

Raymond Chester Walker

By

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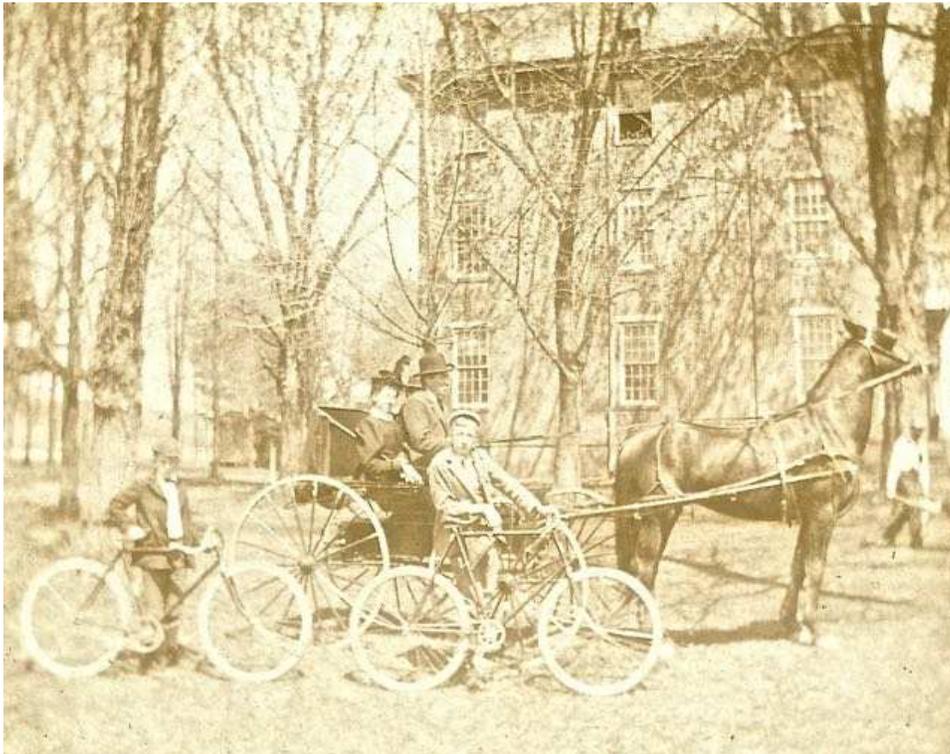
Forty-five years ago, my husband purchased a small farm on the north side of New Berlin Mountain. The house and out buildings were in dire need of repair. In fact, many of our friends and family suggested that we tear them down and build a new home on the site. What a mistake that would have been! Not only would we have destroyed an old log home, but we would have destroyed the history and memories of the folks who lived in the home prior to us.

In 1880, Josiah Walker and his wife, Tillie Peters Walker, lived in our home. So, with this in mind, one day as we were working outside, a car stopped in front of our home. A lady got out of the car and came over to talk to us. She introduced herself as Tillie Walker McDonald, and told us that her grandfather, Josiah Walker lived in our home at one time. She proceeded to tell us that he was a wonderful farmer, and that the property was always kept in pristine condition.

Josiah and Tillie (his wife) had a son Raymond, who was her father. She told us a bit about her father, Raymond, but not until her return visit, did I really discover what an outstanding person Raymond Chester Walker was. Tillie handed me two booklets, one of which was "his story", written by his wife, Esther May Long Walker, and the other was a copy of his 1948 Christmas sermon. The prologue to his sermon was entitled, "I'm Going Home for Christmas!" The information that I am sharing about Raymond Chester Walker is from "his story" written by his wife and completed by his daughter, Tillie Walker McDonald. She also gave us a copy of the public sale of Personal Property and Real Estate of Josiah Walker. Raymond C. Walker was listed as the Executor. On the sale bill it described the small farm, with outbuildings, as a nice home - come and look it over.

Raymond Chester Walker was born September 30, 1883, in a small log house in Union County, near New Berlin. His mother, Tillie Peters Walker was from a prominent family in Snyder County and Josiah's parents, came from England. Raymond was very

close to his mother and attended church services with her at the little Mountain Chapel. His father was stern and was not as affectionate toward Raymond. When Raymond was 13, his mother became ill and passed away. Devastated by her death, Josiah and Raymond moved from the farm to New Berlin where they lived and worked in a knitting factory. Raymond was only thirteen. Fortunately for Raymond, the factory burned



Raymond Walker as a boy on the campus of Central Pennsylvania College. He is the tall boy with the bike. Courtesy Albright College Archives

down and this gave him the opportunity to attend the small college, Central Pennsylvania College in New Berlin, which was run by the Evangelical Church. His father gave him permission to attend for a year, but then did not have the means for Raymond to continue the following year. At age fourteen, Raymond was determined to continue his education and did so by earning his own way. As noted in *A History of Albright College*, Dr. Aaron Gobble had given him work as a janitor, and Raymond was able to sell coal to the students at seven cents a bucket. His father more or less abandoned him, so Raymond stayed in the dormitory. Many times he was the only student in the dormitory during the Christmas vacation, as he had nowhere to go.

Raymond was an excellent student. He was on the debating team, was an excellent public speaker and was even a member of a 16-man football squad in 1899. As

he pursued his education at the college, he began to feel the call to the Christian ministry. His father disapproved and wanted him to be a teacher, but Raymond was certain of his calling. At age 18, Raymond graduated from Central Pennsylvania College in New Berlin with a B.S. degree and became a supply pastor for an Evangelical church



This graduation photo shows Raymond with the other 4 graduates at CPC in 1902. He is the 2nd one from the left. Courtesy Albright College Archives

in York (1902-1903). He was transferred as a supply pastor to a country parish in White Deer, in north central Pennsylvania. To fulfill his duties as the supply pastor, he needed a horse and buggy and his father supplied him with both. Even though Josiah appeared stern on the outside, he must have had concern for his son, as we will also see later. While serving this supply, the smallpox epidemic was rampant. He offered his assistance as a pastor in a burial of a smallpox patient at the cemetery at night, when no one else would assist.

Raymond decided to continue his education at Albright College at Myerstown and received a B.A. degree in 1904. Upon graduation, he served the Evangelical Church in Mechanicsburg. Raymond was ordained March 9, 1907. It was in Mechanicsburg that he came in contact with Dr. Thomas McCarrell of the Presbyterian Church. It was

Dr. McCarrell who influenced him to go to the Princeton Theological Seminary. Raymond was accepted, but late in the summer of 1907, he developed typhoid fever. He had saved \$110.00 toward his first year at Princeton, but had to use these savings to pay medical bills. At some point during his illness Josiah came to visit his son, Raymond, and as he turned to leave, Raymond noted tears streaming down his father's face. At that point, Raymond realized how much his father cared for him. Even though entering Princeton late that fall and with no money, he was able to make up his work, and supply at a church on Sundays. Raymond spent four years at Princeton Seminary and obtained a B.D. degree.

During his senior year, he was certain that he wanted to be in the Presbyterian Church. He was faced with a very agonizing decision---to serve in the Evangelical Church or to change allegiance, and serve the Presbyterian Church. When Raymond was a student at Central Pennsylvania College in New Berlin, he remembered attending a little Presbyterian church in Mifflinburg. He was moved by the service and the conviction came to him: this is where I belong. So with this in mind, and after his graduation from Princeton, Raymond became a Presbyterian pastor. He also received a master's degree from Princeton. During the years of study and being a supply pastor, he



Raymond Chester Walker in later years

made many friends and was known as an outstanding pastor. He was pastor of the Pottsville Presbyterian Church (1911-1929) and was pastor of Market Square Church in

Harrisburg (1929-1951). He held high offices in the Presbytery, and was in great demand as a pastor and public speaker.

Raymond was not only a dedicated and sincere pastor, but he had a love and concern for the families in his congregation. During the 1918 flu epidemic, he worked as an orderly in a hospital and was able to observe how doctors treated patients with the flu. When he would visit his church families, he was able to help family members who had the flu. Raymond not only endured the flu epidemic, but he ministered through WW I, the Depression, and WW II. During these difficult times, he was a faithful pastor, and became a real part in the families of his church, attending to their difficulties and needs. Raymond was noted as one of the finest all-round ministers to graduate from the Princeton Seminary during this time.

During the early 1930's, Lafayette College conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. He was also made a Trustee of Princeton Seminary and was involved with many church organizations.

Even though Raymond's life was completely devoted to the Lord, he did have a personal life. On December 30, 1919, Raymond married Esther Mae Long Walker. Esther lived in Shippensburg, and prior to their marriage, she became the Supervisor of Music in the Pottsville schools. After moving to Pottsville, she became involved with the music at the Presbyterian Church where Raymond was the pastor. Several years passed and a disciplined romance began during which they became secretly engaged. They had to keep their engagement a secret, as they were concerned it would become a topic of gossip for the folks in Pottsville - the minister of the Second Presbyterian Church and the Supervisor of Music being seen together. It was difficult to be together without being seen, so they were married. Their only child, Tillie Elizabeth, was born December 9, 1921.

Raymond's death was sudden and unexpected. After returning home from a three-day minister's meeting, he passed on January 18, 1951, at the age of sixty-seven. His death caused shock and sorrow throughout the whole community and in the circles of the denomination. One letter of condolence came from a Dr. Taliaferro Thompson of Union Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, who stated that Raymond C. Walker was a great church leader. Another tribute came from a young man who was in a Sunday school class that Raymond had taught in Pottsville. Being connected with an aviation firm, he

frequently flew over Harrisburg on a Sunday morning. Since Raymond was involved with a live radio broadcast from his church, the pilot would have his radio on and circle over Harrisburg until Raymond ended his sermon. This young man said he was proud and happy that he knew such a man.

I, too, am proud that in a small way, I had a connection with this great man who had a humble beginning in a little log house on the north side of New Berlin. The memory that will forever be a part of this home is best stated by Raymond in his prologue to his 1948 Christmas sermon, "I'm Going Home For Christmas!" As written by Raymond---"Before me on my desk as I write, is a little watch, a silver watch, the case beautifully chased. As I pick it up, hold it in my hand and listen to its tick, my thoughts travel swiftly across the years. There is the little house far out in the country: there is the small upstairs room - my room at the top of the curved staircase. It is Christmas morning. The sun has barely risen when I awake in my "nightie." I tiptoe quietly down the stairs. I hear voices and there are my father and mother standing before a lovely tree. I gaze in amazed delight and then my attention is drawn to a small box resting on the cotton about the base of the tree. In a moment the box is opened and there I see - A Watch! - the very thing I wanted most of all.

"As I listen to the ticking of that watch the years fade into nothingness and I am ten years of age and back in the old log home. Once again the thrill of that Christmas morning and once again a child's heart all aglow with love and gratitude."

As noted in "his story", Raymond kept this watch for as long as he lived and had it hanging on a small letter cabinet on his desk where it kept perfect time.

So to Tillie Walker McDonald who stopped here many years ago, I write this article as a tribute to your father, Raymond Chester Walker. As Tillie ended her father's story with these words from his last sermon, so I end this tribute with the same words—the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. (1 John 2:17)

