

Menucha Retreat and Conference Center

By Merritt McCall

Menucha, a prime northwest conference center, is located on a windy bluff in the Columbia River Gorge, 25 miles east of downtown Portland and 700 feet above the river. The land was settled on and farmed beginning in 1873 by the Josiah Painter family.

In 1914, Julius Meier, of the Meier and Frank (M&F) department stores and governor of Oregon (1931-1935), purchased the property from the Painters. The Meiers named it Menucha, meaning still or peaceful in Hebrew (a reference to the "still waters" in the Twenty-third Psalm). The first residence, designed by A.E. Doyle in 1915, was in the Adirondack Rustic style (it was destroyed by carpenter ants in the 1920s). The current primary estate residence was designed by Herman Brookman in 1926-27 and influenced what became known internationally as a "Northwest" style of architecture. The Meiers developed Menucha as a showplace family estate during the 1920s and 1930s, generally living there during the warmer months. The estate served as a site for the Meiers to host M&F company picnics, family friends, local politicians, and two US Presidents: Herbert Hoover and Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

After Julius Meier died in 1937, his son, Jack, took over managing Menucha, but in 1941 Jack joined the Navy, and Menucha was "mothballed." The family re-opened Menucha for their own use for two weeks during the summer of 1946 and then decided to sell it. They sold off many of the exotic plantings from the grounds and some of the land area. They also exchanged some of the land for property in eastern Oregon, where they built a place they called "Menucha II," and then put the remaining land and buildings up for sale.

In June 1950, First Presbyterian Church of Portland bought the property to serve as a Retreat and Conference Center, the purpose Menucha still serves. The main building is now known as Wright Hall, for the Rev. Dr. Paul S. Wright who was instrumental in the acquisition of Menucha for the church. Volunteers restored the property from the decade of emptiness and it soon opened to guests. The church has maintained the Meier-era buildings and built additional structures. Menucha is now one of the premier NW conference centers, serving members of not-for-profit groups year-round.

Sources

<http://www.fpcpdx.org/menucha.html>

<http://www.menucha.org/history.html>

The Oregon Encyclopedia

<http://oregonhist-oep-dev.azurewebsites.net/articles/menucha/>