House which is no longer standing. June 19, 1948.
Photo courtesy Fred Huntress

surrounding each tent site in a cozy embrace. Myriad trails wander along the waterside, explore the depth of the woods, and link campsite to campsite. This wooded gem looks deceptively like a prime camping spot on the Appalachian Trail, a remote private area in Baxter State Park, or the ideal wilderness area in an unpopulated region of the state. While housing developments have sprouted up around Gustin, the 100 acres remains untouched, seemingly worlds away from the metropolis of Lewiston-Auburn.

Generations of Scouts have learned to tie complex knots, build campfires, paddle canoes, pitch tents, identify animal tracks, administer first aid, survive in the wilderness, and many other scouting skills here at Camp

Gustin. Robert Reed remembers Camp Gustin for its "great campfires" where he and his fellow Scouts were thrilled to discover "an abandoned obstacle course in the woods complete with rope ladders, slide for life and other challenges." The boys spent the weekend "trying to recreate what we thought the course might have looked like originally." Outings at Camp Gustin were life-altering for Reed, providing him with adventure and long-lasting friendships, and a reverence and admiration for the "dedicated volunteers who always seemed to find money, time, and energy" in order to provide meaningful and memorable opportunities for young boys. Reed's experiences with scouting led him to devote a large portion of his adult life

"hoping to help just one more boy find his path and know that he can accomplish great things."

Reed's testimony is corroborated by many others, including Allen Ward, who states that "Camp Gustin has given [Boy Scouts] a venue to run our programs that have paid off in spades. Pack and Troop 109 have increased in size and accomplishments because of places like Gustin and a strong commitment to scouting locally." According to Ward, Gustin has provided infinite opportunities for both Boy and Girl Scouts in the Lewiston-Auburn area, serving as a day camp, weekend getaway, and large gathering site where wilderness skills are enhanced with the presence of a pond for swimming and water-based skill technique enhancement. Campers have plenty of opportunities to hone their skills when the wilderness area is located close to home. Campers from all generations describe Gustin as being "ideal", a "dream place," and "the perfect spot." Over the years, many Eagle Scout badges have been awarded in the shade of a Gustin tree, friendships formed around campfires, and merit badges have been earned.

In the 1930's, Charles Gustin probably never expected that his ideal dream spot would ever be a place where Scouts might not be welcome, where the boys' campfires would be doused, never to spark again, where the woods might give way to development or

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commercial use. Unfortunately, Gustin's future, at this point, is uncertain. The Pine Tree Council of Boy Scouts of America, which owns Camp Gustin, is considering a possible sale of this popular campsite. The Council is approximately one million dollars in debt, and Gustin could bring in as much as \$350,000 to help alleviate their debt. For Scouts young and old, the sales proposition is heresy. Last fall, roughly 300 Scouts and their families rallied at Camp Gustin, to raise awareness and money, hoping to save this pristine place, and secure its future with the Scouts forever, as its founder intended.

Robert Reed is concerned, as is everyone else who has spent quality time at Camp Gustin. On a previous weekend in March, Reed and some scouts "spent a lot of time and took a lot of pride in bettering our campsite [Gustin]." Reed is worried about the potential loss of this magnificent piece of land that has provided thousands

of campers, troop leaders, and their families with an outdoor community experience. One made possible years ago by a prescient, caring community member. The loss would be painful for the Boy Scouts and individuals who know this place as a second home. Many troop leaders and young campers view the area as irreplaceable; years of work and devotion have made it the perfect camping spot.

During this time of economic upheaval and uncertainty, local Boy Scouts would like to know that some places and memories are sacred – one of the more special places that should be preserved is Camp Gustin. Many

more young people should benefit from Charles Gustin's legacy, a legacy that has created generations of caring, compassionate, dedicated community-minded people who care about others and the outdoors. Camp Gustin is more than worth saving.



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