

# The Sloper Story



The History Of YMCA Camp Sloper  
➡ From Cow Paths  
to Climbing Walls ➡





# TABLE CONTENTS

| Page                                      |           |
|---|-----------|
|   | <b>1</b>  |
| I. Introduction                           |           |
|   | <b>2</b>  |
| II. The Evolution of YMCA Camp Sloper     |           |
|   | <b>3</b>  |
| III. Sloper Farm – The Early Years        |           |
|   | <b>5</b>  |
| IV. Aunt Nellie’s Gift                    |           |
|   | <b>6</b>  |
| V. The First Years of YMCA Camp Sloper    |           |
| ▶ 1950-1959                               |           |
|   | <b>9</b>  |
| VI. From Camp to Outdoor Center           |           |
| ▶ 1960-1969                               |           |
|   | <b>12</b> |
| VII. A Decade of Change and Challenge     |           |
| ▶ 1970-1979                               |           |
|   | <b>15</b> |
| VIII. Building a Modern Day Camp          |           |
| ▶ 1980-1989                               |           |
|   | <b>18</b> |
| IX. Decade of FUN • ADVENTURE • TRADITION |           |
| ▶ 1990-1999                               |           |
|   | <b>21</b> |
| X. A Year Round Place                     |           |
| ▶ 2000-2009                               |           |
|   | <b>26</b> |
| XI. A Staple In The Community             |           |
| ▶ 2010-2019                               |           |
|   | <b>31</b> |
| XII. Conclusion & Acknowledgments         |           |



# INTRODUCTION

This is the story of YMCA Camp Sloper. It all began more than 70 years ago with a bequest and continues to be a work in progress today. The visions and dreams of a few have been made a reality by the support, dedication, and labor of many.

Cornelia Sloper Neal gave us a wonderful gift when she willed her property to the YMCA to be used for "promoting healthy outdoor activities for the largest number of young men and women, both members of the YMCA and similar groups such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts." We believe Mrs. Neal would be pleasantly surprised at the variety and number of individuals and groups that enjoy her farmlands today. This history mentions many of the YMCA programs that have served thousands of people every year at YMCA Camp Sloper. In addition, thousands more have been served with civic, educational, religious, family, scouting, and other special interest groups that have taken advantage of the facilities of YMCA Camp Sloper. Over the years, Sloper has hosted church outings, weddings, Native American powwows, medieval festivals, folk festivals, service club outings, turkey shoots, Scout jamborees and campouts, high school cross-country track meets, coon dog races, fire department training, fishing derbies, family picnics, environmental education, flag football leagues, softball teams, and triathlons.

YMCA Camp Sloper is a valuable community resource, and we are committed to sharing it with as many people as possible in keeping with Cornelia Sloper Neal's grand hope for her legacy.

## We hope you enjoy "The Sloper Story" – From Cow Paths



**...to  
Climbing  
Walls!**



# THE EVOLUTION *of* YMCA CAMP SLOPER

Within the next 70 plus years, the Sloper property would evolve from an inactive farm to the modern outdoor recreation facility known today as the YMCA Camp Sloper Outdoor Center. Instrumental in helping the YMCA make major strides at Sloper were dedicated staff and volunteers, key people who cared about Sloper with a passion, and a supportive community, including business leaders and service clubs, who provided funds, material, equipment and labor.

After a vigorous start, the development of YMCA Camp Sloper could be characterized as "slow, but steady." The YMCA, as an independent association in a small community, had limited financial resources and struggled to make ends meet in the early years of Sloper. One has to admire the early camp leaders who accomplished so much with so little and helped keep the legacy of Cornelia Sloper Neal alive. More recently, progress in the 1990s might be characterized as "robust," with two major factors influencing this development. First, the population growth of the camp's service area affected program and enrollment growth. Second, the improved overall financial health of the YMCA influenced the level of funding available for camp facility development.

"The Sloper Story" will attempt to trace the events, facility developments, and programs that have combined to provide a memorable "Sloper Experience" for people of all ages. Many Sloper alumni have shared their stories with us and have confirmed that YMCA Camp Sloper has had a lasting influence on their lives. One of them, Marc Johnson, former camper and counselor, gave us some insight into the meaning of the Sloper experience. "The three most important influences in my life have been my parents, the Boy Scouts, and Sloper Day Camp. Sloper provided a number of experiences that have followed me into middle age. As a camper, the songs, games, swimming, and arts and crafts all added up to fun, fellowship, and skills learned. As a counselor, the fun continued while working with campers who were just like me only a few years earlier. Another skill learned was responsibility; to be responsible for your campers, to become aware of how people interact, and how to be responsible to one's self. Looking back reminds me of 10 years of fun, learning, and growing up."





# SLOPER FARM: THE EARLY YEARS

Robert Sloper of Branford received a State Land Grant of a property in Southington in a fertile rolling valley blessed with good farmland and a small flowing stream known as Misery Brook. He moved his family to Southington in 1730, and his son, Captain Ambrose Sloper, later built the present Sloper House in 1760.



Captain Ambrose

Sloper, great-grandfather of Cornelia Sloper Neal, lived to be 89 years of age, outliving his son, Ambrose Sloper. Thus, the property was left to his grandson, David Root Sloper, who was Cornelia Sloper Neal's father.

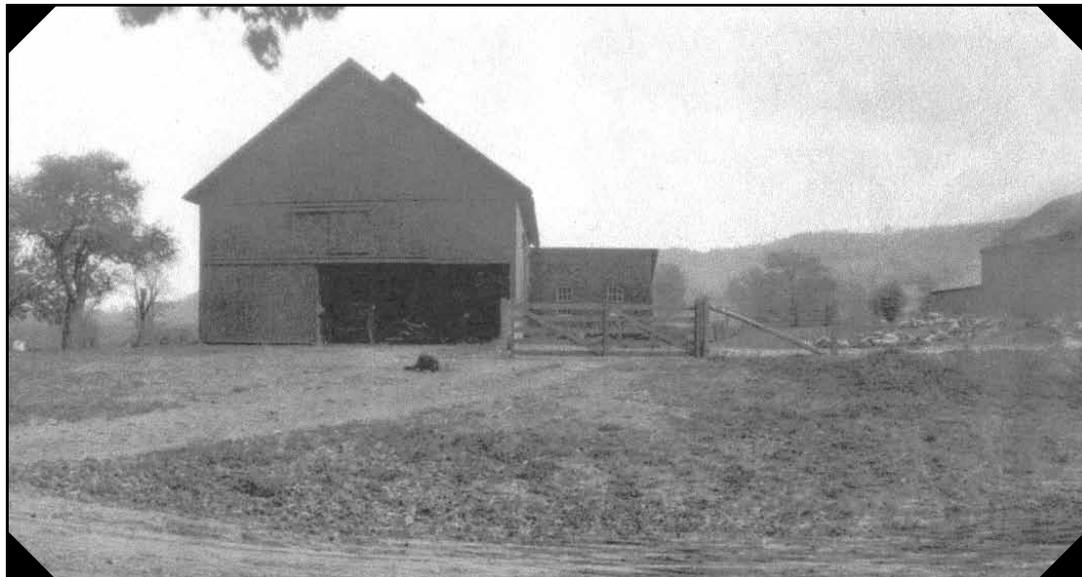
In the course of its history, the Sloper farm property was an active place with diverse commerce. In early times, it was a dairy farm operated by Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Neal until the untimely death of Mr. Neal. It was then run by William Orr until his death, and, subsequently, used by the Pocock family until about 1960.

Three businesses, in particular, thrived on the Sloper property prior to it becoming the successful camp we know today. In 1823, a special kind of limestone that would harden underwater was found on the Luman Andrews farm northeast of Sloper Pond. This limestone was in demand for masonry construction, including the Farmington Canal, bridges, dams, and buildings constructed near water. Credit is given to Anson Merriman for realizing the limestone could be manufactured, but the theory was acted upon by Gad Andrews who constructed a kiln which could hold three bushels of stone; two other refining kilns would follow. The stone was thoroughly burned and, when ready, was transported by horse- and oxen-drawn wagons to David Sloper's grinding mill, where it was mixed with sand and water for use as cement. The manufacturing process required water to turn the grinding wheels, and the small pond on the other side of Kensington Road, currently known as Jacob Pond, was the source of power. However, the cost of transporting the cement, as well as competition from other producers, brought on the eventual demise of the business.

Another successful business run on the Sloper property was a cooperative creamery formed by area farmers to make superior quality butter, which was in great demand at fine hotels in New York City. The butter produced was of such fine quality that it brought a price of one dollar a pound, a lot of money for the time. A Swiss butter maker was specially hired to oversee production, but when he eventually left, quality fell, and soon the butter was no longer in demand. The business became unprofitable and closed in 1890.



A flourishing ice business was started around 1900 by William Orr, manager of Sloper Farm and brother-in-law of Cornelia Sloper Neal. At this time, Mr. Orr constructed a dam to increase the size and depth of Sloper Pond. In 1905, the business was sold to John Jamieson and run by him until the late 1930s when there was a decline in the demand for ice after electric refrigeration came into general use.



Many older folks can recollect the ice man or Miss Lottie Jamieson; what fun it was to watch her score off a block of ice and scurry for the chips as they fell, especially enjoyable on a hot summer day. She would then use giant tongs to carry the blocks into customers' homes. We were told by Russell Andres, a lifelong resident of Southington who spent his boyhood on East Street, that in his memory there were two large barns, larger than the existing Red Barn, which housed the ice harvest, and also a smaller crib which held the ice that would be sold first. The ice harvest would be packed tightly in sawdust and could be kept in this manner during the warm weather months.

# THE SLOPER FAMILY AUNT NELLIE'S GIFT

Captain Ambrose Sloper, Cornelia Sloper Neal's great-grandfather, purchased the "handsome property" which he left to his grandson, David R. Sloper, upon his death in 1822. David R. Sloper, a farmer by occupation and a former cement manufacturer, was Cornelia's father. He was widowed when his first wife, Augusta E. Sloper died, and took Eliza Woodruff for his second wife. Cornelia, along with her brother, Ambrose, from their father's first marriage, and her two sisters, Mary and Julia, was raised on the farm in a house their great-grandfather built there in 1760. Cornelia's sister, Julia, later married William Orr who managed the farm for many years. After William's death, the farm was worked by the Pocock family who also worked land further north on East Street. Three generations of the family grew corn and grain and pastured cows on the Sloper property, and they managed the land so well that they were permitted to use it without charge.

Upon her death in 1949, Cornelia Sloper Neal, referred to as "Aunt Nellie" by those who knew her well, willed to the Southington YMCA, 142.5 acres of land which comprised her family farm, the family homestead, and barns. She gave it in loving memory of her parents, Augusta E. Sloper and David Root Sloper, her brother Ambrose, and her two sisters, Mary and Julia. Furnishings left as part of the estate were auctioned off, and the proceeds helped fund necessary updating of the old family home. Cornelia Sloper Neal was laid to rest in Oak Hill Cemetery with her husband and daughter. Her grave is marked and remembered by the YMCA.





# THE FIRST YEARS YMCA CAMP SLOPER: 1950-1959

In 1950, the buildings on the Sloper property consisted of the Sloper House, the barn, and the MacKenzie cottage, summer home of Mrs. Neal's nephew and wife, Samuel and Eunice MacKenzie. David Dellert, the first General Secretary (Executive Director) to live in the Sloper House, moved into the front six rooms of the house with his wife, Jean, in November 1950, after extensive updating of the facilities. They shared the home with Lucy Purvis, who had life use of the house as stipulated in Cornelia Sloper Neal's will. Miss Purvis was a retired school teacher who had taught at a one room school house located on Kensington Road across the street from the Sloper property, and she had lived with Mrs. Neal for more than 30 years. Along with Miss Purvis' life use of the house, Mrs. Neal's will also stipulated that the old family portraits of her mother and father, Augusta E. Sloper and David R. Sloper, should always remain in the house in a place of prominence or, if not used, should be burned. The portraits hang proudly today in the living room of the Sloper House.

The Sloper property required a great deal of work before a camp could be established. A craft shop was set up in the former sheep shed out in back of the main barn, toilet facilities were added, a flagpole was put up, the barn roof was repaired, and docks were constructed. Insurance had to be purchased, transportation found, and permission had to be procured from the Sloper Fish and Game Club to develop a swimming area. David Dellert, Edward Pocock, and George Westerberg were instrumental in getting the camp up and running, and many others gave their time, labor, and materials, including the Boyce Lumber Company and Anthony Boyce (labor and materials), Beaton and Corbin Company, Clifford Rush, and Boyd Height (supplied barrels to float the newly constructed docks). Finally, on July 1, 1950, a camp for boys, to open on July 17, was advertised. The quota of 50 boys, ages 7 to 12, was quickly reached. There were two, two-week sessions, and campers were picked up by bus.

Once the first year of camp had been successfully completed, the YMCA had time to plan for the future. With little money, but a great deal of hard work and perseverance, David and Jean Dellert laid the foundation for the YMCA Camp Sloper we know today. The early 50s were a time for providing for the basic needs of camp from both a program and facility viewpoint. A kitchen and toilets (donated by the Rotary Club) were installed in the sheep shed, the barn, used mainly for rainy day activities and sleepovers, was painted and wired for electricity, and a well was drilled to provide water for the house and barn (gift of the Exchange Club). Prior to this, a shallow well located under the house's south porch provided drinking water but, for other needs, water



was pumped from the pond. The original swimming area, a small beach with one 10' x 14' dock, was gradually expanded. Two large portable buildings located at Lewis High School (predecessor of Southington High School) were given to the YMCA, and they had to be cut in half to be transported to



camp. One of the buildings was used until the late 1990s! Additional improvements included a 20' x 30' building with a fireplace (funded with an \$800 donation from the Lion's Club) and a pavilion for Kiddie Kamp (a program for younger children) and used by older campers for sleepovers (donated by the Southington Women's Club and built by volunteers under the direction of Dom D'Angelo); this pavilion still stands today and is known as the Old Pavilion.

Camp programming expanded along with the facility improvements. The second year, 115 campers attended each session, and separate girls' and boys' camps were established. The girls' camp was in the area of the MacKenzie cottage. By 1953, there were as many as 125 campers per session who paid \$12.00 for two weeks at Sloper. Kiddie Kamp, for children five to six years of age, was established the following year with activities including swimming, nature walks, crafts, stories and songs. Eleanor Collella was instrumental in the development of the Kiddie Kamp program which served younger preschool aged campers. At about the same time, there was a Pioneer Camp for boys ages 12 to 15 who stayed at camp all week, made their own shelters, and cooked their own meals. Waterfront activities expanded with the acquisition of four rowboats, and archery and riflery programs were added. Crafts were always an important activity. Under the direction of Joan Goggin, Craft Director, each boy made a wooden boat, and each girl, a potholder. Older boys had the opportunity to make shoeshine boxes, a more advanced project. Thirteen counselors were on staff by 1956 to see that everything ran smoothly, and in that same year, two campers benefited from the first camp scholarships. By the close of the decade, YMCA Camp Sloper was offering four, two-week sessions.

In 1958, Joseph Hallissey, the YMCA General Secretary, stated in his annual camp report, "It would be difficult not to enjoy yourself in such a beautiful setting. The property is one of the most beautiful in New England area camping circles." This was a great tribute to the generosity of Cornelia Sloper Neal and to the generosity of the volunteers, businesses, and civic groups who worked together to turn the Sloper property into YMCA Camp Sloper.





# SLOPER FAST FACTS: 1950s

- ☛ **1949:** Sloper property willed to YMCA
  
- ☛ **1950:** David and Jean Dellert move into Sloper House  
YMCA Camp Sloper established and the first season of  
day camp is conducted
  
- ☛ **1953:** Charles "Tuck" Brown heads Boys' Camp  
Nancy Lewis Brown heads Girls' Camp  
Eleanor Collella helps to establish Kiddie Camp for preschoolers  
David and Jean Dellert leave
  
- ☛ **1956:** Dom D'Angelo becomes Director of the Boys Camp  
Joan Smith becomes Director of the Girls Camp  
First camp scholarships awarded

## **CAMP ENROLLMENT: 1950**

50 campers for the summer



# FROM CAMP TO OUTDOOR CENTER: 1960-1969

A full-page advertisement for YMCA Camp Sloper appeared in *The Southington News* at the beginning of the summer in 1962. It described the camp as being in a wonderful outdoor setting with a mature, well-trained staff, milk every day, transportation to and from camp, and all for \$25 per two-week session. That was 80 hours of fun for about 30 cents an hour! By this time,



recognized as the place for kids to have a great day camp experience. However, it was also well on its way to becoming an outdoor center for families and the entire community. Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and church groups used the camp. A Family Swim Club was established, and even the family pet came to camp when dog obedience classes were held.

Continued facility improvements made expanded programming possible. The day camp beach area was doubled in size to 185 feet, and two 40-foot docks and a boat dock to accommodate the expanding fleet of boats (including the camp's first canoe and first aluminum boats) were added. Thanks to a Kiwanis Club donation, a new raft was also added to the swim area. A swing set and wave-shoot slide were purchased for \$400, electricity and running water were installed, and the road from the barn to the beach was paved.

The Chadwick Construction Company, with the cooperation of many volunteers, built a softball field at Sloper complete with outfield fences, backstop and dugouts. Blacktop basketball and tennis courts were constructed in the 1960s and completed the transformation from day camp to outdoor center.

Waterfront activities were a big focus in the 1960s. Executive Director of the YMCA from 1963 to 1973, Russell Ball helped to expand the swim areas and doubled the main beach area as well as put a second beach area by McKienzies Point. Aquatic Camp was held in early July for children who were going away for the summer and wanted swimming lessons beforehand. Day campkids also had swimming lessons and, in 1966, 450 youngsters took part in a free "learn to swim" program. The instructors of the day had a unique system; on the first day of camp, everyone jumped into the water. Those who could swim went into one class, and those who couldn't were assigned to another. (Apparently, all who jumped in came up!) The popular Family Swim Club, established in 1961 (membership: \$25), opened the Sloper waterfront to families weekdays from 4:00 to 8:00 PM, and weekends from 1:00 to 8:00 PM.





Families could swim and also rent boats during those times. The rental fee of 50 cents per hour was used toward the purchase of additional boats. During construction of the main pool downtown, the Y was moved temporarily to the barn and members took advantage of the summer swim club at the camp until construction was complete downtown. Families were also able to take advantage of Sloper Pond for fishing when the first Family Fishing Day was held in April, 1963. Prizes were awarded for the biggest fish and most fish caught, and everyone enjoyed a cookout afterward. Two years later, a record was set when Cynthia Linkovicks caught 26 fish!

Lots of great things were going on away from the waterfront, too. Campers had many opportunities to meet kids from other towns, especially New Britain, since 45 percent of the day camp enrollment came from outside Southington at the time. Along with their regular daytime activities, campers enjoyed overnights with games, singing, and bonfires. The first annual Family Night was held in 1960. The evening included boating and swimming awards, and a slideshow of the year's activities. In 1968, the Counselor-In-Training program was established so that young teens could continue to be involved with camp. The entire Southington community was also able to enjoy YMCA Camp Sloper during the 60s when softball games featuring the Chadwick Construction Co. Softball Team were played there. The team was among the best in the state. Even today the team that consisted of John Salerno, Tony Salerno, Walt Marek, Dick Lorenzo, "Corky" Cassella, and John "Lefty" Koezen would be given serious consideration as one of the best in Southington's history.



# SLOPER FAST FACTS: 1960s

- 🔪 **1960:** First Family Night held as part of the day camp program
- 🔪 **1961:** Robert Chalmers becomes Camp Director  
Aquatic Camp begins and the Family Swim Club is established
- 🔪 **1963:** Donald "Red" Stepanek becomes Camp Director  
The first Family Fishing Day is offered
- 🔪 **1965:** Dog Obedience classes offered  
CL&P granted 13-acre right of way for \$7,000
- 🔪 **1968:** Counselor-In-Training Program begins
- 🔪 **1969:** Donald Echmen becomes Camp Director  
"Red" Stepanek, Family Swim Club

## **CAMP ENROLLMENT: 1960**

163 campers for the summer



# A DECADE OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGE: 1970-1979

A camp study in the mid-60s had revealed that YMCA Camp Sloper was rich in natural resources but limited in program amenities so, in the 70s, work began in earnest to provide much needed facilities. The leadership of H. Douglas McLeod, who became Executive Director of the Southington YMCA in 1974 and brought a wealth of camping experience from his previous job as Director of Outdoor Education and Camping for the Greater New Haven YMCA, was critical. These efforts were helped immensely by the much improved financial stability of the YMCA, due in part to the generous Blakeslee bequest in 1978. YMCA Camp Sloper facility improvements by the end of the decade included a large covered pavilion (known today as the McLeod



Family Pavilion; dedicated to Doug and Carol McLeod for all their commitment and dedication throughout the 70s and 80s), three new tennis courts, new basketball and four-square courts, a relocated parking area, an 18-hole Frisbee golf course, an extensive trail system, and two new sports fields. The first documented "Work Weekend" under the leadership of Daren Colella, chairman of the Camp Committee, (now known as the Outdoor Center Committee), was held in 1971. Volunteers could give an hour of their time or stay the whole weekend, sleeping under the stars, in the Director's Cabin, or the MacKenzie Cottage.

Woodland and pond management were also addressed in this decade. Fred Kuhr, with the help of the Boy Scouts and other volunteers, planted trees, including the grove of white pine on the pond's north side near Kensington Road, a stand of larch near the Kiddie Kamp pavilion (known as the Old Pavilion today), and some ornamental pine and spruce along the old road into camp. Later in the 1970s, hundreds of pine and spruce trees were planted along the pond perimeter and west bank by another group of volunteers under the direction of Bobby Crookes, long-time camp staff member and volunteer. The results of their efforts are clearly visible today. Attempts were made to control excessive weed growth in Sloper Pond, and beach and waterfront areas were expanded and improved.

On the program front, specialty camps were becoming more popular. Campers could choose Conservation and Nature, Gymnastics, Crafts, Tennis, Soccer, or Outpost Camps. For campers ages 11 to 14 with a spirit for adventure, the Outpost Camps offered hiking, canoeing, backpacking, overnights, and trips offsite. One highlight for the boys' camp was hiking the Appalachian Trail in Connecticut in 1971, (these camps later evolved into the Ranger and Trailblazer programs we know today). Semi-private swim lessons were popular, as was long standing Kiddie Camp for four- and five- year-olds, and a new program for the physically handicapped was also developed. The Counselor-In-Training Program grew rapidly, providing leadership training for teens and future camp staff. At the beginning of the decade, all of these wonderful programs could be enjoyed for \$33.00 per two-week session, and by the end of the 70s, more than 200 children were enrolled in each camp session.



One of the defining events of the 70s at YMCA Camp Sloper was provided by Mother Nature when Storm Larry roared through Connecticut. The blizzard left a blanket of snow that lasted all winter, so cross country skiing came to Sloper. Under the leadership of Doug McLeod and Joe LaPorte, long standing volunteer at the YMCA, the back of the barn (then referred to as the sheep shed) was turned into a warming hut, and an extensive trail system was built. A bulldozer cut the main trail around the north side of the pond, into the eastern woodland perimeter, and onto the adjoining Korin property. A country-western show benefit, featuring "Jumpin' Dave Cook," helped fund the purchase of a snowmobile and trail groomer, and maintaining the trails became the winter's principal activity. Lack of sufficient snow in subsequent winters spelled the end of consistent cross country skiing at Sloper, but the trails are still used today by campers and hikers who want to enjoy a pleasant walk in the woods.

Other notable events at YMCA Camp Sloper in the 70s included the Clyde-Cole Brothers Circus in the summer of 1972 (proceeds were used for camp scholarships), a Frisbee golf tournament, the YMCA Spring Fling, the establishment of a cooperative relationship with the West Hartford YMCA which would send many out of town campers to the day camp, the addition of sailing as a camp activity, the expansion of services for Family Swim Club members including babysitting and swim lessons, and, in 1973, Bruce Sherwood, YMCA member, catching a 5.5 pound bass, believed to be the largest fish ever caught at Sloper Pond. He used a flat lure to catch it and a large frying pan to cook it!





# SLOPER FAST FACTS: 1970s

- 👉 **1970:** John Battista head up the tennis camp program  
YMCA Camp Sloper joins Camp Archery Association of the U.S.A.
- 👉 **1971:** Ann Norton becomes Camp Director  
First documented Volunteer Work Weekend led by Daren Colella  
Kathy Polka and Bobby Crookes lead and develop the Outpost Camp program
- 👉 **1973:** Kouaka Kra Bruno, West Africa, is the International Counselor  
Nick Naples becomes chairman of the Camp Committee (Outdoor Center Committee)
- 👉 **1974:** H. Doug McLeod becomes Executive Director of the Southington YMCA
- 👉 **1976:** A fire destroys MacKenzie Cottage  
A new pavilion is constructed (later named McLeod Family Pavilion)
- 👉 **1977:** SHS Soccer Coach Dan Murowski develops and leads the Soccer Camp program  
SHS Marching Band holds concert at Sloper
- 👉 **1978:** Peter Nemeth becomes Program and Outdoor Center Director  
The Frisbee golf course is constructed  
Blizzard of '78' (Storm Larry) begins cross country skiing at Sloper

## CAMP ENROLLMENT: 1970

326 campers for the summer



# BUILDING A MODERN DAY CAMP: 1980-1989

The challenges of the 70s continued into the 80s. This period produced dramatic growth in enrollment and expanded services to new service areas. Day camp enrollment began a steady climb to record levels, and by the end of the decade reached 300 campers per session. In 1981, camp services were extended to Cheshire in cooperation with the Cheshire Branch of the Waterbury YMCA, and campers came from Southington (59 percent), West Hartford (27 percent), and Cheshire (14 percent) that year. Three years later, the



Berlin-Kensington Branch of the New Britain YMCA also joined the Sloper program. The camp scholarship program grew to serve 50 children by 1986. Two important initiatives extended services to new groups of campers. In cooperation with the Berlin Kiwanis Club, and with the ongoing support of Dr. MacIntosh, Camp Kiwanee was established at YMCA Camp Sloper in 1986. This was a pilot program designed to mainstream mentally challenged campers, and it proved to be a great success. And, to better serve parents with demanding work schedules, an extended day program of before and after camp care was developed. To keep up with all this growth, camp staff had to grow too and, by 1982, there were 32 senior staff, 10 junior counselors, an international counselor, and 25 counselors-in-training. Peter Nemeth and Jim Hillbie provided the leadership as Camp Directors for most of the decade serving seven out of the 10 years throughout the decade.

To serve the expanding camp population, there was a great need for additional facilities, especially covered space, and for repair and replacement of deteriorating buildings.



The Rotary Club and Brunalli Construction Company funded the purchase and relocation of portable classrooms for camp, and an 80' x 50' addition to the pavilion (McLeod Pavilion) was constructed. Dressing rooms were expanded, and a new walk-in cooler was installed to refrigerate campers' lunches. Other improvements included an outdoor-hillside amphitheater for large gatherings, a large playing field on the west side of the pond (future home of the West Coast Program Area), a new parking area south of the tennis courts, and a new main entrance, two-lane access road, and main gate. The



barn roof was replaced and the Sloper House was resided. Fencing and a new flagpole were added, and the harvesting of timber on the eastern woodland side of camp was completed.

One hundred years of YMCA camping was commemorated in 1985, and YMCA Camp Sloper joined in the celebration of that milestone. All former campers and staff were invited to an evening program led by YMCA Board President Betty McKeon. A ceremonial campfire was highlighted by songs, dance, and the release of helium-filled balloons bearing messages telling the world about Sloper. Other special events in the 80s included the first Counselor-In-Training Jamboree attended by 100 teens from six YMCAs around the state, (Mark Pooler, future Camp Director, was a member of that 1989 CIT program). John Myers, (future Executive Director of the Southington-Cheshire Community YMCAs), joined the professional staff at the Southington YMCA in 1987 as the Program and Outdoor Center Director. Under John's direction, YMCA Camp Sloper was becoming more and more popular as a location for community events, and the facilities were rented many times each summer to non-YMCA groups. In the late 1980s, John provided hundreds of families with the first ever Halloween Carnival, a long standing family event still held today at Sloper.





# SLOPER FAST FACTS: 1980s

- 🔪 **1980:** Extended day program begins
- 🔪 **1981:** Cheshire Y joins Sloper service area
- 🔪 **1982:** Peter Nemeth is Camp Director
- 🔪 **1984:** Berlin-Kensington Y joins Sloper service area
- 🔪 **1985:** Jim Hillbie becomes Camp Director  
Kiddie Kamp building destroyed by fire  
Celebration of 100 Years of YMCA Camping
- 🔪 **1986:** Camp Kiwanee begins  
Peter Nemeth is Outdoor Center Director
- 🔪 **1987:** Director's Cabin destroyed by fire  
John Myers named Program and Outdoor Center Director  
Facility improvements: walk-in cooler, amphitheater, pavilion addition, west side field, expanded dressing rooms
- 🔪 **1988:** Two more portable classrooms added to camp; parking, access road, new main entrance, fencing, new main gate added

## **CAMP ENROLLMENT: 1980**

641 campers for the summer



# DECADE OF FUN, ADVENTURE AND TRADITION: 1990-1999

By the time the 80s rolled to a close, YMCA Camp Sloper had developed a reputation as a special place in the community. In the 90s, Sloper evolved from a "special place" to a "specialty place," with the camp offering dozens of exciting specialty camps for children of all ages and interests that would help boost camp enrollment. With the introduction of new camp programs, ongoing facility improvements, an expanded group of dedicated staff and volunteers, under the leadership of John Myers and Mark Pooler, YMCA Camp Sloper saw enrollment skyrocket from 1,012 campers in 1990 to more than 2,000 in 1999. This decade is defined by the camp's new tag line, "FUN-ADVENTURE-TRADITION."

John Myers, Camp Director from 1990 to 1995, provided fun in the early 90s with many different events and programs. Sloper played host to numerous special events including the Tony LaHoud Road Race, triathlons, the Apple Valley Folk Festival, Indian powwows, medieval festivals, and many family events. YMCA programs in the off-season of camp continued to grow in popularity. Hundreds of children participated in Youth Sports, Indian Guide campouts, and special holiday events like the Halloween Carnival, the Forest of Fright, the Carol Sing and the Easter Eggstravaganza. Summer provided fun at day camp with lots of specialty camps that included Sports Camp, Earth Camp, Musical Theater, Gymnastics, Dance, and the especially popular Carpentry, Mountain Biking, and Skateboarding Camps in the later half of the decade. So preschoolers wouldn't miss out on the fun at Sloper, the Wanderers program was created for ages 3 to 5 and held in a renovated room of the barn that used to be the old sheep shed.

The Low Ropes Course, a 25-foot climbing tower and the High Ropes Course with a 75-foot zip line were some of the exciting additions to programming that brought a real sense of adventure to Sloper. These facilities were used as tools for teambuilding programs in the off-season, making it typical to find schools, youth and teen groups, and many business leaders developing skills such as trust, communication and cooperation at YMCA Camp Sloper. The adventure continued with new day camp programs for teens. The Rangers program was revised and offered to grades five and six and new Trailblazers program was developed for grades seven to nine. The Voyagers program, re-born in 1995 (this was once the Outback program led by Bobby Crookes in the 1970s), took groups of teens away from Sloper on week-long trips to other camps across New England and on biking, rafting, canoeing and rock climbing expeditions. These exciting activities resulted in a significant increase in teen enrollment throughout the 90s. In 1998, two teenage Sioux Indian boys from South Dakota, Denver and Eric Three Legs, joined us in the Sloper Adventure when they attended camp for four weeks that summer.





The tradition of volunteerism at YMCA Camp Sloper continued throughout the decade. Weekend work groups were formed to maintain and improve the facility. Throughout the 90s, the Woodland Management Subcommittee, led by Ralph Mann and Harry Kastner, completed the majority of the trail work, bridge construction, and brush clearing. Other facility improvements completed by volunteers included a playscape by the waterfront, an 80' Superslide donated by Irene and Leo Charette, and the YMCA Skate Park. Volunteers also renovated the barn and preschool area for the Wanderers and began developments on the West Coast of Sloper Pond. Other traditions that also stood strong in the 90s included camp activities like swimming, archery, boating, arts and crafts, nature exploration and Family Nights remained very popular. Sloper continued to host international counselors from all over the world, and special needs campers from Berlin and New Britain continued to be part of our Camp Kiwanee program. Mark Pooler, Camp Director from 1996 to present, and Jim O'Rourke, Unit Director in the late 90s and current Branch Director at the Cheshire Community YMCA, kept the tradition of LOGS, (Lots of Great Stuff), going strong in the later half of the decade with tales of Sloper folklore, like the stories of Sam Hoover, the deranged former Camp Director, and the mysterious sightings of Mama Cass, the legendary turtle that lives in the pond. Many traditional camp songs were enjoyed such as "I Like Bananas, Coconuts and Grapes," "From East to West," and "Boom Chicca Boom," as well as the all time favorite camp skits, the "Bumble Bee", the "Doctor's Office" and the "Great Swami". With more than 500 campers a day, the old LOGS area was beginning to get overcrowded and plans were developed for a new amphitheater that would overlook Sloper Pond.



In 1999, YMCA Camp Sloper celebrated its 50th anniversary. Several events were planned including a 50th Anniversary Picnic in the summer, a Gala at the Aqua Turf that would serve as a fundraiser for the new 700 seated Amphitheater, constructed by the Sloper volunteers, and a new logo for the Outdoor Center was introduced to the community. Many of the old staff and campers came back to visit Sloper during the summer to rekindle their childhood memories and see some old friends.



At the close of the decade, Tony Palmieri, Chairman of the Outdoor Center Committee, led the push to bring Sloper into the next millennium. He and other staff and volunteers worked with the architectural firm, Milone & MacBroom, to complete a Master Plan for the future of the YMCA Camp Sloper Outdoor Center. This plan focused on enhancing the present day camp program, expanding teambuilding and nature programs, exploring potential childcare opportunities for the community, and continuing to develop community and membership enhancement.



# SLOPER FAST FACTS: 1990s

- 👉 **1990:** John Myers becomes Camp Director
- 👉 **1991:** The Low Ropes Course is constructed  
New specialty camps: Earth Camp, Sports Camp, Karate, Horseback Riding, Musical Theater
- 👉 **1992:** High Ropes Course and Climbing Tower constructed  
The Wanderers pre-school program is developed
- 👉 **1996:** Mark Pooler becomes Camp Director (Co-director with Kim Camera)
- 👉 **1998:** YMCA Skate Park constructed  
New specialty camps: Skateboarding, Mountain Biking, and Carpentry Camps introduced
- 👉 **1999:** 50th Anniversary of YMCA Camp Sloper – donated to the Southington-Cheshire Community YMCAs in December of 1949  
Charette SuperSlide and Mama Cass Playscape constructed  
Two Native Americans boys, Denver and Eric Three Legs, of the Lakota Sioux spend summer at Sloper  
The Master Plan of Conservation and Development for YMCA Camp Sloper is completed

## **CAMP ENROLLMENT: 1990**

1,012 campers for the summer



# YMCA CAMP SLOPER - YEAR ROUND PLACE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM: 2000-2009



From its beginning as a day camp 60 years ago into the new millennium, the YMCA Camp Sloper Outdoor Center, as it is known today, has seen dramatic change under the continued dedication of many staff and volunteers. With the completion of the Master Plan for the facility in the late 1990's and with day camp enrollment climbing, the time was right for the YMCA to invest in Sloper. The staff and volunteers would continue to follow the wishes of Aunt Nellie "promoting healthy outdoor activities for the largest number of young men and women, both members of the YMCA and similar groups...", while following the new visions of the Master Plan for the YMCA Camp Sloper Outdoor Center.

The first investment would be to dedicate a full-time professional staff person solely to Sloper. Mark Pooler was promoted to Outdoor Center Director in 1999 and moved his office onto the property year-round in 2000. With the support of the Outdoor Center Committee, Mark and the volunteers began work on completing the visions of the new Master Plan:

**Day Camp Program:** to provide a day camp program of the highest quality that services 600-750 children in the greater Southington-Cheshire service area; day camp will remain the focal point and feature program of Sloper

**Outdoor Center Programs:** to have local school systems, community organizations, businesses and corporations take advantage of the off-season programs at Sloper: Facility Rental, Teambuilding and Environmental Education

**YMCA Membership and Community Enhancements:** to provide both YMCA members and members of the community with unique programming opportunities and options that utilize the outdoor resources of Sloper

**Volunteer Programs:** to provide the community with a comprehensive volunteer program with multiple volunteer opportunities for all ages and ability levels that will continue to enhance the facility and programs at Sloper

Additional year-round professional staff was added throughout the first half of the decade to assist Mark Pooler and the volunteers in the progress and development of the Master Plan. In the fall of 2000 Amy Hegenbart was hired as the first ever Program Director for the YMCA Camp Sloper Outdoor Center. Upon her departure, Jason Miller took over as Program Director and Lesley DeAngelo came on board as the Camp Administrator, both in the fall of 2002. With the proper staff team in place, the off-season programs began to flourish and it became common to see school and community groups using YMCA Camp Sloper all year long.

The day camp continued to grow in popularity as enrollment records would be broken almost every year for most of the decade, reaching over 2,800 campers in 2007, and a session record of 770 campers. The colors orange and blue were adopted in the year 2000 as the official camp colors of YMCA Camp Sloper. With a staff of over 120 in the summer, an "orange" revolution of "Be FUN, Have FUN, Give FUN, Everyday", (this is the day camp staff philosophy), started and everyone began to associate the color orange with





YMCA Camp Sloper. Each year new specialty camps were added such as Fishing Camp, Golf Camp, BMX Camp, Photography Camp, Rocket Science Camp, and one of the most popular specialty camps led by Eric Korp until 2008 called Fort Building Camp.

The rapid growth of the day camp program encouraged the concept that separate program areas for younger and older campers needed to be created. In 2001, the East Coast of the camp was now dedicated to the campers in grades K-5 and the West Coast of the Camp was geared

towards teens, entering grades 6-10. Each year facility development would be added to each program area to enhance the day camp. The 50th Anniversary in 1999 generated enough funds to build a beautiful amphitheater overlooking Sloper Pond; it was a major accomplishment by the volunteers and a much needed improvement for the camp. With the support from the Capital Campaign at the YMCA in the early part of the decade, over \$1,000,000 in facility improvements were completed between 2002 and 2005 that included new basketball courts on each coast, (one donated by the Lions Club and the other by the Brennan Family), public water and sewer installed throughout the facility, a major renovation and face lift to the East Coast Waterfront (courtesy of the Rotary Club), an Archery Pavilion was constructed, parking improvements were added as well as several other improvements completed by the Sloper volunteers. In 2005 a \$21,000 grant from the Department of Environmental Protection allows for the construction a 440' environmental board walks in the northwest wetlands during the coming years.

In 2004, a neighbor of Sloper, Dr. Robert Jacob and his wife Jerine would supply the funding for the Jacob Family Pavilion on the West Coast that would include a large pavilion area, bathrooms, an office and kitchen area and rainy day and program space for the teens.

Volunteers played an essential part in the developments and progress of the Master Plan and to keep Aunt Nellie's wishes alive for generations to come. Under the direction of Harry Kastner, Chair of the Outdoor Center Committee in the early 2000's, Paul Rosin Chair from 2003 until 2007, and Lance Kilburn took over that year, volunteers continued to drive the improvements at YMCA Camp Sloper. Sub-committees were developed to focus on specific areas of the outdoor center, (Building and Property, Day Camp Improvement, Membership and Marketing, Pond Management, Sloper Alumni, Woodland Management).

In celebration of the 55th anniversary





of YMCA Camp Sloper in 2004, one of the sub-committees focused on developing a Sloper Alumni Association in an effort to reconnect former campers and staff with the magic of Sloper. This group instituted the Sloper Hall of Fame to honor past staff and volunteers who have had a lasting impact on the camp. In January 2005 the YMCA Polar Plunge was held with 15 participants jumping into Sloper Pond. This effort raised \$5,000 to help provide camp scholarships through the YMCA Strong Kids Campaign. By the end of the decade, over 150 participants would take the frigid plunge and raise \$15,000 annually.

Due to the hard work of both the staff and volunteers, YMCA Camp Sloper was able to meet the standards required to be accredited by the American Camping Association (ACA) in 2007. With the departure of Lesley and Jay at the end of the summer of 2006, Patrick Rosin became Program Director and Linda Roy took on the role of Outdoor Center Administrator. The groundwork that was provided by their predecessors enabled the new staff to maintain the standards and continue yearly improvements to again be granted accredited status by the ACA in 2009.

During the second half of the decade there was a focus on refurbishing, preserving, or expanding some of the facilities on the property. A special thanks to Ralph Mann for his leadership in a project to restore the Red Barn. The Arts and Crafts Cabin, East Coast Office, and the Sloper House all received needed renovations. Due to a \$123,000 grant from the State of Connecticut, the YMCA Skate Park was completely overhauled providing a state of the art facility for skate enthusiasts. In 2008 the YMCA Camp Sloper Pavilion Campaign was created to provide additional rainy day space. This campaign was instrumental in generating donations to construct 3 new pavilions. Special thanks go to the Denorfia and Meade families who each provided generous support for the construction of two pavilions on the East Coast which have been named in their honor. The Alumni Pavilion, with donations from numerous Sloper friends and families was built on the West Coast. In addition, an anonymous donor provided funds for a pavilion to be built on the site of the old MacKenzie Cottage. The only stipulation was that the pavilion be named the Pooler Pavilion in honor of Mark Pooler who has been the Camp Director since 1996. In 2009, the Sloper Chapel on the West Coast shoreline was completed for an open air gathering spot for campers or other events.

The 60th Anniversary in 2009 was a celebration of YMCA Camp Sloper's past and future. The logo which was created at the 50th anniversary, was altered slightly to retain some of the old, but usher in a new look. This event was also the dedication of the Alumni Pavilion provided by camper, staff, and volunteer families of the past for campers and members of the future to continue to enjoy the magic of Sloper for generations to come.

Aunt Nellie would be proud to know that the gift she gave many years ago is safe in the hands of many dedicated and hard working staff and volunteers who have a passion to enhance and preserve the 142.5 acres for the next generation. The current camp credo sums up the importance of YMCA Camp Sloper in the community and what it means to the staff and volunteers:

## **YMCA Camp Sloper Credo:**

*Welcome to YMCA Camp Sloper. Here new experiences are introduced and lasting memories are never forgotten. We reach out to the child in everyone and build character in the leaders of tomorrow. We change lives, build smiles, and provide an environment for people to grow. Welcome to YMCA Camp Sloper; love it, share it, and preserve it for the next generation.*



# SLOPER FAST FACTS: 2000s

- 👉 **2000:** Mark Pooler, Outdoor Center Director, moves his office from the YMCA to Sloper on a year-round basis.  
50th Anniversary Amphitheater constructed.  
Orange and blue adopted as the “official” camp colors.  
Amy Hegenbart hired as Program Director for YMCA Camp Sloper.  
The Southington-Cheshire Community YMCAs and the Town of Southington, in a joint effort, purchase more than 70 acres of land adjacent to Sloper for the purpose of Open Space and passive recreation  
Harry Kastner becomes Chair of the Outdoor Center Committee.
- 👉 **2001:** The “coastal concept” adopted for the day camp program with two separate areas for younger and older campers (East Coast serves campers grades K-5 and West Coast serves campers grades 6-10)  
YMCA Memorial Forest developed for friends and members of the YMCA to be remembered  
Archery Pavilion constructed by Sloper volunteers
- 👉 **2002:** Jay Miller hired as Program Director and Lesley DeAngelo hired as Camp Administrator
- 👉 **2003:** East Coast Waterfront re-constructed with donation from the Rotary Club of Southington  
New basketball courts on each coast constructed – Lions Club Basketball Courts on the West Coast and Brennan Basketball Courts on the East Coast  
Paul Rosin assumes the role of Chair for the Outdoor Center Committee
- 👉 **2004:** 55th Anniversary of YMCA Camp Sloper celebrated  
Sloper Alumni Association created for former campers and staff  
Jacob Family Pavilion completed  
Upper East Coast Program Area developed for additional program space
- 👉 **2005:** Sloper History book, the first 55 years, completed  
First Polar Plunge event is held to benefit the YMCA Strong Kids Campaign.  
Department of Environmental Protection provides a \$21,000 grant to constructed 440’ environmental board walk in the northwest wetlands
- 👉 **2006:** Patrick Rosin becomes Outdoor Center Program Director; Linda Roy takes over as Outdoor Center Administrator.



- **2007:** YMCA Skate Park renovation funded with \$123,000 grant from the State of CT.  
The Climbing Tower expanded with 3 new sides; baseball diamond built on East Coast.  
YMCA Camp Sloper is granted accreditation by the American Camping Association (ACA).  
Camp enrollment hits records highs – over 770 campers session 2 and 2,800 for the season.  
Lance Kilburn takes the reins from Paul Rosin and becomes Chair of the Outdoor Center Committee.
  
- **2008:** YMCA Camp Sloper Pavilion Campaign brings in donations to construct three new pavilions: Meade Pavilion, Denorifa Pavilion, and Alumni Pavilion.  
Restoration of the Red Barn is begun thanks to the leadership of Ralph Mann.
  
- **2009:** Celebration of 60th Anniversary with Anniversary Picnic in May; Alumni Pavilion completed and dedicated during anniversary celebration.  
Anonymous donor funds the Pooler Pavilion on the site of MacKenzie's Cottage.

## **CAMP ENROLLMENT: 2000**

2,224 campers for the summer



# YMCA CAMP SLOPER - A STAPLE IN THE COMMUNITY - 2010-2019



Following the Early 2000s, YMCA Camp Sloper became a staple in the Southington community. The color Orange was recognized everywhere in town as a symbol of Sloper staff and the role models that they represent. YMCA Camp Sloper continued being a well-known destination for many groups in Southington and surrounding towns. YMCA Camp Sloper expanded its offseason programming to many other areas including birthday parties, weekend rentals, weddings, and other special events.

In 2010 Jay Jaronko became the Outdoor Center Program Director. Under Jay Jaronko and Mark Pooler, YMCA Camp Sloper partnered with the Southington Education Foundation and the Southington Board of Education and developed Science at Sloper, in the spring of 2010. This program gave all 4th grade students in Southington the opportunity to come to YMCA Camp Sloper twice a year with their class and experience outdoor science lessons. The Fall science workshops include looking at 3 habitats and ecosystems, including the pond, wetlands, and forest. The Spring science workshops include studies of erosion: wind erosion, water erosion, and weathering. This program has continued on and become a great representation of the partnership between YMCA Camp Sloper, the Board of Education and Southington Education Foundation.

The second major program development in the early 2010's was the creation of the 5th Grade Asset Development Days at YMCA Camp Sloper. This was developed with a partnership with the STEPS (Southington's Townwide Effort to Promote Success) Coalition and the Southington Board of Education. Through this program, all 5th Grade students from every Southington elementary school participates in Asset Building Workshops and team building activities. Through these activities students meet and bond with other students who they will become their classmates when they move on to middle school in the new year. Later in the decade the program would be expanded to include the 8th grade transition year to the High School.

In 2012, the Melanie Rossini Program Center was built with the help of numerous donors and volunteers at YMCA Camp Sloper and under the leadership of local builder, Tony Denorfia. Named after Melanie Rossini who had tragically passed away on July 28, 2010, this building would give YMCA Camp Sloper the ability to do year round programs, rentals, and birthday parties. The Melanie Rossini Program Center has become the major rental area at YMCA Camp Sloper for birthday parties, baby showers, meetings, teambuilding groups in the off season and some much needed rainy day space during day camp. Melanie Rossini's memory will live on every time a group enters that building.

With the departure of two key staff, Linda Roy and Jay Jaronko, Shane Altwies was hired as the Outdoor Center Program Director and Patty Nagle became the Outdoor Center Administrator in 2014. The next few years were dedicated to making the area around the Rossini Program Center into a campus like facility. In 2014 the older Nature Pavilion was renovated and enclosed with the help of generous donations including help from the Southington Education Foundation.





The newly renovated building was named the Myers Family Nature Center in honor of long-time Executive Director, John Myers and his wife Moi and children Jack and Catherine Myers who both work at camp at this time.

The inside of the building was named the SEF STEM Lab in recognition of the great donation from the foundation. A small Amphitheater was also created behind the Myers Family Nature Center. The nature center would be used for environmental education groups, winter and indoor team-building, and many other programs. In 2016, the campus was complete when the Meade Pavilion was enclosed to become the Meade Family Library. This was constructed to help prevent summer reading loss and to bring an educational component to day camp. YMCA Camp Sloper now had three enclosed, heated buildings in close proximity to one another, which would allow for more winter and off season programming.

The most significant special event of the decade was the Race4Chase Triathlon Finale held annually at YMCA Camp Sloper in early August. The Race4Chase Triathlon program was named after Chase Michael-Anthony Kowalski, a young boy who tragically passed away in the Sandy Hook School shootings on December 14, 2012. His family developed the CMAK Foundation and the Race4Chase triathlon program would grow to have over 20 sites across the state at local YMCAs. The culminating event would be held at YMCA Camp Sloper each year and the Finale Triathlon Race would draw thousands of people annually and help the Kowalski family heal and share their message of “measure your life with love”!

This decade also brought a lot of staff change to YMCA Camp Sloper. In 2015, Wendy Fisher became the Outdoor Center Administrator taking over from Patty Nagle. After 20 years as Camp Director and over 25 years on the camp staff, Mark Pooler celebrated his last year as Camp Director in 2015. Mark was promoted to be the Director of Operations for the Southington Community YMCA and would later become the CEO of the entire association. Mark shares a quote about his time at camp “I can honestly say I would not be the person I am today without my time at YMCA Camp Sloper. This place has helped me and so many others grow and has taught me so many valuable life lessons.

I am beyond grateful for the opportunity to have served as the Camp Director of this great organization”. Mark Pooler was honored in 2008 by having a pavilion named after him for all his hard work and dedication; the Pooler Pavilion sits at McKenzie’s Point and has one of the best views of Sloper Pond.

Following Mark Pooler in 2016, Shane Altwies was named Outdoor Center Director and Justin Hubeny was named Outdoor Center Program Director. In 2017, the Main Street Foundation provided Sloper with a grant for \$67,000 for the Green Trail around the pond to be widened and flattened, and exercise stations posted around the trail, in an effort to improve the access for people of all ages and physical abilities.





Justin Hubeny became the Outdoor Center Director in 2018 and Tom Sangeloty was named Outdoor Center Program Director. Jeff Kelly was also added to the team that year as the first full time Property Director. That year the Ninja Warrior Course was constructed and a major renovation to the Boat House was completed. 2018 also brought the largest day camp enrollment summer in Sloper history. There were 3388 registrations in total for the entire summer and a record 816 campers in session 2. Justin, Tom and the rest of the Sloper team were off to a great start and would lead the camp with great enthusiasm and passion throughout the rest of the decade.



2019 began with some major renovations to the Sloper House. With John Myers retiring as the Executive Director and Mark Pooler being hired as the new CEO for the Southington-Cheshire Community YMCAs, the time was right to complete some upgrades to the Sloper House. The Pooler Family, Mark, Dawn, Matt and Abby would move into the Sloper House in the spring of 2019.

2019 also marked the 70th anniversary of the greatest gift of 1949, the gift of the camp property from Cornelia Sloper Neal to the Southington YMCA in December of 1949! Aunt Nellie would be proud to know that the gift she gave 70 years ago is safe in the hands of many dedicated and hardworking staff and volunteers. The passion of these caretakers has helped to enhance and preserve the 142.5 acres for the next generation.



# SLOPER FAST FACTS

- 👉 **2010:** Jay Jaronko becomes Outdoor Center Program Director  
Science at Sloper Educational Program Developed for all Southington 4th Grade Students, they get to visit camp for a hands on Science Program. It is founded in Partnership with Southington Board of Ed & the Southington Education Foundation
- 👉 **2012:** Rossini Program Center is constructed with the help of numerous donors and volunteers in honor of the late Melanie Rossini.
- 👉 **2013:** Shane Altwies becomes Outdoor Center Program Director  
Dan Nardini becomes chairman of the Outdoor Center Committee
- 👉 **2014:** Patty Nagle takes over as Outdoor Center Administrator  
Myers Family Nature Center is constructed to serve as a place for campers to attend nature programs while attending Day Camp. Named in honor of Executive Director John Myers and family.
- 👉 **2015:** Wendy Fisher takes over as Outdoor Center Administrator.  
YMCA Camp Sloper hosts Race4Chase Finale, the event sees hundreds of first time triathletes compete in this culminating event honoring Chase Kowalski, a young boy who lost his life in the Sandy Hooks shootings in December of 2012.  
Mark Pooler Celebrates his 20th and final season as Camp Director.
- 👉 **2016:** Shane Altwies becomes Outdoor Center Director/Camp Director  
Justin Hubeny becomes Outdoor Center Program Director  
Meade Family Pavilion renovated and enclosed to become the Meade Family Library, in an effort combat summer literacy loss.
- 👉 **2017:** West Coast Waterfront Rope Swing is added.  
Main Street Foundation provides \$67,000 for the Green Trail to be widened and flattened in an effort to provide better access for people of all ages  
Tony Michaud becomes chairman of the Outdoor Center Committee



- ☛ **2018:** Justin Hubeny becomes Outdoor Center Director/Camp Director  
Tom Sangeloty becomes Outdoor Center Program Director.  
Jeff Kelly hired as 1st ever full time Property Director for the camp  
Boat House expanded and renovated and the Ninja Warrior Course Built John Myers, former Camp Director, retires as Executive Director of the YMCA Record Day Camp  
Enrollment - 3388 Campers overall and record for a session, Session 2 - 816 campers
- ☛ **2019:** Sloper House renovations are complete; Mark Pooler named new CEO and the Pooler family moves into the Sloper House.

## **CAMP ENROLLMENT: 2010**

2,587 campers for the summer



# CONCLUSION

It was Cornelia Sloper Neal's wish that her farm be developed into a camp for young people where healthy outdoor recreation would be encouraged. Mrs. Neal hoped that others would recognize the value of the property and would assist in developing it. We are enormously gratified that her wishes have become reality. Many have provided financial assistance, and others have given countless hours of their time and talents, especially YMCA volunteers and staff, who have routinely gone the extra mile to put it all together to make Sloper an outstanding place. Special thanks are owed to the civic clubs of Southington, including the Lions Club, the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club, and the Southington Women's Club, who, throughout the years, have led the way in making Sloper what it is today. It is our hope that this tradition of giving will continue for many years to come.

How could Mrs. Neal have envisioned what Southington would be like in 2005 growing from a small town of less than 10,000 in population to a community of more than 40,000? Could she have imagined that people of all ages would walk her property just to look at the beautiful pond, open fields, and quiet woodlands, or that Sloper would be an oasis in a rapidly growing community? Could she have envisioned a camp that, more than 70 years later, would grow from serving fewer than 50 children to a camp that serves over 2,700 children each summer? We believe Mrs. Neal would be delighted by the countless youngsters who can proudly say, "I learned to swim at YMCA Camp Sloper." or "I climbed the wall and rang the bell." or "For the first time, I slept under the stars."

Mrs. Neal's nephew, Samuel MacKenzie, hoped that the gift of Sloper Farm would inspire many to do worthwhile deeds for others. It has! We're sure that the next fifty years at YMCA Camp Sloper will be as inspirational and as memorable as our first fifty.

Thanks, Aunt Nellie!

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Many thanks to those who have contributed their time to the development of "The Sloper Story"! The history outlined in these pages is a testament to the passion and hard work of many. A very special thanks goes to the following people for their work and extra efforts of bringing the "Sloper Story" alive for others to enjoy: Donna Ayer, Lesley DeAngelo, Justin Hubeny, Susan Larson, Ralph Mann, Doug McLeod, John Myers, Mark Pooler, Tom Sangeloty, Susan Skarvinko, and Wendy Fisher.*

*We look forward to living the history for the next 70 years of YMCA Camp Sloper!*



# APPRECIATION TO CORNELIA SLOPER NEAL

*This text was taken from a letter written by Samuel and Eunice MacKenzie at presentation in Mrs. Neal's honor.*

Tonight we wish to express our gratitude to Mrs. Nellie Neal (as she was generally known) for bequeathing to the Southington YMCA her entire estate of 142.5 acres, which includes a lovely lake, and the old family homestead now used as a home for the Secretary. Today the property is called "The Sloper Day Camp".

She was the last of the Sloper family and her will states it was given in memory of her father and mother, Mr. and Mrs. David Root Sloper, her brother Ambrose, and two sisters, Mary and Julia.

Many times in recent years we have felt called upon to voice a thank you to men and women of our township who have given material and personal aid to projects for the benefit of all our citizens whatever their birth or station; and so at this time we wish to include Mrs. Neal among the other outstanding benefactors of Southington. Although she lost her husband in the prime of his life, and also her little child at an early age, she never lost her interest in people of all ages and types.

Her death in 1948 at the age of 97 leaving all her real estate to the Y seemed to us to merit a visible reminder in their headquarters of the kindly thought of an old lady of yesterday for the youth of today.

Samuel H. MacKenzie

Eunice J. MacKenzie





# LAST WILL TESTAMENT CORNELIA SLOPER NEAL

*Be it known to all persons, That I, Cornelia Neal of the Town of Southington, in the County of Hartford, in the State of Connecticut, being of lawful age, of sound and disposing mind, memory and judgment, do hereby make, publish and declare this to be my last Will and Testament, hereby revoking all previous wills and codicils by me made.*

*I give and devise my farm located on East Street and Berlin Street in Southington, containing one hundred and fifty (150) acres, more or less, with my homestead, barns and all other buildings which I own, that may be located thereon, including the furniture and furnishing which belong to me, and are in my homestead at the time of my death, to the Southington Young Men's Christian Association, Inc., a corporation under the laws of Connecticut, and located at Southington, Conn.*

*I make this gift in memory of my family, that is: of my father David Sloper, my mother Augusta E. Sloper, my sister Julia Sloper Orr, my sister Mary E. Sloper, my brother Ambrose Sloper, and of myself, I especially request that the pictures of my father and mother, if in my homestead, either be carefully preserved by the devisee of my said farm, otherwise that they be burned.*

*It is my will, that said farm, with the pond of water thereon, shall be developed for, and used as a camp site, and for water sports, and for promoting similar outdoor health and recreational activities, for the largest number possible of young men and young women, members of the Young Men's Christian Association, Inc., and other groups, including Boy and Girl Scouts, under competent and efficient supervision, as part of the work of the Young Men's Christian Association, Inc. of Southington.*

*I cannot definitely state a plan or method which shall be pursued by said Southington Young Men's Christian Association, Inc., in carrying out my intent.*

*I must leave this to the wisdom and discretion of those who shall manage and direct the work of this Association at Southington, during the years that are ahead. However, I desire that said real estate shall always be identified with the name Sloper; that said farm, so far as possible, shall be kept intact, and developed for the purposes I have indicated from time to time, as funds become available.*

*While it is not possible for me to endow this property with a maintenance fund sufficient to develop and maintain it, it is my will, that any portion or portions of the land comprising said farm, which may be determined is not necessary for the fullest use and enjoyment of the farm for the purpose above specified, be sold, but that any money derived from such sale shall be used toward defraying the cost of developing the remainder of the farm for the purpose above specified and not for any other purpose. I hope that others will realize the value of the property for the purposes I have given it and will financially assist the work of developing it.*