

Our First Boy Scout Camp

by Jim Morriss

Nearly everyone is aware of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America. It is difficult to imagine an organization that has served our county better for the last century. Anyone who now has, or ever has had, a connection to the Scouts should be justifiably proud.

A hundred years ago the establishment of the BSA was met with near universal approval in the nation's towns and cities. The growth of the scouting movement was truly staggering. However, areas like south Denton County did not have enough boys living closely enough together to support a troop. Even so, our area has always been supportive of the ideals of Scouting and one of the oldest Boy Scout Camps in what is now called the Longhorn Council was once located right here. However, very few early Scouts from our area are still around who remember the camp that was located between Hickory Creek and the town of Bartonville.

In the city of Denton, the first known scout activity was reported in March of 1913. That was just three years after the formal start of the Boy Scouts of America. As interest in the movement grew, more troops were organized. Soon scout leaders were seeking places where weekend hikes and longer campouts could be staged. One of the many activities that found immediate acceptance was the annual summer encampment. This coordinated jamboree of all of the city's Boy Scouts was an enjoyable event and was helpful in recruiting even more youngsters into scouting.

While in camp the boys were required to work on advancement in the ranks of scouting with the ultimate goal of becoming an Eagle Scout. High moral standards and self reliance were important traits that leaders tried to instill into the boys. A heavy emphasis was placed on development of useful skills such as cooking, personal finance and physical fitness. To the early scout leaders there was probably nothing more important than their belief that all boy scouts should know how to swim. Our area had triple digit summers as well as several

swimming holes. It was inevitable that youngsters would find places to cool off and each summer drownings were not uncommon. Kids, especially boys, needed to learn how to swim! It was therefore essential that wherever the Denton BSA Council decided to hold its annual encampment, there would be a suitable place to swim.

The summer camp in August of 1916 was on the farm of William and Sarah Laney where a small lake had been formed by damming a creek. The following year the scouts had their campout on the banks of Elm Creek at a spot that is now under Lake Lewisville. As more boys were becoming scouts, it became more difficult to locate suitable sites for summer camp outs. By 1922 a choice was made to use the facilities at Club Lake which was a popular business establishment that offered picnic and swimming facilities for a small admission charge. It was a very successful two-week camp attended by 58 boys. Each night various business leaders and ministers came from Denton to deliver messages of encouragement to the boys. Many of the men were becoming convinced that the scouts needed a campground dedicated exclusively to the boy scouts.

On the evening of August 17, 1922, a banquet was held at the First Methodist Church to honor the boy scouts of Denton. Fifty-five merit badges were awarded and several speakers addressed the attendees about the need of a permanent scout camp. A fund drive was started with an announced goal of collecting at least \$1,500, which in 1922 was a considerable sum. Before the meeting was adjourned, over \$750 was pledged. Additionally a committee was formed to select the best possible site for a camp. According to J.O. Bell, the chairman of the selection committee, the following features would be needed:

1. plenty of shade
2. a large level space for athletics
3. hills for games and signaling
4. a stream or swimming lake
5. a well or spring for drinking water
6. within ten miles of the city
7. available at a reasonable price

By the spring of 1923, the committee had investigated 15 different proposals without success.

About ten years previous to the banquet, Dr. Emanuel Fritz, a retired Denton dentist, purchased a 25 acre tract of wooded land that was about six miles due south of Denton. It was thought that this area might be a suitable place to drill an oil well. Dr. Fritz contracted with Tippet & Darnall Co. to try to find oil under his land. Early in 1915 a derrick was assembled on the site and drilling was started. In March the well was down to a depth of 650 feet when a stream of fresh water gushed up. Enough water was pouring out that it made a big mess and hindered continued drilling. After waiting several weeks for the flow of water to subside, the drilling crew channeled the water away from the site so it could be drained into Hickory Creek. Drilling was restarted but in August of 1915 the drill pipe and tool bit were lost into the hole. Special equipment was ordered to retrieve the tool and pipe but eventually the effort was stopped and the well site was abandoned. It was evidently unusual for this type of outflow to last very long but on this site water continued to flow for several years.

The son of Dr. Fritz sold the land, which was now not suitable for farming, to a Denton man named Ed Council. Mr. Council must have been aware of the search that was being conducted by the Denton BSA Committee. He showed the land to Mr. Bell and his team and they agreed that this was a good place for a Boy Scout camp. So on July 13, 1923 a deal was reached and the Boy Scouts of Denton bought the land on the condition that the seller would first build a dam to create a two acre lake.

Boy Scout troops immediately started to use the new site. It was a two hour hike to the secluded spot in the woods on the Bartonville Road. The still steady outflow of water started filling the lake and the boys were put to work helping to clear sites for tents. As the boys settled into camp life, adult leaders constructed a combined kitchen and dining room. *(It should be noted that one of these leaders was Roger Ramey, a former scout who would go on to become a famous WWII hero and Air Force General)*

The summer encampment started on Friday, August 24, 1923. It concluded two weeks later on September 7. A total of 57 boys attended. By all accounts the boys and the city leaders, who came often for evening visits, thoroughly enjoyed the two-week outing. While in camp, there were 42 merit badges earned and 17 promotions in rank, including three new Eagle Scouts. A special ceremony marked the closing of the summer camp which was attended by many of the city's leaders.

Throughout the fall of 1923 the Boy Scouts made good use of their new camp ground with many weekend campouts. It was officially named "Camp Suffling" in honor of Rupert Suffling, one of the early Denton Boy Scout leaders, but the camp was normally just called "Flowing Well." On December 28 the council held a special bon-fire and weenie roast there. More than 120 boys and an unknown number of adults participated in the huge city wide car pool that transported the attendees to the event.

Three events occurred toward the end of 1923 that had a very large effect on the new Boy Scout Camp. First, sometime during the fall, the dam washed out and the captured water escaped. Next there was a noticeable drop in the outflow of water from the old well head. Furthermore there was a reorganization of the BSA and the Denton Council was merged with Montague, Cook and Wise Counties.

An investigation into the failure of the dam revealed that it was poorly made and never could have worked without a suitable bypass or spillway to divert water after the lake was filled. Furthermore much more material had to be moved to make a dam sturdy enough to last. Plans were made and bids were requested to fix the dam, however no suitable contractor could be found to restore the lake.

Meanwhile the new "Mo-Co-Wi-De" Council established its headquarters in Gainesville and plans were started for the 300 or more boys expected to attend the 1924 summer camp. The new Scout Commissioner, James I. Kidd gave strong consideration to the new camp ground but there was no way to get the lake rebuilt by summer. A swimming program was essential.

He decided to hold the camp at Lunn's Lake, a commercial resort which was located northeast of Denton on Elm Creek. It was another huge success and the scouts returned to the same spot for the summer camp in 1925.

Even without a swimming lake, the Flowing Well Campground continued to be a popular destination for Denton campers. A few years ago Dr. Charles Saunders, another retired Denton Dentist, fondly recalled many adventures in the camp. He joined Troop 4 in 1927. Dr. Saunders, who was an Eagle Scout, remembered that the building that had once been a kitchen and dining room was used as a

bunk house. He said that the camp was mostly wooded but there were eroded gullies from the discharge of the well and the lake bed. His and the other Denton troops found it a wonderful place for boys to go on snipe hunts, play capture the flag, and work on merit badges.

Plans were considered to build a cement tank or pool but this would require a filter system and electric pumps. The cost of getting electrical service this far from the city was apparently prohibitive so on December 29, 1934 the camp was sold. I believe that the trustees used the money for the purchase of another camp called Hills and Hollows.

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