

## **Media Release for Topeka First United Methodist Church**

**September 8, 2017**

### **Topeka First United Methodist Church and Boy Scout Connections**

Three youth with association to Topeka First United Methodist Church helped to ensure that hundreds of Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, leaders, parents, grandparents and siblings had fun while learning new skills during the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of summer camping at the property now known as Falley Scout Reservation owned by Jayhawk Area Council, Boy Scouts of America.

Saffron Gutierrez, who serves as crew president for Jayhawk Area Council Venture Crew 513 chartered by our church, served as trading post clerk and office assistant during the two month summer camp season for Boy Scouts at Camp Jayhawk and Cub Scouts at Camp Delaware at Falley Scout Reservation. Ryan Peacocke, member of the church and the crew, served as assistant director for COPE and climbing and assistant medic. Paul Riley, also a member of Crew 513, served as handicrafts director for each of the Boy and Cub Scout camps this past summer.

Church members serving at summer camp is not the only connection between Topeka First United Methodist Church and Falley Scout Reservation. To help Cub Scouts learn about camp features and to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of summer camp a trail of history scavenger hunt was prepared for Cub Scouts. One focus for the hunt was the bronze plaques on various structures surrounding the main parade field at the camp. The oldest plaques are firmly embedded in the stone pillars at either side of the gate to the camp. The plaque reads "GATEWAY TO ADVENTURE DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF ERNEST OFFICER, A GREAT SCOUTMASTER, ERECTED 1950 BY HIS FELLOW WORKERS." Key Scouters were asked about Ernest Officer and names on other plaques including George Bistline, plaque on the main camp north flagpole, and Elmer "Bud" Miltz, plaque on the main camp south flagpole. Initially no one seemed to remember these Scouters. The Shawnee District Chair the last two years found Ernest Officer's obituary online at "Find a Grave" which said he was a member of First United Methodist Church, Topeka.

A contact to church historian's Doris and Larry Wills produced immediate answers. Ernest Officer was "a great Scoutmaster" of Troop 16 chartered by First Methodist Church,

Topeka. In fact, the church records credit Ernest Officer with starting Boy Scout Troop 16 in 1925 and he served as Scoutmaster for the troop for 22 years from 1925 to 1947. He died at Stormont-Vail April 28, 1947 and is buried at Mt Hope Cemetery.

Check the church history wall between the between the Celebration Room and the sanctuary to see: a photo of Troop 16 Scouts, the troop's charter, Ernest Officer's name as Scoutmaster, the signatures of US President Calvin Coolidge, Vice President William Howard Taft and well known early BSA leaders. Notice the various knots Scouts learn to tie which form the border on the charter document. If anyone can identify the scouts in the photo please contact the church historians.

Scoutmaster Officer had two sons Julius and Fredrick. Fredrick's name is on the 8<sup>th</sup> plate on Troop 16's Eagle Scout Plaque. Fredrick earned his Eagle Scout Award in 1934.

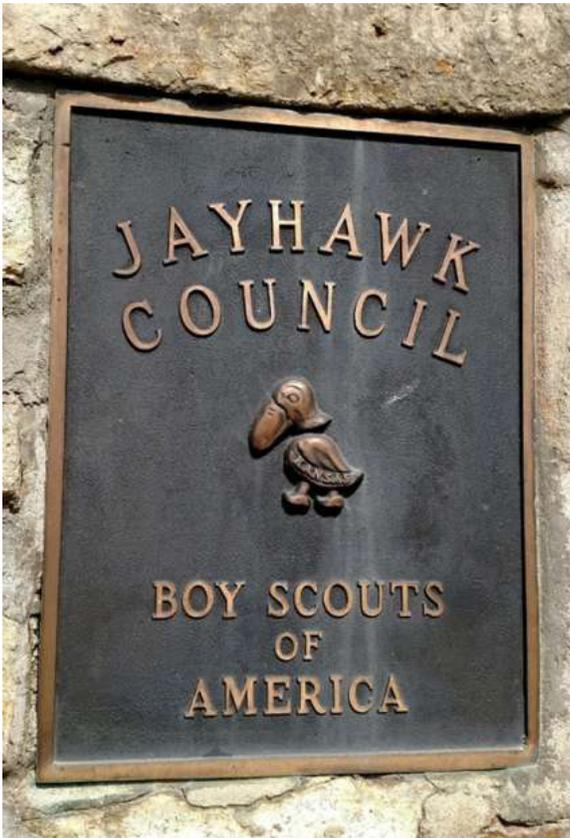
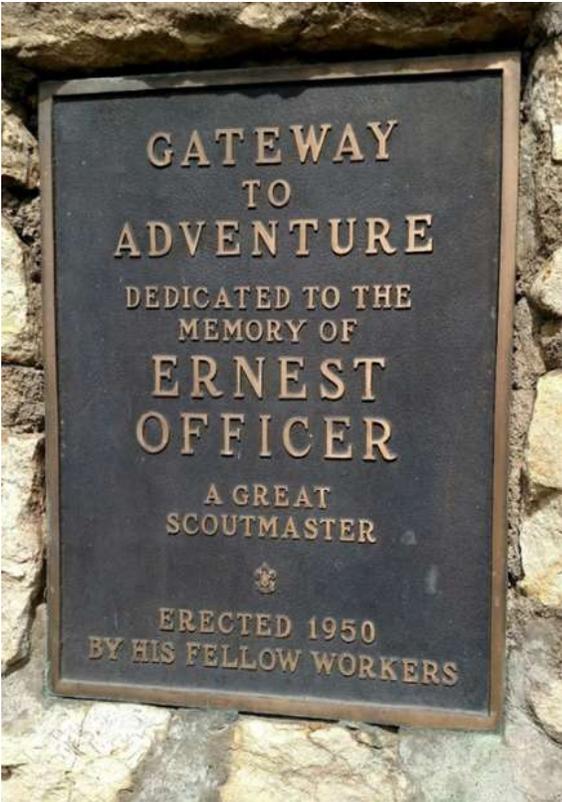
Church records also provide an interesting tidbit about the first name on Troop 16's Eagle Scout Plaque. Under Ernest Officer's leadership, Boy Scout Walter Jennings completed requirements for the Eagle Award during the first year of Troop 16's history and was one of a group of new Eagle Scouts from Kansas and Missouri who went to Kansas City on May 6, 1926 to receive their Eagle Scout Award Badge from none other than Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of Scouting world-wide, who is known as Chief Scout of the World. Boy Scouts of America was chartered by the US Congress on February 8, 1910. In 1926 Baden-Powell, from England, was touring the United States to visit Scouts and Scouters to see the progress of the movement for young boys sixteen years after BSA was established in this country. Baden-Powell's visit to Kansas City was announced in the April and May 1926 issues of Boys' Life Magazine, published by BSA. The visit was documented with photos in the July 1926 issue. All can be seen in the Boys' Life online archives.

The property originally known as Camp Jayhawk was purchased on October 22, 1946. The story is that a member of the Jayhawk Area Council Board of Directors placed an ad "Wanted a good place to raise kids." The person who responded to the ad thought the hilly rocky property, northeast of Topeka, in Jefferson County would be an ideal place to raise kid goats. For the past 70 years, no goats; but, thousands of Scouts and Scouters, including several generations of a number of northeast Kansas families, have enjoyed activities and camping at Falley Scout Reservation home of Camp Jayhawk Summer Camp for Boy Scouts and now Camp Delaware Summer Camp for Cub Scouts.

Photos from Falley Scout Reservation



The 1950 Gateway to Falley Scout Reservation as it appears in 2017.



Bronze plaques on the stone pillars erected at Falley Scout Reservation in 1950.



From Topeka First United Methodist Church History Wall

