

YMCA Camp Coniston Timeline

The first attempt at a local YMCA came in 1875 in Claremont and 1877 in Newport. While short-lived these attempts eventually paid off with the creation of the Sullivan County YMCA in 1910.

February 8, 1911 – The State of New Hampshire and the National Council of YMCA’s issue charters of operation for the Sullivan County YMCA.

1911 – The opening of YMCA Camp Soangetaha (Old Blue & White Logo)



The Sullivan County YMCA opened Camp Soangetaha in 1911 which operated for one or two summers at the Bird Sanctuary in Meriden, NH.

The name Soangetaha is chosen by a group of staff members from Dartmouth College to honor the character from Longfellow’s Hiawatha who “shoots his arrow straight and true.”

The plain blue and white logo served the camp for twenty-five summers and is still sung about to this day, even though the name of the camp changed. There was a tradition at the camp where campers and staff would “earn” various parts of the “Old Blue & White” by completing a list of requirements.

During this period the camp raised over \$150,000 for the relief of our troops during World War I, ran programs during the winter in all the surrounding communities, and grew Camp Soangetaha to local prominence.

1913 – Camp Director PA Foster begins (through 1915) and operated camp in its new location on Rand’s Pond approximately ten miles from the current camp location on Lake Coniston.

1916 –Camp Director Maynard Carpenter begins (through 1919)

1917 – YMCA Camp Soangetaha began administering coed camping programs; making our YMCA one of the oldest coed camps in the nation today.

1917 – As part of a national YMCA program which administered all aid and support to US troops in WW I; campers, volunteers and staff from the Sullivan County YMCA raise \$155,000 in two years.

1920 – Camp Director FR Fogers begins (through 1922)

1923 –Camp Director DK Morrison begins

1923 –The Dudley Family of Hanover, NH opens Camp Interlaken for Girls on Long Pond in Croydon, NH. The property and buildings would later be sold to our YMCA.

1936 – New Logo (Hiawatha Logo)



Soangetaha, “A camp of proved desire and known delight,” operated under this logo and slogan until the camp moved from Rand’s Pond in 1964. The name Soangetaha comes from Longfellow’s Hiawatha who is featured in the logo.

Many of Coniston’s most enduring traditions date to the years camp was located at Rand’s Pond. The CIT Trip to Mt. Washington, Sunday Select, closing campfire, the triangle

ceremony, singing “*Day is Done*,” bathhouses named “*The College*,” and even the bell would make a short list of traditions still found at camp to this day.

Early 40’s – Camp Director is George Wheeler

1943 – Long Pond in Croydon is renamed Lake Coniston by the Dudley Family

1946 – Camp Director Lewis Primer begins (through 1948)

1950 – Camp Director George Magoon begins (through 1953)

1954 – Camp Director Norman Van Gulden begins (through 1958)

1959 – Camp Director Doug Reed begins (through 1968); Van Gulden leaves to direct YMCA Camp Abnaki in Vermont.

1963 – The State YMCA of New Hampshire sells Camp Soangetaha property in Goshen and uses the proceeds to purchase Camp Interlaken for Girls for \$380,000. The name Camp Interlaken is sold to a separate group and still operates as a camp in the NH lakes region.

1964 – New Logo



After searching for the perfect campsite for almost a decade, our YMCA located our present site in Croydon, New Hampshire. The Dudley family, who ran Camp Interlaken for Girls from 1925 to 1963, sold the property to our YMCA in 1963.

After a major fund drive which helped purchase the property, the Soangetaha campers, board, staff, and programs moved to the 1200 acre facility and welcomed many of the Interlaken campers into our YMCA family.

While searching for a formal name the camp operated under the name New Hampshire State YMCA Camping Reservation for Boys and Girls. Camp Director Doug Reed said the name frustrated many parents trying to pay for camp with a check. (Notice the logo in the outline of New Hampshire is the Soangetaha image.)

1968 – New docks put in place at Girl’s and Boys waterfronts while the lake is frozen.

1969 – Camp Director Bob Sanders begins (through 1990); Doug Reed moved to direct State YMCA Camp in Maine.



1969 – New Logo

In 1969 the camp operated for the first time under the name Coniston. Chosen from a long list of possibilities, the name originated from the lake. As a measure to reduce the number of “Long Ponds” in New Hampshire, the state accepted the name Lake Coniston as an alternative in 1943.

The lake drew its name in honor of the best selling book *Coniston* by Winston Churchill, which was set in Croydon. The novel was so influential it was said to be the

favorite of President Theodore Roosevelt who visited with Churchill in nearby Cornish, NH while on tour in 1912.

Other potential names for the camp included YMCA Camp Dorr, YMCA Camp George Williams, Long Pond YMCA Camp, YMCA Camp Soangetaha, YMCA Camp Wilderness, and YMCA Camp Timber Lake.

1970 – New Logo (Old Man of the Mountain)



The Old Man on the Mountain was chosen as the image to match the camp's new name and location. It also represented the New Hampshire State YMCA, which owned Camp Coniston through 1997.

During this time period the camp grew to host more than 300 campers each session; camp also constructed new Colleges, the horse barn, Trigger and Gazebo.

1977 – Mildrid Fristedt of Massachusetts donates more than 200 acres of property to camp on Hogg Hill Road.

1978 – Carl Witherall Fund begins underwriting more than 40 children to come to camp each summer.

1979 – Camp Coniston pays off mortgage from 1963.

1981 – YMCA Camp Coniston recognized as an International YMCA for its program quality and inclusion.

1981 – New horse barn built.

1982 – Camp Super kids starts at Coniston to integrate campers with asthma into a “traditional camp program” in conjunction with Dartmouth-Hitchcock and the NH Lung Association. The program ran until 2001 when asthma was deemed to be main stream.

1991 – Camp Director Nancy LaRue begins (through 1999); Robert Sanders retires in the mountains of Virginia.

1994 – New Logo (Blue Loon)



1995 – The new climbing/belay tower is built in main camp by girl's waterfront.

1996 – Coniston in collaboration with the NH Childhood Cancer Lifeline and the Ronald McDonald House open Camp Winning Spirit. This program annually hosts families who have children with cancer each Labor Day Weekend.

September 27, 1997 – YMCA Camp Coniston became an independent YMCA and created it's own Board of Directors. Breaking away from the NH State YMCA organization, Coniston was able to become more financially sound with this new independence.

1998 – The new dining hall opens in the site of the old girls CIT cabin which will feed all of camp family style at one time (seating close to 500)

1998 (Fall) – Coniston begins first After School programs in the local school districts

1999-2003 – Coniston host Kearsarge Area Children of Hope which brings together Protestant and Catholic Youth from Belfast Northern Ireland for a week of “peace and reconciliation” programs.

1999 (Fall) – The old “Joe’s Place” building is torn down (warn down structure). Replacing Joe’s Place with a new boys CIT Cabin is the first plan of action to be completed by the incoming director. (built Spring 2000)

1999 (Fall) – Camp Director John Tilley begins (current) LaRue left to direct the Nutfield YMCA outside Manchester, NH.

2000 – New Logo (Black Loon)



2000 – Adventure Trips for teens are a new option at Coniston. Each one-week trip is open to 12 boys and girls ages 13-16. The trips begin and end at Coniston and travel through the New England states and Canada. Activities vary from trip to trip but while tenting in their travels trips also include kayaking, whitewater rafting, ropes course/group initiatives, hiking, alpine sliding, and mountain biking.

2001 (Spring) – a new store is built on the backside of the Pavilion facing the dining hall. A birch tree is removed from the skeet area near boys waterfront and carried to main camp to adorn the center of the new store.

2002 (Fall) – a new maintenance building is constructed in the sand pit on Range Road. The old maintenance shed is taken down in the middle of camp and the camp gas tanks are removed the following spring. Lush grassy play space & a sand volleyball court for everyone to enjoy replaces the old maintenance area.

2003 – West Coast CITs are introduced as a third CIT option (sessions 2 & 3)

2005 – Purchased the remaining land around Cranberry Pond. Over the next 3 years, CITs used this property during their “project” time to help construct the camp’s new outdoor Chapel. We began using the new site in 2007.

2006 – Board of Directors approves the campaign to raise 500,000 to purchase the last remaining acreage visible from the lake, securing the valley for all future Conistonians.

2007 – Renovated the Old Dining Hall into New Hampshire Hall, creating a building dedicated to the arts. Dance, drama, chorus, photography, arts and crafts and woodshop are all housed in this building.

2008 – Camp was featured on the front page of the Sunday Boston Globe as an example of a successful camp whose campers are unplugged from technology.

2009 – Family camp ended and was replaced with a One- Week session, aimed at first time campers from the waiting list.

2009 – Coniston awarded the Croydon Community award for its impact in our hometown, and was also honored as a “Champion of Children” by the Governor of New Hampshire for our “dedication to children with chronic health conditions” through Camp Winning Spirit and the NH Childhood Cancer Lifeline.

2010 – A fourth CIT program was added based on the West Coast model.

Today – YMCA Camp Coniston is the fourth largest YMCA camp by acreage in the United States. Coniston’s facility and mission allows us to serve children from across the nation with top-rated programs that foster respect, responsibility, honesty and caring in each individual.

Coniston’s summer programs are based in the belief that all kids deserve the opportunity to work, play and learn from each other. This shared concept allows mentoring of the younger campers by older, and spreads the sense of tradition throughout the community. YMCA Camp Coniston’s campership (scholarship) program assists local children who might otherwise not afford the costs of the camp experience.