

NEWSLETTER

Ira Seebold Sassaman: A CONSISTENT WITNESS TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AND LIFE, PART I

By Annabelle Wenzke

Ira Seebold Sassaman was many things in his life but first and foremost he was an evangelist for the Christian faith. He wanted to share it with everyone and his ministry was marked by his evangelistic fervor. Although he was also a faithful pastor, servant of the church, devoted husband, proud father, educator and community leader, and coincidentally my grandfather, his first commitment was to preach the good news and bring people to Christ. Reflecting on forty years of ministry, he told a reporter in 1949: "My greatest Easter experience in 42 years in ministry came in 1916 during my first year as pastor at St John's Lutheran Church in Northumberland. I had prayed – and worked – toward a goal of 100 new members for the church by that Easter Sunday. The Lord gave me more than I asked for when 116 joined that day." (Williamsport *Grit*, April 17, 1949) Preaching the good news and bringing people into the church was the center of my grandfather's ministry.

He was born in 1878 in Dry Valley Crossroads, a small valley north of Selinsgrove, to Abraham and Elmira (Seebold) Sassaman, the oldest son and third child. His ancestors on both sides of the family had been in the area for four generations and were farmers. His great-grandfather, Henry, is said to be

buried on the farm he owned in Dry Valley, a little to the north of Kratzerville. Little is known about his childhood and youth except to note that the Sassamans were Lutherans and the Seebolds Reformed. Ira, his brother and two sisters, were raised Lutherans. Like his ancestors, Ira was raised as a farmer. However, farming did not seem to be what he wanted to do with his life. There is some evidence (a photo) that he was teaching in his late teens in a school near New Berlin. However, both in family lore and historical records, his story begins with an early marriage when he was twenty (1902) where he lists his occupation as "clerk."

Ira's life took a dramatic turn in 1903 when he lost his wife of less than a year in childbirth. In September of 1902 he had married Nellie Smith, a seamstress of 21. His identification of his occupation as "clerk" on the marriage license and his place of residence as New Berlin show he was no longer working on the family farm. However, he had yet to find his chosen profession. Since this marriage was never discussed in the family, we know little about Nellie or his time with her. Nevertheless, it would seem that the loss of his wife and the newborn daughter profoundly affected

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Annabelle Wenzke writes about her grandfather, Ira Seebold Sassaman
- LHSMA newsletter to be distributed in electronic format only to most members
- German/American Lutheran language conflict covered by three speakers at fall program
- Consider LHSMA membership for your congregation



President's Corner - Fall 2014

For the past twenty years the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic has worked to promote and preserve the history of Lutheranism in the Mid-



Atlantic region. In this newsletter you will see a variety of programs and events aimed at supporting this mission. Some of the society's initiatives focus on providing educational and edifying opportunities for individuals and congregations, while other ones seek to foster scholarship in the field of Lutheranism in America. All these endeavors hope to inspire this generation of Lutherans to delve into and appreciate their history.

In order to encourage Lutherans and their congregations to explore their particular history, the society currently offers three opportunities. At a recent board meeting, the board of directors voted to provide funds for the rejuvenation of the Historic Site Recognition Program. It is the board's hope that this will promote congregational exploration of their history and submit applications for recognition. Likewise the Lutheran Church History Contest for Youth encourages middle

and high school students to explore their congregation's history and heritage. And, finally the triennial Congregational Heritage Workshop affords congregations the opportunity to gain valuable insights and practical information on how to preserve records, tell their history, and celebrate a congregational anniversary.

Through the generosity of the Wentz family and St. Paul Lutheran Church in Biglerville, Pennsylvania the society awards two prizes supporting scholarship in the field of Lutheranism in America. The Abdel Ross Wentz Prize can be awarded each year in two categories: either to a first degree seminarian and/or graduate student pursuing a M.A. or Ph.D. This prize helps foster a new generation of Lutheran scholars. Meanwhile, the St. Paul, Biglerville Prize is awarded every 2-3 years for a published work of mature scholarship.

As I write this I am travelling back to Gettysburg with fellow society members, Sue Hill, Ray Teel, and Barbara Lawver from the Fall Program held in Philadelphia. We were joined by over twenty other participants and treated to a wonderful day of lectures. Topics for the date included the ecumenical Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, language debates at St. Michael's and Zion (Philadelphia), and conflict at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Philadelphia (LTSP) around the German language in the late nineteenth century. The day concluded with a tour of the Lutheran Archives Center on the campus of LTSP. It was an inspiring and educational day. Programs, such as this that are held each Spring in Gettysburg and occasionally in the Fall around the region, enrich and inform our understanding of Lutheran history. They are opportunities for conversation and engagement with others who are interested and intrigued by Lutheran history.

Finally, the society publishes its newsletter three times a year, maintains a website, and organizes display boards for use at synod assemblies. These are the many ways the society is carrying forward this important role and work.

How can you help? Get involved! Attend one of our programs and invite a friend and/or stranger to participate. Encourage middle and high school youth to submit an entry in the youth contest. Share society news and events with the congregation where you worship. The society would like to see its membership

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"With the society's current members and new friends working together, the future of the society looks bright."

LHSMA 2014 - 2015 Board of Directors

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Board Emeriti

Phil Teigen	Donald Housley
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Annabelle White	Fred Wentz

Welcome New Members

LHSMA welcomes the following new members since our Spring 2014 Newsletter:

Annual Memberships:

David & Pat Crouner - *Gettysburg, PA*
 Harold & Harriet Gilbert - *Mercersburg, PA*
 Rev. William & Helen Hall - *Strasburg, VA*
 Paul & Lillian Harner - *Fairfield, PA*
 Edward C. Harshbarger - *Clearville, PA*
 Ruth Shireman - *Middletown, PA*
 Baird & Sarah Tipson - *Gettysburg, PA*
 Carol Widerman - *Gettysburg, PA*

Life Memberships:

Karl Krueger - *Paoli, PA*

Annual-to-Life Memberships:

John Frantz - *State College, PA*

Institutional Annual Memberships:

Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church - *Berlin, PA*
 Trinity Lutheran Church - *McClure, PA*

Please notify us of any corrections to the list.

President's Corner

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grow in 2015. The board has maintained the membership fee at only \$20/year with the hope of attracting more members. Remember with the Christmas season approaching a society membership makes for a good present.

The past twenty-five years have been filled with exciting programming and memorable events. We give thanks for all who contributed to the reorganization of the society in 1989 and have labored to advance the society's objectives. We are poised for another 25 years of promoting and preserving Lutheran history in the mid-Atlantic region. With the society's current members and new friends working together, the future of the society looks bright.

Sincerely in Christ,

Pastor Stephen Herr,
LHSMA President

October 2014

Commemoration of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg

Nominate an Historic Site!

By Phil Teigen

The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic (LHSMA) seeks nominations for its Historical Site Recognition Program. The program recognizes individuals, congregations, and other institutions in Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Region 8, whose history or biography bears witness of their baptismal covenant to present and future generations. The Site-Recognition Program aims specifically to recognize sites where an event important in the history of Mid-Atlantic Lutheranism took place or where an individual (clerical or lay), congregation, or synodical agency practiced an innovative or sustained ministry. The Program also recognizes sites possessing distinctive architecture, singular artistic value, or exceptional craftsmanship, and sites possessing unusual potential for documenting the history of Mid-Atlantic Lutheranism, e.g., archaeological sites, archives, special collections, gravesites, out-door sculpture.



Celebrate Our Heritage

Recognition consists of a commemorative essay prepared by the Site Recognition Committee; appropriate images of the site added to the LHSMA website; presentation of a plaque for mounting at the site itself; and a \$750 grant for preserving the site's historical records, or for disseminating knowledge of the site's history.

The Site Recognition Committee welcomes nominations from members of the Society. To nominate a site please print out and complete the questionnaire on the LHSMA website at <http://lhsmidatlantic.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/Historic-Site-Recognition-Nomination-Form-2014.pdf> and mail to:

Site Recognition Committee
 LHSMA
 61 Seminary Ridge
 Gettysburg, PA 17325

To contact the Site Committee with questions, or for additional information, email phil41@icloud.com.

Ira Seebold Sassaman

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his life. If we look at his life after her death, we might speculate that at some time between 1903 and 1904 he had some religious awakening which set his life on the course it would follow. Sometime in 1904 he entered Central Pennsylvania College in New Berlin (aka. Union Seminary), a school founded by the Evangelical Church but now an “undenominational” school to maintain the “principles which develop Christian manhood and womanhood” (*Catalogue*, 1909-1910). Although called a college, for Ira it was actually a preparatory school to prepare him for entrance to Susquehanna University in nearby Selinsgrove the next year.

Susquehanna University was a Lutheran school founded in 1858 as a missionary institute “to educate poor men for the gospel ministry and to do so gratis, and to inculcate Christian character.” By 1905 when Ira entered it was a full-fledged college offering BA and BS degrees. The Theology School, or Seminary, was considered the “center and culmination” (104, Housley, Donald. *Susquehanna University, 1858–2000: A Goodly Heritage*. Rosemont Publishing, 2007) of the university and awarded

BD degrees. Seminary students, as intended by the founders, paid no tuition or board. Ira was to spend four years here and earn both a BA and BD (Bachelor of Divinity).

It was at Susquehanna that Ira finally came into his own. Everything he did there had consequences for his later life. Although his eventual goal was to earn his BD and become an ordained minister, Ira entered enthusiastically into college life. In his first year at Susquehanna at the age of 27 he was captain of the football team, a brutal sport whose “rules and tactics encouraged brute force” (123, Housley). Perhaps this is why he dropped football to become the athletic editor for the school newspaper, *The Susquehanna*. His enthusiasm for sports would follow him through his life and be passed on to his sons. He was also a member of the Philosophian Literary Society, one of the original social clubs of the university. Along this vein he also served as president of the student volunteer band and participated in some school dramas. But his major commitments outside the classroom were more of a moral and service bent. He served as Vice President of the Philomatrians, a service club whose membership was restricted by invitation.

“Members were leaders on the campus who were committed to building up their alma mater (118, Housley).” Even more indicative of his later commitments was his membership in the school YMCA and Prohibition League where he served as Vice President. The latter was an agency of the Anti-Saloon League and actually a favorite cause of the Progressive Party of Theodore Roosevelt. Ira would continue his work in prohibition for the rest of his life and still think of himself as a progressive long after the cause had become a backwater issue.

Nevertheless, Ira’s goal was clear. He was training for the ministry. Having been founded by Benjamin Kurtz, Susquehanna was clearly in the American Lutheran School of theology. Emphasis was placed on morality, evangelism and Biblical studies that featured fellowship among all Protestants rather than a specific Lutheran identity. For Ira, ministry would be in the doing rather than in right doctrine or proper forms. The boundaries of ecumenicism however stopped at the Roman Catholic Church. Later he would consider joining the Ku Klux Klan, not because of its teaching on race, but on its nativism. Fortunately, his basically tolerant nature overcame his fears.

IMPORTANT NEWSLETTER NOTICE!

The cost of producing the society’s newsletter consumes most of our annual budget. Due to escalating printing costs, the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic will start issuing the newsletter in electronic form (PDF file format) **ONLY** to all members who have provided an email address. This decision is being implemented to make more effective use of our limited income resources. Members with no email address on file **will continue** to receive the newsletter by mail. We will dispense with professional printing and revert to desktop publishing, and therefore only a limited run of hardcopies for each issue will be produced.



If you would like to continue to receive the newsletter **in print**, please send an email to newsletter editor John Deeben at jdeeben@aol.com. If you did not provide an email address with your membership application or renewal and would like to receive the newsletter electronically, please contact the editor as well.

A Wrap-up of the Fall Program:

“Tradition or Context, German Lutheran Congregations Confront the Melting Pot”

By Sue Hill

Covering over a hundred years of church history, three speakers at the LHSMA Fall Program held at Paul's Run Retirement Community in Philadelphia on October 4, 2014 discussed the enduring question of language use in the German Lutheran church in America. After a welcome by LHSMA President, Rev. Stephen B. Herr, the program opened with devotions shared by Paul's Run's chaplain, Rev. Stephen Weiser.

John B. Frantz, *Professor of History, Emeritus, Pennsylvania State University* opened the academic program with “The Ecumenical Henry Melchior Muhlenberg” in which he traced Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's early beginnings in the pietist tradition at Halle University, Germany, to his lengthy service in North America (1742 -1787) where he built fledgling Lutheran congregations in a religiously diverse country. Frantz described Muhlenberg's friendly relations with people of other faiths in colonial America, including English speaking George Whit-

field whom he invited to preach in his church, Presbyterian Gilbert Tennet in whose honor he preached a farewell sermon, and various English and German speaking Dutch Lutherans in New York State. At the same time, Frantz was careful to show Muhlenberg as one who protected the doctrinal identity of the Lutheran church. For instance, he never celebrated communion with his close friend and Reformed pastor, Michael Schlatter, because of the differences between Lutheran and Reformed theological views on Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.

Freiderike Baer, Assistant Professor of History, Pennsylvania State University, Abington and winner of LHSMA's Biglerville Prize, 2011, for [The Trial of Frederick Eberly: Language, Patriotism, and Citizenship in Philadelphia's German Community, 1790-1830](#), illuminated the language conflict in her address, “Wolves in Sheep's Clothing” which had led to violence and threats of death in 1816 among members of Philadelphia's St. Michael's and Zion Lutheran Churches, then located at the corner of Fourth and Cherry Streets. Peter Muhlenberg, then a pastor at Zion, had proposed in 1803 that the congregation

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A Christmas Gift Idea for your Congregation

Did you know that membership in LHSMA is not just for individuals? Congregations can be members as well. Membership ensures that a congregation will receive all news and publicity pieces from LHSMA for distribution. That means that LHSMA events and opportunities are more efficiently being shared with a wider audience. At the same time, congregations are given more opportunities for community-building and education. It's a win-win situation!

All membership dues (individual and congregational) support LHSMA's work in preserving and sharing Lutheran heritage that shaped so much of the culture of the Mid-Atlantic region. If you know of people in your congregation who have an interest in Lutheran history, please consider gifting your congregation with a one-year or life membership.

Membership information can be found on the LHSMA website at www.lhsmidatlantic.com.



2014 Fall Program Wrap-up

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conduct English services *occasionally* for the sake of its American-born children. Fearing that the loss of the German language in worship would result in the loss of their church altogether, factions within the church fought to preserve the old traditions in their new land. Physical altercations followed hot verbal interchanges over the proposed language changes and resulted in a twelve day court trial overseen by Judge Jasper Yates. The trial brought up essential topics of American patri-

otism and freedoms and the questions about English as a national language in America. All nine defendants were found guilty of conspiracy and assault, but there was never an effort by the courts to legislate language within the churches. After a congregational vote to continue the use of German at St. Michael's and Zion, an English-speaking St. John's Lutheran Church was founded by disenchanted members of St. Michael's and Zion.

Karl Krueger, an ordained Lutheran pastor now serving as Library Director and Professor of History of Christianity at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, traced the continuing thread of German/American Lutheran language conflict into the 19th century in his presentation, "A Funeral and A Feud." Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany

died in 1888 and a memorial service was held in his honor in Philadelphia. The one hour funeral sermon delivered by Rev. Adolph Spaeth, president of the General Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America from 1880–1888, was seen by con-



servative Lutherans as having diminished the shorter German sermon offered by Charles Warwick. Growing out of a debate that began in 1881 over the church's contested financial support of immigrant German-speaking theological students training to serve in American Lutheran churches, the perceived disparity ignited the strong ire of Lutherans loyal to the German language. An anonymous letter to the Philadelphia Inquirer in March of 1888 denounced Spaeth, declared him disloyal to his heritage, and called for his exclusion from the pastoral roster of the Ministerium. Krueger said that the newspaper article provided the Lutheran public with the opportunity to air opinions which reflected the ongoing dispute over what it meant to be Lutheran on this side of the ocean.

At the conclusion of the presentations, Fall Program participants visited the Lutheran Archives Center in the undercroft of Brossman Learning Center at Philadelphia Lutheran Theological Seminary, 7301 Germantown Avenue. John Peterson, curator, and Kim Eric-Williams, ordained Lutheran pastor, Southeast Pennsylvania Synod archivist, and pro-

fessor of the Swedish language at The University of Pennsylvania, gave a brief history and a tour both of the archival collections and the museum which located on the third floor of the Brossman Center. Restored volumes of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg's meticulously-kept and now preserved journals were displayed for the group, including a volume whose restoration was made possible by combined donations from the Lutheran Historical Society of the mid-Atlantic and the Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary. Newly completed, the restoration project was funded by generous grants and contributions of many organizations and individuals including America's Treasures which awarded \$93,191 plus 1:1 matching funds for the project. The finished product truly is a treasure.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER!

We send a big THANK YOU to all who have sent their membership renewals, for they provide extensive support for the ongoing work of the Society.

However, if you have not yet done this for 2014 we hope you will use the Renewal Form on the back page of this newsletter and send it with your dues. Your continued membership support is important.



If you're not a member, **Come Join Us!** An application form is on the back page of this newsletter. If you have never been a member and join between October 1 and December 31, the last quarter of the year, your annual dues will also include all of 2015! We'll be delighted to welcome you!

We deeply appreciate the involvement and support from our present members, and we are always eager to greet new members.

Week will Spotlight Christian Unity

During the 2015 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (Jan. 18-25), Northern Hemisphere churches will join together under the theme "Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'" taken from the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. See www.ELCA.org/ecumenical for resources for prayer, encounter and dialogue.

ELCA Presiding Bishop and Ecumenical Leaders Provide Advent Devotions

ELCA News

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and leaders from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the Anglican Church of Canada, and The Episcopal Church have written a series of weekly Advent devotions for members of the four denomina-



tions.

In addition to Eaton, devotions were contributed by the Rev. Susan C. Johnson, national bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada; the Most Rev. Fred Hiltz, primate, Anglican Church in Canada; and the Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop and primate, The Episcopal Church.

In his introduction to the devotions, the Rev. Donald J. McCoid, director for ELCA ecumenical and inter-religious relations, said the church leaders

have met over the past five years "to share with one another, provide worship observances for the 10th Anniversary of Full Communion agreements, to advocate for creation and the environment and to call members to prayer for situations of war and turmoil. At their most recent meeting, the leaders agreed to provide Advent devotions for the four churches."

In her devotion for the first week of Advent, Eaton writes, "Advent is an odd season. It isn't culturally accessible. It doesn't lend itself to retail. There are no made-for-TV movies telling heartwarming stories about the great and terrible day of the Lord. It is an unsettled season that holds in tension the now and the not yet, longing and hope, judgment and redemption."

The Advent devotions are available at

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Advent_Devotions.pdf

Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic

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Email: info@lhsmidatlantic.com
Web: www.lhsmidatlantic.com

*“Preserving, documenting,
and sharing the history of
Lutherans and Lutheranism in
the Mid-Atlantic and
surrounding areas.”*



**Lutheran Historical
Society of the
Mid-Atlantic Newsletter**

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The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic, in the interest of the preservation and cultivation of Lutheran history in Central and Western Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, and the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area issues this newsletter two to three times a year.

Notes of announcements, projects, historical celebrations, genealogical concerns, notes of church or Synodical activities, and notes from other historical societies are solicited.

Address corrections are helpful.

Send replies via email to:

Stephen Herr

info@lhsmidatlantic.com

Subject: LHS Newsletter



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**Lutheran Historical Society
of the Mid-Atlantic
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Name: _____
Address: _____

Phone: _____
Email: _____
Congregation (if applicable): _____

I desire membership in LHSMA as a: _____ New Member or, as a: _____ Renewal.

_____ \$ 250 Life Membership

_____ \$ 20 Regular Membership (*renewable annually by March 31*)

_____ I wish to give a Special Gift. Please send me more information on the Special Gift Program of the society.

I am interested in:

_____ Research

_____ Reading

_____ Publishing

_____ Other: _____

Please complete this form and your check made payable to **LHSMA** and mail to:

Lee Knepp, LHSMA
21 North Brown Street
PO Box 76
McClure, PA 17841