

Chapter 6

Conference in Glen Rock, York County Ordained Deacon, Appointed to Montour Circuit

At this Conference in Glen Rock, I was ordained a deacon, March 11, 1861. My license was signed by Joseph Long, President, and Jacob Young, Secretary.

When the committee on “fates” reported, my name was read off in connection with Montour circuit – to which I was assigned. Montour circuit had formerly been a part of Columbia circuit, which had been divided the previous year. It lay partly in Montour County, hence the name. I rented a house in Millville, into which we moved by wagons. At that time, we did not generally find a parsonage, or even a house rented for us, but must, in many cases, look out for ourselves for a house after conference – which always met the first Thursday in March, making it so near the first of April that sometimes we had difficulty in getting one at all, and had no choice. So I had to do in this case – take what I could get. Nor did we find a house full of friends to welcome us on our arrival, with dinner ready, and everything prepared to make us welcome. No, but we must prepare things for ourselves – and would find but few if any there, except those who went with us. Things have changed in this respect, in later years, and it is a delightful change.

I was severely tried at this time. The last words of my wife to me, as I bade her good-bye to go to conference, were, “Any place but Montour.” And now here we must go. I had now preached two years on single salary, had received but two hundred and twelve dollars for the two years, and was in debt when I started, and had a wife and one child to maintain. We had been looking anxiously forward to the time when I would be allowed, and receive, full salary so as to be able, if possible, to meet some of my debts, enlarge my library – which was very meager – and purchase some furniture which was so much needed. Up to this time we never had a single yard of carpet in the house, and had kept house over three years. The time had now come when I was entitled to full salary – but I knew all my hopes must be blasted, as Montour would be unable to raise more than a single man’s salary at best. The membership was small, and most of them quite poor financially. I should not have been sent there – but such is the itinerancy.

Yet I could not wholly blame the conference, or the stationing committee – as the presiding elder Rev. S.W. Seibert¹ had been but newly elected to that office and was a stranger to the circuit and to my circumstances. The circuit had been misrepresented to the conference by my predecessor, a local preacher who had served the charge under the presiding elder, in consequence of the regularly

¹ Samuel W. Seibert (1824-1913) entered the ministry in 1845 and retired to Perry County in 1888. He was superintendent of the Susquehanna District 1861-64. His brother James L.W. Seibert (1826-1897) was also an Evangelical preacher and superintendent.

appointed preacher refusing to accept the assignment.² This man had been to conference one year ago and applied for a circuit, but was rejected – and now by an exaggerated report of his work on the circuit he expected to sail into the conference. Fortunately he failed again, but has since been admitted into the ministry of a sister church. But I had to suffer on account of his misrepresentations – for if things had been represented in their true light, I would not have been appointed there by the committee. I knew all this – and though my faith was severely tried, yet I accepted the appointment and moved to Millville.

Our first quarterly meeting was held in the Salem Church. S.W. Seibert was present and preached to the general satisfaction of all – and we had a good meeting. Seibert saw the mistake at once – but said I should not blame him for it, as he was a stranger and had been governed entirely by the report presented to the conference. He said I should be faithful in serving the charge until spring, and he would promise me a good field for the next year – which promise he fully kept, as will be seen in the proper place in this book.

Millville is a Quaker town, and Quakers are unfriendly to other churches – and especially to a hired ministry – so I could expect few favors from them, my neighbors, and must depend entirely on the membership of the circuit, and they all lived quite distant. Yet we did find some kind neighbors in Millville. The membership on the charge at that time depended largely on lumbering, and there was comparatively little grain raised on the circuit. And what made it still worse for them, and for us, was the war between the states which broke out this spring, 1861, causing a stagnation in business – and especially in the lumber trade. There was no sale for lumber, and the friends had no means of making money – scarcely enough to maintain their own families, much less to support their minister and his family. Produce and grain they did not have, and for lumber there was no sale. Here we were sometimes hard pressed for the necessaries of life. Money I received but very little – so little that I was sometimes obliged to borrow even three cents to pay postage on letters I was obliged to send.

One morning I went to the stable to feed my horse. Hay I had none, and I was obliged to give him the last bit of grain I had for his morning meal. At the breakfast table my wife said, “The flour is all³ and I must bake tomorrow – and we have no sugar, no coffee, no butter and no molasses. Everything is just all – and no money. What shall we do?” The only reply I could make was, “And my horse feed is all – I just gave him the last bit I had, and I was obliged to borrow three cents the other day to pay the postage on a letter. But after breakfast I will start

² The preacher who refused the assignment was Michael Sloat (1828-1884). That would have been his first assignment. He served Cumberland circuit the following year before locating 1862-67. He returned to the itinerancy in 1867 and served until his death. The local preacher who filled the assignment was Abraham E. Kline (1834-1917), a native of Benton, Columbia County, who later joined the Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church and is buried in the Waller Cemetery.

³ In Pennsylvania Dutch vernacular, “all” means “all used up.”

over the circuit – and if I cannot get money or provisions, I must quit preaching and go to work.”

I started out and succeeded in getting five hundred pounds of hay and six bushels of oats of one brother, and an order for fifty pounds of flour from another one. I also succeeded in getting a new subscriber for the church paper, and he gave me the money for it – one dollar. I ordered the paper, but took the dollar and bought groceries with it – so we had a start again. After a while I received a little money, and then sent the dollar to pay for the paper.

June 28th, 1861, our second son was born and received the name of Elmer Ellsworth – being named after Col. Ellsworth, who was killed about this time at Alexandria in the defense of his country.⁴

In July my wife again informed me that our flour was all baked up and we must have more by the beginning of next week. I said, “And how shall I get it? The friends have not got it, and I have no money to purchase it elsewhere. What shall I do?” But fortunately on this very Saturday I had a wedding – the only one I had during the entire year. For this wedding I received three dollars and fifty cents – just in time. Thus the Lord will provide. With this I purchased three bushels of wheat and had fifty cents left for groceries. From this to the end of the year we had a comfortable living.

This year we purchased our first coal oil lamp, and the first yard of carpet we ever had in the house. Considering the excitement occasioned in the country by the civil war which prevailed, I had a successful year on the circuit. We had several very successful meetings during the fall and winter – one at the Richart⁵ school house which resulted in a goodly number of conversions.

One evening when I came to the school house, it was filled as usual and a number were standing outside – and not far from the door lay a medium sized dog howling all kinds of murder. After meeting the school teacher who, though not a member of the church, was a very fine young man and kindly acted as sexton – warming and lighting up the house, assisting in preserving order, and taking quite an interest in the meeting – informed me of the situation. There were two young

⁴ Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth (4/11/1837 – 5/24/1861) is considered the first Union Army casualty of the Civil War. Born in New York, he organized the noted Zouave drill team, studied law in Lincoln’s office, assisted Lincoln’s 1860 presidential campaign, accompanied Lincoln to Washington in 1861, and recruited and led the famous “Fire Zouave” infantry regiment. He was killed upon entering a building in Alexandria to remove a pro-Confederate banner that he and President Lincoln deemed offensive. Lincoln ordered an honor guard to bring his body to the White House, where he lay in state in the east room.

⁵ The Methodists also worshipped in this Lycoming County school house and dedicated Richart’s Grove ME Church on September 17, 1893. In 1968, while part of the large 7-point Muncy Valley charge, the congregation sought to become independent – and as of 1970, Richart’s Grove was no longer listed as a United Methodist appointment.

ladies present, who had come quite a distance and made it a business of running to all the night gatherings and night meeting for miles around. They were always accompanied by this dog – and he would come into the house with them and keep up a constant confusion, and the girls appeared to delight in it. That night he came in with them and slipped under the desks. One would give him a kick here, and another there – and the dog would give a yelp every time, which made it very annoying. He finally attempted to put him out, but the girls would try to hide and protect him. He said, “I finally reached under the desk, and seized him by the cuff of the neck, and drew him from under it – but then he bit me in the arm and I was obliged to let loose. I then picked up the round leg of a slab bench which was lying there on the floor, struck him over the head with it, knocked him down, picked him up and threw him out the door – and I think he will not bother us very soon again.” And he never did, for I was informed that he died before the meeting closed that evening – served him right.

These two girls had been very annoying to all the preachers in that country for the past few years. They would attend all the protracted meetings in the country and when the penitents were invited to the altar, they would be the first to come forward – so that the meeting would be continued, lest it should close if none came forward. The outside world called them our “stool pigeons.” And their character was such that no respectable persons would present themselves at the altar as long as they were there. They tried this game on me at my very first meeting, but it did not go so well with them. Shortly after the meeting began they came forward as usual. They had been out several evenings, and as long as they were there no one else would come forward – because they all knew them. So one evening, as the two knelt side by side at the altar, before I dismissed the congregation, I addressed them publicly as follows. “Well, here you are again – as usual. You have been forward at every meeting in all this country for the past three years, and the people call you our ‘stool pigeons.’ But you make very poor ones, as you influence tends to keep other people away – and your object in coming forward is only to keep up the meeting. But you cannot come with that game over me. Now if for once you are earnest and sincere, then go to work, pray earnestly, come out again, and we will do all for you we can. But if not earnest and sincere, but as you have always been before, do not dare come out here again – lest God should strike you dead on your knees and cast you into hell for making a mock of religion in this way and becoming a stumbling block in the way of others. You are just as near hell while kneeling at the altar in the spirit in which you kneel there, as you are at any other place. Dare not do it again lest it be the last.”

They never tried it with me again, and what became of them I do not know. It was a severe measure to adopt, but it was needed and it answered the purpose. And their staying away showed their insincerity, for I told them if for once they were sincere they should continue and we would do all for them we could.

We also had a good meeting in the Salem⁶ Church, now Unityville, which commenced with a woods meeting. Here at one time we had considerable trouble with dogs following their masters into church and remaining there – which sometimes became very annoying. So one Sabbath, when annoyed by these dogs running up and down the aisles during preaching, I simply remarked that under the old dispensation the price of a dog was not allowed to be put in the Lord's treasury – but here, said I, we have the animal himself in the Lord's house. Is it right? After that the dogs were left at home, which was better.

At the Kile⁷ school house, on the Fishing Creek, we had the most extensive revival ever known in that section of the country, which continued over the holidays. People came for miles over the hills and through the woods on foot to the meeting – until immense crowds would gather at the school house, many of whom could not gain admittance into the house. These would then build a large log fire a short distance from the school house to keep themselves warm, as it was very cold and in a wooded country. I was told there would be as high as thirty or forty around this fire – waiting until the meeting would close so they could accompany their friends in the house to their homes. And the house would be densely packed with people. The altar was crowded nightly with penitents, and others were laboring in every part of the house – being unable to get to the altar because of its crowded condition. I never could ascertain how many were converted at this meeting. The order was most excellent, considering the crowded condition of the house and the many outside who could not get in.

Those who had formerly been the disturbers of the meetings, though they did not all become converted, instead of disturbing us, assisted in keeping order. And as further evidence of their good will, they purchased the goods and had two suits of clothes made for our eldest son – ready to put on.

One night there was a man present who had been attending the meeting in company with his wife, but who had been a desperately wicked man all his days and was now considerably past middle life. He had been in prison, and in the penitentiary, and yet his morals had not been greatly improved. This evening he stood near the door, and while I was on the other side of the house pleading with a man to give his heart to Jesus, an old Methodist sister – who had been powerfully blessed – spoke to this man's wife and invited her to come to the Savior. He, fearing

⁶ This Lycoming County church building was erected in 1846 and used until 2014, when the congregation was discontinued and the property sold to the fire company.

⁷ This Columbia County congregation erected church building in the early 1890's. The land has been given by John W. Kile, and the building erected, before the 1894 denomination split – but before the formal transfer of the deed. When Kile and the majority of the congregation sided with the United Evangelicals, they attempted to maintain control of the structure – but they were taken to court by the Evangelical Association. The courts ruled that giving permission to build the church was implied transfer of the deed, and the Association kept the property during the 1894-1922 split. The congregation never was strong, and the building was finally sold at a sheriff's sale in 1928 to satisfy a mortgage.

lest she would come, and being opposed to it, rushed for her to the altar where the penitents were kneeling – and in doing so, he forcibly threw to the floor two of the sisters who were standing near the penitents, singing, and had resisted him for some time. I saw it all, and wished I could get hold of him, but I could not get to him.

Just then one of the brethren nearby, and whose mother and wife this man had thrown to the floor, sprang forward, caught hold of him, and said, “What do you want in there?” “I want to get my wife out,” was the reply. The brother replied, “You must not go in that way if you want to get her out.” The man then exclaimed, “If you don’t let me go you will get into trouble” and seized the brother by the throat. But being long in the arms, he broke the man loose – taking his collar and necktie along. He seized him again, until the third time, and kicked him once – when the brother broke him loose again, laid hold of him, drew him to the door, and threw him head long from the door, over the porch, and some half dozen steps into the road.

At this time his wife sprang to her feet in the rear of the house and called out. I saw her, and as the congregation were singing very lively I called at the top of my voice, “What do you want?” She said, “I want out.” I then said, “If you want out, the brethren will assist you – if not, then sit down and be still.” But she called again, “I want out.” The friends then assisted her through the crowd to the door. I now called out, “Let us pray.” We knelt in prayer, and I expected the stones to come through the windows – but they did not. And strange to say – though all took place at the altar, none of the penitents found it out until after the meeting was dismissed and someone told them of it. They had been so earnestly engaged in prayer, and the congregation were singing a lively piece of music at the time. The man left for his home and never returned to disturb us again, but he swore he would place a keg of powder under the school house and blow it up with all of us in it if we did not close the meeting.

The consequence was that the next evening the congregation was very small, as the people feared to come. But I knew such a man’s word was not very reliable, and so continued the meeting. I told the congregation that he could not buy powder enough to blow up the school house, if he wished to do so. They need not fear, there is no danger, and they should attend the meeting as before. The next evening the house was full again as usual, and the meeting continued as before. This was the same school house referred to once before in this book, where the two rowdies took their seat behind me in the desk while I was reading the opening hymn – but of whom I soon got rid of when I insisted on their taking part in the service.

On the last Sabbath before conference, I preached a funeral sermon for a middle aged man who died suddenly near the Richart school house. He had chopped timber in the woods all day with his brother. He then came home in the evening, and after supper retired with his family as usual. In the night he awoke his wife and said that he did not feel well. She then arose and stepped to the door and called his brother, who lived just across the way – and then made fire in the

stove, as it was very cold, being in February. While she was making the fire, the clock struck three. He asked his wife, "What time is it?" She said, "Three o'clock." He never spoke again. When she had completed her fire making, she went to his bed and to her utter surprise she found him dead – even before his brother had arrived. "Thus, in the midst of life, we are in death."⁸

During the winter our youngest son Elmer E. had a very severe spell of sickness. He had a severe attack of cholera-infantum, and for two weeks his life was despaired of by all. But in the mercy of God he was spared to us, restored to health, and is now in the ministry of the Lutheran Church.

I finished my labors on the circuit in February, and received eighty-seven dollars and fifty-two cents salary on the circuit – and at conference forty-two dollars and forty-eight cents out of the treasury, making one hundred and thirty-five dollars for the year. Out of this I paid eighteen dollars house rent. My youngest brother and his family lived with us in the same house part of the year.

I had now preached three years and received three hundred and forty-two dollars salary for the three years. Surely it was poor pay. Perhaps it was poor preaching also, yet all the people appeared fully satisfied with my services. I preached one hundred and ninety sermons during the year. I now left for conference in my own conveyance, accompanied by my father-in-law, Mr. George Evans of Evansville, Columbia County.

⁸ This is an oft-quoted line from the published *Works of John Wesley*, sermon 137.