

A LETTER FROM THE PAST

Little is known of J.B. Scarboro. His brief service as an itinerant minister pre-dates the 1868 formation of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Originally included in the old Baltimore Conference, the work in Pennsylvania became a part of the short-lived East Baltimore Conference in 1856. In 1868 the East Baltimore Conference was dissolved, its Maryland appointments were returned to the Baltimore Conference, and all but one of its Pennsylvania appointments became the nucleus of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. The 1858 letter that follows was written while J.B. Scarboro and the Woodbury PA circuit were part of the East Baltimore Conference.

The 1858 annual minutes of East Baltimore Conference list John B. Scarboro as being admitted on trial and appointed, along with senior pastor George Berkstresser, to the Woodbury PA Circuit of the Juniata District. In 1859, he is listed as a probationer remaining on trial and assigned, along with senior pastor Henry Wilson, to the Juniata District's Phillipsburg Circuit. The annual minutes after 1859 contain no further reference to J.B. Scarboro. His name never appears among the expulsions or withdrawals, nor is he ever included in the conference memoirs.

A reasonable guess, from the detailed journey to his first appointment given in the following letter, is that his home was in northern Maryland -- perhaps not too far south of Delta (York County), Pennsylvania. Why he left the ministry, what vocation he entered into, where he eventually settled, and other details of his life are unknown. Even the story behind the letter itself is a mystery. Found with "to be filed" material in the archives at the Lovely Lane Museum, it was passed on to THE CHRONICLE by the Baltimore Conference with no knowledge of how or when it came into their possession.

THE CHRONICLE now presents J.B. Scarboro's letter essentially as it was written. The author's wording and style have been retained, with minor adjustments only when necessary for clarity. Editorial comments are given in the footnotes.

Martinsburg, Penna.
April 22, 1858

Dearest Uncle and Aunt,

I received your very acceptable letter last night, and you can scarcely imagine how pleased I was to hear from you. I thought you were not going to write to me, and many were the thoughts that revolved in my head as to the reason why. But when your letter came to hand, I gave my doubts and fears to the wind -- sincerely hoping that it will not be long again before you write to me. When I read your letter, I must confess that I felt a little ashamed of my former letter. But if you knew the circumstances with which I was surrounded when I wrote it, you would not blame.

You said you had sent my trunk by Express, but I have not received it -- I rather expect it is piled up in the Station House in Hollidaysburg. But I will see to that shortly, if nothing happens, as I have an appointment on each side of that town on next Sabbath. You stated you wished me to give an account of my travel and all the particulars. Well, Uncle Isaac, I wish I could see you. I could tell you a good deal more than I have time to write, for I am so busy that I have scarcely time to eat. If you were to see the package of books I received the other day, you would not wonder about how busy I am. Besides that, I have free access to Brother Berkstresser's¹ library whenever I am in Martinsburg -- but this is not my travel about which you asked. I will copy from my diary.

Monday, March 22. I left home today for my circuit. I traveled 6 miles, stopped with my Uncle A.T. Howlett, and stayed over night.²

Tuesday, March 23. I started this morning at 7 o'clock, rode 26 miles, and stopped at a tavern kept by a blustering old Dutchman.³ I got my horse fed and heard some very funny things there. I left there and arrived in York at half to 3 o'clock pm. I stopped at the Washington House and had good accommodations. My total travel for the day was 34 miles. I had the pleasure of enjoying the company of John Finley, Esquire, of Castle Finn during the last half of my road journey and during the time I stayed in York.

Wednesday, March 24. I left York this morning at 8 o'clock, crossed the Conewago Mountain, and stopped at Dillsburg for dinner -- plenty of ham and eggs and plenty of dirt and ash to season the beef. [Fancy me, if you please, eating by myself. Just behind me two old women are sitting gabbling away in Dutch like a parcel of geese after a victory over a crop. Just to my right, out marches

a sickly looking cat which amused itself by putting its stomach pump into operation and discharging the contents of a full stomach on the floor. Up jumped one of the old ladies, and the way she talked to it in a language unknown to me appeared to be a caution. But if I should judge from outward appearance, I would be inclined to think the cat understood her -- for the distance between the two was soon perceptible.] I ate quickly and retired, having traveled 20 miles. I left Dillsburg and arrived in Carlisle at quarter past 3 o'clock pm, having covered a distance of 10 more miles. I did not stop, but kept on over the Blue Mountain, a large mountain four miles across. I got to Landisburg in Perry County about 7 o'clock pm, having traveled 14 miles from Carlisle. I stopped with Brother Kennedy and was treated very kindly. Having traveled 44 miles for the day, I was pretty tired.

Thursday, March 25. I started from Landisburg at quarter past 7 o'clock and got to Blain at quarter past 10 o'clock, a distance of 12 miles. I dined at Germantown, four miles from Blain. I crossed Sherman Mountain, a large mountain nine miles across, to Concord, where I stopped with Rev. A.W. Buckingham. Brother and Sister Buckingham are very kind. Concord is a small place surrounded with mountains. Today's travel was 25 miles.

Friday, March 26. I left Concord this morning at half past 7 o'clock and got to Shade Gap at half past 10, a distance of 14 miles. Wonderful mountains. I dined at Orbisonia -- they very kind people there charged nothing, and I didn't dispute the bill. From there I went 12 miles to Mount Union, then up the Juniata 7 miles to Mill Creek. Lord help me! Such a land I never dreamed of -- the most awful mountains and the largest trains of cars I have ever seen. I stopped at Brother Kesler's. He was packing up for moving, and I went to Brother Gray's. Today's travel was 40 miles.

Saturday, March 27. I left Mill Creek this morning very early and went to Huntingdon, 5 miles farther up the Juniata. Then I crossed a very large mountain to Williamsburg, 12 miles, and dined. From thence I came to Martinsburg and to the parsonage. I found Brother and Sister Berkstresser very kind and agreeable. It was 13 miles from Williamsburg to Martinsburg.

Thus I have given you a brief account of my travels. You said you also wished an account of the circuit. Well, I will give you a copy of the plan as I received it from Brother Berkstresser.

<i>Sabbath</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Woodbury</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>2 1/2</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Pattonsville⁴</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Yellow Creek⁵</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Lemnon</i>
<i>Sabbath</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Martinsburg</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Rebecca Furnace</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Martinsburg</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Maria Forges</i>
<i>Sabbath</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>East Freedom</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Dybert's school house</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Sarah Furnace</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Bloomfield</i>
<i>Sabbath</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Frankstown</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Duncansville</i>
<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Alleghany Forge</i>
<i>Monday</i>	<i>April</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>at</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>o'clock</i>	<i>Dondson school house</i>

Thus you see we have 16 regular appointments every 4 weeks. Woodbury Circuit is situated in what is called Morrison's Cove. It is bounded on the east by Gush's Mountain⁶ and on the west by the Alleghany. It is a beautiful and highly cultivated country; the land is very rich and productive limestone soil. Martinsburg is a considerable town and a beautiful place. The surrounding country is very pretty. Our church at Martinsburg costs over 1600 dollars.

I like it much better than I thought I would from the reports I heard when I first came on the circuit. I was told that for a number of years nearly every young preacher that had been here had to leave pretty soon. We have four local preachers on the circuit, and two old chaps in Martinsburg who have made it a practice to criticize and pick on the young preachers until they have scared them off. The official members of the circuit are down on them pretty hard and I don't care a half chew of tobacco for 27 dozen of them farther than what is right. By the grace of God I intend to do my duty in spite of the devil or anybody else. They think they know a great deal, but nobody else thinks so -- and I wouldn't be surprised if they find a boy some of these days about here that can preach them over the mountains and back again.

The people are as kind as they can possibly be. I didn't go to my appointments on last Sabbath -- it rained and I had the French measles. They are nasty things. I have made my home at Dr. Wishart's since I have been in Martinsburg. They are very kind people. The doctor would come to my room during the night to inquire if I were sick. He even made me a cup of good coffee one morning before day, which did me more good than I thought 11 pills would have done. They tried to keep me in bed when I would rather have chopped wood than have complied with their request.

He is an elegant doctor, quite wealthy, with an extensive practice. They have five children, all girls; the oldest is 18 and -- best of all -- is a good Methodist.

My health is very good at present, and I leave town in a few minutes for my Sabbath appointments. We had a glorious prayer meeting last night in the basement of the church. I sing a little up here, too; I started every tune last night. I pray a little, too. I try to preach a little sometimes and get a little happy sometimes. Bless the Lord! I feel a little happy now my dear Uncle while I am writing to you, but I must close now for time and paper appear to be getting scarce. Pray, O pray. Pray for your nephew while he endeavors to do the will of his master.

Tell John Robert for me that while I write I am thinking of him and, with a full heart, my eyes dimmed with a tear. I entreat him to give his heart to the Saviour without delay. Write me as soon as you are done reading this. Tell me all your news.

Farewell,

J.B. Scarboro

Remember the words of Christ, "My grace shall be sufficient for thee."

FOOTNOTES

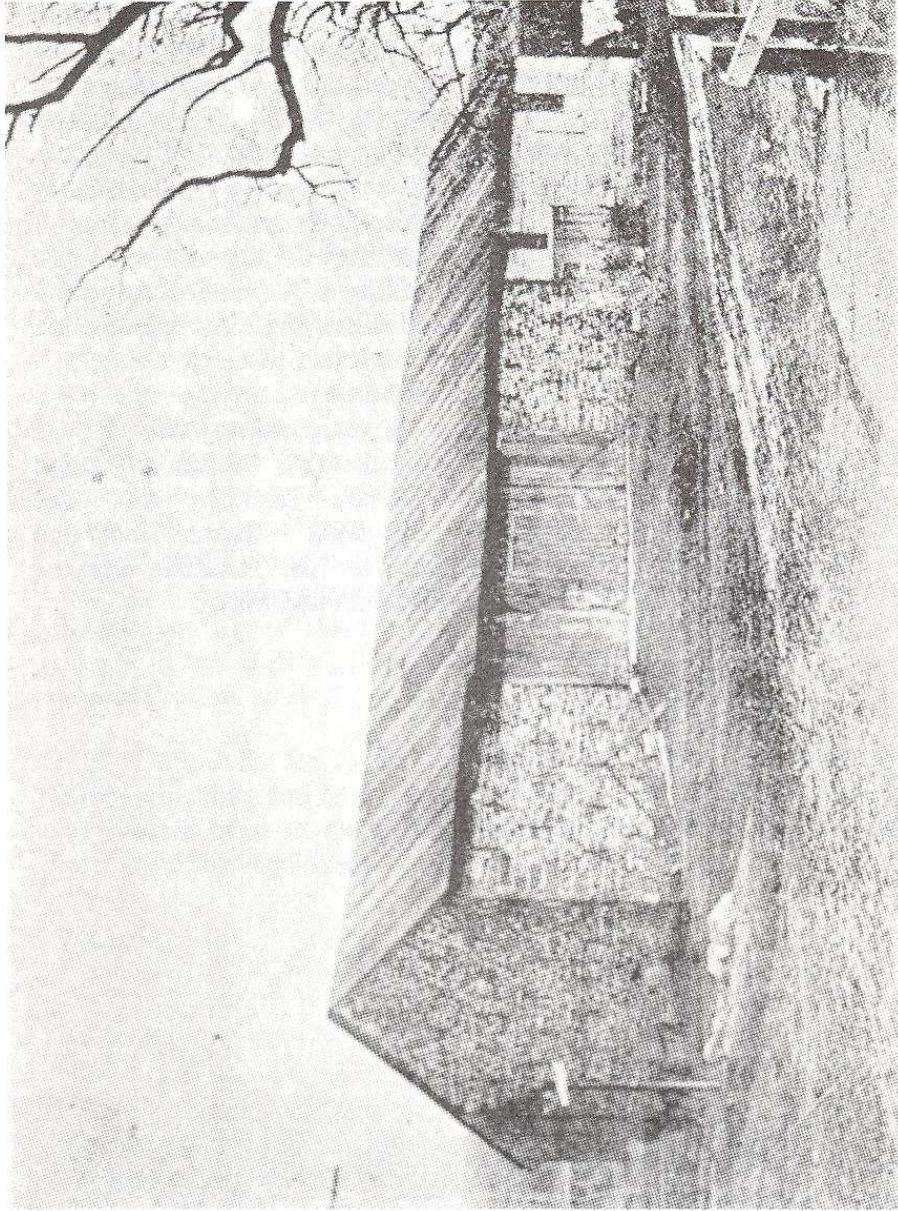
1. Rev. George Berkstresser (1807-1896) was the senior pastor on the circuit. Five years later he was the ME pastor at Gettysburg, and his son writes: *The rebel sharpshooters occupied the roof of the parsonage during the battle, thus drawing the fire of the Union forces. Some years after, when balls of carpet rags that were hanging in the garret were unwound, many bullets were found. A shell struck the parsonage over the second story window, throwing quite a quantity of brick and mortar into the room. My sister Laura was standing at the window. The shell rebounded into the street, and is now, I think, cemented in the wall. Father was, I think, the first one who discovered the retreat of the rebels. He captured two rebel soldiers who were sleeping in an adjoining house, their detachment having neglected to awaken them.*

2. These six miles and the thirty-four traveled the next day place J.B. Scarboro's home 40 miles south of York, via Castle Finn -- probably in Maryland, south of Delta, PA. No information is known about A.T. Howlett or his exact place of residence.

3. By "Dutchman," Scarboro refers here and in the next day's narrative to those Pennsylvania Germans who preserved their native

language and customs and were commonly called "Pennsylvania Dutch." In general, Scarboro and the English-speaking Methodist Episcopal Church left the evangelization of these people to the German-oriented Evangelical and United Brethren denominations.

4. i.e., Loysburg
5. i.e., Bedford Forge
6. i.e., Tussey Mountain



The Eyer Barn, a landmark of the Evangelical Church, as it appeared in 1939. See page 7.