editor’s note: This article, which begins on page 42, is reprinted from the chapter beginning on page 168 of *My Life and Town*, referring to Millersburg in Dauphin County, by Robert E. Woodside (1904-1998). A partner in a Harrisburg law firm and a judge, the Honorable R.E. Woodside displays the ability to grasp and clearly state the essence of a situation in this valuable account of Solomon Neitz and his involvement in the 1894 split in the Evangelical Association.

The information is almost first hand, as Judge Woodside’s mother was the former Ella Minverva Neitz, born in 1867 and the granddaughter of Solomon Neitz (1821-1885) through his son Rev. Henry ["Harry"] A. Neitz. The resolution on the following page, number 162 of the 1998 General Assembly of Pennsylvania, was passed in memory of Judge Woodside.
RESOLUTION #162

WHEREAS, Judge Robert E. Woodside, retired public servant extraordinaire, died on Wednesday, March 18, 1998, at the age of 93; and

WHEREAS, Judge Woodside, a lifelong resident of Millersburg, began his distinguished public service career as a page in the Senate of Pennsylvania during the session on 1921 and as the President’s page during the session of 1923; and

WHEREAS, In 1932 Judge Woodside was elected to the first of five terms in the House of Representatives where he served as Majority Leader in 1939 and Minority Leader in 1941; and

WHEREAS, In 1942 Judge Woodside was elected to be a judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Dauphin County, which at that time also functioned as Commonwealth Court, and served in that capacity until 1951 when he was appointed by Governor John Fine as Attorney General of the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, In 1953 he resigned as Attorney General to accept an appointment to the Superior Court, to which he was elected to a full term on the Superior Court in 1954; and

WHEREAS, Judge Woodside served on the Superior Court until his judicial career was brought to a premature end in the Johnson landslide of 1964; and

WHEREAS, Judge Woodside served as Chairman of the Commission on Constitutional Revision in 1959 and was an elected delegate to and leader in the Constitutional Convention of 1967 and 1968, and was a member of the Commission on Modernization of the Legislature; and

WHEREAS, Judge Woodside was a graduate of Dickinson College and the Dickinson School of Law, and served on the board of trustees of both institutions. He was, during his long career, active in ventures for many civic and community service groups; and

WHEREAS, Following a career of public service at the highest levels of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the Commonwealth, Judge Woodside resumed the practice of law and became a teacher of law and an author on the Pennsylvania Constitution publishing the definitive modern treatise on the Pennsylvania Constitution entitled, “Pennsylvania Constitutional Law”; and

WHEREAS, His children shared his love for government, politics and the law, and continued the tradition of public service, the late William E. Woodside as chief counsel of the Senate, Robert J. Woodside as a United States bankruptcy judge, and Jane F. Woodside recently retired as Senate Counsel; therefore be it

RESOLVED, That the Senate of Pennsylvania express with great sadness the passage of Judge Robert E. Woodside an exemplary public servant whose impeccable reputation and extensive contributions and illustrious record of service are noted with pride, gratitude and respect; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Senate express its heartfelt condolences to his wife Anna C. Woodside, son Judge Robert J. Woodside, and daughter Jane F. Woodside; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution, sponsored by Senator Jeffrey E. Piccola, be transmitted to his widow and children.

The text beginning on the following page is that of Robert Woodside. The footnotes are those of the editor of The Chronicle.
SOLOMON NEITZ

Solomon Neitz, father of Harry A. Neitz and grandfather of Ella Neitz Woodside, was born April 2, 1821, and died in Reading May 11, 1885. He was married to Susan Hammer, daughter of Reverend Charles Hammer, who was a son of Orwigsburg merchant John Hammer. I have not learned the names of Solomon’s parents, but Mother said his father was born in America. Solomon was self-educated, a prominent minister and a man of property.

According to a resolution of his church conference, the Reverend Solomon Neitz was “a wise counselor, a good organizer, a great theologian, and one of the greatest German pulpit orators in the country. He preached with great power and in such demonstration of the Holy Ghost that the whole audience was moved to tears and shouts with praise. He swayed his congregation to and fro like forest trees under the force of a mighty tempest.” A church historian wrote of him: “Few preachers in the entire history of the church have ever possessed such an attractive personality as did Solomon Neitz.”

He was brilliant. Although having only six years of formal education, he could speak five languages and read in two others. His linguistic talent was inherited by his grandson John Neitz, an outstanding language teacher, and by his great-grandson Donald Neitz, who taught the children of many foreign dignitaries – conducting French classes in German, Spanish classes in Italian, and English classes in Russian. He was chief censor of Spanish letters during World War II, having over 300 readers under his supervision. None of the Neitz language talent passed to the Woodsides, although my sister Adelaide learned enough Latin to teach it in high school.

Solomon was licensed to preach in the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Association in 1840. After preaching in Lykens, Lebanon, Pottsville and Philadelphia, he was appointed at the age of 29 to examine and qualify those applying for license to preach in the conference. At the age of 31 he preached the “Conference Sermon” – an honor usually assigned to the older bishops. At the age of 35 he was chosen secretary of the Conference, and at the age of 36 he was elected a presiding elder – serving thereafter in that office at Lebanon, Pottsville, Philadelphia, Allentown and Reading.

In 1861 he took a sabbatical to write, in German, the biography of Bishop John Seybert, the first bishop elected by the Evangelical Association. (Jacob Albright, recognized as the founder of the Evangelical Church, was given the title of “bishop” by his associates before the church was formally organized.)

Neitz was also elected, almost unanimously, in 1863 as the presiding elder to have charge of the missions in Germany – but he refused to accept. Later that year the Board of Missions decided to send an American representative to inspect the work of the church in Germany. Bishop W.W. Orwig was chosen but could

1 Solomon had a sister Lovina (1832-1874) who married an Ephraim Hauser and is buried in Naperville IL. It appears that their father was the John Neitz mentioned as the surviving husband in an 1865 Naperville obituary.
Solomon Neitz, My Great-Grandfather

not undertake the journey because of ill health, and so Solomon Neitz assumed the commission. He stayed in Germany forty days and “preached widely to the delight of the people in and out of the church.” He was less successful in healing a breach between Link\(^2\), one of the leading German ministers, and the church – but he was able to give the American church a better impression of the work in Europe than they had hitherto obtained. In Germany, a member of the Royal Family gave him a watch stand, which I now proudly keep on my bureau.

During Solomon’s years in the Conference, it passed resolutions condemning Sunday newspapers, life insurance, corporations for paying their employees extra wages for working on Sunday, church fairs, festivals, cake walks, bazaars, oyster suppers – and, of course, the use of alcoholic beverages and owning real estate on which they were sold. As active as he was, nowhere does his name appear in connection with any such actions.

He was, however, one of three members of a committee which drafted a resolution passed in 1863 “Unconditionally favoring the preservation of the Union,” condemning “African slavery as a moral evil and a production of hell,” and opposing “the Satanic rebellion.” The resolution praised the Union, the Constitution, and government of the United States as “a great blessing to the church and to mankind.”

There is other evidence that Solomon was a fearless, progressive thinker. In 1857 he published a four-page pamphlet which was the basis for numerous actions of both the Annual and General Conferences of the church for the next 20 or 30 years. The fundamental tenets expressed in this pamphlet were

1. that all true believers possess sanctification
2. that the doctrine of entire sanctification is not apostolic
3. that inbred sin is not entirely taken away, but only covered, in this life
4. that sin as a continuous force or potency remains and intrudes itself continually into the life of a Christian
5. that sin has its seat in the mortal body and will be destroyed by death.

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\(^2\) In 1850, the semi-centennial of the existence of the Evangelical Association, there was great interest in establishing the work in the Fatherland. A member of the Central Pennsylvania Conference, Johann Conrad Link sailed for Germany on November 20, 1850, as the first missionary for that purpose. Stapleton’s 1900 *Evangelical Annals*, page 475, states: “He was successful from the first, although he met with bitter opposition from the ministers of the State Church.” Link was appointed in 1859 to begin a work in Switzerland, but he declined to go. While its not clear what the difficulties in 1863 were, Link eventually withdrew from the Evangelical Association and was not involved in the official formation of the Germany Conference on February 24, 1865. Albright’s 1942 *History of the Evangelical Church*, page 425, gives these comments about Bishop Esher’s visit to organize the new conference: “Very early he discovered the necessity of settling the irregularities of John C. Link and on February 2\(^{nd}\) brought the matter to a painful conclusion. Although denying insubordination, Link withdrew from the church and became bitter in his opposition to the work. In his later years he came to regret this step and before his death was reconciled with many of his former associates in the Evangelical Association.”
I consider this sanctification bit on the level with the ancient argument over the number of angels who can stand on the head of a pin, but theologians are more serious about it. To me, at least, Solomon made more sense than Evangelical doctrine on sanctification.

This pamphlet offended the defenders of the Wesleyan teaching of sanctification, however, because it minimized the necessity of a conscious stage of Christian perfection to be attained at a specific time after the “rebirth.” Attain perfection! What foolish thoughts enter the minds of zealots. Solomon was smart enough to know and honest enough to say that at least he had to wait for death before expecting perfection.

His own conference called him to task in 1858 for publishing the pamphlet without first submitting it to an examining committee. Religious freedom of speech! As no one in the Conference would bring charges, Bishop W.W. Orwig was shipped in from the Central Pennsylvania Conference for that purpose – but Solomon had no difficulty clearing his name before his own Conference.

When the General Conference met in Naperville IL the next year, nearly the entire first day was given to questioning the orthodoxy of Reverend Solomon Neitz. Bishop Orwig again preferred the charges to which Neitz, who had been a delegate to the General Conference for many years, responded in person. The General Conference thereupon passed a resolution that Neitz’s pamphlet conflicted with the doctrine of the Evangelical Association.

Undoubtedly recognizing the limits he could go in attacking the popular preacher and author, “Orwig in presenting his charge stated repeatedly that he desired no punishment, and Neitz was in no way reprimanded.” At the same General Conference, as if to reinforce the absence of punishment, Solomon was elected both a member of the newly-created Board of Publications which was entrusted with the responsibility of revising and enlarging a Historical Catechism and also the presiding elder of the work in Germany – but the latter post he declined to accept. Furthermore, before the end of the Conference he was chosen to preside in the absence of the bishops.

At the next General Conference (1863), two bishops were to be elected from six nominees: the incumbents Joseph Long and W.W. Orwig, along with J.J. Esher, Neitz, John G. Zinser, and Francis Hoffman. Long was elected on the first ballot. Because of the few ballots cast for Zinser and Hoffman, the future balloting was limited to Orwig, Esher and Neitz.

Neitz led through several ballots until Bishop Orwig withdrew and threw his support to Esher. For several decades there had been bitter fights within the church as to whether any ministers would be permitted to belong to any secret societies. Solomon had been a Mason and strongly opposed any rule prohibiting ministers from joining a secret society. On the other hand, Orwig and Esher were united in strongly opposing all secret societies. In the final vote, Neitz received

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3 The author does not give the source of this quote, but it is likely from a publication of the of the United Evangelical denomination that was created in 1894 as the culmination of this dispute.
30 votes and Esher 35. Church historians refer to “the amazing fact that Neitz came so close to being bishop after being arraigned at the previous conference for heresy.”

Church historians would never put it this way, but as a politician I suggest that Solomon paid Orwig for his attack at the prior General Conference by removing him from the episcopacy – but Orwig paid off Solomon in turn by dealing in Esher, a young man whom neither wanted. Having seen the intrigue practiced in smoke-filled rooms, I would give a great deal to know the specific intrigues of the secret meetings held in connection with church conferences. Church records relate enough floor action to whet the appetite of a politician to know what really happened at those conferences.

Solomon was supported for bishop by his friends three prior times – once losing by only one vote. Was Bishop Orwig’s attack on Solomon in 1858 and again in 1859 made for the purpose of removing opposition to his own reelection? The bishops broke precedent in determining the time and manner of the election of bishops at the 1863 General Conference. Why? Did the establishment get him to take a sabbatical from the ministry in 1861 to write Seybert’s biography and elect him in 1863 to be presiding elder in Germany only to get him out of their hair? I suppose whatever was done was done “for the glory of God” – or, would you believe, for the retention of power by those who had it?

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Solomon was ahead of his times. He had joined the Masons when it took courage for a minister to do it – and it was effectively used against him whenever he ran for bishop. He probably was a better Christian, and surely a better preacher, than a politician. But considering the power of the presiding bishops, he did well. Unfortunately the dispute caused by the narrow orthodoxy of Esher on the one hand and the liberal thinking of Neitz (and later Bishop Dubs) on the other hand became more personal and haunted the church for decades – finally resulting in the separation of 1891, when Dubs headed the faction that became the United Evangelical Church in 1894 and Esher headed those remaining in the Evangelical Association.

Solomon participated in the East Pennsylvania Conference in February 1883 and was assigned to the Reading Ninth Street Church, but prior to the General Conference in October of that year he suffered a stroke which disabled him until his death in 1885. The leading Reading newspaper referred to him as one of the greatest orators in the state, and one church historian lists him among the greatest four orators of the Evangelical Church during the nineteenth century.