Articles by W. A. McPhail

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Biblical Name Adopted by This Continent (Part 1) (Nov 1968)

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In Northern Syria is one of the oldest and most beautifully situated cities in the world, very interestingly it still retains the name Damascus by which it was called long before the days of Abraham. It was on the highways and crossroads of commerce and one of its special features was that it had a street called Straight, so called because it ran straight east and west. The street was covered and was about one mile in length and one hundred feet wide with bazaars on each side. We have today at least four things which have names directly derived from the word Damascus. One is the woven fabric known as Damask which is but a shortened form of the word Damascus. Then we have the damask rose; pink in color and a true rose. Also there is a steel known as Damask steel and considered of very high quality. The damson plum also derives its name from Damascus. It may be small, but it is a real plum and none better for jam.

It was on the road to Damascus that Saul of Tarsus had his wonderful vision in which his spiritual eyes were opened and his physical eyes became shut. He saw and talked with Jesus who uttered the singular words, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Saul was converted, a complete turning around. His friends then led him by the hand to the house of Judas who lived near the street called

Straight. A man named Ananias had a vision in which he was directed by the Lord to go to this house and lay his hands on Saul. He obeyed the direction and when he put his hands on Saul, there fell from his eyes as it had been scales and he received sight forthwith and he arose and was baptized. He was no longer a Jew but a Christian. His former comrades were infuriated when they learned of his conversion. His friends, sensing that they would do him bodily harm and knowing that they were watching the gates, in order that he might escape let him down off the city wall in a basket and from there he proceeded to Jerusalem. Afterwards he became known not as Saul of Tarsus but as Paul the zealous Apostle.

We have in Ontario, Canada, a village called Damascus and named for the far off city. If you take a trip from the village of Arthur in the County of Wellington and travel north-east towards the township of Luther, you are on the road to our Ontario Damascus.

Biblical Names Adopted by This Continent (Part 2) (Dec 1968)

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When the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was opened up for settlement, certain groups of religious thought, finding there a land where they could enjoy religious freedom settled in considerable numbers in one corner of the State.

These groups were known as Quakers, Moravians, Dunkards, Mennonites, Amish People and Seventh Day Baptists. Very zealous in their religious exercises, it was natural that they should give to their early settlements Biblical names.

Among the place names on the Map of Pennsylvania are Lebanon, Nazareth, Emmaus, Ephrata and Bethlehem. Lebanon is named for the mountain range which marks the Northern boundary of Palestine. The name is always associated with its magnificent cedars which are truly beautiful, and the wood is of great durability.

Nazareth is the name for the small Galilean village, the home of Joseph and Mary, where the Lord spent his childhood years. Nazareth of Pennsylvania was founded by the Moravians who are the followers of John Huss, the martyred reformer.

Emmaus is mentioned by only one of the Gospel writers — Luke records that on the day of His resurrection, the Lord appeared to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. The disciples' eyes were holden and they knew Him not, but they afterwards knew Him in the breaking

of bread. There is now no trace in Palestine of the place where the village stood. All evidence of its existence has disappeared. The word “Emmaus” is related to a derivative root meaning a warm spring, so the natural assumption is that the warm spring has dried up and thus the disappearance of the village.

Besides Emmaus of Pennsylvania many Bible colleges and schools for religious training have adopted the name “Emmaus,” and thus the warm spring of truth is kept alive.

Ephrata is the ancient name for Bethlehem. Rachel the beloved wife of Jacob died on the road to Ephrata — Bethlehem, and that by one of the saddest of all deaths, she died in childbirth. The event of a woman giving up her life in the act of bringing forth a soul into this World, in a special manner pulls at our heart strings. Rachel labored hard and in her death pangs, she named the child “Benomi” son of my sorrow, but Jacob afterwards named him “Benjamin” which in Hebrew means “son of my right hand.”

After the death of Rachel, the village ceased to be called Ephrata but retains unto this day the name “Bethlehem.”

Ephrata of Pennsylvania is a town of about 8,000 inhabitants; beautifully situated about 70 miles from Bethlehem. It was founded by the Seventh Day Baptists, a sect which broke away from the Dunkards on the question of the proper day of the week to be observed as the Sabbath.

Very early in their organization they developed a monastic form of community life. This was not, however, compulsory on the members, who were left in freedom

as to marriage. They wore a special garb or dress. The members were given monastic names. Cloisters were built and some of these buildings now standing are of great interest to tourists and historians.

About six miles southwest of Jerusalem is the village of Bethlehem the birth place of the Saviour of the World. There is no place name in Palestine so significant and so descriptive as that little Judean village where the shepherds went by night to see the infant Jesus.

The name Bethlehem means in Hebrew the house of bread and so there is a true correspondence as the Lord was indeed the Bread of Life which came down from God out of Heaven.

Bethlehem of Pennsylvania, starting as a small Moravian settlement, is now one of the best known cities of the world, owing to its extensive steel works and coal mines.