

Old Time Religion

There is a cave a little north and west of downtown Waynesville on Swedeborg Road. One of its local names is Campground Cave. We have wondered for several years how that it came to be called that. We had a suspicion and that idea was born out when we read a paragraph, written almost as an aside, in a history of the Waynesville Methodist Church. Theodore H. Wolff, pastor of the church, wrote in 1964:

It may be of interest to some to know that in the late 1800s that each year the Methodists would hold a big camp meeting in what was then called the campground hollow, that is near what is known as the Johnson cave North and West of the Bell Addition. These meetings would last some two or three weeks and people would come for miles to attend and would bring their camping supplies and camp on the ground until the meeting was over and the old time Methodist shouting would take place by young and old alike.

This led us to look a little further into the early camp meeting movement and its derivatives.

Camp Meetings, Brush Arbors, and Protracted Meetings

There are a great many references in the local newspapers to "protracted meetings" being conducted by the various community churches. Local correspondents chronicled the array of preachers and the number of conversions or additions to the church. The majority seemed to occur from July through September.

The protracted meeting had its origin in the early settlement days in the Ozarks. In the remote and sparsely settled hills, there were few church buildings for worship and scant opportunities for the hill people to interact socially or enjoy entertainments. The camp meeting fulfilled all three of these needs. The "Great Revival of the West" was a carryover of the colonial "Great Awakening" that began in 1797 and the religious fervor swept westward. The early camp meetings were characterized by fire and brimstone preaching and resultant fervor on the part of the penitent. Violent shaking and jerking of the body often seized the bodies of the spiritually awakened. Love feasts were also often a feature. These were the relating of personal experiences or testi-



Campground Cave, privately owned, was the site for 19th century camp meetings in Pulaski County. Later, it was used as the community picnic grounds. Photo by Terry Primas.

fy. For some, the meeting and testifying was necessary to get them back on a righteous track after the backsliding since the previous meeting the year before - and they would probably need the rejuvenation again next year.

The antebellum meetings drew participants from a 35-50 mile radius. Families arrived in wagons, provisioned for a stay of more than a few days. Small tents were erected and the meeting place took on the look of a bivouac area. A suitable site afforded level ground and water was a necessity. Such was the site, a quarter mile north of Waynesville on Swedeborg road, known today as Campground Cave. Local resident Maxine Farnham remembers it as the town picnic grounds into the 1930s. It also seems to be the location

for the revived 4th of July picnic in 1906 that was so heavily promoted by the Waynesville town fathers. [See 1906 News.]

Many churches could not support a full time minister and were visited periodically by circuit riding preachers. The Methodists held quarterly meetings when the sacraments were administered and great effort was expended in enlarging the membership and saving souls. If the crowd that assembled could not be accommodated by the school/church, the meeting moved outside.

These meetings grew in popularity for several reasons. Women, who generally gave more weight and thought to religious matters than the hill farmer, saw these gatherings as religious education for their younger children. Often, there would be more

than one preacher to minister to the crowd, exhorting in succession over a period of days, even weeks. Young people saw the meetings as a chance to interact with others their own age and scout the marital market. Some saw it as a chance to sample other moonshiners' products. And it broke the monotony and drudgery of farm life.

The camp meeting, particularly the early and mid 19th century ones, brought religion to the sparsely settled hinterlands. The Methodists, evangelical in nature, realized the converting possibilities of the meetings and institutionalized the approach. Not surprisingly, they drafted many guidelines and methods for holding such gatherings. As a result, the Methodists were the fastest growing denomination in the hills.

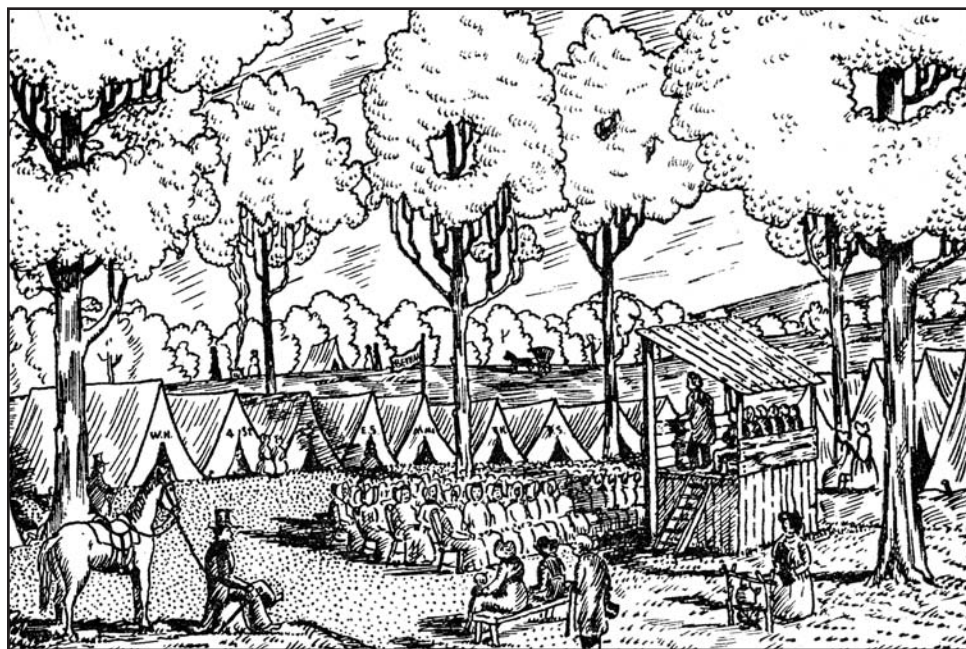
Camp meeting historians assert that these large gatherings provided a democratizing experience. Sometimes there were blacks present, caught up in the religious fervor and allowed to participate. The meetings taught respect for rules and conduct in an informal city environment that the unruly hillfolk often lacked. Women enjoyed "unprecedented indulgences."

Early on, the meetings were also interdenominational. Presbyterians, Methodists, and sometimes Baptists worked the crowds together. They might separate for special services and sacraments but the collegial effort served both causes.

Back East, the camp meeting evolved from the mobile revival, which went to the people, to sites with permanent buildings, which served more as a retreat into the countryside for city dwellers.

As the relatively rich bottomlands were turned into farms and some of the ridge land taken for stock raising, neighborhoods started taking shape. With much of the land clearing accomplished and farms established, settlement attention turned to establishing schools. These schools also served as early churches on Sunday for the neighboring families.

The early founding of a church in Pulaski County occurred near Waynesville in 1834. The settlers had apparently been meeting in the home of Wilson M. Tilley and decided to form a church. Mr. Tilley was sent in search of a preacher. Tilley, being a Presbyterian, looked for a church man of like faith. After riding 150 miles in his search, the preachers willing to come were Methodists. He



Camp meeting scene illustration by William A. Knox on the cover of the *Missouri Historical Review*, April 1943, State Historical Society of Missouri

brought back Jacob Herrin.

This early group included twelve members of the Tilley, Wallace, More, Christeson, Ballard, and Smith families. Meetings continued in the farm home until 1868 when the congregation began holding services in the Mt. Gibson school house. In 1875 the church moved to Waynesville and became the Waynesville Methodist Church.

After the Civil War, the extremes of the camp meeting mellowed but the chance to socialize, find some entertainment in the speaking and music, and, of course, to satisfy the spiritual needs kept the gatherings alive. The desire to shield the audience from the summer sun and light rain (although not a summer cloudburst) led to the erection of temporary structures of vertical posts and hori-

zontal poles covered by pine and cedar boughs. These brush arbor meetings often served a smaller geographic area but as many people as the camp meetings from which it evolved. This tradition lasted well into the twentieth century in some local places.

The legacy today of the early camp meetings, protracted meetings, and brush arbors are the revival, some-

times a traveling one held in a tent, and the church camp. The Macedonia Baptist Church, north of Rolla, has in the recent past had brush arbor services. Most recently, the Gasconade Baptist Church built a brush arbor for their 101st anniversary, as seen on the cover.



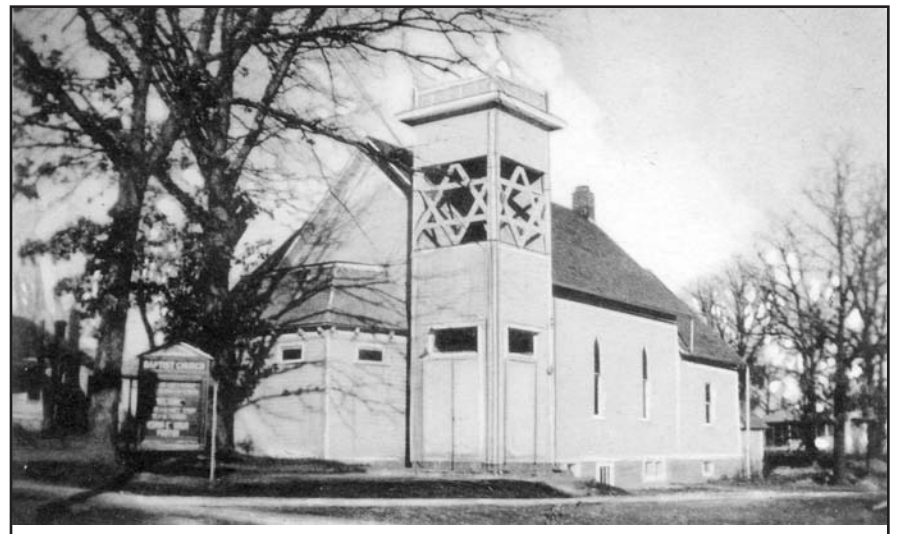
River baptisms were common in the country, as in this 1920s photo by Vance Randolph. Courtesy of College of the Ozarks.



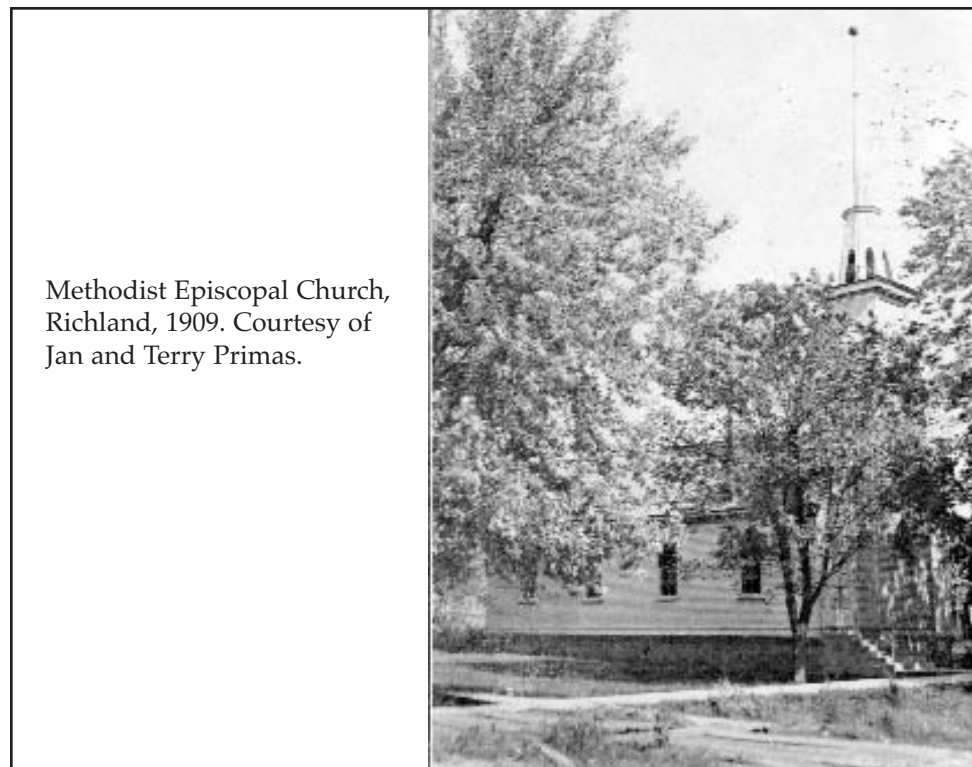
Occasionally, the tradition is repeated with this Gasconade River baptism in September of 2005 by member of Gasconade Baptist. Courtesy of Holly Fuller.



Brush arbor, 1961, at Highways M and 63, Edgar Springs. The sign reads "Revival Tonight." Courtesy of Robert L. Elgin Collection, Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Rolla.



First Baptist Church, Dixon. Courtesy Jan and Terry Primas.



Methodist Episcopal Church, Richland, 1909. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.



The third meeting place of the Waynesville Methodist congregation, now the Korean Baptist Church. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.



We found three images in our postcard files of the Richland Christian Church. Upper left is the earliest, mailed in 1911. Lower left, no date. Upper right is dated 1980. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

For Further Reading

Brown Kenneth O., Ph. D. *Inskip, McDonald, Fowler: "Wholly and Forever Thine"*. Shoals, IN: Country Pines Printing, 1999.

Ferguson, Charles W. *Organizing to Beat the Devil - Methodists and the Making of America..* Garden City , New York: Doubleday and Co., 1971.

Smith, John Abernathy. *Cross and Flame - Two Centuries of United Methodism in Middle Tennessee.* Nashville, Tenn.: Parthenon Press, 1984.

Wolff, Thomas H. *A History of the Methodist Society at Waynesville, Missouri-1838-1963.* Waynesville, MO, 1964.

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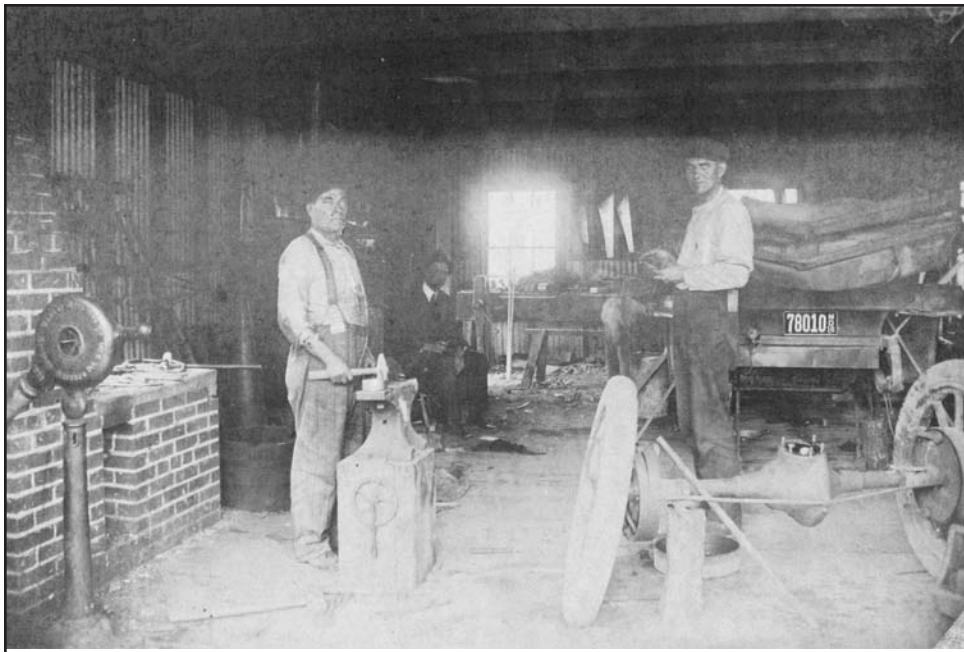
Salvation, not of the soul, but of the edifice where souls were saved. Such is the mission of the Historical Society of Maries County. The Society purchased the old Methodist Church in the summer of 2005. It was built in 1885.

Early Methodists in Vienna met in Sunday school classes and often shared services with other denominations. Eventually, there were enough Methodists to form a congregation. As the Methodist Episcopal Church South, they constructed their first church building, a brick structure, in 1871-1872. The first church was replaced by the building at right in 1885-1886 at a cost of \$950. The building was used until the early 1970s.

The old church was put on the auction block in the summer of 2005. It had its last days as a house of worship in 1971, when the Vienna



Vienna Methodist Church, ca. 1914, was built in 1885. According to local historian John Viessman of Vienna, the building is sitting on log sleepers, which is one side of the log flat and the rest round. The perimeter logs were hued square. Photo courtesy of Vera McDaniel Jones.



Henry Hefti (left) lived in the Victorian House located behind the Methodist Church. He was a member of the parish and was in charge of lighting the oil lamps in the church. Courtesy of John Viessman.



A pump organ, vintage unknown, sits in the church but may be original to the building. There are several original pews awaiting a little restoration.

Methodist congregation vacated the old building for the modern and more spacious church it had built along Highway 63 North. Since then, it has seen use in a variety of ways, including a venue for exotic dancers. After much soul searching by members of the historical society, it was decided that the society's earthly treasure be spent to redeem the historical building from possible destruction. Preserving old county structures is one of the society's purposes.

Local historian and society member John Viessman, along with historical building expert Patrick Steel, have studied the church's construction. Because the building was built during a transitional time in building technology, Viessman said the frame is constructed with mostly sawed timbers, but some of the timbers

were hand-hued. There were saw mills at the time and likely the sawed pine timbers were rafted down to Vienna on the Gasconade river from a mill in the Pulaski County area. The interior is lath and plaster, while the original clapboard siding has since been covered with asbestos shingles. The original white pine plank floor is now covered by tongue and groove oak flooring.

This simple country church design provides a structurally sound building today. It appears the only real need might be a new roof. The original four over four clear glass windows have been replaced by aluminum windows. Viessman would like to restore the original window style.

Additions to the church were made during the decades of the 40s, 50s, and 60s as the needs of the congregation grew. A fellowship hall and kitchen increased the size considerably. The church today is a rather large building. The large size and good condition make adaptive reuse very practical, not requiring a large outlay for rehabilitation.

Connie Schmiedeskamp, President of the Historical Society of Maries County, points out that the church is an excellent addition to their fine museum complex. Members of the Society also maintain the Old Jail Museum and the Felker and Latham Log Houses, all built in the 1850's. These buildings are across Mill Street from the church. The church's function will be somewhat different in that it will be available as a site for community and private activities. There will be a Christmas Market, November 18, where vendors will be selling a wide variety of gift items.



The Methodist Church as it stands today. It does not have the spare look, as in the top picture, after several additions and is still a solid structure. Photos above and left by Terry Primas.