

Rev. L. L. Ortmyer's History of Luccock Park Camp (1963)

Eight thousand years ago, the last of three great movements in God's process of changing the earth's surface took place in the area known as Paradise Valley in the upper Yellowstone River Basin. A small portion of this valley known as Pine Creek is the scene of this narrative, where men are trying to cooperate with God.

When the last great ice sheet moved down from the high central mountain designated on the maps as Black Mountain, it sheared off great boulders and glacier debris from the lower mountains and formed the Pine Creek gorge with moraines, separated by a flat meadow a third of a mile wide and a mile and a half in length. Was it God's dream eight thousand years ago that here, working for centuries, the Creator was laying out a perfect landscape where His children could come upon the mountain, to play, to dream, to walk with Him? Was it here they could come and walk through the woods, up the mountainside or by the rushing stream, learning His plan for their lives and finding inspiration and power to consecrate themselves to Christ and His Kingdom? Some people thought so, and began the work to bring dreams into reality.

The following is a rambling narrative of these events as one who shared a bit remembers them. The written records are fragmentary and incomplete.

In the summer of 1919, the annual convention of the Montana State Epworth League was held in the city of Billings. Among other matters, the convention decided to hold a Montana State Epworth League Institute. The site decided upon was at Wolf Creek, approximately 30 miles north of Helena. The institute proved so successful, it was decided to hold a second one the next summer at the same location. The last and final State Institute was held the next year just a short distance south of the village of Neihart on Belt Creek.

The most important decision (Mrs. Ortmyer insists it was not to allow adults to vote on convention matters) was, in the opinion of your narrator, Louis L. Ortmyer, to hold two institutes the next summer. One was to be adjacent to Glacier National Park and one close to Yellowstone National Park. This left central Montana without a convenient location, so leaders in that area decided to have a third institute, which became known as King's Hill. This account is confined to the Yellowstone Park Institute, with the exception of reference to some persons involved in the total state program.

On the 10th of March, 1923, a district missionary conference was held in Livingston. One of the items of business was the responsibility of locating the Yellowstone Park Institute. As I recall, Cecil L. Clifford was present, representing the State Epworth League. On the second day, the conference members were invited to the Pine Creek Church for a noon luncheon, following which, all who would were asked to go up to Grinell Park, which had been suggested as a possible location for the institute. Saddle horses and a three-seated buckboard, driven by Albert Allen, were the means of transportation. It was a memorable trip, going up a logging trail following somewhat the route of the present Ponath Trail, but the return trip took the party north of the north moraine to the Allen ranch.

Although the ground was covered with two or three feet of snow, the conference unanimously authorized the District Superintendent, Robert C. Edgington, and a

committee to proceed with all necessary arrangements to make Grinell Park the location for the Yellowstone Park Epworth Institute.

With the authorization, Mr. Edgington went to work. His dream was about to be realized. He entered into an agreement with Mr. Allen to purchase 25 acres, the southeast corner of a section bounded by the national forest on the east. The tract is 1,250 feet north and south by 750 feet east and west, or 25 acres "more or less." The purchase price was \$2,500.00, but all Mr. Edgington had was his faith in the young people of the district. Grinell Park was a beautiful spot; but how to get it? Otto G. Ponath, pastor of the Pine Creek Church, undertook to build a road up the hill, which the highway department said was a \$6,000 job. The Pine Creek and Livingston people rallied to the task with a mind to work and before July first, we were able to drive, push, and pull a Model-T Ford up the hill and onto the camp grounds.

Arriving on the grounds, we looked around a bit anxiously, for the lowering clouds to the south were threatening wind and rain. Towering trees, row on row marching up the mountainside, were beautiful; but they provided only a little shelter from the coming storm. Wait! What is that under the big tree? A great pile of canvas, poles and rope. Those resourceful men Bob Edgington, Charles D. Crouch and Rev. Harry Chappell had learned that Ringling Circus showing in Billings had replaced their big three-ring tent and had left the old one in Billings. These men contacted the right person and got this great "Big Top" with the condition that they take it away, poles, rope and everything. A man with a truck was found who agreed to haul it all to the camp grounds for \$90.00. Well, there was the tent, but where Edgington found the \$90.00 will forever remain a mystery.

Portions of this tent provided shelter for the first camp kitchen, dining room and institute meetings. Lodgepole pine trees, large and small, provided floor houses and frame work for tent houses. A strip of canvas 14 by 24 feet covered the frame, while the gables were filled in with remnants. Eight of these tent houses were the accommodations provided for faculty and guests. These were replaced about 1938 by the present faculty cabins.

At the first Institute, members of the state convention, meeting in the afternoons, made some important decisions. Sunday morning, when about 250 people were present, the grounds were dedicated "To the glory of God, the proclaiming of the gospel, for Christian fellowship, recreation, study, worship, inspiration, dedication and commitment to Christ and his Kingdom."

A part of this inspiring service was the naming of the grounds "Luccock Park." This was done in honor and memory of Naphtali Luccock, the first resident Bishop of the Helena area, who died while serving this great territory. Standing at Luccock Park and looking to the east, one is inspired to remove his hat and recall the words of the Psalmist:

"I will lift up my eyes unto the mountains,
From whence shall my help come?
My help cometh from the Lord
Who made the heavens and the earth."

The three mountains were christened that Sunday: "Faith," the mountain to the left, or north; "Hope," the central mountain; and "Charity," the one on the right, or south. These

are not the official names found on maps. The road up the hill was named Ponath Trail in honor of Rev. Ponath, then pastor of the Pine Creek Church.

The time from 1923 to 1940 could properly be called a holding period. Bank failures and financial pressures were legion, and Luccock Park was no exception. To meet these emergencies, the plan of selling leases on lots, \$100 for a 99-year term, was used.

The following is a list (unofficial) of the first leases:

Bozeman Deaconess Hospital, donated as a location for a nurses cabin
Rev. and Mrs. Harry Chappell
Mr. and Mrs. Eli Newell
Mr. and Mrs. Alva Patton
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Seaberg
Mr. and Mrs. Henry James
Bozeman Epworth League
Rev. and Mrs. Alexander P. Aiton
Mrs. Brophy
Butte Epworth League Council
Mr. and Mrs. Berl Asher
Huntley Project Epworth League
Hardin Epworth League
Bridger Epworth League
Billings Epworth League
Fromberg Epworth League
Mr. and Mrs. Lyle Divine
Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Gould
Livingston Epworth League
Laurel Epworth League
Mr. and Mrs. Charles B. Landes

Some of the rentals were paid in full, others paid only a token. The total received, however, enabled Luccock Park to meet its obligations. In the early years, leagues, churches, and individuals pledged and gave generously toward the camp budget.

We have often heard the reference, "Under the circumstances, we can't do this." It is thrilling to note that some folks rise above circumstances and do the seemingly impossible. Some basic advances were made during this period. The original tabernacle, kitchen and dining hall were the first structures built. The architect, designer and construction foreman was the Rev. Bob Edgington. He was a tireless worker, on the job many days at 4:30 a.m. till 10:00 at night. So the tabernacle, dining hall and kitchen were built in spite of some diversions. Preachers Hubert Woods, L. Ortmayer, and E. C. Bartlett, with his daughter Olive, sneaked out of the work camp early one morning on a fishing hike to Shorthill Lake. On returning to the camp rather late for supper, Rev. Charles Rhodes looked over our catch and remarked, "Well, we're glad to have our four loafs back again with their two little fishes."

The original tabernacle was crushed to earth by six feet of snow. From and with its ruins, the present tabernacle was erected a few years later. With the leadership of Walter B. Spaulding, the administration building was erected.

Encouraged by these general activities on the campus, the youth of the district, supported by their churches and pastors, began to build their own cabins. Billings, Clyde Park and Fromberg began the movement, followed by Bozeman, Laurel, Hardin, Livingston and Glendive. Other churches purchased leases and Lodges. Bridger acquired the Robert Edgington lot and cabin from the Wendlands. Miles City bought the James lease and lodge. Through legacies, gifts and purchases, Luccock Park Association is now responsible for the following lots and cabins: Newell cabin, a gift by Eli and Mrs. Newell; Seaberg cabin, a legacy; Patton's and Aiton's (Bide A Wee) were purchased.

This building program brought about a definite change in living at Luccock. During the first twenty years, delegations brought their camping equipment, tents, bedding, cooking utensils and a sponsor who also did most of the cooking. Miles City boarded at the dining hall, but Pastor Martin E. Van de Mark generally managed to stop at the Roundup camp for a generous handout of their cook's offerings. With the availability of cabins and dining hall service, camping passed out of the picture.

The moon supplemented by kerosene lanterns provided light for the first years, but the resourcefulness of Andy Seaberg came to the rescue by constructing an electric power plant. He used a Dodge engine and small generator. This was a big improvement, but it was never too reliable. Bringing R.E.A. to the campus about 1950 was quite a financial venture, but the ever-expanding use of electricity seemed to have vindicated the move.

Pine Creek was a wonderful source of pure mountain water, but how to make it available for a camp raised some problems. The first kitchen was located over the ditch, and a cistern pump raised water to the kitchen sink. Again the resourcefulness of the master mechanic, Andy Seaberg, came to our help. Some may remember the hydraulic ram that forced water into the tank in the garret of the administration building. The source of water in the ditch which skirts the campus on the south is Pine Creek, about five hundred yards above the camp. By laying down a pipe line, constructed out of discarded locomotive flues, the ditch water was conveyed to the camp kitchen. Gravity provided sufficient pressure for all purposes. Maintenance of this pipe line was a continuing problem. Pastor Ben Davis and other men put in days of hard work year after year to get it in service again after the winter freeze-ups.

When the Forest Service finally gave us the right to use water from the big spring in the Recreation Area, a final solution to an adequate water supply was reached. A reservoir was built just west of the spring, 6 feet high, 6 feet wide, and 12 feet long. This is completely camouflaged to meet Forest Service regulations. Clyde Cromwell of Laurel supplied the plastic pipe. With the completion of this project, a dream of abundant water for Luccock Park was realized.

The Lillie Dutton Memorial Chapel was a gift by the Rev. Reuben Dutton and son Watson, in memory of their beloved wife and mother. It was dedicated as a place for worship and study, especially of Sacred Music.

George Harper, Executive Secretary of the Conference Board of Education, organized a National M.Y.F. Work Camp. The project was a new dining hall and kitchen at Luccock Park. Hugo Eck was the architect and Hugh Herbert construction foreman. Under their guidance, the gang went to work. This fine modern building now graces the lower end of the campus.

Coming to the Park from the east, you are sure to be delighted with the stone post gateway. The first building to the left or south is the new residence provided for the camp manager.

It takes a "heap of livin'" to transform a house into a Christian home. Just so, a beautiful meadow must have vision, concern and hard work to make it a sacred place. Here, folk may come and find for themselves and others living in our contemporary world spiritual experiences comparable to those of the disciples when they went up on the mountain with Jesus. Montana Methodism was most fortunate in the leadership of her young people through this changing time. We hesitate to mention names. A host of loyal laymen, pastors and their families gave generously of their time, money and labor to build sure foundations for our assembly grounds. Because of their responsibilities and influences, we may mention three men: Vernon E. Lewis, Cecil L. Clifford and Jesse Bunch.

Vernon Lewis, a lawyer from Fort Benton, was president of the state Epworth League in 1919 when the decision was made to hold an institute. An institute without good leadership might be a failure, so Vernon Lewis went over to North Dakota and persuaded Cecil L. Clifford to come to Montana.

Cecil L. Clifford was known as Dean Clifford. He was a Pastor, District Superintendent and Executive Secretary for the Conference Board of Education. Above all, for 28 years he was Dean of the Montana Institute. As Dean, Mr. Clifford brought to Montana outstanding youth leaders from all parts of the nation and the world. Included were Dr. Gratz, editor of the Epworth Herald, and T. Otto Nall, now Bishop Nall. The Dean thought of the faculty as a team working together toward a common purpose, that of challenging young people to Christian decision and higher standards of living.

Jesse Bunch, President of the Intermountain College, now Rocky Mountain College, was a personification of the Epworth League motto, "Look Up, Lift Up." He inspired youth to choose high goals for living and to give themselves in self-forgetting service, and, with God's help, to lift up others.

It is 1963, or 40 years later, since we rode up the mountain to spy out the land. Mrs. "Ort" and I have given just about a month a year for thirty years to Luccock Park. We are sure that you will forgive us if we are a bit over-enthusiastic when talking about the Methodist youth program and the potential of our wonderful Institute grounds.

-Rev. & Mrs. L. L. Ortmayer

