

History: A tour through the former Camp Chonokis

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By Lorene Greuner

A group of fortunate Historical Society members met at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Whitney on Sunday evening, August 19th. They were fortunate because they experienced a guided tour of the former Camp Chonokis which was operated on the Whitney property from 1927 to 1953, and they later enjoyed refreshments and visiting in the Whitney's charming "log cabin", it is really a quite spacious rustic house, and every log and rock used in the building came from the adjacent land. Most of the furniture was made at the site, too. All the ironwork, including handmade hinges and latches, was fashioned by a Mr. Pigeon, now deceased, in the Meyers Blacksmith Shop – years ago.



When the camp began, Mrs. Whitney was Mabel Winter, a young California school-teacher. Her goal was to give young girls an opportunity to live in the out-of-doors and to develop a love and appreciation of nature. A more suitable location for the purpose would have been hard to find. Camp Chonokis was situated on a beautifully forested hillside behind the present Crescent V area. Huge boulder, flower-filled mountain meadows, and natural springs added to the charm, and just below – a spectacular view of Lake Tahoe.

First stop on the tour was the site of the main lodge, a large building destroyed by fire about ten years ago. The area has since revegetated, largely healing the scar of the "nightmare"

which occurred during the Owners' absence.

Next, the tour group walked through the "slumber yard", then scrambled over rocks to find "seats" in the camp's open air theatre. Where the girls had watched their plays and theatricals, Historical Society members watched an eerie sunset over Lake Tahoe, for it was one of the August forest fire days with the smoke haze turning the sun to a red ball of fire.

Next, a peaceful walk through "the lower pasture" full of wildflowers, shrubs, trees and grasses brought the group to a weathered turnstile and a path leading up to the house. By then, flashlights were in use and punch and cookies a welcome treat.

When the visitors left, they were given large Sugar Pine cones gathered from the Whitney property – a fitting reminder of a delightful evening, for "Chonokis" means "Sugar Pine"!