

Rev. Willis W. Willard, Sr.

[editor's note: One of the last projects former conference archivist and historian Dr. Charles Berkeimer was pursuing at the time of his death in 1968 was a compilation of "ministerial reminiscences" of veterans of the cross, so that their stories could be preserved and passed on to future generations. That vision is now partially realized each spring by the conference's Commission on Archives and History taping interviews at pre-arranged times during annual conference of those retiring pastors willing to so participate.

Dr. Berkheimer started by writing to the most senior of the retired pastors, and had contacted only a few of them before his earthly ministry came to an unexpected conclusion. Unfortunately, virtually all of Berkheimer's efforts ended with responses of regret due to failing health and/or memory – or of rambling greetings with news about families instead of reminiscences about ministry.

One usable response to Berkheimer's request came from W.W. Willard Sr., as indicated in the following correspondence with his wife and his son W.W. Willard Jr. Willis Wardner Willard Sr. (1881-1967) served 42 years under appointment and passed away six months after dictating his story to his wife Helen. His son Rev. Willis Wardner Willard Jr. (1909-1982) served 43 years under appointment and was born during his father's pastorate at Gatchelville.

The statement provided by the family is so eloquent, and presents so well the message intended by *The Chronicle*, that the letter from Willis Jr. and the statement dictated by Willis Sr. will be presented without additional notes or commentary.]

West Side Methodist Church
317 Nichols Street
Clearfield, Penna. 16830

February 13, 1967

Dear Brother Berkheimer,

Enclosed is a copy of some material which my mother asked me to type up and forward to you concerning Dad's rural work. His memory is failing, and he was not able to write it up himself, so she wrote out a sketch of it.

Hoping this finds you both keeping well this winter.

With best wishes,
Cordially,
Willis

RURAL WORK OF W.W. WILLARD, SR.

Graduated from Drew Theological Seminary – 1908.

First Conference appointment – a little country church in Gatchelville, Pa.

The parish extended three miles in each direction.

There we saw the need for a dedicated ministry and careful pastoral work. After two years there, we spent six years among the miners in the soft coal region – four years at Riddlesburg, and two at Hopewell. There we saw the need for dedicated ministers among those fine people – ministers who were willing to stay, and not use it as a mere stepping-stone to larger churches.

We then were sent to Warriors Mark, and after four years the call came from the Board of Home Missions for us to go back to the mining towns. We answered the call and spend three years on a five-point circuit – Robertsdale, Dudley, Wood, Coalmont and Broad Top City. Here we made a map and survey of every home, and we saw the work develop until it became two parishes under two pastors. While doing this work in our own parish, we were sent by the Board to teach pastors in pastors' schools and colleges. We went to West Virginia Wesleyan in Buckhannon, West Va., and to Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia, where we taught colored ministers – a rich experience. Also, we were sent to Minnesota and Wisconsin, and to Drew University's Pastor's School one summer.

Our aim was to inspire young ministers to see the need for dedication to rural churches. In this we believe we promoted interest in rural work in the Central Pennsylvania Conference. Bishop Hughes appointed us to Woolrich, where we continued to go out on missions for the Board. While at Woolrich, we taught rural work and Bible at Dickinson Seminary, Williamsport, for five years. As our ministry began in a country church, so our last year before retiring we requested to be sent to a country circuit – Stewartstown. One minister asked what we had done that the Conference was demoting us. But we knew – and God knew – our love for country work, and He alone knows the results of our ministry.

After retirement in 1947, our interest in rural work still strong, we served two small churches, Pine and McElhatten, for seven years.

– written by Mrs. Willis W. Willard, Sr.
from the reminiscences of her husband
February 13, 1967