

The Amish in Somerset County And The Church of the Brethren

Amish-Mennonites, that segment of the Swiss-Alsatian-South German Anabaptist-Mennonites and their descendants in North America who are the offspring of the group who under the leadership of Elder Jakob Amman (q.v.) of Erlenbach, canton of Bern, Switzerland, in 1693-97 separated from the main body in Switzerland.

Reference: The Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, A-C. Published by Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, Hillsboro, Kansas, 1956.

A Brief History

The proper name of the followers of Jakob Amman is "Amish-Mennonite" although frequently they are referred to simply as Amish. The Amish have kept few records and have produced practically no literature, not even historical, so it is difficult to trace their history (1).

Not all of the descendants have retained the name and the principals of the original group - not at all in Europe -- most of them having been reunited with the main Mennonite Congregations. However, there are still in the United States and in Canada those who retain the name and form. In Europe there have been settlements in Montebeliard, Holland, Bavaria, Galicia, and Volhynia (Russia), most of smaller and lesser significant in size and scope. In the United States, however, there have been many large established settlements, primarily in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas and South Dakota. In Ontario, Canada, a large Amish settlement was formed in Waterloo County, west of Kitchner.

About Jakob Amman

When we think about the Amish way of life today, the first thing that usually comes to mind is that fact that the Amish are "different" or "plain" people. This usually refers to their way of life and their mode of dress. Much of what we see practiced by the Amish today is directly related to the viewpoints held by Jakob Amman back in the late 1600's. He is credited with causing a primary division in the Amish-Mennonite movement and most of the Amish who settled in the United States and Canada were followers of Amman.

It is believed that Jakob Amman visited the Markirch Congregation in Alsace-Lorraine sometime around 1696?. Supposedly he excommunicated some members and immediately started a controversy with the ministers of the Palatinate who tried to reconcile him. Apparently, Jakob "held strict views on wearing untrimmed beards, uniformity of dress, including the style of hats, garments for the body, shoes and stockings, and the prohibition of attending services of the state church." (2) He also introduced "footwashing" which was widely observed in Holland but not in Switzerland. He also staunchly believed that those outside of the Anabaptist movement would not be saved. This point was central to the controversy as many outsiders of the Anabaptists movement gave support when the group came under persecution from the state church. Despite his differing views, he found united support from the local ministers and put many of the other ministers "under the ban". Later on , he tried to soften his point of view and attempted to make reconciliation with the entire group in Alsace. However, he refused to take back his stance and stated that "it was only an error in method and spirit" not directly in belief. (3)

Amman's Emigration and the Movement Westward

Prior to Amman's arrival in Alsace, there were already several communities living in the area. Amman arrived sometime around 1696 and settled along with many others in the Ste. Marie Aux Mines area. Shortly after their settlement in this area, about 1710-1730, persecution arose from the non-believers and state church. Many moved to the territory of Montbeliard (German Mumpelgart) which was part of the Protestant Duchy of Wurttemberg, located in the southern part of Germany. Some of Amman's followers also settled in the Birkenhof area near the Alsatian-Swiss border. Gradually, the Amish in these areas migrated eastward and northward to avoid persecution. By 1815, there were settlements in France and Luxembourg, Germany, and in the United States.

Direct emmigration from Alsace-Lorraine and Bavaria to the United States came after 1815. Settlements in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada; Central Illinois; Stark Co. Ohio; and in Fulton Co. Ohio. In 1873, some Alsatian Amish families migrated eastward to the Lemberg region of Russia and onto areas in the United States, primarily in South Dakota and Kansas.

History of the Amish-Mennonite in Pennsylvania

The very first Amish began arriving in Pennsylvania as early as 1720. They settled in the Berks and Chester Cos. area, and eastward in Lancaster County. These early settlers formed three communities (1740-1760): Reading (extinct c. 1786), Malvern in Chester Co. (extinct 1800) and Morgantown also in Chester Co.

As more and more Amish emigrated from Europe they would come to Pennsylvania and settle in these existing communities. However, because land was unavailable they continued to move westward. Direct settlements from the Berks-Lancaster-Chester area were formed in Somerset County (1767); Mifflin Co. (1793); Union County (1810); Fairfield County, Ohio (1810).

Somerset County, PA

The Amish-Mennonite settlement in Somerset County was populated by more Hessian Amish from Eastern, PA than in any other area. The Hessian Amish settled in Somerset County from (1830-1860) and continued to spread southward up into the Alleghenies and over into Garrett County, MD.

There were three Amish-Mennonite settlements in Somerset County. The first was in the north around Johnstown, the second near Berlin, and the third was south near Springs-Grantsville. The Springs-Grantsville community continued to survive well in the 19th century.

There are several growing Amish-Mennonite communities in Somerset County today. It is believed that these communities are among the fastest growing Amish populations in the United States. Somerset County's mountainous terrain and ruralness have contributed to the sustaining power in this religious community.

The Glades, Berlin Area:

The first land warrants to Amish settlers were issued here in 1773. Some of the first families to settle in this area were: Christian Zook, 1773; Christian Spiker, 1773; Benedict Leman, 1773; John Zook, 1773; Christian Yoder, 1773; John Yoder, 1775; Michael Troyer, 1775; John Troyer, 1775; Joseph Johns, 1775; David Yoder, 1777; Jacob Schrock, 1779; Peter Leman, 1779; John Leman, 1785. Christian Blough had arrived in 1767 but didn't receive his land warrant until 1773. One of the first ministers and the first Amish Bishop in this area was Christian Yoder (1785 until his death in 1838). His son, Christian Yoder, Jr. also served as minister and bishop (1790-1846) as well as his grandson, Abner Yoder (who later moved to the Johnstown congregation in 1866). The last services were probably held at the Glades in the 1870's. There are some old Amish cemeteries in Somerset County but very few records remain. Most of the Amish from the Glades settlement moved on to Homes and Tuscarawas Cos. in Ohio; Elkhart, Indiana; Johnson Co., Iowa; and Moultrie and Douglas counties in Illinois.

Casselman River Settlement:

The Casselman River settlement was the second Amish settlement in Somerset County. It was formed shortly after the Glades. Michael Buechley, from Barn Township, Lancaster Co., bought two tracts of land about 4 miles south of Meyersdale in 1772. In 1773 he bought another piece of land and probably settled here. Peter Livengood and his family were the first family to bring a covered wagon over the Allegheny Mountains and settled here in 1775. The Buechley, Livengood, Christian Hochstetler, and John Olinger families left the Amish Mennonite church and joined the Dunkard "Tunker" or Brethren Church soon after settling in this area, about 1783. The Old Order Brethren settlement flourishes in this area primarily because of the similarity of faith and beliefs between the Amish Mennonites and the Dunkards. For more information on the Old Order Brethren Church and its settling in the Meyersdale, PA area, please see Dunkard - Church of the Brethren. Additionally, suggested reading of Two Hundred Years in Brothersvalley, 1762-1962 will offer clearer insight into the differing Brethren Churches in the Brothersvalley and Summit Township areas.

Conemaugh:

This settlement around the town of Johnstown (now Cambria County) was developed from settlers from the Berlin Glades settlement. Jacob Blough obtained a land warrant in 1793. Joseph Johns moved his family here in 1800. He founded the city of Johnstown in 1800. Other early settlers were: David Yoder, 1802; Jacob Spiker, 1806; Jacob Kime, 1806; Tobias Miller, 1812; and John Lehman, 1835. The first bishop was probably Jacob Eash (1774-1850) from Berks County, PA. The last Amish services were held in 1916. This settlement was absorbed into the Mennonite Church shortly thereafter and continues to flourish today. Gortner:

Many families in the Casselman River congregation moved southwestward to Preston, W.Va. and onto Gortner, MD

(located near Oakland, in Garrett County, MD). The first settlers to this area were the Samuel J. Beachey family. Other early settlers were the Petersheim, Miller, Schrock, and Slabaugh families. The families in this settlement suffered greatly during the Civil War because of their location on the division line between North and South. There are still unorganized Conservative Amish Mennonite families living and meeting in this area. Amish Surnames - You Might Be Surprized To See Your Name Here!

Amish Surnames are very recognizable to those who are familiar with early European history. However, those new to genealogy may not notice their surname as being Amish or Hessian (German).

Some Common Amish Family Names:

Amish Family Names: primarily from the Old Order and Conservative Amish Groups and those descending from the early Pennsylvania Amish settlers and the Hessian-Amish.

Beachey (Peachey) / Bender / Blauch (Blough) / Bontrager (Borntraeger) / Brenneman / Byler (Beiler) / Burkholder / Christner / Chupp / Coblentz / Esch (Eash) / Gingerich (Guengerich) / Glick / Graber / Hartzler (Hertzler) / Helmuth / Hersberger / Hooley / Hostetler (Hochstetler) / Kanagy (Gnaegi) / Kauffman / Keim / King / Knepp / Lambright / Lantz / Lapp / Mast / Miller / Mullet / Nissley / Otto / Petershwim / Plank / Raber / Schrock / Shetler / Slabaugh (Schlappach) / Smucker (Schmucker) / Stoltzfus / Stutzman / Swartzendruber (Schwartzentruber) / Troyer / Umble / Wagler / Yoder / Zook (Zug)

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Amish Family Names: primarily of the Alsatian Group and their Descendants.

Albrecht / Augsburgur / Bachman / Bechler / Beller / Belsley / Berkey (Burki) / Camp (Kemp) / Conrad / Egli / Eicher / Fahrney / Flickinger / Gascho / Gerig / Gunden (Gundy) / Guth / Heiser / Imhoff / Jantzi / Kennel / Kinisger / Klopfenstein / Litwiller / Nafziger (Noffsinger) / Oesch (Esch) / Oyer (Auer) / Raber / Ramseyer / Rediger / Ringenberg / Ropp (Rupp) / Rocke (Roggi) / Roth / Ruvenacht / Schertz / Slagel / Smith / Sommer / Springer / Stahley / Strubhar / Stuckey / Studer / Sutter / Sweitzer / Verkler / Wagler / Wyse / Yordy / Yutzi (Jutzi) / Zehr

More Amish History Amish Resources See also MennoLink Information Center for books, cd-roms and general information on Amish research and history

Note: For more detailed information on the Amish Mennonites, please read the Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, A-C, pages 93-97, published 1956. This page was written by Carol Hepburn, ©1996-1999.



Church of the Brethren

There were several Old Order Brethren congregations in Somerset County. Many people incorrectly refer to this sect of the Anabaptists as "DUNKARD". This term was applied to the members of the Church of the Brethren in the late 19th century and early 20th. The word "Dunker" was acutally a anglicized corruption of the German word, "Tunker," which means "dipper" or immerserer referring to the mode of baptism practiced by this group. The term is still used today by two minor conservative orders, Old Order Dunkards and the Dunkard Brethren. The mode of baptism practiced by this group was adopted during this groups founding in Pennsylvania in the 1770's.

In Brothers Valley Township

It is believed that the first religious group to arrive in Somerset County were the German Baptists or "Die Bruder's Leute". They are the one's who named "Brueder Thal" or Brothers Valley and were said to have been organized in the county as early as 1763.

In Stony Creek Township

The Stony Creek congregation called, Glade Church, first records its founding in 1763 under the supervision of George William MARTIN. In 1770, a list of 17 members is recorded by the Rev. Martin and his wife.

In Summit Township

The next, and most active, Brethren Congregation was formed in Meyersdale in 1783. The first Love Feast was recorded here at the home of John BURGER. John KEAGY was made minister and other early preachers were Peter KOBER, Michael MEYERS, Francis STUMP, John FORNEY and John LIVENGOOD.

The first meeting house was set-up in 1845 in Brothers Valley, the second at Summit Mills. Other churches were Meyersdale (1851), Berkley's (1850), Glade Pike, Milford, Jenners, and Middlecreek.

Many members of the Amish Mennonite Church became "Tunkers" primarily due to the similarity of their faith and customs. It is reported that at one time, Meyersdale, had more "Tunkers" per square mile than in any other area in the United States. In 1775, part of the Buechley land passed to Yost Yoder by Deed. Public records show deeds in this area belonging to the following families: John Miller, 1775; John Hershberger, 1775; Christian Gnagey, 1775; John Saylor, 1775; Yost Zook, 1773; John Hochstetler, 1779; Andrew Borntreger, 1783; John Borntreger, 1783; Christian Mast, 1783; Jacob Mast, 1783; Jacob Saylor, 1783; Peter Beachey, 1785; Jacob Miller, 1793; and Joseph Mast, 1795. All this land is between Meyersdale, PA and the southern border of PA into Garrett County, MD.

Formation of the Brethren Church

In 1881, the Brethren Church split from the old Church of the Brethren. The new congregation formed from the progressive movement veered away from the strict non-conformity with the world and moved towards a more centered belief in keeping with the changing times.

The Berlin Church and the "home church" in Stony Creek merged and became the Brethren Church. The first pastor was the Rev. Harvey HOLSINGER.

Note: For more detailed information on the Church of the Brethren, please read the Mennonite Encyclopedia, Vol. I, A-C, page 109, published 1956.

Or, visit the

[Church of the Brethren](#) - homepage with some marriage, birth and death records. Excellent source for history and other church information.

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