

Chapter 12

Conference at Lewisburg, Union County Appointed to Big Spring Circuit, Cumberland County

I attended conference the first week in March, 1868, which met at Lewisburg, Union County. It was yet extremely cold and the sledding good. But during the conference it moderated and began to rain, and the spring break up followed. Sabbath evening during the conference I preached in the Lutheran church by appointment of the committee on public worship. When the stationing committee reported, I was assigned to the Big Spring circuit¹ in Cumberland County, in the beautiful Cumberland Valley. Rev. A.L. Reeser² was presiding elder. We now moved by rail to Shippensburg, and from there by wagons four miles to Leesburg³ – along the noted “Walnut Bottom” road. Soon after arriving in our new home our second daughter, Carrie, took very sick, but by the mercy of God she was spared to us and returned to health.

I found the circuit in very low condition. The membership was scattered, divided and very much discouraged. My predecessor⁴ had taken up the practice of medicine to some extent, which interfered quite materially with his pastoral work on the charge – which was neglected. Then, too, while visiting his patients he was thrown from his buggy and had one of his limbs badly broken. This, with other injuries, confined him to the house and to his bed for several months. After recovering from this, he was again taken seriously ill. Consequently the circuit was neglected, had no preaching for a long time, and things were not encouraging when we came there.

God was certainly loudly calling this brother back to duty, to abandon the practice of medicine – to leave that to physicians – and to attend to the work of the ministry to which he had been called of God and set apart by the church. But he heeded not the call, and about one year afterwards he laid aside the ministry and clung to the practice of medicine. As a result, he became reckless, he and his wife

¹ Big Spring circuit included four appointments: Leesburg church, McAllister schoolhouse, Mount Rock church, and Waggoner’s church. All of these are United Methodist congregations today, the McAllister schoolhouse appointment becoming Good Shepherd Community UMC.

² Adam L. Reeser (1831-1906) was born near Dushore PA and served appointments for nineteen years (1851-72) before finishing his career with eleven consecutive years (1872-83) as superintendent of the Carlisle, Lewisburg and Williamsport Districts.

³ In 1868, Leesburg was an established Evangelical appointment, the site of a brick church building and the circuit parsonage – but apparently that information has been lost, as congregation’s 1972 Centennial Booklet considers its formal beginning to have occurred in 1872.

⁴ Isaac Young Reed (1838-1897) received his first appointment in 1863. After leaving the Big Spring circuit he served two years on the Cumberland circuit before locating to devote himself to the practice of homeopathic medicine. He appears to have practiced in Chambersburg from about 1872 to 1876 and then returned to practice in Leesburg. He is buried in the Jacksonville Evangelical Cemetery at Walnut Bottom with his wife, a long-time school teacher at Cleversburg.

separated, and he was finally expelled from the church and ministry. What has become of him I do not know. This man certainly experienced, like many others do, that “the way of the transgressor is hard.”

The church property in Leesburg, as well as the congregation, was in deplorable condition. The Waggoners church had been entirely abandoned by my predecessor, and the congregation was scattered by the “Zollingerites” – a sect of whom a Mr. Zollinger was the leader. After Zollinger’s death they were called the “Hofferites” – Hoffer being Zollinger’s successor as their leader. They are now almost extinct.⁵ They had no churches, no church organization, no church ordinances – and any of them could preach. Their religion consisted in stamping, halloing,⁶ shouting, and in denouncing and abusing all other churches and all church ordinances.

Then what made it so acceptable, especially to the ignorant and the covetous, was the fact that it cost nothing – as they had no ministers to support and no churches to build. For a while they carried away everyone in some localities, and the Waggoners church community was one of those communities. But like

⁵ While little documentation about the group exists, the following sources indicate they appear to have survived in Cumberland, York and/or Adams counties at least until 1918. Readers with additional information are asked to contact the editor of *The Chronicle*.

(1) “**What’s In A Name: Churchtown,**” **Cumberland County Historical Society, vol. 8, No. 2, p. 90, by Kevin Vanderlodge** states: “Several churches emerged in the Churchtown community. Two currently grace the town. The Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church dates itself to 1795 although its origins in the Lutheran and Reformed church groups predate this. The Churchtown Church of God with its present day carillon began in 1832 and has seen growth and change in congregation and buildings. Town historians note the religious opposition in 1833 against a John Zollinger from Carlisle when he started a new sect, which lasted only briefly, in the village.”

(2) The **2/23/1948 York Gazette and Daily, page 12, NEWS OF THE PAST** includes the following sentence for 50 years ago: “A Hofferite revival was in progress at Yoe with one penitent at the altar.” Yoe is north of Dallastown.

(3) There was also Hofferite activity south of Dallastown near Adamsville, as reported in the **2003 York Township 250th Anniversary Booklet**. The map on pages 79-80 locates a Hofferite Church on Arbor Drive, east of Adamsville, and the text on page 91 states: “On the property of Robert and Isabel Rohrbaugh was a small church used for religious services by the Hofferites. This group claimed that educated ministers were not an original idea of Christianity. They had no creed and used the Bible for direction. Their sermons consisted of reading selected passages from the Bible. The church was well known for the chickens that ran freely in and out. It was said that sometimes there were more chickens than people.”

(4) Prowell’s 1907 **History of York of York County, volume I, page 1108**, supports the above by stating: “Adamsville is a small collection of houses in the extreme southern portion of the township. In this vicinity is a house of worship used by the Hofferites, a people of peculiar religious belief, who claim that an educated ministry is not in accordance with the original idea of Christianity. They have no creed, claiming all that they need is the Bible as the guide in religious worship.”

(5) Finally, the **7/12/1918 Gettysburg Times, page 3**, includes a reference to a Hofferite, or free-thinker, conducting a short service at a house.

⁶ To hallo is an old usage which meant to greet loudly, often while in physical pursuit.

many other such uprisings, it has proven to be but a straw, or wild fire, which is now almost extinguished everywhere – but for the time, it had ruined that congregation. But it was handed me as an appointment, and as forming part of the charge, by my predecessor.

My first appointment in the church was on Sabbath evening – after preaching at Mount Rock in the morning and at the McAllister school house in the afternoon at 2:30. I enquired of a brother, who was a local preacher on the charge, as to where and how I could find the Waggoner appointment. He informed me of the state of things there and said, “that appointment is quite distant from here and has been dropped. And there is no use in you going there, as you will have no congregation if you do go – and I don’t believe you will find anyone to keep you over night.” I replied, “It is given me as an appointment, and I must go see it – and you must go with me. And if no one will keep us over night, we can come back to your house to stay.” He finally consented and went with me. When we arrived at the church it was about preaching time, and we found a full house, had a good meeting, and were very kindly entertained overnight. From that evening I never had any trouble with the Zollingerites – anybody would entertain me, and the church was always filled to its utmost capacity. That fall I held a meeting there of five weeks, which resulted in twenty-five conversions – all of which united with the church. And thus that congregation was again united and re-established, and has remained so since.

During this meeting one evening, I saw a large portly man about fifty years of age deeply affected by the preaching. He wept like a child. After preaching I went to him. In answer to my questions, he told me he was a member of a certain church – but that he was not converted and not a Christian, and that he felt it most deeply now. I urged him to yield to his convictions by presenting himself at the altar of prayer, or kneel at his seat and pray there, or arise and ask an interest in the prayers of the church, and thus manifest it – but all in vain. He came the next evening also, and again wept like a child. I plead with him again, but all in vain. He came the third evening and had a like experience. I went to him the third evening also and said, “Here I am again, but this is the last time – lest by my continual coming I weary you, and you become impatient with me and get offended.” I said, “God is calling you loudly now to repentance, and if you resist this time it may be the last call.” I urged him to heed it now. And when I could not prevail upon him to do anything in public, I tried to get him to promise to pray in secret – and to erect the family altar at home. But he would not promise me. I said, “Take care. This may be your last call. Do not resist it, lest God ‘cut you down suddenly as a cucumber of the ground.’” And I left him. That was the last time. The next week he was gored by one of his domestic animals and died the following day. Before he died, he said to his family, “I have no hope.” O, it is a fearful thing to fight against God. How much better if he had yielded to his convictions the first night and given his heart to Jesus, for then he would have had hope in his death.

Solomon says, “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death.” – Proverbs 14:32

Now we returned to Leesburg again. What made matters still sore in Leesburg was the fact that during the sickness of my predecessor, it would be natural for the friends and neighbors to call in for him to care for them. This was proper and right. But unfortunately, the mistress had not yet learned to “bridle her tongue” – which appeared to be loose at both ends. And by the time they left Leesburg she had many of the neighbors and members at dagger points with each other by her tattling. The first week we were in Leesburg, two families came to me for dismissal certificates – and the one declared he would arrest the former pastor and his wife for falsehood and slander. I plead with them to wait a few weeks, and see how things would go – that if they left now, it would look as though they left because I had come – that perhaps things would go better. I preached in the Leesburg church the first Sabbath after we moved there – and “In the name of our God we set up our banner”⁷ and went to work. The friends soon became interested – all over the circuit.

I then spoke of starting the Sabbath School in Leesburg, which had been closed during the winter. But the brethren said, “We cannot raise a Sunday School, and there is no use to try it unless you can get a certain man to superintend it. He is the merchant here, but he is not a member of our church. And we don’t believe he will try it, for he tried it last year and nobody attended – and so the school closed. If you can get him to take hold of it, it will go; but if not, it is no use to try it. And he won’t do it.” I published preaching in two weeks, at 10 a.m., and announced that after preaching the Sabbath School would be organized – and urged all to be present. During the two weeks I spoke to the man already referred to about superintending the school. He at first refused and said, “I would, but your members take no interest in it – and some of them are opposed to it. Then we have no library and no books – and we can’t get them. I tried it last year and did not succeed. Some of the most wealthy members only gave twenty-five cents apiece toward it, and some of them begrudged even that afterwards – so you can’t do anything with them, and I won’t undertake it.” I replied, “If you will superintend the school, I will get the library.” He then promised me to do so.

Sabbath came, and with it a full house. I preached a very plain and practical sermon from Numbers 14:24: “But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whither he went, and his seed shall possess it.” I tried to show up that other spirit, and point out the evil spirits which were trying to ruin them and break up their congregation. God blessed me and the word to their good. Some said, “The preacher threw clubs thick and fast today. I guess some one has been stuffing him” – that is, posting him on

⁷ Psalm 20:5

the condition of things. One member,⁸ who was at that time our school teacher, and for whom I secured license as a minister of the gospel in less than six months after I came on to the circuit, has proven himself a most able, efficient and successful preacher and is yet in the active work of the ministry – but he was one who had asked me for a dismissal certificate for himself and wife. He remarked to my wife on the way home from church, “I dodged the clubs as long as I could, but at last I had to just sit and take them. They came so thick and fast. I guess some body has posted the preacher. But it is just what we needed.” The word had its desired effect.

Immediately after preaching I announced that we would now proceed to organize the Sabbath School. I had instructed a certain brother to nominate brother S. as superintendent, and he was unanimously elected. The school organized, I told them the next thing we needed was a library – and we would proceed at once to raise the money to secure it, before we would dismiss. All were interested in it and took hold of it, and in a short time we had on subscription and in cash forty-nine dollars and sixty cents. Some who had before given twenty-five cents, now gave five dollars. From that day forward we had no trouble, and there was no more asking for certificates. The school was continued the year round, and has never been closed for a single month since. The Lord be praised.

During the summer we pulled the old church, a brick structure, partly down – taking the one end out so as to put an addition to it. We finished it up in gothic style, adding a fine tower and a large bell – making a splendid church of it, which was an honor to the town and congregation. The repairs cost three thousand dollars, all of which was provided for by cash and subscription on the day of re-dedication.

Here while the church was undergoing repairs, I had a somewhat singular experience – an experience which perhaps but few ministers have had. It was that of preaching a funeral service in the hotel for the hostler, an aged man who was accidently killed. He was a wicked man. All the words I ever heard him utter were oaths and curses – which occurred but a few days before the accident, as I passed him on the street. The accident occurred on this wise, as they were hauling in a large load of hay. This man stood against the shed holding the door open, while the load was being driven into the shed. In driving in, they passed under a large black cherry tree, the limbs of which caught the handle of a four-pronged fork which had been left on the wagon – and threw it off, striking this man on the breast. Three of the prongs passed his body, but the fourth one pierced his left breast and penetrated four and a half inches to the heart – killing him in ten minutes. I stood by his side when he breathed his last. Thus, “in the midst of life we are in death.”⁹ And O how terrible to die as he did, without any preparation – therefore the

⁸ John Martin King (1839-1912) was born in Springfield, Cumberland County, and licensed and appointed at the 1869 annual conference. He served with distinction for 43 consecutive years in the Evangelical Church before retiring in 1912. He is buried in Williamsport PA.

⁹ Often attributed to scripture, this phrase is from the *Book of Common Prayer*, The Burial of the Dead.

importance of the exhortations in Amos 4:12: “Prepare to meet thy God.” The church undergoing repairs, the funeral service must be preached in the hotel – a strange place to hold religious services, and an experience perhaps few ministers have had.

This man was killed on Monday. On Saturday evening previous I saw a large barn burn to the ground from spontaneous combustion, occasioned, as was suppose, by a fork sticking in a mow full of newly made hay – which heated and caused the fire. The fire occurred near my appointment, just as the congregation was gathering for preaching. All hastened to the fire, and so I was relieved from preaching that evening. Sabbath morning I preached at Mount Rock at 10 a.m., and at McAllister school house at 2:30, and then started for the Waggoner’s church to preach in the evening. But on my way I obliged to stop during a heavy thunder shower at the house of brother James Carothers,¹⁰ brother of Rev. M.J. Carothers.¹¹ During the shower the lightning struck a large hay stack a short distance from his buildings and burned it to the ground also. The rain continued until after dark, so I remained there overnight and returned home on Monday morning – and then saw the hostler killed as above, which certainly was a series of exciting events.

In August I attended a camp meeting in Perry County, at which I presided part of the time. The power of God was gloriously displayed at this camp and “the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.”¹² From there I went to the Liverpool camp, where I presided during the entire camp. Here we also had some powerful meetings, and the power of God was most significantly manifested. One man was so powerfully blessed that he lay in an unconscious state nearly all night – and then came to, shouting and praising God. At the communion, which was held in the forenoon, two sisters began shouting and leaping – so great was their joy – and they fell to the ground, overcome. They were carried into their tents and laid on their beds, where they lay in an unconscious state until four o’clock in the evening – when they came to, shouting and praising God also.

After the camp meetings closed, I commenced a protracted meeting in the Waggoner’s church which continued five weeks and resulted in twenty-five conversions – all of whom united with the church, which gave us a good class there and fully established that scattered congregation again. I then proceeded to the McAllister school house, and held a meeting there with a goodly number of conversions. This meeting closed, I began in the church at Mount Rock, where I

¹⁰ James M. Carothers (1829-1899) lived in the McAllister area all his life. He is buried in the Prospect Hill Cemetery, near Newville PA.

¹¹ Martin Jefferson Carothers (1825-1897) was born in Plainfield and received his license and first appointment in 1846. At this time he was presiding elder of the conference’s Centre District. An eleven-time delegate to General Conference and early proponent of the use of the English language in the Evangelical Association, he is the father of Amanda Elizabeth Carothers Dubs – wife of noted Evangelical Bishop, and one of the central figures in the 1894 denominational split, Rudolph Dubs (1837-1915).

¹² Nehemiah 12:43

had a very successful meeting and a number of good, substantial people were converted and added to the church – one of whom afterwards became a minister of the gospel. The congregation made me a present of an entire suit of clothes, and my wife a fine dress. From Mount Rock I went to Leesburg and held a meeting in the new church, which continued five weeks and resulted in thirty-five conversions – among whom was the now very able minister Rev. G.W. Currin.¹³ One of the converts at the McAllister school house also became a minister of the gospel.

I preached three times on Sabbath and every night during the week – unless the weather was too inclement for the people to come out, which was very seldom the case – twenty-one weeks out of twenty-two, and led the singing most of the time. God gave me health and strength for the work, yet I was entirely exhausted a few weeks before conference and was obliged to rest. God also gave me one hundred converts as the results of my meetings, three of whom became ministers of the gospel. Surely a great work. I also procured license for two brethren who were members of the church when I came on to the circuit – one accompanied me to conference, the other sent his application with me, and both were appointed to circuits. The one traveled one year and was finally expelled from the church and ministry. The other was the Rev. J.M. King, who is yet in the active ministry and an able and successful man in the work.

This was my most successful year in the ministry, up to that time. We purchased a library for the Leesburg Sunday School at a cost of fifty dollars, repaired the church at a cost of three thousand dollars, and secured licenses for two brethren and started them out in the great work of the Christian ministry. We had one hundred converts, three of whom became ministers of the gospel, and so increased the work and extended the field as to require two men the following year – and at my urgent request it was constituted a two-handed circuit at conference that spring. Surely “the Lord had done great things for us, whereof we were glad.”¹⁴ And we would exclaim, “Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name be all the praise.”¹⁵ Yes, to him be all the glory. Amen.

¹³ George Washington Currin (1845-1928) was born near Harrisburg and received his license and first appointment in 1872. He located in 1917 and spent his remaining years (his wife died in 1906) alternating between his married twin daughters in California PA and Berwick PA, where he died.

¹⁴ Psalm 126:3

¹⁵ Psalm 115:1