

South Apalachin Baptist Church and El Rancho de Paz (The Ranch)
by Pastor Jim Walter

From its beginning El Rancho de Paz has had a close association with the South Apalachin church. The three men who started The Ranch in 1955 were from the South Apalachin Church. Not quite, Dale Linebaugh was the pastor of the Birchardville, PA Baptist Church but his wife Opal was from South Apalachin. I am quite sure the vision for El Rancho de Paz originated in their minds. Gordon Hay was the pastor of the South Apalachin church and Bob Monell and his wife Helen who had the farm that was to become El Rancho de Paz were from the South Apalachin church. Down through the years since that time most of the directors and many of the summer staff were from South Apalachin or attended the South Apalachin church. Also I could not begin to give the names of all those from the South Apalachin church who spent untold hours, days, and weeks of their time over the years working at El Rancho de Paz. My wife and I had breakfast just yesterday (May 13, 2015) with two men that have spent many, many hours and days working at the camp starting 50 plus years ago. We talked at great length about past events at South Apalachin and El Rancho de Paz.

The subject that turned our thoughts towards The Ranch was when we told them that we had stopped in central Georgia on our way back from Florida to visit with Dan and Bev Corbett, whom many of you remembered from their years at El Rancho de Paz.



As I had connections in one way or another since the camps beginning I will just speak of a few of the important events in its past history with which I am personally familiar, especially events that relate to our church at South Apalachin.

Some of these things you can read about in my book *50 years a Country Pastor*. One chapter in that book is entitled "The Ranch".

In my book I told of my first knowledge of El Rancho de Paz. It was when Gordon Hay introduced me to Bob Monell who was looking for someone to help cut logs to be sawed into lumber to be used in building and repairing the barn. I worked several days with him cutting those trees. At that time Bob told me of the plans for The Ranch.

Horses were to be the central attraction. South Apalachin Church has been a major contributor of both labor and money from The Ranch's conception.

Here is my second association with El Rancho de Paz. In 1956 we (Windham Summit Church), had Dale and Opal Linebaugh for a week of meetings. During the days Dale and I would visit people in the community, and as well go over to El Rancho de Paz to take care of the horses they had at that time.

On one of those days while Dale was working with the horses and other things that needed done in the barn, I installed a heat run from the furnace to the bathroom in the farm house. But the days I remember the most were the days we helped Jessie make hay. Dale had known Jessie as a farmer that had lived near Birchardville, and had moved five miles south of the Windham Summit church. When we went to visit him he was having a difficult time getting his hay made and into the barn. Without any hesitation, Dale volunteered two days of our time helping Jessie get his hay made. Jessie came to the last two nights of our meetings and made the only public profession of faith in Christ in those meetings. I never saw Jessie from the time we moved from Windham Summit in 1959 until I spoke in a little country church several years after retiring from South Apalachin, some 40 years later. After the service this old man walking with a cane ask me if I remembered him. I did as soon as he mentioned those two days when Dale and I helped him make his hay. Several years ago Dale told me he was called to have part of Jessie's memorial service.

Another incident about the same time was shortly after Gordon moved from South Apalachin to Central Baptist Church in Binghamton. One Saturday my family and myself went down to see where Gordon and his family had moved. They lived in an apartment over the church. What Gordon and I did that day shows that Gordon totally forgot that he was no longer among the country folk of South Apalachin. Now he was among the city folk in Binghamton. That afternoon and on into the evening, Gordon and I made head cheese in the church kitchen. Several weeks before, Gordon and several men from South Apalachin had butchered five hogs that were given to El Rancho de Paz. They were going to throw the hogs heads away. Instead Gordon had brought them home with him and had them frozen in the church freezer. We hunted all the large pots we could find and cooked those heads in the church kitchen. Then we spent several hours picking all that good meat out of all the nooks and crannies of those hog's heads out of which we Pennsylvania Dutchmen made that good old fashioned head cheese. What a sweet aroma all that left to permeate the whole church for the Sunday services the next morning. I don't know if Gordon ever lived that one down. Those city folk certainly didn't appreciate our using the church kitchen to make that delicious head cheese, especially the women of the church. Probably it would of been

wiser to have taken those five hog heads back up to El Rancho de Paz and make our head cheese there.

Through the 1960's my associations with the South Apalachin Baptist Church and El Rancho de Paz was minimal. Gordon Hay had gone to Central Baptist in Binghamton and I had moved to Trumansburg. Although Gordon had moved to Binghamton, he had remained in close contact with El Rancho de Paz. He kept me up on the progress and the growth of the camp during those years. Dick Seefried was the camp director a number of those years before he went to school and into the pastorate.

One thing that was different back in those early years at The Ranch was that much of the food, both meat and vegetables, was grown and raised at The Ranch, and much was donated. Two incidents come to mind as regards to donated live animals to The Ranch to be butchered.

One was the time a farmer from Trumansburg had a big steer he wanted to give to The Ranch. He and I loaded that steer on his truck and brought it down to The Ranch. When we arrived there, it was late in the evening and getting dark. The only person around was a young fellow that had no idea what to do with this steer. He said Dick Seefried was down to the South Apalachin Baptist Church. We could wait for him or go down to the church and get him. He had no idea how soon he would be home. I then said to Curtis, "Let's go down to the church and I can show you where I was ordained and licensed to preach." We did do that and found Dick there at the church speaking with an evangelist who was holding meetings there at that time. We went back up to The Ranch and got the steer unloaded at nearly 10:00pm.

Grandpa Pete:

As I said, I had very little direct contact with El Rancho de Paz the 10 years I was in Trumansburg. Other than bringing kids from our church to the summer camp several times and a few of us men from T-Burg coming down a day or two to help build the bunk house, all the information about the progress of El Rancho de Paz came to me through Pastors Gordon Hay and Bob Monell. They were both enthused about Pete Cleveland coming to care for The Ranch, a retired hardware man from Bob's church in Smethport who wanted to serve the Lord in some sort of Christian work in his retirement years. I first met him the day we came to speak at South Apalachin in 1968. He was a member of the deacon's board at that time and we stayed at The Ranch in our travel trailer over that week end.

It did not take me long to understand why Gordon Hay and Bob Monell were so enthused about having Grandma and Grandpa Pete there at The Ranch. He was a humble servant of God who understood what it was to be a servant leader. By that I mean, in my first several hour visit with him there in front of The Ranch bunkhouse, it was evident he was not first and foremost working for the camp. He was serving God out of love for Him. I am sure he did the same in every area of his life, whether as a husband, father, business man or church deacon. He also had a son in the Pastorate which made it very easy for us to communicate openly about our ministries that God had given us (his ministry as care taker of El Rancho de Paz and my ministry, like his son, the shepherd of a flock of Christ's sheep).

We spent two hours discussing our respective ministries. I told him of our future plans for the church in T-Burg, and he told me of the future plans for El Rancho de Paz. I am referring to the plans for the buildings. We in T-burg had the land bought and one fourth of the money in hand to build a new church building. Grandpa Pete said they had plans to build new bathrooms at each end of the bunk house over the next two years. He had already recruited Bob Strope's crew from South Apalachin to do the masonry construction and some men to do the framing and the roof for the boy's bath and shower rooms. He was still looking for a plumber. I had no doubt he would find a free gratis one just like the men he had lined up to construct the walls and the roof. He was already working on preparations for the footer. What plumber who loved the Lord could turn him down, one who was doing far above and beyond what was expected of him an old retired man?

Little did this Pastor know that before camp opened the next summer he would be Grandpa Pete's plumber for the boy's new bathroom.

Furthermore, Grandpa Pete would recruit the same crew (Bob Strope's gang) and the same plumber to do the same thing again on the girl's side of the bunk house the following spring. This was the extent of my association with The Ranch for the first three years that I was the Pastor of South Apalachin, just Grandpa Pete's plumber.

The 1970s – The Struggling Years

After Grandpa and Grandma Pete Cleveland left The Ranch, real financial difficulties set in. They had been the caretakers of the camp the year round while different men and several couples operated the summer camping ministry for children and young teenagers. The last of these couples was a very talented couple. They had very good rapport with young people. He was the real cowboy type, great with horses and a trick roper (lassos). He and his wife were excellent country singers. He also had been a

pastor. After several years he approached the board with a proposition. "Let's make the camp a year around camp. I am sure we can get people, not just youth for winter retreats and special events for different church groups, etc."

There were just two big things that would have to be done. First, the bunkhouse would have to be winterized (totally insulated and a heating system installed). Secondly, if the board would hire him full time and let him move into the farmhouse he was sure he could handle both jobs (the farm and operation of the camp, summer, fall and winter). The board agreed to do this. The money to get started would be obtained by taking out a good sized mortgage on the entire ranch. Grandma and Grandpa Pete would be going back to their home in Troy, PA and the new Director and his family would be moving in.

When I was asked by one of the Board what I thought of all this I just answered; "I don't know the man you are calling (hiring) but I know you better think twice before letting Grandpa Pete go. His answer: "We cannot afford two full time people and this man says he can take care of the farming and horses and run the camp as well, even increase the camp's ministries. He and his wife have done a great job with the summer camp".

At that time neither the South Apalachin Church nor I was involved with the inner workings of El Rancho de Paz, just good supporters, both financial and sending our kids to the summer camp.

In less than two years the camp was near bankruptcy with the board in a quandary as to know what to do.

Winter camping never materialized. Summer camp little more than paid for its own operation, let alone a full time director/farmer plus a monthly mortgage payment. On top of this the whole bunkhouse had to be done over because materials used to winterize it did not meet code, another big expense. Where was the needed monies to come from?

At this time the board of directors (the original three that started the camp) decided to make it a church operated camp by inviting a number of the churches that regularly sent their children to summer camp become the operating board of El Rancho de Paz. The board was to be made up of the Pastor and/or a representative from each church. This was a very prestigious board to get on, as I knew the main job of the board was to

get monetary support from each of the churches represented in the board. You can read all about this in my book *Fifty Years' A Country Pastor*.

I came on the board with my eyes wide open. It was the end of summer camp after which the director moved out. There was no money in the treasury. The entire summer camp food bill was not paid. The horse population had dwindled to nearly half in the past three years. There was not nearly enough hay and grain to see the ones that were left through the coming winter. Every board meeting was the same: "We need money. What more can we do to get it?" The standard answer, go back to our respective churches and make another appeal to our boards, classes, and individuals. Here I would like to mention many names who responded in many different ways to keep the camp afloat, but if I did I'm sure I would miss some I did not know about. I will say this much. South Apalachin Church, with both money and labor was by far the number one church that saw El Rancho de Paz through those difficult years. But every time I think of those board meetings this one incident stands out in my mind. Hear the words of a young married man, a representative board member from the Ross Corners Church: "We've (his wife and himself) have some money we have been saving for our boy's education in RCCA. We don't need it yet as our boys are just two and three years old. We've decided to give it to The Ranch". With that remark he handed to us (the board) a check for hundreds of dollars (big money 40 years ago). That sacrifice touched me deeply.

The ones who were really sacrificing for those latter years of the 1970s were Dan and Bev Corbett, The Ranch Directors who inherited the financial mess left by the previous director. There was just not enough income to pay that mortgage, the current expenses and Don's salary. Guess which one did not get paid. I had become close to Dan, both Dan's (Dan Corbett and Dan Crane). Our present Pastor could probably tell us more about those years than I, as he had a big part in keeping The Ranch in operation during that time and was aware of its ups and downs, mostly downs financially, but mostly ups as far as the summer camp was concerned. God's blessing was still on the camp's ministry to the youth it served by teaching of the Word of God as well as making it a fun and growth time for both the campers and youth counselors. As South Apalachin's Pastor at the time, I saw what effect the summer camp had on those who attended summer camp, but especially on those who worked there as counsellors and workers for the entire summer.

In order to get back bills paid and get The Ranch through the winter we (the board) had borrowed \$15,000 on two of the board's signatures hoping for enough money to come in from the churches, individuals, and next summer's camp to repay the loan. It did not

happen. It was two years before that loan was paid, and then only by selling off three building lots to builders in the South Apalachin Church.

During those two years Dan and I became very close, not as The Ranch board member and The Ranch director only, neither as a Pastor (shepherd) and sheep, but as two members of the same body, (Christ's Church) with a love and concern for each other's spiritual and material welfare. We worked together at The Ranch, we cut wood together, and we went to Miracle Manor together where I taught for two years. We played basketball together, and we worked many days together to help support our families. That relationship (brothers in Christ) a living, a loving relationship continues to this day and will continue long after El Rancho de Paz and South Apalachin Church are no more.

After Dan and Bev Corbett left The Ranch we (the board) began the search for a new director. The way God led in finding that director you can find in my book *Fifty Years' A Country Pastor*. He not only became El Rancho de Paz's new director but also a member of Christ's Body at South Apalachin. That was 36 years ago and I saw him and Kim there last Sunday. We'll let them pick up the history of El Rancho de Paz from the day they came in 1979.