

COACOOCHEE CHAPTER

In the 1950's a chapter system was set up within the lodge, roughly corresponding to the lines the council drew for district boundaries. But there was one chapter that covered the entire council area and was created for the purpose of segregating black Scouts from the rest in the council. The chapter created in the lodge for this purpose was Coacoochee Chapter.

Segregation had been a part of the Boy Scouts of America since its earliest days. At the National level the Division of Negro Scouting was created to tend to the affairs of black Scouts. Accounts of the arrival of railroad builder Henry Flagler's arrival in the city of Key West on January 22, 1912 state that he was greeted by two Scout troops from the city; one all-white and the other all-black. Many councils throughout the country had separate camps and office facilities, either by law or local ordinance, or for the emotions of the participants. In the Greater Jacksonville Council, black Scout troops were organized in the early 1930's but the Scouts did not wear any uniforms until 1936, out of fear of harassment and abuse from the white Scouts and Scouters. A separate office was set up to service the needs of the segregated troops, and philanthropist and lodge member Francis Johnson donated land for a camp in Orange Park for black troops to use. This was named Camp Coacoochee (Seminole for "wildcat"), derived from a mixed-blood war chief of the Seminoles that fought alongside Osceola in the Second Seminole War (1836-38). Camp Coacoochee was on the opposite side of town from Camp Echockotee and campers were often taken by bus across town to the "white" camp to use the pool and waterfront areas.

In the minutes of the 1951 Area 6-D Conference Chiefs' Meeting, lodge chiefs discussed the problems of Negroes in the Order. The lodge chiefs felt that we were falling down on making our program available to Negroes. Several chiefs promised to remedy this situation in their councils. It is unclear as to when specifically the Coacoochee Chapter consisting of all of the black Arrowmen in North Florida Council was created, but in the context of the segregation policies of that era having a separate chapter like this may have been the only viable alternative available.

From Bill Christian and other anecdotal information still available the chapter had its first Ordeals conducted by members of Echockotee in August of 1958. Tap-out ceremonies often featured drumming, singing, and dancers in Native American clothing. Mr. Christian noted that "concerns over the rituals used during this time in the Brotherhood Ceremony prevented us from taking this next step" of conferring the Brotherhood to members of Coacoochee. The adult adviser for the organization was longtime executive Bob Sewell.

In the early 1960's a flap-shaped patch was created. The patch bore the name "COACOOCHEE LODGE 200 NORTH FLORIDA COUNCIL" and a blue eagle as a totem, and this led collectors across the country to believe that lodge 200 had changed its name. By 1963 the National office called for the end of segregation in the BSA and eliminated the Division of Negro Scouting. The lodge had become fully integrated by 1966 but like many in that time, several members became disgruntled and left the program. The name Coacoochee was still used and the name of a chapter in northwest and downtown

Jacksonville but was changed in 1972 to Cherokee Chapter. Camp Coacoochee was renamed for its benefactor, but was sold in 1979 by the council to become part of the Foxridge subdivision in Orange Park. All that remains today is Camp Francis Johnson Road.