

For United Brethren, the 1800s was a period of explosive growth. In the trenches were ordinary men — farmers, mostly — with extraordinary zeal. They received little or no compensation, often financing their efforts through the family farm left in the care of spouse and children.

The early bishops earned their dues as circuit-riding preachers. The example of Henry Kumler Sr., bishop 1829-1845, was typical. In 1816, he accepted a circuit which took him 370 miles and four weeks to complete.

They typically became ministers quickly, without a lot of preparation — become a Christian one year, become a minister the next. Their classroom was the saddle.

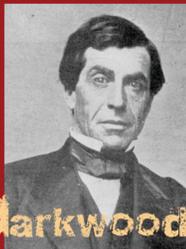
A minister might be assigned to a circuit with 30 charges, or “appointments” — just pockets of people who assembled to hear the Word preached — scattered over a large area, and it might take him a month to get around.

Church buildings were rare. Instead, when the preacher arrived, people would gather in homes, barns, or wherever else seemed suitable. Preachers had long rides between appointments, but despite terrible weather and sickness, would show up when people expected them to show up.

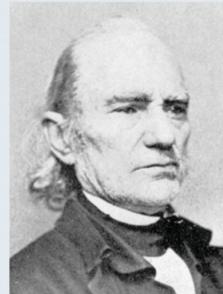
The people, too, might walk or ride 20 miles or more to reach a meeting place, and find a place to bunk overnight.

Jacob Markwood was bishop 1861-1869. It was written of his earlier years as a circuit-riding preacher, “He is never happier than when in his saddle, climbing over the hills and mountains on the way to a quarterly meeting.”

Jacob Markwood



JOHN RUSSEL



John Russel, who became bishop in 1845, began his ministry with a huge circuit which started in Hagerstown, Md., then meandered through Carlisle, Chambersburg, and other parts of Pennsylvania, with preaching points located far apart. When his horse broke down, he traveled on foot.

In 1819, the 20-year-old Russel traveled with Christian Newcomer into the wilderness of Ohio, which was very rapidly becoming settled and needed preachers.

Russel was assigned to a circuit in southern Ohio that took him up to seven weeks to complete. This was the frontier. His constant traveling included dense forests, drenching rain, drifting snow, deep rivers, makeshift shelters, and a lot of mud.

ISRAEL SLOANE

After helping to organize Ontario Conference in 1856, Israel Sloane was sent in 1858 to start churches in California. Forty days after arriving near Sacramento, he had already preached 23 times. During the next three years, the work greatly expanded, with enough churches starting to organize a mission conference in 1861. Sloane died two years later after taking a spill from a runaway horse as he journeyed across the mountains. He was just 39 years old.

Christian Newcomer was the ultimate circuit-riding preacher, riding thousands of miles on horseback during his lifetime. John Lawrence wrote of Newcomer:

“He always kept a good horse, and knew how to take care of him, and to prize him. Hence, when well-mounted, as he always was, it mattered little about cold, rain, hail, snow, mud, or distance. He often rode all day. And never a word of complaint escaped his lips. He was a Christian hero of the noblest type. This fact beams from every page of his journal. He never pens a word of pious complaint about his trials; never imagines that he is making great sacrifices for the church and is doing too much for the Lord. No, no. Storms, hunger, and weariness only make him the happier. Wherever he went, he carried the revival spirit.”

The day after Pennsylvania Conference ended in April 1829, Newcomer, now 82 years old, crossed the Allegheny Mountains to meet with UB people in Ohio. He was gone 11 weeks and traveled 1500 miles on horseback. During that time, he attended three annual conferences and one General Conference, and did other preaching along the way.

Newcomer’s last trip occurred on March 1, 1830. On the way home from a meeting in Maryland, his horse stumbled and threw him to the ground. Despite suffering four broken ribs and a pierced lung, he got himself home. A doctor came, but he kept getting worse.

On March 12, 1830, Bishop Christian Newcomer climbed out of bed to kneel in prayer. Then he laid down and passed on to Glory.

Aaron Farmer

Aaron Farmer, one of the early pioneers in Indiana, began his ministry in 1824 on a circuit which spanned €ve counties. William Davis wrote, “I have known him to ride 40 miles and preach three sermons in a day; and although unbridged streams of high water might cross his path, he never hesitated to swim them, no matter how great the danger or the exposure incurred... Wherever Farmer went, it was said, people flocked to hear him. John Lawrence wrote of Farmer: “His personal piety was deep. No one ever questioned that. He had a passion for souls which no labors, sorrows, or hardships could abate...”

John Fohl, around 1838, felt called to preach to folks in remote mountain areas in western Pennsylvania. People would emerge from the forests after walking five or six miles. Before entering the cabin for the service, they would stack their guns outside. **JOHN FOHL**

“Daily and continually, whether in the house or on the highway, in conversation or meditation, his mind appeared to be filled with but one thought, and that thought was the salvation of a lost world.” (Henry Spayth, writing about his fellow minister, Bishop Christian Newcomer)



CHRISTIAN NEWCOMER

John McNamar, of Scottish-Irish descent, became a United Brethren preacher in western Ohio in 1814. He is credited with planting a number of UB churches in southwestern Ohio and southern Indiana. John Lawrence wrote of McNamar:

“He devoted himself to the Master’s work with a singleness of aim, and resoluteness of purpose, which have seldom been equaled....Rain, snow, mud, swollen streams, and floating causeways — any of these, or all of them combined — could not change his purpose. Nothing but a physical impossibility would detain him from an appointment.”

Preacher and Horse



John McNamar