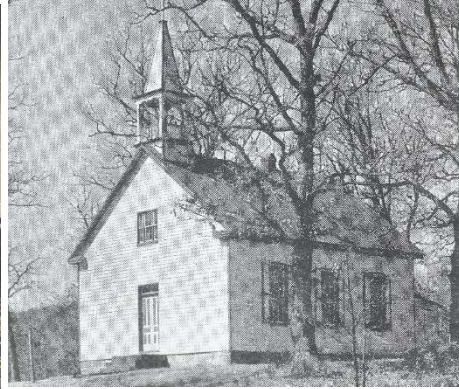


An Early Maytown Painting

The United Brethren denomination erected a frame church in Maytown, northern York County, in 1871. The building was erected atop a small rise on land deeded by Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Bentzel. Prior to 1871, the congregation worshiped in the village school.¹



Maytown School



1871 Maytown Church

A vestibule was added to the front of the building in 1948, and Sunday School rooms to the back in 1956. In 1980, the congregation merged into Bethel [former Evangelical] UMC at Alpine to form the present New Bethel UMC. The building was sold and tastefully converted into a home that has preserved its ecclesiastical features.

This article concerns an oil painting of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane that was secured onto the wall behind the altar sometime in the early 1900's. In the 1940's that painting was replaced² by a depiction of Jesus knocking on the door by United Brethren pastor C. Guy Stambach, whose paintings to this day appear in many churches, both rural and urban, of all denominations – but mostly within the EUB tradition – in Pennsylvania and Maryland. The Stambach painting is still attached to the wall of the former Maytown sanctuary, and now serves as the focal point of the large family living room.

In 2020, the couple that had converted the church into a home and raised their children there sold the property to another family who appreciated the significance of the structure. When the new owners discovered a rolled up oil

¹ This fame building stood in the village proper and is not to be confused with the nearby stone school house at the east end of Pinchot State Park. As originally built, it had one door and no windows in the front. It was later converted into a home and was destroyed in a fire that claimed the life of its occupant.

² The exact date of the replacement is not known. Elsie Knaub, the oldest living member of the former Maytown congregation states that the present Stambach painting was there when she started attending in 1946, and she has no recollection of the Dyer painting in any context. Editor's note: Mrs. Elsie Miller Knaub passed away in December 2021 at the age of 92.

painting in a corner of the attic, they contacted the conference archivist – and the painting was determined to be the original backdrop for altar before being replaced by the Stambach³ painting in the 1930's.

The depiction of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, a likeness of the well-known one by German artist Heinrich Hofmann (1824-1911), was painted by noted local artist F.M. Dyer. Recreating well-known paintings for use in church sanctuaries was a common practice of local artists – and the Stambach painting of Jesus knocking on the door that replaced the discovered artwork was a composite of several noted previous paintings on the subject.

Francis Marion Dyer (1861-1941) was born in Frederick MD and achieved acclaim as an artist while living in York PA. He is best known for his landscape watercolors, and there are avid regional collectors of his works. Dyer married Miss Emma V. Boyer (1872-1916) of Frederick MD in 1889, and Miss Nina M. Gitt (1889-1975) of Abbottstown in 1920. Dyer and both of his wives are buried in the Prospect Hill Cemetery in York.

While Dyer is noted mainly for his watercolors, he also created oil paintings of common people in ordinary poses – all of which sell well at auctions – but no other particularly religious works or paintings for church sanctuaries by Dyer are known to exist. There are two possible explanations as to how an F. Marion Dyer oil painting found its way to the small, rural Maytown Church.

One possible explanation involves the Bentzel family, which was very numerous in northern York County. Original immigrant Henry F. Bentzel came from Germany. Two of his sons were Henry (1770-1853) and David (1777-1856). Henry's grandson Samuel (1829-1902) deeded the land for the Maytown Church, and David's grandson Moses (1831-1918) was the grandfather of the Rockford Henry Bentzel (1892-1973) who married Dyer's daughter Ruth Edna Dyer Bentzel (1893-1968).⁴ It would not be unreasonable to think that Dyer created the painting as a favor for the extended family of his son-in-law.

Another possible explanation involves the United Brethren denomination. Although Dyer was a Lutheran⁵ and the Gitt family appears to have no United

³ Rev. C. Guy Stambach (1875-1972) of the Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren Church is the artist of life-sized paintings of Christ found in churches of all denominations throughout Pennsylvania and Maryland. Comments on Stambach and his work appear in the Appendix I.

⁴ Their offspring continued F.M. Dyer's legacy in name and vocation. Son Harry Dyer Bentzel (1913-1994) was an amateur enthusiast of tintype photography, and grandson H. Dyer Bentzel II (1946-2004) made that his profession – appearing on national TV, lecturing in many states, and serving as the tintype and glass plate photographer for the Gettysburg Tourist Bureau. His work and personal collection in that area have been displayed at the York County Historical Society.

⁵ F.M. Dyer's ancestors and descendants were Lutheran. He was a member of Augsburg Lutheran Church in York PA. That congregation, which merged into St. Paul's Lutheran Church on

Brethren connection, he and Nina Gitt were married in 1920 by United Brethren pastor Josiah Perry Koontz, the pastor at York's Second United Brethren Church. The connection/friendship between Dyer and Rev. Koontz has not been determined, but there must have been one – perhaps through a fraternal or civic organization. It would not be unreasonable to think that Koontz suggested the painting for the small, rural United Brethren church in Maytown as “payment” for the wedding ceremony.

It should be noted that Dyer did have connections and involvement beyond his Lutheran Church. On one occasion, it was reported that the sermon at the Trinity Southern Methodist Church in Frederick MD would be titled “A Great Picture” and that the crayon picture to be used to illustrate the sermon was given by Marion Dyer of York PA and made specially for the sermon.⁶

In October 2021, the F.M. Dyer oil painting – cleaned, remounted and reframed – was hung in the fellowship hall at the New Bethel UMC. That special historical service was attended by former members of the Maytown church and followed by a fellowship/reunion luncheon.



The restored F.M. Dyer painting of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

South George Street in 1939, worshipped in a building on the southeast corner of West Cottage Place and Manor Street. That building now houses the Faith Village Christian Center, an independent congregation, and there is no indication that it ever housed a painting by Dyer.

⁶ *Frederick News*, 8/26/1933, page 2.

Appendix I – Painter/Artist Rev. Charles Guy Stambach (1895-1971)⁷

C. Guy Stambach was recommended for the ministry by the Fourth United Brethren Church of York PA in 1914 when he was a student at Lebanon Valley College. He was ordained in 1920 and served several appointments before being assigned to Mechanicsburg PA. It was there, in the early 1940's that he discovered his gift for creating life-sized oil paintings of Christ, fashioned after well-known works of prominent artists, designed for church sanctuaries – usually behind the pulpit/altar area.

Before failing eyesight ended this ministry in the late 1960's, Stambach produced over 300 such paintings for congregations of all denominations. His works are concentrated in Pennsylvania and Maryland – with over 60 in York County alone – but can be found in churches as far away as Iowa, New Mexico and Oregon. He would accept orders, with waiting times often exceeding a year or more, and work in the early morning hours, on frames erected in his parsonage study, before assuming his regular pastoral duties for the day. His district superintendents and the local churches he served fully supported this special ministry.

Stambach was particular about his work. Once a painting was complete, he typically traveled to the church which had commissioned it and personally supervised the attaching of the canvas to the sanctuary wall. He charged only what was necessary to cover his supplies and expenses – typically \$80 to \$100 per painting, which was estimated to be about one tenth of their true value. The imported Irish linen canvas he used amounted to about 75 percent of his costs.

His most requested painting, accounting for approximately half of his church requests, was his likeness of Heinrich Hofmann's *Christ in Gethsemane*. Other popular requests were for Hofmann's *Come Unto Me* and *Christ by the Door*, and for Bernhard Plockhorst's *The Good Shepherd*. In addition to his usual paintings for church sanctuaries, Stambach's other commissioned works include a series of 23 paintings for the educational building of Memorial Lutheran Church in Harrisburg, portraits of three presidents of Messiah College, and *The Ascension* for the Masonic Center of York in Manchester Township – which was his last painting and the one with the highest commission, and which is encased in a special enclosure and insured for a hefty sum.

While Stambach typically fashioned his paintings after well-known works by master artists, he did not attempt to reproduce those works exactly – not for

⁷ Much of the information in the Appendices was shared by Guy's son, Rev. Paul Stambach, in an interview with the editor. In this issue devoted to **life stories**, it would be remiss not to alert the reader to the many ministerial stories found in the Stambach Family Tree, and so a condensed version of those connections is given in Appendix II.

concerns over copyright or forgery, but to insert some of his own interpretation and to “fit in” with the church which had commissioned the work.

The two Stambach paintings most relevant to this article about the rediscovered early Maytown painting by F.M. Dyer are shown below.



“Jesus at the Door”



“The Good Shepherd”

The “Jesus at the Door” painting is shown as it now appears in the living room of the church-converted-into-house Maytown building. While it calls to mind the well-known one by American artist Warner Sallman (1892-1968), it is certainly not a copy of that work. Stambach’s son Paul states that his father based his “Jesus at the Door” painting on “The Light of the World” painting by English artist William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), but it is certainly not a copy of that work either. But all three paintings (i.e., those of Stambach, Dallman and Hunt) are based on Revelation 3:20⁸ and show Jesus symbolically knocking on the door to one’s heart – a door with no handle on the outside because it must be opened from within.

“The Good Shepherd” painting is shown as it appears in the New Bethel church building, the home of the merged Maytown and Bethel congregations. It is clearly based on the painting of that title by German artist Bernhard Plockhorst (1825-1907).

⁸ "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."



Guy Stambach, 1949
working on his 11'x7' rendering of Hofmann's *Come Unto Me*
painted in place on the chancel wall while he pastor
at Bethlehem UMC in Dallastown PA

Appendix II – A Condensed Stambach Family Tree
showing relationships between ordained clergy given **in bold**

1. **Rev. John Stambach** (1793-1828)
m. Elizabeth Walter⁹ (1792-1866)
2. **Rev. Elias Stambach** (1817-1890)
m. Anna Maria Bower (1825-1910)
3. Jerome Bower Stambach (1855-1925)
m. Sarah Cecelia Harrison (1861-1937)
4. Peony Maria Stambach (1886-1957)
m. Charles Kaufman (1878-1964)
5. **Rev. Jerome Bower Stambach Kaufman**¹⁰ (1908-1991)
m. Ruth Dively (1908-1988)
3. Charles A. Stambach (1866-1939)
m. Annie Lydia Stein (1869-1957)
4. **Rev. Charles Guy Stambach** (1895-1972)
m. Glenna Alice Demuth (1892-1971)
5. **Rev. Arthur William Stambach** (1925-1990)
m. Betty Mae Getz (1924-2015)
6. Susan K. Stambach
m. **Rev. Dwight Miller Schmuck** (1946-2000)
6. Nancy Stambach
m. **Rev. Charles W. Sprenkle**
5. **Rev. Paul Elias Stambach**
m. Gloria Elaine Rohrbaugh (1930-2014)
4. **Rev. Jerome Spurgeon Stambach** (1901-1972)
m. **Rev. Pauline Elizabeth Haverstock**¹¹ (1902-1999)
5. **Rev. Ruth Marie Stambach** (1931-2019)

Note: Those without dates were living in 2021 when this article was in preparation. Except as noted in the footnotes, the ministerial connections fell within United Methodism's United Brethren tradition.

⁹ Elizabeth Walter is the daughter of **Rev. John Walter** (1781-1818), the first preacher to travel under Rev. Jacob Albright (1759-1808), founder of the Evangelical Church, and a sister to pioneer Evangelical preachers **Rev. Michael Walter** (1794-1856) and **Rev. John Walter Jr** (1797-1874). In addition to Jacob Albright, United Brethren pioneer circuit rider Rev. Christian Newcomer (1749-1830) also visited their Snyder County family home.

¹⁰ Jerome B.S. Kaufman was ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

¹¹ Pauline Haverstock is a first cousin to **Rev. Calvin B. Haverstock** (1932-2015).