

EDITOR'S PREFACE

On behalf of the Historical Society of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, I present volume XVIII of THE CHRONICLE. For eighteen years, the society has produced a mix of scholarly, entertaining, informative and inspiring stories of United Methodism – all united by a common theme. This volume continues that tradition by presenting a series of papers on significant and interesting individuals within our three predecessor traditions – the Evangelical, United Brethren, and Methodist denominations.

And as the reader will quickly recognize, the criteria for including an individual in this year's volume is not fame. Instead, we have deliberately sought to recognize some of the lesser-known clergy and lay persons from around the conference who have labored behind the scenes to see that faith in Jesus Christ is lived out and passed on.

This year we also recognize the 200th anniversary of the first regular Annual Conference session of what became the Evangelical Church. It was on November 16, 1807, that members of the Evangelical Association gathered in Millbach, Dauphin (now Lebanon) County, to assign fields of labor to the preachers, formally elect Jacob Albright as their leader, and order the preparation of a Discipline. In 1946, the Evangelical and United Brethren denominations joined to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church. And in 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist denominations joined to form the United Methodist Church.

In special recognition of this significant Evangelical anniversary, the lead article in the year's volume of THE CHRONICLE is the story of an early circuit rider in the Evangelical Association, Rev. James Barber, written by his great-great-grandson Denny Williams. This well-researched account is followed by the story of individuals both pro-Evangelical and anti-Evangelical in Bendersville, Adams County – including an 1818 incident contemporary with James Barber.

We continue celebrating our Evangelical heritage by presenting the story of one of the lesser-known but key persons in that denomination's infamous 1894 split, Solomon Neitz, written by his grandson Robert E. Woodside. We complete the Evangelical portion of this volume with the story of Walter L. Kamble, a Central Pennsylvania Conference pastor who made unique contributions beyond his pastoral ministry.

One of the most significant United Brethren personalities within our conference is Bishop Jacob Erb (1804-1883). First, by way of introduction to those who may be unfamiliar with this multi-faceted man, we present his obituary from the 1884 conference journal. We then reprint two papers, approaching the life of this episcopal son of our Conference from two different perspectives. The first was written in 1961 by Paul Holdcraft, historian of the former Pennsylvania Conference,

for the denominational publication *Friends*. The second was written in 1984 by Milton Loyer, archivist of the present Central Pennsylvania Conference, for inclusion in the *History of the New Cumberland District*.

The Methodist portion of our visit with various conference personalities begins with the story behind the cover photograph – the July 1923 patriotic celebration at Harrison Valley, Potter County. The theme continues with another Wellsboro District account – stories of memorable lay persons in the Luthers Mills congregation, Bradford County, as recalled by Bishop Dwight E. Loder who served his first pastoral assignment there 1939-41.

In an issue devoted to recognizing individuals within the Conference, what could be more appropriate than a list proposing to name the Conference's all-time most influential clergy and lay persons? Upon the request of then conference historian Charles Berkheimer, such an assessment was made in 1965 by pastor, district superintendent, and eight-time General Conference delegate J. Edgar Skillington. Modern readers will find it interesting to see the list, to note the rationale given for the selections, and to see how many of the names are presently recognizable in any context.

Finally, the issue concludes with the story of Edith Orvis, a Methodist home missionary from Wisconsin who devoted most of her career to the now forgotten Unity Mission in Berwick, Columbia County. Consistent with the notion of recognizing persons who labored behind the scenes in order that the spotlight fall on the ministry and not the minister, the final article is more the story of Unity Mission and the work of the Woman's Home Mission Society than it is of Miss Orvis.

It is our prayer that these accounts of Central Pennsylvania persons will inspire each of us to continue faithfully in the work God places before us in the twenty-first century.

Special Note: We are not the only Society recognizing in 2007 the 200th anniversary of the first regular Annual Conference session of what became the Evangelical Church. Those particularly interested in Evangelical history will be pleased to learn of a new book just produced by one of our sister organizations, the Historical Society of the Evangelical Congregational Church. [Evangelical from the Beginning: The Story of the Evangelical Congregational Church](#) is a well-written, 380-page account of the denomination formed by the United Evangelical churches in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois that did not participate in the 1922 re-merger with the Evangelical Association to form the Evangelical Church. Edited by that denomination's archivist Terry M. Heisey, the book is available from the Evangelical Congregational Church Center, 100 West Park Avenue, Myerstown PA 17067.