

## **Beach Haven Circuit of the Methodist Episcopal Church**

Beach Haven circuit of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church came into existence in March 1875, when those churches were split off from the very large Mifflinville circuit. Beach Haven continued to be an appointment for another 145 years, through two denominational unions, until holding a final worship and decommissioning service on October 25, 2020, as a congregation of the Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The village of Beach Haven is an unincorporated community in Salem township, Luzerne County, between US 11 and the Susquehanna River, 3 miles east of Berwick PA. Despite its location along a major waterway, the community received its name from the Beach family. Nathan Beach (1763-1847), the founder, is buried in the nearby Beach Grove Cemetery. He came into the Wyoming Valley in 1769 with the Connecticut settlers.<sup>1</sup> His mother is reported to have been the first white woman to cross the Blue Mountains into the Wyoming Valley, and his brother Stephen is reported to have been the first white child born on the banks of the North Branch of the Susquehanna River. He was a survivor of the 1788 Wyoming Massacre and instrumental in bringing the Susquehanna and Lehigh Turnpike and the North Branch Canal to the area.

The first church building in Beach Haven was a frame structure, on the west side of Mill Creek by the railroad tracks and open to all denominations, erected on land donated by Nathan's son Josiah Beach. The Methodist Episcopal class was organized in 1848<sup>2</sup> and worshiped in the wooden union church until their present brick structure was dedicated in February 1870 – on land which had been deeded to the Methodists March 24, 1868. The old frame church stood empty from 1870 until it burned in 1877 from a spark off a passing locomotive.

Beach Haven was part of Berwick circuit until 1874. In 1874, Mifflinville circuit was split off from Berwick; and the following year, Beach Haven was split off from Mifflinville. Reliable records for Beach Haven begin at that point, and this history of the charge will begin at that point and be presented in three segments.

### **1875-1880**

In 1875, when the Beach Haven circuit was formed, it embraced the following seven appointments as described in the opening comments of the original membership book.

---

<sup>1</sup> In fact, Salem township was named for Salem CT – which, in turn, had originally been named New Salem CT because its largest landowners had come from Salem MA.

<sup>2</sup> The March 22, 1848, *Christian Advocate* describes Beach Haven on the Berwick circuit as “a new appointment at which we have just formed a class of 15 members.”

Beach Haven – 49 members, 5 probationers  
Foundryville – 24 members, 1 probationer  
Summer Hill – 29 members, 0 probationers  
Schloyerville – 22 members, 3 probationers  
Kensey’s – 16 members, 4 probationers  
Beach Grove – 3 members, 0 probationers  
Waltons – 5 members, 1 probationer  
Total – 148 members, 14 probationers  
Total members and probationers – 162

That original membership book also includes the following statements about the first two Quarterly Conferences of the new charge.

- The first Quarterly Conference was held in Beach Haven April 28<sup>th</sup>, 1875, and the charge was organized with the following Official Board:  
Class leaders – James Belford, Albert Brown, John L. Hassler, John H. Smith, John Rosman, Samuel Kensey, David Thompson  
Stewards – William Edwards, Nathan Rabert, Peter Hayman, Joseph Stackhouse, Alex Santee, Conrad Croff  
Local Preachers – Andrew Lutz
- At the second Quarterly Meeting held at Foundryville June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1875, the total membership was 175, showing a net increase for the quarter of 13 souls.

Apparently the charge lacked strong leadership, as the next entry in the book states the following. “No history has been kept since the above was written. Coming upon the charge April 1881, I found the spiritual condition low, many of the membership having lost all vitality in religion. No prayer meeting was held at Beach Haven, and all the membership was merged in one class.”

Beach Haven, the main focus of this article, will be covered in more detail. Information available at the conference archives reveals the following about each of other appointments.

Foundryville and Summer Hill are communities in Briar Creek township, Columbia County, north of Berwick.

•Foundryville – Both this and the Summer Hill class appear to trace their beginning to a powerful 1867 revival led by the Columbia circuit of Evangelical Association in the church building adjacent to the cemetery at Summer Hill. The building here was optimistically erected by the Evangelical Association following the revival, and a class was established with 16 members.<sup>3</sup> But that class could not

---

<sup>3</sup> As a result of that revival, the Evangelical Association also established a class at Beach Haven with 20 members that met in the brick school house. But when the Methodists dedicated their own building in 1870, the Evangelicals lost their momentum in Beach Haven. The class did, however struggle on until 1903 when its three remaining members finally agreed to disband. One indirect reason for the demise of the Beach Haven class was the fact that two of its stronger

compete with the Methodist class established there in August 1867, and the building was sold to the Methodists.<sup>4</sup> The class was never large, and the appointment was discontinued July 7, 2013 – the property being sold to the adjacent landowner.

- Summer Hill – This class was organized in 1868, also an outgrowth of the revival led by the Evangelical Association. They continued worshiping in the union church by the cemetery until erecting their present building in 1882<sup>5</sup> across from the cemetery on land donated by Solomon H. and Boann (Lockard) Bower.<sup>6</sup>

Schloyerville and Kensey are in the portion of Luzerne County across the Susquehanna River from Beach Haven, in Nescopeck and Hollenback townships respectively. Although inconvenient to reach from Beach Haven today, in former days they were easily accessible using Hicks Ferry at Wapwallopen, the only public crossing of the river between Berwick and Shickshinny.

- Schloyerville – The community is now called Briggsville. The Methodists probably met in the Lutheran and Reformed church there before erecting their own building on adjacent land in 1883. A Schloyerville charge (later re-named Wapwallopen when the parsonage was erected there) was formally split off from Beach Haven in 1888. Schloyerville continued as an appointment until 1929, and the site is now a vacant lot adjacent to the Lutheran and Reformed cemetery.

- Kensey [Kinsey] school house – This school house was about one mile south of Wapwallopen and two miles east of Schloyerville. It continued to be an active appointment until 1886, when it was replaced by Powder Glen.<sup>7</sup>

The final three school house appointments are north of Beach Haven in Salem township, Luzerne County. They were located on Beach Grove, Mingle Inn, and Shickshinny Valley roads – which head west off from U.S. route 11 at 6, 7 and 10 miles respectively while traveling from Beach Haven to Shickshinny.

- Beach Grove school house – The school house stood near the present Beach Grove Cemetery, final resting place of the area’s namesake Nathan Beach. It remained an active appointment until 1882.

---

members left to become Evangelical preachers. Class leader J. Monroe Brader and exhorter John H. Hertz joined the itinerant ministry in 1872 and 1877 respectively, and both went on to enjoy long and successful careers.

<sup>4</sup> As reported on page 25 of the March 1870 journal of the Central Pennsylvania Conference ME: “Berwick circuit has also added two churches to her list during the past year. One was secured by purchase at Foundryville, and is a substantial brick [sic], recently erected, sufficiently large for our present wants. The other is at Beach Haven, on the Lackawanna Railroad, and is also a tasteful brick structure, thirty-eight by fifty, seating four hundred persons, and was dedicated Sunday last by Rev. Dashiell.”

<sup>5</sup> The *Conference News* reports [7/15/1882] that the cornerstone was laid on July 7<sup>th</sup> and [12/15/1882] that the building was dedicated free of debt on November 26<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> The Evangelical Association eventually erected their own new building in 1893 on land diagonally across the crossroads from the cemetery.

<sup>7</sup> Powder Glen [a.k.a. Powder Hole] first appears, along with Kinsey, in the *Missionary Contributions* in 1882. Both appointments appear until 1886, after which only Powder Glen appears – and its list includes persons previously given at Kinsey

- Waltons [Hickory Swamp] school house – This was the longest enduring school house preaching place, remaining an active appointment until 1924. There were, however, various attempts to supply and keep membership records off-and-on at all three of the Salem township school houses [Beach Grove, Waltons and Dodsons] into the early 1930’s.

- Shickshinny Valley [Dodson] school house – This appointment is listed on the Berwick circuit prior to 1874 and on the Beach Haven circuit after 1876. Its absence from the opening comments in the original membership book is unexplained. It remained an active appointment until 1886.

## 1880-1929

For five years, Beach Haven circuit existed with 6 appointments north of the Susquehanna and 2 to the south, linked only by Hicks ferry at Wapwallopen. Furthermore, the two separated southern appointments seemed to be growing. In 1880, a parallel situation had developed in the Wyoming Conference – where 3 appointments within the Wapwallopen Creek drainage basin, separated by mountains from the rest the conference and from their circuit base at Mountain Top, had been experiencing growth. These 3 appointments were Slocum, Stairville and Rippletown.

- Slocum – This class had erected a building in the center of Slocum township at Schmid's Corners in 1860.<sup>8</sup>

- Stairville – This class met in schoolhouse before erecting a church building in 1873. A new church building was erected in 1896.<sup>9</sup>

- Rippletown – This class was still meeting in the Rippletown schoolhouse.<sup>10</sup> At some point the congregation either assumed ownership of the school building and remodeled it to suit the purposes or erected their own modest chapel nearby.

In 1880, it was agreed by all concerned to have the 3 Wyoming Conference appointments join their 2 neighboring Central Pennsylvania Conference appointments and be serviced by an assistant from the Beach Haven circuit. Unfortunately, the official minutes of each Conference and the journal of the 1880 General Conference – which, in theory, should have had a say in the matter – are strangely silent about these arrangements. But various local records agree on the basics and allow for a reconstruction of what actually occurred.

While the appointments in the Wapwallopen drainage basin eventually became the Wapwallopen charge, that did not happen immediately. For a few

---

<sup>8</sup> This was in the community of Slocum, at the intersection of Slocum and Schmid's Roads, the present site of the township park. Schmid's Road is also known as Aces Road, and the name Schmid has several variations – including Smith and Schmidt. The church building was relocated to the eastern part of the township in 1909 and is now the Slocum UMC, north of Slocum Corners.

<sup>9</sup> *Central Pennsylvania Conference Journal*, 1896, page 66.

<sup>10</sup> See “The Haunted Schoolhouse of Rippletown” in Appendix I.

years, all the statistics and all the Missionary Contributions of the appointments on both sides of the Susquehanna were reported as part of the Beach Haven circuit. It appears from local records that the pastor Beach Haven employed an assistant to service the five churches south of the Susquehanna while he concentrated his efforts on the north side of the river.

In 1880, that position was filled by local pastor Andrew Lutz, apparently associated the Lehman Church of the Wyoming Conference. Others who filled that role cannot be identified with certainty, but beginning in 1886 the appointments south of the river are listed separately as the Schloyerville charge. For the first two years, Schloyerville was served by David Larish, a located former member of the Wyoming Conference living in Berwick. After that, the circuit was supplied by “regular” ordained or local pastors of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. In 1895, the name of the circuit was changed to Wapwallopen – the location of the charge’s first parsonage.

One significant incident in the life of the Beach Haven congregation during this time was the addition of the belfry to the church building in 1884. A bell approximately three feet in diameter was cast by Henry McShane & Company, Baltimore MD, and had an extra clapper on the side – which was to be tolled by hand for funerals. The bell was inscribed, “In memory of the late Daniel Brader who died September 7, 1883, aged 55 years, 6 months, and 20 days, by his family.” Brader was a canal boat builder and prominent citizen.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, no statistics for individual appointments on the charges are given until 1916 – and the only conference documentation for the existence of an appointment is its mention in the missionary giving report, the superintendent’s report, or some special circumstance requiring conference attention.

From 1898-1900, however, a special “Statistics #5” report details the financial shares for each appointment. The financial shares assessed each appointment give an indication of the relative strength of each, and the total assessed each charge provides a basis for comparing that relative strength. For Beach Haven and Wapwallopen, those reports indicate the following average percentage contribution toward the charge assessments.

Beach Haven	Wapwallopen
42% Beach Haven	31% Powder Glen
18% Summer Hill	27% Schloyerville
16% Foundryville	18% Stairville
14% Shickshinny Valley	17% Slocum
<u>10%</u> Waltons	<u>7%</u> Rippletown
100%	100%

---

<sup>11</sup> The North Branch Canal, which existed from 1828 to 1901, was a main factor in the growth of Beach Haven, which was the site of both a boat-building industry and a weigh lock – a specialized canal lock designed to determine the weight of barges in order to assess toll based on the weight and value of the cargo (and required the unladen weight of the barge to be known).

In addition, the fact that Wapwallopen’s assessment was 98% that of Beach Haven’s indicates that the two charges were equally strong.

Another valuable resource for documenting individual appointments on charges is a list in the 1915 journal of every appointment and the status of the building in which the appointment was meeting. No figure following an appointment indicates a Methodist-owned church building. Other figures indicate 1 – a union church building owned in part by the Methodists; 2 – a rented church building; 3 – a school house; 4 – some other building or hall; 5 – a church building of another denomination. For Beach Haven and Wapwallopen, that report indicates the following.

Beach Haven	Wapwallopen
Beach Haven	Powder Glen
Summer Hill	Schloyerville
Foundryville	Stairville
Shickshinny Valley – 3	Slocum
Waltons – 3	Rippletown <sup>12</sup> – 3

The two circuits continued without major change until 1929, when the Wapwallopen charge was dismantled. At the end of 1928, Powder Glen and Wapwallopen reported no members<sup>13</sup>; Schloyerville reported 27 members, but no financial contribution to the charge. Those three appointments were abandoned in 1929 and Rippletown (31 members), Slocum (60 members) and Stairville (55 members) were returned to the Wyoming Conference.<sup>14</sup>

During these years, as illustrated by the photographs on the following page, the Beach Haven appointment boasted one of the finest rural church buildings and parsonages in the conference.

---

<sup>12</sup> The Rippletown appointment is still listed as meeting in a schoolhouse. This is confusing as the building reportedly ceased being used as a school by the 1880’s, and tradition says that the congregation had either come into ownership of the building and remodeled it into a small chapel or had erected their own small chapel on the site – which was replaced by a building across from the cemetery in 1926. It could be that despite the oral tradition and the fact that the building had been remodeled into a chapel, that it was still not owned by the congregation.

<sup>13</sup> As explained in Appendix II, Powder Glen no longer had a building. The Wapwallopen appointment never owned a church building.

<sup>14</sup> *Wyoming Conference Journal*, 1929, pages 107-108. In the Wyoming Conference, Rippletown was renamed Albert and placed with Mountaintop. In a strange and temporary arrangement, Slocum (now re-located near Slocum Corners) was placed with West Nanticoke, and Stairville was placed with Wanamie and Alden.



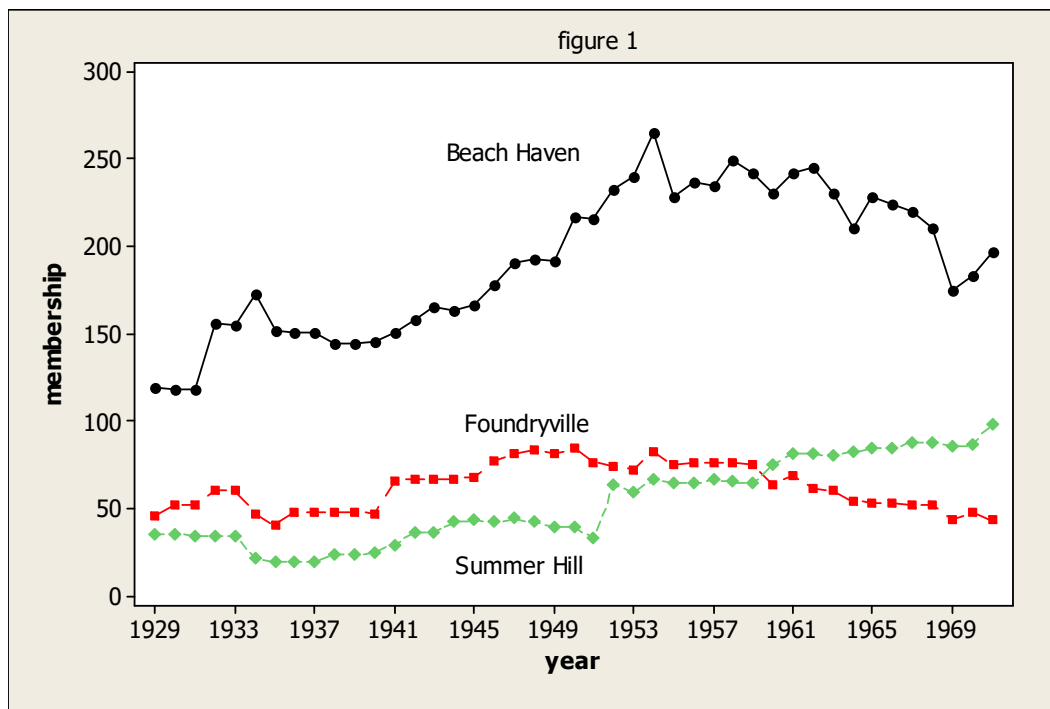
Beach Haven church and parsonage - 1903



Beach Haven parsonage and Rev. Abner C. Logan family – 1903

**1929-2020**

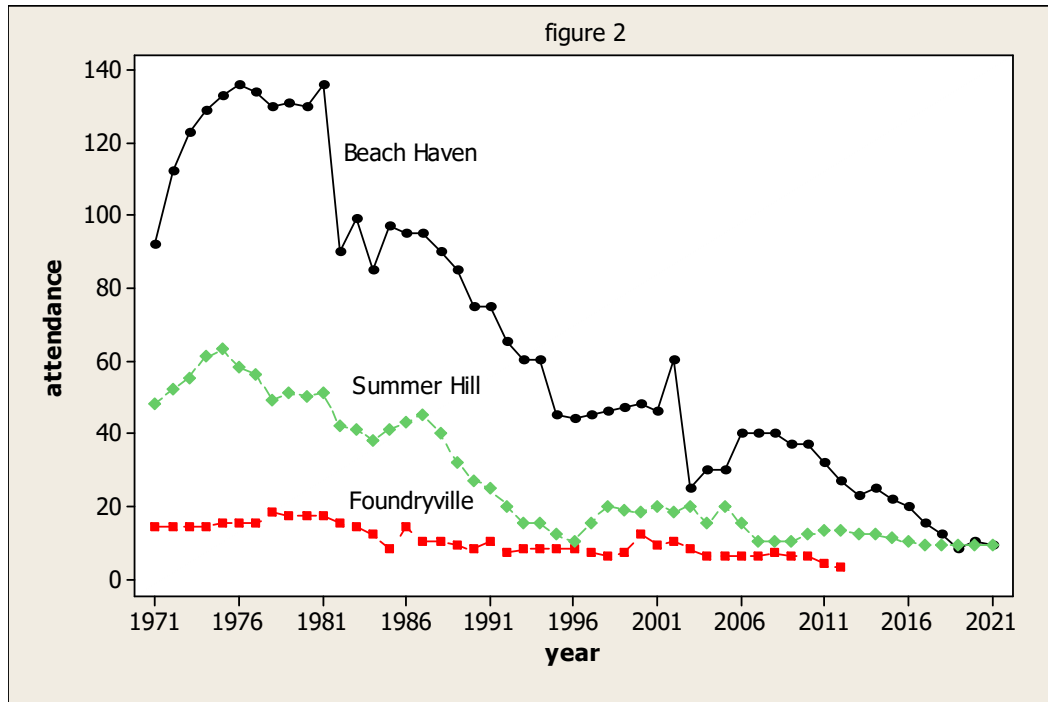
Beginning in 1929, the charge consisted of three points<sup>15</sup> dominated by the congregation at Beach Haven. Figure 1 shows a plot of the memberships of each congregation until 1970, when the new Central Pennsylvania Conference was formed to accommodate the 1968 denominational merger. Note that the Beach Haven congregation membership peaked at 265 in 1954. This corresponds with the entire Central Pennsylvania Conference (Methodist) membership which peaked at 123,335 in 1953.<sup>16</sup> After that there was a steady decline. Another point of interest on the plot is 1960, at which point Summer Hill surpasses Foundryville in membership.



The new Central Pennsylvania Conference formed in 1970 reported the average weekly attendance at the main worship for each congregation as well as its membership. Figure 2 shows a plot of the attendance for each congregation beginning in 1971. Note that the initial attendance figures in Figure 2 begin at about half of the final membership figures in Figure 1. That was the typical pattern across the Conference.

<sup>15</sup> The conference journals carry a membership at Beach Grove until 1933, but that appointment bears no financial responsibility for the charge. In 1934 Beach Grove is not listed at all, and the membership reported at Beach Haven increased by a corresponding amount.

<sup>16</sup> The total membership rose above that in 1962 when the boundaries changed to include the Pennsylvania congregations from the Central New York and Genesee Conferences



While the rises and falls in attendance reflect pastoral changes to a small degree, they more closely reflect the attendance patterns of many other mainline churches in areas of aging populations and limited growth. One development unique to the charge occurred in February 1994, when Rev. Daniel L. Long suffered a stroke while leading the worship at Beach Haven.<sup>17</sup> He would prove to be the last full-time elder appointed to the Beach Haven charge. For the 1994-95 conference year, the charge was placed under the administrative umbrella of the Bower Memorial UMC in Berwick and served from Mifflinville by retired pastor Carl N. Rutherford. That proved unsuccessful, and it was determined that the charge needed a resident pastor – but from that point it was served mainly by part-time and/or local pastors.

As indicated in Figure 2, Foundryville closed in 2011 with a reported weekly attendance of 3. Beach Haven closed in 2020 with a weekly attendance of 10. As of this writing, Summer Hill continues with a most recent reported weekly attendance of 9.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the Beach Haven congregation in its last 1929-2020 phase of existence as a church in a predominantly rural area was its continual emphasis on building for the future.

In 1951, an addition was built on the rear of the church consisting of three Sunday School rooms and a choir room on the church level and a large meeting

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Long (1938-1998) was placed on disability leave March 1, 1994. He continued to experience health problems and died January 20, 1998.

room on the ground level. At this point a new adult Sunday School class was started for young married couples and named the Wesley Young Adult Bible class. But just ten years later it was felt that additional Sunday School rooms were needed.

In 1962, an addition to the east provided a study for the pastor, a nursery, and two large rooms with folding partitions that could set up as four classrooms. A large meeting room on the lower level completed the project.



Beach Haven church and 1962 educational wing

At a church conference held September 27, 2020, the following was proposed: “After many years of faithful worship and service, it is the recommendation that the Beach Haven United Methodist Church conduct its decommissioning and final worship service on October 25, 2020.” Such a motion was then made and passed unanimously by the seven voting members present.

The Beach Haven church and parsonage were sold in April 2021 for \$79,000 with the intent to turn the facility into a chapel for weddings, receptions and other events – while possibly serving as a weekly meeting place for an independent congregation.

Appendix I – The Haunted Schoolhouse of Rippletown<sup>1</sup>

Just west of Mountaintop, in Wright township, lies the village of Rippletown. Rippletown is a quiet place, and has been in existence since the 1860's when two men, Ripple and Line, built a sawmill on the south bank of Big Wapwallopen Creek. Within a few years about a dozen homes lined the creek, and it soon became necessary to build a schoolhouse.

The Rippletown School stood at the corner of Church Road and Line's Lane, where the parking area of the Rippletown Cemetery is located. By the 1880's, this schoolhouse had already been abandoned, and some say that the reason for the abandonment was that the building was infested with ghosts. The official reason given for the school's closure was that it was nearly impossible to find a teacher who would stay for more than a few weeks. According to those who has taught classes there, as soon as a person set foot into the schoolhouse, he or she became aware of an unaccountable presence – and the creepy feeling grew stronger with each passing minute.

The July 26, 1885, edition of the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* described the experiences of one former teacher, who had recently graduated from Wyoming

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the May 10, 2020, *Pennsylvania Oddities* podcast by Martin Bressi. Used by permission of the author.

Seminary, as follows.

The ghosts, hobgoblins, visitants from the other world, or whatever they may be, manifest their presence in but one way – a rumbling and cracking of the ceiling as if someone were above it rolling a game of ten pins. The games begin at around 5 o'clock each afternoon, apparently with but one or two players, but as the shades of evening fall and night advances the hilarity increases, and during the midnight hours but one result of the pandemonium seems possible – that the very roof may fall.

Another teacher shared his experience with the ghosts of the Rippletown Schoolhouse with the reporter, and the 1885 article continued as follows.

After having spent several weeks in guiding the youth of Rippletown up the giddy steps of learning, he found himself a little rusty, having been some time out of school, and concluded to spend his evenings at study... He felt, as others before him had felt, that there was something there. At length a little rumble overhead was heard. The student teacher was startled, of course – he admits he was – but after carefully examining the ceiling and satisfying himself it was all there, he concluded that his fears were unfounded and again gave so much of his attention as it was possible to his books.

Another, and another ball rumbled across from corner to corner... The entire ceiling seemed about to give way under the weight of the heavy balls rolling over it. And as a hundred or more leveled the pins, there came a crash that convinced the now-frightened teacher that it had done so. He made no investigation of the results, but grabbed his hat and hastily decamped, forgetting in his haste to extinguish the lamp... He taught out his term, but never more did he remain at his duties after 5 p.m., and there is not enough money in the district to induce him to take another term there.

So who, or what, caused the ghostly sounds of ten-pin bowling at this rural schoolhouse? While Rippletown didn't have a name until 1875, the surrounding area had been settled as early as 1833. Perhaps an inn or tavern had once stood on the same spot, along a lonesome stagecoach trail flanking the Big Wapwallopen in the days of the Delaware and Shawnee. If such is the case, no record of this long-forgotten establishment exists.

As for the graveyard, which the locals call either the Rippletown Cemetery or the Albert Cemetery, it is doubtful that any clues about the haunted schoolhouse might be found there – though some locals have reported seeing strange lights flittering among the tombstones. The oldest legible tombstone is that of John Owens, who passed away in 1862 – but, undoubtedly, the cemetery contains an unknown number of unmarked graves, as early obituaries indicate burials in the graveyard for which headstones are nowhere to be found.

It was in the 1880's that the Methodists began meeting at the site and apparently remodeled the schoolhouse into a chapel, but there are no indications that the Methodists were ever troubled by the haunting spirits.

## Appendix II – The Powder Glen Appointment

Powder Glen, located in Hollenback township and formerly known as Powder Hole, is on the Big Wapwallopen Creek and known for its gun powder mills. Nathan Beach, the founder of Beach Haven, constructed a mill in the Wapwallopen Gorge in 1795. The mill eventually burned down by accident. Following a series of floods, explosions and bankruptcies under various owners, E.I. Du Pont de Nemours and Company bought the site in April 1859 and constructed powder mills that at time were among the largest in the United States. Despite numerous floods and fatal explosions, the mills operated until 1912, when the Du Pont company moved the machinery to Moosic. Only ruins remain today. It was that 1912 move that marked the beginning of the decline of both the community and the Powder Glen appointment.

But until that time, Powder Glen had been the largest and strongest appointment on the circuit. The Kensey schoolhouse appointment had been moved to Powder Glen, a church building had been erected in 1887,<sup>1</sup> and a new circuit parsonage had been erected there. The parsonage has been enlarged and is now a private home. The church site is now a vacant lot, but the cemetery – which is in disrepair – is still reportedly owned by “the church.”

One of the more interesting parts of the Powder Glen story is the ultimate fate of the church building. Because the village had been depopulated, regular services were discontinued in the early 1920’s, and it was decided the building should be razed. But in 1926, the Rippletown appointment was in need of a larger structure to replace its old chapel, which was also badly in need of repair. Since the church at Powder Glen was to be torn down, a delegation from Rippletown went to inspect the building and decided it could be moved to suit their purposes.

On Labor Day 1926, a group from Rippletown went to Powder Glen to enjoy a chicken dinner and an evening corn roast while volunteers dismantled the church building and loaded it onto wagons and a truck. The pieces were hauled to a plot of ground on the Albert-Nuangola Road, opposite the old chapel, and re-erected. The completed project was dedicated and ready for use in October 1927

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Central Pennsylvania Conference Journal*, 1888, page 58, reports the following: “At Powder Glen, on the Schloyerville charge, the pastor and brethren have made perhaps the greatest struggle and suffered the greatest calamity. With the aid of \$300 from the Church Extension Board, they built an unusually substantial frame church, 40x34 feet, with a 16 foot flat ceiling and iron roof, finished with hard wood, stained glass, carpet, etc., and costing \$1800. It was dedicated November 27<sup>th</sup>, by Dr. S.F. Upham, the pastor and the Presiding Elder after every dollar of its cost had been subscribed.

“On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February following, a packing house of the DuPont Powder Co. in the neighborhood, containing 16 tons of loose powder, mysteriously ignited and the impact of its terrific detonation, which rendered all the surrounding homes untenable, hurled it from its foundation, wrenched its timbers, shattered its doors, windows, and plastering, and left it an unsightly wreck. We are glad that the Powder Co. will promptly and completely restore the loss.”

as the Albert Church. In 1955 the Albert and Mountaintop appointments united to form the Mountaintop Christ congregation, eventually selling both of their previous structures and dedicating the first phase of their present complex in 1960. The former Albert facility, the reconstructed Powder Glen church building, is now the Mountain Top Baptist Church.



Wapwallopen circuit parsonage at Powder Glen



reconstructed Powder Glen Methodist church at Albert  
now a Baptist church