



# Lake Louise Baptist Camp Reflections

E. Floyd Norton  
1968

## The Lake Louise Baptist Camp – E. Floyd Norton – 1968

The history of the Lake Louise Baptist Camp is not complete without an understanding of the history and purpose of the Lake Louise Christian Community. For many years Mr. Charles Horner of Eaton Rapids labored to create in northern Michigan one of the largest and most beautiful estates in America. The task of purchasing a territory six miles in length and from two to three miles in width containing all of Lake Louise; all or portions of three other small, unnamed lakes; and thousands of acres of forests and hills was a huge one. It meant literally hundreds of separate deals, and twenty years of legal actions and court procedures to clear the titles. The abstracts, deeds, and papers which resulted would fill several volumes. As a result, however, the estate has one of the best titles of any in Michigan, representing an investment of a hundred thousand dollars – not much, to be sure, measured by today's economy, but forty years ago it was a large sum.

In time Mr. Horner died and this great estate came into the hands of his two brothers, Edward and William. Urged on by their love for young people and desirous of dedicating Lake Louise to their everlasting service, in 1933 they presented the whole estate free and clear to Michigan Methodism. There were no strings tied to the gift. Those who have had the responsibility of organizing the project have ever kept in mind the love which these two brothers had for young people, and their dreams that Lake Louise might become a national Mecca for them.

In 1934 Lake Louise was accepted by the two Michigan Methodist conferences, and a committee appointed to incorporate and organize. The plan of the trustees was that a camp program for youth of all denominations and ages, and a cottage development for Christian men and women on a beautiful lake in an entirely Christian surrounding, be developed. The idea of the plan was summed up in these five points:

1. The program was to be distinctly Christian in every way, but non-sectarian.
2. Its cost to lease-holders and campers was to be so low that even the poorest might not be denied its rare privileges.
3. Both buildings and programs should be in keeping with the rugged and natural aspects of these vast and forested acres.
4. The theme of the whole movement was to be "Living with Christ out of doors."
5. The entire cost of the development should be met by the natural income of the estate and from donations. It should never be a charge on the churches.

In 1937 about 4,000 acres of back land were sold to the State of Michigan, leaving about 3,000 acres completely surrounding the lake. This insured us the protection and advantage of a vast 50,000 acres of state hardwood forest on three sides of the property. This makes it one of the most, if not *the* most, unique pieces of property in the State of Michigan.

As early as 1936 the Rev. D. B. Ansted, veteran pastor in Michigan, took some of his church women from Harbor Beach, where he was pastor, to a State Women's House party, and from there to Lake Louise using Methodist buildings on the southeast side of the lake. In 1938 or 1939 (we don't know which) the first Pioneer Boys camp was held on this present site of our Baptist Camp, and it was in that year – if it was 1939 – that we entered into definite negotiations for the

lease of this property of 23 acres. The camp was located just west of the present beach steps. The food was sheltered in a lean-to made with a few poles and canvas. They cooked and ate out of doors. Each camper or leader had to furnish shelter by the use of tents which they brought with them. No wonder they called it a pioneer camp! Sunset Bay cabin, the first to be built, was started that year, -- 31 years ago.

The year 1940 was a busy time at Lake Louise. The contract was signed for the building of Elwell Lodge, the donor being Mr. Frank Elwell of Flint. Mr. Ansted was asked, along with the contractor, to establish the location of this lodge. The contractor finished Sunrise and Dawn cabins that year. Mr. Ansted was asked to come to Lake Louise two or three times during the summer to inspect the construction so that it would meet specifications. A group came that summer from Mt. Morris and built Westwind cabin. Mr. Ansted supervised this building as the workers were not skilled in carpentry. Boys Scouts from Ypsilanti came for a camp that summer and 15 women from the Grand Traverse Association (now Lake Louise) for a house party. In September the foundations for Bush cabin were laid and the cabin built that fall, but it was never finished as intended as there was to have been a front porch on it. Later it was intended to be used as a home for missionaries during the summer, so a kitchen was started and the present closet was to have been a bathroom. When I took over the camp in 1953 I had it converted to a sleeping cabin only.

In 1942 a small cabin was built to house the cooks, constructed of native poplar. This later was converted into the Tompkins Health Center (the Medical Center) and that small part where the fireplace is located was this initial building. In the mid-1950s we added the rest of the dispensary, the screened porch, the bedrooms and bathrooms having been added to the original cabin in the mid-1940s. In the mid-1940s the Administration Building, now used as Staff Lodge, was built. When I took over the management in 1953 we converted this into a sleeping lodge for staff exclusively, and registered camps in the program center, which had been built in 1949 and 1950.

I do not have the exact dates when the other cabins were built, but let us go back to about 1945 when Hopevale was built, followed by Moonlight, Whippoorwill, Birch and Martin, all of which were built in about the same period. Martin was given by the family of Rev. Drury Martin, a member of the staff for many years. Birch by Mr. and Mrs. George Martin of Kalamazoo; Eagles Nest by the West Baptist Church of Bay City; Moonlight by the Women of Michigan; and Hopevale by Dr. and Mrs. Galloway of the Palo Baptist Church. I cannot recall the donor of Whippoorwill.

During the 16 years that I was Managing Director of the Lake Louise Baptist Camp, much building took place. First, we built the Director's Lodge in 1953, the material and labor being donated by the First Baptist Church in Niles. In 1954 the Store was given by the Witherridge family of Saginaw, and the section of the kitchen where the large sinks are was added during that year. The screened porch was also added to the Medical Center, and the South half of the dispensary was added to give more room and provide a refrigerator and cooking facilities. Cooks Cabin, by the way, was built in 1952, having been given by the E.D. Ponder family of Bay City.

The last cabin to be built was Lakeview, having been given by the Lakeview Baptist Church of Battle Creek. In 1954 a ceiling was put in the Staff lodge to make it more comfortable. It was

about 1959 that the porch on the lake side of the Program Center was enclosed as a part of the building, giving us a third more room. In 1963 the Lakeview Church of Battle Creek gave us \$5,000 to add 20 feet to the entire structure, giving us third of additional space. It was at that time that the Freeman Lodge, our Administration Building, was constructed--the men of Michigan having raised a sum of money to begin the project. I drew the plans for this building which have added much to the facility of the business of the camp. And this has given sleeping room for permanent staff boys, guests and program staff members, as well as a business office and an office for the Managing Director.

The wash rooms, originally, were government surplus buildings brought in from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and were very crude, without hot water or wash basins. We built a completely new girls' washroom in about 1956, and moved the old building up beside the Staff Lodge where it now serves as the woodhouse. We kept the original boys' washroom and added about a third to the building for showers. We added hot water of course, and two years ago in 1968, we put in new wash bowls. The dispensary in the Medical Center was also greatly improved in 1968.

The first electricity in the camp was furnished by a Montgomery Ward generator, furnishing lights in the kitchen and dining room. It was around 1949 or 1950 that this was abandoned in favor of service from REA which came through the woods. Now this generator is available to be used in emergencies when the power fails, which often happens during storms, or from trees falling on the lines.

The Prayer Chapel was built by Rev. and Mrs. Donald Grey of E. Lansing, Mr. Grey himself having done the carving on the walls. Mr. Grey also was the one who laid out the trails in the woods, with the help of many others.

Elwell Lodge was originally much smaller than at present and you can see where the addition was put by examining the building. The fireplace end, of course, was the original. A few interesting side-lights come to me as I speak: The large tongs which hang in Elwell Lodge were found on a "tote road", or logging trail, near the lake and west of our camp by a group of boys among whom was Rev. Ronald Miles, pastor at Shelton Heights in Flint. These tote roads were used to bring the logs on large wheels to the lake with horses during the logging days, where they were floated across the lake in summer, and on sleighs when the lake was frozen. West of our camp in about 20 feet of water is a load which broke through the ice. The horses were saved, but the load with chains attached is still on the bottom of the lake. This was told to me by a man in Lansing who used to cut my hair, who is now retired and living in Boyne City. A doctor from Manchester, who was at camp two summers, was a skindiver and found this load of logs. He also explored the lake in the deep spots between the sand bar and the road and saw trout as long as about 40 inches.

Near the campfire pit used to be a hand pump. We took this out in about 1954 when we installed new drinking fountains. In 1953 there were still three tent floors made of wood, but that summer we broke them up for the fireplaces. Since then no tents have been used as we have had adequate room for all campers to sleep. In the fall of 1952 I attended the mens' conference and had to sleep in the craft room. With me was a layman from the Owosso church where I was pastor, and

a member of the Pennsylvania Avenue, church in Lansing, a barber by trade by the name of Homer Brown. Homer went to sleep quickly and snored so loudly that he was heard all the way to the boys' washroom. I had a tape recorder with me so I recorded 15 minutes of this snoring. The men went into hysterics laughing at this when it was played at breakfast the next morning, and it was used in dozens of churches during the next year. It was this experience at the men's conference, and my reaction to the camp with our Christian Education State Committee, that caused the officers of the Convention to turn to me when they needed a Director of Christian Education in 1953. At the time I was first vice President of the Convention.

Having served for more than half of the years our Convention has possessed the Lake Louise Property, as Managing Director, it naturally has a large place in my heart. Mrs. Norton has not spent at many weeks here as I have, but nearly. I have put in about 160 camping weeks here, which in terms of years, would be over three years. There is a possibility that the Scoville Presbyterian Church of Detroit will be released from their lease. If so, the Lake Louise Christian community will give us the first opportunity for the purchase of the lease. This would make an excellent location for a trailer camp for family camping all summer.

(This document was found at Lake Louise in the summer of 2004. It was reprinted in October 2004 by ABC-MI.)