

Mahaska and Counties West

Although there are or have been Mennonite churches in at least eight Iowa counties in addition to the ones mentioned above, only three of the six counties now have churches. Treating the six areas geographically, the nearest settlement to those already mentioned was in Mahaska County, where Preacher Peter Beutler and family from Ashland County, Ohio, settled in Scott Township in 1852. Other Beutler families and the Jacob Gehman family moved to this area during the 1850's. The descendants of the three original Beutler families are known now as Butlers and for many years have been influential in and around Oskaloosa.

During the sixties Mennonite ministers occasionally visited the settlement and reported their trips in the *Herald of Truth*, a Mennonite periodical printed in Elkhart, Indiana. In June, 1867, Jost Bally and J. M. Brenneman visited the settlement. Brenneman reported that fifteen members participated in the communion service, and that Deacon Jacob K. Beutler was chosen preacher that day. In 1871 Matthias Eby visited the Mahaska County settlement and conducted communion services for the Gehmans and the Beutlers.

The church always was small and never had a meetinghouse. Reports from the congregation occasionally appeared in the *Herald of Truth*, including Preacher Jacob K. Beutler's obituary in 1892. During those years only two marriages were performed in the community by Mennonite preachers. The larger proportion of the Beutlers married non-Mennonites and joined other churches. Although they had some contacts with the ministers of the General Conference Mennonites (the group that began its conferences in Lee County in 1859) most of the contacts were with the "Old" Mennonites, the name often used for the group known officially as the Mennonite Church, the original and the largest group of Mennonites in America.

Farther west, in Polk County, a small Mennonite church was organized in the home of John B. Neuenschwander of Polk City in 1858. In August of that year Bishop Christian Sutter came into the community and ordained Neuenschwander to the office of deacon and Joseph Schroeder to the office of preacher. On the same trip he united in marriage Schroeder and Neuenschwander's daughter Anna. Schroeder was a talented young man, having been educated for the Catholic priesthood, although at the time of his ordination the church was not aware of his background. He represented the Polk City Mennonite Church in the General Conference of Mennonites held in Lee County in 1860.

How many years Schroeder preached for the Polk City church is not known but as late as 1865 he united a Mennonite couple in marriage. When it became known that he was secretly a Catholic, the church dismissed him. In 1893 Schroeder was buried in the Catholic cemetery of Des Moines.

Other families in the Polk City Mennonite community included Nussbaums, Beerys, Singers, Gehmans, Snyders, Geffellers, and Leichtys. On May 8, 1863, the visiting bishop Christian Sutter ordained John Singer to the office of preacher for the congregation. In 1865 the Polk City subscribers to the *Herald of Truth* were "Pre. Joseph Schroeder, Pre. John Singer, Jacob Gehman, John B. Neuenschwander, Peter Neuenschwander, and John Beutler." In 1868 John B. Neuenschwander moved to Moniteau County, Missouri. John Singer also moved to Missouri, very likely in the same year, and the church was left without leadership and passed out of existence.

Most of the other families evidently moved away also, and in 1933, when the writer interviewed Jacob Leichty, Jr., it was learned that he was likely the only survivor in the Polk City community that had attended Mennonite services in the area years earlier. Many years later a new Mennonite church was established in Polk County with the founding of the "Mennonite Fellowship" in Des Moines in 1956. The Fellowship had nine members in 1959.

In southwestern Iowa the Mennonites began a community in Page County in the year 1864 when the families of John S. Good, Jacob Horning, and Henry Hoffman, all from Allen County, Ohio, numbering twenty-four persons, settled there. Bishop John M. Brenneman of Allen County had been unwilling to let them leave his church without providing a preacher for the new settlement and consequently ordained John Good to that office before the three families left Ohio. On a number of occasions Brenneman visited the settlement and maintained a fatherly interest in it. He submitted the reports of these trips to the *Herald of Truth*, which furnish excellent source material for the history of the settlement.

During the first years of the community, Ohio relatives joined the Good family. Within the first two decades they were joined by the Fergusons, Snivelys, Shellenbergers, Lapps, Gehmans, and Eberlys. When the writer visited the community in the 1930's, only a very few Good, Horning, and Eberly descendants were left in the county. Some of the families had moved back to Illinois and Pennsylvania, while others had gone on to Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska.

By 1866 the membership figure had reached twenty but by 1878 the number had declined to fourteen and in 1880 only nine members participated in the communion service. In 1879 John S. Good had been ordained bishop but he was never

an aggressive leader and when the young people could no longer understand his German sermons, many joined the more progressive English-speaking churches of the community. Some families moved away so that their sons could find Mennonite wives since, in the words of one of the older Mennonite residents of the community, there were "not enough Mennonite girls to go around." When Bishop John S. Good died in 1889 and preacher Andrew Good moved to Cass County, Missouri, in 1890, the church became practically extinct, although Mennonite evangelists occasionally visited the few remaining families during the nineties.

The Mennonite Brethren in Christ had two churches in the area, one in Shambaugh, Page County, and the other in New Market, Taylor County. This branch of Mennonites was formed in 1883 by the union of the Evangelical United Mennonites and a branch of the Brethren in Christ known as the Swankites. They have been progressive in missionary activity, hold camp meetings similar to those of the Methodists a half century ago, and have been much influenced by Methodist practices and church organization. The Shambaugh church is an outgrowth of an early Brethren in Christ church. It became identified with the Mennonite Brethren in Christ in the 1880's. Its sister church, the New Market Mennonite Brethren in Christ congregation, was incorporated in

1894. A third church was established in Trenton, Henry County, in 1880, with a membership of fourteen. In 1947, however, the denomination changed its name to the United Missionary Church and thus they are no longer listed with the Mennonites.

In 1893 four Amish families from Johnson County settled near Clarion in Wright County. These were the families of Shem Swartzendruber, Christian Yoder, William Kreider and Bishop Solomon Swartzendruber. In the following two years at least ten other families joined them, with the names of Swartzendruber, Gingerich, Miller, Gunden, Yoder, Bender and Fisher. By 1902 the church reached its highest membership, when there were thirty-eight members. Their new church was dedicated in July, 1898, with a sermon in English by Daniel Johns of Goshen, Indiana. Disagreements between the church leaders divided the congregation into factions with the result that members began to move away and the church became extinct. In spite of the handicaps under which the church labored, at least four of the young men of the community later became Mennonite elders, and a number of others ministers.

In 1897-1898 several Amish Mennonite families settled in Pocahontas County, in the vicinity of Rolfe and Gilmore City. Coming from Illinois were the families of Joseph Good, Jacob Zimmerman, Joseph Zimmerman, Peter Miller, Joseph

Miller, and Henry Horsch. From Minnesota came the families of Andrew, Joseph, and Peter Shantz. They never had an organized church but Sebastian Gerig and Daniel Graber from the Sugar Creek church in Henry County preached for them at least once a year and the members occasionally attended services in the Wright County church as well as in the Manson Mennonite church, fifteen miles away. When Joseph Good moved to Henry County in 1902, the settlement began to break up.

In 1887 a "Stauffer" Mennonite settlement was begun in Osceola County when Bishop Jesse S. Bauman settled on his 480 acres in section 9 of Harrison Township. He was followed by his assistant pastor Josiah Martin, and by deacon Elias Bowman, all from Ontario, Canada, and by other families from Lancaster and Snyder counties, Pennsylvania, and from Ontario and Michigan.

The Stauffer Mennonites were a small, conservative group who separated from the Mennonite church at Groffdale, Pennsylvania, in 1846, as followers of Jacob Stauffer. This sect was always small and in 1959 numbered less than 500. Stressing simplicity and uniformity their houses and barns followed a common pattern so that many years after they had left Iowa, their community could be recognized by its distinctive architecture. Their little red church, built after 1894, was a symbol of their separation from the customs and standards of their non-Mennonite neighbors.

The economic success of Bishop Bauman caused him to accept modern inventions which had been prohibited in the Mennonite neighborhood, and to compromise his ideals in personal behaviour to the extent that the church turned against him and the congregation disintegrated, becoming extinct by 1915. So the names of Bauman, Brubacker, Martin, Auker, Gingrich, Stauffer, Weaver, Gregory, and Gehman have disappeared from Harrison Township.

A much more successful church was the one established in Calhoun County, in the vicinity of Manson. In 1892 and after, a number of families from Woodford and Bureau counties, Illinois, moved here to obtain cheap land and to settle where their children could procure farms. Among the first Amish Mennonite settlers were the families of Jacob Summers, Peter Ulrich, Catherine Ulrich, Joseph Eigsti, and Joseph Zook. Other family names added to the community in the early years were Baughman, Gingerich, Zehr, and Weiss. By 1936 the church enrollment had mounted to 328 but it later declined when a number of families moved to Pennsylvania. The church had had its greatest increase between 1911 and 1915 when nearly twenty families moved in from Illinois and Indiana. In 1939 the membership totalled 280.

The community started a Sunday school in 1896 but a church was not organized until October

1897, partly because of the presence in the community of "Stuckey Amish," a group from Illinois who had discarded the dress regulations generally followed by Amish Mennonites. Later four or five Stuckey Amish families did join the Amish Mennonite congregation. In April, 1899, Joseph Eigsti was ordained to be the preacher in their church and in May, 1902, Andrew Zehr was ordained to assist Eigsti. In 1903 the congregation built a meetinghouse two and one-half miles southeast of Manson, known as the Cedar Creek Amish Mennonite Church. In 1913 a new church was erected in Manson, which was replaced by a beautiful, modern structure in 1957.

The church throughout its history has been progressive, early changing to the English language, adopting lesson quarterlies, establishing a Sunday school primary department, holding evangelistic meetings and evening meetings, organizing a sewing circle, having church choristers and quartet singing, conducting mission Sunday schools, and absorbing non-Mennonite Germans, Swedes, English, and Danes into its membership long before these practices were general in the majority of Amish Mennonite churches. The congregation became a member of the Iowa-Nebraska Mennonite Conference in 1921.

The latest Iowa county to be entered by the Mennonites is Woodbury. Southeast of Sioux City at Luton the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren

Church established a congregation in February, 1941, when about a dozen families from dried out areas near Jansen and Henderson, Nebraska, moved to this state. They were later joined by a few families from Colorado. In 1956 they had 38 members.

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