

## Chapter 20

### Conference in Baltimore, MD Appointed to Jersey Shore Circuit

Conference met in Baltimore, the first Thursday in March, 1876. At this conference I was entertained by a German family by the name of Messersmith,<sup>1</sup> who had a large bakery. This fine family and treated my very kindly. On Sabbath evening after all had retired but Mr. Messersmith, he took a candle in his hand and examined all the doors to see that they were securely fastened. And as he passed from the hall into the sitting room, it is supposed he took a fit and fell to the floor with his face on the candle, setting his large, full beard on fire. Before he recovered consciousness, his beard was entirely burned off and he was so severely burned about the face and breast, and had so inhaled the flame, that it burned him inside down to the lungs. After severe suffering, he died on Thursday of the same week. His daughter wrote me a letter informing me of her father's sad death.

At this conference I was appointed to Jersey Shore, Lycoming County, with Rev. D.P. Kline<sup>2</sup> as my colleague. Brother Kline was a single man, but had some experience in the ministry. He was an able preacher and a most excellent man. We became most strongly attached to each other. We moved into the town of Jersey Shore, where we had a very pleasant home. To this place we moved by rail. Jersey Shore was a pleasant, but laborious, field. I labored on this field as before, but preached my old sermons and devoted my time to the study of Lutheran literature – and the more I studied Lutheran doctrines and usages, the more I loved the Lutheran Church.

Here I soon made acquaintance of Rev. A.W. Lentz,<sup>3</sup> pastor of the Lutheran church. I found him a most excellent Christian brother, and soon took him into my confidence. I stated to him my views, feelings and intentions, and he gave me his advice and influence. My mind was now fully made up to make the change at the end of the conference year, unless I could find some sufficient reason why I should not – I was yet open to conviction on the subject. I also made it the subject of constant prayer, but everything seemed to point me in that direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Messersmith (1823-1876) is buried in Baltimore's Loudon Park Cemetery

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Peter Kline (1848-1900) was born in Troxelville, Snyder County, and received his license and first appointment in 1874. This was his third appointment. In 1887 he transferred to the Platte River Conference of the Evangelical Association, and in 1891 to the Nebraska Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He is buried in Holdrege NE.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Wiley. Lentz (1834-1906) Served Jersey Shore 1876-78. He was a native of Statesville NC, and his extended family produced several Lutheran preachers, including his brothers David S. Lentz and Caleb Lentz. He died in Penbrook, Dauphin County.

I attended four camp meetings in the month of August – including our own, which was a stationary camp known as “The Pine Station Campmeeting.”<sup>4</sup> Here we had a tent, and our babe Willie was very sick during the entire meeting. All of the camps were good, and we had a number of conversions at ours.

While walking out into the grove one day at one of the camps in company with Rev. M. Sloat,<sup>5</sup> he turned to me and said inquiringly, “You preached the funeral sermon of John Newcomer<sup>6</sup> in Loysville, didn’t you?” I replied, “Yes, sir – over a year ago.” “Well, said he, “that sermon was blessed to the conversion of my eldest son and his wife. We never could do anything with them, but they wrote to us there was a something in that sermon that gave them no rest until they both became converted, about a year afterward – and we were so glad to hear it.” So it is. We sow the seed, but cannot always tell the good it does. Eternity alone will reveal it, and in the last great day many may surprise us by telling how we were the means of their conversion – all unknown to us. I never knew this family, and to my knowledge have never seen them to this day. Brother Sloat was a most excellent Christian man, and an able preacher. He died happy in the Lord in New Kingston, Cumberland County, while pastor there in 1884. Thus he fell with the harness on.

During the year we built a very fine church at Pine Station, Clinton County. Bishop Bowman officiated at the dedication. We also built a church, known as the “Harer’s Church,” not far from Salladasburg, which was dedicated on Christmas – Rev. M.J. Carothers, presiding elder, officiating.<sup>7</sup> A good and lasting work was done in the erection of these two churches. Both are very good buildings and well finished.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Most camp meetings were held in woods owned by a church member and changed locations as dictated by various circumstances and opportunities. A stationary camp was one on property owned by the camp meeting, and having permanent buildings. J. Milton Furey’s 1898 *Past and Present of Clinton County*, page 92, sates the following about Wayne township: “The township is also the seat of the Pine Station camp meeting association grounds, which are located on Love’s run, three-fourths of a mile from the Philadelphia & Erie railroad. The stock of this association is nearly all held by members of the Evangelical association, and the meetings held each year are under their control. The grounds are beautifully located and well supplied with pure water. They are becoming quite popular as a place to spend the hot months of summer. Numerous and expensive improvements have been made to the place, and the association is at present in a very flourishing condition.”

<sup>5</sup> Michael Sloat (1828-1884) was currently serving at Centre Hall. He died while serving the Cumberland Circuit and is buried in his home area of East Prospect, York County PA.

<sup>6</sup> John Newcomer (1805-1875) is buried in the Lebanon Lutheran and Reformed Cemetery in Loysville, Perry County PA.

<sup>7</sup> The dedication was part of a three-day event, with a quarterly conference on Saturday the 23<sup>th</sup>, Sunday services the 24<sup>th</sup>, and the official dedication on Monday the 25<sup>th</sup> – with junior preacher of the circuit D.P. Kline preaching in German and presiding elder M.J. Carothers leading the formal dedication. As was the custom following a dedication, a protracted meeting began that evening.

<sup>8</sup>The Pine Station building, described in Linn’s 1883 county history as “the largest and most commodious church in [Wayne] township,” was dismantled in 1915 and moved by another

Here we purchased a fine “Shoninger” organ as a surprise for the children. By previous arrangement it was delivered on Christmas day, while myself and wife were absent attending the church dedication and the children were at home alone. They were greatly surprised and much pleased. We found them in a great glee when we arrived at home. In the fall my wife had a very severe spell of sickness. At one time I thought she had died in my arms – but she had only fainted, and God in his mercy spared her to us again.

During the winter, Brother Kline and I held several protracted meetings – resulting in sixty-nine conversions. And I preached one hundred and eighty sermons in all on the charge.

During my meeting at Pine Station, Rev. W.H. Gotwald, president of the Susquehanna Synod, came up from Milton to hear me preach and to become better acquainted with me. I had requested him to do so through Brother Lentz – as I thought he should hear me, and I wished to convince him more fully as to my intended change of church relations, and to get his advice. No one in the congregation knew the object of his presence. He gave me every encouragement to proceed as I had intended to do.

During our meeting in the Harer’s Church our eldest son, J. Eugene, to our great joy, came to the altar of prayer and was fully converted to God. He was teaching in the Harer’s school house at the time. Knowing my intentions for the spring, and by my advice, he united with the Lutheran church in Jersey Shore and was admitted by Rev. A.W. Lentz by baptism. Being quite confidential with Brother Kline, I told him all my arrangements for the future previous to the meeting of conference.

On my way home from my last appointment in the German Settlement, I stopped a few minutes with our pastor<sup>9</sup> in Lock Haven and told him of my intentions. I painted things as dark as possible in the Evangelical Church, and bright as possible in the Lutheran Church – making things much stronger than I considered them, in order to arouse him. I then said, “Now, dear brother, I want to be right and do right. We are apt in such cases to look only on one side of the subject. I have tried to look at both sides – or at the reasons why I should leave and why I should not leave – but perhaps I am partial. Now you consider the matter. Then write out all the strongest reasons you can think of why I should not leave, and send them to me by letter, and I will consider them well. I am yet open to conviction on the subject and need not leave, but I intend to do so.” I bade him good-bye. But I received no letter from him, though he was secretary of the conference at the time.

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denomination to Sunbury – only the cemetery remains. The Mt. Pleasant church, which grew out of a Sunday School in the Harer schoolhouse, closed in 1969 and is now a private residence.

<sup>9</sup> Uriah F. Swengel (1846-1921). Biographical sketches for this prominent Evangelical figure appear in the 1939 *History of the Central Pennsylvania Conference*, page 321, and in the 1974 *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*.