HISTORY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE
HISTORY

of the

PENNSYLVANIA CONFERENCE

of the Church of the

UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST

By

PAUL E. HOLDCRAFT

ILLUSTRATED

1789 SUSQUI - CENTENNIAL EDITION 1939
To the
CIRCUIT RIDERS
of the Long, Long Ago
This Volume is Reverently Dedicated

What do we owe to those, that brave and patient band,
Who blazed the wilderness for Christ and followed His command?
By lonesome trails that led o’er hill and rolling river,
Their spirits still go marching on forever and forever.

To cabin homes they went, to give the living bread,
They left their own and journeyed forth as they were Spirit led,
And counted not the cost, constrained by love to be
The heralds of the living God, the spokesmen of the free.

In perils oft by land, in hunger and in cold,
It mattered not, as messengers the story must be told.
The pioneers of peace, the builders of the years,
Upon foundations they have laid the finished work appears.

No monument is raised to mark their service true,
In many a nameless grave they lie, who gave their best for you,
That circuit-rider host, who would not be denied,
Who triumphed over death at last, and now are glorified.

I see them ride at last before the great white throne,
A gallant company of Christ, His faithful and His own,
With saddle-bags laid down, and every hardship done,
And followed by a mighty host, the souls that they have won.

—W. Lomax Childress
Reverend Philip William Otterbein
June 3, 1726 — November 17, 1813
Teacher, Vicar, Missionary, Pastor
First Bishop of The Church of the United Brethren in Christ

Asbury's Tribute to Otterbein

"Great and good man of God! An honor to his church and country! One of the greatest scholars and divines that ever came to America, or born in it! Forty years have I known the retiring modesty of this man of God, towering majestic above his fellows in learning, wisdom, and grace, yet seeking to be known only to God and the people of God."
Admitted into East Pennsylvania Conference, 1897; ordained, 1898; pastor in East Pennsylvania Conference, 1898-1920; pastor in Miami Conference, 1920-1929; professor in Bonebrake Theological Seminary, 1922-1929; business manager of Bonebrake Theological Seminary, 1928-29; elected bishop and assigned to East District, 1929.
Bishop Arthur B. Statton was born in a parsonage at Sycamore, Illinois, March 27, 1870. See history of Dr. I. K. Statton in chapter VI. Following graduation from Leander Clark College in 1890 he became a professor in York College, York, Nebraska, where he remained four years. He was licensed to preach by East Nebraska Conference in 1892 and received ordination in 1896. He served three and a half years as pastor at Olin, Iowa, then accepted a call to the pastorate of St. Paul’s Church, Hagerstown, which he served with notable success from 1897 to 1917. He transferred to the old Maryland Conference in 1898 and entered Pennsylvania Conference when the Maryland Conference merged with it in 1901. In 1917 Dr. Statton was made superintendent of the conference and was a much-beloved official. The conference of 1924 re-elected him with a unanimous vote, but the year was cut short by his election as a bishop in May, 1925. From that date to his death, which occurred December 8, 1937, he presided over the Southwest District of our denomination. His body rests in Rose Hill Cemetery, Hagerstown, Md.

Mrs. Statton was Miss Lola Brown, of Toledo, Iowa. She, with their two children, survives. The children are Mr. Philo A. Statton and Mrs. Edward Oswald, Jr., both of Hagerstown. There are four grand-children.
FOREWORD

Much as I have always loved to hear the story of the fathers, yet I have never been numbered among those that had the habit of blindly worshipping them or of considering the precedents they set as absolutely infallible. They had their faults. Some of them were unbearably cranky, some of them given over, body and mind, to boresome longwindedness. But many of them were heroically courageous. Some of them had such strong wills that they were like the man that Emerson described, so mighty in will that it was conceivable that there was nothing in heaven or earth that could stand against them. There were others among them so persistent that their determination gives one a sort of joy. Then there were many of them that did practice the presence of the Lord. They walked and talked with God. They used to tell me that these pioneer preachers, as they traveled on horseback over the mountains, preached and prayed aloud, until they made the wellkin ring with their improvised eloquence. When they did turn loose their hot words upon the audiences of that rough day, it was not like taking a few genteel pot-shots, it was a mighty artillery barrage.

Yet how soon men forget. The most notable exploits in church labor are as if "writ in water." Grass soon obliterates the tragic marks of great battlefields. Hamlet speaks of the remote possibility of the life of a great man being remembered for half a year. Things most vivid, most extraordinary, soon fade from the minds of men. Mighty deeds that thrill and stir one generation, are entirely out of the mind of the next generation. Joseph might have done wonderful things, but there soon arose a Pharoah that did not know him. "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written." Thus John comments on the vast forgotten history of the One best known in history, and most devoutly remembered.

It is not so important to an individual to be thus remembered. But it is important to us that we make record of these memories. It is this summing up of human experiences that really constitutes civilization and culture. It is the stuff out of which wisdom is made. The fathers care not at all whether we write histories of them. We are the ones that are shallow-minded unless we know much of them. They sought the Lord and found him long before we ever had such inclinations. They met and overcame temptations long before we knew there were such. They dealt with human folly and sin, and many of them victoriously, so that their story ought to be text book and guide book for us. Many things which we think to be new, are really old. Many experiments we think to be the products of our own original minds were tried out by the fathers long, long ago. Many doctrinal trends which we are inclined to prize as the discoveries of our bright minds, were tried, fought for, adopted, found wanting and discarded by the fathers long before we were born, before our church was born, or even before Protestantism was born.

The mother conference of the church, Pennsylvania, is fortunate in having developed Dr. Holdcraft and in having him as its historian. One, so keen of wit, and so eager to note and appreciate all the stories of the past which have passed from mouth to ear, but never recorded in books, be-
comes a providential and valuable asset to the conference. Few can understand the patience, the long and careful investigation required to run down and verify even one fact. Some single paragraphs of this record represent months of investigation. The toilsome gathering, collecting revising and publishing in such attractive form this whole story is indeed a monument before which we ourselves, and future generations will stand in loving awe.

Matter of fact people say, a church is just a church, a mountain is only a mountain, a valley is but a valley. But when we adorn church, mountain or valley with the story of human deeds, it becomes a shrine, an inspiration. It becomes an incomparable picture, with perspective, color, glory. Yes, stones are just stones, and men are just men; but Plymouth Rock is more than a stone, and Newcomer making some thirty-eight trips, horseback, across the Alleghanies, doing his Godly work, is something more than a man; he is a signal fire, an institution.

Pennsylvania conference territory, with its valleys, its mountains, its gorgeous scenery, its rich farms, its many churches, some of them noble in architecture, is one of the most beautiful and attractive pictures in the world. This history will add immeasurably to its beauty with the drapery and foliage of story with which it will adorn these roads, mountains, valleys and churches.

For some hundred and fifty years we have been laboring in this region. Churches have been founded, passed through uncertain years and baffling difficulties and have developed into substantial congregations. This beginning has mothered other churches, until the children of these fathers extend across the country, and they have sent their sons and daughters to remote lands and uncivilized peoples. The advance is still on. The slogan and watchword of the movement from the beginning has been the brotherhood of men in Christ. Sometimes I wonder if we have not builded better than we knew. That which began as a spiritual recognition has gone along with us with perennial freshness of life. Is there any subject more timely than the brotherhood of man? Has age or time ever found any cement that binds men into more unbreakable union than Christ? In the social storms that rage over the world now could any ideal so clearly light the way to a perfect social status and so effectively still the waters of these modern storms than these far seeing preachings of the fathers of the church? Surely God is our father and all we are brethren. Bolshevism has not exemplified it. Fascism has smothered it. Capitalism in our modern world has in its selfishness forgotten it. It may be that we have come into the kingdom for just such a time as this.

This story will refresh in our minds the deep religious truth and the social wisdom of these noble themes which the fathers preached. With renewed minds and exalted spirits we may go forth and spread this gospel that will save from sin, selfishness and from social decay.

A. B. Statton,
Bishop Southwest District

(Editor's Note: This "Foreword" to our Conference History was written by Bishop Statton a few days before his last illness.)
The compiler and writer of this History of Pennsylvania Conference is indebted, first of all, to those who made the history which we are trying to assemble and put into print. Had it not been for their lives of sacrificial love, devotion and courage we would have nothing to write. It has often been pointed out that the patriarchs, prophets and preachers of yester-year were "too busy making history to write it." Indeed, they had but scant interest in storing up data to make the future historian's task a simple one. We regret the fact that they recorded so little, yet somehow find it in our hearts to rejoice that they were men of that sort. Somewhere along the line we ran across this saying: "The Church that in its passion for others forgets itself, in that forgetfulness, find itself." The Church fathers literally forgot themselves in their great zeal to share Christ with others. And we remember them now because they forgot themselves then.

The denomination has not been without its history writers, although no attempt was made to produce a history in book form until 1844 when I. D. Rupp's "History of All Denominations" was published. Bishop William Hanby contributed the history of the United Brethren Church to that publication. In 1851 Henry G. Spayth and Bishop Hanby published the first strictly denominational history. Others have followed through the years, but no effort has been made up to this time to publish a History of Pennsylvania Conference, which considers itself the Mother Conference of the denomination.

We list below some of the historical works to which we have had access during the preparation of this book:


Spayth, Henry G. History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. 1851. (Note: Bishop Wm. Hanby contributed certain chapters of this history.)


Thompson, H. A. Our Bishops. 1889.


Eberly, Albright, Brane. Landmark History of the United Brethren Church. 1911.

Albright, I. H. Translation of Pennsylvania Conference Minutes from the German into English for the years 1800-1839.

Funkhouser, A. P. History of Virginia Conference. 1921.

Drury, A. W. History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. 1924.

We are fortunate in having a complete file of conference minutes from 1800 to the present. The minutes are recorded in several minute books to 1868. Beginning with 1869 the minutes have appeared regularly in printed booklet form.

The writer spent several days in the room of the denominational Historical Society in Bonebrake Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, scanning the files and materials there for data and items of interest. The Rev. Homer Kendall, Seminary student from Penna. Conference, rendered valuable assistance in connection with this visit.

Dr. J. B. Showers and Mr. John B. Lyter of the U. B. Publishing House have put the resources of that great institution at our command and many of the cuts used in these pages were loaned to us free of cost.

Credit is due the pastors of the conference for supplying manuscripts from which we have re-written local church histories. A few did not take the assignments very seriously, but most of them did all within their power to present the story of their churches fully and accurately. Doctors J. H. Ness, J. W. Owen, F. B. Plummer and S. S. Hough, and Mrs. Paul E. Holdcraft assisted as proof-readers and many others, in many ways, have helped with this history.

Rev. R. E. Beachley, a member of the Conference, and manager of The Craft Press, Inc. publishers of this volume, has shown a great personal interest in the work and has done far more for us than was contracted for.

We wish it were possible to call each by name and tell of his contribution. This is, of course, impossible.

While working on this history the author has come to a new appreciation of the meaning of "The Communion of Saints." Many times the nearness of the founders and pioneers of our church has been impressive. The writer feels he has experienced a real fellowship with these saints which has been soul-enriching and challenging.

Mistakes a-plenty will be found among these pages. It is inevitable, and we are sorry for it in advance. We are more than sorry for the omissions. Countless noble deeds and sacrifices must be left unmentioned. We are fully aware of the part played by the laity in the development of the conference and would like to present sketches and pictures of hundreds of great men and women who have stood by the preachers in the good work. This, however, is an impossibility because of the lack of space. And it does seem that the hundreds of ministers' wives should have their meed of praise. They have backed up their preacher-husbands, shared their sacrifices and labors, helped them immeasurably with good advice, and in countless ways have made their impact upon the cause of Christ.

The undersigned wishes to thank one and all who have in any way contributed or cooperated in the compilation of this history, and he wishes to thank the conference Council of Administration for having had enough confidence in him to give him this assignment.

Paul E. Holdcraft

Hagerstown, Md. 1938
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That the readers of this Conference History may get an insight into the activities of our pioneers, we present herewith four portions of Newcomer’s Journal, verbatim. The first portion presents in full his autobiography, which serves as a preface to his journal. The second portion gives the entries in his diary, or journal, from the beginning, October 27, 1795 to December 31, 1798. The third portion gives the entries from January 1, 1813 to December 31, 1816. The fourth portion gives the entries from January 1828 to the close of his life, March 1830.

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