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New York's Nature Friends: Their History, their Camps

The closing of its Weis Center, a nature education location near Ringwood, N.J., by the New Jersey Audubon Society in 2013 had quite an unexpected effect. In an attempt at preserving the grounds and its remaining buildings, people who had grown up in the area came together to unearth the history of the property, revive memories, and collect documents of what up to the 1950s had been the largest Nature Friends camp across the USA. To these activists the following text is dedicated.¹

Beginnings

When the *Naturfreunde* were founded in Vienna in 1895, they were part of a vast network of working class organizations.² These ranged from the Socialist Party through trade unions, self-help and insurance co-operatives, to leisure clubs like the *Touristenverein Die Naturfreunde*. Tourists, then, were those who went on tour, i.e. in their free time hiked and climbed mountains. What united all these institutions was that they were addressing (mainly industrial) workers with the purpose of overcoming their class-derived deprivation of income, power, and opportunities. The greeting phrase "Berg frei, Mensch frei, Welt frei" symbolized this aim, proclaiming that the future—mountains, mankind, and the world as a whole—ought to rest in the hands of the laboring classes. Prominently in the logo, hands unite to claim nature for those deprived of their political and economic rights (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1

¹ By April 2014 the *Nature Friends for Preserving Weis* (NFPW) have brought together a host of pictures and other documents on the Nature Friends of America as a whole and its sections in the New York region. Some of these are presented here, then marked "NFPW" (plus the name of the person who took or who provided the detail, if given). The NFPW is about to solidify into a New Jersey non-profit organisation called "Highlands Nature Friends," and thus will revive the presence of Nature Friends in the area.

² My "The Nature Friends of America: A Historical Sketch" outlines a more general perspective on the NFUSA. see http://www.highlandsnaturalpool.org/History_of_Nature_Friends_of_America.pdf, for a more comprehensive survey (in German) cf. my " 'Berg frei' jenseits des Atlantiks? Die Nature Friends of America," *Internationale wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung* 42.1 (März 2006): 60-87; an oral presentation on the topic was recorded at Ringwood Library in July 2012: "Camp Midvale and the History of the Nature Friends of America"—it is available there on DVD.

New-York. Seit dem 18. September 1910 besitzt unser Verein die erste Ortsgruppe in Amerika. Was noch vor einem Jahre als schlechter Witz gegolten hätte, ist heute zur Wahrheit geworden. Jenseits des großen Weltmeeres, im Lande, wo der Dollar, das Alpha und Omega des menschlichen Trachtens und Hastens ist, weht unser Banner, grüßt unser Abzeichen. In einem Lande, wie Amerika, das überaus reich an Naturschönheiten, gelten diese Schönheiten nichts, werden nicht gesucht und nicht geschätzt, weil das Naturempfinden nicht in klingende Münze umzuprägen ist, weil die kostbare goldbringende Zeit damit vergeudet würde. Und wie an anderen Orten sind es wieder die Arbeiter, die mitten im Trubel des Erwerbes sich Ideale in der Brust bewahrt haben, sich zusammenscharen, um auch in der Neuen Welt das Auge zu ergötzen an den Schönheiten der Natur. Das kleine Häuflein der amerikanischen „Naturfreunde“ wird ein Häuflein sein von Pionieren, deren schöne Aufgabe es ist, ihren Klassen- und Gesinnungsgenossen die Augen zu öffnen, sie sehen zu lernen. Zu werben und zu schaffen wird es genug geben für unsere Ortsgruppe New-York, so schreibt der Proponent in seinem vom 24. September datierten Schreiben: „Leider befinden wir uns — wenn wir von den bewohnten Stätten absehen — in einem verwahrlosten, verwilderten Lande, wo in den Gebirgen wenige geregelte Wege zu finden sind. Unsere Aufgabe wird es einst sein, diese Wege zu bezeichnen“. Bei der gründenden Versammlung am 18. September wurden in die Leitung der Ortsgruppe berufen: Adolf Tanzer, Obmann; Max Riedl, Kassier; Alexander Wiederseder, Schriftführer; Heinr. Weiland, N. Bechtold, J. Richter und Bruno Richter, Ausschußmitglieder. Zuschriften erbeten an Alexander Wiederseder, 124. Ferst Place, Brooklyn, N.-Y.

Fig. 2

It was in New York City where the first non-European branch came into being. On September 18, 1910, the international members' magazine, *Der Naturfreund* (Fig. 2)³, reported from the Vienna headquarters that its new overseas members saw themselves as an avant-garde, as pioneers whose noble task it was to open their co-workers' eyes to the beauty of their land, in a country characterized by a culture of plenty but also of wastefulness, which was fresh but also raw, where promises of social advancement were subverted by desperate living conditions, and where nature was unimaginably bountiful but in whose hectic money-making nobody really cared for such beauty. The president of the new local was Adolf Tanzer, and mail was to be sent to Alexander Wiederseder, 124 Ferst Place, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Wiederseder was a typical *Naturfreund*. Like other young Austrian, Swiss, or German journeymen, after apprenticeship he moved from one 'master' to the next before settling down as a hired craftsman. He followed the example of *Naturfreunde* like Ferdinand Bednarz, a Hungarian typesetter, who in the course of his travels helped found fifteen locals in Austria and Switzerland.⁴ Wiederseder, a carpenter by trade, had come to New York from what was the then Austrian city of Pressburg (Bratislava). From New York he moved on to California, leaving traces in all the *Naturfreunde* locals he founded or passed through. He soon began to promote his new country to those at home, such as in his "At Niagara Falls" (Fig. 3)⁵.

³ *Der Naturfreund: Mitteilungen des Touristenverein "Die Naturfreunde*. October 15, 1910: 290; *The Nature Friend: Monthly Organ of the Nature Friends of America, Inc.* October 1945: 27 names eleven founding members from Austria, Germany, and Hungaria; the founding date is given as August 10.

⁴ Bruno Klaus Lampasiak, Leo Gruber, Manfred Pils. *Berg frei – Mensch frei – Welt frei! Eine Chronik der internationalen Naturfreundebewegung von den Anfängen der Arbeiterbewegung bis zum Zeitalter der Globalisierung (1895-2005)*. Wien: Naturfreunde Internationale, 2nd. ed. 2009. 20.

⁵ *Der Naturfreund*. October 15, 1910: 245-6.



Fig. 3

New-York. Am 1. Mai, dem internationalen Weltfeiertage war es ein Jahr, seit sich die fortschrittlich gesinnten Arbeiter New-Yorks mit dem Gedanken vertraut machten, auch ihr Anrecht an den Naturschönheiten in der neuen Welt in Anspruch zu nehmen. Unsere kleine Schar ist auf ein halbes Hundert Mitglieder herangewachsen, trotz der kurzen Zeit und trotz der Interesselosigkeit, die man den Naturschönheiten gegenüber in Amerika an den Tag legt. Mit einer Anzahl von schönen Ausflügen und Gebirgstouren soll die Liebe zur Natur unter der Arbeiterschaft erweckt werden und wir hoffen dadurch unsere Reihen zu verstärken. Laut Beschluß der Ortsgruppenleitung wird zu den Pfingstfeiertagen eine größere Tour nach Philadelphia und in die umliegenden Gebirge unternommen, wo wir auch zugleich Vorarbeiten zu treffen haben, um dort eine Ortsgruppe zu gründen. Im Monat Juli wird eine dreitägige Partie in die schönste Gebirgsgegend im Staate New-York, in die Catskill-Mountain veranstaltet und im Monat September geht es wieder zu den Niagara-Fällen. Es liegt im Interesse der Mitglieder, für unsere Touren die größtmögliche Agitation zu entfalten. Unsere Mitgliederversammlung findet jeden zweiten Dienstag im Monat im Arbeiterheim (Labor Temple) statt. Unsere Touren sind jede Woche im Parteiorgan der „New-Yorker Volkszeitung“ bekanntgegeben. Bei der kürzlich abgehaltenen Mitgliederversammlung der Ortsgruppe wurde Gen. Willy Mai zum Kassier gewählt. Wegen Gründung einer Ortsgruppe in Philadelphia sind die notwendigen Vorkehrungen getroffen worden. An die Bahngesellschaften im Staate New York ist wegen Fahrpreismäßigungen herangetreten worden.

Fig. 4

Trans-Atlantic relations were close. Already in December *Der Naturfreund* informed Europeans about twelve excursions and a plan to save money for a trip back to the roots, to Vienna. On February 12, 1911, the New Yorkers established a promotional leaflet—a forerunner to the American members' journals of the future.

Celebrating workers' solidarity on May 1 was crucial in the next report (Fig. 4)⁶. Membership—made up of progressively minded workers—had risen to fifty. Once more the unnamed author complained of the average American's lack of interest in the beauty of the landscape, yet hoped that *Naturfreunde* outings would rouse the workers' love of the land and help the movement grow. In March multi-day trips are planned to Philadelphia (also to help establish a local there), the Catskills, and Niagara. New York members were asked to invite male and female comrades from the (Socialist) Party to join. Railroad companies were approached about price reductions for group trips. The local convened at the *New York Labor Temple*; news were published in the *New-Yorker Volkszeitung*—both German language institutions which would serve the Nature Friends for years.

⁶ *Der Naturfreund*. July 15, 1911: 167.

New-York. In der Ortsgruppe hat sich eine Photo-Sektion gebildet. — Kürzlich hat hier eine große Agitationsversammlung unseres Vereins stattgefunden. Die Zahl der Mitglieder steigt. Am Mittwoch den 13. September 1911 hielt die Ortsgruppe ihre Generalversammlung im New-Yorker Arbeiterheim ab. Aus den Berichten läßt sich ersehen, daß im verflossenen Jahre 34 Tagespartien, vier viertägige Partien und zwei Nachttouren mit einer Teilnehmerzahl von 340 Mitgliedern unternommen wurden. Trotz vielen Hindernissen, die uns hier in den Weg treten, haben wir es bis zu 50 Mitgliedern im Gründungsjahre gebracht und als „Naturfreunde“ im fernen Dollarlande soll es unser Bestreben sein, die heimatlichen Ideale und die Freude an den Naturschönheiten zu erhalten und zu pflegen. Denn auch hier ist es mehr als anderswo notwendig, daß wir in unseren freien Stunden hinausziehen in die Natur. Für die nächste Zeit sind mehrere größere Touren vorgeschlagen, und zwar nach den Südlichen Inseln Bermudas, nach den Adirondacs Mountains, nach Thousand Island und zu den Niagara-Fällen. Zuschriften sind zu richten an den Touristenverein „Die Naturfreunde“, Labor Temple, 243 E. 84. St., New-York.

Fig. 5

The next year saw a photo section established, and at the general meeting on September 13, 1911, the success story was 34 daytrips, four four-day excursions, and two nightly tours, with 340 participants (Fig. 5)⁷. Touristic targets reached out as far as the Southern Bermudas, the Adirondac Mountains, Thousand Island, and—again—Niagara Falls.

The main event of the first anniversary (Fig. 6)⁸ was a talk by Josef Jodlbauer, a former Socialist member of the Austrian parliament and recent immigrant to the USA (who would in 1923 return to his native Styria).⁹ Thirty members of the Newark Socialist Glee Club ("Sozialistische Liedertafel") sang, possibly the nucleus of the future Newark Nature Friends. One extraordinary attraction was a miniature mountain home, the first symbolic mention made of owning their own clubhouse.

New-York. Die Ortsgruppenleitung ersucht uns, den Mitgliedern bekanntzugeben, daß sie gerne bereit ist, den aus Europa kommenden Genossen, wenn diese auch Nichtmitglieder sind, mit Rat und Tat an die Hand zu gehen, wenn sie sich im Ortsgruppenheim, Labor Templ 243. E. 84 St., melden.

Fig. 7

Nach Amerika! Wer von unseren europäischen Genossen der alten Heimat den Rücken kehrt, um in Amerika sein Glück zu versuchen, der möge im eigenen Interesse sofort Anschluß suchen bei unseren dortigen Ortsgruppen: New York, 241 E., 84. St., Labor Temple; San Francisco, California, 141. Piv Halle oder Amandus Motander, 1730. Page St.; Philadelphia, Pennsylvanien, John Rosenfelder, 3120. Chatam St.

Fig.8

⁷ *Der Naturfreund*. October 15, 1911: 271.

⁸ *Der Naturfreund*. December 15, 1911: 326-7; 333; v.

⁹ *Der Naturfreund*. July 15, 1911:167-8; also see Josef N. Jodlbauer. *Dreizehn Jahre in America, 1910-1923. Die Autobiographie eines österreichischen Sozialisten*. Ed. Dirk Hoerder. Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1996.

For the second anniversary, in 1912, the *Naturfreund* announced that the number of members had risen to 100. The Labor Temple was pivotal in integrating European members—for those who stay, and for those in transition to the new locals (San Francisco, Philadelphia) (Fig. 7, 8)¹⁰.

The *New-Yorker Volkszeitung* was the city's leading German and labor newspaper. It regularly invited Manhattan members to the Labor Temple on the fourth Thursday of the month, and from 1913 on their New Jersey brothers to the Newark Labor Lyceum on every Wednesday. As locals spread across the USA (see below) and to keep up contacts with those who moved from New York to other places, new ways of communication became necessary: Since 1923, a New York-based continental headquarters published its own magazine, *Der Tourist: Zeitschrift für den Gau der Nordost- und den Gau der West-Staaten Amerika's* ("The Tourist: Magazine for the Districts of the North-Eastern and of the Western States of America").

The most striking aspect of its title page was the Americanization of the logo (Fig. 9)¹¹. It



Fig. 9

incorporated the handshake—now set at the center of an American map and literally underlined by the "T" of the magazine's title. It alludes to that well-known image of the 1869 joining of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads in Promontory, UT., and is also programmatic through its reference to the diversity of American *nature* (mountains [also present in the European logo], valleys, rivers, and trees) and *culture* (an

Easterner dressed in contemporary 1920s hiking fashion and a Westerner clothed according to frontiersman dress codes). The context was topical: By 1923 six locals were active: New York (founded in 1910), Newark (1913) and Philadelphia (1913) in the East, and in California San Francisco (1913), Los Angeles (a first attempt in 1913; successful in 1920) and Oakland (1920).

Der Naturfreund editions of the early 1910s had introduced the Catskills to those left at home in Europe. By 1923, *Der Tourist's* "Memories from the Catskills" were intended for an all-American audience. The author integrated the joys of being in nature ("deep, deep silence and healing

¹⁰ *Der Naturfreund*. 1912: 55; 1913: 82.

¹¹ *Der Tourist: Zeitschrift für den Gau der Nordost- und den Gau der West-Staaten Amerika's*. October 1, 1923: 1.

tranquillity") with programmatic statements ("far from the big city! And what's more: Free People!"). He rejoices in a hike to what would soon be a Nature Friends' camp, Platte Clove, via Tannersville, Devil's Kitchen, High Peak, and Indian Head. Elements of "social hiking" (the *Naturfreunde* concept of consciously keeping one's eyes open to the living conditions of the region one hiked in) are present both in praising the powers of solidarity and cooperation and through references to the exploitation of German and Dutch farmers there.

GAU DER NORDOST-STAATEN AMERIKA'S

Zuschriften sind zu richten an Emil Plarre, Obmann, 249 New York Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey

Die Ortsgruppen sollten ihre monatlichen Zusammenkünfte dazu ausbauen, Bildungsabende für die Mitglieder zu sein. Vorträge über unsere Naturfreunde-Bewegung, Kunst und Literatur werden gern und freudig durch die Gauleitung vermittelt.

Gau der Nordost-Staaten Amerika's.

Alle für den nächsten "Tourist" bestimmten Zuschriften sind an Emil Plarre, 249 New York Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey, zu richten und müssen spätestens am 20. November in dessen Hände sein.

Die Schriftleitung.

Touren-Programm

für die

Monate Oktober, November und Dezember

(Abkürzungen: T=Trepppunkt; G=Gehzeit; F=Führer; Fa=Fahrtgeld.)

Endgültige Berichte der Ortsgruppen New York und Newark werden wöchentlich in der "New Yorker Volkszeitung" veröffentlicht, der Ortsgruppe Philadelphia Freitags im "Philadelphia Tageblatt".

ORTSGRUPPE NEW YORK

Obmann: Henry Winter, 885 Belmont Ave., Brooklyn. Vorstandssitzung jeden zweiten Donnerstag im Monat. Vortrags-Versammlung jeden vierten Donnerstag im Monat im Labor Temple, 249 Ost 84. Strasse.

Sonntag, 7. Oktober: a) Rockaway — Green Pond Mountain Newfoundland: Fa: \$2; G: 5 Stunden; F: E. Plarre. b) Arbeitstour nach dem Naturfreundeheim, Midvale, N.J. — **Sonntag, 14. Oktober:** Suffern — Tuxedo: Fa: \$1.50; G: 5 Stunden; F: H. Siegel. — **Sonntag, 21. Oktober:** a) Woodland Lake: Fa: 25c.; G: 4 Stunden; F: L. Braun; b) Tour: Naturfreunde Farm Midvale, für Schmückung des Herbstfestes; F: G. Treyde. — **Samstag, 27. Oktober,** abends punkt 8 Uhr, Herbst-Fest im Labor Temple.

Sonntag, 4. November: Nachttour — Kakout Mountain: Fa: 1.40; G: 7 Stunden, inklusive Sonntag nachm.; F: P. Moos. — **Sonntag, 11. November:** Tuxedo — Mount Ivy: Fa: \$1.99; G: 5-6 Stunden; F: W. Paulsen. — **Sonntag, 18. November:** Rye Lake — Thousand Fountains: Fa: 70c.; G: 4 Stunden; F: Ch. Walter. — **Sonntag, 25. November:** Pocantico Lake — Buttermilk Hill: Fa: 90c.; G: 3 Stunden; F: M. Grau.

Sonntag, 2. Dezember: Palisaden: F: Ch. Walter. — **Sonntag, 9. Dezember:** Salt Hill: Fa: \$1.65; G: 5 Stunden; F: W. Paulsen. — **Sonntag, 16. Dezember:** Sloatsburg — Stony Brook — Stable Mountain: Fa: \$1.80; G: 5 Stunden; F: E. Plarre. — **Sonntag, 23. Dezember:** Silver Lake: Fa: 70c.; G: 4 Stunden; F: M. Grau. — **Sonntag, 30. Dezember:** a) Suffern — Midvale: Fa: \$1.69; G: 6 Stunden; F: P. Moos; b) Ardley — Tuckahoe: Fa: 30c.; G: 3 Stunden; F: L. Braun.

ORTSGRUPPE NEWARK

Obmann: Hermann Knoll. Vereinslokal: Newark Labor Lyceum, 704 So. 14th St. Versammlungen am zweiten Montag im Monat. Sitzung der Führer-Sektion am ersten Montag im Monat.

Sonntag, 7. Oktober: Great Notch — Watchung Mountains. T: um 7.30 Uhr im Public Service Terminal; F: Schlegel. **Sonntag, 14. Oktober:** Summit — Murray Hill — Berkeley Heights. T: um 8 Uhr in Maplewood; Fa: 50c.; G: 3-4 Stunden; F: Engel. — **Sonntag, 21. Oktober:** Riverdale — Cakeout Mountain — Brook Valley — Pompton Plains. T: zum ersten Zug der Erie in Montclair; F: Paul Benz. — **Sonntag, 28. Oktober:** Montclair — Cabot Lake — Hemlock Falls. T: um 8 Uhr am Montclair Hotel; F: Schuhmann.

Sonntag, 4. November: Preakness Mountains — High Mt. T: um 8 Uhr im Public Service Terminal; F: Bach. — **Sonntag, 11. Nov.:** Summit — Glenside Park — Scotch Plains. T: um 8 Uhr in Maplewood; F: Engel. — **Sonntag, 18. Nov.:** Little Falls — Verona. T: um 8 Uhr am Butler Bus am Military Park; F: Schuhmann. — **Sonntag, 25. Nov.:** Butler — Macopin — Echo Lake. T: um 8 Uhr am Butler Bus; F: Paul Benz.

Sonntag, 2. Dez.: South Orange — Hemlock Falls — Balls Bluff — Washington Rock. T: um 8 Uhr an der Lackawanna Station in South Orange. F: Schuhmann. — **Sonntag, 9. Dez.:** Tour nach Midvale. — **Sonntag, 16. Dez.:** Boonton — Taylortown — Splitrock Pond — Beach Glen — Denville. T: um 8 Uhr am Boonton Bus, Military Park; F: Schauderna. — **Sonntag, 23. Dez.:** Morristown — Washington Corners. T: um 8 Uhr in Maplewood; F: Bach.

ORTSGRUPPE PHILADELPHIA

Obmann: Joseph Schlecht, 3603 Lancaster Ave. Vereinslokal: Halle der Soz. Liedertafel, 6th und Erie Ave. Monatsversammlung jeden vierten Donnerstag. Sitzung der Vereinsleitung jeden dritten Donnerstag im Monat.

Sonntag, 7. Oktober: Clementon Heights. T: um 8 Uhr morgens an Market St. Ferry, Camden; Fa: 28c.; F: Rosenfelder. — **Sonntag, 14. Okt.:** Valley Forge. T: 7 Uhr morgens an 69 Market St.; Fa: 75c.; G: 4 Stunden; F: Schlecht. — **Sonntag, 21. Okt.:** Mannayunk — Gulph. T: 8 Uhr morgens ein Stop vor der Endstation der Mannayunk Car Linie; Fa: 25c.; G: 4 Stunden; F: Knobloch. — **Sonntag, 28. Okt.:** Haycock Mountain. T: 7 Uhr morgens in Willow Grove; Fa: \$1.50; G: 4 Stunden; F: Knobloch.

Sonntag, 4. November: Grosses Farm-Schlachtfest. T: 8 Uhr morgens in Willow Grove; Fa: 65c.; F: Nebel. — **Sonntag, 11. Nov.:** West Chester — Newtown Square. T: um 8 Uhr an 69 Market St.; Fa: 55c.; G: 7 Stunden; F: Borho. — **Sonntag, 18. Nov.:** Zum Naturfreunde-Haus. T: 69 Market St.; F: Mrs. Knobloch. — **Sonntag, 25. Nov.:** Fox Chase — Walnut Hill. T: 8 Uhr morgens Endstation Fox Chase Car; F: Nebel.

Samstag, 1. Dezember: Herbstfest in der Liedertafel-Halle. — **Sonntag, 9. Dez.:** Willow Grove — Fox Chase. T: 9 Uhr morgens an Old York and Edge Hill Roads; G: 5 Stunden; F: Rosenfelder. — **Sonntag, 16. Dez.:** Wyssahickon-Tal. T: 9 Uhr morgens an Ridge Ave. und Wyssahickon Drive; G: 3 Stunden; F: Schlecht. — **Sonntag, 23. Dez.:** Cobs Creek Tour; T: 9 Uhr morgens an 63 Market St.; F: Mrs. Nebel. — **Sonntag, 30. Dez.:** Zusammenkunft im Naturfreunde-Haus. **Montag, 31. Dez.:** Sylvester-Feier im Naturfreunde-Haus.

Fig. 10

The pages of *Der Tourist* also provide a glance into regular Nature Friends activities (Fig. 10)¹². Locals meet at the Labor Temple or Labor Lyceum (Newark), and at the *Sozialistische Liederhalle*, the hall of the socialist glee club in Philadelphia. The program for late 1923 names dozens of hikes of three to seven hours length. For short term news readers were reminded to consult the *New-Yorker Volkzeitung*. A regional coordinating framework ("Gau") has been created. Each of its locals, by and large,

writes its own program, so that even though the New York and Newark groups frequently hike to the same destinations, their activities hardly ever overlap. A major unifying element, though, is new Camp Midvale. The ticket to its closest railroad station in northern New Jersey is, for New Yorkers, \$ 1.60.

The program for early 1924 again features an impressive range of hikes, cultural and educational activities. Four outings, including "work tours," take New Yorkers to Midvale. It also invites readers

¹² *Der Tourist*. October 1, 1923: 5.

to come up with ideas of how to expand the organization into Middle America. There are two main Districts, whose presidents (called "Obmann") were Wilhelm Heidelmann, of San Francisco, for the West, and Emil Plarre, of Newark, for the East.

Since 1911 photography had ranked highly in the activities of the club. Yet everyday practices such as hiking have only rarely been preserved in images. One such exception is a group of Nature Friends visiting Luray, Va. As it is quite unlikely that these are members from California, and as by 1922 there were three Eastern locals, they could well be New York, Philadelphia, or Newark Nature Friends (with a title inserted in English!). Another photo, just three years later, shows the New York local in the Green Mountains (Fig. 11, 12).¹³



Fig. 11

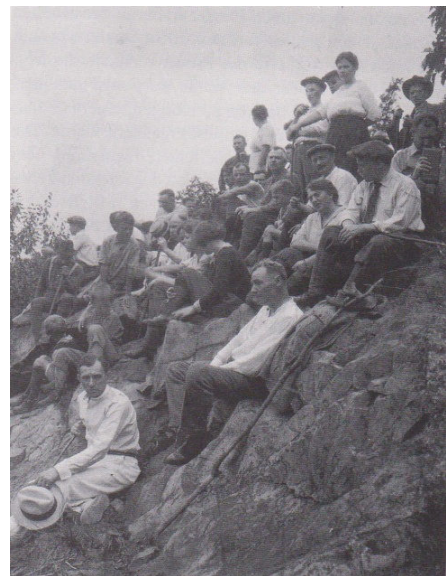


Fig. 12

The first clubhouses and camps

From the beginning the new club tried to imitate European examples and build their own *Naturfreundehäuser*—Nature Friends Homes. In Europe these were (and still are) permanent centers of club activities in both urban and, more often, rural areas. They provide a chance to escape from the big city, and at the same time are places where to exercise solidarity and lead a life beyond "bourgeois" restrictions.

As we have seen, the first convention point for the New Yorkers was the Labor Temple, which they shared with other, mostly German-speaking, organizations: Parties and unions, educational and

¹³ Both images repr. from Manfred Pils. *"Berg frei!" 100 Jahre Naturfreunde*. Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1994. 77 and 118.

mutual insurance institutions, self-help cooperatives and leisure clubs (*"Vergnügungs-Vereine"*) like the *Naturfreunde*. The Temple was situated in the hub of German life, on 84th Street in Yorkville. It was a venue for meetings, discussions, and public talks covering everything from flora and fauna through politics to excursions. Its relevance for the German community is made clear by the long list of tenants reprinted in the 1928 jubilee edition of the *New-Yorker Volkszeitung* (Fig. 13)¹⁴.

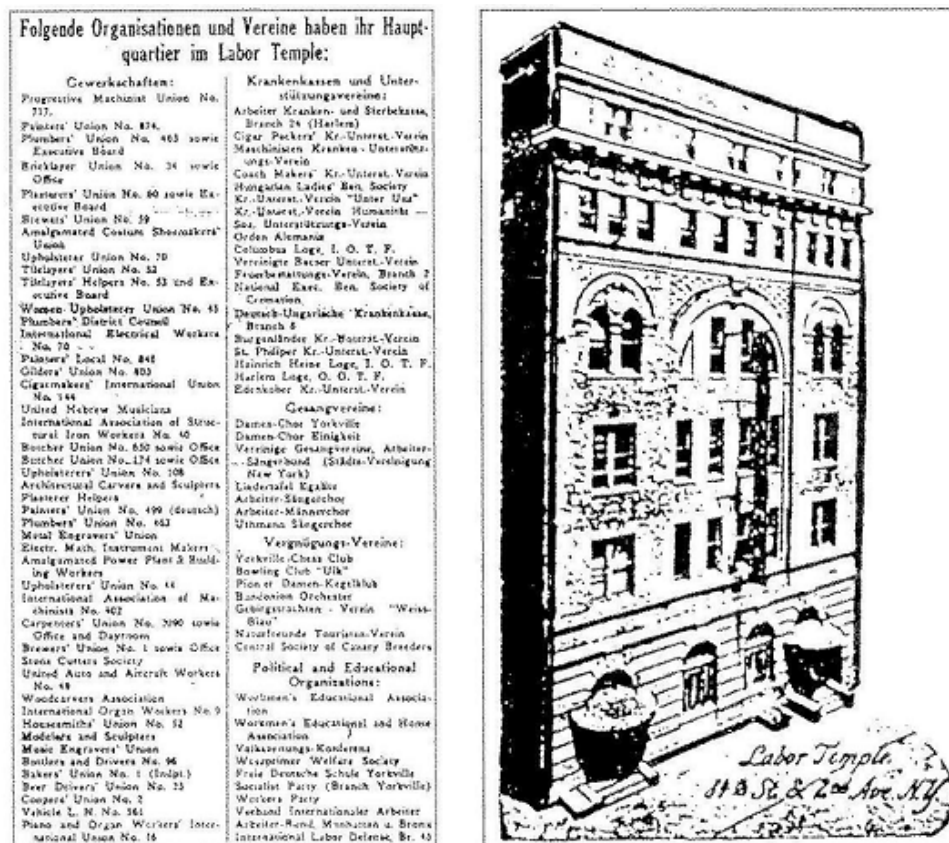


Fig. 13

¹⁴ *New-Yorker Volkszeitung*. January 29, 1928. 13B; repr. from: Labor Newspaper Preservation Project, Universität Bremen. *Glimpses of the German-American Radical Press: Die Jubiläumsnummern der „New-Yorker Volkszeitung“ 1888, 1903, 1928*. Ed. Dirk Hoerder und Thomas Weber. Bremen: Publications of the Labor Newspaper Preservation Project, 1985. 137. The Temple's comprehensive functions are outlined in this (more recent) description: "Over the door of the Labor Temple were chiseled out the words: 'Knowledge is power.' The building has changed hands in the last hundred years, but the words can still be read. The Labor Temple was the meeting hall for the German trade unions in Yorkville. On the ground floor was a bar and a restaurant. On the upper floors were the rooms used for local union meetings. The unions cut across the skilled trade to which German immigrants were related." "On the Sidewalks of New York. Family Roots: An Introduction." http://www.margaretpoethic.com/family_friends/richar/autobiography/sidewalks/2_intro.pdf (30/04/14)

For the *Naturfreunde*, in this edition of the NYVZ New York Nature Friend Walter Boelke remembered how his local had immediately tried its hands at acquiring a home of its own. As early as in 1916, he writes, it ran a first bathhouse on the Hudson River, which during the First World



Fig. 14 - Camp Midvale in the 1920s

War was burnt down by anti-German farmers. In 1917 the local owned a farmhouse along the Hudson River. A rented home on the ocean was washed away in a storm. In 1918 a large area of land was bought near Peekskill. At the time of writing, Camp Midvale, acquired in 1921, had become the main recreational facility of the branch (Fig. 14).¹⁵

Junior Sections and the Language Question

Relations with Europe remained strong. At the 1923 convention in Leipzig (Germany), co-founder and president of the world-wide organization Leopold Happisch stated "that the American comrades alone had donated 30 million Kronen [the Austrian currency] in support of *Naturfreund* magazine."¹⁶ Both in the USA and internationally, communication was conducted in German, including the quarterly members' journal, *Der Tourist*. The German language created a homeliness many cherished, but at the same time isolated the *Naturfreunde* from the mainstream and was an impediment to expansion into the English-speaking Left. Such a restricted appeal was more visible to the younger, sometimes American-born members. Consequently the youth sections of *Der Tourist* shifted to English (Fig 15)¹⁷:

¹⁵ Photo from NFPW. Elsewhere Boelke's data are modified slightly; cf. *The Nature Friend*. October 1945: 27-28. The bungalow at Rockaway Point, Long Island, was adopted in 1915 but soon washed away; a farm building and ten acres of land were bought near Keg Mountain, Croton, New York, and smashed by super-patriots in 1918; Kerrigan's Farm in northern New Jersey, the future Camp Midvale, was acquired as early as 1920; Boelke's text shows rare photos of the first clubhouses.

¹⁶ Qtd. in Albert Georgi-Valtin. "Von 1906 bis 1933." Zentral-Ausschuß der Naturfreunde-Internationale. *Denkschrift zum sechzigjährigen Jubiläum, 1895-1955*. Zürich: Touristen-Verein "Die Naturfreunde," 1955. 86-87: 31-33. 32 („daß die amerikanischen Genossen allein zur Unterstützung des «Naturfreundes» 30 Millionen Kronen gespendet hatten.“).

¹⁷ *Der Tourist*. October 1923: 6.

BULLETIN FOR JUNIOR SECTIONS

Vol. I October, November, December, 1923 No. 2

JUNIOR SECTION, NEW YORK

All correspondences to be addressed to Organizer Max Lindner, 209 East 77th Street, New York City. No trips postponed on account of weather. Cost of trips is figured from meeting place only. Hikes are subject to change. Meetings and lectures to be held during the winter months will be announced in proper time.

(Abbreviations: L=Leader; M=Meet at; C=Cost; D=Distance.)

Sunday, October 7: a) Thousand Fountains; L: Karl Anderson; M: East 180th St. Subway Station (downstairs), 8 A. M.; C: 70c; D: 12 miles; b) Coytesville; L: Chas. Sudan; M: Fort Lee Ferry, 8 A. M.; C: 10c; D: 8 miles.

Sunday, October 14: Staten Island; L: Henry Eberle; M: Staten Island Ferry, 8.30 A. M.; C: 10c; D: 8 miles.

Sunday, October 21: a) Larchmont; L: Kate Eberle; M: East 180th St. Subway Station (downstairs), 8.30 A. M.; C: 56c; D: 12 miles; b) Van Cortland Park; L: Max Lindner; M: Van Cortland Park Subway Station, 8.30 A. M.; D: 6 miles. — **Sunday, October 28:** Museum of Natural History; M: 77th St. and Eighth Ave., 2.30 P. M.

Sunday, November 4: Hunter Island; L: Albert Eschrich; M: East 180th St. Subway Station, 8.30 A. M.; C: 70c; D: 8 miles. — **Sunday, Nov. 11:** Eagle Rock; L: Frances Weisgerber; M: Hudson Terminal (Fulton Street), 8.30 A. M.; C: 60c; D: 10 miles. — **Sunday, Nov. 18:** a) Dunwoodie; L: Elsie Raab; M: Van Cortland Park Subway Station, 8.30 A. M.; D: 8 miles; b) Roman Bath; L: Fritz Hohn; M: Fort Lee Ferry, 8.30 A. M.; C: 60c; D: 12 miles. — **Sunday, Nov. 25:** Sleepy Hollow; L: Egmont Schumann; M: Van Cortland Park Subway Station, 7.30 A. M.; C: 80c; D: 12 miles.

Sunday, December 2: Palisades — Buttermilk Falls; L: Albert Eschrich; M: Fort Lee Ferry, 8 A. M.; C: 10c;

D: 10 miles. — **Sunday, Dec. 9:** Scarsdale; L: Elsie Raab; M: East 180th St. Subway Station (downstairs), 9 A. M.; C: 60c; D: 10 miles. — **Sunday, Dec. 16:** Croton; L: Louis Kukowitz; M: 225th Street, West Side Subway Station (downstairs), 8.45 A. M.; C: \$1.75; D: 12 miles.

JUNIOR SECTION, PHILADELPHIA

All correspondence, German or English, to be addressed to Organizer Ernst Kornfeld, 3522 N. 52th St., Philadelphia. Meetings every second Thursday of the month in the hall of the Soz. Liedertafel.

(Abbreviations: L=Leader; M=Meet at; C=Cost; D=Distance.)

Sunday, October 7: Wyssahickon Park. L: Herm. Renger; M: Wayne Ave. and Carpenter St., 9.30 A. M.; D: 9 miles. — **Sunday, Oct. 14:** Valley Forge, with Senior Section. C: 75c. — **Sunday, Oct. 21:** House Tour. L: Fr. Renger; M: 69th St. Station at 9.30 A. M.; D: 4 miles. — **Sunday, Oct. 28:** City Line — Fox Chase. L: A. Probst; M: York Road and City Line at 1 P. M.; D: 7 miles.

Sunday, November 4: Walnut Hill. L: E. Kornfeld. M: at end of Route 50 Car, 9.30 A. M.; D: 8 miles. — **Sunday, Nov. 11:** Memorial Hall. L: W. Repper; M: at 44th and Parkside Ave., 1 P. M. — **Sunday, Nov. 18:** House Tour. L: R. Repper; M: at 69th St. Station, 10 A. M.; D: 6 miles. — **Sunday, Nov. 25:** Fox Chase — Willow Grove. L: J. Rosenfelder; M: Fox Chase loop; D: 12 miles.

Sunday, December 2: Skating Tour along Pennypack Creek. L: R. Swope; M: at end of Frankfort L., 1 P. M. — **Sunday, Dec. 9:** Aquarium — Fairmount Park. L: Herm. Renger; M: at 32nd and Girard Ave., 1 P. M.; D: 3 miles. — **Sunday, Dec. 16:** Frankford — Fox Chase. L: Fr. Borbo; M: at Frankford Ave. and Margaret St., 1.30 P. M.; D: 7 miles. — **Sunday, Dec. 23:** Unofficial House Tour — Oak View House. L: R. Repper. — **Sunday, Dec. 30:** Pleasant Afternoon at home of R. and W. Renner.

Fig. 15

It seems as if some of the texts in the youth section share a more romantic approach to nature, not in the sense of giving up their basic ideology, but through an upgrading of the individual's responsibilities. In "A Mere Suggestion" (1923) a San Francisco member plays with a fresh combination of ecological and political thinking, in which the traditional political and ecological rhetoric is certainly there, but solutions to environmental problems are sought less in socio-political than personal action (Fig. 16 and 17)¹⁸.

The aim of the "Naturfreunde" is to make real "Friends of Nature." It is the pride and glory of our organization not only to have awakened in thousands of plain working men and women a sense for the enjoyment of the "out-of-doors," which formerly was to be found only among the well-to-do and those favored with higher education, but also to have intensified that interest and made them receptive for the joys that can be derived from the study of the flowers and trees, the observation of animal life, knowledge of soil and rock, and the star-lit heavens.

Fig. 16

competitive sports. There, the spirit rivalry, striving for individual prominence, eagerness for applause and other low ambitions are fostered or catered to. Here, instead, a feeling of comradeship, community spirit, the idea of work for a common benefit, solidarity with one's fellow, are the guiding forces.

Fig. 17

The matter of how ecological and economic elements interact under the living conditions of a particular and concrete society is almost a constituting dilemma for the

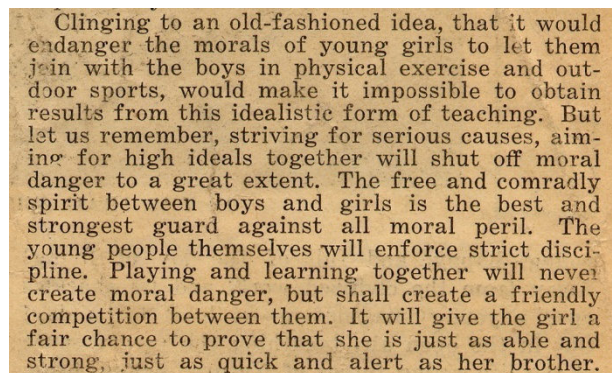
¹⁸ *Der Tourist*. October. 1, 1923: 8.

Naturfreunde. Already in their founding years, in late 19th-century Vienna, they were confronted with this practical problem: As soon as the Lainzer Tiergarten, a hunting area reserved to the aristocracy, was opened to the public, the poorer classes began to extract heating material and thus destroy both its beauty and its long-term value. Ecological values clashed with political ones.

In more modern terms: How to combine access to nature for everyone, which would lead to mass tourism, with the task of preserving nature and saving it from exploitative over-usage? Conservatives (such as many a 19th and 20th century Alpine club) chose the easy solution of keeping out the "uneducated masses" they despised anyway, to reserve access to the beauty of nature for themselves, the well-off. Nature Friends would have to tackle the matter in a more democratic way, one based on solidarity.

In the same number of *Der Tourist*, Egmont Schumann, of New York, discusses another generation gap. He proclaims that in nature young people rather experience individual freedom than follow restrictions of any kind. Schumann's short statement is illustrated on the same page by one such concrete venue, Camp Midvale (Fig. 18)¹⁹. Kate Eberle, an outstanding female leader of the Junior Section, again in less political than romantic terms, describes "girls and boys" enjoying "the walk from the railroad station to the Nature Friends' Farm [...] through very picturesque places," a walk creating opportunities for "releasing the tensions of the week's routine" in order to "amidst pleasant thoughts [forget] all troubles" when communally enjoying food, swimming, ball games, and hikes. She especially praises the "brook flowing through the center of the camp [...] dammed off at one place."

Co-education is also the topic of junior activist Max Lindner's article "A Necessity" (Fig. 19)²⁰. He states that "a handsome, healthy, strong and elastic body" is a great treasure for every human being, but above all, for a girl. This argument for the full development of the physical, social, and mental potentials of both sexes certainly would have been controversial among conservatives, yet was relatively



Clinging to an old-fashioned idea, that it would endanger the morals of young girls to let them join with the boys in physical exercise and outdoor sports, would make it impossible to obtain results from this idealistic form of teaching. But let us remember, striving for serious causes, aiming for high ideals together will shut off moral danger to a great extent. The free and comradly spirit between boys and girls is the best and strongest guard against all moral peril. The young people themselves will enforce strict discipline. Playing and learning together will never create moral danger, but shall create a friendly competition between them. It will give the girl a fair chance to prove that she is just as able and strong, just as quick and alert as her brother.

Fig. 19

¹⁹ *Der Tourist*. January 1924: 7.

²⁰ *Der Tourist*. January 1924: 8.

mainstream within the working classes.²¹ Lindner thus makes a strong point of educating girls in a way similar to boys, reasoning that their future jobs probably will be even more demanding than those of the males.

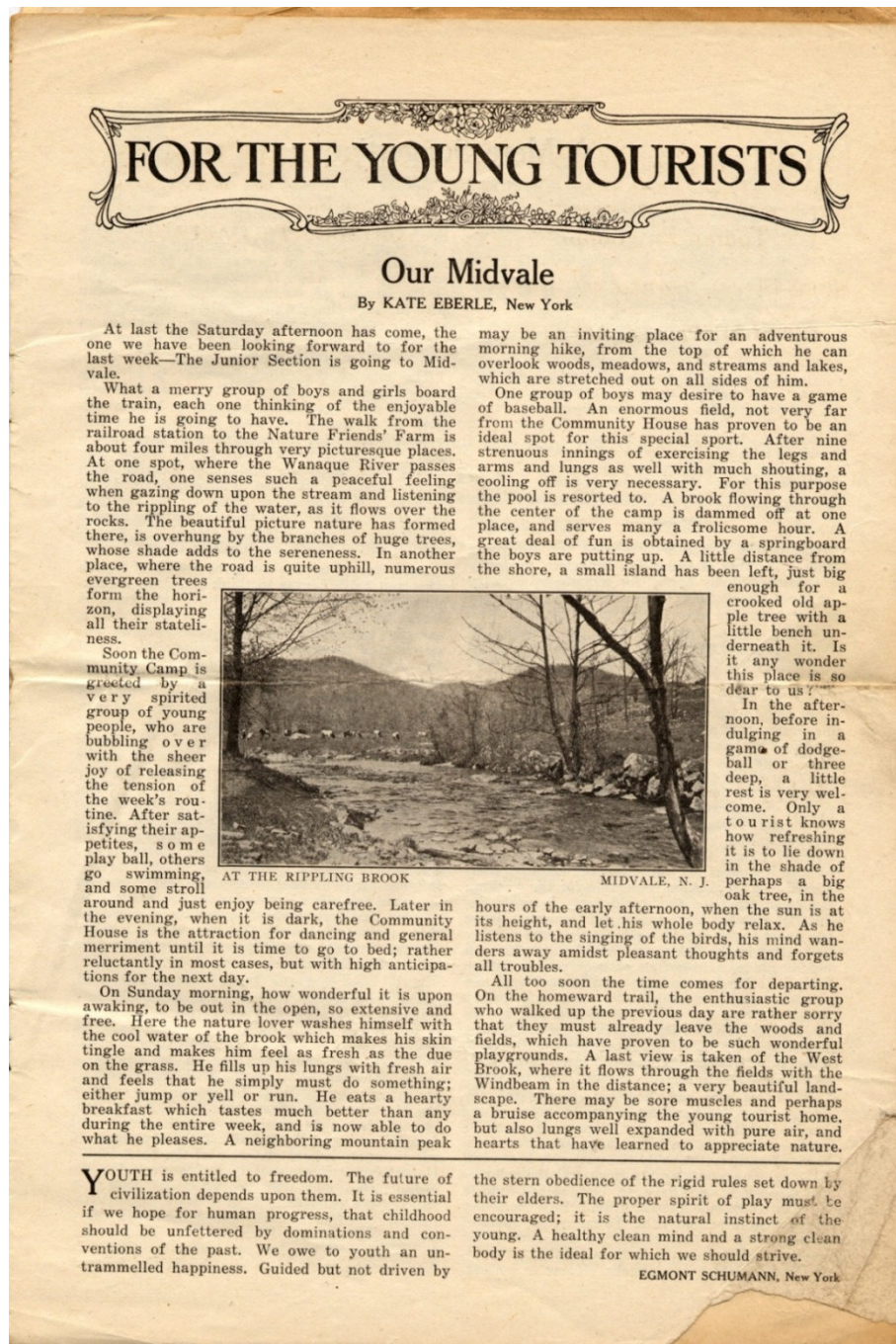


Fig. 18

²¹ For contemporary German discussions in a very similar vein see John Alexander Williams. *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940*. Stanford, CA.: Stanford UP, 2007, part 1 "Socialists and Nature."

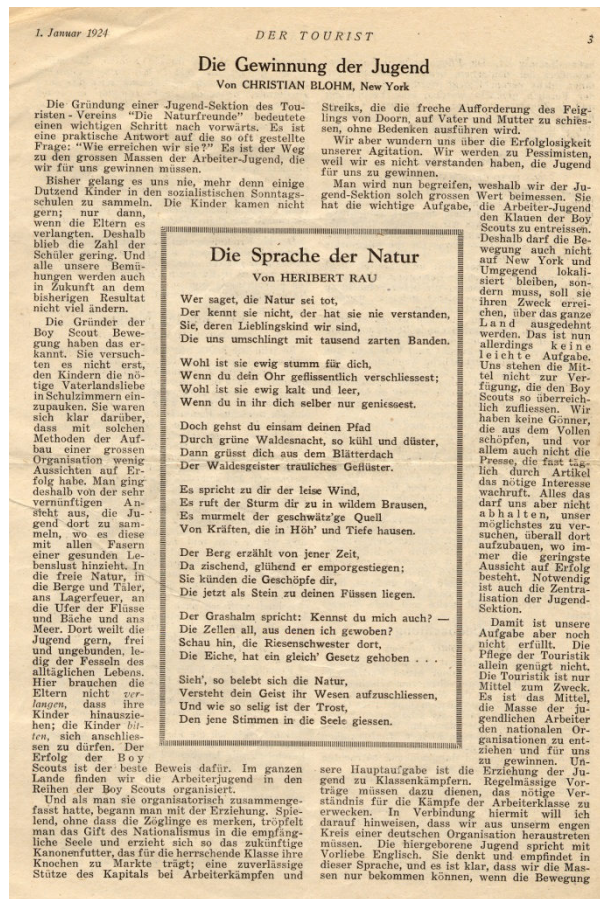


Fig. 20

Individualism, romanticism, and coeducation are the more youthful approaches to expanding the *Naturfreunde* without giving up core values. Still, in their touristic and educational activities the Nature Friends never ought to forget their working class background and their international character. Written in German, in *Der Tourist* of January 1924 (Fig. 20)²² New York member Christian Blohm urges the older generation to be more open-minded as to language and contemplates the role of young Nature Friends in a more general perspective. He contrasts them with the Boy Scout movement, whose strategy, he warns, is to advertise their organization as non-ideological, but then clandestinely integrates children and youngsters in a nationalist and anti-labor agenda. In a somewhat rigid formulation Blohm remarks that tourist activities are a mere tool to achieve the aims of the workers' movement. Their main task is to educate workers

for the class struggle, which in the USA implies the use of English. Thus creating a youth section was one such step in the correct direction (Fig. 21)²³.

Soon also among adults the wish was strong to move into the linguistic mainstream. An English section was founded and began to edit its own newsletter more playful in tone, if more improvised in format. It includes hiking reports, motion picture and literary reviews, and invitations to dance functions. Politics gets into the picture through talk on the American Labor movement and world politics. One decade later, in 1933, *Der Tourist* would become the English-language *The Nature Friend*, first a bi-monthly, from 1934 on a monthly publication.

Proudly the English Section's March 1940 leaflet mentions how in 1939 section membership has gone up from 32 to 58, and it targets 100 in 1940.²⁴ A real rejuvenation of the organization does

²² *Der Tourist*. January 1924: 3.

²³ *Der Tourist*. January 1924: 5.

²⁴ "Newsletter by the English Section of the New York local." March 1940 (copy provided by Chris Idzic).

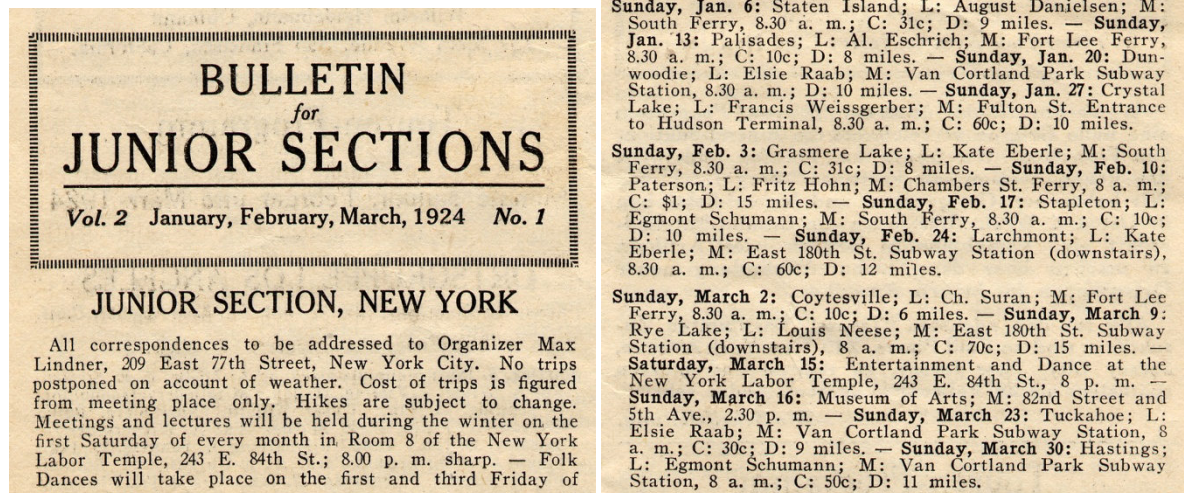


Fig. 21

not really seem to have taken place, though, partly also because at some point later the Junior Section disbanded and joined the English, now Main, Section.

A growing network of locals and clubhouses

After its establishment in 1921 Camp Midvale was expanded to become the main recreation facility of the New York branch. It was not the first Nature Friends Home in the USA—San Francisco's Muir Woods Clubhouse dates from 1914—but up to the 1950s was the most popular vacation center of the Nature Friends of America. It began as the property of one local, but was soon shared with the other locals in the region. Such a co-operative structure was unique in as far as branches mostly preferred to run their own *Naturfreundehaus*.

In 1931, *Der Tourist* names five locals in the New York region: Newark, Syracuse, N.Y., Paterson, N.J., Rochester, N.Y., Jersey City, N.J.—plus Philadelphia and Allentown in Pennsylvania, Chicago, Ill., Detroit, Mich., and Milwaukee, Wisc.²⁵ Other locals, such as Seattle (founded in 1913) or St. Paul, Missouri (1917), vanished after some time. In 1939 the *Nature Friend* names three more locals in the New York area, Hudson County, Stamford, and Bridgeport. District membership is 1094.²⁶

²⁵ *Der Tourist*. July/August 1931: 9.

²⁶ *The Nature Friend*. May 1939: 8.

Amerika.

- 1 Camp Midvale auf dem Ramaquo Mountains im Staate New Jersey, 600 m, O Neuyork, U. S. A.; von P und Bahnstation Midvale, New Jersey, 1 Std; ww; 40 Matratzen, Damenschlafraum, Trinkwasser, Skigelände, Vbk.
- 2 Naturfreundehaus in Muir Woods, am Abhang des gleichnamigen Tales, 800 Fuß, Kalifornien, O San Franzisko; von P und Bahnstation Mill-Valley $\frac{3}{4}$ Std; ww; 80 Betten, 50 Matratzen, Damenschlafräume, Dunkelkammer, Trinkwasser, Tb, Vbk.
- 3 Naturfreundehtütte am High Peak, Catskill Mountains, 2300 Fuß, O Neuyork, P Platte-Clove; von Bahnstation Saugerties und Tannersville $1\frac{1}{2}$ respektive 2 Std; in den Sommermonaten o; S beim Nachbarfarmer Schornmaker; 60 Matratzen, Kochstelle, Trinkwasser, Skigelände, Winterraum, Brennholz, Vbk.
- 4 Oakland, Naturfreundehaus am Redwood Peak, 250 m, O Oakland; von P und Bahnstation Oakland $\frac{3}{4}$ Std; das ganze Jahr offen; Hüttenwart; 25 Betten, 20 Matratzen, Damenschlafraum, Trinkwasser, Brennholz, Vbk, Tb.
- 5 Nature friends Camp, Landistore in den Readinger Bergen, Pennsylvanien, O Philadelphia; von P und Pahnstation Bechtelsville $1\frac{1}{2}$ Std; S auf der Grampschen Farm; 20 Betten, 100 Heulager, Damenschlafraum, Kochstelle, Trinkwasser, Vbk, Skigelände, Brennholz, Winterraum.
- 6 Stade Indiana, Haus der O Chikago im Flachland, U. S. A., P und Bahnstation Garylon; an Samstagen und Sonntagen Hüttenwart; S bei Hugo Ottillinger, 1961 Fremont Street, Chikago 111; 20 Betten, 30 Matratzen, Kochstelle, Vbk, Trinkwasser.

Fig. 22

(Because of its anti-industrial, anti-trade union, and racist ideologies, locals never spread to the South.) For 1929 an international survey of hundreds of Nature Friends properties around the world mentions six vacation and recreation centers in the USA: Camp Midvale, N.J. (run by the New York chapter), Muir Woods (San Francisco), High Peak, Catskill Mountains (New York), Redwood Peak (!) (Oakland), Landistore (Philadelphia), and Stade Indiana (Chicago) (Fig. 22)²⁷. In the East there would soon also be Camp Thorpe's Pond (local Syracuse) and Camp Lima (local Rochester), with fourteen camps all across the nation in 1945 (Fig. 23)²⁸. The New York local itself, with five hundred adult members in 1935 the biggest in the region, over time split up into five sections, one covering the city as a whole, a section for Manhattan and for Brooklyn, an English (later Main) section and a photo section.

A detailed history of the camps run by the locals and district of the New York Nature Friends remains to be written.²⁹ As a preliminary survey the following passages will outline elements of such a history for Camp Midvale, and, to a lesser degree, three other camps, Platte Cove, Mt. Pisgah, and Eureka.

²⁷ *Verzeichnis der Schutzhütten und Ferienheime des Touristen-Vereines "Die Naturfreunde."* Wien: Naturfreunde-Internationale, 1929. 75-76.

²⁸ *The Nature Friend*. October 1945: 62.

²⁹ Tamiment Library, New York University, holds .5 linear ft. of unassorted FBI Files and dozens of oral history tapes (Tamiment 89 and Oral Histories 15); <http://www.nyu.edu/library/bobst/research/tam/summercamps.html>; for the Ringwood Project see Mary Caldwell-Kane. "Ringwood Library: Camp Midvale Grant Project." <http://geschichte.naturfreunde.org/2013/04/camp-midvale-project-2/>; for the not yet systematized collections of "Nature Friends for Preserving Weis" see fn. 1.

OUR CAMPS

STATE OF NEW YORK

(First three camps in the Catskill Mountains)

1. Camp Eureka of the Eastern District near Eureka, N. Y. Summer and winter vacationing—no restaurant—excellent base for hiking and skiing—elevation 1,500 feet—ski-trails.
2. Mt. Pisgah Camp of the Eastern District near Andes, N. Y. Summer and winter vacationing—no restaurant—excellent base for hiking and skiing—elevation 2,000 feet—ski-trails.
3. Camp Platte Clove of Local New York near Tannersville, N. Y. Summer vacationing—no restaurant—excellent base for hiking—elevation 2,300 feet.
4. Camp Georgetown of Local Syracuse on the Ottelee Creek. Vacationing, swimming, no restaurant.
5. Camp Lima of Local Rochester near Lima, N. Y. Summer and winter vacationing—no restaurant—hiking—skiing—swimming—boating—playgrounds.

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

6. Camp Monroe, near Monroe, Conn. Summer vacationing—winter week-ends—hiking—skiing—swimming.

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

7. Camp Midvale of Local New York near Midvale, N. J. Summer and winter vacationing—restaurant open all year round—bungalows—excellent base for hiking—large swimming pool—tennis courts—playgrounds—skiing.

low—excellent base for hiking—large swimming pool—tennis courts—playgrounds—skiing.

STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA

8. Camp Boyertown of Local Philadelphia near Bechtelsville, Pa. Summer and winter vacationing—restaurant open all year round—bungalows—hiking—skiing—elevation 1,000 ft.—swimming pool—playgrounds.

STATE OF INDIANA

9. Camp Crisman of Local Chicago near Gary, Ind. Summer vacationing—winter weekends—no restaurant—hiking—swimming—nearby—skiing—playgrounds.

STATE OF WISCONSIN

10. Camp Mayfield of Local Milwaukee near Katzbach, Wis. Summer vacationing—no restaurant—tents and summer sleeping quarters—hiking—swimming pool—playgrounds—skiing.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

11. Camp Muir Woods of Local San Francisco near Mill Valley, Calif. Summer and winter vacationing—no restaurant—open all year excellent hiking base—elevation 800 ft.—shower baths—Pacific Ocean and hot springs nearby—darkroom.
12. Oakland Club House of Local Oakland in Oakland, Calif. Summer and winter vacationing—no restaurant—open all year—hiking—playgrounds—shower baths.
13. Clubhouse Sierra Madre of Local Los Angeles in Sierra Madre, Calif. Summer and winter vacationing—no restaurant—open all year.
14. San Jacinto Mountain Camp of Local Los Angeles near Idyllwild, Calif. Summer and winter vacationing—no restaurant—excellent base for hiking and alpine skiing—elevation 6,500 ft.—Palm Canyon and desert nearby.

Fig. 23

Camp Midvale

The area which was to become Camp Midvale has a long ("white") history. In the 18th century the vicinity had been an iron ore mine, and two of its names—Blue or Roomy Mine—can still be found on maps to the present day. Exploiting it in the 19th century had not always been successful, and when in 1905 mining was given up for good, first hiking trails were established in the area. So when the Nature Friends decided to buy Kerigan (or Carrigan) Farm on May 20th, 1920, the location was fitting in a double sense, for its industrial, working-class background, and as it offered excellent hiking opportunities. The farmhouse was the first building to be used on a regular basis. The construction of the Wanaque Reservoir between 1922 and 1930 was to change the area profoundly, yet improved the infrastructure of the new camp and provided better access to the property for Nature Friends all around the New York region.³⁰

³⁰ For a historical timeline see <http://www.highlandsnaturalpool.org/history08.html> (04/30/14).

1921 saw the Club House completed. Early on members could even erect their own little cabins on the property. A solid dormitory was built in 1931 almost exclusively through volunteered labor. It was used by visitors and guests and also provided showers and electricity for resident members, if necessary. Improving the technical infrastructure and new sports installations came next. Numerous forest hiking trails were laid out. In 1935 an additional twelve acres of land were added, and instead of the

pond, nicknamed "old dirt hole," one carved an Olympic-size swimming pool into the rocks. In order to guarantee high water quality, this meant purchasing even more land—such as, in 1938, adjacent 83-acre Winfield Farm.³¹

The Camp was advertised both in German- and in English-language contexts (Fig. 24)³². In 1939, during the New Deal era, it is sympathetically singled out as a hiking destination by the New Jersey Federal Writers project. With slight inaccuracies, it is described as "run on a non-profit basis by the Nature Friends' Society, a labor organization, and is modeled after the numerous country resorts conducted by trade unions in Germany up until several years ago. The camp has many rustic bungalows, tennis courts, and a 400-foot open swimming pool. Frequented by trade unionists of all nationalities from nearby industrial towns of Paterson and Passaic, it is especially popular with Americans of German origin."³³

Spend Your Vacation at ...
Nature Friends Camp, Midvale, N. J.
 Located on the Wyanokie Plateau, Ramapo Mountains

FOR long hikes over the mountains as well as short walks through the woods there is no better place so close to the city. Sleeping accommodations for 250 guests at our dormitory, equipped with lockers, showers, electricity and heating plant. Club house with store (city prices), dining room, porch, library. Chess and other indoor games. Music. Dancing.

Eat our meals or buy your food at our store, or bring your own—as you please. **OPEN ALL YEAR.** Crystal clear drinking water from our new 212-foot well.

Swimming in summer—Skating in winter—Sun Baths —Hand Ball Court — Tennis Courts — Volley Ball Courts — Children's games — Swings, slides and seesaws for kiddies.

RATES — FOR GUESTS

Day's stay at Camp .15	Car parking (week-ends) — .25
Sleeping fee, including stop at camp .65	Weekly rate (incl. bed and meals) — \$12.00

FOR MEMBERS

Day's stay at Camp .10	Car parking (per yr) .25
Sleeping fee, including stay at Camp — .30	Weekly rate (incl. bed and meals) — \$9.00
Bus ride between Railroad and Camp (one way) .30	

Bring your own soap and towel

Reduced Camp Fees to workers' organizations will be granted if previously arranged. This privilege to groups of 10 or more visitors only.

DIRECTIONS

To be reached by Erie R.R. from New York by Chambers St. Ferry, ticket for Wanaque-Midvale.

Single ticket	\$1.17
Regular excursion (two days only)	1.20
Week-end excursion, from Friday to Monday	1.30
25-trip ticket	13.50

For information about trains call Erie Railroad, Chamber St. Ferry — Barclay 7-6500.

Our bus meets the most frequented week-end trains or any train upon request.

Walking distance from station to camp, 3½ miles. A pleasant walk along Wanaque Reservoir.

Fig. 24

³¹ Information compiled from *The Nature Friend*, November 1935, and *The Nature Friend*, October 1945: 27-28.

³² Repr. from <http://www.highlandsnaturalpool.org/history02.html> (04/30/14).

³³ Qtd. from *New Jersey: A Guide To Its Present And Past*. Tour 9a: The Wanaque Reservoir and The Kanouse Mountain – Nature Friends Camp. <http://www.getnj.com/njags/tours/tour9anaturefriendscamp.shtml> (04/30/14).

Camp Midvale's expansion in the 1930s is well documented, proving the pride the members took in their project (Fig. 25³⁴):



Camp Midvale Clubhouse, 1934.



Camp Midvale Pond & Clubhouse, 1935.



Lounging by the Pool in 1939.



Camp Midvale Clubhouse, 1939.



Date unknown.



The Pool, date unknown.

Fig. 25

³⁴ Reprinted from <http://www.highlandsnaturalpool.org/history10.html> (04/30/14).

The Camp's swimming pool and sports fields provided multiple opportunities during summers, and its skiing slope was popular during winters. It was frequented for works tours and festive events, for day excursions and long vacations. And it explicitly attracted people irrespective of race, age, or gender (Fig. 26-31)³⁵:



Fig. 26-31

³⁵ Compiled from NFPW collections and <http://www.highlandsnaturalpool.org/history10.html> (20/04/14). Fig. 31 is a rare lantern slide taken by Hans Wittich: "Leisure Hour at Camp Midvale, 1935."

Due to the international character of the *Naturfreunde*, it also invited visitors and exiles from around the Nature Friends world—like this German group in May 1938 (Fig. 32)³⁶:



Fig. 32

Photos like these create an impression of relatively great intimacy and do not reflect the real size of the property. There are only few pictures which imply its real extent, like this view from atop (Fig. 33) or the map overleaf (Fig. 34), both of 1939.³⁷



Fig. 33

³⁶ Collection of images by German Nature Friend Walter Wieland, now stored at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn; for more detail on Wieland see Klaus-Dieter Gross. "Elements of a Pictorial History of the Nature Friends in Chicago." *NaturFreundeGeschichte/NatureFriendsHistory* 1.2. (2013).

³⁷ Collection of NFPW.



Fig. 34

New office, more camps

The Labor Temple served as the center of Nature Friends activities well into the 1930s. Later, one section would have its own venue; at Brooklyn's clubroom in the Queens County Labor Lyceum on Seneca Avenue in Ridgwood one met for hikes and music.³⁸ But although a growing Camp Midvale, plus other new clubhouses and camps, attracted more general interest, many members began to parochially identify with the camps more than they did with their club in faraway New York. Some had moved to the area to be closer, or even built dwellings on the grounds. Camp Midvale, in the process, became a local of its own. Yet for practical reasons and to keep up the notion that everyone belonged to the same club, an administrative and coordinating center was necessary. Consequently, in 1931 a "City Home" was rented at 11 West 18th St. to serve both the local and the district. It also became the national office and the editorial address for *The Nature Friend*.³⁹

It was from there that the old and new camps were promoted. After all, these were signature projects of the organization, as is summed up in a 1935 essay:

While the bourgeois built their country clubs the worker built their camps. There are many workers' camps near New York, some of them tremendous. But as to most of these camps, even though they serve their purpose splendidly, it must be said that the visitors there have no special sense of responsibility or collective ownership thereof. Workers all—but those

³⁸ Hans Wittich. "Nature Friends in Brooklyn." *The Nature Friend*. October 1945: 39-40.

³⁹ *The Nature Friend*. October 1945: 30-32.

who visit the camp are not the same workers who built it, own it and maintain it. It is frankly a proletarian business institution. Class consciousness, cultural activities and sports are the central themes there. These are also developed in the Nature Friends camps, though the tempo is slower. But he who wants a camp for hiking and wood craft can find no better place than the Nature Friends camps. Ours has a different tradition. We are on better terms with nature in our camps, which we, members, have bought and paid for with our money, built with our own hands, and where we go for our pleasure, but also for our work hikes and for camp duty on the appointed days—a practical school of collectivism and solidarity. Those who work in the camps all year round, for low pay, are from the ranks of our most active members, who do that strenuous work because of their devotion to the ideals of the Nature Friends.⁴⁰

Platte Clove

Camp Midvale certainly offered many opportunities for hikers and skiers, for swimmers and ball players, for young and old. But already in 1921, almost parallel to Camp Midvale, members looked for a home in the more challenging, wilder Catskill Mountains, and found it in an area they had known since their first club hikes: Platte Clove. Situated at a height of 2300 ft. in a spectacular landscape overlooking the Hudson Valley, it was used in summers and winters.⁴¹ The camp, like Midvale, was run by the New York local. It began as just a barn, but was extended to 74 acres. At its peak time, it could house as many as forty visitors. (Fig. 35 and 36)⁴².



Naturfreunde -
Schützlinge im alten
Catskill-Mountainhaus
im 2000 Fuß Höhe -
Ortsgemeinde New York
Juni 1935

Fig. 35



Fig 36

⁴⁰ "Twenty-five Years—Red and Green." *The Nature Friend*. November 1935: 4-5. 4f.

⁴¹ *The Nature Friend*. October 1945: 28-30; (camp secretary) Hans Jureschke. "At Camp Platte Clove." *The Nature Friend*. May 1939: 13.

⁴² When the pictures were taken is not clear; Fig. 35 by Walter Wieland; Fig. 36 NFPW.

Mt. Pisgah

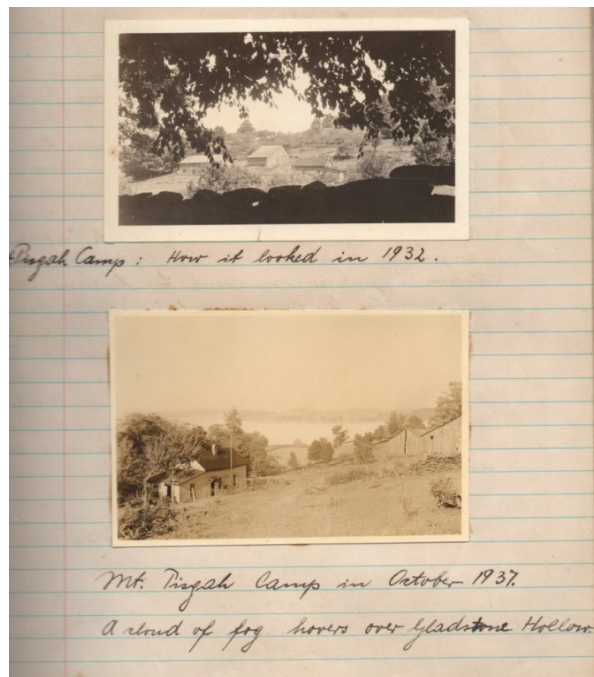


Fig. 37



Fig. 38

A family of union members and Nature Friends called Gambichler owned a 180-acre farm in the deep of New York State, at Gladstone Hollow, Andes, N.Y., about 180 miles from the City. When they wanted to sell the property but nobody came up with a proper offer, in 1937 they gave it to the Eastern District. Hans Wittich became camp chairman, with the Gambichlers active on his team. Wittich was not only a hiker but also mountaineer, photographer, and activist. At the dedication of the camp, in a language astonishingly close to that of the first reports the American locals had sent to Europe, he said:

"Berg frei" is our international greeting. It means: in the rugged, keenly shaped mountains where Nature Friends feel at home, there is boundless liberty. To achieve it, we must go through all the hardships of trailblazing. Mountains must be scaled. But when you have reached the summit and cast your eyes upon the country which lies below you, your voice will thunder "Berg frei!" Into the valleys, into the gorges, into the winds, the music of that sound will dance along. Your greetings will travel away and far to the ears of our brothers and sisters who have not yet experienced the call of the mountains.⁴³

Thanks to Wittich there is a photo diary of the first two-year period of Mt. Pisgah Camp (Fig. 37, 38).⁴⁴ It even contains material from the days before it became a Nature Friends camp. Promoted to

⁴³ "The Land in the Sky: Dedication of Mt. Pisgah Camp." *The Nature Friend*. August 1938: 2.

⁴⁴ Both pages from Wittich's photo diary; these comprehensive materials have survived through the prudence of his son Rolf, and are now partly accessible through NFPW.

Nature Friends nationwide also for summer use,⁴⁵ its major function was to serve as a skiing hut. With space for only about thirty visitors, it was one of the smaller camps. Later a barn was converted to house more guests. There was even a plan (unrealized) to build a swimming pool, which would have been spectacular not so much for its size (it would have been smaller than Camp Midvale's) but for its height, at 2300 ft. above sea level.

Camp Eureka



Fig. 39



Fig. 40

Camp Eureka was the fourth Nature Friends property in the region, and like Mt. Pisgah it was run by the District. Located in the Catskills region near Grahamsville, N.Y., to the present day it is remembered through a Nature Friends Camp Road, or Friends Rd. The camp consisted of three buildings. Its main one was originally a farmhouse, with a 'summer kitchen' and the 'bunkhouse' near by (Fig. 39, 40)⁴⁶. Another barn was especially used for music and dance functions. A brook gave delight to the children. At 1500 ft., the camp was a jewel for those interested in cross-country skiing.

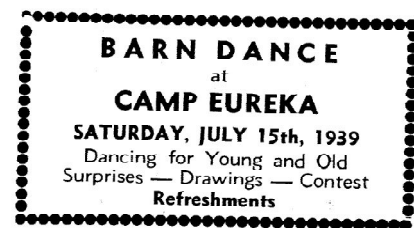


Fig. 41

Popular as these camps were, regional expansion was an ambivalent matter. Not only did distances and travel costs increase, some members so much identified with their favorite camp that they forgot about the club as a whole. Newer members did not always understand the idea of co-operative ownership—that the point was not just to pay a (low) membership or attendance fee but to also contribute working time on a volunteer basis. For a multi-faceted venture like the Nature Friends—

⁴⁵ H.W. [Hans Wittich]. "Flash from Mount Pisgah Camp." *The Nature Friend*. May 1939: 8/10.

⁴⁶ NFPW; taken by Hans Wittich.

simultaneously a leisure, cultural, sports, and political organization—there were too few shoulders to carry the weight. In a report to the Eastern District Convention in 1938 New York delegates complained (Fig. 42)⁴⁷:

New York: Did not develop organizationally as expected. Financial aid to the Labor movement, the German-American League for Culture and the Committee for the support of Spanish Democracy was tremendous. N. Y. has to supply also functionaries on national and district scale. The District Camps were built mostly by N. Y. members, a great percentage of which are also active in the political and trade union field. Camp Midvale again brings problems, which may change the type of organizational structure and management. Youth group was left to itself too much.

Fig. 42

Politics

Progressive ideas had always featured prominently in the Nature Friends' practical work, in *Der Naturfreund* and *The Tourist*. They were constant companions to understanding nature, touristic interests, recreation, and gaining knowledge about how to create a better world. It was taken for granted that a Nature Friend joined a trade union and other working class associations. In addition, many if in no way all were attracted to one of the parties on the Left. A party in its own right—or a satellite club to one—they never wanted to be.

This had already been made clear when the *Naturfreunde* presented themselves to a German-American public in the 1928 anniversary issue of the *New-Yorker Volkszeitung*. In the main article on the *Touristen-Verein*, headed "'Die 'Naturfreunde' bilden ein Glied der Arbeiterbewegung'" ("The Nature Friends constitute a branch of the workers' movement") Walter R. Boelke, of New York, introduces their ideologies and practices (Fig. 43)⁴⁸. He sets out from an intensive description of the beauty of nature, which he contrasts with capitalistic realities; he then sums up the history of the organization, its intentions as an educational and health-improvement institution, its pacifist and ecological aims; and finally he elaborates on Nature Friends Homes as a vision of what a society based on solidarity may achieve. His central political statement reads:

⁴⁷ *The Nature Friend*. August 1938: 8.

⁴⁸ *New-Yorker Volkszeitung*. January 29, 1928: 142.



Fig. 43

We Nature Friends are a hiking and cultural organization. We are [...] consciously proletarian and socialist. Like the political workers' parties and the socialist unions our struggle is devoted to freeing the proletariat from oppression by capitalist exploitation and establishing a communist social order, which guarantees to all workers just wages. There still is a long way to go, and in order to be able to fight the coming, decisive battles we need people physically fresh and intellectually alert. We Nature Friends have concluded that we can obtain this mental know-how outside, in nature, on our hikes; because to our hiking we have given a clearly defined principle, i.e. to educate humankind. Our educational program aims at creating men and women who consciously promote the coming of the new society. Our hiking thus acknowledges a new concept of living, a new collective idea and sense.

Using the terms "socialist" and "communist" interchangeably, Boelke reduces the social order he dreams of to just and fair wages, not exactly what one might expect from a revolutionary. In this, the *Naturfreunde* fit well into the paper which published the article. Paul Buhle writes:

In other ways, the *NYVZ* set itself off from the contemporary Communists. Perhaps the most touching feature (certainly for the historian, but also likely for the contemporary reader) was the loving obituary, the tribute to long decades of faithful struggle. Karoline Ott, for instance, was lauded as "eine treue, hingebungsvolle Proletarierin," perhaps the highest compliment from a movement which believed ardently in its rank-and-filers. The most outstanding quality, manifest in the occasional special issues, was the historical sense of self, of immigrant memories both from old Germany - now vanished but still dear to memory - and from nineteenth-century America, equally long gone. Another striking feature [...] is the increasingly "green" character of nature lore. The "Friends of Nature, Inc." (a hiking and nature-appreciation society, with its main camp in Midvale, New Jersey) came to dominate an increasing amount of space during the 1920s, the descriptions of past and forthcoming hikes a veritable manifesto on the eternal qualities which socialists should strive to understand.⁴⁹

One should add that most Leftist parties, and the Communist Party in particular, followed a language policy which emphasized English as the one and only language of the American working class.⁵⁰ Publications like the *New-Yorker Volkszeitung* and organizations like the *Naturfreunde* thus in their cultural identities collide with party lines. In addition, their emphasis on libertarian and/or homely lifestyles kept them detached from rigid party discipline(s).

Certainly the Black Friday of 1929, just a year after Boelke published his introduction, had its effect on the Nature Friends as well. Although practical work did not differ much, the language of the members' magazines changed. Left-wing rhetoric was prevalent all around in the bigger cities, and it extended to popular and high-brow culture.⁵¹ Political matters were debated in outspoken and radical ways, and Nature Friends publications followed suit.

⁴⁹ Paul Buhle. "Ludwig Lore and the New-Yorker Volkszeitung: The Twilight of the German-American Press." In: Elliott Shore, Ken Fones-Wolf, and James P Danky (eds.). *The German-American Radical Press: The Shaping of a Left Political Culture, 1850-1940*. Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992, 168-18; 174-175.

⁵⁰ See Paul Buhle. *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left*. London: Verso, 1987, 128-134.

⁵¹ For the "Pink Thirties" and their contexts see, exemplarily, Eric Rauchway. *The Great Depression and the New Deal: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, OUP, 2008; and Laura Browder. *Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998. For the appeal of a "revolutionary rhetoric" and a "revolutionary attitude" also among artists, consider that for varying time spans painters like Ben Shahn, Diego Rivera, or Edward Gropper were close to the Communist Party, as were writers Michael Gold, Jack Conroy, Richard Wright, and Theodore Dreiser.

Although the rifts between the Nature Friends Districts which would initiate the national organization's falling apart became virulent only in the 1940s, differences dated back to the 1930s. Western locals were somewhat less affected by the 1930s changes in political culture than the branches in the East and Midwest. Exemplarily, the July/August 1931 number of *Der Tourist* reflects an Eastern radicalization in language, and partly also practice, in a way most Westerners did not share. In his "Vorwärts, Genossen" ("Forward, Comrades"; Fig. 44) Philadelphia member E. Klumpp refers to the ominous Communist concept of "social fascism" to describe the American Socialist Party and demands a fundamentalist revolutionary line within the Nature Friends. In response, Karl Strahl, also of Philadelphia, accuses Klumpp's faction of neglecting the original aims of the Nature Friends as a hiking club of a clearly political conviction yet no party affiliation (Fig. 45). Editor Walter Boelke, author of the 1928 *NYVZ* text, tries to mediate, arguing for an inclusion of all factions (the second editor, he states, is a Communist), but emphasizes that the organization covers "several political directions" ("*mehrere[...] politische[...] Richtungen*"); Boelke defends *The Tourist's* decision not to come out with concrete suggestions as to which of the May Day Parades Nature Friends should participate in; he explicitly refers to the traumatic experiences and ruptures within the working class—and the *Naturfreunde*—in Germany (Fig. 46)⁵².

May Day Parades were of major importance to the Nature Friends in New York both as a political ritual and—dressed up in hiking apparel—as a way of self-presentation (Fig. 47)⁵³. Exemplarily, the May number of *The Nature Friend* in 1939 would devote its full title page to May Day Greetings and images of May Day Parades. But taken as a whole, even in the face of raging fascism in Europe, in the magazine in politics one field among others, and the bulk of essays is on ornithology, geology, and other scholarly topics, on past and future hikes plus information on and from the camps.

Being a legal document, the question of revolutionary versus evolutionary forms of socialism / communism is absent from the Constitution of The Nature Friends of America, adopted in 1935 (for excerpts cf. Fig. 48). It describes "[t]his association [a]s an organization of workers interested in hiking, labor sports and cultural activities," with districts and locals in the USA and Canada, affiliated to the Nature Friends International in Zurich, Switzerland (where it was exiled from Vienna), and "located at 11 West 18th Street, New York City, New York." Its objects "are: to acquaint the workers with the natural beauty of the country and to provide opportunities for its study and enjoyment; to encourage the study of nature; to teach appreciation of natural beauty to disseminate the knowledge of natural science and of the mode of living and the customs of the various people; to further and aid the protection of nature and its beauty; and to strengthen the feeling of solidarity

⁵² *Der Tourist*. July/August 1931: 4 and 5.

⁵³ NFPW: "New York Nature Friends at the May Day March in 1934"; taken by Nelly Peissachowitz.

4 DER TOURIST Juli-August

Vorwärts, Genossen!

Die internationale Entwicklung innerhalb der Naturfreundebewegung hat bereits überall, wo unsere Organisation besteht, grössere Diskussionen zu Tage gefördert, so auch in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika.

Um eine scharfe und strenge Beurteilung der ganzen Lage herauskristallisieren zu können, muss man wiederum auf die ganze Entwicklung unserer Organisation zurückkommen.

Die Naturfreunde, deren Geburtsort Wien ist, wurden von ihren Gründern dazu geschaffen, um die arbeitende Bevölkerung an ihren freien Sonntagen hinauszuführen in die freie Natur, um dort neue Kräfte für den Kampf des Alltags, und für die Kämpfe der Arbeiterbewegung zu gewinnen. Nicht nur das, die Naturfreunde-Gründer wussten genau, welche Aufgabe ihnen beim Wandern hinaus aufs Land noch mitgegeben wurden, da sie zu jeder Zeit meistens Mitglieder der sozialistischen Partei waren, hatten sie die Pflicht, bei ihren Besuchen in Dörfern und Städten für die Partei gewisse Propaganda zu leisten. Das führte dazu, dass in ihren Rückblicken meistens grosse Anzahl Literatur und Flugblätter zu finden waren, die sie in den Reihen der Provinzialer umzusetzen hatten.

Jedoch mit dem Heranwachsen der Organisation selbst und ihrer Verbreitung im internationalen Massstabe wurde diese Aufgabe der Wanderer (natürlich beeinflusst durch die Entwicklung der sozialistischen Partei, die langsam ins sogenannte sozialfaschistische Fahrwasser kam), vernachlässigt. Die reformistische Leitung des Zentral-Ausschusses, alle Hapbach und Co. — mit Unterstützung der Deutschen-Reichsleitung in Nürnberg, alle Herr Steinberger und Co. — haben es natürlich in den letzten Jahren verstanden, die Naturfreundebewegung in jenes Wasser zu leiten, wo sie sie haben wollten. Unschwer ist der politischen Entwicklung in Deutschland glaubte die Reichsleitung, wie der Zentral-Ausschuss selbst schreibt, die Insel der Glücklichen zu bilden. Jedoch, sie sehen nachtragend, dass er den Naturfreunden hier eben das versetzen kann, was er will, daraus war verständlich, dass die Massengasse des Gauorgans keine Massengasse war, sondern mit schmutzigen Anwürfen verantwortungsbewusste Elemente als Seegers gegen die Leitungsmitglieder revolutionärer Ortsgruppen gesiegt war. Aufgabe der revolutionären Klassen Genossen innerhalb unserer Ortsgruppen war es sein, Elemente wie unsere Schriftleitung darauf hinzuweisen, dass sie Material für den Abdruck in "Tourist" vorher gut überprüften. Die Mailnummer hat bewiesen, dass die Schriftleitung nicht nur denken konnte, zum Kanon der Arbeiterklasse unser Gauorgan danach zu formen. Eine Erklärung der Schriftleitung widersteht mir, denn ich bin der Überzeugung, dass sich ein Platz auch nur für ein Wort auf den ganzen acht Seiten hätte finden müssen.

Aufgabe und Pflicht der Genossen wird es in Zukunft sein, dem "Tourist" mehr Aufmerksamkeit zu widmen. Nur dadurch werden wir diese Elemente, welche immer noch glauben, sie allein könnten "Tourist" sein, zum Schweigen bringen. Wir wollen nicht in jenes Wasser kommen, wo unsere Organisation nur dazu verdammt werden sollte, hinauszuweichen, um die Blüthen zu bewahren, sondern wir wollen uns dazu aufschwingen, überall in die Tageskämpfe der Arbeiterklasse einzugreifen und mitzuhelfen, die revolutionäre Entwicklung zu beschleunigen.

In diesem Sinne müssen wir unser Wirken einrichten, hinein in die Tageskämpfe der Arbeiterklasse, vorwärts mit den revolutionären Gewerkschaften und der Führerin der Arbeitermassen, der kommunistischen Partei, unsere Lösung wird immer nur sein:

Vorwärts Genossen, für die revolutionäre Linie innerhalb der Naturfreundebewegung.
E. K. I. u. p. p., Philadelphia.

Die revolutionäre Opposition innerhalb der deutschen Ortsgruppen und Gaus hatte von allem Anfang an gewaltige Aufgaben zu erledigen. Diese bestanden erstens in der Gewinnung der noch bundestreuen Vereine für die revolutionäre Klassenfront und als weiteres die Wiederaufbauarbeit innerhalb der Arbeiterbewegung. Die revolutionäre Opposition machte es sich zur Aufgabe, wieder gemeinsam mit der Führerin der Arbeiterklasse, der K. P., die Tagesparolen der arbeitenden Bevölkerung zu unterstützen und bei ihren Fahrten hinaus in die Provinz die nötige Propaganda für den Klassenkampf zu betreiben. Die Parolen zum Kampftag der Arbeiterklasse, dem ersten Mai, waren: "Heran an die Massen, hinaus aufs Land!", welche auch jetzt mit strengster Sorgfalt durchgeführt werden. Die revolutionäre Opposition hat es verstanden, die Arbeiterbewegung überall auf ihre Klassenpflicht aufmerksam zu machen und sie zu aktiven Kämpfern innerhalb der Arbeiterbewegung zu erziehen. Der Fortschritt und Aufbau der revolutionären Opposition wird auch vor den Herren Steinberger-Hapbach und Co., keinen Halt machen; im Gegenteil, sie wird es verstehen, die heute noch stillen Massen der Bundesstreuen für ihre Reihen zu organisieren.

Gibt es in Amerika eine Opposition?

Zur Beantwortung dieser schon so oft gestellten Frage gibt es nur ein "Ja". Auch Amerika ist von dieser Entwicklung der Klassengegensätze und von dem Versuch, die Naturfreunde ins reformistische Fahrwasser zu treiben, nicht verschont worden; auch hier haben sich die noch klassenbewussten Elemente aufgeteilt, um erstens gegen die Ausschüsse innerhalb unserer Gesamtbewegung zu protestieren, und an zweiter Stelle, ebenfalls die Mitgliedschaft auf ihre Pflicht als Naturfreunde hinzuweisen. An erster Stelle befindet sich in diesem Zusammenhang die OG Philadelphia, welche es verstanden hat, — nicht in Unkenntnis des ganzen Sachverhalts, wie der Zentral-Ausschuss behauptet, sondern mit der vollen Überzeugung als revolutionäre Arbeiter, die amerikanischen Naturfreunde auf die Umtriebe der reformistischen Leitungen hinzuweisen. Heute bestehen in vielen Ortsgruppen der Nord-Ost sowie der Weststaaten Amerikas, Gruppen der revolutionären Opposition. Leider ist diese Entwicklung innerhalb der amerikanischen Bewegung im "Tourist" wenig Beachtung geschenkt worden. Der Schriftleiter sitzt ausschliessend, dass er den Naturfreunden hier eben das versetzen kann, was er will, daraus war verständlich, dass die Massengasse des Gauorgans keine Massengasse war, sondern mit schmutzigen Anwürfen verantwortungsbewusste Elemente als Seegers gegen die Leitungsmitglieder revolutionärer Ortsgruppen gesiegt war. Aufgabe der revolutionären Klassen Genossen innerhalb unserer Ortsgruppen war es sein, Elemente wie unsere Schriftleitung darauf hinzuweisen, dass sie Material für den Abdruck in "Tourist" vorher gut überprüften. Die Mailnummer hat bewiesen, dass die Schriftleitung nicht nur denken konnte, zum Kanon der Arbeiterklasse unser Gauorgan danach zu formen. Eine Erklärung der Schriftleitung widersteht mir, denn ich bin der Überzeugung, dass sich ein Platz auch nur für ein Wort auf den ganzen acht Seiten hätte finden müssen.

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Fig. 44

Anmerkung des Schriftleiters.

In einem Atemzug bekomme ich von der Ortsgruppe Philadelphia den Vorwurf, in der Mailnummer des "Tourist" den 1. Mai übersehen zu haben, — ein Vorwurf, den ich auf mich nehme, den man aber auch an den 2. Schriftleiter, den Kommunisten Albert Faessler richten soll, — und gleichzeitig macht man durch Propagierung sog. revolutionärer Gewerkschaften Stimmung für weitere Zerklüftung der Arbeiterklasse. Ich glaube nicht, dass meine Unterlassung so schädigend war, wie die "revolutionäre" Arbeit meiner Tadler.

Hätte ich zur Mailfeier aufgefordert, dann hätte man mit Recht von mir verlangen können, bekanntzugeben, wo und mit wem unsere Freunde zu demonstrieren haben. Nun ist es bekannt, dass unsere Organisation Genossen mehrerer politischer Richtungen angehören. Einem Teil von ihnen hätte ich immer Unrecht tun müssen und vermutlich hätten sich die Kommunisten am meisten darüber beschwert, wenn ich nicht gerade zur Teilnahme an ihrer Demonstration aufgefordert hätte. Die gleichen Beweggründe wie bei mir, haben die Schriftleitungen der Gaus Sachsen, Thüringen, Baden, Nordmark, Tschecho-Slowakei, Schwaben und Frankreich veranlasst, die Mailfeier unerwähnt zu lassen. Sie waren gewiss mit mir der Meinung, dass die Kapitalisten täglich die Schwäche der Arbeiterklasse feststellen können, und dass es nicht nötig ist, sie noch demonstrativ dadurch zu zeigen, dass unsere Klasse in verschiedenen sich feindlich gegenüberstehenden Gruppen demonstriert.

Fig. 46

Gedanken ueber die Abbestellung des "Naturfreund"

Auf der letzten Gaugangung in New York wurde ein Beschluss gefasst, über den scheinbar sehr wenig diskutiert worden ist. Es handelt sich um den Bezug des "Naturfreund". In der Presse las man darüber gar nichts und aus den persönlichen Berichten konnte man entnehmen, dass der "Naturfreund" abbestellt und nur den Mitgliedern zugestellt werden soll, die ihn ausdrücklich verlangen, ohne dass die Organisation einen Zuschuss gewährt.

Wir Naturfreunde sollten doch eigentlich stolz sein, dass wir ein Organ haben, das über ein gut Teil der Erde verbreitet ist und in dem wir uns durch unsere Wander- und Reiseberichte als klassenbewusste Arbeiter näher kennen können. Wenn nun der Einwand gemacht wird, dass der "Naturfreund" auf die Wiener Verhältnisse zugeschnitten ist, und sich darum für uns nicht eignet, so liegt es doch einfach an unserer Mitarbeit, ihn zu einem wirklichen internationalen Organ zu machen. Dadurch wird auch unser soziales Wandern im internationalen Massstabe gefördert. Erst wenn die Zentrale uns in der Aufnahme unserer Beiträge als Rückfahrgeld behandelt, hätten wir einen Grund, die Abbestellung des "Naturfreund" zu propagieren. In der gegenwärtigen Situation aber, meine ich, zeigen wir den Akt ab, auf dem wir sitzen: denn ohne eine enge ideologische Verbindung mit den revolutionären Verbänden, mittels unserer internationalen Organe, sind wir hier zum Vegetieren verurteilt.

Trotz allgemeinem Mitgliederzuwachs berichten die OG auf der Gaugangung von einem Rückgang der Wanderaktivität. Dem Gebiete der Touristik sollten wir grössere Aufmerksamkeit denn je schenken, aber anscheinend interessiert unseren ganz roten Kommunisten, die dem Verein eine Menge ihrer eigenen Parteiliteratur aufzuhäufen versuchen und dann sagen, es wäre kein Geld da für den "Naturfreund", dieses Problem weniger. Bei uns in Philadelphia sind sie besonders an der Befolgung ihrer Parteiliteratur interessiert, was besonders in dem Versuch, einen allgemeinen Solidaritätsfond für ihre Zwecke dienstbar zu machen, und in der bekannten Protestrevolution (siehe Mail-Juni "Tourist") zum Ausdruck kam.

Karl Strahl, Philadelphia

Mitteilung des Schriftleiters: Infolge ausserordentlich reger Mitarbeit war ich gezwungen, eine Anzahl Beiträge für die nächste Ausgabe zurück zu stellen. Ferner mussten zu stark persönliche Beiträge auf Beschluss der Gaugangung abgewiesen oder zurückgeschickt werden.

Fig. 45

Nun liegen die Dinge so: man beklagt sich wegen meiner Unterlassung und meint doch weiter nichts als den von mir veröffentlichten Artikel Seegers, in dem die Aktivität der allzeit parolefreundlichen Revolutionäre etwas näher beleuchtet wird. Ich bin nicht der erste und werde nicht der letzte sein, der sich damit abzufinden hat, dass die Kommunisten zwar gerne jedem Genossen eins aber wie Mimosen reagieren, wenn man ihnen mal die Wahrheit sagt.

Für die grosse Mitgliedschaft heisst es jetzt, doppelt wachsam die Bestrebungen dieser sogenannten revolutionären Opposition zu beobachten und geeint alle Versuche, unsere Organisation unter die Parolen der kommunistischen Partei zu bringen, entscheidend zurückzuschlagen.

Die Ortsgruppe Chicago hat den ersten Schritt in dieser Richtung getan. Es ist erinnerlich, dass der Vertreter der O. G. Chicago auf der letzten Gaugangung den Antrag stellte, den Ortsgruppen zu empfehlen, sich der I. L. D. anzuschliessen. Der Antrag nahm den Charakter an, als nun der Vertreter Chicagos von seinem Erfolg in seiner Ortsgruppe berichtete und natürlich nun den Anschluss an die I. L. D. vornehmen wollte, hat man ihm mit 47 gegen 34 Stimmen die kalte Schulter gezeigt.

Die Genossen in Chicago haben sich gewiss inzwischen einmal gründlich überlegt, ob sie den Ratschlägen der Kommunisten folgen sollen. Und sie taten gut daran.

In dieser Richtung vorwärts, Genossen!

Walter R. Boelke.



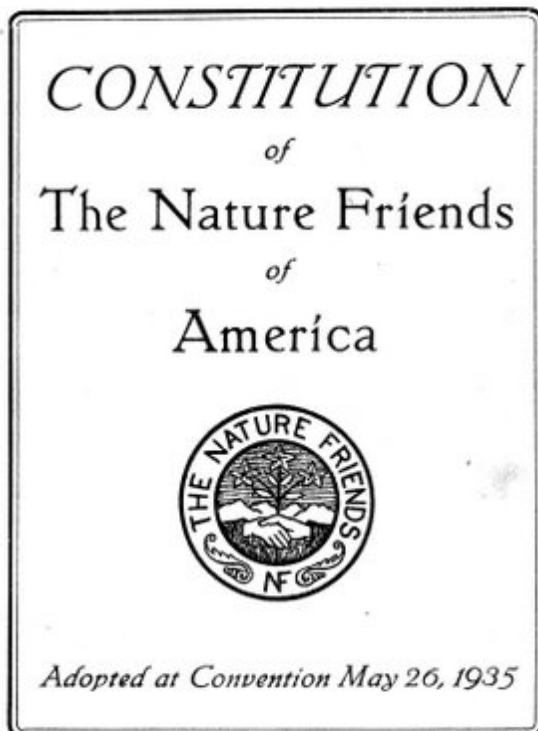
Fig. 47

among the working classes." In short, this is exactly what the *Naturfreunde* in late 19th century Austria had set out from. Of consequence in the context of 1930s American debates on race and immigration is who could join: "Membership in this corporation is open to persons irrespective of sex, color, creed or nationality." In a sense, one can say that with the New Deal in full swing and the American Left as strong as never before or after, the Nature Friends' formal description of their club was close to the contemporary progressive mainstream. But the Attorney General, as we will see, saw things differently, probably not so much relying on official documents as on highly selective information on club activities.

The Constitution of 1935, its values and procedures still united the Nature Friends of America across the nation. The traditional "Gau"-structure, which had acknowledged Vienna as the "world club," was replaced by a "national autonomous organisation," i.e. a national office and three main Districts "East," "West," and "Midwest."⁵⁴ In the 1930s the all-English members' magazine *The Nature Friend* replaced *Der Tourist*. It adopted a new title and logo, but its heading as ever reflected the traditional self-understanding of the Nature Friends as a workers' leisure organization (Fig. 48)⁵⁵:

⁵⁴ *The Nature Friend*. November 1935: 7.

⁵⁵ *The Nature Friend*. November 1935: 1.



2. The objects of this corporation are: to acquaint the workers with the natural beauty of the country and to provide opportunities for its study and enjoyment; to encourage the study of nature; to teach appreciation of natural beauty to disseminate the knowledge of natural science and of the mode of living and the customs of the various people; to further and aid the protection of nature and its beauty, and to strengthen the feeling of solidarity among the working class.

3. These objects shall be served by:
- a) Arranging hikes, trips and outdoor meets.
 - b) Arranging meetings and lectures.
 - c) Establishing collections of specimens, establishing libraries and issuing publications for the objects mentioned.
 - d) Propagating the development, maintenance and protection of National Parks.
 - e) Building and marking trails, fostering the building, maintenance and management of shelters, huts, camps, playgrounds and other places of recreation.
 - f) Supporting similar institutions and movements.
 - g) Establishing and operating workers' camps, which camps are to be owned, managed and operated on the following basis: A camp corporation which is to be a stock corporation, will have title to the camp property; the stockholders will be the chairman of the Local body and the chairman of the District and the secretary of the District, and to those three persons the entire stock of the camp corporation shall be issued as trustees for the benefit of the members of the local organization. These trustee stockholders shall assign their stock in

Membership

5. Membership in this corporation is open to persons irrespective of sex, color, creed or nationality. To become a member a person must join the local where he resides and recognize as binding, observe and abide by the laws of this corporation. The minimum age shall be 20 years, except in locals where no youth group exists, where same shall be 16 years.

Fig. 48

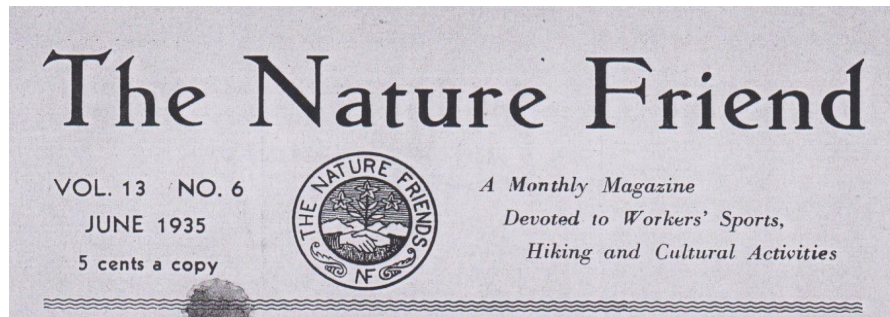


Fig. 49

A combined cultural, leisure, and political schedule we also find in the program of the New York local's celebration of its 25th anniversary. An impressive "Entertainment and Ball," in English (Fig. 49), seeks a balance between traditions and topical references, in a mix of practical and political passages. These reflect the full range of cultural activities pursued by the New York branch. An NF music group opens the festivities with a "Jubelmarsch" (celebratory march), then shows "Nature Friends in Action," followed by a "Sketch," a "Dance," and an "Address." A "Theater Collective" displays "People Who Think." Another musical round presents pieces called "a) 'Neither here nor there'" and "b) 'The Militant.'" The famous German anti-Nazi song "Die Moorsoldaten" and three widely different musical pieces ("Hiram Overture"; "Guittarres"; and the "Internationale") conclude the official part. Members are invited to an information booth, a book stand, and a photo and handicraft exhibition (with products made by the NF Scouts). A preview announces a theater party featuring Maxim Gorki's master drama "Mother" at the Civic Repertory Theater.

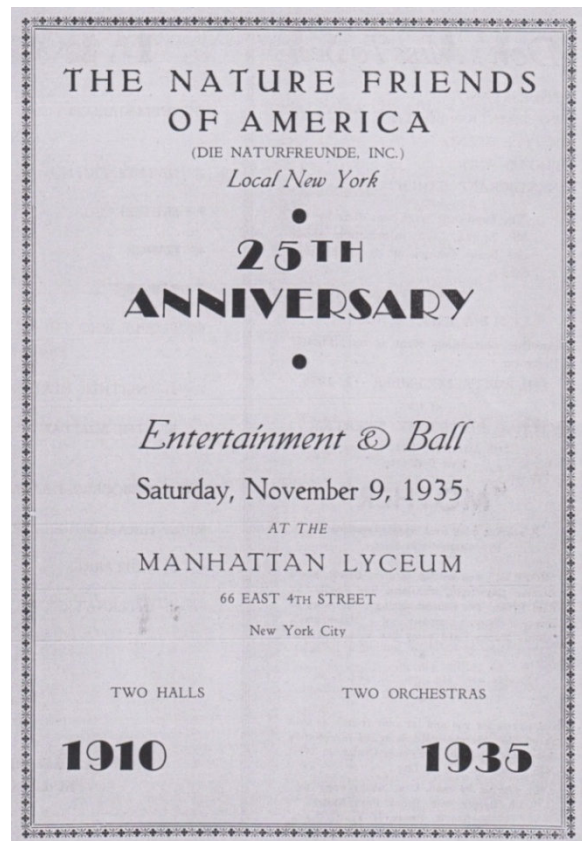


Fig. 50

A major topic in this program, in the magazines, and the camps were activities to oust fascism across the world. With the Nazis overrunning Europe, the German, the Austrian and most other national associations of the *Naturfreunde* were illegal. Thousands of members were imprisoned, in concentration camps, or in exile. In June 1935, for example, the *Nature Friend* opens with an article

relating to "The Story of Jacob Waelsch, Anti-Fascist Fighter," on a young German Nature Friend likely to have been murdered by Nazis near his home town of Heidelberg.⁵⁶ Camp Midvale on a regular basis staged anti-fascist events, on one occasion inviting the prestigious exiled German writers Ludwig Renn and Oskar Maria Graf (Fig. 51)⁵⁷.

JULY, 1939

5

German-American Anti-Fascist Celebration At Camp Midvale

Sponsored by the "Deutsches Volksecho," the well-known anti-fascist newspaper, a BIG outing will be held in Camp Midvale on July 9th.

We advisedly use capital letters for BIG, because for several reasons this day will have to be big. It will be the first German-American Camp Meet to counteract the "Days for Nazism" in the Nazi camps. It will be the first outing of German-American anti-fascists, demonstrating to the people of America that the Nazi ideas are as repulsive to the majority of German-Americans as they are to the majority of all decent people. It will be an opportunity to show our hatred for Nazism and our will to oppose and expose the "Bund" and all other fascist organizations.

During the last few months the Nazis have had a series of setbacks. Their leader, Kuhn, has been indicted as a common thief and their activities have been investigated and exposed as subversive by the Dies-Committee. The fact that the Dies Committee, which has never shown any particular desire to investigate fascist activities, and is treating the fascist leaders very gently; the fact that this committee had to make an attempt to investigate Kuhn and Moseley, proves conclusively that public opinion is aroused against the agents of fascism and demands that their work be stopped. With this sentiment definitely in our favor, it is our duty to make this 9th of July occasion an outstanding event.

If there ever was a time to demonstrate our solidarity with the American people, now is the time! Now is the time to deal a decisive blow to fascism.

A number of German-American organizations have been approached to participate with us in making this day a success and we are happy to report a gratifying response. A special committee, consisting of delegates from various organizations (Workers Clubs, Bakers Union, Singers, Krankenkassen-Branches, Nature Friends) has been formed to take charge of all preparations for this meet. The committee has succeeded in securing the famous German writer and officer of the glorious International Brigade, Ludwig Renn, for the main address. Oscar Maria Graf, the well-known writer and anti-fascist, will also be there. In order to give all visitors time to see and enjoy the camp, only a short program is planned: one or two speeches and some sport exhibitions. We make an appeal to all members to leave the play fields to our guests for this day.

We, Nature Friends, have a special interest in the success of this affair. While doing a service for the anti-fascist cause we will have an excellent opportunity to recruit new members among the many visitors, who, on this occasion will be in camp for the first time. That they will like the camp we are certain; it will then be our duty to win them over to us and the anti-fascist cause.

(Continued on page 8)

GERMAN-AMERICAN ANTI-FASCIST CELEBRATION (Cont'd from page 5)

For this day the camp-committee has reduced the prices and three kinds of tickets will be available:

1. Bus tickets: Price \$1.35. (Including bus trip to and from camp and camp fee).
2. Camp entrance tickets: Price 25 cents. (For all those who come by train or car).

Fig. 51

Once the USA had entered the Second World War, *The Nature Friend* reported how members who served in the Armed Forces were entitled to two-week vacations free of charge at Camp Midvale.⁵⁸ The members' journals printed reports on and letters by "Our Boys Abroad." Another recurrent topic was the Spanish Civil War and the considerable number of members fighting Franco-fascism in the

⁵⁶ *The Nature Friend*. June 1935: 1.

⁵⁷ *The Nature Friend*. July 1939: 5/8.

⁵⁸ *The Nature Friend*. October 1945: 33.

Lincoln Brigade.⁵⁹ The national association and the branches donated money to the exiled headquarters of the Nature Friends International in Zurich.

Even before the fighting was over, the German-born President of the American Nature Friends, New York member Georg Schmidt, discussed the rebuilding of a democratic and prosperous Germany in his article "What do to with Germany."⁶⁰ Immediately after the war he published a statement in the leading newspaper in Germany's American Occupied Zone, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, which was both addressed to the American Military and the German comrades.⁶¹ Schmidt emphasized the efforts of the American Nature Friends in the struggle against fascism, praised the resistance activities of the German members, announced support for the rebuilding of the German clubs, and called for the American Forces to license the organization as soon as possible. And indeed, with regional differences, the Americans were relatively quick in re-legalizing the German *Naturfreunde*. On February 28, 1949 (i.e. before the West and East German States were formally established), it was again Georg Schmidt who wrote to Hans Frank in Dresden, in the Soviet Sector, to (in vain) help re-establish the *Naturfreunde* in what was to become the GDR.⁶²

Crisis

But while clubs in Europe were being revived, powers unleashed by extreme anticommunism were about to destroy the American Nature Friends. The unity of the national organization implied by its 1945 magazines was deceptive (Fig. 52)⁶³. Especially Eastern/Midwestern locals continued their political work, such as in their support of former Vice President and Progressive Party candidate Henry A. Wallace's presidential election campaign in 1948, or in the case of Ethel and Julian Rosenberg, who were executed for espionage in 1953.⁶⁴ Neither the articles in the magazines nor the memories of old-time members recorded in 1987 by Andy Lanset and Chris Idzic (now at Tamiment Library at New York University) suggest that local Nature Friends were aware of the fact that already from the mid-1930s on they were officially blacklisted by American government agencies.

⁵⁹ To the present day there are memorial plaques at Camp Midvale/Weis Center/Highlands Natural Pool, and the fight for the Spanish Republic features highly in the Lanset/Idzic interviews.

⁶⁰ Georg Schmidt. "What to do with Germany." *Nature Friend*. April 1945: 2-3.

⁶¹ *Frankfurter Rundschau*. October 30, 1945: 1.

⁶² Repr. in Joachim Schindler. "Zur Arbeit touristischer Organisationen Dresdens sowie zur Entwicklung von Wandern und Bergsteigen in der Sächsischen Schweiz von 1945 bis etwa 1953 unter besonderer Beachtung des 'Touristenvereins 'Die Naturfreunde' - Teil 2." *NaturFreundeGeschichte/NatureFriendsHistory* 2.1 (2014): 30; Schmidt also addresses the role of the *Naturfreunde Internationale* in the split between the Western and Eastern Districts in the USA and deplores anti-Russian trends in the USA.

⁶³ *The Nature Friend*, October 1945: 80.

⁶⁴ Cf. Andy Lanset. "Nature Friends of America." Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, Dan Georgakas (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the American Left*. New York: Garland, 1990: 512.

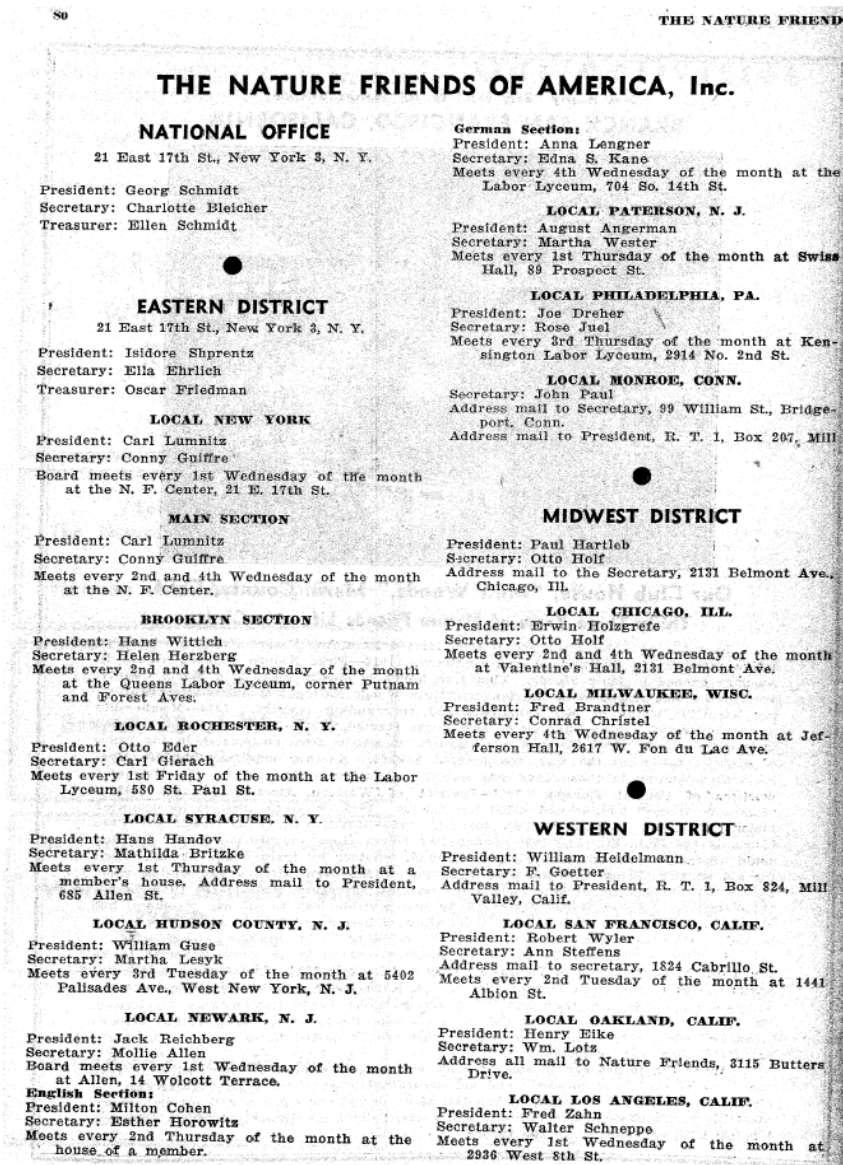


Fig. 52

In spite of the fact that they were not affiliated to any party, that their focus was on leisure activities, and that no concrete accusations were made, the Attorney General had cited the "NATURE FRIENDS OF AMERICA [...]" as a subversive and Communist organization since 1935.⁶⁵ Up to the peak years of the Cold War this had not been too problematic, but when by the end of the military confrontation in 1945 the Cold War against "communism" escalated, suddenly and rather unexpectedly the Nature Friends of America had a problem which affected individual members as well as its overall structure.

⁶⁵ Attorney General Tom Clark, letters to Loyalty Review Board, released December 4, 1947, and September 21, 1948.

J. Edgar Hoover's FBI had for decades found "communists" everywhere⁶⁶; the McCormack-Dickstein-Committee (1934) and the Dies-Committee (1938)—which the Nature Friends in 1945 had still hoped would help erase fascism in the USA—had at least seemingly taken a balanced stand against "communist and fascist" enemies; President Truman's executive order on loyalty in 1947 extended the categories for disloyalty towards groups "totalitarian, fascist, communist or subversive . . . or seeking to alter the form of government of the United States by unconstitutional means." But the focus shifted exclusively to targets on the Left. The Department of Justice's list of "subversive organizations" grew into the hundreds. Government, regional, and private institutions worked together to create an unsubstantiated fear of a communist take-over. After all, at its peak in the late 1930s, the CPUSA had not even had 100.000 members, which came down to less than 5.000 at the high time of McCarthyism; by 1958 it was well below 3.000.⁶⁷

On Juli 9, 1940, 85 delegates and guests representing fifteen locals met, geographically midway, in Rocky Mountains National Park. On the surface things still looked well. Yet for the Californians the fact that the War Eastern locals were in the focus of the red-baiters remained a danger to their own existence. The sole escape, it seemed, was to split the "Nature Friends of America." Arguing that Californian members had never individually been part of this umbrella structure, Western members could not be held responsible for any wrong-doings in the Eastern and Midwestern Districts. Another national convention, in 1947 in Grand Teton National Park, in spite of friendly discussions and refreshing hikes, could not any more reverse its drifting apart.⁶⁸ Western locals separated from the New York headquarters, and also in the East and Midwest some locals sought their distance from the national office.

Hard facts about the (implied) "Communist infiltration" of the Eastern and Midwestern Districts are scarce. Some Nature Friends were known as card-carrying Communists but blended easily into the non-communist majority; none played a major role in the Party hierarchy. National president Georg Schmidt probably was one such CP-member. Whether or not he, like most of the others, left the Party in the late 1940s and early 1950s, is not known.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Tim Weiner. *Enemies: A History of the FBI*. Random House. New York: Random House, 2012; an excellent literary impression, set in 1950s New Jersey, is Philip Roth's novel *I Married a Communist* (1999).

⁶⁷ Harvey Klehr. "Communist Party—USA." Paul S. Boyer (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to United States History*. Oxford / New York: OUP, 2004. 149. For a general perspective see Albert Fried (ed.). *McCarthyism: The Great American Red Scare. A Documentary History*. New York: OUP. 1997; Ellen Schrecker. *The Age Of McCarthyism: A Brief History With Documents*. 2nd. ed. Boston: Bedford Books, 2002; Landon R.Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2013.

⁶⁸ How in detail the separation took place is in no way clear; in a coming number of *NaturFreundeGeschichte/ NatureFriendsHistory* I will try to sketch out the history of these two events and their backgrounds.

Anti-communist aggression against Nature Friends was realized mainly on the local level, i.e. at clubhouses and camps. The American organization had always been limited in size. In the second half of the 1920s membership narrowly exceeded 1000, and was 1200 in 1936; these numbers were reported to the Nature Friends International (NFI) in Vienna/Zurich. According to Nature Friend historian Emil Birkert there never were more than around 1700 members nationwide,⁶⁹ so the 1094 reported in 1939 for the Eastern District look slightly exaggerated. In any case, after the publication of the List membership decreased sharply. By 1956, just after McCarthyism, an NFI report sees it cut by half. In 1951 America-East (including the Midwest) dropped to 855, and in 1952 to 633; after 1953 no more data are given. Western membership slowly grew from 682 in 1951 and 685 in 1952 to 715 in 1953. This slight increase is partly explained by Eastern members seeking refuge in Californian clubs.⁷⁰ In order to survive, endangered clubs in the East without much ado met under new names: The Syracuse club became 'Forky's Pond Outdoor Club,' Chicago called itself 'Midwest Campers,' Milwaukee changed into 'Friends of Nature,' and New York became the 'Metropolitan Recreation Association.' Only a few individual members in the East remained within the International's framework; as late as 1957 copies of its magazine went to New York, Midvale, Wanaque, Cicero, Syracuse and Rochester.⁷¹

The NFI at the time was clearly dominated by the social democratic Swiss organization,⁷² and it played a quite questionable role in the conflict. In the 1935 jubilee edition of *The Nature Friend* the international office had still sent greetings to the Nature Friends of America and its New York local. Once the Cold War was getting hotter, Zurich sided with the Californians. Albert Georgi-Valtin, for the NFI, blamed "irresponsible political zealots" in the East,⁷³ and Karl Poster would even find differing interpretations of the Hitler-Stalin-Pact as the key event triggering the split.⁷⁴

The Attorney General's list also affected private lives. The interviews recorded by Lanset and Idzic report that FBI agents came to the homes of members to question them, that police cars were

⁶⁹ Emil Birkert. *Von der Idee zur Tat: Aus der Geschichte der Naturfreunde Bewegung*. Heilbronn: Touristenverein "Die Naturfreunde", Landesverband Württemberg, [1970]. 46

⁷⁰ One such example is J.L. Behmer, the American delegate at the 1975 NFI conference; presently living in Schwenksville, PA, he had joined the Vienna local in 1920, was then a leading official in New York, and now represented California; cf. "Protokoll des 9. Kongresses der NFI vom 26.-27. September 1975": 16.

⁷¹ Gerald Schügerl. *80 Jahre Naturfreunde Österreich*. Vienna: Naturfreunde Österreich [1975]. 146 and 149.

⁷² Pils. *Berg frei!* 152: "Der Zentrallausschuß sollte [...] von schweizerischen Naturfreunden dominiert werden. Erst 1959 in Amsterdam kam es zur Bildung einer 'echten' Naturfreunde Internationale mit einem international zusammengesetzten Zentrallausschuß und einem eigenen Büro."

⁷³ Albert Georgi-Valtin. "Von 1906 bis 1933." *Denkschrift zum sechzigjährigen Jubiläum, 1895-1955*. Zürich: Touristen-Verein "Die Naturfreunde," 1955. 86-87.

⁷⁴ Karl Poster. "Die Naturfreunde-Internationale von 1934 bis zum Kongress 1950." *Denkschrift z.* 38-44, 43 ("In Amerika ging die Einigung zwischen Ost- und Westdistrikt wegen der verschiedenen Einstellung zum Hitler-Rußland-Pakt wieder in Brüche").

positioned at Camp Midvale every weekend to take down licence plates in order to frighten off visitors, that conflicts arose with neighbors of the camps who had by the media and through targeted gossip been (mis)informed about the excesses of the Nature Friends (communism, nudism, promiscuity, miscenegation, etc.). Few of the members would, for obvious reasons, respond with outspoken opposition to such accusations; after all personal contacts as well as jobs were at risk.

At one instant the fate of a Nature Friend made it into the mainstream and national media.⁷⁵ While working for the drug administration in New York City, Kendrick M. Cole had attended a Nature Friends meeting and consequently lost his job. By 1956 McCarthyism was in its final phase, and a majority of Supreme Court judges ruled that decision to be unconstitutional (Supreme Court 351 U.S. 536 [1956]). Such successful fighting back may have been an individual act of compensation for Cole. It did not save the organisation, though.

Troubles at Camp Midvale

Throughout the 1940s Camp Midvale represented everything the Nature Friends stood for: hiking in a beautiful area, spending vacations cheaply, being together with people of a progressive persuasion, a moderate openness as to moral of restrictions, and no racism. Regularly cultural events attracted hundreds and thousands from the region and from New York City. In the 1940s soldiers were especially welcomed, and occasionally the unemployed enjoyed benefits such as free nights or food. The Pool was attractive not only to visitors but also to neighbors. In the 1950s there were 44 miles of hiking trails, and the Camp was a member of the Trail Conference, which included these trails in the famous *Walk Book*.

For children Midvale was an island of freedom and independence, as is remembered by a youthful resident of the 1950s, whose fondest childhood memories were those of the Camp:

Our bungalow had no electric or water so we had to go to the "Front" with our pails and pump the water. Usually by the time we got back to our home the buckets ended up half empty. We'd eat our meals in the front of our cabin and watch the deer coming down from behind us. There were shows on the stage on weekends and we kids would sit under the apple trees on our blankets. Talent shows, music, dancing and puppet shows. Every week we'd go hiking with our lunches up to High Point. What fun. Maybe I was too young to realize anything political was going on, but it sure wasn't when I got older. We used to go down to the dump in the evenings with our flashlights and watch the bears rummage through the trash. In the afternoons the men would play pinochle in the clubhouse and the women played canasta. We kids just ruled the camp. Ping pong, volleyball, horseshoes, swings, swimming.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *New York Times*. June 17, 1956: 176; *TIME Magazine*. June 25, 1956.

⁷⁶ E-mail to the author, received February 2014.

Children's camps had played an important role ever since Kate Eberle had written about it in 1924 (cf. Fig. 18), and remained so even under McCarthy conditions. Their "informal camp life" was not always met with the full agreement of the older members, who were afraid that their camp might suffer. After all, what they had built with their own hands was taken for granted by the next generation.

Around 1945 the Junior Section even proposed to take over Winfield Farm, a part of the Camp just 15 minutes from its center, for the Youth Section of the District (Fig. 53)⁷⁷. The plan might have attracted more active young people to the area, and could have functioned as a uniting factor in the diverging Eastern organization, but it was not realized.



Fig. 53

Up to 6000 visitors came on weekends. As enthusiastic as most Nature Friends were about the Camp, in order to keep it intact the New York locals' 500 odd members would have to attract between 60 to 80 volunteers per work hike, and as many as ten helpers would be needed every weekend to properly run the camp. The Camp Committee had already had problems in mustering enough participants before the witch-hunts, now even fewer volunteered. Sharing the burden of running the camp between the local (New York and Midvale) and the District sections turned out to be unreliable as well.

From the late 1930s on, a new and younger generation of European expatriates came, refugees from fascism or victims of the war. These were more politically minded and less romantically attached to the Camp. They used the grounds for seminars, meetings, and recreation but did not get as closely involved in operating the camp as the old-timers had hoped. For the latter the younger ones were "too pushy"; for the former the old-timers were "too settled." In the long run this would contribute to an internal split in the New York region: The new-comers would take over Camp Midvale and preserve it under their new name "Metropolitan Recreation Association," the old-timers would rather focus on the other camps.

Already in the 1920s and 1930s members had built private cabins and bungalows at the Camp, and a feeling of personal ownership had developed in spite of its co-operative character. Under the pressure of McCarthyism, some contemplated selling their cabins before they could be taken away from them, or to have deeds to legalize their status as owners. Members even considered suing their own local over giving up its property rights to those who had lived there for years. Old-time members were involved mostly, but the Lanset/Idzic interviews prove that the conflict can not at all be reduced to

⁷⁷ NFPW: "Winfield Farm circa 1950."

generational or political aspects. Nothing came of the court case, though, apart from breaking up friendships and more people withdrawing from Midvale.

Infighting was aggravated, and partly caused, by external conditions. Even though the local population cherished the conveniences at the Camp, some saw it with suspicion and hostility. Not all had forgotten that before the Nature Friends came, the "old dirt hole" had been the place for whites only. In the summer of 1948 the *New York Times* writes:

A fiery cross, made of saplings covered with gasoline-soaked burlap, was hoisted tonight up the metal flagpole on the grounds of the Nature Friends Camp, a summer holiday resort for whites and Negroes at Stonetown near here, by some unidentified persons who left a crude message threatening Communists.⁷⁸

The Lanset/Idzic interviews suggest that immediate neighbors might have been involved. The perpetrators felt safe, as with good reason they could assume the police and the FBI were on their side, and, with the Ku KluxKlan marching in Ringwood, so would be public opinion.

Desastrous as these terrorist acts were, the Nature Friends did not stand all alone. Progressive and Civil Rights organizations came and used the property, also providing necessary financial resources. Even though the CPUSA as the ominous power behind the Nature Friends did not raise its hand in defense of the Camp, some of its sympathizers offered acts of solidarity, among them Pete Seeger (Fig. 54)⁷⁹. Some of these supporters were themselves victims of McCarthyism, others were liberals who defended civil rights, and then there were those who appreciated the progressive character of the camp, including its unique combination of popular and sophisticated cultural work:

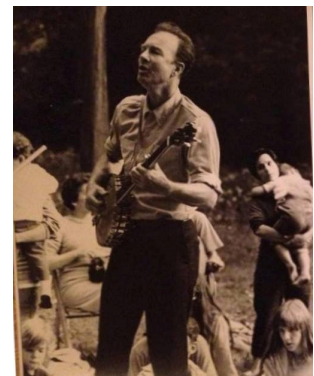


Fig. 54

Various actors, musicians, and others in the creative arts, including several who were on the government's subversive list, joined hands with the Nature Friends. Actor Herschel Bernardi was on the cultural staff one summer and organized various skits. Another actor, John Randolph, and his wife Sarah Cunningham, staged excerpts from Chekhov plays. Ruby Dee and Ossie Davis performed, and folk singer Pete Seeger played a concert in front of an audience of 1,200. John Wilson, an artist in residence, was commissioned years later to create the bust of Martin Luther King in the U.S. Capitol Building.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ "Fiery Cross in Jersey." *New York Times*. August 14, 1948: 14.

⁷⁹ NFPW: "Pete Seeger at Camp Midvale in the 1950s" photo by Robert Ehrlich.

⁸⁰ <http://www.shortescapes.net/A-Hideaway-for-Natures-Friends.4039384.html> (30/04/14). Concerts by blues and folk singer Odetta (Holmes) and Harry Belafonte are also on the record.

Recently, the Nature Friends for Perserving Weis project has generated more and also highly personal second-generation recollections:

[...] this is what I know about the break up of the Camp Midvale Nature Friends, mostly from my father [...]. During the McCarthy era, the local NF members who were not involved in the Communist Party, were very unhappy about the NY-NJ NF leadership's 's associations with the Party. No one knew what the government would do, and there were fears that it would somehow seize Camp Midvale. Some of the members had built homes up on the hill above the main public area of Camp Midvale, on land that still belonged to the Camp, and to protect their homes, they insisted that the property be divided so they could own the land their houses were on, free and clear. This was agreed to, and I don't know the exact dates it took place, but we could probably find out by searching the old deed records. At some point [...] the group agreed to dissolve completely. I know that my parents quit the Nature Friends in 1953, so that's probably when it happened. Most of the former CP people stayed with the Metropolitan Recreation Association, which continued to operate Camp Midvale. The MRA mainly consisted of not the older Germans (who were the original NF members) but the younger and more recent immigrants and some American born. Both of my parents had been in the CP (as I found out only much later) but they quit in 1950. They thought it was a mistake for the Nature Friends to be so closely associated with the party. So even though they were part of the younger generation they stayed with the "not so leftist" group that took ownership of the Camp Eureka property in the Catskills. It may have also been partly for social reasons. My parents were German speaking and they were more friendly socially with the original German NF members. They named this new group "The Winbeam Outdoor Club" (Winbeam is the name of one of the nearby mountains by Camp Midvale). This club held annual meetings at the Firehouse on Stonetown Road in Ringwood (about a mile from Camp Midvale). It is still in operation today, although my family are no longer members.⁸¹

Other Camps⁸²

Some of the members so much under pressure personally, politically, and also often economically, turned to the more quiet Catskill camps. Although the Nature Friends's national and regional structure was gone, they tried to preserve old-time feelings. First one kept the camps open for former co-members, but over time these contacts petered out and the camps were transfered into private properties. Without any efficient club infrastructure left, the camps by and by lost contact with the office in New York. A question to be resolved is who, with also the local deteriorating, could legally sign transactions, pay bills, or sell the property. A close analysis of the local dissolution processes would thus shed light even on the last years of the New York-based nationwide Nature Friends structures.

⁸¹ E-mail to the author, March 2014.

⁸² Information gleaned from various personal sources in the wake of the NFPW project; names, personal references, and family details were cut.

Platte Clove was run by the Nature Friends and their Midvale follow-up organization MRA throughout the 1950s. The number of old-time visitors declined for its problematic accessibility, and the younger, often more politicized members also stopped coming. It was then sold to a group of members in 1960, and is, to the present day, owned by an old Nature Friends family.

After the court case *Camp Eureka* played a particular role: It was, for a time, kept up by members who had given up their (assumed) property rights at Midvale and continued to run Eureka according to old Nature Friends traditions. Dwindling numbers of visitors again caused its being taken over by former members. Obviously some of the old property today is part of the Winbeam Outdoor Club.

Also *Mt. Pisgah* experienced reduced attractiveness. In 1953 the camp burned down, probably, unlike Midvale, by accident, and in 1954 was given back to the original owners, the Gambichler family. Until the 1980s older members kept convening for reunions.

From Metropolitan Recreation Association to Highlands Natural Pool

Increasing pressure on the Nature Friends, internal strife, and a diminishing pool of active members had a lasting effect on Camp Midvale. The locals in New York and in Midvale were falling apart. The younger ones, among them many who had openly refused to succumb to McCarthyism, including former CP members, decided to reincorporate as *The Metropolitan Recreation Association*. They wanted to continue Midvale as a camp catering to a broad range of liberal attitudes. But not only financial and technical problems abounded (hygienic conditions; water quality at the pool; problematic sewage systems; soaring insurance costs; etc.).



fig. 56

The police, the FBI, and the KuKluxKlan kept making life hard also for the MRA. Up to 1966 the grounds were observed by the FBI as a non-segregated camp—including interracial children's camps (Fig. 56)⁸³—and as a meeting place also rented out to organizations of various progressive causes. Local opposition remained strong, although hardly ever in the open. In 1965 there were assaults by neo-fascist "Minutemen." Unexplained to the present day, a late night fire burned down the large wooden social hall. The worst thing to happen was the burning of the clubhouse in 1966, which both destroyed a major site of memory and simultaneously dealt the MRA a severe financial blow; with no

⁸³ NFPW: "Children at the Camp, 1960s."

culprit convicted, the MRA was stuck with the costs for reconstruction (Fig. 57)⁸⁴. When MRA President Henry B. Kasbohm invited contributions to the rebuilding of the destroyed property in a four page leaflet (Fig. 58), he put particular emphasis on the Camps's unique position as "one of the oldest interracial camps in the country,"⁸⁵ and defined it as a retreat for nature appreciation and recreation. But the damages done had permanent repercussions:

Without their clubhouse, it was never the same for members. Visiting one another in their homes couldn't replace the camaraderie of the clubhouse. Seventy families held a meeting and decided to sell the land for \$1 in return for guarantees that the land wouldn't be commercially used and that the 70 families would have access to the land for the rest of their lives. The families rejected a \$500,000 offer from a developer.⁸⁶



fig. 56



fig. 58

In 1968 the MRA gave the 160 acre property to the American Ethical Union, under the provision of operating it according to progressive principles. Among AEU members were Walter and May Weis, who in 1974 created an endowment to preserve the land and buildings; later in their honor the site was renamed Weis Ecology Center. In 1994, it was given to the New Jersey Audubon Society, which emulated the ecological legacy of Weis and established a New Jersey Highlands nature resort. In 2013, for financial reasons, the NJAS decided to hand the complete property over to the State of New Jersey.

⁸⁴ NFPW: "Clubhouse lost in the fire."

⁸⁵ Fundraising Flyer, October 2, 1966.

⁸⁶ <http://www.shortescapes.net/A-Hideaway-for-Natures-Friends.4039384.html> (04/30/14).

Its future is undetermined as of now; among the plans is a highly controversial one to dismantle all the buildings and return the whole area into a "natural state."

For decades the swimming pool had been one of the most prominent attractions at Camp Midvale. With many of the bungalows and cabins unoccupied and public threats in the air, also at the pool attendance went down and costs went up. In a fairly deteriorated state it was closed in 1994. But to save the pool, residents and former members revived the (almost forgotten) communitarian concept already pursued by the Nature Friends: An independent non-profit Community Association of the Highlands was established, which after comprehensive renovation work reopened the pool as a co-operative project under its present name, *Highlands Natural Pool*.

Over time, the history of where the Camp came from had fallen into oblivion. A few years ago even regular visitors were hardly aware of the existence of any organization called Nature Friends beyond Midvale. But both at the Pool and on the terrain of the Weis Center the legacy of the Nature Friends was preserved through plaques, documents, and memories. Recently first tentative contacts have been reestablished with both European and Californian Nature Friends branches. Even more so, the 2014 group trying to save former Camp Midvale from physical destruction consciously tagged itself *Nature Friends for Preserving Weis*, and might in the near future be incorporated as the *Highlands Nature Friends*. Such a preservation project, of necessity, is a communal, ecological, and political effort; it starts from the assumption that culture and nature are not antagonistic but dialectically linked with each other; it is a project which brings together the past, the present, and the future—all in all the program the *Naturfreunde* had had in mind when they first came to America in 1910.

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