

# The Life of Daniel Sommer

By Kyle D. Frank

Daniel Sommer was of German ancestry. His parents were German immigrants. The father, Johann (John) was a Hessian, while the mother, Magdalena Wyman, came from Bavaria. They came to this country in about 1835 and married in Washington D.C. in 1840. Both parents were short in stature, each being about five feet five inches. They both were blessed with good health but died at an early age due to physical maladies. John died at age forty-one of a pleurisy-like condition. Magdalena died from cancer at age forty-eight. This was in stark contrast with the longevity of their son who lived considerably beyond the forecasted "three-score and ten"

John Sommer was a blacksmith by trade. He spent long hours in his shop shoeing horses and creating the everyday items so needed by the common people of those days. His wife, Magdalena often spent long hours in the shop with him when he needed assistance. She would often work the sledgehammer: and operate it as well as any man could do. This work was done at the same time as she was keeping house and caring for the children of the house. Upon her husband's premature death, she was left penniless: a victim of John's proclivity for strong drink and of his poor business practices. He was remembered as good at his trade but poor at collecting outstanding debts. He also had not made any plans for the future nor laid aside any money for "a rainy day".

## BIRTH

Young Daniel entered the world on January 11th, 1850 in St. Mary's county, Maryland. He was moved to Queen Anne, Maryland within a short time of his birth. At age seven, after his father's death, he moved with his mother and siblings to a small cabin in the woods near the town. It was here that the impoverished family was forced to try to make a living from the meager surroundings . The cabin in which they lived was formerly occupied by slaves although it was not furnished as nicely as most slave quarters were at the time. There was one room downstairs and one room upstairs, a ladder served as the means between the two. The floor below was clay, the upper floor was of boards, not closely laid together. There was no weatherboarding on the outside and no plastering on the inside to keep the elements out. The cabin was of rough hewn logs, and the spaces between the logs were filled with slabs of mud and clay mixed with hair. This material would often dry out and crack, allowing the wind to pass through.<sup>1</sup>

To provide a living each member of the family worked. After Daniel's older brother Frederick left home to work for wages, Daniel would supply the table with wild game from his traps. He writes in his autobiography that he would catch "fifty rabbits in the course of a fall season".<sup>2</sup> Another source of game was an old flint-lock musket. This weapon was well worn and had a defective catch for the hammer mechanism. It would prematurely discharge,

causing a "flash-in-the-pan" The only possible remedy was to hold the hammer until the game was in the primitive sight. He soon became a sort of marksman, bringing home gray squirrels, raccoons and opossums.

Shortly after Daniel turned seven, his mother sent him to school. He said: "I was worse than the dull pupil which John Wesley's mother had in hand. It seems from his history that he could understand and recollect an item of knowledge when it had been repeated to him twenty times; but I could not. My memory held what was said in books as a sieve holds water. My older sister called me a "Blockhead". She prophesied that I never would learn anything, and up to the time I was eight or nine years of age, her prophecy seemed probable."<sup>3</sup> Again, in his words, "How long it took me to learn the alphabet, and then how long I was in learning to read, I am unable to say. Yet, I am sure I was unpromising pupil. As memory now serves, it was not until I had completed my ninth year that I took hold of books with any degree of aptness. Then, I did not have to depend altogether on my memory. I began to understand things, and so went forward. As time advanced I became a success in all departments that were not dependent on my memory."<sup>4</sup>

Young Daniel spent very little time in school as his help was sorely needed in providing for the family. When he was able to get to school, (mostly on rainy days when unable to work in the fields) he was delighted as there were very few pupils attending on those days. The school would be quiet and he would be able to concentrate better. . He had a few different teachers over the period of his formal education because of the lack of organization in the schools in those days. Some of these teachers were not prepared to deal with a "slow learner", as he referred to himself. "But I wish to speak further of this teacher. (Mr. William Pervail kdf) I am not sure he knew best how to handle dull pupils, for he kept me hanging over the same lesson for days, and it seems to me, weeks at a time,"<sup>5</sup> "The teacher that had the greatest effect on the young Sommer was a short heavy-set Scotchman named Hector Home Monroe. Of him, I have vivid recollection, and would like to give detailed account of his excellencies as a teacher and as a man... There was no question about either his scholarship or his manhood. He was a bachelor, and wore a wig which would have been fun for the pupils had not his manly bearing reproved all levity and fun making. Yet he was one of the most jovial of mankind. He could relate an incident or tell a story and laugh as heartily as any other man. For some reason known to himself, he called me "Senator", which some pupils followed his example. What the term meant I knew not, yet I felt sure it was not a term of reproach. He soon understood my mental peculiarities, and for his amusement would often ask me puzzling questions, to see me shake my head."<sup>6</sup>

### **On The Job**

Young Daniel started working for wages at an exceptionally young age. Poverty does that to a man. His first job started at age nine. The law at that particular time did not allow boys to work on roads under the age often, but a family friend, a Haswell Macgruder, who was district superintendent, took him to work making and mending roads. This was, as Sommer would later refer to it, his "beginning of sorrows" He later would say, " In the course

of that summer and fall I probably worked on the roads twenty days or more. Sometimes we (Daniel and older brother Frederick kdf) had to walk five or six miles to the place of work. We would start early after eating what we called a "snack" and took our breakfasts, as well as our dinners, with us... Many times in returning home at night I would go to sleep while walking along, and perhaps walk from twenty to fifty steps while asleep."<sup>7</sup> Some years later he told his wife this and was quickly told that this was the only thing that she had ever heard from him that she did not believe.

Another job he was "hired-out to" by his mother was to work on local farms. He would do various tasks such as making tobacco beds, cutting down briars and digging up sassafras bushes so that the land could be cleared and brought under cultivation. It was here that he learned the value of hard work and perseverance. On one particular occasion, he was hired out to a family named Suite, where his older brother Fred had been toiling. This farm was located fifteen miles from his mother's small cabin, requiring a rather lengthy walk both ways each day. This proved to be a rather sizable challenge for a twelve year old boy. Upon arriving at work he would toil to make unproductive soil yield it's fruit. His meals were provided as a part of his employment and would be called to the table to dine long after the others had finished eating. Sommer later would say, "corn bread, rusty bacon and bonny clabber constituted my fare much of the time. I bore it with some secret contempt until one day Mrs. Suite brought an old crock of clabber for the third or fourth time. She remarked, "Dan, if you don't mind, this old two and sixpence will last you a week." That was too much for my childish heart! I choked and ran over a little at the eyes, yet suppressed my feelings as best I could while I ate my miserable meal. But the cruel remark made I should never forget while *my* memory of ungracious speeches remains....Then, the looks of that old crock added to my discomfort, Had it been respectable in appearance, it would have been more tolerable, but it had been broken and mended with putty. To consummate it's appearance, there had been a string tied around it to hold it together."

Another injustice done to the youth at this residence was through a proposed purchase of a pig. The master had expressed a desire to purchase two pigs from the Sommer family. Fred and Daniel had carried the first of the beasts over the entire fifteen mile trek from home to their employer's residence. Shortly thereafter, a misunderstanding led them to terminate their employment. When they called for their wages, they received neither the wages nor the payment for the pig.

### **More Hunting...**

As previously related, wild game was the chief source of food on the Sommer table. Daniel's trap-line contributed to their food but hunting provided the majority of their fare. When older, Daniel often went hunting with Frederick and a local black man named Nace Toodle and his coon hound "Watch." "It was not long before we heard the dog barking at a tree . On reaching the spot we found Watch had treed a good sized opossum. It did not take me long to climb that tree(it was a walnut) and shake off that opossum: and "Uncle Nace", as we called him, bagged the game. Just here it occurs to mind that the shaking of the

opossum off that tree was a tedious matter. I knew walnut timber was brittle, and that I dared not venture out on that limb very far. So I had to remain a good distance from the game and try to shake him off. After shaking awhile, I recollect he turned under the limb and hung on with claws and tail. Hence I was really a quarter of an hour or more breaking his hold; but finally it was accomplished.

The dog was petted a little and sent out again. We were in a ravine in a rough district, not far from the Patuxent River. That night was dark, but we were expecting the moon to rise about midnight...By the time our coon had been killed and bagged, midnight had come and the moon was up. We turned our faces homeward, but soon heard the dog running and sniffing as if on a "hot" trail. What this meant we soon learned when he began to bark near us at a poplar tree leaning out over a small stream. The light of the moon enabled us to see at once that we had another coon, hence I prepared for more climbing. I went up the tree, but the coon did not jump as I came near. On the contrary, he acted much like an opossum, and went out on a limb about the size of a man's wrist. I tried to shake him off but could not accomplish it. I soon noticed that he had turned on the limb and was coming toward me. The situation began to grow serious! I had heard of a raccoon fighting a man up in a tree, and this looked as if I would have a fight. I broke off a small limb and struck at him as he was nearly within reach. He turned and went back on the limb. I took out my knife (a big one-bladed affair) and cut the limb off, and thus coon and limb went down together. When he struck the ground the dog took hold of him and by the aid of "Uncle Nace's" pronged stick the coon was soon dead..."Uncle Nace" gave me one of the coons for my part in getting them, and so we had some good eating for several days-for such as like coon meat, which is very much like the flesh of a ground hog."<sup>9</sup>

### **Early Religion**

Religion was not an important part of young Sommer's early life. Being of strict German stock, he was born a Lutheran. The faith was not practiced by his family. Daniel's first contact came in 1863 when he was thirteen. A young lady named Louisa V. Harwood opened a Sunday School in the village. She had a special effect on the teenage boy's heart: "Children, not one of you is too young to give your heart to the Savior." These words struck my mind and went to my heart. Whatever might be true of others, I certainly knew that I was not too young to give my heart to the Savior. I knew also I was not too young to die. As a result, I began to think in a manner that led me to repentance and prayer. I knew nothing about baptism but I regarded it as my duty to repent and pray.<sup>10</sup> (Miss Harwood was a Methodist, kdf)

Daniel sought to live a godly life as best he knew. He was a good Methodist and sought to grow in his new faith.

Daniel Sommer's first contact with those called "Disciples of Christ" was in 1868. He was employed by a man named John Dallas Everett as a carpenter. They soon were involved in a discussion of the differences between their two religions. Everett informed Dan that he

(Dan) had never been baptized as infant baptism is not scriptural baptism. Sommer sought to defend his belief but found that he could not. He next sought to prove that baptism was non-essential by relying on Paul's statements in Romans chapter 3 &4 where he says that justification is by faith. John Dallas Everett soon showed him that "the law" there referred to was the old law and not the gospel dispensation. The strength of Sommer's resolve quickly faded in this area. The argument soon came around to Acts 2:38. Everett then said "Dan, do you believe Peter meant what he said to those Jews on the day of Pentecost?" "I had to answer yes. And f£ I did I felt Methodism was slipping from me! I saw at once that Peter must have meant what he said for at the time he was an inspired man. Then I saw also, that as he commanded the Jews to repent and be baptized before he promised them remission of sins, and the gift of the Spirit, then I must be baptized before I could scripturally claim remission of sins."<sup>11</sup>. Daniel Sommer was buried with Christ in baptism in August of 1869.

After his conversion Dan then set to the question of what to do with the rest of his life. Up to that point he had been an uneducated farm hand that only worked, and lived, for that day. He had given no thought to his future and now felt it to be time to set a course. He looked at different secular employments but saw that they did not bring happiness. The only thing he found that brought true happiness was true religion. After much wrangling with his own selfish passions he came to the conclusion that the only way he could bring true happiness to his fellow man was to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Once having reached this decision, he then sought to decide whether to preach full time as a located preacher or perhaps as a traveling evangelist. A great deal of prayer and finally a surrendering of his own will brought him to the decision to preach full time as a traveling evangelist. He then sought how to deal with his as he would say "defective mental powers" of slowness of speech, aversion to crowds and an exceptionally poor memory. This search led him to the next chapter of his life.

### **Bethany Days**

Soon after I took membership in the church of Christ and it was understood that I intended to preach the suggestion was made, and next the advice was given, that I should go to Bethany College in Brooke County, West Virginia. I did so; but after reaching college I soon found that I should have gone to common school. Probably no young man ever went to college for the purpose of taking a course of study who was more ignorant than I was when I reached Bethany."<sup>12</sup> His early years did not stand him in good stead as far as his education was concerned. The struggle to survive had kept him mostly out of the classroom and in the fields. Any arithmetic he had learned was gone and needed to be relearned as well as most everything else that a college freshman would need. Between the lack of skills and his deficient mental powers, he was in for a very difficult time. In his first year he took Greek, Latin and Algebra. In his words "Determined to succeed, I soon spent so much time by lamplight that my eyelids became sore, so I could not study at all by lamplight for a time. In consequence thereof, I dropped Algebra and held to Greek and Latin. After a time my eyes got better, and when a class was started in composition and rhetoric, I entered as one of the

pupils."<sup>13</sup>

During his first summer vacation he began to preach locally. He also sought to memorize scripture for use in these discourses. It was here that he realized that he was unable to commit scripture to memory and retain it for any length of time. From this point on he perfected a system of locating where passages were on the page in the Bible. In this way, he was able to locate them and then read the passages directly from the Bible. This would also have the benefit of letting outsiders see that he was in fact communicating a "thus saith the Lord" and not giving the opinions of men.

September of 1870 saw him back at school. He took Greek, Latin, Algebra and a grammar class taught by another student of a higher grade. The subject which soon came to be most important to young Sommer was a course in Elocution which was taught by Prof. Robert Kidd, who had joined the Bethany staff before the end of the term. This addressed the second of Sommer's triad of weakness-slowness of speech. Professor Kidd's statements stayed with Sommer for many years: "'Young Gentlemen:—I have returned to this institution for the purpose of assisting those who may think the kind of instruction I can give in development and management of the voice. In teaching elocution I do not profess to give new ideas nor introduce new theories; but I aim to bring you back to nature. Natural emphasis is the right emphasis. But in order to make the natural emphasis sufficiently strong to be effective, especially before a large audience, it is necessary that you subject yourself to long and severe vocal drill. Hence the classes that may be formed may expect that from the first they will be drilled in development and management of the voice. It is important for you to have knowledge, and to know how to write a speech; but if you do not know how to write a speech; but if you do not know how to deliver a speech, you will with the finest mental attainments make a failure. After you have finished your collegiate course, you will likely be called to deliver a Fourth of July speech at some place where your friends will be gathered. Then if you have not secured control of yourself, and developed your vocal organs to considerable strength and power, you will make such a failure, and be so ashamed of yourself, that you will be tempted to commit suicide!"<sup>14</sup>

During his second vacation, he spent his time preaching for the little congregation in Richville, Maryland. His work preaching helped him to perfect his style of preparation and research which would serve him well for the remainder of his long career. He would make an outline of the sermon and carry that into the pulpit. After some time he was able to commit these outlines to memory and then turn to read the passages from his Bible. This also helped in overcoming his weakness.

Year three saw him taking Greek, Latin, Hebrew and German. He carried nearly a ninety percent average in these classes. He also preached for the church at Dutch Fork, Pa., about seven miles from Bethany. The church at Independence, Pa. Also received his services and gave him some pay for his efforts. This helped considerably because although his grades were good, it was a time of great suffering. In fact, all of his time at Bethany brought great hardship as he had very little support while pursuing his studies. Often, rice, soup or some

other simple fare would be all that Daniel and his room mate would have for his entire day. His rugged constitution was severely tried during the academic years. "I went to Bethany with only enough money to enter the institution and then depended on contributions from brethren who had previously said that they would help me. But I soon learned that general promises were uncertain assurances, and often I was without money for weeks."<sup>15</sup>

### **The Mite Society**

A memorable event that happened during Daniel's scholastic years was with the Mite Society. It had been started by the ladies of the Bethany congregation as a means of supporting building repairs. It soon degenerated into a social gathering that "opened in prayers & hymns, and closed with plays!"<sup>16</sup> Comic speeches and songs were given for the benefit of the givers. ...and only a few were asked to participate. Soon, the "Wallflowers" were excluded and no longer attended the gatherings.

Sunday evening sermons were often given from the Bethany pulpit by the students. Soon, it came to be Dan's turn to preach. He felt it to be his duty to deal with the subject of the Mite Society. When the day finally came, he gave the subject a thorough working over... and then left it for dead. The following day found him to be the hero to some and villain to others, depending on their views of the society.. Either way, soon thereafter, a schoolgirl from the town read the "Obituary of the Mite Society" from a paper that she had prepared. The obituary stated when the society had been born , how long it had lived,, and when it received a shock from the Bethany pulpit, and how some said it would survive but that time had decided the shock was too severe, and now it became a painful duty to announce to the friends of Bethany that the Mite Society is no more."<sup>17</sup> The important part of this account was to show the state of the brotherhood at that particular time. Sommer noted in his autobiography that there were two types of disciples-one was of the apostolic type while the other was of the plastic type. The former class had stability and held that the world should bend to the church, the later class had flexibility and held that the church should bend to the world. This was only the first of the many times that he was to deal with the "plastic type" of disciples. Daniel Sommer's college days were about to come to an end. This experience was to leave a lasting impression on the twenty-two year old man. Shortly thereafter, he was asked to come to work full time for the church in Dutch Fork and also in Independence. Perhaps, the most significant event of his collegiate career came when shortly before leaving school, he received permission to leave school to go to Wellsburg, West Virginia to see Benjamin Franklin speak in a gospel meeting. It was with this man that Sommer was most impressed- He often referred to Franklin in his writings and often fancied himself as the successor to the grand old man in defense of conservatism. More on this later.

### **Daniel Sommer-Gospel Preacher**

Soon after Dan left school he returned to his native state to begin his work. Shortly thereafter, on his journey to Harford county, "There I was met by an old Quaker in a rockaway carriage, who conveyed me to his home near Forest Hill...That old Quaker was

named Francis Way, and he had two daughters, the youngest of whom was named Katherine, commonly called "Kate".<sup>18</sup> I had seen her three times before I went to Bethany, and several times in the course of my first and second vacations from college. Besides, we had exchanged many letters. I did not regard her as beautiful, nor even handsome. She was a plain-faced country girl, weighing about a hundred and forty-five pounds...she was quick-witted & mischievous. Having lived in the country all her life, she was not perverted by fashionable folly. In her I thought I saw something which would make a woman of energy and decision. We were married on January 28, 1873. I was twenty-three years old and she was a little over twenty-two.

Shortly after the marriage, the young couple settled in Baltimore. He began to preach around the city and while doing so had the opportunity to immerse his young wife into Christ. It was from here that the life of the young preacher truly began in the service of the Master. Later that year the Sommer's first child was born. This child, Fred, was only the first of many. They were Fred, Frank, Chester, Austin, Allen and Bessie. Daniel had held the utmost affection for his children and spoke often of them in his autobiography.

Sommer's preaching took him throughout the region. He often found himself traveling through snowstorms and darkness on foot or sometimes on a borrowed horse. The hardships and poverty the family suffered were all for the advancement of the kingdom of heaven. The year 1874 took him from Baltimore to Kelton, Pa. Here he suffered more than perhaps at any other time. Money was scarce and his family was growing. It was now that he-needed help, and that help arrived in the form of Bro. George Austin. This gentleman had helped various times and the help given truly was an answer to prayers.

### **Editorial Adventures**

, Daniel Sommer's life was dedicated to reaching the lost and edifying the saved. The manner in which he felt he had his greatest audience was through the papers. He began writing at an early age, having several articles published in Benjamin Franklin's American Christian Review. His early writings were under the name "evangelist". The first article appeared in the May 14, 1878 issue. Actually, the article was a reply to Franklin's invitation to move to another location. "The proposition you make offers me a support at least double what I am now getting. But I came among the brethren here because the congregation was too weak financially to support another preacher. I remained because they were weak, and intend to continue with them until they grow strong, however much sacrifice it may yet require. While the field is open and still opening for work, I cannot get my consent to leave, because the church here is financially weak and go where it is stronger. In mildest English, I have no sympathy with the spirit which allows preachers to pass by weak or waste places."<sup>19</sup>

Franklin responded in the warmest way: "In another place the reader will find a letter from Bro. Daniel Sommer, of Kelton, Chester Co., Pa. We like this letter...It is in the spirit of the pioneers of our great work, and of the primitive men in the Church. The question with Bro. Sommer is not how much money he can make out of his fine gifts and the gospel, but

how much he can do in the great work of saving men. He declines to be moved from his work where he is to another place that will pay double the money and we have since learned that will pay more than double; almost three times as much, and the living equally cheap. But he is right in declining, and the Lord will bless him and hold him up, and bless the noble people among whom he is laboring, and will build up the cause.. .We were anxious to get a preacher for the place in question , and when we thought of Bro. Sommer, we thought he was the man. So he was, but, like good men generally, he was engaged.<sup>20</sup>

Sommer then began a series on "Educating Preachers" shortly thereafter in which he sought to familiarize the brotherhood with his writings. Ben Franklin died shortly afterwards and questions were raised at who was to be his successor in the editorial chair. Sommer felt that he had the inside track as he had a letter from Franklin proposing that he become familiar to brethren and then take over Franklin's place.

At the time of Franklin's death, the wrangling over the Review resulted in John F. Rowe being designated as editor while Edwin Alden retained ownership of the paper. Daniel continued to submit articles for a short while and then ceased. A short period of time afterward saw him moving to from Kelton Pa. to Reynoldsburg Ohio. He still felt that editorial work was the best way to reach the most people with the gospel so in 1883 he joined in with another former Review writer, L.F. Bittle, and began to produce a paper entitled "The Octograph" (from the Greek meaning 'the writings of eight'-the New Testament authors, kdf)

Due to financial difficulties, Edwin Alden was forced to place the Review up for sale in the summer of 1886. Sommer was very quick to take advantage of the offer to purchase Franklin's former paper and to rescue it from it's decline in quality and also in subscriptions. Now that he owned the Review, Sommer was especially certain in his feelings to be Franklin's proper successor. Once the purchase was complete, the Octograph and the Review were merged to create the Octographic Review. The first issue was dated March 20,1894. David Edwin Harrell saw the event as this: "The tradition of the American Christian Review continued when Daniel Sommer purchased the journal in 1887. Sommer issued his paper under a number of titles...but he always considered himself and his papers as the successors of Franklin and the Review of Franklin's day. Sommer was an intense admirer of "The Grand Old Man" and reflected much of the older editor's character. He was bright, incisive-he frequently analyzed internal frictions in the church with much more perception than liberal leaders-but he was also crude and caustic. Sommer and his Review continued to influence conservatives in the church-especially in the Midwest."<sup>21</sup>

At a later date the title of the paper again changed to the Apostolic Review. It retained this title until after Sommer's death in 1940. It then returned to the American Christian Review when Sommer's children took control. It held this name until it's last issue in 1965. The Review's part in Sommer's story will be covered in the sections that are appropriate.

### **The Events of Sand Creek**

Like his famous predecessor, Daniel Sommer had controversy swirling around him throughout his lifetime. If there was a controversy raging, more likely than not he was involved in some way, shape or form. When the restoration movement began to experience its first division, Sommer was at the head of the "conservative" or "anti" (as known by the liberal group) wing. His Review was in the lead and became the voice of those in opposition to innovations. The innovators or "progressives" as they were called, were in favor of instrumental music, societies and the one-man pastor system. These were seen as "speaking where the Bible is silent" by the conservatives. Sommer wrote heavily on these in the Review. Because of this he was asked to speak at the mass meeting of brethren on the location of the old Sand Creek congregation in Shelby County Illinois. The meeting was held on Sunday August 18, 1889. "On this particular Sunday in 1889, the taciturn audience listened for an hour and forty minutes while Daniel Sommer spoke on the condition of the church. Sommer charged the "innovators" with being responsible for all the bitterness and strife within the church. He claimed that he had constantly asked these men not to push their innovations, but they had refused. The Missionary Society and instrumental music were being pushed into the churches, driving a wedge between brethren. What was to be done?

At this point in Sommer's sermon, P.D. Warren, one of the elders in the Sand Creek congregation, arose and read what was later to be called the "Sand Creek Address and Declaration".<sup>22</sup>

Due to the length of the address, only sections will be covered. "Brethren-you doubtless know that we, as Disciples of Christ, with scarcely an exception, many long years ago took the position that in matters of doctrine and practice, religious, "Where the Bible speaks...." Here the original ground was stated...the common ground.

And now, please to allow us to call attention to some painful facts and considerations. There are among us those who do teach and practice things not taught or found in the New Testament..." Here the indictment is read and the violation identified.<sup>23</sup>

And now we say that we beg of you that you turn away speedily and at once from such things, and remember that though we are the Lord's freemen, yet we are bound by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that it is by keeping his commandments, and not the commandments of man, that we have the assurance of his approval. Therefore brethren, without addressing you further by using other arguments, and without going further in detailing those unpleasant and, as we see them, vicious things, you must allow us, in kindness and Christian courtesy, that at the same time with firmness, to declare that we cannot tolerate the things of which we complain..." A reminder of the original ground and plea to return to it.<sup>24</sup>

And now, in closing up this address and declaration, we state that we are impelled from a sense of duty to say that all such as are guilty of teaching and allowing and practicing the many innovations and corruptions to which we have referred, after having had sufficient time for meditation and reflection, if they will not turn away from such abominations, that we can

not and will not regard them as brethren."<sup>25</sup> The penalty of digression. Basically a drawing of a line in the sand. This could also be considered as a formal declaration of war between the two sides. Strangely though, this address was not immediately recognized nor commented upon by any of the "progressive" papers. Another "conservative" paper, the Christian Leader felt that the time had finally arrived to remove the contamination that had infected the church so it heartily endorsed the "Address and Declaration".

The Gospel Advocate approved of local splits but not of an entire schism of the brotherhood. They were very quiet on the subject of the "A&D" The strongest reaction from the progressives came from The Christian Standard. The editor said "Daniel Sommer has abandoned apostolic ground, and is no more identified with the Disciples of Christ than Sidney Rigdon."<sup>26</sup> This response was only two and a half years late! Shortly after the Sand Creek Address, the churches in Shelby County split, followed by the other churches. Court cases ensued until the Bureau of Census recognized the two separate bodies in the 1906 census. Again, Daniel Sommer was to be found right in the thick of the action.

## **The Bible College Controversy**

### **(a.k.a Sommerism)**

Daniel Sommer was an opinionated man. Daniel Sommer was not hesitant to express his views. Daniel Sommer felt that Bible Colleges were unscriptural, therefore, Daniel Sommer had much to say regarding Bible Colleges. Perhaps Sommer is best known for his "unusual" views on schools. He is referred to as an extremist and perhaps a brilliant career was eclipsed by this issue. His views on Bible Colleges started back in 1870 when he attended Bethany College. The "Mite Society incident" along with the attitudes of the participants in the schools planted the seeds of the dispute. Also: "The trouble at the College of the Bible in Kentucky University found two men that Sommer admired most-Benjamin Franklin and Jacob Creath Jr. turning against Bible Colleges. Sommer was a young preacher, they were older preachers. Their turning against these colleges at a time when Sommer's heart was already chafing at the bitter memory of Bethany, helped form a conviction in his heart. Too, Sommer could never think of himself in any role except that of the successor of Elder Ben Franklin, whom he regarded as the greatest gospel preacher since apostolic times. Franklin, in his latter years, opposed colleges, and the man who wore his mantle would likely do the same."<sup>27</sup>

Sommer was relatively quiet in the period from the Bethany days until the 1890's. The mid 90's saw an increase in his opposition. When David Lipscomb and James A. Harding founded Nashville Bible School, Daniel viewed it with great distaste. When Harding left N.B.S. to start Potter Bible College with others, Sommer insisted that his objections to the schools could be classified under two headings: using the Lord's money to establish religious-secular schools and giving them a sacred name as though they were divine institutions . He insisted that all "all I have written on the subject has been under two headings, namely, the mistake of using the Lord's money and the mistake of thus naming such institutions."<sup>23</sup>

In regards to his position of "using the Lord's money" he was put in a very sticky position as he defined "the Lord's money" as any not necessary to provide necessities, such as food, shelter, clothing and taxes, saying that the remainder belonged to God and should be placed in the treasury of His church. He had condemned himself for spending thousands of dollars of "the Lord's money" to purchase his paper, the Review. According to his own reasoning, it should have gone to the church instead of being used to establish a rival human "device" or "institution", a religious journal to propagate the gospel.<sup>29</sup>

In editorials between the years 1902-1920, he made two strong charges against the schools. The schools, he said, "impoverished the brotherhood by using millions of dollars to pile up brick and mortar to secure furnishings and threatened to create a centralization of the teaching and preaching force of the church."<sup>30</sup> Sommer taught that the Bible could be taught anywhere -even in a saloon, yet he did not believe in establishing saloons to teach. In time, he was to participate in two major debates on the college issue. The first was with B.F. Rhodes on "religio-secular schools" The second being a written discussion with J. N. Armstrong. In these he carried a rather unusual line of argument, and in this writer's opinion, an undefendable line of argument. Such is the effect of trying to maintain an extreme line of argument.

In the course of time, as age overtook him, he began to soften his opposition to the school-even going as far as touring these schools during the early 1930's, In a letter dated January 19,1933, he says:

My Young Folks,

Who 'da Think It?? Here I am, in David Lipscomb's home, writing on official letterhead furnished me by the president of the college here. So positively I know this! But, I am doing what is necessary to let these people know who and what we are in the brotherhood. I have spoken three times, even in the city, and twice here at the college with an invitation to speak here again tonight. Yesterday forenoon, I spoke here on "Education", this forenoon I spoke on "Health and Happiness" and tonight I am privileged to choose what I may regard as best. Last after my speech one person said, "if you talk much more here well arrange to keep you here." I have written to Brewer of Memphis. Henderson (Freed-Hardeman kdf) is not much out of my way in going to Memphis, I am told. I may remain here over next Lord's day and then start for Memphis. I am still feeling well as usual and hope to continue thus to the utmost. I hope all may continue to be well with you at the old homestead. If this winter's tour in the Southland be a success, I may go to Detroit in the spring. My age is an asset in my endeavors to impress the truth on the people both publicly and privately. I would not venture to repeat what these people say to me and of me when I am not present, as I learn from others.

But this will be sufficient to assure you that I have not forgotten you. Goodbye

Your Father, Daniel Sommer

After seeing these schools and how they were managed at that time, Sommer was later reported as having changed his stand on the college issue. While preaching a gospel meeting in Petersburg, Indiana, he was staying at the home of one of the elders who later told another preacher staying there that "he was very concerned about possibly being wrong on the colleges. Later that night, the same elder previously mentioned, heard him praying in his room. He was heard to be asking forgiveness for all the harm he had brought to the brotherhood over the colleges."<sup>31</sup>

### **The Twilight Years**

The Daniel Sommer of the later years was not the same Sommer of the early years. Perhaps age brings wisdom and wisdom brings a change of one's course. Either way, he spent much of his later years undoing much of what he had sought to do in his youth. As mentioned in an earlier section, his views changed about the colleges as he aged and gained experience, so, his views of the "digressives" changed. Looking back to Sand Creek, and the "line in the sand" drawn by those there, later years saw Daniel seeking to re-unite the warring factions. Tracts such as "Religious Sectism, Defined, Analyzed, and Exposed", would later be followed up by "An Appeal For Unity" and the (in)famous "Rough Draft-Can't We Agree on Something?" The Rough Draft is a name given to a document published in the Review on June 21, 1932 as an attempt on the part of the Review publisher to create an attitude of tolerance among the different and controverted segments related to the restoration movement. The theme of the Draft is couched in these words: "If we can search out the things we can agree on, and unite on them, and work together, well have unity." The Rough Draft called for a severance of societies, organizations and schools from church connections and finances. It urged an expedient policy regarding such controversial matters such as "the pastor system", "lesson leaves", and "mutual edification," and emphasized individual responsibility for doctrinal, and organizational innovations rather than church involvement.<sup>32</sup>

Sommer's intentions were to lay a foundation where the process of bringing the groups together could be begin. Unfortunately, the response was far from what was hoped for. Large numbers of Review supporters turned from the paper and it even caused a major split in the Sommer family itself. The chief opponant was Sommer's own son, D. Austin Sommer. D. Austin began a rival paper called "The Macedonian Call." The reactionary forces felt that the Rough Draft to be a compromise with ungodliness and organized an opposition.

### **The Death of Daniel Sommer**

Daniel was engaged to speak for a congregation in Pittsburg, Pa. in 1939. He suffered a stroke, resulting in blindness, along the way. Never a one to miss an appointment, he spoke before the congregation before departing for West Virginia. Hoping to regain his eyesight, he returned home early. He had no serious trouble in travel for he had ridden those rails many years. Train crews knew him, recognized his infirmity and looked after his needs, including transfers. When he arrived home, he alighted from the taxi and made his way over old familiar ground...after giving of thanks...we noted something was wrong as he groped for

his knife and fork.! We queried him and he told of the "hot flash" that passed over his head, and the fatal blind which pulled down over his eyes, never again to look out on this world. His third stroke took his ability to speak and the use of his one arm.

Sommer passed from this life on February 19,1940 in the Indianapolis house that had been his home for over half a century. His long life had spanned many significant events-both religious and secular-in American history. He was not only an observer of events, but was one who was responsible for causing some of them. Whether all of the things Sommer engaged in are judged acceptable by 20th century religious standards, they occurred nonetheless. Whether one approves or disapproves, a glimpse of Sommer's life and thought can enrich our understanding of the mind of a conservative religious spokesman-and of the people for whom he spoke. If we can come to grips with Sommer's life, we can begin to understand the historical development of the Churches of Christ-and perhaps the thought of literally millions of other similar religious conservatives of assorted varieties.<sup>33</sup>

Daniel Sommer, when it became apparent that he was soon to die, began to write an informal will with the assistance of his son Alien. After certain family matters, he spoke of his most prized possession-the Review. He said: "Last Will and Testament of Daniel Sommer-I will that the review be published a year or longer as now and as publishers may choose. Then, what's left of the Review be offered to Foy E. Wallace Jr. With the understanding that it will double by the year the influence of the one who may use it for the purpose of the gospel."<sup>34</sup> It is to be left to the reader's imagination what could have been done had His instructions been followed.

## Bibliography

1. Apostolic Review LXXXIII49-50 Dec. 5,1939
2. Matthew Morrison Like a Lion page 2
3. ibid
4. ibid
5. A Record of my Life p. 18
6. ibid, p.20
7. Apostolic Review LXXXIII 47-48 Nov. 21,1939
8. A Record of my Life p. 26
9. Apostolic Review LXXXIII 51-52 Dec. 19,1939
10. ibid.
11. American Christian Review LXXXV 51-52 Feb 27,1940
12. ACR LXXXV March 12, 1940
13. ibid
14. ACR LXXXV March 26,1940
15. ibid
16. ACR LXXXV :8 April 9, 1940
17. ibid
18. ACR LXXXV :10 May 7, 1940

19. ACR LXXXV:11 May 14, 1940
20. Steve Wolfgang:A Life of Humble Fear pg.56
21. David Edwin Harrell: Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ vol.11 pg. 18
22. Earl Irvin West: Search For The Ancient Order vol.2 pg. 430
23. ibid. pg. 432
24. ibid " "
25. ibid " "
26. Christian Standard June 25,1892
27. West Search For The Ancient Order vol.2 pg.304
28. Wolfgang Life...Fear pg. 110
29. ibid pg.111
30. "Disciples of Christ Challenged" Apostolic Review LXXXI March 2,1937
31. Author interview with Earl West Jan. 30,1998
32. William Wallace: Daniel Sommer: A Biography pg. 289
33. Wolfgang Life...Fear pg. 139
34. Private papers -Sommer estate