

old union

Freshman camp

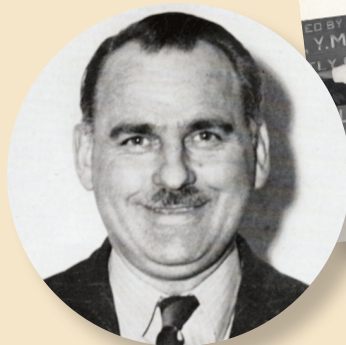
Freshman Camp was a four-day event held before orientation from 1936 to 1942 and, after World War II, from 1946 to 1954. The camp was held at Pilot Knob on the eastern shore of Lake George and included activities like singing, swimming, and a climb of nearby Buck Mountain.

Similar freshman camps were sponsored by campus Christian Associations at several colleges after World War I, according to the *Encyclopedia of Union College History*. Frank Bailey Jr. '31 introduced the idea at Union and Robert D. Everest '37 later revived the camp and garnered campus Christian Association financial support for the first three years, after which the College began managing the camp.

Cross-country coach Wilford Ketz and his wife, Mabel, took on much of the planning and leadership work. The camp's goal was to build class spirit among the then all-male freshman class.

The camp, always a voluntary program that required a fee, began in 1936 with just 61 of 259 incoming students but was pulling in about 60 percent of the class by the early 1950s. Freshman Camp ended as attendance outgrew the camp facilities and the faculty favored a more unified orientation with intellectual content.

Professor C. William Huntley '34 wrote in the November 1939 *Alumni Monthly* magazine of freshman camp, crediting Ketz



with infusing the camp with energy: "Bill, in his brilliant plaid shirt, is constantly on the move throughout camp. He seems to have the faculty of being omnipresent; his personality permeates the camp and infects both the student and faculty staff."

Fraternity rushing was not allowed but Greek organizations were allowed on-site presentations along with faculty lectures. Students slept in tents and faculty in lodges but all ate in a mess hall. The camp was commonly used by the Schenectady YMCA, but was empty at the end of the camping season.

Below is a remembrance of the camp headlined, "An unforgettable experience—Freshman Camp," from the 1948 yearbook:

"The Union College Freshman Camp is one of the main features of the incoming Freshman Orientation. From the first get together in the pile of jumbled camp equipment at the Old Chapel meeting place, the initiation into college life begins.

The Freshman Camp on Lake George is reached about noon after getting somewhat organized in your assigned tent you find an opportunity

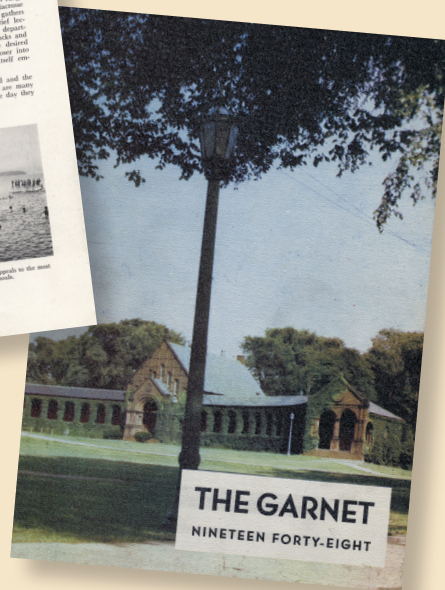


"Images from The Garnet yearbook including: the cover, a Freshman Camp page and a photo of Wilford 'Bill' Ketz."

to look over the beautiful location. You find out that the camp is run on a nonprofit basis (as one can almost gather by the size of the meals) and also that each year's leader is one of the upper-classmen, who this past year was Al Lewis.

The camp life here fills every minute, from the early morning dip (which all like to say they take) to the bull sessions late into the night. Fresh air, exercise, and plenty of sleep (if you have a private tent)—this sounds much like training camp. It is in many respects just such a camp. Here recreation and a college introduction mingle, for during the day there are games and recreation ranging from softball and swimming to lacrosse and football, while at night everyone gathers before the huge fireplace to hear brief lectures by various representatives of departments of instruction. Late night snacks and community signs certainly have the desired effect in that everyone is drawn closer into the personal ties that the College itself emphasizes.

When the last night rolls



around and the skits are given by each tent there are many heavy hearts and a hope that some day they may pay the camp another visit."

Camp goes on

The modern-day version of Freshman Camp, called the Pre-Orientation Experience, is similar but layered with options. Students can choose between a community service project in Schenectady or a camp experience at Silver Bay on the western shore of Lake George.

The Kenney Community center teams up with Habitat for Humanity and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Schenectady to offer up to 50 students a chance to lend a helping hand.

The Lake George outing offers students three options, from low-level recreation like swimming and boating to a grueling two-day hike over Tongue Mountain. All camp activities are based at Silver Bay YMCA of the Adirondacks, a century-old conference and training center on a 700-acre campus on the shores of Lake George. ■