

Anniversaries

Yes, of course, every year is an anniversary year for *somebody, somewhere*. In some parts of the world, and in the sight of God, 125 years is not even a blink of an eye. But to those of us mortals to whom Mt. Gretna is home, or at least a welcoming spirit, 2017 means that for 125 years there has been no summer without praise and worship, music and revitalization for those who sought a concentrated period of worship for relief from the stress and strain of everyday life.



At some point as yet unidentified during the decades of recovery following the Civil War, one or more congregations in the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ decided that Edward Stover's Memorial Campground on the eastern bank of the Swatara Creek in Dauphin County would be a fine location for a summer retreat, aka campmeeting.

They must have liked what they found there – in time a score of families built summer cottages on the grounds – and nine or ten days in August were regularly set aside for the annual gathering. But by the late 1880s, secularization had intruded harshly on the grounds. The camp store sold tobacco and newspapers on *Sundays*, and the management would not accommodate the piety of the UB campers by closing the store and foregoing Sunday profits. So the campers voted overwhelmingly to hold their 1892 meeting on the wooded hills of Mt. Gretna, thereby creating the event whose anniversary we are celebrating all summer long.

As part of that celebration, a well-illustrated book, *Two For The Woods*, has been prepared by Tom Meredith, telling and picturing the Mt. Gretna story as the tale of two “fraternal twins and their five cousins.” It is similar in style to the earlier work *Listed!*, the story of the Campmeeting's listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and will be available after May 20 at the Historical Society Museum on Pennsylvania Avenue.

Ecumenical Worship Services

With five Fridays in June this year, the newest of the Tabernacle program series, the Ecumenical Worship Services, gets an automatic expansion, with pastors from five different worship communities leading the five evening services. Established three years ago, with the intention of providing worship opportunities drawn from various strands of the great tapestry of religious beliefs, this ecumenical series allows worshippers to experience a wide range of styles and beliefs, and to discover the underlying unity that they celebrate. Parenthetically, it might be added that many people in this age of divisiveness find comfort in learning that behind the differences in manner, there is a fundamental central agreement.

Styles could hardly be more varied than among the five represented this year, so a warm invitation to attend is extended to all our readers: Spend Friday evenings in June discovering the unity of the basic beliefs of Edward Zook, a Mennonite pastor; Susan Claytor, an Episcopal rector; Louis Zivic, a Jewish rabbi; Mike Sigman, an Evangelical Congregational pastor and campmeeting spiritual director; and David Sanner, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor.

Mount Gretna Tabernacle 2017

At 3rd Street and Glossbrenner Ave. in Mt. Gretna, PA

ECUMENICAL PROGRAM

Fridays in June - 7:00 PM

“GOD’S CHALLENGES...” is the common theme for Friday night worship services during June at the Mt. Gretna Tabernacle.

June 2 “God Challenges us to be IN but NOT OF this World” by Retired Pastor Edward Zook, Herr Street Mennonite Church, Harrisburg

June 9 “God’s Challenge: the Beatitudes” by Rev. Susan Claytor, All Saints’ Episcopal Church, Hershey

June 16 “The Challenge of Proper Speech versus Politically Correct Speech” by Rabbi Louis Zivic, Beth Israel Congregation, Lebanon

June 23 “God Challenges Us to Forgive” by Pastor Mike Sigman, Grace Community Church, Willow Street

June 30 “God’s Final Challenge” by Pastor Dave Sanner from the Harrisburg First Seventh-day Adventist Church

There is no admission for these programs. A free will offering will be taken.

Music at Gretna

Think again about that phrase; it has come to have a very specific and very delightful reference for lovers of chamber music, but during this anniversary year, let's think about it in more general terms. Music was important to the very first summer visitors on both sides of Pinch Road – in fact the presentation of musical programs for the enjoyment of the general public was specified in the original draft of the Pennsylvania State Chautauqua's constitution. And while there is no similar constitutional basis for the development of a music program in the Campmeeting, the managers always made sure to have a well qualified music director on hand for the "season."

Selecting a music director for the 1892 camp at Mt. Gretna was one of the first actions taken by the board of managers when they met in February of that year. Their choice: John Lehman, professor of mathematics and astronomy at Lebanon Valley College and a talented violinist. Exactly what services Professor Lehman provided that summer are not specified, and they may not have been just what the managers (or campers) wanted. In the run-up for 1893, planning began in February, but it was not until June that Rev. C. J. Kephart officially

informed the board that "Professor Lowe and his wife" had been secured as music directors for the season.

All we know about Professor Lowe and wife is that during the next decade they were regularly called to serve at Mt. Gretna; they must have been well liked. Their work frequently got some recognition in the press, and by 1899 the *Lebanon Daily News* was reporting about Prof. Lowe's choir of 150 voices; two days later the paper referred to the "Mt. Gretna choral society." It appears that Professor Lowe, about whom so little is known, could possibly be credited with conducting the first massed choir concert – in 1899, or perhaps even earlier.

Of course, the real originator of the Massed Choir Concerts was Professor Earl Miller from Messiah College about 1965, and it is doubtful if Professor Miller felt in any way indebted to Prof. Lowe. Choral music is so much a part of religious services that it just appears naturally – but not without a lot of nurturing. So come out to the Tabernacle on Sunday evening, July 30; renew your acquaintanceship with the talented and popular Joe Martin, who showed us a couple of years ago, that musicians are not the least bit intimidated by cascading rain and roaring thunder.

Money, Money, Money

No, that isn't all we ever hear, but from the very beginning of the Mt. Gretna Campmeeting, finding the funds required to create a new campground posed something of a problem. The ministers (six of the nine Association managers were ordained ministers in the United Brethren denomination) had great faith in their enterprise and sometimes took a rather laid back approach to fiscal problems. As noted in *Two For The Woods*, the celebration of the 125 years of activity, growth, and change in Mount Gretna, the managers at one point decided to "sell certificates" without bothering to set a price or provide an incentive to purchase them. Nothing more is recorded about this idea, but somehow the fiscal responsibilities were always met. Today, we have to do a little better than "somehow," and we actually are doing better than "somehow."

In addition to the traditional contribution envelope enclosed with this letter and always available at each program, two new approaches have shown good results. An Endowment Fund has been established, built on the funds derived from a special campaign. The income from this fund is dedicated to program expenses and will supplement the free-will collections received at

the evening programs. Continuing contributions to the fund itself will have the two benefits of increasing the revenue producing base and ensuring support for programs in the future.

A second organized approach to fund raising is the Underwriting Program in which individuals and businesses are invited to subscribe all or a portion of the cost of a specific program, at which they will be publicly recognized as sponsors. A serendipital (if there is such a word) effect is that by contacting area business and professional people, information about the Bible Festival gets promoted in parts of the community that may not be familiar with it.

The recent effort to present higher visibility programs – the National Christian Choir for example – has had a positive effect on the underwriting program. A larger audience, with many "first timers" is a very attractive audience for local and area businesses. We aren't in financial nirvana just yet, but we've come a long way from "selling certificates."

If you or your business would like to underwrite a program, in whole or in part, please email Ben Wiley, MGTA President, at Ben@BenWiley.com.

2017 Overview

Yes, a special effort was made in putting together the elements of this anniversary year program. The truth of the matter is that once a preacher or musician has appeared in the Tabernacle, they are generally eager for a return engagement. And more often than not the audience is similarly eager. So in looking at the lineup for this year, it is not surprising to find many “standards,” such as Andy Roberts, and the New Holland Band, on the list. And even though Campmeeting 2017 style is noticeably different from Campmeeting 1890s style, there is still the dynamic preaching and the stirring music to maintain the tradition of the magnificent Massed Choir – and of the glorious Susquehanna Chorale and the spirit of the QuintEssentially Brass, traditional season closers for almost the past twenty years.

But, as with any living organism, it is not *all* tradition. The June Ecumenical Worship Services are an innovative inspiration that fits comfortably with the Campmeeting pattern. The preaching services, essential to campmeetings, range over a variety of styles and backgrounds. Bob Kettering and Rodney Shearer will combine talents for a truly commemorative old-time campmeeting service. Rev. Quentin Wallace, pastor at Lancaster’s Covenant UMC, has a style and a message that are sure to be as welcome in a tabernacle as they have been at Covenant. And Dr. Tom Long, who *did* “write the book” on preaching, will find the Tabernacle very little changed since his first preaching appearance here in 1996.

A glance at this year’s brochure (or a visit to the website) will quickly reveal that southern gospel style music, almost synonymous with campmeeting, has not been overlooked. The nationally known Rick Webb Family adds the Mt. Gretna Tabernacle to the impressive list of venues at which they have performed, and the Brothers in Grace, from Hershey, will make it clear that not all good southern gospel comes from Pigeon Forge. In fact, there is such a variety of preaching and music that it’s a good idea to pay close attention to the dates and the artists listed in the brochure.

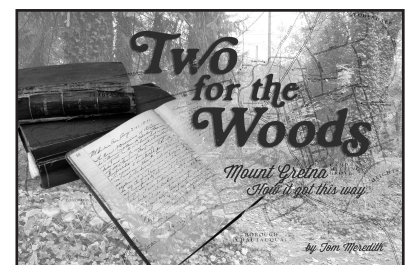
Another Thought

It’s quite possible that by the time you come to the Tabernacle on June 2 for the first of this year’s ecumenical services you will have decided that 125 years doesn’t hold a candle to 200, and you’ll wait a while before going off the deep end of anniversary celebrating. That’s a long wait, and some of us aren’t going to be that patient. So for those willing to accept the notion that a century and a quarter is at least more special than a century, there are quite a few things to contemplate during this summer of 2017.

Thinking back over the whole complex sequence of events that resulted in the establishment of the *Mount Gretna campmeeting* it is tempting to wonder what would have happened if Hiram Dohner had not been president of the Stoverdale Campmeeting Association. Dohner had good connections with the Chautauqua Institution. He earned his divinity degree at the Chautauqua School of Theology, and that may have been the reason he was invited to join the Lebanon centered group that was interested in establishing a local Chautauqua. But there are other possibilities.

He knew that the Stoverdale campers were fed up with the worldliness of the environment – Sunday sales of ice cream and newspapers – rowdy youths racing their horses (and even their buggies) while some respected bishop was trying to make his exegetical discourse on the book of Job interesting to his audience. Dohner was an intelligent man with a decidedly proactive personality. There was a problem at camp, so he was looking for solutions. There are only faint indications in the official records of the Association, but they suggest that Dohner may have initiated the contact with Robert Coleman (or more likely with R. B. Gordon, a key executive with Coleman’s Cornwall and Lebanon Railroad). Coleman owned lots of land and he was known to be something of a philanthropist. And with Dohner’s Chautauqua credentials, he was a good fit on the Chautauqua committee Gordon was working on. Who knew what might develop from these ingredients?

For a less speculative answer to that question, the Mt. Gretna Area Historical Society is publishing Tom Meredith’s *Two For The Woods*, scheduled to go on sale at the Society’s Ice Cream Social, May 20.





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Anniversary Concerts

No, that plural “concerts” is not a typo. At least three of this summer’s musical programs qualify under that rubric. Joe Martin, who returns to direct the 2017 Massed Choir, will extend the length of his visit to Gretna this summer, and with his wife, Sue, will present a special celebration concert of piano and vocal music on Friday evening, July 28. Many readers will recall the pleasure of their first concert here a few years ago and are eagerly anticipating the last weekend of July 2017. On that Friday evening in the Tabernacle – a venue that is probably seared into Joe’s memory – Sue will blend her sparkling soprano voice with Joe’s vibrant playing to make an enchanting evening of sacred and secular music.

Then on Sunday evening, July 30, Joe will lead the 175 voice Massed Anniversary Choir in a program featuring the premier of a new Martin anthem and a selection of favorites chosen by the choir members from among his anthems they have sung in previous years. Thus Joe Martin will be personally responsible for two of the three anniversary concerts.

The third (actually the first to be presented) is the July 2 program by Men In Harmony, will show a decided Martin influence. A gospel-medley anthem he has re-written for the voices of Men In Harmony will be premiered, honoring the influence of gospel music for the whole campmeeting movement, including the one that moved from Stoverdale to Mt. Gretna in 1892. Other program selections will be drawn from Men In Harmony’s large library of music of that period, reminding us of the pleasures (and struggles) of the early times of the two cities in the woods.



Joe Martin
Internationally known Composer, Pianist, and Conductor