



CAMP STAPLETON HISTORY

In 1940 Camp Stapleton for girls was opened in Lexington Michigan, just south of Camp Ozanam. Disaster struck that fall, when one of the buildings burned to the ground. In the spring of 1941, with the aid of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, repairs were completed and the camp reopened

The Adrian Dominican Sisters began serving at Camp Stapleton in 1945. In that year Camp opened on June 26 and closed August 31, supported by 5 Sisters and 5 counselors. Each summer, the camps consisted of a Sister Director and 4 Sisters who assisted in the dining room, arts and crafts, the clinic, canteen, registration data, and other miscellaneous duties. Two experienced women from the Lexington Community did the cooking and total supervision of the kitchen and dining room. The maintenance man, James Doyle, oversaw our repair needs and lawn care. He was assisted by the seminarians from Camp Ozanam. The Chaplain Director and other priests came for daily Mass.

The building consisted of 9 camper cabins, the main house for the head counselors, the kitchen/dining room (sometimes Chapel), small garage for arts and crafts (Hobby Haven), the clinic (attached to the dining building), convent, canteen, and recreation building (also at times the Chapel). Playground equipment consisted of swings and teeter totters. Stairs led to the beach where one boat was available for rescue. The property was small, open and had a few trees.



There were 5 two week trips with 100 girls each trip. The counselors and staff were welcoming and organized. There was no space between each trip: the old campers ate lunch at picnic tables while new campers went to the dining room for lunch and then were assigned cabins. They then settled in.

The schedules were carefully planned but relaxed. There were sports, swimming, hiking, sing-a-longs, evening campfires and of course essential naps in the afternoon. Sister Betty introduced archery in 1967. Softball games were played between Stapleton counselors and those of the nearby CYO Girls Camp. At the end of each trip the campers gave a variety show with a different theme each time.

On September 25, 1959, Mother Mary Gerald OP received the following letter from B.A. Seymour, the then President of St Vincent de Paul: “some days ago, rt. Rev. Msgr. Markey and I had the pleasure of visiting Camp Stapleton, the St. Vincent de Paul Society’s summer camp for girls on the shores of Lake Huron, and I hastened to express the thanks of the members of our society for the cooperation given us and the excellent manner in which the camp was conducted by the 5 Holy Nuns in charge of that camp.”

It was a great testament to the staff that campers often returned later to then become staff members. The hard work of the Vincentians was appreciated as so many girls enjoyed a summer away from the city environment. The Sisters kept things balanced and offered the experience of many years working with children.

Each summer brought challenges. The Federal Government started sending children not attached to Parishes. Some of these girls went to 3 or 4 different camps within one summer. They expected our camp to have a larger range of property and activities; more than we could provide. In the 60's the Detroit riot presented us with a unique challenge. The Vincentians worked diligently to keep the information from the campers so they would not worry about their family and neighborhood. Sister Betty feels she was privileged to work alongside so many others who allowed children a time to be away from worries. The first day Sister Betty was director 2 campers ran away. The Seminarians, Father Martin and the sheriff office spent long hours searching for the girls. The girls families later reported the next day that 2 boys from Lexington had taken them home.

In 2004, Stapleton was opened as a rental camp to assist in generating revenue to support the new co-ed camping program at Camp Ozanam. In 2007, the kitchen went under some renovations including purchasing a used dishwasher and stove, which was a needed upgrade to the appliances on hand. Additionally, new tile and walls were added. The walk-in freezer was moved from the dining hall to the kitchen area. In 2010 a portion of the cement floor in the back of the dining hall (by the bell) was replaced due to cracks and the un-leveling of the cement that happened over the years.

From 2009 through 2013 the camp once again had sounds of joy-filled children running through the camp. The facility had been rented to Wooden Acres, a Jewish camp for children – which took over the facility for 8 weeks each summer. Wooden Acres resurfaced the basketball court and added a new one upon their arrival.

Between 2009 and 2013, the Camps Connect (a collaborative effort between CYO and St. Vincent de Paul) summer staff, working at Camp Ozanam and the two CYO Camps, begins staff orientation each summer at Camp Stapleton to help build the staff community.

At a camp committee in 2013, Chairman Mike Thoen said that his dream was that someday the economy would improve enough to reopen the Stapleton facility as a St. Vincent de Paul camp for girls – a sentiment shared by many.



Camp Stapleton Directors:

1960-1965: Sr. Jane Edwards OP

1966-1972: Sr. Betty Jenkins (formerly Sr. Matthia) OP

1973- 1976: Here come the IHMs: Sr. Marie Miller, Sr. Judy Weirick, Sr. Tiz Fleckenstein, and Sr. Margaret Van Velzen. One of the recruiting strengths of the IHM sisters is that they recruited directly on college campuses such as Marygrove and Madonna. One of the benefits that some of the college students received was college credit in education for working at camp. The credits were

administered by both Marygrove and Madonna.



Barb Koster

1977-1979: Our first lay directors: Sue Marcoux (Rowe) and Mary Jo Evans (Mary Jo was the 2013 medallion winner).

1980: Bonnie BeMeyere

198?: Barb Koster

1989-1992: Noreen Satterwhite

1993-1996: Ann LeWalk

1998: Renee Deroche was hired as Director of Camp Operations and served as overall director at both camps.

2004: Camp Stapleton was “temporarily” closed as a girl’s camp.

Sister Patricia Magee, OP Shares her Story...

Sister Patricia Magee OP writes that she went to camp Stapleton in 1957. She was homesick but the activities provided ample distractions. There were daily crafts, baseball games and swimming. In the midst of these fun activities there was daily Mass. The liturgy was in line with the family practice during the school year. She was particularly taken when the Sisters chanted their office in the mornings and evenings. She spent her time pondering and letter writing. She treasured these memories so much that by the time the bus arrived to leave camp she was not ready to leave.

As a junior and senior in high school she returned to camp as a kitchen kid. The Dominican Sisters were very good to their workers. They provided weekly trips to Port Huron to socialize or in the evenings we would wander over to the convent and watch while a couple of Sisters challenged each other to an intense game of double solitaire.

Since becoming a Dominican Sister she recognizes that the closeness and caring she experienced was based on our togetherness for a common purpose. They prayed together each morning at Mass and joked and laughed their way

throughout the work of the day. She believes that her experience at Stapleton nurtured her vocation to Religious life.

Following a year break she returned to be an assistant cook in the kitchen she knew so well. It was a homecoming. The campers, workers and Sisters were a cohesive community. The daily Mass schedule had to change that summer due to her cooking duties but a great introduction to being a Dominican, which allows for exceptions of daily prayer practice when circumstances occur. The whole tenor of being at camp brought peace, a sense of belonging, and joy.

After several years past, she returned as an Adrian Dominican Sister and had the chance to help at camp for the last 2 weeks of one summer. She had come full circle. She began as a camper, worked in the kitchen and now did the work of one of the Sisters. This completed her journey. It was an “old” sense of community. Thanks to the St. Vincent de Paul Society for supporting this summer community. It will never be known how the faith and life journeys of many other young women were nourished as was hers.

Adrian Dominican Sisters Assigned to Camp Stapleton

- 1945: Sister Mary Angela
- 1948: Sisters Catherine Denis, Norita, Lorraine, Georgita
- 1950: Sisters Bernadine Marie, Georgita, Alice Patricia, James Mary
- 1951: Sisters Bernadine Marie, James Mary, Fabian, Kathleen Mary
- 1952: Sisters Bernadine Marie, Georgita, Ellen Richard, James Mary
- 1953: Sisters Bernadine Marie, Ellen Richard, Armella, Georgita
- 1954: Sisters Mary Florida, Ellen Richard Francis Margaret, Marie Angela
- 1958: Sisters Florida, Rose Camilla, Celeste, Merici, Jean Clare, Mary Theodora, Dominic Marie, Florence Mauice, Thomasella
- 1963: Sisters Jane Edward, John Timothy, Marie Innocentis, Jean Marice, Jean Annette, Richard Therese
- 1964: Sister Jane Therese
- 1966: Sister Jane Therese
- 1967: Sisters Mathia, Theophilus, Vincella, Paul Christie, Ann Clare, John Regis, John Terine, David Yvonne, Rayella, Marie, Catherine Laurine, Raymond Cecile
- 1968: Sisters Mathia Jenkins, Peter Renee Smith, Peter Claver Honson
- 1969: Sister Elizabeth Jenkis (Mathia)

Random Historical Facts

... When the Dominican sisters, who were the directors, wanted to go swimming – they would drive their car and park it by the beach stairs. This would be a sign to the rest of the staff that the sisters were swimming and were not to be disturbed. Remember, in the 60's nuns were still in their habits and were never seen in bathing suits.

... Before the camping season in 1957, the camp caretaker (Bob Conlen) handed out a number of axes and hatchets to the seminarians' staff from Ozanam. There were a number of trees, which needed to be cleared away. Temperatures reached 105 degrees that day. Using the Ozanam staff for physical help during “work week” was a long-lasting tradition, especially with putting in the lifeguard towers (three inches to the right.. or was it two inches to the left?)

... Speaking of the caretaker – one of the bigger celebrations at Stapleton each summer was the caretaker's birthday.

... Spirituality was a cornerstone to the camping program during the earliest programs at Stapleton.

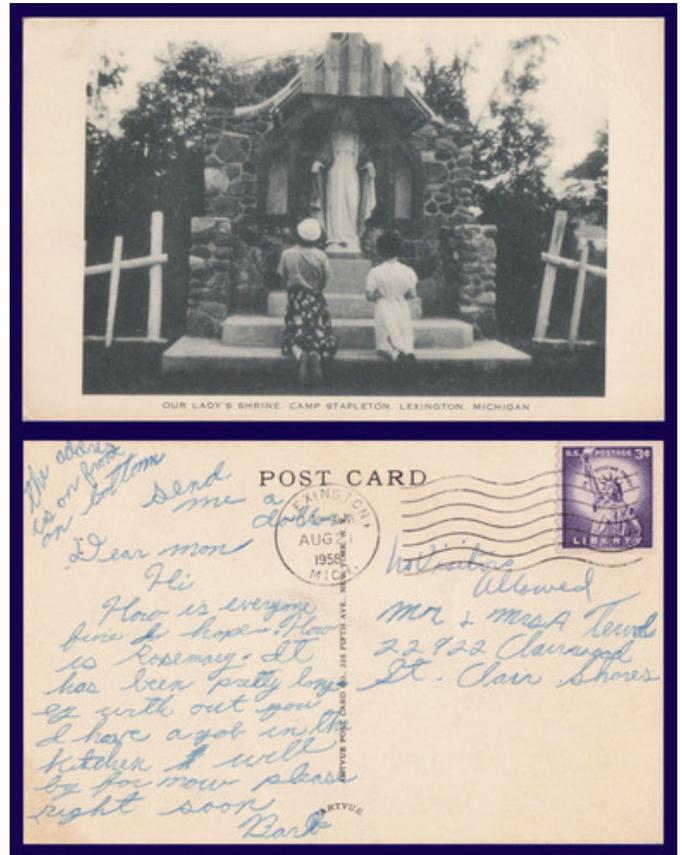
... At the counselor banquet following the 1957 season, all of the ladies wore their finest dresses.

... A little known fact – there were 13,143 communions at Camp Stapleton during the summer of 1957, according to one of the old logs.

... When the campers and staff attended Mass, they always wore coats and scarves as was the tradition back then.

... In the 60's all that was required on the campers' letters home was a 4 cent stamp, how times have changed.

... Some of the earlier camp programs included, watching the Mackinaw boat races (which were then imitated), Sewing was an important part of the Craft Program, and there was always a race to the playground to use the ever-present teeter-totters.



... Camp food is always appreciated. The kitchen staff always ensured that three balanced meals were served daily, something that the underprivileged girls did not always receive at home. The daily meals were always fortified by everybody's favorite, Silvercup bread.

... The girls' favorite program in the 60's included hayrides at a local farm and the Gay 90's Water Carnival!

... Camp stories always dominate the summer. Many times the counselors would put the girls to bed by reading to them from Nancy Drew books. On one occasion, one of the men counselors from Ozanam came down to Stapleton to tell the well-loved tale of Thump drag, changing a few of the details to suit the Stapleton setting. The story was way too scary and not entertaining at all – the story teller and the heroine had to go cabin to cabin telling the girls that the tale was a complete lie just to calm down the girls.

... Camp Pranks always dominate the summer activities, especially between the girls and boys camps. One summer the boys' staff hid all the camp dishes, leaving the camp kitchen manager (Jeannie Byron) to conduct a "dish hunt" so that breakfast could be served.



... Another favorite was when Bonne DeMeyere and Cyndi Harrison were left in charge. They received a call from a local radio station (actually the boys' camp leadership team). The call stated that the camp had been selected to receive a free stereo radio (what is that?). All the girls had to do was to drive in to Port Sanilac, screaming out of their car windows, "We Love you, Port Sanilac!!" The boys' staff raced into Port Sanilac and hid behind the "Welcome to Port Sanilac" sign to witness the girls in

actions. It was barely a few minutes, when you could hear the girls screaming, "We love you, Port Sanilac" over and over. What we wouldn't do for a free stereo in the late 70's. That prank still produces laughter today.

Camp Stapleton served girls from 1940 through 2003.