

Camp Woods, Ossining, New York

METHODIST CAMP GROUND to Secular Suburb, 1831-2001

by **Bill McGrath**

All illustrations in this article are courtesy of the author.

This is the first part of a two-part article based on the author's senior paper, written under the guidance of Dr. Roger Panetta, Marymount College of Fordham University. The author is grateful to Dr. Panetta for his emphasis on the teaching of local history at Marymount.

INTRODUCTION

The spirit of Camp Woods, past and present, is still showing on the old sign that hangs at the entrance to the grounds: "For by the grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8,9."¹

In 1962, when the above quote appeared in an Ossining newspaper, Camp Woods was at the turning point of its existence. For the preceding 130 years the location had been a religious community. During the next 40 years, Camp Woods would become a secular community with a vanishing connection to its history.

As the sign proclaimed, that his-

tory is rooted in a theology that looks to the original source of Christian faith—the New Testament. The community of people who created Camp Woods related their decisions and actions to the Christian faith as interpreted by the Methodist teachings of John Wesley. Wesley's evangelical legacy was maintained in the region well into the 20th century. Camp Woods' identity was determined by the characteristics of the locale and its designated usage as a camp meeting site for Methodists, locally and beyond. In the early 19th century, the Methodist congregations that followed Wesley's theology created a permanent home for the annual celebration of an evangelical expres-

sion of worship in the woods of Westchester.

From the beginning, the Methodist camp meeting was a social phenomenon as well as a profound religious experience for the participants. The evangelical preaching was often thunderous and lasted through the entire day and carried on late into the night, as various preachers took turns exhorting the crowd to accept salvation. The faithful as well as curious onlookers were drawn to the site of the preaching, encouraged by Methodist clergy who hoped that their religious zeal would win converts to their beliefs and strengthen the devotion of their own congregations. Camp Woods in Ossining

proved to be an ideal location for these public religious affirmations.

The transformation that eroded the historic identity of the Camp Woods community was the development of northern Westchester as a suburban region in the second half of the 20th century. The identity of the Camp Woods locale has been obscured, and it is continuing to fade from view. No longer a religious community or a summer vacation haven, Camp Woods has been redefined as a suburban enclave—albeit one with a unique history and a residue of charm.

THE EARLY BEGINNINGS

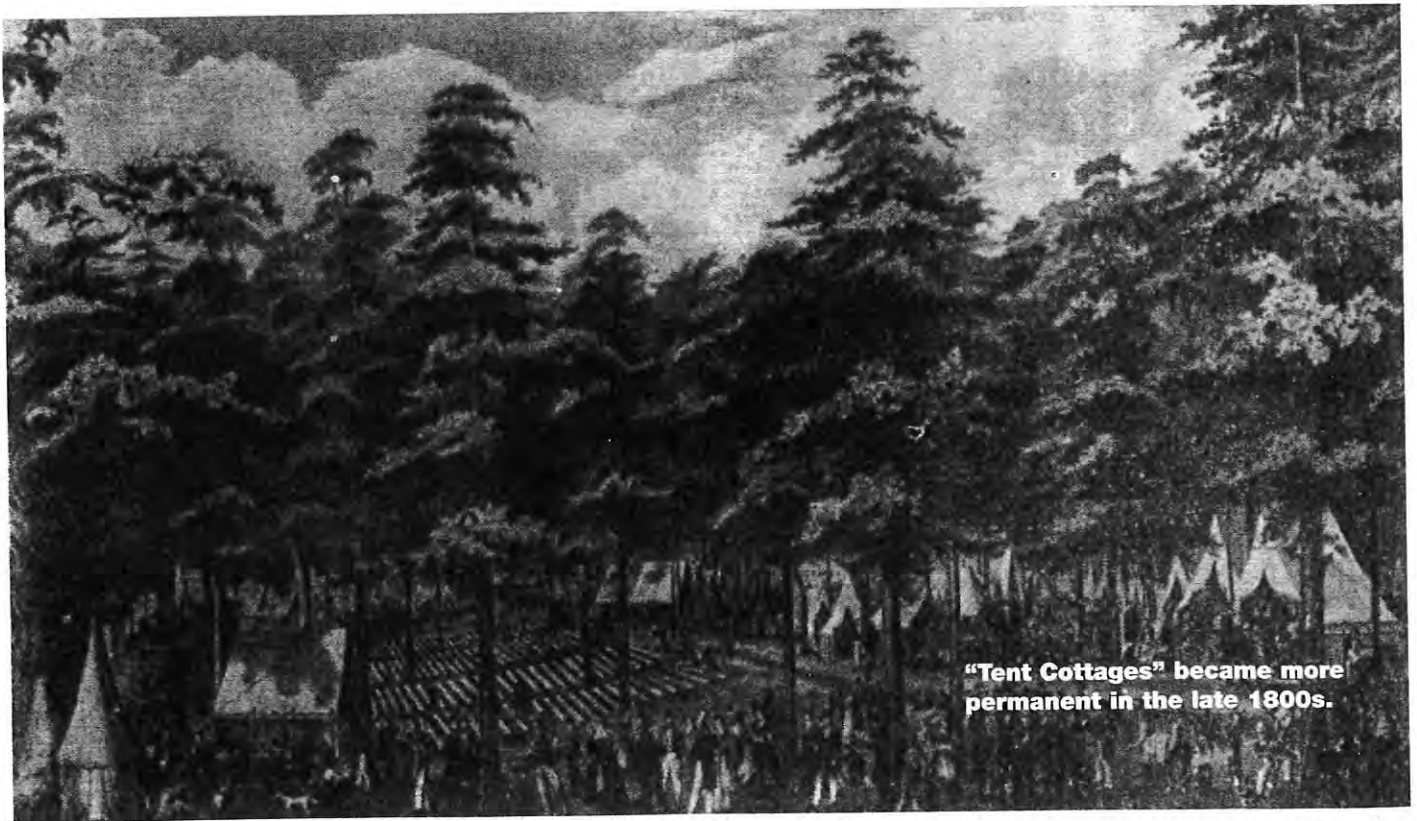
The Croton camp committee that founded Camp Woods in Ossining was searching for a stable environment, in a secluded yet accessible location, that would support the meetings for years to come. The Croton meeting, first held in 1805,² had lasted for 25 years on the

Van Cortlandt property at the mouth of the Croton River, but it had become less manageable by 1830. The marshlands limited expansion, and the overflow crowds of onlookers broke down property fences and damaged nearby crops. The search for a new home was conducted on both sides of the river. One of the main concerns was a suitable docking location near land transportation. Both the Croton River dock and the Sing Sing (now Ossining) town dock were already being utilized on a regular basis by passenger river traffic.

Camp Woods sits on a bluff slightly less than two miles north-east of the Ossining dock and approximately three miles southeast of the Croton River. County and state roads that have been in service since the early 1800s lead to both dock locations. The grade is fairly continuous and horse-drawn wagons carrying camp meeting attendees

were able to make regular trips between the river docks and Camp Woods. When the Camp Woods property was purchased in 1834, the village center of Sing Sing and the surrounding settled area were still far enough off to ensure a sylvan setting. Camp Woods still overlooks a creek that tumbles down to the Hudson from the steep hills behind the bluff, on which the settlement stands. The marshlands of the Croton River are several hundred feet in elevation below and three miles distant. The soil conditions supported towering trees—many well over 100 feet in height still stand throughout Camp Woods.

For the first 50 years of use, Camp Woods would retain its rural character. An article from an unidentified local newspaper in 1896 describes the general physical and natural setting of the area not far from Camp Woods:



"Tent Cottages" became more permanent in the late 1800s.

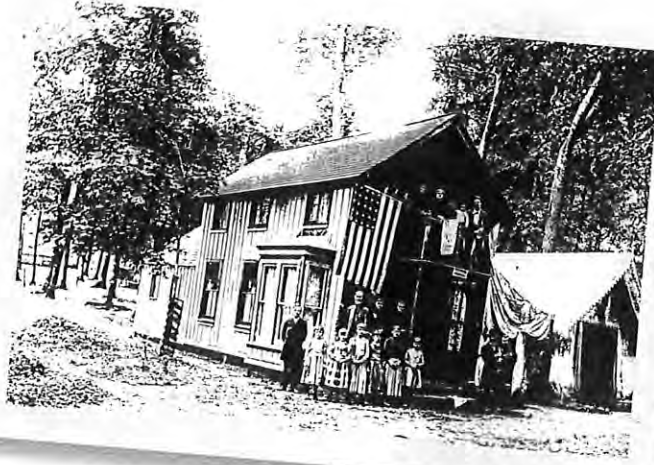
...the banks of the Croton River, which at this point are thickly wooded with an almost primeval forest, and near by the stream was - once spanned by the long covered structure known as "the wire factory bridge," that was condemned many years ago, and after standing unused for some time, fell into the river and was swept away.

The postroad in this section winds through a beautiful country, rich in rural scenery and affording far-off glimpses of river and mountains. A picturesque point on the road going north from Sing Sing, is just before the old tavern is reached, where the road crosses the Indian brook, the source of the village water supply. Here the thoroughfare takes a sweep of almost half a circle and crosses the brook over a bridge of rustic character.

Reference to files of county newspapers published in 1828 show that the following lines of stages ran from Sing Sing at that time...³

The article goes on to describe the three-hour stage-coach trip in the 1820s to Peekskill, "the next important village on the north," costing 50 cents, and the return stage from Peekskill which connected in Sing Sing to New York via the "Village Line" that terminated at 21 Bowery. The stage left No. 21 Bowery, "Mrs. Parker's," at nine a.m. daily to Ossining. Although this trip would take a full day, it is evident that by 1828 the demand for transit on a daily basis to Ossining from New York City had attracted operators of a commercial stage line.

The availability of passenger travel by land and river, combined with the natural beauty of Camp Woods, made the site very attractive. More practical matters would



Permanent summer cottages were built in the late 1800s.

also have to be addressed, however, before the site was deemed appropriate. The Croton meetings had demonstrated that a weeklong religious holiday, usually running from a Monday to a Friday, which attracted thousands of people, would require adequate sanitation and a supply of fresh water. Camp meetings were held on the Camp Woods site from 1831 to 1834 before the purchase of the property as a permanent meeting locale. A second land deed was executed in 1836 that would guarantee that the need for fresh water would be satisfied. As part of the improvement and enlargement of the Camp Woods property that would take place over the next 30 years, the Camp Meeting Society purchased water rights and stream bed property from David McCord, one of the local Methodists, for \$25. The brook that ran through McCord's property adjacent to Camp Woods is the main branch of the brook that continues down to the north end of the village and runs out to the Hudson under the railway tracks. Large wooden tanks were constructed to hold water that was pumped

from the brook in preparation for the meetings, which brought thousands of thirsty participants. In 1832 the New York State Legislature passed an act for "Supplying the City of New York with pure and wholesome water," which became a law in 1834. Construction of the Croton water system had a great impact on

the religious societies of Sing Sing. In 1837 the construction of the Croton Aqueduct, connecting the controlled water below the original Croton Dam to the lower Westchester water system to be built by the City of New York, passed through Sing Sing. Religious services were conducted for the aqueduct laborers by a priest, on ground bought on the Post Road, in a hastily erected, rude, frame building, resembling a barn—the first Catholic Church in Sing Sing.⁴

The increasingly dynamic social milieu was one in which the Methodists of Sing Sing, the rest of Westchester County and New York City strove to create an oasis of religious expression. The formal organization of a Methodist Church in Sing Sing coincided with the advent of the Camp Woods meeting in the same area. Local congregations were active in their participation and formed societies that used the camp meeting grounds.

The Highland Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church of Ossining published a pamphlet in 1906 noting the 116th anniversary of Methodism in Ossining, which would date some sort of Methodist

organization there to 1792.⁵ An itinerant preacher named Jacob Ryder was one of the preachers based in the Sing Sing area at the beginning of the 19th century. Ryder is mentioned as preaching in the “cider mill barns that were his residence above the hill of Camp Woods.” The current Camp Woods Road becomes Ryder Road as it turns up the hill to Maryknoll.

During the formative years of Camp Woods, there was a balance of participation and supervision between the local Methodists and those from New

Coope, David Keyes and Peter McNamara.⁶ No doubt many of these original trustees had been active participants in the meetings from at least 1831 when they began at Camp Woods. Robert Knowlton had sold the original parcel of land to the newly formed corporation of the Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Camp Meeting Society.

Over the next several years there were various changes in the board of trustees, with some increase in participation by Methodist congregations in Manhattan and

creating the new association designated the two organizations as “blended.” The overall jurisdiction of the camp meetings still remained in the Methodist faith. The support of that faith by the Methodist Church authority was organized by regions. The regions were derived from the original circuits established by Freeborn Garrettson, one of American Methodism’s early preachers, in the late 1780s, and Camp Woods was part of the New York (City) Region. The new board of trustees had 15 members and included men who had served during the first 33 years of the camp meetings.

Camp Woods has been administered by a board of trustees from its inception. In the Methodist tradition, this board is not only responsible for administrative duties but also for the guidance of the community. The rules of community conduct are drawn up and overseen by the board of trustees at Camp Woods to this day. John Wesley, always concerned with the perpetual nature of his “Methodism” and its churches, had set this precedent within the Methodist properties from the onset.⁷

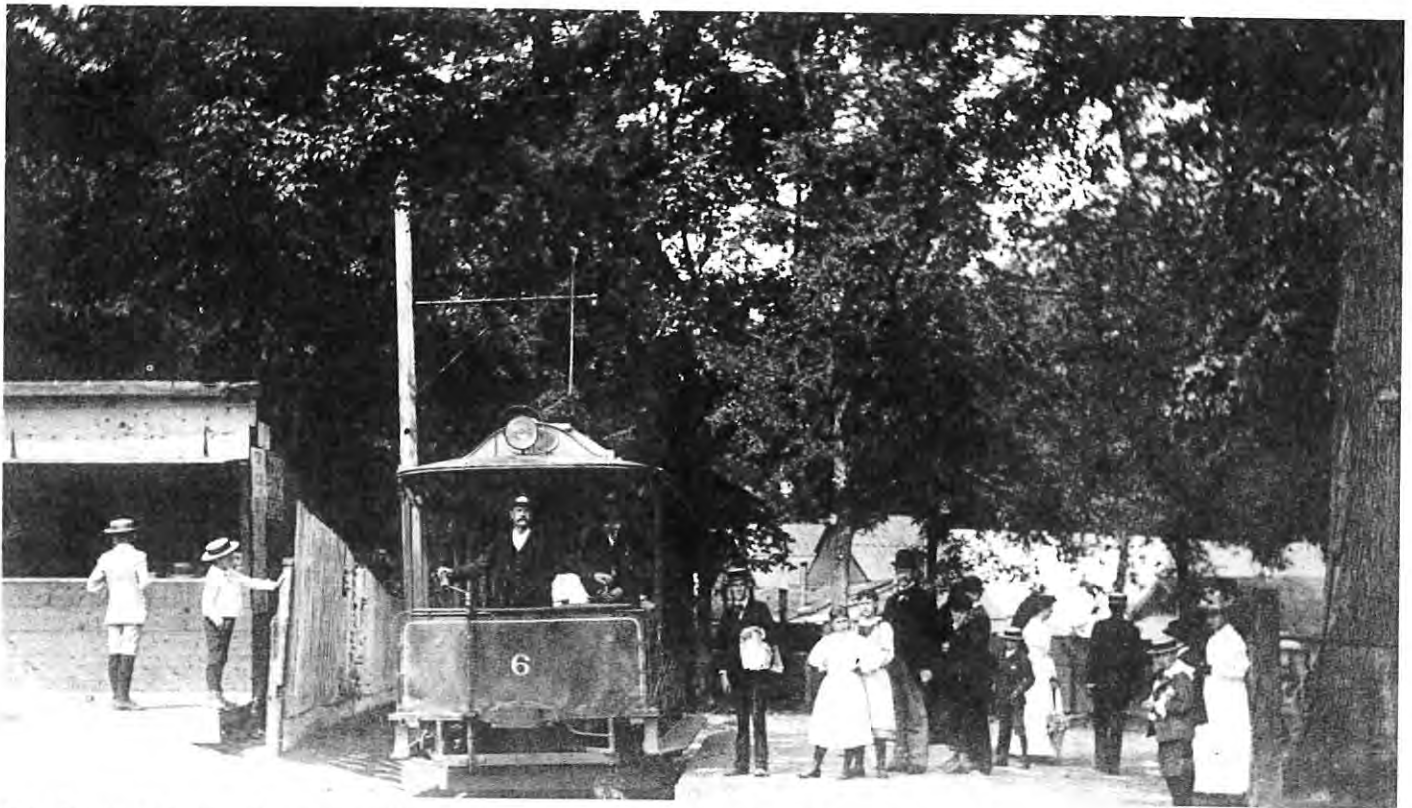
Throughout the period before the Civil War, Camp Woods, Ossining and Westchester County continued to develop, and the regional identity grew stronger. The industrial and commercial expansion of Yonkers, White Plains, Peekskill and Ossining in the mid-19th century was aided by a system of trolleys in the new urban centers with cross-county lines that connected with the new rail lines radiating from New York City. The New York and Harlem Railroad opened to White Plains in 1844, and the Hudson River Railroad was opened as far



The Camp Grounds continued to grow throughout the 19th century.

York City. Pastor Theodosius Clark of the Methodist Church at Sing Sing called a meeting in April 1834 at the camp grounds for the purpose of forming a Methodist Episcopal Camp Meeting Society. Nine trustees were elected: Andrew C. Wheeler, Isaac Smith, Robert Knowlton, John Urmy, Joseph Smith, Nicholas Sureman, David

Brooklyn. In 1867 the organization was incorporated by the New York State Legislature, and its name was changed to the Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the City of New York. The new organization was an amalgamation of two organizations—the original Mount Pleasant Methodist Episcopal Camp Meeting Society and the similar city-based organization, which also owned land in the Sing Sing area. It is significant that the legislation



The Camp Meeting electric trolley stop, connected to the Main Street Railway in Ossining.

north as Peekskill in 1849, with over 20,000 passengers a month starting in its first month of operation.⁸

In the 1840s and 50s, Camp Woods reflected the societal influences emanating from New York City. A recent wave of immigrants from Sweden, attracted to jobs relating to shipping, centered around the New York harbor. This influx of Swedes brought about the formation of several Swedish Methodist congregations in Brooklyn and lower Manhattan. The Swedish Methodists organized their first independent camp meeting at Camp Woods in 1854. Their participation would prove to be the lifeblood of the Ossining camp meeting site during the second 50 years of its existence.

Initially, in the pre-Civil War period of the camp meetings, the

attendees were mostly either locals, arriving by wagons that they often slept in, or Methodists from New York City. The "Cathedral In The Woods," as the bonfire-lit glade under the canopy of the great oaks was called, maintained its isolated location during the 1840s and 1850s. As Westchester developed into a "trading partner" with New York City, in the realms of human capital, natural resources, commodities and economics, the constituency of Camp Woods expanded to include sponsoring church societies from Manhattan, Brooklyn and the outlying suburbanized areas of Long Island and New Jersey.

Local events during this time period give testimony to the small-town character of the surrounding area, but they also foreshadowed pending growth. In 1840 one of Sing Sing's two original public

schools was built. In 1856 the citizens of Sing Sing organized the Ossining Hose Company and raised \$2,000 to buy new steam-powered fire equipment. The small commercial district in the village expanded. In 1845 the town of Ossining was separated from the town of Mount Pleasant.⁹

Ossining's connection to New York City became stronger in the years before the Civil War because of increased commercial interdependence, including the addition of two new passenger steamboats, the *Kosciusko* and the *Telegraph*. Beginning in 1841, the ships vied with each other for business between New York, Ossining and Peekskill. On July 4, 1842, water was released from the upper Westchester reservoir system through the aqueduct that runs over and under parts of the village of

Perhaps the most significant impact on the evolving community and future of the Camp Woods locale was the addition of the Swedish Methodist camp meetings that lasted 142 years. The Swedish Methodists leased the camp meeting site for their own meetings, taking place several weeks after the conclusion of the Camp Meeting Association's regular annual meetings. They subsequently developed the physical infrastructure of Camp Woods, including the summer homes of many of its first seasonal residents. After World War II, the Swedish community, primarily from Brooklyn, would become the sole organizer of the weeklong camp meetings every year.

The bustling seaport of lower Manhattan and the chandleries of the Brooklyn waterfront attracted an increasing wave of Swedish immigrants beginning in the 1840s. Wesley's Methodism had taken hold in the communities of hard-working fishermen and sailors in Sweden, much as it had with the similar communities of New Bedford and Fall River, Massachusetts.

The beginnings of the American Swedish Church date from 1845, when New York's Asbury Society purchased the *Henry Leeds*, a docked brigantine, and re-christened it the *John Wesley*. For 30 years it was moored in New York harbor, surrounded by Scandinavian shipping traffic, and it became a religious center for the many newly arrived Swedish immigrants. In

addition to the congregation that worshipped aboard the floating church, many others were initiated on land. Pastor O.G. Hedstrom, who is credited with bringing Swedish Methodism to America, started the Immanuel Swedish Methodist Church on Pacific Street in Brooklyn. Pastor Hedstrom was the first pastor of the *Bethelskeppet* (Bethel Ship), as the *John Wesley* came to be known in the Swedish Methodist community. The congregation of the Immanuel Swedish Methodist Church was instrumental in the Swedish camp meetings that helped to develop Camp Woods into a religious vacation destination during the last three decades of the 19th century.

The Swedish camp meetings were very similar to those of the Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the City of New York. After the Civil War, the camp meeting grounds were more closely tied to the spon-

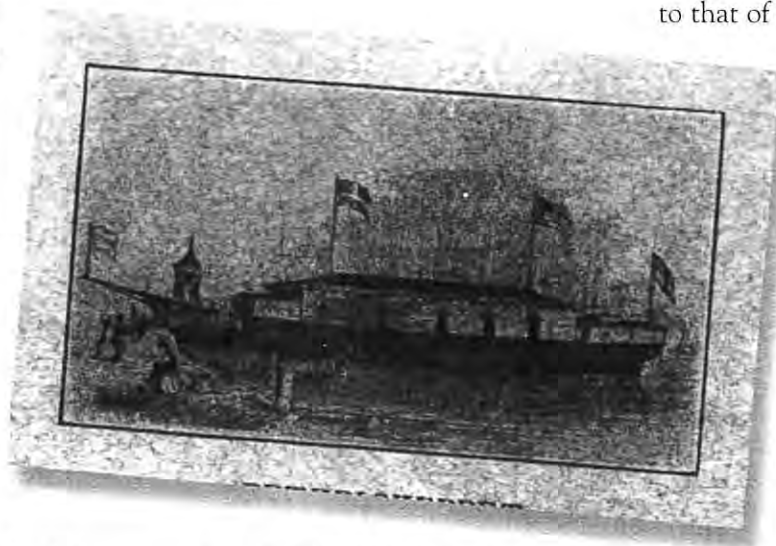
soring churches of the New York City urban area. For both groups' series of meetings, each lasting 10 days, the churches would store large community tents at the Ossining camp grounds. Individual and extended families would erect platforms for smaller tents used as temporary housing and small outdoor kitchens.

During the 1870s many of these tents became quasi-permanent, with wooden walls complete with doors and windows in the Gothic Revival style, but still with canvas roofs. Frame cottages replaced these "tents" by the end of the century. By this time many families remained in residence throughout the summer, as they prepared for the 10 days of camp meetings. Eventually the cottages were equipped with electricity, running water and modern plumbing.¹³ A distinct "camp meeting grounds society" was forming in northern Westchester County. During this period, the identity of Camp Woods was evolving parallel to that of other parts of Westchester

County, yet without being integrated into the larger pattern of development.

C.W. Christman wrote the most comprehensive history of the development of the community of Camp Woods, not only regarding its architecture but also about the spirituality of the community. The Camp Woods community embraced the basic

beliefs that formed the underpinnings of Methodism. The families that settled at Camp Woods, at



The *Bethelskeppet*, the "floating church" of the American Swedish Church, docked in New York Harbor. From the program of the Swedish Methodist 1913 Camp Meeting.

least during their summers, were the faithful core, from both constituencies. These families began leasing land from the Association and building their own summer cottages. The development of year-round homes helped create a permanent "community," as many of the original home-owners' descendants were to remain at Camp Woods. Some of these descendants were the people who winterized their cottages after World War II, establishing today's neighborhood. By 1962 there were 28 year-round houses on the grounds, many occupied by retired couples. They formed a close-knit group, gathering for picnics and other social events.¹⁴

A THREAT TO HARMONY

The community created by the revival movement called the Second Great Awakening remained steadfast to the faith-based religion of John Wesley. The Association's board

provided the organizational structure, as the once remote revival meeting site evolved into a summer haven for Methodists of the New York metropolitan region. About the time the meetings began to attract less attention from the outside world, an internal difference in theology threatened the harmony of Camp Woods.

As Christman noted:

Doctrinal differences and emphases were fruitful sources of trouble. In 1870 the Camp Meeting at Sing Sing was threatened with strife over the doctrine of holiness. Some of the leaders sought to enlist the support of other preachers against holding meetings at which the doctrine of holiness was preached. Some of the brothers and sisters who were on the other side of the issue threatened to leave the camp meeting and go elsewhere where their freedom would not be so restricted. However, they were prevailed upon to remain. For many years thereafter a meeting was held at 8 a.m. for the express

purpose of promoting the doctrine of "holiness as a distinctive personal experience."¹⁵

The experience of being saved, the primary purpose of the initial revival meetings of the early 1800s, was described as feeling Jesus Christ enter your body and spirit. The circuit riders of the early days of American Methodism, the visiting preachers at Camp Woods, and the pastors of New York's Methodist congregations focused on the process of finding salvation and living a life guided by the teachings of Christ and the Apostles. Wesley had also written about the possibility of achieving "perfection" in this lifetime. The theology of perfection, or Wesley's doctrine of holiness, prescribed that a life led totally without sin was the end goal of all Christians. If a person was first saved, and then led a life totally without sin based solely on the ways of Christ, then perfection could be



Sing Sing Camp Meeting, 1838.
All illustrations in this article are courtesy of the author.

achieved in his lifetime. This would enable him to enter heaven directly from this life. This belief was a controversial one within the Methodist Church and not recognized by the New York Conference. A minority of followers dedicated their lives to this path and an even smaller group claimed to have gained a level of holiness through their dedicated efforts. The structure of the camp meetings was threatened until a compromise was reached.

The doctrinal controversy of 1880 provides evidence of the continuing vitality of the religious nature of the Camp Woods locale. Its history was to be one of evolution and change over the next 50 years, but the theological foundation of the meeting site was to remain an integral part of the fabric of the community. By the closing decades of the 1800s, the large-scale camp meetings of the 1860s had waned, and an organized neighborhood was beginning to develop.

Manuela Henning Chadeayne experienced her childhood at Camp Woods during the community's development phase of the late 1800s. She married a local resident (a street bearing their last name is approximately one mile from the main entrance to Camp Woods). Mrs. Chadeayne described her life at Camp Woods in a commemorative pamphlet published by the Camp Woods Association in 1978:

I was born April 21, 1872, in New York City. From the time I was three months old until I was thirteen I lived with my family summers, at the Camp Woods, on Camp Woods Road in Ossining, New York. My connection with the Camp Woods happened this way. When I turned out to be what was called a sickly baby, country air was prescribed for me.



The Swedish Tabernacle, built at the Ossining Camp Grounds.

My father had heard of the Camp Woods through friends from the John's Street Methodist Church in New York. (Those who went to the Camp Woods from the city in those days came mostly from that church.) Thinking it might be a good place for his family to spend the summer, my father decided to look things over. He liked it so well that he immediately made arrangements for his family to occupy a tent there.

Later he became a trustee of the Camp Woods and served as such for many years. How I loved those tents! Most of them were about 10 ft. wide and 12 ft. deep from front to back, and divided into three rooms. The sitting-room was in front, just behind the tent flaps, a narrow room big enough for two or three rocking chairs and a straight chair or two. Then came two bedrooms, one on each side, with the narrow hall in the middle, between them. Canvas curtains that were rolled up in the daytime formed the walls around each bed. During the day, when the beds were made up with handsome patchwork quilts, the whole tent was open, forming one room. People were very proud of their patchwork quilts.

The passage between the beds

led to the back, where the square iron cook-stove stood on a wooden platform. A canvas flap covered this extension and we generally ate out there. I don't remember whether coal or wood was burned in the stove but I guess it was mostly wood.

Practically everybody lived in tents when we first went there. Then some people built half tents - with wooden walls and canvas roofs. The tents varied in size and other ways. In 1880 my father built a permanent cottage (Wesley Cottage), which is still there. Ours was the first cottage on the east side. Around that time many others began to build cottages, which came largely to supercede the tents.

Even after people began to build cottages there were still a lot of tents and half-tents. Some of the tents were even smaller than those I have described.

Tents were also used to house the various stores, which stood in a row at the head of Central Avenue, near Camp Woods Road, facing south. One, I remember was run by a colored barber from Ossining; one we called "the candy tent"; one "the grocery tent"; one "the tin-type tent"; one the post office. These tents were about the same size as those



The summer community at Camp Woods before World War II.

used as houses. Across from them stood the large tent which housed the restaurant.

Drinking water all had to be carried. It came from two wells, one on the west side and one on the east side. There was no plumbing of any sort, even in the cottages, although some of them had their own outdoor facilities. There was an outside place for the women and children. I remember down the hill near the brook, on the west side of the Preacher's Rest.

But you will want to hear about the services, which were famous in this area and attracted people from what we thought was a long ways away. Most of the services were held in the outdoor auditorium under the trees. Just behind the pulpit was the big wooden house where the visiting preacher's stayed, called the "Preachers' Rest." It faced the curving rows of wooden seats in the outdoor auditorium. In fact, the pulpit was partly under the roof of the porch, so that the preacher, although not his audience, was protected in case of a sudden shower. The choir sat on the east side, partly under the porch, and the visiting ministers sat under

the porch on the west side.

Directly in front of the pulpit was a semi-circular bench with straw on the ground in front of it. At the revival meeting, held after the regular evening service, those who came up to the altar knelt in this straw. Behind this were the semicircles of benches with backs, called "the circle."

About ten feet behind the circle the cottages began, and from the curving street that ran along the back of the circle, the streets radiated out - Central Avenue, Fifth Avenue, and another one to the east. During the heyday of the Camp Meetings, there was also a large prayer-meeting tent off Central Avenue, useful in bad weather.

During the big two weeks when the main Camp Meetings were going on, there were two meetings a day, one in the afternoon and one at night. After the night meeting, held about 8:00 to 9:00, everybody stayed for the revival meeting.

The last night of the special services was always exciting. When the meeting was over there was the march called "Going Around Jerusalem." With the

ministers in the lead, and then the choir, we would march all around the Camp Woods singing hymns, two by two, and people from the cottages would join in the march as we passed. The line was so long that the couples were passing each other going in opposite directions - all singing.

During Camp Meeting time the main gates were locked at ten o'clock by a policeman who came up from New York. By then everyone had to be out except those who lived there. I loved to ride on the policeman's shoulder and help him shut the gates. He'd come for me every night. I never was made to go to bed until everybody else went.

We got our meat from a butcher that drove through the Camp Woods with his wagon. In it he had all the meat hung up as though in a butcher shop, and he'd cut it off to order as he went from house to house. The milk also came in a wagon. I remember the milk boy, who drove over from his father's farm on Summertown Road, near Brookside, where the racetrack used to be. We called him "High Water" because his trousers came up so high on his shanks.

While the meetings were in session, in the evening, we would go and sit on a bench and watch the people arriving in carriages from the railroad station. At the entrance to the Camp Woods there were two gates about a hundred feet apart. The openings are still there. Incoming vehicles, such as carriages bringing people from the Ossining railroad station, had to enter through the south gate and go out the north gate. Because the carriages were so high (unlike the modern automobile), they drove up to a platform about two feet high, so that the women, with their long dresses, could step out easily. From the platform steps led to the ground. The bench we sat on was near this platform.

It was always exciting, especially on a Friday or Saturday night, to see who was coming up for the week-end. Sometimes the traffic was quite heavy. For those who drove over to spend the day, there was a place to the east where they could tie their horses.

To the west of the platform there was a restaurant, and connected with it, the Brummel House, which I have already mentioned. It was named after a candy manufacturer who had given a good deal of money toward the Camp Woods meetings. We thought the food at the Brummel House was wonderful.

Beyond it was what we called the Swedish Building, built by a group of Swedish people that used to hold camp meetings for two weeks after ours were over. They also had a large canvas tent for meetings and a restaurant tent.

When I was about thirteen my family moved up from the city permanently to a house on Camp Woods Road. That meant moving out of our summer cottage in the Camp Woods, but I still went over there a lot in the summer - actually until I was married in '99.

Around the turn of the century the Camp Woods passed its heyday and began to go downhill. But in mind it is still connected with all kinds of good times.

From this narrative it can be dis-

cerned that by the mid-1870s, Camp Woods was a community of summer residences, in addition to being a location for temporary camp meetings. Permanent cottages were being built by 1880, and it is a testimony to the true origins of Camp Woods that Mrs. Chadeayne's father named their cottage after John Wesley. By this time, wells had been dug to replace the original wooden holding tanks for water taken from the stream, the small dirt lanes had been given street names, and there was the advent of seasonal commerce on the property. The summer residents and the visitors for the "American" and "Swedish" meetings spent enough money to attract local businesses to open temporary branch stores at Camp Woods. The gates and perimeter security provided by the New York policeman reflect a well-defined and well-regulated community. The local place names indicate the continuity of the surrounding community. The milk wagon was from a farm "near Brookside," which is the name of the local elementary school where the children of current-day Camp Woods attend school.

The narrator speaks of continuing to live nearby until 1899, and subsequently looking back at Camp Woods only to proclaim that its "heyday" ended before the turn of the century. Part of this impression may have been the memories of an adventurous place which seemed rustic and almost wild to a young woman from the city, contrasted with the evolution of Camp Woods into a sedate locale of summer cottages within a developing suburb. More change was about to take place, and the story of Camp Woods in the 20th century will be contin-

ued in the next issue of *The Historian*. ■

Bill McGrath, who lives in the Camp Woods community in Ossining, is employed by *Hotopp Associates in Manhattan*. He was graduated from *Marymount College in Tarrytown*.

ENDNOTES:

¹ *The Citizen Register*, Ossining, N.Y., April 11, 1962.

² Debra L. Clyde, "A People Called Methodists, the Van Cortlandts and Methodism in Early America." Unpublished dissertation. Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restoration (now Historic Hudson Valley), 1984, 76.

³ Vertical Files, Ossining Historical Society.

⁴ J. Thomas Scharf, ed. *The History of Westchester County, New York*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: L.E. Preston, 1886. II:346.

⁵ Highland Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, Ossining, N.Y. *One-hundred and Sixteenth Anniversary of Methodism, Ossining, N.Y.* Ossining, N.Y.: [1906].

⁶ C. W. Christman, Jr., "Camp Meetings in the New York Annual Conference." Unpublished pamphlet at the Ossining Historical Society, circa 1947, 4.

⁷ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meetings; a Model for Making Disciples*. Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997, 89.

⁸ Scharf, *History of Westchester County, New York*. 1:480.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:322.

¹⁰ Methodist Church of New York, *Minutes of the Annual Conference, 1859*.

¹¹ Scharf, *History of Westchester County, New York*. 2:348.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1:482.

¹³ Christman, "Camp Meetings," 6.

¹⁴ *The Citizen Register*, Ossining, NY, April 11, 1962.

¹⁵ Christman, "Camp Meetings," 3.



Part 2

Camp Woods, Ossining, New York

Methodist Camp Ground to SECULAR SUBURB, 1831-2001

by **Bill McGrath**

Front gate to the Camp Woods residential community. This is where the old trolley stopped. All photographs in this article are by Gray Williams.

In the second part of his article, Bill McGrath traces the transformation of Camp Woods from its original purpose as the site for annual Methodist camp meetings in the summer to a permanent residential community.

The development of Camp Woods as a permanent community was guided and codified by The Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the City of New York. The organization worked with the municipal authorities of the Town of Ossining in 1874 to regulate the designated parcels of

land within Camp Woods. A map drawn in this year indicated specific plot numbers and was used both for the leasing of land to tenants and also for the eventual taxes to be levied on each homeowner once his leased plot was developed.

The leases specified a term of 99 years, renewable forever. They clear-

ly designated the land under private lease as taxable, although no annual increase in the tax rate could exceed five percent.

The Association also created new or reinforced existing zoning through the lease agreement. The past character of the community is revealed through anticipated season-

al use:

AND ALSO, that the Party of the Second Part shall not, and will not, at any time hereafter, without the written consent of the said Party of the First Part, their Successors or Assigns, use or occupy said demised premises, or any part thereof, or any building or other structure thereon, or suffer or permit the same, or any part thereof, to be used as a public boarding house, or for any mercantile or mechanical trade or purpose whatever, or for any other purpose than as a residence or summer resort.

The Association incorporated into the lease its rules and regulations, which before the turn of the century only numbered six, but which clearly formed the basis for ensuing iterations.

I. No games or diversions of any kind not approved by the Board of Trustees of said Association will be allowed on the Camp Meeting Ground, or any of the premises of the said Association, at any time.

II. The Association reserve the right at all times to use, lay out, and lease all lands not already laid out or designated as streets or avenues.

III. Water-closet and all sanitary arrangements under the direction of the Association.

IV. No building, stoop, piazza, or platform shall extend beyond the line of the street.

V. No trees shall be cut down or removed without the consent of the Board of Trustees.

VI. Any violation of any of the provisions or conditions of this Lease by the Party of the Second Part shall work a forfeiture of this Lease.¹

The development of Camp

Woods was to be fueled from both the "American" side and the "Swedish" side. In 1886 the sponsoring Swedish congregations built the "Kristen's Hvilla" (Christian's Rest) boarding house. This boarding house was subsequently named Hedstrom House, in honor of O.G. Hedstrom, and later renamed Valin House. An interview with Mrs. Julia Thompson, born in Brooklyn in 1879, appeared in the *Ossining Citizen Register* in 1959. Mrs. Thompson detailed the different usage of the boarding house during the summer vacation season and the 10 days of meetings.

Free straw was provided every year to be used as mattresses in each of the 14 rooms, with the families bringing their own bedding. No food accommodations were made for the seasonal visitor, so the women would chip in for one half ton of coal and also gather wood each day for cooking. The rooms in Valin House were each sponsored by a different church, with each of the 14 rooms accommodating a whole family. For those coming in droves just for the meeting days, the upper floor of Valin House was partitioned off for men and women, with bedding along the wall and long benches set up down the middle of the room for clothing.²

The Swedish community at Camp Woods continued to develop its own sub-identity and usage of the locale. In 1898 a deed was recorded in Westchester County by the "Camp Meeting Association of Methodist Episcopal Church in New York" to the "Swedish Methodist Episcopal Churches in New York, Mt. Vernon & Yonkers" for land rent of \$90 per year for 99 years.

The land was the joining of several plots already demised and demarcated in the survey map of 1874. The lease is based on the leases issued to cottage builders in the 1890s. The only significant difference in language is contained in the section prohibiting commercial activity. A variance was granted, which reads, "The party of the second part may erect and maintain a Restaurant upon the said lot."

In 1905 the 16 churches of the Eastern Swedish Methodist Conference, as their regional conference of congregations was then known, built the Swedish Tabernacle and dining hall buildings at Camp Woods for \$8,000. By this time the Swedish Methodist churches from Manhattan, Brooklyn, lower Westchester, Stamford, Connecticut, and several cities in New Jersey were participating in the camp meetings at Camp Woods. In 1906 there was an electric trolley making regular stops at the Camp Woods trolley stop that was connected to the "Ossining Electric Railway" that had established service in downtown Ossining in 1905. From the Franklin Street docks in New York City, the Swedes from Brooklyn would board the *Sarah Jenks* and disembark at Ossining for a summer vacation at Camp Woods. An entire family could stay at the Swedish boarding house, then known as the Hedstrom House, paying \$10 for the entire summer for one room with no plumbing facilities.

The Swedish meetings were promoted throughout the Swedish community in the Northeast. Pamphlets distributed through the New York-

area Swedish Methodist churches provided meeting schedules and public transportation information in Swedish. The programs for the religious services were printed in Swedish, with English translations for hymn lyrics appearing in the 1915 programs. By the 1930s the Swedish camp meeting programs were in English, but the preachers and many of the attendees would speak Swedish among themselves up until the 1960s.

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century there was a steady decrease in participation in the camp meetings. Many longtime attendees built cottages, usurping space for tents, and the two boarding houses had room for only 100 people each. Tents were still erected by many of the attendees during meetings in the 1920s. However, shrinking attendance from New York City and out-of-town Methodists during the Depression, and the proliferation of mass transit in Westchester County that allowed day trips to the camp meetings, eliminated the widespread use of tents by the early 1940s. Several of the current older residents of Camp Woods recall a small number of tents still being used for the Swedish meetings during the 1970s. As each generation passed, the former practice of the old ways at Camp Woods slowly vanished. The current residents remember the Bible Conferences of the 1950s, while the residents of the 1940s could remember some of the large-scale meetings before the turn of the 20th century.

Vivid in the minds of the old-timers still living, and some of us

not quite so old, is the memory of the "March Around Jerusalem" with which the camp meetings were closed. As a boy I can remember the thrilling pageantry of the procession around the grounds. After the benediction at the last evening service the congregation, led by the choir and ministers, would march around the grounds singing

We're marching to Zion,
Beautiful, beautiful Zion;
We're marching upward to
Zion,
The beautiful city of God."

Having circled the grounds the procession came back to its starting point where the ministers would take their places in front of the "Preachers Rest." The congregation then filed by, shaking hands with the ministers and bidding them godspeed. The next morning preachers and laity would go their several ways, not to meet again until another camp meeting, or perhaps until the Master Preacher gathered them together in "The beautiful city of God."³

The building of the more permanent cottages after the turn of the century and the decreasing attendance changed the character of the meetings. Residents would stay for several months, including those renting a room or cot at the boarding houses. The highlight of their stay would, of course, be the 10 days of the camp meeting, which could be likened more to an intensive religious retreat than the dynamic camp meetings of the early 19th century. During the latter years of the Depression the "American" meetings were suspended, while the Swedish meetings continued. The Association Board and residents organized Sunday evening vesper

services in lieu of the "American" camp meeting. These vesper services were announced in the Swedish camp meeting bulletin. During this time a small number of residents established the permanent resident community at Camp Woods. One aspect of the religious vacations of the 20th century consistent with the earlier meetings was the offering of services several times throughout the day.⁴

The direct cause for the changes at Camp Woods during the course of the 20th century was the evolution of the surrounding suburban region. The transportation infrastructure, employment, and increase in housing changed the nature of the county. The cities of lower Westchester were now providing industrial employment closer to northern Westchester, where Camp Woods is located. The population in Yonkers in 1900 was 40,000, and the total wages paid out by Yonkers employers was one million dollars. By 1908 the dollar amount of wages in Yonkers was estimated at eight million, and in 1909, the Yonkers carpet mill and the Otis elevator factory each had 7,000 workers. The regional economy thrived, and several products sold nationally were produced in smaller factories in the other industrial centers of Westchester. At the end of the first decade of the 20th century, Westchester was a vital part of America's dominant position in the emerging international manufacturing economy.

The housing market in Westchester changed irrevocably at the turn of the century. The 1874 annexation by New York City of the



The dining hall, which is no longer used.

Westchester towns that would form the borough of the Bronx removed significant numbers of Democrats from Westchester politics. Westchester became a Republican-controlled county, and coordinated economic development of Westchester ensued, with large-scale land and housing development tied into both transportation and commercial growth. Although the agricultural base of Westchester was declining, there were significant parcels of land still attached to large estates. Much of this land was sold off for planned developments such as Lawrence Park in Bronxville, areas of Scarsdale, and Philipse Manor in North Tarrytown—all before the turn of the century. The 1890s also saw the

development of the Parkhill section of Yonkers and the village of Pleasantville. Settlement followed the fingers of the rail lines connecting to New York City. Most homes were built within one-half mile of a trolley line or within one mile of a railroad station.

Westchester County and New York City combined to form an economic engine in the 20th century that transformed the county. In 1920 Westchester's population was 344,436, with 1,528 farms still producing agricultural products; by 1930 there was a 51.2% increase in population to 520,947 with only 428 farms remaining. The development of parkways and suburban homes sparked the initial dependence on

Meeting building
the automobile. In 1920 Westchester citizens owned one car per 7.2 persons, and by 1930 the county had one car for every 3.7 persons—in each case the highest per capita county car ownership in the United States.⁵

The boom of the early part of the century was to be followed by the Depression and World War II, during which Westchester County experienced only limited growth. During the 1930s there was only another 10% increase in population, with economic hard times slowing private development. Between 1929 and 1940 over eight per cent of the properties in Westchester were foreclosed. Beginning in 1940 the war economy began ramping up. The defense

industry boomed in Tarrytown, as the GM Fisher Body plant was converted to an aviation sheet metal and parts factory. Women went to work for the duration of the war in record numbers, and by 1945 they comprised 34% of the New York State labor force. World War II impacted many Westchester families, as 70,000 served in uniform and 2,002 were killed in action.⁶

The biggest changes in the suburban development of both Westchester County and Camp Woods were to come after World War II. The post-war era of Camp Woods' history is one of incremental decay, with dwindling attendance and funds. The Swedish meetings continued after the war, but the "American" camp meetings were not held again after the Depression era. Christman's history of Camp Woods reflects upon the devolving nature of the religious character of the locale.

In the late years the camp meetings at Ossining have not drawn great crowds, nor have they drawn the unconverted. The congregations which attend the merged meetings of the so-called "American" and "Swedish" associations are made up mainly of members of neighboring churches. While the services may help to promote religion and deepen the spiritual life of those attending, the meetings do not accomplish what was done in former days in winning large numbers of men for Christ. It is sad, but true, that many who now occupy cottages on the camp ground are more interested in the "Grounds" as a place to vacation than as a place of spiritual refreshment and renewal.⁷

After World War II the church-

es of New York City were no longer directly involved with the programs at Camp Woods. As the Methodist church became organized on a more national and international basis, the regional conferences reassessed their mission with regard to the holding of land for camp meetings. An agreement was reached with the leaders of the Association Board for autonomous control of Camp Woods. In 1947 the New York State Legislature codified the transfer of the land ownership to a new organization.

Laws of New York, 1947, Chapter 503 Section 1. The corporation established under the name "the Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the city of New York," is continued and hereafter shall be known as the Ossining Camp Meeting Association. All property held in the name of the Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the city of New York, shall be deemed to be the property of the Ossining Camp Meeting Association; and all property rights may be asserted and enforced in the name of the Ossining Camp Meeting Association as fully and to the same extent as though the title to such property was originally taken in the name of such association.

During the 1950s more cottages were winterized and some members of families previously associated with Camp Woods took advantage of these low-cost homes so near to lower Westchester and New York City's job base, and the identity of Camp Woods changed significantly. The changes taking place during this era would not be related to the religious camp meeting ground, but rather were an extension of the

evolving surrounding suburban region. Camp Woods began to mimic the developing suburban character of Westchester County.

The previous infrastructure supporting the large-scale annual meetings was no longer needed. "The Restaurant," which stood near the entrance to the grounds, collapsed under the weight of the big snow of December 1947.⁸ The church society tents were long gone. The need for boarding houses, in the day of speedy mass transit and the automobile, was also gone. Most people attending the Swedish meetings or vesper services drove up for the day and visited with friends who now lived in Camp Woods. Interviews with longtime residents of Camp Woods set the date of the destruction of the Preacher's Rest by fire in 1949. The "American" tabernacle and the Brummel boarding house were razed; the current parking lot is located where they once stood. The Swedish Hedstrom boarding house/hotel burned down in 1979. The Swedish tabernacle and the adjacent dining hall are still standing but have been vacant since 1994. Both buildings are falling into disrepair due to neglect and the lack of funds to make them safe and usable.

Throughout Westchester County, as in the rest of the country, the post-war years brought the baby boom, large-scale housing development made possible by affordable loans for veterans, and the GI Bill for education. These factors combined to create an unprecedented demand for suburban housing. The demand for college-educated middle

management rose dramatically. Post-war society also became less elitist as ethnic minorities from Brooklyn and the Bronx began to find employment in the white-collar world of Westchester. The path was much more difficult for racial minorities. In the 20 years between 1950 and 1970, Westchester absorbed a 40% increase in housing sales. The population increased at approximately the rate of 42% over the same period.⁹

The large public events of the 19th century at Camp Woods gave way to the societal changes and secularization of late 20th-century America. Increased middle class affluence, popular culture, family destination vacation development, and the generation schism of the 1960s further eroded the public appeal of the camp meetings. The Bible Conferences at Camp Woods in the last four decades of the century suffered the same fate as the mass gatherings of the turn-of-the-century camp meetings. Debra L. Clyde, historian for Sleepy Hollow Restorations (now Historic Hudson Valley), put the legacy of the first century of Camp Woods into perspective:

Camp Meetings were a thing of the past when Christman wrote of his childhood memories in the early twentieth century. But he knew they had served their day. As a uniquely American institution, and a persistent Methodist one, the camp meeting spread the revival. In their universalistic appeal they softened the harshness of eighteenth-century Christianity. In their emphasis on an individual and experiential conversion to Christianity, they

virtually eradicated Deism. And finally they helped to shape American culture by laying the foundation for the moral reform movements of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

As Camp Woods absorbed the cultural impacts of the Depression, world war, the post-war suburbanization of Westchester County, and the transition into the 21st-century economy, the question of any remaining spiritual legacy is more difficult to answer. The community and the governing organization both evolved throughout the modern suburban era of 1950 to 1970. In the 1950s one weekend of the 10-day camp meeting was geared toward teens and people in their early twenties. On the Saturday night after the meeting, groups of young people would hike to the top of the road to Sunset Hill near Maryknoll and make a campfire in a site overlooking the river. Eventually the teens brought their cars to the meetings and would go into town for pizza and stay until the midnight curfew.¹¹

In 1969 the vesper services and associated home-based discussion groups created the name "The Camp Woods Bible Conference" to indicate a broader inclusion of other denominations. In the turbulent era of the 1960s and 1970s, Camp Woods was still clinging to the traditional values that seemed idyllic to some, and a quaint paradox to others. An attendee of the pre-war meetings reflected upon a visit nearly 40 years later.

At closing Vesper services last summer, I attended the Camp Meeting Association's devotions.

Entering the stone gate, I found that the place appeared much as I had remembered it—but gone was the croquet ground, replaced by a parking lot. As I walked the curving walks, under the great sturdy hemlocks, pine, maple and oak, it looked astonishingly the same, except for the demolished Brummel Boarding House and the fire-scarred Hedstrom House.

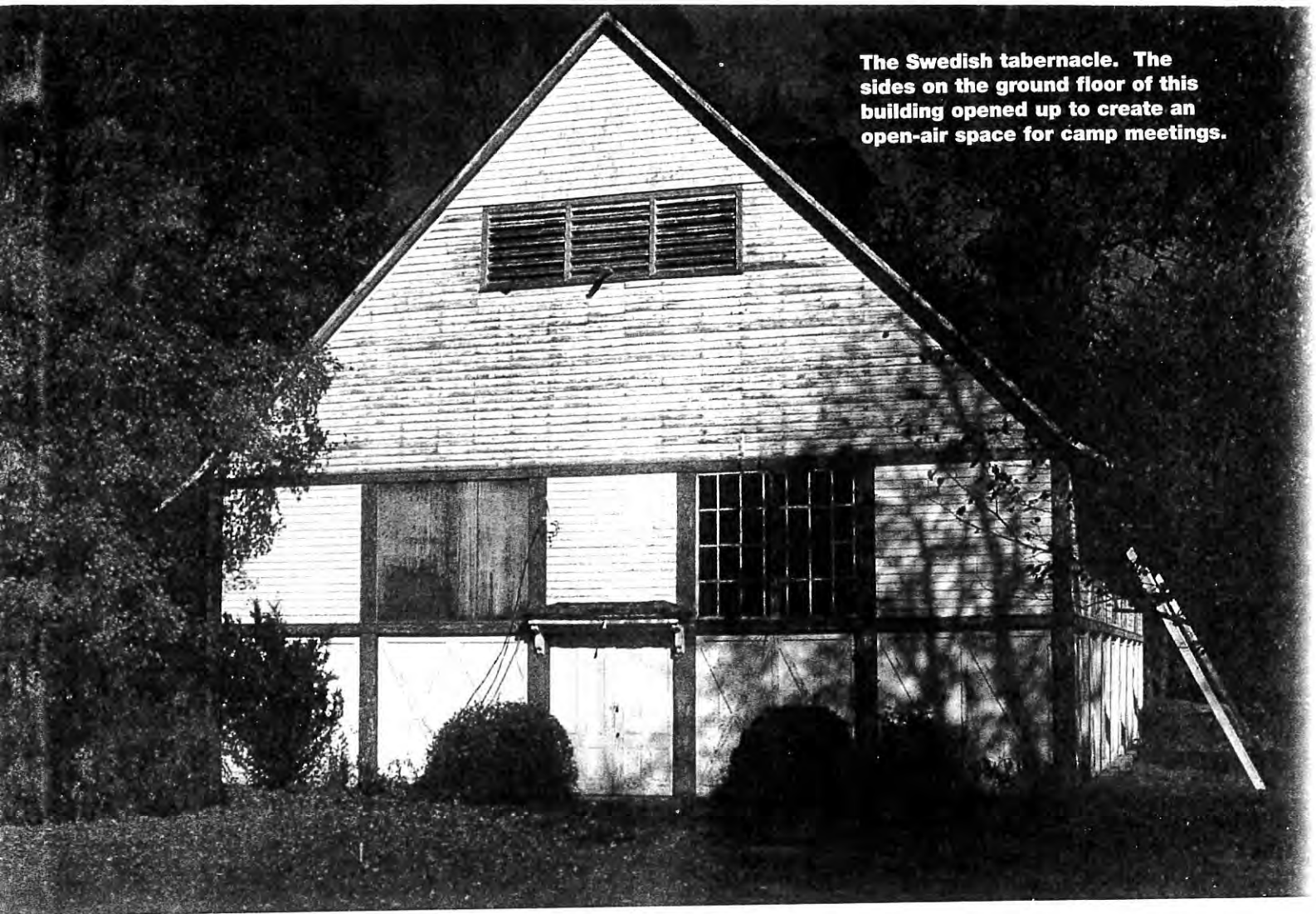
The rows of little Victorian-style cottages, still charmed—each with its carefully tended pocket-handkerchief lawn and cheerful flower beds.

Today's camp meeting differs greatly from the old. The style of the visiting ministers is less evangelistic than yesteryear, and the sermons less rhetorical. The congregation is more reserved in its outward expression of participation.

A few of the older ministers use a Billy Graham-like delivery but there are diversified offerings by evangelists, Baptists, foreign missionaries and speakers from nearby theological seminaries and some pastors from the area.¹²

In the late 1970s there were attempts to merge the Swedish Bible Conference, now called the Ossining Heights Bible Conference to distinguish between the two programs, and the "American" Bible Conference, but organizational talks broke down. Several residents interviewed in late 2001 cited the disruption in the neighborhood during the Swedish Meeting, which still attracted several hundred attendees on the weekends. The main issue of contention reported was the overflow parking conditions. The "Swedish" Bible Conference would continue until 1994, but the popularity of the meetings steadily declined.

The Swedish tabernacle. The sides on the ground floor of this building opened up to create an open-air space for camp meetings.



The Westchester County population trend after the 1970s was not an increase, but rather a redistribution. The population of several southern cities decreased—Yonkers went from 204,297 to 195,351 and Mount Vernon from 72,778 to 66,713. During the same time period 10 communities in Westchester gained population; nine of the 10 were in the county's northern section. The next two decades were characterized by small to moderate growth, but the northern sections of the county, including the Ossining area, became more developed. The relocation of white-collar corporate headquarters to Westchester during the period of 1970 to the present has shortened the commute time and distance to northern West-

chester. This trend created a demand for more middle- and upper-middle-class neighborhoods.

The growth surrounding the Camp Woods area has included five large-scale, high-end condominium developments within a two-mile radius of the front gates of the cottage community. The increase of business travel in and out of Westchester created the growth of one of the five busiest airports in the state. By 1980 Westchester County Airport recorded 263,884 flights in and out bound. Camp Woods is beneath one landing flight pattern, and periodically heavy air traffic can be heard overhead. The once remote community is now characterized in many ways by its Westchester location.¹³

The process of buying a home in

Camp Woods has remained the same since the 1950s. A prospective home buyer is first invited to an interview with several members of the board. The interview takes place in the home of a board member, and the prospective home owner is asked to provide two letters of character reference beyond the bank's mortgage approval. The rules and regulations of the Ossining Camp Meeting Association are reviewed, and the applicant is questioned on his willingness to participate in the four to six non-denominational vesper services taking place each summer. The rules are rooted in the fact that the buyer is only buying the house and not the surrounding land. The homeowners lease the cottage properties from the Association and the



Camp meetings were once held on this field. The auditorium is still used today.

Association reserves the right to approve, revoke and amend the lease at its discretion. The Association also reserves the right to match the buyer's price and take possession of the cottage for sale.

The rules and regulations pre-date many federal and state laws relating to fair housing and the proliferation of litigation. The traditional values of many of the long-time residents set the tone for the small community, and conformity is overwhelmingly embraced for the good of the community. The current

rules and regulations that are distributed and enforced were derived and re-written from the rules predating the early 1900s. These rules were first issued nine years after the ownership and management of Camp Woods was given over to the Ossining Camp Meeting Association in 1947. The "revised" rules and regulations were adopted in 1956 and revised again in 1959, 1968, 1980 and 1986.

The rules and regulations are attached to the lease held by each homeowner. Stipulated within are

the terms of the lease arrangement, the relationship between the homeowner and the Camp Woods' board of trustees, and the ongoing conditions that must be met in order for the lease to continue. The general conditions that introduce the rules and regulations and those items enumerated under the "Cottages" section govern the legal standing of the cottage owner. They also seek to guarantee the general welfare of the community. The tax status of the common grounds is given emphasis in the opening paragraph: "Camp



Woods is an area of Ossining that was originally established by the Methodist Church for the conducting of religious services during the summer. The tax status of a portion of the area depends upon the continuation of this primary purpose."

The rules and regulations outline a relationship that places the board of trustees' responsibility of governance above the rights of the individual homeowner. The ability to levy fines or to deny the renewal of a lease and abrogate a sale without a process that involves the

owner distinctly establishes the primacy of the Association. The defined relationship is consistent with the original purpose for the development of Camp Woods as a specific locale for Methodist camp meetings.

The unique nature of Camp Woods as a private and historic community is sometimes at odds with the individualism and overly litigious ways of much of current-day Westchester. The Camp Woods board interview is much more general in nature now, and in recent years the potential 45- to 50-day wait for the interview has been waived. The board has been advised by legal counsel that only in extraordinary instances can an applicant be turned away during the process if they have an approved mortgage. The emphasis on a traditional nuclear family, clearly stated in secular terms, is generally contrary to the socially liberal lifestyles and politics of greater Westchester County. There exists to this day a moral judgment, based in traditional Methodism, regarding unmarried couples living at Camp Woods.

A great deal of concern with regard to the issue of the common landscaping is incorporated in the rules, but no specific architectural guidelines are mentioned. By the time the revised regulations were drawn up, many "suburban" alterations were being made to many of the cottages. The lifestyle sensibilities of the 1950s and 1960s fostered attempts at "modernization." Wrought-iron railings, vinyl siding, replacement windows and dormers were added to almost all of the cottages during the second half of the

20th century.

The biggest societal change of the post-World War II era that affected both Camp Woods and Westchester County was dependence on the automobile. As buildings burned down or became dilapidated and were torn down at Camp Woods, parking lots were increased in size. As the density of population in Westchester increased, new suburban malls with parking lots replaced the city centers of White Plains and Yonkers, which were serviced by mass transit. The revised rules and regulations of Camp Woods reflected the new concerns relating to automobiles that had not been addressed before the war. The advent of the suburban automobile culture affected the Camp Woods residents' ability to continue residing in the atmosphere of a secluded retreat.

Most of the cottages were winterized during this period, and many families began to keep two vehicles at Camp Woods year-round. At odds with the strict rules attempting to maintain the sylvan nature of the grounds were major concerns regarding traffic on the inner roadway and the overflow of cars during the camp meetings. The rules and regulations specified numbers of cars permitted, parking, speed limits (10 miles per hour within the grounds), motorcycles (forbidden), servicing of cars, and truck deliveries.

The impact of automobiles on the quality of life was obviously a major concern. Other suburban year-round concerns were addressed regarding alcohol and drugs, pets, garbage collection, noise and recreation. The values embodied in a

religious community were still evident in the intent of the rules and regulations, but the rules also reflected the reality of Westchester's suburban influences.

The post-World War II suburban community of Camp Woods was concerned with maintaining the traditional conservative values of a neighborhood in one of America's wealthiest and most progressive local cultures. The identity of the locale would become that of a suburban enclave, albeit one with a unique link to the past and a rare religious heritage.

Other than the request to participate in the non-denominational vesper services, no inquiry is made into the religious beliefs or practices of the applicants. Sundays are given special mention in the rules and regulations. The current residents of Camp Woods feel very strongly that the objective of the rules is to ensure peace and quiet in a community of people living together in fairly tight quarters. Many of the cottages are less than 10 feet apart from one another.

Each lease stipulates the fees associated with the "yearly ground rent." A typical lease issued in recent years has been for the period of 40 years, with renewal options guaranteed. The annual ground rent has been rising steadily since 2000. The ground rents pay for common ground landscaping and lawn care, as well as snow removal and common building maintenance. The Board reserves the right to levy peri-



Some of the residences retain their original character.

odic assessments on a selective basis for emergency road repair, equipment replacement and repairing unexpected building damage. Increased costs for insurance and upkeep have contributed to a rise in ground rents from \$175 in 2000 to \$695 in 2002.

The tax status of an individual's house is that of most homeowners in Westchester County. The value of the home is assessed and taxes are paid through a mortgage institution. The value of the surrounding taxable land—those parcels not designated as "church owned"—are prorated by an individual's property value and paid through the Association's treasurer. The "church owned" common grounds and buildings are not taxable, as the Association owns

these grounds.

The original cottages were erected for limited use by a very close-knit community, and there were only a few water lines installed throughout Camp Woods. This requires four to five homes to share a common line with one main shut-off valve. The pressure is adequate in each cottage, but heavy use by a neighbor can affect another homeowner's water pressure.

The Town of Ossining provides garbage collection at a central collection point, as large trucks can not make the tight turn on the loop road between houses. The road system is now deemed private, and repair, maintenance, and snow removal is the responsibility of the residents of Camp Woods.



Approximately 20 cottages have some gothic ornamentation and window shapes reminiscent of the cottage period so well preserved at Wesleyan Grove on Martha's Vineyard. The erasure of the original architectural features of most of the homes at Camp Woods has progressed past the point of retaining any semblance of a turn-of-the-century cottage community. Several ranch style and builder colonial homes have also been added over the years. Several of the newer homeowners are restoring some of the unique charm to their cottages with increased real estate values in mind. These newer owners

tend to be the least involved in the spiritual community of Camp Woods, yet ironically, they may be responsible for the re-emergence of the community as a "special place" in Westchester County. The gentrified Camp Woods would become a desirable family neighborhood, albeit, secular in nature.

The year 2002 marked the 172nd continuous year that some form of Methodist-inspired, evangelical-based religious service was held at Camp Woods. As in many years previously, one of the scheduled evangelists for the vesper services was the Rev. Dr. Gordon Anderson, who first preached at Camp Woods in 1960 and was one of the featured preachers during the last year of the Swedish Methodist's Bible

The community of Ossining now surrounds Camp Woods, and the immediate area is zoned for mixed use with a volunteer firehouse, day care center, small grocery, coffee shop, pizzeria, lawn mower repair shop and Mobil gas station all within 100 yards of the main entrance. The traffic in the area has increased and the development of upper-middle-class homes continues to fill in the available land farther up the hill beyond Maryknoll's world headquarters.

The trends relating to the scarce and high-priced Westchester real estate market do not bode well for maintaining what community identity remains at Camp Woods. Presently Camp Woods has 45 cottages and houses remaining. Less than five have been in the same

family for multiple generations. The Swedish tabernacle, community dining hall and caretaker's cottage have been closed since 1994. The other remaining structures in common use are a large shed for storage and the auditorium, now used for vesper services on Sunday nights in June, community suppers and board meetings. The remaining longtime residents are fewer in number each year, as several long-time owners have moved out of Camp Woods or passed away in the past five years.

Of the remaining houses and cottages, 40 are estimated to be 90 to 100 years old. Most of the cottages have been renovated, enlarged and "fixed up" to the point of obscuring much of their original architectural uniqueness and detail.

Conference in 1994. Only 20 or 30 residents and approximately the same number of people from the Ossining evangelical community attend the vesper services each Sunday evening at seven, in June. Many of the attendees are the older retirees who have lived at Camp Woods long enough to remember when it was different, and some were summer residents in the 1950s and 1960s. Less than five were living in Camp Woods before World War II. There has been some discussion from the Association board and other residents concerning the revitalization of the community and increasing the number of the summer vesper services. The historic identity of Camp Woods is in jeop-

ardy and if newer residents are interested in gaining a sense of their locale, they must be made aware of the vanishing legacy. A wider recognition of the local history would potentially serve the goals of attracting more people to the vesper services and perhaps aid in the revitalization of the community.

The passing of rituals and institutions, as well as those that survive, give us an indication of the character of the society in which those rituals and institutions existed. The suburbanization and secularization of Camp Woods over the past 50 years has aided in the withering of the locale's character. Fragments of Camp Woods' history still exist in a few of the remaining common build-

ings and the ongoing limited use of the grounds for religious services in the summer. As time passes, Westchester County will continue its evolutionary change, and the 19th- and 20th-century character of Camp Woods will most likely recede farther into obscurity. ■

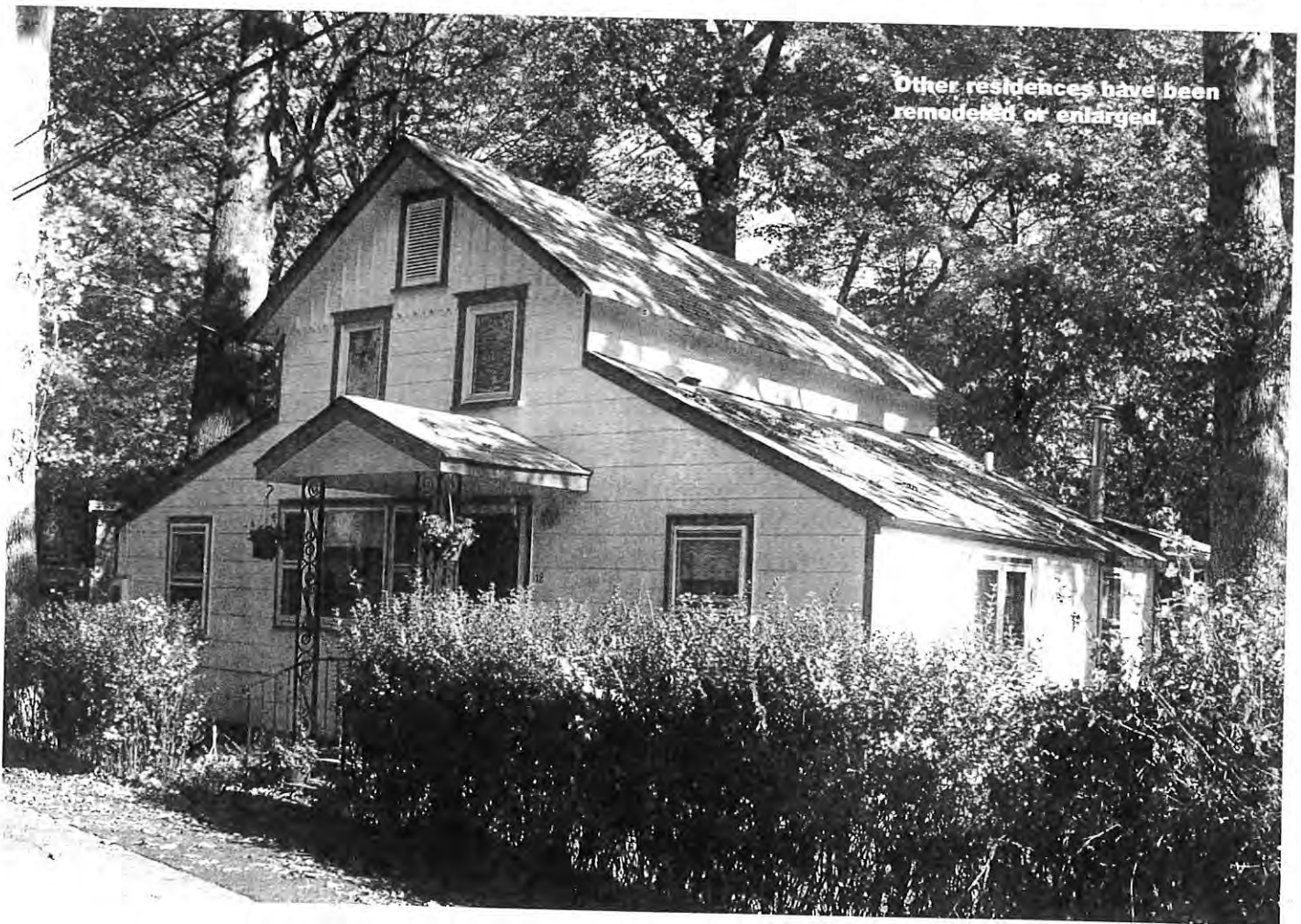
Bill McGrath, who lives in the Camp Woods community in Ossining, is employed by Hotopp Associates in Manhattan. He was graduated from Marymount College in Tarrytown.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Camp Woods Archives.

² *Citizen Register*, Ossining, N.Y., July 24, 1959.

³ C. W. Christman, Jr., "Camp Meetings in the New York Annual



Conference." Unpublished pamphlet at the Ossining Historical Society, circa 1947, 7.

⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Jane McMahon and Edmund McMahon, "Westchester From the Roaring Twenties to V-J Day," in Marilyn Weigold, editor, *Westchester County: The Past Hundred Years, 1883-1983* (Valhalla, NY: Westchester County Historical Society, 1983), 109.

⁶ Ibid., 145.

⁷ Christman, "Camp Meetings in the New York Annual Conference."

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Jeff Canning, "Westchester Since World War II: A Changing People in a Changing Landscape," in Marilyn Weigold, editor, *Westchester County: The Past Hundred Years, 1883-1983*, 189.

¹⁰ Debra L. Clyde, "A People Called Methodists, the Van Cortlandts and Methodism in Early America." Unpublished dissertation.

Tarrytown, NY: Sleepy Hollow Restorations (now Historic Hudson Valley), 1984, 83.

¹¹ Interview, 12/02/01, with Dorothy Olsen, past president of the Youth Bible Camp.

¹² Mary G. Hickerson, quoted in *The New York Times*, 1978.

¹³ Canning, "Westchester Since World War II," 223.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

Re: A History of Lawrence Home Care of Westchester, Spring 2003

This history, in your first-class magazine, is a real service to the people of our area. Congratulations on your presentation of Mary Ellen Scarborough's excellent article....She did an excellent job in recounting the challenges, accomplishments and leadership of this key community service organization as it marks its 70th anniversary. Setting the local story in the perspective of national social, economic and health changes through the years has given the readers a clear picture of why the generations of men and women who carried it forward deserve our profound gratitude....It's especially fortunate to have the [history] published...so [it] reach[es] a base of influential subscribers.

Gordon E. Brown
Rye, New York