



## GENRE OF SHADY OAKS



I have chosen not to let bygones be bygones. The early-day cabin camps were from a memorable time period that I wish to romanticise. The cabin camp era will always remain tenderly tucked away in my dreams.

Travel by auto was exciting, and it was a new phase for many American families. Just for a moment, picture in your mind one of the eight million registered passenger cars of the early 1920s. Imagine stepping on the running board to get into the vehicle. In the summertime, the side windows, sporting colorful, striped awnings, and glass vases on the inside doorposts, filled with bright, fresh flowers, added a decorative touch. In cold weather, a lap robe was a necessity for warmth; and when traveling any distance, a fancy steamer trunk for additional luggage was a must.

If you don't remember, or are too young to have experienced cabin camps, perhaps you can visualize a new little home and neighbors each night. Sometimes a gas station, cafe, gift shop and mini-grocery adjoined the cabin camp. I experienced this adventure and eagerly anticipated each ensuing night. I still remember the names of some of the young folks I met at the cabin camps. One could encounter a cluster of experiences in just a few days.

To put you in sync with the mid-1920s' scene, here are a few examples of prices: the average income was \$2,310, a new car was \$360, a new home was \$7,748, gas was 12 cents per gallon, bread was nine cents a loaf, a gallon of milk was 59 cents and a stamp was two cents.

Cabin camps were either intriguing, or rather blah. Some cabins were plain, while others were splendid replicas of storybook homes such as "Green Gables." A carport adjoining the cabins was a convenient innovation. Names of camps reflected the area, style of cabin or the owner's name. There were camps called Lincoln Logs, Moonshine Camp, Why Not, Twin Oaks, Shady Lawn, Uncle Tom's Cabins, Silver Moon, Rock Garden Camp, Pleasure Park, Shady Rest, Idlewilde, Dew Drop Inn and many more. Each cabin had a number or name such as Spruce, Pine, Dollhouse or Dreamland.

Each setting offered something different. I remember one tranquil park with a lily pool and a willow rocker on each small porch. Some had playgrounds where I met boys and girls my own age. River towns had a special ambience, or nostalgia. Steamboat whistles, tooting tug boats and calliopes were the pied pipers that lured

people to these old, hilly towns with roads that spidered away in every direction. All of the above, and more, created the aura of mystery and excitement of cabin camps.

On one occasion, we stayed in a camp where the cabins were arranged in the form of a crescent moon. Upon our arrival, a rooster proudly strutted about the camp. About 5 a.m. the next morning, it produced a lusty wake-up call. Everyone was up, packed and out by 6 a.m. This assured management that the cabins would be ready much earlier in the day.

The rooster reminds me of some white cabins with green trim that were prefab, octagon-shaped chicken houses. In primitive wilderness areas, such as northern Minnesota and Yellowstone National Park, the window cover was usually a heavy canvas roll-up curtain. Each cabin had a heating stove or fireplace for cool nights. An outside, cold shower was available for the hale and hardy with a pioneer spirit.

Locations of cabin camps (auto camps or tourist cabins) varied greatly. Some were close to railroad tracks. In towns that were too small for main-line trains to stop, the steel monsters rumbled through between 2 and 4 a.m., shaking the cabins, vibrating the windows and sounding their loud, shrill whistles. Others were next to babbling brooks that soothed the senses and lulled you to sleep, or kept you up all night running to the bathroom.

The only alarming thing I recall about staying in cabin camps was the warning from my mother, "Do not drink the water." This was true if the camp was not within a municipality with approved drinking water. Des Moines was my home, and city water didn't have the problem that some wells had. Even more disappointing was the chance that their popcicles were made from stale cistern water. I drank lots of sodas and survived without incident.

I do remember that some health resorts were not the most desirable for swimming. Athletes foot from the slippery, slimy locker-room floors was probably only one of my mother's concerns. A can of Old Dutch Cleanser was usually packed as a precautionary measure just in case a lavatory had been neglected. For me, a fresh pillowcase from home also added a little "TLC."

As a little girl in the late 1920s and 1930s, each wonderful cabin was my own for a night. In my mind, a hotel could not compete, except in Chicago.

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Usually, in a hotel lobby, there were large, well-worn leather settees, brass cuspidors and perhaps a tall, potted fern which survived the cigar smoke that permeated the air and curled from behind newspapers. The area reeked of a combination of tobacco and shoe polish and leather from the shoe shine stall.

It wasn't an atmosphere that welcomed ladies, and it certainly wasn't a place for little girls. In hotels, I liked the coffee shops and dining rooms best. They were often quite elegant, and the service was excellent. If it was a large hotel, the magic of big band music flowed from the ballrooms.

Small hotel corridors were often hot and smelly. An open transom window above the door offered little relief in the summertime, and hall noises were amplified. On one weekend trip in 1936, we were escorted to the rooftop of the YWCA in Burlington which overlooked the Mississippi River. The air was cooler, but it was warm underfoot. The flat, tar roof didn't have a chance to cool off. On that gorgeous, moonlight night, we had a magnificent view of the river and the boats. It was an unforgettable experience, or perhaps "a mid-summer-night's dream."

In comparison, cabin camps were my kind of joy. They were large play houses and kept my imagination in full swing. At home, I had all kinds of playhouses. I put on plays in the third floor of my grandparent's home, kept store in the upstairs of their new, two-story garage, found privacy with a book under the staircase landing or created an igloo under the blanketed, dining room table with "Skippy," a toy fox terrier. The cabins bridged a gap as I outgrew my beloved backyard playhouse. Each cabin was a treasure, and many were remembered long after other things were forgotten.

A night at a cabin camp was much like a large family reunion. It could be compared to a church supper in the city during the Depression era when several hundred people joined hands and sang such songs as "Smiles" and "Marching Along Together." In both instances, there was bonding, or melding of families from different walks of life. An overnight stay under the same trees and drinking in the same sunshine also created a oneness.

Now and then, one found a heavenly, garden oasis in the midst of nowhere. Perhaps perfect weather conditions just made it seem that way. However, rain or other adverse conditions had a chilling, or numbing effect, on weary travelers making a cabin seem cozy and comfortable or the "cabin from hell."

Although the sun has set on the cabin camp era, just as it does each day. I want this period to be remembered, cherished and preserved, as it

deserves a proper benediction. The burden of mystery and a sense of urgency has allowed me to discover the people who lived alongside Timber Creek and the oak forest and recreate their role in the ambivalence of events in the history of Shady Oaks. I will begin with the setting.

In the 1850s, the scenic Rock Valley (Shady Oaks) area provided a natural setting for early Methodist revivals and camp-meetings that dotted frontier America. Families came in wagons, set up tents and brought enough provisions to stay for several days. From 1862 until 1885, the first Rock Valley School and Meeting House was located on this property. It is understandable that, following the Indians and pioneers, the early-day Shady Oaks Camp Ground for tents was also established here in the early 1920s. This scene was the progenitor of what would follow.

The once celebrated Lincoln Highway spanned Marshall County by crossing the now extinct Rainbow Arch Bridge in Section 8 of LeGrand Township. Before the 1920s, this pioneer area was referred to as the Rock Valley community. The core of Rock Valley was named Shady Oaks in the early 1920s, thus, putting it on the map forever. The area was popular for Sunday drives and picnics. The fervor of that time is engraved in my mind. First, I will set the stage for Act One and then introduce the leading characters.

Calvin Coolidge was elected the 30th President of the United States. He presided from 1923 to 1929. This period in history was known as the "Roaring Twenties" and was often called the "Jazz Age." Everyone was happy to "keep cool with Coolidge." The Charleston, a ragtime dance, was the latest craze; and people shimmied the night away. "Tea for Two" was a popular song.

The American scene from World War I to the Great Depression was the era of new automobiles, hard-surfaced highways, fads, wealth and prohibition. The unpopular Volstead Act prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages and gave rise to bootleggers, speakeasies (dives) and gangsters like Al (Scarface) Capone. More people desired alcohol than before prohibition.

Coolidge did nothing to disturb the general well-being of the Country. The President once said, "When things are going all right, it is a good plan to let them alone. The people cannot look to legislation for success. Industry, thrift and character are not conferred by act or resolve. Government cannot relieve toil. It can provide no substitute for the reward of service. It can, of course, care for the defective and recognize distinguished merit. The normal must care for themselves. Self-government means self-support."