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Pioneer Amish Communities

The larger part of what is known as the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference had its beginnings in Amish communities of Pennsylvania. These communities were planted in the eighteenth century by immigrants who came from the Palatinate of southern Germany. The original communities which they founded in colonial Pennsylvania later supplied sons and daughters to the westward movement.

The Amish who landed at the port in Philadelphia in the 1700's settled first in Berks County, Pennsylvania. Amish names appear on the earliest records of the county. Among them are King, Yoder, Lantz, Schmucker, Stutsman, Beiler, Kauffman, Stoltzfus, Hochstetler, Miller, Reichenbach, Hershberger, Mast, Nafziger, Zug (now Zook), Glick, Kurtz, and Hertzler.

Of the five original settlements made by these Amish immigrants only one, the Conestoga near Morgantown, Pennsylvania, survives to the present time.' It dates from 1760 when Jacob Mast and his family moved from the Northkill community in northern Berks County. Mast was granted a warrant for land in the Conestoga settlement in 1764. Here he lived with his family of twelve children. Here also he served as minister and after 1786 as bishop, succeeding Jacob Hertzler (1703-86) of the Northkill community. Until 1808, the year of his death, Mast furnished the leadership for this oldest permanent Amish community in America.

The French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War made life *difficult* for these Amish pioneer communities. Jacob Hochstetler's family, residing in the Northkill community, was attacked by Indians in the fall of 1757. A son and a daughter were tomahawked and scalped and the mother murdered. Jacob and his two sons Christian and Joseph were taken prisoners. Although Hochstetler and his sons later returned to the Northkill community, the settlement declined in

later years. Members of this and the other original Amish communities moved westward to Mifflin and Union counties in Pennsylvania. From there as well as from the original settlements later generations moved to Somerset and Lawrence counties in Pennsylvania. And from the various Pennsylvania Amish communities there were nineteenth-century migrations to Holmes, Wayne, Logan, and Champaign counties in Ohio.

In 1893 an Amish Mennonite Conference was formed in Ohio and in 1898 certain of the Pennsylvania Amish united with this conference.' This conference and the Ohio Mennonite Conference were destined to grow closer in interests, fellowship, and programs. When they merged in 1927, certain of the Pennsylvania Amish congregations were a part of the uniting conferences. This explains the presence of Pennsylvania congregations in the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference of today.

More Pennsylvania Communities

The other Pennsylvania Amish communities that were to become a part of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference were located in Chester, Lancaster, Mifflin, and Lawrence counties. Descendants from the Berks settlement moved into Lancaster and Chester counties as early as the late 1700's and early 1800's. Here they planted communities which later became the Millwood and Maple Grove congregations near Atglen, Pennsylvania. Other descendants from Berks, Lancaster, and Chester counties moved to Mifflin County and formed the Allensville and Belleville congregations.

The Mifflin County settlement in central Pennsylvania began in the 1790's when the Zugs,

Yotters (later called Yoders), Hooleys, and Hertzlers moved into the beautiful Kishacoquillas Valley

and began to till its fertile acres.

The Lawrence County settlement in western Pennsylvania originated in the 1840's when Amish from Mifflin County moved to Lawrence County under the leadership of Abraham Zook. Daniel and Jacob Byler, Adam Hostetter, and John Knepp were among those who made this journey and planted a permanent community in the hills of western Pennsylvania.

Into Holmes County

Ohio's oldest and largest Amish settlement grew out of migra-

tions from Pennsylvania to Holmes County, Ohio.' In 1803 some of the migrants came into the present Holmes County with its large tracts of land, ample springs, and heavy forests. They selected a location for settlement and returned to Pennsylvania. In 1808 Jacob Miller with his two sons, Henry and Jacob, came from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to a section of land about a mile northeast of present Sugarcreek in Holmes County. Here he entered a section of land and after helping his sons to build cabins and start farming he returned to Somerset County. The next year in the spring he moved his family to Ohio and brought with him his wife's nephew, Jonas Stutzman, who in 1809 became the first settler in the town of Walnut Creek, a mile southwest of the stream by the same name. Jacob Miller was a minister and preached what is thought to have been the first sermon in Holmes County.

Deeds for the newly acquired land were secured by the exploring party of 1803. They were dated 1807 and were signed by Thomas Jefferson. Later settlers were Abraham Gerber, Jacob Mast, Charles Yoder, Jacob Stutzman, and Hostetlers and Weavers. A cabin schoolhouse was erected in 1815.

Early records tell of encounters with the Indians. Trade was carried on with them, though apparently not all relations were congenial. One family returned to Pennsylvania because of unpleasant conflict with Indians, though this family found its way back again to Holmes County by 1812.

Organized congregations were founded as the thriving settlement spread in and around the Walnut Creek district. One of these churches was in the vicinity of present Farmerstown. John Frey, Noah Miller, and David Miller were pastors. Levi Miller was bishop. Another church was in the Sugarcreek area where Moses Wenger and Stephen Yoder were ministers and Jacob Coblenz was bishop. A third church in Walnut Creek Township was located in what is now known as Pleasant Valley. Moses H. Miller, Christian Yoder, and Solomon Miller were ministers, and Moses J. Miller was bishop. The fourth church was founded in the area where the present Walnut Creek Church now stands. William Gerber and Abraham Mast were ministers; David Beechy was deacon, and Moses Miller was bishop.

In the community between present Millersburg and Berlin a settlement organized a congregation about 1828. It was later to become the Martin's Creek congregation. The first minister and bishop

was Frederick Hage. Other ministers were Samuel Mast, Paul Stutzman, and Daniel Miller. Christ Mast and Jacob Yoder were deacons. Services were held in private homes during the first fifty years or so of the settlements. The story of how church buildings were erected comes in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Into Wayne County

Amish migrations from Pennsylvania to Wayne County, Ohio, began in 1815 when David Stutzman of Somerset County, Pennsylvania, purchased a quarter section southwest of what is now the Crown Hill Church near Rittman, Ohio.⁵ Henry Yoder from the same county in Pennsylvania came a year later and purchased a quarter section near David Stutzman. Others to come to the promising settlement were Jacob Yoder in 1817 from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania; Christian Yoder in 1818 from Somerset County, Pennsylvania; Christian Schmucker in 1819 from Mifflin County (formerly from Berks). Still others to come in these early years from Mifflin County were John Zook (1815), Christian Brandt (1818), and Stephen Lantz (1820). Additional persons from Somerset County, all in 1818, were Peter, Abraham, and Jacob Schrock, and Benedict Schrag (later spelled Schrock). The above were the nucleus of the Oak Grove congregation at Smithville.

Into Champaign and Logan Counties

The westward movement of Amish continued as the nineteenth century went on. In 1843 Joseph Kauffman moved to Salem Township in Champaign County. In 1844 the Christ Kauffman family arrived to be followed by Christ Yoder in 1848. David Kauffman and Jacob Hooley families came in 1851, and in 1854 the John Zook, Joel Hartzler, and Jacob K. Yoder families settled. Samuel Lantz and his son-in-law, John Warye, reached the settlement in 1851.⁶

All of these came from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania. Some traveled by Conestoga wagon. Others took a boat by way of canal to Pittsburgh and then down the Ohio River to Cincinnati and from there northward to Champaign County. Later settlers followed similar routes in a steady stream within the next few decades.

An Amish congregation was organized between 1845 and 1850 with meetings held in the homes. The first resident bishop was Jacob Hertzler who came from Fairfield County, Ohio, in 1850 and served till his death in 1854. In 1856 John Warye (originally

Werey) and Joseph Kauffman were ordained ministers. In 1861 John Warye was ordained bishop and served till 1903. Warye was a nineteenth-century immigrant from Germany where he was born in 1824 at Hessedorn Stadt.

Something of the pioneer life of the early West Liberty settlers is preserved in the *History of Logan County and Ohio*, an illustrated work published in 1880." The volume contains numerous thumbnail sketches of the important personalities in business, agriculture, religion, and politics who occupied Monroe, Rush Creek, Bloomfield, Union, and Richland townships in the Mad River Valley area. Among these are the following who were of the Amish faith.

Noah Yoder, who was born in Mifflin County in 1827 and who came with his parents to Ohio in 1845, was the owner of 250 acres of "choice land which is adorned with the best of improvements in the way of fruit and farm buildings." Apparently he began his business career "without means or pecuniary aid and has at length risen to the front rank of Logan County's agriculturalists." 9

Among the "prominent farmers and selfmade men" of Monroe Township was Jonas P. Yoder. Born in Mifflin County in 1815, the second of a family of twelve children, he began "doing business without money or `backing' " since his father had no worldly goods to bestow on his son. In 1850 he came westward and purchased ninety acres of land in Monroe Township. This he later increased to "550 acres of excellent land, all of which is a credit to his industry and good management." Jonas P. Yoder was, according to this record, a man who attended "to his personal concerns" and was known as a staunch and reliable citizen in the community."

Mrs. Barbara Yoder is included among the list of leading Logan County people. She was born in 1820 in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, where her limited schooling was in a log cabin. "Her younger days were spent at the spinning wheel or the loom, the potato patch or the garden." She married John Yoder (no relation) in 1843 and the next year came by water and stage and by five-horse team to Logan County. After her husband's decease she continued to live on the 175 acres of fine arable land on which she and her husband originally settled and raised their seven children."

Daniel C. Yoder began life in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, in 1825. He spent his boyhood "attending school in the pioneer cabins, going to mill on horseback, reaping wheat with the sickle, going to

church barefooted, roaming the woods in search of racoons and opossums, rolling logs, picking brush, and relishing many meals of corn bread and milk." He married in 1853 and began farming in Monroe Township and by 1876 owned a 140-acre farm, "among the best in the township." He served the community in minor township offices, assisted in the building of a "fine church" for the Amish with whom he had his membership for thirty-five years. In politics his sympathies were with the Whigs for whom he cast his first vote and with the formation of the Republican party he became an active member in the local scene."

D. D. Yoder was born in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, in 1830 and came to Ohio with his parents in 1845. He became owner of a "fine farm of 160 acres" and in 1875 donated an acre of land for the building of a church at \$1,753, donating \$140 to the building fund. The history states that

he has always been identified with the Republican party since its organization. Mr. Yoder is the architect of his own fortune, and in everything he has undertaken he has been successful-in the ten years during which he dealt in farm implements, as well as in other vocations. He possesses 251 acres of fine land, and connected with every industrial enterprise you will find the name of D. D. Yoder."

Jonathan Yoder is sketched in much the same fashion. Born in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, in 1829 he came to Ohio in 1845, settling in Champaign County and then in Logan County. He attended school for only five years and for the rest of his life he was a farmer. In 1852 he married Anna Sharp and they became the parents of eight children. Jonathan Yoder, it is noted, was no office-seeker "but has always taken deep interest in the selection of upright men to fill the various positions, and has always been identified with the Republican party since its organization."

The above persons may not be "average" or "typical" since there is reason to believe that the biographies were selective on the basis of land ownership and prosperity, roles in church and community leadership, and-one somehow suspects-membership in the Republican party. The sketches suggest, however, that as the Amish moved to the frontier and settled on its broad fertile acres they took with them their centuries-old tradition of faith, family, and farm-all closely knit into a covenanted community that, hopefully, would assure the future of a cherished way of life.

Profile of a Leader

It would seem that the biography of John P. King epitomizes the Amish ideals in a most authentic fashion and does so in the context of a frontier and religious setting. John P. King was born in 1827 in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania-one of seven children. After his father's death in 1847 he was hired out to do farm work in the neighborhood but he soon "conceived the idea that the chances, for a young man of industrious habits and no means, were much better in the populous West, than they were in his native place."

Young King "with a determination to succeed, turned his back on all that was dear to him in youth and set out for this state, arriving in Logan County, March 2, 1849, a poor, but sober and industrious young man."

King married Rebecca Troyer of Holmes County in October of 1850. To their union were born six children. The family was reared on a well-improved farm which by about 1875 was worth \$110.64 an acre. Evidently as a man in the community, John P. King was respected for his integrity and sound business methods for over thirty years.

It was, however, also as a churchman that King became known and as such he makes interesting study of how spiritual and economic leadership were combined in one man. He was ordained as a deacon in 1859 and in 1872 was ordained bishop. As a bishop he traveled extensively in a circuit through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas. He assisted in founding congregations; he preached and served communion to scattered members; and because of his dedication and abilities he exerted a commanding influence. Doubtless to the people of his own faith he symbolized much of what the Amish transplanted to the frontier by way of economic, spiritual, and cultural values. To the compilers of a county history, who studied their Amish neighbors, he merited considerable space as one who fitted into their ideal of a "success story."

From a Local History

The West Liberty community received further space in Robert P. Kennedy's *Historical Review of Logan County, Ohio*, which was published in 1903. Here it is noted that worship was in private homes till 1857 or 1858 and that the German language persisted,

in at least partial use, till about 1900. The membership was given as 350 with

nearly one hundred per cent of the children gathered into the fold, as they come to the years of understanding and accountability. In 1875 and 1876 two substantial churches were built; Walnut Grove in Union Township on the West Liberty and De Graff Pike; these two congregations are blended in one, having services every Sunday, first at one and then at the other house.

The account quotes from an unnamed source which sets forth the faith and practice of the church as follows:

As a church we are orthodox in our belief; we accept the whole Bible as inspired, therefore the only safe guide; we are non-resistant in principle, therefore opposed to war; difficulties or misunderstandings among the brotherhood must be settled by the church. Mixed marriages of believers and unbelievers are not tolerated; divorce is unknown in the church; our dues to the government in taxes or work are considered binding to a faithful Christian.

The above Amish communities in Ohio were nineteenth-century migrations from Pennsylvania Amish communities of the colonial or early national era. They were not, however, the only Amish communities that took root in Ohio during the nineteenth century. Two other counties of the state, Stark and Fulton, received Amish immigrants from Europe during the first half of the 1800's and these church communities in time became a part of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference.

Settlement in Stark County

The Stark County settlement in Nimishillen Township, about four miles northeast of Louisville, traces its first settler to John King (an Amishman from Pennsylvania) who purchased land in 1819 just south of the present Beech Church." Michael Schloneger, Sr., purchased 350 acres in Washington Township in 1822. Other families came into the community and by 1830 a log building served as a meetinghouse on the Michael Schloneger farm.

The prominent family names of the early years were Conrad, Schloneger, King, Miller, Sommers, Schmucker, Becher, Krabill, Ramseyer, Graber, Klopfenstein, Linder, and Maurer. These families came directly from Alsace-Lorraine territory in France, and from the Canton of Bern in Switzerland. Their chief reason for coming to the United States was to avoid military draft during

the post-Napoleonic era in Europe.

Early leaders included Jacob Conrad, Sr., who had been ordained as a minister for the Montebeliard congregation in Alsace. He was the first minister of the Stark County settlement. John Schloneger, son of Michael, was the first bishop, being ordained briefly as a minister before moving to Ontario, Canada. David Maurer was the first deacon and was ordained before 1850. For some years he was the only church leader, and ministers from Holmes County, Abraham Mast and Moses Miller, assisted him. From 1859 to 1870 John K. Yoder of Wayne County had bishop oversight. He was succeeded in 1870 by Michael Schloneger, Jr., who died in 1906.

Beginnings in Fulton County

One more important community laid its foundations through Amish immigration from Europe in the nineteenth century. This was the Fulton County community of northwestern Ohio and of which the Central Church at Archbold became the "mother" church." The trek to this wilderness began on March 8, 1834, in Mulhausen of Alsace, a city about eight miles from the northwestern boundary of Switzerland. A group of twenty traveled by three teams to La Havre, France, in seventeen days and from thence on April 8 began the slow voyage to New York. The group consisted of Jacob Binder and wife (Mary Stuckey), one son and six daughters; Christian Lauber and wife (Magdaline Zimmerman) with three daughters and one son; and Christian Rupp and wife (Christina Stuckey) with their three children.

From New York they proceeded by the Hudson River across the Erie Canal to the Fulton Canal. From thence they traveled to Canal Fulton in Stark County where Peter Schrock and other Amish brethren from Wayne County met them. Here they enjoyed hospitality for six weeks. Here, too, they met another group of immigrants whose European home was only fifty miles from them and who had docked at New York shortly before they had arrived and who had proceeded to Wayne County. This other group which was to share with them the rigors of pioneering in northwestern Ohio consisted of Jacob Kibler and wife (Susanna Meister) and seven children; John Georg Meister and wife (Margaret Keller) and twelve children; and John Van Gunday, a widower with four children.

The two groups formed a company and faced westward in

search of land. Their experience was, typical: streams were forded, trails were mapped, food was rationed. On August 22, 1834, they reached present Lauber Hill in German Township of Fulton County. Here was the beginning of the settlement of what was to become the Central Mennonite Church.

Other families followed and land was acquired by Christian Lauber, Christian Rupp, Jacob Binder, Peter Schrock, Christian Beck, David Stutzman, Jacob Nofziger, and Peter Wyse. There was also Henry Roth, Jacob Roth, Peter Rupp, Daniel Short, Peter Stuckey, Peter Short, John Rufenacht, and Michael Grieser. Before the next few years were past John King became a landowner as did also Christian Riegsecker, and Christ and Peter Klopfenstein. In 1842 the Jacques Frey family arrived and purchased land. Joseph Nafziger purchased a farm in 1841. The Eichers and the Aeschlimans came also within these early years. At the end of the first twenty-six years of settlement a community was established and immigration all but ceased. The building of a church community had begun.

The first church service was held in Christian Lauber's cabin on Lauber Hill in the fall of 1835. Christian Beck was in charge of the service. Little beyond this is known of the service. It is a fact, however, that German church services became a biweekly affair in private homes of the brotherhood.

The first local Amish bishop was Christian Rupp about whom very little is known². Apparently he performed the first Christian marriage in German Township when in 1841 he united in matrimony Christian Rychener and Magdalena Grieser. Peter Wyse (1800-56) was the second bishop and he probably served less than ten years, and some of this time may have overlapped with his predecessor. His successor was Peter Nofziger whose term and contribution is not noted in the meager records. Among the other church officers whose names have been preserved are Nicholas Koenig [King] minister, and John Wyse (1821-84), the first deacon.

Into Fairfield County

One decade after certain Amish had settled in Holmes County others also settled near Bremen in Fairfield County. The latter settlers bore the names of Kurtz, Lantz, Morrel, Hartzler, King, and Zook. They occupied land close to the Mennonite community and the two groups lived as good neighbors and in time worshiped together. Descendants of this Amish congregation later moved to

Champaign County, Ohio, and to the environs of Topeka, Indiana. Some also moved to Iowa. The Amish settlement in Fairfield County died out but its importance in association with Mennonites is to be noted.¹¹

Early settlers in these frontier communities lived in log huts with puncheon floors and windows of oiled paper. Furniture was handmade and produced at home from timber nearby. Crops were grown with difficulty and were often threatened by deer and other wild game. Travel was difficult because it had to be undertaken on poor roads or over Indian trails. In the early years of these settlements Indians still roamed Ohio's woods and could be seen along the streams of the fields and forests.