



The gates of old Columbia College on the grounds of Ringwood Manor in Passaic County. The area behind the gates is part of almost 1,000 acres that Cooper Union has decided to sell.

Cooper Union's 1,000-Acre Green Camp In Ringwood to Be Broken Up and Sold

By ROBERT E. TOMASSON

Cooper Union, New York City's last tuition-free private college, has decided to sell most of its 1,000-acre Green Camp in Ringwood, N. J., which had served as a retreat for students, faculty and alumni for more than 30 years.

The projected sale of all but 173 acres of the rural site in upper Passaic County will mark the break-up of the last portion of a 3,000-acre tract, the ownership of which dates back to Peter Cooper, the college's founder.

John F. White, president of Cooper Union, said the camp would be closed Saturday pursuant to a unanimous vote by the school's 11-member board of trustees.

"For years now the camp has been tremendously underutilized while our expenses have gone up. Last year, upkeep charges were \$150,000 and we feel that we cannot continue to commit our resources to maintaining the camp," Mr. White said.

May Add to Park

He said "the experts" would now explore various avenues of sale to either one developer or to individual buyers. Mr. White said he anticipated that some of the property would be purchased by the state to add to the adjacent Ringwood State Park, which also was a part of the site assembled by Peter Cooper in 1853.

While he declined to cite any anticipated sales price, Mr. White noted that prime sites in the area have been sold for about \$10,000 to \$12,000 an acre, which might indicate a

sales potential of about \$10-million for the camp site.

Two years ago, a similar decision to sell the property met with student and alumni opposition and resulted in a policy reversal by the board to hold off any decision for one year.

Mr. White and Ricardo Scofidio, an associate professor of architecture at Cooper Union who had been commissioned to do a \$20,000 study of the property, both discounted any suggestion that the decision to close and sell the camp had been timed to come after the close of the school year.

The Green Camp site nestles amid thickly forested hills and ponds at the base of the Ramapo Mountains 45 miles from Manhattan. Its 11 buildings, with a total floor space of 35,000 feet, include a vast, rustic lodge complete with stuffed birds and moose heads and numerous memorabilia from past classes at Cooper Union. All of the buildings, including various guest houses, are scheduled to be sold.

After Peter Cooper died in 1883, the 3,000-acre site was

left to Amelia, one of his two daughters. She had married Abram S. Hewitt who served as Mayor of New York City from 1887 to 1888.

The Hewitts, who had three sons and three daughters, left the property to one son, Erskine, who never married. When he died in 1936, he left the Ringwood Manor house, the Revolutionary-period home of the Coopers and Hewitts, and 1,000 acres to the state for use as a park.

Inherited by Nephew

The remainder of the property was left to Norvin H. Green, a nephew of Erskine Hewitt. Starting in 1940, he began to donate parcels of what was to total the 1,000 acres to Cooper Union.

Cooper Union, with an enrollment of 950 full-time and 250 part-time students in its art, architecture and engineering and science schools, presently has a yearly operating budget of \$4,737,000. One of its three buildings on the campus in Cooper Square, the Foundation Building, is presently undergoing a \$15-million interior renovation.

Mr. White said the school's chief source of income was an annual rent of \$1,917,000 it derives for the land it owns under the Chrysler Building. The tax-exempt status of that property, which was granted in 1858, has been under repeated attack by city officials who have sought, without success, to have it repealed in the Legislature.

"Without that tax exemption," Mr. White said, "we'd be out of business."



The New York Times/June 28, 1973