MUSICAL LIFE AT OCEAN GROVE, NEW JERSEY: THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS, 1869-1919
PART II

PATRICIA WOODARD

In 1898 U.S. Methodists faced the approach of a new century with confidence. They took pride in their social, economic, and political success, as one of their own, William McKinley, occupied the White House. With the 1894 dedication of its impressive auditorium Ocean Grove entered a new era of visibility. No less a dignitary than the president of New York’s Columbia University expressed a “higher degree of estimation than he ever had before for these people called Methodists, who, in such a brief period of time had made their mark so grandly on the age, and now own the largest and finest Auditorium for Christian worship in this country, or indeed, in the known world.” Although the loss of Rev. E. H. Stokes, who led the camp meeting community from the time of its wilderness founding to the construction of its great 10,000-seat auditorium, brought great sadness, a new leadership team was in place, and the Camp Meeting Association could bask in a record of extraordinary accomplishment.

Stokes was succeeded by James Fitzgerald, a Methodist bishop from Newark, and longtime song leader John R. Sweney by Tali Esen Morgan. The Stokes and Sweney era had been one of congregational song, with camp meeting leadership and visitors actively engaged in writing, composing, and publishing gospel hymns. The years of Morgan’s tenure and the Fitzgerald presidency brought an enormous increase in the number of musical events offered in the Auditorium and an increasing sensitivity to public demand, but these changes were gradual. There is evidence that Bishop Fitzgerald was very well disposed toward the community’s developing musical life. Both his son and daughter were heard as soloists in services: his son as a violinist, his daughter as a singer. He continued a long-established pattern by collaborating with Tali Esen Morgan and Charles Yatman on the Ocean Grove Song Book, 1900’s officially sanctioned song book.3 The tradition of fine choral singing continued, with the Camp Meeting Association extolling the “uniformity of time and tone as to challenge the admiration of the vast number of cultured people who came from all parts of the country to Ocean Grove.”

2 Leader of the daily 9:00 AM Young People’s Meeting for twenty-five years, Yatman was an evangelist who traveled and preached widely in the U.S. and abroad.
Morgan’s initial success had been in training a large children’s choir and his Children’s Day observance remained one of the community’s most successful annual events. The choir performed both at the morning and evening services on that day. It usually sang only two selections in the morning, but the evening featured the children in a concert. In 1901 the Auditorium “was gayly trimmed with green and white bunting, and the stage was filled with palms, ferns, flowers, and orchids, the latter coming from India. ... For the first time this summer the monster auditorium was crowded to the doors. The audience numbered fully 10,000. The center of the building was reserved for the 800 children who took part in the exercises. The choir numbered 200, and there were 40 musicians in the orchestra. ... Prof. Tali Esen Morgan had charge of the musical part of the programme, which included ‘Holy, Holy, Holy,’ the Gloria from Mozart’s twelfth mass, Handel’s Largo and Handel’s ‘Hallelujah Chorus,’ ‘Papa, Why Don’t You Pray?’ a hymn written by Roy Fitzgerald, the blind son of Bishop Fitzgerald, was sung by the choir for the first time.”

Three weeks later the children performed again at the Children’s Festival. Given the limited rehearsal time, it is not surprising that assisting artists, who usually were child instrumental virtuosos and boy sopranos, were featured at these festival concerts. The repertoire performed was a mixture of popular songs and semi-classical favorites of the era, with an occasional classical piece included. There was a good deal of repetition of material from year to year, which greatly facilitated the training of the choir, since singers were not required to learn a new program each summer and returning members of the group could assist in teaching newcomers. At 1900’s Children’s Festival concert, boy soprano Earl Gulick and the orchestra were responsible for half the material performed. The children sang six numbers, of which only one (Faure’s “The Palms”) was sacred. The 1906 concert, with a bird imitator, an elocutionist, a violin prodigy, and a boy soprano assisting the choir, attracted such crowds that it had to be repeated. The choral selections all were popular songs of the day.

The cooperation of the Asbury Park and Ocean Grove communities in musical matters had long been taken for granted, although there were persisting tensions over other issues such as taxation and the Camp Meeting Association’s insistence on strict Sabbath observance, especially their prohibition of Sunday trains. Ocean Grove’s preachers, in turn, condemned the worldliness of Asbury Park. However, they collaborated wholeheartedly on one of the most popular events of the summer season, the Asbury Park Baby Parade. Begun in 1890, the Parade instantly became one of the area’s star

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5 The same train station served both communities. In order to preserve Ocean Grove’s Day of Rest, no trains were permitted to stop on Sundays. The prohibition was exceedingly unpopular with Asbury Park business owners, who lobbied continually for a relaxation of the rule, finally succeeding in 1911.
entertainment attractions, with some 200 infants costumed as blossoms or fruits, their “carriages festooned with flowers, flags, and bunting.” By 1896 it had become a tradition. “If there is one event of the season in which the people at large feel a deeper interest than any other, it is the baby parade.”

Given this level of public enthusiasm, it is not surprising that the Grove began to work more closely with Asbury Park in expanding the festivities. Taliesin Morgan had organized the pageant which accompanied the Parade, a Fairyland Festival and musical extravaganza which culminated in the crowning of Queen Titania. The festivities attracted participants from New York and Philadelphia, as well as from nearby resort communities. In 1902 it was reported that many pious souls “were led into serious apprehension by the absorbing fascination of the class of entertainments which from the last of June to the twenty-second of August held possession” of the Auditorium, regarding the summer program as a “vortex of sensuous amusement.” Their ire may well have been provoked by accounts of the Baby Parade such as the one which reported that a child riding on a float decorated to represent ‘the Rock of Ages’ “looked pretty, clinging to a cross.” This kind of appropriation of hymns had already earned condemnation a generation earlier, when a waltz version of “Nearer, My God, to Thee” played as accompaniment for roller skating led a visitor to charge another well-known camp meeting with blasphemy and eroticism.

In the midst of such lavish spectacles, however, and whatever controversy they may have raised, congregational singing retained its old importance. The debate over the place of gospel hymns in worship continued, gaining national attention in 1901. A prominent educator, Francis Wayland Parker, attacked gospel hymnody in no uncertain terms: “How much longer shall ‘ragtime’ gospel songs and dance hall music be permitted to exercise their tuneful functions in the religious service of Protestant Christianity?” To gauge reaction to Parker’s jeremiad, prominent clergy and church musicians were polled. It is perhaps a measure of Ocean Grove’s stature that among those queried were Bishop Fitzgerald, Evangelist Yatman, and Music Director Morgan. Fitzgerald embraced the inclusion of different kinds of hymns suitable for the needs of various church constituencies. Yatman, while deploring the general decline of musical standards and the commercialization of gospel hymn publishing, defended the religious inspiration of many gospel song writers. Morgan expressed approval of such hymns for evangelistic work, but felt that congregations should learn to read music.

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*Troy Messenger, Holy Leisure (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 95.


75 Ocean Grove’s Annual Camp,” Ocean Grove Times, August 30, 1902, 1.

76 Winsome Children Capture the Town,” Ocean Grove Times, August 23, 1902, 1.


which would enable them to appreciate a higher class of hymnody. 12 Four years later the Methodist Episcopal Church settled the matter for the denomination by including a certain number of gospel hymns in its 1905 Hymnal, intended “everywhere [to] supplant those unauthorized publications which often teach what organized Methodism does not hold, and which, by excluding the nobler music of the earlier and later days, prevent the growth of a true musical taste.” 13

In the early 1900s, the “Mecca of Methodism,” as Ocean Grove had come to be known, garnered extensive coverage in the mainstream press, which once had caricatured manifestations of religious enthusiasm at the camp meeting. By then its tune had changed, as reporters wrote favorably of “the multitudes assembled … and their refined enjoyment in spiritual worship.” 14 An opening day congregation in 1902 was assured by Bishop Cyrus D. Foss that, “There is no decline in Methodism. … The golden age is not in the past. It is in the future; it is now.” 15 At the same time, reports on the camp meeting itself make it clear that efforts were being made to accommodate both old-fashioned Methodists and their more progressive brethren and sisters. Camp meeting preachers cautioned against being conformed to the world. One condemned card playing, dancing, and tippling and asserted that professors of religion who engaged in these activities were bound for hell, causing a “serious sensation.” 16 In this context it is important to remember that a very large number of meetings (as many as sixteen) were held every day during the camp meeting, beginning with a 6:00 AM sunrise service. Added to these were many prayer meetings and other spontaneous gatherings held in individual tents and cottages. For ten days each year the community experienced a heightened intensity of religious feeling and activity.

As for the role played by the Auditorium choir and orchestra during that period, they and their leader, Tali Esen Morgan, were praised, but the newspaper seemed to take pleasure in noting that they were overshadowed by exuberant congregational singing. 17 In fact, Morgan and his ensembles merited almost no further mention in accounts of that year’s camp meeting, while the musical contributions of amateurs and singing evangelists received a good deal of praise. In the afternoon Tabernacle meetings, for example, a fine group of volunteers sang the newest and best camp meeting gospel songs, and a preacher sang “The Ninety and Nine” as well as Sankey himself could have done it. 18 The titles of many well-loved hymns and gospel songs resurfaced: “All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name,” “Nearer, My God, to Thee,” “Amazing Grace,” and “Beulah Land.” Clearly, the camp

17 “Ocean Grove’s Annual Camp,” 1.
meeting was expected to supply the demand for “the old time religion,” while the remainder of the season catered to other tastes.

Some of Morgan’s genius undoubtedly lay in his ability to adapt to changing times and preferences and to arrange musical events appealing to a variety of sensibilities. In 1904 he introduced an innovation that would have been unthinkable to Ocean Grove’s founders, a concert by an opera singer. Ernestine Schumann-Heink, a contralto as well known for her devotion to her large family as to her art, sold out the great auditorium, attracting local summer residents, as well as “cottagers” from the area’s fashionable resorts. The next diva to appear was another shrewd choice, for Lillian Nordica was the granddaughter of “Camp Meeting” John Allen, Maine’s most celebrated circuit-riding preacher. She performed for an audience of 10,000, which included New Jersey’s governor, along with many people of fashion from the surrounding communities of Long Branch, Elberon, Allenhurst, Belmar, and Spring Lake. During the next fifteen years many of the early 20th century’s greatest singers and instrumentalists were heard in the Auditorium: John McCormack, Enrico Caruso, Emma Eames, Louise Homer, Olive Fremstad, David Bispham, Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, Fritz Kreisler and Albert Spaulding, among others.

From the outset, the substantial fees commanded by these celebrity performers were a matter of concern to many Camp Meeting Association members, although the following story shows that they allowed their initial apprehensions to be assuaged.

It was rumored that Professor Morgan had engaged a singer for the sum of $2,000. This rumor spread rapidly and created some comment, and, it is said, led some officers of the Association to interview Mr. Morgan on the subject; something like the following conversation is said to have occurred: ‘We are surprised,” said the spokesman, “to hear that you have engaged a singer for the Auditorium at a cost of $2,000.’ Mr. Morgan responded, ‘That is a mistake; the price agreed upon is $2,500.’ Then followed some discussion, Mr. Morgan showing his confidence in the engagement by offering to bear one half the loss if he might have half the gain. The Association finally decided to accept Mr. Morgan’s judgement that the engagement would prove profitable, and it is said a net profit of about $3,000 resulted on the entertainment.

Oratorios on a grand scale continued throughout the Morgan era. The size of the choirs involved grew from 400 voices to 1,000 for a 1914 Messiah. To augment the resident choir, oratorio societies from Elizabeth and Newark, New Jersey, and from Manhattan and Brooklyn came by train for the performances. Cantatas were also programmed. In 1903, The Rose Maiden, by British composer Frederic Cowen, an immensely popular work of the time, became the first secular work presented in the auditorium.

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19 It should be noted that one camp meeting founder, Rev. Aaron Ballard, still was active in the community’s running at that time. However, we do not know if he objected to the concert.

However, for the most part, sacred works were presented, some composed by musicians with some connection to the community, including *Nativity* (1905) by Adam Geibel and J. Lincoln Hall’s *Absalom*, along with well known works such as John Stainer’s *Crucifixion*.21

Complaints about the mounting expenses of presenting large-scale oratorios, combined with declining attendance at those events, prompted Morgan to alter his programming. In response to public demand for lighter fare, both the United States Marine Band and Victor Herbert and his orchestra appeared during the 1907 season. Instrumental music had long been a fact of Ocean Grove life. The cornet, a favorite instrument of the era, appears in an 1879 account of “Anniversary Day” (a celebration of the community's founding). Charles Yatman’s young people’s meetings welcomed harp, violin, and cornet solos. At the 1894 opening of the new Auditorium, Sweney had cornets and a trombone, in addition to organs and pianos. But it was Tali Esen Morgan who assembled Ocean Grove’s first orchestra to play and accompany in services and to give concerts.

Just as the size of Morgan’s choirs continued to grow, so did his orchestras. Beginning with thirty players in 1900, the number increased to forty the next year, and to sixty-five in 1903, with even larger ensembles assembled for some oratorio performances. In the beginning, many of the players were local, but in time they were joined by musicians who came for the season and were lodged at Camp Meeting Association expense. In 1903 a musical jubilee was advertised as a benefit concert for the orchestra. Proceeds would help to finance a ten-day vacation for the musicians at Thousand Island Park, N.Y.22 In 1906 Morgan was praised for his “marked ability in producing an orchestra ... without embarrassing the funds of the institution. The hotels have taken a share in this expenditure, and while they continue to do so, it is probable that the present high character of our music will continue.”23 As long as Morgan remained in charge of musical matters, the orchestra was part of the summer experience in Ocean Grove.

Morgan’s most lasting contribution to Ocean Grove’s musical evolution was his role in procuring the Hope-Jones organ, inaugurated during the 1908 season. When the auditorium originally opened, the instrumental ensemble that accompanied the singing—a piano, a portable organ, a cornet—was completely inadequate for the huge space. In 1895 the Auditorium acquired its first organ, an instrument donated by a New York City Methodist

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21Geibel (1855-1933) was well known in camp meeting circles as a gospel song composer. His setting of “Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus” (hymn tune: Geibel) still appears in some hymnals. A prolific composer of popular songs, Geibel wrote “Kentucky Babe,” widely sung during his lifetime and long after. Hall (1866-1930), a well-known Philadelphia composer and publisher, assisted Homer Rodeheaver at Ocean Grove from 1916-1918 and was the camp meeting song leader in 1919. Several Hall-Mack song books were adopted for use during the early 1900s.


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Episcopal Church, which was replacing it. By 1900, however, it became evident that this instrument was inadequate for the space as well as for the musical programming offered at Ocean Grove. In 1903 four pianos were added to the auditorium to augment Morgan's orchestra, but a new organ was clearly needed. For the publicity value of the enterprise the Hope-Jones Organ Company, of Elmira, New York, agreed to design and build an instrument for Ocean Grove, at a price that was extremely advantageous to the Camp Meeting Association. Installed in time for the 1908 season, the organ was first heard in a recital played by Mark Andrews. A national meeting of organists, convened for August, brought some two hundred musicians to the Grove, to hear lectures about the instrument and to attend daily recitals given by Edwin Lemare, a celebrated concert organist. The superlatives employed in descriptions of the organ make it clear that hyperbole was alive and well in the early 20th century. The instrument itself, with 152 ranks of pipes and a host of exotic stops, was ideal for the presentation of "The Storm," first heard in 1909, and thereafter a signature daily offering. Originally played by Will C. Macfarlane, the piece was altered and enhanced by subsequent players. However, its general outline (a day in the life of an army and the storm which bursts over it) remained the same through the years.

The 1908 season as a whole was a high point of the Morgan era. The array of vocal talent presented, in addition to the organ virtuosos, was dazzling: Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Lillian Nordica, Louise Homer, Ellen Beach Yaw, Jeanne Jomelli, and David Bispham (who sang the title role in Mendelssohn's Elijah). The culmination was a testimonial concert and dinner in the music director's honor which was organized in part to applaud his role in procuring the Hope-Jones organ. Mme. Schumann-Heink volun-

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24 This organ can't have been a complete loss, since it was later moved to the Young People's Temple and continued to be played.
25 Andrews (1875-1939), a choir master and composer, was at the time of the Ocean Grove recital, organist at St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Church in Montclair, and well known in New Jersey musical circles. Lemare (1866-1934), born and trained in England, came to the U.S. on an extensive 1900-1901 recital tour, then became organist at Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute. Well known for his virtuosity, he also composed some 100 organ pieces, and transcribed several hundred orchestral works for the instrument.
26 Macfarlane (1871-1945), born in London, trained in the U.S., debuted as a concert artist at the age of 15. A founder of the American Guild of Organists, he was Ocean Grove's auditorium organist from 1908-1910. He also served New York's St. Thomas Episcopal Church and Temple Emanuel (1898-1912).
27 A complete description of the scenario of the storm appears in Troy Messenger's Holy Leisure (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 75-76.
28 Yaw (1869-1947), an American soprano known for her extensive upper range, appeared as Lucia during the 1908 Metropolitan Opera season. Having founded a home for abandoned boys in 1890, she concertized widely in the U.S. and Canada for its benefit. Jomelli (d. 1932) debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in 1906 as Elisabeth in Tannhäuser and later sang with the Manhattan Opera House, La Scala and Covent Garden, retiring in 1917. Bispham (1857-1912), a native of Philadelphia, was a leading baritone of his day, known for his thespian ability as well as his singing. He specialized in Wagnerian roles both at Covent Garden and the Metropolitan Opera.
teered her services, and, in recognition of the musical cooperation existing between Ocean Grove and Asbury Park, Arthur Pryor’s Band appeared in the grand finale. Former New Jersey governor and camp meeting association member Edward C. Stokes, in his glowing tribute, placed Morgan’s work squarely in the context of the community’s mission. “This place is a place of worship. Ocean Grove was organized as a church. Every foot of the land from the ocean to the gates is dedicated to that purpose. Music is essentially a part of worship. It is an essential part of the life of this great place, which is destined to be the greatest centre for sacred music in this land.”

The Camp Meeting Association had in the meantime undergone a change of leadership, when Bishop Fitzgerald died unexpectedly in 1907 and Rev. Aaron Ballard assumed the presidency. Ballard was an admirer of Ocean Grove’s music, having stated that “nowhere in the universe can such inspiring and lofty music be heard as at Ocean Grove.” At the same time, he began his term affirming Ocean Grove’s commitment to “a devout, evangelical type of Methodist Christianity.” However, there was significant pressure on the community to change. Ballard confronted precarious finances and calls for development, as some members of the Camp Meeting Association itself felt it was time to make a modern resort out of the place by replacing all the tents with bungalows. In 1911 the modern world intruded decisively, as trains, which had previously bypassed the station in deference to sabbatarian sentiment, began making regular Sunday stops at Ocean Grove/Asbury Park. A further incursion in the form of dancing (“the first ever hop”) at the Grove’s North End Hotel was noted. President Ballard used the occasion of his Founders Day address to attack proponents of change in vigorous terms, calling them “traitors” and “secessionists.” In the midst of these tensions, daily matinee and evening concerts and entertainments continued, although only one oratorio was performed. With 600 voices in the chorus, Handel’s Messiah, always a guaranteed success, attracted a crowd of 8,000. Three well-known concert artists and the U.S. Marine Band also appeared that year.

29 Arthur Pryor (1870-1942), a virtuoso trombone player and soloist with Sousa’s band (1892-1903), formed his own band in 1903. For more than twenty years the ensemble appeared every summer in Asbury Park.


31 Ballard (1820-1919), then 87 years old and a founding member of the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association, was also President at Pitman Grove, a “sister meeting” known for far greater piety than Ocean Grove. Founded in 1871, Pitman Grove’s camp meeting usually did not overlap with that at Ocean Grove, and many of the faithful attended both.

32 “Splendid Eulogy of Bishop Fitzgerald,” Asbury Park Evening Press, June 17, 1907, 1.

33 Tents, plentiful in the post-Civil War era when many camp meetings were founded, were common in Ocean Grove’s early years before permanent housing was erected. They remain a striking feature of the community, with some 114 having survived into the twenty-first century.


These high-profile events, initially enormously profitable for the Camp Meeting Association, which promoted them, had become a staple of Ocean Grove life. However, the financial burden of sponsoring such concerts apparently led the Camp Meeting Association to curtail the 1912 season’s offerings. No celebrity performers appeared that year and oratorios were also scaled back. Only *Elijah* was performed, but even that was deemed too costly. “These great musical compositions are not as much appreciated by the majority of people who come to Ocean Grove as are the lighter forms of music, and ... do not yield sufficient revenue to compensate for their time.”

Band music, however, continued to be popular and both the U.S. Marine Band and the Sousa Band gave concerts in 1912. 1914 brought similar complaints about the production costs of oratorio. “When it is taken into consideration that the expenses of a great concert do not yield scarcely a percentage of profit, ...Ocean Grove cannot justly be blamed for placing as few as possible in the Auditorium.”

It was becoming increasingly obvious to Ocean Grove’s administrators that financial considerations would have to play a much larger part in the musical programming. In 1915, in addition to a *Messiah* with 800 voices, Morgan introduced “Popular Concerts,” offered in conjunction with motion pictures shown in the Auditorium. However, the religious and educational films which met rigid community standards lost money. That year even the Children’s Festival, one of the Grove’s most popular attractions, earned a reprimand from the Camp Meeting Association, which felt that “...a large part of the expenses could be saved by the elimination of costly freaks of different kinds, decorators, etc. The charm ... is in the exercises of the children ...” The Association called for a return to volunteer labor for the production of the Festival. To complete the financial picture, it is significant that the Association had accumulated a substantial amount of debt during the first decades of the 20th century and ended the 1915 season over $600,000 in the red. Members were increasingly dismayed by the costs of servicing this indebtedness.

What probably began as a 1915 bid for publicity ultimately proved a turning point in the musical fortunes of Ocean Grove, as it ushered in a new era of evangelistic song and preaching. Herald of the shift was Homer Rodeheaver, Billy Sunday’s trombone-playing song leader. His engagement as camp meeting song leader was reportedly the result of Tali Esen Morgan’s attendance at Sunday’s campaign in Philadelphia that year, where he spotted a number of his singers in the revival choir. When the charismatic

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Rodeheaver expressed an interest in participating in the camp meeting, Morgan encouraged him to come, and the Camp Meeting Association followed up with an official invitation. The ever-adaptable Morgan, always an astute manager of public relations, further capitalized on the renown of the revival campaign by introducing “Billy Sunday Song Services,” to be held Sunday evenings at 7:00 (immediately following the popular Surf Meetings).

Rodeheaver’s singing and song leading represented something of a return to the Sweney era, as gospel hymnody regained center stage. At one September service, he joined a quartet which included Charles H. Gabriel, William J. Kirkpatrick, and H. L. Gilmour, three of the best-known gospel song composers of the era, in singing Kirkpatrick’s own “When Love Shines In.” Rodeheaver’s work with the camp meeting choir earned enthusiastic praise from members of the Camp Meeting Association. “In the past the choir had no noticeable part in the services, but this year under his inspiration they were of large value in leading the grand hymns in ways that the congregation could not only feel but join. It is to be hoped that what has appeared to be an innovation may become a permanent feature ....”

The January, 1916 announcement that Tal Esen Morgan would not return as leader of the Auditorium musical services and director of entertainments seemed inevitable. Differences between the music director and the Camp Meeting Association over financial matters were cited. During his eighteen seasons in Ocean Grove, Morgan and his ambitious programming had dominated musical life, but fiscal exigencies could no longer be ignored. Yet many of Morgan’s vocal supporters considered it impossible to return to the old days, musically speaking. “It may be that in those days one concert was all that visitors to Ocean Grove expected. But times have changed. And the people have changed with the times. What was considered good enough for Ocean Grove in the way of music and entertainment several decades ago is far from being good enough today.” But the Camp Meeting Association revealed that fees paid to performers, together with electricity, maintenance, security, advertising, and other incidental expenses ate up whatever box office profits had been realized. The Association repudiated the professionalization of Grove musical, as well as religious life, remarking that much “of this service could be given voluntarily from among the people who visit here, as it was in earlier days of the Grove...”
Much of the immediate post-Morgan era took place in the shadow of World War I, although concerts, song services, and the camp meeting, went on as usual. Attendance for some events decreased decidedly, as was the case for a 1917 ‘popular concert’ that drew only two or three hundred.\footnote{Concerts Begin in Grove Auditorium,” \textit{Asbury Park Evening Press}, July 6, 1917, 6.} One of the year’s successful attractions was a music drama entitled \textit{Ahasuerus}, loosely based on the biblical story of Queen Esther, with text and music by William Dodd Chenery, who also staged the work and conducted the performance.\footnote{Chenery (1863-1942) specialized in the production of spectacular pageants, as well as in music dramas based on Old Testament themes, for which he adapted existing musical material. In 1916 Ocean Grove heard \textit{Joseph}, which incorporated compositions by Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Bellini, Rossini, Wagner, Gounod, and Mendelssohn.} Music perceived as ‘high class’ had not lost its appeal. Chenery included musical excerpts from a variety of sources, such as Wagner’s \textit{Tannhäuser}, Gounod’s \textit{Faust}, and Mendelssohn’s ‘O for the Wings of a Dove.” The chorus reportedly “entered into the singing with an enthusiasm that betokened thorough appreciation of the privilege given them to study such high-grade music under expert direction.”\footnote{“Begin Rehearsals for Persian Drama,” \textit{Asbury Park Evening Press}, July 10, 1917, 8.} But by then the Auditorium was competing with a great many other entertainments and amusements up and down the New Jersey shore: theater, vaudeville; motion pictures, dancing, baseball, and horse racing, all reachable by an increasingly mobile population. A dance (albeit an impromptu affair) was reportedly held at an Ocean Grove hotel, in flagrant violation of reigning prohibitions.\footnote{“Daring Young People at the Spray View,” \textit{Asbury Park Evening Press}, July 14, 1915, 9.} Proponents of Sunday baseball and movie theaters lobbied lawmakers for a repeal of New Jersey’s blue laws.\footnote{“Open Sunday Bills in the Legislature,” \textit{Ocean Grove Times}, 3 May 1916, 1.} The Monmouth County tax board battled the Camp Meeting Association for the right to tax the Grove’s beachfront, merry-go-round, and auditorium.\footnote{Association Won’t Pay License on Carroussel,” \textit{Asbury Park Evening Press}, 1 July 1915, 1.} Those who came to Ocean Grove seeking religious renewal must have seen their values and way of life as endangered.

1916 represented a return to old time religion, when evangelist Billy Sunday came to preach at the camp meeting and Homer Rodeheaver took charge of the music. Forgotten was the disapproval of Sweney’s energetic song leading of a generation earlier, as “Rody’s” flamboyant podium techniques held sway. A camp meeting service for men only, at which various groups were asked about their favorite hymns was typical, and:

the answers created some merriment, because the crowd quickly saw the appropriateness of the selections. The Spring Lake Firemen’s favorite was ‘Rescue the Perishing;’ the Ocean Grove Firemen chose ‘I Want to See Jesus, Don’t You?’ The Board of Trade, where “Rody” said the life saving station was located, called for ‘Throw Out the Life Line.’ The Soda Water Clerks selected ‘There Is a Fountain,’ which led to a short but earnest exhortation from Mr. Rodeheaver, not only to this...
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... delegation but to all the men present. ‘Over the Line’ was announced by the Asbury Park Fishing Club, while the always popular ‘Brighten the Corner’ proved to be appropriate for the Neptune Building and Loan Association. 54

He also followed in the footsteps of his predecessors in offering his own musical publications for sale. Rodeheaver, who appeared with Sunday from 1909 to 1929, began publishing song books in 1910. These, along with other mementos of the evangelistic campaigns, were sold to revival attendees. 55 At Ocean Grove “Rody” busily set about “organizing a choir for the Camp meeting week and urging the singers to buy a copy of the new song book that he has just published.” 56

When Ocean Grove celebrated its golden jubilee in 1919, Rev. Aaron Ballard, who had been part of the Camp Meeting Association from the beginning, was still President. During the half-century of Ocean Grove’s existence, the main body of the church became increasingly uncomfortable with the holiness movement and with the camp meetings promoting it. While many seekers after entire sanctification had separated from their mainstream Methodist brethren and formed other denominations during the early years of the 20th century, holiness thought still had many adherents within the body of the church and holiness meetings remained a part of Ocean Grove’s summer program. Ocean Grove was, in fact, still working to accommodate the preferences and convictions of a religiously diverse, but still overwhelmingly Methodist following. Musically, this “Mecca of Methodism” gave them a unique opportunity to indulge many aspects of their tastes. They could sing hymns and gospel songs from morning until night, either in organized meetings of various sizes, or in informal gatherings in tents and cottages. They could participate either as performers or spectators in presentations of the great oratorios. They could hear many of the most accomplished virtuoso artists and the most popular concert bands of their time. Methodist historian Russell E. Richey has written that the camp meeting was the means by which Methodism could evolve while appearing to remain the same. Ocean Grove’s music certainly reflected the parallel existence of those simultaneous states. The culture of hymn and gospel song-singing that persisted throughout the first fifty years of the community’s existence gave an impression of permanence. Even the new hymns remained, in a sense, familiar, since neither their poetic imagery nor their tonal language strayed from tried and true formulas. Against this background of apparent immutability, residents were free to enjoy magnificent oratorios, splendid solo concerts, and lavish spectacles, all the while fulfill-

55 Some idea of the potential profitability of the venture may be gained from considering that 50,000 copies of a 1915 song book were sold during Billy Sunday’s Philadelphia campaign, according to Lyle Dorsett’s Billy Sunday and the Redemption of Urban America (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 118. The cover price of 1915’s Songs for Service was 5 cents ($3.00 per 100).
ing Ocean Grove’s mission, as stated in its charter, “to provide opportunities for spiritual birth, growth, and renewal through worship, education, cultural and recreational programs for persons of all ages in a Christian seaside setting.”