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Nancy Kettering Frye

Jean-Paul Benowitz

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Winter
**PENNSYLVANIA
FOLKLIFE**

1996-97

**FIRST PROTEST
AGAINST SLAVERY**
Here in 1688, at the home
of Tunes Kunders, an
eloquent protest was
written by a group of
German Quakers. Signed
by Pastorius and three
others, it preceded by
92 years Pennsylvania's
passage of the nation's
first state abolition law.



CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
FOUNDED 1719
MOTHER CHURCH OF THE DENOMINATION IN AMERICA
IN THE BATTLE OF GERMANTOWN, OCTOBER, 4, 1777,
GENERAL FRANCIS NASH, OF NORTH CAROLINA WAS
MORTALLY WOUNDED HERE, CARRIED WITH THE
AMERICAN ARMY IN ITS RETREAT, HE DIED THREE
DAYS LATER, AND WAS BURIED AT TOWAMENCIN
MENNONITE CHURCH, NEAR RULPSVILLE.
THE SAME BALL THAT WOUNDED GENERAL NASH
KILLED HIS AIDE, MAJOR JAMES WITHERSPOON,
WHOSE GRAVE IS AT ST. MICHAEL'S LUTHERAN
CHURCH. SIX OTHER SOLDIERS KILLED IN THE
BATTLE WERE BURIED HERE.
TABLET CREATED AT 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BATTLE
BY THE OFFICERS OF GERMANTOWN AND VICINITY

**THE PENNSYLVANIA
INFLUENCE**

Contributors

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WINTER 1996-97, VOL. 46, NO. 2

CONTENTS

- 54 "An Uncommon Woman" in the Age of the
Common Man
NANCY KETTERING FRYE
- 71 Maintaining Mennonite Identity: The Old Order
Church in Pennsylvania and Virginia
JEAN-PAUL BENOWITZ
- 83 The End of an Era: The Last One-Room Public
Schools in Lebanon County
AMOS W. LONG, JR.
- 92 Pennsylvania Extended in the Cherokee Country:
A Study of Log Architecture
JOHN A. MILBAUER

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(Inside front cover)

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As contributor John A. Milbauer notes at the beginning of his essay on log architecture, "North America's cultural debt to Pennsylvania is enormous." Several articles in this issue explore the influence Pennsylvanians have had on the young nation as they migrated beyond the State's borders.

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“AN UNCOMMON WOMAN” IN THE AGE OF THE COMMON MAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SARAH RIGHTER MAJOR

by Nancy Kettering Frye



Sarah Righter Major, the first woman preacher in the Church of the Brethren. (J. H. Moore Collection, Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Elgin, Ill.)

Pennsylvania native Sarah Righter Major (1808-1884) was, by any definition, “an uncommon woman.”¹ The first woman preacher in the conservative Protestant sect known (by 1871) as the German Baptist Brethren, she also chose to become personally involved in premeditated law-breaking activities, courageously defying the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. An intellectually and spiritually active woman in a Romantic American culture espousing what has been called “the Cult of True Womanhood,”² she managed to transcend many of the limitations imposed on women by the male-dominated society of the times. Like many of her female Quaker contemporaries, she seems to have regarded herself as a complete human being, nurtured directly by God, fully capable of being a channel for the Holy Spirit at work in the world.³ The ordination of women is still

a contentious issue in many Christian churches, and today Sarah Righter Major’s influence is perhaps most keenly felt among Anabaptist women active in, or aspiring to, a preaching ministry, particularly within the Church of the Brethren. But beyond that admittedly narrow appeal, she still has something of importance to say to a much more eclectic audience: In a time of uncertain trumpets and clashing opinions, of mixed messages and self-centered agendas, the quietly heroic witness of one uncommon woman continues, still clear, still uncompromising, still true.

Born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, on August 29, 1808, Sarah was the daughter of John and Elisabeth (Stern) Righter.⁴ The Righters had a second daughter, Mary, on February 26, 1811; she would be Sarah’s only sibling and



Historic tablet at the Germantown Church of the Brethren.



Author and activist Louise May Alcott was born in Germantown in 1832 when her father ran a school there.

a lifelong friend and confidant. In November of that same year the twenty-five-year-old Elisabeth (of English and German parentage) died; the cause of her death is unknown.⁵ John Righter, of German descent and a cooper by trade, eventually married again; his second wife was Ann Frances Wells, daughter of Montgomery County sheriff and state legislator Isaiah Wells. By all accounts a prudent, pious, practical, and approachable man who was selectively conservative and certainly dependable, John Righter was Sarah's role model, confidant, encourager, and protector, as well as her intellectual and spiritual advisor.

A well-established community already 125 years old when Sarah Righter was born, the "urban village"⁶ of Germantown was one of the most nurturing environments in early 19th-century America for a bright, aspiring female. Founded by a group of Quakers and Mennonites from Krefeld, Germany, under the leadership of Francis Daniel Pastorius (1651-1719), this auspicious site east of the Wissahickon Creek (perhaps a brisk two-hour walk from Philadelphia) quite naturally evolved into a hospitable haven for religiously persecuted, educated craftsmen looking for a new start in a new land.⁷ In addition to Germans, it soon included an ethnically and religiously diverse mixture of Dutch, English, Irish, Swiss, Swedes, Welsh, French Huguenots, Scots-Irish, and Negroes. In addition to Quakers and Mennonites, there were those of the Lutheran, Reformed and Dunker persuasions, and also to be found were free thinkers, Separatists, Hermits of the Wissahickon, and Schwenkfelders, as well as persons totally unchurched.



The Deshler-Morris House at 5442 Germantown Ave., the summer home of President George Washington in 1793 and

1794. (Unless otherwise attributed, all photographs are by Tilman R. Frye)

From its inception, the community clearly valued and supported education. Schools were begun as early as 1702, and Pastorius himself served as the first schoolmaster, holding regular classes for eight hours Monday through Friday, and four hours on Saturday. Under the charter of the General Court of Germantown, Pastorius also taught a night school for those youngsters who were needed to work at home during the day. Thanks to the multi-talented Christopher Sauer, the first American Bible was printed here in the German language, along with many newspapers, tracts, and pamphlets. The first grist mill in the Philadelphia area was in Germantown, as was the first paper mill in the Colonies. By the 1740s there were well over one hundred houses, a number of schools, a market, a fire company, a library, and numerous taverns offering convenient hospitality for regular travelers between Philadelphia and Bethlehem. When a yellow fever epidemic swept

the city in 1793, both Governor Mifflin and President Washington wisely moved to the healthy “high ground” of Germantown. During the 1790s, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison also visited this mecca, and soon state and national business matters were regularly being conducted here.

After the turnpike bill was passed in 1798, pluralistic Germantown became a suburb of Philadelphia. In fact, so close was the connection that, although he lived in Germantown, John Righter would eventually be called to serve as Elder in the Philadelphia congregation of the German Anabaptist-Pietist group sometimes called “Dunkers” or “Tunkers” (after the German *tunker*, meaning “to dip”), a reference to their practice of trine immersion baptism. In January, 1817, at a meeting of members of the original Germantown congregation already worshipping together in a schoolroom at Fourth and Vine Streets in



Germantown Academy, built in 1761. Education was always valued in Germantown where founder Francis

Daniel Pastorius was the first schoolmaster.

Philadelphia, the decision was made to buy land and build a house of worship on Crown Street in the city.⁸

Among a generally conservative and consciously peculiar people, this particular urban congregation was from the first noted for its strong leadership and its pioneering practices within the denomination, a reputation reflective of the wise pastoral leadership of Peter Keyser, Jr. Lovingly called “the father of the Philadelphia Church,” he was a descendant of a German Mennonite family noted for its martyrs. Had he been a boastful man, Keyser might have stressed that members of his family were among the original settlers of Germantown, his grandfather, Dirck, having been born there in 1701.⁹ Married to Catherine Clemens of Horsham (Montgomery County) in 1790, Keyser fathered three sons and six daughters; he worked first as a tanner and later ran a successful lumber business.

While Peter Keyser, Jr., dressed in Dunker drab, his

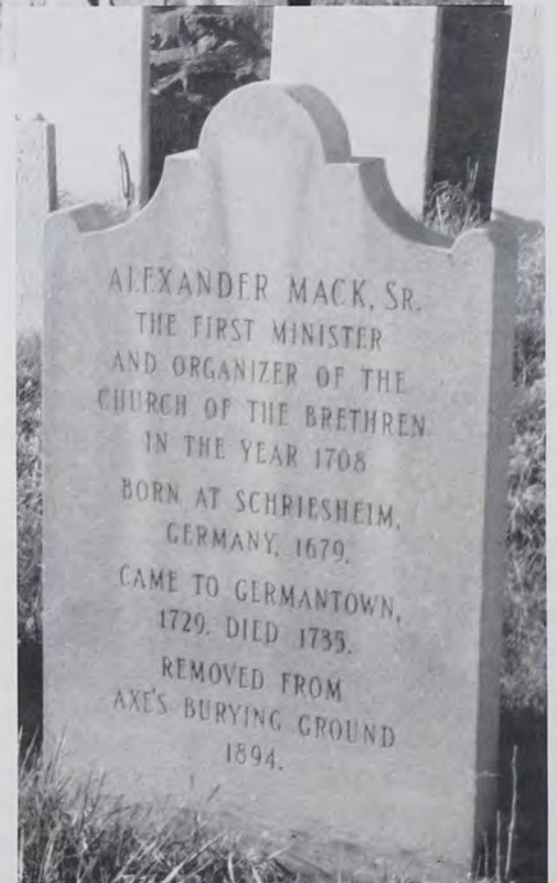
mind and heart were amazingly open, receptive, and in touch with the times. For sixty-one years he served as pastor of both the Philadelphia and Germantown congregations, traveling sometimes on horseback and sometimes on foot. He was never known to neglect his duty, and no matter what the weather was always available to conduct services in both places. He preached eloquently in English and German, attracting crowds from all denominations, including Roman Catholics. So well did he know the Bible, it was said that if the Scriptures were ever to be accidentally destroyed, he could replace them from memory.

By living out the faith he preached, Peter Keyser, Jr., was undoubtedly an example and an inspiration to Sarah Righter, showing her that such faith could be communicated effectively through words fitly spoken with deeds to match. As for the rest of her education—which has been called “good common schooling”—precise details are not



Germantown Meetinghouse and Burying Ground. When Alexander Mack, the organizer and first preacher of the Church of the Brethren, died in 1735 he was interred in Axe's Burying Ground; his remains were removed to the Germantown Brethren Cemetery in 1894.

available. Perhaps she attended the Germantown Union School (later known as the Germantown Academy), a bilingual school established in 1761, with the well-known Brethren Christopher Sauer, II, as one of its founders and a longtime trustee.¹⁰ The young Sarah may also have enjoyed access to a public library, the Germantown Library Company having been founded in 1807, one year before her birth. She may even have been able to borrow books from open-minded individuals like Peter Keyser. Whatever the source of her reading matter, it seems likely that a girl of Sarah's ability, curiosity, and determination may well have discovered through reading what she needed to know about the larger world beyond the confines of her Germantown home.



A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

In 1826 the pivotal moment in Sarah Righter's life came through the ministry of a woman. Nearly eighteen at the time and still living at home, she was not yet a baptized



Germantown Church of the Brethren, 1996.



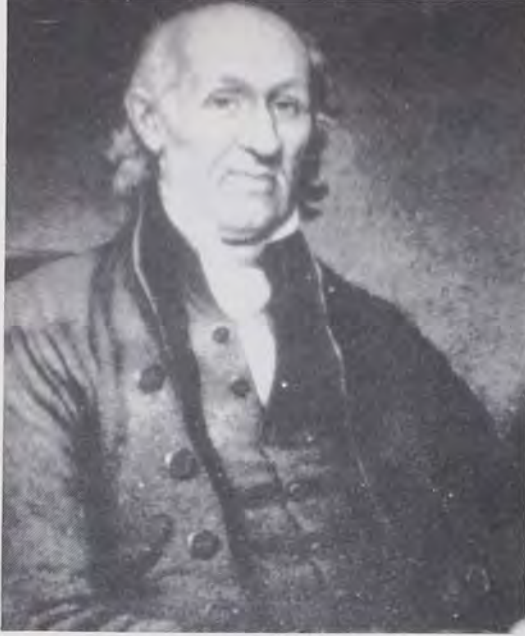
*Harriet Livermore, "The Pilgrim Stranger" (In the Rev. S. T. Livermore, **Harriet Livermore, the "Pilgrim Stranger"**)*

member of the church, so as was the custom, she would have been allowed the freedom of dressing in worldly, "gay" clothes, rather than in the somber, plain, unfashionable garb of the Brethren. Thanks to Peter Keyser, Jr., in August of that year the Brethren were able to hear the preaching of Harriet Livermore (1788-1868), a teacher, author, and itinerant evangelist who called herself "The Pilgrim Stranger," and who was something of a living ecumenical movement. The daughter of a congressman, Harriet Livermore had been sprinkled in infant baptism and confirmed an Episcopalian at age fourteen. Later, she joined the Congregationalists, became attached to the Quakers, received a second baptism as a Baptist, and was now about to be welcomed among the Brethren.¹¹

In a day and age when "true" women simply did not speak in public, particularly to "promiscuous" (mixed) audiences, Harriet Livermore came among the Brethren with incredible credentials. She had already "preached occasionally before Congress at Washington to crowds of people . . . and was considered such a great preacher that she drew crowds of hearers wherever she went."¹² She always spoke extemporaneously, regarding reliance on a manuscript as simply reading. Whether or not they agreed with her, almost everyone saw her as noteworthy: Physically attractive as well as highly intelligent and cultivated, she was a beautiful singer, an earnest, sincere, and forceful speaker, and an intensely spiritual, energetic, powerful, and courageous Christian witness.

It is easy to see why, under her preaching, Sarah Righter was converted—her life forever changed. Of that service in her home congregation her son would later write: "Here it was that my mother heard The Pilgrim Stranger and as the first fruits of her labors in Philadelphia was the conversion of my mother whom Harriet Livermore ever afterwards called 'my daughter,' as Paul called Timothy his son, and was not lacking in parental solicitude for her welfare."¹³ Harriet Livermore herself said of that Philadelphia experience: "In all of my visits never have I given and received greater satisfaction."¹⁴ Thirty-eight and unmarried, she may have been longing for a daughter who could match her in intellect and spirit.

As for Sarah, she was baptized on November 12, 1826, according to a brief entry in the records of the Philadelphia congregation;¹⁵ her mission in life would forever after be what Harriet Livermore called simply, "sounding salvation." Yet even though she had truly experienced the empowerment of "God's caress,"¹⁶ acting on that internally



*Peter Keyser, "the father of the Philadelphia Church," and one of the most influential men in Sarah Righter Major's life. (In Roland L. Howe, *The History of a Church (Dunker) With Comments Featuring the First Church of the Brethren of Philadelphia*)*

Abraham Harley Cassel, noted bibliophile and antiquarian who was converted under the ministry of Sarah Righter Major. (Source unknown)



recognized blessing was by no means easy. Almost simultaneously it seems, she experienced a burning desire to go out and preach, along with an intense fear of the consequences should she attempt such a bold action.

Sarah at first tried to keep her feelings secret, but her father knew her too well to be easily fooled. She rewarded his concern with her confidence, and to his eternal credit, he actively encouraged her.¹⁷ Together they confided in Brother Peter Keyser, and "his words of helpfulness aided her in overcoming her fears and enabled her to begin her work of witnessing."¹⁸ Another male mentor, Elder Israel Poulson of the nearby Amwell, New Jersey, congregation, invited young Sarah to speak. So successful was she that many other congregations invited her to come and hold evangelistic meetings. So winsome was her manner and so eloquent her message, that even those who may have come to criticize were disarmed into incredulous silence, if not outright praise.

THE MISSION

For nearly sixteen years Sarah Righter conducted her maverick ministry in an alien culture as a single "Sister" traveling among the Brethren. Little is known about these early years of her preaching and prophesying ministry, but from all indications it would seem that every word spoken by her must have been uttered with incredible effort and exceptional courage. Clearly she was out of step with most members of her sex, with many members of her religious community, and with most contemporaries of both sexes of any religious persuasion—or of none. During her preach-

ing missions among some of the Southern Brethren she made the acquaintance of Sister Sophia Lightner of Union Bridge, Maryland. Sister Sophia took more than a little interest in Sarah Righter's situation and the problems she encountered, explaining that Sarah's "case was brought forward at the yearly meeting. If I understand correctly it was settled this way: That in her own parts she can speak when ever they think proper, but other churches, that is the br. [Brethren] in other parts or districts durst not send for her unless that family of the church in which they live are in union. If there should be one or two private members not reconciled, they could not prevent, unless it should be an Elder opposed, why then she durst not come. I feel sorry that it is pind [sic] down so close, and yet I rejoice that God did not permit her to be entirely put to silence."¹⁹

Sophia Lightner had earlier written of Sarah's ministry, saying: "I could not begin to tell you how many meetings she had with us, as she spoke in New Windsor, in Woodbury, in Uniontown a couple of times, in the poor house, in Creagerstown, in New Market several times, in Frederick Town a couple of times . . . in different meeting houses, in private homes by day and by night, declaring the Word of God to a dying and guilty world with all the fervency I ever heard a mortal express. She looks weak and pale. One would think it would hardly be possible that she had the strength to speak that she had, but none but God can support her."²⁰

Perhaps Sarah Righter's most famous convert was Abraham Harley Cassel (1820-1908), a noted Pennsylvania German bibliophile and antiquarian responsible for an invaluable collection of historical Brethren materials.

According to Cassel, Sarah's success as a preacher was unassailable: "She was many times at our house, and I often heard her preach, and it was under one of her sermons that I became willing to forsake all for Christ, when but eighteen years old. . . . [She had] commenced preaching before she was twenty years old under the greatest opposition imaginable. But she persevered and finally overcame opposition so far as she was personally known. She had never studied oratory, but she had a very ready command of language to express every shade of feeling. In Biblical knowledge, especially in the prophetic portion, she was almost an oracle. I have heard many sermons, but never any that surpassed hers."²¹

Despite her strong and amazingly independent convictions, Sarah Righter seems to have freely submitted to the authority of what was called the "ancient order of the Brethren." Historian James H. Lehman explains that "this 'ancient order' was ordained by God to direct properly the practice of the church and the conduct of the Christian."²² Although she made every effort to avoid giving needless offence, Sarah persevered in one unshakable conviction: she had been called to preach. Her situation was discussed and disapproved at Annual Meeting (*Die Grosse Versammlung*) in Stark County, Ohio, in 1834. The Elders duly organized a committee which was sent out to silence her. After listening to her preach and seeing her in action the committee members left, unable to enforce the ban. As Elder James H. Tracy, an Indiana minister, explained: "I could not give my voice to silence someone who can outpreach me."²³

Unfortunately for modern scholars, Sarah's sermons were not delivered from written texts. As was the custom among Brethren and others of the time, such expressions would have been almost exclusively extemporaneous. But one extant letter from 1835 does offer a sample of her uncommon mind. Writing to Ohio printer Jacob Sala, she says: ". . . My dear brother, I shall ever acknowledge the head of the woman to be the man, and the head of every man is Christ. He did not send many men, and gave them no authority to forbid any that should do works in his name and kingdom. . . ."²⁴ Further, the not-yet-thirty-year-old Sarah confidently asserted:

. . . I believe man to have been first in creation, but I also believe woman was made to be an help meet for or an equal to him, having a soul and a body, capable of helping him, in his natural, and spiritual world, the companion of his joys and sorrows, in heaven and on earth, who looks up to him as for her power and protection, and on whom he is bound to look with feelings of care and love, so as to secure that confidence to himself which belongs to his high station. I am happy to say that at this dark age of the world, I have met with men who are always the same faithful friends in temporal and spiritual things, but believe me these are the fewest, who are brethren indeed, in every time of need,

especially when the truth is suffering and many are ashamed to defend it.

I believe my character is not so uncommon as that of "Anna the prophetess" of great age, the widow of 84 years, which took the liberty of staying in the temple to serve God. . . .²⁵

Unequivocally she stood her ground, stating her position with quiet forcefulness and convincing logic: ". . . I conceive it would be very inconsistent in an apostle, who had laid his hands on men and women, and pray'd over them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost, to quench the gift of the spirit of God because it was given to a woman—in answer to prayer—when at that time it may not be given in such measure to more mature Christians. God always gave his gifts freely where they were willing to use them, and I believe in Christ Jesus male and female are one, just as Jew and Gentile are made one. Everyone should do as much as they can to Glorify God with the different gifts of the Spirit of God."²⁶



Thomas Major (Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Elgin, Ill.)

MAJOR CHANGES

One auspicious day a young man named Thomas Major, who had been educated in the common schools and had learned the carpentry trade in Philadelphia, came to board in the Righter home. This was a generally accepted practice in the growing craft and industrial center of Germantown. Born in 1811, the young man's ancestors had come from Londonderry County, Ireland, and settled about four miles northwest of Norristown (Montgomery County).²⁷ Thomas Major's father, also named Thomas, had been a shoemaker; he died when he was forty, a circumstance which may have

served to deepen young Thomas's later relationships with John Righter and Peter Keyser, Jr. In 1841, remembered as "the year without a spring" due to six months of severe weather, John Righter and Thomas Major were both elected to the Brethren ministry. In 1842, after realizing their feelings for each other were now more than those of simple friendship, Sarah Righter and Thomas Major were married on March 10, by Brother Keyser.

In the spring of 1843 the Majors joined the westward migration, a movement that had begun some years before. President of the United States when Sarah Righter Major was born, Thomas Jefferson saw independent farmers as God's chosen people; the common man as yeoman farmer was central to his vision of the new nation.²⁸ The economically independent farmer, Jefferson reasoned, would be free to pursue the public good rather than private profit. Since even in his time farmland in the East seemed in short supply, all eyes began looking west. By 1818 the first highway built by the federal government opened a viable route from Cumberland, Maryland, into the new frontier state of Ohio. As the 19th century dawned, fewer than one in ten Americans lived west of the Appalachians; when the first shots of the Civil War were heard at Fort Sumter in 1861, more than half of all Americans had actually "gone west."²⁹

Like many others, then, Thomas and Sarah Righter Major decided to leave an area of culture and comfort (an area called by artist Gilbert Stewart the "Athens of America") for the uncertainties of life in the fertile pioneer territory of southwestern Ohio.³⁰ After their arduous trek across the Appalachians, the young couple settled on a farm in the area of Portsmouth in Scioto County. Here their faith in each other, in their sense of mission, and in God was about to be put to the test. In the family Bible someone succinctly recorded the supreme sadness of those early years: their first child was stillborn in 1844; an apparently "adopted" baby girl died in 1845 when nine months old; and a son, John, died at age three months in 1846. Their next children survived—indeed thrived—in the pioneer environment. Samuel was born on February 23, 1847, and Thomas Elwood on September 19, 1849. Sometime between 1847 and 1849, the growing family moved to a 135-acre farm in Highland County, southeast of Dayton. In addition to preaching, for which they were not remunerated, they busied themselves with farming; Thomas also did carpentry work to add to their income. Their last child, daughter Annie Mary, was born December 13, 1852, when Sarah was forty-four.

"IF SLAVERY IS NOT WRONG, NOTHING IS WRONG"

According to a family historian, in addition to all their other activities the Majors "were very active in the movement for the abolition of slavery[,] and their farm was a stop on the 'Underground Rail[way]' which conveyed slaves to Canada and freedom."³¹ Their courageous actions were premeditated lawbreaking, for the federal legislation known

as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850³² obligated all citizens to give assistance, if requested, in the capture of fugitive slaves, who were considered merely property to be returned to their owners. The Majors thought otherwise, agreeing with Abraham Lincoln that "if slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." From the first, the Brethren had opposed slavery. In northern Europe, where the sect originated, slavery was not being practiced, but America was a different world. Here the issue could not be avoided, although most German Brethren settled on small farms rather than large plantations. As early as 1782, it was noted in the records of the Annual Meeting that: "Concerning the unchristian negro slave trade, it has been unanimously considered, that it cannot be permitted in any wise by the church, that a member should or could purchase negroes, or keep them as slaves. . . ."³³

The first protest against slavery in the Colonies took place in Germantown in 1688, and clearly the Philadelphia area was a hotbed of abolitionist activity. Quakers—men and women—were among the leaders there and elsewhere, and Quaker connections with the Brethren were close, personal, and even familial.³⁴ So, while it is not known to what extent, if any, the Majors were involved in such activities, before deciding to move to southwestern Ohio Thomas and Sarah must have realized they were settling in an area well-known as a heavily used avenue of escape. One can only speculate that their sense of mission included more than a ministry of mere words; that in the best Brethren tradition they were also prepared to "walk their talk."

Most Underground Railway activity took place under cover of darkness and in relative silence; neither runaways nor rescuers wanted any publicity. Fugitives were hidden



The first protest against slavery in the Colonies took place in Germantown in 1688.



Elder Landon West (1841-1916) who published the story of Sammy Weir, a Virginia slave who became an elder and preacher in the Brethren Church. (From a photo in the Individuals File at the Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Elgin, Ill.)

Since by law most slaves had been kept illiterate, written, first-person accounts of those helped by the Underground Railroad were few and far between. Understandably, those who helped them, as well as many of their descendants, were not eager to advertise their illegal activities. Even the Brethren periodical, *The Gospel Messenger*, giving an account of Sister Sarah's life at the time of her death, approached the subject on tiptoe: "She sympathized with the unfortunate and wretched of every condition. She took much interest in the improvement of the colored people, and when an opportunity was afforded, labored to instruct and encourage them."³⁶

One account that has survived, thanks to Elder Landon West who published it in tract form in 1897, involves the Majors directly. This is the incredible biography of Sammy Weir, an illiterate Virginia slave who became Elder Samuel Weir, a free, literate, Brethren preacher.³⁷ According to Landon West's account, "upon reaching the Ohio shore, Brother (B. F.) Moomaw (of Virginia) said to him, 'Sam, you are now a free man and on free soil, where you can enjoy your freedom as all other free men.' . . . From the place of crossing they came down the Ohio River, reaching the home of Brother Thomas Major, living then in Scioto County, Ohio, on Monday. But Brother Major being away from home, they were received and cared for very kindly by Sister Sarah. This was Sammy's first meeting with Sister Major."³⁸

The first meeting, but by no means the last. Sarah and her husband became two of Sammy's most consistent supporters and enabling friends. He eventually learned to read and write well enough to study the Bible, and before long he began to preach, first to members of his own race and later to white congregations as well. Subsequently elected to the ministry, in October, 1865, the Majors became the first white Brethren to participate in an integrated Lovefeast with Brother Weir and two other Negroes, the recently baptized Harvey and Martha Carter. In 1872 Thomas Major gave Brother Weir the authority to baptize and to solemnize marriages. In 1881 he and the Majors had the joy of being present when Brother Carter was called to the ministry.

AQUILLA AND PRISCILLA

After John Righter and Thomas Major were elected to the Brethren ministry in late 1841, Sarah—who had already been preaching for fifteen years—no longer walked alone; she now had the loyal support of her father as well as of the man who would become her husband. From all indications she was the central figure of the three.³⁹ Once in Ohio, the Majors operated something of a team ministry, and according to family records, "their ministerial labors . . . were a heavy drain upon their resources, and sympathies. Each Sunday they held from one to three services, often traveling a distance of ten to fifteen miles, over poor roads, to meet those eagerly gathered to listen to them. Their joint efforts resulted in the building of a church at



The Johnson House on Germantown Avenue was a stop on the Underground Railroad; the area was a hotbed of abolitionist activity.

in barns, in attics, under feather beds, in stables and storerooms, and possibly even in the upper rooms of meetinghouses built to accommodate overnight lodgers during Lovefeast observances. They were offered food and clothing, shelter, and, if needed, nursing care; sometimes they were disguised and always they were moved in secrecy to the next "station" on the road to freedom. In addition to walking, fugitives were transported by wagons, boats, and trains.³⁵



The Lexington Church, built by Thomas Major and Gideon Moore in 1849. Located about two miles south of Lexington (now called Highland) Ohio, it was a 45' x 60' frame structure. (History of the Church of the Brethren of the Southern District of Ohio by the Historical Committee, 2nd ed. [Dayton, Ohio: 1921], p. 65.)

what was then called New Lexington.”⁴⁰

During church services Sarah usually sat with the congregation, waiting to be invited to come forward to preach or to pray. Her manner was completely unassuming; she perfectly personified that wifely submission so dear to the hearts of 19th-century Brethren, yet without weakening in her own vocation to witness. Brother J. H. Warstler of Indiana remembers that “when she entered the church house of the Solomon’s Creek congregation, she took her seat down in front of the stand, and after some little talk and arrangement among themselves, Bro. Major invited her up, and she took her seat at his right side. In dress she was neat and plain, a very plain bonnet, which she soon laid aside; and a little shawl around her neck and over her shoulders extending down the back and over the breast. Her face showed marks of age and care and labor. She was the picture of meekness and humility, completely subject to the will of her husband.”

Brother Warstler goes on to say that “after the opening exercises she was invited by Bro. Major to preach. She arose and slowly announced her text, an old, plain, simple one. I was disappointed. I expected something new, at least something out of the ordinary course of texts and here was one of the common ones. I was disappointed in the text but was interested in the preacher and I gave attention. It did not take long to discover that out of the common came forth sublime. . . . I think I am safe in saying that I never heard a text so expounded, illustrated, and so transformed ‘into newness of life’ as was done in that discourse. The sermon was a masterpiece of workmanship. . . . Yes, their visit that day was an angelic visit of an Aquilla and Priscilla [Acts 18] to our old church years ago.”⁴¹

Under her dark (probably black) plain bonnet, Sarah wore a white prayer covering, its white strings tied in a single-loop bow on the left side. Sometimes she is said to have begun preaching wearing the bonnet; after a while she would gracefully untie its strings, remove it, and hand it to her husband, a “technique” she must have realized had something of a mesmerizing effect on her listeners.



The last home of Thomas and Sarah Major in Greenfield, Ohio.

Her hair was worn straight, parted in the middle and pulled back on each side, as was the custom among Brethren women at the time. A white surplice at the neck of her dark, plain dress made her appearance much like that of such public contemporaries as Quaker preacher and social reformer Lucretia Coffin Mott (1797-1880) and former-slave-turned-itinerant-abolitionist Sojourner Truth (1797-1883).⁴² But while her appearance was conventional, she was not bound by meaningless definitions of what was or was not ladylike: When, on a cold and stormy Sunday, their wagon broke down not halfway on the eight-mile journey from their Ohio home to Lexington where they were expected to lead a service, the Majors unhitched the team and continued on horseback. (Surely her memories of Brother Keyser’s faithfulness to his duties must have encouraged Sarah all these years later on the Ohio frontier.)

In 1878, the year Sarah Righter Major turned seventy, the Brethren held their Annual Meeting in North Manchester, Indiana. It was one of the biggest gatherings yet, with fifty-six railway coaches filled with delegates arriving on a Saturday. When the meeting began on Sunday, an estimated fifteen to twenty thousand people attended; further, there were over fifteen hundred teams of horses also in need of shelter, food, and water. According to a newspaper account, a tabernacle 80 feet wide and 272 feet long had been raised to accommodate preaching services and serve as a dining hall. That evening, Sister Sarah preached to overflow crowds in the Lutheran Church. “The anxiety to hear her was so great that only a small number of the vast crowd that went could get into the church.”⁴³

Yet even into her seventies, after more than fifty years of faithful public ministry, Sister Sarah was still running into resistance from some of her fellow Brethren. Edward Frantz, one-time editor of the Brethren periodical *The Gospel Messenger*,⁴⁴ shares this poignant anecdote:

On a summer Sunday of my boyhood, about 1880 perhaps, came Sarah Major and her husband Thomas from their home in the hill country farther south, to the Donnels Creek Church of Southern Ohio. It was common knowledge that Sister was the better preacher

of the two. Besides that, she was a woman. The younger set was unanimous in hoping that she would preach, but some uneasiness was apparent in the gathering congregation. A council of the members present was called at the west end of the church under the maple trees, a spot well accustomed to consultations on problems of procedure. I recall that in the brief interchange of opinion one brother referred with emphasis to Paul's words: "It is a shame for a woman to speak in the church." The result was a decision to ask Brother Major to preach and Sister Major, taking her place behind the table with the ministers, to lead in the opening prayer. So it was done. I remember being impressed with the eloquence and fervor of her prayer. I recall nothing of the sermon. I think I was too busy nursing my disappointment to give it proper attention.⁴⁵

AN OUTSTRETCHED HAND

In Sarah Righter Major's day, a spiritual phenomenon known as The Second Great Awakening was spreading like wildfire across the American landscape. Not only the Brethren, but also many other denominations were undergoing religious revivals. Within this framework, personal act became primary theology; relationship to a particular church was of secondary importance. Further, the widespread emphasis on perfectionism meant new converts were expected to testify to their changed hearts by living exemplary lives. Voluntary benevolent action became the external evidence of true inner conversion. Also, the value placed upon primitivism (deliberately putting aside European traditions) meshed well with the temper of the times in antebellum America, with people pushing ever westward toward the new and the now.

A powerful belief in millennialism—the idea that Christ will actually return to rule on earth for a thousand years, either personally or through saintly believers—added even more fuel to these spiritual fires. There was a sense of urgency in the preaching of Harriet Livermore, who "believed in the speedy coming of the Lord personally to this earth to reign one thousand years." Given the lifelong mother-daughter aspect of their relationship, it is not surprising to hear the same note being echoed throughout the long public ministry of Sister Sarah, who was "of the conviction that it was her duty to warn the people of their danger."⁴⁶ Clearly this belief added an evangelistic edge to her already controversial preaching ministry among the Brethren, for whom evangelism has frequently been somehow suspect and ever an uneven thrust. It must be remembered that 19th-century Brethren were trying valiantly to live in the world without becoming of the world. But try as they might, most could not entirely escape the effects of the strong prevailing winds, as Sister Sarah's ministry demonstrates.

Motivated by a growing desire for some assurance of social order, many 19th-century Americans of all religious persuasions (or of none) were becoming involved in a



*Many 19th-century Americans were involved in a variety of social reforms, and an antebellum "sisterhood of abolitionists" was followed by suffragists and temperance workers. (Engraving by Patrick Henry Reason; copied from a photo in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood* courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia)*

variety of social reforms. Happily, this led to a widening acceptance of women actively engaged in such endeavors. (An antebellum "sisterhood of abolitionists" was followed by suffragists and temperance workers.⁴⁷) Women outnumbered men among the ranks of those with active religious affiliations, providing an outlet for all sorts of energies long suppressed but now sorely needed. Slowly but surely the church and the community began to acknowledge the worth of these voluntary social contributions which reached beyond the hearth and home.

Since Brethren already felt something of a similar longing for order in human affairs, it would seem that they might have united with at least this aspect of the American mainstream. But, while community outreach and charitable works were valued by Brethren, they were expected to be individual and private acts, rather than those which were the result of worldly, or even ecumenical, public or political efforts. In Sister Sarah's day, separation from the world seems to have overmatched service to the world. At the same time, while the validity of her maverick preaching ministry may not have been completely accepted by the Brethren, her work to alleviate community needs ("She stretcheth out her hand to the poor"; Proverbs 31:20) was seen as generally praiseworthy. Here she followed her God-given Inner Light, fearlessly unheeding of manmade laws and mundane conventions.

Given the rich diversity of her Germantown background, the old Quaker belief that "theology divides; service unites" may have exerted a natural influence throughout her life. Then too, her own Brethren sect also stressed a return to primitive Christianity as practiced in New Testament times, when mutual aid and practical love were the hallmarks of all believers. Sarah Righter Major demonstrated these characteristics in her tireless work among the fugitives from slavery; in her work to promote the cause of temperance;⁴⁸ in her prison and infirmary visitation ministry; in her home visits to any in need; in her one-on-one witnessing; and in the humble heartfelt hospitality shown to anyone who knocked on her door. The rebuffs and rejections she ex-

perienced in her own life undoubtedly made her more empathetic and effective in her outreach among the poor and downtrodden. Given the Brethren aversion to active personal involvement with non-Brethren movements of any kind, no matter how well-intentioned, hers was often a lonely road, and her "success" lay not in the strength of any statistics, but rather in the countless known-but-to-God pains eased, burdens shared, and sorrowing spirits encouraged and strengthened.⁴⁹

ON THE OTHER HAND

Since she was, after all, only human, it should come as no surprise that Sister Sarah had—and has—her critics, both within the family and without. While acknowledging that some people saw her as "the picture of meekness and humility," a family member says that claim "flies in the face of family tradition, which was that she was a red-headed, stem-winding, put-them-all-in-hell-before-breakfast preacher."⁵⁰ Many years after her death, one man would write: "She occasionally spoke on such subjects as infanticide and sexual excesses in such a way as to make many blush, and some good Brethren and Sisters thought her words were sometimes imprudent. . . . One peculiar thing is that tho she was the mother of two boys and one girl . . . not one of them ever became a member of the church of their father and mother."⁵¹ On the other hand, the same writer says that "altogether Sister Major impressed me as being a quiet, godly mother, a noble Christian woman, and a sincere, conscientious, and faithful preacher of righteousness."⁵²

A letter written in 1865 by Sarah Righter Major to one of her sons was published that year in an issue of *The Gospel Visitor*, primarily, it was explained, because of its "beautiful allusion to a meeting of the Brush Creek congregation." In it, Sister Sarah describes having attended a Lovefeast at which she saw a young man who, touchingly, reminded her of the son to whom she was writing: "Memory brings you to me as no picture can. I have many and serious cares, which press me hard these days of infirmity, but among them all, you hold your place in my heart. Do not add to my burdens, do not disappoint my hopes, pray with my life-long prayers, that my children may early, and truly be faithful disciples of Jesus our Lord."⁵³

Based on this letter, which he sees as blatantly manipulative, Alvin F. Connor, in his study of childrearing among 18th- and 19th-century Dunkers (Brethren), has some scathing comments about Sister Sarah's mothering: "This is parenting at its near worst . . . she attempted to make him [her son] feel responsible for her continuing good health . . . were her health to deteriorate, he would also be responsible for that."⁵⁴ While all of her letter may not be what modern psychology would advocate, somehow it seems unfair to judge a 19th-century mother-son communication by current parenting standards. On the other hand, Sarah Righter Major was, despite much of her treatment by Anabaptist hagiographers, a very real, flesh-and-blood, completely *human* being. Her remarkable ministry was

possible in spite of, rather than because of, what she was. It should come as no surprise that even someone described in death as a "sainted mother of Israel" was in life a mere mortal with feet of clay.

THE LAST DAYS

As far as is known, once the Majors left Germantown for Ohio in the spring of 1843, they did not return until 1857. This trip may have been necessitated by the final illness of John Righter, who died in 1860 at age seventy-seven. Their "visit" lasted several years, during which time the Majors officially rejoined their home congregation in Philadelphia, where they apparently carried on an active ministry. Brethren historian Henry R. Holsinger remembers preaching there one Sunday morning during that time, and later admitted to "a feeling closely akin to humiliation at the thought of being in the same stand with a woman preacher. In the evening Sister Major preached, and I now humbly acknowledge that I was very much ashamed of myself because of the prejudice confessed to above, but which, I am thankful to have the assurance, I had carefully concealed. She preached an excellent sermon. Her style was simple, her manner perfect, and every gesture in place."⁵⁵

While the Majors freely devoted much of their time and energies to work and travel "in the ministry to the edification of the churches and the people,"⁵⁶ they also prospered in their family businesses of farming and carpentry. When they finally retired they had "attained unto easy circumstances in life,"⁵⁷ moving to the town of Greenfield in Highland County, Ohio, still within the bounds of the Fall Creek congregation where they had labored so faithfully for many years. By now their children were grown and while none ever joined the Brethren, they all lived productive and positive lives. Their daughter Annie Mary lived in Washington, D.C.; their son Samuel in Chillicothe, Ohio; and son Thomas in Boston, Massachusetts. In 1883 Sarah and Thomas wanted to visit their children and see again their old home in Philadelphia. After visiting their daughter in Washington, they went on to Philadelphia where Sarah became ill; in August they returned home without going to Boston. While no details of her final illness are available, she apparently had the distinct feeling that her earthly pilgrimage was coming to an end.

Sarah Righter Major celebrated a final birthday, her seventy-sixth, on August 29, 1884; her death less than a month later on September 18, was a welcome day of homecoming for her. Her well-attended funeral was held on the following Sunday afternoon in the Major's Greenfield home. Their three children were present, as were ministers of the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches; all testified to her many excellent influences and invaluable services to the community. It was said that Sister Sarah's "appearance in death was that of a much younger person; her countenance was natural and seemed to bear the impress of the quiet and gentle spirit that had left its earthly tabernacle. Her remains, followed by many sympathizing



Sarah Righter Major's grave in the Greenfield Cemetery: "She hath done what she could."



Myra Johns Asplundh, great-granddaughter of Sarah Righter Major, works through an outreach program of the Bryn Athyn Church "for the benefit of the homeless and those in need."

friends, were conveyed to the beautiful cemetery of Greenfield, in which they were deposited to rest in peace until the resurrection of the just."⁵⁸

* * *

During the visit to Philadelphia that culminated in the death of her father, Sister Sarah was asked to speak in the Sunday school which was held in the gallery of the Philadelphia church. After entering the gallery and determining that she was in the correct location, she said: "Years ago today, at this very hour of the day, I stood in this same spot; I was converted to Christ, and felt the assurance of my sins forgiven."⁵⁹ As she acted on that assurance, her entire ministry had about it an overwhelming sense of urgency. She saw her days on earth as "the last days." Soon, she declared, Jesus Christ would be coming to earth again to reign in triumph. This world was not her true and final home; she was only passing through, "sounding salvation" every step of the way. She did not see her life as her own private business or as her own personal venture. She had a higher purpose and a holy destination; she was here doing God's work, not her own. She lived her remarkable life as a pilgrim and, sadly, in some ways as a stranger, even among the Brethren.

A short sketch of Sarah Righter Major's long and active life, published in *The Gospel Messenger* soon after her death, offered this evaluation: "Sister Major was a remarkable woman. It was said . . . that she was an 'uncommon woman.' She was not an educated woman . . . but she had a good and discerning mind. She had good taste, good judgment, and fine feelings. . . much of the influence exerted by Sister Major for good was done through her private talk and her exemplary life. She was a very consistent Christian. . . . we do pray and hope that a double portion

of her spirit may fall on many who survive her. . . that it may be said of her as it is of Abel, 'she was dead yet speaketh.'"⁶⁰

That the hopes and prayers of this 1884 writer are indeed being fulfilled may be seen in these excerpts from two recent letters. Myra Johns Asplundh of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, a Swedenborgian who is the great-granddaughter of Sarah Righter Major, explains that "Sarah's interest in and commitment to her church might be said to be carried down to her great-granddaughter, although I follow the doctrines of a different church and work for the Lord in a different way."⁶¹ And Connie Burkholder, an ordained graduate of Bethany Theological Seminary who considers Sarah Righter Major her spiritual grandmother, writes: "Her strength in the midst of opposition inspired me to stand firm in the conviction of my own call to ministry. I was also impressed by the letter Sarah wrote to Jacob Sala, the printer in Canton, Ohio. Her biblical interpretation defending her gifts for ministry reflects a viewpoint which modern-day feminists are using—at least in part. Sarah was a woman ahead of her time."⁶²

Even though she was ahead of her time—an uncommon woman in an age that celebrated the common man—Sarah Major Righter's name has been little known and only recently remembered. In a time of religious and social turbulence in America she maintained a still center, allowing herself the inner freedom of an empowering balance between self-denial and self-assertion. Her open-hearted acceptance of ultimate human powerlessness became, paradoxically, the source of her greatest power. She was, despite her human foibles and frailties, a person of rare integrity: her inner and outer natures were one. In that synthesis of word and witness lies Sister Sarah's greatest legacy; it is certainly the source of her still felt influence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the contributions of a number of very special individuals. First is Sarah Righter Major herself, who lived a full and faithful life with boldness and hope; her exemplary spirit sustained me as I attempted to tell her story. Myra Johns Asplundh, Sarah's gracious great-granddaughter, was unfailingly kind and generous in granting me free access to many unpublished family records. Kenneth M. Shafer, Jr., director of Brethren Historical Library and Archives, offered invaluable information and encouragement, both by phone and by mail. I am indebted to Rosalita Leonard for finding the "S." manuscripts through her work at BHLA, and for kindly sharing them with me. My thanks to Cathy Calabrese, from Lebanon Community Library, who filled my many interlibrary loan requests with both patience and promptness. I am also grateful to Pastor Connie Burkholder for sharing, in writing, her own enthusiasm for Sarah's example. Above all others, my dear husband, Tilman R. Frye, deserves the greatest measure of credit. Without his photographic expertise, his traveling companionship, and his continual encouragement this story of Sarah could not have been told.

ENDNOTES

¹James Quinter, "The Death of Sister Sarah Major—With a Short Sketch of Her Life," *The Gospel Messenger*, 7 October 1884 (vol. 22: 41), 641.

²Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* XVIII (Summer, 1966), 151-174.

³Quakerism was amazingly progressive in its views of the female sex; women members not only could speak at meetings, but might also be ordained as ministers. A surprising number of Quaker women played important roles in American history. Lucretia Coffin Mott, founder of the first Female Anti-Slavery Society, and an active abolitionist orator, who (with her husband, James) became personally involved in the Underground Railroad and (with non-Quaker Elizabeth Cady Stanton) helped to lay the initial plans for the first women's rights convention held in Seneca Falls, New York in July 1848, perhaps best personifies the free-spirited nobility of these remarkable women. Crusader Susan B. Anthony, also from Quaker ranks, teamed up with Elizabeth Cady Stanton to make a difference in the world. Other Quaker women involved in the Seneca Falls convention included Jane Hunt, Martha Wright, and Mary Ann McClintock. Quakers were, at heart, practical mystics, believing in a direct relationship between God and conscience, practicing the belief that men and women had equal spiritual gifts. Their powerful influence in American history cannot be adequately measured.

⁴Sources for descriptive details, as well as other similarly obscure particulars throughout this study, are the unpublished, frequently anonymously authored, Righter/Major family records and papers, courtesy of Myra Johns Asplundh, Bryn Athyn, Pa., great-granddaughter of Sarah Righter Major.

⁵The gravestone of Elisabeth Righter, located in the Church of the Brethren cemetery in Germantown, Pa., shows the spelling of her name as Elizabeth. Also, some written sources use Riter or Richter rather than Righter. Variations in the spelling of names were a common "fact of life" during those days of cultural assimilation. The spellings used on family records have been my guide.

⁶Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *Urban Village: Population, Community and Family Structure in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* (Princeton: 1980).

⁷Founding father Pastorius, a scholar of Latin, enjoyed referring to his unique Pennsylvania community as "Germanopolis."

⁸Roland L. Howe, *The History of a Church (Dunker) With Comments Featuring The First Church of the Brethren of Philadelphia. Pa. 1813-1943* (Philadelphia, Pa.: n.p., 1943) p. 38. This labor of love was accomplished at a cost of \$9,702.03, with yearly maintenance, which included the cost of wood, candles, and oil, plus opening and closing the meetinghouse and building the fires, budgeted at no more than \$125.00.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 17. In August 1527, Mennonite Leonard Keyser was burned at the stake in Schaaarding, Bavaria. The martyr's family then moved from Germany to Amsterdam, Holland. In 1688, Dirck Keyser, with his little son Peter Dirck, emigrated to Germantown, Pa., becoming part of that original settlement. Peter, Jr.'s grandfather, Dirck, was born in Germantown on 26 September 1701. Peter, his father, was born here on 8 August 1732; he was a tanner by trade and a member of the German Baptists

by choice. Bishop Peter Keyser, Jr. himself was born in Germantown on 9 November 1766.

¹⁰American philosopher/educator Bronson Alcott (1799-1888) once taught here for a short time, thanks to the good graces of two wealthy Quaker merchants who befriended him and helped him to obtain this teaching job. Earlier, while actually peddling shoes in North Carolina, Alcott had come under the influence of a Quaker community who led him to believe that God's Truth dwelled within all individuals, including young children. Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), his author/reformer daughter who was born in Germantown on 29 November, is most widely known for *Little Women*, that classic work embodying the concept of female moral authority asserted through the quietly intimate power of selfless love. For an elucidating study of the certainly subtle, but amazingly strong, impact of Quaker beliefs on American family life, see Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York and Oxford: 1988). According to Levy, "the cult of true womanhood," later associated with New England, "clearly first reached full and unambiguous reality by 1750 in the Delaware Valley among the wealthiest and hegemonic women of one of early America's richest urban hinterlands." *Ibid.*, pp. 329-230.

¹¹The daughter of Congressman Edward St. Loe and Mehitable (Harris) Livermore, the once-privileged Harriet spent her last days alone and in poverty, staying at the Philadelphia Almshouse known as Blockley. Upon her death, she was about to be assigned to a pauper's grave ". . . when Sister Margaret F. Worrell appeared at the 'Dead Room' and like one of old 'begged the body' of the Pilgrim Stranger, took it to her own comfortable home in Germantown and gave it a decent burial in the Germantown Cemetery of the Brethren." See Martin Grove Brumbaugh, *A History of the German Baptist Brethren in Europe and America*, (Mount Vernon, Ill.: 1899), p. 189.

¹²Abraham Harley Cassel, Harleysville, Pa., 11 September 1879, excerpt from a personal letter to the Rev. S. T. Livermore, Bridgewater, Mass., quoted in *Harriet Livermore, the "Pilgrim Stranger,"* Rev. S. T. Livermore, A. M. (Hartford, Conn.: 1884), p. 85.

¹³Col. T. E. Major, Boston, Mass., 25 October 1884, letter to the Rev. S. T. Livermore, Bridgewater, Mass., in Livermore, p. 95.

¹⁴Harriet Livermore, Philadelphia, Pa., 24 January 1826, letter to her father, quoted in Livermore, p. 73.

¹⁵Howe, p. 459.

¹⁶This helpful terminology originates with Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (New York: 1976).

¹⁷The intimate communication between Sarah and her father seems in keeping with changing child-rearing practices of Americans during the early years of the nineteenth century. Parents seem to have been increasingly regarded less with fearful veneration, more with filial respect and genuine love. Further, the Enlightenment view espousing individual rights and worth, plus the Romantic view that children are somehow closer to God than are adults, gradually helped to replace the "Angry God" image with the "Tender Shepherd." These psychosocial innovations informed the tone of an environment conducive to the many individual religious conversions (like Sarah's) which combined to produce the national spiritual revival known as the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830). For a complete and comprehensive study of this American spiritual revitalization, see William G. McLoughlin, "The Second Great Awakening, 1800-1830," in *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: 1978), 98-140.

¹⁸Rev. Freeman Ankrum, "The Light That Could Not Be Hid," in *The Brethren Evangelist*, 13 January 1951, 8, from the Sarah Righter Major Collection, Brethren Historical Library, Elgin, Ill.

¹⁹Sophia Englar Lightner, Union Bridge, Carroll County, Md., 12 July 1840; excerpt from a personal letter to her Uncle John and Aunt Susanna Bonsack, Botetourt County, Va. From the Sarah Righter Major Collection, Brethren Historical Library, Elgin, Ill.

²⁰*Ibid.*; excerpt from a S. E. Lightner letter to the Bonsacks dated 22 February 1840.

²¹Cassel, quoted in Livermore, p. 96.

²²James H. Lehman, *The Old Brethren* (Elgin, Ill.: 1976), pp. 139-160. Lehman elucidated this concept of "order" so essential to understanding Brethren beliefs, practices, and polity: "The Brethren were known by outsiders to live orderly lives. They believed that God expected them to live this way, or at least that the other members expected it. Their homes were neat, clean, and well organized. Their business affairs were generally straightforward, uncomplicated, and above reproach. . . . They were sober. Their church services were simple and without excessive emotion. Persons viewing the Brethren were struck by their simplicity

and orderliness. This is the second and less profound meaning that order had for the Brethren.”

²³*Ibid.*, p. 275. Quoted from “Sister Sarah Major,” J. H. Warstler, *Brethren Family Almanac*, 1901, 5.

²⁴Sarah Righter, Lower Merion, Pa., letter to Jacob Sala, Canton, Ohio; original in the Reuel B. Pritchett Collection, Nashville, Tenn. Published in *The Gospel Messenger*, 28 December 1935, 13, from the Sarah Righter Major Collection, Elgin, Ill.

²⁵*Ibid.* ²⁶*Ibid.*, 14.

²⁷Thomas’s great-grandfather, a Presbyterian weaver also named Thomas, had emigrated with his family which included a son named John; his son Thomas was the father of the Righter’s boarder. According to family records John became a tailor and later kept the Blue Ball Tavern where he sold rum, indicating that he was a man of impeccable character; had he not been, he would not have received a license to sell spirits. Taverns at this time were important meeting places for discussions of community and political issues; a civilized orderliness was considered essential. John’s son Thomas married Catherine Curry, the daughter of James Curry, a Presbyterian farmer who also kept Barley Sheaf Tavern and sold rum; he had also served as an aide-de-camp to General George Washington. Thomas and Catherine Major had six children; Thomas (the boarder) was the second son.

²⁸To that end President Jefferson engineered the Louisiana purchase of 1803, thereby doubling the land area of what he referred to as the “empire for liberty.”

²⁹Further, it was then commonly accepted that any married man had the clear authority to make this life-changing move without the consent of his wife. Generally, neither pregnancy nor even impending birth were reasons to delay the move to free farm land.

³⁰Deciding what to take and what to leave—these and countless other prayerful choices had to be made. The Majors took at least one of two chairs made in 1807 by Sarah’s maternal grandfather Samuel Stern, of English descent, a cabinetmaker remembered in unpublished family records for “making beautiful furniture.” Since they were wedding gifts for Sarah’s parents, this would have been her way of taking a tangible reminder of her mother to her new home.

³¹Kenneth Proctor, Jr., Boston, Mass., 1985, unpublished family history written for his grandchildren; courtesy of Myra Johns Asplundh, Bryn Athyn, Pa., p. 2. The term “Underground Railroad” is believed to have originated in the area of Columbia, Pa., along the Susquehanna River. All traces of slaves tracked and hunted seemed to vanish at that point thanks to a well-organized secret network of abolitionist activists, many of whom were Quakers. “Their pursuers seemed to have reached an abyss, beyond which they could not see, the depths of which they could not fathom, and in their bewilderment and discomfiture they declared *there must be an underground railroad somewhere.*” Dr. Robert C. Smedley, with Robert Purvis and Marianna Gibbons, eds., *History of the Underground Railroad* (Phila.: 1883), pp. 34-35.

³²This legislation, which served as a concession to the South for the admission of Mexican War territories into the Union as non-slave, made it easy for slave owners to recapture former slaves or to pick up any they simply claimed had run away.

³³Roger E. Sappington ed., *The Brethren in the New Nation: A Source Book on the Development of the Church of the Brethren, 1785-1865* (Elgin, Ill.: 1976), p. 256.

³⁴While few Brethren were known to have been actively involved in general abolitionist activities or in the actual Underground Railroad, a case for participating in these illegal activities could have been made by those Brethren like the Majors who felt strongly enough and who were in a position to be involved. The Church of the Brethren began with an illegal act, when five men and three women (already baptized as infants) were baptized a second time in the Eder River at Schwarzenau, Wittgenstein, in central Germany in 1708; led by Alexander Mack, they set something of a precedent for future acts of peaceful civil disobedience by Brethren. Mack, the first minister and the organizer of the Church of the Brethren, led a group of believers to Germantown in 1729. When he died in 1735 he was originally interred there in Axe’s Burying Ground; his remains were moved to the Germantown Brethren Cemetery in 1894. For a concise overview of this often overlooked aspect of the Brethren community, see Donald F. Durnbaugh, *Fruit of the Vine: A History of the Brethren 1708-1995* (Elgin, Ill.: 1997), xiii.

³⁵An invaluable resource in any basic understanding of this heroic chapter in American history is Charles L. Blockson’s, *The Underground Railroad* (New York: 1987). See also Charles L. Blockson, “Escape From Slavery: The Underground Railroad” in *National Geographic* (Vol. 166:1), July 1984, 2-39. For an excellent overview of Brethren actions and

reactions during this period see Durnbaugh, pp. 265-290.

³⁶Quinter, p. 642.

³⁷Samuel (Sammy) Weir, born into slavery in Bath County, Virginia on 15 April 1812 as the property of William Byrd, later moved to Botetourt County with his master. In 1824, he was sold by Byrd to Andrew McClure for \$280. Early in the winter of 1843, a son of the McClures was thrown from a horse and killed. In their time of grief, the McClures desired to join the Brethren. Before being accepted into membership by trine immersion baptism in February 1843, the McClures gave Sammy (their only slave) his freedom. Although slave traders are said to have offered McClure the great sum of \$1500 for Sammy, the offer was refused. In gratitude for his freedom, Sammy remained with the family, continuing to work for them until he could be assured of safe passage to freedom. On 14 May 1843 Sammy was baptized by Brother Peter Nead (a former Lutheran who began a Brethren theologian, author, and elder), becoming the first member of his race to be received by Brethren in that part of Virginia.

Fellow Virginian, Brother B. F. Moomaw, agreed to take Sammy with him on a trip to the free soil of Ohio in October 1843. Travelling usually thirty-five miles each day, they reached the Ohio River and crossed at the mouth of the Big Sandy on Sunday, 29 October. Landon West, *Life of Elder Samuel Weir* (Tuskegee, Ala.: 1897), quoted in Lehman, pp. 216-219.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁹Philadelphia Quaker and well-to-do merchant James Mott, husband of the famous Lucretia, provided a perfect role model for would-be supportive husbands and fathers. He accompanied his wife when she spoke in public, held her bonnet and presided at any gathering requiring a gentleman! This dynamic duo also had six children. In sharp contrast with the complementary marital relationships of both the Motts and the Majors is the relationship of their contemporaries, Henry and Elizabeth (Cady) Stanton. For an outstanding biography offering both sociological and psychological insights into Stanton’s relationships with not only her husband, but also her father, plus Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony and other leaders of that time, see Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: 1984).

⁴⁰Col. Thomas E. Major, “The Major Family,” unpublished family history assembled by Col. Major, taken from History of Summit Co., by Wm. B. Doyle, LL.B., 1908, with supplementary notes from family-papers, courtesy of Myra Johns Asplundh, Bryn Athyn, Pa., p. 3. “The Fall Creek congregation received into their number Elder Thomas Major and his wife from Pennsylvania, in 1847. The public ministry of Sister Major was quite prominent throughout the Brotherhood at this time. Their home was about one and one-half miles southwest of the Fall Creek Church and two miles northeast of New Boston. In 1849 Brother Major with his attendant Gideon Moore, built the Lexington house of worship. It is a spacious frame structure (45’ x 60’) in size with a basement at the rear (18’ x 45’). The upstairs was fitted with lodging conveniences for visiting brethren and sisters who attended special meetings in this local district. This point had a nucleus of seventy-five members, at the date of the organization, but within that same year the membership grew to one hundred. Thomas Major was elder in charge of the body from the date of his residence among them, 1847 until his resignation (by reason of age) in 1883. Elder Jesse O. Garst, ed., and the Historical Committee, *History of the Church of the Brethren of the Southern District of Ohio by the Historical Committee*, 2nd. ed. (Dayton, Ohio: 1921) p. 66.

⁴¹J. H. Warstler, “Sister Sarah Major,” in *Brethren Family Almanac*, 1901, 5.

⁴²This description of Sojourner Truth’s handling of a hostile crowd at an 1851 Woman’s Rights Convention in a church in Akron, Ohio seems remarkably similar to Sister Sarah’s demeanor: “First, she removed her sunbonnet, folded it neatly and set it aside. Her slow, deliberate movements had a calming effect on the audience.” See Patricia C. and Frederick McKissack, *Sojourner Truth: Ain’t I a Woman?* (New York: 1992), p. 112. While there is no proof of any connection between the two, the similarity in personal styles seems striking!

⁴³“Early Days of the Church of Brethren,” in *The News-Journal*, North Manchester, Ind., 17 June 1929, 2.

⁴⁴No official papers or periodicals were published by the Brethren for well over a century. Most Brethren were not academically oriented and many were preoccupied with the labors involved in the struggle for survival, which often included achieving a working knowledge of the English language. As Brethren moved west, the family of believers was separated; like it or not, the winds of change were beginning to blow across the Brotherhood, and in 1851 the first Brethren paper, *The Monthly*

Gospel Visitor, was published at Poland, Ohio, by one Henry Kurtz, a man described as “. . . uncommon. In the first place, he was German-born. He came to this country in 1817 at the age of twenty-one from the duchy of Wurttemberg in Germany where he was born . . . and where he received a good classical education. . . . by the mid-19th century, while still German in culture and partly in language, the Brethren were mostly American by birth. Henry was an exception” (Lehman, p. 165).

Henry Kurtz had been ordained into the Lutheran ministry, but was rebaptized by a Brethren elder named George Hoke. While he did renounce his Lutheran ordination he did not renounce his ministerial calling, his pipe-smoking, his organ-playing, or his passion for reading and writing. Although decidedly un-Brethren in many ways, he was just the right person to begin a Brethren ministry of the written word.

⁴⁵Edward Frantz, “A Personal Recollection,” Elgin, Ill., 28 April 1942, unpublished personal document from the S. R. Major Collection, Brethren Historical Library and Archives, Elgin, Ill.

⁴⁶Quinter, p. 642.

⁴⁷For an outstanding collection of writings on this subject see, Jean Fagen Yellin and John C. Van Horne eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: 1994).

⁴⁸Quinter, p. 642.

⁴⁹One of those she apparently encouraged was Henry Kurtz, whose first issue of *The Monthly Gospel Visitor* (MGV) was remarkable by its very existence; he began with only 240 paying subscribers. Annual Meeting at first gave Kurtz only reluctant approval, but in 1853 decided that since his was a private enterprise, they should not interfere with it. Also in 1853 it is thought that none other than Sister Sarah sent Brother Henry a letter of support: “I was surprised into this freedom,” she said, “and as I now knock at the office-door as a stranger, I will not give my name,” Signing simply “S,” the writer enclosed a poem she had written in praise of the written word (“It makes the vale of shadows bright./To many a lonely one” [MGV Vol. II. 168]) that must have been a great encouragement to Kurtz.

Their association would prove mutually salutary, and most of what is believed to be her communication is signed simply “S.” (This signature, it should be noted, freed both writer and readers from reactions based on gender, as well as age; what an exhilarating freedom for a nineteenth-century intellectual woman like Sarah!) However, since that abbreviated signature continues to leave actual authorship somewhat open to debate, one is left with hints and guesses, clues and surmises—plus a gut-level feeling (based on a knowledge of other details and circumstances in her life) that these written words speak with Sarah’s voice. In the October 1853 issue, for example, there is a poem written for “a sister in adversity,” offering homespun secrets for nesting in the gale of life’s many storms:

Doest thou not know the sweets of pray’r?
Sure thou canst pour thy sorrows there,
Where that blest altar stands for thee,
Its golden wings thy shelter be.

From deep personal experience, it seems, the poem continues:

He tries thee now, but all to prove
To thy poor broken heart his love.
Oh trust in him O ne’er distrust,
For he is ever good and just
Let others fail, he will provide,
Then hide, thou in his bosom hide:
O let thy doves all nestle there
Thy helpless lov’d ones are his care.

In May 1854, there appears an “S.” poem called “A Tribute to the Memory of Sister E. R. of Philad’a,” possibly Elisabeth Righter, Sarah’s own mother, suddenly dead at age twenty-five when Sarah was only three years old. Now a mother herself, she may have used poetry as a way of dealing with this old, yet somehow still fresh, grief. According to an unpublished letter written 26 Nov. 1912 by Sarah G. Felthouse of Seminole, Fla., daughter of an intimate friend of Sarah’s parents, Elizabeth Righter had thoughts of killing the infant Sarah (S. R. Major Collection, Elgin Ill.). This suggests she may have suffered from postpartum depression. If that is so, young Sarah may have felt and remembered, without having actually understood. The words even seem to hint that this death was not entirely unwanted by “Sister E. R.”:

Well ye sung her, “Mild and lovely
Gentle as the summer eve.”
As they laid her lowly—softly,—
In her silent welcome grave,
As she wish’d it, in her peaceful,
“pretty grave.”

Perhaps, for Sarah, one way of coming to terms with the apparently senseless loss of her young mother was to live her own life in a way that attempted to make her mother’s premature death make some sort of sense. The poem concludes:

O give back her warm petitions
On the smoking altar laid,
Ye with whom she smil’d so sweetly,
Ye for whom she wept and pray’d.
Live to answer that she pray’d,
Live to bless the cause she plead.

These enigmatic lines elude complete and definitive interpretation. The writer, like her contemporary, Emily Dickinson, is telling all the truth, but telling it slant. Of such is the surprising freedom of poetry!

From her Ohio vantage point in a nervous nation moving slowly but surely toward what looks like a bloody war between brothers, “S” writes in an 1855 letter to the editor (MGV, 176) entitled “Peace At Any Price,” that all are equal in God’s eyes, that “all true Christians are brethren,” that standing firm, but not fighting is the best response, that death for Christians is a promised reunion and not to be feared, that the Christian’s faith is not to be put in earthly powers, but rather in the “Sword of the Lord.” She sees the Gospel as inclusive, intended for all people, reasoning that “Had its good will been only sent to ‘good-willing men’ . . . many Jews and Gentiles had not had opportunity to reject so great a salvation.”

She urges Christians to use the weapons of the Spirit when fighting to overcome evil with good. As a premeditated lawbreaker in her own aid to fugitives, she now puts this courageous stand in writing, undoubtedly thinking of, while not naming, the controversial Fugitive Slave Act: “The clearest evidence any country or nation can give, of their having divine testimony in its purity, is their humane laws, in which they cherish the sweets of religious liberty, protecting the godfearing, exercising righteous judgment for the oppressed, and showing mercy even in its needful discipline for the lawless”

If, as it seems, Sister Sarah is indeed “S.,” her unique written imprint on Brethren history will stand the test of time. A case in point is a letter dated 5 Dec. 1868, but published in 1869 (MGV, 58), with the Civil War still fresh in American consciousness. In it, “S” writes these prophetic words that seem aimed at the hearts of readers today, from the bleak streets of her Germantown/Philadelphia home and all across our still-divided land: “Sometimes persons in a strange land, with scanty means, are left to work their way among strangers as best they can, when if ‘brotherly love’ continued its work it would be otherwise.”

Sister Sarah had something to say, so she said it, and said it well. The words were not hers; she was merely the “gospel messenger.”

⁵⁰Proctor, p. 55.

⁵¹W. Colvert, Englewood, Calif., 17 March 1910; unpublished personal recollection from the S. R. Major Collection, Elgin, Ill., 2.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³S. R. Major, Dallas, Ohio, 1 Oct. 1865; excerpt from a personal letter to her “dear son” attending school and (temporarily) living in the family of Sister Haas (Clara A. Haas, teacher and author of an English grammar text); published in *The Gospel Visitor* (vol. 15: 12), 378-379.

⁵⁴Alvin E. Conner, M.D., *Sectarian Childrearing: The Dunkers 1708-1900* (Gettysburg, Pa.: n.d.), p. 195.

⁵⁵R. Holsinger, *History of the Tunkers and the Brethren Church* (Lathrop, Calif.: 1901), pp. 360-61.

⁵⁶Quinter, p. 642. ⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸Quinter, p. 641. Sarah’s younger sister, Mary, was with her at the time of her death, and she was also with John Major, her brother-in-law, when he died in 1888 at his daughter’s home in Washington D. C. John was buried next to Sister Sarah in the Greenfield Cemetery.

⁵⁹Holsinger, pp. 360-61. ⁶⁰Quinter, pp. 611-42.

⁶¹Myra J. Asplundh, Bryn Athyn Pa., 15 May 1989, excerpt from a personal letter to Nancy K. Frye, Lebanon, Pa. Mrs. Asplundh, the mother of 7 and grandmother of 22, also wrote: “Sarah Righter Major, my great-grandmother, was only vaguely known to me until a few years ago when I met Brethren historian Clarence Kulp [from Harleysville, Pa.]. He told me more than I had ever known and sparked a curiosity to learn more of my ancestor. In the beginnings of this education I have met many warm, friendly people, some of whom are distant cousins.

⁶²Connie Burkholder, Wooster, Ohio, 1 April 1989, excerpt from a personal letter to Nancy K. Frye, Lebanon, Pa. The Rev. Burkholder was installed as District Executive, Northern Plains District, Hammond Ave. Church of the Brethren, Waterloo, Iowa, on 1 Feb. 1997. See also Pamela Brubaker, *She Hath Done What She Could: A History of Women's Participation in the Church of the Brethren* (Elgin, Ill.: 1985), p. 150.

MAINTAINING MENNONITE IDENTITY: The Old Order Church In Pennsylvania and Virginia

by Jean-Paul Benowitz



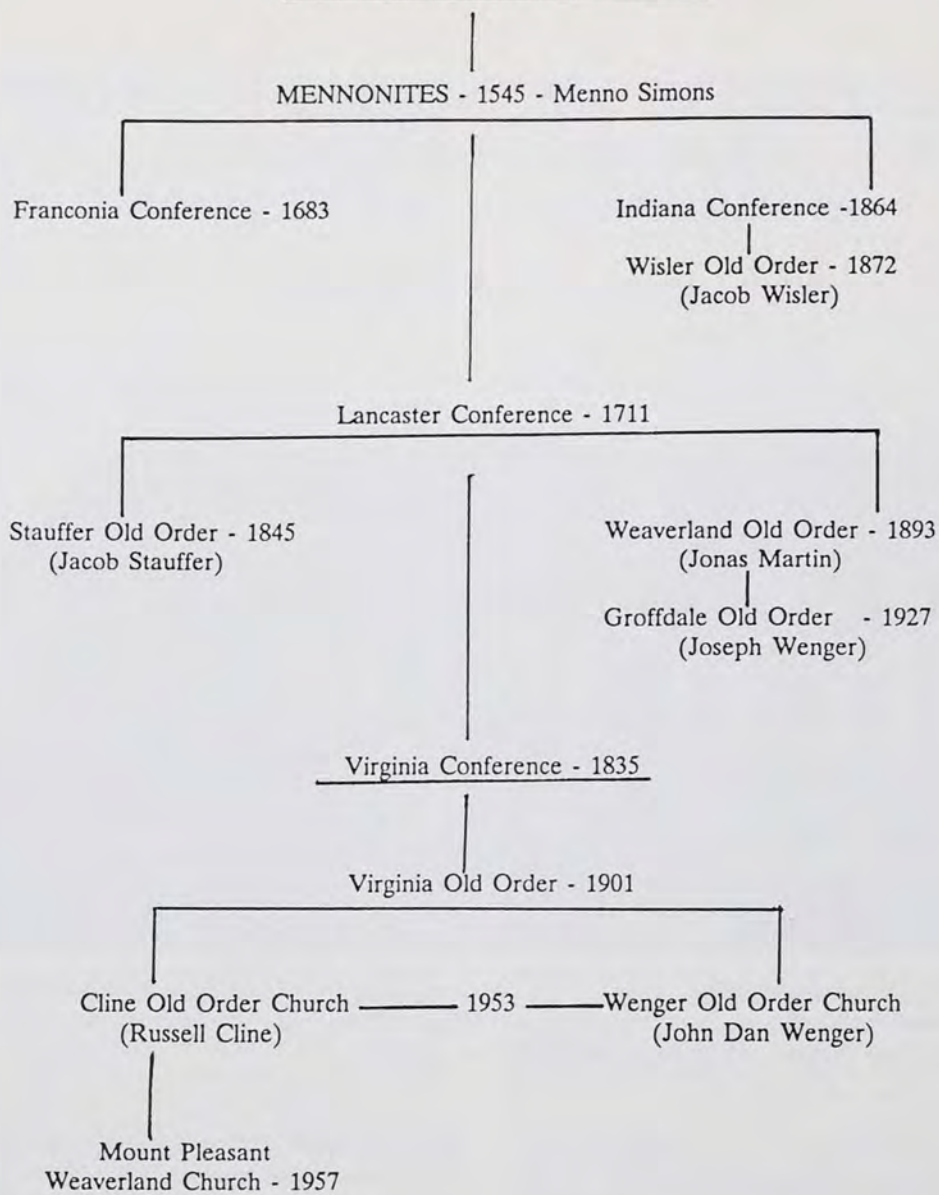
The New Danville Mennonite Church, a Virginia Conference church, in 1901. Notice that men and women leave through separate doors; on the far right is the outdoor restroom. (Photo courtesy of the author; all remaining photos by the author)

Today “Old Order Mennonite” is an unofficial and unspecific designation for any of those believers who retain the theological and cultural characteristics of Mennonites of a century ago. For this reason many historians consider them a 19th-century group. But members of the Old Orders consider themselves as those who have maintained the original understanding of Mennonite identity, with members of the contemporary Mennonite Church—the majority—being those who have accepted innovations which embraced the values and norms of a mainline Protestant world view. This perspective is valuable in understanding the way in which the Old Order Churches developed in the 19th century and the genius behind their persistence.

According to Anabaptist theology, redemption and reconciliation were achieved as Christ yielded to God and renounced coercive power. The capacity for transforming love entered the world, then, through the exercise of Christ’s powerlessness; through Christ as the suffering servant, not the conquering savior.¹ Medieval mystics used the term “*Gelassenheit*” to signify an internal yielding of the heart and mind to God. Believing that self-will and pride were the main obstacles to building loving relationships, Anabaptists expanded the concept of yieldedness to structure their social life. For Mennonites this meant establish-

ing a way of life with social rituals (symbolic actions which bring participants into contact with God and each other) based on Christ’s revelation of God’s redemptive work in the world.² They stressed a renewed life through a commitment to humility, and tangible symbols of that humility such as lifestyle, quality of work, attire, furnishings, and political expressions, became the criteria used to test the level of an individual’s faith commitment.³

While in the 19th century most Mennonites attempted to live separated from the world, they did not escape the forces of change.⁴ Mainline Protestant innovations such as Sunday schools, singing schools, evangelistic revival meetings, and missionary work were accepted by Mennonite communities during this time. Although these innovations challenged the traditional views of the Mennonite community most accepted them, convinced that compromising a theology of humility would broaden the Church’s appeal. But others resisted these changes, leading to schism and the Old Order movement. The foundational issue for these Mennonites was not newness itself (the Old Orders did make changes in their communities from time to time) or the fact that the new institutions lacked value. It was simply that they feared a compromising of Anabaptist values if they cooperated with Protestant groups.⁵



THE ANABAPTIST MOVEMENT

While Martin Luther was the best-known figure of the Reformation, there were other leaders who started with the intention of changing the Roman Catholic Church but ended by leaving it. One of these leaders was Huldreich Zwingli; his work in Zurich, Switzerland, gave birth to the Anabaptists, the most radical group of the Reformation. Zurich became a rallying point for those who were dissatisfied with Lutheran and Zwinglian reforms and who wanted to establish a church based on the experiences recorded in the New Testament. Two young men, Conrad Grebel, a Christian humanist scholar, and Felix Manz, a theologian, believed that the state should have no authority in religious matters and that a new and separate church should be formed based on adult conversion and baptism. 1525, Grebel and his followers met in defiance of a city decree and baptized each other as adult believers. Since they had already been baptized into the Roman Catholic Church as infants, they were called "Anabaptists" ("Rebaptizers").

Despite intense persecution, the Anabaptist movement quickly spread throughout Europe. It was particularly strong in the Netherlands, where it eventually took the name of its most effective leader, Menno Simons, a former Roman Catholic priest. The first Mennonite emigration to Pennsylvania took place in 1683 when thirty-three Dutch and Palatine believers established a settlement called "Germantown" north of Philadelphia. From there, new agricultural settlements were formed to the north and west, in present-day Montgomery and Bucks Counties where the Franconia Conference, the oldest association of Mennonite congregations, was established in the 1740s. In 1717 a great wave of Mennonite emigrants from the Palatinate settled in what is now southeastern Lancaster County, and the Lancaster Mennonite Conference was also formed in the 1740s. Between 1773 and 1820, Mennonites from Montgomery, Lancaster, and York Counties in Pennsylvania settled in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Their churches were under the supervision of the Lancaster Conference until 1835, when the Virginia Mennonite Conference was established.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF OLD ORDER CHURCHES

Throughout his ministry which began in the Weaverland-Groffdale District in 1840, Jacob Stauffer found fault with the Lancaster Conference. Stauffer criticized Mennonites for taking pride in their wealth and for giving legal and financial advice to each other. He argued that participation in political elections, singing schools, and camp meetings were signs of assimilation with "worldly churches,"⁶ outlining his concerns in a work entitled, *A Chronicle or History Booklet of the So-Called Mennonite Church*. When Stauffer was silenced by a unanimous decision of Conference bishops in 1845, fifty supporters invited him to organize a new church. Since the Lancaster Conference granted this group the Pike Meetinghouse south of Hinkletown, they were known as Pike Mennonites. Jacob Stauffer and Jacob Weber were the church's ministers and Jacob Brubaker was its bishop. Stauffer's reactionary behavior and his strict policy regarding excommunication discouraged many from joining the Pike Church.

A more successful schism took place in the Yellow Creek congregation of the Indiana Mennonite Conference in 1872. There, Bishop Jacob Wisler criticized Bishop John F. Funk for introducing such Protestant ideas as the Sunday school, extended revival meetings, singing in parts, and the use of English in worship services. Wisler was able to keep these innovations out of his own church until Daniel Brenneman, a moderately acculturated minister from Ohio who supported Bishop Funk, moved to Elkhart and served with him. When Brenneman introduced many changes into the Yellow Creek community it became polarized. Then, after a committee of Mennonite bishops disciplined Wisler in 1872 for interfering with the introduction of new methods of church work, he withdrew and established his own congregation.⁷

From the Old Order point of view, the most successful schism happened in 1893 in the Weaverland-Groffdale District of the Lancaster Conference. Long before the actual division took place two factions had developed, one centered around the moderately acculturated Bishop Isaac Eby,⁸ the other around Bishop George Weaver, a traditionalist. Bishop Eby and his followers viewed Protestant innovations as beneficial for witnessing to the world and expanding the mission of the church; they also supported certain legislation such as local prohibition laws. Moreover, it was Eby (who maintained friendships with such acculturated Mennonites as John F. Funk, John S. Coffman, and Lewis J. Heatwole) who introduced the use of English in worship services and the Sunday school to the Pequea District of the Lancaster Conference. The Paradise and Hershey congregations began Sunday schools in 1887; they doubled their membership and missionary activity soon followed.⁹

The differences between this group and the Old Order element were clearly defined in 1881, when Jonas Martin

was ordained as bishop of the Weaverland-Groffdale District by Bishop Weaver, his mentor. Martin believed that the consumption of wine in moderation was acceptable, and in 1887 convinced the Conference to persuade its members not to vote for Pennsylvania's prohibition amendment.¹⁰ He also believed that growing tobacco kept young people on the farm and in the community where they could not learn "proud ways";¹¹ and he considered the use of English in worship services, singing in parts, and remodeling meetinghouses in the style of Protestant churches signs of unfaithful assimilation.

During the fall session of the Lancaster Conference held at the Mellinger Meetinghouse in October, 1893, Bishop Jonas Martin was stripped of his ministry and expelled from Conference and congregation.¹² Conference leaders said that Martin had opposed a legal charter created by the Kauffman congregation to govern its property, and had refused to accept a Conference decision allowing ministers to perform marriages for non-members; they also called his attitudes and actions against the Sunday school inappropriate. After Martin's dismissal approximately one third of the Lancaster Conference membership withdrew and joined what eventually became known as the Weaverland Conference. This Old Order Conference was structured under the leadership of Jonas Martin, and today its members consider themselves "Wisler Mennonites," for it was Jacob Wisler (undoubtedly influenced by Jacob Stauffer's published defense of Old Order beliefs) who developed a written doctrine for the group. These developments in Pennsylvania would have consequences in Virginia, where the Mennonite Church was also having problems.

THE VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE AND THE OLD ORDER

In most cases Old Order Mennonite groups organized in response to innovations the church was considering or was preparing to accept. The Virginia Old Order movement was unique in that it occurred after various innovations had already been accepted by the Virginia Conference. These changes were made deliberately, in order to distinguish the Virginia Conference after its initial break with the Lancaster Conference in 1835. For example, in 1837 Peter Burkholder translated *The Mennonite Confession of Faith* into English, and English was used in worship services; then, in 1847 the Virginia Conference published *Harmonia Sacra*, the first Mennonite hymnal in English.¹³ Moreover, Virginia Mennonites shared meetinghouses with other denominations for nearly a century after they settled in the Shenandoah Valley, and when they built their own, the interiors were the same as those of their Protestant neighbors.¹⁴ Between 1880 and 1890, Sunday schools, Bible studies, young peoples' meetings, singing schools, and photography clubs were all accepted institutions. Members were encouraged to vote and to seek public office, which

was also related to a concerted effort in support of prohibition and in opposition to the use of tobacco.¹⁵

But not all Virginia Mennonites agreed with all of these innovations; many were influenced by the Old Order philosophy which was creating schisms in various Mennonite conferences in the latter part of the 19th century. Revival meetings, which challenged the Old Order world view in several ways, were a particular source of contention. Many members of the Virginia Conference ministry did not support revival meetings, but many Conference members did. When these members requested that such meetings be held, church leaders argued they would cause dissension in the body. The controversy was brought out into the open when Bishop Samuel Coffman invited his son, John S. Coffman, to hold revival meetings in the Middle District. Opponents considered the younger Coffman as one who had abandoned Mennonite theology for evangelistic preaching.¹⁶ Nevertheless, revival meetings were held at Weaver's Meetinghouse in December, 1888, despite the objection of the Northern District's Abraham Shank, senior bishop of the Virginia Conference.

Proponents of these meetings claimed they were more concerned with advocating Christianity than a Mennonite theology.¹⁷ And indeed, that was the root of the problem, for revivalists were thought to teach pride rather than humility. Mennonites Heinrich Funck and Christian Burkholder had developed a theology of humility that contradicted Protestant evangelistic revivalism,¹⁸ which Old Order Mennonites believed stressed salvation, but which did not promote a commitment to a new lifestyle. Revivalists explained salvation as atonement for sin through Christ's shed blood; a formal transaction between the individual and God. Burkholder used this explanation to point to God's love, citing the example of the lowly manager as well as the cross to illustrate that Christ could only bring salvation through yieldedness and humility—*Gelassenheit*.

Since a shift from pride to humility was evidence of a new birth, a relationship with Christ therefore included practicing nonresistance and nonconformity in appearance; accepting church discipline as defined in Matthew 18; showing an appreciation for the history of Mennonite suffering, persecution, and scorn; and being obedient to Jesus as taught in the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁹ Viewed as an acculturated Mennonite who did not value Burkholder's humility theology, John S. Coffman had a tendency in his preaching to divorce practical Christian living from the idea of salvation and so displeased some 19th-century Mennonites.²⁰ Indeed, typical evangelists did not address these concepts of humility at their meetings; what they did do was call upon people to give their testimonies. This was an opportunity for individuals to recount a desperate feeling of loneliness, to explain a crisis they had undergone, and to tell how they had realized a sudden assurance of salvation—an inner, subjective experience. Old Order Mennonites questioned the value of what they saw as boasting

and self exaltation,²¹ and questioned as well the necessity of shouting, jumping, and moving one's arms and hands as a sign of conversion.²²

These matters were not all that bothered those Virginia Mennonites opposed to revival meetings; the issue of race was also a concern. Revivalists, especially in Virginia, were interested in bringing African Americans into the Protestant church.²³ Many Virginia Conference Mennonites, however, were not, and so opposed revival meetings because they believed they advocated racial integration. Within the Conference, Bishops Martin Burkholder and Samuel Coffman were self-proclaimed itinerant preachers whose work in nearby mountain communities had begun to produce small Mennonite congregations by 1890; congregations that sometimes ordained leaders who were not ethnically Mennonite.²⁴ Then too, John S. Coffman had published statements defending racial unity in the *Herald of Truth*, and some Mennonites feared that his revivals would disrupt their cultural reality.²⁵

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL QUESTION

While the Virginia Conference did not sanction revival meetings, it did endorse the Sunday school. The first attempt to establish a Sunday school program was made in 1869, but interest waned and the program had to be reintroduced in 1882.²⁶ Ironically, a year after the 1893 Old Order schism in Lancaster County where the Sunday school question was a significant issue, members of the Virginia Conference raised questions about their own educational program. There were concerns about members teaching who were not in conformity with church doctrine; about the use of non-Mennonite materials in lesson preparation; about the scriptures being read in unison and the singing of the Lord's Prayer; and about picture displays which depicted Bible stories.

After the Conference addressed these issues, ministers assumed leadership roles in the Sunday school; only members in conformity with church doctrine were allowed to teach; and the Bible was taught in accordance with the interpretation of the Conference.²⁷ But these reforms did not fully conciliate opponents, who viewed the Sunday school program as a program associated with worldly churches that approved ostentation and that supported war and promoted American nationalism. Old Order Mennonites argued that by promoting patriotism and nationalism Sunday schools interfered with the Anabaptist two-kingdom world view;²⁸ the teaching that the Church is God's kingdom on earth, as opposed to the view of some Protestants that the kingdom was only a future place in heaven.

Many also objected to the Sunday school because they thought it was the parents' duty to teach the scriptures at home. Moreover, even those Sunday school teachers in conformity with the church taught from curricula published by Calvinistic and militaristic Protestant groups,²⁹ and their materials often emphasized converting children. This prac-



Two years after the 1901 schism within the Virginia Conference which established the Old Order Mennonite Church in the state, the latter group built the Pleasant View Mennonite Church in Dayton. The men's door is on the right, the women's door on the left; after the opening hymn, the ministry enters through the door at the rear on the long side of the building.

tice, a total rejection of the Anabaptist understanding of adult conversion and baptism, downplayed the process of religious nurture through home, church, and community. According to Anabaptist theology, an individual matures into a full relationship with Christ through the support of the community of believers, and Sunday school theology often ignored this Anabaptist perspective of God's grace being transmitted through an individual's behavior.³⁰

In response to the concerns about curricula, the Conference introduced the use of *The Herald's Series of Sunday School Lessons*, which were eventually published as *Question Books*. In fact, Virginia Conference Sunday schools did so well at integrating a Mennonite perspective into their programs that the Mennonite Publishing House invited the Middle District Sunday school superintendent, Deacon Emanuel Suter, to speak at a Sunday school conference

in Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, in 1896.³¹ But certain opponents of the Sunday school even criticized the Mennonite-published materials, claiming they did not differ greatly from those provided by Protestant churches. One, Abraham Blosser, published a newspaper, the *Watchful Pilgrim*, from his Virginia home for eight years. Blosser, whose newspaper featured arguments against the Sunday Schools, argued that Mennonites needed to remain objective when interpreting the scriptures, examining both sides of an issue before forming an opinion. Blosser thought that Sunday school materials—especially those published by the Mennonite Church—lacked objectivity.³²

Virginia Conference Bishop Louis J. Heatwole, on the other hand, supported the Sunday school based on his understanding that when the church reached a consensus on accepting an innovation, that consensus was proof that



Established following a schism in the Virginia Old Order Church in 1957, a congregation associated with the Weaverland Conference (whose members are commonly called Black Bumper Mennonites) built the Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church in Dayton, Va., in 1990. Traditionally Old Order churches have been built without indoor plumbing, but Virginia law requires all buildings built for public assembly to have indoor restrooms. This church's restrooms can only be reached through the two doors at the rear on the long side of the building; there is no indoor access.

it was the will of God. When the innovation proved to be successful, then it was evident God had blessed the work. Heatwole believed that the Sunday school taught children the Bible and thus prepared them to be future leaders of the church. He also thought adults benefited from this instruction because it defined expectations of proper behavior.³³ Among others, opinions concerning the Sunday school fluctuated. Simeon Heatwole, a minister in the Middle District, was one of the first Sunday school superintendents; yet at the time of the 1901 schism he was an anti-Sunday school leader and was eventually ordained a bishop in the Old Order Church. Another minister from the same district, Gabriel Heatwole, opposed the Sunday school from the pulpit but attended occasionally with his family.³⁴ After the 1901 schism he wanted to return to the Virginia Conference and claimed it was a mistake to have rejected the Sunday school.

CONFLICT OVER AUTHORITY

Samuel Coffman, who had been bishop of the Middle District in the Virginia Conference since 1861, announced in 1893 that because of his declining health it was necessary to ordain a bishop to assist him. Lewis J. Heatwole, Coffman's son-in-law, ordained a minister in 1887, had moved to Missouri where he was ordained a bishop by Daniel Kauffman in 1892.³⁵ Heatwole decided to return to the Shenandoah Valley and was recognized by the district ministry as Coffman's assistant bishop in May of 1893. The decision was made at a ministers' meeting without consulting church members.³⁶ After Coffman's death the following year, Heatwole assumed the office of bishop in the Middle District by consent of the district ministry.³⁷ When the district decided to ordain two additional ministers in December, 1895, Heatwole preached a sermon in preparation for electing candidates to the lot.



Mountain View Mennonite School was built in Dayton, Va., in 1970, two years after a concession was made for Old Order Mennonites in Virginia's Compulsory Education Laws. Behind the school to the left is the Lewis Martin Harness Shop. Several Martin families, members of an Old Order community in Ohio that did not survive through the Second World War, settled among the Old Order in Virginia. On the right is Mole Hill, a community populated entirely by Old Order Mennonites.

Such a sermon typically focused on what qualified members for the ministry; Heatwole's sermon, however, stressed the points that disqualified a member from holding the position.³⁸ Afterward, members hesitated to vote, many having interpreted the sermon as a direct criticism of those who were being considered for the position of minister. Five candidates had been nominated but two declined the honor, based on their opposition to Heatwole's sermon. Disciplined by the district ministry on the charge that he had influenced members in the selection of candidates, Heatwole was forced to make a public confession for remarks made in his sermon criticizing members who were elderly, uneducated, and who used tobacco.³⁹ Votes were taken for candidates a second time, and in April, 1896, Snivley Martin and Isaac B. Wenger were ordained to the ministry.⁴⁰

When the senior bishop of the Virginia Conference,

Abraham Shank, learned of Bishop Heatwole's behavior he brought him under censure for not having bishops from neighboring districts present at the first election service; for not exercising his authority and dismissing the ordination when he realized there was dissension; for holding a second examination of candidates; and for sending deacons to visit Perry Shank and Israel Rohrer, Jr., after they had withdrawn as candidates for the lot.⁴¹ Then Shank decided to postpone the fall session of the Conference until Heatwole made a second public confession before members of his district regarding his behavior during the ordination conflict. When Heatwole did so, his confession was so well received that the fall session was not deferred. But there were still members dissatisfied with Heatwole, and they did not remain at the fall session for Conference communion.⁴²

Israel Rohrer, Jr., and Perry Shank, the two men who



Most Old Order families have a cottage industry to supplement their income from farming; the Beery Sisters Rugs, Quilts, and Plants Store is in Dayton, Va. Kara Beery

makes rugs and placemats on this loom in her basement; Lydia Ann Beery makes quilts and has a greenhouse on their farm.

had withdrawn from the lot, led the opposition to Heatwole based on their unhappiness with his handling of that incident. Rohrer charged that Heatwole had preached on the points that disqualify a member from the ministry to ensure that Isaac P. Wenger, a young, educated schoolteacher, would be the only man eligible.⁴³ Both Rohrer and Shank felt this was a further attempt by Heatwole to increase support for revival meetings and the Sunday school.⁴⁴ They were not alone. By 1896 there were 425 members of the Middle District of the Virginia Conference. Four ministers, two deacons, and seventy-five of the laity in the District were dissatisfied with Bishop Heatwole's leadership and urged him to resign; they claimed that approximately one fourth of the District did not recognize him as bishop because he had not been ordained through the use of the lot, but had assumed the position without the consent of the church.⁴⁵

Heatwole did not resign, and a petition was submitted at the spring session of the Virginia Conference in 1897 requesting that the Conference mediate the conflict and design a plan for reconciliation. The Conference ignored the petition, taking the advice John F. Funk had given to Lewis J. Heatwole. Funk had explained to Heatwole that since he had made two public confessions the dissidents should have been appeased; if not and they continued to oppose him, Heatwole was to ignore them and they would have to choose between cooperating with the church or being treated as transgressors.⁴⁶

This advice was not acceptable to senior Bishop Abraham Shank. So, when the petition was resubmitted at the fall session of the Conference, Shank decided to invite a committee of objective church leaders from neighboring communities to resolve the problem. Lewis J. Heatwole strongly opposed this decision.⁴⁷ The committee was to interview members concerning their problems with the church and bring about a reconciliation. Dissatisfaction with Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole was not the only contentious issue. Bishop Heatwole had already approached Simeon Heatwole, a minister of the Middle District who represented disgruntled members, to inquire about their concerns. Simeon Heatwole explained that members who were unhappy with the Conference believed that it had abandoned the ideals of the Mennonite Church. He also said that senior Bishop Shank did not object to a separate conference being established by this Old Order constituency.⁴⁸

Chaired by Bishop Isaac Eby of Lancaster County and including C. B. Brenneman, a minister from Elida, Ohio, and Jacob M. Kreider, a deacon who was also from Lancaster County, the committee convened by Bishop Shank met from December 14 to 17, 1897. However, instead of addressing the controversies involving the Sunday school and revival meetings—the issues primarily responsible for the formation of the Old Order Church—the committee chose to focus on the conflict over the 1895 ordination. This decision to limit the discussion to Heatwole's behavior as



This buggy is under construction on the second floor of the Burkholder Buggy Shop, established in 1969 in Dayton, Va. It will be lowered outside onto a running gear and assembled by Everette Burkholder's wife and children. This model seats four adults and costs \$5,000; a two-passenger model costs \$3,500; both have black canvas coverings. Designed by Mr. Burkholder and exclusive to the Virginia Old Order, the buggy's tapered base permits a smooth transition from paved to unpaved roads, a common driving condition in the state.

bishop was a deliberate one.⁴⁹ Since Bishop Isaac Eby had been in exactly the same position as Heatwole during the 1893 schism with Jonas Martin, Eby would not allow the dissidents to convince him that Heatwole was a poor leader.

There were twenty charges against Heatwole brought before the committee. Heatwole in turn brought counter charges against those of his ministry who testified about him, charging each with speaking badly of or to him and saying that they had led him to believe they had reconciled their differences but then had continued to defy his authority and slander him.⁵⁰ The committee completed its work by asking fifteen members representing both sides to affirm a summary read by Isaac Eby describing their involvement in the conflict. Following an exceptionally intense and emotional meeting, all involved agreed to be reconciled to the church. But when the committee members left, Gabriel Heatwole and Israel Rohrer, Jr., retracted their commitments to the Virginia Conference.⁵¹

When Lewis J. Heatwole told Isaac Eby about the retractions, Eby instructed him to follow the rule of the Lancaster Conference: When one member is disciplined and set back from communion, all those who support that person are likewise disciplined.⁵² So, on March 20, 1898, Bishop Heatwole announced that Gabriel Heatwole, Simeon Heatwole, Israel Rohrer, Jr., David E. Rhodes, Daniel P. Shank, and Perry Shank were all set back from communion for retracting their commitment to the Virginia Conference.⁵³ Then, at a meeting of bishops, ministers, and deacons

from all the districts in the Virginia Conference, Simeon Heatwole was denied an opportunity to speak in defense of those who had been excommunicated. In response, he and Gabriel Heatwole joined their wives on the women's side of the meetinghouse and both couples walked out the front door.

But 241 people at that meeting did identify themselves with the Conference, and ten others asked for more time or declared themselves dissatisfied.⁵⁴ Over a seven-month period dissatisfied members were visited individually by deacons and deaconesses who urged them to reconcile with the church.⁵⁵ Bishop Heatwole excommunicated sixty-nine people who did not do so,⁵⁶ explaining that members unwilling to consent to the Church's authority and who refused to commune with other members inhibited the work of the Church, and with their dismissal that work could go forward and be successful.⁵⁷

VIRGINIA OLD ORDER MENNONITES

Bishop Jonas Martin of the Old Order Mennonite Church in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, served as leader of the Old Order Church in Virginia.⁵⁸ One year after their separation from the Virginia Conference, Bishop Martin presented the *Wisler Doctrine* to the group. It required baptized members to be nonconformed to the world in attire and stressed that members were not permitted to marry outside the church. Sunday schools and evening meetings



Old Order Mennonite bonnets and hat

were forbidden; musical instruments were not to be used in worship; and a unanimous vote of church members was required on all decisions concerning congregational government.⁵⁹ Bishop Martin made a concession on the language issue, allowing English (rather than German) to be used in the worship service since that was a long-established practice in the Virginia Mennonite Church.⁶⁰ He established a ministry for the group by ordaining Simeon Heatwole as bishop and John Dan Wenger as minister; Wenger would be ordained a bishop in 1912.⁶¹

The Virginia and Pennsylvania Old Order Churches continued their association until 1927, when Jonas Martin died. Martin's successor, Bishop Moses G. Horning, now allowed his church members to purchase automobiles, and this caused a schism in the Pennsylvania Old Order Church; members who accepted this innovation established the Weaverland Conference. Those who retained the use of the horse and buggy joined with Bishop Joseph Wenger and formed the Groffdale Conference. Bishop John Dan Wenger had launched a campaign against the use of the automobile and so identified with the Groffdale Conference after 1927.⁶²

The Virginia Old Order Church would soon have troubles of its own, with conflicts revolving around members who married outside the Old Order; who supported the taking and displaying of photographs; and who wanted to modify the points in the *Wisler Doctrine* regarding plain attire.⁶³ In 1933, when Russell Cline and Paul Shank were ordained as ministers, Bishop John Dan Wenger was opposed to Cline being nominated for the lot because Cline's father was not a member of the Old Order Church. Yet Wenger did not interfere with the election because he thought Cline had a weak personality and would submit to his (Wenger's) authority. Paul Shank, on the other hand, had a dominant

personality and in addition tended to be lenient with those who wanted to modify the *Wisler Doctrine*. Shank was eventually silenced (although he continued to hold services in his home), and in 1945 Wenger ordained his son Paul to take Shank's place.⁶⁴

Russell Cline was also sympathetic to members who wanted a less-rigid church discipline, and this contributed to his popularity as a minister. In 1952, when Bishop Wenger requested assistance in his office as bishop, there were only two candidates: his son Paul and Russell Cline. Wenger was afraid that if Cline became bishop, he would align the Virginia Old Order Church with the more liberal Weaverland Conference. Wenger maintained that a minister was responsible for interpreting scripture,⁶⁵ and was critical of Cline's preaching style because he argued that rather than doing so, Cline merely quoted related scripture verses. So, citing poor preaching and the fact that many of his children had not joined the church, Bishop Wenger silenced Russell Cline.⁶⁶

When Wenger did so, two thirds of the congregation supported the ministers who objected to their bishop's behavior. They invited Aaron Z. Sensenig of Lancaster, a bishop in the Groffdale District, to establish a new church with Russell Cline as leader.⁶⁷ Bishop Sensenig at first tried to reconcile the two factions, but when he was not successful did establish a second Old Order Church in Virginia in 1953.⁶⁸ Sensenig led this church until 1955, when he ordained Russell Cline as bishop.⁶⁹ He also ordained two ministers, Warren Showalter and Justus Showalter; the latter replaced Russell Cline as bishop in 1969. Lloyd Wenger was ordained bishop to assist Justus Showalter in 1992;⁷⁰ that same year Dale Beery was ordained minister to replace the late Warren Showalter.⁷¹



Old Order Mennonites, Dayton, Va., 1991

Following the 1953 schism, Bishop John Dan Wenger ordained Oscar Martin as minister and his son, Paul Wenger, as bishop.⁷² Years before, just prior to Jonas Martin's death, John Dan Wenger had promised to keep church members from using automobiles and electricity, even though Virginia Old Order Mennonites had already accepted the use of the latter. Nevertheless, in order to distinguish his church from Cline's, John Dan Wenger enforced a no-electricity rule after the groups separated.⁷³ The issue was brought up again in 1974, along with the issue of using trucks for farm work. During this time of controversy it was Bishop Paul Wenger who requested assistance, but one of the candidates for the lot was minister Lloyd Wenger, whom Paul Wenger feared would approve the use of electricity and trucks. Bishop Wenger therefore ordained his son Marion as minister in 1974, at which time Lloyd Wenger withdrew his membership and eventually joined the Cline group. After Lloyd Wenger's withdrawal, Marion Wenger was ordained bishop and Oscar Martin remained as minister.⁷⁴ In late 1992, Robert Knicely, grandson of the late Bishop Paul Wenger, was ordained a deacon.⁷⁵

The Cline church also had problems. Bishop Russel Cline required his members to cooperate with the Groffdale Conference and not use rubber tires on their tractors.⁷⁶ Members who wanted rubber tires on farm machinery and who purchased automobiles joined the Weaverland Conference. In the 1930s, two members of the Cline group, R. C. Rhodes and R. D. Rhodes, bought cars and traveled to Lancaster to take communion with the Weaverland Conference. In the 1940s, joined by other members of the Cline group, they held services in their homes. These services were discontinued after World War II, when participants returned to the Cline church.⁷⁷ In 1957 the Virginia Weaverland Conference Church was reorganized

with Dan Showalter, Jr., as minister and Rhodes B. Landes as deacon.⁷⁸

* * *

It is unusual that a Mennonite Church that was the first to accept change, was the last to experience division caused by resistance to change. The issues that brought the Virginia Old Order Mennonite Church into being were revival meetings, the Sunday school, and dissatisfaction with a bishop who endorsed these programs. Old Order Church leaders Jacob Stauffer, Jacob Wisler, Jonas Martin, Israel Rohrer, Jr., and John Dan Wenger maintained that accepting a Protestant theology that emphasized patriotism and individualism would only compromise the Mennonite view of the church as a community of believers rather than a collection of converts. The problem with Old Order logic, however, was that in reality, the Old Order community became preoccupied with defining itself according to symbols of appearance or lifestyle, and not necessarily with rituals of the faith.

Today, though, the issues responsible for schism in the past do not seem to threaten the Virginia Old Order Mennonite Church. The younger generation seems not to understand how such issues as the use of electricity and motorized vehicles could divide believers. Now all three Old Order groups cooperate in annual Mennonite Central Committee projects, the two "team" churches share meetinghouses and have healthy community and business relationships, and the Weaverland group is closely related to the Cline group as many Cline members join the Weaverland Conference. In fact, a new strategy has emerged as the three groups realize they must cooperate in their struggle against modernity; a struggle being conducted in an increasingly urbanized community.

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- ⁶²Interview, OOMC member. ⁶³Interview, OOMC member.
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THE END OF AN ERA:
The Last One-Room Public Schools
In Lebanon County

by Amos W. Long, Jr.



Washington School



Fontana School



New Salem School



Mt. Pleasant School



Garfield School

Photographs by the author

Our present system of public education had its origin in the one-room school. A great American institution, the one-room rural school was an outgrowth of the rural church, and stood second only to the church in its importance to and influence on the lives of rural inhabitants. In addition to being a center for direct and basic learning, it served as a social center where the community gathered for school programs, particularly at Christmas and Easter, for Parent-Teacher Association meetings, and for meetings addressing school district concerns; sometimes it was also the local polling place. Molding character and instilling patriotism, a sense of responsibility, and a dedication to principles in addition to teaching children how to think and behave, rural one-room schools served well when the pace of life was slower and less complicated. Many of the nation's most eminent men and women were educated in them, as were countless other Americans who went on to skilled or unskilled, technical or professional jobs.

* * *

February 13, 1961, was a historic and sentimental day for teachers and pupils in five one-room public schools in South Annville Township, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. On that day teachers at these schools rang their rooftop bells or their brass hand bells for the last time; on the following day they and their pupils moved into the completely renovated twenty-five-room former high school on South White Oak Street in Annville. Located in the area of Lebanon County where the first schools were established, these five schools, now a part of the Annville-Cleona School District (North Annville, South Annville and Annville Townships and Cleona Borough), were the last public one-room schools in the County. Their closing brought back many memories to residents educated in them before the time of mergers and jointures.

At the time of their closing, approximately 180 students were being educated in these one-room brick structures. They were the Washington School, on state Route 934 just south of Annville, where I began my teaching career in the District and where I was then teaching sixth grade; Mount Pleasant School, on Route 322, where Ira Light, in his first year of teaching, was in charge of the fifth grade; Fontana School, on Route 322 in the village of Fontana, where Mrs. Ada Reigle was teaching third grade; Garfield School, also on Route 322 (between the Mt. Pleasant and Fontana Schools), where Mrs. Armeta Hummel was teaching second grade; and New Salem School, on state Route 241, where Mrs. Mary Forney was teaching first grade. The five buildings were sold in July, 1961. The former Washington School is today a private residence, while the Fontana building is used for official purposes by South Annville Township; the remaining three are now used primarily for storage.

When the move was made, fourth grade pupils from South Annville were already attending classes in Annville,

while North Annville Township and Cleona Borough had their own elementary schools; altogether the District had about 1100 elementary school students. The renovated former high school that was now home to the South Annville pupils had a central library and an area used as a cafeteria-gymnasium-multi-purpose-room which also accommodated pupils attending classes in other in-town locations.

Well aware of all of the conveniences to be found in the larger building, teachers and pupils alike also knew that adjustments would have to be made. Teachers realized they would be relinquishing some of the independence they enjoyed in their one-room buildings, particularly in scheduling the school day. At the same time, they were much relieved to know they would no longer be responsible for such time-consuming chores as starting and attending to coal fires; sweeping exposed-wood floors; dusting furniture; washing windows; getting water for washing purposes from adjoining farms; and shoveling a path to the door on mornings after a snow fall. Of course many such jobs were relegated to pupils, who oftentimes regarded them more as privileges than chores, particularly if they could be done while school was in session. Many pupils were happy to be of service, and felt some satisfaction in being involved in a family-like atmosphere.

EARLY SCHOOLS IN THE AREA

Annville Township was formed from Lebanon Township (then a part of Dauphin County) in 1799. It embraced what is now North Annville and South Annville Townships and the community of Annville. North and South Annville became separate townships in 1845, while present-day Annville Township—comprising primarily the town of Annville—was organized in 1908. The predominately German people who settled in Annville (then called Millerstown) and surrounding areas early took measures to ensure their children's education; illiteracy was not as common here as in some places. Indeed, before the public school system was established in 1834, there were local schools run by individuals, by community members, and by church congregations. Instruction in these early schools was entirely in German because most pupils were not sufficiently conversant with English.

Private schools were usually in the homes of individuals who started and ran them on their own initiative and for their own profit. Squire Daniel Stroh established such a school in Annville before 1800; his son continued it, but it was closed after the public school system came into being. Outside of town, in the southern part of South Annville, there was another such school in the vicinity of Brightbill's Meetinghouse; another on the Horseshoe Pike (Route 322) near Fontana; and one also between Union Waterworks and Bellegrove.

Schools organized and run by members of the community were the most common. One of the earliest of these



Pupils leaving Washington School for the last time in 1961. (Photo by the author)



Lack of equipment didn't keep students at the Washington School from enjoying recess.



Teacher Amos W. Long, Jr., rings his brass hand bell at the Washington School. (This and all remaining photographs by David J. Strickler)

community schools in what was originally Annville Township was the Humberger School, located near the Union Waterworks on the Annville-Bunker Hill Road in what is now North Annville Township. To insure that their children would be able to read their Bible and study their catechism, Lutheran and Reformed congregations organized parochial schools open to all who paid the required fee. Lutheran and Reformed congregations in Annville opened a school in 1804; instruction was at first entirely in German, with English being introduced in 1815. It closed in 1849 for lack of patronage. An even earlier parochial school was established about 1800 by the Reverend John Casper Stoeber on behalf of the Lutheran and Reformed congregations worshipping at the Hill Church, known as the "Church on the Quittapahilla." The school was a two-story building; the teacher and his family lived on the first floor and classes were held on the second floor.

Annville Academy (now Lebanon Valley College) was established in 1834 to teach the so-called "higher" subjects to those who wanted to go beyond the sixth reader (the equivalent of eighth grade). In that same year, Pennsylvania adopted the public school system during the term of Governor George Wolf. Locally, it came into being in 1845 with the division of Annville Township, and even then it was still strongly opposed by rural inhabitants. An interesting anecdote concerns the election in which the public-school question appeared on the ballot. It was said that rural folks, if united against the proposal, could outvote the townspeople and insure its defeat. But because of a severe (some said providential) snowstorm the day before the election and the drifting which made roads impassable,



Mr. Long returning an incomplete assignment. Note pull-down map being used to teach the geography of South America.



Bulletin board display features "Our Neighbor Latin America"; note location of stove and electric water cooler.

many rural residents were unable to get to the polls and the measure became law.

Among other groups, Pennsylvania Germans, a majority in the Lebanon Valley and in other parts of southeastern and south-central Pennsylvania, were opposed to the public school system. Members of the Plain sects especially were afraid that a secular education would replace their religious instruction, while others were afraid that English would replace German. Then too, there were those who thought that education beyond the elementary level was unnecessary and would lead to "worldliness"; they wanted their children to learn to read and to be able to understand the scriptures, to be able to write to communicate, and to understand the basic elements of mathematics. Some believed that public schooling would make children urbanized and lazy, and to many idleness was the root of all evil and laziness a cardinal sin. There were also those who considered it wrong for one person to be taxed to educate another person's children and who feared they would lose their property because of such taxation.

The first public schools in what is now Annville Township were the Lincoln School on King Street; the Webster School on Manheim Street; the Washington School on Queen Street; and the Stevens School at the east end of town. By the end of 1910, Annville Township had eleven elementary schools; North Annville had eight schools serving Bellegrove, Clear Spring, Kauffman's, New Market Forge, Shanamanstown, Steelstown, Syner, and Union Wa-

terworks; and South Annville had seven schools serving Fontana, Mt. Pleasant, and the surrounding areas. At the time of the Annville-Cleona Jointure in 1953, North Annville still had six one-room schools: Laurel Grove, Franklin, Clear Spring, Shady Grove, Bellegrove, and Herr's; they were closed in 1955 and their pupils moved to a new building on state Route 934 between Annville and Bellegrove. Pupils and teachers in the Cleona Elementary School on Penn Avenue, a four-room building where eight grades were taught, moved to a new eight-room building at Walnut and Lincoln Streets in 1953.

ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS

Although as a result of the Jointure there was only one grade being taught in each one-room school when I began my career in South Annville, at one time eight grades were taught in each building in some areas, and later six. Eventually there were even fewer until finally only one grade was taught in each school. Prior to 1900, practically all rural schools were ungraded; a teacher might have as many as thirty or more classes a day, each lasting from five to fifteen minutes. When more than one class was being taught in the room pupils were able to learn by observing the grade or grades above, which frequently made the transition from one grade to another easier.

The size and number of school buildings constructed depended on the density of population; some areas were



Tin cups—each marked with a pupil's name—and ceramic water cooler; water from it was used only for washing after an electric water cooler was installed.



Although there are thirty-one sixth graders in his Washington School class, teacher Amos W. Long, Jr., is able to help students individually.

so sparsely settled there was little need for even one building, making it difficult for any system of education to be feasible. Generally, one-room schools were located in a village or within walking distance of the students they served, and for many years most pupils walked both ways, frequently over muddy paths and poor roads and sometimes through torrential rain, pelting hail or sleet, blinding snow, or buffeting winds. Although there may have been a few days of unscheduled vacation until roads and drives could be opened after a severe blizzard, school closings because of weather were rare. (I remember walking to school several times in my first years of teaching because of drifted snow.) Some of the earliest schools were only in session from December to March. Most rural inhabitants were farmers then and wanted their children to help with farm work in the spring, summer, and fall. Over time the school year was extended to five months, then to 160 days, 170 days, and finally to the 180 days (slightly longer for teachers) now required by the State of Pennsylvania.

There was a commonality in the features of one-room schoolhouses which made them easily recognizable. Usually rectangular in shape, the later buildings were constructed of stone, brick, or timber and covered with a slate or wood-shingle roof. An entryway frequently opened into an enclosed porch which was used as a cloakroom and which helped eliminate a direct draft of air into the classroom. Some of the buildings had a belfry with a bell used to signal the beginning of the school day. Two toilets, one

for boys the other for girls, were usually attached to the rear of the building or stood somewhere behind it. The flagpole from which the stars and stripes flapped stood tall somewhere near to the building as well.

Many early schoolrooms were uncomfortable, unattractive, and poorly lighted. Some also had an unforgettable odor: a smell compounded of smoke, chalk dust, oiled wooden floors, sulphur used for fumigation, sweeping compound, wet garments, lunches, and at times odors from nearby toilets; a lack of proper ventilation often contributed to the problem. A stove was located in the rear or center of the room, and the black tin stovepipe extended above the top of the stove and into a flue opening in the chimney. There were windows on two sides of the room, and one or both of the other sides had chalkboards with narrow wooden trays beneath to hold chalk and felt erasers. There may also have been some shelves below the windows for reference and library books and, especially in those schools without a vestibule, there might be a row or more of clothes hooks on the rear wall. The American flag, a pencil sharpener, pictures (usually including portraits of Presidents Washington and Lincoln), and a group of maps which could be rolled up were other common wall decorations.

There were several chairs in the back of the room for visitors and sometimes a raised platform for the teacher's desk at the front. The pupils' desks, arranged in rows, varied in kind in different schools and even within the same school. Some were double-seated, others single; both had



Space was well-utilized in the one-room school; note room lighting, chalkboards, and rows of desks.



Mr. Long teaching a lesson on the geography of South America.

smooth wooden tops, a shelf below, and sides of solid or filigreed black wrought iron. The initials of previous occupants might be found on the desk top which usually had a hole for an inkwell near the upper edge. Generally there was a filing cabinet, a bookcase, and a globe somewhere in the room, as well as a large, covered stoneware cooler with a spigot commonly kept on an oilcloth-covered shelf. By pressing the button on the end of the spigot one could get a trickle of water into a cup or a basin. Individual drinking cups were taken home at frequent intervals for washing. In later years when electric drinking fountains were installed, the water in the stoneware cooler was used for washing purposes only. (There was usually soap and a washbasin beneath the fountain.)

Before legal decisions brought about drastic changes from the time when the instruction of children was mostly of a religious nature, the school day began with the reading of a few Bible verses. Then came a short moral essay or a poem, followed by the recitation, in unison, of the Lord's Prayer and (during the salute to the flag) the Pledge of Allegiance. There may have been some group singing too, especially if there was a piano in the room and the teacher or one or more of the pupils could play it. This was also usually the time when any special announcements were made.

In addition to the famous "reading, 'riting (penmanship), and 'rithmetic," there were classes in spelling, English grammar, social studies (which had replaced history and geography), health, and science. Although when I began

my career in the public schools a music teacher came in once a week, art instruction was my responsibility; later, an art teacher came once a week as well. Various activities which promoted learning supplemented regular lessons: spelling bees; stories read to the children to help familiarize them within unknown peoples, places, things, and events and which hopefully encouraged them to read more on their own; games made appropriate to school work; plays; and in later years, field trips.

Most early teachers had another job as well. Some were pastors of churches, and in most communities the teacher ranked next to the preacher in importance. Teaching then was to be done from the heart as well as from a book, and teachers were expected to nurture pupils in such a way as to encourage their development into useful and honorable adults able to handle successfully the subsequent requirements of life and endeavor. The emphasis in many early schools then was on spiritual and eternal values and the maturation of an upright Christian character.

Much was required of those who taught in rural one-room schools. In addition to being responsible for academic instruction, teachers acted as janitors, nurses, advisors, arbiters, comforters, and disciplinarians. They did all of this for very modest pay and for many, many years without sick-leave days or paid health insurance. (I remember being brought to school with a broken leg, getting about with crutches, and propping my leg on a chair beside my desk to ease the pain.) Because even as late as the turn of the



Teacher requesting pupils' close attention while a special announcement is being made.



At least one student finds the material perplexing.



Note window arrangement, bulletin board and pictures on wall.

century some children could neither speak nor understand English, some teachers had a challenge if they were not familiar with the Pennsylvania German dialect. Most of their pupils had farm chores to do before and after school and their clothes and body sometimes gave evidence of such work.

There were great variations in the qualifications and fitness of teachers; I was certified in elementary and secondary education and taught grades four through twelve over the course of a thirty-six-year career. The county school superintendent stopped by from time to time to observe and rate the teacher in the days before there were local school superintendents and principals. Members of the school board also volunteered or were appointed to visit, and usually came by once each month. The ability to maintain order in the classroom was an important qualification for teachers and discipline was strictly enforced. Apart from the recitations that were taking place, generally all that could be heard was perhaps some whispering and noises such as those made by new corduroy trousers, creaking seats, shuffling feet, fluttering pages, and the heel cleats on the heavy shoes worn by some of the boys.

Those who did violate the rules were punished, and that punishment was administered with a paddle when necessary. Sharp words or a stern look usually sufficed, however, although there were times when a pupil was banished to the cloakroom or made to sit in a chair in a corner or beside the teacher's desk. There were also reports of teachers throwing chalkboard erasers, pulling hair, or rapping pupils over the knuckles with a ruler for some infraction, for anti-social behavior or for failure to complete an assignment. A form of punishment very much disliked by pupils was having to stay after school and then explain their delay in arriving home. In those days children were taught at home to show respect for authority; parents were usually on the side of the teacher and children were punished at home for their unruliness in school. But good teachers had a healthy, peaceful, and comfortable relationship with their pupils most of the time, soon learning to patiently tolerate individual character quirks. The child likewise adjusted more readily to the dedicated teacher, quickly accepting responsibility and giving learning the value it deserves.

The school day began at 8:30 or 9 o'clock and lasted until 3:30 or 4 o'clock, and mid-morning and mid-afternoon recesses (generally fifteen minutes each) and the lunch hour were perhaps the most enjoyable parts of the day. Times when the children could play and socialize, they served as a safety valve, allowing them to release pent-up frustrations, charged emotions, and surplus energy. Usually there was no playground equipment, but there was plenty of imagination. Children played marbles, nipper, catch, hide-and-seek, crack-the-whip, bean bag, and other such games. On rainy days they played tic-tac-toe or drew pictures on the chalkboard. In the winter, after a sizable snowfall, they built snowmen, snow forts, and igloos.



Paying attention to the teacher.



An inquisitive teacher waits for a reply.



Even the best students sometimes find it difficult not to daydream.

While the children were playing the teacher might do some last-minute planning or hectographing or perhaps might simply relax for a short while. At other times he or she might play baseball, four square, or other games with the children. Teachers also customarily treated their pupils at Christmastime, usually by giving each a box of candy and perhaps an orange; sometimes they received a small token of appreciation in return. The teacher might even be given a birthday party if students were able to learn the correct date.

THE END OF AN ERA

Lacking as they did proper heating systems, plumbing facilities, and auxiliary escape exits, most one-room schools closed because they could not be renovated to meet health and safety regulations mandated by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. Then too, with American society becoming ever more mobile and industrialized, there was an increasing demand for an expansion of educational opportunities. After 1925 consolidation proceeded at a rapid pace, partly because of road improvements and the introduction of the school bus. By 1940 most rural people were convinced that consolidated schools had definite advantages over one-room schools, although some school districts resisted the trend for another decade or more.

With mergers and consolidations larger schools were built, making it possible to establish grades, to procure more and better equipment, to hire more qualified teachers, and to enlarge the curriculum. But with the consolidation of small schools into larger units the school was moved farther away from the children it served, and to some extent there was a loss of local control. It was thought that consolidation would bring about efficiencies and more opportunities for rural children, but frequently it meant the loss of the dedication and adherence to the basic and stern principles which ruled in early rural schools.

There are still opposing views concerning the one-room school. There are those who feel that present-day school-children "don't know what they're missing," and others who feel that students today "don't know how lucky they are." Certain Plain religious groups continue to show fierce devotion to the one-room school in their attempts to maintain their way of life. They want their children to be with those of like mind, and not exposed to the secular practices of the larger society. Modern educators continue to argue the disadvantages of the one-room school's limited facilities, and most people would agree that it is easier to teach in modern buildings with modern conveniences. Yet most would also agree that the fundamentals of education are still the teacher and the textbook, rather than the unlimited equipment found in new and larger buildings.

APPENDIX

Excerpts taken from the minutes of South Annville District meetings about the turn of the century.

H. Clay Deaner presented the following resolution:

Resolved that we certify that Alvin Binner has taught a public school in this district for two terms since his graduation from West Chester Normal School and that we consider him a successful teacher and a person of good moral character. Therefore resolved that we recommend the Superintendent of Public Instruction to grant above gentleman a permanent state teachers certificate.

Hiram G. Newgard, director
Hohn S. Behm, director
June 1, 1903

Whereas it has pleased an all wise Providence to remove from our midst one of our teachers, J. B. Artz: therefore be it,

Resolved that in his death we have lost a faithful and conscientious teacher in the community, a good citizen and

while we mourn his death we remember most pleasantly his genial and companionable disposition when amongst us.

Resolved that our sympathy is due and hereby tendered to the bereaved family in their deep affliction.

Resolved, that a copy of these resolutions be presented to the family and published in the Annville Journal.

F. B. Marshall
Harry Zimmerman Committee
H. G. Lonenecker

"The Board at its meeting today unanimously decided that George be given one more opportunity to redeem himself and is allowed to return to school. The following are the conditions:

He is put upon his good behavior for two weeks and if in that time he does not behave himself and act in a becoming manner to his teacher and try to prepare faithfully his lessons, his failure to fulfill above conditions will sever his relation to the school, or he will expel himself from the school."

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PENNSYLVANIA EXTENDED IN THE CHEROKEE COUNTRY: A Study of Log Architecture

by John A. Milbauer

North America's cultural debt to Pennsylvania is enormous. During colonial times the lower Delaware Valley was settled largely by migrants from northern Europe, the British Isles, and German-speaking central Europe. The area was a crucible in which folk traits of these peoples were modified, combined, and sometimes discarded. Southeastern Pennsylvania became the hearth of a culture region from which certain elements were diffused into the Upland South, the Middle West, the Far West, and even Canada and Mexico. The Midland tradition, also known as Pennsylvania Extended, bequeathed to the continent its dominant form of log carpentry.¹

The region under scrutiny is in northeastern Oklahoma at the margin of the Ozark Plateau (Fig. 1). Forced up by an igneous dome, the Ozarks display horizontal to gradually dipping strata of sandstone, shale, limestone, and dolomite. Frequently interbedded with the dolomite is chert, known locally as "flint." Insoluble in water, chert is conspicuous along stream bottoms and on many slopes. Climate is humid and temperate with hot summers and mild winters. Vegetation consists of oak-hickory forest, and the most numerous trees by far are post oak (*Quercus stellata*) and blackjack oak (*Q. marilandica*). Short leaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) grows on the summits of the region's many bluffs.

The first element of the present population to arrive were the Cherokees. The Western Cherokee began to settle here in 1828, and the bulk of the nation was forced into the locale over an arduous "Trail of Tears" in 1838-39. Natives of the southern Appalachians, the Cherokees were fairly well acculturated with white society before they left their homeland.² Whites gradually moved into the region, and by statehood in 1907 they outnumbered the Cherokees.³ African-Americans have a long history in the area, but they have always been few in number. In terms of its cultural affiliation, northeastern Oklahoma lies within the Upland South.⁴

Methodology consisted of both archival and field analysis. By far the greatest historical source was the *Indian Pioneer History Collection* undertaken by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s.⁵ The multi-volume work is replete with descriptions of 19th century log structures. Reports of the Indian commissioners were also helpful. While considerable attention was directed to historical documents, the project was largely a field study. In 1991-94, I examined 145 log buildings in Cherokee, Adair, and Sequoyah Counties. Data recorded included

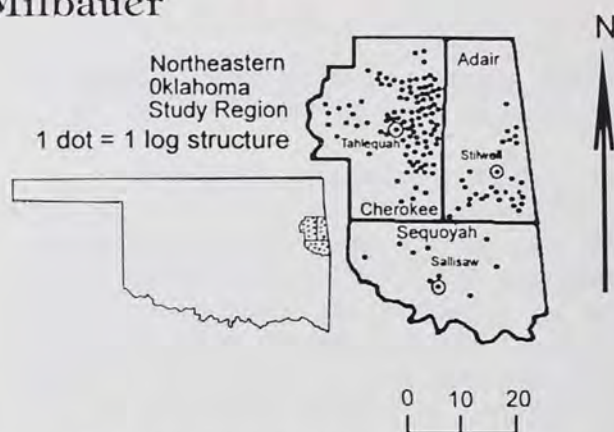


Fig. 1 Northeastern Oklahoma Study Region.

building dimensions, floor plan, shaping of logs, notch-types, roofing, flooring, placement of doors, and heating facilities. For each structure interviews were sought and usually obtained. I learned of log buildings from several years of residence in the area, from students, from local residents, and by driving rural roads. No claim of completeness is made, since time and finances imposed constraints.

CHRONOLOGY

The first structures built by the Cherokees after their arrival in Indian Territory were of log, since they had acquired the practice while they were still in their homeland.⁶ The home of the Cherokee scholar Sequoyah was a single-pen log cabin built in 1829, a decade prior to the Trail of Tears. Of about the same age as Sequoyah's dwelling are the Western Cherokee's log council house and courthouse of Tahlontskee, now a reconstructed historical site in Sequoyah County. The Leoser cabin in Tahlequah dates from 1833. I also observed two log buildings that pre-date the Trail of Tears, according to a local informant. Many persons interviewed by the WPA in the 1930s described how their grandparents and parents built log structures after arriving in Indian Territory. Log construction seems to have been dominant in Cherokee country throughout the pre-statehood period. Indian agent reports of 1843, 1869, 1871, and 1886 all relate that the Cherokees generally utilized log buildings.⁷ An official report of 1872 revealed that Cherokee dwellings consisted of 500 frame and 3,500 log houses.⁸ Numerous descriptions in the *Indian Pioneer Historical Collection* indicate that log structures prevailed throughout the period of Cherokee governance. During this time dwellings, outbuildings, churches, schools, and other buildings were of log, and many were quite substantial. Log structures remained conspicuous in north-



Fig. 2 Single pen log dwelling built in Tahlequah in about 1870 and moved to the nearby Murrell Home Historical Site.



Fig. 3 1930s vintage Finnish plan dwelling with cantilevered frame front porch and later rear addition, Cherokee County.



Fig. 4 Central hall log house with enclosed breezeway, Cherokee County. Said to pre-date the Trail of Tears of 1838-1839.

eastern Oklahoma through the 1930s, after which time they began a slow decline. In recent years the decrease in log buildings has been precipitous, but by no means have they been effaced from the landscape.

Considerable effort was made to date the log buildings that were observed in the field, which is rarely an easy task. The few log buildings that were designated as historical sites were dated, and occasionally one finds a date in the structure itself. In most cases, however, the researcher must rely on the knowledge of the local inhabitants. Despite difficulties, the structures observed were dated at least approximately, and they were arranged into three broad divisions. Twenty-four (16.6%) buildings were erected in the 1800s, eighty-two (56.6%) in the years 1900-1939, and thirty-nine (26.9%) were assembled between 1940 and 1994. Most of the log structures analyzed here are products of the 20th century, and many appeared after World War II. Six were put up in the 1950s, nine in the 1960s, nine in the 1970s, and four were erected in the 1980s. Two log buildings observed in the early 1990s were not yet complete. While not all of the more recent log buildings are mirror images of those of the frontier, they qualify as folk architecture because they were built by non-professionals who generally conformed with local traditions. The recent construction of log buildings in northeastern Oklahoma seems to be unique. The tradition ceased in Hardin County, Illinois, in the early 1900s; in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania it ended in the 1920s; the following decade saw its demise in Coffee County, Tennessee and in the Roanoke Valley of Virginia; and in Texas and Kentucky log construction terminated in the 1940s.⁹

DWELLINGS

Residences were the type of building mentioned most frequently in the documents, and I observed eighty-six in this study. Some domiciles were converted later to serve other functions (especially barns), some were moved, and most were modified in one way or another. Additions include lean-to sheds, porches, concrete platforms, new roofs, aluminum window frames and doors, and modern siding. All told, most log dwellings today differ significantly from their original physiognomy.

The single-pen log home (Fig. 2) is mentioned frequently in the *Indian Pioneer History Collection* and it was the most numerous dwelling floor plan I encountered in the field. Single-pen dwellings consist of one basic log unit, and they often possess lean-to sheds or porch additions. Early informants usually referred to these structures as "one room log houses," or "small log houses." About two-thirds of the single-pens I measured were rectangular, and they ranged from 15.5'x13.5' to 28'x18'. The remaining single-pens were square, and they measured from 14-20 feet per side. Marshall found a similar ratio of rectangular to square single-pens in Missouri's Little Dixie.¹⁰ The rectangular floor plan has been attributed to the Scots-Irish and Germans of Pennsylvania, which reinforces this locale's nexus with the Midland hearth. Of fifty single-pen dwellings with intact roofs, twenty-seven (54%) displayed the main door through the eave side while twenty-three (46%) exhibited the main door on a front-facing gable. The latter design is known as the "Finnish" floor plan, and is named after its reputed place of origin. Among the gable-entrance log



Fig. 5 Central chimney, Beaver Church, Adair County, late 1800s. Central chimney log churches were not uncommon in the pre-statehood period.



Fig. 6 Log school built in the 1930s, Cherokee County.

houses of this study was one with a frame cantilevered front porch (Fig. 3), which is similar to the Finnish *pirtti* with its cantilevered log porch.¹¹ Finnish architectural traits were introduced to New Sweden in the lower Delaware Valley in the seventeenth century, and they were diffused widely on the frontier. Finnish-plan houses have nearly vanished from the East, but they survive in the Great Plains and Mountain West where they are interpreted as an archaism.¹²

Double-pen log houses have a long history in Cherokee country. They undoubtedly date from the arrival of the first Cherokees. Numerous Indian agent reports and WPA informants stated that “double [log] houses” were very common during the pre-statehood period. These double log houses were not always described in detail, but often they were depicted as two log units with a central hall and a common roof. For example, the agent’s report of 1869 stated that “most of the houses are built of logs... They are usually built two at a distance of about ten feet apart, and [they] unite them with a roof and rough boarded front and back, which makes a wide hall.”¹³ This describes the dogtrot/central hall house (central hall when the breezeway is enclosed), which was very common in Cherokee country. Nine dogtrot/central hall houses were observed in the field. Two were said to predate the Trail of Tears (Fig. 4) and two might have been erected just after it. One dogtrot house was dated 1845 (now a historical site), and two were assembled no later than the 1850s. Of the two remaining, one was built in 1912 and the other in the 1930s. The relative abundance of dogtrot/central hall log houses among the Cherokees is consistent with conditions prevalent in Georgia prior to removal, where dogtrot houses might have comprised as much as 9% of 333 farmhouses analyzed.¹⁴ The origin of the dogtrot house is controversial,¹⁵ but this research supports the belief that dogtrots are well represented west and south of the Nashville Basin.¹⁶

One of the double-pen houses observed was rather unusual. Now a barn, the original house was reconstructed by careful examination with the assistance of the elderly landowner. Built at least seventy years ago by Cherokees, it originally consisted of two log pens (16’x10’) with a common wall and a front-facing gable that included a door to each pen. It might be referred to as a “double Finnish” log house.

The Cumberland house, which consists of two contiguous log pens and a gable-end chimney, was found neither in historical documents nor in the field. The numerous references to log dwellings in the *Indian Pioneer History Collection* include descriptions of four buildings in the region that seem to be central-chimney double-pen saddlebag houses. They are described as large log buildings with central “stack” chimneys that served both units.¹⁷ In addition, Sequoyah’s single-pen dwelling was expanded to a saddlebag, and early military bases elsewhere in Indian Territory also possessed saddlebag dwellings.¹⁸ Despite this, saddlebag houses were probably never common in the Cherokee country, since they are mentioned only infrequently by informants and I found no log saddlebag houses in the field. The scarcity of log saddlebag houses in northeastern Oklahoma is consistent with the pre-removal survey of Cherokee houses in which this type is not mentioned.¹⁹ The dearth of saddlebags in the region also reinforces the contention that this dwelling is widely distributed in West Virginia and Kentucky and is less numerous elsewhere in the Upland South.²⁰

Twenty-five (29.1%) of the dwellings examined do not conform well to traditional single- and double-pen classification and are herein designated as “atypical.” Constructed from the 1920s onward, atypical dwellings exhibit a variety of floor plans, door placement, dimensions, and other features. These unusual homes, however, are consistent with traditional patterns of log-shaping, corner notch-



Fig. 8 Single crib barn, 1962, Adair County.



Fig. 7 Cantilevered smokehouse built in the 1940s, Adair County.



Fig. 9 Double crib barn with enclosed runway, Cherokee County.

ing, roofing, and other characteristics that will be discussed below.

Fireplaces were employed for heating and cooking in the region's older log buildings. Usually located at the gable ends of pens, fireplaces and chimneys varied considerably. Small, primitive homes often had crude stone fireplaces with mud-and-stick chimneys that were sometimes lined with stone or adhesive clay made from lime and sand.²¹ Larger buildings, according to WPA interviewees, generally possessed fireplaces of massive stone, either sandstone or limestone. Dogtrot houses usually had a fireplace on each exterior gable, and some larger dwellings possessed as many as four fireplaces.²² Most of the older log houses observed in the field possessed stone fireplaces with massive exterior chimneys. The majority were of hewn sandstone, but occasionally limestone and chert were employed. In earlier times fireplaces were held together with a crude adhesive of mud and lime, and in recent years many have been rebuilt with modern mortar. Sometimes dates are inscribed in stone chimneys; the oldest one recorded was 1858. Fireplaces and chimneys of brick are also found in the log buildings of northeastern Oklahoma, and they are usually not as old as those of stone. Fireplaces have tended to give way to more efficient wood-burning stoves. Later log homes usually have a stove or at least a flue or flue aperture for a stove that has been removed.

LOG BUILDINGS OTHER THAN DWELLINGS

During the period of Cherokee authority not all log buildings were living quarters; most structures of any function were made of log. A man who was taken to the region as a toddler in 1870 related that most churches, like other buildings, were of log.²³ Churches were sometimes situated in campgrounds that consisted of a large meetinghouse surrounded by smaller cabins that might be occupied by worshippers for extended periods.²⁴ Some churches were described as having central chimneys and split-log seats.²⁵ My field survey included two log churches. One consisted of a 30'x24' sanctuary with an 18'x11.5' rear addition, and the other one measured 32'x17' and had a central chimney (Fig. 5).

Churches often served as schools, but when schools were separate they too were usually built of log. In 1852 the Cherokee agent wrote that of twenty-one schools, all but two were log. Most were large, well-built, and furnished with stone chimneys and stoves.²⁶ Double- and single-pen structures often served as schools. Two old log schools were examined in the early 1990s; one was 27'x18'; the other measured 30'x18' (Fig. 6).

Outbuildings of the Cherokee period were usually built of log and they were often rather crude.²⁷ Field study found fifteen log smokehouses (Fig. 7). Nine were rectangular and they ranged in size from 10'x9' to 14.5'x13'. The square



Fig. 12 Cherokee County horse barn, not quite complete in 1993.



Fig. 11 Adair County kitchen, probably built in the late 1800s. The kitchen was formerly attached to a larger log dwelling. Note purlins, hewn logs, and V-notches.



Fig. 10 Corn crib, 1940s, Cherokee County.

smokehouses were between 7'x7' and 12'x12'. All but one had a small door on a front-facing gable. Of the fourteen smokehouses that still had a roof, eleven exhibited cantilevers that varied from twenty inches to three feet in length. Pork was slowly smoked over hickory fires in these small buildings, and at least two were utilized into the 1970s.

Fifteen log barns were found, eleven single-crib (Fig. 8) and four double-crib (Fig. 9). The former consisted of small log units (cribs) with frame shed additions. Three cribs were square, between fourteen and sixteen feet on each side, while eight were rectangular and ranged from 10'x10.5' to 21'x8'. Sheds were usually attached to both eave sides, and sometimes to the rear gable. Entry was usually through a small gable door, although three single-crib barns had eave doors. Double-crib barns consist of two cribs separated by a runway with a common roof over the entire structure. In three cases the cribs were identical in size (16'x11', 16'x12', 13'x13'), and one barn consisted of pens of slightly different dimensions. Of the three barns with the roofs intact, the roof ridge was parallel to the long axes of the cribs, all of which were rectangular. Runways were between eight and a half and twelve feet in width and two were enclosed. In each case the cribs exhibited doors that opened into the runway, and only one door was full-sized.

I found seven buildings that were constructed as corn-

cribs (Fig 10); all were rectangular and they varied in size from 12.5'x10' to 18.5'x15'. One corncrib that had been moved to serve as a dwelling possessed an eave-side full-sized door which was probably not original. Another corncrib that was moved and converted to an antique store had a full-sized gable door, again most likely not the first portal. The remaining corncribs were all entered through small gable doors. Cantilevered roofs were found on three corncribs, and all but one were enlarged with a shed or an open-sided addition. Since the corncrib is the progenitor of the crib barn,²⁸ the distinction between corncribs and single-crib barns is purely arbitrary. The criterion used here was the designation of interviewees.

The survey included five log garages, which are an interesting union of folkways with twentieth-century technology. The first one encountered measured 20'x16', was covered with a cantilevered roof, and had a nine foot door to admit one automobile. Three others were very similar. One log garage, built in the 1970s, was 23'x20' in size and accommodated two cars.

The field study included four log lean-tos, or shanties. Ranging in size from 10.5'x9.5' to 17'x10.5', lean-tos have flat, low-pitched roofs that slope to the rear. The lean-tos of northeastern Oklahoma probably evolved from the three-sided hunter's shanty that was common on the frontier.²⁹ Four-sided shanties, similar to those of this area, were utilized as temporary dwellings in much of North America.³⁰



Fig. 13 Hewn logs with square notches, Cherokee County, late 1800s.



Fig. 14 Peeled round logs with mostly undersided saddle notches, Cherokee County, 1930s.



Fig. 15 Boxed V-notches on hewn log dogtrot house, Sequoyah County, 1845.

Log kitchens seem to have been rather common in the region in earlier times. A woman who was born in Cherokee country in 1869 related that most of the nation lived in log houses “. . . and they were all built alike” After describing a dogtrot house, she added, “The kitchen was set way back from other buildings.”³¹ Field investigation yielded two log kitchens (Fig. 11).

Seven of the log non-dwellings are not easily classified. One is a gable-front store, built in the 1930s. Another is a horse barn that was begun in 1989 and was not quite complete in 1994 (Fig. 12). The barn consists of two units (each about 60' x 16') built along a central runway. One unit is totally of log while the other is part log and part aluminum. The logs were cut on the builder's land, and he built a rather typical single-crib log barn nearby in the early 1980s. Another unusual log structure is a 67'x30' automobile repair shop, equipped with six standard garage doors. The five remaining unorthodox structures were being used for storage when they were examined, and they could not be classified.

FASHIONING OF LOGS

The earliest structures of the last century and the later, less pretentious ones were usually of round log, often with the bark intact. Sometimes logs were split with the round part visible on the exterior.³² More substantial and durable buildings, by contrast, consisted of hewn log. Tree species are rarely mentioned, but better homes were often built of the formerly more abundant white oak (*Quercus alba*) and “yellow” (shortleaf) pine. Most logs were probably hewn on the inner and outer sides only, but some were hewn on four sides.³³ Some hewing, probably four-sided,

was so precise that it obviated the chinking that was usually required to fill log interstices.³⁴

Of the region's extant dwellings, those built in the 1800s and very early 1900s tend to be of logs hewn on the inner and outer surfaces while the top and the bottom are left round (Fig. 13). Score marks from ax or adze are common on hewn logs (Fig. 18). More recent structures usually consist of round logs. This is especially true of outbuildings, which are often built of crooked, unfashioned logs of varying diameter. Nearly two-thirds of all log structures examined were of round log (Fig. 14), which is interpreted as an archaism.³⁵ Remaining bark reveals that post oak and blackjack oak were the most numerous trees utilized, and pine was not uncommon. Log thickness ranged from four to seventeen inches, and most were well under twelve inches. Logs peeled of their bark are sometimes painted, usually a reddish brown. Three of the buildings observed consisted of half logs with the round side on the exterior. One century-old residence was made of logs sawed square on four sides, and a number of recent buildings consist of logs sawed on all but the exterior side (Fig. 17). In larger buildings, logs were sometimes spliced to complete a full side of a building.

In most cases the interstices of log dwellings had to be filled, or chinked. The ruder homes of the last century were often chinked with red clay mixed with sticks or rocks, while larger or better homes were daubed with mortar.³⁶ The mortar was probably prepared from local limestone. Older domiciles observed in the field were generally daubed with reddish mud and rocks or sticks. Between the logs of later houses, however, one finds modern cement mortar mixed with sticks and rocks. Historically, the interior walls of some of the better homes



Fig. 16 Round log V-notches with blunted apices and crowns intact on single crib-barn, Adair County.



Fig. 17 Butt joint false corner timbering on Cherokee County house under construction in 1991. Logs have been sawed flat on all but the exterior side.



Fig. 18 Half dovetail notches on a nineteenth century kitchen of hewn and scored logs, Cherokee County.

were plastered. More recently, inner walls have been covered with cardboard, newspaper, wallpaper, plywood, and sheetrock. Many of the more attractive log houses of the pre-statehood period were weatherboarded, often at the time of construction.³⁷ The custom of covering the outer walls of log houses continues to the present; there are many log dwellings in northeastern Oklahoma that give every appearance of being frame. Unlike dwellings, the gaps of log corncribs and barns were often left open in order to ventilate the grain stored in them.

CORNER TIMBERING

The manner in which logs are fastened at the ends reveals something about levels of workmanship, time of construction, and regional affiliations. Closely associated with Pennsylvania Extended is the V-notch,³⁸ which is the most common type I observed (30.3% of total). The V-notching of older dwellings with hewn logs tends to have a sharp apex and the logs are usually sawed flush at the ends ("boxed," Fig. 15). Much more common is the cruder, round log V-notching which usually occurs on outbuildings and on more recent dwellings. Here the V is often blunted and the log projects past the end of the notch where it is sloppily sawed off. Frequently the log termini are round, or "crowned" (Fig. 16). Round log V-notches, especially those with the crowning intact, were a feature of the Midland frontier. The trait increases with distance from the lower Delaware hearth, and its abundance is interpreted as a survival of pioneer ways.³⁹

Not far behind the V-notch in the Cherokee country is the primitive saddle notch, which accounts for 24.8% of all corner timbering (Fig. 14). Undersided saddle notching is most common, but double saddle and top saddle notching are also present. A few later buildings possess saddle notching that has been cut with a saw and might be described as "square saddle notching." Saddle notches in their variations are almost universally restricted to round logs. Saddle notching is a crude feature that was common in pioneer times, and its importance in northeastern Oklahoma reinforces the marginality of the region.

Square notching is the sole form of corner timbering for 18.6% of the structures examined here (Fig. 13). This notch does not lock the logs in place and many of the square notches recorded here were nailed to avoid slippage. Square-notched logs with no visible nails are probably held together with wooden pegs. Most of the square notches of this study were on older buildings of hewn logs, but they also occur on more recent round-log structures. Like the V-notch, the square notch is also a good indicator of Pennsylvania Extended, and it was formerly more common in the East.⁴⁰ Its widespread usage in northeastern Oklahoma further illustrates the peripheral nature of the area.

False corner timbering of the butt-joint variety⁴¹ occurred on seven buildings (Fig. 17). This method was utilized on more recent structures in which the logs had been sawed on three sides while the outer part was left round. With this technique the logs do not lock, and they must be held in place by nails or pegs. In all cases but one, alternating courses of logs were of different lengths.

The logs of five structures were held together totally by half-notches. As in false corner timbering, half-notches must be nailed or pegged to prevent logs from slipping. It is not uncommon to see half-notches on the same structure as square notches. When this is the case the latter is more common and the former is employed to accommodate odd-sized logs. Only four examples of the rather sophisticated half-dovetail notch were found (Fig. 18). All of these were present on nineteenth century buildings of carefully hewn logs.

Twenty-two buildings, 15.2% of the total, exhibit more than one notch type. Many of these have square and half-notches, as noted above. Some are dogtrot houses in which each pen displays different forms of corner timbering. Additions sometimes have notches that contrast with those of the original structure. At times saddle and V-notches appear on the same structure; in fact, they grade into each other.

FOUNDATIONS, FLOORING, AND FENESTRATION

In conformity with Midland tradition, some of the buildings examined in this region rest on large hewn logs known as sills. Twenty-eight sills were counted, most of which supported dwellings. Sills are most common on older houses, but some of the later dwellings also have them. Most sills are hewn on all four sides, some are hewn on the top and bottom, and one pair of sills was hewn on the bottom side only. Most of the log structures examined lacked sills and the lowest log was indistinguishable from the others.

Sills and bottom logs usually lie on rock. In most cases this is either dry or mortared sandstone, limestone, or chert. Some buildings are supported by concrete blocks. One building observed was built into a hill and had a basement, and another one was erected over a storm cellar. Some of the more recent log dwellings are atop concrete slabs. Quite a few structures, mostly crude outbuildings, simply rest on the earth.

The floors of log buildings in the region have varied through time, according to WPA interviewees. Earlier and cruder dwellings often had earthen floors, while homes of intermediate caliber usually had floors of puncheons, which were logs split in half or hewn flat on one side. More pretentious post-pioneer houses might have sported floors of sawed lumber that was nailed to joists or "sleepers."

Field analysis recorded a number of sills and bottom logs that were notched to receive joists. Older joists were generally logs hewn flat on the top while more recent ones were 2x6s or 2x8s. Flooring was usually sawed boards or plywood. The only earthen floors observed were those of crude outbuildings.

Many log dwellings of the Cherokee era totally lacked windows. In fact, a man who built a log home in the area in 1890 stated that most log dwellings lacked windows.⁴²

A more refined building had "shuttle" or shutter windows. These were fashioned from bark or native lumber, and they were either made to slide horizontally or were mounted on hinges. Only the best log houses of the Cherokee epoch possessed glass windows.

Most structures other than outbuildings that I examined had windows. The only features they had in common were that they were rectangular or square, and were of glass. Size, number, and location all varied greatly, and many windows appeared to be later additions.

STORIES AND ROOFS

Contemporary observers recounted that most of the log buildings of the Cherokee era were one or one-and-one-half stories. Exceptions, however, were numerous. Interviewees of the *Indian Pioneer History Collection* frequently mentioned ostentatious, two-story log houses.

The majority of log structures examined by the author were one story. This might be expected, since taller log buildings date from the 1800s,⁴³ while those of this area are mostly products of this century. Four buildings were one-and-one-half story; three of these were erected in the 1800s and one was an atypical dwelling of the 1960s. Loft joists are visible on two of the older one-and-one-half story houses. Five two-story buildings were recorded. One was a nineteenth century house, three were houses of this century, and one was a single-crib barn built in the early 1950s.

Descriptions of the 1930s *Pioneer Papers* intimate a chronology of roofing on the locale's log buildings. An early trait, inconsistent with Midland tradition, was the existence of thatched roofing. Informants stated that early dwellings and schools sometimes had roofs of "grass" or even "leaves."⁴⁴ Richards' study of log buildings in Indian Territory found thatched roofs,⁴⁵ but the vast corpus of literature on North American log housing very rarely mentions the feature.

Also present on early and more primitive log structures, according to WPA interviewees, were clapboard roofs. Clapboards—boards riven from logs with a froe or an ax—are associated with the ridgepole-and-purlin roof. This roof type is characterized by purlins (ribs) resting on progressively shorter gable logs with a ridgepole at the summit. Clapboards are placed atop the ribs and weight poles rest on the clapboards. Strategically placed "knees" hold the weight poles in place.⁴⁶

Subsequent roofs were covered with smaller shakes and even smaller tapered shingles. Contemporary observers used the terms loosely and sometimes they spoke of "shake shingle" roofs.⁴⁷ Shakes and shingles might have been nailed to the ribs or could have been affixed to a more refined board-gable roof. In a roof of this type log or sawed rafters rest on a hewn plate or top log and their upper ends are fastened together without a ridgepole. Sawed purlins

or lathing are nailed to the rafters and roofing material is attached to them.

Field study detected only two ridgepole-and-purlin roofs (Fig. 11). Both were on nineteenth-century buildings and were covered with modern asbestos shingles. Most roofs examined were of the board-gable variety with a pitch of 25-40 degrees and were overlain with modern shingles, tarpaper, or sheetmetal. Traditional materials have not yet totally vanished, however, since old wooden shingles are sometimes visible beneath recent material.

LOG BUILDING CHRONOLOGY IN THE CHEROKEE COUNTRY

There was a generalized sequence of log-building characteristics in the Midland tradition. Earliest times on the frontier saw the erection of temporary "cabins" with round logs, earth or puncheon floors, and ridgepole-and-purlin roofs. Next came permanent "houses" with hewn logs, carefully fashioned notches, board floors, shingle roofs, and other refinements. Later still, log might be given up entirely for frame or brick. Finally, the Depression of the 1930s brought about a revival of crude log building characterized by unhewn logs and primitive saddle or V-notches.⁴⁸ This pattern, vague as it was everywhere, seems to have fit the Cherokee country. Interviewees of the 1930s indicate that throughout the 19th century new arrivals in the region generally built crude, one-room round-log "cabins" or "huts" with dirt floors and no windows, a stick-and-mud chimney, and a straw or clapboard roof. Later they might erect a larger "house" of hewn logs with glass windows, a puncheon or board floor, or a stone chimney. This pattern was by no means universal, since some prosperous Cherokees built large, even two-story, log houses shortly after the Trail of Tears, and many well-to-do residents continued to live in them for decades. Recalling the late 1800s, one woman stated that most Cherokees lived in log houses. She said that the poorer classes lived in single-room homes, the middle class usually lived in double-log houses (mostly dogtrot), and those who considered themselves rich had frame houses.⁴⁹ The last stage of the succession, Depression-era crude, round-log construction is well represented in the region by numerous primitive log structures built in the 1930s and later.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Log building in northeastern Oklahoma dates from the arrival of the Western Cherokees in the 1820s. Initially most erected crude log cabins, but more prosperous individuals built pretentious log houses even in the early period. In time, primitive log buildings tended to give way to more comfortable ones. Throughout the pre-statehood period log construction was very important, with the masses living in small dwellings while the well-to-do occupied commodious log homes. Frame eventually eclipsed log in

the present century, although the 1930s saw a revival in log building in simplified form. Log construction has gradually decreased, but at this writing it is not yet extinct.

Field analysis revealed that the salient features of the Midland log-building tradition are present in northeastern Oklahoma. Some of the structures studied were built in the 1800s, but the vast majority are products of the present century. The archaic Finnish plan with its front-gable entrance is common. V-notching, a strong indicator of Pennsylvania Extended, is the most abundant form of corner timbering. Older hewn logs display carefully crafted V-notches with sharp apices, but crude, round-log V-notching, often crowned, is more widespread. The primitive saddle notch is also plentiful, especially on outbuildings. Not uncommon is square notching, another characteristic feature of Pennsylvania Extended. Elaborate half-dovetail notches are scarce in the region, and the even more complex full-dovetail and diamond notches are totally absent. Most buildings are of one story. In summary, the surviving log buildings of northeastern Oklahoma are characterized by many archaic and primitive traits.

The persistence of antiquated and crude log building techniques in the region is explained by two factors: remoteness from the Midland culture hearth and recency of construction. Archaic features tend to increase westward and in remote locations. The abundance of such unrefined characteristics as round logs with V- or saddle notches are ascribable to their late building, since recent log structures are generally more primitive. Why has log construction endured so long in northeastern Oklahoma? The practice could be an aspect of the general cultural conservatism that was recognized more than half a century ago by Leslie Hewes.⁵⁰ In sharp contrast with adjacent Arkansas and Missouri, pioneer conditions remained significant in northeastern Oklahoma. The retention of frontier ways manifested itself in various ways, including housing. A house count was conducted on both sides of the Oklahoma-Arkansas boundary and log accounted for 13.7% of the dwellings in Oklahoma, but only 1.3% in Arkansas. Hewes attributed this lack of innovation to the presence of poor and conservative Cherokees and even more numerous whites of similar persuasion. During the period of Cherokee governance, schooling was denied to whites and this tended to discourage more progressive elements from entering the region. Northeastern Oklahoma has experienced profound changes in the last fifty years, but a proclivity for traditional ways survives.

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