

The following was featured on a March 30, 2022 Facebook Post from the Appalachian Mountain Club of Connecticut Chapter (CT AMC). The post begins: "After being contacted by the Sleeping Giant Park Association for more information about the Connecticut Chapter's use of a stone house on Mt. Carmel, members of the Chapter Centennial History Committee got to work! John Grasso researched the Chapter archives and he and Dale Geslien wrote this article:"

When the Connecticut Chapter of AMC had a 'Headquarters' on Sleeping Giant

The Connecticut Chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club leased a stone cottage, built in 1911 near the summit of Mt. Carmel, from 1926 through 1934. Mt. Carmel is the high point within Sleeping Giant State Park, created in 1924. The "Hut," as the cottage was called, was the site of many Chapter events, often utilized for overnight stays, and was for several years regarded as the "headquarters" of the Chapter. Though available Chapter records do not provide all the information we might wish to have, there is sufficient information to sketch this interesting story.



The Connecticut Chapter was formed on June 11, 1921 by a vote of state resident members of the Appalachian Mountain Club who assembled at West Peak, Meriden. There was early interest in establishing a Chapter camp of some kind. The Minutes of the 1923 Annual Meeting (12/8/1923) recount the appointment of a four-member committee "to consider the matter of establishing a field headquarters." At the 1924 Annual Meeting (12/6/1924) the committee reported that it had had no success, and that further effort was "inadvisable." However, sometime in 1925, under circumstances now unknown, the Chapter began to make frequent use of the Hut, of which there is no earlier mention in surviving records. A "Committee on the Sleeping Giant Hut" was created and at the Annual Meeting on December 12, 1925, action was taken to formalize the Chapter's status as lessee.

This entry appears in the Minutes:

"Chairman Buttrick reported for the Committee on the Sleeping Giant Hut that 134 people have registered at least once, there have been 48 overnight parties, and that \$179.00 were subscribed by chapter members for the rental and equipment of the cabin, of which a small balance remains on hand. This report was accepted. VOTED: that the Chapter take over the management of the Hut on Mt Carmel, appropriate \$100.00 for rent and other expenses for 1926, and that the Chairman appoint a committee of three to have charge."

The lease itself, the rent amount, and the identity of the lessor do not appear in the 1925 Minutes; however, in Minutes of subsequent Annual Meetings, the lessor is identified as the “State Park Department,” and the annual rent is said to be \$50.00, a modest annual rent even then.

Minutes from the 1926 and 1927 Annual Meetings reflect much initial enthusiasm for and curiosity about the Hut, culminating in this entry from the 1928 Annual Meeting (11/17/1928): “There were about 300 members and guests registered at the Hut since January 1st, and between 70 and 80 for overnight.” Minutes from the 1929 and 1930 Annual Meetings reference a New Year’s Day party at the Hut.

However, even by the 1930 Annual Meeting (12/6/1930), attitudes regarding the Hut appear to have shifted. This entry appears: “The subject of the lease of the Hut at Mount Carmel was introduced by the Chairman and while no formal vote was taken it appeared to be the sense of the meeting (that) it should continue until revoked.” In contrast to the Minutes of the preceding Annual Meetings, there is conspicuously no mention in the Minutes of either the 1929 or the 1930 Annual Meetings of numbers of members and guests using the Hut.

The condition of the Hut when leased and what responsibilities regarding repair and maintenance the Chapter assumed as lessee, are unknown. Inferences can be drawn from Expenditures reports, such as “Sleeping Giant Hut A.M.C. Cash account, Nov.17,1928, to Nov.23, 1929,” reflecting purchases of a canvas cot, a mattress, blankets, andirons, and an axe and crosscut saw. Inferences can also be drawn from a pointed writing directed to Chapter Chairman Everett O. Waters (“Chairman Everett”), authored by Excursions Committee Chair Franklyn M. Stibbs, phrased as a motion and dated December 4, 1931, the day prior to the Annual Meeting of the Chapter. In it, Stibbs proposes a substantial Chapter investment, primarily in the interior of the Hut, the “headquarters” of the Chapter, of as much as \$200.00, although he states that a portion might be used to assist the state with exterior repairs if required. Stibbs complains that the Hut requires a new roof, that the furnishings “would make a handsome showing in the fireplace,” and describes the interior as becoming “more and more dingy.” A copy of this writing is attached. Minutes of the 1931 Annual Meeting (12/5/1931) reflect that Stibbs made his motion, and that it passed. The Minutes also reflect that use of the Hut for overnight stays in 1931 had dwindled to 12 nights.

Despite this motion having passed, Minutes of the 1932 Annual Meeting indicate that a mere \$36.05 of Chapter funds were actually expended on the Hut in 1932. Members of the Hut Committee were evidently unwilling to take on the task of organizing and supervising the work outlined generally for them by Stibbs in his motion. One speculates that at least some of them were offended by Stibbs’ unflattering remarks, which were likely taken as critical of their stewardship of the Hut.

Minutes of the 1933 Annual Meeting (12/9/1933) likewise reflect authorization of an expenditure of only \$50.00 for Hut repair. The handwritten “Report of the Hut Committee” dated December 9, 1933 authored by Chairman Earle Durham and submitted at the 1933 Annual Meeting sheds light upon the status of the Hut at that time. That Report is attached. In it, Durham noted the effect of the Depression upon use of the Hut, and the new attraction of the nearby Noble View property, acquired by the Berkshire Chapter in 1931, to some members in the northern part of the state. He also noted that the State Park Department lacked funds to make exterior repairs to the Hut, which

implies that such responsibility rested with the state according to the lease. However, some members made repairs to the gutter which supplied water to the cistern and Durham expressed concern about the safety of the Hut “porch.” Chapter records from 1934 reflect that at a September 1934 meeting of the Board of the Chapter (now known as the Executive Committee), up to \$50.00 was authorized for urgent repair of the Hut “piazza.”

Notwithstanding the September 1934 repair appropriation, by the 1934 Annual Meeting (12/8/1934), the decision had been made to sever the Chapter’s ties to the Hut. Hut Committee Chair Earle Durham reported that the Committee had not spent money recently appropriated for repair, “due to a rumor that the state was to take over the hut in the near future.” Bill Burling, Excursions Committee Chair, moved “that the club no longer rent the hut on Mt Carmel,” which was seconded and approved. The Minutes make no mention of discussion, or whether the vote was unanimous. The term of the lease was one year, but because the lease itself is not among Chapter records, it cannot be determined when following the 1934 Annual Meeting the lease expired according to its terms.

Burling then made two motions regarding the Noble View property. He moved “that all furniture and fixtures other than tools, bedding and cots at present in the hut at Mt Carmel be transferred to Noble View.” After discussion, decision regarding these items was delegated to the Camping Committee. Burling then moved that the Chapter contribute \$50.00 to the Berkshire Chapter “to aid them in paying off the mortgage on Noble View.” Following discussion, the majority voted in favor, though some were opposed.

In 1936, certainly after the Chapter’s lease had expired, the Hut was destroyed by fire. Stone from the ruins was salvaged and used later that year in the construction of the Lookout Tower at the summit, a project administered through the Works Progress Administration. The Lookout Tower is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

Surviving Chapter records regarding this early Chapter “headquarters” cannot fully satisfy our curiosity. We don’t know for sure why interest in the Hut, as indicated by the number of persons both hiking to it and spending the night in it, dropped precipitously over time, though we can surmise that after an initial visit to satisfy curiosity, many members felt no need to return. We don’t know whether Excursions Committee Chair Franklyn M. Stibbs’ unflattering opinion regarding the condition of the Hut was fair, or was widely shared. We don’t know if the exterior of the Hut had deteriorated to the point of being unsafe and the committee was unwilling to spend significant funds to make external repairs thought to be the responsibility of the State Park Department. We don’t know whether the Chapter believed that the state would refuse to continue the lease even if the Chapter had sought to continue it. It is interesting to speculate what might have been, had the Chapter opted to invest in the Hut, and had the Chapter sought to lease the Hut year after year for many years. Had such a course of action been pursued, perhaps the lease might have continued, and this early Chapter “headquarters” might now be more than a footnote in the stories of both the Chapter, and of Sleeping Giant State Park.

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