

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE SUMNER DUDLEY



Here is the mostly accurate story—which in our community has risen to the level of origin myth—telling of the creation and distinguished history of Camp Wawayanda:

At a time when New York City and the cities and towns surrounding it were becoming increasingly crowded, and playgrounds were nearly nonexistent, the YMCA of New Jersey developed one of the first organized camps in the United States. In 1901 the first director of a camp dubbed “Camp Wawayanda” was Charles Scott, a Hall of Fame inductee and a man honored by the naming of a lodge at Frost Valley. The camp Scott led was situated on Lake Wawayanda in northern Sussex County, New Jersey. Camp Wawayanda was set up on an island reachable by a barge which was set in motion by the passengers’ pulling on a large rope permanently fixed from bank to bank. This property was sold in 1917, making it necessary for Scott and others to find a new site. A gorgeous location was found in Andover, New Jersey—and this was the long-term site of Wawayanda that became famous and is what we mean when we refer these days to “Old Wawayanda.” The Andover site offered a mile-long natural lake (“New Lake Wawayanda”), 330 acres of forested land, and an open campus bordering the lake. For 40 years at Andover thousands of children enjoyed the highest quality camping offered anywhere in the U.S. by the Y. In 1954, due to the encroachment of commerce, the camp’s trustees sadly sold the Andover site. In the next three years, Camp Wawayanda rented the Stevens Institute Camp at Johnsonburg, New Jersey, while a new location was sought. In 1958 Wawayanda moved to Frost Valley and there began a revival of original goals and the inclusion of girls and women, of children from families unable to afford camp, of children

with chronic illness, and those with intellectual disabilities. And it all started with Charles Scott on Lake Wawayanda.

Well, not really. The great Wawayanda tradition did not actually begin there. It’s much older still. In fact, in telling the story of Sumner Dudley’s brilliant frame-shifting innovation, we disclose the fuller, truer history of Wawayanda as (along with a sister camp that later split off) the oldest Y camp in the U.S. Nearly two decades before Scott set up camp in 1901, Dudley, a tireless young innovator with a vision, had convened a literary society for children; he and they read books and freely talked. Soon Dudley convinced Y leaders to let him lead summertime “rambling tours” into the wilderness—a combination of, on one hand, open discussion and contemplation (the specific origin of our practice of evening “devotions”) and, on the other hand, retreat into natural settings that derived from the Romantic movement earlier in the 19th century but was then completely unheard of as an actual program for kids. The rambling tours soon lengthened into overnight camping. Dudley took seven boys for a week’s encampment at Orange Lake, New York. The next year, 1886, Dudley moved the project to Twin Islands in Lake Wawayanda, Sussex County, New Jersey. **That** was Camp Wawayanda’s beginning. “There was just one tent,” Dudley recalled later, “a boat, a few cooking utensils, and rubber ponchos for sleeping on the ground.” Later the camp split into two—one group moving to Lake Champlain, first named “Camp Baldhead” and later memorialized as “Camp Dudley,” still in operation today (although it recently left the YMCA federation); the other eventually named “Camp Wawayanda” and it is the organization from which Frost Valley YMCA derives.

Sumner Dudley died terribly young—at just 43 years of age in 1897. As visionary as he was, he surely had no idea what his persistent innovation on behalf of young people would later make possible. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the **Wawayanda Whirlwind**, the camp's newspaper, referred to a "Dudley Island" in the middle of Lake Wawayanda, a special site for reflection. The **Whirlwind** interviewed some of the original campers from the very first Wawayanda summers, one of whom remembered that "Dudley's life was a happy joyous life, full of hope and earnest looking forward to the day when some of the things which he planned for the larger work among children should become realities." If only Dudley could see what Wawayanda at Frost Valley has now become—the sheer number able to attend (some 150,000 since founding), and their astonishing diversity of origins, of children whose sense of independence is supported by camp. And if only he could join an evening devotion in a cabin in 2016, where children feel they can speak freely and can begin to comprehend the connection between that discovery of freedom and this temporary retreat into the wilderness we arrange for them. He would be proud, surely. We're glad, to say the least, that Sumner Dudley persuaded his YMCA colleagues to let him try something that must have seemed really strange and uncongenial. Thanks to him, it all makes perfect sense now.

One important final note about Dudley's incalculable and almost invisible ongoing influence on us. The July 19, 1910 issue of the **Wawayanda Whirlwind** printed a lengthy description of 25th anniversary celebrations in honor of Dudley's first

encampment of 1885. A special morning reflection was held on Dudley Island—attended by current Wawayanda campers and many alumni including some of the very first Wawayanda kids from a quarter-century earlier. Someone had the idea of asking the alumni to donate money that would be used in a partnership with a Newark-based organization called "Fresh Air Work"—a gesture of philanthropy that resulted in what might have been the first ever "camperships." A large sum of \$18 was raised, enabling (based on estimates of costs back then) two more children to attend camp. From an idea done in Dudley's memory on that occasion 106 years ago, we may have found the very beginnings of our own "Project 332," the most fundamental means we have of reaching our progressive goal of inclusion. On the day of his induction posthumously into the Frost Valley Hall of Fame, those gathered to celebrate it can hear around them, running in the fields, the delighted squeals of children whose families could not otherwise afford to give them this experience; in those happy free shouts one can hear the finest legacy of Sumner Dudley, our founder.

