Victor Blake Hann was born April 3, 1902. He is a member of the class of 1924 of Williamsport Dickinson Seminary, now Lycoming College. On December 5, 2000, at 98 years of age and the oldest living ministerial member of the Central Pennsylvania Conference, Rev. Hann was interviewed by the assistant archivist of Lycoming College and two students. The interview took place and was recorded in Rev. Hann’s room at the Bethany Village assisted living facility in Mechanicsburg. The Chronicle thanks Lycoming College, their assistant archivist Julia Dougherty, and Rev. Hann for permission to print portions of the transcript from that interview in this form.

Q: We’re interested in whatever you can tell us about Williamsport Dickinson Seminary and your time there. But first, what can you tell us about your earlier years? Where did your family live?
A: I was born and raised in Clearfield. I finished my freshman year of high school there. My dad was working for the New York Central Railroad, but they were on a long and nasty strike. Some of my mother’s people lived in Williamsport, and by correspondence we learned that they were hiring down there. So we moved. The place he worked first was where they made automobile engines. He was there doing anything they wanted him to do for a while, and then the whistles started blowing and there was a strike. We moved away from one strike, and then there was a strike on here. He said to another guy, “Where are you going now.” The other guy said, “To the Rubber Company; they’re hiring down there.” So my dad said, “Do you mind if I go along?” And that’s how he started at the United States Rubber Company.

Q: Is that when you started at Dickinson?
A: Not yet. My Dad had built a home in Garden View. Does that name mean anything to you? And now I had to help financially at home – so I went to work for the Rubber Company, too. It seems unbelievable to start work at 15, but that’s the way it was. I worked from 7 am to 12, and from 12:30 to 6 pm – plus a half day on Saturday. It was 60 hours a week. After I had been there two or three months, a fellow came up to me. I knew he was from the office, because only the office help wore white shirts and ties. “If someone comes by and asks you how old you are,” he said, “tell them you’re in your sixteenth year.” You get the point don’t you?

Q: Well how did you get to the Seminary?
A: On the streetcar. For the first two years I had to walk down from Garden View, or cut across the railroad bridge and go down High Street to get the streetcar there. I always wanted to go back to school, but I had financial obligations at home that had to be taken care of first. My dad needed help. I had four
younger sisters, but in those days girls could not make money as easily as they do today. After three years of working I was ready to go back. But where to? I had done my freshman year at Clearfield before we moved down, and I didn’t want to go to Williamsport High School with kids four years younger than I was. I had read a little bit about Dickinson Seminary and decided to find out more.

Q: So what did you do?
A: I went to see Dr. Long. It was on a Saturday afternoon, after work. Have you ever seen a picture of the old six story building? I peeked around on the first floor and determined the offices must be on the second floor, so I climbed the stairs. When I got to the front room, a gentleman asked what he could do for me. I was always a shy boy and was very flabbergasted. I told him, “I guess I want to get back into school.” And he said, “I guess you’ve come to the right place.”

Q: Was that Dr. Long?
A: That was Dr. Long. We went over the financial business, and he was very helpful at that time. I thought that he was a wonderful man.

Q: Did you live on campus while you attended there?
A: I did for my last year or two.

Q: And you were a member of Theta Pi Pi, weren’t you?
A: That’s right. Theta Pi Pi was a fraternity. How did you know that?

Q: We have the 1924 yearbook here, with your picture in it – and all kinds of information.
A: Oh yes, the yearbook – it was called The Dart. Where did you get that yearbook?

Q: We have them at the archives. Would you like to keep this copy?
A: No, I have one somewhere. When I moved down here, my daughter and son-in-law moved me – and so I don’t know where everything is. They live in California. I think that some things even got lost in the move here from my other apartment. Did you know that for 26 years I was the superintendent of the Methodist Home for Children? It’s an institution on the north side of this facility.

Q: So you feel at home here?
A: Yes, this is my home. This is part of a 164 acre farm that the Conference bought to establish the Home for Children. It was established, and then the home for the aged was approved some time later. Some wanted to build it here. I was on the Conference committee to find a place, and we decided this was a good place. It worked out very, very well.

Q: How long have you been here?
A: I’ve been here 36 years.

Q: I mean in Bethany Village.
A: Oh, I don’t know that. What you should have done is given me these questions ahead of time – so I would have had time to think about them.

Q: Well, just tell us a little about the Home for Children.
A: I came to the Methodist Home for Children in 1942. My wife and I had a two-bedroom house up there, which was part of this property. Some children would be there for just a year – and then the surviving father or mother would re-
marry and take the child back. Others would remain there for years. If they finished high school in a respectable way, then I went out and found money for them to go to college. Many of the children who were raised in the Home remained in the area. They married and developed their own homes nearby. A year or so ago when I became ill, my daughter called them together at our home without my knowledge. It was a Friday afternoon at 2:15 that they came – I remember that. I was not present – but she said to them, “Pick what you want out of the home.” They walked away with what they wanted. I remember the beautiful dining room set that had a table and six chairs – all that was gone. When I first heard about it I didn’t think too much about the idea. I wasn’t ready for it. Afterwards I thought it was a good thing. After they took the things, I didn’t have to worry any more about what I had. But the important things I still have. When you get to be 98, you can brag a little. See that picture on the wall – that’s when I received an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree from Lycoming College. It was in 1956, the first year they decided to give honorary doctorate degrees. That was more important to me – that it was the first year – than that it was an honorary doctorate.

Q: That’s fantastic.
A: There were four given that year. Along with me there was James W. Sterling, Doctor of Letters; Lloyd Christ Wicke, Doctor of Divinity; and Pauline H. Frederick, Doctor of Humanities. She was a network news commentator who worked for NBC. She was the only woman at the signing of the peace treaty with Japan. The fact that I was selected in the first class of four was exciting. If it had been three or four years later, it would not have been as distinctive.

Q: When you were a student at Dickinson Seminary, were you involved in a lot of activities.
A: Well, I missed certain things because I had to take the streetcar from Newberry to campus. But then I started studying my Latin on the streetcar, and I got a B. I got the Latin Prize my senior year.

Q: Who are some of the faculty that you remember?
A: Skeath.
Q: Milton Skeath?
A: Yes, he was memorable. He was one of three teachers that had graduated from Dickinson College in Carlisle and came back to Williamsport to teach at Dickinson Seminary.

Q: You went to Dickinson College, too, correct?
A: Yes, I graduated from the seminary in 1924 and then spent four years at Dickinson College.

Q: That was before they had the junior college here?
A: Yes.

Q: And so what was Dickinson Seminary then, a prep school?
A: It was like a high school, and we had graduates from high school that were here another year.
Q: I have another question, and this is just out of curiosity. The quote by your picture in the yearbook is “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse.” Why is that?
A: I remember that in the yearbook, but I don’t remember what it was about. I remember a kid falling out of bed, and I think it had something to do with that.
Q: What do you remember about housing on campus?
A: In those days there were 16 that lived in the Angel Factory. Skeath and his wife, they lived down there. They were chaperones, so to speak. They’d come into the room every once and a while and tell us to quiet down. The students that lived in Old Main were always wishing that someone would leave from the Angel Factory so that they could move down there. It was a little less strict there.
Q: The Angel Factory was Eveland Hall?
A: Yeah, but that name didn’t come along until later – when they started to name some other places. We just called it the Angel Factory because most the boys there were going to become ministers.
Q: So you lived in the Angel Factory?
A: In my senior year. I told Dr. Long that as a day student I was missing something, and he told me to move in. Dr. Long was generous and kind, but he was strict. He was strict. I roomed with a guy named Benson. He was president of the class. He was from the Baltimore area – a sailor who had been in the First World War. We had a good time – but that train would come by every night after midnight and shine its headlight right in our window. It was from the Pennsylvania Railroad. If you were a light sleeper, you would tend to wake up.
Q: What were the rules in the dormitories? Was visiting by females allowed?
A: No. Oh golly, no. They were not allowed in the rooms. But there was visiting at 7 pm, after the evening meal, in the main room of the second floor. One of the teachers would be there, and some were a little more strict than others – some teachers would sit down, but others would keep walking around for the hour. A girl could sit down next to you, but you didn’t want to get caught holding hands with her. They used to say that was getting caught “with flesh on flesh.” It was very restricted. But you could make a date with a girl – under supervision.
Q: What were some of the activities you participated in?
A: I was not in any activities when I was commuting on the streetcar. Did I tell you that I won the Latin Prize in my senior year?
Q: Yes, you did tell us. Were you in any drama productions?
A: I was in the Senior Play. I don’t remember much about it, but I remember being in it.
Q: Isn’t it true that you were also on the track team?
A: Yes. I went out for the track team, but I found that I couldn’t keep it up. I did that in my freshman year because I found out that I had to do something physical two hours a week. That was the only reason I did that.
Q: Did they have any banquets or parties?
A: There was one big social event in February, on Washington’s birthday – they called it the Presidents’ Dinner, or something like that. It was an annual event.
that you could bring a friend to – either someone from the outside, or someone living in the girls’ section. There was this girl, she lived in Newberry and attended the Newberry Methodist Church – my grandmother attended that church. I brought that girl to the banquet, she was my Dickinson date my senior year.

Q: What about the Chestnut Party? Do you remember that?
A: Yes, I remember. The seniors went up to Lycoming Creek if the weather was fine, to a farm that a friend of the seminary owned. A picnic dinner was served. The year we were there it was beautiful, just a beautiful fall day. One little thing happened while we were there that I remember. One of the fellows got hold of a knife, fork and spoon from the table while he was walking by and put it in Skeath’s pocket. Skeath knew all along what was happening. When Dr. Skeath got the chance, he slipped it back in the student’s pocket and then teased him about stealing the silver. You know it’s funny how some things stick in your mind and some things don’t. Skeath was a wonderful fellow and a leader in activities at the school – along with Dr. Long, who started first the Junior College and then the College.

Q: Were you acquainted with any of Dr. Long’s children while you were a student?
A: Vaguely. As I recall, they had a large family. The Long children used to roller skate along the walkway between Bradley Hall and Old Main. They were children, and he let them be children. When one of the Long children died they suspended classes for the day. Everyone was very sad. They lived in Old Main. I didn’t live in Old Main. When our finances were clearing up at home, and my dad and mother understood that I had natural reasons for wanting to live on campus, it was Dr. Skeath that I saw.

Q: Where was the cafeteria. Where did you eat your meals?
A: That was on the first floor of the central section of Old Main. The chapel section was on the second floor.

Q: How was the food and the service in the cafeteria?
A: It was pretty good. But you know that when you are that age, you need a little more than food to look at. There was a teacher and his wife at each table, and a couple of girls at each table – more boys than girls, of course. The girls moved a table ahead every three weeks, while the boys moved back every two weeks – that was the school’s scientific method of breaking up any connections. But that didn’t bother me, because I was going to church in Newberry and seeing this girl. Eventually we were married. She was a wonderful person.

Q: Were the students required to attend church each Sunday?
A: Let me tell you this. Before my time, the students from Dickinson Seminary had to walk up to Pine Street Church each Sunday, one behind the other – just like ducks. When I first went there someone said, “Oh, you’re one of those quack quacks.” You can’t believe how strict it was. But that was changing. As I said, I started going to church in Newberry to be with that special young lady, and so that didn’t bother me.
Q: Is there anything else you remember about life at the seminary that you want to tell us?
A: Well, I remember this. In Old Main there was a place called the day room. A student who could not behave in his own room would be sent to the day room, and the day students were there all the time when they were not in class. There was a boy at the seminary who had no respect for anyone. One day a girl came into the day room to show off a brand new dress that she had just made. This boy took a fountain pen and squirted ink all over her dress. It was ruined. Word got around pretty fast as to what had happened, and six young men decided to take him for a walk with the paddle. After that he turned himself around and became one of the finest young men on campus. If you didn’t live up to the gentlemanly rules, the brothers took it upon themselves to see that you did.

Q: That’s a good story. Do you have any more?
A: Well, I remember we were in class one day – I can’t remember what class, but it was a warm day and the windows were up. I was looking out the window, and all of a sudden I said, “There goes Dr. Long with a pig under his arm.” He was somewhere and took a chance on a pig. They drew his number, and there he came along carrying this pig. He kept the pig in the barn. One day a couple of fellows and I found a can of green paint. The three of us got into the pig pen and – with difficulty – painted the pig green.

Q: Did you ever get caught?
A: No, he never raised the question. I’m sure that he found out. He was seen after that trying to scrub the paint out of the pig’s bristles.

Q: Do you remember anything else about Dr. Long?
A: He used to go for long walks in that park behind the campus – Brandon Park. He went at night. If someone was misbehaving, he would take him for a walk at night. If you pitted yourself against him, the two of you went for a walk.

Q: How did you afford to go to Dickinson Seminary?
A: I went into debt. Some days Dr. Long would call me and say he had a student appointment, so to speak. A married couple would come and take me to a church to preach, and then to dinner, and then back to the campus. Those appointments were very helpful, and that is how I paid my way. I also worked in the summertime at the U.S. Rubber Company. The fellow that was my boss was a recent graduate of one of the colleges, and he had a rough time. Most of the men who worked there did not have a high school education, and that’s how the company controlled the factory – by having a college graduate come and be the boss. He was a fine fellow and a fine help to me.

Q: Did you work there after you graduated from Dickinson Seminary?
A: Just for the rest of that summer. Then I moved on to Dickinson College, where I had churches to preach in and take care of while I continued my education.

Q: Did you get married after you graduated from the seminary?
A: We were married after I graduated from Dickinson College.

Q: She waited for you, then?
A: Yes. She was a typist, a stenographer. I graduated from Dickinson College in June and we married the following November. She was a year younger than I.

Q: Did you later attend a theological seminary?
A: No. I often wished that I had, but I just didn’t have the finances to do it. I was busy serving churches. My superior said to me, “If you’re worried about not going to the seminary – don’t; you’re better than many of the guys who come out of the seminary.” We have some fellows who rely too heavily on the seminary book learning. I never had any difficulty. When they were voting on the director for the Methodist Home for Children, there were five couples who were eligible – and they selected me and my wife.

Q: That was quite a compliment and a vote of confidence. Have you been back to the campus lately?
A: Not for about 15 years. I know there have been a lot of changes. I remember the heating plant for the whole campus was in the basement of Eveland Hall, the Angel Factory. Is it still there?

Q: That building has been demolished. Bradley Hall is also gone, along with Old Main and the Fine Arts Building on Washington Boulevard. The Hilltop Gym is now the Fine Arts Building, and the new gymnasium is where Old Main was.

A: Imagine that.

Q: Well, Dr. Hann, we’ve enjoyed this conversation greatly. Do you have any final advice for the students of today?
A: It’s nice to get out and do things socially, but get all you can out of school. The main thing is the books – and to be decent.

Dr. Hann graduated from Williampsort Dickinson Seminary in 1924 and Dickinson College in 1928. Licensed to preach in 1925 and admitted on trial in 1929, he completed the Conference Course of Study and was ordained in 1931. He is listed in Who’s Who in the Methodist Church, printed in 1966. His official service record is as follows.

1925-28 Boiling Springs – Hickorytown
1928-30 New Bloomfield
1930-32 Martinsburg
1932-35 Harrisburg St. Paul’s
1935-39 Watsontown
1939-42 Lewistown Grove Memorial
1942-71 Methodist Home for Children
1971- retired

Dr Hann also supplied Vira charge for 3 months in 1925, and he served Dellville charge 1971-73 after his retirement.