On one of his many trips across the Allegheny Mountains, Christian Newcomer knelt to pray at an altar he had constructed at the top of the ridge. Finishing his prayer, he “mounted his horse and turned his face toward the needy fields of the West,” and in so doing “he not only exemplified his sense of dependence on God, looking to him for guidance in every step he took, but he also registered the rising tide of desire and purpose on the part of the Church to extend the saving influence of the gospel as rapidly and widely as possible.”¹

As he rode on he might have recalled how it all began. He was one of a small group of preachers who had begun a revival or renewal movement in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. The foremost leader among them was Philip William Otterbein, who as pastor of the independent Reformed Church in Baltimore, was also ranging far and wide with his preaching and encouraging others to do so as well.

Otterbein, born at Dillenburg, Germany, March 6, 1720, was the son of pious parents who taught him reverence and obedience to God’s law. He had also been given a classical education and theological training at Herborn, a school which had been influenced by Pietism. Ordained in the Reformed Church, he began preaching “justification by faith,” which stirred up considerable controversy. His mother saw what was happening, and said: “Ah, William, I expected this . . . . This place is too narrow for you, my son; they will not receive you here; you will find your work elsewhere.”² But where? A request for pastors in far-off Pennsylvania answered that question and in 1751 he was off to begin his life’s work.

Just five years after Otterbein’s birth, a son was born to a Mennonite family in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. After growing up attending church, Martin Boehm was selected by lot to preach, and began assisting the older preacher. However, he found himself unable to speak, and when he prayed, he felt he had to pray for his own salvation. He became greatly alarmed when he heard a voice saying, “lost, lost,” and fervently sought sal-

²Paul R. Koontz and Walter E. Rousch, The Bishops of the United Brethren Church, 46.
vation. While plowing in the fields he stopped at the end of each furrow and knelt to pray. "Lost, lost" went every round with him. Becoming overwhelmed with fear, he dropped to his knees in the middle of the field and prayed, "Lord save, I am lost." Then a voice answered: "I am come to seek and save that which was lost." In a moment a stream of joy was poured over me," he said. Then Boehm began to preach effortlessly, eagerly looking forward to each new Sabbath.

William Otterbein and Martin Boehm had never met, but in 1767, at the conclusion of Boehm's sermon in Isaac Long's barn in Lancaster County, Otterbein rushed forward, embraced him, and cried out, "Wir Sind Bruder," "we are brothers." These two, different in so many ways, shared a common faith, which could be called an American form of German Pietism. This revival movement placed primacy on feeling, the devotional instead of the intellectual study of a literal Bible, and the "new birth," followed by a life of faith and love with an attendant ethical concern. It also encouraged lay responsibility and displayed an intense interest in evangelism and missions. Not least was the emphasis on brotherhood, which extended beyond denominational lines.

The "United Ministers" who had been meeting since 1774, gathered at Peter Kemp's, two miles west of Fredrickstown, Maryland, September 25, 1800, and officially organized the Church of the United Brethren in Christ. At this gathering the name was selected, two General Superintendents or bishops were elected, and the decision was made to have annual meetings. "Thus," says John Wilson Owen, "a new religious denomination was formally launched, the first to be born under the American flag and possibly the most American in its organization and form of worship." 4

George Adam Geeting, one of Otterbein's earliest converts, became the third member of the leadership team and a "real Timothy" to Otterbein, but it was Christian Newcomer who would become its greatest leader. He "experienced religion" at age 18, the anguish of his soul was removed, and his heart was warmed. Feeling called to preach, he shrank from it, but eventually heeded the call and increasingly identified himself with the revival movement. He would become "the St. Paul of the United Brethren Church." 5 His leadership made a church out of an informal fellowship of preachers.

In 1810, after his first journey across the mountains, which took 12 weeks, Newcomer presided at the organization of the Ohio (later Miami) Conference, attended by 15 preachers. This conference "was an entirely new chapter in United Brethren history. Newcomer became the recognized leader.

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1 Koontz and Rousch, The Bishops, 100, 101.
2 John W. Owen, A Short History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 27.
in the West, as Otterbein and Boehm had been in the East." On his return trip, Newcomer met Francis Asbury along the road and enjoyed a half-hour visit with him. He also shared in a camp meeting with Methodist Bishop William McKendree, who preached in English while he preached in German.

The United Brethren Church moved westward with the surging tide of settlers. First, into Ohio, up its three great rivers, then into eastern Indiana. The pioneers traveled up the Wabash to western Indiana, and across the state line into Illinois. John Denham began preaching tours into Illinois in the 1820s, and in 1830 organized the first class in Illinois at the home of Jacob Moats, north of Towanda, in McLean County. Denham is also reported to have preached the first sermon in Champaign County in 1831 in Big Grove (later Urbana). A county history stated: "He is said to have ridden an ox on his circuit, and it is further intimated that both were very noisy." This pioneer was memorialized in Denham Hall, constructed at East Bay Camp on Lake Bloomington in 1950.

The first church, located on Money Creek, had a long and interesting history.

In the early days of this church, blanketed Indians began to attend the services, bringing their interpreter with them... The wife of a chief was among the band who attended those services. She had ridden there on horseback, using a bridle with silver mountings. While the services were in progress the bridle was stolen and hidden in the weeds some distance from the grounds where the meeting was held. When the theft was discovered, all turned out to help find the missing bridle. It was found after a time and restored to the squaw, but their confidence had been shaken, and all the professions of interest and good will of the worshipers went for nothing with the Indians. It was the last time they could be induced to come there to meeting.

By 1839 there was a Mackinaw Circuit, which would soon extend 200 miles and took three weeks for the preacher to cover. The following year a Spoon River Circuit in western Illinois was established.

In 1831 Henry Evinger moved from Ohio to Coles County and the following year John Hoobler organized a class with Evinger’s family and others near Westfield in Clark County. Hoobler had begun his ministry in Fountain County in western Indiana in 1826, and at the following conference reported that he had organized three active classes. Bishop Daniel Kumler responded enthusiastically: "This work you report, my young brother, is of God and must not fall for want of a preacher. This is evidence of your fitness. Take courage, press the mercies of God and promise of the

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6 Koontz and Rousch, The Bishops, 137.
9 Religious Telescope, July 10, 1912, 11, 12.
10 RT, December 16, 1914, 14.
Lord upon that people another year, my blessing and the Spirit of the divine God go with you. Amen.”

Expansion continued at such a pace that the General Conference of 1845 appointed a committee to study it, “and create new conference boundaries where it seemed necessary to promote and accommodate growth.” As a result five new conferences were authorized, Illinois being one of them. The state was further divided with the organization of the Rock River Conference in 1853, the Lower and Upper Wabash conferences in 1857, the Central Illinois Conference in 1865, and the Southern Illinois Mission Conference in 1872.

Enthusiastic preachers whose “religious experience was so explosive and creative that their hearts could not contentedly dwell in silence,” traveled the circuits and preached in the camp meetings, spear-heading the growth of the church. “Men, women, and children came rushing to the altar crying mightily to God for mercy” at these meetings. Many left rejoicing in new-found faith. For some peace would not come until they took care of certain problems in their lives. “Two young men” at a Paris meeting “could not get the blessing until they made a bonfire and burned their novels.”

Circuit rider Walton Clayborne Smith recalled the time when “he reached the banks of the little Wabash River only to discover the river far out of its banks, with the bridge that crossed the river standing like an island with a mile of water on either side. Unable to secure a guide, he put himself in the hands of God and successfully passed through the flood to reach his appointment in time, and there organized a class of twenty-four members.” In his first six years of ministry Smith recorded six hundred conversions.

Another pioneer, Washington Gardner Crandall, was born in New York in 1815, came west with his family, and at the age of 34 was converted and imbued with a steadfast desire to work for the Master. At this time, he could neither read nor write, and, while at his work of laying drain tile, carried in his coat pocket a small new Testament. As he rested upon the bank of the open ditch, he would laboriously follow the lines of the fine print with a forefinger that was caked with Illinois clay. His wife had had to teach him his letters, and so diligent a student was he, and so thorough was her instruction, that in less than a year after his conversion he was admitted to conference. Mr. Crandall was the strong; rugged, pioneer type, condoning evil in no shape nor form, nor lacking in his scathing denunciation of it in any manner. Sometimes called the Peter Cartwright of the United Brethren, his sermons were characteristic of the man’s determination to preach the Word as he understood it, and he permitted no rebuff nor argument.

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8Augustus C. Wilmore, History of the White River Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 41.
9Nolan B. Harmon, Encyclopedia of World Methodism, Volume 1, 959.
10Paul H. Eller, These Evangelical United Brethren, 55.
11RT, April 27, 1892, 263.
12RT, April 9, 1938, 2, and November 15, 1905, 27.
One circuit [of Crandall's] was bounded on the east by Monticello, on the west by Springfield, and reached as far north as Farmer City. He traveled between two and three hundred miles, and was away from his family three and four months at a period. Too much credit cannot be given to the wives of these consecrated bearers of the word.16

One such dedicated wife was Mrs. P. F. Kettering of the St. Louis Mission. "After the interment of her husband in the cemetery at Terre Haute, she returned to East St. Louis, to her desolate and lonely home, where she took up the work her husband laid down, held prayer-meetings in her own home, gave advice and encouragement to the sorrowing class in every possible way she could."17

The vision of these early pioneers knew no limits. Long having a keen interest in African-Americans, the United Brethren chose Sierra Leone in West Africa as the first missionary field in 1855. In 1877 women's work began in some country, at Rotofunk, near the capital of Freetown. Dr. Zenora Ellen Griggs, a native of Peoria, sailed in 1900 to establish a hospital there, even though all the United Brethren missionaries but two had been massacred shortly before.18

"Uncle" Smith, as Walton C. Smith was affectionately called, had been treasurer of the Lower Wabash Conference Missionary Society for forty-three years, when in 1904 he noted that nearly $50,000 had passed through his hands on its way to the mission fields. Missionary funds supported workers from Illinois in Africa, China, the Philippine Islands, Puerto Rico, and among Spanish-speaking people in the Southwest.

A woman well-known throughout the state was Miss Geneva Harper of Saybrook. She became the first national secretary of Young Women's Work (later known as Otterbein Guild) in 1911, later engaging in evangelistic work and then serving as a missionary in Puerto Rico in 1923–24. She returned to her home town and taught high school English for 22 years. During this time she worked with a Sunday School class of college-age youth, five of whom entered the ministry. Miss Harper was a noted Bible student, continued to be active in the Woman's Missionary Association, and wrote the history of the Illinois Branch of the WMA.

Few statistics are available for the first half-century of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, as a strong prejudice existed against "numbering Israel." Estimates place membership at 10,000 in 1810 and 20,000 in 1835. When the church began to allow the taking of statistics in 1857, membership had reached 61,399, which rose to 89,811 in 1865 and 185,103 in 1886, with 2,984 being recorded in the Central Illinois Conference and 2,400 in the Illinois Conference.

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16RT, June 5, 1920, 16.
17RT, September 9, 1914, 10.
18The Central Illinois Historical Messenger, Volume 12, Number 3 (July–September, 1980), 1.
While there was steady growth during these years, several challenges faced the United Brethren.

I

The first challenge might be called an “identity crisis.” Just who were the United Brethren? Were they really a church or a fellowship of believers? Were they called to make disciples for Jesus Christ, not just for the United Brethren Church? One pastor says of the beginning of the church: “The men who organized it did not intend to do so, but were led of God to take steps they had not planned.”

Often the United Brethren were mistaken for a German arm of the Methodist Episcopal Church, or “Dutch Methodists.” When Dr. William Nast of the Methodist Episcopal Church referred to the United Brethren as “German Methodists,” the editor of The Religious Telescope fired back: “When the United Brethren revivals commenced in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, the Methodists were unknown. The Brethren were the pioneers.” The German language served as a unifying element until the 1830s, and with its decline that source of identity and cohesion was lost. Many asked if the United Brethren Church were still needed.

Otterbein, Bishop Asbury, and others often talked of union in the early years, but discussions were broken off by 1810. With the failure of these overtures, both denominations reverted to the program of cooperation that had been in use. The practice of sharing churches and even membership rolls, tended to favor the Methodists.

Over the years other proposals came from the Methodist Protestant, the Evangelical Association, the Wesleyan Methodist, Free Presbyterian, Free Will Baptist, and Congregational churches, but nothing came of them. Early in the 20th century discussion began with the Evangelical Church, and after several years of negotiation, the Evangelical United Brethren Church was formed in 1946.

As debate heated up during these discussions, one member pointed out how each group “come out” and “set up shop,” so that there were now “a few little, despised, weak and feeble denominations,” and that glory would come to Christ if they united. Another countered with the argument that while the United Brethren were not progressing as fast as others, they were doing so more safely. He felt that, “God has raised her up for a special work and preserved her in the wilderness until her efforts are specially needed.” Another elaborated, “... as a church, with all our faults, we hold to ... principles that no others teach.”

"RT, December 29, 1928, 10.
9"RT, August 1, 1855.
10"RT, February 28, 1855.
The United Brethren were basically a rural people, and their churches were primarily outside towns and cities. One writer observed: "As our church fathers pushed westward they had a pathological suspicion of cities. They established our churches in villages and open country." These societies frequently met in school houses, instead of building churches.

However, the 1883 "Report on Missions" of the Upper Wabash Conference observed that, "within fifty years, the majority of our country churches will be abandoned," and that the money they were expending to support the work in sparsely settled areas was being wasted. "We therefore recommend that some of the most unpromising of these fields be abandoned, and that special efforts be made to build up in the towns."

"Indeed," another commented, "we are needed in all the important towns and cities of this Union as a church. Our pure, simple Gospel teaching and our spiritual songs and devout worship commend themselves to people wherever we go."

Superintendent W. L. Perkins observed: "When I think of Illinois, this great and goodly land, big with opportunity, my heart craves this whole commonwealth for Christ and the church. The United Brethren Church has a goodly history in this State. No church has a louder call to enlarge the place of her tent, and stretch forth the curtains of her habitation. With but nineteen of the 102 county seats occupied, with other cities and towns offering rich fields for cultivation . . . , what must be the crime of narrowness that hedges up the way of advance?" To help accomplish this purpose, the Central Illinois Conference named a "committee for formulating a method for city work" in 1889.

The committee charged with the responsibility of looking to city work reported that Bloomington, Springfield, and Normal should be entered. Two years later the conference voted to start a church in Streator, but it was not until 1910 that an effort was proposed for Bloomington. A lot was selected in November and W. H. Arbogast began his work the following May. Special meetings were held in a newly-constructed tabernacle, and a church was organized with 37 charter members just one year later. The church grew rapidly and in just four years started a mission of its own in southeast Bloomington.

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24. _Minutes of the Twenty-sixth Annual Session of the Upper Wabash Conference of the United Brethren Church_, 1883, 19.
25. _RT_, October 19, 1892, 663.
27. _Minutes of the Twenty-fifth Session of the Central Illinois Conference of the United Brethren Church_, 1889, 8.
But attempts to enter the cities were not always met with open arms. In the summer, 1887 missionaries were sent to Quincy to attempt to start a church there. The preacher announced a meeting to be held on Third Street, but before the first service could be held he was “notified that there were enough churches in Quincy and the mission hall would not be open to the United Brethren intruder.” But a little chapel on the corner of Twentieth and Hampshire Streets was secured in October, 1888 a church was chartered with eight members.

III

“While our ministers and missionaries are going forth as an invading army,” noted an 1887 report, “attacking the world of wickedness and gaining many good and glorious victories for Christ, there is no doubt but much of the success is lost to our denomination for want of permanent and convenient places of worship.”

Editor J. M. Phillippi stated in an address to the Northern Illinois Conference in 1913: “Wherever a denomination . . . made its provisions for housing its converts and put proper men on guard to keep and to cultivate, their permanence was assured.” He went on to discuss the fate of a circuit of fifteen to eighteen preaching places: “not one of those appointments became permanent which neglected to build a church.” “Where there was no denominational garner,” he said, “either the produce spoiled or was gathered into some other garner . . . .”

The Religious Telescope reported that the Methodist pastor at Adair “and Brother Bowman [of the United Brethren Church] arranged to hold a union revival meeting. Brother Bowman did all the preaching. It was a good meeting, with quite a number of converts. At the close of the revival, all converts joined the Methodist church, not one coming into the United Brethren communion. Immediately, Brother Bowman saw that the future of the United Brethren Church in this section depend largely upon having a church in town.” Another concurred, saying: “Look here, my beloved brethren, the Methodists are taking this country simply because they are building all over it.”

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29RT, December 1, 1923, 21.
30“Report on Church Erection,” Minutes of the Thirtieth Session of the Upper Wabash Conference of the United Brethren Church, 1887.
31Proceedings of the Northern Illinois Conference of the Church of the United Brethren, 1913, 42, 43.
32RT, June 12, 1926, 20.
33RT, August 1, 1888, 491.
IV

Feelings about slavery reached a white heat among the United Brethren. The conferences frequently passed resolutions condemning slavery and news of the mistreatment of their missionaries in Kansas because of the church's opposition to slavery kept the issue before the people. Matthias Ambrose, Central Illinois Conference, told of taking a trip down the Mississippi with his brother, and seeing for the first time,

two white men called "slave-drivers," having some forty or fifty men, women, and children of African blood for the New Orleans market. Among the unfortunate creatures were five men in the prime of life, handcuffed and closely chained together.

So foolish and green was I that I inquired what crime they had committed, and was told that they had done nothing; that they had been taken from their wives and children in old Virginia. Then there were number of mothers with small children, and even babies, in their arms; and at night I could hear them sob and cry... Now, I began to see American slavery in its true character, and remembered what I had heard father say of it years before; and gave that as a reason for leaving Virginia. He said he did not wish to raise a family under the corrupting influence of slavery. His faith was that unless the government would take it in hand and put it away, God would do so by some terrible affliction or judgment.

One of the most soul-stirring songs of the Civil War era came from the pen of one of the United Brethren. The incident upon which the song is based occurred when a fugitive slave named Joseph Gray reached the home of the Rev. William Hanby and told the family of his attempt to reach Canada where he hoped to work and earn enough money to redeem his wife from the plantation to which she had been sold. Gravely ill from exposure and privation, he poured out his story of how his "Darling Nellie Gray" had been taken away and he would see her no more, but he had the assurance of the eternal reunion beyond the skies. Years later, Hanby's son Benjamin, wrote the song from his childhood memories. "The song instantly caught the imagination of America. It spread through the nation and became the battle song of emancipation." Perhaps more people are familiar with another of Ben Hanby's works, the children's Christmas song, familiarly known as "Up on the Housetop."

Of course, not everyone supported this involvement with moral issues. John Hoobler reported from Lexington in the 1850s: "We had some dark scenes, and some of the members of the church felt hurt at me for standing up for the principles of the church on the subject of slavery and the liquor traffic, and they said they wished I would preach the gospel and let those things alone. But I continued to preach that the law is holy, just, and good, and that anything that violates any of these principles between man and

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34RT, February 11, 1885, 98, 99.
35RT, March 15, 1941, 10.
man, or between God and man, is a sin, and if unrepented of will damn the soul, and I consider that the United Brethren have taken the only safe ground on these important subjects . . . "

V

Many United Brethren felt that the church's opposition to secret societies retarded its growth. S. J. Graham complained in 1891 that the church had been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years over the secrecy issue, but, he pointed out, like Joshua, it took steps in 1885 to cross the Jordan into the promised land by beginning the process of removing the prohibition of secrecy and was now making rapid advances.

Others, such as John Fetterhoff, had argued vehemently against the change.

I would ask how many of our lay members have as yet manifested any dissatisfaction with the constitution as it now is, notwithstanding the bate [sic] held out to them by lay representation. But it is well known that those who fell in love with the daughters of Moab (secret societies)—see Numbers XXV—and have married them, or wish to do so, agitate this question. I know of no others who have asked for a change in the constitution—only such who wish to blend the Church and world together.

The Central Illinois Conference of 1889 "Resolved, that we are pleased with the actions of the last General Conference, in adopting the work of the commission [removing the prohibition against secret orders], and believe that it will increase the zeal of our membership in Church work, and opens the door to success to us as a church, which has hitherto been closed."

While defenders of the General Conference's action admitted that some members had withdrawn from the church in protest, they felt the net result had been positive. The controversy was not ended, however, as Bishop Milton Wright, father of the Wright Brothers of aviation fame, and others staged a walk-out from the 1889 General Conference, and formed the Church of the United Brethren in Christ—Old Constitution. Both groups claimed ownership of some church buildings, and appointed ministers to them. One of the most hotly contested cases of dispute over ownership of church property took place at the New Michigan Church, in Livingston County, near Streator, which was made the test case for Illinois. Litigation claimed more resources than the New Michigan church could muster, so appeals were made to the conference, and to other conferences for financial help.

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8RT, March 18, 1857.
9RT, April 1, 1891, 197.
10RT, October 18, 1876, 26.
The women's movement challenged the United Brethren as it did other denominations. Women began hearing the call to preach, and would not be denied. Probably the earliest woman to apply to preach was Mrs. Lydia Sexton, who began preaching with a quarterly conference license in Illinois in 1851. Seven years later she presented herself for a conference license from the Upper Wabash Conference. No doubt many shared the opinion of one man who said upon hearing that a woman was going to conference: "I think the woman must be a fool, and the conference a set of fools, if they license that woman to preach. She had better stay at home and wash the dishes and take care of the children, where her place is, and not disgrace herself and her family and the church by strolling over the country. . . . I know that God never called a woman to preach his gospel. He made roosters to crow and not hens."

When Mrs. Sexton was presented to the conference, Bishop David Edwards ruled there was no authority in the United Brethren Church for licensing a woman. He went on to explain that if they were licensed "they would come up for the eldership, and, in the regular progression, ask for the order of bishop, etc., which the General Conference considered not in accordance with the word of God; that the teachings of the Bible forbid women ruling in the church of God—but to be in subjection." However, before the conference was over the bishop unexpectedly called for a vote and Mrs. Sexton was unanimously voted a license.

The first woman to become a member of an annual conference was another Illinoisan, Miss Ella Niswonger, who was received into the Central Illinois Conference and ordained elder at Arrowsmith in 1889. The presiding bishop, E. B. Kephart wrote that they had received the first woman ordained to elders' orders in any conference. "Is this the millennium dawning?" he asked. "God grant it." Miss Niswonger graduated from Bonebrake Seminary in 1887, the first female to graduate in the regular program. In 1900 she was the first female conference member to be elected to General Conference.

Miss Niswonger began preaching at Streator in 1887, and this church which "had not grown as it should," began "prospering under [her] labors." She was appointed to Elliott in 1889, to Fisher in 1893, before Gibson City in 1897. One member reported that this appointment was, "the most bitter disappointment to the church here, . . . But, there never was a more
popular minister who served this church. The people learned to love her with the deepest affection, and at the end of her five-year pastorate were loath to give her up." Interestingly, Ella Niswonger had left the Methodist Church to join the United Brethren conference, as the Methodists had not reached the point of admitting women into conference membership, and wouldn’t for several decades.

VII

The challenge of increasing sophistication and culture among preachers and church members caused more tensions to develop. William S. Titus spoke for many when he asked:

Will we, as a church, maintain, cultivate, and defend from foreign invasion the ground that God has given us, that spirit of humility and self-denial so faithfully carried out by our fathers and mother in the church, that willingness to be little and unknown in the world, or shall we ever long be under the painful necessity of seeing our churches filled with an ungodly choir instead of the sweet singers of Israel, or instead of the humble, self-denying, patient minister of God, shall see the church be cursed with proud, selfish, time serving would-be college-bred speechifiers. O’ God forbid...

Still, some came to recognize the need for education of the church’s young people, but this education should be pursued in the church’s own colleges, lest their youth be lost to other churches or to public colleges. The Lower Wabash Conference resolved in 1881: “The United Brethren sons and daughters ought to be educated in United Brethren colleges, and we believe it a duty to divert the minds of our young people from cheap normal schools.” Westfield College, founded in 1865, produced many converts and leaders for the church, but the members of the churches were reluctant to support it with the resources and students that were needed, and it was forced to close in 1914.

What about the preachers? Should they be educated? John Fetterhoff wrote in his journal in 1842: “Thirteen young preachers were added to our number. All of them were the fruits of revival meetings. Not one of them came from a man-made preacher factory. If their heads were not stored with human knowledge, their hearts were full of the Holy Ghost. Thus they went forth, being sent by the Holy Ghost, and God was with them, and they did more for God in the conversion of sinners than all the D.D.s with their head knowledge and cold souls.”

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Centennial History, Gibson City, 15.
Christian Advocate, October 24, 1889, 2.
RT, July 6, 1853.
RT, March 6, 1853.
John Fetterhoff, Life of John Fetterhoff, 106.
Still, pastors began attending Union, later Bonebrake Seminary in Dayton, which opened in 1871. One of its professors, in a speech the opening day, said: “The time has come for the opening of the Seminary. Yes, it has come, but not a moment too soon. . . . the whole Church has long felt the need of such an institution of this kind.”

The first seminary graduate to join the Illinois or Central Illinois conferences was our first woman member, Ella Niswonger.

The issue of sanctification, or holiness, troubled the United Brethren Church, as it did Methodists and others. The Central Illinois Conference named a conference evangelist in 1871, “in the interest of holiness,” after having a “a full and profitable discussion of the holiness doctrine” the year before. Along with other conferences, a Holiness Association was formed in Central Illinois. At a meeting in Alexis, Rev. Andrew Wimsett, “Uncle Andy,” “became so filled with the Holy Spirit that he fell in a trance and remained in that condition for several hours. This was a new experience for the people of this community and a hush as of death fell upon the congregation.”

The most pronounced advocate of holiness, or the “higher Christian Life,” among the United Brethren was David Edwards, who promoted it while editor of the Religious Telescope from 1845 to 1849, and as bishop from 1849 to the end of his life in 1876. Always a serious student of the works of Wesley and others on the subject, he professed “entire sanctification” in January, 1845. The following year he published The Perfect Christian or Condensed View of the Doctrine of Bible Holiness, which was widely read and quite influential. Edwards lamented the silence concerning holiness, and wrote that, “This is the end—other gospel doctrines and duties the means to lead us forward to this, man’s really true state—Hence Christians are commanded to leave the principles or beginnings of the doctrine of Christ, and to go on unto perfection.”

Others were just as strongly opposed to the holiness doctrine. John Hoobler wrote “I do not like to see communications in our Telescope acknowledging brethren to be in Christ, and then, in the same communication, invite the same brethren to come fully into Christ. If I invite a man into my house and he comes in, tell me what part of him was left out?” John con-

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“The Bonebrake Theological Seminary Bulletin, Volume XLV. Number 3 (Third Quarter, 1946) 3.


“RT, October 3, 1880, 4.

“U. B. Church Anniversary, 1929.

cluded: "O that we as a church may come together in union and preach a full Savior and not a half one."

As the years passed, the growth of membership and new conferences ceased, and a reverse movement toward consolidation began. Membership in the Illinois Conference peaked in 1896 with 3,327 members, and the Central Illinois in 1898, with just over 3,500. As early as 1881 the Missionary Society reported: "Southern Illinois Conference has not had the success we could have desired." Consequently, Southern Illinois Mission Conference territory was turned over to the Lower Wabash Conference in 1889. Central Illinois and Rock River conferences were united by General Conference in 1901, four years later the Illinois Conference was added, then those portions of Upper and Lower Wabash conferences in Illinois.

The Church of the United Brethren in Christ has left a glorious heritage. In addition to a multitude of consecrated laypersons, it has also produced people like Miles B. Leach, Oral F. Landis, W. H. and Mrs. Arbogast, Lynn W. Turner, Eugene J. Moore, Joseph M. Phillippi, editor of the Religious Telescope, and two bishops: Lynn L. Baughman and Paul W. Milhouse.

A "prophecy" concerning the United Brethren Church was made in 1937 for fifty years later. The anonymous author made five predictions: 1. a great improvement in worship, 2. a great increase in lay witnessing, 3. a class of membership for spiritual pioneers, which he called vanguard, 4. a reformation of church statistics. But perhaps the fifth prediction is the most striking. It stated that: "The United Brethren Church of 1987 will be a part of a denomination quite large, made up of several former denominations similar in doctrine and polity." Though this "first and most American church" has now become a part of the United Methodist Church, its noble heritage remains an inspiration.

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55 RT, May 18, 1881, 529.
56 RT, October 6, 1923, 13.
57 RT, May 8, 1937, 6, 7.