

REV. WILLIAM RABER (1824-1875)

William B. Raber was born February 22, 1824, and converted at a revival meeting conducted by Rev. Jacob C. Smith February 19, 1846, in the Littlestown UB church. At the time, Raber was boarding with the Jacob H. Bishop family and conducting the Littlestown Academy. Granted a quarterly conference preaching license by the Littlestown circuit, he exhorted locally and continued teaching at the academy through the end of the 1846-47 school year. At that time he was appointed to assist Rev. James M. Bishop for the remainder of the conference year on the Chambersburg circuit, and he began keeping the journal here presented. Admitted into the Pennsylvania Conference in 1848, he was ordained in 1850.

Raber entered the itinerancy at precisely the right time to help transform the rugged pre-Civil War UB circuit rider into the more cultured and parsonage-oriented minister necessary to lead the denomination into the twentieth century. According to his conference obituary, he was "a man of considerable education, a close student and a rapid thinker" and "few men were better posted in literature and science of the day than he." Conference historian Paul Holdcraft declares, "He had unusual ability to lead young men into the Christian ministry, though insisting that they must be divinely called."

Beginning with the day he left his parents' home in East Berlin to take his place on his first circuit, the journal is an honest and amazing look into the life of a young, dedicated itinerant -- first as a single man moving about a vast circuit, then as a husband-father-pastor struggling to faithfully serve his Lord in an imperfect world.

During his twenty-eight years of ministry, he served ten years as conference secretary, was elected by his peers to attend four General Conferences, and filled the following appointments.

1847-48 assisted James M. Bishop on Chambersburg circuit beginning in July

1848-49 York circuit

1849-51 Chambersburg circuit

1851-53 Perry circuit

1853-54 Dover circuit

1854-57 York station

1857-60 Chambersburg station

1860-63 presiding elder, York district

1863-67 Mechanicsburg station

1867-71 presiding elder, York district

1871-75 York station

Rev. Raber died February 11, 1875. Had he lived until the 1889 denominational split, it would be difficult to predict with which faction he might have sided. Given his conservative nature, his commitment to the proper over the popular, the stance of some of his respected associates and home congregation at Littlestown, and the strong opposition to secret societies shown in his 1855 book The Devil and Some of His Doings, it is possible that William Raber might have become the most prominent and respected member of the Pennsylvania Conference to side with the seceding minority.