

Three Preachers and a Deacon

**The Early Leadership of the Haycock Congregation of the Evangelical
Mennonite Society of East Pennsylvania**

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Introduction

At the May 1858 semi-annual conference session of the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Church the conference approved a formal request to certain men who had been prominent in a movement within that group to adopt a more enthusiastic type of religious experience and new revivalist methods, and in particular, prayer meetings, demanding them to account to the conference why they did not attend the meeting. They were given until the Fall conference to reply.¹

This demand from the conference was the culmination of the 1856 decision of the East Pennsylvania Conference to revoke the permission previously granted for ministers to conduct prayer meetings for their respective congregations.² The preachers who supported conducting prayer meetings did not accept the conference decision regarding prayer meetings and continued to dispute that decision. When William Gehman, one of the Upper Milford Mennonite ministers, first heard of the decision, he is said to have described it as “unevangelical.” The following year (1857), Bishop William N. Shelly tried to prove to the conference that their decision was unevangelical.³

The ministers supporting the prayer meetings did not attend the May 1858 conference and did not respond to the conference demand to account for their actions. By that time, it appears that they no longer had any intention of remaining in the East Pennsylvania Conference and soon took measures to start their own organization.

They called their new organization the Evangelical Mennonite Society of East Pennsylvania, and on Sunday, June 13, 1858, only a few weeks after the close of the East Pennsylvania Conference’s May 1858 conference, we find the first documented meeting, a worship service, of this new group being held by the Upper Milford Congregation.⁴ The Evangelical Mennonite Society initially contained only three congregations which were located in Upper Milford Township, Lehigh County; Haycock Township, Bucks County; and Bangor, Northampton County. We come to this conclusion because minutes of the group’s semi-annual conferences show that congregations existed very early in these locations, and because the elders, preachers, and deacons mentioned as attending this group’s first conference in September 1858 seem to be from these three locations.⁵ Since there are no longer any known records in existence for the Haycock and Bangor congregations, we cannot prove absolutely when the latter two began holding their church services. The presumption, however, is that since the Upper Milford congregation began holding services at the latest by June 1858, it is probable that all three congregations began holding regular services at about that same time.

Of those three original congregations, the principal one, Upper Milford, still exists today as Zionsville Bible Fellowship Church. The Bangor congregation never thrived, and by the time its minister, David Henning, died in 1881, only one or two members remained, and it passed out of

existence. The Haycock congregation existed for about the first fourteen years of the Evangelical Mennonite Society. Four men were affiliated in leadership positions with the Haycock congregation in its earliest years, and it is the lives of those four men who we will examine in this paper. Their names were William N. Shelly, Abel Strawn, Henry Diehl, and Joseph Taylor. Shelly, Strawn, and Diehl were preachers, and Taylor was a deacon.

William N. Shelly

We will start with William N. Shelly. Shelly was born on October 8, 1814 into a sizable Mennonite family in Milford Township, Bucks County. His father was Daniel Shelly, and his mother was Maria Newcomer. While William Shelly's father, Daniel, did some farming over the years, he does not seem to have been a large landholder. In addition to farming, Daniel Shelly is also mentioned as a turner. A turner was someone who operated a lathe. More specifically, though, Daniel Shelly made spinning wheels. Some of the spinning wheels are still in existence. They can be identified by his initial and last name 'D. Shelly' crudely carved into the base of the spinning wheel in uppercase block letters.⁶

The family attended the West Swamp Mennonite congregation in Milford Township along the Allentown Road between the villages of Milford Square and Steinsburg along with other Shelly relatives. The Shelly immigrant had settled in Milford Township in the eighteenth century, and many Shelly relatives lived nearby and attended West Swamp Mennonite Church. We do not know when William Shelly joined the West Swamp Mennonite congregation, but he certainly did become a member at some point. In those days, young people who joined a Mennonite congregation such as West Swamp often did so in their mid- to late teen years. So perhaps William Shelly was baptized and joined the church in about the early 1830s, but we do not know for certain.

The next major event in William Shelly's life occurred on September 23, 1838 when he married Sarah Geissinger, one of the daughters of Philip Geissinger of Milford Township. This Geissinger family was also from the West Swamp congregation, and William Shelly's brother, Jacob, married one of Sarah Geissinger's sisters. This would be the first of three marriages for William N. Shelly.⁷

In 1842 the West Swamp Mennonite congregation selected John H. Oberholtzer as a minister for the congregation. This event would prove to have a profound impact on the life of William N. Shelly. Oberholtzer was soon made bishop of the Swamp District in the Franconia Conference, and he began to advocate new methods to make the work of the church more efficient. He advocated, for example, the adoption of a constitution for the conference, and he wanted the conference to keep minutes of its proceedings. Oberholtzer's advocacy of these reforms gained support from some other ministers in the Franconia Conference, but it did not

sit well with the more conservative members of the conference who constituted the majority. In the ensuing years, increasing friction existed between the conservative ministers and the progressives, and finally in 1847 this resulted in a schism in the Franconia Conference in which Oberholtzer and his followers left the conference and started a new Mennonite conference which they called the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Church.⁸

Like the majority of West Swamp members, William Shelly sided with Oberholtzer and the progressives and remained with the West Swamp Mennonite congregation which was controlled by the progressive majority. Shelly was soon selected as a preacher in the Swamp District probably in 1847. He was certainly a preacher by 1849 when Oberholtzer asked him to preside over the election that was held as part of the process to select a new preacher at the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation in place of Johannes Gehman who had died in 1848.⁹

Beginning in about 1847 Shelly's principal preaching duties were with the Flatland Mennonite congregation in Richland Township, Bucks County. The Flatland congregation was something of an offshoot of the West Swamp congregation, and it was a part of the Swamp bishop district. It was formed in 1837 to better accommodate people living in the area who found it difficult to get to West Swamp for services.¹⁰

William Shelly served at Flatland until 1855 when a need for a preacher arose in the new Bowmansville, Lancaster County, Mennonite congregation. Shelly went to this congregation in the summer of 1855, and it was probably about this time that he was made a bishop in the East Pennsylvania Conference since he would then have been serving outside of the Swamp District, and a bishop would have been needed in the district in which he was serving.¹¹

In the meantime, other issues were brewing in the conference which would affect the trajectory of William Shelly's life significantly. In 1853 William Gehman, the junior preacher in the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation, began to conduct prayer meetings for members of his congregation. Prayer meetings were an innovation which were practiced by some of the more revivalist-minded denominations in the country, but it was a practice that was unheard of among Mennonites. Some of the more conservative preachers in the East Pennsylvania Conference objected to these meetings, and the issue came up for discussion in the May 1853 session of the conference. After Gehman explained how he conducted the prayer meetings, the majority of the conference decided to grant permission for Gehman to continue the meetings.¹²

By 1856, however, there continued to be concerns among many ministers about what went on in Gehman's prayer meetings. The result was that the prayer meeting issue was to be a topic for discussion again at the May 1856 session of the conference. Due to time constraints, however, it was decided to have the conference bishops address the issue among themselves in a separate meeting the next day. When the bishops met, they decided unanimously to revoke

the permission granted three years before for William Gehman to conduct the prayer meetings. Upon hearing of the decision, William Gehman is said to have responded that the bishops' decision was "unevangelical." William N. Shelly was one of those bishops who concurred in the decision. In the fall session of the semi-annual conference the conference membership voted to approve the bishops' decision regarding the prayer meetings.¹³

While still the preacher at the Bowmansville Mennonite congregation, on July 6, 1856, William Shelly's first wife, Sarah, died. On December 24, 1856 William Shelly married for the second time to Anna Taylor Weikel, the widow of Charles Weikel.¹⁴ Anna Weikel's daughter, Anna Eliza Weikel, would in a few years marry the Evangelical Mennonite preacher Abraham Kauffman (1840-1889) of Upper Milford Township, Lehigh County.

As time passed, problems arose between William N. Shelly and some of the members of his congregation at Bowmansville. The precise nature and cause of these problems is unknown.¹⁵ Perhaps it had something to do with the prayer meetings, but we just don't know. Additionally, William Shelly also changed his mind about his concurrence in the bishops' decision regarding the prayer meetings, and he began to side with William Gehman on this issue and supported the continuation of prayer meetings.

As a result of his change in thinking regarding prayer meetings, Shelly asked to address the regular semi-annual conference session that met in the Springfield Meetinghouse on October 1, 1857 so that he could submit a formal protest of the bishops' decision regarding prayer meetings and show that the bishops' decision was unevangelical. Shelly's address attracted a lot of attention. Maynard Shelly wrote of this in recent years, "The meeting was well attended, William Gehman says, 'The church was packed.'" After William Shelly's formal protest, the conference took a vote on a resolution to declare the bishops' decision regarding prayer meetings as unevangelical. Only 3 voted in favor, likely Shelly, Gehman, and David Henning. There were 24 votes cast against the resolution.¹⁶

At the next conference held at the West Swamp Meetinghouse on May 5, 1858, the conference minutes describe what happened:

Since for some time the minister Wm. N. Shelly has been contrary minded toward the Council, he was asked whether he would accept the former decision of the Council and as he declined to do so it was then unanimously resolved by Council to strike his name from the list of ministers of our church.¹⁷

So, William Shelly was gone from the church at that point. Subsequently, at the same meeting, the conference also addressed the issue of certain ministers and deacons who had "for some time . . . absented themselves in contempt of council." Those men, among whom were William Gehman and David Henning, were given until the fall meeting to explain their actions. If they

did not respond, their names would be removed from the list of ministers as well. Neither Gehman nor Henning responded to the conference about this and were eventually removed from the list of ministers.¹⁸

These three preachers, William N. Shelly, William Gehman, and David Henning, then began to organize congregations for a new Mennonite conference which they called the Evangelical Mennonite Society of East Pennsylvania. These congregations appear to have become operational by June of 1858. The records of the Zionsville Bible Fellowship Church show, for example, receipt of money as the result of an offering taken in the worship service on June 13, 1858. We do not have any records for Haycock or Bangor, but since the circumstances were the same as for the Upper Milford (Zionsville today) congregation, the likelihood is that those congregations had begun holding services by then as well.¹⁹

In this new configuration, William Shelly's initial role was as an elder presumably in the Haycock congregation. Initially, this new conference seems to have patterned its governance after the Mennonite conference from which it separated. Thus, each congregation had one deacon, and the ministers were divided between elders and preachers. Shelly and Gehman were listed as elders, and David Henning and Henry Diehl were preachers. The position of elder, then, may have corresponded to what the Oberholtzer group called bishops. Therefore, William N. Shelly likely had some oversight responsibilities in his position as elder.²⁰

In addition to William Shelly, the other original leaders in the new Haycock congregation were the minister Henry Diehl and the deacon Joseph Schneider (aka Taylor). Shelly undoubtedly knew these men well from his years preaching at the Flatland congregation of which they were a part. Now Shelly would be working with them as the leadership team in the new Haycock congregation of the Evangelical Mennonites.

Once the Evangelical Mennonite congregations were functional, the role of a minister like William Shelly would have involved regular preaching in the congregation and general pastoral oversight of the congregation. He also attended the semi-annual conferences which were held in the spring and fall of each year—this was another carryover from the conference the group separated from. Shelly took an active part in the conferences, sometimes preaching there, and serving as chairman of the conference from time to time. In fact, Shelly was the chairman of nine of the first 38 conferences from 1859 until 1878.²¹ Sometimes they would be assigned to a committee for some special purpose. This is what happened in the June 1863 conference where, after the chairman gave an invitation to the preachers for volunteers to become traveling preachers, one of the young ministers, Abraham W. Stauffer, expressed interest in being a traveling preacher. As a result, William Shelly, William Gehman, and the Upper Milford deacon, David Gehman were placed on a committee to provide advice to Stauffer and any other preacher who would undertake the task of a traveling preacher.²²

One area in which the Evangelical Mennonites differed from other Mennonite groups was in their belief in aggressive evangelism. Thus, the Evangelical Mennonite preachers would seek opportunities to preach in places outside of their regular preaching duties with their congregations, and this was true for William Shelly, too. Shelly, for example, was listed as one of the preachers who preached in revival services in Edwin Long's tent when it was setup in Quakertown in 1858.²³

As part of their aggressive evangelism, the Evangelical Mennonites also sent out traveling preachers to preach the gospel in various places. At the June 1870 semi-annual conference, the conference chairman, William Gehman, thought it would be good if the conference would designate two full-time traveling preachers so it could better respond to the numerous preaching requests it was receiving. Gehman challenged the attendees to consider volunteering for duty as traveling preachers. William Shelly and three other preachers volunteered. A lot was then cast to determine which two preachers would perform this duty, and Shelly was not one of those selected. A year later, however, Abel Strawn asked to be relieved of duty as one of the traveling preachers, and Shelly was then given the duty in place of Strawn. In the ensuing year, Shelly reported having preached 124 times, visited 170 families, and baptized two people. Some of these instances of preaching were the result of requests. The conference minutes state that requests to have a minister preach had come in from the counties of Bucks, Berks, Lancaster, Lebanon, Dauphin, Perry, and Juniata.²⁴

When a new congregation would come into existence, the conference would sometimes assign it to an existing church district to provide it with pastors and proper guidance. Such was the case in 1873 when a new congregation in Allentown was assigned to the Quakertown district, and William N. Shelly and Jonas Musselman, both from the Quakertown congregation, were given the responsibility to supervise it.²⁵

William N. Shelly was a founding member of the Evangelical Mennonite Society. For the first twenty years of its existence, he had been a preacher in that organization and had regularly carried out the duties expected of him in this position. In the year 1878, though, for the second time in his preaching career, he was about to take a position against a resolution of his church conference which would again result in his removal from his position as preacher.

William Shelly's daughter, Amanda, married a man named John L. Moyer. The couple resided in Allentown, and John Moyer ran an insurance agency there. Perhaps it was that fact that helped persuade William Shelly to purchase life insurance. Regardless of the reason, we know that Shelly purchased life insurance, and this became known to the members of the Evangelical Mennonite conference. Shelly must have told some of his associates about it. Perhaps he was trying to direct business to his son-in-law. After all, Henry Diehl, Shelly's fellow minister at Quakertown also purchased life insurance. He may have been persuaded to do so by William Shelly. At any rate, prior to this time the church had no rule against purchasing life insurance.

It may be that no one in the church had purchased life insurance before, so it never became an issue. When Shelly's purchase of life insurance became known, however, many of the ministers became uneasy about that. We do not know the discussion which occurred about this issue, but a resolution was approved at the church's thirty-eighth semi-annual conference in June 1878 which stated, "RESOLVED: That we add to our doctrine the following: it shall not be allowed, for preachers or members of our denomination to hold a life insurance policy."²⁶

An additional related resolution was also approved at the same session:

RESOLVED: That, since some brethren hold life insurance policies, they shall have time until the next Conference (the first Monday in October, 1878) to think about whether they will give up the life insurance or not.²⁷

Neither William Shelly nor Henry Diehl attended the next conference. The minutes of that conference note that "the preachers, Brethren William N. Shelly and Henry Diehl from Quakertown, do not want to leave the life insurance company and do not want to submit to this resolution. Consequently in the future they shall not be considered members of our denomination . . ."²⁸

For William N. Shelly, this was the end of his ministry as a preacher in the Evangelical Mennonite Society. It was not, however, the end of his ministry as a preacher. After leaving the Evangelical Mennonites, he joined the United Brethren in Christ as a preacher. He was a supply pastor for several churches which made up the Bucks County Circuit of the United Brethren from 1879-1880, and he was ordained as a United Brethren minister in 1880. After, that date, however, it does not appear that he held any other regular appointment with this church.²⁹

William Shelly owned a home and some property in Quakertown where he lived for many years. His second wife died in June 1881. Both of his daughters lived in Allentown. With the death of his wife, he was alone in his home in Quakertown, and that fact may have influenced him to move to Allentown to be near his daughters' families. We first find him listed in an 1883-1884 Allentown city directory at 219 N. Ninth St. which was the same address as his son-in-law and daughter, John and Amanda Moyer. We find him consistently living in Allentown for the remaining years of his life after that.³⁰

While residing in Allentown, he became a member of the Zion Church of the United Brethren in Christ congregation at Ninth and Linden Streets. On January 18, 1886, William Shelly married Juliann Slough, his third marriage. His new wife, however, died only three months later in April 1886.³¹

William N. Shelly died suddenly on August 4, 1893 while at the home of William M. Landis, his

son-in-law, in Allentown. He is buried in Allentown.³²

Abel Strawn

The Strawn family was living in Bucks County since the 18th century. Members of the family were of Quaker background and were members of the Richland Friends Meeting. Abel Strawn (1765-1848), like many of his relatives, was a Quaker and a member of Richland Friends Meeting, but his son, Joel Strawn, is not listed in the membership of Richland Friends Meeting.

Joel Strawn was born on September 3, 1803. As far as we can tell, he never joined the Quaker meeting. He married Catherine Fretz, a woman from a Bucks County Mennonite family. Joel and Catherine Strawn had a son, Abel, who was born on December 5, 1830. It is this younger Abel Strawn who is the main subject of this sketch. Abel Strawn married Hannah Brunner on October 30, 1850.³³

Hannah Brunner came from a Salisbury Twp., Lehigh County, family. This marriage would tie Abel Strawn to a family which eventually became extremely important to the nineteenth century history of the Evangelical Mennonites and its successor, the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Hannah Brunner was a sister of Joel Brunner who was a farmer in Upper Milford Twp. and, after his conversion at one of Edwin Long's revivals in Quakertown, joined the new Evangelical Mennonite Society as a member of the Upper Milford congregation of the new group. Hannah Brunner was also a sister of Lucy Brunner who married Jonas Musselman, an early minister among the Evangelical Mennonites. Lucy Brunner would later become a driving force in the Gospel Workers Society.³⁴

We first encounter Abel Strawn as a preacher among the Evangelical Mennonites in the minutes of the November 1861 semi-annual conference of the church.³⁵ It is possible that he became a minister prior to that, but the minutes of the conferences prior to November 1861 do not list the ministers in attendance at those conferences. Rev. A. J. Fretz in his Fretz history states that Strawn was elected to the ministry of the Evangelical Mennonites in 1859. That information was likely provided by Strawn himself since Fretz obtained most of the information for his book by corresponding directly with members of the respective families. Memory, however, can fade as time passes, and Fretz's work was published in 1890, many years after the event. Furthermore, David Gehman wrote a letter to Daniel Hoch, a Mennonite minister from Canada and generally on good terms with the Evangelical Mennonites, in July 1860 in which Gehman describes something of the May 1860 conference and specifically names all of the ministers and deacons in attendance. Abel Strawn is not one of those named in Gehman's letter. Perhaps Gehman simply forgot to list Strawn's name in his letter, or maybe Strawn was absent from the meeting for some reason. On the other hand, Strawn's memory could have been faulty when he provided the information to Rev. Fretz many years later. The best we can

say at this time is that sometime between 1859 and November 1861 Abel Strawn became an Evangelical Mennonite preacher.³⁶

At this early date, Strawn was probably preaching in the Haycock congregation since, for one thing, his family was from Haycock Township. Additionally, on March 29, 1862 Joel Strawn and his son, Abel Strawn, executed an agreement with Joseph Snyder (aka Taylor) and David Weirbach, trustees of the Evangelical Mennonite Congregation of Haycock Township, in which the trustees agreed to allow the Strawns to have the "right liberty and privilege of occupying said Evangelical Meeting House one week out of every four at all times and seasons hereafter forever And full power and authority to select such minister of the Gospel to preach in said . . . designated weeks."³⁷

This was a rather unorthodox arrangement, and it is unclear why this was thought to be necessary or desirable, especially since there were presumably at least three preachers available within the congregation to preach on a regular basis. It is unknown how long the Strawns continued this arrangement. It is likely, though, that the congregation was holding meetings in those early days on alternate Sundays, and the Strawns may have been using the meetinghouse on a Sunday when it was not otherwise in use.

As the years passed, Abel Strawn continued his duties as a preacher with the Evangelical Mennonites. It is difficult to know what the various preachers were doing or where they were preaching because in many cases the early conference minutes do not provide information on the preaching assignments of each preacher. It was in the November 1873 conference that specific preaching assignments were first recorded in the minutes. At that conference it was decided to include the Fogelsville congregation in the Coopersburg District, and Abel Strawn and Joel Rosenberger were assigned to that district for the coming year. In the ensuing years, Abel Strawn would serve in many of the congregations of the church including Upper Milford (Zionsville), Ironville, Springtown, Quakertown, Hatfield, Emmaus, East Hereford, Reading, Terre Hill, and Remps.³⁸

Abel Strawn exhibited some interest in being involved in traveling preaching. At the June 1870 conference, the conference chairman, William Gehman, asked for two volunteers to be traveling preachers full-time. Strawn volunteered and was one of the two volunteers selected to perform this duty. The following year he asked to be relieved of the duty, but again in 1887, he spent a year as a traveling preacher.³⁹

Beginning in 1892, Abel Strawn was usually assigned as a local preacher each year and in most years was not normally a regularly assigned preacher to any of the congregations or circuits.⁴⁰

In 1902 Strawn was absent from conference. The following year, he was absent from conference again. This time the conference minutes state that the Committee on Examination

of Presiding Elders, Local Preachers, and Missionaries found all of them satisfactory “except A. Strawn who is charged with disloyalty to the church and Pastor, circulating untruthful reports about the work and Pastor, and sowing dissension among the classes.” Later in the day, the Committee on Communications “read a letter from A. Strawn of Allentown, which we hold under advice.” Strawn and the conference clearly had a falling out, and he apparently left the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ permanently at that point. His name never appears in the conference minutes again.⁴¹

Thus ended over forty years of service preaching in the Evangelical Mennonite Church and its successor organizations.

Abel Strawn’s wife, Hannah, died in 1900, and in 1904, after having lived in Allentown for 12 years, Strawn moved to Norristown which is where he died on March 13, 1913. The funeral was held at what is today Calvary Bible Fellowship Church in Coopersburg, and Strawn was buried in the adjoining cemetery there. In addition to Abel Strawn, his wife, parents, brother, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, and an aunt are also buried at the Calvary Bible Fellowship Cemetery.⁴²

Henry Diehl

The preacher Henry Diehl came from a Mennonite family in Rockhill Township, Bucks County. His family attended the Flatland Mennonite Church in Richland Township. His parents were George and Catharine (Rosenberger) Diehl.⁴³ It was in the Flatland congregation that the family would have first become familiar with the Mennonite preacher William N. Shelly. As previously noted, the Flatland church was an offshoot of West Swamp Mennonite church, and it was part of the Swamp bishop district. After the Mennonite division in 1847 which resulted in the establishment of the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Church (John Oberholtzer’s group), William Shelly, who was originally from the West Swamp congregation, was made a preacher and assigned to preaching duties with the Flatland congregation.

We don’t know what motivated Henry Diehl to leave the Flatland congregation for the new Evangelical Mennonite group that formed in 1858. Perhaps, William Shelly was an influence in that decision. But things like this usually have a more complex cause than merely the influence of one man. Revivals were occurring in the area in the 1850s, and Diehl would have been well aware of that. The revival movement among the Mennonites in the area attracted him to become part of it, and Diehl joined the new Evangelical Mennonite group as soon as it began.

Diehl must have also been recognized as a leader since he was immediately selected to be one of the preachers for the new Haycock Evangelical Mennonite congregation which was started. Diehl was the only one of the four original preachers who had not been a Mennonite preacher

prior to that.⁴⁴

Henry Diehl consistently attended to his preaching duties. He attended the semi-annual conferences regularly, but he was not one of the more prominent preachers in the conference. For example, in his twenty years with the Evangelical Mennonite Society, he was never selected to be the chairman of a semi-annual conference. That role mostly rotated among William Gehman, William N. Shelly, David Henning, and Eusebius Hershey.⁴⁵

One also notices when reviewing the conference minutes that Henry Diehl appears to be less active than most of the other ministers. His name is rarely mentioned as taking an active part in the semi-annual conferences. He attends the conferences consistently but rarely preaches, admonishes, or leads in prayer or singing. Additionally, when the preachers began to submit reports detailing their activities in the 1870s, Diehl's reports consistently show below average totals for number of times preached, families visited, and miles traveled. Sometimes he didn't submit a report. One time he gave a verbal report instead of a written one, and another time instead of providing a numerical report, he reported that he preached as often as he could and tried to be useful.⁴⁶

This is not to disparage his efforts. There may have been some legitimate reason for this which we, looking back from today's vantage point, can't possibly know. And perhaps he was engaged in other activities which do not show up as easily in the statistics. Certainly, there is no evidence that his fellow preachers thought he was not qualified, and often different people with different personalities and skills can complement each other's abilities and in the end be a more effective team.

His time with the Evangelical Mennonites finally come to an end in 1878 when he decided to take a life insurance policy and refused to give it up after the conference came out against life insurance.⁴⁷

Henry Diehl lived on in Quakertown for another twenty years after that and died on August 3, 1898, at his home in Quakertown. He was 83 years old and was buried at the Union Cemetery in Quakertown.⁴⁸

Joseph B. Taylor

Joseph B. Taylor (aka Schneider) came from a Mennonite family which attended the Springfield Mennonite Church. His parents were Joseph Schneider (aka Taylor) and Hannah Beidler. Joseph B. Taylor was born on July 12, 1822.⁴⁹

According to the obituary which William Gehman wrote for the Gospel Banner, Joseph B. Taylor was converted to God "30 years ago."⁵⁰ That would place his conversion experience in

approximately late 1859. However, that number given by William Gehman should probably be considered an approximation rather than a precise time frame. Taylor would no doubt have said he was converted prior to his joining the new Evangelical Mennonite Society in 1858 which would place the date in either early 1858 or even in 1857.

The Evangelical Mennonites seem to have patterned their organization after the Mennonites from which they broke away which meant that each congregation had one deacon. The list of attendees at the first conference in September 1858 shows three deacons, one for Upper Milford, one for Haycock, and one for Bangor, although the specific congregations are not named on that list.⁵¹ Joseph B. Taylor was the first and original deacon of the Haycock congregation, and he would go on to hold that position for the remainder of the Haycock congregation's existence and then with Quakertown after Haycock closed and he joined the new Quakertown congregation.⁵²

He continued to be Quakertown's deacon until 1882 when the position was eliminated. At that point he was selected for the new position of delegate which he held for two more years.⁵³

In the obituary that William Gehman wrote for Taylor, Gehman says, "he was a brother who could give good advice, and would point the discouraged ones to the precious promises of God."⁵⁴

In August 1889, while engaged in loading stoves from a local stove foundry onto a freight car, the horse hitched to the wagon began walking off causing Taylor to fall and striking his head on the freight car. At first, he seemed to recover from the fall and returned to work after a few days, but eventually his physical condition became worse. The *Quakertown Free Press* says "he had been sick for about four weeks with a disease of the spine." William Gehman described it as "spinal disease, and paralysis." Taylor died on November 23, 1889. Pastor George Campbell conducted a funeral service in Taylor's home, and William Gehman conducted a service in the Quakertown MBC Church. Taylor was buried in the Union Cemetery in Quakertown.⁵⁵

Notes

1. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Conferenz der Mennoniten Gemeinschaft 1847-1872*, 25; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference. 1847 to 1902. Translated from the Original German Records, Twentieth Session.
2. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Conferenz*, 21; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Seventeenth Session.
3. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Conferenz*, 23; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Nineteenth Session; Harold P. Shelly, *The Bible Fellowship Church Formerly Mennonite Brethren in Christ Pennsylvania Conference Originally die Evangelische Mennoniten Gemeinschaft von Ost-Pennsylvanien* (Bethlehem, Pa., 1992), 5, 5n1, 18-20; John L. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship: A narrative account of life in the oldest Mennonite community in North America* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1984), 301; John C. Wenger, *History of the Mennonites of the Franconia Conference* (Telford, Pa., 1937), 370.
4. Records, Evangelical Mennonite Church, 1858-1906, Upper Milford Twp., Lehigh County, Pennsylvania. Three copies of the original manuscript are stored in the Bible Fellowship Church Archives, Whitehall, PA. These are records of the Upper Milford congregation which is known as Zionsville Bible Fellowship today.
5. *Glaubenslehre und Kirchengzucht-Ordnung der Evangel. Mennoniten-Gemeinschaft von Ost-Pennsylvanien* (Skippackville, Pa., 1866), 4; "Doctrine of Faith and Church Discipline of the Evangelical Mennonite Society, of East Pennsylvania," in Leonard E. Buck, ed., *What Mean These Stones?* (Coopersburg, Pa., 1983), 23.
6. Rev. A. J. Fretz, *A Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Jacob Beidler of Lower Milford Township, Bucks Co., Pa.*, (Milton, N.J., 1903), 52, 55.
7. *Ibid.*, 55.
8. Wenger, *History of the Mennonites of the Franconia Conference*, 354-356; John L. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship*, 259-274; Shelly, *Bible Fellowship Church*, 9-10.
9. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship*, 269.
10. 125th Anniversary, Flatland Mennonite Church (booklet), Flatland Mennonite Church Archival Collection, Mennonite Heritage Center, Harleysville, PA.
11. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship*, 292; Maynard Shelly, "A new church came to the pine grove," Swamp Story Preview 56, September 2001, Maynard Shelly research files on West Swamp Mennonite Church, Mennonite Heritage Center, Harleysville, PA; "Von der Rathversammlung," October 16, 1854, *Der Religiöse Botschafter*; W[illiam] N. S[helly], "Für den Botschafter," August 20, 1855, *Der Religiöse Botschafter*, 158-159.
12. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Conferenz*, 17; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Eleventh Session; Shelly, *Bible Fellowship Church*, 12-13.
13. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Conferenz*, 20-21; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Sessions; Shelly, *Bible Fellowship Church*, 15-20.
14. Fretz, *Descendants of Jacob Beidler*, 55.
15. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Conferenz*, 24; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Twentieth Session.

16. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Konferenz*, 23; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Nineteenth Session; Maynard Shelly, “Swamp pastors face off on this one,” *Swamp Story Preview* 58, November 2001, Maynard Shelly research files on West Swamp Mennonite Church, Mennonite Heritage Center, Harleysville, PA.

17. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Konferenz*, 24; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Twentieth Session.

18. *Verhandlungen der Ost-Pennsylvanischen Konferenz*, 25-26; Minutes of the Eastern District Conference, Twentieth and Twenty-first Sessions.

19. Records, Evangelical Mennonite Church, 1858-1906, Upper Milford Twp., Lehigh County, Pennsylvania.

20. *Glaubenslehre*, 4; “Doctrine of Faith and Church Discipline of the Evangelical Mennonite Society, of East Pennsylvania,” 23.

21. Richard E. Taylor, ed., *Verhandlungen (1859-1895)* (Coopersburg, Pa., 1989), 30-106.

22. *Ibid.*, 32.

23. Rev. Edwin M. Long, *The Union Tabernacle; or, Movable Tent-Church: showing in its rise and success a new department of Christian enterprise* (Philadelphia, 1859), 28. Rev. Long states only the surname of the Mennonite minister named Shelly who preached in his tabernacle, and there were two Mennonite ministers named Shelly at the time. Considering Long’s favorable view, however, of the supporters of prayer meetings with respect to the issue of prayer meetings which arose in the Hosensack Valley, and William N. Shelly’s significant involvement in that issue, there can be no reasonable doubt that the minister mentioned as preaching in Long’s tabernacle is William N. Shelly.

24. Taylor, ed., *Verhandlungen*, 63-64, 68, 70-71.

25. *Ibid.*, 81.

26. *Ibid.*, 115.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, 119.

29. Phares Brubaker Gible, *History of the East Pennsylvania Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton, Ohio, 1951), 421, 429, 509.

30. I. L. Shiffert, H. A. Schwartz, and Aug. W. Mennig, *City Directory Allentown Pa. 1883-1884* (Allentown, Pa., 1883), 106, 130, 164.

31. Church Records, Zion Church of the United Brethren in Christ, Allentown, PA. I consulted a copy of the original records at the Lehigh County Historical Society, Allentown, PA.

32. “Death of the Rev. Mr. Shelly,” August 9, 1893, *The Allentown Democrat*, 3; “Rev. William N. Shelly Dies Suddenly,” August 11, 1893, *Quakertown Free Press*, front.

33. Rev. A. J. Fretz, *A Brief History of John and Christian Fretz and a Complete Genealogical Family Register With Biographies of Their Descendants From the Earliest Available Records to the Present Time* (Elkhart, Indiana, 1890), 126-127.

34. Richard E. Taylor, “Beyond Sivvah Menna,” Newsletter, The Historical Society of the Bible Fellowship Church, January 2006, <http://www.bfchistory.org/soc1'2006.htm>; Ardis Dreisbach Grosjean, “Deacon and Schreiber David Gehman, 1802 – 1881,” Newsletter, The Historical Society of the Bible Fellowship Church, July 2005, <http://www.bfchistory.org/soc7'2005.htm>.

35. Taylor, ed., *Verhandlungen*, 28.
36. Letter - David Gehman, Hosensack, Lehigh Co., PA, to Daniel Hoch, July 29, 1860, "Early Mennonite Correspondence and Papers, 1708-1901," Hist. Mss. 1-10, Box 1, File 14 entitled "Hoch, Daniel (High) correspondence, Ontario, Canada, 1856-1873," Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Indiana; Fretz, *A Brief History of John and Christian Fretz*, 127.
37. Agreement, March 29, 1862, Deed Book 118, pp. 13-14, Bucks County (Pa.) Recorder of Deeds.
38. Taylor, ed., *Verhandlungen*, 82-191.
39. *Ibid.*, 64, 68, 165.
40. *Ibid.*, 212.
41. *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference Also Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Ministerial Convention of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Pennsylvania Convened In Faith Chapel, Reading, Pa.*, 1902; *Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Conference Also Proceedings of the Fourteenth Annual Ministerial Convention of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Pennsylvania Convened In Ebenezer Church Mt. Carmel, Pa.*, 1903.
42. "Funeral of Rev. Abel Strawn," March 15, 1913, *The Allentown Leader*.
43. Rev. A. J. Fretz, *A Genealogical Record of the Descendants of Henry Rosenberger of Franconia, Montgomery Co., Pa. Together With Historical and Biographical Sketches, and Illustrated With Portraits and Other Illustrations* (Milton, N.J., 1906), 293; George Diehl Estate File – 1870, #12742, Bucks County (Pa.) Register of Wills Records.
44. *Glaubenslehre*, 4; "Doctrine of Faith and Church Discipline of the Evangelical Mennonite Society, of East Pennsylvania," 23.
45. Taylor, ed., *Verhandlungen*, 24-116.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*, 119.
48. "Obituary Rev. Henry Diehl," August 5, 1898, *Quakertown Free Press*.
49. Membership record book, 1849-1867, Springfield Mennonite Church Archival Collection, Box 1, Mennonite Heritage Center, Harleysville, PA.
50. Wm. Gehman, "Died," December 15, 1889, Vol. 12 No. 24, *The Gospel Banner*, Berlin, Ontario, 13.
51. "Doctrine of Faith and Church Discipline of the Evangelical Mennonite Society, of East Pennsylvania," 23.
52. Taylor, ed., *Verhandlungen*, 28-136.
53. *Ibid.*, 71-136.
54. Gehman, "Died," *The Gospel Banner*, 13.
55. "Obituary," November 29, 1889, *The Quakertown Free Press*.