

George Miller “The Printer” (1794-1859) of the Evangelical Association

George Miller was the first head of the Evangelical Association’s first publishing house. That building’s location in New Berlin, Union County PA, is part of a Heritage Landmark of the United Methodist Church which includes the site of the Evangelical Association’s first church building and a self-guiding series of historical signs that relate the importance of New Berlin – the first headquarters of the denomination founded by Jacob Albright that eventually became the Evangelical Church in 1922, merged into the Evangelical United Brethren and United Methodist denominations in 1946 and 1968 respectively.

As there was also an ordained contemporary of the same name in New Berlin and active in the Evangelical Association, Rev. George Miller (1774-1816), the subject of this article is usually designated as “George Miller, the printer.”¹

Evangelical activity in the area traces its origins to Abraham Eyer (1748-1823), a Mennonite who migrated here from Lancaster County in 1772 and opened his home to traveling German evangelists – most notably Christian Newcomer (1749-1830) of the developing United Brethren Church and Jacob Albright (1759-1808) of the developing Evangelical Association. He became the father-in-law of the first two presiding elders [now called district superintendents] of the Evangelical Association – John Dreisbach (1789-1871) and Henry Niebel (1784-1877). It was Dreisbach who personally brought the printing press and George Miller to New Berlin to establish the denomination’s first publishing house.

In 1854, it was Dreisbach who engineered the relocation of the publishing house to Cleveland OH – which was more centrally located for the westward expanding denomination, and which had better transportation connections than New Berlin.² That same year, as compensation for losing the publishing house, New Berlin was chosen as the location for Union Seminary, the denomination’s first permanent educational institution.³

The story of Dreisbach and Miller and the publishing house at New Berlin is well-documented in denominational and other history books.⁴ This article goes behind the scenes to present little-known and previously unpublished information

¹ In fact, there are seven different and generally unrelated George Millers – including Rev. George Miller and George Miller the printer – who lived in the 1800’s that are buried in the New Berlin cemetery

² Most incoming supplies came by canal from Philadelphia to Selingsgrove, and then were taken by wagon to New Berlin. Outgoing printed materials were typically taken west by wagon. Once, for example, Bishop Seybert personally took a 2500 pound order of 23,725 books by wagon from New Berlin to Ohio.

³ After two relocations, that institution is now Albright College in Reading PA.

⁴ See, in particular, *One Hundred Fifty Years: A History of Publishing in the Evangelical United Brethren Church* by John H. Ness, Jr. (1966).

about Miller, Dreisbach and the work in New Berlin. Much of this primary source material was provided by David Feick, a great-great-great-grandson of George Miller now retired and living in Florida. *The Chronicle* thanks Dr. Feick for his willingness to share this valuable material.

This article is given in three sections, the first two were written by Susan Miller Dunkle (1819-1889), a daughter of George Miller. This material is taken from a larger manuscript history of the extended Miller family written by Mrs. Dunkle circa 1889 and updated by an unknown hand circa 1895. The first section has been titled “My Father” and tells the story of George Miller as passed on to and experienced by his daughter Susan. The second section has been titled “The Spirituality of George and Margaretta Miller” and concentrates on the religious experiences of George Miller, his wife Margaretta (Zimmerman) Miller, and the Zimmerman family.

The final section of this article is the translation of an 1851 letter from John Dreisbach to George Miller giving personal information and telling of the plan arising at the 1851 General Conference to move the publishing house from New Berlin to Cleveland. The original letter is in the possession of the aforementioned David Feick.

Taken as a whole, the article not only gives important information about George Miller and the publishing house at New Berlin, but also insight into the politics, spirituality and everyday life in rural nineteenth century America. In addition, the accounts of Dreisbach and Miller stepping out by faith and relocating themselves and the publishing house nicely support this year’s theme of **“Where He Leads Me I Will Follow.”**

My Father, George Miller by Susan Miller Dunkle⁵

George Miller, the third son of Henry and Barbara Miller was born in Mount Joy township, Lancaster County PA, September 29, 1794. Subsequently the parents moved to Hanover, Dauphin County, where he spent his early years on the farm of his parents doing work in the fields and also assisting his elder brother Daniel, who was a miller by trade, in his father’s mill whenever there was much on hand to do in running the mill both day and night. By these means he obtained a knowledge of making flour and grinding chaff.

At the age of about 18 he had a strong desire to learn the art of printing. His father, however, did not encourage him in this idea by saying that a mechanic never amounted to much – meaning making not much more than a livelihood. He had a strong desire to get an education, but the schools in the county were only kept open

⁵ Susan Miller Dunkle (5/13/1818 – 2/4/1889) is the daughter of George Miller. She married a Mr. Jacob Dunkle in 1855, lived most of her life near New Berlin, died in Hagerstown MD, and is buried with her daughter Ellie (died in 1869 at the age of 12) in Ashland Cemetery in Carlisle PA.

a few months during the winter, and teachers in those days were also very inefficient – so there was a very poor chance for getting anything like an ordinary education. Besides, farmers had a great deal of work to do all the year round. The winter was the time to do the threshing of grain – which generally was done by the flail and the horses by treading it out.

He, however, was not discouraged and continued in his pursuit and went to Harrisburg and entered into an engagement with Christian Gleim⁶, then the State printer and publisher of the laws for the Commonwealth, to learn the business of printing and also binding books. He served his time faithfully and satisfactorily. During the time of his apprenticeship, the British army threatened the city of Baltimore in 1812 and 1813, and a company of militia men was raised in Harrisburg. Mr. Gleim and some of his hands went with the company as defenders of Baltimore and remained there some time – until the danger was over.

Apprentices in those days lived with the family and would often do some work for the family. In the fall of the year they had some butchering to do and no help could be obtained and so George Miller, the farm boy, was pressed into service and for the first time in his life killed a hog and cut it up for the family – and was highly commended for his services. He was highly respected by them for his piety and integrity and faithfulness.

In the year 1816, Rev. John Dreisbach⁷ and some others were in Harrisburg on a mission to find a competent man to take hold of a publishing house – a man that understood practically how to print and bind books. They called on Mr. Gleim, and he recommended one of his boys as the man who could do it successfully and well. That was George Miller.

He accepted the position. The materials had already been bought by Rev. Dreisbach and company. In the fall of the same year he left Harrisburg and traveled to New Berlin, Union County PA, and entered his duties as the superintendent and publisher for the “Evangelical Association.” The first publications were hymn-books, the Discipline, catechisms, a German testament, and some other works. He engaged an Englishman, Joseph Burrell, as bookbinder – whom he boarded in the family. But unfortunately Joseph would sometimes go on a debauch and made it very unpleasant for the family. George eventually had to discharge him.

⁶ Christian Gleim (1780-1861) of Harrisburg published numerous English and German materials – including at least one songbook, *Geistliche Lieder [Spiritual Songs]*, edited by Bernhard Heinrich Sasse and printed by Gleim in 1814. The grandson of German immigrant Rev. John Godfried Gleim, he was born in Lancaster PA, served as Dauphin County Sheriff 1821-24 and moved in 1830 to Pittsburg, where he died. He was reportedly “a highly cultivated Christian gentleman” and his children erected The Gleim Memorial [Episcopal] Church in his honor in Tipton MO.

⁷ John Dreisbach (1789-1871), a native of the New Berlin area, entered the active ministry at the Evangelical Association’s first conference of 1807 and in 1814 became its first presiding elder. He later settled in Ohio and led the movement to relocate the denomination’s publishing house there. He was married to Abraham Eyer’s daughters Anna (1783-1848) and Fanny (1791-1876).

He carried on this work for several years, when a financial crisis set in and the Evangelical Association suspended the enterprise and sold out the concern. George bought some of their material and carried on the business for himself.⁸ For a while, times were now very dull and hard – and he had to turn his attention to do something else to maintain his family. He taught one winter school in Shamokin, and afterward took lessons in weaving and did work in New Berlin for the people there. When times improved, however, and money matters became more settled, he commenced to print again.

He started a German weekly newspaper called the “Independent Correspondent” and also at the same time did some work for the Evangelical Association in book printing, etc. This was the first German newspaper published in the county and financially was a success for a number of years – until the Anti-Masonic party was formulated and the party spirit grew hot and bitter. He had an apprentice, Joseph Miller, who learned printing from him – and very soon after he served his time, he started an opposition paper and published in the German and English languages. This, of course, divided the business. Many of the Democratic party became violent Anti-Masons (or Whigs, as they were called in later years). George became disgusted with the way things took a turn and discontinued the publication. This Joseph Miller published slanderous articles in his paper, and it grieved him very much. The articles made him appear to be the tool of the Masons, and that he was paid by them to do the work of their party. Joseph Miller called the Democratic party the Masonic party. The said Joseph Miller turned out very bad in later years. His old master George had told him once that he would lose all credibility on account of publishing so many falsehoods and personal attacks of character – so that no man would trust him for a bag of wheat.

In 1833, George bought from Ingraham and Longman the “Union Gazette” office and published that paper for a short time. It was a Democratic paper.

He was also one of the first to advocate the publishing of a religious journal, and the idea spread among the preachers of the Evangelical Association. The General Conference passed a resolution, so as soon as enough subscribers were obtained, the “Christliche Botschafter” should be issued. The paper was a monthly, and Rev. A. Ettinger⁹ and George Miller were the editors – the latter being the

⁸ This part of the history of the Evangelical Publishing House is glossed over in much accounts, leaving the impression that the denomination operated the press continuously from 1816 until in moved to Cleveland in 1854. As stated later in this article, the denomination repurchased the press from Miller in 1837.

⁹ Rev. Adam Ettinger (1787-1877) was the son Rev. Adam Ettinger Sr (1760-1809) of the Reformed Church, a co-worker of United Brethren founder Philip William Otterbein, and the father of Rev. Jesse Ettinger (1846-1895). The Ettinger family, primarily of York County PA, where Adam Jr was born and is buried, was prominent in the Evangelical Church – and the Susquehanna Conference archives has a file on the Ettinger family.

assistant. The first issue made its appearance on January 1st, 1836, and 600 copies were printed. He served in this capacity for 18 months.

Now [i.e., in 1889] the Evangelical Association again bought a building and materials for another concern of their own to publish books and the periodical. Rev. W.W. Orwig was the editor, Rev. Charles Hammer the book agent, and Rev. Solomon G. Miller the printer. The *Christliche Botschafter* is now a weekly and is published in Cleveland, Ohio, and has a circulation of over 20,000.

In 1837, George Miller sold his printing office and book bindery to the Evangelical Association and worked in the bindery. In 1841 he printed 3000 copies of the Bible from stereotype plates. He continued in this publishing house until about 1850. In 1853 this book concern was moved to Cleveland, Ohio.

George Miller was a Democrat. In 1840 he allowed his name to go before a Democratic county convention and was nominated for county commissioner. He was defeated by 80 votes, yet he polled the highest vote of all the Democratic candidates – the county was carried by the Whigs and was politically known as such.

He was executor and administrator for several estates and fulfilled the trusts committed to him faithfully and with credit. One of the heirs of an estate he had settled told his son some years later saying, “When your father died and when I heard the bell toll, I had to weep. He was kinder to us children than our own father could have been. He handed me my \$5 when he paid the balance of my legacy and said, ‘Now I give you this towards erecting a monument for your mother.’ He was tender-hearted when he saw people in distress and affliction. He lived an exemplary and consistent Christian life.” People had confidence in him as a professor of religion, from the fact that he was frequently called to the sickbed of the dying to pray and for consolation for the spiritually distressed.

In 1858 he contracted a severe cold which finally settled in his lungs and ended his earthly career prematurely on January 28, 1859 – aged 64 years and 4 months. He died with his daughter Susan Dunkle in Buffalo Valley and was interred in New Berlin, beside his wife who preceded him March 10, 1845. The funeral sermon was given by Rev. W.W. Orwig¹⁰ in the old Evangelical church, which was filled by his old acquaintances and friends.

He had some out lots near New Berlin, and had for some years the land farmed on shares – and for a number of years he superintended and had the land ploughed by others. He braised more grain he needed for his own use. He kept 1 or 2 cows and hogs.

¹⁰ William Wagner Orwig (1810-1889), then currently serving in York PA, was a personal friend of Miller. He had been editor of *Der Christliche Botschafter* (1836-1844) and would later be the principal at Union Seminary in New Berlin (1856-1859) before being elected a bishop in 1859.

The Spirituality of George and Margaretta Miller

by Susan Miller Dunkle

George Miller was immersed about the age 18 by Rev. Gerberich and connected with the German Baptist Brethren, generally called “Tunkers”.¹¹ He did not, however, feel satisfied with the more formal religion. He wanted the spiritual baptism – which he received while in Harrisburg, while he attended the Methodist services there.

He was married July 12, 1818, to Margaretta Zimmerman by Rev. H. Niebel.¹² Margaret Zimmerman was born May 27, 1789, in Northampton County, Pa. She was the youngest of the family of 3 sons and 7 daughters and was left an orphan. The rest of her sisters were all married and lived in Columbia and Schuylkill counties. Her brother John was a Justice of the Peace many years in Schuylkill County, and Leonhart was several years an itinerant preacher in the Evangelical Association and was a local minister until his death. He died December 17, 1840, at Manheim, Lancaster County, Pa., aged 59 years. He was a very earnest and lively preacher; he was married, but had no children. He was a good man.

The Zimmerman family was a very religious one. They belonged to the German Reformed Church – but the church was in a very dead state, had only a form, and experimental religion was a rare thing. Ministers were given to drunkenness, as well as were members of the church. When the Methodists and Jacob Albright came in their country and preached repentance and the new birth doctrines, and a holy and sanctified life, the family embraced religion and were converted. Then persecution commenced and they left the church and united with the Evangelical Association and were some of the first members there.

Margaret was of an amiable and kind disposition – rather quiet in her habits, an excellent and very cleanly housekeeper, and more than ordinary as a cook and making good bread. She was kind to the poor, and whenever she would visit them she would often take some viands along to give them to supply their needs. She was consecrated in her youth and was an exemplary Christian. Plain in her dress and of a meek mind, she taught the children early to be good and to give their hearts to Jesus. Fervent she was in her prayers, and she had a strong faith in God and his Word.

¹¹ Tunkers, also sometimes rendered Dunkards, is from the German *tunken*, meaning “to dip” and refers to their insistence on believer baptism triune immersion. Founded in Germany in 1708 by Alexander Mack (1679-1735) as a pietistic contrast to the formal established Lutheran and Reformed denominations, by Miller’s time the movement had also become more formal – trusting more in customs and rituals than personal experience. Today the progressive branch of the movement exists as the Church of the Brethren.

¹² Henry Niebel (1784-1877) was converted at Abraham Eyer’s in Winfield, Union County PA, 1806, entered the active ministry in 1809, and was elected the Evangelical Association’s second presiding elder (after his brother-in-law John Dreisbach) in 1815. He moved to Ohio in 1833. He married Abraham Eyer’s daughter Mary (1787-1857)

She suffered considerably in her lifetime of not enjoying as good of health as was desirable; however, she accomplished a great deal of work. She was a fast worker and, to her bodily injury, could not break herself of that habit. In her last sickness, of about six month's duration, she suffered great pain in her bones and nerves. At first it was thought it was rheumatism, but later developments proved that was not the case. The physicians were divided in their opinions as to the disease. After her death, a post-mortem revealed that it was an enlargement of an artery. Her request was that an examination should be made. She died in great peace. Her children revere her memory and call her blessed. She often sang "I now have found the ground wherein sure my soul's anchor may remain" – hymn number 420 in the 1878 Methodist hymnal, as translated from the German.¹³

The Dreisbach Letter¹⁴

Pickaway County, Ohio, 10th October 1851

My dear friend and brother in the Lord!

May Jesus be our life, Amen. Your friendly and welcome letter of 27 August reached me on 6 September, just when I had returned from my trip through Dayton, Covington, and Greenville, after the camp meeting on the Miami circuit, and from there through Troy, Vandalia, and Springfield, and shortly before my departure for the General Conference. I hoped to answer you from the Conference, but it didn't happen.

On the 4th of this month, I returned home, and on the 5th I left once again to serve as traveling preacher on my allocated circuit. My health is better than it was earlier (and I therefore have hope to be able to serve as a traveling preacher still some while, but time will tell whether I can do it or not; from God our heavenly Father comes both the desire and the accomplishment of it.) All my family is also as healthy as usual, thanks be to dear God.

There was an uncommon amount of sickness in our corner of the world after the drought of this summer: dysentery, fever, cholera, etc., and it carried many away. With regard to fruit—we have none in the southern part of Ohio, and the sweetcorn harvest in our neighborhood has also not turned out to be so abundant, especially in the high lands; it is better in the western counties, but much worse in the northern ones. The wheat here in the south was also not so productive as last year, and the same for potatoes and hay. But we cannot

¹³ This hymn was written by German Lutheran pietist Johann Andreas Rothe (1688-1758). It was one of 40 or so hymns he wrote which were included in hymnals edited by Nicholas Zinzendorf (1700-1760), a bishop in the Moravian Church, and popularized in English after being translated by John Wesley (1703-1791), founder of the Methodist Church.

¹⁴ Translation by Dr. Lawrence Morris, Chair & Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Albright College, Reading, PA 19604

complain—there is always a bit left over. Both people and animals are full. Oh, indeed—how unthankful are the children of men!

As for my opinion regarding your son’s plan, to purchase for himself a plot of land here or elsewhere in the West, and “to put a tenant on it who would farm and operate it,” I wish only to say: if he were to live in the vicinity of it, it could be profitable, but I doubt whether he would get greater yield than the interest on his money gives him. But, if the land that he purchases grows in value, then he would have that profit, of course, and would have kept his money in good security, and so would have done well in that respect.

Finally, about the transfer of the bookstore, I thought, on the way to the General Conference, I wanted to handle it according to the English phrase, “to leave good enough alone”. But when I arrived there, I found myself needed in the vote for the transfer, but with the condition which you will have already learned, namely, that the costs of the transfer should first be secured through subscription.¹⁵ It is doubtful, however, whether that condition will be fulfilled—time will tell. I hope, however, that our bookstore will be transferred to Cleveland, Ohio, so that you, dear brother, come also—am I right! What do you say to that? Would such a thing be possible and doable for you?

NB. On the whole, we had a pleasant General Conference session; everything proceeded with brotherly love and acceptance, and all our delegates appeared to be of “one heart and one soul” for the things of the Lord. O, I was so happy, amongst my dear brothers in the blessed ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. “The Lord has done a great thing for us (as a small branch of his church); therefore are we joyful!” Yes – I am truly happy in my heart as a result. May the Lord be praised, the great shepherd of the sheep, of me and of everyone, now, in the future, and for eternity, amen.

God bless you. Keep me in mind before the seat of mercy; and write back to me soon. I would be still happier to see you again, whether it be on this side or the other side of the grave. I send hearty greetings to you and yours, and bid you farewell. I remain your loving brother in Christ,

Johannes Dreisbach

P.S. Please greet for me my relatives and acquaintances around you. May the Lord help them on the way to his heavenly kingdom, just as we do ourselves, through Jesus Christ, amen.

¹⁵ The “bookstore” is the printing business. Despite previous discussions about transportation difficulties to and from New Berlin, the action of the 1851 General Conference near Flat Rock OH took Dreisbach by surprise. According to Ness’ history, a Saturday motion that the publishing house be transferred to a more convenient place “touched off a heated discussion that continued through the following Monday.” A move to Cleveland (chosen over Pittsburgh, Harrisburg and Philadelphia) was finally approved with a number of stipulations to prevent incurring heavy costs in the relocation – and the move took place three years later, in 1854.