

The Historical Society
Of the Bible Fellowship Church
February, 2018

I am picking up on the promise I made after our August publication to explore more about the history of Camp Meeting. In August, I told the story of the development of camp meeting from a grove meeting in 1879 to the move to Mizpah in 1910. I promised to pick up the story and I am keeping that promise now.

What follows is a more detailed account of the first weeks at Mizpah Grove in 1910. As you will see, reports to the denomination tended to be brief and perhaps understated. But for the local Allentown papers, the events there were big news which led to reports of what was happening. The newspaper coverage allows us to hear more and perhaps feel the excitement of this new venture that was to become such a significant part of our denomination.

After you have read the accounts of Mizpah Grove, you can read about the earlier camp meeting held in 1909 at Waldheim Park. You will again be able in your imagination to be there because of the newspaper reports.

Mizpah Grove
Summer, 1910

Mizpah Grove: The New and Improved Camp Meeting
Richard Taylor

Camp Meeting had become a fixture in the annual calendar of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Beginning with a few tents on the farm of Milton and Fannie Kauffman on Chestnut Hill outside of Coopersburg, it had grown to attract at times thousands of participants. Lack of resources and crowded roads made it increasingly difficult to hold the camp meeting at Chestnut Hill.

Holding several camp meetings seemed to be an attractive way to solve some of the problems created by the success at Chestnut Hill. In 1892, a second camp meeting was held in Royersford. In 1893, three camp meetings were held. In 1895, four camp meetings met. These are just the main meetings and it is possible that other smaller ones were held. They created new difficulties. The logistics of setting up at least four camp meetings must have been complex. A place needed to be found, the tents to be moved, food to be arranged, preachers to preach and announcements made. It must have started to wear on the preachers. In 1909, the resolution was made, "**Resolved**,

That the Executive Board be authorized to purchase land or property for Camp Meeting purposes.” Probably, the pastors gave a silent cheer.

The land they purchased was located in East Allentown. They decided to call it Mizpah Grove since mizpah meant meeting place. And indeed, it became the meeting place for the denomination. In many ways, for years to come, Mizpah was the magnet which drew and held the denomination together.

C. H. Brunner, to whom we owe a debt for his recording of our history, tells about the purchase and development of the land. You can read about it in our publication, “... What Mean These Stones?”. But, not much was written about the first meetings that were held in the summer of 1910. The local Allentown newspapers were very interested and printed the information they were gathering. This allows us to get a picture of what took place.

According to Brunner, the property was located in Hanover Township in East Allentown. The purchase, he reported, was made in the spring of 1910. That did not leave much time to prepare the grounds so the work was begun in haste.

The Morning Call reported on June 18 that a drilling contractor was hired to prepare a well. The drilling was tough going through “the hardest iron granite” but when finished boring down 42 feet they had their water. The article also reported, “The work of preparing the grove for the coming camp meetings during July and August is being pushed very rapidly, a force of more than twenty men and eight teams being kept busy this week.”

A little over a week later, on June 27, the paper reported on the progress. More land had been purchased, a bit of woodland. Jeremiah Esterley had been contracted to provide boarding and a refreshment stand. He was hired because he had done well in providing for the Waldheim Camp Meeting the previous summer. A cement slab was provided to surround the newly drilled well and an iron pump installed. The reporter commented, “The grove presents a fine appearance.” On July 5, the paper informed the readers, the arrangements were completed in anticipation of the July 30 inauguration of the facilities.

With the grounds ready, it was time to get the word out. Again, the Morning Call was ready to inform its readers. The tents would be erected on Thursday, July 28. Good tents, 12 x12 could be rented for \$2.50 for the whole summer. A lumber floor would cost an additional \$.65 and a bunk, \$1.00. This article concluded, “Mizpah Grove is a new camp grove, beautifully and conveniently located. Plenty of the very best water

from an artesian well in the grove. Ample room has been provided for the horses. Good board provided for the term or by the meal.”

July 29, the day before the opening, a final report that all was ready and all were invited. “All this week everything was hustle on the grounds. Tents are being erected and everything necessary for the comfort of the campers is being installed.” The reporter

continued, “Each family will erect its own tent and it is expected that there will be at least 150 individual tents.” “The tents will be erected in a circle and the most desirable spot on the ground has been selected for their pitching. Within the circle will be two large tents, one of which will be known as the preachers’ mess tent and the other the service tent.” “The service tent is 40 x 46 feet and within is installed camp chairs, sufficient in number to accommodate all the campers. The tent will only be used when the weather is unfavorable. All of the services will be held in the open as long as the weather permits and upon a well constructed platform, near the tent the preachers will deliver their sermons.”

No articles appeared on July 30, the opening day of the new camp meeting but the following day gave glowing reports. The headlines read, “First Affair By Mennonite Brethren in Mizpah, Woods Crowded Both Days, Near to City Offers Other Exceptional Inducements – Presiding Elder H. B. Musselman in Charge – 150 Tents Set and Occupied – Helpful Services Yesterday.” Saturday evening’s kick off included a short address by H. B. Musselman followed by an address by W. S. Hottel. Hottel was picked as one of the best preachers to give the inaugural sermon. His text was Acts 1:8 and the sermon was titled, “The Power of the Holy Ghost.” Mizpah Grove was up and running.

The schedule was well planned and would be in place for the first full day.

5:30am – Early Prayer Meeting

7:00am – Breakfast

9:30am – Bible Study

10:00am – Preaching



Mizpah Auditorium 1912 - destroyed by a storm in 1925

12:00noon – Dinner
1:30pm – Sunday School
2:00pm – Preaching
3:00pm – Preaching
5:30pm – Supper
6:30pm – Fellowship Meeting
7:30pm – Preaching

The program for Sunday, August 1, gives an idea of what the campers were hearing.

5:30am – H. B. Musselman – read the rules for campers to follow

9:00am – P. J. Musselman led in prayer, W. J. Fretz gave a Bible study entitled, “Who the Blessed Ones Are”

10:00am – J. C. Roth preached, Colossians 3:1-4, “Being Risen with Christ”

2:00pm – E. N. Cassel, John 17:17, “Sanctification”

3:00pm – W. G. Gehman, Ephesians 5:18, “Being Filled With the Spirit”

6:30pm – C. W. Stine led in prayer

H. K. Kratz – Acts 26:19, “Disobedience”

E. T. Shick – Matthew 7:21-23, “Deception”

W. S. Hottle – gave invitation and altar to close the day

On Tuesday, August 2, the camp meeting welcomed William Gehman, whom the Morning Call identified as the founder of the Mennonite sect. “The campers in Mizpah Grove, East Allentown, greeted the founder of the sect and wer[e] benefitted by his sage teachings,



Mizpah Crowd - probably 1912

delivered in the form of a strong sermon.” “Rev.

Gehman, although in his eighty-fourth year, is still a powerful preacher. He took for his text, Mark 4:24. During the course of his remarks the large audience sat spell-bound and attentively listened to a sermon that was fraught with Bible truths from beginning to end.” It was noted that he preached in German and that he would be present for the rest of the week.

The week progressed with something special almost every day. Thursday morning at 9:00am brought an "Old Folks Service" in which a number of "old folks" were invited to give short messages. On Thursday night, a number of people from Philadelphia were welcomed along with rain showers. "On account of the rain the services were held in the big tabernacle which was filled. The services lasted until a late hour." On Friday morning, the paper reported, "The rain on Thursday night was a great blessing to the campers in settling the dust and cooling the air, which brought many visitors to [M]izpah Grove. Friday morning was another special event. "At 9 a.m. an anointing service was held, a number presented themselves at the altar of prayer, and were anointed for the healing of their bodies."

On Sunday, the week ended on what was a high note. The Allentown Leader wanted their readers to know. "The Mennonite Camp meeting at Mizpah Grove came to a close Sunday evening. The attendance was unusually large and the camp was pronounced the most successful in the history of the denomination." The article on the closing ended with the news of what was yet to come. "Many have ordered tents for the second camp meeting. While the camp closed last



Early Mizpah scene - note policemen

evening and many campers returned to their homes, the Committee on Arrangements and some of the campers will live in the grove until the close of the second. The special policeman appointed by Judge Trexler will remain and take care of the tenters. The second camp meeting will open on August 20 and will continue until August 28."

Saturday, August 20, could probably not come soon enough for some of the campers. The Morning Call reported that all was ready. "Everything is in readiness for the opening of this camp, which in many respects will surpass that of last year. In a semi-circle, on well selected ground is erected 170 tents, wherein the members of this denomination will dwell during the eight days of life in the grove. At least 500 members of the aforementioned charges will be in attendance in conjunction with 20 clergyman."

The account continued, "The grove presents a nifty appearance. Everything is neat and tidy, and nothing that would mar its appearance is noticeable. Throughout the grove, in conspicuous places, is posted a copy of the rules governing the camp, all of which must be strictly adhered to. During the services special policemen will be on duty as a prevention of rowdyism."

On Wednesday, August 26, the Morning Call gave more information about those supporting the needs of the camp. "Mr. Jeremiah Esterly, of Allentown, again has charge of the refreshment stand. Gangewere Bros., the butchers on Walnut Street, again have the contract to supply the campers with meat. Ferry and Schleifer furnish the ice and M. W. Laub the milk. The ministers of the district board themselves, while the invited ministers with their families, get their board in a large tabernacle that has been erected for the purpose, by the committee on arrangements... The artesian well that was drilled by Jacob Straussberger, of Weissport, some weeks ago supplies the campers with the very best water, not only is this good water appreciated by the campers but also by the employe[e]s of the Kaltenbach and Stevens' silk and many of the residents living near "Mizpah Grove."



Early Mizpah Scene

C.H. Brunner gave a summary report in the Gospel Banner (September 1, 1910).

The first Camp-meeting held in our newly purchased "Mizpah Grove" was indeed a blessed one. There were one hundred and fifty-four tents. The weather was ideal and the attendance large throughout. The large tabernacle was well filled every morning at 5:30 for a short season of prayer which was followed by instructive addresses to the campers on the practical, every day life of the faithful child of God.

The Brethren preached the Word with boldness and inspiration; the flood gates of heaven were opened while rivers of salvation, cleansing and healing, flowed and many plunged in and received the desire of their hearts.

The classes represented were greatly benefited and a good impression was made upon the community and the people in general.

In the following edition (September 8, 1910), he reported the second session.

The second camp-meeting held in "Mizpah" Grove, Allentown, Pa., is a thing of the past... In all 167 tents were occupied. The attendance was excellent, the order first class, and the weather fine. A number had come quite a distance from a place where we have no class, especially to be baptized. The brethren preached the truth with great liberty. A great many were at the altar throughout the whole Camp-meeting, for salvation and sanctification. A number were anointed for healing. The early morning services were especially instructive; as many as four hundred being gathered in the large tabernacle before 5:30 in the morning for prayer, to get right with God, and listen to the practical instructions of the Presiding Elder to the members. The offerings were large, only two special offerings being lifted for the expenses.

H. B. Musselman's very brief report to the Annual Conference in October put it all together in what might be called an understatement. "The purchasing and fixing up a camp meeting grove was a heavy taxation on the time and mental and physical strength of the ministry. We held two very successful camp meetings, of 154 and 167 tents, respectively." The whole camp-meeting report to the Conference boiled down to two sentences but it must have been quite a time for these hungry pilgrims.

Waldheim Park
Summer 1909

The summers of 1907 and 1908 saw four camp meetings throughout the denomination. Certainly, the logistics of planning and putting together four camp meetings was exhausting. 1910 saw only three meetings but the Waldheim Park meetings were pointing toward Mizpah. What follows are the newspaper accounts of the first and last day. They give an indication of what was to come.

[The Allentown Morning Call – August 30, 1909, page 5]

Mennonite Camp's Auspicious Opening
Crowds Assemble in Grove at Waldheim Park

Sermon by Rev. L. B. Taylor
Who Has Already Passed Beyond Allotted Age of Three Score and Ten.
Presiding Elder Musselman in Charge – Opening Sermon by Rev. R. Bergstresser

The Mennonite Brethren in Christ campmeeting of the Allentown District, opened at Waldheim on Saturday evening. At 7.45 the bell was run, after singing Rev. E. T.

Shick of Mt. Carmel led in prayer. Presiding Elder H. B. Musselman, of Bethlehem, then delivered a very encouraging address after which he introduced Rev. R. Bergstresser, of Gratersford, as the evening speaker. He took for his subject "Jesus Christ and Him Crucified," from [1] Cor. 2:2. The speaker was attentively listened to by the large concourse of people who had gathered under the spacious auditorium of the camp.

After a pleasant and refreshing rain during the early morning hours, the sun-rise prayer meeting was held in the larger of the tabernacles that have been pitched, where these early service will always be held. These will be in charge of Presiding Elder H. B. Musselman. The first service was already one of the highest type and was very interesting. Very few remained in their tents this could be readily seen by the large attendance. The tabernacle was nicely filled before the bell was rung at 9 a. m. The people gathered together and opened the services with singing after which M. W. Ettinger, of Macungie, led in prayer. The presiding elder then announced that Rev. L. B. Taylor, of Co[o]persburg, would deliver a German address, while Rev. Taylor is already in the seventies, and his voice having somewhat failed, his address was nevertheless greatly enjoyed. The second speaker for the morning was the Rev. E. N. Cassel, pastor of the Allentown charge. Rev. Cassel took for his subject "The Love of Christ Constraining Us," from 1 Cor. 5:14-15. While he is chairman of the committee and has much care upon him, not only during the erection of the camp, but for weeks already, his sermon was nevertheless a very timely sermon one. At 1:30 p. m. Rev. William Gehman, of Vera Cruz, the founder of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church delivered a powerful sermon in the German language from Rom. 10:1-4. The sermon was greatly enjoyed. A number of Rev. Cassel's Church, Allentown, sang a hymn entitled "The Old Account Settled Long Ago." A quartet composed of Rev. C. H. Brunner, of Reading, Rev. R. L. Woodring, of Quakertown, Mrs. Rev. H. B. Musselman, of Bethlehem, and Mrs. Rev. J. C. Roth, of Bethlehem, then sang a hymn entitled "I Want To Go There." After which a quartet of the Bethlehem class sang a hymn "They Crowned the Master's Head With Thorns."

At 3 p. m. Rev. W. G. Gehman, of Allentown, the presiding elder of the Mt. Carmel District, preached a powerful message in the English Language on "Sanctification" from 1 Thess. 5:23. The sermon was delivered in a very able manner. The evening services opened with a song service, Rev. O. S. Hillegass, of Siegfried, led in prayer. The Reading quartet sang two selections, the first was "We Are More Than Conquerors", second, "By and By." The first speaker for the evening was Rev. E. T. Shick of Mt. Carmel, who spoke on "Overcoming" from 1 John 5:4. He was followed by J. C. Roth, of Bethlehem, who delivered a very earnest address and gave the altar call. The first Sunday of the camp can indeed be termed a successful day, in every respect. The attendance throughout was large especially in the evening. Rev. J. C. Roth, of Bethlehem, and Rev. J. F. Barrall, of Coopersburg, had no services in their churches for

the afternoon and evening and brought at least a few hundred of their people to the camp, who added much to the interest of the camp.

[The Allentown Morning Call, September 6, 1909, page 5]

Mennonite Camp at Waldheim Ends
The Worshippers Will Break Camp Today
Big Crowds Were There

To Hear Yesterday's Services – One of the Most Successful Camps Yet Held by
Mennonites in This Section. Spirited Services Marked Close of Worship in the Grove

With spirited service the Mennonite camp meeting at Waldheim last evening, and to-day the tented city will disappear and the worshippers return to their respective homes after having spent a pleasant and profitable season.

Friday Evening

Services opened with singing after which Rev. W. W. Zimmerman, of Zionsville, led prayer. "Gospel Herald" G. F. Yost, of Shamokin, then gave a short address on "Following God" from Matt. 4:22. He was followed by Rev. C. H. Brunner, of Reading, who preached a powerful sermon on, "Love Not the World" from John 2:15. Rev. Brunner also gave the altar call. Presiding Elder H. B. Musselman will preach on Sunday morning, at 9:45. The camp will close in the evening.

Saturday Morning

The sunrise prayer-meeting was a season of refreshing, the service was a glorious one, and was again largely attended by the campers. The 9 o'clock service was opened by singing. Rev. F. M. Falk [Hottel], of Fleetwood, led in prayer, after which Rev. J. G. Shireman of Philadelphia, spoke on the subject "Our Standing in Christ," from 1 John 4:17. An interesting and enthusiastic praise and testimony service then followed in which both old and young took an active part. The children's service at 1:30 was in charge of "Gospel Herald" G. F. Yost of Shamokin. "Gospel Herald" J. T. Anderson, Hackettstown, N. Y. , delivered an address to the children, and also sang a solo. At 2 p. m. Rev. J. C. Roth, of Bethlehem, spoke on "The Christian's Three-fold Relationship," basing his remarks on John 15. He was followed by Rev. C. W. Stine, of Lehighton, who spoke on "The Cross of Christ," from Gal. 6:4. The mixed quartet sang a selection entitled "Your Father Knoweth," which the Allentown Quartet also followed with a selection.

Saturday Evening

Services opened at 6:30 with congregational singing after which the mixed quartet sang a selection entitled "Tis Now in Part." The first speaker for the evening was Rev. W. S. Hotkel [Hottel] of Spring City. He preached on "The Gift of the Holy Spirit," from Acts 2:37-39. The Reading Quartet then sang a selection entitled "We Are More Than Conquerors." Rev. J. Shireman, of Philadelphia, followed with a brief address and gave the altar call.

Sunday Morning

Rev. E. Cassel, of Allentown, had charge of the 9 o'clock service, the same opened with singing after which Rev. C. H. Brunner, of Reading, led in prayer. The Allentown Quartet then sang a German selection. Rev. Cassel then announced that Presiding Elder H. B. Musselman would be the speaker for the morning. The presiding elder took for his theme "Submission," basing his remarks on Jam. 5:17. In the course of his remarks he said the sin of the age is unbelief, first not believe God, and second not submit to God. Our first parents sinned because they would not submit to God. Cain's offering was rejected because he submitted not to God's order and conditions. No church creed, ceremony or doing good works will save man, he must submit to God, be born again, and accept the "Salvation of Jesus Christ." All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. If men are born by the Word of God they will obey God, and receive His Word. After we are born by the Word we will then be sanctified by the Word. Sanctify them through the truth, Thy Word is truth. The command is to submit to God, unsubmitiveness keeps us away from God. The time will come when men will submit to God. The sermon was "Bible" from beginning to end, and was greatly enjoyed.

Sunday Afternoon

Services opened with congregational singing. F. E. Frey, of Bethlehem, led in prayer. The male quartet of Reading, sang a selection entitled, "We are Homeward Bound." The [Female] Quartet, of Allentown, then sang "Seeking the Lost." The first speaker for the afternoon was Rev. J. C. Roth Bethlehem, who preached on Isa. 28:16. The mixed quartet then sang "Jesus Is Coming Again," after which Rev. W. S. Hottel of Spring [City] preached on Rev. 3:20. The male quartet of Bethlehem, sang "Jesus Pilot Me Home."

Sunday Evening

Services opened at 6:30 with congregational singing. A number of the Bethlehem class sang few selections, one of which was the "Glory" song. The speaker for the evening was Rev. C. H. Brunner, of Reading. He took for his subject the "Lord's Coming." His message was the final one at the camp, which was one of the most successful yet held by the Mennonites. The attendance yesterday and last evening was

very large. The campers will to-day return to their homes and not soon forget the camp at Waldheim. The Park Association can well feel proud of such an ideal place for camp meeting, near such a large city as Allentown.

The Gospel Banner report for the Waldheim meetings was written by C. H. Brunner. It was not as detailed but the enthusiasm shows.

[Gospel Banner – September 23, 1909 pg 13]

Allentown, Pa. (Waldheim Camp-meeting.)

The third Camp-meeting of the Pennsylvania Conference for this season just closed. It was held in Waldheim Park near Allentown (Aug.28th to Sept. 5th). The park belongs to the United Evangelical church. The auditorium is one of the most beautiful in the state. The weather was delightful, just enough rain to settle the dust.

There were one hundred and fifty-three tents on the ground, all of which were occupied. The attendance was excellent throughout, thousands hearing the Gospel of full salvation, both in sermon and in song, who perhaps hear it at no other place. The brethren had glorious liberty in presenting the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. The 5:30 A. M. addresses on practical life and holiness by our esteemed Presiding Elder were especially helpful and well attended.

Nearly all the ministers of the Conference were present. Quite a number were saved, others sanctified, while others were anointed and healed. A number followed the Lord in baptism. The expenses which were very large were very easily met.

The Father was honored, the Lord Jesus was lifted up, the Holy Ghost had the right of way, the ministry united and the wise and energetic management of our Presiding Elder all helped together to make this one of the best, if not the best, Camp-meeting we ever held.

C.H. Brunner, Sec'y.

A camp meeting was held in 1909 in Hellertown. I could find no newspaper coverage. A report was sent to the Gospel Banner by H. B. Musselman.

[Gospel Banner – August 12, 1909 pg 14]

Hellertown Camp-Meeting

The Camp Meeting at this place was largely attended by many thousands of people. We never had a better attendance of people at this place. Large crowds came from far and near, and listened eagerly to the Word spoken in demonstration of the Spirit and power. The brethren who spoke the Word had grand liberty. The people of God were edified; others were gloriously converted and baptized, going their way

rejoicing. Sister Emma Lambert, of the Indiana Conference, was present for a few days, and also gave us a grand message.

There was unity in the ranks of God's people and the word of the Lord had free course. We feel assured that eternity alone will reveal the results and benefits of this Camp-meeting.



Hellertown Camp Meeting - 1909

Unto Him who had led and who doth still lead, we wish to ascribe all the praise and all the glory, even now and evermore.

H.B. Musselman, P. E.

Shamokin Camp Meeting

A camp meeting was held in Shamokin in 1909. No report was sent to the Gospel Banner and I could find no newspaper account. W. G. Gehman who would organize the meetings there in the future did give an announcement of the meetings.

[Gospel Banner – June 17, 1909 pg 14]

The first Camp Meeting of the Pennsylvania Conference, (Mt. Carmel District) for 1909 will be held in Edelman's grove at 22nd and Butler Streets, Easton, Pa., July 3-11. Twelve Acres of large oak trees furnishing elegant shade help to make this an ideal place for God's people for eight days. The Easton and Bethlehem trolley lines run along two sides of the grove and the Easton and South Bethlehem lines within a three minutes' walk from the grove. The D. L. & W., the Pennsylvania, the C. R. of N. J. and the Lehigh Valley railroads all run into Easton.

The ministers of our entire Conference, as well as the Gospel Heralds, will be present.

Order your tents no later than June 20th. Lodging will be free; but pilgrims will please bring blankets along. Lunch to be had on the ground. All lovers of Camp Meeting will earnestly beseech God for great victories throughout this "Feast of Tabernacles."

W. G. Gehman, P. E.

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