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ONE DOLLAR

VILLAGES

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Inside: Remembering Camp Hudson

A Camping We Went

If you were a Boy Scout in Houston in the 40s, 50s, or 60s, you'll remember Camp Hudson

BY NANCY LOFTIS



Annual Field Meet of the Sam Houston Area Council, April 1939. Drill of Troop 55 led by Senior Patrol Leader Oscar Cadwallader.

Most any man over 40 who grew up in Houston and wore a Scout uniform for any part of his youth probably remembers Camp Hudson. With tents and a swimming hole and all kinds of wild life, the 100-acre Boy Scout Camp between Memorial Drive and Buffalo Bayou welcomed Houston Scouts for almost 50 years.

Today, the camp is no more. Memorial Drive still makes two perpendicular turns around the property just west of Piney Point, but Briar Forest Drive cuts through the middle of what was the camp. Various real estate developments

named Hudson fill the grounds. But from 1925 until 1973, Scouts from all over the greater Houston area claimed this natural wilderness on Buffalo Bayou only twelve miles from downtown Houston.

Former campers vividly remember the day when those 100 acres greeted campers instead of cars, "Once you got away from the cleared area with the buildings and the baseball diamond, it was as wild as it could be," says Hunters Creek resident Butch Gregory whose Boy Scout troop met at Camp Hudson every Wednesday night during the mid-

50s. "Just coming out Memorial Drive at that time was getting away from civilization," he adds.

"It was primitive in all respects and at least 80 percent absolutely thick woods," recalls Roger Beebe who grew up near Camp Hudson and notes it was simpler than most camps today. Playing Capture the Flag in the sand pits, a deep draw leading to the bayou, highlighted Beebe's weekly outing. "It was fun and wild," he says. "There were also zillions of raccoons—so many, in fact, that we'd wake to find them going through our overnight camping stuff."

“My mother took our whole Cub Scout troop to Camp Hudson from West University in the early 40s,” says David F. Eby, City Administrator for Bunker Hill Village. “We were seven and to us camp was so far out in the country it seemed to take a day’s drive to get there.” Eby loved swimming in the camp’s large pool and playing in the bottom of a washed out gully near the bayou. “The pool impressed me because we didn’t have one in West University,” he says. “We pretended the gully was a sand castle.”

Lewis Mattingly got to camp from West U under his own power: biking or hiking. “Camp was as close to being in the wilderness as we were familiar with,” says Mattingly who first attended Camp Hudson in 1945 when he was 14. “Gas rationing due to the war made the camp’s accessibility even more significant,” he adds, “because it was an absolutely great place to get away from the city.”

Mattingly lives in Bunker Hill Village and for 27 years has been a Scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 642 at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church.

Another Scoutmaster, John V. Wheat, took his troop from the First Methodist Church to camp during the 30s. He remembers Buffalo Bayou, long before flood control was put in upstream, as a constant flood threat to Camp Hudson. “One rainy night we had about 1,000 campers as thick as we could get them,” Wheat says. “We taught the boys to ditch their tents against rain, but all night long we kept checking to see if they were dry.” Parents even made the trip out to check on their sons, but according to Wheat, who at 82 has been almost everything one can be in

Scouts, most went home reassured that all was well.

The person who made all these camp memories possible was E. A. Hudson, a Houston businessperson who gave his family’s country retreat to the Scouts in 1925. Hudson’s son Dick remembers the property prior to that time as their “home away from home.” Even though the drive from the Hudson’s Chelsea Place residence in the Montrose area took half a day because of inadequate roads, Hudson remembers loving the time he spent there. “In those days people needed to get out of town to escape the heat, and we thought it was cooler there,” says Hudson. “We had a clapboard house with a breezeway and screened porch.”

The initial donation was about 50 acres of unimproved land on Buffalo Bayou. Three years later Hudson donated the additional 50 acres, all of which could be reached by Katy Road

or Westheimer Road. E. A. Hudson was a part of Houston’s business community since 1893 when, at 24, he moved his furniture business to Houston from Tyler. A leader in many community activities, Hudson died in 1938. He was a charter member of the Houston Boy Scout Council, served as its president from 1922 to 1931, and gave the Scouts the camp land during that time.

The Council immediately improved the property so that it could be opened for camping the summer of 1926. Improvements, used throughout the life of the camp, included a kitchen and mess hall, a deep water well, sanitary facilities and a parade ground. They dredged the bayou for use as a swimming pool and built a concrete dam to increase water depth at one end.

Unfortunately, one day before camp was to open, a heavy rain caused Buffalo Bayou to flood washing out the

dam and causing other damage. This delayed the camp opening until 1927. For eleven years, campers used the bayou for swimming, but, in 1939, a large swimming pool was built.

In 1960, the number of uses of the camp totaled 47,603 including weekend camping, district training for boys and adults, Cub Day Camps, pack picnics, field meets and swimming meets. By the early 70s, according to Mattingly, the camp was used more as a training facility for adults. And this is when the question of keeping or selling the property became a hot topic.

“I didn’t see the necessity for the Council to own such a valuable property,” says Mattingly. He also notes that the camp’s location did not have the same appeal to Houston Scouts in 1973 that it had in 1943. Plus, vandalism of the camp site had become an increasing problem.

According to Wheat, who as



Pack meeting and slide presentation held at Camp Hudson.

COURTESY OF LEWIS MATTINGLY

an attorney participated as one of the leaders in the sale of the property, those involved in scouting argued for years about selling Camp Hudson.

"Everybody had something to say about it," he says. "It was a very controversial question."

In 1973, the Boy Scout Council accepted an offer for the camp. The sales price was approximately \$8 million according to Howard Tellepsen who has been a Council board member since 1946. "We felt Camp Hudson was too close in town for the real purpose of camping," says Tellepsen, "and by then we had acquired the 3,000-acre Camp Strake site near Conroe."

Because the original camp deed stipulated that the camp would revert to the heirs if used for any purpose other than as a camp, an agreement was worked out with Hudson's four children. It was also agreed that the new camping facility purchased with proceeds from sale of Camp Hudson would use the Hudson name. In addition to the 3,000 acre Hudson Scout Reservation near Centerville, Texas, proceeds from the sale were used to build a new

training center at Camp Strake and establish a permanent fund to insure camping opportunities for generations of future Scouts.

It seems logical to ask why Camp Hudson, north of Buffalo Bayou, was not a part of Bunker

A hue and cry rocked the neighborhood when Camp Hudson was sold in 1973.

Hill Village. The answer may be that as a Scout camp, it had no tax value. According to Bunker Hill Village's first mayor, Byron P. Sadler, the camp wasn't even considered as part of the plan for Bunker Hill Village, incorporated in 1954. It was assumed that the property would always be a camp. "We never thought they'd be able to break the Hudson family's deed restrictions," Sadler says. "Then when the city of Houston moved around us, Houston took it." Naturally, because the camp was in the city of Houston, it could be developed without Villages zoning restrictions

A hue and cry rocked the neighborhood when Camp Hudson was sold in 1973. One neighbor even wrote a poem, "Ode to Camp Hudson," lamenting its demise and predicting devastation to the property by developers. Driving west on Briar Forest from Memorial Drive allows one to judge the accuracy of the poet's prediction.

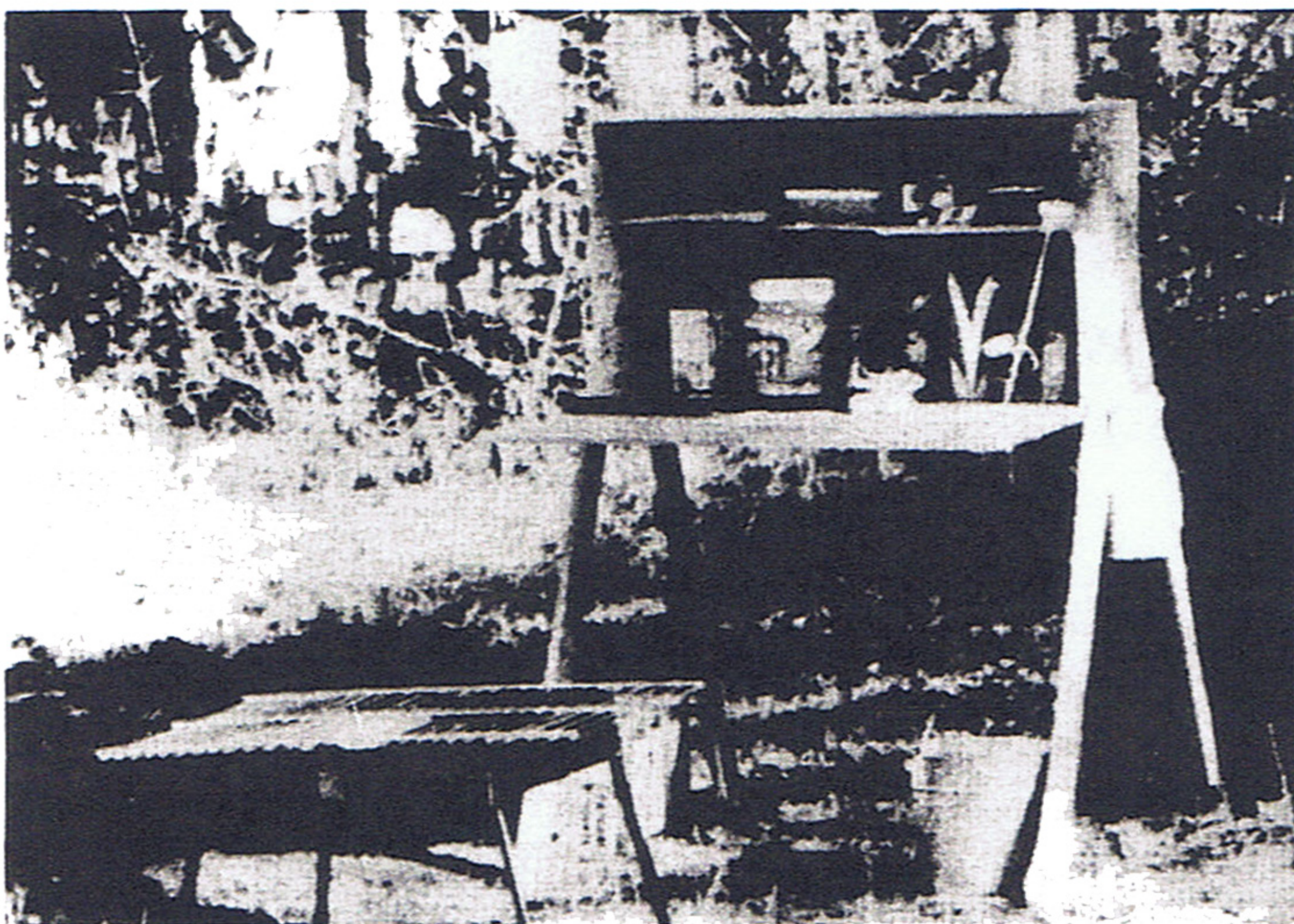
The acreage on the left was developed by Christiana Southwest, Inc., a California company that purchased the 100 acres from the Scouts. Called Hudson Forest, the development originally produced California contemporary townhouses. The property maintains a natural, wooded appearance in spite of the fact that the 46 acres contain 196 lots with townhomes up to 5,000 square feet ranging in price from \$300,000 to \$3 million. Today, only four empty lots are available.

In 1977, the Christiana Corporation sold the north 40, or all the land on the right of Briar Forest, to Houstonians W.K. Reid and Gary Levering. The camp facilities were located on this property. Between 1977 and 1979, Reid and Levering completed two projects, Hudson Oaks with 411

condominiums and Woods at Hudson with 72 town homes on about half of the acreage. Originally marketed for between \$20,000 and \$60,000, the projects sold out immediately. Prior to construction, Reid remembers meeting with homeowners in the area to address their fears regarding development of Camp Hudson. "We discussed our plans with them," he says, "and made changes to eliminate light pollution on adjoining properties."

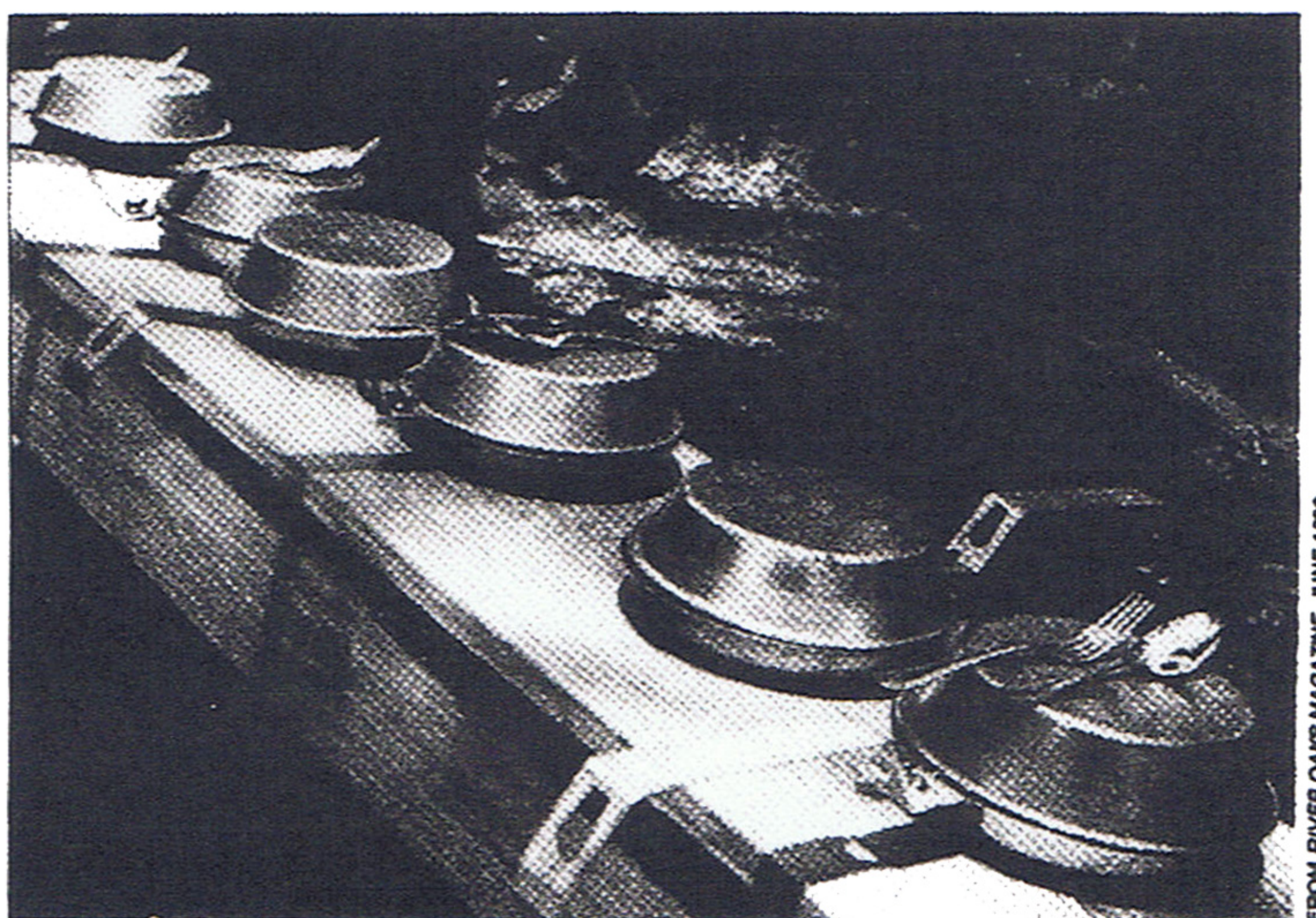
Reid and Levering also hired a botanist who identified over 50 types of pine trees and over 400 species of bushes and plant life on the camp grounds. "We laid out Hudson Oaks to preserve at least one of each tree type," says Reid.

Currently Hudson Bend, a patio custom home development, is being completed on the remaining land originally sold to Reid & Levering. About half of the 58 lots contain finished homes. The last piece of land to be developed was purchased about a year ago. Previously not economically wise because it is on bayou flood plain, the eleven-lot development is called Hudson Place. □



The Scouts' cooking facilities.

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Mess kits of the Comanche Patrol, April 1939.

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