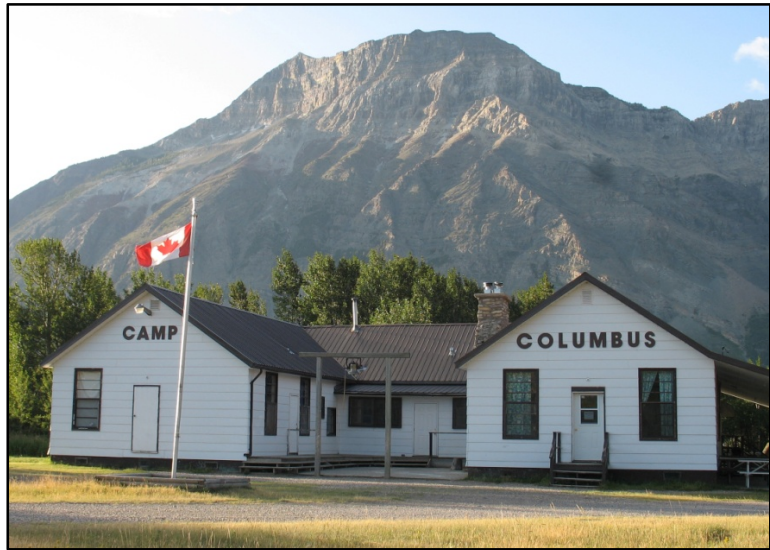


## Summer Camps

### Camp Columbus

Camp Columbus, under the sponsorship the Knights of Columbus,<sup>1</sup> has been serving the camping desires of boys and girls since 1956. It was the fourth and final youth camp at Waterton. Camp Columbus was built just after Camp Tee-La-Daw for girls on Lower Waterton Lake. It was built at a time when Canada was struggling to building schools and other youth-oriented facilities for the large numbers of children that formed what came to be known as the baby boomer generation.<sup>2</sup>

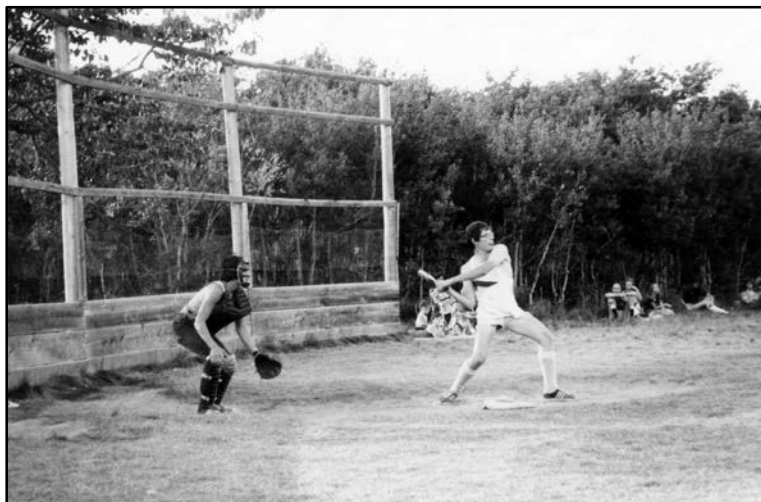


*Camp Columbus has a utilitarian layout which includes a dining and activity area on the west side and a sleeping area on the east side. (Photo: Chris Morrison)*

The original request for a camp location was made in 1954 when three Milk River, Alberta members of the Knights of Columbus approached Waterton managers. The men suggested four potential locations: two were on Pass Creek in the Blakiston Valley, one was along Upper Waterton Lake and one was along Middle Waterton Lake opposite Vimy Peak. At first, park officials were hesitant to allow construction of another camp in the park<sup>3</sup> but relented having no good reason to object.<sup>4</sup> The Upper Waterton Lake location was rejected out of hand, leaving three other potential sites to be examined.<sup>5</sup> The Middle Waterton Lake site was approved and became home to the final fixed roof permanent youth camp in the park.<sup>6</sup>

Quickly on the heels of the approval, the Knights of Columbus began raising money for the camp. All the Knights in the area got behind the project in a big way beginning with a door to door canvas of Catholic residents in Lethbridge, Pincher Creek and Milk River and selling tickets for a draw with the proceeds going toward camp construction.<sup>7</sup> Fundraising was also done from time to time in years to follow to finance camp improvements.<sup>8</sup>

Plans for the camp were drawn up by May, 1956 and by July construction of a single squared off U-shaped building began. Estimated to cost \$25,000, the camp was built by Sieben and Schamber, general contractors of Milk River. Hopes for a 1956 completion were optimistic but on July 1, 1957, the facility was finished and an open house was held incorporating Dominion Day activities.



*With a ball field of their own for games and access to Middle Waterton Lake for canoeing, campers could stay close to home base as the schedule allowed. (Photo: WLNPA Archives)*

The ceremonies began with a flag raising while a band from Milk River played *O Canada*. Throughout the afternoon, the public was invited to participate in bingo and outdoor games. Topping off the attraction was a barbecue for some 1,200 people.<sup>9</sup>

One week later, the first 10-day camp session for children ages 10-14 opened under the supervision of Bruce Field, camp manager. In later years, the age limit was lowered to 8 years and the time at camp reduced to five days per session

for 50 participants each. Open to all children regardless of religious affiliation, the camping activities included water safety, canoeing, team sports, lake swimming, horseback riding starting at the nearby stable, boat rides on commercial vessels and the ever-popular hiking and evening campfires. When the new town swimming pool opened in 1960, the Camp Columbus kids became regulars at the facility.<sup>10</sup>

Over time, hijinks became a normal part of camp much to the delight of the seasoned campers and the embarrassment of the newcomers. But, in the long run, it was all about youthful character building. The last night of camp for many years, a kind of kangaroo court was held to admonish those who were supposedly guilty of imagined misdemeanors. Punishments were silly and kept spirits high.<sup>11</sup>

The activities at the summer camp were seldom reported in the newspaper with one notable exception: the death of a camper on July 25, 1973. Twelve-year-old Arthur Joseph Cordiero of Lethridge was among a group of five boys who became separated from a group of 23 during a two-night outing in the Mount Lineham area. Cordiero's body was found at the base of an 800 foot cliff.<sup>12</sup>

In a follow-up report later that year, it was noted that park wardens had responded to five accidents occurring during large organized hikes that summer and blamed inadequate supervision by group leaders and selection of trips that were too difficult for the hikers' ability.<sup>13</sup> This was the only group hike which resulted in a death and it cast a pall over activities for the balance of the summer.

Camp sessions resumed the following year with greater caution and have been held every year since for boys and girls emphasizing Christian Spirit, concern for a fragile environment, cooperation with others and maintenance of individuality.<sup>14</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Knights of Columbus is a Catholic men's fraternal service organization.

<sup>2</sup> Baby Boomers were those children born from approximately in 1946, after the end of the Second World War, through 1964.

<sup>3</sup> The first youth camp was the YMCA Camp Inuspi on Lower Waterton Lake, the second was Canyon Church Camp in the Blakiston Valley, the third was Camp Tee-La-Daw across Lower Waterton Lake from Inuspi.

<sup>4</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 2171, file W 16-30, pt. 1. Letter to C. W. Jackson, Deputy Minister, Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources, Ottawa, from J. R. B. Coleman, Chief of National Parks Service, Ottawa, Sept. 2, 1954.

<sup>5</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 2171, file W 16-30, pt. 1. Memo to Waterton Lakes National Park Superintendent from J. R. B. Coleman, Chief of National Parks Service, Sept. 14, 1954.

<sup>6</sup> As of today, only Canyon Church Camp and Camp Columbus still exist.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Morrison, *Waterton Chronicles: People and Their National Park*, (Lethbridge: Gothaunt Publishing, 2008), 130-131.

<sup>8</sup> "Knights Set Talent Show," *Lethbridge Herald*, Sept. 29, 1916, 5. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 19.

<sup>9</sup> "Catholic Youth Camp Officially Opens at Waterton Park—Greetings From Bishop Are Read," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 4, 1954, 16. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 19.

<sup>10</sup> "Youngsters Cast Eager Eyes Toward Summer Camps," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 27, 1960, 17. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 19.

<sup>11</sup> Chris Morrison, *Waterton Chronicles*, 130-131.

<sup>12</sup> "Local Boy Dies in Fall," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 26, 1973, 14. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 19.

<sup>13</sup> Resource Conservation Report, 1973, 23-24; WLNP Archives, Box 114, Item 4.

<sup>14</sup> Camp Columbus website: <http://www.campcolumbus.com/>