

CADDO AREA COUNCIL AND ITS CAMPS

The cities of Texarkana, Arkansas and Texas, were founded in 1873 at the junction of the Texas & Pacific and the Cairo & Fulton Railroads. Over the years that followed, the cities grew as a railroad and lumber center. The Cairo & Fulton Railroad merged with the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad and later grew to become the Cotton Belt Railroad. As a railroad hub, Texarkana served the north and northeast through Arkansas and the southwest via Texas.

In the succeeding years the railroads learned that they needed to provide their men wholesome activities in which to spend their leisure time as well as places to stay and eat during the layovers at the end of their runs. So, around the turn of the century the railroads partnered with each other to construct "Railroad Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)" buildings at the hub cities around the country. The Railroad YMCA building in Texarkana was constructed on Front Street near Union Station in 1899. The financing was shared by the Texas & Pacific, Cotton Belt, and Iron Mountain Railroads.

About 100 miles north, the Railroad YMCA owned a camping area in Polk County, Arkansas, near the small village of Potter. Located in the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains, at the confluence of the Mountain Fork of Little River and Two Mile Creek, the site was ideal for summer camping, hiking, swimming, boating, and nature study.

Subsequent to Chicago businessman and publisher, W. D. Boyce, bringing Scouting to America from England in 1910, Scout troops began to spring up all around the country. Troop 1 in Texarkana was chartered in 1914.

In the summer of 1916, Scoutmaster William H. Riley and 20 of the 40 boys in Troop 1 boarded a Kansas City Southern (KCS) train in Texarkana and headed for a 10-day adventure at the Railroad YMCA camping area. When they arrived in Potter, they loaded their equipment onto a wagon and hiked about five miles of dirt road to the camp site. They named this first encampment, "Camp Patterson" after one of their own Scouts.

Upon arrival at the camp site, Troop 1 literally built their camp in the large clearing next to Two Mile Creek and the river. Their only convenience during the 10 days was the great food prepared by a professional cook provided by the KCS Railroad and served under a large dining fly. Troop 1 followed a strict schedule while at camp, beginning with Reveille 6:45 a.m. and ending with Taps at 9:45 p.m. Each day was filled with camp chores, swimming, hiking, washing clothes, etc.

Scoutmaster Riley and Troop 1 returned in the summers of 1917 and 1918 naming their encampments "Woodrow Wilson" and "General Pershing", respectively. Their trips and adventures were reported by the Texarkana newspapers. Other troops from Texarkana also began to use the area for their summer encampments. By 1919 the Railroad YMCA campground in Polk County was well-known, well-used, and well-liked by the Boy Scout troops of Texarkana.

In the fall of 1919, the Texarkana Council, BSA was chartered. One of the first actions taken by the new council was to hire George W. Powell as their first Scout executive. Mr. Powell attended all Scouting events, led weekend hikes, and oversaw the expansion, growth, and improvements of the council.

By spring 1920, the Railroad YMCA had granted a 99-year lease of their camping property in Polk County to the Boy Scout council. Mr. Powell named the property "Camp Pioneer" and the first council-wide encampment was held there June 1 -14, 1920. About 85 Scouts from local troops attended. Special coaches were provided by the KCS Railroad for the four-hour run from Texarkana to Hatfield, Arkansas, 4 ½ miles away from Camp Pioneer.

Over the years that followed many permanent structures were built at Camp Pioneer. These included the Big House, trading post, dining hall, cabins, handicraft shop, and a rifle range. Through the mid-1920s most boys attended camp as members of provisional troops, made up of Scouts from all the troops in the council. The boys were then divided into small groups (by cabins) to act as a patrol while in camp. Campers ate family style.



Taking the train up to camp from Texarkana was a tradition born of necessity until the 1940s. The lack of good roads, bridges, and vehicles made the train ride comparatively quick, comfortable, safe, and very affordable. The KCS Railroad was very supportive, providing special cars for the Scouts. The KCS Railroad also provided cooks until the 1950s, so the food was well prepared, nutritious, and plentiful.

By 1928, the council had expanded to include several neighboring counties and the council was renamed Tex - Ark Council. Additional counties were added by 1936 when Mr. Powell departed and the council re-chartered with its current name: Caddo Area Council #584, BSA. The new name recognized the American Indians who had originally occupied the area and was more inclusive of all the communities in the two counties in northeast Texas and eight counties in southwest Arkansas.



In 1936, the council opened a new camping facility a few miles east of Texarkana. Camp Preston Hunt was state-of-the-art, including a swimming pool, dining hall, and cabins. In 1938 the council decided that summer camp would be held at Camp Preston Hunt instead of Camp Pioneer. Summer Camp was held again at Preston Hunt in 1939.

The 1938 - 1939 summer camps were a success for advancement, but attendance was low. The same sense of excitement and adventure that existed at Camp Pioneer was not there. In fact several troops held their own individual troop summer camps at Camp Pioneer during these years. The summer camp program returned to Camp Pioneer in 1940 and has remained there since.





In the 1950s, Camp Pioneer ran six one-week sessions per summer. Today, twelve tent camp sites have replaced the cabins. A junior Olympic-size pool has been added. The camp operated two one-week summer sessions in 2016 and three sessions in 2017. The camp was temporarily closed for repairs in 2018..



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