

FROM SHOEMAKER TO SOUL-SAVER

The Story of Rev. John Snyder (1768-1845)

Pioneer United Brethren Circuit Rider

by

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Whenever the members of Snyder's United Methodist Church in Perry County, Pennsylvania, join in worship and ministry, they are celebrating the life of a German immigrant shoemaker-farmer-evangelist. In 1814 he gave the land, the leadership, his name, and his service as first pastor for the establishment of the church.

The history of Snyder's Church is bound so closely with the life story of Johannes Schneider (John Snyder) that they must be recalled together. In turn, their chronicle memorializes countless other pioneer preachers and churches intertwined with and influencing the path of early United States history.

It was in the village of Beddelhausen, Wittgenstein, in the German principality of Nassau, on the upper Rhine, later a part of the Kingdom of Prussia, that John Snyder was born on December 28, 1768. On his birth record his father, also named John, was identified as a kirchen-ältester (church elder), implying oversight of the local congregation. Godparents at his January 11, 1769, baptism were from the neighboring village of Elsoff. His mother's maiden name was Maria Katharina Betzel, and genealogical research shows both families rooted in that locality east of Cologne for more than one hundred years.

In keeping with the custom for a son to learn a trade, young John early mastered the skills of a shoemaker. He also received a better than average education in German that would prepare him for a career far beyond his or his parents' imagination at that time. Quite traditionally, at the age of eighteen he was confirmed into the German Reformed Church.

Marriage and Emigration

In nearby Richstein on August 23, 1768, was born Katharina Elisabetha Pfeiffer (Piper), daughter of an ironmaster and his wife, Philipp and Anna Elisabetha Dornhöfer Pfeiffer. In addition to moderate schooling, she learned linen-bleaching. In a chapel wedding on April 1, 1794, she became the bride of John Snyder. According to the pattern of previous generations, the normal expectation would have been



**The Reverend John Snyder
1768-1845**

EDITOR'S NOTE: The above picture was provided by the author. It was discovered labeled simply as "John Snyder" among the United Brethren materials in the national United Methodist archives at Lake Junaluska in 1977. In the author's words: "My researcher did the meticulous job of ruling out other John Snyders. Comparison of the photo with a pen sketch known

positively to be my John Snyder clinched the evidence."

Photography was invented in France in 1839. Most surviving American photographs of the early 1840's are either poor quality street/room scenes taken by experimenters with the new process or portraits of wealthy individuals. If this is indeed a photograph of the John Snyder it is remarkable for the young couple to settle down near their families, rear their children in Calvinist doctrine under an autocratic government, and eke out subsistence with the tedious work of their hands.

Instead, their marriage record bears parenthetically the end of their life on German soil: (Nach U.S.A. ausge-wandert). That brief notation hides all the anxieties and fears attendant upon the pain of farewells: to parents, with no prospect of ever seeing them again, and to the small community known to them for their twenty-five years. All were exchanged for a strange, foreign expanse four thousand miles across the Atlantic.

Nor does "Departed for the United States of America" reveal the circumstances under which the young Snyders left their homeland: their poverty and their determined decision to seek a new life in a free country. Like many other German emigrants of the period, they had no money for overseas passage. The alternative was to sell themselves as bond servants, under contract to work out their ship fare, after reaching their destination.

Into their meager baggage they packed a fruit preserve stand of English pressed glass, perhaps a wedding gift. After a generation of use holding "spread" for lightbread in Pennsylvania, it would survive as the only vestige of Beddelhausen to be passed down through descendants. Today it remains a valued keepsake in a suburban Chicago home.

Also passed along to descendants was the account of a grueling, longer-than-usual, six month voyage dismally deficient in space, sanitation and nutrition. With what weariness and with what mixed emotions -- fright, hope, curiosity -- the young immigrants must have disembarked in Philadelphia! In what was then the capital of this new republic, did anyone point out to them Independence Hall or the residence of President George Washington?

at least four reasons: (1) that a Perry County preacher would be in a position to experience the latest technology, (2) that such an early photograph is of such fine quality, (3) that a man at least 72 years old appears so robust and (4) that the subject sported sideburns, which did not become popular until after the Civil War.

The editor consulted a professional in the field who agreed to perform a non-damaging analysis to determine the age of the original photograph, if it could still be located. The

national archives, now at Drew University, did locate the photograph in question -- but it is not an original; it is a copy made and given to United Brethren historian A.W. Drury in the 1930's. The photograph is presented with these comments for the reader to make his own judgments.

Three Years of Redemption

Their most urgent business was to make contact with the master, a Frenchman named Louis Morel, for whom they were to work. To redeem their transportation charge which he paid, they were bound to him for three years of service. After the bustle of Philadelphia, they may have welcomed the quiet of Morel's farm on the Susquehanna River near present Duncannon. Actually, their loneliness may have been somewhat assuaged by the picturesque terrain of river, mountain, woods and valley -- all reminiscent of their own Nassau.

When put to work on Morel's farm, the Snyders became his property -- like his house or his horse. Even with a fair master, indentured servants labored long and vigorously with their hands. Thus John and Catharine (American spelling) joined the company of thousands from Europe and Britain, beginning in early colonial days, who literally bound themselves to the soil of this new land of the free.

With what relief the couple must have checked off each day of toiling side by side in the fields! There would have been little time for anything else -- even for the grief that came when they buried their first child, a son, born during that period. Finally, at the end of their three years as redemptionists, they would have received "freedom dues" (probably cash) with which to start farming on their own.

Eventually the Snyders bought land in Wheatfield Township, Perry County. Once free, and with no stigma attached, former bond servants could advance in respect and achievement to the extent of their diligence and integrity. For that privilege, the two young immigrants from Wittgenstein set about to repay their adopted country manyfold.

The Trumpet of the Gospel

Amid frontier hardships, the far removed formal religious training and concepts of John Snyder's youth had little opportunity for expression. It was a plight shared by a host of other Germans as they felt their way into the English-speaking New World during the 1700's. Word of their needs having reached back to Europe, missionaries were recruited and dispatched through the cooperative efforts of the Reformed Church in Germany, Switzerland and Holland.

Among the missionaries arriving in Pennsylvania in 1752 was one whose influence was to alter forever the lives of John

and Catharine Snyder. This was German-born Philip William Otterbein, who combined classical and theological education with piety, zeal and dynamic preaching. In the challenging surroundings of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the Reverend Otterbein one day experienced a powerful, soul-searching revelation that added another dimension to his Reformed Church background: the spiritual warmth of a personal relationship with God and Christ. He then felt called to lead others to know the peace and warmth and exultation of salvation by faith.

Attempts of Otterbein and like-minded preachers to warm with deepened spirituality the ritualistic formalism of established churches met with hostility toward both themselves and their converts. Finally, with no other alternative, Otterbein and a dozen others gathered in a stone farmhouse near Frederick, Maryland, on September 25, 1800. That day they brought into being the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, the first American-born denomination. It was geared to sowing the seeds of faith in the soil of this nation, especially among settlers of German descent.

One of a sizable number of ministers unable to attend the organizing conference of 1800 was John Neidig. In 1793 he instigated the building of the first meeting house east of the Susquehanna River for the followers of Otterbein. This was in Oberlin, near Harrisburg. Carrying his evangelism to the west side of the river, John Neidig wrote a decisive chapter in the Snyder's story. As the writer of John Snyder's obituary records in 1845, "In the year 1802 he heard the trumpet blown by Father John Neidig, at which time he was awakened to a sense of his danger and embraced in faith Christ as a crucified Redeemer..."

Just how John Snyder heard the trumpet is not recorded. Whatever form the revelation took, it was no brief emotional episode. It was a mystical encounter of such convincing power that from that moment the course of a life was changed for the next forty-three years. For John Snyder, as for other transplanted Germans striving for identity, this new denomination's spiritual warmth and emphasis on individual responsibility for a personal relationship with Christ filled a serious void.

It was an experience that Snyder, too, felt compelled to pass along. Continuing the words of the previously cited obituary, "...and [he] soon began to preach Him to others: soon the work of grace spread through his own neighborhood, and on one occasion thirty or more were converted and added to the Church." Thus was created the nucleus of what would evolve into Snyder's United Brethren Church.

Such a testimonial to his literate and fervent delivery consigned farming to second place in his pursuits, in the manner of Peter and Andrew leaving their fishnets for discipleship with Jesus. Likewise, left far behind in

Beddelhausen was John Snyder's trade of mending the soles of shoes, as he took the Bible in hand and turned to the saving of souls of men and women and youth.

Citizen of the United States

Upon Catharine Snyder was to fall heavy responsibility for home and farm management, and for the rearing of four daughters and one son. In 1802, when their father began his spiritual awakening, Ann was four years old and baby Catharine was one; Mary was born later that year, Susanna in 1806, and John George in 1809. Happily, Mrs. Snyder shared with her husband in the awakening of conversion to the new pervading faith -- and so did her younger immigrant brother, Daniel Pfeiffer, whose name would be added to the United Brethren ministerial roster.

Still another challenge fell upon Catharine's shoulders: ingenious budgeting. She could look forward to the time when her husband's itinerant preaching would qualify him for a salary under direction of the denomination's original organizational unit -- variously referred to as the Mother Conference, the Eastern Conference, or the Pennsylvania Conference.

In 1805 the conference voted to compensate its active itinerants with an expense allowance of forty pounds (\$106.80) per year. On the other hand, preachers "who preach where they desire, according to their inclination, shall have no compensation" and should they receive any cash gifts from their audiences, "they shall bring the same to the conference, to be given to the regular preachers."

Further specifications were added by the conference in 1807. Married itinerants were to be paid forty pounds yearly, and single preachers twenty-four pounds (\$64.08), provided they travel regularly. In 1811, the salary of single preachers rose to \$80.

In addition, the conference was beginning to be divided into districts, or circuits, over which presiding elders had supervision. The presiding elder, usually a farmer-preacher, not only oversaw the work in his own community but also arranged appointment schedules for the preachers assigned to ride his circuit and looked after their material needs. All these duties were performed without pay. Into this developing denominational structure John Snyder was prepared to enter.

The time had also come for him to take another step. Left in the past, along with shoemaking, was his allegiance to Germany. On October 1, 1808, John Snyder appeared in court and met all the requirements for becoming a citizen of the state of Pennsylvania and of the United States of America. That day President Thomas Jefferson gained a new loyal subject who professed to be of good moral character and to possess

attachment to the Constitution of the United States.

Beyond Perry County

John Snyder's preaching and reputation gradually spread beyond his community. In 1809 he was received as a licentiate into the annual conference of the United Brethren Church in the East. Thereafter, he was to answer to many titles -- church father, traveling preacher, circuit rider, presiding elder, pastor.

Furthermore, his voice was to be heard in denominational conferences for many years, helping to shape policy and initiate programs. At early conferences he attended, he was one who volunteered a positive response to the annual question, "Who is willing to travel?" Much of that traveling was done when circuits were widely extended over Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania.

In today's comfortable, convenient and specialized world, it is hard to imagine what a traveling preacher's weeks away from home involved: braving unpredictable weather, roads, meals and beds; straining one's voice and physical endurance as preacher, prayer, song leader and Bible interpreter for however few or many could be garnered into a settler's cabin, barn, schoolhouse or orchard; occasionally participating in revival services or other "big meetings"; counseling a class -- as a group of converts in one place was called -- and hopefully developing them into a congregation; riding lonely under the stars to the bedside of a dying repent. All these demands were accepted with a sense of dedication and rejoicing in performing a mission: to bring the unsaved to their Lord.

At the 1814 conference in Hagerstown, Maryland, it was resolved "that John Snyder shall preach in Hagerstown Circuit one year." His horse had to take him a considerable distance beyond the boundaries of Perry County that year. He made regular stops, for example, at the historic log Geeting Meeting House. Salem Church of Keedysville, Maryland, which grew out of that congregation, lists John Snyder as its pastor 1814-1815.

Catharine Snyder was likely grateful for action that had been taken at the conference of 1812: that a married preacher riding circuit every four weeks was to receive the generous sum of \$120 a year and traveling expenses! In addition, the conference ordered that such circuit riders "shall give a strict account of all money that they receive."

General Conference Delegate

With the United Brethren denomination having grown to include six states [Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky], the move to hold a General Conference became a reality in 1815. John Snyder was one of fourteen authorized delegates who assembled at that June 6 Conference in Bonnet's Schoolhouse near the western Pennsylvania town of Mount Pleasant -- a site chosen because of its accessibility by both roads and waterways.

Stimulating indeed must have been the flowing German conversation of horseback riders en route to the meeting. Along with Presiding Bishop Christian Newcomer rode John Snyder and four other stalwarts. Newcomer's extensive travels as a frontier missionary and circuit rider, his eloquent preaching, and his aggressive organizing stamp him as "The Saint Paul of the United Brethren Church."

Reports of that memorable First General Conference reveal sharp differences among strong-willed representatives of varying districts regarding order and discipline, and Bishop Newcomer needed all his skill and authority to keep the emotional temperature inside the schoolhouse from exceeding the Fahrenheit temperature recorded outside. Nevertheless, the final paragraph of the English translation of Secretary Jacob Baulus' minutes could serve as a model for concise action in any modern-day group: "The Confession of Faith and the Discipline were considered, in some respects enlarged, some things omitted, on the whole improved, and ordered printed."

At the Second General Conference, held at Mount Pleasant June 2-4, 1817, John Snyder was again one of the (twelve) official delegates attending. That they engaged in much Bible reading, singing and "hearty prayer" during the three-day assembly is evident in the brief minutes which concluded with this significant statement: "Resolved that three hundred Disciplines be printed in the German language, and one hundred in the English language." No ethnic barriers were going to keep these dedicated preachers from uniting in the gospel with brethren of any national background.

Also emerging was the trend toward more churchly structure and organization. Thereafter, a General Conference would be held every four years. Over time, the Church of the United Brethren would develop a distinctive government combining episcopal, presbyterial and congregational features, and John Snyder would be participating in top denominational affairs for years to come. As late as 1833, for example, he was one of six delegates from the Pennsylvania Conference to the General Conference held at Dreisbach's Church in Ohio.

New Titles and Tasks

The annual Eastern Conference of 1817, meeting two weeks

before the General Conference, marked a milestone for John Snyder. There, in Antietam, Maryland, he was ordained as an elder -- the title his father had held in the German Reformed Church in Beddelhausen fifty years before. There it had been used to signify a position of lay leadership, in the United Brethren Church it meant "minister."

The explanation why official "ordination" came to Elder Snyder after fifteen years of preaching is simple. Until 1813 there was no formal ceremony or laying on of hands for ordination of a United Brethren preacher. There was merely an informal conference vote to grant the privileges of preaching, baptizing and administering the sacraments. Even "Apostle Paul" Newcomer himself was not formally ordained until October 2, 1813, when the aging Bishop Otterbein acquiesced to a conference request to "ordain by the laying on of hands one or more preachers, who afterward may perform the same for others." The Discipline of 1817 went so far as to provide a form for the ordaining of preachers.

That the ritual begun that October day was passed directly on to John Snyder by the hands of Bishop Newcomer is almost certain, since it was he who presided at the Eastern Conference of 1817 where the Snyder ordination took place. Along with ordination, the conference of 1817 honored Rev. Snyder with election as presiding elder. Now it would be his unpaid turn to see that any circuit rider in his area was scheduled, fed, clothed, housed and provided with horse and saddle.

In a listing of 819 ministers of the Pennsylvania Conference from 1789 to 1964, in the order in which their names first appear in conference minutes, John Snyder is number fifty-seven. The Histories of the Pennsylvania and Central Pennsylvania Conferences of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, by Charles R. Miller and William L. Raker, includes a biographical sketch of Snyder as one of a select group of clergymen of the 1789-1846 early period "who made a strong impression upon the conference and who continued in its membership until their death."

In the Footsteps of Otterbein

Finally, the year of 1817 brought to John Snyder, former bond servant, one of the highest distinctions that could come to a United Brethren minister -- the title of pastor of Old Otterbein Church in Baltimore, the mother church of the denomination. It was named for founding father Rev. Philip William Otterbein, who served as pastor from 1774 until his death in 1813.

What had begun as a chapel in 1771 became in 1786 a \$6,000 structure made of bricks from England. Bells cast in Bremen, Germany, were installed in the tower. When Otterbein

invited a group of fellow evangelists there in 1789 to lay plans for sounding the gospel trumpet among German Americans, he was entertaining what is now considered the First Conference of United Brethren Ministers. This was the beginning of organizing that led to the establishment of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ at the Frederick, Maryland, meeting of September 25, 1800.

Into that impressive, historic Baltimore setting moved John and Catharine Snyder from rural Wheatfield Township, Perry County, Pennsylvania. But four years separated from the administration of Bishop Otterbein, John Snyder embarked on what would become one of the longest pastorates in that famed church's history and served there from 1817 to 1825. Coincidentally, he was followed in that pulpit, 1828-1831, by his old friend John Neidig, whose gospel trumpet first captured him for the Lord. In the next 150 years, there would be only one pastoral term longer than Rev. Snyder's.

Human Rights Advocate

From records that have been preserved, it is strikingly clear that John Snyder matched energy and action with pioneering thought. Some 160 years before ERA, he elevated the position of women. Until he took over the Old Otterbein helm, only males of legal age were listed as members of the church. But during his ministry, the names of female members appeared on the church roll for the first time! We wish that some word had come down as to any German dialogue emanating from the male heads of household regarding this break with tradition.

Moreover, in that day before social welfare plans, John Snyder was thinking of the underpaid and the aged. The Proceedings for the United Brethren Conference of 1818, held in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, state: "At the last, a letter from Baltimore, brought by J. Snyder, was handed over, relating to the raising of a fund to supplement the small salaries of the poor preachers who preach in the frontier of western counties under the direction of the conference." On behalf of Old Otterbein Church, the letter urged specifically the "creation of a fund for the purpose of helping to support the poor preachers in the out-of-the way places under the direction of the conference, to make up for their small salaries. As already a beginning had been made at a conference held in the state of Ohio, June 11, 1816, we thought we would make an effort, the Lord willing, to give the people a chance to make voluntary contributions thereto."

In his own prestigious position with Old Otterbein Church, Pastor Snyder did not forget the needs of the traveling preachers that he himself had experienced. Let private donors help, he appealed in a vein characteristic of

the present age. But he also recognized the necessity for organization. It was natural that at the Conference of 1821 in Hagerstown, he was appointed one of a committee of seven to devise a plan to raise a fund for support of the traveling preachers. The report of that committee led to the adoption of a constitution for a Benevolent Society, the first in the denomination, for "the support of the traveling and aged preachers." For the first time, aged ministers were included and the way was open for assistance to widows of ministers. All were indebted to a soul-saver concerned also with the physical welfare of human beings.

"Power and Unction"

The facts demonstrate that no matter how strenuous his routine duties, John Snyder looked upon attendance at conference, both regional and general, as vital. Repeatedly, even during his years at Old Otterbein, he was elected presiding elder. At the Conference of 1818 he was named to the committee to examine candidates for the ministry. At the 1820 Conference, held in Washington County, Maryland, he served on the committee to audit accounts of the treasurer. The minutes of that conference also report: "on third day, at 10 o'clock, John Snyder preached from 1st Peter 4:17,18 in great power and unction... On fourth day, at 11 o'clock, John Snyder preached from the fourth chapter of 2nd Timothy, 2nd verse."

We can imagine that the portly stature and determined countenance of the former shoemaker from Beddelhausen emphasized the "power and unction" with which he relayed the command of the tentmaker, Paul of Tarsus, to Timothy: "Preach the word; be instant in season; out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

There is deserved justice in the fact that after his retirement from the pastorate of Old Otterbein Church, John Snyder in 1817 and 1828 achieved the status of full time "traveling presiding elder" -- a denominational first -- and with pay. Thus were introduced both a new designation and unprecedented financial compensation from the common fund. In apparent tribute to his executive ability, he was assigned to the Pennsylvania district -- with jurisdiction over the Juniata, Lancaster and York circuits. As late as 1838, when he was in his seventieth year, his name appears on conference appointments as presiding elder.

Farewell to German Script

Particularly memorable must have been the 1838 Conference at Wormleysburg, Cumberland County. There

presiding elder Snyder was accompanied by his twenty-eight year old son, John George Snyder, who had been ordained a United Brethren preacher that very year and was serving as a secretary for the conference. Notable, indeed, was the secretarial task of the young American-born Snyder and his fellow secretary, his German-born uncle Daniel Pfeiffer. For the first time in conference history, the minutes were to be recorded in English -- forerunner of today's English-as-a-second-language programs. From 1800 through 1837, minutes had been written in German script.

Some details of the 1838 Conference that did not get into the official minutes undoubtedly were described to the wonderment of Catharine and Peggy Snyder and other wives when the preachers returned home. By the invitation and generosity of Jacob Erb, the recently married pastor of the Dauphin Circuit, all conference accommodations in Wormleysburg were free! He boarded forty guests in his own home and paid for more than forty additional ones to be entertained in other homes. For their horses, he provided feed and shelter against the March cold. In addition, he rented an abandoned schoolhouse for the conference sessions.

The continuing growth of the Pennsylvania Conference brought about another historic event in 1838 -- division. Numerical increases in both the laity and the clergy, as well as the geographic expanse involved, made it wise to provide for the separate administration of the work in the northern and western portions of Pennsylvania. And so the Snyders bade farewell to their preacher friends who were withdrawing to form the Allegheny Conference.

Young's Church

Except for the years in Baltimore, Perry County continued to be home for John Snyder. Two churches still flourishing in the county today stand as memorials to his leadership: Young's Church and Snyder's Church.

It was in 1833 that Rev. Snyder visited the community where Henry Young lived, about 10 miles west of Marysville. As part of his Dauphin Circuit duties, he established a preaching appointment in the Young home. These efforts resulted in the organizing of a United Brethren class there in 1835, and a revival meeting in 1840 added many to the rolls.

In the early years of the United Brethren Church, a building erected specifically for religious services was a rarity. It is estimated that in the 1830's there were fewer than twenty such structures, typically called Meeting Houses, in the entire denomination. As with the Young' Class, innumerable groups met in homes, schoolhouses and other make-do accommodations.

It must have been one of the joys of John Snyder's

latter years to see work begun on the construction of a building there in 1841. Completed and dedicated as "Young's Church" in 1842, it was replaced by the present structure in 1896. As evidence of the congregation's undiminished spiritual growth, the present building was renovated in 1952, improved by an addition in 1957 and continues to be filled to near capacity today.

Unique Snyder's Church

It was much earlier that the progressive little United Brethren congregations in John Snyder's neighborhood recognized the need for a building to be used distinctively for the organized worship of its members and for perpetuation of the faith. This was Rev. Snyder's flock, dating back to converts from his earliest preaching, and it was natural that he would lead in the deliberations.

The first step was to acquire a church site. Farmer-preacher Snyder had an answer for that. He and Catharine plowed the first furrow by transferring the deed to a piece of their own land to the trustees of the congregation for the token legal sum of three dollars. The date was February 17, 1812. For Catharine's name to appear on the deed was unusual as land ownership in that day was regularly in a husband's name only. The partnership that John and Catharine Snyder shared could have been engendered by the three years they toiled together on another's land as bond servants.

Record of the transaction with the church trustees is preserved among Cumberland County Courthouse documents, as the land was then in that county. In 1820 the property would become part of the newly created county named for Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, the hero of the Battle of Lake Erie. Independent-minded German and Welsh settlers struggling to overcome pioneer hardships could readily relate to Perry's victorious cry, "We have met the enemy and they are ours."

Against the background of the United States engaged in the War of 1812, protesting actions of an autocratic British government, plans proceeded toward building a church on the Snyder property. The trustees acting on behalf of what was to evolve as Snyder's Church were: John Rathfon, Alexander Shortess, Philip Wax, Jacob Smith and John Owen. They exemplified the beginning of democratic government at the local church level. For their farsightedness and their united efforts, they merit honor and gratitude from the generations that follow them.

The United Brethren were putting "united" into action, for they gained the cooperation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in making it a union church. Such an ecumenical move would have been normal for John Snyder. He was following the precedent of the forty-year friendship of the former German

Reformed missionary, United Brethren Bishop Otterbein, with the English Methodist missionary, Bishop Francis Asbury, so instrumental to the establishing of Methodism in the United States. In fact, Bishop Asbury often preached from the pulpit of Old Otterbein Church that Rev. Snyder would occupy for eight years.

The union church, located along the Duncannon-Bloomfield Road, was occupied in 1814. The Methodists offered services in English; under the fluent direction of Pastor John Snyder, the United Brethren conducted theirs in German. In general, the mutual evangelistic fervor of United Brethren and Methodists created a strong spiritual bond between them. Indeed, the United Brethren were sometimes called "German Methodists." After a while, however, the predominantly German neighborhood offered little promise for English preaching. The Methodists relinquished their share of the work, and the log building emerged as Snyder's United Brethren Church.

Immediately, Snyder's Church made history by being the denomination's northernmost church building. It is the oldest United Brethren church in the Juniata Valley. West of the Susquehanna River, few churches of any denomination can match its record of maintaining continuing ministry in the same location. In the whole United States, it would be difficult to find another 180-year-old church continuously bearing the name of the man who inspired its organization, provided the land for its first building, served as its first pastor (1814-1831), and who is buried alongside his wife in its well-kept adjoining cemetery.

The composition of that original structure distinguishes it in old records and recollections as "Snyder's Log Church."

The gravestones of the "Rev. John Snyder and his consort Catharine," rising in the center of the cemetery and surrounded by generations of church families, focus symbolically on the importance of that church to the community. That the citizens of the vicinity early recognized the importance of education along with religion is evident in their establishing near Snyder's Church in 1820 a log schoolhouse that was in use until 1848.

Into the Twentieth Century

Around 1860, the walls of the 1814 building were covered with siding. By 1904, the German church had grown with the nation into an English-speaking American church with enlarged needs. As in 1814, the building project was planned by five perceptive trustees: Philip Wallace, John Dickel, John D. Weldon, E.S. Bartruff, and another John Owen.

They bought from Mr. and Mrs. William A. Weldon for the sum of fifty dollars a small lot, lying next to the original Snyder land. On this new lot a frame structure, the present

sanctuary, was built. The \$2,500 cost was fully paid when Pastor A.L. House officiated on the day of dedication, January 22, 1905. That same year, the old log structure and its contents were sold for \$56.60. No monetary value, however, could be placed on the spiritual disbursements to the thousands of persons gathering there for worship and instruction through ninety years!

One example of those who could have acknowledged a debt to Snyder's Log Church in 1905 was a young man named George Dickson Owen, born in Centre Township on May 14, 1883. He attended the church, where his mother was organist, during the formative first sixteen years of his life and joined it on November 25, 1894. As a nineteen-year-old student at the United Brethren denomination's Lebanon Valley College, he returned to the log church to preach his first sermon on September 7, 1902, a date he remembered clearly till his 1976 death in Tarrytown, New York, at the age of ninety-three.

That sermon launched him on a career that began as a "sky pilot" preacher, reminiscent of early circuit riders. His was a parish of eight hundred square miles, taking him six thousand miles on horseback during two years of ministering to cowboys and Indians in South Dakota. After graduating from Yale Divinity School, he went on to distinction as pastor of Congregational churches in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and Florida; Connecticut legislator; wartime YMCA secretary; the John D. Rockefeller, Jr., family minister for thirteen years; author of books, magazine articles and sermons -- one of them, "Will the Old Book Stand?", a national prize winner in 1911 that is still being reprinted today. From Snyder's Log Church, Dr. Owen would carry for the rest of his life this guideline, which he shared with his wife and two daughters, "May all of us live out best today, for today reaches into Eternity."

In 1950, during the pastorate of Melvin Geiman, Jr., the interior of Snyder's Church was renovated and redecorated, and a rededication service was conducted. With the 1960's came more plans for expansion, and an additional five acres of adjoining land was purchased from Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Bower. In 1962, the congregation relocated the 1904 sanctuary, complete with chimney, to the new property by safely moving it on dolly wheels about one hundred and fifty yards, even across a small stream. Fellowship and educational areas, including a new brick wing, were added. For several years thereafter, a corps of members rooted in the church labored to put the finishing touches on the exterior and the interior, capping their efforts by placing new carpet in the sanctuary and Sunday School rooms.

An interesting aside to the story of the restorations involved the uncovering of a large unidentified print of a scholarly looking patriarch. Restored and framed, it was hung on a wall of the church with the supposition that it might be

John Snyder. A later comparison with portraits of United Brethren Church fathers, however, pointed to the figure being Philip William Otterbein himself. In the early years of Snyder's Church, the denomination's founder apparently looked down upon the congregation in more ways than one.

A Persistent Trumpet

Along with changes in architecture, there have been adjustments in the name on the sign outside the church. From 1814 until 1946, it was "Snyder's United Brethren Church." In that year the United Brethren and Evangelical denominations merged to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and a new word was inserted to have the sign read "Snyder's Evangelical United Brethren Church."

With 1968 came another denominational merger; the Evangelical United Brethren Church joined with the Methodist Church to become the United Methodist Church. Consequently, the church today east of Meck's Corner on Rural Route #1, New Bloomfield, Pennsylvania, is "Snyder's United Methodist Church." In conversation and informal print, nevertheless, the two essential words have remained the same -- "Snyder's Church." The words in between were unnecessary, and ever since 1814 the church founded by Rev. Snyder has survived wars, depression, urbanization and secularism.

The church that once ministered largely to German-stock rural families, reaching it by foot or by horse, has a far different constituency today. A study of names on the cemetery gravestones and a glance at the membership rolls show that through the decades the United Brethren have become the United Nations. In today's suburban-like community reside mobile families of various backgrounds with material goods, social demands and patterns of living undreamed of in 1814. Yet there are still diligent workers in the Sunday School, the Ladies' Aid, the youth groups, the music department, and in the maintenance of the facilities who believe that the human soul hungers now even as then. They continue to blow the trumpet of the Gospel.

Memories and Echoes

On October 14, 1979, led by Pastor Kraig L. Faust, members of Snyder's Church celebrated its 165th anniversary with a sharing of fellowship, food, worship, and greetings from former pastors. Also present were out-of-town guests for whom Snyder's was once the center around which their lives revolved each Sunday.

Elsie Stine Lebo (Mrs. William J.) of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, was there with vivid memories of the lone frame

sanctuary of the 1920's -- Sunday School every Sunday morning and church services every other Sunday. She remembered particularly Pastor H.P. Baker, who frequently took advantage of her grandmother's standing invitation for the pastor to come for a Sunday dinner of roast chicken and a freezer of homemade ice cream, turned the day before. Their Sundays were special days of Bible reading, Homer Rodeheaver records on the victrola and eating apples and hickory nuts cracked beforehand. Among her attic keepsakes is an angel costume with tinselled crown that she wore as a little girl acting out to music the words of "Nearer, My God, to Thee" and "Rock of Ages" before a Snyder's Church audience. Mrs. Lebo, with her husband, has tried to perpetuate such Snyder's Church values in the home life of their seven children.

Pantomiming the hymns with Elsie Stine Lebo was her cousin and fellow Sunday School pupil Arba Owen, both of them direct descendants of the two history-making trustees of the church named John Owen. Whatever direct or indirect influence Snyder's Church may have had on the youth of Arba Owen Herr, she carried it far into her adult career -- fourteen years as the editor of religious education resources for children, first for the Evangelical United Brethren denomination and then for the United Methodist Publishing House. After her 1978 "retirement", she served for one year as consultant-trainer of editors for a joint Lutheran-United Methodist curriculum project in Liberia -- and simultaneously taught a semester of Old Testament Religion and Christian Ethics in the College of West Africa. Following that she served as Christian Education Director for five small churches surrounding Nashville, Tennessee, taught English as a second language to refugees, lead tours to China for the United States-China People's Friendship Association, and taught English to technical college students in Jiangsu Province -- as one of twelve persons in the first Christian missionary group permitted to work in China since 1949. In 1987, at age seventy-four, Arba Owen Herr returned to China for two more years of teaching.

The oldest person attending the Snyder Church's 165th anniversary celebration was an aunt of Mrs. Lebo and Mrs. Herr -- ninety-year-old former member Mary Amelia Owen Shaeffer of Carlisle. As she was honored with the first piece cut from the large birthday cake, she bridged two centuries and all three places of worship on those grounds. Her father was the John Owen on the board of trustees handling the 1904 building project. At the time of her death in January, 1985, when she was almost ninety-six, Mrs. Shaeffer had the satisfaction of knowing that the family religious tradition was being continued. Her grandson Charles Salisbury of the Grace United Methodist (formerly United Brethren) Church in Carlisle had already been ordained in June, 1984, to a ministry emphasizing social service. Upon graduating magna cum laude from Boston

Theological Seminary in 1985, he began a two-church pastorate in Ulysses and Genesee of the conference's Wellsboro District.

Because generations of leadership in one small rural church have kept alive the atmosphere of worship, the Bible lessons of faith and salvation, and the inspiration of discipleship, uncounted numbers of persons like these, touched by its influence, have gone into the world beyond Perry County sounding their own individual notes on the trumpet. What if there had been no Snyder's Church?

The Snyder Connection

John Snyder is listed as pastor of Snyder's Church from 1814 to 1831. Since that period overlaps for eight years his ministry at Old Otterbein Church in Baltimore, he apparently exercised supervision during 1817-1825 from a distance and depended on traveling preachers and lay leadership to fill the Snyder's Church pulpit. Otterbein himself had set that pattern. It was his custom to appoint in each developing congregation a talented, devout lay exhorter to conduct services until he could visit the group again. He even left books of sermons to be read at gatherings. From close association with his neighbors, John Snyder should have had no difficulty in recruiting capable exhorters. Likewise, during his absences as traveling presiding elder, he could have relied on their assistance.

After retiring as pastor of Snyder's Church in 1831 at the age of sixty-three, he continued to live nearby and to maintain close ties with its activities. Special satisfaction must have come from seeing his son, John George Snyder, serve as its pastor 1838-39. By 1857 the younger Snyder had transferred from the Pennsylvania Conference to Iowa, where he and his wife Peggy Owen Snyder planted United Brethren seeds. For some years he was an instructor at Western United Brethren College.

A genealogical tracing of "the Snyder connection" reveals that other members of the family of John and Catharine Snyder reflected their Christian impact and passed it down to generations of descendants.

Daughter Ann married young Jacob Smith (German "Schmidt"), son of the Jacob Smith who was one of the five trustees acquiring the original church land in 1812. The romance of the young couple blended common roots. Trustee Jacob Smith and his wife had wed in Wittgenstein in 1794, the same year as John and Catharine Snyder, and had joined them in emigrating to Perry County. Jacob and Ann Snyder Smith moved in 1837 to Ohio, where some of their descendants still live.

Joining Old Otterbein Church during John Snyder's pastorate was a young redemptionist from Germany named William Numsen, who married the Snyder's daughter Mary in 1823. At a

time when the new Sunday School movement from England was not being readily accepted by American churches, William Numsen emulated his father-in-law's example of pioneering -- in 1827 he organized the first Sunday School in Old Otterbein. Rising from poverty to become one of Baltimore's wealthiest businessmen, he contributed liberally to the building of churches and to benevolent enterprises.

During an 1870 visit back to his birthplace, Numsen spoke to the local pastor about the contrast between the prayer meetings there and those of the German brethren in the United States. He was consequently prevailed upon to preach to the congregation the following Sunday, which he did to an overcrowded house -- a bit of Snyder-generated zeal and spark reaching back to the old homeland. Mary Snyder Numsen shared her father's and husband's spiritual enthusiasm. In a letter written to her sister Susanna in 1855, she rejoiced over a "protracted meeting" at which there were forty converts, among them her two sons. Some Numsen-Snyder descendants remain in the Baltimore area.

Susanna Snyder married Perry County farmer-blacksmith Jesse Owen in 1836. It was at their home in March, 1851, that a group of United Brethren met to initiate plans for building a church in Duncannon. Soon three trustees, one of them Jesse Owen, were overseeing the construction of a frame building. Dedicated that fall, the structure's total cost was \$546, including the ground. That church lives on today as Duncannon's Otterbein United Methodist Church. Between 1851 and 1854, it was Jesse Owen who collected members' payments on the church debt.

One of those who paid, Jesse's brother Levi Owen, married another of John Snyder's daughters, Catharine. Jesse and Levi Owen were nephews of Alexander Shortess, another (i.e., along with Ann Snyder Smith's father-in-law Jacob) of the five original trustees of Snyder's Church. The dispatch with which English-speaking Americans of non-German origin were being absorbed into the United Brethren Church in one generation is demonstrated by the fact that three of John Snyder's children married mates named Owen, descendants of a Welsh Baptist immigrant who landed in Pennsylvania in 1721.

Jesse and Susanna Snyder Owen took the Snyder religious motivation with them to Ohio in 1864. In 1867, their blacksmith-farmer son Alfred Isaac Owen carried it on to Callaway County, Missouri, where he organized and taught a Sunday School in a rural schoolhouse. In a county populated largely by Southerners, he readily affiliated with the denomination most like the United Brethren -- the Fulton, Missouri, Methodist Church. He remained a steadfast church worker, often as steward, until his death at age eighty-one.

The author of this sketch knew Alfred Isaac Owen well as her maternal grandfather, and she perpetuated the name of his mother, John Snyder's daughter Susanna, in her daughter. She

hopes that her great-great-grandfather John Snyder would have approved her efforts on the editorial staff of the Methodist Christian Advocate, 1944-1956, and the publication by Methodism's Abingdon Press of two books written by her on religious education.

Final Migration

Three months before his death in his seventy-seventh year, on June 20, 1845, John Snyder, a resident of Wheatfield Township, Perry County, and "being at present weak in body but of sound mind and memory, thanks be to God for the same," prepared his will with the same incisiveness that had characterized his entire career.

First came explicit directions for the care of "my wife Catharine." The bequests to the children were not to be distributed until after her death. It is of interest that son-in-law William Numsen and his wife Mary would get only one dollar, as they had received two hundred dollars in 1827 -- a preacher's scant savings had helped to prepare the way for the Numsen food-packing and canning empire.

An inventory of John Snyder's estate appraised two items symbolic of his life: Ramsay's Universal History, nine volumes, and saddlebags, the emblem of all circuit riders. One item represented the intellectual, the other the spiritual; each undergirded the other. The funeral at his namesake church was equally symbolic of his ministry. Officiating were his friend, Henry Young, and James M. Bishop, then pastor of the two Perry County churches that John Snyder had inspired -- Snyder's and Young's. The service, based on Hebrews 4:11 and Nahum 1:7, was fittingly conducted in both German and English. "It was attended by a great concourse of people," assured that their loss was "his eternal gain."

Katharina Pfeiffer Schneider, the German bride who left linen-bleaching to accompany an intrepid shoemaker across the Atlantic to the rigors of an untried land, survived her husband by one year. Her obituary described her as an "exemplary and devoted Christian, exhibiting in her deportment the power of that grace by which we are made new creatures in Christ Jesus." As the helpmate of Johannes Schneider for fifty-one years, she merits recognition alongside her husband in any memorializing. She typifies the host of other wives of tireless spreaders of the Word who imbedded in the United States the religious grassroots of democracy.

Ongoing Heritage

John Snyder's obituary in the denominational publication Religious Telescope of July 30, 1845, called him "another of

the 'Fathers'" and a contemporary of Otterbein. "He filled many important stations in the church as a pioneer," it continues, and "was often engaged in bearing the 'heat and burden of the day.' He labored faithfully up to the last year in which he aided in promoting revivals of religion."

The obituary also stated that "the Church known as Snyder's was built in his neighborhood through his instrumentality, and is still [1845] the place in which God is worshiped." Such was prophetic, for the legacy of John Snyder lives on and a dedicated, progressive Snyder's Church is still [1993] the place in which God is worshiped.

There is one final reminder of the enterprising, ecumenical spirit of the founder and people of Snyder's Church. In 1814, United Brethren uniter John Snyder had the help of Methodists in establishing that place of worship. Today, one hundred and seventy-nine years after the building of Snyder's United Brethren Church, John Snyder would certainly have bestowed his blessing upon its participation as Snyder's United Methodist Church.

Appendix I: Resources.

The following resources were drawn upon for background, historical and biographical information.

Genealogical documents from Germany.

Family records and memorabilia.

Information from Elsie Stine Lebo.

Information from Miles L. Beaston.

General Commission on Archives and History,
The United Methodist Church.

History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ,
by A.W. Drury, 1924.

The Histories of the Pennsylvania and Central
Pennsylvania Conferences of the Evangelical United
Brethren Church, by Charles R. Miller and William
L. Raker, 1968.

The Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of
Maryland and the District of Columbia, National
Biographical Publishing Co., 1879.



Snyder's 1814 log church, covered with siding around 1860.

Appendix II: The Snyder Connection of Frances Dunlap Heron.

