

The Bowman Family

No account of passing the torch of Methodism within central and northeast Pennsylvania could be complete without consideration of the Bowman family of Briar Creek, Columbia County PA. Immigrant Christopher Bauman (1733-1806) was born near Ems, Germany, in 1733 and came to Bucks County PA in 1754, where he married in 1759 and where his first child was born in 1760. He then moved to Mount Bethel, near the Delaware Water Gap in Northampton County PA, where the rest of his children were born and where the family was visited by Bishop Francis Asbury – resulting in the conversions several family members. Those family members established Methodism in Columbia County and were the progenitors of a line of at least 26 Methodist preachers that continues to the present.

Christopher's sons Thomas (1760-1823) and Christian (1761-1831) Bowman were among those converted under the ministry of Francis Asbury in Northampton County PA before they came to Columbia County. Christian brought his family to Briar Creek in 1792, and his brother Thomas followed with his family the following year. As local preachers, the Bowman brothers were the human instruments responsible for the great revival of 1805 that established Methodism in the area. Asbury ordained them deacons on July 19, 1807, at a camp meeting near Forty-Fort. In 1808 Old Stone Church, an historical site of the Susquehanna Conference, was erected on their land, and now provides the final resting places of the brothers and dozens of others within the extended Bowman family.

That church building was used until 1856, when the congregation relocated to Fowlersville. Once the structure was no longer needed for religious services, it was used for a score or more years as a Grange Hall. Vacated for a second time and receiving no care, the property became dilapidated. During the summer of 1915 the church building was restored and the grounds improved through the efforts of Alfred S. Bowman (1845-1934), a preacher in the Central Pennsylvania Conference and a grandson of Jesse Bowman (1769-1828) – a brother of Thomas and Christian, who is also buried in the Old Stone Church cemetery.

A list of the Methodist ministers in the extended Bowman family is given in Appendix A. This article concentrates on the grandson of Thomas Bowman – Bishop Thomas Bowman (1817-1914)¹, who served as president of Williamsport Dickinson Seminary and DePauw University before being elected to the episcopacy in 1872.

¹ He is not to be confused with his contemporary Bishop Thomas Bowman (1836-1923) of the Evangelical Association, which through mergers is now part of the United Methodist Church. Sources report that the Evangelical Thomas Bowman's immigrant ancestor Hans Deiter Bauman (1727-1762) is believed to have been a cousin of the Methodist Thomas Bowman's immigrant ancestor Christopher.

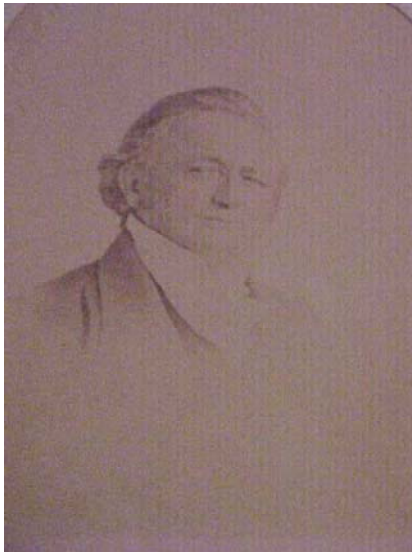
Bishop Thomas Bowman

The bishop's grandfather Thomas was born in Bucks County, and was about one year old when the family moved to Mount Bethel in Northampton County. Because the journal of Francis Asbury is not a detailed account of his daily itinerary, lodgings and activities, the exact date and circumstances of the conversion of the Bowman brothers cannot be determined. The journal entry for Sunday, July 19, 1807, however, is very specific.

I went to the woods and preached and ordained Thomas and Christian Bowman deacons. Before I got through my discourse the rain came on, and I made a brief finish; the people were attentive. In the afternoon the preachers and many of the people went to a barn; there were showers of rain and thunder whilst service was performing.

Thomas Bowman married Mary Freas (1759-1829). They are buried in the Old Stone Church cemetery.

The bishop's father John was born in Northampton County, and was about six years old when the family moved to Briar Creek in Columbia County. He was a farmer. His tombstone in the Old Stone Church cemetery states, "For thirty-five years he was a firm and consistent member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His end was peace."



John Bowman
(1786-1843)

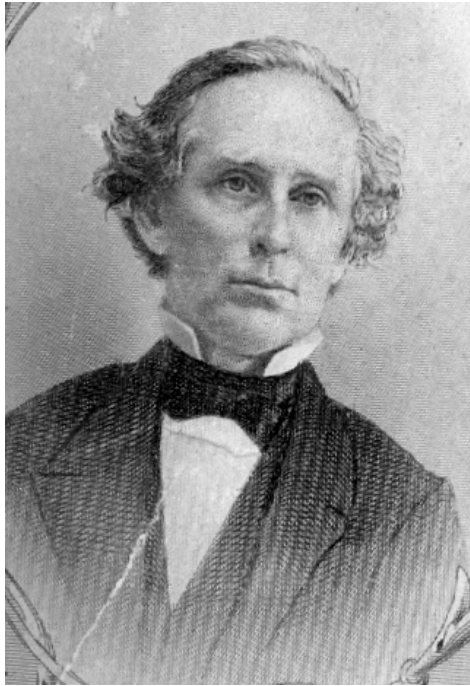


Sarah Brittain
(1786-1852)

John Bowman married Sarah Brittain September 18, 1808. Sarah was born in New Jersey into a family that had been divided by the Revolutionary War – her grandmother Brittain supported the colonists, while her grandfather was devoted to the king. As a result, her father Samuel Brittain and his two older brothers fought for the colonies in the New Jersey forces, while his three younger brothers moved

to New Brunswick, Canada, to fight for the crown. The Brittain family, like the Bowmans, were faith-oriented, and Bishop Thomas Bowman named one of his sons Samuel Brittain Bowman (1856-1939) after his mother's father.

Bishop Thomas Bowman was born July 15, 1817, in Briar Creek PA. He was born again January 1, 1833, when as a student at Methodism's Cazenovia Seminary preparatory school in Cazanovia NY "his heart was strangely warmed." He graduated from Dickinson College in 1837 as the valedictorian in a class of seven and stayed for another year to study law before yielding to the call of God and presenting himself for the itinerant ministry. He was admitted on trial to the Baltimore Conference during the 1838-39 conference year and assigned to Beaver Meadow – in Carbon County, in the extreme northeast part of the Conference.



Bishop Thomas Bowman
(1817-1914)



Matilda Hartman
(1821-1879)

After deciding that he was, at least for the present, better suited for academia than for the itinerant ministry, Bowman returned to Carlisle to teach in the preparatory school of Dickinson College. That decision led him to meet the woman that was to become his lifelong partner and mother of their ten children – Matilda Hartman.

Matilda's father Johannes Hartman (1789-1853) was a wealthy merchant and prominent citizen of York PA who wanted the very best in education and culture

for his daughter. She was enrolled in the preparatory school of Dickinson College, where in 1838 at the age of 17 she experienced saving grace and joined the Methodist Episcopal Church. Soon, through the influence of her Christian life, her parents and then others of the family similarly united with the Church. Thomas and Matilda were married in 1841 and her culture, education and Christian spirit combined to make her the ideal helpmeet of one who would be called first to head educational institutions and later to enter the episcopacy.

Formal education was important to the Bowmans. It was at the Cazenovia preparatory school that Thomas had been spiritually awakened, at the Dickinson preparatory school where Matilda had become a believer, and at Dickinson where Thomas and Matilda met each other. And so it was no surprise that their first son was named John Durbin Bowman (1842-1871) – after Rev. John P. Durbin (1800-1876), president of Dickinson College 1834-1845.

In 1843 Thomas Bowman returned to Berwick for health reasons, and to manage the estate of his recently deceased father. While he was working in a flour mill there he was approached by Benjamin H. Crever (1818-1890), his friend and fellow-classmate at Dickinson, about becoming the first president of the proposed Williamsport Dickinson Seminary. Crever was the true founder of the institution, but he would be more than content to serve as an instructor if Thomas Bowman would take the presidential reins. It was Bowman who designed the curriculum and established what would prove to be an outstanding institution on firm academic ground. He served as president from 1848 until 1858, when he was called to the presidency of Indiana Asbury College [renamed DePauw University in 1884] in Greencastle IN.

Bowman's tenure at Indiana Asbury was marked by, in addition to academic excellence, a proactive building program and an insistence upon coeducation as essential to a university. During this time he also served as chaplain to the U.S. Senate from May 1864 to March 1865 and became a friend and confidant of Abraham Lincoln. See Appendix B for an interesting newspaper article about Bowman and Lincoln.

In 1872 Thomas Bowman was elected on the first ballot, and by an overwhelming majority, as a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In those days of the "General Superintendency" bishops were not assigned to episcopal areas, but each bishop was a bishop of the entire denomination – and as such could be given episcopal duties anywhere in the Church. Bowman retired from the episcopacy in 1896, having the distinction of presiding at least once at every Annual Conference within the United States as well as performing episcopal duties in Europe, India, China, Japan and Mexico. During his tenure in the episcopal office he dedicated over 1000 church buildings.

The demands of the episcopacy also affected the personal lives of those elevated to that office. It was during Bishop Bowman's first episcopal tour to India that the death of his wife Matilda occurred. In March 1879 he was in Italy, and the sad and painful circumstances under which that intelligence reached him are related in the following portions of a letter written by the Leroy M. Vernon (1838-1896), superintendent of the work in Italy.

On the second day of the Conference, about two p. m., while placidly presiding, like a patriarch in the midst of his family, Bishop Bowman received the sad tidings of his wife's death, nearly twenty days before. The announcement fell upon him with cruel but almost unavoidable abruptness, like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky. Despite his well-known composure and Christian fortitude, the venerable veteran was momentarily stunned and almost overwhelmed. And when the writer explained as best he could the mournful case to that group of astonished and respectful brethren, every face was suffused with tears and every heart wrung with sorrow.

As the good Bishop drew aside to read, as best he might through tears, the letters burdened with the mournful particulars, the Conference, with one heart, betook itself to prayer. This baptism of affliction, under circumstances so peculiarly painful, indissolubly bound the hearts of all the brethren to Bishop Bowman, and there are no sixteen men in the wide world who will ever hereafter think of him with more constant, tender, filial affection and reverence. After an hour the Bishop resumed the chair, but to the brethren, who received him standing with bowed heads and every evidence of profound sympathy, in that brief period ten years seemed to have passed over him.

Bishop Thomas Bowman entered into eternity on March 3, 1914, at the home of his daughter Sarah Elizabeth (Mrs. Burns Durbin) Caldwell in East Orange NJ. He and Mrs. Bowman are buried in the Forest Hill Cemetery in Greencastle IN. Perhaps the best summary and insight into the life and ministry of Bishop Bowman are these words from the March 12, 1914, *Christian Advocate* notice of his departure.

Only a few days before he closed his eyes upon this world he turned to his nurse and asked, "Have you given your heart to Christ?" When she assured him that she had, he inquired, "And has He received you?" Obtaining an affirmative response, he continued, "Are you sure? This is a very important matter." Thus to the very end Thomas Bowman made full proof of his ministry.

The little children in the city where he spent his last days are weeping for loss of him – the fine old gentleman with the beautiful face and the white hair, who always carried candies in his pocket for his numerous little friends, and whose playfulness exercised a charm over their hearts. So he lived as well as preached his Master's gospel of love, and has entered into the reward promised by our Lord: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Appendix A: Bowman Family Methodist Ministers

This family tree gives the relationships between Methodist clergy in the Christian Bowman family. It does not list non-ministerial persons, except those needed to establish the ministerial relationships. Books by Rev. Shadrach L. Bowman² and Rev. Alfred S. Bowman³ give relatively complete listings for the families of Christopher's sons Thomas and Jesse respectively. Christopher was said to have been a Lutheran all his life. His sons Thomas and Christian were local preachers (LP in the chart below) ordained by Francis Asbury July 19, 1807, at a camp meeting at Forty-Fort.

The following conferences of primary service are indicated in the family tree: Baltimore (Bal), California-Pacific (CPac), Central Pennsylvania (CPa), Cincinnati (Cin), Iowa (Iow), Minnesota (Min), Newark (New), Northern Minnesota (NMin), Southern California (SCal), Yellowstone (Yel).

1. Christopher Bowman (1733-1896): 1754 immigrant ancestor
 2. **Rev. Thomas Bowman** (1760-1823) Bal(LP)
 3. John Bowman (1786-1843)
 4. Mary Ann Bowman (1813-
 - m. **Rev. David Charles Kalbfus** (1807-1882) Cin
 5. **Rev. Charles Henry Kalbfus** (1834-1911) Cin
 4. **Bishop Thomas Bowman** (1817-1914) Bal
 4. Elizabeth A. Bowman (1825-1886)
 - m. **Rev. William T.D. Clemm** (1814-1895) Bal
 3. Jesse Bowman (1788-1880)
 4. Sarah Bowman (1817-1880)
 - m. **Rev. Jared H. Young** (1810-1855) Bal
 5. **Rev. Jesse Bowman Young** (1844-1914) CPa
 4. Eliza Bowman (1820-1906)
 - m. **Rev. William Hirst III** (1815-1862) Bal
 4. **Rev. Shadrach Laycock Bowman** (1829-1906) New
 3. **Rev. Wesley Bowman** (1793-1867) Iow(LP)
3. Sophia Bowman (1797-1880)
 - m. John Gearhart (1789-1858)
 4. Margaretta R. Gearhart (1823-1911)
 - m. **Rev. Irvin H. Torrence** (1821-1899) CPa
3. Susan B. Bowman (1799-1875)
 - m. **Rev. Shadrach B. Laycock** (1795-1882) Bal (LP)
 4. Mary Anna Laycock (1821-1898)
 - m. **Rev. John Woosley Haughawout** (1811-1891) CPa

² *The Bowman Family: A Historical and Memorial Volume From the Earliest Traditions to the Present Time*, by E.B. Hirst and Shadrach Laycock Bowman, 1886.

³ *The Jesse Bowman, Sr. Lineage*, by Alfred S. Bowman, 1931.

2. **Rev. Christian Bowman** (1761-1831) Bal(LP)
 3. Eleanor Bowman (1786-1868)
 - m. Joseph Diltz [Dills] (1787-1857)
 4. Huldah Diltz [Dills] (1829-1879)
 - m. Tarbel Rood (1824-1859)
 5. Rebecca Augusta Rood (1844-1901)
 - m. Daniel Hartman (1837-1878)
 6. **Rev. Franklin Eyer Hartman** (1865-1944) CPa
 3. Parmelia Bowman (c1799-)
 - m. **Rev Morris Howe** (1766-1843) Bal
2. Lydia Bowman (1767-1839)
 - m. **Rev. Jacob Mack** (1771-1815) Bal(LP)
2. Jesse Bowman (1769-1828)
 3. George A. Bowman (1799-1881)
 4. Dorothy A. Bowman (1827-1910)
 - m. Henry Clay Freas (1821-1896)
 5. Annie Bowman Freas (1860-1938)
 - m. Franklin Asbury Witman (1861-1943)
 6. **Rev. Harold Ewing Witman** (1891-1917) CPa
 6. **Rev. Edwin Henry Witman** (1895-1971) SCal
 7. Harold Francis Witman (1924-)
 8. **Rev. Cynthia Witman** (1953-) Min
 8. **Rev. Jan Witman** (1958-) Yel
 7. **Rev. Frank McConnell Witman** (1931-) CPac
 4. Martha Bowman (1834-1862)
 - m. **Rev. Aaron M. Kester** (1827-1892) CPa
 5. **Rev. Reese Bowman Kester** (1861-1940) NMin
 4. **Rev. Alfred Steck Bowman** (1845-1934) CPa
 2. Anne Bowman (1774-)
 - m. Phillip Dimm (c1782-1850)
 3. **Rev. George Dimm** (1808-1868) Bal(LP)

Appendix B. Thomas Bowman and Abraham Lincoln

The following article appeared in the November 23, 1903, *New York Times* – noting that Thomas Bowman warned President Lincoln of his impending assassination.

BISHOP THOMAS BOWMAN, THEN SENATE CHAPLAIN, HAD A FOREBODING THAT BOOTH WOULD KILL HIM

East Orange, NJ. November 22 – Bishop Thomas Bowman of East Orange, the oldest living Methodist Episcopal Bishop who has just passed his 86th birthday, has just made a public story in which he tells that he warned President Lincoln that he was in danger of being assassinated by John Wilkes Booth five days before the tragedy occurred. Mr. Lincoln laughingly made light of the warning and a few days later laid down his life.

Bishop Bowman was Chaplain of the United States Senate at the time, and one morning was about to open the Senate with prayer when he saw Booth enter the room. Later he saw Booth prowling around the capitol buildings and White House, and became convinced that his presence there boded evil for Mr. Lincoln. He made inquiries concerning the man, and then went to Mr. Lincoln. The president smiled in his kindly manner and told the clergyman that he did not believe that anyone would attempt his life. A day or two later, Bishop Bowman went to his home in St. Louis. Hardly had he arrived there when the news of the assassination came.