

Chuck Evertz and Larry J. Smotroff

Camp Staff Breathes New Life into Old Cabin

Have you ever seen an old cabin in the woods and wondered who built it and lived in it from season to season? The stories that the old cabin could tell would fill a book. This is the story of a cabin that lived, died, and was reborn through the efforts of a life-saving team of volunteers who remembered their times at Todd Lodge, along the Appalachian Trail, atop the Kittatinny Mountain Range.

In 1995, the staff alumni associations of Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec (KEP) and Crossett Lake Scout Reservation (CLSR) merged to become the KEP-Crossett Lake Association. This was a natural union because the proceeds from the 1972 sale of Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec to the National Park Service for inclusion in Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (NRA) helped the Orange Mountain Council of the Boy Scouts of America purchase Crossett Lake Scout Reservation the following year. Crossett Lake operated until 1994 when the Boy Scouts sold the property. It was at that time that the Crossett Lake Alumni approached the KEP organization and the new association was formed. It was decided by the executive board of the new association that an effort would be made to form a partnership with Camp Ralph S. Mason, the current operator of KEP, and the National Park Service to renovate and put Todd Lodge back into service.

Todd Lodge was the first building constructed at Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec. It was built by volunteer leaders and scouts from the Orange Mountain Council and was dedicated in 1938 to the memory of Rev. Francis Cheswick Todd, a driving force behind the building of KEP and the scouting movement

in the Oranges, an area of New Jersey west of New York City, near Newark.

Over the course of its long history, Todd Lodge served many purposes. It was used extensively in the winter camping season for short term camping. During the summer months, Todd Lodge served at one time or another as the handicraft lodge, the scout craft lodge, and commissioner headquarters. For several years after the sale of KEP, Todd Lodge was used by the various lease groups that occupied the camp. Little or no maintenance was done, however, and the building began to deteriorate. For many years, Todd Lodge was boarded up and abandoned.

The newly formed KEP/CLSR Association presented a plan to Camp Ralph S. Mason and the National Park Service to save Todd Lodge. After many meetings and visits to the site, the plan for the restoration project was approved. Several subcommittees were formed to tackle the various aspects of the project.

A mailing list of over 2,000 former campers, staff, and friends of both camps was created to gain support for the new endeavor. Not only was financial support sought, but also technical sup-

The Todd Lodge after resuscitation. Photo courtesy KEP-CLSR Association.



An alumni reunion at Todd Lodge. Photo courtesy KEP-CLSR Association.

port and manpower to do the actual work.

The response to our Birchwood Newsletter was very favorable, and within six months close to \$10,000 in cash and gifts had been donated. A great many people indicated their willingness to help, and on our first work day close to 50 scouters and their families came back to KEP to start the project. Those who could not attend contributed by sharing memories and memorabilia and providing resources for future use.

The association developed plans for the actual restoration of the lodge with the guidance and approval of the National Park Service. Due to the historic nature of the building, it was decided that the lodge would be restored to the way it was during its prime operating years. This provided additional challenges such as finding exact replicas of the light fixtures and wooden double hung windows with 6/6 true divided lights. However, all these challenges were eventually overcome due to the diligence and hard work of the association members.

Finally, after months of planning and preparation, the actual work began in May 1996. Over the course of the next five years, association members met one Saturday a month during the May to October camping season to work on the project. Not only was there a great deal of work accomplished on these days; but also friendships were made and renewed, fond memories were relived, and scouters found that they could really come back "home." The group was made up of staff and friends of both camps, and very often family members and children joined in the effort.

The scope of the project was enormous because Todd Lodge had been closed up for so long. Structurally, the lodge was intact; however its appearance was disheartening. A great deal of time was spent cleaning out years of accumulated debris. Once that was accomplished, windows were replaced, new doors were built, the building



was rewired and replumbed, the entire ceiling was replaced, the walls were scrubbed and refinished, and the floor was sanded and refinished.

The highlight of the 1998 season was a grand reunion and rededication of the cabin. Close to 100 former staff and their families met that weekend to share memories, rekindle friendships, and enjoy again the magic of the camp of their youth. The highlight of the day was a rededication ceremony at Todd Lodge. Although the work was not yet finished, the progress made in the 2+ years was astounding.

In the years since the 1998 reunion, the majority of the work on Todd Lodge has been completed. The association still meets monthly during the camping season to finish up odds and ends and to do maintenance on the building. Plans for the future include reserving Todd Lodge on the first Saturday of each month for association use. The rest of the camping season Todd Lodge will be used by Camp Ralph S. Mason.

Chuck Evertz grew up as a camper at KEP and was a long time staff member at Camp Ken-Etiwa-Pec and Crossett Lake. He is an Eagle Scout. He currently resides in Sussex County, NJ, where he is a teacher with the Vernon Township Board of Education.

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