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Other hikes available include:

- Sloper Tree Identification Hike
- Seven Natural Wonders of Sloper Hike
- Sloper Wildlife Identification Hike
- Sloper Wetlands Hike

# YMCA CAMP SLOPER Historical Hike



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YMCA Mission: To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all. The YMCA is a non-profit 501c(3) organization.



## 1 McKenzie's Point Early 1900s to Present

At one time on this scenic point stood a small building called McKenzie's Cottage. This cottage, built sometime in the 1920s, was the summer home of Samuel and Eunice McKenzie, nephew of Cornelia Sloper Neal. The cottage remained on the property and was used by the Boy and Girl Scouts in the early years of camp. The cottage was also used as a warming hut for ice skaters and for winter recreation on the Sloper property. The cottage burned in 1974. Sam McKenzie and his family were influential in persuading Cornelia Sloper Neal to leave her property to the Southington-Cheshire Community YMCA.

Currently, this point is still used as a popular camp site for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, YMCA programs and day camp. The future plans for this point are to rebuild a Nature Cabin that overlooks this scenic area that can be used for year-round recreation, just as the original McKenzie's Cottage once did.

## 2 Cement Mill 1834 to 1850s

YMCA Camp Sloper of today contains the foundation and water powered grinding wheels of one of the first cement mills in the US.

In 1823 on the Luman Andrews Farm, located on Andrews Street about one mile north of YMCA Camp Sloper, a special kind of limestone was discovered that would harden under water. This made the cement valuable for such projects as the Farmington Canal, bridges, dams and many buildings constructed near water. This limestone first had to be burned in a wood fired kiln, then cooled and transported by horse drawn wagons to David Sloper's grinding mill. At the mill, the burned limestone was ground into a fine substance. It was then mixed with sand and water to make this new type of cement.

The water used to power the mill, on the property that is now YMCA Camp Sloper, was supplied by a pond on the north side of Kensington Road. The outline of the spillway which brought water to the mill can be seen on the hill above the Sloper Pond inlet stream and the remnants of the water wheel pit can be seen at the edge of the pond, just beyond this sign.

The cement business flourished for years but eventually could not compete with the large quarries in New York State that could transport their cement cheaper by water. By 1860, the last of the Andrews Street limestone quarries and cement manufacturers went out of business.

## 3 Old Leatherman Rock Shelter 1856 to 1889

The Old Leather Man was a vagabond who was well known across Connecticut and New York during the late 19th century. Dressed in clothing that he fashioned out of old leather, he traveled a 365 mile route between the Connecticut and Hudson rivers in a clockwise cycle of 34 days continuously throughout the year. For protection from the elements the Old Leather Man established a variety of natural shelters along his route. It is believed that one of his rock shelters is located at YMCA Camp Sloper along the Green Trail.

Little is known about this mysterious figure as his interactions with others were greatly limited. Photographs are rare, but

newspaper articles were written about him occasionally. After 20 years of research, Dan DeLuca of Meriden published a book in 2010 entitled "The Old Leather Man" which has peaked interest in this man who interacted only when necessary with the residents in the towns along his route. After the Old Leather Man's passing on March 20, 1889, his remains were believed to have been buried in a cemetery in Ossining, NY. The reasons for his inexplicable wandering were buried along with him, but this reclusive character has become a part of Sloper history and legend.

## 4 Cooperative Creamery 1880 to 1890

On this site, a number of farmers joined together to construct and operate a cooperative creamery. The creamery processed, preserved and sold butter and a variety of other milk products. This particular location was chosen due to the large spring (located to the left of this sign) that made it possible to keep up the creamery's success. Evidence of this storage area can still be seen in the spring behind the creamery's foundation.

The farmers leased the property from the Sloper family. During the early years of operation, the creamery prospered under the management of an expert Swiss buttermaker. The butter made here was in high demand at hotels in New York City. After the Swiss buttermaker left, the quality of the products deteriorated. The creamery became less and less profitable and finally went out of business in about 1890.

Sometimes if you stand very, very quietly at the site of the old creamery today, you may be able to hear the slightest sounds of butter churns, the pouring of thick cream, the clanking of milk cans, or the trickling of the old dependable ice cold spring.

## 5 Ice Harvesting On Sloper Pond 1900 to 1930

Before refrigerators were common, the cutting and storing of ice was a major business on the Sloper Farm. About twenty to twenty-five men worked during the winter and four to five men worked throughout the spring, summer and fall seasons to sell and preserve the ice for the winter. Ice blocks were preserved within the insulation of sawdust and hay in the Sloper Ice Houses.

William Orr was the manager of the Sloper Farm and brother-in-law of Cornelia Sloper Neal. He started the ice harvesting and sales business that supplied Southington with natural ice for many years.

William Orr constructed a dam to increase the size and depth of Sloper Pond around the year 1900. Two large ice houses were built adjacent to the dam; these structures were located in the field behind this sign. They were each larger than the Red Barn which currently sits at the front of the property on East Street.

In 1905, the business was sold to John Jamieson who continued its operation through the late 1930's.

## 6 The Sloper Family & Homestead Early 1700s to 1948

Robert Sloper, of Branford, received a State Land Grant of property in Southington and moved his family to Southington in 1730. Robert Sloper's son, Captain Ambrose Sloper, built the present Sloper house in 1760. Captain Ambrose lived to be 89 years of age

and outlived his son, Ambrose Sloper, who died in 1810. Thus, the Sloper property was left to Captain Ambrose's grandson, David R. Sloper, who was the father of Cornelia Sloper Neal, the woman who willed the Sloper property to the YMCA in 1949.

Robert Sloper	Early 1700s to 1767
Capt. Ambrose Sloper	1734 to 1822
<b>served in Revolutionary War</b>	
Ambrose Sloper	1774 to 1810
David R. Sloper	1801 to 1887
Cornelia Sloper Neal	1851 to 1948
Julia Sloper Orr	1855 to 1922

The last member of the Sloper family to run this farm was William Orr, husband of Julia Sloper Orr. From about 1905, and for the next few decades, three generations of the Pocock family, who owned a farm further north on East Street, maintained the farm by growing their corn and cutting the hay. They pastured their cows on the land to the north of the pond bordering Kensington Road. Mr. Edward Pocock, Sr. was of great help to David Dellert, YMCA General Secretary, who created and ran the first day camp in 1950.

Cornelia Sloper Neal left her family's 143-acre Sloper Farm to the Southington-Cheshire Community YMCA in 1949. She gave it in loving memory of her mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. David Sloper, her brother Ambrose, and her two sisters, Mary and Julia. Annually, the YMCA Camp Sloper staff remembers and celebrates this magnificent gift which has provided thousands of children with fun, adventure, tradition and a lifetime of memories.

## 7 Sloper Red Barn Mid-1800s to Present

The Sloper Barn is one of the only standing historical sites from the earlier years when the property was operated as a farm, with the exception of the Sloper Farm House just beyond the barn. At one time, there were three barns, equally as large as the existing barn that stood on the Sloper Farm. It is estimated that the two barns that no longer stand were built in the early 1700s and the remaining barn was built in the mid 1800s, possibly dating as far back as the 1860s. The remaining Sloper Barn has seen many uses over the 140 plus years of existence on the Sloper property.

When the Sloper Farm was active, this barn was believed to be used as a dairy barn that housed cows and horses. Inside the barn, you can see the older post and beam style of construction with an existing hay loft and steel track, which was used to transport the hay. Sometime in the 1900s, the back addition of the barn was constructed to house sheep.

When the YMCA took ownership of the property in 1949, the barn became the cornerstone of the property and still serves as a historic landmark for many folks in the community. In the earlier years of the camp, the barn was used as the main building for the day camp program. Over the years, it has been used as a warming hut for cross-country skiing and winter recreation, program space for overnights, rainy day shelter, a musical theater program, and most recently it functions as a maintenance facility with a pre-school room for our youngest campers in the back portion of the barn.

The YMCA Camp Sloper staff and volunteers currently have a plan in place to preserve the Sloper Barn so that it will remain the cornerstone of the property and a historic landmark for generations to come.