A History Of Deering Camp

BY Mrs. Marvin B. Vice

The seven or eight acre camp site known as Deering Camp Grounds or Parks Hill Camp Grounds in Nicholas County came into being about 1879 and was in operation about forty years. The famous old Camp Grounds site was sold fifty years ago this month for $2,000. An account, a part of which was used in writing this historical account, appeared in the Lexington Leader on April 7, 1919.

The "Deering Camp Grounds" were named in honor of Rev. S. S. Deering of The Kentucky Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and at the time was pastor of the Carlisle Circuit, in the bounds of which the grounds were located and who began the camp meetings.

The transforming of this wild section of God's country into a beautiful place of worship was first conceived by Rev. Deering. In his travels, he saw so many people who were not affiliated with or attending any religious worship services. He saw that a circus, a fair, a picnic, an election and many other things excited their curiosity and made idle pleasure for them and it dawned upon him that a woods meeting would excite curiosity and cause them to come and while the novelty was drawing them, he would preach to them and sing to them of "Jesus and His Love". Many thousands attended these meetings with their families for two weeks duration, the meeting the morning began being presided over by registers of the Methodist persuasion.

The site overlooking the Licking river was in a triangular elevation, with the Lexington Creek valley on the southeast side along which ran the Carlisle and Flemingsburg pike, on the southeast side also ran the Louisville and Maysville branch of the Louisville and Nashville railroad.

Once, My mother, Mrs. Nettie Coy Hughes and her brother Lora Coy, both Nicholas County natives, went with a group from Fayette County in 1909, to spend the day at the Camp Grounds and attend services. She was about thirteen at the time and they boarded the train at Muir Station and got off right at the Camp Grounds, which was "flag stop", as she recalls. There was a man at the entrance that took tintype pictures if anyone wanted to have their picture taken. Then they ascended the steps up to the ground and that day they ate lunch in one of the cottages with friends. She said she knew of the excursion trains that brought groups to the meetings.

From almost every point of observation, the eye had spread before it a panorama of beautiful scenery. Before it's conversion to a Camp Ground, it was an isolated spot covered with briars and rough undergrowth. Indigenous to the Licking Hills and at the time gave no promise of a beautiful resort, carpeted with bluegrass.

After discovering this site, Dr. Deering discovered that it was owned by Clarke, Agnew and Company of Carlisle. The owners finally built a shed with the understanding that if the meetings failed they could use the shed for a tobacco house.

Then the meetings were begun, but difficulty arose. The Church objected to people selling goods and would steal all the melons fruit, chickens and anything else in the neighborhood, others said it would bring a lot of debauchers. This greatly troubled the Deering committee in securing many people this writer has spoken to have heard them were many acts of drunkenness, of, in a place nearby known as "Hell's Hollow" and "Hell's Hollow" was where the drunk brought their "corn whiskey" to sell. This was in the days of prohibition and their troubles.

Rev. Deering, by persuasion, the [illegible] a few cottages were built and [illegible] suffer the least moisture. It was [illegible] of the first camping [illegible] better food in the language [illegible] of the [illegible] In describing [illegible] among the old rubbish [illegible] Many [illegible] from the [illegible] a [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]