

**A HISTORY OF THE FOUNDING OF  
CAMP KANESATAKE,  
SPRUCE CREEK, PENNSYLVANIA**

*Ralph D. Harrity*

God of the Mountain, God of the Hill  
Show us Thy spirit, teach us Thy will.  
God of the starlight, God of the dawn,  
Show us a vision, lure us on.  
Giver of blessings, to Thee we pray.  
May we be thankful, ever alway.  
God of the starlight, God of the dawn,  
Show us a vision, lure us on.  
Lure us on. Lure us on.”

Charles I. Davis, Jr. 1934  
(Inspired through years of  
association with Camp Kanesatake.)

## INTRODUCTION

Summer camps of all types and for many purposes have long been a part of the American way of life. The reason for this development can be seen without much difficulty. There is an ever increasing demand for various means of “escapes” from the rigors of our complicated civilization. While enjoying the relaxation offered by such means, the average individual seeks those higher enjoyments and inspirations which are constantly being sacrificed on the altar of the never-ending effort toward earning a living in everyday life. Religious and spiritual regeneration, becoming acquainted and mixing on a common basis with one’s fellow man, finding time for meditation, thinking, reading, plus physical rejuvenation – these are the aims of people who seek a well-rounded camping experience and are considered as a necessary criteria for continuation of a happy and normal life.

Many camps are conceived, born, end then die out because their programs do not reach the high level of enjoyment and inspiration of which I spoke. But others, based on firm purposes and idealistic goals, have lasted and have seemingly never grown out of date. Such a camp is Kanesatake, located near the western point of the Juniata Valley, near spruce Creek, in the heart of Huntingdon County. Maintained chiefly by the Pennsylvania State Sabbath School Association as a summer training institution for Sunday School workers, it is opened to Christian youth of Pennsylvania and surrounding states.

Should one visit the site today, he would find Kanesatake resting comfortably beneath the protecting bulk of Tussey Mountain, its green wood cabins sprawling over the “Hill,” shadowed by many stately pines and spruces – an ideal spot for thought and meditation if you wish. Below, on the one side of the “Hill” is a recreation field, where stood, about a century ago, an old mill close by the creek which bounds the field. In this mill was held the first Sunday

School in Pennsylvania, a noble forerunner of the institution which was to occupy the area a hundred years later. Thus, history and heritage are all on the same bit of ground. On the other side of the hill are the swimming pool and tennis courts. But Kanesatake was not always this picture of perfection. It, like all other things, had a beginning and likewise a history, which is of significance to those interested in young people, youth training, and ordinary students of history.

I count it a privilege, then, to be able to gather together the material necessary to retell, in as detailed a manner as possible, the story of the camp’s founding, that posterity might not so easily forget the sacrifices of a few Christian pioneers, who surmounting many obstacles, provided Christian young people with an opportunity for closer communion with God and manifold service to humanity.

### ***Preface***

This research was made possible through the kindness and generosity of Mrs. O. R. Myers who allowed the author access to the personal papers of her late husband, one of the founders of Camp Kanestate.

To the author's knowledge, these papers constitute the only source of information as to the camp's early history; hence this narrative is not only original but is the only one dealing with this particular subject. Gratitude is also expressed to Miss Mary Ruth Myers, daughter of the late O. R. Myers, and to Mr. E. E. Rodgers, present treasurer of the camp board, who aided considerably in the formation of both ideas and content.

R. D. H.

May 1, 1947

Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

### **Forward**

Ralph D. Harrity is well qualified to write concerning Kanesatake, since it was for young people like him that the camp was founded. The son of a Reformed minister in Altoona, Blair County, Ralph was a camper at Kanesatake for five summers. Enrolled at Juniata College, his studies were interrupted by World War II. Returning to Juniata to graduate in 1947 as a history major, he won a prize for this paper in the Stackpole contest for works of significance on the history of the Juniata Valley.

It is, I believe, significant for the future of both the camp and the state association that Mr. Harrity has collected the facts of the early days and put them in easy, readable form.. It is really only by chance that much of the material he used – letters, memoranda, early folders and year books – had been kept, and it is indeed fortunate to have the history of the founding of the camp set down before it had become a complete blur in people's minds.

Mary Ruth Myers

July 11, 1947

Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

### **A HISTORY OF THE FOUNDING OF CAMP KANESATKE**

Prior to the year 1923, the Sunday schools of Pennsylvania sent their young people either out of the state for summer recreation and training, or to the Erie County Sabbath School Association campgrounds near the shores of Lake Erie, at Camp Colodon. The International Sunday School Association Camps at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin and Lake Winnepesaukee, New Hampshire were among the sites which attracted

Pennsylvanians, but the very nature of the long distance involved, plus high transportation costs proved a perplexing problem to local county associations, especially when deserving young people were without funds with which to attend these camps, despite help from local groups.

This camping situation was the topic of conversation between three county presidents who were gathered informally in a restaurant at Altoona, Pennsylvania, one day in October 1921. They were discussing the lack of interest of the young people of the vicinity in attending summer camps, and deploring the fact that no camp like the ones mentioned existed nearer home.

Suddenly, the idea was given to form their own camp! They would ask the three counties to support it, and would be able to send to this camp many times the number of young people who had previously gone to camp. The three presidents, Mr. R. A. Zentmyer of Tyrone, president of Blair County, Mr. Ives S. Harvey of Bellefonte, president of Centre County, and Professor O. R. Myers of Huntingdon, president of Huntingdon County realized the terrific implications of their decision. But the gravity of the camping situation in the tri-county district, combined with the invincible will which each possessed, prompted the feeling that the new ideas was of great, worthwhile significance, and each departed, determined to arouse as much enthusiasm as possible in his own county.

Almost a year passed, during which the three leaders aroused sufficient interest in the project to make it worth their while to begin looking for a suitable and central location for the building of the new camp. The first site studied was an area of land adjoining the old Pennsylvania State camp near Spruce Creek, the camp now known as Coleraine Park. However, after inquiry as to the possibility of its purchase, it was discovered that no land in the vicinity was for sale. Undaunted, Mr. Zentmyer, who by this time had been elected chairman of the group, took the party to another site. By unanimous approval, this new site was chosen because it met with all the basic physical requirements of a camp, besides offering possibilities in the nature of beauty and appropriateness which could rarely be found. According to Mr. Zentmyer's information, the land could be bought, so on the strength of his assurance, the little group again departed, this time with something tangible to show their counties, a definite location on which to build.

The next step was to "sell" the location to the various groups within the county organizations which were to become the camp's major supporters. On September 9, 1922, an executive meeting was called to meet on the site of the proposed camp, and to include representatives of the Sunday School Associations of the three counties. The purpose was primarily to secure "on the spot" enthusiasm for the purchase of the properties involved, and once secured, to find ways and means of raising a sum of money to start the camp on its way to reality.

Following a prayer by Rev. John Snyder of Centre County, Mr. Stevin S. Aplin, secretary of the Bellefonte YMCA, presented the Centre County proposition for raising the necessary money. The total cost of the purchase of the property had been estimated as being \$9,000.00. While as yet no estimate was made as to the cost of developing the site, a total of \$6,000.00 would be raised over and above the property cost for this purpose. Thus, with a total of \$15,000.00 as a goal, Mr. Aplin proposed that each county raise \$2500.00, thus totaling \$7500.00 for the three counties, with the State Sabbath School Association, which had, through rev. E.H. Bonsall, Jr., its youth representative, expressed willingness to "go along" with this new project raising the other \$7500.00. This proposition was passed unanimously, and the State Board, after communication as to the proposal, agreed to assume the responsibility offered them. \$2500.00 would come from the Board itself, and \$5,000.00 was to be raised by the State Young People's secretary, Mr. Bonsall, through popular appeal.

Having made secure the financial foundation of their scheme, the three "pioneers" (Mr. Zentmyer, Professor Myers, and Mr. Harvey) next began to open negotiations concerning the actual purchase of the properties involved. Mr. Zentmyer, acting in the capacity of chairman of the Tri-County Camp Committee, as the camp nucleus was now called, carried on the negotiations.

The first piece of land required included the entire holding of 240 acres of the Sidney T. Isett farm. The cost was estimated at \$6,000.00, of which \$2,000.00 was to be given at the time of transfer. The second tract of land was a 46 acre piece of the Grazier woodland. It had an estimated cost of \$1500.00. According to an agreement between Grazier and Mr. Zentmyer on October 30, 1922, the amount would be paid in full at the time of transfer of the deed. The third section was a tract belonging to Charles Gill, then assistant to the treasurer of Allegheny College, Meadville, PA. It was a 25-acre tract extending mostly

along the Spruce Creek-Warriors Mark Road, with an estimated cost of \$1500.00. By agreement, the Tri-County Committee would pay half of it in cash, and give a mortgage for the other half, at 6%, at the time of transfer. The date set for the transfer of the three deeds was given as April 2, 1923, at which time representatives would meet in the office of Attorney Chester D. Fetterholf at Huntingdon.

After the conclusion of these agreements as reached, the actual work of clearing ground and surveying was begun. Particularly active in this undertaking were Mr. Zentmyer and Professor Myers, because of their relative nearness to the site. A Mr. John Kinch of Spruce Creek was hired to aid in the work, especially in log-clearing, etc.

As the winter of 1922 wore on, it became evident that the "pioneers" were handicapped legally through a definite lack of organization on which to base their functions. To remedy this feeling, a meeting was called of the Tri-County Camp nucleus for January 12, 1923, at the office of Mr. Zentmyer in Tyrone, to discuss organization. Along with this discussion, it was brought to light by Professor Myers that the State Association had declined the responsibility of taking the titles of the properties, thus throwing the full load on the shoulders of the counties. Faced with this dilemma, the group decided to adopt a series of resolutions calling for the incorporation of the Tri-County Camp Committee with a board of directors divided between the county groups and the Pennsylvania State Association, should they finally decide to "go the whole way" with the camp venture. The resolutions adopted were as follows:

"Whereas, there has as yet been no permanent organization effected to assume ownership, direction and control of the new Tri-County and State Training Camp and

Whereas, the time is now here when this can no longer be delayed without serious injury to the entire project, be it therefore

Resolved, that it is the sense of the Tri-County Camp Committee, representing the Blair, Centre, and Huntingdon County Sunday School Associations, by direct action of these said associations, that a local corporation be formed, the same to be incorporated in Huntingdon County with a Board of Directors or Trustees appointed jointly by the Pennsylvania State Sabbath School Association and the three above mentioned county associations.

Resolved, that a copy of these resolutions be sent to each member of the Special Committee appointed at the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania State Sabbath School Association on December 12, 1922 to consider and report on the relation of the above mentioned Camp and its interests to the State Sabbath School Association."

Those present who agreed to the adoption were Mr. Zentmyer, Professor Myers, Mr. R. A. Lockard, secretary of the Blair County Association, Miss Rynthia Shelley, Blair County Young People's superintendent, and Mr. Emmert Swigart of Huntingdon. As an afterthought, it was moved that should the State Association not act on the resolution, a committee consisting of Zentmyer, Myers, Dr. M. Hadwin Fischer, Religious Education representative of the State Board, and Rev. Bonsall of the State Young People's division, would be given power to continue the project independently in cooperation with the three counties. Under the incorporation agreement, Mr. Zentmyer was to be president of the Board of Directors; Professor Myers, heretofore acting secretary of the committee, was nominated to be retained in the same capacity, while Mr. Ives Harvey continued as treasurer.

Late in February, 1923, R. A. Zentmyer died. After the purchase of the properties, Mr. Zentmyer had acted as chief surveyor, both in defining the limits of the camp boundaries and in laying out the various sites for proposed buildings, etc., and his work was invaluable to the project's early beginning. This sudden happening necessitated a reorganization in leadership, with the result that Professor O. R. Myers succeeded to the chairmanship of the camp committee. Mr. K. L. McClain, also of Tyrone, was elected as Zentmyer's successor in the Blair County organization, and automatically became a member of the camp directorate.

The board of directors of the State Sabbath School Association had meanwhile accepted the resolutions forwarded them by the camp committee, and it was finally agreed that the incorporation would be effected March 30, 1923

under the name of the Mid-State Sunday School Training Camp, in the office of Attorney Fetterholf in Huntingdon, PA. As attended to in the preceding resolution, the articles of incorporation called for a body of six trustees, three from the State Board, one from each of the three counties – Blair, Huntingdon,

and Centre, and two ex-officio members from the state staff. Chosen to be the first directors of the new camp were the following: from the State Board, Mrs. John Boyd of Harrisburg, Mrs. W. Burnet Easton of Stroudsburg, and Mrs. William Decker of Montgomery; from Centre County, Mr. Ives Harvey of Bellefonte, from Blair County, Mr. K. L. McClain of Tyrone, and from Huntingdon County, Professor O. R. Myers of Huntingdon. (Before his death, Mr. Zentmyer was nominated as chairman of the directorate with Mr. Harvey as treasurer and Professor Myers as secretary. However, since he died before the articles of incorporation became effective, the above board of directions is considered as the original.) Professor Myers, who had been acting as chairman of the group after Mr. Zentmyer's death was elected president of the board. Mr. Harvey remained as treasurer, and Mr. McClain became the new secretary. Rev. Bonsall and Miss Elizabeth Nutting were chosen to represent the state staff as the two ex-officio members.

With the purchase of the land completed, together with full organization of the camp group, it remained only to begin the actual building. Advertisements for bids having been made, April 10, 1923 was the date selected to open them. Two bids were submitted, one calling for \$10,000.00, the other for \$13,000.00. These bids called mostly for the supplying of necessary material and road building rather than actual hand labor. However, by April 20, the former bid having been accepted, work began on the construction of a mess hall and other necessary buildings of a permanent nature, with J. O. Fischer of Franklinville doing much of the carpentry work. It had been hoped that a swimming pool might be built for that first year, but after looking at the amount involved in the bids, it was decided to get along without one, advertising for special bids in the meantime.

The first official meeting of the directors on the camp site was called by Professor Myers for May 3, 1923 at 2:30 p.m. At this meeting the future development of the camp was discussed, along with plans pertinent to the provisions for the first camping periods, beginning July 23. Professor Myers announced that a full quota of campers would be sent from Huntingdon County, and hoped that the other counties would reciprocate. The directors for the camp periods were affirmed as the same as those that appeared in the first camp advertisement of January, 1923: Miss Nutting was to direct the girls' camp, Rev. E. H. "Bonnie" Bonsall, Jr., the boys' camp, and Dr. M. Hadwin Fischer, the adult training camp.

On July 23, 1923, the camp site was dedicated to the service of youth everywhere, and Professor O. R. Myers, chairman of the board of directors, presided over the ceremonies. More than a thousand persons were present, from every part of the state.

A history of this early period would not be complete without a word concerning the first camping year, both as to conditions and programs. The campers of that initial year were housed in tents acquired as Army surplus, and situated down on the creek bottom where the swimming pool now is. Solid wooden platforms were erected as protection against ground dampness. Permanent buildings furnished for use were three – a mess-hall, and two cabins on the hilltop for use by Rev. Bonsall and Dr. Fischer. The summer was attended by heavy rainfall, unusual for the vicinity, hence the camp street was literally a sea of mud, except for a few short periods of time. Swimming was enjoyed by damming up the creek that flowed by the camp, "Warriors Run," into what was called the "Daum," which served until the cement pool was built in 1927. Mr. Aplin served as camp manager that year.

A list of the first camp faculty as found in the second annual Tri-C Yearbook (C.C.C. – Camp Conference Club) reads as follows:

For the Girls' Camp:

Esther I. Williams, Director  
Elizabeth Shimer, Associate Director  
Dr. M. Hadwin Fischer, Bible  
Miriam Bombard, Nature-study  
Mariam Thompson, Four-fold Life  
Ida Mae Gritzan, Recreational Director  
Elsie Witter, Swimming  
Roxie McGinnis, Nurse

For the Boys' Camp:

Mr. E. H. Bonsall, Jr., Director  
Julian Ulmer, Associate Director  
Dr. M. Hadwin Fischer  
Charles E. Garran  
Charles G. White, Commissary Department

For the Adult Training School:

Dr. M. Hadwin Fischer, Director  
Dr. F. W. Robbins, Psychology  
Dr. A. S. Fasick, Old Testament History  
Walter E. Myers, Adult and Administration Methods  
Mr. E. H. Bonsall, Jr., Young People's Methods  
Miss Emma G. Lemon, Children's Division Methods  
Mr. B. A. McGarvey  
Roy A. Burkhart  
Miss Maginis, Camp Nurse

That first season there were a total of 394 campers, coming from at least forty-seven counties, and representing at least ten denominations.

The program of the camp the first year was (and still is) based on the "Four-fold Life" – Religious, Social, Mental, and Physical. According to the first advertising pamphlet issued by the camp committee – "the camp periods are real school of instruction along physical, mental, social and spiritual lines. The highest testimonial to the value of this training is the wonderful development of the boys and girls who have been touched by the inspiring influences of a similar camp life." Despite the attendant hardships which the new camp, like other camps, experienced the first summer, the success achieved in attendance and inspiration was so great that in the Fall at a closing executive meeting of the county associations held at the site, plans were enthusiastically put forward for raising money to complete erecting the cabins and other necessary buildings as soon as possible. An example of the means used to accomplish this was humorously illustrated when, during the course of the meeting, Professor Myers got up and asked everyone to pledge money to the value of the chairs on which they were sitting. Again, Professor Myers took pledges amounting to the costs of individual bags of cement, when raising money for the swimming pool – proof of his undoubted ability to raise money and to keep the camp continually in a solvent state.

Of the actual work done by the "pioneers" I have said but little deliberately, saving personal contributions till last. Mr. Zentmyer, of course, died before the job was completed, but to his credit goes the work of surveying and general physical planning, which indirectly cost him his life. As a memorial to his contribution, the stone steps which lead up to the hill-top in front of the camp were built by the Blair County Sunday School Association.

Ives L. Harvey (1881-1945) had been identified with the State Association since 1917, first as vice-president, and from 1922 as a director, being at chairman of the State Board at the time of his death. Acting as treasurer of the camp board from its inception, he was intimately concerned with the earliest days of the camp. His moving away from Blair County in the summer of 1923 caused his resignation from the camp board, but throughout the years of the growth of the camp, until the time of his death in 1945, he was vitally interested in the life and needs of the project.

A fourth "pioneer" in the person of "Bonnie" (Rev. E. H. Bonsall, Jr.) can be discerned. In making the effort to interest the state board in their project, the Tri-County Camp Committee used Rev. Bonsall as their liaison man, due to his position as a field representative of the State Young People's Division.

At the time, "Bonnie" was responsible for raising \$5,000.00 of the State Association's original \$7500.00 share of the fund for starting the camp. Bonnie served as general camp director from the beginning until 1941, and thus was responsible for the over-all program of the daily life of the camps during the years of the camp's beginning and on into its growth and maturity. His influence on the lives of the thousands of young people with whom he came in contact can be measured only in terms of their subsequent service, which, as has long since been proved, is word-wide in scope.

Professor O. R. Myers was considered as the guiding genius behind the development of the camp. Taking the helm after the death of Mr. Zentmyer, he steered the affairs of the mid-state training camp from 1923-1948, the time of his death, as chairman of both camp boards – the board of directors, which comprises the trustees of camp property, and the board of school administration, which decides upon management, curricula, and details of camp. Mr. Harvey, with whom O. R. was associated on the old committee, quite glowingly attributes the real success of the camp to the “untiring efforts and financial genius of Professor Myers. He was able to build a fine organization, to manage the camp, and to cooperate with the staff of the State Association in building programs.” His wife rather amusingly relates the fact that he often spent so much time at the camp during the early days, that she wondered whether he remembered about home. But it is true that behind every successful enterprise, the lines of responsibility must eventually be focused to one man, and Professor Myers proved his capability in handling the responsibility with success throughout the years. If, in seeking an epitaph to his memory, one would wish to make it all-inclusive relative to the service rendered to his fellow man, one need only write, “A servant of God through his service to youth.” The results of his vision and efforts shall surely belong, in their own small way, to the ages.

The camp’s development after 1923 belongs in another place. The hardest and most exciting work had already been done – that of its founding. One need only turn to any Kanesatake year book published by the state association, and the results of the work of the “pioneers” will be clearly illustrated.

On October 12, 1923, at a Sunday School Convention in Williamsport, the State Association officially named the camp “Kanesatake,” an Iroquois Indian name, was suggested by Professor Speck of the University of Pennsylvania. Much history and tradition which today are a part of the camp itself came later than the scope of this paper. The Juniata Valley can be proud to boast of an institution which holds so great an influence over the lives of its Christian young people – Camp Kanesatake, “it’s guiding light an example to many.”