

John H. Powell (1893-1952)

The most common example of “passing the torch” in United Methodism occurs when one pastor hands over the responsibility for his charge to his successor. While this typically happens on July 1 as the result of re-assignments made at an annual conference, pastoral changes can take place at any time. Such was the case in 1915, as reported in the following article.¹

THE REV. JOHN H. POWELL

Dillsburg, Pa., Feb. 20. The Rev. John H. Powell, of West York Street, though young in years, is advancing in ministerial work. The Rev. Mr. Powell is now a member of the Pennsylvania conference of the United Brethren in Christ, having been admitted on October 9, 1914. Recently he was appointed pastor of the Beavertown² and Union³ United Evangelical Church by the quarterly conference to fill the vacancy caused by the serious illness of the Rev. A. L. Burkett, who was stricken with paralysis. The Rev. Mr. Burkett was stricken while he was conducting a series of revival services in the Union Church. The Rev. Mr. Powell immediately took up the work and continued the services for another week and on frequent occasions has filled the pulpits in the Dillsburg United Brethren charge.

This particular passing of the torch is interesting because it involves a United Brethren pastor assuming duties at a United Evangelical charge. While both of those denominations now fall within United Methodism, one can't help but wonder whether such an occurrence was commonplace in 1915. In addition, after having completed this assignment and before the calendar year expired, young John H. Powell was called upon a second time to make an unexpected transition – this time within his own United Brethren denomination. Reporting on events that happened immediately following the October 1915 annual sessions of the Pennsylvania Conference, the 1916 journal reports the following.⁴

¹ *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 2/20/1915, page 4.

² The Beavertown Evangelical church was located west of Dillsburg on east side of Campground Road, near its southern terminus at Mountain Road and just south of Pine Street. The 1876 York County Atlas shows the exact location. The building was purchased about 1921 by John Baker and his son-in-law Henry Heisey. They dismantled it and used the lumber to erect the house to the right of the Cocklin Funeral Home in Dillsburg – but only used the material and did not reconstruct the original building.

³ This is believed to be the South Mountain Union Church on Mountain Road southwest of Dillsburg, erected in 1867 and used by the Evangelicals, United Brethren, German Baptists, and Church of God. The congregation was re-organized in 1925 as a United Brethren (Old Constitution) Church and in 2008 as Celebration Community Church, which affiliated with the Assembly of God denomination in 2009.

⁴ 1916 journal of the Pennsylvania Conference, page 30.

Rev. S.R. Ludwig could not see his way clear to accept Lemasters charge to which he was appointed, and Rev. John H. Powell was assigned the pastorate.

To complete the stories of the ailing Rev. Burkett, the unable-to-respond Rev. Ludwig, and the novice Rev. Powell with regard to the transitions (or, in the case of S.R. Ludwig, the non-transition) cited above, *The Chronicle* now reports on each of those individuals before and after those transitions.

Rev. Burkett

A.L. Burkett was born near Hyndman PA on February 11, 1850. The history of Hyndman, located in the southwestern corner of Bedford County may be summarized by this statement from website of the town's library.

The first settler in Hyndman was Samuel Waters. He settled near Wills Creek. There was not a bridge across the creek. So he built one. About 1800 Jacob Burkett and Amos Raley started a boat-building business near the bridge. Because of this, the settlement was called Bridgeport. The boats were used to float grain down to Cumberland and then to Washington D.C. In Sept. 1877, the town petitioned the court to have its name changed to Hyndman. The request was granted.

The boat-building partnership of Jacob Burkett and Amos Raley that started the town of Hyndman was apparently personal as well as business. On March 28, 1838, Jacob's son Jesse (1820-1898) married Amos' daughter Drusilla (1821-1864) and twelve years later became the parents of A.L. Burkett.⁵ While there are admittedly other accounts that question the above relationships between the parents of A.L. Burkett and the boat-builders of 1800, the above is supported by the 1884 *History of Bedford, Somerset and Fulton Counties* by Waterman, Watkins & Co.⁶

The Hyndman area had been visited by Jacob Albright himself,⁷ and the Evangelical influence there remained strong. Burkett was licensed by the

⁵ While virtually all secular, genealogical, and ecclesiastical references to this man use only the initials A.L., one source gives the first name Albert and another gives the first name Allan.

⁶ On page 370 appear the following biographical statements.

Jacob Burkett settled in this township prior to 1800. He emigrated from Germany, and while a young man was engaged for some time in wagoning between Baltimore and Wheeling. His children were ... Jesse. Jesse followed wagoning for several years, and afterwards was a raftsmen. He married Drusilla, daughter of Amos Raley. Their son A.L. Burkett is a prominent citizen of Hyndman.

Amos Raley came to Londonderry township about 1800. For many years he was engaged in building boats, which were floated down Wills Creek at times of high water. His children were ... Drusilla.

⁷ See, for example, "The Planting of the Evangelical Association in Western Pennsylvania, 1800-1833" by William Beal in *Methodist History*, July 1978, page 218: *In Morris Cove ... was a large settlement of Germans from the eastern part of the state. In this region Albright and his associates gained entrance prior to 1804. The appointments were near the present town of New*

Pittsburgh Conference of the Evangelical Association in 1888 and ordained an elder in 1892. In 1902 he had been serving the Morgan WV charge when that territory was transferred to the Central Pennsylvania Conference.⁸ He opted to remain in the Central Pennsylvania Conference and in 1908 was assigned to McClure, where he had an attack of paralysis that incapacitated him for a while and almost forced him to leave the ministry. He rallied from this attack and in 1912 was sent to the Idaville charge – which then included Flint Ridge (Uriah), Beavertown and Union. It was there in January 1915 that he had the second attack from which he never fully recovered.

Burkett “located” (i.e., withdrew from the itinerancy) at the March 1915 annual conference and went to live with his married daughter in McClure. When he concluded that he was not going to recover, he returned to Hyndman in 1919 to spend the remainder of his life living in his own home. This is how the obituary⁹ in the denomination’s newspaper describes his final days.

He arrived here on April 7 and died on the 16th. He worked hard during the entire day, and ate his meals as usual, and in the evening he, with his wife, was sitting in the room talking till near 9 o’clock, when, of a sudden, he leaned back in his chair. His wife rushed to him and took him in her arms and spoke to him, but there was no response. He passed over with a smile on his face, without a murmur or a sigh.

Rev. Ludwig

Sanford Romanus Ludwig was born in McCauley, Hardy County VA [now WV] on May 14, 1859 – one of 10 children of Solomon and Susan Stubblefield Ludwig, and reared in a simple log home. At the age of 30, in September 1889, he was married to 20 year old Martha Virginia Shoemaker of adjacent Hampshire County WV by United Brethren pastor William H. Clary.

Three years later S.R. Ludwig began serving as a local pastor, having been recommended by the Toms Brook charge, and in 1894 he was formally licensed to preach and admitted on trial by the Virginia Conference of the United Brethren Church. He attended the denomination’s Bonebrake [later United] Seminary in Dayton OH and returned to serve churches in the Virginia Conference until 1908 – when he transferred to the Pennsylvania Conference.

Enterprise at the homes of George and Jacob Stull, Henry Schnebly, George Kring, J. Lyons and Philip Muhleisen (now Milliron). South of this on Wills Creek, near Hyndman, they preached at the house of John Wilhelm.

⁸ This charge, which then included Berkeley Springs WV, remained in the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Evangelical (until 1922), Evangelical (1922-1946), and Evangelical United Brethren (after 1946) denominations until the 1952 conference re-alignments resulting from the 1946 EUB merger.

⁹ *The Evangelical*, May 21, 1919, page 19.

In 1913, while still a member of the Pennsylvania Conference, S.R. Ludwig accepted an appointment to Elkins WV. While both he and Mrs. Ludwig had living relatives in West Virginia, the exact reason for this arrangement has not been determined. Apparently he made it known that he was ready to receive an appointment back in Pennsylvania in 1915 and was assigned to Lemasters. For some reason he “could not see his way clear” to accept the appointment, and he remained as the pastor in Elkins WV for another year. In fact, he remained in West Virginia for two more years, serving in Clarksburg WV, before returning to the Pennsylvania Conference in 1917. In 1922 he transferred to the Virginia Conference and served in Winchester VA for 11 years, from which appointment he retired in 1933. He died in 1934 and is buried in Winchester VA.

Rev. Powell

John H. Powell was born in 1893. As a young man he attended the United Brethren church in Dillsburg¹⁰, was involved in the work of the church, and in 1912 was granted a local preacher’s license at one of the charge’s quarterly conferences.¹¹ He was employed in Dillsburg by the Bulletin Publishing Company, which produced a local newspaper and advertising materials and did other commercial printing. Two newspaper articles give details of his life during these years.

Dillsburg. Pa., Jan. 22. John H. Powell, an employee of the Bulletin Publishing Company, sustained a severe laceration of the thumb of his left hand on Tuesday morning while operating a paper-cutting machine. Several stitches were required to close the wound.

Harrisburg Telegraph 1/22/1913, page 2

The Young Peoples Society Christian Endeavor of the Calvary United Brethren church, held their semi-annual election of officers last night with the following result: President. John H. Powell.

Harrisburg Telegraph 6/14/1913, page 9

While a local preacher’s license gave him authority to preach as needed at the churches on the Dillsburg charge, and he exercised that authority with apparent enthusiasm, John Powell began to sense a call to preach more widely – and possibly enter the full-time ordained ministry. At the October 1914 annual session of the Pennsylvania Conference he was referred to the Committee on Candidates for the

¹⁰ This building on East Harrisburg Street was dedicated in 1895. In 1968 the former United Brethren and former Methodist congregations in Dillsburg united to form a single congregation and plan for the erection of a new building. The united congregation met in the Methodist building at Baltimore and Church Streets until the present Calvary United Methodist Church building on Mumper Lane was dedicated in 1978. The former United Brethren building is now a Brethren in Christ church, while the former Methodist building houses a pre-school and day care.

¹¹ 1912 journal of the Pennsylvania Conference, page 33.

Ministry, granted a license to preach, and admitted on trial into the ministry¹² – but he did not ask for or receive a ministerial assignment at this time. In January 1915 Rev. A.L. Burkett of the Idaville-Dillsburg charge of the United Evangelical denomination suffered a stroke and was confined to bed. Powell, with his new credentials and local reputation as a pious follower of Christ, was appointed to supply that charge until the March 1915 annual session of the Central Pennsylvania of the United Evangelical Church – at which time a new pastor was appointed.

At the October 1915 annual session of the Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren Church, when the S.R. Ludwig found himself unable to supply the Lemaster circuit to which he had been appointed, Powell was assigned there. A third newspaper article gives the details involved.

The Rev. John H. Powell has resigned his position with the Bulletin Publishing Company and has been appointed pastor of the United Brethren church at Lemasters. He, with his family, has moved to that place and he has taken charge of the work. D. M. Nye, of Middletown, Pa., has accepted the position with the Bulletin Publishing Company.

Harrisburg Telegraph 11/1/1915, page 5

John Powell's family at this point consisted of his wife Gretna, their three-year-old daughter Dorothy, and their 7 month old daughter Winifred. John served Lemaster for one year and at the October 1916 annual conference was referred back to his quarterly conference.¹³ After completing one year in the full-time ministry, John H. Powell apparently determined that not to be his calling in life.

The family lived briefly in New York State, as indicated by the following newspaper item.

Mrs. Gretna Powell and her two daughters, of New York State, are the guests of Mrs. L.W. Arnold.

Harrisburg Daily Independent 12/12/1916, page 10

To complete the Powell family, their son Harry was born a few years later.

The family then moved to Harrisburg and joined that city's Sixth Street United Brethren church,¹⁴ where they seem to have permanently settled – but nothing more can be determined about their life there except for occasional

¹² 1914 journal of the Pennsylvania Conference, pages 16 and 27.

¹³ 1916 journal of the Pennsylvania Conference, page 77

¹⁴ Sixth Street United Brethren Church began in 1906 as a Sunday School in the old Susquehanna School at Fifth and Seneca Streets, was organized as a congregation in 1907 with 40 charter members, and erected a building at Sixth and Seneca Streets in 1913. In 1970 the congregation sold the building to the Macedonia Baptist Church and joined with the two former Methodist congregations, Trinity and Paxton, to erect the present Paxton United Methodist Church on North Progress Avenue.

newspaper articles. One article pertaining to each of the children gives a glimpse into their family life in Harrisburg.

BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR DOROTHY E. POWELL

Dorothy E. Powell was guest of honor at a birthday party recently given in celebration of her sixteenth birthday anniversary, by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John H. Powell, at their home, 609 Geary Street. The guests were: Dorothy Grimm, Bernice Bollinger, Thelma Lindsay, Virginia Goodyear, Esther Bleich, Adalyn Hershey, Alice Shaffer, Phyllis Rodenhaver, Winifred Powell, Gerald Rodenhaver, Donald Smelts, Harry Bleich, Robert Campbell, Harry Powell, Mrs. Marie H. Hoerner, Mrs. Harry Powell and son, Leona Mifflin.

Harrisburg Telegraph 10/9/1928, page 5

DOROTHY ESLINGER MARRIED SUNDAY

Miss Dorothy Mae Eslinger, daughter of Mrs. Edith M. Funk, 2332 North Sixth Street became the bride of Harry Lewis Powell, son of Mr. and Mrs. John H. Powell, 609 Geary Street, Sunday afternoon in the Sixth Street United Brethren Church. The bride was given in marriage by her grandfather, William T. Wadsworth. Her gown of bridal satin, was made on princess lines and featured the use of lace inserts at the neck line and train. Her full length veil of tulle was held to the head with a bandeau of lilies of the valley. She carried white roses and lilies of the valley. The maid of honor, Miss Winifred Powell, sister of the bride groom, was gowned in blue mousseline de soie with pink trim. Her flowers were pink roses and blue delphinium. The bouquets of the bridesmaids, Mrs. Robert Eslinger and Miss Ruth Worth, were of similar roses and delphinium, and their gowns, of pink mousseline trimmed in blue, were patterned after that of the maid of honor. Edgar Martin, Brooklyn, N. Y., was best man. The ushers were John Blosser, Lester Blosser, Earl Gingrich and Robert Eslinger, brother of the bride. More than 125 guests attended the reception at the home of the bride's parents, following the wedding, after which Mr. Powell and his bride left for a wedding trip to New York City and the World's Fair. They will make their home at 2332 North Sixth Street, upon their return. Mrs. Powell, who was graduated from William Penn High School, has been employed at the Bell Telephone Company. Mr. Powell was also graduated from William Penn High School and he is employed by the Automatic Stoker Sales Company, here.

Harrisburg Telegraph 5/30/1939, page 8

SHOWER HOSTESS

Mrs. Paul Kline and members of her Sunday School Class of the Sixth Street United Brethren Church, entertained at a shower recently at Mrs. Klein's [sic] home, 532 Schuylkill Street, in honor of Mrs. Edgar Martin, who before her marriage in Sixth Street Church this morning, was Miss Winifred Powell. Members of the class present with Mrs. Martin were: Mrs. Mary Wolfe, Mrs. Ray Hawn, Mrs. Joseph Knisley, Mrs. Dillon Yingst, Miss Miriam Gingrich, Miss Geraldine Deibler and Miss Lois Weiler.

Harrisburg Telegraph 9/3/1940, page 4

One thing clear from the above articles and other newspaper items is that the Sixth Street United Brethren Church played an important part in the lives of the Powells – and vice-versa. There are also some interesting behind-the-scenes bits of information relating to the above articles that indicate close family relationships in the extended Powell family.

1. The Sixth Street home into which the newly married Mr. and Mrs. Harry Powell was the home of the bride's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. William Wadsworth. According to the 1940 census, the household included the grandparents, the bride's mother, the bride's sister, the Harry Powells, and a 9 year old Charles W. Powell described as a nephew of Mr. Wadsworth.
2. The best man for Harry Powell was Edgar J. Martin of Brooklyn NY – the man who would marry Harry's sister 15 months later.

Dorothy never married and is buried with her parents in the Dillsburg Cemetery:

John H. Powell (1/13/1893 – 8/?/1952)

Gretna M. Powell (1893 – 1955)

Dorothy E. Powell (10/4/1912 – 10/15/1993).

Winifred and her husband are buried in the same plot:

Edgar J. Martin (2/2/1909 – 5/?/1968)

Virginia Winifred Martin (3/24/1915 – 7/13/1999)

The Dillsburg Cemetery includes in a different plot a marker for son Harry Lewis Powell (1918 -), with a notation that he served in the US Navy in WW II, but no death date is inscribed. Another follow-up to son Harry is the following newspaper article.

SECRETARY TO CHIEF PASSING OUT CIGARS

Babies may be expensive and a bit of trouble, but Harry L. Powell, 613 Oxford Street, secretary to Police Chief Oscar L. Blough, doesn't think so. Mrs. Powell presented him with a son, Robert Lewis, Tuesday, at the Polyclinic Hospital. She is the former Dorothy Mae Eslinger. The city's finest at the police station congratulated the proud father, sympathized a bit when the usual floor-walking jokes were told, but had no answer to Daddy Powell's: "I'm not a bit bothered. Of course I had to make out a new withholding exemption certificate on this pay - as - you - go tax business, but that little feller's just cutting down my deduction from \$5 to \$2.40 on each pay check, so what do I care."

Harrisburg Telegraph 6/30/1943, page 7

While there are many unanswered questions about John H. Powell, he appears to have adjusted well to the many transitions in his spiritual, professional and family life. His story, especially when coupled with those of the reverends Burkett and Ludwig, demonstrate that when a congregation experiences a transition of the passing of the torch from one pastor to another, there are also transitions going on in the lives of the pastors involved.