

Contemporary Comments on Unions within United Methodism

The concluding section of this volume of *The Chronicle* is a collection of material relating to various unions within United Methodism. Some of the items have been reproduced from published sources. Others are letters and notes, not composed for general publication, that are appearing in print for the first time. But all of the material is presented just as it was written – i.e., as primary source material unaltered by the benefit of “20-20 hindsight” and unedited for “political correctness.” It is imperative that what follows be read with that thought in mind.

Presenting the material in this manner allows the reader to get a better feeling for the thoughts and emotions of those actually experiencing the events – events for which most of us have only second-hand knowledge that has been received in very filtered form. The material is presented chronologically in three sections, each with a brief editor’s note.

1. Early Methodist-United Brethren Correspondence: 1809-1813 – official letters discussing possible denominational union.
2. United Brethren Unions that Weren’t: 1903-1929 – material commenting on developing United Brethren unions that were never consummated.
3. Central Pennsylvania’s 1939 Non-Union – behind-the-scenes correspondence and negotiations relating to the coming together (or not!) of Central Pennsylvania Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant congregations.

1. Early Methodist-United Brethren Correspondence: 1808-1813

Editor’s Note: The long and close relationship between Francis Asbury and Philip William Otterbein is well known, as is the association between Asbury and Martin Boehm through Martin’s son Henry. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that there were serious talks of union between Asbury’s Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church and the United Brethren (UB) denomination of Otterbein and Boehm “from the very beginning.”

While the existence of such communication about union is common knowledge, the actual documentation of that dialogue is seldom reproduced. The Baltimore-Washington Conference Historical Society, in their depository at the Lovely Lane Museum, have the actual early nineteenth century letters between the ME and UB conferences. The Central Pennsylvania Conference archives has photocopies of several of those manuscripts, the transcriptions for six of which, labeled (i)-(vi), appear below.

The letters appearing in this volume are significant for several reasons. First, they are both personal and official – written as from one believer to another, yet carrying the authority of their respective Conferences and denominations. Secondly, they chronicle the very beginning steps exploring the possibility of union – who can identify, for example, the very first personal and/or “official”

Methodist-EUB letters that suggested the possibility of the union that was finally realized in 1968? Thirdly, they reveal how close the union came to occurring – and the boldface sentences [bolding added] in letter (iii) indicate that the Methodists actually thought the union had been accomplished! Finally, to the best of our knowledge, this collection of primary source material has not appeared together in print for over 100 years – since A.W. Drury printed them (and others, with notes) in 1897 in his Minutes of United Brethren Conferences 1800-1818.

Except for minor adjustments in spelling and punctuation, the letters appear completely unedited. While they are given without additional comments or footnotes, the reader should be aware of the single most identifiable difference (besides language) between the ME and UB Churches was the fact that the latter was more of a loosely organized association than a true denomination. UB preachers were accepted more on the basis of their personal testimony than according to doctrinal or educational standards. Ordination and/or proper credentialing of pastors was secondary to sending people out to preach the gospel. Getting people to join a denomination and keeping records of membership were far less important than leading people to Christ – it was God and not the Church who wrote the names in the Book of Life. These issues, and the general lack of structure or an official Discipline, are what most concerned the Methodists and what they wanted corrected if union was to take place.

(i) MAY 1809: FROM UB CONFERENCE TO ME CONFERENCE

Brethren in Christ Jesus,

At our Conference held in Lancaster County on the 10th, 11th and 12th of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and nine.

After having taken into serious consideration all those points concerning a closer union between the German United Brethren and the English Methodist Brotherhood (I suppose the English Methodist Episcopal Church) as they have been proposed by an epistle from the late Baltimore Conference, directed unto us as met, as verbally by two of their ministers, namely James Hunter and James Smith, it did appear the fundamental Christian doctrines, as held by the two societies, to be the same, and all the difference between the two merely to consist in some external church regulations.

Truly it is to be lamented, that not only in these our days, but throughout the past centuries, by the setting up and obtruding of opinions, immense harm hath been done. Yet our Conference doth not mean by this an aversion to hint as if any umbrage was given to entertain any such apprehension from your side, but she simply mentions it as matter of reflection.

As to the first point proposed concerning a written license to be given to our preachers, we had already once come to a conclusion about the same. But yet til now there were some of us which had not received a formally written license, but shall be supplied with it now. And such as might refuse it, we wish you to take the Christian liberty not to regard them as preachers ordained of us, as we likewise shall not receive any English preachers as ordained of you except he hath a certificate of your conference.

And this did appear unto us as a necessary regulation to prevent disorder, as far as possible.

As what belongs to the second point, concerning a token to be given by their respective preachers, as well to the English as to the Germans, to such members as might desire to partake of the Lord's supper at the big and quarterly meetings, for the reason mentioned above, we think it perfectly agreeing with that order which becomes Christians.

Concerning the third point with respect to such, as by an unchristian walk have forfeited their privilege, we desire to act in uniformity with you, that such shall remain deprived of Christian fellowship and communion, as long as they remain impenitent and neglect to mend their ways.

Thus if we continue not to do unto others what we would not wish to be done unto us, under influence of divine grace, we are confident that all jars [sic] shall soon be done away, and our meeting houses will open by themselves.

Any further points, as we think they need better to be considered, will be deferred to our next Conference.

The God of peace and love, may he deign to unite us still closer in the bands of love and union, in this present time, and throughout the eternal ages. Amen.

Be assured of our sincere love, as we are confident to have a share in yours.

Undersigned,
Martin Boehm
George Adam Geeting
Christian Newcomer

(ii) JUNE 1810: FROM UB CONFERENCE TO ME CONFERENCE

Dearly Beloved Brethren in Jesus,

Having received your letter from your last conference signed by Joseph Toy, Secretary, on behalf of your Conference, we finally agree with you to give hand in hand to preach the gospel of a crucified Redeemer and work together in spiritual peace and harmony to bring lost sinners home to God through repentance and holiness.

And we further agree with you that our meeting houses and places of public worship shall be open to all your preachers that have written licenses from you. Likewise it is our earnest wish from you to open your doors of public preaching houses to all our preachers that have written licenses from us.

We also inform you that we have regulations upon record with us to guide and walk by and our preachers are at liberty to keep class meetings or to class at any place they think proper or to be useful amongst the members or society at large.

And lastly, we give unto you the hand of fellowship and assure you that we shall always as much as is in our power do unto you as we would wish you to do unto us.

We also have an interest in your prayers and assure you that it is our full desire to be as near in Connection with you as the nature of the cause will admit us to bear each other in love, which is the duty of all Christians to each other. Knowing as we do with you that we agree with the main points of doctrine and preach the same as you, therefore smaller things and only the shadow of religion ought to separate us from each other.

May the Lord be with you and make you prosper with us to spread the gospel wide and far unto the ends of the earth is our earnest wish from your dear Brethren in Christ.

Given at our Conference of the United Brethren in Frederick County, Maryland, held on the 7th day of June 1810.

Directed to the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church,
George Adam Geeting
Christian Newcomer

(iii) MARCH 1811: FROM ME CONFERENCE TO UB CONFERENCE
To the United Brethren,

Dearly beloved brethren, we have received your affectionate letter with hearty thankfulness that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all peace and consolation, has inclined our hearts to unite in this bond of the gospel to walk in love as Christ also hath loved us and given himself for us.

We consider now (if we have not misunderstood you) that we are fully agreed in respect to the necessity of union and a mutual endeavor to accomplish it. We have therefore directed and instructed all our presiding elders and preachers whose business it may be to consult with the United Brethren in their several districts and circuits about the most expedient form of carrying the proposed union into effect.

To our own forms of license and certification et cetera, we presume you can have no objection, as they have been of long use among us. If you have already a fixed form, we shall cheerfully accept it and would only advise that if you have one yet to fix upon you may bear in mind whether it will not be proper to be somewhat uniform in the formation of the licenses for your preachers and the certificates for your members. But if you see proper to vary in different places, our brethren are instructed to make no objection on that head, but merely to seek for information and to conform to your usage accordingly.

You will please then, dear brethren, to accept from us the right hand of fellowship and our assurances – that all our preaching houses shall be opened to your licensed preachers, as far as our power and advice may extend (for some of our houses may be under the control of trustees); and that our sacraments, love feasts, and class meetings shall be open to your members who apply with such form of certification as you may judge proper according to our proposals sent to you from the Harrisonburg conference.

As soon as our presiding elders and preachers return to their districts and circuits, we shall consider this union as having commenced on our part. But we propose to keep open an intercourse between the two conferences to improve and perfect the plan as far as experience may furnish matter for improvement.

We hope to hear from you at our next annual Conference, and we invite you to exercise the fullest confidence in us in your correspondence. Having given this invitation, we take the same liberty.

We hope that you will not indulge for a moment a suspicion that we wish to interfere in your Conference and Church concerns. There will constantly, no doubt, be many in both Churches not disposed to become privileged members. None of our regulations can have any effect on such. But knowing as we both do the imperfection of human nature, we cannot help foreseeing that offences will come between the ministers and

members of the two Churches who claim privileges. Now we think that some plan ought to be agreed upon for the settlement of all such matters. As nothing can now be done decisively, we beg leave to propose to you the following plan for your consideration.

1. If any preacher or member of either Church claiming to be a privileged preacher or member in the other, shall be accused of anything contrary to Christian prudence or Christian conduct by the Church in which he may be a privileged preacher or member, the accusation shall be made to the Conference or Church in which he is [sic] regular membership, who shall try and judge accordingly. But in cases of this kind, if the difficulty is not settled according to the satisfaction of the Conference or Church making the complaint or bringing the accusation, his brethren shall advise and request him to desist from the use of the privilege and to confine himself to his own proper Conference or Church.
2. No preacher or member who shall have been excluded by one Conference or Church shall be received by the other.
3. As often as may be convenient, a messenger shall be sent with any letter which shall be assessed from one Conference to the other, with instructions to explain any difficulties.

We invited our beloved Brother Newcomer to a seat in our conference as your messenger, and he is doubly near to us as the messenger of such joyful tidings of brotherly love from you. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet" of all the messengers of mercy and love and peace and good will.

We have the happiness to inform that we have enjoyed great harmony and love in our Conference. And by what we can learn of the state of religion at present, we have many tokens for good and abundance of evidence that God is waiting to be gracious. Wishing you peace and prosperity in the kingdom, and [illegible word] in the kingdom, and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ. We remain your affectionate brethren in the bonds of Christian fellowship.

N.B. John Swartzwelder and Robert Burch to present this address.

(iv) MAY 1811: FROM UB CONFERENCE TO ME CONFERENCE

To the Methodist Episcopal Church
Dearly Beloved Brethren in Christ,

We have received your affectionate letter bearing date March 27th, 1811, by our brothers Burch and Swartzwelder with much joy and thankfulness, seeing therein that the God of love has united your hearts in love and harmony with us, to unite more and more together in the bonds of the gospel. We are certain, brethren, if we walk in the light as children of the light, we shall ere long be of one heart and one mind. Seeing likewise the blessing fruits of our union together in a measure already, and the glorious prospect before us, we do not hesitate a moment longer to give you the right hand of Christian fellowship again. We have now formed our membership classes, much as possible, however there are a number yet among us who have not joined with us in this privilege so long delayed with us. We earnestly hope you will recommend your traveling preachers to bear with such in as much as the orders of your Church will admit.

We have also set up some regulation or discipline within us, and shall endeavor more and more to put them in effect with our members.

Any preacher or private member excluded from your Church we will not receive with us, and hope you will do the same.

We likewise hope that the intercourse of friendship will continue by sending some message from the Conference annually which will always be joyfully received by us – to explain every kind of difficulties that should happen.

And lastly, may the God of all peace and consolation who has united our hearts together in the gospel spread his Militant Church by you and us from pole to pole, and finally when time is no more, make us one and all members of the Church Triumphant to praise God and the Lamb for ever.

Remember us before the throne of God is the earnest prayer of your affectionate brethren. Wishing you peace and prosperity in the kingdom, and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, we remain your affectionate brethren in the bonds of Christian fellowship.

Singed by order and in behalf of the Conference.
May 25th, 1811,
Christian Newcomer
George Adam Geeting

(v) MAY 1812: FROM UB CONFERENCE TO ME CONFERENCE

To the Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church assembled at Baltimore, 24th March, 1813,

Dearly beloved brethren, we the members of the Conference of the United Brethren, assembled at G.A. Geeting's, with the greatest satisfaction, mention the receipt of your address from Leesburg. Our souls have been truly refreshed, particularly when we view the chords of love uniting our kindred souls. We will adopt the language of the royal psalmist with you: "Tis good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity." We do cordially and sincerely pray that Jehovah may make us undecidably instrumental in spreading his blessed cause and extending his militant church from the rivers to the ends of the earth. We rejoice with you that the power of the Lord was in your midst. Our hearts also have burned while consulting the welfare of Zion.

We are truly thankful for the delicacy and tenderness intimated to your preachers as touching those members of our church that may not be, as yet, divested of certain particulars. But we humbly hope that the mists will ere long thron through the effulgence of the gospel and be dispersed from every mind. We have in many places succeeded in forming classes and extending discipline – and as far as prudence may dictate, will pursue.

An "interchange of messengers" and correspondence will be still deemed a favour. Brothers A. Griffith and J. Swartzwelder were thankfully received by us, with whom we had the happiness to consult on the much desired subject of permanent peace and harmony.

Brothers G.A. Geeting and C. Newcomer are intended as messengers to you. Finally, brethren, may the God of love and peace unite our hearts and efforts in the indissolvable bonds of Jesus' love, is the sincere prayer of your fellow labourers, in the blessed gospel of peace.

Signed in behalf and by consent of the Conference,
Washington County, Md., May 14th, 1812
Christian Smith (secretary)

(vi) MARCH 1813: FROM ME CONFERENCE TO UB CONFERENCE

To the United Brethren, in Conference assembled in Lancaster County,
State of Pennsylvania, 1813.

Dear Brethren,

As the ministers of the peaceful gospel of Christ, we are solicitous to promote the essential principles of that holy religion, which qualifies the soul for the fruition of God in everlasting glory – these consisting in loving God supremely, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. We are thankful to the great Father of our spirits, that by his grace we feel disposed to give out utmost aid to all, collectively and individually, that are endeavoring to promote the benign religion of the gospel, the glorious work of God, and do heartily join with you in praying that our united efforts may be greatly successful in spreading the great Redeemer's Name, and the sweet odours of his grace, to the ends of the earth.

We have been greatly comforted and much encouraged in this labour of love, which we have been consulting together on the most proper means, and measures, to obtain this great end. The great Captain of our salvation hath not sent us to warfare at our own expense, but hath furnished us with ample means for this great work – to wit, the oracles of God, an inexhaustible fountain of truth, and the unction of the holy spirit of grace, to enable us to perform every good word and works. Pure doctrinal truth, and gospel discipline, dispels darkness from the mind and corrects the errors of the heart and life, and through the efficacy of the spirit perfects us in the love of God.

We acknowledge the receipt of your affectionate address, by our respected brethren C. Newcomer and C. Crum, and rejoice to hear of your success in forming classes, and extending Discipline. The closer the union of Christians can be drawn, the more readily they yield to gospel discipline, and we still recommend a prudent perseverance in this good work, knowing from long and happy experience that your labour will not be in vain in the Lord.

We shall rejoice to embrace every opportunity of consulting together, openly and freely on the most proper measures, to promote peace and perfect harmony. In order thereto, we have appointed our much respected brethren Robert Burch and James M'Cann as bearers of this address to your respectable body, whom we recommend to you as persons able and ready to give any information on the subject of peace, and union, that you may require.

Finally, brethren, we commend you to God, and the word of his grace, praying that his peace and love may unite all our souls in Christ Jesus, and that we may all see the pleasure of the Lord, prospering in our hands, 'til they that sow and they that reap shall meet and rejoice together in the kingdom of God, forever and ever.

Signed in behalf, and at the request, of
the Baltimore Annual Conference,
held in the city of Baltimore
March 20th, 1813,
Beverly Waugh, secretary

2. United Brethren Unions that Weren't: 1903-1929

Editor's Note: The article "United Brethren Ecumenism" in the 2002 volume of The Chronicle is a detailed account that denomination's interests in various mergers over the years. In this section of the present volume devoted to contemporary accounts of proposed unions within United Methodism, we present several United Brethren statements published during merger negotiations that never came to fruition.

1903: United Brethren – Methodist Protestant – Congregational

The following two paragraphs appear on page 62 of the 1903 journal of the Pennsylvania Conference. They indicate local approval, perhaps with some reservations about a denominational union under consideration. As it happened, the Congregational Church removed itself from the proposed merger – leaving the United Brethren and Methodist Protestant denominations to continue in two-way negotiations. – ed.

Resolved, That, as a Conference, we are heartily in accord with the proposed organic union of the Methodist Protestant and Congregational churches and our own denomination.

There was quite a lengthy discussion on the subject, an amendment having been offered to strike out the word "organic." Z.A. Colestock, Ex-Bishop J. Dickson, Bishop J.S. Mills, J.W. Kiracofe, C.T. Stearn, and C.I.B. Brane addressed the Conference upon the subject, after which the amendment was defeated and the original paper passed with but little opposition.

1913: United Brethren – Methodist Protestant

The following two articles, labeled (i) and (ii), appeared on page 5 and page 20 of the United Brethren denomination's weekly publication The Religious Telescope for October 8, 1913. This union was approved 557-60 by the 1913 General Conference and was currently being voted on by the various annual conferences. The new denomination was to be called the United Protestant Church. For reasons that are not altogether clear, the union never materialized and the 1917 General Conference simply reported that "due to serious objection in both denominations, further agitation on the question of organic union ceases." – ed.

(i) CHURCH UNION

Last week added another annual conference to the list of those voting against church union – East Pennsylvania. This makes three: one each in the East, Central and Northwest districts. All conferences in the Pacific and Southwest districts have voted favorably, unless there was a negative last week which has not been reported.

All the Methodist Protestant conferences which have met in regular session have voted for union with great unanimity. Seven of them have been unanimous.

The cause of union is gathering momentum as it proceeds. The difficulties do not seem too many to be insuperable. The sloughing off that was feared seems less likely now than at any previous time. If this can be a fair and square union in fact as well as in name, there will be little opposition on either side. What good this would do for the kingdom, and what an inspiration it would be to the denominations primarily concerned, no one now can venture to outline.

Future developments are awaited with interest – interest growing into anxiety. We dare not make any blunders. With a proper conception of the difficulties involved, with a keen study of the grave questions connected with proposed amalgamation, we should take frequent counsel of God. We are under the impression that, when men are altogether right with God, they usually agree on plans for religious work; also, if men are altogether right with God, and there should be a conscientious disagreement, the minority is always forward to yield to the majority.

(ii) VOTING ON CHURCH UNION

[reprinted from the *Methodist Protestant* periodical]

Next comes the Virginia, then the Eastern, and afterward at short intervals the conferences of the great Southwest, with three or four also in the great Southeast. In two or three of the conferences already polled, there were rumors of possible division; but somehow all possible division melted into final harmony. Let us believe that this harmony was breathed forth by the Holy Spirit, and that the same Shekinah will enter in at the door of all other conferences, making way for the question.

In this firm conviction may we also predict, and I here venture the prediction that our denomination will come into the union in all the fullness of her strength, and in perfect final harmony, arm in arm and heart to heart. How stands the record so far? The fourteen conferences which have already voted cover all the territory from the Alleghenies to the Rockies, and from the Northern Lakes to Tennessee, and represent a membership of one hundred thousand. That one hundred thousand will come into the union one hundred thousand strong! There will be no discount! Nay, more, this territory will come into the union at a premium, for the very slight losses which are only possible will be offset in a manifold way by the gains which are certain; and I believe that same prediction may be safely made for the Eastern Conference, and for the conferences of the Southwest and the Southeast.

If the union is inevitable, as determined in the good providence of God, then let us all pray that the Lord will give unto the union our every conference and our every congregation. And in whatsoever city the two General Conferences shall meet in their separate denominational capacity, in whatsoever temple the General Conference shall meet in joint convention, may the sent angels of God prepare us there an upper room – where all controversy shall learn to speak with other tongues, and where all hearts shall melt into the one brotherhood of the kingdom!

1929: United Brethren – Reformed Church - Evangelical Synod

This union, to be called The United Church in America, was the big topic at the 1929 General Conference held in Lancaster PA. Although “unanimously approved” by that body, the merger did not take place – and no formal explanation for the failure was given at the 1933 General Conference. The other two denominations, however, followed through and formed the Evangelical and Reformed Church in 1934 – which joined with the Congregational Christian Church in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ. What follows are three communications, labeled (i) and (ii) and (iii), between Time Magazine and L.B. Harnish, that are preserved in the collections at the conference archives. Raised in Grace Church in Carlisle and an active layman at all levels within the denomination, Mr. Harnish was in charge of publicity for the 1929 General Conference. –ed.

(i) LETTER ON TIME MAGAZINE STATIONERY

Mr. L.B. Harnish
Box 928
Dayton, Ohio

Dear Mr. Harnish,

Some time ago we received from you a dispatch on the proposed union on the Reformed Church in the United States, the United Brethren in Christ, and the Evangelical Synod of North America.

We are very much interested in this possible merger, and should like to know more about it as action is taken. May we have any authoritative news on the vote on the plan by the various denominations concerned when you release it.

Also, we should like copies of two pamphlets issued by the Committee on Publicity of the Joint Commissions. One is called “The United Church in America: A Handbook of Information” and the other is titled “The United Church in America” with a line at the bottom of the title page “approved by unanimous vote; Dayton, Ohio; February 7, 1929.” Will you please forward these to us as soon as possible?

Sincerely yours,
[signed]
Rhoda Booth

(ii) POSTAL TELEGRAPH SENT DURING GENERAL CONFERENCE

LX NEW YORK NY MAY 16 1929.

L B HARNISH.

PLEASE SEND ALL GOOD AVAILABLE DATA ON UNITED BROTHERS CONVENTION
SPECIAL DELIVERY IF MERGER SEEMS PROBABLE. WILL YOU SUGGEST
PHOTOGRAPHS. GIVE FULL NAME. POSITION OF. WHAT HE DID.
A R JACKSON. TIME MAGAZINE. 250 EAST 42 ST.

(iii) PORTION OF RESPONSE TO ABOVE TELEGRAPH

Hotel Brunswick
Lancaster, Pa.
May 20, 1929

A.R. Jackson
Time Magazine
250 E. 42nd St.
New York City

Dear Jackson:

I am sending releases to both your Cleveland and New York addresses so you'll be sure to get what you want.

Your wire of 16th inst. to hand.

Merger looks like a certainty. Associated Press, United Press, and International New Service are carrying wire reports and they will probably reach you before my releases can possibly do.

As to photos – my complete sets are now in the hands, in New York City, of the following: [9 news bureaus listed]

I do not have here, and cannot now get, a complete set and I am sorry. I did want 25 more sets but did not have the money to get them. Hence, the news photo service bureaus have what I had, and you can get what you want from them.

I enclose pamphlets that cover about all there is, also my special release on Church Union.

Respectfully,
L.B.H.

3. Central Pennsylvania's 1939 Non-Union

Editor's Note: The Methodist Protestant [MP] denomination was formed in 1830 by so-called reformers who left the mainstream Methodist Episcopal [ME] body to establish a more democratic Church. Accordingly, they had lay representation at all conferences – whereas only ordained clergy had a vote at ME annual and general conferences. They also had a less powerful episcopacy – with the chief ecclesiastical officer called a president instead of a bishop.

In the MP Church, most of Central PA was originally part of the Pennsylvania Conference. Never a strong conference, it peaked about 1912 when its General Conference statistics reveal 26 church buildings, 5 parsonages, 10 itinerant ministers, 3 unstationed pastors, and 977 lay members – the only smaller non-missionary conference was the South Carolina Conference. By the 1939 re-union, it had been placed with all the work in New Jersey, New York and New England to form the Eastern Conference. Pennsylvania MP churches in the western part of the state and along the Maryland border were members of the Pittsburgh and Maryland Conferences, two of the denomination's strongest.

What happened at Shippensburg typifies the MP work in Central PA. The Shippensburg circuit was organized in 1830, at the time of the denominational split. It was soon clear that the strength of the appointment was in the northwest part of the circuit, and it was renamed the Concord circuit in 1839. In 1843 the southern part was split into a separate appointment and named the Carlisle circuit. The Carlisle circuit existed from 1843 to 1868, but it never had more than three church buildings and struggled for most of its existence. When the circuit was discontinued in 1868, the remaining congregations were “on their own” and could either disband or seek to identify with another denomination. One congregation, Barnitz, chose to become ME – but the others disbanded.

The Concord circuit was renamed Doylesburg in 1929, endured until the 1939 re-union, and brought three congregations (Doylesburg, Amberson and Roxbury) into the Central PA Conference of the Methodist Church. Part of the strong Maryland Conference, Doylesburg was the only entire MP circuit to join the Central PA Conference in 1939. [Most other Maryland Conference churches and circuits in Pennsylvania became part of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Church until the conference boundary was fixed to agree with the state line in 1962.]

The material in that follows is a representative selection of the items in the conference archives relating to the three remaining 1939 Eastern Conference charges (Cassville, Reyburn, Shickshinny) within our boundaries – which contributed only a single congregation (Cooks) to the Central PA Conference of the Methodist Church. Some of the material is sensitive, and certainly not written for general publication. The items are presented, with thanks to those whose vision has led to their preservation, assuming that the passage of 65 years renders this an appropriate time to share their contents with a broader audience of interested persons.

(i) 1939 LETTER FROM James H. Straughn TO J. Edgar Skillington
A former President of the Maryland Conference, Rev. JH Straughn was the last President (1936-39) of the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1939 he became a bishop in the Methodist Church and was assigned to the Pittsburgh Area. Rev. JE Skillington was president of the Conference Board of Trustees. –ed.

Dear Dr. Skillington,

You wrote me in the middle of September concerning our Methodist Protestant fields within the bounds of the Central Pennsylvania Conference. The secretary of the Maryland Conference informs me that only one charge from the former Maryland Conference will at this time become a part of your conference...

Doylesburg – F.A. Carroll, pastor
Mrs. Carrie Wolff, delegate
Miss Alma Vansyoc, reserve

There are three churches on the charge – Doylesburg, Amberson Valley, Roxbury.

From the Eastern Conference...

Cassville circuit – A.M. Freer, pastor

This charge is composed of Cassville, Coles Creek, Cooks Mills, Harmony, Meadow Green. Freer is really a very nice fellow and I think with some attention he will be drawn along into the union.

Reyburn circuit – to be supplied

Rev. J.W. Booth, Shickshinny RFD, was pastor last year and because he joined the dissenting group which left our Eastern Conference was given a relation of “left without appointment.” I understand that this same dissenting group, which organized, reappointed Booth to this charge. Evidently the charge itself is in a very uncertain condition with reference to the union. In several similar cases, Bishop Richardson reassigned dissenting men charges hoping it might mollify their position.

Shickshinny – A.F. Birdsall, pastor

This charge voted itself into independency two years ago, but has never been dropped from the conference roll. The pastor is a paralytic and has to be moved around in a wheel chair – a very nice boy, but strongly anti-union. He was reassigned to this appointment this year.

I am making a list of all of these appointments, with notations, sending them to Bishop Hughes. I am sorry these churches are in such an upset condition, but we have had quite a time of it with these dissenting brethren in the Eastern Conference. Things worked out infinitely better than I thought they might, with a very minimum of dissent. With kindest regards.

Sincerely yours,
(signed)
James H. Straughn

(ii) 1939 LETTER FROM F. Lamont Henninger TO Conference Officials
Rev. FL Henninger was superintendent of the Sunbury District, which included the Reyburn circuit and Shickshinny appointment mentioned in (i) above. –ed.

Dear Brethren:

Within the bounds of the Sunbury District are two charges of the former Methodist Protestant Church. Most of you have heard reports, as I have, of the condition in Shickshinny over a period of several years, and, no doubt, all of you read of the recent session of the Eastern Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, held last week in Atlantic City, and the “walk-out” staged by 16 of their ministers and about 60 of their laymen in attendance. As the newspapers carried the story, the Rev. John Wesley Booth, pastor of the Reyburn circuit of that Church, now within the bounds of our Sunbury District, was one of the leaders. The newspaper said that they were warned that if they went they could no longer hold the property or use the name “Methodist Protestant”, all of which is legally correct, of course.

Realizing that definite facts and statements on the situation in these two cases should be at hand, I traveled yesterday to Wilkes-Barre to search the records of Luzerne County in the court house with respect to the deeds for these churches: Shickshinny and Reyburn, Koonsville, Bloomingdale (churches on the Reyburn circuit, which is just outside Shickshinny and adjacent to our own Bloomingdale charge).

Here are the facts so far as the court house records go:

Shickshinny – vol. 529, page 396. January 28, 1919 [legal specifics follow]

Reyburn – vol. 760, page 428. December 24, 1936 [legal specifics follow]

Bloomingdale – vol. 253, page 572. December 8, 1883 [legal specifics follow]

– vol. 245, page 362. April 4, 1883

Koonsville – vol. 378, page 10. January 11, 1900 [legal specifics follow]

Reyburn circuit parsonage – vol. 529, page 430. December 31, 1917

Register – vol. 171, page 28. December 2, 1870. This used to be an appointment on this charge, but is no longer used. [legal specifics follow]

Now then, all the above sets forth the legal side of the matter. Let me turn now to the practical. I called on Rev. Booth in his home. I learned he is a man past 70, a licensed preacher for 20 years, but ordained and a member of the Conference much less than that. Not many years. If we had him, he would be ready to retire. The total membership on his charge, active and inactive, is about 135 (he was not just sure). The buildings are none too good, though the parsonage is fairly new. He is utterly opposed to the “modernism” of the Methodist Church and some of its leaders, naming them in particular. He has a long signed petition, which includes most of his membership, and I think all the officials, asking they be released to go their own way. This he carried to Atlantic City last week, but nobody would take it. But it presents their frame of mind. He was “left without appointment” at Atlantic City and the charge was listed “to be supplied.” Shall we send a man in, and displace him? If we do, it would be a raging storm, making a nasty local situation for our own churches thereabouts. Our man I feel would be locked out and not received. In the little community of Bloomingdale where they have a handful of people, and we do too, families are evenly divided in feeling and in fact. Upon my question, he stated they expect to keep right on going until stopped by court. What would we gain by such action? Just a few old buildings; certainly not the people.

At Shickshinny the situation is still different. Here in a congregation of about 125 members, several years ago in a meeting 110 persons took action to withdraw from the Methodist Protestant Church – objecting to the “modernism” of the MP Church. For 5 years they have paid no Annual or General Conference apportionments, participated in nothing in the denomination. The pastor has not attended his Annual Conference sessions for two years. Over a year ago they incorporated as “The Protestant Church of Shickshinny” and cannot understand why they are continued under the MP set-up. Rev. AF Birdsall, the pastor, is in the same physical condition that Dr. Leon Prince was, and has been so for the past 11 years of his present 15 year pastorate. He is not more than 40 or 42, I think. After talking to him I am quite sure he would not fit into our ministry doctrinally, and what would be done with him, in his physical condition, after he is through at Shickshinny? This is pretty fair property, but if we take it he states they will only build elsewhere. What would we gain? They would be willing to give us a cash consideration for the property.

In both these cases I would recommend a way worked out to permit them to go their own way. Taking our legal right to the property would gain us nothing but bad publicity, bad local feeling, a few church properties we could not turn into much cash, and two men who would only be problems for us in the Conference.

Yours sincerely,
(signed)
F. LaMont Henninger

PS However, these men should officially receive a notice of our Conference session on the 25th from the Secretary.

(iii) FINAL RESOLUTION – SHICKSHINNY & REYBURN CIRCUIT

- a. The trustee minutes for May 13, 1941 state,
“J.E. Skillington reported that Quit Claim Deeds were in his hand to be executed by him and the Secretary, to the trustees of the Bible Protestant Church of Bloomingdale, and to the Trustees of the Reyburn Circuit, Luzerne County Pa, for the former Methodist Protestant Church and parsonage properties respectively.”
- b. An undated and unsigned circa 1940 handwritten note in the files at the conference archives states,
“Deeds given to following former MP Churches
 1. Shickshinny
 2. Reyburn
 3. Koonsville
 4. Bloomingdale (church and hall)
 5. the parsonage at KoonsvilleRev. Birdsall is holding services in Register Church. We have given no deed for this.”

(iv) 1-12-1940 LETTER FROM Weidner Titzck TO Walter L. Crowding
Weidner Titzck was a New Jersey attorney retained by those who left the Eastern Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church and later reorganized as the Bible Protestant denomination, after they were forced by the courts to discontinue using the name Methodist Protestant. Rev. WL Crowding was Secretary of the Central PA Conference of the Methodist Church. While the pastor of the Cassville MP circuit is given as Alfred W. Freer in this and subsequent material, he had been identified as Alfred M. Freer in the MP journals ever since he joined their ministry in 1927. –ed.

Dear Rev. Crowding:

I represent the Eastern Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Cassville Circuit of the Eastern Conference composed of appointments at Coles Valley, Meadow Green, Cooks Mills, Harmony and Cassville, who are within that body, and in order that there may be no misunderstanding in the latter's position, with respect to the attempt of the union of the ME Church, ME Church South, and MP Church, I have been requested by the Cassville Circuit to inform you that:

- each individual church therein has voted to oppose union;
- at the quarterly conference, said charge has voted unanimously, on July 12, 1939, that under such circumstances, they would recognize no compromise whatsoever, of the said Methodist Church;
- at said quarterly conference on July 12, 1939, they adopted a ten point program to meet any emergency in regard to the same;
- said quarterly conference has accepted and affirmed its loyalty for, and determination to continue its connection with the Eastern Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, and to accept the appointment of the present pastor to the charge made by the continuing Eastern Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church at Scullville, New Jersey, September 28, 1939.

Furthermore, Alfred W. Freer has requested me to advise you that he has accepted the appointment of said Eastern Conference of the MP Church, made at Scullville, on September 28th, and does not recognize any attempted appointment by any other body.

The Eastern Conference of the MP Church resolved that all communications with the united Methodist group or any part thereof should be made through its attorney, and I am writing so that you may know the position of the Cassville Circuit, and this letter is without prejudice to the rights of my clients, and without recognition that there is any valid union of the Methodist Church.

Respectfully yours,
(signed)
Weidner Titzck

(v) 2-5-1940 LETTER FROM George Henry Ketterer to Walter L. Crowding.
Rev. GH Ketterer was the superintendent of the Altoona District, which included the Cassville circuit mentioned in (i) and (iv) above. —ed.

Dear Brother Crowding:

Your letter of January 31, 1940, calling my attention to the communication of attorney Weidner Titzck of Camden, N.J., representing the Eastern Conference of the former Methodist Protestant Church and the Cassville Circuit of the Eastern Conference of the former Methodist Protestant Church was received on February 1, 1940.

With your letter you enclosed the letter of Mr. Titzck addressed to you and dated January 12. The letter was addressed to you, and you have replied to it. You have given me the substance of your reply, though you did not give me a copy of your letter. I do not think any reply to Mr. Titzck is expected from me, and I shall not make any unless he communicates with me.

I think you should have the facts, however, as they relate to me, and to my office. After the action of the Uniting Conference at Kansas City, Mo., I assumed that the Cassville Circuit of the former Methodist Protestant Church had become a part of the Altoona District. I sent the pastor all the communications that I mailed to the other pastors. I fixed the time for the Quarterly Conference and mailed the necessary blanks. I have never received an acknowledgement of any communication. Before the session of our Conference which was held in Harrisburg on October 25, 1939, I called at the parsonage of the Rev. Alfred W. Freer to interview him concerning his attitude toward his relation with our Conference and the relation of his Charge to it. I was not admitted. Whether anybody was at home or not I cannot say.

I heard indirectly of the action of the Quarterly Conference of the Cassville Circuit of the Eastern Conference of the former Methodist Protestant Church, and I tried to get a copy of the ten point program which was adopted at that time, namely July 12, 1939. In this I was not successful. It would seem that the Quarterly Conference was not willing to address these points to the body or bodies to which they were aimed.

In the absence of any communication as to the intention of the Cassville Circuit of the Eastern Conference of the former Methodist Protestant Church and the pastor, Rev. Alfred W. Freer, there was only one thing for me to do at the session of the Conference which was held in Harrisburg on October 25, 1939, and that was to include this charge on the list of appointments and this pastor in the list of preachers to be appointed. To do otherwise would put the responsibility of excluding the appointment and the pastor from the Conference and the District upon me. Accordingly, this appointment was made by Bishop Hughes. Please note that the Rev. Alfred W. Freer's refusal to recognize any appointment made by any other body than the Eastern Conference of the former Methodist Protestant Church is contained in a letter written to you by his attorney and dated January 12, 1940. This is two months and a half after the date of the session of the Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the Methodist Church.

As to the appointment and the conference relationship, I do not see that I have any jurisdiction. I shall request you to refer these matters to Bishop Hughes and Bishop Straughn.

As to the property rights and equity, I shall ask you to refer the matter to the Conference Trustees. I believe that the Annual Conference placed such matters in their hands. I do not believe that it is the intention forcibly to take over the property, but if

there are any releases to be made, they should be made a matter of record and should be cared for in a legal manner. Personally I am not interested in the property, but I am interested in the rights involved.

Further, I wish to put myself on record, and I trust that you will so inform the attorney of the Eastern Conference of the former Methodist Protestant Church and the Cassville Circuit of that Conference, that the refusal to recognize that there is any valid union of the Methodist Church does not alter the fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church have united to form one body known now as the Methodist Church, and that all the rights, privileges and possessions of the said former churches have now come to the said united church, the Methodist Church.

Furthermore, it is my feeling that the refusal to recognize the union is a decision based upon unfortunate misunderstanding and leadership. I cannot reconcile it with my understanding of the mind of our Lord, nor with my understanding of the spirit of good will on the part of His followers.

Yours very cordially,

(signed)

George Henry Ketterer

Copies to Bishop Hughes, Conference Trustees

(vi) 6-23-1944 LETTER FROM J. Edgar Skillington TO William A. Robbins
Rev. WA Robbins was the President of the Bible Protestant denomination. As uncertainty regarding the Cassville circuit and the new denomination dragged on, it became apparent that things weren't as clear cut as they had been made out to be – and several members at Cooks decided to stay with the Methodist Church. In the end, only the Cassville church actually became Bible Protestant. The Coles Valley congregation (which never had their own building) disbanded, and Meadow Green and Harmony eventually became Mennonite and Church of God buildings respectively. –ed.

Dear Brother Robbins:

I have been very tardy in writing you, but the pressure of my work has been terrific, and in these war times I can get little stenographic help. A sentence in your last communication is partly responsible for the fact that I have pushed this matter aside to do other things. It is, "There is no necessity for urgency."

Our Board of Trustees did meet late in May, and the matter of executing the quit claim deeds for the churches of the Cassville circuit was presented to them. The attitude of the Board was entirely favorable. However, members of the Board were aware of the fact that a situation prevails at Cooks which must be dealt with carefully. Persons misinformed or incorrectly informed have, as such always do in a case of that kind, talked too much. And misunderstandings and suspicions have arisen, which now must be taken account of for the sake of God's work there. Accordingly, the Board decided and

directed me to inform you that the quit claim deeds will be promptly executed as desired on three conditions, to which I feel you will readily consent.

1. That the deed for the church at Cooks be delivered to me.
2. That the appropriate officers of the Bible Protestant Church execute a quit claim deed for that property to us.
3. That you assure us that the Bible Protestant Church will not seek in the future to establish an appointment so near to this church as to be reasonably regarded as tending to compete with the Cooks Church.

The first of the above conditions needs no explanation. It is purely for the sake of the peace of mind of the people at Cooks. The deed is recorded at Huntingdon, and it matters little who has physical possession of the original, but it will be a satisfaction to the people at Cooks to know your Church has delivered it to them.

We want the second thing done just as you want the deeds to the three other properties, though with a difference. You admit our denomination has a legal right in the three properties for which you seek quit claim deeds. We do not admit any such right upon the part of your denomination in this property, but the people at Cooks are uneasy, and this will reassure them. You understand that it is not necessary to admit or assume any right upon the part of the grantor or prospective grantor of a quit claim deed. If the grantee has any reason to fear that the prospective grantor may make a claim he may desire the deed to insure him against the trouble the making of such a claim might cause. We ask for this to put the minds of the people at Cooks at rest.

We understand that you can give no perpetual guarantee concerning the third condition, but are confident that your assurance as President of the Bible Protestant Church that this will not be done will be respected by your successors in office, assuming that you have an Executive Committee or some such body which will act in the matter, and whose action you will voice.

I assure you that no lack of confidence in you or your Church inspires our Board in stipulating these conditions. Our action is prompted purely by a desire to settle once and for all the unrest among our people there as relates to this matter. It may be possible some of our people lack confidence in some of the officials of your Cassville charge, and that may be at the bottom of this unrest. It was to such things I referred in my second paragraph above when I wrote of the prevailing situation.

I trust in the matter of promptness you will treat me better than I have treated you, for our Board will meet again within a few weeks.

With assurance of high personal regard and earnest good wishes and prayers for the success of your work, I am,

Sincerely yours,
(signed)
James Edgar Skillington