

Edwin Lincoln Eslinger

“Dillsburg’s Quiet Ambassador”

by N. Joel Clary

Rev. Edwin Lincoln Eslinger (1864-1942) is one of those quiet ambassadors of the Gospel of Christ who may have been little-noted by ecclesiastical authorities or historians, but who labored faithfully and effectively in every ministry opportunity with which he was presented. He had no formal advanced education, and he held no positions of authority within the Conference, yet he gained a reputation as an effective preacher and administrator in some of the larger churches within the Conference and in the public arena. The following paragraphs from his conference obituary¹ explain how that came to be.

He received his early education in the public and subscription schools of the community until seventeen years of age, when he was compelled to give up school on account of illness. All further education was secured in the hard school of life through persistent study and application. In 1887 he received a diploma as a graduate of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, a great popular educational institution of that day.

From 1881 to 1885 he was a clerk in the Dillsburg post office, where his father was the postmaster. Four terms he taught school near Dillsburg. It was during the years as teacher and clerk he began the accumulation of books, which grew into a choice library of several thousand volumes. He was a very diligent student, arising at four o’clock in the morning and working far into the night. Here lies the secret of his intellectual development and wide range of knowledge.

In January 1889, shortly after his marriage, he purchased a notebook and prepared a brief biographical sketch of his life up to that point. Because it serves as a good introduction to the man and his personality, that sketch is presented *verbatim* to cover his early years.

Biographical Sketch

I was born in a house owned by Dr. Gorge L. Shearer*, Sr., at the northeast corner of Baltimore and York Streets in Dillsburg, York County PA, on December 5, 1864. I am a son of Augustus N. Eslinger* by his second wife Agnes A. Diller. My ancestry can be traced back to my grandfather on my father’s side and to my great-grandfather on my mother’s side.

My father’s family consisted of seven children, four girls and three boys – three children to his first wife and four to his second. His second wife, my mother,

¹ *Journal of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Church*, 1943, page 208.

*This article references scores of nationally prominent and local persons, and a footnote on each person would certainly make for interesting reading and more appreciation for the text. Instead, Appendices B and C give additional information about selected national prominent and local persons, whose first appearance in the text is marked with an asterisk.

blessed him with one girl and three boys, of whom I am the youngest. At this writing, January 1, 1889, the children are all living but two – Maggie and Lizzie.

I attended the public schools in winter and sometimes subscription schools in the summer – until my seventeenth birthday. Then, partly on account of ill health, I quit attending school. I had for some time past clerked at odd times in the Post Office, as my father was postmaster, and shortly after I quit school I was the regular clerk in the Post Office.

There I remained until August 7, 1885. The Democratic president having been elected in 1884, Mr. L. Ross* was appointed postmaster. I remained with the new postmaster from August 7 to October 1, when I again started to school taught by Mr. J.H. Bradley. I went that winter and the next summer.

On September 30, 1886, I was examined for a Teacher's Certificate by Prof. D.G. Williams, County Superintendent, and got a certificate which averaged $1\frac{1}{2}$. I taught the Stony Run school² that winter 1886-87, and have been teaching it ever since – now in my third winter and one summer session. In August 1887, I was examined by the new County Superintendent, Prof. H.C. Brenneman*, and my certificate averaged $1\frac{7}{36}$.³ In July 1888, examined by the same superintendent I received a certificate which averaged $1\frac{2}{9}$.

I have attended three County Institutes. The first one was held in 1886, between Christmas and New Year's. The principal day instructors were Col. Francis W. Parker* and Dr. Edward Brooks, and the night lecturers were Dr. James Headley ["Success or Failure"], Joseph Cook ["Ultimate America"] and Robert J. Burdette* ["Mission of the Funny Man"]. The second Institute was held in 1887, between Christmas and New Year's. The most eminent day instructors were Dr. J.C. Mendenhall of Indiana, Dr. E.E. Higbee*, State Superintendent Dr. E.O. Lyte, and Dr. G.W. Hull of Millersville – also Prof. Kemp and Miss Boice. The night lecturers that I heard were the Hon. R.G. Horr ["Labor Problems"], Rev. Russell H. Conwell ["The Silver Crown, or Born a King"], and Henry Firth Wood ["The Growth of the Bald Spot"]. There was a concert by the Welsh Prize Singers. The third Institute was held in November 1888, during Thanksgiving week. Prof. Coughlin, Dr. Higbee, Dr. G.M. Philips, Prof. Neff and Miss Coffin were the principal day instructors. The night lecturers were as follows: the Hon. George R. Wendling ["Saul of Tarsus"], Wallace Bruce ["Ready Wit"], Jahu Dewitt Miller* ["Love, Courtship, Marriage"], Prof. R.L. Connick ["Readings and Recitations"].

² The Stony Run school is on the east side of Old York Road, between Dillsburg and Rossville, at the intersection with Meadowview Road. Most recently used for grades one and two until the late 1950's, it is now a private home.

³ Those examined for a teaching certificate were graded in nine areas according to the following scale: 1 = very good, 2 = good, 3 = middling, 4 = poor. The nine individual scores were averaged to produce a final value – with lower scores being better, and Eslinger's move from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $1\frac{7}{36}$ indicating an improvement.

In this connection, I will mention other great lecturers that I have heard.

Dr. George P. Hays	Rev. Wilbur F. Crofts	Dr. O.H. Tiffany*
Dr. George Miller	Dr. P.S. Henson	Dr. W.H. Withrow
Hon. Walter J. Mills	Dr. Josiah Strong*	Bishop Kephart
Bishop Mallalieu	Bishop Bowman	Bishop Castle
Bishop Dickson	Rev. Dr. J.P. Newman	Francis Murphy*
James G. Blaine*	James A. Beaver	

I have been a regular attendant of Sunday School from my youth. When very young I attended two different Lutheran S.S's, but shortly was taken to the M.E. S.S. of this town, where I still attend. In the winter of 1880-81, I was converted at a protracted meeting held in the M.E. Church, Rev. W.A. Carver pastor. I immediately joined the M.E. Church on probation, was baptized some time after in our own house by Rev. W.A. Carver – in the presence of father, mother, and Bro. Alex Billifelt.* In the summer I was taken into the church in full connection, Rev. R.H. Gilbert pastor.

In the Sunday School I have served the following offices: librarian, 1 year; secretary, 2 years; superintendent, 2 years (1886-88). At present, I am a teacher. In the church I am, and have been for two years, on the Evangelism Commission. In the spring of 1887, I was elected steward – and re-elected in 1888.

I was recommended for exhorter's license by the class at this place (Bro. Billifelt, leader) May 15, 1887, and I received my license from Rev. C.V. Hartzell, pastor, May 23, 1887. At the last Quarterly Conference of 1887-88, my exhorter's license was renewed by a vote of the Quarterly Conference. I had been recommended for license to preach during the winter 1887-99, and on May 11, 1888, I was examined and given license by Rev. H.C. Pardoe, presiding elder, Harrisburg District.

On October 9, 1881, a Chautauqua Literary Scientific and Scientific Circle was organized in this town. I was elected secretary, and was re-elected three successive years. I finished my reading during the four years and received my diploma as a graduate of the class of 1887. In the fall of 1886 a Teachers' Local Institute and Lyceum was organized, and I was elected the first regular president. I was present at every Institute but one, and I helped to discuss all the questions but one. The side that I was on was successful four out of six times.

In the spring of 1886, I attended the Central Pennsylvania Conference held at Harrisburg, Pa. I heard Bishops Bowman and Mallalieu, and also Rev. Dr. J.P. Newman, lecture and preach. In the fall of 1886, I attended one of Francis Murphy's temperance meetings at Carlisle and heard this famous advocate of temperance deliver a most powerful appeal.

Since I have received license as an exhorter and preacher, I have spoken at quite a number of places: Methodist churches in Dillsburg, Boiling Springs and

Wellsville; United Brethren churches at Arnolds, Mt. Zion, Franklinton and Chestnut Grove.

In the spring of 1886, my mind seemed to be directed toward a young lady of our town – Miss Minnie C. Berkheimer. In a short time our friendship ripened into a pure, unselfish love – and on my 24th birthday, December 5, 1888, we were united in marriage by Rev. C.V. Hartzell, pastor of the M.E. Church. My wife was born November 17, 1869, and was therefore nineteen years old when we married.

The Teacher

After composing the biographical sketch, E.L. Eslinger used the notebook as a diary for the spring 1889 school semester. Selected entries from the diary give additional insights in the man.

The first two entries set the stage for four themes that run throughout the diary: (1) an awareness of and interest in current events, (2) a concern for books and finances, (3) family/friend relationships, and (4) Christian growth.

Jan 1 – State Legislature met at Harrisburg, Pa. Holiday, no school today. Bought this book today...\$0.25. Father at Harrisburg. Commenced reading the Bible through today.

Jan 3 – Roast at home, Miss Forney of Harrisburg and my wife and I present. No school today. Charles Atticks married at Shiremanstown.*

Teacher Eslinger knew how to walk the line between compassion and firmness. He used his own money to purchase school materials for some students, and he suspended students when necessary. To show their respect and appreciation, the students and their families responded accordingly.

Jan 3 –Bought a drawing slate for Alice Sollenberger ...\$0.10.*

Jan 4 – suspended Bailey Weaver from school.

Jan 10 – Received a present from some of the members of my school – Fleetwood's Life of Christ.

Feb 28 – bought book for Alice Sollenberger...\$0.50.

He also made certain that he did not neglect his spiritual growth and development – attending regularly the Dillsburg M.E. Church, and preaching in various churches as the opportunities arose. And he practiced the Christian charity that he preached from the pulpit.

Jan 13 – Preached at Boiling Springs, wife and I drove up together. Paid in S.S. collection...\$0.05.

Jan 22 – Paid to tramp...\$0.05.

Jan 27 – Preached in the Lutheran Church in Dillsburg Sunday morning.

Mar 2 - Paid for missionary collections...\$0.15

Mar 10 – Paid for Conference minutes...\$0.25. Paid for additional missionary collections...\$0.15. Paid for other collections...\$0.05.

While he certainly did not consider money the most important thing in life, the future pastor was careful to be a wise steward of all with which he had been blessed – as indicated by his accounting for practically every penny.

Jan 10 – Received \$31, for third month's salary for teaching. Paid Raerick...\$1.10. Paid school tax...\$1.00. Paid boarding...\$5.00. Paid A.D. Altland...\$4.50. Put \$15 away and have \$5 in pocketbook.

Jan 11 – Paid Dr. Wolford...\$0.70. Paid for postal cards...\$0.03.*

Jan 19 – Radway's pills...\$0.25. Paid for pair of pants...\$2.00.*

Feb 9 – Bought books for \$1.00. Paid for medicine...\$0.20. Paid for eraser...\$0.05.

As might be expected, the diary also included the usual periodic (but not daily) reports on the weather – and one particular event of note.

Mar 8 – Friday evening at 5:45 an earthquake⁴ shock was sensibly felt by nearly all the persons in town.

The Pastor

While a chronological trip through the pastorates of Rev. Eslinger, lifting up his accomplishments at each appointment, would make an interesting excursion, we approach his ministry in terms of his involvement in four specific areas: temperance, evangelism, food conservation efforts in WWI, and conscientious dual-citizenship. His official pastoral record is given in Appendix A.

Temperance

One of Rev. Eslingers's continuing interests was the Temperance Movement. While serving at Roaring Spring, for example, he is mentioned in the April 29, 1914, Journal of the House of Representatives regarding a petition favoring national prohibition – and he saved a copy of that page among his belongings.

Locally, he spoke out against alcohol at every opportunity. In a paper he prepared in retirement, he lists some of what he considered his major accomplishments at each appointment. Many of those involved the fight against alcohol.

York Ridge Avenue (1890-94) – helped defeat a license close to the church.

Saxton (1907-11) – found 26 licenses when I arrived; had 19 revoked the first year, and all but one the second year.

Roaring Spring (1913-18) – there were no licenses in town, only bootleggers; put two of them in jail.

But temperance was not the only social issue that stirred the good preacher into action. That same paper listing his major accomplishments also includes the

⁴ Records confirm that on March 8, 1889, Lancaster County was at the center of a 4.1 magnitude earthquake, one of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded in Pennsylvania.

following.

Berwick First (1918-23) – opposed street carnivals.

Waynesboro (1923-29) – called for raids and arrests over gambling services in social clubs; broke it up for the time being.

Gettysburg (1933-37) – fought against Sunday movies.

Evangelism

While speaking against social ills is an important ministry – one addressed by Jesus himself – the oft stated primary mission of the church is “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” In this, Rev. Eslinger was not delinquent. In the words of his conference obituary, “Edwin Eslinger was an evangelist of the old school. He proclaimed the good news of salvation and many responded to it. His private records show that hundreds were led to Jesus through his ministry.”

Those private records list, for example, the names and dates of conversion of 99 persons who professed Jesus as Savior during his four years at York Ridge Avenue, his first pastorate. The previously mentioned paper summarizing his ministry lists the following.

New Buffalo (1896-1900) – 68 conversions

Port Royal (1900-02) – 3 good meetings, over 50 conversions

Half Moon (1902-05) – 4 good meetings, over 100 conversions

Martinsburg (1905-07) – 68 conversions, 86 new members

Roaring Spring (1913-18) – over 300 conversions.

That paper estimates the total number of persons who received Jesus during his ministry at “1200 to 1500.”

His conference obituary also states that his long and effective ministry included erecting a new church at New Buffalo, building a parsonage at Saxton, and major church expansions/renovations at three consecutive appointments – Roaring Spring, Berwick First and Waynesboro.

Food Conservation in World War I

The United States Food Administration, created in 1917 and headed by Herbert Hoover, campaigned to convince Americans to voluntarily change their eating habits in order to have enough food to feed our military and starving civilians in Europe. This included conserving wheat, meat, sugar, and fats, so those items could be sent overseas. The Food Administration advocated using alternatives like honey or molasses for sugar and corn or barley for wheat. They educated with memorable slogans, such as “when in doubt, eat potatoes” and “help us observe the Gospel of the clean plate” and invented “Meatless Mondays” and “Wheatless Wednesdays.” To free up transportation for war supplies, they encouraged buying locally produced food, or better still, growing liberty gardens.

To promote and carry out its objectives, the Food Administration appointed an administrator in each state – and in Pennsylvania that person was Henry John Heinz, noted founder of the Pittsburgh-based H.J. Heinz Company. In each county the Food Administration related to the Committee on Public Safety – and in Blair County that committee included two prominent Methodists, Abraham L. Garver* and John Woodcock.* A February 14, 1918, letter from John Woodcock to A.L. Garver, a copy of which was sent to Rev. Eslinger, states in part as follows:

My dear Sir:

The food situation in America and for our Allies has reached so serious a crisis that the American Food Administration has determined that it is absolutely necessary to enlighten the people of America. In order to do this, Mr. Heinz, Food Administrator of this State, has decided to hold mass meetings in all centers of population... We have appointed you chairman of a local Committee to take charge of the public meeting...

I wish you would please call a meeting of this Committee together as soon after the receipt of this letter as possible, in order that you may meet with the General Committee in Altoona on Friday evening ... where we will give you the details as suggested by Mr. Heinz.

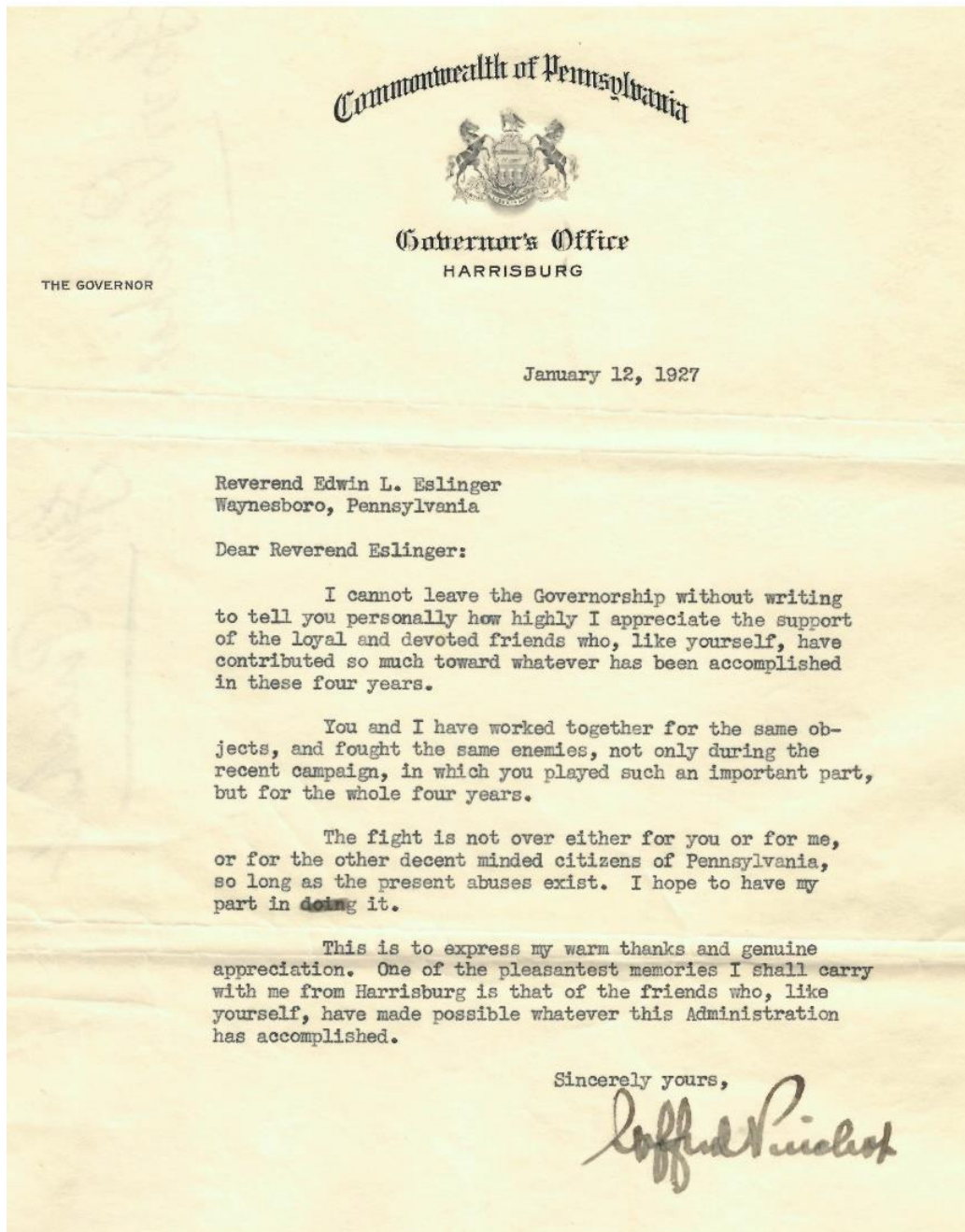
There appears to have been no doubt that the best speaker for such an occasion would be Edwin L. Eslinger, then the pastor at Roaring Spring. Subsequent letters between the parties involved reveal the arrangements. One week Rev. Eslinger was scheduled to speak at the mass meeting in the Tyrone YMCA auditorium on Tuesday, address the Taylor Township High School (Roaring Spring) student body on Wednesday, and speak at the Hollidaysburg court house on Thursday. The following Wednesday, he was scheduled to speak at the Altoona mass meeting. That the good preacher did not disappoint the local Committee or the general public is confirmed by a clipping from the Altoona Tribune praising “the Rev. Eslinger, who for more than an hour held the deepest attention of his audience, as he with convincing force and earnest eloquence, told of the situation that confronts this nation today and the absolute necessity of the conservation of food.”

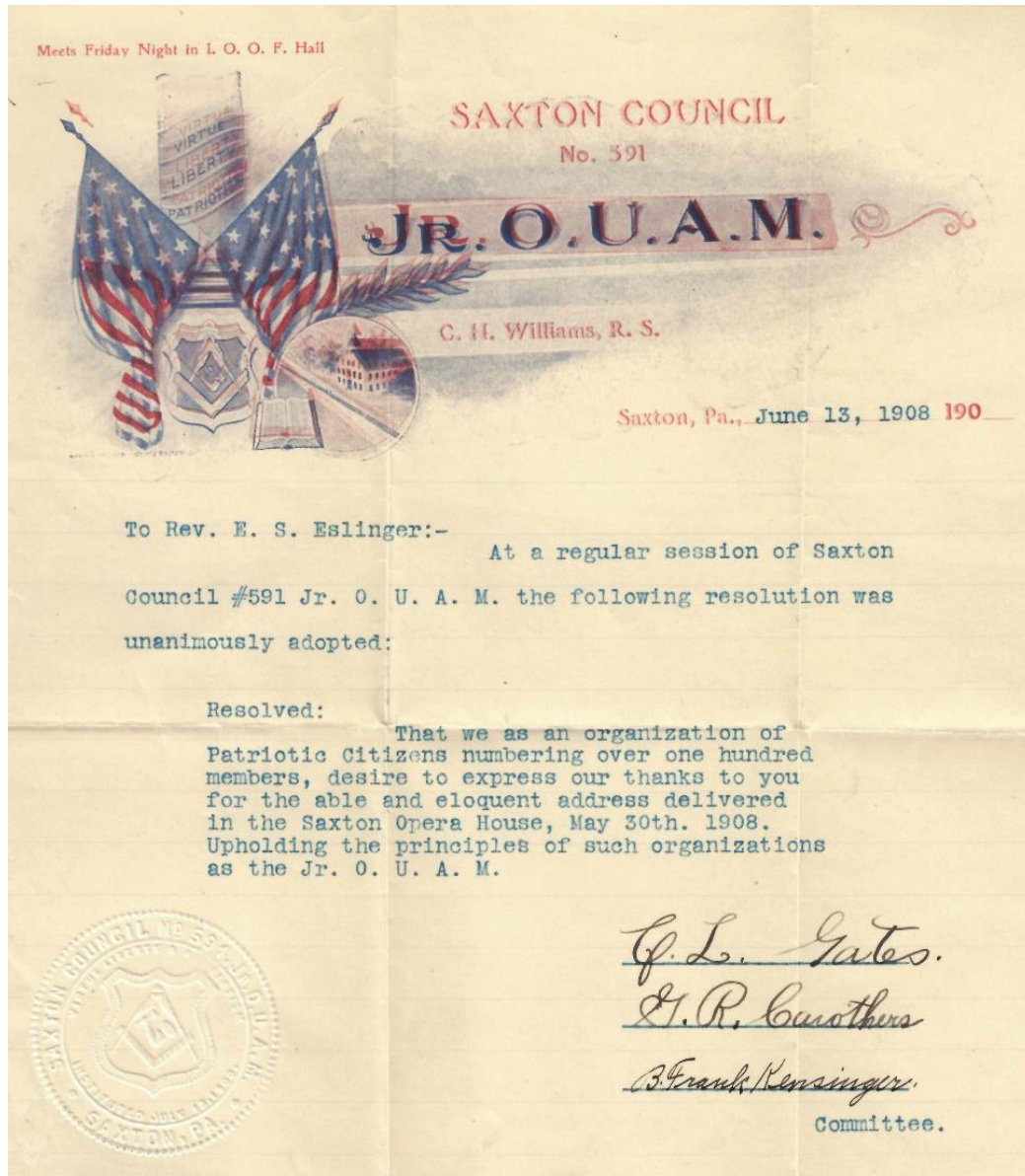
Conscientious Dual-Citizenship

Rev. Eslinger’s involvement as an American citizen certainly included strong support for the War Effort at home and for those who carried the fight to the enemy. It also manifested itself in his interest in local civic and patriotic organizations and his support of decent, like-minded elected officials. Among the letters of thanks and commendation he received are the ones on the following pages from Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot and the Jr. O.U.A.M.

He was also a faithful citizen of the Kingdom of God, building congregations both spiritually and numerically wherever he ministered. Letters from former parishioners preserved among his personal effects speak to his Christian example and the impact he had on those he served. Rev. Edwin L. Eslinger was one of the many little-recognized pastors in our United Methodist connection who labored out of the spotlight in significant ways – a quiet

ambassador from Dillsburg, who dedicated himself to the cause of Christ and had an influence far beyond his limited formal education.





Note: the Junior Order of United American Mechanics is a fraternal order that at one time had state and local councils in nearly every state and a home for orphans of deceased members in Tiffin OH. Originally anti-Catholic and strongly nativist, the group has abandoned those positions. Its membership peaked at over 250,000 in the 1920's and now stands at about 8,000.

Appendix A. Service Record of E.L. Eslinger

ESLINGER, EDWIN LINCOLN

Born: 12-5-1864 Dillsburg PA married: Minnie Coover Berkheimer
Died: 7-28-1942 Waynesboro PA obit: Central PA Conference 1941, 220

1890 admitted on trial, recommended by Dillsburg & Wellsville
1892 ordained deacon
1894 ordained elder

Interment: Dillsburg Cemetery, Dillsburg PA
Obit: Central PA Conference 1943, 208

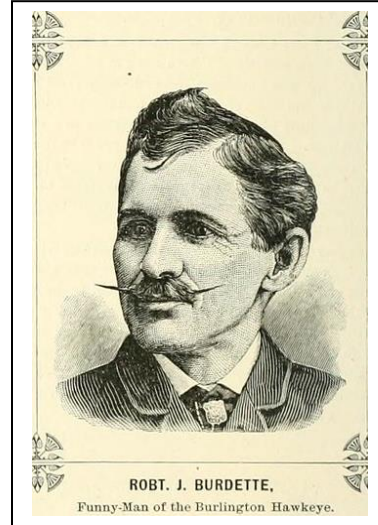
1890-94	York Ridge Avenue
1894-96	Harrisburg Epworth
1896-00	Liverpool
1900-02	Port Royal
1902-05	Half Moon
1905-07	Martinsburg
1907-11	Saxton
1911-13	Huntingdon Fifteenth Street
1913-18	Roaring Spring
1918-23	Berwick First
1923-29	Waynesboro
1929-33	Clearfield Trinity
1933-37	Gettysburg
1937	retired

Note: Edwin L. Eslinger retired to Waynesboro and is reported to have supplied Greencastle in his retirement. Mrs. Eslinger is a second-cousin of the father of the noted Rev. Charles F. Berkheimer (1896-1968), former historian of the Central Pennsylvania Conference.

Appendix B. Selected Nationally Prominent Persons in the Eslinger Story

Blaine, James Gillespie (1830-1893) – a founder of the Republican party, and its 1884 presidential candidate. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives (including 6 years as Speaker), the Senate and as Secretary of State.

Burdette, Rev. Robert Jones (1844-1914) – author, minister and nationally-known speaker. Writing as the “Funny Man” humorist for a Burlington IA newspaper when he crossed paths with Eslinger, he later became pastor of the Pasadena CA Presbyterian Church 1899-1906, founder of the Temple Baptist Church of Los Angeles 1906-1909, and a regular columnist for the L.A. *Times*. A Civil War veteran, he also engaged in at least one speaking tour in Europe.



Higbee, Elnathan Elisha (1830-1889) – PA Superintendent of Public Instruction (1875-1889). A gifted teacher with formal training in mathematics, botany, classical languages and theology, he is also the author and/or translator of several lesser-known hymn texts

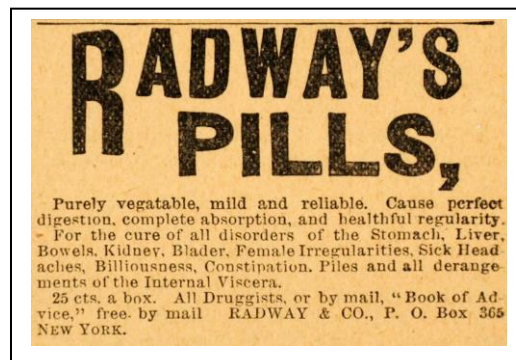
Miller, Jahu Dewitt (1857-1911) – noted humorist, lecturer, bibliophile and Methodist lay preacher. He died in Boise ID on a Chautauqua speaking tour.

Murphy, Francis (1836-1907) – noted temperance evangelist. Born in Ireland, he immigrated to the US at the age of 16. Murphy fought in the Civil War and served as a chaplain in the Spanish American War. He also carried his message to Britain and Australia, eventually settling in Los Angeles. A dynamic speaker, he is said to have induced 16 million people to sign his temperance pledge.

Parker, Colonel Francis Wayland (1837-1902) – Civil War Union officer, pioneer in reform methods of teaching, called the “father of progressive education.”

Radway's Pills – a popular late nineteenth-century medicine described in the 1894 newspaper ad at the right.

Josiah Strong (1847-1916) – American editor, author, missionary supporter and early leader in the Social Gospel movement. He was controversial due to his beliefs about race and methods of converting people to Christianity. His 1885 book *Our Country*, for example, argues that Anglo-Saxons are a superior race who must “Christianize and civilize” the “savage” races.



Tiffany, Otis Henry (1825-1891) – humorist, speaker and author of the 1881 *Gems for the Fireside*. He also was a Methodist preacher and had taught math at Dickinson College 1848-57.

Appendix C. Selected Local Persons in the Eslinger Story

Atticks, Charles (1867-1907) – family friend who married America Ohmit 1/2/1889. This marriage seems to have met with multiple tragedies. Charles died at age 39, their first child Stanley (1889-1925) died at age 35, and a later child Merhle (1901-02) died as an infant. They settled in Steelton.

Billifelt, Alexander – an 1836 charter member of the Dillsburg ME class. He served as chief burgess of Dillsburg 1857-58. The 1870 federal census places him and his wife Eliza in York city.

Brenneman, Henry C. (1858-1914) – York County superintendent of schools 1887-93. Born in York County, he attended the Evangelical Association's Union Seminary in New Berlin, graduated from the Millersville State Normal School in 1880, and later became a prominent York attorney.

Eslinger, Augustus Nicholas (1827-1909) – father of E.L. Eslinger, postmaster of Dillsburg 1863-85 and 1889-93. A strong union supporter, he gave his son the middle name Lincoln in honor of the President. In 1902 he authored and published the book *Local History of Dillsburg, Pa.*, which includes accounts of the two Confederate cavalry incursions of Dillsburg.

Garver, Abraham Lincoln (1858-1920) – general manager of Roaring Spring's Blank Book Company, which by the 1920's was the world's third leading maker of accounting books and school stationery. He was an active member of the Roaring Spring ME Church.

Ross, Lemuel (1835-1916) – Dillsburg postmaster during the 1885-1889 Democratic presidency of Grover Cleveland. His *Harrisburg Telegraph* obituary reports the "peculiar incident" that he was one of five 80-year-old friends born in Rossville within 100 yards of each other whose friendship as playmates had continued across the miles for 8 decades – the others being John M. Underwood of Mechanicsburg PA, Thomas Hayward of Baltimore MD, Mrs. Caroline Cocklin of Bowmansdale PA, and Abraham M. Byers of Aledo IL. Although not Quakers, he and his ancestors (for whom the village of Rossville was named) are buried in the nearby Warrington Friends Meeting House Cemetery.

Shearer, Dr. George L. (1801-1878) – Dillsburg physician, and one of its leading citizens. He was the borough's first chief burgess, its postmaster 1828-45, a principal investor in the 1873 Dillsburg to Mechanicsburg railroad, a strong advocate for public schools, and the owner of substantial commercial properties.

Sollenberger, Alice A. (1879-1961) – student for whom Eslinger bought materials. Daughter of David Sollenberger and Mary (Barnes) Sollenberger, she later married a Jacob A. Donson and is buried in the Dillsburg Cemetery.

Wolford, Dr. Martin L. (1853-1921) – Dillsburg physician. He graduated from the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia in 1880 and practiced in Dillsburg before relocating to Harrisburg in the early 1890's. He is buried in the Dillsburg Cemetery.

Woodcock, John (1886-1954) – Hollidaysburg attorney in practice with his father William Irwin Woodcock. He was an active member of the Hollidaysburg ME Church, and chairman of the trustees.