

# YMCA Spiritual Legacy Series

## Sumner Dudley – Founder of YMCA Camping Movement



**Sumner F. Dudley** started the Boys' Camping Society in 1885

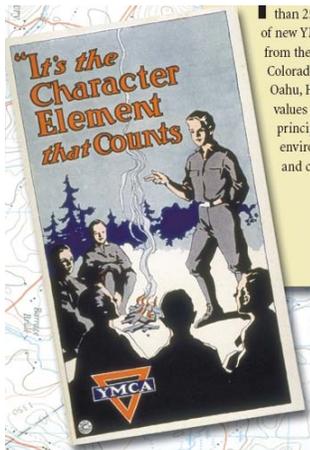
*"Pleasure seeking does not necessitate any relaxation of Christian study and work."*

-- **Sumner Dudley**

with an eye toward development among young men in a physically challenging outdoor setting. *"The purpose of the plan is not only to have a happy, jolly time but also to teach in a practical way that to have such a time it is not necessary to break away from wholesome restraint, not to forget the Sabbath and religious habits, but to continue, under circumstances that will make it always remembered, the study of God's word..."*

Y literature of the 1880's describes Sumner Dudley as a major spokesman for boys work in the YMCA well before he

took his now legendary 1885 "camping" trip, an extension of his work with the New York City and New Jersey Y's. Dudley, long active in both the New York and New Jersey YMCA movements, was asked in 1884 to take young



for sleeping on the ground".

Ultimately, the camp settled on Lake Champlain, NY, in 1908. Dudley referred to the first camp as Camp Baldhead. After Dudley's death in 1897, the camp was renamed Camp

*"The city youngsters enjoyed their experiences in the country and parents were impressed with the spiritual values their sons were learning, so by 1890 the island became so crowded that another site had to be found."*

honor YMCA members camping. In 1885 he took seven boys for a week's encampment at Orange Lake, NJ. The next year Dudley moved the site to Twin Islands, Lake Wawayanda, NJ

*"There was just one tent, a boat, a few cooking utensils, and rubber ponchos*

Dudley. Camp Dudley's history describes a strong religious and spiritual atmosphere:

*"Guided by leaders of common sense and practicality, it emphasized the Christ-like spirit in the healthy body, and developed its recreational features in a way the church was unequipped to do. Its directors and secretaries were not theologians. They were earnest Christian men. Their theology was a simplification of current Protestant belief worked out practically in daily life. Sportsmanship, fellowship, cooperation, good humor, physical fitness, and moral responsibility were what the Y regime emphasized."*

Though the YMCA did not invent camping in 1885, and Sumner Dudley did not lead the first YMCA camping program. What the YMCA can claim is having founded the first continuously used camp (Dudley).

Dudley set up that first camp to provide *"healthful recreation without temptation, the gratification of the natural desire for a free and easy life outdoors, together with the cultivation of a manly Christian character."* From those first seven campers in 1885, the number of Y campers grew to 6,348 in 187 YMCA camps by 1905.

The idea of bringing youth closer to God and each other has been the foremost benefit and mission of YMCA camping. The YMCA puts Christian principals into practice, through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind, and body for all. YMCA camping is more than songs around a campfire on a summer night. Camp is about community, and a commitment to building strong kids, strong families, and strong communities. (Camp Grady Spruce)



In 1891, Camp moved to Lake Champlain, with no fewer than 83 campers and operated under supervision of New York and New Jersey Y state committees. In 1897, Sumner Dudley died at age 43, leaving a lasting legacy of Christian mission with the YMCA.

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