

Nikiwigi Pre-OA Honor Society  
Revised March 24, 2019  
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The Nikiwigi honor society was among the many pre-Order of the Arrow honor societies that existed nationally in the early days of the Scouting movement<sup>1</sup>. The specific origins of the Nikiwigi are not known nor has the name been traced to a specific Native American origin/language. Members who were interviewed for this summary indicate that the word/term “Nikiwigi” means “the chosen” (or, alternatively “the chosen one”), but this information is anecdotal and awaits further research.

The Nikiwigi is known to have existed at least four New England camp locations:

1. *Camp Pioneer, New Hartford, Connecticut  
Hartford Council (#70, Hartford, Connecticut)*

The earliest known appearance of the Nikiwigi was at Camp Pioneer in the summer of 1927. The Nikiwigi was at Lake of Isles Scout in North Stonington, CT (Charter Oaks Council #70) upon its opening in 1960. In 1963, Wipunquoak Lodge #59 was established and members of the Nikiwigi honor society were made charter members. A short overview of the Nikiwigi at Camp Pioneer is provided in Mitch Reis’ 2005 history of Scouting in Connecticut.<sup>2</sup>

2. *Camp Nutter, Loon Pond Acton, Maine  
York County Council (#217, Saco Maine)*

The Nikiwigi was active at Camp Nutter in the early 1930s. Nutter was the original summer camp of the York County Council, serving Scouts in southern and central Maine. In 1935, York County Council merged into

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<sup>1</sup> For a general description of Scout honor societies see - <http://usscouts.org/honorsociety/honorscout.asp>. See also “Scouting Honor Societies,” The American Scouting Traders Association Report, volume 14, no. 2, June 1999.

<sup>2</sup> The History of the Connecticut Rivers Council Boy Scouts of America 1910 – 2005 (self-published, c. 2005)

Pine Tree Council #710 in Portland (itself the former Cumberland County Council #218 until a name change in 1933) and Camp Nutter ceased operation until sometime after 1944 when it again operated as a summer camp until its last known year of operation in 1955. The present-day Pine Tree Council #218 stills owns the camp property, but it is used only for weekend camping and as a Cub Scout day camp. See also: <https://pinetreebsa.org/1665>.

Madockawanda Lodge #271 was established in July 1944 at Camp Hinds in Raymond, Maine. A separate lodge chapter was established in the summer of 1946 at nearby Camp Bomazeen (located on Great Pond in North Belgrade, Maine). A third lodge chapter was added in 1950 soon after when Camp Nutter was re-opened as a full-time council camp. Since York District had previously adopted the “Nikiwigi,” there was a period of negotiation required before the Camp Nutter Chapter of the Lodge replaced the Nikiwigi tribe. The chapter was active, however, for only a few years before full-time summer operation of Camp Nutter ceased. See also: <https://madockawanda.wordpress.com/history/>

3. *Camp Collier, Gardner, Massachusetts*  
*Monadnock Council (#232, Gardner, Massachusetts)*

The Nikiwigi was active at Camp Collier, a summer camp operated by the Monadnock Council that opened in 1930 (later known as the David R. Collier Scout Reservation; now owned and operated by the Monadnock Trust Inc.; see <http://www.baevents.com/campcollier/>). The Nikiwigi presence at Collier is not well documented. General references are found in a history of the Nikiwigi Lodge #329, chartered at Collier on February 16, 1946 when the first ordeal ceremonies were held, presided over by the members of Tsutsusid Lodge #309 (Wachusett Council #237, Leominster, Massachusetts). The Nikiwigi Lodge became active at Camp Collier and held its first ordeal ceremony on June 21, 1946. Former members of the Nikiwigi (referred to at this camp as the Tribe of Nikiwigi) who met OA requirements were eligible for membership. See also: <http://www.campwanocksett.org/index.php/lodge-history>.

4. *Camp Sachem, Antrim, New Hampshire*  
*Sachem Council (#223, Lexington, Massachusetts)*

The Nikiwigi honor society was introduced to the Sachem Council in 1943 by Philip M. Johnson, a professional Scouter. Born in 1904, Johnson was hired as the Scout Executive for Sachem Council and from 1942 to 1951 also served as Camp Director at Camp Sachem. Prior to his tenure with Sachem Council, Johnson had been employed by the Charter Oak Council in Hartford, Connecticut. It is likely that Phil Johnson brought the Nikiwigi honor society with him from Connecticut to Camp Sachem, but this has not been documented.<sup>3</sup>

As described in the Camp Sachem information guide<sup>4</sup>, the purpose of the Nikiwigi was:

- *To recognize campers, leaders and friends of Camp Sachem.*
- *To foster a spirit of good Scouting fellowship.*
- *To keep alive a love of Camp Sachem and its pleasant memories.*
- *To promote Camp Sachem among all Scouts and Scouters.*

Membership qualifications were also detailed:

*“All boys and men who show outstanding leadership or willingness to serve and better Camp Sachem may qualify for membership in the Order of Nikiwigi. In the words of the Great Spirit in the Legend of the Nikiwigi, “Quona must wander from fire to fire peering into the faces of those about, ‘yea into their very hearts,’ ever seeking those who once again should raise the tribe to glory.” Elections for the Nikiwigi are held each period at Camp by the members present...”*

Thirty-Eight Scouts and Scouters were initiated into the Nikiwigi at Camp Sachem during the 1943 summer camp season. Camp Director Philip M. Johnson was accorded the honor of member #1 – an appropriate recognition as he was the individual most responsible for introducing the honor society to the camp. At Camp Sachem, new members were initiated

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<sup>3</sup> Marsh served as Scout Executive for Sachem Council until 1955. He died at Lexington, Massachusetts on March 12, 1971.

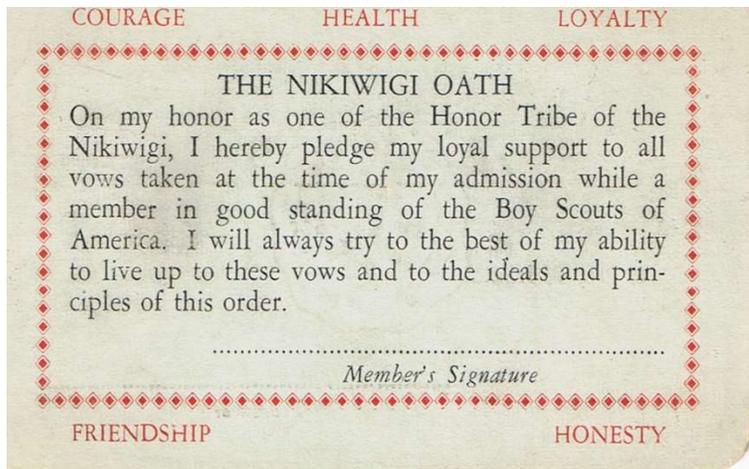
<sup>4</sup> Camp Sachem Information Guide, 1959, p. 3.

into the early 1960s and ultimately more than 400 individuals were so honored.

The rituals of the Sachem Nikiwigi included a “calling out” ceremony at the weekly council fire (almost exclusively during summer camp season) where the names of prospective new members would be revealed and the legend of the Nikiwigi read aloud. The candidates would then follow the tribal chief and his entourage to a separate, remote fire circle where the induction ceremony would be held. At Camp Sachem, the initiation ceremony did not include an overnight camping or vigil experience. New candidates were given (or asked to make) a small leather/suede pouch to wear around their neck, secured by a rawhide strap. The pouch contained various totems, each representing a virtue or value that the owner agreed to live by. Many of the Nikiwigi pouches had the initials of the recipient on the front side in script.



Nikiwigi members received a membership card of the type shown here:



The Sachem Nikiwigi also commissioned a commemorative lapel pin for initiated members<sup>5</sup>. These pins were available for purchase, not awarded automatically upon initiation.



The earliest mention of the Sachem Nikiwigi pin was in a 1949 Sachem Nikiwigi newsletter (the “Nik News”) where mention was made of a lot of 100 pins, of which “50 have been sold.” Additional detail was provided in the spring 1959 edition of the same newsletter where the manufacturer (“Doherty of Boston”) was mentioned:

*“they have the die from which they were made... We hope to have the pins ready for the Work Week-End June 14 & 15 (1957). Pins are \$1.00 each.”*

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<sup>5</sup> Image from the collection of Bill Topkis.

A last mention of the Sachem Nikiwigi lapel pin was in a 1960 edition of the Nik News:

*“Nik Pins will be available sometime in the future, probably in the fall...The pins are gold, about a half-inch in diameter, have the inscription Nikiwigi-Sachem, with a campfire and will cost one dollar...Remember – everybody needs a Nik pin and it will probably be another 5 years before another order is made.”*

Previous written accounts of the Nikiwigi honor society at Camp Sachem have suggested the existence of three “membership levels” – Camp Sachem Ranger (CSR), the Order of the Trail, and Nikiwigi. While such recognitions did exist at Camp Sachem (and were awarded in patch form), neither the CSR nor the Order of the Trail had any connection to the Nikiwigi. This has been confirmed through interviews with various Nikiwigi members. No patch associated with the Sachem Nikiwigi (or any of the other known Nikiwigi locations) is known to exist.

In 1959, Sachem Council merged with Fellsland Council (#242, Winchester, Massachusetts) and Quannapowitt council (#240, Malden, Massachusetts) to form Minuteman Council (#240, Stoneham, Massachusetts). After the merger, Taskiagi Lodge #261 was chartered - formed from the merger of Missituck Lodge 261 (formed May 13, 1944, Fellsland Council), Souhegan Lodge 447 (formed January 18, 1951, Quannapowitt Council), and Menetomi Lodge 496 (Sachem Council).

Menetomi Lodge (#496) of the Order of the Arrow was chartered on July 20, 1953 to the Sachem Council. The initial Ordeal Menetomi ceremony was conducted by a team from Madockawanda Lodge #271 consisting of (from left to right below) Al Elliot, Wayne McDuffie, Clyde E. Nason, Jr., and Frank Bailey (all staff members at Camp Hinds, with Bailey being one of the camp founders in 1927. Bailey was also the first Madockawanda Lodge Advisor upon its founding in 1944 until his retirement in 1970<sup>6</sup>):

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<sup>6</sup> [http://friendsofhinds.org/documents/newsletters/Alumni/med\\_1974-page1.stm](http://friendsofhinds.org/documents/newsletters/Alumni/med_1974-page1.stm)



Many members of the Nikiwigi at Camp Sachem also became members of Menetomi Lodge. In the 1954 camp season, for example, the Nikiwigi welcomed twenty-five to their group and Menetomi Lodge added fifty-three Ordeal members. Nine individuals joined both groups. The first Menetomi Lodge Chief – Wayne Taft of Belmont, Massachusetts – became a Nikiwigi member in 1951 (#182) and was active in both organizations throughout the 1950s.



**In the 1960 summer camp season, the Sachem Nikiwigi initiated 25 new members. This was the last group initiated during the summer camp season although at least one members was initiated in 1961 (and other perhaps later). The Sachem Nikiwigi continued to hold work weekends at Camp Sachem into the mid-1960s and held an annual banquet as late as 1966.<sup>7</sup> The formal dissolution of the Sachem Nikiwigi is not known.**

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<sup>7</sup> Nik News, November 9, 1966. Reference made to a “Steering Committee” for 1966-67.