

John Ledlie

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

One would be hard-pressed to find a leader whose lifetime influence and contributions have left as indelible an impact on the camping industry as John Ledlie. During his impressive career spanning more than four decades, Ledlie was a pioneer forging the burgeoning path to what would become modern-day camping best practices.



John Ledlie began his illustrious 44-year career as a 19-year-old assistant secretary for Boys' Work at the Bronx Union Branch YMCA. In 1924 he became the Boys' Work secretary at the Jersey City Y before serving as Director of New Jersey State YMCA's Camp Wawayanda from 1930 - 1944. In 1944, he was appointed Youth and Camping Secretary for the National Council.

During his tenure as Director of Camp Wawayanda, Ledlie introduced the camp, and subsequently the camping industry, to the concept of "villages" as a means of organizing campers by age. This decentralized "village" enabled a large camp to create age-based programming based on smaller communities of campers. Though it took years to accomplish, six villages were eventually established—Forest, Pioneer, Outpost, Lenape, Totem, and Hemlock, along with the appointment of Village Chiefs to supervise them.

In an impassioned letter to former Frost Valley YMCA Executive Director D. Halbe Brown, Ledlie advocated for the continuation of the practice of organizing camp into villages saying, "This was the most important change in the administration of the camp for which Holbein (Associate Camp Director) and I were responsible. I believe that the village plan makes it possible to provide for better supervision of counselors' effectiveness. The Village Chiefs were able to establish a close relationship with the counselors in their respective villages. This made it possible for each village with the Chief, counselors, and campers to develop village programs graded to its particular age-range."

The practice of utilizing villages to create a more personalized camp experience for children has since been widely adopted by camps nationwide. However, the monumental scope of his impact didn't end there. Ledlie's prolific writings about camp management including

Managing the YMCA Camp, The Handbook of Trail and Wilderness Camping, and Camp Counselor's Manual contained foundational camping principals that would be used for decades to come.

He also contributed architectural design plans for ideal camp layouts for YMCA's book, Building Designs, and Equipment for Y.M.C.A. Camps. Ledlie's designs were intended to not only prevent camps from making costly mistakes in layout and construction, but also according to Ledlie, "to provide for a consistent architectural style in keeping with the natural environment and for landscaping, reforestation, the prevention of erosion and the restocking of a lake." His designs were meant to more than simply incorporate the natural environment, but to steward those natural resources to ensure their availability for generations to come.

During Ledlie's administration at Camp Wawayanda he was responsible for the expansion of the equipment and program of the camp in several key directions. A new infirmary was added in 1932, making it possible to supervise the health and safety of campers. A completely new sanitation system, the installation of electricity, electric refrigeration, and a dishwashing system, which were implemented during Ledlie's tenure ranked Wawayanda as one of the best-equipped camps of the century.

All of these modernizations coupled with the shift toward cabins as the preferred camper sleeping accommodations in the 1940s opened up a new market for camps—providing retreats for families and conference groups. In the YMCA's publication "Putting Campers in Their Place," Ledlie noted that in the off season "two or three conference groups can use the property at the same time."

This revolutionary concept would allow camps to amortize construction and maintenance costs over a longer camping season. Frost Valley is just one of many camps who have benefited from this shift from summer-only programming to year-round camping and retreat opportunities for people of all ages.

For his dedication and deep abiding passion for creating positive camping experiences for children as evidenced by his impressive career in camping spanning more than four decades, fourteen of which he served as Director of Camp Wawayanda; for revolutionizing the camping industry by introducing the concept of the "village" as a means of enabling a large camp to implement age-based programming, which has not only influenced Frost Valley but has become the model for camps nationwide for centuries to come; and for his profound impact on the camping world through his influential writings and leadership roles, John Ledlie is hereby inducted into the Frost Valley YMCA Hall of Fame.