CAMP LOYALSOCK

(1938–1984)

by

Milton W. Loyer

Camp Loyalsock, one of four summer camping grounds brought into the 1968 United Methodist merger by the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Church, has an interesting history that involves two conferences, evolving ministries and changing philosophies. Camping at this Sullivan County location was initiated by the Central New York Conference of the Methodist Church, the original 15 acres purchased in 1938 being supplemented by additional parcels secured in 1940 and 1944 to bring the site to its final size of 97 acres. The map on the facing page, prepared for an early engineering study of the facilities, locates the camp in relation to the borough of Forksville, the Sullivan County Fairgrounds and PA 154.

Effective June 1, 1952, the Northeast Jurisdictional Conference transferred all Central New York Conference Methodist churches in Sullivan County into the Central Pennsylvania Conference. Specifically, this involved the Forksville charge consisting of Bethel, Estella, Forksville and Hillsgrove. Even though Camp Loyalsock, one of the Central New York Conference's two camping grounds, was situated in Sullivan County within walking distance of the Forksville church, it remained the property of that conference.

As might be expected, the Central New York Conference found it increasingly more difficult over the next few years to continue to attract staff and campers to such a distant location. When the conference began to offer summer camps at alternative rented facilities within its own boundaries, loyalty to the once-popular Camp Loyalsock dropped below the reasonable threshold for good Christian stewardship of resources.

The report of the Loyalsock Managers in the 1960 conference journal declared the inevitable:

It is with a real regret that the Board of Managers sees the end of Loyalsock as a Central New York Camp. Its rustic charm will long be remembered by many. Yet, the steady decline in camp registrations and the increasing popularity of camps nearer home have made this a necessary and wise move.
The Board would thank all those who through the years worked and prayed for Loyalsock.

We would introduce the following motion as the conclusion of our report.

"Be it hereby resolved that with the consummation of the sale of Loyalsock, the Loyalsock Board of Managers shall turn over all funds to the Conference Board of Trustees to be held in a special account for the purchase and development of a second camping site. All program equipment shall be turned over to the Conference Board of Education. Upon completion of these two acts, the Loyalsock Board of Managers shall be declared dissolved."

Camp Loyalsock was then sold to the Central Pennsylvania Conference, within whose boundaries it was situated. The second paragraph of the Summer Camping section of the Board of Education's report in the same 1960 journal also mentions the sale. Because the first and third paragraphs provide interesting insights and assurance that our conference is not unique, the entire section of that report is given:

The summer camping program is one of the major activities of the Board and our conference. Last year, in twenty camps there were a total of 1478 campers and 312 staff members. The problem of securing staff members for Summer Camps is becoming increasingly more serious. We believe it is the responsibility of every minister to attend at least one camp.

This year two camps will be held at a new site, Camp Owhata, the Courtland County 4H Camp. These camps were formerly held at Loyalsock. Though Loyalsock as been sold, we will continue to hold some camps there through an agreement with the Central Pennsylvania Conference. This year two camps will be held at that location.

The increasing workloads in connection with the preparation and administration of the camp program leads us to believe that we cannot much longer continue to ask that this be done on a volunteer basis. Nor can this load be carried by the Executive Secretary. Very soon the conference must face the necessity of some arrangement for an additional staff person to do this work.

It should be noted that the two camps mentioned above for the summer of 1960 proved to be the only ones the Central New York Conference held at Camp Loyalsock following its sale to our conference.

For the Central Pennsylvania Conference, as it turns out, Camp Loyalsock could not have become available at a
more opportune time. In a move away from large convention-
style gatherings to smaller, decentralized, camp-style
programming, the Conference had sold the Methodist Training
Camp at Newton Hamilton and was renting interim camping
facilities. The following excerpts from consecutive
journals give a fairly complete picture of the dynamics
involved.

1958: from the Methodist Training Camp report

The Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference took
action May 20, 1954, recommending that the Board of
Directors of the Methodist Training Camp sell the
Newton Hamilton Camp Ground...

More than 80 years ago the Methodists of Central
Pennsylvania established the camp meeting ground at
Newton Hamilton. When it seemed impossible [in 1926]
for Epworth League Institutes to return to Eagles Mere
and since the Newton Hamilton property was then for
sale, a group of interested ministers and lay people of
the Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference organized a
Methodist Training Camp Corporation. Additional land
was purchased and a number of cabins, the kitchen, and
the dining hall were erected. A swimming pool was also
constructed.

When the Board of Directors of the Methodist
Training Camp was directed by the Annual Conference to
sell the property it was thought wise to continue the
tradition established by the Methodists a good many
years ago and sell the property to a religious group
interested in the religious instruction of children and
young people. This concern for maintaining the
tradition of the camp has been shared by the Methodist
constituency and members of other denominations who
reside in the Lewistown - Mount Union - Huntingdon
area.

Attorney Welch, representing the Board of Directors
of the Methodist Training Camp Corporation, and
Attorney Stuckenrath, counsel for the Mizpeh Training
Camp, have worked out the legal details for the
transfer of the property. The sale price of $17,750.00
covers all indebtedness, two $1,000.00 annuities --
which were ordered by the conference last year to be
transferred, one each to the Methodist Home for the
Aged and the Methodist Home for Children -- attorney's
fees and the cost of liquidating the Methodist Training
Camp Corporation.

The Board of Directors have to the best of their
ability carried out the request of the Annual
Conference and the Corporation in the sale of the
Methodist Training Camp property. We recommend the
dissolution of the Corporation with mixed emotions,
remembering the many thousand children and youth who for 32 years received religious instruction and inspiration under the direction of Christian leadership at Methodist Training Camp.  

1959: from *A Proposed Program for the Provision of Adequate Camping Facilities for the Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference*

A basic philosophy for this type of camping ["decentralized" camping] appeared in the last issue of *Christian Education News*, May 1959. This idea of church camping is just beginning to take hold. Church camping uses informal group living and the best skills of camping for the purpose of bringing campers into a closer relationship with God in the warmth of Christian fellowship. It is a medium through which local church groups can grow in harmony and in the deepening of the spirit. Local church day camps for children, residence camps, trip camps for youth and adults, and family camps are on the increase. There are not enough camp sites available to meet the growing demand.

At the present time Central Pennsylvania Conference does not own any camp sites. Not only must the Conference Board of Education rent camping facilities from others, but local church groups likewise must avail themselves of the camping facilities of the YMCA, colleges and private institutions. Central Pennsylvania Conference needs camp sites and more training must be provided for the development of local church, district and conference leaders in camping.

Your Conference Board of Education, convinced of the importance and value of decentralized camping as a part of the total program of Christian education, and likewise the need to provide for all churches, large and small, facilities, guidance and financial support in this area of work, adopted a policy approving decentralized camping in 1954.

Your committee makes the following recommendations and moves their adoption by the Conference:

1. That camping in the Conference be coordinated and developed under a Committee on Camping of the Board of Education of the Central Pennsylvania Conference...
2. That camp sites be developed as needed...
3. [That each site have representation on the Committee on Camping.]
4. That there be a Board of Managers for each camp site...
5. That for the purpose of procuring, developing, and equipping small camp sites the sum
of $200,000 be raised during the Quadrennium 1960-1964...

6. That a Conference-wide committee of ministers and laymen be appointed by our Bishop...

7. That the title to all camp properties, if and when purchased, under the program of decentralization, for the use of the Conference Board of Education, be held by the Trustees of the Annual Conference...

8. That the Conference Board of Education shall be responsible for the management of and program at such properties...

1960: from the Camping section of the Board of Education report

Considerable progress has been made in the area of camping this year. Negotiations have been completed for the purchase of Camp Loyalsock and Camp Weikert. The plan for financing the purchase of these two sites will be a part of a plan to be presented by the Commission on World Service and Finance. Our camping program has been inadequate for years because of the need for camp sites. Under the leadership of Victor Meredith, Chairman of the Committee on Camping of the Board, our program has been going forward.

1961: from the Camping section of the Board of Education report

During this last twelve months, the results of studies and actions taken by this Board over a period of years began to take tangible form. The camp sites at Forksville and Weikert came into our hands. The Board was incorporated as of March 24, 1960.

With no facilities available for small group camping at the former Robertson property at Weikert, the camping committee under the able and devoted leadership of Victor K. Meredith, Jr., with the aid of our caretaker Alfred Goodlander, and his helpers and a six-day senior work camp composed of 30 youths and 10 adults developed a campsite ready for use by July. The Forksville site was ready for occupancy when purchased.

Unfortunately, as Camp Weikert developed into Wesley Forest, as Greene Hills and Mount Asbury were purchased, and as Central Oak Heights and Camp Penn entered the Conference via the 1968 denominational merger, Camp Loyalsock became the camp site with the fewest advantages and/or opportunities for development. During the early 1970's, conference offerings at the site gradually decreased and
Beginning in 1974, an effort was made to utilize the camp for more creative programming. In addition to one "usual" elementary and junior high camp each season, the following were offered.

1974: a special issues camp for grades 7-12
   a trail camp for grades 7-12
1975: a canoe camp for grades 9-12
   a trail camp for grades 7-12
1976: a beginners trail camp for grades 6-8
   an intermediate backpacking camp
   a beginners backpacking camp

At least once during those years the sale of the property was formally considered. Included in the Board of Education's 1976 report to the annual conference was the following recommendation:

4. That we approve the sale of Camp Loyalsock at Forksville in Sullivan County totaling 98 acres when a suitable buyer or buyers complete satisfactory negotiations at any time between the adjournment of the 1976 session of Annual Conference and January 1, 1980, with the understanding that the sale be completed by January 1, 1980.

At their March 6, 1976, meeting, the camp's Board of Managers voted to oppose such a sale and moved that "an official statement" be prepared to be passed on "to the proper conference agencies and District Superintendents and Bishop." In addition, it was "the unanimous decision of the Board of Managers of Camp Loyalsock" to request that the statement, which included five specific objections to the sale of the property, be read at each district meeting of the 1976 pre-conference sessions. Also, on May 5, Board of Managers President W.S. Thomas sent a form letter to each member of the 1976 annual conference outlining the situation requesting consideration of the worth of Camp Loyalsock to the Conference.

The recommendation came to floor on Friday, June 18, the last day of the 1976 annual conference, and the debate was lively. A William Smith [whom the author has been unable to further identify] moved to amend the motion by adding that "the proceeds from the sale of Camp Loyalsock be used for the purchase of a new camp site within the bounds of the Wellsboro District." Rev. Warren Baughman, Jr.,
moved to amend the amendment to have the matter of the proceeds "referred to long range planning committee with a view of carrying out the intent of what the Wellsboro gentleman had in mind." Finally, a motion to curtail discussion and bring the question to a vote was put forth and sustained by the necessary 2/3 majority. First the amendments to the recommendation were voted upon and defeated, and then the original recommendation was voted on and defeated. Camp Loyalsock had been granted a reprieve.

The severe winter of 1977-78, however, took its toll from the camp. The April 12, 1978, minutes of the Committee on Camps and Conferences record "problems of damaged and downed buildings due to storms" and the unanimous passing of motions (1) prohibiting further expenditures and/or maintenance and (2) ordering the Board to lock and secure all remaining buildings and to haul away and/or burn all collapsed structures.

As a consequence, no conference events were scheduled at Camp Loyalsock during 1978 and the facility was advertised as "available for local church use." In 1979, plans were made to remove the deteriorating kitchen/dining facility and erect a pavilion suitable for picnics and other day uses. These plans, along with other site improvements, finally became a reality during 1980. By 1981, Camp Loyalsock seemed poised for a new beginning and plans were made to offer week long programs from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm for day campers in grades 4-6.

The above efforts to save and revitalize Camp Loyalsock were primarily the initiative and work of the camp's Board of Managers. A detailed reading of their minutes preserved at the Conference Archives reveals the unusual dedication of this group of area pastors and laypersons. There were, of course, also times of frustration. The following paragraphs are taken from a letter of M. Lee Ellenberger, pastor of the Forksville charge and secretary of the Board of Managers, to Associate Director Samuel Fry of the Conference Council on Ministries. The March 24, 1981, letter is preserved in the Camp Loyalsock file at the Conference Archives.

I was greatly disappointed when I received the March issue of The Link. The center section on "Camping 1981" was an excellent work of promotion, but not once was Camp Loyalsock mentioned. The camp was not even placed on the map of camp locations in Central Pennsylvania on page four.

How can we increase the use of this facility if there is no promotion of it? It was discussed and
decided at the May 3, 1980, meeting of the Board of Managers that the Camp Loyalsock site be made available for day use by church groups.

Why was there no attention given to the promotion of Camp Loyalsock? It could be advertised as an ideal site for primitive camping. And now that a nice pavilion is constructed, the camp can also be used as a great setting for church picnics and other kinds of outings.

Despite minor difficulties and the apparent relegation of the site from a conference camp to a regional special-use facility (similar to Bethlehem Farm in the York District), the 1981 season of the new Camp Loyalsock was a success. This is indicated in a November 3, 1981, letter from Lee Ellenberger to Wellsboro District Superintendent J. Carl Williams.

I was asked by the Camp Loyalsock Board of Managers to ask if you would mention in your upcoming district newsletter the availability of Camp Loyalsock for various church related activities during the 1982 camping season.

This summer we had two backpacking camps, one week of Day Camp for 4th-6th graders, six church picnics and one family reunion using the camp facilities. The Board feels that your mention of Camp Loyalsock in last spring’s newsletter helped create such a response.

Thank you for your concern and support of Camp Loyalsock.

In 1982, the Camp Loyalsock continued to developed as a day-use facility. All the old cabins were removed except for two -- which were converted into a first aid building and a craft storage area. The Day Camp was held for three weeks. Also during 1982, however, the Committee on Camping of the Board of Education began serious long range planning that questioned the wisdom of retaining Camp Loyalsock.

By 1983, the decision had been made -- subject to approval by the Annual Conference in June -- that Camp Loyalsock should be sold. With surprisingly little discussion, the Annual Conference approved the sale and a committee was appointed for that purpose. Programming and other commitments already in place were allowed to proceed, and what was to be the final season of use for the camp included the following events.

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<td>June 11</td>
<td>picnic</td>
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<td>July 5</td>
<td>district ministerium</td>
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<td>July 11-15</td>
<td>Day Camp</td>
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<td>July 18-22</td>
<td>Day Camp</td>
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<td>July 22-24</td>
<td>All Faith Lutheran Church</td>
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July 24, 29    backpackers from Eastern Pa. Conf.
August 7     Unityville UM Charge
August 14    Estella UM Church
August 19-21 Benton UM youth

The last entry in the minute book preserved at the Conference Archives was made in spring 1984 and is given below in its entirety.

The Camp Loyalsock Board of Managers met at the Forksville Parsonage on April 28, 1984, at 10 am. Present were Rev. Brubaker, Rev. Schell, Rev. Carson, Art Worthington, Don Rinker and Calvin Cramer.

Rev. Brubaker opened the meeting with prayer. The main item of business was the sale of the Camp Loyalsock property. Mr. Cramer reported that six bids were received, ranging from a low of $350 per acre to a high of $90,000 for the property. The task force appointed to make a recommendation has recommended that the property be offered to the Sullivan County Agricultural Society (better known as the Sullivan County Fair Association) for their bid of $75,000. The society has stated that it is their intention to have the facilities remain available for local and church use.

The Board of Managers concurred with the task force in a motion made by Rev. Schell and seconded by Art Worthington, and this recommendation will be made to the Conference Trustees. Carried unanimously.

The question of moveable property, such as lawn mower and picnic tables, resulted in a motion by Don Rinker and seconded by Rev. Carson to appoint Cal Cramer and Art Worthington as a committee to coordinate the disposal of these items to other conference camps.

It was pointed out that the Camp Loyalsock Board of Managers will cease to exist upon the official sale of the property.

Chairman Brubaker thanked those present for their service in the work of Camp Loyalsock. Motion to adjourn was made by Don Rinker and seconded by Rev. Schell. Respectfully submitted,

William L. Carson, acting secretary

While the Conference Archives has complete minutes and records of the "last days" of Camp Loyalsock, there survives virtually no documentation of its beginning and early days as a part of the Central New York Conference. This brief sketch of Camp Loyalsock closes with a letter preserved at the Conference Archives with the Loyalsock material that provides all that is known of those early days. The letter speaks for itself and provides a fitting closing tribute to Methodism's Camp Loyalsock.
Dear Sir,

Thursday, June 25, last, my parents, family, and myself were enjoying a day trip in your locality. We drove up to "Loyalsock" to see the various changes made. A young man very kindly took time to explain to me the various changes I was seeing and explain the Methodist Conference now managing the camp. I explained to him that I had attended camp the in the early 1940's and attempted to give a little history of the camp that I could recall.

Upon reaching home I contacted a former cook at the camp and have learned a few more details I would like to pass on to you. The young man stated there didn't seem to be records of the early years.

I told him a group of Methodist ministers banded together realizing the lack of a church camp for their young people. In that fact, I was correct. Mr. and Mrs. (---) Rogers of Forksville offered to donate land for the camp. At that time the trees were small and one could look across the valley to a tree shaped as a cross. The present location was agreed upon by this beautiful sight of the cross -- which was not man-made.

The camp was opened either in 1939 or 1940 with Reverend Hotchkiss of the Monroeton Church, Rev. Northrup of the Powell Church and several others in charge and doing all heavy labor such as building cabins, the hall, and even making the road. Our water was hauled from a nearby spring, even for cooking. The ministers and boys slept on the fairgrounds and all classes were held there. Each night we walked to the old Forksville church for services and held our campfire on the fairgrounds. Perhaps records were destroyed when the original church burned.

Dr. Gordon Rideout of Philadelphia, a wonderful Negro minister and musician, would pay his own expenses and donate his time to us by conducting our music and song fests. At our Friday night Communion Service he would conduct a choir in beautiful hymns and spirituals.

There is so much more I could say -- really. "Loyalsock" is a favorite subject of mine. I would like to suggest your contacting Mr. Harold Van Nest
Pennsylvania Avenue
Waverly, New York
for further information.

May I say in closing, I am a church organist -- and have been since 1943. My wonderful years at camp (1940-1947) have helped to instill in me the want and love of serving God in my small way.

God bless you and your staff continuing to serve and help the young people of today drawing nearer to God in such beautiful surroundings.

Please thank the young man for his kindness to me Thursday. The people I have been in contact with are also happy to know the camp "is still there."

Very sincerely,
Patricia B. Ramsey
(Mrs. Thomas Ramsey)
FOOTNOTES

1. The other three Methodist camping grounds that came into the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1968 were Camp Mount Asbury near Carlisle, Greene Hills near Altoona and Wesley Forest near Lewisburg. The Evangelical United Brethren Church contributed Central Oak Heights (originally Evangelical) near Lewisburg and Camp Penn (originally United Brethren) on leased state land near Waynesboro.

2. This action was a prelude to the later Northeast Jurisdictional Conference decision to have conference boundaries coincide with state lines whenever possible. Effective June 1, 1962, the Central Pennsylvania Conference was extended to receive essentially the present Wellsboro District from the Central New York and Genesee Conferences and several charges in the southernmost part of the state from the Baltimore Conference.

3. The Bethel church ceased being listed with the charge in 1970. The building still stands as a part of very small and inactive campmeeting ground several miles north of Estella. The remaining three churches still constitute the present Forksville charge of the Williamsport District.


5. ibid., 1960, pages 84-85.


7. ibid., 1959, pages 130-132.


10. Apparently, Mrs. Ramsey's recollections are slightly inaccurate. As the Powell Church has always been a part of the Monroeton Charge, the two congregations could not have been served by different pastors. The journals of the Central New York Conference indicate that Roy L. Hotchkiss was assigned to the Monroeton Charge 1935-38 and that Leon Northrop was assigned there 1939-40. Beginning in 1939, Rev. Hotchkiss served the Ulster-Milan Charge and probably returned from there to help Rev. Northrop and others from the area during the time about which Mrs. Ramsey writes.

11. References to "the old Forksville church" and "the original church" are to the building that was destroyed by fire on April 5, 1955. The present structure was erected on the same site during 1956 and first used for services on March 3, 1957.

12. The identity of "Dr. Gordon Rideout of Philadelphia" remains a mystery. It is possible that Mrs. Ramsey is referring to Daniel L Ridout, who was admitted to the Delaware Conference (one of the black Methodist
conferences) of the Methodist Church in 1924 and died a member of the Peninsula Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1982. Consistent with Mrs Ramsey's remarks, he pastored Camphor Memorial Methodist Church in Philadelphia 1941-1949. In addition, Rev. Ridout wrote poetry, authored a book about Negro spirituals and composed two arrangements for the 1964 Methodist Hymnal (for "There is a Balm in Gilead" and for "When the Storms of Life Are Raging" of fellow black Philadelphia Methodist Rev. Charles A. Tindley). During his distinguished career in the Methodist Church, D.L. Ridout also served as district superintendent, as bishop's administrative assistant, and in national denominational committees/capacities.

13. Efforts by the editor of THE CHRONICLE to contact Mrs. Ramsey for further information and/or clarification reveal that she passed away in 1983.