

## **A Brief Historical Note on the Life of the Colonial Park Church**

by Bruce C. Souders, 1962

[Editor's Note: In 1962, Rev. Bruce Souders was historian of the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church. It was customary in that Conference for the historian to make a formal presentation each year. This is a paper read before the 163<sup>rd</sup> Annual Session of the East Pennsylvania Conference, Wednesday, September 19, 1962, at the Colonial Park EUB Church in suburban Harrisburg. The paper and footnotes are given as they were originally presented, with appropriate updates indicated as editor's notes added in brackets.]

On September 17, 1917, the Rev. I.H. Albright, Ph.D., one of my predecessors in this office, read a paper before the Harrisburg United Brethren Ministerium on the subject, "History of the United Brethren Church in Dauphin County." At the end of the paper, he said, "There are 42½ United Brethren churches in Dauphin County, I think more than any one of the other denominations within the same territory."<sup>1</sup> Though it would be interesting to know which church Dr. Albright considered to be the "half" church, we know that he was not speaking about our host church for this 163<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference. The East Pennsylvania Conference Missionary and Church Extension Society had not yet entertained the idea of a church in the Colonial Park area.

Harrisburg was being well served by the Church of the United Brethren in Christ in 1917. There was no apparent need for new churches. Derry Street Church had been founded by the Penbrook congregation in 1889 to minister to the people in the southeast section of the city. The Penbrook Church itself was on the verge of a relocation project which was to culminate in ground-breaking (on May 14, 1922) for their present building. When completed, this building would provide the center for a wider Christian witness along the northeast fringes of the city. Furthermore, State Street Church (organized in 1902) and Sixth Street Church (organized in 1906) were serving beside their more established sister churches – First Church and Otterbein Church – to minister to the central and northern sections of the city.

Apart from this seemingly adequate number of churches in the Harrisburg area, there were other considerations which turned the Conference's attention

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Albright's paper is on file in the Archives of the East Pennsylvania Conference Historical Society in the Gosdard Memorial Library on the campus of Lebanon Valley College. [editor's note: About twenty years ago, the EUB material formerly at Lebanon Valley College was removed to the denominational archives on the campus of Drew University in Madison NJ. Since then the Dauphin County material, including the paper by Dr. Albright, has been placed in the archives of the Susquehanna Conference at Lycoming College in Williamsport PA.]

away from expansion in this section. First, there was a strong sentiment to increase our efforts in the regions around Philadelphia. Second, even though there were efforts to help the General Conference to raise its Golden Jubilee Anniversary fund goal of \$200,000 by 1919, there was also the hard fact that “the war has impeded church building because of the advanced cost of material and labor.”<sup>2</sup> The “Report of Church Erection” read by the Rev. C.E. Rettew to the Annual Conference in session at Philadelphia Second Church in 1916 enunciated the aforementioned sentiment quite clearly:

*The United Brethren Church had her beginning within two hundred miles of the Atlantic Coast, but the course has been westward until churches have been planted along the Pacific Coast before we have reached the Atlantic. Churches have been erected in the West upon virgin soil, while large parts of our own East Pennsylvania territory have remained unoccupied.*

*The fact that the unchurched of Philadelphia would make ten (10) cities the size of Harrisburg proves to us the vast opportunities for the Home Missionary and Church Erection Societies east of the Susquehanna.*

*Ours has been a church of the rural districts. It is a striking coincidence that like the birth of Christ, the United Brethren Church had its beginning in a barn. But with the decadence of the country church, in general, and the onward march to the cities, we should not be content to be one of a few struggling churches in an over churched rural community while our people are moving to the cities and being housed by churches of other denominations.*

*As evinced by our recent achievements in Philadelphia, East Pennsylvania Conference has caught the proper vision. It may be necessary in obeying this vision to call upon the Church Erection Society. Less than two per cent (2%) of the over due loans are in East Pennsylvania Conference. This fact, coupled with the vast opportunities in this Conference, should cause the Church Erection Society to regard us as a good investment.<sup>3</sup>*

Five years later, however, the spotlight of expansion was again focused upon the Harrisburg area, thanks to the initiative of the Derry Street Church. Listen to the exuberant statement from the Board of Managers of the Conference Missionary and Church Extension Society as delivered by Thomas G. Spangler, the Secretary:

*The outlook for a sixth church in Harrisburg is very promising. At a meeting of the Board held recently, Dr. Lyter [J.A. Lyter], pastor of the Derry Street Church and Vice President of this Board, submitted a proposition so comprehensive and generous that it took some time to know where we were at. The plan means the purchase of a site, the erection of a building, and the maintenance thereof until self supporting, without any financial obligation on the conference.*

*The Board unanimously passed a resolution accepting and agreeing to the plan, and submitting the project to him and his Board of officials to develop details for the plan.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> Conference Proceedings, 1918, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Conference Proceedings, 1916, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Conference Proceedings, 1921, p. 26.

The next year, the Rev. Dr. Enck, in his Superintendent's report, called attention to the consummation of the land deal leading to the establishing of the Twenty-ninth Street Church, which would minister to the people on the southeast growing edge of Harrisburg:

*Harrisburg Derry Street purchased a very desirable corner lot on Twenty-ninth and Derry Streets for \$8,000. A chapel 40x60 will be erected upon this lot in the near future. This church will be under the foster care of Derry Street Church until said church is able to take care of itself, when it will be turned over to the Conference. We anticipate a great future for this apprehended child.*<sup>5</sup>

Brother Spangler, in the report of the Conference Missionary and Church Extension Society, verified Dr. Enck's report. In addition, he announced another opportunity for church expansion in the Harrisburg area:

*A new, very promising site opened at the east end of Progress which the officers were authorized to secure, with the approval of this Conference.*<sup>6</sup>

It looked as though the expectant parent might have twins. However, because of the head start it had and because of the support which it enjoyed from the Derry Street congregation, the Twenty-ninth Street Church was able to lay its cornerstone almost a year ahead of the Colonial Park Church. This does not mean that the Conference was dragging its feet, for the same session which heard of the opportunity which existed in the Colonial Acres also passed a resolution on motion of the Conference Treasurer, J.R. Engle, making possible the purchase of "a certain lot or plot of ground situated on the Jonestown Road, east of Progress, Dauphin County,... for the location of a church, for and at the price of \$3,500." Brother Engle was "authorized to pay the purchase price thereof."<sup>7</sup> In 1923, the Rev. I. Moyer Hershey, reporting for the Conference Missionary and Church Extension Society, said:

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<sup>5</sup> Conference Proceedings, 1922, p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Conference Proceedings, 1922, p.12. Among the other of Brother Engle's resolutions upon which the Conference acted was an authorization to the Church Extension Society "to secure an option and purchase for and in the name of the Conference a suitable property, at a reasonable price, in the city of Harrisburg... for a Superintendent's Parsonage."

Since we have recently vacated the property purchased as a consequence of this action, the reaction of I. Moyer Hershey to this acquisition is interesting reading: "The Extension Board obeyed the instructions of the Conference with reference to a Superintendent's Parsonage. It is located in Harrisburg on the corner of Sixteenth and Primrose Streets, in a very desirable residential section, one square north of State Street, and a good hearty throw of a stone from the Bishop's home. So far as the Board knows, all agree it to be a fine location. The parsonage is built of brick, two-story, with a finely adapted Superintendent's office and all other rooms to match. A fine double garage is built to the rear. Also a suitable fireproof Conference archive receptacle is being built in, so that all valuable historical, ecclesiastical, and official records may be secured properly for future reference. One might describe for an hour about a house which makes the superintendent 'all smiles,' but 'nuf sed.' Make a pilgrimage between sessions and see for yourself. As to cost, study the Treasurer's report." Conference Proceedings, 1923, p. 27.

*The conviction matured early after the purchase of the lot, that a class should be organized and a church edifice built. In keeping with this judgment, a suitable resolution is to be presented granting permission to build said church.*<sup>8</sup>

The 1923 Conference took action to attach Colonial Acres to Linglestown; and with all in readiness to launch the new enterprise, the cornerstone was laid by Dr. S.C. Enck June 29, 1924. Addresses were delivered by the Rev. H.E. Miller and the Rev. H.F. Rhoad.

At the 1924 session of Conference, the Missionary and Church Extension Society reported:

*Colonial Park has been fast taking on permanent shape. The new church edifice is about ready for dedication, its location is beautiful for situation; with the appointment of a resident pastor at this session of conference, the class is to be organized, the Sunday School, Christian Endeavor and other church activities started. This beautiful church edifice will be set apart formally for worship and service to God some time during the late fall.*<sup>9</sup>

Also, the Conference approved the recommendation of the Committee on Boundaries separating Rockville from the Linglestown charge and keeping Colonial Park attached to the Linglestown charge. Following up on this, the Stationing Committee appointed the Rev. Frank C. Aungst to the Linglestown and Colonial Park charge and sent the Rev. E.E. Saul, who had been serving the Linglestown and Rockville charge, to the new appointment at Rockville.<sup>10</sup> Pastor Aungst supervised the completion of the church building and tackled the job of developing a new congregation.

In his report to the 1925 Conference, Dr. S.C. Enck placed the following evaluation upon the progress of the Colonial Park project:

*The Conference Church Extension and Home Missionary Society erected a beautiful modern church building practically by faith, at Colonial Park, one of the growing and prosperous suburbs of Harrisburg. This church was dedicated Sunday, January 4, by the Conference Superintendent,*

*Large congregations were present throughout the day. The enterprise was unique in this respect, that it was a church without members and without Sunday School. The offerings for the day amounted to about \$600, a bright indication that the people present had faith in the noble project.*

*The building and ground all told in round numbers, cost about \$40,000. Pastor F.C. Aungst had a vision, and, Sunday following the dedication organized a Sunday School with an enrollment of 37. This was followed by a strenuous campaign for prospective as well as active members, and in this he was not disappointed.*

*Sunday, March 1, he organized the church consisting of 35 members. To this date he reports 41 members; Sunday School enrollment 153, with an average attendance*

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<sup>8</sup> *Conference Proceedings, 1923*, p.26.

<sup>9</sup> *Conference Proceedings, 1924*, p.39. While in this paper we have been speaking about *Colonial Park*, this is the first time the term is used in the Conference session records.

<sup>10</sup> It is significant that Dr. Aungst should retire this year at the first Annual Conference entertained by Colonial Park.

*of 74; a Christian Endeavor Society of 20 members; prayer meeting attendance, an average of 30.*

*The local church showed their appreciation to the Conference by paying \$388.44 on the church indebtedness, aside from the offering, on the day of dedication.*

*This is a growing suburb of the city of Harrisburg; almost all the lots surrounding the city have been sold. People are building beautiful homes and move from the congested sections of the city to the less populated environs.*

*The members of this infant church have a mind to work and we predict that it will only be a short while until we shall have a self-supporting church in this beautiful section of the capital city.<sup>11</sup>*

Despite the almost insatiable optimism of Dr. Enck and others in the Conference, the first fifteen years were difficult years. The movement of the population into the suburbs was not quite as rapid as had been anticipated, perhaps, in part, because of the depression years beginning in 1929. Nevertheless, under the prayerful and determined leadership of the men assigned to the charge, slow but sure progress was affected. Church membership increased from the original 35 to 104 by the time the parish was ten years old, and to 154 by the time it was fifteen years old. A Women's Missionary Association chapter was organized during the 1927-28 Conference Year with 22 members, an Otterbein Guild in 1932 with 24 members, and an Otterbein Brotherhood in 1944. Guiding the parish through the first fifteen years of growing pains were the Rev. F.C. Aungst 1924-26, the Rev. A.G. Nye 1926-28, the Rev. William C. Rhoad 1928-30, seven months supply William J. Bock 1930-31, and the Rev. Russell L. Shay 1931-40.

When the Rev. Clarence E. Ulrich arrived on the scene to begin his fifteen-year ministry in 1940, things were looking brighter because the population shift which people had been anticipating was now in progress. The years of World War II (1941-45) saw only a temporary retardation in this movement. Years of rapid growth were in the making for Colonial Park Church. Membership rose from 154 to over 400. The Sunday School outgrew its facilities; and with the cancellation of the original indebtedness in 1948, the way was open for building in 1953 at an approximate cost of \$60,000 an educational unit equipped with fellowship hall and kitchen – and containing space that could be finished off into additional rooms as funds were available. So effective was the growth of the parish from 1940 to 1955 that by action of the Annual Conference, Colonial Park was separated from Linglestown in 1955. The Rev. Robert H. Sholter was assigned to the charge.

At first, things looked well for the congregation and its new pastor. A parsonage was purchased in Susquehanna Township in 1956 at a cost of approximately \$20,000. The population shift was still on and growth seemed inevitable. By 1957, however, it was obvious that this same development of the suburban area; and the growth of the city of Harrisburg and its environs which

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<sup>11</sup> Conference Proceedings, 1925, p. 19.

had been so beneficial to Colonial Park, also had more ominous prospects in store for the congregation. More and safer roads were needed to serve the local citizens, as well as the travelers who were passing through the area. To alleviate the problem, the Pennsylvania Highway Department and the Federal Government decided to build a cloverleaf at the intersection of US Route 22 and Interstate Highway 83. The plans were to encircle the church with the southwest section of the cloverleaf; but the church was given the option of remaining in a the circle or building a new church at another location. After the Council of Administration and the congregation had agreed to relocate, the State condemned the building on June 28, 1957. Legal counsel was obtained and plans were begun for the new building.

A building site was secured along Colonial and Valley Roads. The greater part of 1958 and 1959 were used in planning and building, as pastor and people applied themselves to the task of developing the 10.5 acre plot they now owned. Groundbreaking ceremonies were held May 24, 1959, with cornerstone laying ceremonies following on November 22 of that same year. By July 3, 1960, Fellowship Hall was ready for the first service in the new building. Four weeks later, the first services were held in the sanctuary.

September 11, 1960, inaugurated a week of dedication observances. On that day, Dr. D.E. Young preached the sermon at the morning worship service. At 3:00 p.m., Bishop Kaebnick preached the dedication sermon and conducted the dedication itself. In the evening, Pastor Sholter conducted a devotional service. The next week of services included a fellowship night with devotions by the Youth Fellowship, three successive nights of sermons by former pastors (Dr. Aungst, Pastor Shay, and Pastor Ulrich), and a Community Churches Night. One of the participants in that service, Colonial Park United Church of Christ, had also been forced to relocate because of the new cloverleaf. Sunday, September 18, concluded the week's festivities with a Rally Day address in the Sunday School by Dr. Roy H. Stetler, a morning worship sermon by the Rev. Dr. Ezra H. Ranck, and an evening service of personal rededication led by Pastor Sholter.

What might have been viewed as a catastrophe in 1957 has become for Colonial Park a new opportunity for service in Christ's Kingdom. The area in which it is situated is still growing. Its total church property with a value of \$340,000 was encumbered at the close of the 1960-61 Conference Year only to the extent of \$52,000. Church membership at that time stood at 474. Though by comparison with our Conference itself Colonial Park is still in its late adolescence, it has had a lifetime of experience with the problems of suburbia. Let us hope and pray that this wealth of experience can be harnessed with the vitality of adolescence for a future of even greater service for Jesus Christ.