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With their own eight hands, an inspiration and lots of diligent labor, four women have transformed a woodland area into a camp for girls.

Tamahay, located on Island Lake near Akeley, Minn., is in its first summer of existence as a camp.

And each of the members of the administrative staff holds a masters degree in the field of recreation. Lois Haskin is the camp director and "master-mind" of the group, for it was she who designed the structures and directed the building of them. ("Our engineer, architect, leader and inspiration") She also runs their summer sporting goods store in Nevis, a few miles away, and she put together the camp brochure — pictures and all.

The outpost and waterfront directors are teachers in Moorhead during the school year. Donella Palmer teaches physical education at Moorhead State College, Shirley Malcolm is a P.E. teacher at Concordia. Jane Besler, in charge of camp programming, teaches at the junior-senior high school in Park Rapids.

The four have a background of camping. While living in Wichita, Kan., they spent summers traveling and camping. In 1961 they bought the land, and from that time on spent their spare time developing it, commuting from Kansas.

There was one cabin there already, according to Miss Malcolm, and they spent their second summer there adding a porch and a bathroom — "to make it a little more convenient for ourselves."

When parents and friends discovered the purchase, they, too, wanted to visit. So the four got busy on a larger cabin and did all the work themselves, except for the main framework. Successful

buildings were a shed for tools and a pumphouse. When they decided to spend a winter in the cabin, they had to install a heating device.

In 1965, all four moved to Minnesota. "We decided that if we were going to get anything done, we'd have to move here," Miss Palmer says.

It was after they moved that they got the idea to make the area into a summer camp. "It's such a pretty place, and we were the only ones who ever saw it," explains Miss Malcolm. "So we decided to share it."

Other additions to the camp have been a barn for their four horses and colt; a lodge, and a cabin which holds twelve campers and two counselors.

The lodge was designed and built with one wall which can be removed easily, for an addition to the building at a later time. The main floor consists of a large kitchen, an area used for dining (and games on rainy days); the camp office and a couple inside rooms. The floor below, when completed, will be the craft area.

All were designed by Miss Haskin and built by the four — except for the main frameworks which were done by a contractor. "Lois makes all the plans and tells us what to do," explains Miss Palmer. "We just follow her directions."

The philosophy of the camp, according to the brochure, is the happiness of individual achievement, the joy of sharing with others, and a real love for the out of doors. "We want to help girls achieve independence and develop character," says Miss Malcolm. "We believe in competition, but we only have it in special events. Otherwise the girls might feel they had to spend time practicing so they could do well. We pick sports that all have some skill in."

"We believe that camping is not a personality, athletic, or endurance contest. Rather it encourages self-confidence in each girl for what she is as an individual."

The program is designed so that each camper has a chance to gain skill in swimming, canoeing, sailing, gymnastics, archery, horseback riding and campcraft in a relaxed atmosphere. Later, a tennis court will be added. "We have followed all of the guidelines of the American Campers Association," says Miss Palmer.

Overnight campouts and trip are in the schedule as well. "We hope 'tripping' will be a feature in future years," Miss Malcolm explains. "As the girls advance in skills, their trips will be longer and further from camp."

Since this is the first year of operation for the camp, the women are directing only one session. A group of twelve girls, ages 10 to 16, were chosen through school administrators in Fargo, Moorhead and Park Rapids, and few were acquainted before this summer. Two girls were scheduled to come from out of the area, but one developed an allergy at the last minute and cancelled.

The 11 campers and their counselors, both physical education majors at Concordia College in Moorhead, live in the cabin's divisions according to age. They form two tribes, of mixed ages, with names they selected for themselves from books of Indian folklore. "We have tried to provide a library of books and magazines for the girls so that when they don't recognize a tree or a bird, they run the lodge to look it up," Miss Malcolm says. Tamahay is an Indian name for "pike."

The girls in the pilot group had a contest to name different areas and buildings of the 45-acre camp and put up their own nails for hanging clothes in the cabin, as well as establishing traditions which future campers will follow.

The day begins with a flag ceremony. Besides regular sports, they have learned to make different types of fires, including a reflector oven in which they baked a pizza. They learned to build their own latrine, and many of the older, more experienced swimmers took their first "pioneer bath," taking shampoo and soap in the boat out into the lake — an experience which builds up endurance in treading and swimming.

"We believe camping should be fun and enjoyable, but we feel that the girls should have knowledge of camping skills, in case something goes wrong — so they can take care of themselves," Miss Palmer says.

Rides to church in town Sunday were provided for those campers wishing them, and others stayed at camp for vespers. Sunday was a free choice day, and the girls made up songs and chants, chose their tribal colors and made tribal flags.

The girls keep watchful eyes out for deer and keep close track of the wild raspberries, strawberries and blueberries which will be ready to eat soon — "so the birds don't get to them first."

Miss Haskin's mother is spending the summer at Tamahay, and cooks for the hungry group. A registered nurse, a neighbor, stops by daily to check on the girls' health.

After the girls leave, plans are to repair all of the camp equipment, which includes an old truck, tractor and several boats, and to start work on another cabin.

Almost everything is considered jointly, according to Miss Malcolm. "All of it is a partnership — 'We,' not 'I.' About everything we do is together."