SOME GLIMPSES OF THE CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE OF THE FORMER METHODIST CHURCH

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The Central Pennsylvania Conference of the former Methodist Church existed as such for 101 years from 1868 to the end of 1969. It is the grandchild of the mother conference in Methodism, the Baltimore Conference. Most of the territory comprising the Central Pennsylvania Conference of 1868 had originally been within the bounds of the old Baltimore Conference. In 1856, East Baltimore Conference was divided from the Baltimore Conference and most of our present conference was included in that new body. The General Conference of 1868 dissolved the East Baltimore Conference, creating a new conference in Pennsylvania named the Central Pennsylvania Conference, and the remaining churches returned to the Baltimore Conference.

The ties between Baltimore Conference and our Conference were formally renewed one time after our separation with reunion services held on March 10, 1873, at Chambersburg, where our Conference was in session. Members of the Baltimore Conference left the seat of their sessions at Hagerstown and arrived by train. At 8:45 a.m. Bishop Merrill welcomed the visiting brethren, hymns were sung, speeches made, and reminiscences about the preachers and events of the past were causes for joy and peace. That afternoon the reunion ended, the doxology sung, the good-byes said, and the two conferences separated, never to meet again in joint session during these one hundred years.

It is our purpose in this paper to look at Central

Pennsylvania Conference before and during its organization, some of its life, and persons who influenced the Methodist Church from the origins of Methodism in this territory to the present. We are not presenting an abridgment of our Conference history, Methodism in Central Pennsylvania, 1771-1969, written so ably by Fred Maser.

When Methodism was introduced two hundred years ago into what is now the area of Central Pennsylvania Conference, all this territory was frontier country, roads were few in number and mostly rough and rugged. Timber still covered most of the hills and mountains as well as much of the valleys. The rugged mountains which covered much of the area made travel hazardous and difficult. Wagon roads were few and far between. Settlers, traders, merchants, and itinerants were to follow these roads, sometimes at risk of injury to person and horse. Particularly difficult was the crossing of three mountains running southwest to northeast between Fort Littleton and Breezewood in the south central part of the state. The road across Blue, Kittatinny, and Tuscarora Mountains, belonging to the Appalachian Mountain System, was a part of Forbes Trail, laid out during the days when the British had difficulties with the French and Indians. This road eventually became route 30, or the Lincoln Highway.

Francis Asbury frequently commented on the awful roads in this part of the state. In 1786 he made a trip from Maryland into Friends Cove in Bedford County and wrote in his journal that "What with rocks and logs in our route, the way was so rough, it was a mercy that ourselves and our horses escaped unhurt... The roads are bad; my horse's hind feet [are] without shoes." The itinerant preachers often had not even a path to follow, they had to find their way to the next house or settlement as best they could. At another time when he crossed these mountains he wrote: "We encountered the steep, rugged path over Sideling Hill; we had heat, rocks, dust, and then rain."

The Methodist itinerant preacher found places to eat and overnight lodging wherever he could. It might be a house or a cabin of a friend or stranger; or it might be a tavern or inn. Sometimes there would be no meal, and only lodging under the stars, or under a tree as a poor refuge from the falling rain or snow. Asbury knew all kinds of living conditions. He thought of Weirich Pentz and his wife in York as very dear friends whose home he characterized as a "beautiful retreat" and "his paradise." Asbury also thought of the Ramsey families at Fort Littleton as "exceeding kind people."

Sometimes the lodging at taverns or inns was most repulsive to Asbury. Along the Loyalsock Creek he and his traveling companion paid $2.00 for "wretched lodging." Asbury never wanted to be indebted to any man, so he nearly always paid for lodging, no matter what the cost, for as he wrote at Everett, he did not

wish to be under any obligation to tavern keepers. On one of his western trips he stopped at the stage house in Bedford operated by a Mr. Graham who was known to Asbury from previous stays there. Graham did not charge Asbury a cent. Asbury commented in his Journal that this was the first place of the hundred taverns or inns he stayed at during the year where he was entertained without any cost to him. Sometimes the noise and confusion around the taverns interfered with Asbury's routine of evening prayers and sleep. On one of his stays in Bedford, he remarked that "At night we had fiddle and flute to enliven our prayers and assist our meditations. I had but little rest."

Asbury was somewhere within the bounds of what was the Central Pennsylvania Conference 21 different years, beginning in 1781 with a visit to York where Freeborn Garrettson had introduced Methodism at the beginning of that year. His last visit was in 1815 from the eastern to the western boundaries of the Conference beginning in Wrightsville in York County and continuing on to Bedford. His western destination was Ohio. Nine months after his journey across the conference Francis Asbury, the greatest Methodist itinerant preacher in American Methodism, entered the Promised Land.

What kind of people lived in these mountains, hills, and valleys? In 1803 while Asbury was resting at Fannettsburg from an attack of dysentery, he expressed himself with these words: "I feel, and have felt thirty-two years, for Pennsylvania -- the most wealthy, and the most careless about God, and the things of God: but I hope God will shake the State and the Churches."

Another early Methodist itinerant was William Colbert who came to the huge Northumberland Circuit in 1792. He observed that religion at Berwick appeared to be at a very low ebb. When he came to Milton he remarked that, "It appears to be one of the most dissipated placed I ever saw."

When Asbury preached at Rock Chapel in Adams County in 1784, he remarked about the poor time. But there were more rewarding and blessed experiences for Asbury and all the other dedicated preachers of the Gospel. In 1783, while conducting a love feast in conjunction with the quarterly meeting being held at York, Asbury commented that many spoke with great simplicity which caused him to feel his spirit refreshed among them.

Methodist preachers from earliest times preached so that men would feel convicted of sin, repent, and accept Christ as Savior and Lord. The conversion of the sinner was often a very emotional experience for the individual as well as for other persons in the meeting or service. A great number of conversions occurred at camp meetings, at revivals or protracted meetings, at prayer meetings, and at quarterly meetings. The phenomenon of a sudden conversion is misunderstood and deplored today by many

Christians.

Here is a description of the conversion experience of James Widney, a fourteen year old boy who lived in the village of Concord. It was in the year 1800. About three weeks after he had joined the church, he became deeply affected with the feeling of being a sinner who needed a Savior. His emotions became uncontrollable. Weeping and praying day and night brought little relief to his troubled soul. The cry of his heart was, "Give me Jesus, or I die!" Some days later he experienced conversion in a prayer meeting held in the room of the village doctor. The teenager's experience has been described thus:

> *A vivid ray of light at that moment broke upon his soul, through the darkness and gloom which, until then, had enveloped him. At the same instant, a deep thrill, like an electric shock, was felt throughout his soul, and his whole frame was made to feel and tremble under its intensity... The change was so great, and so sudden, that for a moment or two his consciousness was overwhelmed. On recovering it, he found himself prostrate upon the floor, in the middle of the room, uttering expressions of praise. Rising to his knees, he scarcely recognized himself as the same desponding and broken-hearted boy who, a few moments before, felt as if he had hardly life and strength to totter down the stairs... All this was the work of not exceeding 30 seconds."*

Even thirty years ago revivals were still being held in numerous churches of the Conference. And there were altar calls, several persons praying aloud at the same time for penitents kneeling at the altar rail, shouts of amen and hallelujah, giving of brief testimonies, and spontaneous singing of Gospel songs. Revival services have continued unbroken from the earliest days here to the present -- what changes in the contents of the sermons and exhortations and what differences in the ways people have responded through the years!

An excellent description of a revival in the Carlisle Church in 1840 is given by a visitor who appreciated a liturgical service. The revival had been going on from sunset to midnight for fifteen successive nights. The visitor, who had never attended a revival in this country, went on a winter evening about 9 o'clock, which was after the sermon had been given. Every seat was filled, the men sitting on one side of the church and the women on the other. Even the aisles were filled.

> *The scene which was here presented, it would be difficult to describe; and the*

sensation with which it inspired me, would be still more difficult to explain. They were a compound of surprise, awe, sorrow, pity and terror. It was like being in an assembly of maniacs... The revival minister, a young man, was on a platform underneath the pulpit, with a number of young men and boys -- some were mere children, nine and ten years of age -- on his right and left. He was addressing the audience, calling on them to come out this night or never -- this moment, which might be their last -- from the hell in which they already were to save themselves from that deeper hell to which they were already hastening. They were, he said, but a few feet from the very brink of the cataract, over which they would soon be carried into the lake that burns for ever with fire and brimstone. He then pointed to the youths on his right and left, as brands saved from the burning, 40 or 50 of these having become converts during the present revival.

On the front bench, before the platform, were young females occupying what is called "the anxious seat." Most of them were in convulsions; and from every part of the upper half of the church, near the platform, were proceeding loud and discordant sounds, amounting almost to yells. At least twenty different persons were all engaged in loud prayer at the same time, some on their knees, and some standing with their arms extended upward and vociferating at the top of their voices. The females alternately sobbing and groaning, the mingling of so many discordant sounds -- with the general agitation that seemed to pervade the whole assembly -- produced impressions on my own mind which I shall never forget.

That all the persons engaged in this scene were sincere, for the moment, I did not then nor do I now doubt... Granting that many open profligates are, by such revivals, drawn from a sinful life and become reformed characters, it is to be apprehended from the falling back of many when the effervescence of this excitement is over, that some injury is done to the cause of religion. This counteracts the good effects produced in the first instance so that, on the whole, these

revivals are not productive of so much permanent benefit to the cause of religion and morality as the more steady and orderly proceedings of religious worship conducted in a more moderate manner.

As to the exhibitions themselves, however habit may lead the people of America to look upon them with comparative indifference, I must say that they appeared to me most extravagant. I had seen the Howling Dervishes in Turkey, the Faqueers and Pilgrims in India and Arabia, the Santons in Egypt and Syria, the Ranters and Jumpers in England, and the Shakers in America; but among them all, I never witnessed more of convulsive excitement, and religious frenzy, than at this Methodist Revival in Carlisle, which must leave most camp meetings in the shade.

The mourners bench was evident in most churches, even in the plainest one-room churches. Later it was replaced with the altar, really an altar rail or chancel rail, where persons were invited to accept Christ. Thirty years ago it was quite common in our Conference to hear preachers invite persons to come to the altar and accept Christ.

The camp meeting ground was where equally moving and dramatic religious experiences took place. Camp meetings were popular in our Conference from the earliest years of the 19th century, the first one being held near Milton in 1805. Two years later Flavel Roan noted in his journal concerning his attendance at the above camp meeting on Sunday, September 19th, "The moon shining through the trees, the fire, candles in the camp, the large, quiet crowd of people, made a scene romantic and solemn."

Many of the meetings on camp grounds lasted past midnight and sometimes till dawn. W. Lee Spottswood, a Methodist preacher of our Conference, has written about his going to a camp meeting near Jersey Shore. It was the custom on the last night to keep the meeting going until morning -- in charge of the younger preachers, while the older ones went to bed. As dawn approached, seeing the interest abating -- for everyone was sleepy and tired -- the leader called for an experience meeting. "The announcement of so unusual a thing at such an hour brought all the preachers from their beds into the stand again. The experience meeting was a success."

Many camp meetings were held in conjunction with quarterly meetings, sometimes sponsored by one circuit, sometimes by several circuits. In the last years of our Conference only two camp

meetings were being held annually, and the services were almost like any informal evening service held in a local church.

The itinerant preacher could never have looked after the spiritual needs of the people at the various appointments, nor could Methodism have prospered and extended its outreach without the contributions made by local preachers. Among the earliest were Michael Cryder at Huntingdon; Jeremiah Duvall, Thomas Laken and Henry Horne of Bedford County; Thomas and Christian Bowman who lived in Briar Creek, near Berwick; and Alexander Ewing at Gatchelville.

> Thomas Laken came to live in Bedford County about 1783, he being the first local preacher to reside there. Abel Stevens portrayed Laken as having *superior talents as a preacher, was diligent in visiting the sick and dying, and was [a] sort of chaplain of that distant region on funeral occasions and other public solemnities. He often mounted his horse and went preaching from appointment to appointment over a six week's circuit, and attended every Quarterly meeting in his own and many on the neighboring circuits. In fine, this good man was a pioneer of religion on the frontier, doing more effective work than most regular preachers of later times.*

James Reiley met Laken for the first time in 1816 at a camp meeting on the Allegheny Circuit. Reiley wrote than Laken "was the most able minister I ever listened to in the locality, who had never traveled." One local historian described Laken's ministerial services thus: "In early years his services as a performer of marriage ceremonies were in great demand. The states of Maryland and Virginia demanded a license, while Pennsylvania did not. Often times parties consisting of a dozen or more couples, each of whom desired to be married, presented themselves before the parson. On such occasions, Laken had all the business he could well attend to, while the young people were merry, happy and full of fun."

Jeremiah Duvall was also a physician, either the first or second to practice in Bedford County. It is said that he preached a Christmas sermon every year from 1795 to 1831, the year before he died. Thomas Bowman was the grandfather of Bishop Thomas Bowman who was elected to the episcopacy in 1872. There were local preachers in our Conference who were preaching regularly and conducting funeral services and visiting as late as the 1950's.

Classes in the Methodist Societies were held regularly for guidance of the new converts, to reprove those who failed some

Christian duty, and to encourage each other to be faithful to the Lord and to the church. Class leaders were the key persons. They were responsible for the spiritual welfare of the members in their classes. In the last century those classes were an integral part of the church's life. Class meetings were still being held in our Conference during the earliest years of this century.

What were earlier traveling preachers like? Of course no one answer would apply to all. What did they wear? Shortly after Asbury's ordination, he appeared at a preaching appointment in North Carolina attired in a gown, cassock, and band. It is doubtful Asbury appeared very often thereafter dressed as a priest of the Church of England. Asbury and all the preachers of that day were remarkably plain in their dress. Later the preachers in their conference voted against double-breasted coats and vests. The appearance of the itinerant preachers is described by an early Methodist in Danville, who recalls as a young man, shortly after 1815, the visits of several itinerants. "I well remember the appearance of these devoted itinerant preachers in their journeys around the circuit, with their jaded horses, their portmanteau and umbrella tied on behind their saddle, and hat covered with oil cloth to protect it from the storms, and their extremely plain garb, such as I saw Lorenzo Dow wear at a subsequent date."

A time came when the clergy dressed more formally, including the Prince Albert coat worn in the pulpit. Some men were wearing such coats as late as the days immediately before World War II. In the last thirty years most clergy have come to wear a robe for services, and many in more recent years wear the clerical collar at various times. Even some of the lay pastors wear the collar.

Men of the cloth are to be remembered as human, capable of doing good and of failing. We may think of Asbury as a stern person about the more mundane things of life, but he was also caring and compassionate. One night he was staying at the home of Jacob Gearhart at Danville. He wrote: "My company went to bed, and I sat up helping to hull peas." When he was in Fulton County in July of 1815, he saw that the farmers were late in harvesting their crops. He was too feeble to help them with his labor, but he did loan his horses to help the farmers bring in their harvest. Through the years and to this day, there are preachers who volunteer their labor to help farmers harvest their crops.

For many years, and by action of the General Conference, the use of tobacco by our clergy was deemed improper and unsuitable to good and exemplary conduct. Long before this action was taken, there were opponents to the use of tobacco by Methodist preachers. Jacob Gruber was very strongly opposed to smoking and said so directly to the offenders. Often preachers would indulge in the smoking of cigars during idle moments while attending camp meetings. It seems that the chewing of tobacco may have become

as wide spread last century in our Conference as smoking. Cigarette smoking was another matter. As long as the provision was in our Discipline regarding clergy abstaining from the use of tobacco, few, if any, smoked cigarettes anywhere in public -- be it at special functions or among friends. The Board of Ministerial Training and Qualifications inquired of every candidate desiring admission to the Annual Conference or approval as a supply pastor his attitude about smoking and his intention to refrain from smoking if already a smoker. A few had a difficult time when they insisted upon ignoring this part of the Discipline, and there were some who did smoke cigarettes or a pipe in the privacy of their homes. I have neither seen nor heard of anyone in our Conference smoking cigarettes since the provision was omitted from the Discipline.

W. Lee Spottswood, at one time President of Williamsport Dickinson Seminary tells in his autobiography that he had been a confirmed tobacco chewer for thirty years. In the last years of his ministry he decided he would quit the habit because it was an inconvenience to him and an annoyance to others. He would enter a house with a quid in his mouth. Soon he needed to spit. He would use his handkerchief or spit out a door, through a raised window, or into a stove. He would enter the church with a quid. A spittoon, which he used during the service, was placed near the pulpit. His daughter's challenge to quit and his grandson's comment in Sunday School class about Grandpa chewing tobacco brought the whole issue to a head. Spottswood finally won the battle. Tobacco chewing did not entirely disappear in our Conference until the 1930's.

When John Wesley set forth the duties the preachers ought to assume, there seemed to be little or no time for a preacher to get involved in any community organization. The Annual Conference of 1825 adopted a resolution disapproving of preachers meeting with, or joining, Masonic bodies. The resolution was also adopted at the 1827 session. Eventually -- this was more than a century ago -- some did become members of a Masonic body. Some preachers, however, were suspicious of their fellow preachers who were Masons. About 1856 an incident took place in the Conference relative to the possible election of a certain preacher as a delegate to General Conference, whose election would be certain because all the Masons in the Conference would vote for him. There have been times since then when preachers have stated that certain men received good appointments because they were Masons. Some years ago a District Superintendent told me that never does a man's membership in the Masonic order, or his not being a Mason, have any influence in any way as to the man's appointment.

Actually, there seemed to be more opposition to a preacher being a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. In 1847 the Hughesville Quarterly Conference heard a complaint against

B.B. Hamlin, the assistant preacher, because he belonged to this lodge. The Quarterly Conference "resolved that Brother Hamlin withdraw from the Order of Odd Fellows at the earliest opportunity." The Annual Conference in 1842 had expressed its disapproval of a traveling preacher belonging to this order. Years ago all this changed and preachers became members of secret societies and service clubs without serious criticism from pulpit or pew.

The Methodist preachers of the last century not only practiced piety but also became involved in moral and social issues. Prior to the Civil War some were Abolitionists. Most all were opposed to slavery. Some in the southern counties of the state, however, were not in sympathy with the Abolitionists -- who lived mostly farther north.

The so-called liquor traffic was opposed and fought more vigorously in this Conference than probably any other social evil. As early as 1810 the Baltimore Conference saw the use of liquor as one reason for the small increase in the number of Methodists. The 1830 Annual Conference complimented the makers of two addresses on pointing out the danger of using liquor, and approved the efforts of Temperance Societies on the emphasis of total abstinence. The Conference also deemed the General Rules ought to be obeyed, requiring preacher, both by precept and example, to prevent the use and sale of liquor in their communities.

Way back in 1800, when the Methodist society was formed at Concord, the little group, having promised to live by the General Rules, made a virtual temperance pledge not to use liquor. They knew there was a Rule prohibiting members from "drinking spiritous liquors, unless in case of necessity." At first their drinking neighbors sneered and ridiculed them. Finally, one neighbor after another gave up such drinking until all persons who regarded their reputations no longer used liquor or allowed it in their homes.

All through the years of our Annual Conference's history, it has vigorously supported those state and local organizations which have opposed the sale and use of both beer and liquor -- such support including both finances and leadership. The last stalwart foe of the liquor traffic of statewide prominence is still living, the Rev. O. Bruce Poulson, now past 90 years of age and one of the oldest ministerial members of our Annual Conference.

A large part of the time and energy of pastors last century was devoted to conducting services and to visitation. The schedule of services for a station church is well illustrated by that of Grace Church, Harrisburg, about 1857. Preaching service was every Sunday at 10:00 am and 7:30 pm. The rest of the schedule was as follows: lecture every Thursday evening; Communion the first Sunday of every month immediately after the morning

service; baptism the last Sunday of every month immediately before preaching; class meetings in the basement of the church on Sunday afternoon at 3 o'clock, and on Monday, Tuesday and Friday evenings; Sabbath School at 1:30 pm in the basement; infant school and Bible classes at the same hour. Up to a generation ago, very few Church Schools were still meeting on Sunday afternoon. The Sunday evening service passed out of existence very rapidly in the days following World War II.

The setting for the preaching service in the earliest years was no different here than elsewhere in Methodism. By the 1850's there were churches with galleries, and there were churches with two floors -- the first floor being used for Sunday School and other meeting purposes, and the sanctuary was on the second floor. Such buildings were rarely erected after 1900. Nearly every church building through the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century had in common a pulpit-centered chancel with one, two or three chairs -- sometimes a sofa. After World War II a movement swept over the churches resulting in the remodeling of the front of the church and making a divided chancel, with an altar against the wall and a pulpit and lecturn on either side near the front of the chancel. A cross and candles were placed on the altar, and sometimes artificial flowers when fresh flowers were not available. This change was made not only in the town and city churches, but also in the one-room village and open country churches. Not all ministers were prepared to use properly this new setting for worship; Methodist theological seminaries in previous years had done little or nothing to train future ministers for this innovation. This change, to what some said was an imitation of the Episcopalians or Lutherans, did not cause any prolonged serious objection among the laity. Many times the people were as enthusiastic about the change as the clergy. All this occurred in a conference considered to be quite conservative.

The ecumenical spirit was expressed very early outside of the Union Church building when seven different denominational Sunday Schools in Harrisburg, including Grace Methodist, gathered for a union Communion Service in a Presbyterian Church in November of 1855. Ten clergymen officiated and three hundred Sunday School scholars, who were church members, received communion. The side pews and galleries were crowded with spectators. It was a deeply moving experience which was repeated annually for several years. The ecumenical movement was also expressed churchwide through the American Sunday School Union formed in 1824, although many Methodists began to support the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church founded in 1827.

Sunday Schools became very popular in our Conference and in our state. Pennsylvania became known as the great Sunday School State. The first full-time person to be employed by an Annual Conference in the 20th century for supervising Sunday School work

was the Rev. Edwin C. Keboch of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. In the 1920's and 1930's a goodly number of Sunday Schools had a total enrollment of over one thousand members. Some years ago seventy percent of all persons being confirmed as church members were first members of the Sunday School. It is surprising to note the influence of Sunday Schools even in their earlier years. Someone wrote in the Sunday School Advocate of December 3, 1844, that "Some of the most extensive and powerful revivals of religion with which the Church has been blessed, in latter times, have commenced in Sabbath schools. A very large portion of the present membership of the Churches throughout our country regard Sabbath schools as in some way instrumental in their conversion."

Bishop John Emory was a promoter of Sunday Schools. In 1832, while in Bedford, he preached to a large congregation and then approached the people about forming a Sunday School. They quickly responded to his offer. He included this information about the school in a letter to the editors of the Christian Advocate and Journal:

> *In half an hour a society was formed, a superintendent and teachers appointed, a sufficient sum subscribed to commence the school, notice given that it would be commenced on the next Sunday, and a meeting of the superintendent and teachers appointed for the afternoon to make their arrangements for obtaining additional subscriptions, collecting scholars, etc., etc., which was all attended to, and I am now, as a result, authorized to request you to send them twenty dollars worth of books and tracts... The plan on which I have advised this school to be commenced immediately is to collect the scholars, class them according to their attainments, teach them their letters, to spell, read, recite verses of Scripture, hymns, etc., to sing and pray with and for them, and give them good advice how they are to behave at home, at school, at church, to keep the sabbath, to be cleanly, to attend public worship, keep out of the streets, out of mischief, etc., and as to their morals and interests generally.*

Each Sunday School acquired a library of books to be circulated among its scholars. Before the days of the Sunday School, the itinerant preachers were book sellers who encouraged the people to buy and read such books as Wesley's Sermons and Notes, The Experience of Preachers and Thomas a Kempis. The preachers were required to circulate the hymnal and Discipline.

Asbury once described his chance meetings with persons thus: "People call me by my name as they pass me on the road, and I hand them a religious tract in German or English; or I call at a door for a glass of water, and leave a little pamphlet."

The Baltimore Conference in 1838 voiced formal opposition to the appointment of itinerant ministers to literary institutions. Twenty years earlier Joseph Doddridge, born in Bedford County in 1769 and a Methodist itinerant preacher for a few years in western Pennsylvania before becoming a clergyman in the Episcopal Church, had this to say about education:

> *I formerly indulged the hope that the Methodist society would, sooner or later, in obedience to the order of their spiritual father, adopt the use of the service book which he gave them, and that with the increase of their number and wealth, they would found literary institutions, so as to associate science with their zeal in the public ministry of the Gospel. This hope may yet be realized.*

Fifteen years after Doddridge wrote this letter, Baltimore and Philadelphia Conferences expressed interest in acquiring Dickinson College as a Methodist institution. It is the oldest college west of the Susquehanna River and is still a Methodist-related college. It has just begun a celebration of its two hundred years as an educational institution. Just 125 years ago, in 1847, Benjamin Crever began negotiations to secure the former Williamsport Academy for the Old Baltimore Conference. Williamsport Dickinson Seminary began operation under the auspices of the Conference in 1848 and it educated hundreds of men for the ministry. The Junior College was accredited in 1935, and in 1947 it was made a four-year college and named Lycoming College. The Seminary had been phased out previously over a period of years. The college continues to be a Methodist-related educational institution.

Other academies or preparatory schools were established within the bounds of our Conference by individuals, churches and the Conference. They were Irving Female College and Cumberland Valley Institute, both located at Mechanicsburg, Cottage Hill College at York, Cassville Male and Female Seminary, and Allegheny Male and Female Seminary at Rainsburg, Bedford County. None of the above schools now exist.

As we look back over these two hundred years of Methodism in Central Pennsylvania, we are indebted to Asbury and the other early itinerant preachers who established a firm foundation for the Church's ministry and mission in their day and for all the ensuing years. The labor of these itinerants on the frontier that

existed here was admirably evaluated by Joseph Doddridge who was so well acquainted with conditions. He wrote that the progress of the Methodist societies

> *at first was slow, but their zeal and perseverance at length overcame every obstacle, so that they are now one of the most numerous and respectable societies in this country. The itinerant plan of their ministry is well calculated to convey the Gospel throughout a thinly scattered population. Accordingly, their ministry has kept pace with the extension of our settlements. The little cabin was scarcely built and the little field fenced in, before these evangelical teachers made their appearance amongst them, collected them into societies and taught them the worship of God.*
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> *Had it not been for the labors of these indefatigable men, our country, to the great extent of its settlements, would have been to this day a semi-barbaric region. How many thousands and tens of thousands of the most ignorant and licentious of our population have they instructed, and reclaimed from the error of their ways? They have restored to society even the most worthless, and made them valuable and respectable as citizens, and useful in all the relations of life. Their numerous and zealous ministry bids fair to carry on the good work to any extent which our settlements and population may require.*

Thus we can understand why there was or is a Methodist Church in almost every sizable village, town and city within the bounds of the Old Central Pennsylvania Conference.

There were other itinerant preachers in whom we have a great interest. The United Brethren and the Methodist preachers had a number of official contacts worthy of note. In 1809 the Old Baltimore Conference sent an adopted report to the United Brethren for their consideration. The report recommended their careful licensing of their own preachers who might then enjoy "our privileges"; adopting our Discipline which had been translated into German; furnishing their members with certificates which might entitle them to the privileges of class meetings, sacraments, and love feasts in our Church. The following year they responded favorably to the report. By 1812 the Methodists saw favorable indications of the mutual efforts to bring about a union of the two churches, but several years later the whole plan had failed to materialize. In 1826, however, communication between the two bodies was temporarily renewed. In addition, itinerant preachers formed the Evangelical Church within

the bounds of our Conference. The paths of the itinerant preachers from the three denominations frequently crossed over the years in various parts of our Conference.

The Central Pennsylvania Conference has a history of many successes and failures, the same as any other conference. More specifically, the Conference was considered at times provincial, most often conservative. Yet it furnished leaders and officials in the Methodist Church beyond our Conference boundary, leaders in the ecumenical movement and in church-related organizations. Men, women, youth -- lay persons and clergy -- have labored and witnessed for Christ and the Church all through the years. Ours is a spiritual heritage -- no matter which was our mother church: Methodist, United Brethren, or Evangelical -- we gratefully acknowledge, and we feel humbly proud.

Rev. Earl Edward Kerstetter
(1913-1978)