

# Eaton Rapids Camp Meeting 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Walking Tour

2025 marks the 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Eaton Rapids Camp Meeting. Much has changed since our beginnings, but the one constant is God's presence in this place, and our mission of "the conversion of sinners and preaching scriptural Holiness." As you participate in this exercise, it is our hope you enjoy the beauty of the grounds as you learn a little about the history of this camp, and that you take time to praise our Creator and all that has been provided for us! Enjoy!

*Instructions for locating each of the 12 History Spots will be in italics. The first History Spot is located in back of the Tabernacle, just off South Tabernacle Drive. Each mailbox will contain the History Spot information for that location. The permanent copy will be laminated or encased. Please make sure you put this copy back in the box. The complete Walking Tour is available on our website at [www.eatonrapidscampmeeting.org](http://www.eatonrapidscampmeeting.org) under the 140<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. You can follow along on your electronic device.*

## **History Spot #1**

**Callen Memorial Tabernacle-** is the centerpiece of life during Eaton Rapids Camp Meeting. It is the second structure that has stood on this site. The first tabernacle was too small and in poor repair, so on June 2, 1916. Dr. Marshall Callen presented the Board of Directors with \$2500, in memory of his wife, Helen Bosworth Callen to construct a new tabernacle. On July 29, just 57 days later, a bill of \$3,662.23 was presented for the completed structure. That Sunday, the total amount was raised, and Joseph H. Smith preached the dedicatory sermon. Today it would cost over \$108,000 to build the structure alone. Electricity, technology upgrades, a cement floor, furnishings, instruments and a metal roof have all been installed in the last 109 years, pushing the replacement cost to over one million dollars. Please step inside and take a moment to admire the beam construction and notice that pegs were used to connect the massive pieces of lumber.

*If you look left, you will see a small building, this is the*

## **Book Store**

It is open 30 minutes prior to and after worship services and is open during the afternoon. You will know the bookstore is open when the sides are up and the lights are on. This small but mighty structure contains some of the best reading material on the topic of holiness, inspirational reading, devotionals and bibles for all ages. Additionally, you will find an excellent selection of reading material from our past and present speakers and teachers. The bookstore also carries a selection of logo clothing in most sizes. If you want the new annual design you need to shop early, as these are limited editions and sell out fast!

*Look north along the Tabernacle to the Bell Stand.*

**Robinson Memorial Bell**, given in honor of W.W. Robinson and his wife. This bell still calls us to worship each morning and evening and is rung 15 minutes prior to each service and then again at 10:30 am, and 7:00 pm. It is an honor to ring the bell and over the years, families and individuals have asked for the honor of ringing the bell to mark a milestone or special occasion in their life. It is important to remember that bells have played an important role in communicating important information in the life of any community. They note time, celebrations, emergencies, gatherings and other important occasions. Up until a few years ago ERC had three different bells in use, that called us to gather, The Tabernacle Bell, The Peace Chapel bell, and the Dinner Bell, which stood in front of the cafeteria. Each one had their own distinctive tone and there was no confusion about which bell was being rung!

*The History Spot #2 is located behind you, across the street in front of the Office.*

### **History Spot #2**

**The Ice Cream Shop/Camp Office-** Was constructed on the site of the original dormitory, which housed the camp workers and guests. The building was ready for use in 1886 and contained thirteen first floor rooms (four to a room) and two large rooms on the second floor, each accommodating 25 to 30 people. After many years, the second floor of the building was removed, and the building was converted to the camp store, where individuals could buy fresh milk, ice, and other groceries, and gentlemen could have a haircut and shave. Eventually the building needed replacing, and the current block building was constructed to house the camp office and a snack shop. In the early two-thousands, the back porch was screened in, more than doubling the seating capacity, The Ice Cream Shop contains a Bastion Blessing Soda Fountain, Antique Freezer and a water-cooled Coke Cooler, all of which are in use today. This would be a great time for you to check out the Ice Cream Shop and order a cool beverage or an Ice Cream Treat!

*History spot #3 is located just inside of the front gate. Go left on South Tabernacle Drive toward the River. Turn right on Grand River Drive and walk two- and one-half blocks. The next History Spot will be on your left, about 25 feet inside the gate.*

### **History Spot #3**

**The Stone columns at the camp entrance-** held the original arch and gate. A small ticket booth/office was located adjacent to the gate, and individuals were charged a fee to enter. Admission to the camp was by ticket and it cost 10 cents per day or 50 cents per season. Photos of the gate and office are available in the History Room in the Hotel.

*Look across the street at the first building.*

**Unity House-**the first building inside the gate, was built in 1886 and was the original boarding house on the grounds. During the camp meeting, it was run by the owner of the Morgan Hotel, which was in Eaton Rapids. The main level contains bedrooms on both sides of a long open area in the center of the house. This housed the kitchen and Dining Room for guests. The second floor has an additional 6 bedrooms and a bath. Over the years, hundreds of people have stayed in Unity House, and it is used as a retreat center and meeting place at other times of the year. Enjoy your walk to the next History Spot.

*Walk toward the interior of camp along Grand River Drive. You will cross Outer Drive, which leads to the camping area, Hart-Toplif Pavilion, and the newly updated Play Areas. If you look to the right, you will see a small bridge, which spans a gully for run-off. This landmark has long been a place to meet for quiet conversations or for younger children to play. As you continue walking along the river, you will note some of the larger homes. These were built by some of the early founders. The front porches were open to take advantage of the breeze and enjoy the view. Cross North and South Tabernacle Drive. At the 3-way stop sign, look toward the river for*

#### **History Spot #4**

##### **The Boat Landing**

This is the site of the boat landing. When ERC was founded, the modes of transportation available and established roads were limited. It was about a five-mile trip to get to town. Folks arriving in Eaton Rapids by train had to either walk, hire a horse and buggy, or, for a few years, take a River Boat, named the Stirling.

*Look across the street and note a gray cottage with a large porch. This is*

**Bishop Cottage, 1505 Grand River Drive-** This cottage was owned by one of the early and longest serving Association Presidents, Marshall Callen and his wife Helen. In the early 1900's, visiting bishops, often as many as five or six, would stay with them at the cottage which was named Rio Vista. Over time, it affectionately became known as the "Bishops Cottage." In the early 2000s, the wrap around porch was reinstalled on the original footings, though the second-floor door was not put back to accommodate a pitched roof. The first porch had a decorative railing on the second floor.

*Continue to walk along the river. History Spot #5 is located on this side of the cross and fire bowl seating.*

#### **History Spot #5**

##### **The Cross and Fire bowl**

In 1852 Mineral Water was discovered in Eaton Rapids. Several wells were drilled, and two bath houses were established in town to cater to the hundreds who sought the healing properties of the mineral infused water. At one point in time, 16 trains per day would bring the tourist to the baths, earning Eaton Rapids the nickname of "The Saratoga of the West."

The camp also had bath houses located along the river. There was no air conditioning, and the men all wore black wool suits, and the women high necked, long sleeved black dresses, or black skirts and white shirtwaists. As you can imagine, on a hot summer day, bathhouses were not just a luxury but were needed to help manage hygiene and comfort. The bath houses are long gone, but the banks of the river remain important for continued enjoyment for all ERC attendees.

In 2024 a new cross was installed along the river, replacing one that had been on the site for as long as 70 years, We don't know if this was the site of an original bath house, but we do know that the cross and fire bowl has been used by generation for worship and is the site of the Galilean service. Galilean services were first introduced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and were

celebrated by camps around the country. Eaton Rapids Camp has long been committed to being good stewards of God's creation and are seeking new environmentally friendly alternatives for this loved tradition.

This is a wonderful place for personal devotions or prayer and reflections, and we invite you to return to this spot often during your time at ERC.

*Turn and walk toward the north end of Grace Hotel for History spot #6.*

### **History Spot \$6**

**Grace Hotel-** was completed by 1900 for a cost of \$400 and housed the kitchen and dining room on the first floor. By 1905 additions were added to each end of the hotel to double the capacity. With 64 double beds, Grace Hotel could house 128 adults. After a separate dining hall and kitchen was built, another sixteen rooms were added on the first floor, again, increasing the capacity of the hotel. In 1908, electricity was brought to the camp, and Grace Hotel was open from July 1 to September 1, allowing guests to enjoy the new installation. At about the same time the front porch was enclosed and screened, and the second-floor porch was eliminated for a more durable roof. In 2011, the hotel underwent many needed upgrades. All new restrooms were installed on the first and second floors. New carpet was added to the lobby and halls, and recently, the back living room was converted to "The Gathering Place" where guests can enjoy sitting around tables for a refreshing beverage, a quick game or a small meeting.

*Walk back toward the river, turning left onto Grand River Drive. Enjoy the view you would see if you were staying in the hotel or sitting on the front porch. Continue to walk toward the end of the road. The next three cottages on your left were intentionally built in this location. They were to house the camp platform staff and program workers. As these individuals were high profile with responsibility, the camp founders determined that their housing should be set apart, to provide some opportunity for rest away from the hundreds that sought their attention.*

*The first Cottage is **Deaconess Cottage built in 1906**, is one of the larger cottages on the grounds. It's function was to house the deaconesses and female missionaries. It contains a large living space on the first floor, and currently 4 bedrooms, though when it was built, there were at least two other bedrooms. The History Room contains photos that show the cottage and its occupants in the late 1900s.*

*The second cottage, **Mac Donald**, currently houses our kitchen staff.*

*The third cottage is **Workers Rest**, originally called Workers Lodge, was built in 1909 to house the platform staff. Originally the two-story porch wrapped around the house to the left, and it was finished with a simple railing. The History room also has photos of this building with its residents. This cottage underwent updating about 10 years ago and each of the four rooms now has a private bath, sitting area and private refrigerator and coffee maker, making it easier to house couples and female speakers. The room at the back does not have a river view, but has a separate living space, making it desirable in its own way.*

*We continue to follow the early leadership's wisdom and honor the privacy of our staff by not planning any programming in this area.*

*As you approach the end of the road, **History Spot #7** is in sight.*

### **History Spot #7**

**Athletic Field-** Just inside the opening in the trees is the current Athletic Field. 50 years ago, it was known as the Ball Field and had a well-worn diamond worn into the grass. 140 years ago, this was the original corral, and livery barn. When ERC was established, people and horses were charged an entrance fee to attend camp. A daily ticket for a horse was \$0.05, the weekly was \$0.25 or \$0.50 for a team. Here all the horses were cared for at the same price as the livery stable in town.

*Retrace your steps to just past Workers Rest, turn right and cut across the lawn to the Dining Hall drive. Walk to the front of the Dining Hall where you will see History Spot #8.*

### **History Spot #8**

**Dining Hall-** A major step was taken in 1912 when a separate 30 x 100 foot long, two-story dining hall was built to serve 250 people in one sitting. The second floor was designed to house all the dining room help, saving them the walk from the original dormitory. At this time there were about 80 cottages on the grounds, increasing the demand for meals.

*Turn away from the Dining Hall and walk up the path behind the cottages on your left to Chapel Road. Turn right and walk up the hill to the Children's Center on the right, where you will Find History Spot #9.*

### **History Spot #9**

**The Children's Center-** was constructed in 1972, to house 100 elementary aged children, that today is called ERC Kids. It was through the persistent efforts of Beth Nixon Carruth, that this building exists, ending years of using several large tents for the many aspects of the program. If you walk past this building during music time, you will be amazed at the volume and energy that radiates from the building, though the windows are closed. This ERC Kids begins on the First Saturday at 9:00 am and ends the Second Sunday with the Children's Special Worship at 10:30 am. The Children's Program is always presented at 7:00 PM on the last Friday evening of camp in the Tabernacle.

ERC Kids is free of charge, but registration is required at the time your child enters the program.

*Walk back to Chapel Road and turn right. A short distance ahead is History Spot #10.*

### **History Spot # 10**

**Youth Complex-** A small tabernacle, named Epworth Chapel was in this area. For many years, the program was led by Iva Durham Vennard, educator and Holiness Deaconess, who was known for leading worship with her guitar. As the old tabernacle fell into disrepair, it was torn down and the new Peace Chapel was built in 1953. The small entrance was added later and is an important part of the structure, as it houses all the shoes that come off as the youth enter the building. In 2007, New youth dorms and a bath house were built, and two years later a second dorm was built.

*As you leave this area, take the curve north and walk back toward the center of the camp. Look right into the woods and you will see a slight rise. A few years ago, you could still see a few pieces of rotted boards, which is all that is left of the original privies. As there was no running water in any of the buildings, the privies were strategically placed near the center of the camp, and yet not in sight of the tabernacle. Some of the cottages built in the early years had their own out houses and the bath houses and river provided much needed relief from the hot summer days. Pass Epworth Street to the next road and turn right. History Spot #11.*

### **History Spot #11**

**The English Nursery Cottage-** has grown over the years to house the youngest members of our camp family. The facilities include nursery and pre-school programs with facilities for inside and outside play. Childcare is provided here during all services and the bible study.

*Follow the road toward the opening in the fence row. Straight ahead is the*

**The Big Boy Camping Area** located in the meadow is the newest of our camping areas. As the size of camping rigs have increased, a special area for the “Big Boys” was built with upgraded utilities suited for these special rigs. While they do not have the benefits of the old growth trees, campers here get to enjoy the fruits of ERC’s forestation program and the wildlife that it supports.

*Continue to follow the road past the camping area. As the road curves to the left, you will find History Spot #12 on the left in front of the pavilion.*

### **History Spot #12**

**The Hart-Topliff Pavilion** provides a covered table area and second restroom facility for campers. Many activities take place here during camp, and it is a great place for campers to gather for fellowship and fun.

### **The Play Area**

Adjacent to the pavilion is the newly updated play area. The nature inspired color scheme, and the use of natural products unifies the three distinct areas of the updated play area. Benches allow adults to relax while supervising their kids and separating them from the roads.

*We hope you have enjoyed this glimpse into ERC, both past and present. For more information about the camp, we suggest you visit the History Room, which is in Grace Hotel, adjacent to the Gathering Room.*

*For more in-depth information about ERC, we suggest you stop in the bookstore and purchase the book “At the Bend of the River Grand” by David & Marybeth Baggett. This book records 130 years of ERC history and its commitment to the pursuit of Holiness.*