

Early Faculty Successes Lost to History
Department of Recreation and Park Administration
Clemson University

MARVIN OWEN KEITH

Narrative by:

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Camp Hope and the Outdoor Laboratory

When I came to Clemson in August of 1967, Assistant Professor Marvin Owen Keith had been on the faculty for one semester. He served as the summer camp director for South Carolina Jaycee Camp Hope (1968 and/or 1969?), a camp for individuals with special needs. As I recall, Camp Hope used an old (1930's) 4-H camp facility, Camp Long, near Aiken, which was not designed with accessibility for special needs clients. Also, it was a rented or loaned facility with no assurance that it would be available in the future. Its distance from Clemson presented problems, too.

Marvin had been an employee of the Greensboro (NC) Parks and Recreation Department where he worked with the Kennedy Foundation to establish Camp Joy, a camp for individuals with special needs. He recognized that South Carolina had a need for such a camp. [Camp Joy, Marvin's legacy to Greensboro, continues to serve special needs clients, today (2021)].

I can remember Marvin coming to my office carrying maps of the Clemson Experimental Forest on which he had marked areas where a camp's facilities could be located. He would say: "The Clemson Forest is over 17,000 acres, I don't see why we can't have a few hundred acres for Camp Hope".

The Department of Forestry, which managed the Forest, had individual trees marked as "research trees", scattered about the Clemson Forest, that were "inviolable". While that designation may have been a true representation, those trees were used as a means of forestalling any other use in the Forest, at least in regard to the Department of Recreation and Park Administration's (RPA's) request for land for the camp facilities.

The South Carolina Jaycees liked the idea of a facility at Clemson, the Recreation and Park Administration's department head, Dr. Herbert Brantley liked the idea, and the University President, Dr. Robert Edwards, liked the idea. The head of the Department of Forestry, Dr. Koloman Lehotsky, did not like the idea. Lehotsky was vehemently opposed to having "his" Department of Forestry associated with the Department of Recreation and Park Administration in any manner and, in particular, sharing the Clemson Forest.

At that time, the Department of Forestry, and the forestry industry in South Carolina, was pressuring President Edwards for a new building for the Department of Forestry. But the Department of Forestry had an enrollment of about 100 student majors which was not sufficient to justify a new building. On the other hand, the Department of Recreation and Park Administration had about 500 majors. It needed more space for teaching and for its faculty and staff. Additionally, it was requesting land on Lake Hartwell in the Clemson Forest for Camp Hope and an outdoor laboratory.

University President Dr. Robert Edwards, who established the Department of Recreation and Park Administration at the request of the South Carolina Recreation and Park Society, thought that placing the two programs into one college (College of Forest and Recreation Resources [1970]) was a perfect path to resolve the building needs of both departments along with a camp for special needs clients. As Dr. Lehotsky was dead set against that merger and Camp Hope, President Edwards removed Lehotsky as department head. Lehotsky retired. Unfortunately, this created great enmity among the senior Forestry faculty which only slowly diminished as they and their successors retired or left the University.

With the placement of the Department of Forestry with the Department of Recreation and Park Administration into the College of Forest and Recreation Resources in 1970, and the removal of Dr. Lehotsky as the Head of the Department of Forestry, the way was cleared for the develop of a permanent Camp Hope on the shores of Lake Hartwell, with further additions of facilities for other groups and purposes leading to the facility being named the Clemson University Outdoor Laboratory with subunits for Camp Hope and, later, other groups such as Camp Sertoma.

For reasons unknown to me, Marvin Keith and the department head, Dr. Brantley, had a falling out during 1969 which resulted in Marvin leaving Clemson University. After that, Marvin Owen Keith's contribution to the Camp Hope / Outdoor Laboratory was buried with the credit being assumed by, or ascribed to, others.

Marvin Keith came to Clemson having worked with the Kennedy Foundation to create Camp Joy while he was employed with the Greensboro, NC Parks and Recreation Department. It was that experience that led him to see the potential for permanent facilities for special needs clients on the Clemson campus.

I am certain that, without Marvin Keith's insight, imagination and perseverance, there would not be an Outdoor Laboratory at Clemson. There can be no question about that!

After Marvin's departure from the University, other's carried forward Marvin's vision, notably the Department Head, Dr. Herbert Brantley, and Marvin's successor, Charlie Raymond White who was hired in 1971.

Marvin Owen Keith died, June 21, 1994 at the age of 58, leaving a legacy of Camp Joy (Greensboro, NC) and the initial steps and forward momentum for his vision of Camp Hope and an outdoor laboratory on the Clemson University campus.

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