

## **Heartland Christian Free Methodist Campground**

The parsonage of the Birmingham Free Methodist Church is located at the entrance to a beautiful fifteen acre camp ground at the west edge of Birmingham. This camp ground was known for years as the "Huffman Grove" and has been used by the Fairfield District for Camp Meeting purposes off and on since at least 1887. In the District Conference Minutes of 1897, it was spoken of as the "Old Camp Ground at Birmingham," suggesting that it may have been used earlier than 1887. After much discussion and consideration given to a permanent camp ground it was decided to purchase the Huffman Grove at Birmingham at a cost of \$1125.00 J.Graham, who represented the Birmingham site, secured pledges amounting to \$440.00 of the purchase price from citizens of Birmingham. Lewis Mendenhall, A.S. Doughty and S.S. Stewart were appointed as the committee to draw up the articles of incorporation necessary to make the purchase, which articles were executed December 24, 1898.

The old well at the East of the tabernacle was dug by J.S. Booten and his brother, G.G. Booten, in August 1901 to save having to haul all of the water to supply the large crowds who attended the camp. The present tabernacle was built about 1905. Evidently, the crowds on Sundays were massive for an action was taken by the District Quarterly Conference, August 10, 1901 to "petition the Burlington Railroad Company not to run Sunday excursion trains to the Birmingham Camp Meeting, for the reason that it brings such a rowdy element to the camp ground." The Fairfield Ledger published an account of the camp meeting in the horse and buggy days, stating that the trains and hacks were chartered to take the crowds to the camp meeting which numbered on Sundays, around 7000 people. An attendant at the camp stated that the horses and wagons lined the highway north of town for two miles.

The camp ground was not used for a few years and the Fairfield District Conference decided in 1942 to deed the camp ground to the Iowa Conference as permanent conference camp ground on the condition that the conference would gradually improve the property. In compliance with this agreement, the tabernacle was completely repaired and the grounds landscaped.

The present dining hall was built in 1944 and the Missionary Chapel in 1946. Rest rooms were provided in the basement of the dining hall and new wells bored in 1949 to increase the water supply. Some additional land was purchased in 1967. At that time a yearly program of improvement was planned by the camp trustees which made the camp one of the outstanding camp grounds in the middle west.

In 1998, the Free Methodist Church in Birmingham closed but the Heartland Christian Campground continues to be an important place for the North Central Conference. Every summer the camp holds Women's Retreat, Family Camp, Teen Camp, Kids Camp, and Sportsmen's Retreat. The camp has also become available for groups outside the North Central Conference to rent for camps, retreats, family events, etc. Throughout its history the Heartland Christian Camp has had the motto to be used to reach people with the Gospel.

In 2001, the Camp leased another 13 acres of land connected to the south with the option to buy. This property has a small pond that provides the Camp with fishing and boating. The remaining land is being developed and will eventually be used for paintball, and other new activities. Facilities are being expanded and updated with buried electricity, sewer, camper / RV sites, and new cabins.