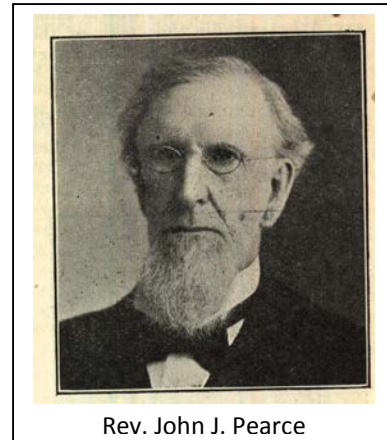


## What Ever Happened to... John J. Pearce

The story of John J. Pearce is different from the others in this volume in that it involves someone who dropped off the radar not “permanently” – but on two different occasions for brief periods. Specifically, he “located” for the 1854-57 and 1865-66 conference years. This was not an uncommon event, as family pressures or health concerns or financial difficulties caused many persons to leave the itinerant ministry for brief periods of time. But considering his ministerial lineage and his prominence in several conferences, one can’t help but wonder what the Rev. Pearce was doing during those years.

John Jameson Pearce (1826-1912) was the son of prominent pioneer circuit rider and district superintendent Marmaduke Pearce (1776-1852) – who through various early boundary changes and creations of conferences served from Holland Purchase NY to Baltimore MD in the Genesee, Baltimore and Oneida conferences before becoming a charter member of the Wyoming Conference in 1852. The service record of John J. Pearce is as follows.

1844-45	Lycoming
1845-46	Bellefonte
1846-47	Northumberland
1847-48	Milton
1848-49	Warrior’s Mark
1849-51	Lycoming
1851-52	Muncy
1852-53	Jersey Shore
1853-54	Lock Haven
1854-57	located
1857	“transfer” to Wyoming Conference
1857-58	Wyoming
1858-59	Owego
1859-62	superintendent, Owego District
1862-65	superintendent, Honesdale District
1865-66	located
1866	“transfer” to Philadelphia Conference
1866-67	Williams Grove
1867-70	Philadelphia 19 <sup>th</sup> Street
1870-71	Waynesburg
1871-74	Pottsville
1874	transfer to Central Pennsylvania Conference
1874-77	Williamsport Mulberry Street
1877-81	superintendent, Williamsport District
1881-84	Huntingdon
1884-87	Lewistown
1887-88	McVeytown
1888-98	retired



Rev. John J. Pearce

A person who “locates” does not surrender his ministerial credentials, and he may still function as a local pastor. He is, however, removed as an active itinerant clergyman of the conference and must formally apply for re-admittance to the conference in order to return to the itinerancy. This is different from being on leave for medical reasons, or asking not to be appointed for a year. “Location” is typically considered a permanent leaving of the itinerant ministry in order to pursue another vocation while still assisting in the local charge as needed.

Pearce’s reasons for locating at the June 1854 session of the Baltimore Conference (which then included most of what later became the Central Pennsylvania Conference) were no secret. He was running for the U.S. House of Representatives in the November 1854 election as the candidate of the Opposition Party (which later developed into the Republican Party). He won the election and represented Pennsylvania’s 15<sup>th</sup> Congressional District (Centre and Clinton counties) in the 34<sup>th</sup> Congress from March 4, 1855 to March 4, 1857.<sup>1</sup> He did not seek re-election in 1857, but rather applied for re-admittance to the Methodist itinerancy – this time in the Wyoming Conference.

Part of the difficulty in tracing Pearce’s movements during the 1865-66 conference year is due to the misspelling of his surname. The 1857 Wyoming Conference journal credits his admission to the Conference and his first appointment to “J.J. Pierce” – and even named his father as Marmaduke “Pierce” in its 1853 obituaries.<sup>2</sup> In 1865 Pearce located and moved to Delaware, near Dover, to start a business venture in a place named West Camden – which had just come into existence when the nearby town of Camden DE would not grant access to the Pennsylvania Railroad, which bypassed the town and built a railroad station one mile west of the center of town and named the area West Camden. One history book<sup>3</sup> tells the story as follows.

Some time in 1865 the Rev. John J. Pierce [sic], of the Wyoming Valley, Pa., came to “West Camden” and purchased the land from Dr. Isaac Jump and others, and laid it out in building lots. Through the exertions of Messrs. Pierce, Jakes<sup>4</sup> and others, the village received quite a boom in the way of building, and many persons from the Wyoming Valley, and from North Murderkill and West Dover Hundreds, flocked to West Camden and engaged in in business. During the same year a meeting of the leading and most enterprising citizens was called to take into consideration the propriety of severing all connection or identity with the town of Camden, and out of complaisance to Mr. Pierce,

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<sup>1</sup> On August 9, 1856, Pearce delivered a lengthy speech on the floor of the House addressing the issue of slavery and the growing division it was creating in the nation. The full text of this speech is available in the Congressional Record.

<sup>2</sup> Marmaduke Pearce had retired to a community north of Bloomsburg, became the owner of considerable property there, and re-named the town Light Street – in honor of the Light Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore where he had served.

<sup>3</sup> J. Thomas Scharf’s 1888 *History of Delaware: 1609-1888*, page 1138.

<sup>4</sup> John T. Jakes was the agent for the Pennsylvania Railroad who set up the station and operations in the area the railroad dubbed “West Camden.”

they agreed that it should be called “Wyoming,” after his native valley on the North Branch of the Susquehanna.

During the same year, in the midst of the peach season, John T. Jakes started a subscription list for the purpose of putting up a temporary building to be used for a Sunday School, which had not progressed far before the movement developed into a church. Out of the moneys collected was built a plank church, but before its dedication the Rev. Mr. Hamersley of Camden Circuit organized the board of trustees to receive the edifice in the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The church was dedicated Sunday, November 12, 1865, and “Rev. J.J. Pearce, late of Wyoming Conference,” served as the pastor for the remainder of the conference year. The state of Delaware was then part of the Philadelphia Conference, and in 1866 Pearce applied for re-admittance to the itinerancy, this time in the Philadelphia Conference. Whether or not it was his positive experience in starting a new congregation that encouraged Pearce to re-enter the itinerancy will probably never be known, but he went on to serve in the Philadelphia and Central Pennsylvania conferences as the pastor of prestigious congregations and a district superintendent.

What ever happened to John Jameson Pearce during his two periods of location? He left a permanent record in the U.S. House of Representatives, and he left his mark in the state of Delaware as the one who brought the name “Wyoming” to the area. The town of Wyoming exists to this day as a suburb of Dover, and the Wyoming United Methodist Church, at its new location on Wyoming Mill Road, is a thriving congregation that celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year in 2015.



Wyoming United Methodist Church, founded 1865