

GOOD NEWS

GRETNA



MT. GRETNA BIBLE FESTIVAL NEWS

WINTER 2010

Back on the Benches

MT. GRETNA
BIBLE FESTIVAL
2010 *Year in Review*

After a lengthy enforced absence from the Bible Festival's "Summer at the Tabernacle" programs, what a wonderful feeling it is to find the scene virtually unchanged. Of course the Tabernacle is still there—why wouldn't it be? But the array of program offerings, ranging from the award winning Susquehanna Chorale to Andy Roberts' popular jazz quartet; from the newly formed but still familiar Quintessentially Brass to the unique Silver, Wood and Ivory, and the Singing Boys of Pennsylvania, both making their first appearances at the Tabernacle testified to the vitality of the Bible Festival itself, a concept even older than the Tabernacle. After all, not a summer has gone by since 1892 without a series of summer programs of music, worship, preaching, and teaching. The format



has changed somewhat, but the spirit persists, and surely it was present in the pure, clear voice of Elisabeth von Trapp, singing unaccompanied as she came onto the platform for her fourth appearance here. If spirits have voices, this was surely the spirit of Mount Gretna.



The spirit was there when the audience began to sing "Abide With Me" along with the Lancaster British Brass Band—imagine! A brass band playing that gentle hymn. But then, remember that the origins of the "British brass band" go back to General William Booth and the beginnings of the Salvation Army in 19th century England. And for all its gentleness, "Abide With Me" is really a hymn of great strength and spirituality—fittingly played with the strength of the brass instruments—spiritually moving the audience. And while band music has the power to move its hearers to sing, as the New Holland Band also did with "God Bless America," the softer and more innovative sounds of the Andy Roberts Quartet give another expression of the spirit that inhabits this place and that we worship in many ways.

Some new programs were presented this year and we hope 2010 will not be the only year they appear at the Tabernacle. The flutes and piano of Silver, Wood, and Ivory



brought another new kind of sound – one that seemed entirely fitting and appropriate for this setting. The crystal clear sounds of young voices, brought to us by the Singing Boys of Pennsylvania (misnamed because the group is made up of boys and girls aged 10 to 18) harmonized perfectly with the open setting and blended seamlessly with the neat jackets, skirts, and trousers of their costumes. Sight and sound were perfectly matched in this group.

No doubt Revs. Dohner and Kephart and their 1892 colleagues would be distressed by what they see **Back to the Benches** page 2

Back on the Benches continued

MT. GRETNA
BIBLE FESTIVAL
2010 *Year in Review*

continued from page 1

would surely think of as wasted opportunities (“all those meetings and so little preaching”) but the summer programs at the Tabernacle have always provided a good measure of really good preaching. The Rev. Ed Zeiders has been here many times and always delivers an inspiring and captivating message. It was a double pleasure to have Rev. Louis Butcher, pastor of the Brightside Baptist Church in Lancaster, preach for us; not only were we treated to some nostalgic recollections about life “the way it used to be,” but we were given some serious thoughts derived from those recollections about such important things as personal responsibility for today’s living. And Dr. Butcher brought with him the Brightside Baptist Gospel Choir, whose joy in worship and song was infectious.

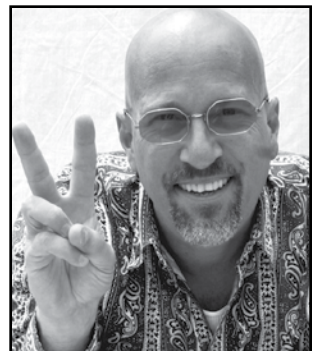
A close look at the 2010 schedule might reveal a ghost of a hint of “the way it used to be.” There was a little clustering of programs during the middle of the season, reminiscent of the original seasons with services every day, from early morning until evening. This year, during the week between July 25 and August 1, six programs or worship services were presented, mostly during the evening hours, although on the two Sundays morning services were led by Dave Stahl’s Sacred Orchestra and Bob Troxell’s Dixieland Connection. With its music and Christian witness the Sacred Orchestra led an inspiring worship service that ended with the orchestra playing one of the hymn tune arrangements written by Rodney Miller, whose sudden death a few years ago is still mourned by his many friends in central Pennsylvania music circles. At the end of the week the Dixieland Connection led worshippers in a joyous, toe-tapping service of prayer and praise.

In between these two services, The Singing Boys (and Girls) of Pennsylvania made their debut here on Sunday night; Silver, Wood, and Ivory debuted on Wednesday night; and on Saturday evening the annual Handbell Festival continued with five local handbell choirs participating. What for many used to be (and is again becoming) the highlight of the Campmeeting-Bible Festival season—the Massed Choir concert—closed out this busy week. Many years ago (we’re

not sure just how many) choir directors and choir members from churches around the Lebanon Valley attended the campmeeting season at Mt. Gretna to participate in its church music workshops, a concert by the workshop attendees being the culminating activity. In recent years, with the valued cooperation of Loser’s Music Store, the Massed Choir is again bringing together singers and choir directors from the area, this time for a day-long rehearsal and an exciting evening concert under the direction of a nationally known composer and director. This year, a Mt. Gretna favorite, Joe Martin, returned to lead the choir and captivate the audience with his talent and personality.

While there have been many necessary concessions to present day life styles and conditions, some aspects of the original campmeeting seasons and programs are still easily recognizable on today’s schedules. Gospel music and group hymn sings are cases in point. The hymn sing on August 4 this year, led by Bob Kettering, offered an evening of enjoyable participation in musical praise and worship. And for fans of gospel music, the songs of the Bethany Gospel Boys quartet provided an inspiring program.

This year’s programs also continued and expanded the offerings designed primarily for children and young people, again in cooperation with the Mt. Gretna Chautauqua. Steve Courtney entertained with a half music, half games hour, and a Saturday morning program by the Grace Puppeteers from Grace UCC in Lebanon was enjoyed by children and adults alike.





A Look Ahead

MT. GRETNA
BIBLE FESTIVAL
2011

We aren't nearly finished with 2010 yet, but some people are already thinking and working in 2011. That is certainly true of the dedicated group of people who put together each year's Summer at the Tabernacle program. Their work for 2011 isn't finished, but it is off to a very good start. Of special interest to United Methodists is the date that has been arranged for **Bishop Peggy Johnson** to speak at the Tabernacle. Bishop Johnson is well known for her outstanding work with the deaf. Details of her program for the Bible Festival have not yet been completed, but she will no doubt be drawing on some of her experiences in developing a deaf choir in Baltimore. It will be a distinct privilege and honor to welcome Bishop Johnson to the Tabernacle.

The **Andy Roberts Quartet** will open the season with a jazz worship service, and among the returning groups will be the **New Holland Band**, **Dave Stahl and the Sacred Orchestra**, the **Susquehanna Chorale**, and the popular **Quintessentially Brass**. The **Brandywine Harps** have accepted an invitation to return next summer, and another audience favorite, **Marie Barlow Martin**, will also be making a repeat appearance.

Plans are underway to put a Maranatha dramatic production on the schedule, and the **Men in Harmony** choral group that has been so well received here will be presenting a program of their popular religious and patriotic songs.

standing nationally known composer-conductor. **Dave Stahl and the Sacred Orchestra** are expected back for the morning worship service on July 31. Tony Campolo has been contacted for an appearance in 2011, with details still to be worked out.



It can be seen that next year's Summer at the Tabernacle program is shaping up very nicely, with many favorites returning. We hope to be able to continue one of the newer features of the programs, the Children's Program presented in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Chautauqua. It is especially pleasing to have the opportunity of hearing and meeting Bishop Johnson; we are looking forward to her visit and to another successful Summer at the Tabernacle.



An evening Hymn Sing is planned, as, of course, is the **Massed Choir concert**, again with an out-

Thank You, Tom Meredith

As you ought to be able to tell by the poetic quality of the writing in most of the articles in this newsletter, our good friend Tom Meredith is back at his position of writing and editing our newsletters. We are so happy to have him back and to read his unique insights about

the Bible Festival and the Tabernacle. He reviews the past season and anticipates next summer with a special flair. And his articles keep us informed about some of the inner workings of the Bible Festival. Welcome back, Tom!

Anthem Library

Several years ago, the Program Committee made a decision that had far reaching consequences. Something new would be tried in order to maintain an old tradition. Fifty years ago (more or less) a workshop in church music for choir directors and singers was a major offering during the campmeeting “season,” and at the end of the season, workshop members liked to show off their newly mastered anthems in a culminating Massed Choir concert. This was usually the highlight of the year, with as many as two hundred singers participating, and was eagerly anticipated by the public.

But as time passed, things changed. The Massed Choir was becoming less and less massive, but the tradition of a choir concert remained a significant part of the Bible Festival tradition; hence the committee’s decision to adapt to new conditions. The result? A cooperative arrangement with Loser’s Music Store that has produced positive results for both parties. By scheduling the Massed Choir concert for the day after Loser’s regular summer workshop with a nationally known composer or director, the Program Committee can provide a full day for the director to work with the two hundred volunteer singers, retaining a bit of the earlier workshop experience as well as conducting an exciting “new traditional” concert in the old traditional venue of the acoustically live Tab-

ernacle. And the choir members have the inspiring and valuable experience of working for a day with an outstanding director. Under this arrangement participation in the Bible Festival’s massed choir concert has increased dramatically, and sales of music have increased for Loser’s.

Local area choir directors have enjoyed an unexpected benefit. They now have available a well maintained and cataloged library of the music for many of the anthems sung in the concerts from which they may borrow at any time. At the conclusion of the concert each year, those singers who do not, for whatever reason, wish to keep their music (perhaps they don’t sing regularly in a choir) are encouraged to leave the music in the Tabernacle. Esther Mefferd has been collecting, cataloging, and filing these extra copies. They are stored, appropriately enough, in the Tabernacle and can be borrowed by any local pastor, choir director or chorale conductor. A complete computerized catalog of the holdings, showing the number of copies, the parts available, the title, composer, and date is available. Contact Esther by telephone (964-3123) or by email (vicar@paonline.com) for a copy of the catalog. The library is maintained as a resource for all area churches, choirs and chorale leaders. There is no charge to borrow the music, the only requirement being that it be returned in good condition.

Tabernacle Gets New Roof

The good news is that the Tabernacle is getting a new roof, for the fourth or fifth time in its life. Thanks to the generosity of Nancy and Marlin Seiders and the continuing support of our loyal Partners in Ministry, Mary Blackburn, president of the Tabernacle Association, was able to announce last summer that the money was available and a new roof would be in place by winter. The present roof, which was installed 23 years ago, is still weather tight, but the shingles are near the end of their life. So on the advice of Merv Lentz, the Campmeeting’s supervisor of buildings and grounds, the joint decision by the Campmeeting board and the

trustees of the Tabernacle Association was made to replace the roof now, before it creates a problem.

Certainly, one of the main reasons the Tabernacle structure has lasted so well and so long (111 years, to be exact) is the good care and maintenance it has always had. Of course, the quality of John Cillely’s engineering and carpentry provided a sound base, but over the years the Campmeeting Association has seen to it that the building has been given the best of attention. Superintendent Merv Lenz arranged for regular structural inspections, followed whatever the engi-



Partners in Ministry

The work done so far in preparing the application for listing the campmeeting on the National Register of Historic Places has had at least one unexpected (but very welcome) result. It confirms what folks have been saying about Mt. Gretna for a long time: that it is a unique place. As a result of some serious research, we now know that there is no other campmeeting in Pennsylvania quite like Mt. Gretna, which should make everyone reading this issue of Good News from Gretna feel sort of special. And you are special – you have been faithful in your support of the Bible Festival programs and in providing for the care and maintenance of the Tabernacle. You are indeed our Partners in Ministry, helping to bring “Christian spiritual renewal in a unique Victorian setting” to thousands of people each summer.

Becoming a Partner is very simple: a check in the offering basket at any program or mailed to PO Box 408 in Mt. Gretna will add your name to the list of Partners published each year. By using the contribu-

tion envelopes enclosed with this issue you can indicate how you’d like your contribution to be used. A contribution to the “Bible Festival” will help pay for the actual programs presented during the summer; a contribution to the “Tabernacle Association” will help with the ongoing care and maintenance of the Tabernacle structure itself.

You really do not need to be reminded that programs of the quality presented each Summer at the Tabernacle represent a significant cost or that the Tabernacle building would not have lasted as long as it has without good care, preventive maintenance, and regular roof replacement. Meeting those necessary costs would be impossible without the generous assistance of the Partners in Ministry, for which we are all very confident and appreciative. As we move through the second century we are confident that in the “spirit of Mt. Gretna” the Partners in Ministry will increase in numbers and continue steadfast in their support of the programs and the dedicated Tabernacle.

Tabernacle Gets New Roof

continued from page 4

neer’s recommendations were, and when necessary alerted both the Tabernacle and the Campmeeting Associations to the need for any preventive maintenance. And after the disastrous winter of 1954, when two of the four remaining John Cilley structures were destroyed by the weight of the winter snow on their roofs, snow removal from the Tabernacle roof has been a high priority. The conical shape of the roof creates unique problems involving weight distribution as the snow is removed (to say nothing of the problems of not falling off the roof), so the operation in recent years has wisely been left to professionals.

Several years ago the Tabernacle Association established and has maintained a special “roof” fund for contributors who wanted to direct their gifts to this particular purpose. And Marlin and Nancy Seiders, because of their deep interest in the Campmeeting and the Tabernacle programs, arranged their wills so that a large portion of their estate would go to the

benefit of those entities. With the money available, arrangements were completed, and the work began as scheduled on September 20, removing the old shingles preparatory to installing the new 30-year architectural asphalt shingles.

A new technique to avoid damage from ice dams (melted snow that seeps up under the lower courses of shingled roofs and then freezes) will be employed along the two lower rows of shingles. This involves inserting a plastic shield between the shingles of rows 1,2, and 3. The plastic has adhesive on both sides, and is glued to the top of the lower row and the bottom of the upper row, creating a waterproof shield to prevent snow melt from seeping in between shingles, freezing, and buckling them.

With this kind of care and attention to detail and new developments, we can confidently expect another quarter century of weather-resisting service from John Cilley’s masterpiece.

Historic District Application

Several years ago, the Campmeeting Board of Managers authorized Tom Meredith to prepare an application to the Pennsylvania State Bureau of Historic Preservation with the goal of ultimately listing the Campmeeting on the National Register of Historic Places. This turned out to be a two-part process: one application to the state, followed by a second, vastly more detailed one to the National Park Service. The first application was submitted, and although it received positive comments from the state, Tom was unable to pursue the project for a significant amount of time.

Recently, however, he has been able to return to the application project, and with the invaluable help of Esther Mefferd, Linda Campbell, and George and Chris Resch, the required detailed inventory of all buildings and structures in the proposed historic district has been completed. Madelaine Gray has offered her outstanding photographic skills to the project. Members of the Bureau of Historic Preservation have been generous with their advice and their time, so it is now possible to report that the project is well underway, with good prospects for completing it within a year.

Listing a historic district on the National Register is simply a recognition of the historic integrity and

significance of the area. It imposes no restrictions on the property owners within the district, being mainly a matter of prestige. However, it does provide an extra layer of protection against unwanted change. For example, if PennDot should develop a plan for improving or materially changing Route 117, that plan would have to be reviewed by the Bureau of Historic Preservation in addition to all the other groups that have input into such plans – really just another level of protection. And listing on the National Register may also qualify property owners for special tax consideration for repairs or restoration to the property. The tax considerations, of course, are highly individual matters and are dependent upon funds being available.

The initial impetus for trying to list the Campmeeting on the National Register probably came from the frequently expressed opinion of many of those attending Bible Festival programs that the Tabernacle should be on the list, and of course it has been listed as a United Methodist Historic place. Tom Herald, in addition to his significant contributions to the work of the Program Committee, has been constant in support of applying for national listing. We aren't there yet, Tom, but we're a lot closer than we've ever been before.



Mt. Gretna Bible Festival
P.O. Box 408
Mt. Gretna, PA 17064

Return Service Requested

PRESORT STD. U.S. Postage PAID Mt. Gretna, PA 17064 Permit No. 2 Non-Profit Organization
