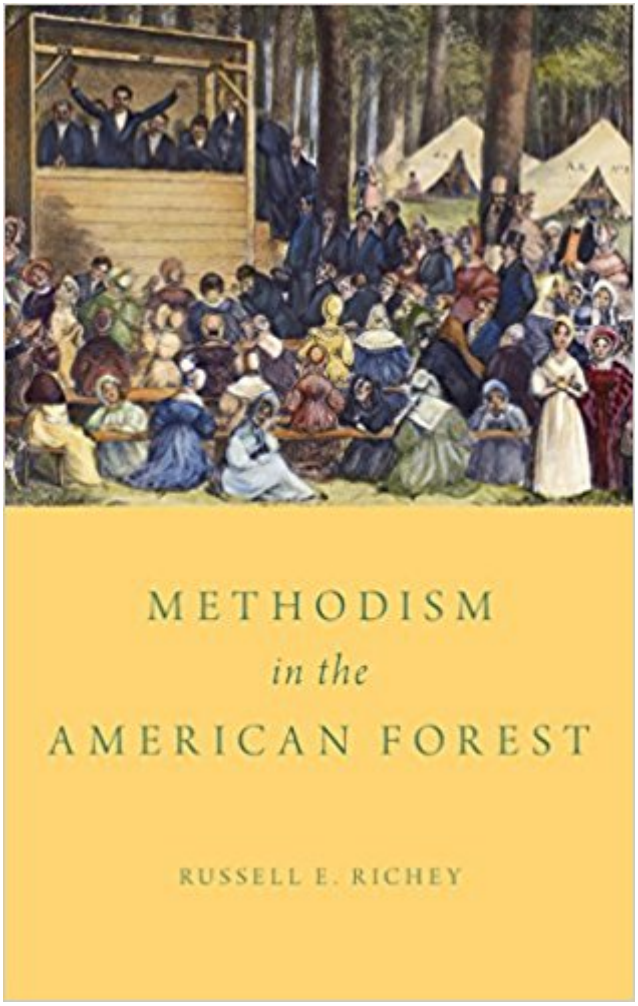
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Methodism In The American Forest



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Synopsis

Winner of the 2015 Saddleback Selection Award from the Historical Society of The United Methodist ChurchDuring the nineteenth century, camp meetings became a signature program of American Methodists and an extraordinary engine for their remarkable evangelistic outreach. Methodism in the American Forest explores the ways in which Methodist preachers interacted with and utilized the American woodland, and the role camp meetings played in the denomination's spread across the country. Half a century before they made themselves such a home in the woods, the people and preachers learned the hard way that only a fool would adhere to John Wesley's mandate for preaching in fields of the New World. Under the blazing American sun, Methodist preachers sought and found a better outdoor sanctuary for large gatherings: under the shade of great oaks, a natural cathedral where they held forth with fervid sermons. The American forests, argues Russell E. Richey, served the preachers in several important ways. Like a kind of Gethesemane, the remote, garden-like solitude provided them with a place to seek counsel from the Holy Spirit. They also saw the forest as a desolate wilderness, and a means for them to connect with Israel's years after the Exodus and Jesus's forty days in the desert after his baptism by John. The dauntless preachers slashed their way through, following America's expanding settlement, and gradually sacralizing American woodlands as cathedral, confessional, and spiritual challenge-as shady grove, as garden, and as wilderness. The threefold forest experience became a Methodist standard. The meeting of Methodism's basic governing body, the quarterly conference, brought together leadership of all levels. The event stretched to two days in length and soon great crowds were drawn by the preaching and eventually the sacraments that were on offer. Camp meetings, if not a Methodist invention, became the movement's signature, a development that Richey tracks throughout the years that Methodism matured, to become a central denomination in America's religious landscape.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"In this erudite work, the dean of historians of American Methodism shows how field preaching in Britain morphed into woodland camp meetings in early America."--Christian Century"Methodists in the American Forest will be of interest to historians of American religion and to scholars interested in the cultural history of forests."--Journal of American History"Reading through the lens of the sylvan images that inspired mainstream American Methodists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, eminent Methodist historian Russell Richey reexamines Methodism’s missional impulse and brings into focus its practiced theology and ecclesiology. This robust and engaging study speaks principally to Methodism’s past, but it also has much to say about and to American Methodism in the present day." --Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, Professor of Worship, Boston University "Russell Richey effectively employs a unique and engaging approach to Methodist history. Beginning with John Wesley and early British Methodism, he leads us to recognize the manner in which American Methodism grew and flourished in wilderness, forest, and shady grove. With generous quotes from primary sources and insightful interpretation we learn about American Methodism’s mission and ministry as it moved across the continent,becoming an influential force in American life." --Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., General Secretary Emeritus of United Methodism’s General Commission on Archives and History "Russell Richey has done as much as anyone to shape how we think about early American Methodism. In this call to reconsider the connection between nature and faith, Richey expands the scope of his work. American Methodists did not simply tolerate ’the woods,’ they engaged with the forest and incorporated it into their ministry. Nowhere was this more evident than at camp meetings, as Richey so persuasively argues." --John Wigger, Professor and Chair, Department of History, University of Missouri "Both as a well-documented historical examination of American Methodism and as a thoughtful and suggestive theological work, Methodism in the American Forest is a valuable addition to the corpus of American church history that should draw the attention of scholars of both Methodism and the larger evangelical community." --Church History

Russell E. Richey, author or editor of twenty books and an array of articles on American Methodism, held professorial and administrative posts successively at Drew, Duke, and Emory universities. He

is Dean Emeritus of Candler School of Theology and William R. Cannon Distinguished Professor of Church History Emeritus. He now serves as Visiting Professor at Duke Divinity School.

Did Methodists squander an opportunity in the wilderness? That seems to be one of the implications in Russell RicheyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s new book, Methodism in the American Forest. Richey, always a provocative historian of Methodism in its American context, takes what seems a thin theme and turns it into a chaotic book that nevertheless entertains and enlightens along the way.At the center of the book is the Methodist tradition of camp meetings, which had their glory days in the early 1800s, but nevertheless continued to influence Methodism into the twentieth century. Drawing on the field preaching tradition established by Whitfield and Wesley, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Methodists sacralized American woodlandsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦as cathedral, as confessional, as challengeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •as shady grove (natureÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s cathedral), as garden (a Gethsemane where temptations might be found and spiritual solace sought), and as wilderness (a challenge through and into which the Methodist ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Ëœgospel ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ must be taken)ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (7).In the camp meetings, MethodismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s polity, exemplified in the quarterly meeting, was joined to frontier revivalism, resulting in a powerful expression of the Spirit. In the wilderness, Richey argues, the camp meetings ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“proved especially powerful demonstrations of MethodismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s repudiation of genteel patriarchyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• (54). Outdoors, ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Methodism sustained its biracial ministryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• by including white and black worshippers in ways that were not permissible indoors (71).Over time, however, the camp meetings settled down into more ordered affairs. Small cities for camp meetings popped up in the forests and by seashores. And Methodist leaders grew wary that the meetings were losing their spiritual power, that perhaps the social and leisure dimensions of the events were overtaking the spiritual.By the end of the 19th century, about the time that a camp meeting featured so prominently in Harold FredericÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s send-up of Victorian Methodism, The Damnation of Theron Ware (1895), MethodismÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s sylvan ambitions were being harnessed by competing interests - holiness advocates, who had extended the conversion narrative beyond salvation to the second blessing and promotion of Christian perfection, and the Chautauqua movement, which used the forest setting for the edification of leaders in the Sunday School movement. One tended toward what emerged in the 20th century as evangelicalism and the other as liberalism - a breach still not healed.What could Methodists have done in the wilderness? They may have developed a doctrine of creation, an ecclesiology, or a theology adequate to the North American context. These things, Richey says, remained more

subtext than text. And what Methodists will do with their heritage in the woods is still unclear.

Ritchie has written a history of Methodism in the American outdoors, specifically under the trees. The theological insights are illuminating. His tracing of the evolution of preaching outdoors in English fields to the trees of America, through camp meetings and Chautauqua meetings made somethings clearer that I've seen in other areas of Methodism. This is a useful book.

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