
“Orgonon Today and the Rangeley Community”

**Remarks Delivered at the
Rangeley Chamber of Commerce
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I was an 18-year old college student when I first visited Orgonon and the Wilhelm Reich Museum in the 1970s. I knew absolutely nothing about Wilhelm Reich, his name meant nothing to me. The only reason I went to Orgonon was because it was located here in Rangeley and was obviously *some* part of its local history.

And because I'd been coming to Rangeley since I was a child—staying out at Rangeley Manor when Curt and Alice Mercer owned it—I was fascinated by everything about Rangeley: its two railroads, the sporting camps and hotels, the logging industry and the colorful personalities who were part of this history. And to this day I see Wilhelm Reich and Orgonon as distinct and valuable pieces of that same rich heritage.

So this evening I'd like to briefly discuss the Museum as both a unique tourist attraction and as a neighbor, very much involved in the life and the fabric of the Rangeley community.

Orgonon was the name of the home, laboratory and research center of Wilhelm Reich, M.D., an Austrian physician, psychiatrist and scientist who had studied with Freud in the 1920s.

In the 1930s and 40s, Reich discovered a powerful unknown biological energy in living matter *and* in the atmosphere, that he called “Orgone Energy,” and he devoted his life to the investigation of its properties and uses, including medical research, motor power and weather experimentation.

In the 1950s, the United States government *banned and burned* Reich's books and publications, with burnings at Orgonon and New York City. Reich died in 1957 in a Federal prison and is buried at Orgonon.

Since 1960 the property he called Orgonon has been open as The Wilhelm Reich Museum. It comprises 175-acres of fields and forests and trails open daily to the public; and the Orgone Energy Observatory—one of four buildings in Rangeley listed in the National Register of Historic Places—open for tours in the summer and by special arrangement throughout the year. This tour includes a half-hour documentary about Reich that we produced; exhibits; Reich's inventions and scientific apparatus; his library and study; and personal memorabilia.

We also have a Museum Bookstore that carries the widest selection of Reich's publications anywhere in the world. And a Conference Building in what was originally Reich's "Student Laboratory." Annual summer conferences are held here on various aspects of Reich's work and their significance for current social, medical and scientific issues. And we have two rental cottages on Dodge Pond, where Reich and his family lived, which are now important sources of income for us.

Our property and facilities are also a venue for numerous social, educational and recreational activities *not* specific to Reich's work, but rather as expressions of our roots in the Rangeley and Maine communities.

For example, our Natural Science Program—now in its 17th year—brings people to our property on Sunday afternoons in July and August to learn in a practical, experiential way about our wildlife, our fields and forests and waterfront. Our Conference Building is the site of our Evenings of Music, educational and historical lectures, our Santa's Breakfast and Winter Carnival, and many other community events.

And for eight weeks every summer since 1989, we donate free-of-charge the larger of our two cottages to an Adoptive and Foster Family program. This has made it possible for dozens of families—who could not otherwise afford such a vacation—to spend a week in the Rangeley area with their own private dock on Dodge Pond.

We also give out three individual \$300 scholarships to Rangeley High School seniors going on to college: the Barbara Bruce Scholarship, the Russ Wilkinson Scholarship and the Wilhelm Reich Museum Scholarship. Now we know that this amount barely puts a dent in the overall price of higher education today. But it's our way of honoring, within *our* financial constraints, the achievements and aspirations of our young people in the community.

But when all is said and done, we are, in fact, a *rural* museum in Maine. And subject to the same challenges, tourism patterns, and economic indicators as the Rangeley Logging Museum and the Rangeley Lakes Historical Society.

But perhaps with one promising difference.

Every year, without exception, people from across the country and around the world travel to Rangeley specifically to visit Orgonon. And to effectively reach out to this potential market, fourteen months ago we launched our new website, which includes more content about Reich, about the Museum and about Rangeley.

Today when someone Google-Searches the words "Wilhelm Reich" on the Internet, *we* are the first result that comes up out of literally hundreds. And as of 4:30 this afternoon [February 1, 2006] our website visitor-counter over fourteen months showed 37,157 hits—an average of 85 hits per day.

Now obviously those numbers are significant to us in terms of Online Bookstore sales, future membership and financial support. And in terms of our plans for an International Conference on Reich which we've already announced for July 2007 at Saddleback Mountain. But I also believe those numbers may be relevant to many of us here because they represent *potential* future visitors to Orgonon and to Rangeley.

So our priority at the Museum is to make ourselves more attractive as a destination for this potential market, and to expand as best we can every visitor's experience at Orgonon into a broader experience out into the Rangeley community and our natural surroundings.

People who come to Rangeley, or are planning to come, specifically to visit us seldom have any idea what to do beyond the confines of Orgonon. So we make a point of finding out what their preferences might be in terms of recreation, dining, shopping, or entertainment. We always urge participants at our Summer Conferences to come a couple days early or stay a few days later. And we design our Conferences with ample free-time so people can enjoy what Rangeley has to offer. This is simply good business for us and good business for you.

Finally, on a personal note: One of my great pleasures is drawing upon *my* knowledge of Rangeley whenever I come in contact with people who are unfamiliar with this area. I've been coming here since the 1950s, I owned a camp here for many years, I've hiked all of the mountains in the area and canoed, explored and fished all of the waters from Little Kennebago and Little Boy Falls down to Umbagog, and everything in between. So I know what this area has to offer and I love to see people enjoy the Rangeley Lakes area as I have since I was a kid.

If you have any questions about anything that we do, our director Mary Higgins, our administrative assistant Mary Henderson, and I are always happy to help. Give us a call or better yet come on out and visit. And thank you to the Chamber for this opportunity.

*Kevin Hinchey
The Wilhelm Reich Infant Trust*