

HickoryCoveSM

B I B L E C A M P
and Retreat Center

A Brief History



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Preface

In 1927, the Southern Power Company built a hydroelectric dam on the Catawba River in an area of Alexander County, North Carolina, known as Oxford. As the dammed water flooded over 4,000 acres of fields and valleys surrounding the river, it created a shoreline of one hundred and five miles. One section of this shoreline formed where the water flooded a roadbed leading to what had been known as White's Ferry. It was from this very section of shoreline, thirty years later, that two Bible teachers took a group of their students to swim in a little cove on Lake Hickory.

Chapter One

"A Lighthouse": Grace and Truth Bible Camp (1959-1968)

The story of Hickory Cove Bible Camp begins not in North Carolina, but in Grainger County, Tennessee, 200 miles northeast of the Camp's current location. It was September 1954, and Eugene Vedder, Jr., was heading away from his home in Kenosha, Wisconsin, for the state of Tennessee. As he made his way south, his plan was to join fellow Wisconsinite Ervin Wurz, originally from Wausau. Ervin had for many years conducted a Bible study and memorization program in the public school systems of eastern Kentucky and now Tennessee. Earlier that summer, Eugene, Ervin, and several others hosted a Bible camp at the former health resort where Ervin lived. Sixteen boys and girls who had memorized two hundred Bible verses during the school year were rewarded with a week at camp, and several of them came to know the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Now Eugene was traveling to Tennessee to assist Ervin on a more permanent basis.

Unbeknownst to Eugene, the Lord was closing the doors to the Bible program in Tennessee. Shortly after his arrival in Grainger County, the schools disallowed Ervin's study and memorization program. Ervin and Eugene began canvassing neighboring regions for opportunities to continue similar programs in other school systems. One day, shortly before closing time, Ervin and Eugene found themselves in the office of Sloane Payne, superintendent of schools in Alexander County, North Carolina. Before the meeting ended, Superintendent Payne allowed the two men access to all of the county's schools. During the next two weeks, Ervin and Eugene began work in five of the seven schools in Alexander County, holding Bible classes for over 2,000 students. They soon became known as the "Bible men."

A typical Bible class took place once every two weeks and lasted about one half-hour: 10 minutes of singing and 20 minutes of Bible teaching. A voluntary Scripture memory program accompanied the

Bible class. For learning five verses, a child could earn a Gospel of John; for 25 verses, a New Testament. Additional verses yielded additional prizes, and some children learned as many as 600 verses this way.

Three years later, Ervin and Eugene were conducting children's Bible classes, not only in the schools, but outside school in the evenings. These classes were specifically for boys. This, in turn, developed into a home Bible study for adults and families, hosted in various local homes. One such family, that of Jack and Libby Lackey, continued to be involved in the operation of the Camp over the next 50 years, donating food and helping with construction and kitchen work.

As the Bible classes continued, the two men considered planning a summer camp to reward verse memorization, as they had done in Tennessee. Duke Power (formerly the Southern Power Company) was offering special leases on lakeside property to individuals and organizations who met certain criteria. Already Ervin and Eugene occasionally brought groups of boys to the lake for camping and swimming through the generosity of some lakeside landowners. The men applied for a lease, even though they had no money to pay for it.

As the 1957 summer holidays began, trouble was brewing in the Alexander County schools surrounding the two Bible teachers and their classes. Objections to their work came from both secular and Christian circles: if the schools allowed these men to teach religion in school, what other religious teachings might be allowed next? Before the fall school season began, the school board told the two Bible teachers they would no longer be able to carry on their classes in any of the county schools.

Once again the schools were closed to the "Bible men," and many local families were concerned that they would leave the area. However, with the evening Bible classes for both children and adults going strong, Ervin

and Eugene felt they should stay in Alexander County. By now, their Bible studies had also expanded to the Stony Point area. Along with Eugene and Ervin, some of the local families formed *Grace & Truth Bible Chapel* in Taylorsville. Both Eugene and Ervin belonged to a group of evangelical Christians widely known as the Brethren or Plymouth Brethren, noteworthy for their strong emphasis on Scriptural teaching and simple form of gathering for worship. In the 1960s and for many years to come, both *Grace & Truth Bible Chapel* and *Grace & Truth Bible Camp* were associated with the Brethren, and most of the Christians who volunteered to work at the Camp also came from Brethren churches until the 2000s, when the Camp Board of Trustees decided that Hickory Cove Bible Camp would operate as a non-denominational Christian ministry.

In early 1959, Duke Power agreed to lease a small six and a half acre lot on Lake Hickory to the men, right next to the land where they had taken boys camping and swimming. On April 29, 1959, with the help of a Hickory lawyer, the two men established the non-profit corporation, *Grace and Truth Bible Camp*, with Ervin as President and Eugene as Vice President. In addition, they set up a five-member Board of Trustees.

As donations came in for the Camp construction, the two Bible teachers cleared the land at the top of a hill overlooking the lake. During the winter of 1958-59, Ervin and Eugene used axes and saws to fell trees and split them into firewood, which they gave away. This area would provide the location for the dining hall used during the next fifty years. Initially, all of this work was done by hand, but eventually they were able to rent a bulldozer to do some of the clearing.

The "Bible men" constructed the first building with the help of both local Christians and believers from Brethren churches in other states, mainly New Jersey and Pennsylvania. That building consisted of a kitchen, a small sleeping room for cooks, two bathrooms, and a dining room.

By Mother's Day weekend in May 1959, the first building of *Grace and Truth Bible Camp* was ready for its initial Camp session. The directors dedicated the building with a Bible conference whose attendees included local and out-of-state Brethren families, parents of boys in the weekly Bible classes, and families who attended the local home Bible studies.

Several days later, on May 16, 1959, Ervin, Eugene, and a third member of the Board, Gustav Kaschel, met in Ervin and Eugene's home on Three Forks Church Road in Taylorsville for their first Board Meeting. In the words of Eugene:

"The meeting was opened by a season of prayer, asking the Lord's guidance and blessing in the work of the Camp. The desire expressed was that the Name of our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, might be honored in precious souls saved for eternity, and the Camp be a 'Lighthouse' of truth to all around, especially in the County of Alexander, North Carolina."

That summer, *Grace and Truth Bible Camp* held sessions for the very first time. These sessions lasted ten days and cost \$15. Because there was only one building, camp sessions were open to only one gender at a time. This one building served as dormitory, kitchen, chapel, and indoor recreation room. A temporary partition was put in place to divide between dining and sleeping sections. Ervin and Eugene and other volunteers (many from the Midwest) filled multiple roles as counselors, teachers, song leaders, musicians, cooks, dishwashers, sports directors, lifeguards, and janitors. As Eugene put it, "The Camp was normally short-staffed, short on space, and short on facilities. But how thankful we were for the Lord's provision and for each one who pitched in wholeheartedly!" Most of the campers came from the local area, but some traveled from New York, New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia, South Carolina, and even Canada.

As the number of campers grew, so did the need for additional buildings. 1960 saw the construction of a dormitory (the bottom floor of the current girls' dorm). It was soon followed by a second dormitory (the back two rooms of the current boys' dorm). Having two dorms enabled the Camp to host co-ed camp sessions. In 1961, the Camp added a chapel building. Originally, this building also served as an indoor recreation center; the bedrooms in this building were used for staff sleeping. While both the dining hall and the chapel had indoor restrooms, there were no indoor bathrooms for the two dormitories, but each had outhouses situated behind the buildings. In 1964, indoor recreation moved to a new building (the current office); the bedrooms in this building were used for staff sleeping and overflow from the dormitories. This new recreation building also housed a laundry room and a sports equipment closet. (The laundry room was eventually converted into a nurse's station for June Hartman, and the sports equipment closet became the laundry room.) Local contractor George White did the masonry work on all of these buildings.

During this time, Duke Power leased 10 more acres to the Camp, the area where the soccer field and swimming pool now sit. The Camp cleared more land to make room for a recreation field, and built a two-level dock with a diving board for the cove, as well as a floating dock for lifeguards.

In 1961, Ted Becker brought a group of boys to Grace and Truth Bible Camp from Ontario, Canada. Inspired by the ministry in North Carolina, Ted and his wife Barb began a camping ministry in Ontario, now known as Beacon Bible Camp. The first Camp building was constructed in 1964 and Beacon Bible Camp is still ministering to children and youth today.

Throughout the early 1960s, the Camp staff and Board of Trustees brought in several new Board members. In 1961, both Ervin and Eugene were married, Ervin to Ruth McIlwain and Eugene to Madeline Black. In 1963, the Board of Trustees expanded from five members to seven. One of these Board Members, Fred Carlson, Sr., became very involved in the daily operations of Camp. Fred soon moved to Taylorsville from New Jersey with his wife Mary and their three children. At the September 1963 Board Meeting, the Board named Ervin as Director and Fred as Assistant Director. This left Eugene more time to teach and focus on handling other aspects of the Camp program.

In 1965, Holden Shoop, one of the original Camp Board Members, asked Bill Hubler of Pottsville, Pennsylvania, to fill a vacancy left on the Board of Trustees. Bill agreed. Bill and his wife Nancy became involved with Grace and Truth Bible Camp alongside Bill's sister, June Hartman, and her husband Paul. The Hartmans had taken an interest in the Camp in 1963 when Eugene, visiting in Pennsylvania, had mentioned the need for counselors and other staff. The Lord arranged for Paul's vacation time to coincide with one of the Camp sessions, so Paul and June, along with three others from Pennsylvania, made their way to North Carolina. When they arrived at the Camp, they discovered that, along with one young man from Tennessee, they made up the entire volunteer staff for the whole session!

One of Paul's first jobs was to help put a Camp bell on the tower that had recently been built. Ever since, bell ringing has played an important part in every Camp session. Other long-standing traditions got their start in these early years. One was the trek from Camp to Bowman's Store for ice cream. As the road went from dirt to pavement, this tradition continued into the 1980s. Eugene, who spent a lot of time and effort on meal preparation, began a tradition of delicious meals for which the Camp is still well-known.

Despite the amount of work, Paul and June Hartman fell in love with both the Camp and the Lord's work there. They continued to participate in most of the camp sessions over the next 40 years, eventually moving to Taylorsville in the late 1980s. Many other Christians from all over the country volunteered their time at the Camp. These included Margaret Spence, known to campers as "Splash," who served as a lifeguard and

swimming instructor; sisters Regina and Lydia Pearson, craft instructors and Bible class teachers; and Alfred and Violet Jackstadt, who would bring food to the Camp from South Carolina until they moved to North Carolina in the 1980s and were familiar faces around Camp into the 2000s.

In 1966, Ervin Wurz resigned as President of the Corporation as well as Director of the Camp, but continued to serve on the Board of Trustees until 1967. By this time, Grace and Truth Bible Camp held four Camp sessions during the summer, including two junior camps, one senior camp, and one family camp. During the summer of 1967, the Camp hosted a total of 112 campers.

In the summer of 1968, Gary Flor, also a Camp Board Member, undertook the directorship of the Camp. However, he was unable to continue as Director. In addition, Fred Carlson, Sr., and Eugene Vedder, Jr., both relinquished their positions on the Board. This proved to be a difficult time for Grace and Truth Bible Camp; personal difficulties among the Camp workers and local Christians in Taylorsville put a strain on the ministry. Eventually the Carlsons moved to Florida and the Bahamas as missionaries. At the end of August 1968, the Vedders left Taylorsville and headed to Wisconsin, then eventually to St. Louis, Missouri, which has served as a home base for Eugene's ministry as a traveling Bible teacher ever since. As the summer of 1969 approached, Grace and Truth Bible Camp was without a Camp Director, and the Board felt that perhaps the best option was to sell the Camp.

However, God was still at work in the ministry. In their summary report for the summer of 1968, the Board recorded abundant answers to prayer and many children who had received Christ as Savior. The work at Grace and Truth Bible Camp was far from over.

In 1969, Bill Hubler told the Board of Trustees that, before they sold the Camp, he would like to take a leave of absence from his machinist job to prepare the Camp for summer and direct that summer's session. Bill and Nancy, along with Russ and Adell Skaling, drove to North Carolina to work for a week. While Nancy and the Skalings returned home after this week, Bill remained to work alone. Among the items on Bill's to-do list were painting and repair of Camp buildings, purchasing supplies for the summer, and making personal visits to local campers. God rewarded Bill's efforts with a fruitful summer and this schedule continued until 1973, when the Hubler family relocated to Taylorsville and opened a new chapter of God's work through the ministry of Grace and Truth Bible Camp.

Chapter Two Expanding Horizons (1968-1995)

It was 1974, and the Hublers had been living in Taylorsville for almost a year. Bill left his machinist job in Pennsylvania behind and moved the family to North Carolina at the close of the 1973 Camp season. Bill found full-time machinist work in Statesville but unfortunately, he had to work long hours at this job and his availability for the Camp was limited. By the time summer camp rolled around, Bill's employer refused to give him the time off necessary for directing the summer camp sessions and Bill resigned from his job in order to be free for Camp work.

In August 1974, after a busy summer, Bill expressed to the other Board members his growing conviction that it was time for him to begin working at the Camp full time. The number of people attending Camp was growing, the camper base was expanding, and there was a need for follow-up with local children and youth. In addition, there was a lot of building and property maintenance to be done. In November, Bill and Nancy Hubler became full-time missionaries at the Camp.

Around this time the Camp changed its name to "Hickory Cove Bible Camp" to accompany the anticipated expansion of the Camp. With the name change came changes to the property. Jim and Gary Hubler, sons of Bill and Nancy, along with Dave Lackey from Stony Point, funded and built the "Trading Post," a small Camp store for selling candy, t-shirts, postcards, and other items. The kitchen underwent several improvements, among them a commercial dishwasher, new sinks and tables, and an enlargement made by removing a wall which had formally partitioned a spare bedroom. Both the boys' and girls' dorms were also expanded during the 1970s to provide more sleeping accommodations.

The ministry of the Camp was also expanding. The Camp sessions had gone from a few weeks of summer camp to a schedule of evangelistic and discipleship weekends for adults and weekend retreats for children and youth, in addition to the summer program. 1975 marked a triple increase in camper days from 1972. To help with the increase of Camp use, Howard and Hazel Bailey moved to the Camp from Sunbury, Pennsylvania. Howard served as the Camp caretaker until 1980. The trailer they brought to Camp remained long after they left and served as the Camp office in the 1980s and 1990s.

During the 1970s, Bill Hubler expanded the publicity of the Camp through promotional events such as a booth at the county fair where staff members served ice cream and handed out Gospel tracts, as well as local Sunday School work. In 1978, the Camp purchased a bus for transporting Sunday School children to Camp and for taking campers on off-campus outings.

Also under way during the late 1970s was the construction of a swimming pool. Up until that time, all of the Camp swimming had taken place in the lake. In addition to the two-story diving tower built in the early 1960s, there was a raft where lifeguards could keep watch over swimmers. Because the lakebed drops off so quickly, non-swimmers had a very narrow space along the shore to swim, designated by a rope strung through milk carton floats. Like many other camps, Hickory Cove made use of a buddy system for safety, with buddy checks every few minutes to ensure that everyone was okay. Eugene and Fred were lifeguards in the early days but, over time, others such as "Splash" had taken over the job. Bill Hubler and Paul Hartman earned their lifeguard certification in 1978 when the camp opened the swimming pool. At this point, most of the lake swimming came to a close, the rafts were removed, and a boathouse was built in 1982. Paul Hartman helped build this boathouse over the old swimming raft. When Bill moved to Camp, he brought his own boat; in time, the Camp was able to purchase a larger boat. A donated pontoon boat provided another opportunity for

campers to enjoy the lake.

Bill and Paul's wives were also very involved in the Camp work. In addition to assisting her husband in his administrative duties, Nancy took on the management of the kitchen, serving family-style meals with campers seated around the tables on wooden benches. June served as a nurse, both before and after the Hartman's move to North Carolina. Originally there was a medicine cabinet which moved from room to room depending on where the nurse was staying. In 1974, Fred and Roy Witt and Alfred Jackstadt tiled the floor and put cabinets in the current nurse's station. In addition to these duties, Nancy and June had many other responsibilities, such as washing the bed linens every weekend in the summer.

Barb Martin (now Taylor), a school teacher from St. Louis, came to work at Camp for three weeks during the summer of 1975. Barb had visited Hickory Cove during her spring break the previous year with her friend Jean (Claar) Bassett. Barb had been praying about what to do with her summers off, and she became a fixture at Hickory Cove's summer sessions until 1997. At first, Barb served as a counselor, but as the years went on, she served as the Camp secretary and administrative assistant. Her first office was the end of a dining room table and a manual typewriter with carbon paper for making copies. Eventually her office moved to the first bedroom of the recreation building (now office building), a bedroom in the mobile home, and finally the mobile home living room. Barb was a familiar face at the Trading Post each day. She also served at times as Camp photographer, teacher, and pianist for chapel singing times.

By 1982, the Camp summer season had increased to two elementary-age camps, one intermediate camp, one high school camp, and a family camp. The off-season schedule had expanded to two weekend teen camps (one spring, one fall), one weekend junior camp, and a marriage weekend, in addition to various rentals. A typical day at Camp consisted of breakfast, morning chapel, Bible classes held at picnic tables around the property, recreation time, lunch, rest hour, swimming and boating, supper, evening chapel, and a snack and maybe games before bed.

More improvements to the original dining hall building were also underway. The walk-in cooler and freezer were installed in 1982, along with an addition to the dining hall to house it. The Camp also added a concrete slab for a picnic area outside the kitchen. Another ongoing project during the 1980s was the Administrator's home. With the help of many volunteers, the home was ready for the Hublers to move into in 1986. Joe and Leah Deviny of Charlotte lived at the Camp for two years and Joe, an experienced carpenter, contributed heavily to the completion of the Administrator's home. Paul Scanzillo also contributed to the completion of the home.

In the mid-1980s, Gus and Janet Marquardt began bringing children to Camp from Florida. Bill met the Marquardts on a trip to Florida, and soon they were bringing van loads of children across the 600 miles between Orlando and Taylorsville every weekend of the summer. Janet, who stayed at Camp during the week to lifeguard and serve in other areas, would leave Saturday morning with a bus full of returning campers and meet Gus, who had a van full of arriving campers, in South Carolina. They would exchange campers and then Janet would return to Hickory Cove and Gus to Orlando. Others, such as Bob Disher and Tom Berg, continued the Marquardts' work of bringing campers from Florida well into the 2000s.

In 1988, Paul and June Hartman, who had been traveling to Camp almost every summer since 1963, felt the Lord calling them to move to North Carolina. With 40 years of work at an aluminum plant in Pennsylvania, Paul was able to retire. So he and June put their house on the market to see if it would sell. Within three days the house was sold. Soon after, they found a home in Taylorsville where they still live today. Summer was just around the corner, so the Hartmans quickly moved into their new home and began to help the Hublers

prepare for summer. One of the first projects Paul helped with was a new Trading Post building, one that is still in use now. June served as a nurse and teacher, and helped in many other areas. During her first year living in North Carolina, she remembers washing every window on the Camp property.

The Hartmans' move to Hickory Cove was just in time, as 1989 turned out to be a difficult year for the Camp. During a women's retreat that spring, a tornado hit the Camp and took down several trees. In the fall, just prior to a one-day Bible conference, hurricane Hugo made its way inland as far as Alexander County. The evening Hugo came through, Paul and June Hartman remained in their home in town, while Bill and Nancy Hubler took cover with Roy and Irene Witt in the recreation building for safety. The next morning, Paul and June tried to get to the Camp, but were forced to park their car on the road and climb through the fallen trees to get to the Camp property. When they arrived at the recreation building, they saw that a large tree had fallen over it, damaging the roof and causing a small flood inside the bedrooms. Trees had fallen on several other buildings and caused minor damage. So many trees were down that it was difficult to see from one building to the other; about 165 fallen trees in all. In addition, the boathouse floated away in the storm, so Paul and Bill had to paddle it back into the cove.

Despite the extensive damage and scattered debris, the Lord provided many volunteers to help with repairs and clean-up. Helm Rink, who hadn't heard about the hurricane damage and the conference cancellation, showed up at the Camp that weekend and immediately pitched in to help. The Camp's power remained off for a week, so Paul and June brought hot water to the Camp from their home each day. It took many hours of work, but with the help of willing volunteers, including Dan and Phebe Martin of St. Louis, Missouri, the Camp was eventually brought back to normal operating conditions.

In addition to the Camp building repairs, Hickory Cove began work on a maintenance building (completed in 1993), as well as a pool building constructed with the help of Paul Scanzillo. In June of 1992, Hickory Cove erected the flag pole that stands beside the dining room. At the suggestion of Don Thompson, Jr., this flag pole was put in place to honor the staff and campers of Hickory Cove who served during the Persian Gulf War.

During Bill's tenure, session directors volunteered to direct week-long sessions of Camp. These directors managed the daily schedule, organized activities, helped recruit and coordinate staff members, and served as speakers during chapel time. Also during this time, the Board of Trustees was very involved in the growth and development of the Camp. Among the Board members involved at this time were Art Hart, Bob McGarty, Richard C. Todd, Tim Gessner, Gary Hubler, and Don Thompson, Jr..

In 1995, after serving at Hickory Cove in some capacity for over 30 years, Bill and Nancy sent the Board of Trustees a letter announcing their retirement as they moved on to other ministry opportunities. They served as Camp advisors for a brief period of time before relocating to Charlotte. Mark and Emily Wickham, who had participated in Camp sessions for a number of years, took over the administration of the Camp at the end of 1995.

Chapter Three Turn of the Century (1995-2004)

By the time Mark Wickham became the Camp Administrator, he already had a rich history at Hickory Cove Bible Camp. Mark, a native of Roanoke, Virginia, had attended Camp for the first time when he was eight years old and over the years, Mark continued his attendance and involvement at Hickory Cove. In the spring of 1993, Bill Hubler came to speak about Hickory Cove at a Christian conference near Roanoke, where Mark and his wife Emily were living. Bill mentioned the need for a young couple to come to Hickory Cove to help and eventually take over the administration of the Camp. Mark and Emily began praying about moving to North Carolina and serving at Hickory Cove. In December 1993, Mark and Emily traveled to Hickory Cove to direct a youth retreat. After this retreat, Mark and Emily felt the Lord's leading to move forward. The Lord soon provided a home to rent and the Wickhams moved to Taylorsville in February 1994.

During 1994, Mark worked under the supervision of Bill Hubler, learning the various aspects of the administrative role and helping with the various projects underway at the time. One of the major initiatives in the mid-1990s was the construction of a gymnasium. Bill had a vision for the gymnasium, and his son Gary Hubler, an architect, was heavily involved in planning and construction. When Bill and Nancy retired from Hickory Cove in October 1995, the concrete slab for the floor had been poured and the metal girders were in place. When Mark assumed the role of Administrator in the fall of 1995, one of his first responsibilities was to oversee the completion of the gymnasium. He worked with local inspectors to make sure the gym met health and building codes.

Many people assisted with the construction of the gym, including Chris Fail, who framed the stage area; Steven Detwiler, who provided the heat and air conditioning; and Brian Knisely, who

installed the lights. One weekend a group of men from Tri-City Baptist Church put up the paneling that surrounds the interior walls. By the winter of 1995-96, the windows were installed and the lines were painted on the basketball court. Although there were a few items to complete, the gym was used for the first time in the summer of 1996.

1995 also saw some internal changes to the Camp. Previously, the Camp Administrator had been a member of the Board of Trustees. In 1995 the role of Administrator moved outside the Board of Trustees, leaving the Administrator responsible to the Board. The Camp continued promotion with booths at fairs and other events. The number of camper days was also expanding. In 1996, Hickory Cove hosted a ski weekend, a senior adult week, a married couples' weekend, a women's weekend, a men's weekend, a work week, and a weekend youth retreat in addition to summer camp weeks for elementary through high school. Rental camps were also on the rise and by 1997 almost every open weekend was filled.

Summers were fun-filled but hectic. Among popular activities were intense basketball games and a team-based game called Mission Impossible. One week, Mark was directing high school camp when Emily went into labor with their second child. Fortunately, Vern Gibson was there to take over the directing so Mark could be with his wife.

After the Hublers left the Camp, there arose a need for a Camp Food Service Manager. While Bill was Administrator, Nancy spent many hours in the kitchen along with her mother, Bernice Cox. Over the years many people assisted with the running of the kitchen, including Elsworth and Helen Dougherty, and Irene Witt. Following the Hublers' retirement, Lydia Todd of Charlotte took on the job of Food Service Manager. Lydia and her husband Richard C. Todd had been involved in the Camp for a number of

years; Richard served on the Board for many years and Lydia assisted the Hublers with financial records. Their family, including sons Richard, Charles, and Philip, has served over the years as counselors, Board members, camp directors, cooks, among many other jobs.

As Food Service Manager, Lydia took the Food Service Manager's Training Course and became certified in food protection and sanitation. Some of her responsibilities included preparing food service manuals, recruiting staff, purchasing new equipment, managing kitchen staff, ordering food, and cooking when needed.

As early as 1995, Bill Hubler had inquired about the availability of land surrounding the Camp. By the end of that year Mark learned that Duke Power would be surveying and selling off 66 wooded acres surrounding Hickory Cove in 1997. This acreage included a creek, lake access, and a varied landscape suitable for hiking trails and nature activities. Mark became concerned that if builders purchased the land, the Camp could be forced out of the area in the future. At the fall 1996 Board meeting, Mark showed the Board members the land in question, and they agreed it would be in the best interest of the Camp to purchase the land. The cost for the land was \$220,500; however, there were no funds available at the time for such a purchase, and everyone involved felt it would be unwise to go deeply into debt. A celebration for Bill and Nancy Hubler was scheduled two weeks after the Board meeting, so Mark asked the Board for that time to find financial support for the project, and the realtor agreed to give them until the Monday following the Hubler celebration to make a decision. During that two week time period, Mark called about 40 individuals. Due to the Lord's provision and Mark's diligence, those two weeks yield \$40,000 in donations, commitments of monthly payments over the next three years amounting to \$60,000, \$8,500 in interest-free loans, and an additional access to \$30,000 in loans. By dividing the acreage into lots and selling some of them to friends of Camp, the Camp was able to offset the cost of the loans. In late March 1997, the Camp purchased the new property.

Also in 1997, George Vedder, son of Camp founder Eugene and Madeline, moved to Taylorsville from St. Louis. George had served as a counselor and summer staff member at Living Waters Bible Camp in Westby, Wisconsin, and decided to volunteer at Hickory Cove. He helped Mark with various jobs around Camp, including clearing trails on the new property, building low ropes elements, and serving as a counselor in the summer. In the off-season, George lived in the old Camp trailer. In the fall of 1998, George moved to Newton to start a business, but continued to volunteer at Camp in his available time.

After the summer 1996, there was an apparent need for a full-time Maintenance Director. Paul Hartman had been serving in a maintenance capacity since 1988, and his retirement would leave a large gap in the Camp staffing needs. In October 1997, the Board began advertising for the position of Maintenance Director.

In the spring of 1998, the Lord brought an answer to prayer when Dean and Karen Siler moved to Taylorsville with their two children. Both Dean and Karin came to know the Lord through the ministry of Living Waters Bible Camp. Dean, an experienced carpenter, assisted with Camp maintenance and construction as a volunteer until becoming the full-time Maintenance Director in February of 1998. Dean and Karin spent many hours improving and helping the Wickhams run the Camp. Dean began dressing the buildings with the wood siding that is familiar at Camp today, a tradition carried on by Luke Thomas in the 2000s. The off-season was filled with many projects during the late 1990s, including the construction of soccer goals, additions to the boat dock, renovating the former recreation building into the current office, the removal of the old mobile home across from the current office building, and the installation of a new mobile home near the gym, both in December 1998. The late 1990s also held some very intense work weeks, with help from many volunteers. One volunteer that stands out is Elwood Tangren, who has traveled to Hickory Cove from Minneapolis for many years and is a familiar face at Work Week today.

In 1998, Steve and Sylvia Mooney became the Food Service Directors at Hickory Cove. Steve Mooney had been a camper as far back as the 1960s and through Camp he met Sylvia Partenheimer of Kenosha, Wisconsin. Both served as counselors during the 1980s and in 1987 they were married. When Lydia Todd retired from Camp food service in 1998, Steve and Sylvia took over the position and helped with food ordering, menu planning, and recruiting kitchen staff. They served in Camp food service until Cecile Ford arrived in 2004.

Following their daughter Sylvia, Egon and Eva Partenheimer moved from Kenosha to Taylorsville in the mid-1990s and became heavily involved in kitchen work. Eva is well-known for her special pastries and breads. Egon formalized the fishing program at Camp, arriving early in the morning to ready rods and bait hooks for campers who wanted to fish.

On March 20, 1999, Hickory Cove celebrated its 40th year with an anniversary event. The Camp had expanded far beyond the original few weeks of summer camp in 40 years, both in size and impact. The vision for the Camp, however, remained unchanged: to reach children and youth for Jesus Christ. One notable aspect of Camp in the 1990s which illustrated this continuing vision was the many baptism services held at Hickory Cove. Many children saved at Camp were not necessarily from Christian homes or local churches. Often someone from Camp would call the parents, tell them what had taken place in their child's life and invite them to the baptism. Most of the time parents would attend. Sometimes it appeared that the baptism would have to be canceled due to storms, but each time the weather would clear in time for the baptism to take place.

In September 1999, Fred and Susan Green retired from their paramedic work in Atlanta, Georgia, and moved to their newly-constructed home on a lot purchased from Camp. Susan had attended Hickory Cove as a child, and both Fred and Susan had participated in Camp sessions for a number of years. Fred planned to help Mark full-time in the summers and part-time during the off-season.

In the fall of 1999, Mark and Emily Wickham left Hickory Cove and became involved in other local ministries. They left behind a legacy of hard work and enthusiasm that brought many campers to Christ. The Wickhams settled in Hickory with their four children, and Mark currently serves in a leadership capacity in a local community church.

Following Mark and Emily's departure, Fred and Susan Green continued the operation of the Camp. At this time, Richard M. Todd (son of Richard and Lydia Todd) and his wife Connie were also putting in many hours assisting Fred with various jobs that needed to be done. Richard, a current member of the Board, had been a camper at Hickory Cove as a child and had served as a counselor, activities director, kitchen helper, lifeguard, and session director before joining the Board of Trustees. During Mark's tenure, Richard became involved with the financial and administrative responsibilities of Camp. Now Richard was spending late nights after work assisting Fred with Camp administration duties. Richard's wife, Connie, also spent many days serving at Camp. She, too, had attended Hickory Cove as a child and spent many summers at Mountain View Bible Camp in Pennsylvania. With her previous camp experience and background in physical education, Connie helped to organize Camp sports equipment and programs. In 1997 she launched an archery program at Camp which is still in place today.

In January 2000, Fred and Susan sent out a letter to the Board asking for additional help. It was after reading this letter that Dave and Phyllis Baseler decided to leave their home in Memphis, Tennessee, and move to Taylorsville. Dave, a former ServiceMaster executive, had participated in Camp with his family for several years and joined the Board of Trustees in 1998. In early 2000, Dave and Phyllis discussed the

possibility of moving to Taylorsville. Reading Fred's request, they realized the Lord was opening the door. Dave left the Board to help Fred with the Camp administration and in May, Dave and Phyllis arrived in North Carolina to immediately begin work at Camp. Together, Dave and Fred formed the "Office of the Administrator."

In the midst of this transition period, Hickory Cove hosted an All Camps Meeting on the weekend of March 16-19, 2000. During this meeting, camp directors and staff members from several Bible camps (all associated with the Plymouth Brethren) met together to share ideas, discuss camping trends, and talk about the future. Attendees came from Beacon Bible Camp in Ontario, Canada; Living Waters Bible Camp in Westby, Wisconsin; Mountain View Bible Camp in Snyderstown, Pennsylvania; Ocean View Bible Camp in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica; and the Adventure Learning Centre in Nassau, Bahamas.

Under Fred and Dave's care, Hickory Cove progressed in several areas. Fred, with the help of George Vedder, took particular care with the training and discipleship of counselors and volunteer staff. Fred and George held training weekends both at Camp and in various locations in North Carolina, Virginia, and Pennsylvania to prepare teenagers and college students for ministering at summer camp. These weekends eventually evolved into week-long training sessions at the beginning of each summer season. Fred's view of the counselors and staff as a "camp within a camp" helped many young men and women to mature in their relationship with the Lord and their ability to minister.

Dave Baseler's leadership and corporate experience raised the business aspect of Hickory Cove to a new level of professionalism. Dave made pricing adjustments and refined the Camp's public identity. By the summer of 2000, Hickory Cove initiated a formal scholarship program for campers in need of financial assistance. By the fall of 2000, Hickory Cove had a new logo as well as a new slogan: "Reaching and teaching youth for life in Christ." The logo, designed by Micah Chin, a former camper and staff member from Charlotte, features the now-familiar flame and wave which represent both the spiritual and physical characteristics of Hickory Cove Bible Camp. In February 2001, the Board of Trustees approved the new logo and in March, Hickory Cove launched its first web site at www.hickorycove.org.

In addition to a change in administration, the year 2000 also brought a transition in the maintenance of the property. Dean Siler moved with his family to Ocean Isle and, with his son Jonathon, launched Faith-Building Missions, a ministry to third-world communities. This of course left Hickory Cove in need of a new Maintenance Director. The Lord answered prayer when Luke Thomas and his soon-to-be wife Ruth-Ann Partenheimer called the Camp in the summer of 2000. Luke Thomas was familiar with Christian camping through his mother, Pam, who was the Food Service Director at Living Waters Bible Camp. Ruth-Ann had served at Living Waters since her teenage years as a counselor and full-time summer staff member. After hearing about the open maintenance position, Luke and Ruth-Ann began to pray about relocating to North Carolina. In October 2000 they moved to Taylorsville and after their wedding on October 21, met with Fred and Dave to discuss Luke's interest in the Camp maintenance position. While Luke had never served as a Maintenance Director, he had a background in construction and farm work, as well as an aptitude for learning new skills. In early November, Luke became the full-time Maintenance Director at Hickory Cove and, with the help of Paul Hartman, Helm Rink, and father-in-law Egon Partenheimer, Luke quickly acclimated to the new position. Over the years, Luke has worked hard to maximize the use of Camp facilities and keep up the appearance of both the buildings and the property.

Before the summer of 2001, Hickory Cove made a change in its weekly schedule. Up until this point, week-long camps began on Sunday afternoon and ended on Saturday morning following breakfast. The new schedule began on Sunday as usual but ended after supper on Friday night. This schedule was advantageous for two

reasons: first, it allowed the staff a full day off, and secondly, each Camp session now ended in a family picnic with a brief program.

As planning moved forward for the 2001 summer session, it became clear that Ruth-Ann Thomas's previous experience in programming serving under Chris Sanner at Living Waters made her a perfect candidate for the Camp's first full-time program staff member. Ruth-Ann improved the Hickory Cove program and helped to bring a spiritual focus and application to Camp activities. One area of Camp that Ruth-Ann expanded was the low ropes course. George Vedder and Jerry Hartman had both used low ropes initiatives in the past, but with Luke's help, Ruth-Ann established several fixed low ropes elements that are still in use at Camp today. She also organized manuals and systems for facilitating the course. Her enthusiasm for teaching resulted in memorable spiritual lessons with summer themes such as creation and American heritage. Ruth-Ann left programming in 2003 to focus on ministries with her family and community, but she continues to support Luke in his role as Maintenance Director and is responsible for the beautiful plants and flowers around the Camp grounds.

In 2001, John and Marcia Russell, Dave and Phyllis Baseler's son-in-law and daughter, moved from Tennessee to Taylorsville and began renting the mobile home. By spring of the following year, John and Marcia Russell were serving at Hickory Cove and that fall John Russell became the Camp Administrator. John served as Administrator until the fall of 2003 when he and his family moved back to Tennessee. With John in charge of administrative responsibilities, Fred was free to focus on the Camp program and staff training.

One of Fred's ideas during the early 2000s was a tree house village situated deep in the woods of the new property. In 2002, Board member Helm Rink, who helped during the summer by driving the boat and leading nature hikes, volunteered to build an elevated platform and begin constructing tree houses. With Luke's help, Helm hauled the lumber and tools into the woods with golf carts and completed the first tree house. Helm was also able to complete construction of a large elevated platform for outdoor meetings attached to the tree house before he went home to be with the Lord in 2004. The tree house and platform have proved a valuable asset to Hickory Cove's outdoor camping program during both summer camp and off-season retreats.

In 2003, Luke found a tractor near his hometown in Wisconsin and the Camp was able to purchase it for a reasonable price. Luke also found a hay wagon and rebuilt it for Camp use. That summer, the archery range moved to the wooded area and the tractor and hay wagon provided a way to transport campers from the main Camp grounds to the archery range. In the spring of 2003, the Board of Trustees approved a new Camp house and in the August of that year, the new home was constructed and the old mobile home was hauled away.

In the office, Sylvia Mooney began helping with secretarial duties and eventually took over the role of Registrar from Susan Green. After John and Marcia moved back to Tennessee, Dave became Acting Administrator and the Board of Trustees appointed Richard Todd to find a new Administrator.

On September 27, 2003, Hickory Cove held a celebration in honor of Paul and June Hartman and their 40 years of service to the Camp. While their work was often done behind the scenes, their dedication and commitment resulted in many saved lives and even more who were changed through the ministry of Hickory Cove.

Chapter Four - Pressing Onward (2003-The Present)

At the celebration for Paul and June, Richard Todd informed the Board that he had spoken with Keith Moore of Greenville, South Carolina, about the Camp's need for a new Administrator. Keith Moore, along with his wife Beth, had been involved in Christian camping ministry for 25 years, serving at Awanita Valley in South Carolina, Camp Willow Run in North Carolina, and City Vision in New York, in capacities ranging from maintenance to camp directing. Keith had also served on the Board of the Carolinas/Virginias Section of Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA), as well as the Southeast Region Director for CCCA National. Richard found Keith through the CCCA Web site and contacted him about Hickory Cove. Richard explained that the Board of Trustees was considering some structural changes regarding the relationship between the Board of Trustees and the Camp Administrator. Richard wanted to find an Administrator who would help facilitate these changes.

In November 2003, the Board of Trustees met for a retreat in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. In addition to discussing of future direction and changes at Hickory Cove, the Board agreed to interview Keith Moore for the new position of Executive Director.

In January 2004, the Hickory Cove Board of Trustees held an interview with Keith and Beth Moore. Following this interview, Keith was hired as the new Executive Director of Hickory Cove Bible Camp. In March, Keith moved into the new Camp house and began work. Keith and Beth's two sons were in college, and Beth remained in Greenville, South Carolina, with their daughter Sarah until the end of the school year.

Since Fred Green had already finalized many plans for the coming season, the summer of 2004 was largely an observation period for Keith, an opportunity for him to become familiar with Hickory Cove and its ministry. Fred ran the Camp program with the help of Brittany VanRyn and George Vedder. Keith also took the opportunity to visit Living Waters Bible Camp in Wisconsin. His goal was to nurture Hickory Cove's strengths while drawing on his own camp experience to provide structure and a vision for the future.

During the course of 2004, the Board of Trustees made some changes to its own structure. After consulting with Dr. Richard Biery, they approved a proposal to become a Policy Governance Board. In this restructuring, the Board provided Keith, the Executive Director, with policies outlining certain goals and limitations, leaving operational decisions to Keith and the other staff members. Keith in turn, reported to the Board on the Camp's compliance with their policies. In October, the Board attended Policy Governance training with Dr. Biery and formally adopted the new system.

Keith and Beth were not the only new additions to the Camp staff in 2004. In January, Wolfgang and Charlotte Salewski began the process of relocating to Taylorsville from Kenosha, Wisconsin. Both Wolf and Char had been involved at many other Christian camps since the 1960s as both campers and counselors, including Riverside Bible Camp in Wisconsin, Lowry Bible Conference in Minnesota, and Big Bear Camp in California. After their marriage in 1972, Wolf and Char spent many weeks serving at Living Waters Bible Camp, both in camp directing and meal preparation. Wolf also served for nine years on the Board of Living Waters. Bill and Nancy Hubler had traveled to Kenosha for years, reporting on the work at Hickory Cove. Wolf and Char first came to Hickory Cove in the 1990s when they served in the kitchen with Egon and Eva Partenheimer (Wolf's brother-in-law and sister) during Family Camp. They made several other visits to Hickory Cove throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. Some time after helping direct a week-long camp in 2003, Wolf and

Char became aware of several staffing needs at Hickory Cove and decided to move to Taylorsville. In

January 2004, Wolf visited Taylorsville for an interview at the Alexander County Correctional Facility and to train with Dave Baseler in running the Camp finances. In April, Wolf began working at the prison during the day and at Camp in the evenings as Business Manager. In June, Char followed and became the Healthcare Manager while also working at nearby Catawba County Medical Center. During this time, with the arrival of Keith and Wolf, Dave transitioned out of his administrative responsibilities at Camp and returned to serve on the Board.

Also in 2004, John and Cecile Ford moved to the nearby town of Conover from Newport News, Virginia, and Cecile became the Camp's Food Service Manager. John and Cecile were no strangers to Hickory Cove and had even spent a short time living in the old Camp mobile home. Cecile came to Camp with many years of experience in management and food preparation at Washington Bible College in Maryland and Piedmont Bible College in Winston-Salem. As Cecile served at Hickory Cove, John used their home in Conover as the base for his itinerant preaching ministry.

In December 2004, Josh Nixon of Chesapeake, Virginia, moved to Taylorsville and lived in Fred and Susan's basement for a number of months while searching for a job in the area in anticipation of his upcoming marriage to Lauren Penn, who was living in the nearby town of Newton. Josh had attended Family Camp and Lumberjack Weekends in the past until 2000, when he counseled at summer camp for the first time. Lauren had been a camper at Hickory Cove since the early 1990s and had served as a counselor and summer staff member since 1996. As Josh began job-hunting and substitute teaching, he spent his free hours volunteering at Camp, helping with office work and graphic design, and assisting Luke with various maintenance projects. As the summer season approached, it became clear that the Camp was in need of a full-

time Program Director. After much prayer and discussion, Josh and Lauren agreed to join the full-time staff of Hickory Cove in March 2005, with Josh as Program Director and Lauren assisting in programming and taking over the management of the Trading Post. Josh and Lauren began readying for summer as well as preparing for their upcoming wedding in May. With summer camp only two weeks away, they were married at Camp on Memorial Day weekend with Richard M. Todd performing the ceremony.

Also in the spring of 2005, Wolf left his job at the prison to become a full-time missionary at Hickory Cove. As the 2005 summer approached, Fred assisted Keith in staff recruiting and training. In the fall, Fred and Susan retired from Camp work but they remain in close contact with the ministry from their nearby home. Cecile served as Food Service Director until 2007, and Beth Moore served in that capacity through 2008. In the fall of 2008, Beverly Wood of Statesville, who had been introduced to Hickory Cove through Richard and Connie Todd, became the new full-time Food Service Director.

In early 2005, Keith began investigating the purchase of a parcel of land north of the land purchased in 1997. In November 2005, under Keith's supervision, Hickory Cove closed on ten additional acres of land including what had formerly been a dirt race track.

The late 2000s have largely been occupied with improving the organization and structure of the Camp, while expanding the Camp's relationship with the local community through online and print materials, as well as personal visits to local churches. One additional avenue of ministry during recent years is cooperative programs with local Christian schools, which come to Hickory Cove for team building, spiritual development, and ministry opportunities.

As of Spring 2009, summer camp has expanded to one week of staff training, one week of high school camp, three weeks of elementary-aged camps, two weeks of middle school camps, and a family camp, supplemented

with additional guest groups. The off-season months often include retreats for men and boys, women and girls, and elementary-age children. The lake remains a focal point of daily activities, as well as the wooded acreage. In 2007, Hickory Cove added an inflatable climbing slide called "The Iceberg" to enhance the menu of lake activities. Archery, low ropes, hiking, swimming, tubing, canoeing, and fishing are all popular among campers. Singing and Scripture memorization are still central aspects of a week at Camp as they were in the early years.

Toward the end of 2008, Hickory Cove launched a fundraising challenge toward the construction of new bunk beds in the dorms. With the help of over 200 donors, Hickory Cove raised \$9,600 for materials. During Work Week 2009, Luke and a crew of volunteers were able to completely replace all the bunks in the boys' dorm as well as several in the girls' dorm. The Camp plans to finish replacing the girls' bunks in the fall of 2009.

As Hickory Cove moves into the future, the goals have remained unchanged—to reach young people for the Lord Jesus Christ, to maintain a focus on strong Biblical teaching, and to promote discipleship through close relationships and individual attention. While Hickory Cove has and will continue to minister to campers from distant areas of North America, it retains the vision of the original directors to "be a 'Lighthouse' of truth to all around, especially in the County of Alexander, North Carolina." To better accomplish these goals, Hickory Cove is planning a number of physical expansions, including additional tree houses and a new combined meeting and dining facility.

Over the July 4th weekend of 2009, Hickory Cove Bible Camp plans to celebrate 50 years of God's work at Hickory Cove. Lord willing, campers and staff members from the past five decades will unite with thanksgiving and praise for all that God has done since 1959. Like a ripple through the waters of Lake Hickory, it's often difficult to measure the results of the service of so many Christians at a camp like Hickory Cove over 50 years. But this much is certain—the Lord knows, and it is through His power and grace that Hickory Cove Bible Camp will reach more lives with the good news of Jesus Christ until He returns.

Afterword

We have done our best to accurately represent the history of Hickory Cove Bible Camp and to mention the names of many who have contributed to the Lord's work here. There are most likely names and details which in retrospect ought to have been included in this booklet and escaped our attention. While the Lord never forgets, human memories do fade. In addition to the names mentioned in this history, there have been countless others, known and unknown, who have left their mark on Hickory Cove through their service, gifts, and prayers.

We want to acknowledge the help of those who have helped in the compilation of this history. It is largely based on autobiographical documents from Eugene Vedder, Jr., Bill and Nancy Hubler, and Paul and June Hartman, along with fifty years of Board Meeting minutes, carefully recorded by numerous Board Secretaries. Additional material came from interviews and correspondence with Dave Baseler, Dave Lackey, Barb Martin Taylor, Don Thompson, Jr., Fred Green, George Vedder, Keith Moore, Luke Thomas, Lydia Todd, Mark Wickham, Richard and Connie Todd, Sylvia Mooney, and Wolfgang Salewski.