

Salem Camp Meeting:
A Theater of Family Memory

Nathaniel Kendell-Taylor
Bradd Shore

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BREAKING AWAY

Staying connected is the new problematic for the American middle-class family as the family struggles to adapt to rapid changes in communication and information technologies and to changing scheduling practices at work, home and school.¹ Cell phones and internet messaging are replacing more traditional forms of direct communication, rendering the idea of “keeping in touch” increasingly ironic. The “latch-key kid” has become the norm for many middle-class families and the “stay-at-home mom” has become increasingly rare. Like their parents, accumulating activities has become a new form of status activity for children of middle-class families, and the “over-scheduled child” has become the subject of concern in parenting magazines and television talk-shows. These changes, along with certain realities built into the idea of the American family, are making the production of “family culture” problematical and are challenging our sense of what it is to be a family.

The instability of our families is an American theme with a long tradition. The distinctive qualities of American family life have been shaped by both venerable traditions and novel circumstances. The United States began as a “settler society,” and the theme of breaking away from the ancestral motherland or fatherland have been identified as pervasive themes in American history and modern American life (Gorer 1948). The settler mentality has been a key component of our collective identity. For middle-class families, modern economic conditions have added to this tradition of self-fashioning and moving on an emphasis on economic mobility which translates into physical mobility, as families move in response to corporate or business relocations or to opportunities for economic advancement.

THE MEANING OF HOME

Where geographic relocation means economic upward mobility, physical displacement of families is often positively (thought ambivalently) valued, linked to notion of progress, development and self-improvement. This value link between physical displacement and upward mobility creates a complex relationship between Americans desires to have a place that is our home and a yearning to constantly keep moving out and away. From *On the Road*, to *Travels With Charlie*, to *Field of Dreams* to *Home Alone* American literature and film are replete with stories that simultaneously valorize leaving home and returning home. So complex and ambivalent are American associations with “home” that we might wonder aloud what home actually means in the American middle-class context.

The meaning of home for Americans varies, of course, depending on individual biography, but it is also a function an individual’s stage of life and where he or she is in the developmental cycle of the family (Goody 1958). In different contexts, home is where I am living now, the place where I have resided for the longest period of time, the place that we originally come from. Home may be something remembered in the past, or something imagined for the future. Home is a place, a sense of comfort, an imagined or remembered community, or anyplace I hang my hat or put my stuff. For some, “going home” has an ultimate sense of a life after death, and this sense of home as permanent displacement from family is built into the American uses of “home” for funeral parlors or old-age homes. These varied and conflicting senses of “home” are all tied to the distinctive mobility of the American middle-class family, and the settler history of the United States. The inherent contradiction between “remembering home” (home as nostalgic) and “making home” (home as an ongoing refashioning of the self through dislocation) creates a situation in which individuals are expected to strike out on their own,

creating their own place, while at the same time being constantly reminded that they come from some specific location and have strong connections with this place. How do we reconcile these conflicting ideas of home? How do we create a situation where we can experience a feeling of home that is not discontinuous?

FAMILY CULTURE

It is useful to consider the importance of “family culture” in the lives of middle-class families. Particularly in urban and suburban settings, families are often relatively autonomous entities, living in pseudo-communities where relationships between neighbors are tenuous, short-lived or lacking in the kind of multiplexity of relations that families develop in small towns. Close relations among neighbors may develop as a kind of mutual aid society for children. And there may be considerable community oversight and influence over the look and maintenance of the house and yard (Perin 1988). Yet what goes on inside the home is understood as a private matter, and family culture is to a large degree a family matter, not the business of the encompassing community. Parents have the primary responsibility for producing not just a family but also a family culture, a distinctive set of practices, values and traditions which, ideally, provide a coherent environment for “raising a family.”

The idea of family culture presents problems in the context of the American family. The American family is expected to generate its own identity, semi-independent of the particular family culture from which each parent emerged. The production of family culture is a long-term project, generally negotiated by a couple or produced by a single-parent out of the resources and memories each parent brings from their past, plus new and emergent conditions specific to the new family situation over time. Families may often develop in communities far from that of either parent’s own childhood. And families differ dramatically in the degree of confluence or divergence of the ethnic, religious, or regional traditions brought by each parent. While maintaining something of the traditions of either parent’s natal family cultures, each new family must forge some conception of their own distinct unit.

This production of family culture is often not a self-conscious process, but it is an important part of the history of each family unit. And though it is an essential part of American family life, it is not an automatic process, but is dependent upon the quantity and quality of communication among family members, and is powerfully affected by the multiplex demands on family members from school, the workplace, and the community. The production of family culture becomes especially difficult as families see less and less of each other due to conflicting schedules, and the increasing demands of work, school and the demands of planned activities on children and parents both.

Producing a family culture is concretely connected to the problematic of “home.” As the American family must move on and out away from the nostalgic conception of each parent’s home, it becomes vital that this new group, with its synthesis of multiple existing conceptions of family, form its own home and culture. So we are forced to form something new while constantly experiencing the yearning for a place that once existed but is now forever lost in our mythic pasts. And while confronted with this apparent paradox the family must deal with new situations in which this already problematic construction is further complicated by facts and conditions of modernity. This reconciliation between individual family culture and the desire for a continuity with the past will constitute the majority of the following discussion.

HOME-COMING RITUAL

This essay will examine an example of one American institution that responds to this paradoxical experience of home: “the homecoming reunion.” Home-comings and reunions are an important part of the American ritual landscape. For American families, holidays like Christmas, Passover, Kwanza, Thanksgiving and landmark birthday celebrations are especially important occasions for dispersed family members to come together and give the dispersed and extended family a brief moment of actuality.

Reunions take on their importance from the fact that, while Americans talk about their families in ways suggesting that they are an important conceptual basis of individual identity, the typical middle-class family is actually an evanescent entity, with a limited life-span, constantly aiming to propel its children out of the natal home to form distinct families of their own. Given that the middle-class family unit in the United States is over time more an imagined than a realized community, ritualized enactments of family community are particularly important for many Americans.

This essay focuses on the importance of an annual home-coming event in the lives of a group of families who trace their roots to two semi-rural (but rapidly urbanizing) counties 40 miles east of Atlanta. Salem Camp Meeting is a venerable example of the Methodist camp meeting tradition. Since 1828, families have been assembling in the heat of the late Georgia summer for a week of sermons, communal prayer and bible-classes in a context of “down-home cooking,” and family fellowship. The setting is a beautiful campground in the town of Salem, Georgia. This is a story of a relatively successful experiment in a religiously scaffolded family reunion ritual that appears to have an extraordinary effect on regulars.

Understanding why anthropologists interested in studying working family dynamics would focus on a religious revival is important to explain before beginning this paper which seeks to explore the family culture and family memory dimensions of Salem Camp Meeting. This project was conceptualized during interviews and conversations with members of the campground community while conducting research for a larger more long term research project for the Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American life on family ritual. During these formal and informal conversations for the larger project with middle-class families from Newton County, people, upon hearing that research was focusing on the creation and maintenance of family culture through ritual, would frequently bring up Salem camp meeting. It became almost expected after detailing our project that we would hear “Oh, well you need to go to Salem,” or “You’re studying family? Well why haven’t you been over to Salem yet?” Having never heard of Salem and not having any background on the subject of Camp Meetings these comments were initially perplexing. Why did these people find a religious revival to be of such importance to a study aimed at revealing the functions and dimensions of ritual in the modern southern family?

We were compelled to find out more and possibly attend one of these week long rituals. By questioning various people who knew about the event and were repeated attendees as well as conducting research on the religious genre of camp meeting, we discovered many interesting dimensions of the ritual. We hoped that in studying this event we would be able to add valuable insight to our broader research project and gain a better understanding of the effects of family ritual and its place in the lives of the evolving modern family.

Salem Camp Meeting is a religious revival, but it is more than that. It is also a large-scale family reunion in which “family” means both one’s own kin-group and a larger body of

friends and congregants who are regular attendees at the annual reunion. This fusing of religious and familial elements is not restricted to the Salem Camp Meeting but is characteristic of traditional Methodist revivals. The link is clear to many campers. One woman said “Salem is how we remember family...” while another emphasized its importance by stressing “We wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

ONE OF THE OLDEST

Salem Camp Meeting has been taking place in Newton County since 1828 which makes it one of the oldest Methodist camp meetings in the nation. It began as a meeting of a group of farmers who traveled to renew their spirit and faith in God after the harvest had been taken in. They would come in covered wagons and set up tents for a week with other farming families. During this week they would focus their time and attention on worshiping God and affirming their beliefs in the Methodist religion.

This tradition of camp meetings actually began with interdenominational revivals in the Southeast (most notably in the Kentucky area). (Eslinger 1999) These preliminary gatherings were a key part of the religious awakening that occurred in what was then the American west. They were a response to a general decline in interest and membership in churches in this newly settled area. At this time there was tremendous conflict between the denominations of Christianity over issues such as slavery and ways of attracting new members and ministers. This conflict caused a general malaise and caused church attendance to reach dangerously low numbers. Camp meeting became a successful way of bringing these divergent groups together as well as inspiring (through the use of evangelical preaching and charismatic worship) the youth and attracting new members to the church.

These meetings attracted large numbers of participants and consisted of a week-long gathering where preachers from the three main denominations of the area (Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists) would come and speak (often simultaneously) to the crowds. Initially there was little order to these gatherings in terms of scheduling and the organization of space. (Eslinger 1999) Due to the incredible number of people who would come to these events as well as the differences in style between the denominations, the groups eventually split up and conducted their own respective meetings. However, themes of community, *communitas* and cohesion remained along with other structural and organizational elements. Over time there emerged a definitive form to these events, and the structure of these meetings at the turn of the 19th century is very similar to the present day Salem Camp Meeting.

While camp meeting is a very real and immediate part of each year for regulars, it is also a kind of imagined community, a nostalgic reenactment of a mythic community from time-past. The participants today pride themselves on the meeting’s power to re-create the simple act of families gathering and partaking in religious worship in an environment where all else is pushed aside and (for the week) forgotten. In other words, the event seems most obviously to be an attempt at re-creating a mythic past time. Today most of the families are not farmers but instead are middle to upper middle class working families from around the Atlanta area. A number of families that have moved away from Georgia return each year from as far away as California, attempting to pass on the Salem tradition to the next generation.

The worship and preaching at the week long event is said to be less charismatic and evangelic today than it was at the time of the formation of the Camp Meeting genre. However, other changes have purposefully been limited in a deliberate attempt to “freeze a bit of a way of

life.” Entire extended families come together as they did in the past, and focus on religion by immersing themselves in church activities and services (two services and a bible study take place every day of the week).

The religious preaching that takes place presently at Salem also harkens back to the time period in which the event began. Preachers still have the same (while less intense) sense of competition that existed at such early grounds as Cane Ridge (where preachers actually roamed through the crowd and preached simultaneously in an attempt to attract new members to their church). (Eslinger 1999) Each year a Methodist minister is invited to preach, and he (for they are always men) is paired with a Baptist or Presbyterian preacher, so that the good-natured “dueling sermons” that alternate over the week engage not just personal but also denominational rivalries. All of these features of Salem seem to be deliberately maintained and crafted with the aim returning to the some past time and creating an experience that is clearly distinct from that of their everyday modern lives.

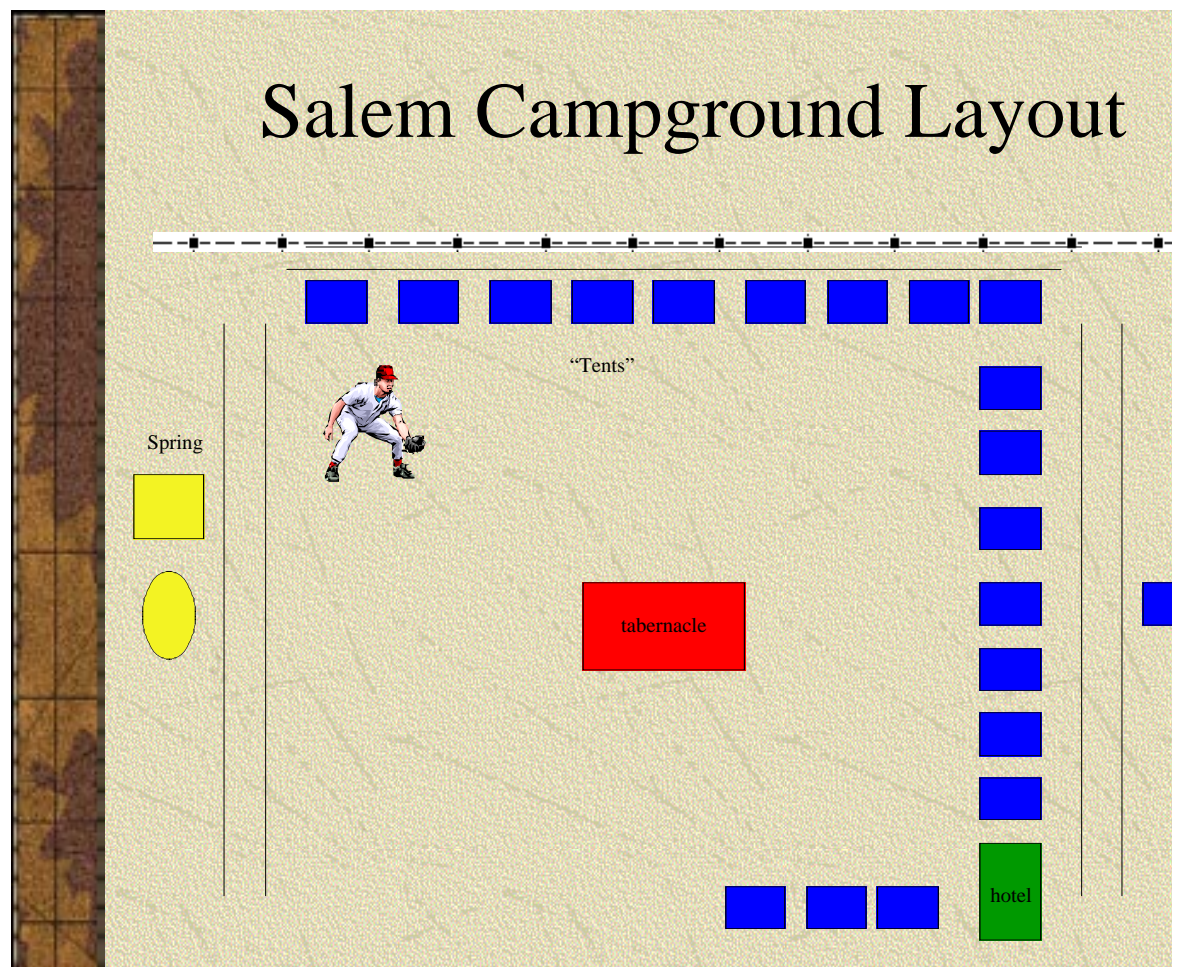
OUR QUESTIONS

After gaining a preliminary understanding of the Meeting’s history and aspects of its role as a recreation of a mythic past time, we formulated a series of research questions that, after better understanding the event, we hoped to answer. These questions were aimed at reaching a measure of clarity as to the structures of the ritual and their effects on those who were participating. First of all, what role was Camp Meeting playing in the lives of these middle-class families? Why did the Meeting produce such powerful feelings of emotional commitment? How does the Camp Meeting systematically orchestrate certain kinds of meaning-creation and memory effects? And finally, what contradictions are entailed in the attempt to recreate a mythic past for one week a year?

To begin answering these questions we first need to look at the physical layout of Salem campground and the symbolic components that this layout reveals. Since the beginning, the genre of camp meeting has had a clear and observable spatial organization. The first religious revivals (which later became the institution of Camp Meeting) were characterized initially by a certain lack of order and a confusion of spaces (Eslinger 1999). This early lack of order, however, was the cause of problems for the participants. There was little opportunity for worshipers to sleep due to the fact that (because of a lack of cabins or even tents) the only places to sleep were where worship took place. This meant that sleep was both infrequent and poor. The fact that these early meetings lacked a defined schedule also created problems. This meant that worship could spring up any time (which obviously made sleep difficult and fragmented). There were also problems with the profusion of promiscuous behavior, described mainly as the chicanery of married men (Eslinger 1999). The appearance of this behavior was most likely due to a combination of the lack of enclosed sleeping spaces and the fact that there was such a large group of men and women placed together in a time where people lived very secluded and private lives.

Figure 1 Spatial Layout of Salem Campground

As the men in charge of these meetings began to realize these problems were a direct result of a lack of organization and planning they began to formulate schedules. This organization of time and the space of the meeting grounds was designed to ensure that the week of the meeting would run smoothly and these earlier problems would be eliminated. They began by separating the place of worship from the space where families would sleep and relax. They also came up with a clear schedule that restricted worship to certain times of the day and determined times for other activities. This schedule and the organization of space are very similar to that which can be seen at Salem and in other modern Methodist or interdenominational meetings.



THE ORGANIZATION OF SPACE AND ITS SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE AT SALEM

Fig. 1, above, is a schematic representation of the spatial layout of Salem Campground. At the spatial and spiritual center of Salem lies the Tabernacle. It is in this structure that two religious services and a bible class take place daily throughout the week of the meeting. This particular tabernacle is over a hundred years old and is listed as a National Historic Landmark. Its general design is characteristic of tabernacles found at many Methodist campgrounds. The floor of the tabernacle remains covered with wood chips as it has since the time of its

construction. These wood chips, or “sawdust” as it is termed by the events participants, is an important symbol at Salem and is a concrete reminder of the tradition and historical power of the place. The structure of this religious site is of particular symbolic importance. The primary characteristic is a lack of walls. The structure is little more than a roof supported by a system of column-like structures that runs around the tabernacle’s perimeter. This makes it possible both for everyone in the tabernacle to see the entire grounds and, at the same time, for those people not in the tabernacle to see directly into the structure. Symbolically, it allows the religious transcendence experienced during services or worship to spill out into the other areas of the grounds.

As we move out from the center of the grounds (this feature of radiating circular layers is key to the construction of meaning that is derived from the spatial structure of Salem), we come to the open field that lies between the tabernacle and the individual family tents. This field of grass and intermittent trees is primarily the arena for the sports and games of children. In addition to the water fights and bike riding that takes place in this open area, there is also a hyper-ritualized (meaning that repetition has become valuable in its own right) softball game. This activity takes place daily at four o’clock and has occurred in this manner for many years. Kids (from the ages of approximately ten to eighteen) come together and pick teams each afternoon. The younger kids play as hard as they can and with as much effort and skill as possible while the older contingent plays in mock seriousness, allowing the younger players to hit the ball and round the bases. It is clear from talking to these softball players that winning is not the important thing (most players can’t even remember which team won the game that was played on the previous day), rather it is the act of playing the game that resonates with importance. The tremendous importance placed on the fact that the game is played in the same spot and in the same way that it has always been is also important to note.

The field extends to the open front porches which are an important feature of each of the tents. These tents form the third layer in the concentric structure of Salem space. While these fixtures are called tents they are, in fact, rustic and minimally furnished cabins. The use of the word “tent” is interesting considering that these structures are clearly not literally tents. The use of the word tent indexes the original Salem campers who came and stayed in tents. While the residences are no longer tents there are clear attempts to keep most of the cabins as rustic and basic as possible to achieve the re-creation of a sense of the mythic old south. In many cases the floors are concrete covered in sawdust, and even in the slightly more updated tents a lack of furnishings, insulation and, in all but a few cases, air conditioning is purposefully maintained. Each of the structures is designed with a similar layout (the two exceptions being the two tents which were built over the past several years and have different layouts due to modern building codes and restrictions).

Each tent has an open front porch where people sit for hours and tell stories to various members of their individual family as well as members of the extended community of Salem residents. The porches are very public spaces even though they represent the beginning of each family’s tent. These porches are spaces that members of the group that comes to Salem can feel free to visit and sit for hours immersed in both individual family and Salem family stories.

Beyond these porch areas, the individual family space begins. There is normally a long hallway that you look down upon entering a tent. It is on the walls of these long hallways that families tend to put up pictures and other historic Salem memorabilia. Branching off from this central hallway are bedrooms which are often divided by hanging sheets or plywood walls

that rise just above eye level. Continuing back towards the rear of the tent you find the kitchen with a door that opens on to the back of the campground. The kitchen is where the family eats and spends time together (but where other members of the Salem community do not normally enter). The structure and organization of space in these tents along with their existence as relics of the past, are key aspects of the experience of Salem for those who participate. Later we will discuss the various ways in which the space of the tent and the building as an object are central concepts in the creation of meaning and family memory.

In this same ring of space we find the Salem Hotel. It is a fully functional hotel complete with a restaurant and air conditioning. People who come to Salem and want to stay but do not have access to a tent rent rooms at the hotel for the week. The hotel, unlike the other areas of the camp ground, is open and used all year round (the tents, with the exception of one, are used only during this one week in August). While it is open year round, the hotel does the clear majority of its business during the week of Salem camp meeting. It is interesting that the occupants of the hotel have a clear conception that their identity at Salem is different from those participants who stay in tents. During interviews with these hotel residents, it was clear that they wanted a family tent but for various reasons were unable to procure one (either not enough family to fill a tent or the fact that the tents are in great demand and understandably have a very slow turnover rate). These people recognize the fact that having a tent to stay in is an integral part of the Salem experience. For this reason, they feel that their identity is not at the heart of the Salem week. As if by staying in the hotel they are less a part of the ritual of camp meeting. It therefore becomes clear that much of a family's identity at Salem is invested in and derived from the tent that they occupy and the history of the structure. Without this prominent Salem symbol and identifier, the hotel residents have the feeling that they are occupying a peripheral role.

The next layer of Salem's physical space is what used to be a second row of tents and now contains just one new tent. Some campers believe this lone tent in back of the others presages the re-emergence of this second row. Before a fire in the 1920s there was a row of tents behind the first row. The ambiguous role that the proprietor of this new tent feels she occupies is important to mention as it reveals a key aspect of the relation between the various layers of Salem's physical space. Closeness to the center of the campground clearly counts for a lot. During the process of setting up interviews with the Salem tenters, the women living in the tent on the second row approached us with an obvious anxiety about being excluded from the interview process because of the location of her tent. She seemed to worry that her status as a tenter was somehow compromised (at least to our perception) by the position of her tent. This can be interpreted in several ways but most obviously it emphasizes the importance of seeing and being seen at Salem, of having a connection to the tabernacle and the open field via a direct line of sight. It also highlights the importance of "being viewed" as having a tent at Salem, as a special and valued status, and being recognized by the Salem community and seen as an official Salem tenter. This tenter stressed to us the importance she placed on building a tent for her grandchildren. Her children, she told us, had not attached themselves to Salem in the way she had hope they would, and she was determined that through this new tent her grandchildren would attach themselves to the place and pass the tradition along to their own children some day.

The road that runs into Salem is another important feature of the ritual's physical space. Up to about fifteen years ago the road was actually a fairly quiet country road. However, its appearance has changed dramatically due to the rapid expansion and development of the city of Atlanta, and the emerging status of Newton and Rockdale counties as bedroom communities of

the great Atlanta metropolitan area. Presently the road is a major highway running through Newton county that connects the area to the city of Atlanta. The issue of area development is a major point of concern of the people who live in Newton county (many Salem participants are residents of this county). For many Salem participants it is this road that symbolizes the area's development. They experience the sensation of going back in time as they come off what is now a major highway onto the static grounds of Salem. It serves as a symbol to which the time and rhythms of Salem can be compared and contrasted. And it clearly sets the Salem space and experience apart from that of the everyday lives of the Salem participants. The road comes to represent the other, standing for the development and change that these people are effectively escaping for the week.

The status of the road as a clear boundary between modern space and Salem ritual space was underscored when we watched an accident on the road from the porch of one of the tents where we were interviewing family members. A screech of breaks was followed by a crashing sound and, after a quick check to make sure it was not a serious injury-accident, campers sat back and shook their heads, saying that this was an all-too-common event nowadays at Salem, and how sorry everyone was to see the traffic buildup around the campground. The distinct impression we gained was that we were watching this accident from a separate space, and that the road was, for the week, part of a world campers had temporarily left behind.

A final feature of the camp ground is a spring that exists on the other side of the road. This water source is the reason that the original tenters chose Salem as the location of their revival. However, after running water was installed in the Salem residences, the spring lost its primary practical function. Fresh water springs have always been an important practical and symbolic resource at Methodist camp meetings, and though the spring has, since the 1930s, been replaced as a water source by piped in water, it remains a key symbol of the Salem experience. People continue to make the pilgrimage across the road to visit Salem's roots and history. Today the spring has become the site of a type of pseudo baptism for some Salem families. Parents take their children to the spring and allow them to play and pour water on themselves in an attempt to infuse the young with the spirit of Salem. This seems to be a conscious attempt to get some of the power of camp meeting "in their blood" (an analogy often used by campers when talking about how the importance of Salem camp meeting is instilled and connected with the idea of family identity).

LAYERS OF FAMILY TIES

Having laid out the organization of Salem's space and its key features, we turn to a discussion of the ways in which these spaces orchestrate important symbolic ideas of family. The layers of Salem, radiating out from the physical and spiritual center, create three layers of "family" ties at Salem. The first, lying at the center, is the Spiritual Family. This domain of family is maximally inclusive and is defined by the tabernacle. It includes maximally all those who come (even those who do not stay) to Salem for religious services during the week long event, and clearly regular attendance enhances one's sense of membership. Over the week the greater spiritual family can include close to 8,000 people and has an open and inclusive feel. Again and again during interviews we would hear the statement that "anyone" can come to these services at Salem, and the original Methodist orientation of the Camp Meeting has gradually given way to a more ecumenical and encompassing sense of the community. It appears that Salem participants conceptualize this group as including everyone who wishes to come together

and worship. It can be described as “one big family of God”.

As we move out from the tabernacle we see what is referred to by Salem residents as the Salem Family. This domain of family includes all of those people who actually stay on the grounds for the week. At this level, the conception of family is more exclusive than that of the spiritual family which resides at the center of the grounds. The Salem family is located in the open fields and on the open front porches of the individual family tents. The feeling at this level is one of a group of people who have been coming together at Salem for a long string of uninterrupted years and share the common experience of being a Salem camper. It is a single grouping, free of individual distinctions. People who are part of this classification know each other and are free to move about Salem’s open spaces and engage in friendly familiar interactions. The central site of this social family is the front porches of the tents and the hotel, which are welcoming sites of self-conscious Southern hospitality for all (including itinerant anthropologists wandering around the campground with recording equipment).

Finally, the third layer of family at Salem is the Family Local, the distinct family units that make up the larger community at Salem. This layer of family is located within the confines of the individual family tents that form the outermost region of Salem’s concentric circular organization of space. At this level, the conception of the Salem family as one large group, free from individual distinctions, is overshadowed by the view that the grouping is actually a collection of autonomous family units that exist in the closed spaces within the tents. In this space the larger Salem family is not free to enter. The tents are the domains of distinct kin-groups bound together by self-conscious ties of blood and marriage. Occasionally, very close family friends will be invited to join a family in its tent for the week. In one case, two families agreed to purchase a tent together and have become symbolically related through common residence in the tent. It is within this space that distinct family events (such as meals and the display of family pictures) take place. These three domains of family are reliant of the orchestration of two types of space throughout Salem campground.

A CLASSIC DURKHEIMIAN SENSE

The open spaces of the tabernacle, field and front porches are important in creating the inclusive and accepting feeling that dominates the first two domains of family (spiritual and Salem family). This pervasive feeling relies on the sense that the spiritual community is without discrimination and is absolutely accepting. The fact that there are no solid spacial boundaries between the spiritual and Salem domains allows for the secular groups outside of the tabernacle to become invested with these inclusive elements of the congregation. In other words, the structure of the grounds is such that the feeling pervading within the tabernacle during religious services is allowed to emanate into the second layer of Salem’s spatial construction. This creates a classic Durkheimian sense of religious/social solidarity, where the distinction between spiritual, Salem and individual families becomes blurred. Family Local and the Salem Family each become invested with the power of the Spiritual Family, while the congregation reinforces its sense of being “family” from the power of Local Family relations at the Campground. This conjunction of spiritual and local family is what makes Camp Meetings distinct from most other protestant revivals, where the family unit is less stressed. The end result is a strong feeling of *communitas* within all three layers of family at Salem. The week long ritual enables a transcendence and allows participants to conceptualize their existence as belonging to some order larger than that of the individual.

In contrast to these open spaces there are clearly areas that can be characterized as closed and private. Here we are primarily referring to areas within the individual family tents. It becomes clear after a brief examination of a key architectural component that privacy is a premium in this area of Salem. Remembering that this ritual takes place in central Georgia in mid-August, the absence of large open windows might seem initially perplexing. It is actually the need for a setting that isolates an inner and distinct family unit that causes the participants to keep windows draped and closed. They seem to place enough significance in the maintenance of a private family environment that they are willing to suffer humid, hot and stuffy living conditions. This common suffering actually functions as a cohesive tool in its own right. By sharing the discomfort of heat and humidity, the family laments together and is bonded through this sharing of intense experience. Because these tents house extended family members who may not see each other during the rest of the year, closing off the interiors of the tents provides a powerful experiential basis for local family identification and bonding. The closed space of the family tents emphasizes the individual level of Salem families and creates a feeling that the large grouping of Salem residents is, in fact, a collection of distinct individual units. A situation is created where participants are able to experience both the feelings of exclusivity of a nuclear family and the feeling of a large transcendental religious unit.

These ideas of closed and open, or inclusive and exclusive are important not only to life during the week of Salem, but are also key components in the larger arena of Southern Life. Southern culture is famous for its emphasis on hospitality and community, but actually includes a strong sense of family autonomy and tendencies toward distrust of outsiders, not excluding neighbors. In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam has suggested that the American South, for all its stress on neighborliness and hospitality, evidences much less social capital between neighbors than other parts of the country (Putnam 2000). In the case of Salem, a sense of these ideas can be seen from an examination of the various symbolic spaces on the grounds and their physical manifestations vis-a-vis one another. While differences between these two sentiments are obvious, we must not forget the fact that both of these models make use of the idiom of family.

SALEM'S RITUAL ORGANIZATION

While Salem Camp Meeting may be viewed as a ritual in itself, the week is made up of smaller ritual components. Let us first look at the various religious rituals that take place during the week-long event. These religious rituals are, for most participants, a main focus of the event and they therefore account for much of Salem's ritual activity. Every day of the week begins with what is called Morning Watch. This event consist of the Salem bell next to the Tabernacle being rung and a group of people making their way around the camp ground singing hymns, saying prayers and finally raising an American flag in front of the tabernacle. The day therefore starts with a religious tone and the religious events appear throughout the day as cornerstones of the daily Salem schedule.

There are two services a day in the Tabernacle for the seven days of the meeting. In addition to these formal meetings there are daily bible study classes that take place in the tabernacle at 9:30 and run into the 11:00 am morning church service. In addition, the Sunday of the Salem week is known as "Big Sunday" and is the day when people from the community (even those who do not stay the week at the camp ground) come to attend what is regarded by most to be the most important service at the tabernacle. There is a communion on this day as well as several baptisms that are scheduled prior to the beginning of the week. The scheduling of these events remains static from year to year, and the church services are important markers for

the scheduling of other Salem activities (rituals such as the daily softball game and meal times).

One informant spoke of the regularity of this schedule and its function as a means of creating a distinctly “Salem feeling” week, “I was driving down here the other day with one of my girl friends who I used to go to camp meeting with when we were just little girls. An’ she looked at her watch and said that we’d better be getting there soon because it was time to wash up for evening service. An’ she and I hadn’t been to camp meeting in years.” Clearly, individual ritual events of Salem are important to the overall experience, and especially important to creating a distinctly Salem week are the church services and religious events.

Not only are these religious events highly ritualized in scheduling, but there is also a hyper-ritualized component to individual attendance at these events. Attendance is kept for the bible classes and church services for the children throughout the week. They are rewarded at the conclusion of the week for their attendance with a ribbon of a color that corresponds to the number of events that they attended. The majority of the kids that are of the age to receive a ribbon get a gold marker which indicates a perfect attendance record. It is clear that these hyper-ritualized events work to bring people together over the course of the week. It is also important to note that all of these religious events take place in the open areas (areas noted for their pervading feeling of inclusiveness) and it is clear that these rituals are associated with an inclusive sentiment.

SPORTS

In addition to these religious rituals there are many non-religious ritual events that take place throughout the week. A softball game takes place every day at four pm and has been an important feature of the camp experience for as long as many of the present day participants can remember. This game is incredibly rigid in its elements and primarily for this reason is clearly classifiable as a ritual. First of all, it is always played in exactly the same location. The game takes place right beside the road in the open field that lies between the tabernacle and the front porches of the tents. This location becomes important after the observer realizes that there is actually a new baseball field that lies behind the church right next to the grounds. It is obviously not actually the game that is the central to the event but, in fact, the meaning derived from the uninterrupted repetition and hyper-ritualization that is key to the event. The game goes on “just as it always has” even if other developments (like the presence of the busy road, which carries with it a certain degree of danger) make alternatives seem, at least to an outsider, attractive and practical.

Every afternoon sides are chosen by captains from a group of young adults and children ranging from approximately ten to twenty in age. The younger children play the game with optimal effort in an attempt to win while the older participants allow the younger ones to successfully make their way (with at least some success) around the bases. While the game is being played by these younger Salem generations the older camp meeting participants sit on their porches and watch the game while visiting with other tenters and exchanging stories and gossip. The softball game takes place in the open environs of the grounds and is successful in bringing the various generational groups together and allowing stories and memories to be rehashed and, in a sense, re-experienced. While the game is going on the participants are clearly functioning within the Salem family domain. At this level they are one big family participating as either players or spectators in this highly ritualized event.

FOOD

Food is another aspect of the week at Salem that is highly ritualized. Similar recipes and foods are eaten year after year, and cooking responsibilities are ritually dolled out by the matriarch of each tent. While take-out and convenience foods have appeared on the Campground in recent years, and while the African-American cooks that prepared the meals for some of the wealthier families in years past have disappeared, the idealized role of food at the campground is realized in ritual fashion on “Big Sunday.”² Every year the Big Sunday meal represents the pinnacle of the ritualization of food. It is on this day that the most traditional Salem foods are prepared. These dishes are predominantly southern mainstays with fried foods being the focus.³

Some of the larger families eat the Big Sunday meal outside their tents, in real tents or on tables placed on the grass. Members of the community that are not attending the camp meeting may be invited for dinner on Sunday as a token of family hospitality, but the dinner is a decidedly “family affair” with an emphasis on extended family members. This is a time for families to display the extent of their wider family links and the power of Salem to unify dispersed family. Big Sunday is generally the only instance (with the exception of the ritual of after-service home-made ice cream parties) when meals are eaten outside of the family tent and may include members beyond the individual tenting family.

Generally, Salem meals are eaten in the dining room of the tent which is often the backmost space of the house (in the depths, so to speak, of the private family space). Therefore, unlike the religious ritual events, this instance (the use and ritualization of food) does not create the permeable feeling of inclusiveness but rather functions as a means of distinction and a way of separating individual families from the larger collective. The fact that meals are eaten in the farthest back area (the most private area of each families’ tent) of the tent space serves to further emphasize the private and exclusive nature of meals. Meals clearly pull families together and at dinnertime it is not rare, when walking the grounds, to see absolutely no one participating in the Salem activities of visiting porches or standing around watching the children play. Dinner time is still very much a family ritual at Salem and serves as a clear ritual marker distinguishing between the various units that, as a collective, make up the inclusive Salem family.

MARRIAGE AND ROMANCE

Rituals that bring together families (with members of all ages) and serve as a type of community family reunion can often function as a meeting ground for young people of opposite sexes. Due to the fact that these families come annually to Salem with the primary purpose of concentrated spiritual worship, families feel that Salem is an excellent place for their kids to meet other young people and possibly find a partner for marriage (since a vast majority of the families that come are of similar religious backgrounds and share many beliefs and values). The fact that the kids of Salem see each other annually with a very concentrated exposure creates an almost summer camp feeling with respect to romance. This summer camp like situation is another reason why Salem tends to be a place rich with innocent romances and courting.

During our interviews we found that many of the couples that are now running tents actually met at Salem. There also seems to be a premium placed on these “Salem marriages,” as if meeting on these sacred grounds somehow lends added piety to the bond of marriage. While Salem does function as a meeting place and a site of romance for its youth, the event also plays an important role in the lives of newly married couples, as it is central to the family identity and

structure of these Salem families.

What is of great interest to us, as we are studying family culture and the place of ritual in the modern American family, is the way that Salem (through its established and rigid gender roles and labor patterns) actually works to solidify the family unit when new members are introduced (in this case through marriage). First it is useful to lay out a view of the actual divisions of labor that are and have been an important part of the Salem ritual (these are patterns and as can be expected there are certain exceptions to these categories and divisions). The men at Salem are primarily in charge of the upkeep of the tent from year to year (which can be a hefty responsibility considering the houses are largely unattended for 51 weeks of the year). Women are responsible for the day-to-day tasks which include cooking, cleaning, organizing activities and looking after the children. One informant described the situation as one in which “The men take care of the business end of the campground, and the women take care of the nurturing of the campground: Taking care of the children, teaching the classes, doing the crafts and doing t-shirts.” It is central to the examination of the division of gender roles that, with very few exceptions, the women stay on the grounds for the entire week of the Salem ritual. Men, on the other hand, often leave during the day and go to their regular jobs. Keeping in mind that most of the families that come to Salem are dual income earners this becomes significant. Women are expected to take the week off from their everyday jobs in order to run the tents and take care of the family for the week: the women of the families are at Salem dramatically more than the men. The differences between the roles of men and women at Salem are no secret, and were mentioned by several informants. Here is how one of the informants put it:

[My husband will] come up for Sunday dinner. So, that is the contrast. It's like complete and total opposites. And then there are men that ___ it's like the men thing is weird. It's like usually they don't take off work. So they have to go into work. And then they are just here in the evenings. They are not here all day. So, that's another issue too that women that marry into camp meeting usually become much more involved in it.

They move into the center of it?

Right. They become very attached to it more so than their husband, who grew up here. Because they are here all week. They are here all day and that makes a big difference.

Many informants that we spoke to vividly described the first trip to Salem made by a new wife or husband. The new family member's reaction to Salem is incredibly important because so much of the existing family's identity is bound up in this event. People would tell stories (in a manner that was at simultaneously jocular and serious) about bringing a potential spouse to Salem as a way of determining if it was proper (meaning that the new spouse liked Salem and would include the ritual in their lives) or ill-advised (if the potential spouse rejected the annual ritual).

The relationship that a new spouse has with Salem depends to some extent on the gender of the new member of the family. Due to the fact that women are more visible and play a larger

role in the day to day running of the tent, it is very important that a new wife take to and embrace the Salem ritual. The new wife "...becomes very attached to it, more so than their husband, who grew up here. Because they are here all week. They are here all day and that makes a big difference." In this light it would be more difficult for a man who is a lifetime Salem participant to marry a woman who rejected the ritual than it would be for a woman of a Salem family to marry a man who wanted no part in the event. This creates a very interesting situation for a new wife in a Salem family. In adopting and participating centrally in Salem she has a means of gaining immediate acceptance and incorporation into the identity and structure of her new family. She essentially "...moves to the center of it (the Salem ritual and in a sense the larger structure of the family)." On the other side, if a new wife were to reject Salem or decline to participate in the ritual, it would be very hard for her to find a place and a way into the structure of her new family. Looking at new husbands, Salem becomes less important as a means of entering into and being accepted by a new family. In having the role of being the full time worker and part-time Salem participant the husband occupies a much more periphery place than that of the wife. Because of this role the man does not have to fully embrace the Salem ritual to become part of the identity of his new family. One informant very observantly stated that "...you're going to find that there are not many men that get it (Salem) in their blood." Even if the new husband totally rejects Salem and does not attend, his absence is much less noticed and he always has the excuse of placing his every day job as a priority above attending Salem.

In order for Salem to work, women participants often feel obliged to take vacation during Salem Camp Meeting, while their husbands or others may not.

There are a lot of working women here. They take this week off. But the men don't?

Well, no. . . . I think that women feel the responsibility of the children. I mean, why would you bring a nanny down here with your children? And basically, the men- if the women went back to work and the men stayed here, the men couldn't do. We wouldn't necessarily trust the men to do it all. The men take care of the business end of the campground. And the women take care of the nurturing of the campground. Taking care of the children, teaching the classes, doing the crafts and doing t-shirts. Don't leave without a t-shirt.

SYSTEMATIC MEMORY EFFECTS

Thus far we have described and discussed the layout of Salem and looked at the specific rituals that contribute to the overall experience of camp meeting. We can now move on to an examination of the way that being on the grounds and participating in this ritual actually facilitates the formation of family memory and works as a means of establishing a powerful meaning and a narrative of family identity and continuity.⁴

Specifically relevant to this discussion is the way in which time is organized and structured. Earlier in this paper we mentioned that Salem seemed most obviously to be an attempt to re-create a mythic past time. For one week of the year, participants experience life

and family as it was 170 years ago. The scheduling and sense of time is another aspect of the past that Salem makes a deliberate attempt to re-establish. With a sense of the Old South with its small towns and close families comes a conception that time (during this mythic period) and days somehow passed at a slower pace. The conception is that people did not rush, instead they had time to sit and talk and remain in visiting mode for hours. This slow pace is actually built into the Salem ritual. While there are activities scheduled during the days there are always periods between these activities which are reserved specifically for inactivity. These periods of down time are spent on the porches telling stories and rehashing old Salem experiences (as they believe people have done at Salem since its beginning). One of the older campers put it this way:

I was just talking to another person, about my age, whose family has been coming out here for generations. Of course so many of them just go way back. We were just saying that this is the way that life in small communities this is the way an afternoon would be with people sitting on their porches and other people coming around and visiting. So what they've done here is in a way to try to freeze a bit of a way of life in a community that's gone from people's lives. And one week a year they can return.

The rhythm of Salem is another one of the many connections that the present tenters feel they retain with past members of Salem and their families. This connection and the maintenance of the various other “traditional” practices establishes a powerful sense of continuity, as the participants believe they are living the way their ancestors did. In this mode they feel connected to their past and see their place in a family structure with a powerful history and sense of tradition.

A second significant use of Salem as a memory tool is the way that Salem is clearly distinguished and distinct from the other 51 weeks of the year. While at Salem, participants engage in behavior that is clearly significant in part because it is so different from their day to day lives. The time at Salem is ritual time and is ritually marked by a beginning (the first service) and an ending (the candle light ceremony on the final night of the week). The fact that the time spent at Salem is such a departure from the every day lives of its participants creates a situation where the events that occur are highlighted in these people's memories. Some of the campers with whom we talked were very aware of this special ritual ability of Salem to alter time, and bring back a past time:

This is like a sacred place. You feel it. But, more than that, you've got the week. You can have a sacred space and not have the time to use it together. But, the fact that everybody carves a week out, this is, when does that exist in the world today? Where's there a week? That's what I think is really special. And, you probably couldn't do it for more than a week for practical reasons, but for one week. It's like one week in the year you go back to time zero, you know? A very powerful ritual thing.

There is no risk of confusing Salem memories with those of the rest of the year. Events that occur in the ritual sphere of Salem are so unique and distinct that people actually refer to them as “Salem memories” or “Salem stories.”

IDENTITY UPDATING

The organization of time and space at Salem serve as a framework for a kind of identity updating. The inexorable sense of getting older or of time moving on is a universal challenge for humans in framing their lives as meaningful. Salem provides a powerful arena and framework for articulating one's life, and it is not a coincidence that campers young and old were anxious to tell us how many years they have been attending Camp Meeting. Salem has clearly delineated age-based roles for every stage of life, and members can use Salem as a common reference point for updating their sense of who they are and who they are becoming in relation to Camp Meeting. Moreover, campers use these clear age-frame reference points as a way to not only see themselves at different stages of their lives, but as a way to connect themselves to children and grandchildren. The power of Salem Camp Meeting to promote these two kinds of identity updating was vividly expressed by several informants:

And it's funny because when you're young, you don't every think about that. I mean these kids out here now, anybody below the age of like 20 is flat out playing, having fun and milking it for all it's worth. You know, but when you get older you begin to see that and you know it, especially if you're prone to notice that kind of thing, which I am. You can't help but notice it. That it's like you think__is that so and so or is that their son? You know, that kind of thing. Especially when you're as old as I am because you know kids that I watched growing up have children now. I mean, you know. That's the way it works. And it has always been striking to me. Look at that picture. I've got all these little girls and my cousins, I've got pictures of all of them doing exactly the same thing that I was doing then. That is the thing about camp meeting. There is nothing like it. I can't think of anything like it.

Sometimes, I have to just get myself out of a daze almost. I can see things, you know, that I did, and how they are doing them. I think probably it means the meaning of Salem changes as you get older. Like it's probably real different for the kids, in some way, than it is for the parents.

TIME SCHEDULING

The sequential order of the schedule at Salem is another factor that sets "Salem time" apart from that of everyday life. It is quite clear that the scheduling of time in our own families is far from sequential. We all deal with issues of schedule conflicts, where multiple schedules of family members makes it impossible for certain meetings or time together to occur. Problems with multi-tasking (the scheduling of several tasks or events at the same time) also makes our family lives stressful. Events at Salem do not involve this same incidence of multiple overlapping activities. During any day there will be a progression of activities in which one event will be followed by a period of down time (porch or play time) and then another event or activity. The rhythm of each day at Salem is therefore different from that of day to day life. Because of this, events that occur during "Salem time" are highlighted and coded as Salem

memories. Also the fact that this sequential type of schedule enables entire family units to be together at the same time is significant.

In everyday life, events that become memories might only be experienced by one or two members of the family unit. These memories are questionably family memories (in that they are not shared by the entire family unit). However with all members present (as is the case at Salem), events of memorable nature are clearly and distinctly memories of the entire family. Therefore Salem's use of a highly sequential schedule creates a situation where the distinct rhythm of the day creates a unique situation where the entire family is together and events that transpire become ingrained clearly family memories.

The fact that the week's schedule does not change from year to year is another factor that contributes to Salem's powerful way with memory. In having a rigidly set schedule, the tenters are assured of several things. First of all, they can easily remember what happened in years past at any given time (through the knowledge of what events were going on and where). Secondly, the older participants are actually allowed to see their own childhoods and pasts being reenacted in front of them. This unchanging schedule truly creates a theater of memory. Participants are constantly reminded of their pasts as kids engage in the same activities they once did, and interact in similar ways. Not only are they able to see their memories played out in front of them, but the actors doing the reenacting are actually their children, grandchildren, or other related youth. This creates a truly unique situation where generational continuity is impossible to miss.

In the outside world with its changes in technology and other social forces, the worlds of parent (or more extremely grandparent) and child are so different that relating to one another in terms of experience is difficult (just think of the scripted parental lecture of "Well when I was your age..."). Where in the outside world there are huge gaps and continuity is fraught with problems, Salem presents a situation where experiences do not change and one generation's stories can blend seamlessly into the one before and the one to come. Families are left with a powerful feeling that even though they might not be able to keep up with the outside world of constant changes and modifications, there is a place where their kids play now as they themselves once did. One woman's statement captures the essence of this idea, "I've got all these little girls and my cousins, I've got pictures of all of them doing exactly the same thing that I was doing then. That is the thing about camp meeting. There is nothing like it."

HYPER RITUALIZATION

Clearly the structure of the Salem schedule and its sense of rhythm contributes to the event's ability to create meaning and family memories, but another force that contributes to the week's power is its "hyper-ritualization." By hyper-ritualized we are referring to the fact that value is placed on repetition purely for its own sake. In other words, part of Salem's significance as an event is connected to the fact that it has been taking place in a relatively unchanged form for the past 170 years. As each year that includes a week at Salem passes, individuals begin to see more and more merit in their attendance for the simple reason that they have been doing it for so long. Their attendance becomes important because it has been repeated so many times before that the event becomes part of both an individual's personal sense of identity as well as their conception of family identity and memory.

This value of repetition, along with the inevitable establishment of a Salem component of identity, establishes a feeling of continuity with the individual family's past as well as the history

of the institution. Salem becomes part of who they are both as a family and as Christians. Therefore, the prospect of missing a year of camp meeting poses a serious threat to the individual's perception of identity. The line heard most often when meeting people at Salem is "My name is ___ and I have been coming to Salem for ___ years.", followed closely by "I haven't missed a year in my ___ years coming here." It is crucial that this connection between repetition and identity not gloss over the importance of repetition in terms of the religious beliefs of these people. It is beyond question that many participants have come to view the event as a necessary means of spiritual renewal and affirmation in the Lord. In this light, continued repetition becomes a key component of the individual's spiritual identity. One respondent summed up the way that repetition creates a situation where attendance is paramount, "I know that if I can just make it to Salem everything will be all right."

MEMORY OBJECTS AT SALEM

The tent, for a Salem participant, is not merely a place to sleep for one week of the year. Because these tents are passed down through families, they accumulate intense meaning. The actual structure of each family's tent is somewhat of a memory album in its own right. Most of the tents at Salem are over 100 years old and have, over the years been maintained and updated quite frequently. Each repair to, or new installation in the tent becomes encoded with some memory of who did the construction and the circumstances surrounding its necessity. In this way families are able to look at the inside and outside of their tents and be constantly reminded of some story or some deceased relative who repaired a wall or put in a new sink. The tent, like the history of the family itself, is being constantly updated.

And then Daddy bought this one. This one was dilapidated and it was falling in and Dad bought it and we we hauled logs to the monastery to get them to saw the lumber to put a new roof on this tent, and then, they let Robert Christian have it. And then, we took that one. Well, the other thing is, I would guess the way people talk about it, is that because the families own and improve their own places these things become deeply identified with family history.

The main thing is like I mean everybody knows where you are and certain people you know if they are not at a certain place, then they are probably at another one. And meals are a big, huge deal. Because there is so many people. See I'm having all the cooks down here for dinner on Monday night. It started out with fifteen and they subtracted a couple of people, but that was where it started. Some of the men are not there, so. And see my father built this table. The most fun thing to do up here is we put little kids up there. All the little kids. When they are that age. As a matter of fact, Ramsey needs to get up there. I don't know if she's done it. And notice the ... here. I don't know if you can see it. It's higher than the others. And it's a long one. And that's for little kids. One of the special features, well for me the special feature obviously is that daddy built it and it's just daddy all over. I mean it reminds you of something about him.

Well, the shelves over there. I was looking at where all the food and dishes and stuff are. They are so sturdy and the wood-- and I was trying to think yesterday if was oak that they are made out of. It's like stuff now that you get is like, you

know, it's just built to last a couple of years and stuff is not built to last. And this stuff was built to last. It was built to last maintenance free. I have never swept the place. And one of the things that I just love--my brother-in-law has been very, very, helpful even though he is not fond of camp meeting at all. But he is real nice about helping us do things. We needed a new sink. You see that our bathroom is like-- the bathroom sink there is behind the refrigerator and that's not the original sink there. The original sink that was in there was about this far off the ground and it was a little sink and it was about this far off the ground. Daddy put that down low like that because we were little. Then eventually it ended up you were practically standing on your head to brush your teeth, but for years all the little kids, especially I remember the girls next door, they would all come over when they were about two or three years old and say, "Can we wash our hands?" And they would want to come in and wash their hands. And of course when they left they were soaking wet, completely and totally soaked. So they would come and play at that sink and my mother would say "Aaron why don't you put in _____," and he would not do it. He did not want to put another sink there. He wanted that one. He was very sentimental. We needed a new sink and they routed some plumbing around and I said okay you can put another sink there, but I don't like it. And you will have to see before you go, don't forget, you have to look at the shower. When the shower was built daddy did all kinds of things, he used to lay bathroom tile, that's one of the things he used to do. He would have samples. They would have samples of different colors and they would have them strung together. That's what is in our shower. All different colors. And the kids loved that. Some of the little cousins would come and spend the night with us and they would say, "I'm going to take a shower now."

These updates serve as actual physical memory triggers much as pictures in a photo album do. As each new generation stays in the tent they add their own touches in terms of modifications or improvements to the structure. It is both this process as well as the simple fact that these new generations stay in the same structure that their past family members once did, that establishes the tent as a site of memory and a place invested with strong feelings of continuity.

We can therefore say that the actual structure that the tenters live in for this week is yet another part of Salem's power as a ritual. It is a ritual that has the ability to form powerful memories and produce a pervasive feeling of family identity and continuity.

The actual structure of the tent is not the only aspect of these temporary residences that resonates with memory and family identity. A common feature of the interior of the tents at Salem is that pictures cover or are drawn on walls. Pictures that are not mounted on the walls are stored in visible and accessible photo albums or displays. These photographs document the years that the family has spent at Salem. Throughout the week, tenters will look through these picture books or glance at the walls and use these pictorial reminders as a means of recalling a story or person from the past. Many times these pictures will depict the family at various stages but in similar poses participating in similar activities. This elicits the sense of continuity that Salem tenters experience during this week.

In addition to pictures, families have a tendency to hang on to meeting programs from years past. This is yet another way of marking both the past history of the meeting and showing

the present contribution to the deep tradition of camp meeting. Unlike these people's everyday houses, in the Salem tents kids are allowed (in most tents) to sign the walls or mark their heights in doorways. This taps into the feeling of being part of an institution with incredible family history and, again, contributes to the idea of generational continuity. The kids are signing the same walls that their parents and grandparents did, and are asserting their identity as a tenter and as a member of a family line. Finally, it is significant that most of the furniture that is found in the tents and on their porches is recycled. It is furniture that is too old or worn to be used in the permanent homes of the Salem tenters. It is essentially furniture and furnishings that is invested with family memories and has, like family pictures, countless family memories and stories. The tent, from its actual structure to its furnishings, is a site rich with family memories and presents the prospect of continuing the ongoing narrative of family culture.

Even the furnishings of the tents are significant means by which family objects get recycled and become memory objects as well as functional items:

I was supposed to bring them to the campground. Stuff you quit using other places. You bring bedspreads that you don't use at home anymore. Instead of throwing them away or giving them away to the Salvation Army. It's a thing. Everybody does it ___oh, let's take that to the campground. Don't throw it away, we can use it at the campground. You know stuff that you would ordinarily throw away because you are replacing it with something nicer or more modern, you bring to the campground. That's where those cushions came from. But we have over the years done lots and lots of work on this place.

SENSORY DIMENSIONS OF MEMORY

A final component of the Salem experience that is important to its overall memory effect are the sensory dimension of spending a week on the grounds. By participating in the ritual of Salem camp meeting, tenters are accepting the experience of intensity in the form of extreme heat, compromised living conditions (when compared to the way that these families live their everyday lives) and crowding. These sensations function, in terms of creating memories and meaning, in much the same way that the schedule and rhythm of Salem time does. They set this week apart from the other 51 weeks of the year. And by experiencing something as intense as 100 degree heat without air conditioning or sleeping in the same bedroom with ten relatives, the week stands out in the minds of its participants. Also, the heat and crowding become challenges around which the people who are collectively experiencing them are wrapped in a feeling of connectedness.

In our interviews with family, the powerful effects of sensory associations of heat, smell, crowding, and feeling sawdust under foot were frequently alluded to:

I think Annie must have been about six that summer when we came out. It was 105 and 100 percent humidity and he says, Mom, she says I have to work to bring up a sweat in California. He says all I do is just stand here and sweat."

That's really funny. I think that part of being hot all the time or just fanning

yourself and sitting on the porch, probably has an effect that people are not quite aware of; like slowing you down and making you sit and talk for a while rather than running around. Of course the thing is, in the beginning you see, it was this way every place. But since there's air-conditioning now every place else in the world, people just prepare for it and I guess they think of it as something they're giving up in order to have this experience.

It was very crowded and very hot and we had cold showers. And, you know, but it was fun.

If we all got air conditioning all the people would stay inside more and I think it would take away the, take a little more of the community out of it. Just come out here and these houses like, they're so hot. You've been in some of them, just hot. You think how in the world do they stand these houses. They're so hot. And, uh, they want to come so bad, so, but it is a wonderful place. It's like going back in time, to, I guess, an easier, simpler time, when you could sit around and play and swing and visit.

CONCLUSIONS

As has been shown, Salem is a ritual that is successful on several fronts. The event does an excellent job of recreating a mythic past for one week every summer. It also is incredibly important and successful as a component of family memory and in creating a sense of family identity. However, in the process of stopping time and creating a space where the past is re-created, two aspects of history become problematic. First of all, the recreation of gender and gender roles at Salem reveals certain ambiguities as modern conceptualizations differ dramatically from those of the time that is being re-enacted. Women, in this mythic past, were responsible for taking care of the house, cooking and tending to the children. They were not employed outside of the house. During Salem week these modern women, most of whom are employed to some degree, must take off work and be responsible for more traditional chores and responsibilities. This role change takes place while the men continue to work and do not take time off from their jobs. Some women at Salem surely resent this but many are hesitant to verbally recognize these feelings. In the world in which these women live they have power and are often equal contributors to the family's economic resources.

However at Salem they effectively lose this power and must assume the exclusive role of the economically disempowered homemaker. In their everyday lives these women may be on decision making committees or boards but at Salem these power positions (the Salem board of directors) are almost exclusively male in composition (there is presently one female on the board who was elected several years ago with a good deal of contestation from Salem participants). This reduction of women's roles to traditional domestic and care-taking roles is an ambivalent aspect of Salem for women. For many it seems to be at once a source of pride in the importance of their traditional care-taker roles, which are underscored at Salem. But it is also a source of some latent resentment by some women that men do not feel as committed to being at Salem full time as their wives and sisters do. Salem offers an opportunity for people to "play" at traditional roles with a clarity and lack of ambiguity that is not true in the world beyond. But the message is

also a conservative one, one that appeals to many but not all of the women we spoke to at the campground.

A second aspect of the recreation of the past that yields problems is the issue of race. African Americans have always been part of Salem. They were the slaves and later the retainers and hired hands that helped build the tents on the grounds, and were the cooks in the kitchens. How do you accurately recreate this aspect of the past in the context of the world as it exists today? Salem's "solution" is that the subject of race is glossed over and is, essentially, not accurately reproduced. There are attempts made to include African Americans in the ritual. One of these attempts is that Salem's board of directors has invited black preachers to preach during services. And in 2000, there was a black preacher who was a guest at the event. However, this attempt at being inclusive is not altogether effective. While there has been one black preacher, the crowd attending services at Salem is almost exclusively white and there is not one tent on the grounds who is African American.

When tenters are asked if Salem will ever become more racially integrated, many express the characteristic Salem open and inclusive idealism but say that the likelihood of integration is, in fact, almost non-existent. It is obvious that the role that slaves occupied in of Salem's past is excluded from the reproduction that presently takes place every year. While there are attempts made to clarify and resolve the ambiguities surrounding race relations at Salem (the inviting of black preachers and the presentation of an award to a black cook), the problem is not solved and for the most part, the difficulties associated with this aspect of the recreation are ritually forgotten. Salem remains a white institution and attempts to include African Americans as equal participants has been relatively unsuccessful.

Despite these contradictions, Salem Camp Meeting does seem to be a very effective ritual. It enables effective remembering and forgetting. In other words, Salem creates an intense ritual sphere where memories are created in a family context and become associated with this distinct week. Salem scaffolds identity updating, in which both changes and continuities are recognized. Life stages are clear and less ambiguous here. People are allowed to see themselves moving through various life stages and fitting into a clearly defined structure. Also, by recognizing the long and unchanging history of this structure they are able to conceptualize a family continuity in which every member moves through an almost identical progression. The ritual of Salem also creates a situation where generational continuity extends in both directions. The older generations are allowed basically to see themselves in the past and feel a strong connection to their children and grandchildren. On the other side, the younger participants are imprinted with the importance of Salem and its success in freezing time. They can see that they are connected to their parents and grandparents through shared experiences and a distinct family tradition.

The connection that Salem enables between spiritual and social relations is another key component of the ritual and contributes to its effectiveness. Constantly moving in to the tabernacle and then out to the various domains of family creates a situation where the feelings of inclusion and transcendence that are present in the religious component fuse into the fabric of the family. This movement between the various regions of Salem Camp Ground also allows the exclusive and inclusive themes to be linked in a way that the ambiguities and complexities of normal life do not allow. The idea of hyper-ritualization is also an important component of the Salem ritual. The ritual becomes important for the fact that it has been repeated so many times. This valorization of repetition stresses continued attendance and establishes the event as an

integral part of each tenter's life.

Like many rituals of re-enactment, Salem acts to clarify roles and positions people in an arena where modern ambiguities are simplified. It is clear at Salem what the role of the women is and what role men occupy in the structure of the family. In the everyday lives of Salem's participants these roles are surely less clear cut and may be problematic in the relations between these modern day family members.

Salem is also successful because of the way it deals with a particularly painful truth about the American Family. One of the hardest things about being in a family is the fact that it inevitably breaks apart. This is a basic tenant of our system of family where the whole point of raising kids is to enable them to successfully distance themselves from their original family and start one of their own. This realization is painful and in some ways Salem provides an outlet for this pain. This is one week of the year when families who are sometimes separated by vast distances can come together and create the semblance that they are in fact still one integrated unit. What makes this even more powerful is the hyper-ritualization that we discussed earlier. Repetition and its valorization have created an event where people always come back next year. So while the integration of a dispersed family only happens for one week of the year (which in itself might not be therapeutic) everyone knows that the family will all be back together next year. In this way, Salem can certainly be seen as a therapeutic means of dealing with the often painful reality of the existing American family system.

Part of the ritual recipe that Salem employs relies on its structure and scheduling of time. The sequential ordering of events, along with the creation of a clearly slow rhythm, creates an environment that is clearly distinct from that in place in the daily lives of Salem families. The entire family is able to be together and interact in an arena where family identity and culture occupy the forefront of attention. This shared time becomes even more significant when we understand that the distinctness of the week acts to highlight the events that take place and creates intense memories that are clearly and absolutely "Salem Memories." The different sense of time at Salem functions then in two ways. First it enables a type of family interaction that is not feasible in the stretched and multi-tasked every day lives of the modern American Family. It also takes these extraordinary family experiences and creates memories of them which are separate from other memories due to the uniqueness of the week that is spent at the camp ground.

Finally, we must not overlook the significance of the clearly defined time span of the event. In part, Salem owes its success to the fact that the event is confined to one week. If it were more than one week its intensity would surely fade and the family relations that exist presently (at Salem) would begin to break apart as the incidence of fights and arguments would increase exponentially. Confining the event to one week creates a ritual that is clearly distinct from normal life and allows the ritual to be viewed as an escape or departure from daily family life.

Throughout this paper we have seen that Salem succeeds on several fronts. First of all, the event functions in creating a tenable perception of family identity and continuity. Families at Salem recognize that this ritual is an important part of who they are as a family and that it gives them a sense of powerful sense of tradition. In recreating the past and living in the manner that prior generations have, Salem tenters create a concrete connection to the history of their family. Salem not only creates this family culture but also ingrains this culture into the memories of those families that participate. As Salem becomes a ritual staple of their year, Salem memories (which are to a large degree family memories) become a key part of their structuring of family

memories. While Salem is a success in these ways, it struggles in several veins. In recreating a picture of the past the subjects of race and gender become problematic. However, these problems allow the participants to recognize social progress and re-frame the issues that emerge as problems at Salem. For these reasons along with its undefinable pull and tranquility it seems only obvious that Salem will continue to constitute a powerful force in the lives of its people.

Due to constraints of time and energy, we were forced to limit our research and focus our attention on the aspects of Salem that have been discussed above. We view this research as ongoing and our understanding as far from complete. The large numbers of families that were interviewed along with the incredible quality of the information gathered, made the discussion of further subjects impossible. We recognize the fact that the information presented here is not the whole story. The religious component of Salem will be a major focus during the continuation of our Salem research (which will in fact continue next summer as we were invited and encourage to return to the event). With respect to spirituality, we plan to interview the preachers of Salem as well as conduct further interviews with its participants about religion. We also hope to gain a more detailed picture of the genealogical ties within and among the Salem families, and a better sense of who comes regularly and who does not. The family aspects of Salem are by no means simple and adding to this complexity is the fact that ideas of family are only one of several parts that, when seen together, enable a more complete understanding of Salem and its central role as a deep and powerful tradition in the lives of the families who attend year after year.

Notes

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²The important role of African-American families at this traditionally all-white institution as central in building and provisioning the tents is remembered by many of the older campers, and is represented today by the presence of a black cook who has been working for the Camp Meeting for 50 years and today supervises the cooking in the hotel kitchen.

³The symbolic importance of frying food was repeatedly emphasized in conversations. The power of the idiom of deep-frying food needs to be explored further, and may well involve powerful metaphorical linkages between “deep,” “frying” and “Southernness.”

⁴On the importance of attending to the systematic memory effects of ritual see Connerton 1989; Csordas 1994; Feely-Karnik 1991; Munn 1969; Levi-Strauss 1967; Scheffelin 1976; Battaglia 1990; Baxandall 1972/1988; Shore 1996, 1998; Yates 1966.

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