

The National Methodist Camp Meeting at Manheim in 1868

By GEORGE L. HEIGES

The number of camp meetings which have been conducted in Lancaster County would likely run into the thousands. Little has been written about these assemblies which have been prominent features of the summer season for one hundred and forty years, although certainly the history of the famous camp grounds of Lancaster County and the meetings which were held in them would prove highly interesting and add much to the religious data of our county. At this time, we want to bring to your notice all available information about only one camp meeting in Lancaster County, but one which, it seems to us, must have been the most outstanding of such meetings in this region. It was the National Methodist Camp Meeting held at Manheim in 1868.

Religious camp meetings in the United States had their beginning in Kentucky where the first camp meeting is said to have been held by Presbyterians, along the Red River in 1799. Later, the Presbyterian Church looked with disfavor on these outdoor religious gatherings, while the Methodist Church had taken up the idea with such enthusiasm that summer camp meetings were soon accepted as a prominent feature of American Methodism.

Probably the first camp meeting in Lancaster County was held in 1810 at Martin Boehm's farm, south of Willow Street. In the *Lancaster Journal* of July 28 of that year appears this notice:

"A Camp Meeting
Will be held on Thursday, the 9th of
August next, on Martin Boehm's place,
and will continue several days. Strange
preachers will attend this solemnity."

Following this, other camp meetings were held at various points in the county during the next thirty-seven years, but then none were held under exclusive Methodist auspices for a period of twenty years. The explanation for their discontinuance is that the prevailing sentiment among Methodists was that such occasions had become little more than picnics. Then in 1867 there was a revival of the camp meeting spirit among Methodists in Lancaster, Harrisburg, Lebanon and Columbia with the result that a district meeting of interested people from these towns was held under the direction of the Rev. C. I. Thompson, who was then pastor of the Duke Street Methodist Church in Lancaster, and who had himself conducted successful camp meetings. A decision was reached to once again hold a Methodist camp meeting, and the place selected was Erb's Woods, three-quarters of a mile north of the town of Manheim (opposite Hernley's Mennonite Meeting House, on present Route 72).

A brief report of the Manheim Camp Meeting of 1867 is found in a book entitled, "A Modern Pentecost," and is as follows: A fine grove near the old town of Manheim was, with some difficulty secured and the meeting commenced August 8, 1867. The working force at Manheim was inspired with new zeal; and converting and sanctifying grace came upon the people. Father [Henry] Boehm in his 93d year, preached one of the sermons, addressing the grandchildren of his own early associates in the vicinity. Other Methodist ministers who preached on the Manheim Camp Grounds were [according to the *Methodist Home Journal*, August 17, 1873]: "Messrs. Isett, Kessler, J. F. Meredith, Pugh, J. P. Miller, Hurlock, O'Neill, S. H. C. Smith, T. B. Miller, G. Cummins, Pancoast, Rakestraw, Lindamuth, W. L. Gray, P. Edler, J. W. Jackson, Freund, Wiggins, Cookman, J. A. Wood, J. F. Chaplain, C. I. Thompson, and Wm. Major. The order was good, although a few refractory cases had to be dealt with in a manner admonitory to others. Rowdiness was met, and on its own chosen field, completely conquered."

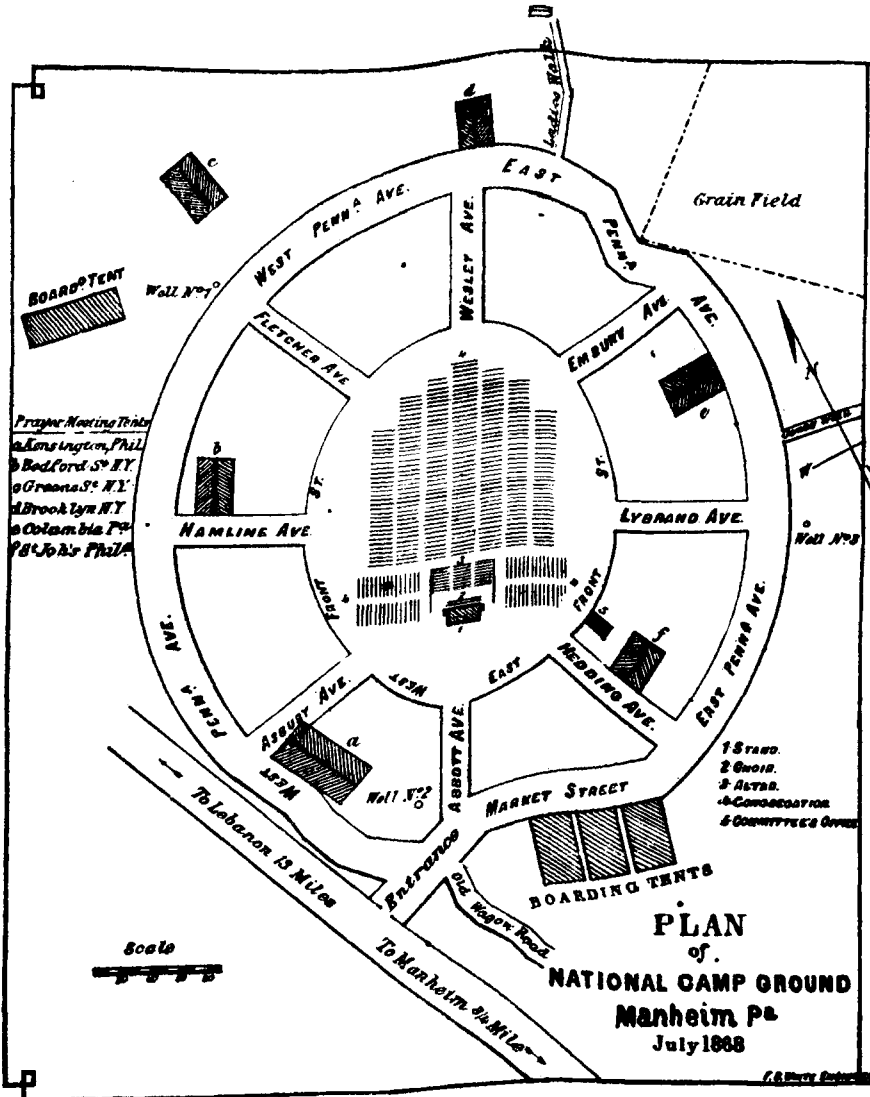
The next year, 1868, the Manheim site was again selected as the most suitable and central place to be found for a camp meeting. In this year, too, the National Methodist Camp Meeting Association, which had only been organized the year before, selected Manheim as the place for the Second National Camp Meeting. Thus at once it was realized that the meeting of 1868 was going to have more than local interest and significance. The presiding elder, the Rev. W. L. Gray gave personal co-operation to the movement and his preachers threw their full influence into the work, all of which largely contributed to the eventual success of the meeting.

We know of no better way of presenting the entire picture of the National Camp Meeting at Manheim than by the daily reports of the proceedings as found in the *Lancaster Intelligencer*:

July 13, 1868

THE GREAT CAMP MEETING AT MANHEIM — Yesterday the ground on which the great Camp Meeting at Manheim is to be held was dedicated to its several uses by appropriate exercises. . . . There were possibly 400 tents in position. . . . Four or five large frame sheds have been erected to be used as boarding houses and 3 or 4 structures under which visitors can partake of lunch. A couple of tents to be used as barber shops have been pitched, three wells have been dug, and indeed no convenience that could be desired has been neglected.

The grove comprises oak, hickory and chestnut trees, and is one of the most beautiful that could be selected. The encampment is laid out in the form of an oval, the tents fronting on streets and avenues, the principal of the former being **Front and Market**, and of the latter: **Wesley, Asbury, Hedding, Abbott, Embury, Lybrand, Hamline**. In the center is located the stand and altar, and seats sufficient to accommodate 3000 persons. The entire space devoted to religious services is about 284' x 224'. Every facility will be provided for transportation, vehicles having been taken to Manheim from all surrounding towns. At the camp an efficient force will be stationed, having at its head Wm. Y. Lyon of Reading who understands how to keep good order in a crowd.



PLAN OF THE CAMP GROUNDS

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July 14, 1868

The Harrisburg papers state that a large number of citizens of that city have already left, and many more will leave to-day for the great camp meeting at Manheim, which probably will be the largest religious convocation ever witnessed in the state.

July 16, 1868

FROM THE CAMP GROUNDS — Since the mention of the apparent copious supply of water in the wells on the Manheim Camp Grounds, a rumor has just reached us from a most reliable source that the supply of water has totally failed. A more disastrous thing could not occur and we can only hope that it is not as bad as represented.

July 17, 1868

ABANDONED — The project of publishing a "Camp Meeting Daily" newspaper at Manheim during the continuance of the National Camp Meeting at that place has been abandoned.¹

July 18, 1868

The great National Camp Meeting at Manheim is now in full progress. It is one of the largest religious gatherings of its kind ever seen in this country. The number of tents on the ground is about 500. The occupants have come from far and near to participate in the religious exercises. Those from different sections are grouped together and placards indicate where they are from. Here is a circle of tents from Illinois, there a large number from New York, while Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Jersey, Wilkesbarre, Columbia, Lancaster, Harrisburg, Altoona and various other places are represented. The ground is admirably adapted for the purpose, there being a gradual rise from the preaching stand to the upper end of the large circle in which seats are arranged capable of seating several thousand hearers.

The religious exercises are said to have been very interesting from the commencement, and all with whom we have conversed say that a more than ordinary solemnity and devotion of feeling prevails.

The best of order has prevailed, and not an instance of indecorous behaviour has come under the notice of the managers. The special feature of this meeting is that it is directed to the explanation and enforcement of the Methodist doctrine of entire Sanctification from Sin and over the pulpit is inscribed in large letters "Holiness in the Lord." The preaching and other exercises have had a special reference to this peculiar subject. . . . There are nearly 200 ministers in attendance, some of the most distinguished preachers in the M. E. Church being present. Among the notables are Bishop Simpson, the Rev. Alfred Cookman, Father Boehm, the oldest Methodist minister living, and others.

¹ This paper was planned by John M. Ensminger, Editor of the *Manheim Sentinel*, and was to be called "Daily Sentinel & Camp Meeting Record." It was to be a twenty-column paper and everything was in readiness to issue the first copy when Mr. Ensminger and the Camp Meeting management had a disagreement.

July 20, 1868

We understand that the attendance at the Camp Meeting near Manheim on yesterday was very large. Reliable parties estimate that not less than 20,000 persons were on the Camp Grounds. Fifty-four car loads of passengers left this city during yesterday for Manheim. The train which left at 8 A. M. contained 17 passenger cars, which connected at the Junction with a train from Columbia consisting of 32 passenger cars. The number of persons conveyed by these two trains could not have been less than 8,000. Fourteen cars left Harrisburg for Landisville. The number of persons present from Reading is estimated at 4,000. The train from Reading consisted of 25 crowded passenger cars.

Bishop Simpson preached in the morning from the text, "And now are ye the sons of God." The sermon is said to have been a very able effort, both eloquent and philosophical in character. Bishop Simpson preached to not less than ten thousand auditors.

The Rev. Alfred Cookman preached in the evening. Mr. Cookman is said to have a superior voice which was distinctly heard at a considerable distance from the pulpit. Bishop Simpson's voice is stated to have been not so strong, although he could also be heard at quite a distance.

July 22, 1868

It is estimated that 225 ministers were in attendance at Manheim Camp Meeting on Sunday.

The Council of Manheim has created considerable dissatisfaction by passing an ordinance requiring all persons not residents to pay a special license for running hacks, coaches, etc., from the depot through the town to the Camp Grounds.

July 31, 1868

FROM MANHEIM — On Friday morning last, while the immense number of persons returning from the Camp Meeting were congregated at the railroad station, our neighbor Wenger had his pocket picked of \$24 and the Rev. Mr. Farrell had his picked of \$75. Several other persons were relieved of their pocket books.

Having thus seen the newspaper account of the Camp Meeting, let us pass to a brief account as preserved in the diary of the late B. H. Hershey, who in 1868 was a young man, living on a farm near Manheim:

Tuesday, July 14, 1868 — The National M. E. Camp Meeting commenced near Manheim.

Thursday, July 16, 1868 — I was at Camp Meeting in the evening.

Saturday, July 18, 1868 — Our hands didn't work on account of Camp Meeting. We ourselves finished with wheat sheaves. Sister and I started for Camp Meeting after supper. There were a good many folks there. The road is awful dusty from Manheim out.

Sunday, July 19, 1868 — I started for Camp Meeting in the morning, was there till noon. Toward evening, started again for camp meeting, was there all evening. There was an awful crowd there all day, 20 thousand at noon. Bishop Simpson preached in the forenoon. It was not pleasant there, very warm and awful dusty.

Thursday, July 23, 1868 — I started for Camp Meeting after supper. About the last will break up to-morrow.

Mr. Hershey's sister, who attended a session of the camp meeting with him, is now Mrs. Sue Nissley, of 514 West James Street, Lancaster, Pa. Seventy-five years after the event, Mrs. Nissley's most vivid recollection is that the roads and camp grounds were thick with dust, and also that trains arrived at the Manheim station with flat cars filled with passengers.

Through the years, I spoke with many people concerning this historic camp meeting, but none remembered anything except the extremely dusty roads and the just as dusty camp grounds. Mr. Daniel Hamaker, who owned the grove in 1868, told me that because of the very dusty roads, those coming to the meeting took to the fields — his own and his neighbors — regardless of unharvested crops, and soon had worn dusty trails through the fields. Mr. Allen Miller related to me what happened to one horse on the dust-covered road from Manheim to the grove. His grandfather, John Fritz, ran a bus to the grounds during those memorable ten days. The dust was so thick (iver ein foos deaf, according to Mr. Miller) that one of his horses suffocated, dying on the road before it could be removed. In the issue of the *Manheim Sentinel* that appeared during the progress of the camp meeting, we read the lament of a contributor that "the camp meeting has accomplished one great fact: filled every ones house with dust. As the meeting draws its weary length to a close, people begin to breathe freer and look forward to less exciting times."

In the year 1868, as now, the official organ of the Methodist Church was the *Christian Advocate*, published in New York City and perhaps the most accurate report of the Manheim Camp Meeting is to be found in the *Advocate* of July 30, 1868:

"THE NATIONAL CAMP MEETING" — The campmeeting at Manheim, Pa., closed on Friday, July 24, having been held for ten consecutive days. Rev. Wm. L. Gray of the Phila. Conference presided, assisted by an efficient committee. The grove was not one of the best, as the trees were too much scattered and were of too great a height to afford protection by their foliage. The grounds, too, were not well supplied with water, and on this account, great inconvenience was suffered almost from the beginning of the meeting. There were about 600 tents on the grounds, some being exceeding ample in their accomodations. The attendance was correspondingly large and on the Sabbath Day immense. On that day, it is reported, 20,000 to 25,000 people were present. The sermons throughout the whole meeting were characterized with deep spirituality and all the sermons were most practical, urging the people to a present experience of the great blessing of perfect love. The sermon of the meeting was preached on Sunday morning by Bishop Simpson who in its delivery exceeded himself. Rarely in the history of the modern church has an audience been more powerfully affected in listening to the ministry of the word. . . . As to results we learn that very many (we have heard no estimate of the number) during the progress of the meeting were led into a blessed realization of a holy heart. The power of God rested upon the people.

"PERSONAL" — The venerable Henry Boehm was one of the deeply interested attendants at the recent National Camp Meeting at Manheim. In the closing sacramental service he officiated in

servicing the clergy present with the elements. At the love feast held in the morning he gave some very interesting reminiscences of former times.

In the next issue of the *Advocate*, further information concerning Manheim appeared:

“RESULTS at MANHEIM” — In addition to the item given last week concerning the meeting at Manheim, Pa., we are furnished by the courtesy of Rev. I. S. Inskip with the following. There were about three hundred and fifty preachers present during the progress of the service. All came to be personally benefited, and to do good — and the blessing of God seemed to rest upon them in large measure. . . . The services constantly improved in interest to the very close and on the last evening there were many conversions. . . . Near the close of the meeting suggestions were made that a purse of \$500 be contributed for the purpose of establishing a mission service at Manheim by the M. E. Church. The people generously gave the sum asked for and it is understood the presiding elder, Rev. W. L. Gray, will provide a minister for the work.

Articles, long and short, continued to appear in the *Advocate* for several months, all of them attesting to the great spiritual fervor exhibited at the Manheim Camp Meeting.

These word pictures of the camp meeting taken from the secular and the church press tell us nothing about the personalities of the men who preached at Manheim during those July days in '68. The three names which occur frequently in the accounts which you have heard are Bishop Simpson, Father Boehm, and Rev. Cookman, and it is now my purpose to tell something about these men.

BISHOP MATTHEW SIMPSON who delivered the principal sermon at the big camp meeting was more than a famous Methodist preacher.² He was

² Bishop Simpson had convictions concerning traveling on Sunday, and was forced to tarry in Lancaster for a day in 1853. This letter was written to his wife on that day:

“Lancaster, May 1, 1853

“A bright and beautiful day is this, but my mind anxiously reverts to Pittsburg and inquires for your health. After spending the day in Hollidaysburgh and surveying the various churches, etc., I returned to the Mountain House and took the train. At Lancaster I stopped, as it was after midnight, and I could not reach Philadelphia until six or seven in the morning. Brother and wife kept on. How ministers can reconcile Sabbath traveling with a sense of duty I cannot tell.

I preached to-day for Mr. Bishop who is the stationed minister. I introduced myself to him, telling him that my name was Simpson, and that I was from Pittsburg. Finding that I was a minister, he asked me to preach, and introduced me to the congregation as Brother Simpson from Pittsburg. Going into the pulpit, he asked me if I belonged to the Pittsburg Conference. I told him not now; that I had belonged to it. After I had preached, he took my hand and apologized; said he had no thought of my being bishop till I was preaching, and told the congregation that they had been listening to Bishop Simpson, etc. Whether they thought any more of the sermon for the name I cannot tell. Mr. Bishop, notwithstanding this little blunder, is a very fine man, an excellent preacher, and is greatly beloved.”

a national character for almost half a century. Born in Cadiz, Ohio, in 1811, he was an intimate of Edward M. Stanton (Secretary of War in Lincoln's Cabinet) and John A. Bingham (prosecutor of Lincoln's murderers), both of whom were also natives of Cadiz. Moreover, while living in Evanston, Illinois, he had gained the friendship of Abraham Lincoln, and even before Lincoln went to Washington as president the two men had conferences in Lincoln's Springfield home. In Washington, Bishop Simpson was often at the White House. After Lincoln's first call for volunteers, Simpson told the President and assembled cabinet members that 75,000 men were but the beginning of the number needed and that the struggle would be long and severe. Secretary Seward seemed to doubt that a minister was a competent judge in such matters, whereupon Judge Bates said that few men knew so much of the temper of the people as Bishop Simpson. When Stanton came into Lincoln's cabinet, the Bishop's relations with the President became even more intimate, and it has been written (by General Fisk) that the Bishop was used by Mr. Lincoln to modify the War Secretary's views and to gain the points which he wished to reach.

Bishop Simpson was also welcome in Lincoln's family circle, and when the President died by an assassin's bullet in 1865, the Bishop was at once called to Washington to be with the bereaved family, and console them as best he could. The morning of April 19 came and the first part of the Lincoln funeral rites took place in the East Room of the White House. Carl Sandburg has written of that moving scene, "As 600 dignitaries were grouped around the dead President's body, Bishop Simpson of the Methodist Episcopal Church offered prayer 'that smitten hearts might endure, might not be called upon for further sacrifices, that the widow and children might be comforted. Around the remains of our beloved President may we covenant together by every possible means to give ourselves to our country's service until every vestige of this rebellion shall have been wiped out, and until slavery, its cause shall be forever eradicated'."

Bishop Simpson was one who went with the funeral cortege on the long tedious journey to Springfield, Illinois, "There on May 4th the Lincoln funeral procession moved with its hearse from the State Capitol to Oak Ridge Cemetery, where on green banks and hillsides flowing away from the burial vault, the crowded listeners and watchers heard prayers and hymns and heard Bishop Matthew Simpson in a rounded moving oration speak the last words over the body of his late lamented friend, Abraham Lincoln." (Sandburg).

Strangely enough, Bishop Simpson figured again in the events growing out of the death of another President at the hands of an assassin. It was in 1881 and the Bishop was attending a Methodist Conference in London, England. President Garfield was shot, and when the news eventually came of his death, the Americans in London at once arranged a memorial meeting for Exeter Hall and asked Bishop Simpson to deliver the memorial address. James Russell Lowell, then United States Minister to Great Britain, presided at the meeting.

When Bishop Simpson preached at Manheim, he was fifty-seven years of age, and at the height of his power as an orator and preacher. The *Manheim*

Sentinel editor wrote of his effort: "He discussed his propositions most eloquently and logically, and well sustained his reputation as being one of the best pulpit orators of the country. The immense congregation was spellbound by his profound thoughts and thrilling flashes of eloquence."

Bishop Simpson lived until the year 1884.

HENRY BOEHM, lovingly known as Father Boehm, was in his ninety-fourth year when he preached at the Manheim meeting in '68. He was the son of Martin Boehm, and was born in Lancaster County on June 8, 1775. He united with the Methodist Church in 1798 and was licensed to preach in 1800. He became the traveling companion of Bishop Asbury in 1808 and continued with him for five years, and at Asbury's request he translated the Methodist Discipline into German. While Boehm was one of the earliest German preachers of the Methodist Church, he preached fluently in English also. For seventy-five years he was a familiar figure at assemblies of Methodists in Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey, passing his last years in this state as a member of the Newark Conference. On the 8th of June, 1875, his centennial anniversary was celebrated in Trinity Church, Jersey City. He continued to preach until two months before his death, which occurred on December 29, 1875.

ALFRED COOKMAN was born at Columbia, Lancaster County, in 1828, and died in Newark, New Jersey, in 1871. He was licensed to preach at the age of eighteen, and developed into a preacher of great power, serving congregations in Pittsburgh, Wilmington, Newark and New York.

This paper would not be complete without a sequel. No more camp meetings were held in the Hamaker grove at Manheim after 1868, as Mr. Hamaker was done with a crowd of 20,000 people in one day despoiling his crops. In 1869 the encampment was moved to Mount Lebanon in Lebanon County, and sometime during the encampment there a decision was made to select a permanent camp ground. A grove was found at Landisville in Lancaster County, which in the judgment of those who selected it, could not be surpassed for accessibility and all the prerequisites necessary for a first-class camp ground.

The first meetings were held at Landisville in 1870, and were followed by annual district meetings in 1871 and 1872. By this time the Landisville Grounds had been improved to such an extent that a proposition was submitted to the National Camp Meeting Association that "The National Camp Meeting for 1873 could not find a better place than Landisville." It was pointed out that "the prestige and holy memories of Manheim have not paled in contrast with the many great meetings held since 1868 and thousands would experience a thrill of pleasurable anticipation, if it should please the National Association to appoint another Manheim meeting, only in a better grove, and where every preparation is already made for such a gathering of the Lord's people."

The National Camp Meeting at Landisville in 1873 was preceded by a similar meeting at Cedar Rapids, Mich., and followed by others at Moundsville, W. Va., and Knoxville, Tenn., as now a number of national meetings were being held each summer. Rev. Inskip gave the opening address at Landisville on July 23, 1873, and this is what he said, "Manheim was great, but Landisville must be greater. Nothing inspires me with success here, except faith in God. Do not permit yourselves to be deceived; the devil does not intend to let us have success here any more than at Manheim. How well we remember the conditions that surrounded us there. The air itself seemed to be hot, as if intended to parch and destroy our power of utterance. You remember how it continued until, in the midst of prayer, when a few of us had met in the association's business tent, God sent deliverance (rain). We gained the fight on our knees."

So, forgetting the dust and the lack of water and the many inadequacies of the Camp, there can be no doubt that the meetings there were great and a rich spiritual experience for all who attended, if, after five years, it could still cast an aura over the opening session of the Landisville Meeting. In this sequel to the history of the Manheim Meeting, we have the beginning of the Landisville Camp, which now has a history of seventy-three years of successful summer assemblies. Our story is finished, and it remains for someone else to take up the story at this point and give us a history of the Landisville Camp Meetings.