

A Brief History of Camp Conestoga

Where did the Camp Conestoga name come from? The name Conestoga comes first in 1699 from an Indian tribe (Susquehannock tribe along the Susquehanna River) in south central Pennsylvania. Later, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the Conestoga covered wagon was built and named after the Indian tribe. A camp naming contest was held, and Conestoga was chosen in as the camp name in 1946.

In the 1940's, the need for Camp Conestoga arose after the Boy Scout camp, that had allowed Girl Scouts to use it, ran out of space due to the growth of both organizations. In August of 1945, the first parcel of land, 132 acres, was purchased and funded by the Kiwanis Club, and by cookie sales. In 1951, the original, formal dining hall named after long time Girl Scout leader and volunteer, Bea Conrad, was built.

Between 1967 and 1968, the second and third parcels of land were purchased for a total of 340 acres of re-claimed grazing ground, small farms and timber. In 1969, the Wamphler Dining Hall was constructed and named after Jack and Fran Wamphler, the founders of the Maintenance Committee that helped with council-wide camp infrastructure duties from 1959 until the 1990's.

In 1970, construction of the 14 acre Flint Lake began, which was first used for activities three years later. Also in 1970, a capital campaign was completed which added several new buildings such as, the pool/shower house, Prairie's Edge Unit House, Tomahawk Pass Unit House, Outpost Unit House, Indian Ridge Lodge, Swift Boat House, Infirmary, maintenance building and site manager's residence.

In 1990, the shower house was rebuilt by contractors/staff/volunteers. In 1998, Bea Conrad was condemned and torn down, leaving only the cement pad and fireplace. The horse corral was built in the south west end of camp, which added a road access, a well, power supply, an outdoor arena, one loafing shed for horses, a hitching rail area, feed stalls, a tack house and a trail system. Horses arrived from Camp Piper Hills in March.

Resident camp was closed for the beginning of the reconstruction of current facilities in 2001. Between 2001 and 2002, the filtrations system was reconstructed and updated to new automated chemical systems. The camp also added three bathroom/storm shelters to replace latrines in Outpost, Tomahawk Pass and Prairies Edge. Bea Conrad Pavilion with bathrooms was built over the existing cement pad and fireplace. Sixteen new cabins were built to replace old tent platforms. The kitchen and back rooms of Wamphler Dinning Hall were gutted and rebuilt with all new kitchen equipment. The camp office was moved to one of the back rooms. The trading post was moved from the parking lot up to the back porch of Wamphler Dinning Hall. The infirmary was gutted and remodeled to be used as a lodge for weekend camping as well to serve as the infirmary for resident camp. Site manager's residence was remodeled and added onto to accommodate a family with children.

Also in 2002, Donahogaweh returned to camp in a new area as a tipi unit from tipis from Camp Shabonee, located in a new prairie between Tomahawk Pass and Outpost. In 2003, the zip line and low ropes challenge course were rebuilt. Three new loafing sheds were built to accommodate the horses during bad weather. A new unit was added by Flint Lake called North Star Valley in appreciation of past camp director North Star (Brenda Silkman). The dock was moved to the current water front area. The lake is under a new maintenance plan directed by local DNR volunteers to help make the lake more usable for basic canoeing and fishing.

A butterfly garden was established between the dinning hall and swimming pool by a local troop in 2004. In 2005, the pool was resurfaced by Mid American Pool Innovations with a 25 year warranty. The boat house was rebuilt at the north end of the lake by the dam. The Swift Boat House was remodeled into the Swift Arts and Crafts Center and North Star Unit house.

In 2006 two new latrines were built, one replacing the old one in Tinder Trails, and a new one at Donahogaweh. The infirmary was moved to Wamphler Dinning Hall. The fencing of new paddocks and another outdoor arena was completed to accommodate the new Equestrian Driving Program. The entire camp went high speed capable for email, and new computers were installed with a server at site manager's house to put us online with Rock Island and Cedar Rapids office, and the Store RMS system.

In 2007, a Sundial Garden was constructed in Memory of Paula Egolf. In 2008, the donated 30' by 54' hay barn was reconstructed at the Horse Corral, which has hay storage and a feed room. They can be used for equine maintenance and ground handling skills for the program during bad weather. An 18' x 36' program building was attached for bad weather equestrian program/arts and crafts classroom.