

## CAMP NEJECHO

At precisely 7:00 am the sound of a bell pealed reveille through the pine trees and over the waters of the Metedeconck River calling choirboys to begin another day of camp. A second explosion of the bell sounded at 7:05 to encourage the late risers. So began a typical day in Camp Nejecho's life. All campers, boys and counselors alike, were expected to be in front of the Administration building for the flag raising ceremony and then calisthenics. Since a dip in the river (sans suit) followed immediately the uniform of the first 45 minutes of the day was often none at all. Happily, all dressed for breakfast.

Camp Nejecho was the brainchild of the Rev. Elliot White, rector of Grace Church, Newark, from 1906-1913. He spent his summers at Bay Head and soon purchased a tract of land along the Metedeconck River at Adamston. It was his dream to start a camp where Choir Boys of the Episcopal Church might find a reasonably priced vacation. One of his assistants at Grace Church was the Rev'd Morton A. Barnes who, it turned out, was to play the crucial role in the Camp's development. Fr. White incorporated his camp in 1914 under the name, New Jersey Choir Camp. Fr. White had been rector of St. James', Long Branch 1903-1906 and, coincidentally, where Fr. Barnes served from 1914 until his death in 1949. Several years later, Fr. White left for work near Ossining, New York, and then retired in Philadelphia. On his leaving, Fr. White gave the Camp to Fr. Barnes who also inherited the Board of Directors. In 1917 Fr. Barnes reincorporated the Camp as sole owner and director. Some years later he added 50 acres of land to the original 25. The Camp was now known as Nejecho, taking letters from the original name: Ne (New), Je (Jersey), Cho (Choir). Campers, counselors, and, one suspects, Fr. Barnes, enjoyed telling the apocryphal tale that the word Nejecho was an Indian word!

Choirboys could come to Nejecho for the sum of \$35 per week. Some came for just a week while others might afford the entire season. Evidently the very first camper to enroll at Nejecho was one Howard Krippendorf of Grace Church, Newark. Fr. Barnes was an organized man and he expected his camp to run like a clock, smoothly and accurately. Breakfast was followed by a required activity for one hour in which one could enjoy water safety, first aid, handicrafts, nature study, camp maintenance, Bible study, archery, sports of all kinds, and, of course, singing. Then came two hours of free time, followed by lunch. A rest period from 1-2 pm followed lunch, and was in turn followed by free time unless involved in the soft-ball tourney. Supper was served at 6 and then Evening Prayer was said in the Chapel at 7:30. At 8 o'clock the altar was removed and the Chapel became the arena for campers to try their hand at boxing, movies, drama, or amateur night. Lights were out at 9:30 for younger boys, 10 for older boys, and 11 for the staff.

Originally Chapel was held in one of the six buildings erected by Fr. Barnes but the need for a "real" Chapel-Theater became evident. Since many of the 'boys' and backers of Nejecho were from Trinity Church, Princeton, and knew of the vacant Episcopal Chapel down in Princeton Basin, it was no time before someone suggested dismantling that edifice now fallen into total disrepair and then

reassembling it at Camp Nejecho. Stryker Warren, in a letter written in 1973, recalls the obtaining of Vestry approval, the dismantling of the old church, and the salvaging of what material they could. The original chapel according to Stryker, was about 25X50 but, in order to be of any use to the Camp it had to be much larger with a stage and plenty of seating. An architect from Trinity Cathedral, Trenton, donated his time to design the new structure and make its plans. Those in their late teens and early twenties did the heavy labor. Stryker recalled that they had limited experience for such a large undertaking. Fr. Barnes mustered up one carpenter, the only professional in that labor pool!

The addition of the St. Lawrence Chapel, as it was named, greatly expanded the number of activities available to campers. After evening services the altar would be whisked away and the camp program would continue. Boxing, if it was inclement weather, amateur night, movies, and dramatics were the favorites of the boys. Now that they possessed a proper stage and lights to enhance the theatrics, a great deal of effort and energy went into theatre productions. Perhaps spurred on by the Princeton University Triangle Club, the campers threw themselves into writing and producing their own stage revues. The Diocesan archives have photographs that show chorus lines of real "beauties", complete with fetching costumes which would, with alterations, show up from year to year in varying productions. The campers were so involved in theatrical endeavors that they soon took the shows on the road, featuring themselves as The Camp Nejecho Players. Really variety revues, they would feature a series of skits any one of which would bring down the house. One show, for example, staged in the borough hall of Bay Head on August 18, 1932, featured the Corps de Ballet as the opener. A short skit written by Stryker Warren followed and then came intermission during which the production orchestra would play alone. It was known as the "Chris Flannery's Nejecho Jazz Bandits" and never failed to receive a rousing round of applause. After intermission a 10-part variety show was presented which included: *The Gaiety Girls*, one of which was Edward Pettit, a brother of our own Vincent K. Pettit, one-time Suffragan Bishop of New Jersey; a barbershop quartet; *Scenes in the Life of Queen Victoria*, with Fr. J.T. Matthews as Queen; *The Floradora Sextette*, reprising Ed Pettit and including Jack Pettit, his brother; *At the Bijou O'Pry House* with Fr. Morton A. Barnes as House Manager and Vernon Crane as "Nellie, the Beautiful Flower Girl." By 1935 the touring "Players" were featured at Bay Head, the Long Branch High School, and the Community Auditorium at Spring Lake. Former campers also remember other sites being visited but memories were not clear as to where they might have been.

In 1993 the initial meeting of the NEJECHO history group was held at St. David's Church, Cranbury, and included the Rev. Canon Frank V.H. Carthy, Robert Hazen, and John P. Newton. John Barnes, a descendent of the Camp owner, was interested but deterred by ill health. We held several meetings during which Mssrs Hazen and Newton provided valuable written and photographic information about the Camp, each memory triggering other memories from the group. John Barnes sent marvelous photos and memorabilia to add to our growing collection. A visit was made to the old campsite where many pictures were taken and memories awakened. The Diocese owes a great debt of gratitude

to this committee that has really preserved an all-but-forgotten part of our Diocesan history.

It was from this collective memory that a list of 15 to 20 participating churches from four to six states was identified. Other happy remembrances included the day-to-day activities of the camp. B Dorm housed 70 to 75 youngsters from 7 to 12 years of age, plus adults occupying the four corner rooms of the Dorm that became known as The Monastery, The College Club, The Seminary, and Buckingham Palace. A Dorm housed 45 to 50 older campers, counselors, and stewards. If things got too rowdy for Fr. Barnes at night, he would stomp down the aisle of the dormitory repeating, "Too much levity" until the proper silence was restored.

Fr. Barnes evidently felt that the way to a satisfied camper's heart was via the stomach and outstanding food, bordering on the gourmet, was provided by Charles O'Dell (the chef) worked at the Waldorf in New York City during the winter months.

However, the end of Camp Nejecho was in sight. Its demise is clouded in some confusion. What is known at this time is that on April 2, 1940, Fr. Barnes and the New Jersey Choir Camp, Inc., sold the four parcels of land comprising the Camp to the Nejecho Corporation which later developed what is now the Nejecho Beach Club. It appears that the Camp continued to operate until late in the 1940s or early 1950s although further research is needed to provide a date certain. Fr. Barnes died on November 4, 1949, and, in papers reporting his death, are found an estimate that over 15,000 boys had been campers at Camp Nejecho!

Although our Diocesan Archives have a modest collection of photos and other memorabilia of Camp Nejecho, we would glad to hear from persons who have additional material and memories. We know that there was a Nejecho "N" patch, a Nejecho Key modeled after the Phi Beta Kappa Key, Nejecho belt buckles, and various shoulder patches awarded for proficiency in Camp events, all of which are not represented in the Archives. I would be happy to hear from any persons who are alumni of Camp Nejecho or are related to such persons, so that we can add to this unique history of a marvelous and innovative Camp over which the notes of "Taps" have long since sounded.