

The Camps of Lake Beulah By Jean Humphrey

The residents of Lake Beulah are particularly fortunate because their lake is blessed with large areas of open space owned by six camps which encircle the lake. Beginning at the source of the lake west of Springer's Bridge, the Milwaukee Area Girls Scout Council owns Swan (formerly Mud) Lake and its surrounding woods and marshes. The other end of Upper Beulah is dominated by the open spaces of Camp Charles Allis and the Divine Word Residence (once also the location of Camp Richards). Adjacent to Divine Word, the marshes connect Beulah to Army Lake, location of Salvation Army's summer camp, and adjacent to that is Camp Edwards, the rural outpost of the Elgin, Illinois YMCA. Finally, in one corner of the Lower Lake, the Bnai Brith Beber provides a pleasant break in the shoreline.

Camp Charles Allis – Beulah Heights Road



Camp Charles Allis came to Lake Beulah in 1907, when the Wisconsin University Settlement in Milwaukee rented land to give their neighborhood customers an opportunity for a summer outing in the country. The idea behind the settlement movement, then at its peak of activity, was that privileged young people would "settle" in the poorer sections of the city, using their education to help the neighborhood people to learn citizenship, useful trades, and culture. Wisconsin alumni and faculty established a settlement at Milwaukee in 1902, and clubs were formed by various groups of young men and women.



Each club was allotted a week at the camping place, and some arranged to camp together.



The initial experiment was so successful that one of the Settlement's principal philanthropists, Mrs. Margaret Allis (wife of Edward P. Allis, a Milwaukee foundry owner) purchased the first twenty acres for the Settlement. This portion contained the large tamarack swamp, the current boating area, and the hill above. Her son, Charles Allis (founder of Allis Chalmers), then persuaded Milwaukee architect A.C. Eschweiler to design a clubhouse, for which Allis furnished the funds.



By the 1908 season, the camp had a permanent structure with dormitories, a kitchen, dining and recreation halls, and an office. The Settlement's Warden, Herbert H. Jacobs, moved his family to the camp for the summer, leaving assistants in charge of the Milwaukee operation.



The campers were so pleased with their summer space that they threw themselves into fund- raising activities to improve the facility. Another five acres of lakefront were purchased (from the boating area to the next property) and more buildings erected.



Used lumber was found, some was donated, and the campers supplied the labor for a boathouse, a washhouse, a cabin for Mrs. Jacobs and her children, a changing house at the swimming area, a "bungalow" with six small rooms for mothers with very young children, and a "winter house" with insulated walls, a stove, and an indoor pump. During this time, entrepreneurs attempted to develop the land behind the camp by digging a channel from the lake and creating a large inland island. This channel cut off the road access to the camp. The camp solved its problem by acquiring a launch to transport campers from McGraw's landing - next to the present Yacht Club. The resulting lawsuit went on for years, and was settled when the developers ceded land between the road and the channel to the camp. The campers raised the funds to purchase more of these lots, bringing the camp to its present size of about 35 acres.



In 1929, Mrs. Jacobs died, Mr. Jacobs retired, and the Settlement was disbanded. The Settlement House in Milwaukee was given to the Milwaukee School Board for use as a social center, which function it served until the early 1970s. As a tribute to their efforts and devotion, the camp was given to the Settlement Clubs, to be owned and managed by a Club and Camp Council consisting of delegates from the various clubs. A Chief executive was appointed (in charge of summer finances, works projects, and discipline), as was a hostess (in charge of food service, shopping, daily job assignments, laundry, and sleeping rooms).



The Clubs disbanded over the years, and in the 1950's a membership corporation was formed which now owns the camp and its facilities. Membership is by invitation only, and a probation period reveals whether potential members are suited to the Camp Charles Allis lifestyle and cooperative spirit. Most of the current members are third generation descendants of the original campers, including a great-grandson of H.H. Jacobs. The Corporation Board appoints leaders for the major projects such as cleaning, provisions, maintenance, and the social schedule; executive and hostess duties are rotated; tradition dictates sleeping arrangements (in the bungalow or in dorms designated by sex and age) and cooperation in the daily chores of meal preparation and cleaning. Individual members devote themselves to such projects as improving and maintaining the playground, furniture, nature trails, gardens, and other facilities. There are no employees, as members share and rotate the necessary tasks. The annual dues cover the taxes and maintenance, while the "grub" account (room and board) covers the costs of communal meals and laundry. On the waterfront, the Camp provides several row boats and two main piers for use by its members. The remainder of the boats are individually owned, as are their service piers. Space assignments are made by tradition and mutual agreement, as are winter storage and trailer parking.

The tamarack swamp and the large managed forest at Camp Allis are major sources of water filtering and of area for the breeding of marine and land wildlife. With the exception of hiking trails, this land is kept in a natural state - a major Lake Beulah asset.



Camp Alice Chester – Milwaukee Area Girl Scout Council

The Milwaukee Area Girl Scout Council acquired their original campsite of 90 acres on Booth Lake in 1924. On that site are located the large main lodge and service buildings and a series of sleeping cabins. By the 1950's, they were ready to expand their holdings, and began to purchase parcels on the opposite side of Town Line Road and along St. Peter's Road. Some readers may recall that there was once a farm on the corner of Stringer's Bridge and St. Peter's Roads. As this property was developed, the land on the south side of St. Peter's Road was sold. The remaining land, bordered by Town Line, St. Peter's, and Stringer's Bridge Roads, and by the woods surrounding the northern shore of Swan Lake, consists of over 200 acres of natural forest, marshes, and the lake, and includes an outstanding kettle close to Town Line Road. A bit farther along the road is a low section bridging the marsh; the source of Lake Beulah is to the west of these wetlands at Pickeral Lake.

The first use made of this property was to establish a day camp on an oak knoll on the northeast shore of Swan Lake. This development can be seen on the geodetic survey map. This day camp, called Melody Woods, operated until 1979, when it was abandoned. Two of the decaying three-sided shelters have recently been taken over by nesting turkey vultures. Near the southwest shore of the lake is a sports field, where the scouts in residence can engage in various team sports. On the north shore of the lake is a screened sleeping house, furnished with a hand pump and a latrine. Elsewhere, a primitive camp site, also with hand pump and latrine, is intended for tent camping. Scouts hike to these sites from the main camp. Presently, it is not possible to hike around the lake because beavers have built a dam in one of the feeder channels and caused an overflow on the path.

Because the camp's well developed waterfront on Booth Lake serves the boating and swimming needs of Camp Alice Chester, Swan Lake is not used for water recreation. It is used for the study of pond life, plants, and animals in the vicinity. Hiking trails and a service road (often used by bicycles) wind through pine and deciduous

woods, and connect the sports field and the camping areas. Winter activities on the site, under a program titled "Frosty Fun" include cross-country skiing and ice fishing on Swan Lake.

Camp Alice Chester hosts between 1100 and 1200 scouts each year. Long range planning for the site is currently in process, involving market studies and research. Potential development plans include trail improvements and marsh boardwalks. We are fortunate to have these neighbors protecting one of the two sources of our lake.

Camp Edwards

Camp Edwards contains 132 acres. To the left (as you face the camp from the lake) it is bordered by privately owned land; to the right, it shares the marshland with Divine Word Residence and the Salvation Army Camp on Army Lake. The property is a long rectangle, over a mile from the road to the lake, with the short sides on the lake and on Army Lake Road. When entering the access road, the visitor will pass two staff residences and a reforestation project. A small reconstructed prairie is tucked into a corner here. Next, the playing fields are located behind the evergreens along the road. A side road leads to two visitor residences, each containing of 32-34 sleeping spaces, bathrooms, meeting rooms, and a kitchenette. Groups using these facilities can be virtually self-contained, or visit the main lodge or the waterfront for meals, large group events, or other activities. Between this short road and the visitor parking lot, the new outdoor amphitheater is ready for entertainments or presenters.

The space from the visitor parking lot to the lake contains the original 50 acre campsite. Two additions have been made - one along the lake and the second a large parcel, originally farm land, from the parking lot to the road. The Elgin, Illinois YMCA was founded in 1866 by Elgin businessmen seeking to offer the "Y"s programs to their city. By the turn of the century, they were beginning to discuss the desirability of obtaining a summer camp. Given the roads and vehicles of the time, they centered their search on the lakes of southern Wisconsin; a five hour drive was the most, they felt, that could be reasonably handled. This site on Lake Beulah was one of the last they visited; they were easily able to agree that it was ideal for their program. Elgin factory owner A. D. Edwards made the first, substantial contribution to the purchase fund, and the needed amount was soon raised. The first director, E. E. Mickelwright, worked with the planning committee on the site and facilities plan. Construction took place in 1928, and in June of 1929, the camp was opened. Excellent archives preserve these events, including movies of the supporting businessmen, in their suits, mixing concrete and handling timbers.

To honor the land's original residents, who were displaced after the Black Hawk War of 1832, the cabins are named for famous Native American leaders: Dekorah, Shabonna, Black Hawk, Oshkosh, Pontiac, and Tecumseh from the midwest and the balance from other parts of the country. Older residents may remember when the campers took to their canvas canoes for day trips; these brightly painted craft were also named for Native Americans. The educational program combines Native American crafts and lore with scientific study of the plants, animals, and geology of the area.

All the original buildings are still in use. The main lodge, named for Mickelwright, houses business offices, cooking, dining, and program activity areas on the main floor. There are study and activity rooms on the lower level and some sleeping quarters in a loft above the offices. An outstanding feature in the main lodge is a totem pole, originally carved in 1929 by Chief Waukon of the Winnebago Tribe and Arthur Wild, the camp's first program director. In subsequent years, carvings were added to memorialize important events at the camp, including a large blank space to show that the camp was closed from 1942-46 because of World War II.. In the woods are 13 cabins, each of which serves 10 campers and two counselors. A modern sanitary facility is centrally located, and there are also activity shelters and a crafts cabin. On the hill to the left of the lodge (looking from the lake) is the chapel, recently enlarged from 75 seats to the camp's current capacity of 250; this is an outdoor space, surrounded by tall oaks and evergreens, with a wonderful view of Lake Beulah. At the waterfront, swimming and boating via canoe, kayak, or sailboat can be seen from the lake. In the shared marsh, a boardwalk leads to study areas on two small hummocks, called Edwards Island and Tamarack Island.

Camp Edwards is probably the busiest camp on the lake. The summer program (co-ed since 1973) for young people from the Elgin area and elsewhere hosts a total of 1000 campers from mid-June to mid-August. From September through May, various school groups (a total of about 6000 campers) come for sessions in environmental education. A recent addition, the "maple syrup program," takes students out to identify trees, tap trees, collect sap, and see how it is boiled down in the evaporator. Finally, they get to taste the delicious confection. Outdoor conferences, serving church groups, folk music "Stringalongs," and business retreats host another 4500 people. Finally, family camping is available on holiday weekends; it attracts about 500 campers.

The recent constructions (amphitheater and chapel) completed the site plan developed in 1970. Planning for the next phase of Camp Edwards' development is currently underway. This plan will be unveiled in 2003; it is expected to guide the directors for the next 25 years. Although many changes have taken place over the years, the Camp's basic philosophy has not. Camp Edwards seeks to build strong character on the basis of understanding the self, others, and the outdoors so that individuals are better able to make ethical and informed choices concerning each. Please wave "hello" to say thanks to this good neighbor as you pass by in your boat or vehicle.

Divine Word Residence (Seminary Road)

The Society of the Divine Word was founded in 1875 in Holland by a German Catholic, Arnold Jansen, who was not permitted to foster his missionary activities in Germany. Engaged primarily in world-wide missions (especially in Africa and the far east) it is the fifth largest order of its kind, and encourages its members to maximize their abilities to serve the Society and the Church. The Society came to Lake Beulah at the beginning of the century, using two cottages across from the present site as a Novitiate for the early training of priests. The present site was acquired in 1925, and now comprises over 200 acres. The large marsh along the channel linking the upper and lower lakes provides important breeding areas for fish and waterfowl; the open fields along Peterson Road are rented to local farmers; the woodlands and shore areas help to filter the waters that feed the lake and preserve some geological "kettles."

The Novitiate, which provided two years of intense and spiritual training, occupied school buildings on the hill from 1926 through 1937. In that year, the buildings were converted to use as a minor high school for future seminarians. For much of this same period, from 1949 through 1986, the Society used the residences for a summer camp, Camp Richards, which helped raise money for the support of the school. The large lakeshore boathouse and assembly hall was constructed to serve the Camp, providing storage and recreational space. Financial pressures caused the school to be closed in 1991. The classrooms, gym, and other buildings were demolished in 1993-94, leaving large open spaces surrounding the former faculty residence, which also houses the chapel and offices. Service and maintenance buildings also survive on the site.

The Residence serves as a retirement home for Society Fathers and Brothers returning from their years of service in foreign missions. Their well-maintained home is dedicated to a Chinese leader of the Society; a grotto built into the hillside offers residents a spot for a contemplative getaway. Brother Bernard, who has been at this site for over 30 years, is the Rector at Divine Word.

B'nai Brith Beber Camp

Tucked away in a corner of the lake formed by Jesuit Island and Beulah Beach is another camp. Long term residents may remember it as "Burr Oaks." What they may not know is that it was established in the 1920s as an exclusive girl's summer camp emphasizing equestrian skills. Wealthy girls from New York came by train with their horses and the camp staff for several weeks of summer camp with riding training. In the winter of 1976-77, the campsite was sold to B'nai B'rith International, an organization which exists as a service group for Jewish people. Its projects include senior housing, women's groups, synagogue support, and youth organizations. This site, with about 300 feet of lake frontage and 28 acres of land, serves as a summer camp for Jewish youths, ages 8-17, from throughout the United States and abroad.

The original site, purchased through the generosity of a group of Chicago philanthropists led by Ted Perleman, included two undeveloped farms on the opposite side of Highway J. It was thought that this area might be developed to serve as a retreat for the Jewish population of Chicago, and as a training facility for the Counselor Leadership Training Corps. This program, a project of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, trains 16-17 year olds to lead groups of children and youths in their own communities. These young people are in residence for three two-week sessions each summer.

On the lakefront campsite, a full camping program is offered in two four-week sessions, running from early June until mid-August. In recent years, a total of 275 campers plus a staff of 110 have been in residence. The atmosphere is geared to a well-rounded camp within a Jewish experience. Arts and crafts focus on the Jewish

heritage; dining is Kosher. Weekenders will not observe much lakefront activity, as the Saturday Sabbath is observed, and (with concern for camper safety) Sunday activities are organized to avoid the very busy lakefront. A full range of waterfront activities and sports takes place during the week. Sports, computers, gardening, cooking, theater, and even classes in film making are offered. The summer staff is augmented by guest teachers on a wide variety of subjects. These guests come for a few days and stay at a local motel. The camp has a doctor and four nurses in residence at all times.

Across Highway J, about a quarter mile from the road, is the Perleman Leadership Center. The campus consists of an outdoor swimming pool and several buildings: staff housing, a screened dance hall, a gymnasium, dining and dorm buildings, classroom and lounge buildings, Library, faculty lounge, chapel, and apartments for the permanent staff. When the summer leadership training sessions end, this campus is leased by the Nature's Classroom Institute. This organization holds classes on several sites in the midwest. A school district will plan a one- week session for nature and science study at Nature's Classroom. At this site, 48 schools in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan sent students in 2000-01. The staff of eight teachers offers a full curriculum, with emphasis on science, nature, and the environment. Each group is accompanied by teaching chaperones. Students utilize every part of this nearly 360 acre outdoor classroom. Nature trails, organic gardens, and resident wildlife all enter the curriculum. On weekends, the facility is available on lease to other groups for short study intensives.

On the lakefront site, the current goal is to repair, restore, and refurbish all of the camp facilities. The lakefront gazebo on the island, lost in a storm, has been replaced. Buildings are being repainted in a consistent color scheme. (Look through the bare trees as you drive by in winter.) Inland, continuing maintenance aims at woodland and prairie restoration. Nuisance plants (such as certain trees, vines, and weeds) are removed; the steel fenceposts and barb wire left over from farming days are gradually found and disposed of; deer stands (a menace to students using the woods) must be found and dismantled. The Institute also cooperates with the local snowmobile club to maintain trails through the campus.

Long range plans for the campus are also in place. Soon, a Montessori school will occupy the lounge, serving the bright toddlers of East Troy and Mukwonago. A four year residence academy may appear in several years. Programs are being planned in cooperation with the Michael Fields Institute of East Troy for their agricultural education program, especially in organic gardening. Teacher workshops in agricultural, environmental, and natural science studies will be offered.

The 380 plus acres of B'nai B'rith back up to the 1000 acres owned by Rainbow Springs, and are close to the 375 acres occupied by the Lakewood Farms on Highway J. These three excellent neighbors of Beulah's northwest shores are invaluable keepers of open space around our lake and thus help maintain the purity of our waters.

*Historical images courtesy of:
Club Life Anniversary Edition 1902-1928.
Wisconsin University Settlement: Milwaukee, 1928.*