Glimpses of a Pioneer's Life

Excerpts from the journal of Bishop John Seybert
Introduced and selected by Gerry Klinefelter

John Seybert was the first bishop of the Evangelical Church. His father, John Henry Seybert, came to America as a Hessian soldier. Imprisoned in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, at the close of the war, his freedom was purchased by a Mr. Shaffner, for whom he was obligated to work for three years. When this service was completed, he began working for himself as a tailor in Lancaster County. In the course of this work he met Susannah Kreutzer, who had come with her parents from Germany when she was four. They were married in 1790 and had four sons, of which only two grew to maturity. John was the older of these. The father died after nine years of marriage and the mother then entered the Economy, a communal society near Pittsburgh. John's journals go from 1820 to 1858 and were written in German. They were translated into English by J. G. Eller in 1956 and lodged in the library of the Evangelical Theological Seminary. The present selections are from the earliest years, with recollections from experiences prior to 1820 from other sources. The entry descriptions are editorial additions.

Conviction. [As recalled later]. When I mingled in company with young folks I was led by them often into sin, which caused my conscience to condemn me as I came into the society of the righteous, whose services I visited near and far. My heart was greatly moved by the Spirit of God at a protracted meeting of the United Brethren Church, so much that warm tears ran down my cheeks, that I finally more and more became more loud and the people of God who noticed it came to me and prayed with me, yet I did not get through, but I did get so far that I attended the prayer meetings and volunteered to pray. There came to me also a strong impulse and desire to read and commit gospel songs to memory. Thus my pleasure was now in the service of the Lord.

June 21, 1810. Assurance. [His recollection described by S. P. Spreng who reports that on this day Seybert awoke depressed and thought of himself as the most miserable creature on earth and groaned his oft-repeated prayer, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner, for Jesus' sake." Going to wash he reached the well and trough where family members washed themselves. As he stooped to bathe his tear-stained face in the clear water, he suddenly became conscious that the load of guilt had been rolled from his soul.] Telling the story later Seybert would say: "There by the well the Lord converted me deep into eternal life; there he blessed me for the first time, and I will not forget it to all eternity. My heavy load was suddenly gone, my sorrowful spirit was made instantly happy, and I was fully of the
Holy Ghost. Hallelujah.

September 13, 1820. Wednesday. Testing the call. On this day, I feel encouraged to serve God with more sincerity and zeal as before. At the camp meeting and even now, I am firmly resolved to join in with my Evangelical Brother Preachers to build the kingdom with exhortation and preaching. If I only had known positively it is God's will. But as I had no rest at home and no peace in my heart, I know of no better way to arrive at a certainty and have rest as to give it a trial. And if God will bless me and make me successful in the conviction and conversion of souls and the encouragement of God's children then I will serve him as long as I live with all my strength wherever I am sent in preaching and exhortation. I go to my first appointment in good health of both body and soul.

September 14, 1820. Thursday. A discouraging beginning. My first appointment was at Brother Jacob Stern's. But it was not announced and nobody came. However, we sang, had prayers and spoke of religious matters and finally went to bed.

February 10, 1821. Wednesday. Facing opposition. I went to my appointment at Reber's where many people gathered. Some of the audience were hard-hearted, bold, ungodly sinners. They talked aloud in the service and laughed mockingly and ran out about the house making an alarming noise. Brother Reber took a lamp and went into the kitchen among them and the commotion was somewhat calmed. I preached with all the might of body and soul to this unrighteous group. I selected the hymn "How dreadful it is that man does not consider the pain of hell." Abraham Schneider exhorted and Michael Schneider prayed in closing. Then we kept quiet until the group of midnight darkness went out with a wild howling yell. We then continued the service, singing and prayer which is most beautiful among men opening their lips in singing of God's grace. Our souls were richly blest. The movement of the spirit was so strong that God's people in voices of mighty shouting exalted the name of Jehovah.

March 3, 1821. Saturday. A preacher's temptation. I went to the appointment at Bastian Wonder's and only three persons came in addition to the household. I also had a combat with the tempter who suggested to me that it was scarcely worth while to preach to so few people. But as I looked at it in a true light that one soul is worth more than the whole world I felt myself guilty and under obligation as a minister of Jesus Christ to preach to such a small audience. Preaching went fairly well.

May 8, 1821. Tuesday. Overcoming discouragement. Early this morning I sensed a hard inner temptation to think of a continuous preaching of this gospel which seemed to me to be very hard thing to do. But I drew near to God in prayer and soon felt some better.

May 29, 1921. Tuesday. Appreciating another's ministry. [At a camp meeting at Philip Breidensteins.] In the forenoon Brother Zimmerman preached from 2 Peter 4:18 and Barber exhorted with life and power. Thank God, we had a blessed time. In the afternoon Brother Niebel preached from 1 Cor. 1:30. He preached wonderful and with such wisdom, and power showing how the Christ was made unto us: Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption, that in my life time I have heard. He preached over two hours long and as he finished he invited such who are weak in faith, the backslidden and those convinced of sin to come forward to the altar. There was a movement of power, weeping and many received more grace; also sinners were converted to God.

June 27, 1821. Wednesday. Difficult travel. I went to Jacob Bachert's, a distance of about twenty miles, and was in a cheerful mood, over the branch road to Danville. On the way... I was hindered in that I erred in the way and rode in a wrong direction which led me on a high hill.
and then into a shrubbery patch with thorns where I was lost. . . . It was impossible to ride and in addition these hills were so thickly overgrown with young timber and thorn bushes that I had to force my way through in many places. I was walking leading my mare which patiently followed over these rocky hills through thorns and bushes and to this our misfortune the weather was very hot for the past days which caused local thunder storms. One of them was directed above us. The lightening made it light; the fiery thunder strokes accompanied the lightening one after another with shuddering effect upon the earth. From my heart I wished I were at the place of our meeting to escape the rain. In my haste, I became very hot and also very thirsty. Despite my hurry to escape the oncoming rain it caught up with us. After the rain I found the way out of this wilderness. By making inquiry often I found the place of our meeting. But as the service was appointed for the afternoon only three persons came. I gave an exhortation and after we had prayed together, I closed the service and started for the appointment at Philip Miller’s.

January 8, 1822. Tuesday. Sensing God’s presence. It was snowing and at night the appointment is at Peter Walter’s. A watch night service was announced without my knowledge. The United Brethren joined with us in the service. I preached from Romans 12:9-10 and God’s presence was already manifest in the beginning. God blest my soul this evening wonderfully with life and power. Abraham Walter followed preaching from Jeremiah 13:16-17. Some of the United Brethren sisters were so blest in heart and filled with Divine love that they clapped their hands with joy and shouted the glory of God. Herner, a UB class leader, exhorted. Wunder exhorted. The meeting was recessed for a time. After midnight we began singing and praying continuing until three and four o’clock. The unconverted were respectful and some of them shed tears.

January 21, 1822. Monday. A lay person’s confidence. The appointment was at Henning’s where a large respectable group gathered. I preached from Isaiah 3:10-11 and Spengler exhorted. Preaching went well for me. Spengler had come to take me to his home to officiate at the marriage of his daughter Magdelene to Jacob Weis. This appeared as a responsible act to me, as I had never before married a couple and then also as a preacher on trial it was not in my place to do it. But neither of these excuses satisfied Spengler. He said he would prefer a preacher on trial to a priest of Babel, and preachers on trial are trustworthy also. “You do it, as well as you can,” he said, “you will have to do it sometime for the first time and you must come with me now.” And I agreed to go.

March 11, 1822. Monday. Encouragement and danger. Today as I was going with Schmidt to his home where we had services we stopped at John Steiner’s who with his wife began to serve God and live for Him in this world. For this reason then, I asked him if he and his wife did not wish to join our church and after hesitating for a few moments he answered he would rather wait awhile until they were more worthy. I told him that they were enduring the shame and bearing the cross and he would better do it now. Again in saying goodbye, I urged it upon them to say yes or no. He was quiet for a few moments when his wife said with a smile, “Oh say yes, John,” when he agreed that I might write their name into the membership record. At night I preached from Ezekiel 36:26-27 at Schmidt’s and after the closing prayer the devil moved one of his faithful followers to throw a brick through a window breaking the pane and one of the pieces hit me on the head and about the room.

March 22, 1822. Friday. First efforts in English. This morning it snowed violently and later changed to rain which made the roads for several days very unpleasant to travel for they were muddy. In the evening I preached at Daniel Mauerer’s from Mt. 25:46. The congregation was composed of mostly English people excepting the Mauerer family and because of this the tempter attacked me because I would preach in German to a people who would not understand it and in addition to this I was so hoarse. This made it almost impossible for me to either sing or pray so that often I had to contend against impatience and envy. I would gladly have preached in English but I believed it impossible
Discoveries

Many persons know about J. Arthur Heck's *Theology for Laymen*, a series of chapters on important Christian doctrines made clear for ordinary readers, and which first appeared as columns in the *Evangelical Messenger*. What few persons are aware is that this book was translated and published in the Ilocano language of the Philippines as *Theologia Camcameng*. Prior to this publication in 1962, its chapters were printed in the Ilocano paper *Naimbag a Damag* (Good News) in 1957/58. A letter from Noel D. Osborne to Dr. Heck in 1962 reported that the book was then being sold at one peso each (about 25 cents US). A thousand copies were printed and distributed. A copy may be found in the UTS archives.

It is good to find again Aletha Knapp Faust's *These Things Have Happened*, which was published by the Missionary Society and the Woman's Missionary Society of the Evangelical Church in 1945. Subtitled *Spiritual Adventures in Africa*, it is dedicated to the "Christian Wom-
en of Wurkumland who share the concern for their sisters yet without Christ." The meat of the book is the collection of incidents of how the Gospel was shared among Pero women both by the missionary and then through warm relationships and the simple telling of the Good News.

News from here and there

• The Otterbein United Methodist Church of Hagerstown, Maryland, had a Heritage Celebration to observe the 25th anniversary of Church Union. As part of that commemoration the church had tours of Washington County, Maryland, a banquet and a worship service with address by Dr. James Nelson of the EUB Heritage Center Board. Following the practice of one of the early UB churches, a shepherd's horn was used to call the banquet and worship service to order. The placemats for the banquet featured pictures of Otterbein and Albright on one side and pages from the Telescope-Messenger on the other.

• The J. Allan Ranck Collection of the publications of the Friendship Press has been deposited at United Theological Seminary. The collection consists of over 1,000 titles representing books, pamphlets, audio-visual and other materials issued by the press and its predecessors since 1902. The Friendship Press is the ecumenical agency for producing missionary education materials. Dr. Ranck, a graduate of UTS and a United Methodist minister, served on the staff of the National Council of Churches for 33 years.

• Northern Nigeria is an area of mission begun by the former Evangelical Church. Persons remembering the days of that mission when Dr. Arthur and Mrs. Aletha Faust served there with creativity and distinction will be glad for an up-date. In their 1992 Christmas letter the Fausts reported that the Northern Nigerian church has been granted United Methodist conference status. It has its own bishop and other African leadership, 104 organized conferences and 68,000 church members. Aletha Faust has written of their experiences in a 1945 book, These Things Have Happened.

• Oakwood Park, a United Methodist Campground at Syracuse, Indiana, observed its centennial on August 6-8, having been purchased by the Evangelical Association in 1893. Centennial events included a camp fire sing-along on Friday, a historic pageant on Saturday evening and worship with Bishop Wayne Clymer as preacher on Sunday morning. For an updated history of the grounds phone (219) 457-5781.

Ecumenical Contributions

At times those in the EUB tradition come upon names of persons from the EUB heritage who have gone on to make contributions in other places. It would be appropriate to identify such persons, their contributions and their origins. They should be considered a part of the EUB gifts to the larger church.

Father Douglas Clark. When Dr. Wayne Barr saw the story in the Dayton Daily News written by the Religion Writer with the opening sentence, “The first revision of the official catechism of the Roman Catholic Church in more than 400 years is being translated to English by a Dayton area native who was raised as a Methodist,” he became curious. He saw that Clark's parents were Delman and Marjorie Clark. A bit of research disclosed that Delman was the son of Ira Coble Clark, who graduated from then Bonebrake Seminary and served in the Miami and Ohio Miami Conferences.

Ira's grandson Douglas converted to Catholicism as a freshman in college at William and Mary. By his senior year he wanted to be a priest and he was sent to Rome for theological studies. Later Father Clark became advising theologian to the Bishop of Savannah and then an advisor to Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston, who proposed the new catechism. Thus eventually he was asked to do the translation into English. He has spent the last nine months on leave from his parish in Richmond Hill, Georgia, on this work.

The Telescope Messenger and the Center for the EUB Heritage would be glad to learn of other personal contributions the tradition has made to the wider Christian Fellowship.
Christ Church, United Methodist, Charleston, West Virginia, observed Heritage Sunday on April 25th to celebrate its Evangelical United Brethren roots. The bulletin front cover had pictures of Boehm, Otterbein and Albright and the back cover had a chart tracing the background traditions that make up the United Methodist Church. The order of service included passages from the Rev. John Dreisbach (1789-1871), first presiding elder of the Evangelical Association, and from the 1917 Discipline of the United Brethren Church. In the “Moments with the Children,” a brick from the original Barratt’s Chapel was presented to the church (this chapel, built in 1780 is often referred to as the “cradle of Methodism”). For the sermon, “Mission on Horseback,” the pastor, the Rev. Harry Jenkins, dressed as an early circuit rider, read from the diary of the Rev. John Dreisbach; Dreisbach’s great-great-great granddaughter, a member of Christ Church, presented a summary of EUB history; and EUB Heritage Center board member, Dr. Robert Frey, related some more modern experience in the church. The sermonic portion ended with the uniting prayer from the Dallas conference ceremony in 1968.

German-Russian Evangelicals in North Dakota

by Arnold H. Marzolf

Today as the United Methodists herald a new missionary interest in Russia, it is appropriate to recall that the Evangelical Church showed its concern much earlier for the German-Russians in North Dakota.

German-Russians are Germans who were invited to colonize large parts of Russia, first, by a manifesto published in 1783 by Czarina Katherine the Great (a German princess who married Czar Peter III), and second, by a manifesto by Czar Alexander I in 1804. Thousands of Germans moved to the Volga area between 1763 and 1768 and to the Black Sea region between 1804 and 1842. They left Germany because they were tired of religious persecutions, exhausted by wars (the French Revolution, 1792-1800 and the Napoleonic Wars, 1800-1815), and almost devastated by poverty.

They went to Russia because they were promised religious freedom, land, exemption from military service, the right to use the German language, and the right to build and govern their own villages, schools and churches. Many of those who left Germany were deeply religious people (Lutherans, Catholics, Baptists, Mennonites, Jews). Then after years in Russia, thousands of them moved to the United States because a new government in Russia broke the promises inherent in the manifestoes.

Many German-Russians who moved to the United States had been deeply influenced by a pietistic movement in Germany and in Russia. To understand the importance of the kind of pietism found among these German-Russian Lutherans, Baptists and Mennonites, we should first be reminded that Rationalism was popular in Europe (especially in Germany) in the early part of the 18th century. Rationalism, in the simplest terms, is the belief that human beings can find religious truth and solve their problems by their own reasoning abilities.

As Rationalism spread throughout some of the established churches in Europe, many Germans began to feel that their churches were becoming too formal, too cold, too indifferent to their spiritual needs and too dogmatic. As a result, many people could no longer find contentment, inner peace and hope within their beloved churches; in fact, some churches seemed far removed from the needs, comforts and expectations of many humble, ordinary members within their care. Thus, some members came under the influence of pietism, which put emphasis on conversion, Bible study, prayer meetings and on what they thought of as a humble, simple, frugal, unpretentious, sincere way of life.

In the 18th century, when many Germans moved to Russia, most of them still clung tenaciously to their established churches. But they had no real idea of the conditions they were to face in Russia. On those wide, open, bare Russian steppes (prairies), far removed from civilization, they faced loneliness, homesickness, starvation, heat and cold, pestilences which killed off
whole families. But most of all, they missed their helpful religious communities. And because they faced a severe shortage of pastors in Russia, they again turned to their pietistic ways. They organized their own prayer meetings in their homes, where they studied the Bible, prayed, sang their precious German hymns and witnessed for Christ. Most of their leaders were laity. So, these German-Russians practiced a simple, down-to-earth, “feelingful” kind of Christianity, and at the same time attended the worship services of their established churches on Sundays, if and when a pastor was available.

In the latter part of the 19th century, many of these German-Russians migrated to America and carried their deep religious feelings and convictions with them. Thousands of them settled in Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota. They became the dominant ethnic group in the south-central part of North Dakota. Most of them were still pietistic Lutherans (with some Baptists and Mennonites). Hundreds of these pietistic Lutherans were attracted to the German Evangelical Church because, first, there was that name, “die Evangelische Kirche” (the Evangelical Church), which was the name used in Germany and Russia to designate the Lutheran Church. Second, the Evangelical Church practiced child baptism and confirmation just like the Lutheran Church. And third, as Pietists, they were attracted to the prayer meetings and evangelistic services of the German Evangelical Church.

George J. Eisenach tells us that McIntosh County in North Dakota, in the census of 1900, was listed as having 95.5 percent foreign born people, the majority of them being German Russians. Father William C. Sherman reports that the German-Russians first appeared in North Dakota in 1884, and writes, “The German-Russians are the largest national group in south-central counties, occupying over fifty percent of the area and making up the majority of residents of Logan and Emmons Counties, and over ninety percent of the rural residents of McIntosh County.”

Some of the towns in Logan and McIntosh counties are still largely German-Russian: Lehr, Wishek, Kulm, Napoleon, Ashley, Medina, Linton, Streeter, Fredonia and others. In pioneer horse-and-buggy days, there were about fifty active German Evangelical Churches within eight miles of Lehr (the center). These people became Evangelical United Brethren in 1946 and United Methodists in 1968.

Notes
1 More extended accounts of the Evangelical witness among the German Russians in North Dakota can be found in Professor Marzolf’s article, “The Lehr Tabernacle: A Historical and Personal View,” Heritage Review (published by the Russian Heritage Society) 21:3 (September 1991) and abridgement of Pietism and the German Russians by George J. Eisenach (Berne, Ind.: Berne Publishers, 1948).
Anecdotage

The recent death of Edna Schutz (at Otterbein Home, April 7, 1993) recalls the life of two influential Evangelical United Brethren who served years in Sierra Leone, West Africa, before ending their careers at UTS. Any who knew Walter and Edna Schutz have their own stories of them, but such can hardly match one Walter told of their time in Rotifunk.

Paramount Chief A. G. Caulker of Rotifunk was a student at our Shenge school and attained to the 5th standard. When he was made the Chief of the Bompeh Chiefdom (of which Rotifunk is the capital) he began to drink heavily. I would go to his compound every Sunday morning to hold a 6:00 AM service for the court messengers and the strangers who came from medicine or fish and who came to tell the chief ho-do. The chief had a spite against the mission because of its stand against drink, polygamy, etc. For about eleven months I faithfully held services at his place. He did not show much interest but still wanted me to continue with the services.

One day a small leopard was killed. Our son Stanley was just about 6 weeks old. The chief was proud to have a white baby in his country. He wrote me a note asking that I come and he would give me the skin of the leopard and I should tell Stanley when he grew up that Chief A. G. Caulker gave it for him. We were standing watching the dance put on because the leopard was killed and the hunter honored. The chief in his talk referred to the “strict interpretation” the mission put on the use of alcohol. I told him I would like to talk this over with him privately.

The chief invited me to his inner court and with a shush of his right hand dismissed the messengers that were with us. We then talked over the matter of drinking. I told the chief that from what I have seen of chiefs taking to drink, I would prophesy that before ten years were over he would no longer be the chief of this chiefdom if he continued as he had been doing with drink. We must have talked for two hours when I suggested we take this to God in prayer.

We both knelt down and he made one of the finest prayers I ever heard, asking God to forgive him and heal him from this curse. When we got back on our feet he said to me, “I want to make a promise to you. I'll never drink another drink of any strong drink so long as I shall live, by the Grace of God.”

The wonderful change that came over the chief was truly remarkable. He began to take an active part in church, sent boys for schooling, paid a pound Sunday by Sunday to the church and his example became widely known and finally he was chosen the first chief to the Executive Commission of the Legislative Council of the government.