

THE CHRONICLE

Journal of the Historical Society
of the
Susquehanna Conference
of the
United Methodist Church

Milton W. Loyer
editor

Volume XXIX spring 2018

Editor's Preface	2
Henry Dietterich's "A Wonder of Grace"	
Chapter 1: Early Life.....	5
Chapter 2: Marriage.....	7
Chapter 3: 1858-59 Columbia.....	17
Chapter 4: 1859-60 Luzerne.....	22
Chapter 5: 1860-61 Luzerne.....	31
Chapter 6: 1861-62 Montour.....	36
Chapter 7: 1862-63 Buffalo.....	43
Chapter 8: 1863-64 Buffalo.....	48
Chapter 9: 1864-66 Wyoming.....	54
Chapter 10: 1866-67 Gettysburg.....	60
Chapter 11: 1867-68 farming.....	68
Chapter 12: 1868-69 Big Spring.....	79
Chapter 13: 1869-70 Big Spring.....	86
Chapter 14: 1870-71 Conewago.....	92
Chapter 15: 1871-72 Conewago.....	99
Chapter 16: 1872-73 Cumberland.....	104
Chapter 17: 1873-74 Perry.....	111
Chapter 18: 1874-75 Perry.....	114
Chapter 19: 1875-76 Perry.....	120
Chapter 20: 1876-77 Jersey Shore.....	124
Chapter 21: 1877 honorable dismissal.....	127
Appendix A: Columbia circuit appointments for 1858.....	130
Appendix B: Luzerne circuit appointments for 1859.....	133

EDITOR'S PREFACE

On behalf of the Historical Society of the Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church, I present volume XXIX of *The Chronicle*. For over 25 years, the society has produced an annual volume designed to be a mix of scholarly, entertaining, informative and inspiring stories of United Methodism – all united by a common theme. This entire issue is devoted to reprinting, with footnotes and minor editing, portions of the 1892 book *A Wonder of Grace* by H.A. Dietterich.

Rev. Henry Alonzo Dietterich (1838-1899) was raised in a Lutheran environment sympathetic to the “new measures” of Wesleyan revivalism and married the daughter of a family with deep roots in the Evangelical Association. The book, his autobiography, tells the story of his personal faith struggle within these two traditions and with the indifference to religion that even then was creeping into American society. That struggle involved his birth family, his own conversion, his service for 18 years as an ordained preacher in the Evangelical Association, and his return to the Lutheran Church as a pastor in that denomination.

The portion of this relatively rare¹ book reprinted and annotated in *The Chronicle* covers the early life of H.A. Dietterich, his conversion, his service within the Evangelical Association, and his decision to leave the Evangelical Association for the Lutheran Church. While his personal faith struggles alone are worthy of republication and consideration by a new generation of readers, his association with the Evangelical Association brings a particular relevance to the material.

The period just prior to, during, and immediately following the Civil War was a crucial one for the Evangelical Association in central and northeast Pennsylvania. The charges that Rev. Dietterich served and the persons both lay and clergy with whom he interacted were important parts of the Evangelical story within the bounds of the present Susquehanna Conference. The comments and insights of the autobiographer, together with the footnotes provided by *The Chronicle*, produce an interesting and comprehensive account of God’s work in the establishment and development of the Evangelical branch of United Methodism within central and northeast Pennsylvania.

In addition, there are three distinct areas in which this document is of particular value. First, the early journals of the Evangelical Association (and also the

¹ While the book itself is indeed rare, the information it contains is no longer so. The book is in the public domain and was digitally copied and placed on the Internet by Google, using a copy in the Harvard Theological Library, as part of its noble effort “to organize the world’s information and to make it universally accessible and useful” – all available on-line without cost to the user. Since then, for-profit enterprises have begun reproducing the book and it is available (for a considerable price) from literally dozens of such companies advertising on the Internet. Only *The Chronicle*, however, presents the material with minor editing for better readability and detailed annotation.

United Brethren and Methodist Episcopal denominations) give membership and financial figures for only the entire charge – and the individual appointments on the charge are not named. Historians must speculate where the charge boundaries fell, which appointments were on which charge, and when particular appointments began being served. This document gives heretofore unknown clarity to some of those issues and calls for a rethinking of the structure and development of some of the charges in the areas served by Dietterich.

Second, most printed congregational histories begin, for all practical purposes, with the erection of their first church building – usually sometime after the Civil War. Anniversaries are marked from that date, the list of assigned pastors begins with that date, etc. The period before the erection of that first building is typically covered by a few statements such as “Circuit riders are known to have visited the area as early as 1840” and “Meetings were held in school houses and/or private homes before the erection of the first church building in 1872.” In truth, most congregations existed and ministered in their communities for decades before erecting a church building – but lack of documentation as to when the appointment began, which circuit served the appointment, and exactly where the appointment met have necessitated such sketchy early histories. This document gives information that may not agree with some printed congregational histories that were reconstructed from seemingly reasonable conjectures and/or the memories of older members.

Finally, Dietterich's document sheds considerable light on the inner workings of the Evangelical Association – its doctrine, its policies, its practices, and its politics. His having to move every two years, with no say in the matter, make a person wonder why more Evangelical preachers didn't transfer to denominations without a strict itinerant system. His experiences with the developing controversy regarding sanctification, which eventually led to the 1894 split in the denomination, are particularly valuable. Both the casual reader and the serious scholar of the Evangelical Association will find the material riveting and enlightening.

As editor of this volume, I acknowledge that the notes supplementing the autobiographical text include a certain amount of subjective interpretation and that the text itself was apparently composed as the author reflected on decades old details and events. Nevertheless, this particular document is a unique and invaluable account of the early Evangelical Association in central and northeast Pennsylvania and provides key information that does not appear in any other known primary source material.

Because of the spiritually powerful and historically relevant content of the material, this issue has been expanded, with the financial support and approval of the Commission on Archives and History, beyond the usual 96 pages. As always, it is the hope of *The Chronicle* that this volume will be of value to its readers as they examine their own spirituality and learn more about their rich United Methodist heritage.