

Thomas B. Miller (c1831-c1901)

In the Methodist Episcopal Church (1851-1880)

T.B. Miller's final appointment¹ in the Methodist Episcopal Church began in 1877 at Kinglsey Church the Kensington area of Philadelphia. The congregation had been organized in 1874 and erected a chapel at Sixth and Lehigh Avenue. During Miller's pastorate, financial difficulties caused the congregation to relocate to Lawrence and Lehigh Avenue – and it was renamed Eden.² Sometime before the 1880 conference, charges were brought against Miller and he was suspended until the matter could be resolved at conference. The nature of the charges, which were unrelated to the difficulties at the Kinglsey/Eden congregation, are not specified in the 1880 *Journal of the Philadelphia Conference* – but they are given in detail in Appendix II. The following paragraphs give the story as told in the 1880 *Journal*.

W. Swindells, Presiding Elder of the North Philadelphia District, stated that in consequence of rumors affecting the moral and ministerial character of T.B. Miller, he had appointed a Committee of Investigation, and that they had suspended T.B. Miller until the session of the Conference. He presented the papers and documents in the case and moved that the case of T.B. Miller be referred to a Committee of Trial. The motion prevailed. – page 5

Nominations for the committee on the case of T.B. Miller were presented and confirmed as follows: G.T. Hurlock, B.T. Vincent, G. Oram, G.G. Rakestraw, J. Dyson, J.E. Kessler, W.W. McMichael, L.D. McClintock³, W.L. McDowell, G.S. Broadbent., S. Barnes, J. Stringer, W.C. Johnson, J.S. Hughes and I.R. Merrill. On motion, the committee was authorized to proceed with the case, if thirteen members are present. On motion, the accused was allowed to select counsel to conduct his defense. J.R.T. Gray was appointed to act as secretary of the Committee of Trial. – page 7

¹ The complete service record of Thomas B. Miller as it appears in the Susquehanna Conference's on-line data bases is given in Appendix I.

² The Eden Methodist Church was still in existence at the time of the 1968 Methodist-EUB union, but eventually they sold their property to St. Christopher's Hospital. For some years they continued to worship in the building, until it was destroyed by fire. The hospital then gave the congregation facilities in which to worship until it completely disbanded in 1982.

³ This is Lorenzo Dow McClintock (1824-1911). Whenever the initials L.D. appear in old records, both religious and secular, there is a high probability they stand for Lorenzo Dow. Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834) was an eccentric Methodist evangelist and preacher of holiness who was the subject of the entire inaugural 1990 issue of *The Chronicle*. At his death he was among the most widely known and widely traveled figures in America – and the number of persons named after him is uncountable. Every United Methodist conference is sure to have at least one Lorenzo Dow in its records, and the last one in the Central Pennsylvania Conference was Lorenzo Dow Ott (1863-1955)

J.M. Hinson asked that eleven be made the minimum number of the Committee of Trial in the case of T.B. Miller, and thirteen the maximum. The Conference, on motion, so ordered. – page 13

T.C. Murphey presented the records and documents of the trial of T.B. Miller, together with the charges, and the finding of the Committee of Trial. The select number appointed to try the charge and specifications presented against T.B. Miller, having found the charge and specifications sustained by the testimony, present the following verdict: That T.B. Miller be, and hereby is expelled from the ministry and membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

S.M. Cooper, counsel for T.B. Miller, gave notice of his intention to appeal, and desired the privilege of examining the records, and making such extracts as may be necessary in preparing the appeal. The Conference, on motion, granted T.B. Miller, or his counsel, permission to make such examination and extracts as may be necessary in the presence of the secretary.

W. Swindells moved, that, after the Tiers of Appeals have disposed of the case of T.B. Miller, copies be made of all the documents furnished by Mr. Norris⁴, and the originals returned to Mr. Norris, if requested by him. The motion prevailed. – page 28

This expulsion of Thomas B. Miller was not undertaken lightly. Not only had he served successfully in the Philadelphia Conference since 1851, but he had also entered that body with impressive Methodist credentials. His paternal line includes both a father⁵ and a grandfather⁶ who served in the Philadelphia Conference, and his maternal line includes a grandfather⁷ in that conference. In 1860 Miller published a book⁸ about his two grandfathers.

⁴ John Norris (1856-1914), city editor for the *Philadelphia Record*, was the one who investigated the story for his newspaper and subsequently provided the documentation used by the Conference at Miller's trial. He was born in Philadelphia, son of a Union soldier who was killed in the Battle of Gettysburg, and graduated from Philadelphia's Girard College – an endowed school for fatherless boys. He later moved to New York City to work personally with Joseph Pulitzer and the *World*, and in 1910 he became business manager of the *Times*.

⁵ Rev. Joseph Miller (1809-1882) was born in Cecil County MD. He and Margaret Warburton Miller (1807-1865) were the parents of 7 children.

⁶ Rev. Thomas Miller (1770-1847) was born in Cecil County MD. He and Sarah Griffith Miller were the parents of 8 children.

⁷ Rev. Thomas Warburton (1776-1857) was born in Maryland and lived most of his life in Cecil County. He and Elizabeth Tyson Warburton were the parents of 12 children.

⁸ *Original and Selected Thoughts on the Life and Times of Rev. Thomas Miller and Rev. Thomas Warburton*. This relatively rare book was published in Bethlehem by George D. White in 1860 while Miller was serving there. The Susquehanna Conference archives does not have a copy, but the book is accessible at several libraries. The Millers and Warburtons were very active in the Cherry Hill ME Church on the Cecil circuit (then in the Chesapeake District of the Philadelphia Conference) and many of those families are buried in the cemetery there. Today this church is in the Peninsula-Delaware Conference.

Medical Interlude (1881-1882)

As given in detail in the appendices, the complaints against Miller involved his involvement in questionable activities as a physician. After being expelled by the Conference, he continued offering medical treatments in Philadelphia until being arrested in March 1881 “for committing medical malpractice.”⁹ That incident appears to have prompted Miller to relocate temporarily to Missouri.

The Saturday, April 2, 1882, edition of the *Cecil Whig* newspaper of Elkton MD which announced the death of his father lists one of his sons as “Dr. Thos. B. Miller, now a practicing physician in St. Louis.” It could be that it was the April 1882 death of his father that brought Miller back east to begin ministerial duties with the United Brethren Church in Philadelphia in the summer of 1882.

In the United Brethren Church (1882-1886)

The United Brethren Church was originally a rural denomination, and very slow to establish congregations in urban areas. It wasn’t until 1882 that the East Pennsylvania Conference established its first church in Philadelphia, and at the time of the 1946 union with the Evangelical Church it had only four churches within the city limits: First, Second, Third, and Burholme. When Thomas B. Miller was put out of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he helped to establish Philadelphia’s First United Brethren Church. The History of the East Pennsylvania Conference¹⁰ notes his involvement as follows.

A small band of members of the Fourth Street German Mission, because they worshipped in English, were no longer recognized by the East German Conference. These were received and properly recognized as a class of the East Pennsylvania Conference. After worshipping for a short time in a private dwelling at 2812 Leamy Street (now B Street) under the spiritual guidance of J.A. Nice and T.B. Miller, they secured, during the summer of 1882, a lot on the southeast corner of Kipp and Cambria Streets and erected thereon a frame chapel... T.B. Miller, an ordained minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a druggist and medical doctor, remained pastor of the congregation until the conference session of 1885, then reporting a membership of seventy. – page 430

At the same time Miller was serving Philadelphia’s First United Brethren, he supplied the denomination’s Jasper Street Mission 1883-84.¹¹ Following his

⁹ *Lewisburg Saturday News*, 6/28/1883, page 1. This 1883 Lewisburg PA article reporting on the discovery of 21 skulls of infants buried in the cellar of a Philadelphia residence formerly occupied by alleged abortionist Isaac Hathway includes the following sentences: “Dr. Hathaway was arrested in March 1881, with the Rev. Thomas B. Miller, for committing criminal malpractice upon Mary Butler, a servant girl, whose child died. They were admitted to bail.”

¹⁰ *History of the East Pennsylvania Conference* by Phares B. Gibble, 1951 – hereafter denoted as *Gibble*.

¹¹ *Gibble*, page 441.

service at First, he was appointed to the denomination's Fifth Street Mission 1885-86.¹² This is his last appearance in the records of the United Brethren Church.

In the Independent Methodist Church (1886-87)

Over the years there have been numerous congregations in many different cities that identified themselves as "Independent Methodist" churches – operating as completely independent entities and not associated with any similarly named congregations. In the context of this article, however, the "Independent Methodist Church" appears to refer to a group of congregations operating under some structure. The following three references are representative of several such supporting this conclusion.¹³

1. An 1879 almanac¹⁴ printed in Philadelphia lists the Independent Methodist Church among the denominations present in the city with J. Baker Steward¹⁵ as the President and four congregations as follows.
 - Ridge Avenue, at Islington Lane, pastor Rev. C.H. Treglawny
 - St. Luke's¹⁶, at Broad and Erie, pastor J. Baker Steward
 - St. Paul's, at Forty-second & Chestnut, pastor Rev. J.W. Longmore
 - Wesley, at Hart Lane & Frankfort Avenue, pastor Rev. Fisher Wilson

¹² *Gibble*, page 441.

¹³ There are other references that give the names and addresses of other area "Independent Methodist" congregations in the 1870's and 1880's. It appears that there was an association of such congregations in existence before Miller was expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1880, and that Miller chose to identify with them after his brief 1882-86 affiliation with the United Brethren.

¹⁴ 1879 *Public Ledger Almanac*, page 34.

¹⁵ Joshua Baker Steward (1835-1920) was an Avondale bricklayer who served in the Philadelphia Conference as a supply pastor. In October 1868, as the pastor on the Chatham charge, he began holding prayer meetings in his home that led to the organization of the Avondale Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1875 he was asked by dissatisfied Philadelphia Methodists to help them organize St. Luke's Independent Methodist Church. He is listed in the 1895 *Boyd's Philadelphia Combined City and Business Directory*, page 2114, associated with the Free Methodist Church. He later led an association of congregations known as the Congregational Methodist Church, North, that extended into New Jersey. He served as their superintendent for 20 years. In 1919 this Congregational Methodist Church, its property and pastors, joined the Eastern Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church (see their 1919 journal, page 70). Steward died the following year, a member of the Eastern Conference of the MP Church (see their 1920 journal, page 20) – and his funeral was held at the aforementioned St. Luke's Church, which by then was part of the Maryland Conference of the MP Church.

¹⁶ In 1875 dissatisfied members of Mt. Carmel Methodist Episcopal Church organized St. Luke's Independent Methodist Church with J. Baker Steward as their pastor. In 1876 they purchased a lot on Erie Avenue and built a church. St. Luke's became Methodist Protestant (in the Maryland Conference) in 1881. The property, actually one block east of Broad Street at 1333 W. Erie Avenue, came into the 1939 union as Methodist Protestant, was closed in 1970, and is now home to the East Bethel Baptist Church.

2. An 1887 almanac¹⁷ printed in Philadelphia lists the Independent Methodist Church among the denominations present in the city with T.B. Miller as the President and two congregations as follows.
Shiloh, at Fourth and Cambria, pastor Rev. T.B. Miller
Ridge Avenue, at 2106 Jefferson¹⁸, pastor Rev. J. Baker Steward
3. An 1887 newspaper article¹⁹ about T.B. Miller describes him as “presiding elder of the Independent Methodist Church for the district embraced in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland.”

From 1886 to 1887, Miller served as pastor of Philadelphia’s Shiloh Independent Methodist Church at Fourth and Cambria Streets, which he reportedly²⁰ “built mainly with his own money.” He appears to have worked closely with the aforementioned J. Baker Steward, the apparent organizer of the Independent Methodist Church as an association of Philadelphia area churches, and was also serving as a district superintendent. But in 1887 he found himself in legal trouble and was sentenced to prison. The details of this are given in Appendix III.

The Finals Years (1887-?)

This is the end of the documented story of Thomas B. Miller. As stated in Appendix III, Miller was sentenced in 1887 to serve seven years at Philadelphia’s notorious Eastern State Penitentiary.²¹ Whether he served the entire seven years, and what happened to him after his release from prison is unknown – but the following death notice for his wife indicates that he may have reconnected with his family.

MILLER – On February 18, 1896, Julia Levis Miller, wife of Rev. T.B. Miller. The relatives and friends of the family are invited to attend the funeral, on Saturday, at 1 o’clock, from her husband’s residence, No. 544 West Lehigh Avenue, Philadelphia. Interment at Mount Moriah Cemetery.

Some genealogical sites give Miller’s death date as 1901, but without any conclusive documentation or a place of burial. His children,²² however, are known from census records – and his son Thomas Francis Miller (1863-1939) became a prominent Philadelphia architect known for designing several area churches.

¹⁷ 1887 *Public Ledger Almanac*, page 34.

¹⁸ Other sources give the address of the church building as Twenty-fifth Street and Ridge Avenue.

¹⁹ *New York Times*, 10/22/1887, page 5.

²⁰ *New York Times*, 10/22/1887, page 5.

²¹ Located at 2027 Fairmount Avenue in the Fairmount section of Philadelphia, the prison was operational from 1829 to 1971. At its completion it is reported to have been the largest and most expensive public building erected in the United States. Its wagon-wheel design and emphasis on reform rather than punishment made it a model for prisons world-wide. This structure which once housed some of America’s most noted criminals is now a National Historic Landmark and open to the public for tours and as a museum.

²² The 1870 census lists the household of Thomas and Julia Miller with children Lizzie (12) and Frank (6). Lizzie Miller died 6/20/1877 and the age of 20. The 1880 census lists Thomas B. and Julia L. Miller with child T. Frank (16).