

This, Too, Is Harrisburg District History
prepared for delivery at the Harrisburg District Ministerium
at Salem Church in Cumberland County
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by C.F. Berkheimer

editor's note: The title is the one given by conference historian Charles F. Berkheimer, then retired and living in Williamsport, in 1967. Prior to the denominational union that formed the United Methodist Church, the Harrisburg District of the Methodist Church included the city of Harrisburg and all of York, Adams, Franklin, Cumberland, Perry and Juniata counties. In 1967, that area included 60 charges – 11 in Harrisburg and 49 west of the Susquehanna. Since the Evangelical United Brethren were much more numerous than the Methodists in that part of the conference, the 1968 union necessitated a major realignment in the district boundaries. In 1970, the first year of Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, the York District alone – which didn't even include the entire county – had 60 charges.

While copies of the paper were distributed to the attendees, this valuable contribution to the history of our conference – like most of Berkheimer's research – was never actually published. *The Chronicle* is pleased to serve as the instrument by which this information now receives the wider circulation it deserves. The paper is surprisingly concise and assumes that the listeners were familiar with the persons, places and events discussed in the document. Either Dr. Berkheimer over-estimated his audience or people had a greater interest in church history in the 1960's than they do today. Since modern district gatherings seldom include historical presentations, the latter may be the case.

We have resisted the temptation to add footnotes to expand on some of the material and/or to explain 1967 references that are no longer accurate. And so the reader must constantly keep in mind the time and setting of the original paper. Even the building in which the paper was delivered, for example, no longer goes by the name Salem. On January 1, 1970 the Del Brook (former EUB) and Salem (former Methodist) congregations united to form Hope United Methodist Church – which now worships in a new sanctuary erected beside the old Salem structure, presently used for weddings and other special occasions.

The paper is essentially the story of individuals from the Harrisburg District, almost any one of which could be the subject of a complete article in future volumes of *The Chronicle*. Perhaps you will be that reader that is challenged to do further research and write one of those articles. The resources at the archives are always available to those whose interest is piqued by material in *The Chronicle*. The paper as delivered begins with an introduction.

Introduction

Will Durant, the author of the monumental 10 volume History of Civilization, once epitomized it all like this: “Civilization is a stream with banks. The stream is sometimes filled with blood from people killing, stealing, shouting and doing all the things historians usually record, while on the banks, unnoticed, people build homes, make love, raise children, sing songs, write poetry and even whittle statues. Historians are pessimists because they ignore the banks for the river.”

Church historians have largely told the story of church buildings, pastoral appointments, dates, dollars, dues and debts, together with the deeds of the D.D.’s, without giving regard for the people – all kinds of people whose homes were on the banks of the stream. Durant did not mean to say that the stream was unimportant. Without it there would be no banks to live on, or to carry people from one bank to another one far away. So I intend today to talk about people – some of whom never left the bank on which they were born, and other people who took to the stream and landed on some distant shore, taking the Gospel to make history there. This, too, is Harrisburg District history.

This, then, will not be a conventional history. But I hope it will supplement some of the previous histories with some data never mentioned in them. To me, what the people did and who they were brings alive the driest of dry bones. Let this paper be thought of as a part of the Harrisburg District’s 11th chapter of Hebrews.

I am not proposing to say here that Methodism “in the good old days” was either greater or better than today. I do not believe that. There was a day in this very church, as in most others, when cuspidors were necessary in many pews – and often in the pulpit – so as to keep the filthy saints from spitting on the floor. In those days the women on the left side of the church went to Communion first, before the men on the right side could contaminate the sacred chalice – only to find that the tobacco-chewing preacher had already done so before them. There was a day when women were not permitted to speak or pray in meeting – except in their own classes. In those days the patriarch who shouted most often and loudest was thought by some to be the most spiritual of the saints.

Suffice it to say that this was not really “old fashioned Methodism” at all, but an American camp meeting variant of Wesleyanism. In the rear gallery – and one was originally a part of this building – the Negro slaves were welcomed in sacred segregation. And yet history of a high order was made here by the fathers who were influential spiritual leaders in this valley. In this history we should take great pride. To help instill a sense of pride in this great Conference is part of my purpose today.

Personally I am convinced that if every member of this Conference were to take sincere and intelligent pride in her history, and then talk about it on occasion, instead of freely pointing out everything that seems wrong with it now, our youth might be more easily induced to think of investing their lives in it. In

short, our recruitment program today – for filling pulpits and pews alike – is often nullified by the expressions of dissatisfaction too many of us are very free to make public.

Harrisburg

The first reference to Methodist preaching in Harrisburg is made in a record written by the grand-daughter of John Harris, of Harris Ferry. She said that in the summer of 1741, the great evangelist John Whitefield spent some time at the Ferry and preached quite frequently while there. In fact, the settlers came from long distances and from their as yet little clearings in the endless forests to hear him preach – and stayed so long in good harvest weather that their crops were ruined in the fields when bad weather set in. Some of them would have faced starvation the next winter, if John Harris had not established credit at one or two mills where they could get grain and meal. There is no record of how many escaped damnation through Whitefield. There is only the record that some escaped starvation through Harris. George Whitefield was in the main stream of history; John Harris was on the bank.

The next reference to Methodists in Harrisburg is found in the sentence pronounced upon a Methodist preacher by the local court in 1796, which convicted him of using a conveyance without the consent of the owner. He was sentenced to serve his church for seven years without a salary. I take it he was a local preacher who would not have received a salary anyhow. As he was from Philadelphia, and that is not part of the Harrisburg District, we are absolved!

Carlisle Circuit

The first reference to Methodism on this historic spot in which we meet today is the old Carlisle circuit steward's book for the year 1818, when Jacob Gruber was presiding elder of the district. Here was organized Stayman's class, and the meeting house later called Salem Meeting House was first called Stayman's Meeting House and erected here on the Stayman farm. The Staymans were Pennsylvania Germans, and so was Jacob Gruber. A very close friendship existed between Gruber and leading members of this class for many years. It might well be that Jacob Gruber should be called the father of Methodism here and in Mechanicsburg.

There is a tradition that the Staymans were Quakers and that they built this to be a Quaker meeting house, selling it to the Methodists about 1818 for \$200. But historians of both branches of the Society of Friends declare that there was never a Friend's meeting, a meeting house, or a Stayman family with a birthright in this vicinity. It is more likely that the Staymans had been Mennonites or Dunkards who converted to Methodism under Gruber's ministry. They may have been thought to have been Quakers by later generations who were told of their Quaker-like garb. At any rate, they became one of the most generous and influential families of Cumberland County Methodism. Joseph, Abraham and

Christian Stayman were all Methodist class leaders, the last named serving also as one of the first Methodist trustees of Dickinson College. His son John Keagy Stayman was once principal of Dickinson Grammar School, and later a member of the college faculty for many years.

Another Cumberland County convert of Jacob Gruber was Oliver Ege, the scholarly scion of the iron master Ege, of Boiling Springs. He became a notable member of the Baltimore East and Central Pennsylvania Conferences, spending 62 years in the Methodist ministry. Upon his conversion, he arranged for preaching and organized the first class in Mechanicsburg. He retired in 1857 and moved back to Mechanicsburg – where he and his two sons owned and conducted the Cumberland Valley Institute for young men and the Irving Female College, both approved Methodist institutions for decades.

The donor of the land and buildings for Irving College was Solomon Gorgas, a boy in this church who married the daughter of a leading member of this church. Indeed, many of Mechanicsburg's earliest members had been converted at Salem Meeting House. Their first class leader lies buried in this churchyard – near where Daniel Coffman, the well-to-do young man who gave the first parsonage at Mechanicsburg, is buried. Both died in the 1840's before middle life, but not before they had made telling testimonies.

One can't really know the history of our denomination here in the early days without knowing of Jacob Gruber – eccentric, ultra conservative, individualistic exponent of old fashioned Methodism. He was a vigorous opponent of new fangled ideas – yet withal was an outstanding and wise leader of his generation. He was a friend of Asbury, who had ordained him. He didn't like the idea of reducing the size of the circuits to only 10 or 12 preaching places. Once having a circuit of only 13 places, he called it “just a little piece of a good old circuit.”

He was sarcastic about preachers seeking position for themselves, especially easier places, and often condemned the use of the word “parsonage” – since Methodists had no “parsons” as such, but only common preachers. He saw no reason for an educated ministry, although he was not opposed to higher education, and in the 1840's wrote:

Between 40 and 50 years ago, some critical persons asked, “Why have you Methodists no Doctors of Divinity among you?” We would answer, “Our Divinity is not sick. No doubt when it gets sick we will get Doctors.” What shall we say now? We have enough Doctors to cure all – and the Masters, too. But what a pity when an M.D. administers a few pills to a D.D. – they should work the other way here. We have M.A.'s and D.D.'s enough for a while. We want some Masters of Economy, and we need not a few who are willing to take the lowest seats and do hard work. [Christian Advocate 1/22/1845]

When Gruber was presiding elder of the Carlisle District, it contained only 9 pastoral charges – all circuits, as Carlisle did not become the district's first station appointment until 1823. With all 4 Quarterly Conferences held each year at each circuit, that meant only 36 Quarterly Conferences in a whole year – but

each conference then lasted 2 days. And this was just the beginning of the Quarterly Meeting, which was expected to be protracted at least a week – with the presiding elder preaching from 4 to 6 times, depending on the Holy Spirit’s leading. Carlisle District then had these circuits: Harford, Carlisle, Hunting-don, Juniata, Bedford, Somerset, Aughwick, Chambersburg and Fredrick. Harford and Frederick circuits and much of the Chambersburg circuit were in Maryland, and Somerset circuit was entirely in what is now the Western Pennsylvania Conference. The other six circuits covered all the territory now within our present Harrisburg, State College and Altoona Districts. In addition, each circuit had its own camp meeting lasting at least 2 days – and the presiding elder was expected to be present and preach at each one, if not to take charge of the camp meeting. Outside of this there wasn’t much for Gruber to do except to ride around the country on his horse.

Carlisle circuit in 1818 contained the following preaching places, each with an organized class: Carlisle, Van Kirk’s, Newville, Mishes (2 miles from Shippensburg), Evans (near Rehoboth), Smith Furnace, Stephens, Dillstowne (Dillsburg), Ripertons, Petersburg (York Springs), Studebakers (Heidlersburg), Rock Chapel, Gettysburg, Hunterstown, Worleys (York), Breeces, Stickels (near Rossville), Lewisberry, Yocumtown, Lisburn, New Cumberland, Worm-leysburg, Stamens (Salem [Hope]), Cryshers (Churchtown), and Maybury’s (near Mt. Holly).

Precisely who was the first Methodist circuit rider to come into the district is a matter of conjecture. The one who is said to have ridden to near Rock Chapel in 1770 might well have been Robert Strawbridge himself. He is said to have spent so much time away from his own farm on preaching excursions that his neighbors at Sam’s Creek banded together and rather cheerfully harvested his crops for him. Rock Chapel was only a good day’s ride from his home. Some have conjectured that Philip Gatch, a Strawbridge convert, was that first preacher – but Gatch was not converted until 1772. He was, however, appointed to Frederick circuit in 1774 and probably preached there during the time the first chapel was being built.

Shrewsbury Area

Gatch reports that shortly after his conversion in 1772, he left his home in Maryland and came north on the road to York – where he preached his first sermons and organized three places into a little circuit, two of them in Pennsylvania and one in Maryland. Shortly afterwards, one of these Pennsylvania appointments was at the home of John Lawson, where a class was organized. Lawson erected a meeting house for Methodists, and it was used until his family lost control of it in 1788. Whereupon his nephew John Low converted the first floor of his own farmhouse into a meeting house by removing a permanent partition and enlarging its capacity. For a period of 27 years the meetings were

held in the Low barn in summertime and in the house in the winter. This was Low's Meeting House.

In 1815, Rock Chapel was erected on the Low farm as the third meeting house for this class – not to be confused with the Rock Chapel erected in Adams County where 1770 circuit rider preached. Low's Meeting House, Low's Camp Ground and Low's Burying Ground were known far and near a century and a half ago and are now practically forgotten. The camp meetings there drew vast crowds, especially from Baltimore, and the greatest preachers of Methodism readily agreed to preach there. The camp ground was often called the Baltimore Camp. When the railroad came through, it became the means of conveyance for multitudes from north and south. During the latter half of the last century it was superceded by the inter-conference camp meeting established in New Freedom at Summit Grove, directly along the railroad.

On Tuesday, August 18, 1812, Bishop Asbury and Henry Boehm stopped to dine with the John Lows on their way to the Pipe Creek Camp Meeting. An editorial heading in the recently published annotated *Journal of Francis Asbury* erroneously puts this in Maryland – and a footnote indicates that nothing was known of John Low. Fortunately the Low family spoke proudly of the honor they had in entertaining Bishop Asbury and Henry Boehm – and also Bishops McKendree and Roberts, and other notable preachers. Much information about the saintly Lows is available in the splendid obituaries which appeared in the *Christian Advocate*, submitted by grateful and appreciative pastors. As we shall see, the Lows had much to do with Harrisburg District history.

At Low's Camp Meeting a little ten year old boy named Eugene Hendrix of Missouri, then visiting the home in which his father had been reared, went forward and publicly accepted Christ as his Saviour. He is known in Methodist history as Bishop Eugene R. Hendrix of the M.E. Church, South – one of the organizers of the Federal Council of Churches in America, and its first President. He was largely responsible for founding Scarritt College at Nashville, and Hendrix College at Conway AR bears the name of his family – who were leaders in Shrewsbury and New Freedom Methodism for generations. As a student at Connecticut Wesleyan College and Union Theological Seminary, he spent many summers at the home of his grandparents near Rock Chapel.

Low's Burying Ground, also carved from the Low farm, is one of the oldest Methodist cemeteries in this conference and is in the most disreputable state. Mr. and Mrs. John Low, Sr., both died in 1815, and the stones once marking their graves are in excellent state of preservation – but they were in the way of the local farmer who took a crop of hay off the cemetery this past summer, and he pushed out of his way scores of stones into stone-rows for his own convenience. I challenge local leaders, for the sake of Methodist pride, to restore this God's Acre and set up again the memorials to these local saints. Both Shrewsbury and New Freedom Churches are daughters of Low's Meeting House and Rock Chapel. This, too, is Harrisburg District history.

An even more romantic story about these people who remained on the bank and made history there must get into currently written history. When I inquired at Shrewsbury and New Freedom last summer, no person I spoke to had ever heard about it. But it, too, is Harrisburg District history. It is a story of race relations, social justice, and evangelism all combined. At an early camp meeting at Hyattsville MD a lady slave owner was converted and joined the church. Thereupon she set up plans for the freeing of her slaves. Her best slave was given first opportunity to buy his own freedom and then to buy that of his wife and four children. This achieved, he went to visit relatives across the Mason-Dixon line in Pennsylvania, near Rock Chapel. He stayed more than the permitted ten days, and thus opened himself to the danger of resale as a slave if he returned to Maryland. As a consequence, he decided to stay in Pennsylvania and send for his family.

It was our John Low, Jr., who gave him a job and a house to live in on his farm. Early Shrewsbury records show 4 Negro members of the church, these ex-slaves having joined. One of the little girls, named Amanda, wandered into a revival meeting in the old Shrewsbury Church, the only Negro there. The daughter of Henry Doll, a local preacher, went back to her and asked her to give her heart to Jesus – and she went with her to the altar, where the saints gathered to help pray her through.

That little ex-slave became the greatest woman evangelist the Methodist Church ever produced – internationally known as Amanda Smith. She is said to have had the greatest contralto voice in America in her time, the Mahalia Jackson of her day, singing only Gospel songs and spirituals – not in night clubs for money, but in great revival services before vast multitudes of souls. Her influence over people was phenomenal, and it was no less so in the presence of the elite and the wealthy. She appeared as a guest soloist in two General Conferences of the M.E. Church. She sang and preached all over the United States – and in England, Scotland and France – always upon the invitation of people she had helped, and always with no remuneration except her expenses.

She spent 12 years with Bishop William Taylor in Liberia, among the colonized ex-slaves from America. She visited India and drew countless thousands to crowded theaters and out-door meetings to hear one who had once been a slave in America. Missionary Bishop James M. Thoburn said that she had taught him more about how to deal with people than any other person he ever knew. While she was in her prime, she was a great holiness enthusiast when holiness enthusiasm in the M.E. Church was waning. She was the wife of a leader of the A.M.E. Zion Church. She died in 1915, having retired for health reasons as superintendent of a home for neglected Negro children which she had founded and supported in Illinois. This, too, is Harrisburg District history.

Gatchelville Area

Methodism came into the southern portion of York County from Maryland, and we now know that our churches there began as classes on the Baltimore and, later, the Harford circuits. When Freeborn Garrettson was invited to come to York in 1781, he was then a preacher on the Baltimore circuit. The Low appointment had already been a preaching place for 9 years before he went to York, Lewisberry and Wellsville to start classes there.

While William Colbert was on the Harford circuit in 1790, he received into membership in Fawn township Edward Manifold, Alexander Ewing and James Ewing – all of whom were to know considerable persecution because they became Methodists. Alexander Ewing became a class leader, exhorter and local preacher at the Prospect Church, now reported as the Gatchelville Church. His son James Ewing, ordained by Asbury, became a leading member of the Baltimore and East Baltimore Conferences and spend many years on circuits in our section – including Carlisle circuit 1834-35.

Alexander Ewing was the first of a great line of ministers who have blessed the church. From his licensing until this day, there has been no time when one or more members of his family has not been a Methodist preacher. Give attention to this list of men of God!

- His son James Ewing gave his life to the ministry – and his 4 sons followed suit, producing 4 ministerial sons of one minister father!
- Through James, then, four grandsons were pastors.
- One great-grandson in this line was a pastor: Edwin Henry Witman.
- Two great-great-grandsons entered the ministry: Harold Witman, who died as a very young member of this conference; and Edwin H. Witman, now a member of the Southern California-Arizona Conference.
- There is also a great-great-great-grandson, Frank McConnell Witman, currently serving in the Southern California-Arizona Conference.
- [editor's note: The chain shows no sign of ending. Since Dr. Berkheimer prepared this paper, two g-g-g-g-granddaughters entered the ministry: Cynthia Witman (formerly in the Minnesota Conference, now in the United Church of Christ) and Jan Witman (in the Yellowstone Conference). In addition, a g-g-g-g-g-granddaughter, a niece of the Reverends Cynthia and Jan Witman, Rachael Wiley is currently preparing for the ordained ministry.]

But go back a bit. Alexander Ewing also had two sons-in-law who were early circuit riders: Tobias and James Reiley. Brothers, they were the forefathers of all the Reiley ministers of this conference – who are, in addition to all those mentioned above, also ministerial descendants of Alexander Ewing. James Reiley was the father of Asbury R. Reiley and of James McKendree Reiley, the greatest orator of them all. James McKendree Reiley was the father of William McKendree Reiley of our conference, who was the father of J. McKendree Reiley of more recent years. William McKendree Reiley was also the grandfather of Henry Baker Reiley and of William Witman Reiley, now of the Ohio Conference. And I have just been informed that Robert Knupp, the conference lay leader, is

also a descendant of the sainted father Alexander Ewing. This, too is Harrisburg District history.

Quiet Women of the District

Here's another historical moment long forgotten. It is the moment in 1847 when Mrs. Thomas Tanyhill, wife of the senior preacher on Gettysburg circuit, urged young Robert Maclay, the junior preacher on the circuit, a graduate of Dickinson College from Concord in Franklin County, to heed the call as a missionary to China. He followed her advice, entered the stream of history, and became one of the all-time greats of Methodist missionary history. More about him in a moment, but Mrs. Tanyhill made Kingdom history while at Gettysburg.

Then too, there was a little Mrs. Shillito of Chambersburg, who quietly filled her missionary box with coins, as she could, bringing them without exception on Missionary Day for about 50 years – including the year she had buried it in her cellar for safe keeping, and had to dig it up from the ashes of her house when the Confederates burned it to the ground along with the rest of the town.

And then there was poor Mollie Brown of Chambersburg, who got a \$40 a year pension from the government as the widow of a Revolutionary War soldier whom she had helped to man his cannon, like Mollie Pitcher, at Trenton. One of the earliest members of this small class, Mollie lived 8 miles from Chambersburg but walked it to and from every meeting of her class – wading a stream barefoot in winter, for there was no bridge, and putting on her shoes again on the other side. She didn't know she was poor and charged herself 25¢ each Quarterly Conference for the preacher's salary and the same amount for missions – borrowing or begging this amount when she didn't have it. We would call her eccentric, but she knew the Lord and never missed an opportunity to testify to the riches of God's grace to her. Decades after her death, a prominent physician in town wrote her story for the *Christian Advocate* and told of her influence on him. She made history on the banks of the stream. Her influence may have had much to do with the unmatched record of her church in recruitment and support for the missionary program of the church.

Working quietly elsewhere in the district were history-making women whose names have not been listed by the historians. In 1838, for example, on New Bloomfield circuit in Perry County was organized the district's first Female Missionary Society of which there is any reference. That same year a similar society was organized at Shippensburg, after a missionary address by Jacob Gruber, and the names of the first officers have been preserved. And yet only a few years earlier there appeared in the *Christian Advocate* (February 29, 1828) a proposal by a man (of course) signing himself "A Lover of Propriety" that the M.E. Church should organize a "Society for the Prevention of Women Speaking in Public at Improper Times and Places."

Fruits of the Concord Class

But I must have sufficient time to list some of Harrisburg District's "called of God" to "go forth to look for a city whose builder and maker is God." To tell it properly would require much more time than we have today. I shall try to mention some items pertinent to my thesis.

In 1784 there emigrated from Ireland a family of brothers and sisters named Widney, and their children. James, the leader of the group, had been a Methodist class leader in Ireland and knew John Wesley. They first came to Carlisle, and then they moved to Concord, Franklin County, where they bought land. Being the only Methodists there, they first tried to be good Presbyterians – but failed to be accepted because of their strong Arminian beliefs. The nearest Methodist class was 20 miles away at Burnt Cabins. At first they traveled to Burnt Cabins, but Francis Asbury heard of them and came to spend several days at Concord, the family said, preaching and promising them a preacher if they would form a class – which they did about 1800.

This was the beginning of a romantic story – once recorded, but then forgotten. In 1851 there were a series of articles in the *Ladies Repository* on the origins of Methodism at Concord. It was written by Samuel Williams, a nephew of James Widney, then a leading Methodist layman of Cincinnati OH. Born in Carlisle in 1786 and reared in Concord, he entered the stream of history to find his fortune and his field of Christian activity in Ohio. Bishop Simpson reported that he was credited with proposing to the Book Concern that they publish the *Methodist Almanac* and the *Ladies Repository* – and they did both! He was also one of the founders of Wesleyan Female College in Ohio, and a founder and one of the first trustees of Ohio Wesleyan University. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth or Concord? Well hear me now – for if Harrisburg District history was made anywhere, it was made at Concord.

You know about the Maclay brothers, Samuel and William, the first U.S. senators from Pennsylvania – for the Maclay Mansion on Front Street is one of Harrisburg's landmarks, and Maclay Street is named for William Maclay. Their nephew and niece moved to Concord and raised their family there. Their home still stands in the village, and their bodies lie in the local cemetery. Whether they had other children or not I am not sure, but their five sons all became Methodist ministers and were history makers par excellence.

Robert Maclay graduated from Dickinson College in 1845 and joined the Baltimore Conference. In 1847 he left Gettysburg circuit to go as a missionary to China, which had just opened to Methodist work. That year he arrived in Foochow – a walled-in city of millions, all opposed to foreigners and not a single one knowing a word of English. Furthermore, no English persons had ever learned the local dialect. Maclay stayed there for 27 years – until he had written a Chinese alphabetic dictionary and a book on "Life with the Chinese," and had organized the first Methodist class and church in the Chinese Empire.

The Foochow mission, once staffed entirely by Central Pennsylvania missionaries, was now well established, and in 1872 Maclay was a member of the General Conference which named him superintendent and first missionary of the newly established mission to Japan. Here his wife died and was buried. Here he also translated into Japanese a large part of the New Testament. While superintendent of the Japanese mission, Maclay established communications with the Hermit Kingdom (Korea) and personally secured from the king permission for Christian missionaries to enter for the first time. Here he remained until he had assisted a committee in translating the New Testament into Korean and wrote or edited other literature for the infant Korean church.

He organized the first Methodist church in the Chinese Empire, the first Methodist church in Japan, and the first Methodist church in Korea – this boy from Concord. When Dr. Maud Keister Jensen of this District gives leadership in the present day Korean church, she is continuing work begun by a Harrisburg District apostle. When we recite the Korean Creed, let us give credit to Bishop Herbert Welsh for the authorship of it – but let us not forget that the church Bishop Welsh found there was started by a Harrisburg District missionary.

Finally, in 1888 Robert Maclay was elected dean of the Maclay School of Theology at Southern California University – which was made possible by the munificence of his brother Charles Maclay, once junior preacher on Bloomfield circuit who left his appointment as financial agent of Williamsport Dickinson Seminary to go as a missionary to California during the Gold Rush and arrived there in 1850 or '51. Here he helped to open Methodist work, served for a while as president for the college at Napa City, and then lost his voice – requiring that he leave the active ministry. He continued, however, as a local preacher and is listed as one of the most influential laymen in Southern California Methodism. He engaged in business, practiced law, made good investments, and became wealthy.

Soon after he came to California he sent for his youngest brother William, who arrived there in 1852, having transferred there as a missionary. He served as a pastor, presiding elder, and teacher of ancient languages and president of Napa City College – and when he died he was a member of the California legislature.

The next Maclay brother to go to California was John, the oldest, who had joined the Baltimore Conference in 1841. His first appointment after his transfer was to Honolulu HI.

Finally the fifth brother, Alexander, went to California and served as a pastor in one appointment. I have not found other data about him yet.

But go back to Charles Maclay – Concord boy, Methodist preacher, California businessman. About 1886 he proposed the establishment of a Methodist School of Theology and offered the trustees \$100,000 cash to start it, or a large tract of land he owned in the San Fernando Valley. The trustees wisely accepted the land, named the school the Maclay School of Theology, elected Dr. Robert Maclay dean, and then realized \$175,000 from the land they had received. This, too, is Harrisburg District history. The school fell on hard times in financial

depression, but that is California Conference history! And so the new school of theology in southern California is not the first in that area.

Now I ask you. Whose work for civilization and eternity was greater: that of the two distinguished Maclay statesmen, great as they were, or their grandnephews, the five brothers who spread the Kingdom as Methodist preachers?

Return with me now to that first Foochow mission started by Robert Maclay. He married a missionary there, and these two were joined in 1850 by two couples from Central Pennsylvania: Dr. Isaac Wiley (later bishop) and his wife, who was soon to die there; and Rev. and Mrs. James Colder of Harrisburg. Dr. Wiley was from Lewistown and his wife was from Port Royal. In 1853, Mrs. Wiley and her babe died and were buried in the Foochow Mission Cemetery – where, remarkably, Bishop Wiley would be buried by her side after dying many years and many ministries later in the very room in which she had died. The Maclays, the Wileys and the Colders were the staff of the Foochow mission. Maclay organized the first class, but the credit for the first convert goes to James Colder and his wife – for it was their houseboy who first accepted Christ as his Saviour. James Colder of Harrisburg had graduated from Connecticut Wesleyan and was there interested in missionary work by the noted Dr. Wilbur Fisk. He married his childhood sweetheart from Harrisburg, the oldest daughter of Rev. John Winebrenner, the founder of the Churches of God. When the Chinese convert was ready to be baptized, he and James Colder asked for immersion. But the latter withdrew from the mission because his views of Methodist polity had changed, returned to Harrisburg at his own expense, and soon became pastor of the Church of God there – now Fourth Street Church of God. Shortly thereafter he was elected principal of the Shippensburg Collegiate Institute, and there Mrs. Colder died – but not until she and her husband had led in the establishment of the first foreign missionary program of the Church of God. Bishop Wiley wrote her memoir and paid high tribute to her as a faithful, efficient and consecrated Christian missionary.

The women of the Baltimore Conference, years before the W.F.M.S. was formed, organized a movement to start a Chinese Girls School at Foochow and to provide for the support of girls there. Dr. Maclay instituted the school and the first girl to be baptized was named May Marlatt Irving – at the suggestion of the Irving College girls in Mechanicsburg who supported her – for Rev. A.G. Marlatt, the first president of Irving College, was then yet in charge.

Other Harrisburg District Missionaries

Another Harrisburg District boy who gave his entire adult life to missionary endeavor in China was J. Resides Hykes of Shippensburg, whose wife was also a Shippensburg girl. He died in 1921 in China, having been a member of this conference for 47 years, and is buried in Shanghai, where his widow and children continue to live.

Our purpose is not to mention all our missionaries, but Carrie Macmillan of Gettysburg takes a leading place in the list of the W.F.M.S. missionaries. She went to India in 1871, there married Dr. Philo M. Buck, and became the mother of several children – the best known being Dr. Oscar MacMillan Buck, missionary scholar and teacher of Methodist ministers and leaders. Carrie MacMillan Buck spent the rest of her life in India and is buried there.

Our present missionaries in Sarawak, the Charles Roots, are now building on the foundation laid by “Jim” Hoover of Chambersburg, another of the greats in Methodist missionary history. He was a layman, a volunteer, and an extraordinary servant of the Master among the so-called head-hunters in Borneo. He organized Chinese colonists in Sarawak into classes, taught them agriculture, and led them to Christ. He died and is buried there, where he literally gave his life. Bishop Titus Lowe, in charge of the work in Malaysia, told me that when Jim Hoover was buried it was in the rainy season and his body was lowered into its grave while it was overflowing with water.

Chambersburg’s list of missionaries includes Dr. Shoemaker and Miss Elizabeth Bender. Born in Bendersville, Miss Bender graduated from Dickinson College in 1888 with her twin brother, the Rev. Simpson Bender, and was a missionary to Japan – where she was president of Aoyama Jo Gakuin College in Tokyo at the same time that her twin brother was president of Maine Conference Academy. They were the children of the Rev. A.R. Bender of Bendersville and Chambersburg.

York’s Contribution to Larger Methodism

This record must also include reference to four young men who went forth from York to make history elsewhere, each of them becoming distinguished far above the average of their fellows.

The first is William Hunter, a talented young lad whose parents were poor Irish immigrants living at York, where he joined the church. In 1837, at the age of 26, he became the secretary of the Pittsburgh Conference, and in 1844 he was elected by the General Conference to the position of editor of the *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate*. He had graduated from Madison College – the forerunner of Allegheny College, in which he later taught. He wrote the commentary on the book of Proverbs for the famous *Whedon’s Commentary*, composed numberless hymns and songs, many of which appeared in the Hymnal, and was a member of the Hymnal Commission of 1878. Pastor, presiding elder, and leader – he is listed as one of the great pioneers of the former Pittsburgh Conference.

And William “first findeth his own brother Andrew” and urged him to follow Christ’s leading. Hesitant about entering the gospel ministry, Andrew finally yielded to the call to go to Arkansas to teach the Indians there and soon became a leader in the newly formed Arkansas Conference. In 1844 the brothers, William and Andrew, were both members of the General Conference which divided Methodism, voting against each other consistently on matters of polity but

uniting in brotherly loyalty to the principles of Methodism as they saw them. Entering conference at the age of 23, Andrew was a Methodist preacher for 66 years. He was elected to the General Conference of 1844 after only 6 years, and was elected subsequently to 11 General Conferences of the M.E. Church, South – 3 of those after he had retired. He never transferred, and he never located. He was a presiding elder 9 times. In the absence of a bishop in 1849, he presided over his conference – which he did 3 more times during the Civil War, and again in 1899.

A recent historian of that conference calls Andrew Hunter “the greatest of the great in the history of Arkansas Methodism. Hunter Memorial Church in Little Rock is a memorial to this Harrisburg District member of the M.E. Church, South. When Andrew Hunter was well past 80, he came back to York County to spend a few weeks with his sister, Mrs. Abraham Wells of Wellsville. While there he preached a number of times with great vigor, eloquence and unction in revival services then going on. When he died in 1902 he was the last surviving member of the historic General Conference of 1844.

The Hunter brothers induced their boyhood friends, James and William Graham, Methodists at York, to come to Arkansas to help teach and convert the Indians who had been so ruthlessly torn from their ancient lands in the southeast and transferred by force to the barren wastes of Arkansas and Oklahoma during the presidency of Andrew Jackson. Both of them went, and the story of their going is both dramatic and romantic. Both of them joined the conference there.

James, through the division of the conference, became a charter member of the North Texas Conference of the M.E. Church, South. He spent a long and eventful life there as a circuit rider, presiding elder, and president of an academy which he and his cultured wife founded in Paris TX. The recently published history of that conference tells of his pioneer leadership and of the numerous churches he founded as small classes a century or more ago. The Graham Public School building and Graham Street in Paris TX are named for him and testify to the esteem in which he was held.

William Graham transferred early to the Indiana Conference of the M.E. Church and was regarded for years as one of its most distinguished leaders. He was conference secretary for decades and one of its foremost administrators, especially in the financial program of the church. He was a trustee of 3 colleges, one of them Indiana Asbury when it became DePauw. In 1861 Abraham Lincoln named him U.S. consul to Liberia, but he respectfully declined the office.

The List Goes On

You have read of William Van Orsdel of Hunterstown going from Gettysburg to Montana and becoming the noted “Brother Van” of colorful personality, often called the best-loved personage in Montana.

You can also read about William Nast, discharged from the faculty at Gettysburg after he had gone forward to the altar in the Gettysburg Methodist

Church, later to become the father of German Methodism in the United States. As an immigrant German scholar, he was a tutor on Duncan's Island, near Duncannon – where there was a Methodist class, and his first experience at a Methodist camp meeting was on the Juniata near Newport.

There are so many others whose names should be mentioned, including Emma Clous of New Bloomfield. She became the wife of the Rev. Manuel Andujar, a native of Spain and a member of this conference, and was killed in a storm in Porto Rico where her husband was superintendent of the mission and pastor of the San Juan Church.

You have long since, I venture to hope, seen what I have been trying to say about the history of this section of our great conference. You can trace its apparent influence in this country from Maine to California, and from Montana to Texas. And its influence abroad extends to every major continent and the islands of the sea. And who knows how far it has penetrated with the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into the spiritual lives and social consciences of His people. The communion of the Harrisburg District Saints transcends time, space and eternity. Amen.

Harrisburg District Personalities



Jacob Gruber
(1778-1850)
Founder of Harrisburg Methodism



William Nast
(1807-1899)
Father of German Methodism



William Van Orsdel (1850-1919)
Father of Montana Methodism
"Brother Van Shooting Buffalo"
painting by the famed western artist Charles M. Russell