

Camp Fred Darby



In 1596 the Spanish Explorer Juan de Oñate was the first non-native to explore the area of Camp Fred Darby. Later in the 18th century the French trapper and explorer Berrard de LaHarpe explored the area.

In 1830, as a result of the settlement of the Western Cherokees in present Oklahoma, the Reverend Samuel Newton established a mission, near the camp's present swimming hole, called the Mission of the Forks of the Illinois. It was one of the first missions in Indian Territory, but was subsequently moved to Welling. Additional Cherokees settled in this vicinity when brought here by the Trail of Tears, but malaria was so bad that they moved to Park Hill.

On December of 1863 a Civil War battle was fought near the site of the camp. It was known as the Battle of the Barren Fork. Federal forces from Ft. Gibson were successful engaging Confederate Forces after they had attacked Tahlequah, burned the Cherokee Capital, and several homes in the area including the home of Cherokee Chief John Ross at Park Hill.

The Ozark Club was established in 1903 by a group of Muskogee and Tahlequah citizens as an "outing club". Transportation was made much easier with the establishing of the Frisco Railroad between Muskogee and Tahlequah and on to Fayetteville, Arkansas. A clubhouse was begun on May 1, 1903 near the present location of the flagpole between Darby and Murphy Halls. A brochure published in 1905, entitled: "Muskogee, Indian Territory", has pictures of the Ozark Club. A few years later, the clubhouse burned. With the advent of cars, it was found that the Sequoyah Club was more convenient, since the Illinois River and the Barron Fork did not need to be crossed. Consequently, the Ozark Club was dissolved with most of the members joining the Sequoyah Club.

The Boy Scouts had been looking for a permanent camp for several years, as they had used several sites since their organization in the fall of 1910. Rev. A.E. Moody, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, and Chief John L. Templeton made several exploratory trips looking for a suitable location and finally decided on this site. In the meantime, Wilbur Hyatt became Scout Executive, and the three consummated all arrangements for the beginning of present Camp Darby. J. Fred Darby bought the original property from Dr. Claude Thompson, and the first camp was held on this site in the summer of 1923.

A sort of cook shack was built near the location of the garage and squad tents were erected between present Darby and Murphy Hall. Campers as well as food and equipment were transported to Welling by means of the Frisco Railroad. There a man met them with a team and wagon, which transported the food and equipment to camp with the campers hiking the rest of the way. Thus was held the first Summer Camp under the name of Camp Mus-Ko-Gee.

The camp operated each summer since this first one. They experienced some difficulty during the World War II years due to lack of transportation and adequate food. However, with the help and cooperation of many friends, the transportation was provided. Growing their own garden and raising and butchering their own beef solved the food problem. The name of the camp was changed to Camp Fred Darby in honor of its principal benefactor, J. Fred Darby, who also built Darby Hall.

Eastern Oklahoma Council in Muskogee operated the camp until it merged in 1983 with Indian Nations Council out of Tulsa. The associated Order of the Arrow Lodge, Ni-U-Kon-Ska (earlier named Nanimohistiim) also merged with TaTsuHwa Lodge at the same time. After 60 years of continuous use as a Boy Scout week long summer camp, Camp Fred Darby no longer served this purpose. The camp still serves Scouting in many ways to this day. Today many Troops use it for year-round weekend camping and canoeing. Many District level Camporee and training events are also hosted at the camp. The Order of the Arrow holds its annual Fall Fellowship here. Cub Scouts and parents who participate in Dad-and-Lad or Mom-and-Me programs have been added to the hundreds of Scouts and Scouters who enjoy the natural beauty and historic facilities of Camp Fred Darby.