



Merle Mott and the Mott farm, site of future Foxwood Springs Living Center



The 11 years that William T. Gible was President of NBA were filled with growth and innovation in other areas as well; Longview Christian Retirement Center was opened in Longview, Texas, on July 10, 1973, and Santree in Williamston, North Carolina, in September 1980. Both were wholly owned by NBA and brought to fruition longtime dreams of the churches in Houston and in eastern North Carolina.

But perhaps the most dramatic change was the result of an unexpected "angel . . . who came walking in like people." Nancy Wahonick, editor of *Family Talk*, tells the story best:

Merle Mott and her husband Harry were raised in Taft County, Missouri, southeast of Kansas City. She was a school teacher in a one-room school by the time she was fourteen and he was an ambitious young man whose dream was to own his own dairy farm. When they married, they set out to make that dream come true.

Because of depressed conditions in Missouri and Kansas in the late 1920s, the couple moved to California where Harry worked as a dairy hand and learned the dairy business, while Merle cooked and cleaned for 20 hands each day on the dairy farm. For fourteen years they worked and saved.

Then came the glorious day when they had enough money to buy a farm of their own and they returned to Taft county and purchased a small farm.

But this wasn't the farm they dreamed of. The one they truly wanted was a beautiful 63-acre tract of land that had a spring on the property, which according to local tradition had never run dry. The spring was called 'Foxwood' because the phosphorescent light from the woods surrounding the spring could be seen from the nearby trail by early travelers across the Missouri prairie land.

Their dream came true when 'Foxwood' farm was put up for sale—and they quickly closed the deal. Soon, through hard work, they built up their dairy.

Merle enjoyed the life of a farmer's wife, but she was also active in the nearby communities of Raymore and Belton where she and Harry were members of the Belton Christian Church. Over the years, they became acquainted with the work of NBA. Merle served as local outreach chairman and later as District CWF President. Benevolence and the NBA Homes were very close to her heart.

In 1971 Harry died and Merle was left with the farm, which by this time had become a prosperous beef cattle operation. It was too much to handle alone and Merle sought an answer to the question in her mind—what should she do with the farm?

She decided to sell it. 'Somehow I knew that wasn't the right thing but I really didn't know what else to do.' Not surprisingly, she had an immediate offer. But she delayed acceptance.

One day she approached a close friend, also a member of Belton Christian Church. 'Do you suppose NBA could build a home for older persons on my property if I gave it to them?'

'Why don't you ask?' came back the answer.

That afternoon Mrs. Mott sat down and wrote a letter to Dr. William T. Gible, President of NBA. 'I knew at that moment this was what I was supposed to do. And Dr. Gible called me within a week.' Mrs. Mott turned over her farm to NBA for a life income.



Nancy Wahonick

Merle Mott





And her life changed.

Suddenly, the quiet farm became a beehive of activity as Dr. Thomas Johns came to develop the facility to be built on Mrs. Mott's land. Since there was no office, Mrs. Mott moved her furniture out of the living room, and turned it over to NBA for this purpose. She became involved in the fund raising process and was soon speaking in churches and before civic groups and talking with anyone who would listen about Foxwood Springs—as the new NBA facility for older adults was going to be called.

Her neat farmhouse was soon alive with people as architectural planning meetings, board meetings, and fund raising meetings were held. Mrs. Mott, who had seldom been *in* a business office, soon found herself doing receptionist duties and secretarial duties, in addition to treating visitors with delicious pies and cakes.

'I have never worked so hard, been so busy, or so happy in my life,' she says of those first hectic days when Foxwood Springs Living Center was still an empty pasture. Months and years of work and waiting passed. Never growing discouraged, Mrs. Mott's strong faith in her dream never wavered, and she worked hard at making that dream come true.

Today bulldozers and construction equipment roar in the background as townhouses for gracious retirement living, apartments for older adults, and a health center are being constructed. Mrs. Mott has learned the construction 'lingo' and can be found cheerfully helping prospective residents select carpeting, or showing off with pride her new modern garden home which is being used as a model for prospective residents . . .

Foxwood Springs Living Center is more than just another retirement facility. It is a carefully planned, caring Christian community devoted to the idea of comfortable living for retired persons.

'It is so much more than I ever dreamed it would be,' Mrs. Mott says today.

But those very close to Foxwood Springs Living Center knew that it was Merle Mott's dream—and her faith in God and that dream—that has made NBA's newest and most modern facility a reality.



Looked at more than a decade later, after the project was a success, Foxwood Springs Living Center in Raymore, Missouri, seemed the natural next step in NBA's development. However, Foxwood Springs provoked the strongest debate in the NBA Board of Trustees of the 1970s. Gible summarized it as "probably the hardest thing we ever got through the Board."

NBA had begun its ministry to older adults because the church needed some way of caring for the destitute widow and retired servant of the church. That was "pure religion and undefiled" in New Testament terms, even if it never attracted the same passion and support as the ministry to orphans.

Later, government involvement and pensions changed the nature of the needy population, and NBA changed accordingly. Missionaries who returned from 30–40 years on the foreign field with savings of \$1,000 and a \$61 monthly pension were not indigent, but their lives were even more precarious. NBA and Kansas Christian Home had built James H. Tilsley Manor to provide residences for these retired missionaries. Other changes had also been made: NBA had gotten into low-income housing and nursing centers because that was where the needy population was. Also, because of government involvement in the support of older adults, NBA had quit writing life-care contracts and had begun offering services that were paid for by the month.

But Foxwood Springs Living Center was a matter of building a community

Tilsley Manor, Kansas Christian Home



for people who could afford it. It was to contain only two types of housing: equity housing in which people purchased their own homes and had the right to sell them if they needed to do so; and rental apartments with a small initial payment and regular monthly charges. Foxwood Springs required a more sophisticated understanding of NBA's ministry by the NBA Board of Trustees, the staff, and the churches. NBA had learned from the nursing home experience in California that management was not enough; the difference had to be the way in which the community was infused with the spirit of the church.

Not only did Foxwood Springs necessitate a changing understanding of NBA ministry, it also involved great risk, likewise a matter of great concern to the Board. The initial capital campaign fell short. After a critical exploration of alternatives, NBA set up a development corporation and advanced the initial high-risk loans itself. No board is comfortable with that. One NBA Board member expressed his concern, "I'm against anything done in a blind alley."

In spite of the risks, Foxwood Springs Living Center did succeed. In 1987, it has a population of 635 adults, 55 or over. They live in 246 equity-based garden houses, 148 rental apartments, or in the 122-bed nursing center. The health care facility has both a residential care wing and a skilled nursing facility. It offers modern medical and therapeutic equipment serviced by professionally-trained, caring personnel. The community center has a library, shops, community rooms, and all the other facilities that are essential to the "community" of the Center. (Note: In many cases, "Center" had replaced "Home" early in the 1970s because the term was more inclusive of the total ministry of NBA on its varied campuses.)

Foxwood Springs, in the end, received few church funds or NBA funds, but the community itself is already generating considerable gift money for NBA's ministry to others. Such a result of generous care and the infusing of communities with the spirit of the church has been common in NBA's first hundred years. As NBA continues to refine and expand its ministry to older adults, the fact that Foxwood Springs will be one of the models is clear from the development of Robin Run Village in Indianapolis and PIER-H, a cooperative retirement community being ecumenically developed by NBA at Seaside, Oregon.

Bill Gibble planted seeds that would develop well-entrenched roots by the end of his tenure. The creation of a joint NBA-National Convocation of the Christian Church Task Force set the stage for responding more pointedly to Black voices. Recommendations from that task force led eventually to such innovations as the establishment of the position of Director of Social Services, the opening of Hasina House in Pittsburgh, and the management of Hollybrook Homes in Jacksonville, Florida.

In the same years, NBA became more inclusive in its leadership and more professional in its staffing. In 1979, Virginia L. Hargraves of Littleton, Colorado, became Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, the first woman to lead the NBA Board since Fannie Shedd Ayars. Later, in 1982, Hildur Skaggs of Wheeling, West Virginia, would be elected Chairperson of the Board after serving effectively on several important committees.

From the very beginning when Mattie Younkin was designated as missionary with a monthly traveling allowance of \$10, NBA has had to be concerned about obtaining adequate funds for its growing ministry. Through the years various structures were developed to serve this fund raising function and many outstanding ministers have preached the gospel of "Inasmuch. . ." As NBA entered the '70s with the greatly increased demand for resources for expansion, it became clear that fund raising had to be professionalized. Ray Heckendorn, who had



Foxwood Springs Living Center design rendering

Araminta Smith, William T. Gibble, William Fox, Ozark Range

