EDITOR'S PREFACE

On behalf of the Historical Society of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, I present volume XIII of THE CHRONICLE. For over ten years, the society has produced a mix of scholarly, entertaining, informative and inspiring stories of United Methodism connected by some theme. This volume continues that tradition.

From John Wesley and Philip William Otterbein to the present, United Methodism has been a blend of scholarly discipline and the heart-warming experience – the capable mind and the willing spirit. This volume is dedicated to the memory of Dr. John H. Ness – one who modeled both scholarship and pietism to the present generation of United Methodist historians. His academic, administrative and personal characteristics continue to shape the denomination and its heritage.

The volume is divided into two main sections. The first consists of papers by prominent United Methodist historians – one of which is Dr. Ness himself, and the others all were acquainted with him. Each of these previously unpublished papers was given at an historical gathering, and they are presented here in chronological order.

The Five Papers

As no collection of historical papers on Pennsylvania Methodism would be complete without one by Dr. Charles F. Berkheimer, we begin with a paper he presented in 1965. This paper on Methodism in the Northern Tier has particular significance because it was delivered just after the Methodist work in that section, essentially the present Wellsboro District, had been transferred to Central Pennsylvania from the Genesee and Central New York conferences. Presented to a gathering of the Williamsport District, of which the region was then a part, the paper helped the rest of the conference appreciate the unique history, heritage and New England influences found in the Northern Tier.

The paper by Dr. Ness was presented at the 1992 annual meeting of the Central Pennsylvania Conference Historical Society. No one in the entire denomination would be more qualified to write on this topic, The Place of the Historical Society in the United Methodist Church and its Predecessors. We are thankful that the first General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church honored his home conference with this presentation, and now we take great pleasure in sharing it with a wider audience.

United Brethren Ecumenism was presented by Rev. Edwin Schell at the 2000 annual meeting of the national United Methodist Historical Society. Longtime historian of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, Rev. Schell is the living authority on American Methodism. We are thankful for permission to print this paper by one whose expertise is recognized throughout the Northeast Jurisdiction, and across the
Centre County PA as a Microcosm of Early United Brethren Dynamics is an expansion of a presentation by Dr. Milton Loyer at the 2001 annual meeting of the Central Pennsylvania Conference Historical Society. The paper adds a missing chapter to United Brethren history by examining little known but significant dynamics that profoundly influenced the early United Brethren denomination.

The Significance of Old Hay Bay Church was presented by J. William Lamb in September 2001 at the ceremony designating that structure as a National Historic Site of Canada. The building is our denomination’s only registered historic site in Canada. The paper reminds us that early Methodism knew no national boundaries. Even though Canadian Methodism is now part of the United Church of Canada, the importance of the Methodist influence there is not being forgotten.

The Five Letters

The volume concludes with five nineteenth century manuscripts by different writers living within the present Central Pennsylvania Conference. Each one reveals something of the personal, congregational, regional and/or denominational religious dynamics of the day. Taken together, they paint an amazingly broad picture. Like the papers, they are presented here in chronological order.

The Swedenborgian letter from Harrisburg (1826) presents an almost unbelievable array of persons – including the engineer who designed the canal and inclined plane system that ran from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, the engineer who designed the all-rail network that replaced it, the author of The Old Oaken Bucket, the man who elevated dentistry to a profession, and the first American to advocate music therapy. The letter provides insight into the major Harrisburg congregations of the era and the dynamics of early nineteenth century religion in general.

The Lewisberry (1828) manuscript is the only one that is not really a letter. This remarkable record of preachers and their sermon texts is one of the earliest surviving primary source documents of early central Pennsylvania Methodism.

As explained in the remarks that accompany it, the Williamsport (1847) letter may not directly relate to Methodism’s Williamsport Dickinson Seminary. But even if not, it provides insight into the era and the conditions in which the institution now known as Lycoming College had its birth.

The Bellefonte (1854) account of the trials and tribulations of the new presiding elder is a classic. It’s truly unfortunate that more such manuscripts haven’t survived that could help us put human faces and foibles with the names that come down in the official historical accounts and statistics.

The above comments could also be made regarding the New Berlin (1867) letter and its account of life at the Evangelical Association’s Union Seminary as seen through the eyes of a typical student.

We trust that this volume will prove to be a significant memorial to Dr. Ness, and we express special appreciation to the General Commission on Archives and History in Madison NJ for providing the funds to make this dedication possible.
Dr. John H. Ness
(1919-2000)

John Herbert Ness was born September 29, 1919, in Hagerstown MD. The son of Rev. John Harrison Ness and Myra (Kiracofe) Ness, he entered this world with impeccable United Brethren credentials. His father was a graduate of the denomination’s Lebanon Valley College and Bonebrake (now United) Seminary and a member of the Pennsylvania Conference. The elder John Ness served as Pennsylvania Conference superintendent 1931-48, before moving to Dayton to assume high-level United Brethren administrative positions until his retirement in 1963. Dr. Ness’ mother, also a graduate of Lebanon Valley College, descended from the prominent Kiracofe United Brethren family. Her father James H. Kiracofe was a charter trustee of the Hagerstown Grace church, where it was reported he “held practically every office in the church at various times, excepting that of pastor.” He was a lay delegate to six General Conferences, served on several denominational boards, and had six brothers that entered the ministry. Yes, John Herbert Ness was destined for service in the United Brethren Church.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Rev. Dr. Ness graduated from Lebanon Valley College and Bonebrake (now United) Seminary. He also received a master’s degree in history from the University of Pennsylvania and an honorary doctorate from Lebanon Valley College. Within the Pennsylvania Conference he served the York Haven-Pleasant Grove, Frederick Centenary, Mont Alto-Quincy, and Manchester-Starview charges. A testimony to his ministerial effectiveness, both the Mont Alto and Manchester churches grew into station appointments during his tenure there.

In 1958 Dr. Ness moved to Dayton OH to become curator and chief administrator of the General Historical Society of the Evangelical United Brethren Church. His definitive 1966 book One Hundred Fifty Years, A History of Publishing in the Evangelical United Brethren Church is an excellent second-level history of the EUB Church and its predecessor denominations. In the denominational union of 1968, he became the inaugural General Secretary of the Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church. As chief administrator responsible for the records of the new denomination and all of its predecessor bodies, he helped to guide the church through the process of consolidation and reorganization and the move into its new archives center in Madison NJ. He retired in 1982.

The Chronicle wishes to thank the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church for its financial support and encouragement toward this volume. In the words of the current General Secretary Charles Yrigoyen, “We will be pleased to give toward the memorial issue commemorating the life and ministry of John H. Ness. John gave outstanding leadership to the General Commission on Archives and History and its predecessors.”