

Camp Wood “The Camp of Far Horizons”

By George T. Dawson, Elmdale, Kansas

In the summer of 1915, Lawrence K. Hall, Maple hill, David Page, Topeka, and A. A. Hyde of Wichita, were in Chase County, looking for a site for a YMCA camp for boys in the Flint Hills. As these men came over Osage Hill, near Elmdale, they met Howard Wood delivering mail on his motorcycle. Howard, having been at a YMCA camp near Maple hill, Kansas, the previous season, recognized Mr. Hall and a friendly visit resulted. In the course of the conversation the men told Howard what they were looking for. Howard told them his Grandfather had a tract of land which he thought would be an ideal location for a camp.

Stephen M. Wood, the grandfather, took these men to see the land and the three men were very well pleased with the location. The surrounding country was ideal for horseback riding and hiking, and the little stream could be dammed up and made into a beautiful lake. From this hilltop site the Cottonwood valley could be seen for miles. Mr. Stephen Wood donated the original forty acres of what is now know as Camp Wood, named in honor of Mr. And Mrs. Stephen Wood. Howard Wood was killed in line of duty, during World War One at Belleau Wood, France, in 1918.

Camp Wood “The Camp of Far Horizons” is located in the beautiful Flint Hills, one and one-half miles south of Elmdale, Kansas. Elmdale is situated on Highway 50, between Emporia and Florence.

Camp Wood comprises more than 350 acres of scenic land, suitable for horseback riding and permitting a wide range of camping activity on a decentralized basis.

Miss Carrie Wood passed away in February 1, 1960 and by her will added forty more acres to the site. For more than fifteen years she served as an active member of the board of directors of Camp Wood and then remained on as an honorary member up to the time of her death. Her immortality is not with God alone, but in the daily lives of those she leaves behind, and of the many young people whose lives have been touched and inspired through the camping program of Camp Wood.

The people of Chase County contributed \$3,500 to erect the first building on site. Today the camp has a total of 100 acres.

Camp Wood was dedicated June 4, 1916, and Honorable Arthur Capper, then Governor of Kansas, was the main speaker. The estimated attendance was 6900 persons together with 250 automobiles. The first camp opened May 30, 1916, and summer camps have been held each year since.

During 1917 the lake was completed and now carries the name of Lake Hall, in honor of Mr. Lawrence K. Hall, the first director of Camp Wood. In 1917 the officers were:

President Lem. T. Jones, Kansas City

Executive Secretary Harper Glezen, Topeka

Camp Director Walter G. Ruesch, Topeka

Chairman Ted B. Griest, Topeka

Treasurer George T. Dawson, Elmdale

Under the able leadership of Frank B. Parker of Topeka, and Forrest M. Rogers of Wellington, \$30,000 was raised for new improvements during 1944, 1945, and 1946. Hutch Hall, built around this time, was named for the first Negro leader at Camp Wood. The man's name was Hutcherson, and his picture hangs in Hutch Hall. Tinga Shelter House on the hill was named for a Chinese boy killed in the service. Twenty-five dollars was donated for it, only \$17.00 was used, the rest used in the library.

On June 16, 1946, an open house and service, was held, for the dedication of the new improvements at the camp. The Honorable Andrew F. Schoepel, Governor of Kansas, and L. K. Hall, first director of Camp Wood were the principal speakers. Camp Wood was operated by the West Central Area YMCA at Topeka until July 19, 1966 when it was leased by the YMCA of metropolitan Wichita, a corporation. The officers at that time were:

President George T. Dawson, Elmdale

Vice-President George Brown

Secretary Steadman Ball

Treasurer Clair K. Morris

Trustee George R. Smith

In 1965 a \$250,000 long-range improvement program was completed. The first structure on the site was a dining hall, built in 1916, the same year Camp Wood was organized. It was known simply as "the dining hall", but in reality the building housed the camp library, a combination chapel, meeting and game room, as well as the kitchen and dining room. Under the rafters of the sturdy building were the camp staff sleeping quarters. The first step in the long-range improvement project was the renovation of the old dining hall. Only after engineering studies were made to determine if the building was still structurally sound was the decision reached to remodel. Although minor interior changes had been made through the years, the remodeling job completed recently is the first face lifting the building has received (1965). Camp facilities include 23 cabins for campers and staff, a directors cabin, headquarters building, office, supply room and canteen, infirmary, large stone chapel, shower house (know as the castle) food storage building, maintenance building, and the resident caretakers home.

Recreation facilities include a well-stocked lake for fishing, boating and swimming, rifle and archery ranges, softball field, stable and 20 horses, outdoor tennis and volley ball courts and horseshoe pits.

The cabins and dining hall have all been sided with ranch type cedar boards and battings. Future plans include a swimming pool, raising the dam, enlarging the lake area, relocation of stable complex and new barn, and construction of new cabins.

Camp Wood serves weekend camping groups as well as regular YMCA campers. All are welcome regardless of color, religion or age. From the middle of April until the end of October, the camp is a beehive of activity.

The river bridge, below Camp Wood had gotten to be quite a problem to the truckers trying to deliver necessities to Camp Wood, and some refused to cross it as it had been condemned. The following is part of a letter written by George T. Dawson to the county commissioners on August 30, 1968:

"The undersigned, being a member of the YMCA Camp Wood committee, wishes to report the following findings: said camp has supervision 12 months out of the year and is active for seven months out of each

year to which approximately 4,000 people attend this camp each year. It has become very hazardous to use the old bridge across the Cottonwood River. Various trucks going to service Camp Wood have refused to cross the bridge. To name a few – F & E Wholesale, Emporia Foods, three soft drink trucks and one milk truck, the Fanestil Packing Co truck has notified said camp they will not cross this bridge and have not crossed it during the 1968 season. Various concrete and rock trucks, sand trucks, bulldozers and various other farm machinery are unable to cross in safety. I have also been advised that large buses full of boys and girls are crossing this old bridge at least 35 times each summer season and this risk should be stopped at once.”

The new bridge was built in 1970.

The camp is located near the Cottonwood River which affords water for excellent six hour trips to Cottonwood Falls.

Ted Passmore, T. F. McKee, and Ralph Lutt are some of the former custodians at the campsite. Walter Green is the present custodian.