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Converting rituals: the worship of nineteenth-century camp meetings and the growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New England

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CONVERTING RITUALS:
THE WORSHIP OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY CAMP MEETINGS
AND THE GROWTH OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
IN NEW ENGLAND

by

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requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

To my grandparents, Rev. Handford Wright and Frances Edmands Wright, who made sure that I was immersed in a Christian culture that awakened me to the power of the living God at a young age.

and

To the Methodists, past, present and future, who have given or will give their lives to the “Work of God” in New England.
Soli Deo Gloria.
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Work like this never takes place in a vacuum, but comes out of a great deal of community support and encouragement. I give thanks to the Boston University Chapter of the Order of Saint Luke as it was reconstituted in 1998 for giving me my first introduction to the School of Theology, and providing me with a supportive, worshipping community for many years. I am particularly thankful for Sr. Cheryln Gates’ suggestion that the time was right for me to begin a doctoral program at Boston University.

By God’s providence Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker had just accepted her position on the Boston University faculty as I was heading into a half-time appointment so I eagerly signed up to be her first doctoral student. For the Th.D. program, I needed a minor professor and was delighted to learn that Dr. Nancy Ammerman had also recently joined the faculty of Boston University. My intended focus of study was worship and change, both how worship changes us and what it is about worship that can make congregations so resistant to some changes. In that pursuit I was blessed to also receive the significant guidance of Dr. Bruce Morrill who was then at Boston College.

I could not ask for a better pair of Doctor Mothers who have modeled excellence in scholarship and teaching, encouraged my own development as scholar and teacher, and guided me through the requirements of this degree with wisdom, patience and gracious hospitality. With their direction each phase of my degree program was purposeful and led into the next, equipping me well to research and write this dissertation. I am thankful for the opportunities each have afforded me in sharing various phases of my work with wider communities of scholars who share similar interests. I cannot thank them enough.
for keeping the doors of the academy open even as my personal and professional life unfolded. I got married just as my prospectus was accepted, and my husband and I welcomed two little girls into the world before our third anniversary, while simultaneously I resumed work as a pastor, albeit on a part-time basis. My Doctor Mothers have rejoiced in these changes and advocated on my behalf as I asked for more time to allow this dissertation to develop fully during an unusually long gestation period.

During the three years when the bishop of the New England Annual Conference appointed me only to school, and two years after that I was blessed to find employment at Boston University. For four years Dr. Westerfield Tucker hired me to serve as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for the Introduction to Christian Worship class and Dr. Dale Andrews gave me TA work in the spring for his Introduction to Preaching course. I also served as TA for Dr. Glen Messer for one semester teaching United Methodist History and Doctrine. I am also thankful for Rev. Joel Guillemette, dean of the New England Annual Conference’s Local Pastors Licensing School, for hiring me as part of the permanent staff and to teach classes on worship. These jobs have all given me experience teaching and working as part of a team.

I am also thankful to Dr. Jack Ammerman who hired me to work at the School of Theology library, to Caroline Christian who taught me the ropes of cataloging the periodicals, and to Kara Jackman who gave me an enjoyable project with the Methodist archives. Ms. Jackman also gave me easy access to the archival materials I needed for my dissertation as well as to the scanner and microfilm reader that enabled me to capture
most of my primary sources on PDF files so I could work from home, and she found answers to several questions along the way.

As I began looking for primary sources for this dissertation I was graciously received by Dale Patterson and Mark Shenise at the United Methodist Archives and History Center at Drew University where I found the manuscript diaries of Rev. Charles Merrill. The staff of the Schlessinger Library at Harvard helped me to obtain the manuscript diary of Rachel Stearns. Hospitality was also extended to me by people in the existing camp meeting communities of Martha’s Vineyard, Asbury Grove, and Hedding. I am thankful that the late Dr. Charles Estes found me during his own exploration of camp meetings on Cape Cod and first introduced me to Ann Taves’ work. He and his wife Kathleen were gracious hosts, giving me a tour of the Yarmouthport camp meeting.

I am thankful to have had the opportunity to make the acquaintance of fellow scholars of Methodism at the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, and of liturgists at the North American Academy of Liturgy. I have had the privilege of presenting portions of my research within both communities, and I met Dr. Ron Anderson who helped me to publish my first article in Doxology. I also presented two different stages of my research to the Social Science and Religion Network at Boston University.

My life during this time was enriched by several friends: housemates Susan Forshey, Larry Whitney, Anissa Glaser-Bacon, and Clare Hoffman Caldwell. Fellow doctoral students Ben Hartley, Eric Baldwin, MiSoon Im, Angel Santiago, Kevin Taylor, Julian Gotobed, and Jung Kim shared their experience and let me sit in on their
dissertation defenses and celebrations. Also the cohort of liturgy students who started with Dr. Westerfield Tucker just after me: Jim Olson, Beth Spaulding, Erika Stalcup, Steph Budwey, and Ryan Danker. Kristen White, Pauline Jennette, Doug Tzan, Kevin Taylor, and Kudzai and Pippa Mupunzwana have also blessed my life during these years.

I am thankful to the Cabinet of the New England Annual Conference for the gift of time to get through my course work and exams while being appointed only to school, and for the part-time appointments I have had since. For the supportive lay leadership and congregations of Wesley UMC, Medford, and South Walpole UMC, which included two maternity leaves and a third leave of equal length to give concentrated attention to this dissertation, I am grateful. I am indebted to District Superintendent Rev. Rene Perez, to the South Walpole UMC worship committee, and to Lay Ministers Steve DiMattei, Dianne Langer and Sharon Gunn who planned worship and worked with nine outstanding guest preachers during this leave.

I am deeply appreciative of Stacey Battles de Ramos who gave me the invaluable gift of transcribing Rachel Stearns’ handwritten diary, and to Zach Woods who donated time and a critical eye to proofread early drafts of some chapters.

As much as this work has been a community effort, it has most deeply impacted the lives of my family. My daughters Grace and Salem have made do with less Mommy time in the past few years, but we have been blessed with the good care given by Christy MacDonald, Rose Cook and the South Walpole Community Preschool. We were also assisted greatly when my parents, Nana and Papa, graciously donated several full weeks to their care. But most of all it has impacted the day to day life of my husband Joseph
Elewononi who has washed more dishes, changed more diapers and done more grocery shopping, house cleaning and cooking in these first few years of marriage than most married men from Kabba do in a lifetime, all to afford me time to give significant parts of myself to my ministry and this scholarship. I look forward to being able to reallocate my time and to give a bigger portion to my family.

Through it all I have been led, supported and gifted by the grace of God whose power working in my life has already done infinitely more than I could have asked or imagined. May this dissertation contribute in some way to promoting the work of God here in New England and be a blessing to others.
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(Order No.               )

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the practice of the camp meeting as a significant factor in the growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church in nineteenth-century New England. Such a comprehensive investigation into camp meetings in New England has never been done before. Also, with the exception of one book and one other recent dissertation, the general history of Methodism in New England is a topic that was overlooked for nearly a century. This research helps to fill those gaps.

Many scholars give credit to camp meetings for fostering conversion, though the focus has generally been on camps held in the American South and the western frontier. After briefly recounting the rise of Methodism and camp meetings in the United States, the thesis turns to a more specific focus on the rise of Methodism and camp meetings in
New England prior to 1823. *Zion’s Herald* newspaper provides a steady and previously untapped source of primary information about camp meetings in New England from its first appearance in 1823 to well into the twentieth century.

After discussion of some key developments of New England Methodism relevant to camp meetings between 1823 and 1871, a thick description of one camp meeting in 1823 is presented to show how the many parts worked together. This is followed by an account of aspects of the camp meetings that might be classified broadly as ritual, how these changed over time, and the impact they had on the process of identity formation at the camps.

The spotlight is then directed toward the liturgical aspects of camp meetings as practiced in New England. These include components of worship practices common to Methodist congregations of the period as they gathered for prayer meetings, Sunday worship and quarterly conferences, such as preaching, praying, singing, and love feasts, and also those acts of worship developed specifically for camp meetings such as dedicating the grounds, and the closing ritual procession and “parting hand.” As with the ritual practices, attention is again given both to how these worship practices influenced worshippers, and how they changed over time.

Finally the interpretive framework of “poetic discourse” offered by Stephen Cooley is used to analyze the most potent ritual elements involved in the process of conversion and church growth in conversation with contemporary scholars in the fields of sociology and ritual studies.
In the end this study shows not only the factors that fostered conversions and church growth, but also how the camp meetings gradually lost their potency as they changed over time.
Starting when I was five years old, I spent the last full week of August at camp with my grandparents. We would rise early in the morning on the day of the journey and set off from Schenectady, New York, to Geneva Point Center on Lake Winnipesaukee in New Hampshire. Taking a different way every year, we always passed through quaint New England towns, wound along mountainous roads through the Berkshires or Green Mountains toward the White Mountains, and stopped somewhere for a picnic. Since I had begun looking forward to this pilgrimage at Christmas time, when we finally turned onto Moultonborough Neck Road to Geneva Point Center the anticipation made my heart pound. As soon as we parked the car I would leap out to hug dear friends I had not seen since the summer before. Not only was I friends with children my age at this camp, but I was on a first name basis with all of the adults.

We all came to camp to experience “kingdom living.” This included singing spiritual songs, listening to male and female “speakers” give testimony to what God had been doing in their lives, and being part of small prayer groups called “prayer laboratories” where we practiced different kinds of prayer. There was also a daily time for creative expression with writing, music, clay or paints. We were encouraged to pick an activity we did not think we were good at and let the Holy Spirit create through us. My favorite time was “devotions in motion” where we took off our shoes like Moses, for the dewy lawn was “holy ground.” The children were brought forward and the leader always reminded the group that “unless you become as a little child you might not enter the kingdom of heaven.” I delighted in being one of the little children, leading the way as
we skipped across the lawn, or danced the hora. After we stretched our backs, we walked
tall and greeted one another, “Good morning Saint Ann!” “Good morning Saint Sarah!”
No Mr. or Mrs. here; we were all saints living in the kingdom of God.

My grandparents sought out this camp to share with me because they had both
attended Methodist camp meetings when they were young. Grandma’s family were
members of the College Avenue Methodist Church in Somerville, Massachusetts, and
made their regular pilgrimage to Asbury Grove each summer when she was growing up.
When my grandparents first visited a Camp Farthest Out it felt like home, and when they
discovered a CFO on Lake Winnipesauke that welcomed families they committed to
bringing me there every year.

This personal life experience has given me a deep connection to the subject matter
of this study. Though it was not a Methodist camp meeting, CFO had several key
features that are very similar. Though the discourse did not feature John Wesley’s way of
salvation, the camp used a particular discourse to encourage people to move deeper out
into their Christian faith. Most of all this was the place where I was sure to hear about
what God was doing in the lives of the ordinary people who gathered, and I was taught
how to listen for God’s voice when I prayed. It was a key influence on my spiritual
formation. Somehow this place of pilgrimage populated by ordinary people transformed
us into a communion of saints whose true home was the reign of heaven. Like
nineteenth-century Methodists, participants of Camp Farthest Out had a language to
describe the agency, will, and grace of God in their lives and in the world around them.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAJZH Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald

MWJ Maine Wesleyan Journal

NECH New England Christian Herald

ZH Zion’s Herald

ZHWJ Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal
CHAPTER 1

CAMP MEETINGS AS CONVERTING RITUAL

Identifying Factors of Church Growth

We feel that thou art here,
    In righteousness;
O give the hearing ear,
    Thy people bless:
In power, O Lord, come down,
    And claim us for thy own
And here erect thy throne,
    Thy church to bless

It is no secret that the United Methodist Church in the United States has been in a long period of decline, almost since its formation in 1968 when the Evangelical United Brethren joined together with the Methodist Church. The decline is across the board, from the number of professing members, to the average weekly worship attendance, participation in Sunday school, the number of baptisms, and the number of full time appointments for the clergy.

The story is the same in New England. If anything, this northeastern region of American United Methodism has been in greater decline for a longer period of time. As many long-time members have been dying, the number of new members, particularly those who are newly converted to the Church (not just transferring their membership from another church) has been negligible. Rev. Rick McKinley, the director of

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1 Enoch Mudge, *The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book: Containing a Variety of Original Hymns, Suitable to Be Used at Camp-Meetings; and at Other Times in Private and Social Devotions* (Boston: Joseph Burdankin, 1818), 34.
Congregational Development for the New England Annual Conference,\textsuperscript{2} has cited one projection that in fifty years the number of United Methodist congregations in New England will decline by half—from about 600 today to about 300.\textsuperscript{3} One of the programs recently employed by the New England Annual Conference\textsuperscript{4} to address the decline has shown that the churches are particularly lacking in the areas of “passionate spirituality” and “inspiring worship.”\textsuperscript{5}

Rapid Growth of the Past

Things were very different for the Methodism\textsuperscript{6} of the past. From the time that Methodism was introduced to the American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century

\textsuperscript{2} An annual conference is a subdivision of the United Methodist Church in the United States. United Methodist clergy belong to the annual conference rather than the local church, and agree to be available to be appointed by the bishop to whichever location within the conference that they are needed.

\textsuperscript{3} Rick McKinley in a sermon at the United Methodist Church in South Walpole, Massachusetts, given on September 8, 2013.


\textsuperscript{5} On average, “passionate spirituality” received 31 points on a 100-point scale. “Inspiring worship” tied for third place at 43 points, which in Natural Church Development (NCD) terms is not very good either. Curtis Brown, *Natural Church Development Scores* (Lawrence, MA: New England Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2008). This dissertation is not intended to evaluate, nor fully embrace, the terms used in NCD. Schwartz’s terms are rather obtusely defined and his claims and methodologies are academically problematic. See Rene Erwich, “Missional Churches: Identical Global ‘Plants’ or Locally Grown ‘Flowers’?,” *Transformation: An International Evangelical Dialogue on Mission and Ethics* 21 (2004): 80-91; A. Burge Troxel, “Natural Church Development,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998): 127-128. But these terms, “passionate spirituality” and “inspiring worship” seem particularly useful to show how this study of nineteenth-century camp meetings is relevant to the contemporary church.

\textsuperscript{6} The history of Methodism in America is one of many divisions and mergers. This dissertation is primarily focused on what was first called the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), though some mention of Methodists who split off from the MEC will be noted from time to time. The United Methodist Church is
through the nineteenth century it spread like wildfire, taking in many new members, and playing an influential role in the Second Great Awakening. Yet by the mid-twentieth century, membership numbers began a steady decline in Methodist congregations. At this critical point in the life of the United Methodist Church, it is worthwhile to spend some time analyzing the earlier period of rapid growth, when Methodist spirituality was passionate and Methodist worship was inspiring, to learn about the original factors leading to church growth. Since the social and religious culture of New England has been and is still unique when compared to that of the mid-Atlantic, southern or western regions of America, a close look at the growth of Methodism in New England in particular can shed light on methods of church growth that have worked particularly well in this region.

This dissertation examines one major factor that has been given much credit for the growth of Methodism in the United States: the unique practice of camp meeting as introduced, promoted and evaluated by Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) leaders, with a particular focus on the camp meetings in New England. When the topic of camp meetings is introduced in most standard American histories, it is presented as a phenomenon that took place on the western frontier as part of the Second Great

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7 The very term “awakening” comes from terminology used extensively by Methodism’s founders John and Charles Wesley. It is central to their understanding of the way of salvation.

8 The MEC became a distinct denomination in 1784 at a conference of Methodist preachers initiated by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement in England.
Awakening. It is often confined to a short period of time in the early nineteenth century. But there is clear, if unexamined, evidence that Methodist camp meetings were a major part of the ministry of the MEC in New England as well, affecting the cities and countryside. Furthermore, the influence of camp meetings in New England lasted through the entire nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. The leaders of the denomination credited camp meetings for much of the “Work of God” in the New England states, and they strove to hold at least one per district every year for well over a century. The leaders of the MEC in New England were convinced that camp meetings were a major factor in the growth of the church. This dissertation takes a close look at the camp meetings in New England to see how they were organized and used by the leaders of the MEC to foster identity formation and church growth.

**Camp Meeting Studies**

A detailed description of the rise of camp meetings is better left to Chapter Two, but it is important here to locate this dissertation within the body of scholarship that has been focused on camp meetings. The majority of this scholarly work falls into two categories. The first and most common place to find mention of camp meetings is in surveys of American history, and American church history in particular. Other scholarship looks at the phenomenon of camp meeting through several other social science lenses.

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9 A district is a geographical region under the supervision of a presiding elder. A bishop is placed in charge of multiple districts so that the presiding elders are seen as “arms” of the bishop.
Historical Accounts

_The Story of American Awakenings and Revivals_

In his *Religious History of the American People*, Sydney Ahlstrom placed camp meetings in a section called “The Golden Day of Democratic Evangelicalism.” Significantly, the illustration at the start of this section is an outdoor scene of a preacher addressing a congregation of men and women from a preaching stand.\(^{10}\) One can find camp meetings mentioned specifically in Ahlstrom’s chapter called “The Great Revival in the West,” and the phenomenon is treated in a way common to most American histories which have been influenced by Catherine Cleveland and Peter Mode.\(^{11}\) They adopted Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis that the uniquely harsh way of life experienced by people who had migrated to the western frontier accounts for the rise of individualism in American culture. Cleveland spun out Turner’s description to posit a pervasive need on the frontier for emotional solace. In her telling, this need was met by ministers who pastorally softened the harsher tenets of Calvinism as they preached to large gatherings at camp meetings.\(^{12}\) Ahlstrom was just one of many modern historians who adopted this theory and perpetuated it.

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\(^{10}\) This is a ubiquitous symbol of camp meetings. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 385.


By his categorizing of revival camp meetings and Methodists among other “popular denominations” primarily on the western frontier at this period, Ahlstrom seemed to disconnect both camp meetings and Methodists from religious developments in other parts of the country. His chapter “The Second Great Awakening in New England” focused only on orthodox Congregationalists leaders, as if the two regions and denominations had no influence on each other. Ahlstrom also followed the lead of previous historians and suggested that the camp meetings had become ineffective nationwide by the 1840s and that the few that remained became nothing but secular resorts.

In *Religion in America*, Winthrop Hudson and John Corrigan affirmed that camp meetings were part of the Second Great Awakening, but still depicted them as a feature of frontier religious life. Their version of history, like Ahlstrom’s, pinned the start of the camp meetings to a Presbyterian revival in Kentucky which led to the most famous camp meeting in American history. Known for its location, the Cane Ridge camp meeting of 1801 drew an astonishing crowd of between 10,000 and 30,000 participants. The

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13 “Orthodox” was a term used by some Congregationalists to distinguish themselves from Unitarians and Universalists at a time when their denomination was splitting over doctrine. Ahlstrom lists Congregational clergymen Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Nathaniel William Taylor (1786-1858), Bennet Tyler (1783-1858), Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844) and Lyman Beecher (1775-1862) as leaders of the Second Awakening, without noting that all of them were working in New England as the Methodists were “invading” the same territory under the leadership of Jesse Lee. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 418-422. This observation was made by Richard D. Shiels, “Methodist Invasion of Congregational New England,” in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001), 257-280.


religious significances of Cane Ridge has often been overshadowed by focus on the social pandemonium that broke out in such a large gathering.

The main point that most historical surveys make about camp meetings is that they are part of the story of the rapid growth of the Protestant churches in the early days of the new American republic, particularly among the Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists. In this telling, the first two denominations dropped the practice rather quickly and camp meetings did not last in a significant way even among Methodists beyond the 1840s. But while the camp meetings were being employed, the growth of the MEC far outpaced the nation’s population growth. Statistical evidence is often cited as proof. “Between the American Revolution and 1845, the United States grew from 2.5 million to 20 million—about eight-fold. But the number of clergy per capita tripled, from 1:1,500 to 1:500.”¹⁶ The trouble with such brief treatment in general histories is they often led to inaccuracies and caricatures, highlighting the bizarre or the dramatic aspects of some camp meetings, and ignoring the fact that camp meetings were held all over the United States and attracted large crowds, from settled communities, for most, if not all, of the nineteenth century and beyond.

In-depth Histories of Camp Meetings

The first in-depth historical treatment of the camp meeting phenomena in America was published in 1955. Charles A. Johnson’s *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion’s Harvest Time* was intended to offer a more accurate historical account of the camp meeting as both the cause of revival on the American frontier and as “one of the most important social institutions in the trans-Allegheny West in the first half of the nineteenth century.”17 Though groundbreaking in its use of primary documentation and focused treatment, Johnson’s work still took a limited view of camp meetings as part of the history of settlement of the western frontier. This “faulty assessment” influenced other historians including the Methodists themselves.18 In his last chapter, Johnson also pins the decline of the “backwoods revival” to the 1840s. “The once-great institution had reached the final stage of gradual but inevitable decline.”19 Even so, he depicted the rise of camp meetings as mysteriously spontaneous. “One day the frontier was a godless place… and the next it was all aflame with religious zeal.”20 Johnson’s bibliography showed that he did not consult primary Methodists sources such as *Zion’s Herald* newspaper after 1833.

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20 Ibid., 25.
Historical treatment of camp meetings has become more refined over time as scholars have taken care to look even more closely from more specific points of view. Scholars of Methodist history such as Russell Richey have poured over a far greater wealth of documentation than Johnson probably had available to him, and have demonstrated that far from being an “adopted child” of the Methodists, camp meetings most likely arose from the activities associated with Methodist quarterly meetings. The revivalistic style of preaching used by Methodist circuit riders and their determination to preach anywhere they could gain an audience meant that their influence was not limited to the western frontier, but was a major factor in the Second Great Awakening everywhere that Methodists went.

Lester Ruth picked up on this thesis at the end of his study of early Methodist worship at quarterly meetings before 1825. Looking at practices in that period he compared the quarterly meetings to a school where Methodists learned to combine worship and evangelism in a large extended setting, and saw camp meetings as a kind of graduation to something larger. Ruth also paid attention to questions of space, time, the

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21 Ibid., 82.

22 Bishops appointed Methodist preachers to serve several communities which they would navigate through in a circuit. Quarterly meetings were held by all the Methodist preachers and laity on a circuit of congregations. They typically lasted three days and included several times of worship and intense prayer as well as business meetings. Richey, “From Quarterly to Camp Meeting.”


24 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 187.
“rubrics of assembly,“25 and parting rituals at camp meetings. As a result of his findings, Lester Ruth called for a revised history of the Second Great Awakening that would include recognition that: 1) camp meetings were a national phenomenon; 2) Methodist quarterly meetings played a role in the development of camp meetings; 3) the specific practices of camp meetings had been longstanding features of American Methodist worship since the 1770s; 4) camping allowed for longer protracted meetings; 5) other denominations, not just Methodists, saw the worship practices as novel; and 6) the name “camp meeting” led to active promotion of the revival, but did not cause the revival to start.26

Widening the historical scope from the origins of camp meeting to their continued use into the twentieth century, Karen Westerfield Tucker offered an overview of the development of camp meeting practice in her survey *American Methodist Worship.*27 Placing them among other “special services of worship that expressed and reinforced [Methodist] denominational identity,” including love feasts, watch night,28 and quarterly meetings,29 she noted that Francis Asbury embraced the camp meetings as a means to combat “false doctrine.” Camp meetings were “cultivated throughout the nineteenth

25 These were the rules and regulations for the camps and served to create the camp meeting congregation. Ibid., 196-197.

26 Ruth, “Reconsidering the Emergence.”


28 A service held on New Year’s Eve when members renew their covenant.

century by all the different branches of Methodism…and attended by whites, blacks, and native peoples, sometimes together and sometimes apart.”

Westerfield Tucker also chronicled the physical design that emerged as Methodists began to construct permanent structures on camp meeting grounds that were used repeatedly year after year. Furthermore, she observed that the camp meetings featured love feasts, and “every evening had the potential of being a watch night.” Other Methodist rituals such as baptism, marriage, the Lord’s Supper and reception of members were often imported into the camp meetings. Preaching, prayer meetings and the singing of hymns and spiritual songs were the central activity, and “kinetic responses” were “generated in reaction to the spiritual and emotional intensity” of the worship.

Another author who has contributed invaluable service to the historical study of camp meeting is Kenneth O. Brown. He has compiled a working bibliography on the subject and a working list of camp meeting sites (former and existing) across America. Brown’s careful work has allowed expansion of the definition of “camp meetings” from criteria that assumed Cane Ridge must be the first one, to a more inclusive definition that

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30 Ibid., 75.

31 A watch night was an all-night prayer vigil that Methodists engaged in, particularly, but not only, on New Year’s Eve.

32 Westerfield Tucker described the love feasts as “closed” which is not the case in the camp meetings reviewed for this study. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship*, 76-77.

a camp meeting was a series of outdoor religious exercises that combined the elements of sacrament, preaching and revival, and required the participants to camp. As a result, Brown has been able to count as many as seventy separate camp meetings held by the Methodists before the Kentucky revival began in 1799.  

_Narrowly Focused Accounts—Cane Ridge and New England_

Historians working outside of Methodism and on specific regions have also contributed to the body of knowledge about camp meetings and the role of church leaders in revivals. In *Citizens of Zion*, Ellen Eslinger used a wide range of primary documentation to provide a thick description of the region surrounding Cane Ridge. Thus she was able to give a far more plausible account of how such an event could occur on the “western frontier.” Among her findings Eslinger claimed that by the time of the revival of 1800, Kentucky no longer bore much resemblance to its frontier beginnings, particularly not according to the criteria set by Frederick Jackson Turner. By the time of the Great Revival, though there were still some significant social and political tensions, westerners were “safe in their homes,” and had a “secure” economic future. A second fundamental insight Eslinger worked with is that the camp meeting revivalism at the time of Cane Ridge was significantly different from both earlier evangelical forms and later manifestations. Accordingly, her study “tightened the temporal scale of analysis,” and used historical methods to reconstruct carefully the setting and the phenomenon of Cane

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Her close attention to details specific to the region of Kentucky is admirable, and her assertion that “much of the economic, political, and social turmoil experienced by Kentuckians in the late eighteenth century was not unique to the western settlements but was found in varying degrees throughout the nation” is enlightening for it “explains why so many parts of the new nation experienced religious revival” during the era of the new republic.

In a similar fashion, Richard Shiels has carefully explored primary documents related to revivals in Goshen, Connecticut, and Andover, Massachusetts. While not focused on Methodists or camp meetings, Shiels’ study has produced evidence that the “resuscitation of Congregationalism in the same decade in which Methodists came to New England” is no coincidence, and the field is ripe for harvesting even more evidence of the relationships between Methodist newcomers and the established congregations in the New England region.

36 Ibid., xii-xiii.
37 Ibid., xvi.
39 Shiels, “Methodist Invasion,” 257-280. Shiels’ earlier work documented the “New Divinity” Congregational clergy in Connecticut; see Richard Douglas Shiels, “The Connecticut Clergy in the Second Great Awakening” (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1976). After his thesis, Shiels reviewed the contemporary work of Paul Conklin, Leigh Eric Schmidt and Marilyn Westerkamp that all draw connections between camp meetings and Scots-Irish Presbyterian worship forms as they developed in America; see “America’s Pentecost,” Cross Currents 42 (1992): 279-301. But then Shiels’ scholarship started to consider Methodist influence on the Second Great Awakening, asserting that as much as the New Divinity leaders were trying to “show that [their] revivals were not like Methodist camp meetings,” they had been greatly influenced by the Methodist preachers roaming around New England; see Shiels, “Origins of the Second Great Awakening in New England,” 257-280. All of this led to the pointed argument that the Methodists “invaded” New England.
Sociological Theories of Camp Meeting Religion

Historians examining camp meetings have often drawn on social science theories in their work. Ellen Eslinger’s review of camp meeting histories identified the influence of Émile Durkheim and Arnold van Gennep in the explanations historians have given for camp meetings. Durkheim believed that religion could affect social reality through ritual, and scholars who read Durkheim, such as Catherine Bell, came to see ritual as the site where “collective beliefs and ideals are simultaneously generated, experienced, and affirmed as real by the community.” Eslinger noted that traditional church history has focused much more on theology than on ritual, and when historians have factored ritual into explanations of the camp meeting they have generally paid attention only to one aspect of ritual: namely the rite of passage.

Camp Meetings as Liminal Spaces: Threats of Hell-Fire and Songs of Joy

A rite of passage, according to Arnold van Gennep, has three basic stages. An individual is first separated from his or her initial status or condition (i.e., child, bachelor, wife), then goes through a liminal stage characterized by emotional tension and finally is reintegrated into the community with a different status (i.e., adult, husband, widow).

Among the work most influenced by rites of passage theories, developed by van Gennep


41 Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, xvii.

and expanded upon by Victor Turner, was Dickson Bruce’s often-cited camp meeting study *And they All Sang Hallelujah.*

In his research, Bruce described conversion from sinner to saint as a rite of passage stimulated by the tension between worldly behavior and “religion.” Camp meetings served to separate sinners from “life in the world” at the same time they came to know themselves as a sinners. “This period of ambiguity constituted the most important aspect of the conversion experience, for it was a period when the structural framework of an individual’s life was negated as he passed from one state to another.”

Bruce critiqued the historians and sociologists who made so much of the camp meeting’s frontier origins and sensational qualities, stating “that one often loses sight of its religious character and the content of its religious appeal.” He aimed to show how religious symbols employed in the camp meetings “made the emotional appeals to felt needs of the believers.” His book set out to trace the connection between the normative structure of ritual behavior and the goal of the camp meeting. Bruce then consulted the spiritual songs written for camp meeting as evidence of how the plain-folk interpreted

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46 Ibid., 7.
what they were doing at camp meeting.47 Embracing the typical depiction of the southern frontier as a context of tension and instability, Bruce suggested that conversion at camp meetings offered a new way of life, giving people “alternative goals and a different way of looking at self and others.”48

Bruce used the concept of the rite of passage to portray how individuals attending a camp meeting could be led from a state of conviction of sins, to a liminal period of “mourning”49 for their sins, to a state of assurance which “put the individual in a new relationship with the things of this world, placing those things in an order devised by the divine.”50 He then examined the spiritual choruses added on to older hymns,51 arguing that the choruses were “group religious statements which were sung by those who had been converted.” He described the motivation for conversion as coming from the sharp tension between the positive joy of these songs and the preaching which threatened hell-fire. This created a psychological dilemma for the “mourners,” pressing them to make a choice between eternal life and eternal damnation.52

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47 Ibid., 10-11. Bruce argued that camp meeting as a cultural innovation was a product of “plain-folk” because it was led by and aimed toward “plain-folk.” He said that Methodist and Baptists preachers, often lacking in formal education, were also “plain-folk.”

48 Ibid., 34-35.

49 A term used synonymously with “anxious” to indicate those persons who had been awakened were in a state of repentance for sins, but had yet to have their own experience of God’s pardoning grace.

50 Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 69.

51 For example, the refrain “Marching to Zion” added on to Isaac Watts’ “Come ye That Love the Lord.”

52 Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 96-97.
Bruce’s assessment may have some merit, but he wrongly assumed (without any supporting documentation) that particular spiritual songs in the camp meeting song books he reviewed were actually sung. Anyone who worships regularly in a tradition that uses printed hymnals or song books knows that only a fraction of the songs are actually known and used by any particular congregation. Thus the nature of the tension in Bruce’s work is more in the content of the songbooks than in any proven experience of the participants.

Camp Meetings as Sacred Spaces

Another major addition to camp meeting literature is the work of architect Ellen Weiss. Her dissertation, later published as City in the Woods, employed a sociological perspective on the design of the famous Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting. The uniquely American arrangement of sacred space grabbed the interest of architects as early as 1809.53 Weiss describes how the cottages and paths were laid out in an unusual “radial concentric scheme” at Martha’s Vineyard and how the plan was adopted at several other camp meetings as “the direct projection of the usual pattern of action and energy at a revival.”54 While this interesting study does not connect much with the questions at the heart of this dissertation, Weiss’s work does contribute to the broader study of American camp meetings. City in the Woods reveals that camp meetings have had a far greater impact on American culture than many historians have acknowledged. Wesleyan Grove

54 Ibid., 32.
on Martha’s Vineyard has been the breeding ground for a uniquely American style of architecture, a model for city planning, and an inspiration for the growth of leisure time activity taken up by a growing American middle class.

Camp Meeting Discourse

After reviewing and evaluating all the primary data for this study, the theme that resonates most with prior research centers on the development and use of a particular kind of Christian discourse. This will be explored fully in Chapter Five, but a brief exploration of the earlier studies on which I will build is in order here.

In 1994 Steven Cooley used linguistics, sociology and anthropology to explore the “poetic” language of camp meetings. He documented three “poetic strategies” (romantic, meditational and metaphysical) and described how Victorian camp meeting participants were endowed with the knowledge of a sizeable and complex metaphysical symbolism to make sense of and enhance their religious experience. The primary sources of this dissertation show such discourse at work among New England Methodists even in the antebellum period.

Discourse is more than language spoken, sung, written, heard or read. It also encompasses performance. Troy Messenger earned his doctorate in performance studies with a dissertation about Ocean Grove camp meeting in New Jersey. Using the ideas of Don Handelman, Messenger looked at Ocean Grove as a place where “the performance

of holiness created by the leaders of the community and facilitated by [such a] unique performance space allowed large numbers of guests to model perfection together.”

William Courtland Johnson lifted up the likelihood that much of the distinctive performative discourse that was prevalent in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Methodist worship, including camp meetings, has African roots. His dissertation, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation’: Camp Meeting Revivalism and the Color Line,” paid attention to an often ignored link between the kinetic aspects of camp meeting worship and African religion brought to America by the slaves. In particular, Johnson argued that the use of circles, dance and other dissociative ritual (often referred to as a “shout”) was key to the success of camp meetings. Johnson showed that camp meeting ritual elements such as circle dancing, prayer circles, handshakes and grand processions all have roots in African religious tradition. Even the placement of tents in a circular form would be seen as a means of spiritual protection in West African culture.

Finally, Ann Taves’ *Fits, Trances, & Visions* looked specifically (though not only) at the worship practices of “Shouting Methodists.” She described how the worship found at camp meetings shaped both the ways people experienced religion and how they

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57 William Courtland Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation’: Camp Meeting Revivalism and the Color Line, 1799-1825” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Riverside, 1997).

58 See Chapter Two for more on this topic.
explained their experience. Taves and these other historians have paid attention to the discourse and embodied experience of camp meetings in ways that help to inform the analysis that follows.

The present study, then, adds to the body of literature about American camp meetings by taking a close look at the camp meetings organized by the leaders of the MEC in New England. While the focus on a region not typically associated with camp meetings makes this study unique, it is also different from other studies because it is designed to answer a more focused question. Namely, how is it that actual worship practices of these camp meetings functioned to produce changes in individuals (those who experienced justification, and those who experienced sanctification), and change to an institution (the dramatic growth of membership in the MEC in New England)? Such a study is made possible because there is a virtually untapped source of consistently presented, detailed information about the specific practice of camp meeting in New England spanning about 150 years, *Zion’s Herald* newspaper.

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Methodology

Zion’s Herald as a Rich Source of Primary Material

Preliminary Study

The research for this dissertation began in 2005 with an exploratory study of New England camp meetings as reported in Zion’s Herald, a Methodist newspaper published in Boston and held in the Boston University School of Theology archives. Zion’s Herald was started by Methodist Episcopal clergy in 1823 and was published weekly, providing continuous coverage of their Church in New England until 1970. Critical for this study, it included in-depth coverage of the camp meetings planned and held in the region. In any given year of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one can find announcements of upcoming camp meetings, general articles reflecting on the practice of camp meeting, and, in later years, even ads for camp meeting songbooks and other amenities for sale. Reports of some, though not all, of the meetings were also published, including several that chronicle the events of each day in great detail.

The initial exploratory study was a review of everything about camp meetings in volume two of Zion’s Herald published in 1824, and then contrasting those meetings with the ones described in volume 104 published in 1926. Though Zion’s Herald is no longer published and there is no comparable source of news about Methodism in New England today, there are several camp meetings still operating in New England. In the initial

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60 The choice of the second date was not completely random. The author’s grandmother grew up attending Asbury Grove in Hamilton, Massachusetts, with her family as a girl. She was there as a young woman of 16 in 1926.
study, three of the existing meetings were explored through participant observation: Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts; Asbury Grove in Hamilton, Massachusetts; and Hedding in Epping, New Hampshire. What was most striking from the perspective of a liturgical scholar, was that originally whole camp meetings could be classified as very long acts of worship, and the earlier Methodist leaders enthusiastically insisted that camp meetings were a vital tool for church growth. The worship in these camp meetings was inspiring, and the spirituality of the participants was passionate.

In contrast, by 1926, although many New England Methodists were still attending the camp meetings each year, the conversion of people outside of the MEC no longer seemed to be the primary aim of the meetings. Furthermore, lots of other activities had crept into the camp meeting experience that could not be classified as Christian worship, including daily “sports, contests, games and recreations” parades, governor’s day, nightly camp fires and illumination nights. In the twenty-first century, the existing

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62 Only interrupted by eating and sleeping. See a full description of this in Chapter Three.

63 J[ames] N[elson] S[earver], “Claremont Junction Camp-Meeting,” ZH (22 September 1926): 1221. Many newspaper articles, like this one, are signed by the author’s initials, or by first initial and last name. Through the use of appointment records and other information I have generally been able to deduce the author’s name.

64 “High-Water Mark at Old East Livermore,” ZH (22 September 1926): 1248. Some newspaper articles, like this one, were unsigned, others were untitled, and a few were published without a title or an author.

65 Governors of the respective states spent one day at Asbury Grove and Sterling camp meetings in Massachusetts and the Wilmot camp meeting in New Hampshire in 1926 where they were treated with honor and invited to speak.

66 Illumination night, still practiced at some camp meetings today, involves decorating the camp with colorful lanterns so that in the evening the grounds look like a “fairy land.” Weiss, City in the Woods,
camp meetings in New England, while still populated by some United Methodists, are not a typical part of the average lay or clergy person’s experience, and worship is only one type of the many activities from which to choose.

**Focus of the Question**

Because the aim of this dissertation is to examine closely the camp meeting in New England during the time when the majority of the days at any camp meeting were spent in acts of communal worship, and the meetings were perceived as a means for church growth, the time period has been limited to the nineteenth century. But this study is intended to be of use to the United Methodist Church today, and particularly valuable to the New England Conference. The question driving the research is to identify practices that made up a typical camp meeting experience such that countless “sinners were awakened,” and “backsliders reclaimed” while the faithful were “quickened and sanctified” or even claimed to have “attained the blessing of perfect love.” Zion’s Herald promises to yield answers.

The term “conversion” today often conjures up an individual’s personal experience. But this is not the main focus of this study. What the articles about camp meetings in New England, while still populated by some United Methodists, are not a typical part of the average lay or clergy person’s experience, and worship is only one type of the many activities from which to choose.

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**Notes:**
122. Martha’s Vineyard held their first Illumination Night in 1869 and it became an annual event. “From then on no summer was complete without it.” Sally W. Dagnall, Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association, 1835-1985 (Oak Bluff, MA: The Association, 1984), 40. While these activities might still be seen by sociologists as ritual they are not clearly related to Christian practice and thought.

67 “Concord, Vt,” ZH (4 October 1826): [2]. Some volumes of Zion’s Herald have no pagination. The page number of the issue is in brackets to help the reader locate the article.

68 Just one of many examples is reported by William Kimball, “Leyden Camp-Meeting,” ZH (7 October 1835): 159.
meetings in *Zion’s Herald* shed light on is conversion from an institutional perspective. Because *Zion’s Herald* was a newspaper created by Methodist Episcopal clergy, most of the correspondents writing about camp meeting were also Methodist clergy. The conversions about which they were writing were not just of individuals becoming Christians, but also of apostates being wooed back to the church, and those who were still active in the church, including the leaders, being renewed and experiencing deeper levels of faith and greater enthusiasm for participation in the Christian community. A term, other than “conversion,” that better encompasses all the changes fostered in the lives of individuals by camp meetings is “identity formation.” From the preachers’ perspectives camp meetings generated passionate spirituality for whole congregations and communities and often led to months of inspiring worship. Church leaders firmly believed that their congregations grew and new ones were formed because of camp meetings.

The initial comparative study of camp meetings in 1824 and 1926 revealed that there was a change in camp meeting practices and emphasis over time. The evidence indicated that the change would be gradual, so the original plan was to begin looking at every third year of *Zion’s Herald* until the focus of the camp meetings was no longer on conversion. By the time the reports for 1862 were added, however, the study had reached a point of data saturation so that the primary question about the converting rituals of camp meetings could be answered. But 1862 was right in the middle of the American Civil War and American culture was dramatically different before and after this war, so the year 1871 was added to get a glimpse of how that year’s camp meetings might be
different than those in the antebellum period. As a result, data from sixteen years of reports on camp meetings, spanning nearly fifty years, is the main source for this study.\(^{69}\)

The span of the data allows one to see what ritual practices were maintained or adapted, which ones were newly initiated, and which ones fell out of use over a long period of time.

**Zion’s Herald as the Primary Source**

Although *Zion’s Herald* [ZH] will serve as the generic term for this source, the publication had a rough start, which led to several name changes including: *The Christian Advocate and Journal* and *Zion’s Herald* [CAJZH]; the *New England Herald* [NEH]; *New England Christian Herald* [NECH]; *The Maine Wesleyan Journal* [MWJ]; and *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal* [ZHWJ].\(^{70}\) *The Christian Advocate and Journal and The New England Herald* [CAJZH] were merged with the *New York paper* to form *The Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald*.\(^{70}\) The Christian Advocate and Journal and

\(^{69}\) The change to a focus different than conversion had begun to be manifest, but conversion was still a clearly stated aim in 1862, and even in 1871.

\(^{70}\) In the summer of 1822, the New England Conference formally began to consider publishing a religious paper in Boston. A committee chose Rev. John R. Cotting as the first editor and arranged with Moore & Prouse to print weekly. The first issue was published on January 9, 1823. Dissatisfied with the initial product, members of the conference regrouped over the summer and hired Mr. Barber Badger, a Methodist layman, who began work as “editor and principal agent” in October. The publication grew from 2,000 subscriptions in 1824 to 6,000 subscriptions in 1827. But in 1826 Mr. Badger moved to New York to become the first editor of the Methodist Episcopal *Christian Advocate* causing New England clergy to hire Mr. G. V. H. Forbes to take Badger’s place. In 1828, both at the urging of the Book Concern of the General Conference and in consideration of debts, the New England Conference sold *Zion’s Herald* and it was merged with the New York paper to form *The Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald*.

Though the paper now had a subscription of 25,000, Methodists in New England were soon frustrated by the reduction of news about their region. As a result, Aaron Lummus began *The New England Herald* on October 7, 1829, but it was not quite satisfactory. Finally in May of 1831, the Boston Wesleyan Association was formed and changed the name of the paper once again to *The New England Christian Herald*. Meanwhile the Maine Conference started *The Wesleyan Journal* in 1832. After *The Christian Advocate and Journal* dropped the name “Zion’s Herald,” the Boston publication was allowed to pick it up again, and it soon merged with the Maine publication to form *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal* (at this point the volume numbers were adjusted as if the periodical had run continuously since 1823). The Boston Wesleyan Association continued to manage the paper on behalf of all the New England conferences and was eventually able to get it to turn a small profit, which was given back to the
Zion’s Herald proved to have particularly spotty reports about New England camp meetings given that it served a much larger region of the country.\textsuperscript{71}

Zion’s Herald has yet to be indexed or made available online, so it was necessary, at first, to examine each page of all fifty-two issues of a volume for any reference to camp meetings.\textsuperscript{72} It soon became apparent that if an article did not have “camp meeting” in its headline it would not likely be related to camp meetings. Still, it typically took from four to six hours to scan through a whole volume on microfilm, and to capture all announcements of upcoming meetings, reports of past meetings and general camp meeting articles onto PDF files.\textsuperscript{73} The number of articles increased as the years progressed, in proportion to the increase in number of camps held in a year, though full reports also tended to be less detailed in later years. Occasionally, the microfilm was damaged or the image of the page was unreadable. At times an original paper copy of the issue in question was attained to glean the full text. But at other times, especially when

\textsuperscript{71} The specific inventory of volumes used for this research include: Zion’s Herald volumes 1 (1823), 2 (1824) and 4 (1826); The Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald volumes 3 and 4 (1829), 6 and 7 (1832) (Note: the volumes of this publication start in August and end in September); The New England Christian Herald volume 2 (1832); The Maine Wesleyan Journal volumes 1 (1832), 4 (1835) and 7 (1838); Zion’s Herald volume 6 (1835) and 9 (1838); and Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal volumes 12 (1841), 15 (1844), 18 (1847), 21 (1850), 24 (1853), 27 (1856), 30 (1859), 33 (1862) and 42 (1871).

\textsuperscript{72} There were generally about eight pages to an issue.

\textsuperscript{73} Even though care was taken, the tedious nature of this work means that it is possible that a few relevant articles in this set were inadvertently left out. In the end, data was gleaned from 319 issues of the papers.
the Boston University School of Theology Library did not hold the paper copy, full coverage was not possible.

Process of Organizing the Data

Such a wealth of detailed information about camp meetings lends itself to grounded theory; that is, building the theory from the data, rather than trying to fit data into existing theories. The computer program Filemaker Pro was used to create a complex database to capture and organize the potentially significant information found in the newspaper articles. In the beginning the articles were read and the pertinent information was entered directly into the database. But as the research continued, starting with 1844 (volume 14), it seemed more useful to copy each of the reports, announcements and articles into Microsoft Word documents to facilitate key word searches and increase the ease of re-reading and coding the data. It was also possible to generate a report of much of the material in the database from the years 1823 to 1841 and turn that into a searchable Word document, though the reports for these years are not of “whole cloth” as the subsequent ones are.74

Adjusting the Method

New England camp meetings were typically held in August or September, though in the early years some Methodists experimented with holding a few in June. So in the

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74 Taking the time to turn the scratchy, hard to read microfilm into Word documents also made it possible to utilize newly available NVivo software, though it was not used to its fullest potential.
winter issues of *Zion’s Herald* there is scant reference to camp meetings, except for an occasional article talking about an ongoing revival that had its beginnings at a particular camp meeting the previous summer,\(^\text{75}\) or a few articles reflecting on camp meetings in general. So, toward the end of the data gathering, the issues from January to April were skipped.\(^\text{76}\) While some information may thus have been lost, significant events during those months were very likely to be referenced in the summer and fall issues.

**Content of the Newspapers**

Two or more months before the camp meetings began one can find simple calendars listing the towns and the start dates for several meetings. Most camps also had longer announcements about the meetings giving specific information about the location and often detailing transportation options, board, other amenities and fees. Each volume of *Zion’s Herald* also published several reports about camp meetings after they took place. Some of these were quite lengthy, detailing the schedule for each day, the names of the preachers and the scripture texts they “took” as well as the names of the brethren\(^\text{77}\) who offered official exhortations and prayers from the stand. Accounts of the weather

\(^{75}\) For this reason there is some information about camp meetings in the years 1822, 1825, 1828, 1831 and 1840 in the data base.

\(^{76}\) Fortunately this practice was adopted after 1859 when an important article was published in January about the decision of the Boston District to find a new site on the North Shore for their camp meeting rather than to continue traveling to Cape Cod for the Millennial Grove camp meeting. See more in Chapter Three.

\(^{77}\) In the period when formal exhortations and concluding prayers followed the preaching from the stand, *Zion’s Herald* reports no one giving such, other than those appointed to a circuit—or clergy from another denomination—and only men.
were frequently included as well as reports of the numbers who attended, and the numbers who claimed to have attained various stages of salvation (whether “backsliders reclaimed,” or those who “found the pearl of perfect love,”78 or those who were “sanctified wholly”79 as well as those who were “left seeking earnestly”80).

*Bias and Other Concerns Associated with Zion’s Herald*

While *Zion’s Herald* provides a vast source of information over a long period of time, there are some problems that it poses as the main source of information about camp meetings. One cannot miss the fact that the paper and all the articles therein are highly biased in favor of the meetings. While some of the editors had served as circuit riders and were ordained and others were laymen, they were all working for the promotion of the church.81 Almost every report claims that this meeting was “one of the best revivals”82 and that the meeting was sure to bear many fruits in eternity as well as in the temporal community nearby. The authors were typically clergy, if not leaders within the clergy, all of whom were white men. Scant attention was paid to women, children or minorities who participated or to concerns that may have been largely left to the women.

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to take care of such as packing and cooking. There are, however, a few accounts that include these marginalized people and activities. The camp meeting articles were almost always written with the intent to promote more interest and attendance at future camp meetings, so unfavorable aspects were minimized.

It is also important to emphasize that Zion’s Herald was a publication of the MEC. Though there were some other kinds of Methodists in New England (Reform Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal Zion and Methodist Protestant) they were largely ignored by this newspaper, and when some mention was made it was often dismissive or obtuse.  

The methodology of this study makes it impossible to be definitive regarding a number of aspects of the New England camp meetings. For example, many camp meetings were announced, but no report of them was published after they occurred. So little more can be said about those meetings other than when and where they were expected to occur. Some camp meeting reports were just a paragraph or two in length, while other camps had more than one very detailed report published. In other years it was the explicit policy of the editors to “publish but one full account of any Camp-meeting.”

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83 See Sarah D. Brooks Blair, “Reforming Methodism 1800-1820” (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 2008). Widening the scope to include other Methodist denominations would bring in some female preachers at camp meetings that were not held by the Methodist Episcopal leaders. Salome Lincoln, for example, began preaching in 1827 and preached in many places including protracted meetings and camp meetings, but there is no record that she preached at a Methodist Episcopal camp meeting. According to her memoir the only clearly designated MEC camp meeting she attended was the first one at Martha’s Vineyard in 1835. The memoir clearly states that she did not preach at this meeting. Almond H. Davis, The Female Preacher, or, Memoir of Salome Lincoln, Afterwards the Wife of Junia S. Mowry (Providence: Junia S. Mowry, 1843), 132.

84 “Camp Meetings & Revivals Starks, Maine,” ZH (18 October 1826): [2].
In addition, events in the years not included in this review cannot be accounted for. It is often not possible, for instance, to say specifically when or where a camp meeting practice started, or exactly how long it lasted. But the data collected show strong general trends and is sufficiently thick to ground an emergent theory of how the worship at camp meetings engendered conversion.

Other Primary Sources

Supplemental primary sources were used to verify and quantify church growth during this period, to gain knowledge of the full names and vocational histories of the preachers named in the newspaper accounts, and to gain a glimpse into a few specific lives of Methodists of the period to complement the “bird’s eye view” offered by Zion’s Herald.

Statistical Reports

In addition to Zion’s Herald reports, specific sections of the published Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the MEC\textsuperscript{85} for the New England, Maine, East Maine, Providence, New Hampshire and Vermont Annual Conferences were consulted for two types of information. First, since so many camp meeting reports touted great success in stirring up revivals, the statistical reports were checked to see whether there was

\textsuperscript{85} Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1773-1839, vol. 1-2 (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1856); Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1838-1859, vol. 3-5 (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856); Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1860, vol. 6 (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860).
corroboration of the anticipated increases in membership. So every third year of the published Methodist Episcopal statistical tables for the years 1822-1863 were used to monitor the growth of Methodism in New England during the span of this study. These tables reported the numbers of members “in society” for each charge (appointment) in each district. In the early years there were two categories of members, whites and colored. In later years, the statistics begin to track the numbers of members, probationary members and local preachers rather than race. This change in who was being counted poses a slight problem when one wants to know how the membership grew over time. Do the numbers reported before 1851 represent just the full members of each Methodist society or also include the probationary members? When this study presents totals it includes all the people reported in any category for a particular year while

86 The term “society” comes from England where Methodists were encouraged by John Wesley to be active in their Church of England parish congregations as well as their local Methodist society which met for prayer and special services. Transported to the American context the term can almost be a synonym for congregation. But there was a probationary period when people could attend society meetings and prayer meetings before becoming a full member of the local Methodist society. When a society went to camp meeting together it included the preacher, society members and their friends and family members.

87 “Charge” here refers to the perspective that the preachers were “charged” by the bishop to tend to a particular location. In the earlier years these were generally circuits (i.e., the Mansfield Circuit); in later years the charges were to a smaller area called a “station” (i.e., South Walpole).

88 In 1822 19,807 white members and 217 colored members were reported in the New England Annual Conference. In 1830 the Maine Annual Conference claimed to have 11,259 white and 10 colored members, the New England Annual Conference registered 12,164 white and 277 colored members, and New Hampshire claimed 11,629 and 8 colored people. It is notable that after 1833 the Maine Conferences no longer reported any colored members and by 1842 only the New England and Providence Conferences reported any colored members, primarily among the urban locations. One is left to wonder whether leaving this question blank reflected an intentional abolitionist protest rather than a true reflection of the racial make-up of the congregations.

89 Sometime after 1848 but no later than 1851.

90 These terms will be clarified in Chapter Two.
recognizing that the preachers and presiding elders have been excluded from all of these figures. Again this data must be examined critically, knowing that clergy then (as now) were probably not always accurate in reporting their membership numbers.

Appointments and Clergy Status Lists

Finally these same Minutes were consulted to find the full names of many of the preachers in the camp meeting reports, and their clergy status and appointments have been noted in every third year between 1823 and 1862, and in 1871. Having the full list of appointed clergy for each year provides a sense of how many were or were not involved with camp meetings. More importantly, the table of preachers generated from these records allowed the names reported in Zion’s Herald to be cross-referenced so that in most cases the preacher in question can be definitively identified. The records not only helped to determine the preachers’ full names but also their ordination status and service to the church over time. This was particularly important because the newspaper reports frequently referred to the preachers as “Bro. Scott” or “Father Taylor” and there were often preachers with the same last name (some of whom, like the Merrills, were related). While the lists of appointments found in the conference Minutes commonly used only the first and middle initials, the other lists of preachers found in these Minutes typically provided their full names.

Occasionally some educated guesses were made based on the location of the camp meeting and the location of a preacher’s appointment. If Br. E. Scott was reported to preach at Hebron, Connecticut, and there were three E. Scotts serving in New England, it
would be less likely that Elihu or Elisha Scott traveled from their circuits in the Vermont District to preach a hundred miles or more south and more probable that it was Elias Scott, who was appointed to Thompson, Connecticut, in the same district as Hebron.

Preachers were assigned to either circuits or “stations” and were listed in the Minutes in the following categories: those admitted “on trial” in that year, those who remained “on trial” from a previous year, those who were admitted in “full connection” in that year, those who were ordained deacons in that year, those who remained deacons, and those who were elected and ordained elders in that year. Lists of clergy who were put “on location,” were supernumerary, or “superannuated or worn-out preachers” as well as those who were expelled, withdrew, transferred to another annual

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91 New England Methodists pushed sooner than Methodists in other regions to have their preachers assigned to towns or villages (aka stations) rather than circuits. But they continued to be appointed on a year by year basis, and generally were only in one station for two years at a time.

92 Allowed to start working as a Methodist preacher on a probationary basis, either appointed to a circuit or a station.

93 Typically the acceptance into full connection and ordination as a deacon took place at the same time.

94 Some clergy had to be taken out of service for a time due to illness or other extenuating circumstances. Thomas Tucker went on location for a year when his appointment to Marblehead, Massachusetts, proved to offer so little provision for him and his family that they could not possibly stay. He moved his family back to Bristol, Rhode Island, to stay with friends for that year. See Mary Orne Tucker and Thomas W. Tucker, *Itinerant Preaching in the Early Days of Methodism* (Boston: B.B. Russell, 1872), 76-79.

95 This category tended to be used to place preachers (in full connection) who may have been too ill to travel on a circuit or to take a full charge of a station alone, but still could provide assistance in preaching and other leadership in an appointment. For example, in 1847 Daniel Waterhouse, Noah Hobard, and Benjamin Burnahm were all appointed to serve Durham, Maine, in the Gardiner District, but Burnham was designated as superannuated.
conference, or died were also published. Noting the status of the clergy and when it changed over time made it possible to see whether there is was a link between roles (assigned or taken) at a camp meeting and clergy status.

**Manuscript Diaries and Biographies**

In addition to these three main sources, which provide a great breadth of information, a few other sources were consulted to thicken the description of camp meetings. During the period of this study many diaries, memoirs and “hagiographies” were produced documenting the lives of Methodist Episcopal clergy and lay people, including their encounters with camp meetings. Other documents include unpublished manuscripts, two of which were consulted to flesh out the newspaper accounts of camp meetings. First was the diary of Rachel Stearns, a laywoman, who documented her process of spiritual growth and conversion from 1834-1835 following her attendance at a Methodist camp meeting. The second manuscript is the diary of Rev. Charles A. Merrill.

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96 Though there was no explicit explanation, it seems that a general practice was to italicize the names of elders in the appointment lists, and leave those who were at a lower level in plain text. But this was not always consistent.

97 From here on “New England Methodist clergy” in this dissertation refers to anyone who is under appointment according to these lists (including those on trial and not yet ordained). On some occasions people who had licenses to preach or exhort may have spoken from a camp meeting preachers’ stand, but in the *Zion’s Herald* reports this was very rare.

98 The originals are crumbling with age, being kept preserved by various archives and only available on site, yet more and more of them are being digitized and are even searchable.

from 1856 to 1860,\textsuperscript{100} in which he made notes of the camp meetings he attended. This study will also refer to the published writings of Lorenzo Dow;\textsuperscript{101} the diary of Mary Orne Tucker,\textsuperscript{102} in which she documented her life as the wife of Rev. Thomas W. Tucker; the story of the conversion of young Isaac Jennison Jr.;\textsuperscript{103} the fascinating life of “Camp Meeting John” Allen;\textsuperscript{104} the autobiography of William Apes;\textsuperscript{105} the autobiography of Hiram Munger;\textsuperscript{106} Enoch Mudge’s camp meeting hymnal;\textsuperscript{107} and a letter written by Lucy Fisk to Jabez Pratt\textsuperscript{108} in 1854. Though it is not quite a primary document, the 1910

\textsuperscript{100} Charles A. Merrill, “Diaries, 1856-1860,” Charles A. Merrill Papers. United Methodist Archives, General Commission on Archives and History, Madison, NJ.

\textsuperscript{101} Lorenzo Dow, Extracts from Original Letters to the Methodist Bishops, Mostly from Their Preachers and Members in North America: Giving an Account of the Work of God, since the Year 1800: Prefaced with a Short History of the Spread and Increase of the Methodists, with a Sketch of the Camp Meetings (Liverpool: H. Forshaw, 1806); Lorenzo Dow, The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil, as Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow, in a Period of More Than a Half Century; with Reflections on Various Subjects, Religious, Moral, Political and Prophetic (Norwich: Printed and sold by W. Faulkner, 1833).

\textsuperscript{102} Tucker, Itinerant Preaching.

\textsuperscript{103} Edward Otheman, The Christian Student: Memoir of Isaac Jennison, Jr., Late a Student of the Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn: Containing His Biography, Diary, and Letters (New York: Published by G. Lane & P.P. Sandford for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1843).


\textsuperscript{105} Also spelled Apess. William Apess and Barry O’Connell, A Son of the Forest and Other Writings (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{106} Hiram Munger, The Life and Religious Experience of Hiram Munger, Including Many Singular Circumstances Connected with Camp-Meetings and Revivals (Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts: The Author, 1856).

\textsuperscript{107} Mudge, The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book.

History of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church by James Mudge has also proven to be an indispensable source of background information.

**Boundaries**

The temporal boundaries of this study, as explained above, are dictated by the primary source of information, *Zion’s Herald*, as it revealed substantial information for answering the question of camp meetings as instruments of conversion and church growth. For reasons that will become clearer in Chapter Two, the geographical boundaries of “New England” as used in this study are not quite simply the six New England states. Portions of western Connecticut and western Vermont are left outside the bounds as they belonged to the New York and Troy Annual Conferences respectively, and *Zion’s Herald* provided little to no coverage of the camp meetings in these regions.

**Contributions of this Study**

Along with answering the primary question of conversion at camp meetings, this study contributes to the general history of the MEC, specifically in New England. It also offers insight into the influence of camp meetings on American culture and occasionally challenges some of the long held or popular characterizations of camp meetings as short-lived, spontaneous events in the western frontier. In particular this study shows that camp meetings were consistently a significant yearly activity for the MEC from 1803 well into the twentieth century. Theories that claim camp meetings declined or nearly faded away in the 1830s need to be reexamined. This longitudinal study also shows that the transformation of some camp meeting grounds like Martha’s Vineyard into resorts for
middle class Americans was slow and steady, and for the most part, in keeping with the original religious purposes of the camp meetings. Finally, this study shows that many accounts of the holiness movement as something originating from Phoebe Palmer’s parlor in the 1840s onward is as ridiculous as the notion that Cane Ridge happened as a kind of spontaneous combustion of frontier living conditions. Helping seekers experience sanctifying grace (holiness) was just as important to New England camp meetings from 1823 forward as experiencing justifying grace (conversion).

But more than correcting accounts of the past, this study contributes to the life of the church today by identifying liturgical elements of camp meeting that repeatedly and reliably fostered such potent experiences of God’s grace among so many people year after year, experiences that contributed to the growth of Methodist class meetings, societies, circuits, districts and annual conferences through the better part of the nineteenth century. Though some may be more easily replicated than others, it is hoped that by their adaptation and use United Methodists and other Christians might continue to participate in the “work of God” into the future.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter Two provides the reader with background and context by first describing the rise of Methodism in North America, its growth as a denomination, and the role of camp meetings in general. The chapter then looks more specifically at the introduction of Methodism to New England, with its unique religious culture, and at Methodism’s spread, including the practice of camp meetings. The chapter ends with the year 1823
when *Zion’s Herald* was first published. In the process the reader will become more familiar with key elements of nineteenth-century Methodist discourse.

Chapter Three has three parts. Part One covers developments of the MEC in New England between 1823 and 1871 relative to camp meetings. Part Two begins with a thick description of a particular camp meeting in 1823 and then presents variations described that year at the other camp meetings also found in that first volume of *Zion’s Herald*. Such a presentation serves to give the reader a clear sense of how camp meetings were organized, the various elements and people involved, and how they all fit together. The third part of Chapter Three explores the leadership, times and places, and the aspects of camp meetings that might be considered “ritual,” but not necessarily Christian liturgy, with an eye to how all of these changed over time.

The heart of this study lies in Chapter Four, which focuses on the specific liturgical rituals of the camp meetings between 1823 and 1871 including preaching, praying, singing, love feasts, and parting rituals. It will trace how these ritual practices were enacted, and how they changed over time. The section on preaching includes a report on the scripture “texts” which were “taken” by the preachers, paying attention to the most popular pericopes, demonstrating how the Christian scriptures were woven into the discourse spoken at camp meetings. It will also show that Methodist discourse about holiness, often thought to appear with Phoebe Palmer in New York, was actually in wide use in New England prior to her Tuesday evening meetings.

Chapter Five first highlights evidence in the primary data which will help future historians looking at American Methodism to produce more accurate accounts of camp
meetings, the Second Great Awakening and the rise of the Holiness Movement than have been offered thus far. The rest of the chapter looks at the data from this study and names seven elements which worked together to elicit conversions, spiritual growth and church growth. These elements are all held together by their participation in a specific discourse used by Methodists of the nineteenth century. This “poetic” revival discourse is differentiated from theology by Steven D. Cooley who claims it was instrumental as nineteenth-century American Methodists “developed distinctive ways for living religiously in the world and for ushering the faithful into the presence of God.”

The conclusion of this chapter names the ingredients of camp meetings which were critical in creating, sustaining and spreading a Methodist world view to New Englanders.

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CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF CAMP MEETINGS IN AMERICAN METHODISM
AND NEW ENGLAND IN PARTICULAR

Part 1 – Methodism and Camp Meetings in North America Before 1823

Growth of the MEC in the United States

When Zion’s Herald was founded in 1823, some parts of North America had already been exposed to Methodism for nearly sixty years, and New England had experienced 25 years of steady Methodist preaching since Jesse Lee’s arrival in 1798. This chapter outlines the development of Methodism in North America and the role of camp meetings up to 1823, and then focuses on New England in this period in order to establish the context for the primary sources at the heart of this study: the camp meeting announcements, reports and reflections found in Zion’s Herald and other New England newspapers of the MEC between 1823 and 1862.

Methodism was originally a movement led by brothers John and Charles Wesley who were priests in the Church of England. The movement was meant to revive Great Britain by helping people to experience the grace of God in their lives and grow in their faith. Methodism involved preaching to people wherever they gathered (in the fields, marketplaces and work houses—rather than just in the parish churches), and organizing people into “classes” or small groups that met weekly in homes for confession, prayer and encouragement to participate in works of piety (i.e., prayer, reading the Bible, fasting), and works of mercy (i.e., feeding the hungry, visiting the prisoners, advocating
for neighbors who were oppressed). The classes were organized into societies which gathered for joint worship with preaching, and the societies were organized into circuits so that the Wesley brothers’ traveling force of “circuit riders” could each tend to several societies. Some of the circuit riders were ordained priests in the Church of England while others were laity, both put on the circuits because they were effective preachers. As the organization grew John Wesley began to hold conferences with his preachers to keep them organized.¹

Methodism was brought to the American colonies first by British laity who had been involved with Methodist societies back home. Robert Strawbridge appointed himself as a Methodist preacher in Maryland about 1764. In 1766 New York resident Barbara Heck convinced her cousin Philip Embury, who had been a Methodist class leader and local preacher in Ireland, to resume this ministry and eventually another society was formed. A letter from one of the New York society members to John Wesley requesting better qualified preachers resulted in the appointment of the first Methodist missionaries officially sent to America in 1769.²

Wesley sent missionaries over in four pairs: Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore in 1769, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright in 1771, Thomas Rankin and George Shadford in 1773, James Dempster and Martin Rodda in 1774. By their work Methodism spread along the eastern seaboard, finding the most fertile soil from New

¹ Richard P. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

York City to the Carolinas. New England and other places where Congregational or Presbyterian churches were strong proved to be most unreceptive.³

Francis Asbury’s Leadership

Major credit for the rapid growth of American Methodism in the early years is due to Francis Asbury.⁴ In 1771, when John Wesley sent him to the colonies there were only about 600 American Methodists. When Asbury died forty-five years later, there were 200,000 American Methodists. The ratio had grown from 1 in 5,000 residents to 1 in 40 of the total population of the country.⁵ Asbury’s commitment to his mission is noteworthy; he was the only missionary Wesley originally appointed who remained in America during the Revolutionary War. After a period of laying low,⁶ Asbury re-emerged into a place of leadership among the American-born Methodist preachers. John Wesley confirmed this position when he decided to provide for Americans in the new nation, suddenly left without Anglican clergy, by ordaining a new pair of missionaries, Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, and “setting apart” Thomas Coke as a “general superintendent.” Wesley asked that the Methodist preachers in America gather for a conference and he instructed Coke similarly to set Asbury apart by laying on of hands.

³ Ibid., 71-75.

⁴ Born in Birmingham, England, and converted to Methodism as a young man, Asbury worked as one of Wesley’s itinerant preachers in England for four years before traveling to America.


⁶ Some of the other Methodist missionaries had put them all at risk by publicly stating their sentiments against the Revolution.
When this took place in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1784, Asbury wisely insisted that the members of the conference also elect him to the position of superintendent. On three successive days in December 1784, Asbury was ordained deacon, then elder and then consecrated as superintendent. It was not long before Asbury and Coke substituted the term “bishop” for their office. While Coke traveled back and forth between the United States and England, Asbury remained at the helm in America until his death in 1816.7

Circuit Riders

Asbury used two very effective tools for the spread of Methodism. The first was a system of itinerant preachers.8 Teams of energetic young men were enlisted and sent out strategically on horseback, traveling from town to town on the circuits. Their task was to preach the gospel with emphasis on the Wesleyan Way of Salvation,9 form lay-led class meetings that met weekly to pray, admonish and encourage one another as they sought to progress along the way, and develop these prayer groups or “classes” into

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8 This system had its roots in England where Wesley sent other preachers out to communities of Methodists in Britain as a means of extending his own pastoral oversight. See Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 162; Glen Alton Messer, “Restless for Zion: New England Methodism, Holiness, and the Abolitionist Struggle, Circa 1789-1845” (Th.D. dissertation, Boston University, 2006), 48.

9 As Wesley taught it, the way began with people who were unawake or had never consciously experienced the grace of God personally. But once awakened to the grace of God at work in the world around them, people became anxious to experience that grace for themselves. Upon experiencing assurance from God that one was pardoned for one’s sins, the person was said to be justified. But Wesley taught that after that it was a Christian’s duty to move own toward “Christian perfection.” Through God’s grace Christians could be sanctified, made holy, and enabled to participate in God’s perfect love.
congregations. Each circuit was generally a size that could be circumnavigated once every two weeks. The preachers would stop and meet with existing classes, and work to build up new ones, usually preaching once or twice daily. Some of the circuit riders were ordained, but many were serving as apprentices and given greater authority by stages: first given license to exhort, then to preach, then ordained as deacons and finally ordained as “elders” with the authority to administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Members of the classes on a circuit would meet together with the preachers four times each year for quarterly conferences which dealt with business, paid the preachers and held both private and public worship. Circuits were organized into districts with a

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10 This pattern was adapted from John Wesley’s organization in England. Class meetings became the means to oversee and promote the spiritual growth of Wesley’s newly awakened followers. Similar to the Oxford Holy Club of the Wesley brothers’ college days, the goal was to conform one’s mind and behavior to scriptural teachings. Members would confess the state of their souls and encourage new members to seek after justification while they spent time in prayer, hymn-singing and mutual accountability. Each class had a leader who kept track of every member’s spiritual growth. Wesley also experimented with small groups of spiritually justified Methodists which he called bands. The members of the bands continued with the pattern of prayer, singing and mutual accountability, but with a focus on pursuing sanctification with the goal of perfect love. Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 46–48.

11 Local communities nominated men who were then examined by the members of a quarterly conference as to their character and gifts. If they were determined to be promising they were given temporary permission to preach in their home communities. Many Methodist preachers were happy to stay at this level as “local preachers.” They remained under supervision of both itinerant and presiding elders. When a local preacher displayed significant gifts for preaching, desired to start traveling and was healthy enough and free enough (no wife, children, or debts), the quarterly conference could recommend him to become an itinerant preacher “on trial.” The members at the next session of the annual conference would decide how to act upon each recommendation. The apprenticeship would continue under the supervision of an elder for at least two years, upon which time the annual conference could elect him to the office of deacon, and recommended to become a “probationary member” of the annual conference. Deacons were given more responsibility and had less supervision. After another minimum of two years the candidate could be considered for election to full membership and ordination as an elder.


13 Private worship was just for the members of the Methodist societies. Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 103.
presiding elder appointed to each by Asbury. They continued to preach and meet with classes and societies but also managed the district by attending each of the quarterly conferences.

In the early years there was an attempt for the clergy of the whole Methodist connection in America to come together yearly—but the distance was too great for everyone to be present. So the circuit riders and presiding elders began to hold a series of conferences with the bishops in various regions. In 1792, for example, seventeen conferences were held to take care of the business of the denomination. In 1796 the Church adjusted its organization once again, dividing the nation into six regions with the expectation that each one would hold an annual meeting and all clergy in that conference would be present. Both the region and the annual meeting came to be called an annual conference. The year 1796 also marked the beginning of an all-embracing general conference, set to meet once every four years. At first every traveling preacher had a right to attend, but in practice many more preachers from the region where the conference was held were present than were preachers from further away. So in 1808 they amended the organization yet again, requiring each annual conference to send a set number of delegates to the general conference.¹⁴

This method of church organization was extremely flexible and highly effective for a new nation as its citizens moved from the established communities of the thirteen

original colonies, pushing further inland\textsuperscript{15} in search of new places to make a living. Circuit riders did not need to wait for a community to grow big enough to build a meetinghouse or gain enough members to afford to pay their preachers.\textsuperscript{16} By linking together several settlements on the circuit and enlisting young, single men with high ideals and adventurous spirits to serve as preachers,\textsuperscript{17} people in new communities and individual households in remote locations were quite likely to hear Methodist preaching, be exhorted to join a Methodist society, and upon converting be nurtured by weekly Methodist fellowship in the form of class and society meetings. In most cases Methodists organized districts and annual conferences in the frontier territories before the regions became states.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} In the context of New England this meant \textit{north} into Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, and the more remote areas of Massachusetts and Connecticut as well as places further west like New York and the midwest.

\textsuperscript{16} “A disgruntled Kentucky Presbyterian once was ‘ambitious to find a family whose cabin had not been entered by a Methodist preacher. In several days I traveled from settlement to settlement…but into every hovel I entered I learned that the Methodist missionary had been there before me.’” Bernard A. Weisberger, \textit{They Gathered at the River; the Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact Upon Religion in America} (Boston: Little Brown, 1958), 45.

\textsuperscript{17} Circuit rider journals are full of tales of sleeping under trees, in barns and occasionally being offered a bed inside, and being thankful for whatever morsels of food were offered. For details of Boston-born preacher Thomas Tucker’s adventures, see Tucker, \textit{Itinerant Preaching}.

\textsuperscript{18} Norwood, \textit{The Story of American Methodism}, 145.
Camp Meetings Emerged\textsuperscript{19}

The other tool intentionally employed by Asbury, which proved to be highly successful in helping the denomination to grow, was the camp meeting. A camp meeting is simply a period of days when a revival is held with so many people present that shelters and provisions are needed. The eccentric Methodist preacher, Lorenzo Dow, described a camp meeting this way.

[The unique nature of some Methodist worship] brought out such flocks of people from the adjacent places, that no building would contain them; so they would be necessitated to go to the neighbouring\textsuperscript{20} forest; and as the circumstances were such, it was found necessary to carry provisions, so as not to burthen the vicinity too much; and also to make preparation against the inclemency of the weather, by sewing coverlets together or blankets, and preparing tents or markees [sic]; and some would make small wooden tents or bowers, &c…

Those companies which came from a distance by curiosity or some other motive, would return home, some mourning under conviction, and some would find peace by the way; whilst others would be rejoicing in God, to the surpriz [sic] and alarm of their friends and neighbours; and this would be the beginning of good.\textsuperscript{21}

The pattern of conversion Dow described was the basic goal first of protracted quarterly conferences and then of camp meetings as well. Methodist preachers came to understand that it frequently took several days of constant worship and prayer for sinners to become penitent (i.e., \textit{awakened}), and for the penitent mourners to experience the assurance of pardon from God (i.e., \textit{justification}). Likewise, several days at camp

\textsuperscript{19} A term used by Lester Ruth to name the common pattern of development in both the quarterly meeting and the camp meeting. The three stages of this pattern: emerging practice, naming of the practice and promotion of the practice. Ruth, \textit{A Little Heaven Below}, 189, note 17.

\textsuperscript{20} Primary documents from the period frequently spell words using “our” rather than “ur” as they are commonly spelled in American English today. For example neighbour and neighbor.

\textsuperscript{21} Dow, \textit{Extracts}, vi.
meeting could lead backsliders to be “reclaimed” and give faithful believers the experience of deeper holiness (i.e., sanctification). Some even claimed the experience of perfect love.\textsuperscript{22} As Dow indicates in the quote above, conversion and sanctification did not always fully take place at the intense worship experience of a camp meeting. Many people would be deeply impressed, returning home to attend weekly Methodist prayer meetings to be converted and become members some weeks later.

Jesse Lee recorded such a meeting held in Virginia in 1776. He estimated two to three thousand people gathered under a large arbor because there were too many to be housed. Of the love feast held on the second day, Lee wrote:

\begin{quote}
The place was truly awful, by reason of the presence of the Lord. Many of the members spake; and while some declared how the Lord had justified them freely, others declared how, and when the blood of Jesus had cleansed them from all sin. So clear, so full, and so strong was their testimony, that while some were speaking their experience, hundreds were in tears, and others vehemently crying to God, for pardon or holiness.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

Such meetings were also taking place in North Carolina in the 1790s. In 1794 a meeting was held for several days and nights in a forest in Lincoln County, and hundreds were converted at a meeting in 1795 in Bethel, North Carolina.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} Jesse Lee, \textit{A Short History of the Methodists} (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 279-280.

\textsuperscript{23} Richey, “From Quarterly to Camp Meeting,” 203.

\textsuperscript{24} Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 32. See also Cleveland, \textit{The Great Revival}, 53.
Bodily Exercises as a Sign of Religious Experience

The form of worship, which seemed most effective in leading people to conversion at these early Methodist gatherings, involved “kinetic responses,” also called “bodily exercises.”

The movements Methodists saw as signs that a person was in the process of conversion included:

1. Falling—to the ground while shrieking and writhing, or conversely motionless as if dead (catalepsy). Some fell suddenly as if struck by a bullet, others seized with a body tremor before falling. Often large numbers of people fell at once.

2. Trances and visions—some said they were carried to the “spirit world” and could talk to the spirits of departed friends. Others saw the city of heaven or a bird’s eye view of all creation.

3. The jerks—spasmodic twitching of the entire body, bouncing or hopping with head, limbs and trunk shaking, sometimes causing clothing to shake off.

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25 Westerfield Tucker, American Methodist Worship, 77.

26 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 63-70; Richard McNemar, The Kentucky Revival, or, a Short History of the Late Extraordinary out-Pouring of the Spirit of God, in the Western States of America, Agreeably to Scripture Promises and Prophecies, Concerning the Latter Day: With a Brief Account of the Entrance and Progress of What the World Call Shakerism, among the Subjects of the Late Revival in Ohio and Kentucky, Presented to the True Zion-Traveller, as a Memorial of the Wilderness Journey (Cincinnati: From the press of John W. Browne, 1807); Weisberger, They Gathered at the River, 34-37.

27 Most of this list comes from Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 64-69. Some preachers judged their success by the number who fell. Benson gives two detailed firsthand accounts of falling.
4. Rolling—head cast down near feet and the body rolling like a wheel or like a log.

5. Barking—and crawling on all fours and snapping like dogs to “tree the Devil.”

6. Laughing—individuals or several people burst out into uncontrollable laughter called a “holy laugh,” an indication of “superior grace.”

7. Singing—melodious chanting.

8. Dancing—encouraged as relief from the jerks and barks.

Tracing the origins of such practices is a complicated issue. But it is clear that these exercises had become common among British Methodists during the time that the Wesleys were working among them. In the 1740s John Wesley summed up Methodist doctrine as “perceptible inspiration.” The mark of a faith built on such inspiration is that it produces “peace, and joy, and love, and inward (as well as outward) holiness.” But in his view, “falling into fits or crying out” may or may not have been authentic signs of this faith. The critical signs for Wesley were the fruits of the Spirit, conversion from a life that was “wicked” to one that was “holy, just and good.”

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28 Benson quotes Simon Ansley Ferrell’s *A Ramble of Six Thousand Miles through the United States of America* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1832).


30 Ibid., 71.

31 Taves, *Fits, Trances & Visions*, 73.
But while he was cautious about regarding “outcries, convulsions, visions, trances” as essential to the inward experience of conversion, Wesley also believed it could be detrimental to regard these exercises too little or “condemn them altogether, to imagine they had nothing of God in them and were a hindrance to the work.” He came to believe that some visions, dreams and trances were divinely inspired while outcries and convulsions were “natural” consequences of supernatural conviction of sin. As the bodily phenomena continued among Methodists, Wesley shaped the experience by narrating it into a scripturally-grounded framework. “God was quite definitely present and people cried out and fell to the ground when the power of God came upon them.” Wesley often called for such “signs” during his preaching, and many in the congregation complied, becoming “living witnesses’ whose experiences confirmed God’s word.”

These bodily expressions of faith were brought to America by British Methodists, where some scholars have argued they were transformed. In the American context, particularly in areas surrounding the Chesapeake Bay—the Delmarva Peninsula, the western shore from Baltimore to Washington, D. C., and eastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina—people of West African descent made up a significant percentage of most Methodist gatherings. William Courtland Johnson has argued that

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32 Ibid., 53.
33 Ibid., 72.
34 Ibid., 72-75.
35 Ibid., 79.
36 Taves noted that more than half of the people in one circuit were black. See ibid., 379, note 12.
Africans responded to the Methodist preachers in ways typical for West African religion including the formation of circles, dancing, shaking hands and holding processions. The circle in West African religion is as sacred as the cross is to Christians. Johnson noted that in West African tradition the devil cannot get in a circle. Africans in America would dance in circles whenever they managed to gather on their own.  

Ann Taves joined Johnson in proposing that these practices, blended with the “exercises” already practiced by white Methodists, emerged as a practice that came to be known as “shouting.” “Shouting Methodists” became both a complimentary and derogatory term depending on one’s point of view. As in England, some believed that such responses were the outward proof that a person had experienced “true religion,” for the presence and power of God was most fully realized through bodily performance. But critics dismissed these actions as mere “enthusiasm.” Taves noted, “Most people associated true religion with order and false religion, especially enthusiasm, with disorder.”

The bodily exercises or shouting became a standard feature of Methodist worship in the American context. It was present both at the quarterly conferences and at the camp meetings. Johnson speculated that shouting became a part of camp meeting exercises in

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37 Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 53.

38 Ann Taves explains that “shouting” is not systematically defined by the sources because it “was developed and passed on by means of embodied performance.” Taves, Fits, Trances & Visions, 76.

39 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 70. See also McNemar, The Kentucky Revival.

40 Taves, Fits, Trances & Visions, 46. To gain a sense of the controversy surrounding enthusiasm in Wesley’s time, see Chapter On 20-46.
the places where worship was relatively integrated, and then these practices were transported by circuit riders who had been in these areas and moved to new areas until “rhythmic clapping, singing and participation in ritual dance” became integrated into the general camp meeting practice. In his dissertation, Johnson went so far as to say that “West African derived…ritual was, in many instances, a key element in the success of the [camp] meetings.”

Ann Taves believed that Johnson presented “a wealth of evidence” suggesting that the “most dynamic features of camp meeting worship, especially circular dance and grand processionals, were first introduced by blacks and then appropriated by white Christians as an unprecedented effective means of provoking religious possession among potential converts.”

Circles were employed in the camp meetings as praying circles and grand processions, and even became the most common layout of the tents at the meeting. Very often after a time of preaching and exhorting the preachers would invite the congregation to come forward and they formed praying circles. Praying circles were formed at other times as well, and in New England, at least, it seems that the participants of a love feast formed a circle when they could. Circles took on a sacred meaning within camp meeting culture. A Methodist leader from the Troy Conference wrote, “The entire enclosure

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41 Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 74.

42 Ibid., vii.

43 Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting, 43. See also Weiss, City in the Woods, 10.
within the circle of tents around the preaching stand was considered specially consecrated, for the time, to the service of God.”

The grand processional was a somewhat more formal African contribution to camp meetings, usually conducted just before the campers went home. Jesse Lee described such a “parting ritual” in New Jersey in 1809.

[The] men with their trumpets went foremost, rank and file, blowing as they went; and then the preachers followed after; and then the men in general followed the preachers; they then made a circular march, and when the preachers came round to the place from when they started, they turned out of the ranks to the right hand, and stopped and shook hands with all the men next to them till they came round, and then the men who were marching in the circle, shifted sides, each with his companion, and went round again, and those who were on the opposite side from the preachers the first time, came next in turn to the preachers, and had an opportunity of shaking hands. Then the women marched around twice, in the same form, and all shook hands as the men had done before them.

As the bodily exercises of Methodist worship were influenced by the addition of African worship practices, this new form of public worship called “shouting” emerged and spread among black and white Methodists alike. Shouting used together with biblical narratives helped to create an experience of the “power and presence of God in new public spaces” (quarterly conferences and camp meetings) that was “distinctively Methodist.” Shouting became a hallmark of the early camp meeting experience, and was seen by the practitioners as confirmation of the work of God among them. Even

44 Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 105.

45 Jesse Lee and Minton Thrift, Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee. With Extracts from His Journals (New York: Published by N. Bangs and T. Mason for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1823), 311.

46 Taves, Fits, Trances & Visions, 77.

47 Ibid., 78.
after a period of tempering, elements of the shout remained a part of camp meeting worship well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Camp Meeting Worship Pattern: Entering into the Biblical Narrative}

The pattern of worship that was developed by camp meeting leaders to evoke such responses was also referred to as “exercises.” Jesse Lee outlined a typical camp meeting in his journal:

We proceed in our religious exercises as follows: soon after the first dawn of day a person walks all round the ground in front of the tents blowing a trumpet as he passes; which is to give the people notice to arise; about ten minutes after the trumpet is blown again with only one long blast; upon which, the people in all their tents begin to sing, and then to pray, either in their tents or at the door of them, as is most convenient. At the rising of the sun a sermon is preached, after which we eat breakfast. We have preaching again at 10 o’clock, and dine about one. We preach again at 3 o’clock, eat supper about the setting of the sun, and have preaching again at candle light. We generally begin these meetings on Friday and continue them until the Monday following about the middle of the day. I have known these meetings to continue without any intermission for two nights and a day, or longer. The people being continuously engaged in singing, praying, preaching or exhorting without any cessation...I have known some Camp Meetings to continue eight or ten days.\textsuperscript{49}

As this description shows, the entire time of the camp meeting was built around worship, from the first trumpet in the morning to late at night when the people fell asleep with songs and prayers on their lips. Each of the three or four preaching services included one or more sermons by a Methodist preacher who typically “took” a scripture text,

\textsuperscript{48} The grand procession was still being practiced in Ocean Grove, New Jersey in the 1990s, and the use of circles in the design of the camp grounds is also well documented. See Messenger, \textit{Holy Leisure}, 10; Weiss, \textit{City in the Woods}, 32.

\textsuperscript{49} Lee, \textit{Short History}, 361-362.
followed by another Methodist circuit rider who exhorted, and then another one or two who offered prayers. Hymns could be sung at the beginning, in the middle and the end of these “public exercises.” As hymnbooks were scarce, hymns were typically called out one line at a time by the preachers and, often, new memorable choruses were added to older hymns so that the campers could easily join in. Between the preaching services people would often gather in praying circles or go back to their society tents for more singing, prayers and exhortations. In the early years of camp meetings, which are the focus of this study, the only considerable time away from worship was the time it took to prepare and eat meals, and to sleep for a few hours at night.

Participants frequently drew on biblical images as they planned, participated in and reported on camp meetings. The physical arrangement was simple and fairly easy to create in a short time. Choice spots were near a spring or stream, and in a grove for shade. A large space was cleared and the trees that were felled were used for benches. Usually a preachers’ stand was erected at one end—sometimes one at each end for simultaneous preaching. The tents, pitched mostly by Methodist societies and a few families, were typically arranged around this clearing, and behind them were fireplaces for cooking. But with their biblical imaginations the participants saw these places as “holy ground,” where God was breaking into human existence to bring glory and salvation to their lives. It was the Bethel where Jacob dreamed of heaven; it was the

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50 Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, 80-83.

51 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 44.
Promised Land of milk and honey, Canaan, Zion, Beulah Land,\textsuperscript{52} it was the Jabbok where Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed; it was where the nations of Israel pitched their tents in the wilderness, being led by God and fed manna from heaven. Camp meeting was a time and place to reenact the Feast of Tabernacles.\textsuperscript{53}

The events of the camp meeting often enacted biblical imagery too. One afternoon prayer meeting in Ohio was so engaging that the participants did not stop for supper, nor heard the trumpet announcing the 7 o’clock service at the stand. Finally, at 11 p.m., the assembly was dispersed when one preacher assembled some singers and a trumpeter who led them in

procession of three abreast around the encampment, inside the circle of tents, singing as they went. After each time around, the company halted near the preachers’ stand, the trumpet sounded, and the marchers shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” This occurred seven times and after the last time, [another preacher] began to preach at exactly midnight.\textsuperscript{54}

In many southern and western camp meetings a space was created at the front of the congregation, closest to the stand, called variously the “anxious bench,” “mercy seat,” “mourners’ bench,” or “glory pen.” It was a space where the newly awakened mourners could come forward during the worship. Christian brothers and sisters further along on the way of salvation would be there to pray with them, encourage them, and keep them safe as they fell, or contracted the jerks or engaged in other bodily exercises.

\textsuperscript{52} Isaiah 62:4.

\textsuperscript{53} Brown, \textit{Holy Ground}, xi. See also Taves, \textit{Fits, Trances & Visions}, 114.

\textsuperscript{54} Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 45; see also note 59 on page 53 of Benson.
Methodist scholars have made convincing arguments that camp meetings emerged from the quarterly conferences. Since the participants regularly had to travel some distance to get to a quarterly meeting, they lasted for three to four days and included multiple worship services, love feasts and holy communion. Some of the worship and prayer times were private for the Methodist members, and some were open to the general public and designed to yield new converts. As Lester Ruth puts it, quarterly meetings were a kind of school where Methodists learned “how to combine worship and evangelism in a large extended setting.” Some of these quarterly meetings were so exciting that they began to attract large numbers so that camping was the only way to accommodate them. As these protracted meetings proved to be successful, the leaders began to plan them to last for four days or longer. Such camp meetings were held by Methodists in the Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia in the 1780s and 1790s.

55 Richey, “From Quarterly to Camp Meeting.”

56 A love feast is a service that Methodists borrowed from the Moravians, who in turn believed they were imitating early Christian practice. It involved sharing sweet bread and water, and inviting all present (including women and children) to give testimony to what God was doing in them at the meeting. Oftentimes the leaders would note how many claimed to be “awakened,” how many were “justified,” how many “backsliders had been reclaimed” and how many had “attained perfect love” at a Love Feast.

57 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 187.

58 Brown, Holy Ground, Too, 28-32. Brown counted as many as forty-one separate camp meetings held before McGready began to conduct sacramental services in 1799.

59 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 189-190; see note 119 on page 189. See also, Westerfield Tucker, American Methodist Worship, 74-78. Ellen Eslinger has concluded that these years of “dedicated religious work” were necessary for the Cane Ridge revival to take place. Eslinger, Citizens of Zion, 184.
While the ferment of camp meeting practices was starting to bubble up throughout Methodist territory, the practice seems to have come to a rolling boil in the summer of 1801 when an encampment in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, drew so many it became an event worthy of national news. Cane Ridge was organized largely by Presbyterian ministers and was the culmination of a revival led by James McGready who began his preaching vocation in North Carolina in 1788. Now ten years later, McGready had moved to Kentucky and was serving three congregations in Logan County. From time to time Presbyterians would gather large crowds for sacramental services, and at one particular service at Red River in 1800 the McGee brothers were present.

William McGee was a Presbyterian preacher, but his brother John was a Methodist preacher. At Red River John introduced what Methodists had learned about combining worship and evangelism in a large extended setting, and presented the powerful emotive style of exhorting to his Presbyterian colleagues. This resulted in many congregants being slain in the spirit as they fell to the floor, screaming for mercy, and led to some conversions. While McGready and William McGee did not know what to do,

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60 McGready traveled to Hampden-Sidney College in Virginia which was experiencing a revival. In North Carolina he led a revival converting about a dozen young men, including Barton W. Stone, who became ministers. Then in South Carolina his opponents accused him of “running people distracted” and sent him a threatening letter in blood. So he moved to Kentucky. Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 56.

61 The McGee parents were Presbyterian and William was called to pastor a church in Tennessee in 1796. He was known for his moving exhortations. Ibid., 58.

62 Brown, Holy Ground, 18-20. See also Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 187.

63 Weisberger, They Gathered at the River, 24-25.
John McGee had seen such behavior before at the Methodist quarterly meetings, so he showed his colleagues how to respond to this unusual behavior. McGready was so impressed with the intensity of this experience that he began to replicate it, encouraging falling at each sacramental service, requesting Methodist colleagues to help, and also giving advance notice that such services would take place. In this way Presbyterian sacramental meetings adopted the practices of camping, falling and ecumenical worship for a time. In June of 1800, there were only 500 Presbyterian communicants at one gathering, while 800 fell. There were at least six camp meetings held in the region between May and August of 1801. By then the revival had drawn enough interest that some 10,000 to 30,000 people converged at the sacramental service planned to start at Cane Ridge on August 6. They were of all ages, from eight to sixty.

The Cane Ridge meeting was organized by McGready’s colleague Barton Stone, who gave the surrounding communities ample advanced notice. There were eighteen

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66 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 35.

67 Ellen Eslinger’s careful study provides the more conservative figure, see Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, xi. Older scholars like William Warren Sweet and contemporaries like Peter Cartwright and Barton Stone reported the larger figure. See Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 156-157; Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 94.


69 Stone, who had converted under McGready’s influence, became a minister, being ordained in 1798 in Kentucky where he served as pastor of the Cane Ridge Church. Stone later was part of a group that split off from the Presbyterian Church to form the Springfield Presbytery which later came to be called the Christians, or Disciples of Christ. Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 57-58, 88.
Presbyterian and four Methodist ministers who came intending to share the sacrament together, and they happened to gather in close proximity to a meeting of the Elkhorn Baptist Association. The preaching commenced with the goal of promoting spiritual rebirth. At times four to seven preachers addressed thousands at the same time from different stands. As people began to be convicted of sin, they felt “remorse, shame, fright, and, most of all, helplessness,” signaling the beginning of their conversion as they cried, moaned, and sank weakly to their knees. Eslinger wrote:

Participants might fall at any point during the proceedings, but were especially apt to fall during group activities, such as the singing of hymns. Reverend John Evans Findley reported, “The falling down of multitudes…happened under the singing of Watts’ Psalms and Hymns, more frequently than under the preaching of the word.” Falling also tended to follow the emotional structure of the proceedings, sweeping the crowds toward the end of the day or toward the meeting’s close, as religious feeling became more urgent. At such times, “a universal agitation pervaded the whole multitude; who were bowed before it as a field of grain waves before the wind.” As Reverend McNemar remarked, “How striking, to see hundreds, who never saw each other in the face before, moving uniformly into action, without any preconcerted plan.” To members of a society severely divided by culture, economic differences, and political ideology, the camp meeting seemed to exert a miraculous unifying power over the crowd of participants.

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70 They had eight to ten thousand in their ranks according to Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, 208.


74 Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, 224.
The meeting lasted six or seven days until the food ran out.\textsuperscript{75} Cane Ridge brought the practice of camp meeting to national attention through letters first and then in magazine and newspaper accounts.\textsuperscript{76}

At first the practice was emulated by Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists alike. They promoted camp meeting revivals in North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee and Ohio.\textsuperscript{77} But after just a few years only the Methodists made concerted and regular efforts to hold them. Camp meetings continued to spread into South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, and Maryland, and then to whatever territory into which Methodist preachers ventured.

Not all the reports were complimentary. Cane Ridge gained a reputation for being the “most disorderly, most hysterical…revival ever held in early-day America.”\textsuperscript{78} By all accounts, the large number present created chaos. One witness counted “seven ministers, all preaching at one time.” The simultaneous singing, praying, crying for mercy and shouting was too much for him to bear. There was also allegation of sexual impropriety and “all manner of wickedness.”\textsuperscript{79}

Camp meetings continued to be criticized as the large crowds attracted many undesirables. There were entrepreneurs who wanted to take advantage of the gatherings by peddling their food, camping comforts or alcoholic beverages. Young rowdies were

\textsuperscript{75} Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 94.

\textsuperscript{76} Eslinger, \textit{Citizens of Zion}, 236.

\textsuperscript{77} Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 75-76.

\textsuperscript{78} Johnson, \textit{The Frontier Camp Meeting}, 62-63.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 64-66.
known to throw firebrands into the meeting, clip the tails and manes of the horses tethered nearby, take wagons apart, steal horses, kidnap carriages and run them into streams, and otherwise attempt to break apart the meeting. Charges of sexual impropriety also persisted, with some people claiming that the events stimulated sexual desire and that, along with the increase of church membership, camp meetings were responsible for the sharp rise in illegitimate births. Heckling was also quite common, though many of the Methodist preachers such as Jacob Young, Peter Cartwright, James B. Finley, and Lorenzo Dow were happy to match wits with them, and often succeeded in their exhortations so that the rowdies remained to pray.

While Cane Ridge took place largely due to Presbyterian leadership, the quarrels and divisions within that denomination that resulted from camp meetings caused them to abandon the practice after only a few years.

**Camp Meetings Named 1802**

As Lester Ruth observed, it wasn’t until camp meetings had been in practice for some years, and Cane Ridge drew national attention, that they actually came to be called

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80 Peter Cartwright’s ministry was on the American frontier where he served as Presiding Elder for fifty years. Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 60.

81 James Finley was from a Presbyterian family but was converted at the Cane Ridge camp meeting and joined the Methodists. He began to itinerate in 1809 in Ohio where he held many camp meetings. Ibid., 61.

82 From New England, Dow’s ministry is described below.

83 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 48-49.

84 Ibid., 59.
“camp meetings.” As word spread of this most dramatic revival, more and more similar events sprang up. Lorenzo Dow reports that he heard “many and various stories” of Cane Ridge and other such meetings while he was traveling from New Jersey to Georgia, and came across several eyewitnesses in the Carolinas.\textsuperscript{85} Jesse Lee wondered in his \textit{Short History of the Methodists} whether camp meetings per se began in South Carolina, Tennessee or Kentucky.\textsuperscript{86} In 1802, Lee reported that Baptists and Presbyterians frequently joined the Methodists in Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia and called their events “general meetings.” He cited one example of a general meeting at Hanging Rock, South Carolina, where fifteen ministers, some from each of these denominations, led about three thousand laity in services lasting all weekend.\textsuperscript{87} Lester Ruth noted that “the widespread use of the term ‘camp meeting’ \textit{per se} occurred among Methodists in 1802, and active promotion began immediately afterward.”\textsuperscript{88} Lorenzo Dow explained, “[The] name of ‘Camp Meeting’ was first derived from the necessitated order of the meeting, by the providence of God (beyond man’s expectation) instead of human wisdom.”\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{85} Dow, \textit{Extracts}, vi.
\textsuperscript{86} Lee, \textit{Short History}, 279.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 284-285. See also Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 76.
\textsuperscript{88} Ruth, \textit{A Little Heaven Below}, 189, note 17.
\textsuperscript{89} Dow, \textit{Extracts}, v.
Camp Meetings Promoted

It is clear from his letters and journal that, after Cane Ridge, Francis Asbury became quite convinced that the camp meeting was a very effective tool to spread the “new work of God.” 90 He had been praying for a major revival for years and believed that the camp meeting was God’s answer. He wrote to a presiding elder in western Pennsylvania in December of 1802 that “this is fishing with a large net.” 91 In the Western Conference alone, membership in the MEC tripled between 1801 and 1803, and camp meetings were seen as the means to this fruit. 92 Asbury’s journal is peppered with accounts of camp meetings he attended, preached at and promoted, and he often received letters reporting the results of other camp meetings through the connection. 93 Though early studies of the camp meeting concluded that they were “never an official practice” because they were not addressed in the Methodist Episcopal Church’s Book of Discipline, no Methodist body ever formally adopted the practice, and circuit riders were never given questions concerning them in their exams, 94 it must be noted that in practice presiding elders were expected to organize at least one camp meeting in their district each year. 95

90 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 186-192.


92 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 87.


94 Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting, 81.

95 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 42.
When the geography warranted it, there were often two or three camp meetings held on different sides of a district in the same year. Even Charles Johnson admitted that the fourth quarterly conference of a district, or even an annual conference, could be organized in conjunction with one or more camp meetings. In 1824, the New England Annual Conference began on June 22 in Barnard, Vermont, and preachers were requested to attend either the Brookfield, Vermont, camp meeting, or the Westmoreland, New Hampshire, camp meeting, both starting on June 14.

For a time there were both quarterly meetings held “with a camping format,” and camp meetings held separately from any church business. Then presiding elders began to use quarterly meetings to encourage greater attendance at camp meetings. “Ever increasingly, camp meetings became the times when revival was expected and planned for.” It was a time to “distill” the liturgical and evangelistic aspects of quarterly meetings and “to place them in a setting not connected to the administrative aspect.” At the same time quarterly and annual conferences became more focused on church business than conversion through worship. As Russell Ritchey observed, camp meetings “allowed Methodism to change while seeming to remain the same.”

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99 Ibid., 188.

100 Ibid., 189.

101 Richey, “From Quarterly to Camp Meeting,” 199.
By 1811 about one million participants attended between 400 to 500 Methodist Episcopal camp meetings in the United States every year.\textsuperscript{102} Besides word of mouth and letters, the Methodists employed local newspapers to spread the word. One notice in an 1804 paper from Trenton, New Jersey, was published nearly three weeks before the meeting was set to begin. It informed “all friendly ministers and praying people” that the meeting would last three days, gave directions, and encouraged “those who may come a distance to bring provisions for themselves if possible, and to tarry on the ground till the meeting ends.”\textsuperscript{103}

Camp Meetings Tempered—“Methodist Error”

As camp meetings became more ubiquitous, they also were conscientiously tempered. This was part of a conservative move by William McKendree,\textsuperscript{104} Nathan Bangs\textsuperscript{105} and John Emory,\textsuperscript{106} who sought to tighten things up in many areas of the Methodist connection after Asbury died. Changes included: 1) creating policies to

\textsuperscript{102} Ruth, “Reconsidering the Emergence,” 337.

\textsuperscript{103} Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 43.

\textsuperscript{104} McKendree served as presiding elder in Virginia before serving with Asbury as bishop starting in 1808. While he focused on parts of the country west of the Appalachian mountains, and moved Methodism beyond the Mississippi, McKendree also visited the eastern areas including New England. Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{105} Bangs was born in Connecticut but became a circuit rider in Upper and Lower Canada after his conversion in 1800, and was brave enough to volunteer to be the Presiding Elder of Lower Canada in 1812. In 1820 he became the senior book agent of the Methodist Book Concern in New York where he had great influence, producing many Methodist publications. Abel Stevens, A Compendious History of American Methodism (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1867), 367-369, 446-447, 454.

\textsuperscript{106} Emory was first appointed to the Philadelphia Annual Conference in 1810, served as Book Agent with Nathan Bangs in 1824, and was elected bishop in 1832. Ibid., 443.
regularize the education of the clergy; 2) establishing formal missionary programs; 3) founding academies and colleges to educate young church members; 4) repealing the requirement of itinerancy for newly recruited preachers and exhorters; 5) in 1816 renouncing efforts to combat slavery. For example, Nathan Bangs wrote in 1805 that he liked camp meetings and particularly appreciated the praying circles. But in 1810 as Preacher-in-Charge of New York City, he sought to “ban enthusiasm” from the churches there. After describing a parting ritual that he witnessed in New Jersey in 1809, Jesse Lee commented, “I did not like so much ceremony and form.”

Criticisms were usually published anonymously, and church leaders responded carefully, acting to eliminate the questionable practices without harming the reputation, mass appeal and proselytizing success of the camp meetings. One example of a clear critique of camp meeting practices is *Methodist Error*. Though first published anonymously in 1814, scholars have deduced that it was the work of John Fanning Watson, *Methodist Error, or, Friendly, Christian Advice to Those Methodists Who Indulge in Extravagent Emotions and Bodily Exercises* (Cincinnati: Phillips & Speer, 1819).

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107 Or rather redefining itinerancy from traveling constantly around a circuit with no home to residing in one neighborhood on a year-to-year basis, usually staying for a year or two.

108 Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 128.

109 Ibid., 129.


111 Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 136.

Watson, a lay Episcopalian from Philadelphia who encountered Methodism through his mother.\textsuperscript{113}

In \textit{Methodist Error}, Watson called Methodist leaders to relegate extravagant emotions and bodily exercises to the time of conversion or in private devotion. He drew upon John Wesley’s comments on Jonathan Edward’s writings to argue that “such exercises were appropriate in ‘closet’ devotions because it was there, rather than in public or social worship, that persons might be ‘as vehement’ as they liked ‘without offense to others.’”\textsuperscript{114} Watson purported to be concerned about the bad reputations Methodists had gained from those in “the minor part, [who] have been…very zealous for…outward signs of the most heedless emotion,” and he marginalized this “minor part” by indicating they were either the lower class whites or blacks.\textsuperscript{115} Watson’s critique is tinged with racism, as he “bluntly attributes white participation in praying circles and Ring Shouts to the influence of blacks.”\textsuperscript{116}

Response to \textit{Methodist Error} was mixed. Ezra Stiles Ely affirmed Watson’s opinion in the \textit{Quarterly Theological Review} and concluded his comments by “lambasting praying circles.”\textsuperscript{117} But a letter to the \textit{Harrisburg Chronicle} charged that \textit{Methodist Error} should be condemned as “abounding in calumny, absurdity, falsehood,

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\textsuperscript{113} Taves, \textit{Fits, Trances & Visions}, 377, note 2.  \\
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 76.  \\
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 77.  \\
\textsuperscript{116} Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 131.  \\
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 132-133.
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and misrepresentation, and manifestly designed to injure the cause to Methodism.” This was also the sentiment of the Philadelphia Conference of 1819. William Johnson noted that the conference minutes are less convicting, describing *Methodist Error* as “ill timed, censorious, calculated to revive old, and injurious prejudices and highly deserving the disapprobation of all the truly Pious.”

Johnson claimed that if the members of the Philadelphia Annual Conference had ignored Watson, camp meetings would have been “sullied beyond repair.” But they could not permit Watson’s allegations to fester. American Methodism’s reputation was at stake.

So by the 1820s camp meetings in most regions were being reformed. Praying circles, grand processionals and circular dance were among the “more outlandish forms of enthusiasm” forbidden at some camp meetings in the 1820s. Participants gave witness in letters and journal entries to the “good order” at camp meetings, noting that they now lacked “irregularities or extravagancies” such as the jerks or dance. “Orderly” and “serious” meetings became the norm.

William Johnson noted that some Methodist historians such as Nathan Bangs even wrote the religious exercises out of their

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118 Ibid., 134-135.

119 Ibid., 136.

120 Ibid., 173. Though Chapter Four below shows that praying circles and the processions of the parting ritual were still practiced in New England even as late as 1871.

histories. Camps located where there was greater racial diversity also began to enforce racial segregation at most meetings.

The concern for order was not only with liturgical practices, but also with the havoc wreaked by rowdy young trouble makers and those seeking to make a profit by selling liquor or enticing campers to steal away from the preaching and prayer services to engage in gambling. Attempts were made to regulate who could organize a camp meeting, stipulating that each one have a president who would be responsible for publishing and enforcing rules such as the distance peddlers needed to stay from the edges of the meeting, and the time when all campers should either retire to their tents or leave the premises for the night. In 1819, the Ohio Conference passed a resolution “that no camp-meeting be appointed on the Circuits, only by the direction of the Quarterly meeting Conference & that they shall draft rules for the regulation of the same, and that the Presiding (Elder) of each Dist. have it inserted in the journals thereof.” “As time went on, the meetings were organized and policed, so that these temptations were reduced and suspicious characters discouraged away.”

But “less enthusiasm at camp meetings might translate into a lesser number of conversions.” Enthusiasm seemed to be a key ingredient in a revival. William Johnson points to the irony that as the Methodists were weeding out worship practices rooted in

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123 Benson, “American Camp Meeting,” 78. See also Calvin Colton, History and Character of American Revivals of Religion (New York: AMS Press, 1832), 133.

124 Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 159.
Africa, Charles Finney took some of them up: “preaching in a lively, exhortatory manner employing the vernacular of the working classes and coaxing worshippers onto the “anxious bench” at the front of the pews.” Though as we will see later in this work, the concern for asserting that camp meetings were “well ordered” remained prominent, and the religious exercises became more moderate, some elements put into question by 

*Methodist Error* continued to be part of camp meeting practice for many decades.

The first section of this chapter has traced the development of Methodism in North America, showing that camp meetings were one of the important tools of this growth. Early Methodist leaders, including Asbury, saw camp meetings as effective instruments for promoting “the work of God,” and the historical evidence supports their assumption. While some aspects of the earliest Methodist worship practices were challenged for being too wild, the Methodists were careful in the way they imposed “order” so as not to strip out the spiritual and emotional aspects too. Before turning to examine the *Zion’s Herald* reports of camp meetings in New England, it will be helpful to examine the same early period in the development of Methodism as it was experienced in the New England region before 1823.

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125 Ibid., 171.
Part 2 – Methodism and Camp Meetings in New England Before 1823

Methodism Spreads through New England

It seems that, from the very beginning, Asbury had a sense that spreading Methodism into New England would be fraught with tough challenges because of the particular way religion had been practiced there. A brief review of the religious environment in New England is important to understanding how Methodism eventually took root and grew, and the role of camp meetings in this growth in the region.

The New England Religious Environment

Colonial New England has been characterized as a refuge for English Puritans. It is where they flocked after the English Civil War of 1642–1649 to establish their own vision of socio-religious order, in line with their Calvinist understanding of the perfect Christian church and civilization. The early communities in New England functioned as “religious societies,” and religious observances were prominent “in public, in the family, and in the closet…Public authorities, civil and ecclesiastic, assumed…a parental guardianship over the morals and religion of individuals.”126 No one could hold office or vote unless a member of the church.127

People inclined to practice any different form of religion faced a range of legal impediments. Roger Williams is well known for being expelled for his dissention and for

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126 Colton, American Revivals of Religion, 44-45.

subsequently founding Rhode Island and Providence Plantations which became the New England sanctuary for Baptists, Quakers and even Jews.\textsuperscript{128} There were a few Anglican (Church of England) congregations established in Puritan territory before the Revolution, including King’s Chapel in Boston.\textsuperscript{129} But during the Revolutionary War, many Anglican priests decided it was wise to follow other loyalists and government officials to safer places such as Nova Scotia.\textsuperscript{130}

After the American Revolution the religious climate of New England relaxed a bit. Dissenters were no longer hung\textsuperscript{131} or run out of town. Yet the states of Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire legally established the Congregational churches of each town to collect taxes to support the local ministers and the upkeep of a church meeting house in each community.\textsuperscript{132} There were economic benefits to church membership including the right to own property, but eventually members of other denominations were exempted from the tax if they could provide certification that they attended worship and contributed financially to their own church.\textsuperscript{133} The Congregational Church had also begun to decline and Congregationalists themselves were becoming far

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Ahlstrom, \textit{A Religious History}, 166-183. The first group of Portuguese Jewish immigrants settled in Newport in 1658. Hudson and Corrigan, \textit{Religion in America}, 57.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Where Charles Wesley was welcomed as he traveled back to England from his time as a missionary in Georgia.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 40-41.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Such as the Quaker Mary Dyer in 1660.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 37-38; Weisberger, \textit{They Gathered at the River}, 8, and 287, note 23
\item \textsuperscript{133} Lee and Thrift, \textit{Memoir}, 106-107.
\end{itemize}
less committed to the theology upon which their churches were founded. Methodism arrived in New England after the states had begun to separate from their founding churches, and those churches had begun to lose some of their cultural and spiritual power.

Even earlier, developments in New England religion and society had helped to open cracks for the seeds of Methodism to take root. The First Great Awakening (1730s and 1740s) is surely one of those fertile cracks. Social historians such as Sidney Ahlstrom point to the development of socio-religious anxiety in the more populated settlements of Massachusetts and Connecticut as a catalyst for this awakening. With a religious worldview that God’s providence is a sign of being part of the elect, farmers could feel pretty good when there was plenty of land for developing new farms. But after a few generations the population became too great for everyone to have a suitable farm. This left many of the younger generation wondering how they would make a living. Some young men began to move west to New York and beyond the Alleghenies, or north into Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine in their search for new farmland. This left a shortage of men for women in the settled communities to marry. Uncertainty about whether God would provide for them left young men and women doubting that they belonged to the elect. When Jonathan Edwards took his grandfather’s post as the pastor of the church in Northampton, Massachusetts, in 1727, the young people seemed to be acting out of their fear that they were predestined to damnation by staying out late at

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136 Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 43-44.
night in mixed company, frequenting taverns and other lewd behavior. Edwards began ministering to them and they responded by reforming their behavior.  

This Awakening was seen by Edwards and his colleagues as an awakening of the elect, those predestined by God to come to salvation. He came to believe that preaching could “fright[en] persons away from hell.” After awakening, the elect would be known by the holiness of their lives. This helped to break down the hard theology of double predestination, which afforded people no agency in whether their souls would ultimately be saved or damned. Marks of salvation were expanded beyond God’s providence to experiences of salvation expressed in love and joy.

George Whitefield spent considerable time in New England starting in 1740 when he traveled 800 miles through the region preaching 130 sermons in seventy-three days. Jonathan Edwards hosted Whitefield in Northampton, and there is evidence that each influenced the other. Whitefield introduced the practice of preaching whenever and

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139 Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 43.
140 Ibid., 41.
142 Whitefield had been a member of the same Holy Club as John and Charles Wesley during their Oxford days.
wherever he could find anyone to listen, including whatever pulpit was opened to him, and out in the open air. Edwards helped sway Whitefield to a Calvinist version of salvation.  

A second occurrence that loosened the religious soil of New England was the development of Unitarian and Universalist theology in reaction to the hard Calvinist theology of predestination. The Awakening and the education offered at Harvard were two principal influences toward a more liberal theology that both moved people away from the tenets of Calvinism and tried to reconcile Enlightenment methods of attaining knowledge with faith. In the midst of very divergent points of view, some common Unitarian sentiments included the rejection of the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. At the same time Universalism developed among less educated people who were repelled by the idea of eternal damnation. They also rejected orthodox Trinitarian theology. Conflict ensued that forced towns to vote, often resulting in the Calvinists being displaced from the “parish church” and forced to regroup and build new meetinghouses. By 1820, eighty-one Congregational churches had divided over this theology. The region was no longer dominated by a single and unified religious establishment.

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145 Ibid., 156-158.
146 Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, 15. Evidence of this history is still quite visible as one travels through New England towns and takes note of which denomination has the original Congregational building and a sign saying “first parish,” and which one meets elsewhere.
Methodism Enters the Scene

Given the religious climate in New England, Francis Asbury was initially hesitant to expend scarce “human resources” in the region. Few Methodist leaders even passed through New England before 1789. There were several barriers to overcome. First, Methodism’s theological teachings were Arminian, not Calvinist; second, the Methodist movement came out of the Church of England, so it would be natural for New England patriots to see Methodism as a Tory religion; and thirdly, almost every Presbyterian and Congregational minister ordained between 1758 and 1789 had some college training while Methodist preachers used a system of mentoring and self-education to train their clergy. Many clergy of the Congregational Church attacked Methodist doctrine verbally and in writing. Clergy frequently prohibited Methodist preachers from using the town meeting house, and civil authorities denied use of courthouses. Thomas Ware, a contemporary of Jesse Lee, wrote that the Congregational clergy were often “violent in their opposition to us and the rough manner in which I was usually treated by them rendered me unwilling to come in contact with them.”

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148 Emphasizing human agency in receiving the salvation Christ offered to everyone.

149 Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River*, 14.

150 Shiels, “Methodist Invasion,” 266.
The Methodist preachers who accompanied Jesse Lee in the early years saw themselves as invaders spreading Arminian Christianity, which avoided both the “despondent doctrines of Calvin” and “the more fatal extreme”\textsuperscript{151} of Universalist thought. New territory was won whenever the zealous preachers could stir people up to conversion. While the Methodists typically thought of themselves as calling the lost home, the Congregational clergy saw it as “sheep-stealing.”\textsuperscript{152}

\textit{The Work of Jesse Lee}

In May of 1789, Jesse Lee from Virginia, still just a licensed lay preacher, asked Francis Asbury for an appointment to Stamford, Connecticut, where he began to form a circuit. After seven months he had only enticed seven persons to join a class, and endured rebuffs and public denouncement from many pulpits. But in 1790, Asbury sent reinforcements, dispatching three preachers in February, and together the four preachers added a second circuit around New Haven, Connecticut. Jesse Lee ventured up to Vermont and New Hampshire in April of that year and stopped in Hampden, Massachusetts, to preach his first sermon in that state on his way back. In June he headed east toward Rhode Island. Stopping to preach in eastern Connecticut along the way, Lee then headed north toward Boston for the first time, and on July 7 when he was in the area

\textsuperscript{151} Stevens, \textit{Memorials}, 44.

\textsuperscript{152} Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 42.
of Dedham, he met up with Freeborn Garrettson\footnote{Garrettson’s ministry as an early circuit rider was focused along the Hudson River of New York.} who was just taking leave of the city.\footnote{Mudge, \textit{History of the New England Conference}, 24.} Even though Garrettson confirmed that Boston was not so receptive, this encounter with a Methodist brother bolstered Lee’s spirits. On July 11, 1790, Jesse Lee preached his first sermon on Boston Common under an elm tree by the frog pond, drawing large crowds three consecutive Sunday evenings, but with no permanent results.

On October 4, 1790, Lee was finally ordained at the conference in New York City. At that same conference, New England was designated as a district and Lee was appointed as its presiding elder. After sixteen months of work, 200 persons had joined classes, two small chapels had been erected, and five circuits were formed in five northeastern states.\footnote{Maine remained a part of Massachusetts until 1820. Cook, \textit{Roots and Branches}, 11.} There were four other preachers appointed to serve four circuits with Lee: three in Connecticut—Fairfield, New Haven, and Hartford (which extended into Wilbraham, Massachusetts) and one called the Boston Circuit in Massachusetts that also embraced Rhode Island. Two more preachers were appointed to the fifth circuit in the New England District (Litchfield, Connecticut) but were placed under Freeborn Garrettson’s supervision.\footnote{Ibid.}

Though the easternmost circuit was named for Boston, Lee could find no place to preach in that city when he returned in November of 1790, so he accepted an invitation
from further up the north shore in Lynn where the first Methodist society in
Massachusetts was formed in February of 1791. Soon seventy male members of the
Congregational church in Lynn left to join the Methodist society.\textsuperscript{157} By 1791, the number
of members in New England had more than doubled in size to 481. Asbury paid a visit to
New England that year, but Boston was unreceptive even to him. It took until June of
1792 for a Boston society to be formed with fifteen persons who met on North Street.

Circuits were quite large in those years—the Needham Circuit “at first covered
most of the territory between Boston and Worcester.” As noted by the numbered points
on the contemporary map in Figure 2.1, this included societies in Needham (1), West
Boylston (3), Lunenburg (2), Townsend (11), Shirley (4), Harvard (5), Littleton (6),
Grafton (7), Uxbridge (14), Westborough (12), Marlborough (9), Hopkinton (8), Sudbury
(10), Milford (13), Framingham (15), Holliston (16), Natick (17), Weston (18), Newton
(19), Waltham (20), and Malden (21).\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{158} The map above was created for this dissertation using MapQuest. The list comes from Mudge,
\textit{History of the New England Conference}, 43-44.
Methodism continued to spread through the northern New England states, sometimes carried by converts themselves. Already Methodists, the Hedding family moved from Duchess County, New York, to Starksborough, Vermont, in 1781. They joined with another Methodist family to organize weekly worship until the Vergennes circuit was formed in 1798.\footnote{D. W. Clark, 	extit{Life and Times of Rev. Elijah Hedding, D.D.: Late Senior Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church} (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1855), 49-57.} In the fall of 1793, Lee had been appointed to Lynn and the “Province of Maine” and set out for new territory. About a year later the first class formed in Monmouth, and the first Methodist meeting house in Maine was built in Readfield. By 1809 Methodists had developed eighteen circuits in Maine with 2,848
members in society.\textsuperscript{160} The first Methodist society in New Hampshire was formed in Chesterfield in 1795, allowing Jesse Lee to note that it had taken just twenty-six years after Wesley had sent the first preachers to have Methodist societies in every state.\textsuperscript{161}

\textit{New England Annual Conference Formed}

As noted above, the territory of the United States had proved too large for all the Methodist preachers to gather with their bishops at one time. At first they tackled the problem by holding several conferences throughout the territory each year so each preacher might attend at least one nearest to him. In 1796 there were seventeen conferences in the United States, including the first in New England, held in Lynn, Massachusetts. Finally, that same year the Methodists called a general conference and took on the task of reorganizing. At this conference they divided the United States into six annual conferences.

In 1796 the northern-most annual conference was called New England, but included the portion of New York state east of the Hudson River. Freeborn Garrettson superintended sixteen circuits in the Western District and Jesse Lee’s Eastern District had fourteen circuits. By 1800 forty-six circuits were divided into six districts: New York and Western Connecticut; Western Massachusetts and Vermont; Eastern Massachusetts

\textsuperscript{160} Cook, \textit{Roots and Branches}, 14.

\textsuperscript{161} Lee, \textit{Short History}, 227.
and Rhode Island; Eastern Connecticut; Maine; and Upper Canada. There were 2,519 members.¹⁶²

In 1800 the general conference divided this region along astoundingly unnatural boundaries. Only Maine, Eastern Massachusetts (east of Worcester) and Rhode Island remained in the “New England” conference while all of Connecticut, New Hampshire (including Massachusetts towns east of the Merrimac River), Vermont and New York, as well as the western portion of Massachusetts and Upper Canada were now in a region called the “New York Conference.” Historian James Mudge noted that of the sixty-one preachers appointed to this conference, only eighteen were sent to communities within the state of New York.¹⁶³

Figure 2.2 New York and New England 1800  Figure 2.3 New England Conference 1804

¹⁶² Cook, *Roots and Branches*, 17.

General conference righted this blunder in the 1804 session by using the Connecticut River and the Green Mountains to set the western boundary of New England in Connecticut and Vermont respectively, while the boundary in Massachusetts was in the middle of the Berkshire Mountains. At first the area west of this boundary remained part of the New York Conference, with a portion later formed into the Troy Conference. The boundaries of this study remain those set around New England in the 1804 conference. The practicality of this boundary is confirmed by the scope of Zion’s Herald, which rarely mentioned a camp meeting outside of the New England territory as defined in 1804. Thus, for this work, New England is defined as including Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont east of the Green Mountains, Connecticut east of the river, and Massachusetts east of the Berkshires.

*Early Conversions to Methodism in New England*

Of course, the growth of Methodist territory is a result of the many people the circuit riders touched and led toward conversion. Lorenzo Dow provided insight into how the circuit riders fostered these conversions. In 1791, Brother Hope Hull came to the region of Dow’s hometown, Coventry, Connecticut, when Dow was a lad of thirteen. The date of a preaching service was set and made known, so when Brother Hull arrived “the people flocked out from every quarter to hear.” Hull preached there the next day as

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164 In 1832 the portions in Massachusetts and Vermont were split off from the New York Conference along with the upper Hudson River Valley and the Adirondack and Mohawk River Valley to form the Troy Conference. Ibid., 56.
well using Jeremiah 8:22\(^{165}\) to draw “the analogy between a person sick of a consumption and a sin-sick soul.” Proclaiming that the “real balm of Gilead” would heal the consumption, Hull “spiritualize[d] it, in the blood of Christ healing the soul; in which he described the way to heaven, and pointed out the way marks; which [Dow] had never heard described so clearly before.” Hull was not shy about his proclamation, for next he pointed his finger towards Dow, saying, “Sinner, there is a frowning providence above your head, and a burning hell beneath your feet; and nothing but the brittle thread of life prevents your soul from falling into endless perdition.” The way out was to pray. This sermon sent Dow into a state of mourning and fear of death until he “first attempted to supplicate the throne of grace for preservation through the night.” When Dow learned that some of his relatives and neighbors had “found the pardoning love of God,” he asked one of his young friends to hold a prayer meeting. As he went there he prayed. “I made a solemn promise to God if he would pardon my sins and give me an evidence of my acceptance, that I would forsake all those things, wherein I had formerly thought to have taken my happiness, and lead a religious life devoted to him.” While at the prayer meeting, still feeling that a just God could not show him mercy, a young woman who was traveling through town shared a hymn with him and encouraged him by predicting that he would “come down here praising God” before she left in the morning. Sure enough, Dow struggled through the night at home, reflecting on his own sinful state using scripture and reason. Finally, he submitted to God in prayer, crying,

\(^{165}\) “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?”
I yield; I yield; if there be mercy in heaven for me let me know it; and if not, let me go down to hell and know the worst of my case. As these words flowed from my heart, I saw the mediator step in, as it were, between the Father’s justice and my soul, and those words were applied to my mind with great power: “Son! Thy sins which are many, are forgiven thee; thy faith hath save thee; go in peace.”

Dow testified that the peace, love and joy that filled him was incomparable. He rose from his bed, went back to the house where the prayer meeting had taken place and announced his new state to the young woman and the preacher who celebrated with him.166

This account shows how a circuit rider’s presence for just a few days in one community could impact it. Lay people gathered to hear the preaching which provided them with a new way of applying scripture to their lives. By learning the “marks” of the way of salvation, those who joined were newly inspired and could then encourage one another toward salvation through prayer meetings and conversations, which led to conversions. These factors all worked together to convince the individual of the holiness of the Methodist preacher and his message. Participants became convicted of their own state of sinfulness, and they would get into a concentrated state of mind, which focused constant attention on salvation until the desired peace of justification was attained.

Another example of a conversion in the early days of New England Methodism is that of Nancy Woodward Caldwell,167 who was born and raised in the area of Poland, Maine. In 1795, she met her first Methodist circuit rider, Joel Ketchum. As a result of his

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preaching, Nancy wrote that she felt convicted, saying, “My sins appeared like mountains.” For some months, she “cried to God for mercy,” knowing that if mercy did not prevail, she “was lost forever.” Then another Methodist circuit rider, Stephen Hull, became Nancy’s “nursing father.” Though his influence convinced her to “cast her lot among the Methodists,” Nancy did not experience “the witness of the Spirit that [her] sins were forgiven” until 1798 when she was seventeen.

Two years later Nancy married William Caldwell and moved to his farm in what is now Oxford, Maine. She described herself as a feeble invalid as a result of childbirth, the labors and hardships that came with farming and “great mental sufferings.” When she was twenty-five, Nancy “sunk under the weight of disease,” and while in this state a Methodist preacher came to call. During a time of pastoral care the preacher told Nancy “you must be convicted for holiness as much as you were for justification.” Someone then gave Nancy a copy of Thomas Coke’s sermon about Hester Ann Rogers, which explained holiness in more detail. But Nancy’s physical health continued to worsen through the next year until her physicians had given up hope of a cure and “left [her] to linger in suffering, and to die.” Nancy continued to read her Bible and pray. On March 1, 1806, she read Saints’ Everlasting Rest by Richard Baxter, which served as the catalyst for her experience of sanctification. She wrote, “I felt as perfectly free as an infant from the defiling nature of sin.” A few days later her doctor visited and found that Nancy had

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168 Ibid., 20-21.

169 Ibid., 21-24.

170 Ibid., 26-28.
undergone a physical healing as well. As friends and neighbors came to call, Nancy Caldwell began to hold a Methodist prayer meeting in her home and dared to give public testimony to the grace of God.\textsuperscript{171}

Through Nancy Caldwell we can see that conversions could take place away from large gatherings such as quarterly meetings, fostered through the pastoral care of the circuit riders, which included the dissemination of religious literature. Nancy Caldwell is also an example of someone who went through the process of sanctification.

\textit{Developing a Crop of Methodist Preachers}

It did not take long for the Methodist preachers such as Lee who had come up from the mid-Atlantic and southern states\textsuperscript{172} to inspire an enthusiastic crop of native-born New England circuit riders. Again, Lorenzo Dow provides a glimpse into the process, even though his inward call to ordained Methodist ministry was never fully affirmed by the members of the New England Annual Conference.

Starting in 1793, when he was fourteen years old, Dow began wrestling with a call to preach. He tried exhortation for the first time when he was fifteen, to his parents’ great disapproval.\textsuperscript{173} Finally, at the end of 1795, he made his intentions known to the local circuit rider, C. Spry, and was invited to join the New London Circuit as an

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\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 31-39.
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\textsuperscript{172} Some of these include Jacob Brush, Daniel Smith, George Roberts, John Lee (Jesse’s brother), John Bloodgood and Nathaniel B. Mills. Mudge, \textit{History of the New England Conference}, 32, 34.
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\textsuperscript{173} Dow, \textit{The Dealings of God, Man and the Devil}, 14-16.
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exhorter. Dow recorded that there were mixed reviews of his work, which, as expected from a teenager, often came across as too prideful. Some of the older brethren plainly asked him to leave them; others kept trying to take Dow under their wing, impressed with his gifts. But Dow frequently set off on his own, preaching and starting class meetings, without the permission or credentials of the Methodists. Jesse Lee expelled Dow from Methodist circuits and told him to go home more than once. At the 1797 annual conference in Thompson, Connecticut, Dow even “passed the examination by the bishop,” but was still rejected by the conference.

Finally Dow was accepted as one of ten new preachers on a trial basis at the 1798 conference in Granville, Connecticut. Mudge notes, “this was the third time that Dow had applied, for the brethren, though they admired his zeal and diligence, his ability and success in making converts, were rightfully afraid of his aberrations. He was a right-hearted, wrong-headed man, almost a lunatic at times. After laboring two years with much fruit he believed himself called of God to preach in Ireland.” He “turned up [in New England] again in 1801, traveled one more circuit, and then set out on that wandering career which took him into every corner of the nation.”

But as detailed below, Dow’s unsanctioned ministry bore much fruit in New England. The evidence apparently points to him as the one most responsible for introducing camp meetings to New England in 1803.

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174 Ibid., 16.

175 Mudge, History of the New England Conference, 60-61.
Other important indigenous New England preachers from these early years include Enoch Mudge, Aaron Lummus, Timothy Merritt, Wilbur Fisk, and Elijah Hedding. Like Dow, these men experienced conversion as teenagers and quickly moved from exhorters, to preachers, to deacons and elders. Merritt and Lummus used their gifts to write and publish theology; Merritt also edited *Zion’s Herald* and *The Christian Advocate* newspapers. Mudge founded the Seaman’s Bethel in New Bedford, Massachusetts, until he was paralyzed by illness. After that he was elected twice to serve terms on the Massachusetts state legislature, and as a delegate to the convention to revise the state Constitution.  

Fisk and Hedding used their leadership skills as presiding elders and Hedding became bishop in 1824. Fisk is noted as the first principal of Wesleyan Academy, which opened in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, in 1825, and then became the first President of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, when it opened in 1831. Messer noted that besides religious motivation, becoming a Methodist preacher gave these young men a reason to stay in New England, some means of livelihood, and status.

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176 Ibid., 46.

177 Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 94.
Camp Meetings in New England

New England Camp Meetings Begin

A variety of primary sources reveal that events called camp meetings were organized in New England for two decades before the first issue of *Zion’s Herald* was published. Just as elsewhere in the country, the religious “exercises” that came to be associated with camp meetings began taking place at New England Methodist gatherings as early as 1799, before the term “camp meeting” was in use. At the Middle Haddam, Connecticut, quarterly meeting, Shadrach Bostwick, the presiding elder, reported,

The Lord came down in mighty power! Many were struck and fell from their seats prostrate upon the floor, crying in bitter agonies, some for converting, and others for sanctifying grace! It happened well that brother McCombs and myself had been formerly favoured with such scenes in the South, and well knew what to do. The New-London friends carried the flame into the city, and this brought on a quickening there; about sixteen members joined in one day, and many more in the circuit.\(^{179}\)

In his volume of camp meeting hymns published in 1818, Enoch Mudge states that camp meetings were

first introduced into modern use… [w]hen the people of God assembled for the ordinary purposes of his worship, to preach his word, and administer the sacrament for the Lord’s supper, [and] it was found that their houses would not contain the multitudes assembled. It was natural, therefore, that they should turn their attention to the grove, where (at that season of the year) they might all be accommodated in one assembly.\(^{180}\)


\(^{179}\) Dow, *Extracts*, 12. Lester Ruth cites this letter and others like it in Ruth, “Reconsidering the Emergence,” 335.

\(^{180}\) Mudge, *The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book*, iii.
Illustrative of Lester Ruth’s claim that the name “camp meeting” was devised after Cane Ridge, James Mudge reported that the first camp meeting in New England was in Haddam, Connecticut, in 1802.\footnote{Mudge, \textit{History of the New England Conference}, 385.} Other primary evidence, however, suggests that Mudge, who cites few sources for his history, was off by a year. While no other corroborating evidence for an 1802 meeting has surfaced, there are two primary sources that indicate that the first event to be called a camp meeting was indeed held in Haddam, but that it was held one year later, in 1803.

The first source concerning this 1803 Haddam camp meeting is Lorenzo Dow, who was no longer seeking approval of his ministry by the MEC, and thus no longer under appointment of a presiding elder. He continued, however, to live the life of an itinerant preacher and persisted in promoting the Methodist cause and making converts as he traveled up and down the east coast. In 1803, when Dow heard several reports of the great revival at Cane Ridge, his interest was piqued. He decided to attend his first camp meeting in Georgia, and Dow was so favorably impressed that he began to organize camp meetings along his way back north. A few years later, Dow compiled a collection of letters from Methodist preachers to Asbury. These letters gave an account of the work of God, through camp meetings, to increase and spread Methodism in North America. In the introduction, Dow makes claims concerning his involvement in camp meetings, “Thence I introduced them first into New York State, then into Connecticut, and after that into Massachusetts; and I understand that they since have made their way through the
Province of Main [sic] and Vermont.”182 In the same volume is a letter by Daniel Ostrander, Presiding Elder of the New London District, dated September 1803, describing “a kind of field-meeting” by the river near Middleton (Haddam is just south of there).

As it was down the Connecticut river [sic], about fifty went from Middleton by water. Some of them were awakened at the meeting, and eight or nine were converted, on their return, before they got home. The city was soon alarmed, and from that time the work began to spread. About forty, it is supposed, were brought to the saving knowledge of the Lord in about six weeks. The spirit of perfection is much awake.183

Independent evidence about this camp meeting in Haddam serves as the second primary document. The following description of Nabby Frothingham’s conversion at a camp meeting in 1803 was written at the time of her death in 1809:

[After] a time of intercessory prayer, God arrived, in the participants’ opinion. Some who were already believers were soon caught up in the travail of seeking sanctification. Elsewhere, as an eyewitness reported, “sinners began to be pricked to the hearts, and cry out under a sense of their sin.” Others fell prostrate and lay as if dead. Across the grounds there was crying, praying, singing, preaching, exhorting, and shouting, all at one time….Finally, after watching her friends and family proceed from the throes of mourning over sin to the glory of feeling forgiveness, she herself experienced a conversion at the very end of the field meeting. She arose with “shouts of joy, wondering why believers did not tell her more of the sweetness of pardoning love.”184

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182 Dow, Extracts, vii.

183 Ibid., 35.

When the meeting closed, “Nabby Frothingham traveled home and joined the Methodists.”\textsuperscript{185} Nabby was from Middletown, Connecticut—and the field meeting was in Haddam. Lester Ruth notes that “This Connecticut meeting itself seems not to have gone by [the name of camp meeting].”\textsuperscript{186}

\textit{Camp Meetings Replicated}

The next camp meeting noted by James Mudge was in 1804 near New Haven, Connecticut, which further supports 1803 as the correct year for the first New England meeting. For if they met with so much success in the first year there would be little reason to skip an entire summer before holding more camp meetings.\textsuperscript{187} Success in the eyes of the circuit riders and converts encouraged the organization of more camps.

Lorenzo Dow worked with Daniel Ostrander to organize the third Connecticut camp meeting (in Bolton) in 1805, which ran for four days in early June. Dow reported that “thousands appeared on the ground” on Sunday and “several found peace, and prejudice seemed to wear off from the minds of the people.”\textsuperscript{188} Three days after that one ended, Dow was present for the first meeting in Massachusetts on a farm in Norton (just east of Attleboro) between June 6 and 10 in 1805. George Pickering of the Boston

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{185} Ruth, “Reconsidering the Emergence,” 334-335.
\item\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 335.
\item\textsuperscript{187} Mudge, \textit{History of the New England Conference}, 385.
\item\textsuperscript{188} Dow, \textit{The Dealings of God, Man and the Devil}, 107.
\end{footnotes}
District was the presiding elder and eleven preachers from the district were present along with Lorenzo Dow.  

James Mudge reported that “great numbers of these Camp Meetings were held all over our territory, scarce ever twice in the same place, inexpensive gatherings adapted to the poor people who frequented them.”

At some central point in the circuit or District where the owner of the ground or grove was friendly and there was a good supply of pure water and other conveniences, the widely scattered people would come together, some in wagons, some on horseback, some on foot. A plain shed-like structure, built of poles and a few rough boards, served for a preacher’s [sic] stand. Some logs with slabs over them answered for seats. Clean straw on the bare ground with sheets and quilts upon it was made to do for beds, and a partition of cotton cloth separated the men from the women. A substantial fire of pine knots or maple gave warmth by day and light by night. On Sundays there were often congregations of thousands of hearers. The roughs resorted to these meetings to make disturbance, and, especially when they could obtain liquor, there was often trouble. But the power of God frequently got hold of them, and the hand of the law, as a rule, proved efficient. The memoirs of all the early preachers are filled with accounts of these great gatherings, and the triumphs of the gospel at them.

To many New Englanders, however, these early meetings were “barbarous emotional outbreaks.” Daniel Ostrander noted that when nearly forty people were converted in the six weeks after the 1803 camp meeting in Haddam, “the houses where they assemble are frequently stoned, and the windows broke to pieces, but all this does not move the young converts, who are as bold as lions.”

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189 Ibid., 108.


192 Dow, Extracts, 35.
The Camp Meeting in Conjunction with the 1809 Annual Conference

A camp meeting was held in conjunction with the annual conference in Monmouth, Maine, in June of 1809. Bishops Asbury and McKendree were both present and presumably had a hand in its organization. The preachers, including Elijah Hedding, then a presiding elder, took turns leaving the conference to preach at the stand.\(^{193}\)

Fanny Newell, who had been newly converted and joined a Methodist class in Sidney, Maine, described this camp meeting as her first. The journey, by way of Readfield, was about thirty miles from Sidney. Her account gives a participant’s perspective of what took place. At first Fanny felt “much tried within myself” because everything appeared strange. As the public prayer meeting began on the first evening she offered a silent prayer, “O Lord! I want more religion! I must have more religion! for I am not half enough engaged in the work of God. I feel that there are greater attainments for me, even in this life. O deepen and widen the work of grace in my soul. O sanctify me wholly before I leave this place.” She offered this prayer the second day as well and found herself in an anxious state, unable to sleep or eat. She saw herself like Jacob at the Jabbok and quoted Charles Wesley’s hymn “Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown.”\(^{194}\)

On the third morning, a Sunday, Fanny went to the early morning prayer meeting at the preachers’ stand and felt perfect love, though she was not sure just how to name it at first. When others returned to their tents for breakfast, Fanny remained at the stand. When two friends led her to food and drink, Fanny said, “my soul was so full of glory,


\(^{194}\) The hymn and Fanny Newell’s thoughts both refer to Genesis 32.
that I was ready to fly away—I mounted as on eagles’ wings—I soared aloft.” She returned to the stand. Rev. Timothy Merritt, the secretary of the meeting, was “taking down the names of those who had experienced justification, and those who had obtained the second blessing—sanctification. “He sent for me,” Fanny remembered. “Accordingly I went, and stepped upon the preacher’s [sic] stand.” When he asked if Fanny had experienced sanctification she answered, “No, for I did not understand what sanctification was—but I felt as I never did before.”

Immediately Fanny fell to the floor and “was caught up to the third heaven and heard things unspeakable” which she describes at length in her memoir. After seeing angels, visiting the city of God, and joining in the chorus of Hallelujah and Glory, she moved in her vision to earth “to a place where I had a view of Christ…nailed to the cross,” begging the Father to “spare the barren…a little longer.”

Fanny asserted that her actions on the stand created “no confusion, or disorder, or any irregularity, or the least interruption in the proceedings.” The congregation preceded in prayer and singing while she was down on the floor. She came to just before “the bishop” was going to preach. When Brother Sabin encouraged her to give testimony, Fanny “beheld a small light on the heads of many—some larger and some smaller.” As she looked towards the preachers’ stand, she saw “stars of different magnitudes—some of them appeared like burning lights.” Then she “delivered the message which his Spirit dictated to me….All were silent until I had closed my message and sat down.” The rest

195 Part of what was happening here is that Fanny was being introduced to Methodist discourse which gave her names for her experiences.
of that day Fanny felt “like a young convert…I passed a most solemn, glorious, and happy night.”

On Monday morning the camp meeting ended. Fanny described the parting ceremony as a “solemn procession, the preachers in front.” She continued, “we all moved round the ground in order to take the parting hand in a regular and profitable manner, and to see the dear servants of the Lord fold each other in their arms, with tears running down their cheeks, then tearing themselves from each other’s embrace.” Fanny also made it clear that the mission of those who attended was to share the news of Jesus’ saving love with “dying men” so that when they met again they could bring new people with them to camp meeting.196

When Elijah Hedding returned from Monmouth to the New London (Connecticut) District in 1809, he proceeded to organize a camp meeting in Hebron. In these days, Hedding’s biographer wrote, there were at least four sermons a day interspersed with prayer meetings, exhortations and people relating their Christian experience with little time given to any other activities. As the organizer of the Hebron meeting, Hedding was rather anxious due to the prejudice against camp meetings—but the meeting was deemed successful when those who came out of curiosity “were striken down to the ground, and cried aloud for mercy,” while others from different denominations “fell powerless to the earth.” Not less than 500 were reported to be lying prostrate “by the power of the Holy

By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, New England Methodists had begun to experience the spiritual power of this new form of gathering.

Camp meetings also called out new forms of preaching and new ways of thinking about the content of the sermons. Camp meeting preaching was not always simply spiritual “milk” meant for “seekers.” There appears to be no “dumbing down” of the gospel message for the masses. If one sample, apparently delivered at a camp meeting in East Hartford, Connecticut, in August of 1816, is at all typical, the sermons could present complex theological arguments. In “The Apostles’ Commission,” Rev. Timothy Merritt took as his text Jesus’ commission to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature,” apparently defending the circuit rider invasion of the Congregational settlements. The bulk of this address however, defended both the divine and human nature of Christ, perhaps in response to the Unitarian Universalist thinking afloat in the culture. At the end of the address, Merritt defined preaching as delivering the gospel by speaking without reading it, setting apart his style from the learned pastors around him. Although sermons like his could be complex, they were also memorable—something for the listeners to take with them. “Father Taylor,” who was also in attendance at the East Hartford camp meeting that year, preached on the manna given to the children of Israel. “The discourse made a great sensation and impression on the meeting; so that it was the

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198 This seems to be pointed at those Congregational preachers trained at Harvard and Yale who read their sermons. Merritt, however, did affirm writing outlines of sermons—“to enlarge the mind, strengthen the memory, render your ideas distinct, and enable you to have method in all your discourses.” Timothy Merritt, *The Apostles’ Commission: Being the Substance of a Discourse Delivered at a Camp-Meeting in East Hartford, August, 1816* (Palmer, CT: From E. Terry’s Press, 1816), 37.
constant theme of remark, as people met each other, ‘Have you had any manna to-day?’”

Methodist Response to Resistance

Just as there was resistance to Methodists in New England, so there was resistance to their camp meetings. According to William G. McLoughlin, “To New Englanders the camp-meeting revivals… [were] as far from true religious activities as Jacobinism was from true republicanism. The camp meeting hysteria seemed to New England divines to be the work of the devil trying to discredit true religion.”

Surely there were those who would take advantage of the large gatherings by setting up booths to sell their wares, be they food, bedding or rum. The camp meetings regularly attracted young lads seeking to do mischief. But New England camp meetings were populated by New Englanders who prized their ability to maintain order.

Calvin Colton, who lived and traveled in the Northeast at the time of the early camp meetings, wrote a history of American revivals for a British audience in 1832. In it he noted the quiet order of the revivals in New England, as distinct from elsewhere.

The ostensible phenomena of revivals of religion in the United States, have exhibited themselves very much according to the characters of the communities affected, and of the individuals to whom, in the providence of God, have been committed the guidance and control of public feeling. In New England the character of the communities has always been of a grave and sober cast, where thought takes lead of feeling; and the temperament of the ministry more severe


than ardent—more prone to stock the understanding than excite the passions. Hence the public excitements of revivals have never exposed the people or the ministers to extravagancies. The most remarkable characteristic of such seasons, is not noise but stillness—the reign of contemplative silence and solemn reflection. The world itself seems hushed, as if awed by eternity. The public assemblies are thronged, indeed, but the ordinary restive listlessness of an unthinking crowd is settled into a rapt attention of the soul, and into the silent, but not less expressive demonstrations of the deepest emotions. Public order is not less, but more exact. A violation of it would be the more shocking. There is no want of feeling, and no difficulty in controlling it. And I have yet to learn the occurrence of any notable disorders in all the revivals of New England that have ever come to my knowledge. They may have happened, but I never heard even of one. All is decency, and all quietness—not, however, the quietness of stupor, but of subdued feeling. A large portion of New England is literally educated to revivals. The present generation of ministers and churches has been born in them, and brought up in them, and is familiar with all their scenes. They understand the symptoms—they know what to do and how to do—and the people know how to behave. In the highest excitement of public feeling, it would be morally impossible to drive the people into disorder, or extravagance. They have no such habit. Such is the fixedness of their character, that no power on earth could essentially discompose the public mind.\footnote{201 Colton, American Revivals of Religion, 132-134.}

Colton’s depiction of ubiquitous harmony was most likely exaggerated. There were times when the rowdies got out of hand as will be described below. There is also evidence that Methodists got help in maintaining order, successfully lobbying their state legislatures to create laws protecting the grounds, and enlisting local law enforcement officials to support the order Methodists wished to maintain. As the data from Zion’s Herald shows, disorder was enough of a threat that at least ninety percent of the camp meeting reports mention order. But the New England Methodists were also vigilant enough about keeping order that almost every report stated that it had been kept.
**Fruits of Camp Meetings**

The driving force behind the continued organization of camp meetings through New England was that they appeared to be working, with fruits growing from them for many months after each encampment broke up. On January 22, 1818, the presiding elder of the Kennebec District reported the results of a camp meeting in Sidney, Maine, held in September of 1817 where Bishop Enoch George was present. Four months later, the author could report that nearly 100 people had “professed converting grace” in Fairfield, and seventy had joined that society. “A considerable number of converts are people of middle age, and of established characters, as good citizens. This adds great strength to the old society.” He linked revivals as far away as Orrington, Bucksport, Northport, Belmont and Waldoborough to this meeting.²⁰²

A great many New England preachers experienced conversion or sanctification at camp meetings, including Isaac Jennison Jr., and “Camp Meeting John” Allen. Orange Scott was converted at the camp meeting in Barre, Vermont, in 1820,²⁰³ and Wilbur Fisk was deeply affected by the Wellfleet camp meeting of 1819.

His mind had been deeply wrought upon before going in regard to the subject of holiness. After much prayer and no little struggle he received a marvelous blessing, the effects of which were abiding. He was so wrought upon that his physical strength departed and he sunk to the ground unable to stand.²⁰⁴

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Rev. Charles Merrill’s diary entries show that camp meetings were not only places where he preached and gave pastoral care, but gatherings where he could meet friends from his seminary days as well as from his childhood and youth. For clergy like him, camp meetings were places to get reenergized for ministry.  

Not all Methodist Episcopal preachers were very involved with camp meetings, however. One possible example is Thomas Tucker from Boston who was converted in 1807, became a member of the annual conference in 1812 and was ordained elder in 1816. He served twenty-six places in five different states over a thirty-seven year period before retiring at the age of fifty-eight. He married just prior to becoming an elder, and his wife, Mary, kept a diary, which was published by their son after both of his parents had died. In 1833 Mary wrote:

The first camp meeting I ever attended was held in this place [Westfield] during our stay. The concourse of people was very great, and I was greatly impressed by the novelty and efficiency of this means of grace. I had the misfortune to break my left arm very badly, late in the autumn of this year, by being thrown from a carriage at Springfield, while on a visit to that place.

If this was the first (and seemingly only) camp meeting Mary attended, it is perhaps not surprising that Thomas’ name does not appear as a preacher or leader of any of the camp meetings in this study. On the other hand, the published version of Mary’s diary was

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205 Charles A. Merrill, “Diaries.”


207 Though he is reported by James Mudge to have preached at the 1834 camp meeting in Needham, Massachusetts. Mudge, *History of the New England Conference*, 390.
edited by their son, who may have expunged many camp meeting references from the original.

As Glen Messer observed, New England camp meetings were venues in which “the Methodists could experience themselves as the dominant religious group within [a] community.”\textsuperscript{208} A Methodist worldview “acted as the social organizing principle driving the gatherings,” and “camp meetings moved the hoped-for manifestations of a holy society from the not-yet into the now that could be readily experienced by Methodism and those who came to enter their ranks.”\textsuperscript{209} By 1823, when Zion’s Herald was founded, camp meetings had become routine; a standard, expected, yearly event in every district, with some societies having twenty years of experience participating in them. Over those two decades routinization had begun as the Methodist leaders worked to maintain order, but spiritual and emotional fervor remained an essential part of the practice, and a distinct Methodist discourse was employed to describe and evoke these experiences.

\textsuperscript{208} Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 118.

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., 119.
CHAPTER 3
DEVELOPMENTS IN NEW ENGLAND METHODISM 1823-1871

Chapter Two provided the historical context of the rise of Methodism and the practice of camp meetings in America, with a focus on New England in particular, up until *Zion’s Herald* was founded in 1823. This chapter makes note of general developments of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), and general developments of its camp meetings in New England between 1823-1871, the years corresponding to the volumes of *Zion’s Herald* used as the primary data of this study. The first part of this chapter describes the growth of the Church and other developments of Methodism in New England as they relate to camp meetings. Part Two presents the Marshfield, Massachusetts, camp meeting of 1823 as a case study, providing a thick description of what camp meeting was like, with some attention to variations found in other camp meetings from that year.

Examining one camp meeting in depth will reveal how the various camp meeting elements worked together in 1823, providing context for discussing how these elements of camp meetings changed over time. Part Three then chronicles changes in the ways in which camp meetings were organized, who participated, and other general developments of camp meetings which have bearing on camp meeting as a practice that fostered conversions. Then Chapter Four will focus on the activities of the camp meetings which can more properly be classified as Christian liturgy, such as preaching, prayer and love feasts. Most of these acts of worship were also practiced by Methodists at home, or with
each local circuit, on a weekly or quarterly basis, but moving them to a place of pilgrimage where they could be experienced day and night for several days intensified their impact on participants.

Part 1 – Development of the Methodist Episcopal Church in New England 1823-1871

Continued Growth

By their own reports, members of the MEC saw tremendous growth of their Church throughout New England in the nineteenth century. Preachers filed the statistics of their charges with their presiding elders on an annual basis and these were collected and published yearly by each annual conference.

In 1823 the New England Annual Conference was still defined by the 1804 boundaries and comprised seven districts\(^1\) with eighty-six charges. Over the next twenty-five years growth was steady. The Maine Annual Conference split off in 1824 (this included the entire state of Maine plus territory in New Hampshire east of the White Mountains and north of Lake Ossipee).\(^2\) Then in 1829 another new conference was formed. Though it was called the New Hampshire Conference, it included much of

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1 Namely, Boston (including circuits in Suffolk, Essex and Plymouth counties as well as New Bedford, Cape Cod and the Islands of Nantucket and Martha’s Vineyard), New London (including all the circuits in Connecticut, Rhode Island, western and central Massachusetts as well as parts of Norfolk and Bristol Counties), New Hampshire, Vermont, and the Portland, Kennebec, and Penobscot districts in Maine.

2 These New Hampshire churches remained in the Portland District of the Maine Conference well into the twentieth century. Maine had become a separate state from Massachusetts in 1820.
Vermont, bits of Massachusetts east of the Merrimack River\(^3\) and the Leyden (Massachusetts) Circuit on the border of Vermont and Massachusetts.\(^4\) In 1830 each of these three conferences had three districts\(^5\) with a total of 164 charges in the whole region of New England.

In 1840 the Providence Annual Conference was organized to include Connecticut, Rhode Island, Cape Cod and the islands of Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket. It was divided into three districts. In 1844 the Vermont Annual Conference with three districts split off from the New Hampshire Conference, which then comprised four districts. In 1845 the whole New England region had grown to twenty districts and 505 charges.

Finally, in 1848 the Maine Annual Conference split into the Maine and East Maine Annual Conferences. Now there were six annual conferences of the MEC within the 1804 boundaries: Providence, New England, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and

\(^3\) Namely Amesbury, Salisbury, Lawrence and Haverhill.

\(^4\) In 1832, the Troy Annual Conference was formed, comprising the Methodist Episcopal congregations in eastern New York State (around Albany and the Mohawk River and the Adirondack Mountains), western Vermont, and a few congregations in the Berkshires of Massachusetts. Congregations in the eastern part of Vermont remained part of the New Hampshire Conference until the Vermont Conference was formed. The territory of the Troy Conference was mostly outside of the 1804 New England Conference boundaries, and the number of reports of camp meetings in this region found in Zion’s Herald was so small that it was best to set the Troy Conference outside the bounds of this study.

\(^5\) In the Maine Annual Conference, the Portland District had doubled from eleven to twenty-two charges, the Kennebec District in the middle of the state had grown from thirteen to eighteen charges, and furthest north, the Penobscot District had doubled from six to thirteen charges. The New England Conference had the Boston District (Essex, Suffolk, Plymouth counties, Cape Cod and the Islands) with thirty charges, the New London District (Rhode Island and parts of Norfolk and Bristol counties of Massachusetts) with sixteen charges, and the Springfield District (Connecticut, Central and Western Massachusetts) with eleven charges. The districts of the New Hampshire Conference included Danville (nineteen charges northwest of the White Mountains), New Hampshire (twenty charges including Salisbury, Massachusetts) and Vermont (fifteen charges including some New Hampshire towns not far from the Connecticut River, and Leyden, Massachusetts).
East Maine. They contained a total of eighteen districts made up of 532 charges. After that the total number of districts fluctuated, dipping down to seventeen in 1860, but the number of charges continued to increase steadily so that by 1863 there were twenty districts with a combined total of 745 charges. During the whole span from 1822-1863 the total number of members reported in the statistical reports grew from 20,024 to 85,737. The two graphs below illustrate the growth of charges and lay membership of the New England MEC from 1822 to 1863.

Table 3.1—Methodist Charges 1822-1862 Table 3.2—Methodist Membership 1822-1863

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6 Boundaries continued to be shifted well into the twentieth century until all of Massachusetts was included in the New England Conference and all of Vermont plus the eastern part of New York State, which boarders Vermont, constituted the Troy Conference. In the latter part of the twentieth century, as the denomination had shrunk, the six conferences began merging until 2012 when all of the 1804 territory, including all of the United Methodist churches in Vermont, were included in the New England Annual Conference.

7 The membership declined between 1845 and 1848 by 7,603 (though the number of charges increased). This may reflect the 1842 Wesleyan split from the Methodist Episcopal Church led by Orange Scott and LeRoy Sunderland. There is evidence that Methodist congregations in New England became Wesleyans for a time (e.g., Rockport Massachusetts—it is unknown how many others did the same), and then after the Methodist Episcopal Church divided in 1844 they rejoined the MEC in their respective New England Conferences. By 1851 the total number of people started growing again reaching 85,737 in 1863.
To look at the data from another angle, we can compare the New England Methodist charges of 1822 to those of 1863. In 1822 there was one conference with seven districts, including between six and fifteen charges each (see Table 3.3). The chart below lists the districts with the number of charges for each. In 1863 there were six conferences with twenty-one districts, including between twenty-three and fifty-four charges each (see Table 3.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Charges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New London (CT/RI/MA)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland, ME</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennebec, ME</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penobscot, ME</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3—New England Methodist Charges in 1822
Table 3.4—New England Methodist Charges in 1863

Another way to track the growth of the church is by the numbers of clergy. From the days of Jesse Lee to 1823, the clergy of the New England Annual Conference had grown to 156. By 1862 there were more than five times as many total clergy in the same region (see Table 3.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Charges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>Claremont</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concord</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dover</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>Providence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New London, CT</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providence, RI</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sandwich, MA</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Maine</td>
<td>Bangor</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bucksport</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rockland</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Lewiston</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Readfield</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Worcester</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Danville</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Montpelier</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Springfield</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St. Albans</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5—Increases in Number of New England MEC Clergy, 1823-1863

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1823</th>
<th>1862</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Clergy</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not appointed (located or worn out)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepted on Trial</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordained Deacon</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordained Elder</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The growth patterns of each level of the MEC in New England were not based on growing large congregations. There were no “mega churches” in this time. Instead the church grew like “friendship bread,” through a repeated process of growth and division. A prayer group would form, grow and split into two. A circuit would form, grow and
divide; the same with districts, and with annual conferences. It is also significant that the
presiding elders had manageable numbers of charges to work with. In 1822 the most
charges was fifteen in the New London District. During the sample years from then until
1863 there was only one year when one presiding elder had over sixty charges, and there
were only a few times when the number of charges in a district was in the fifties. But
most of the years the numbers ranged between twenty and forty charges per presiding
elder. This gave the leaders of the MEC enough time and knowledge of each community
to plan strategically for continued growth. Even on the level of the annual conference
there were never more than four districts.

Throughout this period, the leaders of the MEC in the New England conferences
definitely believed that camp meetings were critical to the growth of their Church. As an
article in the second volume of *Zion’s Herald* put it, “Whoever has read with attention the
accounts of revivals published in this paper the past year, cannot but have noticed that the
commencement of most of them may be traced to the good effects of Camp Meetings.”

First of all, the people who experienced conversion at camp meeting very often became
members of whichever society brought them along. Then there were those who had been
awakened to the knowledge of God at the camp meetings, but were still in a state of
“mourning” when they left the grounds. Numerous accounts exist of continued spiritual

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8 It would be fascinating to study what happened with the Methodist Episcopal Church in New
England when it began to build giant buildings meant to accommodate more than 1,000 persons.
Mathewson Street in Providence, Malden Centre, Wesley in Worcester, all seem to have reached their peak
membership when they built their “cathedral” size buildings with bowling alleys, swimming pools and
basketball courts.

struggle after a camp meeting, which finally resulted in people joining a local Methodist society. One report from Lower Canada stated:

After leaving Concord, [Vermont,] we had a pleasant journey home. The ensuing evening, (Sabbath) being the regular time for us to meet for conference and prayer, our friends who had found the saviour at Camp-meeting declared what he had done for them. Two professed their hopes for pardoning love; two more blessed the Lord for what they felt, but could not ascertain whether their sins were blotted out. They have all, however, been baptized, received into the Methodist society, and are now, we trust, enjoying a good evidence of their acceptance with God. Another of our company has recently found peace in believing, so that five out of seven who went to Camp-meeting without the knowledge of God, are now rejoicing in the Rock of their salvation.

But that was not the end of the revival for this society, for there were “two or three young persons, who for some time, had been seeking the Lord. Encouraged by the visible change in their mates, they acknowledged themselves on the Lord’s side, and from that time to the present, the work has spread through our neighborhood in a powerful manner.” Including the “adjoining neighborhoods” the preacher reported about twenty-five who “professed a determination to leave all for Christ” and most of them were “rejoicing in hope.” 10

Reports of revivals were sent to Zion’s Herald months after the local camp meeting had taken place, giving credit to the meetings for initiating the “work of God” which was still going on in the community. Heman Bangs sent such a report to the Methodist Magazine on December 7, 1825:

You will rejoice to hear that God is carrying on his work in this place. It has been gradually going forward ever since the Camp-meeting at Compo. Several have been awakened, and truly converted to God; and 34 have been admitted into the church. I took them under my own immediate care, meeting them constantly in

class, that I might have the better opportunity of nursing them, and instructing
them in the things of God. They appear to be doing well.\footnote{11}

John Newland Maffitt gave this update of what had been happening in his community
since the camp meeting in Kittery, Maine, in 1829:

Many from [York] visited that remarkable meeting, some of whom returned home
deply laden with sorrow, while others rejoiced, and the Lord was in our midst.
Since that time the work has been progressing gradually and surely. Over seventy
souls have professed religion, forty of whom are joined in society according to the
rules and regulations of our church discipline, and seem determined to honour
their profession and to walk humbly before their God. A great change has been
wrought in the character of the town, and the prospects are truly reviving.\footnote{12}

Even at the beginning of the twentieth century the only historian who attempted to
write a comprehensive history of the New England Conference, James Mudge, dedicated
Chapter Thirteen to camp meetings on the grounds that they “have so much to do with the
prosperity of Methodism, they well deserve an entire chapter.”\footnote{13} Mudge wrote, “The new
converts and the newly quickened believers were so filled with zeal that, on going home
they went to work at once for the salvation of their friends.”\footnote{14} That work included the
adoption of the new discourse they had been immersed into at the camp meeting,
practicing it at their prayer meetings and worship at home, and teaching it to others.


\footnote{12}{John Newland Maffitt, “Camp Meetings and Revivals,” \textit{CAJZH} (6 November 1829): 38.}

\footnote{13}{Mudge, \textit{History of the New England Conference}, 384ff.}

\footnote{14}{Ibid., 387.}
Change and Conflict in the Life of New England Methodism

In this time period, the Methodists in New England were also becoming more settled and organized. They went through a transition from being small gatherings in people’s homes for prayer and worship, with circuit riders coming around about once in every two weeks, to finding larger spaces for weekly gatherings. At the same time, the Methodist preachers were making the transition from traveling large circuits and preaching every day in a different location,\(^\text{15}\) to being appointed to a “station”\(^\text{16}\) for a period of one or two years. The Methodist congregation in South Walpole is a typical example. It was started in the fall of 1818 when Benjamin Harris came to the village to do business with Elephalet Smith. While he was there he preached to Mr. Smith’s family and neighbors, and a class meeting was formed. South Walpole was added to the Mansfield Circuit under the care of one, two or three circuit riders at a time until 1834 when it became a station.\(^\text{17}\) During this time districts included a mixture of circuits and stations. In 1832 the Portland District was made up of sixteen circuits and stations in mostly York and Cumberland Counties with a few in towns in Oxford County and in New Hampshire.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{15}\) Preaching in a field or under a tree as often as to a local Methodist society.

\(^{16}\) While a circuit included several towns and shared just a few traveling preachers, a station was just one town or village.

\(^{17}\) Roy S. Belcher, *The Village Church* (South Walpole: United Methodist Church, 1971).

One effect of the transition from circuits to stations is that fewer Methodists traveled to attend quarterly conferences with Methodists from other communities on the same circuit. When South Walpole became a station, the members of the society no longer met with other Methodist societies for their quarterly conferences. Rather, the presiding elder held a quarterly conference just for South Walpole, and a separate one for Mansfield, and another one for Attleboro. The very practice, holding quarterly conferences, that had spawned the camp meetings was being dropped from many Methodists’ experience. Now camp meetings, not the quarterly conferences, were the primary places when a multitude of New England lay people and preachers gathered for the worship of God.

Another effect of these changes is that it became increasingly possible for the Methodist preachers to marry and have children. There were some stalwart women, such as Mary Orne Tucker who had married an itinerant preacher and even dared to go with her husband on the two-week adventures. But when the circuits turned into stations, family life became somewhat easier, though it may also have made participation in camp meetings more difficult. There is evidence that having family at home may have caused some Methodist preachers to attend only part of a camp meeting rather than the whole event. In 1856, Charles Merrill, a preacher who was still “on trial,” left his wife and young son at home on the edge of Fall River, Massachusetts, to attend the camp meeting.

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19 See Chapter Two.

20 Tucker, *Itinerant Preaching*. Still not every society could easily afford to provide adequate living quarters. See chapters seven and nine in *Itinerant Preaching* for descriptions of the kinds of housing problems the Tucker family experienced.
on Martha’s Vineyard. Charles was intending to return home just two days later, but he was unable to gain passage off of the island. He wrote of his concern about his wife’s disappointment and eventually managed to leave, two days later, well before the camp meeting was ended.\(^{21}\)

At the same time that Methodist societies were transitioning from being points on a circuit to stations, they were erecting their own church buildings. After they became too large to meet in someone’s parlor, they moved to larger spaces, such as taverns, schools and barns, until they eventually built their own chapels. Becoming a station and building a church could happen in either order. While still part of the Mansfield Circuit, the class meeting at South Walpole outgrew Mr. Smith’s home and began meeting in a tavern until the congregation grew large enough to build its first small church around the corner from the tavern in 1830. While it was meeting in this building, the congregation became a station in 1834. In 1846 the congregation had outgrown their first church and built a new one next to the tavern.\(^{22}\)

With the buildings came a need for more money to purchase land, pay for construction, and cover ongoing upkeep. Subscriptions were requested,\(^{23}\) pews were

\(^{21}\) But there were several other times that Merrill’s wife and son accompanied him to the camp meetings. Charles A. Merrill, “Diaries,” 116-118.

\(^{22}\) Roy S. Belcher, *The Village Church*, 2-5. For more examples of church buildings, see Mudge, *History of the New England Conference*, 49-50, 227ff. In the spring of 1794 they built the first chapel in Boston. Mudge reports that there were about twenty “rude, cheap meeting-houses” erected before 1800.

\(^{23}\) In 1831 there was a second Methodist society in Duxbury which had preaching on the Sabbath and was “about to erect a Meeting House, to be called the Second Methodist Meeting House in Duxbury. Their subscriptions are nearly sufficient to accomplish it. It will probably be finished some time next fall.” D[aniel] Fillmore, “Revivals. Duxbury, Mass,” *MWJ* (12 April 1832): 54.
rented, and debt was incurred by the local societies. More leadership was needed to pay attention to the care of buildings and finances. This pattern of Methodist societies incurring new responsibilities related to property and buildings, with all the expenditure of time and money this required, is a pattern that can be seen emerging as well in the practice of camp meetings during the same period.

At the same time that New England Methodists were settling into stations and constructing buildings, they were also faced with theological and political tensions that affected camp meetings and congregations alike. Millerites and abolitionists were movements widely promoted in the region and eventually led to the formation of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and various Adventist denominations. Not only do the camp meeting reports specifically mention Adventism and abolition, but a deeper study of individual leaders of each movement shows that many of them preached at the camp meetings.

While the congregations were building churches, the MEC in New England was also building educational institutions. As Russell Richey has pointed out, the training for Methodist preachers initially came primarily through reading books and mentoring relationships. He cites the case of Dan Young of Vermont who was mentored by Elijah Hedding. Young wrote:

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24 This was done in New England even though it was forbidden to build churches with pews by Discipline until 1852 because it was “impossible to raise the money for the structures demanded except in some such way.” Mudge, History of the New England Conference, 99.

25 Russell E. Richey, “Handout: Ministerial Formation” The UMC After Tampa: Where Do We Go From Here? (Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia: 2013).
We so arranged the circuit as to be often together at our meetings, in which we preached alternately. The one who heard watched and noted all the errors of the one speaking, and gave him a faithful account of them. This was a great means of improvement.\textsuperscript{26}

But perhaps due to the proximity of Harvard and the jeering they received from their Congregational and Unitarian colleagues for their lack of formal education, Methodist Episcopal clergy in New England soon pushed to build their own educational institutions. Official work toward this goal began in 1816. After a brief attempt at opening school at Newmarket, New Hampshire, the project was relocated to Wilbraham, Massachusetts, in 1825 and Wilbur Fisk, formerly presiding elder of Vermont, was appointed principal of Wesleyan Academy.\textsuperscript{27} Other Methodist academies and seminaries sprung up in the New England region in the years following including a seminary in Newbury, Vermont, and Maine Wesleyan Seminary at Kents Hill in 1824.\textsuperscript{28} Next, the New England Methodists helped found Wesleyan University located in the bounds of the New York Annual Conference, which opened in 1830. Wilbur Fisk was elected to serve as President and many children of Methodists in the New England conferences were sent there in subsequent years.

Finally, in 1839 clergy from the New England and New Hampshire Annual Conferences made moves to establish a theological institution for training clergy. A site near the Methodist seminary in Newbury, Vermont, was chosen and Newbury Biblical

\textsuperscript{26} Dan Young, \textit{Autobiography of Dan Young, a New England Preacher of the Olden Time}, ed. W. P. Strickland (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1852), 47.

\textsuperscript{27} Mudge, \textit{History of the New England Conference}, 324-333.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 87.
Institute was opened in 1834. John Dempster was enlisted from the New York Conference to help, but he had trouble fundraising due to the “anti-slavery battle and Millerite frenzy,” and the Institute was not drawing enough students in that location. So in 1847 the school was moved to Concord, New Hampshire, and renamed the Methodist General Biblical Institute. Still the school struggled, so finally in 1867 the Methodist leaders moved it to Boston and in 1871 it was named the School of Theology, a department of the newly formed Boston University.30

These institutions surely had an impact on many camp meeting preachers in New England. There were times that groups of students would attend a camp meeting together, and like parishioners, bring revival back to their schools.31 Another impact of the schools visible in the camp meetings is that Methodist Episcopal clergy developed personal relationships with one another that stretched across conference boundaries. Charles Merrill from Maine graduated from the Methodist General Biblical Institute in 1855 and was appointed in the Providence Conference for the early years of his ministry, but his diary shows that he “saw friends” at every camp meeting he attended in his conference, the New England Conference and the Maine Conference. Though he rarely stayed at the camp meetings outside of his district for the duration, he frequently made the effort to travel to them for a couple of days.

29 Ibid., 338.

30 Ibid., 337-342.

31 Ibid., 396.
But theological training was not always looked upon favorably. Mudge notes that opponents were fearful that these schools “would become breeding places of heresy, and intellectual qualifications would be substituted for the call of God and a living experience.”\(^{32}\) It is likely that the style of sermon delivery changed as well since preachers better trained in exegesis would be more likely to approve of “reading” sermons than were their forebears in 1826.\(^{33}\) As Steven Cooley has pointed out, by the time the School of Theology had been relocated to Boston, at the end of the period under study here, the professors were intentionally reshaping the mode of discourse used by the preachers in their ministry.\(^{34}\) The significant impact of this change will become clear in Chapter Five.

William Miller was a Baptist from Vermont who, after two years of independent Bible study, concluded that Christ would return “on or before 1843”\(^{35}\) (though later the timing was announced as before March 21, 1844, and adjusted again to October 22, 1844\(^{36}\)). In 1831 Miller started making his views public.\(^{37}\) As scholar Ruth Doan explains, expectations about the millennium were part of the New England social and

\(^{32}\)Ibid., 338.

\(^{33}\) The Conference of 1826 voted down a motion to allow the reading of sermons (as opposed to extemporizing them) “when the evidence of important truth depends on a series of close and connected argumentation” by a vote of 46 to 20. Ibid., 90.

\(^{34}\) Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 575.


\(^{36}\)Ibid., 176, 196-197.

\(^{37}\)Ibid., 96.
religious climate at least since Jonathan Edwards, and the loose conglomerate of “multiple orthodoxies” created by the denominations in the United States allowed for a variety of thoughts about the matter. So in 1831 “most antebellum Americans conceived of movement toward the millennium—or its secularized form of progress—as a process that would indeed move forward, but not necessarily with smooth regularity.”\(^{38}\)

Members of the MEC were no exception. At the end of the report of the Wellfleet camp meeting of 1824, the preacher wrote, “Let God be praised for what he has wrought; and may the work spread, until the millennial day shall rise, and the glorious triumphs of the cross shall universally prevail.”\(^{39}\)

Therefore, it would not be surprising to discover that William Miller was at first welcome to preach at some Methodist camp meetings, though his name does not appear in the data for this study. It is known that in 1838 Miller preached at “a conference” in Bethel, Vermont, where he met MEC preacher Josiah Litch who became a supporter.\(^{40}\)

That same year the data for this study shows that the Boston District Methodists had started calling the site in Eastham “Millennial Grove,”\(^{41}\) and thinking of their camp

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\(^{39}\) D[amon] Young, “Camp Meeting at Wellfleet,” *ZH* (1 September 1824): [2].

\(^{40}\) Rowe, *God’s Strange Work*, 158. The term “conference” is taken from a non-Methodist source so it is quite unclear what kind of meeting it might have been. Bethel, Vermont, shows up in my data as a camp meeting site in 1841 and 1840 though not in 1838. E[lisa] J. Scott, “Camp Meeting,” *ZH* (7 July 1841). This does not mean that the “conference” was not a camp meeting—but it could possibly have been some other kind of meeting like a quarterly conference. Litch’s appointment is listed as Barnstable, Cape Cod in 1838. So it is more likely that it was a camp meeting in Bethel, Vermont, for Litch to have traveled 220 miles from Cape Cod before the advent of passenger trains.

\(^{41}\) Amos Binney, “Millennial Grove Camp-Meeting,” *ZH* (22 August 1838): 134.
meeting as a place to prepare for the millennium. An announcement before the meeting proclaimed,

If you love Camp-meetings, you will certainly be pleased to find the permanent improvements which have been made, in order to insure the continuance of these glorious auxiliaries for the spread of the Redeemer’s kingdom, until the millenium [sic].

The report titled “Millennial Grove,” published after the meeting took place, continued to place their work in the future-oriented context.

The ground with all its improvements is now free from debt, and regularly deeded to an association of worthy brethren, who are to hold the entire property in trust, for the special purpose of religious meetings until the Millennium shall dawn on our world and all things become new.

With the help of Joshua V. Himes, Miller began to publish an Adventist newspaper called *Signs of the Times* out of Boston in 1840. A sizeable percentage of subscribers came from throughout the New England states. In 1842 Himes encouraged Miller to begin utilizing camp meetings to get the word out and the Adventists did hold their own camp meetings, reportedly featuring the “largest canopy in the world.” There was some crossover between the Adventist and Methodist meetings and leaders during these years. But neither Miller nor the two Methodist preachers most commonly

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44 Doan, *The Miller Heresy*, 231, note 2. The breakdown of correspondents with addresses between 1840-1847 is fifty-two from Connecticut, fifty-four from Maine, eighty-eight from Massachusetts, seventy-three from New Hampshire and twelve from Rhode Island.

45 Rowe, *God’s Strange Work*, 162.

mentioned as supporting Miller’s Adventist cause, Josiah Litch and George Storrs, are recorded as preaching at the MEC camp meetings in data for this study.\textsuperscript{47}

Hiram Munger, a layman from western Massachusetts, wrote of encounters with both Litch and Storrs. Brother Litch assisted in Munger’s conversion at a Methodist prayer meeting at a chapel in Chicopee, Massachusetts, about 1831.\textsuperscript{48} In 1842 Munger had leased the land for a Methodist camp meeting in Chicopee Falls that August. He reports that Himes wanted to use the same grounds the very next week for a Millerite camp meeting, offering $25 to use the land, and $25 for Munger to arrange for the Adventists to use the Methodists’ tents for boarding and lodging. Munger agreed to help and the Millerites set up “the largest tent I ever saw, in the centre of the ground.”\textsuperscript{49} The other Methodists on the grounds were quite willing to share their site with the new group and some even attended. MEC preacher, Philo Hawks, even “went into the work as usual, laboring for sinners” at this meeting.\textsuperscript{50} When that meeting was over, Himes invited

\textsuperscript{47} Josiah Litch does not appear in the Annual Conference Minutes of 1829 or 1832, but is listed as being ordained a deacon in full connection in 1835 and appointed to Middleborough and Rochester, Massachusetts. In 1838 he was appointed to Barnstable, Cape Cod, and in 1841 he was located, and after that he appears no more in my sample. George Storrs (also Stores) was still on trial in 1826 and appointed to Sandwich. He was ordained an Elder in 1829 and appointed to Gilmanton and Northfield of the New Hampshire District. In 1835 he is listed as supernumerated, and does not appear in any more conference Journals in my sample.

\textsuperscript{48} Munger did not provide exact dates or years in much of his book, but he said he was twenty-five years old and he was born in 1806, so this puts his conversion about the year 1831. Munger, \textit{Life and Religious Experience}, 26.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 46ff. He gave the date of August 26 as the start of the Adventist camp meeting, two days after the Methodist camp meeting ended.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 50. Philo Hawks was appointed to Hebron, Connecticut in 1838; Gill and Leyden, Massachusetts in 1841; and is listed as withdrawn in 1844. He appears as one of the Adventist leaders in Munger’s biography. Ibid., 44, 47, 50, 55, 60, 77, 99, 106.
Munger to help with the arrangement of their next Advent camp meeting in Plainville,\footnote{Could be in Massachusetts but Plainville, Connecticut is closer.} where he met George Storrs. Being convinced by the Adventist theology he encountered at this second meeting, Munger became an Adventist.\footnote{Munger, \textit{Life and Religious Experience,} 53-54.}

By 1844, after the spring equinox date had well passed, \textit{Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal} titled its first announcement for the Eastham camp meeting “Camp-Meeting At Millennial Grove.” Bartholomew Otheman stated, “We hope it will prove to be such a meeting as the shores of the Cape or New England never witnessed; such as will make hell tremble and heaven rejoice.”\footnote{B[artholomew] Otheman, “Camp-Meeting at Millennial Grove,” \textit{ZHWJ} (24 July 1844): 119.} An announcement the following week stated that those at a preachers meeting in Boston on August 5 unanimously agreed that “the preachers and people in Boston and vicinity \textit{ought to use their utmost endeavors to sustain the Eastham camp-meeting.}”\footnote{J[onathan] D. Bridge, “Eastham Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (7 August 1844): 127. Emphasis in the original.} But other Methodists in that year seemed more wary and weary of Millerism as the “Great Disappointment” set in.\footnote{Doan, \textit{The Miller Heresy,} 202.} A reporter of the camp meeting in Palermo, Maine stated:

> The church in this section needed such a meeting much, for they had been surrounded by Millerism in its various modifications, come-out-ism in its various departments, and false prophets with the several editions of their prophecies which have been extent among them, much to the annoyance of the pious and devoted.\footnote{M[ark] R. Hopkins, “Palermo Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (10 October 1844): 163.}
Miller’s millennial ideas permeated Methodist discourse, sometimes complicating the perspective of MEC leaders as they embraced his predictions, and adding a sense of urgency to their work as the predicted end times drew near. As seen from the case of Hiram Munger, the Adventist message was at times in competition with the MEC, leading some people to give up their membership in the MEC.

During this same period, Methodist preachers and camp meetings were also challenged by the abolition movement, as some MEC preachers in the New England conferences started to be influenced by the writings of William Lloyd Garrison. One of the most notable Methodist abolitionists was Orange Scott, who was introduced to the movement while serving as a presiding elder in the Springfield (Massachusetts) District. He was so impressed by the cause that he immediately purchased 100 subscriptions to *The Liberator* for the clergy on his district. Several Methodist Episcopal clergy in New England joined local and national abolition and anti-slavery societies from the 1830s to the Civil War. The injustice of slavery, which had not been dealt with head on by general conference after 1800, was raised by Scott and other delegates from New England (including George Storrs), together with some delegates from other northern

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57 There were several camp meeting preachers who had some involvement including Orange Scott, Charles K. True, Abraham D. Merrill, Jared Perkins, Timothy Merrit, James Porter, Joseph A. Merrill, Phineas Crandal, Gershom F. Cox, and Jonathan D. Bridge. Opponents to the changes the abolitionists demanded also preached at the camp meetings including Amos Binney, Wilbur Fisk, John Lindsey, Bartholomew Otheman, Hezekiah Ramsdell, Edward Taylor and Jacob Sanborn.


annual conferences at the 1836 General Conference and again in 1840. The bishops
determined that the MEC should “wholly…refrain from this agitating subject,” an action
that allowed bishops and presiding elders to prevent the topic from being addressed at
annual and quarterly conferences.\footnote{McLeister and Nicholson, \textit{Conscience and Commitment}, 20-21.}

But some New England clergy persisted in working for abolition, publishing their
thoughts,\footnote{Several clergy from the New England and New Hampshire conferences published an appeal in \textit{Zion’s Herald} in 1835. Cyrus L. Matlack, \textit{The AntiSlavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church} (New York: Philips \& Hunt, 1881), 86. In 1836 LaRoy Sunderland, also a New England Methodist clergyperson, began publishing \textit{Zion’s Watchman} after being on trial several times.} giving addresses and lectures and attending conferences, and preparing to
present “memorials” (resolutions\footnote{Methodist annual conferences and general conferences make changes to their polity by debating, amending and adopting resolutions.}) to their annual conferences; and they were repeatedly
taken to task.\footnote{In 1837 a committee made up of Timothy Merritt, Orange Scott, Jotham Horton, La Roy Sunderland and James Porter were not allowed to present any “memorials” related to abolition and slavery at the New England Annual Conference. Matlack, \textit{The AntiSlavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church}, 110.} In 1836, Bishop Hedding removed Orange Scott from his appointment as
presiding elder of the Providence District and appointed him to Lowell because Scott
would not refrain from writing and lecturing on slavery and abolition. By 1838 Scott was
listed as supernumery,\footnote{“Supernumerary” was the term used for ordained clergy members of an Annual Conference who were not able to administer a charge (often for reasons of health) but were sometimes well enough to assist with preaching and pastoral care duties.} but continued to work for the American Anti-Slavery Society.
He was a delegate to the 1840 General Conference, but that winter his health failed and
he retired. In 1842 he withdrew his clergy status from the MEC along with colleagues Jotham Horton, LaRoy Sunderland and Luscious C. Matlack. In early 1843, they held a convention in Andover, Massachusetts, to make plans for a new church, and in May of that year a convention in Utica, New York, gave birth to a new denomination which they called the Wesleyan Connection. Orange Scott was president, Horton was a vice president, Porter R. Sawyer of Providence was a secretary, and Sunderland and Matlack were also present at the convention.

As will be discussed in Chapter Four, abolition was a topic that was addressed at the camp meetings referenced in this study, often being given whole preaching sessions at the stand. Several of the Methodist preachers aligned with the abolitionists, including Orange Scott, were regular camp meeting preachers, and several followed Scott in withdrawing from the MEC and forming the Wesleyan Church. Some of the noted conservative preachers who took an anti-abolition stance were also frequently on the camp meeting preaching roster, however. Camp meetings became a forum where abolitionist preachers could offer their best persuasive rhetoric to large crowds of New Englanders, and conservative preachers could argue their case for not meddling in this politically-charged arena.

It is perhaps not surprising that the upheavals caused by the Adventists and abolitionists led to some declines in the membership of the MEC. For example, a

66 Matlack, The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 141.

gathering of Methodist Episcopal clergy in 1871 heard a report of statistical trends in the Maine Annual Conference. The statistician reported that “from 1840 to 1850 there was a decrease of 1,359 [members of local congregations], owing to the reaction from the Miller excitement, the Wesleyan secession, and the excitement connected with the division of the Church in 1844.”

All the movements noted above happened concurrently with the camp meetings of this study, and the changes had an impact in the development of camp meetings through the years.

**Part 2 – A Picture of New England Camp Meetings in 1823**

Before taking a close look at the ritual practices of camp meeting, it will be helpful to gain an understanding of the basic elements of such meetings in New England: who organized them; where and when did they take place, and for how many days; who and how many attended; how people got to the grounds; and the living conditions at the camps. It will also be helpful to note and define the particular activities that reoccurred at the camp meetings, and to see these elements in relation to one another.

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68 Daniel B. Randall, “Comparative Statistics of Methodism in Maine,” *ZH* (19 October 1871): 501. The year 1844 was when the Methodist Episcopal Church split in two over the issue of slavery. Those that supported the practice formed the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, while the other half retained the name Methodist Episcopal Church.
Marshfield, Massachusetts, 1823

The 1823 Marshfield camp meeting was held from August 18 to 22 and was announced three times in *Zion’s Herald* just ahead of those dates, in the August 7 and 14 issues. *Zion’s Herald* refers to only six other camp meetings in the New England Conference for the year 1823, in Hebron, Connecticut (in June), Barnard, Vermont (also in August), and four in September: East Pittston and Bucksport, Maine; Sandown, New Hampshire, and Cabot, Vermont. The Marshfield camp, then, was the easiest choice for Methodists from the circuits in the Boston District and the eastern half of the New London District, drawing participants from the southeastern corner of New England.

The first announcement was written by a preacher who used the pen name “Evangelicus.” It was embedded in a five-part series intended to defend and promote camp meetings as an “institution owned and blessed of God.” The first article, in the June 5 issue, described why the author went to worship “in a temple of God’s own making, the grove,” and addressed objections from both the “hardened sinner” and “uninformed, or misinformed” Christians. It also noted that the legislatures of several states had passed laws “for the protection of these meetings,” and that there had been

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69 The fourth part responded to an article published in the *Boston Recorder* on August 23 which was critical of camp meetings. The fifth part aimed to demonstrate further the “utility of camp meetings” for promoting morality, good order and benevolence” and for promoting “experimental religion.” These parts were published September 11 and 18 respectively and do not mention the Marshfield camp meeting.

70 This part is general and makes no mention of the future camp meeting in Marshfield.

instances when “Congregationalists, Baptists and other clergymen [had] united in carrying on such meetings.”

Part Two, in the August 7 issue, announced that the Marshfield camp meeting would begin on August 18. Evangelicus assured the readers that this meeting was “easy of access both by land and water” and referred to a camp meeting that took place in the same spot the previous year. He speculated that there would be an “assembly of from three to five thousand people,” from the immediate vicinity and from twenty to sixty miles or more distant. They would be from “almost every class and description, which the adjacent country contains...the rich and the great, the learned and revered, the pious, the enquiring mourner, and some of refined taste and manners.” The “dissolute and abandoned” were expected as well, giving the Methodists “occasion to exercise patience, meekness, wisdom and firmness, and perhaps legal authority.”

Evangelicus then provided eight tips regarding what to expect and how to conduct oneself at a camp meeting so that the experience would be “pleasing and profitable.” From this list we can surmise that people often came just to part of a camp meeting, a day or two in the middle, though the leadership encouraged campers to come at the beginning and stay until the end to get the most benefit. We can also surmise that orderly conduct

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72 Evangelicus, “Camp Meetings - No. 1,” ZH (5 June 1823): 86.

73 Several of the appointments on the Boston District were along the coast including Charlestown, Lynn, Marblehead, Scituate, New Bedford, Fairhaven, Summerset, five charges on Cape Cod and the Islands, as well as four charges in Rhode Island. Methodists who were part of the Needham, Malden, Mansfield, and Northbridge circuits would have had to travel some or all of the way by land. Northbridge is approximately 60 miles from Marshfield. Evangelicus, “Camp Meetings - No. 2,” ZH (7 August 1823): 122.

74 The last was needed for those who came to the camp meetings only to make trouble. See below.
was a major concern. Readers were told that rules and regulations were read from the stand, and campers were expected to at least be “well disposed and civil, if…not religious.” The religious seriousness of the event was also emphasized. Those who attended were encouraged to use the scriptures to base their judgments of the experience, to “compare what you see and hear with what you there find.” They were warned not to be excessively curious and not let their minds be scattered. “Consider, you came here to worship God; but how do you worship him? By running from place to place, and by seeing and hearing only, or by meditating, praying, and seeking him in all the appointed means?” We can also surmise that the temptations of such a large and intense gathering were many. Evangelicus noted that “many are not much profited” by camp meetings because they “give way to temptations, to worldly cares, vain reasonings and doubts, to pride, unbelief, the fear of man, lightness, carelessness, &c. hence all the preaching, exhorting, praying and praising God, does them little good. They are unhappy, wish themselves at home, and think they will never go to such a meeting again.”

Evangelicus expected that some readers would be unfamiliar with prayer and that camp meeting would be a time to begin learning the practice.

If you lack wisdom, ask it of God. If you want the spirit of prayer, that also is his gift: ask and you shall receive. Perhaps you are cold and unfeeling: so much the more need then of praying, even till your heart is warm and engaged: then you will love to pray. Possibly you are backslidden: at this meeting then seek God with all your heart; it is a favourable time for you to recover your first love. It may be you are a hardened sinner; and having outlived many reformatons around you, and resisted many calls and warnings, you may think your case hopeless. But you are yet out of perdition; therefore hope, and beg for your life, that insulted heaven may yet shew mercy to you, who are on the verge of the bottomless pit.75

75 Evangelicus, “Camp Meetings - No. 2,” ZH (7 August 1823): 122.
The last tip offered was about leaving the campgrounds. It was understood that not everyone would be in the same spiritual state at that time. Some would be “happy” while others would find that their souls were “not yet supplied with what you wanted. You wanted pardoning, restoring, quickening or sanctifying grace: or you desired God’s blessing on some who were there, and are coming away as they went. You mourn and are tempted to be discouraged.” Evangelicus offered encouragement. “The Lord will go with you to your dwellings, and there he will most certainly bless you, if you wait upon him.”

On August 14, a week before the camp began, there was an announcement of the Marshfield camp meeting on the front page of *Zion’s Herald* written by “A Methodist” which was a reprint of an article published in the *Old Colony Memorial*. This shows that Methodists used other periodicals to publicize their events. The main purpose of this article was to remind the general public that there were laws “permitting us thus to worship our God without being directly or indirectly disturbed by the sale of spirituous liquors.”

The friends of peace, good order, equal rights, as well as those who profess to be disciples of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, no doubt will use their influence to suppress the demoralizing practice of carrying spirituous liquor for the purpose of sale, where large numbers of people are assembled for any purpose, and especially that of worshipping God.

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76 Ibid.


78 Ibid.
This shows that one source of the disorder often associated with camp meetings was drunkenness, and that Methodists had sought legal means to keep the alcoholic beverages away from their camp grounds.

The second announcement of the Marshfield camp meeting in that same issue of the newspaper was on the inside page as the opening paragraph of the editorial that week. It also was intended to combat prejudice against camp meetings. “The Methodists do not intrude upon the rights or property of any man, neither do they interfere with the concerns of others, they are a peaceable, respectable class of Christians, who ask for liberty to meet together in peace, once a year, in the consecrated grove, to worship the God of nature.” Taking a full column of space, the editorial also mainly enforced the sentiments that alcohol was unwanted within the bounds of the encampment and that “those who are guilty of vending spirituous liquors” would be brought to justice. The editor concluded by stating that he would not be able to attend the Marshfield camp meeting and hoped that someone would volunteer to “favour us with an account for publication.”

“Evangelicus” and another anonymous writer who signed as “An Observer” were quite happy to oblige. The latter tells the tale of a harrowing boat ride transporting seventy persons from Boston to Marshfield through a “violent squall” with “tremendous

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79 Presumably written by Barber Badger.
81 This report does not specifically name Marshfield as the camp meeting, but as it follows the one submitted by “Evangelicus” directly and other details match up, it is safe to assume that it relates to this camp.
thunder” and “vivid lightening.” But the Observer declared, “Jesus was in our Packet. He spoke in accents sweet as heaven, and louder, far louder than the awful thunder, ‘be not afraid.’” The passengers turned to Jesus in prayer. “Shouts of praise echoed through the hold to the cabin—from the cabin to the deck and from thence back to the hold—yes, we found the grace of God could make the stormy sea as pleasant as the land, and enable us to welcome a watery grave.” The Observer relayed the prayer of one woman: “Lord we should be happy to go to the place where we have anticipated seeing our christian [sic] friends, at Camp-Meeting, but if thou art about to take us hence, Lord we are willing to go—we bless thee that we have a celestial prospect that our souls shall fly home to glory.” Her faith impressed him so that he wanted to possess “religion” too and in closing said, “I think I shall never again be an unbeliever.”

The report filed by Evangelicus is of the sort found throughout the years of Zion’s Herald in this study, namely a highly detailed day by day account of the entire meeting. He claims to have been appointed the secretary of the meeting, and was dutifully sending a copy of the minutes of the meeting to the editor. In keeping with his series, it is titled Camp Meetings—No. 3. The following is an outline of his report.

The preachers’ tent, stand and seats were built on Wednesday, August 13, and that night Edward Hyde, the presiding elder of the Boston District, offered a prayer of dedication. On Saturday night, “a few poor creatures, lost to all decency,” vandalized the site, but local Methodists put it back together quickly. On Monday, August 18, the first

sermon was offered at 3 p.m. by Brother Isaac Jennison from Norwich, Connecticut, who used 1 Samuel 12:23-24 as his text. The sermon was followed by an exhortation given by Brother John Adams of Malden, Massachusetts, and a concluding prayer was offered by Brother Samuel G. Atkins of Wellfleet, Massachusetts. In the evening John Adams preached, Brother Ruben Peaselee exhorted, and Brother Frederick Upham, a deacon on trial from Martha’s Vineyard, offered the concluding prayer. The report for this day ended by noting the good order in the congregation and that eleven tents had been erected.

On Tuesday, August 19, family prayers were offered from the tents at dawn. The group gathered at the stand at sunrise for prayers. At 7 a.m., a heavy rain showered upon them. At 10 a.m., Brother Phineas Crandel, a deacon of Nantucket, preached on Psalm 84:1. The women huddled in tents to the left of the stand to listen because the ground and seats were quite wet. Following the sermon, Brother Nathan Paine of Eastham exhorted and Brother George Pickering read the “Rules and Regulations for the preservation of order in the encampment, and added some remarks suited to the

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83 “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.” All scripture quoted is from the King James Version.

84 No Peaslee is listed in the 1823 appointment list, but a Ruben Peaselee was serving Plaistow, New Hampshire, in 1826.

85 This is likely the same storm that threatened An Observer’s packet. Lightning burnt down a barn five miles away from the campground.

86 “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!”

87 Appointed as conference missionary that year.
occasion.” Then Brothers “J. C. Pierce and Peaselee exhorted and br. Pierce prayed.”

Another series of exercises began at noon. Brother Leonard Bennett who served Wellfleet preached on Job 21:15 which was followed by Brother Benjamin Hazelton’s exhortation. “The mourners in Zion were then invited forward to be prayed for; a praying circle was formed, the spirit of prayer prevailed among the brethren, and one soul professed deliverance.” The weather improved, the congregation grew in number and in “seriousness.” About 4 p.m., Brother Pierce preached on 1 Corinthians 12:6, Brother Joseph Allen of Falmouth exhorted and Frederick Upham offered the concluding prayer. “Good attention was paid to the word: the spirit of intercession and supplication increased, and the brethren generally settled more deeply into the work.” The congregation gathered before the stand again at 7 p.m. as Brother Lewis Bates of Barnstable preached on Hebrews 3:2. This time the sermon was followed by a prayer meeting before the stand. A dozen persons “presented themselves as subjects of prayer” and three professed faith in Christ at the end of the session. The day ended with prayers in the tents and people got ready to sleep at 10 p.m. While some stayed in the tents,

88 The 1823 conference journal lists Thomas C. Pierce of Duxbury that year. He was serving the Danville Vermont circuit in 1824 and submitted a report of the Lyndon camp meeting. He preached at the 1826 camp meeting in Brookfield, Vermont, and was the Presiding Elder of the first camp meeting on Martha’s Vineyard in 1835. No J. C. Pierce appears in any appointment lists. It is most likely that the Brother Pierce at Marshfield is Thomas C.

89 “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?”

90 Listed as Hezelton in the Journal and appointed to Somerset, Massachusetts.

91 “And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.”

92 “Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.”
others slept in nearby homes or inns. Several packets arrived from Boston that evening, probably including the one “An Observer” took, “detained by adverse winds and weather.” Those on the grounds worked quickly by the light of a full moon to help the newcomers erect their tents and get settled. In total, thirteen tents had been added to make twenty-four. Though some recent graduates of Charlestown Seminary and some “preparing for that institution” were present and threatened to cause a stir, there was no disturbance.

The pattern of the day was about the same on Wednesday, August 20, with family prayer at dawn and a “sunrise prayer meeting” before the stand. Then breakfast was held “at the usual hour” while a new tent was set up and some prayers took place in the tents “accompanied with a spirit of lively devotion.” The first preacher of the morning was Brother Solomon Sias who was serving New Bedford and Fairhaven. He took Isaiah 61:1 as his text. “There [were] twice as many people on the ground during this exercise as there had been at any other during the meeting. Hitherto they came by hundreds, now they came by thousands.” Next Br. John Adams, Br. Edward Taylor of New Bedford and Fairhaven, and Br. Asa Kent each took a turn to exhort, and Brother Heman Perry, a deacon on the Mansfield Circuit, offered the concluding prayer. There was singing in the

93 Further research is required to ascertain the denomination with which this seminary was affiliated, but the Congregational Church is a likely candidate. In 1823 Congregationalists did not take fondly to Methodists invading their territory.

94 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”

95 Listed as supernumerary in the Journal.
intermission until the next exercise began at 10 o’clock. Br. Pickering gave another reading of the rules and regulations after which Joseph A. Merrill, the presiding elder of the New London District, preached on John 3:15.96 “A spirit of conviction attended the word … and the work of God appeared far more deep and general through the assembly than we had witnessed before since our meeting commenced.” After Br. John Lindsey of Boston exhorted, the mourners were called forward for prayer. “Three souls professed to find the pearl of great price. The number of people on the ground this forenoon was thought to be 6,000.” At noon the people ate and there was praying and singing in several tents. A few “professed converting grace, and one backslider professed reclaiming mercy.” At 2 p.m., as the crowd had grown to about 7,000 at the stand, Br. Pickering read the rules for a third time before preaching on Matthew 16:26,97 and Br. Lindsey exhorted. At the invitation twenty mourners came forward for prayer. At 4 p.m., Brother Bartholomew Otheman from Charlestown preached on Luke 18:1398 and Brother Leonard Frost of Cambridge exhorted and prayed. In response “one soul professed pardoning love.” During the supper break there were prayers heard in different parts of the encampment. The crowd gathered again at the stand at 7 p.m. to hear Brother Edward

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96 “That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

97 “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” King James Version.

98 “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’”
Taylor preach on Numbers 23:19. Br. Snowden exorted, Br. Lindsey exhorted and prayed, and then the tent prayer meetings lasted until late into the night resulting in at least “one score of souls” professing pardoning or sanctifying grace that evening.

Similar to Wednesday, the camp on Thursday, August 21, started with early morning prayer and praise, but this time a prayer meeting was held at the stand at 5 a.m. At 8 a.m., Br. Timothy Merritt from Bristol, Rhode Island, spoke “particularly to Christians” about holiness. At 10 a.m., Asa Kent preached on 1 John 4:16-17. Then there was a procession, which passed around the area enclosed by the tents and then formed into a prayer circle.

The particular design of this was that the two last sermons were addressed to professors of religion, such might have an opportunity of mingling their prayers to God for a deepening of his work in their hearts and in this exercise I saw ministers and members of several denominations uniting, without respect to names or parties.

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99 “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”

100 Brother Snowden does not appear on any Methodist appointment lists. A brother S. Snowden is mentioned as preaching at the Eastham camp meetings of 1844 and 1847. Mudge notes that Sammy Snowden was the “noble patriarch” of the “colored people.” He preached at the 1834 Needham camp meeting one evening that was “given to the colored people” though the whites clearly listened to his wise, witty, shrewd, explosive” sermon. Mudge, History of the New England Conference, 390.

101 “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.”

102 I believe this ritual action is unique in all the data I collected.
After about an hour the group broke to dine at noon. At 2 p.m., the rules were read yet again before those gathered at the stand. Then Br. Lindsey preached on Luke 16:31, and at 4 p.m. Br. John Newland Maffitt from the New Bedford Fairhaven Circuit preached on Judges 3:20 and brother John Adams closed with prayer. The leaders expected the larger part of the crowd would be leaving this day, so they did not plan for an evening service at the stand, but instead prayer meetings in the tents. So many people remained on the ground, however, that Brothers Maffitt, Taylor and Bates decided to exhort from the stand, and Brother Bates prayed. This attracted those in the tents to move to the stand as well and Br. Maffitt responded by preaching on Ecclesiastes 11:9. Between fifteen and twenty mourners came forward, and prayers and exhortations continued until about midnight.

There were two disturbances on Thursday, the first one taking place in the afternoon at the edge of the camp where a peddler was found intending to sell liquor. He was removed from the premise when “a sturdy son of Eren (not a professor), thinking this rather ill manners, seized the intruder with as much ceremony and good grace as a lion would, and immediately transported him beyond the limits of the encampment.” Later

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103 No copy of these particular rules was published.

104 “And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

105 “And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.”

106 “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”
that night some “drunken lawless rabble” came to the edge of the encampment, “abused our watch with hard words and some blows, and no doubt would have broken up our encampment had their power been equal to their depraved dispositions. I am told that legal measures are in train to bring these wretches to justice.”

On Friday, August 22, the congregation rose early for breakfast and gathered one last time at 7 a.m., where Brothers Merritt and Kent gave addresses that led into a brief love feast and a parting ceremony before everyone headed for home.

Evangelicus concluded his report with some statistics. By sea, thirteen packet sloops and two schooners loaded with passengers. By land, “carriages of every description thronged the encampment.” He estimated that not fewer than 10,000 persons came to the ground during the meeting. The tents numbered twenty-five, the ministers and preachers numbered forty-seven at least part time, and six denominations were represented. He believed thirty to forty souls were converted, at least six backsliders were reclaimed, and “as many renewed in love.”

To add to his count, we can see there were twenty-two Methodist preachers at various stages in their careers from the Boston and New London Districts (including both presiding elders) who preached, exhorted or prayed from the stand. The encampment lasted four days running from Monday evening to Friday morning, though some people

\[107\] This was not described by Evangelicus, but there is a description of what such a ceremony looked like in Chapter Four.

were at work preparing the ground and dedicating it the Wednesday before. The typical daily schedule was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dawn</td>
<td>“Family prayer” in the tents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunrise</td>
<td>Prayers before the stand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breakfast with prayer meetings in the tents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 a.m.</td>
<td>Preaching, Exhortation, Concluding Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intermission – singing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 a.m.</td>
<td>Reading Rules, Preaching, Exhortation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mourners called to the stand for prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noon</td>
<td>Dinner with praying and singing in the tents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
<td>Reading Rules, Preaching, Exhortation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mourners called to the stand for prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 p.m.</td>
<td>Preaching, Exhortation, Concluding Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supper Prayers throughout the encampment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
<td>Preaching, Exhortation, Concluding Prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>Prayer meetings in tents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were typically five sermons a day, each followed by one or more exhortations and either a concluding prayer led from the stand by a preacher or a time of prayer for the mourners who accepted the invitation to come to the stand. Not every layperson took Evangelicus’ advice to attend for the whole meeting (the crowd grew as the camp meeting progressed). Neither did all of the preachers. Some came at the beginning and left in the middle; some came in the middle and stayed to the end. Even in the years when transportation was quite difficult and the meetings were spread wide apart, however, it was not unusual for the Methodist ministers to attend more than one camp meeting in a year. Evangelicus reports elsewhere that in seven years he had attended ten camp meetings.109

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Other 1823 Camp Meetings

A comparison with other camp meetings in 1823 can reveal trends and variations. Six of the seven occurred at the end of the summer, two in August and four in September. Of the four with published start and end dates, two began on Wednesdays and ran five days to Monday, while one other was like Marshfield and started on a Monday and ran four days to Friday. The news from the camp meeting in East Pittston, Maine, was noted as a letter from “an aged and respectable lady to her friend” and paints a picture of the scene. Tents were made of white duck or white cloth in the shape of “small framed buildings” and one large one “in the form of a marquee.” There was a stream at the bottom of the tents. Glass lamps were lit at night and hung on trees and at the door of every tent. A trumpet was used to awaken the people at daylight and to signal the start of prayers at sunrise. Breakfast was at 7; preaching started at 8.110

In 1823, only the Hebron, Connecticut, and Bucksport, Maine, meetings had reports published of a similar length and detail as Marshfield. There were no announcements of the Hebron meeting in Zion’s Herald before it took place and no presiding elder or president was mentioned in the report. The secretary was Aaron Lummus of the Mansfield (Massachusetts) Circuit, who wrote his minutes for the “many who had never attended a meeting,” aiming to describe “exactly as possible our manner of conducting such meetings.” He and twenty-three other preachers spoke from the stand over five days.111

110 “The Late Methodist Camp Meeting in East Pittston, Me.,” ZH (25 December 1823): 206.

111 Aaron Lummus, “Hebron Camp-Meetings,” ZH (June 19, 1823): 94. The preachers included Daniel Morcheste and Ebenezer Blake who were serving Hebron, John Case of Tolland, and Ephraim
According to Lummus, there was no formal gathering of people the first night of the Hebron meeting, but some brethren and sisters sang, exhorted and prayed while other brethren built the tents that day. There were also five sermons a day, but here the family prayer time in the tents at dawn was followed by preaching at sunrise, and two more preaching services that morning at 8 and 10:30. The sermons were followed by exhortations and/or concluding prayers. The 2 p.m. exercises led to a praying circle and the evening service started at 6 p.m. Similar to East Pittston, people were called to the stand by trumpet. Just as at Marshfield, meal times were used for more prayer and singing. The daily pattern was employed, but not strictly. After the morning sermon on Saturday, the preachers felt moved to give several exhortations and the congregation sang several hymns. Lummus wrote:

In consequence of a special influence of grace among the people, the usual manner of closing our exercises was not observed in this instance. God’s order is the best, and however excellent human regulations may be as general rules, they should always be subject to the dictates of providential [sic] circumstances.\textsuperscript{112}

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

Avery from Pomfret, Connecticut. Other preachers from Massachusetts included Barzella Pierce and Benjamin Paine who had both just been accepted on trial that year and were on the Ashburnham circuit together with William Barstow who preached as well; Hezekiah Thatcher appointed to the newly formed circuit in Milford; and Lewis Bates of Barnstable (about 130 miles east). Three Methodist preachers from Rhode Island spoke including Elisha Frink and Caleb Rodgers (just accepted on trial that year) both from Warwick; and Milton French from the Rhode Island and Little Compton circuit. Joel McKee was there from the Veshire, Vermont circuit—about 190 miles north of Hebron, but along the same Connecticut River. Ira Bidwell preached once even though he was not accepted on trial and appointed until 1824. Eight other preachers listed as speaking at the Hebron camp meeting are not listed in the 1823 appointments including Brothers Bentley, Brainerd, Clough, Griffin, Lathrop, Smith, Spencer and Stocking. More research is required to know if they were Methodists whose preaching career was short lived, or if they were clergy from other denominations.
There were sixteen tents to start with which grew to twenty as the days passed. At the love feast more than thirty souls “professed to find the pearl of great price,” about ten backsliders professed “recovering grace” and a “goodly number” professed sanctification “according as we understand that doctrine.”

The Bucksport camp meeting in the Penobscot District in Maine had twenty-three tents up at the start of the meeting. Similar to Marshfield, the first preaching service started on the evening when the tents were erected. The sermon was followed by exhortation and concluding prayer, followed by prayer meetings in the tents until ten o’clock. When the camp was awakened in the night by a rain shower, hymns of praise and prayers of gratitude were offered for quenching the “severe drought” that summer. Again the daily pattern was to rise at dawn to pray and sing in the tents, then gather at the stand at sunrise for prayer, this time accompanied by singing and “public reading.” The first preaching service of the day was at 8 a.m. with the usual pattern of sermon, exhortation and concluding prayer. A second preaching service started at 10:30 or 11 a.m., a third at 2:30 p.m. which ended with a praying circle at the stand, and a fourth preaching service at 7:30 p.m. followed by prayer meetings in the tents. The preachers drew on a wide range of texts from the Old and New Testaments. There were praying circles at the stand after some of the preaching services, and prayer meetings in the tents following the rest throughout the day.

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113 This term was used frequently in counting. As this instance shows it appears to be a synonym for being justified, or experiencing assurance of pardon.

114 Presumably of scripture.
On the morning of the first day at Bucksport there was a preachers’ conference to choose the secretary and appoint three to superintend the watch and assist the president\textsuperscript{115} in preserving order. Presiding Elder Benjamin Jones was present and probably served as president, taking the stand six times during the meeting. He shared it with sixteen other preachers, six of whom were elders on the district.\textsuperscript{116} Just one preacher came from the neighboring Kennebec District\textsuperscript{117} and there were eight inexperienced preachers taking the stand including two deacons,\textsuperscript{118} two preachers who had just been accepted on trial that year,\textsuperscript{119} and four who are not listed in the appointments until 1824 or later.\textsuperscript{120} Both of these facts can be accounted for by the remote nature of this section of Maine, making travel more difficult and requiring the most energetic circuit riders. There also were eight preachers present for the camp meeting who did not speak from the stand.

The secretary reported that somewhere between 1,500 and 3,000 were on the grounds for Sunday’s exercises. The meeting closed on Monday morning with “the usual

\textsuperscript{115}See page 79 of this dissertation for a description of the function of the president. See also the lengthy discussion of the role on page 163ff.

\textsuperscript{116}John S. Ayer of Hamden, Oliver Beal of Orrington, Thomas Smith of Penobscot, Peter Burgess of Columbia, Sullivan Bray of Union, Samuel Baker an Elder with no appointment.

\textsuperscript{117}Samuel Plummer appointed to Unity.

\textsuperscript{118}Ezra Kellog of St. Croix and Stephen Lovell a deacon on trial of Thomaston.

\textsuperscript{119}William Douglass of Penobscot, and Moses Sanderson of Thomaston.

\textsuperscript{120}Josiah Eaton who was appointed to Dennysville in 1824, Joshua Hall who was appointed to Bucksport in 1824, Gershom F. Cox, and Joseph Lull.
ceremony on such occasions…it was a solemn melting time, and the people went down from their feast of tabernacles rejoicing.”

Part 3 - Camp Meeting Structural Developments 1823-1871

Now that the pattern of early New England camp meetings has been examined, it will be easier to highlight the most important developments and changes to this pattern over time. Since Christian worship at camp meetings is the main focus of this dissertation, Chapter Four is dedicated to the changes in those parts of the camp meeting pattern that can be called “liturgy” (e.g., preaching, exhortation, singing of hymns, prayer, sacraments and love feasts). But from the social science perspective, there are many structural aspects of camp meetings that are likely to be important factors in the experience of conversion engendered by camp meetings. The remainder of this chapter looks at the developments in the camp meeting leadership, the places and times the meetings occurred, those who attended, the constant objective of maintaining good order, and other activities that occurred during camp meetings which cannot be called Christian liturgy.

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121 “Melting” was a common adjective used by Methodists to describe particularly effective worship. People experienced their hardened hearts being melted and thus able to be transformed by God. It comes out of Ezekiel 21:7: “And it shall be, when they say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings; because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall faint, and all knees shall be weak as water: behold, it cometh, and shall be brought to pass, saith the Lord GOD.”

122 A Preacher, ZH (25 September 1823): 150.
Leadership Structures of New England Camp Meetings

Examination of the leadership of the camp meetings reveals both that the MEC was tightly connected to camp meeting through the presiding elders and other MEC clergy, and that throughout the nineteenth century the leadership grew in size and duties to meet the needs of the growth of the size and increasing complexity of the camp meetings.

Presiding Elders

Because yearly camp meetings were believed to be a highly valued tool for church growth, most New England presiding elders held it as their duty to make sure their districts organized at least one each year. They clearly expected that “all the preachers of the district” would attend and “bring at least one tent, with friends to occupy it.” When a district was large enough, presiding elders would sometimes arrange for multiple meetings to be held in different corners of their territory.

123 This evidence can be used to refute the claim that camp meetings were not officially owned by the denomination. They may not have been legislated in the Book of Discipline, and Methodist preachers may have not been required to participate, but most presiding elders, in New England at least, took responsibility to hold them yearly.


125 In 1830 the Portland District (which comprised all the territory west of the Kennebec and Sandy Rivers except for a few towns on the Kennebec) held three camp meetings in Paris, Readfield and Kittery, Maine. And in 1831 four camp meetings had been planned for the same territory in Gorham, Farmington, Paris and Kittery, though it was divided into two districts before the meetings began. John Lord, “Portland District, Me,” CAJZH (2 March 1832): 106.
The sole exception to this rule is instructive. In 1832, Presiding Elder John Lord decided *not* to schedule a camp meeting for the Portland District.\textsuperscript{126} Apparently something dreadful had happened at the Gorham camp meeting on his district the previous year. Rev. Lord explained to the readers of the *Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald* that state laws to preserve order would only “make the *remedy* worse than the *disease*”\textsuperscript{127} when executed. He then reasoned that since camp meetings were “not essential to Christianity” and were not “recognized in our Discipline: as it is no part of my duty as a minister or presiding elder to appoint or attend such meetings,” he resolved not to hold or attend any more camp meetings “until the evils above named are removed.” Brother Lord chose instead to continue encouraging the smaller, less chaotic “four days meetings” which he had been promoting since he was presiding elder of the Danville (Vermont) District in 1827\textsuperscript{128} because they were less expensive and trouble, and had “*all* the *effect* of camp meeting, without their evils.” Fifteen of his district’s four days meetings of 1832 were connected with the quarterly conferences that Presiding Elder Lord conducted. Lord asserted, “We find that these meetings have as gracious an influence in preserving the life and power of religion among Christians, and in reclaiming

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\textsuperscript{126} John Lord published a detailed account of the troubles of this meeting in the 114\textsuperscript{th} and 115\textsuperscript{th} numbers of the *New England Christian Herald*. Unfortunately a copy of this report is nowhere to be found.

\textsuperscript{127} Emphasis in the original.

\textsuperscript{128} Mudge, *History of the New England Conference*, 391.
\end{flushright}
the societies from lukewarmness, backsliding &c., as in the awakening and conversion of sinners.” 129

But the Methodists on the Portland District were not so keen to follow their presiding elder’s lead. They held a camp meeting that year from September 24 to 29 in Kennebunkport in spite of John Lord’s wishes. Richworth Ayer, who was appointed to Kennebunkport, signed the announcements of the meeting and the secretary “C[yrus] C. Munger” 130 signed the report but did not give any names of participants. The camp meeting ran well, with only a slight disturbance by “the loathsome sight of [a] staggering and almost senseless drunkard” walking from a nearby rum shop through the grounds. 131

After nearly thirty years of holding camp meetings in the New England region, the members of the MEC expected every district to hold a camp meeting every summer. As the leaders of their districts, the presiding elders almost always exercised their office by organizing, promoting and being present at the camp meetings. But as the case of the Portland District in 1832 shows, the expectation that camp meeting would occur was so ingrained that clergy would unite against the wishes of their presiding elder and hold a camp meeting without his support or participation.

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130 Who is not on the appointment list for 1832, but was ordained a deacon in full connection in the Maine Annual Conference of 1835.

131 C[yrus] C. Munger, “Kennebunk-Port Camp Meeting,” MWJ (15 November 1832): 177. John Lord transferred his membership to the New England Conference in 1833 and was appointed to Charlestown and Medford, Massachusetts. By 1835 Lord was located, and in 1838 he was expelled.
Organization

In the early years the camp meetings were loosely organized. The presiding elders would typically set and publicize the camp meeting, start the proceedings with a dedicatory prayer, remarks and/or the first sermon, and likewise oversee the closing ceremonies. Throughout the period of encampment the presiding elder was ultimately responsible (and typically praised) for keeping the meeting orderly.

By the 1830s camp meetings began to have their own roster of officers. The leaders of the camp meetings were starting to be called the “President,” even when the presiding elder, as was typical, held that office. There were times when the presiding elder was sick, or otherwise indisposed, that another elder of the district was chosen to function as the President. In 1850, Joseph Jenne needed to leave the camp meeting in Kennebunk, Maine, early on the last day to attend to a quarterly conference, and he left William Farrington (formerly a presiding elder) to conduct the closing exercises.\(^\text{132}\) In 1847, the presiding elders of the Boston and Sandwich Districts presided together over the Millennial Grove meeting in Eastham, Massachusetts. Occasionally the position was referred to as the “Preacher in Charge”\(^\text{133}\) or the “Superintendent.”\(^\text{134}\)


But presiding elders needed others to help run large camps, so they would call an impromptu preachers’ conference of all the clergy present to appoint other preachers to particular tasks. At a preachers’ conference on the first morning of the 1823 Bucksport camp, they chose a secretary and “an agency of three to superintend the watch, and assist the president in preserving order, &c. and [they also] adopted rules for the government and exercises of the meeting.”135 Those at the preachers’ meetings or conferences, often including the tent masters,136 made spontaneous decisions for the camps. Besides adopting codes of conduct, they would evaluate the camp location for future use. In 1844, the preachers discussed finding a new site for the New Bedford District camp because some were concerned that Martha’s Vineyard had become an “old story” after nine years of camp meetings there.137 Preachers’ meetings were also used to address disturbances to the camp from outside. In 1844, at the Webster, Massachusetts, camp meeting, the preachers and tent masters met on the last day of their encampment and selected a committee “to prepare a resolution to be presented to the congregation for adoption, expressing our obligations to the citizens of Webster and vicinity, for their prompt and efficient co-operation with the civil authorities in preserving order in our meeting and protecting us from all annoyances.”138 At times the clergy turned to polling

135 A Preacher, ZH (25 September 1823): 150.

136 Usually a lay person who organized the tent from a given society.


the whole camp on a question. During a particularly rainy encampment in 1841 at Buxton, Maine, the “brethren” were asked if they should strike their tents and go home. Not a man, woman or child said yes, save two.\textsuperscript{139}

As leaders, the preachers held one another accountable for working out their own salvation, even as they were helping others move along the way of salvation. This is demonstrated in that preachers’ meetings at the camp meetings were also used to attend to the souls of the preachers. In 1826, at the West Windsor, Vermont, camp meeting, the preachers retired into the preacher’s [sic] tent, and held a conference upon the subject of present Christian holiness. The searching Spirit brought conviction for holiness to many of them. Tears flowed from their eyes while engaged in silent prayer.\textsuperscript{140}

MEC preachers could hardly be expected to lead others to experience holiness unless they had experienced it themselves.

\textit{From Committees of Arrangements to Camp Meeting Associations}

As time went on, more and more camps developed a committee of arrangements. This was still only comprised of clergy and took on the work of the preachers’ meeting, but had the additional task of planning future camp meetings with the presiding elder. The committee particularly focused on finding and preparing suitable grounds, and designing a layout for the tents and stands and benches. They had the authority to obtain and hold leases on land that was deemed particularly desirable. They also were charged

\textsuperscript{139} Gershom F. Cox, “Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (15 September 1841): 147.

to make sure that there was enough water and other supplies for the participants, and eventually began to oversee the construction of more permanent structures and to purchase land. To accomplish their tasks, the committee of arrangements needed to meet some months before their next camp meeting. The Kennebec Valley Camp Meeting Committee and the Newmarket Camp Meeting Committee each met nearly two months before their camp meetings in 1856. The committee for the Providence District camp meeting at Martha’s Vineyard of 1838 was appointed at the camp the year before.141

One of the critical officers in the committee of arrangements was the secretary. In the early years, the presiding elder would assign this work to a preacher or one was elected at the preachers’ meeting. The office was frequently given to a younger clergyman on the district. Though the length and quality of their reports varies through this study, there are many reports that are highly descriptive of each day, and even of each part of the day. It seems that the secretaries often kept notes as the camp went along so as to be able to report the numbers of “backsliders reclaimed” or campers who had “found the pearl of great price” at each prayer meeting through each day. It also seems that the secretaries were quite self-consciously writing to promote camp meetings to the readers of Zion’s Herald. The editors were more than happy to accept these uncritical reports. In 1859, the editor of Zion’s Herald wrote of Hebron Vincent:

The camp meeting has its regularly appointed secretary, who like a true and faithful man that we know him to be has for a succession of years given our readers a more than readable account of this great annual religious gathering. To

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that gentleman’s able pen we leave the delightful task of presenting before the patrons of the Herald a glowing description of the charming spot.”¹⁴²

Camp meeting secretaries were crucial in promoting a favorable view of the camps by painting the experience in brilliant, attractive colors with the goal of enticing more campers at the next meeting that would entice larger crowds the following year.

Another role that is seen from the early years is the tent master. Each society would bring its own tent to accommodate its members and their friends and relatives. The tent masters were designated to keep order in each tent¹⁴³ and attend organizational meetings of the camp, providing a direct line of communication between the people and the leadership. In 1856 at Martha’s Vineyard, the tent masters were not only in charge of the society tents, but also the family tents of those who were recommended by that society. A motion was adopted that each small tent should have the name of the owner and of the church recommending the occupants by the door, and “every tent should be under the supervision of the tent-master of the society approving it.”¹⁴⁴


¹⁴³ “If you are a tent master, stand to your post, and see that all in or about your tent stand in their proper lot or place.” John Allen, “East Livermore Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (21 August 1850): 133.

As time went on more committees were assigned increasingly complex tasks. These included publishing committees, finance committees, trustees, and committees on railroads. Some camp meeting leaders formed a committee on lots or a committee on altar service. More individual leadership positions were created as well, including the vice president, song leader, and chairmen of the various committees.

General Ministry of the Clergy at Camp Meeting

It should also be noted that some clergy were present who did not speak from the stand or hold a specific leadership office. They helped with the prayer meetings in the tents, and the aged ones seemed to be especially inspiring. When the superannuated “Father” Ebenezer F. Newell traveled from Massachusetts to the camp meeting in East Poland, Maine, it “was a blessing to us by his presence and counsels. He is 87 years old,

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145 Millennial Grove in Eastham, Massachusetts, had a publishing committee in the 1850s.

146 In 1856, the Martha’s Vineyard Finance Committee set regulations about who could tent on the grounds, how to obtain a permit and what information should be on the sign on each tent. Hebron Vincent, “Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (25 June 1856): 104.


148 Sterling, Massachusetts had one in 1871. The need for this committee will be explained below. F[redrick] A. Clapp, “Sterling Junction Camp-Meeting,” ZH (29 June 1871): 313.

149 Members of this committee would be at their grove at regularly posted times through the summer to help people find a site for their tents. They also began to regulate the removal of trees.


151 This is the Methodist term for retired.
all meekness, patience and love.” Sometimes preachers from other regions showed up at a camp meeting. Brother Payson from St. Davids, New Brunswick, Canada, was present at the Charlotte, Maine, camp meeting of 1862, “but took no part in the exercises.” Charles Merrill, originally from Maine, but holding membership in the Providence Annual Conference, traveled to Maine one summer and stopped at several camp meetings along the way.

It is quite possible that far more clergy were present at the camp meetings than those who were named in *Zion’s Herald.* All appointed clergy were encouraged to attend with people from their circuits and societies, and they were enticed with deals such as free or reduced train fare or free board. In 1823, there were 158 persons listed on the appointment list for the New England Annual Conference; fifty-six of them were listed as preaching, exhorting or performing some other work at one or more camp meetings that year. But figuring out the percentage of clergy who participated in camp meetings is also elusive because many of the reports do not list the clergy by name. It is also quite likely that some camps were held that were never reported in the newspaper. In 1823, the seven camp meetings reported on in *Zion’s Herald* represented only six of the seven


154 Charles A. Merrill, “Diaries.”

155 Though as noted in Chapter Two, there is evidence that some Methodist Episcopal clergy did not participate much in camp meetings.

156 In 1823 only three of the seven name clergy.
districts.\textsuperscript{157} Nothing was reported on the Portland Maine District, which most likely had at least one camp meeting within its bounds that year.

The Case of the Rev. Charles A. Merrill

While serving his first appointments, Rev. Charles A. Merrill was in the habit of attending multiple camp meetings in a year. Merrill was born in 1826 in Woodstock, Maine, and graduated from the Theological Institute in Concord, New Hampshire, in 1855. That same year he married his second wife, Sophia, providing his son Charlie with a new mother.\textsuperscript{158} Charles was accepted on trial in the Providence Conference in 1855 and appointed to Globe Village,\textsuperscript{159} Rhode Island, where the family moved. While serving there he was admitted into full connection and ordained a deacon in the Providence Conference. Merrill then served two years (1857-1858) in Middletown, Rhode Island, (just north of Newport) and then in 1859 Merrill was ordained elder and the family moved to Millville, Massachusetts (just over the state line from Woonsocket, Rhode Island) where he served for two more years.

\textsuperscript{157} Marshfield was in the Boston District, Hebron was in the New London District, East Pittston was in the Kenebec District, Penobscot was in the Bucksport District, Sandown was in the New Hampshire District and Cabot and Barnard were both in the Vermont District.

\textsuperscript{158} His first wife was Sarah A. Foster who died in 1852.

\textsuperscript{159} There is no Globe Village, Rhode Island today. But there were at least two Globe Villages in Rhode Island in the past. One was part of Woonsocket. See Erastus Richardson, \textit{History of Woonsocket} (Woonsocket: S. S. Foss, 1876). And there was also a section of Fall River called Globe Village. Though Fall River is now completely within Massachusetts, there was a time when there was a Fall River, Rhode Island. See Arthur Sherman Phillips, \textit{History of Fall River: Physiography and Natural Resources, Early Life of Inhabitants, Civic and Political Developments, Judicatures, Calamities, War Times}, vol. Fascicle III (Fall River, MA: Dover Press, 1946), 17-18. In 1856 Charles left his home in Globe Village at 7 a.m., took a boat from Bristol Ferry at 11:30, and arrived at Martha’s Vineyard at 2:30. Given this itinerary, it is most likely that Merrill was serving a congregation in the Globe Village section of Fall River.
In the first five years of his ministry, Merrill made notations in his diary of the
camp meetings he attended. On August 14, 1856, he went to Martha’s Vineyard for the
first time, bringing an undisclosed number of others with him, but leaving his wife and
young son behind. This was the camp meeting of his own district, and though he brought
a sermon with him just in case, he was not called upon to preach. But he did seem be in
charge of the meetings in his society’s tent.

Merrill left Martha’s Vineyard early so that he could travel with his family to the
Manchester, Connecticut, camp meeting which started on August 18. This was the camp
of the New London District that year, and it is interesting that Charles had left his own
Providence District’s camp meeting early, but was present for the entire camp meeting of
the neighboring district of his annual conference. Here Merrill was called upon to preach
at the stand. When that camp ended on a Saturday, the family traveled first to Rockville,
Connecticut, where he preached three times on Sunday and “met with many old
friends.”\(^{160}\) Edwin “Eddie” Stanly was among these friends, and on Tuesday, August 26,
the Merrill family traveled with him to Somers, Connecticut, where Stanly was
appointed. Stanly was also a preacher on trial and likely a close friend Merrill had made
at the Theological Institute. They stayed on with Stanly five more days until Charles set
out on his own, by train, to attend the Worcester District camp meeting in Sterling,
Massachusetts.

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\(^{160}\) It appears that it was common for people slowly to make their way home after a camp meeting,
visiting locations near to the camp in the first few days after the camp meetings ended. In 1857, after the
Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting ended on a Thursday, Charles Merrill hosted a Brother Edmands from
Boston who preached the following Sunday to his congregation in Middletown, and Brothers Bailey,
Anthony and Holt were present as well.
The Worcester District belonged to the New England Annual Conference, so Merrill was surely not beholden to attend the Sterling camp meeting. But Sterling was yet another opportunity for Charles Merrill to meet “many old friends.” This is not to say that he did not participate in the work of the camp as a trained clergy person. Charles notes in his diary that he got little sleep on the last night of the camp, typically the highpoint of the prayer meetings in the tents. *The Zion’s Herald* report of that same camp noted that “Revs. Merrill, Eastman and Dearborn were in charge of the tent and public prayer meetings.” While this might have been David K. Merrill (appointed to Monson, Massachusetts, on the Worcester District and ordained deacon in 1844), who preached to the congregation at Sterling on Thursday (Charles was technically not yet a “Rev.”),\(^{161}\) it also could very well have been Charles working together with Eastman\(^{162}\) and Dearborn.\(^{163}\) Similar to Charles, Eastman and Dearborn did not preach from the stand at the 1856 Sterling camp. Like Charles, George S. Dearborn was not serving on the Worcester District, for he was appointed to Nashua in the New Hampshire Conference that year. Since Charles slept very little on the last night and noted that “in many of the tents meetings were held nearly all night,” it may very well be that he was put in charge

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\(^{161}\) His ordination as a deacon was the following year.

\(^{162}\) This was probably Cyrus L. Eastman (accepted on trial in 1844 and ordained deacon in 1847) who was appointed to Leominster on the Worcester District.

\(^{163}\) The only two people named Dearborn appointed in 1856 were Reuben Dearborn, assigned to Andover, New Hampshire, in the Concord District and George S. (on Trial in 1844, ordained elder 1847) who was appointed to Nashua in the Claremont District of New Hampshire.
of the prayer meetings at Sterling. In any case, Charles Merrill surely assisted his fellow clergy friends in helping the people at the camp experience the grace of God.

Charles Merrill repeated this pattern of attending multiple camp meetings in a year. In 1857, he again attended his own district’s meeting at Martha’s Vineyard (August 20-27) with others from his new appointment in Middletown, Rhode Island. Then he attended the New London District’s camp meeting in West Killingly, Connecticut, in the second week of September. In 1859, now serving in Millville, Massachusetts, Merrill still belonged to the Providence District, so he led a “tolerable company” to Martha’s Vineyard from August 9-19. That year the Sterling and West Killingly camp meetings took place over the same five days. Merrill first went to Sterling and then headed for the West Killingly camp much closer to home and in his own annual conference. In 1860, Merrill brought his wife to the Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting at the end of August, and also participated in the Willimantic, Connecticut, camp meeting. At each camp meeting his diary includes notes about meeting old friends.

The most interesting year of Charles Merrill’s journal was 1858 when he traveled with his wife and Charlie to visit family and friends in Maine. After a brief visit to the Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting, where he arranged for supply preachers during his absence from Middletown, Rhode Island, Charles came home, made final arrangements and on August 23 set off for home by wagon. It took one day to travel to Milton, Massachusetts, and another to bring the family to Kittery, Maine. From there they stopped at the camp meeting in Kennebunkport for a couple of days, then they journeyed on to Portland to visit friends and family. Leaving his wife there, Charles and Charlie
traveled further “down east” stopping in Winthrop and Waterville and getting to the Kendall’s Mills\textsuperscript{164} camp meeting on September 1. The father and son heard one sermon that day and then pressed on to Skowhegan, eager to see dear friends there. Charles noted that these friends were “glad to see Charlie,” suggesting that they may have known Charlie’s mother Sarah. Clearly very fond of these friends, Charles nonetheless led his son back to the Kendall’s Mills camp on September 3. This time they stayed long enough to hear three preachers including two who had been Charles’ “old pastors.” On September 4, the two set out westward to the camp meeting in Poland, stopping in Winthrop and Turner, Maine, along the way. On September 7 Charles reached the Poland camp on his own.\textsuperscript{165} Wife and son joined him two days later, and on September 11 they set out for “the old homestead,” most likely Woodstock where Charles was born.

From the diaries of Charles Merrill it is clear that camp meetings were more than a place for him to perform his work of leading people to God’s grace. They were times of reunion with old friends. Charles quite possibly met some of these friends as a young man attending Methodist camp meetings. Since the Theological Institute in Concord served to train Methodist clergy for all the New England Conferences, it is also likely that Charles first became friends with many other colleagues in class. Then as he continued to attend so many camp meetings, he surely made new friends there as well. The friends he met at camp meetings in Maine may also have included laity, people he knew as a boy

\textsuperscript{164} This was a section of present-day Fairfield, Maine.  

\textsuperscript{165} It is unclear when and how Charlie left his side, but his wife and Charlie met him at Poland on September 9. Perhaps she met them in Turner?
and a young man. But then, as now, ordination divided the clergy from the laity so that the clergy were not considered members of local congregations. Camp meetings were opportunities for clergy to be reunited with their peers as well as with friends among the laity whom they had made through life. Welcoming clergy from other districts and annual conferences also provided each camp meeting with a greater number of workers.

Leadership of the Laity

It should also be noted that as time went on, the leadership of camp meetings began to be shared with the laity. Besides serving as tent masters, they were engaged to help supply food and tend to the horses. Eventually the post of “camp agent” was created in some camps. In 1859, the president and secretary of the Boston and Lynn District Camp Meeting Convention were laymen, respectively Edward F. Porter and Luther L. Tarbell. Tarbell had served on the publishing committee for Millennial Grove in 1853 and 1856 as well. By 1871, two laymen were listed as the source for

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166 It seems the agent lived near to the camp meeting grounds and could keep an eye on the property through the year, and coordinated building projects in between camp meetings. Sirson P. Coffin was the Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements in 1849 and then served as the Agent for Martha’s Vineyard at least until 1871. Dagñall, Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association, 1835-1985, 12.

information about the Northport, Maine, camp meeting,\textsuperscript{168} and other laymen were taking applications for tents and orders for Asbury Grove\textsuperscript{169} and Empire Grove.\textsuperscript{170}

By 1871, the largest camp meetings with permanent grounds had all formed Camp Meeting Associations, with sub-committees. These Associations included lay representatives, operated under by-laws, and owned and regulated the grounds. The Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association of 1871 held its annual meeting in the hall on the campground one day in the middle of camp meeting week at 8 a.m. Each quarterly conference was instructed to send their elected delegate with a signed certificate of election. The officers of the Association included the president, vice president, clerk, treasurer and directors for three-year terms. The directors were instructed to “provide a boarding place and board at the lowest possible rate for those who do not wish to pay the present prices.”\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{168} Albert Church, “Northport Camp-Meeting,” ZH (27 July 1871): 361.

\textsuperscript{169} One could order tents, straw, oil and articles of furniture from A. D. Wait of Ipswich, Massachusetts, or J. P. Magee of Boston in preparation for attending Asbury Grove in 1871. “Hamilton Camp-Meeting,” ZH (27 July 1871): 361.

\textsuperscript{170} “East Poland Camp-Meeting,” ZH (27 July 1871): 361. In 1862 the finance committee of Martha’s Vineyard was composed of fifteen laymen. Hebron Vincent, “Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (20 August 1862): 134.

\textsuperscript{171} L. G. Westgate, “Martha’s Vineyard Camp-Meeting,” ZH (14 September 1871): 442.
How Time was Structured at New England Camp Meetings

*Dates and length*

Given the climate of New England, it is not surprising that camp meetings only took place in the summer. In the early years there was an occasional camp meeting in June, but by far the most popular months were August and September. In the whole set of data there are just two meetings starting in late September that spilled into October, and only two meetings that started in October. All of the meetings in the sample for this study started on weekdays, Monday through Friday, with Monday commencements chosen most frequently. The length of the meetings ranged from two to ten days, and the average length gradually increased. There was one eight day meeting in 1826, and one in 1835, but all the rest were held between four and six days until 1847 when a couple of seven-day meetings began to be offered each year. With the

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172 There was one in 1823, two in 1824 (in conjunction with the annual conference), one in 1826, one in 1835, one in 1844, and one in 1859. They were in districts in Connecticut, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

173 These were in Steuben, Maine, and Lyndon, Vermont, in 1841.

174 These were in Surry and Dover, Maine, in 1838. Most likely the campers found it too cold to camp comfortably by then.

175 Many more camp meetings were advertised than had significant reports printed after they took place. Sometimes a meeting was mentioned as having happened “last month” with no specific date at all. Not all camp meetings appearing in *Zion’s Herald* were given a start date, and there were a great many that have a start date, but nothing to indicate how long they lasted. The summary given here is based only on what was reported.


addition of Stark, Maine, one year, Martha’s Vineyard and Eastham were the two that held all the seven day camps between 1847 and 1859. Martha’s Vineyard even held a ten day camp in 1859. But stretching this long was not a consistent practice because of the debate about camp meetings on Sundays.

*A Good Way to “Honor the Sabbath”?*

There were always camp meetings that included Sunday in New England, but this was a topic of great debate throughout the period. When a camp meeting did not encompass a Sunday, the societies could hold their regular Sunday services back home and start the work of incorporating those who had experienced religion at camp meeting into their folds. But when a camp meeting did extend over a Sunday, the crowds were usually at their largest.

Although it rained hard Sabbath morning, yet thousands attended to hear the words of salvation, and many we trust, heard not in vain. Sabbath evening was a time of great power and many during the night, were translated from darkness into marvelous light. After the Vassalborough, Maine, meeting of 1832, Secretary Daniel B. Randall commented that the only fault of the meeting was that it was too short and suggested that future meetings “continue at least six days, including a Sabbath.”

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178 With a possible exception of 1829. The reports from that year were only in *The Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald* and have so little detail that no camp meeting lengths are given, and only six of the eleven mentioned have start dates.


continued. In 1855, the leaders voted that the presiding elders of the Providence and Sandwich Districts consult the several societies within their respective districts who are accustomed to attend this camp meeting, sometime during the year, as to whether or not they would prefer to have the meetings held between Sabbaths; that is to say, to begin on Monday and close the following Saturday.  

That year the dates were set for Thursday, August 14 to Wednesday, August 20. After that, it seems the matter was settled for the Vineyard. Camp meetings there would encompass Sundays, though not without protest.

We are very sorry to learn that the Committee having charge of one of the camp meetings, have decided to hold it over the Sabbath. The fact that the Martha’s Vineyard meeting is held on an island, forms an apology in the minds of some for its continuance over the Sabbath. The propriety of this course, however, is doubted by many ministers and members of our church on the Providence District. But we decidedly object to holding the meeting over the Sabbath elsewhere, for the following reasons: -

1st. It will place before many a strong temptation to desecrate the holy Sabbath.

2d. There is no necessity and no propriety in thirty or forty ministers being at one place on the Sabbath, and as many congregations left without the preaching of the gospel.

3d. The Sabbath at camp meeting is usually the most confused and unprofitable day of the meeting.  

By 1871, six of the thirty-five camp meetings spanned a Sunday including the ones for the districts of Boston and Lynn in the New England Annual Conference, Providence, and Sandwich in the Providence Annual Conference and Dover in the New Hampshire Annual Conference. Asbury Grove sought to honor the Sabbath by making sure that no trains would be running to the grounds that day, and prohibiting anyone from

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driving carriages. The clergy at the June meeting of the Dover District Ministerial Association that year considered an essay by Rev. A. R. Lunt on the subject and came out “strongly in favor of the new order. The great success of the camp-meeting on the Sabbath last year was used as the strongest argument for repeating the practice this year.”

Shorter “Grove Meetings”

In 1871, there was a noticeable effort to hold shorter and simpler meetings. Of the thirty-five meetings held that year, seven were called grove meetings, which lasted four days or less. A preacher from the Bucksport District in East Maine offered a word about them in a letter published in Zion’s Herald on June 29. He observed:

There are many groves that are suitable for holding meetings, and many communities that can be reached in that way, and any two ministers with a body of Christians could pitch a tent or two, clear up a spot, make some temporary seats, and hold meetings, and God will pour out His Spirit, and in this way thousands of souls may be saved this season. This is especially so in the eastern part of Maine. There are whole regions of country that may be reached in that way. The expense is trifling. The reward is glorious. Dear brethren, try it, and God will bless. The grove-meeting held in Washington County last fall, directly or indirectly led hundreds of souls to Christ.

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185 These were located in Northfield and Milltown, Maine; Seabrook, New Hampshire; Russell, Palmer, Dana and Heath, Massachusetts. None of these took place in permanent groves. Two other camp meetings that year lasted four days, but were held in permanent groves and were the camp meetings for their respective districts. Sterling camp meeting had been taking place in that location for eighteen years and the camp in East Machias had been there for seven.

There were fewer people involved at the grove meetings, and the reports were much shorter, but these meetings still resulted in converts, backsliders reclaimed, new people joining the church, and the members finding “new zeal.” As observed in the case of Presiding Elder John Lord above, four days meetings were frequently practiced alongside camp meetings. They were smaller and involved less, if any, camping. Grove meetings seem to be a kind of hybrid between those four days meetings, and camp meetings—gathering in tents in a grove in the summer and early autumn, but for the shorter time, with fewer people.

Clergy in the Northampton vicinity of the Springfield (Massachusetts) District also committed to holding several shorter meetings in the fall of 1871, forming a “Four Days Meeting Association.” Their aim was “to hold a series of meetings in the neighboring churches. The first one was held on Northampton on October 17. A certain number are to be pledged from each Church to attend all the meetings of the Association.”188 The author suggested that similar associations be formed in the lower Connecticut, Westfield, Deerfield, Chicopee, and Miller’s river valleys. These are not considered to be camp meetings in this study because it does not appear that any camping was involved, and there are no reports about them in the 1871 Zion’s Herald.

Throughout the period under study, the leaders of the MEC continued to experiment with the time of camp meetings, they were lengthened and shortened, held

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188 “Springfield District,” ZH (26 October 1871): 513.
earlier and later, included Sunday and ended so that everyone might be at home for worship on the Lord’s Day. Yet, as Chapter Four reveals, the order of worship within this time is quite uniform.

Structures of Communication

While Zion’s Herald was a wonderful new way to publish information about upcoming camp meetings, not all of them were organized enough in advance to take advantage of the publication. In 1826, Abraham D. Merrill, the experienced elder of the Barre, Vermont,\textsuperscript{189} circuit, came to believe on September 1 that he should organize a camp meeting that month. After gaining permission from John Lord, the presiding elder, a meeting on September 18 at Plainfield, Vermont, was first announced to those gathered at the Concord, Vermont, camp meeting about forty miles away. The preachers and lay members of the circuit spread the word, and on Sunday, September 10, the members of the Barre circuit who gathered for worship first heard about it—just eight days before it was to start. That is, news about a camp meeting could spread though the usual chains of communication between presiding elders and preachers, but there is also evidence that local newspapers, when they existed, were used to promote upcoming camp meetings.

In the early years of Zion’s Herald, a few camps published notices in the paper before their camp started. In 1824, the camp meeting at Brookfield, Vermont, was first announced twenty-five days in advance, and readers were reminded again eleven days before it started. The 1824 meeting at Bucksport, Maine, was announced in Zion’s

\textsuperscript{189} James Templeton, “Barre Circuit, Vt,” ZH (20 December 1826): [2].
*Herald* just once (forty-six days in advance). Eventually, short announcements of upcoming meetings were grouped together on one page. By 1841, convenient listings of the towns and start dates of all the upcoming Methodist Episcopal camp meetings were printed in chronological order each week, while more detailed announcements could still be found in the same issue. See figure 3.1.

![Figure 3.1 Listing of camp meetings in 1841 Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal](image)

With this development in communication, camp meetings started being advertised multiple times well in advance of each start date. The announcement of the Landaff, New Hampshire, meeting of 1841 was first made on July 14 in a short article by the presiding elder. That article was repeated seven times and the meeting appeared in a list like the one above eight times, making a total of sixteen times that readers were notified of the meeting within two months before it began.

The two biggest camp meetings of the period, Martha’s Vineyard and Eastham, Massachusetts, started publishing their announcements earlier than the others and seemed to vie with one another to get the most attention. With the addition of notices by Methodist businessmen like James P. Magee, who published the prices of tickets for the boats and trains to multiple camp meetings in a season, readers could not possibly miss notification that these large, well-established meetings were about to take place.
By 1871, notification of the Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting on August 17 began on May 4. The same brief announcement was reprinted four weeks in a row in June. Two lengthy articles describing the “Edenlike” grounds as a “kingdom by the sea” were published, one in July and one in August. August 10 and 17 carry two more short announcements, this time of the annual meeting of the “Martha’s Vineyard Camp-Meeting Association” scheduled for August 23, and also on August 17 another lengthy article designed to entice new guests to join them. Thus, there were twenty opportunities to learn of the camp meeting in time to participate that year.

The Structures of Place and Space

See their tents, their humble dwelling,
    O how lovely their retreat!
Palaces of kings excelling,
Where the great in splendour meet.
    Hallelujah, I am going,
Where the saints for worship meet.

Originally the leaders located camp meetings “at some central point in the circuit or district where the owner of the ground or grove was friendly and there was a good supply of pure water and other conveniences.” At times the leaders intentionally picked remote sites. The meeting in Hebron in 1832 was held about two miles south of

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190 Untitled, *ZH* (20 July 1871): 337; “The Kingdom by the Sea,” *ZH* (10 August 1871): 378. The latter author generously quotes Edgar Allan Poe’s *Annabel Lee*, and also likens it to a “fairy scene” and asserts that if he could only describe it well enough “all the cities full would follow our words, as the children did the Pied Piper of Hamelin.”


the town, “at a distance of nearly half a mile from any public road…The place was so retired from the haunts of this pitiable part of community, that alcohol was disarmed of much of his malignity before they could stagger from the vender’s to the consecrated spot.” But the “brethren” also worked to “render the site convenient and easy of access.”

There are about 190 locations mentioned in the sample of *Zion’s Herald* newspapers used for this study. Many of these locations, such as Lincoln, Massachusetts, and East Greenwich, Rhode Island, only appear once. Several of these were used multiple times such as Bristol, New Hampshire, and Vassalboro, Maine. Some locations were so favorable that the leaders eventually leased or purchased the land for a long time, such as in Eastham, Massachusetts, in Sterling, Massachusetts, and in Northport,

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194 The data set for this study includes camp meetings in Bristol in 1828 (reported on in 1829), 1829, and 1841. The Presiding Elder’s announcement of the camp in 1841 referred to “the old ground;” C[harles] D. Cahoon, “Camp Meeting,” *ZHWJ* (14 July 1841): 111. Another announcement informed the readers that the ground was “occupied for that purpose two years since.” R[euben] Dearborn, “Bristol Camp Meeting,” *ZHWJ* (1 September 1841): 139.

195 The data set for this study includes camps in Vassalboro in 1829, 1832 and 1841 and it was also called the “old ground” in an 1841 announcement. Chas. [Charles P.] Baker, “Camp Meeting,” *ZHWJ* (1 September 1841): 139. Other camp locations that were used repeatedly for a period of time include Madison, Bethel, East Livermore, Fairfield and Charlotte, Maine; Southampton and Wilbraham, Massachusetts; West Killingly and Manchester, Connecticut; Lyndon and Springfield, Vermont; and Durham, New Hampshire.

196 This camp meeting was jointly sponsored by two districts (Boston and New London), and later by two annual conferences (the Boston District of the New England Conference and the Sandwich District of the Providence Conference). It was the clear rival of Martha’s Vineyard in terms of popularity until the Boston District mostly gave up on it in 1859 when the Boston and Lynn Districts built Asbury Grove in Hamilton. The Methodists on Cape Cod eventually gave up on it as a location and built Yarmouthport in 1863. Mudge, *History of the New England Conference*, 394. Other sites used for a long time include Kennebunk, Bucksport, Maine; and Newmarket, New Hampshire.
Maine. There are a handful of these camp meetings that are still in use today.\textsuperscript{197} Most camps were referred to just by the name of their town. But a few were given special names. As mentioned above, Eastham came to be called Millennial Grove. Martha’s Vineyard was named Wesleyan Grove in 1840, East Poland came to be called Empire Grove, Epping was eventually named after Bishop Hedding, and the camp in Hamilton was named Asbury Grove at its founding in 1859.

With the general goal of holding at least one camp per district each year, the number of camps grew with the number of districts. In 1823, there were seven districts and seven camps. In 1826, there were nine districts and thirteen camps. In 1832, there were fourteen districts and nineteen camps. The peak in the data set from 1823 to 1862 was in 1841 with twenty-seven camps. After that they hovered between fifteen and twenty-three camps per year.\textsuperscript{198} In 1871, there were thirty-six meetings offered in the region counting the several “grove meetings” mentioned above.

Shade, a good source of water and enough wood for fires were always a concern when locations were chosen. Methodist preachers consulted with the laity to find the right

\textsuperscript{197} Martha’s Vineyard is the most famous, but is least used as a camp meeting today. The last full camp meeting week was held in the 1930s. In 2006, leaders of the Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association attempted to revive camp meeting week. Two years in a row they scheduled three summer evenings with revival preaching and imported gospel choirs. Other existing camp meetings founded within the period of this study and still in use include Willimantic, Connecticut; Asbury Grove in Hamilton, Massachusetts; Hedding in Epping, New Hampshire; Empire Grove in East Poland, Maine; and Jacksonville in East Machias, Maine.

\textsuperscript{198} The decline can be accounted for by the disruption made by the Millerites and the withdrawal of some Methodist Episcopal congregations to join Orange Scott and the other Wesleyans, both in the mid-1840s. The church records of Rockport, Massachusetts, indicate that that congregation became Wesleyan, and later rejoined the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is unknown if other congregations followed a similar pattern. The peak in 1841 may also be a result of millennium fervor.
place. Layman Hiram Munger wrote that in 1842 the presiding elder of the Springfield District, Reuben Ransom, asked him where the camp meeting should be because Munger regularly attended and regularly complained about the location. At a meeting with Brother Ransom and eight to ten other preachers at Munger’s home in Chicopee Falls in July it was agreed that Munger should choose the location. He took leases for some adjoining pieces of land and even set the date for August 15.\textsuperscript{199}

As time passed, some features that made a site favorable changed. At first a place near the ocean was favored by those who lived in cities and towns along the coast. Before a camp was held in Eastham, people from the Boston District experimented with other towns on the South Shore and Cape Cod, including Duxbury, Marshfield, Wellfleet, Falmouth and Truro. As trains came into use for public transportation, camp meeting leaders started looking for sites that were convenient to the rail lines.

The first structures on the campgrounds were simple, inexpensive and easy to put up. Makeshift tents were the original dwellings, and tents were still used prevalently in 1871 though many had upgraded to platform tents, and the more established camps like Martha’s Vineyard had started building their hallmark cottages. In the early years, each society that attended a camp meeting brought its own tent and most of the first day was spent in setting them up. At the Palermo, Maine, camp meeting of 1841, “little was to be seen but men, horses, carriages, &c. about the spot designed for our rural temple; and

\textsuperscript{199} Munger, \textit{Life and Religious Experience}, 41-44.
little was to be heard but the sound of the axe, saw, hammer, &c.”

Uneven ground and irregularly dispersed trees could keep tents from being set up in the “order which is usual.” But being able to “pitch…tents in beautiful order” was preferred. The tents gradually got larger over time. When the Frankfort, Maine, society attended the Bucksport camp meeting of 1841, they brought a spacious circular tent thirty feet in diameter. When it rained it could hold 209 persons for a preaching service. A bit more segregated than society tents, the students at the General Biblical Institute in Concord had their own tent at the 1859 camp meeting at Newmarket, New Hampshire.

As time passed, some people preferred to bring their own family tents. At the 1841 Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting, there were several family tents set up in an outer circle around the twenty society tents. At the 1862 Newmarket camp, there were eight “very cozy and inviting” family tents pitched among the thirty-two tents belonging to churches. In an extraordinary gesture of hospitality, the leaders of the Kennebunk camp meeting of 1856 voted that the following year they would provide a “stranger’s

203 William E. Pinder, ZHWJ (15 September 1841): 147.
tent, to be free of charge for the homeless, remembering the word of him who said, ‘I was a stranger, and ye took me.’”

Once camp meeting grounds were purchased, more permanent cottages started to be built. Like the tents, these cottages were owned by their builders, but the camp meeting officials owned the land and regulated the building. By 1871, the camp meeting for the Worcester District in Sterling, Massachusetts, had sixty-eight society tents and 117 cottages and private tents. In the same year, “the Provincetown people” erected at Yarmouthport eight identical (“even to the bellpull and door plate”) new cottages in a row. This development was reported with some concern. “It may well be doubted…whether this house-building is really a sign of success, as it seems. There seems good ground for fear that our camp-meetings will degenerate into mere holidays.”

The other original structures were the preachers’ stand and seats for the crowd. An early preachers’ stand was a “plain shed-like structure, built of poles and a few rough boards” while “some logs with slabs over them answered for seats.” The stands gave the preachers a raised platform from which to preach to the larger crowds and were made wide enough for many preachers to sit at once. In 1823, in East Pittston, Maine, more

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207 Andrew J. Church, “Kennebunk Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (10 September 1856): 146.

208 William A. Braman, “Sterling Camp-Meeting,” ZH (September 14, 1871): 441.


than thirty ministers could sit on the stand at a time.\textsuperscript{211} In 1838, at Millennial Grove, a committee was appointed to erect a

building 40 by 20 feet, and two stories high, to accommodate the preachers with lodging, and for a stand to preach from; also for the purpose of stowing the tents and cooking utensils of the various societies, during the intervals of the meetings, together with sundry other improvements, all of which will cost from six to eight hundred dollars.\textsuperscript{212}

The stand was located at the heart of each camp meeting, serving as the liturgical focal point, with the tents arranged around it in concentric circles. This is where the public exercises (preaching, exhortations and concluding prayers), love feasts and the parting rituals took place as long as the weather permitted. The area between the stand and the first row of benches was often referred to as “the altar.” It was here at the foot of the stand where newly awakened mourners and those seeking holiness were invited to gather for prayer after the preaching. The stands typically had roofs and the space under the floor was often used as the preachers’ sleeping quarters and/or for storage. One side of the seats was reserved for men in the early years, the other given over to the women. This separation started to relax in the 1850s.\textsuperscript{213}

Over time the seating was improved by adding “comfortable backs upon which to lean and hear the truth easily.”\textsuperscript{214} In 1859, Asbury Grove included seats with backs for 2,500–3,000 people, located on a slope to give view of the stand. The elevated platform

\textsuperscript{211} “The Late Methodist Camp Meeting in East Pittston, Me.,” \textit{ZH} (25 December 1823): 206.

\textsuperscript{212} Isaac Harding and John Gove, “Eastham Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (8 August 1838): 127.

\textsuperscript{213} Mudge, \textit{History of the New England Conference}, 397.

\textsuperscript{214} “A Trip to Martha's Vineyard,” \textit{ZH/WJ} (13 August 1862): 131.
had room for a choir. Next, the permanent camps sought ways to protect the crowd before the stand from the sun and rain. In 1869, Martha’s Vineyard constructed a “mammoth tent” over the seats. It “contained 4,000 yards of sail-cloth, weighing 1,198 pounds” and “covered seats for about 4,000 people.” It was used for nine years.  

Eventually the permanent camp meetings raised the funds to build a roof over their seats, calling such structures “tabernacles.”

Other capital improvements made on the permanent grounds included the digging of multiple wells, building sturdy landings on those sites located along rivers or the ocean, and constructing boarding tents. In 1871, the Hedding camp meeting in Epping, New Hampshire, even offered space, for a small fee, to stay in its new dormitory with “berths furnished with straw, sacks and pillows for men.” Another significant development was the addition of fences and gates to some of the permanent grounds. Martha’s Vineyard built a high picket fence around all thirty-six acres of their grounds in 1867 as an attempt to separate those who came to the island to worship from the many temptations being offered by the Oak Bluffs Land and Wharf Company, including tennis, swimming and croquet. In 1871 Northport, Maine’s “substantial fence” that was meant to enclose the whole ground was half completed, while Asbury Grove in

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216 The Martha’s Vineyard iron tabernacle was built in 1879. Ibid., 51. Asbury Grove’s tabernacle was built in 1893. Mudge, *History of the New England Conference*, 400.


Hamilton, Massachusetts, was enclosed by a picket fence and entrance could only be gained through the gates.

These gates will be closed on Saturday evening at 11 ½ o’clock, and not be opened until Monday morning, at 5 o’clock. All persons wishing to enjoy the Sabbath in the grove must be within the [enclosure] before the gates are shut on Saturday.220

Structures of Consumption

With only simple structures, life at the camp meetings was quite rustic in the early years. People tended to bring food that was already cooked or could be eaten raw, slept on straw beds covered with quilts on the ground, and cared for their horses as best they could. The daily schedules had breaks to cook and eat three meals a day, and campers were encouraged to bring their own provisions rather than rely on getting them nearby. “The brethren there, nearest to the ground, shut up their houses and tented on the ground. They were wonderfully blessed, and so were many that came from a distance. But now people come, and even our brethren, without tent or provisions, walking around the ground as spectators.”221 Camp Meeting John, clearly preferring that people have an emersion experience, warned those who would attend the meeting in East Livermore that the “benefits of a camp meeting are almost if not altogether lost to those who are continually running off the ground for the refreshments; in so doing they come in contact with many things which are calculated to divert their attention from the object of the


meeting. Come prepared to stay on the ground, then, if you would be benefited.”

By the mid-1850s, camps started hiring someone to cook and provide board for a fee. The Sterling (Massachusetts) Trustees hired two cooks from Webster to “keep a good public table during the meeting.” People could eat in their tent for a total price of $2 for five days. Another writer reports, “there was a full supply of that which was good, gentlemanly and willing attendants, and everything nice and in order, for a low price.” Many times the offer of free board was used to entice preachers to bring people to the meeting. In Manchester, Connecticut, “companies of ten, taking their meals at the committee boarding tent, will have the board of their preachers gratis.”

In later years there were reduced rates if one wanted a full week or full day’s worth of meals. Millennial Grove paved the way for camps to set different prices for men, women and children. By 1862, there were ten camps offering board with similar pricing schemes, and in 1871 board was advertised at seventeen camps. Asbury Grove in Hamilton, Massachusetts, had set up a restaurant as well as the regular dining hall. Meals

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222 Ibid.
226 In Wilbraham that year one could purchase board for 50 cents per day for ladies, 60 cents per day for gentlemen or 25 cents per meal. William M. Gordon, “Wilbraham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (17 August 1859): 131.
227 Men were expected to pay $5, women $4 and children $2.50 for board for seven days in 1859. T. Bagnall, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (27 July 1859): 119.
could be “obtained at any hour (except during public services) on the European plan. Also a Café where a lunch can be purchased.” It even had, “A Grocery, where almost any needed article can be purchased at fair prices.” Yet “the present boarding accommodations were found too limited, and grand improvements in this department have been projected.”

As early as 1838, camps began to advertise that they had made arrangements for “horse keeping in the neighborhood, at a reasonable price during the meeting,” and sometimes the prices of hay, grain, and pasturing were published. The 1871 camp meeting in Epping, New Hampshire, had stalls for more than 200 horses. In 1871, provisions for horses were also offered by the meetings in Hatfield and Palmer, Massachusetts; East Livermore, Fryeburg and Starkes, Maine; and Seabrook New Hampshire.

Likewise, many camps apparently tried to encourage more people to attend by advertising that supplies would be available. These could include lumber, straw, nails, lamp oil, and articles of furniture. One could order such items in advance to be sure they were on the grounds. In 1871, one could rent a whole tent from establishments such as J. P. Magee in Boston. He offered several sizes at graduated prices from 7 by 7 at $4.00 to 12 by 16 for $12.00.231

The campers also brought more and more of their own supplies and amenities. Advertisements for camp meeting song books and sheet music grew to be plentiful in the later years of this study. The Musical String of Pearls, “a new collection of the right kind of Music, by Bradbury, Dadmun, and others. Price 15 cents,” was advertised by J. P. Magee nine times in the summer of 1862. Other titles for sale that year included the Camp Meeting Melodist and several songs sold as sheet music. It seems from the newspaper that individuals generally brought their own books as there are no announcements that camps had begun to invest in whole sets. In 1859, campers could obtain “camp stools, which have backs on them” from Wing & Morse, Nos. 29 & 31 Brattle Street. The Yarmouthport camp meeting of 1871 advised:

All heavy goods must be sent by freight train previous to the opening of the Yarmouthport meeting of 1871. Stoves, cooking apparatus weighing over 25 pounds, beadsteads [sic], sofas, bureaus, settees, chairs etc. will be forwarded free, but freight will be charged if returned. The railroad company will not receive or forward wood or straw. Freight will be charged on children’s carriages.

Baggage must have frequently gotten lost for campers were regularly reminded to mark their name, the depot and the name of the tent they would be staying in distinctly on their luggage. Yarmouthport’s Committee offered return tags for baggage to everyone in 1871. Occasionally one can find a newspaper notice of camp meeting articles that were lost or found.

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233 “Camp Stools,” ZHWJ (3 August 1859): 123.

In 1841, those going by boat to the Eastham camp meeting were warned through the newspaper the week before to beware of unauthorized ‘teamsters.’ The lower rates of the same service provided by Methodist brethren were published and the readers were informed that:

[the] brethren that have entered into the above agreement, will be provided with certificates to that effect; and it will be well for all, who visit the meeting, from all the societies, not to employ any teamster who is not provided with one of these certificates; as, if they do, they will be liable to be charged at the most exorbitant rates. 235

Camps also began making arrangements to encourage the exchange of mail while camp was in session. In 1859, there were instructions of how to address a letter to reach a camper at Martha’s Vineyard, and where campers could post their outgoing correspondence. 236 By 1871, Asbury Grove delivered “four mails per day” and Martha’s Vineyard had a post office. 237 Also a daily camp newspaper called the Camp Meeting Herald was started at Martha’s Vineyard in 1862. 238 In 1871 Yarmouthport even had a book store. 239 By 1871 some camp meetings had almost all the comforts of home.


236 S. L. Pease, “Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (3 August 1859): 123. Pease was evidently the post master of Edgartown, but he also had a tent at 1 Asbury Avenue where outgoing mail could be deposited. He promised that, if properly addressed, letters would be delivered the same day they arrived at the post office.


238 Hebron Vincent, “Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (20 August 1862): 134.

Financial Structures

Of course as the camp meetings became more elaborate and “convenient,” they became more expensive to hold and maintain. Sometimes the leaders were able to gather enough money at the time of the camp meeting by taking up a collection. At the first camp meeting on Martha’s Vineyard, the preachers decided to stay in the same location the following year. After just two collections (presumably involving everyone at the camp meeting), they gathered nearly enough money to cover all the expenses of the present meeting and to buy lumber to build for the coming year.\(^{240}\) The trustees of the Sterling, Massachusetts, camp ground were embarrassed by the debt of $200–$300 they incurred in erecting buildings, but in 1859 the people contributed enough that the trustees were debt free and there was “money in the treasury.”\(^{241}\) Other camp meetings “took pledges.” In 1838, readers who “pledged at Eastham to defray the expenses” of Millennial Grove were informed afterward that they could pay it to Isaac Harding, 136 Hanover Street, Boston.\(^{242}\)

Camp meeting leaders also adopted other means of generating income. In 1862, the Newmarket, New Hampshire, camp meeting added five cents to the fare on the railroads “to be paid to the Association toward the expenses of the meeting.”\(^{243}\) In 1871, in Northport, Maine, “every person visiting the ground [was] expected to pay a tax of 10

\(^{240}\) Hebron Vincent, “Vineyard Camp-Meeting,” ZH (16 September 1835): 147.


\(^{242}\) Isaac Harding, “Notice,” ZH (August 29, 1838): 139.

cents. The money so collected [was] used to pay expenses, and to make improvements upon the ground.”

The money collected was spent for more than just the expenses of the meeting. The people at Millennial Grove in 1841 contributed about $500. This was divided between the Hyannis Sabbath School ($30), the African American preacher Sammy Snowden ($120) “as a token of the affection of the brethren for him,” with the remainder going to cover expenses of the meeting and to “liquidate the remaining debt of the association, leaving also a balance in the hands of the treasurer.” At the Marlborough, Connecticut, camp meeting of 1841, the expenses were “much higher than usual.” But after the bills were paid there was about $14 left over, which the preachers agreed belonged “exclusively” to God. So they voted to give it to the Preachers’ Aid Society.

Campers also had to consider the financial requirements of provisions as they became more readily available on the grounds. While many probably found it helpful to be able to purchase items they had not brought from home, Camp Meeting John warned that things could get out of control.

Again, it appears to me to be altogether out of place for any one to speculate out of a camp meeting—especially our own brethren. It is indeed afflicting to see our brethren around a camp meeting scrabbling with all their might, to see how much money they can make during the session of the meeting; why, they say, strangers must be provided for and they may as well have the money as others. Now I say, strangers have as good a right to bring their provision with them, and tent on the ground as we have, and if they will not do that, let them provide for themselves, as best they may elsewhere. I trust the tents’ companies will lay in store


something, over and above, to accommodate such strangers as will work with us in carrying forward the great object of the meeting; let us be willing rather to make sacrifices, than attempt to make money out of a camp meeting.  

The leaders of the camp meetings were ever vigilant to keep the “things of this world” from distracting people from having an experience of heaven.

Structures of Transportation

Come, my brethren, I am going,
Where the camp is pitch’d abroad,
Where the sons of God are bowing,
In the presence of their Lord,
Hallelujah, I am going,
There to love and praise my Lord.  

By Road

A significant element in the experience of camp meeting was the process of journeying to the site. In the early years, many people traveled to camp meeting by horse, either riding alone as a circuit rider, or pulling a wagon, or by carriage to convey more people and supplies. Enoch Mudge included hymns for traveling to camp meeting in his collection. Published directions found in the newspapers gave general coordinates. The camp meeting in Holderness, New Hampshire, in 1838, for example,

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248 Mudge, The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book, 12.

249 In the preface of this volume, Mudge wrote, “it would seem proper that persons traveling a distance to, and from Camp-meeting, should beguile the tediousness of the way, by singing Hymns comporting with their views and feelings on the way.” Ibid., vii.
was located on Captain Barker Prescott’s farm, eight miles west of Sandwich Center, and two miles east of the Squam Bridge.250

Even in these early years some undertook long difficult journeys by land. The longest trip by road in the data set of this study was made by Joseph Baker, a preacher from Oneida County, New York, who attended the camps in both Readfield and Starks, Maine, in 1826. Baker was originally from Maine, and since he reported that his “little family” was with him, he probably made the journey, like Charles Merrill, primarily to visit relatives.251

By Water

As noted earlier, some camps were situated on the Atlantic Ocean or along the larger rivers to facilitate faster, easier transportation for more people. The Northbridge, Massachusetts, camp meeting of 1835 used a canal boat to transport up to 100 campers from Providence along the Blackstone River.252 A camp meeting in Woolwich, Maine, in 1841 attracted “steamboats and sail boats, crowded with passengers, playing up and down and across” the Kennebec on the first day of camp.253 The use of boats even made it possible for a company from Mystic, Connecticut, to cross Long Island Sound to attend

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252 W. Haflett, ZH (12 August 1835): 127.

the Hampstead camp meeting in New York in 1841.\footnote{B[enjamin] C. P[helps], “Hampstead Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (8 September 1841): 143.} Transportation by boat made it possible for larger numbers to attend camp meetings and for them to come from further afield, allowing Methodists and others who did not usually see one another to become acquainted.

Sailboats such as the packet schooners that transported Methodists from the Boston District to Marshfield in 1823 were the main way to travel by water at first. The long journeys were sometimes scheduled at night, so the passengers could sleep (or watch and pray) and arrive at their grove on the morning camp started. But by the 1830s steamboats began to be used as well. Readers from the Portland area were encouraged to use a steamboat “on her way to Boston” to attend the meeting in York, Maine, in 1835.\footnote{Charles Baker, “Camp Meeting,” MWJ (13 August 1835): 126.} Jacob Sleeper announced that the “safe and commodious steam-boat Huntress” had been chartered to take Boston District campers to and from Eastham in 1838. It was scheduled to leave Lewis’ wharf at 6 a.m. and passengers were advised to be on board by 5:30. The cost to and from, also with board and lodging at the camp, was $3.50. Passage without board was $1 each way.\footnote{J[acob] Sleeper, “Eastham Camp-Meeting,” ZH (25 July 1838): 119.} That same year Phineas Crandall, an elder serving Fall River, Massachusetts, suggested chartering a steamboat from Providence to Martha’s Vineyard stopping in Pawtucket, Warren, Bristol, Fall River, Portsmouth and Newport on the way.\footnote{P[hineas] Crandall, “Edgartown Camp-Meeting,” ZH (1 August 1838): 122.} Similarly, a packet schooner was chartered in 1853 to leave Ipswich,
Massachusetts, and stop in Gloucester and Salem before crossing the bay to Eastham. In 1841, the committee arranged for a steamboat large enough to carry 200–300 persons at once to Millennial Grove.

*By Rail*

The first freight service on the new Boston and Lowell Railroad began in 1835. By 1838, leaders of the camp meeting in Andover, Massachusetts, advertised that their grounds were located about three miles from the depot and they offered “conveyance” to and from the ground and the station. In 1841, readers were informed that the camp meeting in Southbridge, Massachusetts, was eight miles from the Charlton Depot on the Springfield Railroad, about ten miles from Webster Depot on the Norwich road. “Conveyance can be had from either place.”

Though boats were still needed to get to Eastham and Martha’s Vineyard, the committees arranged for sail times to coordinate with trains. In 1853, campers could take the train to Sandwich where a stagecoach would meet and transport them to Cotuitport, and from there a packet was waiting to sail to Martha’s Vineyard. This was intended

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to serve “our friends from Sandwich, Hyannis, Centreville and adjacent places” as well as those coming from Boston. That same year the steamer “Canonicus” was chartered to leave Fall River on August 10 “at 9 o’clock or immediately after the arrival of the morning cars,” and the steamer “Massachusetts” would leave from the wharf at the foot of School Street in New Bedford at 10:30 that same morning.

The readers were informed that the above-named steamer, called “Massachusetts,” made regular trips to Martha’s Vineyard each day and would make an extra stop near to the camp ground that week. The “Canonicus” was appointed to make a second trip to Wesleyan Grove on the third day of camp, stopping at the same places, and was to bring everyone home again when the camp ended on August 16. At this point it was clear that the Committee for Wesleyan Grove had moved from expecting some people to arrive mid week to encouraging people to come and go as they pleased. (Figure 3.2 is an example of the time tables that began to be published several times a season for Martha’s Vineyard.) Millennial Grove also encouraged more people to arrive at the end of the camp by arranging for a steamer to leave Boston on Saturday afternoon, to return when camp ended Monday morning.  


Figure 3.2 Time Table for Boat to Martha’s Vineyard

As transportation developed, so did links to the financial and organizational structures of the camp meetings. The owners of the railroads must have enjoyed having so many passengers travel to a camp meeting because they almost always allowed
campers to go at reduced rates. A very common arrangement was to pay full fare one way and get a free ticket home. Sometimes the discount was on condition that a company of a certain size traveled together.\textsuperscript{266}

Sometimes the preachers were expected to sell these discount tickets after acquiring them from a designated person; other times the tickets could be purchased at the stations. The arrangements had to be made with each railroad company separately—so if campers were coming from several directions on several lines this took a lot of arranging. It is no wonder that some camp meetings developed a committee on railroads.

Ministers were often allowed to travel free, sometimes with their wives.\textsuperscript{267} An added enticement was the offer of free transport of baggage on the trains, and from the trains to the camp grounds. In West Killingly, Connecticut, it seems that all the preachers on the district were given passes, as it was advertised that any preachers from other districts who wanted to attend could write to get a pass too.\textsuperscript{268}

But the railroads were not always so accommodating. In 1856, the Androscoggin and Kennebec road directors refused to make such arrangements as they had the past year for the Kendall’s Mills meeting, though the other roads to the meeting (Kennebec and

\textsuperscript{266} In 1856 companies of twenty-five could get a 20\% reduction in rates and ministers could ride for free to the Manchester, Connecticut, camp meeting on the Hartford, Providence and Fishkill Railroad. P[ardon] T. Kenney, “Manchester Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (13 August 1856): 131.

\textsuperscript{267} “Arrangements have been made with the Worcester and Nashua, Fitchburg and Worcester, Vermont and Massachusetts, Cheshire, Fitchburg and branches, Stony Brook, Lowell and Lawrence, Salem and Lowell, and Wilton Railroads, to carry passengers at reduced fares, and give passes to each preacher and wife whose church attends the meeting.” Frederick A. Clapp, “Sterling Junction Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (6 August 1862): 127.

Portland and Penobscot and Kennebec) sold tickets through the camp meeting president at reduced rates.

Sometimes extra trains were added to accommodate the high volume of passengers. In 1859, one car was added to the train leaving Gardiner, Maine, adding passengers at Hallowell, Augusta, and the intermediate depots to the camp at Kendall’s Mills. Asbury Grove arranged for a special train to travel from Boston to Hamilton on Saturday evening so as to discourage traveling on the Sabbath.

Though trains were generally preferred for transport, they were not always the safest way to get to and from the meetings. In 1871, a train full of passengers leaving the Maine State Holiness Camp Meeting in Richmond, Maine, for Bangor crossed a “timeworn” bridge that gave way, causing four cars to fall thirty feet. Two people were killed and about forty others were severely injured. One correspondent pondered,

“How unsearchable are God’s judgments, and his ways past finding out.” How near we may be to death, without being conscious of it. Hundreds with myself crossed that bridge the day before the disaster, hundreds crossed it the same day, little dreaming that the timbers over which they passed were so soon to give way. Let sinners unsaved take warning; there are rotten bridges all around us. Near some broken rail or corroded boiler, death sits in ambush, waiting to take his victim by surprise. How necessary to be always ready. To them that are in Christ Jesus, death never comes too soon; and though never so sudden, it is always and every where safe. Whether cut down by the leaden hail of death upon the field of battle, or swept from the vessel’s deck by the white-crested billows, or crushed among the debris of a shattered car, it matters not “the foundations of the Lord standeth sure,” and He knoweth them that are His; he makes no mistakes and death, in whatever form, is but the angel that with one blow strikes off the

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shackles of mortality, and lets the liberated soul into the immediate presence of the Great King. “What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.”

As on boats, travel to and from camp meeting by rail could heighten one’s awareness of mortality, a factor that increased the felt sense of urgency about conversion.

Finally, it seems that the advent and use of railroads was a large factor in the demise of Millennial Grove. The Committee had been having trouble arranging for large enough boats as early as 1844. On August 7, 1850, after the Eastham camp meeting had been announced three times in the past month, the Boston Committee gave notice that they had not yet been able to charter a large steamer to arrive on August 20 for the commencement of the meeting. “Should the company be large enough to justify the expense, steam may be employed to tow the packets if necessary.” In the end, four packets set sail (without any steam power) on the evening of August 19 carrying 400–500 campers. At first it was a pleasant journey and passengers could converse with one another from boat to boat, listening to songs of praise drift across the water. But about midnight a storm arose. “Onward [the waves] rolled, and rolled, and our vessels rolled and pitched, and the passengers with few exceptions—(description fails)—we were sea

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271 “Rotten Bridges All Around,” ZH (17 August 1871): 385. Another report of a train wreck that year came at the end of August. “Shocking Railroad Accident at Revere,” ZH (31 August 1871): 420. The people at Asbury Grove apparently heard the news about midnight, “twenty-five killed and eighteen wounded.” And the article noted that there were extra trains because of the camp meeting, but there is no mention of any campers among the casualties.

272 The start date of August 21 was announced in the July 24 issue, but two weeks later the Presiding Elder notified his district that it was “impracticable for our friends in Boston to obtain a suitable boat to convey them and the hundreds that will accompany them, until Friday, the 23d of August, therefore the meeting will commence at that time, instead of Wednesday, the 21st.”B[artholomew] Otheman, “Time of the Eastham Camp-Meeting Altered,” ZHWJ (7 August 1844): 127.

sick.” It took them thirteen hours to arrive. The passengers as well as those from other boats that had sailed through the same storm agreed that they never wanted to repeat such a trip again.274

On July 16, 1856, the presiding elders of the Boston and Sandwich Districts announced that the Millennial Grove Camp Meeting Association found it “impossible to procure a suitable host to convey the company from Boston and vicinity” so there would be no camp meeting that year. But on July 30, a contradictory announcement was published to say that the Association had made arrangements for the steamer “Acorn” to tow some packets, “thereby securing a safe and speedy trip in any emergency.”275 There is no report of what actually took place that year regarding Millennial Grove.

Given these events, it is not surprising to read in the January 12 issue of the 1859 volume of *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal* that a convention of delegates from the societies on the Lynn and Boston Districts met on January 3 to hear the report of a committee of twenty-one people chosen at the 1858 camp meeting in Eastham. The difficulties of attaining “passage to and from that place, as well as the expense of such passage, fails to unite the churches of Boston and its vicinity, in this important means of grace.” They voted to seek “some other more accessible locality” with consideration of “the poorer classes in our communities who cannot afford to pay high prices for conveyance, or may not be able to attend but a portion of the time of the meeting.” They


also decided that the new location should be in the Lynn District (Essex County, Massachusetts) which had no permanent camp meeting up until then. Ten laymen and five preachers were given the power to “select and secure by lease” a small grove and prepare it for a camp meeting during the next season.\(^{276}\)

The May 4 issue of *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal* announced that the new site one mile from the Wenham and Hamilton Depot had been chosen,\(^{277}\) and in the June 22 issue it was advertised as the Asbury Grove Camp Meeting, to start on August 22.\(^{278}\) The Eastham camp still took place, from August 2-9, even though the Millennial Grove Camp Meeting Association voted on June 29 not to go there as an Association. A small number from Boston who wanted to participate formed a committee that chartered a steamer.\(^{279}\)

This was a sad turn of events for the Methodists on the Sandwich District, who were not numerous enough to fill the noteworthy old grove. Some of the people in Boston were also unhappy about the demise of such a long tradition. In 1859, one anonymous person lamented:

> There seems to be a sort of magic in that old spot, and of all places it is doubtless the place for a good camp meeting. Other more accessible spots might be found near Boston, where one might go by railroad in the morning and return at night; but after all it is quite questionable to those experienced in this matter, whether


\(^{278}\) “Asbury Grove Camp Meeting,” *ZHWJ* (22 June 1859): 98.

we can have a good camp meeting, have souls awakened and converted, backsliders reclaimed, and the church quickened, at a camp meeting so near our great cities as the one proposed at or near Beverly, on the Lynn District. To have a good meeting in the tented grove, some little sacrifice of home comforts, such as regular meals and sleep, must be made; people must stay on the ground both night and day; the stuff must be left behind while we go yonder to worship.\textsuperscript{280}

The editorial ended with the case of a man who attended a camp meeting in Eastham and had been displeased with the meeting. He would have returned to Boston early, but missed the boat. Upon returning to the grove he was “convicted, converted” and no longer desired to leave. The advent of new modes of transportation dramatically effected both the location of the camp meetings and the experiences of those who attended. Easy access was not as conducive to generating conversions.

Those who felt loyal to Millennial Grove continued to make efforts to hold a camp there. In 1862, Eastham appeared on the camp meeting list in the newspaper starting on June 18. But in the July 23 issue of the newspaper, the secretary published an announcement that there were no boats available because the government had “chartered every available vessel” for the Civil War. They could neither find a steamship nor a “tugboat of sufficient power to tow even packets that distance…They trust that those who have for years made their pilgrimage to this Mecca, will still hold the old spot dear, and be prepared next year, with renewed energies, to gather upon that sacred ground, to do battle for the Lord.”\textsuperscript{281}

\textsuperscript{280} Nausett, “What Has Become of the Camp Meeting Association?,” \textit{ZHWJ} (8 June 1859): 90. “Nausett” is a rather mysterious penname—the Nauset were thought of in this time period as the “Cape Cod Indians.”

On the next page for the July 23 issue there was an announcement from Presiding Elder Pardon T. Kenney of the Sandwich District encouraging the Methodists of Cape Cod to attend Martha’s Vineyard if possible. He concluded, “Being convinced that it will accommodate the Sandwich District much better to have a camp meeting at Yarmouth Port, it is proposed to make arrangements to have one in that place next year.” Indeed, James Mudge confirms that 1861 was the last year a meeting was held in Eastham. He explained that since Yarmouthport was on the railway, the Methodists of Cape Cod purchased ground and began their new camp there in 1863.

The steam engine made a big impact on the practice of camp meeting in New England. Not only did it make it first possible and then quite easy for many more people to attend a camp meeting by steamboat or train for just part of the time, but the rise of trains also appears to have depleted the availability and raised the cost of travel by steamship between Boston and Cape Cod. Or perhaps the cheaper cost of the trains served to undercut a fare that once seemed quite reasonable. In any case, the trains made people less willing to embark on the slower and riskier voyage by sail.

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282 P[ardon] T. Kenney, “Sandwich District,” ZHWJ (23 July 1862): 119. His letter also gives evidence that the Millennial Grove Camp Meeting Association had been abolished, and an Eastham Camp Meeting Association had been formed in its place.
New England MEC Camp Meeting Demographics

Methodist leaders in the New England region were proud of the diversity of people present at, and spiritually touched by, their camp meetings. The boundaries of their camp meetings were purposefully porous, even though there were some who abused the extension of Christian hospitality. The leaders accounts in _Zion’s Herald_ give us a good view of the different types of persons who participated in the camp meetings. The report of the camp meeting in Paris, Maine, in 1826 portrays the diversity in age.

What will excite more thrilling joy in the soul, than to see fifty or sixty of all ages, from the man of silver locks, down to the lovely ones just entering upon the scenes of youth, all on their knees, at the same time, bewailing their sins; and while they were surrounded by the praying multitude, to see them arise in quick succession, and with childlike simplicity, in all the beauty of natural eloquence, declare the unutterable joys of deliverance from the guilt of sin? To see the newly converted husband and wife meet, and praise God together; the affectionate sister clasping the hand of her brother, and both employing their lips with new songs; the father and mother shedding tears of joy over a promising son or lovely daughter just born again! such scenes we witnessed here; - O that we might be permitted to live and die in the midst of them! 

There was diversity in class and education as well, which was especially obvious when people gathered at the end of a camp for a love feast and many individuals took the opportunity to give testimony. Lumen Boyden’s report of the Millennial Grove camp meeting in 1850 is a good example.

Among those witnesses was one who has been for years a judge in one of the counties in New York; and another had been a slave…There were the illiterate and the learned, the uncultivated and the refined, rich and poor from different nations and climes, yet, when brought together, their testimony perfectly agreed; and he who would not believe such a cloud of witnesses, would not be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.

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That the camp meetings touched the lives of so many different kinds of people served to validate this method of revival in the minds of the leaders. This section notes what is known about the categories of people who were present at the camp meetings.

**Gender**

Though the Methodist Episcopal newspapers used for this study do not provide any information on the proportion of male to female campers, it is clear that women always participated in large numbers. While it seems that some reporters wrote of “brethren” and meant it to be gender inclusive, it was exceedingly common for the writers to pen “brethren and sisters.” At the 1838 camp in Bolton, Connecticut, “The brethren and sisters are strengthened and much quickened, and backsliders and sinners are earnestly inquiring what they must do to be saved.”

The secretary of the Vassalboro meeting of 1841 reported that “many of our brethren and sisters were baptized in the spirit of holiness.”

Sometimes the women were brought by the men in their families. A man converted at a camp in Ellington, Connecticut, in 1822 returned home after the camp to find his wife was “opposed.” But when he attended a love feast in the winter she came with him, and after he gave testimony she came forward to the altar and requested prayers. Both she and “a mother of the same family... experienced religion and joined

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our society."

At other times pious women brought the men in their lives to camp meeting, such as a young woman whose brother was converted while trying to get her away from the praying circle at Manchester, Connecticut.

Women were only rarely given official leadership positions in this period, but they could greatly influence other campers through their prayers and encouragement in the praying circles and society tents. At the 1824 Lyndon camp meeting, the preachers decided that one brother or sister should lead the prayer vocally in the society tents while the others should pray “mentally, except in responding the amen.”

Women gave testimony during the love feasts and, in 1862, the women of East Poland made a petition to the President (although the reporter’s account of their request is unclear).

I have found no evidence of women exhorting and only one woman in the data for this study was called a preacher. In 1871, with absolutely no fanfare, Maggie van Cott simply appears in the list of six preachers at the Grove Meeting in Heath, Massachusetts, in August. This is undoubtedly Margaret Newton van Cott, who was the first woman to receive a license to preach in the MEC in 1869.

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287 “Extract of a Letter from a Member of the Society of Intelligence,” ZH (12 June 1823): 90.


290 John Collins, “Poland Camp Meeting, Maine,” ZHWJ (17 September 1862): 150. “Mrs. E. Robinson and others started the ladies’ petition to the President, and got over six hundred names, but some refused.” Was this President Abraham Lincoln, or the President of the camp meeting?


Also in 1871, Sisters Clark, Smith and Boyden of New York City and Sister Drake of Boston were given the stand at the Maine Holiness Camp Meeting in Richmond. There “God poured out His Spirit upon his handmaidens, as he did upon his servants, and they prophesied, and it was a wonderful meeting. We were refreshed by the presence of God. The tide continues, ‘to set in.’” Apparently the same Sister Smith had been present at the National Camp Meeting for Holiness at Round Lake, New York, between July 4-14. “The comely and devout Sister Smith, from New York,” also appeared as “the central attraction” at the meeting in Lyndon, Vermont, that August. “Her words and songs were full of sweetness and power.” She probably ended her tour of New England camp meetings at Asbury Grove, where she was described as “a poor colored sister…of New York,” whose words were “extraordinary.” “The Spirit possessed all hearts, and the great audience seemed borne along upon His divine fullness.” It is clear from those reports that Sister Smith was an African American.

*Racial Diversity*

While it was quite extraordinary for a woman of color to have spoken from the stand, there is some measure of racial diversity at the camps all through the material of

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293 See the end of Chapter Four for more about the holiness camp meetings of 1871.


this study. The “work of God” in Duxbury and Marshfield after the camp meeting of 1822 was at first “principally amongst the people of colour” before it spread amongst the descendants of Europe. In 1856 the secretary of the Sterling camp meeting of 1856 wrote about the love feast. “A fugitive from a servitude of 49 years was there, breathing once more the free air, beholding the light of a free sun, and what is better still, rejoicing in the service of Christ, which is the most exalted freedom in the world.”

The presence of blacks at New England camp meetings is not surprising when one takes into account the statistical reports of the time. While they were never counted as a large presence, the number of colored members in the statistical reports grew from a little more than 200 in 1822 to about 400 in 1837. Most of these were located in coastal areas of southern New England like Boston, Nantucket, Providence and New Bedford, and there were, at times, populations of more than ten in inland towns such as Hebron and Franklin, Connecticut.

In the MEC’s statistical tables the colored and white members were always listed as part of the same charge. There was never an all colored charge. But it is not clear

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299 In 1822, the Boston District reported ninety-five “colored” people, while the New London District reported 110. The total number of colored people reported in the MEC in New England continued to increase slowly in the region until about 1837 with 399. See footnote 88 on page 32 above.

300 In 1837 the largest congregation was Broomfield Street in Boston with 187 colored (352 white), Norwich Landing, Connecticut, thirty-seven colored (163 white), Providence West with thirty-one colored (259 white), Providence East with twenty-five colored (125 white), Elm St. in New Bedford with twenty-one colored (205 white), Franklin, Connecticut, with thirteen colored (265 white), Southbridge, Massachusetts, with ten colored (198 white), and New London, Connecticut, with nine colored (226 white). Thirty-seven other charges in the New England region had between one to four colored members each that year.
whether, for example, the 187 colored members of Broomfield Street in Boston worshipped separately from the 352 white members of that congregation. At the camp meetings, however, there is specific evidence that segregation took place at times. At the 1829 camp meeting in Eastham, for example, there was the ironic statement “Our African friends had the privilege of the stand and altar in the evening, and the Lord manifested himself as not being a respecter of persons.” There is even a report in 1859 of an African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) camp meeting in Bristol, Rhode Island, the only state where the white MEC had rarely before held a camp meeting. The AME leaders had attracted over 4,000 people on Sunday, and preachers came from Cleveland, Ohio, and New York City as well as Boston and New Bedford. The anonymous reporter was presumably white and was present at the meeting. He noted, “I have heard a good many thousand sermons in my day, but never any more powerful or interesting ones than those preached by those men of God.” He indicated that there were at least a few other whites present:

It appeared to me that we all felt truly that “God hath made of one blood all nations to dwell upon the face of the whole earth, and is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.” We felt, individually, that we were a part of this great, common brotherhood.301

Abolitionists would, at times, point out certain individuals of color at a camp meeting, as they did in 1844 at Martha’s Vineyard.

A very pathetic appeal was made to the congregation in the afternoon by Br. House of New Bedford in favor of a good colored sister, late from Brooklyn, N. Y. who is soliciting assistance to purchase her son from slavery. Fifty dollars only

were asked for by Br. H. although several times that sum were needed to accomplish the desired end. About $60 were contributed. At the request of some friends who wished to contribute, but desired the gratification of seeing her whose heart was to be made glad by their benefactions, she was conducted on to the preachers stand, where, with covered face, she was heard by a few who stood near her, in a subdued tone of voice which indicated deep emotion, to thank us for our well timed aid. The audience seemed well nigh electrified by the scene; and the readiness with which the change was handed over, showed that they felt in their pockets as well as in their hearts. Indeed, who that has a mother’s heart, or even a spark of human sympathy, could but feel at such a scene! There were a few conversions to-day and many reclaimed.302

Some Methodist leaders displayed the racial assumptions of the day even more blatantly than those who insisted on their “gratification” above. Hebron Vincent, in comparing Martha’s Vineyard to Pentecost, listed the diversity of persons present in 1844: “Americans, a Swede, a Swiss, an Englishman, an Irishman, and one of the descendants of Ham.” But other authors sought to fight racial prejudices. Writing of a camp meeting in Guilford, New Hampshire, in 1838, Charles Harding said, “Though there were a few of the baser sort, that would trouble us by day, and annoy us by night, in every instance they were whites. And notwithstanding there were a number of colored persons on the ground, all were respectful.” He concluded, “gentelmanship [sic] does not consist in the color of the skin.”303 In 1871, when Sister Smith spoke at Lyndon, Vermont, a lawyer (clearly still struggling with issues of race) was reported to have said, “I would willingly wear as black a skin, to have as white a soul.”304

Black Methodist preachers were also found at camp meetings from time to time. The first one mentioned in the data for this work is Sammy Snowden, who exhorted at Marshfield in 1823 and East Kingston in 1841, and preached in Eastham in 1844 and 1847. As noted above, the Eastham camp gave Brother Snowden $120 “as a token of…affection” in 1841. Another black preacher, Brother Mars, was at the Marlborough, Connecticut, camp meeting in 1841 and “gave a discourse” from 1 Corinthians 15:58 “in the demonstration of the Spirit. Every countenance indicated anxiety to hear, and every heart appeared willing to receive the sacred word; and a devotional spirit seemed to breathe through the whole assembly.” In 1862, the newspapers show evidence of a third black preacher named Mitchel from the “African Zion’s Church,” who took the stand at Willimantic.

Throughout the period of this study, however, mention of the presence of black campers fades away. Except for a few brought to the stand perhaps by abolitionists for some emotional appeal to their cause, or the spectacle of a good black preacher or Sister Smith, the newspaper correspondents no longer mention any groups of blacks sharing a tent or holding an exercise of their own. It is unclear whether the omission in the reports

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305 At that time Rev. John Mars had moved from the New York Conference to Salem, Massachusetts to work with Rev. Newell S. Spaulding serving as “pastor of the church of the Colored people.” *New England Annual Conference Journal,* (Boston: James P. Magee, 1885), 81-82.

306 “Discourse” is a term that seems to be used interchangeably for sermon in this period, especially when there is a scripture text noted.


indicates that blacks were no longer attending or that their presence was no longer remarkable.

African Americans were not the only ones to provide some ethnic diversity to the New England Methodist Episcopal camp meetings. Two other groups deserve brief mention. Twice Native Americans appear in the sample of newspapers for this study. The first was at Thompson, Connecticut, in 1832. The Secretary reported, “Three of the tents were occupied by a few Indians, a part of the remnant of one of our interior tribes, and some people of color. A part of their number appeared to be truly pious.” Similar to the pattern of the African Americans, the 1862 appearance of a Native American was a single person presented to the crowd. “Joseph Caby, a converted Indian of the Ojibwa tribe, Michigan, and now a student in Baldwin University, Ohio joined with a missionary from Turkey and Bro. Kristeller, a converted Jew, and at present a member of the Wesleyan University at Middletown” captivated an audience at a missionary meeting after the closing love feast. Brother Kristeller also preached at Martha’s Vineyard that year at the unusual hour of 6 p.m.

This was not the first time a “converted Jew” spoke at a New England Methodist camp meeting. There is record of Brother Bonhommea taking a preaching slot at the

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309 [samuel] W. Coggeshall, “Camp Meeting in Thompson, Conn.,” NECH (12 September 1832): 198. The autobiography of William Apess, a member of the Pequot Indians, verifies that there was at least one group of Methodists led by his aunt Sally George of Groton, Connecticut. For several years there was a monthly gathering of Methodist Pequot from various places in Connecticut and Rhode Island for their own three day meetings. Apess and O’Connell, A Son of the Forest and Other Writings, 84 ff.


311 Hebron Vincent, “Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (20 August 1862): 134.
Windham, New Hampshire, camp meeting of 1844 to speak about “the duty of the Gentiles to the Jews and the prospect of their return to their ancient Jerusalem, conversion to Christianity, and the reign of Christ with them for a thousand years.”

Brother Siegfried Kristller, who was with Caby in 1862, was reported to have been converted at Martha’s Vineyard “five years since.” It is no surprise that there is no evidence that groups of Jews attended any New England camp meeting.

**Children and Youth**

As the presence of people of color seemed to diminish, the number of children and youth at the camp meetings increased. In the early years there were children “but ten years of age” present at Falmouth in 1824. Heman Bangs reported that thirty to forty children and youth between the ages of ten and twenty-five were converted at the Compo, Connecticut, camp meeting in 1825. The men, women and children were all well behaved at the camp meeting in Starks, Maine, in 1826. That same year in Manchester, Connecticut, “A large number of the children of our brethren were subjects of the work—also several of the preachers could rejoice over their children brought home to God.” At a love feast in Sterling, Massachusetts, in 1856, there was a boy under

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twelve “whose little heart had felt the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, and as he rose from his seat he said, ‘I have given all to Christ.’”

Children proved to be instrumental in spreading the faith. Two “little girls” from Milburn went to the altar at the Madison, Maine, camp in 1831, and when they returned home they gathered six or seven of their Sabbath School class and were given “a private chamber” in which to hold meetings. It was not long before some of the girls in this group began going “from house to house” telling all they met “what the Lord had done for their souls.” At the regular prayer meeting the next evening the girls were permitted to speak. As a result, “quite a number were willing to rise and request prayers; the meetings were continued every evening for some time, and one or two converted at every meeting.”

As early as 1838 the Eastham meeting held a special event on the penultimate day of camp for the Sabbath School children. “In the afternoon all the Sabbath School children on the ground, [and] their teachers…were assembled and addressed by some twelve or fifteen speakers, each occupying five minutes only.” The leaders must have made a concerted effort to attract a sizeable number of children to occupy so many adults’ time. This event was expanded upon in Eastham in 1841 when several meetings were held for the Sabbath School children. On one day that week four Methodist

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preachers from the Maine Conference gave instructive addresses to parents and children from the stand.\textsuperscript{319}

On the other hand, the secretary of the Eastford, Connecticut, camp of 1838 complained, “There is too great a neglect on the part of parents in not getting their children to those meetings where extraordinary means of grace are used for their conversion.”\textsuperscript{320} Readers of Zion’s Herald who were going to the camp in Irasburg, Vermont, in 1841 were encouraged to “bring your neighbors and children with you, expecting that God will convert them.”\textsuperscript{321}

Apparently others concurred that it was good to attract more children to camp meetings, for in the newspapers of 1841 one can begin to see mention of reduced rates for children who attended camp meetings. That year children less than fourteen years old could have passage on the boat to and from Eastham at half price. By 1856, the same camp was advertising that passage and board for children under twelve would be half price.

By 1871 there was a special meeting for the children each day at one camp. Another had a special prayer meeting for children on the Sabbath and an occasional one for “young people” during the meeting. Another designated a particular tent to gather


\textsuperscript{320} James Stafford, “Eastford Camp-Meeting,” ZH (12 September 1838): 146.

\textsuperscript{321} I[ra] A. Sweatland, “Camp-Meeting Danville District,” ZHWJ (1 September 1841): 139.
“the lambs of the flock” every day at 1 p.m. Yet another had a children’s meeting at the stand one afternoon. It seems that some clergy were specializing in childrens’ ministry.\textsuperscript{322}

Youth were also encouraged to attend the camps so that they, too, could be converted. In the fall of 1829, Orange Scott reported that the revival begun at the camp in Somers, Connecticut, two months earlier with 100 “hopefully converted, and about 80 added to the membership of the Methodist church.” He claimed that the “work” was “principally among the youth of from 15 and 25 years old.” Scott commented, “this is the general character of most of the revivals of the present day. The old transgressor seldom ceases from sin.”\textsuperscript{323} Two case studies useful for exploring the nature of conversion for New England Methodists are of youth. Isaac Jennison, Jr.\textsuperscript{324} and Rachel Sterns\textsuperscript{325} will be introduced in the discussion of conversion in Chapter Five.

\textbf{Class}

New England was known for being the most urbanized and the most educated part of the country. It was also an early center of the industrial revolution, which soon developed a shortage of workers, leading to the emigration of many young women and men.


\textsuperscript{323} O[range] Scott, \textit{CAJZH} (23 October 1829): 36.

\textsuperscript{324} Otheman, \textit{The Christian Student}.

\textsuperscript{325} Rachel W. Stearns, “Journal.”
children from the countryside to work in the factories. The textile industry also drew immigrants, especially the Irish, in this early national period.\textsuperscript{326} Thus, New England was made up of a population of farmers, workers and factory owners, teachers, shop keepers and sailors who lived in cities, towns and in the countryside.

There is evidence that people from each class participated in camp meetings, though this is more difficult to assess than gender or race. The newspapers and memoirs mention immigrants,\textsuperscript{327} shoemakers\textsuperscript{328} and farmers, as well as lawyers, “highly respected gentlemen”\textsuperscript{329} and “leading men of town.”\textsuperscript{330} Single and married women, with and without children, were also present. Particular attention was given to seamen. In 1829, at Eastham, “A sermon and prayer meeting were devoted to the special benefit of seamen, and found to be profitable.” They did so again in Eastham in 1837:

[One] of the most interesting scenes upon the encampment was that of the “Bethel” flag waving in the tops of the trees as a signal that the mariner too has an interest in the Christian millennium; a goodly number of these were present this year, not weary in well doing, or faint in their minds at all; but steadfast, immovable and abounding in every good word and work.\textsuperscript{331}


\textsuperscript{327} Hebron Vincent, “Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (4 September 1844): 143.


\textsuperscript{329} Greenleaf Greely, “Readfield and Starks, Maine,” ZH (11 October 1826): [2].


Methodists started out among the poorer classes, then moved into the middle class as the church emerged and grew through industrialization. The status of the average Methodists who attended camp meeting had a similar trajectory. By 1871, newspaper articles described some fancy cottages on Martha’s Vineyard and Yarmouthport.

**Denominations**

While New England Methodist Episcopal clergy held the camp meetings with a main goal of building up their church, there were always people from other denominations present, both clergy and laity. In the 1823 Mansfield camp meeting described above, Evangelicus reported clergy from six different denominations. It was reported of the 1825 meeting in Westmoreland, New Hampshire, “Many of our brethren of different denominations, went from the meeting, quickened with new determinations to serve God.”

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332 In 1776 Methodists made up 2.5% of the American population. By 1850 roughly one in three Americans was a Methodist. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 56.


England from Manchester, Connecticut,\textsuperscript{336} to Plainfield, Vermont,\textsuperscript{337} to Madison, Maine\textsuperscript{338} and Eastham, Cape Cod.\textsuperscript{339}

Of course, some Christians from other denominations were opposed to camp meetings, or at least found Methodist ways very foreign. General impressions of camp meetings in the surrounding culture, among those who had never been to one, seem to have been generated from stories of the wild events at Cane Ridge, or by the occasional disturbances like the one that so bothered Presiding Elder John Lord that he wanted to curtail future meetings. This helps to explain why the Methodist reports almost all seem to be on the defensive about how well ordered and good for the society their exercises were. In 1835, the Methodists of West Townsend, Vermont, were seen as peculiar and the leaders believed that prejudice of people from other denominations “retarded the operations of the meeting in some degree, for one or two days.”\textsuperscript{340}

Congregationalists seemed to be particularly critical in the early years, understandably since they had only recently begun losing their monopoly as the state religion of Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.\textsuperscript{341} Their clergy were put on

\textsuperscript{336} Amasa Taylor, “Chatham, Con.,” \textit{ZH} (11 October 1826): [2].


\textsuperscript{341} The people of Maine were also used to the Congregational monopoly as long as they remained a territory of Massachusetts. In 1776 about 61\% of the population were Congregationalist. \textit{The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy}, 44.
the defensive when parishioners such as Rachel Stearn converted to Methodism. But over
time, at least some Congregationalist ministers and laypeople welcomed the camp
meetings as tools for revival of their own flocks.

Methodists seemed pleased to report when revivals began at their camp meeting
and spread beyond their own class meetings and chapels to their neighbors. The 1826
“work” ushered in after the camp meeting in Starks, Maine, produced “a new impulse
[that] spread in different directions through the town; social meetings were frequent, and
fully attended, and often very interesting, while Christians of different denominations
heartily joined, and took an active part together.”\textsuperscript{342} Baptists and Congregationalists had
been at Stark with the Methodists “harmoniously united in exalting the Lord our
righteousness.” A Congregationalist who had been at that camp meeting penned an
evaluation of his experience which was published in \textit{Zion’s Herald}. He wrote, “It was a
very affecting scene to see those in different parts of the assembly, whose hearts were
deeply penetrated, by arrows of conviction, when the invitation was given for all who felt
the need of religion to come to the altar and prayers would be offered up for them. They
came, like doves, sensible of an approaching storm, flying to the ark of safety.”\textsuperscript{343} In
1871, both the Yarmouthport meeting on Cape Cod and Hedding in Epping, New
Hampshire, welcomed Congregationalist ministers to their preaching stands.\textsuperscript{344}

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The other most common denomination to be mentioned in the camp meeting reports of this study are the Baptists. Several different types of Baptists joined in the camp meetings including both Free Will and Calvinistic Baptists.\textsuperscript{345} After the camp meeting in Compo, Connecticut, the Baptist minister of New Haven informed his Methodist colleague that “they had had some reviving showers, and several had professed faith in Christ.”\textsuperscript{346} A delegation of English Baptist ministers visited the Wilbraham camp meeting of 1835 and were warmly received.

Drs. Cox and Hoby…appeared exceedingly interested, but not altogether decided in their views of the utility of such extraordinary measures, and could not, at first, be induced to take any part of the exercises, but occupied a seat among the congregation, and, after the preaching, were very attentively engaged in observing the exercises in the prayer-meetings of the tents. We invited them to tea in one of the tents, where they were very free in the exchange of brotherly sentiments, and appeared to have received no unfavorable impression from the observations they had made during the afternoon. In the evening they sat with the preachers on the stand, and were to take a part in the evening services, but owing to the arrangements for their departure to Springfield, they were compelled to leave before they could do so. They took a most cordial leave, and seemed gratified with their visit.\textsuperscript{347}

Three Baptist clergy sat on the stand with the Methodists one day at the Uncasville, Connecticut, camp meeting of 1844 and one of them preached. The secretary commented, “We feel assured that they gave us full fellowship in the work, and thanks be

\textsuperscript{345} “Revival in Vermont,” \textit{ZH} (5 May 1824): [2].


to God, we know that we did not withhold from them a single grain of Christian charity and affection.”

Methodists did not just welcome those curious outsiders when they arrived; they actively invited them. The readers of the 1859 Zion’s Herald who wanted to go to Martha’s Vineyard were informed:

Persons from any place not represented by any society upon the ground so also persons from any religious denomination may erect family tents and receive a license for the same on application to me through any number of the M. E. Churches. Licenses will be immediately [granted to] ministers making application.

It was not uncommon for the Methodists to welcome preachers of other denominations to the stand. In 1841 at Middleborough, Brother Collier preached one afternoon following the sermon of Methodist Brother Edward Lyons. Secretary Franklin Fisk commented, “[Brethren] denominations, both in the ministry and [members] united harmoniously in the work, and the…utility of the meeting increased.” In 1862, Martha’s Vineyard enjoyed an address by the president of Brown University, Rev. Dr. Barnas Sears, on the power of “religion” to “make the evening of a Christian’s life excellent and glorious.” Another Baptist minister, Rev. Mr. Jones, superintendent of the Worcester Public Schools, also preached at the Vineyard that year. But a Universalist

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350 Franklin Fisk, “Middleborough Grove Meeting,” ZHWJ (6 October 1841): 158. Members of the other denomination (presumably Congregationalist) also assisted by taking the grove meeting participants into their homes for the nights because there were no society tents on the grounds of the meeting.

351 Hebron Vincent, “Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (20 August 1862): 159.
who took the stand in Windsor, Maine, in 1844 did not escape the criticism of the Methodist Secretary who wrote, “The speaker seemed to be at home in all the serpentine windings of that multiform and indefinable system.”

People from other denominations including Episcopalians and Catholics appeared from time to time. Though the Wesleyan Methodists had formally separated from the MEC, several Wesleyan “brethren” attended the 1847 camp meeting in Charlotte, Maine, as well as a few Wesleyan clergy. It is quite likely that several Wesleyan people there had been attending the Bucksport District camp meetings as Methodists before the split in 1843. The spirit of ecumenism pervaded throughout the period. At the love feast on Martha’s Vineyard in 1871, “the principle of Christian union was well illustrated for Congregationalists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Friends and Seventh-day Baptists took part in the speaking.”

“Infidels”

The boundaries of the camp meeting between Methodists and their neighbors were permeable. Methodists were strongly urged to bring their non-Methodist family and neighbors along, and in the early years they complied. Strangers were welcomed. Not

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only were upstanding members of other congregations expected and received, even those “infidels” who were not actively part of a church were expected at camp meeting. The pages of Methodist history and biography abound with tales of those who came to the camp meeting to cause trouble or simply out of curiosity. John Allen of Farmington, Maine, attended a camp meeting in 1825 out of curiosity. Immediately after his conversion he was so excited he went home to Farmington and set off a revival. As a young man Hiram Munger and a friend attended a camp meeting with the intent to “see if the Methodists could put us into the preachers’ stand” as punishment. The experiences of each of these men will be discussed further in Chapter Five. This last category of people at camp meetings leads to a review of the measures the Methodists took to deal with troublemakers and maintain order at the camp meetings.

Structured the Boundaries

Should foes in wicked league unite,
To discompose, by day or night,
Our peaceful worship here;
Through hand in hand in sin they’re join’d
Yet thou, O Lord, canst change their mind,
And awe their souls with fear.

356 Amos Binney listed those who had found common ground of the same faith at the Eastham camp meeting of 1838 including Baptist, Orthodox, Episcopalian, Catholic, Infidel and Universalist. Amos Binney, “Millennial Grove Camp-Meeting,” ZH (22 August 1838): 134.


358 Munger, Life and Religious Experience, 17-19.

359 Mudge, The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book, 15.
It was quite a job to keep the camp meeting boundaries porous enough that infidels could be converted, while providing for the safety of the people and protecting the reputation of the MEC. The early camp meeting leaders realized that only if the “profane, intemperate, and otherwise immoral and vicious” were present could the camp meetings be instrumental in them becoming “moral, virtuous and useful.”\(^{360}\) It probably took the “reckless young men, who made an attempt to disturb the peace of the meeting” by surprise when the “people of God” assembled to pray for their conversion.\(^{361}\) Secretaries were quick to report the witty retorts of Methodist preachers to the hecklers who “at times raised their unearthly, goat-like cries, in solemn imitation of the flock of Christ.”\(^{362}\) Yet there was always a tension between letting the troublemakers come close enough to be converted and preventing disturbances.

Some of the trouble came from entrepreneurs who sought to take advantage of the gathering crowd by offering their wares nearby. The commodities for sale ranged from food, to alcohol and various forms of gambling. The alcohol was particularly unwanted for it at once bolstered the confidence and heightened the stupidity of the rowdies.\(^{363}\) At the start of the 1841 camp meeting in Steuben, Maine,


\(^{363}\) “It is well known, that nothing will cause more disturbance at meetings of this kind, than the selling of ardent spirits, or any kind of refreshment near the meeting. The laws of Maine prohibit the sale of any kind of spirits or refreshment whatever, within one mile of the meting. We had on the ground the civil officers, and every thing that might be necessary to punish this, or any other violation of the law. This
Secretaries of camp meetings in Hebron, Connecticut, and Vassalboro, Maine, seemed pleased to report no disturbance in 1832. In the same year, the secretary of Thompson, Connecticut, bragged that the only disturbance was caused from the people praying late into the night. It is important to know, however, that it was at the Thompson camp meeting of 1832 where Methodist elder Ephraim K. Avery allegedly raped Sarah M. Cornell, a reminder that these reports by Methodist clergy always need to be read with an assumption of bias and that sometimes Methodists themselves could be the troublemakers.

Regardless of their failures, the Methodist Episcopal clergy worked hard to maintain and improve the order at camp meetings. Though a minority denomination in being known, had any one been disposed to be disorderly, fear would have deterred him.” William C. Larrabee, “Paris, Maine,” ZH (11 October 1826): [2].


366 Sarah Cornell was from the New Bedford Society. She claimed to have been impregnated by Avery, who refused to accept the child as his. Cornell either committed suicide or was killed by Avery in December of that year. The Methodist clergy sided with Avery both in ecclesiastical and government trials. Ephraim K. Avery, Trial of Rev. Mr. Avery: A Full Report of the Trial of Ephraim K. Avery, Charged with the Murder of Sarah Maria Cornell: Before the Supreme Court of Rhode Island, at a Special Term in Newport, Held in May, 1833 (Boston: Daily Commercial Gazette, 1833). See also Catherine Read Williams and Patricia Caldwell, Fall River: An Authentic Narrative, Women Writers in English 1350-1850 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). The camp meetings reports in Zion’s Herald give no hint about this situation, or any other sexual impropriety. Methodist clergy apparently chose to protect the church’s reputation above seeking the truth.
New England, without a history of political power, they initiated local and state regulations that created a one-mile buffer around many of their camps. Responsibility for keeping order ultimately fell on the President of each camp, but they generally enlisted others to help. Committees drew up rules and regulations; an example was published in the report of the 1824 camp meeting in Falmouth, Massachusetts:

1. The ground within the circle of the tents is considered as consecrated to the worship of Almighty God.
2. In order, therefore, that this worship may be conducted in a proper manner, there must be no unnecessary moving or conversation.
3. Preaching will be attended at the sound of the trumpet—when all other exercises are to cease.
4. Family prayers, with reading of the Scriptures, will be observed in all the tents, both evening and morning.
5. Strangers are not permitted to stay in any tent unless recommended by some person who knows them.
6. Every tent must be lighted during the night.
7. There must be a superintendent appointed to each tent.
8. For the safety of the congregation and property, there will be a guard appointed each night and day during the Meeting.
9. There are to be three public exercises each day—at 10 o’clock, A.M. and at 2 and 7.

As they were at Marshfield in 1823, such rules were often read aloud from the stands of the camp meetings in the early years. This practiced diminished by the 1840s,

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367 “The laws of Maine prohibit the sale of any kind of spirits or refreshment whatever, within one mile of the meeting. We had on the ground the civil officers, and every thing that might be necessary to punish this, or any other violation of the law.” William C. Larrabee, “Paris, Maine,” ZH (11 October 1826): [2].


however. One camp, at least, nailed the rules to trees around the grove. Night watches were organized, so that rowdies could not attack a whole camp unawares. Methodist leaders also invited local law enforcement officials to come and help. Orange Scott reported that the 1835 camp meeting in Northbridge, Massachusetts, was cut short because of a riot where the law was called in Thursday evening.

It seemed as though there must have been an eruption in the bottomless pit; for the supposition, that such agency of miserable wretches could be found anywhere else, is almost incredible. Indications of disturbance began to appear before the close of day in the environs of the encampment and tumultuous noises commenced near the stand and about the ground at dusk, and continued to increase during the public exercises at the stand. About ten o’clock, by order of the sheriff, the riot act was read, and the mob; which by this time was numerous and furious, was ordered to disperse. After this, the disturbances seemed for a few moments to die away; but they were soon renewed with increased vigor. The order was now given by the sheriff to seize the rioters, many of whom were armed with clubs. A struggle ensued between the friends of good order and the unprincipled, self-appointed judges of expediency, which resulted in some blows, and a few moderate wounds. Rev. Joel Knight was knocked down, though not much injured. Rev. Erastus Otis was struck rather lightly several times; and Brother Slocom of Woonsocket, was struck a heavy blow in the face. Several of the rioters were wounded, one or two, I believe, pretty severely. Seven or eight were arrested, and the rest soon dispersed. Of those who were arrested, two were discharged the same evening. Another by the name of Loud was delivered to a gentleman, who promised to return him this morning, but he has not yet been returned. The other four were examined this afternoon by Mr. Adams, of Uxbridge, one of whom was discharged, the other three were bound over to take their trial at the next term of the County Court, and ordered to recognize the sum of three hundred dollars each. We have the name of the ringleader, and several

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371 William M. Gordon, “Webster Camp-Meeting, Worcester District,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 147; H[ezekiah] C. Tilton, “Northport Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (25 September 1850): 155. The latter reported, “Much is due also to several magistrates and officers who fearlessly did their duty in enforcing the law upon some of its incorrigible offenders—perhaps a certain class will learn, that it is too late in the day to trample on the religious liberties of the Christian portion of community with impunity.”

372 This appears to be a description of the mob.
others concerned in the mob, which we intend to present to the grand jury at their next session.\(^{373}\)

Given such disturbances, it follows that the presidents, committees and associations would keep working to make their camp meetings orderly. By 1871, Northport gave credit to an “efficient police, under the direction of Bro. Calderwood, Sheriff of the County.”\(^{374}\) The Yarmouthport camp meeting built a police office right on their grounds.\(^{375}\) Some camps, as mentioned above, had erected fences with gates that could be guarded and locked.\(^{376}\) Over time the boundaries become less and less porous; good order superseded the conversion of infidels.

Structures of Denominational Work

Another development one can see taking place while looking over the newspaper reports in this study is the gradual addition of activities that were neither Christian worship, nor the basic work of organizing a camp meeting. It appears to have started when presiding elders began to set meetings of their district stewards at a specific time during the camp meeting. The business the stewards addressed while at camp meeting ranged from setting apportionments for compensating the presiding elder, to supporting

\(^{373}\) O[range] Scott, “Camp Meeting,” ZH (2 September 1835): 139.

\(^{374}\) “Wesleyan Grove Camp-Meeting, Northport,” ZH (7 September 1871): 429.

\(^{375}\) “Yarmouthport Camp-Meeting,” ZH (7 September 1871): 429.

\(^{376}\) There was coiled razor wire around the tabernacle at Asbury Grove in 2006.
the Preachers’ Aid Society, to picking lay delegates for a future annual conference.\textsuperscript{377} The assumption was that most, if not all, of the stewards would already be present at the camp meeting. Holding one of the quarterly meetings at a place and time when the members were already gathered was quite practical.\textsuperscript{378} There were also a few times when quarterly meetings were held in conjunction with a camp meeting—though this happened much less frequently.\textsuperscript{379}

Other meetings for church business that were set to take place at camp meetings include a business meeting of the East Maine Seminary trustees which met on the second day of the Northport camp of 1853, and interviews of preaching candidates conducted by Presiding Elder Otheman at the 1847 Charlotte, Maine, camp meeting.\textsuperscript{380} In 1871, a District Ministerial Association Meeting for preachers and their wives took place on the grounds of Hedding camp meeting in Epping, New Hampshire, but it occurred two

\textsuperscript{377} On the Bucksport District the presiding elder planned for the stewards to attend one of the meetings at either of the camp meetings, rather than try to gather all the district stewards in one place. Francis A. Soule, “District Stewards,” \textit{ZHWJ} (24 August 1859): 135.

\textsuperscript{378} The first time the newspapers of this study show such a meeting is in 1844 at the Danville, Vermont, camp meeting when the stewards were asked to meet on Thursday afternoon at 1 o’clock. This was the second day of a five-day camp meeting, presumably just before the afternoon preaching exercises. S[ylvester] P. Williams, “Notice,” \textit{ZHWJ} (21 August 1844): 135. A similar meeting was held for the stewards of the Springfield (Massachusetts) District the same year. The practices grew every year of the study with a high of seven district steward meetings at the camps per year in both 1859 and 1871.

\textsuperscript{379} The presiding elder of the 1844 Danville camp meeting called the Danville quarterly meeting to take place on the third day of the camp meeting. The society of Bath, New Hampshire, also held their quarterly meeting at the Bath camp meeting that year. Bethel, Maine’s camp meeting held a quarterly meeting in 1856 and the camp meeting at Stark, New Hampshire, held a quarterly meeting on the “Sabbath” to accommodate four societies in 1871. Newmarket, New Hampshire, held their quarterly meeting just prior to the camp meeting on the same ground, attracting “upwards of a thousand people” to the morning and afternoon preaching.

months before the camp meeting was in session. The camp meeting committee invited the couples to use the rooms free of charge, but they were each expected to bring “a well fitted basket” of food for themselves.\footnote{James Thurston, “The Picnic Preachers' Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (1 June 1871): 264.}

These types of activities held concurrent with or even on the grounds of the camp meetings had the unintentional effect of beginning to turn camp meeting groves into “contested spaces,” no longer places solely reserved for sacred pilgrimages.\footnote{See Chapter Five.} This paved the way for even more activity at camp meeting grounds that was unrelated to the sacred business of the church.

\section*{Structures for Leisure and Recreation}

Beyond the meetings, addresses and services just mentioned, the participants in camp meeting gradually adopted other activities which were even further removed from the concerns of Christian discipleship. Apparently some people were swimming while at Millennial Grove as early as 1856 for “Mrs. Bird of Dorchester lost a brown ‘bathing dress’” there and placed an ad in the paper hoping to reclaim it.\footnote{“Eastham Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (10 September 1856): 37.} In 1859, a correspondent calling himself “Patmos” compared Martha’s Vineyard to Newport, saying, “The grand opportunity afforded here for the luxury of bathing in the briny deep is not surpassed even by Newport, and hundreds are availing themselves of this health-

\begin{thebibliography}{1}

\footnotetext[1]{James Thurston, “The Picnic Preachers' Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (1 June 1871): 264.}

\footnotetext[2]{See Chapter Five.}

\footnotetext[3]{“Eastham Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (10 September 1856): 37.}
\end{thebibliography}
In 1871, bathing was joined with fishing, sailing, and croquet as activities to help “this great company” who are “weary” to rest.\footnote{Patmos, “Notes from the Encampment,” ZHWJ (24 August 1859): 134.} The fanciful description of Martha’s Vineyard as Poe’s “Kingdom By the Sea” presents croquet as a game with “excellent qualities” for men and women, for boys and girls, for parents and children, and for out of doors. It seems to have been invented to teach the father that he has children, which his business almost prevents his knowing, and better than that, that his boys and girls can beat him “just as easy.”\footnote{“The Fruit of the Vineyard,” ZHWJ (17 August 1871): 390.}

The editors of Zion’s Herald apparently had no qualms about depicting Martha’s Vineyard as “enchanting”\footnote{“‘The Kingdom by the Sea,’” ZH (10 August 1871): 378.} or like a “fairy land” in 1871. “[Most] charming for children, and none the less for those of riper age.” Among the benefits of attending camp meetings, the advertisements began to list that they were good places to improve one’s health or spend leisure time. The ad for Sterling camp meeting in 1871 concluded:

As the above grounds are in the neighborhood of Mount Wachusett and Lake Waushacum, it offers great attractions to persons who would enjoy rest where they can have the purest of air, and the delights of fishing and country sports.\footnote{Patmos, “Notes from the Encampment,” ZHWJ (24 August 1859): 134; Hebron Vincent, “Wesleyan Grove Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (31 August 1853): 140. The latter wrote, “Never did our snow-white city look more enchanting. Instead of being tired of the scene in less than one short week, many of us who staid till the close, felt more like remaining another week than we had done like continuing through the first.”}

An ad for Martha’s Vineyard that same year said:

\footnote{“Sterling Junction Camp-Ground,” ZH (13 July 1871): 336.}
The religious air is excellent, the social also; Try the Vineyard. You will buy a
summer home there if you make it a visit. No place can be found superior for
your family in health and morals, or cheapness. Again we say, try the Vineyard.389

People had been building their cottages at the more established camp meetings
since 1859.390 Those in the growing middle class were starting to arrive at the
campgrounds early or stay on the grounds after the “camp meeting week” had ended. At
Asbury Grove, “quite a large number of families were dwelling in their cottages, finding
health and rest in this delightful retreat” two or three weeks before the meeting.391 Zion’s
Herald also reported that Rev. J. Thurston, the secretary of the camp meeting, had
“broken up house-keeping in Dover, and he intends to spend most of his time with his
family, during the summer months, on Epping Camp-ground, to recruit his health.”392
Martha’s Vineyard had begun holding evening services in the large tent on summer
Sundays. The author described his reverie in late July, “when the sultry sun was pouring
over Boston and New York, it was delicious to meet under the trees, and sit and sing
ourselves away to everlasting bliss.”393

The Newmarket campgrounds were even used for a Fourth of July celebration in
1862, attracting more than 1,000 people. There was a procession that included the

389 Untitled, ZH (20 July 1871): 337.

390 Dagnall, Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association, 1835-1985, 23.


392 Untitled, ZH (13 July 1871): 333.

393 Untitled, ZH (20 July 1871): 337.
children of three Sunday schools\textsuperscript{394} and a “large carriage conveying the aged,” other citizens on foot and in carriages, and Knight’s Cornet Band of Portsmouth. They all marched to the grove where one other Sunday school and delegations from two or more other towns were waiting. The morning was “devoted to the children,” and activities included a recitation of the Declaration of Independence by the principal of Newmarket High School, an address by a little girl from the Methodist Sabbath School of South Newmarket, and three addresses given by local ministers. “At 2 o’clock we were again ‘called to the stand’ to listen to the orator of the day, Rev. R. S. Stubbs, chaplain of the N. H. Legislature…Mr. Mellows, of Newmarket, followed in a brief patriotic address…An original national poem was read by Rev. J. W. Adams.”\textsuperscript{395}

In looking at the advent of these activities, the developments in transportation, and the shift in camp meetings from being temporary places to participate in the “work of God” to summer homes and vacation destinations, it is not hard to see why camp meetings changed from being powerful places where multitudes were converted to Methodism, to being the preferred vacation spots for middle class Methodist Episcopal families, or just an entertaining way to spend a Sunday. Some Methodist leaders seemed to have prophetic vision on this matter. In 1859, the presiding elder of the Bucksport District, Francis Soule, wrote,

\begin{quote}
It is hoped that our churches in that section of the district will furnish a large number of Tents, well filled with waking Christians and seeking penitents, and that no tent’s company will consent to [?] themselves, their friends, the meeting,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{394} Two Sunday schools were apparently Methodist and the “Piscassic Union” Sunday school made up the third.

and the cause of God, by keeping an eating saloon for the multitudes to go to the meeting a day or two for pleasure. You cannot afford to spend all your time and strength and means in feeding those who contribute nothing to the interests of the meeting, and have no time, nor strength, nor spirit left for the social services of your tents. Let not our camp meeting be a great “pic nic”—a place of resort for public pleasure, at the expense of the church, or a few of its members who annually bear these burdens, but let it be a place (and a season) of prayer and religious labor for the salvation of souls, and the sanctification of the church.396

But the camp grounds were well on their way to becoming contested space. Martha’s Vineyard surely was at the forefront of this development, while some of the smaller camps in northern New England were less attractive to the temptations.

The developments of all the social structures of the MEC camp meetings in New England are illustrative of the process of “routinization” observed by sociologists who study religion. The very process of perfecting the places, the transportation, the finances, the necessary commodities and the boundaries had made the camp meeting something that could be coopted for other uses.

Still, the early camp meetings are of great interest because they engendered so many conversions and quickened the faith of the “brethren” and sisters who attended. Chapter Four examines the liturgical elements of camp meetings and the part they played in these conversions.

CHAPTER 4

WORSHIP PRACTICES OF EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND CAMP MEETINGS

The Order of Worship at Camp Meetings

It is a premise of this study that the early camp meetings were multi-day services of worship, filled with liturgically-shaped activity from the dedication of the tents to the parting handshake. For most of the people gathered at the groves, every waking moment of every day, except for meal breaks, was dedicated to the worship of God. As one correspondent put it, “We had no vacant time. The brethren were hearing preaching, praying, shouting or singing, early and late; and on the last night several of the tents prayed and sung all night.”¹

On a typical day the camp was roused from sleep at the break of day, and people began to worship in their beds. They had family prayer in their tents, and sometimes gathered at the stand for an early morning praise session. After breakfast they gathered at the stand for “public exercises,” which included preaching, exhortations and prayer and congregational singing. These “preaching exercises” were followed either by a time of prayer at the foot of the stand or by a time when societies gathered at their tents, along with their guests, for a “season of prayer” that was more intimate because it was mostly among the people from home. After a break for dinner, there was another time at the

¹Gershom F. Cox, “Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (15 September 1841): 147.
stand for the preaching exercises, followed by either public or intimate circles of prayer. Then after supper a final round of preaching exercises was followed by prayer in the tents that often lasted well into the night. The earliest camp leaders in this study generally scheduled four or five times for preaching each day.

Occasionally someone gave an address, remarks or a discourse, or read the rules from the stand. Toward the end of the encampment a love feast was almost always conducted. Usually the camp went through a closing ritual as well. Some camps would also add one or more sacraments to the agenda. This chapter explores each act of worship found in the New England camp meeting newspaper reports from 1823 to 1871 as they were typically practiced, highlighting changes over time and paying special attention to the factors which seem significant to the process of conversion.

**Gathering**

Should you for worship go abroad,
And join in camps for praise and prayer,
In all those scenes behold your God,
And worship him sincerely there.
We have attempted there to lead
Your minds to worship him indeed.\(^2\)

Though easy to overlook, the act of gathering was the first act of worship that the Methodists and their guests performed. Unlike the gatherings of Methodists in their

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hometowns for Sunday worship, the gatherings of camp meetings required a pilgrimage. Going “away” was seen as a valuable spiritual practice. Camp meeting participants believed they were like Abraham who “[retired] with his family and friends to the sacred grove…that he might worship God in a more collected and impressive manner. And doubtless it was for this purpose, that Christ with his disciples frequently resorted to the mountains, gardens and groves of Judea.” Making a pilgrimage provided one with new perspective.

There, in the secret of retirement, away from the care and bustle of business, where no eye was upon them but the eye of God, with the beautiful heavens spread out as a canopy above, and the delightful scenery of nature spreading out before them,—[the disciples] explored the vast field of human wretchedness—they prayed for the lost sons of Adam—they wept in view of the approaching desolation of their city and nation—and formed their plans for the universal spread of the gospel and the conversion of the nations of the earth to God.

As noted in the previous chapter, getting to camp meeting could be quite arduous and sometimes dangerous. In his *Camp-Meeting Hymn Book*, Enoch Mudge indicated that traveling to the camp and setting up the tents, however, could even be treated as acts of worship if accompanied by prayer and hymns. Campers were also encouraged to

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3 “The [camp meeting] scene should teach us that our life is but a pilgrimage, and happy is that one, who, at the close of each day can pitch his tent, ‘a day’s march nearer home.’” Horace C. Atwater, “Why I Love Camp Meetings,” *ZHWJ* (31 July 1850): 121.


5 Ibid. Ely went on to reflect on the use of groves by the “worshippers of false gods” and concluded that the “pleasantness of such a place was apt to allure the people and beget within them a love for religious worship” and that the “solitude of groves was …fit to create a religious awe and reverence in the minds of the people” for both heathens and “worshippers of the true God.”

6 Many of the verses sprinkled through this work are from the collection of hymns he wrote. Though we cannot know if and how his hymnal was used, it does reveal attitudes which Mudge probably shared with his “brethren” about the camp meetings. Mudge, *The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book*. 
meditate on what they hoped would take place at the camp and what attitudes and practices they should uphold.⁷

Fasting

Camp meetings occasionally advocated the practice of fasting, presumably as a way of tying their gatherings into the larger body of Methodists in New England. In 1826, the New England Annual Conference appointed Friday, September 1 as a day of fasting and prayer for laity and clergy alike. This affected at least three camp meetings which were in session on that day.⁸ At Readfield, a discourse about fasting was offered on that day followed by “the sacrament.”⁹ Meanwhile, those at the Woodstock, Connecticut, camp meeting came to believe “the Great Head of the church was well pleased with this appointment; for such a display of his glory and power is seldom witnessed by mortals as was realized during Friday night.”¹⁰ Also in 1871, both the Yarmouthport and Sterling camp meetings asked that the Fridays before their encampments be set aside for a day of fasting and prayer. “Let all the ministers please notify their respective churches accordingly. Let some portion of each day, between this

⁷See, for example, “Reflections at Camp Meeting,” ZH (9 June 1824): [4].

⁸Woodstock, Connecticut, which started Monday, August 28; Readfield, ME and West Windsor, Vermont, which each started Tuesday, August 29 and closed Saturday, September 2.


and that time, be set apart for special prayer for the same object.”¹¹ In the Worcester District the people were requested to “fast and pray for the highest results” and the preachers were instructed to “preach upon the subject of camp-meetings some Sabbath in the month as well.”¹² Such fasting allowed some form of participation¹³ in the camp meeting even by those who were staying at home.

Worshipping Outdoors as Part of Creation

If you retire into the grove,
Or range the mead, or flow’ry field
Each object there should kindle love,
And all a thousand pleasures yield
In every flow’r, and shrub, and tree,
God’s goodness you may plainly see.¹⁴

While Methodists had some experience with outdoor worship, both when a circuit rider was preaching in an area for the first time and when the circuits gathered for quarterly conferences, New England Methodists generally held their services inside (a house, a barn, a tavern) even before they built their own chapels. Though many Methodists in New England were not far removed from nature in their daily lives (getting around by foot or horseback; many of them working in agriculture or fishing), still it was


¹³ No specific instructions about how to fast, or indications of whether a modified fast allowed by John Wesley, were offered.

¹⁴Mudge, The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book, 11.
novel to worship in a grove.\textsuperscript{15} As for New England Congregationalists, who generally built their meetinghouses as part of establishing their towns, worshipping out of doors was particularly innovative.

For many campers, being outdoors heightened their awareness of the God of creation. There was often a sense that the grove was a more authentic place to worship than a human-built chapel:

the wide-spreading branches of the trees afforded a propitious retreat and comfortable shade, their lofty summits, waving, seemed to invite us up to a more glorious meeting, and to “an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”\textsuperscript{16}

The site of the Rumford, Maine, camp meeting “reminded us of the Mountain where Christ resorted for devotional exercises.”\textsuperscript{17} The camp at Pelham, Massachusetts, made one correspondent think of the heavenly Jerusalem.

[Looking] out upon a scene so enchanting, the mind rises in its contemplations as by instinct, to that city so beautifully described in the Apocalyces [sic], through which runs a pure river of water of life, on either side of which stands the tree of life whose fruit is for the healing of the nations. The ground is finely shaded by the stately oak and towering chestnut, which afforded a good protection against the wind and rain, and the scorching rays of the sun. In this beautiful place the people of God assembled.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15}C[yrus] C. Munger, “Kennebunk-Port Camp Meeting,” \textit{MWJ} (15 November 1832): 177. “The first day was occupied in the erecting of tents and preparations of conveniences for the meeting. The scene was truly novel to many who stood spectators of the preparations for this new mode of worship.”


\textsuperscript{17}Daniel Fuller, “Rumford Camp Meeting,” \textit{MWJ} (4 October 1832): 154.

\textsuperscript{18}William White, “Pelham Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHJW} (13 October 1841): 164.
The coming of dawn and the experience of breezes could help campers feel close to the Spirit of God.

The rising sun in the east, darting his lucid beams through the grove, which that time was vocal with the voice of morning prayer in the respective tents,—the gentle zephyrs softly whispering through the foliage of the beautiful grove, now consecrated to God, was an expressive emblem of the divine spirit which so sweetly filled the soul and tranquilized all the passion of the human heart.\(^{19}\)

The weather was generally seen as an intentional act of God. Campers rejoiced in days of “clear sky and shining sun, and all that heaven and earth could afford to make the good man happy.”\(^{20}\) But God was also the author of the storms.

The winds blew seriously, the awful thunder sounded frequent and loud. The sharp lightning darted through the air, and the rain fell powerfully. Exposed to the fury of the tempest, they would have feared and trembled, had they not recollected that the God, whom they came there to worship, had the elements under his control.\(^{21}\)

Alternatively, bad weather might pose a challenge to the people, but one that they overcame, as when the throngs continued to gather in spite of the rain.\(^{22}\) Better still, the campers sensed that the purposes of the Creator were not thwarted by the creation.

[The] brethren had not continued long in prayer…when an Allwise Providence saw fit to send a shower of rain, which seemed to some extent to thwart our hopes. But the Lord knoweth what is best. The God of all the earth doeth right. Although the rain drove us into our tents, and caused many of the congregation to leave the ground, yet our time was too precious to be lost. The place was holy to the Lord. The mighty ones of God’s Israel used their sacred armor in small

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\(^{22}\)Aaron Lummus, “Hebron Camp-Meetings,” ZH (June 19, 1823): 94.
companies. “The angel of the Lord encamped round about us,” and His glory was in the midst.\(^\text{23}\)

Though the rain descended at times in mighty torrents, and the clouds prevented our receiving the clear rays of the sun, yet all this did not injure our peace. The sun of righteousness shone with healing in his wings, and illuminated almost every heart, and the gentle dews of heaven watered every soul.\(^\text{24}\)

Rain typically drove the crowds to their tents, where preaching often continued as scheduled with several ministers preaching simultaneously. It also evoked thoughts of baptism of water and spirit.

[The] exercises of the public prayer meeting in the afternoon, and of public preaching in the evening, were prevented by the rain…our brethren being contained to their several tents, had a better opportunity to labor for God, and for the unconverted in their own companies and also to get their own souls a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{25}\)

But a few Methodist clergy, such as John Newland Maffitt, were so popular that “the people stood beneath the storm to hear the distinguished preacher.”\(^\text{26}\)

By meeting in the summer months, the weather was generally warm enough for camping. But when the Steuben, Maine, meeting began at the end of September in 1841, it was cold enough that the preachers needed to “study brevity.”\(^\text{27}\) In general, most people


\(^\text{24}\) Cyrus Scammon, “Solon Camp-Meeting,” \textit{MWJ} (13 October 1838): [2]. The author was alluding to Malachi 4:2 and Charles Wesley’s “Hark the Herald Angels Sing” verse 3.


\(^\text{27}\) Herrick M. Eaton, “Steuben Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (20 October 1841): 165. Though one “good brother” led the shivering congregation on “a walk with Ezekiel down into the ‘valley of dry bones,’ and did not return for the space of one hour.” Still “the power of God…accompanied the word that was preached” and people were convicted and “felt that God was fulfilling to them his promise.”
found the space in which they gathered for a camp meeting, together with the natural inhabitants, vistas, and even the weather, to be particularly conducive to worship.

Worshipping With Methodists from Other Communities

Though a great many of those who attended camp meetings in New England arrived with people from home and shared a tent with them, the camp meeting was a time for several Methodist societies throughout a district to come together. Each camp meeting was “a general convocation of the membership of the church from an extended territory, to labor and pray together for the general good.” They promoted “extended acquaintance among the members of the church, and binding in golden bonds of union and fellow feeling the hearts of our people, over large districts of country.”

Many met one another for the first time at the camp meetings. The gathering of many Methodists on a district served to knit the “brethren” together. As Presiding Elder Pilsbury of the Maine Annual Conference exhorted:

We assuredly need, just now, as much as our friends in the New England or any other Conference, the benefit of such an association, in saving our own and the souls of others. We as much need such an opportunity for the interchange of thoughts and views, for the intermingling of feeling and faith, for mutual council, and social prayers and exhortations.

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29 T[omas] C. Pierce, “Camp Meeting at Lyndon, Vt,” *ZH* (15 September 1824): [2]. “If our fellowship below in Jesus be so sweet/What heights of rapture shall we feel when round his throne we meet?”

Camp meetings became times to meet Methodists from even further afield. The Methodists of the Boston and Sandwich Districts worshipped at Eastham together for many years, though for much of that time they were in separate annual conferences. One could meet “Methodist missionaries from England, newly stationed in Canada,” guest speakers from other conferences, clergy who had transferred to western conferences but came back for a visit, and missionaries who had worked on the other side of the world. All of these helped the participants to feel that they were part of a significant movement.

At other times the camp meetings actually served to help cement a newly formed class or society from a nearby settlement. In Kittery, Maine, the first class was only formed the day before the camp meeting began.33

Worshipping Ecumenically

As noted in Chapter Three, there was a wide range of diversity at the camps, including many Christians from other denominations. Unlike the Sunday worship at home, services at camp meetings gave Methodists the experience of worshipping with Baptists, Congregationalists, Unitarians and others, though in this study the Methodist Episcopal clergy were always in charge of the camp meetings and did not hesitate to argue against divergent theology from the pulpit.34 But normally it felt good to meet “on


common ground…contending earnestly for the same faith—the faith once delivered to
the saints.”

To the matter of who gathered, it may be noted that the pattern of when they
gathered was rather different from a Sunday morning service of worship. The nature of
the gathering at camp meetings was always such that more people arrived as the days
progressed. The leaders accepted this, and even encouraged it, when they planned for
respected preachers to address the large crowds on the penultimate days, or “Sabbaths,”
of their encampments. There was no sense conveyed that there was a time when it was
“too late” to join a camp meeting. Just as the landowner did to the workers in the parable
(Matthew 20:14b), New England Methodists believed that Jesus “will give unto this last,
even as unto thee.” Arriving late was far better than not attending at all.

Consecration/Dedication of the Ground

This sacred spot, O Lord, to thee,
We consecrate by prayer;
Thy pow’r and goodness may we see,
Display’d in mercy here.

In the early years, the reports regularly described a time of dedicating the tents
and grounds at the beginning of a camp. Invoking God’s name at the very start and
dedicating the space to God’s “work” helped to transform a grove into a sacred space and
to remind the people that they were on a pilgrimage. The day appointed for the start of

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camp was usually the same day the people set up their tents, and the prayers of consecration were generally offered in the evening of that day. In 1824, the Lyndon, Vermont, camp was “consecrated to God” along with the tents, preachers and brethren and all connected with the encampment. While the reports do not always note specifics, it is likely that the presiding elder, when present, led the dedicatory prayers. Though it was not mentioned in every report, camps from every state “dedicated their temporary homes to the worship of Jehovah” well into the 1850s. It was also common for each participating Methodist society to dedicate its own tent when it had been set up. Again, it is not stated explicitly, but one can assume that the preacher appointed to a society would offer the prayers of dedication of its tent. Afterward each society gathered with the others around the stand to “[plead] for heavenly peace to descend and… [surround] the social altar with incense to the Almighty.” There is no explicit description of any ritual acts accompanying the prayers but the prayers alone were enough to set the groves, and temporary structures apart for holy work. These acts of consecration helped the participants to feel the presence of God.

In dedicating the delightful grove…to his service, together with the altar, the stand, the tent, and our own poor hearts, we felt that Jesus had verily come up to the feast of tabernacles with us and accepted the offering we made.

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39 A Congregationalist, “Starks, Maine,” ZH (18 October 1826): 2. Though not explicitly explained, “social altar” likely means the preaching stand around which the societies offered their prayers. See the section below entitled “The Social Meeting Puzzle” on page 275.

40 William M. Mann, “Camp Meeting at Danville, Vt,” ZHWJ (2 October 1844): 159.
Mention of consecration seems to taper off, however, with the rise of permanent grounds and structures. A dedication was planned for Asbury Grove in the opening services of their inaugural meeting in 1859, but there is no mention of dedications or consecrations in 1862 or 1871. In 1871 a dedication was made of a new chapel tent in a new “development” called Vineyard Highlands meant to accommodate even more campers at Martha’s Vineyard, but no mention is made of dedicating or consecrating the whole grounds. As an act of worship meant to sanctify a new structure or place, it did not make liturgical sense to consecrate a permanent campground or its structures more than the first time they were acquired, erected and put to use.

**Daily Order of Worship**

Within the weekly pattern of camp meeting worship there was a daily pattern that was repeated two or more days in a row, as described above. This section will examine each of these daily acts of worship briefly in the order they occurred before looking more in depth at the public preaching exercises and the intimate group prayer exercises.

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42 Untitled, _ZH_ (17 August 1871): 391.
Trumps and Bells

Ye messengers of God, arise,  
And blow the trumpet of your Lord;  
And let all men beneath the skies,  
Hear the awak’ning joyful word.\textsuperscript{43}

Liturgy is always an exercise that involves all the senses—not least the sense of hearing, and at camp meeting the day itself was marked by distinctive sounds. The time to wake at camp meetings was typically at dawn, before sunrise,\textsuperscript{44} and the trumpet sounded early in the mornings before sunrise to wake the camp for a new day.\textsuperscript{45} In the early years many camps used a trumpet to signal the time throughout the day. It was particularly used to call the people to the stand as the preaching services started, reminding the people that “all other exercises [were] to cease.”\textsuperscript{46} Trumpet blasts were also sounded, typically at 10 p.m., to let people know that it was time to go to bed, and to usher anyone who did not have accommodations in a society tent out of the grounds.\textsuperscript{47} For some, such as Camp Meeting John, the trumpet also reminded them that the Lord would one day return to the sound of trumpet fanfare and that their time at camp meeting

\textsuperscript{43} Mudge, \textit{The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book}, 54.


was meant to prepare them for that day. But the use of trumpets for signaling the time was no longer mentioned from the 1840s onward.

Some camps began to use a bell instead. Like a trumpet, the bell would announce “the time of separation” (the end of the day) to the locals, and its peal would waken the campers “as soon as it began to grow light.” In 1859, the Sterling camp meeting replaced their small hand bell with a heavy cast-steel bell suspended upon the trees, “the clear tones of which reached the farthest tents upon the avenues and were distinctly heard in the midst of singing.” The trumpets seemed to evoke more biblical allusions than the bells, however, as instruments helping the residents of “Zion” or “Beulah Land” to awaken or revive.

Morning Hymns and Family Prayer

To be sung by the watch in the morning
The birds of the morning are tuning their notes
Their strains most melodious they pour from their throats
Ye children of God, rise and welcome the day
Come, join in devotion, to sing, read and pray.

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48 C[adford] M. Dinsmore, “Camp Meeting at New Market Junction,” ZH (21 September 1859): 151; S[yvester] P. Williams, “Camp-Meeting at Corinth, Vt,” ZH (3 October 1838): 158; Lorenzo W. Blood, “New London District Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (25 September 1850): 153. At this camp in Coventry, Connecticut, “immediately on ringing the bell at ten o’clock in the evening, all was still; those not provided with lodging on the ground immediately retired, and the tent’s companies retired to rest;”

49 C[ornelius] Stone, “Camp-Meeting at East Livermore,” ZHWJ (13 October 1847): 163; E. S., “Eastham Camp-Meeting - Its Regulations,” ZHWJ (22 September 1847): 150. The latter article provides a detailed explanation: “The rule is this: - ‘At ten o’clock in the evening the bell will ring at the stand, at which time all exercises in the tents will cease, and all retire to rest, and remain silent until the bell is again rung at the stand, at five o’clock in the morning.’ The observance of this rule is very necessary, that all may have the privilege of obtaining the necessary amount of sleep, and thus be prepared for the duties of the ensuing day.” (E. S. may be Elijah Streeter, who withdrew in 1847 and had no appointment, but had been very active in previous camp meetings and had once been the Presiding Elder of the Portland District.)

Response by those within  
We rise with devotion to welcome the morn,  
We thank our Creator we ever were born  
To be brought to this place, to see this bless’d day  
To join in devotions, our worship to pay.  

Upon being woken by the trumpet, bell, or the night watchman, the campers would begin their day with “family prayer” and the singing of hymns.

Wednesday opened with a most beautiful morning. Nature appeared in all her loveliness [sic]. Those who have attended these meetings, know well how delightful it is to hear at early dawn the melodious songs of Zion coming from those whose hearts glow with holy fervor. It seems almost like heaven begun below.

Here the camp meeting was incorporating rituals already familiar to Methodist families, who were instructed to practice family prayer at home each day, including scripture reading, songs and prayers of praise. At Falmouth, family prayers with reading of the scriptures were to be “observed in all the tents both evening and morning.” Family prayer together with breakfast evoked the image of Israelites gathered around their

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54 “A Sketch of the Camp Meeting at Kittery, Maine,” *CAJZH* (2 October 1829): 18. “The song, the reading of the Scriptures, the prayer, the gentle and the thrilling, happy response were all heard as they rose up over the empowering trees to mingle and unite before the sprinkled throne. Attendant angels wafted fragrance from the celestial hill, and the beautiful green temple created by the Divine Architect, became vocal with ravishing sounds and loud hosannas.” The primary sources do not indicate who chose the scripture readings and hymns, or who led these services.

smoking family altars in the wilderness. As late as 1862, the leaders of the New Market camp meeting expected family devotions to be held in every tent between 5 and 6 a.m. As explained below, the liturgy of the camp meeting experience took place both in the tents and other intimate gatherings and in the more public gatherings at the stand.

“Public Exercises” at the Stand

Methodists used the term “exercise” to denote their worship, both the public preaching at the stand, and the more extemporaneous and intimate “seasons” of prayer. The terms “preaching exercises,” “public worship,” “public exercises” or “preaching service” were used interchangeably in the early newspaper accounts of New England camp meetings. These encompassed everything that took place as the crowd assembled on the benches before the preaching stand, and though the size of the congregation was larger, the acts of worship were similar to Methodist worship performed with their congregations in their home towns each week, except that there were more clergy involved and a much larger congregation. The seats were divided, with men on one side and women on the other. All the Methodist preachers at a camp typically took seats

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58 In describing the Wellfleet camp meeting the reporter wrote, “the exercises…of the meeting were much as usual; it will therefore be unnecessary to detail them.” D[amon] Young, “Camp Meeting at Wellfleet,” ZH (1 September 1824): [2].

59 “The religious exercises of the Camp meeting are like those of the sanctuary precisely; and consist of prayer, preaching, singing, exhortation and the narration of individual experience.” Gorham, Camp Meeting Manual, 22.
together on the stand. In the early years, as seen at the Marshfield camp meeting of 1823, several Methodist preachers spoke at a single service. The first preacher “took a text,” followed by one or more exhorters and a formal concluding prayer offered by yet another clergy person. These services would often end with an invitation to come toward the stand, also called an “altar,” and form a praying circle.

“Before the Altar”

The invitation was extended particularly to anyone who had been awakened by the preaching exercises and found themselves in a state of anxiety or mourning. But they were not the only ones who came forward at the invitation. Many others came to pray to God on behalf of the mourners. Believers came forward to pray for “the work of holiness,” and backsliders came with tears of remorse. The mourners’ benches, so prevalent in southern camp meetings, receive little mention in the New England sources. The correspondent for the 1832 camp meeting at Kennebunkport wrote of a “mercy seat,” but in a way that was perhaps metaphorical, and it was clearly not located

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60 For example, there were thirty preachers seated on the stand at the 1826 camp meeting in Starks, Maine. Greenleaf Greely, “Readfield and Starks, Maine,” ZH (11 October 1826): [2].

61 The terms “altar” and “stand” often seem to be used interchangeably. Rather than any separate piece of furniture, the altar tends to mean the preaching stand. It seems that the people rarely got up on the preaching stand with the preachers, but stood on the ground before it—symbolically laying themselves or their prayers upon it.


63 The term “mourners seat” appears just once in 1841 at the Marlborough, Connecticut, camp. P[ardon] T. Kenney, “Marlborough Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (15 September 1841): 148. Though the following description from 1838 shows that Martha’s Vineyard also had a place set apart for the mourners: “those seats where the Lord’s people had been receiving the tokens of mercy, the anxious sinner was invited to approach.” Franklin Fisk, “Camp-Meeting at Martha’s Vineyard,” ZH (12 September 1838): 146.
among the seats before the stand.\textsuperscript{64} New England camp meeting congregations thought of
this space up front where they stood for prayer as the “altar.” \textsuperscript{65}

The invitation to come forward was a signal for the camp meeting to become
more animated. Often between ten and 150 people “convinced of their need of a
Saviour…rushed forward to the altar.” People seeking sanctification or an increase in
holiness were also invited to come to the altar in response to the sermons and
exhortations. As people made their way through the crowd, they freely emoted “with
streaming eyes and trembling frames, crying, ‘pray for us.’”\textsuperscript{66} Once there, many fell to
their knees in prayer. Sometimes the space in front of the stand was too small. In 1826 at
the camp in Starks, Maine, the mourners and intercessors “all marched with ‘solitary
steps and slow’ to a more ample space for the exercise of intercession.”\textsuperscript{67}

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\textsuperscript{64} C[yrus] C. Munger, “Kennebunk-Port Camp Meeting,” \textit{MWJ} (15 November 1832): 177.
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\textsuperscript{65} This metaphor of the altar, and placing one’s self on the altar before God, was so prevalent in
New England camp meetings in the 1820s and before that it calls for investigation about the origin of
Phoebe Palmer’s “altar theology.” The link very well may be Timothy Merritt, who had served as a circuit
rider in New England before moving to New York City. He met Phoebe’s sister Sarah Lankford in 1835
and coached her in the way of holiness. Phoebe Palmer, \textit{Phoebe Palmer, Faith and Its Effects: Or, Fragments from My
Portfolio} (New York: Phoebe Palmer, 1850); S. Olin Garrison, \textit{Fifty Witnesses: Covering the Whole Range of
Christian Experience} (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1888), 188-190. Merritt had been present at a camp
meeting in Wellfleet in 1819 where Wilbur Fisk received the “blessing” of holiness. Mudge, \textit{History of the
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\textsuperscript{66} Daniel Fuller, “Rumford Camp Meeting,” \textit{MWJ} (4 October 1832): 154.
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Prayer Meetings in the Tents

While public services and prayer at the stand took place amid the whole encampment, the New England Methodists always offered participants the more private society tents as space to “work out their salvation.” These meetings were also called “exercises” from time to time, but they were not “public” exercises. A few times it was reported that class meetings took place in the tents. Most people who would be in such a prayer meeting would be from the same Methodist society, or they could be a friend, neighbor or relative from the same location where the society met back at home.

The last event for the day was the evening prayer meetings in the tents. Though usually scheduled to end at 10 o’clock, they often lasted longer, especially on the last night of a camp. But eventually the people would allow themselves some time for sleeping.

Retire to your tents, for the service is o’er
For the night is the season for rest.
The watchmen shall faithfully guard at your door
And will see that no harm shall molest.

Because the exercises at the stand, the public prayer which followed, and the prayer meetings in the tents were the core of the daily camp meeting ritual that ushered

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people to the “throne of grace,” they deserve to be treated in greater depth. But first attention is due to some puzzling terminology.

The “Social Meeting” Puzzle

The movement back and forth from public exercises to the intimacy of the society tents seems to be a very important factor in leading people to conversion. But the correspondents of the camp meetings did not simply use the terms public and private exclusively. They also used the term “social” in a specific, but puzzling way. Examples include “social meeting,” “social prayers,” “social altar,” “social circle,” “social worship” and “social exercises.” Examination of the uses of the terms can help to define them. The following discussion assumes these are synonymous and will use the term “social meeting” to encompass them all.

“Social” gatherings not only took place in relation to camp meetings. Methodists held “social meetings” in various locations on their circuits throughout the year. One correspondent appreciated that some people learned new tunes at the camp meetings and brought them home “to add interest to our social meetings.”

The 1826 report of Rev. Greenleaf Greeley is of interest. That year the Norridgewock Circuit of Maine held a quarterly meeting which

was made happily instrumental in giving the work a new impulse.—After this it became more and more interesting, and spread in different directions through the town; social meetings were frequent, and fully attended, and often very interesting, while Christians of different denominations heartily joined, and took an active part together. In some instances, we have seen more than 30 seated in a

circle together, who were anxiously concerned for their souls, and inquiring the way to Zion.\textsuperscript{71}

The term is also found in Methodist writings other than \textit{Zion’s Herald}.\textsuperscript{72} It seems from these accounts that “social” meetings may have been the regularly scheduled prayer meetings of members of Methodist societies. Thus one could judge whether they were “fully attended” or not. This account has some resonance with the pattern presented by Lester Ruth and Russell Richey of Methodists at private worship “opening the doors” to invite the public.\textsuperscript{73} But it seems that Methodists holding social meetings at Norridgwock invited Christians of other denominations to take part in the “social meetings” from the start, rather than meeting in private first and then holding a second meeting for those outside of the society.\textsuperscript{74}

Whatever the pattern at home, “social meetings” also took place at camp meetings. If social meetings generally meant gatherings of members of the societies, it

\textsuperscript{71} Greenleaf Greely, “Readfield and Starks, Maine,” \textit{ZH} (11 October 1826): [2].

\textsuperscript{72} The term is also found in other Methodist writings besides the camp meetings literature. Abel Stevens writes that Philip Munger “attended the social meetings of his charge,” and that Solomon Sias stayed with a brother “at whose house one of the social prayer meetings was held.” Stevens, \textit{Memorials}, 179, 323. James Porter wrote of class meetings, “They are generally opened by singing and prayer, after which the leader gives some account of his own experience the past week, and then inquires of each concerning their spiritual state, giving them such advices, as he proceeds, as appear to him most suitable. They may rise and speak, or remain on their seats and answer such questions as the leader may propose. Some pursue one course, and some the other, according to their respective tastes and states of mind. The main point is to find out where they are, and to help them to work out their salvation. The less formal, and the more social and conversational the exercises, the more satisfactory and profitable.” James Porter, \textit{A Compendium of Methodism Embracing the History and Present Condition of Its Various Branches in All Countries: With a Defence of Its Doctrinal, Governmental, and Prudential Peculiarities} (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1851), 459.

\textsuperscript{73} Ruth, \textit{A Little Heaven Below}, 164-174.

\textsuperscript{74} Ruth noted that in New England “closed meetings seemed particularly distasteful.” Ibid., 115.
would be logical for them to take place within each society tent. While some statements indicate this to be true, it appears that social meetings could take place in other locations as well, including before the stand.\textsuperscript{75} At Yarmouthport in 1871, social meetings were clearly something other than tent meetings.\textsuperscript{76} Were social meetings at the stand still generally organized by society, a cluster from one society to the left, and another society to the right? Perhaps the changes in structures by 1871 in Yarmouthport made it possible for social meetings to meet elsewhere, while other kinds of prayer meetings still gathered in tents.\textsuperscript{77}

Social meetings often followed a preaching service, but not always. In 1844 at Plymouth, New Hampshire, the camp held “social exercises” first thing on the first morning, following which they “repaired to the stand to listen to the introductory sermon.” The same author reported that the “social meetings [one] day were generally spiritual and interesting.”\textsuperscript{78} Also in 1844, the people at the encampment in Windsor, Maine, quickly finished setting up their tents on the first day and were able “to

\textsuperscript{75} Compare “the social meetings in the tents, public prayer meetings and love feast, were seasons of special interest with us,” with “the social exercises at the stand and in the tents, were spiritual and powerful. Our brethren and sisters had a mind to work.” N[evell] Culver, “Rockingham Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (17 September 1856): 150; Stephen Eastman, \textit{ZHWJ} (2 October 1850): 157.

\textsuperscript{76} “The social meetings were many of them seasons of unusual power and interest. The same was true of most, if not all of the tent meetings.” “Yarmouthport Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (7 September 1871): 429.

\textsuperscript{77} See the discussion of prayer groups segregated by gender and age at Martha’s Vineyard on page 351 below. L. G. Westgate, “Martha's Vineyard Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (14 September 1871): 441.

commence social worship at an early hour” before everyone was called to the stand at 7
o’clock in the evening for the introduction of public services.  

Descriptions of who was present at the social meetings shed some light on the
question. Preachers were expected to help lead the social meetings. At Corinth, Vermont,
in 1838, the preachers from the Montpelier District were “eager to do all in their power to
advance the cause of God, were generally present at all the social meetings, ready to
contribute their full share to the interest of each.”  

However, the brethren and sisters
spoke at them as well. Camp Meeting John Allen felt it necessary to remind the men to
“let all the sisters take a part in the social meetings.”  

Enoch Mudge’s camp meeting hymnal includes descriptions of what took place at
social meetings in New England camp meetings through two hymns designated for
“social worship.”  

The first hymn is written in the first person plural, and the activity
described includes staying in God’s presence, rising to sing praise, bowing to pray, and
waiting on God. The final verses are a prayer that God would apply and seal his word,

82 “Bow thine ear, thou heav’nly King, While we in thy presence stay; While we rise, thy praise to
sing, While we bow to thee and pray. Grant to us thy Spirit, Lord, May we wait on thee aight; Now apply,
and seal thy word, Send us down thy heavenly light. Strengthen every feeble soul, Grant them each thy
gracious power; Heal the sick, and make them whole, All thy blessings on us shower. Let the flame of love
arise, Melt away the dross an d tin; Make us by thy wisdom wise, Purify our souls from sin.” Mudge, The
American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book, 65. “How happy, Lord, thy servants are, Who meet to worship thee;
They meet to join in praise and prayer. And wait thy power to see. As thy disciples did of old, the promis’d
dressing claim; so these thy servants now take hold by faith, and plead the same. Lord, didst thou not in
ancient days Thy promises fulfil? So these are waiting in they ways; O Lord thy promise seal.” Ibid., 109.
send down heavenly light, strengthen and grant power to every feeble soul, heal the sick and make them whole, shower all his blessings, and let the flame of love arise to melt away dross and purify them from sin. The second hymn is in the third person plural calling those gathered “servants” of the Lord who meet to worship, praise, pray and wait for God’s power. In the later verses of this hymn, those gathered plead for God’s blessing, and wait for God to seal his promises. These descriptions all lend themselves to the conclusion that social meetings were times when the members of societies, led by the itinerant preachers (or at least their class leaders and local preachers), met for worship that included singing, testimonies, and prayer.

An article from 1859 describes a “prairie camp meeting” and a skeptical Mr. Downs who ventured into the meeting to deliver food from his farm. Passing by a “social meeting” while making a delivery, Mr. Downs saw a young man who stepped upon a bench, and in a clear, musical voice, spoke thus: “How are you, fellow sinner; how have you enjoyed yourself since we last met? Has there been no heart yearnings, no longings for something beyond, for something higher that this life affords?” And thus gaining their attention he gave an exhortation that was full of power, and wound up by inviting them to the altar. In response several “drew near for social prayer.”

This seems to be in line with the practice Ruth and Richey call “opening the doors.”

“Social exercises” did not include preaching, and were listed as events separate from preaching. At East Wilton, Maine, in 1841, there was a “social meeting” one morning instead of preaching. They were sometimes described as distinct from public

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prayer meetings and from love feasts. In 1856, at Rockingham, Vermont, they had “social meetings in the tents” as well as “public prayer meetings and [a] love feast.”85 But at Northport in 1853 there were “public social exercises” that were neither preaching, nor tent meetings.86

Whenever they happened, social services were stirring. In 1847, there was an article offering advice on how to “render camp meetings most profitable.” On the list was a suggestion that the campers take time for their own private prayer because “the excitement of the public and social services may degenerate into a species of mere spiritual dissipation.”87 Some concern was voiced that social meetings afforded some “indiscrete persons [to] thrust themselves into prominence, and get, many times, a leading influence.”88 But, in 1856, the correspondent for the Kendall’s Mills camp wrote, “The order was excellent, the public services appropriate, the social meetings highly interesting.”89 The inspiration and passion of the camp meeting was clearly sustained in part by these intimate gatherings of prayer and praise.

85 N[ewell] Culver, “Rockingham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (17 September 1856): 150. For further evidence that social meetings were also not “public,” see E[ward] Davies, “Bethel Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (28 September 1859): 310. Davies wrote, “A blessed and hallowed spirit pervaded both the public and social meetings.”


89 J[ohn] Young, “Kennebec Valley Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (24 August 1856): 135. At first the term “interesting” seemed significant. As it was used frequently in the camp meeting reports of 1926 it seemed to contrast with the “red hot Methodists” described in 1824. But extensive work with the reports of the nineteenth century reveal that “interesting” was used frequently throughout to describe camp meetings, and seemed to signify something more than just “amusing”—perhaps “engaging,” or “worthy of attention.”
Camp meeting conversion was linked with both the public “social circle” at the stand and the more intimate prayer meetings that generally took place in the tents. From the context it seems that “unconverted” friends were welcome to take part in both types of meetings along with members of the Methodist societies.

It is known to all camp meeting going people that the work of getting people under the influence and power of the gospel is mainly done in the prayer meeting held in the tents both before and after preaching. Those who may attend our camp meetings are more or less waked up by the preaching; but the power of Christian sympathy, the real eloquence of the sanctified heart, is felt most powerfully in the social circle. The prayer meetings on the camp ground are held when there is not so much of a multitude who come to the ground as mere spectators, sight-seeing being their main object; so that the greatest good of a camp meeting is effected by those who count the cost, make the sacrifice, and go with a purpose to stay on the ground, taking as many of their unconverted friends with them as possible.90

It is noteworthy that in the later years of this study, the term “social” seems to be used in a second sense, more akin to common usage today. Rather than having to do with a Methodist society, “social” became much more generic. In 1850, Hebron Vincent stated that camp meetings produced much good and mused that “Man is a social as well as a religious being, and as such ought to avail himself of suitable opportunities for the cultivation of his social nature.”91


91 His thought continued, “Some indeed have tauntingly exclaimed against Camp Meetings, by alleging that Christians go to these meetings for the same purpose for which the world’s people at large go to a social gathering – say a ‘pic nic’ – viz: ‘to have (as they say) a good time’ to exchange friendly greetings, and enjoy the comforts and courtesies of the occasion.

However true it may be that some professing Christians may have attended these meetings for the purposes named, we do not believe, nay we know it is not the case with the mass; and even if it were so, we should think it by no means an unworthy object, nor time and money misspent, provided the ceremonies were rationally conducted. Tired nature occasionally seeks repose from the toil and strife of business. The ancient Jewish festivals were no less the means of restoring the social and intellectual equilibrium, than of promoting religious sentiment and devotional feeling. Those institutions, like the holy Sabbath, even viewed as mere matters of rational policy, were no less economical in their provisions than sacred in their tendencies. So with our annual gatherings.
Taking all the above into account, it seems most plausible that social meetings in the midst of the camp meetings were gatherings of members of each particular society that was present, with their class leaders, local preachers and the itinerants. The main activity in social meetings was prayer for those among them who were seeking experiences of God’s justifying, sanctifying and perfecting grace. Everyone was encouraged to speak, men and women, young and old, to “tell how it was with their souls,” and those who were anxious or mourning would then offer up prayers for themselves while other members of the society simultaneously prayed for them. Singing was a regular part of these meetings because, as Dickson Bruce noted, the camp meeting hymns and spiritual songs were mostly ones which gave assurance of the availability of God’s grace.92

When campers began to bring their own family tents, these “luxurious arrangements, and the very frequent occupancy of them during the times of the public and social services” proved a threat to the mission of the camp meetings.93 When there were only society tents, there was no place else for campers to go, especially at night and

But these benefits, after all, are not to be regarded as the only, nor yet the principal ones. And those professing Christians commit a great, and in some sense, an irreparable mistake, who come to spend the week in mere social enjoyments, and thus allow to pass by one of the most important occasions of a whole life-time for securing permanent and lasting spiritual advantages. This hallowed occasion was, however, otherwise improved –improved for spiritual advancement mostly – by happy hundreds who left the cares of the world at their homes, and came up to this spiritual Jerusalem, this city of tents, to worship, not the leafy canopy which overshadows us, but the great Builder of this magnificent temple. Nor are such the only ones thus spiritually benefited; many who came with cold, dark and unbelieving hearts, here left their load of guilt, and returned to their houses rejoicing.” Hebron Vincent, “Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (4 September 1850): 142.

92 Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, 97.

during rainy times. So even if they were not very interested in the prayers, they could not help but see and hear what was taking place. Once family tents and cottages were added to the grounds, people had more alternatives available regarding how and with whom they spent their time. The alternation between public and intimate shared spiritual experience no longer structured the gathering.

**Preaching**

Erect thy banners, heavenly king  
As we the Stand erect;  
May Preachers thy salvation bring  
And souls to thee direct.\(^{94}\)

As noted above, preaching was a key element in every day of a camp meeting, occurring three to five times a day. These were the times when the whole camp meeting gathered before the stand to hear the word of God. It was an opportunity for the Methodist preachers to link the Christian scriptures, interpreted through Wesley’s way of salvation, in a way that reached both the hearts and minds of the congregation. The rhetoric that was used was powerful, impressing images and evoking strong feelings that led to responses. The preaching services were the place where the grammar of Methodist discourse about salvation was taught and reinforced.

As a category in the database compiled for this study, preaching is by far the most common item mentioned in *Zion’s Herald*. Even the least detailed reports of a camp meeting would list the names of the preachers, and a great many reports gave details

about when each preacher spoke and what text he took for his sermon. Sometimes a brief synopsis of the sermon, and/or the response of the congregation, was included as well. Following the lead of those accounts, one can assess the role that preaching played in the liturgy of the camp meetings. We can see who was trusted to preach, what texts informed their preaching, and the way particular preachers shaped the discourse of these gatherings by tying it to the narrative of the Bible.

Who Preached

Because the role of the preachers was so formative for Methodist discourse spoken at the camp meetings, the leaders naturally were protective of bestowing the authority to speak. While the grossly exaggerated depictions of camp meetings seem to suggest that anyone could speak, in reality the preachers’ stand in New England was tightly controlled. While there are a few instances of some Methodist preachers at the camp meetings who were not at the time under appointment, almost all of them show up on appointment lists a year or two after they preached. While more research would be necessary to be certain, it is very likely that those who were given the stand to preach at New England MEC camp meetings had at least received a license to preach. In the case of the small number of preachers who came from other denominations, it is also clear that not just any clergy person’s theology would be welcome at the stand.

The amount of information about the preachers in this study is tantalizing. It would be interesting to know if, for example, the pattern of allowing younger preachers

\[95\text{ With enough time one could figure out how far each preacher traveled to be at a camp meeting (whether from the same circuit as the meeting was located, the same district, or from another annual} \]
on the stand in the more remote parts of the New England region in 1823 persisted over time. Were highly popular camp meetings like Martha’s Vineyard and Millennial Grove more selective about the age and experience of their preachers? Unfortunately, finding the answer to many of these questions is beyond the limits of this dissertation.

What has been possible is the creation of a list of named preachers with the texts they took (and any comments offered about their preaching), correlated with what camp meetings they attended (thus giving information about the year and place where they delivered each sermon). This list, which does not include the many instances when preachers are named without noting the scripture texts, extends thirty-one pages and includes over 350 individuals preaching between one and five sermons each. Seven people appear on this list five times, four people show up four times, twenty-seven people are on the list three times, and fifty-six preachers are on the list twice. Some of the persons on this list, such as Orange Scott and Wilbur Fisk, are better known to Methodist history, and one can consider the “texts they took” in relation to their personal histories. Others on this list remain unknown, such as J. E. C. Sawyer “of Providence” who preached at Martha’s Vineyard in 1871, but whose full name does not even appear in the Providence Conference journal of that year. The following is a synopsis of some conference), and where each preacher was in his career (whether newly “accepted on trial” or an elder at the end of a fifty-year vocation, or the presiding elder), or conversely which preachers had little involvement with camp meetings. Such information could be further examined to determine the relationship of age to preaching, gauge the proportion of preachers on a district who preached at a camp meeting, and track the preachers who were at more than one camp meeting in a year. The data could be compared by district and annual conference, and scrutinized for changes over time.
characteristics that *Zion’s Herald* reveals about the camp meeting preachers in New England between 1823 and 1871 by using the top seven preachers as case studies.

When looking at all the camp meetings of this study, Camp Meeting John Allen’s\(^96\) name appears as a preacher eleven times,\(^97\) including once in 1847 at Eastham and twice in 1862 at Martha’s Vineyard. The texts for five of his camp meeting sermons are noted.\(^98\) He preached a sermon in 1832 as a licensed local preacher, three years before he was appointed on trial as a circuit rider.\(^99\) Thirty years later, the correspondent for the 1862 East Poland camp meeting said John Allen “talked as no other mortal man could talk.”\(^100\)

John Allen’s enthusiasm for camp meetings accounts for his nickname; he attended 374 camp meetings in fifty-seven years and spoke at many of them.\(^101\) But John Allen had difficulty throughout his career satisfying his “brethren” that he was truly able to preach. As described in his biography, a proper sermon was defined as having three main parts, each with three sub-parts, and was to be delivered from memory. John Allen

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\(^96\) See Chapter Five for a basic biography of John Allen.

\(^97\) There is no “text” cited for six of them.

\(^98\) All in the State of Maine where he resided: Rumford in 1832, Vassalborough in 1841, Northport and Kendall’s Mills in 1856, and East Poland in 1862.


\(^100\) John Collins, “Poland Camp Meeting, Maine,” *ZHWJ* (17 September 1862): 150.

was passionate and able to rouse a crowd, but “his mind like a balky horse, would not work in the harness of any prescribed method in preaching, and he was obliged to allow his thoughts a free rein.”\textsuperscript{102} His skill as an exhorter, however, was effective in stirring up revivals, and colleagues called upon him to help with protracted meetings.\textsuperscript{103} In terms of propagating the discourse of camp meetings, Camp Meeting John was an expert. He was known to remedy other preachers’ dull sermons by springing to his feet and singing “Blow, Ye Trumpets Blow” and “Come Sinners to the Gospel Feast” until “smiles and tears and hearty amens would come from every side, and the whole face of things [would] be changed, as nature, parched and dusty, is freshened and cleaned by a copious shower.”\textsuperscript{104}

In contrast to Allen’s place on the margins of official Methodist preaching circles were the presiding elders, who frequently took their turn at the preaching stand. It seems that they were expected to preach at least once at the camp meetings they organized. One example is James Porter, who was received into the New England Conference on trial in 1830 and proved to be highly influential as a Methodist Episcopal minister. He served as

\textsuperscript{102} Allen, \textit{The Life of Rev. John Allen}, 28, 33. Though he was accepted as a member on trial and ordained a deacon in 1835, Allen never settled in to the normal life of a Methodist elder. Ibid., 33. Allen’s passion for camp meetings lasted to the end of his life when he died at the Livermore camp meeting of 1887 at the age of 92. Ibid., 126.

\textsuperscript{103} Including a revival on the Livermore circuit when Nathan A. Soule and his brother Francis were converted. Finally, after bouncing between the Maine and East Maine Conferences, interspersed with times on location, the Maine Conference re-admitted him in 1862 as “a supernumerary without appointment, so as to leave him at liberty to engage in evangelistic work wherever there might be a call for his services.” Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 43.
presiding elder twice, was elected to General Conference seven successive times, was involved in discussions about slavery and slave holding, and in strengthening the lay leadership of the church. Porter also helped to manage the business of Zion’s Herald and wrote books about camp meetings and revivals as well as an early “History of Methodism.” Not surprisingly, in this study there are nine instances of James Porter preaching at the camp meetings. Of the sermon at Webster, the correspondent said that Brother Porter applied the scriptures to the thousands gathered before the stand and led them to “a heart searching time.”

Another presiding elder who appeared frequently as a camp meeting preacher in the newspapers is Heman Nickerson of Maine. Still a deacon in 1823 and 1824, by 1832

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105 First of the Worcester District in the 1840s and then of the Boston District in the 1850s.


107 Porter called an anti-slavery convention in 1838 in Lowell, Massachusetts, and as delegate at the 1844 General Conference, he helped draw up plans of separation that divided the Methodist Episcopal Church, South from the MEC due to irreconcilable differences over slavery. *Ibid.*, 294-295.


111 Porter, *A Compendium of Methodism*.

112 Twice at the Hebron camp meeting of 1832, once at Eastham in 1841, twice at the Webster meeting of 1844 while he was presiding elder, once each in Southampton, Massachusetts, and Uncasville, Connecticut, in 1850, once at Sterling in 1859 and at the East Livermore, Maine, and Hatfield, Massachusetts, meetings of 1871.

he was serving as presiding elder of the furthest north district of St. Croix, and frequently was appointed to be a presiding elder thereafter, though further south in the mid-Maine districts of Readfield, Augusta and Gardiner. As presiding elder, Nickerson preached twice in 1838 at the camp meeting in Strong, Maine, presenting the opening and concluding sermons of the week and, in 1841, he preached the opening sermon for the Madison, Maine, camp meeting. In 1853, Presiding Elder Nickerson organized two camp meetings in his district. There is no report in Zion’s Herald about the one at Bowdoinham, but Nickerson is listed as preaching once at the Bethel meeting, though no text is included. In 1859, when Nickerson was appointed to the church in Bath, Maine, he preached a sermon at East Poland and another at the Bethel camp meeting.

A third presiding elder who shows up in this study as a frequent preacher is Justin Spaulding, who served mostly in New Hampshire. Though he was admitted on trial in 1823, Spaulding only first appears as a camp meeting preacher when he was presiding elder of the Haverhill (New Hampshire) District in 1844 and 1847. He organized and preached at camp meetings in Bath (where he preached twice and offered “remarks”) and Plymouth, New Hampshire (where he preached three times) in 1844, and did the same for a camp meeting in Stark, New Hampshire, in 1847 (where he preached twice).

But not all those who preached often at camp meetings were presiding elders. Asa Kent entered the ministry in 1802, and served in southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island for the period of this study. By 1838 he was being referred to as “Father

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Kent” in the newspapers as a sign of respect for his age. The data shows that he preached once and gave an address at Marshfield in 1823, preached once at Westmoreland, New Hampshire, in 1824 (on his way to annual conference), three times at Martha’s Vineyard (twice in 1838 and once in 1844—also giving an address that year) and once in Durham, New Hampshire, in 1844 when he was superannuated. The newspaper accounts that mention Kent gave no details about any of the sermons they listed.

The much younger Henry H. Hartwell was appointed to charges in the New Hampshire Annual Conference, being first appointed on trial in 1841. Like Justin Spaulding, Hartwell appeared as a preacher at the 1844 camp meetings in Bath and Plymouth, the 1847 camp meeting in Stark, New Hampshire, and also at three 1859 camp meetings in Sterling and Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts, and Newmarket, New Hampshire. Interestingly, the year he ventured to camp meetings in the New England and Providence Conferences was when he was serving one of the congregations in Lawrence, Massachusetts.115 There was no further commentary offered in the newspapers about Brother Hartwell’s preaching.

The last group of camp meeting preachers in this sample includes Lewis Bates and his sons George W. and Lewis B. Bates. Lewis Sr., a contemporary of Asa Kent, joined the MEC at the age of twenty-one and became a member of the New England Conference three years later in 1804.116 During the period of this study he served in the

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115 Lawrence, being east of the Merrimack River, had always been part of the New Hampshire Annual Conference.

116 Mudge, History of the New England Conference, 78.
New England Conference through 1835, and then the Providence Conference until he was superannuated. He died in 1865, after sixty-one years as a preacher.

The senior Rev. Bates is listed as preaching eight times in the data for this study. He preached once at Marshfield and twice at the Hebron camp meeting of 1823 and once in Middleboro, Massachusetts, in 1841. In 1844, Bates preached twice at Martha’s Vineyard and once at the camp meeting in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. The report of the 1853 Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting records him as preaching there once as well. No descriptions accompanied the reports of these sermons.

Lewis Bates’ older son George W. Bates was accepted on trial and appointed to Marlborough, Massachusetts, in 1838. He was ordained a deacon in 1838 and remained in the New England Conference for sixteen years. Zion’s Herald listed George W. Bates as preaching at the Webster, Massachusetts, camp meeting in 1844, and at Millennial Grove in 1847.

Lewis Bates’ younger son Lewis B. served as a preacher for fifty-eight years, with twenty-five of them at the East Boston church with a focused ministry to sailors. He

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117 Barnstable (1823 and 1824), Wellfleet (1826), Easton and Stoughton (1829), Mansfield (1832), and Saugus (1835).

118 Sictuate Harbour (1838), Taunton (1841), South Dartmouth (1844), and West Sandwich (1847).


120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., 217.
also took a turn as president of the New England Methodist Historical Society.\textsuperscript{122} Most relevant to this study, Lewis B. Bates served as president of the Asbury Grove Camp Meeting Association for a time and preached there for “forty consecutive years.”\textsuperscript{123} He also had “a pleasant home” at Martha’s Vineyard.\textsuperscript{124} Two sermons given by Lewis B. Bates are recorded in the data.

A few observations come to the fore when looking at such data. First, the tendency for most preachers was to stay in their own district or state most of the time. The exceptions are found in the eccentric Camp Meeting John and those, such as Henry Hartwell, who lived closer to Boston during the latter period of this study and could use public transportation to go farther away. Those preachers who were superannuated also seem to travel greater distances to attend camp meetings, perhaps because they then had the time to make such long journeys. It also seems that there may be a correlation between being a presiding elder and preaching more often, but this could be due either to the expectations that presiding elders would organize camp meetings each year on their districts and preach at the meetings they organized,\textsuperscript{125} or to the leadership skills and charisma of the men who were appointed to preside over districts. Finally, the diaries of Charles A. Merrill reveal that the development of theological education in New England

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 317.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 399.

\textsuperscript{124} “‘The Kingdom by the Sea’,” ZH (10 August 1871): 378.

\textsuperscript{125} A job description for a nineteenth-century presiding elder in New England would require the candidate have both strong charisma and the skills of a bureaucrat. The rarity of finding both qualities in one person may explain why many presiding elders were appointed to this position for many years, even decades, while appointments to circuits or stations lasted only one to two years at a time.
served as a catalyst for Methodist ministers to attend more than one camp meeting in a summer so as to draw spiritual strength from one another.

By 1862, the bigger camp meetings were drawing preachers from much farther away, and also drawing from a pool of esteemed New Englanders who were not part of the MEC. The list of preachers at Martha’s Vineyard in 1862 includes Barnas Sears, the Baptist president of Brown University, Mr. Jones, also a Baptist minister who was serving as Superintendent of the Worcester city Public Schools, and John Lindsey of New York City, who was a Methodist professor at Wesleyan University. Also, Siegfried Kristeller, a converted Jew from Wesleyan University, preached at Martha’s Vineyard and Asbury Grove, while Barlow Weed Gorham, author of the *Camp Meeting Manual* and a member of the Wyoming Conference, preached at Martha’s Vineyard, Asbury Grove, Sterling and Willimantic in August that same year. At these more popular camp meetings, the discourse “at the stand” was no longer only the purview of the passionate Methodist preachers appointed in New England as it was in previous decades.

What Was Preached

What was that spiritual discourse? Just what did the preachers say to the crowds who gathered? What texts did they use and how did they move the people to respond so dramatically? Were a small number of texts used over and over again? How did the

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preachers interpret the pericopes? In the reports of the sixteen years of camp meetings reviewed for this study, there were 539 texts cited. It is important to keep in mind these are only the sermons that were reported every third year of the span of the study, and many known camp meetings had no report or a very brief report with no list of sermon texts. Undoubtedly an even wider spectrum of texts would be found in a full accounting of all the meetings held during this time, but much can be revealed when looking at these 539 texts and the accompanying information about the sermons and preachers.

**General Findings**

Of these known sermons, thirty books of the Old Testament and twenty-three books of the New Testament were used. It is interesting to note that the two books of the Bible centered on female characters, Esther and Ruth, were excluded by these male preachers, and Philemon, which expects a slave to return to his master, was set aside at a time when abolition was a central concern of so many New England Methodists. Of the books of the Bible used for preaching, the most popular were three of the Gospels (John—forty-five sermons, Luke—forty-three sermons and Matthew—forty-two sermons). The next favorite was the Book of Psalms (thirty-five sermons), followed by Acts (twenty-nine), Hebrews (twenty-seven), Romans (twenty-three), Isaiah (twenty-one), Revelation (nineteen), 1 Corinthians (eighteen), Proverbs, Jeremiah and 1 John (each at fifteen sermons). 1 Peter merited thirteen sermons, and the Gospel of Mark,

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127 Those not used in the Old Testament include Leviticus, Ruth, Ezra, and Esther, and five of the lesser prophets: Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Haggai and Malachi. The books of the New Testament not used for preaching in the sample include 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, and 2 and 3 John.
Ephesians, 2 Corinthians and 1 Timothy were the sources of ten sermons each. Seven Old Testament books and the book of Jude were used just once in this set. Methodist preachers were clearly in the habit of utilizing most of the Bible as they proclaimed the word of God.

The specific texts cited in the camp meeting reports give even more evidence that the preachers made extensive use of the Bible. No pericope\textsuperscript{128} appears in this data set more than eight times. Five pericopes were used six times, nine pericopes were used four times, six pericopes were used three times and many pericopes were used twice. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine each scripture text used, but it is nonetheless revealing to scrutinize those used most frequently, consider particular thematic patterns found in the body of texts as a whole, and consider how the texts may relate to the discourse of camp meetings.

\textit{Mapping Out the Wesleyan Way of Salvation}

A large portion of the Bible was utilized in preaching, adding a variety and depth to the discourse presented at camp meeting through many scriptural characters, stories and ideas. The interpretive lens used by the Methodist Episcopal preachers of New England as they read the Bible was clearly the Methodist way of salvation. Though there was not any formal written lectionary for Methodist Episcopal use, there appears to be a

\footnote{128} A section of scripture—usually a story, or saying, used for preaching. Unlike today when preachers are taught to pay careful attention to context and use several verses of a chapter for one sermon, the common preaching practice in the nineteenth century was to “take a text” which meant one or two verses.
logic to the correlation of scripture passages to various points along this way of salvation (awakening, mourning, justification, sanctification, perfection) that employed people’s imagination, engaged people’s hearts, and fostered their conversion and spiritual growth.

Awakening the People to God’s Presence and Judgment

As the term “awakening” infers, one main aim of preaching was to proclaim that the living God was now in the midst of people who had not experienced God’s saving grace for themselves. Preaching was first and foremost a tool for alerting people to God at work in the world at large, and in their lives in particular.

One example is a sermon text that was used for the opening sermon every time that it appears in the data. John 11:55-56 raised the rhetorical question up before the congregation, “What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?” Brother Putnam explained that the “Savior’s presence was necessary” and he described “what we must do, and what avoid doing, to secure his attendance” at the camp meeting. The testimony the reporters gave of the sermons on this text is striking. One said, “During the service, it

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129 Listed five times in the data, the verses read: “And the Jews’ Passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?” It was the basis of the sermon delivered by Presiding Elder Heman Nickerson at the Strong, Maine, camp meeting of 1838, and Simon Putnam preached from it on the first morning of the camp meeting in Webster, Massachusetts, in 1844. It was the basis for the “practical remarks” given by Presiding Elder Charles C. Cone at the Bethel, Maine, camp meeting of 1856 and the text of the first sermon of the Sterling, Massachusetts, camp meeting of 1859 preached by James W. Mowry, as well as the text for the “key-note” sermon by Josiah P. Hooper of the Holiness camp meeting at Bath, New Hampshire, in 1871. John Allen, “Strong, Sept. 30, 1838,” MWJ (13 October 1838): [2]; William M. Gordon, “Webster Camp-Meeting, Worcester District,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 147; K[insman] Atkinson, “Bethel Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (1 October 1856): 158; Albert Gould, “Sterling Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (14 September 1859): 147; Robert S. Stubbs, “Bath Camp-Meeting,” ZH (28 September 1871): 461.
was manifest that the Savior had truly come to the feast.”130 Another wrote, “We felt that Jesus manifested himself to his people, and his presence rendered the feast most delightful.”131 A third testified:

Then “came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you;” and the hearty response was evidence that all were ready to acknowledge, “The master is come” already, and a hundred happy souls shouted forth the vigorous amen, and loud hallelujah, while many of God’s children followed the discourse in witnessing to the goodness and mercy of God which had preserved and brought them safely through life’s storms, to another annual feast in this consecrated grove.132

Apparently these sermons led campers to experience the active presence of Jesus in their midst.

Choosing a different text, preacher Justin Spaulding, like Brother Putman, “clearly [showed] how we might draw near unto God, especially in the use of the means of grace at camp meeting.”133 Camp meetings were looked upon as sacramental, a sure and certain means for experiencing God’s grace.

In a similar way, Presiding Elder Haman Nickerson drew the congregation’s attention to the presence of the living God when he preached on Hebrews 2:6 (“What is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him?”) in

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Madison, Maine, in 1841.\textsuperscript{134} Reporter John Allen quoted Hebrews 11:6 in his review of the sermon: “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”\textsuperscript{135} Camp meeting congregations were also urged to ask, seek and find with the expectation that a living God would actively respond.\textsuperscript{136}

One tactic preachers took to help people experience the presence of God was to preach in a way that enabled the people to see their own current life stories as similar to those found in scripture. One such paradigmatic story used frequently at camp meetings was that of Jacob, who, after lying to his father Isaac and cheating his brother Esau, encountered God in a vision while he was running away from home. Though at that time Jacob only related to God as the God of his father (not yet claiming his own relationship with God), his vision led him to affirm, “Surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.” When James Thwing preached on this text, “many shouted and praised the Lord with a loud voice.”\textsuperscript{137}

Looking at the whole camp meeting event, or portions of it, as similar to events in the Bible also helped those present to open up their hearts to the experience of God. On a steamer to Cape Cod in 1844, Brother Stephen Remington preached on the story of the

\textsuperscript{134} John Allen, “A Good Camp Meeting in Madison, Me,” ZHWJ (13 October 1841): 164.

\textsuperscript{135} This text from Hebrews was also used at least twice. A[aron] Lummus, “Camp Meeting,” ZH (23 June 1824): [2]. J[ohn] Perrin, “Poland Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (5 October 1859): 158.


Israelites traveling through the wilderness, setting up a tabernacle to house the Ark of the Covenant whenever they rested in tents. There were many such sermons pointing out that the Israelites worshipped God in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land. Camp meetings were also compared to the Festival of Booths. Turning to the New Testament, camp meetings were also equated with the experience of the Transfiguration. Lozien Peirce responded to Brother May’s sermon by saying, “like Peter of old, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here.’” Camp meetings were also seen as analogous to feeding of the multitudes. As people camped in the wilderness, they felt God’s presence and were spiritually fed.

Preachers frequently equated themselves with the original apostles. Ebenezer Blake preached from Acts 4:31, “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” Samuel Kelly

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138 Numbers 10:35-36, which says, “And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.” S[tephen] Remington, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 146.


140 Lozien Pierce, “Reformation and Camp Meetings,” ZHWJ (22 September 1841): 150.

141 Heman Nickerson preached on Luke 11:17 “And they did eat and were all filled.” “The bread of life multiplied wonderfully in his hand, while he, by the blessing of God, distributed the same to the multitude. The shouts of the redeemed were heard in every direction.” John Allen, “Strong, Sept. 30, 1838,” MWJ (13 October 1838): [2].

preached from Acts 5:32, “And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the 
Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.”143 

In the process of awakening people to the presence of God, the preachers included 
scriptural depictions of God’s judgment on human sinfulness. These are the verses that 
led so many to feel convicted and anxious. Hebrews 2:1-3 (in several subsets) is one of 
the two texts that appeared most frequently.144 Asking “how shall we escape, if we 
neglect so great salvation?” the full text reads,

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have 
heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels 
was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just 
recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; 
which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by 
them that heard him.

Judging by the comments that went with some of the texts, the focus was on “the 
greatness of salvation” or, more pointedly, on those who neglected that salvation. The 
text affirmed the Methodist preachers’ practice of proclaiming salvation to anyone who 
would listen, and offered a warning to those who hear the good news of salvation but 
neglect to embrace it.

New England camp meeting participants heard sermons focused on threats of 
death, judgment, and damnation to hell,145 which could be quite frightening. Elisha


144 It is in first place when ranking the texts by the number of times they appear the data set. Verse 
3 was preached at Hebron, Connecticut, and Bucksport, Maine, in 1823, Westfield, Massachusetts, in 1838, 
Eastham, Massachusetts, and Bath, Maine, in 1844 and Martha’s Vineyard in 1859. Verse 1 or verses 1-3 were preached at Brookfield, Vermont, in 1826 and Martha’s Vineyard in 1838.

Streeter “took” 1 Kings 19:11-13 about Elijah. The correspondent reported that during the sermon “it seemed as if the ‘strong wind,’ ‘earthquake,’ ‘fire,’ and ‘still small voice,’ mentioned in the text, had actually appeared: while our dear father in the Gospel, with his silver locks trembling in the breeze was exhorting sinners to fly to the ark of safety. Oh, it was an awful time.”146 John Twombly preached “on the anger of the Lord against the wicked founded on Zephaniah ii. 1, 3.” It was “one of the most earnest, and forcible and affecting appeals to sinners that we ever heard. The heart of the preacher was stirred, and the Lord was in the word.”147 At Brookfield, Vermont, in 1826, Brother John G. Dowe preached on Jeremiah 13.

Our dear brother, forgetting his usual theme of love and heaven, thundered forth the wrath of God, uncovered the flames of hell, and portrayed the misery of the wicked, in such glowing colors, that awful conviction was felt through the congregation.”148

New England Methodist preachers kept a place for hell-fire and damnation in their rhetoric, and convictions often came from these frightening descriptions of the end for those who fail to convert before they die.149

Sometimes pictures of damnation were held alongside visions of salvation in the same sermon. A sermon based on Matthew 16:24 and 26 was intended both to convict and encourage campers: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after


148 Horace Spaulding, ZH (12 July 1826): [2].

149 Zion’s Herald also includes several descriptions of people who died when they were not in a state of grace as a warning. For one example, see William White, “Pelham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (13 October 1841): 164. See also Lucy Fisk, “Natick, Massachusetts to Jabez Pratt.”
me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me;” and “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” These scripture verses allow for discourse that encourages people to become open for changes in their lives both for the reward of “gaining the whole world” and to avoid the punishment of losing one’s irreplaceable soul.

Wilder B. Mack preached on Luke 13:34 and “exhibited an alarming picture of the danger to which the wicked are exposed, and then painted, in lively colors, the willingness of Christ to save the chief of sinners, while the congregation listened with profound attention.” This close examination of actual scripture texts preached, however, does not fully support Dickson Bruce’s theory of the emotional tension at camp meetings. Clearly the evidence shows that the New England preachers were not just offering a steady diet of “hellfire and damnation” while the hymns presented the hope and joy of salvation. The judgment of God was an important subject, but the theme of God’s grace was always very strong in the camp meeting sermons. The emotional tension was explicit within the preaching.

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151 “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!” Greenleaf Greely, “Readfield and Starks, Maine,” ZH (11 October 1826): [2].

152 Bruce, And They All Sang Hallelujah, 97.
Assuring the People that God’s Justifying Grace is Free to All Who Believe

One reason that people flocked to camp meetings, and returned over and over again, is that they were fed a steady diet of good news from the preaching stand. The messages given by William Douglass and Josiah Scarritt were based on the message of the angels to the shepherds camping outside of Bethlehem, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”  

A great majority of camp meeting sermons promised the assurance of God’s justifying grace available to all people. In a similar way, 2 Chronicles 20:15 was offered to assure the congregation that God’s grace was ready to assist all who repented. The correspondent quoted the scripture and then commented, “The God of the armies of Israel was in the midst of us, and the battle went well.”

It is not surprising to find the heart of the third chapter of the Gospel of John among one of the most common pericopes used for camp meeting sermons. John 3:16 was the most common of the set, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting

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154 He said, “Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says the Lord to you: ‘Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God’s.’” Daniel Fuller, “Rumford Camp Meeting,” MWJ (4 October 1832): 154.

life.” Verses 14-15, which echo the promise “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life,” were “taken” once. Verse 14, “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up,” was once taken on its own. This verse may have led the preacher in a different direction, for his “subject was the brazen serpent on the pole, and Christ on the cross.” But it is still likely that the preacher referred to the sacrificial love of a God who wants the world to know salvation.

Romans 1:16 was another very common text for preaching assurance: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Rev. S. J. Carroll preached about the reasons for Paul’s confidence and Rev. C. C. Mason did the same, asserting that he had the same confidence as Paul. This text asserts that salvation is available to everyone who believes in the gospel of Christ.

Some sermons were aimed specifically at mourners who desired to experience God’s justifying grace. Gorham Greely, for example, quoted the Beatitudes in Matthew, and “gave us a very interesting description of the character of the mourner, and then

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157 This text can be found six times in the data and was preached in Maine and Massachusetts between 1832-1871.


exhibited the promise, ‘They shall be comforted,’ with considerable effect.”\(^{160}\) Using 2 Timothy 2:4 as a text, Brother Huse Dow “brought forward the willingness of God to save all, if they will comply with the requisitions of the gospel.”\(^{161}\)

Jacob again appears as a paradigm of the penitent, anxious mourner who is seeking God’s blessing in Genesis 32. On Jacob’s return home, he spent the night alone wrestling with his fear and a mysterious divine being. This text was specifically named for three sermons in the sample of sermons for this study, and it was frequently referenced in the camp meeting discourse. John Allen focused on the individual’s response with the words, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me.”\(^{162}\) But Brother Rodney Gage highlighted the role of the collective as he “spoke of the vastness of the work of the Christian church, the importance of commencing it aright, and her dependence on God for success.”\(^{163}\) Those who wrote of their conversion frequently describe periods of intense spiritual wrestling lasting for days, weeks and even months, quoting this passage of scripture as ways of describing their own experience.

Another narrative presented to the people because it fostered identification for those who were in a state of penitence was the Prodigal Son from Luke 15, which was preached eight times in the sample of sermons under review. The three portions of this pericope were “taken” including verse ten from Jesus’ introduction to the story:


“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” It was reported that one preacher described “why joy is heaven.” Verse eighteen was preached upon twice, which is the point of repentance of the son who says, “I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.’” Verse twenty-two, however, which describes the father’s gracious welcome, was preached the most times (“He said to his servants, ‘Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’”). One preacher spoke of the “best robe.” Once again the sermons focused on the positive experience and results of repentance. Though these “texts” were just one verse each, it is hard to imagine that the preachers could keep from telling the whole dramatic parable in the course of their sermons. One can see how such a text would encourage and entice those convicted of sin to repent, offering both the joy of heaven and the gifts to be gained in returning home. It could be applied to infidels and backsliders alike. One can imagine the service including the singing of a spiritual such as “I got a robe, you got a robe, all of God’s children got a robe.” The text could be used in a dramatic and positive way to woo the listeners toward salvation.


The story of Zacchaeus was also presented three times as a mirror for anxious mourners seeking justification and the gracious call of Jesus. William Tripp preached on the text, “The sinner was warmly entreated to come down and receive the Saviour.”168 Brother Nichols “set forth that the hinderance [sic] to salvation is in us; we are unbelieving, distrustful, and, therefore, unsaved and unblest [sic].”169 Jesus is ever ready to be reconciled to penitent sinners whenever they begin to believe.

Sometimes the image of the sinner in need of justifying grace was depicted as one in need of healing. Jeremiah 8:22 was used to help campers identify the sickness in their souls.

The sickness of the soul, the signs of that sickness, and the cure for it, were all clearly explained. Divine unction attended the word. The people rose from their seats and gazed with astonishment at the speaker. Sighs, groans, and loud shouts were heard from all parts of the congregation; for the word came like peals of thunder, and sinners trembled like the forest before the driving storm.170 Matthew 10:22 was preached to encourage the anxious to “endure to the end that we might be saved.”171 Mark 2:5 was also used to connect ill health to the need for forgiveness.172 The secretary reported that when Br. Beadle preached his sermon on this

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170 This is in reference to the “balm in Gilead,” which was used five times in the sermons under review.” C[harles] D. Cahoon, H[orace] Spalding, “Windsor, Vt,” ZH (18 October 1826): [2].


In a similar fashion, Daniel B. Randall used John 5:6 to promote healing.

“When Wilt thou be made whole?” He showed that this man’s natural desire was strikingly illustrative of man’s moral state by nature, which was natural, dreadful, universal, unhappy, inherent, and (without a remedy applied), fatal. Jesus Christ was presented as the great physician of soul and body, who is divine in his origin, nigh at hand, easy of access, heals gratuitously, and effectually, all that apply unto and receive him. The cure was represented as conditional, instantaneous, supernatural, and perfect. This was a blessed hour—the word was in demonstration and power of the Spirit. Two were made whole during the sermon, and we all felt that the great physician was present to heal.173

At other times sin was depicted as a prison. When Rev. Benjamin Pomeroy of the Troy Conference preached a sermon on Mark 16:16, “His wondrous sentences sent thrills of rapture into any a darkened heart. Chains and bolts, and bars, that long had kept Pauls’ and Silases’ imprisoned, yielded to the fiery rhetoric of this man of God. Such power, such quaintness and quietness combined and poured forth in torrents of burning eloquence and tender pathos. I could only think of Rev. John Dempster, whom he resembles much.”174

As one reporter wrote of Methodist sermons focused on God’s justifying grace, “The preaching was plain, pointed and practical. The object was not to display talents, but to do good—not to frighten men, but to persuade them to become reconciled to

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173 “When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?” Justin Spaulding, “Dresden Camp Meeting,” MWJ (20 September 1832): 146.

174 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Robert S. Stubbs, “Bath Camp-Meeting,” ZH (28 September 1871): 461.
God. James Cushing quoted Matthew 11:28 and “zealously” invited “sinners, mourners, backsliders, and imperfect believers” to Christ.

In the midst of promoting a Wesleyan view of salvation, Methodist Episcopal preachers sometimes attacked divergent theologies. Samuel Coggeshall’s sermon was described as “an able discourse of predestination. No doubt that those present who were saying ‘We are delivered to do these things,’ found this shelter torn from them—this refuge of lies swept away.” Methodist preachers also defended the divinity of Christ in camp meeting sermons based on John 1:1 and Acts 8:5. In preaching the latter, Asa Sanderson “presented Christ to the people as an Almighty, sympathetic, willing, and present Saviour.” Brother Stephen Remington used Hebrews 4:14 to defend “adherence to the Christian religion.” In 1844, Justin Spaulding refuted works righteousness when he preached on Romans 8:3-4 and “ably showed the inability of the

176 “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Daniel Fuller, “Rumford Camp Meeting,” MWJ (4 October 1832): 154.
178 Minor Raymond’s sermon was reportedly “on the divinity of Christ.” S[tephen] Remington, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 146. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
179 “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.” Justin Spaulding, “Dresden Camp Meeting,” MWJ (20 September 1832): 146.
180 “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” S[tephen] Remington, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 146.
law of God to save poor sinners.”\(^{181}\) When Brother Jefferson Hascall preached from Matthew 7:13, the secretary wrote, “As we might expect, it was full of evangelical truth. In a fearless, yet Christian manner, he met the evils of the church, and with a heart beating for her success, struck a blow whose good execution will long be witnessed.”\(^{182}\)

New England Methodists in this period considered that when a person had experienced God’s justifying grace they were “converted to God” whether they became a member of the MEC or not. But conversion was clearly not the only, or even the chief, aim of the preaching. It was evenly yoked with holiness; together these two themes drove the discourse of the camp meetings.

Inviting the People to a Life of Holiness

John Wesley drew his theology of Christian perfection from scripture,\(^{183}\) arguing that Christian perfection must be attainable in this life, if only by a very few, or Christ would not have given a directive. It is not at all surprising, then, that “Be perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect” was chosen by Rev. Moses Sherman, who “brought forward the blessed doctrine of holiness”\(^{184}\) to the camp meeting in Bath, New Hampshire, in

\(^{181}\) Pickens Boynton, “Camp-Meeting, Bath, Nh,” \textit{ZHWJ} (25 September 1844): 155. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

\(^{182}\) “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” W[illiam] J. Hambleton, “Sterling Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (17 September 1856): 150.

\(^{183}\) One key passage for Wesley was Matthew 5:48. John Wesley, \textit{Plain Account of Christian Perfection} (Boston: McDonald, Gill & Co., 1800), 35, 106.

1871. By this time the Holiness movement associated with Phoebe Palmer and the National Camp Meetings for Holiness had been going on for more than four years. But as one can see from the citations below, the theme of Christian holiness was strongly present in the discourse of New England camp meetings throughout the period under study, beginning well before Phoebe Palmer started hosting Tuesday night meetings in her parlor.

One of the primary scriptural paradigms for holiness used at camp meetings was Israel’s time in the wilderness. This is where God taught the newly freed Israelite slaves how to live according to God’s laws. Indeed, this is where the Decalogue was handed down, and progress through the wilderness led God’s people to the promised land.

The association of camp meetings with this image is pervasive, and the rhetoric and texts related to this narrative were frequently used for sermons. Charles Ainsworth preached to a large crowd assembled before the stand, saying:

“Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.” [Exodus 14:13] and then... “Go forward.” [Exodus 14:15] There was good attending to the word. Many who heard appeared to feel that they must not only consider, but also go forward in the use of the means now furnished, in order to be partakers of saving grace.185

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185 Exodus 14:13-15. William M. Gordon, “Webster Camp-Meeting, Worcester District,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 147. More sermons that likened the camps to the Israelite exiles include Exodus 17:6, “Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel;” Daniel B. Randall, “Vassalborough Camp Meeting,” MWJ (25 October 1832): 167. Deuteronomy 33:12, “And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.” Franklin Fisk, “Camp-Meeting at Martha's Vineyard,” ZH (12 September 1838): 146. Deuteronomy 33:29: “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!: and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places;” Daniel B. Randall, “Vassalborough Camp Meeting,” MWJ (25 October 1832): 167. Numbers 13:30“When Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it;” A Preacher, ZH (25 September 1823): 150; and Numbers 25:5, “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! And thy tabernacles O Israel.” Theodore Hill, “North Dixmont Camp Meeting,” MWJ (29 September 1838): [2].
Brother Pickens Boynton preached on Christian warfare, assuring the gathering that “the God of the armies of Israel is with us.” This “going forward” was in line with the Wesleyan theology of moving on to perfection. Just as the people of Israel found salvation together, so those at the camp meetings were urged to move on together to find perfect love.

The other most common paradigm used to preach holiness and sanctification was Pentecost, including texts where Jesus promised the presence of the Holy Spirit after his ascension. In 1859, Heman Nickerson preached a sermon at East Poland on John 16:7 entitled, “Expediency of Christian Ascension,” to talk about the Holy Spirit at work as Comforter. At the 1856 camp meeting in Sterling, William Gordon preached a sermon “full of faith and the Holy Ghost” from Acts 2:4, in which “he spoke of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost—its effects, our need of a baptism from on high, God’s willingness to bestow it, and the probable results.”

The effects of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 4:31 seemed very similar to the experience so many Methodists had in their social meetings: “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all

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187 “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” 0 C. M., “Poland Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (5 October 1859): 158.

filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” Like the early Christians, the camp meeting participants literally shook, and even laity were empowered to speak of that experience during the prayer meetings and at the love feasts. Justin Spaulding used Jude verse 20 to preach about praying in the Holy Ghost.

Just as some sermons offered instructions on how to attain justification, so others gave advice on becoming sanctified. Br. Daniel Randall preached on 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, both explaining sanctification and giving directions on how to find it. “Many were the convictions, no doubt, in the congregation, for this blessing. God grant they may obtain it.” After proclaiming Joshua 3:5, “Sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you,” the preacher at Bolton, Connecticut, in 1838 presented “the object for which we had assembled, and the best manner of attaining that object.” As a result, “many present by their hearty responses said, we will now go to work; and work as God has directed.”

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191 “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” John Allen, “Strong, Sept. 30, 1838,” MWJ (13 October 1838): [2].

Though sanctification could, in Methodist discourse, indicate a distinct moment, it was also clearly a process that required effort. Stephen Waterhouse gave some instruction when he preached from the Gospel of John 21:17, telling the story of where Jesus addressed Peter after the resurrection, asking if the disciple truly loved his master. “He saith unto him the third time &c. [Waterhouse] brought to view the nature and evidence of love to Christ, in a very clear and impressive manner. It was well calculated to excite self-examination and encouragement among Christians.” This was the key work of the Methodist class meetings back at home, helping people to examine themselves, and encouraging one another to keep moving toward perfection.

Holiness was by no means easy to attain, and one could always slide backwards. For this reason the story of Jacob wrestling was sometimes interpreted for those seeking the second blessing of holiness or the assurance that they had been forgiven again. Brother Ezekiel Martin told the camp meeting at Augusta that “the way to have power with God and man is to be holy; and to be holy, we must consecrate, pray, and believe, as Jacob did.” Ultimately, though, Methodists remembered that sanctification, like justification, was a gracious gift from God. As Paschal E. Brown said in his sermon on Matthew 11:28-30, “Christ gives rest to the penitent, who comes to Him, by pardoning

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193 As explained in Chapter Five, Rachel Stearns believed she had been sanctified at a camp meeting, but spent the next several months testing and examining herself until finally joining the Methodist Society the following spring.


him, and rest from all inward unrighteousness to the justified believer by sanctifying him wholly.” 196

The call for becoming sanctified was not only for the sake of the individual, but for the sake of others around him or her. One’s own failures could be a bad influence on those still struggling. In 1844, Bartholomew Otheman warned “professors of religion” gathered at Millennial Grove of not being serious enough, and especially of using passages of scripture in jest. Taking Ephesians 5:4 197 as his text, Otheman warned against foolish talking and jesting at the camp meeting. The influence of such behavior was “decidedly bad upon Christian character,” and dangerous because it seemed harmless when really such foolery could destroy confidence, interrupt “the evidence of our acceptance with God,” and “cool down our desires for holiness.” 198 Such behavior was also a bad influence on those who had not yet found salvation. On a more positive note, Isaiah 9:1-3 was used by Benjamin Bryant to call believers to bring others to “religion.” 199 After his sermon, the secretary commented, “What a tremendous influence may be thrown in favor of religion by the people of God.” 200

Other preachers also encouraged the faithful to be obedient to or cooperate with God, using their influence for the good of others. The points of a sermon given by Albert

196 Ibid.

197 “Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.”


199 Isaiah 9:1-3: “Arise, shine, for thy light is come.”

Church on 1 Corinthians 3:9 were summarized as, “Christians work with God, and God with them; and are 1 consecrated to God; 2 in union with Christ; 3 spiritually qualified by Christ and 4 constantly benefited by the reflex influences of their work.”201 Five sermons from the data set for this study were based on the phrase “prepare the way of the Lord,” though alternately citing Mark 1:3,202 Matthew 3:3203 and Isaiah 11:3.204 In 1871, at the Richmond Camp Meeting for Holiness in Maine, Brothers Pratt, Munger and Brown “each addressed the brethren and sisters of the Church, urging them to be faithful, and use all the means of grace, read the Word of God, attend family prayer, class and prayer-meetings, and where practicable, to hold meetings for holiness.”205 Holiness was the means by which Christians were enabled to participate in the work of God. In this way holiness brought one into union with God. Brother John Lapham asserted this using 1 Peter 1:16, “he stated that man is not in harmony with his Maker, but holiness harmonizes him with God.”206

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201 “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.” W. T. Jewell, “Maine State Camp-Meeting,” ZH (31 August 1871): 417.


204 After Edward Hyde preached, “It was indeed evident that the glorious Saviour was about to make his celestial appearance in the place consecrated for his service.” B[artholomew] Otheman, “Falmouth Camp Meeting,” ZH (28 August 1824): [2].


206 “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” Ibid.
Though foolery was frowned upon, a life of holiness was not dour and boring. Holiness brought joy. As noted in Chapter Two, Wilbur Fisk experienced sanctification under the preaching of Timothy Merritt at a camp meeting on Cape Cod in 1819. In 1824, Fisk was preaching the joy of sanctification at the camp meeting in Lyndon, Vermont. Taking Nehemiah 8:19 as his text, Fisk proclaimed:

“The joy of thy Lord is your strength.” 1 Describe this joy; and 2 the benefits of it. It is the joy of the Lord, not of the world—this joy is received by faith—it is a pure joy—it is a permanent joy—it is a liberal joy—it is a solemn joy—it is a full joy. 3 This joy strengthens the body, but more particularly the mind—preserves from dejection, and keeps in a spiritual frame.

The discourse of the way of salvation was completed by talk of perfection. This was alternately called perfect holiness, entire sanctification, and entire holiness. Brother Ammi Prince declared to the camp meeting of Hampden that “liberality is essential to perfect holiness.” Brother Daniel B. Randall preached from 2 Corinthians 11:7 and “showed the necessity of entire and practical holiness.”

Brother Elliot Fletcher was requested to preach on perfection and used Ephesians 3:14, 21.

He gave us a most happy and able exposition of his text—he particularly explained and enforced the great doctrine and privilege of perfect love or sanctification, as brought to view in his subjects. O, thought I, what a pity all


209 2 Corinthians 8:17 “Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.” W. T. Jewell, “Maine State Camp-Meeting,” ZH (31 August 1871): 417.

210 “Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?” Ibid.

211 “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”
ministers do not experience, understand and preach holiness more!—It is the marrow of the gospel—it comes from God and leads to God - nothing but holiness will save a soul from hell.\textsuperscript{212}

Summing up the work of the preachers at New England camp meetings, Rev. J. F. Sheffield of East Greenwich addressed three questions with his sermon based on Colossians 1:28: “whom we preach,” Christ; how we preach, “warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom” and why we preach, “that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”\textsuperscript{213} Not only were individuals called to move on toward perfection, the whole denomination was called and seeking to answer in faith by holding camp meetings.

\textit{The analysis of the texts preached at Hebron, Connecticut, in 1832}

Just how were these themes presented and interwoven through the liturgy of any particular camp meeting? A close examination of the order of the pericopes used for sermons preached at the Hebron camp meeting of 1832 shows a typical flow of the public discourse offered through preaching.\textsuperscript{214} Though Orange Scott was the presiding elder of the Springfield District in 1832, he had not yet arrived at the Hebron camp meeting in time for the opening exercises on the first evening, so James Porter gave the opening

\textsuperscript{212} Justin Spaulding, “Dresden Camp Meeting,” MWJ (20 September 1832): 146.

\textsuperscript{213} “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” L. G. Westgate, “Martha's Vineyard Camp-Meeting,” ZH (14 September 1871): 441.

\textsuperscript{214} All of the quotes in this section come from Hebron Vincent, “Hebron Camp Meeting,” NECH (5 September 1832): 195.
sermon, choosing Isaiah 3:10 as his text. On the first full day (Tuesday), the regular hours for preaching were set at eight, ten-thirty, two and seven-thirty. Elias C. Scott preached first on 1 Timothy 4:7-8. Hebron Vincent preached the second sermon of the morning on 1 John 4:19. Brother May preached on the Prodigal Son, and Brother Joel M'Kee preached on Luke 18:1. In the first five sermons the campers were assured that what they were doing would bear fruit; they were encouraged to exercise godliness, reminded that God loved them as the father loved his prodigal, and they were instructed on how to pray.

On Wednesday, Brother Sizer, a visitor from the New York Conference, preached on Daniel 6:10, followed by James Porter who “took” Joshua 24:15 for his sermon. The afternoon sermon of Brother Kellogg, also from the New York Conference, was noteworthy. In the first part of his discourse on Matthew 27:50, he gave "some

215 “Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.”

216 “But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

217 “We love him, because he first loved us.”

218 “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”

219 “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”

220 “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

221 “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.”
biographical sketches of the character of Christ. The preacher excelled in description. His imagery was very lively. The argumentative part was truly impressive. The sermon, generally, was admired by the intelligent and pious, and was, we trust, to many of the impenitent, ‘as a nail in a sure place.’ There were a few conversions.”

Wednesday concluded with an evening sermon on Matthew 7:7 by Brother Day. This second full day the encampment was challenged to choose to follow God’s ways even if they seemed counter-cultural. The congregation was presented with a graphic depiction of Christ’s death and was encouraged to ask, seek and knock before going to bed.

On Thursday, the early morning sermon delivered by Br. Beebe likely promised the congregation that they could be abundantly satisfied (Psalm 36:8). But later that morning Daniel Dorchester warned that many who seek to enter would not be able to do so (Luke 13:24), and that afternoon Orange Scott counseled that one might gain the whole world and yet lose his soul (Matthew 16:26). Then Brother J. Whitlesey spoke in the evening of the Day of Judgment (Acts 17:31).

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223 “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.”

224 “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.”

225 “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

226 “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

227 “Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”
the discourse shifted to include more of the threats of losing one’s soul, the anxiety and conversions increased. Hebron Vincent called it a “day of great power. God’s people seemed anxious for a greater conformity to His will and image. Many cried to him for a clean heart. The slain of the Lord were many, and we have good reason to believe that some were truly converted.”

Friday morning started with a love feast, but then continued with the regular schedule of preaching. Br. Clapp “took” 1 Corinthians 7:29, likely warning the congregation that the time was short, and Br. Day probably encouraged the “mourners” to be anxious no longer when he spoke from Luke 12:24. Orange Scott took the stand in the afternoon to expound on John 7:37, perhaps offering the free gift of God’s salvation. “Soon after the sermon in the afternoon, a praying circle was formed, and mourners invited. Some fifty or sixty came forward. It was a very glorious time…The place was holy to the Lord. The mighty ones of God’s Israel used their sacred armor in small companies. ‘The angel of the Lord encamped round about us,’ and His glory was in the midst.” That evening Horace Moulton preached the last sermon from Revelation

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229 “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none.”

230 “Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?”

231 “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”
22:17, continuing the invitation to “take the water of life freely.” After that the campers “again repaired to the tents to commence anew the delightful work of prayer. In some few of the tents, devotion was kept up through the night. In one of them, from ten to fifteen experienced the blessing of the perfect love (sanctification) before the dawn of day.”

In summary Hebron Vincent noted that at this camp meeting the preaching was “plain, practical, and pointed. Much was said on the subject of prayer.” This was the year before Scott had become acquainted with the abolition movement and began promoting it through his district, but this camp meeting also took place the year after William Miller began to publicize his predictions about the millennium, and the region was being plagued with cholera, though “the health of the people was as good as usual” at the camp meeting. But perhaps the threat of plague and the anticipation of the end times caused the meeting to be “unusually solemn.” The focus of the sermons meant to awaken, convict, convert and consecrate the people to holiness each day, and the people responded by self-examination, prayer and by giving testimony to the work of God in their lives. Through the course of the meeting, “more than thirty souls were hopefully converted,” nearly that number “found the pearl of perfect love, amongst whom were several of the preachers, five prodigals were reclaimed, and Christians generally quickened to a new engagedness. Doubtless some were converted, and a great number

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232 “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

convicted, of whom we can give no account. The glorious results of this memorable meeting, eternity alone can fully unfold.”

**Exhortations, Concluding Prayers and Invitation**

**Exhortations**

A common pattern found in the earliest camp meetings reported in *Zion’s Herald* show that as soon as a preacher concluded his sermon one to three different persons took the stand to exhort. Early Methodists considered exhortation to be distinct from preaching. Preaching was defined as taking place when one “formally [announced] a text, and [confined] himself to the elucidation of any particular passage of Scripture.” Exhorting took place when one “read a Scripture lesson, and [made] a practical application of its general sentiments to the people.” Church leaders believed exhorting was “eminently serviceable in promoting the interests of the Church.” Receiving a license to exhort was a stepping-stone for men to obtaining a license to preach. Osmon Baker further explained that by *Discipline* exhorters were under the direction of the preacher in charge, and were expected to cooperate with local preachers.

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234 Ibid.


236 The Methodist clergy in New England took this distinction seriously enough that although Camp Meeting John Allen excelled in exhortation, he had difficulty meeting the qualifications to obtain a license to preach, and thus in maintaining his status as clergy. Allen, *The Life of Rev. John Allen*, 28.
At Marshfield in 1823 there were eighteen occasions when the exhorter was named. The typical pattern seemed to be that one person preached, another exhorted, and then either one of the exhorters or a different person would offer a “concluding prayer” from the stand. Once the sermon was followed only by a prayer, while on four occasions no one followed the preacher at the stand, and on the last evening, though no exercises at the stand had been scheduled, so many people remained on the ground that some preachers spontaneously resumed exercises, starting with three exhortations and ending with a sermon and closing prayer.

While exhorting was of a lower order than preaching, at the New England camp meetings in this study not just anyone could exhort, nor was it reserved only for the newer, less experienced clergy under appointment. Of the twenty-three persons who took the stand at Marshfield in 1823, nine of them did not preach, but exhorted and/or offered prayer, while six both preached and exhorted. Four brethren offered at least one sermon, one exhortation and one concluding prayer during the course of the camp meeting. As expected, there was a tendency for the more experienced clergy to serve as preachers. But it was not a hard rule; both Isaac Jennison, Sr., and Phineas Crandall had only four

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237 The first was on the second evening when the sermon by Lewis Bates was followed directly by prayers at the stand. The other three were during the last full day of camp. That morning the sermon was followed directly by a procession. Neither sermon that was given at the two afternoon exercises at the stand were followed by exhortation.


and two years under appointment respectively, and Crandall was still a deacon. Even more surprising is that John Newland Maffitt, who had only been accepted on trial the year before, was scheduled to preach the very last sermon of the camp on Thursday afternoon, perhaps as testament to his homiletic skill. Later that evening when some brethren decided spontaneously to hold another exercise at the stand for the crowd that was still there, Maffitt was the first to exhort and, after two more exhortations, it was he who offered the final sermon of the encampment.

The opportunity to exhort seemed often to have been afforded to younger itinerants who had more recently been accepted under appointment. Of the set of brethren who only exhorted, prayed, or did both, none of them had served under appointment for very long prior to 1823, and several of them weredeacons, or not yet ordained. Also on this list of exhorters was Samuel Snowden, who was pastor to Methodists of African descent in New England. It does not, however, appear from this data that it was considered “beneath” a more experienced preacher to take a turn exhorting. Asa Kent, whose ministry began in 1802, exhorted and preached, and John Lindsey whose ministry

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240 Interestingly, Maffitt’s scheduled sermon used Judges 3:20—“I have a message for thee”—a text about Ehud, the verse just before he dramatically killed the King of Moab. The spontaneous sermon Maffitt preached that evening was on Ecclesiastes 11:9, “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” Evangelicus, “Camp Meetings - No. 3,” ZH (4 September 1823): 138.

241 More investigation is needed. Snowden does not appear on the MEC appointment lists from 1823 on, but an article on Wikipedia notes that he was appointed to the Chestnut Street MEC in Portland, Maine, prior to 1818 and then served the May Street Church, a “separate black Methodist church” in Boston from 1818. See Wikipedia, Samuel Snowden, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Snowden accessed 30 October 2014.
began in 1809, exhorted three times and prayed at the stand once before finally delivering his sermon.

Exhortations continued to be an element of camp meetings all the way through 1871, though reports of them waned over time, so that by the late 1840s they were generally summarized in a sentence or phrase such as: “Great unanimity was manifest among all the preachers and a special unction attended their sermons, and exhortations;”\textsuperscript{242} and “The sermons were usually followed by faithful and earnest application and exhortations.”\textsuperscript{243} Exhorters stopped being named, leading one to wonder if they were still being offered by clergy who were different than the preachers, or if the preachers added an exhortation section to the conclusion of their sermons. The reporter of the 1871 camp meeting in Heath, Massachusetts, indicated that the more extemporaneous exhortations were no longer as common as they once were, and that camp meetings were starting to become boring.

On Tuesday, P. M. the monotony of camp meeting exercises was broken by a series of exhortations, instead of a sermon from the stand. As in the olden time the Lord brake the bread to his disciples, and they gave to the multitude, and all were fed; each receiving a portion in due season. The effect was so excellent that in future, without doubt, our Presiding Elder will not regard similar exercises dangerous experiments.\textsuperscript{244}

A rare mention of women exhorting in this data was in 1871 at Machias, Maine. The women were not named, but the reporter simply stated, “several of the brethren and


\textsuperscript{243} Hebron Vincent, “Vineyard Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (4 September 1850): 142.

sisters exhorted.” This instance of exhortation seems to be more spontaneous similar to the exhorting that took place in Hebron when some of the brethren and sisters were waiting for the tents to be set up in 1823.\(^{245}\) The report from Machias continues: “At the same time some were praying, some were exhorting, and some were trying the express the inexpressible emotions of a soul at peace with God and man, and filled with the fullness of Divine love.”\(^ {246}\) Such a description is reminiscent of the scene at Cane Ridge seventy years earlier.

For whatever reason, the practice of exhortation eventually dropped out of use, even though there is much testimony in the reports that when it was done well it was very effective. After an exhortation “preachers and people evidently felt the case of the sinner and conviction found way to the heart.”\(^ {247}\) Exhortations “of the right stamp” were “fitted to press the question of immediate surrender to God home upon the conscience.”\(^ {248}\) Lorenzo D. Barrows offered a “pungent and eloquent” exhortation against backsliding at Asbury Grove in 1862. His exhortation was relayed:

> “To whom will you go, to what will you go, after having believed in Jesus Christ?” [He then explained how] backsliding begins, not by conscious disbelief, but by lukewarmness and neglect of prayer; how it ends in the wreck of faith, and in the company of depraved men and women, in the loathsome haunts of sin, was depicted in a few pregnant words, which rang clear as a bell through the pine grove, and away beyond it. Then the speaker turned towards those who had enlisted for the war, “To whom will you go?” and urged them to the only safe


\(^{247}\) A Preacher, \textit{ZH} (25 September 1823): 150.

refuge and protection in the day of carnage. Through the stillness of the woods and the dusk of the night, only relieved by the flickering lamps, the speaker seemed like the prophet of God. Dr. Barrows is an excellent illustration of the best kind of culture—of the action of the heart upon the intellect, giving it clearness, strength, and rapidity of movement, and making even the physical man the easy and graceful exponent of the man within.249

Indeed, it seems that exhortations could lead some to feel they were directly encountering God.250 As Wilbur Fisk exhorted in 1826, “a shock of divine power descended, and loud praises resounded from a hundred tongues.” In 1838, “the Eternal Spirit sent conviction among the people”251 during an exhortation. Sometimes exhortation flowed directly into invitation. Following the exhortations, which came after a sermon in Rumford, Maine, “Mourners…came from different parts of the congregation with streaming eyes and trembling frames, crying, pray for us.”252 At other times, there was a formal concluding prayer offered from the stand after the exhortation.

Concluding Prayers at the Stand

While the preachers who offered the concluding prayer of the preaching exercises from the stand were named in 1823 at the Marshfield, Hebron, and Bucksport camps

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249 Edmund H. Sears, “A Day with the Methodists,” ZHWJ (17 August 1862): 149.

250 Exhortation was part and parcel with preaching in the early years, even though different persons delivered the sermons and the exhortations during any given service. These exhortations had both a practical and a spiritual function that were intertwined. By describing examples of his own and others’ encounters with God, an exhorter was able to give members of the congregation a sense of what such an encounter might be like for them. With passionate descriptions of God’s yearning and the blessings that come from surrender, the exhorters crescendoed to a direct question, “will you go?” thus demanding an immediate response.


presented in Chapter Three, that level of detail did not persist for very long. By 1826 there was no documentation of formal prayers from the stand to conclude a preaching exercise. Perhaps the preachers or exhorters adopted the practice of concluding their own discourses with a prayer, rather than waiting for someone else to come and do it. But if this is so, it was not considered worthy of mention in the camp meeting reports.

What is also interesting about the concluding prayers is they did not occur all of the time. The pattern seems to be that either the preaching was followed by exhortation and a concluding prayer, in which case the participants were then dismissed for a meal and/or prayer meetings in their tents, or the exhortation led directly to an invitation to any in the congregation to come before the preaching stand ("altar"). Either the invitation or the concluding prayer was the last formal act of worship before the stand in the sequence of "preaching exercises."

Invitation

When camp meeting participants took their seats before the preaching stand, they heard sermons and exhortations using scripture to paint a vivid portrait of the need for salvation and sanctification, and the graciousness of a God eager to meet them. As that message was taken in by the hearers, they were often convicted of their need to respond, and often preaching exercises ended with an invitation for the congregation to leave their seats and gather for prayer. The invitation was typically addressed to "mourning
sinners,” “all who felt the need of religion” or “those who were convinced of their need of a Saviour.” Those who responded were joined by “the people of God” who mingled with them and prayed for them.

The correspondent from the camp meeting of 1832 in Kennebunkport, Maine, described the nature of the invitation this way:

The servants of the Most High, under these circumstances stood before the people, and in the name of God declared the ruined state of man, gave offer of salvation and invited him to God. The glories of the heavenly world were arrayed on the one hand to invite, and the terrors of the world of woe on the other, to warn, with the attending bliss or misery of the path that leads to each, and in view of all these, the invitation pressed upon the sinner, and the voice of commanding mercy, urged upon his ears with all the fervor of the feeling soul.

These invitations might be given after a sermon or as part of an exhortation, but they did not follow every gathering for preaching. When participants responded to an invitation and came forward it led to the next act of worship: public prayer before the stand.

“Seasons” of Prayer

Wher’er thy people meet, ‘Tis hallow’d ground;
Before the mercy seat, There God is found.
Within no wall confin’d, But in a humble mind,
And they who seek shall find, Here thou art found.

We here unite in prayer, To seek thy face;
Come sweeten every care, Display thy grace;
Here let our souls arise, To heaven in fervent cries,
Display before our eyes Riches of grace.  

**Public Prayers Before the Stand**

Public prayers before the stand could occur immediately after preaching services, or at other times during a camp meeting. Additional expressions of public prayer include the praying circles (which may or may not have been located before the stand) and praying bands.

**Immediately Following a Preaching Exercise**

The preaching exercises which closed with an invitation flowed into the exercises of public prayer before the stand or “altar” as many called it. Many people would rush forward, emoting in public. Some came on their own; others were led by friends or family members, while the rest remained seated on the benches. The “people of God and ministers of the sanctuary knelt to invoke a blessing upon the broken hearted penitents.” These exercises were less structured than the time of preaching and exhortation, and at times could verge into the disorder so dreaded by most of the Methodist Episcopal leaders. In spite of the danger of chaos, New England Methodist leaders found that these exercises could be well ordered.

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259 In Thompson, Connecticut, in 1832 the seventeen seekers going forward was called an “exhibition of the saving power of the gospel in converting the soul.” S[amuel] W. Coggeshall, “Camp Meeting in Thompson, Conn.,” *NECH* (12 September 1832): 198.

All heard attentively the word, and when, at the close of the sermon, the serious were invited to the altar, the praying army gathered around, and while all within the circle were kneeling before God, and one voice was heard in supplication, hundreds of hearts were ascending to heaven, strong faith took hold on mercy, and souls were soon brought into the liberty of the children of God.²⁶¹

Nonetheless, they clearly exhibited the tension between heeding the promptings of the Spirit of God and keeping general order.

Extravagant and unmeaning noises, in our devotional exercises, will always create confusion and disorder among the people. For when in any part of the encampment a confused and irregular noise is made, all those, who are standing around, will rush forward to the place from whence the noise proceeds, and it will be utterly impossible to call them to order. Far be it from us, however, to oppose ardor, fervor, energy or any thing prompted by the spirit of God. If the power of God is displayed in such a manner, that, there are heard, at the same time, the fervent prayer of the Christian, the cry for mercy of the penitent mourner, and the shout of the happy soul just converted, Amen,—so let it be. The congregation will generally be in order while God is displaying his glory in the conversion of souls. But still we think, that exceedingly boisterous exercises, extravagant noises, and inarticulate exclamations as a general thing, to say the least, make the congregation ungovernable, and thereby prevent the good effects of the meeting.²⁶²

Some organizers tried to influence the behavior of the campers by giving them advice in the newspapers before the camp began.

If any one is in the habit of making long prayers at home, or elsewhere, let him pray short here, for conscience sake. Why, there are a great many to take a part, and if you take up all the time yourself, how can others improve? But if any one should forget himself and become lengthy, let others...be very careful and not become impatient and fretful; that will spoil all; no, rather pray for patience, and make the best of it.²⁶³


Sometimes the newspapers relate that particular preachers were put in charge of the prayer meetings—as noted in Chapter Three when Brothers Merrill, Eastman and Dearborn were in charge of both the tent and public prayer meetings at Sterling in 1856.\(^{264}\)

These prayer sessions were the times when the preachers could begin to see the fruits of their efforts. They counted how many came forward, and rejoiced when some claimed to find “deliverance” in a particular session.

After the conclusion of the discourse, an invitation was given for mourning sinners to come to the altar, and one hundred and fifty accepted the invitation. O, my soul! what a glorious and interesting scene was here presented to thy view! Such a multitude of weeping sinners, now made sensible of their wants, and in the wilderness of their thoughts eagerly looking out for a directive star or a guiding hand to show them the path of life, could not but interest the feelings and excite the sympathy of all who wish well to immortal souls. But something more than sympathy was excited on this occasion.—The prayer of faith was offered up for them, and many found deliverance. This exercise continued for the space of several hours, during which time continual accessions were made to the number of mourners, which probably amounted to two-hundred at the close of the exercise.\(^{265}\)

The experience must have been encouraging for preacher and layperson alike. “The servants and people of God were at their post—‘prayer ardent opened heaven,’ and a stream of salvation and glory poured down upon the souls of penitents—the shout of glory to God! was heard sweetly to roll from the souls of some who had been ‘lost but were found.’—Praise the Lord, for the good accomplished this day.”\(^{266}\)

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\(^{265}\) D[amon] Young, “Camp Meeting at Wellfleet,” *ZH* (1 September 1824): [2].

Public Prayer At Other Times

Public prayer could take place at times other than after the preaching exercises and in settings other than just before the stand. At Eastham in 1838, “scores were found at the altar, trembling under a deep sense of inward pollution and fervently praying” at an early hour on the first morning. \(^{267}\) The Bolton camp meeting of 1838 had “several public prayer-meetings, in different parts of the ground.” \(^{268}\)

Praying Circles

While the prayers before the stand described above may have generally meant the people crowded up front by the preaching stand, in the earlier years of this study the people often formed praying circles. \(^{269}\) At the 1823 Bucksport, Maine, camp meeting, “A praying circle was formed; and, in invitation, a number of penitents came forward, manifesting their desires for the prayers of the faithful.” \(^{270}\)

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\(^{267}\) Amos Binney, “Millennial Grove Camp-Meeting,” ZH (22 August 1838): 134.


\(^{269}\) Praying circles are described by Joseph Snelling in his autobiography. The 1804 Annual Conference at Gorham (probably Maine, possibly New Hampshire) had them on the “Sabbath.” The preachers were scattered around in a grove praying and exhorting to the people gathered around them “in companies, similar to what are called praying circles at Camp-meetings. In the circle which I was in, there were eleven persons who professed to be brought from darkness to light; besides many others who were inquiring what they must do to be saved.” Joseph Snelling and S. W. Coggeshall, *Life of Rev. Joseph Snelling: Being a Sketch of His Christian Experience and Labors in the Ministry* (Boston: John M’Leish, 1847), 74.

\(^{270}\) A Preacher, ZH (25 September 1823): 150.
up to God from the altar of his children’s hearts.” From these descriptions it seems that the praying circle was first formed by those already converted, and the mourners were invited in to receive prayers on their behalf. In the praying circle at the 1826 Readfield, Maine, camp meeting,

> [e]ffectual, fervent prayers were poured forth from the souls of the devoted men of God, accompanied by the responses and ejaculations of the pious multitude, and the long drawn sigh, and humble prayer of those burdened with the load of sin. All this was not unavailing. The Saviour came in mighty power, and displayed the glory of his grace in the midst, until shouts of victory and songs of redeeming love burst forth from the happy bosoms of all who had come forward as penitent mourners. The battle was fought, a complete victory gained, and we retired to our tents, triumphing in the Lord.

The praying circles could continue for long periods of time. At Lincoln, Massachusetts, in 1832, the “brethren seemed unwilling to give up the contest, and so continued praying in the circle until sunset.” Several descriptions indicate that the people thought of themselves as reenacting Jacob wrestling with God and receiving a new name and blessing before returning home.

**Praying Band**

In 1862 at Martha’s Vineyard, a new phenomena was introduced by “Brothers Halsted and others including the Hon. M. F. Odell, M. C. of the New York ‘Praying Band.’” The report gives further detail. The Halsted brothers and Moses F. Odell, a
Representative to Congress, were from Brooklyn. “In the public prayer meetings following the forenoon and evening sermons on the Sabbath, they took lead by request and managed in their own way to the great satisfaction of the brethren in the stand and in the seats. Nor did they labor in vain; at the evening meeting, which was continued till 10 o’clock, quite a number professed conversion.” It is not at all clear what happened in a praying band, and this was the only mention of them in the data.

As effective as these public prayer meetings were, many waited until they were inside the flaps of their tents before they opened themselves to the work of the Holy Spirit on their souls. In New England, the prayer meetings in the tents were a crucial element of the camp meeting experience which led so many to experience spiritual transformation there. The complementarity and balance between the two kinds of social meetings is a critical piece of the genius of these meetings.

Prayer Meetings in the Tents

Hail, ye goodly tents, we see you
Stretch your curtains far along;
Here may faith, and hope, and virtue
Each increase, and all grow strong;
Hallelujah, all hail, brethren!
Let us join the holy song.

New Englanders who attended Methodist Episcopal camp meetings in the nineteenth century spent at least as much time in prayer meetings in the society tents as

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they spent listening to sermons and exhortations at the stand. While some preaching services were followed by the public prayer meetings, many others were followed by meetings in the tents. Spontaneous prayer meetings were also likely to take place during meal times. Every night of the camps concluded with evening prayer meetings in the tents, often lasting until the wee hours of the next morning.

Almost every report of a camp meeting mentions these prayer meetings and considered them significant even though most of the descriptions are quite general. For example, the “prayer meetings in the tents were well attended to. Both ministers and people seemed each one to understand his own work and to attend to it.” Prayer meetings in the tents could be “attended with a remarkable display of sanctifying grace.” They could be described as “times of divine power,” or “earnest and effectual” or even “rather dull.” But the newspaper accounts are short on details, leaving one to wonder what went on during a prayer meeting, what were the markers of an effectual prayer meeting, and what observable signs might lead a participant to conclude that God’s grace had been present and active. There are a few reports that provide enough details to put together the pieces of this puzzle.

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Some descriptions make it clear that the preaching services at the stand and the prayer meetings in the tents went together like a call and response. The themes lifted up in the sermons and formal exhortations were reinforced by those leading the prayer meetings in the tents. At the 1838 camp meeting in Dana, Massachusetts, the preachers were expounding on the ability of the believer to attain Christian perfection, and this theme was “kept…before the mind in the prayer meetings in the tents, and was attended with the blessing of God, for many believed, and entered into the rest of perfect love.”

After listening to “an excellent discourse from Bro. Latham” in Wilbraham in 1859, the work of the congregation “went on better” in the tents than it had in public, “and the baptism of the Spirit became more general.”

At the 1856 camp in West Killingly, Connecticut, “the preaching was especially practical and heartsearching; it was generally listened to with attention, while the prayer meetings were characterized with fervor and earnest supplication, and the result witnessed the conversion of souls.”

The exercises in the tents were much less formal than those at the stand. Though overseen by clergy, the meetings could be led by class leaders and even lay women; and informal exhortations, testimonies and extemporaneous prayers were welcomed even by those who did not have a license. Tent meetings were the place where those who were

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284 This was mentioned above in Chapter Three. T[homas] C. Pierce, “Camp Meeting at Lyndon, Vt,” ZH (15 September 1824): [2].
convicted could ask like those gathered at Pentecost in the book of Acts, “What must I do to be saved?”, while those who had experienced salvation surrounded them with earnest prayers and support. Participants could “exhort one another to flee the wrath to come, and sing with the spirit and the understanding.”  

Apparently the informal nature of the prayer meetings could make some uncomfortable. It was common for many people to pray aloud all at once in the tent meetings. When people came to the grounds who did not belong to a society they were prone to roam about. In 1847, the leaders of the Eastham camp meeting sought to correct this by establishing set times for all prayer meetings in tents to take place while simultaneously discouraging people from wandering from tent to tent, a practice which “is always productive of evil to the person indulging in the habit.” Conversely, when pursued in good order, tent prayer meetings were an essential part of the worship that led to conversion. The people of the 1856 West Killingly camp meeting were praised when most of our members seemed to go to those meetings as much to work as to see and hear; for when the meetings were through at the stand, they returned to their tents and renewed the exercises at every proper interval, and thus kept the tented grove vocal with prayer and praise; and whenever they found a soul convicted, they offered effectual prayer till that seeking soul was blessed in the forgiveness of his sins.  

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The “work” that was done in the tents was spiritual in nature. It was the application of strong faith to “earnest wrestling” and a general “cry for a clean heart.” Because the telos of the Wesleyan way of salvation was perfection, there was the possibility of spiritual transformation for everyone, at every stage of faith. “The meetings in the tents were generally characterized by deep yearnings of love for full deliverance, old pilgrims were comforted, young converts strengthened, backsliders reclaimed, sinners convicted and converted, and shouts of victory went up from all parts of the encampment.” A prayer meeting in a tent was judged as truly successful, however, when God’s agency could be felt and one could testify that “the Lord answered in the full salvation of many souls.”

The most detailed description of a prayer meeting in the newspaper accounts of this study came from the pen of Unitarian minister Edmund H. Sears, who attended Asbury Grove in 1862.

The exercises in the grove closed about half-past eight, when notice was given that there would be prayer meetings in the tents until ten, upon which any strangers or visitors were invited to attend. Under this invitation, I went into a tent from which I heard strains of devout music, and sat down. About thirty persons were within. It seemed a class meeting, and two clergymen were conducting the exercise. Soon after I joined the circle began the relation of personal experiences, commencing at one end of the tent, and proceeding in rotation. As each one told out his joy or his difficulty, the minister would put in a word or thanksgiving or advice. “Bless God for that, by brother.” “Press on,—press on.” My turn came. “What can you tell us my brother?” This was rather more personal than I had anticipated; but, in such a sphere of manifest love and goodwill, it was not very

difficult, but rather a privilege, to speak of the joys and struggles of the inner life. In the midst of the exercise was sung the first stanza of the hymn of Watts, “Come, ye that love the Lord,” to which, however, was added this refrain:

I’m glad salvation’s free,
I’m glad salvation’s free,
Salvation’s free for you and me,
I’m glad salvation’s free

About ten o’clock I applied at the quarters of the Committee of Arrangements. One of the committee, who, I inferred, had been one of the three months volunteers, took me into his tent, gave me a mattress, and spread his soldier’s cloak over me, under which I slept sweetly till morning, the Methodist refrain dying away, in my dreams,—“I’m glad salvation’s free.” One thing impressed me very deeply,—the power and efficacy of the prayers. There is nothing like them in our Congregational churches. In none that I heard was there a particle of extravagance or fanaticism, but a depth of earnestness, showing that the whole soul was reaching forth and taking hold of the hem of the divine garments. 291

Whether Sears’ account is typical or not is hard to say. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence in Zion’s Herald newspaper accounts that the acts of worship which took place in the society tents were as critical to the process of conversion and sanctification of the participants as the preaching services and the public prayers at the stand. This was expressed poetically in 1853—“We had not so great victory in the open field of combat as we often witness, but general triumph in the tents” 292—and it was articulated multiple times in 1856:

The labors were more effective [in the tents] that they probably would have been at the stand.” 293

The tent and public prayer meetings…were characterized with much earnest interceding at the throne of grace, sometimes amounting to real agony.


293 Andrew J. Church, “Kennebunk Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (10 September 1856): 146.
The result was, many souls were converted to God and others received the blessing of entire sanctification.\textsuperscript{294}

Great zeal and perseverance also prevailed among the children of God, especially in the tent meetings, most of which was according to knowledge, and resulted in the conversion, reclamation and sanctification of a large number of persons.\textsuperscript{295}

Assertions of the effectiveness of the prayer meetings were made, even when the results were harder to observe. Summing up the 1856 camp meeting in Franklin, Maine, the secretary wrote, “A struggle for complete, inward holiness, was prominent in the exercises in the tents, which though less productive of immediate, visible fruits, than labors aiming exclusively at conversions, promises more to the cause of God, for we hold that if the church is holy, conversions will follow.”\textsuperscript{296}

The holiness of the church was often directly tied to the work in the tents, given that those in the prayer circle were likely to be part of a congregation together. The potency of what transpired in the society tents must have had much to do with the fact that people from the same neighborhood came to the camp meetings together and stayed together in their society tents. For the time they were at camp, the society tent was their bedroom, their dining hall, their shelter from a storm, and their inner sanctum. Participants dwelt with their spiritual brethren under the same roof. Though there may have been great crowds at the stand, the society tent was the place where “everybody knew your name,” your business, your history, and your family. Moreover, when camp


\textsuperscript{296} Ammi Prince, “Franklin Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (8 October 1856): 164.
was finished, those who were still yearning for pardon or sanctification would be leaving with a society of cheerleaders ready to continue the work back at home through their prayer meetings. “The meetings in the tents were of a truly spiritual character, and we doubt not that the several tents’ companies, as they separated, felt better prepared for the work devolving upon them.”  

The Slow Demise of the Society Tents

Looking at the data over time, one can see that changes in accommodations worked against this critical mechanism that fostered so many conversions in the early years. It started imperceptibly with the introduction of family tents. When everyone slept in the very tents where the prayer meetings took place, one could not help being at least a witness to the proceedings, and, most likely, as the meeting got more exciting, even the most tired of the campers would be drawn into the experience. But when families brought their own tents, those members would be more likely to retreat away from their society during times of prayer. Then with the construction of cottages, those who stayed therein would have even more opportunity and enticement to separate themselves from the work of prayer in the society tents.

Peer Group Prayer Meetings

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The result of this shift started to be evident in some camp meetings of 1871 when peer group prayer meetings were being held instead of society prayer meetings.\textsuperscript{298} These meetings were announced for particular subsets of people. There was a prayer meeting for young people held occasionally during the Northport, Maine, camp meeting, and a special prayer meeting for preachers.\textsuperscript{299} At Martha’s Vineyard there were times in the daily schedule for a YMCA prayer meeting and a “mother’s prayer meeting.”\textsuperscript{300} By this time, of course, very few people were sleeping in the society tents, preferring their family tents or cottages. Perhaps these peer group prayer meetings were devised because too many people were neglecting to pray with their congregations. In any case, the likelihood that one would go home with the same people with whom one prayed during a camp meeting greatly diminished. Peer group prayer meetings also functioned to divide the congregation in new ways. Children and participants of the YMCA prayer meetings would be less likely to be inspired by the aged faithful. Young mothers might have felt emboldened to share their hearts with other young mothers, but other camp meeting participants would never hear the testimonies. All in all, the segregation of persons by age or station kept the community from witnessing the power of God at work in everyone’s lives.

\textsuperscript{298} A precursor to this practice was prayer meetings held specifically for sailors at some camp meetings on the coast. “A sermon and prayer meeting were devoted to the special benefit of seamen, and found to be profitable.” Aaron Lummus, “Camp Meeting at Eastham, Mass.,” \textit{CAJZH} (21 August 1829): 202.

\textsuperscript{299} “Wesleyan Grove Camp-Meeting, Northport,” \textit{ZH} (7 September 1871): 429.

\textsuperscript{300} L. G. Westgate, “Martha's Vineyard Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (14 September 1871): 441.
Music

Musick’s [sic] charms delight the soul,
As its pleasing numbers roll;
Youth and virtue both combin’d
Zephyrs play about the mind.

Sweetly shall the sounds accord,
Usefully to praise the Lord;
Truth and justice here agree,
Holiness and Charity.\(^{301}\)

Music was peppered through the order of worship of the camp meetings examined in this study. As mentioned above, music was part of the routine of rising in the tents and getting ready for a new day.\(^{302}\) People would often break into song at meal times as well. Singing was apparently woven into the preaching exercises at the stand, particularly during the exhortations and invitations, as well as during the prayer meetings in the tents.\(^{303}\) Singing also took place at events such as dedicating the tents,\(^{304}\) love feasts, and the parting ceremonies.

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\(^{302}\) “Scarcely had the glorious king of day begun to scatter the feeblest of his rays over the eastern horizon, before many watchful spirits in the different tents, began to break the silence of night by hymning the praises of their high Deliver.” J[onathan] D. Bridge, “Westfield Camp-Meeting,” *ZH* (3 October 1838): 158.


“Animating hymns” could enliven a crowd and they often created a sense of unity. At the final act of worship at the camp in Eastham in 1844,

[t]here were persons present of different nations, languages, habits and customs, but all told one story. One common feeling pervaded the whole assembly; the love of Christ melted and cemented every heart. Every distinction seemed to be lost in being one in Christ Jesus, while with melody that made every heart thrill with heavenly emotion was sung—We are marching through Immanuel’s ground, We soon shall hear the trumpet sound. And soon we shall with Jesus reign and never, never part again.  

The reports of the camp meetings do not, however, give as much attention to the singing as to other acts of worship. They do not systematically describe when in the order of things singing was likely to take place, nor are there more than a few instances when singing was mentioned specifically together with the names of hymns or their tunes. Some of those instances include: “Blest be the tie that binds” used in 1838 at Martha’s Vineyard when the final service began with singing; “Blest be the dear uniting grace” was sung at Plymouth, New Hampshire, in 1844; “On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand” at the New Sharon camp of 1853; “America” sung at a patriotic service at East Poland in 1862; and the tune “Coronation” at the Maine State Holiness Camp Meeting of 1871.

305 Aaron Lummus, “Hebron Camp-Meetings,” ZH (June 19, 1823): 94.
310 Likely paired with the text of “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.”
One contemporary voice shared the current wisdom among liturgists that “no one tune book has all the good tunes we want, but there are from two to six good tunes, perhaps, in each; some have only two; and it would cost a great deal of money to buy them all, and each singer would want a hand cart to carry them about.”\(^{311}\) This correspondent’s advice to the choristers was to “cull from a dozen, or more, tune books, about three to six tunes from each, only the best, write the hymns to them in a little book made with a few sheets of paper (if they cannot easily remember hymns), and keep that little book in their pocket, ready to lead the social singing, and to learn them to all the congregation by rote.”\(^{312}\) While camp meeting hymnbooks were written by New England Methodists,\(^{313}\) sold and presumably used at camp meetings, there is no specific mention of this, nor can one assume which of the hymns were actually sung.

Singing was frequently an act of praise made by ordinary people as a sign of their conversion. Walter Wilkie wrote in Bolton, Connecticut, in 1838, of the ten or twelve people who had left the rank of the adversary “and are now singing the ‘new song, even praise to God.’”\(^{314}\) The presiding elder of the camp meeting at Wilbraham in 1835 explained, “the songs of the healed were frequently heard during the progress of the meeting, since this is what may always be expected upon such occasions of the out-


\(^{312}\) Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

\(^{313}\) Mudge, \textit{The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book}; Orange Scott, \textit{The New and Improved Camp Meeting Hymn Book: Being a Choice Selection of Hymns from the Most Approved Authors Designed to Aid in the Public and Private Devotion of Christians} (Boston: Dexter S. King, 1842).

\(^{314}\) Walter Wilkie, “Enfield, Conn.,” \textit{ZH} (24 October 1838): 170. This example may be metaphorical.
As such, in the early years, different songs of praise were likely to arise from many different sections of the camp at once. One correspondent liked to walk a little away from the encampment during the time of morning prayer and hear the “songs of praise ascending from the grove. Surely the harp of Orpheus was not more pleasing.” Another reported, “The songs of the redeemed were heard in every direction but all without disorder, extravagance or confusion.”

In the views of one reporter, the singing at camp meetings would sometimes verge away from being an act of worship. He described the problem of “unsuitable and superabundant singing”:

In the first place a great deal of downright nonsense is often sung at these meetings; they are sometimes called “penny-royal hymns.” They are a mere pious—rather impious—jingle-jangle, but contain but precious little solid sense, and not a particle of poetry. They are only calculated to kindle a mere animal excitement, of the lowest kind, which is as far from genuine religious feeling as the east is from the west. Some of our popular “camp-meeting hymnbooks” abound in such trash. But such singing should surely be frowned upon by all who desire to see the saving power of God at these meetings. Religion, in all her doctrines and exercise, perfectly agrees with common sense. In the next place, we have, I think, by far too much singing, and too little praying, at our camp-meetings. No man loves good singing better than I do. When rightly employed, it is a powerful aid to devotion; but like most other good things, it may be carried too far. I think it very often is at camp-meetings. We frequently have upon the encampment bands of very fine singers, whose main object seems to be to let all within reasonable distance know what splendid voices they have. You rarely see them in a prayer-meeting, and very rarely do they take any part in one, except to sing, and they will do that part for you “to a charm.” They beat everybody else at that! From early dawn to bedtime, O, how sweetly they do sing, sing, sing—save in preaching time. To these perpetual singers I would kindly say, the meeting is of no use to you, and you are a serious trial to many. You attract many from the

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prayer meetings, who would otherwise be there, and who ought to be there with yourselves. Besides this, you greatly disturb the worship of those who are near you. Depend upon it my dear friends, your practice is a great evil. Let me earnestly exhort you to sing less and pray more; and be sure that you both sing and pray “in the spirit,” that is in faith.\footnote{“A Great Evil at Camp Meetings,” \textit{ZHWJ} (18 August 1847): 131. If, as noted in Chapter Two, some of the hymns this writer is irritated with are the very ones created out of a fusion of African and European sacred music styles, then this tirade exhibits some of the same cultural bias as John Fanning Watson showed in \textit{Methodist Error}. Perhaps, however, the people were starting to focus on the singing more than their participation in the times of prayer, turning music into obstacle, rather than an aid, along the way of salvation.}

Yet in spite of the dangers, music continued to be used throughout camp meetings to aid in the worship of God. This was particularly effective in the practice of congregational singing.

**Congregational Singing**

While some individuals may have broken into song upon rising from sleep or experiencing the grace of God, the majority of the songs were performed by whole congregations in the early years of camp meetings in New England. People noticed, of course, particular individuals who had musical talent and appreciated when they could help the whole group improve in their singing.

The singing which was led by Br. Pratt of Boston, assisted by some other brethren, was of a very elevated order. The old standard tunes were generally used, which we never heard sound so much like heaven before; and when the whole congregation joined in it, it was as the sound of many waters. The singing in the tents and praying circles was also generally performed in a very elevated and manly style, and seldom failed to attract and deeply interest the feelings of all who heard it. We are truly happy to see, that a most decided improvement is taking place among our people in this matter; and that the “pennyroyals” once so much in vogue, are giving place to some of the finest and most beautiful airs; and
which much more perfectly and appropriately express the ardent and joyous feelings of the pious of heart.  

At the Methodist Episcopal camp meeting in East Greenwich, Rhode Island, an elder “gave out the hymn” line by line so the people could sing.

Methodist hymnbooks of this period, like the one created by Enoch Mudge, included only the texts without any musical notation. The practice was for a congregation to know several hymn tunes of different meters, each with its own name, and know the meters of both texts and tunes so that multiple hymn verses could be matched with well-known tunes. Occasionally reports can be found that include details such as the hymn tunes that were used.

The singing was unusually good; it was generally led from the stand, and such tunes were selected as were familiar to the congregation, and appropriate to the occasion. While listening to the sublime and spirit-stirring harmony of old Bridgewater, Exhortation, Lenox, Greenfield and Coronation, arising in full chorus from the whole congregation, mingled sometimes with bursts of praise from overflowing hearts, we could say, in truth, that “no man having drunk old wine, straightway desireth new, for he saith the old is better.” Give us the simple but soul-stirring melodies of olden times, and we shall again have congregational singing in our churches as well as on the camp-ground; the congregation then could not help singing.

It appears that “new music” at camp meetings of the 1840s was as controversial as it still is today when new music is introduced.

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321 For example, “Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow.”
322 For example “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.”
Like everything else about camp meetings, the music became more complex over time. In 1850 at the Coventry, Connecticut, camp meeting, Brother Tiffany of New London led the singing during the regular services and in all the prayer meetings at the stand. He was described as “an excellent chorister and teacher of sacred music.” The report continued:

He sang with taste, and with the spirit and understanding also, and inspired others to sing in like manner. He is just such a teacher as Methodist choirs or congregations need to teach them to “sing the songs of Zion.”\(^{324}\)

The campers of the Sterling meeting in 1856 enjoyed singing under the direction of Brother Amasa Davis, “who was assisted by more than a score who could sing with the spirit and with the understanding also.”\(^{325}\)

Performance—Choirs, Ensembles and Solos

Singing by a soloist or a small group of people for those gathered at the stand came into camp meeting practice slowly. In 1841, Brother Hawkins sang at the end of his temperance address, claiming

that it was the first time, in which, since he has been engaged in his present work, he has felt at liberty to sing “glory to God,” and which he did in a most hearty manner, and to which a multitude of voices most joyously responded, “Amen.”\(^{326}\)

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As congregations began to insert choir anthems in their worship at home, so choirs began to be featured on the stage at camp meetings. At the Steuben, Maine, camp meeting of 1841,

[there] were present on the Sabbath quite a number from different choirs, who united in their efforts to contribute to the interest of the meeting. They performed their part in a very graceful manner. The anthem to which we listened at the close of the exercises in the afternoon, contained cheering sentiments, and was met with a hearty response.327

Choirs were also mentioned in 1850 and 1859. The choir in 1859 sat on an elevated place near the preachers. In 1862, Martha’s Vineyard’s singing was led by “an educated choir, with whom the congregation too seldom joined.”328

When guest musicians from outside New England participated, campers got to experience the broad reach of the family of faith. When Sister Smith from New York made her way to several New England camp meetings in 1871, she sang songs “full of sweetness and power.”329 That same year the Hutchinson family from Minnesota stopped at Asbury Grove, Yarmouthport and Martha’s Vineyard. They sang “sweet, sacred airs, some gathered from the slave plantations, some from Methodist Camp-meetings” to raise money for building a Methodist church back home.330

Though choirs and solo musicians started to be introduced to camp meetings, they were hardly a trend. Congregational singing remained the primary source of music at the

328 “A Trip to Martha's Vineyard,” ZHWJ (13 August 1862): 131.
330 Untitled, ZH (7 September 1871): 428.
camp meetings during this period. The ability for each person to sing these songs for themselves was instrumental in the process of ingraining Methodist discourse upon their hearts.

**Addresses, Discourses and Remarks**

Besides the sermons, exhortations and prayers, there were some other occasional presentations given at the stand. These were generally called “addresses,” “discourses” or “remarks.” The term “discourse” was most versatile, for when it was used in conjunction with a scripture text it most often was synonymous with “preaching.” At other times, however, a “discourse” or an “address” was given on a subject not tied to a particular scripture text. In 1844 at Windsor, Maine, the congregation was “entertained with a discourse from ‘Camp-meeting John,’ who told us that he had been to sixty-two camp-meetings. He is a practical illustration of his text, ‘So, as much as in me is, I am ready.’ Here, though John Allen was quoting Romans 1:15, the term “discourse” may have been used because Allen had difficulty satisfying his colleagues that he could preach a proper sermon.

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331 At the Brookfield, Vermont, camp meeting in 1826, Wilbur Fisk “delivered an appropriate discourse, from these words—‘By the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone with tears.’ His design was to show why the ministers of the gospel have such painful feelings for the souls of men.” This quote is from Acts 20:31, so it seems that this “discourse” was a sermon. Horace Spaulding, *ZH* (12 July 1826): [2]. And at another camp meeting the reporter wrote of the preacher who “addressed us from Ezekiel’s vision” then “after the conclusion of the discourse, an invitation was given.” Here the term “address” and “discourse” are used synonymously for sermon. D[amon] Young, “Camp Meeting at Wellfleet,” *ZH* (1 September 1824): [2].


The most distinctive “discourses” and “addresses” were the words of speakers giving advice to the campers on how best to proceed through the camp meeting, or explaining matters of practical theology, such as defining “gospel holiness,” perfect love, “the duty of the worshiper” advice on fasting and on “receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost.” The presiding elder of the Truro camp meeting on Cape Cod, for instance, “opened the meeting by a discourse exceedingly well calculated to prepare the minds of the hearers for the blessings of the meeting.” The term “address” was even more clearly used in reference to times of teaching rather than preaching. “Remarks” might also take the form of instruction as, for example, in 1844, when the campers were called to the stand for the last time before parting remarks were made “relative to the courses of those denominated ‘come-outers.’” Methodist preachers were trying to guide people through the “great disappointment” that William Miller’s predictions had not come to pass. Though these forms of public speech strictly speaking were not

conducive of worship, they do fit what has come to be known as the Sunday school pattern of worship outlined by L. Edward Phillips.\textsuperscript{340}

\textbf{Love Feasts}

\begin{center}
Of past experience they converse, \\
They talk thy mercies o’er \\
Thy love and faithfulness rehearse, \\
Thy goodness they adore.\textsuperscript{341}
\end{center}

At almost every camp meeting in this study a love feast was held toward the end of the time together and they were generally described as the climactic events of the camps. Everyone was gathered, eager to take account of what the “work of God” had been accomplishing thus far. This was a time when the laity were encouraged to give public testimony of their relationship to God. Arranged in a circle, the camp spent at least an hour listening to personal and frequently moving stories offered by sailors and farmers, freed slaves, young women and children, grandmothers, businessmen, servants and “Fathers” of the annual conference. At a love feast one heard people like themselves give “testimony to the power of Christ to create anew,”\textsuperscript{342} and affirm “the importance and value of experimental religion”\textsuperscript{343}


\textsuperscript{341} Mudge, \textit{The American Camp-Meeting Hymn Book}, 17.


Similar to family prayer, preaching services and prayer meetings, love feasts were practiced by Methodists during the year and brought with them to their camp meetings.\textsuperscript{344} In English Methodist practice, the love feasts were reserved for those in “intimate fellowship.”\textsuperscript{345} After a hymn, prayer, grace, the distribution of bread and “the loving-cup” of water, and a collection for the poor, testimonies were encouraged from all the participants. The use of bread and water seems to have faded away quite early in the American Methodist practice of love feasts.\textsuperscript{346} But there was still some effort to limit love feasts to members, regulating them by class tickets,\textsuperscript{347} or by notes provided by itinerant preachers to non-members. In America, love feasts started to be practiced regularly as part of quarterly meetings and the rules for participation opened up, allowing non-members to attend them once or twice before becoming members.\textsuperscript{348}

\textsuperscript{344} Based on a practice recorded in the New Testament and early church, and revived by the Moravian community at Herrnhut, John Wesley first shared a love feast with the Fetter Lane Society in England on New Year’s Eve of 1738, and adapted it for the new Methodist Societies he founded. See Frank Baker, \textit{Methodism and the Love-Feast} (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 10. In England, love feasts came to be practiced fortnightly, and were segregated by gender. They were coupled with watch night services on Friday evenings and scheduled for alternate fortnights, men first, women second each month. Every three months a general love feast was scheduled.

\textsuperscript{345} Wesley expected participants to be members of bands. These were small groups organized by gender and marital status who met weekly to sing, pray and confess faults “committed through word or deed, and the temptations…felt” to one another. Each band had a leader who went first, and then helped the others by asking them searching questions about their spiritual state. Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{346} Lester Ruth, \textit{A Little Heaven Below}, 106-107.

\textsuperscript{347} Often printed with the words “for the admission of members into the love-feast,” Baker, \textit{Methodism and the Love-Feast}, 35 ff.

\textsuperscript{348} Ruth, \textit{A Little Heaven Below}, 107-114. As late as 1859 the Newmarket and South Newmarket quarterly meeting, which took place on the grounds of the Newmarket camp meeting, held a love feast. C[adford] M. Dinsmore, “Camp Meeting at New Market Junction,” \textit{ZH} (21 September 1859): 151.
noted that even in the early years, the Methodists in New England “found the idea of closed meetings… particularly distasteful.”

By 1823, the love feasts at the New England camp meetings appear as occasions that everyone attended, and there was no mention of bread or cup at any of them, and offerings were rare. The main feature of the original Methodist practice that remained was the time of testimony to the “goodness of God,” although an opening prayer and/or address and singing were still commonly included. Camp meeting love feasts were

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350 At the 1844 love feast at the Eastham Camp “several Baptists and Congregational brethren also spoke… Many spoke of their great obligations to methodism [sic], to the instrumentality of which, under God, they owed the salvation of their souls.” S[tephen] Remington, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” *ZHWJ* (11 September 1844): 146. At the 1871 love feast on Martha’s Vineyard, “Congregationalists, Baptists, Episcopalians, Friends, and Seventh-day Baptists took part in the speaking.” L. G. Westgate, “Martha’s Vineyard Camp-Meeting,” *ZH* (14 September 1871): 442. The Methodist Episcopal leaders seemed to delight in their ability to be as leaven to other New England denominations. The love feasts at the New England camp meetings were always held in the public space before the stand unless rain drove them into the tents.


almost always held in the morning. Almost every camp meeting held one, and only one love feast as the climactic event at the end of the week.

During the early years a few of the camp meeting love feasts were scheduled as the penultimate act of worship on the very last morning of a camp, followed only by the parting ritual (described below) before everyone broke camp and made their way home. Or, in the case of the 1835 meeting in Durham, New Hampshire, the love feast was followed immediately by communion and a final prayer meeting before the procession. By this time in the encampments the participants had had several days and nights together, praying intimately with one another in their society tents. The experience of being on retreat with Christian friends was enough to create the kind of communitas

354 Sometimes at dawn, at other times the first thing after breakfast. Though the 1838 camp meeting in Dana, Massachusetts, held theirs in the afternoon. S[tephen] Cushing, “Camp-Meeting at New-Salem, Mass.,” ZH (3 October 1838): 158.

355 The Eastham camp of 1844 diverged from the pattern by holding their love feast on Sunday morning, which was the second full day of a six day encampment. S[tephen] Remington, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 146. A few other exceptions in the reports of this study include the two camps of the Danville (Vermont) District in 1841. The camp at Lyndon, Vermont, began their meeting with a love feast at eight o’clock the very first morning (Tuesday), held two simultaneous love feasts in different tents at eight on a rainy Thursday morning, another at eight on Friday morning and finally a “short” (thirty-five minute) love feast at seven o’clock Saturday morning before going home. The account of the camp meeting in Albany, Vermont, that year also notes, “the love feasts were lively” but gives no other details. E[lisha] Adams, “Camp Meetings on Danville District, N. H. Conference,” ZH (27 October 1841): 172. The 1844 Martha’s Vineyard Camp meeting secretary reported “supplements to our love-feast of yesterday” held on the very last morning. Hebron Vincent, “Vineyard Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (4 September 1844): 143.


358 This term, which comes from Victor Turner will be discussed further in Chapter Five. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, 96, 96 and 109 ff.
which the earlier Methodist leaders had been seeking to foster when they limited access to members.

Much more often the camp meeting love feasts were not the final celebration, but took place early in the morning on the last full day of the encampment. Making the love feast “the crowning feature of the [camp] meeting” by holding it at the beginning of the very last day of camp seems to be intentional because they appear to have heightened the fervor and sense of urgency amongst the anxious—signaling to the people who had not yet experienced God’s grace that the end of the camp meeting was drawing near.

For example, on the last full day of the camp meeting, many “began to fear that they should go away unblest, and seemed anxious on the last evening, to renew their struggles for this mighty victory.” In 1832, Cyrus Munger described the mood of those who had not yet been “delivered from the tormenting slavery and power of sin” on the penultimate day of camp. They all gathered in one tent where they were “encouraged and led on in the pursuit by a number already rejoicing in the blessedness of full salvation”

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359 In Lincoln, Massachusetts, in 1832 it was held on the penultimate day at 7 a.m. S[amuel] W. Coggeshall, “Camp Meeting in Lincoln,” NECH (26 September 1832): 206. Franklin Fisk reported that the love feast at the Martha’s Vineyard camp of 1838 started at 5 a.m. on the penultimate day. Franklin Fisk, “Camp-Meeting at Martha’s Vineyard,” ZH (12 September 1838): 146. On the final day of the Martha’s Vineyard camp of 1841 there were several love feasts in the tents on account of rain. The order of worship for that day was quite different than most. It being the “Sabbath,” when the benches had dried off in the afternoon there was a crowd of 3,000 to hear a “thrilling” temperance address that lasted two hours and fifteen minutes, followed by the Lord’s Supper at four o’clock and a parting address followed by the parting ceremony at six o’clock in the evening. Given the timing, it can be assumed that people spent a final night on the island before returning home. G[eorge] F. Poole, “Camp Meeting at Martha’s Vineyard,” ZHWJ (8 September 1841): 143.

360 “Camp Meetings,” ZHWJ (7 September 1859): 142.
and they “pressed their suit at the mercy seat; strong cries and prayers came up before the throne, and lo! Heaven was opened,—inexpressible [sic] glory filled our souls.” A love feast was the typical way to start off such an intense final day of the camp.

The testimonies given at the love feasts helped to convince the spiritual stragglers that all they had been hearing in the sermons and exhortations was real. As noted above, Luman Boyden asserted that “No intelligent skeptic could have listened to the testimony of those witnesses and remained a skeptic still.” After describing the witness of a judge from a county in New York and a slave from the South—“the illiterate and the learned, the uncultivated and the refined, rich and poor from different nations and climes”—Boyden concluded that “their testimony perfectly agreed; and he who would not believe such a cloud of witnesses, would not be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.”

The testimonies exhibited diversity and many were very moving. The love feast of the 1844 Martha’s Vineyard camp was described thus.

It was a pleasing family interview at which many spoke of their age in Christ. It also very forcibly reminded us of the day of Pentecost: for although we could not say that we had testimonies from “Parthinians, Medes, Elamites,” &c., yet we did hear speak in the language in which we were spiritually born, Americans, a Swede, a Swiss, an Englishman, an Irishman, and one of the descendants of Ham. But the most soul-stirring part of the whole was, to see a deaf and dumb sister speak by signs of the goodness and wonderful works of God.

The Eastham camp meeting love feast of 1841 was similarly diverse.

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A love feast was held at the stand on Sabbath morning; and a most powerful season it was. One young brother made a most happy allusion to Mr. Wesley, and to the result of his extraordinary labors, a part of the fruits of which were then before us, and in which he remarked, that he had visited the birth place of that truly good and great man, and had shed tears over his grave. One aged brother from Lynn remarked that he was brought to God through the instrumentality of Jesse Lee, and had been a member of the society for fifty years—one of those few men, who in themselves, connect the history of the past with the present. One sea captain, who had been most happily converted on the ground, said, that he had followed the seas for six and twenty years, during which time—he was ashamed to say it—he had sailed under the black flag, but that he had now hoisted the white. Several Baptist and Congregational brethren also spoke, to whose pious feelings, and truly evangelical sentiments, the people most heartily responded. Many spoke of their great obligations to methodism [sic], to the instrumentality of which, under God, they owed the salvation of their souls.—Others also spoke very feelingly of their indebtedness to the prayers and labors of pious parents. On account of the vast number who were present at this love feast, that perfect order which is desirable could not well be maintained. But it was a most delightful and refreshing occasion.364

Even those with disabilities found ways to communicate their religious experience as in Bolton, Connecticut, in 1838.

Here the old soldier of the cross, those who had just received a clean heart, and the young converts spoke of the goodness of God. Among those who testified of the goodness of God, was a deaf and dumb man, who found the Lord about a year since. He told us, by signs, that he had been a great sinner, and that God had blessed him with his great salvation. It was a silent eloquence it is true, but it was powerful. It spoke loud to every heart. Many wept, others rejoiced. All doubtless could exclaim, “It is good for us to be here!”365

Those who spoke often compared themselves to characters from scripture as they did at the Eastford, Connecticut, camp of 1838.

The Presiding Elder remarked that what we had to offer was common stock, and in distributing, we should feed the whole. It was so. Here was the aged father almost on the threshold of heaven, about to gather up his feet; and the lad with his five barley loaves and fishes to feed the multitude. Here and there a Hannah who


rejoiced in the salvation of God, and the Marys, content to sit at the feet of Christ, while the Marthas were cumbered about much serving at home. It was truly an interesting time. About 70 professed to enjoy the present witness of perfect love, while others confessed their conviction for the blessing.  

At the camp meeting love feast at Sterling in 1856, two aged veteran pastors, Ebenezer Newell and Isaac Jennison, spoke as well as “a fugitive from servitude” and a “lad of less than a dozen years whose little heart had felt the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, and as he rose from his seat he said, ‘I have given all to Christ.’”  

Presiding elders encouraged people to speak when they were hesitant, though at times “all appeared ready to declare what God had done for them.” Occasionally the invitation to speak was abused by those offering “witty or eccentric expressions” meant to stimulate the mind “without improving the heart,” by remarks that were “inappropriate or in bad taste,” and the comments of those “anxious to create a laugh, or say something which might be reported in the papers.” But this opportunity for every person to speak publicly regardless of age or station was critical to helping people claim their new identities as new Christians or those who had just received the grace of “perfect love.” The clergy simultaneously gave each person the opportunity to name themselves, while providing several categories within the Methodist discourse from

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which to choose for that name. They were like Jacob, or the Prodigal, Mary or Peter.  

Furthermore, as anyone learning a language knows, the ability to speak in a second language is critical to becoming fluent in it. The love feasts were an opportunity for people to show that they were becoming fluent in the Methodist discourse of salvation.

Most often at love feasts, “[m]any spake understandingly and feelingly, of God’s love manifested to them,” so that the public testimonies generated many strong emotions. A love feast could be described as “a solemn melting time,” a time of “general refreshing to the people of God.” Another recalled that it was “a time of joy and will not soon be forgotten. We delight we could say in truth – Angels now are hovering round us.” At Martha’s Vineyard, “[m]any of us felt more like building more durable ‘tabernacles’ here than we did like quitting this ‘mountain of holiness,’” while at the Webster love feast, the “veil which separates the two worlds was indeed thin.”

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At the camp meeting of 1871 in Richmond, Maine, the love feast “seemed like bees gathering honey among the flowers on a bright June morning.”

Besides helping many people feel good and leading the yet unconverted to mourn all the greater, the love feasts also functioned to bring the fruits of the work of God into plain and measurable view.

In this [love feast], we could see, in a measure, the beneficial effect of the meeting upon the church. Encouraging, comforting, animating, strengthening, and purifying their hearts; preparing them to serve God in newness of life, and exert a hallowed and powerful influence in their respective societies. But nothing in connection with the meeting appeared more interesting and important, than the benefit derived by the preachers; who were remarkably blessed. Several of them, through outward trials and inward temptations, had become so discouraged and disheartened in their work, that they had determined to locate at the next conference. But at this meeting, Divine grace raised them above every embarrassment, and they resolved anew, to trust in God, and devote themselves wholly to the great work, whereunto he had called them, be their sacrifices and sufferings what they might. It is impossible to calculate, how extensive will be the consequence, of such a quickening of so many Ministers in Christ. Probably it will be a means of adding hundreds if not thousands, to the number of souls who will be saved through their instrumentality: generations to come may feel the vibrations of the impulse then given.

At the love feasts people testified to their state of salvation, enabling a public accounting of the camp meeting’s results and allowing Methodist preachers to see evidence that their hard work was paying off. At the love feast in Dana, Massachusetts, in 1838, they counted “ten converted, and eight reclaimed from a backslidden state” and “there were


very many and clear testimonies of the experience and present enjoyment of entire sanctification.”

Love feasts were not just celebrations of justification, but also moments when sanctifying grace was publicly claimed. Many at love feasts would be bold to profess they had attained “perfect love.” In 1841, the love feast at the Pelham, Massachusetts, camp meeting

[was] a time of great interest. Many spoke of the enjoyment of perfect love, with a clearness and power which demonstrated that the attainment of the blessing is no delusion, or figment of the imagination. As near as we could calculate, during the meeting there were converted, sanctified and reclaimed, about one hundred and fifty souls.

Many campers at the Avon, Maine, camp of 1844 “testified that at camp-meeting they had not only received justifying grace, but had plunged in the fountain of full redemption, and felt a strong attachment to the cause of Christ and the church of their choice.”

The leaders of the camp meetings supplemented the anecdotal evidence of the fruits of the camp meetings with an attempt at collecting quantitative data. This was always problematic because the categories were not fixed, nor was it ever completely possible consistently to collect the data. A typical report states that thirty to forty were justified, while “a great number advanced in holiness” and “some professed perfect

love.” But counting those who spoke at a love feast was somewhat easier. These most often numbered more than 100 in a period of about an hour, but the rate could go as high as 263 in an hour, giving an average of about twenty seconds per testimony.

Since there were often far more people willing to speak than there was time, the leaders resorted to inviting members of the congregation to signal their intention, such as by standing or raising their hand. For example, in 1838 at Eastford, Connecticut, “there not being time for all to speak, an invitation was given for the rest to manifest their testimony by rising...a cloud of witnesses arose, in honor of their master.” When this happened at the Sterling camp of 1856, “a request was made that such as desired to show their love of God might do it by raising their hand, when more than four hundred were raised.” Three years later at Sterling, “[t]housands more, at the invitation of Bro. Hascall, bore their silent testimony for Christ by raising the right hand.” Not only did organizers use the occasion of the love feast to count the results of the meeting, they also sometimes even offered an opportunity to join a society at the end.

By the beginning of the twentieth century love feasts were disappearing from Methodist practice. In 1926, only three of the camp meeting reports in Zion’s Herald...
mentioned a love feast. Among United Methodists in New England today, love feasts are practiced only rarely and many Methodist congregations have never experienced one. Regarding the demise of love feasts, Frank Baker speculated that the transformation of love feasts from being “an intimate festival of the saved, together with a few seekers, into a public meeting—and even a public spectacle” was responsible for the decline of its practice. 391 But the reports of the love feasts held at the New England camp meetings during the nineteenth century show that they were constantly viewed as among the most important events of the camp meetings.

**The Lord’s Supper**

The Lord’s Supper, also frequently called “the Sacrament” in these reports, was administered at some camps almost every year of this study, though it was not a part of every camp. Sometimes it was offered rather than a love feast. 392 Sometimes it followed the love feast. 393 Sometimes it was given at another time all together. 394 Unlike the love feasts, the Lord’s Supper did seem to be reserved for members of the societies. At Dixmont, Maine, “thirty of Christ’s Ambassadors [the preachers] and two hundred and

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392 “The Late Methodist Camp Meeting in East Pittston, Me.,” *ZH* (25 December 1823): 206.


thirty three of his professed flowers came around the altar and there with penitent hearts, confesset [sic] their Lord by partaking of the Holy Sacrament.”

Similar to the love feasts, the Lord’s Supper evoked strong feelings. When the people at the Bath, New Hampshire, camp meeting of 1844 “commemorated the death of their crucified Redeemer,” it was “an affecting and melting season.” At Martha’s Vineyard, “[i]t did indeed seem, as one was heard to say, ‘that mercy was dropping down from the smiling skies.’” Holy Communion appears to have been frequently experienced as a memorial meal. At Kennebunk in 1832, the communicants received “the dear memorials of their dying Lord.” In Springfield, Vermont, the “Eucharistic feast” of 1844 was a “season of sad remembrance, solemn joy, and glorious hope. O that not one Judas may be found among that number who shall go away and betray their Lord.” But it was also understood as a means of God’s grace. After the love feast at the Durham, New Hampshire, camp meeting in 1835,

the Lord was made known unto us, in the breaking of bread. A precious means of grace, which, I fear, is not in general sufficiently prized, nor used so often as it should be. The use of it on such occasions as this, is, on some accounts peculiarly appropriate; particularly, for the sake of the weak, who are then strengthened to take up the cross, and in taking it up, gain a blessing, which encourages them to bear it afterward.

397 Franklin Fisk, “Camp-Meeting at Martha's Vineyard,” ZH (12 September 1838): 146.
Offerings and Special Church Ministries

It was not uncommon for camp meeting leaders to set aside one regular preaching session to highlight a particular ministry of the church. This likely began simply as the time of collecting an offering which had been associated with the Methodist practice of the love feast since the time of John Wesley. At the New England camp meetings under review, offerings were taken for several causes (besides the expenses of the camp meetings). At Millennial Grove people made a “sacrifice of about thirty articles of jewelry.”\textsuperscript{400} The Methodists at the Windsor, Maine, camp meeting of 1844 took up a collection for Father Wentworth,

a worthy old veteran, whose name is on the superannuated list of our Conference. He labored and toiled and suffered for the church when we were scarcely a people in Maine; but for several years past he has been able only to suffer and pray for it. I presume the brethren did not look upon the good old man, as he stood before them supported by his crutches, as an object of mere charity, but as one to whom they owe a debt for long and faithful services, a part of which they were ready to pay.\textsuperscript{401}

Special times began to be set aside to highlight particular interests, missions or ministries of the church. These were often set up somewhat like the usual “public exercises” and typically occurred in the place of one “exercise” session at the stand. The leaders might also claim that these meetings, similar to regular preaching services, were meant to move those gathered a step closer “toward perfection” in some way.

\textsuperscript{400} Amos Binney, “Millennial Grove Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (22 August 1838): 134. Binney reported that these “ladies” had “just found a better adorning, the pearl of great price, the kingdom of God within them. May their offering prove successful as a means of winning others to Christ.”

There were meetings to highlight the work of a variety of missionaries. These appeared to be even more like a regular exercise because the missionary often preached a sermon or at least gave an address in place of a sermon. The big difference was that instead of inviting people to respond by an altar call, an offering was taken up to support the missionary. In 1838, at Bolton, Connecticut, a missionary from Africa\textsuperscript{402} preached to the crowd on the subject of missions using Luke 10:35\textsuperscript{403} as his text. Inspired, the people took up a collection of more than $150 “to send the gospel to heathen lands, and seek for the adorning of a ‘meek and quiet spirit.’”\textsuperscript{404}

In 1841, the Marlborough, Connecticut, camp meeting held a “missionary meeting” at the stand and Br. F. Hodgson of Hartford and Dr. Bangs of Middletown gave addresses, and an offering of $109 was collected. But then another preacher challenged the crowd to raise another $30 in honor of their presiding elder to “perpetuate [his] name” in Africa. “The proposition was immediately met and we returned to our tents praising God for liberal hearts.”\textsuperscript{405} There were two more reports of missionaries at the camp meetings in subsequent years.\textsuperscript{406} The “impromptu meeting” at Asbury Grove in 1862,

\begin{footnotes}
\item[402] Listed as Brother Seyes.
\item[403] When the Good Samaritan give the inn keeper “two pence” and said “take care of him.”
\item[406] Br. Smallwood, an English Missionary from British Provinces preached at Millennial Grove in 1844. S[tephen] Remington, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (11 September 1844): 146. Edward Davies, an elder in the Maine Annual Conference also fancied himself a missionary as he went about preaching in the area of Grafton after a camp meeting in Bethel, Maine. But there is no mention of any portion of the camp meeting focused on missionary work. E[ward] Davies, “Bethel Camp Meeting and a Missionary Tour,” ZHWJ (9 November 1859): 177.
\end{footnotes}
featuring Br. Kristeller, Joseph Caby and the missionary from Turkey identified in
Chapter Three, was the final special missionary meeting mentioned in the newspaper
accounts of New England camp meetings used in this study.\textsuperscript{407}

The Sunday school assemblies have already been noted in Chapter Three in the
discussion of children at the camp meetings. They were also held at the stand and took
the place of a preaching exercise. The aim of these “assemblies,” which mostly took
place at the Eastham camp,\textsuperscript{408} seems to be meant to inspire congregations to start or
improve Sunday schools back home. The first one in the records was in 1838 at Eastham.
It featured one “old lady” speaker “known and beloved in all the church, as an intelligent
and devoted Christian.” She had been involved with this ministry “from its first
introduction” and even though she was over seventy years old, she intended to continue
until she “fell at her post, feeding the lambs of Christ’s flock”\textsuperscript{409}

The cause of temperance was promoted from several New England camp meeting
stands in 1841. Mr. Starbird of Hampden, Maine, addressed the Bucksport meeting,
focusing particularly on “the rum seller” and moving the congregation to pray, “Lord
have mercy on the rum seller,” before gathering temperance pledges.\textsuperscript{410} In 1841, at the


\textsuperscript{408} The Millennial Grove events for Sabbath school children are recorded in Amos Binney, 
1847): 142. There was also one at Newmarket, New Hampshire, in 1862. John W. Adams, “New Market

\textsuperscript{409} Amos Binney, “Millennial Grove Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (22 August 1838): 134.

\textsuperscript{410} William E. Pinder, \textit{ZHWJ} (15 September 1841): 147.
Middleborough, Massachusetts, grove meeting, the “Washington Total Abstinence Society of Boston, addressed the audience on temperance…there is no longer a refuge for [the] drunkard; for these reformers, like the early [apostles] go ‘every where.’”\footnote{Franklin Fisk, “Middleborough Grove Meeting,” ZHWJ (6 October 1841): 158.}

Brother Hawkins from Baltimore took the stands at both Millennial Grove and Martha’s Vineyard that same year giving “a thrilling relation of his own experiences. He threw into his subject a heart warmed with the love of God, and made frequent and effectual appeals to the conscience of the sinner.”\footnote{G[eorge] F. Poole, “Camp Meeting at Martha's Vineyard,” ZHWJ (8 September 1841): 143; S[amuel] W. Coggeshall, “Eastham Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (25 August 1841): 135.} Temperance appeared again at the 1871 Hedding camp meeting when several prayers were offered and speeches made by two Methodist preachers and the former governor of New Hampshire, Nathaniel Berry. “A total abstinence pledge was read to the congregation, and more than a thousand people rose to their feet, and with uplifted hands declared that they signed it.”\footnote{“Hedding Camp-Meeting,” ZH (21 September 1871): 449.}

Likewise, the theme of abolition was highlighted at some of the camps. At Westfield, Massachusetts, in 1838, Br. D. Todd gave a “plain, independent, consistent, gospel, anti-slavery sermon,” which was contrasted with other preachers who “prayed most earnestly for the slave in a way which all could understand.”\footnote{Orange Scott also preached at this camp meeting. J[onathan] D. Bridge, “Westfield Camp-Meeting,” ZH (3 October 1838): 158.} The service at Martha’s Vineyard, where Brother House made an appeal on behalf of the “colored sister” from Brooklyn, New York, who was subsequently brought to the stand, was
another instance. But the clergy of the MEC in New England were divided on this issue, and there were several ministers on each side who preached at the New England camp meetings.

There was a collection of $100 at the 1856 camp meeting on Martha’s Vineyard for the Colored People’s College in response to a statement made by its agent, Rev. John F. Wright of Ohio. In 1862, people at the Newmarket, New Hampshire, and Kennebunk, Maine, camp meetings responded to Rev. H. Cox of St. Louis and his “recital of trials, sufferings, and barbarities which has already fallen to the lot of the Border States Union people,” and made offerings toward the debts of the Union Church in his city.

In light of a theology of sanctification, these addresses urging people to support certain social causes were very fitting for camp meetings. In this period of Methodist thought and practice, social and personal holiness were integrated. One simply could not be holy if one’s life was ruled by drink, did nothing while human beings were subject to the injustice of chattel slavery, or did nothing to share the gospel with those at home (Sunday school) and abroad (missions). As a corollary, the way one used one’s money, time and life energy was a spiritual matter of great concern to the Lord. As Heman Bangs

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416 To review the list of camp meeting preachers who had some involvement in abolition and those who were opposed to the changes the abolitionists were calling for see page 138, note 57, above.


set out in his sermon on Joshua 3:5, holiness was “the object for which we had assembled.” After hearing his advice on the “best manner of attaining that object,” those present were inspired, saying, “we will now go to work, and work as God has directed.”\(^{419}\)

Not everyone, however, was pleased with so many offerings and special meetings. In 1859, the Sterling preachers and tent delegates set a policy that there be no collections taken “save for the purpose of defraying expenses attending this camp meeting association” and that no agent be allowed to speak from the stand to promote his institution. The secretary explained, “If one agency is introduced all others applying should also be, and soon the objects now contemplated by our annual camp meetings, viz., the immediate conversion of men, and the sanctification of believers, will be exchanged for those of a less important character.”\(^{420}\) The secretary of Asbury Grove offered similar sentiments that year calling such collections a “great annoyance.”\(^{421}\) The Sterling Committee was “rejoiced to know that there [was] a prospect, that, hereafter [1862], the expenses of the meeting may be met without resort to a public collection.”\(^{422}\)

In the midst of the Civil War a new category of activity was introduced at several camps: a “patriotic service” or “a war meeting” was held during seven of the camp

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\(^{420}\) Albert Gould, “Sterling Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (14 September 1859): 147. This statement makes visible the early development of a fault-line within Methodism; one that separated social concerns from personal holiness.


\(^{422}\) The committee had just reported themselves free from debt. George Prentice, “Camp Meeting at Sterling,” \textit{ZHWJ} (24 September 1862): 142.
meetings in 1862. Each camp was a little different in how it acknowledged the war. In Northport, Maine, a morning was simply devoted to prayer for the country. Similarly at Willimantic, “the condition of the country elicited a great deal of interest, and many and fervent were the prayers offered in behalf of those who have been called from their homes to put down rebellion.” Those at the Charleston, Maine, camp meeting held a general prayer meeting at the stand for the nation: “The interest of this meeting was increased by the references to Bro. Jos. P. French, of our Conference, who was present one year since and preached an eloquent and earnest sermon in which he faithfully presented the duty of Christians to their country in the hour of her calamity. His brother, L. P. French, was with us.”

When a non-Methodist visited Asbury Grove that year, he was deeply impressed by

> the power and efficacy of the prayers…When [Dr. Barrows] prayed for the country and its enemies, for our armies in battle, for our wounded and sick soldiers, for the homes bereaved and filled with anguish, and when the low and fervid Amen! went up from every part of the great congregation, one felt that such prayers must and would be abundantly answered.

At the Columbia, Maine, camp meeting prayers for the war spontaneously began after “news came of the defeat of the rebels. Many rejoiced at the success of our army. Earnest prayers were made to Him who rules the destinies of nations that the sin which lies so

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426 Edmund H. Sears, “A Day with the Methodists,” ZHWJ (17 August 1862): 149. This article was originally printed in The Monthly Religious Magazine of Boston. Zion’s Herald editors suspect that the author was the editor of the magazine, Rev. Edmund H. Sears.
near the door of the nation might be removed—all feeling that unless this be done that our fighting will be in vain.”

Some camp meetings did more than pray about the war. At East Poland, Maine, a sermon was delivered on the subject and the congregation responded by singing “America” and holding “a season of prayer for our country.” At Sterling, Massachusetts, addresses were given by various brethren, one of which sparked a “bitterly unbrotherly report” for being of bad taste. At Newmarket, New Hampshire, the whole afternoon was “devoted to a patriotic service.” First there were prayers offered by two clergy and by a layman whose son was either dead or a prisoner of war, then Rev. Lorenzo D. Barrow of the New England Conference made a speech, and an offering for Captain W. C. Sawyer, a veteran “who lost a limb at Newbern,” was taken up to assist with his costs of preparing for the ministry at the Methodist General Biblical Institute in Concord. Finally, the Honorable J. P. Hale, a former Representative and Senator from New Hampshire, gave an address. Then next afternoon, Rev. H. Cox of St. Louis described “the trials, sufferings, and barbarities which had already fallen to the lot of the Border States Union people,” which inspired the aforementioned collection.

427 The sentiments of this quote bear striking resemblance to President Lincoln’s Second Inaugural speech given two and one half years later. James W. Day, “Epping Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (15 October 1862): 166. The name “Epping” might be confused with the more prominent camp meeting in New Hampshire, but the clergy listed in the report are all from the East Maine Conference and there is an Epping Road in Columbia, Maine, where this meeting more likely took place.


Cox of St. Louis also appeared at the Kennebunk camp meeting along with “Capt. Cowan, of the Maine Cavalry; and William R. Clark,” all speaking at their “patriotic service in behalf of our country.”

But the most impressive patriotic service that year was held at Martha’s Vineyard when John A. Andrew, the Governor of Massachusetts, traveled to the island and addressed an estimated 10,000 people who had gathered for “the Sabbath.” His address, which followed the regular afternoon preaching service, was “the great public attraction.” Arriving at the Vineyard the previous day, he attended three preaching services before giving his own address, accepting the invitation to sit on the stand with the preachers. His “well conceived, skillfully arranged and ably delivered” address took one hour and fifteen minutes and “was well received.”

He said that although he had not been licensed to preach, and could hardly call himself a layman, yet, having been invited by the President of the meeting to stand in this sacred place and address the people, he had consented to do so. In view of the day, the place and the occasion, he was disposed to take a Christian view of the matters to which he was about to advert. This he did in proceeding to review the early history of our liberties, and in his reference to the cause of our present calamity—slavery—which must be removed before we could have a permanent peace. These Christian ministers were recruiting volunteers for the Son of God. He was here the head recruiting officer for the army, and did not think it wrong for men to enlist on the Sabbath.

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431 R[ufus] H. Stinchfield, “Kennebunk Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (24 September 1862): 154. Henry Cox is listed as an elder appointed to Chestnut Street in Portland, Maine, in 1856 and 1857, and still on the Portland District but as a supernumerary elder in 1859. His name does not appear on appointment lists before or after this period. Perhaps he came to New England as an elder and then moved to St. Louis.

432 It would be interesting to research just who initiated this appearance at the camp meeting, the MEC district superintendent or the Governor of Massachusetts.
Though the crowd had been instructed not to applaud during the address, they could not repress the frequent responses of “Hallelujah,” and “Amen.” In the actual text of the Governor’s speech, which was printed in full in Zion’s Herald, he said that he had brought with him “several kinds of recruiting officers upon the ground.” He had witnessed “the fathers of Massachusetts”

come up voluntarily to the work of the Lord himself against the mighty powers of hell. Now I want to see my brethren come up to this work in the spirit of religious devotion to the church. I do not feel courageous at the idea of our brothers’ marching to the field led by nothing but an impulse, led by a blind and heathen patriotism. The Romans of old had that; all the men who have ever mustered beneath the flag of any despot have had that—they fought for their country, and they have one by one fallen so low that no plummet has yet reached the depth where they rest. And we, too, proud of our history, may yet by our want of fidelity, by our own hardness of heart, may yet be left to sink so low that the resurrection trump shall never reach its depth. No sirs, there is no charter peculiar to any men, peculiar to any people. God has given but one charter on earth, and that is the charter of universal humanity. Walk by it, live by it, swear by it, remain with it, bear it in your arms as the Jews did the tables of the law, keep it in your hearts, and fight for it whenever you may.

One word and I have done. I cannot sit down without repeating the invitation. I cannot believe that this glorious old Bay State of ours shall ever see a conscript son marching to the defense of the liberties of his country. No conscripts in the old Bay State! All are volunteers in the army of the Lord. All must come willingly because heroically, and from an inward conviction of the righteousness of this great and noble cause.

You will find, here upon this ground, gentlemen who will receive your names. It is not wicked on Sunday afternoon to make up your minds to save your country. Do your duty now! As the old minister in the Legislature said many years ago, when a fearful storm was threatened and it began to rain, and some of the members said, “I think, Mr. Speaker, we’ll adjourn.” Up jumped the faithful man and said,” Don’t let’s adjourn; let us work through this storm; because if the Lord comes I want him to find me about my duty.”

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The Governor’s definition of holy action, delivered in this place and time, is a significant departure from the calls to holiness we have seen above. This turn of events is all the more poignant when one reflects on the heavy debate that year among the Methodist clergy on the Providence District and other parts of New England about whether camp meetings should even take place on “the Sabbath” at all. So when the Martha’s Vineyard leaders proceeded to hold their meeting from Tuesday to Tuesday they were already taking a stand. But when they chose to invite the Governor to come to the Vineyard and give an address on the “Sabbath,” and he proceeded to use the fact that the crowds were larger that day than any other to bring his officers to sign up new recruits, it is clear that Vineyard leaders had pushed well beyond the pious Methodist concerns for keeping the Sabbath holy. There is, however, no critique at all of this turn of events in the pages of the newspaper that year. Though it was once outside of and threatening to the established church of Massachusetts, in 1871 New England Methodism had reached an apparent pinnacle. Here, at its premier camp meeting, it willingly offered its holiest and most well attended day to the designs of Governor Andrew, who encouraged thousands of men to worship and sacrifice their lives to the god of war.

Looking over these “extra-curricular” activities (church business meetings, Sunday school, missionary, temperance and abolition addresses, and the patriotic services of 1862), we can see the first real threats of diverting the attention of camp meeting


435 Or perhaps allow—there is no evidence about who made the initiative for the governor to be there.
participants from the original purposes of converting the unawakened, quickening the believers and ushering them toward “perfect love.” Activities like these had the unintended effect of draining power from the camp meetings. From looking at Martha’s Vineyard, it seems the bigger and more attractive a camp meeting got, the greater danger there was of losing its potency as an instrument of church growth.

**Parting Ritual**

Tho’ with regret we leave the place; We hope to meet again in love;
But if we meet not face to face On earth, O may we meet above.
The time for parting now has come, And we will go rejoicing home.

O God, we give ourselves to thee: May our hearts ne’er prove untrue
But may we ever faithful be, Here, take my hand, adieu, adieu.
The time for parting now is come, And we will go rejoicing home.

When death shall call our spirits hence, To leave these tents of flesh and clay,
With joy we’ll quit these scenes of sense, And rise to dwell in endless day.
And when that parting hour shall come, We’ll shout, and go rejoicing home.436

Come, brethren, form the line, And each in order move;
In regular procession join, All ye who Jesus love.
With solemn pace and slow, We march the circle round;
Where we have seen thy goodness flow, And felt thy love abound.
We find it hard to part, From those we love so well;
United by thy grace in heart, We would together dwell.437

The parting ritual appears to have been practiced by New England Methodists only at camp meeting. It was called variously the closing ceremony, the parting


437 Verses 2, 3, 4. Ibid., 38.
ceremony, parting scene, or “taking the parting hand.” The ritual had two primary acts of worship, marching around the camp grounds in a choreographed way, and shaking hands with one another as a sign of farewell. While not practiced at every camp reviewed in this study, the parting ritual was so well known that many a reporter could just note that the camps “proceeded to close with the usual ceremony.” This ritual was frequently called “old fashioned,” indicating that it had been practiced in New England long before *Zion’s Herald* was first published, but also, perhaps, that the Methodist Episcopal leaders had experimented with other ways of ending the camps. Still, it was being practiced in 1871, at least at Asbury Grove, Martha’s Vineyard and camps in Maine and New Hampshire.

Most often this ritual was conducted as the very last act of worship before breaking camp and returning home. The 1838 camp in Corinth, Vermont, started their final day with prayer meetings in their tents and breakfast followed by the “mournful notes of the tolling bell [that] announced the approach of the hour of separation. All

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440 Likely introduced by Lorenzo Dow in 1803.
assembled at the stand.\footnote{S[ylvester] P. Williams, “Camp-Meeting at Corinth, Vt,” \textit{ZH} (3 October 1838): 158.} In 1841, the people at the Martha’s Vineyard camp meeting were called to the stand at six o’clock in the morning.\footnote{One exception is the 1871 camp meeting at Asbury Grove when the congregation processed “by the magic moonlight night, streaming through the trees.” Untitled, \textit{ZH} (7 September 1871): 428; “Asbury Grove, Hamilton,” \textit{ZH} (14 September 1871): 442.}

Though it is not often stated explicitly, it would not be surprising for hymns to be sung at this time.\footnote{“The services commenced by singing the beautiful hymn beginning, ‘Blest be the tie that bind, Our hearts in Christian love,’ which was followed by prayer, and an impressive address by Br. Burrill. Franklin Fisk, “Camp-Meeting at Martha's Vineyard,” \textit{ZH} (12 September 1838): 146. See also Herrick M. Eaton, “Steuben Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZHWJ} (20 October 1841): 165.} Hymns that are either reported, or quoted in the description of the parting scene include “Blest Be the Tie That Binds,”\footnote{Franklin Fisk, “Camp-Meeting at Martha's Vineyard,” \textit{ZH} (12 September 1838): 146.} “There’s a Fountain Filled with Blood,”\footnote{W. T. Jewell, “Maine State Camp-Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (31 August 1871): 417.} “Welcome Sweet Day of Rest” (Isaac Watts),\footnote{Greenleaf Greely, “Readfield and Starks, Maine,” \textit{ZH} (11 October 1826): [2].} and “Marching to Zion”.\footnote{Samuel Hoyt, “Durham Camp Meeting,” \textit{ZH} (26 September 1838): 154.}

Parting scenes described in detail often included an address or closing remarks given by the presiding elder or other ministers. For example at the 1838 camp meeting in Corinth, Vermont, Presiding Elder Elisha J. Scott and “apostolic father [Eleazer] Wells”\footnote{Wells had been Presiding Elder of the Kennebeck District in 1826 and of the Danville District in 1829, and was listed as superannuated in the 1838 Annual Conference reports.} gave a “solemn and appropriate address” before the procession.\footnote{S[ylvester] P. Williams, “Camp-Meeting at Corinth, Vt,” \textit{ZH} (3 October 1838): 158. Such remarks were also called “appropriate and comprehensive” Pickens Boynton, “Camp-Meeting, Bath, Nh,” \textit{ZHWJ} (25 September 1844): 155. and “spirited and affectionate.” G[eorge] F. Poole, “Camp Meeting at Martha's Vineyard,” \textit{ZHWJ} (8 September 1841): 143.}
Meeting John provided an example of the content of the address given to those assembled at Madison, Maine, in 1841: “[The] duty of practical religion was solemnly enforced on all, and that we should go and tell what great things the Lord had done for us here.”

A distinctive feature of this ritual was that it very often included a procession around the camp grounds. The secretary of the Kennebunk camp meeting of 1850 explained that the procession reached “around the far extended circle.” Noting these “closing marches” had been part of camp meetings from the beginning, historian Troy Messenger explains that they functioned to “ritually mark the boundaries—temporal and spatial—of the camp meeting assembly and provided a means for crossing those boundaries.”


451 J[onathan] D. Bridge, “Westfield Camp-Meeting,” ZH (3 October 1838): 158; John Allen, “A Good Camp Meeting in Madison, Me,” ZHWJ (13 October 1841): 164. The procession at the 1823 camp meeting in Marshfield described in Chapter Three was atypical as it took place in the morning of the penultimate day, while the love feast and a “parting ceremony” (with no other details describing them) were the final acts of worship for that camp. Evangelicus, “Camp Meetings - No. 3,” ZH (4 September 1823): 138. A few New England Methodists encountered another atypical procession when they sailed across Long Island Sound to attend the camp meeting in Hampstead, New York, in 1841. This one occurred at three o’clock in the morning. “[First] rate singers, with tunes, books and lamps in their hands, and apparently with much of the spirit of God in their hearts; they commenced marching through the streets of the little city, singing the Millennium Hymn. This was rapturous and sublime; only think! the waving torch, the melodious voices, the sentiment of the song, and the echo in the grove, united with the first dawn of day. I cannot describe it, it was too much like heaven. At length the procession halted before the stand, and sung the ‘Star in the East,’ with several other airs, and moved off, and were soon lost among the tents and people assembled.” Benjamin C. Phelps, “Hampstead Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (8 August 1841): 143.


453 Messenger, Holy Leisure, 122.
The procession typically seemed to flow seamlessly into the next ritual act known as “the parting hand” when “the preachers… formed a line facing inward, and the procession in single file passed by, giving to each the parting hand.” Sometimes everyone shook everyone’s hand, but larger encampments seemed to make do with a choreography that allowed the preachers to shake everyone else’s hand. The secretary of the 1838 camp meeting in Eastford, Connecticut, described what they were doing: “We then … gave the parting hand in token of our Christian love and friendship, wishing each other a pleasant and a prosperous journey in the Christian cause, and an entrance into that rest which remains for the people of God.”

Of the camp meetings reviewed in this study, the parting scene at Starks, Maine, in 1826 stands out as unique. Joseph Baker wrote:

The parting scene on Friday far exceeded all description. First the preachers took their seats on the stand, being about 30—some of different orders; then nearly two thousand people gathered before the stand. Now the converts were invited to take their seats at the altar; immediately the congregation was in motion, and you might see one here and another there, with glory beaming on their countenances, coming forward, until we counted eighty within the sacred enclosure. Then the mourners were invited to take their seats on the outside of the railing; with mournful steps they came until about one hundred were seated, looking down upon earth, but sighing to heaven—“God be merciful to me a sinner.” We all fell upon our knees, and scores sent up the same desires for them. Now we felt a mighty shock of diverse power. A gentleman, who had for some years been seeking only this world and had gained much, had been poor in spirit for several days—had come forward for prayers whenever invited; still complaining that he could not feel, but knew that he was a sinner, and must be converted or perish, and would, therefore, put himself in the way of mercy. He now had an answer to prayer, and fell on the earth in deep agony of soul. Soon, however, the fetters broke, and he rose, saying, “Take thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place


whereon thou standest is holy ground;” and every pious heart felt, and many said, Amen. Now this new convert joined the others within the altar, and another mourner soon filled his place. There was rejoicing in the “tabernacle of the Lord,” and prayer and praise alternately went up through the waving trees, and another mourner gave the token of joy by leaving his seat for that of the converts, and another from the congregation took his place. The scene became more and more interesting, until we counted ninety among the converts, and yet the numbers of the mourners was not diminished.456

Even in this parting time, the work of conversion continued.

What comes through very clearly in each final act of worship is that it was extremely emotional for the participants. Over and over again these parting scenes are called “powerful and glorious,”457 “most affecting…a scene of pleasing grief and mournful joy.”458 At times it seems that even more than during the love feast, Christian unity had come to its peak.

The brethren “loved each other with pure hearts fervently.” Although prior to this meeting many had been entire strangers to each other; yet on the occasion of parting, hardly a dry eye was visible.

“If our fellowship below in Jesus be so sweet,
What heights of rapture shall we feel when round his throne we meet?”459

But just as the unity brought joy, the thought of parting from the hallowed grounds and the fellowship of the communion of saints brought sorrow.

Here were assembled the toil worn sire of three score years and ten, the smiling innocent of few and tender days—the athletic and robust—the saint and sinner—the mourner and happy convert—standing, sitting, or reclining upon some sturdy tree—gazing at the messenger of eternal salvation—eager to catch each falling


458 Franklin Fisk quoted “All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord” by Charles Wesley. “Camp-Meeting at Martha's Vineyard,” ZH (12 September 1838): 146.

word, or with downcast eyes and sorrowing heart, seeming loath to part… The separation of brethren from a spot rendered sacred by the presence of God, and Christian communion, was painfully joyous. But we parted in full and earnest hope that we shall meet again in a land “When sickness, sorrow, pain and death, Are felt and feared no more.”

This was a time when many became aware of their mortality, thinking that they might be “now shaking hands with each other for the last time.” Given the life expectancy of the time, it was truly quite probable that several in their company would not live to make a return pilgrimage the following year. As the expectation of the millennium grew, so those taking leave from the camp meetings grew more mindful of an imminent judgment day. What the converted and renewed people of God took home as consolation was the hope of meeting again at the coming of Christ. “We separated there to meet no more till summoned to the judgment!”

Or, as more elaborately described by Camp Meeting John Allen:

[We] took the parting hand amidst the tears of mingled joy and sorrow, which does not grow in nature’s garden. Glory be to God, the period is arriving when all tears will be wiped from the eyes of saints, and joy and gladness be their lot forever. O Lord, prepare us for that day when bodies will part no more for ever. Amen.

In the case of the camp meeting at Steuben, Maine, in 1841, those gathered at the stand were sure that their presiding elder, David Copeland, was taking leave of his post.

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During his remarks, he stated that he had been upon that district nearly four years, and that it was probable that he should never meet with us in the tented grove again; but expressed a strong desire to meet us in heaven. May the Lord prepare us for it. The words, “the last time,” kept ringing in our ears and produced those impressions upon the mind which led us to ask the question, “Will conference send us another brother Copeland?”

After their intense time of spiritual communion, the parting of camp meeting friends was often an occasion to ponder the uncertainties of the future.

One additional act of worship that was often included in the parting ritual was a benediction, typically offered by the presiding elder who then sent everyone home. Every so often, however, the people felt the Spirit of God moving among them so that they could not depart after the benediction was uttered.

Friday was a day long to be remembered; many were pricked in the heart, and a goodly number hopefully converted. Saturday the parting scene commenced—and the Lord gave us a parting blessing; but some were so distressed that they could not leave the ground, and a few old soldiers of the cross stayed behind and offered up prayers for their healing, until about the middle of the day, when four or five more were made whole, which made up the number of converts about fifty during the whole encampment, and nearly a hundred more were fully persuaded to seek the Lord.

The experience of several days at a camp meeting made a lasting impression on many, which is why so many made the pilgrimage year after year.

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464 Indeed, David Copeland became the Presiding Elder of the Portland District, at the opposite end of Maine, and continued his ministry in Southern and Mid Maine. By 1856 he was Superannuated.

465 This appears in reports of about a dozen camp meetings between 1823 and 1871 with nearly no commentary.

Bodily Expressions of Conversion—Shouting in New England?

The practice of “shouting” as described in Chapter Two most frequently took place during the preaching and praying exercises. There is some indication that one could observe shouting or bodily exercises in New England too. Most likely the praying circles, processions and the parting hand were brought to New England by Lorenzo Dow and others who learned the practice in the mid-Atlantic and southern states. The term “shout” certainly appears from time to time in the reports of this study, but often simply indicating a loud exclamation. In 1823, “[p]rayers in all the tents closed the exercises of the day and evening; but these prayers were mingled with shouts and songs of praise to God, for victories and blessings received from his gracious hand!”

In 1838, “[m]any while engaged in these exercises, felt their hearts to grow warm with holy fire. They wept, they praised, they shouted. It was heaven ‘begun below.’” Shouting and other bodily expressions were indicators of God at work among the people.

On Thursday, the work of the Lord increased in every direction; and mourners and converts, with their tears, sighs, and shouts of glory to God in the highest, by the good spirit of our God, kindled up the flame of devotion in every pious breast.

More than twelve who had been struggling with the powers of darkness, gained a complete victory, and with souls swelling unutterably, full of the glory of God, were enabled to shout in the words of St. John, “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

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467 Aaron Lummus, “Hebron Camp-Meetings,” ZH (June 19, 1823): 94.
During the day God himself was present and wrought wonders among the people. —In one part of the ground the mourning of the broken hearted sinner was heard; in another, the poor backslider making his acknowledgement to God for his ingratitude and neglect, while others were enraptured with the praise of God, or were shouting victory over the liberated sinner.\(^{471}\)

It is not always easy, however, to determine when “shouting” might refer to practices related to the African ring shout and other bodily exercises and when it simply meant vocalizing loudly. Examples of the latter could occur during sermons,\(^{472}\) at the close of the meeting,\(^{473}\) during the parting exercises. As the people of the West Townsend, Vermont, camp meeting of 1835 processed around the ground, “some shouted at the prospect of meeting again, others sighed, and wept in silence at the thought of leaving a place where the presence of [God] was so powerfully felt.”\(^{474}\) In 1838, Asa Swinerton led both the Eastford and Bolton, Connecticut, camp meetings to express gratitude to God,

who had preserved us in the tented grove, and made such displays of his power and glory among us and in the hearts of his people; we with one voice united, in raising that most sublime note, “Glory to God!”\(^{475}\)

After shaking hands with each other, and while the friends remained in an entire circle around the ground, our beloved P. Elder ascended the stand, and requested


\(^{472}\) During the sermon of Brother Thwing at the 1832 Dresden, Maine, camp meeting “many shouted and praised the Lord with a loud voice.” Justin Spaulding, “Dresden Camp Meeting,” \textit{MWJ} (20 September 1832): 146.

\(^{473}\) “At the close of the meeting, we counted the converts, and behold! over 40 souls rose up, shouting hosanna to Israel’s God. O, it was a goodly sight, on which angels looked down with joy and satisfaction; for there was joy in heaven.” J[ohn] N[ewland] M[affitt], “Rochester, N. H.,” \textit{ZH} (25 October 1826): [2].


all who had obtained the victory during the meeting to give a hearty shout to God. The signal was to be the raising of his hand. Such a simultaneous shout of “Glory to God,” I never before heard. But it was glorious.476

This type of shouting was still going on in 1871: “Waves of heavenly power rolled over many hearts during that lovefeast hour, and exultant songs of praise, and shouts of victory went to heaven from souls that were happy in the love of God.”477

Occasionally, however, the term shouting is used in connection with descriptions of other bodily exercises. An early example comes from Manchester, Connecticut, in 1826, where a young man was slain the spirit.

Some conversions were remarkable displays of divine power. One particularly demands notice. A young man went into one of the praying circles where one of his sisters was engaged in prayer to God, and began to use profane language; but, whilst doing it, he was arrested by the power of God and fell to the earth. After lying several hours in awful distress, he sprang upon his feet, ran shouting, “Glory to God,” and gave good evidence of having passed from death to life.478

The following description is of a scene at Martha’s Vineyard in 1841, where many were slain in the spirit.

The work of grace was confined principally to the church; and here it was manifested in a wonderful manner. The prevailing sentiment seemed to be entire consecration to God. The cry for a clean heart became general, and the Lord answered in the full salvation of many souls. Numbers, who are not easily excited, were shorn of their strength and lay for hours without the power either to speak or move. Some, who had doubted the reality of such exercises, looked on in amazement, and exclaimed with the Psalmist, “This is the Lord’s doing: it is marvellous [sic] in our eyes.479

Campers at the 1835 camp meeting in Hennker, New Hampshire, were apparently slain in the spirit during the closing exercise.

The power of God came down, after we had shaken hands, and the lovers of Jesus fell, like men slain in battle though there was no wrath in the One who slew, or, in the slain. But the latter were, evidently, unutterably full of glory. The pleasure that I enjoyed, during that last hour, on that consecrated ground, speaking after the manner of men, amply repaid me for every temptation, trial, and affliction through which I have passed, during the eighteen years of my Christian experience; and if so much can be enjoyed in one hour, in this life, what must be that eternal weight of glory reserved, in heaven, for the faithful? Scores of others, I presume, felt much as I did. Glory to God for a full salvation.

Such shouting tended to escalate toward the end of the camps as it did at Kittery in 1829.

But the last day was truly the great day of the feast. The morning opened as it was wont during the whole time of our feast, with uncommon splendour. The song, the reading of the Scriptures, the prayer, the gentle and the thrilling, happy response were all heard as they rose up over the empowering trees to mingle and unite before the sprinkled throne. Attendant angels wafted fragrance from the celestial hill, and the beautiful green temple created by the Divine Architect, became vocal with ravishing sounds and loud hosannahs. After the family altars had smoked, and, like the Israelites, we had refreshed ourselves from the table spread in the wilderness, a general prayer meeting commenced. It was then the Lord’s arm was made bare. Over a hundred weeping mourners pressed into the circle…the new creations starting up around us, bearing up on their countenances the wondrous change clapping their glad hands, and shouting aloud for joy.480

Shouting also occurred toward the end of the camp meeting in Buxton, Maine, in 1841.

We had no vacant time. The brethren were hearing preaching, praying, shouting or singing, early and late; and on the last night several of the tents prayed and sung all night. We had a few remarkably clear conversions—several instances of entire sanctification—and nearly the entire church appeared to be baptized with God’s sanctifying grace.—One preacher fell helpless into the arms of his brethren under its influence, and several of the members lay helpless as babes for hours, from the same cause.481


It is not surprising that New Englanders only cautiously admitted to shouting, all the while insisting that it was nothing extreme: “The Lord of hosts was in the camp of Israel, and his saints were harnessed like men of way! The shout of a king was heard among us. Nothing like disorder or incivility was seen during the day or evening.”

We have had no wild fire, no extravagance, no strange hollowing, jumping, or screaming. Now and then we have heard a strong and bitter cry for mercy from heart-broken mourners, and a hearty shout of glory from those whom God had graciously delivered into the liberty of his dear son, with a responding amen from the people of God. I think I may say, with the utmost propriety, that the work is solid, rational, and scriptural.

Summary

Though there was quite a bit of variation, a standard pattern of nineteenth-century New England camp meetings emerges. Most of the time the camp meetings began with an opening exercise (with consecration of the ground if it was being used for the first time) on the evening of the first day. This was followed by three to five “regular” days each beginning at dawn with family prayer in the tents, followed by alternating preaching and praying exercises repeated four time in a day. The preaching services were always at the stand unless the weather was so prohibitive that campers took refuge in the tents, and then multiple clergy preached at once. The praying services were of two types: 1) praying circles that formed in response to an invitation immediately following a preaching exercise, or 2) praying services in the society tents. Only one or the other type of praying exercise followed a preaching exercise.

482 Aaron Lummus, “Hebron Camp-Meetings,” ZH (June 19, 1823): 94.

Every day at camp meeting ended with the prayer meetings in the tents. Singing took place throughout the day, though *Zion’s Herald* does not provide enough details to say when, how and what. The bodily exercises and shouting occurred most often during the prayer times, though they could take place during a sermon as well. For most of the camps the last full day was the crescendo, starting most often with a love feast, and then following the usual daily pattern, though the prayer meetings in the tents typically lasted well past the 10 o’clock bed time. In the last morning the encampment would be called to the stand one last time for the parting exercises.

Other acts of worship occurred occasionally. A day of fasting and prayer was sometimes set aside in relation to a camp meeting. In 1841, the Marlborough, Connecticut, camp meeting held a service of “divine worship on Sunday.” The Lord’s Supper was celebrated from time to time, but was not a standard feature of the camp meetings, according to the reports in *Zion’s Herald*. The sacrament of baptism also took place.

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place occasionally. One wedding and one funeral have even come to the surface in these camp meeting reports. But none of these acts of worship appear to be essential to a nineteenth-century New England camp meeting. What was essential was immersion in the discourse of the faith – preached, exhorted, prayed, sung, testified, even shouted.

**Bringing the Revival Home**

Thy will we must obey, All thy designs fulfil; And each go forth his different way, To love and serve thee still.

Prepare them all to carry home An evidence of grace; That others may in future come, To seek thy glorious face.

To friends and neighbours all around, O let your graces shine; In ways of holiness abound, And live a life divine.

And now, my Christian friends, adieu, may Jesus with you dwell; May grace and peace abide with you, “So now, dear friends, farewell.” Farewell, and to your homes repair, And as you pass along;

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486 Edwin S. Helmershausen, “Camp Meeting, Corrinth, M.E.,” ZH (12 October 1853): 162. The report of the nuptials at the Corinth, Maine, camp meeting of 1853 is brief. “A little episode occurred the late morning in the altar, when Rev. P. Higgins made Mr. James H. Buck and Sarah Hennis one.”

487 James W. Day, “Epping Camp Meeting,” ZHWJ (15 October 1862): 166. At the 1862 camp meeting of Epping, Maine, a funeral service was held for Brother S. R. Ingersoll. “There were many sad hearts in the congregation. Bro. Ingersoll was a man highly respected as a citizen and a Christian.”


489 Ibid., 17.
Employ your hearts in humble prayer, And raise the cheerful song.\textsuperscript{490}

Though camp meetings were created as sacred spaces to foster conversion, Methodists recognized that for many people awakened and convicted at camp meetings, conversion took place after they left the sacred groves. The following case is just one example.

A young man, the mate of a whaleship recently returned from sea, was present at the services of the Sabbath. Under the preaching in the forenoon he was awakened, but left the encampment at the close of the day for his home in Harwich, without committing himself for Christ. At about midnight, as he was proceeding homeward, he came to the house of a devoted local preacher connected with the East Harwich church. His feeling had now become so intense that it seemed to him that he could not pass the house. He stopped near it, groaning and crying. The good local preacher, awakened by the unusual noise and going out, found him in this condition. With his wife and a pious brother who happened to be there, he engaged in prayer for the penitent, and ere long he was happily converted, and “went on his way rejoicing.”\textsuperscript{491}

Indeed, Methodist Episcopal clergy who wrote about revivals in their circuits or districts very often traced back the origins to the previous camp meeting. Camp meetings were regarded as catalysts to long-lasting and far reaching revivals. The following report was written by John Newland Maffitt one month after the camp meeting in Rochester, New Hampshire:

Since we left that consecrated spot, hallowed by the most delightful associations, God has been doing wonders amongst us. The several societies, who sat around the table spread in the wilderness, have returned to their homes bearing along with them the fruit which they plucked from the tree of life. They are on the mountain top. Such has been the wonderful influence of the meeting upon the minds of almost all who attended, that we have strong faith to expect ere long a rich, abundant harvest of precious souls. Indeed, already we largely participate in the

\textsuperscript{490} Ibid., 35.

fruits of the meeting. Ride on, King Jesus, prosperously, till from the rivers to the end of the earth, thy victories are proclaimed and the inhabitants of universal nature crown thee Lord of all. 492

B. W. Gorham embraced this understanding of the way spiritual formation worked in his *Camp Meeting Manual*.

Herein appears their beautiful harmony. It often happens that the fire is kindled on the Camp Ground, and burns in the form of a blessed revival carried forward by means of the Protracted Meeting all winter. On the other hand, if extensive revivals of religion have prevailed over a district of country during the winter, and added many to the church, what better thing can she and her children do, than to retire from the cares of the world, for a week, and renew their vows, and brighten their hopes just at that period of the year when the faith of the faithful is likeliest to wane. 493

That the work of the camp meeting continued outside of it shows that camp meetings were part of the larger Methodist world view and were used as a tool to support the mission of the MEC.

**1871 Camp Meetings for Holiness**

The original plans for this study were to look at every third year of *Zion’s Herald* until the focus of the camp meetings had shifted away from conversion to other goals. By the time 1862, had been reviewed, the primary question about converting rituals at camp meetings could be answered even though this shift in camp meeting goals had not been fully realized. Having attained data saturation signaled it was time to stop gathering more data. But 1862 was in the middle of the Civil War, which led to questions about how


things might have changed or remained the same after that seismic shift in American culture. So the year 1871 was added to provide a point of comparison.

The most obvious new development in the New England camp meetings of 1871 was the influence of the National Camp Meeting for Holiness movement. This movement had begun in New Jersey in 1867 and grew quickly in the following years. Some New Englanders, such as Camp Meeting John Allen and Charles Munger, became very involved right away.494 A National Camp Meeting for Holiness was held at Asbury Grove in June of 1870,495 and Rev. Benjamin Pomeroy of the Troy Conference stayed in New England several months afterward to help with the revivals that followed.496

494 John Allen attended the very first National Camp Meeting for Holiness in Vineyland, New Jersey, in 1867. Allen, The Life of Rev. John Allen, 48. A sermon Charles Munger preached at the Second National Camp Meeting, held in Manheim, Pennsylvania, in 1868 was published in McLean and Eaton, Penuel, or, Face to Face with God, 180. The Third National Camp Meeting for Holiness was held between July 6 and 16, 1869. When a leader from the stand asked the congregation for report of spiritual health of the states, statements for all six New England States were registered.

Maine: “Full of faith and of the Holy Ghost.”
New Hampshire: “New Hampshire is suffering for the want of a holy ministry.”
Vermont: “Vermont has the evergreen of perfect love. Our banner is up, and we mean to keep it flying.”
Massachusetts: “God is there at ‘the hub of the universe,’ and this work is reviving; and I believe God will carry it on.”
Rhode Island: “A Congregationalist responded, ‘We have the Lord with us there, but we are going to carry back a mightier flame from this Camp-Meeting.’”
Connecticut “The Lord is marching on. We are in for the beauty of holiness.” Ibid., 381-382.

495 It was one of three National Camp Meetings for Holiness that year. While there, Rev. John Inskip, president of the National Association, read “ye shall be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16) from a Bible used by the Wesleys at this meeting. Kenneth O. Brown, Inskip, Mcdonald, Fowler: Wholly and Forever Thine: Early Leadership in the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness (Hazleton, PA: Holiness Archives, 1999), 95-96.

In 1871, not only were New England Methodists encouraged by *Zion’s Herald* to attend the National Holiness Camp Meeting at Round Lake, New York, July 4–14, but some camps throughout New England were designated as “holiness camp meetings.” Both Yarmouthport, Massachusetts, and Bath, New Hampshire, were two camps where “the blessed doctrine of holiness” was “brought forward.” The camp meeting held in Highgate, Vermont, starting August 22 was also “devoted to holiness.” The correspondent was, however, “unable to endorse the policy which would affix a distinctive title, and give exclusive direction to these public meetings.” Opinions of the holiness movement ranged from enthusiastic to skeptical among New England Methodists.

Martha’s Vineyard engaged in the holiness movement by allowing prayer meetings for holiness to be held every evening at six o’clock. In this way holiness was permitted on the grounds without letting it become a pervasive influence. Those who were interested in promoting holiness were segregated into an affinity group as were those who chose to attend the mother’s prayer meetings, the YMCA prayer meetings or the children’s meeting. On the other extreme, Methodist Episcopal clergy from the East

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497 An ad for this camp meeting in *Zion’s Herald* included transportation details, a catalog of various sized tents available for rental, information about the use of the post office, telegraph and express package delivery service, bookstore and how to acquire a map of the grounds. In the May 25 edition all who desired to go to Round Lake were invited to attend a meeting at J. P. Magee’s store in Boston on that very day. On June 22, another announcement featuring details of getting to and staying at the camp was placed by the president of the Round Lake Camp Meeting Association.


Maine and Maine Annual Conferences joined forces to hold a state wide camp meeting for holiness in Richmond, Maine, from August 8 to 13 on the Kennebec River.\footnote{This was located at the border of the Maine and East Maine Annual Conferences.}

*Zion’s Herald* is a rich resource for anyone wishing to explore deeper into the MEC’s engagement with holiness before Phoebe Palmer became its most well-known advocate, but this topic stretches beyond the question and bounds of this study. While the themes of holiness and sanctification were nothing new to the Methodist Episcopal camp meetings of New England, the rise of the holiness movement and its interplay with and influence on camp meeting culture indicates a fascinating shift in Methodist discourse worthy of study in its own right.
CHAPTER 5

MAKING METHODISTS AT CAMP MEETING

After careful examination of just how the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) camp meetings were conducted in New England between 1823 and 1871, it is now time to place the evidence from the primary documents in conversation with the present day questions which generated the study in the first place. The aim has been to take a close look at the practice of camp meeting initiated by MEC leaders every year in nearly every district of the region. They believed such practices played a large role in the conviction, conversion and sanctification of participants in a way that ultimately contributed to the growth of the local congregations. The main question driving this research is, how? What ritual elements of these multi-day worship services contributed to the growth of the church? After spending so much time in the “trees” of the New England camp meetings and looking in depth at how camp meetings were actually practiced over a period of fifty years, it is time to pull back for a view of the forest. What patterns come into view that explain why this particular method of Christian formation was found to be so effective by the leaders of the MEC? How do these results converge with or diverge from other research on the question of identity formation through ritual?

But before turning to answer these large analytical questions, it is worth noting that the camp meeting practices described here do not entirely conform to the picture that has been painted in earlier historical studies. This study has brought to light evidence
that can improve the accuracy and richness of future accounts of Methodist camp meetings, correcting a variety of misconceptions often found in general American histories, Methodist church histories and even camp meeting studies themselves.

**Historical Corrections**

Camp Meetings Were Not Just a Rural Frontier Phenomenon

This in-depth, yet broad, view of over 300 specific camp meetings of the nineteenth century provides clarification and sometimes correction of the most commonly told story of camp meetings as part of America’s Great Awakenings. This study clearly shows that camp meetings were a steady, significant and substantial part of the Methodist experience in New England from 1803 well into the twentieth century, and that they impacted the lives of urban Methodists in the seaport cities and in the growing factory towns as well as those in rural sections of the region. Though advances in transportation, the rising economic status of many Methodists, and other such factors created gradual changes in the way camp meetings were practiced, interest, intent and participation in the camp meetings remained high among adherents to the MEC in New England during the period under review.
Post-1830 Camp Meeting Decline Should Not Be Assumed

The evidence found in *Zion’s Herald* leads one to question the origin of the common belief that Methodist involvement in camp meetings declined after the 1830s.¹ While further study of camp meetings in other regions of the United States would be necessary to make a general claim, there is simply no evidence of a significant decline in the number of camp meetings New England in the nineteenth century. Could it be that B. W. Gorham’s statements to this effect have been simply taken at face value, without significant corroborating evidence? His *Camp Meeting Manual*, which has long been known and easy to come by, begins by noting a decline in interest in camp meetings in Cooperstown, New York. Could it be that historians have taken one Methodist preacher’s experience in 1845 in one appointment as indicative of Methodists in the whole country? Charles Johnson interpreted Gorham’s work (and a few others like his) as “rear-guard actions, a conservative phalanx battling to preserve the old.”² Johnson also pointed to a few biographies, such as that of Peter Cartwright, that contain laments that the camp meetings were in decline. Johnson further interpreted the silence of historians such as Nathan Bangs, who did not have much to say about camp meetings after 1816, as evidence that they were no longer important to the life of the MEC.³

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² Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting*, 249.

³ There are other plausible explanations for Bangs’ silence. First of all, common practices are frequently left unmentioned in histories because they are taken for granted. Furthermore, it has been documented that Nathan Bangs in particular was not a fan of camp meetings, nor of any overly enthusiastic religious exercises, so, William Johnson speculates that Bangs may have written camp meetings out of his
But the New England Methodist Episcopal clergy correspondents to Zion’s Herald tell a very different story, affirming that considerable resources of time, money and effort were put into holding at least one camp meeting year after year in every district of the region. In 1823, there were seven camp meetings reported in six of seven districts; in 1826, there were thirteen camp meetings reported in nine districts. In 1841 there were twenty-seven camp meetings reported in nineteen districts. Their reports in Zion’s Herald testify to their belief that these camp meetings were instrumental in reviving communities through conviction, conversion, renewal and the sanctification of members.

There was a decline in the number of camp meetings in the 1840s (twenty-three in 1844, fifteen in 1847). This decline correlates with a slight decline in membership reported in the denomination’s statistical reports in the same years. But this is likely accounted for by the loss of members and clergy to two sectarian movements. Orange Scott’s Wesleyan Church split off over abolition in 1843, and the millennial “Great Disappointment” experienced in 1844 was followed by the split off of some New England Methodists to the Adventist churches that emerged. In just six years, however, the number of Methodist Episcopal camp meetings reported on in the region was growing again, reaching twenty-two camp meetings in eighteen districts in 1859. The number of

histories in the interest of making Methodism appear more socially acceptable and sophisticated. Johnson, “‘To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,’” 159. Karen Westerfield Tucker provides further evidence when she quotes Abel Stevens’ account of Bangs’ objection to the “physical eruptions” in which he saw a “spirit of pride, presumption, and bigotry, impatience of scriptural restraint and moderation… [that] marred and disgraced the work of God.” Westerfield Tucker, American Methodist Worship, 77. William Warren Sweet, however, places the decline of the effectiveness of camp meetings as places of revival in the 1880s. Sweet, Methodism in American History, 333.
camp meetings continued to grow after that, for in 1871 there were thirty-six camp
meetings reported in *Zion’s Herald*.

The story of Presiding Elder John Lord’s unusual decision not to organize a camp
meeting on his Portland District in 1832, and the defiant effort made by several other
clergy on his district to hold one anyway,\(^4\) brings into view just how important
Methodists believed the camp meetings were to the life of the church. Rev. Lord’s
negative feelings on the matter are quite an anomaly among the set of articles and reports
found in *Zion’s Herald*. The vast majority of camp meeting correspondents were
overwhelmingly excited about the onset of camp meeting season, affirmative of most of
what took place, and hopeful that the results of the camps would be long-lasting fruit in
the congregations.

The Transformation of Camp Meetings to Middle-class Summer Resorts
was a Gradual and Unintentional Development

At the end of his book, Charles Johnson accused the rising camp meeting
associations of adding “a commercial flavor” and transforming the camps into “middle-
class summer resorts.”\(^5\) This study reveals the progression of such transformation
especially on Martha’s Vineyard. A closer look at the development of New England
camp meetings show that the advent of camp meeting associations was a gradual, organic
development starting with the wise move of the presiding elders to delegate the work of

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\(^4\) See Chapter Three, page 163 above.

\(^5\) Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting*, 252.
organizing and running the camp meetings as they grew in size and complexity. The motivation for this organization was to draw as many people as possible to the camps by ensuring they were 1) located in places that were easily accessed by horse or boat and later rail, 2) had ample provision of water and food for people and horses, 3) had hospitable accommodations so that tired pilgrims would not have the unfortunate experience of being waked from slumber by rain dripping down onto their straw beds, and 4) were well ordered, insuring everyone’s personal safety. As the clergy of the Methodist Episcopal districts in New England found suitable locations and were able to cultivate the grounds (first by leasing and eventually by purchasing the land), associations consisting of clergy and members of several congregations in the district were incorporated to be the bodies which held the deeds to the properties. While the camp meeting leaders were unwittingly forming the organizational basis for more “secular” activities associated with camp meetings, their intention was that the camps be used for sacred purposes.

By 1871, middle class attitudes about vacations and recreation were, however, noticeable in camp meeting reports in Zion’s Herald. With the advances in rail transportation, residents of Boston could journey into the middle of New Hampshire at the spur of the moment intending to drop in for the final “Sabbath” of a camp and return the same day.6 But, in 1871, it was clear that all of the places that had become permanent

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6 An article from 1871 is comical because the author and his friend(s) took the 7:15 train from Boston to spend Sunday at the camp meeting at Lyndon, Vermont, only to find en route that it had already ended. As they stopped for dinner they considered what other camp meeting they might visit, but the one in Northfield, Vermont, had also ended and there was a three hour wait for a train to arrive that would take them to Epping, New Hampshire (or back to Boston). The author was most sad about the Lyndon camp being over because they “lost that charming ride hence, hither, along the Connecticut, which grows the
camp meeting grounds with improved accommodations still intended to be settings for conversion, sanctification and revival of the churches. Even at Martha’s Vineyard, where middle class leisure was perhaps most evident, \(^7\) the goals of sanctification and renewal of the church persisted, and even hope for conversion had not been fully abandoned.

On the other hand, the depiction of dour Methodists “wedded to a “producer’s ethic of self-denial, frugality, and hard work,” and averse to any kind of leisure time, is also a caricature.\(^8\) The earlier camp meetings were places where people experienced the exuberant joy of the hand of God in their lives. It was exciting to become awake to the presence of God at work among the people and learn that the Spirit of the living Christ was deeply concerned for the salvation of souls. It was reassuring to experience the saving grace of Jesus for oneself, and rejuvenating to have repeated experiences of forgiveness and sanctification. Even the already-confirmed faithful who attended camp meeting went home quickened in their faith. Those Methodists who opposed “the gospel of consumerism and relaxation”\(^9\) especially as it was encroaching on their holy camp

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\(^7\) The *Zion’s Herald* articles of 1871 show that Martha’s Vineyard was clearly becoming “contested” space, a term used by Janet Jacobs in “Deconversion from Religious Movements: An Analysis of Charismatic Bonding and Spiritual Commitment,” *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 26 (1987): 294-308.


\(^9\) Ibid.
grounds were legitimately concerned. When historians, such as Dona Brown, depict Methodist as pious stick-in-the-muds fighting to keep the secularization of the camp meetings at bay, they misrepresent the main concern. The Methodists who attended camp meetings in New England never saw “unremitting labor” as a “Christian duty” that might never be interrupted by a week away at camp meeting.

To the contrary, Methodists saw participation in camp meeting as a religious duty. When they spent several days away from home and work at camp meeting they were honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy. When they took the trouble to fashion a tent, and journey over land or sea with food and clothing, they were accepting Jesus’ invitation to the disciples to “come away to pray for a while.” When they felled trees and built a preachers’ stand they were preparing to hold a Feast of Tabernacles in the wilderness to worship God just as the ancient Hebrews did. The Methodists and their friends were engaging in a sacramental practice where the inward and spiritual grace of God had repeatedly been experienced in an outward and visible way, namely, church growth and revival.

The problem was not resting from one’s labors. The problem for Methodists was the threat of the ever-growing temptations for camp meeting visitors to be distracted from the sacred task at hand. This had been a perpetual problem from the beginning. In the early years, the diversions were in the form of peddlers and those who went with the intention only to see the spectacle\textsuperscript{10} of camp meeting—or worse, to create a disturbance.

\textsuperscript{10} In Part One of his Manual, Gorham emphasized that one’s experience would be determined by one’s intent and attitude when going to a camp meeting. Gorham, Camp Meeting Manual, 1-118.
In later years, after the problems of keeping order were largely solved, new diversions cropped up such as recreational activities and secular songfests being held simultaneously with the preaching and praying exercises, as was going on at Yarmouthport in 1871.

Over time, other changes diminished the sacred focus of the meetings as well. The creation of wooden cottages, together with the growing affluence and leisure time among Methodists, encouraged people to stay in their cottages before and after the designated camp meeting week. As a result, the camp meeting grounds took on multiple meanings; the participants’ relationship with the space changed. Even though the holy experiences at such a camp meeting made participants wish they could stay there forever, expanding the time spent at the groves from a few days into a lengthy summer stay changed the experience. People cannot sustain such an intense spiritual experience over the course of a whole summer.

While this study cannot presume to speak for what was happening in other regions of the country, in New England the practices of camp meeting remained remarkably constant even as the experience evolved. Some aspects of the experience in 1871 were very different from attending one in 1823. Transportation had become less arduous, accommodations were more comfortable, more people were present, and some people attended more than one camp each year—especially those people from more urban areas, and Methodist preachers who were drawn to these gatherings to be with their colleagues. Modifications were made slowly and naturally corresponding to changes in culture, technology, economic status of the participants and changes in theological perspective, particularly as participants needed to adjust their eschatological expectations
after the Great Disappointment of 1844. But the basic worship pattern of the camps was remarkably constant across time and throughout the region. People gathered with an opening address, settled into the daily rhythm of intimate prayer, public preaching, and more prayer for several days, followed by a morning love feast when those present were given voice to testify to the work of God thus far during the meeting, and signaling that there was only one day left for those who were still anxious to find “perfect peace” of forgiveness in Christ or experience the “perfect love” of sanctification.  

Like many leisure time activities which developed later in the culture, New England camp meetings were autotelic experiences, providing pleasure and satisfaction in and of themselves. Like rock climbing, Neitz and Spickard show that this kind of pleasure called “flow” is not obtained through everyday activities, but activities which “exhibit a particular structure conducive to extraordinary experiences.” The rituals at the camp meetings might be an example of a method of “structuring experience so as to produce flow,” while at the same time using the Wesleyan way of salvation to name the experiences people had.

11 See page 367 in Chapter Four, above.


13 Religious explanations offered for the experience of flow can consist of a “complex interplay of experience and symbol.” This can “lead one deeper into the symbolic world of the group, if one chooses to become involved. One learns the rudiments of the group’s conceptual universe. One learns their methods of structuring experience so as to produce flow. One may become adept at generating such experiences. Or one may decide that conceptual meaning is more important than flow, and become a theologian.” Ibid., 24.
Rise of the Holiness Movement Revised

Starting from 1871 and looking backward, this study calls into question some common narrations of the histories of the emergence of camp meetings for holiness. These tales generally start with Phoebe Palmer, who inspired the founding of the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness. But to depict the holiness movement as if it spontaneously sprang out of the teacups at Palmer’s Tuesday evening meetings is just as dubitable as believing that Cane Ridge was caused by a kind of spontaneous combustion of elements that came together for the first time in 1801 on the western frontier. Such a conclusion comes from looking at the most famous big events and individuals and trying to connect the dots between them without acknowledging how all the other people and regularly recurring events of life lay the foundations and carry the practices on which a presumed “founder” builds.

14 Hudson and Corrigan, *Religion in America*, 331. Norwood claimed that the doctrine of perfect love was being obscured “everywhere in the struggle to plant and build a new church.” He credited the work of Timothy Merritt in promoting holiness, but not until 1839 with the beginning of his *Guide to Christian Perfection*. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 293. Clearly the doctrine was already interwoven through Methodist discourse in New England in 1819 when Merritt preached about it at the camp meeting in Wellfleet, and Wilbur Fisk was among the sanctified. Mudge, *History of the New England Conference*, 226-227. At the Wellfleet camp meeting in 1820, the “work of God” on the second day “was apparently more effectual among believers than among the unconverted. Such ardent cries for pure hearts, have, it is believed, been seldom heard. A large number professed that they had found the blessing of perfect love, thus testifying that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. In preaching the doctrine, and in seeking to know the power of it, the preachers were much engaged, and their labour was not in vain in the Lord.” Benjamin R. Hoyt, “Revival of Religion in Wellfleet,” *Methodist Magazine* (30 August 1821): 78-79. Furthermore, Merritt was the secretary of the camp meeting in Monmouth, Maine, ten years earlier where Fanny Newell was sanctified. Newell, *Diary of Fanny Newell*, 109 ff. While this study cannot speak to whether the Methodist doctrines of sanctification and perfection were preached on the Western frontier in these years, it does reveal that Norwood’s description is inaccurate. Ahlstrom, curiously, does not even connect the dots between Palmer and the National Association for the Promotion of Holiness. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 478, 817.
The many correspondents who contributed reports about the camp meetings in New England for Zion’s Herald between 1823 and 1871 consistently wrote about conversion and sanctification as points on the same continuum along the Wesleyan way of salvation, together with reclaiming backsliders, and urging everyone to keep pressing on toward perfection. Holiness and Christian perfection had always been integral parts of Methodist soteriology as handed down from John Wesley and carefully maintained and promoted in American Methodism, and in New England particularly by Timothy Merritt. Merritt passed this doctrine on to Sarah Lankford and her sister Phoebe Palmer.\textsuperscript{15} Though Palmer’s simplification and promotion of the doctrine may have been the impetus for the founders of the National Camp Meeting for Holiness in Vineland in 1867, the doctrine was nothing new in New England. As the story of Rachel Stearn’s conversion will show, what was taking place in Phoebe Palmer’s New York City parlor on Tuesday evenings in 1837 was not all that different than what was happening at the weekly Methodist class meetings held in Brother Humes’ home in Greenfield, Massachusetts, in 1834 and 1835.

This may explain why some people like Camp Meeting John Allen and Charles Munger fully embraced the holiness camp meetings by traveling to the national events, hosting one at Asbury Grove in 1870, and creating a state-wide camp meeting for holiness in Maine in 1871. While Martha’s Vineyard offered holiness prayer meetings each afternoon of 1871, some Methodist leaders questioned why the “distinctive title” \textit{holiness} was necessary for the “Highgate Camp Meeting for Holiness” in Vermont (see

\textsuperscript{15} Palmer, \textit{Faith and Its Effects}, 148-149.
Chapter Four) in 1871. In any case, in New England, the promotion of holiness at camp meetings did not in any way arise spontaneously in the 1870s after a thirty year period of decline in camp meeting participation. Leaders of the MEC in New England had been promoting holiness all along. The new movement in the 1870s seems mostly to have increased the number of traveling preachers, “prophets” and musicians from other regions to New England, but these promoters engaged with and made use of (and sometimes interfered with) the regularly occurring camp meetings, many of which—such as Sterling, East Poland, Newmarket and Asbury Grove—had been long established as permanent grounds for their districts.

These corrections to church history come out of the opportunity offered by *Zion’s Herald* to bring “the researcher into and close to the real world”\(^\text{16}\) and generate grounded theory. While the methodology employed for this study does not allow the researcher to ask the subjects questions, or allow the subjects to give corrective feedback to germinating theories, the breadth and depth of information about the weekly lives of New England Methodists, from the perspective of New England Methodist Episcopal clergy, is invaluable.

**Ritual Elements Used to Make Methodists**

This study did not just set out to provide a more nuanced account of camp meetings in New England so as to correct the historical record. Its primary aim has been

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to identify and analyze the ritual elements in the camp meetings which made them such effective tools for the growth of the MEC in nineteenth-century New England. Based on the articles found in Zion’s Herald, several important themes have been identified: 1) MEC leaders were clearly focused on their intention to lead the people to conviction, conversion and sanctification; 2) the MEC clergy led whole communities (members of Methodist societies or prayer meeting groups along with their unconverted neighbors and relatives) on pilgrimages to the camp meetings; 3) the boundaries of the early camp meetings were porous which not only allowed but encouraged outsiders to come close enough to be transformed; 4) the preachers used biblical stories and images as illustrations of various points along the Wesleyan way of salvation in a way that the people could envision their own lives as part of the same narrative; 5) the preaching also created an emotional high tension between the threat of hell and the promise of grace, propelling the participants to respond; 6) the camp meeting functioned as a ritual model, allowing participants to practice living in a new way; and 7) the participants of the camp meetings insisted that God was present and at work in all of the above. Each of these elements was central to the camp meeting experience, and the remainder of this chapter shows how they were critical to the process of conversion and religious identity formation—to making Methodists. But running through all of this was a particular form of discourse—what Steven Cooley calls a “poetic discourse”—employed by Methodists of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{17} This way of describing the world using biblical imagery to

\textsuperscript{17} Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 571.
illustrate life along various points of the Wesleyan way of salvation shaped the religious culture that camp meetings fostered and into which Methodists were converted.

Poetic Discourse and Identity Formation

The poetic discourse utilized in the camp meeting is the overarching factor in the process of making Methodists for two reasons. First, it connects all the other elements of that nineteenth-century religious world and explains how they worked together; but second, its absence from United Methodist communities in New England today provides evidence for the critical lessons to be learned from this history. The former assertion will show itself as each of the other elements are presented below, and the latter theme will be picked up again at the end of the chapter. But in order to use Cooley’s term well, it must be unpacked and explained.

In 1994, Cooley published a paper which argued that nineteenth-century Methodist leaders used the notion of “poetic discourse” themselves to explain what they were doing.\footnote{Among the sources Cooley lifted up are Matthew Simpson’s \textit{Lectures on Preaching} (New York: Philips & Hunt, 1879), in which Simpson described the “ideal revivalist” as having “a poetic outlook” as distinct from a “rational, literal, and empirical” form of language. Also a sermon given to the National Camp Meeting for Holiness in Manheim, Pennsylvania, in 1869 by J. W. Jackson published in McLean and Eaton, \textit{Penuel, or, Face to Face with God}. In this sermon Jackson argued that in order to communicate experiential knowledge preachers “must employ ‘the vagueness of our language’ rather than its precision.” Ibid., 218. Cooley also points to the views presented by revivalist G. W. Wilson while disputing with Bordon Parker Bowne who worked to replace the “artificial, unreal, [and]…silly” discourse with a “more public and empirical language that would be able to describe the actual conscious facts one might expect in religious life.” Wilson responded that a trained and cultured imagination was required to speak the language of experience well. George W. Wilson, \textit{Methodist Theology vs. Methodist Theologians} (Cincinnati: Press of Jennings and Pye, 1904), 79-80, 91. Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 573-575.} Cooley also claimed that it was a useful analytic tool to “highlight four
characteristics of their language.” First, it had an experiential quality. For example, the experience of camp meeting participants at Concord, Vermont reported in the *Zion’s Herald* in 1826, read, “The flames kindled in their hearts by fire from the altar of heaven, increased and brightened.” Second, it used concrete representational vocabulary. The groves where the camp meetings took place were described in *Zion’s Herald* as a tabernacle of Christ “not made by hands.”

The several societies, who sat around the table spread in the wilderness, have returned to their homes bearing along with them the fruit which they plucked from the tree of life. They are on the mountain top. Such has been the wonderful influence of the meeting upon the minds of almost all who attended, that we have strong faith to expect ere long a rich, abundant harvest of precious souls. Indeed, already we largely participate [in] the fruits of the meeting. Ride on, King Jesus, prosperously, till from the rivers to the end of the earth, thy victories are proclaimed and the inhabitants of universal nature crown thee Lord of all.

Third, these representations were sacramental. That is, they described people’s direct experience of God. The fourth characteristic is that the language deliberately included “non-definitional textures and multivocal possibilities.” Camp meeting leaders could report the count of “hopeful conversions,” “happy converts,” “hopeful subjects of salvation” who “found peace in believing” or “the pearl of perfect love,” “prodigals reclaimed,” “those brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God,” and those

19 Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 571.


21 Hebrews 9:11.


23 Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 571.
“feeling deep conviction of the necessity of fleeing from the wrath to come” without creating precise definition and distinctions. Cooley noted that Methodist poetic discourse was more literary than analytic, but it was particularly effective because it “[ordered] the world in such a way that adherents might live in the world close to God.”  

As an example, Cooley discussed the common comparison Methodists made of camp meetings to heaven. Such appraisal was not made through historical empiricism or by reason, Cooley argued, but came out of “an experience cultivated within a poetic strategy for living religiously in the world.” Cooley further asserted that such language was not used only by the less educated lower class, but can be found in the primary documents penned by middle class and highly educated Methodists up until the early part of the twentieth century.

When Cooley examined the language structures of camp meeting documents from the 1850s to the 1880s, he saw three distinct poetic strategies the authors used to describe their religious life: the romantic, the meditational and the metaphysical. The articles of Zion’s Herald show that those same strategies were already being used in New England in 1823.

**Romantic Strategy**

With this strategy, language was used to focus on the internal religious experience of individuals. It evoked strong emotion and invited hearers into a longed-for

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 572-573.
imaginative world. Methodist preachers were aware of different kinds of language they might employ, and preferred to use “language for emotive experience” when preaching rather than the language that “seeks to express intellectual knowledge.” Cooley noted that J. W. Jackson brought this up directly in a sermon preached at the Manheim National Camp meeting in 1868. While knowledge is manifested in words, “in the department of feeling language only expresses the fragments of thought, the shallow places in the heart.” Jackson asserted that preachers needed to employ “the vagueness of our language” rather than its precision to communicate adequately experiential knowledge. Jackson was also aware that such language, while fluently spoken within Methodist circles, would be so foreign to outsiders as to be unintelligible. As every language expresses contextual particularity, nineteenth-century Methodist discourse expressed the culture of those that spoke it. Cooley pointed out that Methodists did not believe that a true and full experience of God required formal training. But “the articulation of the experience did require… a trained and cultured imagination to speak the language of experience well.”

26 Ibid., 574.

27 For example, prayer meetings, society meetings and camp meetings.

28 Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 574-575. What Jackson actually said is, “your auditor must have the same or similar culture, or our words are to him but sounding brass and tinkling cymbol [sic]; you speak in unknown tongues.” Cooley noted that Jackson’s use of the word “culture” in his explanation “predated its appearance in American scholarly dictionaries by more than a generation. Moreover, it coincided with Matthew Arnold’s Culture and Anarchy (1869),” where the term supposedly originated. Cooley says that Phoebe Palmer was writing about culture in the 1840s and seemed to share both the “evaluative inference of human perfection” with Arnold, and the more neutral German notion of culture used today by the social sciences. Ibid., 574.
One example comes from the report of the camp meeting at Lyndon, Vermont, in 1824:

It was “the last day of the feast;” and “Jesus stood and cried,” nor did he in vain...and glory be to God on the highest, there was joy with the angels in the conversion of sinners...Some of the conversions were remarkably bright and clear.

Another example of this romantic poetic discourse comes from the camp meeting at Truro, Massachusetts, in 1826.

Preachers and professors of religion, animated by the scene around them, and brought into heavenly places by the operations of the Holy Spirit on their own minds, were filled with new joys, hopes, and consolations. But the strong eye of faith looked a little beyond the scene around them, and saw a bright company with celestial faces, bearing the news of a “sinner converted from the error of his ways,” to the place from whence they came. The swift messenger on snowy, balmy wings was despatched [sic] again and again. They sent their bursting joy to the innumerable company in heaven, and a loud song went up from immortal harps of, “Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, good will to men.”

These two quotes helped the readers of Zion’s Herald imagine the campers interacting with characters from scripture. Jesus is crying for the sinners yet unconverted. The angels are dancing and singing with joy at each conversion. The “celestial faces” of the “innumerable company of heaven,” that great cloud of witnesses, are cheering the campers on as the angel “messenger on snowy, balmy wings,” traveled up and down Jacob’s ladder sharing the good news of sinners converted. In this romantic poetic language, God, angels and the communion of saints are fully and really present as part of

29 Untitled, ZH (23 August 1826): [2].

30 Hebrews 12:1.

31 Genesis 28:12.
the gathered community, thus those who speak and hear this discourse can share in an exciting moment of anamnesis,\(^{32}\) experiencing the real presence of God in their midst.\(^{33}\)

**Meditational**

The meditational strategy used by camp meeting leaders, with roots in Anglo-Puritanism, had a three step-process “traditionally directed by a spiritual guide:”\(^{34}\)

1) The camp meeting preachers (exhorters and hymn writers too) would first help the congregation imagine a sacred scene in their minds’ eyes and urge them each to locate themselves within the scene; 2) next, the leader at the stand would use imperative, active tactile verbs commanding the listeners to look, see, behold, hear, feel, taste, and smell.

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\(^{32}\) Anamnesis (meaning remembrance in a dynamic and active sense) is a technical term for the portion of a Holy Communion liturgy’s Great Thanksgiving which remembers God’s past acts for humanity in Jesus Christ, while the term “prolepsis” is the word used for the eschatological part of the liturgy looking forward. Liturgical scholars have noted that this liturgy actually collapses time, bringing both the past and the future eschatological hope into the present experience. Geoffrey Wainwright explained, “The church recalls before the Father in thanksgiving the first coming of Christ and prays for the second coming of Christ in final fulfillment of that promise. And because the Blessed Trinity is Lord of time, the one Christ who came and who is to come can come even now at the eucharist in answer to the church’s prayer.” *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1978), 67. See also Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 194-198. For the purposes of this dissertation “anamnesis” is a moment in sacramental worship when remembering the past and future acts of God creates an opening to an awareness of the presence of God in the midst of a congregation.

\(^{33}\) Another example of employing the romantic strategy in camp meeting discourse is when, in 1856, a correspondent contrasted the oaks in Wesleyan Grove with Oak Hall, Boston’s famous men’s clothing store. Not only was Wesleyan Grove’s Oak Hall “sufficiently spacious so to receive many thousand customers at once,” its construction was none other than “the work of the great Jehovah” and “the Great proprietor and Master of this place” fully stocked with “ministering spirits, so that however numerous the visitors, all can be attended to at a moment’s notice.” But the only clothing is “the best robes” in “abundance, suited to every size and sex.” Many a “returned prodigal son, and daughter” can testify to these facts. Furthermore the garments acquired at this establishment can be worn every day of the week, can never be worn out, indeed, “the longer you wear it the better it looks and the better it is.” Best of all everyone can have it—the poor as well as the rich; for it is “without money and without price.” Hebron Vincent, “Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting,” *ZHWA* (27 August 1856): 138.

\(^{34}\) Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 579.
“In the...imagination the sacred scene was physically experienced in the present
moment,” and 3) the final step was to lead the congregation in “a cathartic burst of
feeling and action, as the soul spontaneously burst forth in petitions, thanksgiving, praise,
or resolutions.”35 This feeling was not just thanksgiving for what God had done, but also
anticipation of Christ’s second coming. Thus the meditational discourse used in camp
meetings also achieved what liturgists today call anamnesis.

Cooley suggested that such discourse trained Methodists to think of scripture in
terms of scenes which were then mirrored by the scenes of the camp meetings. For them
scripture was “a picture book of sacred scenes rather than a reference book of sacred facts
and data.”36

The camp meeting reports in Zion’s Herald are full of descriptions of such scenes
from the 1820s onward. The following example recounting the Wellfleet camp meeting
of 1824 also describes the experience of anamnesis had by the participants:

But the most interesting and powerful scene was yet [to come]. Never did the
morning sun usher in a more glorious day to us than Thursday. This was indeed
the “great day of the feast.” Our brethren by this time had become well engaged in
the work, and the arrows of the Almighty were flying in every direction. It
seemed as if the overflowing presence of Jehovah was so sensibly realized
that the most thoughtless were awed into a “reverence which dared not move.” An almost
universal stillness pervaded the assembly, excepting now and then a deep groan,
which echoed to the preacher's voice, while brother J. Lindsey addressed us from
Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, by which he very beautifully illustrated the

35 Ibid.

36 Taves noted that such scenes were used by the Separate Baptists, and more important to this
work, they were criticized by John Fanning Watson in Methodist Error thereby showing that this form of
discourse predates the holiness movement. Taves, Fits, Trances & Visions, 114-115.
sinner’s fallen condition, and his recovery to the enjoyment and fellowship of God, through the agency of the Holy Ghost.”

The stillness of a penultimate camp meeting morning was explained as even those participants who were “most thoughtless” had been struck by God’s arrows of conviction, turning them first into dry bones, but then encouraging them to breathe deeply of the breath of the Holy Spirit so that they might recover the enjoyment and fellowship of God.

Metaphysical

The metaphysical poetic tradition as described by Cooley includes types and emblems. Types were seen as “divinely instituted symbols” drawn from the Old Testament. The use of typology in Methodist discourse turned the events and ceremonies found there into a foreshadowing of Christian realities. For example, Jacob was depicted as wrestling with Christ at the Jabbok, just as newly-awakened campers anxiously felt that they were wrestling with Christ.

Emblems were seen as “divinely instituted symbols” drawn from nature. Stemming from the belief that anything created by God could reveal divine truths one could, for example, closely analyze the characteristics of the pearl as an entity in itself to see what spiritual realities it revealed. An example of using emblems in metaphysical discourse is found in the report of the camp meeting in East Pittston in 1823:

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38 Ezekiel 37.
At the bottom of the tents ran a beautiful stream. A broad aisle ran thro’ the centre. In the evening this place formed a most beautiful appearance. The grand ethereal blue—the moon walking in its brightness—with all the twinkling stars shining through the thick foliage of the trees—formed an appearance at once beautiful and sublime. And to add to the beauty of the scene a large number of glass lamps were placed on the trees—and a light at the door of every tent.³⁹

Such symbolism needed to be learned, and in the mid-nineteenth century Methodists such as Elon Foster (Phoebe Palmer’s son-in-law) compiled large reference books meant to increase fluency. Having a good command of these typologies and emblems could allow a religious person to “live meaningfully in a world inherently structured with religious significance.”⁴⁰

But as anyone who learns a second language and has had the privilege of living in a culture where that language is spoken knows, immersion dramatically improves one’s comprehension and ability to speak and think in the new tongue. The unique form of discourse developed by Methodists was spoken year round in the prayer meetings, worship services and quarterly meetings. But the prolonged camp meetings were like islands of Methodist culture where “Methodeese” was the primary discourse for everyone, day and night. This gave outsiders and new probationary members who attended for several days (and fully participated in all the exercises, rather than watching from the sidelines) ample opportunity to become fluent by immersion in Methodist discourse.

³⁹ Untitled, ZH (25 December 1823): 206.

⁴⁰ Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 582. See also Elon Foster, New Cyclopedia of Illustrations Adapted to Christian Teaching, 2 vols. (n.p.: 1870).
The work of social anthropologist Martin Stringer further supports and explains the importance of becoming immersed in Methodist discourse at camp meetings. In the course of his ethnographic research, Stringer observed that people within worshipping Christian communities were in a kind of feedback loop of experiencing worship, articulating belief statements and telling stories, and having personal experiences of faith. Stringer claimed that “once into the loop then the process generates its own momentum and appears to be unstoppable, self-sustaining, and totally complete.” But the people must place themselves fully within the circle and “be caught up within the worshipping context, for that situation to make any sense whatsoever.” If this is right, then camp meetings can be seen as effective ways to usher many people into the loop at one time. Stringer further notes that this feedback cycle obviously requires repetition and also memory to provide continuity between each revolution of the circle. The partial nature of this memory (i.e., for camp meetings one remembers feeling God’s love in August, but one is not feeling it so intensely in May) provides the momentum for keeping the cycle in motion.

*Wesley’s Way of Salvation*

One essential and intrinsic source of vocabulary for this Methodist discourse can be found in John Wesley’s theology of the way of salvation which served as a map for everyone involved, placing them on a continuum, a one-way street leading to Christian

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perfection. Atheists, deists and those who were not “religious” were simply looked upon as unawakened, while the awakened mourners, convicted of their sins, were anxious to experience God’s justifying grace, and the justified “Christians” were urged to press on toward holiness and perfect love. The path was intended to usher everyone toward perfection, the one-way street allowed for backsliders, but always in the hope that they would repent like the Prodigal Son and resume their journey in the right direction. Such discourse automatically set a common goal for the camp meeting community.

Faith shaped the function and form of most of the ritual elements found in the early New England camp meetings. Acknowledging the many unawakened souls in their midst, trumpets were blown to wake the encampment and usher them into spiritual battle; meditational exhortations created a yearning for salvation and “perfect love” motivating people to desire to move toward perfection. Parting rituals emblematic of heaven made some misty eyed thinking that they might not see these beloved “brethren” again until they reached heaven, and left those who had not yet “found the pearl of great price” doubting whether they could even expect to meet their justified friends there. For those who still had not experienced pardoning grace at the end of camp, the parting ritual further increased their fear of being forever barred from heaven’s gates, eternally separated from this beloved community, and thus amplifying their desire for God’s grace as they returned home.
As Cheryl Townsend Gilkes noted, the names people are given in a community of faith can strengthen the ties of the individuals to the community. At camp meetings not only were the participants called brother and sister, but at the prayer services and love feasts they learned to name for themselves where they stood along the way of salvation. Once a penitent responded to an altar call and came forward, the identity was solidified by the affirming prayers of the faithful, and the encouraging words offered by class leaders and preachers. By inviting people to name themselves by category (convicted seeking God’s pardoning love, or Christian seeking “the pearl of great price,” etc.) and counting them, the MEC leaders could evaluate the success of a camp meeting and anticipate the fruits that would grow out of it. Yet these categories were very subjective and were not used in a standard fashion within the Methodist discourse spoken at the camp meetings in the New England region. In the case of Rachel Stearns, she most likely raised her hand during the count of those who were sanctified, yet she spent many months afterward testing herself, uncertain if she had truly been sanctified or not. This is an example of the “non-definitional textures and multivocal possibilities” of the poetic discourse use at Methodist camp meetings.

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44 For this reason it is impossible to make any kind of statistical comparisons of the numbers presented in the camp meeting reports of this study. Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 571.
Experience as Discourse

It is important to state explicitly that discourse includes not only words but experiences. In the case of the discourse used at Methodist camp meetings, this included physical actions such as falling, shouting, and visions as well as the interpretation of these actions. When Methodists in England began falling and crying out during worship, John Wesley and others responded by “calling upon God, till he raised [them] up, full of ‘peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.’”\(^{45}\) Ann Taves observed that even as Wesley wrote about such an event, he was creating it by giving it structure, precipitating its context, relating it to other similarly constructed events and evaluating it. Just by using the terms “falling and rising,” Wesley was making theological connections to dying and rising in Christ, death and resurrection, damnation and salvation—all of which were central to the process of conversion.\(^{46}\)

This experiential vocabulary of Methodist discourse was exported to America with the first Methodists so that by 1776 it seemed even to an Episcopal priest that “where the greatest work was—where the greatest number of souls have been convinced and converted to God, there have been the most outcries, tremblings, convulsions, and all

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sorts of external signs.”

Because this experience was so prevalent at camp meetings it “sacralized” the meetings, leading to the belief that they must be the “work of God.”

Taves noted that when Methodist worshippers experienced “dissociation” they used biblical typologies to interpret the experience. The accounts of their experience blend bodily knowledge with biblical narratives. For example, shouting echoed David dancing before the ark of the covenant, God smiting the “wicked nation” and speaking through Ezekiel to ask the people to repent (a passage which also mentions people melting and being slain), Jesus telling the Pharisees that the stones will cry out if the disciples cease from praising, the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the account in Revelation of Jesus’ return in power and glory.

The worship practices which developed at camp meetings were centered on the presence of the Lord in the holy city of Jerusalem. From her study of camp meeting documents, Taves noticed that the Old Testament types of Ark, Temple and Jerusalem had corresponding antitypes in Christ, the Church and Heaven in the New Testament. Shouters could point to all of these related passages of scripture and claim that the proper response to being in the presence of God was to shout, and scripture even prepared them

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47 Taves, “Knowing through the Body,” 208. See especially the quote on page 208 from Devereux Jarratt’s letter to Rev. M’Roberts.

48 Ibid., 201. Ann Taves describes “dissociation” as “altered states of consciousness in which ordinary, waking consciousness is displaced partially or completely by that which I experience or believe is ‘not me.’” For Taves’ discussion of types, see Taves, Fits, Trances & Visions, 78.


50 These types all are found in a song called “The Methodist and the Formalist” found in William Hauser, Hesperian Harp (Philadelphia: n.p., 1848), 454-455.
to be criticized for shouting: “The camp-meeting ground was a new public place of worship wherein the very presence of the deity was to be expected and where Methodists gathered to glorify God with shouts of praise.”

Besides adding to the discourse of camp meetings, the bodily experiences made camp meetings more interactive and the importance of interactive experience was especially true in the cultural elements brought to camp meetings from African traditions. During the period of interracial worship on the Delmarva peninsula, many features of African music such as repetition of musical phrases, call-and-response, and hand clapping found their way into camp meeting choruses and spiritual songs. The musical style moved into preaching and the introduction of circular dance. From an African perspective, the interactivity is what fostered conversion, not the preaching. These interactive elements proved effective for white worshippers as well. Once part of the Methodist discourse, they were transported to New England by the preachers.

When the bodily experiences were linked to Wesleyan understandings of the way of salvation, they began to be seen as signs not only of conversion, but of sanctification. People such as New Engander Fanny Newell reported falling to the ground and having a vision of heaven when they were sanctified. The shouting went with being sanctified and seeing the glory of God. When crowds of people shouted at the same time, it seemed to Methodists trained in the poetic discourse of sanctification that heaven had come on

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51 Taves, Fits, Trances & Visions, 113-115.

52 See ibid. Also Chapter Two starting at page 57 above.

53 Ibid., 101-104.
earth. Conversely, the act of mourners crying for mercy represented the manifestation of hell.\textsuperscript{54}

According to William Johnson, African shouting practices were grafted onto the religious “exercises” brought to America by the English Methodists. The African practices showed up first among the classes and prayer meetings (not the preaching services led by the itinerants). In these meetings the mourners were surrounded by converted Christians who prayed, sang and shouted in an effort to bring the mourners through to conversion.\textsuperscript{55} This was the genesis of the praying circles or “social rings” as they were alternatively called.\textsuperscript{56} Initially the white preachers often found such outbreaks disturbing when they took place in the middle of the sermons. So shortly before Cane Ridge, they started the practice of inviting the awakened sinners to come to the “altar” (out of the midst of the congregation). As Robert Todd explained in 1799, “the interest became concentrated; penitents were much more conveniently counseled; [and] the meetings became more orderly.”\textsuperscript{57} Thus it developed that preaching led sinners to conviction, and practices from the ring shout transferred to praying circles and eventually to society tents, and led mourners to conversion.

Methodist poetic discourse was the way in which Methodists learned to see God at work in their everyday lives. It was the primary tool to help people see their lives as

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 86-87.

\textsuperscript{55} Johnson, ““To Dance in the Ring of All Creation,”” 42.

\textsuperscript{56} Taves, \textit{Fits, Trances & Visions}, 100-101.

\textsuperscript{57} The quotation from Todd is found in ibid., 102.
extensions of the drama found in the scriptures. The Bible was not a dusty book on a coffee table or placed on an altar for show. Rather, it was presented as a mirror where one could find oneself, and it provided witness of how the living God engages with individuals and communities and transforms them. The discourse both helped to increase desire for and expectation of religious experience, and gave people a common way to describe that experience once they had it. Because it was such an integral part of the camp meeting worship experience, this Methodist poetic discourse can be found running through all of the other aspects of the camp meetings under study as they fostered conversion, spiritual growth and the growth of the MEC in New England.

Intent to Convict, Convert and Sanctify

For most people today, the term conversion connotes thoughts of individual conversion stories. But the primary focus of this study has been on the institutional dimensions and practices of conversion. From this vantage point, it is obvious that there is much more to the story than simple conversion of non-believers to believers or Congregationalists to Methodists. Methodist camp meetings also addressed spiritual formation (which was called sanctification) as well as reclaiming backsliders (addressing apostasy), thereby directing their work to the renewal of the whole church.

Even so, it is plainly clear that the original intent of the Methodist itinerant preachers who organized the camp meetings reviewed in this study was to convert people who were not “Christians.” That is, they were most concerned to reach those who had not experienced forgiveness of their sins by a merciful and loving God, and to welcome all
newly converted Christians to attend their prayer meetings. This was a major motivation for employing their discourse of the Wesleyan way of salvation in their sermons, newspaper reports and other public addresses. Because awakening and converting were goals, Methodists did not appear to mind if the “work” spread to neighboring churches. But they were clearly glad when their own congregations grew and/or were revived.

In respect to the convictions and conversions at these meetings, being the effects of passion merely, it is well known that many happy revivals which our orthodox brethren have unitedly acknowledge to be genuine, have originated from a Camp-meeting. Many persons who for years afterwards have lived a pious and godly life, and terminated their earthly career in joy and peace; at the close of life, have acknowledged that their conversions began at a Camp-meeting. There God was pleased to manifest his grace unto them. There Christ first appeared precious to their souls. There they felt the power of redeeming love. And there lives and conversations corroborated the fact, and compelled even unbelievers to acknowledge it.  

In 1859, the founders of Asbury Grove still named conversion as an explicit goal: “[It] is our wish and purpose here to establish a meeting solely for promoting the spiritual interests of our churches and the conversion of souls.”

Over time the institutional concern widened. Converted Methodists who had been raising their children in the church wanted them to have their own powerful experiences of God’s grace. Concern for holiness grew as individuals returned to the camps year after year and needed a spiritual goal beyond conversion. By 1871, concern for conversion may have diminished, especially in the bigger permanent camp grounds and most of all at

58 Untitled, ZH (4 September 1823): 138.

Martha’s Vineyard, but it was still articulated as a desired outcome by the camp meeting leaders.

By 1926, one can see that the trends foreshadowed by 1871 had clearly continued. The discourse of camp meetings had shifted so that camp meeting reports offered no counts of those awakened, justified, or sanctified, or repentant backsliders reclaimed. The only significant population the leaders hoped to “convert” were the Methodist youth who attended. But some of the camps had begun the practice of holding “youth institutes” at other times in the summer, thus segregating the young people and eliminating that population of potential converts from the camp meetings proper. The New England camp meetings of that year were still well populated because the Methodist congregations were large. One might grow in faith there by attending an inspirational talk given by a missionary home on furlough or a “round table discussion.” A wide range of other activities which might generously be considered “holy leisure” were available including swimming, sports, pageants and campfires. The discourse had clearly shifted. Without the intent to convert, conversions became negligible.

On Pilgrimage with a Society

Another critical factor promoting conversion at the early camp meetings was that they required participants to go on pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is a practice where people separate themselves from the everyday time and space of life. By going away, people do not have the distractions of the normal chores and duties of home and work. Going away

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60 Mount, “Camp Meetings in New England: Then and Now.”
also creates in people an expectation for things to be new and different; they are much more open to change, even change of worship patterns. The camps were intentionally set up away from where most people lived and worked.61

In the introduction to *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, John Eade and Michael Sallnow posit that pilgrims are drawn toward holy places, holy persons (who are found in a particular place), and holy texts (providing opportunity to reenact or extend participation in the acts of the text).62 As places of pilgrimage, camp meetings could meet all three desires. Methodist preachers and other seasoned Methodists served as holy persons. The use of emblems, typology and meditational strategies of discourse, which led the campers to see what they were doing as reenacting passages of scripture, made any grove chosen for a camp meeting a holy place. Once a ground was deemed good enough to return to, leased for several years, and eventually purchased and built upon, layers of memory of the holy experiences that had transpired there made the grounds holy as well.

It is no little thing that the practice of camping also allowed the Methodists to experience themselves temporarily as the dominant religious group. In these spaces Methodist discourse was the primary language spoken and enacted. For this reason,

61 One part of the story of camp meetings losing their power to convert may be that they are now too easily accessible. Some people live at Asbury Grove year round or all summer, driving to work from their cottage. Eade and Sallnow see pilgrimage as “an arena for competing religious and secular discourses, for both the official co-optation and non-official recovery of religious meanings, for conflict between orthodoxies, sects and confessional groups, for drives toward consensus and communitas, and for counter-movements towards separateness and division.” John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 2-3. While there were competing discourses at some camp meetings, the Methodist discourse was clearly dominant.

62 Ibid., 6-9.
camp meetings may have been especially important in New England where Methodists were a tiny minority in the midst of states that had sanctioned the Congregational Church into the first part of the nineteenth century. Back home, Methodist discourse could only be spoken a few hours a week in prayer meetings and Sunday worship. But at the camp meetings it dominated every hour of every day. Even those who did not believe and were not members of the denomination embodied Methodist worship and fellowship, and lived within a Methodist worldview during the days of the camp. While John Wesley defended itinerant preaching by saying, “the world is my parish,” camp meetings were set up as temporary Methodist parishes which strengthened both the preachers and the small societies for the work of bringing the gospel out into the world.

Where a language student of Spanish might travel alone to Mexico for a week and struggle on her own to get a better grasp of Spanish, the native speakers of “Methodees” took a concertedly active role in teaching their discourse. Pilgrimage to a camp meeting was not typically made by individuals, but by whole societies. The unawakened, mourners seeking God’s grace, and Christians who had not yet become members of the MEC were invited by friends and family who were fluent Methodists. These potential

63 The Congregational Church was disestablished in Connecticut in 1818, while state funding for the Congregational Church in Massachusetts was suspended in 1833. Wikipedia, Separation of Church and State in the United States, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_church_and_state_in_the_United_States accessed 30 October 2014.

64 This “tabernacling” might prove to fit well with the culture of those “younger generations” studied by Roof and Wuthnow who tend to move from place to place seeking God along the way, rather than dwelling in the “temples.” Wade Clark Roof, A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); Robert Wuthnow, After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
new recruits were expected to sleep in the society tents, take meals with the society members, and participate in the society prayer meetings which happened multiple times each day. This is what made camp meetings an immersion experience for those just learning the language.65 Before the use of trains, one could also not easily “escape” in the middle of the pilgrimage. This argument was used in 1859, in fact, to counsel against abandoning Millennial Grove for the more easily accessible Asbury Grove.66

While on pilgrimage, class leaders and other Methodist lay persons would keep a close watch on their neighbors. If they started to cry or otherwise emote during an invitation, someone from home would take them by the hand and lead them forward to a praying circle. In the praying circles and tent meetings, parents prayed for children, husbands prayed for wives, sister prayed for sister. Gorham’s *Camp Meeting Manual* instructs each society to have at least one large tent “where the members can hold their prayer meetings together, under the supervision of the pastor; and every such tent and society should be a centre of influence for the promotion of the work of God as connected with that charge and neighborhood.”67 Members who attended the Manchester, Connecticut, camp meeting of 1856 did this well.

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65 In her study of Wesleyan Grove on Martha’s Vineyard, Ellen Weiss saw the cottages as an answer to the isolation of the nuclear family because they were so open. Weiss, *City in the Woods*, 69-72. But when one looks at the development of camp meetings from the beginning when everyone stayed in the society tents, to the development of family tents and then construction of the wooden homes, it can be seen that the rise of the cottages contributed powerfully to the breakdown of the social interactions of the society tents. As the report of Yarmouthport in 1871 showed, it had become all too easy to hang out in a cottage at the edge of the encampment and sing, rather than attend the prayer meetings. The pearl of great price was all too easily exchanged for a handful of beans.


It is worthy of remark that most of our members seemed to go to those meetings as much to work as to see and hear; for when the meetings were through at the stand, they returned to their tents and renewed the exercises at every proper interval, and thus kept the tented grove vocal with prayer and praise; and whenever they found a soul convicted, they offered effectual prayer till that seeking soul was blessed in the forgiveness of his sins. To God be all the praise.68

By the end of the week, especially during the love feasts, the new initiates were expressly invited to narrate their own lives using the Methodist poetic discourse. They were asked where they believed themselves to be on the way of salvation. Had they “received the pearl of great price” or experienced “sanctifying love” or were they still anxiously awaiting an experience of God’s grace? This is akin to what ethnographer Glenn Hinson witnessed among the “saints” in “a host of churches.” The people he observed used narration to “demonstrate the passage from sinner to saint.” This was done when one specified

*how* the Lord had acted on one’s life. For the saints, this meant describing not a process of considered thought and gradual choice, but an experience of soul-jarring intensity, a moment of knowledge and certainty, an encounter that so far transcended the mundane that it achieved the status of eminent tellability…And in that telling lay manifest proof of conversion. To truthfully “give one’s experience,” a convert first had to have had one.69

Perhaps most important of all, this circle of friends who dwelt together in a society tent would all be going home together. If anyone left the camp meeting still in an anxious state, someone from back home was likely to know about it and continue to encourage, counsel and pray. As long as they continued to attend the Methodist prayer

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meetings, they would be invited to tell of their experience of God using the terms of Methodist poetic discourse.

The examination of two specific cases will prove helpful in seeing how the members of a society worked together to foster Methodist identity. Isaac Jennison, Jr., was the son of a Methodist preacher. At one camp meeting he claimed the name Methodist for himself. Some years later Jennison had an experience of sanctification at another camp meeting. The accounts of these experiences were collected after he suffered an untimely death. While there are bits of young Jennison’s own diary in the collection, the volume is clearly a hagiography.

Rachel Sterns, on the other hand, was from an orthodox Congregationalist family but attended Methodist prayer meetings as a young woman. She “gave her heart to the Savior” and “found peace in believing” shortly after she started attending prayer meetings in January 1834, but was torn between remaining in her own church and becoming a Methodist. In September 1834, Rachel went with the Methodists of Greenfield to a camp meeting where she felt she was sanctified and shortly afterward she began to keep a diary. In it she chronicled her questions and uncertainty about whether she truly had been sanctified or only thought she had, and also expressed her inner conflict about becoming a member of the Methodist society. Each young person’s story shows the place of the camp meetings in their identity formation and spiritual growth.
Isaac Jennison—Raised by Methodists

This yearning for one’s own children to experience the grace of salvation was especially keen for Methodist clergy. Isaac Jennison, Sr., an ordained Methodist preacher, was appointed to Wilbraham, Massachusetts, in 1825, when his son, Isaac Jr., was ten. Wesleyan Academy opened that year and young Isaac was enrolled in the first class with six other scholars. Two years later, Isaac Jr. “became subject of pardoning mercy” during a revival led by John Newland Maffit. But as a teenager he became a backslider. Even a life-threatening illness did not keep him from wandering “from God and from peace.” Both his family and his school were places where Methodist discourse were spoken fluently, but Isaac Jr., like many teens, was practicing autonomy from his elders.

When Isaac Jr. was seventeen years old, his father took him to a five day camp meeting on Ephraim Brown’s farm in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Rev. Samuel Coggeshall reported that praying circles were formed every afternoon and the numbers who presented themselves and the numbers who were converted increased each day.

It was indeed pleasant to see the seekers, upon being invited, come out from the crowd, some of them led by their friends to the place of prayer, while the people of God and the ministers of the sanctuary knelt to invoke a blessing upon the

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70 The Senior Isaac Jennison’s sister Isabella married Moses Fisk, and their son Franklin Fisk was a Methodist preacher as well. It is unclear from information about Wilbur Fisk whether he is related to these Fisks of Natick, Massachusetts, but it is curious that Wilbur Fisk was the principal of Wesleyan Academy.

71 Isaac Jr. was three years old when his father was given his first appointment on a circuit.


73 It was organized by the Methodist congregation in Weston, a town that borders Lincoln.
broken hearted penitents. Here many received “the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”74

Yet according to his cousin Rev. Franklin Fisk, Isaac Jr. had “met several of his companions in youthful folly” at that camp meeting, to “whose society he tenaciously adhered till the last day of the meeting.”75 Finally, as the family story goes, during the final invitation at the last public prayer circle young Isaac was still skulking around the edges. So his father “entered the circle, and gave his son up to God in vocal prayer. His words reached the ears of the secluded boy, and went like a dagger to his heart.”76 Isaac came out of hiding into the middle of the circle “bathed with tears of penitence” and as he knelt he was “immediately delivered from his burden, and joy and praise began to spring up from his soul.”77

It is interesting to note that in Coggeshall’s report, where neither Jennison father nor son is mentioned, the same prayer circle is described. The “battle now waxed hotter and hotter. Our brethren seemed unwilling to give up the contest, and so continued praying in the circle until sunset.”78 Young Jennison’s conversion was not just a private decision, nor only the product of parental pressure; the whole encampment was at work


75 Otheman, The Christian Student, 11.

76 This demonstrates the convicting power of the Methodist discourse. As Glen Messer noted, “the Methodists… found themselves no less distressed by the implications presented by the reality of unconverted children. For [them] there was no comfort of predestined salvation to fall back upon—an unconverted child was lost to the devil; that was the unavoidable fact of the matter.” Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 122.

77 Otheman, The Christian Student, 9-12.

praying for all those who were yet unrepentant. At the end, Isaac Jr. was among forty to fifty “broken hearted penitents” who presented themselves for prayers of blessing at that time.\textsuperscript{79}

Five years later, when he was a twenty-one year old student at Wesleyan University, the younger Jennison attended the camp meeting at Bolton, Connecticut, with some of his friends. That was his “spiritual pentecost [sic]” where he was “permitted to rejoice in the full salvation of the gospel.” Again, his experience may have been personal, but it was not individual. Ralph W. Allen reported that “many who were converted at Bolton that week, were young men, who promise[d] much to the Church.” Others, like Jennison, “professed to experience the blessing of perfect love.”\textsuperscript{80}

Jennison’s biographer quotes his journal entries at the time of this camp meeting. The day he set out for the camp meeting, Jennison reported that he prayed, “May the Holy Spirit go and abide with me! I hope there to be freed from the contamination of sin. O Lord, convict me of the infinite importance of being holy in heart and life!” Two days after the meeting ended, Jennison wrote again explaining that he had not felt any uncommon blessing the first couple of days, so he set about examining his heart to “destroy every idol there,” coming to the conclusion that “I would sacrifice all for the

\textsuperscript{79} After the love feast that evening, Brother Coggeshall, who was appointed to Weston and Needham, thought it “best to reap some of our fruit as it became ripe” and invited these new converts to join a society that same evening. “Twenty-eight complied right away, and another three joined the next morning.” Ibid.

sake of Christ, for that holiness ‘without which no man shall see the Lord.’” 81 Jennison did not just keep to himself, but “sought instruction and aid upon the subject from many of [his] devoted Christian friends.” 82 Appreciating their support, Jennison continued to seek

with all my heart. I had bound all upon the altar of sacrifice, and looked to the blood of Jesus as the only ground of sanctification. Having done all that I could, and finding that Christ alone could save me to the uttermost, with a concentration of all my attention on the great atonement, and with a struggle of all the energies of the soul, together with the faith that his blood now avails for me, I swooned away into the embrace of the Savior, and all was peace. A silent, heavenly tranquility stole over me which no mortal tongue can ever describe. O how infinite did I behold the love of the Savior to be; his willingness how great! He seemed more willing to bestow a full salvation than a partial joy. How sweet the rest in Jesus! No inward disposition to sin. The Son, and the Father, and the Holy Ghost come and take up their abode in the soul, and consequently the evil one finds nothing to accord with his suggestions. It is a heaven within. This work was accomplished in my heart the sixth day of September, about sunset. 83

Jennison set off back to Wesleyan with five of his friends who “experienced the same great blessing.” The next Sunday, when he was back at Wesleyan, Jennison testified to his experience at Bolton during the chapel service. His words were recorded:

> For many weeks past I have enjoyed communion with my heavenly Father. Do you still hold in dear remembrance the scene we witnessed five years since in Lincoln grove? Though that spot will ever be held dear by me as my spiritual birth-place, yet Bolton camp grove can never be forgotten as the place where the ‘old man’ was completely crucified, and where, like Jacob, I wrestled and prevailed. May I not spiritually call that place Peniel, which, being interpreted is the face or vision of God? When the victory was won, when I had fallen just as I was into the hands of Jesus, then by faith I beheld his smiling face. While all submissive I remained at the feet of the blessed Redeemer, how kind and loving that look of his, he looks and all is heaven! It was in the grove in Bolton that I

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82 Ibid., 72.

83 Ibid.
began to know that it is possible to love the Lord with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. If I could I would tell you how I felt when all was given to Christ. It was no ‘rushing, mighty wind,’ no overwhelming rapture, but a silent tranquility, such as seems to rest upon the peaceful lake when the sun, first rising, throws his gentlest, mildest beams over its undisturbed surface.\textsuperscript{84}

\textit{Rachel Stearns—Congregational Convert}

Unlike Isaac Jennison, Rachel Stearns had no family pressure to convert. To the contrary, several of her orthodox Congregationalist family members mocked her for associating with Methodists. They were part of the local “orthodox” congregation,\textsuperscript{85} and Rachel’s widowed mother, Sarah Ripley Stearns, belonged to a women’s group dedicated to piety. Sarah also helped to found a female charitable society, and worked toward other social concerns as a young single mother of three.\textsuperscript{86} Rachel was examined as a candidate for admission to the Congregational Church in Greenfield on October 15, and became a member of that congregation on October 18, 1833.\textsuperscript{87}

It seems from appointment records that Methodist leaders formed their first society in Greenfield that very winter. Rachel began attending the local Methodist prayer

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 71-72.

\textsuperscript{85} This name “orthodox” was sometimes chosen rather than “Trinitarian” to distinguish a congregation from those that had become Unitarian.


meeting on January 17, 1834. One week later, Rachel gave her “heart to the Savior, and found that peace which the world can neither give or take away.” She also dated that as the time she gave her “heart & hand to the Methodists.” An exploration of records from the Greenfield church may offer clarification, but it is possible that Rachel was received as a probationary member of the Methodist society at that time. On the one year anniversary of this experience, Rachel described it in her diary: “The first time I went I did not like the meeting but I soon became interested in the plain & simple truths of the Gospel, there preached in such a fervor and earnest strain as I never before heard.”

In September of 1834 Rachel attended her first camp meeting. While she did not note the location, it seems most likely that Rachel was at the camp meeting held in Winchester, New Hampshire, just a few miles from Greenfield, from September 1-6. She came away believing that she had obtained the blessing of sanctification and her diary chronicles both how Rachel tested whether she had truly been sanctified, and how she wrestled with becoming a full member of the Methodist society throughout the fall and winter of 1834–1835.

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90 Ibid.

91 This is the most likely candidate from the camp meetings listed in September issues of the 1834 Zion’s Herald. The Winchester meeting was jointly put on by the Springfield, Massachusetts, and Winchester, New Hampshire, districts. The report noted that “Though our congregation did not exceed 1,000 at any time, as the fruits of the meeting we received thirty into society. Upward of seventy professed to find the inestimable pearl, and over one hundred to experience the sanctifying love of God.” Joseph H. Patterson, “Winchester Camp-Meeting,” ZH (17 September 1834): 150.
Though she started to associate with the Methodists just three months after joining the Congregational Church, Rachel continued to teach her own small Congregational Sunday school class “whom I love as if they were my own children”\textsuperscript{92} and enjoyed attending female prayer meetings with her mother.\textsuperscript{93} This helps to explain why Rachel’s journal expresses conflicted loyalties in the first seventeen months of her association with Methodists. Though she gave her “heart & hand to the Methodists… [and] thought [she] had found the system of religion [i.e., discourse she] had so long been seeking, after the [camp meeting] ended, and the excitement in some measure subsided, [she] found to [her] great surprise that some of [her] Orthodox friends believed the same, that religion is the same in all who feel its power.” \textsuperscript{94}

There was strong social pressure for Stearns to shun the Methodists. Less than a year after she started to attend the Methodist prayer meeting in Greenfield, Rachel confessed her former “pretensions” shared by her sister and two cousins. These young ladies of Greenfield were haughty in both attitude and demeanor. Before her conversion Rachel would not have spoken to some who had later become her dearest Methodist friends. She “would have considered it an imposition to sit in the same room with them, or eat at the same table.”\textsuperscript{95} Rachel confessed she was prone to slander others, and to “look on the dark side of things” and was vain about her education. She “doubted

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\textsuperscript{92} Rachel W. Stearns, “Journal,” (27 October 1834, 20 November 1834, 3 December 1834).
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., (17 October 1834).
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., (25 January 1835).
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., (5 December 1834).
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whether it would be respectable in a young lady to attend” a meeting of Methodists.\textsuperscript{96} Rachel was aware that many in the town found Methodists suspect. “When they first came here, if a Methodist went into a house, the whole family were collected together, to see what sort of an animal a Methodist was and I shall be looked at just so.”\textsuperscript{97}

The pressure against joining the Methodists was also within her own family. At first her mother commended Rachel for growing in grace since her time with the Methodists,\textsuperscript{98} and Sarah accompanied Rachel to visit the Methodist class leader, Brother Humes, and seemed “pleased with him,” inviting “him to call and see us.”\textsuperscript{99} At times Rachel felt that her mother seemed “more and more inclined to be willing” that Rachel officially convert.\textsuperscript{100} But at other times Sarah Stearns seemed “very unwilling,”\textsuperscript{101} and voiced her opposition to Rachel “speaking and praying in meetings,” accusing her daughter of vanity and pride in the notion that she had experienced holiness.\textsuperscript{102} When Rachel was employed as a school teacher in Leominster for the winter months and resided with her relatives, she recounted her Christian experience to her cousin Susan.

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Ibid., (30 April 1835).
\item \textsuperscript{98} Ibid., (16 October 1834).
\item \textsuperscript{99} Ibid., (17 October 1834).
\item \textsuperscript{100} Ibid., (19 October 1834).
\item \textsuperscript{101} Ibid., (1 February 1835, 20 February 1835).
\item \textsuperscript{102} Ibid., (15 March 1835).
\end{footnotes}
Rachel’s host made it clear that she did not want Rachel to make it known in Leominster that she had any association with Methodists.103

With so much opposition to conversion, the questions is raised: what led Rachel Stearns to convert from being an orthodox Congregationalist to a member of the Methodist society in Greenfield? What was the process of that conversion? After a close reading of her diary, it is still unclear what or who broke through her prejudice and convinced her to attend her first Methodist prayer meeting. Rachel did, however, claim that at the time she became a member of the Orthodox Congregational Church of Greenfield she had difficulty answering the doctrinal questions asked by the minister. “I dreaded the approaching time when I should publicly profess my Savior’s name. I dared not think of it, I know I was not fit, but no other recourse remained, if I did not do that I thought, I never would be saved.”104 Rachel was not satisfied with the faith offered by her mother’s church. When it came to joining, she went through the motions out of fear of the consequences, but her heart was not in it.

In the first months after she “gave her hand to the Methodists,” Rachel was welcome to attend Methodist meetings, but was apparently not required to renounce her membership in the Congregational Church or its views. She was not yet a Methodist. But she considered this the time that she was “converted,” when she “became a Christian.”

103 Ibid., (27 November 1834).

104 Ibid., (18 October 1834).
Being a Christian was not the same, in Rachel’s view, as being a Methodist. Rachel called both her mother and her cousin Frances “Christians” because they had given their hearts to Christ. Sanctification (alternately called “second blessing” and “perfect love” in Rachel’s diary) and church membership were both something other than conversion. This is reflected clearly in the pages of Rachel’s diary.

Using her diary to search her own soul, Rachel confessed qualities unfitting of sanctification: “pride, selfishness, impatience, unbelief, the fear of man, all still retain possession of my heart, though in a greatly subdued degree.” The next day she resolved to confess sanctification publicly to the prayer meeting as soon as she received witness of it, and “tried to take the [second] blessing, and call it mine.” Like Isaac Jennison, Rachel consulted a number of other people as she wrestled with whether she could rightly claim sanctification or not. Congregationalists counseled that Satan was tempting her to be boastful if she did, while the Methodist elder Paul Townsend warned Rachel “not to

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107 Ibid. 6-7 October 1834. Rachel clearly felt shy about speaking in public in a mixed gendered group.

108 Her questions were not unlike those of Phoebe Palmer’s sister Sarah Lankford who was wrestling with them in New York about the same time. See the description of Lankford’s experience in May of 1835 in Garrison, *Forty Witnesses: Covering the Whole Range of Christian Experience*, 189-190. Both Stearns and Lankford considered that it was “the enemy” leading them to doubt their sanctification due to a lack of “expected emotion” as evidence.
reason with Satan, but take hold of the promises of God, exercise faith, and pray for grace to resist the temptations.”

Rachel indicated in her diary that both after her initial conversion and after obtaining the blessing at camp meeting she longed for instruction in living a Christian life. She felt more “able to comprehend the deep things of God.” Besides attendance of prayer meetings, she had discussions with Brother Townsend and class leader Brother Hume, who had schooled her in the doctrine of Christian perfection. Rachel also read the Short Account of the Experience of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers, “Dr. Beecher’s Instructions for Young Christians,” “The Life of Wesley by Watson,” and a letter by Miss Myra Littlefield on the doctrine of Christian perfection. This process of trying on new identities was described by sociologist Mary Jo Neitz as “molting,” when, like the

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110 Ibid., (20 October 1834).
111 Ibid., (21 October 1834).
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., (30 December 1834).
114 Christian Perfection (held by Boston College Library) is “a letter from Miss Myra Littlefield of Stoughton, to the church of North Bridgewater under the pastoral care of Rev. Daniel Huntington of which she is a member.” Rev. Huntington was the Congregational pastor of the North Bridgewater Church from 1812-1833. Bradford Kingman, The History of North Bridgewater (Boston: Bradford Kingman, 1866), 137-138. This is an intriguing lead. Was Myra Littlefield converting to Methodism and writing her home church to let them know? There is no hint from the history of North Bridgewater that the church was anything but orthodox.

feathers of a bird, the new feathers take root and gently push the old ones out.\textsuperscript{116}

Similarly, Rachel’s conversion process could be described as “sifting,” or trying things on for size while she fully participated in the formation of her new identity.\textsuperscript{117} Perhaps her identity had been so rooted in Congregational discourse that Rachel needed this time (more than one camp meeting could afford) to make the transition.

The two times when Rachel’s affiliation with the Methodists seemed most at jeopardy were when she moved temporarily to Leominster seeking to live as a Methodist on her own without a local class meeting,\textsuperscript{118} and in the spring of 1835 when the Congregational Church entered into a revival.\textsuperscript{119} On the heels of the revival a new minister, Mr. Albro, was expected in Greenfield. Rachel had made up her mind that if he came she would remain a member of the Congregational Church. But on March 29, the word came that Mr. Albro was not coming, and Rachel took it as a sign that God meant for her to join the Methodists.

Participation in camp meeting was an important part of Rachel Sterns’ Christian experience, though it was just a few days in the middle of the process of the formation of her new identity as a Methodist. At the camp meeting Rachel had a taste of what it was like for Methodism to be the majority culture, and she gained the valuable experience of


\textsuperscript{118} She did find support in Leominster when she met Mr. and Mrs. Hale, a quiet Methodist couple who invited her to pray with them in their home. Rachel W. Stearns, “Journal,” (5 December 1834).

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., (15 March 1835).
being sanctified. On the day before she was examined for membership by Br. Townsend, Rachel was still using the joy she felt after camp meeting as a litmus test for her faith. On May 1, Rachel finally presented herself for examination of membership and on May 2, 1835, she joined the Methodists of Greenfield.

These two accounts display both the dynamics of individuals making a group pilgrimage to camp meetings (either with one’s society or one’s family and friends), and the ways in which the individuals adopted and employed the Methodist discourse and let it shape their identities. Isaac Jennison did not appear to struggle with his identity as a Methodist; he had been raised by and surrounded by Methodists. But after claiming the justifying grace of God as a boy, he became a backslider. The camp meeting helped him to reclaim the faith in which he was raised. Rachel Stearns, on the other hand, was quick to become a Christian, accepting the justifying grace of Jesus as presented by Mr. Townsend. But her ties to the Congregational Church were strong and it took many months, including a visit to a camp meeting where she experienced sanctification, and still more months of reflection, prayer and conversation with members of the Methodist class meeting, before Rachel was ready to leave her Congregational identity behind and step fully into her new Methodist identity. These examples also illustrate the way different social worlds made the discourse more and less “sticky.” Even when Isaac drifted to the edges, he had already been surrounded by the language and easily picked it up.

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120 Students at Wesleyan were also involved in prayer meeting groups and bands. Otheman, *The Christian Student*, 38-43.
up again. Rachel was learning it from scratch and in the context of others who did not want her to speak it.

It is quite striking that language both Isaac and Rachel articulated about their sanctification was so very similar to what Phoebe Palmer used later in her writings. Here, in New England in 1834 and 1838, there was already talk of “binding all to the altar” and “looking to the blood of Jesus.” This is evidence that the discourse used by Phoebe and her sister Sarah was already the “lingua franca” among New England Methodists, not a later innovation.

Porous Boundaries

While it was surely a strength that Methodists made society pilgrimages to camp meetings, another important factor in the conversion of so many New Englanders in the early part of the nineteenth century is that camp meetings were not reserved only for Methodists and their friends and relatives. The “porous boundaries” of the camp meetings made a significant contribution to the act of conversion.121 As Russell Richey has noted, camp meetings, like quarterly meetings, were places where three communities were brought together at once: the itinerant preachers, the Methodist circuit or district, and the general populace. The community could witness the “deep engagement of ministers with ministers. The drama that unfolded derived some of its intensity from the heightened sensitivity and mutual stimulation of the ministers. Their proclamation and praise had the

strength of numbers, the intensity a support group provides and the creative nurture afforded by peer review.”

Ann Taves highlighted that camp meetings were also a place of dialogue between the mourners and the shouters, for mourners needed the prayers of the shouters in the process of experiencing salvation. She shows that, in the earliest depictions of interracial worship of Methodists on the Delmarva Peninsula, the Spirit was known through the dynamic rhythmic action between the inside shouters and the mourners who were closer to the outside.

But outsiders, including those who were not friends of the Methodists, often came into the camps to challenge the Methodist worldview. It was tricky to keep the bounds open enough, but still keep chaos at bay. Yet experience showed that the chances were good that some of the adversaries could be converted too. It surely helped that so many of the exercises were fully public, including the prayer circles formed at the invitation at the end of a preaching service. As one reporter attested:

The public social exercises were seasons of peculiar interest. Several infidels were deeply impressed by the testimonies on Friday morning. One particularly said,
that until that morning he had disbelieved the Christian religion. Some who had been saved from the same delusion spoke of the power of the Gospel to save. These testimonies were like a two-edged sword to his soul. The bold statement of Christian experience is one of the most powerful agencies in converting the world. Hence the great usefulness of our public social meetings. There are those who hear the powerful exhortations of the church, that would not go into a private place to hear them. How many thousands have been awakened and converted by these means!125

In keeping with the poetic discourse used by the Methodists of the day, the preachers responded to the skeptics, hecklers and trouble makers not with rational argument, but by seeking to arouse a desire, or at least a general sympathy, for the experience of God’s grace.126 Speaking to them in the image-rich and emotional language of the community, outsiders were courted by camp meeting preachers.

Again, a close look at two cases will prove helpful in showing how Methodist camp meeting discourse coaxed outsiders into the community. The first is none other than Camp Meeting John Allen whose appearance in this study has been almost as ubiquitous as he was at the camp meetings of New England. He attended his first camp meeting as a curious infidel, skeptical, but not seeking to cause any disruption. After his conversion John quickly became a local exhorter and preacher, and eventually served in the itineracy. He remained highly involved in the camp meetings of the MEC in New England. Similar to Isaac Jennison, what we know about John Allen’s first experiences at camp meetings are from a book published by a family member after his death.127

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127 Allen’s personal papers were consumed in a house fire at the end of his life, so what was pieced together were stories told at John’s funeral, as well as obituaries and family memories.
The second case, Hiram Munger, first went to camp meeting as a young man intending to cause trouble. He later converted and exercised some leadership in the local Methodist societies for a time until he was swayed by the Millerites. He published his autobiography in 1856.

*John Allen—Curious Infidel*

John Allen was raised in a Congregational family around Farmington, Maine, and left the church and dabbled in tobacco, profanity and intoxicating drinks when he left his father’s home. To “quiet his fears of the future,” Allen adopted Universalism. After five years of marriage, John attended his first Methodist camp meeting out of curiosity in 1825. He was thirty years old. Though there is no record that John had significant associations with Methodists before then, he went with an openness of heart, stopping to pray that “if he was mistaken in his religious belief he might be convinced of his error at the meeting.”\(^{128}\) Immersed in the worship with Methodists from about fifteen societies, John Allen’s interest was piqued and he “soon became deeply convicted of his sins and of his appalling danger.” John wrote that he “melted into tenderness to hear them in different tents singing and praising God, and…felt an anxiety to realize what they felt. Sometimes I was resolved to seek till I obtained, and then again I would fall into a stupid frame.”\(^{129}\) When Rev. Ebenezer Newell (Fanny Newell’s husband) gave an invitation to “those who desired an interest in Christ” to go forward for prayer, John wrestled at first,


\(^{129}\) Ibid., 24.
not wanting “to expose myself before a thousand people.” But those around him encouraged him, and John did go before God

with confession and shame. I thought I would ask the Lord to have mercy, when, no sooner had the words escaped my lips, than I was raised from my seat, and cried to the Lord with all my power to have mercy upon me. I saw myself sinking into despair with no possible way of escape, when in the height of my agony, a perfect calm pervaded my whole frame. I looked around and said, ‘There is peace,’ and no sooner had I said the word than Oh! The praises of God which flowed into my soul.  

Unfortunately, John Allen’s personal papers were destroyed, so if he, like Rachel Stearns, kept a journal documenting his transformation, it has been lost. At his death Allen’s biographer reported that from the time of this conversion John Allen “immediately commenced an earnest Christian life, and declared to all whom he met what great things the Lord had done for him…Ever after the camp-meeting seemed to him the next place to heaven.”  

John Allen was so enthusiastic about his experience of forgiveness that he started giving testimony and exhorting at home, and began a new prayer meeting which grew until they hosted “union protracted meeting” resulting in converts for three denominations.  

At the camp meeting in 1826, John Allen “received a wonderful spiritual baptism, and ever after he remained a firm believer in the Wesleyan doctrines of Christian perfection, though his experience was not always up to that high standard.” This appears to be an instance of his sanctification. That same year John Allen received his exhorter’s

\[130\] Ibid.

\[131\] Ibid., 22.

\[132\] Ibid., 25-26. Reportedly the Congregationalists and Baptists gained the most new members.
license, and in 1828 he was licensed as a local preacher. The immersion into camp meeting discourse was instrumental in Allen’s progression from an “infidel” to a preacher in just three years.

Not only was John Allen’s identity so formed by camp meetings that he received the name “Camp Meeting John,” but John Allen’s fingerprints are on many camp meetings of New England as they developed through the nineteenth century. John Allen was inspired by the discourse spoken at Methodist camp meetings, learned it quickly, and joined in the ranks of those who promoted it by exhorting and preaching at camp meetings and leading prayer meetings, and by serving as a frequent correspondent to the *Zion’s Herald*.

**Hiram Munger—Rabble Rouser**

Hiram Munger, like John Allen, was an unbeliever when he attended his first camp meeting. Though Munger had encountered a few lay Methodists in his life and “felt the pardoning love of God” once as a teen, he did not align himself with any church.\(^{133}\) Munger confessed that his motivation for attending his first camp meeting was the challenge it presented. He had heard that the Methodists used their preaching stands as a kind of jail for rowdies and Munger intended to cause enough trouble that they would try to lock *him* up. He wanted to see if they could, so when he and a friend arrived they intentionally broke the rules and caused a stir. The Methodist leaders put things in

\(^{133}\) Munger, *Life and Religious Experience*, 15-16. As a poor person he was offended by the Congregationalist church taxes.
order, but did not lock the lads up. That evening a mob of rowdies assembled at night to tear down the tents while the people were in them. Munger and his friend stayed back as the mob attacked, women and children screamed, and the presiding elder tried to organize the men to defend the camp. When he saw an elderly neighbor bleeding from being struck, Munger decided to take sides with the Methodists, chased the mob away and kept watch the rest of the night. Munger attended a number of camp meetings after this one, but only as a spectator.

Next, Hiram Munger got involved in temperance meetings and attended some Methodist prayer meetings. But as a typical New Englander, he was resistant to speaking about his feelings in public or even to his wife. He kept telling himself that that he would speak after he was “blessed,” not before. When Munger was twenty-five, a revival broke out and a young woman’s tearful testimony almost moved him to go forward at the invitation, but still he hung back for two more days, afraid of what his friends would think. Finally, on the third evening, the invitation of Josiah Litch moved Munger to his feet. Walking home that evening, after Brother Litch and others had prayed for him, Munger felt a great peace.

But Munger found it difficult to remain in that spiritual state, especially because of the “gang of hands wicked as Satan himself” among whom he worked. When he and

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134 Ibid., 15-17.

135 Munger noted at the beginning of his memoir that he did not keep a diary and could not remember many details of his life—so there is no mention of him attending any specific camp meetings between this one and the one in Haddam. Ibid., 29.

136 Ibid., 24-26. Litch later became a leader in the Adventist movement.
his family attended a camp meeting at Haddam they had a very rocky start. Their boat with 400 passengers arrived and there were no tents for them. Sleeping under the stars was exhausting, his wife got homesick and their small son was badly burned in a fire. But there was no way for them to return home before the boat left at the end of the week.

Munger presented himself for prayers at every invitation, several times a day, but admitted that his heart was hard. Eventually a preacher who had been reading Munger’s body language invited him to describe his feelings and tell his experience. The preacher then advised Munger that his problem was that he was not well connected to other Christians at home: he needed to join a class meeting and tell them his feelings and experiences.¹³⁷ Munger followed this advice and this improved his spiritual experience.

Munger’s account of his spiritual development reveals that he had difficulty expressing his experience with words and stories. There are likely several factors at work. First of all, it is clear from Munger’s autobiography that he is less educated than Jennison, Stearns and Allen. This illustrates Cooley’s assertion that the poetic discourse was not less intellectual, even as it relied more heavily on emotional intelligence than on rational intelligence. Second of all, when Munger joined his first camp meeting and began his shenanigans the meeting already in progress. He had very little time to be exposed to the Methodist discourse before the midnight brawl broke out. Calling himself a “spectator” at subsequent meetings may indicate that he still hung back on the edges of the camp. He clearly did not joined a Methodist class meeting as a result of his first camp

¹³⁷ Ibid., 29.
meetings. Here he seems to be illustrating B. W. Gorham’s assertion that the attitude one brought to camp meeting, and the manner in which one did or did not participate made a difference in the experience one could have.\textsuperscript{138} Whereas Allen immersed himself in Methodist relationships after his first camp meeting, even starting prayer meetings himself, Munger did not associate regularly with Methodists until some years later after receiving advice from the preaching at the Haddam camp meeting. Outside of the camp meetings, Methodist prayer meetings were the primary place a person could learn to tell their feelings and experiences by listening to others tell theirs. There was wisdom inherent in the formal process of becoming a Methodist when the main requirement was to demonstrate fluency in Methodist discourse by narrating one’s own spiritual journey along the Wesleyan way of salvation.\textsuperscript{139}

As can be seen from these two accounts, porous boundaries were difficult to maintain and presented the leadership challenges, especially when some came in to disturb the peace. Also, what flowed in, could easily flow out again. Some competitors like the Millerites capitalized on this quality, adopting the form of the Methodist camp meeting and much of its discourse to draw people intentionally into their circle. In the case of Hiram Munger, they succeeded in attracting an energetic leader. Yet if the porous boundaries of the camp meetings could account for gaining new professions of faith from


\textsuperscript{139} Munger eventually became a member of the MEC, and served as a leader, especially helping with camp meetings. See more details in Chapter 3. But it was also through camp meetings that he was introduced to the Millerites which led him to move on and become an Adventist.
many who were even a fraction as committed as John Allen, the hard work of maintaining order was all worth it.

On a larger scale, the permeable boundaries also served to allow aspects of Methodist discourse to flow out into the surrounding community. Other denominations were strengthened by their members’ introduction to experiential religion. As Nancy Ammerman has noted, all institutions have permeable boundaries which allow conversations that shape elements of identity to be transported across them: “Sacred consciousness is neither confined to individual minds nor to self-contained religious institutions.” 140 But the nature of the early camp meetings made them especially absorbent of new people who then were engaged in conversations. Their identities were constructed in the interaction. As Ammerman put it:

This is not a simple “appropriation” of tradition into everyday life but a process of intersection and creativity. There is an intertwining of individual and communal. Religion is found in the places where individual agency and shared symbols intersect, where elements of socially recognized traditions meet the everyday situations of ordinary people. 141

Preachers and Other Spiritual Guides

The itinerant preachers played a critical role in setting the discourse for Methodists at camp meetings even though they were not the only ones to do so. As Mark R. Teasdale noted, the itinerant system “guaranteed that the circuit riders understood their


141 Ibid., 300-301.
primary job to be evangelistic.”¹⁴² In the discourse of the community, everything they did, including camp meetings, was to participate in the “work of God” growing the church. If a Methodist preacher could attract interest when preaching in a new community, then he would read the General Rules and explain the “economy” of the church; but he was also introducing the church’s particular linguistic world. He would invite any who “were willing to conform to the Discipline of the MEC, and desired to join us,” saying, “come and give me your hand.”¹⁴³ Of those who accepted this invitation, the circuit rider would create a class meeting and select a leader of that meeting. Most individuals were expected to spend several months praying weekly with their class—i.e., enter their discursive world—before they officially became a member. Membership was granted by the appointed itinerant after an examination, which consisted of the candidate telling his or her own story of experiencing God’s grace in a way that reflected the newly learned Methodist discourse.

Camp meetings assisted in this process by bringing many people in a class meeting or society to a spiritual climax. Presiding elders expected the itinerants on their districts to bring their societies to the camp meetings. The preachers were highly involved within the prayer meetings in the society tents, even those who were not given


¹⁴³ Ibid., 100-101. See also Peter Cartwright, Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher, ed. W. P. Strickland (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 90-91. This speech may have been quite uniform since Rachel Stearns gave her “hand to the Methodists” when she first joined the class meeting in Greenfield, Massachusetts.
the opportunity to preach at the stand. There is also ample evidence that the preachers mentored and counseled individuals throughout the days and nights of a camp meeting.

The discourse of salvation being practiced by these Methodist preachers stood in contrast to the theological discourse being taught to the Congregational ministers at Harvard and Yale.144 One interesting question for future research would be to map these contrasting discourses in New England.145 Perhaps the reason Boston was such a hard location for Jesse Lee and his brethren was that too many people were fluent in the discourse taught at Harvard. But in Lynn, populated by shoemakers and more recent immigrants, Methodists preachers functioned like “organic intellectuals,”146 better able to translate concepts of faith into the language of the people. Such leaders, according to Antonio Gramsci, come from “pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology, and aims they conserve for a time.”147 Enoch Mudge, “the first native of New England to enter the itinerant ranks,”148 was a shoemaker149 from Lynn, Massachusetts. Edward T.

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144 Omar McRoberts, Tex Sample and James Wind all have shown that when church leaders come from a different class, hold different aesthetic tastes and use different vocabulary than the congregation, his or her influence is liable to be weakened. Omar M. McRoberts, Streets of Glory: Church and Community in a Black Urban Neighborhood (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003); Tex Sample, White Soul: Country Music, the Church, and Working Americans (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); James P. Wind, “Leading Congregations, Discovering Congregational Cultures,” The Christian Century (1993): 105-110.

145 Methodism seems to have taken root more easily in the rural areas, and among the workers of the urban regions of New England, such as the shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts.


149 Tucker, Itinerant Preaching, 84.
Taylor was a sailor, “one of the roughest and most unpromising specimens,” when he was converted by the preaching of Elijah Hedding. They surely were not dressed in “the powdered wig, breeches ending at the knee, knee buckles, white top boots, and silk stockings that were common among Congregational clergy.”

As Cooley described, Methodists using poetic discourse did not draw upon the Bible to create systematic statements about the nature of God and the nature of humanity. Rather, Methodist preachers “turned to scripture as a picture gallery of religious experiences for representing the textures and colors of their own immediate experience.” As evangelist G. D. Watson explained it: “In no one Scripture portrait can we find our exact reflection, yet by walking through this gallery of character and experience, we may find ourselves sufficiently delineated as to find our true moral stature and complexion. We shall find lessons and shadings of experience in Moses at the burning bush diversified from Isaiah and Jacob.” When they preached at camp meetings and elsewhere, the Methodist ministers added vivid stories of their own personal conversions to the gallery. In this way, “organic intellectuals” such as Enoch Mudge and Edward T. Taylor provided even more plausible models of conversion to their congregations, giving them the sense

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150 Ibid., 10.
151 Shiels, “Methodist Invasion,” 265.
that if God can save an “old salt” like Father Taylor, God can transform their lives as well.¹⁵³

Camp meetings also provided a place for the newer preachers to witness their craft in practice. By hearing four or five sermons a day, and at least as many exhortations, they could observe how to use the discourse in a way that worked. When it was their turn to take the stand, they were equipped with images, stories, and poetic language that would invite listeners to conversion and holiness. They could practice using the discourse that was designed to stir people’s emotions, convict their hearts and move them from their seats.

Resolving the Tension: Threat of Hell—Promise of Grace

Historians and sociologists have long noticed that there is a kind of tension involved with the process of conversion. Whatever one’s status, it is called into question, and the resulting tension is eventually resolved as a new status is established. Some have labeled the religions most interested in making converts “sects” and write about how they have much more tension with society than the other extreme, the “church,” that accommodates the surrounding culture.¹⁵⁴ Stephen Warner has pointed out that Christian sectarian groups are much more conscious that leading a Christian life is different than a

¹⁵³ This dynamic is described in contemporary congregations by Donald E. Miller, Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 54-55, 66-68.

Furthermore, living a distinctive life means speaking a distinctive language about that life. Sects tend to suspect that someone whose behavior is not distinctive from the world is not fully following Christ. Sects strongly encourage their members to integrate their faith into all aspects of life, not relegate it to a place and time called “church.” Rituals in sect-like congregations tend to be emotionally demanding. They often require more of a person’s time and ask individuals to make sacrificial commitments and/or demonstrate that they have really changed before they are offered the rite of initiation. Early Methodism has often been thought of as a sect until it grew more “respectable” and church-like, prompting some dissatisfied members, like Orange Scott and the Wesleyans, to break away and form new sects.

Another explanation of the tension found in conversion comes from the study of rites of passage. Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep and, following him, Victor Turner, named a three-stage pattern they saw in rituals of initiation. Those who are about to be converted are first separated from the society, then they enter a state of liminality in which they may experience a radical social equality or (what Turner called) communitas with a new community, and finally they reenter society in their new status. It is during the liminal stage that the dominant structures of everyday life are elaborated and

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156 Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, 48.

challenged, and the responsibilities and rights of one’s new status are taught.\textsuperscript{158} The liminality of camp meetings surely heightened the intensity of the spiritual world for potential converts.

People who have studied modern day “sects” observe that they tend to want to suspend in time the \textit{communitas}, found in the liminal stage. These are groups that seek to maintain a social levelling. The clergy of sects are less likely to wear vestments, and the laity (including women) are encouraged to give testimony and preach.\textsuperscript{159} In these congregations the sacred is not the sole province of the clergy; there is an attempt to teach all the people to observe God at work in their daily lives. Here there is a conscious desire to show in ritual that the church, though accessible to all who convert, is not like the world. As a corollary, these congregations are also quick to brand the traditional rites of the church types as empty and meaningless,\textsuperscript{160} just as H. Richard Niebuhr noted in his classic \textit{Christ and Culture}.\textsuperscript{161}

There is much about the Methodists who participated in nineteenth-century camp meetings in New England that resonates with this line of thinking. They were the minority group trying to break ground and grow in the midst of an established church. The clergy were not educated at Harvard or Yale, and were intentionally poor, not even


\textsuperscript{161} Niebuhr, \textit{Christ and Culture}, 110-111.
owning their homes. The language of brother and sister, the pride in having all economic classes side by side at the love feasts, and the infamous chaos of camp meetings can seem to follow the threefold rite of passage pattern. Methodism attracted far more converts among the working classes than among the Boston Brahmin.

These social theories are echoed by social historians such as Paul Johnson, Mary Ryan, Nancy Cott and Randall Roth. They tell the story of nineteenth-century revivals and conversions in terms of the widespread changes and dislocations of the period. As Richard Sheils stated, their assumption was that “large numbers respond to a revivalist when changes in their lives prepare them to do so.” Especially significant in this theory are changes that threaten the “family, the community, or the work group.” With such theory historians have set out to identify revival converts in categories such as sex, age, class, occupation and household structure. Nancy Cott, for instance, brought Rachel Stearns out of the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe to the scholarly public eye in the 1970s as an example of how women participated in religious activities “as a means…to define self and find community, two functions that worldly occupations more likely performed for men.”

While theories about social causes for revivals (i.e., large numbers of people converting at once) are compelling and widely used, scholars must be careful about devising solutions that neglect to take elements of the converts’ spiritual lives seriously.


Focus on the tensions and dislocations arising in the society fails to take the faith of the people fully into account. As products of the Enlightenment, social interpreters tend to look for any explanation other than a religious one, but a more careful look at the camp meeting experience and the discursive world it produced makes clear that much of the existential tension arises from within the religious community itself.

Cott’s intense focus on Rachel Stearn’s social location disregarded most of Rachel’s own explanations of what she was experiencing and intending to do. In 1996, Candy Gunter pointed out that as Rachel Stearns “renegotiated social and religious identity, differences in doctrine mattered… Religion was simultaneously intellectual and emotional, individual and social, internal and external. Stearns’s experiences suggest a need to work outward from an understanding of personal religious experience, instead of using social categories as a framework for understanding religion.”

Shiels would concur based on the study he made of the congregation in Goshen, Connecticut: “Revival did not break out among the shopkeepers of Goshen—or among any one identifiable group of people.” Perhaps some of these scholars find the poetic discourse of Methodism so foreign that they are unable to understand the religious tensions inherent in the discourse that could push whole communities toward Christian perfection.

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165 Shiels, “Origins of the Second Great Awakening in New England,” 290. Shiels concluded that in Goshen it was the “promise and threat of westward migration” that disturbed large numbers of people enough that they would respond to revival preaching. They were both asking “What must I do to be saved?” and “Shall I move to Ohio?” Ibid., 293.
Other accounts of tension are more plausible because they do factor in the faith of the converts they study. In 1974, Dickson Bruce presented a compelling theory that theological discourse “dictate[s] how participants…act.”\textsuperscript{166} Accordingly, Bruce studied the words of camp meeting hymns and accounts of camp meeting sermons, which led him to believe that the preachers’ and exhorters’\textsuperscript{167} words primarily presented the threat of hell, while the theme of the songs he examined was the assurance of salvation. When the songs alternated with the preaching and exhortation,

the tension…was reinforced by the content of the two kinds of messages: just after the exhorter had reminded mourners of the nonregenerate sinner’s doom, the congregation showed the would-be converts the joys of assurance awaiting anyone who had been saved…When the two forms of expression came to be performed simultaneously as meetings structures were broken down, the clarity of the opposition between the messages was also negated, forcing initiate to choose eternal life or eternal death.\textsuperscript{168}

But Bruce’s description is problematic. His theory does not appear to be grounded in primary documentation about just which hymns were sung and at what times, nor does he seem to factor in enough accounts of actual sermons preached.\textsuperscript{169} Furthermore, Bruce did not allow for human agency in the process of conversion. A much closer look at the actual experience of hearing and singing would be necessary to support his hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{166} Bruce described Methodist camp meeting discourse as “ideas which participants accept with regard to their own relationships to each other and to the divine.” Bruce, \textit{And They All Sang Hallelujah}, 10.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 97. It is not clear that he recognized the distinction when he wrote of “the hell-fire preaching of the exhorter.”

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 96-97.

\textsuperscript{169} Granted, to do so would likely be extremely difficult, if at all possible.
The reports from Zion’s Herald, on the other hand, do provide ample evidence of the kinds of sermons that were preached in New England over a span of fifty years. As mentioned in Chapter Four, some sermons surely warned unrepentant sinners of the torments of hell, but many other sermons, similar to the camp meeting hymns Bruce reviewed, presented the attractions of eternal life in Christ. Unfortunately, there is still not enough evidence in Zion’s Herald to say much definitively about the singing. But the sermons in New England do substantiate Bruce’s theory in that there was considerable tension within Methodist discourse at the camp meetings between the threat of hell and the promise of God’s saving grace.

The religious tension is obvious in Camp Meeting John’s conversion story. He admitted to adopting a Universalist worldview in his youth because it eased his fears about the consequences of adopting bad behavior (smoking and drinking). Once converted to a Methodist worldview, John Allen was clear that automatic universal salvation\textsuperscript{170} was absurd. To make his point he wrote this verse:

\begin{verbatim}
That all the filthy Sodomites, 
When God bade Lot retire, 
Went in a trice to paradise, 
On rapid wings of fire.

And all the wicked Canaanites, 
To Joshua's sword were given, 
The sun stood still, till he should kill, 
And pack them off for heaven.

God saw those wretches were too bad 
To own that fruitful land 
He therefore took the rascals up
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{170} As opposed to John Wesley's belief in the universal possibility of salvation to the penitent.
To dwell at His right hand.

And Judas, that perfidious wretch,
Was not for crimes accursed,
But by a cord, out went his Lord,
And got to heaven first.\textsuperscript{171}

While the Methodists were by no means Universalists, neither did they believe in predestination. Methodist discourse on the matter of salvation was in the middle. There was something to be saved from, but everyone possessed the agency to repent and receive the pardoning grace of God. The newspaper reports show that there was more wooing than threatening going on in the New England camp meeting sermons. Life was precarious enough—people needed fewer reminders of their mortality in that period than most do today.

But the Wesleyan way of salvation always presented the option of falling out of God’s grace, and the sorrowful picture of such experiences colored camp meeting discourse as well. In a letter to Jabez Pratt, Lucy Fisk described one of her “tent’s company” who died of cholera. She noted that “strong drink had slain him many times; then he would return to the Lord, and perhaps six months he would be victorious—love and serve God: then his appetite [would] overcome him, and thus he died.” Another neighbor “went to our altar to seek the salvation of his soul: and a more broken hearted penitent I scarcely ever saw: despair seemed to fill his soul for weeks: we did all in our power to cause him to hope in the mercy of Christ. Finally he felt that the ‘chief of sinners’ was saved. He received happiness, [he was] well, was happy.” But when he

\textsuperscript{171} Allen, \textit{The Life of Rev. John Allen}, 92.
traveled a distance from home to harvest a hay crop, “his old drinking companions
determined on his ruin. They succeeded.” When the man returned home he had resumed
drinking. “He lived a year, but never again hoped in the mercy of God. His pious sister
exhorted him to pray; but he exclaimed “I cannot pray”— and died. O! how many there
are whose sun sets behind a cloud.”172 The high mortality rate plus the threat of
damnation by dying while in an unawakened or backslidden state kept the tension
heightened, pushing, if not propelling people to convert.

Camp Meetings as Working Models

Another helpful way to understand how the camp meetings effected change in
individuals, societies and the wider community is to look at them as models. Both
particular ritualistic actions such as the love feasts and the parting ritual, as well as camp
meetings from start to finish, came to be models of life in the kingdom of God manifested
on earth.173 In Models and Mirrors: Toward an Anthropology of Public Events, Don
Handleman defines models as ritual events “whose explicit purpose is that of change.”174

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172 Lucy Fisk, “Natick, Massachusetts to Jabez Pratt.” Emphasis in the original.

173 As Lester Ruth’s primary sources put it “a little heaven below.” Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 103.

174 Handelman notes two other type of public ritual—those that simply “present” the existing
world order and help to maintain the status quo, and those that “re-present” the order “by creating
temporary change through an alternative ordering of the world. An example of the latter is
Altweiberfastnach, the Thursday during Carnival in the Rhineland when women have traditionally gone
about cutting off the neck-ties of the men. This temporarily appeases the oppressed group, but ultimately
serves to reinforce the status quo. Handelman, Models and Mirrors, 41-58. Some social scientists like
Stark and Bainbridge have tended to look at religious discourse focused on Christian eschatology (like
camp meetings) along these lines, arguing that “compensation” of a spiritual “reward” (“not readily
susceptible to unambiguous evaluation,” i.e., a future in heaven) keeps the oppressed classes from
Though no evidence has appeared to suggest that MEC leaders consciously thought they were working with models, several of the characteristics of models described by Handleman are useful in understanding camp meetings as they evolved from quarterly meetings and took on a standard form and pattern.

Models have anticipatory capacities that refer always to future events. Though there was some looking back to Old Testament types (the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites in the Wilderness, Jerusalem/Zion) at the camp meetings, these were all linked in their discourse to the antitypes of the New Testament (heaven, New Jerusalem, church). Reenacting life as presented in scripture was a way of embodying the future millennium. Handleman also noted that a model proves that the predicted future is possible: “Models make space within themselves for probable futures, and specify conditions of the potential attainment of these, through operations upon or with the model.”

Camp meetings were perceived by many, especially those who were fluent in Methodist poetic discourse, as an experience of realized eschatology, a prolonged foretaste of life in the kingdom of heaven.

As a model, camp meeting featured a discourse that highlighted “incompatible, contradictory or conflicting states of existence.” Those who were unawakened needed


Ibid., 24-25.

Ibid., 30.
to be roused by the trumpet blast and become aware that God was at work among the people here and now. Those who had not experienced God’s pardoning grace were anxious to be justified. Christians who wanted to make sure they were moving toward perfection yearned to experience holiness. This liminality made camp meetings such a potent space for conversion.

The camp experience as a whole created a “space between,” but within the meeting the movement back and forth from the preaching exercises to the praying exercises created the opportunity for camp meeting participants to experience liminality as well. The preachers defined and described both sides of the limen: sin and grace, hell and heaven. The exhorters, even more than the preachers, used an organic discourse to convince the unawakened, or not-yet-sanctified, sister that she was on the wrong side of the limen, and simultaneously assured her that it was possible for her to cross over just as others had. As Dickson Bruce suggested, the camp meeting hymns also functioned to encourage her to move over the limen by giving assurance of pardon and hope of perfect love to those who believed. Then, if she was sufficiently moved to respond to the invitation, the prayer meetings surrounded her with brothers and sisters who offered their own passionate petition to God on behalf of her salvation or sanctification. By bringing the prayer meetings into the intimacy of the society tents where everybody knew her because they were from home, she, like any typical New Englander (including any who did not like to emote in public), had an even safer space to work out her own salvation. The actual liminal moment could take place at a variety of times for different people. Some were converted at the beginning of camp, some felt it at a prayer meeting part way
through like John Allen or at the end like Isaac Jennison, Jr., while others, like Hiram Munger and Rachel Stearns, went home and continued to struggle and pray, receiving the blessing they sought several days, weeks or months after the camp meeting.

Victor Turner’s analysis of rituals points to the experience of *communitas* as powerfully formative of the new person who would emerge. In New England, it seems that *communitas* was present in many of the social meetings throughout the week. Just like the prayer meetings at home, women and men at the camp meetings were encouraged to tell how it was with their souls, and everyone prayed for those who were struggling. But *communitas* was displayed most powerfully at the love feasts. Men and women, children and the elderly, immigrants and descendants of the Mayflower, whites and blacks were all invited to give testimony to the work of God in their lives. At camp meetings every summer, throngs of New Englanders caught a glimpse of a future reality when white women, people of color, youths and children might join with the white men as leaders of the church. They not only saw a vision, but they fully experienced the new heaven come on earth and were thus persuaded to strive for its realization in the world through such movements as temperance and abolition.

This experiencing of heaven on earth, and the personal appropriation of the grace of God, illustrate Handleman’s point that models have “autotelic” qualities about them.\textsuperscript{178} Just being present at a camp meeting and experiencing the joy and peace in believing, witnessing the changes in lives, and receiving the foretaste of the kingdom of heaven was

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 25.
intrinsically rewarding. Other scholars have noted such qualities of worship. Some have pinpointed an experience of “flow” that happens when action and awareness merge, when one’s sense of individual self vanishes, when it seems one is in time yet out of time. During flow there is a complex interplay of experience and symbol.  

179 Personal accounts of camp meeting conversion experiences often include descriptions which resonate with this concept.  

From the point of view of a liturgist, the phenomena being described here strongly resonates with the concept of anamnesis.  

180 Using Christian discourse, the camp meetings became most sacramental when they ushered people into this experience where time collapsed and they found themselves recalling Christ’s saving work and having visions of heaven, resulting in an assurance that the grace of the living God extended to them.  

By Handleman’s definition, some models are purely theoretical. But when people actually enact a model, its effect “on lived-in realities may be profound indeed.”  

179 Mary Jo Neitz and James Spickard have made some initial exploration into this realm by lifting up the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Alfred Schutz. See Neitz and Spickard, “Steps toward a Sociology of Religious Experience,” 15-33. Csikzentmihalyi developed the concept of “flow” to describe experiences that arise from structured activities that must be learned, like playing chess or rock climbing. Schutz’s concept is called “tuning in” and describes something that can only be known by experiencing it. Listening to music, for example, requires tuning in. No combination of words can ever capture what one experiences by listening directly. Similarly, worship cannot be defined by trying to sum up what it symbolizes or what it means.  

180 See the accounts of Nabby Frothingham and Fanny Newell in Chapter Two, pages 95-96 and 98-100 respectively.  

181 See definition of anamnesis for the purpose of this paper in note 32 in Chapter Five above.  

182 Handelman, Models and Mirrors, 25.
islands of Methodist culture, camp meetings were places where people’s lives were ordered in line with the perceived order of heaven. At the camp meetings Methodists and their guests lived in tents arranged to symbolize a Christian cosmology.\textsuperscript{183} Even as the society tents gave way to family tents and cottages, a distinct kind of openness remained, showing that, unlike Adam and Eve, sanctified people had nothing to hide.\textsuperscript{184} They were woken by the trumpet reminding them of the day of Christ’s return to earth. They called each other sister and brother, or saint. They prayed for God to make them more holy, and then witnessed examples of sanctified lives. They heard testimony of freed slaves, women and recovering alcoholics. They prepared to leave the holy place of their pilgrimage by encircling the grounds in the same way that the spheres danced and sang around the Godhead.\textsuperscript{185}

Experiencing such a model of the spiritual world was, however, “observer-dependent.” As Handelman argues, culture does not exist “to be mapped and discovered without evaluating our own roles and operations at one and the same time.”\textsuperscript{186} This explains why not everyone responded to camp meetings in the same way. To those who were not fluent in the poetic discourse being used, or who disagreed with the fundamental

\textsuperscript{183} Such cosmologies can be found in the writings of Dante, Milton and Shakespeare as well as Timothy Dwight. See Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 577, note 21.

\textsuperscript{184} See Weiss, \textit{City in the Woods}, 70-75.

\textsuperscript{185} Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 578. See also Weiss, \textit{City in the Woods}, 32. The procession in particular belongs to the acts of worship that have interested Stephen Warner. He argued that when people engage the sensorimotor system in worship the physical experiences involving use of muscles can produce solidarity in a congregation by creating symbiosis. “Religion, Boundaries, and Bridges,” 222 ff.

\textsuperscript{186} Handelman, \textit{Models and Mirrors}, 25.
theology behind the discourse (i.e., Universalists or Calvinists), the love feast seemed to become pandemonium. But for those who embraced the discourse, the same experience was heavenly.

Handelmann’s theory causes one to ponder in which ways camp meetings were models of a new social order and in which ways they might have served only to re-present the existing society. Because camp meetings were group pilgrimages away from the town centers dominated by Congregational churches, they functioned as counterhegemonies\(^\text{187}\) in New England society. But within a camp meeting, the leaders of the MEC were afforded the opportunity to promote their own hegemonic ideology. Permission to take the stand to preach and exhort was closely monitored by the Methodist Episcopal clergy. While freed slaves, sailors, reformed alcoholics and women were brought up to the stand from time to time, and an occasional black preacher was permitted to exhort or preach from the stand, that public space and the discourse presented from it to the crowds was tightly controlled. Of the sixteen years of camp meetings examined within a fifty year period, only one woman took the stand to preach at a camp meeting run by the MEC. Though formal seminary education was not a requirement to be a preacher throughout this period, those men with a certain quality of intelligence were favored over others. As effective as John Allen was at exhorting, the intellectual incoherence of his sermons made him unworthy to serve a regular appointment as an ordained elder.

On the other hand, real social change did take place at the camp meetings. They modeled a way for individuals to experience spiritual transformations that changed their lives. When people were persuaded to give their hearts to Jesus and their hands to the Methodists, they were taught practices that affected their health, their wealth and their relationships. Once part of a Methodist class meeting or society, they were schooled to give up alcohol and frivolous living, to “earn all they could, save all they could and give all they could,” including donating their jewelry to support Methodist missions. H. Richard Niebuhr (following Weber) observed, these habits of living had the very real (if unintended) consequence of upward social mobility.188

But the Methodist discourse spoken at nineteenth-century New England camp meetings was not simply focused on “personal” behavior. Out of this Methodist discourse leaders were emboldened to lobby their governments to pass laws to protect the camp meetings from rowdies and peddlers, changing the social order of the world for the sake of the good order of their camps. Out of this Methodist discourse drinkers were convicted, and millions signed temperance pledges until that movement culminated in Prohibition. Out of this Methodist discourse thousands were persuaded to support abolition fully, a stance beyond what the MEC officially sanctioned at that time. This led to multiple outcomes. Orange Scott and others splintered off to form the Wesleyan Church in 1843. The MEC divided over slavery in 1844. The MEC staunchly supported the Union army so much that they welcomed American flags into their sanctuaries, and

held special prayer services during the camp meetings all over New England in 1862. In
that same year the Governor of Massachusetts gave an address from the stand at
Martha’s Vineyard on the Sabbath at which his recruiters prepared to sign up more
troops. As Glen Messer has noted, Methodist holiness in these early years had great
social significance.  

The Work of God

Nineteenth-century Methodist camp meetings in New England developed a
discourse in which the primary agent of action in the work of conversion was God. All
discourses are based on assumptions about who has the power to act and who has the
power to speak. Unlike modern Enlightenment discourse, the discourse of camp meetings
was one in which God spoke and God acted. Contemporary ethnographer Glenn Hinson
explains why this is so important to a discussion of conversion. As noted above, Hinson
observed that the ability of the convert to name his or her experience is important.
Converts gain discursive power by speaking. But Hinson’s “consultants” rejected the
notion that this is a complete explanation of their conversions.

[They argue] that [such an interpretation of conversion] rather cavalierly shifts
experience from the domain of divine induction to that of mortal creation. In so
doing, it ignores the mystical sense of certainty that pervades conversion, the
profound knowledge that the encounter’s author is none other than the Lord. The
depth of this knowing validates the experience and confirms its intrinsic
insulation from cultural process.”

189 Messer, “Restless for Zion,” 141.
In other words, any account of what is happening must include God as an active agent in the changes that people go through. The subjects of this historical study of conversion are unable to critique the explanations offered here, but one can be reasonably certain from reading their accounts that they, too, would be dissatisfied with any explanation that left God out of the process of conversions.

Just as Hinson concluded that a true account of the experience of the Holy Spirit must somehow be acknowledged as participating in the events that he observed, so this dissertation cannot do its “consultants” justice if it only presents a theory of Christian formation based on human action. The contemporary accounts of nineteenth-century camp meetings in New England again and again attribute the conversions, the reclamation of backsliders and the sanctification of Christians, as well as the revival of whole neighborhoods, to none other than the work of God. They boldly proclaimed what God (manifesting as various persons of the Trinity) was doing during the camp meetings. “The Lord did indeed give his children mana [sic], and corn from heaven; we did eat angels food [sic], here in the grove.”191 “He who formerly fed the multitudes by miracle, was with his people, showing us that ‘his delight is still with the sons of men.’”192

Of the sermons, the prayers, and the praises which followed, we have only to add, that the approbation of man would avail but little, but Heaven seemed to own the labors of love, and crowned them with a lasting blessing. Preachers and professors of religion, animated by the scene around them, and brought into heavenly places by the operations of the Holy Spirit on their own minds, were filled with new joys, hopes, and consolations.193

191 A Preacher, ZH (25 September 1823): 150.
192 D[amon] Young, “Camp Meeting at Wellfleet,” ZH (1 September 1824): [2].
193 “Camp Meeting at Truro,” ZH (23 August 1826): [2].
Yet modern discourse used in academic study, as a product of the Enlightenment, was designed specifically to exclude divine action from a *wissenschaftlich* explanation for how the world works. Many social scientists and historians have followed this principle just as ardently as their colleagues in the natural sciences. Only recently have scholars like Hinson begun to explore ways to shape their account of religious communities so as to make room for God.

Considering all the elements that contributed toward conversion and church growth named above, it is tempting to conclude simply that immersion into a particular religious discourse is the answer to the question of conversion. It is tempting to conclude that conversions are produced by listening to the narratives of the experience given by preachers and lay persons, and by immersion into this discourse. But Hinson argued that this explanatory tactic discredits the “experiencers.” “Denial, disregard, and assimilation” are “strategies of disbelief” for many ethnographers of religious communities who accept the Enlightenment’s rules to replace God as a cause (“ontological substitution”).\(^{194}\) Too often the discursive power of the ethnographer silences both the community’s own discursive claims and the action of the divinity the community understands to be at work.

The same strategies are found in modern day religious histories of people and communities. Hinson pointed out the “subtle deception” which takes place:

The objectivity [scholars] herald in fact disguises a form of conceptual imposition, as native frameworks of understanding are silently shaped by the subjectivity of the researcher’s worldview….When applied to supernatural belief and experience…it becomes crucially important. Conceptual substitution in this domain transforms our understanding of the very mechanisms that believers use

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\(^{194}\) Hinson, *Fire in My Bones*, 375, note 16.
to frame their reality, distorting not only their thoughts, but also the sense-making and sensory-receiving processes that underlie them.” 195

Using participants’ own narratives, Hinson relied on their descriptions of the action of the Holy Spirit as a participant in worship. While taking these accounts of God at face value, Hinson still pondered the fact that even those who experience the Spirit are at a loss for words to describe that experience, though the surrounding details (i.e., time, date, place, situation) “leap to the tongue, begging for expression. The rest remains untellable.”196 He explained that telling about the experience to those who have already experienced God is not necessary.

For once saints have felt the holy touch, they know it. With this knowing comes the awareness that all other born-again believers have shared the experience. They too have felt the holy fire; they too know the reality of divine encounter. Why the struggle to describe that which is already so deeply known? Among the saints, descriptive glosses will suffice. These glosses admit the inadequacy of language while simultaneously referencing the singular encounter that draws believers into experiential communion.197

As for those who have not felt the Spirit, close description—say the saints—would be meaningless, for these hearers have no experience in which to ground understanding. The words would not resonate with internal knowledge, and thus would not carry power. Consequently, when addressing the unsaved, the details surrounding encounter (rather than the experienced specifics of encounter) become centrally important, in that they establish an experiential common ground. By locating spiritual experience firmly in the nonbeliever’s world, they affirm the commonality of hearer and teller, and thus invite belief. The rest, say the saints, will become known only when it is felt.198

195 Ibid., 334.
196 Ibid., 18.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid. This description resonates with what Alfred Schutz calls “tuning in” described in note 179 on page 455 above. Tuning in is another autotelic experience described by Neitz and Spickard, “Steps toward a Sociology of Religious Experience.”
The same phenomenon is found in the descriptions of experience at the camp meetings in question. *Zion’s Herald* was primarily written for a Methodist audience, using Methodist discourse. Its writers boldly proclaimed the actions of God throughout New England with “descriptive glosses.” But the editors hoped that their newspaper would find its way into the hands of the unawakened as well, so accounts included many details surrounding the camp meeting encounter.

The people came, they looked on, and acknowledged, that the power of Almighty God was with us. They were astonished at the mighty displays of his grace in the conviction and conversion of souls. To see fifty or sixty go forward at one time in a praying circle, fall upon their knees, and cry to God for mercy; to hear the powerful, moving prayers ascend to Heaven in behalf of these penitents, was, to them, a thing so new, so serious and so awful, that they forgot all thoughts of opposition, and before they were aware, the tear would steal down their cheeks. In the above quote, “the power of Almighty God was with us,” “the mighty displays of his grace in the conviction and conversion of souls,” and the experience of the penitents of something “new… serious and… aweful” function as descriptive glosses, surrounded by the more routine details that fifty or sixty went forward to the praying circle, fell on their knees, cried to God for mercy, offered powerful moving prayers and were moved to tears.

Hinson’s work resonates with Ann Taves’ claims about experiencing religion and explaining experience. Taves argued that typically elites have explained away the religious experience of ordinary people embedded in faith traditions, acting as if they themselves (the elites) have no faith experiences. In *fits, Trances and Visions*, Taves

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showed that both ordinary people and elites have religious experiences and develop a way to explain religious experience. “By recontextualizing explanations of experience in their own traditions of discourse and practice,” Taves showed what was at stake for “both those experiencing religion and those explaining experience.”200 Those who were opposed to “enthusiasm” offered natural explanations for them. Methodists tended to explain their experiences in supernatural terms (i.e., as the work of God).

When looking at the American “shouting Methodists,” Taves said that they “elaborated on the experience of their British counterparts… by pushing the Methodist performance tradition in an even more interactive direction and by interpreting their bodily experiences in light of biblical typologies.”201 As noted in Chapter Two, some of the interactive aspects of American Methodist worship were most likely adopted from African religious traditions known to those of African descent who lived in the Delmarva Peninsula. Looking particularly at the interactive nature of African music, a group interaction, Taves argued that this is “precisely the means whereby the dynamic rhythmic interconnection of individuals-within-a-group emerges and the Spirit is known.”202

She also claimed that the view of sanctification offered by Wesley, as a distinct second experience in the life of the converted Christian, grounded visions and bodily effects in a theological rationale. At camp meetings the experience of sanctification was an experience of the reality of heaven in the present, and “the felt-presence of heaven

200 Taves, Fits, Trances & Visions, 4.
201 Ibid., 78.
202 Ibid., 81.
took on special prominence among Methodists in conjunction with the doctrine of sanctification.”

Looking at accounts of the Methodist revival in 1787, Taves concluded:

Mourners…weep and cry out, and the saved…praise God with loud voices and shout for joy. Joy is so contagious that it “spreads like a flame” and gives rise, in some cases, to what is called “a great shout.” In each instance, these religious expressions were intimately associated with the presence of the power of the Lord in the congregation. This latter point cannot be stressed too highly, for it is the association of these actions on the part of the congregants with the power of the Lord that lay at the root of the shout tradition.

In the end this study supports Hinson’s argument that personal experience of God is primary even if “these personal grammars of significance are shaped by culture.”

Indeed, J. W. Jackson admitted that Methodists had a particular culture that was required to make sense of the grammar. Methodist leaders such as Jackson employed “the vagueness of our language” throughout the nineteenth century to communicate experiential knowledge of God.

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203 Ibid., 87-88.
204 Ibid.
206 Cooley, “Applying the Vagueness of Language,” 754.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Methodist camp meetings in nineteenth-century New England were intentionally created and used for the purpose of the conversion and spiritual growth of individuals, and for the growth and revival of congregations. The camp meetings supported the work of Methodist preachers who were deployed primarily to establish communities of believers with a uniquely Methodist culture. While the discourse of the culture was used by enclaves of Methodists whenever they met (in classes, societies, quarterly meetings and annual conferences), camp meetings were particularly effective because they immersed outsiders into the culture for a long enough period of time so that they learned the discourse and adopted components of the corresponding world view, which often included the reshaping of their own identities.

As yearly events in the life of every Methodist Episcopal district in every annual conference in New England throughout the nineteenth century, camp meetings were particularly effective because they became places of pilgrimage for groups of people, each group representing one society in one neighborhood. Members of the societies brought neighbors and relatives who were yet unconvinced of the work of God in the world, and the lay members toiled in conjunction with the preachers, exhorters (and, as they saw it, with the triune God) to lead one another closer to Christian perfection. At the camp meetings people were awakened to the living God, and led to personal experiences of God’s grace, including justification, sanctification and the reclamation of apostates.
Because communities went to the camps and returned home together, those who were newly converted or sanctified, and even those who went home still yearning for assurance, continued to receive support from their weekly prayer groups, society gatherings and conversations with Methodist lay and clergy leaders.

Methodist Episcopal camp meetings were not just for Methodists and their friends. As events with porous boundaries, many people from other denominations and those with no particular religious faith were present too. Some came out of curiosity and some came as adversaries. But as “cultural islands,” the camp meetings were places where outsiders found themselves immersed in the Methodist discourse and culture so that many went away different than when they arrived.

As many who have examined camp meetings have noticed, there was a tension at work in the process of conversion and sanctification at camp meetings. The documents of this study show that the tension was intrinsic to the Methodist worldview and suffused the discourse of the camp meetings. It was built from the Christian biblical narrative, and was focused on the struggle between sin and salvation, hell and heaven, condemnation and grace. Once introduced to the discourse, the newly-awakened felt the urgency of their choice to align themselves with God and became anxious for signs that God’s mercy extended to them. The discourse in which they participated, both verbal and embodied, helped them to perceive those longed-for signs and to experience their own lives in accordance with biblical types. They were wrestling with God like Jacob, or welcomed home like the Prodigal, or sent out into the world like Jesus’ apostles to shine light in the darkness. Within the discursive world of the camp meeting, God was actively bestowing
forgiveness, grace and new life to nineteenth-century Methodists, their friends and strangers, just as God had done at the time of Christ.

The practice of camp meeting not only immersed people into this worldview, it modeled for them what it was like to live in the kingdom of God as it was becoming realized “on earth as it is in heaven.” Social barriers of class, gender and race were lowered, if not entirely dismantled, and many participants were motivated to extend what was modeled at camp meeting into the wider society by joining home and foreign mission societies, the temperance and abolition movements, and contributing to the building of schools, universities and seminaries.

As much as there were specific things MEC leaders could do to support the processes of conversion, spiritual growth and church growth, they always believed that their efforts were no more than collaboration with the work of God. The discourse they produced flowed from their own faith and helped people to see God at work, to feel God’s merciful pardon, to know God was directing their paths. God was felt, and thus known, to be the primary actor in the drama of faith. Camp meetings became sacramental festivals where people experienced eternity (like John of Patmos) on a regular basis. The “red-hot Methodists”¹ had no trouble maintaining a passionate spirituality. From their point of view, their worship was inspired by none other than the Holy Spirit of God.

The effect of camp meetings extended far beyond the Methodist denomination. The main objective of the Methodist preachers may have been to lead individuals to adopt holy living in Christ and revive the church, but, as a byproduct of their efforts, their discourse spilled out beyond Methodist congregations and camp meetings to shape the general American culture. Through the work and “method” of Methodist preachers, Methodism became a wildly popular movement of nineteenth century America.² As Hatch and Wigger note, “Methodists were particularly adept at recognizing the needs of people whose lives were in transition—the case for many in the fluid years of the early national period—and the validity of the religious expression of people otherwise held on the margins of society, including women and African Americans.”³ Methodism profoundly influenced the style and tone of other mass religious movements in the nation, deeply influenced “the course of the Union in the years before the Civil War…eroded patterns of deference to established authority and tradition, and dignified the convictions of ordinary people on important matters…instilled habits of industry, sobriety, and mutual accountability…[reached] out to marginal people” by promoting self-education, “binding people together in supportive community, and [in] identifying the aspirations of common people with the will of God”⁴

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³ Ibid., 15.
⁴ Ibid., 16.
Sacred Canopy Reconsidered

The first generations of Methodist preachers were masterful (and tireless) at gaining a hearing as they stopped daily along their circuits to preach. Their words were persuasive and they called forth a following. In forming class meetings and societies, they were creating an alternative social order, and at their camp meetings, growing numbers of the population were given an experience of what life in that new social order was like. Methodist discourse used the Bible in ways that allowed it to become a paradigm for moving toward Christian perfection. This worked in conjunction with the new American experiment of democracy. Thus, Americans with a Methodist worldview were motivated to shape their new society guided by the telos depicted in the Christian scriptures. This telos was nothing less than the kingdom of heaven on earth. As citizens in a new democracy, they were empowered to act; as Christians they were empowered to form social orders shaped by the pursuit of holiness.

American church historians might argue with Peter Berger’s classic theory in The Sacred Canopy, noting that there was not a single sacred canopy hanging over the American colonies before the Revolutionary War. There is evidence that the theological

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5 Bruce Lincoln argued that gaining a hearing, being persuasive and creating an alternative social order led to the success of social “agitation.” Lincoln, Discourse and the Construction of Society, 9.

6 Lincoln also argued that myth cannot be reduced as “a tool of the right and the right only.” Ibid., 49. Methodist discourse is an example of this, for it led Methodists toward abolition, the building of schools, universities, hospitals, home mission for the poor, feminism and civil rights. Martin Stringer said, “the term ‘humanism’ appears to capture the essence of this new dominant discourse more completely than any of its alternatives.” But he noted that there are a variety of humanist discourses and some are “formed by a combination and syntheses of pagan and Christian, or Christian and humanist, elements and so a ‘pure’ Christian, pagan, or humanist discourse is almost impossible to identify.” Martin D. Stringer, The Sociological History of Christian Worship (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 18.
narratives offered by the elite classes of clergy trained at Harvard, Yale and Princeton were not so plausible to the general public (such as Rachel Stearns and Hiram Munger), nor to many Deist members of the Continental Congress. When the Methodists entered the scene in New England, they began to create an alternative sacred narrative more suited to the lives of farmers, factory workers, and immigrants, most of whom had little formal education. As a counter-hegemony, the Methodist worldview presented under the leafy canopies of the camp meetings threatened the existing Congregational social order.7

As Richard D. Shiels has been discovering, however, some aspects of the new discourse introduced to New England by the Methodists were actually adopted by certain Congregational clergy. Nathaniel William Taylor began teaching his “New Haven theology” (which played down the harsher doctrines of predestination) at Yale after Jesse Lee had started preaching in Connecticut. In the same years, Asahel Nettleton began calling himself a “Domestic Missionary” and always took short-term assignments rather than accept a call. Also at this time, Congregationalists began to organize small groups: “missionary societies, Bible societies and tract societies. Similar to Methodist prayer meetings, most of the people who attended these mid-week meetings were women.”8

Peter Berger said, “The world begins to shake in the very instant its sustaining

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7 The competing discourse was powerful enough to create a strong reaction including very rough treatment. Shiels points to “scores of anti-Methodist treatises” published between the time of Jesse Lee’s arrival and the 1830s, and inhospitable clergy and civil authorities denying the Methodists the use of meeting houses and court houses. “Husbands forbade their wives, and parents barred their adolescent children from attending Methodist meetings.” Violent attacks included pelting Methodists with stones, whipping young people and turning them out, burning barns and tarring and feathering Methodist preachers in effigy. See Shiels, “Methodist Invasion,” 266-268.

8 Ibid., 277-280.
conversation begins to falter.” The case of the Methodist invasion of New England shows that world also shakes when the conversation is *altered*.

The new Methodist way of speaking about the world used an alternative taxonomy built upon on Wesley’s way of salvation. In Methodist conversations, anyone could speak of the grace of God. Whereas in the Congregational classification those who were wealthy, educated and held positions of authority were looked upon as the predestined elect (for surely all of these blessings were a sign of God’s favor), the Methodists offered a taxonomy based on an experience of God’s grace and love which was not dependent on acquiring worldly status or objects. Anyone who desired to “flee from the wrath to come” could join a Methodist prayer group. Anyone of any class, including slaves, could experience the justifying and sanctifying grace of God. According to Bruce Lincoln, this “anyone” is key, for the inversion of a worldview works best when it is not just a substitution of top for bottom, bottom for top. As they were awakened, converted and sanctified, sailors, shoemakers and farmhands could be promoted to preacher, and women were invited to speak (at least in their prayer meetings). But there was nothing in the new classification to prevent Wilbur Fisk, with his formal education, from joining forces with his less educated brethren to spread the Methodist worldview. Methodist practices of piety taught by this new discourse—pledging temperance, not

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11 Ibid., 142ff.
wasting time and money on frivolous clothing and dancing,\textsuperscript{12} earning all they could, saving all they could and giving all they could—also, ironically, worked together with the structure of the New Republic to usher “anyone” into a growing middle class.

Ingredients of Vital Plausibility Structures

The main aim of this dissertation was to gain a deeper understanding of the way in which the MEC progressed in New England during the period when it grew the fastest. The motivation behind such a project was that today the successor of the MEC, the United Methodist Church, is in a period of rapid decline and many would like to reverse that situation. This dissertation has revealed that what worked so well in the process of spiritual formation of Methodists in New England in the nineteenth century was the introduction of a vital plausibility structure built on the Wesleyan way of salvation.

Of course, the social context of the contemporary church in New England has changed greatly since 1871. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to assert precisely how one might go about reshaping the plausibility structure used by United Methodists so that it is both unifying within the church and can be presented in a winsome fashion to others. What this dissertation offers is a list of key ingredients of the vital plausibility structure promoted by Methodists of the nineteenth century.

At the top of the list of ingredients was a team of church leaders who were both fluent in the Methodist discourse and felt an urgency in offering the Wesleyan way of salvation to anyone and everyone they could. Second was the intent to awaken people to

\textsuperscript{12} Shiels, “Methodist Invasion,” 273-274.
the “work of God” in their lives. A third ingredient was the sense of urgency about ushering people toward salvation created by a world view which included the threat of damnation. The fourth ingredient was the presentation of a living God with agency, perceptibly at work both in the world and in the lives of ordinary people.

A fifth key ingredient was the way the preachers presented stories and images of scripture so that their sermons and exhortations captured the hearts of everyday people and taught them to see themselves as people of God, as Israelites making their way to the Promised Land, and as disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ. The practice of encouraging testimony (i.e., integrating the new language as individuals told their own stories), especially at the love feasts, promoted the notion that anyone could experience the living God at work in their lives just as had Jacob, Moses, Peter, Mary or Paul.

Camp meetings were ideal for employing the sixth ingredient of modeling a new society. This fostered such a vital plausibility structure by giving people a taste of enacting a “little heaven below.” While the sermons and exhortations helped people to imagine themselves as part of the biblical narrative, attending a camp meeting also gave them an experience which supported the notion that they were part of the heavenly realm even now. By modeling a partial fulfillment of the prayer “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,” many camp meeting participants were propelled back into the world with a heightened anticipation that they were, even now, part of God’s eschatological work.

The seventh key ingredient, porous boundaries, was in keeping with the Wesleyan doctrine that salvation is universally available to all. Though the open nature of the camps heightened the risk of disorderly outbursts, it also increased the number of non-
Methodists who were exposed to the Methodist discourse. The result is that some of the most enthusiastic converts had come as outsiders, uninvited, but not unwelcome.

The final key ingredient for the spread of the Wesleyan plausibility structure was the steady opportunity for those who were interested in Methodism to go on group pilgrimage with their Methodist family members and neighbors. While the camp meetings themselves had become effective at ushering many before the throne of God’s grace, it was even more important that those who had intense experiences at the camp meetings be escorted home and tended to by fellow pilgrims. As in the case of Rachel Stearns, many went to camp meeting and returned without having experienced assurance of pardon or sanctification, or they were still questioning what that experience meant for their identity. The weekly class meetings and one-on-one conversations with class leader, other members of the society and the preacher helped to nurture potential new converts as their new identities were taking shape.

How these eight ingredients might be put to use today in the effort to revive the United Methodist Church is for the imagination and experimentation of contemporary church leaders. Whether and how they might be brought together to build an effective means to evoke experiences of God’s grace remains to be seen. Having identified the underlying dynamics at work during New England Methodism’s early growth, this dissertation has attempted to lay the foundation for today’s leaders to imagine new models for experiencing and sustaining the means of grace. Given how effective the ingredients were in the past, it might be worthwhile to try them out in the present.
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