

FORT SCOTT CAMP HISTORICAL MARKER
DEDICATION 23 October 2016

Located on this site, for over 60 years, Fort Scott Summer Camp served as a summer wonderland for the young people of America. On this site, near the banks of the Great Miami River near New Baltimore, summers at Fort Scott created lasting memories, relationships, and graces for many of us gathered here today. Founded in 1922 by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, Fort Scott was a pioneering venture – the first Catholic camp in the United States.

The camp received its name based on its frontier character and its religious heritage. The name "Fort" was given the camp because of the strategic terrain. Here, in the pioneer days of America, Fort Hamilton was just eight miles north at Hamilton, Ohio and Fort Harrison was located down the river in Harrison, Ohio.

The name "Scott" was the surname of Michael Scott, who emigrated to Cincinnati from Baltimore in 1805, and was one of the first Catholics in the Cincinnati area. He invited visiting missionaries to stay at his home and to offer the Holy Sacrifice of Mass there, since there was yet no church in Cincinnati. Later he himself built the first church in this area along the Ohio, which became the Cathedral upon the arrival of Bishop Fenwick to Cincinnati in 1822.

Although the word Fort suggests a military defense, the years have shown that Fort Scott is more of a haven for young people of all faiths to journey into the frontiers of a life of values and virtues. A life of faith and friendships.

The original camp site in 1922, was located near Cleves, Ohio. It consisted of about 82 acres and a few buildings, but it was soon judged inadequate. A new site was selected here in 1924. Father Francis A. Gressle, Director of the Catholic Charities and founder of the camp, purchased 131 acres with the help of dedicated seminarians and laymen. In 1926, Father R. Marcellus Wagner was appointed director of Catholic Charities and Fort Scott Camp. He held this position until his death in 1959.

In 1935 the Chapel of St. Victor was completed. It was the gift of the late Mrs. Suzannah Walsh Hinkle, in memory of her son Victor Walsh. Volumes could be written about the generosity of Mrs. Hinkle. She became interested in Fort Scott around 1930 and provided the financial help to Monsignor Wagner to liquidate debt, to renovate the camp buildings and to build the mess hall and the infirmary. For twenty years, until her death in 1950, Mrs. Hinkle was the camp benefactor and guardian angel. It would be difficult to total the amount of her financial gifts to Fort Scott during this time. One thing we know; if the facilities at Fort Scott Camp today are the best in the country, much of the credit must go to her generosity and interest.

In 1936 Mrs. Hinkle proposed the idea of two camps, one for boys and one for girls. Up to that time boys would camp for part of the summer, and girls for the rest, both using the same camp facilities. Additional property was bought and a completely new camp for boys, similar to the original camp, was constructed. This was dedicated in 1936 to the memory of Mrs. Hinkle's

son, William Sebastian Walsh. The original camp then became the girls camp, and since 1936, Fort Scott has had two complete and separate camps.

The custom of scheduling a special event each period during the camping season may be traced back to the early days of camp. In 1925 the famous Fort Scott Minstrels and Musical Show was begun by Father Al Griesinger. Assisted by Dr. C. Richard Schroder and Dr. Joseph Link, he began a tradition which has been handed down to the present time. Leading players in the early days included such men as William J. Bien, Irvin Beumer, Dr. Fred Droege, Rev. Erwin Bertke, Bob Sutthoff, Rev. Robert Suver, Rev. Charles Blum, Lou Betz, Bob Kavanaugh, Dr. Don Vollman, Jim Arata, Harold Link, Emmett Crowe, Paul Hallbach, George Ratterman and many others.

In its history of 66 years, there was one year when Fort Scott was closed -- 1943. This was during the Second World War, and because of the hardships of the time and the scarcity of manpower and supplies, it was decided to keep the camps closed that summer.

On October 5, 1959, death claimed Monsignor Wagner. After thirty-three years of devoted service to the youth of America, Monsignor was called to his eternal reward. In 1960 and 1961 six more new cabins were built -- three each year -- and in 1962 the St. Margaret Lodge was begun. In the spring of 1962 the riding stable was remodeled and given a new roof.

In 1960 Dr. Joseph Link ended his long and active career in camping. He had come to Fort Scott in 1931, served the camp in various capacities, and became the director of the boys camp in 1940. In 1943 he was called to military service, returning to Fort Scott in 1948. And in 1953 he served as camp administrator in which position he was able to relieve Monsignor Wagner of many of his camp responsibilities.

During his years at Fort Scott, Dr. Link helped organize the National Catholic Camping Association at a National Catholic Youth Convention in Cincinnati in 1951 and served as Regional Director for several years. Dr. Link continues his interest in Fort Scott today as a member of the Walter Schott Family Foundation, which in recent years has been generous to Fort Scott with financial assistance.

In the 60s and 70s, the Fort Scott grounds included sixty-one buildings on 205 acres, in addition to the two swimming pools. The maintenance of these facilities is one of the camp's chief concerns. When it was quite evident that a full time resident caretaker was a necessity, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Yearion moved into the farm house as did the families of Bruce Louder and also Eddie and Pam Shannon. Much of the improvement in camp facilities can be attributed to their resourcefulness, ability, and constant interest over the years.

The medical program at Fort Scott has always been of the highest caliber. In the early days the medical program was handled by medical students and a registered nurse with physicians such as Dr. John Danshy, Dr. Al Willke, and Dr. George Kolb as consultants. During 1938, Dr. C. Richard Schroder became the first full-time resident physician. Then in 1950 he returned as

resident medical director after serving as examining physician in the intervening years. Serving up his stomach treatments and wisdom, Dr. Schroder served decades as the camp medical director and long time friend of many campers young and old.

To promote and continue the friendships and acquaintances of the past it was decided in 1961 to begin an annual reunion of Fort Scott counselors and staff members to be held after the camping season. A committee of twenty met at camp one evening and began to search for names and addresses. The annual reunion has become an important occasion in the lives of former staff members and each year more than five hundred adults and children are present for it. The tradition is carried on today with an annual gathering around St Patrick's Day. Former counselors and campers of Fort Scott may be found today in all parts of the United States, and in many foreign countries.

Today we gather to recall the many memories and friendships forged here at Fort Scott Camp. We recall the primary purpose had always been the moral and religious, spiritual, social, recreational and cultural development of the boys and girls as well as their safety, welfare and interest. Every job is important, whether it be in maintenance, administration or program, that of helping to develop the character and personalities of young Americans.

The R. Marcellus Wagner Youth Lodge, of course, dedicated to the memory of Monsignor Wagner was opened in June, 1978, under the generous auspices of Fort Scott alumni, families, and friends. Dedicated by Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin, Wagner Lodge allowed the camp to provide year-round opportunities for various school, parish, and organizational youth and adult programs. Over 2,000 persons would use Wagner Lodge each year. During the 1985 season, the Fort Scott Board of Directors developed out of a former Advisory Board and worked closely with the camp leadership evaluating the camp's physical condition, programs, assisting in funding and maintaining a sound financial base upon which to operate.

After the summer of 1988, a quite unfortunate public perception of Fort Scott gained the attention of parents and families in the Cincinnati area. Subsequent concern for the declining source of sound financial support led the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to withdraw its sponsorship of Fort Scott Camp effective the following spring. On May 13, 1989 a Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated as the final service in St. Victor Chapel. In front of St Margaret Lodge, the American flag was lowered to taps for the last time at Fort Scott.

Today we gather to install a memorial for the many lives, loves, and lasting friendships that rose out of the heart and soul of Fort Scott Camps. Thanks to the dedication and generosity of the faithful Fort Scott Camp community, this Historical Marker recognizing the many hands and feet who hallowed this ground has been erected on the grounds of what used to be Fort Scott Camps.

We recognize the planning committee: Ted Leonard, Stevie Leonard, Mark and JoAnn Maxwell, Biz McClure, Mary Anne Ryan, Anne Schrimpf, and Tom Beiting. The committee was chaired by Sister Mary Morley.

With gratitude to the creative energy and ingenuity of Steve and Ted Leonard, we are able to see before us this historic marker on this day: Sunday, October 23, 2016. This permanent sign recognizes and remembers Fort Scott as "America's Vacationland for Youth." Many thanks to the committee for organizing this effort to permanently recognize Fort Scott camp!

[INSCRIPTION]

As we dedicate and bless this marker, we also recall the truth of God's providence and the ultimate purposes for which we were gathered to Fort Scott, and the purposes that our camp provided to us:

to reveal the touch of heaven,
alike in the lowly worm and the glittering star;
to present to youthful wondering eyes the whole world of nature
to teach them how to live in it;
to assure their questioning minds of the high purpose of it all, and
to set them on the highway of life with confidence in their steps, courage in their hearts
and many songs on their lips, this,
and nothing less – was the divine purpose of Fort Scott Camp.

Lest we forget that this work is god's work, and strive after some lesser purpose, we have set up in a place of honor this historical marker. May it remind all visitors of the work of the Holy Spirit among these trees and aside the current of this flowing river.

May its memories set aflame the hearts of campers and counselors alike to carry into new frontiers the values and virtues found at Fort Scott. For centuries to come, may our families, friends and descendants know of the faith and friendships found around the warmth of God's campfire. As we revive these cherished memories today, may we carry that light and love into the frontiers of the future. As the mantelpiece inscription read over the fireplace of the Girls Lodge, the original camp headquarters, "No wonder that your wood fire cheers.
Tis the sunshine – of a hundred years!"

God Bless America