

## The History of Susquenango Council

At the invitation of Rev. Alvin C. Sawtell and the Scoutmasters of the Binghamton troops, a meeting was held February 8, 1918 at the Chamber of Commerce, to discuss the Boy Scout situation in Binghamton and its vicinity. The group decided to organize a local council. Ten days later Daniel Carter Beard, the national Scout Commissioner, inaugurated the organizational meeting of the "Binghamton Local Council."

The first year's budget was set at \$5000. Elmer A. Barrett accepted the position of Scout Executive at the salary of \$2000 on April 2, 1918; three months later he resigned to enter the US Army. The first office secretary was hired in July 1918 at \$10 per week. In September, L.R. Mathews took the Scout Executive's position at a yearly salary of \$2200. At this time, a yearly subscription to *Boys' Life* magazine cost 90 cents; the Boy Scout Handbook sold for 30 cents.

By 1919, the Council's budget had increased to \$7000. The Council's offices, shared with Robert S. Wickam, were in the Binghamton Press Building. The region served by the Council was the City of Binghamton; Endicott and Johnson City were known as "affiliates" of the Council. Camp Roosevelt, which was not owned by the Binghamton Council, was used for summer camp.

A Field Scout Executive was hired in March 1920 and the next month, at the insistence of the National Council, the name was changed to "Susquenango Council." By this time, the Council had two camps – Camp Russell (weekly fee \$7) and Camp Kiwanis (weekly fee \$3). By November of 1921, Endicott and Johnson City (including Vestal, Maine, and other outlying areas) separated to form the "Fair Play Council."

In June 1922, Susquenango Council moved from the Heath Block to the Berry Block in Binghamton. It was formally incorporated on December 7, 1922 and notarized by C. Addison Keeler on February 1, 1923. In June of 1923, a Council Scout cabin was built on Deyo Hill.

Chenango County was invited to join the Council in September 1924. A campsite of Cincinnatus Lake was purchased in January 1925 and named Camp Spalding (March 1925) in honor of the Council President, R.Z. Spalding. In July of that year, the camp operated for four weeks. In December, C. Fred Johnson donated \$500 for a fireplace at Camp Spalding. The camp increased its operation to six weeks in 1926. By 1929, the weekly fee was increased from \$6 to \$7. In 1930 an Indian village with teepees was added.

Sea Scouting and the Cub Scout program were organized in 1931. On February 28, 1933 the Fair Play and Susquenango Councils were merged. With the merger, the Fair Play Council's Camp Kiamesha ("land of the high beautiful waters") was leased to Susquenango Council for two years; in 1935 it became the property of the Council.

July 1935 was a time of disastrous floods. The road into Camp Spalding was washed out and the dam at the end of Cincinnatus Lake was swept away. With the drop in water level, the camp docks ended up 100 yards from the lake. The Council offered to donate \$1000, but the reconstruction of the dam was never accomplished. Thus, in 1936, Camp Kiamesha became the official summer camp with Camp Spalding reserved for Troop camping. By 1938, the

Council had moved to the Old State Armory in Binghamton. The records for 1939 show net losses for both camps: \$63.75 for Camp Kiamesha and \$12.47 for Camp Spalding.

World War II brought gas and food rationing; summer camp operations were consolidated at Camp Spalding by 1942. The Council headquarters had moved again, and again – to the Security Mutual Building in Binghamton and then to 27 Main Street just west of Binghamton Central High School. There it remained until 1955 when the new service center was built on Jensen Road in Vestal.

Camp Spalding and Camp Kiamesha were sold in 1953 and Camp Summit (now the Tuscarora Scout Reservation) became the Council camp. (The United Way required the sale of the two camps before a capital development campaign for Tuscarora could be initiated.)

### **The History of Susquenango Council**

On February 8, 1918 on the invitation of Rev. Alvin C. Sawtell and the scoutmasters of the Binghamton troops, a meeting was called to be held at the Chamber of Commerce, Binghamton, to consider the Boy Scout situation in Binghamton and vicinity. At this meeting "it was resolved that a local council be organized in Binghamton." On February 18, 1918 the organizational meeting of the council was held. Daniel Carter Beard, National Scout Commissioner, was present and spoke.

The Council was named "The Binghamton Local Council" and the budget was set at \$5000. The first scout executive was Elmer A. Barrett employed at a salary of \$2000 a year. He started April 2, 1918 but left on July 3, 1918 to enter the US Army. In July 1918 an office secretary was hired at a salary of \$10 a week. In September 1918, a new Scout Executive was hired – Mr. L.R. Mathews at a salary of \$2200 a year. In 1918, *Boys Life* magazine was 90 cents a year and the Boy Scout Handbook was 30 cents.

In 1919, the budget of the Council was \$7000. The Council headquarters were in the Binghamton Press Building where it shared office space with Robert S. Wickham.

Originally, the Council took in only Binghamton. The first Council camp was "Camp Roosevelt" – which the Council did not own. In March 1920, a Field Scout Executive was hired. The next month, April 1920, the Council name was changed, at the insistence of the National Council, to "Susquenango Council."

Also in 1920, the Council had two camps – Camp Russell where the fee was \$7 a week and Camp Kiwanis where the fee was \$3 a week. At that time, Endicott and Johnson City were known as "affiliates" of the Council.

On November 1, 1921, Endicott and Johnson City separated to form a separate council – "The Fair Play Council." This also included Vestal, Maine, etc.

In June 1922, the Susquenango Council headquarters moved from the Heath Block to the Berry Block in Binghamton. And on December 7, 1922, the Susquenango Council was incorporated, being notarized by C. Addison Keeler on February 1, 1923. In June 1923, a council scout cabin was built on Deyo Hill.

In September 1924, Chenango County was invited to join Susquenango Council.

January 1925 saw the purchase of a campsite on Cincinnatus Lake. In March 1925 the new camp was officially named Camp Spalding in honor of the Council president, R.Z. Spalding. In July 1925, Camp Spalding opened for four weeks. In December 1925, C. Fred Johnson donated \$500 for a fireplace at Camp Spalding. In 1926 Camp Spalding ran for six weeks.

In 1929, the summer camp fee at Camp Spalding was raised from \$6 a week to \$7 a week. In 1930 an Indian village with teepees was added to summer camp at Spalding.

In 1931 both the Sea Scout and the Cub Scout programs were organized in Susquenango Council.

On February 28, 1933, the Fair Play Council and the Susquenango Council were merged. Camp Kiamesha, on Highland Lake – near Warren Center, PA, was the camp of The Fair Play Council. Kiamesha meant "land of the high beautiful waters." With the merger, it was leased to the Susquenango Council for two years and in 1935 became the property of the Susquenango Council.

In July 1935, disastrous floods hit this area. The road into Camp Spalding was washed out and the dam at the end of Cincinnatus Lake was swept away. The level of the lake dropped drastically, and the camp docks were about 100 yards from the lake. The Council offered to donate \$1000 toward the reconstruction of the dam, but it was never done.

In 1936, Camp Kiamesha became the summer camp and Camp Spalding was used for troop camping.

In 1938 the Council headquarters were in the Old State Armory in Binghamton.

In 1939, it was reported that Camp Kiamesha operated its summer camp program with a net loss of \$63.75 and Camp Spalding had a net loss of \$12.47.

### **A Brief History of Camp Tuscarora**

In August of 1952 Susquenango Council purchased a 585-acre tract near the village of Gulf Summit in the town of Sanford. This tract surrounded a 35-acre lake known as Page Pond. Plans were immediately set in motion to develop a camp. Consultations with architects and the BSA Engineering Services revealed that \$243,000 would be required. Plans for a Capital Campaign were formulated and approved by the United Way with a kick-off set for February 1953.

In 1953, the first building phase of Camp Tuscarora commenced with the construction of the Dining Hall, Trading Post, Handicrafts Building, Commissary, Ranger's House (original house), Winter Unit #1, Administration Building, and the Shower Building (in Winter #4) along with the construction of six summer units. At this point the camp was ready for occupancy and opened to a full camp on July 1, 1953. In 1954, the Health Lodge, Summer Units 7 & 8, Winter Unit #2, Rifle Range, and the Picnic Pavilion were all built. 1955 saw Winter Units 3 & 4 built by volunteers, and Summer Units 11 & 12 were built. In 1957-58, Winter Unit #5 was built along with part of the Ranger's Shop (old part).

In the late 1950's the Council purchased the portion of land now known as Family Camp and in the 1960's Council obtained the land west of Page Pond Road, bounded to the north by Laurel Lake Road and to the west by Noony Hill Road. In the late 1960's to early 1970's the Council obtained the Taxe's property, bounding the eastern side of the camp property. This brought the camp property to about 1200 acres and a name change from Camp Tuscarora to Tuscarora Scout Reservation.

Council Point was bulldozed out and seating planks added in 1961-62. In 1963, the Nature Lodge was completed, the pond outside of Family Camp was built by the NY National Guard in 1968-69 and the Family Cabins were added in 1971-72. The Meditation Chapel was dedicated in 1970 and the Outdoor Chapel was built by the Order of the Arrow. A new Shower Building was built in 1976 and the Campmaster's Building was erected in 1981-82. In 1984, lightning struck Winter Unit #2 Center Lodge and destroyed it. It was rebuilt the same year along with a new addition to the Ranger's Shop. In 1993, a capital campaign was conducted to raise \$500,000 to upgrade the camp facilities. The Council was able to modernize the Kitchen, Dining Hall (including new handicap accessible rest rooms), Health Lodge, construct a new Ranger's home, add a handicap accessible living unit, and convert the Nature Lodge into a Training Center/Nature Lodge.

### **A History of Camp Tuscarora Resident Camp of the Susquenango Council Boy Scouts of America**

As told by: Charlie Wright, Camp Ranger 1953-83; Russ Mosher, Chairman, Camp Tuscarora Property Committee; the Merrill sisters and granddaughter; Harry Deyo; Ira Reynolds; John Meskunas; and Spider Hyatt.

The original tract of land that Tuscarora sits on was farmland and heavily forested in the years 1880-90. The original plot of 585 acres consisted of four farms less a 5-acre portion on the southwestern corner of the lake. This land was about 99% forested, and a fire between the years 1906-08 destroyed about 70% of the forest from east to west across the camp. It was said that if you stood on the west mountain high spot and looked east over camp, you would see nothing but bare land and a few scarred tree trunks after the fire. A cherry tree that Charlie Wright cut while the camp ranger bore a fire scar 4 inches in on the rings of the stump.

In the late 1800's, Charlie tells of a Mr. Page and his team of horses who were drawing timber across the pond, when the ice gave way, and the team and sled were lost. He assumes the pond was named after him for I find on some old maps (including the USGS Topo) the listing of Page Pond, although it is now Summit Lake. Our entrance road is still Page Pond Rd.

There were four abandoned farms that surrounded the 585-acre plot, including one at the present Winter Unit #5 site. The story goes that a Mr. Coon, a war veteran who served in the Civil War, was given a land grant at the end of the war. He settled on this land (WU #5) and started his own farm and raised his family. When his wife passed on and a fire destroyed the buildings, he moved on. All that remained was the well, which has been used ever since at WU #5. Mr. Coon used to turnover his potatoes buried under ground, and cart them to the Gulf Summit grocery store where he sold them and received 10 cents a barrel.

A Mr. Eugene P. Merrill, who at the time (early 1900's) owned the Sky Lake (Kilmer property) and Deer Lake properties, purchased the main 585 acres in 1918-19 of what was to become Camp Tuscarora, and erected three cabins for his sons. Roland's cabin was east of the present day waterfront closer to the Admin. Building. It was eventually torn down. Peter's was near Council Point and burned down in May of '53; and Arthur's near summer unit #12, whose fireplace still stands.

The local Girl Scout organization was looking for a camp in the years 1918-20, and contemplated purchasing the property until the well they drilled down 100 feet produced no water. This prompted them to look elsewhere. That well was drilled near the present dining hall. Thus their misfortune eventually led to the Boy Scouts good fortune, as time will tell further on in our story.

The lake was on the highest elevation around, and being on a divide, when full it emptied both directions. One interesting episode is when Page Pond became a lake. Mr. Merrill wanted to expand the lake, and by so doing would change its outlet from the south to the Delaware River watershed. This was accomplished by hitching teams of work horses that pulled a huge scoop with a rope tied around a tree across the ground and hillside and then dragging the scoop down the hillside and emptying it. It thus dammed up the then southern outlet, forcing the water to reverse its course and flow the other direction. This dam, and with help from bulldozers later on, is part of today's parade field.

At one time there were eight stone quarries at Tuscarora, with four operating at one time (one at an elevation of 1885' near the plateau, and another at 1918' elevation). They supplied flagstone or building stone for sidewalks and curbing in New York City. The sidewalk slabs were about 2 feet thick, and the curbing 8-10" thick. How did they transport the slate and curbing out of camp and to NYC?

The Susquenango Council owned and operated two camp properties, Camp Spaulding on Cincinnatus Lake near Smithville Flats, NY and Camp Kiamesha, which was on Highland Lake near Warren Center, PA. Ira Reynolds, who is now 93 years of age at this writing, took his first training course in scouting at Kiamesha. Both camps were sold in 1953 as part of the fundraising campaign to purchase what is now Camp Tuscarora.

In their quest to find a larger camp property, the committee of which Ira Reynolds was member, suggested in 1950 the Merrill property to Art Baker, Scout Executive. Mr. Baker and committee narrowed their choices to two properties, Sky Lake and the Page Pond property.

The Susquenango Council, BSA finally purchased the 585 acre original Page Pond plot from Mr. Merrill on August 29, 1952, with the provision that he could summer in his cabin on the 5-acre plot of land till his death and that the scouts were not to walk in front of his cabin on their way around the lake trail. The Boy Scouts then built a wood fence starting near the end of the present day parade field and established a trail that went around his cabin, up the hill, and back down to the lake. Mr. Merrill passed away in 1961 or 1962, and the cabin was dismantled as it was getting to be a dangerous area. The fireplace was left intact and remains so today.

Also of note, Dave Harder, a former OA Lodge Chief, who works for the Broome County Sheriff's Department, extended the lake road/trail to the Merrill cabin, and was consequently named "Harder's Highway."

On Saturday, May 16, 1995 we had the good fortune during the Order of the Arrow Spring Fellowship to have the Merrill sisters and one of their daughters stop in for a visit. They walked around the camp telling us of their happy times on the pond, especially skipping stones and keeping warm by the fireplace on cool nights. Mr. Arthur Merrill's daughter mentioned that there was a screened-in porch they would sit on for hours during the summer, and Charlie Wright claims to have one of those original rocking chairs at his house on Deer Lake from that cabin porch. One of Mr. Arthur Merrill's married daughters still lives in Johnson City, and the other lives in Florida. Her daughter told of the cold patches of water they would encounter while swimming, and Charlie tells of searching out the cold springs in the pond on a hot day during the summer. What a relief it was when these were found.

In the fall of 1952 Camp Tuscarora hosted its first major event, a district camporee. This was the Susquehanna, PA District, and came to be known as the "Delahanna District," and was formerly associated with the Scranton Area BSA's council.

In 1953 the first building phase at the unnamed camp commenced, with the Dining Hall, Trading Post, Crafts Building, old Commissary, Ranger's house, Winter Unit #1, Campmasters' (now administration), and Shower Building were built, along with six summer units.

The Dining Hall was dedicated to Dwight D. Crisp: "In recognition of his inspiring leadership as Scout Executive of the Susquenango Council, 1/1/50-8/31/66." Those who have been to the Oneonta Council's summer camp "Crumhorn or Henderson" as it is known now will see a remarkable similarity between the two, as Dwight Crisp came to Binghamton from Oneonta, and Tusky is an exact duplicate.

The main water system for the camp was from the Dining Hall well, with a 1½" to 1¾" line going out. Other wells were dug at the Ranger's house (57' deep) WU #1,2,3,4 and the plateau in 58/59°.

A "Name the Camp" contest was held in 1953 by the Scout Executive, Dwight Crisp, and his related committee who picked "Tuscarora" as the final name. As Charlie Wright tells it, his choice was "Woodlands," in honor of the Native Americans and mountains that were only 4-5 miles away. Tuscarora was not only the name of an American Indian tribe in the area, but also the name of the local mountains.

Both Charlie and Mrs. Merrill give much credence to Native American artifacts being found on the property. Mrs. Merrill claims to have knowledge of an Indian fireplace that produced charred sticks and flint chips. Rumor has it there is an old burial ground on the camp property also. We were close to an old Indian trail that ran from the Delaware River through the Finger Lakes to Seneca Lake, thus giving further credence to these thoughts and findings.

In 1954, the Administration Building, Health Lodge, Summer Units #7 & 8, Winter Unit #2, Rifle Range and Picnic Pavilion (known as Gilwell Hall) were all built.

Additional property was added through purchase of the Decker Farm on Connor Road to the east, of which old foundations still remain of the farmstead. The purchase price was \$8,000. Eventually, the Martin Farm was purchased.

1955 saw WU #3 & 4 built by volunteers, and SU #9 & 10. In 1956, summer units 11 & 12 were built. In 1957-58, winter unit #5 was built, 4 lean-tos in '57, and Center Lodge in '58 and the wood framed portion of the shop was also built.

In the late '50's, the Council obtained the portion of land extending north from the boundary lines of the original camp extending east of Page Pond Road and south of Laurel Lake Road where the Family Camp is now located.

In the early '60's, the Council obtained an additional parcel of land west of the Page Pond Road bounded to the north by Laurel Lake Road and to the west by Noony Hill Road to a point just south of where Lawrence Road goes off Noony Hill Road. In the late 1960's to early '70's the Council obtained the Taxe's property on the west side of the camp and later the Wurzbach property located south of the Taxe's and bounding the east side of the camp's property. This brought the camp's property to approximately 1,200 acres. About this time, the name also changed from Camp Tuscarora to Tuscarora Scout Reservation, with plans to build a second camp on the top of the hill just west of the lake to accommodate the population increase from the "baby boomers." This did not materialize, although the plateau overnight camping area is now located here.

Council Point, originally part of a quarry, was bulldozed out and seating planks added in 1961-62. In 1961-62, Cub Scouts and the OA lodge raised money to build the Nature Lodge. It was dedicated to George S. Tate, former principal of North High School in Binghamton, in recognition of "Faithful Service to Scouting" on 10/5/63.

The pond outside of the family cabins was built by the NY National Guard Engineering Battalion #104 in 1968-69, and planned for family camping in the '70's, as well as staff training, tenting and campgrounds. The family cabins were added in '71 and '72. The Meditation Chapel, located on the east side of the lake, was dedicated to Arthur J. Farrell, the camp's Program Director, who passed away in the Dining Hall. Its plaque reads: "Dedicated to the glory of God and all those who advance his work" - 1970.

The outdoor chapel on the west side of the lake, between Council Point and the Nature Lodge, was built by the Order of the Arrow. Its dedication inscription reads: "To the Glory of God and the Youth of our Country through the Cheerful Service of many brothers in the Otahnagon Lodge Order of the Arrow."

The new shower building was built in 1981, and the Campmasters' Building was put up in '81-'82. In 1984 lightning hit WU #2 and started a fire there, which destroyed it. It was rebuilt the same year.

In 1993 a capital campaign was conducted community-wide to raise \$500,000 to upgrade facilities at Camp Tuscarora. It concluded by going over the top, enabling the Council to renovate and modernize the kitchen, dining hall with handicapped accessible restrooms and showers, health lodge, put on a shop addition, and construct a new Ranger's home. This year work is progressing on the handicapped living unit between SU #2 and #3, and also a training center is in the works as the final project.

Although our records are sketchy, Scout Executives for this Council have been Del Howard; Art Baker, 1946-50; Dwight D. Crisp, the driving force behind obtaining and building Camp Tuscarora, 1951-1966; Jim Case, 1966-1969; Jim Corey, 1969-1983; Dave Ross, 1983-1987; John Anthony, 1987-1991; Ed Underwood, 1991-1994; and currently Brad Farmer, who came on board in July of 1994.

The Susquenango Council was formed in 1918, and merged with the former Fairplay Council in 1934. Today it services two New York State counties, Broome and Chenango, and also Susquehanna County in Pennsylvania. Our Council lists over 6,000 registered scouts and volunteer leaders in 1995.

*This information was recorded during the period of spring-summer 1995, in a Scouting Spirit, for the past, the present and the future of BSA Camp Tuscarora. It was compiled by Don O'Brien, 48 Smith Hill Rd., Binghamton, NY 13905, 1995 Tuscarora Camp Committee Chairman and also the 1995 Summer Camp Program Director. Updates and revisions are welcome.*



