

love, and had one hundred dollars left to move on. Surely we did well. “We thanked God and took courage.” Our eldest daughter was born here, September 10th, 1863, and received the name of Laura Bernetta. Thus ended my two years labor on the Buffalo circuit, March, 1864 – and now for conference. As my time is expired on this circuit, I will be obliged to move this spring. But, O where? Echo answers, “Where?”

Chapter 9

Conference in Lewisburg, Union County Appointed to Wyoming Mission

Conference met in Lewisburg, Union County, March, 1864. I arrived at conference, and while in conversation with Rev. S.W. Seibert, our presiding elder, he said to me, “Well, where do you want to go now.” I replied, “Any place but Wyoming mission.” During conference I was called to preach a funeral sermon for a child of brother Bastian, which died from vaccination. The vaccination ran into erysipelas and caused its death.

During my absence from conference Brother Seibert resigned his office as presiding elder, and Rev. Simon Wolf¹ was elected his successor. When the bishop read the appointments, I was surprised to hear, “Wyoming mission – H.A. Dietterich.” Yet so it was. It was a bitter pill for me at first. Like Montour circuit in 1861, just the place where I did not want to go. I told Seibert so, but he only laughed and said, “It will be all right in the end” – and so it was. But some time afterward I had the chance of rubbing this in on Seibert – and did so. Some years after this he got up in conference and said he desired a circuit – but not farther north than Perry County. He was living in Perry County at the time. When the appointments were read off he was sitting in front of the pulpit by the writing table, and what was his surprise to hear, “Lock Haven – S.W. Seibert.” His head dropped, and I think tears filled his eyes. I now stepped up to him, and patting him on the shoulder said, “Brother Seibert, it will be all right – remember Wyoming.” And I think it was all right in the end – at least I found it so on Wyoming mission, and I think he did in Lock Haven.

Wyoming mission embraced the upper, or northern, part of Luzerne and the southern, or lower, end of Wyoming County. We moved to Newton Center, Luzerne County. This was our first move on the cars, and they played havoc with our goods. They broke our table and, among other things, the applebutter crocks – which were all filled – and we found a sorry mess when we unpacked our goods. On our way to Wyoming we stopped in Columbia County to visit our parents, who

¹ Simon Wolf (1815-1890) entered the ministry in 1846 and died while serving in McConnellsburg. He was superintendent of the Susquehanna District 1864-66. His brother Aaron Wolf (1820-1899) was also an Evangelical preacher.

were still living at that time. Here our babe took quite sick, and we were detained two weeks on account of it. Then, too, at this time everything was excitement up at Wyoming, Kingston, Wilkes-Barre and Scranton on account of the spotted fever which prevailed to an alarming extent in that country at that time – closing all the schools and stopping, to a great extent, all manner of business and traffic. Many people fled from the county on account of it.

Father advised me not to go up, but to order my goods back again until the fever subsided – for if I went, I did so at the risk of my life. But when my appointments fell due, I felt like meeting them. So I mounted my sulky and drove up and preached on the new field. I found the fever had abated to some extent, though many had died from it. One family consisting of the two parents and seven children, nine in all, had all died in one week – except the father.

On Monday I returned for my family, and we arrived on the circuit on Friday evening. We stayed with a family of members overnight, and on Saturday morning they took us to the parsonage. But instead of finding the house full of friendly faces, as is now generally the case, to greet and welcome “the new preacher,” we were taken to the house and set down there. No one came near to inquire whether we needed any assistance, or had anything to eat or not. We were left alone, as strangers in a strange land, to help ourselves as best we could – surely a cool reception.

We found our goods in the house, but, as already said, in a sorry condition. On my return with my family, I learned that during the week two had died in the immediate neighborhood – and that there were several new cases of the fever. It was terribly severe, as but few who took it recovered, and in most cases the patient did not live more than from six to eight hours – and all were buried without funerals, similar to smallpox cases.

Wyoming mission was the field Rev. J. Hartzler and myself had taken up during the first year of my ministry. But we found a wonderful² state of affairs in that country now, on account of the war which continued to rage at that time. The people, as a general thing, were not in sympathy with the administration in putting down the rebellion – consequently the country was full of deserters and non-reporting drafted men. These generally kept concealed in the woods during the day, and at night were harbored by the citizens. At one time the government was obliged to send troops there to enforce the enrollment, as the citizens refused to be enrolled and made most terrible threats as to what they would do. When the soldiers came, though but a part of the Invalid Corps,³ they quietly submitted to be enrolled – but when drafted, they did not report. Consequently the marshal from Scranton, eleven miles distant, or his deputy was out constantly at night hunting these men, as well

² The word is used here in a negative sense, a “wonderful state” being a state that makes a person wonder about what is going on.

³ The Invalid Corps within the Union Army existed 1863-69 and was created to allow partially disabled soldiers to perform light duty – thus freeing able bodied men to serve on the front lines.

as the deserters harbored by them. The deputy marshal and one of his assistants were shot and killed about a mile from our house, by deserters, while attempting to arrest them.

To show the feeling existing in that country at that time, I might say that a reward of three thousand dollars was offered for the arrest of the deserter who shot the deputy, and yet he was never arrested. He could not be found by the authorities, and many of the citizens thought he had done a noble deed and gloried in his pluck. And I do not think he ever left the neighborhood, as I saw him at different times, but his friends kept him effectually concealed from the authorities.⁴

Thieving prevailed to an alarming extent by these men, and others I presume stole on the credit of these men. A man was not safe to be out after night, unless he was well-known, as he was in danger of being shot by these men as an officer – or by the officers, as a deserter. A soldier in company with an officer did shoot an innocent man in this way, and killed him, not far from our place – shortly after the deputy had been shot, and while in search of the deserter who shot him.

I, however, fared very well, as I took no part whatever in political matters and did not even attend any of the elections. With the Democrats I could not vote at that time, and to vote with the other party, according to my views, would have impaired my influence for good among that people. Sometimes I would catch it from one party and then the other – each accused me of belonging to the opposite party, as I said nothing on either side. But on the whole, I was respected for it by the majority of the people and received the support of all.

Dr. Hand,⁵ our family physician, and myself rented a field of eight acres for thirty-five dollars and planted it with corn, from which we realized a good profit.

⁴ Such stories about draft resistance in Pennsylvania during the Civil War, while not well-publicized, are quite numerous. While *The Chronicle* has been unable to discover any documentation or additional details about the particular incident described by Dietterich, let the following well-documented similar and nearby incident inform the reader that such incidents did occur. This quote comes from H.C. Bradsby's 1893 history of Luzerne County, which included a biographical sketch of Lieutenant James Stuart Robinson. After detailing Robinson's war record, Bradsby states: "On the evening of July 30, 1864, less than two months after his arrival home, he went with a deputy provost marshal to assist in arresting deserters and drafted men who failed to report, in Benton, Columbia County (a locality strongly tainted with secession doctrines, a majority of the citizens having been led to believe that the Government had no business to interfere with their liberties by compelling them to take up arms against their wishes), and was shot and mortally wounded by one of a party of armed men whom they attempted to arrest, dying from the wounds November 3, 1864... Those who were suspected of doing the shooting left the country at once, and others who had been evading the draft immediately reported to the proper authorities, to escape arrest. At this time it seemed impossible to fix the crime upon the guilty ones, so no arrests were made by the civil authorities, and the matter was dropped for the time." In 1891, 27 years after the incident, a local man was tried for the crime and found not guilty.

⁵ David Bishop Hand (1848-1923) was a well-respected area physician born in Hawley, Wayne County, and buried in Waverly, Lackawanna County. His biography says he began the study of

Corn was two dollars per bushel, hay forty-five dollars per ton, flour fifteen dollars per barrel, dressed pork eighteen to twenty dollars per hundred pounds. I paid fifty-four dollars for a fat hog at eighteen dollars per hundred, dressed. Lard was twenty-eight cents per pound, and everything in proportion. I paid twenty-two dollars for a web of muslin, at fifty-five cents per yard. But money was plenty, and the friends were very kind and liberal toward us.

They made us a donation each year, amounting to over two hundred dollars each, besides many presents. The donations were conducted on this wise. It was publicly announced that on such a day and evening a donation would be made for the benefit of Rev. H.A. Dietterich and family, in the public house in Newton Centre, and all were most cordially invited to attend. The hotel was then rented for the afternoon and evening at a certain price, the bar to be closed and no drinks to be served or given away. In the afternoon friends would come laden with provisions ready for the table. About sundown the table was set and supper served. In the evening the people, young and old, would flock in by the sled load, and full table after full table would be served until midnight. Some perhaps would eat three or four times during the evening. While at the table they were waited on by a committee, each having a book – and every one at the table would write in the book and pay any sum they felt like giving for the supper, or for the preacher. Some gave as much as five dollars. One young man, with whom I was well acquainted, though not a member of any church, ate three times in one evening – having a young lady with him each time – and gave seven dollars for the evening.

One elderly man, an Englishman who ran the grist mill two or three miles distant, with whom I had no acquaintance, came up to the donation with his wife. They both took supper, and he gave them five dollars. He then desired to see the preacher for whom the donation was made, and he was shown up the stairs into the room where I was sitting. He came in, reached me his hand and said, “Mr. Dietterich, I respect you as a preacher of the gospel, and not as a politician. Our minister is a politician, and I did not give him a cent. But I came up here this evening, and brought my wife with me. We both took supper, and I gave them five dollars – and here are three dollars more for you. I respect you as a minister of the gospel. Good night.” I thanked him kindly for it, and he left. I received the largest donations of any minister in that country, notwithstanding it was only a mission and our membership was small and poor financially – but it was because I left politics to politicians, and was so respected and supported by all parties.

The evening was spent in social chat and innocent sport by old and young, and a general good time was had. In this way the provisions would be nearly all consumed, and the money was given to me – amounting to over two hundred dollars each year.

medicine “early in life.” In 1864 he would have been a 16-year-old medical student/apprentice en route to graduating from the medical department of the University of New York City in 1868 at the age of 20.

There I sold my horse at an advance of forty-eight dollars and bought another one for one hundred and forty dollars, drove it six months, and sold it for two hundred dollars – an advance of sixty dollars. I bought another one for one hundred and fifty dollars, which I drove several years and sold for one hundred and sixty-four dollars. Here our second daughter, Carrie S., was born, April 16, 1865. Notwithstanding the excited condition of the country, I had good success on the mission – so much so that it was constituted a circuit and became self-supporting the spring I left, and continued so.

During the last year of our stay here the war closed, and many attributed the closing of the war to the assassination of president A. Lincoln by J. Wilkes Booth. They said, “Booth stopped the war by shooting Lincoln” – and gave him the praise, thus manifesting the same spirit they did during the war. Yet, upon the whole, I liked the mission and people very well. We had interesting camp meetings both years, near the Square-top school house.⁶

At this school house I had an interesting meeting the second winter, with a number of conversions. This place, and a small village nearby, was noted for its skepticism – but the mighty power of God shook their sandy foundation, and some of their leaders were powerfully converted to God by saving grace. The evening I commenced my meeting it snowed, blowed, and was fearfully cold. I preached as best I could to the few (less than two dozen) present, but all appeared cold and dead. When I pronounced the benediction I thought to myself it is an entire failure to begin with. But I had hardly said “Amen” when an elderly woman present sprang to her feet in the rear of the school house and in a very excited manner cried out, “Oh pray for me. I am so wicked. Oh what a mother I have been to my children. I have seven sons, most all of them grown up to manhood, and I never prayed for them. Oh pray for me, lest we all be lost.” She continued in this strain for some time – when after prayer and a few words of instruction, all went home. The next evening she came forward as a seeker of religion, and her sons soon followed. But the husband would not come to the meeting at all. Yet, in spite of himself, he become most deeply convicted at his home and was driven almost to distraction. But rather than yield to his conviction and give up his skepticism, he resolved to commit suicide – and attempted it twice, but was fortunately rescued both times, while in the act, by his sons. He finally became so wretched that he sent for me at midnight to come and pray for him – which I did. The next evening he came to our meeting and gave himself to the Lord in earnest prayer until he obtained peace by believing in Jesus. The whole family were powerfully converted to God. O what a change in the family. Where before had been cursing and swearing, now was prayer and praise. Amazing grace!

On Sabbath afternoon I preached to a full house from Psalm 145:20 – “The Lord preserveth all them that love him, but all the wicked will he destroy.” I tried

⁶ Square Top is in Falls township, Wyoming County – just across the line from Newton township, Lackawanna County.

to show that if a man perished forever it was his own fault, and not the Lord's. It was not because God had decreed his destruction, but because he refused to love God – in other words, hated God – and thence his destruction. Love the Lord and he will preserve you. Love him not and he will destroy you. Hence you hold your salvation, your life or death, in your own hands – and if you are destroyed, the fault is entirely your own. “The Lord preserveth all them that love him, but all the wicked will he destroy.”

After the sermon a man came to me and asked permission to make a few remarks before I dismissed the congregation. He was a married man and the village blacksmith, but a stranger to me. I asked him as to the nature of his remarks, and when he informed me I granted him his request. He then stepped in front of the desk and facing to whole congregation said, “I have always been a skeptic and made light of religion and religious people. I have spent my Sundays fishing or hunting, and did not go to church. But I heard so much about this meeting that I concluded to go to church today and see and hear for myself. Hence I am here, and the sermon has fully convinced me of my error – and I want to renounce it thus publicly. I intend now to become a Christian man, and I want you all to pray for me.” All this was spoken with deepest feeling. That evening he came to church again, presented himself at the altar as a penitent, and was truly converted to God and united with the church. I inquired after him some years later and was informed that he was, at that time, an official member of the church. How great the salvation of God in saving sinners!

On this mission I preached exclusively in school houses – except at Gardner's Ferry,⁷ where I preached in a private home. But now they have a church and parsonage there, and churches have been built at different places throughout that country. I finished up my two year's labor on the mission having preached three hundred and ninety-one sermons and married eight couples. Two years being the limit, I knew I would be obliged to move – and to move down the river, there being no other field of labor in all that section of country at that time. Though now there are quite a number of them, all the outgrowth of this mission. So I drove to Columbia County with horse and sulky, on the way to conference.

⁷ Gardners Ferry is another name for Ransom, along the Susquehanna River in Lackawanna County. This class was organized in 1859 and met briefly in the 1854 German Lutheran church building – until they were asked to leave because of their revivalistic religion. They worshipped in the home of Miss Melinda Gardner until erecting their first building in 1871. That structure burned in 1898 and was replaced by the existing structure in 1899. In 2008 Ransom joined with the former Methodist churches at Milwaukee, Newton and Schultzville to form Countryside United Methodist Church and erect a new building at 14011 Orchard Drive.