

Part III

Missions,
World War I,
and Reunion

10.

Growth in Early 1900's

The early decades of the twentieth century saw a number of new congregations planted and a growing missionary zeal. With the founding of Elkhart Institute (1894) and its successor Goshen College (1903) a number of future Ohio church leaders received a church-oriented education and their contributions became important. In 1900 the Elkhart Institute graduated A. J. Steiner and I. W. Royer, both of whom became influential leaders in Ohio churches. Foreign mission work challenged the congregations in the sending of M. C. and Lydia Lehman to India. Mrs. Lehman was the former Lydia



*Ohio Mennonite Conference
Leaders*

*Left to right: A. J. Steiner,
I. W. Royer, J. S. Hartzler.
Hartzler was an instructor
at the Elkhart Institute, Elk-
hart, Indiana, and Steiner
and Royer attended the insti-
tute as students. Steiner and
Royer played key roles in
the leadership in Ohio Men-
nonite Conference. The Elk-
hart Institute through these
men was influential in the
work of these leaders in the
Ohio churches.*

Liechty of Wayne County, Ohio. Lina Zook, also of Wayne County, married Jacob A. Ressler and in 1903 sailed as a missionary to India.

In Eastern States

Among the new congregations of the early years of the twentieth century was Providence Church located at Oyster Point, Virginia.' A number of the founders of this church came from Ohio. They included D. Z. Yoder of Smithville, D. S. Yoder of Orrville, and Isaac Stoltzfus of West Liberty. These men and their families, together with Christ Miller of Cass County, Missouri, and J. Z. Mast, Long Green, Maryland, were organized as a congregation by two bishops from Ohio, Fred Mast and J. S. Gerig, in 1900. In 1902 the congregation petitioned for membership in the Eastern A. M. Conference, the request being granted.'

Another congregation to form in the eastern states was at Westover, Maryland. The settlement here was formed by the Daniel P. Yoder family from Oscoda County, Michigan (1909); the Christian Schrock family from Virginia Beach, Virginia (1914); Amos Ogburn from Kenmare, North Dakota (1916,); and Ira M. Zook from Cass County, Missouri (1919).' Though communion services were held as early as 1913 by Bishop John S. Mast of Conestoga Church near Morgantown, Pennsylvania, the congregation was not organized till 1919 when Bishop Mast did this in the home of Israel Kauffman. A meetinghouse was built the next year.'

For some years Bishop Mast had oversight of the congregation known as Holly Grove. In 1922 Aaron Mast of the Millwood congregation in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, was ordained to serve as a resident pastor. Mast moved his family of seven to this developing community in the fertile, vegetable-producing Eastern Shore of Maryland. Here in time, despite unimproved roads and isolation from cities, a prosperous community developed. Leading evangelists and Bible conference speakers came and went in the course of the years.'

"Reasonable Land," Good Markets, a New Church

The growth of new communities in these years, as in the nineteenth century, was frequently the result of a quest for cheaper land or better markets for a group of religious people with generations of deep attachment to the soil. This accounts for the origin

and growth of the Plainview Church in Portage County, Ohio. In 1904 Joseph and Alex Stutzman of Nebraska settled on land near Aurora. In 1905 they were joined by the Alex A. Miller family of Sugarcreek, Ohio. Others from Kansas, Iowa, Colorado, Missouri, Michigan, and Pennsylvania settled in the new community.

By 1906 a Sunday school was organized. In 1908 a class of converts was baptized by Bishop Moses Mast. During March of 1909 Eli B. Stoltzfus arrived from the West Liberty community and in his coming the growing congregation had its first resident pastor, a man who faithfully served till his death in 1942. Stoltzfus, as early as March 13, 1909, wrote in the *Gospel Herald* that in this community there was economic as well as spiritual opportunity. There is something typical in Stoltzfus' letter to the *Gospel Herald* in that it reflects both the economic and spiritual concern which was so often found in the church leaders of past generations.

The last goodbyes given, the farewells spoken, the ringing of the bell, the throb of the great locomotive, and we were off for our future home and field of labor at Aurora, in Portage County, Ohio, where we arrived in due time and the brotherhood here soon had our car of household goods unloaded.

There is a membership here of 38 besides three applicants for baptism and another family moving in this spring. Farming land is very reasonable in price and is adapted to the main cereals. Markets good, as we are located on the Erie railroad between the great cities of Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Anyone desiring information in regard to this place will please address above and we shall gladly answer to the best of our ability.

Remember us at the throne of grace that we may always be true, that we may be used to His name's honor and glory, for the advancement of His cause and the extension of the borders of His kingdom.

Early in its life this congregation showed a missionary vision which was to characterize it for years to come. Much of this was due to the efforts of Eli B. Stoltzfus. The congregation also had as one of its ministers Daniel Raber (1858-1939), who was an itinerant evangelist. Raber was born in Iowa and joined the Mennonite Church at twenty-four. He was ordained in Kansas City in 1890. After moving to Aurora in 1911 he served not only this new community but traveled extensively to Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.' Raber felt a call to preach to neglected and unchurched communities, and for this he had definite gifts. He became known as a remarkable and zealous preacher to all kinds of people. He preached to miners, to isolated people of

the Appalachian Mountains, to Negroes-often in the face of travel difficulties and in communities where religious influence was something not well known. His zeal drove him to face dangers and threats for the sake of the gospel.

The same congregation was later to become active in starting Sunday schools in the neighborhood and in ministering to new congregations in nearby counties and cities. A son of Eli B. Stoltzfus, Elmer, succeeded him as bishop in 1959, and David F. Miller was ordained pastor in 1962.

In 1909 a mission in Orrville was established by the Oak Grove (of the Amish near Smithville) and Martins (of the Mennonites near Orrville) churches." In 1911 the mission was taken over by the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities which operated it until 1921 when it was transferred to the Ohio Mission Board. In 1922 the mission was organized as the Orrville Mennonite Church with 100 charter members. By 1936 an independent congregation was established.

In Central Ohio

In 1896 a Madison County Amish community was started as a daughter colony of the Holmes County Amish.' By 1903 it was well established; its thrifty members engaged in the production of crops on the rich black soil, some of which was once swampy. The community retained the Amish traditions of intensive farming, belief in rural life as the good life, a peculiar style of dress, and mutual aid. There was little change until 1930.

However, as early as 1916 and 1917 a few members of this community united with the Oak Grove Church near West Liberty. At least one family, that of Ben D. Yoder, moved to West Liberty. Others continued to live in Madison County but to worship at Oak Grove. In 1924 S. E. Allgyer preached the first sermon for this group in a Madison County farm home. In 1926 a Sunday school was organized near Plain City in Madison County. S. E. Allgyer and N. E. Troyer of the West Liberty community conducted church services occasionally after the Sunday school was organized. In 1927 young people's meetings and a midweek Bible study were started. The following year saw the first Bible conference. In 1933 the group became an independent congregation with Abram Kauffman ordained as minister by S. E. Allgyer. During the same year Enos F. Hartzler conducted a Bible conference. The congregation be-

*Ten Church Leaders in the
Early Twentieth Century*



S. E. Allgyer



John Blosser



Ira J. Buekwalter



E. B. Freu



Elias L. Freu



O N Johns



John S. Mast



J. W. Roger



A. Steiner



M. S. Steiner

came known as the Sharon Church."

This Amish community was to see further changes and the formation of other church bodies derived from the original settlers. The community in time, due to the impact of technology, education, new forms of recreation, and other forces, came to divide into four different groups. There were the Old Order Amish who retained the historic traditions. There were the Beachy Amish who modified somewhat their church discipline on transportation and personal appearance. There were the Conservative Amish Mennonites who came to tolerate greater changes in language, dress, and church methods. Finally there were the members of the Sharon Mennonite Church who have come to assume cultural traits which make them quite similar to their rural Protestant neighbors.

The Plain City community, including the Sharon Church, has been studied by a social scientist who is a native of the community."

The study probes into the processes of change in the community and the effect on the religious life of the people. The study is convincing that here isolation from the influences of a mass society is not possible. (It goes without saying that complete isolation has not been possible in any other of the numerous Amish communities which have become a part of the Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference.)

The changes in the community out of which came the Sharon Mennonite Church are quite similar to the changes which have influenced virtually all the other communities in this study. The differences are in detail, in time, and in rate of change but not in direction taken, since the changes themselves and the forces producing them are essentially the same. In the Plain City community, as elsewhere, the resistance to change in the religious life of the Amish was at conflict with the necessity or desire for change in the economic life.

The changes in the larger society (modern inventions and applied technology) sharpened the conflict for the Amish. The Amish could no longer compete with their neighbors who used the new inventions and machinery such as automobiles, electricity, and tractors. Slowly changes took place among the Amish but not to everyone's satisfaction. Some favored more innovations than did others and were willing to form a new congregation that permitted them. For these persons the German language was no longer sacred. The larger society's values in education, recreation, homelife, and occupation became more and more accepted by a part of the Amish community and, having decided to form a new religious life, this group then sought to affiliate with a Mennonite body or with some other Amish body that had also changed.

That new patterns are not accepted by everyone to the same degree is seen in the following statement from the study: "From a community one hundred per cent Old Order Amish in 1926 has developed a community with a church affiliation of 26.7 per cent Old Order, 20.8 per cent in the two Beachy churches, 25.8 per cent in the two Conservative Churches, and 26.7 per cent in the Mennonite Church."

The future of this community and others similar to it will bear watching as technology grows, as urban areas develop, as family life changes, and as religious and spiritual values are then retained or modified in the process.

In an Urban Setting

The Mennonite church at Canton, Ohio (known through the nineteenth century as the Rowland Church), had declined by the end of the century for several reasons. Loss of leadership appears to be one reason, together with the lack of a teaching program.

One historian says that "probably most powerful of all, the Rowland Church was taken in by a growing city and in this way rural

Mennonites were overwhelmed by an urban tide."

In 1904 the Eastern A. M. Conference joined with the Ohio Mennonite Conference to establish a new mission in Canton. J. A. Liechty was appointed to be in charge of the venture which in 1909 became one of the city mission projects of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in Elkhart, Indiana. In 1917 a new meetinghouse was erected on the site of the old one.

Superintendents of the Canton Mission were: J. A. Liechty, 1904-6; P. R. Lantz, 1906-12; George M. Hostetler, 1912-14; C. K. Brenneman, 1914-19; M. E. Troyer, 1919-23; O. N. Johns, 1923-26; C. C. King, 1926-27; E. A. Shank, 1927-31; M. C. Lehman, June to August, 1931; William G. Detweiler, 1931-38; J. J. Hostetler, 1938-52 (Edwin Alderfer served in 1945-46 during Hostetler's leave of absence); Don McCammon, May to September, 1952; and Allen Ebersole, 1952-57.

Ordinations taking place at the Canton Church include: P. R. Lantz, 1907; Enos F. Hartzler, 1910; Otis N. Johns, 1923; E. A. Shank, 1928; William G. Detweiler, 1933; J. J. Hostetler, 1939; D. W. Miller (Deacon), 1941; and Allen B. Ebersole (Bishop), 1953."

The church is now known as the First Mennonite Church of Canton.

Another congregation to be started as a mission outpost is the Berlin Mennonite Church which dates from 1917. Fred Mast of the nearby Martin's Creek Church and Samuel Miller from the nearby Walnut Creek Church were among those who promoted this outreach. Together with B. J. Yoder and Henry Schnell they planted a congregation in the little town of Berlin, some six miles east of Millersburg, the county seat of Holmes County. A building was remodeled to serve as a church edifice, with the first worship service taking place in it on March 3, 1918."

Thus the various churches continued to transplant and grow in different environments for a number of reasons-economic and evangelistic-and a combination of both.