

Conventions of the Past and Present

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Our churches started conventions in 1938 with a purpose in mind for our churches' youth. The goal of writing this is so that the reader can be informed about what conventions were like in the 1940s and how they are different from conventions held now. There are many things that are different about our conventions now than they were back then, but also many things that have remained constant throughout all of the conventions that were ever held. It struck me when doing research for this essay that my parents, my grandparents, and possibly even great-grandparents may have had the same experience of convention as I did this past summer at my first convention.

The main goal of convention is one thing that has remained the same ever since conventions were first started in 1938 and continued throughout the years: learn more of God and His word. The young people all together can grow spiritually, increasing in their love for God, and be spiritually edified by the fitting words of the preachers through speeches and discussion groups. Not only is there a spiritual benefit, but the young people get to enjoy the fellowship and friendship with others of their same faith. ([Vol. 2, No. 8, p. 2](#)) ([Vol. 9, no. 6, p. 23.](#)) ([Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 18.](#))

From reading through the *Beacon Lights*, there were many different opinions such as whether conventions should have activities or not. Over time more activities have been added, but we have not lost sight of the spiritual aspect of conventions. *Beacon Lights* editors often wrote articles in the *Beacon Lights* to encourage young people to come. From the March 1949

issue one person wrote, *“SO: IF you enjoy Christian fellowship, IF you would like to see Iowa, IF you would like to taste food where it is raised, IF you would like to meet all our young people, IF you like a good time, then don't miss the 1949 Convention in Iowa.”* ([Vol. 9, no. 7, p. 10.](#))

These were some of the goals of convention planners back then, and still are the goals of our conventions today: learn more of God and his word, and still be able to get to know other young people from our congregations across the country. The conventions are always a big hit and every year since they started, the number of young people getting registered and attending the convention grows.

So where are these conventions held? In the 1940s, the conventions were not quite as large as they are today. WWII was going on during this time period, so many of the young men were drafted to go fight in Europe. Also, our churches have grown considerably in size since then. For this reason, conventions could be held at the church that was hosting, or at camps. ([Vol. 4, no. 9, p. 18.](#)) ([Vol. 2, no.8, p. 1.](#))

Lodging was hard to find because they did not know how many to expect to come. Many conventions hosted the visiting Young Peoples in the homes of the nearby members of the congregation. One minister said in the March 1949 issue, *“But let me assure any society that may plan on inviting the Convention to be held in their community, that also this problem is not insurmountable. Young peoples are easily accommodated. If need you can put three or four in to a bed. At our last convention we even had them sleeping floor. It is a fine experience to have a group of these young people in our homes for a few days, and gives us an opportunity to exercise the Christian virtue of hospitality.”* ([Vol. 9, no.6, p. 29](#))

Today we have our conventions at retreat/convention centers, places built specifically for conventions like ours. Also, they have been held at colleges in the area of the church hosting the convention. Last year we slept in large cabins that could hold quite a few people; this coming year we will stay in a big hotel-like building that can hold many people as well. Although we no longer stay in other families' homes while the convention is going on, we do sometimes stay in their homes the weekend before the convention will take place.

Transportation to the convention was about the same back then as it is now. Depending on how far away you are from the hosting church, you can take plane, train, car, bus, or whatever means are available. ([Vol. 5, no. 10, p. 20.](#)) This past year, many of the young people rode on a large charter bus to get to Grand Rapids. You can get to the convention by any means that is available to you.

In the 1940s our churches' conventions were held for two days. The young people would sign in and get registered on Wednesday morning of convention week, then spend Wednesday night, Thursday, and Friday enjoying the convention ([Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 11.](#)) ([Vol. 2, no. 8, p. 1.](#)) Now our conventions usually have registration on Monday morning bright and early, the convention being held Monday night through Friday morning.

Now some people may be rather "concerned" as to what they were going to eat. Apparently the food was great in the 1940s at our conventions, and it still is now! *"The food was delicious. Just right. Also spiritually, the food had all the nutritious value it could possibly have contained and as a result every one of our formed youth, in those two days, have eaten and digested food which most surely cause us to grow in strength and beauty."* Jean Dykstra, Grand Rapids. ([Vol. 7, no. 1, p. 11.](#))

At convention this summer, Ryan Dykstra, who let us know everything that we possibly needed to know to survive the week, graciously told us on our first day there that he had tried the food and that it was delicious! Once we had tried it for ourselves, we learned that he did not lie, because the food was great and we were well-fed throughout the whole week.

Although the goals of our convention have not changed, above was mentioned that a few things have been added over the years. Many games have been added. For example, on the first day at our convention we played mixer games, and every day after that we had a few hours to have fun playing team games. The team games are very popular and are definitely a good addition to the conventions. A lot of free time is given to the young people during convention week. Some free time is good to have just to do whatever you like to do, but too much free time on the schedule tends to steer us away from the purpose of our convention.

The banquet was always present at our conventions; this was something that was done in the past and continues to be something all the conventioners look forward to every year. On the last night there great food is served and the young people enjoy a night of fellowship together. After banquet, games are played involving many of the young people. These are also very fun and looked forward to.

In conclusion, the conventions themselves are an awesome experience: if you are debating whether or not to go, go this coming year and try it! It's definitely worth the time to go. The speeches are very edifying, the games are fun, and our chaperones are always making things great. You get to meet new people! The conventions from the 1940s compared to conventions now are quite different, but also very much the same. I hope that by reading this you are informed and can use it to for a good purpose.

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