

Camp Croix

Serving the Youth of the St. Croix Conference



Church History Paper

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THE HISTORY OF CAMP CROIX
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In 1993 I served as the summer vicar at Camp Croix. During that summer, I was asked a number of questions pertaining to the early history of both the camp and camping in general in the St. Croix conference. I was unable to answer most of these questions and I found out that most of the people that had been connected with the camp for years were somewhat unsure of the answers as well. For example I heard that the camp had belonged to everyone from Roy Rodgers to John Wayne.

When I was asked by Pastor Mark Schwertfeger to compile a history of Camp Croix, I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to answer these kinds of questions. In this paper, I have attempted to organize the Camp Croix Board minutes and other information from 1951 to the present time as well as some personal interviews with people closely connected to the camp at the time of its beginning. Through these sources, I have compiled what I hope will be an informative and interesting history of your camp.

Before Camp Croix was started many of the children and young people of the congregations in the St. Croix Conference were attending camp at Whitewater, Frontenac and Emmaus. Camp Whitewater was a WELS Youth camp located between St. Charles and Weaver, Minnesota. It was a camp which focussed on growth in faith and knowledge of God's Word as well as Christian fellowship. When Camp Whitewater was destroyed by a storm the Pastors conference decided to start their own camp in the Minnesota area. At the same time as this decision was made, the youth camp on the Wisconsin side of Interstate Park across from Taylor's Falls became available and consequently Camp Croix came into existence. Pastors K.

Seim, John Lau, J. Petrie and Albert Eberhart played a large role in getting the camp started.
(Camp Croix Newsletter, 1969)

The earliest record on hand of the camp was the 1951 August 23rd edition of the Camp Croix Chatter. The Chatter was a daily newspaper produced by the campers which made some camp announcements and outlined the daily schedule. It was also the forum for budding comedians and poets. Camp Croix hasn't changed much in 44 years. The staff was just as shocked if the kids were in bed on time, and the director had to speak to the kids at the noon meal over a chorus of laughter and conversation.

As was expected, a lack of "training" and inexperience caused many problems. But the camp also experienced problems that were beyond the authority of the Camp Croix board. The grounds at Interstate Park were under the control of the State of Wisconsin Park Commission. The location of the camp was ideal in many respects since it was close to the Twin Cities, surrounded by beautiful scenery, interesting hiking trails and a supervised beach, however, the buildings and equipment were in terrible condition.

Interstate park was a camp that had been built by the Civilian Conservation Corps which was a work program initiated by President Roosevelt during World War II. The CCC constructed the buildings of this camp mainly out of native logs which at this time had begun to deteriorate. After numerous unanswered requests for changes and replacements, it became apparent that the State of Wisconsin was going to allow the camp to fall into complete disrepair and finally be closed. (Interview with Edward Voss) In addition, pastors and families were beginning to complain about the conditions. In 1958 Pastor ^{Harold} Sauer, the Chairman of the Camp Committee, brought these problems to light in his report on Camp Croix. He realized that they were under pressure to find another suitable site. Already at this time Pastor Sauer was beginning to think

about purchasing a camp instead of renting one. He argued that if they owned their own property, they wouldn't be limited to holding camp during two or three weeks of the summer. Various groups and organizations could use the camp all summer long. Interestingly, the St. Croix Conference turned down an opportunity to buy the camp at Interstate Park for the price of one dollar because it was so run down. (1958 Board Minutes)

Purchasing a camp brought a whole new set of questions. Would it be best to purchase a camp that was already developed, or was it better to buy an undeveloped site that would require volunteer labor from the participating congregations? Would they have to hire additional help such as lifeguards for the beach, nurses and cooks for the summer camp?

Whatever the case, Pastor Sauer thought it was vitally important to do something immediately. "It is my personal opinion that if we wish to continue the camping activities of the conference that this matter should receive thoughtful consideration before we are forced to shut down. It is always difficult to get things started again after activity has ceased." (1958 Board Minutes)

At this time the pastors were not ready to think about purchasing a camp of their own but they did inform Pastor Sauer that they were still in favor of the camp program and urged him to try and find a location for camp for another season.

In January of 1959 the Camp Committee brought a report to the conference which recommended the discontinuation of the camping program in the St. Croix Conference. They based their convictions on the fact that the camping facilities at Interstate Park were definitely undesirable and no alternative site was available. They also came to the conclusion that purchasing a camp of their own was financially out of the question.

In addition to the Camp Committee, which was made up of four pastors (Donald Kolander, Paul Borchardt, Alfred Schubring and ^{Harold} H. Sauer) and two laymen (Mr. Charles Sedgewick and Mr. Egon Banke), there was also a Camp-Site Committee made up of twelve laymen and three pastors. Each circuit appointed four laymen and one pastor to serve on the Camp-Site Committee. Since this new committee had not yet met, a motion was made to table the issue of purchasing a camp site until they had a chance to discuss it, and that the matter of sponsoring a camp be placed before them for discussion as well. (1959 Report to the St. Croix Pastors Conference)

Less than a month later, the Camp Croix Board met to discuss the continuation of the camp program as resolved at the last Pastoral conference. Pastor Sauer suggested that they organize by selecting a chairman and secretary. Pastor Paul Borchardt was elected chairman and Mr. Egon Banke was elected secretary. At this meeting the committee restated what they felt they wanted and needed in a camp. They felt very strongly that the camp should be available for year round use by pastors, youth groups and congregational organizations. It was fairly obvious that they would have to rent a camp for the upcoming season, but the committee really began to focus their attention on the long term goal of owning their own camp. Reports were given on the cost of such a camp. The prices ranged from about \$75,000 to \$30,000. It was also the consensus of the committee that something had to be done to begin to set aside funds for the purchasing of a camp. The committee didn't want it to interfere with the Lutheran High School financing program but they wanted both individuals and organizations to have the opportunity to contribute to a camp fund. (1959 Board Minutes)

In March of that same year the committee brought the recommendation to the Pastors Conference to hold the camp at Camp Tipi Wakan on the shores of Lake Minnetonka, one mile

south of Spring Park, Minnesota. The Christian "Disciples of Christ" Churches of Minnesota had owned and operated this camp for about twelve years. The camp was very convenient since it was accessible from all points and the Greyhound bus routes passed by it several times a day.

Camp Tipi Wakan did have some possible drawbacks. The price would have to be raised since the camp had more to offer than the former site. It was also registered with the National Camping Association which required a health certificate for every child and a counselor to camper ratio of 1-8. Camp Croix operated at this site during the first three weeks of August of that year.

With the possibility of discontinuing camp and the eventual change of site, advertising and promotion became even more vitally important. Camp Croix relied heavily on the pastors of the conference to get the word out about the upcoming camp, talking the camp up to the various congregational groups and assisting them in getting competent counselors. Eventually a 35mm slide presentation was prepared to show to the congregations. (Newsletter 1959)

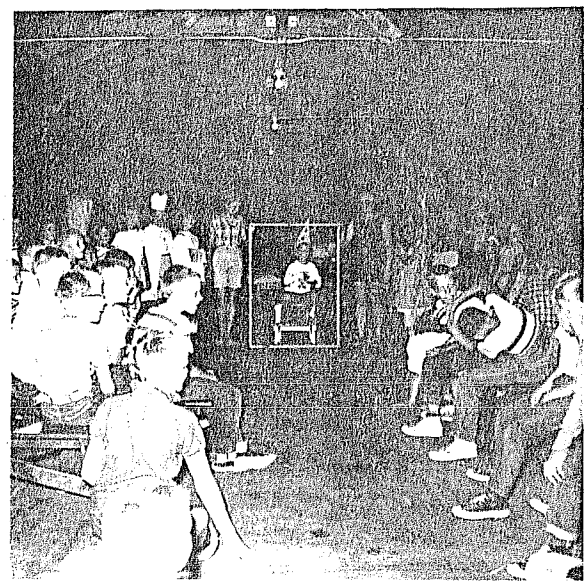
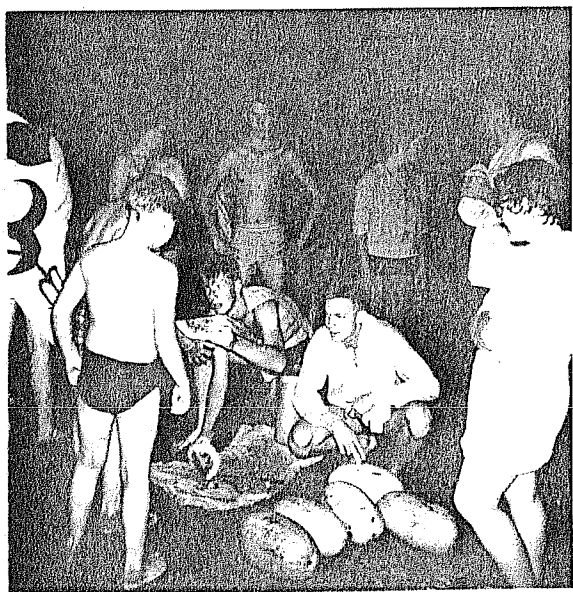
In June of 1959 the Camp Croix Committee organized a weekend retreat at a camp called Leahy's Resort located north of Siren, Wisconsin. The resort was for sale at the time and the committee wanted the pastors and congregations to see this site since it was very reasonably priced. They had missed out on possible camp sites at bargain prices in the past and they didn't want this to happen again. The weekend retreat was held on the fourth of July weekend.

(Advertisement to the Congregations of the St. Croix Conference)

Even after all this promotion, the members of the Camp Croix Committee were still unsure of the future of the camp program. In September of 1959 at the St. Croix Pastoral conference, the Committee recommended that the camp program be continued for the next year since it had proven itself to be beneficial for the instruction of the youth in God's Word and their

growth as Christians. However since it had also experienced financial problems, a decrease in the number of campers and difficulty finding an adequate camp available at a reasonable rental, they recommended that it be continued for one year only and then be reevaluated. They also recommended that the Camp Croix Committee be reorganized to include three pastors, two male teachers, and three layman. The new committee was to make regular reports to the St. Croix delegate and/or Pastor's Conference. The Conference authorized this new committee to approach all the congregations of the St. Croix Conference for donations to promote and support the Camp Croix program. (1959 Pastor's Conference Minutes)

In September of the following year the Camp Croix Committee was once again making recommendations to the body about the future of the camp. Since the camp at Tipi Wakan required a considerable increase in fees, the committee recommended that the camp for the 1960 season be held at Norway Point in St. Croix State Park near Hinkley, Minnesota until a permanent site could be acquired for its operation. (1960 Pastor's Conference Minutes)





(1961 Camp Croix at Norway Point)

In 1961 a couple of Senior High School aged kids attended the third week of camp so Pastor Borchardt began to think about a separate teen program. (1961 Report to the Pastor's Conference) 1962 saw 61 High School age kids attend camp during the second week and the need for a third week of camp became apparent. (1962 Report to the Pastor's Conference)

In an effort to further organize Camp Croix, the committee wrote for information from the Michigan District which operated a similar type of camp, called Camp Killarney. James Doletzky, the chairman of their Lutheran Campsite Association sent information including a short history of the camp, tips on how to help the camp grow and a copy of their Constitution. Mr. Doletzky advised to focus their attention on publicity. "Publicity, incidentally, is your greatest need...all could be lost if you don't inform all the people. I can not emphasize this too much." (Letter from Mr. Doletzky to Egon Banke) Camp Croix took their advice and sent out 5,000 brochures and 100 posters in 1964. (1964 Board Minutes) They also began to produce T-shirts and sweatshirts in an effort to advertise the camp. In 1967, a slide presentation was

prepared and presented in congregations throughout the conference. (1967 Newsletter)

Pastor Borchardt continued to serve as the chairman of this committee. He spent quite a bit of time carrying out his duties. For example he wrote thank-you letters to all the counselors and staff who helped make camp possible. He sent thank-you letters to all the guest preachers and bible study leaders. Thank-you letters were also sent to the operators of the camp and the director of the Minnesota State Parks.

The camp was held at Norway Point for a number of years. Lack of campers, counselors and funds plagued the camp just as they had throughout the 1950's. Pastor Borchardt made continual pleas to the pastors to increase their efforts to advertise and ask their organizations for donations. (1966 Report to the Pastor's Conference) The Minnesota State Park Association began to rent out the park on the basis of certain priorities. Handicapped children, children from poverty and low income families, and other special interest groups enjoyed first priority while the church camps didn't receive a very high priority. The year after this policy took effect, the St. Croix Conference was again looking for another site. (Letter from the Minn. State Park Association)

In 1967, Pastor Borchardt stepped down as the chairman of the Camp Croix Board. Pastor Richard Weeks, who at that time was serving as pastor at Zion in East Farmington, Wisconsin took over his position. Other members of the Camp Croix Committee at that time were Pastor Harold Sturm, Pastor Chester Zuleger, Scott Taylor, Paul Schultz, Werner Lemke, David Pomerence, and Harlan Hagen. (1967 Board Minutes)

In 1967, the property that later became camp Croix went up for sale with an asking price of \$125,000. In January of 1968, the owners dropped the asking price to \$95,000 and that is when the St. Croix Conference showed interest in buying it. The camp in question was initially

a Gold Star Mother Camp. The Gold Star Mothers were a group of mothers and wives of World War I veterans. Their sons and husbands were either killed during the war or died shortly thereafter. The camp, which at this time consisted of only the lodge, was built for them as a place where they could go and relax. Monies for the building of the camp were donated by various sources but of special interest was the donation of the camp's first dock. Hopalong Cassidy donated the dock to the Gold Star Mothers for their use at the camp. As the members of the Gold Star Mothers grew older the camp was used less and less frequently until finally the camp became vacant. (Interview with Edward Voss)

At this time the area surrounding Camp Croix was occupied mainly by people from Chicago who came up for the summer to vacation in their summer cabins. A man who lived in the area had seen the camp and had envisioned it as a camp for profit. While one of these groups from Chicago was in the area for the summer, he talked three men into investing in this camp for profit. One of the first changes to the camp was the construction of the cabins which now stand at the present site. These men operated the camp for one season charging approximately \$175.00 per child for a week of camp. After only one season the camp showed a loss. The three investors from Chicago were then approached by the man from the area, who initially got them interested in the camp, with the idea to build tennis courts, riding stables and all the things many other first rate camps had to offer. At that time, however, the investors were unwilling to sink any more money into what seemed to be a poor investment. (Interview with Edward Voss)

The camp stood idle for two years while Camp Croix continued to operate at Norway Point. During the Fall of the last year of camp at Norway Point, Pastor Weeks of Zion East Farmington noticed an ad~~a~~ about a summer camp for sale in Northwest Wisconsin while reading

a newspaper. He then brought the add^d to the attention of the other members of the Committee who also thought it sounded interesting. A group of men went up to take a look at the property and came back with a favorable report. Not long after this trip, committees were formed to begin to raise the money needed for the purchasing of the camp. The asking price of the camp was \$70,000. The owner wanted \$10,000 as a down payment and agreed to finance the rest at 6.5% interest with an annual payment of \$5,000 each subsequent year until the balance was paid in full. All in all, four states were involved in the transaction. The owners were from Illinois, their Realtor was located in Michigan, the camp was located in Northwest Wisconsin and was purchased by the St. Croix Conference of Minnesota. Henry Oakey a lawyer from Osceola, WI. handled the legal matters for the St. Croix Conference but later they switched to a law firm in New Richmond, WI. (Interview with Miles Wittig)

Why would the Camp Croix Committee think that the St. Croix Conference would be willing to spend \$70,000 on a summer camp for kids? Pastor Borchardt had a philosophy about the camp and his philosophy influenced the other members of the committee at this time. He said, "Central in Camp Croix is the cross of Christ. Without it we would be no different from other camps and would have no right to function as an agency of the church. Our name, Croix, should be a daily reminder of what God's Son did for us Christians." (1960 Counselors Manual)

Immediately the members of the congregations in the conference were excited about the prospect of owning such a camp and there was a tremendous push to get the program started. In May of 1968 a meeting was called at St. Croix Lutheran High School. Pastor Eberhart who was involved with the camp in its early years encouraged the congregations to attend. At the meeting things didn't go very well. There was a tremendous amount of arguing going on between the proponents of the camp and a group of pastors who claimed that if there was

\$70,000 dollars out there it should be used for mission work. Only a few short ^{years} prior to this meeting, the Wisconsin synod had broken fellowship with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Was it possible that some of the pastors present at this meeting were feeling apprehensive about surviving as a synod without the benefit of our big brother? (Interview with Edward Voss)

Pastor Weeks and others who wanted the camp argued that camps like this weren't all that common especially at a reasonable price. That day, in an effort to "settle" the argument, a number of men gave written commitments and wrote out checks to Camp Croix amounting to almost \$10,000. The owner of the camp agreed to accept the \$10,000 as a down payment on the condition that the other \$5,000 would be paid by the first of December. In May of 1968 they purchased the camp and Camp Croix had found a permanent home. (Interview with Edward Voss)



(Lodge)

At the time of the purchase, the camp had all the bedding that was needed, Hudson Bay blankets and throw rugs, 22 rifles for the rifle range, all the cooking and kitchen equipment

along with a set of Syracuse china. It had a fiberglass runabout boat with a 50 horse motor and a number of canoes. It was basically ready for summer camp from the moment of the purchase. Many of these items were sold since it was anticipated that most people would bring their own equipment. (Interview with Edward Voss)

The camp was not without its problems however. The wiring in the cabins was inadequate and many fuses were blown by the numerous curling irons, hair dryers and radios. Scott Taylor would drive from Hastings, Minnesota to fix the problem and then home again that night for work the next day. In addition to that, the water was red with rust and almost undrinkable. (Interview with Edward Voss) In an effort to clear up the water the maintenance committee contracted a local man to fix the problem for \$600, but even after that the problem remained. Campers had to supply their own water until the water problem was settled once and for all when a new well was installed in 1977. (1977 Board Minutes)



(Typical Cabins)

For the most part the camp was left vacant in winter so the committee asked a man named Herman Beyl from Osceola to serve as the winter caretaker. Mr. Beyl made frequent trips to camp to check in and make sure everything was all right. His trips during the winter often involved shoveling the snow off many of the roofs of the buildings. (1969 Board Minutes)

In 1969 the Camp Croix Board was divided into individual Committee heads with separate areas of responsibility.

Responsibilities

Chairman--Pastor Weeks--ex officio member of all committees
Secretary--Harlan Hagen
Scheduling for Camp Croix--Harlan Hagen
Treasurer--Pastor C. Zuleger
Publicity--Norman Dux
Property Maintenance--Paul Schultz

Camp Program

A. Religious Program--Pastor Sturm
B. Purchasing--Scott Taylor
C. Athletics--Dean Loucks
D. Arts and Crafts--Werner Lemke
E. Canteen Management--Scott Taylor
F. Registrar--Werner Lemke

(1969 Board Minutes)

After the purchase of the camp, the congregation did a lot of work to improve the facilities. The athletic field as it stands today is twice the size it was in 1969. The committee had gone to the DNR to get permission to decrease the hill that surrounds the athletic field and fill in the swamp. In an effort to keep the cost of the development of the land to a minimum, Camp Croix signed an agreement with the Wisconsin Soil and Conservation Service to provide an aerial view of the property, a soil survey of the area, assistance in a land use plan and a SCS biologist and recreation specialist to assist in developing a master plan. (1969 Board Minutes)

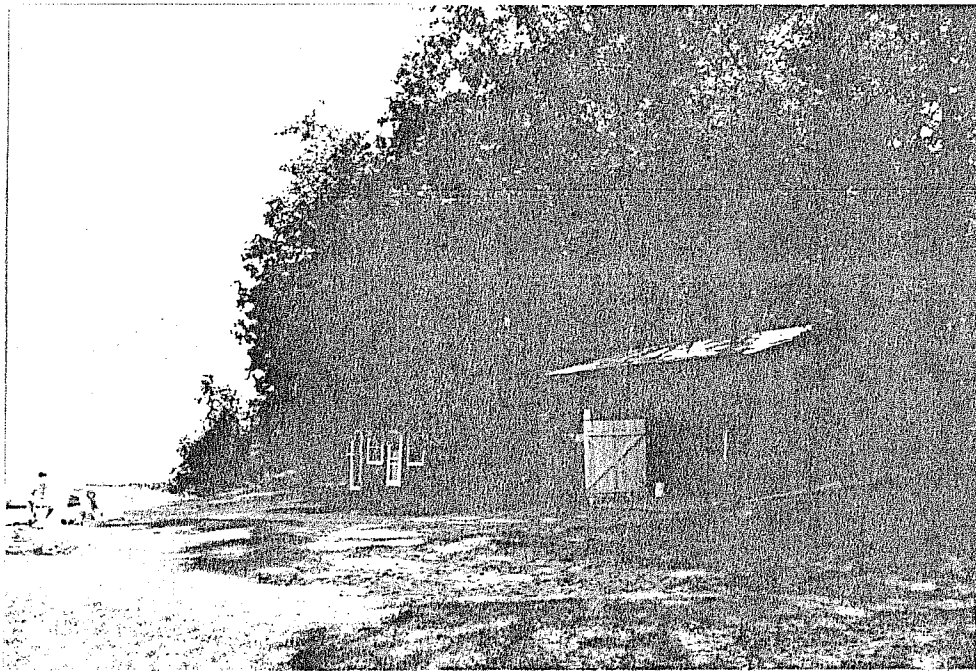
The Improvements being discussed were a combination nature and access trail to a wilderness camp site on the Northwest corner of the property, setting up the wilderness camp site location, improving the existing nature trail and marking off additional trails. They also worked on a layout of recreation and ball fields, improvement of the main cabin site layout, additional roads within the camp and providing steps or other means to prevent erosion of the hill and along the lake. (1969 Board Minutes)

After the swamp had been filled in, Edna Chapman, the resident of the cabin immediately to the North complained that Camp Croix had gone past its own property and onto theirs. After a survey of the property was completed, the surveyors decided that Camp Croix had not gone past their lot line. The man who did the survey was Dickman Knutson, a licensed land surveyor with McKomb-Knutson and Associates. Mr. Knutson, coincidentally was also the President of Timothy Lutheran Church in St. Louis Park, and was interested in the success of Camp Croix. (1970 Board Minutes)

Pastor Weeks had also contacted Clarence Farrell, an assessor from Spooner, Wisconsin. He informed Pastor Weeks that Wisconsin State law says that the first 30 acres of the land would be non-assessable since Camp Croix was a Bible camp. The camp had the right to decide which 30 acres would be non-assessable. Since much of the land is lake front property this provision in the State law was seemingly extremely significant, especially to a camp which had been struggling financially. In 1970, Pastor Weeks was informed that he had misinterpreted that law, and that Camp Croix would be responsible for paying additional taxes. After a lot of headaches and correspondence the matter was finally resolved. Pastor Weeks agreed to pay some back taxes for 1969, but in return the State had to agree to lower the camps taxes for 1970. Camp

Croix was able to take advantage of the provision in the State tax law to identify 30 acres of non-assessible land. (Letter from Assessors office to Pastor Weeks)

Because of their financial situation Camp Croix relied on the members of the St. Croix conference to lend them the materials and equipment needed to make the camp function. For example, the camp's first means of transportation was a Volkswagon van loaned to them by Salem Lutheran congregation in Stillwater, Minnesota. In 1969 a truck was donated by Marvin Beise. All the pots and pans along with and the camp's first typewriter and mimeograph machine were loaned to the camp. The boat house as it stands today was donated by the Marv Beise family and assembled in the spring of 1971.



Another big financial boost came from the AAL Co-operative Benevolence Program which matched funds raised for a specific project at Camp Croix by three of its Branches. (1970-71 Board Minutes)

During the early 1970's the Pioneer program of the WELS was especially strong in the Minnesota district. The Pioneers used the camp quite extensively at that time. Since the camp

was starting to fill up on many of the weekends of the summer, the lodge and other areas were beginning to become overcrowded. In 1971, the pioneers along with a number of other organizations and congregations built a new cooking shelter to relieve some of the congestion in the lodge at mealtime. Another camp improvement was a new building that would house the hot water heater and tool shed. In 1972 the pioneers worked on the plumbing and electricity to both the summer kitchen and vicar cabin. (Interview with Miles Wittig)

The summer vicar program was first discussed in 1971. (1971 Board Minutes) In 1972 the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary sent Robert Balza of Madison, Wisconsin to serve as the first summer vicar at Camp Croix. The Board was pleased with the work done by Mr. Balza and decided to request another summer vicar for the 1973 season. (1972 Board Minutes) However, the 1973 camping season went without a vicar and the board decided to find a maintenance man from one of the area congregations who would be on site for the months of June, July and August. (1973 Board Minutes) This worked for two seasons but in 1975 the Board once again applied for a summer vicar. (1975 Board Minutes)

Many improvements and repairs were underway in 1974 including the plumbing, insulation and rewiring of the lodge, the construction of the Athletic Building and the painting of several cabins. At a cost of over \$3,400, the Board was more than a little concerned. Fortunately, Camp Croix received an unexpected profit of over \$2,000 for the harvesting of the mature aspen trees on the property. (1974 Board Minutes)

Things were going well as these improvements were being made but in January of 1977 ^{the camp} they suffered a small setback. A fire in the lodge caused over \$600 damage. Thankfully the Church Mutual Insurance policy covered the expenses. The fireplace was rebuilt out of field

stone for \$2,260.00 by Fireside Masonry Construction Company that same year. (1977 Board Minutes)

The camp operated for years by the hard work of the Camp Croix Board and the labor and supplies donated by the congregations and organizations of the St. Croix conference. As I read through the Minutes of the Camp Croix Board and some correspondence that I found in the files, I couldn't help but notice the thankfulness and appreciation for the blessing God had given to the St. Croix conference in Camp Croix. I also recognized the Conference's sense of pride and accomplishment that went along with the development of the camp.

By 1986 the property was paid for in full. (Financial Report to the St. Croix Pastor's Conference) Throughout the late seventies and early eighties Camp Croix really didn't take on any major construction projects. The cabins were repainted and some congregations quite a bit of work in the cabins they adopted. Some remodeling was done in the vicar's cabin and the lodge kitchen and bathrooms. In 1994-1995, a new "Red Cross" building was constructed. This building is probably the most extensive building project Camp Croix has ever undertaken. However, it should be a building to be enjoyed for many, many years. Camp Croix has truly been a spiritual blessing for the children of the St. Croix Conference, and wonderful facility for the recreation of its congregations.