Chapter I

CONFERENCE NAME AND AREA

The geographical area now within the bounds of East Pennsylvania Annual Conference was part of the original United Brethren Conference. The members of the first regular yearly conference held at the home of Peter Kemp near Frederick, Maryland, in the year 1800, did not set geographical limits within which to carry on their ministerial labors, nor did they designate a conference name under which they would operate. Their labors at the time were confined to certain areas within the states of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. Consequently, these areas comprised what the historians write of as being the "Old" or the "Original Conference."

In recording the proceedings of the session of the year 1820, the secretary, John Hildt, for the first time used what may be considered to be a conference title, it is; "Der Jahrlliche Conference der Vereinigte Brüder in Christo," ("The Annual Conference of the United Brethren in Christ"). The secretaries of the conference of which the East Pennsylvania area was a part continued to head the proceedings, until 1838, as though there were no other conferences in existence. It is therefore evident that the brethren of those early years were not concerned about a conference name or title.

The first division affecting our area was ordered by the General Conference of 1829 by the following resolution: "Resolved that the Hagerstown District be divided to the best advantage." The committee appointed to carry out this action reported thus: "The said district shall in the future consist of the whole of Virginia, and the counties of Washington and Allegheny in Maryland, and that the remaining part of said district shall consist of a new one to be called the Harrisburg District." The northern district or conference thus formed was never called, "Harrisburg," by those who recorded the proceedings. The conference secretaries continued to use the title, "Conference of the United Brethren in Christ," making no geographical distinctions, until the year 1838, when for the first time, the title, "Annual Conference of the United Brethren in Christ for the Pennsylvania District," appears. Incidentally, this is the first year the proceedings are recorded in English, Rev. John G. Snyder being the English Secretary.

Allegheny Conference was set off from the northern district or conference in the year 1838. It seems strange that this action was taken in the Annual Conference, not in the General Conference. The committee appointed, reported: "The dividing line to commence at the Maryland line on the Tuscarora Mountain, from thence along the mountain east (northeast) to the Juniata River, from thence to the mouth of said river, from thence north along the Susquehanna
River to the North Branch, from thence a straight line to Lake Erie. Resolved that the west part thus cut off by the committee be called the Allegheny Conference." The dividing off of Allegheny Conference would need no mention here except for the fact that only nine years after the action was taken, certain churches in that area were served by ministers who held membership in East Pennsylvania Conference, which arrangement was by agreement between the two conferences. General Conference, however, in 1849, 1853, and 1857, assigned territory west of the Susquehanna River to East Pennsylvania. It was a part of East Pennsylvania Conference until 1870, then of East German Conference until 1901.

East Pennsylvania Conference area was affected by a third major division of territory. The General Conference of 1845 delineated its boundary as follows: "East Pennsylvania Annual Conference embraces that part of the State of Pennsylvania east of the Susquehanna River, West Fork." The two conferences met in common session in 1846 at Florin. Though the geographical division had been made by General Conference action, the division of conference membership was left to the members in Annual Conference assembled. Upon calling the roll, the ministers were to respond, "east" or "west," according to their choice—thirty-eight answered "east," and forty-four answered "west."

East German Conference was formed of parishes within East Pennsylvania Conference, in the year 1869. The English language was now more widely used than formerly, but there were those who much preferred to continue the use of the German language in Christian worship. In order to meet this demand the German conference was organized. It was a case of a conference within a conference; a situation which at times gave rise to serious friction. This was to some extent caused by leaving open, and to the final disposal by Annual Conference, the question of membership in each, as can be seen from the nature of the resolution adopted by General Conference pertaining to division; which was as follows:

Resolved, That should any of the fields of labor in East Pennsylvania and East German conferences be dissatisfied to remain with the present named conference, the members of such station, circuit or mission, may express their desire by vote, to the next East Pennsylvania Conference, and be placed to such of the named conference as a majority of their votes may direct.

The German conference existed for thirty years. During that time its name was changed three times. In 1877, it was changed to, "Eastern Conference;" in 1881 to "East German;" and in 1897 to "Eastern Conference."

General Conference of the year 1881 ordered that East Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania Conference be united. These two conferences, therefore, met in joint sessions four years, but as separate entities, not as one corporation. When the two conferences met for
the first joint session, the question of the legality of union was raised. East Pennsylvania had been incorporated by act of the General Assembly of the State of Pennsylvania under date of April 12th, 1866. At the first joint session, a committee, composed of Bishop J. J. Glossbrenner, G. A. Mark, Z. A. Colestock, Ezekiel Light and C. T. Stearn, was appointed to ascertain the proper method of procedure. The committee reported, that by consulting legal counsel they,

find it will be necessary for each Conference, in separate session, for the present, before final adjournment to ratify and confirm the doings of the joint sessions of this conference. By so doing no chartered rights or privileges of either Conference will be jeopardized in the least.

This procedure was followed during the quadrennium, at the end of which period the conferences again met separately.

After a period of thirty years the churches of East Pennsylvania, and East German or Eastern Conference, except those west of the Susquehanna River belonging to the German conference, were brought together in one. Various attempts had been made to bring about this union. As early as 1877, East Pennsylvania adopted the following resolution:

That this Conference, after seven years of experience since the division of our Annual Conference, whereby we have two conferences covering the same territory and both using English and German languages, would hereby express our conviction that the real interests of the church within the bounds of the old East Pennsylvania Annual Conference demand that the ensuing General Conference unite two conferences (East Pennsylvania and East German), into one annual Conference, as they were before the division was made.

The annual session of the same conference, year 1878, again took up the question of union, asking for the appointment of members by each conference to meet as a joint commission in the year 1879, said commission to report to the sessions of 1881. The reaction to this is reflected in a resolution adopted by the German conference in its 1879 session. It is as follows:

We have examined and thoroughly considered the subject presented to us by East Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren Church, touching the re-uniting or proper bounding of the East Pennsylvania Conference and the Eastern Conference, and, after due deliberation, offer the following: “Resolved, as peace is one of the essentials necessary to success in the church of Christ, we respectfully decline to agitate said question in any way, believing that time alone will correct, rectify and settle the question.”

General Conference, from time to time, dealt with the problems involved, by establishing fixed geographical boundaries. But after each attempt there remained difficulties in overlapping of bound-
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aries and other contingencies which seemingly could not be avoided. The proceedings of the quadrennial session of 1889 reveal there was wide divergence of opinion at that time on the subject of union. However, in a little more than a decade later all obstacles were overcome. Time indeed, in the language of the German brethren did, “correct, rectify, and settle the question.”

The union was consummated by General Conference action in 1901. The report of the boundary committee having to do with the union, follows: “That Eastern and East Pennsylvania conferences be united, and that such conference be called, “Eastern Pennsylvania Conference,” with the following boundaries:

Beginning at the northeast boundary of the State of New Jersey on the Atlantic Coast; thence along the said boundary line and the Delaware River to the northern boundary of Pennsylvania; thence westward along said boundary to the north branch of the Susquehanna River; thence southward along the east shore of the Susquehanna River and the Chesapeake Bay to the Atlantic Ocean; thence northward along the Atlantic Coast to the place of beginning. Said conference shall be the legal successor of the Eastern Conference and East Pennsylvania Conference.

The item was adopted without discussion. In addition to settling the question of union, this action also returned to Allegheny Conference all territory west of the Susquehanna River, North Branch. The act of union ended all controversy on the subject and today it remains only a matter of historic record. Like all other disputable questions, of lesser importance, it fades into insignificance in the onward march of a conference and a denomination which have as their goal, a united fellowship within the body of Christ. The boundaries of the conference remain as established in 1901. There has been, however, a change in name. The following General Conference changed its name to, “East Pennsylvania.”

As concerns the general geographical boundary between Pennsylvania and East Pennsylvania from 1846 onward, several exceptions prevailed. Congregations in Harrisburg and Philadelphia, in the early period, were served by pastors of the Pennsylvania Conference through an arrangement between the two conferences. Harrisburg Otterbein Church was officially with the same conference until a later date. Their individual record will appear in this work. Three churches in the city of Baltimore, Maryland, were under pastoral appointment of East Pennsylvania. Their records are fully treated in the, “History of Pennsylvania Conference.” ¹

Note

¹ Dr. Paul E. Holdcraft, author.