

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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Dear Readers:

It is with pride that I devote this week's column space to the story of Camp Don-Yon-Dah by Carlton Historian Lysbeth A. Hoffman. Over a period of several months Mrs. Hoffman has undertaken extensive research and interviewing of people once connected with this camp. Like all our town and village historians who persist in the search of memories and their documentation, she is to be praised for her work

Camp Don-Yon-Dah

By Lysbeth A. Hoffman
Carlton Historian

Camp Don-Yon-Dah, also referred to as "Camp On The Farm," was a rustic, summer camp, primarily for Boy Scouts, and existed during the 1930's. American Legion Sheret Post No. 35, of Albion, provided financial support and gave much of the equipment.

Don-Yon-Dah was located in the woods, just north on the Ross Belson Farm (now owned by Mrs. Elmer Seward), one mile east of Kuckville. The Lakeside Beach State Park Day Picnic Grounds has been built in the same woods. Nothing can be seen of this camp at the present time due to erosion of the high banks along Lake Ontario.

According to Manley Whipple, Carlton Supervisor.: "When you left the Roosevelt Highway, you would go north down the farm lane, past the barns, and before arriving in the camp you'd pass under an arch, made from small branches, twisted up and around and spelling out 'Don-Yon-Dah.' This was large enough for vehicles to drive through. I don't know who built that."

William M. Covell, of Carlton Station, tells us: "You had to be 12 years old to be a Boy Scout in those days, so it must have been between 1933 and 1935 when I went there as a camper. I

can remember being there for a couple of summers. There were buildings down there built from rough-cut logs. The Mess Hall - Recreation Hall was the biggest structure and the Cook Shack was smaller. The Legion had built wooden decks and World War I canvas tents were put up on these platforms. I remember that Herb Dawson ran the camp store."

Herbert W. Dawson, of Albion, remembers: "I went there as a camper. The store was in the Mess Hall. It was just the end of a table, after meals, when I'd sell candy, gum, and boondoggle materials. Ray Meland was the cook down there. I remember they had a "one-lung" gasoline engine to run the generator. As for sanitary facilities, they sometime dug holes in the woods."

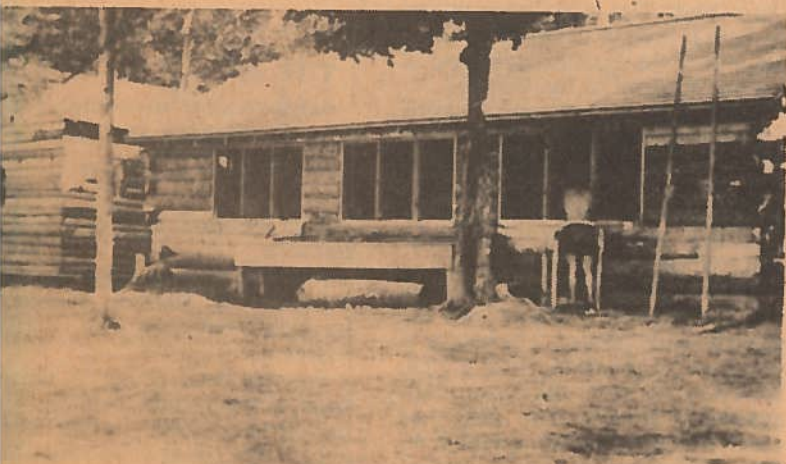
Maurice Belson, of Point Breeze, reminisced; "The camp was down on Dad's farm. I never went there as a camper, being too young, but I was down there alot helping out. There were a couple of hundred feet of land in front of the buildings back then. It's all washed away now. I remember the Legion had an old World War I "40 and 8" down there. That was a Personnel Carrier capable of carrying 40 men and 8 horses or mules. At Don-Yon-Dah it was used to hold spinning clay mold for their pottery classes. My brothers and the F.F.A. did alot of work down there too. They planted all those evergreen trees."

From an Albion newspaper clipping, dated June 25, 1936, we find that Camp Don-Yon-Dah was scheduled to open that summer on July 5. It tells us the first week would be for registered scouts while any boy ten years or over could attend during the second period. Willis Beckwith had been named as Camp Director and his associates were to be Michael Spierdowis, who was to be in charge of swimming and athletics, (an interesting note at this point is there is no swimming allowed presently at the State Park Picnic area), Richard Beedon was to be in charge of nature study, and other members of the staff that year were Marc Cole, Jr., Burt Larwood, and Irving Casselman. This newspaper article went on: "A varied list of activites including swimming, athletics, wood work, nature study and first aid will be presented campers. With good Albion leaders and a happy environment, the Scout Camp will present one of the most complete programs ever offered at Scout Camp here."

Two of our sources remember each tent held eight campers and they recollect there being six to ten tents, therefore the population at Camp Don-Yon-Dah would have numbered between 50 to 70 campers and counselors.

We have not been able to discover the first year camping was begun at Don-Yon-Dah and believe it was discontinued about the time of World War II. This historian remembers walking through the woods, on trips between Camp Archbald and Lakeside in the early 1950's, and seeing the remains of wooden platforms and a huge, rusting cast iron kettle. By that time they were very close to the high, clay lake bank and by 1960 all had been washed away.

It is hoped this report will spark some long forgotten memories for former campers at Camp Don-Yon-Dah. If there is anyone who might like to relate further memories of their camping days it is hoped they will contact the Carlton Historian.



Main Mess Hall, with Cook Shack to the left, at Camp Don-Yon-Dah. The original photo was sent by Sheriff Herbert T. Clark as a holiday greeting card to the Ross Belson family about 1935. Photo was reproduced by Bill Covell, Photographer.