MAINTENANCE OF A TRADITION: AN ANALYSIS OF IDENTITY AND MEMORY MAKING PROCESSES AT ROCK SPRINGS CAMP-MEETING

by

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ABSTRACT

WYATT MANLOVE. Maintenance of a Tradition: An Analysis of Identity and Memory Making Processes at Rock Springs Camp-Meeting
(Under the direction of DR. SEAN MCCLOUD)

The Rock Springs camp-meeting in Denver, North Carolina is a communal religious gathering, the maintenance of which is passed down generationally and regarded by some as an important piece of Denver's community history. The camp-meeting phenomenon is an extant, Protestant revivalist tradition that still happens each summer across the United States. This thesis places the focus on how one camp-meeting community both speaks about and remembers their experiences tied to the place and event of Rock Springs camp-meeting. In this thesis I ask, *how are memory- and identity- making processes expressed through oral history by long-standing camp meeting members*? I argue that the stories they tell show that long-standing members set Rock Springs camp-meeting apart from the everyday world and representative of what long-standing camp participants view as an idealized "traditional" religion which they contrast with how they view the contemporary world outside of the campground. The narratives given to me in interview and questionnaire form by members of Rock Springs camp-meeting give insight into how an aging generation of people over fifty understand their roles as being both the inheritors and the stewards of a place where an idealized form of worship is preserved and a modern, contemporary world is interpreted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank both the Board of Trustees of Rock Springs Camp-meeting for their help in facilitating my research, and the members of the community who participated in my research. This thesis would not be possible without their help and input. I

would also like to acknowledge my advisor Dr. Sean McCloud, who was instrumental in every stage of this project. Finally, I want to thank my mother who brought me into the camp-meeting experience.

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Introduction

Sitting on a front porch swing, likely built by hand, on a late July afternoon, I can see children throwing a football on a gravel pathway between the first and second row of tents here at Rock Springs campground. Behind me I can hear my grandmother's side of the family talking as my mother and cousins of mine, who are decades older than me, catch up about children, remember recent deaths, and discuss the line my mother has on a good upholsterer. The day is July 24, 2021, a Saturday and the first day of this year's camp-meeting. The swing that I was sitting on was one of many attached by chains to the ceiling of 255 crude wooden structures called "tents," either on the front or back of the tent. Across from me was another swing attached to the ceiling of another tent, albeit empty for the first few days of the first week, or "little week" as members call it. Members were still coming in and getting their tents set up for camp-meeting. Besides the last week of June and the first week of August, the tents at Rock Spring Campground largely stand empty throughout the rest of the year other than for an occasional family reunion or wedding and the Christmas activities put on by the Rock Springs Campground board of trustees.

A large portion of the families in Denver, North Carolina, today can trace their ancestry back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as inhabitants of this area. Some of these same families can also trace the ownership of their tent through familial lines back to the inception of the Rock Springs Campground. What ultimately drives members to the campground year after year are the religious services that turn Rock Springs campground into Rock Springs campmeeting. Beginning as a sporadic revival event spearheaded by Methodist itinerant ministers on the American frontier, camp-meeting has now transformed into both an annual

family gathering and a multi-denominational religious event happening all over the United States each summer.[1]

The Rock Springs camp meeting is a communal religious gathering, the maintenance of which is passed down generationally and regarded by some as an important piece of Denver's community history. It is in this passing down of the Rock Springs camp meeting experience where my interest lies — for it is not merely the deed of a tent being passed down, it is also the stewardship of a tradition. In this thesis I ask, *how are memory- and identity- making processes expressed through oral history by long-standing camp meeting members*? I argue that the stories they tell show that long-standing members set Rock Springs camp-meeting apart from the everyday world and representative of what long-standing camp participants view as an idealized "traditional" religion which they contrast with how they view the contemporary world outside of the campground. Towards this end, I analyze interviews and questionnaire responses that reveal various themes in the ways participants talk about their memories at camp-meeting and why the event is important to them. These themes include, referring to Rock Springs campground as (1) an unchanging place; (2) a haven from the outside world; and (3) constitutive of a spiritual community; engaging in (4) the social atmosphere of the camp-meeting event. In addition to these things, I also show how the Rock Springs community conceptualizes itself as the stewards of an idealized "traditional" religion, what that means, and how their narratives form and inform that conceptual framework.

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[1] See Hatch, Nathan. *The Democratization of American Christianity*.(Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1989*).*

Jay, a Rock Springs Board of Trustees member, touched on these multiple themes when he told me: “See, this is the last stand for the front porch, if you think about it. People walking around, visiting each other, and you know maybe not always got your head in the phone or the TV’s not on because nobody brings them out here much, a few do. But during the day, kids are playing ball out here, and it's the same place we played ball. I mean nothing has changed.” Here, Jay’s sentiments replicate what I heard from other members who understand the Rock Springs camp-meeting to be a refuge from the outside world.

For camp-meeting members, this refuge also serves as a holy ground for spiritual revival that is distinct from the religious environments that participants inhabit when they are not at camp-meeting, such as their normal Sunday church services. The narratives given to me in interview and questionnaire form by members of Rock Springs camp-meeting give insight into how an aging generation of people over fifty understand their roles as being both the inheritors and the stewards of a place where an idealized form of worship is preserved and a modern, contemporary world is interpreted.

Research Method

During the summer of 2021, I conducted audio-recorded interviews with seven longstanding members of the Rock Springs campground community and passed out 104 questionnaires to be filled out anonymously at the camp-meeting event at Rock Springs. Participants returned thirty questionnaires to me.[2] Both the interviews and the questionnaires were developed in order to ask about memories that participants associated with Rock Springs camp-meeting and what they found important about the event. I asked five questions on the

[2] IRB Approval Date: 6/15/2021

questionnaires and during interviews: (1) How long have you been coming?; (2) Do you spend the night when you come to camp-meeting? If so, how many nights do you spend?; (3) What's your first memory here?; (4) What are a couple memories that you have from camp-meeting over the years that stick out the most?; and (5) What do you find important about Rock Springs campmeeting? Additionally, I left a section at the bottom of the questionnaire for the participant to leave a way for me to contact them for an interview. Otherwise, all questionnaires were anonymous.

Before the event began in the last week of July, I was in contact with members of the Rock Springs Board of Trustees with whom I worked in announcing my presence to campmeeting members. I worked closely with them throughout the duration of the event, which ended after the first week of August. Officially, my research began on July 25, 2021, and ended on August 8th. During this period, I would arrive at the campground at three p.m. and sit at my family tent until around four when more people began to arrive. I would then set up two chairs and a plastic table beside the arbor, where preaching services and worship band events would be held each night. There, I would spend about four hours each day handing out questionnaires and taking notes. After my presence was announced by the board of trustees members, people would often come up to my table and either volunteer for an interview or ask to take more than a few questionnaires back to their tents.

My mother's side of my family has lived around the Denver area of North Carolina going back at least three generations. Her father owned a tent for some time and my mother remembers spending many summers excitedly waiting to go to camp-meeting. Like many others, my mother brought her children to camp-meeting as well. While we never owned a tent, members of our

family and friends owned tents, and I have my own memories of looking forward to campmeeting, roaming its gravel paths, playing with other children, and sleeping there overnight. Undeniably my personal relationship with Rock Springs camp-meeting affects my position as researcher. However, I do believe that my relationship with the tradition is less of a hindrance than it appears insofar that camp-meeting members' familiarity with my family name enabled their willingness to share their experiences and memories with a tradition that they highly value.

Camp Meetings in American History and Scholarship

North American revivalism is a well-documented religious phenomenon going all the way back to the first Great Awakening in the mid-1700s. Scholars such as the historian Nathan Hatch have charted trends in American Christianity during the early days of the Republic and have noted that camp-meetings began during a time of populist transformation across the American religious landscape. Hatch argues that during this transformation the authority of religious experience moved away from the hands of learned clergymen into the hands of non elites.[3] Amongst them arose "magnetic leaders who were highly skilled in communication and group mobilization" from both Methodist and Baptist congregations.[4] These leaders were revivalist, itinerant preachers who, through circuit-riding, both reimagined some forms of American Protestantism and paved the way for the camp-meeting event. Scholars such as Sarah M. Pike have argued that camp-meetings during the antebellum emerged out of a rejection of the norms imposed by culturally dominant Christian churches, and thus served as opportunities for

[3] Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity,* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 1989*),* 16.
[4] Ibid., 5.

religious conversion, vacation retreats, and "drew boundaries between the participants' gatherings and the rest of society."[5]

Much of the existing scholarship on camp-meetings tend to limit their analysis on how camp-meetings existed and operated during the mid-to-late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[6] Because of this, the primary sources that they engage with also come from a time past, which neglects the fact that camp-meetings remain a living tradition. Three scholars who examine contemporary camp-meetings are Minuette Floyd, Bradd Shore, and Sarah Pike. Minuette Floyd produced an in depth look at historically African-American camp-meetings active in the Carolinas today through photography. Bradd Shore studied how narrative and memory function at Salem camp-meeting in Georgia, making him one of the few scholars focusing on camp-meetings as they exist in the contemporary period. Sarah Pike's anthropological study of Neopagan camp meeting festivals mirror some things I saw at Rock Springs. For example, both of our studies analyze how religious communities create and maintain sacred space set apart from the everyday world.

In *A Place to Worship*, Minuette Floyd examines African American camp-meetings in the Carolinas via oral history and photograph. Floyd suggests that "camp meetings are a place where the past meets the present day," and that they are a "living tradition that continues to unfold…" [7]One of the symbols that Floyd found recurring in her photographs was the lightbulb. "Like the

[5] Sarah Pike, *Earthly Bodies and Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community*, 1st ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 14.
[6] See Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, Nathan Hatch, Stephen D. Cooley.
[7] Minuette Floyd, *A Place to Worship*. (Columbus, SC: University of South Carolina Press), 97.

ones that hang from sockets underneath the tin roofs of arbors… a lightbulb flaring above the pastor's head as he scaled the heights of a sermon, or one glowing across a dusty path to welcome weary travelers at night."[8] For Floyd, who is a participant in the camp-meeting tradition, these hanging light bulbs were associated with a core experience of the campgrounds themselves, that of spiritual illumination.

In "Spiritual Work, Memory Work: Revival and Recollection at Salem Camp Meeting," the anthropologist Bradd Shore describes camp-meeting as a "home-base that is experienced as relatively immune to change" where memory and identity are made and reinforced over the course of generations.[9] In his study of Salem Camp-Meeting in Georgia, Shore identifies distinct spaces within the camp-ground structure where the experience of both the familial and the religious are found. By this Shore means that within the camp-meeting area, there are places where strictly religious activities take place such as the arbor, and then other areas such as the tents where non-religious activities like spending time with family and friends take place. Campmeeting goers constantly shift between these spaces. As generations continually return over the course of their lives, individuals are able to see their past experiences at camp-meeting reflected back at them as they see younger generations experiencing what they themselves did growing up at camp-meeting. Shore tells us that "the effect of this constant shifting between distant past, recent past, and present is to provide a sense of historical change and, at the same time, a blurring of time and a continuity of space."[10] By understanding the dynamic of generational returning to camp-meeting, examining the ways in which camp-meeting

[8] Ibid., 8.
[9] Bradd Shore, "Spiritual Work, Memory Work: Revival and Recollection at Salem Camp Meeting," 114.
[10] Ibid., 107.

underwrites family narrative, and exploring how camp-meeting shapes memory and identity, Shore has developed the departure point for my own research.

In her fieldwork study of Neopagan festivals, the religious studies scholar Sarah Pike notes that camp meeting traditions are not restricted to Protestant Christians, but extend to spiritualists, wiccans, and others. Pike's findings about how pagans describe the festival site versus the everyday world— as well as her work on memory and narrative among festival goers— mirror things I found in my examination of Rock Springs. Pike's goal in *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves* is to "learn the ways that Neopagans make sacred spaces, create rituals, tell stories about themselves, and act out their religion through music and dance at festival sites removed from their daily lives."[11] Pike illustrates the ways in which Neopagan festival-goers create the festival grounds, often in open plots of land in fields or wooded areas. The festival grounds are constructed specifically in contrast to everyday society, or "mundania" as Neopagans call it.[12] By themselves, these areas do not necessarily hold the same measure of meaning as they do once they are transformed into *the* festival space. Pike notes that there are a few antecedents in American religious culture that give way to the Neopagan festival, with one of those being the Evangelical camp-meeting. In Pike's analysis, both camp-meetings and Neopagan festivals share common themes such as: a perceived subversiveness in the form and structure of the event by critics of both Neopagan festivals and camp-meetings; both events take place in nature, thereby allowing for a different sort of behavior commonly associated with religious behavior; and that because in both instances, the events take place away from society,

[11] Pike, *Earthly Bodies and Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community,* xi.
[12] Ibid., 13.

the meanings of each are made in contrast to society. In other words, Pike suggests that both the Neopagan festival and the Evangelical camp-meeting exist as sites for religious communities where meaning is made in the setting apart of the religious site from the rest of the world.

In this way, my analysis of Rock Springs camp-meeting will be similar to Pike's insofar that my analysis concerns how long-standing members understand the camp-meeting event as an event that occurs in a place set apart from the rest of society. According to Pike, "it is by establishing their identity in contrast to the outside that festivals become more powerful places of meaning making."[13] Members of the Rock Springs community similarly make meaning out of its separateness from the rest of society. However, there are aspects in which the evangelical camp-

meeting and the Neopagan festival diverge. In her conclusion, Pike notes that individuals are often drawn to Neopagan communities because they feel ostracized by heteronormative and patriarchal cultures that dominate the world they come from and based on this part of what they do in the festival space is work on the construction of new identities. They are able to do this because of the boundaries created that separate the festival space from the rest of the world. Communities engaged in contemporary evangelical camp-meetings do not specifically seek to construct new identities within the sacred space of the campground. The community I engaged with at Rock Springs is heteronormative, and my work will show that they instead seek to maintain the camp-meeting tradition as they remember it— as a place set apart from society where an idealized form of religious practice is upheld and passed down through generations. Furthermore, the place and structures built on the Rock Springs campground have remained since they were built and do so even when the camp-meeting event is out of session whereas

[13] Ibid., 18.

many of the festivals Pike visited took place on rented festival grounds. Even for the festival grounds that are privately owned, Pike notes that various shrines and altars available to festivalgoers for devotion and worship accumulate eclectic mementos left behind, amounting to an everchanging identity present in the structure of permanent festival grounds. Similarly, Rock Springs campground is a permanent site where the ownership and maintenance of is passed down generationally which allows for a very close connection between the campground and the people who take care of it.

Rock Springs Camp-Meeting

History

The Rock Springs Campground website tells us that "on August 7, 1830 Joseph M. Monday was paid a total of $90 'in-hand' by Freeman Shelton, Richard Proctor and James Bivings for a tract of land estimated to be 45 acres. The land was held in trust for the Methodist Society of the Lincoln Circuit, otherwise known as the Methodist Episcopal Church of Lincoln Circuit, and a Mr. Martin Sigman and a Mr. H Asbury witnessed the transaction."[14] This tract of land would come to be known as the Rock Springs Campground, named after the actual springs of water amongst the rocks on site. Terry Brotherton, a local historian of Denver NC, writes that "the early tents resembled cow stables with tin roofs. There were no windows, just slatted walls of weathered, unpainted boards, and the floor was just the good old earth with straw on it."[15]

According to Brotherton's history— which draws upon legal documents, minutes of Rock Springs trustees board meetings kept by families, other records and articles from locals—

[14] https://www.rockspringscampmeeting.com/

[15] Terry Brotherton, *Rock Spring Campground,* 3rd ed. N.P. (Denver, North Carolina), 20.

religious services began at Rock Springs Campground in 1830 and people have been attending ever since. During the early days, the website tells us that:

> The first campers slept in covered wagons, canvas tents and brush tents. They came in covered wagons in the first years; later in wagons without cover, buggies and surreys. They hitched their horses near the spring for convenience in watering. An ample supply of hay and fodder for the horses was brought from home. The ministers rode horseback in order to attend camp-meeting. Some rode from as far away as Columbia, South Carolina to Rock Springs Camp Ground. Since there was no refrigeration, they brought their chickens live in a coop from home. Chicken and ham were fried in a pan over an open fire. Cakes, pies, jams, and dried fruits and vegetables were brought in the wagons of the early days. While campers around the turn of the century cooked meals over outside fires, most of the meals are now prepared on oil or gas stoves or hot plates. For years automobiles have replaced the horse and buggy days. No automobiles are allowed in the arbor during worship service.[16]

Officially, Rock Springs Campground has held a camp-meeting event every year since 1830 except for two years: in 1865 it was closed because of the Civil War, and in 1948 because of the polio epidemic.[17] Fires suspected to be caused by arson also occured in 1973, again in 1975, in 1981, and again in the late eighties or early nineties, according to Jay Sigmon. Otherwise, Rock Springs has held its camp-meeting event every summer beginning on the Sunday of the last week of July and ending on the Sunday of the first week of August.

The Campground Today

Denver, North Carolina is always hot and humid during the summer, especially when the heat peaks in late July and the beginning of August. After parking in one of the many gravel lots surrounding Rock Springs Campground and stepping out of an air-conditioned car, one is met

[16] Rock Springs Camp-meeting, accessed March 25, 2022, https://www.rockspringscampmeeting.com.
[17] Jay Sigmon, Board of Trustees member.

with immediate sweat forming on their skin and the smell of old wood and hay underneath a bright, late-afternoon sun. The campground itself comprises 255 wooden structures on forty acres of land called "tents," that come right up against Campground Road and are very hard to miss if simply driving by. The tents are arranged in three concentric rectangles around a large, open tabernacle called the "arbor." Underneath the tin, slanted roof of the arbor are rows of pews that reportedly seat up to 1,000 on top of an earthen floor strewn with hay.[18]

The arbor is the focal point of Rock Springs and was named after the original brush arbor that camp-meeting services were held under until the permanent wooden structure was built in 1832 (see figure 1). Here, every night around seven visiting pastors and choir groups preach and sing the Gospel from a wooden stage, often accompanied by musicians and always in front of a full congregation filling the arbor pews and spilling out into the grassy area beyond. Other events at the arbor, such as children's services and talks about local history given by campground members, happen after five in the afternoon and before seven.

The first row of tents encloses the arbor and grassy area, creating a space where one is unable to view the road or the houses of people who live near the campground. In this grassy area between the arbor and the first row of tents, there are large oak trees with small plots of flowers kept by campground members. Wooden swings built in remembrance of members who have passed have their names displayed on plaques, and there is an almost constant presence of children playing hide and seek or tag in between religious services when camp-meeting is in session. Between each row of tents are gravel paths. Besides attending services in the arbor, one

[18] Rock Springs Camp-meeting, accessed March 25, 2022, https://www.rockspringscampmeeting.com.

of the more popular activities at Rock Springs camp-meeting is walking these paths. Members lounging on the front or back “porches” of their tents, likely sitting in hand-made swings underneath a fan, contour these paths. The Rock Springs community is close knit and many of its members across different age groups have grown up together, one can watch members stopping in and visiting at various tents as they make their ways along the path.

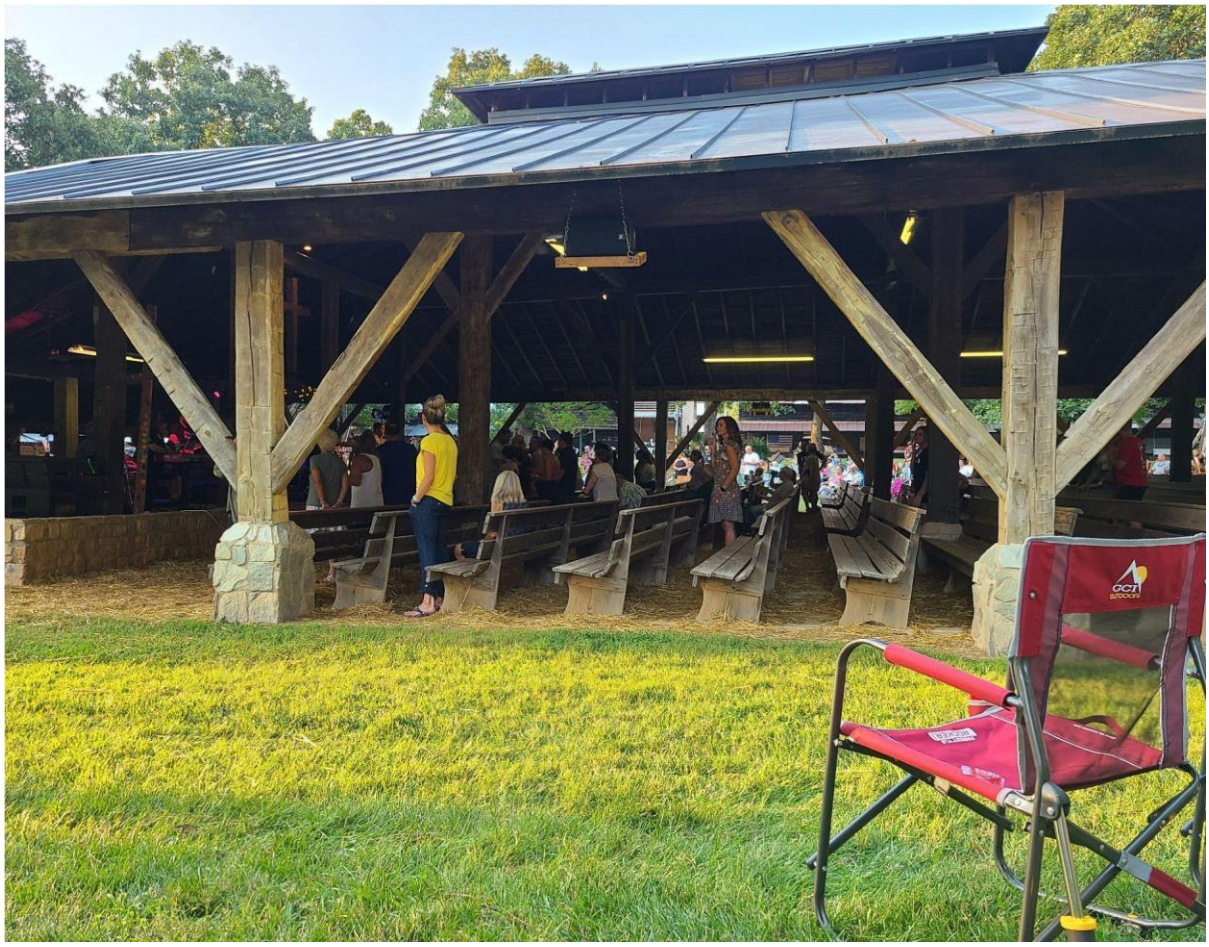

Figure 1. “The Arbor” Photo by author.

As I noted before, each tent typically has at least one front or back porch with a swing and other chairs. Some tents hang family quilts and other hand-me-down mementos on the porch wall, letting passerbys know who is “tenting” there— a term used by most camp-goers. These days, most tents have cement floors but some still use hay or wood shavings to make a floor.

Inside, members often hang old pictures of passed family members who also attended Rock Springs, or homemade family trees—in one case, a tree was painted on a bedsheet with family members listed at each branch— in the "living room" area of the tent. Nowadays, every tent has electricity and running water. While it varies, each tent is approximately 900 to 1,000 square feet. Many families have added on to and extended their tents over the years, however. The inside of most tents resembles a horse stable, with a walkway leading to the other side and two or three main rooms: a kitchen area, a living room area, and sleeping areas. When there is a second story, it is typically one large room, sometimes with a balcony and another swing.

In the living room area, members keep chairs or sofas to provide an alternative lounging space to the porches. In tents that have more space, the living room area might also include a picnic or dinner table where members often gather to eat the meals they cook in the kitchen. Some tents have a bedroom space large enough for one or two beds on the ground floor. In some cases the entire second story of a tent is dedicated to bedroom space, allowing for three or four beds. Some families who have young children have bunk beds in their tents to help with space. Each tent usually has one small bathroom with only a toilet and a sink.

The scene of Rock Springs campground really comes to life in the late afternoon to early evening. The only activities in the morning are Bible study groups who meet underneath the arbor, beginning at ten in the morning and typically ending before noon. Often members who spend the night and members that are retired are those who attend the Bible studies. Throughout the day members usually go home to freshen up or into work. Approximately ninety percent of members leave the campground during the day. But when everyone returns around five p.m and the amber electric lights hanging in each tent turn on as the sun sets, the once empty and quiet plot of wooden structures turns into a bustling social event. Sitting on the swing at ground level,

or, in some cases, on the second story balcony of some tents (see figure 2), one can watch as groups of people from all age groups walk the gravel paths. In the early evening, one can peer slightly through the spaces between wooden planks of tents and see the figures of members illuminated by hanging light bulbs cooking and corralling children as a family sits down to eat their dinner, or see groups of teenagers playing cards in the sleeping spaces of tents away from the rest of their families.

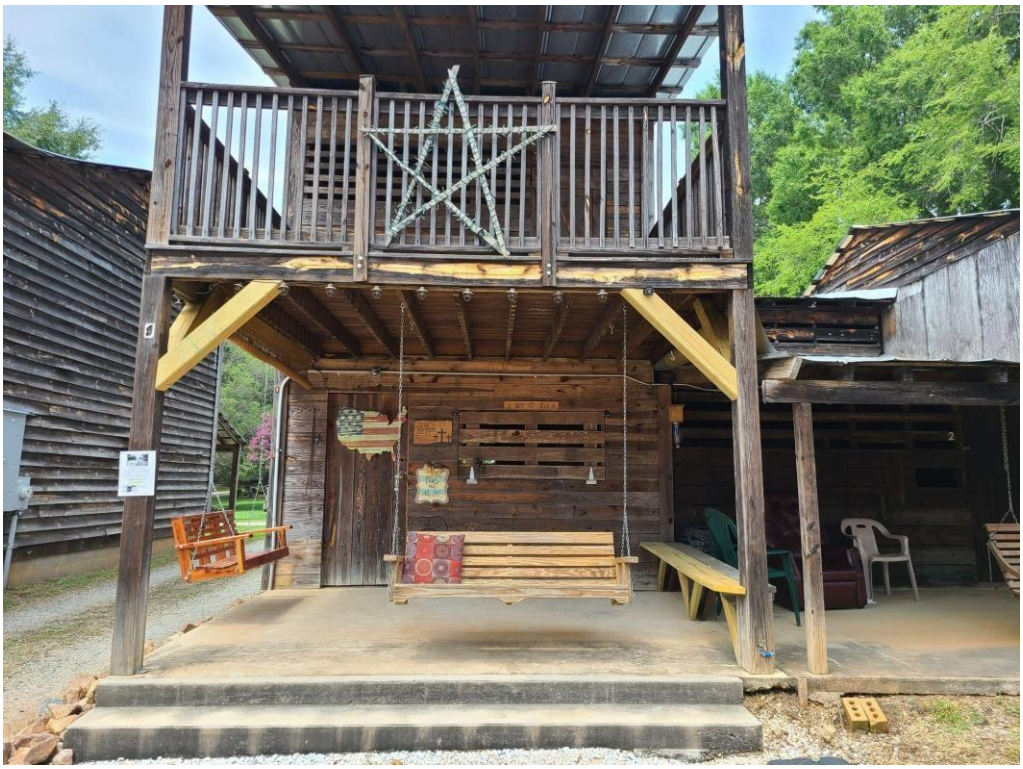

Figure 2. Tent #1 Photo by author.

For those who do not feel like cooking one night, or for those who simply look forward to it every year, they can go to what is called the “Shack,” a food stand the size of a small gas station beside the last row of tents that sells festival food like french fries and burgers, toys for

children, and ice cream (see figure 3). There is a full kitchen inside where all the food is made in plain view because of open air windows to help combat the heat of the grills within. The Shack is one of the social hubs of the campground, with picnic tables for people to sit while eating or waiting on their orders to take back to their tents. For many years, the Shack has been run by the local East Lincoln High School marching band as a fundraiser, but it has been around for decades and, at one point, my grandfather helped run it.

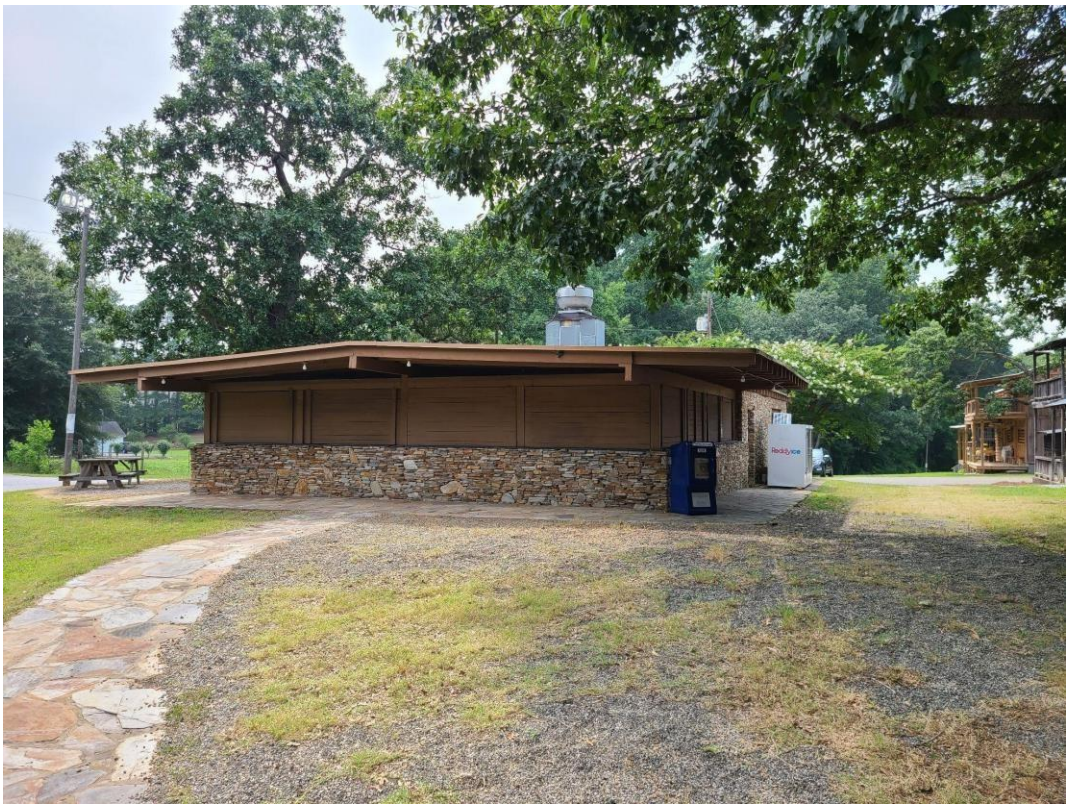

Figure 3. "The Shack" Photo by author.

The Participants

The community that makes up Rock Springs campground mostly comes from Denver, NC and the surrounding towns and cities in the Piedmont area. A large portion of campground members are families who have been attending camp-meeting for multiple generations. The current population is largely a white and heteronormative group of people—most are married men and women with kids—who come from multiple Protestant denominations, but a good number of them come from Methodist and Baptist congregations. There are two African-American centered camp-meetings located in the same area— Tucker's Grove Campground is seven miles from Rock Springs, while Motz Grove is five miles away. As with the history of North American camp-meetings and, indeed, American religions in general, Rock Springs camp-meetings remain racially segregated in an informal way. As noted by the sociologists Emerson and Smith, churches—along with neighborhoods—remain the most racially separated spaces in the United States.[19]

The age of members ranges from new-born infants to members in their eighties. I would estimate that over half of the members of Rock Springs campground are over fifty, and that the community is evenly dispersed between men and women. From my observations, members are middle to upper-middle and working class families, with more working and middle class families than upper-middle class families. The careers of members range from judges, doctors and lawyers to teachers and trade workers. Many of the families who have lived in Denver since Rock Springs was founded were originally farm workers, but have gained upward mobility in the time since. As I will discuss later, not everyone who comes to Rock Springs camp-meeting

[19] See Michael O. Emerson, and Christian Smith. *Divided by Faith : Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2000.)

comes for the religious services, a good number of people come for the social scene that the campground provides during the event. This includes friends brought by younger generations who do not have specific religious ties to the event. In other words, anyone can come to the camp-meeting, but conversations overheard at Rock Springs often begin with a person introducing themselves (on the off chance that they need to introduce themselves) by detailing who they are related to. Beyond hearing many camp-meeting members speak of their kin, there are also patterns in the ways that they conceptualize, remember, and articulate their experiences of camp-meeting in a general sense.

Ways of Conceptualizing Camp-Meeting

In my interviews with participants, certain patterns emerged in how members speak about both the campground and the event of camp-meeting. Their words and phrases set both the place and the event apart from the rest of the world. The most salient theme was that members situate the campground as a place that does not change in contrast with an outside world that does change. This is evidenced in how multiple members spoke of the campground as lacking in technology and as a place that resists changing trends in church services—even though they acknowledge that those trends do make their way into camp-meeting. Situating the campground as unchanging is connected to members then viewing it as a haven from the outside world. Members describe the experience of coming to camp-meeting as a rehabilitative act that allows them to prepare for another year in the outside world. Members further set the place and experience of camp-meeting apart by understanding the relationships they make with other members to be specifically tied to camp-meeting. Participants often describe these relationships as friendships they interact with once a year when camp-meeting is in session, and act as a kind

of spiritual community that is separate from their regular church community. Finally there is a social atmosphere that sets camp-meeting apart from the rest of the world. Members speak about celebrating certain social milestones such as birthdays, courtships, and marriages at the campground while camp-meeting is in session and even when it is not. This suggests that the campground occupies an important space in member's lives beyond what some might think of as religion's institutional functions.

Rock Springs Camp-Meeting as an Unchanging Place

The first interview I conducted, sitting outside of the arbor underneath the shade of a tree, was with Jay who told me that Rock Springs is the last stand for the front porch. Jay is part of what former lead pastor for camp-meeting Tony calls the "old guard." The old guard are elderly members of the Rock Springs campground community who have attended camp-meeting each summer in some capacity— either staying on-site the whole time or coming for a few hours every evening— for their entire lives. This often means that they have participated in campmeeting anywhere between sixty and eighty times. Members of the old guard were raised by parents and grandparents who came to camp-meeting and are members who similarly brought their children and grandchildren to camp-meeting. Six of my seven interviews were with members of the old guard. The other was with a participant who is thirty years old and has come to camp-meeting every year of his life. Twenty-three of the thirty questionnaires returned to me were also from members of the old guard.

If Rock Springs is the only place that has not changed, then it must be the rest of the outside world that has changed. Here we see Jay making a distinction between Rock Springs and the outside world, where the outside world is a place that changes and Rock Springs as a place that does not change. But what is it about the outside world that changes, and why is it important

enough to note for members like Jay when they are speaking about their memories and experiences at Rock Springs? Jay briefly touches on technology, and how the absence of it at camp-meeting is a good thing. He describes camp-meeting as a place where people are "walking around visiting each other" and you do not "always got [sic] your head in the phone or the TV's not on because nobody brings them out here…" and specifically states that "this is the only place that don't change."[20] Here, Jay looks to the fact that today there are kids at Rock Springs playing ball where he once played ball as a kid as evidence that Rock Springs is a place that has not changed.

Conceptualizing certain spaces, like the campground, as set-apart and unchanging is evident in many religious communities. For example in *Mitzvah Girls: Bringing up the Next Generation of Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn*, anthropologist Ayala Fader notes how Hasidic Jews living in diaspora speak of the *alte haym*, or the 'old home' of pre-war Eastern Europe, with a certain reverence and nostalgia despite it being highly romanticized and geographically unspecified. In the same way that long-standing campground members might speak of how they remember camp-meeting as children, Fader tells us that Hasidic Jews speak of the alte haym as a simpler and better time where, because of the harder conditions of life, a higher level of religious observance is remembered and longed for. Members of the Rock Springs community return to the event year after year for similar reasons.

Sitting on the porch of tent #218 on the outer ring of tents, sweating in the heat of a late August afternoon, I began an audio recorded interview with Janet. Janet told me that she has been coming to Rock Springs for 69 years. She told me that she typically stays for seventeen

[20] Interview with "Jay." July 25, 2021.

nights, coming a few days before and staying a day or so after camp-meeting. According to her, there have been years when she was not able to stay for that long, but Janet assured me that even during those years she made it to camp-meeting at least once. According to Janet, she has been at camp-meeting with six generations of her family over the years. Staying seventeen nights in a row is something that Janet mentioned to me twice, the first being when we were setting up a

time for the interview. She told me then that she stays that many times because of how serious she is about camp-meeting. When I asked her about this, she told me:

> Because when I come here, I don't watch television, I don't have a radio, I don't have a smartphone, I don't do any computer. This is where I come to get away to know that I can live without all this stuff. That that's not what's important. What's important is that when I come here, and I don't have those distractions. At home when I finish a meal, I go and turn the TV on, or I go to the computer or I have other distractions. Here, I don't. I find it much easier to get up in the morning here and have personal devotions than I do at home. When I'm here, my devotions are much deeper, I have more time to concentrate, I sit there with my Bible and a devotion book and a dictionary and I try and research - 'what does this really mean?' And so my commitment to things of the Lord are much deeper here without all the distractions of the world.[21]

Here, Janet is making a clear distinction between the outside world and the environment that the place and event of Rock Springs camp-meeting provides. The reason why she is so serious about camp-meeting, she tells us, is because the outside world she inhabits is a world full of distractions. Those distractions are distractions of the outside world— the television, smartphones, and computers that prevent Janet from being able to focus on her devotional work.

However, Janet does attend regular church services on Sundays. When I asked her how her church services are different from camp-meeting, she told me:

[21] Interview with "Janet." August 2, 2021.

[19] Interview with "Janet." August 2, 2021.

> I think technology has changed alot of religion, a lot of services. We used to stand with hymn books, and now we have religious karaoke. And I miss the old hymns that we used to sing that have been replaced with praise and worship. My heart yearns for the old hymns that concentrate on Jesus and on things that He came for. Yes, God Is an awesome God but you don't have to say it 20 times. "The Old Broken Cross," you don't have to repeat, you get more of a theme of what's going on and it follows a theme and you can go through that. I miss those things.[19]

Janet misses the time before praise and worship bands, when old hymns focused on the Gospel instead of repeating how awesome God is twenty times. It is important to note the language Janet uses when she suggests "the old hymns that have been replaced with praise and worship." This kind of language suggests that there are changing trends in her religious life in the outside world that she is unsatisfied with. Janet goes on to describe camp-meeting as being "much simpler" and how there is a "purer" religion there. From this we can further our understanding of how Janet, a member of the Rock Springs' old guard, distinguishes between camp-meeting and the outside world: for Janet, camp-meeting represents a time when the music in services focused on the old Gospel hymns, and it is a place where technology is notably absent as opposed to an outside world dominated by technology, and changing trends in Sunday church services.

Despite maintaining that the religious services at Rock Springs are purer and simpler, Janet also mentioned to me how on the Friday prior to our interview, there was a praise and worship band that performed at the arbor. According to Janet she sat there for two hours and her "brother is more aware of that music than I am. And so he would sit there and feed me the words because I wasn't understanding them. There were two songs that I knew and could worship and was blessed in the two hours."[22] Janet defines the experience of being blessed as "to be

[22] Interview with "Janet." August 2, 2021.

overwhelmed with the blessing that God has put in my life. The undeserved favor that He shows me personally." I asked her if she feels that kind of blessing in her church back home and she told me she does but that there is more of a concentration of the feeling of being blessed at Rock Springs, and that it is tied specifically to the combination of both music and sermons there. In other words, a very important aspect of Janet's experience at Rock Springs camp-meeting was disrupted the previous Friday night by the praise and worship bands performing. I look to Tony, a former Rock Springs lead pastor, to shed some light on if there is a larger uneasiness towards praise and worship bands or if it is just one or two individuals.

As the former pastor of camp-meeting, Tony was once the leader and organizer of religious events at camp-meeting. Now he comes to spend time with family and friends like everyone else. Tony tells me that he has seen a lot of change at camp-meeting, noting specifically that it is through worship styles of music where there is significant change. According to Tony, when he became the lead pastor in the early 2000s, "it was still unheard of to hear much of guitars and drums."[23] From my own experience, the 2020 Rock Springs campmeeting had guitars and drums present in most, if not all, worship music services each evening.

They've (members of the old guard) had to adapt, Tony tells me, but according to him they have also asked why it is that they have to change. Tony references a previous night when he witnessed the reaction of the old guard to what Tony calls "Southern Gospel" and

[23] Interview with "Tony." August 4, 2021.

"contemporary" styles of worship music. During an evening service, a woman got up on the stage under the arbor with her guitar and before she began playing, she addressed the crowd by suggesting: "okay we might stand up we might wiggle, we might clap." Upon hearing this Tony tells me that "you could kinda feel the old guard going 'oh what's this, here we are gonna get one of those contemporary songs where they're jumping up and down."[24] However, the singer went on to perform the Southern Gospel classic, "I'll Fly Away," and upon hearing this the old guard, according to Tony, was excited for the music.

For Janet, praise and worship bands prevent her ability to get the kind of experience she wants out of camp-meeting. Furthermore, Janet tells us that one of the main differences between her religious life inside and outside of camp-meeting is how she feels that praise and worship bands seem to dominate religious services in her regular church life— creating a kind of

"religious karaoke," as she calls it. According to Tony, Janet is not the only member of the old guard who feels like the more contemporary praise and worship bands that are associated with the "jumping up and down" behavior do not belong on the Rock Springs musical lineup. Even though both Jay and Janet suggest that the lack of technology at Rock Springs is part of what separates the camp-meeting experience from their religious lives in the outside world, a more detailed analysis of their interviews reveal that it is because they situate Rock Springs as a place that resists the change occurring in the outside world.

[24] Interview with "Tony." August 4, 2021.

Viewing the Campground as a Haven from the Outside World

The ways in which camp-meeting is set apart extends beyond its members viewing it as an unchanging place. The unchanging characteristic members attribute to the campground gives rise to also viewing it as a safe place from the outside world. On the bottom of their questionnaire, an anonymous member of the old guard, who has been coming to camp-meeting for sixty-three years, wrote that "camp-meeting feels like the start of a new year. The peace I feel helps to prepare me for the situations that will happen in the coming year." In other words this member understands the experience of camp-meeting as rehabilitative and in this way sets campmeeting apart from the rest of the world. This member was not the only one who spoke of campmeeting in such a way. Speaking of camp-meeting as a place that helps prepare for situations in the outside world suggests that, like viewing the campground as an unchanging place, members set camp-meeting apart by viewing it as a kind of refuge or haven from the outside world where they are able to get away and recharge.

While he does not yet qualify as a member of the old guard just yet, Tucker, who has been coming to camp-meeting for thirty consecutive years since he was born, is on track to becoming one. Tucker, like myself, is currently engaged in the process of collecting pieces of history related to Rock Springs and often gives lectures one or twice during camp-meeting about the things he has learned. During our interview, Tucker told me that he takes off a week and a half from his job in Raleigh to come back to camp-meeting each summer. He then told me that, "I absolutely hate the heat, but I come here. So if that tells you anything. Because I was out here every day last week, and I was out here every day this week. I try to come out here and make it to where I can recharge to make it another year in Raleigh." I asked Tucker if coming to the campground to recharge worked for him, and he responded with "pretty good," and that he could

"always use another week."[25] Janet described camp-meeting as serving a similar function by allowing her to renew her faith and review changes she has witnessed in herself and others. Janet, however, describes camp-meeting as a touchstone, saying that it is "a place that you go back to" and that if she "can just get there and sit in the swing and be still and know that He's God."[26]A member who has been coming every year since 1957 noted on their questionnaire that one of the most important aspects of camp-meeting is that it is "a sanctuary— a place of simplicity, a safe place, a place where you are accepted as you are, a place for family, a place founded on the principle of gathering to worship God." For these reasons, this member is drawn back to camp-meeting year after year and why it is a "sacred part" of their life.

Spiritual Community

At least four different questionnaires detail that part of what is important about campmeeting is that there are relationships between people where they only see each other when camp-meeting is in session. One member notes that "I treasure the time I get to visit with extended family and my 'camp-meeting' friends, ones I have grown up with."

The last question that Janet answered in our interview was: why is camp-meeting important, not for just you but for everyone who comes here? Janet's response was:

> Well I know that I made friendships here with people that are strong. And this is the only time we see some of these people. You have known them for years, and you look forward to coming here… this line [of tents] is just really close, the people here, this line, and we take a picture every year of the tent owners, every year ust to have the memory. I think

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[25] Interview with "Tucker." August 7, 2021.

[26] Interview with "Janet." August 2, 2021

> it's important to keep those contacts, and then to be sure that they're going to spend eternity with you. It's not just a here thing, it's a forever thing.[27]

The friendships Janet has made with other members of Rock Springs, and specifically with the other tent owners in Janet's line of tents, are friendships that extend beyond death. According to Janet, these are friendships that are annually updated and memorialized with a picture they take every year to be sure that they will spend eternity together. Moreover, Janet notes that these friendships she has were made at camp-meeting and are only engaged with when camp-meeting is in session. Like Janet, the aforementioned member who described camp-meeting as a sanctuary also wrote on their questionnaire that an important part of camp-meeting is "the rekindling of annual friendships." For this member, the friendships specific to the event are part of what draws them back each year, along with "the memories of past times, the times of worship, and even going to the shack." Both this member and Janet's description of the kind of relationships they maintain with other members of the campground, and, particularly how they are updated or rekindled each year, suggests that the meaning of these relationships are rooted in the experience of camp-meeting and further work to set it apart from the rest of the world.

The Social Atmosphere of Camp-Meeting

An anonymous member, who has been coming to camp-meeting since they were three or four, noted on their questionnaire that one of the most important memories they have of camp-meeting was when she met her husband at the campground. This member states that when they were fourteen years old, and their future husband was seventeen, he told her that one day he was going to marry her. An addendum at the bottom of the same questionnaire states: "I got married

[27] Interview with "Janet." August 2, 2021

at the Arbor in December, 1988. My neighbor played an antique pump organ. We had a Christmas tree, decorations, strings of popcorn and rabbit tobacco. Our old toys were under the tree. We had a horse and buggy." For this member, coming to camp-meeting has affected her life beyond strictly religious reasons; she both met and married her husband at the campground. Another member who has been coming for seventy five years, or their whole life they say, notes that "the most fun was getting a girlfriend or boyfriend and walking around the walkway holding hands and sitting in the swings."

One member answered the question about memories that stick out the most to them with: meeting friends from places other than Denver; staying at the campground during the day; getting married at the campground in August of 1969 on "Big Sunday" (i.e, the last Sunday of camp-meeting; renewing their vows at the campground twenty-five years later; their granddaughter's baptism in 2017; and having their 50th anniversary party at the campground. This particular member notes that they have been to camp-meeting seventy times, suggesting that they are at least seventy years old. Throughout those years this member details how they experienced important milestone events of their life at the campground, even when campmeeting was not in session. Furthermore, they note how the younger generations of their family experienced important religious rites, such as baptism, not at their regular church but at the campground. This suggests that the importance of camp-meeting and the campground for its members, particularly members of the old guard, extends beyond the annual event held each summer and illuminates how the space of the campground is further set apart— through memories attached to important milestone events held at the campground.

Understanding Camp-Meeting as a Contemporary Phenomenon

The members of today's Rock Springs camp-meeting, among other camp-meeting communities across the United States, are among the living inheritors of American revivalism and the stewards of an annual tradition that has survived for many decades. In a general sense, my work has moved the focus of scholarship on American camp-meetings from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to how one exists and operates in the contemporary period. Specifically my work highlights how the Rock Springs campground community expresses both its memories and experiences tied to the camp-meeting event. This analysis reveals that Rock Springs members—especially its long-standing members—set the event and place of Rock Springs camp-meeting apart from the rest of the world in how they speak of their memories and experiences there. These points of analysis bring this work into conversation with those who study American revivalism, how religious communities create, maintain and behave in sacred space, and the relationship between idealized conceptions of "traditional" religion and how they exist in the modern world. The most important contribution that my work brings to the contemporary study of religion is in the analysis of how the Rock Springs community maintains and remembers the sacred space of the campground. For its members, the maintenance of the campground space involves understanding it to be a haven from the outside world—a world that, according to Rock Springs members, is notably characterized by changing trends in the American religious landscape. In other words, the Rock Springs community is interested in maintaining a continuity of tradition that they understand camp-meeting to represent. Accordingly, there are ways of behaving and conceptualizing relationships made within the community that its members reference when speaking of camp-meeting as being set apart from the rest of the world.

American Revivalism

The study of American revivalism and specifically of the camp-meeting phenomenon has largely kept its analysis on how they both operated in the mid-to-late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Because of this, much of how revivalism and camp-meetings operate in the contemporary period have been left untouched by scholars who study religion. Moreover, the camp-meetings that are still around in the contemporary period, such as Rock Springs, the Salem campground studied by anthropologist Bradd Shore in Georgia, and the camp-meetings Minuette Floyd visited and photographed, have survived the passing of time and many changes in the American religious landscape since their inception during the antebellum period. Because of this, studying camp-meetings in the contemporary period means studying living repositories of cultural information tied to sacred space that has been passed down from family to family over the course of generations. While my study focuses on how one camp-meeting community sets the place and experience of the event apart through memory and narrative, other areas of potential study are: an ethnomusicological look at how certain forms of Gospel music are favored over other genres of Christian music; how camp-meetings are melting pots of various Christian denominations; and a comparative look of both predominantly white camp-meetings and black camp-meetings, how those boundaries were set up and enforced during the Jim Crow era and the relationship they now have in the post-Jim Crow period.

Religious Communities and Sacred Space

The scholarship that most closely resembles my study on the Rock Springs camp-meeting community is *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community* by scholar of religion Sarah M. Pike who notes that evangelical camp-meetings serve as a nineteenth century antecedent to the Neopagan festival. Here, I discuss the ways in which

Neopagan festival communities construct and maintain their festival space in ways that mirror how the Rock Springs camp-meeting community does, and place it in conversation with one of the only other contemporary studies on American camp-meetings—the work of anthropologist Bradd Shore's work on the Salem camp-meeting in Georgia. The most salient similarity between the two is how both the Neopagan festival space and the place of Rock Springs camp-meeting act as places set apart from the rest of society. Furthermore, there are similarities in how both groups look to older, idealized versions of religion to inform ways of being religious in the present day, place importance on childhood memories that translate into current event experiences, and maintain and commemorate the sacred event space.

Pike tells us that festivals "become places separated from the everyday world not only because of their physical settings, but primarily because of the ways in which festival goers perceive them."[28] Neopagans view the festival space as an ideal reality where they are able to truly be their pagan selves—selves they have to repress when they are in "mundania," as they call it, or the outside world. The physical settings and environment of the Neopagan events are also an important way that the festival stands in contrast to the outside world. Pike describes those she attended as vivid, magical environments noting that some festival goers describe it as if they are actually "driving into faery" or as a "psychedelic experience."[29] In other words, the physical environment and the layout of the festivals heightens the contrast between the festival and mundania. Likewise, members of the Rock Springs community situate the campground as a

[28] Pike, *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community*, 19.
[29] Ibid., 19.

place set apart from the rest of the world where, in the eyes of campground members, an ideal religion is preserved. This occurs in the way that the camp-meeting community, especially the long-term members, perceive both the place and event of camp-meeting, and how the physical layout and environment calls back to a more rustic way of living. The lack of technology such as televisions, cellphones, and computers that some members associate with the outside world, paired with spending more than a few nights sleeping in wooden tents helps distinguish between the campground and the outside world.

A further point of similarity between Neopagan festival communities and the Rock Springs community is born out of how they both cultivate environments that represent traditions from the past. In both instances, these traditions of the past are idealized and inform contemporary religious practices. For Neopagans, Pike notes that one of the reasons why festival sites are attractive is because of "the part they play in recreating ancient pre-Christian practices, when, Neopagans believe, humans honored the changing seasons and lived more harmoniously with their surroundings."[30] However, Pike does note that the historical connection between contemporary Neopagans and ancient pre-Christian practices is an imagined connection, whereas the Rock Springs community has a direct lineage going back to the inception of the Rock Springs campground. Camp-meeting members look to this heritage as representing an idealized form of religion they understand to be preserved in the camp-meeting tradition. This is evidenced in how long-term members of Rock Springs situate camp-meeting as a place that resists the changes present in the outside world. The long-term members especially maintain this perception of camp-meeting because of how long they have been coming to the event; as I noted earlier, this

[30] 28 Ibid., 48.

can be anywhere between sixty and eighty times over the course of their lives. Because of this, members like Jay, who told me he has come to camp-meeting all sixty-one years of his life, have the perspective to say that they can see children today engaging in the same activities he engaged in as a child and conclude that nothing has changed.

Childhood memories are similarly useful in Neopagan communities. For many Neopagans, Pike tells us, their journey to becoming Pagan and entrance into Neopagan communities begins in their childhood. Many of the Rock Springs members that I spoke to told me that the first time they were brought by their parents to camp-meeting was when they were less than a year old. Pike notes that many Neopagans describe a feeling of alienation from the predominantly Christian world they were socialized in as children. For them, the Christian world was one in which their “innocent appreciation of nature and sensitivity to the supernatural" were lost as they grew up and redeemed as they found themselves connecting with Neopagan communities.[31] This dynamic works to set the festival grounds apart from the rest of the world by defining the boundary between the outside world and the festival along lines of nurturing and reconnecting with the childhood self that was lost in the outside world. Importantly, the narrative individuals have of redeeming the childhood self is a way for Neopagan community members to interact with each other. For Neopagans, Pike notes, the world should be as they remember it as children. In other words, an important theme in the experience of Neopagan festivals is the cultivation of an idealized childhood that is remembered in contrast to the Christian world Neopagans grew up in.

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[31] 29 Ibid., 157.

For Jay, the image of children playing ball where he once played ball is intimately connected to his conceptualization of how the campground resists change from the outside world. In his study of Salem camp-meeting in Georgia, anthropologist Bradd Shore discusses how camp-meeting affects a lifetime of memory insofar that the tendency for dedicated members is to return annually each summer for their entire lives, causing them to have a "lifetime of memory that has no specific location in the past, for it is being continually updated."[32] By this, Shore means that for members who have been participating in camp-meeting for most of their lives, there is a blurring of memories insofar that virtually every camp-meeting is the same as the one the year before, and will likely be the same as the one that follows. The old guard members from Rock Springs are no different, and those that I spoke to have been coming for at least seventy years. While Neopagans seek to, amongst other things, redeem a lost childhood in the sacred space of festival grounds, camp-meeting members seek to maintain and perpetuate childhood memories and experiences that form the lifetime of memory—as Shore calls it— in the sacred space of the campground.

Another important point of analysis between Neopagan festivals and camp-meetings are altars and tents, or how spaces within the sacred space of both festival and campground are maintained. In the Neopagan festival context, altars exist in two ways: there are the altars that are constructed by community members on festival grounds, typically on permanent festival sites, and the altars that festival members have at their homes in the outside world. Pike tells us that

[32] Shore, "Spiritual Work, Memory Work: Revival and Recollection at Salem Camp Meeting,"107.

altars are a "site of connection between the living and the dead as well as between human and deity, but home altars situate the individual in particular kinship arrangements among the living" such as with others within the Neopagan community.[33] Pike tells us that Neopagans often bring objects from their home altars to festivals to contribute to collective altars constructed in festival

space that act as sites of community identity. These collective altars, when built on permanent festival sites, accumulate meaning over the course of years as each festival brings in new additions to the altars.

Similarly, camp-meeting members bring items and aspects of their lives with them each year to the campground. While camp-meeting is not in session, each tent stands basically empty throughout the year leaving only the heavy appliances like refrigerators (albeit unplugged) and large tables. But a day or so before the official beginning of camp-meeting, one can find many tent owners parked outside of their tents carrying in cushions, bed sheets, lamps, other amenities, and cleaning out the dirt that accumulates over the year. Importantly, however, what campground members also bring back each year are pictures of late family members and older generations who have both inhabited the campground space and maintained the family tent itself. While campground members might not call these arrangements of photos "altars" (as that language would often be used by these Protestants to describe where a Bible rests in a worship space) they do operate in ways that mirror what Neopagan altars do—connecting living generations of the campground community to the generations of the past and serving as an orientation for the younger generations of camp-meeting members. Photos of community members commemorate

[33] Pike, *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community,* 66.

relationships beyond just the strictly familial, however. As Janet tells us, her line of tents take a photo each year to commemorate that year's camp-meeting and to update the spiritual community in a way that allows Janet to remain sure that they will spend eternity together.

Anthropologist Bradd Shore's analysis of the Salem camp-meeting also made note of how photos are used, especially in tents as reminders of ancestors and the lineage that the living are a part of. Moreover, the photos do not only depict family members who have passed on, but also showcase living members alongside the dead. The effect of this, Shore tells us, is "a blurring of time and a continuity of space" as members are constantly moving between images of the past, the present, and imagine the future.[34] Janet's use of photography to commemorate her line of tents works in a similar way. For Janet, the meaning of the relationships between her line of tents is not confined to the here and now, but extends beyond death and into the afterlife. Furthermore, Janet mentions specifically that the religious experiences she has when she comes to camp-meeting are different from those she has at her normal Sunday church. Throughout our interview Janet maintains that the religious services at camp-meeting are "purer" and "simpler" than those in the outside world. For Janet this means that there is noticeably less influence of contemporary praise and worship music styles in the sermons at camp-meeting. Because of this, Janet is able to feel "blessed," which she describes as an overwhelming feeling of blessing from God, a feeling that is more concentrated at camp-meeting than it is at her regular church. Understanding that members like Janet view camp-meeting as representing a purer and simpler religion that resists changes from the outside world, and comprises a spiritual community gives

[34] Shore,"Spiritual Work, Memory Work: Revival and Recollection at Salem Camp Meeting,"107.

insight into how both the place and event of camp-meeting becomes set apart. In so doing, however, situating the camp-meeting as set apart from the outside world brings it into conversation with the relationship between the so-called modern world and the world of tradition and what place religion has in an increasingly secular world.

Conceptions of "Traditional" Religion and the Modern World

In her work *Religion as a Chain of Memory,* sociologist of religion Danièle Hervieu-Léger discusses the place that religion has in the modern world where "the process of rationalization which informed the advance of modernity went hand in hand with the process of 'dismantling the gods.'"[35] Hervieu-Léger's work is important to my analysis of Rock Springs insofar that it gives context to what is meant when members speak of camp-meeting as being a "purer" or "simpler" place of religion and speak of it in contrast to the outside world. In other words, by placing my analysis of Rock Springs in conversation with Hervieu-Léger and her conception of the relationship between the "traditional" and the "modern" world, the function of camp-meeting rises to the foreground as a religious tradition that persists despite "a defining feature of the modern world" being the decline of religion.[36] Ultimately, Hervieu-Léger argues against religion being wholly associated with the world of tradition. In this sense, tradition is defined by its conferring of "transcendent authority on the past " and is therefore presumed to be in opposition to a modern world. The modern world, Hervieu-Léger suggests, is characterized by

[35] Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory,* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 1.
[36] Ibid., 1

"on the one hand, heteronomous society, its institution beyond reach and outside its own control; on the other, autonomous society that recognizes itself as at once self-created and creative."[37] In other words, Hervieu-Léger disagrees with the idea that the world of tradition is incompatible with the modern world based on its tendency to confer authority on a transcendent past.

In fact, Hervieu-Léger argues that "religion, which was deemed to have been relegated to the margins of modern society, has every appearance of displaying its capacity to take on new social, political and cultural relevance in the crisis of modernity."[38] The crisis of modernity that Hervieu-Léger refers to is the process of rationalization "demystifying whole sections of human reality" which gives rise to "the dislocation of comprehensive systems of meaning, which in past societies gave sense and coherence to the chaos of meaning."[39] In other words the modern world, in its ability to "dismantle the gods," has only left a void of meaning where religious meaning once held space, and has given no acceptable replacement in its wake.

For Hervieu-Léger, the response to this void lies in the creative power of tradition, which is able to bring about a "world of collective meanings in which day-to-day experience that can play havoc with groups or individuals is related to an immutable, necessary order that pre-exists both individuals and groups."[40] In other words, what tradition is able to do for groups and individuals is give them coherent meaning systems through which they are able to make sense of their lives. Hervieu-Léger looks to the description of a celebration of the Sabbath in a Polish

[37] Ibid., 85.
[38] Ibid., 2.
[39] Ibid., 90.
[40] Ibid., 86.

shtetl as an example of how tradition— and specifically religion— can bring about a world of collective meanings. Hervieu-Léger concludes that for the Polish family celebrating the Sabbath, "every gesture expressed, every moment passed by the Jewish family followed through the course of the feast day is invested with a sense of immemorial continuity in which it is supposed to find its place."[41] I would suggest that the camp-meeting event functions similarly to how this celebration of the Sabbath is described. Based on how the members of the Rock Springs community speak about their memories and experiences tied to the event of camp-meeting, there is indeed a sense of continuity that they seek to maintain. The meaning of camp-meeting comes directly from its separateness from the outside world. A chief dissatisfaction with the outside world that Rock Springs members proclaim is how the outside world is changing. The changes that they refer to are the changes in the American religious landscape through trends such as

praise and worship musical styles in their weekly church services. When Rock Springs members speak of camp-meeting being a place of a "purer" and "simpler" religion, they are invoking the contrast between the outside world of change and the set apart place and event of camp-meeting. For members of Rock Springs, "purer" and "simple" means an understanding of religion that has not changed in the ways that they see the American religious landscape changing in the outside world. What those changes represent is the dilution of what Rock Springs members understand as an idealized form of religion preserved at camp-meeting. In this way, camp-meeting is a place where a "traditional" understanding of religion persists despite the decline of religion in the

[41] Ibid., 86.

modern world by virtue of the fact that camp-meeting members maintain camp-meeting in ways that separate the event from the outside world.

Conclusions: Will Camp-Meeting Survive?

On the very last day of camp-meeting, after most of the Rock Springs members have packed up their cars and prepared their tents to sit empty for another year, the Board of Trustees and some of the other long-term members of the community gather underneath the arbor in the late afternoon one last time. The leading pastor for camp-meeting began with a prayer and then gave room for Jay, the unofficial "mayor" of Rock Springs camp-meeting played a song he wrote on the guitar. Everyone sat quietly and listened to Jay's song about always wanting to get back to camp-meeting and the feeling he gets from being there. After this, the pastor opened the floor for those sitting in the pews to voice their thoughts and concerns about this year's camp-meeting. While many stood up and spoke about how much they enjoyed coming back to camp-meeting again this year, a great worry on most everyone's mind was about the plan to keep newer generations coming to camp-meeting each year.

Like other Protestant churches in America, camp-meeting is funded by its congregation and will only continue to survive so long as more are brought into it. But the thought of losing camp-meeting for good seems to be unbearable for many of its members, who all hold the memory of the arson fires from the late twentieth century like scars in their hearts. But the threat of imminent destruction of the campground via fire is different from the slow, dwindling numbers of camp-meeting attendees. Some of the suggestions I heard that day were more activities for children and more planning set aside for the children's services during the campmeeting event. One member stood up and passionately suggested that one of the main

problems is the in-fighting he has witnessed amongst the Protestant denominations who are involved in camp-meeting that ultimately leads to major splits between church congregations. Other members feel more confident about the future of camp-meeting. When I interviewed him, Terry Brotherton, who compiled and published the local histories of Rock Springs, said “I've had many people ask me over the years—will this thing survive? I’ll say look out there in the passway at all those children; they’ll come back as adults. They keep coming back. It’s just a continuous system, I guess.” Either way, the future of Rock Springs camp-meeting does rest on the shoulders of new generations. The worries expressed about the future of camp-meeting highlight how camp-meeting has functioned for its members over the years. Each member that was present for the final meeting under the arbor on the last day, are members who were brought by their parents as young children and are among those in their generation who kept the tradition of camp-meeting alive by returning each summer. For these members, camp-meeting has been a consistent memory and experience that they have gladly maintained over the course of their lives, and look forward to passing down to newer generations of stewards. For that is what the survival of camp-meeting requires—passing the torch of stewardship from one generation to the next, and so on and so forth.

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Appendix A Voluntary Questionnaire

1. How long have you been coming?
2. Do you spend the night when you come to camp meeting? If so, how many nights do you spend?
3. What's your first memory here?
4. What are a couple memories you have from the camp meeting over the years that stick out the most?
5. What do you find important about Rock Springs camp-meeting?
6. (optional) If you are interested in taking part in an interview, leave your name and contact information. After the questionnaire is returned, I will reach out to you via email or phone to set up an interview either during camp meeting or after.

Appendix B

Transcribed Interviews

"W" stands for the author

Jay

W- This Sunday, Jul 25, 2021. I'm having a conversation with Jay Sigmon. So, what I plan on doing in interviews is just using the questionnaire as a script.

J- That's fine.

W- So do you want to tell me how long you've been coming here?

J- I'm 61, and I've been coming for 61 years.

W- Do you spend the night when you come here? J-
Every night.

W- What's your first memory here?

J- As a kid, playing out here and all the other kids staying out here and playing out here. We stayed all day long, we never left.

W- You never left?

J- Never left. Momma would maybe come and get us in the evening to take us home and make us take a bath. We'd take a little tub bath, a wash tub bath. She'd make us go home, and she wouldn't be ready to come back, and we'd be afraid we'd miss something. I lived about a mile away, so me and my sisters we'd run all the way back down the dirt road here; we looked like pig pen when we got back. But we were afraid that we were going to miss something. Because

we played out here in the arbor all day, and there might be 100 kids out here. There'd be four ladies watching us -

W- Making sure nobody was getting in trouble?

J- Yep. Or put a band-aid on us, because the mothers went home.

W- Interesting. And that's your first memory here?

J- That's my first memory here. Staying up later than you would normally get to.

W- Because it's kind of like a vacation when you come here, right?

J- It was our only vacation that we had.

W- Oh yeah. I mean, growing up I have very similar memories to that. I don't know if I have one single memory that sticks out in my mind, because I asked my mom the other night when she first brought me here and she said like when I was six or seven. But do you remember how old you were when you first came?

J- Well I was born in January, and I was brought here in July.

W- Wow.

J- So I was actually born into it. Went out here barefooted, your feet were tough as nails you could run on rocks, briars and all.

W- When were you born?

J- I was born in 1960.

W- So the summer of 1960, you were here. J-
Yep.

W- Wow, okay. So if that's your first memory, do you have any other memories that stick out as being, maybe not important for the community but important for you?

J- In '72, that's when I got saved out here.

W- And it was during..

J- One of the services. Preacher Redmond. I was 12 years old.

W- Why does that stick out? I mean obviously you were saved and that's a huge thing, but can you elaborate?

J- Well I guess it was the first time that it touched my heart. W-
Right.

J- And so you don't forget something like that when you're saved and you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

W- Do you remember how it looked?

J- The place was packed, and they gave the altar call and that's when I came down and lots of other kids my age came down.

W- How old were you then?

J- I was 12. Well you know a lot of backsliding since then, like my teenager years and stuff. But it's something you don't ever forget.

W- So, had you been baptized at that point?

J- I'd been baptized. As a Methodist they baptize you when you're born.

W- Right. Because I went through something similar at Salem called confirmation. Was this different from confirmation?

J- Mhm, this is different from confirmation. Confirmation was later.

W- Interesting. And besides that, what else is important about camp meeting?

J- Well, it's like I told somebody, camp meeting can go on without me but I can't go on without camp meeting. It becomes in your blood, you know. I've quit jobs to come here because I couldn't get off.

W- Wow.

J- So, you know you can get another job but you can't miss camp meeting. And there's been lean years, there's been times that I couldn't be out here but only on the weekends because I was traveling out of state but I was able to get here on the weekends so I actually still came. And so.

W- You have a tent here, correct?

J- Oh yeah.

W- How long have you had that tent?

J- I can trace my roots back - my family, all the way back to 1830 on paper.

W- The Sigmons?

J- Yeah.

W- Wow.

J- Martin Sigmon, my ancestor was one of the largest signers of the deed.

W- I think I've seen his name on some of the sources that I've read.

J- Both sides of my family, the Gabriel tent is up here even tells of him helping shingle the roof of the arbor in 1870 something, but I can trace it all the way back to that time. My great great grandpa. W- The same tent?

J- Not the same tent. My grandpa owned four at one time is what my dad always said. It was #51 and #52, and then we had #149 and #150. But back in the day there was different numbers because when it burnt, they added more tents so it was #148 and #149. But the second row was built later on.

W- Okay so if we're talking about numbers of rows, this is number one?

J- This is number one on the inside, and then number two, and then the third row. And a lot of the third row was here a hundred years ago, but some of it here was built in '75 or '73 when it burnt the first time.

W- And do you know what caused the burning?

J- Well they're not really sure, but they suspected arson. If it hadn't been for Dwight Jr. with a bulldozer making fire breaks a lot more would have burnt down. Our tent didn't burn in '73, but it did burn in '75. So half burnt the first time, the other half burnt the second time. W- What happened the second time?

J- It was the same thing, arson. Matter of fact I was in junior high, I was at rock springs, and we saw the smoke during class. And every fire truck in the area came, everyone came to fight the fire.

W- What do you think would have happened if the entire thing would have burnt down?
J- It would have been built back.
W- But it would have been bad, right?
J- It would have been really bad. And when we came by we were on the school bus on the road and we had to see it when we came by, and it was awful. It was devastating. I was wanting to leave then, and couldn't leave. And you know, you're seeing it burn.. But everybody plugged back together, gave everybody two years to build back and shoot - they built back on the first year.
W- Because it is that important to the community?
J- Oh yeah. This was the only vacation my grandfather took. And he came here, and never left the whole time he took his baths in the little washtub. Daddy and all my uncles went home to do the chores. He never left, he was the secretary of the board. I became one in 2002, and I can trace that back too. On paper there are Gabriels and Sigmons all the way back (as board of trustee members).
W- That's really all the big questions that I have. You know a lot about camp meeting. What else sticks out? What's important about it?
J- Well the history of it is, you know, really neat. I mean, I can walk the same paths that my ancestors walked, you know what I mean? It's like it is a part of me. You don't want to miss it. When you get here, you go home to take a bath or something, you're worried about missing something. I felt that way as a kid, I feel that way now. So I want to get back here. This place means alot to me.
W- The last time I came was the summer that I graduated from high school and its kind of strange and nice to be back here.
J- A lot has changed.
W- But also a lot has stayed the same.
J- And this is the only place that don't change. And we have people that don't like that come by and see this as shacks, but we try to invite them to come see what it's like when it's going on. See, this is the last stand for the front porch, if you think about it. People walking around visiting each other, and you know maybe not always got your head in the phone or the TVs not on because nobody brings them out here much, a few do. But during the day, kids are playing ball out here, and its the same place we played ball. I mean nothing has changed. It's been fixed up alot. My uncle was on the board, and he'd get me and some others and we'd be here cleaning up. It's never looked this good before but we used to take care of the grounds.
W- So you've got blood sweat and tears in this place?
J- Oh yeah. This place means the world to me. Me and my wife got married out here.
W- Do you have children?
J- No I don't have children. My children are the ones that come up to the front (he starts to tear up here), I do the children's service on both Sundays.
W- Interesting, because part of what interested me in this is how at any given point there's three different generations experiencing the same thing.

J- Well you tell me where else you can go for 125$ and have this much fun and fellowship. It's the original timeshare condo.

W- That's a good way of putting it in layman's terms for someone who doesn't know what's happening here. And a lot of people don't know what's happening here.

J- And that's why I tell them that they need to come out here and see how it goes.

W- At this point it's more than what just happens in the arbor, it's a social thing too about family and friends.

J- But that's the most important part. This arbor is the focal point. We put a new roof on in '96 and it was paid for in the first year by donations, people bought the old benches before we put in new ones. People are very generous here. You wouldn't believe what people will give on a sunday.

W- Well it's important to them.

J- Yeah, it is important. To keep it going. And we have a good crop of young people, and a good crop of children to keep it going. And like you said, these tents are handed down from generation to generation, and to me, it's like selling one of your family but there's people that sell. I think the highest one is 55,000, ones for sale for 65,000 and ones for sale for 75,000. Its hard to imagine. A lot of history here too, the Methodist church was trying to say in 1910 that its purpose was done and that it needed to be shut down, that there's too many rowdies out here doing stuff they shouldn't be doing than there was going to church. So three of the trustees agreed that it needed to be sold. Seven disagreed. One of them was the mayor at the time. W- Of Denver?

J- No the, what they called the mayor, or the chairman of the trustees. He told them he'd deputize the everyone before they closed down the campground. And they actually were a township, and they only lost their charter in 1975 because no body kept it up. So imagine the power they could have had today if they had just kept it up, they could actually vote.

Terry Brotherton

W- What are a couple memories from camp meeting over the years that stick out the most to you? And not just like the oldest, but important events and experiences?

T- Well, I think camp meeting is- has changed from the rowdiness to a much calmer... I can remember drunk staggering around when I was a youth, but you don't see that these days. It's really changed for the better, I'd say.

W- What else?

T- The appearance of the grounds has changed drastically, this used to be very rough. And Dwight Calloway probably was more responsible for that, and the ladies started bringing their plants out. It's unreal what's been done to beautify the grounds, especially around the arbor.

W- Right, and it's been here since 1830, so I'm sure it's gone through many iterations.

T- The preservation of the arbor, all the new timbers we put in years ago. It had got foul timbers in it, and those were replaced to make it structurally sound.

W- So, besides the changing, are there any memories that you hold near and dear to your heart? I mean, why did you compile two books worth of camp meeting history?

T- Well, it was kind of by accident. My mother had collected some information, Rita Sigmon had collected some information, she shared it with me and at some point in time in the late '80s I felt that this needs to be preserved for future generations because there was never - the lion's club had at one time printed a couple books, but they weren't really in depth. Elsa (?) King had a book for her grandfather who kept minutes of the trustee's meetings.

T- You know something else that's gone from here - the sheriff would arrest someone on the grounds, when I was a kid, I would stand outside of Manual Primm's tent and he was just a piece - he had a little store down on Unity Church Road. They would take them into Manual's tent for a trial, no attorney present. Manual was a very fair man. They got a fair trial, but no one ever come out innocent. (Laughing) I mean they were all convicted. Most of it was for intoxication, I guess.

W- So Jay was telling me that this place was a township up until about '75?

T- It was a municipality. Incorporated a lot of statutes, and you'll find some of them in my book that were passed from the legislature in Raleigh. I believe it was '72, the house and senate in Raleigh - all the municipalities that were not active were wiped off from the books. But this campground had a mayor, and aldermen which were selected from the trustees and they had authority to appoint their own police officers; which they did for many years gone by.

W- Do you have children?

T- No.

W- Because part of my interest in this study is how, when camp meeting is active, you can see three generations - children, parents and grandparents - and if they are active, long standing members like yourself, each generation is experiencing the same thing.

T- Well, I've had many people to ask me over the years - will this thing survive? I'll say look out there in the passway at all those children; they'll come back as adults. They keep coming back. It's just a continuous system, I guess.

W- Jay told me that he was born in January and that August he was here.

T- I was born in February and that August I was here. In '46. I was coming in here Friday, and there were four ladies walking out through there and they had some books in their arms and I stopped, rolled the window down, and said to 'em "I'm from New Jersey," and I said "we've heard how bad poverty is in the South, but I never realized it was this bad that people had to live like this." They started laughing and said "we know you!" "you know this place!" They started telling me who they were, and I said "Yeah I know your husband…" But they said they had a bible study out here like every couple of weeks in the arbor, they meet in the arbor during the year.

Janet

W-Today is Aug 2, 2021 and I am talking with Janet and you have a lovely tent, Janet. It's an Abernathy tent?

J-My nickname is Jenny. Let's use Jenny. That's who everybody here calls me. W-Ok, so how long has this tent been yours?

J-The original tent that stood here was built in 1948 when my daddy and his brothers and sisters decided rather than rent one, which they had done for years and years. They got a space from the trustees and they used lumber that they had for a chicken house, to build a tent because they felt it was important to have a place. And so in 1948 they built the tent, and the family went together and bought tin. Different ones bought stuff to build it and they built it and in 2008, my husband got concerned because the boards were turning to powder and he says, "if you are going to continue to come and stay, it's going to have to be safer than this because im afraid it is going to collapse on you". So we tore that one down and built this one and we tented in this one the first year in 2009.

W-And you have been coming here for 69 years.

J-Yes

W-Have you missed a summer?

J-

Oh yes,there was a period when I couldn't come and stay but I come for the Big Singing or sometime during camp meeting every year.

W-So every single year, you have been here at least once and sometimes for the entire time.

J-Yes, sometimes for the entire time.

W-Because you said you would stay for 17 nights in a row.

J- Normally that's what I do. I come three days before anything starts, we come early and set up. They usually turn the power on the last week in June, and we come then and set it up and stay here for the weekend for the 4th of July, and have a family get together here. Then we go home, and I come back usually the Wednesday or Thursday before little week and stay until the monday after camp meeting is over.

W- Because you said, the other night that we were talking, that you come that much because you are serious about camp meeting. Why is camp meeting so serious for you?

J- Because when I come here, I don't watch television, I don't have a radio, I don't have a smartphone, I don't do any computer. This is where I come to get away to know that I can live without all this stuff. That that's not what's important. What's important is that when I come here, and I don't have those distractions. At home when I finish a meal, I go and turn the TV on, or I go to the computer or I have other distractions. Here, I don't. I find it much easier to get up in the morning here and have personal devotions than I do at home. When I'm here, my devotions are much deeper, I have more time to concentrate, I sit there with my Bible and a devotion book and a dictionary and I try and research - "what does this really mean?" And so my commitment to things of the Lord are much deeper here without all the distractions of the world.

W- And also the environment of this place kind of brings about a reverent feeling.

J- And that heritage that my family had here is a special blessing that I can sit and reminisce about.

W- So you said that your first memory here was walking around and tripping on the tree roots, are there any other early memories?

J- Yes. When I was very young, probably four or five, our family came. I had three brothers and my mother and daddy and we came to stay with grandma. We all had pallets on the floor in the old tent, and my mother had feen-a-mint underneath her pillow.

W- What's that?

J- That's a laxative chewing gum. And so my two older brothers and I found mother's chewing gum and we chewed it all. So at that time, there were no bathrooms in the tents and my poor mother went in to get us and she realized what was going on. We had the most stressful night. We messed up all our clothes, all the bedding, everything. And the thing was my daddy worked on second shift, and he would drive from Kannapolis over here at night to be here for camp meeting the next day. Well it was a terrible storm that night, and we were the last tent on the end, and so when he got here that night the storm was so strong he just stayed in his car. He didn't come in. And so here mother was with three kids that were having terrible problems, messing up everything and she was concerned because her husband hadn't gotten here yet.

J-

W- And you didn’t have cell phones back then either.

No! You didn’t have anything. So the next morning he got up and walked in, she just erupted into tears because he had decided to sleep in the car, leaving her to deal with everything. So that’s one of my early memories. But she and grandma cleaned everything up, cleaned us up, and things went back to normal. But you adjust here to whatever life brings you.

W- That’s a good memory. So you said that part of coming here, and why you’re so serious and why it's so important is because it helps you really commit to your devotions J- To the Lord.

W- Would you call that a religious experience? Or is the whole thing a religious experience?

J- Define experience.

W- Experience in the sense of what you attribute religiosity to be

J- I think I see it as a time when I renew understanding of what is important. I renew the fact that faith is really important because I review things that people have gone through during the year that I have seen faith work. I use it as a time to see how my life needs to change, to be more like Christ. I see it as a time when I can reflect on how others have changed through camp meeting, and to know that this is a touchstone. A place that you go back to. If I can get there and sit in the swing and be still and know that He’s God. There's something special about this whole area, about this campground. Even when camp meeting isnt going on, it's still holy ground as far as I’m concerned. I don't know if that answers your question.

W- That’s a perfect answer. Every scholar has problems defining religious experience, so whatever people say is ultimately the right answer. Another question that I have is do you go to church regularly?

J- Yes, definitely.

W- How is this different?

J- I think technology has changed alot of religion, a lot of services. We used to stand with hymn books, and now we have religious karaoke. And I miss the old hymns that we used to sing that have been replaced with praise and worship. My heart yearns for the old hymns that concentrate on Jesus and on things that He came for. Yes, God Is an awesome god but you don't have to say it 20 times. “The Old Broken Cross,” you don't have to repeat, you get more of a theme of what’s going on and it follows a theme and you can go through that. I miss those things.

W- So to put it in another way, there's something about camp meeting that harkens back to, perhaps, a purer time for religious activity in the Christian church. J- Much simpler.

W- Where there’s less distractions.

J- A Lot of the songs now are more, the music covers the words. It's hard to hear the words, the music is so loud. Even if the words are wonderful, you're not even hearing the words. Because it's boom boom boom. It's a purer religion, here. Now I know on Friday night they had that praise and worship team, and I sat there for 2 hours. And my brother is more aware of that music than I am. And so he would sit there and feed me the words, because I wasn't understanding them.

There were two songs that I knew and could worship and was blessed in the two hours.

J-
W- What does that mean, to be blessed?
To be overwhelmed with the blessing that God has put in my life. The undeserved favor that He shows to me personally.
W- So it's a feeling that you get?
J- It's more than a feeling. It's a realization that He is personally mine. I am important to Him. That He loves me, to the point that He took care of me. All my past sins, and that I have a home to look forward to.
W- To use that language, do you feel that way at your church back home?
J- I feel it in other places. It can happen anywhere where the Lord is. But here is more of a concentration of the feeling. The concentration here is greater. I come here expecting that. Whereas some churches, my home church - I'm more blessed more there by the messages and the sermons. And here it's a combination of the music and the sermons. There are messages that I've heard years back and still I can tell you what they were and how they affected me.
W- From here? J-
From here.
W- And that's why you keep coming back?
J- That's why I keep coming back. I have heard messages, for example, on Jonah and the Whale for years, and how the Lord took care of Jonah and how you follow the Lord and do what you're supposed to. And then I came here and heard a message about Jonah and the ship he was on going to Tarsus and they started throwing things overboard, and they got to Jonah and they threw him overboard. And the message for an application was "what do you need to throw out of your ship? What do you need to get out of your life?" And there's some specific changes that came from that message in my life that still linger today. And that's been probably ten years ago. I had never heard a message like that on Jonah. That one was different. W- Despite hearing about Jonah all your life.
J- Right! So there's usually one like that every year that I can put my finger on.
W- Interesting. So I have one last question for you. This interview we've been talking about how you feel. How do you think this place is important for the community itself?
J- For the community?
W- Why is it important not just for you but for everyone who comes here?
J- Well I know that I made friendships here with people that are strong. And this is the only time we see some of these people. You have known them for years, and you look forward to coming here. Just like she came out and we share things. And this line (of tents) is just really close, the people here, this line, and we take a picture every year of the tent owners, every year just to have the memory. I think it's important to keep those contacts, and then to be sure that they're going to spend eternity with you. It's not just a here thing, it's a forever thing.
W- That's very interesting, something I hadn't considered. Because I've been thinking about camp meeting for a while now and that's just something I hadn't thought about. J- It's a forever friendship here.

J-
John

W- This is August 2, 2021. I'm having a conversation with John. How long have you been coming?

J- Well, I was born May 26th, 1940. And I came out here, August of that year. And I've been coming out here every year except all but 1948.

W- What happened in 1948? J-
The Polio.

W- Oh right, that's the one year they closed it down.

J- I don't think they had it that year.

W- And you've come every year since?

J- I've come every year since. Some years, my dad died in '84, but I was out here 3 or 4 days that year. I've seen a lot of changes made.

W- Oh I'm sure you have.

J- Oh yeah. Used to be a lot of room between the tents. And us boys would run around and play, you know. We'd have a big time, people stayed all day back then, you know.

W- That's what people have been telling me. Parents would go off to work, and the kids would stay.

J- Yep, yep. And my parents were farmers, so I got to come out here and stay a week and a day instead of the two weeks they have now. I met a lot of friends out here. I'd see my school friends. Hadn't seen them since school let out in May, come out here and you get to see them again before school in the fall.

W- Well it sounds like, at least for the kids, a community vacation.

J- Oh yeah, well back in those days I didn't get to go anywhere on vacation. My dad and them stayed around the farm. This was my vacation. I really enjoyed it. W- Why have you not missed a year besides the polio year?

J- Well, I've always been around, and I just live three miles up the road. And I've always made it a point not to plan anything for camp meeting. I had to work several years, but I still come to camp meeting. That was one of my main things - I used to go to the beach, and I'd come to camp meeting, and go to the mountains. And that was my vacation. W- Can you tell me about the earliest memories you have here?

J- Oh yeah, the earliest memories I had were this tent here - well it was another tent that burned up.

W- The same place though?

J- Same place. We'd come out here and you didn't have a roof over the porch, and you'd sit out here on the ground. I mean you had straw to sit on. And the ice man would come by in the mornings. Pulling some ice. You'd get you a block, and have your Frigidair in here that would hold our ice.

W- There was a compartment for an ice block under or above?

J-And that's how you kept your stuff cold that week. We'd have a bunch of our kinfolk come that week. And my cousins, they would come in and we'd have a big time playing. Paddle ball was

big, and water pistols were big. We really enjoyed it. Anyhow, back then it was a slower pace thing, you usually had to have a flashlight because there weren't many lights around here, all us kids walked around with a flashlight. That one time they had a balloon lined all here in the corner, tied together. And it was so good that I slept upstairs with my cousin. When it rained you could hear it real good on these roofs, and we went to young people service every evening at 4 o'clock. But before that when we were younger we went to the kid's service it was 9 o'clock in the morning. I remember some of the things, singing the "Lord's Army" and all that stuff. I could lay up here and hear the old bell ring - they had a different bell back then. And when you got to be 13 or 14 you'd have to go to youth service in the afternoon. So we'd have to quit playing and freshen up a little bit, go down there. They would have us count off, to know how many was there. When your time got close, you got nervous. Had to say what you was. Anyhow they had some pretty good preaching back then, I remember a good many of the preachers, we just had a pretty big time. Let's see now, you got anymore questions?

W- Yeah, do you see the children's generation doing the same things that your generation did growing up? J- Yeah, a lot of it. No paddle ball. We had water guns, sometimes you'd make an adult mad. Anyways, this woman tented right down below me, she didn't want you going down there to filling any water up at her spigot. And mumblypeg, my cousins, they were big on that. They'd straddle the bench. They'd sit there and flip knives all evening. W- Was that also called jackknife?

J- Well we called it mumblypeg. Another thing, go get a big walking stick and carve it out all around. We'd have to go across the road down there and go in the woods and get that. We'd get us a stick. We'd have a friend or two's tent we'd go sit with them awhile and talk. And at night, a bunch of us boys would sit out here until 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning and the sheriff would walk by and shine the light on us. And that meant we'd all be in bed. And then you would sleep kinda late the next morning. Everything was slow pace. Old people would sit around and talk.

W- Is it faster paced these days?

J-Now? Yeah. I mean people get up and leave, and then come in late in the afternoon. Any more questions?

W- Why is camp meeting important? To the community at large?

J- I think it's a good thing. People that don't come much don't understand it. You've got religion, if you want it. You've got fellowship. A lot of people have met their mate down here, and I think it's a real good thing. I'd hate to lose it. Most everybody comes, moves in here, comes to like it too.

Tony

W- Today is August 4th, 2021. And I am speaking with Tony, former pastor of Rock Springs

Camp meeting. So, you were going to tell me about the “church without walls.”
T- Right, right. When I came to the campground, I was actually familiar with it from serving another appointment in the area. I was pastor at Hill’s chapel, down 16. Was actually introduced to it at a previous appointment in Mooresville, there were people in the congregation. So when I came to Hills chapel and started coming, it was amazing. The variety of, again, the denominations and people who were here. So, when I was appointed to serve Bethel, and you know whoever serves Bethel, since it is the oldest congregation [serves the campground]. Bethel goes back to 1791 and whoever serves Bethel serves here. So it basically gives you another congregation for several weeks. It really increases your visibility in the community. And a lot of people here, regardless of what church they go to or even some of the people that are not regular members of churches get to know you. W- Is that a sought after position?

T- Uh, no hahahaha. It’s like you're going down the grocery aisle and people are like “I know you!” Or even your voice, I've had teenagers working at grocery stores in Lincolnton that said “I know you.” They recognize the voice. I would walk around alot and talk to folks and develop relationships, because that was important to me - to develop relationships. They’ve got this new pastor coming in. And each pastor invites a different group that they know. And that is kind of reflective of their own visions. I mean I know some great pastors that would not translate well in this setting. Some said “please don’t ask me to preach there.” It’s too distracting, they couldn’t shut everything out. But people would then start confiding in me things, as the relationships developed, so did those deep conversations and their needs. They would let me know things that were kind of confidential, there’s pain. The family things that were going on. It was regardless of socioeconomic backgrounds. You know, we’re not as ethnically diverse, although I used to ask. Though there have been african-american pastors and choirs here. And by the way, you probably know this, it was early on in its history. It was the confederacy laws that made it divided. But the socioeconomic backgrounds tended to tumble here. Regardless of who you are, you're in one of these, people don’t see you for what you have. It’s more of who you are. Children play here, meeting other children, they have no idea about their backgrounds, not the things at school that would divide you. Now it’s all about what kind of iphone you have.
W- So a church without walls isn't limited to the arbor being an open space. Is it denominational? T-It’s the whole thing. Well the arbor first, of course it is without walls. But the walls for me were a metaphor for other things. For denominations, for even liberal and conservatives. I tend to be more of, shall we say, a progressive style. And that’s why you need relationships as more of the people around would be traditional. So how do you break that barrier? Relationships, without the labels. I would not get up and say “I'm your progressive camp meeting pastor.” That’s a good way to shut 50% down immediately. I would also invite a lot of pastors that were not Methodist to preach. I would have Lutheran pastors, Moravian pastors, Episcopalian pastors to come.
Because, we look around there are Lutheran, there are Episcpalian, there are Baptists.
W- Probably here, tenting.

T- Oh, yes. Most definitely. My only rule, to be honest with you, and these were my colleagues and my friends and I knew someone was not going to get up, for example, and say “now we know you Methodists do it this way, now to be REALLY saved you’ve got to…” We were not going to go there. And since they were my colleagues and my friends, there was an understanding. So I had male female, black white, different denominations come. Now occasionally there would be an eyebrow raised, like “the Moravians? We’ve never heard of the Moravians.” Go to Old Salem. My daughter then married a Moravian. It was that chance to really see a sense of family, and you know in my theology, when we hear the body- we’re not called to be the same thing. And that’s okay and I think that is especially needed today because we are so exceptionally polarized, religiously and politically. I don’t know if culture is just reflecting our failure in the church or the church is reflecting culture, or both. So we need that kind of- in a world where diversity is seen as political or a bad thing. A church without walls is needed now more than ever.

W- So is that what revival might mean to you?

T- Revival, to me, is- that is one thing. We need a revival of understanding of compassion or empathy. And at least people coming out here, that helps foster that environment for revival. Revival not just being “are you saved?” you know, that kind of theology. But a revival of return to who we are as the body of Christ. It’s renewing to me, the relationships. I was out here last night until 12:30, on a porch swing swinging, talking, remembering. I mean last night I laughed, I cried, just talking to friends and worshiping also. I’m a pastor and I'm opinionated. Any sermon I listen to I'm thinking, “where are you going with that, you are not faithful with that text at all were you..” So sometimes the worship aspect is really hard for someone like me. But for me to let go and worship is sometimes difficult to do when I'm critiquing everything. I’m looking at some of my members, and I've got members right down here. And I'm like “man if they weren’t here I could have really, I'm gonna have to give that pastor credit because I am going to use that. So what revival is to me is going to be different than what it is for a lay person. Even for you, you are viewing things under a different lens that people are not going to understand. That revival is kind of a loaded term these days.

W- And doesn’t mean the same thing today as when revivals were happening.

T- And that’s okay. That’s what I let people know also. Yes the atmosphere is the same, but we’re on a journey, we’re not supposed to be where we were in 1920. We should be somewhere else, and embrace it. We’re going through that with worship styles of music. When I came in the early 2000s to be pastor and lead the campground. It was still unheard of to hear much of guitars and drums. And so that changing dynamic, they’ve had to adapt. And people ask “why do we have to change?” My answer was because Jesus changed. The incarnation, no one changed more than Jesus. Change is incarnational theology to me. And the lady that played last night was fantastic. And she did a version of “I’ll fly away,” and the people I was sitting with I told them there really is a shorter leap between Southern Gospel and contemporary than what people realize.

W-Interesting, say more about that.

T- Well she got up and said okay we might stand up we might wiggle we might clap. And you could kinda feel the old guard going “oh what's this, here we are gonna get one of those contemporary songs where they’re jumping up and down” and then she starts “I’ll fly away.” And all of a sudden those old people are like Whoo!. And so when they hear that, its not that much. The theology in the songs change just a little bit, but it helps it make an easier transition.
W- Well for a lot of hardcore campground goers, the idea is that it is a - it harkens back to a more pure idea of religious experience.
T- Well and a lot of them are not rehearsed in the language to be able to say this - that when your old religious experience was coming together with people, your old religions experience wasamazing grace used to be a contemporary song.

W- I see what you are getting at. What they’re remembering was at one time also contemporary.
T- And they don’t always make those connections. Getting electricity to tents, getting a bathroom in the tent. Paving the tents. They’ve seen a lot of change and they don’t even realize it. And you know when the younger generation comes up, they will also look back at those “old days”. Everybody thinks those days were the good ole days, especially because when you’re younger you didn’t have the responsibilities of adulthood. So everyone looks upon their childhood experiences as the good ole days. I realize too that these people really have seen change in the Denver community. I moved to Mooresville, in 1994. And I grew up in West Lincoln. I've seen a lot of change. And when change happens people ask, “what is there to hold onto?” When they hear a different biblical interpretation, they think, “is it okay to believe this?”
W- Right because they attach identity to such things that they hold onto.

T- I was telling someone last night, “do you own two coats? The Bible says if you own two, give one away.” So, why are you taking that so literal and the other not? And again, I can say that because of relationships. They have to learn to trust you and know who you are.

W- And that you aren’t trying to lead them astray.

T-I’m not trying to lead them astray. So getting to know people is key to this setting, or really. I think Wesley would have embraced the social aspect, so when people get a little down on the social side, I tell them we embrace that. I had a resident bishop in school who was talking about camp meetings, he could weave a story. I'll never forget when he was talking about camp meeting. Because he started talking about how there were people who were isolated, alone, they went through their heart aches alone, they went through death and gave birth basically alone. But camp meeting was a time when people came together. And you shared. You played, kids got to meet each other. Women got to exchange recipes..
W- What time are we talking about that his story takes place in?
T- He was talking about the early camp meetings of the 1800s, when this would have been exceptionally rural. A Lot of the people I was talking to this week, I love to hear them talk about stories that are described as “before the lake was filled up.” And then they’ll talk about how this was hidden. People, in those days, really were so spread out. It was an agro business, you needed space. And they really didn’t see each other. To hear him talk about that, to come together through the Depression and you’re talking about hope. Imagine this area in the Depression or the

War days when the men, you know, where are all the men? I grew up still in an era that still had the draft but I mean you just think about "who's next to go?" And in a way, this happened during Pandemic, there's a lot of different beliefs about the pandemic and I'm one that brings a different approach to some of the folks around here. And then a little over a year ago I lost my wife. Not to the pandemic but over a very long, great boring life. One of 25 years of knowing that she had brain cancer. And it really hit me yesterday, coming and seeing the faces of people that- were when I was returning in a group, things that you share. And when you listen to their stories after a loss like that, you really listen.

W- Thinking about it like that. And the pandemic really does bring it into a similar dialogue as how we would talk about the Depression or Polio, and camp meeting really does act as a social utility in many way.

T- And back then, it really was your news. There wasn't 24/7 news networks that were sensationalizing the news for the sake of a dollar. This is where you got your news. W- Especially about the community.

T- And that's why there were more souls conceived than saved. Hahaha WYou really think so?

T-No. But there was a lot of courtships, and where else are you gonna meet people?

W- And that gets back to what I was talking about a little bit ago about anointing. And how in my studies, when you look at camp meetings back in the 1800s where there was the anxiety bench and people with the shakes and how there's a very specific religious experience, whatever that might be that doesn't seem to be as present today.

T- But they recall when people used to get up and run the aisles. W-Here?

T- Oh yes, the old timers that remember that. It's interesting. You never know as a pastor, who might stand up and start, especially when I did worship during the daytime. I transitioned that to something different, to bible study. That called their attention. They said, "that's not what we do." But then they were like, "by golly, we like this." And so, the worship during the day was kind of dying out. And they would say things like, "well when I was a kid…" But when they were a kid mom would stay home because they didn't have as many people working. Now is a different world. And I thought about how do we engage people who are in the area and what are we missing. Bible study. Everyone's perspective is a little different. And I don't really like the term progressive, back in my day I used the term neo-orthodox, because I do have a very othrodox and ritualistic side.

Tucker

W- Today is August 7th, 2021. And I am speaking with Tucker, and I take it that you are a longstanding member of the camp meeting community.

T-I've been here every year since I was born as far as I know of. W-
And how old are you?

T- I'm 30.

W- So you've been here 30 times.

T- I guess, technically I was born on October first. So I guess this is really my 29th camp meeting.

W- But that next summer you were here.

T- Yes.

W- Do you spend the night when you come here? T-
Yes, I stay every night.

W- Why? I mean I understand why and it's a pretty simple answer butT-

It's half the fun.

W- Can you tell me about your earliest memories?

T- When I was really young I stayed up in tent 42 on the inner row, that was my dad's parents tent. My grandma stayed pretty much during the whole day.

W-She was here the whole time during camp meeting?

T- Yeah I think she would go home to take a shower or something, but I remember my grandpa would have either a propane or gas stove of some kind and he had this huge 5 foot tall 6 foot tall tank he would always have to roll that thing off the back of his truck every year. I remember my grandma would be making cakes or salmon patties, our next-door neighbor would always be happy to get salmon patties.

W- And those are your earliest memories of being here?

T- Yeah I think so. I remember riding tricycles with my neighbor, Logan. I remember there's an early newspaper article when I was 3 or 4 that my grandma was pushing me in the swing, and I remember when that reporter came by. I also remember other things and I only remember them because I've seen pictures of them- I was out in the walkway with a toy vacuum cleaner sucking up rocks.

W- Can you tell me a little bit about what you were doing when I walked up today?

T- Yeah, I was just visiting my neighbor Andrew, and I've also been going around collecting stories.

W- Right, you're engaged in your own work around here.

T- Find older people around to get local histories.

W- Why are you doing that, why is it important to do that?

T- Because I realized how little stuff that's actually on record. Because I've actually done family work, so I see all the deeds and wills. But there is just no information about people's lives except for those who left letters and diaries. There's very little day-to-day information. Newspapers are probably the best source. So I was just trying to write down more details of what actually happened. W- And there's a little bit of a vacuum between the early 1900s and the past 20 years or so. There's not alot of stories that have been written down. Most of what we have on camp

meetings is from the 1800s, so there's a void to be filled. Do you have more to say about that? T- This is a little embarrassing, but i'll tell you. Maybe when I was 6 or 7, me and my friend Mackenzie we were riding bicycles around the campground. And I think we're probably the reason why you aren't allowed to do so anymore. I remember we had underwear on our heads, pretending they were space helmets.

W- So you cherish these memories?

T- Yeah. And I can't leave out especially my grandma's swing, you could get really high in that one.

W- What do you find important about Rock Springs Campground?

T- I think it's probably one of the last places around Denver that still retains how it was before people started moving in from around the lake. All the housing developments is taken over everywhere else. It's still a small number of people from before the lake was built. W- And people from Sailview tried to get it taken down, right?

T-Well I heard somebody, and I was thinking it was someone living down the road behind here. [someone interjects that it was just a housing development nearby] I know that they said they wanted to get rid of this eye sore, and someone asked how much it costs to buy it and someone said 30,000 dollars, and they were like well I could buy that, and they were like "no that's just one tent." And that was the end of that.

W- Right, and they're that expensive because people cherish this place and it's a community event.

T- Yeah the prices have definitely went up. I know my grandparents paid 100 dollars for there's but it was half a tent, it was a boy scout tent. I think half the tent, if I remember right, was where the boy scouts would tent, and the bigger half was where everyone would eat and stuff.

W-Interesting.

T- And this tent here, my grandpa bought it from Smith Brotherton for either 350 or 450 dollars. I was told by Smith's son that it was 450, but I found a piece of paper that says 350, so one of the two. But my grandpa actually tented here for many years, renting it from Bunk Brotherton. Smith Brotherton settled Bunk's estate so that's how he ended up with it for a little while. Then Bunk's mother she had owned the tent, her parents owned the tent originally. A couple years ago I was cleaning out straw and I found an 1858 dime.

W- So what's your endgame with the research you are compiling?

T- Well I've got a few different things I want to write, but what i'm working on right now is a book called "The history of the west side of lake norman." Before lake Norman was there.

W- That's what your talk was about the other night, right?

T- It was specifically on the Webbs Chapel community, then last year - well I didn't do a talk that year. But two years before that I did a talk on Denver, kind of the history of Denver, and then a year later, the more recent history of Denver.

W- Is this just a hobby of yours or?

T- Purely a hobby.

W- Did you go to school for something like this?

T- No, I went to school for electrical engineering. And then I did some physics after that. W- So just interested in the history of our town.
T-Yeah.
W- Is there anything else you feel is important about camp meeting?
T- I'm sure there's a lot of stuff to be said.
W I mean yeah, but what's your relationship with it?
T- Well I guess, I come here and take a week and a half off of work to get away from Raleigh where I live.
W- So you come back every year?
T- Yes. And I absolutely hate heat, but I come here. So if that tells you anything. Because I was out here every day last week, and I was out here everyday. I try to come out here and make it to where i can recharge to make it another year in Raleigh.
W- Does it work, coming here to recharge?
T- Pretty good. I could always use another week. I used to stay 3 weeks when I was in school.
W- Well, thank you very much.

Rand

W- Today is August 7th, 2021. I'm speaking with Rand. How long have you been coming? R- All my life, I'm 66.
W- So that's 66 years you've been coming here? R-
Yep.
W- Why are you here?
R- Well it's a tradition. When it's going on, it's just hard to stay away - I've always done it. W- I'm assuming what might make that harder is that you know a lot of people that come here, so there's a lot of relationships here.
R- Well yeah, I always see old friends.
W- Do you spend the night when you come here?
R- I used to always spend the night. I've just retired this year, so work got in the way of sleeping here at night. I'd like to be, just haven't started. But I love to sleep up here.
W- Why?
R- I don't know, just something about it. It's probably changed a lot from the last time that I slept up here, but it used to be when I was young just the noise and the smell. You could just lay there and go to sleep. It's just always brought back memories of the past.
W- Right. It's definitely a specific kind of environment up here. What's your first memory here?
R- My cousin and myself, I swear we were in diapers, sitting up there playing in the shavings.

W- The wood shavings on the floor?
R- Yeah, we always had those shavings. Back then, no one had concrete. You either had shavings or straw. It was about a half and half deal. We always had pine shavings in our tent. I can remember, sitting down and playing - it was raining. We were playing with toy cars and trucks and things, we were trying to build a dam to keep the water from running into the tent.

W- That's pretty detailed.

R- That's as far back as I can remember.

W- That might be the most detailed first memory that i've heard so far. If that's your first memory, what else sticks out over the 66 years that you've been coming?
R- When you're growing up, this place - once you get to teenage years, it's all about girls. You could just sit back and watch all the girls walk around and kinda decide "boy, that's the one i'm going to pursue tonight." Or whatever like that. Also there was this one blonde headed girl that tented here that I always admired a lot, she grew up and had blonde hair and as she grew up she developed very large breasts. I was kinda drawn to her.
W- Hahaha okay, right on. So finding potential girlfriends and boyfriends was a huge thing for the adolescent groups coming here?
R- Yep.
W- That makes sense. And then when you got out of adolescence, what stood out then? R- Well I never really made it out. I'm still kinda stuck in that same deal. But, now that little blonde that I was talking about, I ended up marrying her. She tented right here at this tent, and I tented up there at #42, she kinda moved on but I didn't. But anyways we're still married. She just got old and I stayed a teenager.

W- What's important about Rock Springs camp meeting?

R- Well, I agree with what Tanner just said. It's history, this area - people, they all come back here. Most of the people I knew have died but the family still hangs on. I think it's just important that the history stays intact and that people continue to come. W- Well it's a generational thing.

R- Yeah. That's exactly the words I was looking for.