The author of this article wrote a book titled Camp St. Marys—Its Life and Legacy (1991), and it is from this book that the quotations in the following article are drawn.

To the thousands of young people who first met Christ or who found a deepening spiritual commitment there, Camp St. Marys was hallowed ground. For forty years (1946-1985) it was the center of life of the Sandusky (United Brethren) and the Ohio Sandusky (EUB) conferences. The beautiful lakefront grounds was the gathering place for all major conference events.

During the 1920s and 30s youth from the UB Sandusky Conference attended Christian Endeavor camps at various sites throughout Ohio including Bluffton College and Lakeside. In 1944 when the conference realized how much it was spending on these camping experiences, none of which was completely satisfactory, a decision was made to search for a campsite the conference could acquire. On August 10, 1946, the conference purchased an 83-acre site on the south shore of Lake St. Marys for this purpose.

Major credit for the purchase goes to Conference Superintendent Dr. V. H. Allman, whose good friend John I. Young of St. Marys, had previously deeded to Dr. Allman (who was a former pastor of the UB Church at St. Marys) a lot and cottage at the entrance of the 83-acre site—also owned by Mr. Young. Since he was suffering from severe wounds received in World War I and was unable to develop the land, Mr. Young agreed to sell the property to the Conference. The contract specified that the Conference was to pay Mr. Young $100 dollars a month for the remainder of his life. Upon his death the payments were to cease and the Conference “shall be free...forever from any further claims under this contract.”

The Conference’s Council on Administration approved the purchase quickly because the cost was much less than the Conference had been paying over a period of years to the Lakeside Association and to Bluffton College for ground privileges. In his report to the Annual Conference of 1946, Dr. Allman stated his vision for the camp and concluded his remarks with these words: “Never in the history of the Conference has a program been presented that would, or could, give so large benefits to the entire membership...”

Plans for the development of the property began immediately. The initial goal was to provide lodging accommodations for approximately 400 people, an auditorium with offices, a dining facility, and sanitary facilities. Surplus areas were to be laid out into lots for the construction of cottages for ministers and lay people of the Conference. Because Rev. C. H. Lilly (pastor at St. Marys) and Rev. W. A. Lydick (pastor of the Elida congregations) were carpenters, they were placed on special assignment as camp builders at a salary of $2,500 annually. A special Conference-wide appeal was made in October 1947 for contributions and pledges to finance the camp’s development.

Work on the campsite began. A power-saw was purchased and the underbrush was removed. Improvement of the site required the evacuation of drainage channels, but a dredge was needed to accomplish this task. Dr. Allman had observed a temporarily unused State of Ohio dredge in the area and contacted Governor Thomas J. Herbert to see if it could be used to dredge the channels. Having had few dealings with politicians, Dr. Allman indicated he was nervous at the encounter. “Governor Herbert saw how nervous I was,” he said, “so he threw his feet upon the desk and said, ‘Come on, let’s visit.’” Not only did the Governor agree to permit the use of the dredge, but he also agreed to appear at the camp’s dedication. The State also assisted with lengthening and building the entrance drive and many other areas in the development of the camp.

The earth displaced from the channels was spread over the lowlands to cover the swamp
vegetation and to raise the level of the land above the high-water mark. Other materials, such as trimming from roofing shingles and rubber from the Goodyear rubber plant, were contributed to help fill the swampy areas. Rev. Harold M. Stockman, in recalling his many connections with Camp St. Marys remarked, “I remember that when Camp St. Marys was first built much scrap rubber was dumped in the swampy grounds as filler... Then, muck from the channel around was dug out to cover the rubber. It was a good plan. And for many, many years there were wonderful areas where you could jump up and down on the ground and get a trampoline effect!”

An amazing amount of construction was undertaken that first year with a large part of the labor being donated by ministers and laypersons of the Conference. Nineteen cottages, two permanent homes, two concrete block dormitories each housing 78 persons, a dining hall, and an auditorium (called the “Tabernacle”) with a seating capacity of 2,000 were built. To furnish the dormitories a large amount of government surplus goods (from World War II) were purchased. Beds, mattresses, blankets, a dump truck, refrigerator, kitchen equipment, urinals, stools, and showers were among the items purchased for a grand total of $12,500.47—a tremendous saving!

The first camp, an Intermediate Camp with the theme “Walking with Jesus,” was held in the summer of 1947. Tents were set up for housing. The Tabernacle and the dining hall were not finished so meals were served in what later became the Men’s Dormitory. Swimming was at the breakwater north of Slim’s Place (a previously established bar at the north end of the campus). Rainy weather plagued the young people who trudged good “naturally” through mud from one area to another. In spite of the hardships, the 1947 camps were rated the most successful ever held in the Sandusky Conference. A Senior Camp followed the Intermediate Camp. Registration fees were $2.00, and each camp director was to receive a salary of $100 a month.

In 1948, 259 juniors attended the first camp for that age group. Mrs. Roy Cramer, Conference Children’s Director, was in charge. The camp closed with “Decision Night” and the following morning a period was set aside for campers to fill out “decision cards” which were later mailed to their respective pastors for follow up. Letters the children wrote home were revealing. Nancy wrote, “Except for the fact that you can’t lock the bathroom, it’s pretty nice.” Another wrote, “The heat’s terrible... all the stamps you sent me stuck to the inside of the envelope.” Debbie said, “I have just about made Boober Peas the National Anthem of our cabin. In fact, I have...The food is okay as long as we prime ourselves with ‘vittles’ from the snack bar!”

By 1949 four camps were held with more than 100 young people finding the Lord and fifty or more signifying their intention to give themselves to full-time Christian service. Through the years the number of camps and those being served continued to grow. Conference Youth Director Rev. Don Hochstetler, who directed the first camps, described them as having left an indelible impression upon all campers of Christ’s enthronement in their lives. The climax of the camp was the fagot service where “a large group of youth lit their fagots and left the testimony of the[ir] consecration to his kingdom.”

Special conference days and programs also made use of the camp. Camp St. Marys Day was begun in 1948 as an open house for community and friends to explore the facilities. Beginning in 1947 Annual Conference sessions were held there. The Women’s Society of World Service met annually at St. Marys for its Branch Convention. Men’s meetings, Bible conferences, schools of music, Fall Pilgrimage Day, and Christian Education/Youth fellowship Quadrennial Conventions also met there. Groups from other denominations, such as band camps and the Ohio Ashram, were permitted to use the camp when it was not occupied. Ten Cuban families were housed at the camp from 1971 to 1987, a group of Chinese Christians from the area met annually, and a group of Muslim businessmen from Iran or Iraq stayed at the camp while receiving special training in the United States.

By 1950 most of the major construction was complete and the camp was in use with the exception of two weeks during the entire summer. It was time to name the camp, a responsibility granted to the Conference Board of Trustees. Initially known as Camp Sandusky at St. Marys, the Trustees followed the lead of other conference camps named for their location. The new camp was named Camp St. Marys partially with the hope that it would engender good will with the city of St. Marys. It worked. Mayor George K. Losher expressed his joy and stated: “This is a great work indeed and one which deserves the praise and good will of all our citizens... We believe that you will make one of the most beautiful camp grounds... in all the state.”

By 1962 Camp St. Marys consisted of 41 buildings valued at $284,000. An island across the peninsula from the dining hall became known as Worship Island—a choice spot for outdoor worship. In time a bridge was built across the peninsula to
provide walking access to the island. Vera Faulker (Mrs. Woody) whose family owned a cottage at the camp recalled how “Worship Island became a sacred place for many young people. Of course, we all enjoyed our early morning services and our vespers there, but the biggest thrill was to see one or two young people in prayer and meditation in the midst of the day trying to solve some personal problems. These young people returned home better persons, and more able and determined to serve Christ.”

Persons who attended those early camps still remember with a great deal of joy their experiences—the friendships, the fun and the pranks. Going on a “wild goose chase” when the camp director sent them searching for a “wind changer” because he explained the wind was coming from the wrong side of the cabin. Swinging from the rafters in the dormitory as if on a trapeze bar. Hearing the raindrops pound on the roof of the Tabernacle during a storm. The consecration services and the campfire services on Worship Island where campers sat around a campfire singing and enjoying the rich fellowship; and then being asked to depart from the service in silence—and the difficulty of remaining silent until after grace at breakfast the next morning.

Through the years Camp St. Marys continued to grow. A swimming pool replaced the designated swimming area at the breakwater on the lake. With the addition of family camps, a “motel” was constructed that could accommodate 72 persons. The motel was separated from the Tabernacle by a channel crossed by a bridge. When a flood forced all channels over their banks, an ingenious group made a walk by placing the picnic tables end to end. Eventually house trailers were permitted on the grounds, a winterized dormitory was built, and a cottage lease program was initiated that allowed individuals to build their own cottages with a 99-year lease on the lot. Rev. and Mrs. Walter Adams, among the early lease holders, recalled one wet year when they had to stop their car to let the fish cross the flooded road before they could get into the driveway of their cottage.

The merger of the EUB and Methodist denominations in 1968 brought into existence a Committee on Camp Management to review all camp programs and to anticipate changes. At the outset it was obvious there were too many camps within the bounds of the new West Ohio Conference. Four camps were in the former EUB Church: Miami, Otterbein, St. Marys, and Sabroske. Six were former Methodist camps: Asbury, Cartwright, Lancaster, Sabina, Todimeca, and Wesley. Many of these were badly in need of repair. Furthermore the cost of maintaining a camp was increasing, the camps were not designed for year-round usage, and lifestyles were changing, making traditional camping more difficult to conduct.

In 1976 a Northwest Regional Camping Committee was organized and a Master Plan Task Force was appointed that recommended a limit of three camping/retreat centers in the Conference. Subsequently a St. Marys Association was formed and incorporated. Conference owned properties were deeded to it in 1978. Membership fees were to be charged and these were planned to be the major source of income for St. Marys. Under the leadership of the Association a variety of new programs were initiated including Sunday evening programs, planning conferences and retreats, family camps, and a special “Heritage Camp.” Adults outnumbered youth at these new ventures and the request for motel style housing increased.

Over the years many persons had taken advantage of the option to build vacation cottages on the grounds of St. Marys with the intention of using them as retirement homes. With this need in mind, serious consideration of enlarging the program to meet the needs of retirees began. At the same time the Otterbein Home Board of Trustees, at the request of the West Ohio Conference’s Division of Health and Welfare Ministries, had been engaged in a study of northwest Ohio to determine if a new Home should be built in the area. The Board of Directors of the St. Marys Association was enthusiastic about the prospect and authorized its Executive Committee to participate in the development of the Northwest Project.

After much deliberation the Association decided to give the Camp St. Marys facility to Otterbein Home for the purpose of creating a retirement community. The Otterbein Home Board of Trustees approved, and the gift was made on February 11, 1985. With the receipt of the 83-acre site with an appraisal value of $1,100,000 a new form of ministry started at St. Marys. The original mission statement was: “Otterbein St. Marys is to become a comprehensive, integrated retirement community consisting of independent living areas and three levels of long term care as a ministry related to the United Methodist Church and sponsored by Otterbein Homes.”

Shortly after the change to a retirement community had been made, Maria J. Adams-Fuller expressed the feelings of many toward Camp St. Marys: “My parents live at Camp St. Marys, now
Otterbein St. Marys. Going back now seems strange... But, like all things in life, change and growth must occur. Certainly, Otterbein St. Marys is a wonderful new 'paradise' for the residents who live there. The setting is beautiful with the channels and the lake. I still have my memories, which will be there for as long as I live. Some life-changing events took place for me at Camp St. Marys. I am grateful for the opportunities that I had there and for the place that St. Marys has in my heart—even today.”

The Reunions of the “Servants of Sierra Leone”
by
Mary Woelfle Phelps

Mary Woelfle Phelps and her husband, Vernon, were missionaries to Sierra Leone. Many readers may be unaware of the regular meetings of these former missionaries to Sierra Leone.

How does one tell about reunions? Reunions of people who are not blood kin and yet are family. Reunions of people whose hearts and souls are united in an almost inexplicable way. Who are these people who hold such ties and what is their connection? How and why did they come to be?

These people call themselves “Servants of Sierra Leone.” They have given a part of themselves to serve on the mission field in Sierra Leone, West Africa. A part of them has been left in Sierra Leone, and a part of Sierra Leone has become a part of them. They are participants in the history of missions in this West African country that at one time had been known as the “white man’s grave.”

Over one and a half centuries ago a group of Congregationalists formed the American Missionary Association and accompanied the Amistad captives to Sierra Leone hoping that all of them would help in establishing mission work there.

Some years later the United Brethren Church formed its mission program with the plan of sending missionaries to Kansas (a home mission) and to Africa. The mission board of the UB Church was formed and all of the church constituted the Missionary Society.

The American Missionary Association invited the UB missionaries to stay with them while the UB missionaries searched for a place to start their own mission. They began their work at Shenge, and after a time the A.M.A. turned its missionary work in the area over to the United Brethren mission. With the United Brethren merger into the EUB Church in 1946 and then into the United Methodist Church in 1968 the mission work in Sierra Leone is currently carried on by the UM Board of World Missions.

In the last decade or so the work of the UM Church in Sierra Leone has been repeatedly threatened by rebel activities and brutal anarchy. The horrible atrocities that occurred have been of great concern to the “Servants of Sierra Leone.” The reunions in August of 2002 and 2004 provided a time for all in attendance to tell their stories and to share their concerns about fellow Christians in violence-torn Sierra Leone.

The highlights of the reunions are the times when natives of Sierra Leone are present. At the 2002 reunion Rev. David Caulker, the senior pastor of King Memorial Church in Freetown, and Ambassador Sylvester Ekundaya Rowe and his wife, Julianna John Rowe, were present and participated in the program. They shared with us the most recent happenings in Sierra Leone. Rev. Caulker told of an incident when a rebel pointed a gun at him at close range, but for some reason the perpetrator did not fire. Rev. Caulker expressed a desire to see
missionaries return to Sierra Leone where their help is desperately needed. He expressed gratitude for all the missionaries did over time “to make him what he is today.”

Dr. S. E. Rowe is currently the Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the United Nations. He shared with us insights about Sierra Leone, such as the problems the country has as it struggles with the politics of war. His wife blessed us with dramatizations of stories of Rhoda from Acts 12:1-17 and Jairus’ daughter from Mark 5: 21-43. Americans Joe and Carolyn Wagner who operate a program called Operation Classroom also made a presentation. A part of their work is to distribute much needed materials for the schools in Sierra Leone. They continued their work despite the difficult times caused by the war. Dr. Lowell Gess and wife, Ruth, continued to do eye surgery at the Kissey Eye Center even as the war raged around them. We listened in awe to the stories of their experiences.

Every missionary had stories to tell while others listened eagerly and awaited the time to tell their own stories. Story telling is a major part of the reunions. At the most recent reunion in Minneapolis, the missionaries or other participants were given an opportunity to tell their stories. Some of the stories are of experiences individuals had during their tenure in Sierra Leone while others told of more current events. Through story telling a web is formed that connects the participants of the reunion.

Sometimes the children of missionaries come to the reunions. For the most part these children are now adults and they have formed their own organization to keep Sierra Leone alive in their experiences. It is always a joy to see these “children” whose experiences in Sierra Leone have been a major factor in forming the type of people they are today. The anticipation of seeing each other at these reunions is strong. When ill health or death prevents or ends participation in the reunions, the group feels the sadness intensely.

There are three special occurrences at these reunions. One is the banquet on the last night of the reunion. Second is the worship service and communion during which time all the deceased members are remembered as each name is read. The third is the Sunday morning worship service followed by lunch before people leave. At the banquet, people dressed in clothing they brought home from Sierra Leone, sang songs in the Mende and Temne languages, and enjoyed the food that often had a taste of “Sierra Leone.” It was a joyous and colorful time.

The reunion does have a formal business meeting. It includes the election of officers, a decision on how or where to spend the offering collected at the reunion, and a decision on the location and time of the next reunion. The 2002 reunion was held in Washington and the 2004 one was held in Minneapolis. The 2006 reunion is being planned by people living in Northern Illinois, so it is likely it will be held in that area. Unfortunately, like the remaining EUB’s, the number of “Servants of Sierra Leone” is being diminished each year; thus, we are anxious to get together as frequently as possible.

The smiles, hugs, and handshakes that occur at the beginning of each reunion end with its closing. As people depart to return to their homes or to continue their travels, there is a tug at the heart strings because by the next meeting the number is likely to be diminished. The fervor of the country they love will always be kept alive as long as these “Servants” stay alive. The fire that they kindled will not be extinguished as long as there is someone for whom the fire was started.

In closing this report, I want to share the song that Rev. David Caulker uses so often.

**Tel Papa God Thankee**

Tell 'em, tell 'em, tell 'em
Tell our Papa God Thankee
Tell 'em, tell 'em, tell 'em
Tell our Papa God Thankee
The tings He do for me
Tell our Papa God Thankee
What He do for we
I will tell Papa God Thankee

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**Mark Your Calendar**

Please reserve the week of October 10 - 17, 2005, for a United Theological Seminary Homecoming and dedication of the new campus in Trotwood, Ohio.
The General Conference of the Evangelical Church
by
Wilmer T. Bloy

Among the EUB memorabilia given to me for the Wisconsin United Methodist archives was a report of the Evangelical Church General Conference of 1926. It was an eight-page typewritten document written by lay delegate Charles Schoephoerster of Prairie du Sac, Wisconsin. The report is probably what he presented to his home church and various neighboring churches around the south central part of Wisconsin. It gives insight into the happenings at the conference, tells us what was important to this lay delegate, and tells how it affected him. I share it in an edited and abbreviated edition.

The Conference was held in the North central Pennsylvania town of Williamsport. Schoephoerster begins his report by telling how he and another delegate by the name of Edwin Doll left by train from Baraboo, Wisconsin, at 6:14 a.m. on October 6th; got to Chicago at 1:30 p.m.; boarded a train at 8:00 p.m.; rode all night; arrived in Buffalo, New York, on the morning of October 7th. “Here we laid over until 8:00 p.m. when we took another train, riding through the night, arriving in Williamsport at 2:30 a.m. on October 8th. We then went to bed and slept until daylight.” We who are accustomed to relatively quick travel in the 21st Century, should note the extra effort needed to travel to General Conference from Wisconsin back in 1926, taking almost three days by train to get there.

The report tells us that the Conference was held at First Evangelical Church in Williamsport. “This is one of 59 churches in that city, six are Evangelical Churches, and First Church is the newest and largest. The seating capacity of the Sunday School Room is approximately 800, and that of the auditorium 600.”

“The Conference opened with the senior bishop, Bishop [S. Charles] Breyfogel, presiding. It opened with a song, scripture reading, prayer, and then roll call. The representatives from each conference sat together in a group. There are 29 conferences. The first day Bishop Breyfogel began the reading of the Episcopal Message. It took the Bishop a day and a half to read all of it.”

“The first week of the conference was mostly taken up with long reports. Thursday, October 14, the Conference observed the fourth anniversary of the merger of the Evangelical Association and the United Evangelical Church. A feature of the service was the singing of a reunion hymn, heard just four years ago, in 1922, when the merger was accomplished.”

At this point the report tells of a 95-mile pilgrimage made by the delegates riding in a caravan of 110 automobiles escorted by the State of Pennsylvania Highway Patrol to various historic Evangelical places in the central Pennsylvania area. Stops included the Evangelical Home at Lewisburg (home for the aged and orphans); the Dreisbach Church and home of John Dreisbach where the first Evangelical General Conference was held; the little town of New Berlin where at the site on the banks of Penn’s Creek the first church was built by the denomination in 1816, and “where John Dreisbach set up a printing press establishing the first Evangelical Publishing House. Here is also where Union Seminary was established in 1855 and where many of the early ministers received their training until 1902 when the school was merged with Albright College in Meyersstown. At New Berlin, in 1810, the first German Camp meeting was held in America.”

1 Charles Schoephoerster was a member of the Prairie du Sac Evangelical Church. He owned and operated a successful general store (mercantile, hardware, groceries, etc.) in the town of Prairie du Sac. See “Historical Sketches of Prairie du Sac” by Walter G. Doll, Wisconsin Historical Society Library Pamphlet Collection.

2 List of delegates, both lay and clergy, from Wisconsin to the 1926 General Conference can be read in the Proceedings of the Wisconsin Conference of the Evangelical Church (conference journal) of May 12-16, 1926, pages 17-18, copies at the Wisconsin Conference United Methodist Archives, Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. Nine lay delegates and three alternate delegates, plus an equal number of clergy, were elected at this 1926 annual conference held at Calvary Church, Milwaukee, to represent the Wisconsin Conference.
Page 6 of the report continues with happenings of the Conference. Schoephoerster writes: “One day we were visited by Bishop [William Melvin] Bell of the United Brethren [denomination]. He gave us a great sermon, and with tears streaming down his checks he told of how much they loved the Evangelical Association. I might explain here that the United Brethren is a very powerful church in the East with a membership of over 400,000. The Bishop said that they feel that some day the United Brethren and Evangelical Church will be united. A commission has been appointed to work out a plan within the next four years whereby these two churches may be united. Our own Evangelical Church has only 251,000 members, so by adding 400,000 we would have a combined membership of over 650,000 which would make us a very strong organization.”

“Four years ago, in 1922, when the merger of the United Evangelicals and the Evangelical Association took place at Detroit, Michigan, there was a group of 2,700 United Evangelicals that would not unite with us. This year the conference sent two delegates to their conference which was in session at Reading, Pennsylvania, during the same time we met, asking them to join our church. These proposals were entirely rejected.”

“The election of bishops resulted as follows:

Bishop S. C. Breyfogel, Reading, Pennsylvania
Bishop M. T. Maze, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
Bishop S. P. Spreng, Naperville, Illinois
Bishop J. F. Dunlap, Cleveland, Ohio
Bishop E. H. Seager, LeMars, Iowa
Bishop J. S. Stamm, Kansas City, Missouri
Bishop S. J. Umbreit, Berlin, Germany.”

“The Wisconsin delegation to the General Conference paid tribute to Dr. S. J. Umbreit who was a former member of the Wisconsin Conference. He left Wisconsin twenty-one years ago to serve as a missionary in Japan and now was elected a bishop. He was presented with a basket of roses, at which time Bishop Umbreit responded by saying that he always regarded the Wisconsin group affectionately as his mother conference. The roses were placed alongside another beautiful basket of flowers which the Illinois delegation had presented to Bishop Stamm.”

“The next General Conference is to convene at 2:00 p.m. the first Thursday after the first Tuesday of October, 1930, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Bishop Seager, chairman of the closing session, called on Bishop Breyfogel to bring the Conference to a conclusion with a brief prayer and the benediction. So ended the General Conference of 1926, the second of the Evangelical Church, the twenty-ninth of the Evangelical Association, and the ninth of the United Evangelical Church.”

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**Getting it Right**

In the last issue Dr. John F. Schaefer was listed as the Executive Secretary of the Board of Missions of the EUB denomination from 1963-1968. His correct title was Executive Secretary of the Division of World Missions and his oversight was over the mission work of the EUB Church outside of the United States.

The Division of Home Missions and Church Extension had a separate director and supervised mission work and church extension within the U.S. With the Division of Women’s Service, these three divisions formed the Board of Missions (see Steven O’Malley, *On the Journey Home, A History of Mission of the Evangelical United Brethren Church*, New York, 2003, pp. 196-197).
Anecdotage

Here is another story about Bishop Harold Heininger who served as both professor and president of the Evangelical Theological Seminary. It is told by one of his students who graduated from ETS in 1951.

Our reading assignment was on the Holy Spirit. Professor Heininger began class by asking questions concerning the assigned readings. He directed questions to specific students, addressing them by name. The Professor’s neck began to turn red as student after student was unable to answer. By the time he called my name his irritation was obvious as he asked, “Jim, did you read the assignment?” Honesty demanded that I answer, “No Sir, not all of it.” At that, he slapped his palm down on the podium and shouted at us, “READ THE ASSIGNMENT!” Then he stalked out of the room and slammed the door between the room and his office so hard that the glass rattled for a few seconds. We all sat in speechless silence.

In a few moments Professor Heininger opened the door and slowly stuck his head back into the room. In a pleading voice he said, “Pray for me!”

James A. Lange

The next issue of the Telescope-Messenger will feature recollections of the Youth Mission to Youth Program that began 50 years ago with a pilot program on the campus of United Theological Seminary. A number of participants in the pilot program and the programs that followed from 1956-58 have submitted or are in the process of submitting their recollections. It will be an interesting issue recalling an effort to reach youth that has been missing in United Methodism in recent decades.