

## **The Methodist Episcopal Church in Northeast Pennsylvania**

This collection of three articles concentrates on that branch of United Methodism that was most dominant in northeast Pennsylvania – the Methodist Episcopal Church.

As dominant as the Methodist Episcopal Church was in northeast Pennsylvania, however, there were not enough of that denomination's churches to support a full conference without reaching into the southern tier of the state of New York – and so the former Wyoming Conference also included essentially that part of New York drained by the Susquehanna River. The Pennsylvania portion of the conference was bounded on the east mostly by the Delaware River, and cut off at the south from the Philadelphia Conference by the Pocono Mountains. On the west, the northern portion was separated from the Central New York Conference by the Susquehanna River and the southern portion was separated from the Central Pennsylvania Conference by the rugged and less inhabited area between the more populous upper (Scranton and Wilkes-Barre) and lower (Berwick and Bloomsburg) portions of the Susquehanna River valley.

But those boundaries within the state of Pennsylvania did not remain unchanged. The first article in this collection tells the stories of boundary adjustments made over the years between the Wyoming and its neighboring Philadelphia, Central New York, and Central Pennsylvania Conferences.

The second article tells the story of a formal church trial for a pastor laboring in the rugged and less inhabited area between the Wyoming and Central Pennsylvania Conferences. The trial mainly involved personality clashes (as opposed to theological differences or moral issues) between the itinerant pastor assigned by the Central Pennsylvania Conference and local pastors with sympathies for the Wyoming Conference.

The final article was written by a young bride from one of the Wyoming Conference's more settled and refined New York towns that began her parsonage life in some of the rural and less structured Pennsylvania communities of the conference.

We trust that the three articles will prove to be a suitable welcome to our new readership from the former Wyoming Conference, and both a reminder and a celebration of the common heritage we now enjoy within the Susquehanna Conference.

## **The Wyoming Conference's Pennsylvania Boundaries 1852-1968**

*compiled from the conference archives, 2011*

The Wyoming Conference was formed in 1852 by separating off the southern portion of the Oneida Conference. With exception of some territory at its eastern edge that was drained by the Delaware River, the Wyoming Conference was located within the basin of the east branch of the Susquehanna River. While other Methodist conferences underwent major boundary changes during the years between their original establishment and the 1968 denominational union that formed the United Methodist Church, the Wyoming Conference did not.

But the boundaries of the Wyoming Conference were not as permanent as they might appear to have been. This paper tells the story of those minor adjustments to the Wyoming Conference's Pennsylvania boundaries that occurred between 1852 and 1968.

### **1880. The Wapwallopen Charge**

The Wapwallopen charge (a.k.a. Schloyersville charge) covered an area geographically isolated from its nearest neighbors. It was bounded on the north and separated from Nanticoke by Penobscot Mountain, bounded on the south and separated from Hazleton by Nescopek Mountain, bounded on the east by the rugged highlands that include Mountain Top, and bounded on the west by the Susquehanna River. It also fell between the natural service area of the Wyoming Conference (which included Nanticoke and Mountain Top) and the Central Pennsylvania Conference (which included Berwick and Hazleton).

The most convenient entrance to the area was via Nescopek (across the river from Berwick) and the sliver of relatively flat land between the Susquehanna River and Nescopek Mountain. And so in 1880, the area was transferred from the Mountain Top charge in the Wyoming Conference to become the Wapwallopen charge in the Central Pennsylvania Conference. Included in the transfer were active Wyoming Conference appointments at Rippletown, Slocum and Stairville.

For the next 50 years the Central Pennsylvania Conference supplied a Wapwallopen charge with 6 appointments: Powder Glen, Rippletown, Schloyersville, Slocum, Stairville, and Wapwallopen. The 1905 journal declared that the charge had 4 church buildings (assumed to be Powder Glen, Schloyersville, Slocum and Stairville).

The conference's 1915 first official property listing does not include Wapwallopen at all, describes Rippletown as a schoolhouse appointment, and states that the other 4 properties are Methodist-owned. It is believed that the denomination never owned a church building in Wapwallopen, even though the

charge was so-named and there appears to have been a class there – perhaps meeting at the parsonage. In 1926 the Powder Glen building was dismantled and moved to Rippletown.<sup>1</sup>

The charge was disbanded in 1929. At the end of 1928 Powder Glen and Wapwallopen reported no members; Schloyersville reported 27 members, but no financial contribution to the charge. And so those three appointments were abandoned in 1929 when the charge was disbanded. Rippletown (31 members), Slocum (60 members) and Stairville (55 members) were returned to the Wyoming Conference – see the 1929 Wyoming Conference Journal, pages 107-108.

In the Wyoming Conference, Rippletown was renamed Albert and placed with Mountaintop, Slocum (actually located in the community of Slocum Corners) was placed with West Nanticoke, and Stairville was placed with Wanamie and Alden.

Since the move back to the Wyoming Conference, further changes have taken place. Albert united with the congregation in Mountaintop to form the Mountaintop Christ congregation and erect a new building in 1960 on 13.5 acres southwest of town. Following the 1968 Methodist-EUB denominational union, the former Methodist congregations at Slocum Corners and Stairville were once again back together – this time on a three-point charge with Faith, the former EUB congregation at Slocum.

### **1933. The Pocono Lake Charge**

The 1868 Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal specifies the boundaries of the Philadelphia Conference, and then defines the boundaries of its neighboring conferences by default. On page 305 appears the statement that the *Philadelphia Conference shall be bounded on the east by the Delaware River; on the south by the Pennsylvania state line; on the west by the Susquehanna River; on the north by the north lines of Dauphin, Schuylkill, Carbon and Monroe Counties, excluding Ashland and Beaver Meadows circuit.* Ashland in Schuylkill County and Beaver Meadows in Carbon County were excluded because they were part of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. That statement failed to exclude from the Philadelphia Conference, however, that part of Carbon County within the White Haven charge of the Central Pennsylvania Conference and that part of Monroe County within the Stoddartsville charge of the Wyoming Conference.

Stoddartsville is on the southern boundary of Luzerne County, where the old Easton to Wilkes-Barre turnpike crosses the Lehigh River. The Methodist work here was begun in 1813 by Marmaduke Pearce, preacher on the Wyoming circuit, at the request of two local preachers from Delaware who had recently moved into the area. The first church building was erected about 1820.

In 1900 the charge base was relocated to the more prosperous and more populous community of Thornhurst, where a church had been erected in 1858. Thornhurst is in Lackawanna County, about 5 miles upriver from Stoddartsville.

Chaffee's 1904 History of the Wyoming Conference lists 5 appointments (all with church buildings) on the Thornhurst charge: Stoddartsville (1820) in

Luzerne County, Thornhurst (1858) in Lackawanna County, and Blakeslee (1845) and Locust Ridge (1901) and Pocono Lake (1902) in Monroe County. Eventually Stoddartsville was closed and the pastor took up residence at Pocono Lake, but the charge continued to be called Thornhurst. In 1928, however, Thornhurst was split from the charge to be supplied separately by a student from Wyoming Seminary<sup>2</sup>, and the remaining three Monroe County congregations became the Pocono Lake charge.

In 1933 the Pocono Lake charge was transferred to the Philadelphia Conference.

### **1947. The Terrytown Charge**

The northern tier of Pennsylvania west of the former Wyoming Conference has been in several different conferences over the years. The longest-lasting assignment was made in 1880 when the territory from the Susquehanna River west to what is now US 15 was placed in the newly-created Central New York Conference. This lasted for 80 years, until the 1960 Northeast Jurisdictional Conference voted to realign the conference boundaries along state lines and transfer the territory to the Central Pennsylvania Conference.

Historically, the Terrytown appointment in the Central New York Conference consisted of six appointments, with a parsonage at Terrytown. There were two appointments with church buildings (New Era and Hollenback) and four appointments without church buildings (Norway Ridge, Quick's Bend, Sugar Run, and Terrytown). In 1923 the charge was disbanded. New Era, Hollenback and Terrytown (which by then had a church building) were served by the pastor of the New Albany charge, and the remaining appointments were abandoned.

In 1926 the Terrytown charge was reconstituted, consisting of Terrytown and Hollenback – with New Era continuing to be served in connection with New Albany. The 1928 Elmira District report states, “A new basement and a new coat of paint on the Terrytown Pa church, at a cost of \$650, and repairs on the parsonage, \$85, is part of the wonderful story of the work of Rev. Richard Barnes, who reopened the work on this circuit [in 1926], but who must now return to complete his education.”

The charge declined in the 1930's, and was left “to be supplied” in 1938. From 1939 to 1944, Hollenback, Terrytown and other Methodist churches in the “river hills” were combined in various attempts to support a charge. By 1944 it was obvious that such a charge was not viable and the churches that were not closed were divided up among the surrounding charges. At this point Terrytown was closed and Hollenback was returned to the New Albany charge.

This westward orientation was not pleasing to the Hollenback congregation. In 1947 Hollenback was dropped from the New Albany charge, the entire Terrytown-Hollenback area was removed from the conference map, and the following resolution (from page 39 of the 1947 Central New York Conference journal) was adopted.

*WHEREAS, the officials of Hollenback Church, in an open meeting, unanimously requested that their Church be transferred to the Wyoming Conference, and be attached to the Wyalusing charge. Wyalusing is the center of their social, educational, and economic activities, and is readily accessible. New Albany, from which point Hollenback has been served recently, is seventeen miles distant, making effective service practically impossible.*

*THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that we recommend the transfer of this Church, with its assets, to the Wyoming Conference, subject to review and approval by the Jurisdictional Committee, and any others that be involved.*

*BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we authorize the Trustees of Hollenback Church to dispose of the parsonage at Terrytown, and to distribute the proceeds equally, between the Hollenback and New Era Churches. These being the only two active churches remaining, that were part of the old Terrytown charge.*

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<sup>1</sup> The appointment at Rippletown had been meeting in an abandoned schoolhouse transformed into a small chapel, but more room was needed. Since the church at Powder Glen was to be torn down, a delegation from Rippletown went to look at it and decided to secure the building. On Labor Day 1926 a group returned to Powder Glen, dismantled the structure, enjoyed a chicken dinner, loaded the lumber on two wagons and a truck, and had an evening corn roast. The material was hauled to a new plot of ground located across from the old chapel, and the building was reconstructed.

<sup>2</sup> The old parsonage at Thornhurst was then remodeled to accommodate student pastors from the seminary at Drew and others who supplied the congregation. That arrangement lasted for many years. At present the parsonage is being rented out and Thornhurst is part of a two-point charge with Gouldsboro.