



March 5, 2025

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Faithful Friends of CBC –

It is hard to say goodbye to an old friend ... Even if that old friend is a sacred space. Yet, that is what we're being called to do in 2025.

Unfortunately, last year on May 18th during a camp workday, we became aware of significant dry rot issues in the ceiling rafters of the Tabernacle. This posed an imminent threat to camper safety, so the Tab was shuttered and not used in 2024. Subsequent inspection revealed dry rot and significant structural weakening in other places as well, especially at ground level.

One truth uttered during our deliberations on what to do was, *"Buildings are like people ... both grow old."* So true ... but it does not make it easy to say, *"Goodbye"* to our old, good friend, the Tab.

After eight months of research, prayer, and discussion the Board made three decisions at our January 18 meeting:

1. For many reasons, the Board concluded that an investment to try and extend the life of the Tab is not good stewardship;
2. The Board determined that the best time to decommission the Tab is this Spring, prior to the resumption of the 2025 summer camp schedule and early enough to avoid tearing up the grounds (ideally, before the frost is out);
3. Prior to demolition, there will be a decommissioning service where the contribution of the Tab as a "sacred place" will be recognized and celebrated. (This has been scheduled for Sunday, March 23rd, 3 pm at camp).

The document that follows captures the essence of the Board's DNA as we grappled over the months with making a tough decision.

On behalf of the Board of Directors*

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Update on the Tab: Renovate? Or Retire? The CBC Board's Research & Decision

3-1-25

The mission statement of Cooperstown Bible Camp is *"Making Jesus known through life-changing experiences ... **Escape, Encounter, Engage.**"*

Let's focus on the first of these "E words" in our mission and capture the essence of **Escape**:

*CBC is a place "away" ...
a retreat and safe haven
to recreate, to relax, to pray,
and to find peace of mind, heart and spirit.*

The Board of Directors realizes the important role that the Tab has filled in meeting that first element of our mission ... **Escape**.

- For many of us, our *"life and core memories are connected with Cooperstown Bible Camp and events here that have defined us and continue to shape us today ..."*
- Look at it in another way: CBC has played *"a pivotal role in the deep life experiences"* of our guests. *For many people when they make their own list of the places that have shaped them, Cooperstown Bible Camp is on that list.*
- For the last nearly one hundred years, "the Tab" has often been a place for our campers to **Escape** ...

Unfortunately, on May 18th during camp workday, we became aware of significant dry rot issues in the ceiling rafters of the Tabernacle. Subsequent inspection revealed dry rot and significant structural weakening in other places as well, especially at ground level.

Short-term Solution

Given the concerns about structural integrity and camper safety, the Executive Director (our chief safety officer) wisely decided not to use the Tabernacle for camper activities last summer but rather chose to use the Pioneer and the Rock for chapel instead of the Tab.

Long-term Solution

The long-term solution is not so readily achieved. We knew that there would likely be no easy answers. Further, the Board must have the leadership courage to weigh all factors and prayerfully make a decision. Should we renovate it? Or retire it?

The critical question we considered was: “What’s the tipping point between the cost of a reasonable repair versus too much investment to make an aged building survive a few more years?”

Buildings are like people. Both grow old. Psalm 90:10 (NLT) tells us:

*“Seventy years are given to us!
Some even live to eighty.
But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble;
soon they disappear, and we fly away.”*

Average life expectancy in the US is 77.4 years. In ND it is 77.5 years.

What is the life expectancy of a wooden structure like the tab? Has it already lived past its life expectancy at nearly a hundred years of life? If the tab could speak, how would it advise us on its "end of life" decisions? What if the tab had a living will, what would the "do not resuscitate" order look like?

Is the tab already on life-support? What heroic measures should we take – if any – to extend its life? If we did, what would it cost and how long could we expect it to “live”?

These are heavy questions and summarize the range of discussion that the CBC board has had over the last nine months.

Analysis

- Bernie Satrom, the President of Maranatha Custom Churches, Inc. told us, “... *you’re looking at tens of thousands of dollars to just fix this with a band aid ...*” We know that band aids don’t last long, especially on a century-old structure whose life has already exceeded the Biblical “three score and ten years” of human life expectancy (Ps. 90:10).
- We considered retaining a structural engineer to give us a professional opinion with an estimated cost in the thousands ... which basically would give us a well-engineered, more expensive band aid, with no guarantees. As we considered engaging a structural engineer, we learned the following:
 - An engineer will likely require steel ... “Sister studs” (lumber) could not be used
 - This would kill the “feel” / aesthetics of the Tab
 - Because of the risk and liability involved, structural engineers are expensive to engage for a professional opinion
 - Further, they often tend to overdesign a solution
- Additional factors to consider in renovation or retirement of the Tab:
 - The structure is nearly 100 years old.
 - The structure as is could not meet current structural design code requirements.
 - If there is any consideration to repair, renovate, climatize and enhance the building, the costs would likely exceed those to build new; and the building would not serve the intended capacity without compromising function and usability for program activities.

- With the loss and non-usability of this current structure, we've lost this facility and, in essence, compromised another (The Rock); and we have identified the need for a new chapel.

Board Perspective and Conclusions

As stated at the beginning of this document, the CBC board recognizes *"the importance of spaces"* and one of our long-term planning intentions is *"to create more welcoming, powerful and safer places for ministry."*

The Board, at its January 18 meeting decided that the Tab cannot be responsibly renovated or restored. Further, it was decided that the best time for this to occur is this spring, before our camp season begins in May.

- *We understand that "nothing lives forever ..."*
- *In September, our inspections revealed that the structural health of the Tab was worse than was earlier recognized*
- *We simply need to document the facts of our recent findings (and we will) and the picture becomes clear, pointing the path forward on decision-making*
- *God is honored by the great teamwork, diverse perspectives, candid and frank conversations that the Building & Ground Committee and Board have been having in their deliberations over the last ten months ... the Holy Spirit is clearly at work, guiding us and leading us forward.*
- *We are "speaking with one voice" with great unity*
- *At one point, we considered hiring a structural engineer to evaluate options to rebuild / renovate the Tab*
- *But we concluded after further inspection that the dry rot and decay of the structure was greater than initially observed.*
- *Further, it was going to be a very expensive process with only a short-lived extension in the life of the Tab*

Three Decisions

1. For many reasons, the Board concluded that an investment to try and extend the life of the Tab is not good stewardship;
2. The Board determined that the best time to decommission the Tab is this Spring, prior to the resumption of the 2025 summer camp schedule and early enough to avoid tearing up the grounds (ideally, before the frost is out);
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Future Direction¹

You might ask, “What does the future hold for CBC in constructing a new chapel?” We do not know at this point but rest assured that we started our planning process months before we learned of the Tab issues.

Planning that was started in March 2023 set the stage for board development, including participation by two Board members joining our Executive Director at the Christian Camping and Conference Association (CCCA) in late November of 2024.

Two major decisions came out of that conference were: (1) To engage with the CCCA “Thriving Boards” program for board development; and (2) To explore the development of a comprehensive master plan for CBC – to include programming, facilities and site development with BCI Architects-Engineers-Planners.

We scheduled an on-site visit with BCI on August 18. BCI specializes in developing master plans for camps. They do about 15 camps per year.

Their lead architect, Rich Parker (BCI’s Principal-in-Charge) has twenty-five years of architectural design experience and specializes in wood structures. Jackie Kaminsky (BCI’s Market Sector Leader for camp master planning and design) is a landscape architect with fifteen years of experience.


We gave them a tour of the CBC campgrounds and facilities and had a wonderful discussion with them to follow. They gave us a lot of insight in a short time. We have a follow up visit scheduled with them in July.

So please rest assured, that as we work together and follow God’s leading, we can confidently move into the second century of Cooperstown Bible Camp. Please join with the Board as together in prayer we remember the wisdom of Solomon:

*“Any enterprise is built by wise planning,
becomes strong through common sense,
and profits wonderfully by keeping abreast of the facts.”*

- Proverbs 24:3-4, *The Living Bible*

On behalf of the Board of Directors*



Mel Nelson, Board Chair

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¹ Added as a footnote to this report after the annual meeting, drawing on the Chairman’s report at the annual meeting.