

## Camping Program Celebrates 85 Years!

By Jane Megginson, Camp Administrative Secretary

Many of us know that we have had a camping program in Baltimore Yearly Meeting for a long time. Almost everyone in Baltimore Yearly Meeting associates camp with Catoctin Quaker Camp. Catoctin will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year in 2008! However, the Yearly Meeting's history with a summer camping program for youth does not start at Catoctin. The Yearly Meeting first owned a camp starting in 1922 along the South River in Anne Arundel County called Keewadin.

"A young people's camp took place in June, while families could use it in July and August. Numerous conferences, picnics, and outings were held there as well. The camp remained in use until 1953. It has remained the happy summer place in many Friends' memories. Bliss and LaVerne Forbush and Mary Blackburn served as camp leaders for about 20 years." From *Minute by Minute, A history of the Baltimore Monthly Meetings of Friends Homewood and Stony Run*, Barbara C. Mallonee, Jane Karkalits Bonny, and Nicholas B. Fessenden, 1992.

Keewadin was sold in 1953, due to encroaching development and other problems with the site. Before Catoctin was bought and after Keewadin was sold, camp sessions were held at the 4-H grounds in Maryland.

Fifty years ago, a group of Friends in Baltimore Yearly Meeting got together and purchased the option to buy a property in the Catoctin Mountains of Maryland that we now call Catoctin Quaker Camp. In April of 1958 the purchase of Catoctin was finalized. Immediately, the industrious group that purchased the property (later to become known as the Catoctin Trustees) got the property ready to hold camp during the last two weeks of August, 1958.

A new well provides adequate, safe water. A water pump, distribution lines, and a hot water heater (for the kitchen only) have been supplied. A good sewer system adequate for expanded facilities is completed. Two modern wash houses contain adequate sanitary and washing facilities for a camp capacity of at least 80 persons. The kitchen has been modernized and conforms with Health Department requirements. Modest but pleasant swimming is available. Eight rustic shelters with canvas roofs have been built. These things have been accomplished despite the handicap of an unusually wet season.

Looking ahead, we feel the pressing need of a sizeable wing to the lodge to serve as a dining-recreation room. For adult conferences or retreats we should have some simple cabins for shelter. Further in the future, an attractive three-acre lake seems a practical possibility.

*Excerpted from Report to Baltimore Yearly Meetings of Catoctin Quaker Camp, Inc, August 1958, Ross W. Sanderson, Jr., Chairman*

The property was acquired for \$26,600 and the above mentioned development costs were over \$8000. The bath houses built at that time for around 80 people are still in use today being used by over 115 people at peak consumption. The swimming pond that was eventually made is about one third of an acre, not the dreamed of three acre lake. In 1958, the dining hall wing was completed, to seat 100 people.

During our first year of ownership the camp property was used during the year by 21 groups for a total of 72 days. The use of Catoctin for meetings and retreats remains popular today. This year, the Catoctin property is rented 95 days by 44 groups when not in use for the camping season. The camp sessions have expanded from two weeks to six weeks for campers, with an additional three weeks of staff development. In 1960, 80 campers attended camp at Catoctin, 40 campers each week. This past summer, 182 campers came to Catoctin for 2 or 4 weeks at a time, with 80 campers or more in camp at any given session.

But wait, there's more... many of us young whippersnappers are saying what about Shiloh, Opequon, and Teen Adventure? Yes, Friends, the camping program has expanded several times since the late 1970s. The first expansion took place in 1978 when after adding sessions at Catoctin and overfilling them repeatedly, a new camp was started in Virginia at the Glaydin School in Lucketts Virginia. Due to a dormitory fire the next year, Glaydin moved to the Opequon Creek property that is a part of the Pidgeon farm in Brucetown Virginia. This is the site of the current Opequon Quaker Camp but not the same program! Also in 1979, the first trip for teens was offered: the New England Caravan trip. Different trips were offered for teens over the next several years. In 1982 the program was christened Teen Adventure (TA) and had such great demand they expanded to two trips running simultaneously. By 1986, the demand for TA had grown even more and three trips were run.

In 1987, Opequon Quaker Camp had to move to a site down the hill from the current site – for all of you current campers that would be the area around the swimming pool. This site was open, unshaded, and a floodplane. I can still remember rest period under those hot blue tarps – you could have gone from tarp to tarp rolling the campers and basting them! The toilets never flushed fully and would overflow several times a day. Every year we would have to rebuild the bathouses and pull the toilets out of the creek where they would end up after the annual flooding! Still camp continued on at Opequon cheerfully, expanding with the growing needs of the Yearly Meeting and others flocking to our camping program. Due to the difficulties with this site, however, we began searching for a better site to hold camp that the Yearly Meeting could own. In 1992, we found that site near Stanardsville Virginia in the foothills of the beautiful Shenandoah Mountains at a camp owned by the Church of the Brethren called Shiloh. We bought Shiloh and that is how Opequon Quaker Camp became Shiloh Quaker Camp.

Some of you out there are probably scratching your heads about now and saying to yourself, but we still have an Opequon Quaker Camp. That is so, but for several years from 1992-1999, we did not! In 1997, all of the Yearly Meeting camps, Catoctin, Shiloh and Teen Adventure, were full and had a waiting list of campers wanting to get in. So in 1998, the Religious Education Committee of the Yearly Meeting started an arts camp that was held on the campus of Sandy Spring Friends School. In 1999, the arts camp was moved under the care of the Camping Program and in 2000 the Quaker Arts Camp moved to its current location at the top of the hill on the Pidgeon Farm at Opequon. The name of the camp was later changed to Opequon Quaker Camp. In 2001 Opequon increased sessions from 3 weeks to 5 weeks. Now Opequon runs for 6 weeks, like Shiloh and Catoctin.

For many years, Teen Adventure ran 4 trips but after increasing our residential camps, more campers were graduating and wanted to attend TA. In 2002, 6 trips were offered for Teen Adventure campers. In 2007, 8 trips will be offered. Shiloh and Opequon are no longer full, but TA and Catoctin are extremely full.

What strikes me most in researching the history of the camping program of BYM is how integral a part of the Yearly Meeting it has been for over 80 years. The vision and commitment of members of the Yearly Meeting to this type of programming, to the development of religious education of our youth through camp, and the faith of members of the Yearly Meeting to make great leaps in support of this program has been consistent. The Camping Program of BYM has affected the lives of thousands of campers over the past 85 years, not to mention the staff of our camps, and families that participate in retreats. Many campers become active participants in the Religious Society of Friends because of their involvement in our camps. Sometimes entire families start attending meeting after a child comes back from camp enthusiastic about the insights gained and spiritual practices begun after a summer or two at camp.

I don't know where our Camping Program will take us next, but I await the changes with interest, excitement, and an open heart, knowing Way Opens.