

From the Benches, 2005

Summer 2005 at the Tabernacle brought with it a variety of programs, some of which might have pleasantly surprised the original Program Committee of 1892, and some would have already been quite familiar to them. If this evaluation surprises you, just think for a minute how surprised the Rev J R Meredith would have been by the actual sounds and harmonies of the "contemporary Christian" music of **Expressions of Faith**, but how he would have approved of the message they brought. (We'll have to grant him familiarity only with 19th century harmonies.)

But it would not have taken any leap of faith for the Rev Meredith to appreciate the combination of words and music provided by **Bob Kettering** and **Libby**, or to enjoy "Singing the Scripture" with **Dr Darrell Woomer**.

Each of these programs certainly provided opportunities for "Christian spiritual renewal in a unique Victorian setting." And the small group that came to hear **John Read** sing the songs and tell the stories of the Wesley family and of Isaac Long and Martin Boehm had the same opportunity to imagine themselves back in earlier days, experiencing the spiritual adventures of the founders of our church.

As you anticipate next year's series, or as you recall the experience of summer 2005, music is probably the dominant impression. There is music with every program (sometimes music *is* the program) to provide emphasis to the spoken word, or to afford opportunities for weaving your own counterpoint to the program theme. The thoughts and experiences shared by **Connie Pombo** during the Women's Seminar were certainly highlighted and counterpointed by the lovely voice of **Marie Barlow Martin**, who will be returning in 2006 with her own program of faith based music.

The Rev Meredith would certainly have had no trouble identifying with and enjoying the preaching of **Bishop Michael Sigman**, the Campmeeting preacher this year, whose insights into the traditions of campmeetings and evangelistic thrust made his comments opportunities for application to our own particular situation and afforded many opportunities for spiritual renewal.

The opening program for this year, **Andy Roberts** and the Four Piece Quartet, reflected the blend of popular music styles and the worship experience that have come to be associated with the Summer at the Tabernacle programs. The Quartet's jazz style presentation of familiar hymns, and the Rev John Roberts' commentary about listening - as a jazz musician listens to his fellow players - was an inspiring message.

The Sunday morning appearance of **The Sacred Orchestra** with Dave Stahl brought out one of the largest congregations of

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the season to worship with traditional hymns and other sacred music played in the style of the Big Bands of the 1940s. Perhaps it is the drive and familiarity of the style that attracts, and undoubtedly the commitment and artistry of the musicians make this worship service distinctly different and definitely compelling.

The Dixieland style of the **Bob Troxell** jazz group has an appeal of its own, and with its roots in the funeral services of old New Orleans it offers plenty of opportunity for revival and spiritual renewal, as the large Sunday morning congregation experienced. The **Rev Bill Garrett** preached a stimulating sermon to match the spirit of the music.

There was also music somewhat less associated with worship services, although the **New Holland Band** played a well mixed program of classical operatic arias, patriotic airs, the hymn "It Is Well with My Soul," and, of course, a number of Sousa marches, ending with their special rendering of "Stars and Stripes Forever."

The **Bell Choir Festival** continued its traditional pattern of bringing together several church handbell choirs, to play a variety of musical forms, from hymns to challenging solo performances and some purely amusing pieces.

The very disciplined harmonies of the **Susquehanna Chorale** provided ample stimulus for spiritual reflection as the power of the music carried listeners to lands and eras far from the Tabernacle. (At least one person was so caught up in their performance of "Comin' Through the Rye" that he had to check to make sure his feet were not wet.)

The engaging personalities of the **Lancaster Brass Quintet** are such a plus to their superior musicianship that most of us look forward with pleasure and a little regret to their appearance -- pleasure, because of the wonderful music, and regret because their performance ends our season of Summer at the Tabernacle. But with this group, even endings are fun; and there is always next year: they will be back, as will the **Susquehanna Chorale** and many of the others whose music has made the Tabernacle such a popular place.

And speaking of endings, our summer series must be the only one with two endings, for surely the **Massed Choir** concert, with this year's theme of Peace on Earth, provided a fitting conclusion to the two central weeks of worship services, preaching, and the festival of the bell choirs. With nearly 80 singers and musicians under the expert direction of Fred Rice helping us to Recognize the Peacemaker and to take the Walk of Peace, what could have been more appropriate or more spiritual?

Another Clue

One of the questions some of us would like to have answered is, "Is the old upright piano in the Tabernacle the original one?" From the very beginning there was always a pianist (frequently Maggie Baltzell) for the worship services and for the song services.

There is a photograph of uncertain date that shows an upright piano - and also a reed organ, (the fate of which was revealed in a previous Newsletter). But the piano is still something of a mystery. It was played several times this year, and each player found that the action and the sound were excellent. So the question remains, "How and when did this product of the old Miller Piano Company (now defunct) that was located at 8th and Maple Streets in Lebanon, become part of the Tabernacle equipment?"

An item in a summer, 1905, issue of the *Pennsylvania Chautauquan* sheds a little light on the subject and is worth quoting in full. It gives us a glimpse of activities at Campmeeting around the turn of the century:

Children's Entertainment

The children's entertainment given in the auditorium at Gretna Grove was a decided success. Miss Margaret Baltzell, of Reading, and Mrs. Rinkenbach, of Harrisburg, had the affair in charge. The program consisted of recitations, drills, singing, and pantomimes. While every number was fine, the daisy drill by the little girls deserves special mention. All the participants were dressed in white and their hats were a creation of daisies, and each carried an immense bouquet of the same flowers.

No admission fee was (continued on page 4)



Partners in Ministry – 2005 – Through October 31

Our thanks to those who have become Partners in our Ministry of providing a Christian spiritual renewal in a unique Victorian setting by making specific contributions to Bible Festival Programs or to the Friends of the Tabernacle.

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charged, but an offering was lifted, which will be used to defray the expense of having a piano placed on the rostrum of the auditorium for use during the Campmeeting services.'

Evidently, in 1905 there was no piano in residence at the Tabernacle. Pat Hartranft recently added another bit of evidence, which, as often happens, raises more questions than it answers. Her story is that sometime during the 1960s (she is not sure of the year, but it was while she was working at Otterbein Lodge) the massed choir was preparing to rehearse for their concert. It was probably a very large group that year, and they needed more space on the platform for the singers; the piano had to be removed from the platform and put down right in front of the stage. Many willing hands grabbed the piano, not realizing there was a bouquet of flowers in a water filled vase on top of it.

In the process of lowering the piano the vase toppled over, the water cascaded down the interior of the piano and effectively silenced it. The team of piano movers charged up to Otterbein Lodge, which contained another piano, and with considerable difficulty moved that one down to the Tabernacle.

Pat's memory of the incident ends at that point, so it is unclear whether the original Tabernacle piano recovered from its wetting and remained there, or whether the Otterbein piano became the replacement Tabernacle piano on a permanent basis.

Any reader who recalls this incident, or has any piano type information is invited to send the information along to the Newsletter editor at PO Box 408, Mt Gretna, PA 17064.

The Massed Choir Concerts

Thoughts of past Bible Festival seasons (and of Summer at the Tabernacle programs) almost always include a comment about the Massed Choir concerts, which at one time concluded the Campmeeting season. There are recollections of nights when the Tabernacle platform supported more than a hundred singers (one past review says the choir consisted of 400 voices, but this does not seem to be a credible number). There are recollections of storms and power outages that failed to stop the singing and of the years when members of the audience were invited to join the choir for Handel's "Halleluiah," as the finale to the concert.

But one very important aspect of the Massed Choir program is missing from nearly everyone's memory. It is one of the most expensive programs to produce, which may surprise a great many people. The costs of providing a hundred or more copies of the music are substantial and there are costs for the accompanying musicians and the director's fee.

Programs need to be printed, and the volunteer singers, who spend the entire day of the concert in rehearsal and performance, need to be fed. The amount collected in the free will offering usually does not cover all the expenses; money from other contributions must be used to make up the difference.





Underwriting Opportunities

In the Tabernacle, where traditions meet with innovations in programs, there are still some portions of the programs that cling to tradition - like the tradition of having an organ accompaniment for the Massed Choir concert. It was necessary this year to rent an organ, provided by Reifsnymers of Lancaster, and through the generosity of Herman and Reed Good, who have long been staunch supporters of the Bible Festival programs, this cost was completely underwritten. We thank the Goods most sincerely for this very significant help.

There are many such opportunities for supporting Summer at the Tabernacle programs by paying all or a portion of a specific cost. For example, a contributor who may be especially interested in "spreading the word" about the Tabernacle programs might consider underwriting all, or a portion, of the cost of printing this Newsletter; payment of all or a portion of the cost of printing the brochures, or of advertising in local newspapers.

Paying the cost (or a portion of the cost) of having a particular speaker during the two central weeks of programs would provide strong support for that program and for the entire season.

Programs for the 2006 season are nearly all scheduled. To learn more about opportunities for underwriting specific costs, contact Don Zechman (email at fezdez@infionline.net) or by telephone at 653-8588).

Tabernacle Stewardship

The trustees of the Tabernacle Association are aware that within the next 8 to 10 years, prudent maintenance of the Tabernacle will require replacing the structure's roof. The present roof was installed in 1987 at a cost of \$48,000; it represents the only modification made to John Cilley's original structure.

The change, which does not in any way alter the appearance of the building, was made during the 1987 re-roofing process, and was initiated by Merv Lentz, the Campmeeting's Superintendent of Grounds. The roof being replaced consisted of

wooden shingles laid over laths that were 8 to 10 inches apart. To improve the structural integrity of the building, these laths were replaced by extra thick plywood. This in turn was covered with a layer of felt, and modern asphalt shingles, similar in appearance to the original wooden ones, were placed over the felt.

This modification has helped the Tabernacle withstand severe winds and the crushing weight of the 1994 blizzard that destroyed two other historic John Cilley auditoriums.

When the Tabernacle Association was created, one of the first actions of the trustees was to provide the green envelopes for contributions intended for the upkeep and maintenance of the Tabernacle building. Funds received in this way are used for the physical improvements to the Tabernacle. For example, the additional lights over the front of the stage area that were installed prior to the 2005 season, were paid for from these funds.

As a part of their stewardship responsibilities, Association trustees are beginning to plan for the expense of replacing the 1987 roof. It will be a major undertaking, but with the support of all who have enjoyed Tabernacle programs or the spiritual refreshment it offers, the task will be accomplished.

Choral Music Available

One of the results of the long tradition of Massed Choir concerts is that a very substantial body of choral music has been accumulated over the years. Not long ago Esther Mefferd completed the huge job of cataloging and physically filing the entire collection.

The music is available for lending to any church choir or musical group that would like to use it. The only requirement is that the music be returned in good condition, sorted, and ready for filing. Contact Esther by email at vicar@paonline.com or by phone at 964-3448 to see the catalog of available songs.

Some readers may remember when the Mt Gretna Bible Conference included workshops for church organists, choir directors, and singers. Making this collection of

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music available free of charge to interested churches is a way of continuing that workshop tradition and reaching out to the community of churches.

A Note From a Friend

Some of you may have missed seeing Mary Springer at the Tabernacle this summer. Mary, who lives in Baltimore, was kind enough to include an explanatory note with the contribution she mailed in early in the spring.

She told us that the festivities involved in a family wedding would keep her away from Mt Gretna this year. We hope that Mary enjoyed the wedding and all the associated activities and that she will join us in the Tabernacle next year.

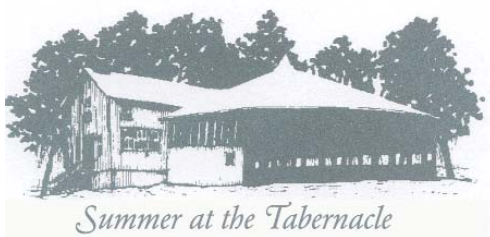
(Ed. Note: Mary, this seemed the best way of getting the word to all your friends.)



Summer at the Tabernacle
THE MT. GRETTNA BIBLE FESTIVAL

SUNDAYS at 10:00am & 7:30pm
June 26-August 28
 GOD'S GLORY AT GRETTNA

Did you notice the new signs along Route 117 last summer? The Program Committee decided to change them after a number of years. With the help of Carper Signs in Mount Joy, this was the new design. The dates will be changed each year. (This shows the 2005 dates.)
 What do you think of it?



Summer at the Tabernacle

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