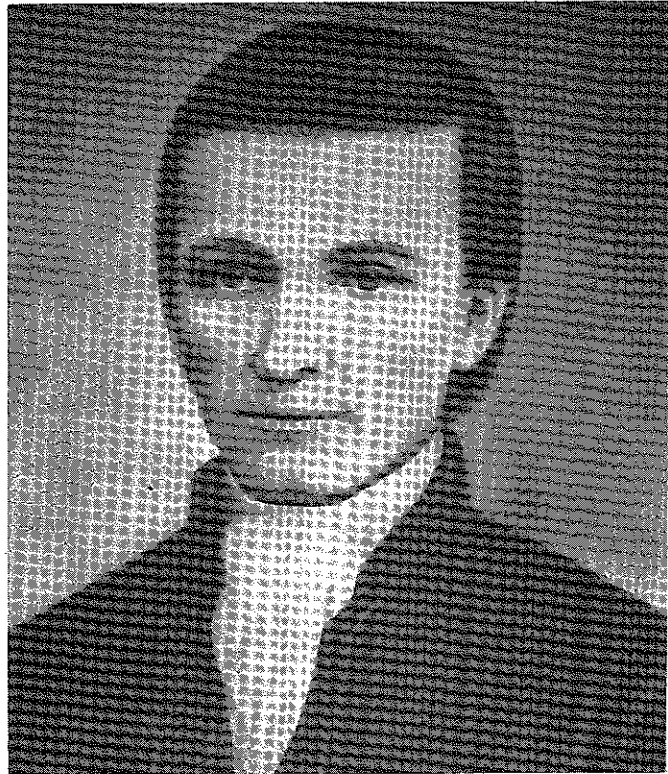


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Travelers passing through the village of Kleinfeltersville in eastern Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, will see a historic marker provided by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, bearing these words:

Jacob Albright

The son of German immigrants, Jacob Albright (1759-1808) founded the Evangelical Association, preached to poor farmers, and rose to become Bishop in the Methodist Church. His grave is nearby at Albright Memorial Church.

This inscription may give the impression that Jacob Albright was elected a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Instead, his selection as bishop was by his own followers, who were not recognized organizationally by the Methodist Episcopal Church of the early 1800's.

The inscription, however, is prophetic in that Albright's followers, who later chose the name *Evangelische Gemeinschaft* (Evangelical Association), in 1946 united with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ to form The Evangelical United Brethren Church, which denomination in 1968 merged with The Methodist Church to become The United Methodist Church. At that time Jacob Albright officially became recognized as a

bishop of the "Methodist Church" and is so listed in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*.

Two smaller denominations also claim a share in the spiritual heritage of Jacob Albright and trace their origins back to his pioneer evangelistic labors. These are The Evangelical Congregational Church (1928) and The Evangelical Church of North America (1970).

Jacob Albright never gave evidence of envisioning a denomination or even an organized evangelistic, missionary movement. Although he had received an exhorter's license from a Methodist class in eastern Lancaster County, he was not officially sponsored by them. Nor did he continue his connections with them, which was required in order to have the license regularly renewed. In his own estimation he was simply following the call of God to tell his Pennsylvania German neighbors of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, which would enable them to live a holy life before God and men. As people were converted under his ministry, they organized prayer classes, which in turn sponsored their own conference, which selected Albright as their bishop.

The traveler who will heed the state roadside marker can turn off State Route 897, which leads eastward from the city of Lebanon through Kleinfeltersville. In a small cemetery a few rods off the main highway one can find a tombstone engraved in German, the translation of which reads:

To the Memory of the Evangelical Preacher,
Jacob Albright
Born May 1, 1759 Died May 18, 1808
Aged 49 years and 17 days
Under this stone lies his remains
The death of his saints is precious for the Lord.
Psalm 116, v. 15

This old tombstone had to be replaced in the late 1960's because it had deteriorated and the inscription

was not very legible.¹ The new stone is identical and bears the same inscription. Nearer the road is a large stone indicating Jacob Albright as the founder of the Evangelical Association.

The thirteen colonies attracted immigrants from many parts of Europe in the seventeenth century. Some came for adventure, but most came because of political or religious restrictions. In sections of Germany the head of the province determined the religion of his people. Thus in some areas the people were followers of Martin Luther, others followed John Calvin, or Ulrich Zwingli, or Roman Catholicism. The Anabaptists, known today as Mennonites or Brethren, were persecuted in all of these areas because of their disagreements with the authorized church. Many of these dissatisfied people heard of William Penn's colony in America. In fact, this English leader visited some of the persecuted people in Germany and invited them to move to his colony on the banks of the Delaware River. The first shipload of German immigrants came on the British ship *Concord* and arrived in Philadelphia, October 6, 1683. They settled north of the city in what became known as Germantown, a part of present-day Philadelphia.

By 1708 Queen Anne of England encouraged thousands from the Palatinate section of Germany to migrate to America. On one of the ships of this period, the *Pink Johnson*, arriving in 1732, a Johannis Albrecht (John Albright) was listed. Family tradition indicates that he was the first of the family to arrive in America. In 1759, Anna, wife of John Albright, bore him a son who was christened Jacob. He was one of four sons who grew up in the Fox Hill community, about three miles north of the present city of Pottstown, Pennsylvania. The family was affiliated with the

¹It is now preserved inside the chapel on the same grounds.

Lutheran Church of New Hanover (sometimes referred to as Faulkner Swamp).

There were no free public schools in those days, but Jacob did attend the school supported by the church. He received his education in the German language, which was also the language used in his home and daily local communication.

When the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, Albright was seventeen years of age. He served as a drummer boy in the militia, while his brother was the fifer. They were members of the Seventh Company of the Fourth Battalion with Jacob Wirz (Wiltz) of Pottstown as captain. Their military career began in 1781.² For two months Jacob also served as a guard at the Hessian prison camp at Rosenthal (Rose Valley, now Mineral Springs Park) in the city of Reading, Pennsylvania.

In 1785, Jacob Albright married Catherine Cope. They purchased a farm in West Cocalico Township, east of the present community of Ephrata, Pennsylvania, where he became not only a farmer but engaged in a profitable enterprise of tile-making. In those days many barns used a flat roofing tile made from baked clay. Pliable clay was placed in a mold and baked in a hot kiln. The tile had a curved part which hooked over the adjacent tile in the absence of nails. Albright became known as "the honest tiler" by his neighbors and was a successful businessman. Even after he began his circuit-riding ministry Jacob would return to his family from a tour of his circuit, manufacture a quantity of tile to sell for their support, and then leave again for a preaching tour.

Six children³ were born to this home with only three surviving childhood. An epidemic of

²Pennsylvania Archives, sixth series, vol. 1, p. 796.

³Raymond Albright refers to six children in the family. Albright, *History*, p. 28; Reuben Yeakel indicates that there were nine. Yeakel, *Jacob Albright*, p. 13.

dysentery in 1790 claimed the death of several children. It was this tragedy which opened the heart of Jacob Albright to receive an experience of saving faith.

Jacob had been baptized as a baby and later catechized and instructed in the Lutheran Church. After moving to East Cocalico Township, he and his wife joined the Bergstrasse Lutheran Church near Hinkletown. Prior to the death of the children in 1790, Albright had come under the influence of the pietistic preaching conducted by a small group led by Philip William Otterbein.⁴ Anthony Houtz, a member of this group and a preacher within the Dutch Reformed Church (United Church of Christ), conducted the funeral service for Albright's children. This pietistic preaching emphasized repentance and conversion of the individual, whereas the average Lutheran or Dutch Reformed minister among the Pennsylvania Germans stressed a more formal Christian faith with emphasis upon creeds and catechisms, the observance of church rites, and almost no mention of conversion from sin or practice of holy living.

When Albright listened to the funeral sermon, his heart softened by grief as God's comfort was proclaimed. He had had a reverence for God, but he had not known the joy of forgiveness. He was moved to seek repentance. In spite of his sincerity and desire, he could not find that peace with God that he sought until he discussed his need with his neighbor Adam Riegel. This man was a lay preacher among the Otterbeinites, later to become the United Brethren in Christ. The result of this and succeeding visits brought the blessed peace of God which expressed itself through redemption by faith in Jesus Christ.

⁴Later Otterbein founded the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

Albright began to attend class meetings⁵ in the home of another neighbor Isaac Davies. As early as 1780 a Methodist evangelist named Benjamin Abbott had visited in this area, preaching with extraordinary power. A Methodist class was organized, which at the time of Albright's conversion was meeting in the Davies' home. Jacob Albright, unable to find spiritual nourishment in the Lutheran Church where he was a member, joined this class and learned to pray and exhort on Bible passages. The class licensed him as an exhorter (local preacher).

Albright noted the lack of true religion among his fellow Germans and their families. He prayed that they might be converted to a true life of godliness. As he prayed, he believed that God was calling *him* to let the light shine among his neighbors. At first he felt that he did not have the ability to preach. Then a serious illness came into his life during which period he spent much time in prayer and meditation. As he studied his Bible faithfully and absorbed its teachings he became challenged to respond to God's call.

In 1796 Jacob Albright began to travel through several counties of Pennsylvania among the German people and preached wherever opportunity could be found. Sometimes it was in a union church building, but more frequently in a home where neighbors would gather to hear his message.

One of his early preaching attempts was in Schaefferstown, about twenty miles west of his home. On October 8, 1797, a union church was

⁵The Methodist class meeting was one of the significant experiences of that church and contributed to its early growth. A group would gather under a leader for weekly prayer, singing, and Bible study. Each member was called upon to give accountability to his Christian progress during the week. In this period of accounting to God and one another, the class grew and prospered.

being dedicated with both Reformed and Lutheran preachers on the program. The services continued for several days. Attendance was so great on one occasion that many could not get inside the building. So Albright saw this as an opportunity. He climbed upon a pile of lumber at the town market and exhorted the people there. His message brought conviction to some and created antagonism for others. Some of the crowd became unruly and attempted to abuse him, but he was rescued by a Mr. Maize, a member of the Reformed Church. Maize grasped the slight figure of the preacher in his arms and protected him by carrying him to a nearby home.

A year later upon a return visit to Schaefferstown, at the time of the Cherry Fair, Albright again preached at the same market place. This time an unruly crowd seriously injured the young preacher, who escaped by riding his horse two miles down the road to the home of Jacob Zentmoyer, where he arrived with torn clothes and a bloody face. In the crowd that day, however, were George Becker and Jacob Bricker, who later became prominent leaders in the Evangelical Association.

Jacob Albright liked the Methodist emphasis on organization and discipline. Although he had close fellowship with those who followed Philip William Otterbein, he felt that they were too loosely bound together to be effective. When his followers sought some form of organization, he followed the Methodist plan and rules for Christian living.

Jacob Albright continued his ministry as the Lord encouraged him. His travels took him through all of the eastern counties of Pennsylvania where Germans had settled, and also into Maryland and Virginia. His preaching had power. He had the ability to speak vividly concerning God's judgment against sin. His messages always included the way of salvation. In addition he preached a holiness of life which should follow

Christian conversion. This was typical of the Wesleyan emphasis on holiness which he had learned in the Methodist class.

Jacob Albright antagonized the people who adhered to the "main line" churches, because he pointed out the sins of the preachers and the church officials. He respected the office of the clergy and recognized the truths found in the catechisms and the German hymns, but he emphasized a Christian experience rather than a mere adherence to a creed of faithful receiving of the sacraments. He preached that a Christian should live for God not only when he was in church but also during the week at home and at work. His condemnation of gambling, drunkenness, cheating and ungodly festivities brought persecution and opposition upon him. This same public antagonism proved to be a stumbling block for some of Albright's converts who feared taking the definite stand of their teacher.

A good example of his preaching was that of a street sermon in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, in 1805. His text was Isaiah 58:1—"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." He then went on to say,

You Lutherans, of course, think you have Luther, and that he was a converted man; that you have the Catechism; etc., but your sinful lives prove that you are not Lutherans, for you live contrary to God's Word and Luther's teaching. And you, German Reformed—what does it mean to be *reformed*? It means to be restored, to be converted from sin and the world to God; but your lives prove that you have turned from God and towards the world. You, Dunkards and Mennonites, with your peculiar dress and outward plainness, by which you comfort yourselves, you will be lost without the new birth,

notwithstanding you have large farms and earthly possessions. Be not astonished that I said unto you, "Ye must be born again," for these are the words of our Savior and Judge.⁶

Albright as well as most of the common people of his day did not use the high German of the intellectuals. Instead they spoke a low form of the language which included some English words and mixtures of expressions. The language was known as "Pennsylvania Deutsch (Dutch)," and in some communities of eastern Pennsylvania it can still be heard. Language scholars refer to it as a dialect. It was not a written language, though some of the songs used in religious services made use of this form of German. The great hymns of the day, however, were in the more scholarly German language.

At first Albright made no attempt to organize his converts into any kind of a group or church. His aim was to preach what he believed to be the truth. He expected them to use whatever means of grace were at hand, whether in the established churches or out of them. Exhortations to pray and praise and to study the Bible were urged upon the new converts. After four years of preaching (1796-1800), Albright realized that a closer organization was needed if he sincerely desired to strengthen his converts. He had given no evidence that he intended to start a new denomination. He was a Methodist who liked the Methodist organization of gathering converted people into classes.

The first class that Albright organized was in 1800 in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in a community known as the Ridge or Rock Hill, three miles east of Quakertown. It was a small class consisting only of Charles Bissey and his wife, Peter Walter (class leader), his wife and family.

⁶Yeakel, *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 72.

This marked the beginning of what was to become the Evangelical Association.

A second class was organized in eastern Berks County, Pennsylvania, at the Colebrookdale Iron Works community, east of Boyertown. It was known as the Liesser class. A third one was formed in Hamilton Township along the Blue Mountains with Conrad Phillips as the class leader. These additional classes were also begun in 1800.

With the organization of three classes there was a desire for the leaders and members to meet with each other. This resulted in a series of "Big Meetings." The first was held at the home of Samuel Liesser, Jr. in Berks County in 1802. These meetings continued for two or three days with neighbors joining in. Those who came from a distance would sleep in the barn, with friendly neighbors, or in the farmhouse. Since several young men were encouraged to exhort, the "Big Meetings" usually featured more than one speaker. Its aim was to bring the sinner to conversion.

A second "Big Meeting" was held at the home of John Thomas in Mifflin County that same year. A thousand people gathered under the cherry trees for services which continued from Saturday noon to Monday noon. Albright preached on one occasion from the text John 8: 12—"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Many persons were impressed; some shed tears. Albright preached with such power that it appeared to some as if a halo of glory shone around his head. There were those, however, who were stirred to opposition so that one man was reported to say, "If I only had powder that would make no report, I would shoot that Albright down." John Walter, one of Albright's converts, was one of the exhorters at this meeting. He became a great leader of the denomination and a powerful preacher of the Word. This meeting opened Mifflin and Snyder

counties particularly to the Evangelicals, since other evangelistic preachers did not normally visit this area.

Either at the time of the "Big Meeting" or immediately before its opening, Jacob Albright would visit a number of homes in the area. On one occasion he visited the Wonder family, speaking to them about God's way in a gentle and touching manner. Before departing he called together the family and prayed with them. Mr. Wonder, following the custom of the day, offered whiskey to the visitor before his departure. Albright in a gentle manner replied, "Dear people, I drink no liquor; I don't need it, and can do without it right well. You must not be offended on account of my refusal to drink." The family was quite surprised, for their pastor not only accepted the whiskey each time he visited, but he often became quite drunk. Mr. Wonder was led to accept Albright and his teaching, but his wife continued to remain loyal to her pastor. The children came to tease their mother, saying,

But there is a difference between father's pastor, Albright, and mother's pastor, St. Father's pastor sings and prays, and talks about religion, and drinks no liquor when he visits us, but mother's pastor does not pray, but curses and gets drunk—we will stick to father's pastor.

About two years later the entire family joined with the Evangelicals.

After additional classes were formed, a general meeting of the lay leaders and the preachers was called for November, 1803. In addition to Albright there were two other preachers and fourteen lay leaders present. They met in the home of Samuel Liesser. Besides religious exhortation and prayer the group recognized Albright as a regular preacher, drawing up a license.

From the Elders and Brethren of His Society of Evangelical Friends: We the undersigned Evangelical and Christian friends, declare and recognize Jacob Albright as a genuine (Wahrhäftigen) Evangelical preacher in word and deed, and a believer in the Universal Christian Church and the communion of saints. This testify we as brethren and elders of his Society (Gemeinde). Given in the State of Pennsylvania, November 5, 1803.⁷

This document was signed by those present, after which the other two preachers in the group placed their hands upon Albright's head and duly ordained him. During this same meeting a brief statement of faith was written declaring the Holy Scriptures to be their rule of faith and practice.

These procedures and declarations were done in order to meet some of the criticism that had come from the established churches that Albright and his followers were not duly constituted. There had been frequent attempts to impugn Albright's right to be regarded as a duly ordained minister. Later when ministers of the Evangelical Association sought transfer to the established denominations, their ministerial credentials were not always accepted.

In 1807 the first annual conference was convened with Albright in charge. He was elected bishop, made the assignment of preachers, conducted whatever business was essential, and signed the first official ministerial license of the church. At this time the group chose as their name "The Newly-Formed Methodist Conference." There was no Book of Discipline, although Albright was authorized to prepare one. The conference did

⁷Albright, *op. cit.*, p. 66, translated from the German.

adopt the itinerant system, probably from Albright's influence and Methodist background.

The Evangelicals did not have a resident ministry, but each preacher travelled from place to place on a circuit. Usually two preachers were assigned to each circuit. Their families would remain at home as the preacher would begin his circuit, traveling as much as two hundred miles over a six to eight week period. He would return home from his itinerating to work at his trade or farm for the support of his family. Several weeks later he would start out again over his circuit, visiting the organized classes and accepting invitations to preach wherever an opportunity was found. Most of the preaching was in rural areas, although some towns were included in their travels. Many of them kept journals, but much of the material has been lost. Although Jacob Albright himself kept a journal, it has not been preserved.

Their compensation was very meager. They had no promise of a salary but lived and traveled by faith. The people would welcome the traveling preachers into their homes for overnight lodging and provide food and shelter for their horses. Some would give gifts of clothing, books, or other necessities. There is no record of offerings being taken at first, though later contributions were received from the people. When the first record of salary was listed in 1804, the money was placed into a fund from which each minister received an equal share. If a minister, however, needed a horse, extra money would be set aside for that purpose. On one occasion John Walter had to collect money for two years before he had enough to buy a horse. Albright shared equally with his brethren in all of these considerations. Fortunately he had his tile business to fall back upon, so that he was free to travel after producing a new quantity.

In 1805 Alexander Jameson received as his annual portion the sum of \$66.67, with an additional amount of \$69.33 for the purchase of a

horse. It was reported that there was a total of seventy-five members in all the classes that year. There was an average contribution of \$4.50 per member for the support of the ministry. Considering the scarcity of money this was evidence of self-denial and sacrifice on the part of the membership.

The worship services were considered very emotional by "main line" church people. Enthusiastic singing of German songs, loud preaching and praying, and earnest calling upon God for salvation characterized the meetings. Although Albright gave evidence of concern that these services not be emotional in a manner that would turn people away from God, we find a number of accusing names applied to these people. Sometimes they were called by such names as *Knie-rutschers* (knee sliders), *Kopfhänger* (head hangers), *Schwärmer* (fanatics), *Krächzers* (groaners), or *Heuchler* (hypocrites).

In 1806 a revival movement spread across eastern Pennsylvania stirring up work among not only independent groups but the established churches as well. During this period Albright's followers increased considerably so that by the time of the conference of 1807 there were 220 members in the church, many from the Buffalo Valley, west of the Susquehanna River. This area was soon to become the headquarters for the young denomination, locating at New Berlin, Pennsylvania.

Albright's constant exposure to the weather affected his health. Tuberculosis afflicted his body. Despite his weakness he insisted upon traveling and preaching, although he was unable to carry out the request of the conference to prepare a book of Discipline.⁸ Usually a young preacher

⁸Albright had planned to use the Methodist Book of Discipline (German edition of 1808) in preparing one for his followers. After his death it was finally written by George Miller. Its content was almost entirely taken from the German edition of the Methodists.

or lay leader accompanied him. As he became weaker he spent more time in meditation and prayer. He could frequently be heard singing a beloved hymn. His prayers were free and spontaneous, while his sermons were well prepared. He believed that his selection of words should be pleasing to the Lord and well outlined. A good commentary as well as his Bible were carried in his saddlebag, and these were often read as he rode along on his horse. His illustrations came from everyday life.

A regret of Albright was that his family showed no interest in his ministry. He tried not to neglect them, but he was necessarily away from them much of the time. It is family tradition that after his death his wife did become a member of the Evangelical Association, and his daughter Sarah showed interest.⁹

Jacob Albright's life came to a close in the spring of 1808. He had attended a general meeting on Easter Day, at the home of John Brobst in Berks County, Pennsylvania. All of the ministers were present and were given their assignments for the last time by Albright. A second general meeting was scheduled for a week later at Peter Raida-baugh's home at Linglestown, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Albright insisted upon attending. At this general meeting he was unable to preach because of the advanced stage of his illness, but he did manage on one occasion to sit on the preacher's stand in the barn, propped up with pillows.

Following this general meeting, Jacob Albright set out on horseback for his home about fifty miles away. Unable to travel alone due to weakness, Jacob Gleim and Abraham Walter accompanied him. By the time they reached the George Becker home at Kleinfeltersville he had become too weak to continue further. Upon his arrival Albright asked, "Have you my bed ready?"

⁹Yeakel, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

I have come to die." Here he died May 18, 1808, at the age of forty-nine years and seventeen days. His wife was notified immediately upon his arrival, but she came a short time after his passing.

On May 20, 1808, Jacob Albright was buried in the Becker family cemetery on the edge of the village. John Walter, one of his early converts and a minister of the church, preached the funeral message, using as his text: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:3)

In 1850 an appreciative church erected a memorial chapel near the grave, but due to poor construction it was necessary to rebuild it ten years later. The Becker family deeded to the denomination the acre of land upon which the chapel and cemetery stand. Today its ownership is titled with The United Methodist Church. Both the chapel and Albright grave are marked as a National Historic United Methodist Shrine.

The faithfulness and devotion of this one man was passed on, so that his influence continued. The movement that formed the Evangelical Association flowed ultimately into The United Methodist Church. It has also been kept alive in The Evangelical Congregational Church and The Evangelical Church of North America.

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