Christian Perfectionism in Pennsylvania Dutch Country:  
The 1868 Manheim Camp Meeting  
of the National Holiness Association  
by William Kostlevy, 1997

[Editor's note: William Kostlevy is the archivist for Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. He was the Fall 1997 Fellow at the Elizabethtown College Young Center for the Study of Anabaptist and Pietist Groups. The following material was taken from a larger paper presented by the author at the Young Center on November 13, 1997. We wish to thank the author and the Young Center of Elizabethtown College for allowing THE CHRONICLE to print the results of Professor Kostlevy's research in this form.]

Introduction

One of the most significant inter-denominational religious phenomena of the late nineteenth century, the Holiness Movement was committed to the propagation of a second religious experience following conversion variously called Christian perfection, entire sanctification, full salvation, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, heart purity, or the second blessing. Although historically rooted in eighteenth century Methodism, especially in the writings of John Wesley and John Fletcher, perfectionist elements in the Wesleyan revival found fertile soil among both plain and Lutheran/Reformed Pennsylvania German evangelicals.¹

Former Mennonites Martin Boehm and Christian Newcomer, founders (along with Reformed pastor Philip William Otterbein) of the United Brethren in Christ Church, joined Methodism's circuit-riding bishop Francis Asbury and former Lutheran Jacob Albright, founder of the Evangelical Association, as leaders in the spiritual awakening that swept the Pennsylvania Dutch country in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Both United Brethren and Evangelical Association members actively sought the experience of entire sanctification, or full salvation.

By the 1830's, perfectionist currents, although largely unstructured, were also shaping the popular revivalism of Charles G. Finney, influencing the thoughts of pioneer psychologist and Bowdoin College professor Thomas C. Upham, and contributing to the radicalization of Oberlin College.

In the Dutch county of eastern Pennsylvania, the movement continued to shape the spiritual experiences of Methodists, United Brethren and members of the Evangelical Association. In the meantime, Oberlin-style perfectionism which taught that Christians were morally obligated to work toward the creation of a just social order affected the reform-minded Congregationalists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and even Lutherans. Although antebellum revivalist currents did affect the ministries of Brethren such as Sarah Major and James Quinter, and converted Amishman Adam Miller would become one of the most important leaders in the German Conference of
the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Holiness Movement's greatest impact upon the Anabaptists would come after the Civil War.

In the years following the Civil War the Holiness Movement was transformed from an informal network of individuals who shared a common spiritual experience to an organized inter-denominational and inter-national movement with a sophisticated network of weekly meetings, camp meetings, publications and regional associations. The central expression of this growing institutionalization was the formation of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness (NHA) in 1867. This occurred following a highly successful camp meeting at Vineland, New Jersey, which had been called to promote "the higher Christian life."

Headquartered in Philadelphia, the NHA was primarily an organization of prominent Methodist pastors from New York City, New Jersey, Eastern Pennsylvania and Maryland. Although the NHA would establish a periodical, operate a publishing house, and eventually establish a missionary board, it owned no property and generally conducted camp meetings only upon the invitation of local camp meeting committees.

The founding NHA president was John S. Inskip, pastor of New York City's influential Green Street Methodist Episcopal Church. New Jersey pastor George Hughes, a close associate of Methodist layleader Phoebe Palmer, the Movement's most influential spokesperson, was chosen secretary.

Following the organization of the NHA, it was agreed that a second NHA camp meeting would be held in the summer of 1868. A sub-committee was appointed to make the necessary arrangements. Members of the committee included Inskip, Hughes, Wilkes-Barre PA pastor J.A. Wood (whose classic treatise on Christian perfection, Perfect Love, would make him independently wealthy), and Newark NJ pastor Alfred Cookman.

The Manheim Camp Meeting

The choice of Pennsylvania's Lancaster County for the second National Holiness Association was primarily the work of Alfred Cookman (1828-1871). The son of George Cookman (1800-1841), one of Methodism's most beloved early preachers, Cookman spent much of his childhood in Lancaster County. Appointed as a circuit rider when he was only eighteen years old, Cookman was admitted on trial to the Philadelphia Conference in 1848. Following successful pastorates in Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Wilmington DE and New York City, Cookman had been named pastor of Newark's Central Methodist Church.

In planning the camp meeting, Cookman had the support of a strong local arrangements committee which included the local Methodist presiding elder W.L. Gray, prominent Lancaster lawyer James Black, Columbia PA financier and Methodist layman William K. Bender, and pastor C.I. Thompson of the Harrisburg
Among Thompson's more dubious qualifications was a reputation for organizing successful camp meetings among "even the most stolid and obstinate of the German population." 4

The local arrangements committee rented a 25 acre tract from local farmer D.M. Hamaker. Located one-half mile north of the paved roads in the borough of Manheim and 1.5 miles from the depot of the Reading and Columbia Railroad (and opposite the present Hernley Mennonite Church on PA route 72), the site was readily accessible by rail from the important Holiness Movement centers of New York and Philadelphia, and from other urban areas in Eastern Pennsylvania.

In May of 1868, workers began readying the grounds. Underbrush was removed while the ground surface was smoothed, a preachers' stand was erected, and seating for as many as 5,000 people was prepared. The camp was arranged in the form of an oval, with the seats facing the preachers' stand and altar. Eight avenues stretching back from the circle were named for such Methodist luminaries as Wesley and Fletcher, while as many as 400 boarding and specially designated prayer tents surrounded the encampment. The price of board was $1.00 per day, with single meals costing 50 cents. Provisions were also made for the care of horses and buggies. Although the sources are silent about the number of toilets, it was reported that three wells had been dug to provide water for the camp meeting.

Expecting large crowds, the organizers employed a camp police force to provide security and prevent rowdy-ism -- a common problem at camp meetings. This force was also to enforce the camp's strict rules -- which included a 10 pm curfew, encouraged attendance at all services, prohibited the use of liquor and tobacco, and banned all unauthorized sales on the grounds. Further, at the request of the camp meeting, town officials of the borough of Manheim passed restrictions banning so-called "huckstering" and running unauthorized stagecoaches to and from the camp grounds. In effect, only local residents were to be able to market products to those attending the camp meeting. 5

The camp was formally opened with the dedication of the camp grounds at 3 pm on Tuesday July 14th. By Thursday an estimated 5,000 people were on the grounds. Consistent with the earnestness of the quest for heart purity, life at the camp was characterized by continual prayer and frequent religious services. The day began with family prayer at 6:30, breakfast at 7:00, a public prayer meeting at 8:00, a sermon at 10:00, another at 2:00, and evening services at 7:30. 6

As the camp meeting moved toward its climax on Sunday July 19th, crowds exceeded the 10,000 people who had gathered at the 1867 Vineland NJ meeting. By Sunday, conservative estimates placed the number of people on the grounds between 20,000 and 25,000. On that day alone, an estimated 12,000 people were conveyed to the camp meeting by special trains from Harrisburg, Columbia, Lancaster and Reading. Years later, one local resident remembered trains arriving at the Manheim
station with flat cars filled with passengers. Coping with near record heat, dust so thick that one teamster reported that one of his horses suffocated, and problems assuring an adequate water supply, the crowds and the intensity of Sunday's services entered into the folklore of the Holiness Movement.  

An understanding of the intensity of nineteenth century Holiness camp meetings begins with an appreciation for the fact that for Methodism, and for that matter much of evangelicalism, religious faith was far more than the acceptance of an abstract doctrinal formula. Profoundly experiential, people passionately sought and if testimonies are an adequate judge -- received a satisfying experience with God.

The seriousness of such a search is evident in the testimony of a participant in the Manheim meeting, Lizzie Smith. As Smith remembered years later, she had come to Manheim after a long quest in search of the assurance of her salvation. In fact, she had begun the year convinced that God could not allow such an unfruitful person an indefinite existence. "I felt then," Smith recalled, "that if I did not follow the light, and find a satisfying experience, I would be cut down as a cumberer of the ground." Although experiencing salvation, Smith remained troubled by her "man-fearing spirit." Told of her need for entire sanctification, Smith came to Manheim determined in her quest for a "satisfying religious experience." Claiming the experience by faith, Smith enjoyed, as she recalled, a baptism of "Pentecostal power." Liberated from her "man-fearing spirit," she now boldly proclaimed the message of full salvation.

By the mid nineteenth century, publishing agencies such as the American Tract Society and the Methodist Book Concern were providing an eager middle class reading public with a vast body of literature devoted to the nurturing of personal religious experience. For Holiness people, John Wesley's journal, the journals and biographies of early Methodists such as Mary Fletcher, Hester Ann Rogers, William Carvosso, Francis Asbury and James B. Findley, and the writing of Catholic mystics such as Madame Guyon, Fenelon, Catherine Adorna and Molinos, were authoritative texts that guided the faithful toward Beulah Land -- on earth, and ultimately for eternity.

In a similar manner, by the 1860's Holiness people eagerly devoured the testimonies to the experience of entire sanctification that filled periodicals such as the widely circulated Guide to Holiness edited by Phoebe Palmer and The Highway to Holiness produced by persons from the Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren denomination. In turn, such testimonies were compiled in book form and widely circulated among the Holiness faithful.

No single institution of Methodism had done more to perpetuate this sense of spiritual expectation than the traditional Methodist love feast. An attempt by early Methodism, freely borrowing from the Moravians, to revive the Christian fellowship agape meal of the first century church, the Methodist love feast consisted of a simple sharing of bread and water followed by the heart of the service -- the testimonies of
those gathered. So central were testimonies in the Methodist love feast that they were often called experience meetings. As with other institutions of American Methodism, by the 1860's the love feast was rapidly becoming the exclusive property of Methodists devoted to the experience of Christian perfection.\textsuperscript{10}

One of the highlights of the Manheim meeting was Sunday's celebration of a traditional Methodist love feast. In a mere eighty minutes, with four or five people speaking at the same time in different sections of the vast assembly, between 400 and 500 women and men shared their experiences of heart purity. As a friendly newspaper correspondent noted, the frequent shouts and "the happiness, peace, and joy... on every countenance" easily compensated for all the "choking dust" and "all the sweltering and crowding" that accompanied the remarkable gathering.\textsuperscript{11}

By 10 am, following the love feast, an estimated 12,000 people had assembled before the preacher's stand to hear one of the Civil War era's most celebrated preachers, Methodist bishop Matthew Simpson. This noted orator and friend of presidents, who had officiated at the funeral of Abraham Lincoln, had long -- although apparently unsuccessfully -- sought the experience of entire sanctification. Nevertheless, he remaining deeply committed to the experiential religiosity of historic Methodism. Speaking for 80 minutes from his chosen text of Romans 8:14, "as many as are lead by the spirit of God are the sons of God," Simpson reminded his hearers that although humanity was incapable of comprehending the full implications of our divine parentage -- and, in fact, that the consequences of such ideas approach fanaticism -- we are regardless created "to be like God." As such, a fully consecrated Christian is characterized "by boundless benevolence everywhere and to all persons."
The Manheim Sentinel noted, "The immense congregation was almost spell-bound by his profound thoughts and trilling bursts of eloquence."\textsuperscript{12}

Following an afternoon message by NHA President John S. Inskip, Alfred Cookman was to conclude the day with a Sunday evening message on "evening prayer." As can occur in Holiness worship, Cookman felt a distinct impression that he should "abandon" his prepared sermon and share his spiritual experience. In obedience to his sense of divine leading, Cookman proceeded to narrate his experience of full salvation. The results were electrifying. One reporter noted that "men fell under the mighty power of God in all parts of the ground." Simpson's friend George Hughes remembered the conclusion of his testimony this way:

\begin{quote}
His hands were uplifted. His voice in mighty tones swelled out upon the night air. Cries and groans of oppressed spirits were co-mingling. Standing thus... his faith grasping the promise, he was a conqueror: he literally pulled down the power. Hallelujahs, like the sound of many waters, rolled through the forest temple. How many plunged into the cleansing stream that night we shall never know until mortality is swallowed up of life.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

The scene was repeated on Monday evening. On Monday, following a message from Methodist pastor John Thompson of Germantown PA and an
exhortation by John S. Inskip, suddenly -- as reported by Inskip's biographer -- the quiet was rent as "one simultaneous burst of agony, and of glory, was heard in all parts of the congregation; and for nearly an hour, the scene beggared all description." As the Lancaster Daily Express noted, "the scene was beyond all description. It was one of the most powerful manifestations of divine power we have ever beheld. Several thousand people seemed to be prostrate under the mighty influence of supernatural power."  

There was a similar occurrence on Wednesday. That evening, one observer remembered, "the slain of the Lord covered the land." For many it was, as another participant noted, "a little Pentecost" -- as Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Congregationalists, Quakers, United Brethren, Evangelicals and Episcopalians became indistinguishable as they sought and received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.  

As the encampment moved toward its close, William McDonald reminded those gathered that "home will not be Manheim." Appealing for tolerance and even compassion for pastors and others who had not experienced full salvation, he entreated his audience to avoid controversy and extreme austerity in matters such as dress and even suggested that one should show humility in professions of Holiness. In conclusion, he noted that "in the discharge of your religious duties, do not be governed by feeling, but by faith."  

Although such advice was freely given by Holiness proponents such as Phoebe Palmer and Hannah Whitall Smith, there was no little irony in the fact that many found the experience they sought only when they in faith claimed a reality they had yet to feel. In the twentieth century, a similar logic often historically linked to Phoebe Palmer and the Holiness Movement is found in the so-called "name it, claim it" teaching of popular Pentecostal evangelists.  

On Thursday evening the camp was closed with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Interestingly, the overall intensity of the worship and the diversity of the crowd -- although universally celebrated -- may have troubled the NHA leadership. After the Manheim experience, it was decided that all future National Holiness Association Camps would be held only on regular Methodist camp grounds. Accordingly, the 1869 gathering was scheduled for Round Lake, near Albany NY.  

Among the permanent results of the Manheim experience was the emergence of a strong and enduring camp meeting tradition in Lancaster County. Methodist believers, for example, began the nearby Landisville Camp Meeting in 1870. Regardless, meetings never returned to Daniel Hamaker's grove. The destruction of his and many of his neighbors' crops convinced the Lancaster County farmer that one camp meeting was enough.  

Although some of the thousands of people who made the pilgrimage to Manheim were undoubtedly pick-pockets, curiosity seekers and profiteers, most were
pious white middle class Protestants. Although non-Methodists -- including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Episcopalians and Reformed -- were given prominence, the majority of those gathered were likely Methodists from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Maryland. Occurring in an area where the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren Church were strong, the encampment certainly strengthened the already strong perfectionist sentiment among German Wesleyans.

Almost certainly a significant number -- perhaps even the majority -- of those gathered were women. Ironically, though it was part and parcel of the often discussed nineteenth century feminization of American religion, the NHA was an organization of Methodist ministers -- and as a result was all male. Nevertheless, it was dedicated to the doctrinal formulations of a laywoman, Phoebe Palmer.

The Holiness Movement drew on the Methodist tradition of women lay preachers and the growing dependence of evangelical religion upon "evangelical women's culture." And so the Movement greatly expanded the roles of women and the opportunities for women in the church. Scholars have noted that empowered by the liberating experience of entire sanctification, women challenged the authority of husbands, pastors, and even bishops. It is no accident that Methodism's chief opponents of women's ordination, such as Bishop Charles H. Fowler, were the leading critics of the Holiness Movement, or that Holiness Movement educational institutions trained most of the early women pastors in Methodism. But after all, men in positions of authority would quite naturally be suspicious of an experience that could turn a black washer-woman such as Amanda Smith into an international religious leader, or turn Phoebe Palmer into the impatient spiritual director of a humbled Matthew Simpson.

Nor are the experiences of Smith and Palmer unusual. The literature of the Holiness Movement is replete with accounts of defiant women leading repentant husbands into the experience of heartfelt religion. In a typical account, Lizzie Smith reported that at Manheim her skeptical husband, in response to the experience of Alfred Cookman, sought and received the experience of full salvation. As the century advanced, the Holiness women initiated the Women's Crusade in Ohio and dominated the subsequently established Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Committed to women's suffrage, women's ordination, and a single sexual ethic for men and women, the WCTU members saw themselves as God's instruments in the emancipation of women -- and, not incidently, in the elevation of the sadly deficient moral qualities of men.

Surprisingly, many of the men gathered at Manheim would also enthusiastically endorse the vision of social equality propagated by the WCTU. In fact, one of them was the head of the local arrangements committee -- Lancaster lawyer James Black. In 1872, as the first presidential candidate of the Prohibition Party, Black ran for president on a platform that called for, among other things, the
enfranchisement of women.

Local Impact of the Manheim Camp Meeting

What was the impact of the Manheim Camp Meeting on the people of the area? These were mainly the Pennsylvania Dutch plain people -- Mennonites, former Mennonites who were now United Brethren, and Brethren. Some were enriched -- a certain Mr. Gibble who operated a fruit stand comes to mind. Others were impoverished -- as a Mr. Wenger, who was unfortunate enough to fall victim of a pick-pocket. But the overall implication, admittedly unencumbered by much evidence, is that the encampment had little impact on area religion and that the "plain people" seem to have been curious by-standers.

This is hardly surprising. In spite of its name, the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness was an embodiment of the dominant bourgeois social order. Its leaders, pastors of great urban Methodist churches, were the moral aristocracy of a triumphant nation. Although occasionally waxing nostalgic when celebrating the Methodism of a simpler age, and even at times admitting that the carnage accompanying the Civil War had demoralized the nation, Holiness leaders understood themselves as the spiritual force that lay behind the military and industrial power of the post-bellum North.

One such Holiness writer, Jesse T. Peck, argued in a widely circulated celebration of Methodism and American civilization that even as America was God's chosen instrument in the advance of the human race, Methodism was the dynamic spiritual power that had shaped America. While many Holiness people were not inclined to see the hand of God in Yankee industrial might, few of them had the leisure or financial resources to make the trek to Manheim.

No one represented the triumph of urban bourgeois Methodism and its distance from the plainer people of the area more than the matriarch of the Holiness Movement, Phoebe Palmer. Freed from the drudgery of domestic responsibilities by her wealth, Palmer embodied the domestic values of Victorian North America. Although her public prominence did defy the spirit behind "the cult of domesticity," Palmer seldom challenged the socially prescribed roles for women -- or even slaves. Fittingly for a Victorian woman, she did serve as the moral guide to many of Methodism's most prominent leaders and urban pastors.

Nevertheless, and despite her social conservatism, Palmer did found New York's historic Fivepoints Mission and remained deeply committed to Methodism as a divine instrument for the elevation of the poor or culturally deficient. As the encampment moved toward its close, it was Palmer who raised nearly $500 toward the establishment of a permanent Methodist presence in Manheim. Given the existence of a United Brethren congregation in Manheim and the general Evangelical Association presence in the region, both of whom were no strangers to the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection, one finds a certain irony in this (unsuccessful)
attempt to establish yet another church in Manheim.

The unreceptiveness of the United Brethren Church at this time to overt Methodism, however, may be easily explained. It was precisely during these years that the denomination was struggling with the Hoffman schism that culminated in the formation of the United Christian denomination in 1874. These conservatives, who were not untypical of the area's rural United Brethren, supported pacifism and plain dress and opposed the promotion of higher education, the baptism of infants, the wearing of wedding rings, and participation in secret societies. The Mennonites and Brethren, although they did not embrace the outward revivalism of the Methodists and United Brethren, also held to these positions of the followers of Hoffman.

There were other indications at Manheim that urban Methodists were poor candidates to lead the locals into the experience of "full salvation." In fact, even the testimony of Henry Boehm reinforced the vast cultural divide that separated urban Methodists and the rural Dutch. Henry was the son of Martin Boehm -- the Mennonite preacher who emerged as a leader of the Second Great Awakening among the Pennsylvania Germans and became, along with Reformed pastor Philip William Otterbein, a co-founding bishop of the United Brethren denomination. In 1868 the 93-year-old Henry Boehm, once the youthful traveling companion of Francis Asbury, was a living link with the heroic Methodism of an earlier time. An especially popular speaker among urban Methodists, Boehm regaled the Manheim crowd with accounts of early Methodist camp meetings in Lancaster County. But he was fresh from an engagement in the Methodist utopia of Evanston IL, where he had urged the students at Northwest University to seek the "second blessing," and the two themes and the two ages they represented only reinforced the differences between the perspectives they embodied.

While Henry Boehm's message addressed the nostalgic longing to honor, but not duplicate, Methodism's heroic past, William McDonald's final words, a call for moderation in "all" things, urged the sanctified to avoid "peculiarity" in dress and life. In spite of the camp meeting's location in the "Pennsylvania plain belt," McDonald's point was not that Mennonites and United Brethren should embrace the dress and practices of the Methodists. It was a not very guarded reference to the continued presence among the Holiness faithful of Methodist radicals -- especially Free-Methodists, who believed that urban Methodists and their Holiness allies were soft on racial equality, secret societies and ostentatious dress while preaching a hopelessly sentimentalized gospel. The effect may have been the same however, and it would be from sources other than urban Methodism, the Manheim camp meeting, and the NHA that the Evangelicals, United Brethren, and plainer people among the Pennsylvania Dutch would acquire their Holiness.
End Notes


3. Widely-known pulpit orator Alfred Cookman served the Harrisburg Locust Street [Grace] Church 1853-1855. His equally prominent father George Cookman was lost at sea in the spring of 1841 while returning to England to visit his parents and carrying the greeting of President William Henry Harrison to Queen Victoria. No trace of the ship, the President, was ever found.


5. On the camp meeting rules, see "Rules for the Camp Meeting," *Lancaster Daily-Evening Express*, 16 July 1868.


11. This quotation is from the Columbia PA *Daily Spy*, 20 July 1868. See also the Manheim PA *Manheim Sentinel and Advertiser*, 24 July 1868.


15. McLean and Eaton, Penuel, 260.


20. Jesse T. Peck, The History of the Great Republic Considered from a Christian Standpoint (NY: Broughton and Wayman, 1868). The debilitating effect of the war and Methodism's new found wealth is found in Hughes, Days of Power, 10; and in McDonald and Searles, Life of the Rev. John Inskip, 185.

21. On domesticity, see Schneider, The Way of the Cross Leads Home. Writing on Palmer and domesticity has been done by Kathryn Long.