

## **SLUMBER FALLS**

### **CONTEXT**

Slumber Falls Camp located at 3610 River Road, New Braunfels, Comal County, Texas, 78132, achieved significance during the Comal County Historic Resource Survey for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history. According to the report, “Slumber Falls is important for its association with the county’s tourism industry that began in the mid-twentieth century, particularly along River Road. As roads were improved and people began taking trips, the Guadalupe River grew in popularity and tourist camps like Slumber Falls catered to these travelers. As one of the few remaining intact tourist camps, Slumber Falls reflects this early tourism trend and is significant for this association, making it eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A.” Slumber Falls began as a tourist camp in the 1930s and then in the 1950s, after being sold to the Texas Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (United Church of Christ), continued as a church youth and adult camp and retreat facility. Slumber Falls celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2008 as a church camp and continues the tradition to this day of providing a memorable camping and learning experience for youth and adults.

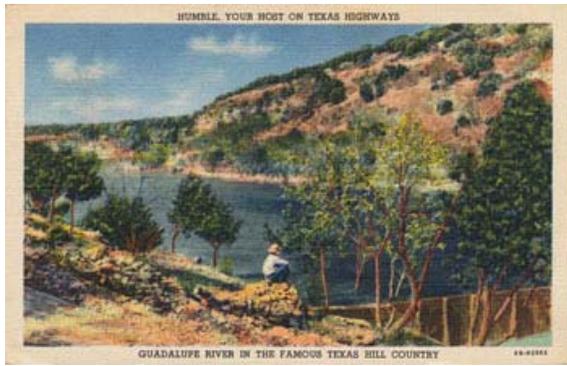
The photo key and credits used in this narrative are included in Appendix A.

### **OVERVIEW**

#### **LOCATION**

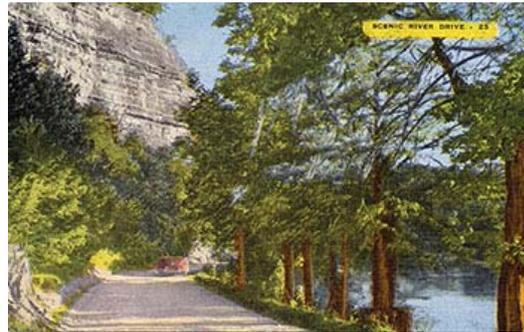
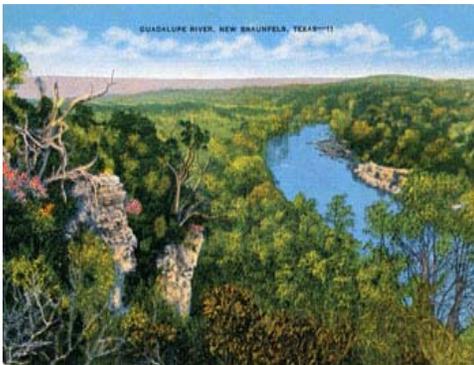
Slumber Falls is located at the beginning of the Guadalupe River Road four miles northwest of the city of New Braunfels. The property encompasses approximately 20 acres with ¼ mile fronting the Guadalupe River. The name, Slumber Falls, came from the falls on the opposite side of the River Road that entered the Guadalupe where the camp was built. (Incidentally the dam that created the falls and a swimming hole is no longer in existence as a flood in 1998 destroyed it).

New Braunfels and Comal County were founded in the 1840’s by primarily German immigrants under the Commissioner General, Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels and was largely unoccupied at the time as many of the Native American tribes no longer remained in the area. They had been the Tonkawa, Waco, Lipan Apache, Coahuiltican, Karankawa and Comanche and there is evidence of their past presence at the Slumber Falls site. Spanish explorers traversed the area as recorded in diaries beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, however, never established a permanent



settlement. The county's fertile soils and abundant water supply proved favorable to the establishment of farms and ranches outside of the New Braunfels area with Comal County becoming an agricultural center in the early years. The Guadalupe River was central to the success of the immigrants. The Guadalupe River later provided for the tourist

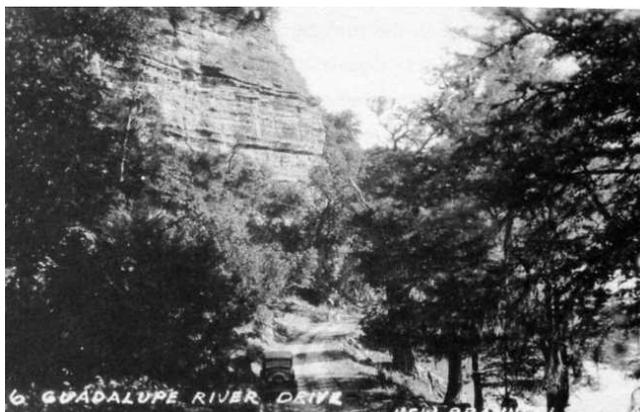
industry to flourish beginning in the early 1900s. Tourist camps sprang up along the river and became popular destinations.



## ROADS AND THE AUTOMOBILE

There were only 250 miles of concrete highways in 1912 in the nation and with the advent of the automobile the amount of paved roads was not acceptable. Good Roads Clubs developed that insisted on road programs to make overland travel possible. The Austin to San Antonio Post Road developed in 1914 allowing travelers to reach New Braunfels and Comal County on good roads.

According to the Comal County Historic Resource Survey of 2013, "Throughout much of



the county, early travel was hindered by lack of safe crossings over the Comal and Guadalupe Rivers, and improved bridges and low-water crossings were not built until the 1920s, when the automobile became popular." "One of the earliest roads in the county was Guadalupe River Drive (present-day River Road). The Comal

County Commissioners Court established the road in 1901 as a public road, third class, twenty-two feet wide with gates. The nearly 10-mile road stretched from New Braunfels northwest along the Guadalupe River and was essentially a trail cut from the hillside used by farmers and ranchers traveling to New Braunfels.” Upgrades happened in the 1930s which allowed for tourist camps and summer homes to develop. County road improvements began in the 1920s after the founding of the Texas State Highway Department, Federal Aid Road Act and funding provided by state gas tax. In 1925, there were 983,420 vehicles registered in Texas. The New Deal programs during the Great Depression provided money and manpower for road work and bridge building.

In the early 1920s New Braunfels resident Joe Sanders started taking Sunday drives with his family. Along the way he met many drivers that were lost. There were no directional signs in those days and no accurate maps. Joe began charting his drives that would eventually lead to his map making and directional sign-making for the entire county.

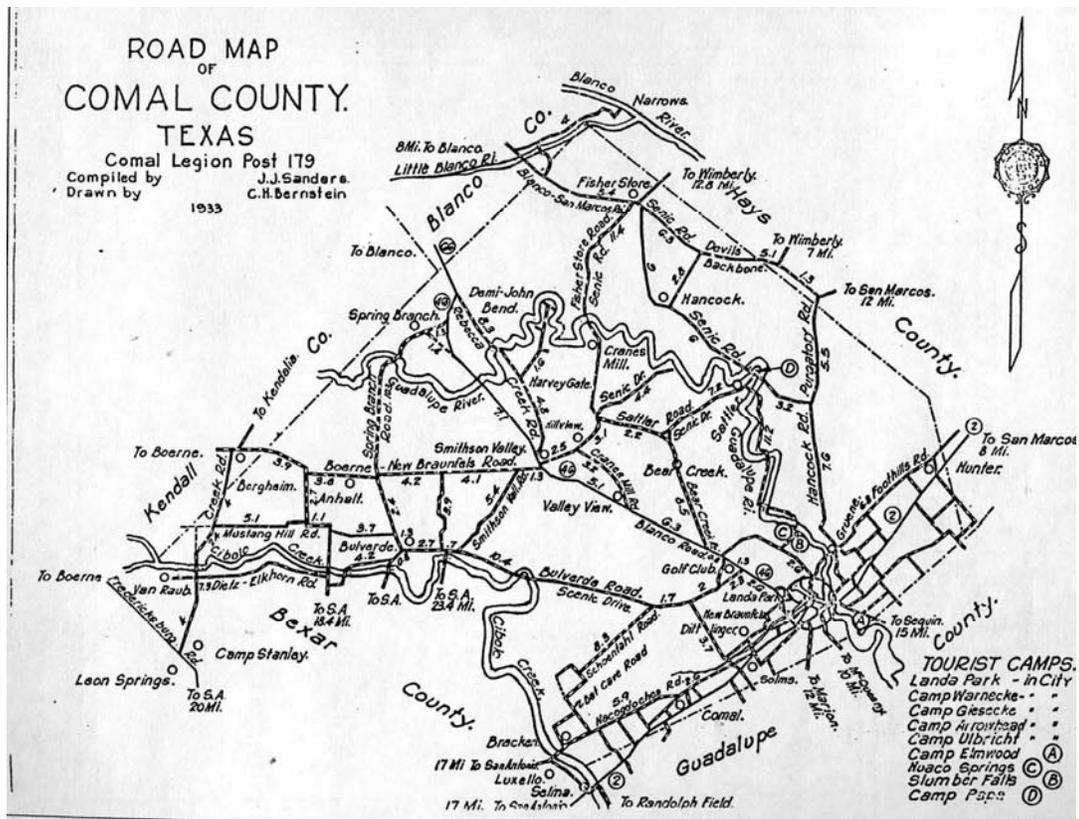


The 1933 American Legion Comal Post 179, Road Map of Comal County, Texas, compiled by



J.J. Sanders and drawn by C.H. Bernstein, was significant with its mileage notes and landmarks such as tourist camps. Slumber Falls Camp is one of nine tourist camps noted in the county. In 1936, Sanders developed the Centennial county map and on the reverse was noted: “We believe you will find yourself rewarded by scenes that will never

leave your memory and which may even be the reason for your returning to New Braunfels time and again.”



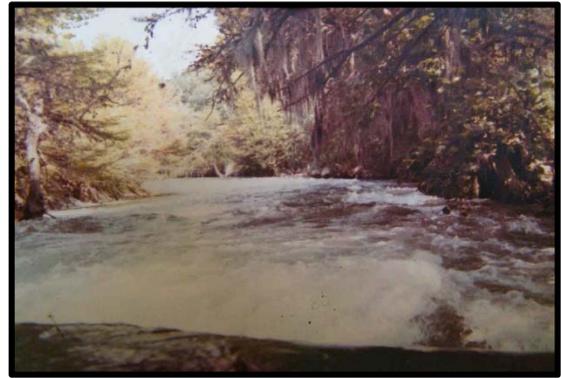
Also on the map concerning the Guadalupe River Road, “This road gives you an opportunity for first hand acquaintance with the fascinating and temperamental Guadalupe River. In places the right of way includes shoreline. At other points you have access to privately owned camp grounds. This narrow strip of country presents endless recreational possibilities.”

### THE GUADALUPE RIVER

The 230 mile Guadalupe River on which Slumber Falls is located begins in Kerr County. The river itself is formed by two small tributaries joining together. Along the upper banks the towns of Kerrville and Comfort were established. The Guadalupe flows into the Canyon Lake completed in 1964. After the outlet of the dam, the river once again begins its flow towards New Braunfels. It is on this section of the river that Slumber Falls is located. Prior to the building of Canyon Dam and Lake, the river flow was inconsistent, ranging from drying up in drought conditions to tumultuous floods during rainy seasons. The next series of photos at Slumber Falls



shows the Guadalupe River in flood stage.



As depicted in the next two photos, at its best, the Guadalupe is a crystal clear, cold stream flowing over boulders and rocks bordered by cypress trees along limestone cliffs. In the



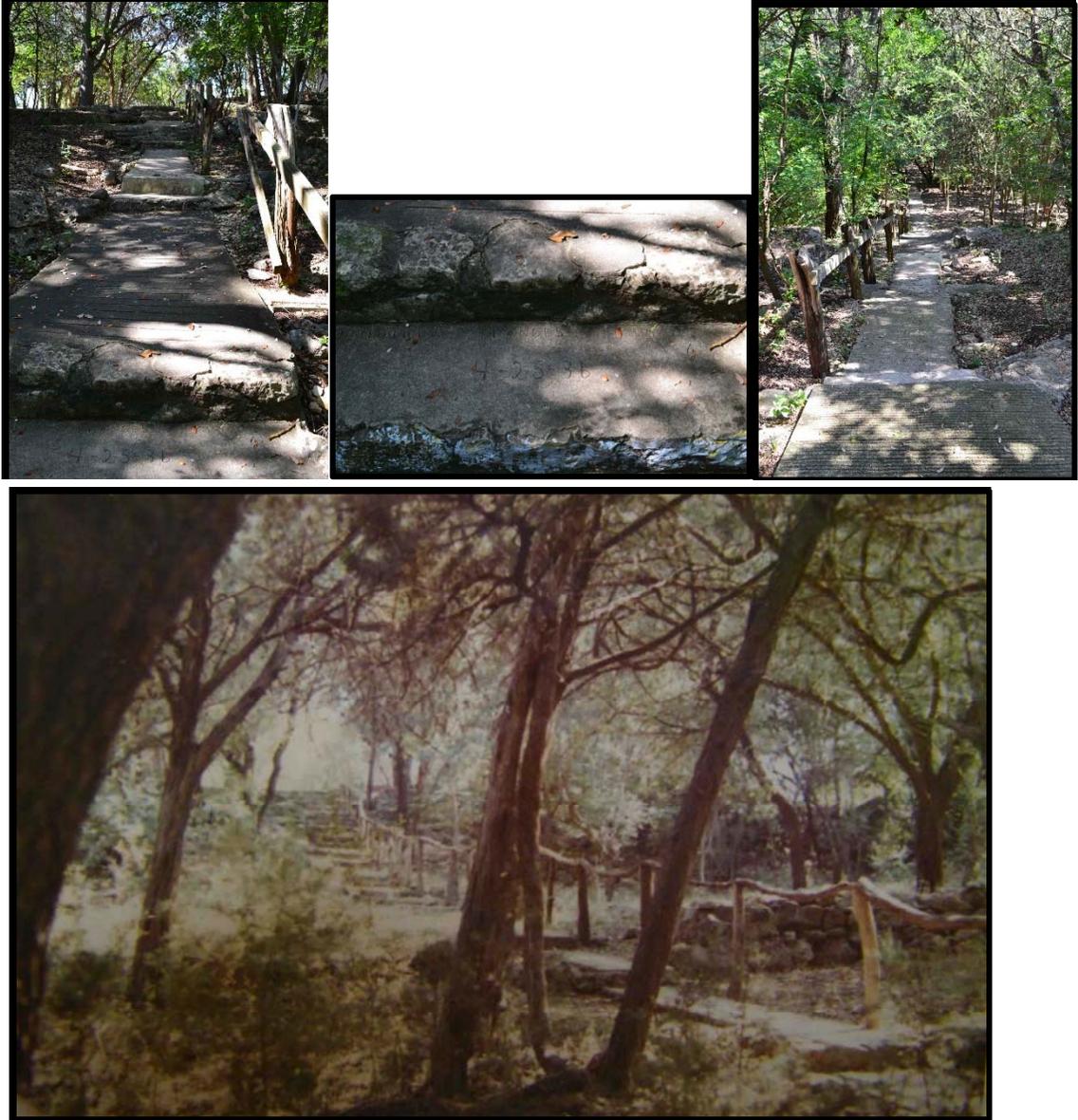
hill country above the Balcones Escarpment, it maintains this quality. After passing through New Braunfels, it becomes a much different stream traversing the lowlands towards the Gulf of Mexico. Canyon Lake and Dam provided for more consistent river flow.



## **HISTORY OF SLUMBER FALLS TOURIST CAMP**

In the 1890s Joseph Landa purchased a large parcel of land on the Guadalupe River for cattle grazing. History notes the use of the land by locals as a popular swimming and picnicking site. In the 1930s, Harry Landa (Joseph's son) sold 20 acres in the Veramendi survey to W. V. & Francis Schultz Lillie for \$1545 and it was developed into a tourist court with a panoramic view of the Guadalupe River. Mrs. Lillie was born in 1893, a native of Hope who moved to San Antonio in 1905. One of her two half-brothers was crippled in an accident and she decided to buy a piece of property in New Braunfels where he could recuperate. Mrs. Lillie had to contact Harry Landa four times to try to persuade him to sell her this parcel of land. Mrs. Lillie's niece described the property as "...virgin land with fields of bluebonnets and mountain laurel. At times the fragrance was overpowering."

Victor Silvas was hired as the gardener. He planted and maintained the crape myrtle along the river by the bathhouse and several beautiful flowerbeds around the camp. During this period, retaining walls were built as well as steps to the river. A license plate dated 1935 is embedded in the riser of the top step as well as the names Herman, Francis, and Will (referring to the Lillies and her brother Herman Schrader) inscribed in the concrete step with a date of 1936.



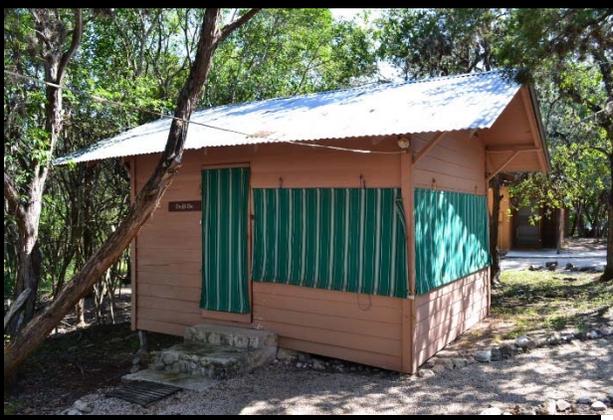
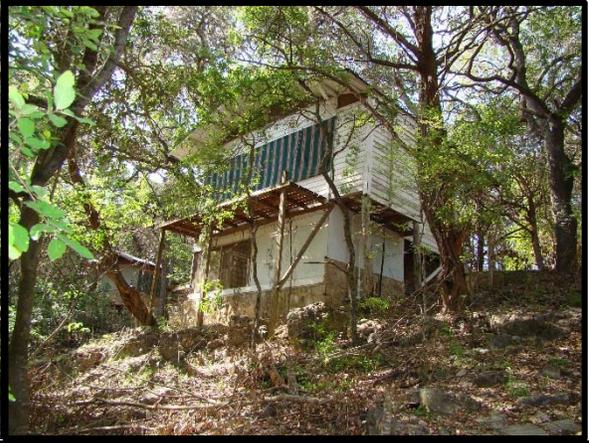
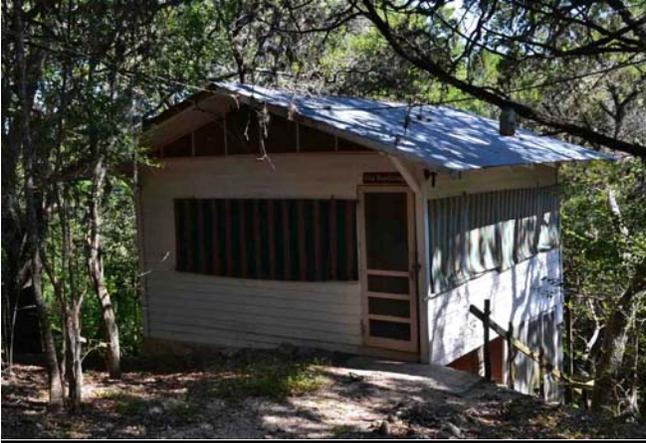
It is reported that the name of Slumber Falls came from Mr. Lillie as he remarked that it was so peaceful by the river it would be a good place to sleep.

Mrs. Lillie and her brother, Herman Schrader, a carpenter, built 11 cabins one at a time as they could afford them. The first one constructed was Whip-O-Will. Heigh Ho was known as the honeymoon cabin. The tourist court was advertised as “Paradise of the Hills.” Rates for cottages with linens, cookware, dishes and silver provided were: Single cottage \$2.00-2.25; Double cottage \$3.00-3.50; and weekends were \$1.00/per person/ per cabin/per day. The cottages were furnished with a dresser, icebox and hot plate. Once a cottage was complete, Mrs. Lillie and her brother would start constructing a new one. The names of the 11 cabins were: Shady Nook,

Asper Inn, Toddle Inn, Twill Do, Joy Within, Dun Wandering, Idle Hours, Rio Vista, Heigh Ho and Whip-O-Will. The following collage of photos represent current images of the original

cabins at the camp.





World War II had an influence on the tourist industry. Passenger car production ceased and tires as well as gasoline were rationed. There was a “victory speed” limit imposed. The Sunday drives stopped as they were considered unnecessary trips. After the war ended, in 1946, tourism once again became active. After the death of her husband in 1946, Mrs. Lillie sold the tourist court to her two nephews and a third party for \$20,000. The war had brought changes to the lifestyles of people and the tourist court had suffered. In 1954-56, a terrible drought caused the Guadalupe River to virtually dry up. This was the final blow. The tourist court was closed and the nephews decided to sell.

### **HISTORY OF SLUMBER FALLS CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER**

Slumber Falls Camp was purchased on December 31, 1957, by the Texas Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (United Church of Christ) for \$16,500. As early as 1956, the Texas Synod voted to seek a campsite for youth and adult activities. Rev. Fred Woelke was chairman of the Committee on Christian Education at the time. He and his wife Hilda spent their honeymoon at this tourist camp and when it came up for sale, Rev. Woelke promoted it as a campsite to be purchased.

Interest in camping probably began with the Evangelical Leadership Training Schools held at Robison Academy in Waco and then at Baylor University. Camps had been held at the Y.W.C.A. Camp on Galveston Bay, Texas Lutheran College, the Piney Woods Camp at Woodlake, Round Rock and Bastrop State Park. During the years it became a dream of certain members of the synod to own a private camp.

The owners of Slumber Falls Camp wanted the property sold by December 31, 1957 but since there was no money for a down payment, several pastors including Rev. Woelke, Rev. Herman Borne and his wife Martha, and the Brotherhood Foundation of Houston got the earnest money together. Ultimately a loan was made from the Hill Bank and Trust of Weimar, Texas and on December 31, 1957, the beautiful wooded site with 11 cabins became the property of Texas Synod.

The dedication of the camp was on June 1, 1958.



Much needed to be done to hold camp that first summer of 1958. Rev. Cliff Freudenberg found reasonable bunk beds and mattresses. He noted in his



camp files that

there was a problem with rats, trash piles and bugs in the open showers that needed screens. There were several cabins,



some small outbuildings and a garage. A centrally located cabin became a kitchen. An

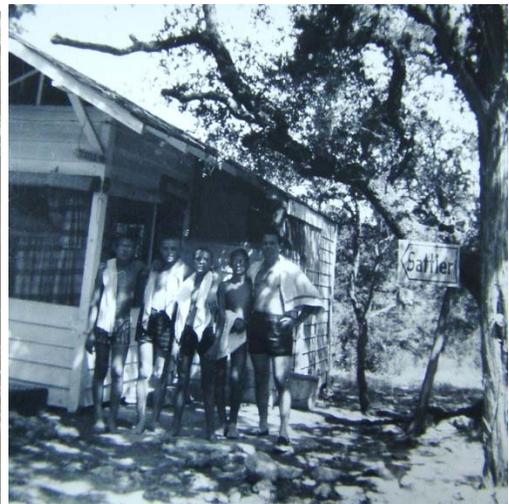
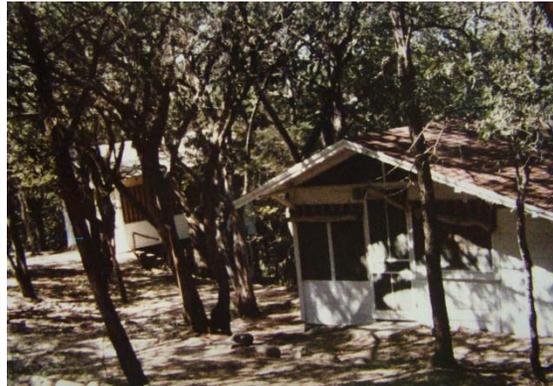
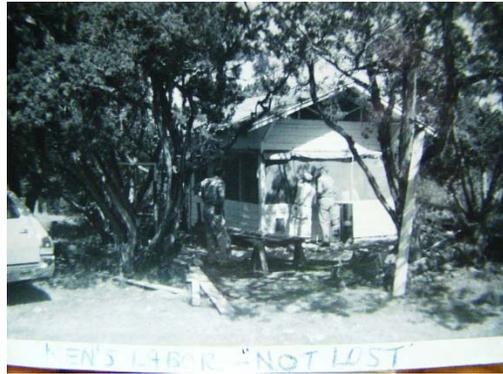


adjoining area, covered with tarpaulin, a gravel

floor, picnic tables and benches became the dining area. The initial amount to put the camp in operation was \$4000 that first year. Most of the work



was done by volunteers. In 1959, it was noted that living cabins were curtained with Comal cotton plaid material. Some had lavatories, showers and commodes but most did not. Common restrooms and showers were utilized. The photos on this page and the following collage represents historic photos of the cabins from the 1950's.



Other early renovations included a caretaker's cottage (currently the camp office) and garage (completed in 1959), a new dining and kitchen area (in 1960), cabin improvements (in 1961), and an enlarged septic tank system (in 1962).

Camps began in the summer of 1958 with 385 campers attending 7 camps and 100 staff.



In addition, there were 12 other church group retreats that year. In 1958, the camps accommodated Junior (ages 9-11), Jr. High (ages 12-14) and Sr. High (ages 15 and over) age groups for summer camping as well as families throughout the year. The cost was \$20 a camper for the week in 1959 and the themes for the camps were: Junior- "God At Work In His World"; Jr. High-"Living Together In The Christian Community"; and Sr. High-"Truth Speaks To Our Day". The Rio Vista

Cabin Group noted: "We

felt that camp was a very important experience in our lives. For one week we were removed from the hustle, bustle, and problems of daily living and were given an opportunity to know God better." Vesper point has always been a

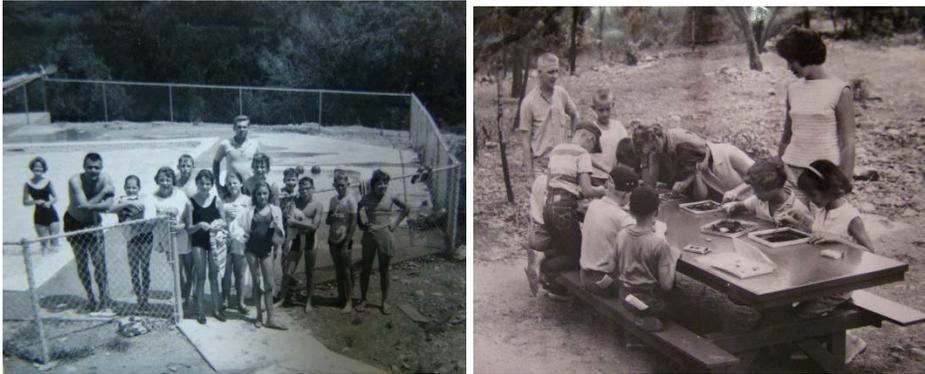


special place for reflection and prayer, as well as sing-

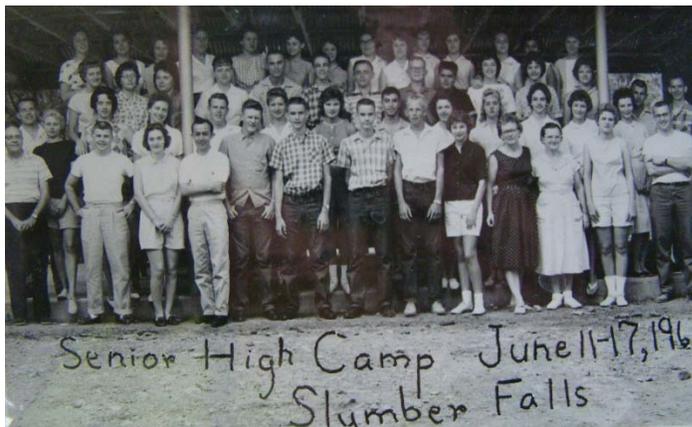


alongs. All of the surroundings were left natural and even arts and crafts centered around nature. In the "Cedar Bark" camp newsletter in 1960, the following story was told: "Yesterday the brave and fearless explorers of Group #3 went on a dangerous hike through the chigger-infested badlands around camp. They hiked to the wild

southwest corner of the campus. The total count of chiggers brought back was 5,936 1/2. If you do not believe that figure ask anyone you see scratching. They will probably be from group #3.”



Words and phrases that describe Slumber Falls camp in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary video include: kids hungry, birds, outdoors, teaching about life, dancing, games, passing fruit loops with tooth pick, leadership from camp experiences, swimming in the river, skits, singing, support, friends for life, togetherness, meeting God, impact on lives, hope, peace, faith, adventure, blue skies, clear water and daisies in the sun.



In 1959, special staff members at the camp included Rev. Mitchell Whiterabbit, pastor of the Winnebago Indian Church, Black River Falls, Wisconsin; Rev. William Baur, missionary to Raipur, India; Mrs. Martin Rodriguez, missionary, now on leave from Honduras; and Miss Han Block, exchange student from Holland.



The camp facilities that began with run-down cabins, evolved to a beautiful natural landscaped youth and adult camp with a main lodge dining hall (enclosed in 1964), swimming



pool (built in 1963), and two winterized cottages (built in 1969), one in memory of the Bornes. These two all-weather cabins housed thirty-two. Mr and Mrs. Emil Dischinger became the first caretakers living on the property. They were followed by Harvey and Ruby Lee Isleib, who served as caretakers from 1974 to 1986. Soon after the Isleibs became caretakers, a

new caretaker house was constructed as Haver House. Rev. Ray Bizer became the first paid part-time administrator of camp activities from 1979 until 1986. Prior to Rev. Bizer, ministers and staff came from other churches in the conference to run the camps. They included Rev. Cliff Freudenberg, Rev. Fred Woelke, Rev. Ray Buck, Rev. Wm. Scholze, Rev. Barney Federwisch and Rev. Al Hennig. Site administrators after Ray Bizer have included Rev. Mark Sirnic (first full time administrator), Rev. Frank Horak, Jr., and Rev. Richard A. Carse. Rev. Charles Stark was hired as administrator in 1997-current.



Improvements in the 1980s and 1990s include the building of the Bizer Retreat Center which houses 40 campers with two meeting rooms and a small kitchen. The Bruce Triesch Pavilion (picnic tables and grill) was added in 1980. In the early 1990s, one of the older screen cabins, “Joy Within” was taken down to make way for a new facility, the Muehl cabin. This beautifully constructed cabin can accommodate 20 campers. “Vicki’s Haven”, completed in 1998, is a facility designed to house long-term volunteers. The Kelsey Lodge, dedicated in 2002 provides meeting space and kitchen facilities. The addition of Horak Court, a covered multi-use outdoor facility, was completed in May 2003. In 2007, “Jeanette’s Wing” an extension of Woelke Lodge (dining and kitchen facility), was dedicated and serves as a recreation and meeting room.

The 2014 summer camp schedule includes 9 camps for ages six through 18 and Slumber Falls is sure to provide “A Special Place” for these kids. The camp includes three fully contained camping facilities: Bizer Retreat Center with capacity of 40; Kelsey with capacity of 40; and Woelke with capacity of 73. Included in Woelke are the original screened cabins that

sleep 26. Four of the cabins remain as they were in the 1930s with minor changes and two have been updated and winterized.

The steps down to the Guadalupe River access from the bluff above which houses the



cabins are still present. At the base of the steps, the Guadalupe River meanders over rocks and around cypress trees. At some point, a dam was constructed that also had a rock foot bridge across the top.



This small dam provided for a swimming hole at the base of the camp steps. The dam was removed after being damaged by the flood of 1998. Campers still get to swim and splash in the river.



Slumber Falls Church Camp and Retreat Center celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2008. The mission statement is: *A place of grace close to the heart of the church...Developing outdoor ministry for youth, adults and families; Engaging individuals in spiritual renewal and leadership training; Building a vision of the wider church by enhancing relationships in communities; Maintaining the spiritual and physical environment;*

*Creating a place of inclusiveness for Christian community; As a ministry of the South Central Conference of the United Church of Christ.*

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

The Guadalupe River and the contributing springs in Comal County have always been the lifeblood of the county. From the early days, when survival depended on agriculture and water, through the industrial era when the automobile and travel became a pastime contributing to the tourist industry of the area, the Guadalupe River provided for a successful economy. It also afforded enjoyment to those who visited its banks. The Guadalupe River has at times been treacherous at flood stage and a concern during drought, however, when it's flow is "just right",

has been a source of pleasure to those who visit and achieve benefit from its resources. Slumber Falls Camp developed along the Guadalupe River in the early 1900s at just the right time due to the building of roads and the proliferation of the automobile. Everyone went out into the country for a Sunday drive and had a picnic. Slumber Falls Camp was a place to get away from the city, enjoy the beauty of the hill country river valley and slumber in the open air cabins with the sound of waterfalls. Drought conditions closed Slumber Falls as a tourist camp but allowed it to be purchased and opened as a church camp in the 1950s. The tradition of relaxation, reflection, fellowship and education in the ideal setting continued. Preservation of the open air cabins out of respect for their historical significance resulted in campers of today experiencing nature and camping like the 1930s, where they can still slumber with the sound of waterfalls.



Narrative compiled by Rev. Charles Stark, Terri Armstrong, Stacey Silvey, Sami Devillier, Myra Lee Goff, Gay Wimberly and Karen Boyd.

## **Appendix A Photo Key and Credits:**

Page 2-three historic postcards of Guadalupe River Road from the Edwards Underground Aquafer website.

Page 2,3&4-B/W historic photos of River Road, Joe Sanders with signs and map reprinted with permission from *Backroads-Showing the Way in Comal County, Texas* by Laurie Jasinski.

Page 5&6-Guadalupe River at flood stage and serene from the Slumber Falls Camp files.

Page 7-Path to the river photos taken by Karen Boyd 2014 and historic photo of the path from the Slumber Falls Camp files. Step photo contains etching by the Lillies.

Page 8&9-Photos taken from Hardy-Heck-Moore historic resource survey of Comal County 2012 conducted by the Comal County Historic Commission and Comal County Commissioners Court. Four cabins are original and two have been renovated. Photos show the inside of one of the cabins as well as cabins Idle Hours, Rio Vista, lower level of Rio Vista, Dun Wandering, Twill Do, Heigh Ho and Whip-O-Will.

Page 11-17-historic photos of the camp from the Slumber Falls Camp files.