The Hotel: From Hunting Lodge to Methodist Assembly

Three articles are grouped here. The first, by Herschel Gower, on the history of the hotel from its earliest days up to 1941, is from the first edition of this book. The second, by Carl L. Elkins and likewise from that book, details the story of its purchase by the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church in 1941. The third part, by Ann Troutt, from parts III and IV of her "A History of Beersheba Springs Hotel and Assembly" in the Tennessee Conference Review, May 30 and June 13, 2008, brings the story up to 2008. A fully footnoted version of this work is available at the Assembly office.

The Fortress that Shrugged at Doom

“That doomed hotel,” wrote Mrs. L. Virginia French in her diary on September 2, 1863. The entry was made with a trembling hand and reasonable conviction, because on that day during the Civil War a group of lawless thieves broke into the apartment of Tom Ryan, the Irish overseer of the closed inn, took what they wanted, and set fire to papers, straw carpets, and clothes. Then they rode away to look back as the smoke from the famed hotel rose to the sky. This was one of many raids, but it seemed the final blow to Mrs. French.

Just then a maid of the French family was passing by and ran to tell her mistress, who was refugeeing from McMinnville and keeping house that summer at the Bass Cottage, that Ryan’s rooms were in flames. Fortunately, young Walter Scott French, age 9, ran to the Hotel cistern with an earthen crock — the only vessel he could find at that crucial moment. He made many trips as he dashed water on the flames and thus saved the Hotel from what would have been total destruction.

It is the lad Walter Scott French, called Bouse by his family, whom we can thank today when we look down the long portico or enter the courtyard at Cozy Corner or walk along brick, log, or whiskey row. The son of John Hopkins French and Lucy Virginia Smith, Walter saved the building that is central to the town of Beersheba. Everybody gravitates to the Hotel and its view for good reasons. Architect Charles Warterfield has called it “the biggest and most imposing structure of its kind in the State of Tennessee.”

The origins of the Hotel were neither grand nor imposing. A few months after Beersheba Porter Cain discovered the chalybeate spring in 1833, a row of cabins was built and a tavern erected soon after. It appears that George R. Smartt and his brother-in-law, Dr. Alfred Paine, both of McMinnville, were the first owners and operators of this place of resort for those in the lowlands trying to escape malaria, yellow fever, and cholera.

Being 2,000 feet above sea level, Beersheba soon caught on and other rows of cabins had been built by 1837. It was in that year that invitations were issued to a ball that was held on July 4, given by the young men who designated themselves as managers: E. Pendleton, Robert White, William T. Coons, F. K. Bell, Samuel Henderson, and William L. Cain.

The ball, beginning at 4 o’clock in the afternoon, must have ended with pine knot flares lighting the dancers and must have been a rustic affair at Beersheba long to remember.

In the years following, the Hotel and tavern were owned by a succession of investors. Then Colonel John Armfield bought extensive properties on the mountain, including the Hotel, in 1854 and began his scheme of developing Beersheba as a major resort. He closed the Hotel in 1855 to make repairs and build the second storey and columned portico at the front. With a large crew of workmen, Armfield made additions that were considerable. Observers like Jack E. Boucher of the National Park Service speak of the buildings as resembling a western fort, likening it to a self-contained complex with quarters for officers, enlisted men, and servants. Alfred E. Howell remarked that the buildings in his time formed a square figure 8. By the late 1930s when J. F. Smith visited the Hotel and made a drawing of existing buildings — and sketched in those that had been pulled down — for his book White Pillars, the plan did not include a third cross row at the bottom of the... That section was probably planned but never constructed.

Yet by 1858 the Hotel was big enough to accommodate 400 guests and was presided over by Lorenzo Dow Mercer of McMinnville. Among the visitors that year were Phillip H. Thompson of Memphis and Randal W. McGavock of Nashville, whose accounts
appear elsewhere in this volume. The next year Colonel Armfield, then past sixty, persuaded several men of wealth to form the Beersheba Springs Company, and on December 6, 1859, he sold out to a group of fifteen investors, many from the Deep South, and the Company took over in 1860.

When visitors to Beersheba in its heyday reported that it compared favorably with the watering places of Virginia, they were thinking not only of the water but of the Hotel and its furnishings and appointments. An inventory of the furniture, carpets, china, and miscellaneous items conveyed by Colonel Armfield to the Beersheba Springs Company in 1860 provides the reader with some fascinating details of the appointments enjoyed by visitors before the Civil War. For example, there were 150 guest rooms with bedsteads, cots, and cribs, mattresses, blankets, counterpanes, and sheets. Each room had split-bottom chairs, a dressing table, and a washstand. Each had a wash tub and a foot tub, apparently. There were curtains at the door for privacy and these allowed the flow of air into the room.

In the public rooms there were sofas, rocking chairs, card tables, billiard tables, and parlor lamps. There was a long dining table with chairs to accompany it. The kitchen inventory indicates that guests were not roughing it when Beersheba was in her prime: soup tureens, soup ladles, vegetable and fruit dishes, copper tea, coffee, and hot water urns, glass tumblers and goblets for sherry, hock, ale, claret, and champagne, and even egg glasses, nut crackers, and finger bowls. Further lists of items conveyed were noted, according to the public inventory, in the ledgers of the Beersheba Company.

Chilling accounts of war-time Beersheba include the sound of hoofbeats in front of the Hotel as Nathan Bedford Forrest led his cavalry down the mountain to assemble his forces at McMinnville for the daring and successful raid on Murfreesboro on July 13, 1862. War-time reports also tell how Confederate leaders camped their troops beside the Hotel, received food and supplies from Colonel Armfield, and rode away a few hours ahead of their Yankee pursuers, who on one occasion camped on exactly the same spot occupied by their enemies the night before. Buchwhackers, led by Hard Hampton or Charlie Ainsworth, terrorized the community. Federal troops, as observed by L. Virginia French, backed up wagons to the Hotel and hauled away beds, vessels, dishes, and supplies to furnish two Yankee hospitals. Doomed was the word.

Although shaken to its foundations, the Hotel escaped destruction. The Company which owned it was ruined by the war and went bankrupt. Most of the incorporators could not pay the notes they owed Armfield. In fact the Company was sued on October 17, 1867 for $3,911.76 by a Nashville merchant for groceries and other items he had supplied earlier. By 1867 the property had been returned to John Armfield and Dr. Thomas J. Harding. They negotiated a sale to W. W. Bierce and Richard Clark of Cleveland, Ohio, who had made fortunes during the war, and the Hotel was reopened in 1870 under the management of Mrs. I. C. Nicholson.

In reporting the Grand Ball staged that year, the Nashville Republican Banner described the elegant gowns of the ladies, the jewelry, and all the finery of the occasion. Mrs. Nicholson was singled out as a hostess “who lives to make others happy, in true holiday attire, and smiled a happy welcome upon all who graced the joyous occasion.”

The hotel brochure for 1875, when S. M. Scott and Company were listed as proprietors, strikes a different chord: “It will be the aim of the proprietors to make Beersheba, this season, a plain, quiet home for families, rather than a place of gaiety and fashion. P. S. Our supply of ICE this season is abundant.” It should be remembered that 1875 was only a decade after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox and that Federal occupation and Reconstruction in the South did not end until 1877.

In 1878 Richard Clark and his wife Adelaide sold their interests to Richard’s younger brother James H. Clark. James Satterwhite of New York bought out W. W. Bierce in 1883. Then Satterwhite in turn sold his part to Alexander Nelson, including “all the fixtures, furniture, utensils and improvements of every kind pertaining to the kitchen, parlor, barroom, billiard room, bedrooms, all bedding, bedsteads, sheets, tablecloths, towels, napkins, blankets, knives and forks.”

The sixteen-page brochure printed for Alexander Nelson for the season of 1887 is rich in details describing the accommodations at the Hotel, including the billiard hall, bowling alley, and ballroom with its imported band. By common consent, the ballroom could be “changed to a theatre where concerts, charades, and tableaux are indulged in by amateur artists, which affords much amusement to the audience.” It was further noted, with some ambiguity:

“Guests will be furnished with the best wines and whiskeys for medical purposes” and “ice in abundance
for all purposes.”

In 1887 board for a month was either $40.00 or $45.00, according to the location of the room, $15.00 by the week, or $2.50 per day. Children under ten and colored servants were welcome at half rates.

In spite of the fancy brochure, advertisements in several newspapers, and the considerable energy of Nelson as manager, payments on the notes were not met and the Hotel reverted to James Satterwhite, who sold it in 1901 to the Beersheba Springs Improvement Company, a group of investors who included R. W. Turner, President, R. Boyte C. Howell, Secretary, Gates Thruston, Charles Mitchell, and Tom Northcut. Operating the Hotel for them were several managers over the years, including Mr. And Mrs. John Mears from Florida, who later joined Marvin Brown as coowners. Brown had earlier worked for Tom Northcut in the store opposite the Hotel and then taken over the store before joining the Mears at the Hotel.

During the later 1920s—and then with the depression in the 1930s—the Hotel saw several owners and managers who tried hard but had little success in making the property pay. When someone in Nashville mentioned Beersheba and the beloved inn, the standard question was: “Well, wonder who’s running the Hotel this year?”

Deterioration caused by time and weather was more and more conspicuous during the depths of the depression. Standing on the rotting boards of the Observatory, visitors looked up at the crumbling edifice and thought to themselves what Mrs. French had written in her diary in 1863: Doomed.

Herschel Gower

**Purchase by the Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church**

[Because of the importance of the hotel to the Beersheba community], it is of particular interest to make known the contents of some of the documents relating to the purchase of the property and its subsequent use in the retreat and assembly program of the Tennessee Conference.

These documents were made available by Dennis Brown, a manager of the Beersheba Assembly for a number of years.

The earliest is a post card written by the Rev. W. M. Cook, District Superintendent of the Murfreesboro District, to the Rev. O. B. Johnson, Executive Secretary of the Conference Board of Education, dated Aug. 12, 1941, which reads as follows: “Dear O. B., Thinking things over, I hope you can get things in shape to pay 1st payment, even though small, and get that place. I suggest you write each member of Board and ask if he or she will stand behind you in the deal. If they promise that over their signatures, it will be as good as if they were in session. You can hear from a majority before Friday or Saturday. When you leave, give me instructions of what steps to take in case I get the word in your absence. Sincerely — Cook.”

On August 18, the Rev. O. B. Johnson wrote a letter to Martin Gribble, Joe Gessler, George Comer, and H. E. Baker which stated:

“We are asking you four men to look after getting the deed for the property. I am calling a meeting of our Board of Education for September 5 at which time we are going to ask them to appropriate $1,500.00 for the Beersheba Springs property — $500.00 of this to be paid on the purchase price, and $1,000.00 to be used for repairs.”

An interesting letter was written on Aug. 25, by...
G. W. Comer to O. B. Johnson, E. J. Ayers, and C. H. Yarbrough, Jr., as follows:

“Gentlemen: Some Nashville property owners in Beersheba are very much disturbed about us buying the Beersheba Springs Hotel property and have made some underhanded passes to try to get it away from us, and since that method has failed they are going to contact the commission proper so this is to put you on your guard.

“First, I am reliably informed that they had a Beersheba resident to call Miss Farrar and offer her $100.00 more than our contract price. This is not guess work. I know it is fact for the party that called admitted it but didn’t mention the raised offer. But Miss Farrar says she has it sold to us and is making the deed as soon as Gessler is ready but that she has been offered the $3,100.00 if we didn’t want it. . .Sincerely, G. W. Comer.”

On Aug. 29, 1941, H. E. Baker wrote the following letter to O. B. Johnson:

“I have this morning mailed a deed to Miss Farrar! She has agreed to sign this deed and mail to the City Bank and Trust Co. as her agent to hold until we are ready to make final settlement.”

The Committee on Camp and Assembly Grounds met on Sept. 15, 1941, with the following persons present: Bishop Paul B. Kern; O. B. Johnson; C. H. Yarbrough; H. W. Seay; Haynes Ayers; Willard H. Blue; B. G. Hodge; C. B. Cook; H. E. Baker; W. M. Cook; Herbert Luton; E. C. Shelton; W. B. Ricks; Walter Durham; E. H. Crump; John Ferguson; and Alvis J. Davis. O. B. Johnson was elected chairman and A. J. Davis, secretary.

The minutes of this meeting contain the following statement: “Bishop Kern said that the Tennessee Conference needed a place of retreat rather than a campus. Walter Durham pledged the support of the young people. Willard H. Blue, E. C. Shelton, H. W. Seay pledged the support of the Clarksville, Cumberland, and Columbia Districts. E. C. Shelton moved that: ‘We approve the Beersheba Springs proposition and request the Conference Committee on Camp and Assembly Grounds to work out a finance and purchase plan for securing the Beersheba Springs property and present the whole matter to the Tennessee Conference for approval and operations through a constituted group.’ The motions passed.”

On Nov. 28, 1941, O. B. Johnson wrote members of the Committee:

“We have the deed drawn up transferring the Beersheba Springs property to the Tennessee Conference Foundation and it is in Dr. C. B. Haley’s office, 808 Broadway, awaiting the signature of the men to whom the property was deeded.” Thus, Beersheba Springs Assembly became the property of the Tennessee Conference.

A report of the first year’s use indicates receipts for summer activities as $5,481.41, with expenses of $3,631.26, and an ending balance of $1,850.15.

The Hotel was saved. Its purpose as a haven for assemblies ...has been realized. The Church can take pride in the achievement.

Carl L. Elkins, CCD
Director of Conference Camping
United Methodist Church in Tennessee

The Methodist Assembly in Beersheba

In October 1941, the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church, responding to the need for an assembly and retreat center, purchased the antebellum hotel complex. The buildings had stood unused for several years and were in a state of disrepair. During the ensuing months Methodists from throughout middle Tennessee came with their hammers, mops and brushes. Individuals as well as entire families repaired, cleaned and painted, preparing to open the facilities for use in the summer of 1942. Although there was electricity in the common areas, candles provided light in the sleeping rooms. There was one bathroom for women and one for men, each containing cold-water showers. The first season of operation the new Beersheba Springs Methodist Assembly Grounds hosted Youth Assembly, Young Adult Assembly, Pastors’ School, Children’s Workers’ Camp and three weeks of Intermediate Camp. A total of 717 persons made their way to the mountaintop that first summer in spite of the scarcity of automobile tires imposed by World War II. The next year the strain of the war continued and, even though gasoline was rationed, still more people came seeking inspiration and Christian fellowship.

During the summers of the 1940s and the 1950s attendance increased steadily as the Assembly came to be noted as a Christian retreat center. The ballroom, renamed the “assembly hall,” rollicked again with activi-
ty. Groups gathered there for Bible study, worship, hymn sings, classes, stunt shows and talent shows. During youth camps the room was used on rainy evenings for folk dancing, called folk games because some Methodists frowned upon dancing. Other even-ings this popular form of recreation was held outdoors in the courtyard and, in later years, on the tennis court. Vesper Point overlooking the valley was a sacred site for outdoor services at dusk. Meal-times were announced by the ringing of a dinner bell. Delectable home cooked type meals were served family-style on large tables in the dining room. Games of horseshoes, ping-pong and baseball were popular and hikes to Lovers’ Leap and Stone Door were favorite activities. Courts for croquet, tennis, badminton and shuffleboard were enjoyed by all ages. Porches with rocking chairs were always available.

Proper dress was important during the early days of Assembly events. Youth campers were permitted to wear shorts during the daytime but for evening activities they were expected to “dress appropriately.” For most evening programs girls donned skirts and blouses or dresses and boys wore sport shirts and long pants. They were allowed to dress more casually, however, when a campfire was held. It was often suggested that people coming for a weekend retreat plan to dress for the Sunday service in the chapel as they would dress for church at home. Dresses or suits with high-heeled shoes were usually worn by the ladies and suits or sport coats and slacks were worn by the men. Men who attended the weeklong Pastors’ School wore white dress shirts with ties and dress pants every day, and some wore suits. Although there were few female ministers in the Methodist Church in those days, those who attended Pastors’ School also wore their Sunday best.

The Methodists of the Tennessee Conference brought many changes to the resort as they sought to update the facilities. In 1943 electricity was extended to remaining buildings. Light for each sleeping room was provided by a single bulb hanging from a cord extended from the center of the ceiling. In 1944 kitchen equipment was upgraded and electric refrigerators replaced iceboxes. In the early years of the Assembly the water system was dependant upon rainwater drained from the roofs and stored in cisterns. During periods of little rain the manager had to remind campers not to flush the toilets very often because the water in the cisterns was low. Occasionally water was hauled from McMinnville to fill the cisterns. Later, wells were dug to provide better sources of water. Additional bath-

rooms were built and electric pumps and water heaters were installed. In 1946 an upstairs porch was added to the back of the hotel, improving fire safety and increasing accommodations by dividing the two-room suites into separate rooms with each room opening onto a front or back porch. The wood frame kitchen was torn down in 1950 and replaced with a more fire-resistant concrete block structure. In 1952 modern telephone service became available. A row of concrete block rooms was built between Log Row [or Cross Row] and Upper Neal [formerly Whiskey Row, the most southern row of rooms] in 1955 and the structure was named Lower Neal. In 1958 major renovation of the hotel was completed. It included a new concrete foundation, new floor joists, flooring and ceilings throughout the first floor, and new paneled walls and gas heat in the lobby.

Other changes took place at the Assembly as Methodists sought to make the place more functional for worship and fellowship. In 1944 Grace Chapel, a nearby community church, was deeded to The Methodist Church. A parsonage was constructed on Assembly property and the minister in residence was available to conduct communion services and perform other clergy functions for Assembly programs. Walkways inside the quadrangle were repaired and the roofed sections became favorite spots for adults to enjoy conversation while children played in the courtyard. In 1945 a stone observatory was built in front of the hotel to replace the decaying wood structure overlooking Collins River Valley. The observatory became a favorite site for morning watch, a brief devotional time to begin each day’s activities, and it served throughout the day as a place of reflection and appreciation of nature’s beauty. Also in 1945 the front porch of the hotel was refloored over a new foundation and three sets of native stone steps were built. The porch was a popular gathering place where people enjoyed rocking and conversing. In 1946 croquet and shuffleboard courts were constructed and a concrete play area called “the slab” was built for tennis, folk games and other activities. The chapel was completed in 1949 and it became a hallowed place of indoor worship for Assembly events. Organ music broadcast through amplifiers mounted atop the chapel brought an aura of reverence to the entire Assembly area during designated quiet times. In 1982 the amplifiers were replaced with a steeple erected in honor of Jim Bell, past Tennessee Conference Lay Leader.

Large numbers of people continued to attend events during the summers of the 1960s and 70s and
several improvements were made to the property. The creation of a water utility district on the mountain brought a dependable source of water in 1964; wells and cisterns became obsolete. (One cistern remains on display between the hotel and the chapel.) Also in 1964 a roof was built over the slab, or tennis court, and the open-air structure became "the pavilion." It was used for basketball, folk games and other recreational activities, and for worship services and classes. In 1969 the winterizing of 22 sleeping rooms, rest rooms, classrooms, the kitchen, the dining room and the chapel enabled small groups to use the facilities during the spring and fall. However, all buildings continued to be closed each winter and, prior to closing, water pipes were drained to prevent freezing. In 1975 a cottage on the south side of the property known as Hopper House (since removed) was converted into a winterized retreat site. It contained a kitchen, a meeting area and sleeping quarters for 36 persons.

Camping and outdoor recreation became a nationwide rage in the 1970s. In 1974 the State of Tennessee established the Savage Gulf State Natural Area with locations for backpacking, hiking, rock climbing, rappelling, and picnicking. Beersheba Springs Assembly became a home base for nature lovers who came to access the Gulf using the nearby Stone Door entrance. In 1978 the Assembly developed a campground for tent and trailer camping. It had 24 campsites, a bathhouse and a picnic shelter. (The bathhouse and picnic shelter remain.)

The latter part of the twentieth century became a period of assessment and redirection for Beersheba Springs Assembly. Attendance at events had begun to decline and several previously hosted church groups were holding their retreats at other sites. Common complaints were that buildings were out-dated, most of them were not air-conditioned, and bedrooms did not have adjoining baths. Income was decreasing and the deteriorating buildings were expensive to maintain. Concerned individuals and various committees began exploring options for the future of the Assembly. A series of open meetings held across the Tennessee Conference of the United Methodist Church during 1986 resulted in much opposition to selling the Beersheba property. Church leaders were then faced with the challenge of finding the funds to renovate and modernize the facility, turning it into an attractive, comfortable retreat center that could be used year-round. Hiring a full-time manager to live at the Assembly and oversee its maintenance was the first step undertaken in 1991. The manager’s initial residence was the former Grace Chapel parsonage (since demolished). Interest in improvements at Beersheba gained momentum and in 1991 the Assembly celebrated 50 years as a retreat center. Artist Dan Roundtree drew a commemorative sketch of the hotel and authorized prints to be sold to raise funds for the restoration of Beersheba Springs Assembly. In 1994 a new manager’s residence was completed.

In 1999 the Tennessee Annual Conference approved the Together We Can Campaign to benefit the Assembly at Beersheba as well as other conference institutions. United Methodists from throughout the conference made pledges and, as payments designated for Beersheba came in, renovation and construction began to take place. Those involved tried to retain the historic integrity of the old buildings and they attempted to blend the architecture of the new buildings with the old.

The first structure was a bathhouse built in 2002. Located in the open space of the quadrangle between Marvell and Brick Row, it was a welcome addition and a much needed facility. Next a large maintenance building was erected. Late in 2002 Turner Family Lodge was completed. It consisted of two sections, each containing a lobby with a fireplace, a kitchen and 12 bedrooms with baths. Heated and air-conditioned, it provided the first modern year-round accommodations at the Assembly.

In 2003 sewer service was extended from Alamo to Beersheba Springs allowing connections to be made to new structures at the Assembly as well as to older buildings with their outmoded septic tanks. During 2003 the one-story East Side building was replaced with a larger two-story building that was heated and air-conditioned. It contained two meeting rooms and 22 bedrooms with baths.

Restoration of Upper Neal was completed in 2004 and the building was renamed Marcella V. Smith Row. It consisted of eight bedrooms with baths, heat and ceiling fans. The rooms were cooled by natural mountain air flowing through front and back screen doors, as in the past. First floor sleeping quarters in the Hotel were renovated in 2004. Two suites and four bedrooms in the Bishops’ Wing were provided with heat, air-conditioning and modern baths. Ella Eaton Gill Dormitory was also constructed in 2004. The building contained bunk beds and a large bath in each end and it had a large meeting room and kitchen in the center. It provided accommodations for 32 persons and was heated and cooled.
By the end of 2004 there was a dilemma: with the increased sleeping capacity provided by the new buildings there was no longer a meeting place large enough for an entire group registered at the facility. United Methodists and other friends of the Assembly came through with the funds to erect a large enclosed structure and in 2006 the Samuel Boyd Smith Multipurpose Building was dedicated. Located in the center of the grounds on the site of the old pavilion, the temperature-controlled building could serve as a meeting hall, as a large classroom, or as a gym with half-court basketball.

Many people have used their skills and resources to make Beersheba Springs Assembly what it is today. Several building names honor the dedication and generosity of individuals and families who have held a special appreciation for Beersheba. Marvell was named for Marvin and Dell Cook during the very earliest years of the Assembly. Marvin (W.M.) Cook was a minister of the Tennessee Conference who spent many hours repairing and building at the Assembly. The stone fireplace in the hotel lobby and the stone inlay with scripture on the observatory were his handiwork. Turner Family Lodge honored the family of Cal Turner, a member of Brentwood United Methodist Church in Nashville and an avid supporter of a number of United Methodist institutions. Marcella V. Smith Row honored a member of Forest Hills United Methodist Church in Nashville. Marcella Smith came to Beersheba year after year for events such as Family Fellowship and each time she stayed in the row of log rooms that, after her death, were named for her. The construction of Ella Eaton Gill Dormitory utilized funds from the sale of property on Black Mountain near Crossville. In 1934 Ella Eaton Gill had donated the mountain acreage to Cumberland Mountain School, an institution of the Tennessee Conference of the Methodist Church. After the school closed, the Tennessee Conference continued to follow her wishes to allow the property to serve as a wildlife preserve and a site for nature appreciation. It was sold in 2001 to the Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation to become part of the Cumberland Trail State Park. In 2006 the Multipurpose Building was named for the late Samuel Boyd Smith, a member of Belmont United Methodist Church who devoted many hours to making plans for Beersheba and other outdoor ministries during the years he served on the Tennessee Conference Camping Committee.


With the increased interest in camping in the 1970s, the Tennessee Conference created a full-time position of Coordinator of Camping, later termed Director of Camping. Carl Elkins served in this office from 1976 until 1984 dealing with many aspects of program and property at Beersheba and other conference camps. Succeeding directors of camping continued to supervise facilities and many dealt with program. Those directors and the years they served were: James F. Swiney, Jr., 1984-1987; James G. Hughes, Jr., 1987-1995; Terry Carty, 1995-1997; L. C. Troutt, 1998-2001; Beth Morris, 2002-2007.

Facilities and program continue to be a blend of the old and new at Beersheba. The charm of yesteryear is still available in certain rooms that have not yet been modernized. Worship services are still held in the Chapel and at Vesper Point; they are also held in the new Smith Multipurpose Building and in the meeting rooms of other new buildings. Morning watch is still held on the observatory overlooking the valley; it is also held on the deck of Turner Family Lodge overlooking the wooded area. Classes are still held in the lobby of the hotel with participants sitting in rocking chairs by the fireplace; classes are also held in the new meeting rooms and Smith Multipurpose Building with presenters using the latest visual aids and sound systems. Parents still chat on the porches of the quadrangle while their children play in the open area; they also leave their infants and toddlers in the attractive nursery provided in a room of Brick Row. In the quad youngsters still enjoy tetherball, volleyball, badminton and playground equipment; they also delight in slip-and-slide mats on the grass. Young people still walk to Lovers’ Leap; they also travel to nearby rivers for whitewater rafting. They still hike to Stone Door to enjoy the view from the cliff; they also engage in supervised rappelling and rock climbing on the cliff. They still swing to music in the evening; folk dancing to recorded music in the pavilion has been replaced with swaying to live band performances in Smith.
Multipurpose Building. Oldsters still congregate on the front porch of the hotel to quietly reminisce; only the occasional ringing of a cell phone interrupts the tranquility. Campers still dress casually for campfires; they wear casual clothes for other activities as well. Meals are still announced by the ringing of the dinner bell; food is now selected from a serving line. Rocking chairs still beckon from the weathered porches; they summon from the new breezeways and decks as well.

In reserving the facilities at the Assembly staff has given priority to groups within the Methodist Church, renamed the United Methodist Church in 1968. Others have been welcome to use the facilities, however, for overnight events or for day activities alone. Through the years Methodists and non-Methodists have scheduled day activities that included luncheons, dinners, parties, receptions, weddings, memorial services, reunions, meetings, festivals, photography and nature classes.

Cooperation with the community of Beersheba Springs has been important. In 1968 the Assembly began hosting the Arts and Crafts Festival, a fund-raiser for various community projects. Held in late August, it has continued to be an annual event. In 1980 residents and friends of Beersheba Springs were successful in an effort to place the hotel complex and other buildings in the community on the National Register of Historic Places. Since 2003 a Christmas party for children in the community has been held each year at the Assembly. Staff members participate in July 4th celebrations and parades. The observatory serves as an overlook for residents of the area and for those traveling through who pause to view the beauty of the valley. The stone inset reminds all to lift up their eyes unto the hills.

Beersheba Springs Assembly has served as a place of inspiration, study and fellowship for generations of people seeking respite and spiritual direction for their lives. Samuel Boyd Smith was once asked, “What is Beersheba?” He replied, “Why, Beersheba is the crown jewel of Tennessee!” Many agree that it continues to be just that.

Ann Troutt