

# Origin of Camping in Nauvoo: Wendy Eaton

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## SPEAKERS

Josh Mangelson, Wendy Eaton, Karin Peter

### Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

### Karin Peter 00:34

Welcome to *Project Zion Podcast*. This is "Cuppa Joe" where we explore Restoration history, and I'm your host, Karin Peter. Today's episode is sort of part of our series about women in the Restoration, because we're going to talk about some women who were really central to our topic today, and that is camping in Community of Christ, or particularly youth camping in Community of Christ, which is a huge part of our identity as a people, and also is a primary formational and community building practice that still lives in Community of Christ today, so it'll be fun to get some insight on how that started. Our guest to walk through this with us and explore camping is Wendy Eaton, and Wendy is a favorite here at *Project Zion Podcast*, and she always brings us new information to amaze and astound. So, I'm looking forward to this because actually, Wendy, camping in Community of Christ, and the camping program in general, is one of my least favorite of things. So, I'm interested to hear a little bit more about it. It wasn't my least favorite when I was younger, but now that I'm older, it's lost a little bit of its appeal. But we're happy that you're here, Wendy. And for those of you that don't know, Wendy works at the Joseph Smith Historic Site in Nauvoo, Illinois, so she's up on all this stuff Nauvoo. And so, let's get started. So, Wendy, first off, hi.

### Wendy Eaton 02:07

Hi.

### Karin Peter 02:08

It's good to be with you again. We haven't recorded an episode together in a while.

### Wendy Eaton 02:1

I have to agree with you. I loved camping as a teenager. I was greatly involved in camping ministry as a camper, as a staff, but today, my idea of camping is a hotel. I would rather not have to be in a tent or a cabin and cold showers and all that fun stuff.

**Karin Peter** 02:34

Well, if that's your idea of camping, you and I can camp together, because that's, that's my idea of camping too. All right, so let's talk about that. First, why are we talking about camping? Why was that a topic of interest for you? What brought that on? And then, let's get talking about camping.

**Wendy Eaton** 02:53

So, back in 2018, the year before, here at Joseph Smith Historic Site, we were preparing for the centennial anniversary of being established as a historic site, and I was spending a lot of time researching, finding stories that we could share about the beginnings of the Historic Site, and tied right in there was this story of the first youth camp for the Church, and it happened here in Nauvoo. And because of everything else going on with the centennial, I just kind of set it aside and kept working on it slowly over the years, finding more and more resources and photographs and things like that. And it just became this topic that, having this past love of camping, I liked that it got started here. I liked that it was making part of the history of Nauvoo as a historic site even bigger than just the history of the 1840s. It was adding to the significance of this space after the beginnings of the Latter-day Saint movement, and I really liked that we were able to keep building the history of the site with youth camping history.

**Karin Peter** 04:14

Okay, so let's talk about that first camping experience at Nauvoo and how it came to be, so take it away, Wendy.

**Wendy Eaton** 04:22

Yeah, so, just a little bit of background information; when Nauvoo was being established, 1839 and into the 1840s, there was a lot of coordinated, directed building projects here and one of those was a hotel that Joseph Smith Jr. and other church leaders went to the extent of designing, planning, laying a cornerstone and that was the Nauvoo House. It never gets completed. It's in competition with other building projects, particularly the temple here in the town. But jump ahead from 1840 to the late 1860s, Emma Smith, she's remarried long by this point and she and her second husband turned to this old building project and decided to do something with it. They take the shell of the structure, remodel it into a lovely three story brick and stone home that they call the Riverside Mansion, and Emma Smith lives out the rest of her life in that home. Her funeral is held in that home. When Lewis Bidaman, who died about 10 years after her, when he dies, he hands the home to his son, who then sells it to Community of Christ, about 1909. So, it's one of the earlier buildings that goes into the development of the Historic Site. And when I was doing that research for the centennial, one of the resources I came across was a visitor to the area named Florence Wiley Smith, and she describes the Nauvoo House in 1917. So, this is one year before the Historic Site is designated, 11 years before the camp would happen. But in 1917 she writes, "Everywhere there are horse weeds, higher than our heads and so thick around the Nauvoo House that we had to part them with our hands to get through. The doors were standing ajar, pulled partly loose from their hinges. We went inside and found floorboards broken through what is now the dining room, and the water from the basement came up to the floorboards. I remember taking off my shoe and dabbling my foot in the water." So, going from this lovely home that Emma Smith had up to her death in 1879, now it's 1917, and it sounds like this house is a bit of a disaster. A lot of that has to

do with its proximity to the Mississippi River. Essentially the ground floor, where that dining room, Emma's parlor, is, it's basically river level. And so, when the river gets high, it gets wet. And so, it's not surprising that she finds the water that high. But it's also scary to think that it was in really rough shape. And here's the church, a year out of wanting to start a Historic Site at this place, thinking the Nauvoo House could be a place we could use like they planned. It'd be a hotel. Visitors can stay there as they're visiting the site. So, there's a lot of work that needs to be done, especially when that big step happens in 1928 with that first camp. So, early in 1928, advertisements start showing up in the *Saints Herald*, the newspaper of the Church. One of them reads "Summer Camp at Nauvoo from June 20 until June 30. A summer camp is being conducted at Nauvoo, the activities of which center at the Nauvoo House, the homestead and the Mansion House. This year is the first time such a project has been launched. And what was at first thought to be an experiment has already produced such splendid results, that it's very probable that the camp this year will be the first of many." And they conclude that advertisement that they're hoping this will, "... help old Nauvoo smile again."

**Karin Peter** 08:39

Ah.

**Wendy Eaton** 08:40

So, there's this implication that they're wanting to reclaim this part of the history, this space that once was so significant to the Church, and their idea is to have a camp there for the teenagers. Now, reunions have been going on, the family camps, for several decades at this point, but this is the first time that there's a coordinated effort for a reunion of sorts that's geared at teenagers, and the first two co-directors were Eugene Closson and Lenore Woodstock. And in department records within the Church, they lay out their aims for what this camp would be for the teenagers. So, "The first aim is to provide opportunities for our young people to, live, work and play together under consecrated leadership and wholesome surroundings. The second is to offer opportunities for development and self-expression in a natural, simple, unforced way. The third is to supply activities which will result in bringing to the fore latent leadership opportunities and abilities. And the last aim, to live Christianity without continually emphasizing it, and to offer religiously meaningful activities without their being forced or obtrusive." So, these are four fancy steps that seem very familiar to me, to things that I've heard, the time that I was a teenager and when I'm the adult. There's a lot of social change and unrest going on. How do we keep the kids invested in the church?

**Karin Peter** 10:34

Without sounding too churchy, which is what I've picked up on some of those last ones.

**Wendy Eaton** 10:38

So, 1928 falls between the two world wars. First, they don't know the second world war is coming, but it falls between the two of them. These wars are marked by great trauma, by rise in women working, and by great technological advancements. It's during the U.S. prohibition on alcohol, which will touch on our story. There are big changes in what we could term today social media, with radios being firmly established in many homes, and those new fangled moving picture theaters springing up everywhere. The 19th amendment of 1919 gives women the right to vote. A number of resources from the Church clearly show the unease of a quickly changing world. It's a sentiment that's repeated every few

decades. I heard this growing up. Scared of what's going on in the world? What are we going to do with the kids to equip them for this? Send them to camp. And as tedious as those feelings are for teenagers to hear their parents and grandparents saying it, I venture to say that through the generations, camping has been a bridge between the different eras and generations. It's a happy medium that everybody can agree on, or most people can agree on. So, in 1928 they have a youth camp. And I found quite a few different resources, but two of them have really struck out to me. The first was, I found an article in the 1978 *Saints Herald* for the 50th anniversary of this camp, and one of the campers were Berta Lewis Garrett. She wrote her memories of that camp. And as much as I love those memories, the big treasure came when I was digging through the *Autumn Leaves*, the youth magazine from the early 1900s, and I found the May, 1929 issue, written by Stella Brockway, who I'm not sure if she was a camper, a staff, or something in between at that 1928 camp, but it's essentially the camp log. It's a day-by-day account of the things that they did at this camp. And so, it was really neat to see that. And the funny thing was reading through that, how many of the things they talked about and did, felt very familiar to when I was youth camping, 70 some years after this camp.

**Karin Peter** 13:31

So, give some examples of what felt familiar.

**Wendy Eaton** 13:34

The campfire program and how significant it was, the pranks that were going on, the, some of the not so fortunate, a little bit of the discrepancies between boys and girls in 1928. But we were still experiencing that in the 1990s, that movement back to purity culture that I had to experience my teenage-hood through, the leadership, the opportunities that they trained the youth in, the classes that they took, the openness that they were experiencing church in a very different format than what you get sitting in a brick and mortar church, in a pew. And I'm gonna get into details on some of that in some of these stories. So, the makeup of that first camp, there was about 60 teenagers, 60. That's a big group of teenagers from a *[inaudible]*

**Karin Peter** 14:29

That's a big camp.

**Wendy Eaton** 14:31

They came from six states, so this wasn't just local. They were all Midwesterners; Michigan, Ohio, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska. These are big settlement areas for the Church at this time period. It's not surprising that they found enough youth, and close enough to Nauvoo that they were able to travel here. And there's lots of the stories of them traveling by train, and boat, and car to get here, oftentimes all three modes of transportation, catching the train to Fort Madison, Iowa where one of the staff would meet them in the motorboat, or in a truck, depending on how many kids were there, and bring them down river to Nauvoo. There was a camp fee, of course. It was \$1 a day plus their travel cost and the supplies that they would need to bring, basically, then \$10 for the day. The \$10 was pretty well geared at the food costs. Everything else was pretty well covered, except what the kids themselves had to bring. That works out to about \$174 today, and that seemed very steep to me, at this time period, considering the state of the world at this time, and the fact that the kids had to bring their own travel expenses on top of that dollar a day. But it made me think about how oftentimes in modern days,

congregations and mission centers have camping funds set up. And within a few years after this 1928 camp, there were scholarships made available to help get the kids to camp. So, it's important to me to recognize that they saw this expense, you can't avoid the expense, but they pretty quickly start trying to alleviate that, and that's something we continue to do today. Within these documents from Roberta and Stella, one of the fun things was the list of the things that the kids needed to bring with them. So, these are all the supplies they would have had to bring. So, your toiletries, wouldn't have probably been sleeping bags, but bedding, boots, raincoats, jackets, shoes, all of that fun stuff, but then the dress code was included.

**Karin Peter** 16:54

Oh, a dress code for camp. Excellent.

**Wendy Eaton** 16:58

So, for the boys, regular everyday clothes; dark shirt, trousers, tennis shoes, so on. Nothing suspicious in there. The girls though, when I saw that there was a dress code for the girls, the immediate response in me was, oh, great. How bad is this going to be? But then I read it, and I was fascinated by this. It's, so, what Roberta writes the girls were told to bring, and I will translate this into modern language for us. Roberta remembers that the dress code for the girls, "...two pairs of dark blue or black gym bloomers." So, bloomers are very loose-fitting pants that are typically tied just below the knee, full length dark hose," basically tights. I'm not sure what tights were made out of back then. It might have been closer to leggings, "...white middies with black ties," which was a blouse that, if you think the old sailor shirts, that's basically what a middy and a black tie would look like, that big broad collar, "...tennis shoes and one white skirt for Sunday." Roberta assumes in her article, but she didn't quite remember, that people must have complained that the girls were not in skirts every day. And I found this fascinating, because 1928, I think, okay, they're scared about the influence of the broader world and the drastic change in women's fashion that's happening at this point in time, but to me, this seems like a very forward thinking dress code for the girls. She's basically describing what I've seen in Graceland photographs from this time, women's athletic wear. It was very craftable clothing. I'm like...

**Karin Peter** 18:55

That's what I thought when, when you said it. It was like, wait a minute, some older people, I mean, even for me, the athletic dress code for physical education in high school wasn't far off from that. So, I'm thinking, okay, that is pretty progressive. Do we know why that was?

**Wendy Eaton** 19:13

My only speculation, because I couldn't find a definitive answer is, a big part of this camp was working and was very active. And so, it had, to me, and I could be way off because you're not supposed to interpret history by modern standards, but I kept thinking, maybe the leaders were thinking practically; running around in white skirts and blouses in Nauvoo in the end of June, where it can either be chilly or scorching hot, but they're running around in basically athletic clothes. They're able to do a lot more, they can move around a lot more. And it just seemed like a very practical thought that they had in mind. They wanted the girls to not be cumbered by their clothing and able to participate in all the different activities. Though I will say, one of the photographs in the magazine, shows the girls in their swimsuits and bathing caps. That was clearly 1920s fashion, the whole outfit.

**Karin Peter** 20:21

Those dark wool swimming costumes, yes.

**Wendy Eaton** 20:25

They were like short straps, and they were above the knees. So that wasn't like ankle to wrist, but that was very historical looking. It was really interesting to find that little tidbit in the history. And, like I said, the rest of the camping gear was the very basic stuff that you would expect: jackets, rain boots. They were encouraged, if they had them, to bring musical instruments, and music was a big part of the camp experience for the kids. Gonna talk a little more about Roberta. Her hometown was Nauvoo, so she was one of the fortunate ones. She didn't have the travel expenses. I don't know exactly where she lived, but this town is small enough she probably could have easily walked to the camp, which was at the Nauvoo House predominantly. So that expense for her was pretty minimal, that \$10 per day. But to her, it was important that she earned that money herself, so that she wasn't having to ask her parents to, this expense, so that she could experience this camp. And so, in that article she wrote in 1978, she's thinking back to how is she going to get the money for this camp? And I'm going to read what she wrote in here. "How could I, a 15 year-old, earn a fortune like that by the end of June?" So, \$10. "There was strawberry picking at three cents a quart. That wouldn't do. It was then that I learned that a local man was offering \$3 a day for weeding onions. I toiled and boiled on my knees until I had acquired the \$10. I'm thankful I did not know at the time that his onion growing was a cover up for bootlegging. What a decision that would have been." So, for those who don't know, Nauvoo, after the height of the Latter-day Saint period, developed a booming grape and wine industry, and other fruit, like the strawberries. Prohibition, which started in 1920, was not an economically supportive law for this committee. No matter what your opinion is on prohibition, alcohol consumption, it was not great for the economy of Nauvoo. I had heard rumors of Nauvoo during Prohibition, but this was the first documented account I had found of bootlegging, and it was connected to a Church youth camp. And that is one of the stories that has stuck with me the most these past several years, as I've slowly been gathering information on this camp that, how much was Prohibition hanging over the Church at this time. That's not something I've ever studied. And to have this camp in a community so affected by that, and to have Roberta panic that she was going to camp by unintentionally helping out with this gentleman's bootleg, just great story.

**Karin Peter** 23:50

I feel an episode coming in the future all about Prohibition and Church perspective. So, I'm sensing that at some point coming down the line.

**Wendy Eaton** 23:59

We might have to bring someone in to help on that. I really have very little information.

**Karin Peter** 24:05

But I think it is really interesting, where she voices that, oh, that would have been a dilemma had I known what I was doing? I find it interesting that she even put that in her account of this camp later on. That seems like the type of thing that, for a lot of people, they wouldn't want to put in their printed account because they wouldn't want people to know. So, kudos to her for keeping that in her narrative.

**Wendy Eaton 24:28**

And so, the plan, once all those 60 campers arrived here, was for the girls to sleep in the Nauvoo House up on the third floor. The second floor would be used for classroom space and other gatherings, and then the bottom floor, which is where the kitchen and dining room are, for those purposes, eating and meal preparation. They made up straw tick mattresses, lined them on the floor up in the attic. And the supervisors at that time believed strongly in fresh air at night, which, and the girls were often wakened in the middle of the night by chilly winds and rains coming in on their mattress up on the third floor. I think the boys might have had it a little easier. They were in tents outside, and so they had plenty of fresh air without windows being open.

**Karin Peter 25:17**

Yeah, yeah.

**Wendy Eaton 25:18**

The boys would tent camp for at least the first two years before cabins were built right along the shores of the Mississippi, right there by the Nauvoo House. But I think they must have really liked the tent camping. I think, as a teenager, I would have had a big kick out of doing that, as opposed to sleeping on the floor of an attic, which would have been hot, except for those cold winds.

**Karin Peter 25:44**

Yeah, there are some days, when you think about Midwest summers, that could definitely be muggy and hot, even when a storm comes through at night.

**Wendy Eaton 25:53**

So, being 1928, you would expect the facilities to be very rustic. There was a lot of issues with sanitary facilities within the first few years of the camp here in Nauvoo. And in fact, they would be shut down one year so that they could resolve the issues. Those first few years, including 1928, they just had some, what sound to be pretty scary outhouses that they were using. All their water for cooking, bathing and drinking came out of the Smith family well located by the homestead, which is still there. That's the well that the Smith's used back in the 1840s, and then later on. But this was not adequate for the state inspections; that they were getting their water out of a well and they didn't have proper plumbing in the house. So those would all be resolved eventually. But that first year, pretty rustic situation and drawing water seems like it was a continual chore at that camp, just to keep everything going. So, like camps today, especially the younger kids, swimming was a major activity. As both Stella and Roberta put it, there was no mixed bathing, so the boys and girls had separate swim times. The girls were wakened every morning at six for a morning swim.

**Karin Peter 27:24**

What?

**Wendy Eaton 27:25**

Now, like I said, this camp, and I have experienced some very chilly late June's here in Nauvoo, I can't imagine being pulled out of bed at six in the morning to go swim in a cold river, a cold, muddy river, but

they would have that morning swim. Often, they would have a second swim in the afternoon, and the boys would have a swim after that. Craig Sigfried was the camp lifeguard and swim instructor, so they did have that at this first camp, which I think risk management would approve of, that they had that foresight in 1928. Craig Sigfried coordinated the boy's efforts to complete a diving raft, setting the swim boundaries, because it is a river and a lot of these kids probably would not have had experience swimming in a river, especially such a big one. And then, all the campers worked together to complete the swim beach, which was just down the river from the Nauvoo House. I don't know exactly where, but I have a couple ideas where I speculate it may have been. The river's changed a lot since 1928, so it looks very different today than it did back then. But it wasn't just in the river. They had a lot of activities on the river. Like I mentioned, traveling to the camp they had access to boats and so they took several excursions on the river. And the first one was really interesting. So, Nauvoo is just south of Fort Madison, Iowa, and Fort Madison has the Iowa State Penitentiary. And the kids went on a field trip to the state penitentiary for a tour of the facility there and to hear what it was like for the prisoners, which I thought was just really strange. Stella doesn't give many details about why they did this. The only thing she really pointed out was how many pancakes it took to feed all the prisoners. I want to say it was like 7000 pancakes or something like that. Roberta just mentioned that it was a very unpleasant visit. So, I don't know what the point was taking them there, but it was one of their field trips. The next field trip was far more exciting for everybody I imagine. Located just opposite of Nauvoo is Montrose, Iowa, and this was where the Church had a reunion ground, Bluff Park, and they took a trip over to Bluff Park for a picnic and games, just, I think, to give them a chance to experience some time on the Mississippi and to see that reunion grounds. So, they had games, the picnic, and both Stella and Roberta talk about how unpleasant the trip back was. So, it's just a mile across the river, but a storm blew up. And so, there were three boats to get all 60 campers and staff back and forth across the river, and they say that the third boat had a, "...truly thrilling experience crossing the river," and that by the time they got everybody back to the Nauvoo House, the staff decided, you know what, here's some hot chocolate. Go to bed and get warm.

**Karin Peter** 30:43

Oh, no.

**Wendy Eaton** 30:46

And then they were allowed to sleep late the next morning. So, they were concerned about the kids getting quite wet and getting quite cold. But both Stella and Roberta, like I said, they talk about, this was a really fun trip that they took. I think the last big excursion was the more exciting for all of them because it was a little more of a pleasant journey altogether. They didn't have the stormy crossing of the Mississippi, but they went south on the Mississippi to Keokuk, Iowa to tour the new hydroelectric dam. Now, this is one of the reasons why the river is so different today than it was back then. The other big reason would be increased flooding and river build up along the edges. But they took this trip down to take a tour of the dam and watch the boats go through the locks, which would have been a very new experience for some of the kids. And I think this was interesting in one way for the kids because one of the classes that they had taken involved a slide show that one of the professors, Professor Mortimer, he had taken a trip to South America and Panama to see the Panama Canal. And the Keokuk Dam and the Panama Canal were completed within about a year of each other, these two massive projects. Panama Canal took far longer than the Keokuk Dam and lock to put together. But to hear this story



about the Panama Canal and then to experience a much smaller lock and dam system themselves, to kind of reaffirm that lesson that they had taken. And for me, this was fun, because my dad was in the Air Force and we lived in Panama for a few years. And so, I have seen boats go through the Panama Canal and I've seen boats go through the Keokuk Lock and Dam. So, there was a way for me to touch, oh, the kids got to see all this, and I've gotten to experience all that myself, so that was neat.

**Karin Peter** 32:43

I think it also speaks to something you brought up earlier, which was, this period of time, along with having a lot of shifting roles in social and cultural areas, but it was also a time of technology and industry, great advancements in engineering. All those kinds of things were happening and this is an experience for them to actually live in that.

**Wendy Eaton** 33:05

Yeah, I think so.

**Karin Peter** 33:06

It still doesn't explain the prison visit. But I can see why the lock.

**Wendy Eaton** 33:11

Yeah, I wish they had included more information. Maybe that's going to require more digging as to, why did you take the kids here? So, speaking of classes, like this one on South America with the slideshow and the Panama Canal, their classes were pretty varied. There was a survey of world history. There was of course, a focus on Church history, because where they're located and this was pretty important for them to get across to the kids. But then there was also a lot of classes in science, especially natural science. I think maybe this may have been a way for them to say, oh, let's take the kids on a nature hike because there's lots of great places to walk along the Mississippi and experience nature and see new things. And so, they had this history and nature and Church history exposure within their Church classes. A lot of their classes, whenever they could, took place outside. The homestead faces the Mississippi River and it's a little hill down to the river, and whenever they could, that's where they had their classes, outside, lovely view of the Mississippi. I imagine lots of boats going up and down the river, all the wildlife around them, which makes me wonder about the mosquitoes and the chiggers, *[inaudible]*.

**Karin Peter** 34:28

Yes, and the ticks. Don't forget the ticks.

**Wendy Eaton** 34:31

Yeah, maybe they had blankets and that helped, but I think it was a really nice setting to have these classes, and in some cases, I would wonder, pretty intense classes, sitting outside with this really great environment surrounding them. Their nature hikes, they were collecting leaves and flowers and geodes, which, if you're not familiar, geodes are rocks that, as water passes through them, it deposits minerals that builds crystals inside the geodes. There are geodes everywhere out here in this area and so they would take these hikes, find the geodes, bring them back to camp and break them open to see if they had found a good one that has lots of great crystals in it. And a lot of their flowers and leaves were

used in art projects and other classes that they were having. So, Blanche Mesle was in charge of worship services for the camp. She chose scriptures and worked with a camp music leader, Mrs. Wallace Blair, and I was never able to find what her first name was, but Mrs. Wallace Blair, to choose hymns and songs for the group to use. Blanche also coordinated to invite several church leaders to come be a part of camp for classes and devotions and worship services. J. A. Gardner and C. Ed Miller, who were two very prominent leaders at this time, were present for the entire camp. And President Fred M. Smith came out for the last few days. And I thought it was interesting, President Smith spoke some on Church history, and the evening that he was leaving the worship service where he talked about Church history and some of his experiences, it was one of the rainy nights, and so when it was too rainy to have campfire outside, they would have it around the fireplace in the Nauvoo House. And just in my mind, I'm thinking what must have it been like for Fred M. Smith, to be in his grandmother's house, teaching Church history? And I think Emma would have been quite proud of this, because it's pretty well documented that she was very fond of children and youth. And the number of stories that I've come across of children who were not Church members, being welcomed into her home, to have cookies and to listen to her tell stories. I think she would have really approved of this youth camp happening in her home. But that must have been really neat for President Smith to be able to have that experience. And after that worship service, they kept calling it a worship service, and he was doing lessons. I don't know, I guess they kind of blended together, but after that, the youth were given a chance to meet him and get a chance to talk to him one-on-one, without adults. The kids, the teenagers, were being put out there to have this chance to interact with President Smith and I thought that was really neat for them to have traveled to get to have this experience at this time. So, three times, speaking of churchy type activities, the campers walked the half mile from the Nauvoo House to the Old Brick Church here at Nauvoo. So, if you visit Nauvoo now this is not where the church is located today. This is down Main Street, right about a half mile, and it used to be one of the old schools here for the community, that the Church bought and had established as a congregation for a number of years. And so, they walked the half mile, the first Wednesday night, for Wednesday prayer and testimony meeting, and they talk about how they sang songs the whole way, which is something I have experienced myself as a camper years ago. And then they returned on Sunday morning for Sunday school, with the class for Sunday School for the teenagers had the ominous topic of problems. They did not go into detail what problems. I could speculate what that might have been. But anyway, after Sunday school, they had the preaching service and they walked back to the Nauvoo House for a Sunday pie dinner, which just sounds incredibly cozy to me, and gives me an opportunity to bring to light what I think are some of the most important camp staff; the cooks...

**Karin Peter** 38:54

Ah, the cooks.

**Wendy Eaton** 39:54

...because Stella named the cooks. And to...

**Karin Peter** 38:58

Well, you have been camp staff many times, Wendy, as I have, and every camp director knows the most important person you're going to get for a camp is your cook. So, let's hear about these.

**Wendy Eaton** 39:09

Okay, so, I don't have a lot of information, but I have their names. And so, 95 years later, they're probably not around, but I'm going to name them, because I think it's really important and I have been a camp cook before. I got socked into that once, will never do it again either. But these are the women who really took care of the physical needs of the campers and the staff. And so, the head cook was Clara Wood, and she was assisted by Marie Nelson, Veralyn Stevenson and Iona Smith, so very important core group of women leaders at that camp right there. So, after this Sunday pie dinner, provided by these wonderful women, they had a period of rest before, as was typical at this time period, they returned to church for Sunday evening worship services. And I think it's interesting because one of the camp's staff was Elder D.B. Sordan, and he had recently been spending a lot of time in Jerusalem for the Church. And so, he shared about his time there. And Barb Walden, not that long ago, did a *Project Zion Podcast* about the Church in Jerusalem, and I believe she talked about Elder Sordan. It's a "Cuppa Joe", episode 354, in case people are interested in that. For the kids to have the opportunity to hear about the Holy Land from a minister who was there, I think was pretty neat. And to have him on staff, it also speaks to how many quality staff members they had at this first experiment that they were holding here in Nauvoo. That's kind of a quick summary of the classes that were going on at this time. So, I mentioned pranks.

**Karin Peter** 41:02

Yes, you did.

**Wendy Eaton** 41:02

So, this was a great story. On the second to last day, the boys were volunteered to provide the noon meal, and so this is an area that probably not too many of the boys would have had experience at home, doing a lot of meal prep. They've, were farm families, which I speculate a lot of them probably were, they would have been outside working the farm. And Stella wrote, "It would have done many a mother's heart good to see her boy with his sleeves rolled up, a mixture of perspiration and dishwasher running down his face." She says that, "...the boys were not very good at peeling potatoes." She said they basically ended up whittling them. But the pork roast and the mashed potatoes, the gravy were all very good. There was only one big snafu. They had three batches of ice cream, and this would have been hand cranked ice cream, which I've only experienced a few times in my life, but one of the plugs came loose and salt got into the third batch. And so, they didn't have as much ice cream as they hoped, but the boys did a good job. But the best part of this, Stella concludes, that the boys even decorated the dining room.

**Karin Peter** 42:18

Really?

**Wendy Eaton** 42:19

Yeah, she wrote, "One of the high points of the meal was the really beautiful flowers on the tables. But woe to the innocent person who ventured to smell them, because they had been well peppered with true boyish gusto." So here the boys spent all this wonderful effort preparing the meal, cleaning up after the meal, but then they had to do their little bit and put pepper on the flowers. I love it.

**Karin Peter** 42:49

Definitely, I can't think of a youth camp I've been at where there hasn't been some kind of a prank somewhere.

**Wendy Eaton** 42:55

And the fact that they're typically very harmless pranks, and this is a very typical, harmless, camp prank. I love it. It's great. So, as I've mentioned before, lots of singing is going on at this camp, and including during meals, and I've mentioned camp fires, which were a big part of the camp experience. And as I mentioned, most of the time, like you would expect a campfire being held outside, but they had a backup in the Nauvoo House to gather in there. And this is another thing that I think connects with the Smith family; several of the children and grandchildren of Joseph and Emma talk about the family gathering together to sing in the evenings at the home, and so, to have this carry on, this singing in the evening together. With campfire, this was a prime place for leadership training with the youth, which continues to be something today. And one of the Saturday evenings the girls were put in charge of campfire, so they got to pick all the hymns that they wanted. They got to choose who was giving what prayers at the beginning and closing. There was also a Graceland slideshow presentation in the middle of the campfire. I'm not sure what that had to do with campfire but Graceland was involved. But then they closed their worship with song and prayer. Couple nights later, the boys were given the opportunity to experience leading a campfire, and it's written that, "...after supper the campfire was built and the boys put on a program of songs and stunts," which to me broke down exactly what I see when youth plans campfire services today. They're very thoughtful, they're very meaningful, they're often very humorous, and to see that as one of these training tools for youth that had been going on for so long. I love that, to have that connection with that heritage and the training of the youth. It's so important and for that to be a critical part of this camp. I love that they included that bit information in here.

**Karin Peter** 45:07

Well, it still is a way that youth develop leadership formation and discipleship formation in the church today, is through their experiences at camp and being invited to lead things at camp. I like that connection as well.

**Wendy Eaton** 45:19

So, one of the places of great significance for the youth is David's Chamber. So, this is named for Emma and Joseph's youngest son, David Hiram Smith. David's Chamber is a scenic turn off, right about a mile down the river from the Nauvoo House. This was a destination for many of their nature hikes, but then it was also a place that the youth would go for worship services. And so, I mentioned the Wednesday night prayer service. This was a big deal within Community of Christ, even up until the 1990s. Some places probably still hold this. But rather than return for the second Wednesday to the Brick congregation, they decided to hold their own prayer and testimony meeting up at David's Chamber. And so, this was interesting for me. In 1998, I was on a youth caravan where I got to visit the Church Historic Sites. This was the first time I visited the Historic Sites as a teenager. Nauvoo was at the end of our trip, and so I don't remember much because you're exhausted by the end of the camp, but I do remember one of the very last things we did on the last morning before we headed back to Independence, Missouri, was we went to David's Chamber for a prayer and testimony meeting. And so, for this to continue for decades to be a significant place, and Community of Christ groups today, and

some of the other Latter-day Saint traditions that are closer tied to Community of Christ, a lot of them still continue to visit David's Chamber. David's Chamber was a place that he liked to visit to be inspired with his poetry and his art, a place that he liked to just get out to and connect to nature. So maybe this is one of our oldest expressions of connecting with nature in a spiritual formation practice. But David's Chamber is still a pretty significant place today. It's still just down the road from here and it's still connected with camping here in Nauvoo. So, the last full day of camp was gray and wet. The youth followed a pretty typical schedule, but added to that was cleaning and packing. They had autograph books, which was a fad at that time, but ended up being significant so that they could write special messages to one another. Their morning class, Fred M. Smith was still in town, so he spoke to future plans of the church and encouraged the youth that they had a place in helping carry out those plans. The final campfire was held and the staff spent time thanking the campers for being there and being a part of this experience, and then they ended by roasting marshmallows around the fire. So that pretty well brings to close that 1928 camp. From 1928 to 1955, youth camps at the Historic Site were nearly an annual event. There were the two years that were skipped; the one I mentioned, the sanitary facilities, the other one there was a lot of financial constraints. I think that might have been the 1933 camp. It, just financially, they were not able to pull it off. But it grew in popularity. By 1930 there were 90 campers...

**Karin Peter** 48:47

Oh, my.

**Wendy Eaton** 48:48

...and it was so big that they divided into two age groups. So, the senior camp was ages 16 to 20, and then the junior camp, ages 12 to 15. By the 1950s, the purpose of the Historic Site was being reevaluated, which led to the decision to suspend camping on site. A new campground was built and dedicated, not too far from David's Chamber. Camp Nauvoo is still just up there on the hill today. But those first 30 years of youth camping, happening right down here on the banks of the Mississippi, and how far it expanded and how very quickly it expanded. One report that I found was, by 1953, nearly 4000 teenagers attended 39 camps. So that is a very quick expansion for a youth program that was just an experiment to try in the beginning. So, many of those staff from the 1928 would continue serving the Church in pretty significant capacities. Eugene Closson, one of the co-directors would soon join the Graceland faculty in the psychology department. He became a favorite counselor to the students, and a huge supporter of Graceland athletics. Lenore Woodstock, the other co-director, would help spread church camp ministries around the United States, including, I think she was at the first camp up in Michigan. I think that was Park of the Pines. Michigan folk don't hold me to that, but I think it was Park of the Pines. But then she also was director of Girls Work, which was a subset of the Women's Department for the Church, and directed the first girls camp at Lake Doniphan, which is the Church reunion ground that serves the Kansas City area. Blanche Mesle was heavily invested in women's work during this time. She was a member of the General Council of Women. She authored and edited several books and pamphlets for the Church. Probably the most well-known of all the staff members was Roy Cheville, who would continue on as a prominent leader of the Church, especially at Graceland, and with his significant music ministry. His wife, Nell, would join the camp as staff nurse, then a few years later, so another very important role for *[inaudible]* camps. And so, we are going on 95 years of youth camping, and it being a significant ministry within the church. I'm not sure when the first

youth camps outside of the United States started, but I'm pretty sure that Australia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, they were starting youth camp programs pretty early on, and I know that they all still have very strong camp activities for youth today. Spectacular has been held at Graceland for decades, giving youth across the United States a chance to come together for leadership, arts, athletics, the same types of things that they were doing at that Camp Nauvoo in 1928. International Youth Forum is held every few years for, I think about the last 30 years, bringing youth from around the globe together. Of course, we've had a lot of changes in the last decade or so with financial constraints and more recently, the COVID pandemic, but the camping programs have persisted, even if they've been taken online or completely reimaged so that they could be done safely and affordably. This youth camping ministry, it's really important, and I'm pretty proud that it got started right here in Nauvoo. It's one of the things that makes working here pretty exciting, to know that that got started right down the road from me. So, I have one last story that I want to share about the beginnings of camping ministry. So, I mentioned in 2018, we were celebrating the centennial, and one of our evening activities, we had a woman named Martha Harper visiting. Now, Martha is a longtime supporter of Community of Christ history, especially Liberty Hall in Lamoni, and she was here for that evening activity and she shared her memories of Camp Nauvoo as a child. Now, she doesn't go back to 1928, but she talked about, she was 10 years old in the summer of 1945, and she gave me permission to share her name, to clarify that, but she and her parents drove across from western Iowa to pick up her brother who was attending camp that year. And I can only imagine a 10 year-old and the excitement she must have picked up from the other campers, and how hard it was to wait five years before she was old enough herself to attend the camp. But when it finally did roll around and she was old enough to attend, she remembers there were 10 youth from her area who loaded up in the back of a farm stock truck for the trip from western Iowa to Nauvoo, Illinois. She talks about them singing and sharing stories, the old campers gearing up the young campers, the first timers especially, for this experience that they were about to have. She closed her sharing with a song that she picked up at the camp. I thought it was charming. I jotted down the words, didn't think too much of it, but a few weeks ago when I was doing some additional research for recording this evening, I was looking through the September 1930 *Autumn Leaves*, the Church youth magazine, and I found the words almost exactly how Martha talked about them and sang them for us. And it got me thinking, and it looks like that song may have been written in 1928, definitely by 1929 though, because in 1929, there was that article that talked about this song and printed some of the words of this song. There's a lot of speculation, and I think it's pretty good argument that Roy Cheville is the one who wrote the words to this. And so, I want to close by sharing these words as they appear in Nell's article. "We're coming back to you, dear old Nauvoo, to camp once more on bending shore, 'neath skies of blue. For your happy days and friendly ways, there came a call that drew us all to old Nauvoo. Oh, Mississippi, your waters enchant me. By you I'll sit and dream while mellow moonbeams gleam, or float along with boating song at old Nauvoo."

### **Karin Peter 56:03**

That's a great way to close out our episode, to actually recite a camp song from old Nauvoo from the first youth camp. So, I want to thank you for sharing this. A lot of people who are new to Community of Christ ask, what's our most important children's or young person's discipleship formation aspect, and invariably, it's camping. That's where kids really get to experience the blessings of community and the sacredness of creation for their first time together as part of the community of faith. So, I'm looking forward to our next installment. You're always surprising of what you come up with and what we're

going to talk about. But if you're listening and have questions about Camp Nauvoo, that you would like to ask Wendy, you can get a hold of her at weaton, which is weaton@cofchrist.org. This is "Cuppa Joe", where we've been talking about youth camps and Camp Nauvoo as part of Church history in the *Project Zion Podcast*. I'm Karin Peter, your host. Thanks so much for listening.

**Josh Mangelson** 57:14

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