

FROM TENTS TO TABERNACLE  
FAIRMOUNT CAMPGROUND 1895-1995

Camp meetings had become one of the favorite religious activities on the early American Frontier, and during frontier days Indiana Wesleyans had occasionally held community camp meetings. Just when the frontier camp meetings were about to die out, the holiness movement adapted the camp meeting for its own purposes.

CAMP MEETING IN INDIANA

As early as 1874, the Indiana Conference appointed a committee to study the propriety of holding a conference camp meeting. Again in 1886 a committee was appointed to effect the organization of a camp meeting association. But it was not until 1891 that these plans began to materialize, as the conference elected a committee composed of Eber Teter, W. H. Kennedy, Jacob Hester, J.M. Cummins, and Ambrose Teter, and ordered them to provide tents for the holding of a camp meeting in connection with the 1892 conference session. The camp meeting began on Tuesday, August 23, one week before the business session, and continued concurrently with the session through Sunday, September 4. This conference and camp meeting were held at the Center Church, between Bourbon and Tippietown in Marshall County. Miss Clara Tear was the featured evangelist.

A second camp meeting was held in Warren, at the fairgrounds, beginning July 25, 1893. This was not held in conjunction with the conference session, which was held a month later at Lewis Creek. The third camp meeting was held at Arcadia, beginning July 19, 1894. It too was held at an earlier time and a different place from the conference session.

At the 1894 session, held at Victory Chapel near Strawtown, an informal discussion took place concerning the propriety of incorporating a camp meeting association for the purpose of purchasing a permanent camp meeting and conference ground. The proposal was endorsed by the conference. In the months which followed, members of the conference organized a separate camp meeting association which was properly incorporated. By January 1895, they had acquired seven and one-half acres of land immediately northwest of Fairmount and were preparing to develop it for their purposes.

"It is now being fitted up by building a Tabernacle, boarding-houses, etc., suitable for such gatherings as camp-meeting, conference, etc., so that rooms can be had for a nominal cost and places to cook and eat in, in connection with same. The Board has just ordered six buildings erected for lodging purposes that will accommodate over 100 persons. They have also in process of erection a restaurant and boarding-house. The Tabernacle will be about 44 x 72 feet. We expect to have all things ready to hold a camp-meeting in by June or July of this year." (Wesleyan Meth., Jan. 30, 1895 Page 5).

Room rentals at \$1.00 and 1.50 for the ten day encampment. Six dormitories were built in a row north of the tabernacle, measuring 16 x 48 Ft. divided into a total of 60 rooms, measuring 8 x 8, 8 x 10 and 8 x 12.

Another building was constructed housing a 20 x 20 ft. restaurant (meals costing 12½ to 15¢ each) with a 14 x 16 ft. attachment housing a barber shop, a bath room, and a parcel room

Back of the row of dormitories was a dining room 16 x 42 ft for those who wished to prepare their own meals in the attached kitchen, 10½ x 16' with a cooking range sixteen feet long.

A well of excellent water had been provided, and a horse shed for 55 horses along with a commodious wagon and buggy yard.

The first camp meeting was held August 1-11, actually ending in the early morning hours of Monday, August 12, 1895, with such a large attendance that enlargement was already envisioned. The camp meeting has been an annual affair from this time on.

The 1895 session of the Conference was not held at the Fairmount campground but rather at Pleasant Grove Church in Wabash County. But a major business session was held at the campground later when the General Conference convened on the new campground, October 12-23, 1895. (More General Conferences have met at Fairmount than any other site.) The 1896 session did meet at the campground, although it was still nearly a month later than the camp meeting. The 1897 session was again held away from the campground, meeting at the Bryant Church. But in 1898 the Indiana Conference returned to the campground for its

business session and did so in each succeeding year thereafter. In 1898, 1899, and 1900, the conference session immediately followed the camp meeting, running Monday through Wednesday in each instance. Beginning in 1901, the pattern developed of beginning the business session first, running from Tuesday or Wednesday through Saturday, with business occasionally being completed on the Monday morning of camp meeting. A later innovation was the preaching of the opening sermon of the conference session on the Monday night before business began Tuesday morning. Camp Meeting, would begin on Saturday evening and continue through two Sundays.

#### FAIRMOUNT BIBLE SCHOOL

One of the earliest needs of the Indiana Conference was training for ministerial and church workers. The 1887 session of the Indiana Conference voted "authorization for the Committee on Itineracy and Elders' Orders to hold "theological institutes for the training of ministers". Elder J.O. Baker describes the efforts to implement the 1887 resolution as follows:

"For years we partially met the need of the Church in a trained ministry by holding annual Institutes, varying from ten to thirty days' duration. This was a marked improvement over the very crude method practiced in the earlier years of the Church, when for two or three days, during the Annual Conference the Licentiates would meet the Committee on Elders' Orders and

be examined in the Disciplinary Course of Study.

"The need of the work outgrew even a thirty-day Institute, and the establishment of the School grew out of the developed intelligence of our people. We cannot expect to hold our young people in the Church, and lead them into the deeper depths of intelligent spirituality, through the leadership of an ignorant ministry. An untrained ministry is limited in its work at the best, and becomes more so as the people we desire to reach with the gospel grow in intelligence. Ignorance makes men and women an easy prey to spiritual pride and fanaticism. For years we have seen the need of our ministry having trained minds, as well as hearts large with salvation.

Different propositions were made, at times, for a School which showed the trend of growing sentiment among our people, but it was not until the year 1906 that steps were taken in the direction of the establishment of a School."

The Wesleyan Institute is located at Fairmount, Indiana, on the Wesleyan Methodist Camp Ground. The Camp Ground is a beautiful Grove of twelve acres, containing the school building (The Children's Building), and an auditorium with a seating capacity of one thousand people; building for campers containing about one hundred rooms, besides many cottages, a dining hall, restaurant, and many other things that space will not permit mentioning.

Tuition was six dollars per term, charged payable at the beginning of each term. A fee of \$1.00 was charged for late

registration. Study hours were strictly observed from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM., except when excused by the President, or to attend religious services. Everyone had to be in their room by 10:00 PM. Chapel was required every day for all students. Ladies and gentlemen were allowed to accompany each other to and from (certain) meetings, but were not to "tarry".

The Course of Study included "a regular four years English Theological Course and a four years Greek Theological Course, with the requirements of the eighth grade, for the completion of which the student was awarded a diploma". Subjects such as Ancient History, Medieval History, English, Psychology, and Bible, Geography probably set the pattern for the Humanities component of present day ministerial curriculum requirements.

Among the some 76 workers trained at Fairmount Bible School were names such as: Glen Payne, Mary Green (Seekins), Frank Birch, Walter and Miriam Jennings, Willie Roberts, and Glen McKinley. Many others would be listed besides this 1914-15 listing. The school was incorporated in the Theological Department of Marion College in 1920.

#### CAMP FACILITIES

In addition to serving as the site for Camp Meetings, District and General Conferences, Fairmount Camp has expanded facilities and services for its constituency. The Tabernacle was enlarged in the late 1920's to accommodate about 2500 people.

A 56 foot addition was added to the south of the original building. A second addition on the north end of the Tabernacle in the 1950's doubled its length and raised the platform. Some can remember when a packed Tabernacle attendance was enhanced by large outdoor crowds on both sides.

In 1939, the Young Peoples Tabernacle (Teen Temple) was built. Garl Beaver supervised the building. Helpers were Carl Holder as a carpenter and Mike Bowsman was responsible for the steel trusses. Wesley Service Center was the dream of Elizabeth Leach. Three original committee members remain active in Indiana North: Elizabeth Leach, Harold Bardsley and Kathryn Beaver. The building was completed in time for the 1963 General Conference. The Centennial Building was erected in 1949 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first Conference session. Other buildings were added such as an office, book store, snack shop, and nurse station. Two dorms were remodeled, into four Camp workers' apartments.

#### FAIRMOUNT ACADEMY

On the southeast corner of the camp grounds there was a school building known as Fairmount Academy. It had been closed and then reopened for use by Fairmount Public Schools. After five years of use, the Camp purchased the property. The building was removed in 1973 to make room for trailers and recreation.

## CAMP PROGRAMS

After serving nearly a century as a location for camp meetings and both district and general conferences, the camp-grounds underwent intensified use and development. Conference-wide Youth Rallies were held each Memorial Day. Youth Camp was started with leaders such as Russell Klinger, Richard Howell, and Garl Beaver.

In 1951 the Youth Camp was devoted to those in the Youth-age bracket and junior-age boys and girls were provided with a separate Junior Bible Camp. Young Married Couples" Retreat has been a dynamic, growing district program. The camp-grounds are also used by other denominations' Youth Camps and some small leadership groups.

Camp history reveals strong commitment to the message of holiness and the helping ordinary people live righteous lives and be effective servants in their day. May each reader be motivated to continue Kingdom building.

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Text materials were taken from: HISTORY OF THE INDIANA  
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