

Camping In The Old Style

Classic vs Traditional Style

David Wescott, 2018

For some time now I have struggled with coming to a resolution about how to use the term “**Classic**” and its relation to the term “**Tradition**” when addressing the topic of “old-style” camping. I first addressed the issue in a presentation I gave during Kephart Days at the Schiele Museum of Natural History in Gastonia, NC, 2016 - *Horace Kephart and the Classic Camping Revival* – quoted near the conclusion of this paper.

At this point in time there is no clear distinction between the two, and they are often used interchangeably. There is no real problem with that until we want to create a distinction between using Camping In the Old Style as an interpretive tool or as a viable post-modern camping style. By this I mean that as Classic Camping is defined now, it reflects a very specific time period, and the skills, furnishings, clothing, food and more requiring the use of “period correct” examples in camp – *the spirit of the classic re-encampment.*

This is Classic Camping.

However, many have rediscovered the beauty and comfort of classic style by replacing “modern” camping gear with options that have their roots in the past – for example, wall tents and wood stoves for winter camping – but the old-style tent might be made from a space-age hybrid material, and the stove may have all of the most up-to-date options; or you make your own gear from instructions written in 1902 with materials that were not available in the past.

This is Traditional Camping.

*Classic designates time,
while Tradition moves through time.* DW

- **Traditional** would indicate an ongoing theme used by a specific group.

- **Classical** would indicate a specific time period, not specific to a certain group, but defined by context.

They are often used interchangeably, but “traditional” usually relates to “ideals” while “classical” usually addresses “time”.

Dictionary Definitions

Traditional - adjective

1. handed down - handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice.
2. **relating to, or characteristic of the older styles.**
3. an inherited or established way of thinking, feeling or doing; a cultural feature preserved or **evolved from the past.**
4. How old is the tradition?

Classic – adjective

1. serving as a standard, model, or guide: of or relating to antiquity.
2. **adhering to an established set of standards or methods.**
3. of enduring interest, quality, or style: honored as definitive in its field.
4. noteworthy of its kind and **worth remembering.**
5. **unchanging in style.**

Tradition vs Classic - Related through Fashion, Design, Literature and Music

(Definitions gleaned from a variety of sources)

Traditional Music

- closely related to the culture and history of people in a particular region. Folk
- passed from one generation to another through *imitation*.

Classical Music

- written for performance in a concert hall with *set standard* instruments.
- the most artful kind of music that a culture has produced which has lasted through time.
- usually has a large body of music theory that supports it. This is never true of traditional music.

Traditional Literature

- stories that have been passed down through generations. Much of traditional literature was initially told orally and written down later on. Because of this, the stories are *often altered slightly* in each retelling.
- *universal themes* are important to the genre. The purpose of traditional literature is having the story be relatable to everyone - the story is always one that the majority of people can understand and value.
- recognizable archetypes.
- Traditional literature can fall into a number of categories: proverbs, fairytales (often romantic and always fictional), folklore, fables (heavily allegorical or symbolic), animal tales, myths and legends (based on real people and events, or those thought to have been real), etc.

Classical Literature

- of or relating to a style of literature characterized by *conformity to established treatments, taste, or critical standards*, and by attention to form with the general effect of regularity, simplicity, balance, proportion, and controlled emotion (contrasted with romantic).

Traditional Fashion

- expresses an identity through costume, which is usually associated with a geographic area or a period of time in history.
- defined as the ensemble of garments, jewelry, and accessories *rooted in the past* that is worn by an identifiable group of people. Though *slight changes over time* in color, form, and material are acknowledged, the assemblage seems to be handed down unchanged from the past.

Classical Fashion – Here the entire argument appears to fall apart, but not quite.

- Classic clothes are styles that look good on just about everyone and that have been popular for years; *a timeless look*.
- an outstanding example of a particular style; something of *lasting worth or with a timeless quality*; of the first or highest quality, class, or rank – something that exemplifies its class.
- Fashion is cyclical and can look dated after its popularity deflates and until its next refresh. Classic style, on the other hand, stays relevant no matter the year - something like the basic fit of the Levi's 501. How many times has that silhouette changed since the early 1920s? Maybe a little, but not very much. The 501 is a classic because the fit is just right, and it hasn't changed much in its 90-something year history.

Traditional Design - The word "traditional" can mean something different to every homeowner.

- inspired by 18th and 19th century; *timeless style* that exemplifies elegance and comfort - perfect for those who love antiques, classic art pieces, symmetry ("symmetry is paramount in traditional design) and other design elements that are rich with history.
- prides itself on its harmony, order and its friendly charm – *rich yet warm and inviting – you feel right*.

- includes several design elements, including warm colors and symmetrical lines, elegance and romance, yet casual.
- brass and bronze are the most common metals used.
- either made during a traditional era or is modeled after items from that era - a little bit country, a little eclectic, a little rustic, and a little old world.

Classical Design - A classic is something that never goes out of style such as a yellow raincoat.

- Classic furniture tends to be welcoming but is more often ornate when compared to traditional furniture. The primary difference is that classic furniture often *looks like it belongs in a museum* and has a richer overall feel when compared to traditional furniture.
- any furniture period style that has stood the test of time - *has “staying power”*.

Elements of a Traditional Camp.

- A healthy merging of classic style with emerging technologies.
- Woodsy style mixed with a post-modern outdoor ethic*.
- Preference for styles and materials reminiscent of the old style.

Elements of a Classic Camp.

- Actual or authentic reproduction furnishings, bedding, dress, food and tools.
- Items identified as authentic or antique.
- Accouterments that would have been available to the camper during the Golden Age of Camping - 1880-1930.

Shared Sensibilities

- Carbon steel, wood, cast iron, cotton, wool and silk.
- The golden glow of lamp light.
- Preference for edged hand tools
- Campfire and woodsmoke.
- Admiration for items labeled “handmade”.
- Honest skepticism of trends and fads.

Key Words From The Experts

Traditional -

- imitation - characteristics of
- often altered - evolves through time
- universal themes
- rooted in the past
- timeless style
- warm and inviting - you feel right

Classic -

- set standards
- conformity - unchanging through time
- timeless look and quality
- lasting worth - worth remembering
- museum setting



Excerpts from "Horace Kephart and the Classic Camping Revival"

By David Wescott, 2016

The Hunter Library Special Collections and the Mountain Heritage Center at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee NC have an exhibit and an on-line gallery called *Kephart Revealing an Enigma* -

<https://www.wcu.edu/library/digitalcollections/kephart/>

I'm not sure why they called it that, but it's a perfect title for how Kephart might be perceived as his life relates to camping.

Through his life's work, Kephart set the stage for the "Classic Camping Revival" to take place. I believe there were two sides of Kephart –the traditionalist and the progressive. His skills were well entrenched in the old ways, but he was always called upon by manufacturers to asses the latest and greatest of the new gadgets available to the masses. He was able to balance his passion for the past and his fascination with the future. Even though he was able to balance both, his preference was clearly for preservation – it would influence everything else he did that had future implications.

Steve and I talked about this a lot. We came to the conclusion that we each came to the table with parts of Kephart's paradigms of camping and woodcraft - what the rules to the game should be, and how we would approach it. We each had experience on both sides of Kephart, but we came to the campfire of Classic Style with separate preferences for the revival.

Kephart – 20th Century Leader, 21st Century Pioneer Or -Watts and Wescott Do Kephart

- *Kephart was clearly a traditionalist who kept up with the times.*
- *Kephart used tradition to inform his choices not define his choices.*
- *Kephart recognized that he had a bully pulpit to influence the future.*

Kephart was a dedicated traditionalist that knew he had to stay up-to-date to remain viable.

*There is an old Japanese Saying -
Mastering tradition is honorable
But if you don't keep up with changing times,
you can't maintain tradition.*

This battle between tradition and modernism created a tension in woodcraft that was its eventual undoing. Our job as proponents of classic style is actually three-fold:

1. To help create a new appreciation for how camping was practiced in the past – Living History in the Classic Camp.
2. Undo the myths that surround it by teaching people that classic style is more than a snapshot of an anachronism, but has a viable reason for being used today – Go camping and teach from a foundation of Tradition.
3. Do both with ethics and style.

Honoring the Two Sides of Kephart

**Steve- Accuracy / Interpretation
Context
Preserving a Tradition
The Re-Encampment**

STYLE

**Dave - Beauty / Practicality
Context
Implementing a Tool
The Post-Modern Camp**

Defining Classic and Traditional Camping ... And How They Differ

With the above preamble, I'm going to make the bold move to put some finishing touches on what Steve and I started in 2013 – define the fields of Traditional and Classic Camping.

While in “The Center” at the Schiele Museum - *Kamphaven* - we were on a deadline to complete an article we had promised *The American Frontiersman* magazine, entitled *The Classic Camping Revival* (which they renamed *The Classic Camping Comeback*). We had been trying to write a concise definition for Classic Camping for months, and it finally came together that day. A definition for Traditional Camping came 2 years later.

CLASSIC CAMPING DEFINED (2016)

Classic Camping is the use of tools, techniques and traditions in the style of the Golden Age of Camping (1880-1930).

“When the frontier skills of Daniel Boone meet the industrial age of Henry Ford.”

Classic Camping is:

- directly connected to it's historic context.
- an understanding and appreciation for handmade craft.
- the use of classic style – timeless utility - aesthetic efficiency.
- a comfortable confessed relationship with romance and nostalgia.
- re-creative and fun.

TRADITIONAL CAMPING DEFINED (2018)

Traditional Camping is the adaptation of tools and techniques reminiscent of the classic style used to camp in a modern world.

“When the skills of the Golden Age of Camping meet the 21st century.”

Traditional Camping is:

- romance with tradition that connects us to our heritage.
- skills and knowledge documented by the masters of the old style.
- a viable alternative to contemporary/emerging technologies.
- retention of skills and techniques over convenience and security.
- a reconnection of skills with place.
- a merging of past, present and future.

*Go where there is no path...
And leave a trail. Emerson*

Exiles* From Wilderness

David Wescott, 2012

It's been said that an expatriate is someone who lives in a country in which he does not belong. I hazard to say that not a person who is living as an expatriate by choice would deny that the place in which they now live chose them, not the other way round. Moving to a new place, one casts off many of the trappings of their old life in favor of those best suited to their new surroundings. So be it with those expatriates of the drawing room persuasion who throw off its mantle in favor of the sylvan life. DW



Are we expatriates to modernity or exiles from the wilds?
Expatriate yourself back to a land from which you were exiled.

* **Exile** - the state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons. *The Wilderness Act 1964* – a place where man is a visitor and does not dwell...

Creating a Woodcraft Ethic

Ethics concern values, morals, and the principles of right and wrong – not only the rules of conduct among ourselves.....there are some elements of **style** that help to define the rules of the game.... **Ethics** are so you don't screw it up for the next guy, and **style** is so you don't delude yourself into thinking you're so hot. **Yvon Chouinard**

It is understood that this *Post-Modern Woodcraft Ethic* supports most of the Seven Operating Principles of Leave No Trace, Inc. It does not, however, support the underlying premise of LNT - that added layers of technology can “leave no trace” or that a simple mantra is a viable replacement for skill, knowledge and judgment – removing man as a part of the natural world. Woodcraft also recognizes the value of designated wild lands, with the knowledge that a small percentage of all US lands are designated parks and Wilderness, leaving room for a variety of styles and ethics to be enjoyed.

1. Employ skills only in appropriate areas - practice skills within limits.
2. Learn from where you are - develop a sense of place.
3. Look just beyond your doorstep - Stay home - wilderness access is not a must.
4. Do more with less – Treat consumerism as the problem.
5. Leave room for judgment - Always employ positive social ethics.
6. Use it up, wear it out, make do, or do without. – develop craftsmanship/improvising.
7. Recognize traditions and foundations – honor our shared heritage.
8. Allow room for mastery – pursue optimal experience.

Bottom Line

- There are tensions and conflicts within both traditional and emerging technology ethics.
- Woodcraft is an art-form that must be conducted in controlled settings with good technique and a working knowledge of the environment in which it is practiced. Woodcraft, however, does not require a “W”ilderness setting.
- Woodcraft is honest about its suspicions of modernism and consumer culture.
- Woodcraft does a better job of connecting people to the land. We learn from the land, and to work within the limits of the materials and resources it provides.
- The practice of Woodcraft skills can create impact, but impacts can be mitigated and are, for the most part, limited to the places they occur.
- Woodcraft looks beyond the “backpack” paradigm of camping, embracing a variety of camping styles.

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road. Healthy, free, the world before me; the long brown path before me leading wherever I choose. Henceforth I ask not good fortune, I myself am good fortune. Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing. Strong and content, I travel the open road. Walt Whitman