



The Camp Fire Club of America

by Jeffrey A. Gronauer
Camp Fire Club of America
B&C Regular Member

ABOVE: Dr. Hornaday pictured with a bison in 1907, at the National Collection of Heads and Horns. The original and still official logo for the Camp Fire Club of America is illustrated with a ram (above).

BELOW: A second logo with the bison is the one the Camp Fire Conservation Fund uses. The bison was used (as opposed to the ram) as the Club members funded the majority of Hornaday's American Bison Association's transportation of the bison out west.



The Camp Fire Club of America (CFCA) was the brainchild of Dr. William T. Hornaday who was brought to New York in 1896 by the Boone and Crockett Club to run the New York Zoological Society (now Bronx Zoo). Hornaday would meet and befriend a number of New Yorkers who were “unattached” hunters and outdoorsmen. He saw that B&C had only one social dinner and a long (and despairing) waiting list, so he got together with his friend George Shields, editor of *Recreation* magazine and proposed a new club where neither wealth, power, nor social standing counted; only proven manhood in the outdoors. The early members were naturalists, scientists, photographers, painters, sculptors, and hunters. CFCA started as a social club with several dinners a year to gather men together as they would around a campfire, thus the symbolism and name of the club. These new members, who traveled the world hunting and exploring, were the first investigative reporters who would return to the club to reveal what was happening to the wildlife and wild lands they visited.

Camp Fire Club of America was officially incorporated in 1904. With the growing concern that wilderness and wildlife were disappearing, its stated purpose was to “combine into a parent and allied clubs, sportsmen of America that, through effective organization, proper support may be given to game protection and forest preservation measures both state and national.” The Camp Fire Club of America was now a club of conservation. Hornaday's main concern was that animals would not survive without land and habitat, which, during those years, had been devastated by industry's clash with wild lands; turning forests into clear-cuts, gouging mountains for coal and gold, and turning rivers into sewers. Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot both joined Camp Fire and there would later be many common B&C/CFCA members who worked together on establishing parks, wildlife and forest preserves, and restoring wildlife habitat. In 1909 the CFCA officially organized a Camp Fire Committee for the Conservation of Forests, Lands, and Wildlife—today named the Conservation Committee. While the CFCA maintained an office in New York City, it purchased a property in Chappaqua, New York, in 1917, which continues to be the Camp Fire Club's permanent home.

Hornaday spent many years testifying in Albany and Washington to stop the millinery trade from slaughtering birds for hats. He got New York State Senator Howard R. Bayne to introduce and pass the Baynes Bill, which stopped the feather millinery industry. He went to Alaska and stopped the indiscriminant killing of Pribilof fur seals by creating

a treaty with England, Japan, and Russia. He also started the American Bison Society, which brought Bison from the East Coast out West to re-establish the almost-extinct herd. Hornaday got many CFCA members to put up \$8,500 of the \$10,500 needed to fund the actual Bison transportation by rail out West.

While many Camp Fire men would help Hornaday with his work, many members would work with other organizations as well. John Burnham would run the American Game Protective and Propagation Association from 1911-1928. He worked hard on passing the Migratory Bird Act with Canada. Burnham started the American Game Conference in 1915 to gather various state officials to meet and discuss game laws and conservation work around the country. This is today the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference run by the succeeding organization, the Wildlife Management Institute. Senator Fred Wolcott worked on passing the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Act (Duck Stamp Act) to help fund and restore dwindling duck populations. Members like Karl Frederick, Marshall McLean and George Pratt worked on many issues in the Adirondack Park in New York.

It is not possible in so short a space to list all the accomplishments of the Camp Fire Club, but if it involved big game management, game and hunting laws, habitat restoration, national and state parks, and conservation education in this country, a Camp Fire man or committee was probably working on it.

Perhaps the longest and largest legacy of the Camp Fire Club of America comes from the early work of members Ernest Thompson Seton, Daniel Carter Beard, and Dr. William T. Hornaday. Seton and Beard had started organizations for boys back in the early 1900s. Seton had his Woodcraft Indians and Beard had his Sons of Davy Crockett. They both met and befriended Robert Baden-Powell who wanted to start a similar organization in England. Beard met Baden-Powell in Washington, made a phone call, and 20 minutes later they were meeting President Theodore Roosevelt in the Oval Office (imagine trying to do that today!). TR encouraged Baden-Powell to start his organization for boys in England. In 1908 the Boy Scouts (of England) started. It quickly spread to other countries. A short time later, another American named W.D. Boyce discovered the scouting organization in England and incorporated the idea in America (February 1910). This led to the massive organization of a number of similar boys groups in America into one group which would be known as the

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Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Seton wrote the first Boy Scout Handbook in 1910 and served as the organization's first chief scout. Beard would serve as a national commissioner (from 1910 to his passing in 1941). TR was the vice president and chief scout citizen. Other Camp Fire members would serve on the board or other BSA committees. The Boy Scouts of America celebrated its 100th anniversary year in 2010. Approximately 110 million boys have been members of the BSA over the years.

Hornaday started a funding organization known as the Permanent Wild Life Protection Fund. He awarded gold medals to people who had shown proven conservation work and he also created a Gold Honor Badge specifically for the new Boy Scouts of America organization to encourage them to do conservation work. This would become the Wildlife Protection Medal and later named, after Hornaday's passing in 1937, the William T. Hornaday Award, the highest conservation award in the BSA. This is the oldest, continually-presented conservation award in the nation. Approximately 1,100 Hornaday Awards have been given out.

Although conservation efforts slowed during the two world wars and other military conflicts when many members served, the work of the Camp Fire Club has continued since its first days. In the 1970s the CFCA

created the Camp Fire Conservation Fund, now a separate 501(c)3 organization funded by CFCA members to help continue the work and influence of the Camp Fire Club. To date the Camp Fire Conservation Fund has helped fund roughly 200 projects involving wildlife research, habitat restoration and conservation education.

In 2000, Camp Fire joined 35 other sportsmen organizations to form the partnership known as the American Wildlife Conservation Partners (AWCP). A Camp Fire member, Bob Model, has both served on and chaired AWCP's federal advisory committee known as the Sporting Conservation Council during the Bush administration as well as serving on the Obama administration's Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council.

It is somewhat humbling to see all the work these early Camp Fire members did after they started the club. They may have lived in cities like New York, but their hearts were out in the wilderness. They went to great lengths to make things happen for wildlife as they felt few people cared for the outdoors. As in the early days, Camp Fire continues to work with many of the present sportsmen/conservationist organizations in the country, especially the Boone and Crockett Club, to carry on the tradition of conservation in North America. ■