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Autumn
**PENNSYLVANIA
FOLKLIFE**
1996



THE MENNONITES

Contributors

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Relief workers under the auspices of the Mennonite Central Committee in the Netherlands after World War II. (Courtesy of the Mennonite Historical Library, Harleysville, Pa.)

THE MENNONITES OF PENNSYLVANIA: A House Divided

by Jean-Paul Benowitz



Joseph and Katie Derstine Hackman and their family (Franconia-Souderton, Pa.) in a time when regulated dress was a sign of not being “conformed to this world.” (Unless

otherwise noted, all photographs courtesy of the Mennonite Historical Library, Harleysville, Pa.)

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.¹

These words, written by the Apostle Paul to his friends in Rome nearly two thousand years ago, have served as the impetus for the Anabaptist movement, as the engine for Mennonite development, and as the foundation for most Mennonite beliefs and practices.² The Anabaptist movement was initiated by the heirs of the Swiss aristocracy, young men educated in the best universities of the day where they were trained by Christian humanist scholars to search the ancient scriptures in order to discover the original intentions for God’s Kingdom—the church. Their rejection of the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformed churches was the result, then, of their education and their spiritual convictions.³ This process of renewing and transforming the mind would be applied to the Anabaptist dilemma of theological acculturation in post-persecution Europe; would define the Mennonite church in colonial America; would be employed to resist forms of civil religion in the 19th century; and would serve as a guide for Mennonite involvement with the “worldly” society around

them in the 20th century.

The principle of not being “conformed to this world,” originally a matter of theology defined by discipleship, community, and nonresistance,⁴ eventually was transformed into a preoccupation with lifestyle issues, particularly in regard to dress.⁵ Nonconformity remains the central focus of their theology and culture as Mennonites search for a distinct identity while embracing the modern world. Differing interpretations of Anabaptist theology and the principles of nonconformity are the result of believers—individually and corporately—seeking to “prove what is . . . the perfect will of God.”⁶ It is this seeking which contributed to the numerous divisions within the Anabaptist movement in Europe; to the establishment of various sects; and to the ongoing schismatic nature of the Mennonite Church.⁷

Attempts to understand what God’s will is—and the best way to execute it—are the source, then, of never-ending conflict, and nowhere has the drama of Mennonite conflict been played out as it has in Pennsylvania. Throughout their denominational history, Pennsylvania Mennonites have been embroiled in controversy over the definition of nonconformity. As a result, the church has divided again and again as they have sought to redefine and reinvent themselves.

Contributing to the problem is the fact that Pennsylvania Mennonites are originally from two different lines—the Dutch Mennonites and the Swiss-German Mennonites—with each group having its own unique experiences of persecution, of defining the Anabaptist church, and of relating to the larger society in which they lived.⁸

THE ORIGINS OF ANABAPTISM

Unlike the Italian humanist scholars who reached back to the classical age for models of sophisticated secular life, Christian humanists of the 15th century sought guides to a purer religion and identified in the ancient writings those ideas that would encourage spiritual reform. Applying the new linguistic and textual skills developed by southern European humanists, northern European humanists attempted to establish a more accurate Bible and thus restore Christianity.⁹ The learning and scholarship of one of these northerners, Desiderius Erasmus, won him acclaim throughout Europe as the “prince of Humanists.” His most widely read and entertaining work, *The Praise of Folly* (1509), argued that the time had come to cleanse the Church and society of selfishness, cruelty, hypocrisy, pride, and ignorance and to replace them with tolerance, honesty, wisdom, service, and love. Repelled by violence and disorder, Erasmus hoped that appeals to reason would bring about peaceful change. He spoke of the foolishness of war and war makers, of the peculiar conceits of individualism and nationalism, and criticized hairsplitting theologians, vain and ignorant monks, and power-loving prelates. He also ridiculed the excesses of the popular cult of relics, the invocation of saints, and the purchase of indulgences.¹⁰

Ignoring Erasmus’s criticism of the development of nation states and war, in Switzerland a prominent member of the Zurich city council, Jakob Grebel, viewed the scholar’s ideas of church reform as a vehicle through which despotic kings and princes could gain control over the church in their respective territories and build state churches, as Martin Luther was advocating in Germany. Grebel disliked the fact that church properties were exempt from taxes, reasoning that his own taxes would be reduced if church holdings were shifted to private hands. So, needing a religious leader who was influenced by Erasmus but was keen on cooperation between church and state as well, he found such a candidate in Huldreich Zwingli, an ardent Swiss patriot who had absorbed the spirit of independent research and free speech. Chosen to be priest in the Gross-Münster at Zurich in 1519,¹¹ by 1523 Zwingli had left the Catholic Church and become a Protestant minister.

With careful guidance from the Zurich city council, Zwingli laid the foundation of a new church order in the Canton of Zurich. However, in this new order there was no abolition of the Mass or formal recognition of the Reformation, since he was simply authorized by the city council to continue the expository preaching of the New Testament. Zwingli hoped that an initial appeasement of the council would eventually lead to his being allowed to

introduce reforms such as modifying tithes legislation, abolishing the Mass, and creating an evangelical communion celebrated four times a year instead of daily. But as long as Jakob Grebel was a council member these concerns would not be addressed,¹² although during this time Zwingli did gather around him a circle of enthusiastic younger humanists, among whom was Conrad Grebel, Jakob’s estranged son.

Jakob Grebel had secured his political influence by marrying his daughters to sons of equally influential families throughout Europe, and he hoped his sons would continue his political achievements. The eldest, Andreas, died very young,¹³ but Conrad attended the best universities of the time in Basel, Vienna, and Paris. His education completed, Conrad Grebel returned to Zurich advocating a radical adherence to the views of Erasmus, particularly the ideas of a tolerant and honest church inspired by wisdom and characterized by service and love.¹⁴ Nonresistance was at the heart of his argument; a nonresistance among individuals and between nations.¹⁵ Frustrated by Zwingli’s close friendship with his father and by his cooperation with the city council, Conrad Grebel led a movement away from Zwingli, taking with him a number of the older man’s young humanist followers, including Felix Manz, Wilhelm Reublin, and Simon Stumpf.¹⁶

Here then was the issue: Should the state continue to dictate the faith, life, and worship of the church, or should pastors and the laity carry through the necessary reforms in church life according to their convictions? Jakob Grebel now realized how influential his son had become and how detrimental Conrad’s views would be for his own political career. Sensing a threat to the authority of the state, on January 21, 1525, the Zurich city council ordered Conrad Grebel, Manz, Reublin, and Stumpf to stop meeting for Bible study, which Zwingli viewed as the source of their radical ideas. The mandate also called for the immediate baptism of unbaptized infants as a sign of support and solidarity for the state church;¹⁷ those who refused to comply were threatened with exile. Although they had no specific program for introducing a church that would be independent of the state, Grebel, Manz, and Stumpf met immediately in defiance of the council’s decree.

Then Conrad Grebel decided that he would not only refuse to have his two-week-old daughter baptized as a symbol of his dissatisfaction with the church, but that he himself would be rebaptized as a symbol of making a voluntary choice based on his own free will and of his pledge to a new form of church. In turn, the others at the meeting baptized each other. All of this was done in the full realization that since the time of the Emperor Justinian (A.D. 529), the imperial law code decreed rebaptism a heresy punishable by death. Thus, those rebaptized (“Anabaptists”) were at once legally subject to condemnation and execution.¹⁸ But fearing neither Zwingli nor the city council, the Anabaptists traveled throughout Switzerland, recruiting people to their new cause and church. The response was remarkable, in spite of repeated arrests, fines,

and imprisonment. Conrad Grebel himself brought leadership to the new church between times of imprisonment and the constant need to elude the authorities. However, in July, 1526, shortly after his arrival in the Canton of Grisons, where he found sanctuary in the home of his eldest sister, Conrad Grebel died of the plague.

Meanwhile, in Zurich, Zwingli was slowly gaining support on the city council for reforms, beginning with the abolition of the Mass in May, 1526. He was then able to obtain and consolidate a pro-Reformation majority on the council, with the last pro-Catholic reaction in the city crushed in October, 1526, when Jakob Grebel was executed on the charge of having received illegal stipends from foreign rulers in the years between 1520 and 1522. Fearing that lesser penalties would be ineffective, in November, 1526, the council established the death penalty for participation in the Anabaptist movement. Zwingli gained constantly in political influence and in January of the following year executed Felix Manz, who became the first Anabaptist martyr.¹⁹ Zwingli's example was widely followed within Switzerland and beyond, but despite persecution and the application of the death penalty, Anabaptism had political and religious appeal to the peasants and to the middle class, both disturbed by the injustices of the era. But these followers, denying that infant baptism was baptism at all, objected to being called Anabaptists. Their real objection to the name was their refusal to be classed as heretics rather than as the true church. They wanted to be called the "Swiss Brethren" and to be recognized on the merits of their own faith, testimony, and doctrine. Accordingly, in February, 1527, in the Swiss town of Schleitheim, seven articles of faith—the Schleitheim Confession—were drafted primarily by Michael Sattler, a former priest.²⁰

As already indicated, the Anabaptist movement had spread beyond Switzerland, and it had particular appeal in the Netherlands, where it was met with fierce persecution²¹ and where would be found one of its most influential leaders, Menno Simons. Like many from the lower socio-economic stratum of European society, Simons had entered the Catholic priesthood as a way of gaining social mobility. Typical of his peers, he was neither interested in nor particularly gifted for the work he had chosen, but the economic rewards were indeed satisfying. While Simons was living near Leeuwarden, the capital of the Dutch province of Friesland, he learned of the impending public execution of one Sicke Freerks Snijder, for adult baptism. The spectacle, which both impressed and disturbed Simons, was the beginning of a long spiritual journey that would end with his denouncement of the Catholic Church.²² In 1536, after escaping from the parish at Witmarsum, his home community where he was now pastor, Simons found sanctuary at the home of Anabaptist preacher Obbe Philips. He became an "Obbenite" following his baptism by Philips.²³

Due to severe persecution, especially in the Netherlands, many Anabaptists believed that Christ was going to relieve them of their suffering by returning to earth and establishing a new kingdom. Several in the movement were

convinced this "New Jerusalem" would come to Münster and Amsterdam, and in an attempt to speed that coming seized the German city in 1534. The civil and religious authorities in the surrounding areas overthrew the Münsterites the following year, and in the aftermath Philips (who had been one of those who believed it was the church's responsibility to help Christ usher in the new millennium) returned to the state church, leaving Menno Simons to lead the various Anabaptist groups. In 1545, Countess Anna of East Friesland distinguished the followers of Simons by calling them "Mennist," and they were eventually known as Mennonites.²⁴

Despite many attempts to distinguish themselves from the Münsterites, the events in that city characterized the Anabaptists in the collective imagination of their persecutors. Thus, wherever the movement spread—northern Italy, Austria, Moravia, France—persecution followed, and of course it continued in Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands as well. Then, in 1579, eighteen years after the death of Menno Simons, a period of toleration for Mennonites began in the Netherlands. In large part Dutch Mennonites were an urban community, and during this period they remained in the cities and became wealthy and influential.²⁵ Still, they maintained a separate lifestyle, and even after the eschatological belief was abandoned observed a plain style of living, including plain dress, houses, furniture, and food, although they never practiced asceticism; never prohibiting, for example, the use of alcoholic beverages.²⁶ But after Mennonite congregations became established and organized, differences arose between those who wanted to strictly maintain the old style of plainness, and those who regarded these matters as insignificant and wanted to abandon such regulations. The Mennonites of Friesland thought the dress of Flemish Mennonites too worldly, while the Flemish community accused the Frisians of paying too much attention to their houses and furniture. In 1566-67, a schism occurred between the two communities.

Fearing that separation over matters of nonconformity might weaken the church, an eighteen-article agreement was drawn up in the Dutch town of Dort in 1632. Known as the Dordrecht Confession of Faith, this document would both unite and divide Mennonites, and would be retained until the 20th century as their only confession of faith.²⁷ The issues involving nonconformity were dealt with at the Frisian Conference of North Holland which drew up twelve articles in 1639. Enlarged in 1697, these resolutions merely gave advice, they were not prohibitions. However, in 1659, the Groningen Old Flemish group passed a resolution at their conference in Loppersum making a number of restrictions and forbidding certain things; these regulations were strictly enforced for about a century, and many were banned for breaking the precepts and inclining to unseemly luxury in dress and furnishings. Eventually nonconformity was applied to such issues as marriage (allowed only between church members), holding political office, and business practices.²⁸ And speaking of business, it was for economic



The restored home (1740s) in Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County, Pa., of minister Dielman Kolb.

advancement, rather than because of religious persecution, that the first Mennonites came to America. A French Jesuit traveler, Father Jacques, reported in a letter dated 1643 that Dutch Mennonites were living in the Manhattan settlement of New Netherlands. Also, in a document dated 1657, Mennonites are listed among the settlers of Gravesend, Long Island.²⁹

MENNONITE EMIGRATION TO PENNSYLVANIA

In an attempt to escape the Anabaptist stigma, many Mennonites heeded the call of Quaker missionaries who had established churches in Holland and along the German Rhine, particularly at Crefeld and Kriegsheim in the Palatinate. They found they had much in common with the Society of Friends: pacifism; the refusal to swear oaths; persecution by the government; and a community based on equality with unprecedented status accorded to women. (Because of their literacy and the permission granted them to preach, one third of Anabaptist martyrs were women.³⁰) As he did to all those religious groups along the Rhine oppressed by their various governments, William Penn issued a cordial invitation to his new colony to the Mennonites, offering them complete civil and religious toleration.³¹ Had the Mennonites been invited to Rhode Island by founder Roger Williams, who had been greatly influenced by the Anabaptist tradition of the civil government not being involved in religious matters, the relation-

ship between church and state would have satisfied them. The Quakers, on the other hand, believed that a holy commonwealth required cooperation between church and state.³²

Twelve Quaker families and one Mennonite family from Crefeld arrived in Pennsylvania on October 6, 1683, and established a community north of Philadelphia called Germantown. In 1708, the first Mennonite settlement was established by Matthias Van Bebber along the Skippack Creek, fifteen miles northwest of Germantown in what is now Montgomery County. In the following year, Christian Herr settled sixty miles west of Philadelphia in the Pequea and Conestoga Valleys in present-day Lancaster County. Eventually, Mennonites established communities along the Juniata River in south-central Franklin County and near the headwaters of the Ohio River in Somerset and Westmoreland Counties.³³

In 1717, a large emigration movement was underway in the Palatinate, with the majority of families settling in Lancaster County. Mennonites in the Palatinate were not among the groups guaranteed religious liberty by the Treaty of Westphalia which ended the Thirty Years' War in 1648. Rather, they had to pay an extra tax in the form of protection money; their young men could not join craft guilds and so could not learn a trade; they were not allowed to live in cities without the consent of the authorities; and they were not allowed to be buried in public cemeteries. Poor and thus without sufficient resources to pay for passage

to America, these Mennonites were entirely dependent on financial assistance from their Dutch brethren who enjoyed both religious toleration and enormous financial success throughout the Netherlands and colonial America.³⁴ These Dutch Mennonites organized the Commission for Foreign Needs which greatly aided the emigration movement. Often the Dutch Commission could only afford to send Mennonites to England where they lived in refugee camps outside London. Some were able to bargain with ship captains for free passage, in return for which the captain might sell their services at auction upon arrival in Philadelphia.³⁵

No matter what measures were necessary to secure passage to Pennsylvania, once established in the new colony Mennonites from the Palatinate hoped to find asylum from oppressive governments and enjoy religious autonomy. Upon their arrival, however, they encountered new forms of discrimination and conflict, for this period of Mennonite immigration coincided with William Penn's decline in power, his return to England in 1701, and his death there in 1718. His family, now Anglicans, governed Pennsylvania, and they thought it wise to have the pacifist Mennonites receive the best limestone lands while the Scotch-Irish, long experienced in border warfare, were expected to gravitate toward the frontier where land was cheaper and where there were fewer social restrictions. The Penns thought the Scotch-Irish could best bear the brunt of possible Native American resistance.

This policy created friction, particularly between the Mennonites and the Presbyterians from Northern Ireland who established Donegal and Paxton Townships in present-day Dauphin County. The Scotch-Irish found the placidity and exclusiveness of the Germans (Mennonites did not become naturalized under the British Crown until 1729³⁶) extremely irritating, but the antagonism between the Mennonites and their British neighbors went deeper than mere racial antipathy. It was part of the struggle for control of the Pennsylvania Assembly which runs through the history of the province; it was the struggle between east and west; between radical and conservative; between those with property and those without; and between frontier and older communities. It was the same conflict between east and west which characterized the history of the United States until the frontier disappeared.³⁷

In 1725, realizing that the Dutch Mennonites in the communities closer to Philadelphia were gaining more respect than they, the Swiss-German Mennonites agreed to accept the Dutch Dordrecht Confession of Faith, which was translated into English in order to gain understanding from their British neighbors. Beginning in 1740, both Mennonite groups held semiannual meetings of all ordained members, organizing themselves as the Franconia and Lancaster Conferences respectively.³⁸ Attempting to convince their Scotch-Irish neighbors that they were not wealthy, Lancaster Conference Mennonites held to a strict interpretation of nonconformity and simplicity of lifestyle. For example, in 1742 Hans Tschantz called a conference to reprimand Martin Mylin for having built a large and

extravagant sandstone house. Refusing to meet in it, the ministry gathered in a log cabin next door and admonished Mylin to hold to simplicity and allay any undue suspicions among his British neighbors concerning Mennonite prosperity.³⁹

During these difficult times the Mennonites began to fear, and with reason, that the principle of nonresistance would be put to the test. Consequently, in 1742, Christian Sauer of the Franconia Conference issued the first American edition of the 1564 European Mennonite hymn book, the *Ausbund*; it contained inspiring tales of the Anabaptist martyrs in hymn form. This edition also included an appendix of forty-six pages telling the story of the persecution of the Anabaptists in Switzerland from 1635 to 1645. Another Mennonite work, *Gulden Apfel in Silbernen Schalen*, published in 1745 at Ephrata, contained stirring accounts of early Mennonite martyrs and their testimonies.⁴⁰ But the chief source of information about the martyred ancestors of the Pennsylvania Mennonites was *Het Bloedig Tooneel of Martelaers Spiegel der Doops Gesinde of Weeloose Christenen*, by Tieleman Van Braght, published in Holland in 1660. Known in America as the *Martyrs Mirror*, there was hardly a Mennonite family in Pennsylvania which did not have an ancestor whose story appeared in it. In 1748 it was printed by the German Seventh-Day Baptist Cloister at Ephrata, under the supervision of the Lancaster Conference. The large folio volume of 1,048 pages was the largest book published in the colonies prior to the Revolution, and its wide dissemination would be a most effective means of strengthening the principle of nonresistance among Pennsylvania Mennonites.⁴¹

That principle was tolerated in Pennsylvania as long as the Quakers retained control of the political machinery. And while they did, Mennonites took little interest in politics. They depended on the Quakers and the Schwenkfelders (a plain religious sect with its roots in Silesia) to take an active part in the political process and represent their position on nonresistance. That position included, in addition to pacifism, the refusal to sue at law for the protection of property and the payment of taxes as a matter of duty. All this would change in 1745, when the Quakers lost control of the Pennsylvania Assembly and the peaceful policy inaugurated by William Penn was ended.⁴² The events which followed plunged the Mennonites into political participation, and that participation became a point of contention within congregations from that point forward.

There were three events which convinced Mennonites that they had to become politically active in order to help elect Quakers to the Assembly: In 1755, provoked by violent settlers on the frontier, Native Americans killed settlers living in Shamokin (thirteen Mennonites were among them); the Assembly approved participation in the Seven Years' War, during which the principle of nonresistance among Mennonites was truly tested; and, in 1763, a militant group of Scotch-Irish residents of Donegal Township known as the Paxton Boys massacred peaceful Conestoga Native



Voice of Youth Chorus, Hiram Hershey, director, performing at the Souderton Mennonite Meetinghouse in the early

1950s; note the plain furnishings.

Americans. (Two were rescued by Mennonites and lived the rest of their lives on a Mennonite farm.⁴³)

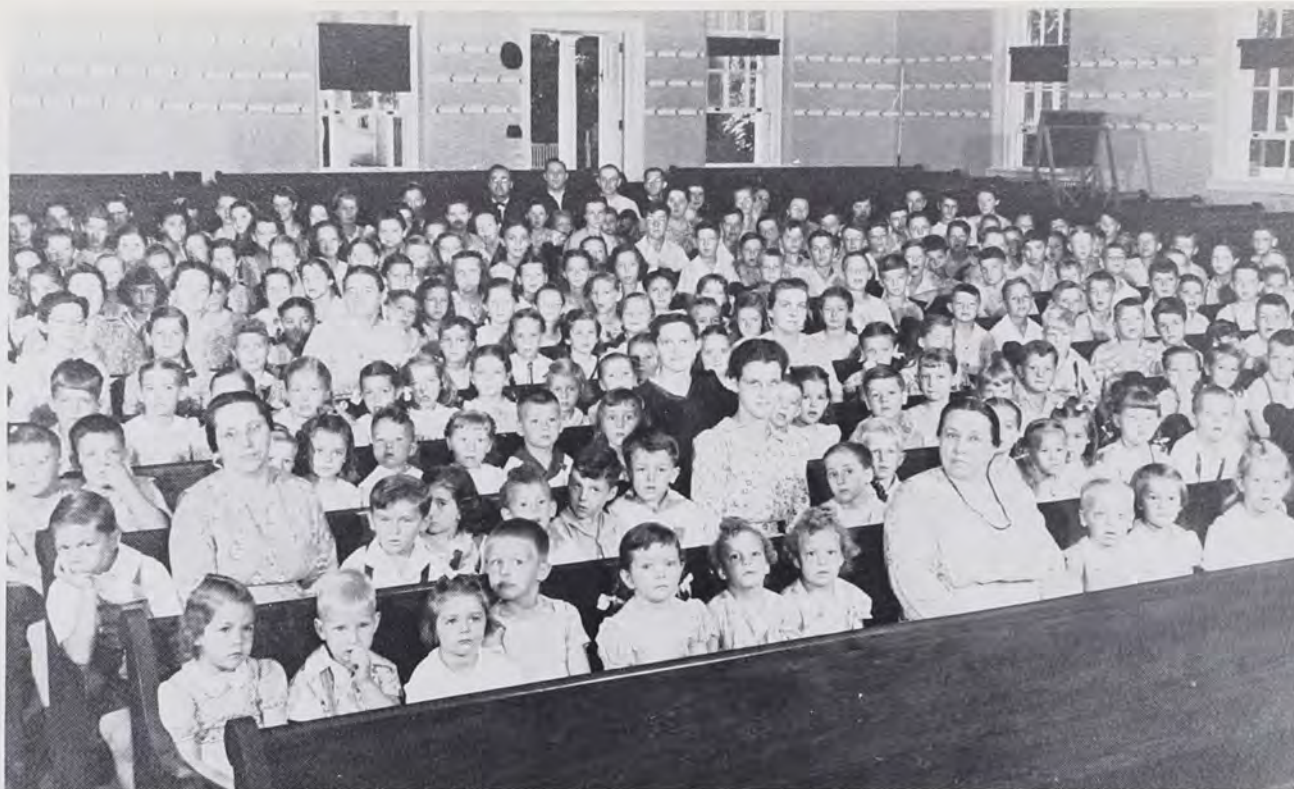
In light of these events, Mennonites voted solidly and steadily for Quaker candidates. The Assembly, which had promoted the Seven Years' War, was now encouraging a revolution. Mennonites feared that a successful revolution might take away the privileges they enjoyed under the British Crown, and as pacifists they would vote for a course that would not lead to war. The impetus toward revolution they identified as a movement among the distrusted, radical, frontier element which had provoked the Native Americans and which criticized Mennonites for their economic and cultural independence.⁴⁴

In 1775, Mennonites addressed a statement to the Pennsylvania Assembly which explained that they would not participate in the Revolution and would work for the "preservation of men's lives." (In 1783, Mennonites in Lancaster were accused of treason for feeding British soldiers.⁴⁵) During the war, Mennonites were exempted from military service upon the payment of a fee, and this created further antagonism between them and the Scotch-Irish. The community viewed nonresistance not as a matter of conscience, but as a privilege based on social and economic status.⁴⁶ Among Mennonites themselves, some argued that paying a fine or a special tax for support of the war was as inconsistent as enlisting in the army for actual service; others viewed such payments as being in accordance with their nonresistant principles and their tradition of paying taxes out of respect for the government. It was left to individuals, then, to deal with the problem according to their own consciences, and some did serve as teamsters, pay special taxes, or hire substitutes to fight in their place. But during the Revolution Mennonites did

refuse to swear an oath of allegiance to the colonies and therefore lost the right to vote. They regained that right after the war and then exercised it consistently.⁴⁷

CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

By 1777, America was well into the Revolution and Mennonites had been in the colonies for at least 134 years. In all this time there had been almost no attempts by them to explore the faiths of other religious groups. One Mennonite bishop by the name of Boehm, from the Byerland congregation of the Lancaster Conference, decided to do just that and then introduce new ideas to his faith community. He was silenced in 1777, when after ten years of such explorations he discovered a concept foreign to Mennonites—the idea of a "conversion experience." Boehm believed that he had recognized the point at which he was "saved," and when he spoke of the experience in a sermon it was the last the church would hear of him. Mennonites maintained that such discussions were uncouth emotional exhibitions, arguing that moral goodness was cultivated by a gradual process of character building in which individuals learned to model their behavior after that of Jesus, rather than by a sudden emotional conversion. Boehm left the Lancaster Conference and formed a new church called the United Brethren (later, the United Methodist).⁴⁸ In 1778, the Franconia Conference decided to excommunicate Bishop Christian Funk when he insisted on the universal payment of a special tax as an appropriate response to participation in the Revolution, although the Conference had previously decided to make no such demands. In response, fifty-two of his followers, later known as "Funkites," formed an



The first summer Bible school held in the Souderton Mennonite Meetinghouse in 1944.

independent congregation which remained in existence until 1850.⁴⁹

After the Revolution two works would be published in an attempt to unite Mennonites in their understanding of what it meant “not to be conformed” to the new nation in which they lived. Christian Burkholder, pastor of the Groffdale congregation (Lancaster Conference), published *Christian Spiritual Conversation in Saving Faith* in 1792; and in 1794 the German translation of Menno Simons’ *Fundamentbuch* was also published in Lancaster. Both espoused a doctrine that made the line between the worldly and the peaceful kingdoms bold and distinct, and this was both a strength and a weakness. The former because common people could easily grasp such unambiguous doctrine and so avoid being swept along by nationalism and similar idolatries; the latter because doctrine was made not only simple, but simplistic.⁵⁰ Neither work spoke directly to the real dilemma—trying to live in both realms—and both facilitated many schisms within the church.

One Mennonite leader who wanted a more specific definition of what it meant to be “in the world but not of it” was Francis Herr, excommunicated by the West Lampeter congregation (Lancaster Conference) in 1798. Herr believed that Mennonites were not following the beliefs and practices of Menno Simons and that church leaders were lax in disciplining members who had become careless in their religious life and social practices, and who had become patriots of the new nation. Francis Herr had a small following until he died in 1810; in 1812 that congregation called on his son, John Herr, to be their new pastor. Then, one of the members decided it was necessary to repeat the actions of the original Anabaptists, so Abraham Landis baptized John Herr, who in turn baptized him. This new group called itself the Mennonites, the only “true”

Mennonite church. However, in order to distinguish them from the old church, others sometimes called them “New” Mennonites, or occasionally “Herrites,” and later “Reformed Mennonites” which finally became their official name.⁵¹

In the Franconia Conference, there was a different response to the question of an individual’s relationship to civil government. Since the 16th century a significant segment of Dutch Anabaptists had permitted their members to hold local political offices. Menno Simons himself seemed less certain about nonparticipation in the magistracy.⁵² So, for Abraham O. Fretz there was no violation of a two-realm theology when he ran for the office of county commissioner in 1837 and won over the Democrat by a mere twenty-five votes. (Democrats argued that many of the votes were cast by Negroes, and said that was an invasion of a “sacred right” of whites; as a result the state constitution was changed to say that “every white freeman” rather than “every freeman” had the right to vote.⁵³)

As a result of this episode, a Lancaster Conference bishop, Jacob Stauffer, complained that there were “few Brethren in the so-called Mennonite Church” who had not participated in elections or served on juries. Many, he said, even deluded themselves into thinking that voting was a high and solemn duty, a right to be exercised lest they lose the privilege.⁵⁴ Another Lancaster Conference minister complained that men in his congregation went out and helped the world elect its officials, with some even going to political rallies to sell “oats, cookies, and beer.”⁵⁵ In response, Jacob Stauffer criticized Mennonites for participating in political elections, singing schools, and camp meetings; all signs, he said, of assimilating with “worldly churches.”⁵⁶ Excommunicated by the Lancaster Conference in 1845, Stauffer was asked by fifty supporters to organize

a new church. Granted the Pike Meetinghouse (south of Hinkletown) by the Conference, this group was known as the "Pike" Mennonites.⁵⁷ In 1855, in his *Eine Chronik Oder Geshicht-Buchlein Von Der Sogenannten Mennonisten Gemeinde (A Chronicle or History Booklet about the So-Called Mennonite Church)*, Stauffer would fill in the specifics of nonconformity that Simons' and Burkholder's works had evaded. But his reactionary behavior and strict interpretation of excommunication discouraged people from joining the Pike Church.⁵⁸

While the Lancaster Conference excommunicated Stauffer because they thought him too conservative, in 1847 the Franconia Conference excommunicated John H. Oberholtzer and fifteen other ministers because they were considered too liberal. The group insisted on a written constitution for the Conference and also wanted to discontinue the wearing of the collarless ministerial coat; keep minutes of meetings; publish a catechism; freely associate with other denominations; and engage in Sunday school and mission work. In October of that year they formed the East Pennsylvania Conference of Mennonites and, in 1860, organized as the General Conference Mennonite Church of North America.⁵⁹

When several members of the Bowmansville district brought a lawsuit opposing the state's introduction of compulsory public education in 1848, the Lancaster Conference excommunicated them, charging that it was against the Dordrecht Confession for Mennonites to sue at law. These excommunicated members formed their own congregation and joined Oberholtzer's East Pennsylvania Conference in 1852.⁶⁰ The leaders of that conference had excommunicated Abraham Hunsicker and pastor Henry Hunsicker the year before because the Hunsickers were critical of the evangelical nature the church was assuming. Once again Mennonites were challenging the concept of a conversion experience. Abraham Hunsicker wrote: "Being a progressive creature man must rise gradually . . . and seek to ameliorate and improve the condition of man."⁶¹ The Hunsickers established a new church (the Trinity Church Society) and six years later (1857) excommunicated member William Gehman because he favored mid-week prayer meetings. Twenty-three members supported Gehman and formed the Evangelical Mennonites; they eventually merged with similar groups in Ohio, Indiana, and Ontario, Canada, to form the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.⁶²

Abraham Hunsicker and his family were influential in Whig politics, and while some (such as John Oberholtzer, for example) did not approve, such an affiliation was by no means unusual. From the beginning of Mennonite political involvement, members of the Lancaster Conference, who resided in the County's wealthiest townships where they were the majority, voted Federalist and then Whig. When, in the 1850s, the fast-rising Republican Party absorbed the Whigs, Mennonites switched to the new group.⁶³ Mennonite political support enabled Thaddeus Stevens, who would become one of the nation's most

influential politicians, to win control of the Whig (and later, Republican) party in Lancaster County, and from this base he went to Washington as a congressman. Just as they had supported the Quaker political machine in colonial America in order that their own interests might be represented, Mennonites now supported Stevens throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction.⁶⁴

Mennonite support was crucial to Stevens' reelection, and he in turn represented their interests on the Federal level. When the first national draft law (1863) allowed any man able to hire a substitute or pay a \$300 commutation to be exempt from military service, the Lancaster Conference lobbied Stevens to have these provisions apply only to conscientious objectors. Democrats argued that the provisions made the draft a rich man's law since working people could not afford to pay a commutation fee. Therefore, in mid-1864, an amendment was passed which eliminated the option of the commutation for most people—Stevens won a fight in Congress to keep it for conscientious objectors. The Mennonites were well pleased with their "leader," while their neighbors went off to fight the Civil War.⁶⁵

Some young men reared in the Mennonite church but not yet baptized did go off to fight,⁶⁶ however, and Mennonite leaders concluded this was because of the lack of specific church rules. Thus, thirty-six years after excommunicating Jacob Stauffer for advocating the adoption of rules, the Lancaster Conference issued *Rules and Discipline* in 1881. It said that members could hold political office and vote, but advised them not to participate in poll raising, mass meetings, or conventions, or to engage in electioneering for office. A member could serve on a jury except in criminal cases; could hold the office of bank director; could serve as an officer of a mutual fire insurance company which did not use force; and could hold a liquor license but only to sell it for medicine. Members were allowed to have lightning rods and building insurance, but could not have matrimonial insurance or life insurance; there was also a prohibition against belonging to a secret society.⁶⁷

The selling of liquor only for medicinal purposes was related to another political problem, that of prohibition, which Mennonites did not automatically support. In the Mennonite tradition there had never been any mandate forbidding the use of alcohol or tobacco.⁶⁸ (In Burkholder's *Christian Spiritual Conversion In Saving Faith*, the only admonition concerning alcohol was to use it in moderation to prevent drunkenness.⁶⁹) The Franconia Conference advised members against joining temperance societies or taking a temperance pledge, since temperance promoters often asked for a personal commitment not to drink, a practice associated with the detested revivalists who closed services with altar calls. Franconia Mennonites did not want temperance societies to displace church loyalty and identity.⁷⁰

So, when Pennsylvania put the prohibition question to a statewide referendum in 1889, it was a difficult program

for them to endorse. After all, there were Mennonites like Abraham Oberholtzer from Scottdale who had become wealthy from his distillery.⁷¹ The progressive midwestern Mennonites published a newspaper, *The Herald of Truth*, which Pennsylvania Mennonites read but were critical of because of its often liberal agenda and its cooperation with non-Mennonite churches. Making it quite clear that they wanted a “yes” vote for prohibition, the *Herald’s* editors said that it was a “well-known fact” that most Pennsylvania Mennonites voted if they were eligible.⁷² Pennsylvania Mennonites themselves were skeptical because prohibition had grown out of a number of other reforms ranging from health food crusades to antislavery. The Lancaster Conference advised any member unable to vote for the measure to at least not vote against it.⁷³

Prohibition and the temperance movement were linked with a series of issues considered by many Mennonites to be detrimental to the church. In the 1890s, some young Mennonite “progressives” worked with Presbyterians, Methodists, United Brethren, and others to arrange and attend temperance lectures. In Lancaster County two activists who did so were Isaac Hershey and Jacob Ressler. Within several years the latter would lead the Lancaster Conference’s first missionary team to India.⁷⁴ Participation in temperance work, then, meant support of interdenominational work which was linked with the Sunday school which was associated with missions; all were considered by many as sure vehicles for compromising Mennonite identity.⁷⁵ In anticipation of Sunday schools being an opportunity for acculturation, the *Rules and Discipline* allowed them as long they did not include picnics, celebrations, festivals, or fairs. And, there could only be a Sunday school library when “Conference chooses brethren to write books or to select books which are entirely free of novel matter.”⁷⁶ The Sunday school, among other issues, would cause the most significant of Mennonite schisms.

That schism occurred on October 6, 1893, during the fall session of the Lancaster Conference when Bishop Jonas Martin of the Weaverland district was stripped of his ministry and excommunicated. The charges were: that contrary to the authority of the Conference, Bishop Martin had opposed a legal charter the Kauffman congregation had taken out to help govern its property; that he had also refused to accept a Conference decision allowing ordained men to marry couples not yet members of the church; and that his attitudes and actions concerning the Sunday school were not appropriate.⁷⁷ Following his expulsion, Bishop Martin held services for his followers at which time he baptized twenty-two new members. Then services were held at the Weaverland meetinghouse beginning October 23, the off-Sunday in the pattern of every-other-Sunday services.⁷⁸ Thus was the Old Order Mennonite Church established in Pennsylvania; eventually, one third of the Lancaster Conference would leave and join the Old Order.⁷⁹ Unlike the Lancaster Conference, it would reject the Sunday school and missions; would maintain strict nonconformity in plain dress and lifestyle; and when building meeting-

houses would resist architectural changes that imitated Protestant patterns. Most importantly, in the 20th century the Old Order would remain Biblicist and not compromise Mennonite theology for fundamentalism or evangelicalism, and it would also maintain a strong position on nonresistance.⁸⁰

* * *

Two years later, after enough of the dust from this dramatic division had settled, 150 Lancaster Conference Mennonites created a mission organization, moving cautiously so as not to overstep the limits set by their bishops. Bearing in mind that the Conference had already accepted the Sunday school, the name chosen—“Mennonite Sunday School Mission”—was a clever one, implying as it did that more than mission work was intended. This organization was soon operating at least six Sunday schools in rural and urban areas of the County; giving relief to the poor in a nearby mining community; bringing “Fresh Air” children from New York City for stays in the country; and organizing a women’s sewing circle in the Paradise congregation.⁸¹

But the Lancaster Conference found its greatest challenge among the Negroes in Welsh Mountain, a community of former iron forge laborers living on the Conestoga River in Caernarvon Township. Welsh Mountain residents had an undeserved reputation for begging and stealing and dissolute living. The Mennonite strategy was one of philanthropic uplift; they started an industrial mission aimed at teaching cleanliness, a work ethic, management skills, and social responsibility. Their means were many and various, from starting a shirt factory, to giving families a pig to raise, to establishing a school.⁸² As a 1906 mission report would say: “The Welsh Mountain Mission is an industrial rather than a religious institution.” Mennonites were willing to help their Negro neighbors, but they did not accept them into their congregations. Religious instruction was left entirely to ordained Negro Methodists and Presbyterians.⁸³

PENNSYLVANIA MENNONITES IN THE 20TH CENTURY

In January, 1899, a little band of Mennonites gathered on the front lawn at the home in Millersville of their pastor, A.D. Wenger, to bid him farewell as he set out on a journey around the world that would last almost fourteen months. When he returned, Wenger recorded his experiences and observations in a book entitled, *Six Months in Bible Lands and Around the World in Fourteen Months*, published in 1902. Going door to door throughout the Lancaster and Franconia Conferences, Wenger sold his book, told his stories, and introduced a brand new idea for church development—revival meetings.⁸⁴ That same year (1902), the Mennonite Publishing House (now located in Scottdale but with its origins in Elkhart, Indiana) published a new hymnal,



In 1938 Elsie Smith was fitted with a new bonnet by Ellen Moyer Gross of Blooming Glen, Bucks County, Pa.



Revivalist A.D. Wenger and Anna May Lehman on their wedding day in 1990; earlier that year Wenger had returned from a fourteen-month trip around the world. (Photograph: Eastern Mennonite College)

The Church and Sunday School Hymnal with Supplement, to replace the 1804 *Gesangbuch*, which had replaced the 1654 *Ausbund*. Many of the hymns in the new book were borrowed from the evangelical Protestant churches of the time, making it the perfect tool to be used at Wenger's revival meetings which were being held annually or biennially in each congregation by 1905.⁸⁵

These revival meetings not only awakened young people to religious concerns, they persuaded young and old to be more earnest about simplicity of lifestyle. Mennonite evangelists turned with intensity to the Bible, to its general admonitions concerning nonconformity, and to specific injunctions such as the Apostle Paul's teaching (I Corinthians 11) that women should cover their heads. Subtle differences developed in the dress code as members tested the limits set by the bishops. Prayer coverings varied in size, type of fabric, and length and color of ribbons and whether or not those ribbons (commonly called "strings") should hang loose or be tied. It was resolved in the 1911 fall session of the Franconia Conference that "sisters wearing hats are required to dispense with them before spring communion and instead wear the plain protection covering." The "covering" referred to was the Quaker-style bonnet, worn in addition to the prayer covering. Women also had to wear a "cape dress" all the time, but men only had to wear the collarless ("plain") coat during church services and when doing church work.⁸⁶

These "plain" Mennonites expanded their Sunday school and missions programs to promote their new form of nonconformity among the poor, whom they sought to help.

The Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities replaced the Mennonite Sunday School Mission in 1914 and promoted their agenda of simplicity in living by enforcing nonconformity programs at previously established welfare institutions: the Mennonite Home in Lancaster (1905); the Mennonite Children's Home in Millersville (1911); and the Eastern Mennonite Home in Souderton (1916).⁸⁷ Their regulated dress identified Lancaster, Franconia, and Old Order Mennonites as separate not only from the non-Mennonite world, but also from the older traditionalism on the one side and the more liberal General Conference Mennonites on the other.

However, by 1917 the War Department did not care about such differences; their view was that all Mennonites were conscientious objectors and all were a problem. World War I would force Mennonites to put aside their differences to preserve their lives and their churches.⁸⁸ When it began, Pennsylvania Mennonites took a firm stand against *all* forms of military service. They paid a high price: 503 conscientious objectors were court-martialed and sentenced during World War I; 138 of the 360 religious objectors were Mennonites. Prison sentences ranged from a year or less to life; there were seventeen death sentences. Within a few months after the end of the war, most had received a Presidential pardon.⁸⁹ In the last year of the war and immediately following (1917-19), pardon was granted only



Old Order Mennonites of the Groffdale Conference, 1996. (Photograph courtesy of the author)

so that conscientious objectors could provide relief and reconstruction work abroad. (As a result of this exposure to postwar Europe, the Mennonite Central Committee was created in 1920 to operate a famine-relief program among Mennonites in Russia.) Conscientious objectors were also granted farm furloughs and there were proposals near the end of the war to assign them to land-reclamation projects as well as to agricultural and educational services.⁹⁰ During this time the government used every conceivable means to convince Mennonites to give up their convictions, but with few exceptions they refused to compromise their consciences.⁹¹

But Pennsylvania Mennonites did begin to compromise their theology at this time, as cooperation among Mennonite conferences and exposure to Christians of other denominations began to influence them. In the postwar period, Mennonites would be keenly interested in fundamentalism, a movement that reached its height within American theological circles in the years between 1925 and 1930. Exposure to educated and progressive Mennonites, especially from the west, led to a greater separation between the conservative and liberal factions of the Mennonite Church.

In part because of increasing distaste for the government, Mennonites forged a bond with fundamentalists, who expressed attitudes of alienation and distrust politically, while psychologically, they tended toward authoritarianism and anti-intellectualism.⁹² It was a movement of both cultural and theological opposition to the drift of North American culture, and for Mennonites it seemed the perfect framework for their two-kingdom theology.

Mennonite pastors began to join local, regional, and national fundamentalist organizations and occasionally served as leaders in the movement.⁹³ In 1921, the national meeting of the Mennonite Church (the General Assembly;

formerly the General Conference) reprinted the Dordrecht Confession and added an appendix which included eighteen "fundamentals"; these were based on *The Fundamentals* (1909) which had been accepted by the World Christian Fundamentals Association, organized in Philadelphia in 1919. The Church's position on nonconformity, nonresistance, and the cultivation and use of tobacco would not be compromised, but a version of eternal security was introduced.⁹⁴ This was not a totally foreign concept to them, for in 1916 the Mennonite Publishing House in Scottdale had published a supplement to the *Church and Sunday School Hymnal* called *Life Songs*. In it, Mennonites were introduced to Calvinistic theology and for the first time began to talk about being "saved by grace" and to confess that they "were sure they were saved."

Although this movement affected Lancaster and Franconia Conference Mennonites, Old Order Mennonites were untouched by it. They were having their own troubles. Their patriarch, Jonas Martin, died in 1926, at which time certain church members wanted to buy automobiles. Martin had opposed this accommodation to modern technology, and after his death the church divided. Those who bought cars were led by Bishop Moses Horning and so were called "Horning Mennonites"; and, later, when they began a practice designed to make their vehicles unostentatious, "Black Bumper Mennonites." Their official name, however, is the Weaverland Conference, and they would make other concessions to technology and eventually embrace a form of missions as well. Because those who retained the horse and buggy organized under the leadership of Bishop Joseph Wenger, they were known as "Joe Wengers" and eventually as the "Team Church" (which included Pike Mennonites). But officially they are the Groffdale Conference and with the exception of the telephone, they would make

few concessions to modern technology.⁹⁵

The Mennonite Publishing House produced another hymnal for fervent Mennonite fundamentalists, *Life Songs Number Two*, in 1938. That year, Mennonites were also reading *Modern Religious Liberalism* (already in its third edition), a defense of fundamentalism by John Horsch, a Mennonite theologian and historian from Scottsdale. Particularly attracted to the premillennialism and dispensationalism of fundamentalist theology, Horst was an ardent German patriot who considered Hitler a reformer whose National Socialism had led to an unprecedented economic revival in Germany. Articles published in the General Conference Mennonite Church magazine, *The Mennonite*, were militantly anti-Semitic, pro-Hitler, and anti-New Deal.⁹⁶ Horsch accepted the premillennial belief that God's plan unfolded in stages of dispensation, and this led Mennonites to view the persecution of Jews as God's way of moving them to accept Christ, thus anticipating the "end times."⁹⁷ Thus, in 1933, the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities appointed Martin Z. Miller to establish contacts among Jews in urban communities with Mennonite missions. In 1942, a Jewish evangelism committee was organized, and in the decades that followed, Mennonites established "Hebrew Christian" congregations.

Speaking of missions, Mennonites had not moved beyond their understanding of mission work since their experience on Welsh Mountain in 1898. Still believing that it was the church's, rather than the government's, responsibility to feed the poor and assist them with money, they accepted the fundamentalist belief that "the poor will always be among you." Despite their good intentions, their attempts before World War II to run urban summer Bible schools were unsuccessful, and their Fresh Air program to bring urban youngsters to the country was a complete failure.⁹⁸

These failures were due at least in part to the great disparities in rural and urban life. Even during the Depression, urban Americans were taking advantage of modern conveniences and educational opportunities not available to rural Americans. During Franklin Roosevelt's second term in office, 31 percent of rural Americans had no running water; 32 percent had no indoor toilet; 39 percent had no bathtub or shower; and 58 percent had no central heating. Of seventy-four million Americans twenty-five or older, only two of five had gone beyond the eighth grade; only one in four had graduated from high school; and only one in twenty had gone to college.⁹⁹ When urban children were brought to stay on rural Mennonite farms or were taught Sunday school lessons by them, the results were disastrous. In fact, Mennonites were not successful with urban church development until after World War II. Their success then was due in large part to members who had worked with the Civilian Public Service (CPS) program,¹⁰⁰ the unique church-state partnership which satisfied some Mennonites because it exempted them from military service, but displeased others because of the cooperation with the government it represented.¹⁰¹

WORLD WAR II AND AFTER

With World War II already underway, the Mennonites, the Brethren, the Mennonite Brethren, and the Quakers (referred to as the Historic Peace Churches) could not agree on a definition of nonresistance, but eventually were able to compromise in order to present their concerns to President Roosevelt at a meeting in the Oval Office on January 10, 1940.¹⁰² The Peace Church delegation was given the same treatment that would be accorded a Civil Rights delegation in 1941 and a Jewish delegation in 1942: The President opened with small talk and then, in typical fashion, turned raconteur, entertaining his audience with political anecdotes. He spoke for eighty percent of the time, was both hospitable and affable, and closed with a warm and reassuring statement which put the delegation at rest.¹⁰³ As they left the White House, P. C. Hiebert, who represented the Mennonite Brethren, commented to E. L. Harshbarger, who represented the Mennonites: "I visualize an almost incalculable amount of suffering and heartache warded off. May it be so!"¹⁰⁴

The churchmen overestimated the significance of the visit, for the President would play no active role whatsoever in Historic Peace Church concerns for many months.¹⁰⁵ Then, in July, 1940, his wife Eleanor charged him with abandoning the New Deal for participation in war, and argued that real national defense meant the mobilization of the country as a whole, so that every individual could receive training to help end poverty and make the community a better place in which to live.¹⁰⁶ To accomplish this, she persuaded him to create a form of service available to men and women by expanding the National Youth Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps.

President Roosevelt signed the Selective Training and Service Act into law in September, 1940. In the six and a half years men were drafted under it, nearly 12,000 of them (4,665 of whom were Mennonites) were assigned to Civilian Public Service camps to perform "work of national importance." In line with Eleanor Roosevelt's suggestion, the Act allowed the camps to be under civilian direction, and the National Council for Religious Conscientious Objectors (later called the National Service Board for Religious Objectors) governed them. The Mennonite Central Committee represented the Lancaster and Franconia Conferences on the governing board, and in Pennsylvania they operated the Sideling Hill Camp at Wells Tannery where conscientious objectors built that section of the Pennsylvania Turnpike; Howard Camp at Howard, a soil-conservation project; and also ran four mental hospitals located in Harrisburg, Allentown, Norristown, and Wernersville.¹⁰⁷

The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) appointed Conference ministers to direct the camps, and, in addition to conducting regular religious services, they instituted educational programs with Bible courses, crafts courses, and high school and college courses. Each Mennonite camp also had a director of education who cooperated with the



The Civilian Public Service Camp at Denison, Iowa, at Christmas.

director in organizing and administering programs designed to give the men creative and meaningful experiences during nonworking hours. Courses were taught by camp staff, by government officials, and by church and school leaders who visited the camps regularly. Bishops also visited to insure that members were living in accordance with Conference rules and discipline and to administer communion.¹⁰⁸ Those drafted into Civilian Public Service served without pay, so the Lancaster Conference gave each member a gift of \$10 a month. Since many of them had dependents, the Lancaster and Franconia Conferences urged churches to take care of members in need; cases not handled in this manner were dealt with directly by the MCC. There were some men who would not allow the church to support their families, opting instead for noncombatant service abroad. They (and their families) were excommunicated and reinstated after the war only if they confessed before their congregations. Many chose not to remain with the church and took advantage of the benefits available to them under the GI Bill of Rights.¹⁰⁹

* * *

Those who took part in Civilian Public Service returned after the war as changed men. As a result of their experiences, some would want the church to move backward while others would want to go forward; the conflict between the two groups would mean dramatic changes for all Pennsylvania Mennonites, as two major developments occurred in the years immediately following the war. The first was the development of somewhat of a "cold war" between the General Conference Mennonite Church and the so-called

"Old" Mennonite Conferences—the Lancaster, Franconia, and Allegheny churches (the last named being congregations in western Pennsylvania formerly known as the Southwestern Mennonite Conference). The second was a major schism within the Groffdale Conference of the Old Order Mennonite Church.

Recognizing the acculturation evident among General Conference Mennonites and among those of their own congregations that embraced the policies and programs of the MCC, bishops in the Old Mennonite Church began to sense that trends in the broader community and the spirit of patriotism would hurt church identity. Old Mennonites were frightened by the national trend of women entering the workforce and the resulting transformation of the nuclear family; and by the change in fashions begun with the War Production Board's "Victory suit" for civilians. Suits with cuffless trousers and narrow lapels, pleatless skirts that rose several inches above the knee, and a new, two-piece, bathing suit, were all designed to make more cloth available to supply the army.¹¹⁰ As a result, sermons and church literature emphasized nonconformity to prevent "worldly" or immodest dress. In 1953, the Lancaster Conference published an updated version of the 1881 *Rules and Discipline* to address changes affecting the church, and members who violated the bishops' rulings were harshly disciplined. Many were refused communion, and in some cases communion for the entire congregation was postponed until the conflict was resolved.¹¹¹

Conservative Mennonites feared that exposure to liberal Mennonites might encourage young men to pursue a college

education or, worse yet, to attend a seminary. While progressive Mennonite conferences and churches encouraged higher education and the employment of an educated ministry, conservative Mennonites chose their leaders by lot. This was believed to be God's way of personally making the choice. The process begins with the congregation or the district voting for candidates for ordination. Then the bishop in charge, usually assisted by one or more visiting bishops, places on a table in sight of the congregation hymn books equal in number to the candidates. A deacon has hidden in one of them a thin slip of paper on which is written: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). After a special prayer for divine action, each candidate in turn takes one of the hymnals and then the bishop opens them until he finds the lot slip. The chosen one is ordained immediately and holds office for the remainder of his life.¹¹²

Old Order Mennonites, too, were opened to a wealth of new ideas when they lived and worked with Old and General Conference Mennonites in Civilian Public Service camps, and Old Order young men would not be immune to these influences either. One of them, David B. Hoover, of the Groffdale Conference who lived in the village of Reidenbach near New Holland, was opposed to CPS because it meant cooperating with the Mennonite Central Committee and the federal government. Hoover argued that cooperation with the Selective Service Administration was still a contribution to the war effort and therefore a compromise of nonresistance. Advocating complete deferment from all obligation of service, he criticized what he saw as the shortcomings of Civilian Public Service: the initial classification of objectors being left in the hands of local draft boards; the administration of the process being the responsibility of the Selective Service Administration, a military rather than a civilian agency; and the program's failure to define "work of national importance." Since the Groffdale Conference ministry believed that CPS was a privilege granted by the government to them, they did not appreciate Hoover's criticism of the program. So, in 1946, David B. Hoover organized his own church, the Reidenbach Mennonite Church.¹¹³

In many ways the Reidenbach Church would prove to be more progressive than the Old Mennonites, because Hoover's position on CPS would influence the progressive Mennonites on whom they depended for representation in Washington. When President Truman called for universal military training and reinstatement of the draft in March, 1948,¹¹⁴ Dr. Harold S. Bender of Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana, testified before the Senate in April and May of that year on behalf of the Mennonite Church. Bender had been secretary of the Mennonite Central Committee and was instrumental in the administration of CPS camps. He argued that absolutist conscientious objectors such as the Reidenbachs should be given complete exemption; that military personnel should not be involved in administering alternative service programs, leaving that work to church agencies; and that the government should

pay maintenance allowances and wages to all men in the program.¹¹⁵

In July, 1952, very shortly after the United States became involved in military action on the Korean Peninsula, Civilian Public Service was replaced with the I-W program. Mennonites did consign some control over conscientious objectors to the Selective Service administration so that the Mennonite Central Committee could decide in what capacity they would work. Conscientious objectors now lived in "intentional communities" along with their wives, who also served in the program, rather than in camps. Some farmers were assigned to the American Dairy Herd Improvement Association and to the Agriculture Department's experimental farms, while a small group served as "guinea pigs" at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. But these assignments were the exception: eighty percent of all I-Ws held low-level jobs in hospitals. Another option created by the MCC, a program called PAX service, employed conscientious objectors in construction, agricultural development, and relief activities around the world.¹¹⁶

Pennsylvania Mennonites went abroad with PAX and stayed abroad with the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions which was expanding its ministry around the world: Churches were established throughout Africa beginning in 1933; throughout Latin America beginning in 1950; in Germany (1951), the Middle East (1953), Vietnam (1954), France (1954), Hong Kong (1965), and the Philippines (1970); throughout Eastern Europe beginning in 1971; and in Indonesia (1977) and Australia (1977).¹¹⁷ Sometimes the Mennonite Central Committee and the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions were working against each other, with the former introducing a liberation theology with their relief work and the latter maintaining a traditional form of proselytization. Conservative conferences and congregations throughout Pennsylvania eventually created their own mission boards when the Eastern Mennonite Board stopped including a strict program of nonconformity in their teaching.

Many Pennsylvania Mennonites had limited contact with minority groups despite their efforts abroad. Outside of their urban mission work, most of their involvement with minorities was with the migrant laborers who worked on Mennonite farms; an economic rather than a social relationship. To address the problem of racial discrimination, the national body of the Old Mennonite Church established the Committee on Social and Economic Relations in 1955. It sponsored a study of the subject and drafted a statement—"The Way of Christian Love in Race Relations"—officially adopted by the Old Mennonite Church. The statement condemned racial prejudice and discrimination as a sin and as "a major cause of present day international conflict and War"; a sin in which a nonresistant people could have no part. In response, the broader Mennonite Church attempted to racially integrate its congregations, while Pennsylvania Mennonites established separate congregations for their migrant workers. These congregations

grew out of Voluntary Service assignments among Puerto Rican and Mexican communities in 1951 in the cities of Lancaster and Coatesville and the borough of West Chester.¹¹⁸

Next to migrant workers, tourists gave Pennsylvania Mennonites their greatest exposure to racial diversity. The tourist industry provided them with unprecedented business opportunities as well as with another mission for the Church, particularly in Lancaster County. When the Pennsylvania Turnpike was completed in 1956, it crossed most of the County's Old Order Mennonite communities: Morgantown, Churchtown, Bowmansville, Denver, Ephrata, and Manheim. Travelers spending any time in these towns could hardly overlook folks dressed in 19th-century garb traveling in black buggies (the buggies of the Amish are gray) or black automobiles with black-painted chrome bumpers. These plain people were exploited by the owners of hotels and restaurants—often acculturated Mennonites—who promoted the misnomer "Pennsylvania Dutch" country for economic gain.¹¹⁹ In an attempt to educate tourists about Mennonites and dismiss folklore legends, the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities opened the Mennonite Information Center in 1958.¹²⁰ Eventually dozens of museums, cultural centers, and historical societies would be opened by every Mennonite Conference in Mennonite communities throughout Pennsylvania.

CHANGE AND MORE CHANGE

When President John F. Kennedy passed the torch "to a new generation of Americans" in 1960, that included young Mennonites who had already made numerous concessions to the larger society, particularly in lifestyle. Modifications had been made in plain dress, with many men having given up the plain coat and women abandoning the bonnet and wearing smaller coverings without strings; changes were made to the cape dress as well. These changes consumed the Lancaster, Franconia, and Allegheny Conferences, and in response to them, nine ordained men withdrew from the Lancaster Conference and organized the Mennonite Christian Brotherhood in 1960.¹²¹ But these lifestyle issues were minor in comparison to the issues raised during and after the Vietnam War, when some Mennonites challenged the government concerning the payment of taxes to support the war, refused to register for the draft, worked with Vietnamese communist sympathizers, and supported President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs through Voluntary Service assignments. These actions, along with the abandonment of plain dress and the doctrines of fundamentalism, made further schisms inevitable.

Prior to the Vietnam conflict, the Mennonite Church did not witness against war. They held firm positions against going to war but did not pass judgment on the government for doing so. Vietnam, however, was different. Now there was no struggle to be granted alternative service, and the various alternative service programs available were run

only by the Mennonite Church and had no connection with the Selective Service System.¹²² Now, for the first time, Pennsylvania Mennonites were confronted with the issue of whether or not there was a difference between nonresistance and pacifism. Fifty young Mennonite men were among the 325,000 draft-law violators who went to Canada or to prison during the course of the War (1960-1973).¹²³ The vast majority entered college, did voluntary service work in the United States with the Eastern Board of Missions and Charities, or worked in both North and South Vietnam with the Mennonite Central Committee.¹²⁴

In 1963 the Mennonite General Assembly adopted the *Mennonite Confession of Faith*. Loosely based on the Dordrecht Confession, it replaced that document's interpretation of the Bible as "infallible," calling it instead "authoritative inspiration"; dropped the eighteen fundamentals; and gave no specifics about dress, although short hair for men and long hair and a covering for women were listed as symbols of "Headship."¹²⁵ In the Lancaster, Franconia, and Allegheny Conferences the rules and discipline books of the 1950s were used to supplement the new Confession to insure that their members would remain plain in dress; and, among other things, they would also impose sanctions against members who owned television sets and who went to movie theaters.¹²⁶ But as Mennonites returned from college and graduate school, from Voluntary Service or Mennonite Central Committee assignments, or from prison, they challenged the authoritative structure of their churches. In 1968 the MCC opened a Washington office to lobby against the war; the next year the General Assembly of the Old Mennonite Church adopted a statement which said: ". . . we willfully refuse to cooperate with the Selective Service System. We feel that this is the stance we have to assume as Christians. We do not attempt to willfully rebel against the state, but recognize that our first loyalty and obedience is to God." The statement recognized the validity of noncooperation with the government as a legitimate witness against war.

* * *

The Lancaster Conference had decided in 1968 that members could choose, independent of their bishops, whether to live according to the broad approach advocated in the 1963 *Mennonite Confession of Faith* or to abide by the Conference's more specific *Rules and Discipline*. Certain bishops who had organized at the beginning of the decade as the Mennonite Messianic Mission, felt this would allow members too much latitude and so refused to cooperate with the 1968 decision. Thus, in 1969 the last significant schism occurred in the Lancaster Conference with the establishment of the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church.¹²⁷ Two years later the Lancaster and Franconia Conferences officially joined the General Assembly of the Old Mennonite Church. Now, rather than being distinguished as the "old" Mennonites with the General Conference the "new" Mennonites, the Old Mennonites re-

ferred to themselves as “the” Mennonite Church.

In 1972, John Howard Yoder, president of Goshen Biblical Seminary and associate director of the Institute of Mennonite Studies, wrote *The Politics of Jesus*, a work based largely on the Sermon on the Mount and a groundbreaking interpretation of Anabaptist theology and Mennonite historiography. The book and its ideology was rejected by conservative Pennsylvania Mennonites who retained a traditional fundamentalist theology, and by acculturated Mennonites as well, for they now embraced the charismatic movement, a new form of fundamentalism. Just as fundamentalism took Pennsylvania Mennonites by storm after the First World War, the charismatic movement was almost universally accepted by them after the Vietnam War. Initiated by a conference held at the Landisville campgrounds in 1974, the Lancaster, Franconia, and Allegheny Conferences would follow a version of the charismatic movement’s theology and worship patterns from that time on.¹²⁸

In 1975 the Reformed Mennonites suffered a schism involving the practice of excommunication. In traditional Anabaptist theology the “ban” (excommunication) was a means of setting members outside of the community so that they would be drawn back when they experienced life without their faith family. As the evidence shows, Mennonites have used excommunication to rid the church of members who opposed the status quo; no opportunity was given for a return to the fold. So, when an individual excommunicated years before sued because he wanted to return and the church refused to restore his membership, the Reformed Mennonites hired a lawyer to defend them.

This legal action was viewed by some members as a violation of the Dordrecht Confession; believing the issue should have been settled out of court, they left and established the United Mennonites.¹²⁹ Another division occurred that same year when several congregations (principally from York and Adams Counties) abandoned the Lancaster Conference to form the Conservative Mennonite Church. This division was no doubt at least partly due to dissatisfaction with the broader church’s criticism of patriotism and civil religion.¹³⁰

Mennonite concern with the evils of civil religion peaked with the patriotic celebrations surrounding the American Bicentennial in 1976. In the twelve months preceding the celebrations, the Old Mennonite Church’s weekly, the *Gospel Herald*, ran twenty-three articles (including three editorials) on the subject; the MCC distributed a Civil Religion packet which had eleven articles describing and critiquing civil religion and nine others which discussed appropriate ways to celebrate the Bicentennial; and several regional Mennonite conferences issued statements criticizing the “strong spirit of nationalism.” This issue, too, was contentious: Because they felt the Lancaster Conference put too much emphasis on being “Mennonite,” and not enough on being “Christian,” congregations from the Atlantic States Districts of the Ohio Mennonite Conference (1834) in Pennsylvania and The Eastern Amish Mennonite (1893) Joint Conference (1927) joined together forming the Atlantic Coast Conference of the Mennonite Church in 1978.¹³¹

In the years between 1985 and 1995, the Lancaster, Franconia, Allegheny, and Atlantic Coast Conferences



The Atlantic Coast Conference Church at Neffsville, Pa.; the Atlantic Coast Conference of the Mennonite Church was founded in 1987. (Dynacolor Graphics, Inc.)

experienced the greatest amount of change in their history. Reacting to years of strict, authoritarian church rule, they quickly and in (loosely) the following order embraced: divorce, remarriage, and the marriage of Mennonites to non-Mennonites; the wearing of contemporary fashions and the abandonment of the covering; members holding local office and joining unions; the opening of Mennonite businesses on Sundays; membership in formerly forbidden organizations (the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, the National Rifle Association); the acceptance of a "just war" theory and the compromising of nonresistance; the acceptance into membership of former members of the military and those not baptized as adults; licensing and ordaining women into the ministry; remodeling church buildings to include steeples; the use of musical instruments; many racially segregated congregations becoming independent of their conferences; and the acceptance into membership of homosexuals with consent of same-sex marriages.¹³² As a result of these changes, many churches experienced minor schisms but no new conferences were formed.

In July, 1995, the Old Mennonite Church merged with the General Conference Church. The exact name of the new church has yet to be decided, although a new joint Confession of Faith was approved; church institutions will be merged gradually over a six-year period.¹³³ Opposition to the merger was greatest among Pennsylvania Mennonites, and many congregations are organizing to create new schisms from their conferences.¹³⁴ As the ongoing saga of the renewal of the collective Mennonite mind, the transformation of nonconformity, and the quest to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" continues then, perhaps it is appropriate to consider the words of Jesus. Reasoning with the Scribes, He said: "And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:24).

ENDNOTES

¹ Romans 12:2

² While other verses have been used to support the idea of nonconformity such as: 1 John 1:15 and 1 Peter 2:11, the passage in Romans 12:12 is the best example to describe the objectives of Mennonite nonconformity.

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⁴ Harold S. Bender, "The Anabaptist Vision," *Church History*, (March, 1943), pp. 14, 20-22.

⁵ Richard M. Pope, *The Church and Its Culture: A History of the Church in Changing Cultures* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1965) pp. 421, 431.

⁶ During the summer of 1994, the author interviewed the leaders or moderators of each of the forty-three Anabaptist sects within Lancaster County, Pa. Asked what distinguished their group from other sects, each said their group represented the more accurate interpretation of God's will.

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¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

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²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123

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²⁶ C. Henry Smith, "Mennonites and Culture," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (1938), pp. 81, 82.

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- ¹²⁵ *Mennonite Confession of Faith* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1963), pp. 10, 20-21.
- ¹²⁶ Interview with Jesse Neuenschwander, May 20, 1994. Neuenschwander was formerly a member of the Lancaster Conference but joined the more conservative Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church.
- ¹²⁷ Neuenschwander to Benowitz, May 21, 1994.
- ¹²⁸ Harold E. Bauman and Ernest Hershberger, *Gospel Herald* (January 27, 1987), 52-55.
- ¹²⁹ Interview with John S. Kilgore, May 21, 1994 and Kilgore to Cornelius J. Dyck, July 15, 1994. Kilgore was a minister in the Reformed Mennonite Church and one of the founders of the United Mennonites.
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“NOT ONLY TRADITION BUT TRUTH”: Legend and Myth Fragments Among Pennsylvania Mennonites

by John L. Ruth



*Illustration from the *Martyrs Mirror* showing the Anabaptist Dirk Willems rescuing the constable pursuing him.*

Though in writing several books of Pennsylvania Mennonite history¹ I have tried to keep alert to folk memories from the Delaware to Juniata, I've never studied the topic of legend systematically, nor do I have any academic apparatus to approach it with. My aim has been simply to preserve access to narrative elements that have survived. To quote from the preface to my forthcoming narrative history of the Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite Conference, "While as a nonprofessional historian I know well how human memory edits and massages its material, I have nevertheless regarded it as good company, rather than the enemy to be mainly mistrusted, musing always on why this or that story has survived the winnowing of time."

On the one hand, the Pennsylvania Mennonites' traditional sobriety and general discountenancing of carnal or irreverent imaginations have worked among them to reduce the quotient of story-for-story's sake, especially in written and/or published form. On the other hand, since Mennonites have always been great visitors, conversation and reminiscence have played a significant role in their life. One old Montgomery County bishop, Josiah Clemmer (d. 1906), even suggested that a qualification of a candidate for the ministry was the ability to tell a story.

Our late-19th century Mennonite family historians often included legend fragments in their genealogies. While those memories are lost to most modern, English-speaking Mennonites, where the Pennsylvania German language has persisted among the most conservative Mennonites and Amish, oral storytelling still flourishes. In what follows I have included material from both written and oral traditions. However, let the reader remember throughout that this is legendary material. Though in this article I have imposed some chronological order under a dozen simple categories, I present the stories pretty much unedited, as

I have found them. For few of them can I claim literal historical accuracy.

My caveat draws intensity from personal experience of the way a very tellable story inevitably takes on an incremental life of its own. I recall sitting bemused in a lecture at the Harvard Divinity School in 1960, as the well-known Reinhold Niebuhr reinforced a theological point by regaling his listeners with a Mennonite-related story that I knew could not be literally true. The same phenomenon was all too well demonstrated as late as the 1980s, as an "urban legend" featuring a feminine Mennonite encounter with "Reggie Jackson" ran like greased lightning through supposedly enlightened Mennonite circles.²

In what follows I'll describe or quote, with minimal comment, sixty or so anecdotes, some pieced together from multiple fragments. Many of them are taken from among the many more that I have woven into my books. Where I know a source I have credited it in the notes.

FROM THE OLD COUNTRY

Not a great deal is known about the life of the Frisian Menno Simons (1496-1561), the ex-priest turned Anabaptist whose prolific writings after 1535 made him the Netherlands' "first reformer" and founder of its Anabaptist movement. It is certainly known that he lived a life under threat of death as a heretic. An oft-recounted anecdote that has him riding a stagecoach brings together the themes of both persecution and Mennonite ethical scrupulosity. Police who are on the lookout for him stop the stagecoach and inquire of Menno, whom they do not recognize as he sits on an outside seat, whether Menno Simons is on the coach. Menno calls down into the coach, "Is Menno Simons in there?" When the passengers reply in the negative, he says to the police, "They say he's not in there." As the police

then ride off, Menno has escaped without having had to tell an overt lie.³

No book outside of the Bible has the hagiographic status among Pennsylvania Mennonites of the *Martyrs Mirror*, a Dutch collection of martyr stories dating from 1660, enlarged in a beautifully illustrated edition of 1685. Seven of the copper etchings by Jan Luycken in the latter edition have actually been brought to the United States in recent years by Old Order Mennonite farmer Amos B. Hoover of near Denver, Pa. One of these illustrations, appearing in modern English translations, shows an Anabaptist named Dirk Willems in the act of rescuing a constable who, in pursuing Dirk across a frozen canal, has broken through and is in danger of drowning. The accompanying story holds that after this magnanimous deed on behalf of his enemy, Dirk was rewarded by a slow death at the stake. The combination of illustration and written account has exercised considerable power on young Mennonite imaginations, as they come to terms with their people's centuries-long teaching of loving one's enemy, from Christ's Sermon on the Mount. In recent years the etching has appeared here and there almost as a logo, and has prompted an extended, intense conversation on the Internet which continues even as I write these words. True to the character of legend, in Willems' home town of Asperen, in the Netherlands, the local Reformed people hold him as a hero in the struggle against Catholic Spanish control, but with no reference to the fact – all-important to Mennonites — that he was punished for being baptized and holding Anabaptist meetings in his house.⁴

Among the stories in the Dutch *Martyrs Mirror* which move from the historical into the legendary, there appear, toward the end, accounts of persecution of Anabaptists in Switzerland. One of them, the story of the 1571 execution of Hans Haslibacher from the Emmental in Bern, exhibits the legendizing tendency. It seems to have been written long enough after the actual execution for the mythic elements to have been accepted. In the English translation published in Elkhart, Indiana, in 1886, a ballad on Hans Haslibacher appears in a translation by future Pennsylvania Governor Samuel Pennypacker, the grandson of a Mennonite bishop from near Phoenixville. Stanza 21 of his version has Haslibacher promising that his death will be accompanied by strange things:

He further said: "The Lord will show
Three signs, to let you plainly know
That innocent I die;
For when my head's struck off, 'twill fall
Into my hat and laugh withal.

The second sign upon the sun
You'll plainly see when it is done;
And of the third take heed.
The sun will, like my blood, be red
The town well likewise blood will shed."

When all three signs appear in due course, an old observer states:

"The Anabaptist's mouth did laugh,
Which surely indicates God's wrath,"
and another says,

"If you had let this Baptist live,
Eternally you would not grieve."

As a result,

With one accord the people said
"Henceforth no Baptist's blood we'll shed."⁵

Interestingly, the very last addition to the roster of martyrs in this great tome (its translation into German being the largest volume published in the Colonies before the American Revolution), was made at the Ephrata Cloister in 1748-49. The book was very nearly finished when someone from a Christian Kropf family handed in an old list of Anabaptists executed in Bern.⁶ It had been copied out of the record book in the *Käfigturm*, a prison tower in Bern, by Hans Loersch (Lötscher, Latschar), while he himself had been incarcerated there either before or after being sent as a galley slave to the Mediterranean. Thus, this collection, which had been begun in the Netherlands and augmented with information from co-religionists in Switzerland, was completed in Pennsylvania by a lengthy addition to the margins of several pages apparently already set in type.

After 1640, well over a thousand *Täufer* (Anabaptists) from Zurich and Bern fled northward into the Palatinate. Already living there were "Mennist" families with names like Cassel, Clemens, Kolb, Krey, etc. Around 1717 an interesting sheaf of papers was brought by Cassel family immigrants to what is present-day Montgomery County. Not only do they contain drawings of three comets which appeared early in the 17th century, but there are lengthy stretches of rhyme in which Yellis (Gillis) Kassel narrates wartime troubles in this region fought over repeatedly by the French and others in the Thirty Years' War and later. The poetry in its original German was published in Philadelphia by Daniel K. Cassel in 1890,⁷ and has often been alluded to in Pennsylvania Mennonite attempts to relate to the premigration story. Although not itself in the nature of legend, it has been repeatedly quoted to evoke some sense of its era.

A folk story from the Palatinate has to do with the jealousy expressed by neighbors who saw the Swiss *Täufer*, who had come into war-ravaged fields with almost nothing, soon thriving beyond the local norm. ". . . One day the [Palatine Elector] rode through the Pfrimm valley when he saw a well-improved farm he commented about. A jealous neighbor remarked, 'Yes, if it would only have been acquired with honesty; that man is a counterfeiter.' When the count made investigation and asked the farmer

to show him the mint where the money is being made, the farmer held out his rough, horny hands and said, 'This is the mint with which I make my money.' Whereupon the count replied, 'If that is the case, then keep right on making money, and also teach your children how to make money with hard labor and industry.'"⁸

IMMIGRATION

A relatively modern legend of German migration to Pennsylvania was set afloat in 1880 with the publication of a story called, *Two Faithful Comrades: The Two First German Settlers in America*.⁹ Purporting to describe events prior to and following William Penn's invitation of 1681 to come to his colony, the tale features young Kraichgau-region emigrants Henry Frey and George Plattenbach, whose excellent relations with Indians near Germantown prompt the Native Americans to offer the "Palefaces" a place of settlement for their families still in the Rhineland. Several family histories passed on this tale in order to give color to their origins, even while acknowledging the anachronisms involved.¹⁰

A memory connected with the first American Mennonite community at Germantown, near Philadelphia, appears in an 1839 letter back to the Palatinate written by immigrant Mennonite minister Jacob Krehbiel of near Buffalo, New York. He had heard the story on a visit to Mennonites around "Skippack." "Among all the members of the Germantown congregation," he reported, "there was no one who had previously been chosen as a preacher by [casting lots]. Since they wished to follow strictly our traditional regulations in this matter, they were not willing to ordain a preacher on their own authority. They went only so far as to take votes for a preacher. These votes they sent across the ocean to their old home in Europe to their brethren in the faith with the request that their preachers cast the lot and then ordain the minister thus chosen, whereupon they were to send back to America a report of their work. This took place and accordingly the first preacher of the Mennonites in America was chosen several thousand miles distant from the congregation, in another part of the world, a procedure which should be well-recorded because of its unusualness. Among those who told me this story was a bishop [actually, a deacon] of Lower Salford, named [John] Lederach who said that the documents dealing with this matter were still preserved in Germantown."¹¹

An even more legendary-sounding story from Germantown, collected by N. B. Grubb, runs as follows: "In Dutch families in the olden time the gift of second sight, [as] it was called, was in the possession of many, and in a remarkable degree in some members of the Keyser family, as the accounts of their lives assure us. Among these were Peter Keyser, the third in descent from Dirk Keyser, pastor of the Mennonite Log, now the Stone, meeting-house in Germantown. He lived at the time in a house on the west side of the Main street, occupied later by Charles Keyser, the teacher in Germantown. A woman



*This etching by Christoffel van Sichem (c. 1608), is the oldest known portrait of Menno Simons. The words in the open book refer to I Corinthians 3:11 — "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (From a revised translation of the "Confession" and a new translation of *The New Birth* published by the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, Lancaster, Pa., 1996.*

came to him in great trouble; she had married, her husband had gone to sea, and had been gone for some years; her family was anxious she should marry again, believing him to be dead. She went to Peter Keyser for advice in the matter. He was lying, as the story goes, on a couch in the front room of the house on the first floor, the window overlooking the Main street. He placed his hands over his eyes, and was silent a few moments and then said, 'I see a boat, they are rowing to the shore, there is a vessel in the distance, there are palm trees on the shore. The men from the boat have landed, one turns this way, going back to the boat. I recognize him, it is your husband; you must not marry again.' Mr. Keyser was a man of very considerable influence there, and his advice was accepted by the family. A year elapsed, when in the same room, in the afternoon, he was lying on the couch, as was his habit, he rose up and called his wife, and said, 'He is coming up the street, there is a pack on his shoulder; it is our sailor boy coming home.' They went to the door, and in fact it was the sailor returning home. That is the story, as related to this day in the Keyser family."¹²

I'll forbear reviewing the very interesting legendary material collected by I. D. Rupp in visits to the original 1710-11 "Pequea" Mennonite settlement in what became Lancaster County. Suffice it to mention here that it was

Rupp's pioneering Lancaster County history published in 1844 that gave permanent life to century-old memories of the Herr and Groff families, and served as the main source of the mythology of the original migration.

A particular family tradition involving the Mennonite immigration following 1717, centers on Lancaster County's Hans Brubaker, thirty-one-year-old bachelor son of a Hempfield Township pioneer "constable" of the same name. Having urged his father to let him travel back to the old country to find a wife, Hans, Jr. was sent instead to Virginia, where the family owned land, to collect money for the voyage. But by the time of his return, neighbors had persuaded his father not to allow the trip. Nevertheless, when Father Brubaker died, the son sailed to Europe, where he was received with great joy. According to family tradition, "his friends had two lamps burning evenings" for the wife-seeker from Pennsylvania. His quest soon gained the hand of a Maria Newcomer, whom he married eight days before Whitsuntide. Back to Pennsylvania with them came Hans' cousin Abraham. The latter, it was said, was afraid that if he stayed at home he might be called to be a minister; ironically, after eventually settling at "Indiantown" (Clay Township), he would be ordained there. Hans and Maria Brubaker began housekeeping at Hammer Creek, but their idyll was cut short by her death in her first winter in Pennsylvania, a mere thirty weeks after their arrival. Her body was buried in the garden, from whence, said the lonely husband in his grief, he felt he could have dug her out with his bare fingers. Yet in less than five months more he had found a second wife, another Maria, oldest daughter of Michael Tanner.¹³

Another Lancaster immigrant story of special interest is that of the widow of Martin Stauffer from the Mückenhäuserhof next to Ibersheim, just north of Worms. Though too crippled by rheumatism to walk, she had been pulled by her four sons in a little "waggon" all the way down the Rhine Valley to the seaport, and had come with them to Philadelphia in 1738 or 1739. Here they all set out for Lancaster County, again pulling their wagon through the forests. On this trek the third son, Matthias, disappeared from their party, never to be heard from again. The others pushed on to uncleared land in Warwick Township, four miles north of present-day Lititz, where they eventually established a "Stauffer's Mill."¹⁴

An apparently related, perhaps another, version of the Stauffer memory is as follows: "John Stauffer and his brother Jacob emigrated to America from Germany about the year 1740. They were mere boys, John being not more than 12 or 15 years old. They started from Philadelphia to Lancaster on foot. While traveling along they came up with a farmer driving in a wagon. He, seeing that they were boys and must be hungry, threw some bread on the ground, which the boys eagerly picked up and ate. When they arrived in Lancaster they found the town to consist of only a few houses. They then traveled to the neighborhood of Lititz, where they lived until grown up, when John married a daughter of John Martin Amweg. He then

settled about 3 miles north of Manheim, where he bought a mill on the Big Chiques creek, at present in the possession of Moses Light. When the Revolutionary war broke out he refused to take up arms, having conscientious scruples, being a member of the Mennonite church. The officers searched the mill for him; he, however, made his escape to the hills. They finally gave up the chase and left."¹⁵

Of particular interest in an immigrant group of 1732 is the case of sixty-three-year-old "Christel" (Christian) Martin from the little community of Mennists at "the Bockschaft." This was a *hof* just southeast of the well-known "Steinsberg" towering over the fertile Kraichgau south of Sinsheim in present-day Baden. A report sent to the Dutch Mennonite benefactors by ten Palatine Mennist ministers states quite specifically that "Christian Marty," his wife and two children have only the sum of 1001 guilders, which is not enough to pay their ocean passage, but that they also expect financial help "from friends in Pennsylvania." On the ship list of the *Plaisance* that same fall we do indeed find the names of Christian (63) and "Ells" (age 60) Martin, with a Fravin Martin (age 16) and a child named Fronik.¹⁶ This Christian Martin's age corresponds exactly with that of the "Christel" Marty who would later be recorded as living with his son David, a Weaverland pioneer of 1727.¹⁷

Martin descendants in Lancaster County have never forgotten an oral tradition about the first American ancestor of their family. It recounts how the father of David, Henry, and Jacob Martin of Weaverland had been imprisoned for his faith at "Schaffhausen." When the brothers, on the verge of departing for Pennsylvania, had come to visit him, he had told them to go ahead, and that he would follow them when he could gain his release. Years later, according to the story, the tall patriarch showed up unannounced, elderly but still hearty, in the barnyard of his son David ("Daafeli") at Weaverland. He had brought along his "German" scythe, with which he could still cut a swath so heavy that those who raked after him would have preferred to follow a less powerful mower.

There are dependable records showing that the father of David and Henry Martin came directly from the Bockschaft only two years later than Henry. Since it had indeed been common for Swiss *Täufer* to spend time in prison after the 1640's, we may suspect that the Martin legend has combined story bits from previous generations with the memory of the joyful reunion at Weaverland.¹⁸ The claim that the old father had not been able to stand up straight in his small prison room hints at specific incidents.

A much later story from the 19th-century immigrant family of Heinrich Kühner (Keener) recalls how he had narrowly missed being sent with Napoleon's armies to fight the Russians at Moscow. His father, Peter, a Mennonite, had arranged with a local doctor to have his son so badly stung by bees that he would not be fit to be drafted.¹⁹ Many of Heinrich's descendants live in Lancaster and Franklin Counties.



Germantown Mennonite Meetinghouse (1770) in Germantown, Pa. (Mennonite Historical Library, Harleysville., Pa.)

SETTLEMENT IN PENNSYLVANIA

There are many vague legend fragments that telescope or conflate motifs explanatory of community foundings. Whereas a man named Adam Mentz is listed on the tax roll for Franconia Township in 1769, Mennonite Bishop Josiah Clemmer told a young neighbor “that when the first Clemmers came into this neighborhood in 1717, there lived a man in a little hut” beside a spring, “and that his name was Adam Mensch.”²⁰ A more mythic name for beginnings in a pristine landscape would have been impossible.

A century after Mennonites had pioneered in Lancaster County, an English visitor asked why people from his own country, who had earlier settled only slightly eastward, had stopped short of the great, limestone-based Lancaster Plain. The answer suggested to him was “that the heavy timber of the [Pequea] soil, & the difficulty of clearing it, frightened the Welsh, Irish, & English settlers, so that they came back from it to other lands far inferior, and more lightly wooded[;] however, it was better understood by the Germans, who . . . were the first settlers of it, their descendants retaining it ever since. . . .”²¹

As to the plain people’s relation to land ownership, a benevolent view is conveyed by a surely exaggerated report of an early Pennsylvania Amishman. Having been “offered 1,000 acres of land by the Penns” without charge, “to gain this influential man’s favor and thereby stimulate purchase of land in that neighborhood,” “the old churchman refused it saying that it was against the church as they did not believe nor approve of a man owning more land than he could cultivate.”²²

A memory of dangers from wolves involving a non-Mennonite neighbor (Christopher Franciscus) in the pioneer Mennonite community at Pequea, in Lancaster County, was vivid enough to surface at least five times in print, each time with varying details.²³

A vignette of forest loneliness concerns the Mennonite

widow Veronica Ulrich Eberly, who, after her husband had missed their boat in Europe, came to Philadelphia with six children on September 17, 1727. She purchased “a tract of land, about a mile square, what is now known as Durlach, in the northern part of Lancaster County.” Here the family’s things were “unloaded under a big white oak tree, near a spring, which still marks the spot.” Their closest white neighbors lived four miles away. “Money was very scarce, and the nearest store was in the village of Lancaster, 16 miles away. So it happened that [when son] Jacob had to go to town one day, the aged mother gave him a half-shilling, sometimes called a ‘levy,’ worth about 12 cents, to bring some molasses along for her; she had tasted no molasses for a very long time. The mother was exceedingly anxious that her son should bring some along for her, so that she might taste molasses again. But her son Jacob, instead of buying the molasses, bought a cow bell, for they had been accustomed to have cows in the woods and woodlands, and could find them better if they had a bell attached to them. When Jacob came close to the home, he rang this cow bell, then the old mother cried bitterly because she was so disappointed, she being so hungry for molasses, and after all received none.”²⁴

INDIANS

A number of legend fragments connecting Mennonites with the Natives they helped to displace have the clear aim of depicting cordial relationships between the newcomers and their Indian counterparts. One such involves Henry Frey (apparently the man on whom L. A. Wollenweber based his longer romance noted above), who in 1709 has moved north from Germantown, and “builded himself a cabin on the South side of the Towamencin Creek On the other side of the creek lived an Indian Chief with whom the Frey family soon became very friendly. Frey soon

learned the Indian language so that he could converse with them. The Indians supplied the Freys with meat and fish in exchange for flour and potatoes. One night Frey stayed late with the Indian Chief and his wife. The squaw withdrew early in the evening without any suspicion on Frey's part. Early the next morning the squaw came barefooted wading through the Towamencin Creek, the water reaching to her knees, to show her new-born babe."²⁵

Another story depicts the 1717 immigrant, Jacob Kreider, first setting up a tent for his family near the Conestoga Creek with cloth brought along from Europe. Next he erected a cabin of hickory saplings covered with bark. Indians came to share the warmth of this new hearth, and to trade fish and game for bread. During one such visit, goes the tale, Jacob, having consulted an almanac, predicted a forthcoming eclipse of the moon, naming the very night it would occur. Some "fifty or sixty Indians who gathered at Kreider's home saw his forecast come true. After a profound, astonished silence, one of them commented that, "'Tis the white man's God tells him this, else he would not know it."²⁶

Of the pioneer Brennemens, also of Conestoga, an observer purports to recall even finer detail. Sometimes the whites and Indians, wrote Redmond Conyngham in 1831, "engaged in contests of foot-race; in which, the Indian lads would excel, although the German boys would discard their clothes, to put them on an equality with the naked savages. Sometimes with the bow and arrow, but here the little Indians would all show their superiority in skill, and accuracy of aim. In wrestling, and most of their exercises, the Indian boys excelled, but in the mechanical arts, the little emigrants had the advantage. I have often seen the chiefs reclining on the ground, leaning on the arm, looking at the diversions and amusements of the children; and when the little Indian would excel, they would laugh very heartily.

"It would not unfrequently happen, that the little Germans would show some degree of anger, when they were unsuccessful, by giving a blow, or taking up a stone, and ceremoniously hurl it at the head of a competitor, which the little Indians would receive with the utmost complacency. I was one day amused by seeing a struggle between an Indian and a German; the former was younger, but more active than the latter, and the little son of the forest was evidently playing with the strength of his adversary; the German became heated, and exerting all his strength endeavored to throw his companion with some force upon the ground, but the wily Indian gave a sudden trip, which caused the German to fall beneath; who, rising angrily, seized a stone and levelled his opponent to the earth. The chiefs, who were near laughed very heartily, for the little white faces did not wait to see the result, but ran hastily homewards, dreading a severe castigation. In all and every transaction we had with the Indians, we found them mild and peaceable; and . . . not disposed to revenge, when the act appeared to be a momentary burst of passion. I have often seen the little Brennemens, children of a Mennonist emigrant, playing in the most sportive and innocent manner

with the little red faces, and I never knew or heard of one little white face receiving an . . . intentional injury."²⁷

Dunker lore claims that Jacob Preiss, who in 1719 bought land in the midst of a slightly earlier Mennonite settlement in Montgomery County, "had but one son, whose name was John; he was born in Germany, and was in his seventeenth year when he came to this country. He was so weakly that his father feared he would not live long enough to have any issue, and yet so desirous was he to leave a name and posterity behind him that he therefore encouraged his son to marry while he was yet very young; being only eighteen years of age he married a girl, said to have been half Indian, who was chosen for him by his father on account of her excellent physique and good health. Having entered into matrimonial alliances he was blessed with two sons, Daniel and John, but he died before the latter was born. Old Jacob, the grandfather, then took these two lads into his care to raise, but he also died before the younger son, John, was of lawful age. Daniel received the old homestead. . . ." In 1886, Lower Salford historian James Y. Heckler, a member of the Indian Creek Dunker congregation, also quoted a tradition written by "D.E.D." from Doylestown, as published in the *Pottstown Ledger*: "Black Hawk, the Indian Chief, in meeting a descendant of Jacob Price, claimed her as a daughter of his people. She had the eyes of his people. . . . Tradition says that Jacob [sic] was out with his gun and found 'a daughter of my people' in the bushes, left behind by the Indians, sick with fever, her eyes attracted him, he took her home, provided medicine and food: she got well and became his wife." Still another "conversation with Abraham H. Price" is quoted by Heckler, in which this direct descendant, "who still resides on the old [Price] homestead" 165 years after the legendary wedding, declares that the story "is not only tradition but truth." Abraham's claim was that "the mother of Daniel Price, of the third generation, was an Indian girl when his father, John Price, married her, and she made a very fine woman. Her parents and family connections resided on the farm in a loghouse on the other side of the Indian Creek, until the latter part of the last century or longer."²⁸

A Bowman family history compiled from an Ontario perspective also takes the benevolent view of Mennonite-Indian relations. It presents a move by Jacob Baumann from Lancaster into unknown Berks County territory in 1747. Baumann, goes the account, "was a great hunter and fisher. By this time the woods and streams in this neighborhood [Bowmansville] had been well hunted and fished. When Jacob . . . was at Muddy Creek prospecting for a new location, an Indian offered to show him good hunting ground to the eastward on the upper reaches of the Muddy Creek. Baumann's [relatives] at Muddy Creek advised strongly against this proposal. The Indian danger was then not yet at the pitch reached in the French and Indian War of 1754 to 1763, but the Indians were uneasy over the encroachment of the whites. In general, the earlier friendliness between the two races was at an end. But Baumann

A German Mennonite Hof in the general Kraichgau area, c. 1950s. (Mennonite Historical Library, Harleysville, Pa.)



decided to make the venture.

"The next morning he, with the Indian, started from the log cabin of one Good about a quarter of a mile south of the present Bowmansville, prospecting eastward up the valley of the Muddy Creek. The next day they found a site that pleased Baumann. The Indian helped him to lay off 300 acres along the creek. At the same time he advised Baumann never to settle at any point where the water was running toward the sunset. In such places, he said, there was no good luck; and the next day he would take him to a place where the water was running toward the sunrise, and where there was plenty of fish, game and good luck. The Muddy and Alleghany Creeks in these parts are parallel streams, some miles apart, but running in opposite directions . . .

"Baumann the next day followed the Indian still eastward to the head of the Muddy Creek Valley, then northward, by the Indian path leading from Sinking Spring to the Delaware, over a small range of hills into another valley near the path. They selected a location and built a cabin for Baumann about a mile and a half southwest of the Indian's home. The Indian invited Baumann to bring his wife and child, guaranteeing their safety.

"Baumann's [Mennonite] friends at Muddy Creek, Weaverland and Groffdale were greatly surprised at his safe return. They helped him move as far as Muddy Creek. From this point Baumann, with a few of the most necessary things, went forward alone. It was a month since he had departed from his Indian friend, who was greatly pleased at his return. When Baumann told him of the trouble with his friends, who had halted with his goods at Muddy Creek, the other said, 'Friend Jacob, go and tell your white friends to go home, and tell them also that you have found a friend who is a friend indeed.' The two completed the transportation of the goods. The friendship between them continued for life. Frequently in this virgin territory they shared the pleasure of fishing and the chase."²⁹

In Montgomery County's Lower Salford Township the oral tradition was lively in 1879. "One of the oldest residents of the township," wrote a person with the initials S. H. O., "dictated to me the history of [the] aboriginal inhabitants, which I shall now attempt to give in as few words as possible. . . . On the approach of the white men they left for the Blue Mountains. This took place about one hundred and seventy-five years ago. The custom of this tribe, probably of all others, was to kill all the elder members of the tribe who were not able to go along with the majority during a removal. Indians are said to travel solely by night, and at the rate of about fifty miles during the absence of the sun. An old squaw—too old to travel with the rest—hearing of their intention, and not wishing to become a victim of the customary practice, hid, and consequently was left behind. She remained in one of the vacant huts situated on the present land of Abraham Hallman, then and for a long time thereafter owned by a generation of Zieglers. Her mode of living was very degraded. She is said to have collected all the tortoises in the vicinity and taken them to her home, where she alighted a large fire and roasted them alive. This formed the basis of her food. [Mennonite] Andreas Ziegler, the original owner of the tract, considered this too inhumanly, and took her to his home, where she became partly civilized. She drove the cattle to pasture and returned them again.

"Toward the latter days of her life she had partly learned the language of the family. It is said that during a thunder storm she would call upon all the children of the family to remain quiet, for the 'Great Spirit' was mad then. Death . . . relieved her of her earthly toil at a ripe old age. [Bishop] Heinrich Hunsicker preached the funeral sermon. She was buried on the family plot of the Lederachs, now owned by Jacob and John Kinsey."³⁰

These memories seem related to a tradition handed down by my own step-great-grandmother, Sarah Moyer Landis, who died in 1942 at the age of ninety-eight. In

the time of her grandfather or great-grandfather, she would say, the family heard a long, wailing cry down near the northeast branch of the Perkiomen Creek that flowed near their farm. When it persisted, her ancestor went to investigate and found an encampment of Indians preparing to move west. The wailing came from an old woman who, being too decrepit to make the journey with her people, was about to be put out of her misery by them. Rather than see that happen, the old Mennonite said she could come and stay on his farm, and she did—remaining there until she died.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

In the dozen or more genealogies of Bucks County Mennonite families produced by Abraham J. Fretz (e.g. Fretz, Kratz, Moyer, Overholt, Wismer), are scattered a number of brief vignettes of Mennonite experience in the American War for Independence. However, having started his work in 1888, Fretz remarked that he “should have . . . begun years ago, while there were yet living those of the third generation, who could have given more satisfactory information of the early ancestors . . . but which with their demise is forever lost. Already the ancestral thread was lost to many who were unable to trace their lineage farther than to the grandfather. . . .”³¹

Several family-tales recall the tensions the pacifist Mennonites experienced during the winter of 1777-1778, while the British Army was in possession of Philadelphia. Although General Washington tried to interdict all traffic on nine main roads leading out of the city, local farmers persisted in attempts to take their produce to their accustomed market. Along this line I quote from my *Maintaining the Right Fellowship*: “From Bedminster Township came Mathias Tyson, who was caught trying to ride past the American guard with a packsaddle of butter and eggs. Mathias was courtmarshaled and found guilty of ‘supplying the enemy with provisions.’ General Washington approved his sentence: ‘to be put in the Provost at night while working at Camp Fatigue during the day.’ But this decree was apparently modified to one of briefer duration. He was ‘stripped to the waist, tied to a tree with a dozen soldiers placed ten paces away each supplied bountifully with eggs, and at the word “fire,” his . . . body was reduced to an eggnog, his gray horse was confiscated and he was allowed to depart, with the assurance, if he ever came down that way again, that he would be shot.’ A hundred years later the tree in question would still be pointed out as the place of the Mennonite marketman’s punishment.”³²

Then there was Abraham Hunsberger, a “great singer” living on a farm in Frederick Township. “During the Revolutionary War, while the British under General Howe were in possession of Philadelphia, they tried to prevent the farmers from bringing their produce to market, in order to starve the Americans who sympathized with the struggle for American liberty or else compel them to surrender. Yet the farmers needed the market, and so many watched their

opportunity to sneak into the city and supply their customers with the usual amount of the necessities of life. It was at a great risk that this was done, and sometimes farmers were caught and imprisoned. Abraham Hunsberger undertook to supply his customers and was arrested by the British and locked up. His prospects were rather gloomy, but he was a sweet singer and his faith did not shrink. This kept him in a cheerful mood, and all night he charmed and amused his guards with sweet strains of music. They were so delighted with his jovial nature that the next morning they let him go on his way rejoicing.”³³

From the same years comes the memory of another Abraham Hunsberger, known as “Hum,” the Samson-like son of a Franconia Township Mennonite family. In 1925 a local Hunsberger still told, in Pennsylvania German, the story of Hum’s forcible enlistment in the American Army in 1776. “Officers had heard about Hum’s great strength and wanted him for the Army. When the squad came to get Hum, he was upstairs and refused to come down. The men went up the narrow stairway to bring him down. But as fast as a man came within reach, he was knocked over by Hum’s fist. Finally the squad went away, [but] came back with reinforcements and chains. They overpowered Hum, took him to camp at Valley Forge, and chained him in a cabin. During the night Hum broke the chains and went home.”³⁴ Similar feats attributed to this local Paul Bunyan-type of strong man are credited to other heroes in other communities, in their own fund of legend.

INTERCULTURAL RELATIONS

There is an interesting story of a Mennonist family living along the Old Philadelphia Road east of Lancaster, said to have taken in a thirteen-year-old Irish boy named James Annesley as an indentured servant in 1798. When his term was nearly up, two other immigrants who knew his Irish relatives identified this James Annesley as a lost son and heir of a well-known family, and took him back to England, where his claims were brought to court in November 1743. The popular novelist, Walter Scott, would use elements of this tale for the storyline of his romance, *Guy Mannering*, published in 1815. Naming his fictional hero Harry Bertram, Scott places the exile in India rather than on a frontier Pennsylvania plantation.³⁵

Thomas Solvon was an indentured servant bound from the age of eleven to twenty-one to the employ of Mennonite Christian Neukummer in Manor Township, Lancaster County. Since the boy’s impoverished “Irish” parents, with a family of nineteen children, had disagreed religiously, Thomas had not been baptized at birth. His strict employer, Neukummer, sent him to school for four months, and then “presented” him as an eighteen year old to “the Menonist congregation.” Apparently they saw no problem in having an Irish member, for on Easter Sunday of 1771, Bishop “Bentz Hirsche” (Benjamin Hershey) baptized Thomas. However, there was trouble within a few months. With the wedding of his step-sister approaching, Thomas asked for

time off and some money for celebration. Farmer Neukummer, who had frequently kept his Irish servant from “celebration” before, would now give him neither request. Determined to get money somehow, that very night (he later claimed) Thomas found an unexpected opportunity. Hearing the farm’s cattle tramping about near the house long after dark, he went out, cursing, to drive them out of the yard. Here he came upon “the devil in the form of a man,” who promised him the needed money if he would sign “his baptized and family name” in his own blood. Later, he claimed to have seen the Devil coming to him “dressed in green,” a hue we may guess had little to do with anything Bishop Hirsche might have taught him in whatever instruction class he had. All of this tale would be told by Thomas some eighteen years later to a self-styled Lutheran exorcist in Maryland who was eager to release him from the Devil’s power.³⁶

An unwritten family tradition from Cocalico, where the Mennonist presence was thin, bespeaks the tensions of couples divided in faith. Farmer Christian Bricker (d. 1784), a brother-in-law of Deacon Christian Eby of Hammer Creek, had married a Lutheran wife. While he was away on a trip, she took her children to be baptized in the Lutheran church at Schaefferstown. When he found this out he was so furious that at the next meeting of the Lutheran congregation he rode his horse into the church and up and down the aisle, earning thereby, if the story is correct, a heavy fine. None of the children, it seems, followed their father’s Mennonite faith.³⁷

RELATIONS WITH AFRICAN AMERICANS

“The Mennonists,” recorded a New Jersey Quaker, “Disown their Members” who acquire slaves, “and there is no Remedy for them that buy them till they make the Negroes Restitution.” In the mid-18th century there may have been as many as 800 slaves in Lancaster County, chiefly in the predominantly Scots-Irish communities and in the borough of Lancaster. When one Mennonist man, asserted the Quaker account, decided against his own church’s teaching to purchase a slave, he dreamed, during the “night before he got him,” that he “Saw a Lader that Reached to heaven, & he thot he attempted to go up it, & there came a Negro man & thrust him off, & he attempted the Second & third time, & the Negro pushd him off Each time, & he awoke & Concluded he would go back and Have no more to Do with the Negro, & accordingly went back next morning & threw up his bargin.”³⁸

I have often heard oral narrations based on an account by the famous Quaker journalist, John Woolman, mentioning an experience during his travels in 1757. “At Menallen [Maryland],” he records, “a Friend gave me some account of a religious Society amongst the Dutch, called Minonists, and amongst other things related a passage in substance as follows: One of the Minonists having acquaintance with a man of another Society at a considerable distance, and



*18th-century immigrant schoolteacher Christopher Dock, who has been called the author of the first American book on pedagogy. (From **Christopher Dock: Colonial Schoolmaster**, by Gerald C. Studer)*

being with his wagon on business near the house of his said acquaintance, and night coming on, he had thoughts of putting up with him; but passing by his fields and observing t[he] distressed appearance of his slaves, he kind[led] a fire in the woods hard by and lay th[ere] that night. His said acquaintance [heard] where he lodged, and afterward mee[ting] the Minonist told him of it, adding he should have been heartily welcome at his house, and from their acquaintance beforetime wondered at his conduct in that case.

“The Minonist replied: ‘Ever since I lodged by thy fields I’ve wanted to come to thy house for entertainment, but seeing thy slaves at their work and observing the manner of their dress, I had no liking to come to partake with thee.’ [He] then admonished him to use them with more humanity, and added, ‘As I lay by the fire that night, I thought that as I was a man of substance, thou would have received me freely, but if I had been as poor as one of thy slaves, and had no power to help myself, I should have received from th[y] hand no kinder usage than they.’”³⁹

Related to this topic, there is recorded as occurring in Germantown on August 4, 1762, an incident that was, unfortunately, not merely legendary. A slave had committed suicide. “The reason,” reported Christopher Saur’s German newspaper on August 12, “is supposed to be this: Since he had been stolen by force out of his country, and had to leave behind his wife and children, he had believed and said that he would hang himself, in order to come

back into his country to his wife and children. In carrying this out he had also stuffed his pockets full of apples, in order, it appears, to take them along to his wife."

MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

In our community, possibly the most often used name of a local person from the 18th century is that of Christopher Dock, an immigrant German schoolteacher who lived in present-day Upper Salford Township and taught at my home Mennonite meetinghouse, Salford, and in one at Skippack, four or five miles distant. The historic resonance of Docks's name was such that in 1953 it was given to our local Mennonite high school. This was especially appropriate, in that Dock was the earliest known practitioner in Pennsylvania of what we have called *Fraktur*, and since has also been called the author of the first American book on pedagogy, by virtue of his *Schul-Ordnung* (*School Management*) written in 1750. He died in 1771, with a legend remaining in the community that he had been found on his knees in the Skippack schoolroom, where he had been praying for his pupils.

In 1887 we find Salford Mennonite preacher Henry Bower telling a Quaker visitor "an anecdote of Christian [sic] Dock, one of their people who lived in the neighborhood many years ago & was a very pious man. A neighbor who was a wicked man became so enraged against him at the contrast of his blameless life with his own evil manner of living, that he determined to put him to death. Accordingly he cut a heavy club & went to his house & Hearing the sound of a voice within, he thought the man might have company, and drew near to listen. He found that the sound he had heard was that of the pious man in prayer to the Almighty, & he overheard him pleading for the Divine mercy to be extended to his enemies, so that they might be rescued from everlasting destruction. Overawed by the solemnity of the feeling, and . . . pressed with a sense of his own wickedness, he entered the house, made known the purpose for which he had come, and begged the good man to pray for mercy on his behalf. . . . He asked Christian what he should do with his club? It was put into the fire and consumed."⁴⁰

Another version I have heard tells of an ungodly stonemason who swore that he could prove the saintly Dock a sham capable of losing his temper like anyone else. But after being virulently attacked verbally, the old schoolmaster simply replied, "Friend, may God have mercy on you." Lower Salford's famed bibliophile, Abraham Harley Cassel, told young Samuel Pennypacker that Dock was so scrupulous a man that he would not wear linsey-woolsey for fear of transgressing an Old Testament proscription of mixing two kinds of cloth. Some of these and other memories of Dock were woven into a "Cantata" for which I wrote the text and Alice Parker composed the music in 1966, and which is occasionally performed in our community.

"Genius" Joseph Shirk (1820-1902) lived in Caernarvon Township in eastern Lancaster County. As a youthful

apprentice with his uncle, a tanner, he had read the older man's books on surveying and taught himself so well that he became the entire community's most trusted practitioner of this skill. Already as a twenty year old, in this era of many mechanical inventions, he had startled his family by designing a grain cradle that sped the harvest remarkably.⁴¹ His knack for very close observation was such that he was said to be able to name every plant, herb, or weed within miles of his home. He would write to the publishers of almanacs with corrections of their celestial calculations, as well as to the authors of surveying books. As his prowess in surveying developed, his standards of accuracy became such that he constructed his own compass, in every detail. At one time he lived on a farm at the foot of Turkey Hill near the Mennonite meetinghouse called "Smoketown" or Lichty's. From here he went forth, during sixty years of surveying (1841-1901), to map "almost every acre of land from Terre Hill to Morgantown." After his reputation had solidified, the corrections of "Old Man Shirk" would never be questioned.⁴²

As a twenty-five-year-old bachelor, Joe Shirk had fashioned his own repeating seven-shot pistol, which he called his "squirrel-thrasher." This he expected to use on a visit to a brother in Ohio, who had written to him that the woods out there were full of game. Shirk family tradition later held that he sold his invention to an insistent New Englander he met on a canal boat on the trip west, saying that he could just as easily make another one for himself when he got home. The mysterious Yankee, hints the family tale, may have been the Samuel Colt of Connecticut who claimed to have invented the famous six-shooter revolver.

Even more intriguing, though seemingly more exaggerated, is another local tradition. Several Italian engineers, goes the story, had been sent from Philadelphia to the farm of Joseph Shirk, to get expert advice on their assignment of calculating the path of a tunnel to be constructed under the Alps. Found at work in the fields, the legendary surveyor told his guests to come back the following morning, and when they did, he presented them with the figures they needed, charging a fee of one dollar. The tale concludes triumphantly with the claim that when the two crews working on the tunnel came together under the mountains, it was found that Joseph Shirk's calculations had made them come out within inches of each other.⁴³

Whether or not this story was factual, it was certainly true that Shirk's little frame shop (still standing today on an Amish farm between Churchtown and the Welsh Mountain), with its stream-powered saws, lathes and grindstones, would eventually turn out about a hundred grain cradles annually, along with dozens of handmade wooden rakes.⁴⁴

Of all the stories I've surveyed, none seem more appealing than that of the career of "Blind Johnny" Wenger (1843-1916) of Blue Ball. The following is based on a selection of anecdotes both written and still circulating orally. Johnny's ability to function usefully, easily, and

cheerfully was discussed in many a “Waverdahl” (Weaverland Valley) Sunday afternoon conversation. Among the stories often swapped was one about a farmer who had come to Johnny near the end of the harvest, somewhat desperate for a new binder. As a dealer, Johnny assembled such machines in his shop after receiving the parts by rail. In this case, he had sold all but one of the fifteen he had received for the year, and the remaining one had not been assembled. Telling his customer to come back the next morning, he worked late that night, fitting the finicky machine together in the dark. His working thus without light caused some persons coming by the unlit shop and hearing sounds of movement within to gossip of the shop being “haunted.”

On another occasion, a neighborhood farmer named John Eby could not get the “knotter” on his binder to work properly. After a local handyman proved similarly unsuccessful, Blind Johnny was called in. Calling for silence, he asked that the machinery be turned with a hand crank so that he could listen to it moving, then told them to take the knotter apart and look for a shaft the size of a pencil. They would find this shaft bent, he said, and predicted correctly that when they straightened it the machine would work again. Another story had a binder salesman, unable to make his machine perform correctly, sending for Johnny. The blind man listened, and said, “You have a machine bolt [with a square head] where a carriage bolt [round head] ought to be.” When this was changed the malfunction stopped.

When the circle of a half-dozen “store sitters” in his establishment saw Johnny lighting the coal-oil lamps at dusk and asked how he knew it was getting dark, he replied, “*Ei, die Vögel singe nimmy*” (The birds aren’t singing anymore). Traveling by foot or by trolley, he was so well oriented that he sometimes guided people who could see. When asked how he knew he was in Terre Hill, he replied, “I smell the cigar factory.” He could not pass a farm, he said, without hearing something — “A child, screen door, dog, cat, chickens or some other noise” — which sighted people did not notice. Humans were created, he felt, with senses that remain “dormant” unless others are lost.

His sense of humor was never far beneath the surface. Once a man named Zimmerman who was taking him along on his carriage, remarked, “*Nau dort sin’ vier schöne Gaul!*” (There are four nice horses). “*Ja,*” responded Johnny, “*un’ sie sin’ au’ fett*” (Yes, and they’re fat too). “*Nau wie wesht du ’es sie fett sin?*” bantered the driver (Now how do you know they’re fat?). “*Ei,*” said Johnny, “*husht du sei lewe en schöner Gaul g’sehne es net fett war?*” (Did you ever see a nice horse that wasn’t fat?).⁴⁵

Endlessly curious, the storekeeper might be found crawling high up on a new trolley bridge across the Conestoga behind the Wenger house, “looking at” the structure with his fingers, or examining a growing crop of corn in the same way. When a young fellow deliberately set a wheel-

barrow in his accustomed path to the chicken house, causing him to stumble and fall, he said nothing, but a day or two later, sensing the presence in his store of the boy he was sure was the perpetrator, he grabbed him and without explanation gave him a thrashing. Once, twelve-year-old Aaron Weaver came into the post office and changing his voice to sound like that of a neighboring girl, asked for the mail of another family (Ike Hurst’s). When the boy then laughingly said in his normal voice, “No, I want Joe Weaver’s mail,” Johnny chased him out the door demanding angrily, “*Verwas schwetzt du net verständich!*” (Why don’t you talk understandably?)⁴⁶ A woman who brought some butter to Johnny’s store for barter failed to thwart his sightless shrewdness. When Johnny, feeling something strange about the butter, remarked that it wasn’t right, she insisted it was, until he took a knife, sliced through the butter, found it concealing a large sweet potato, and sent her home with the package.

Another trick failed as Johnny was crossing the Conestoga on a fallen tree (he would go to an icehouse to get ice for his store). Jere Martin, standing quietly in the creek as Johnny felt his way, tugged on the blind man’s pant leg. “Now Jere,” came the immediate response. “How did you know it was me?” complained the boy. “*’Sis niemand es boshartig als du bisht,*” replied Johnny (There’s nobody as mischievous as you are). Once he turned the laugh on a group playing near his store. After showing a boy a stake in the ground, the others would blindfold him, turn him around, and let him try to hit the stake with the wheel of a wheelbarrow. Good-naturedly, Johnny took a turn. As he headed straight toward the stake, one of the astonished boys yelled, “*Chonny, du peepsht!*” (Johnny, you’re peeping!)⁴⁷

Another Mennonite remembered for exceptional capability and neighborly quality was Bishop Jacob Kulp (1798-1875), a farmer on the Allentown Road in Towamencin Township, Montgomery County. While going on foot to the courthouse in Norristown in order to look up some deeds, he turned down the offer of a ride, saying, “*Ich hab’s augenumma fa laufe*” (I’ve decided to walk). He is particularly remembered via a story that used to be told by a 20th-century successor in office, John E. Lapp. As Lapp would tell it, when someone borrowed money from Bishop Kulp, he would make a notation of the name and amount on the wall of a little wash house between the house and barn. Presumably, because of his affluence, there were a good many names on the list, which was his only record. Some, of course, took longer to pay than others. Once, when the time came around for whitewashing the walls, the Bishop was asked what to do about the names. Just whitewash over them, he replied; God and the debtors would remember what had been written.

Of a similar community-oriented spirit was Mennonite dairy farmer Henry G. Rosenberger (1894-1967) of Hilltown Township in Bucks County. I have heard several versions of the following incident: “. . . There was a man in the

community who was not an exceptionally good manager. He wanted to borrow some money from [the Chalfont Bank]. He said that he had talked with his neighbor, Henry G. Rosenberger, and that Rosenberger was willing to endorse his note. Since Rosenberger was a prosperous dairy farmer [and a director of the bank], the poor man got his loan. When it was time to pay off the note, the poor man came to the bank to have it renewed. But this time he had no one to endorse it. He was certain, though, that Henry Rosenberger would once more do so, but [Rosenberger] was not at home when he stopped in. The banker thought that the man's assumption was likely true, so he allowed him to renew the note.

"But . . . a day or two later, before Rosenberger had signed the note, the poor man suddenly died. When Rosenberger learned of the developments, and that the bank was going to lose the money, he also stopped at the bank and asked to see the treasurer. From him he learned that his fears were correct: the poor man — not to mention the banker — had been counting on Henry to endorse the note. So Rosenberger said, 'Could I see the note, please?' Whereupon the banker handed it to him. To the amazement of the banker Henry G. Rosenberger signed it — knowing full well that that obligated him to pay it, which he did."⁴⁸

PLAINNESS

N. B. Grubb, long-time pastor of the First Mennonite Church in Philadelphia, collected a story of disagreement involving early members of the Germantown Mennonite congregation. Some who had come from Holland were too stylish for the simpler Palatines who came a few years later. In particular, Dirck Keyser, silk merchant from Amsterdam, wore a blue silk coat that looked out of place to the Palatine brethren from Skippack. The latter decided at length to visit Dirck and admonish him on the matter. When several of them arrived, however, they were non-plussed to find Dirck in his garden, wearing his silk coat while in the midst of humble hand labor. When he saw them, moreover, he wiped his hand on the coat before stretching it to them in greeting. This so deflated the Palatines' attempt to show him how proud he was to wear the coat that they didn't bring up the subject they had come to discuss.

Whereas the above incident must have occurred, if it did, by 1730, another recorded as occurring "some years" before 1781 is on the same theme. A hat maker of the Quaker persuasion, "Took a parcel of womens hats to Lancaster to Sell, & young Menonist women were pleased with them and bought them, but their Elders were not easy with Any New fashion Coming amongst them, & held a Conference Amongst the Elders, & concluded to . . . Advise the friend the next time he Came with hats to Sell, not to be instrumental in introducing New fashion or Superfluity amongst them, but in particular, if he brought any more that way, to let them be plain & no Ribbon about them. . . ." ⁴⁹

Coming up into the early 19th century, the issue of plainness persists in story. "Mr. Samuel N. Eby late of Mt. Joy, related an incident relating to the family of his grand-father, Bishop Samuel Nissley. When his two youngest sons were boys before they were quite grown they were full of mischief. At that day the clothing worn by boys were [sic] commonly made at home and parents who lived in the country, especially those who belonged to plain churches, were strict in having the clothing of their children made plainly. When the youngest of the two Nissley boys named Henry was nearly grown to manhood in size he despised the plainly cut home made suits but knew that his people at home would not consent to putting on store clothes. However he in some manner managed to get to Lancaster where he bought an outfit of the most extreme dudy kind, and brought it home secretly. Then the next Sunday morning when all the family had departed to church at Erismans, then he dressed in the new clothes and followed to the meeting house, arriving there late when the meeting was in order. He went in through the door and walking up the aisle he took his accustomed seat. His father was standing at the table preaching, and when he beheld his son in the dandy new colors, silk vest, and cravat, etc., he was so shocked by the sight that he broke down instantly and could not proceed with the sermon. The tender father did not rebuke the son by look or act or word at home the following week, and on the next Sunday the boy wanted to wear his new clothes again but could not find them, the women assisting in the search for Henry's store suit. They searched all through their house. Then in his customary good-natured way the father asked, 'Henry, can't you find your suit? Look in the tar barrel, and never again come to meeting that way.'⁵⁰

An oft-repeated story in Lancaster County recalls how conservative critics of Bishop J. N. Brubacher approached him much as the Skippackers had gone to correct Dirck Keyser. In a version told seventy-three years after his death by a great-granddaughter, the bishop was remembered as being visited one evening in his new house near Mt. Joy by "a delegation" of fellow ministers. They were concerned by rumors that he had "bought expensive, fancy furniture for his parlor." "After listening patiently and quietly, he asked them if they would like to see this 'wonderful' new furniture in his parlor. They agreed. He led them to the parlor with no more words. He solemnly opened the door to the parlor and raised the shades in the dark room. But all they saw was a big pile of potatoes on the bare floor. The big summer's harvest of potatoes was all there. He closed the door and told them, 'You may leave now.'⁵¹

A story Mennonites tell with many variations is that of a plain-coated man who sold a blind horse with the recommendation that although it might not "look good," it was otherwise of fine quality. Shortly thereafter, when he saw the disappointed purchaser returning with the horse, he immediately protested that the deal had been legitimate since he had duly informed his victim that the horse didn't

“look good.” The purchaser replied that he had come not to return the horse, but to borrow the plain coat so that he could wear it while selling the horse to someone else.

Raconteur Isaac Clarence Kulp of Vernfield in Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County, relates the anecdote of Abe Ziegler of Lederachville. Once, after Abe had gone into the local tavern “*fa 'n Katz ab petze*” (literally, to pinch off a cat — to have a drink), a “bully” (standard participant in many local legends) came in and began to raise a ruckus. “*Butz 'n uff, Abe*” (Clean him up), said the proprietor. Setting down his drink, Abe, who was wearing a plain coat, walked over to the coat hooks and hung up his broad-brimmed hat and his coat, saying, “*Dot hengt mei Grischdendum bis ich z'rick kumm*” (There hangs my Christianity until I come back). Then he picked up the bully and threw him out through the double doors. Then he finished his drink.

WESTWARD MIGRATION

Two stories recorded in the same year, 1993, in Franconia Township, Montgomery County, focus on the theme of hospitality to strangers. The first was written by aged farmer, Henry R. Bergey, in a little chapbook he kept for miscellaneous thoughts, recipes, and memories. Though his English is occasionally quite broken and even obscure, it is printed here verbatim to preserve its phonetic evidence of how it was pronounced by one of our local Dutchman of that era.

“Hear you will find,” Bergey begins, “a Story which was told to me By Reveren Daniel G. Lapp, a missionary from India: of a minister who lived onct in Illanoise and Preached there For Several years: and it hapened that Some of his nearest Friends moved to the Far west, where they often wrote to that minister to come to them as they need a minister to come to them as they need a minister there: at last the minister mat his mind up to Follow them, and that minister Preached there For Twenty years: and often came in his mind to come Back to Illanoise onct to wised his Old Friend and Brethren in Faith: the minister wrote a letter to one of his Best Friend and also a Brother in Faith nearly to Find whether they are alive yet. Before he would go on his Journey Back to Illanoise. And did not menten a word that he Expect to wised them Shortly: Those Good Friend answered that letter Promptly. and wrote a wery interesting letter to that minister in Reply on his leter: But thoes good Friend wer lack of that one thing which we find Phillipen 4-5 let your modration Be knownen to all man: when thoes good Friends would have obayed that, they would Shur[el]y not have Bin caught in that Trap: that they must Shame themselves later. that minister came on a wised to thoes Best Friends in Illanoise unExpeced and he wer not taken up as a loving Friend. non of them know him any more he Did not look like a tramp Neither came he like an update man. he walked From the Station and met his Best Friend in the afternoon in Front of there house and asked the woman For lodging.

But the woman Said in reply. they are not Prepared For Strangers to lodge But the minister wer not Skared. when Even his lodging were refuse. he knoweth when they would know him they would also do as Jesus told that Sameritan woman if you would know me you would Pray me For that Everlasting water So would that woman have Don if she would know him. in Stead to go to inquire of her husband what he got to Say. they Both Stand under the Forhead of there Barn. and looked after the Stranger. who took his Seat on the Porch: nearly to hear what the husband got to Say. and Boath came to the hous. and the husband Said they are realy not Prepared For Strangers to lodge. But the Stranger were not Scared when even the Second Time [he] wer refused: then the Stranger Said in reply, he is tired of his Journy and he daunt want to go any Further he would like to stay with you: at last it came a little heavy on the old man and he said we must try to Shape it he can stay. with them. he knoweth that he hath not told the truth. they have a large house. and Said they are not Prepared to lodge one Person: and the minister kept his sead on the Porch till the Super was Prepared then the woman came out and said to the Stranger the Super is now Prepared. and if he wants Something to Eate he can come in: the Stranger went in and took a Seat at the table. and wery little wer Spoken. at the Table and when they wer Filed the Stranger Starded for his Sead on the Porch again then the husband Said you can take a sead in hear and they Star[ted] a Conversation with Each other: while the woman [was] washing Dishes In another room. then the husband ask the Stranger about his Business Then the Stranger Said it was long agoe in his mind to come Back to Illanoise Onct more to wised my Old Friends and Brethern in Faith But it would never fid till now. then the minister gave his name and said I am the minister who Preached in your meetinghouse Several years: and the husband was nearly Staunded, and he ran to the Door at the other Kitchen where his wife [was] washing Dishes and Said what a great Shame have we Broad upon ourselves. this is the minister to whome you wrote that lether. the other week. and the woman ran in and Shaked hands with the minister and wept. and Said O i Shame my Self that I do not know where to look at: then the minister Said you need not to Shame of me I nearly want to See hou you would Deal with Strangers: then the woman Said this Should be a worning that I never Deal with Strangers as tramps. we find that Some People could not Believe that an upright man would Fool his Best Friends in Such a way: the writer could not Prove that Because Such things may hapen to Prove themselves. . . .⁵²

The second example, from the same year from a man living hardly three miles away, Henry D. Hagey of the village of Elroy, was submitted to the local newspaper in the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect. Its opening is transcribed here in that language, followed by a translation of the entire anecdote.

“*Es hud a-mohl en Mon in unserm Shteddel ga-wooned beim naa-ma Martin Bechtel, derr hud mohl em Jake Freed*

ferr-zaeld wee err noch young und led-ich gewesd ware, warre err aw a-mohl en tramp ga-wesd. Err hud ihm g'saud, err un noch en Kerrl war-en a-mohl noch em Shlade Ohio ga-lofa. Now ae Hunnerd yohr z'rick."

"There was once a man who lived in our town with the name Martin Bechtel, who once told Jake Freed that when he was young and single, he had been a tramp. He told him that he and another fellow once walked to Ohio, now about 100 years ago [i.e., ca. 1890s]. A preacher told him at which house they should stop for a room, where good people lived that he knew well. There was at that time a big wilderness between here and that house in Ohio. They walked paths that went through big, thick woods where they didn't see man or house.

"One evening when it was beginning to get dark they came out of a big woods and to a small house, where the preacher had said the good people lived.

"The boys decided they wanted to see whether these were such good people. They asked whether they could stay overnight. The man said they could. The boys didn't introduce themselves and also didn't tell them who told them to stop there.

"That evening they told the people that when they were going through the woods they had heard a man holler or cry, but they didn't go and look for him. The man told them that it was lucky for them that they hadn't gone to look for him, because it was a hungry panther that was crying.

"The boys were tired, hungry, and thirsty, but the people didn't bring them anything to eat. They also thought the man watched them all evening with one eye. It was a small one-storey house. On one end was a ladder, and when it was bedtime, the man told them they could climb up the ladder and sleep upstairs. When they were almost asleep, they heard the man saying something downstairs. Then they heard that he was praying to God for them and his family, to keep them from evil people. Then they felt safe.

"In the morning when they were ready to leave, the boys told them who they were and who told them that they had rooms and were good people. This made the man sorrowful, and he told them to eat breakfast before they left. But they said 'no' and left."⁵³

EXEMPLA

As late as the 1950s one could find circulating in Pennsylvania a tract containing the story of a man who, in going out into the woods, had defied the biblical command to keep the sabbath day holy. He had sat down on a stump, only to find that he could not rise from it. As I recall the story, when someone tried to cut the stump with an ax, blood ran from it. The tract was entitled something like "The Sitting, Sleeping Preacher in the Woods," and seemed to have been newly mailed out by an old-fashioned Mennonite from Ontario.

One Sunday morning in 1832, the unmarried Elizabeth Martin told Bishop Jacob Rutt Zimmerman, in the ante-

room of the Weaverland meetinghouse near Blue Ball in Lancaster County, that she desired baptism. For years afterward Bishop Zimmerman would tell her story: how after the service, as she was mounting her horse, the animal had reared, throwing her to the ground, and then fallen backwards on top of her. With her chest punctured by the pommel of the saddle, she had lived only a short while. Short, thickset Bishop Zimmerman, his round face wreathed in tears, would frequently begin a sermon with this exemplum, hoping thereby to awaken his careless young people to their need of salvation.⁵⁴ Elizabeth Martin's colorfully decorated sidesaddle is today part of the collection of the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society.

Among our older "Dutch" people in Montgomery County one heard little stories warning against spiritual sins. One John Landis, who had made considerable trouble over "ditches" along a road running by his land, received a condign punishment, it was thought, when as an older man he had bodily "trouble" with his own "water." Another person in the community who "didn't die friendly" was remembered from time to time, when persons traveling at night would see a hand reaching out to them from the darkness, seeming to beg for a friendship the deceased person had declined to give in life. Children were warned that whistling on Sunday would make the angels cry.

An exemplum told in some confusion by an old Mennonite minister at Doylestown after the turn of the last century was about a father and son who had set out from home for the Delaware Canal locks. Unfortunately, went the story, the son had rushed off so thoughtlessly that when they arrived they found he had "forgotten the keys." This appears to have been the minister's pious recycling of an old joke story of the "left-hand wrench" variety. That is, while it was originally about sending someone to get the nonexistent "keys," the minister, not getting the point, had turned it into a warning against youthful heedlessness. At least that was the point taken from it by a sober, if puzzled listener who tried to make sense of it to me half a century later.

HUMOR

I'll begin this section with an excerpt from my history of the Franconia Conference Mennonites. Christian Halteman (d. 1833), minister of the Salford congregation, "was not considered as fluent a speaker as his son Abraham would be. Nevertheless, he would be remembered for one particularly apt choice of a text. An enthusiastic hunter (so goes a varying local legend), he was walking one morning toward Salford (or Herstein) meetinghouse, when he became engrossed in following the trail of a fox in a new-fallen snow. Having finally traced the tracks to a lair, he hurried to the meetinghouse to find his congregation already seated, wondering what had happened to him. Stepping into the 'preacher's bench,' he took a text that brought together both a hunter's pleasure and the Mennonite sadness at the world's rejection of the true Christ: 'Foxes have

holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”⁵⁵

One of the most often-told folktales from the Pennsylvania Mennonites of the prerailroad era was kept among the descendants of Jacob Kraybill, “an old flour miller of Marietta” who occasionally took his product to Philadelphia by wagon. A widely read telling of it has it that while Kraybill, accompanied by a younger brother who was tending the brake, was en route, he encountered another heavily laden wagon coming toward Lancaster. Alas, the teamster showed no inclination to yield the right of way. Kraybill, a powerfully built man, sternly warned the other: “If you don’t give me my share of the road I’ll have to do something I don’t like to do.” The teamster sized him up, then meekly pulled aside, permitting Kraybill to pass. Farther along the road the brother could no longer check his curiosity. “What would you have done,” he inquired, “that you didn’t like to do, if that fellow had not pulled over?” “I would have pulled over,” said Kraybill drily.⁵⁶ (As some of the present-day Kraybills tell the story, it was a matter of frozen ruts, making it necessary for one of the two wagons to back up, rather than pull aside.)

The frightening meteor shower of 1833 left its trail in Pennsylvania diaries. As an older man, William Kunstman of Nazareth, wrote, “‘Did you see the stars falling this morning?’ almost everybody asked his neighbor on or around November 14, 1833. I was almost twelve years old then. My father, John Kunstman, a farmer in Lower Saucon Township, had engaged George Werner to break flax, so we got up very early. Before daybreak George was very frightened, and said, ‘Do you see the stars all falling down? I believe it’s the end of the world. Are we going to be doing any work today?’ ‘Oh I think so,’ said Father, and then we all went out and an amazing sight presented itself. It seemed as though the stars were coming right down. It looked like firey snowflakes in all directions over us, though none nearby, and it kept on like this until daybreak. Then George and I went to work breaking flax, and the next night the stars were just as sparkling as ever.”⁵⁷

In this connection, Isaac Clarence Kulp relates the legend of a man living on or near the *Barick-Shtross* (Ridge Road) near Tylersport, who was sharpening a millstone at the time of the meteor shower. Someone said he should stop, in view of what was happening. He replied, “Letting the stars fall is God’s work. Sharpening millstones is mine.” (This is uncannily parallel to John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem “Abraham Davenport,” in which a Connecticut worthy of 1780 refuses to halt a meeting when the sky grows ominously dark, saying, “Let God do His work, we will see to ours.”) At another home in Montgomery County, during the meteor shower someone was asked to “Go and get the Bible.” As Isaac Clarence Kulp tells it, the reply was, “We have none.” “Well then,” came the anxious request, “at least get the Lancaster Almanac.”

A classic anecdote often retold along the upper Conestoga in Lancaster County is firmly accredited by descendants of Bishop Jonas Martin. As the story goes, when

an aggrieved brother had poured out a complaint to Bishop Jonas, he had received the sympathetic response, “You’re right.” Later, another man, the object of the first brother’s complaint, had come in turn, told his (opposite) side of the affair, and had also been told by Bishop Martin, “You’re right.” At that, the listening Mrs. Martin is supposed to have admonished her husband, “Well now, they can’t both be right,” whereupon the irenic bishop acknowledged, “You’re right too” (*Du husht aa recht*). A grandson of Bishop Martin, Titus Martin of New Holland, interviewed August 30, 1984, reported that his brother had recently told him that he had been present as a boy when their grandfather made the oft-quoted remark. Citing the same source, Amos B. Hoover dates the occasion of the story “about 1912.”⁵⁸ However, there is a Juniata County version as well, and a Jewish version was heard in a 1991 commencement speech at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. “Pennsylvania Dutch” writer Noah G. Good remembers hearing a version of the story in 1925, told by a young man from Ohio at a social occasion at Eastern Mennonite School in Virginia. Noah has made use of the same motif in one of his many written Pennsylvania Dutch stories.⁵⁹

My brother-in-law Art Kennel, who grew up near Atglen in eastern Lancaster County, passes along a story from that community. A woman brought some homemade butter to a storekeeper named Hershey in Christiana, telling him of an unfortunate accident. Since a mouse had fallen into their butter, she said, the family couldn’t bring themselves to eat it. However, citing the common wisdom that “what you don’t know won’t hurt you,” she was wondering if the butter might be saved by having someone else eat it unbeknownst. Would Mr. Hershey be so kind as to take it and sell it, while giving her some other butter? The storekeeper consented, took it back into another room, and rewrapped it. Then he gave it back to her, agreeing with her that it was all right to go by the principle of “what you don’t know won’t hurt you.”

A market story told in our community a few decades ago has a well-dressed woman wandering past a stall at the end of the day as the occupants are cleaning up. She asks, “Have you a roaster left to sell?” The young Mennonite woman, knowing that there is one rather scrawny leftover in the barrel, gives the impression of selecting it from among others, and lifts it out for the customer’s inspection. Predictably, the customer says, “Do you have anything nicer?” The girl respectfully lowers the chicken into the barrel, stirs around in the ice, and lifts it out again, showing it from the other side. “All right,” says the customer, “I’ll take both.”

A nonlegendary anecdote comes from two young marketmen in our community, now no longer living. Around 1930 they were cleaning up at the end of the day, when a rather stout African American woman walked by. Mischievously, one of the fellows said to the other, “*Wie daitscht gleiche mit so 'n dicky Frau hame z'geh d'novet?*” To their consternation, the woman looked back at them

and said, "Ja, wie daitst?"⁶⁰

Then there are courtship stories. During the horse and buggy days, a certain young man, who is said to have been from the Conestoga [Amish Mennonite] congregation [near Morgantown], was dating two girls at the same time.

Exactly how he was able to accomplish this is not known, but as time progressed, he realized that such nonsense would have to end. He wanted to get married, but he thought so much of both girls that he could not come to a decision as to which one he should choose. Finally, after much thought and realizing that he could not make the decision himself, he decided to have his horse help him.

"The route that he used in traveling from where he lived to the homes of these two girls was the same route up to a certain point, where there was a 'Y' in the road. The one girl lived on the left and the other on the right. At that 'Y,' he planned to release the reins and allow the horse to decide which road to take. That road would lead him to the home of his future wife, where he would receive her acceptance to marry him, and then he would break relations with the other girl. On the day that he finally went through with this scheme, he approached the 'Y' and released the reins as planned, but the horse did not choose either road — it went straight into the field where it began eating grass. The young fellow sat there bewildered, not knowing what to do. The sequel to the story is that he did not marry either girl."⁶¹

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A quota of Amish, Dunker, and Brethren in Christ legends, of course, also survives. Not long ago I was seriously informed by a good-hearted young Amishman that the reason a certain genetic condition was evident in a Lancaster County Amish family was that the father had previously made mocking comments on similarly afflicted people. Another Amishman from the Big Valley confided in me that his neighbor, looking in the eye of a horse that would not thrive for him, was dismayed to see the perfect image of a neighbor woman who wished him ill. Such thoughts are of course not typical of all Amish. John A. Hostetler includes a few legends in his 1989 book, *Amish Roots: A Treasury of History, Wisdom, and Lore*.⁶² Especially meaningful on the Dunker side is a story of Preacher John Naas and his encounter with the King of Prussia shortly before 1719, as written up by Martin G. Brumbaugh.⁶³ The fascinating story of the visions of Catharine Hummer, daughter of a Dunker preacher at White Oak in northern Lancaster County (1762-65) can be accessed in an old history of the Ephrata Cloister.⁶⁴ A modern Brethren in Christ story of legendary character (later repudiated) was printed in Elizabethtown as late as the 1950s.⁶⁵

I was personally never more impacted with the power and intrigue of legend than in standing before a family reunion nearly thirty years ago, with the sacred assignment of conveying to the younger descendants of my grandfather

what kind of man he had been. I remembered several stories he had told me twenty years before that, especially one about how troubled he had once been to find one of his competitors in a Philadelphia market house turning into an enemy. For years the man, a farmer from our Lower Salford-Towamencin Township community, had refused to speak to Grampop, even deliberately crossing the street to avoid meeting him. Nonetheless, Grampop had always waved to him and said hello. Finally, when the man had become ill, he called Grampop to his bedside and asked for a reconciliation. From this and quite a few comments from old neighbors, as well as from my own experience, I had gained the authentic impression that my grandfather was a very kind man.

Eleven years after his death, I was trying to illustrate Grampop's benevolent character by telling a story of his taking me along to fetch a calf from a neighboring farm. On our way home, I recalled, the poor excited animal in the back of our homemade truck had lurched against the nape of Grampop's neck and shot its fragrantly warm bowel contents down his shirt. But just as I was making the point of how patient a man my listeners' kindly ancestor was, I suddenly suspected that the probable reason for my remembering this incident at all was my grandfather's angry reaction to the unpleasant deposit on his person. Here I was reversing the actual reaction of my grandfather, telling a story that was literally false while at the same time being sure that the point I was making about him was true. It threw me badly off stride in mid story to think that I was misinforming my hearers while trying to make a spiritually valid point. Yet my fallacious legend was communicating "not only tradition, but truth." As I think Shakespeare put it somewhere, "The truest poetry is the most feigning."

My final legend-example here, on an even lighter note, has to do with a Franconia Township man whose Mennonite standing was made marginal by a rather common human failing. In the 1970s Reinhart Gottshall (b. 1880) and Linneaus Kulp (b. 1893) separately narrated to me an anecdote that plays on the name of this local worthy. Some years after hearing it I turned it into a ballad which has occasionally been sung to guitar accompaniment by my neighbor Henry Derstine. In the refrain, a reader (or singer) should raise the pitch between the first and last names, and in the last two refrains, extend the pronunciation of the first name in a low voice:

There was a man named Ephraim Delp, lived in Elroy, P-A,
He often walked to the hotel to spend his hard-earned pay.
The inn was at Franconia Square, across the Skippack Creek;
He liked to spend the evening there after a busy week -
Epherum, Epherum, Delp, Delp, Delp!

One night old Ephraim lingered late with friends in talk and drink;
When midnight came his patient wife did not know what to think.
Although she kept the screen-door locked, she couldn't go to bed;
She'd worried many times, but now, she feared old Ephraim dead.
Epherum, Epherum, Delp, Delp, Delp!

Next morning when the sun rose up, he staggered in the lane;
His pants were torn, his shoes were wet, and he had lost his cane.
"Ephraim, where did you spend the night?" his waiting wife she cries;
"What story can you have this time? and don't give me no lies,
"Epherum, Epherum, Delp, Delp, Delp!"

"I'll tell you, wife, the honest truth: two men beneath the bridge
"Kept calling to me all night long, down at the water's edge.
"An old one called my first name, with a deep voice like a drone;
"A younger one kept calling 'Delp!' in a kind of baritone;

"Eeepheruum, Eeepheruum, Eeepheruum, Delp, Delp, Delp!"
Now when you cross the Skippack Creek, below Franconia Square,
If you look down beneath the bridge, you'll find those men still there:
They're crouching, one on either side — neither one is very tall;
Both bass and baritone are green, and every night they call:

"Eeepheruum, Eeepheruum, Eeepheruum, Delp, Delp, Delp!"

Note alternative format:

There was a man named Ephraim Delp,
Lived in Elroy, P-A;
He often walked to the hotel
To spend his hard-earned pay.
The inn was at Franconia Square,
Across the Skippack Creek;
He liked to spend the evening there
After a busy week.

Ref.: Epherum, Epherum, Delp, Delp, Delp!

ENDNOTES

¹*The History of the Indian Valley and its Bank* (Souderton, Pa.: Union National Bank, 1976); *'Twas Seeding Time: A Mennonite View of the American Revolution* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1976); *Maintaining the Right Fellowship: A Narrative Account of Life in the Oldest Mennonite Community in North America* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1984); and forthcoming "The Earth is the Lord's: A Narrative History of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference."

²Ervin Beck, "Reggie Jackson Among the Mennonites," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LVIII (April 1984), 147-167. Cf. the same author's "Mennonite Origin Tales and Beliefs," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, LXIV (January 1990), 32-48.

³Versions of this and two other Menno-related tales are recounted by Myron Augsburger in "Irvin B. Horst: Historian, Bibliophile, Churchman," in *Menno Simons: A Reappraisal—Essays in Honor of Irvin B. Horst on the 450th Anniversary of the Fundamentboek*, ed. Gerald R. Brunk (Harrisonburg, Va.: Eastern Mennonite College, 1992), 11. One of these stories, earlier uncirculated among American Mennonites, has been making the rounds recently: This is "the story of a preaching service where Menno stood on a barrel of Molasses to be better heard and seen, and suffered a misfortune. Persons posted to keep watch suddenly interrupted the meeting with the cry that soldiers were coming. As he moved quickly to get off the barrel and flee, the top broke and he found himself standing in molasses. Unable to flee without leaving tracks, he stood while the women gathered and took turns licking off the molasses, and then he was able to escape. Horst adds his quip, 'This accounts for Mennonites having a sweet tooth.'" — *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴One of the most recent reproductions of this etching is in John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, *Mirror of the Martyrs* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 1990), 36-37.

⁵Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, tr. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1950), 1128-1129.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 1129.

⁷Daniel K. Cassel, *Geschichte der Mennoniten. Von Menno Simons' Austritt aus der Römisch-Katholischen Kirche in 1536 bis zu deren Auswanderung nach Amerika in 1683* (Philadelphia: J. Kohler, 1890),

431-440.

⁸Emil J. Waltner, *Banished for Faith* (Freeman, S.D.: Pine Hill Press, 1968), 144.

⁹L. A. Wollenweber, *Zwei treue Kameraden: Die beiden ersten Deutschen Ansiedler in Pennsylvania*. "Historische Erzählung aus der ersten Epoche der deutschen Einwanderer in Pennsylvania im Jahre 1680." Philadelphia: Jg. Kohler, 1880.

¹⁰E.g., Daniel H. Bertolet, *A Genealogical History of the Bertolet Family the descendants of Jean Bertolet* (originally printed at Harrisburg, Pa., 1914) (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1989), 173-176.

N.B.: Since the above was written, Isaac Clarence Kulp has shown me a copy of a kind of diary and collection of miscellaneous historical notes kept by Abraham Harley Cassel around 1858 (original in the collection of the Germantown Historical Society). This Cassel manuscript contains a section of "Anecdotes von mich selbst Versamlet," which includes parts of the Henry Frey story. It thus seems that Wollenweber drew on material that Cassel had originally collected orally. Several details in the part of the "Henry Frey" story involving Indian neighbors at Towamencin (cf. note 25, below) also appear in Cassel's manuscript.

¹¹John C. Wenger, *History of the Mennonites of the Franconia Conference* (Telford, Pa.: Franconia Mennonite Historical Society, 1937), 91-92.

¹²"An Early Germantown Tradition," *1901 Mennonite Yearbook and Almanac*, 12.

¹³Jacob N. Brubacher, "Brubacher Family and Connections in America," in *Biographical Annals of Lancaster County* (Lancaster, Pa.: J.H. Beers & Co., 1903) 353.

¹⁴Jacob N. Brubacher *The Brubacher Genealogy in America* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1884), 156-157.

¹⁵*Biographical Annals of Lancaster County* (n. 13), p.555.

¹⁶Annette Kunselman Burgert, *Eighteenth Century Emigrants From German-speaking Lands to North America*. Volume I: The Northern Kraichgau (Breinigsville, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Society, 1983), 422.

¹⁷David Martin's father, described as seventy-nine years old, is recorded as living at Weaverland in 1748. See "Brother Hantsch Visits the Mennonites — A Moravian Missionary Diary of 1748," tr. and ed. Don Yoder, *The Pennsylvania German, III*, November 1, 1951, 5.

¹⁸See Amos B. Hoover, *Descendants of Elisha M. Martin and Mary R. Heller* (Denver, Pa.: author, 1962), 7.

¹⁹Mary Louise Diller, *The George H. Keener Family*: (n.p., 1984), 2.

²⁰Henry D. Hagey, *Some Local History of Franconia Township*, ed. Joyce Clemmer Munro (Souderton, Pa.: [Moyer Packing Co.], 1979), p. 94.

²¹Joshua Gilpin, *The Journal of Joshua Gilpin 1809*, ed. Joseph E. Walker (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1975), 7.

²²H. Frank Eshelman, *Historic Background and Annals of the Swiss and German Pioneer Settlers of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and of their Remote Ancestors, from the Middle of the Dark Ages, Down to the Time of the Revolutionary War* (Lancaster, Pa.: author, 1917), p. 353.

²³John L. Ruth, "Piercing the Curtain: Genealogy Enriching History," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, XVI (April 1993), 3.

²⁴E. Elmer Sensenig, *A History of the Heinrich Everly Family and Their Descendants*, "Pamphlet No. 1" (Allentown, Pa.: Eberly Family Association, 1927), 2-3

²⁵Jacob A. Freed, *Partial History of the Freed Family and Connecting Families* (Souderton, Pa.: W.F. Goettler & Son, 1923), 72.

²⁶I. D. Rupp, *History of Lancaster County* (Lancaster, Pa.: Gilbert Hills, 1844), 116-118.

²⁷Redmond Conyngham, "Further Information relative to the Amish or Aymenist Sect," *Hazard's Register*, VII (March 12, 1831), 163.

²⁸James Y. Heckler, *The History of Harleysville and Lower Salford Township, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania* (Harleysville, Pa., 1886), reprinted (Bedminster, Pa.: Adams Apple Press, 1893), 85.

²⁹H.M. Bowman, "The Removal of Wendell Bauman's Sons Christian, Peter and Jacob to Berks County," in Sarah Bauman and Erna Freeman comps. (using material formerly compiled and published by Angus S. Bauman, Wallenstein, Ontario), *Family Records of the Descendants of Pioneer Joseph Bauman* (n. p., authors, 1967), pp. 9-10

³⁰S.H.O. (Sylvester H. Orr?), *Schwenksville Item*, August 22, 1879.

³¹Abraham J. Fretz, "Preface," *A Brief History of John and Christian Fretz* (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1890), p. 6.

³²John L. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship* (n. 1), p. 150, citing William H. Keichline, "Early History of Bedminster Township," A

Collection of Papers Read Before the Bucks County Historical Society, V (1926), 268-269. Note: My brief book, 'Twas Seeding Time: A Mennonite View of the American Revolution (n. 1), weaves together family traditions of this era from Montgomery, Bucks and Berks Counties.

³³George S. Hunsberger, comp. and ed., *The Hunsbergers: A Portion of the Genealogical History of a Few Swiss Hunsbergers* (Germantown, N.Y.: Hunsberger Family Association, 1969), 566, quoting N.B. Grubb in *The Mennonite*, June 15, 1922.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 257. On the same page is noted another story from Israel H. Hunsberger (d. 1941): "Hum was taking a load of hay to Philadelphia. On the way he came up to a man with a load of hay stuck in the deep mud. This man asked assistance. Hum went around the load of hay, put his back under the wagon, lifted the end of the wagon out of the mud, and called the driver to start his horses. This was done and the journey was resumed together. It happened that Hum and his companions sold their hay at the same place. The amazing feat of Hum was rehearsed to the bystanders. A noted prizefighter was in the group and immediately challenged Hum to a fight. Hum declined, saying that fighting was only for dogs. The fighter thereupon slapped him on the face. In an instant Hum seized his assailant bodily and dashed him down upon a chair so violently that the chair was demolished and all desire for further fighting knocked out of the victim."

It is interesting that a very similar story about setting a bully down on a chair and breaking it was told of "Strong Isaac" Kolb of Rockhill, who was further credited with single-handedly carrying a beam that several ordinary men could not handle.

³⁵Three conflicting references to this affair are "Columbia—Early History of, &c.," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania*, March 10 1832; 145n.; Samuel Whitaker Pennypacker, *Pennsylvania the Keystone: A Short History* (Philadelphia: Christopher Sower Company, 1917), 184; William Riddle, *Cherished Memories of Old Lancaster-Town and Shire* (Lancaster, Pa.: Intelligencer Printing House, 1910), 253-62.

³⁶Johann Georg Schroeder, "The Noteworthy Story of a man who entered a pact with the Devil," *Der Reggeboge. Quarterly of the Pennsylvania German Society*, IX (Summer 1975), 9-10.

³⁷Conrad E. Hermstead, "The Lineage of the David Bricker Family of Lititz, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania," MS. based on written reminiscence (ca. 1884) of David Bricker (1806-1885) of Lititz, copy in Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, vertical file, "Bricker," p. G-7. The oral tradition of Peter Bricker's protest is not confirmed by any known written church-record.

³⁸"John Hunt's Diary," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, LIII (January 1935), 28-29.

³⁹John Woolman, *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, ed. Phillips P. Moulton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 73-74.

⁴⁰MS Journal of Joseph Walton, November 7, 1887. Haverford College Library, historical collection, brought to my attention by Mr. Edsel Burdge.

⁴¹Family lore has even erroneously claimed that Joseph invented the cradle. What seems likely is that he invented a cradle specifically for wheat. This is the consensus of Alan G. Keyser and Amos B. Hoover, who have noted in the diary of a Weaverland farmer that he began to thresh "cradled" wheat in 1843, a few years after Shirk made his invention. Amos B. Hoover to the author, February 12, 1992.

⁴²A.G. Seyfert, "Joseph Shirk, Astronomer, Mathematician and Inventor," *Papers Read before the Lancaster County Historical Society*, XXIV (1925), 88-89.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 90; "Joseph Shirk," *New Holland Clarion*, August 23, 1902.

⁴⁴M. G. W[eaver], "Grain Cradle Features of the Days of Long Ago," undated clipping from the *New Holland Clarion*, M. G. Weaver Scrapbook entitled "History," p. 52, Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society.

⁴⁵Anecdote heard from Eli Zimmerman by Amos B. Hoover, reported in letter to author, September 28, 1988.

⁴⁶Joseph Weaver, Weaverland, interview, March 6, 1986.

⁴⁷"John S. Wenger (1843-1916)," reprinted in *The Wenger Book: A Foundation Book of American Wengers*, eds Samuel S. Wenger, et al. (Lancaster, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Heritage History, Inc., 1978), 75-83. Among the features of Johnny's story that locals would only guardedly share was an unwritten communal tradition that he might have been punished for his father's youthful experiments on birds, in which he had put out their eyes to see how they would fly without sight.

⁴⁸J.C. Wenger, "Anecdotes from Mennonite History: 'Henry Rosenberger Sent Me,'" *Mennonite Reporter* (Waterloo, Ontario), October 27, 1980, p. 3.

⁴⁹"John Hunt's Diary" (n. 36), 28-29.

⁵⁰Supplied by Joanne Hess Siegriest, Bird-in-Hand, Pa., from the "Journal" of Amos Reist Nissley (1857-1925), original not known.

⁵¹Mrs. Naomi Brubacher Fast (Newton, Kansas) to the author, May 12, 1986. Another version of the story, remembered by Irvin Kreider of East Petersburg, is that the concern of the visiting brethren was over reports that Brubacher had bought an organ.

⁵²Henry Bergey, "Manuscript Notebook of Henry Ruth Bergey, 1923," *Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania Newsletter*, XII (April 1985), 9-10.

⁵³Henry D. Hagey, in the *Souderton Independent*, December 22, 1933, republished in the *Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania Newsletter*, VII (March-April 1980), 5-6.

⁵⁴M. G. Weaver, *Mennonites of the Lancaster Conference* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1931), 435; Samuel S. Wenger, "Brief Life of Elizabeth S. Martin," *The Wenger Book* (n. 45), pp. 86-87.

⁵⁵John L. Ruth, *Maintaining the Right Fellowship* (n. 1), 157, citing N.B. Grubb, "Mennonite Reminiscences," typed MS, p. 6, Schwenkfelder Library, Pennsburg, Pa.

⁵⁶Pennsylvania Writers' Project, Works Projects Administration, *Pennsylvania Cavalcade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942), 322.

⁵⁷Wm. Kunstman, Nazareth, Pa., "Die Meteoren von 1833," unidentified German newspaper clipping.

⁵⁸Amos B. Hoover, *The Jonas Martin Era. A Collection of Essays, Letters and Documents That shed Light on the [American] Mennonite Churches During the 50 Year Ministry (1875-1925) of Bishop Jonas H. Martin* (Denver, Pa.: Muddy Creek Farm Library, 1982), 26.

⁵⁹Noah G. Good, "Ja, Un Du Hoscht Aa Widder Recht," *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage*, V (July 1982), 22-24.

⁶⁰"How would you like to go home tonight with a fat woman like that?" "Yes, how would you like it?"

⁶¹J. Lemar and Lois Ann Mast, *As Long as Wood Grows and Water Flows* (Morgantown, Pa.: Conestoga Mennonite Church, 1982), 216.

⁶²John A. Hostetler, *Amish Roots: A Treasury of History, Wisdom, and Lore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 225-234.

⁶³Martin Grove Brumbaugh, *A History of the German Baptist Brethren of Europe and America* (Mount Morris, Ill.: Brethren Publishing House, 1899), 103-105.

⁶⁴Catharine had her first vision in October 1762 when she answered the knocking of an angel at the door of the Hummer farmhouse. The celestial messenger sang, "How well I feel, How well I feel, / When our God doth show himself / In spirit to my soul / So that within I leap ... for joy ...". When Catharine broke into tears, the angel complimented her for her humility, and asked whether she had noticed the pride of women wearing "gay calico" in the community. Warning that such persons would "be shown down into hell," where they would "burn to all eternity," the angel sang again, prayed, and flew up to heaven. In the following month Catharine herself was taken up to mingle with "all the saints and patriachs" in Heaven, who assured her that her neighbors who thought baptism by immersion "was not so essential" were grievously in error. Again in December she was "carried ... up into the invisible eternity." As these visions continued for some three years, Catharine's father Peter Hummer took her from place to place to have people hear her testimony. Somewhat suspiciously, the only person Catherine allowed in her room during a trance was the young man she favored, and when she married him "the spirit retired into its chamber again and the whole work stopped." — Lamech and Agrippa [Peter Miller], *Chronikon Ephratense: Enthaltend den Lebenslauf des ehrwürdigen Vaters in Christo Friedsam Gottrecht* (Ephrata, Pa.: Ephrata Cloister, 1786), Chapter xxxiii.

⁶⁵Born in Ontario in 1895 and converted at the age of eight, Elizabeth Sider Bossert fell sick on May 8, 1948. After her celestial visit, she claimed, "...it seemed so earthly down here. I was never closer than eight feet to Heaven, but I must have got a little of that heavenly air in my lungs." She reported extended personal conversations with Jesus. After her coming to, "I found my room full of Real, Live Devils ... Not imaginary, but as real beings as I was. They were hideous, black monsters with great glaring eyes like balls of fire, sharp teeth and pecked ears [and] long, sharp, bony fingers." The family cow, which had earlier gone dry, now began to give milk at the rate of eight quarts, as long as she had no regular appetite. When her appetite returned after a holiness camp meeting in Ohio, the cow dried up again. — Elizabeth [Sider] Bossert, *My Visit to Heaven and How the Lord Healed Me* (Elizabethtown, Pa.: McBeth's Religious Art Studio, 1950), pp. 31, 35, 37.

MENNONITE WOMEN AND CENTURIES OF CHANGE IN AMERICA

by Paula T. Hradkowsky



*The Franconia Mennonite Meetinghouse in Montgomery County, Pa.
(All photographs courtesy of the Mennonite Historical Library, Harleysville, Pa.)*

The status of American women has changed dramatically over the past 250 years, but of course that change has not occurred in a vacuum. As America changed, American women changed, and as they did, society modified its views of women's roles and acceptable behaviors; a process that will no doubt continue as long as American society exists. Since Mennonite women have been a part of this society since the late 17th century, they have not been immune to these changes. But, because Mennonite culture has been somewhat isolationist and dogmatic regarding religion, Mennonite women have experienced change in a different way and at a different pace than women in the larger society.

Indeed, the Mennonite Church was a culture within a culture and so had its own dynamics at work as it sought to deal with the social and religious changes in America which so profoundly affected believers. At least fifty percent of the Mennonite Church has always been female,¹ and — focusing on Pennsylvania's Franconia Conference — the following is an attempt to delve beneath the surface of historical events to explore the complexities which have brought Mennonite women to their current position of unprecedented participation in the church. The journey has in fact been a circuitous one, as women went from a unique position of equality in the Anabaptist movement (they could always vote on church issues²) to a point where it was not considered proper for them to have leadership even of a women's organization in the Mennonite Church.

ORIGINS AND BELIEFS

Since their origins and beliefs shaped the Mennonite lifestyle and culture, both must at least be summarized. In short and from a theological viewpoint, the Reformation came about because some men desired to lead godly lives according to their understanding of the Bible and because the Roman Catholic Church was allowing unchristian living among its clergy and membership.³ Mennonites were originally part of a larger group that separated from the

official state church in Switzerland in the early 16th century. Members of that group were derisively known as "Anabaptists" (Rebaptizers) because converts who had been baptized as children were baptized again as believers. Anabaptists were routinely opposed and persecuted: "Protestants tried to exterminate them because they refused to make common cause with Protestants against Catholics. Catholics tried to exterminate them because they refused to acknowledge themselves members of 'the holy Catholic Church.'"⁴

The basic beliefs of the early Anabaptists were that: 1) infants should not be baptized because baptism was to take place only after a confession of faith; 2) church membership and baptism should be entered into voluntarily; 3) the state and the religious community should be governed separately; 4) there should be church discipline, including excommunication of those who continued in sin; 5) the Bible was the final authority over all conduct, secular as well as religious, with the life of Jesus as delineated in the Gospels as the central model for the Christian life; 6) believers were not to participate in violence, including military service or civil lawsuits; 7) an involved system of theology was unnecessary; 8) there was no efficacy in communion; 9) church members — men and women, clergy and laity — were equal; 10) church members should practice mutual aid and sharing; 11) Jesus is divine Lord and Savior while man is a sinner whose only hope is salvation by faith in Jesus Christ; 12) the local congregation is primary.⁵

Despite severe and relentless persecution, the Anabaptist movement grew and spread quickly. Mennonites, then, "derived their spiritual, ideological, and biological ancestry from Swiss, German, Alsatian, Moravian, Dutch, and Russian origins";⁶ the two main groups of Germanic Anabaptists were the Swiss and the Dutch. Indeed, it was in the Netherlands that the man for whom the Mennonites are named was born and lived. Menno Simons was raised a Roman Catholic and educated for the priesthood which he entered in 1524. Strongly affected by the first Anabaptist

to be martyred in the Netherlands in 1531, he eventually left the priesthood and presented himself for baptism into the Anabaptist faith in 1536. A short time later he became an ordained Anabaptist minister, serving until his death of natural causes in 1561. Always persecuted and living under the threat of death if caught, Simons nonetheless traveled and wrote extensively, thereby having a strong influence upon the Anabaptist movement and its unification.⁷

In fact, the Schleitheim Confession of Faith (1527; the first charter of the Swiss Anabaptists), persecution, and the writings of Menno Simons were probably the main forces that consolidated the Mennonite Church. Simons provided an expanded, written belief structure, and persecution enabled them to develop a sense of cohesion which empowered Mennonites as, in order to survive, they migrated throughout Europe. This frequent migration caused the "formation of an ethnic group because the relationship of the group with the new host society becomes one of unfamiliar and strange environments."⁸ Some of the consequences of migration seem to have been the development of a narrow and traditional religious belief system; a controlled and inhibited social system; and the ability to accommodate and respond to various economic conditions.⁹ All would shape the character of those who were the ancestors of the Franconia Conference Mennonites.

THE FRANCONIA CONFERENCE

The Mennonites are not a monolithic body; until mid-1995, when it merged with the General Conference Mennonite Church, the largest Mennonite group was the Mennonite Church. It was made up of geographical districts called conferences, each comprising member congregations within its geographic boundaries, although a few conference boundaries overlapped. The Franconia, Lancaster, and Virginia Conferences are the oldest in the United States. The first permanent Mennonite settlement in Pennsylvania was in Germantown (1683), outside of Philadelphia. As more emigrants arrived they moved west into Montgomery County, where the largest Mennonite community was at present-day Skippack. Mennonites fanned out from there, and by the mid-1730s, the Mennonite immigration which populated the area later known as the Franconia Conference — the oldest association of Mennonite congregations — was seventy-five percent complete.¹⁰

A rural people, the lives and lifestyles of these early Mennonites were shaped by the family, the community, and the congregation.¹¹ The importance of the Mennonite community cannot be overstated, for it was a distinctive "network of relationships"¹² among people who shared a similar history, who had an identical symbolic system, and who identified with and felt emotionally tied to other believers. In colonial America, then, the Mennonite community was the setting for worship, work, and relaxation; it was a source of support for the family and of



Harvest Home Service held in 1938 at the Deep Run Mennonite Meetinghouse.

financial aid when that was necessary; and it was where the Mennonite world view — based on a literal interpretation of the Bible — was endorsed and confirmed.¹³

While detailed information on early efforts to organize the church is not available, it appears that the Franconia and Lancaster Conferences were functioning bodies by about 1750.¹⁴ At first merely structured to allow for occasional meetings of all congregational leaders for fellowship and discussion, the conferences rather quickly became authoritarian and powerful enough to impose their decisions on individual congregations.¹⁵ The Franconia Conference was shepherded by overseeing bishops whose number at any given time depended upon the size of the congregations. These bishops generally met twice a year to discuss and decide on actions to be taken on any issues brought to their attention. Their focus was spiritual, and in their decisions they attempted to apply the teachings of the Bible (and particularly those of the New Testament) to every facet of life. At the congregational level, deacons shepherded needy and infirm members, while ministers (called "servants") were responsible to teach and admonish and to inform their congregations of the bishops' decisions. Ministers also answered to the bishops for their own conduct and that of their members. Seeing their roles as guardians of the Mennonite flock as an extremely serious obligation for which they would one day be answerable to God, bishops, ministers, and deacons together enforced conference regulations and policies.

There was a certain balance of power between the congregation and the conference, however, that has continued to the present. It was the congregation that decided who could be baptized and thereby obtain church membership; that selected candidates for the lot (the process, based on Acts 1:23-26, used to choose ministers); that oversaw the education of children; that collected and disbursed resources; that decided how to associate with other congregations;¹⁶ and that could voluntarily withdraw from conference membership.¹⁷ Conversely, the conference could expell a congregation that refused to obey its rules

or failed to support its doctrines and standards; then, no other conference would receive such a congregation without the agreement of its previous conference.¹⁸

With a few extremely rare exceptions, all bishops and ministers were men. Mennonites interpreted the Bible literally, and although women were considered spiritual equals and the work of the church was acknowledged to be a cooperative effort between the sexes, they were not allowed to hold positions of authority.¹⁹ And, while some women expressed their opinions freely outside the church, they were expected to be quiet while they were within.²⁰ In fact, Lancaster Conference bishops passed a resolution forbidding women to speak in church or at church meetings of any kind as late as 1928.²¹ Women were deaconesses — an office of service — and as such they visited; comforted and helped the poor, ill, and needy; counseled and assisted other women in the rites of baptism and footwashing;²² and prepared the bread and wine (or juice) for communion.

In the Franconia Conference worship services were held every second and fourth Sunday (a custom continued as late as 1937 by some congregations). Attendance was expected, and members looked forward to services as a break in the week's routine and as an opportunity for socializing. Sundays without services were spent in relaxing, in Bible reading, and in visiting or receiving callers. Funerals were also held on Sundays; weddings were not held in meetinghouses much before 1910.²³ Special meetings were conducted on Good Friday, Ascension Day, First and Second Christmas, and at harvest time and for the ordination of a new minister or bishop. Meetinghouses were very plain, with a pulpit at the front of the "auditorium" (so called because Mennonites consider the church sanctuary merely a room). Behind the pulpit was a bench for the church leadership — at least two leaders were present for every worship service²⁴ — which was therefore known collectively as "the bench."

The service, both preaching and singing, was conducted entirely in German until the 1880s when there were young people who were not fluent in it and some congregations began holding two services — one in German and one in English. Change came slowly, though, and some Franconia Conference congregations continued all-German services until the 1930s, and some still sang German hymns throughout the 1950s.²⁵ No musical instruments were used since Mennonites found no mention of them in the New Testament, and there was no choir, but there was a male who led the congregational singing. All the ministers present took part in the preaching which was not eloquent or dynamic, but which has rather been described as "melancholy chanting."²⁶ Until the 1920s, men and women sat on different sides of the auditorium. Since there were no Sunday school classes or children's programs before 1870 in the Franconia Conference,²⁷ until then families with large numbers of children divided them between the father and the mother; they remained with their parents throughout the service.

For Mennonites the family was the primary social group,

and home life reinforced the teachings of the church. Most Mennonites were farmers well into the early 20th century, and all family members worked together, with women often doing the same jobs as men. Since wives were under the authority of their husbands, they were able to assume responsibilities unmarried or widowed women could not. For example, many ministers and bishops (who served without pay) traveled often, so their wives supervised the farm in their absence, making decisions as necessary.²⁸ The Mennonite farm family not only worked together, it played together and studied the Bible together. But, "because they were a busy and nontheoretical people, we have only scant written records of their daily life."²⁹

THREATS TO THE MENNONITE WAY OF LIFE

The transportation revolution got underway in Pennsylvania in 1832 when thirty thousand people watched the first horse-drawn train arrive in Germantown. By 1840 a train traveling twelve miles an hour was making a daily round trip (approximately 120 miles) between Philadelphia and Reading, and in 1857 the railroad connecting Philadelphia with Bethlehem was completed. Many new villages were established along the railroad routes, and these provided new living and working opportunities as factories, mills, and houses were erected.³⁰ As population pressures decreased the amount of farmland available, more Mennonites took jobs in town, and this affected family life. So, while Mennonites appreciated the convenience of rail transportation, they did not approve of the cultural and social changes it made possible. When living in rural isolation, children had been able to see and participate in their parents' work, customs, and beliefs, and Mennonite adults did not have to compete with outside ideas and ways of living.³¹

Another acculturating force was a state law passed in 1834 making schools "free, tax-supported, and directed by a state-wide legislated philosophy."³² German-speaking Mennonites felt apprehensive about the "English-dominated schools,"³³ and thought that the government and outsiders were wresting control of education from parents and the church. Until this time education was paid for and controlled by each community, and some townships were slow to enact the new law; Salford and Franconia Townships did not do so until 1850 and 1851, respectively. The latter remained the "most conservative of townships. In 1856 when less than five percent of the school children in Montgomery County still received German instruction, half of them were in Franconia."³⁴

In the early 1900s the automobile brought changes just as the train had done nearly a century before. Automobiles were common in the Franconia area after 1914 (there was even a Mennonite selling them in next-door Souderton in the 1920s), although some Mennonites put off buying one for as long as that was practical, and some families shared the purchase and use of a car.³⁵ In the 1920s, radios, too, were common, and one Franconia Conference member

recalls gathering with her family to listen to classical music.³⁶ By 1931 the Conference leadership had condemned the radio, largely because it introduced new and worldly ideas and ways of thinking, as well as many different religious doctrines, some of which Mennonites considered heretical. Thus, when a Mennonite missionary in Ohio began preaching on a weekly radio program in 1933, the Franconia Conference (in which he had grown up), rescinded his right to preach in their pulpits. And, seeing television as an extension of the radio, they banned it completely in 1947, before it became widely used.³⁷ (A ban that remained in effect until the late 1950s.³⁸)

THE CHURCH'S REACTION TO CHANGE

Mennonites viewed with alarm the social changes brought about largely by the new technologies. They were particularly concerned about the changes in clothing styles begun in the late 19th century when "the average American became more ostentatious."³⁹ But dress was not the only concern; in 1924 Daniel Kauffman, a leader in the Mennonite Church, listed the following widespread changes as having an evil influence on America: compulsory public education through high school; allowing young people to work in factories; the double standard between the sexes; the proliferation of pool halls, taverns, and movie theaters; the sports fad; the growing acceptance of divorce; public sanction of areas where the sexes could swim together; and worldly literature and radio programs.⁴⁰ Moreover, the suffragist movement was considered to be the reason for "an alarming decay in home life, immorality in youth, and juvenile delinquency."⁴¹

The Church had various solutions to these perceived threats, including building Mennonite high schools and colleges; forbidding women to take jobs outside the home; keeping young people busy in church work; and expelling church members "who continue[d] in willful disobedience."⁴² But the problem that received the most attention concerned the question of dress, because conference leaders thought it could be easily dealt with. Until the late 19th century in America, style of dress was mainly a reflection of social class. Until then, Mennonites had no formal restrictions on clothing, and wore the costume of their society and class; the only difference was the Mennonite emphasis on simplicity; they used no decorative adornments.⁴³

However, in reaction to the changes in "worldly" fashions, Mennonite leaders passed 230 resolutions on nonconformity in dress between 1865 and 1950. Now, simplicity was no longer enough; uniformity in nonconformity was the new requirement.⁴⁴ Most of the new rules affected women, who were now given explicit instructions on appropriate dress style, head gear, and hairdos. The cape dress, with its rectangular piece of cloth attached to the waist at the front and back or at the waist in front and at the shoulders to insure modesty, and a simple cap — referred to as a prayer veiling — were required; while lace,

ruffles, and hats were forbidden, as were "bobbed hair" and jewelry of any kind.⁴⁵

THE TRADITIONAL ROLES OF MENNONITE WOMEN

Just as Mennonite dress styles diverged little from those of mainstream American society for many years, so too were the traditional roles of Mennonite women those of the larger society for a very long time. Mennonite women were expected to marry and spend most of their time devoted to the duties of a wife and mother, roles viewed as their God-ordained position and which most looked forward to and did not consider confining. Unmarried women served the community by helping married women who were sick, who had sick children, or who had newborns or many small children. They were not thought of as special because they devoted their lives to others.⁴⁶

Women were expected to be submissive to their husbands, or to their fathers if they were unmarried, and to church authorities. This submission was seen as the key to a happy homelife and well-adjusted children,⁴⁷ and women were expected to defer to male authority regardless of their situation or talents. Mary Lederach, for example, had been a teacher at Hesston College and was considered a better speaker than most of the Franconia Conference preachers in the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, she was not allowed to utilize her talents for the church.⁴⁸

In spite of the restrictions placed upon them, it would be inaccurate to view Mennonite women as delicate flowers, totally dependent on men. As did other women of the time, they worked long hours beside their husbands as "silent partners."⁴⁹ Rosa King is a good illustration: Born in 1881, she married a farmer in 1902; they had five sons and worked the farm together for twenty-seven years before he developed tuberculosis and spent his final years in a sanatorium. Impoverished, she remained on the farm, working it with her sons, three of whom preceeded her in death.⁵⁰ Nor did submission to male authority mean that a woman could not express her opinions. One Salome Bergey, a spinster from Doylestown (Bucks County), wrote over twenty letters to her bishop between 1866 and 1879, as the two appeared to carry on a written dialogue.⁵¹

As already noted, the Anabaptist movement considered men and women spiritual equals; the sexes merely had different spheres of work. (It has been claimed that women lost some status in the Mennonite Church when English replaced German, bringing subtle changes in vocabulary. For instance, *Gemeinschaft* [Christian community], which has no gender connotation, was replaced by "brotherhood."⁵²) Nevertheless, the male leadership of the Mennonite Church did not allow women authority over men in any capacity, and while most Mennonite women accepted that fact, there were a few exceptions. One was Sarah Gross, the daughter of a conservative Mennonite family, who began to study medicine (a strictly male profession) with a doctor in Harleysville (Montgomery

Bishop & Bro. general store, Blooming Glen, Bucks County, c. 1915. New technologies, including new modes of transportation, threatened the rural lifestyle of Franconia Conference Mennonites in the early 1900s.



County) in 1875; she later relocated to the Nebraska frontier where she worked in a Mennonite community. Another, Hettie Kulp, was the first woman in the Franconia Conference known to have received some advanced education; she attended a Mennonite college in 1898.⁵³

Also exceptional was Ann Jemima Allebach. A baptized member of a Franconia Conference Mennonite Church in Schwenksville (Montgomery County), she transferred her membership to a more liberal, non-Franconia Conference church in Philadelphia. In 1911 she asked her pastor there to ordain her, which he did. Never truly accepted as a minister, she was rarely a guest speaker in Mennonite churches; she did accept a pastorate at a Reformed Church in New York City in 1916, two years before her death.⁵⁴ The experience of Ella Shoup Bauman, however, is more typical of the outcome for Mennonite women who tested church boundaries. In the early 1900s, Ella Shoup was a pioneer in the movement to give shelter to abused or homeless (or both) women and children, working through the auspices of a Mennonite mission in Youngstown, Ohio. After her marriage she began a weekly children's Bible-story time on her front porch, afterward renting a storefront for Sunday afternoon meetings when her group got larger. A male minister was asked to lead the group eventually, and because of her original efforts, that group later became a congregation.⁵⁵

Mrs. Bauman's story illustrates the situation Mennonite women found themselves in at the time. Wanting to have a Christian impact on the world, they began to look beyond their family responsibilities for ways to serve, starting new mission stations, congregations, and medical clinics simply by reaching out to the people around them. But when their work became organized and too big not to be official, men stepped in and took control. That such opportunities were available to Mennonite women at all was because of changes in other American religious denominations that eventually affected the Mennonite Church as well.

CHALLENGES TO MENNONITE DOCTRINE

"Only a part of a much more comprehensive religious system in America,"⁵⁶ the Mennonite Church was exposed to numerous and divergent religious denominations and

sects openly practicing their beliefs. In the late 1700s and continuing through the late 1800s, various "awakenings" began taking place among some of these. As they did, a belief grew that America's manifest destiny was as a Christian nation, and many of the Protestant denominations of this era determined to remake American society through evangelism, education, and charity. Consequently, they started many new organizations such as mission, tract, and Bible societies, and engaged in various activities such as the religious training of lay people; Sunday school movements; helping the poor; and holding programs in the church in addition to the Sunday worship service.⁵⁷ Many of these activities were made possible by population growth and speedier forms of transportation.

The view that America was destined to be a Christian nation if the church did not shirk its responsibilities was in direct opposition to the Anabaptist belief of two kingdoms in this world. Mennonites interpreted the New Testament as teaching that until Christ's second coming there would always be a secular, evil kingdom contending with the kingdom of Christ, comprised of His followers on earth; thus it was impossible to Christianize an entire nation.⁵⁸ Then, too, revival meetings introduced a previously unknown emotionalism into the Protestant religious experience, and Mennonites frowned on "an emphasis on 'experiential' or 'experimental' religion. . . . [asserting that true religion was] following Christ and carrying his cross, sharing with the brother and sister, and maintaining the right fellowship."⁵⁹ So, bombarded from the outside by troubling secular and religious forces, the Mennonite Church drew inward, with the leadership attempting to maintain church borders by instructing members not to become involved with any organization whose parent denomination did not practice separation from the world and nonresistance.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the revival and evangelism movements began to influence the Mennonites, and there was a growing interest in having their own-published materials, in establishing schools of higher learning, mission and relief organizations, and Sunday schools,⁶¹ which were particularly controversial. Because they found no mention of Sunday schools in the Bible, conservatives opposed their



This girl was from a Mennonite family in the Hilltown area (Bucks County) before the Civil War. For many years the Mennonites had no formal restrictions on clothing, but wore the costume of their society and class.

establishment; another faction favored it, believing them to be the ideal place to teach the German language to young people no longer conversant in it; and many women saw an opportunity for them to participate more fully in the work of the church. When a few congregations began their own without official sanction, and when some Mennonites began to send their children to non-Mennonite Sunday schools, the Church finally gave its approval, and by 1875 Sunday schools were common in the Franconia Conference.⁶²

This approval seems to have opened the door to other organized activities in the Mennonite Church, and there was a gradual increase in those sponsored by individual congregations.⁶³ Now women became Sunday school teachers and helpers at young people's meetings, members of interdenominational mission societies, and missionaries. Late in the 19th century outside Protestant influences caused an "awakening" in the Mennonite Church,⁶⁴ and the result was another increase in organized activities in the Franconia Conference. Members were interested in Bible study, in more religious education, and in lay church work; in fact, the first Mennonite evangelizing committee was organized through lay efforts during this period,⁶⁵ and it was now that the church in general became interested in missions work.⁶⁶

THE SEWING CIRCLE MOVEMENT

Mennonite women, then, were influenced by the new organizations established in other denominations as a result of the Protestant revival, and the subsequent appearance of these organizations in their churches gave them new opportunities for Christian service. The first and most important of these opportunities involved sewing circles; the *Herald of Truth* reported contributions to missions work from women's sewing groups as early as 1894. So, gradually, sporadically, and independently, these groups were organized in individual congregations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, until by 1912 there were forty-

three such groups in the Mennonite Church. The first sewing group in the Franconia conference was begun in 1909 in Doylestown.⁶⁷

Most groups met monthly, at first on a rotating basis in the homes of members. Each woman brought her own lunch, and the hostess served tea and coffee. The meeting always included Bible reading, prayer, and hymn singing. In some groups the women themselves read the scriptures and led in prayer, but in most groups a man was present for that purpose. One group committed its aims to writing: "To relieve suffering by supplying material needs; to become more conscious of the welfare of others; to give concern and appreciation for organizations of charity; to provide contact with the needy spiritual; [and] to provide a means of social contact with members of the circle."⁶⁸ Approval of these aims and activities was by no means universal, and the amount of opposition varied widely from congregation to congregation until about 1911, when the majority of churches had sewing circles.

It was at this time that Mennonite women took their first steps toward church-wide organization. The "Associated Sewing Circles of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference" came into being in 1911, the same year that Clara Eby Steiner began writing to individual sewing groups throughout the Mennonite Church in an effort to unite them. The widow of a pastor who had been chairman of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, Mrs. Steiner was a woman in search of a vocation. Her husband had sought her opinion, and as his secretary she had had access to meetings where important decisions were made. She was also well aware of the more active roles available to women in the missions organizations of other denominations. But when her husband died she lost her job as well as her spouse; so, left with the experience and desire to help in the missions movement but with no outlet for her talents, she turned her attention to the sewing circle movement.⁶⁹

Greatly concerned by the lack of education and training opportunities for women, Clara Steiner saw church-wide sewing circles as a way of encouraging study, discussion, and missionary interest and activity; she even hoped that in cooperation with the Mennonite Board of Missions, women could sponsor and support their own missionary.⁷⁰ (At this time, almost forty-one percent of Mennonite mission workers were women.⁷¹) Steiner was not the only wife or widow of a clergyman working toward consolidation of women's efforts in the sewing circle movement. As her letters describing her proposals arrived at local churches, many of her strongest and most energetic supporters were or had been married to leaders in the Mennonite Church.⁷²

Even in their efforts to organize, Mennonite women as a rule did not contest what the Church considered their proper role. What their leaders did want, however, was "recognition of the worth of women's work and control of the work within their sphere."⁷³ These leaders held their first general public meeting in 1915 in conjunction with the Mennonite Church General Assembly, a church-wide

Mennonite farm wife and daughter in Worcester Township (Montgomery County) c. 1910; on the farm, all family members worked together.



meeting of leaders and congregational delegates held bi-annually. Several hundred women attended this charter meeting, and Clara Steiner began to consider writing a charter to help solidify the group. Another significant, though small, event also took place in 1915, as in at least one Mennonite congregation, sewing-circle members began gathering in the meetinghouse basement—thus implying church sanction—rather than in members' homes.⁷⁴

By the end of that year church leaders felt the need to address the issue, and the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities designated a committee to study whether it was prudent to approve a general women's organization. They decided not to embrace the group, but they did not attempt to disband it either, so in 1916 the women held their second general meeting, again with several hundred women in attendance. The women elected a chairman, approved a constitution, and decided to call themselves the "Mennonite Women's Missionary Society" (MWMS). The group accomplished much: In 1918 they provided relief for European civilians affected by the ravages of World War I; in 1919 they pledged to pay transportation and living expenses for two women going to India as missionaries; in 1920 they raised \$100 a month to send a missionary doctor to India, sent \$2000 to native teachers there, and agreed to pay to build a hospital for an orphans' home in Ohio; and in 1923 they assumed transportation costs and living expenses for another missionary to India and a missionary to Argentina as well. A bimonthly letter first published in 1919 by the MWMS was in existence until 1928.⁷⁵

All of this activity did not go unnoticed, and ministers and Mission Board members wanted the women to disband and work as a sewing auxiliary to the Board.⁷⁶ At issue, then, was not the sewing circles themselves, but the wider purpose of the MWMS—its independent support of missions and missionaries with money, clothes, and volunteers.⁷⁷ But it was only through a separate group that women were able to become fully involved in the church's world mission efforts: "If they had been allowed to participate on the general boards, they would not have had to form their own."⁷⁸ While this controversy simmered, the women kept working to meet their goals: in 1920-21 they donated 28,798 newly made garments, 27,189 used garments, and \$33,853.64 in cash to their charitable works.⁷⁹

When Clara Steiner had to resign as president of the MWMS in 1926 because of ill health and there was no one able and willing to assume her leadership role, the Board of Missions saw their chance to take charge of the women's group as quietly as possible. And they did: The *Gospel Herald* published a letter from the chairman of the Board of Missions and Charities saying that they had taken control of the MWMS, appointing a committee of three

women to assume leadership and report to the Board. Members and leaders of the MWMS were not consulted beforehand or informed in advance of the published announcement; they simply read about it just like everyone else.⁸⁰

There is disagreement as to why leaders in the Mennonite Church disapproved so strongly of women organizing on a church-wide basis. Certainly the technological, social, and religious changes taking place in the larger society and in other religious denominations in the 1920s had created tremendous tensions within the Church; as already discussed, the leadership reacted to these perceived threats by becoming increasingly conservative, authoritarian, and dogmatic. One assertion, then, is that women were caught up in what was primarily a struggle between conservatives and liberals, with the question of their proper role a secondary issue. According to this thinking, the conservatives—who controlled the church—distrusted anything new and anything which was perceived as institutionalizing the church; therefore the women's group (whose leaders were considered liberal) was doomed to be misunderstood and rejected by them, even without the gender issue.⁸¹

Another point of view is that, although the conservative-liberal struggle played a definite role in the renunciation of the MWMS inasmuch as its liberal leadership would never have received approval even had it been male, gender was still the main issue. Specifically, the unwillingness of men to accept women as true collaborators in the church. From 1915 through 1929, the *Gospel Herald* was full of articles, letters, and questions about a woman's proper place in the church and home. Many men thought women had gone too far, and some church leaders believed that since God had commanded that women were to be in subjection to men, it was wrong for them to have leadership even over a women's organization.⁸²

After the takeover of the Mennonite Women's Missionary Society was announced in 1926, a two-year transition period began. By 1928 the absorption process was complete, and the formerly independent group became the "Women's Mission Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities." The next year the name was

changed to the "General Sewing Circle Committee of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities." This exercise of authority probably created more anger and resentment than will ever be known, for the Mennonite way is to keep feelings private. Yet, while some women left the Mennonite Church during this period,⁸³ most stoically submitted to the restructuring because leaving was simply not an option for them. More than a place to worship on Sunday, the Mennonite Church was a community to which its members had made a commitment; not to accept leadership authority would have been disloyal, especially during a time when the church was being agitated by other issues as well.⁸⁴ Then, too, most women were wives and mothers, and leaving the church would have disrupted the entire family. The majority, therefore, accepted the solution imposed by the church leadership.⁸⁵

INCREMENTAL CHANGES IN THE STATUS OF MENNONITE WOMEN

There was not as much turmoil in the Mennonite Church in the 1930s as there had been in previous decades, and in the 1940s the Church's main concerns were the military draft and the ramifications of nonresistance. During this period Mennonite women once again began to take the initiative in their sewing organization, even though it was still an auxilliary of the Missions Board. Envisioning expanding their aims beyond needlework, in 1944 they voted to change their name to the "Women's Missionary and Sewing Circle Organization." More changes were made in the 1950s as the group's leaders established a headquarters in the Mission Board's building; hired a full-time executive secretary; prepared a handbook; and wrote a new constitution. They also addressed such issues as the role of women in the life of the church; the lessons to be learned from the lives of women in the Bible; family relationships; and the concerns of women worldwide. Changing their name again in 1954 to the "Women's Mission and Service Auxilliary," they now stated their intention of "involving the total life of women in the total program of the church."⁸⁶ Their aim was to make the WMSA into an umbrella organization for all of the Church's various women's groups—those which met for prayer, for fellowship, or for homemaker-, missionary-, or sewing circle-related activities.⁸⁷

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, women continued to expand their role in the Church, but now without the critical outcry that had been the norm early in the century. Within certain limits, many of the rules enacted then—including those which placed restrictions on women—were slowly allowed to fade away. In the 1970s, women did begin to be included on congregational boards and did hold some leadership positions, but they still had a restricted role in decision making.⁸⁸ Now, however, they were allowed to supervise their own activities. Thus, in recognition of their now equal rather than auxilliary status, the women's group first organized by Clara Eby Steiner



Blooming Glen Girls Chorus, c. 1940. Keeping young people involved in church activities was one way of dealing with perceived threats from the larger society.

was renamed the "Women's Missionary and Service Commission" in 1971. The official goals now were to: "unite the women and girls of the church; help women and girls find and articulate faith; encourage regular and disciplined Bible study; promote strengthening the quality of family life; develop an awareness and appreciation of Anabaptist heritage; help women and girls discover, develop, and utilize their individual gifts; help women and girls develop leadership potential; encourage cultivation of person-to-person relationships; motivate creativity in planning programs and activities; [and] respond as Christ's representatives to community and worldwide needs."⁸⁹ Notable is the fact that there is no mention of sewing at all in this effort to move beyond the traditional roles of Mennonite women.⁹⁰

Throughout the 1970s, American women continued to expand their roles in government, education, business, and the professions. Some of the women entering the workforce at this time were Mennonite, but even many Mennonite women who did not work outside the home were now affected by the women's movement,⁹¹ and some began to speak out against cultural and religious socialization which assigned children roles based upon gender.⁹² In a 1970 article in the *Gospel Herald*, one man likened the limitation of a woman's role to racism, stating that "the church needs to assume some responsibility for the oppressive aspects of our culture which suppresses a woman's role. [He goes on to say that the church] should not be unduly late in honestly grappling with a reexamination of the position of women in society."⁹³ That reexamination did take place, as various members of both sexes came to believe that church leaders had misinterpreted Bible passages referring to the submission of women, now considering them relevant only to the writers' own cultures rather than as directives for the 20th-century church.⁹⁴

As this belief was being reevaluated, some members of the Women's Missionary and Service Commission were not satisfied to participate only in an exclusively women's

organization; they wanted to work as a team with men in Church planning and policy making. At the same time, the Church began to be aware that the talents of a large part of its membership were underutilized, and some women began saying publicly that the Church would suffer if their talents were not given expression.⁹⁵ But these aims and opinions were challenged, even by women, many of whom readily accepted the roles traditionally assigned to them. Older women, especially, did not understand their younger sisters' need for greater involvement in the workings of the Church.⁹⁶

The Church moved slowly on the issue, appointing women to two major administrative committees with Church-wide authority for the first time in the early 1970s.⁹⁷ Then, for the next ten years, women were given what appears to have been token representation as they sought to be accepted as equals in the Church. With no consensus on the issue even among women, in the 1980s changes were uneven from congregation to congregation and from conference to conference. In the Franconia Conference specifically, in the 1990s, after decades of turmoil brought about by irresistible pressures from the outside, women are now accepted as preachers and chaplains, hold important committee positions, and serve as lay delegates at the biannual Assembly.⁹⁸ As a result, Franconia Conference Mennonites are not only moving toward greater conformity with the secular community, they are moving closer to the original Anabaptist view of the role of women as well.

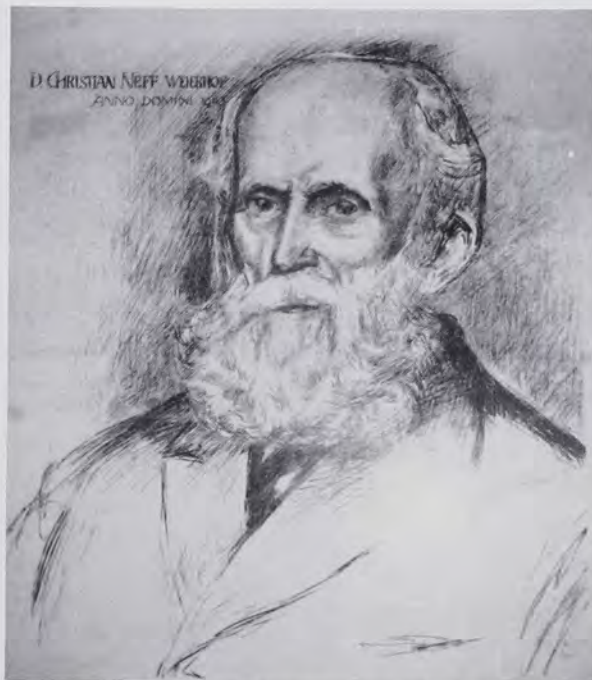
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- ⁹⁵Clemens, pp. 31, 114; and Dorothy Swartzentruber, "Women, Equality, and the Church," *Gospel Herald* (July, 1970), 615.
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“IT IS PAINFUL TO SAY GOODBYE”: A Mennonite Family in Europe and America

by Monica Mutzbauer



Christian Neff; 1943 portrait (Weierhof).

That the extensive information found in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* is available to researchers today is at least partly due to the work of Christian Neff—pastor, teacher, and historian of the Mennonite community of Weierhof in the Palatinate from 1887 to 1945. Together with Christian Hege, Neff published the first volume of the *Mennonitische Lexikon* in 1913; he continued working on it until his death in 1946.¹ American Mennonites later used Neff's work as the basis for their *Encyclopedia*,² and the project was certainly his crowning achievement. Yet Christian Neff had another concern no less important to him: that concern was the necessity for cooperation among Mennonites worldwide. Toward that end he made numerous journeys, and one led him to America in 1913. The purpose of that visit, he wrote, was to establish and nourish close contacts with his American brothers.³ These contacts later resulted in Mennonite World Conferences, organized by the influential Neff.

Neff's connections with American Mennonites, coupled with his interest in history, led him to the discovery of letters exchanged between members of a Mennonite family living in the Palatine town of Kindenheim and relatives who had emigrated to Pennsylvania at the end of the 18th, and the beginning of the 19th century. Neff found the letters at Worms and Kindenheim, in the possession of the

Schmidt-Weber family, probably descendants of the writers. Some of the letters were written by one Jakob Weber, who lived with his mother, Maria Möllinger Weber, and his brother and sister in Kindenheim in the early decades of the 19th century. Jakob Weber's correspondent was his maternal uncle, Martin Möllinger, who was living with his family in Lancaster County. Other letters in the collection had been exchanged by friends and relatives of the family in Europe and America; the oldest was written in 1699; the most recent, in 1839. Claiming their contents were of general and historical interest, Neff planned to publish them over a period of time in the *Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender*, a yearbook for Mennonite families.⁴ But his death in 1946 ended the project after only a few of the letters had been printed.

Altogether the Möllinger-Weber collection includes about forty letters and documents, and for some years it has been housed at the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle in Weierhof, an important center for Mennonite research in Germany. This small village has had a Mennonite community since 1682, and its research facility was established in 1965. Its collection of literature, documents, and family histories was begun in 1944 by a Mennonite couple in Berlin. Dr. Ernst Crous was working at the famous Preußische Staatsbibliothek there when it was decided to move the



*Palatine Elector Karl Ludwig
(Mennonite Historical Library, Harleysville, Pa.)*



On the main street of Weierhof a plaque commemorates the existence of a Mennonite community in the village since 1682.

library's more valuable documents to Göttingen to protect them from war damage. Dr. Crous and his wife moved to Göttingen and continued to collect materials relating to the Mennonites. After the death of the couple in 1965, the entire collection came to Weierhof where it is kept in the rooms of the former Weierhöfer Lehr- und Erziehungsanstalt, a well-known school founded by a Mennonite teacher in 1867.⁵

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Although its roots were in 16th-century Switzerland, Anabaptism soon spread to the Netherlands where Menno Simons assumed leadership of the movement which was then named for him. He soon had followers in nearly all parts of Germany, and in the Palatinate particularly, Mennonites were a considerable force. That changed after the Thirty Years' War (1618-48), when only the Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed faiths were tolerated in Germany. Now Mennonites virtually disappeared from the Palatinate, as they were either put to death, imprisoned, or deported. The situation changed again when Karl Ludwig became elector of the Palatinate. Needing workers to rebuild the war-ravaged country, he welcomed the hardworking Mennonites (many of whom escaped from even more

relentless persecution in Switzerland between 1650 and 1680) and granted them religious toleration in 1664.

But that toleration had conditions: Mennonites could meet and worship, but not more than twenty could be together in one place; and each male head of household had to pay six gulden a year as protection money.⁶ The Mennonites were treated even more harshly after the turn of the century when the country had recovered from the depredations of war. Now the government not only demanded more and more protection money, but an old law ("ius retractus") allowed members of the officially tolerated churches to buy the Mennonites' land for the same price its owners had paid for it years before.⁷ Under these conditions many Mennonites preferred to emigrate to America, where William Penn offered them better living conditions. In 1801 the Palatine government did grant Mennonites equal rights, but after 1820 no man was allowed to refuse military service and so the emigration movement continued.

The first and most famous group of German immigrants in America comprised those thirteen families from Krefeld who landed with their leader, Franz Daniel Pastorius, in Philadelphia in 1683. (Their ship, the *Concord*, is often called the "German Mayflower.") One of the members of this group purchased land situated along the Skippack Creek from William Penn; in 1702 the first Mennonite



The village of Kindenheim, home of the Weber family.

farmers were living there. The small colony expanded, and by about 1750 there was “a Mennonite community on both sides of the Skippack Creek ten miles wide, extending north through the north central part of Montgomery County, the western part of Bucks County, a small section of Eastern Berks and Lehigh Counties, [and] southern Northampton[;] . . . included also [were] a few scattered settlements in Chester County.”⁸

In 1717, a group of three hundred Mennonites left the Palatinate and embarked for Pennsylvania via Rotterdam; in all, about three thousand Palatine Mennonites found a home there during the 18th century.⁹ And, while it was not the first, the “most important of the early Palatine colonies . . . was the one established by the Swiss Palatine Mennonites along the Pequea Creek, a tributary of the Susquehanna, in what is now Lancaster County.”¹⁰ It is among these Swiss Palatine Mennonites that we find the Möllinger (“Mellinger” in English) and Risser families who are the subjects of this study.¹¹

THE MÖLLINGER AND RISSER FAMILIES

In 1778, state economist Christian W. Dohm wrote: “The most perfect farmers in Germany are the Palatine Mennonites.”¹² There, “in the middle of the 18th century, at a time when scientific agriculture was still unknown, David Möllinger of Monsheim, by introducing the principle of the rotation of crops on his farm, and use of clovers in place of fallowing, selective stock breeding, and other improved methods of agriculture now everywhere praised, became known as the father of Palatine agriculture.”¹³ At the time David Möllinger was introducing his revolutionary farming practices, some members of the Möllinger family were already living in Pennsylvania.

Because emigration documents from the village of Kindenheim have disappeared from the Landesarchiv in Speyer where they were kept for many years, it is not possible to determine exact dates of emigration for all members of the Möllinger family; the dates that are known come from the family’s letters. Martin Möllinger, born in 1752, emigrated to Lampeter Township, Lancaster County, in 1772 with his wife Maria, who died in 1826. His sister, also named Maria, lived in Lancaster County too; she died in 1822. One of the letters published by Christian Neff in 1940 was sent to Martin’s sister Maria in 1783 by a certain Johannes Weber of Kindenheim; he writes deploring the situation of Mennonites in the Palatinate where, in his opinion, the spirit of brotherly love seems to have vanished from the community.

But most of the letters in the Weierhof collection were written by Martin Möllinger to his sister, Charlotte Möllinger Weber, and her family. Charlotte, mother of Jakob, Peter, Maria, and Katharina Weber, very seldom wrote to her brother herself; most of the correspondence was between Martin Möllinger and his nephew Jakob, who himself had five children; two boys and three girls. In a letter written in 1835, Jakob mentions that his eldest daughter died that year. Jakob’s sister Katharina married Johannes Risser, a member of another well-known Mennonite family. The Risser and their eight children emigrated to America in 1832; family letters tell of their journey and of their lives in Ohio, where they settled; Johannes Risser’s brother and his family followed him to Ohio in 1833.¹⁴

It is not difficult to understand why Charlotte Möllinger Weber was often unhappy, for she knew she would never see those of her family now living in America again in this world. She acknowledged as much in a letter to her brother Martin written in 1826, long before her daughter



The main street of Kindenheim today.

and her family decided to leave Germany: "*Dann der abschied duth wehe, aber ich hoffe wir werden einander wieder antreffen wo uns kein Tod thrennen wird.*" ("It is painful to say goodbye to someone, but I hope that we will meet again where death cannot separate us.")

Certainly not all of the letters exchanged between the Webers and Möllingers are in the collection at Weierhof; some no doubt are still kept by descendants of the family in Pennsylvania. In fact, in *Peace, Faith, Nation*, author Theron F. Schlabach mentions a letter Martin Möllinger sent to his sister Charlotte and her husband, John Weber, in February, 1816.¹⁵ In it he tells of his joy because the War of 1812 with England is over; parts of a letter from "a decade later" are also quoted. But even though the Weierhof collection is not complete, there is enough material in it to afford many insights into Mennonite life in the first third of the 18th century.

A TYPICAL EMIGRATION STORY

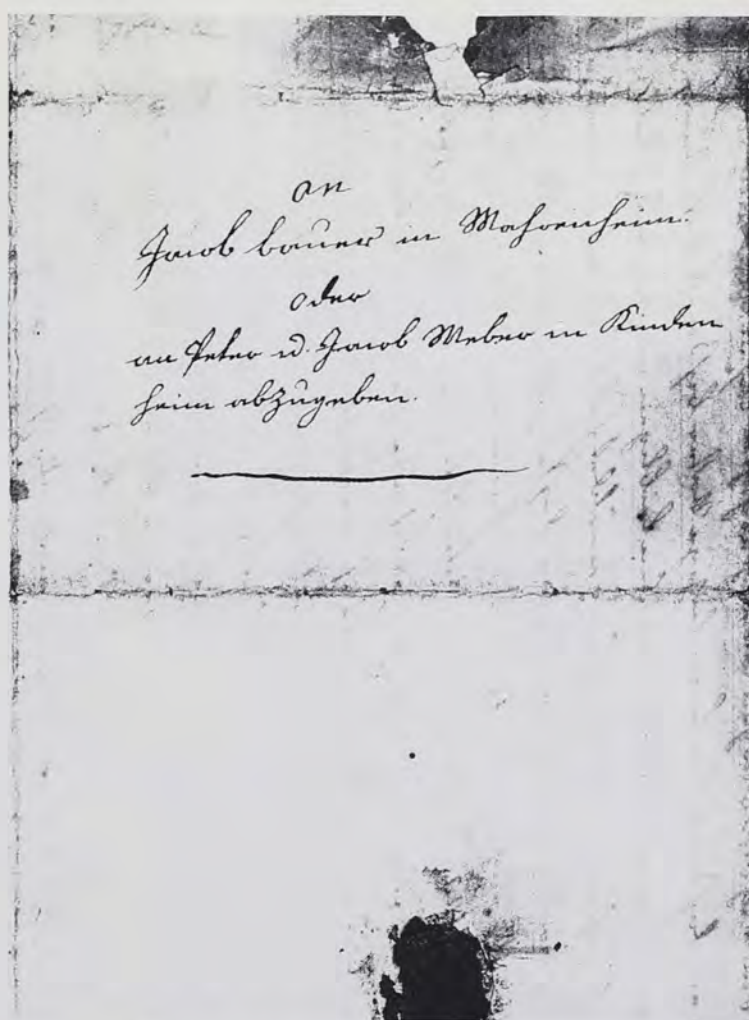
In a letter dated June, 1832, Jakob Weber informed Martin Möllinger that his (Jakob's) sister Katharina and brother-in-law Johannes would soon start their journey to America. Indeed, in the collection at Weierhof is a receipt for \$770, paid by Johannes Risser at Bremen on July 17, 1832, for passage on the *Elizabeth*. On board a week later, Johannes Risser wrote in his own and "in his wife's name" to the Webers, to tell them about the beginning of the trip. He commends the ship's captain and describes the sailors as industrious and honest. When the family climbed the rope ladder onto the ship it was they who recommended the best places between decks to avoid seasickness. Johannes says that for some days the weather has been bad — rainy, cold, and stormy — and the family is disheartened. He nevertheless writes: "Disbelief and sorrows will go away with the moving waves of the ocean, and the best anchor to protect us is God." He ends by saying that the bad weather has made him think of the work on the farm at home, where he now fears for the harvest.

Four days earlier another letter had been written aboard the same ship. It was sent by David Rothen, a teacher, to his friend, Jakob Ellenberger, who was also a teacher. Rothen had arranged passage for a group of about ninety people, but when the members of the group arrived at Bremen they found that other passengers had paid less than they. Evidently they were quite disgruntled, for Rothen complains about their mistrust and ingratitude, warning his friend never to undertake such a task himself.

In the middle of August that year, Jakob Weber writes to his uncle Martin to say that because of the bad weather he fears for the arrival of the Risser family. He goes on to add that his mother has calmed down and accepted the Risser's departure. In April of the following year (1833), Martin Möllinger writes to Kindenheim with news of the Risser's arrival in Lancaster County the previous September. They had stayed only a short while with the Möllinger family there, before traveling to Pittsburgh where they rented a house for their first winter in America. Möllinger wrote to Kindenheim with more news of the Risser in May, 1834. He says he received a letter from them in March complaining about a lack of necessities and about the high costs involved in getting started farming in Ohio. There, "in the forest," they had begun to build a house and stables and to clear the land for a garden and fields. (Möllinger used the typical Pennsylvania German "*klahren*" for this process.)

Martin Möllinger not only told the Webers the news he had heard from the Risser, he added some telling comments as well. After noting that Johannes Risser had been joined by his brother Jakob and his family, Möllinger commented that neither "of the Risser brothers is to be pitied, because they have enough money for their start in the New World. Many other people have worse conditions." He added that both families were fortunate to have made the journey without any loss of life, telling of two families in which either the mother or a child had died enroute. He claimed the Risser had no reason to be dissatisfied, saying their experiences were simply "teaching

Because it was to be hand delivered, Martin Möllinger's letter of April 10, 1835, has only a partial address.



for life.” Since we hear nothing more of the Rissers’ concerns in following years, it seems Möllinger was right; their problems were merely those typically encountered when starting a new life.

CONCERNS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Since they were farmers, it is not surprising that the weather and the harvest — good or bad — are main topics in the Möllinger-Weber correspondence. In the letter he wrote to his uncle in August, 1832, after the Rissers had set out for America, Jakob Weber told of several heavy thunderstorms, adding: “We are still bringing in the harvest. If the weather remains fine we will be ready at the end of the week, except for the oats.” In April, 1833, Martin Möllinger reported that “now the peach, plum, and cherry trees are bursting into full bloom, the apple and pear trees are in bloom also, and the young winter crops seem to be doing well.”

In September, 1833, Jakob Weber gave his report: “The fruit is very well grown, but because of the dry weather there is less straw and fodder for the cattle than usual; but the potatoes (*Grundbirnen* in the Palatine dialect) are looking very good and the grapevines are hanging full of grapes.” These details of agricultural life are found in all the letters, sometimes with the exact dates of dry, wet, or stormy weather. Even differences in the harvests are precisely noted. For example, in a letter dated June, 1837,

Martin Möllinger tells his Kindenheim relatives that: “In the state of Ohio the winter crops have grown well — but it is just the opposite here in Pennsylvania. Some farmers do not have enough bread from wheat and corn combined, and some have harvested less than they have sown. But summer crops such as oats and potatoes were ample.”

Money is another topic mentioned in almost all the correspondence, oftentimes in connection with paying for the letter itself. For instance, in 1834 Martin Möllinger sent a letter to Kindenheim together with a letter written by someone else to a neighbor of the Webers. He explained that he did so “because you are both living in the same place.” He then goes on to tell his relatives to “divide the costs you have to pay for the letter peacefully.” In April, 1835, he corresponds with the Webers simply because “our maid Maria writes to her brothers and sisters and will give the letter to cousin Schöneberger, who wants to go back to Germany. One sheet of her letter is still unused, and because there are no further costs, I can write on this sheet a letter for you.”

Although he seems to have been a very economical man, Martin Möllinger was generous. In January, 1835, he wrote to Kindenheim saying that he has decided to give his nephews and niece — Jakob, Peter, and Maria Weber — each a gift of one hundred dollars. However, he suggests that rather than sending them the money, they allow him to give it to their brother-in-law, Johannes Risser, who will use it to buy land for them. Möllinger explains that this

will be a good investment since increased immigration is driving up the price of farmland. Jakob Weber writes to his uncle in February, saying that he and his brother and sister have not yet decided what to do with the money. In April, Martin Möllinger once more asks what he should do, but receives no answer until September, when Jakob Weber writes again. Apologizing for the delay, he tells his uncle to give his and Maria's share of the money to Johannes Risser to buy land, but to send Peter his share. This was not the only money matter to cause some concern in the family. In May of the previous year (1834), Martin Möllinger had helped his brother Jakob draw up his will, and Katharina Weber Risser later expressed her "indignation" at one of the clauses. The following January Möllinger was still worried about whether his advice had been correct, while at the same time condemning too great an interest in money: "In the Bible it is said, 'In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread.'"

THE ROLE OF RELIGION

Biblical references such as the one from Genesis (19:2) quoted above, are common in the Möllinger-Weber correspondence, but in only one or two instances is religious faith the writer's main concern. A case in point is Martin Möllinger's January, 1835, letter which tells of his gift to the Weber children. Writing now as the family patriarch — he was over eighty at the time — he compares himself to Jacob, the son of Isaac in the Old Testament. This is because, like Jacob, he is able to say to God: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and all of the truth which you have shown your servant [Genesis 32:10]." In the role of patriarch he feels the need to advise and admonish his relatives and so begins his January letter by saying: "I wish for all of you that — as we have left behind us the old year — we are able to leave behind us the old man with his desires and errors. I wish for you that — as we begin a new year — we begin to live in the spirit of the new man, who is created by God full of justice and sanctity."

Later in 1835, Martin Möllinger described for his Kindenheim family what he considered an important old book which a friend had just had reprinted. Although he did not own the book he had read it, and so repeated the entire list of contents; he also quoted some passages which seemed especially significant to him, such as: "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the spirit of God dwells in you?" (I Cor. 3:16) Such quotations have implications for the role Mennonites are expected to play in the matter of their own salvation; a more active role than is necessary in the Lutheran faith, for example, where salvation depends only on God.

In an April, 1839, letter, Jakob Weber tells of a quarrel in the religious community over a preacher. Some members of the community want to get rid of the preacher because he seems to be "too Christian," or "too saintly"; another faction wants to keep him, while a third group is neutral. Jakob Weber himself hopes that "the truth will win." Since

this is the only time that he deals directly with a religious topic at any length, and since his uncle almost never did, it may seem that for Mennonites, faith was strictly a private matter. Yet even if this is so, to the individual — and to the community — faith was of enormous importance and all events were interpreted in a Christian context.

Thus, when Martin Möllinger compared the harvests in Pennsylvania and Ohio in his 1837 letter, he concluded by saying: "When God likes to give us less than in former years, he will do this for our best, because he wants us to think of him more often and to intensify our praise of him." In the same way, when Jakob Weber wrote to his uncle to tell him of the Risser's departure for Europe, he finished by saying that he wished them success and happiness on their journey and hoped that the Savior would accompany them as He had accompanied his disciples during the storm on the sea. Then, in February, 1835, when he had to tell his uncle of his sister's illness and his mother's increasing weakness, he interpreted these happenings as God's own way of reminding us "that we all, young or old, have no guarantee for our life on earth and so shall prepare everytime for death."

Even when his oldest child died in September, 1835, Jakob Weber was able to find meaning and comfort in his Christian beliefs: "The loss of the child is depressing us a great deal," he wrote, "but we have hope and comfort in the faith that she is in good hands now, in a place where she is preserved from temptation and the danger of sin." And, when he had to inform Martin Möllinger of his sister Charlotte's death in April, 1839, he did so with the same Christian confidence: "Even if we feel the loss of our dear mother, we must admit that her death was a boon for her because God has released her from her sufferings and pains. During her last years she had no hope of being relieved of her pains in this earthly life."

ENDURING THE TRIALS AND CATASTROPHES OF LIFE

This rich faith not only helped Mennonites accept the deaths of family members, it enabled them to live with disease or illness while waiting for the end. Maria Weber lived with her brother Jakob and his family, which included five children. When she fell ill in February, 1835, she went to stay with her brother Peter because it was quieter at his house; she died there in November. In December, Jakob Weber wrote and told his uncle Martin of Maria's death, saying: "She had fought a good fight. Although she wanted to live and be healthy again, she resigned herself to her fate and accepted the will of God." The same attitude prevailed in Lancaster County. After giving a truly harrowing account of the way "brother Jakob" lost his leg, Martin Möllinger concluded by saying: "I have not written this in order to make you feel sorry for him or for those of us in this house. He is more often happy than sad, and is accepting the will of God. He is friendly to everyone coming to visit him, and he talks to everyone so that we all like to be with him."

Their deep faith and confidence in a new life after death enabled these believers to accept whatever befell them. Their earthly life was considered to be of less worth than the life which awaited them in God's presence — the life of eternity. Realizing, then, that death was considered to be but a necessary step in achieving that life, helps one to understand why suffering and dying are so often spoken of in what seems to be an indifferent or unfeeling manner, as in the following remarks by Martin Möllinger. In his January, 1835, letter he wrote about an important businessman who owned railroad shares: "Five weeks ago he was riding along the railroad when a locomotive came, and his horse shied and threw him under the engine so that he was dead immediately. We have a railroad connection now between the Susquehanna and Philadelphia, where we often hear about accidents and quick deaths . . ."

In a similar manner, Jakob Weber tells of the consequences of some very severe weather in the area around Kindenheim in August of 1832: "On the 10th we had some heavy thunderstorms, in the course of which some houses in our region were struck [by lightning]. At Niederflörsheim the mayor's house was struck, and he and two maids were injured,¹⁶ but not killed. At Monsheim . . . a tree was struck. A house was also struck at Dirmstein and a girl injured. At Quirnheim the mayor's eldest son was struck and killed while plowing a field.¹⁷ The lightning made a hole in the top of his head where it entered his body and one in his chin where it left it. His clothes and boots were torn to pieces — a terrifying day for the whole region, as you can see."

In a chapter entitled "The Inner Life," in *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America*, Theron F. Schlabach observes that, "in essence Mennonites and Amish were not pleasure-oriented but serious."¹⁸ Yet he recognizes that these hardworking people cannot always be somber, and says that "traditional folks found diversion in the rhythms of deaths, marriages, and the seasons."¹⁹ He cites as an example the story of Emaline Nold, who was so intrigued by the spectacle of a local hanging in 1864 "that she rushed to tell a friend the details."²⁰ This illustration, especially with its emphasis on "details," might have a parallel in Martin Möllinger's full and rather cruel and macabre account of an incident already referred to — "brother Jakob's" loss of his leg. Concerning that event, Möllinger wrote:

On April 9, in the evening, one of our maids came from Jakob. Shocked, she said that Jakob's leg had come off. At once I went to him and asked him what he had done. He [said], "I got out of bed to use the chamber pot. When I returned to bed, I saw my foot lying beside me. I was shocked and looked at my leg. Really, the foot was not there, so it had to be my foot lying there in the bed. I saw that it was broken off at the two tubes of the calf." Then I myself looked for the foot, but I did not know that it was still in the stocking. I took it out, and at that moment the three men who were with us looked the other way.

. . . Perhaps I told you that Jakob had had pain in his left foot four years ago; some toes had become black, but he cut them away himself and was healthy again. But last summer he once again complained about pain in his calf and about his leg being cold. Every day the pain grew. Twenty-one weeks ago, on a Sunday evening, he complained about unbearable pains. The next morning the foot had a blue color from the toes to the ankle. . . . During the next ten days the foot was quite dead and jet black. . . . It seemed as if the flesh of the calf would rot and drop from the bones. . . . The people in the house often talked about having the leg amputated, above or below the knee, but he would not accept that. . . . When the leg had to be rebandaged, all visitors disappeared at once so they would not have to see it. . . . We had a lot of famous and foreign doctors here . . . [and] some time ago two Lancaster doctors came, one saying to the other, "It is worth walking thirty miles or more to see such a thing."

Möllinger goes on to say that they hope that with the doctor's help the patient will be cured. As mentioned earlier, he tells his Kindenheim relatives there is no need for pity since Jakob has accepted his fate as God's will.

Christian Neff, who initiated the publication of the Möllinger-Weber correspondence, gave a speech on the occasion of his 50th anniversary as a preacher. The words he spoke and the faith he demonstrated then, are a fitting way to end this account since they are remarkably similar to those revealed in the letters written more than a century before. Having lost his wife and his twin brother shortly before the 50th-anniversary celebration, Neff asked his listeners: "What does God want to say to us through this? One thing especially: Our earthly life is nothing; [therefore] we shall not rely on ourselves, we shall not trust only in our own powers, and we shall not work only for worldly success."

ENDNOTES

¹*Mennonitisches Lexikon*, Volumes I-IV, 1913-1967.

²Horst Penner, *Weltweite Bruderschaft: Ein mennonitisches Geschichtsbuch*, 4th ed. (Weierhof, 1984), p. 257.

³Paul Schowalter, "Christian Neff: Ein Lebensbild," *Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender*, 1951, p. 34.

⁴Christian Neff, "Alte Briefe," *Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender*, 1940, p. 100.

⁵Penner, pp. 96, 261. ⁶*Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁷C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, 4th ed. (Newton, Kan., 1957), p. 312.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 359. ⁹*Ibid.*, p. 314. ¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 540. ¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 542.

¹²*The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, p. 111. ¹³Smith, p. 320f.

¹⁴Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, Johannes Risser left behind a considerable correspondence with well-known American and European Mennonites of the time. These letters are also housed at Weierhof.

¹⁵Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1988), p. 19.

¹⁶The German word is "beschädigt," in modern times used only for objects, not for people.

¹⁷Palatine dialect term used by Weber is "zackern".

¹⁸Schlabach, p. 71. ¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 72. ²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 71.

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