

History of *Camp Geiger*

By the early 1900's, the Scouting Movement began to grow rapidly across the United States. Troops in St. Joseph were organized as early as May, 1912, with the chartering of Troop 1 at the YMCA. There was no official Scout Council at that time, nor was there an official summer camp.

By July of 1916, several troops had organized, and a group of the city's business and professional men met at the Chamber of Commerce to organize the St. Joseph Council, Boy Scouts of America. At that time, no paid Scout Executive was employed. Summer camps were held at various locations, including Bean Lake and Garrettsburg, for several years following.

As summer camping became a mainstay of the new program, the need for a permanent camping location grew. In 1918, a group of Scouting organizers located a high ridge of wooded property, or "hog back," as it was called, near Agency, Missouri. Excitement grew as they realized the thirty acre tract would make an excellent permanent summer camp.

“The land was owned by a local farmer, W. E. Brinton. The owner was at first hesitant, as he had ‘dealt with city boys’, and felt justified in suspecting and mistrusting them. Experience had shown him they had tendencies to take fruit, to damage property, to annoy and injure livestock. But the little group of men struggling to develop Scout work here named a committee to talk the matter over...and seek temporary use of the ground...”

Finally the farmer agreed. Following the first summer, Brinton was of a changed mind. He enthusiastically agreed to continue loan of the ground ...each summer, and ...within a few years, he voluntarily deeded the tract over to the council...Camp Brinton, as it was known, became the first permanent summer camp of the St. Joseph Council. By 1925, attendance had grown steadily, but nothing would prepare the Council for what was to follow. The new Scout Executive, just arrived from Wyoming, would popularize Scouting and summer camp in a manner never seen before. He would provide an exhilarating experience for boys which continue to the present day. His name was Harold Roe Bartle.

Bartle arrived in January of 1925, and worked diligently at expanding the Scouting Movement. Within a short time, boys were clamoring to join the Boy Scouts in St. Joseph, and to attend the summer camp at Agency. Camp Brinton was remodeled and improved each year in an attempt to keep stride with the growing attendance. Bartle's intense energy involving the community in Scouting, and his innovative summer camp concepts, including an Indian Lore honor camper program called Mic-O-Say, began to fill the little summer camp beyond its endurance.

Scouters began to look about for a new summer camp which could be acquired. When Bartle was transferred to the Kansas City area in 1929, his successor, Rex Gary, continued the search.

In December of 1930, an exciting news article appeared in the St. Joseph Gazette. It was announced that a local physician, Dr. Charles Geiger, would make a gift of his old boyhood home to the Boy Scouts to be used as a summer camp. The beautiful river bluff property he had explored as a youth would be rediscovered by countless others. It would be called Camp Geiger.

Clearing and building on the new property began as soon as possible. A Dining Hall and Caretaker's Cabin were fashioned from the many rocks found in the area, and a stream was dammed to form a swimming hole. A colossal bridge was built to traverse the ravine between the main ridges of the camp.

Living quarters were constructed of rock and wood and canvas. By 1935, Camp Geiger was officially opened as the summer camp of the council, and work was begun on a new swimming pool, to be built high on the bluff above the camp.

Many additions would follow as the new Camp Geiger enjoyed more than fifteen years of immense popularity to the Scouts in the St. Joseph and surrounding areas.

By the early 1950's, it was clear that the ever-increasing camp attendance had once again outgrown the facilities. Additional land purchases allowed the beginning of a new camp, to be located to the north, high on the river bluffs. In December of 1950, it was announced that Harry Block of St. Joseph would donate the first new building. The Block Memorial Training Center would serve primarily as a Dining Hall. Construction of this building marked the beginning of the "new Camp Geiger" located on the northern river bluffs. Additional buildings were donated by civic-minded organizations and individuals, including the Headquarters and Trading Post building. Camp was officially moved to the new area in 1952. Handicraft Lodge (the nature lodge that is no longer standing) was donated in 1954. Goetz Lodge was dedicated in 1956, and the Maryville Health Lodge was built in 1965. By the late sixties, the old swimming pool had served for over 35 years and construction began on a new facility on the northernmost property in 1970. In the early 1990's, the property adjacent to the camp entry road was purchased. On this land called "Chieftains' Corner" now reside the Dining Hall and Headquarters/Health Lodge buildings built in 1992.

For seventy-five years, Camp Geiger has served thousands and thousands of Scouts as their summer home away from home. If one hikes southward from the present camp, down into the Valley toward the old Waterworks Road, he'll find the remains of the old swimming pool. The foundation of the first Camp Geiger Dining Hall is still visible, and one can locate several of the rock-based campsites. A stone corner and fireplace mark the old Caretaker's Cabin. On a quiet day, the wind seems to echo the laughter of young boys. It carries their hopes and dreams to mingle with ours on the northern bluffs. For, though Camp Geiger has enjoyed the reputation of ever-changing programs and fun for so many decades, we have kept the concepts and traditions with which we began. The future – and the past – are alive at Camp Geiger