

Campmeeting Adventist Style

1. The Summer of 1983

by Bonnie Dwyer

Camp meetings — those nostalgic summer gatherings—continue to grow in number and diversity in 1983, 115 years after the first Adventist camp meeting was scheduled in Michigan.

In 1973 there were 74 camp meetings in North America (according to the *Adventist Review*). Ten years later there were 111 camp meetings, a 67 percent increase. Every union except Columbia had more camp meetings this year than a decade ago, with the Pacific Union almost doubling their count—from 16 to 27.

Three conference-wide, extended camp meetings remain the largest in North America: Central California's session at Soquel; Oregon's meeting at Gladstone; and Michigan's at Grand Ledge. A growing number of administrators are eliminating the traditional 10-day, conference-wide meetings in favor of regional, weekend sessions. Northern California conference in 1983 had seven weekend camp meetings. In Hawaii there were five such meetings, one on each island. Even some local churches conduct their own sessions.

Camp meetings for special groups have mushroomed. Adventists from different ethnic groups gathered this year: for example, Filipinos, Chinese, Samoans and American Indians. National camp meetings

included one for retired workers and one for singles. For a third year Adventist homosexuals gathered for their Kinship Kampmeeting.

At campers camp meeting, a weekend retreat in Southern California, attendees could bring a recreational vehicle or rent a tepee for the weekend. Indeed, camp meeting still seems most special when old-fashioned camping is included. In Wyoming, camp meeting is held on Caspar Mountain, high above the city. Campers like Cooley Taylor, a retired miner who has pitched his own camp meeting tent for the past 50 years, love the annual gathering and feel a special closeness to each other. The whole Wyoming congregation joined to sing Happy Birthday to Cooley at the Saturday night session last summer. He was 93 years old.

Adventist camp meetings predate even Cooley Taylor, however. The first camp meetings were held in the 1860s, in conjunction with church business sessions. It was James White who made a strong appeal for general camp meetings, calling the business sessions unsuitable for a spiritual feast. With the emphasis on religion rather than business, camp meetings became part of the church's evangelistic efforts: "When camp meetings were held in a different locality in the conference each year, the convocations represented major evangelistic campaigns to reach various places," records the *SDA Yearbook*. In the 20th century, camp meetings turned into yearly

sectional gatherings of church members for spiritual meetings. In the 1950s and 1960s large, permanent pavilions replaced many of the old canvas tents as general meeting places.

Besides different kinds of camp meetings, workshop sessions also add diversity to the modern version of camp meeting. Health, home life, finances, and Bible study probably get the most workshop attention, but even these topics were presented uniquely in 1983.

The Southern California Conference scheduled runner Bill Emmerton to lead an early morning exercise class at campers' camp meeting. At Chinese camp meeting, exercise discussions focused on Tai Chai (shadow boxing). Meetings on personal

another workshop, demonstrated new crafts and hobbies for Pathfinder leaders.

In spite of innovations, some traditions remain the same. Unusual weather still seems to strike during camp meeting. Temperatures over 100 degrees kept fans waving during the Sabbath sermon at Michigan camp meeting last July. Later that week, a tornado swept through the Grand Ledge campground, lifting some tents off the ground.

Another continuing tradition is that speakers featured at the main meetings are usually men. Linda Davis, co-author of the Pathfinder Honor Series Books, was one of the few women speakers in 1983. Most presenters still come from the ministerial ranks of the General Conference, unions, and local conferences. Media personalities such as H.M.S. Richards, Jr., and George Vandeman continue to tour the camp meeting circuit. For example, Richards spoke at no less than 12 sessions in 1983. Very few non-Adventist speakers are included on camp meeting programs. Two exceptions this past year were the president of Northwestern University of Missouri, who gave a welcoming address for the Iowa/Missouri meeting held on his campus, and Harold Lindsell, editor emeritus of *Christianity Today*, who spoke Sabbath afternoon at the Second Annual Fellowship of North American Retired Workers.

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relationships annually take a most unique form at the Kinship Kampmeeting, where small group discussions of personal experiences fill part of the program. Financial workshops often focus on trusts and wills, but in Kansas this year Paul Damazo, owner of Versitron Industries, presented his personal formula for financial success. At the Washington camp meeting Larry Downing, pastor of the Seattle Green Lake Church, conducted a Bible study seminar on a “non-prophetic reading of Revelation.”

Workshops also provide an opportunity to explore a wide variety of subjects, from astronomy to music. Larry Otto, a professor of music at Southern College, presented a series on church music at the Georgia-Cumberland camp meeting. Linda Davis, in

What would camp meeting be without book sales? From the very first meetings in the 1960s, book and tract sales have been a part of the tradition. Adventist Book Center managers worry about sales in conferences that do away with week-long camp meetings. Clyde Kinder, director of publishing for the North American Division, estimates that 20 to 30 percent of annual ABC sales are made at camp meetings, and the trend toward shorter sessions, weekend meetings, and local camp meetings is hurting book sales. The changes in camp meeting format have spurred the ABCs to emphasize direct

mail sales programs, which Kinder says now account for about half of the ABC business. An approach being used to heighten sales at camp meetings is book auctions. Larry Guinn, Adventist Book Center manager for the Texas Conference, was the guest auctioneer at a large book auction on the Georiga-Cumberland campground, where Saturday night sales totaled \$11,746.

For the conferences which sponsor camp meetings, expenses continue to escalate, a primary reason some administrators are cancelling 10-day sessions or conference-wide meetings. Colorado's big camp meeting was trimmed to a weekend "mini-camp meeting" in 1983 for this reason. Safety

considerations also figure. Cooking in canvas tents presents a fire hazard. Fires were one reason for Southern California's decision to end its large camp meeting at Lynwood Academy. Ten thousand people make heavy demands on local water and sanitation systems, a real concern in Oregon.

Nevertheless, it is certain that when the summer of 1984 comes, so will camp meeting. In spite of the changing trends in camp meeting sizes, places, and styles, camp meeting is a tradition entrenched in the Adventist lifestyle and one that holds a fond place in Adventist memories.

2. Soquel Through a Glass Darkly

by Jan Daffern

Only once in 29 summers have I missed camp meeting. In California, Oregon, New Mexico, Michigan, and Virginia I have learned its rhythm, and in recent years my response to it has become predictable. I get edgy each spring at the first hint of its return. Camp meeting is a jarring intrusion in a life built around an urban church, graduate education, and a microwave oven. Two weeks in the country with tents, gospel music, and revival preaching are marked on my calendar, but not discussed in polite conversation. On the day I am to leave for camp pitch, the most trivial detail receives my studied attention until all reasons for

delay are exhausted. By the time the big tent is up I cannot recall my past logic and I am swept into the summery seduction of camp meeting. For reasons I only dimly discern, camp meeting still holds me fast.

This past summer I returned to camp meeting in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. I looked for the camp store, which, like others on similar grounds, smelled of ripening produce and college-baked bread. I wanted to see if the women from Loma Linda Foods and Worthington of Ohio who had introduced me at past camp meetings to Chickettes, Stripples, and Tuno had anything new on their toothpicks. I was not disappointed. I got my first taste of an Adventist crabcake, released by Loma Linda Foods. I have no inkling of what a crabcake ought to taste like, but that did not occur to me at the time, nor did it blunt my delight with the innovation. Occasionally, new

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