

A Student Composition Book

by Lena Elizabeth Beck, 1909

Lena Beck's Family

Lena Elizabeth Beck and Bertha May Beck, each single, were received from probationary status into full membership of Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church by Rev. William H. Stevens on November 11, 1906. They were daughters of John C. and Elizabeth Beck. The girls had been baptized at the church along with 19 others ranging in age from 5 months to 10 years by Rev. J. Emory Weeks on January 23, 1898. The baptismal entry gives dates of birth for Lena and Bertha as December 20, 1896, and February 11, 1895, respectively.

It could be that concern for the baptism and religious welfare of the girls was what brought the Beck family into the church. Elizabeth became a probationary member the following Wednesday on January 26, 1898, and John followed suit on February 13, 1898. John was baptized two weeks later on February 27, 1898. John and Elizabeth were admitted into full membership as a couple on August 14, 1898.

Elizabeth Beck was the former Sarah Elizabeth Bomgardner. Her brother and sister-in-law Benjamin F. Bomgardner and Alice (Snyder) Bomgardner also became probationary members in early 1898 and full members in the latter part of the year. In addition, within the next 10 years 4 first cousins of Elizabeth and Benjamin would become full members, at least for a short time, while various of the Bomgardner clan sojourned in Harrisburg. All this activity, of course, involved the original frame Epworth church building erected in 1891 and enlarged in 1899.

The early Epworth church records do not always give complete street addresses for the members. The 1898 address given for Benjamin and Alice Bomgardner is 2136 Greenwood Street, while that for John and Elizabeth Beck is simply Greenwood Street, without a number. In a 1913 record book, the Bomgardners are living in Hershey and the Becks at 433 S. 15th Street. The address given for John C. Beck starting in the 1920's is 922 Norwood Street, and a 1940's entry shows him living at 10 S. 13th Street.

It is not difficult to tell how involved the Beck family became, for they appear to have taken their church responsibilities seriously. In 1919, for example, in addition to being a regular Sunday School teacher, John Beck was Epworth's assistant SS superintendent and SS treasurer. That same year, Bertha Beck served as secretary/treasurer of the congregation's Temperance Society. In perhaps his most physically enduring contribution to the congregation, John was a member of the building committee responsible for the stone sanctuary dedicated in 1922. John Beck died July 7, 1955. He was also an unordained local preacher, and he filed regular quarterly conference reports as such. His last report filed February

18, 1955, stated: “Taught Sunday School class up to September 1954. After that I took sick and did not do much of anything. I helped the pastor at communion.”

There is a gap in the church records after 1916, and the death of Elizabeth is not noted – but John is listed as a widow when the records begin again in the 1920’s. Secular records indicate that Sarah Elizabeth Bomgardner Beck was born in Swatara township February 10, 1873, died in July 1922, and is buried in Harrisburg.

Lena married Harry Rhinesmith Murphy on June 22, 1916 – Rev. J.D.W. Deavor officiating. Harry was the son of Epworth members Franklin Pierce Murphy and Anna L. Rice Murphy of 749 S. 21st Street. His parents joined Epworth in 1910 – as probationary members January 30 and as full members March 13. They were from Perry County, and later moved back to that area. Harry joined in 1911 – as a probationary member January 22 and as a full member June 11.

Unfortunately Lena and Harry disappear from the records during the 1916-1920’s gap in the records. Secular records indicate they had a daughter Helen Irene, but no further information is available.¹

Harry’s sister Miss Sadie Murphy lived at 2101-A Derry Street, across 21st Street from Epworth Church. She transferred to the Duncannon church April 24, 1943, later moved to the Odd Fellows Home in Middletown, and transferred back to Epworth May 28, 1950. In January 1957 she moved to the Methodist Home in Tyrone, where she died on February 1, 1971.

The Composition Book

After serving as “The Lighthouse on the Hill” for 115 years, Epworth United Methodist Church closed in February 2005. The composition book from which the following material is taken was among the materials removed from the church and taken to the conference archives. How or why it came to be preserved at the church is not known. The book contains moral platitudes, poems on Thanksgiving and Christmas, two of the Psalms, and other writing exercises.

The inside cover of the composition book reads: “Lena Elizabeth Beck – September 17, 1909.” Miss Beck would have 12 years old when she began her entries, most likely as part of a home schooling exercise. While most of the material was copied from other sources, the following paragraph is Lena’s own composition.

¹ Lena Beck Murphy died during the flu epidemic in 1918. Harry (1896-1981) remarried in 1921 to Miss Mary Kathryn Barnes and died in Mechanicsburg. They had two children – Anna May Murphy (1922-1998) who married Ralph Johnson and died while a resident at Messiah Village in Mechanicsburg, and Franklin Stewart Murphy (1924-1998) who was a member of Trinity UM in New Cumberland living in Annapolis MD at the time of his death. Lena and Harry’s daughter Helen Irene Murphy married a Mr. Nelson and was still living in Bowie MD at the time of her sister’s 1998 obituary.

A Day Spent in the Country

One day I was in the country. The cherries were ripe. There were four girls. The boys were up on the trees throwing the cherries down. We played games, took walks through the woods, went to another girl's house, and she played the piano. We had fun the whole day. It was a very nice day.

The following set of alphabet-based poems is the first entry in the book. Together they summarize all that any child growing up in the early 1900's needed to know in order to grow up properly.

An Alphabet of Memory Gems

A

All that you do, do with your might;
Things done by half are never done right.

B

Beautiful faces are they that wear
The light of a pleasant spirit there;
Beautiful hands are they that do
Deeds that are noble, good and true.

C

Children whether great or small,
Should never, never sulk at all;
Gloomy be the day or bright,
Laugh and sing – all will be right.

D

Doing to others as I would
That they should do to me,
Will make me honest, kind and good –
As children ought to be.

E

Early to bed, early to rise,
Makes people happy, healthy and wise.

F

For every evil under the sun,
There is a remedy, or there is none.
If there is one, try to find it;
If there be none, never mind it.

G

Guard, o guard thy tongue,
That it speak no wrong.
Let no evil word pass o'er it;
Set the watch of truth before it.

H

Hearts like doors ope with ease
To very, very little keys;
And don't forget that two are these:
"I Thank you, sir," and "If you please."

I

It is a lesson you should heed –
Try, try again.
If at first you don't succeed –
Try, try again.

J

Just a tiny sunbeam on cloudy day
Makes the whole world brighter, as it sheds its ray.
We can all be sunbeams, though we be but small,
Brave and kind and loving, helping one and all.

K

Kind hearts are the gardens, kind thoughts are the roots;
Kind words are the blossoms, kind deeds are the fruits.

L

Little deeds of kindness, little words of love,
Make this earth an Eden, like to heav'n above.

M

Make this world a brighter place,
Just because you're in it;
Chase each frown from off your face,
Keep cheery every minute.

N

Not what we give, but what we share;
For the gift without the giver,
Is an offering most bare.

O

O, the star reigns its fire while the beautiful sing,
For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King.

P

Politeness is to do and say,
The kindest things in the kindest way.

Q

Quite your best, your very best,
Do it every day;
Little girls and little boys,
That is the wisest way.

R

Remember always we should seek,
Rather to be good than wise;
For the thought we do not speak.
Shines out in our cheeks and eyes.

S

Sixty seconds make a minute,
How much good can I do in it?
Sixty minutes make an hour,
All the good that's in my power.

T

The fisher who draws in his net too soon,
Won't have any fish to sell;
The boy who shuts his book too soon,
Won't learn any lesson well.

U

Unless our lives are true each day,
It matters not what our lips say.

V

Very good is God to me;
Look where I may, His gifts I see.
The food I eat, the clothes I wear,

Are tokens of my Maker's care.

W

Work while you work, play while you play;
That is the way, to be happy and gay.

X

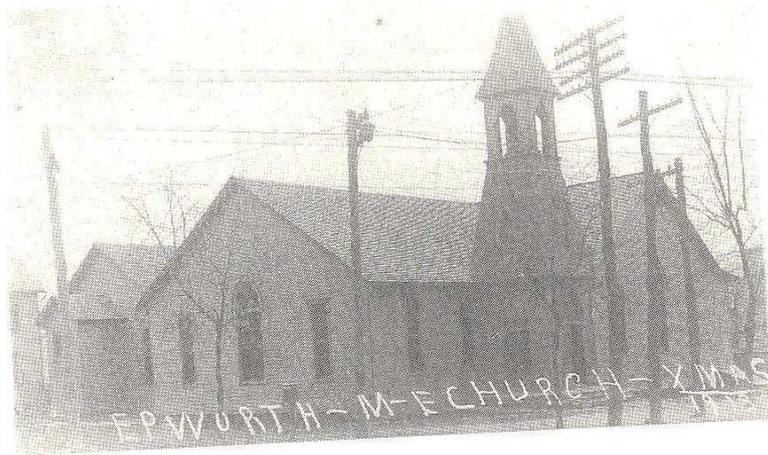
Xcept our best each day we try,
We cannot hope to win bye and bye.

Y

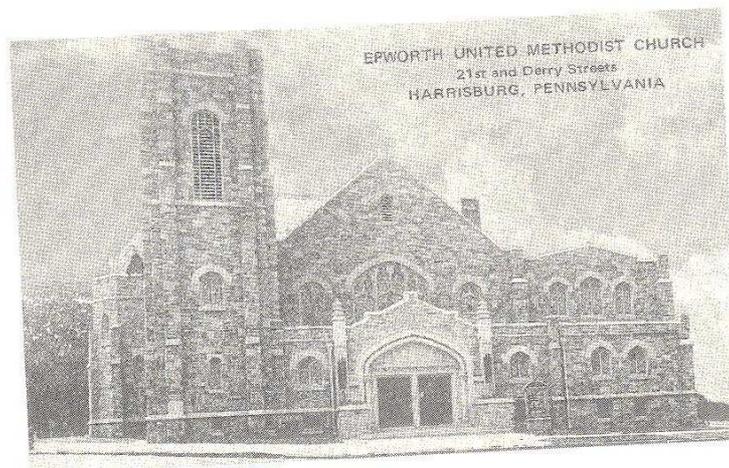
You need two good weapons – a heart that is pure,
A will that is ready – to do and endure.

Z

Zealously strive that every day,
May see some task begun;
Nor be content to rest at eve,
Until that task is done.



Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church in Harrisburg at 21st and Derry as it appeared when Lena Beck attended in 1909.



Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church in Harrisburg at 21st and Derry as it appeared when closed in 2005.