Lorenz Everhart:  
A True Soldier for Christ

Lorenz Everhart (1755-1840) was a true soldier for Christ in more ways than one. His large monument in the Zion Lutheran Cemetery in Middletown MD bears witness to the position of honor this long-time resident held among his fellow citizens. Inscribed on the base of that monument are these words.

Sergeant
Laurence Everhart
Ordained a Minister of the Gospel in the M.E. Church
by Bishop Asbury
Born May 6th, 1755
Died August 6th, 1840
in his 86th year
A veteran of the Revolution,  
the rescuer of Colonel Washington at the Battle of Cowpens.  
He assisted at the most remarkable battles of the war, 
and in the Battle of Brandywine, when Lafayette was wounded, 
he and Sgt. Wallace rescued him from his perilous situation, 
and carried him about two miles to the house of a friend. 
He served from the beginning to the end of the Revolution. 
He was generous and just in all his relations of life.

While the inscription on his monument bears witness to his military heroism, it tells only part of his story – which includes some unanswered questions, some well-intended misinformation, and significant involvement in both the Methodist and United Brethren ministry. The Chronicle now attempts to put the pieces together, especially as they relate to Central Pennsylvania Conference United Methodism.

Johannes Lorentz Eberhardt is probably the most accurate rendering of his given name. He appears in the records at the conference archives as Lorenz (Lawrence) Everhart. As noted above, his tombstone identifies him as Laurence Everhart. He was the oldest of 14 children of German immigrant parents Christian Eberhardt (1727-1808) and Maria Sybilla Geier Eberhardt (1731-1812). Christian and Sybilla left Germany for America in 1764 – and their 2 year old son Conrad died during the voyage. Even though government pension papers filed by Lorenz himself in 1834 state that he was born in Middletown MD, and that birthplace is given in most of his biographical sketches, he was born in Hessheim, Germany.

Everhart was raised in Middletown MD and left home at the age of 21 to enlist in the Continental Army at Taneytown MD on August 1, 1776. Each time his term of service expired, he re-enlisted – sometimes taking a few
weeks off to help the family with the crops. He was captured, escaped and/or
wounded several times during his distinguished service. At 6’3” and with a
strong build, he was an imposing figure – and there are numerous stories that
attest to his bravery before the enemy. He apparently was offered promotions,
but refused them on the basis of his lack of formal education and military
training. While he participated in several prominent battles and was present at
the surrender at Yorktown, the two incidents recounted on his tombstone are
the ones most noteworthy.

At the September 11, 1777, Battle of Brandywine, Everhart rescued a
wounded Marquis de Lafayette and, with the help of another, carried him two
miles to a safe house. This marked the beginning of life-long friendship with
the General. When Lafayette visited Frederick MD during his triumphant
1824 tour of America, Everhart was among the dignitaries that welcomed him
and led the parade through the city – and Everhart was reportedly given the
second most important seat at the banquet held in Lafayette’s honor.

Everhart’s actions at the January 17, 1781, Battle of Cowpens, are not
fully documented – although he is credited with saving the life of Colonel
Washington. It appears that Everhart was wounded, captured and treated by
the British, found his way back into the battle, was wounded a second time,
disabled a British soldier who was in the act of striking Washington, and was
wounded a yet third time before the fighting was over. This incident, which
involved Colonel William Washington and not General George Washington, is
the source of the incorrect stories claiming that Everhart was an aide to the
future President and once rescued him in battle. While Everhart did meet
George Washington at least twice during the war, he never served directly
under him or fought with him in military action.

Following the war, Everhart identified with the newly-organized United
Brethren denomination which was very active in the Middletown area –
although the precise circumstances of his conversion and/or initial contacts
with the followers of Otterbein have not been preserved. The earliest record
of his involvement with the United Brethren is a visit to his home by Christian
Newcomer on December 12, 1799: *Today I preached at Eberhardt’s from
Isaiah 61:1-2, held class meeting, and returned home.* Everhart attended the
annual conference of 1805, and is listed as a preacher – although there is no
formal record of his license or ordination. He was an active participant,
however, for the United Brethren conference of 1806 met at his home in
Middletown.

During his years with the United Brethren, Everhart acted as a local
pastor and never accepted an assignment as an itinerant. When he attended the
conference held at Geeting’s meeting house in 1812, however, he was asked to
supply Henry Spayth’s circuit in “Pennsylvania and Maryland” during the
month of November while Spayth ministered in Virginia. His son John
Everhart\(^1\) migrated to Indiana and became an itinerant in the Wabash
Conference, a missionary to Iowa, and an 1844 charter member of the Iowa Conference.

But it was Everhart’s connection with the Methodists that was mentioned on his tombstone. He claimed to have been ordained by Francis Asbury in 1808 – but no documentation of the event can be found in Asbury’s journal or the official minutes of the various conferences. He does, however, appear in Asbury’s journal for August 20, 1813: *We started for Ohio, passing through Frederick and Middletown, to Williamsport. Called on father Everhart, and sheltered under his shade from the excessive heat. The old saint has a son and a son-in-law, local labourers.*

Everhart’s simultaneous association with two denomination’s was not unusual for the times, as Otterbein himself retained his ministerial credentials in the German Reformed Church while being a founding bishop of the United Brethren denomination. The United Brethren conferences of 1809, 1810 and 1812 specifically addressed the matter of ministerial cooperation and coordination with the Methodists – and Everhart was likely personally involved in those discussions. Attempting to tie these loose ends together in 1899, United Brethren historian C.I.B. Brane even goes so far as to state that “the facts are probably that Lawrence Everhart was ordained by Bishop Asbury under the auspices of the United Brethren Church.”

Everhart’s United Brethren Pennsylvania Conference service record indicates that his ministerial membership ceased in 1812 – but it gives no details, and there is no formal notation of such in the conference minutes. It does appear that after that date Everhart labored exclusively with the Methodists – also in a local relationship, and not as an itinerant. Since only a very few Methodist preachers were able to preach in German, Everhart’s dual linguistic abilities made him a particularly valuable asset to that denomination.

While no official documentation survives regarding Everhart’s ministry as a local pastor, it is clear that he actively pursued any and all open doors – and at least one Central Pennsylvania Conference congregation owes its existence to this untiring soldier of the Lord. Foreman’s 1967 History of Little Cove, Franklin County, states that the present United Methodist congregation there began when “one Lawrence Everhart, missionary, organized a Methodist class in 1816.”

In his first official appearance in the Methodist minutes, Everhart is listed in 1817, at the age of 62, as a German missionary in the Carlisle District of the Baltimore Conference. In 1818 and 1819 he is assigned as a missionary in the Monongahela and Pittsburgh districts respectively. In 1820 he is listed as being ordained an elder, received into full connection, and assigned as a German missionary in the Monongahela District. Unfortunately, the significance of this assignment is not recognized in the history of Methodism – which considers William Nast the father of German Methodism and dates the denomination’s efforts toward that segment of the population from 1835.\(^4\)
In 1821 Everhart is listed as “located” (not available for appointment) – but not “superannuated” (retired). Apparently Everhart now returned to his home in Middletown for good, although he undoubtedly continued speaking and ministering as doors opened. One could say that while no longer on active duty, this soldier of the Lord continued as a reserve and in a supporting role until his heavenward muster in 1840.

End Notes

1 As detailed in end note #2, John Everhart served in the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant itinerancy before committing to the United Brethren. The material on John Everhart in chapter 17 of the 1908 United Brethren mission study course book “Our Heroes: United Brethren Home Missionaries” includes the following.

This man of God was sent to Iowa by the Wabash Conference in August 1841. Though a missionary, he had no appropriation behind him to make sure his living, hence was left to grapple as best he could with the financial situation involved in his self-surrender to the will and work of his Church. Like others of his co-laborers he found it necessary to turn aside occasionally to secular business to prevent the wolf coming too near his door; but as soon as the necessary provisions were made for his family, he was out and in the work again.

His travels extended over nearly all the southern part of the state, and great revivals were promoted through his almost ceaseless labors. During these itineraries he crossed over into northern Missouri, and preached at various places as his time and strength permitted. In 1851 he organized the first United Brethren class in Missouri in Clark County.

Later he was sent to do missionary work in northern Iowa, but found the people in a state of fear and unrest. In 1857 the settlements near Spirit Lake had been raided by a hostile Indian tribe and forty of the citizens mercilessly slain. This created a condition which made permanent church work next to impossible, and it was quite a while before feelings of security were fully restored. But who was better prepared than Mr. Everhart to grapple with such a situation? His faith and courage and indomitable will always made him a master of the situation, no matter what his environments might be. What a pity that so little of his history has been preserved!

He was known to travel in storm and snow until his feet and hands and face were frozen. At other times he would swim turbulent streams at the risk of life; or if a ferry boat were accessible, he would pay out all his money to get over. Once he pawned his Bible to the ferryman in order to reach his appointments on time, hoping that he might be able on his return to redeem the dear old Book which was as sacred to him as life itself.

Frequently, when too far away from human habitation to find shelter, he would camp out wherever darkness overtook him on the plains, with naught but the skies for a covering and the howling of wolves to break the monotony of silence. Is it any wonder that his end was peaceful and triumphant. Having done his duty as a gospel herald, and in every other relation of life, he could say when the parting hour came, “Tell my brethren that I die without a single cloud.”

2 The son whom Asbury calls a “local labourer” in 1813 was the John Everhart who later became a United Brethren itinerant in Indiana and Iowa. At the time of Asbury’s visit he was a local preacher in the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. His ministerial career before joining the United Brethren in sketchy, but conference journals and other sources indicate the following.
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3 The son-in-law was Thomas Larkin, married to Everhart’s daughter Nancy. He was admitted on trial in the Baltimore Conference in 1814 and assigned to Montgomery circuit. The following year he served Chambersburg circuit. In 1816 he was admitted into full connection, ordained a deacon, and assigned to Aughwick circuit. The following year he served Huntingdon circuit. In 1818 he was ordained a deacon and assigned to Aughwick circuit. Serving in an age when it was difficult to ride a circuit and keep a family together, he located in 1819. Thomas Larkin is not to be confused with Thomas Lakin, a prominent local preacher in Bedford County from the time he settled in Bean’s Cove about 1783 until he moved to Ohio in 1826.

4 The 1935 publication One Hundred Years of German Methodism in America, for example, includes the following statement: *German Methodism had its official and historical beginning when the appointments at the close of the session of the Ohio Conference, in the fall of 1835, were read, and the Bishop announced, “William Nast, Germany Missionary in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio.”*