

## The Tale of Anson Minor: An Ontario Camp Legend

Edith Fowke

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### Résumé de l'article

L'objet de cette étude concerne la plus répandue des légendes de camp de l'Ontario, l'histoire d'Anson Minor. L'auteur en présente un certain nombre de versions encore inédites et elle questionne l'historicité de cette légende, et, surtout, décrit le pattern de ces légendes en Amérique du Nord.

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## Articles

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### *The Tale of Anson Minor: An Ontario Camp Legend\**

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EDITH FOWKE

The folklore of summer camps is becoming an increasingly popular subject for study: in recent years there have been a number of articles and theses dealing with camp songs, camp rituals, practical jokes, and camp legends. The legends in particular offer a rewarding field for investigation. Camps play an important part in spreading the urban belief tales current among teen-agers: the boyfriend's death, the baby-sitter, the escaped maniac, etc., but these are not specifically camp legends. However, there is one particular type that is definitely related to camps: it takes various forms and the details differ with the locality, but the pattern is remarkably constant.

In Ontario the most widespread camp legend features a character called Anson Minor. Tales about him have circulated in Jewish camps for several decades. I first became aware of them when students in my introductory folklore class turned in versions as part of their assignment on folktales. Then George Waverman, a student in my fourth-year "Canadian Folklore" course in 1973, did his project on "A Study of the Anson Minor Tale." Other students added more versions, and when I began to analyze them I had fifteen accounts varying greatly in detail but all sharing certain common factors.

George Waverman heard what he believed was the original version from Ms. C. Burnstein who worked as a director for a Jewish youth organization. She first heard the story at Camp Kvutzah, a Labour Zionist camp located on Lake Erie near the town of Dunnville, and said the tale originated at this camp from a supposedly true event. Waverman

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\* A somewhat shorter version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada in Montreal, June 1980.

reported her thus:

- (1) This story took place sometime in the 1920s. The land on which Camp Kvutzah stood once belonged to the Anson Minor family and was his farm. It was located in the Dunnville area of Ontario. His family still lives in Dunnville and runs a taxi service. At least until the early 1960s they were running it. One day Anson Minor was driving his tractor in the field. It suddenly stopped moving and he could not get it to start. So he got out to try and see what was wrong with it. While fixing the engine, the tractor started up and began moving. He became caught in it and his leg was badly mangled. He did not receive medical attention and as a result he developed gangrene. The gangrene became worse and in that state his mind snapped. He was demented. He developed a fixation for the colour green. In that state of mind he hung his wife in the shed and murdered his daughter.

At this point in the story, George interjected, Ms. Burnstein does not know what happened to him, whether he was put in a mental institution or whether he remained on the farm. Then her story continues:

However, his family felt that he was incapable of managing the farm and sold it without his knowledge. The land was bought and turned into a summer camp. From that time on Anson Minor hated the camp for taking his farm. He despised it incredibly. Shortly thereafter he either died of natural causes or committed suicide, although it is generally regarded that he committed the latter. Following his death he returns as a ghost every August first, the anniversary of his death, to haunt the camp. His ghost waits by an orchard near the old farmhouse and he is seen to be carrying a lantern of some sort which is green (gangrene). It is said that anyone who goes near the ghost will die. At least it is implicit in the tale.

There is a secondary tale always told with this one. It concerns a counselor who worked at the camp and did not believe the story. So he decided to spend the night of August first at the orchard. After the ordeal he was found the next morning by some staff members. He was in complete shock and his hair turned white. He could not speak. He tried to regain his faculties but could not and would never speak about what he saw at the orchard.<sup>1</sup>

Waverman said that when Camp Kvutzah closed and was turned into a provincial park in the 1960s, the people who worked there moved on to other Jewish camps and took the story with them. However, it had spread long before that. Another student, Heddie Mangarten, got a statement from Robert Arbuck in 1978. He said:

- (2) This is a true story that happened about thirty years ago when I was a boy

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by George Waverman in "The Migratory Tale: A Study of the Anson Minor Tale," an unpublished project paper submitted in English 430, "Canadian Folklore," York University, 1973.

of about ten years of age. (That would make it about 1948.) In the summers I'd go up north to the Muskokas to spend a few weeks at an overnight camp up there. Now a few miles down the road from this camp was a farmhouse totally surrounded by dense trees, orchards and fields. It looked mysterious to us young kids, almost haunted. A man lived in that house alone but he was hardly seen. We knew of him at the camp, but paid little attention to his existence, but this was soon to change.

It so happened, as we were to find out later, that Ansi Miner, as he was called, was driving along in his tractor one night, and somehow managed by an accident of fate to get his left foot caught up in the turning parts of the machine. His leg was chewed up something terrible. And that very same night, in our campgrounds, a mysterious green light was seen moving very, very slowly. And we were most of us awakened by the step-drag, step-drag, step-drag of his limping walk. It was enough to put a fright into the entire camp, adults and children alike.

The next year, when I was at the camp, on that very night, on the anniversary of his misfortune, August 1, the very same thing happened — green light seen slowly moving through the grounds; the dull sound of step-drag, step-drag, step-drag.

The camp was soon closed down for good — parents didn't want their children going to a camp that was haunted. But to this day, camps throughout the Muskokas swear that, every August 1, they are tormented by the green light and step-drag of Ansi Miner's ghost, lurking in the haunting darkness of the grounds.

Robert Arbuck has obviously dressed the story up a bit, but while his account has transferred it from the 1920s to the 1940s and from the Dunnville area to Muskoka, it still retains similar details of the accident, the green light, and the anniversary haunting which, of course, is staged by the counselors.

Most of the tales, like the last one, transfer the story to other areas, but one that retains the Dunnville location ran as follows:

- (3) Ansen Minor owned a piece of land outside of Dunnville, Ontario, right on Lake Erie. He and his family farmed the land. One day Ansen was working in the fields and his son accidentally ran over his foot with a tractor. Slowly gang-green set in in Ansen's foot and he slowly became insane. Eventually he killed his son and was taken away. Ansen escaped from the asylum only to find his wife dead. She had hung herself because of the tragedies she was faced with. No one knew where Ansen lived.

The authorities took over his land and few years later a man bought the land and set up a camp. Ansen's wife's birthday is on Aug. 1st and it is said that on this night Ansen returns to the orchard (where his wife was buried) limping with a shiny green knee, and reunites with his wife.

One night some campers decided to be brave and sleep out on the orchard to see if Ansen really did return. Sure enough, the next morning they were found lying stiff, one with a white streak in their hair.

August 1st is a frightening night throughout the camp but is certainly intensified by the tricks the counselors play on the campers.

About ten years after the camp was bought it was sold to the Provincial Park. Now the story of Ansen Minor has spread to many other Canadian camps and it is believed at all these other camps that Ansen Minor haunts them on Aug. 1st.<sup>2</sup>

The next tale shares many motifs with the previous ones but adds a new element, a reason for the haunting of the camp:

- (4) This is the tale of a farmer called Ansa Minor and the large farm he was supposed to have owned up near Huntsville, Ontario. One day while out ploughing the fields the son of Ansa Minor stepped off the tractor and was killed. A very short time later while Ansa was out ploughing alone, he stopped the tractor, got out to inspect something and for some unknown reason the tractor leapt forward cutting off one of his legs. Since Ansa Minor now lived alone he didn't receive proper medical aid and as a result gangrene set in.

A local boys' camp heard about his predicament and thought that since he couldn't run his farm effectively any more they could buy his farm cheaply to expand their camp. Ansa Minor refused to sell and the camp refused to give up trying to force him to sell. Finally in sheer desperation Ansa was forced to sell through tricky manoeuvring on the part of the members of the camp. Immediately after selling the land on August 1st, Ansa died but before he died he swore he would get revenge for having his land virtually stolen from him.

Shortly after the camp was opened, Ansa Minor was believed to have returned to the mess hall one night bringing with him a flashlight. He completely destroyed the place and even shot two bullets into the walls. No one doubted for a moment that it was Ansa Minor returning for his revenge.

It is said now that each year on August 1st, it rains at the camp and everyone believes it is Ansa returning on the date of his death in order to receive his revenge.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the story spread from Dunnville throughout the province, and everywhere it retained certain details and changed others.

- (5) Anson Minor lived in Northern Ontario where ten years ago the site of Camp Kfutsa was situated. He was a farmer and he got his leg caught in a tractor and had to have his leg removed. It was replaced with a wooden leg. A ball and chain was attached to the wooden leg to help him walk.

He eventually went crazy, murdered his wife, and locked his son in the

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<sup>2</sup>Margaret McEwen submitted this in an assignment for English 253, "An Introduction to Folklore," York University, 1974. She got it from Laurie Sone who heard it at an unnamed camp in 1963.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Eakin submitted this in 1971; she got it from Barbara Lazarus who heard it from a boy who attended a camp near Huntsville that year.

garage and killed him. For years after that he carried a green lantern while working around the farm at night. He died in a mental institution.

Twenty years later Camp Kfutsa was formed. Every July 1st, the anniversary of Anson Minor's death, the sound of "Step-drag" was heard in the camp and a green light was seen. There was no visible source for the sound or the light.

The last summer that the camp was opened one of the counselors took a dare and stayed up all night tied to a tree to prove he wasn't scared of Anson Minor. In the middle of the night there as a shriek, but everyone was too scared to go to see what happened.

The next morning the counselor was found at the tree, alive, but completely white. He couldn't explain what happened and everyone assumed he had seen Anson Minor. The camp was closed down permanently because parents believed the story and were afraid to send their kids there.<sup>4</sup>

In version (3) above Anson's son was accidentally responsible for the accident. In this version he caused it deliberately:

- (6) In the backwoods around Haliburton, there lived an aged man, Ensign Minor, and his son. The son, 30 years of age, was jealous of the fact that all the land of the farm was owned by his father, and nothing belonged to him. One day, while the father was getting into the threshing machine, the son intentionally turned the switch on and caught the father's entire leg in the massive claws of the machine. The father's leg was badly mangled and during the night infection set in. By morning he was dead.

The camp that I work at, Camp Northland, is situated around the area that Ensign Minor died, and it has become a legend, that once every summer, on the same night that he died, campers are awakened by a thumping, dragging sound and by the swinging of a bright green lantern. It is Ensign Minor haunting the area, in search of his murderer.<sup>5</sup>

In version (4) above Anson's son is the primary victim with Anson being crippled as a secondary theme. That pattern is elaborated in the following more complicated tale:

- (7) This story took place about eighteen years before I heard it. There was a camp named Camp K'vutzah which was southwest of Toronto. Beside the camp lay a property owned by Anson Minor. He had a farm on it. Anyhow the camp wanted to buy his property in order to expand. This property had been in his family for years. He was an only child. He wasn't very tall, just average height. But he was extremely broad-shouldered and very strong in the shoulders and arms. His wife was a typical country

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<sup>4</sup>Carol Fromowitz submitted this in 1976; she got it from Terry Brady who heard it ten years earlier at a B'nai B'rith camp in northern Ontario.

<sup>5</sup>Shelley Dubin submitted this in 1971; she got it from Jeff Schwartz who heard it at Camp Northland in Haliburton in 1970.

wife, small and frail. She was constantly sick. She gave birth to a boy but died in childbirth. The boy was the apple of Minor's eye. He tenderly cared for the boy and raised him. In the meantime the camp wanted to expand on his property but he refused to sell. So the camp owners and the township put pressure on him. One day they drove up to his house with expropriation papers. In the meantime, Anson Minor was in the barn teaching his son how to drive the tractor. When he heard the men at the house he went to see what they wanted, leaving his son alone on the tractor. Just when he was talking to them they heard a scream from the barn. They all ran out and to their horror they saw that the tractor had flipped over and fallen on the boy, crushing him to death. Anson Minor lifted the tractor off the boy and picked up the broken body. Something inside of Anson Minor cracked and from that day on a new light shone in his eyes. They burned like wildfire. He became a changed man after that and wouldn't speak to anyone, especially the camp owners. He associated the lawsuit and the death of his son. Inside his heart he blamed the camp for the loss of his son. One night on August first his barn suddenly caught fire. They said it was possibly started by campers. Everyone from the camp ran out to see. Inside was Anson Minor trapped. His right foot had become entangled in some heavy chains on the floor and he couldn't free it. The chains became red hot from the fire and burned off his foot. Finally with a great roar he freed himself and limped off into the forest. His foot had been completely burned off and only a bloody stump remained. The barn burnt to the ground. They say that as Anson Minor ran into the forest he had the expression of a wild animal on his face. He disappeared and later strange things began to occur. Windows in camp buildings were broken and food was stolen. A lantern was taken. People became worried. In the end the camp took over the property. The thefts died down and everything seemed peaceful again.

Years later after the story had been told and retold at Camp Kvutzah people would make a standing bet that no one could stay in Minor's orchard on August first. One day two male staff members made a bet that if they spent the night they would receive fifty dollars. They took food, sleeping bags, and a radio and set off for the orchard on August first. The orchard was separated by some hills and a clump of trees so that it couldn't be seen from the camp. That night people in the camp thought they heard strange noises emanating from the orchard, but they weren't sure.

The next day the two boys did not show up for breakfast. So the staff went to see what had happened to them. When they arrived at the orchard they couldn't see anything but an empty campsite. There were no signs of struggle, just two sleeping bags and a cold campfire. Then the men noticed that the bags, though sealed shut, were plump. So they slowly opened one bag and saw a sight rarely seen by modern man. Inside was a tiny, shrivelled, white-haired aged little man making squeaking noises. In the other bag they found the same thing. It was the two staff members who had aged about 100 years in one night. They were taken to an asylum and they are still there to this very day. My counselor claims to have seen them. Anson Minor is still alive. He'd be about fifty now and

lives like a bear in the forest. Things still disappear now and then. You know, he'll be around for a while still.<sup>6</sup>

In most of the tales Anson Minor frightens but does not harm anyone (except members of his family as in tales 1, 3, and 5), but two have him murdering others, thus strengthening the horror element. Both of these tales depart from the typical story pattern.

- (8) In the woods behind the camp about ten miles away was an old burnt down farmhouse. Anson Minor was a farmer there and one day while out in the fields his farmhouse caught on fire. Inside the home were his wife and children. They were trapped and unable to escape the flames. When Anson Minor saw the fire he rushed to the house in an attempt to save his family. However he was unable to get to them and he was badly burnt in his rescue (attempt). The family perished and Anson Minor fled into the forest with an axe he had used to break his way in. His face was terribly disfigured and scarred from the flames. His right arm had withered up. The shock of the fire caused him to lose his mind and he spent the rest of his life hiding in the woods. Because he had become insane, he sometimes came into the camp and any campers he found walking around at night he'd chop to death with his axe. It is also said that one night a whole cabin of boys were found murdered in their bunks at the farthest end of the camp. This murder took place about ten years before we heard the story.<sup>7</sup>
- (9) The story I heard was that Anson Minor was an alcoholic, a wino. His children were murdered by someone and he went mad. He started wandering the countryside trying to find children to replace his own. After that, they say he died and his ghost comes back August first. If he sees anyone he kills them. So you have to be quiet at night otherwise he may hear you and come and kill you. They also say that he ate the flesh of children.<sup>8</sup>

Although these retain the name of Anson Minor and the idea of a tragic accident causing insanity, they do not have the typical details of the injured leg and the ghost's halting walk, and the first does not have the almost universal motif of the ghost's annual return. Another tale that retains only the name and the idea of annual haunting has Anson being murdered:

- (10) Back around the beginning of the twentieth century a hermit named Ansin Minor lived in a small cabin in the northern part of Ontario. he never came into contact with other people as he secured for himself everything he needed. One day two hunters came upon Ansin's cabin and while robbing Ansin the two hunters killed him. Ever since that time Ansin

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<sup>6</sup>George Waverman noted this from A. Resnick who had heard it when he was twelve at Camp Northland. c. 1965.

<sup>7</sup>Waverman himself heard this story at Camp Ramah near Huntsville, c. 1962

<sup>8</sup>Waverman noted this from Ms. S. Citron; time and place not specified.



Minor's ghost has haunted the cabin and legend holds that each night he leaves the cabin and wanders around the camp that is near the cabin.<sup>9</sup>

Three other versions present more typical stories. In one a farmer near Kingston has his leg mangled by a tractor, develops gangrene, goes mad, kills his wife and sons, is committed to an asylum, escapes, and disappears, to return every year to terrorize the local farmers and campers; he carries a blue light with him.<sup>10</sup> In the second a farmer had an accident with his plough, his arm was terribly mangled, he fled into the countryside and died; now his ghost wanders the country scaring children.<sup>11</sup> In the third a farmer near Pickering is killed when a tractor rolls on him, cutting off his right foot; every August 1 his ghost appears carrying a green lantern; two campers who spent the night outside one August 1 were found dead with their hair turned white.<sup>12</sup> These and versions (1) to (7) are all obviously related; (8) and (9) have less in common, while (10) sounds like quite a different legend that has adopted the name of the more widespread one — an interesting illustration of the way legends change as they wander.

The only published version of this legend I have come across is in Shelley Posen's article on "Pranks and Practical Jokes at Summer Camps":

A kind of prank which seems to be played mostly by staff on younger campers is one which involves the apparent transubstantiation of supernatural figures from ghost stories told by the staff. A typical example comes from one camp where a legend was told about "Anson Minor." Minor (the legend went) was the farmer who had owned the land the camp was on. He was out plowing one day when his tractor turned over on him, horribly mangling his legs and dousing him with gasoline, battery acid, and antifreeze. Minor recovered, but he walked with a limp and glowed green in the dark from that time on. When he died his farm was sold to the camp, and they say that his ghost still walks the fields. Some night after this story was told to the campers, or even the same night, the campers heard the sound of a limping walker outside their cabin window, and those not too frightened to look out detected a green glow bobbing up and down in time to the sound. Both of these effects, of course, had been engineered by the staff.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Neil Abbott submitted this in 1978; he got it from Lee Abbott who heard it at Camp Northland in 1965.

<sup>10</sup>Waverman reported this as told by J. Lightman who heard it at Camp White Pine, Haliburton, in 1963.

<sup>11</sup>Waverman reported this from Ms. N. Sherman who heard it at Camp Northland, c. 1966.

<sup>12</sup>Debbie Anshell submitted this in 1978; she got it from Esther Miller who heard it at Camp Winabago in 1967.

<sup>13</sup>Sheldon Posen, "Pranks and Practical Jokes at Summer Camps," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 31 (1974), 304.

Thus the tales vary greatly in details, but they all tell of Anson Minor or a very similar name such as Ansi, Ansa, or Ensign Minor. They all tell of an accident, usually involving farm machinery, and usually mangling a leg. Nearly all involve the return of Anson Minor, mentioning an anniversary, which is usually specified as August 1. Many involve madness and give some reason for Anson seeking revenge on the campers, usually related to the taking over of his farm for the camp. Most mention his dragging steps and a green light (useful for the ghostly impersonators), and some informants link the green light to gangrene. Several add a supplementary story of campers who spent the night in the haunted place and died of fright, went insane, or had their hair turn white.

It is thus clear that despite the many variations most versions are remarkably consistent in their use of traditional motifs.<sup>14</sup> Common to almost all (except a couple that treat Anson Minor as still alive) are E275: A ghost haunts place of great accident or misfortune; and E585.4: Revenant revisits earth yearly. Most also have E402.1.2: Footsteps of invisible ghost heard; E530.1: Ghostlike lights; E599.8: Ghost carries a lantern; E234: Ghost punishes injury received in life; and F1041.8.2: Madness from grief. The supplementary stories of those who face the ghost include F1041.7: Hair turns gray from terror, or N384: Death from fright.

Curious to determine if this legend indeed had a basis in fact, I wrote to the *Dunnville Chronicle* giving a summary of the legend and asking about its background. A local reporter, Cheryl Gard, got in touch with a woman whose family had lived near the Minor farm in the 1920s and 30s. She reported that Anson Minor never owned a tractor (which is the most frequently cited cause of the tragedy), and that it was his son, Floyd, who had the accident. He apparently got his leg caught in a rope during haying and it was cut off below the knee. Floyd died of pneumonia in 1923 at the age of ten, and Anson Minor committed suicide in 1943. She confirmed that the farm was sold and became a Jewish camp, and that it is now part of Rock Point Provincial Park.<sup>15</sup> (The camp closed and the land was taken over for the park in 1965.)

This local tragedy obviously formed the basis for the legend. Factual elements retained include the accident with farm machinery involving amputation and the establishing of a camp on Anson Minor's land. Several tales mention Anson's son, although in only a few is he the victim. One report mentions Anson's suicide:

The man who originally owned the land was named Anson Minor. Sometime in 1952 he committed suicide. He did this by driving his car

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<sup>14</sup>Stith Thompson, *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1966).

<sup>15</sup>Letter, Jan. 11, 1980.

into the garage and sealing himself in, he left the car running and died of carbon monoxide poisoning. They claim that his ghost prowls around scaring people.<sup>16</sup>

(This account, which comes from Camp Kvutzah, gives a late date for the suicide, but the method may well be accurate: I was unable to confirm the details.)

It is interesting to note how the original tragedy was elaborated to make it conform to a typical camp legend pattern. Just as Lord Raglan and Joseph Campbell found that hero legends tend to acquire certain definite incidents, so camp legends tend to acquire a particular pattern. This Anson Minor story growing out of local events came to resemble various other legends that are told in other camps and in other regions.

For example, there is another Ontario legend told in Boy Scout camps that is obviously a fairly close relative:

When this camp was being built a carpenter was working on the roof of a cabin (probably this one). He fell from the roof and banged his head and broke his leg. He headed off into the woods. (Here the sound of his walk was demonstrated. The story-teller would "thump" one foot on the floor to represent Thump-Drag's good foot and "drag" the other "broken" one.) His friends couldn't find him (maybe he had been working alone) but saw his peculiar footprints, the one clear impression and the other dragged. His walk was sometimes heard by them (again the sound was demonstrated) and so became known as "Thump-Drag."

The next year a Cub camp was held and one night the campers heard a strange sound outside. (Again the sound, "thump-drag" was made on the floor.) In the morning one of the Cubs had disappeared and was never heard of again. The next year the same thing happened . . . Every year Thump-Drag was heard and a camper disappeared.<sup>17</sup>

Lee Haring and Mark Breslerman wrote of a New York tale about "The Cropsey Maniac" in which "a respected member of the community whose insane desire to avenge an accidental death prompts him to stalk the outskirts of the camp property as a revenant. The camper who strays off the grounds needs to beware of Cropsey who is probably acarrying an ax." They note that eleven versions display interesting variations but preserve a consistent plot structure, and conclude: "It is a New York state story, known today to many city undergraduates who have had a summer camp experience in the Catskills. It continues to be transmitted each year and is a vital piece of modern folklore."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Waverman got this from G. Kraset; he heard it from his cousin who attended Camp Kvutzah c. 1957.

<sup>17</sup>Ranald Thurgood wrote out this account in 1980 as he had heard it at Ernwigle, a Boy Scout camp near Windsor, c. 1961.

<sup>18</sup>Lee Haring and Mark Breslerman, "The Cropsey Maniac," *New York Folklore*, 3 (1977), 15-28.

The New York tales are on the whole more violent than the Ontario ones: Cropsey typically seeks and kills victims while Anson Minor usually frightens but does not harm the campers (unless they confront his ghost). However, both groups of tales feature insanity and revenge, and share the limping ghost and the anniversary motifs. The writers give no indication of whether there is any factual basis for the Cropsey story, but the consistency of the name suggests that there may well have been.

In an article entitled "The Boondocks Monster of Camp Wapehani," James P. Leary wrote that while attending a Boy Scout camp in Wisconsin he:

encountered various fragmented narratives concerning a creature called the Swamp Man . . . It was his custom to roam the fringes of the campsites at night in search of wayward Boy Scouts who if caught were carried off, never to be seen again . . . My experiences with the Swamp Man led me to suppose that similar monsters might be present at other camps. A survey of materials in Indiana University's Folklore Archives bore this supposition out. Some ten entries deal with monsters which supposedly attack young campers. Invariably told by scoutmasters and other Scouts, these narratives have certain common elements. They all say some kind of terrible creature exists in the dark wood; it is usually stated directly or implied that one should avoid this area and that failure to keep out of the monster's domain leads to dire consequences. These narrative elements suggest Alan Dundes' motifeme sequence: Interdiction, Violation, Consequence, a basic structure which suggests that the legends might function primarily for admonitory purposes.<sup>19</sup>

(That conclusion seems more than a possibility: it seems clear that one of the purposes was certainly to control the campers.)

Jay Mechling writing of "The Magic of the Boy Scout Campfire" sums up the camp legend pattern:

The fifth element in a typical Boy Scout campfire is a tale. This is sometimes a story read from a collection of mystery or ghost stories. The more interesting case, however, is the local legend, the purportedly true story that is told about some strange creature or unfortunate person said to live in the locale of the camp . . . The two examples of local legends from my Florida Boy Scout camp experiences share these qualities: both involve a man physically disguised or dismembered and both insist that this grotesque still inhabits the pinewoods surrounding the camp.<sup>20</sup>

That, of course, fits the Anson Minor story and the others cited. It seems, then, that this Ontario legend is typical of many others told in summer camps throughout North America (and perhaps elsewhere). We

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<sup>19</sup>James P. Leary, "The Boondocks Monster of Camp Wapehani," *Indiana Folklore*, 6 (1973), 174-75

<sup>20</sup>Jay Mechling, "The Magic of the Boy Scout Campfire," *Journal of American Folklore*, 93 (1980), 48

can surmise that one reason why they display such similar characteristics is because they have a common function: to prevent young campers from wandering abroad at night when they might get lost or run into danger. James Leary notes, "As I recall, fear of encountering the Swamp Man effectively kept us from wandering the woods at night,"<sup>21</sup> and some Indiana stories included such statements as "Beware of the dark nights. You don't know what's crawling out there," and "Anyone who swims at night during the full moon risks being attacked by this beast and will never be seen again."<sup>22</sup> And as the Anson Minor tale (10) said: "You have to be quiet at night, otherwise he may hear you and come and kill you."

Haring and Breslerman suggest other functions for the Cropsey story which are equally valid for the Anson Minor tale:

... For one, it permits a few moments of imagined melodrama as an escape from the scheduled life under constant surveillance that characterizes camp and school. . . . A second function is to promote a feeling of solidarity among the hearers: the setting and the main actor of the story appear *outside* the camp or school grounds, and the action of mayhem and insanity is of a type solidly condemned by the society to which the hearers belong. A third function is to integrate new campers into the camp society by imposing on them the local traditions. Thus camp society ingeniously solves the problem of continuity in a situation of yearly change.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to these functions, the stories also of course have a strong entertainment value. The campers naturally enjoy hearing a scary story while safe in the company of their peers. The stories all make clear that only those who break camp rules by wandering at night or making noise after lights are out are threatened. The attraction of such fare is obvious and not restricted to children. People enjoy being terrified as long as the danger does not directly menace them. The current popularity of horror movies testifies to the universal appeal of the occult and the macabre.

York University  
Downsview, Ontario

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<sup>21</sup>Leary, p. 174.

<sup>22</sup>Leary, p. 189.

<sup>23</sup>Haring and Breslerman, p. 21.

**Résumé**

*L'objet de cette étude concerne la plus répandue des légendes de camp de l'Ontario, l'histoire d'Anson Minor. L'auteur en présente un certain nombre de versions encore inédites et elle questionne l'historicité de cette légende, et, surtout, décrit le pattern de ces légendes en Amérique du Nord.*