

Part I. The Founding Fathers

The five official conference historic sites in these five chapters relate to the introduction of Wesleyan theology into central and northeastern Pennsylvania. The dates associated with each site echo the order in which each of our predecessor denominations entered the geographic boundaries of the present Susquehanna Conference – the first two sites being Methodist-related, the next two relating to the United Brethren denomination, and the fifth site having great importance to the Evangelical Church.

While John Wesley did minister briefly in the colony of Georgia 1736-37, his missionary to America, Francis Asbury, is generally credited with being the founding father of American Methodism. But self-appointed circuit riders Robert Strawbridge and Anning Owen are believed to be the first active Methodist evangelists to minister in central and northeastern Pennsylvania respectively. These are the individuals associated with the first two conference historic sites in this section.

The United Brethren Church was born in spirit when German Reformed preacher Phillip William Otterbein and Mennonite evangelist Martin Boehm, each having separately experienced the new birth espoused by Methodism, met at Long's Barn in Lancaster county in 1767 and agreed to work together for the salvation of German-speaking souls in the New World. The denomination resulting from that meeting was officially organized in Frederick County MD in 1800. But the preaching of John Neidig and the hospitality of John Shopp are credited with establishing the United Brethren Church in the Harrisburg area's east and west shores respectively of the Susquehanna River. These are the individuals associated with the next two conference historic sites in this section.

Jacob Albright professed conversion in 1791, began preaching in 1796, and by 1800 was looked to as the leader of a loose network of his converts and followers. That body formally organized in 1803 as the Evangelical Association. Among the early places where Jacob Albright and his preachers established an evangelical stronghold was New Berlin, in Union County. In 1816 that community became the first unofficial headquarters of the denomination when its first church building and first printing establishment were erected there. The site of those buildings is the fifth and final conference historic site in this section. But not only is that location a conference historic site, it is also a Heritage Landmark of the United Methodist Church – an improved and landscaped park with informative markers, owned by the denomination and maintained by the Susquehanna Conference.

The stories of the five historic sites in these five chapters present chronologically the introduction of our three predecessor dominations into the present Susquehanna Conference.

Chapter 1 Rock Chapel 1773



Rock Chapel circa 1950
Oxford Road, Adams County PA

Historians generally consider that Methodism began in England with John Wesley's 1738 Aldersgate experience and officially entered America in 1769 when Wesley sent preachers Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman to aid adherents to his movement that had migrated to the New World. American Methodism became truly organized in 1771 when Francis Asbury arrived on the scene with orders and authority from Wesley to superintend the work in the colonies. But there was a local preacher from Ireland named Robert Strawbridge who had come to America with his family a decade earlier and who is generally recognized as the first Methodist preacher/circuit rider in America.

Strawbridge was never ordained or appointed to a circuit by any of the official preachers sent by Wesley, and he was somewhat of a thorn in the side to the rather authoritarian Francis Asbury, but his influence and zeal cannot be denied. Because he never kept a journal or any records of where he preached, the full impact of his work may never be known – but there are documented instances of Methodist and Presbyterian circuit riders in the late 1700's arriving in what they thought were unevangelized regions within a few days' ride from Strawbridge's properties only to find organized, although preacherless, Methodist societies.

Even the exact date and place of Strawbridge's arrival in America is unknown. It is generally believed to have been about 1759, although the name Robert Strawbridge appears in at least one 1753 Maryland legal document. What is known is that Strawbridge rented a farm near New Windsor MD about 1760, began preaching about 1764, and purchased the farm in 1773. That property is now a Heritage Landmark of the United Methodist Church that includes the Strawbridge house, a relocated house in which Strawbridge preached, a replicated meetinghouse, a caretaker's house and a museum/library/bookstore.

In 1774 Strawbridge purchased additional land some 75 miles away along Sideling Hill Creek in what is now Clay township, Huntingdon County PA. That fact was discovered by noted Methodist historians Edwin Shell and Raymond Martin Bell in 1984, but the exact site of the property was not identified by Milton Loyer until 2013. This information, not available to earlier historians, greatly expands the known range of Strawbridge's travels and likely sphere of influence. And so it is now considered very likely that Robert Strawbridge was indeed the unnamed Methodist circuit rider who began the work that led to the construction of Rock Chapel, the first Methodist Episcopal church building known to be erected within the bounds of the present Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The earliest known account of the history of Rock Chapel was a formal presentation September 25, 1887, by its pastor, Rev. William W. Carhart of the York Springs circuit, at the "One Hundred and Fourteenth Anniversary of Old Rock Chapel." While subsequent historians have reservations about his research and some of his claims, his account has become the basis for all later histories of Rock Chapel. The following paragraphs are selected from that presentation.

"But little is known of the early history of Rock Chapel. Just when and by whom was preached the first Methodist sermon in the neighborhood will, perhaps, never be known. Tradition says that about the year 1770 a Methodist itinerant was riding among the rocks and hills without either shelter or food. Night was coming on and the man of God grew anxious concerning the welfare of himself and beast. With a strange superstition, or perhaps a living faith in God's providence, he threw the reins on the horse's neck and trusted that God would direct the beast to a Christian home. The horse left the big road. He entered a lane and in a short time stopped in front of a house that proved to be a Methodist family.

"He preached and the word was attended with power. His word was blessed of heaven. Souls were converted. A class was formed, and Rock Chapel as an organization came into being. The grandchildren of the founders of Rock Chapel are still living. They tell us that the services were first held in the house and orchard of Mr. George Fickes, then belonging to the older Peter Group. The apple trees are still standing under which that mighty man of God delivered the message of his Lord.

“The need of a church was felt. Three families (viz., those of Peter Group, William Sadler Sr., and a Mr. Swisher) undertook the erection of a house of worship. The site selected for the new church was on the Carlisle and New Oxford Road, about one mile north of Heidlersburg. The cornerstone of Old Rock Chapel, the first Methodist Episcopal church in Adams County PA, was laid about 1773.

“For a time, from a lack of funds, the work was stayed. During the interval, the shell – for it had neither windows, doors, nor floor – served as a fold for sheep, emblematic of its true relation to the children of men. At last the house was finished. It was a small plain structure of stone, with gable end to the road, two doors on the southeast side, and a gallery across the end opposite the pulpit.

“The first [church] record of Rock Chapel is in the minutes of the first quarterly conference of 1803 held in Carlisle. The second quarterly conference of that year was held at Rock Chapel. The circuit of which Rock Chapel was a part extended from Waynesboro to York, embracing all intermediate Methodist preaching places, about forty in number. From this time until 1827, Rock Chapel was favored with one quarterly meeting almost every year.”

From 1827 to 1844 Rock Chapel was part of the Gettysburg circuit, and historian Samuel Milton Frost (1825-1906) says of that period: "Rock Chapel in those years was a point of great attraction. The congregations were large, the revivals were frequent and extensive, and the membership embraced many of the finest families in that section." Even though it was never part of a village, Rock Chapel had more members, with the exception of Gettysburg itself, than any other class on the circuit. As the circuit riders could visit but infrequently, much credit for the success belonged to the local class leaders and lay preachers. Ludwick Group used to walk from his house near Idaville, hold class at Rock Chapel, walk to Bendersville and hold class, and then walk home — completing a circuit of 18 to 20 miles on foot in a single day.

In 1844 Rock Chapel was placed on the newly-formed York Springs circuit – along with Petersburg [York Springs], Sadlers schoolhouse, Pine Grove, Bendersville, Oxford, Flat Bush, Spring Forge, Hanover, Hellers and Hampton. The chapel was rebuilt in 1849 and has changed little since then. The adjacent graveyard was established in connection with this rebuilding. Before the Battle of Gettysburg, blankets from a nearby woolen mill were reportedly hidden between the ceiling and roof to keep them from the invading Confederates.

The membership gradually dwindled over the years, and the last reported membership was 3 in 1967 – at which time the York Springs circuit was a four-point charge consisting of York Springs, Hunterstown, New Oxford and Rock Chapel. The church was officially closed in 1982 and is under the care of York Springs UMC. The building is kept in good repair and available for tours and special events. A fall homecoming service and a candlelight Christmas-season service are held at Rock Chapel each year.

Chapter 2 Anning Owen Homesite 1778

While his name is not usually mentioned as a founding father of one of United Methodism's predecessor denominations, this Luzerne County blacksmith almost single-handedly established Methodism within the former Wyoming Conference and is intimately connected with the single most defining event in the history of the Wyoming Valley. Anning Owen (1751-1814) was born in Goshen, Orange County NY, and settled in the Wyoming Valley of Pennsylvania. He is one of the few survivors of the Wyoming Massacre of July 3, 1778, which story is told in the endnotes for Part I.¹ The following paragraphs recounting Owen's experience during the massacre and his resulting spiritual transformation are selected from George Peck's 1860 *Early Methodism*, pages 28-31.

"In the battle he was by the side of his brother-in-law, Benjamin Carpenter. He stood the fire of the enemy, and answered it, shot after shot, in such quick succession that the barrel of his gun became burning hot. 'My gun is so hot that I cannot hold it!' exclaimed the brave patriot soldier. 'Do the best you can, then,' was the reply of his friend. A shot or two more and the day was lost. Owen and Carpenter fled to the river, and secreted themselves under cover of a large grapevine which hung from the branches of a tree and lay in the water. The place of their concealment was near the mouth of Shoemaker's Creek. While there fearful sights of barbarous cruelty in the river above pained their eyes and stung their souls to agony. They saw through the leaves Windecker, the Tory, tomahawk Shoemaker and set his body afloat, and the mangled corpse of their friend and neighbor passed quietly by them.

"When upon the run, he expected every moment to be shot or tomahawked, and the terrible thought of being sent into eternity unprepared filled his soul with horror. He prayed as he ran, and when he lay in the water his every breath was occupied with the silent but earnest prayer, 'God have mercy on my soul!' There and then it was that he gave his heart to God, and vowed to be his forever. He was spared, and did not, as thousands do, forget the vows he made in the hour of his distress.

"Mr. Owen returned to the East with the fugitives, but he was a changed man. He considered his deliverance from death as little short of a miracle, and that in it there was a wise and gracious design. He was now a man of prayer, possessed a tender conscience, and indulged a trembling hope in Christ. In this condition Mr. Owen became acquainted with the Methodists. Their earnest and powerful preaching, and the doctrines which they taught, met in his heart a ready response. His religious experience became more deep and thorough, and his evidence of sins forgiven more clear and satisfactory. He now rejoiced greatly in the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free, and panted to be useful.

"In this state of mind Mr. Owen returned to Wyoming and settled among his old companions in tribulation. He was a blacksmith, and he commenced, as he supposed, hammering out his fortune between Kingston village and Forty Fort, at the point where

the highway crosses Toby's Creek. There still stands the humble frame house which he built, and which his family occupied for many years.

"Mr. Owen had no sooner become settled in Wyoming than he commenced conversation with his neighbors upon the subject of religion, and began with many tears to tell them what great things God had done for his soul. His words were as coals of fire upon the heads and hearts of those he addressed. He appointed prayer meetings in his own house. The people were melted down under his prayers, his exhortations, and singing. He was invited to appoint meetings at other places in the neighborhood, and he listened to the call. A revival of religion broke out at Ross Hill, about a mile from his residence, and just across the line which separates the townships of Kingston and Plymouth. Great power attended the simple, earnest efforts of the blacksmith, and souls were converted. He studied the openings of Providence, and tried in all things to follow the divine light. He was regarded by the young converts as their spiritual father, and to him they looked for advice and comfort.

"Mr. Owen, now considering himself providentially called upon to provide, at least temporarily, for the spiritual wants of his flock, formed them into a class. Most of the members of the little band residing in the neighborhood of Ross Hill, that point became the center of operations. This class was organized in 1788. After a season Mr. Owen became convinced that it was his duty to devote his whole time to the ministry. "

It wasn't until 1791 that the Wyoming circuit was formed and the first official circuit rider visited Ross Hill. Asbury records his first visit to the Wyoming Valley and the class at Ross Hill on July 3, 1793. It was Owen who guided that first circuit rider through the region in 1791 and who did the same for Asbury in 1793. It was also in 1793, in April, that Owen met the newly assigned noted circuit rider William Colbert and introduced him to the Wyoming circuit.

In due time Anning Owen became an official local preacher and a local deacon. He was admitted to the itinerancy on trial in 1795 and ordained an elder in 1797. His service record is as follows.

1796-98	Seneca circuit NY	1804-05	Dauphin circuit PA
1798-99	Albany circuit NY	1805-08	superintendent, Susquehanna District
1799-00	Flanders circuit NJ	1808-09	Lycoming circuit
1800-01	Bristol circuit PA	1809-10	Canaan circuit PA
1801-02	Wyoming circuit PA	1810-11	Cayuga circuit NY
1802-03	Northumberland circuit PA	1811-12	Seneca circuit NY
1803-04	Strasburg and Chester DE	1812-13	New Amsterdam (Holland Purch.) NY

In 1813, due to bodily debility, Owen retired. He died in 1814 in Ulysses NY.

As Owen labored over wide area and established Methodism in northeastern Pennsylvania before the first official circuit rider ever arrived, his importance in the area that became the Wyoming Conference cannot be understated. Conference historian Alfred Steck Bowman of the Central Pennsylvania Conference, in his 1918 semi-centennial address to that body stated the following:

Of fascinating interest is the story of Anning Owen, the converted blacksmith. He became presiding elder of the Susquehanna District in 1805, a position he held for four years. The district was comprised at that time of virtually all of our conference territory plus the Tioga circuit. Anning Owen was one of the few who escaped the "Wyoming Massacre." During his flight, through some Methodists, he was converted and came back to the Wyoming valley resolved to do all he could for God. He hammered away at his forge and exhorted his neighbors in his own house and in other nearby places. Two years before a regular Methodist preacher was seen in the Wyoming valley, he had gathered nearly 100 souls into a Methodist class. Authorized by the church a few years later to preach the Gospel, he kept his coals in God's altar burning as brightly as the fires of his smithery. Abel Stevens says in his history: "After joining the itinerant ranks, 'the converted blacksmith' Anning Owen labored successfully from the Delaware to the Chesapeake, from the Hudson to the interior settlements of New York and Pennsylvania. He retired at last a worn out veteran. His motto was 'Work, work, work! This world is no place for rest.'"

Anning Owen and his family lived in the same modest Wyoming Valley structure from his 1788 return following the Wyoming massacre until 1810, when he was appointed to Cayuga circuit in New York and moved there. The exact location and fate of that Wyoming Valley house has been the subject of no little discussion. As noted above, Peck in 1860 states that the house is still standing between Kingston and Forty Fort, where the highway crosses Toby Creek. Discussing area Methodism, F.C. Johnson's local history publication *The Historical Record* II:3, for July 1888, page 117, states: "Between Forty Fort and Kingston is the Owen house, where that wonderful trio, Valentine Cook, William Colbert and Anning Owen, met 95 years ago to plan the conquest of the continent from Maryland to Canada."

The current prevailing opinion is that the house stood on the west side of Wyoming Avenue, between John and Union Streets – somewhere on the property now occupied by the Bonner Chevrolet dealership – but further research and deed searches are definitely in order to identify this location that was designated an historical site by the former Wyoming Conference.

Chapter 3 Neidig Memorial UMC 1793



Neidig Memorial UB Church 1850 building
Oberlin, Dauphin County PA

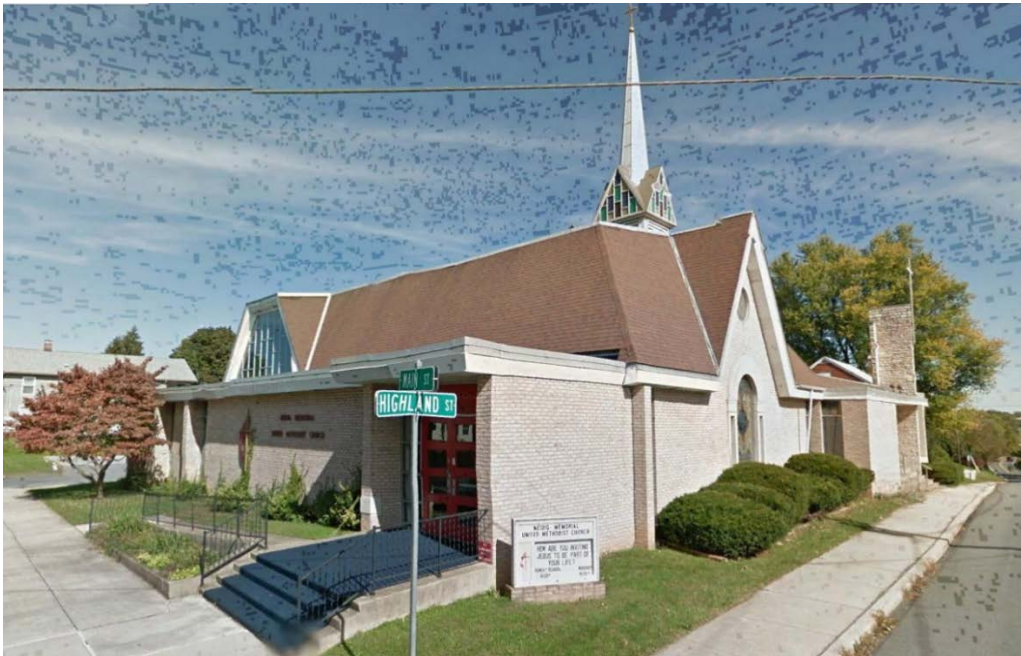
The United Brethren in Christ denomination was formally organized in 1800 at the Peter Kemp home near Frederick MD, but the ministry was conceived in 1767 at the Isaac Long barn near Landisville PA. It was there that Philip William Otterbein (1726-1813) and Martin Boehm (1725-1812) met at a revival meeting, conducted by Boehm, and Otterbein exclaimed, “Wir sind brüder” [“We are brothers”]. From that point on the two of them agreed to work together to bring the message of experiential religion to the German-speaking settlers in America.

Otterbein was a German Reformed pastor, and Boehm was a preacher in the Mennonite church. Each had a heart-warming experience similar to Wesley’s at Aldersgate Street and began preaching that attending church, adhering to a denomination’s rites and rituals, and following a strict code of behavior or dress were no substitutes for a personal relationship with Christ. Although that message was not well-received within their established denominations, Otterbein and Boehm continued working together in hopes that their ministry could become a renewal movement within the Church – with no plans or ambitions of creating a new denomination.

Among the persons converted as a result of these efforts was Mennonite preacher John Neidig (1765-1844). Neidig preached with great vigor the necessity of experiencing the new birth and soon had amassed a group of believers. He worked within the Otterbein-Boehm community, but as there was yet no formal name or organization, his followers were known as “Neidigs Leute” [Neidig’s people]. In 1793 Neidig led these believers in erecting a 30x40 feet limestone church building in the Dauphin County community now known as Oberlin. When the United Brethren Church was officially organized in 1800, Neidig and his congregation were what would be called today “charter members” of the denomination.

This site is of particular importance because that limestone building was the second church building erected by the entire denomination, after the Geeting meetinghouse near Keedysville MD, and the first one east of the Susquehanna. Since the Geeting site has long since been abandoned and this site has been continuously occupied by an active congregation, it is now the nation’s oldest continuous site of United Brethren worship. More specific to the Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church, it is the conference’s oldest continuously operating church site of any of our predecessor denominations.

The modern sanctuary now occupying the site is the location’s fourth such structure. The original 1793 limestone chapel was replaced in 1850 by the frame church building pictured on page 11. That structure was razed in 1887 and replaced by a much more commodious two-story one. Many additions and modifications proving inadequate to meet the needs of the growing congregation, the present modern sanctuary was erected in 1974.



Neidig Memorial UM Church 1974 building

While conference historical sites are just that – “sites” – they are typically strongly associated with persons of historical significance. Here, John Neidig certainly fits the bill. Those interested in learning more about this contemporary and co-worker of United Brethren founders Philip William Otterbein and Martin Boehm are referred to the 1995 volume of *The Chronicle*, which includes “A Lecture on John Neidig, Sr.” prepared by noted United Brethren preacher and historian Daniel Shearer and “A Biography of John Neidig” written by his son Isaac Neidig (1809-1894), just before his death in Iowa in 1894. The latter 26 page document had never before appeared in print. It existed only within the family as a handwritten manuscript until it was copied and typed in 1947, and even then it remained unknown to United Brethren researchers until the 1960’s.



Rev. John Neidig, Sr. (1765-1844)

John Neidig passed at the then advanced age of 78. While he traveled in the Lord’s work, and his family was instrumental in establishing the strong United Brthren presence in Iowa, he never abandoned his Oberlin homestead and is buried in the nearby Highspire Cemetery. He is also one of earliest United Brethren preachers of whom we actually have a photograph. The one above was provided to the Church by Nathan Harlan Hoffman (1872-1944) – one of the organizers of the United Brethren work in Puerto Rico – a grandson of the Isaac Neidig mentioned above, and hence a great-grandson of Rev. John Neidig.

Chapter 4 John Shopp Homestead 1803



John Shopp Home 1803
Industrial Park Road
Shiremanstown, Cumberland County PA

John Shopp Sr. (1761-1821) was a friend and contemporary of the John Neidig Sr. (1765-1844) of Oberlin who established the conference historic site now known as the Neidig Memorial United Methodist Church. The two had similar spiritual experiences, and John Shopp's daughter Catharine (1803-1880) married John Neidig's son Jacob (1806-1838).

Originally from Lancaster County, John Shopp owned and operated an extensive homestead adjoining present day Shiremanstown to the east and north. His homestead just across the river from Harrisburg was the stopping place for all United Brethren preachers traveling west from Lancaster and Dauphin counties and played a key role in the expansion and solid establishment of the United Brethren faith into the Cumberland and Shenandoah valleys and the Allegheny mountains.

The Shopp property was so extensive that it will be described in two parts, beginning with the main family home pictured above – one of the earliest and most enduring appointments in the entire denomination. This structure is still standing about ½ mile northeast of Shiremanstown, among the trees along the south side of the PA 581 expressway, just east of the Trindle Road interchange. Unfortunately, however, the home is in ruins and surrounded by industrial properties. It is likely

only a matter of time before the present owners sell the property for industrial purposes and the building is razed.

While United Brethren co-founders Philip William Otterbein (1726-1813) and Martin Boehm (1725-1812) first met and agreed to work together as relatively young men in 1767, they were both nearing the end of their physical usefulness by the time they officially gathered their adherents into a denomination in 1800. The real task of organizing the United Brethren Church fell to their protégé, the third bishop of the new denomination, Christian Newcomer (1749-1839) – often called the St. Paul of the United Brethren Church.

Following the October 1803 annual conference at the home of David Snyder, near Newville in Cumberland County, Otterbein and Boehm and Newcomer were all present at this house when a great revival broke out. This is the date and event used to identify the Shopp homestead in United Brethren history whenever a single reference is needed. At least one denominational historian has stated that if he could have been present at any single event in United Brethren history, this would be the one he would choose – even over the 1767 meeting of Otterbein and Boehm in the Isaac Long barn and the 1800 formation of the denomination at the Peter Kemp home.

Newcomer records that event in his diary for October 1803 as follows:

8th – A sacramental meeting commenced at Shopp's; father Boehm preached first, with great power. The word reached the heart; many were the wounded and slain, lying in every direction, lamenting and crying aloud for mercy. We prayed with them a considerable time; some of them obtained peace with God in the pardon of their sins.

Sunday 9th – We held our Love Feast; the brethren and sisters spoke very feelingly and freely of the dealings with God. It was a melting time; father Otterbein spoke with great power and energy. An English brother named Stone followed him. The grace of God wrought powerfully among the people; a man fell suddenly to the ground and cried for mercy. Others were so affected that they were unable to move from the spot where they were sitting or standing; some had to be led and others to be carried away, being unable to walk by themselves.

This home was also the scene of another great revival in 1819, when eight children of John Shopp were converted in a single night, and the scene of the 1826 annual conference.

The second part of the Shopp homestead is the cemetery pictured on the following page, owned and maintained by the Shiremanstown United Methodist Church, ½ mile east of Shiremanstown on the south side of Simpson Ferry Road. It was here that the Shopp church was erected in 1827. While the United Brethren were generally not disposed to erecting church buildings at this time, the presence of 42 ministers at the Shopp home for the 1826 annual conference convinced the local members to construct a building for worship services.



Shopp church site and cemetery, east of Shiremanstown

The Shopp's church building has the distinction of being the only the 12th one erected by the United Brethren – the earlier ones being

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| (1) Geeting's near Keedysville MD, 1774 | (7) Corydon IN, 1818 |
| (2) Neidig's in Oberlin PA, 1793 | (8) Light's near Lebanon PA, 1820 |
| (3) Hagerstown MD, 1805 | (9) Chambersburg PA, 1822 |
| (4) Germantown OH, 1806 | (10) Littlestown PA, 1823 |
| (5) Snyder's near New Bloomfield PA, 1814 | (11) SHERK's near Grantville PA, 1825 |
| (6) Roth's near Oakville PA, 1816 | |

The annual conferences of 1830, 1835, 1844 and 1854 were held in this building. Following the conference of 1854, the structure was razed and the stone, lumber, stoves, pews and other such materials were taken to Shiremanstown to be used in the construction of a new building. That structure was used for over 100 years, until the present Shiremanstown UMC was erected at the same site in 1963.

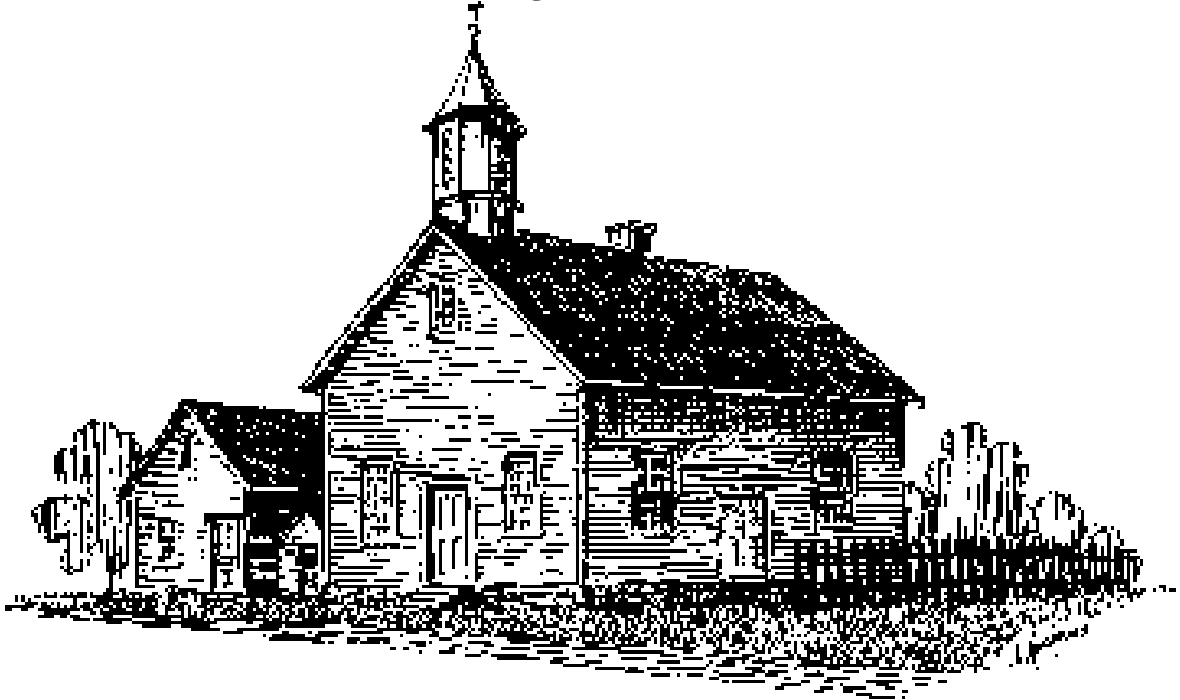
The cemetery remaining at the site contains the final resting place of many United Brethren pioneers, including Bishop Jacob Erb (1804-1883). He was converted at his boyhood home, an early United Brethren peaching station, in nearby Wormleysburg at the age of 16, and in 1823 (at the age of 19) he was assigned to the 30 preaching appointments on Lancaster circuit – which he had enlarged to 40 within the year. Sent as a missionary to New York state and Canada,

he was present at Rochester in 1825 when the first water was let into the Erie Canal. Elected bishop (for four year terms) in 1837, 1841 and 1849, Erb was a major figure in the denomination's formative years. On July 4, 1830, it was he who rebaptized John Winebrenner by immersion in the Susquehanna River when the latter made his break from the Reformed Church to found the Churches of God denomination.

Other noteworthy persons interred in the Shopp Cemetery include

- Elizabeth Shirk Erb (1801-1834) – wife of Bishop Jacob Erb.
- Rev. Samuel Eberly (1790 – 1862) – United Brethren local preacher. He is the father of prominent United Brethren preacher, historian and educator Daniel Eberly (1834-1910).
- Catherine Erb Eberly (1791-1860) – wife of Rev. Samuel Eberly, sister to Bishop Jacob Erb.
- Rev. George Gilbert (1805-1870) – United Brethren pastor. Natives of Chambersburg, George and his brother Rev. Frederick Gilbert (1801-1869) each served churches in the Pennsylvania Conference for over 30 years. While Frederick served Shopp as part of the Carlisle circuit 1827-39, it is unclear why George and his family settled here in the 1860's.
- Mary Gilbert (1806 – 1875) – wife of George Gilbert. Three sons of George and Mary are also interred at the Shopp Cemetery: Ezra (1841-1914), Frederick (1830-1855), and Lewis (dates illegible).
- Rev. Ezra F. Gilbert (1841-1914) – United Brethren local pastor. A son of Rev. George Gilbert, he received a quarterly conference license (later made permanent) to preach the gospel in 1880. His daughter Bertha B. Gilbert is also interred here.
- Anna Maria Eberly Gilbert – wife of Rev. Ezra F. Gilbert. Anna is daughter of Samuel Eberly and Catherine Erb Eberly. In 1852 she went to the denomination's Mt. Pleasant College in Westmoreland County, where she was converted and joined the church. She returned to Shiremanstown where she met and married Ezra Gilbert in 1866. They resided on a farm in Eberly Mills.
- Rev. John S. Miller (1848-1888) – United Brethren pastor. This promising young preacher died of apoplexy at the age of 39 while in the midst of a “very precious” revival at his appointment in Wilkinsburg PA. Born in Shiremanstown, he lost his father when he was 3, was converted at 14, and enlisted in the Union Army before he was 16. He had served in the ministry 16 years and left a wife and 3 daughters. Also interred in the Shopp Cemetery are his father John S. Miller (1811-1851) and his infant son Clarence Miller (1869-1870).
- Jacob Neidig (1806 – 1838) – son of Rev. John Neidig Sr. (1765-1844), the founder and namesake of the Neidig Church in Oberlin. In a joining of two prominent United Brethren families, he married the daughter of John Shoop.
- Catharine Shopp Neidig Rupp (1803 – 1880) – daughter of John Shoop, wife of Jacob Neidig. Following the death of Jacob, Catharine married George Rupp (1802-1849) of Shiremanstown – brother of the noted scholar and historian Israel Daniel Rupp (1803-1878), who published six volumes covering the histories of 23 Pennsylvania counties.
- John Shopp (1761 – 1821) – patriarch of the Shopp family
- Anna Hershey Shopp (1765 – 1850) – wife of John Shoop. Anna is a member of the prominent United Brethren Hershey family of Lancaster County. She is a sister to Elizabeth Hershey Erb (1772-1857), the mother of Bishop Jacob Erb, and to Rev. Abraham Hershey (1774-1839), preacher and presiding elder and statesman, and to Rev. Christian Hershey (1777-1853), who led the huge 1847 United Brethren migration to Iowa.

Chapter 5
New Berlin Heritage Landmark 1816



First Church and Publishing House of the Evangelical Association 1816
Plum and Water Streets
New Berlin, Union County PA

Jacob Albright (1759-1808), prosperous Lancaster County farmer and tile maker, was converted in 1791 and immediately began sharing his faith among the German-speaking peoples in central Pennsylvania. By 1800 a loose organization had formed that looked to Albright as its leader. A formal organization was created in 1803 and named the Evangelical Association – which later became the Evangelical Church. This denomination, along with its Methodist Episcopal and United Brethren counterparts, is one of the three distinct predecessor bodies of the United Methodist Church.

The New Berlin site of the first church building and first publishing house of the Evangelical Association is one of a handful of Heritage Landmarks of the United Methodist Church – the most significant designation that the denomination can bestow upon an historical location. The property is owned by the denomination and administered by the Susquehanna Conference. In truth, New Berlin was the first denominational headquarters of the Evangelical Association – and there are many sites within the borough of significance to United Methodism. These sites, identified by a marker/map at the Plum and Water Street location, are all considered part of the conference’s “New Berlin” historical site. Several of the different locations are as follows.

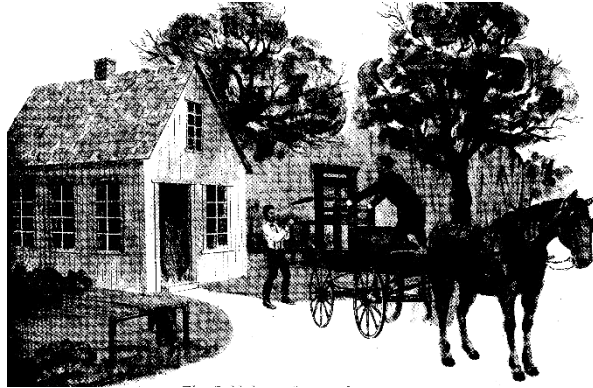
First Church Building



Jacob Albright and his co-laborers John Walter and George Miller first visited New Berlin on an evangelistic tour looking for German settlers in the spring of 1805. They were entertained in the home of Michael Maize who arranged for a regular appointment at the schoolhouse, where Walter preached a number of times. Opposition arose, however, and the next time Walter came to fill the appointment the schoolhouse was locked – the door barred from the inside. A large number of people had gathered to see what would happen, and so Walter began to preach a powerful sermon from the schoolhouse steps. At one point he raised his voice and cried out, “God has opened to us a door in New Berlin, and He will establish His work here, in spite of all the opposition of hell and wicked men.” A loud noise was heard inside the schoolhouse, and the door flew open. The hook that had held the cross bar was found lying on the opposite side of the schoolroom.

That prophecy became history. A revival broke out and a class was organized, Michael Maize being the first Evangelical class leader west of the Susquehanna. The first German campmeeting ever held on American soil was conducted by the Evangelicals on the Michael Maize farm in 1810, and the property for the denomination’s first church building was purchased in 1815, with a modest log building erected the following year. That structure, later improved and covered with siding, served the congregation for over 50 years until a brick building was erected two blocks to the north in 1873.

First Publishing House



While 1803 is usually given as the date for the official beginning of the Evangelical Association, the first annual conference was not held until 1807. At that time it was agreed to print licenses for preachers, a denominational discipline, songbooks and other items. For the next few years almost all such printing was done by John Ritter and Company in Reading, Berks County PA. After the death of Jacob Albright in 1808, leadership fell to young John Dreisbach (1789-1871), who felt strongly that the denomination needed its own printing press.

Historian John Ness, in his 1966 definitive book *One Hundred Fifty Years: A History of Publishing in the Evangelical United Brethren Church* tells how Driesbach worked tirelessly, and often at his own expense, to make the denomination press a reality. He traveled to Philadelphia to purchase and transport the printing and binding equipment to New Berlin, he made arrangements for the construction of a suitable building, he traveled to Harrisburg to secure the services of George Miller to run the printing operations.

Union Seminary



Union Seminary, the first enduring educational institutionⁱⁱ of the Evangelical Association was authorized for New Berlin by the General Conference of 1854 as consolation for the loss of the publishing house to Cleveland. The school opened in 1856 and quickly gained a regional if not national reputation for

academic excellence. It became Central Pennsylvania College in 1887. In 1902 the school moved to Myerstown to unite with that community's Albright Collegiate Institute and become Albright College. In 1929 Albright College united with the denomination's Schuylkill Seminary in Reading, Berks County PA, to become the present Albright College.

The property continued to have an interesting history after being vacated by Central Pennsylvania College in 1902. A new Union Seminary, not associated with the Evangelical Church, was formed in 1904 and lasted until 1911. The building was used briefly as a silk mill in 1919 and then stood empty until the east wall collapsed in 1954 and the structure was razed the following year. In 1954 the borough sold the property to the school district for \$1 and the New Berlin Elementary school was erected on the site. A stone marker placed in front of the new building designates the property as the original home of Union Seminary, the predecessor of Albright College.

The Mifflinburg School District closed the New Berlin Elementary School in 2013, at which time it employed five teachers serving 71 students from kindergarten to grade 4. While the ultimate fate of the property has yet to be determined, the stone marker for Union Seminary remains.

Second Church Building



This structure on the southwest corner of Plum and Market Streets was erected in 1873. Canes and picture frames made from the wood of the first church building were sold to help finance the project. Unfortunately, the building and congregation were plagued with problems from the start. The natural westward migration of Evangelical families had already been enhanced by the removal of the publishing house to Cleveland in 1854. A further blow to the church and community came in 1855, when Union County was divided in two and the former county seat of New Berlin was no longer centrally located. The southern portion became Snyder County, with county seat at Selinsgrove, and the county seat of Union County was moved to Lewisburg.

The removal of the college to Reading in 1902 proved to be the beginning of the end. Beginning in 1908 the pastor's salary was subsidized by the annual

conference, and in 1920 New Berlin was placed on the Winfield charge. The church closed in 1931, the remaining members transferred to Winfield, and the building was sold in 1938. After being used as a yoga/exercise center for many years, the building is currently for sale.

Second Publishing House



In 1836, the publishing house moved from the small structure next to the first church building to this larger facility on the northeast corner of Plum and Market Streets. It became a successful commercial venture.ⁱⁱⁱ Only two annual dividends were omitted, in 1839 and 1842, and over \$18,000 was distributed to the annual conferences for the retired preachers, their widows and orphans. This plant produced the denomination's hymnbooks, histories, theological books, disciplines and newspapers – as well as other secular and books. In 1854 the denomination moved its publishing house to Cleveland OH. The building was later used as the girls' dormitory for Union Seminary. It was sold in 1864 and is now a private residence.

New Berlin Cemetery

Oddly, one of the most prominent persons buried here was not part of the Evangelical Association – Methodist preacher Rev. Peter Beaver (1782-1849). As a rule, early Methodist circuit riders left the ministry when they married. Asbury never married and discouraged his circuit riders from doing so, as the salary and extended circuit travel were not conducive to family life. Beaver, because of his fluency in German, was a valuable exception. He married Elizabeth Gilbert in 1801, lived in Pfoutz Valley, Perry County PA, and was appointed by Asbury in 1810 as “missionary to the Germans.” He did not have to ride a circuit, but could support his family (as a tanner and a merchant) while preaching as he could. Elizabeth died in 1808, six days after giving birth to her eighth child, and Peter married her sister Hannah, with whom he had five more children. The Beavers moved to New Berlin in 1828, where Peter operated a store and organized a German-speaking Methodist congregation. He is the namesake of Beaver Memorial UMC in Lewisburg and the grandfather of Pennsylvania governor (1887-1890) James Addams Beaver.

Prominent members of the Evangelical Association buried in the New Berlin cemetery include the following.

- Rev. James Barber (1797-1867) – Evangelical preacher and superintendent. An extended article on James Barber appears in the 2007 volume of *The Chronicle*, pages 4-33.

- Mary Maize Barber (1805-1870) – daughter of Michael Maize and wife of James Barber.

- Rev. Thomas Buck (1789-1842) – Evangelical preacher and superintendent. He served as conference president 1829-33 and as president of the notable 1839 General Conference. He is the father of Evangelical preachers Rev. Solomon T. Buck (1838-1908) and Rev. Henry W. Buck Sr. (1843-1916) and the grandfather of Evangelical preacher Rev. Henry W. Buck Jr. (1883-1971) – combining for over 125 years of active Evangelical ministry.

- Rev. Aaron Ezra Gobble (1856-1929) – Evangelical educator. He was associated with all three stages of the Evangelical educational institution in New Berlin – being the principal of Union Seminary 1879-1887, the president of Central Pennsylvania College 1887-1902, and on the faculty at Albright College in Myerstown 1902-1929.

- Michael Maize (1770-1841) – first Evangelical class leader west of the Susquehanna. He was the one who first opened his home to Evangelical preaching in the area, who arranged for preaching in the New Berlin schoolhouse, and on whose land the first Evangelical camp meeting was held.

- Rev. George Miller (1774-1816) – Evangelical preacher. One of Albright's early (1798) converts, he was the appointed itinerant who gained the first converts and opened the Evangelical work in Union County. Following Albright's death he became the *de facto* leader of the Evangelical Association 1809-13. His other contributions include editing the denomination's first Disciple (1808), and producing the first biography of Jacob Albright (1811) and the book *Practical Christianity* (1814). A biography of George Miller appears in Stapleton's 1896 *Evangelical Annals*, pages 522-525.

- George Miller (1794-1859) – first printer of The Evangelical Association. This very skilled and highly recommended young man, who was already a member of the Evangelical Association, was secured in 1816 to move to New Berlin as the denomination's first resident printer – a post he ably filled during the entire 20-year existence of the first building.

- Rev. Solomon Miller (1777-1820) – Evangelical preacher and publishing agent. He was the first manager (1816-1820) of the denomination's publishing interests in New Berlin.

- Azima Vallerchamp (1805-1854) – Evangelical preacher. He located and settled in New Berlin so his children could receive a solid education at Union Seminary. That strategy apparently worked well, as two of his sons become dentists – John in Harrisburg, and Wesley in New Berlin.

- Ruthanna Davis Vallerchamp (1805-1886) – wife of Azima Vallerchamp. Following her husband's death she enjoyed an extensive ministry as unofficial house mother to the students of Union Seminary. An extended biographical sketch of Mrs. Vallerchamp appears in Stapleton's 1908 *Flashlights on Evangelical History*, pages 145-165.

Other Locations given on the Marker/Map

The interpretive markers added to the new Berlin Heritage Landmark site in 2014 include a map of the town of New Berlin identifying the locations described about plus the following sites relevant to United Methodism.

The Vallerchamp Home Site – southwest corner of Market and Hazel streets.

Emmanuel United Methodist Church – southwest corner of Plum and High streets, originally a United Brethren building. Although Christian Newcomer itinerated through Buffalo Valley as early as 1796, no United Brethren classes were formed in the area until much later. J.B. Dougherty of the Middleburg circuit organized a class in New Berlin in 1857, and a church building was erected the following year. The church was closed and sold in 1935. In 1950 it was reopened by the Central Pennsylvania Conference (formerly Evangelical) of the EUB denomination and has been active ever since.

Francis C. Hoffman House – southwest corner of Front and Walnut streets. Rev. F.C. Hoffman served on the faculty at Union Seminary 1861-73. He was principal of Union Seminary from 1865 to 1869 – difficult years caused in part by the Civil War. The institution had been closed from 1863 to 1865, and re-opened in 1865 without a charter and with a severely reduced field of patronage, but Hoffman guided the school through the troubles – partly by dropping Greek and Latin from the curriculum and advertising the institution as “An English and Scientific School for Young Men.” This decision was not popular with the trustees, however, and led to his resignation as principal in 1869. In 1867 he married Lizzie C. German, an 1859 graduate of the school who had stayed on to work with the female enrollees. His father Rev. Francis A. Hoffman served under appointment in the Evangelical Association for 62 years, and his mother was an aunt to Bishop W.W. Orwig. He is a brother to gospel song-writer Elisha A. Hoffman (1839-1929).

Site of the Methodist Episcopal Church – south side of Market Street, second lot west of Union Street. This building was erected in 1845, but the congregation was never strong. The final blow came in 1876, when a storm blew off the roof. The church was torn down, and the lot was sold in 1879.

William W. Orwig House – south side of High Street, second house east of Union Street. An effective pastor, superintendent and editor of the denomination’s *Der Chrisliche Borschafter*, Rev. W.W. Orwig (1810-1889) served as principal of Union Seminary 1856-59 – followed by a term as Bishop 1859-63. He is both a first cousin of and the father-in-law of gospel song-writer Elisha A. Hoffman (1839-1929).

Endnotes for Part I

ⁱ During the Revolutionary War, British Colonel John Butler recruited a regiment of Loyalists augmented by Seneca Native Americans to attack the Wyoming Valley. The forces arrived in the valley on June 30, having alerted the settlers to their approach by killing three men working at an unprotected gristmill on June 28. The next day Colonel Butler sent a surrender demand to the militia at Fort Wintermute, and the defenders surrendered the fort with all their arms and stores. On July 3, however, the British saw that the defenders were gathering in great numbers outside of Forty Fort and Butler organized an ambush. He ordered Fort Wintermute set on fire, and the Patriots, believing it signified a British retreat, advanced rapidly. Butler told the Seneca to lie flat on the ground so as not to be seen. The militia advanced to within a hundred yards of the British rangers and fired three volleys at them. The Seneca rose to their feet, fired one time, and then charged the militia to engage in hand to hand combat.

Accounts indicate the battle lasted about 45 minutes. An order to reform the Patriot line instead turned into a frantic rout as the inexperienced militiamen panicked and began to run. It became a deadly footrace, from which only about sixty Patriots escaped. The victorious Loyalists and Native Americans killed almost all who were captured, and only 5 prisoners were taken alive. Butler reported that 227 scalps were taken by his Native American allies.

A monument in the borough of Wyoming, at Wyoming Avenue (US 11) and Susquehanna Avenue marks the gravesite and bones of the victims and includes the list of those killed in the massacre.

Located along Susquehanna Avenue near Seventh Street in Wyoming is one of the most interesting artifacts of the Wyoming Massacre – Queen Esther’s Rock. Named for Queen Esther Montour, the descendant of several "mixed" marriages between white settlers and Indians, this large rock marks the spot where, allegedly, following the Battle of Wyoming, Queen Esther, angered by the recent death of her son, lined 16 American colonists around a huge stone and personally smashed their skulls with her tomahawk. The site is enclosed by an iron fence and identified by an historical marker.

ⁱⁱ There were two earlier educational institutions of the Evangelical Association that did not survive. The Pittsburg Conference started Albright Seminary at Berlin, Somerset County PA, in 1853 and the Ohio Conference started Greensburg Seminary at Greensburg, Summit County OH, in 1855. Both schools struggled, and during the 1856-57 academic year Albright merged into Greensburg. In 1865 the school was sold, and a short time later Greensburg Seminary passed out of existence.

ⁱⁱⁱ For an excellent account of the publishing house at New Berlin, see *One Hundred Fifty Years: A History of Publishing in the Evangelical United Brethren Church* by John H. Ness, Jr., 1966.