

“Where Nature Before Had Ever Reigned Supreme:  
Doing Landscape History at American Methodist Camp Meetings”

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Introduction

Accept to begin, that history is not the past and architecture is not a building. Accept as well, that American methodist camp meeting sites are, each and every one, a vast and complex landscape with their attending architecture waiting to be read, as both William Hoskins and J.B. Jackson have argued, as an open book, perhaps our richest record of who we have been and may be.<sup>1</sup> Accept that the future of Methodist camp meetings, our future as Methodists--particularly of the American variety, is an open road with unlimited possibilities for both re-form and re-vival, and we are ready to go.<sup>2</sup>

History is not the past. Certainly the past is vast, most of it an enigmatic record of practices mostly gone from us as they have been left unattended. History is the creating, concatenating really, of things—wooden tabernacles, rough-hewn pews, site designs and maps, signs to keep dogs on leashes and skateboards from running down the elderly, and people to name a few—from the past, carefully and artfully designed to be useful in our futures. History is related to and is the product of both culture and tradition(s), two terms with which it approaches synonymy. Closely aligned together, these three are not the same but are dependent upon one another. Culture is a mental construct, an idea(1) that arises from the mindfulness of humans working together, closely aligned by values and shared experience. Aware of the great and relentless forces of both ideals and change (the constant state of tradition as William Morris observed in his lectures Hopes and Fears for Art over a century ago), humans create together out of culture, a material fabrication of their shared ideals and experience.<sup>3</sup> Culture, arguably a

mental construct, resists time, and may at least remain ever incomplete. One of the great virtues of culture is its ability to ever inspire toward perfection. However, within a structuralist, or in the case of this paper, the perspective of a landscape structure that realizes culture, rituals or the realization of theology, social practices, and the material world of the landscape allow us to observe culture. The realization of culture, that which eventually creates tradition(s) and becomes history, is in time. Being in time, culture becomes history and is realized as landscape, taking up both place and space full of things that represent the ideals of culture in time, in lived experience. Traditions become the use of history, experiences in time, the creation of our history, and tradition actuates both culture and history being the swing catalyst between them, local bodies of evidentiary ideals that resemble each other across the different landscapes that make history. “Tradition...is to be understood as a process of cultural construction.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, camp meeting is a culture with observable history expressed in localized landscape traditions.

In this paper, I am arguing that American Methodist camp meeting histories, while making much hay from the sensationalistic and dramatic reports of the revivals that occurred within them have largely undervalued what is there in the camp meeting landscape for their relational and semio-semantic value—particularly, the relations of those things to one another. To state it clearly, there is more to camp meetings than we have allowed. Camp meetings constituted more than just a cathedral in the woods, expressions of a ‘Grand Camp Meeting Tradition,’ but served as a ‘second church’ for American Methodists, a history lived and living, expressions of traditions that proved useful, as well filled with details and physical descriptions that grant agency to things—God is always in the details. Methodist camp meetings as a church are, as any church is, landscapes of re-presentation, complexes with distinctive material/spiritual

culture/practices that express both theological/ideological distinctives and the social relationships of their polity/administrative practices at the same time.

One need not look far for vestiges of this ideal. One need only to flip through the useful guides of Methodist camp meeting history to see the traces of the landscape. A perusing of B.W. Gorham's Camp meeting manual, a practical book for the camp ground; in two parts (1854), Charles Johnson's The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time (1955), Claudia Deviney's University of Georgia dissertation, "From Spirit To Structure: A Study Of Georgia's Historic Camp Meeting Grounds," (2002), Dickson Bruce's, And They All Sang Hallelujah (1974), or Ellen Weiss' City in the Woods: The Life and Design of an American Camp Meeting on Martha's Vineyard (1987) and several others for some informed insight into the ways distinctive Methodist camp meeting revival landscapes were developed in America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some with American democracy at their back, some noting national tendencies in camp meeting creation, others citing specific local architecture practices (more or less broadly conceived) as rationale. What is noteworthy is that in these works there is little theorizing of how these landscapes, spaces, and places became and created the specific material culture practices of the spiritual life of American Methodism both within time (synchronic) and over time (diachronic) and how these landscapes became lived religion over time. Such histories became more interesting when historians began to take note of the work of John Brinkerhoff Jackson and his student John Stilgoe and their appeal to understand American camp meeting spaces—Jackson noting that camp meetings in America took place within a grove that provided Methodist corrective disorder to Old World standards of Christianity and Stilgoe situating camp meetings between graveyards and rural churches. Ellen Elsinger's Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism (1999), and most recently the fabulous

histories of the National Camp Meeting Association by Samuel Avery-Quinn, both reveal how these spaces and places created landscapes both useful (functional) and creative, carefully cultivated to show landscapes filled with Methodist theological themes, distinctive revival practices, practical applications of administrative/discipline needs as visible expressions of Methodist polity and piety, vital spiritual/recreative spaces for Methodists as they lived their faith within particular social and geographic landscapes at particular times.<sup>5</sup>

A better history, one read out of the landscape, is what we are after. Seeing Methodist camp meeting histories within landscapes, geographically situated communities and their accountings of experience and practice of the Christian faith, specific, grounded and accounting for both synchronic time (how the landscape existed at one particular point in time) and diachronic time (how the landscape existed over time and as a cultural expression of American Methodist camp meeting) is the goal. Boundaried by such an approach are the expectations of a better history: a more complete accounting of the things that we have made and have made us, an understanding of ourselves as Methodists together and the communities that we have created and that, in turn, create us, the goal of any history taking full account of its landscape. What this may teach us will be interesting. If this is providence, so be it.<sup>6</sup> If it provides better theological questions and answers, all the better. If it provides explanation of and better attention to our monuments, it will be valuable. Should it cause us to live with the joy and peace that should be ours as Methodist children of the Almighty, then it will prove, I am convinced, the way forward. Any accounting of the landscapes will require a vigorous and dynamic questioning of it and ourselves, theologically, socially, and practically. It will also push us to greater self-understanding as human beings. “No group sets out to create a landscape, of course. What it sets out to do is to create a community, and the landscape as its visible manifestation is simply the

by-product of people working and living, sometimes together, sometimes staying apart, but always recognizing their interdependence.”<sup>7</sup>

### Camp Meetings and American Methodism

That American Methodists took to the camp meeting is, at least, interesting and noteworthy. Russell Richey notes that Methodists of the American variety re-iterated and revised the great concern of their founder, stating their great aim: “To reforming the Continent, and spread scriptural Holiness over these lands.”<sup>8</sup> That reform, while finding considerable norms in churches, chapels, and homes, also found space in the woodland, a better term than forest or wilderness. The sacred use of the forest proved “religiously special, significant, and noteworthy.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the woodland provided a signature, an arguably original, Methodist achievement: the camp meeting. That camp meetings situated field preaching was not inevitable, nor predictable. Much ink has been spilled over the origins of such, and the search for the answer of why camp meetings came into existence by pinpointing the first camp meeting has proved in vain, no disrespect to the late Kenneth O. Brown.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the cause of camp meeting, it worked and proved useful. In the camp meeting arena, the possibilities of Methodist distinctives was realized.

The camp meetings provided an open context for Methodists to be themselves. The camp meeting sites realized the popular response to open-air cathedral religion as Methodists and their other Christian kin came to the gatherings in large numbers to hear the preaching. The woodlands also proved valuable for the exercise of private devotions, another staple of the Methodist religious diet.<sup>11</sup> The greater historical surprise came with the allowing for multiple camp meeting sites, some on the expansion of the United States, some because of multiple interests in geographies like the Delmarva peninsula, the camp meetings resounding with

Methodist themes: that ours is a moveable feast and that one can be and do Methodist wherever they are; the sense of the real presence of Christ, both in the creation and the Eucharist; and that the church is a democracy of the people where they gather and where they roam, with theological experience the proving ground situated in an American creation called camp meeting. Grace for all, atoning experience in the liturgy of word, sacrament, and penitence, and the experience of holiness on the woodland surface of the new world worked together in a dynamic landscape that came together in the forest as well as churches and circuits. The usefulness of camp meetings as sites for the polity necessitated by quarterly meeting while allowing for the mass gathering of Methodists to hear the gospel and receive the sacrament perhaps proved their usefulness most of all.<sup>12</sup>

The unvarnished forest or wilderness setting (take your pick as to the appropriate term) of camp meeting also allowed for the Methodist dependency upon dreams and visions as direct experiences of the Divine. That the veridical nature of Methodist understanding of these dreams went unimpeded, save for its vociferous critics (and lo, their name at times was legion), was not overlooked. It institutionalized one of those great categories by which we judge all things quadrilaterally. The new context of camp meeting, especially in the dangerous confines of the untamed forest gave safe, unimpeded space, to direct spiritual experiences. Camp meeting became the place of Boanerges preaching, shouting, swooning, suspended animation, and near-death experiences and allowed them to become as normal as the ‘pens’ set up in Methodist camp meeting sites where the penitents were thrown onto a bed of hay so as they might kick about without hurting themselves.<sup>13</sup> As John Rule notes: “Methodism did not so much replace folk-beliefs as translate them into religious idiom.”<sup>14</sup> It is in the translation of experience into camp meeting sites that there is much to consider.

The camp meeting landscape provided more than just a new idiom for Methodist idiosyncrasies and normative practices. The popularity aside, and not at all to be underestimated, camp meeting landscapes provided *loca sacra* for the movement in America and a great tool for reform. Positioned as they were/are Methodist camp meetings fathomed networks and site lines where famous preachers and common saints could plant their footsteps and raise their voices in new soil. Brush arbors and preaching tabernacles more reminiscent of Isaac Long's famous barn, where Behm and Otterbein held their famous Brethren meeting in 1767 than anything else, save perhaps the Old Testament witness to the tent of meeting with surrounding campers, surrounded first by wagons and smaller arbors and eventually by tents and then cabins called tents, became the context or site for enthusiastic experience in both preaching and song. That so many were converted at these sites meant that they were arenas, and arguably agents, of change, a reform led by revival.

As sites charged with the energy of the crowds and the agency of Divine activity, the earliest woodlands sites offered prodigious natural settings which served as the surface onto which American Methodists projected their deepest concerns in a once a year city that lasted but a week or two. The cities were delightful and useful in the Augustinian sense—aligning liturgy, theology, ecclesiology, and geography in staged dramatic revivals. The cathedrals in the woods became the laboratory of experimental divinity, so necessary for the advancement of the young church in the new world. Preaching to multitudes, the camp meeting pulpit and revival buildings—brush arbors or wooden sheds—brought down the forces of the universe and re-presented the acme of the universe, the very presence of heaven come down to earth where the intimate theology of Methodist conversion and sanctification would find a home. Such edifices and their attending practices and objects proved both text and artifact, written, reviving, and

reforming those who attended. The testimonies to the power of the camp meetings are plenteous and note the close presence of God in both ecstatic services and quiet encounters with the divine.<sup>15</sup> The woods proved a medium of heavenly instruction. The camp meeting creators conceived of the physical environment they occupied as a work of the Deity, a sculpture designed by the Lord that bore the marks of his intervention by placing the camp meeting within its confines. J.B Jackson notes there is a question to be answered here: Was the place sacred because it was God's creation or had it become sacralized because of the work of those who built the meeting site? While Jackson's answer is that in the beginning was the deed and the camp meeting landscape made the site a *loca sacra*, the better answer is both yes and no. There was no real distinction between the woodlands and natural landmarks and the architectural structures of camp meeting that were the natural outgrowth of them. The boundaries between these were vague and hazy. Camp meeting creators conceived of the physical environment they occupied and the work of their hands as divinely designed by the Lord, bearing marks of his continual intervention to save souls and fight off the devil and spiritual damnation.<sup>16</sup> The work of camp meeting, in the fullest sense, meant that a reformed landscape constructed a world fit for revivals of religion. Making the most of the sylvan around them, the Methodists constructed a world within it, taking advantage to sanctify the sites where Nature before had ever reigned supreme.<sup>17</sup>

In studying the reform of such a landscape, one that extends beyond the convenient confines of what we call 'The Second Great Awakening,' or 'The National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness,' or any other chosen Golden Age or model camp meeting, such as Wesleyan Grove (1837), Ocean Grove (1869), or Indian Springs (1890), or the good number of Methodist camp meetings founded throughout the South in the late 1820s and early 1830s (e.g. Salem Camp, Lucedale, MS 1828), and any such notion must be understood as



detrimental to such a history. To understand camp meetings well, we must avoid any notion of “this is the true camp here at Indian Springs” or “the camp meeting that occurred there in 1867 was the best there ever was” or “this was the first camp ever in the United States” in order to understand each one well as signifying the culture of camp meeting and having a history with something to teach us. So Daniel Miller noted of the promise of a material culture studies and landscape/complex approach to doing our work: “There is no Golden Age...The goal of this revolution (in material historical study) is to promote equality, a dialectic republic in which persons and things exist in mutual self-construction and respect for their mutual origin and mutual dependency.”<sup>18</sup> Such an approach will go a long way toward situating camp meeting studies as American and seeing within their sites as much as we can from good evidence. It will also allow histories the freedom to fully explore the significance of what was there as equal partners in both agency and meaning. Those whose voices have been noted but ignored or suppressed as less important are equally important in such an approach to our work. Phoebe and her octagonally shaped “Bower of Prayer” and the multitude of spaces given for local churches to hold services within the camp deserves equal consideration with Inskip standing in the pulpit under the main tabernacle at the Vineland, NJ. The hymns of Richard Allen, published in the first Black songbook in North America in Philadelphia in 1801, who revised and combined Wesley and Watts, adding choruses from field and work songs of African American labor enslaved and free, may have more to teach us about as the significance of camp meeting than do more traditional hymns that have clear links to a theology of nature like “This Is My Father’s World” that have remained, at least for the moment, in our hymnals. We must give some consideration to the voices and texts that exist as the forceful creations within the built environment, like buildings themselves, but also roads; what happened that footpaths turned into

sidewalks; and the stylistic, intentional evidence of architectural adornment like the hanging of handmade outsider art quilts sewn within the confines and times of camp on the front of a cabin as a personal testimony to God's creative work at Rock Springs in Denverton, NC—a tradition that still exists. Allowing within the study of camp meeting histories other approaches to doing and being historical, some that resist the necessity of the "law of coverage" and seek to construct a self or an identity through a web of meaning as well or within a narrated chronology of events, must also be allowed their voices if we are to reach our intentions of self-understanding and, in turn, help to shape our futures. Somewhere between fatalism and chaos is the future of Methodist camp meetings; our future and such re-vivals call for a reform of historical self-understanding. What is called for is an extended horizon of understanding, for camp meetings have proven quite resilient and adaptive within their landscapes. In short, they have endured and Jesus has tarried, so there is much to deliberate and ponder. That camp meetings in the woods occurred is a phenomenon, and that they so resembled cathedrals—places of confession, polity, and challenge—shady groves—the place of gardens like Eden, Gethsemane, and so many medieval monasteries, and wildernesses, places to tame for the Lord's sake and fight the devil—means a variety of interpretations both scriptural and American within any serious study of the topic.<sup>19</sup> That they have endured and in their enduring have changed and adapted as time has marched on is even more ponderous. Camp meeting sites have birthed churches, shrines, graveyards, and even neighborhoods in their surroundings and have been monumentalized in the National Historic Register, the Historic American Landscape Survey, with federal and state highway markers, Colonial Dames designations, County Historic Anniversaries, and even the shadow silhouette of John Wesley. That Methodists can now zip line, rock climb, and target shoot at camp meetings gives pause to both wwft (What Would Francis (Asbury) think) and what this

means for those of who are alive to see such adaptations of the *loca sacra* of American Methodist revivalism? No matter the answer to those questions, what is clear is that studies of the camp meeting require reformed vocabulary and a rethinking of what camp meeting means as cultural ideal, historic concatenation, and traditional catalyst for Methodist forms of religion in America. Following Jackson and Stilgoe, while shaking off our continual deterministic constraint courtesy of Braudel, what is clear is that camp meeting is and always was more than a revival site with quaint intentions for holy moments, no matter how rapturous the experienced testimonies were. Given what we know about camp meetings, their attendees—poor farmers, mothers, child evangelists, Methodist bishops, enslaved people, freedpersons, Methodists, Presbyterians and Baptists (for a while anyway)—and what has now occurred over time, we need a better history, a fuller accounting of the camp meeting as a cultural construction, a built environment regarded as the ‘biography of a society.’<sup>20</sup> The landscape of Methodist camp meetings is/was a story of legendary revivals guided by high and wild ideals, but it is/was much more. It is a dense and complex system of meaning with texts, experiences, signs, wonders, things, and people that must be considered together as particular communities that make up a culture. Therefore, we who are professional historians must recognize that we are now gatherers, artful assemblers of the past. The historian is not the one who debunks or deconstructs, but the one whose joy it is to assemble, to hold things together in comparison, which includes changes in our landscapes. We must resist any notions of rupture and demand that change is just the catalyst of usefulness. Historical work is a “gathering of things,” an assembling of the landscape that was, that is, and that just might yet be out of the past that takes things into account in as much relational fullness as possible.

## Landscape History and Camp Meetings

A landscape is more than it seems.<sup>21</sup> It is a gathering of our artifacts, objects of material culture produced by a society to fulfill particular functions determined by and thus embodying the ideals and social relationships of the productive forces of a community. Landscapes, like the buildings and people and material productions they leave behind, are artifacts filled with artifacts and each one relationally connected to the other. Approaching history as landscape allows for the studying of each artifact for what it is, as a virtuous haecceity, and what they are together provide historians with an arena in which to discover and discern the relationships and social processes and thereby consider the future which becomes history itself. Putting together all the observable processes and concerns that occur within one landscape, one site, you have a landscape fraught with history and evidence plenty and political to discuss. The landscape must be read and as the sp(pl)ace of artifacts, things that combined together to make human experience--a pl(sp)ace of lived and living community. Some of this will be dependent upon our willingness to admit that camp meetings as a movement and as particular sites are sacred economies of the productive non-contemporaneous type. They have never been modern even when they were new.

Landscape history by way of its product, explains the architecture, broadly conceived, of the society as a social product, the spatial configuration within the built environment and the built environment itself incorporating economic political and ideological or theological dimensions of the thinking of those who created it. This makes doing history an accounting for all that is present in any landscape, for divining the depths of it as far as possible, examining what is obvious and what is less so, and giving room in the landscape for all that is found to be present within it at the same time—in historical texts, common wooden sheds, grand theater-

style buildings, personalized messages of peace painted on simple wooden doors, numbered privies set aside for personal use, teaching songs long known to new converts to shape their witness, and accounting for why the gaze of a community was so focused in the tightly knit squares and circles of ‘tents’ around the tabernacle. All of this allows history, investigating the landscape to “be in touch” with all the people, things, events, that it has been over the course of time as an expression of the culture we have so opportunely named camp meeting.

Done well or done poorly, and anything worth doing is worth doing poorly, as the gigantic figure G.K. Chesterton reminded us, by practiced storytellers, such history will allow us to (re)consider our future—the future of revival in need of reform to be experienced by people—so that they can share in the reality that this landscape is. This will also make what we can know dependent upon the evidence of the past, and thankfully some of it remains available to us through preservation of buildings and tradition. Making the past useable will allow it to be more present than it has been and also allows for discourse—for comparison, for linking cause and effect, for pushing the boundaries of the landscape as it intersects with other landscapes like roadways, cooking methods and newly emerging political and religious ideologies for both critique and the great goal of Christian friendship. Opening the landscape as a book to be read, the work of historians both professional and volunteer, in this way will create a better way of understanding what camp meetings have been over time—an engagement of the will in theological arenas of contest. Such an interpretation engages all the players in the drama in what history loves most--the massive fact of continuity, the engagement of difference over time, the competition of different visions of the future in the ongoing game of landscape constructed materially. Our need is for a more expansive and inclusive history, a history whose approach to the whole built world is to “reveal shifts in emphasis,” which may help us to avoid the kind of

rupture that kills revivals and reform to see, rather, a change in tone and use. “History is ill-served by dichotomizing human beings....,”<sup>22</sup> notes the fabulous Henry Glassie, and I would add it is ill-served by dichotomizing camp meetings and their landscapes or counting what is Traditional and what is not. If we proceed from such a dictum then a different history is possible, a history through which the landscape and its built environments over time tell the story of a people striving, longing, working, building, and living together. We begin to see a more continuous, more expansive history. Writing history as the continuity of built environments, built by people black and white, young and old, Methodist and Presbyterian, Protestant and non-Protestant, modern and non-modern, presents a historical interpretation of another kind. History done as landscape that architects societies notes interaction, not disruption. It explores and explains the connection of will to circumstance by seeing the landscape as a continuing narrative of competition and debate that joins people and beliefs to things and the land, and presents all of this together with the fullness of what we can tell about that landscape in the present moment and over time. It allows for each participant within the broader landscape, each building, each builder, each user, to have as full a say as the evidence can support. Such an interpretation explores many layers together, even allowing them to critique their shared history when possible. Creating a layered continuity of history within the same landscape will be more true to the past and will provide a pathway in place toward the future.

Material culture studies, the study of architecture and built environments, recognizes that humans, buildings, design intentions, and artifacts are bound in a logical sphere of creating and recreating the world in the landscape where they are found. Changes occur and history is made. Henry Glassie argues that instead of reading such changes within the landscape as rupture, we should couple the terms “history” and “tradition” along with the terms “identity,”

“communication,” “performance,” “art,” and “culture” and present them for what they are: the interplay of humans and their environments where people create and are creatively affected by buildings, pots, desks, beds, and places of collective identity like Sycamore Springs, SC and Manheim, PA.<sup>23</sup>

If we do history as the study of the landscape, the built environments at the address become the representations of something other than successive changes built upon notions of politics or progress or sentimentality for the old-time camp meeting. The built environments give us a competition of narratives, a competition of traditions, some within the same vale of existence, some across the measures of time. This is what good history does. It narrates the connection of will to circumstance in the materially built environment in which one finds it. What we need is a system of investigation and a vocabulary of interpretation to fit the purpose.

#### Pattern Method, Pattern Language

What follows are some suggestions based on the text above. As suggestions, they remain incomplete and open to revision, the purpose of scholarship and perfectionist religion. As they are, they are based on the readings listed in the end notes and the work cited in the bibliography of this paper. They seem to me the logic necessary for what I am suggesting to be useful.

#### Pattern Method

It follows that the culture-tradition-history path is more than just context for descriptive analysis; it is also a method for doing the work of recording our histories. The three-fold pattern suggested above reveals not only the intentions and ideals of a perfectionist people in the camp meeting landscape, given the evidence we find within it, it also serves as a method for doing good observation of that evidence, putting into history, and then into the built environment by

way of traditioning it as camp meeting sites. Following that pattern, we can perceive a method of actually doing the work.

One note to make about Methodist camp meeting sites as culture as we continue: culture connotes style, the idiom that stuff is created in--in design study, whether art, architecture, or built environment/landscape. As a culture, camp meeting sites exude a world fashioned in a 'vernacular' idiom. Admittedly, such a designation is hard to pin down. Vernacular can mean 'architecture without plans'; it can also mean common or ordinary. Stewart Brand notes that vernacular architecture should be understood as a 'low road,' a loaded and interesting term to be sure, given that most camp meetings have been and are accessible along the pathways of ordinary people, whether going to the woods, the beach, or the mountains.<sup>24</sup> That John Stilgoe groups landscapes as part of the ordinary landscapes of America, situated between graveyards and rural churches, may be proof enough to make the point. By noting that camp meeting landscapes are vernacular in style and express the ideals of the broadest range of Methodist people both throughout time and from a variety of social classes, I am arguing for vernacular style as a democratic idea, the common will of all those assembled expressed in the building of the worlds that they believe(d) would help them reach the promised land of Christian perfection—available to all and for all.

Pursuing this ideal, N.J. Habraken, in The Structure of the Ordinary, notes that built environments are the evidence of the "desire of irrepressible human creativity to (1) invent, (2) renew, and (3) reinterpret" to structure the communities they inhabit according to the ideals they intend to live out.<sup>25</sup> From a similar perspective, Henry Glassie argues that each of the three modes of method have a dynamic quality that follows a general outline of 'progress' or something like it. In the first stage of the dynamic invention or the original landscape is created.



In the second, certain entities within the landscape are dismembered or rearranged to preserve essences and virtues believed more necessary than others for future use. In the third stage, what is preserved is something of the “general tone” of the original—“a sound, a look, a certain spirit.”<sup>26</sup> Taken as patterns for method, both Habraken and Glassie give us a model for interpretative method and observation. The variety of evidence will lead us down many roads, but all will lead to continuity and change as the goal of our work and lead to a better history (and hopefully future) of camp meetings. Maps, some hand-drawn like that of Latrobe and the equally famous one in Gorham’s manual, can show us the shape of the grounds and the intentions of the founders.<sup>27</sup> Camp meeting songbooks will reveal preserved virtues from one era to another both in repeatedly-published hymns and the art, pictures, and design graphics (often in the shape of crosses) engraved next to them as interpretive signs as to why this hymn was kept when others were abandoned. Noting the insertion of zip lines, youth tabernacles, newly-constructed individual prayer rooms and garden, souvenir benches, and monuments to Henry Clay Morrison into camp meeting landscapes as third-stage tones and looks may vex us, and yet may reveal more about the world that is to come than we have heretofore been able to imagine. The promise of the method is our willingness to trust the evidence (history) we find as much as the intentions (culture) of the original. In the experience, we may yet find ourselves (tradition). And that surprise may be that we see much our Methodist ancestors in the mirror.

### Pattern Language<sup>28</sup>

The scheme of a pattern language or vocabulary compliments the method. Admittedly the evidence will drive any pattern language, but if history is the engagement of wills over time, so will cultural ideals. Patterns are dual in nature—simultaneously means and end and within the Pattern Method the dynamic of the method. The pattern language below is incomplete, one of

history's great virtues, and that makes it worth thinking about and revising—another sign of continuity.

This pattern language is assembled from and revised several sources, mainly from Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum's *An Anthropology of Landscape*.<sup>29</sup> The ambition is not to provide discreet domains, but to point out areas of investigation and describe patterns of evidence that exist within the landscape of camp meeting significant enough to give rise to other patterns of like constructions. Given that this is history done in and through the landscape, the patterns of place, space, and architecture (which gives space and place their cultural fabric) take precedence.

- *Architecture*: Camp meeting architecture means the buildings within the camp meeting site. Buildings, like poems and literature, realize culture, the intentions and desires of those who create them.<sup>30</sup> Given that most camp meeting architecture, at least until recently, fits within the vernacular style as described above, reading the buildings that center the camp meeting landscape is akin to describing the soul—both of camp meeting culture and camp meeting as a particular site. The details and adornment of the building also fit within the vernacular style. Boughs entwined made of local wood, just as a tabernacle like the one at Rock Springs camp in Denverton, NC, reveal the character and the cultural ideals of heaven come to earth. Architecture patterns will note sameness across camp meeting sites, e.g. in the American South most of the Methodist camp meeting tabernacles, and reach across architectural style patterns to note that the ceilings of those tabernacles work in the same way that Gothic churches and some medieval monastic chapter houses do, floating mass above suspension with open-air walls. Color, shape, and size are all important as the Charlestonian 'Rainbow Row' of outbuildings at

the Hortense, GA Wesleyan Camp Meeting visibly connect backwoods, coarse camp meeting grounds to the grandest architecture street in the American South. The attending buildings within a camp—tents or cabins, privies (some built with WPA plans), kitchens, and now utility facilities—all are woven into the landscape. How these buildings ‘learn’ or change over time—wooden pathways are covered with concrete; sections are deleted or added—will show what has been done in history and give some sense to the significance of those changes.

- *Place:* Place is patterned site design, the place-making activities of naming, building, renaming, and maintaining efficacy. Camp meeting sites, maps, and plans—like B.W. Gorham’s drawn plans for the first two National Camp Meeting Association meetings in 1867-1868—elucidate design ideas and explore their manifestations in practice, those relationships built between building and nature, flesh and stone. Looking for the ways things are positioned within the landscape and in relation to the other things there allows design philosophy and design action to offer a dynamic rendering of how and why the site was created as it was.<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, this may allow for some chaos in the mix given what little written evidence we have about camp meeting site constructions, but in noting landscaped patterns compared to other camp meetings, town plans, neighborhood settings, etc., may reveal much about the people and society who built a camp meeting and gift of revealed wisdom that guides all Methodism. Some place patterns will come from general ideas about what makes for a good camp meeting site like the list in Gorham’s Manual which includes an abundant supply of fresh water and pasture land, nearby Methodist neighborhoods, and a canopy of shade.<sup>32</sup> More work will have to be done in the field on sites like Indian Springs, GA where historic signage marks the spot

where the Spirit moved the founders to site the camp. As camp meetings endure and move into third-stage ‘tone’ revision and reconstruction, they can become retreat centers or sea-side vacation spots developed in partnership with retail idealists and capitalistic enterprises like the several-story hotel and spa that the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association renovation that is currently underway.<sup>33</sup> “Divine direction” or “Necessity for survival” will align place and philosophy within the landscape.

- *Space*: Space patterns in camp meeting studies have to do with nature and how it is conceptualized. Shady Grove, Forest, Wilderness, Clearing, Oceanside are all determinants of meaning in landscape studies. There are questions to be answered here, some geographical, some metaphysical. How Methodists have cared for the environment and preserved it for camp meeting use will show up and provide clues as to how and why preservation occurs. There are some guiding documents that will help. Claudia Deviney’s UGa master’s dissertation offers a preservationist’s ideal of how to do this and should be read by camp meeting planners and lovers everywhere.<sup>34</sup> That local camp meetings like Shady Grove in Dorchester County, SC now partner with granting agencies like Saving America’s Treasures shows the objective interaction and significance of this pattern.
- *Theology, idealism, perfection*: Russ Richey sets the tone for reading camp meeting space theologically when he notes that they evoke “an enacted soteriology” and live within practiced a practiced doctrine of creation.<sup>35</sup> Being dual in nature, the evidence within the landscape gives particular expression to the Augustinian annoyance that this theologically bound world in which we live ever perseveres in a dilemma of wills between delight (the love of the Almighty) and use (what we who love the Almighty make out of the creation

in all of its fullness—both people and things).<sup>36</sup> The camp meeting landscape is full of idealic expression of rest, in rural gatherings isolated from the busyness of cities like so many medieval monasteries, and for individuals on benches—some isolated beyond the formal space of the tabernacle liturgy. “As in heaven, so in camp meeting” is the rule. Widening the boundaries of meaning will be the challenge for theologians to give veridical witness in what may be the cacophony of theological conversation. The joy of experience will make those conversations Methodist ones.

- *Biography, performance*: In the camp meeting landscape are stories of conversion, the changed lives of the saints that so outnumber the preachers and founders we have acclaimed that we could call them legion. Methodist camp meeting spaces are egalitarian, ecumenical, and grant agency as the Spirit moves to old and young, black and white, male and female. Consideration of how, when, where, and why such agency was conducted and received will be the key understanding the ways souls were formed within the landscape.
- *Motility*: Moving to and across camp meeting involves foot paths, wagon trails, family units, railroads, highways, Chaucerian pilgrimages, and sign markers in the interplay of the landscape map, a curious dance wherever they occurred. The depth of meaning will also reach across the boundaries of time to teach about what happens when motility is challenged or changes. Gorham’s Manual published in 1854 and designed to save a dying movement with testimonies of effectiveness and plans on how to site and build an ideal camp meeting, teaches us two things. First, the earliest camp meetings reached their journey’s end when railroads replaced wagons. Second, that the same book could serve as a template when railroad stops became the necessary landscape border for each of the

National Camp Meeting Association's meetings between 1867-1923. Camp meeting landscapes depend upon motility in ways we need to rethink. The camp meetings waned again after 1923 until automobility and interstate highways would make camp meetings accessible to the masses in the 1950s and 60s. Motility is a key, perhaps the key, in any topographic understanding of camp meeting landscapes.

- *Agency*: Agency is about more than power, it is about well-being. Terms like commodious and delightful, shady and covering are indicators of what makes a camp meeting landscape sensually attractive and what such sites do for their inhabitants. The shady grove and the opened field are powerful to challenge and restore camp meeting attendees, spiritually and physically together. Given that Gorham, Richey, Brown, and so many others note what the camp meeting landscape did for people, we must search deep in the forest of evidence to consider all of the theological connotations of being in relation to nature.
- *Contest*: The differing politics of what makes a landscape a good camp meeting—more isolated from roads and urbanity or less, whether tents should be larger or set-aside for those who 'work' (preachers, presidents, administrators) as opposed to those who merely attend, whether or not to allow signs from the outside world to designate a camp meeting's significance and to whom—the federal government, tourists, county anniversaries, granting agencies, to allow metal detectors or not, marked out spaces for different churches or social classes extending to enslaved people and the as-yet unrepentant and how different sites built different answers over time—some(times) yes, some(times) no--considered in whatever fulcrum of time they are planted will teach us much our identity as a contested people. Given that continuity and stability are two of

the great goals of history, the landscape allows us to consider these together—where they occur and where they do not. To know which battles are worth fighting and whether or not the battles we have fought need to be renewed will teach wisdom.

- *Technology*: Technology is the material means that we use to shape dreams and memory into existence. Limiting and conceptual, technologies nonetheless conquer things and keep history from becoming a-historical. Tabernacles carved out of the native forests that gave them birth and the additions of recreational opportunities, unnecessary and unnamed by our ancestors, are the battle grounds where the challenges of morality and power craft a better and more harmonious world. The products of technology alter nature, realize culture, and make us face the moral demands of evaluating what we have done. Learning from technology allows for the specialists and craftspeople to transmit both technique and spirit across lines of heaven and earth, noting comparative successes and failures. Technology produces patterned change, observable in its result and across mediums and maps. That talent is no respecter of persons, technology reinforces the egalitarian aim of a landscape that fits both Methodist aims and achievements.

Understanding the way patterned worlds work, we delve into relationship and consequence with each borrowing from the other. Responsibly reading all these patterns can teach in and across time, there is much work to be done. The patterns that created the landscape of American Methodist landscapes reached across regions, gave birth to movements called Holiness and Chautauqua, birthed a number of denominations like the African Methodist Episcopal Church the Wesleyans, the Salvation Army, the Free Methodists, the United Methodist Church, my own Church of the Nazarene, independent Holiness congregations and many others that deserve to be a part of the Pan-Methodist family. What is Methodist about all of this, and hopefully all of us,

is the demands of doctrinal accountability—free grace, real presence, holy conduct—and the willingness to show patterns of experimental divinity in the landscapes we create. All of the groups listed above built their own camp meetings and used camp meeting patterns to construct missionary landscapes, local churches, educational curriculums, and local liturgies of salvation and reconciliation, but that is another paper. Historically responsible, we live Methodist-traditioned lives. That we can compare those patterns of historical responsible means we are in this together.

### Re-Vitalization

Accept, to end this paper, that history and our Methodist landscapes are vital—vital in the sense that they are mythic places filled with the anamnestic quality of living on earth as we will in heaven. Accept, as well, that any successful reform or revival for those of us live in the shadow cast by field preachers, oceanfront theaters, gingerbread cottages, and repentant sinners will require the mythic vitality that we who are Methodists have always been dependent on it as a form of grace. Accept that patterns of historical responsibility attached to experimental divinity with the powerful and mythic memories of our ancestors have left a landscape of opportunity, filled with the power of the Spirit and we are headed home. The joy of giving agency to the landscapes we have shaped and who in turn shape us means believing that we can be free to live as the Spirit leads us, making traditioned-living the necessary vitality that cultures and histories of revivals and reforming religion require. Believe that the camp meeting study will and can open up to us a landscape and world ancient and yet filled to overflowing with new expectation because God is in the details with gifts anticipated and as yet unimagined. Know that our story includes the past and that not every experiment will succeed, but God exists in the world to



forgive and redeem even the righteous. History has much to teach us--all we have to do is pay attention.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> W.G. Hoskins, The Making of the English Landscape, 14. 'The ... landscape itself, to those who know how to read it aright is the richest historical record we possess.' So J.B. Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, 8.

<sup>2</sup> It is hard to choose whether the term Methodist should be capitalized throughout this paper or not. Having too long endured a graduate school experience somewhere in St. Louis, MO with Jesuits, Cappuccines, ex-priests, Protestants and the like where most of what we argued about was whether Catholic must be spelled with upper or lower case punctuation, I note here both spellings and use Methodist throughout the rest of the paper as a term of convenience.

<sup>3</sup> So Jim Deetz noted on his U.Va. memorial webpage, that such a structuralist idea of culture was not included in any of the original academic notions of the definition of culture but, following the work of Walter Taylor, that culture becomes "understandable through its various objectifications, be it ritual practice, social structure, or the material world."

<sup>4</sup> Henry Glassie, "Tradition," 398.

<sup>5</sup> Avery-Quinn's forthcoming book Cities of Zion: The Holiness Movement and Methodist Town Planning in America (Lexington Press, 2019) promises to be the best representation of this kind of landscape history. Avery-Quinn's technique of combining the 'New-Historicism' with anthropological theory and his outstanding attention to the geographic details of the settings and places where National Camp Meeting Association meetings took place is a model for a landscape history approach to camp meetings that I am arguing for here. For an explanation of his approach see his University of Tennessee Dissertation, "From Parlor to Forest Temple: An Historical Anthropology of the Early Landscapes of the National Camp-Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness, 1867-1871," 2011.

<sup>6</sup> I admit to reading any definition of providence, Methodist or otherwise, through Vichian eyes. The great Giambattista Vico, the creator of the modern discipline of history, taught that providence, whatever it may prove about the Divine or religion, is simply the world as we experience it today.

<sup>7</sup> J.B Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Russel Richey, Methodism in the American Forest, quoting from the MEC *Discipline* 1787, 23.

<sup>9</sup> Richey, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth O. Brown, "Finding America's Oldest Camp Meeting," 252-254.

<sup>11</sup> Richey, 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Richey, 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> So the placement of the pen in the famous 'Plan of the Camp' from a Methodist campsite in Fairfax County, VA drawn by no less than Benjamin Latrobe kept in the Latrobe Papers by the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in John Wigger, Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America, 111.

<sup>15</sup> Richey, passim, but especially that of Francis Asbury, 5-6, who found both quickening and calm in the woods; James B. Finley, 27-28, and pages 33-37 for testimonies from James Quinn, Freeborn Garretson, Jesse Lee, and William Colbert. See also Kenneth O. Brown, Inskip, Fowler, MacDonald, Wholly and Forever Thine.

<sup>16</sup> See the discussion of human existence as a place between nature and culture within environments as 'quasi-objects' in Bruno Latour's We Have Never Been Modern, 49-51.

<sup>17</sup> "Where Nature Before Had Ever Reigned Supreme," The New York Times, August 6, 1865.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Miller, "Introduction," *Materiality*, 37-38.

<sup>19</sup> Richey, 7.

<sup>20</sup> This idea is argued in terms of the landscape of the British Reformation of the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Alexandra Walsham's magnificent The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland, especially 5-6, and provides something of a rationale and model for this kind of historical thinking and work.

<sup>21</sup> So John Stilgoe's erudite forty page definition of the concept that covers everything from shovels to fish mongering in What is Landscape?, 2-44.

<sup>22</sup> Glassie, "Tradition," 396.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Glassie, "On Identity," 239.

<sup>24</sup> Stewart Brand, How Buildings Learn, 22-24.

<sup>25</sup> N.J. Habraken, The Structure of the Ordinary, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Glassie, "Tradition," 408.

<sup>27</sup> Barlow Weed Gorham, Camp Meeting Manual in Three Parts, 135.

<sup>28</sup> The scheme of investigation follows the ideal set forth by Christopher Alexander's book by the same name. There is no claim here to follow the method or vocabulary set forth by him and the team of academics that have worked with him to produce what is now an eight volume series on architectural theory and practice, the best-selling of its kind in history. Alexander's claim is that plain or ordinary architecture is more meaningful and beautiful than high-style architecture and therefore deserves more careful attention and examination than grand or high-style architecture. It remains an inspiration for doing this kind of work.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Tilley and Kate Cameron-Daum, An Anthropology of Landscape, 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Glassie, "Architects, Vernacular Traditions, and Society," 9.

<sup>31</sup> Carol Burns and Andrea Kahn, Site Matters, ix.

<sup>32</sup> Gorham, 87.

<sup>33</sup> Elana Knopp, "Divine development: Mixed-use project with hotel to anchor dormant Ocean Grove plot", <http://www.njbiz.com/article/20180611/NJBIZ01/180619982/divine-development-mixeduse-project-with-hotel-to-anchor-dormant-ocean-grove-plot>.

<sup>34</sup> Deviney, "From Spirit to Structure," 120-125.

<sup>35</sup> Richey, 8. For Richey's extended reflection on the way doctrines played out in the camp meeting landscape, see pp. 90-100.

<sup>36</sup> St. Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, Book 1.

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