

**EARLY METHODIST RECOLLECTIONS
IN THE
CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE**

by Harry A. Smith, 1968

One of the earliest Methodist references to Sunbury appears in the journal of Bishop Asbury. In June 1793 he rode the usual circuit up from Maryland that included Fort Littleton, the Aughwick and Juniata Valleys, Mifflintown, and the Susquehanna Valley. He records spending a night at Penn's Creek (i.e., Selinsgrove) and traveling the next day to Northumberland. "In the afternoon [I] paid Sunbury a visit," he states, "the people here are almost all Dutch [German]."

As this event and the early history of the Sunbury Church have been covered very well in various writings by Dr. Charles Berkheimer, I can add nothing of significance and proceed to my own personal recollections, which begin with the early 1890's.

Growing Up in the Methodist Church in Sunbury

I became a Methodist because of my mother. My grandfather was German Reformed and required his children to attend the catechism classes conducted by that church. When my mother was 18, however, she left the German Reformed Church for some reason and joined the Methodists. Even though she later married a German Reformed man and moved in with him and his sister, she continued worshipping with the Methodists.

I was baptized in the Sunbury German Reformed Church and initially went to Sunday School there with my aunt. The story has it that I "carried on" so badly that she eventually refused to take me with her. It was then that my mother began taking me with her to the Methodist Church.

Reading between the lines, I suspect that my father and my aunt must have prevailed upon my mother to have me baptized and raised in the German Reformed tradition. Furthermore, I suspect my rebellious boyhood spirit needed the warmth of Methodism over strict Reformed rigor. Many years later, when I needed some evidence to establish my age, I found that my baptismal records had been lost in the flood of 1936.

Among my earliest recollections is attending revival meetings with my mother. She was in no sense emotional, at least outwardly, in her reactions; when many of the people gave vent to emotion, she remained silent. By the 1890's, moreover, emotional outbreaks in the prayer meetings and the revival meetings -- so common in the pre-Civil War campmeetings -- were limited to a few of the older folks and were more or less predictable. An ancient Negro who had been a slave in his youth and early life, for instance, always sat in the "Amen Corner" and could be counted on to leap to his feet sometime during the meeting to shout "Glory Hallelujah" or "Bless the Lord." An elderly man was another who always got happy and came forth with a loud "Bless the Lord."

During the "testimony" period some folks told of the sins they had been saved from when they "accepted Jesus as their Saviour." Sometimes what they said would have been better left unsaid -- at least as a small boy I thought so. The revival meetings were thought to be an essential part of the Christian life and were more or less demanded by a good part of the congregation for their own spiritual renewal and as a means of acquiring new members. Such meetings were a tradition in the Methodist Church.

Eventually the individual church revival was replaced by union evangelistic services conducted by professional evangelists, of whom Billy Sunday was the most famous. In the early 1900's a man by the name of Reese held union evangelistic services in Sunbury in a building used for a skating rink and, I recall, for boxing matches. A "tabernacle" built by the Methodists at Fifth and Arch Streets for use while they were erecting a new building during World War I was employed for a union evangelistic campaign by a man named Stowe. The Lutheran, Reformed (no longer *German* Reformed) and Presbyterian churches did not officially join the movement, but many from their congregations attended out of curiosity and as "a place to go."

In a word, the union evangelistic meetings were a popular form of entertainment -- though they were not consciously thought of as such. The preachers, as President Coolidge once put it, were "agin' sin" and the congregation was sent home with a feeling of well being -- after all, was not sin being blasted and were not sinners called to repentance? Even today vast crowds assemble to listen to Billy Graham and leave with a feeling of well being -- but it is reported that 54.5% of the present Christian church is guilty of racism and thinks that Christian brotherhood means white brotherhood.

After this bit of diversion and sermonizing, I now get back to a closer examination of the old time revival meetings. They were usually held for two or three weeks and lasted for an hour and a half or longer. The singing was led by the preacher and the pianist. The regular hymn book was not used and was replaced by a gospel songbook. The preacher called for the congregation to choose the selections to be sung. One song that was popular was "There is Sunshine in my Soul." After a "song service" there was "a season of prayer" during which a number of folks prayed aloud at the same time. The preacher might close with a prayer or announce, "Let us arise and sing No. X."

The meetings were held in the downstairs Sunday School room -- where the benches were not fastened to the floor as they were in the upstairs auditorium or, as it is now called, sanctuary. Everyone who could do so knelt for prayer, and indeed for many years it was the custom of the preacher to kneel beside the pulpit when he offered prayer in the Sunday morning and evening services. The whole atmosphere of the prayer meetings and revival services was informal and created a sense of togetherness.

After a short "talk," rather than a sermon, came the "altar service." This usually began with the song "Just As I Am without One Plea," during which the invitation was given. Some of the older members moved out to kneel at the "mourners' bench" at the front of the room. Others "went forward" for the express purpose of "seeking religion" and knelt at the bench, where they were counseled by the older members. Still others went about the room talking with different ones whom they thought were

still "sinners." I recall one young man who came and was "talked to" -- but he made the remark to me, "They will never get me." After he was ignored for several evenings, his game was played out and he did not come back.

The song "Almost Persuaded" was certain to be sung during this latter part of the service. It contributed to the emotional atmosphere which, by the time I began attending the meetings, was quite subdued except on the part of a few of the older members. The preacher did not try to stimulate emotion, but rather to guide it so that it helped to keep the interest level. People were moved when someone they knew, a friend or a relative arose from the bench where they had been praying -- perhaps for three or four meetings -- and expressed satisfaction, assurance of "acceptance by the Lord," or other words to that effect. I can recall many "shining faces" as they came to their feet, shook hands all around, and sat down on one of the front benches.

The old revival meetings were *of* the people and *by* the people in a different sense than the regular church services, which were *for* the people. This, of course, is judgment based upon my recollections. The simple talks by the preacher, the testimony periods, the voluntary prayers, and the rhythm of the songs all combined to make the revival meetings a means of self-expression among the people called Methodists. This approach to religious experience has been one of the chief characteristics of Methodism from its beginnings under John Wesley.

I recall also an emotional undercurrent in the life of many people that something sinister awaited the unconverted in the "hereafter." The revival meetings then became a safe and sane means of both self-expression and salvation. As a child, I also saw the beginnings of a different emphasis in Methodism. In the larger towns and cities, like Sunbury, business men, professional people, railroad office employees, and others of that class were becoming Methodists but were not attending the prayer meetings or revival services. At this point it must be noted that the level of education was very low. As late as 1908, when I graduated from High School, the class -- which was the largest up to that time -- numbered only 27, and the population of the town was almost as large as it is today!

The congregation was becoming divided; only the older members -- along with a decreasing number of younger folks, mostly those who didn't finish school -- were maintaining the traditional Methodist customs. As noted above, union evangelistic services conducted by professionals began replacing the old-time revivals in the Methodist, United Brethren, Evangelical and Baptist churches. It was also about this time that the moving picture industry began to capture the interest of the younger and middle-aged groups.

One of the traditional customs of Methodism still observed during the 1890's was the Love Feast. I have no memory of attending any of these services, which were held on Sunday morning preceding the Communion Service. Bread and water were used as symbols, and it was a period of prayer and testimony attended by the older members of the congregation.

The Reformed, Lutheran and Presbyterian churches made use of the catechism for training the youth of the church in its doctrines and principles. These churches became kinds of closed circles

within which the children were brought up to membership through indoctrination. The teaching of Proverbs to "bring up a child in the way he should go and he will never depart from it" was followed strictly. At this time the Methodist church also taught the catechism. The classes were conducted either by the preacher or one of the Sunday School teachers. I recall study of the catechism and that I was bored by the study. I always had difficulty memorizing words and it seemed, as I recall it, that catechism had no meaning. Ideas I could remember and relate to each other, but the memorization of words in the catechism was required. I suppose it was my being brought up "in the way he should go."

The Community in Which the Church Existed

The recent television pictures showing the restoration of the old Ford Theater in Washington recall to mind the old Chestnut Street Opera House in Sunbury, which closely resembled the Ford Theater. For 30 years and more, the Opera House was an important cultural asset to Sunbury -- but not to the people called Methodists. Theater going, card playing and dancing -- along with all forms of drinking -- were banned by the church Discipline. I recall seeing several performances, however, that were deemed "proper" because of their religious connotations. I saw *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and recall vividly the great dane dogs and the antics of Topsy. I remember Eliza fleeing across the Ohio River by jumping from one cake of ice to another -- using white spots on a dark background. The great dogs could not follow, so she escaped to the North. Being a good observer, I noticed the long lash of the whip curled harmlessly around Uncle Tom's back and legs when he was whipped. It was all very thrilling for a boy to attend the forbidden pleasures of the theater.

Another play I saw was *Ben Hur*, but of this I can recall only the dramatic chariot race. Four live white horses galloped madly on two tread power machines hitched to chariots -- the drivers flourishing long whips and shouting to the horses. The curtain went up showing the running horses and tread power machines being drawn across the stage by a mechanism in the wings. Gradually one chariot passed ahead of the other. A wheel came off one chariot as the curtain went down. The roar of the tread machines and the shouting of the drivers created an unforgettable climax to the play -- which was thought right and proper because of the religious connotations of the drama. Years later when I saw the same play in moving picture theaters, the performance was more realistic but much less dramatic.

I recall one other play, which I managed to see when I was in high school, that had no religious significance. For some reason I followed the careers of heavyweight boxers. As a small boy, I was given pictures of the Corbett-Fitzsimmons contest. The small pictures were bound at the bottom with staples, and if snapped fairly rapidly they gave a kind of moving picture of the fight. After his retirement, Fitzsimmons made personal appearances in a play which featured him boxing four rounds with a burly opponent. Since he had been a blacksmith in Australia in his earlier years, the boxer worked at an anvil (a real anvil and forge!) preparing a shoe for a horse that was brought on stage. Most unfortunately, the horse had not been consulted beforehand and -- to the amusement of the audience and the dismay of the stage hands -- was not house broken. The impression left in my mind is that the boxer was much better in the ring than on the stage. But after all, we saw what we went to

see -- a real live celebrity in the flesh. That night when I went into the house in the dark (there were no electric lights), I walked into a door jamb with a bang. I recall that my first thought was that I had gotten into the way of one of the fighter's left jabs.

One reason why Sunbury (and also nearby Williamsport) could support a theater was that it was a railroad town. Since many of the shows traveled by rail, a siding was built to come within fifty feet of the rear of the theater. Stage props from the train cars could be easily moved in and out of the building. In addition, the Pullman cars housing the troupes on the road could be parked within easy reach of the performers.

A backward look enables one to see events with the 20-20 vision of hindsight. A high school classmate of mine, for example, never missed a theater performance from the time he was old enough to attend until the Opera House closed. Influenced no doubt by his years of attending the theater, he wanted to become an actor and attended classes at a drama school. He did not succeed in this profession, and to my mind he was misguided in attempting it. In my own case, largely influenced by the early years of religious experience, I entered the Methodist ministry -- perhaps I, too, was misguided.

I have referred to the coming of moving pictures -- which created a new source of interest that began drawing people away from church meetings. It seems that some of the first moving pictures in town were shown in the county courthouse auditorium. Anyway, I recall seeing *The Great Train Robbery* -- and the Methodist preacher (I do not recall his name) sat right beside me! He had expressed himself as being very apprehensive about the moral effect of the new moving pictures on the youth. He seemed satisfied that no real harm would be done when, at the end of the picture, the robbers were apprehended and punished. It seems he had feared that sin and evil might be seen to be rewarded.

Any account of recollections of the 1890's would not be complete without reference to the ways of life in town outside of the church circles. First, it must be remembered that there was no electric gadget in the living rooms that could bring in world events and "entertainment" with the turning of a knob. Every form of activity apart from what was required to make a living had to be created by the people themselves. For the "well-to-do" folks, there were dancing parties and theater parties -- in the summer the dancing parties were on the river on a "double-decker" flat boat towed by one of the river's steam boats. (In midstream, incidentally, there are no insects.) Moonlight and Japanese lanterns provided a romantic setting for these ventures.

Many of the young men spent the evenings on street corners "watching the girls go by." Others collected in the saloons, where there was often little drinking and much talk. Two such places existed in the block on which I lived. One was across the street, and so during the first 20 years of my life I saw every form of intoxication from just "high" to dead drunk. Men staggering along the sidewalk were common. There was only one policeman in town, and I recall but one drunk ever being hauled off to the police station. On Saturday afternoons the farmers and working people gathered at the saloon, and it was rare that fights did not occur. The contestants were separated when hostilities

became serious. The bystanders became the police force, but no arrests for disorderly conduct were ever made. In the business section of town were three more saloons, now labeled "tap rooms." There were also three or four "open houses" down town.

The 1968 World Almanac sets church membership at 22 percent of the total population in 1890 (compared with 54.5 percent for today). A backward look seems to confirm that 1890 figure as being true for Sunbury. A print shop not far from home printed material with an obvious double meaning. Pornographic literature was circulated, and some of us youngsters knew more about the facts of life than our parents suspected. Sex was a covert topic, but we knew the intended meaning when mother or another adult referred to someone having "jumped the fence." There was a certain "house" often referred to in adult conversation. We knew about this place, and something about its function. The woman who operated it was always referred to as Madam _____ -- incidentally, she was the only woman I knew who smoked cigarettes. Yes, the "seamy side" of life, while studiously ignored, was clearly visible.

There were newspapers in town, and I recall the first cartoons (i.e., comic strips) that they printed. One of the first was the "Yellow Kid" -- a Chinese character in a long yellow night gown, or so it appeared to be, with a long queue flying out behind. We followed the kid's antics with interest. Then came two Frenchmen -- one tall and thin, the other short and fat -- who were always very polite in their activity. The Katzenjammer Kids came along in time. Now it will be noted that all the early cartoon strips featured characters who were not native Americans. This has always puzzled me. At least, I suppose, no American citizen was being offended.

Much humor, both printed and in stories passed along orally, was at the expense of immigrants. The Jews were lampooned; the Irish, Hungarians and Polish were the butt of humor. People were referred to by names such as Kikes, Hunkies and Polacks. Common in adult conversation, this was picked up by the youngsters. After the radio and TV came into use, the references changed --for the sponsors of the shows objected to their customers being insulted.

An incident that occurred in 1898, during the Spanish American War, throws light on the thinking of the period. Across the street from my home, a small store owner made a Spanish flag (red and yellow strips) which he nailed to his door mat. We ten year olds went by and "wiped our feet on the enemy flag." After all, we reflected the adult thinking.

The Methodist Preachers

I can recall the preachers stationed in the Sunbury Methodist Church after 1890 -- earlier ones I only heard about. The first one I heard about was a man by the name of Wilson, who married my father and mother in 1887. Although father was German Reformed, it seems mother had the choice of the preacher. He was followed by Rev. Gano. I heard about him because his son, a retired army officer, wrote a biography of his father and came to town some years ago to sell autographed copies of the book -- of which I have a copy.

He was followed by Rev. George Leidy, a tall spare man with a beard and a wry sense of humor. Like many preachers at that time, he operated a hand printing press on which he printed copies of the catechism used by the children of the church. I think that he also printed some material for the Conference. While he was in Sunbury, the parsonage barn burned and the press on the second floor was destroyed. The horse was taken out safely, but the type wound up scattered in the ashes. My wife was then a small child and lived next door to the parsonage. She was so badly frightened by the flames that she still has a great fear of fire. Living so close, she did come to know Rev. Leidy and the other preachers who lived there quite well.

Rev. Leidy was followed by James B. Stine, later a Presiding Elder (or, as we say today, a District Superintendent -- the old term was shorter). Rev. Stine's wife was very deaf and his children could not talk to be understood. Perhaps it was for this reason that the Stines had difficulty with their son and daughter.

Rev. Rue came after Stine, and he had a son about my age who had a hobby of collecting the names of Pullman cars. When the trains stopped at the station, and then there were many through trains, he would dash out to learn a new name for his list. The last I heard about him (in the 1920's) he was manager of a foundation that collected and dispersed charity funds. One evening Rev. Rue conducted an Epworth League meeting using questions written out on slips of paper and given to different individuals to answer in a "discussion period." A not too bright boy had a question that read, "Why is it wrong to dodge taxes?" When he was called upon, he got up and read the question as he saw it. To the surprise of everyone and to the dismay of the leader, he read, "Why is it wrong to tax dogs?" When the laughter had subsided the preacher said kindly, "I think you have read the question wrongly." The boy sat down in confusion and looked about with a vague expression on his face. It was the type of insignificant happening that we often remember through the years.

Rue was followed by Rev. Brill, who had a penchant for American history and made much use of it in his sermons. I recall a Sunday evening when the boy sitting beside me whispered, "He has taken ten minutes just to discover America." The Brills had a daughter who entered high school in my class and graduated as the Valedictorian. She became a professor at Penn State University. In addition, they had a son that was killed in World War I and another son that remained in Sunbury to become a leading business man.

Brill was followed by Rev. George Glenn, who did much to advance the interests of youth in the church. He was a very great help in directing my girl friend and me toward the same college. It seems he brought influence to bear at the right place and at the right time. A son died while the Glenns were in Sunbury, but I have learned that their other two children did very well in their chosen professions.

I know very little about the preachers stationed in Sunbury after Rev. Glenn. I refer to one more, however, who was there in 1915 -- Rev. Daugherty, who married my wife and me at her home. Years later when he was stationed in Lewistown, we happened to be passing through and I stopped to call on him. When he came to the door I asked him if he remembered me, and I shall never forget his

blunt question in reply -- "Why should I?" For him our marriage was only one of a great many -- for me it was, shall we say, something special.

The Beginning of My Methodist Ministry

It is my hope that these memoirs will be read by the young men who are entering the ministry, that they may avoid some of the errors made by the writer. Fifty-three years ago, the small community was very different from what it is today. Then there were no paved roads -- just dust in dry weather and deep sticky mud in wet weather. Many of the folks did not get away from home for months, and even years, except to some nearby small town. There were no outside influences like radio or TV to lift their horizons. The only newspaper was a weekly that almost everybody subscribed to. The small community was self-centered, and the preacher was -- in the minds of many people -- and outsider who was viewed with suspicion. This was especially true if he was an "educated" man and used words they were not familiar with.

In truth, there existed in all my early appointments a "credibility gap" that I did not fully understand. Then, too, most of the folks did not consider the preacher a leader -- rather, he was thought of as a kind of servant or handyman. When he stood up on Sunday and denounced sin -- sin they were guilty of -- he was doing his duty. This may strike some readers as an exaggeration, but most people did not really respect a preacher. It is also true that I was treated with more consideration by non-church people than by my own church members -- I am now writing, remember, about things more than fifty years ago.

I recall an instance at Shirleysburg, for example, when a man told me I could use an old sleigh. Since he could not be around, I was to go to the barn and get it out -- which I did. I patched it up and used it, only to learn that there was a story around town that I had stolen it, and in broad daylight at that! I also recall that some of the folks who treated me with the most consideration did not pay any of the salary. In the last analysis, the preacher was an outsider who lived off the community and -- since money was hard to come by -- there was an unconscious resentment. So it was that if the preacher was not being paid by a non-member, he could afford to be cordial and friendly without reservations. Today, when cash is more abundant and people have more money and are more outgoing, this resentment may have vanished.

All of the foregoing observations are about something intangible, a kind of undertone in preacher-member relationships that I experienced all the years I was in the work in Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio. I left the work in 1937, so I am in no sense a "modernist." The most difficult situations preachers must meet, and I still think this is true today, is that some large contributors assume the preacher is "their man." Only a few years ago, for instance, I was present when the new pastor of a large church was given a reception and the chairman of the official board said in closing his little speech of welcome, "I am sure Brother _____ will do a good job for us." He said nothing about leadership in church or ministry in the community. It seemed to me that chairman was thinking of the

church as he would of his own business, and of the preacher as he would of a new manager. If you who read this think I am in error, I shall be happy. I hope I am wrong.

In June 1914 I came out of Syracuse University by the back door. At that time, a course in Greek as well as Latin was required for the A.B. degree. Because I had failed Greek utterly, I did not have enough credits to graduate when I should have in 1912. I stayed out a year and then went back, transferred my credits in the College of Liberal Arts to the Teacher's College, and graduated in 1914 with the Ped. B. (Bachelor of Pedagogy) degree.

I came out of college with ideas about a career in the "teaching ministry." I had majored in philosophy and minored in sociology, and besides that I had completed courses in methods of teaching and "education." I read Rauchenbush and found a book -- I have forgotten the author -- on *The Teaching Ministry*. This seemed to open the way for doing great things in the Methodist ministry, but in leading the parade I did not look back to see whether there were any followers -- there were none.

At graduation time I had a letter from the Presiding Elder (a term more fitting for a church official than "District Superintendent" -- which sounds like a business organization term describing the overseeing of salesmen) of my home district telling me he had an appointment for me in the fall -- when the young preacher there would be going to college. This was in Excelsior, a little town with two out appointments in the hard coal regions near Shamokin. It was supposed to be a good place to "start up."

My sister and I went one day to the place and found the preacher was not home. We viewed the nice little parsonage from the outside. The windows opening on the front porch came down almost to the floor, and the lower portion was covered with three or four iron bars. Interested about the need for bars on parsonage windows, we asked a native why they were there. "Oh," he said, "they are there to keep the goats from smashing through the windows!" Most of the people in the town were second generation Europeans and kept goats for milk and meat. The goats had the run of the streets and, at least, served as self-propelled lawn mowers. But if a billy goat wandering about ever happened to see his reflection in a window, it was taken as an instant challenge to combat. The goats, it seems, like some people, had to learn the hard way.

I waited around in Sunbury all summer for the young man to leave for college. One day in August I went to the YMCA, which at that time was on the second floor over the post office on S. Third Street. A newspaper had been left at the foot of the stairs. As I picked it up to take it along, I noticed the startling headline *Germany Declares War on Austria-Hungary*. I recall clearly my first thought: "what a crazy thing to do!" I had just completed a course in European history from 1814 to the present, but I must admit that I was unprepared for the declaration of war -- I'm still not sure if the reason was the material in the course or my inattention.

(One always recalls what he was doing and where he was when an event of momentous significance occurs. Who does not remember the radio announcement of Pearl Harbor, news of the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King, or hearing of the death of a member of

the family? I recall, for example, walking down a street toward the railroad station when a woman stopped me to ask if I had heard that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was dead. There were tears in her eyes -- of course, not all Americans were sad at that news!)

Then came September, and the young man at Excelsior decided he would not go up to college. The Presiding Elder and I were both out on the end of a limb -- and I was further out than he. From what I have written, the reader can see (as I also perceived) that Excelsior would have been a good place for me. There I would have been an outsider in the community -- along with many other outsiders. The community was quite heterogeneous, with many people of many different religious beliefs and different nationalities, where a man with an education would be accepted. There were also many Catholics, and the Catholic folk respected their priests and the Protestant ministers. People in a community like that tend to overcome their narrow prejudices and become more outgoing.

The Work at Bellville

Just how I got to Bellville I do not recall, except that my Presiding Elder "loaned" me to another, Dr. Mosser. I do recall very definitely that I came, I saw, but I did not conquer. I found that the parsonage was rented, and there was no place for me to live on my own. A family took me in -- literally. The family consisted of two bachelor brothers and a single sister. I was given room and board, and I soon found I was expected to work for it by doing household chores such as beating rugs and cleaning house. I felt that I had the status of a poor relative. I cannot recall if I was paid any salary in cash while at Bellville, but there must have been some money from some source -- and I am sure it was not much.

Bellville was in the center of the Big Valley, and almost the entire population was (and still is) Amish. There was then a Presbyterian and a Methodist church in town, with a out appointment (Methodist) about six miles from town. The Presbyterian congregation had no pastor, and so this seemed the right time and the right place to make one church grow where two were withering. I canvassed some of the members of both churches and found the idea had been discussed at some time previously and was not new. What I did not observe carefully was that the people who would go along with the idea of uniting the churches were not those who paid the larger proportion of the salaries and upkeep.

Finally the test came when the idea was made public as a definite proposal. The folks I was living with made it abundantly clear that such a proposal could not possibly work and that I was evidently not a loyal and true Methodist. I see now that I was viewing the situation as an objective social scientist rather than as a preacher appointed to build up and not tear down. Those were the words of the Presiding Elder when I went to see him. So it was that I went through Bellville -- in the front door and out the back, and both were slammed shut behind me.

In truth, there was no real congregation. Only a few people came to the church services in both Bellville and at the out appointment. In fact, there were very few families in either community that

were not Amish. When I went back to the town about twenty years ago, I found the church had been closed for years. I do not mean to say, "I told you so," but if the non-Amish folks had united they could have supported a church and a Sunday School.

I do recall one satisfaction, however, that I derived from that community. There was a family there which had a relative in a high position in government in Washington, D.C. I became acquainted with them, and through them with some other folks who were mostly not church members. Our relationships were cordial and friendly -- as man to man. This was the first time I had ever lived in a community outside of my home town where I could meet people and be respected as a person first and as a preacher second. I did not realize it fully at the time, but that is the way I now look at it. Most people tend to think of and treat preachers differently than they do other men. This always annoyed me, and for that reason I make it a habit of never telling anyone directly that I have been one of that profession.

I also became acquainted with several young men of the town, and one evening one of the young men asked me to go with him to a husking bee at an Amish farm where he knew the family (although he himself was not Amish). We arrived and went into the field and husked corn with many other folks who were working in connection with members of the family -- who would then go in turn to help in another bee at another farm. After an hour or so my partner got tired, and we sat down behind a corn shock for a while. Then we went to the house, where a long table had been set out with an array of Amish food. We helped ourselves and were greeted cordially by everyone. After eating, we found the folk dance was already underway on the cleared barn floor. We climbed into the hay mow and looked over the edge, while the clean shaven boys and pretty girls in their long dresses and lace caps danced to the tune of a fiddle and the calls of the dance master. A good time was had by all - including us who could only sit and watch.

I had heard about the Amish all my life, and at times I had seen some of the men and women passing through the railroad station in Sunbury. As I met them and talked with them, I learned to respect them as real human beings -- that is if the standard for such is self respect, dignity and integrity. They went their own way in matters of religion, but they were (and are today) cooperative in every other respect. If I had to choose a good neighbor to live near by, it would be an Amish family.

When I bowed out of Bellville, but not gracefully, the Presiding Elder appointed a retired man to the place who had, of course, his pension as a back up to his support -- and that is what should have been done in the first place. I am not regretting my first "try out," for I learned this observation: it is not the situation, but how you manage it that counts.

The Work at Shirleysburg

After that two months sojourn in Bellville, I was sent to Shirleysburg to a six point circuit -- at least I think it was six points, but whatever the number it was enough! Again I was a "lame duck" preacher in that I was filling out a year because no one had been appointed at Conference or because the man had to leave. I only know that I went there to find the parsonage rented to a couple who took care of the church building. They gave me a second-floor room, with a small stove for my heat. I took my meals at the hotel, operated by a couple who were not members of the church. The man was a tailor, and I recall him sitting cross-legged on the big table working on a suit of clothes -- although not many men had their suits tailor made.

One of the school teachers also boarded at the hotel. While we waited for meals to be served, we talked about the topics of the day -- of which the war in Europe was the most frequent. One evening something was said by both of us which did not fit the opinion of the lady of the house -- and she told us so. After that, relations were strained. I also found that she was a gossip who relayed her opinions throughout the community. While this made little difference so far as the teacher was concerned, it did me no good.

I had to secure a horse and buggy for this work. I do not recall the deal or the man from whom I bought the horse, but I found that the horse was worthless for road work and that no amount of good care or feed could put any life into it. One of the girls of the community remarked that I had the slowest horse she ever saw, and I agreed. The man who sold me the horse knew it was of little use on the road and took advantage of my ignorance. I took his word trustingly and was taken in. I should have taken the horse back to him and had him return my purchase price, but he was sure that a preacher would not do that.

The roads were all dirt roads, dusty in dry weather and muddy when it was wet. When there was mud to get through, my horse was even slower, and all the distances seemed to double. To get to Sunday morning appointments out of town, I had to leave on Saturday afternoon and stay overnight with a family near the church. This was expected, and I always felt welcome -- but I could detect at times that I was a burden. I particularly recall one older couple that always made me feel at home. One cold night in their home I was shown to my room, in which in those days there was no heat. I got ready for bed, "outened the lamp," turned the cover back, and jumped in. Then I jumped right back out again! Something soft and warm was there, which I thought was a cat. Feeling around in the dark, I found it was a hot flat iron wrapped in a soft towel. The lady had indeed prepared a surprise. The big straw tick had been fluffed up and I slept comfortably. At breakfast we had a lot of fun about the "cat" in my bed.

The services in town were always held in the evening, with some members of the church conducting the Sunday School in the morning. The church in town was always filled, mostly with young people. The Sunday evening service was a place to go. A boy could take his date and have a long drive there and back. Young folks without dates came to meet and to make dates. Some of them had attended the morning or afternoon service at one of the out appointments and heard the same sermon -- that is, if they paid any attention to the sermon.

In those days it was expected that special meetings would be held in all of the out appointments, which meant living out among the different families around the church. There was the difficulty of being yourself and, at the same time, acting as many folks thought a preacher should act -- so I fear that some of the people were not entirely satisfied. I do know that at least some of the folks accepted the preacher as he was without criticism.

In early winter before the special meetings began, and with the help of a good farmer member, I got another horse. This horse was a truly beautiful animal -- on one side. As a colt, it had become entangled in a barbed wire fence and had a disfiguring scar on its left shoulder. It traveled with a limp, but the blacksmith helped its gait by adjusting the shoe on its left foot. It was a chestnut sorrel (if that means anything to non horse owners reading this) and it had what horse men call "get up and go." One did not need to *drive* that horse, but just to guide and control it.

As one who has driven and ridden horses knows, however, never trust a horse. One time, for example, the "girl friend" came to see me over a week end during one of her school vacations. I met her at Mt. Union and contemplated with pleasure the long drive to Shirleysburg. As could be expected, I was not paying too much attention to the horse as we jogged along. Suddenly, with a wild snort, the horse reared up and tried to turn around. It was not hard to control once I tried, and it took off straight ahead after I spoke calmly. Then I saw what I should have noticed before. There was a man working at the top of a telephone pole -- which, in the mind of the horse, was no place for a man. We made it the rest of the way without incident. Years later when I recalled the incident to the lady's attention, she said she had completely forgotten it. She must not have been scared very badly.

I remember one particular Sunday evening special meeting. I had an afternoon appointment and stayed for the evening meal with a family that lived within a short distance of the meeting -- or so it seemed, since I could see the church across the fields. I found, however, that the road went the long way around. It was bitter cold that night, and by the time I got to the church I could hear singing. I had to go a considerable distance from the church to find a place to tie the horse, and then I had to cover him with a blanket. All this took time, and the singing continued. When I opened the door I stopped in amazement to find the church so filled that some folks were standing and others were sitting on the edge of the platform. I made my way to the front and sat down in the still empty pulpit chair until the song was finished.

It did not seem fitting to make any comment about the unusual congregation, and so I called for prayer. Although it was still the custom for the preacher to kneel by the pulpit for the pastoral prayer, I never did so. The ligaments in my knees have always been short, and kneeling was very painful and disturbing. After the prayer there was another song, and then I began to preach. I never kept a diary, and I do not remember the exact text or the sermon. The message was along the lines I always followed -- responsibility for living the good life right in the place where you live. I preached that night "with power," as they used to say -- but it would be more accurate to say that I had some degree of fluency and ease. In those days I could still watch the expression on some responsible individual in the back row and talk to that person, although he or she did not know it. The attention was complete, for I did not notice any looking about the room to signal boredom.

There was neither an "altar service" as in the days of my youth in Sunbury, nor any emotional element in these special meetings -- chiefly because the folks who came did not do so to "get religion," but rather to meet friends and neighbors while performing a religious duty that was satisfying to their minds. Many were young people who used the services for a social outlet, as there were no other forms of entertainment or opportunities to socialize. I tried to make the most of the moment and to set forth moral and religious principles in terms that could be understood and with apt illustrations. The congregations were good, and the attention was excellent at all the points on the charge.

I think I was a new kind of preacher there, and the people responded. By contrast, I remember a man in Ohio, where I later moved. He came every night to a series of special meetings, and on the last evening he said to me, "I did not know there were any Methodist preachers who *talked* like you talk." In Ohio and in the rural south, people were back in the 1890's in their religious thinking. In rural Pennsylvania, education was further advanced and the people did not express religious feeling emotionally.

One night after a thaw and freeze, the road going home from one of the special meetings had deep cuts in the ice and snow. I had not gone far from the church when the sleigh upset. I lost the reins and the horse went on without me. Several young men walking home had left the church before me and stopped the horse down the road. They seemed to enjoy the joke when they found that no harm had been done. About a mile further we upset again, but this time I held on to the reins and we were soon on our way -- once the occupant was out of those old swell back sleighs, they righted themselves. Had I lost the reins the second time, I would have had to walk home -- on such a cold night the horse would have instinctively tried to get back to the warm barn and stable.

One family stands out in my memories of the Shirleysburg Charge. The name has slipped from my mind, but it was a large family with two sons still at home and at least one daughter. I was always welcome there, and I felt at home. I recall stopping there one evening and finding the house full of company. I offered to go on, but they insisted that I stay. At bed time, they put me away early in a little room while the visiting went on. One day as I drove into the driveway the father and one of the boys were mounting horses and carrying shotguns. Surprised, I asked what was up. "A wild turkey," they said and rode away. The explanation was that a man on horse could get closer to a wild turkey than a man on foot.

The father led the singing at the out appointment he attended, and he roared when he sang. He told me that he could not "carry the tune" unless he could hear himself singing. Whether or not he sang off key I do not know, because my ear for music was never very accurate. This was always a disadvantage, for I could never lead the singing in a church service.

It was this man who helped me get my better horse by endorsing my note to purchase it. He said, "I see you want the horse very much" -- which was a fact, since the one I had was so slow and lifeless. How much of the salary he paid I do not know, but I do know that he never even hinted about how I should act or preach. We always had a very good man-to-man relationship and not merely a

member-preacher association. I recall this man and his family with pleasure, which is more than I can say concerning other families in later years.

I have many memories of Shirleysburg. I could drive to Orbisonia from this charge, and the pastor there and I became good friends. In a letter I wrote home, and later found, I told about being on the program at a Teachers' Institute. I made a speech of some sort on the educational process. Teachers in the one room schools of the time were paid fifty dollars a month, for a seven or eight month term. A Model T Ford Roadster, as the one-seat car was called, sold for \$425 and had no sales tax added. These were also the days of the railroad. I once went to Sunbury and back to Shirleysburg in one day by rail. It was narrow gauge railroad to Mt. Union, and the Pennsylvania Railroad to Sunbury. There were many trains a day, and the fare was about three cents a mile.

I said above that one should never trust a horse. I also learned not to trust a woman when she is riding with you behind a horse. I was making some calls on a pleasant winter day, when the roads were well-packed with snow. At one home I found a lady who said that if I would take her home, about a mile and a half down the road, that her daughter would have dinner ready. Since a good country-style dinner always comes in handy, I readily agreed. But dinner or no dinner, I could not have refused the request of that family. We had gone down the road but a short distance when I saw a two-horse bobsled coming at us right down the middle of the narrow road. I pulled off as far as possible to the side of the road. The other driver did not turn aside, and his sled brushed against the shaft of my vehicle and broke it. My horse was frightened, and the lady even more so. She fouled up the situation still more by screaming and grabbing the reins. I got the reins back without asking her leave, and I soon had the horse quiet, but I found I would have to walk the rest of the way holding the shaft together.

The horse and I got the lady home without further incident. The dinner? I cannot recall anything about it. I found some wire or rope and bound the shaft enough to get back home. I learned later that the driver of the bobsled was drunk and that his team was taking him home on their own. He never came to see me after his "hit and run" accident, nor did he offer to pay the damages. I was told that the man was that kind of person -- no concern for anyone else, preacher or otherwise.

I cannot recall a quarterly conference, but one must have been held before the end of the year. I do remember one elderly lady saying that she thought the charge should have an older man the next year. At least such a man would not have made the social blunder I made one day when I stopped at a home where a church group of younger married women were gathered for a "sewing bee." They had some kind of refreshments, like coffee and donuts, and invited me to help myself. This I did, and some good-natured banter passed back and forth. Finally one of the women said to me, "If you eat any more you'll be kicking all night." This was a current expression for restlessness. I replied without thinking, "I have nothing to kick but the wall." When this caused loud laughter, I sensed something was wrong. And then it came to me why the women were laughing. In confusion, I bid a hasty retreat through the laughter. Lest any reader miss the point, I was then in the state of "single blessedness."

Then came spring and the time for annual conference session, which was held at Shamokin that year. I attended and took the examinations required of those men who sought admission to the Conference "on trial." I passed the exams, but made the mistake of not checking on the presiding elder's recommendation. I assumed that would be taken care of by my supervising elder, but I learned too late that neither Dr. Stine nor Dr. Mosser had taken responsibility in the matter. As each elder had assumed the other had made the recommendation, I was left on the outside looking in.

On the train back to Sunbury, I was talking with one of the men of the conference about the situation. The man sitting behind us overheard the conversation and told me that if I wanted a job he had a place open. He was the sales manager for the Hammond Typewriter Co. (the machine today is called the Verityper). The work involved following up leads sent to the central office in Philadelphia in answer to magazine and newspaper advertisements. The next week I went to Philadelphia to be fitted out with a sample machine and a drawing account for traveling expenses.

I soon learned that I was no salesman. I recall one man who had sent in a postal card asking to see the machine and to have it demonstrated. When I got there, he refused even to look at the machine and gave no good reason for his refusal. Even though I had still made no sales after several weeks, I was sent to Scranton (or Wilkes-Barre?) to show the machine at the annual session of the Wyoming Conference. There I met a presiding elder and we talked about my educational background and the work I had done in the Central Pennsylvania Conference. When we parted he said he would be seeing me later.

A day or two afterward, he found me and told me he had a station appointment (no less) at East Worester, New York, at a salary of \$800 -- one of the few times I can recall the amount. There was one condition: I would have to go there as a married man, or enter that state shortly thereafter. I told him I was sure that could be arranged, because some of the preliminary proceedings had already been carried out. The girl in question was teaching school. Her term would close out in June, and after that...

On that basis I went to East Worester, much to the annoyance of the Hammond sales manager. And you have already guessed it -- I muffed it, fanned out. But that begins another story -- how a preacher can weave a very tangled web when he first tries to think and act independently in a "one man" church.

Editor's Comment: The last installment of the 1968 material received by Charles Berkheimer ends at this point. Apparently Rev. Smith never continued his memoirs to include his subsequent work beyond the Central Pennsylvania Conference. Unfortunately, Harry Ambrose Smith seems to be unknown as a ministerial son of the St. John's Church in Sunbury. As the very brief Ohio obituaries of Rev. Smith and his wife contain few Pennsylvania references, any one able to provide additional information on this couple is asked to contact the conference archivist.