

REFLECTIONS OF CAMP CHRISTY

BY LARRY OYER

The American Baptist Convention acquired 100 acres of land from the Christy family in 1929. My father Rev. Amos Oyer was pastoring ABC churches in Western Kansas in those years. He took our family of my sister Juanita, my mother Marie Oyer and myself in our Model A Ford to the first gathering of brave souls who camped on the grounds in tents. There were no buildings on the grounds. I remember there was a large three burner kerosene stove placed in the drive area beside the present chapel. A large kettle of stew was prepared there for the meals. Our tent was close to the creek just south of the present chapel.

It was not long before men from churches came to construct the first dining hall which is now called the Craft building.

Boys and girls camps were organized which usually numbered 100 boys and about 20 pastors and laymen to supervise as cabin leaders.

I recall two bothers named Spec from the Garden City Baptist church who were employed to work in the kitchen and grounds. There were three tubs placed at the west wall of the dining area. One contained very hot water where the Spec brothers washed all the dishes and silverware. The other tubs were for rinsing. Each camper passed by the tubs, picked up the items they used in eating and dried them with large towels.

The dining hall had a room addition on the south side which was the cooks quarters. Two or three cooks lived there and prepared all the food for the campers.

The dining hall was constructed along a sharp bend in the Ladder Creek which was named that because of its winding route through the valley of the grounds. The dining hall was flooded several times so it was decided to build cabins called "Huts" farther up the hill to the east side of the grounds so flooding was not a problem, however, the creek did cut through making its own shortcut which

called for a bridge to cross the "new" channel. At one time the creek had enough water to make fishing enjoyable by the campers.

Several churches contributed money for materials for cabins to be constructed in a line along the bank of the creek. Volunteers from churches came and built 10 cabins.

Girl camps and other conferences were scheduled to meet at Christy through the summer months. The camp was also rented out to other church groups not just ABC churches. My father, Rev. Amos and my mother, Marie, served as Camp Directors in the ensuing years while they pastored in Jetmore, Ness City, Gem, Greensburg, and North Ottawa Kansas.

For several years a man named Rev. J. E. Dollar served as the Western area missionary. He often directed the boys camps. He believed that boys needed to be taught discipline. He followed a schedule resembling army protocol. A bugle was sounded at about seven each morning and we campers had to pile out of our bunks, get our pants, shirts, shoes and socks on in five minutes, then line up in front of the cabins for inspection where Rev. Dollar would check us all over to see if we were fully clothed. Each cabin held 8 boys and one counselor. Any boy found not fully dressed had to be punished. The next bugle blew and we had five minutes to go to the back of the cabin where we had placed a bucket of water and wash pans. We had to brush out teeth, comb our hair, wash our face and hands, clean our finger nails, then line up again for another inspection. If we did not pass the inspection we were pulled out of line and had to pass between two lines of campers who could swat us in the rear as we ran between the lines. If any boy was charged four times in the two week camp he had to pass through the belt line. I remember having to go through the paddle line once but I never had to do the belt line. Mothers today would not allow this kind of treatment but it was all in fun and no one was ever really hurt. I would like to hear from anyone who attended camp in those years. We then had another five minutes to make our beds, arrange our belongings, clean up the cabin including the grounds around it and then get to the flag pole for the morning flag salute and devotions. We then went to breakfast while Rev. Dollar inspected our cabin. He placed a one

by four board about two feet long beside the door of our cabin and if our cabin passed inspection he would paint a white strip on that board. If we were guilty of small infractions he would paint a red strip on the board. If we failed badly he painted a black strip on the board. The cabin boys that had the best record throughout the two weeks got a Water Mellon feast at camp ending. The tradition later expanded to a feast for the whole camp thankfully .

I recall one year when all the finished cabins were full of boys and they set up some tents along the creek bank. I was in one of the tents and a strong wind blew the tent down on us in the night. The building later called the Administration was just being finished and the ground floor room on the east side was equipped with bunks. I was one who got to move in the room. The men had made wood framed bunks but used what we called "HOG" wire for the bottom of the bunks. When we got up in the morning our backs would be marked in squares. The men went to Scott City and brought back some large cardboard they got from a furniture store that was disposing of mattress covers. They placed these in our bunks and we slept much better.

I hope to provide more reflections if I am allowed to do so. I would welcome remembrances from any folks who love Christy like I do and would send their stories to me at Larry Oyer (Lawrence in those days) at 432 E. Third Newton, Kansas 67114 or . Thank you for your time.