

Gaston John Fercken



1855-1930

Pastor, Grand Master,
Missionary, Bishop

By
Richard S. Fercken

Forward

The contents of this document are taken from various Church records and Books, personal letters, passenger lists, birth, death, marriage records, and put together in Chronological order to show what Rev. Gaston Fercken's life was like. It tells about the different Churches he ministered in. The areas he traveled to and from. It also gives some personal information on him and his family.

When information was use from a source, the source is shown in the footnote at the bottom of the page. No conclusion should be drawn while reading this document due to the fact that we don't have all records involved to draw a proper conclusion.

I wish to thank Bishop Serge Theriault of the Christian Catholic Church of Canada, and Grand Master of the "Order of the Crown of Thorns". His Biography on Rev. Gaston Fercken guided me to make contact with him, and gave me the inspiration to put this work together. Working together we located the various documents on Rev. Gaston Fercken and his family.

I also wish to thank Ben Wellink from The Netherlands, out of his love of Genealogy and the only connection to the Fercken family is that his wife's Grandparents were good friends with a Karl and Alda Gesina Fercken. When his wife was young she would listen to the stories Mrs. Fercken would tell. While searching The Hague and other Dutch resources the Fercken Family genealogy has been

uncovered and advanced far beyond my wildest expectations.

My thanks to all who have help in this work either indirectly or directly.

The Early Years

Gaston John Fercken was born in Aleppo, Syria on 10 June 1855 where his father William Esaie Fercken was a Vice-consul of the Netherlands to Syria.¹ His mother Sophie Hortense Fautrier was born 18 Jan. 1827, in Marseilles, France². The daughter of one of the soldiers who, under Napoleon, fought at Waterloo. When Gaston was a child his father was order by the Government to locate to Beirut being made the Consul of the Netherlands there. From seven till fourteen years old Gaston attended the private school of a Lutheran minister who taught him reading, spelling arithmetic, grammar, history, geography, the bible and the catechism. He then entered the National College, a native institution, where all studies were in Arabic. Five years gave him thorough training in the language as well as other studies. Here he learned the English language. He began to work in an insurance and mercantile office, but soon having the opportunity to travel through France, Italy, Tunis, Algeria, Egypt, India and Ceylon, with a wealthy manufacturer as his private interpreter, he quite the office. In the meantime, his parents both having died, he located at Smyrna, where his father was born, and where two of his brother's resided.³ Here he spent five years in the Austrian College, teaching and pursuing his studies, until he was granted the degree's BA and BS. Here he also became fluent in speaking Greek. Up to this time he had made no profession. His mother was Catholic; his father never identified himself with any organization. Gaston felt the call

¹ This biographical outline is from a Letter written 11/04/1903 to Bishop W.F. Pendleton of the New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, PA. This letter and others are in procession of the Church Archives.

² Mother's name taken from Gaston J. Fercken Death Certificate, Received from Yverdon-les-Baines Archives.

³ This statement of two brother's is unproven no records exist that backs this up. We believe that this was translated incorrectly from French and should read " where two of his uncles resided"

to the ministry and thought he would attend a divinity school, and look into the word to determine where he could be most at home. The choice of schools was Faculte Libre de L'Oratoire at Geneva, Switzerland⁴. In the free reformed Church. After two year's of study he embraced the opportunity to come to America, and finish his theological education in the Episcopal College at Middletown, Connecticut. This school is now known as Berkeley Divinity School at Yale⁵. He then entered the Ministry of the Episcopal Church.⁶⁻⁷

⁴ School name was found in "The Swiss Background of the Purrysburg Settlers" Written by Francis Harold Fercken his son.

⁵ In 1854, Bishop John Williams of Connecticut saw the need for a new seminary to be a mediating influence during a time of theological division in the Episcopal Church. Williams founded the Berkeley Divinity School in Middletown, Connecticut, naming it after George Berkeley, as a place where students from the various streams of Anglicanism could learn, worship, live and minister alongside one another. Bishop Williams, who later became Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, served as Dean of the School himself until 1899. As indicated by the School's motto, *in illa quae ultra sunt* ("into the regions beyond"), the seminary has for over 150 years prepared clergy, educators and other leaders to serve throughout the church as part of its mission of "restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." From article History of Berkley Divinity School at Yale.

⁶ This biographical outline is also from "Thirty-Three Years of Missions in the Church of the Brethren" by Galen B. Royer (1913) pages 317, 318. A picture of Gaston and his wife is on Plate 9 Opposite 304 of same book.

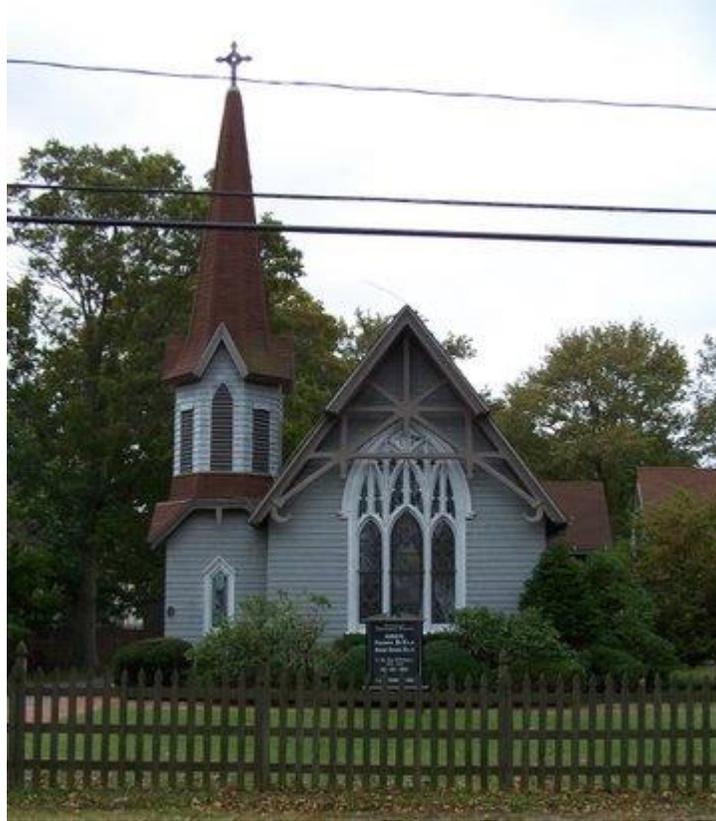
⁷ Episcopal Church, USA, Descendant of the Church of England in the U.S. Part of the Anglican Communion, it was formally organized in 1789 as the successor of the Church of England in the former British colonies. The church accepts both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed as well as a modified version of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. The highest authority in the church is the General Convention, which is headed by the presiding bishop (elected by the House of Bishops). The Reformed Episcopal Church broke away from the main body in 1873. This article is from the Wikipedia online Encyclopedia.

The Episcopal Years

After finishing his theological studies in 1884 he was ordained A Episcopal Priest on 8 June 1884⁸ by Bishop Abraham Littlejohn of Long Island⁹. He then became Rector of Emmanuel Episcopal Church, Great River, Long Island (still in use today) 1884 to 1892.

⁸ From Book “List of Persons Ordained Deacons in the Protestants Episcopal Church From Jan. 1, 1859 To Jan. 1, 1885” Author Elijah H. Downing-1886, Publisher Thomas Whittaker, Bible House. Index page 74 shows Fercken, G.J. 3092, page 65 under 3092 Gaston J.Fercken shows June 8, 1884, Bishop Ordaining Littlejohn.

⁹ Dr. Littlejohn was born in Montgomery County, N. Y., Dec. 13, 1824; was graduated at Union College in 1845, and was ordained Deacon, March 18, 1848, and Priest in November, 1850, soon after entering upon the rector ship of Christ church, Springfield, Mass. He remained in Meriden ten months. He was afterwards Rector of churches in New Haven, and Brooklyn, N. Y. In 1856, he received the degree of D. D., from the University of Pennsylvania, and soon after was elected to the Presidency of Hobart College, Geneva, N. Y. For ten years he was lecturer on Pastoral Theology at the Berkeley Divinity School, Middletown. Nov. 11, 1868, he was elected Bishop of Central New York, at the Episcopal Convention at Utica. He declined the appointment, and on the 19th of November was elected Bishop of Long Island, which he accepted. From www.quinnipiac.edu/other/ABL/etext/wallingford/chapter11.html website



Emmanuel Episcopal Church
Taken 10/7/2006, By Tiffani L. Fercken

On 9 September 1885 he married Selena Roberdeau Shober, in Salisbury, Rowan County, NC, at Saint lukes Catholic Church.¹⁰



Selina Roberdeau Shober

She was the daughter of Congressman Francis Shober from North Carolina¹¹. She was also the sister of the Rev. Francis Emanuel Shober rector of St. John's Church, Barrytown, NY¹².

¹⁰ Taken from Marriage certificate dated September 8, 1885

Very little information is known during this time. The only information that The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island could find was a copy of a page from a Parochial Report dated 1890. It states the Rev. Gaston J. Fercken Rector of Emmanuel Church, Islip (now Great River). Also states the following “The past year has witnessed the realization of a hope long deferred. Through the liberality of members and friends of Emmanuel Church. A \$ 5000.00 Queen Anne cottage has been erected on the church lot, to become ultimately the Rectory. It is completely furnished, and

¹¹ **SHOBER, Francis Edwin**, (father of Francis Emanuel Shober), a Representative from North Carolina; born in Salem (now Winston-Salem), N.C., March 12, 1831; attended the common schools and the Moravian School, Bethlehem, Pa.; was graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1851; studied law; was admitted to the bar in 1853 and commenced practice in Salisbury, N.C., in 1854; member of the State house of commons in 1862 and 1864; served in the State senate in 1865; elected as a Democrat to the Forty-first and Forty-second Congresses (March 4, 1869-March 3, 1873); was not a candidate for renomination in 1872; delegate to the State constitutional convention in 1875; county judge of Rowan County in 1877 and 1878; appointed Chief Clerk of the United States Senate in the Forty-fifth Congress; upon the death of Secretary John C. Burch in the Forty-seventh Congress was appointed Acting Secretary of the Senate and served from October 24, 1881, to March 3, 1883; delegate to the Democratic National Conventions in 1880 and 1884; again a member of the State senate in 1887; resumed the practice of his profession; died in Salisbury, Rowan County, N.C., May 29, 1896; interment in Oakdale Cemetery. Taken from the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress.

¹² **SHOBER, Francis Emanuel**, (son of Francis Edwin Shober), a Representative from New York; born in Salisbury, N.C., October 24, 1860; studied under private tutors; was graduated from St. Stephen’s College, Annandale, N.Y., in 1880; engaged in ministerial and educational work in Dutchess County, N.Y.; reporter on the News-Press of Poughkeepsie; pastor of St. John’s Episcopal Church at Barrytown, N.Y., 1880-1891; editor of the Rockaway Journal at Far Rockaway, N.Y.; member of the editorial staff of the New York World; elected as a Democrat to the Fifty-eighth Congress (March 4, 1903-March 3, 1905); unsuccessful candidate for renomination in 1904; deputy tax appraiser of the State of New York in 1907 and 1908; resumed newspaper work; editor of the New York American until his death in New York City October 7, 1919; interment in Worcester Cemetery, Danbury, Fairfield County, Conn.

now occupied by the present incumbent and his family.”¹³



Photo taken 10/07/2006
By Tiffani L. Fercken

When Emmanuel Episcopal Church, 320 Great River Rd, Great River, NY was contacted, Rev. Canon Domenic K. Ciannella¹⁴ sent birth, baptism, sponsor and death information on Rev. Gaston J. Fercken’s family. During this time they had the following children Phoebe, born on 9 August 1886, Baptized on 5 September 1886, By Bishop Abraham Littlejohn, Sponsors and Witnesses were Hon. Francis E. Shober, Mrs. F.E Shober Jr, and Miss Alexine Fercken. Francis Harold Fercken, born 6 August 1887, Baptized on 9 October 1887, Sponsors and witnesses were Rev Gaston Fercken, Selena Roberdeau Fercken, and William Nicoll. The Officiant was Henry Machett. William Roberdeau Fercken, was born on 25 May 1889, Baptized on 14 July 1889, Sponsors and witnesses were Mr. & Mrs. William Bayard Cutting. He also sent information that Gaston’s name appeared on the following church records. Baptism from 22 June 1884 to last entry of 15 Feb. 1892. Confirmations from 6 July 1884 to 15 Nov. 1891. Marriage

¹³ As stated in the Episcopal Parochial Report, (1890), Episcopal Diocese of Long Island.

¹⁴ The Rev. Dominic K. Cianella has been appointed part time Locum Tenens of Emmanuel Church, Great River, Effective April 1, 2004. As stated in the Episcopal Life, The Dominion, News of the Diocese of Long Island, September 2004

records from 16 Dec. 1884 to 27 Jan.1889. Burial records from 9 Nov. 1884 to 1 March 1892.¹⁵

During this time Rev. Gaston Fercken having done translations (in Arabic) between the Christian Catholic Church¹⁶ (CCC) and the Patriarchate of Antioch (Syriac), Patriarch Ignatius Peter III authorized Rev. Gaston to re-establish the Order of The Crown of Thorns (OCT).¹⁷ He assumed leadership as the First modern Day Grand Master of OCT on 1 June 1891.¹⁸ On 27 June 1891¹⁹, his infant son William Roberdeau Fercken dies of pneumonia at Great River, NY. He is buried in the Emmanuel Episcopal Church Cemetery.²⁰

In the April 1892 issue of the Oregon Churchman, Bishop Morris of the Portland Oregon Diocese announces the coming of Rev. Gaston J. Fercken to St Stephens Cathedral 1432 SW 13TH St Portland, Oregon (still in use today). He and his family arrive on 10 April 1892 Palm Sunday. During the two years that Dr Fercken was at St. Stephens Cathedral.²¹ He carried on the services at Ascension Chapel.

The Journal of the Fourth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon that took place between June 16-19, 1892 states “There have been added to our list of clergy this year, the Rev G.J. Fercken from the Diocese of Long Island.” It shows that Rev. Fercken answered the call of the roll of

¹⁵ From letter dated 29 June, 2004, from Rev. Canon Domenic K. Ciannella of Emmanuel Episcopal Church.

¹⁶ The Christian Catholic Rite of Community Churches originates from a Community Organization of Religion (COR) which started in 1858, among French-Canadians. Churches bearing the name Christian Catholic were established in Illinois and Michigan, by Rev. Dr. Charles Chiniquy (1809-1899), and in Wisconsin, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, Canada, by Rev. J. René Vilatte (1854-1929). From the Website www.ccrcc.ca

¹⁷ Oct was founded in 1239 by St Louis IX, King of France. Under the name of Ordre du Genest. Inspired from the Order de la Couronne founded by Charlemagne.

¹⁸ This information comes from Bishop Serge Theriault of the CCC and Grand Master of OCT.

¹⁹ From letter dated 29 June, 2004, from Rev. Canon Domenic K. Ciannella of Emmanuel Episcopal Church

²⁰ From letter dated 29 June, 2004, from Rev. Canon Domenic K. Ciannella of Emmanuel Episcopal Church

²¹ Oregon Churchman, V, 4th series, (May 1892), page 2

the clergy on Friday, June 17, 1892.²² This Journal also shows The Rev. G.J. Fercken minister in charge of St. Stephens Chapel.

The Journal of the Fifth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon that took place between June 8, 1893 states “That Rev. Gaston J. Fercken answered the call of the roll of the clergy on Friday, June 9, 1893.” It also shows that Rev. Fercken was paid \$ 3.75 for traveling expenses.²³ The Journal also states that “Ascension Chapel, on Portland Heights, has been so far supplied with interior finishing and fittings as to make it quite a seemly and comfortable place of worship. The Rev. Mr. Fercken, of St. Stephen’s Chapel, and members of his congregation, are conducting an interesting and promising Sunday school there, and keeping up a Wednesday evening weekly service, with every prospect of a good and permanent work.²⁴ Again it states The Rev. G.J. Fercken Minister in charge of St. Stephen’s Chapel also has charge of Ascension Chapel on Portland Heights. (1893).²⁵ The Journal of the Sixth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon that took place in June 1894 states “Other changes that have taken place in our clergy list, is as follows : Dr. Fercken to the Missionary Jurisdiction of Spokane.”²⁶

In the summer of 1892 he discovered the works of Emmanuel Swedenboug through Pastor J.L. Higgins (Swedenboug Church)²⁷. On August 11, 1892 his infant son Gaston Esaie Fercken Jr. dies of meningitis at Portland Oregon.²⁸ He is buried at Greenwood Hills Cemetery, Portland, Oregon, in section 4, grave 36.²⁹

²² As stated in the Journal of the Fourth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon Held in Grace Church, Astoria on June 16-19, 1892, page 27.

²³ As stated in the Journal of the Fifth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon Held in Grace Church, Astoria on June 8, 1893, page 17.

²⁴ As stated in the Journal of the Fifth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon Held in Grace Church, Astoria on June 8, 1893, page 40.

²⁵ As stated in the Journal of the Fifth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon Held in Grace Church, Astoria on June 8, 1893, page 80.

²⁶ As stated in the Journal of the Sixth Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Oregon Held in Grace Church, Astoria on June 1894, page 4.

²⁷ As stated in letter to Bishop Pendleton, from Montreal .Ain, France, November 14, 1903, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

²⁸ As stated on his Death certificate.

²⁹ From Email received from Bonnie Kiser Caretaker of Greenwood Cemetery dated October 10, 2005, 2:05 Pm

On 1 June 1893 he resigned his position as Grand Master of OCT and made the following declaration: “After two years of service, we feel ourselves forced (for entire personal reasons), to transfer our charge of Grand Master to his Grace J. Rene Vilatte³⁰, Primate and Archbishop of the Christian Catholics in America, whose wisdom, influence and social position will shed a greater luster upon the Order still young, but destined, it may be, to rival those of a glorious past.. We have transferred our charge and function of Grandmaster to His Eminence and to his successors in the Christian Catholic episcopate, with full powers to confer the grades of the Order and to make modifications in them as he may deem fit for the well-being, honor and perpetuity of the Order.”³¹

The Saturday Evening copy of the Woodlawn Daily Democrat Newspaper dated 30 Dec. 1893 under Church notices of Saint Lukes Episcopal Church states “The Rev. Dr. Fercken of St. Stephen’s Church of Portland, Oregon will occupy the Pulpit morning and Evening, All welcome.” The same paper for 6 Jan. 1894 for Saint Lukes Episcopal Church states “Services and Sermon by The Rev. Dr. Fercken of Portland at 7PM: Bible study Friday at 7 PM, A Hearty Invitation extended to all.

On 23 March 1894 Good Friday announced his intention to resign in order to accept work in the newly created missionary District of Spokane. His leaving took the congregation by surprise, and his resignation was reluctantly accepted by the people who had come to love and respect him.³² When St. Stephens Cathedral at 1432 S W 13th St, Portland, Oregon was contacted they responded by sending The History of St. Stephens Cathedral along with copies of their records that he took part in. Burials From 13 April

³⁰ Joseph René Vilatte was consecrated a bishop on May 29, 1892. He worked in Green Bay, Wisconsin to develop an alternative American Catholic Church during the years preceding and subsequent to his consecration as a bishop in accordance with the edict issued by His Holiness, Ignatius Peter III with Francis Xavier Alvarez, Archbishop of Ceylon as principal consecrator and the Metropolitan Archbishops, Gregarious and Athanasius as co-consecrators in the cathedral at Colombo, Ceylon. This biographical outline from the website: www.ecc-usa.org/Vilatte_bio_and_pict.html.

³¹ Published in Statutes of the Chivalrous and Religious Order of the Crown of Thorns, James Kerr & Son, Fort Howard, Wisconsin, 1893, page 6-7

³² Oregon Churchman, V, 4th series, (May 1892), page 2

1892 to 5 April 1894(Burial of his own son is recorded). Baptisms from 12 June 1892 to 8 April 1893. Marriages 21 September 1892 to 14 April 1894. Confirmations 5 June 1892 to 25 March 1894.

In December 1894, he and his family after some correspondence with D.L. Miller and one or two others, of the Church of the Brethren, moved to Mount Morris, Illinois, and united with the Church of the Brethren³³.

During his stay in Portland, Oregon, Rev Gaston J. Fercken published *Among the Ruins of the Apocalyptic Cities*. This book describes his journey through the apocalyptic cities.³⁴

³³ The Church of the Brethren was organized by Alexander Mack, a miller in Schwarzenau, Germany in 1708. The Church of the Brethren began as a melding of Pietist and Anabaptist ideas. The first church was established in America in 1723. These churches became commonly known as German Baptist Brethren. The denomination holds the New Testament as its only creed. Historically the church has taken a strong stance for non-resistance or pacifism. Distinctive practices include believers' baptism by trine immersion, a three-fold Love Feast. This article is from Wikipedia online Encyclopedia.

³⁴ *Among The Ruins of the Apocalyptic Cities*, By Rev. G. J. Fercken , Printing Department, Posson's Seed Store, 208-210 Second Street, Portland Oregon (1893?)

Church of the Brethren

In due time the Mt Morris Church called him to the ministry. The Brethren Conference of 1895 approved of him as a Missionary to Asia Minor.³⁵ Brother Fercken and his family arrived on July 13, 1895 and choose Smyrna as the headquarters for the mission.³⁶ Although the mission had been started when Christianity was frowned upon by the government and when severe persecutions against Christians were not uncommon, real success seemed to be attending the efforts of the Brethren Mission.³⁷ On September 29, 1896 the first love feast was held³⁸. Previous to the feast, G. J. Fercken was ordained to the bishopric, D.L. Miller and H.B. Brumbaugh laying on hands.^{39 40} In the Asia Minor Mission, Third Report, Easter 1897-1898, shows 3 churches, Smyrna (modern day Izmir), Aidin (Modern Day Aydin) , Philadelphia (Modern Day Alasehir), with the total of the three churches having the following membership, 1 Bishop, 3 ministers, 1 Deacon, 16 Baptized and 39 total members.⁴¹ On March 10, 1897 to Brother Galen he reports 19 orphans.⁴² On May 1, 1897 he reports the following “This mail

³⁵ This biographical outline is from “Thirty-Three Years of Missions in the Church of the Brethren” by Galen B. Royer (1913) pages 317, 318. A picture of Gaston and his wife is located on Plate 9 Opposite 304 of same book.

³⁶ As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931), page161.

³⁷As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931) , page 162

³⁸ The Brethren love feast is a conscious imitation of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples. It begins with foot washing symbolizing humility and service. They then share a meal, symbolizing fellowship. Finally, they share the bread and cup communion, symbolizing participation in Christ’s suffering and death. There may also be hymns and a sermon, as well as a preliminary time of self-examination.

³⁹ As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931), page 194.

⁴⁰ In letter to Prince Albert of Wittgenstein, dated 31 January 1900 he signs it G. J. Fercken, Bishop of the Brethren Church. 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin Il

⁴¹ As reported in Asia Minor Mission, second Report, Easter 1896-Easter 1897, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin Il

⁴² As stated in letter from Smyrna, Asia Minor, March 10, 1897, to Brother Galen. 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin Il

brings to Bro. D.L. and the church at large the accession by baptism of three precious souls, among them my cousin Alphonso Fercken of the Roman Catholic Church. This makes our membership here in Smyrna to amount to 15”.⁴³ He mentions “Ida my sister called on Mrs. Miller” in a letter dated November 5 1898.⁴⁴

About the middle of 1898 reverses came. The Armenians learning of the baptism of several of the orphans became unfriendly to the mission. They brought serious charges against Brother Fercken which however could not be sustained, and also influenced the Turkish Government to become antagonistic. For the sake of his personal safety, Brother Fercken had to leave the country.⁴⁵ He states in a letter to Mrs. Lucy A Harrold “My Counsel, knowing my innocence and the character of the Orientals advised me to leave”.⁴⁶ Upon hearing of the charges the Church of the Brethren investigated the charges and published the following statement to its members “Having investigated the charges made against Brother Fercken, we most unhesitatingly declare our full belief in his innocence. We express our esteem for and confidence in our brother who has brought to suffer so much for the cause he loves and for which he made such great sacrifices. His success made envy and ill will but the right will triumph by the grace of God, and in the end come off more than conqueror through him who loved us and died for us all”. Signed J. H. Moore, W. E. Roop, May B. Oller, Lizzie Miller, And D. L. Miller.”⁴⁷

⁴³ As stated in letter dated May 1, 1897 from Smyrna, Asia Minor to Bro. Galen, , 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL.

⁴⁴ As stated in letter dated November 5, 1898, from Geneva, Switzerland to Bro. Galen, , 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL.

⁴⁵ As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House Elgin, Illinois (1931) , page163

⁴⁶ Letter dated 30 January 1899 from Gaston Fercken, Geneva, Switzerland to Brother Galen 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL.

⁴⁷ As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931), page 164. Also stated in the Gospel Messenger 1899, page 601.

During this time Gaston writes “ this has been a trying experience for me, the most bitter experience of my life and faith, I have often asked myself if, had I remained in my little missionary field on the Mount (Mount Morris, Illinois), I would not have saved myself this sorrow, this disgrace, this heavy and unbearable burden. But when in more hopeful moments, I have thought of what Christians have suffered in the early days of the “faith once achieved.” I did ask myself whether I ought not to bear my cross cheerfully and manfully, and rejoice that for Christ’s and truth sake, I was found worthy of suffering this most awful specimen of persecution.” He goes on to say that “I have selected Geneva where I lived from 1880-1882 and where I still have friends where I can live cheaper, especially now that my family is soon coming to join me. My poor wife is much run down by the long nervous strain brought upon her by this affair and my absence from home about 2 months and a half.”⁴⁸ In a letter dated December 23, 1898 once again he mentions family, “And by some Providential dealing, fell in Mr. Langdon’s (my brother-in-law) hands.”⁴⁹

The general Mission Board met in January 1899 and decided that Brother Fercken should be permitted to open a Mission in Switzerland⁵⁰ Where his mother tongue, French was spoken. In June of 1899 a Sunday-school was started (in the vestry room of the Old Catholic Church⁵¹) at Lancy, A little village near Geneva, Switzerland. In October Gaston was called to Oyannax, France to baptize several applicants there.⁵² In 1900 Gaston’s request to build a Church house in Lancy was approved, with the corner stone

⁴⁸ Letter dated 14 September 1898 from Gaston Fercken, Geneva, Switzerland to Brother Galen 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL.

⁴⁹ As stated in letter dated 9 December 23, 1898 from Geneva, to brother Galen, , 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁵⁰ As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931) , page 164.

⁵¹Letter dated 30 June 1899 from Gaston Fercken, Geneva, Switzerland to Brother Galen 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁵² As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931), page 164.

being laid 8 September 1900. Due to the poor location of the church house the services were moved into a rented hall in Geneva in 1901 The Board order the church house sold.

The board wished Elder Fercken to come into closer touch with the home church and in 1901 asked him to come to America for a furlough. Although he did not go, his wife Selena and two children Phoebe and Francis Harold did sail from Le Havre by the steamer Champagne on 27 April 1901.⁵³ Upon there arrival they stayed with family at 280 Saint Nicholas Ave⁵⁴, and 234 West 122 St⁵⁵, NYC, NY. In a letter he states about his furlough “I can accept it not, the work here being still in its infancy.”⁵⁶ On 25 November 1901 Gaston writes “My dear ones arrived safely here on Friday noon last, after a rather pleasant trip on the Ocean”.⁵⁷ In April 1902 Gaston writes “I shall sail from Boulogne-Sur-Mer for New York on the 17 April on board the Dutch Steamer Ryndam of the Holland America Line. My son Harold is coming with me and I shall try to place him this fall at Mount Morris College”.⁵⁸ Then in the spring of 1903 he returned to the US again to attend the Annual Conference.

Passenger arrival records of La Champagne sailing from Le Havre, Seine-Inferior, France, on April 11, 1903, and arriving at the Port of New York 19 April 1903 show him going to Mount

⁵³ Letter dated 29 April 1901 from Gaston Fercken, Geneva, Switzerland to General Mission and Tract Committee 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 2 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁵⁴ This address taken from letter dated May 7, 1901, from Selina Fercken to Bro. Galen, , 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 2 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁵⁵ Address taken from letter dated November 7, 1901, from Salina Fercken to bro. Galen, , 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 2, Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁵⁶ Letter dated 28 October 1901 from Gaston Fercken, Geneva, Switzerland to Brother Galen, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 2, Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁵⁷ 1903 passenger list record is from National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC and verified with The Ellis Island web site

⁵⁸ Letter dated 2 April 1902 from Gaston Fercken, Geneva, Switzerland to Brother Galen B. Royer, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 2 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

Morris, IL, to visit Rev. D. L. Miller⁵⁹. He then spent a few months among The Brethren in America. None of Gaston's letters in 1903 gives a departure or arrive date, but there is a gap in his letters that would put him in America. He seemed to be deeply interested in the work of the Church of the Brethren and in the mission in France and Switzerland.⁶⁰ Upon his return after the Conference of 1903, where he served as a member of the Standing Committee Brother Fercken moved to Montreal, France, about sixty miles from Geneva, Switzerland. Here he established an Orphanage in which were eleven girls and one boy.⁶¹

From this time on Rev. Gaston Fercken problems start to surface from dishonest coworkers who he states "He has gone over to the other side and has doing us (and me personally) untold harm. All these annoyances and departures are, of course to me a source of great grief and disappointment. Several times I have felt as if I would send to the Committee my resignation"⁶². Another problem that arose is having to use his own funds to run the Orphanage due to the fact that the funds were slow in coming from the Church due to miscommunication of facts.⁶³

Brother Fercken was fluent writer a great reader and while in France began to follow the teaching of Swedenborg. In 1906 the Board learned that Gaston Fercken had written some books (Through the Swedenborgian Press) which were asserted to be heretical. The secretary was instructed to order a set for each member of the Board, and also to procure a concise statement of the Swedenborgian faith, which for some time had claimed the

⁵⁹ La Champagne (French Line), 19 April, 1903 passenger list record is from National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC and verified with The Ellis Island web site.

⁶⁰As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931), page 165-167.

⁶¹As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931) , page 237

⁶² As stated in letter dated September 10, 1902 from Geneva, Switzerland, From Rev. Gaston Fercken to Brother Miller, , 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 5, Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin Il.

⁶³ Information taken from following letters from Montreal (Ain) to Brother's Galen and Miller, July 18,1904(Galen), July 26, 1904 (Miller), August 3, 1904 (Galen), , 2/5 Mission Work in Asia Switzerland and France, Folder # 2, Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken(Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin Il.

interest of Gaston Fercken. Before the order was filled Gaston disappeared. It was learned later that he had gone to Mauritius⁶⁴, a small island east of Madagascar, to become the pastor for a group of French-speaking Swedenborgians. It was learned that he had published a book on the Mystic doctrines of Swedenborg in 1903(Twelve Letter's to my Son) another in 1904(Even Thine Alters) and still another in 1905(The Divine Philosophy).⁶⁵

The passenger List from the ship Noordam, sailing from Boulogne, Pas de Calais, France, on November 3, 1906 shows Rev. Gaston J. Fercken, Phoebe, and Harold arriving on 12 November 1906 going to 92 Morningside Ave. NYC, NY.⁶⁶

In a letter to the Board Gaston Fercken Said, “After several days of inward struggle and keen, poignant anguish accompanied with much prayer for guidance, I have finally decided to totally withdraw from the Brethren Church with which I am no more in sympathy as to the doctrines, rites and ordinances It gives me much pain to leave a church where I have always been well treated which loved me and trusted me and for which I have given the best years of my life. I am afraid I have not done well as I could, but in the presence of trying difficulties and experiences I constantly met I did what I could..... I wish you would convey to the whole Brotherhood my regrets and the assurance of my lasting affection”.⁶⁷

At the December Board meeting of 1906, Galen B. Royer writes “the Board with heavy hearts, made disposition of matters the best it could. Brother Fercken membership was referred to the committee which was to visit the churches in Europe the following summer.” In 1907 Brother Bonsack and another Brother—the committee who visited this mission met the churches and formally

⁶⁴ Republic of Mauritius is an island nation in the southwest Indian Ocean, about 900 kilometers (560 mi) east of Madagascar, which is off Eastern Africa and about 3,943 kilometers (2,450 mi) southwest of India.

⁶⁵ As stated in Missions in the Church of the Brethren, By Elgin S. Moyer. Brethren Publishing House, Elgin, Illinois (1931) , page 167

⁶⁶ Noordam (Holland American Line), Passenger List record is from National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC and verified with The Ellis Island web site

⁶⁷ From Gospel Messenger 1909 page 9, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 2 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

withdrew membership from Brother Fercken. His wife did not accompany him after he left France. She and the children had come to America and no action was taken in their cases.⁶⁸ Sister Fercken accompanied her husband through all his labors until after the mission was established in France. At last accounts she was living with relatives in New York City.⁶⁹

In all fairness he did also write for the Brethren Church Also. One of these articles “Personal Appearance of our Savior” appeared in the gospel Messenger.⁷⁰ Secret Prayer,⁷¹ Saturday or Sunday – Which?⁷² Spirituality⁷³ were printed and sold for the Brethren General Missionary and Tract Committee.

⁶⁸ “Thirty-Three Years of Missions in the Church of the Brethren” by Galen B. Royer (1913) pages 238-239.

⁶⁹ “Thirty-Three Years of Missions in the Church of the Brethren” by Galen B. Royer (1913) pages 319.

⁷⁰ From Gospel Messenger February 19 1895 page 119, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 1 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁷¹ Published by the Brethren’s General Missionary and Tract Committee Elgin Ill. Order No.328 price 13 cents per 100

⁷² Published by the Brethren’s General Missionary and Tract Committee Elgin Ill. Order No.324 price 18 cents per 100

⁷³ Published by the Brethren’s General Missionary and Tract Committee Elgin Ill. Order No.328 price 13 cents per 100

The Swedenborg Faith

Rev. G.J. Fercken on October 28, 1906, was first baptized and then ordained into the ministry of the New Church⁷⁴, By the Rev. Fedor Goerwitz at Zurich. He has for a number of years been a zealous and systematic student of the Heavenly Doctrine, and is known as the author of some exceedingly well written evangelistic works in English, such as Twelve letters to my Son, Even Thine Altars, and Divine Philosophy⁷⁵, besides a number of able contributions to the periodical literature of the church, Some years ago he informed us that he had at last become convinced of the necessity of a distinctive organization for the New Church, through the reading of New Church Life. He has now acted upon his conviction and, by arrangement with the committee on Foreign and Colonial Missions of the British Conference has accepted a call to the pastorate of the Society in Mauritius, where he will preach both in French and in English. He has already started on his long journey to Port Louis. Thus, for the first time since its establishment in 1847, the New Church in the island of Mauritius will enjoy the services of an ordained minister⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ The New Church is a religious movement which began in the late eighteenth century. Its members believe it is a New Christian Church being established by the Lord, which is symbolized by the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven in the book of Revelation. Of all the organized movements of The New Church none of them were founded by Swedenborg, but by those who read the books he published. It was in the books written by Swedenborg that the concept of The New Church was first laid out. There are various organizations which believe in the doctrines of The New Church, but none of them claim to be The New Church itself. The New Church is seen by members of New Church organizations as something above organized religion which the Lord is establishing with all those who believe that the He, the Lord, Jesus Christ is the One God of Heaven and Earth, and that one must follow Him by desisting from evil and learning to do good. Therefore it is essential in understanding New Church organizations that none of these organizations claim to be The New Church itself, but rather strive to represent, in an organized body, the higher spiritual concept of The New Church which is not limited to any organization. The basis of New Church belief is that the Lord has come again in the Holy Spirit to reveal the inner truth of the Old and New Testaments, that the Christian Church is in a fallen state and has been judged, and that a New Christian Era of freedom in spiritual thought has begun. This article is from Wikipedia online Encyclopedia.

⁷⁵ Copies of these books are on file, dates checked and verified.

⁷⁶ AS stated in New Church Life, Vol. XXVII, February 1907, No. 2 page 125-126, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

The earliest contact found with the New Church is a postcard to Rev. Geo. G. Starkey from Ain, France, October 21, 1903, which states if you wish to know more about me, I shall write to you confidentially or to you Bishop.⁷⁷ In November he writes a letter introducing himself to Bishop Pendleton in it he states “Ten years ago while in Portland, Oregon, I had the pleasure of meeting the pastor of the N.C. Society in that city, Rev. J. L. Higgins, whom the Lord providentially put across my way that I might become acquainted with the grand, sublime Heavenly Doctrines which, since for the past four years, I have accepted in full.”⁷⁸ This letter shows when Rev. Fercken first became interested in Swedenboug, and when he accepted its principles. He also states “If I am writing to you so confidentially it is because I am very anxious to sever all relation with old and dead churches, & pass on to your side, believing you are fully on the truth’s side. My study of the Baptism question, my reading of your address on “The Principles of the Academy” & “the Distinctiveness of the New Church” prompts me to apply to you for Baptism & for work in the New Church of the New Jerusalem, whether in America or here in Europe.”

During his ministry on the island of Mauritius 1906 to 1914 (8Years) Rev. Gaston Fercken refrained from writing. In a letter to Bishop Pendleton dated November 1, 1912; he states “My desire is to join the General Church of the New Jerusalem⁷⁹. I trust you will

⁷⁷ As stated in a postcard to Rev. Geo. G. Starkey from Ain, France, Dated October 21, 1903, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁷⁸ As stated in letter to Bishop Pendleton, Written at Montreal, Ain, France, November 14, 1903, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives.

The General Church of the New Jerusalem (also referred to as the *General Church* or just simply the New Church) is an international church based on the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the theological works of Emanuel Swedenborg (often called *the Writings for the New Church* or just *the Writings*). The General Church of the New Jerusalem distinguishes itself from other Swedenborgian churches by teaching that the Writings for the New Church are the Heavenly Doctrine revealed by the Lord in His Second Coming and have authority equal to the Old and New Testaments. It is larger, newer, and more conservative than the Swedenborgian Church of North America. This article is from Wikipedia online Encyclopedia.

accept me not only as a member, but inscribe me also on the roll of your ministers. During the six years that I have been a minister of the New Church I have refrained from writing on any theological subject in our Church periodicals. I have preferred to remain a silent listener & observer of what was said and done in both camps. The New Church Life” so ably written up & which your Publication office has kindly sent me so long free of charge, has convinced me, by its most scholarly articles, that your platform is unshakable one. I therefore here declare that I believe the Writings to be a Divine Revelation from the Lord; that marriage ought not to be celebration between persons of different faiths, & I approve your missionary system which is to be undertaken among the youth of the New Church. In fact, I adopt the general principles which guide New Church Life.”⁸⁰ In this same letter he states “During the six months’ vacation spent in the south of France from November 1911 to March 1912. I purchased a property outside Marseilles, the largest city in France in population after Paris. Luynes is the village where I purchased my property. There I left my family and returned alone to Mauritius. I hope to finish my year and return to rejoin, them, D.V., this coming spring.”

On October 14, 1913 Gaston Fercken gives as a little bit of family information he states: “Before closing this letter I wish to speak to you about the enclosed one just received. It comes from my nephew, Felix Fares⁸¹, whose mother is my sister by my father only. Her husband, Habib Fares, is a Syrian proprietor on Mount Lebanon and the editor of a Daily paper edited in the Arabic language in Beirut where I passed the first twenty one years of my life. I passed by Beirut seven years ago which I had not seen for the long period of 32 years. My nephew offers in the enclosed

⁸⁰ As stated in letter to Bishop Pendleton, from Curepipe Rd. Mauritius Island , November 1, 1912, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁸¹ The relationship stated in this letter is the only proof we have that Felix Fares is his nephew.

letter to translate some of Swedenborg works into Arabic⁸²”. In a letter dated March 14, 1914, he states “It was very kind of you to recommend my nephew Felix Fares to the Swedenborg Society of London for translating Swedenborg works into Arabic.”⁸³

The Island of Mauritius is published in *New Church Life* in January 1915.⁸⁴ The Unjust Steward is published in *New Church Life* in June 1915.⁸⁵

Passenger List from the ship *Espagne* sailing from Le Havre, Seine Inferior, France on 19 September 1914, arriving Port of New York on 27 September 1914 show Rev. Gaston J. Fercken arriving alone. He is going to New Rochelle, NY to be with his son Francis Harold Fercken.⁸⁶ Gaston’s wife Selina stays in Geneva, Switzerland. It Describes Rev. Gaston Fercken as being 5 foot 8 ½ inches tall, gray hair,

Dr. G. J. Fercken spent the whole winter in Bryn Athyn, taking almost all the courses in the Theological School as seemed possible or useful. The committee has borne the cost of his traveling expenses from and back to France, and he is now working in Lausanne, Switzerland.⁸⁷

The Rev. G.J. Fercken has, since July 9th, conducted services at Lausanne, Switzerland, the average attendance being twenty-one. Besides the services, doctrinal classes are held and lectures are given. Interesting work has also been carried on in Geneva, where every other Thursday evening about twenty-five persons gather to

⁸² As stated in a letter from Mauritius, dated October 14, 1913, From Gaston Fercken to Bishop Pendleton, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives.

⁸³ As stated in a letter from Mauritius, dated March 14, 1914, From Gaston Fercken To Bishop Pendleton, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁸⁴As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXV, January 1915, No. 1, page 31 – 37, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives.

⁸⁵As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXV, June 1915, No. 6, page 374 – 380, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁸⁶ *Espagne* (French Line), 19 September 1914 passenger list record is from National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC and verified with The Ellis Island web site

⁸⁷ As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXV, August 1915, No. 8, page 547, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

hear the heavenly doctrines. At the present the General Church has sixteen members in Switzerland.⁸⁸

The Rev. G. J. Fercken will shortly move to Geneva, giving up his work in Lausanne.⁸⁹

For several years the Rev. G. J. Fercken has been supported in his work in Lausanne, Switzerland, by the private beneficence of the late Mr. John Pitcairn, which support has since been continued by Mr. Raymond Pitcairn. It has seemed more orderly to Mr. Pitcairn that this support, if continued, should be under the oversight and judgment of the committee on Church Extension. This charge has been undertaken by the Committee in the hope that results may justify its continuance,⁹⁰

The following Resignations were reported in *New Church Life*, Rev. G. J. Fercken, Mrs. G. J. Fercken, and Miss Phoebe Fercken all of Geneva, Switzerland, February 20, 1919.⁹¹

In the Report of the Committee on Church Extension, It's states "The support to the Rev. G. J. Fercken, in Lausanne, Switzerland, given for a number of years by the late Mr. John Pitcairn, and since his death by Mr. Raymond Pitcairn, was transferred to the Extension Fund in the spring of the year 1918. The committee, in consultation with the Consistory, decided to discontinue the support given to Dr. Fercken after December 1, 1918, as the work done by him did not appear to justify the expenditure."⁹²

⁸⁸ As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXVI, Aug.-Sept. 1916, No. 8-9, page 497, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁸⁹ As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXVIII, Aug. 1918, No. 8, page 494, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁹⁰ As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXVIII, Aug. 1918, No. 8, page 503, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁹¹ As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXIX, December, 1919, No. 12 page 772, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

⁹² As reported in *New Church Life*, Volume XXXIX, December, 1919, No. 12 page 789, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

Return to the Church of the Brethren

A letter dated 16 May 1917, from 15 Chemin de Boston, Lausanne, Switzerland from Rev. G.J. Fercken to Elder Galen B. Royer states “I am in receipt of your kind letter of April 23rd last and Thank You for the information therein contained. If the Mission Board could not decide anything in my behalf, I firmly hope the Standing Committee will come to some favorable conclusions. I shall patiently await their decision and trust in the Lord. If nothing turns out favorably to my earnest desire, I trust nothing will be divulged to the public, as this might injure us and leave us breadless and homeless. And it will still be worst to be where the heart is not, and not to be able to be where the heart is! So, I Trust God, and wait, any rely upon your entire discretion”.⁹³

On 14 July 1917 Rev. Gaston Fercken writes the General Mission Board and makes the following statements “About a year ago I resumed correspondence with Elder D. L. Miller. Had I not had the shame of having left you I would have been the first to find out Brother Miller. I mustered up the courage, and not only express to him my regrets of having left the Brethren Church, but also my sincere desire of returning back to her fold. This I am again doing today officially by this letter to you, my Dear Brethren of the General Mission Board and trust it will find your brotherly approval & sympathy. Yes Dear Brethren, I very much regret this departure from your body eleven years ago. I never found sense then that sphere of Christian brotherly love & spirituality which strongly characterized your church. I am weary of dogmas,

⁹³ Letter dated 16 May 1917 from Gaston Fercken, 15 Chemin de Boston, Lausanne, Switzerland to Elder Galen B. Royer, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 2 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

doctrines and theologies. At this time of my life, I want what is practical, what is the marrow of the Gospel-love! With love there is peace in God and there is success for his truths preached and proclaimed. After this sincere confession of my sincere regrets, for which I ask your pardon, I kindly beg of you to take me back and restore me to membership and to the ministry of the Brethren Church, with my promise to prove myself ever worthy of your kindness & confidences in the future. Of the past, I can not say more than I have said above-sincere regrets for my desertion which, a great part, was due to the annoyances & calamities of unworthy co-workers, which subsequent events proved to you after I had left. As to the future I lay it all into your hands, as you judge best you. If there is any suggestion that you might want from me, I would say that I might begin missionary work here or in the neighborhood".⁹⁴

In letter dated 15 February 1918 address to Brother Galen, Rev. Gaston Fercken states "On receipt of your letter I called on the American Consul to obtain reliable information from him. He said that if we were to travel on an English ship woman would not be allowed to pass not so on French or Spanish lines. Anyway he would not take responsibility, as the trips at present are fraught with many dangers. To my great regret I am not a Naturalized American. I am always first a Dutch subject. Before I left Oregon I took my first papers, but the matter dropped when I join the Brethren and was sent to Smyrna. The fact that my case will be exposed in the official organ of the Brethren Church, and will no longer remain a secret and may come to the hearing of the authorities of the Swedenborg Church. It is therefore necessary and just that I send in my resignation, but it is all important also that I have the means of living pending this war ends and our departure for the US. My earnest desire is to act honestly in all this affair, and only the Board can help me in doing this and as rapidly as

⁹⁴ Letter dated 14 July 1917 from Gaston Fercken, 15 Chemin de Boston, Lausanne, Switzerland to Elder Galen B. Royer, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 2 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

possible. Praying to the Lord to direct us all to His greatest glory and honor”.⁹⁵ This being the last letter of the file from the Brethren Church Archives.

The Brethren Encyclopedia (1983) states “In 1917 he (Gaston J. Fercken) was reinstated as a member of the Church of the Brethren but was not restore as a minister”.⁹⁶ This is the last known entry about Rev. Gaston Fercken in the Brethren Records and Archives.

⁹⁵ Letter dated 15 February 1918 from Gaston Fercken, 15 Chemin de Boston, Lausanne, Switzerland to Elder Galen B. Royer, 2/5 Mission Work in Asia, Switzerland and France, Folder # 2 Gaston J. and Phoebe Fercken (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

⁹⁶ From Brethren Encyclopedia (1983) Fercken, Gaston John and Selina (Phoebe), (Brethren Historical Library and Archives) Elgin IL

The Final years

The passenger list of the ship Rochambre departing the port of Le Havre, Seine-Inferior, France on 16 July 1919 and arriving at the Port of New York on 25 July 1919 show Rev. Gaston Fercken and his wife Selina going to visit there son Mr. Harold Fercken at 580 Franklin St. Wilkes Barre, Pa. The following description is given of Rev. Gaston Fercken as male, white complexion, 5 foot 7 inches in height, gray hair and blue eyes, place of birth as Aleppo, Syria. For Selina as Female, white complexion, gray hair, gray eyes, place of birth Salisbury, USA. They left their daughter Sister Phoebe Fercken at Yverdon, Switzerland. In answer to the question “Whether ever before in the United States” they answered yes, from 1884 to 1895, Islip, 13 years.⁹⁷

A newspaper article dated 4 November 1922 in the Gettysburg Times, Gettysburg, Pa reads “WILL DEDICATE WAR MEMORIAL, Mont Alto will hold Consecration Services on Armistice Day. The program will open with the playing of “America” by the Mont Alto Citizen Band. Prayer will be offered by Rev. G.J. Fercken”.

After this there is little information on Rev. Gaston J. Fercken. We do know that they return to Yverdon, Switzerland, to be near there daughter Phoebe. A letter from the Yverdon Archives show them living at rue du Milieu, Yverdon, Switzerland on 1 November 1924.⁹⁸ Phoebe entered the convent of Saint Loup on 11 September 1916, received her habit on 12 May 1918 and finally on

⁹⁷ Rochambeau (French Line) July 25, 1919, passenger list record is from National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC and verified with The Ellis Island web site.

⁹⁸ Letter received from the Yverdon, Archives dated 24 January 2005. Sent first to Bishop Serge Theriault of the Christian Catholic Church, in Canada, And Grandmaster of the order of the Crown of Thorns, Then forwarded to me by him.

27 July 1921 became a nun. She dedicated her life to care for the aged and sick which included her father and mother.⁹⁹

Rev. Gaston John Fercken passed from this life on 13 March 1930 at Yverdon Les Bains, Switzerland, being 75 years old. Death certificate shows name in French as Gaston Jean Esaie Fercken, Born 10 June 1855 at Aleppo (Syria).his father as William Esaie Fercken, his mother as Sophie Hortense Fautrier, and his wife as Selena Roberdo Shober Fercken.¹⁰⁰

Selena Roberdo Shober Fercken died on 26 June 1934 at Yverdon-les-Baines, Switzerland, being 77 years old. She was Born 5 January 1857 in Salisbury, North Carolina. The Death Certificate also shows her father as Francis Emmanuel Shober, her mother as May Wheat Shober. Husband Gaston Jean Esaie Fercken.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Information take from obituary, documents, letters received from the St Loup Deaconesses in Pimplades, Switzerland. Items sent first to Bishop Serge Theriault of the Christian Catholic Church, in Canada, And Grandmaster of the order of the Crown of Thorns on 2 March 2005 and then forward to me by him.

¹⁰⁰ Taken from Gaston Fercken's Death Certificate 15/248/30 received from Archives at Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland, sent first to Bishop Serge Theriault of the Christian Catholic Church, in Canada, And Grandmaster of the order of the Crown of Thorns on 2 March 2005 and then forward to me by him.

¹⁰¹ Taken from Selina Fercken's Death Certificate 16/295/73 received from archives at Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland, sent first to Bishop Serge Theriault of the Christian Catholic Church, in Canada, And Grandmaster of the order of the Crown of Thorns, and then forward to me by him

Death Notices

Swedenboug Church

Fercken—The Rev. G. J. Fercken passed to the spiritual world from his home in Yverdon, Switzerland, on March 13, 1930.

Mr. Fercken's life and contact with the New Church was of peculiar interest because it was placed, as one might say, at the intersection of two cosmic lines. It is a phenomenon familiar to most students of such matters that any ecclesiastical group stands related to its preachers in a three-fold way: there are (1) the fixed stars—preachers who grow up with a Society and remain with it for years on end: (2) the planets—the familiar wandering preachers who pass from Society to Society: and (3) comets—men who enter swiftly into the ministry at one point, stay awhile, and pass out again, sometimes into other fields of activity and sometimes into the other life. It was to this last group that Mr. Fercken belonged. He came into the church; impulsively sought some field in which to work; could not see his way clear to accept certain propositions covering English and French methods; and presently stepped aside.

The other line of his connection was that began by Le Boys des Guays, continued ardently by the Rev. Frank Sewall, and brought to a climax by the Rev. Julian Kennedy Smyth—the production of devotional literature for the organized Church. Caught in the current of this stream, Mr. Fercken produced many articles, and one book; “Even Thine Alters.”

For several years at the close of his earthly life he was afflicted with blindness—the tedium of waiting relieved by his loyal wife, who survives him.¹⁰² Adolph Roeder

¹⁰² Taken from The New Church Messenger, Volume CXXXVIII, January-June 1930, page 303 dated May 31, 1930, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

Rev. Gaston J. Fercken

We learn from the New York Times that the Rev. Gaston J. Fercken died on March 15, 1930, at Yverdon, near Lausanne Switzerland, at the age of 75 years. It will be recalled that Mr. Fercken visited the Theological School of the Academy of the New Church during the years 1914-1915. After which he was appointed to represent the General Church as Minister in Lausanne, Switzerland, officiated in that capacity for several years.¹⁰³

Rev. Gaston J. Fercken

American Theologian Dies in Switzerland at the age of 75.
Wireless to the New York Times.
Geneva, Switzerland, March 16.

___ The Rev. Gaston J. Fercken, noted American theologian, died yesterday in Yverdon, near Lausanne, at the age of 75 years. He had held positions in Africa, Madagascar and Switzerland, as well as in America. He retired recently.

Mr. Fercken was a forceful writer on religious subjects.¹⁰⁴

Journal D Yverdon 17 March 1930

This article was written in French, this is a rough translation:

G.J. Fercken

We want to express this Saturday afternoon, that in our city, a few years ago his daughter became the Deaconess of the institution of

¹⁰³ As reported in New Church Life, Volume 1, Number 6, June 1930, page 380, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives.

¹⁰⁴ A.N.C. Library Archives, no. 1332, New Church Academy, Bryn Athyn, Pa, Church Archives

St-Wolf attached with the old age home at Clendy, The last honors were given to Reverend Doctor of Divinity, Gaston J. Fercken, who died on Thursday at 75 years of age.

Originating in the United States, he had made serious studies and had traveled much. He was a disciple of Swedenborg. He spoke with an equal facility several languages. He had been a missionary and minister in many regions, in particular in Mauritius, Madagascar, Nauntua (France) and Lausanne (The New Church of Christ) since 1916 etc. He was very cultured, told with charm his memories about his long and animated existence. It is at the time of his stay in Lausanne that his daughter dedicated herself to the diaconate.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ From Journal D Yverdon, March 17, 1930, received from Ville D'Yverdon-Les-Baines Archives, Switzerland, sent first to Bishop Serge Theriault of the Christian Catholic Church, in Canada, And Grandmaster of the order of the Crown of Thorns, and then forward to me by him.