

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Amish in Wright County

The Amish people who settled in Wright County during the early 1890's were descendants of what is known in history as the Anabaptist Movement which had its origin in Switzerland in the early part of the sixteenth century. The leaders of this movement, Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock and William Reublin, were highly trained theologians, graduates of the universities of their time. They disagreed not only with the state church of that day but also with the leaders of the other main dissenting movements — the Reformed in Switzerland, and the main theological doctrines of the Christian church, but they differed widely on other points.

The Anabaptists accepted the Bible as the highest authority for their faith, morals, life and conduct. From their very beginning, they stood for a complete separation of church and state. They rejected infant baptism and held that the rite should be administered only upon a voluntary confession of faith. They believed that the author-

ity for church discipline and ecclesiastical administration and control is based on the teachings of the Scripture and is vested in the congregation rather than in the pronouncements of some ecclesiastical body. They were opposed to participating in war, and since they lived in an era when nations were much involved in warfare they were, for this reason as well as for their differing doctrinal views, persecuted and driven from place to place in Europe and finally landed in large numbers in what is now the United States long before 1776.

The Amish, together with the Quakers, Mennonites and other religious groups, founded homes along the Atlantic seaboard where they could live in peace, and worship in accordance with the principles and doctrines in which they so deeply believed. From these eastern sea-board states they migrated westward, following the lure of the land, and founded what became the large and prosperous settlements in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and other states of the Union and Canada.

The Amish were for the most part highly skilled and industrious farmers whose services were eagerly sought after by the large land owners and proprietors of estates in Europe. Among them were also to be found highly skilled craftsmen such as carpenters, blacksmiths, masons and such other crafts and trades as were connected with the community life of their co-religionists. It was from this group that the Johnson, Washington,

and Iowa County Amish came during the middle of the nineteenth century.

*Amish Unrest in Southeastern Iowa*

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century there was considerable unrest among the Amish people in the southeastern Iowa settlement. Land was selling for forty to fifty dollars per acre, which was then considered a high price. The colony was large and was becoming somewhat crowded and there was in fact not much land for sale. Beside this, there was also a growing dissatisfaction with the regulations and rigid enforcement of the social customs of the church.

From their beginning in Europe the Amish held their worship services in the homes of the members on account of the severe persecutions. They tended to settle in the secluded mountain areas where they were less disturbed instead of the large and more densely populated centers. After their migration to America, they followed this custom of "house-meetings" largely because they were widely scattered and because they were poor. By the time they were able to build churches, this practice had become so fixed that it became a set and established custom of their religion. However, with the growth of the congregations, this became more or less burdensome and many of the members desired to depart from the old forms and transfer their public worship to houses adapted to such usages which were set apart for that purpose.

As a lad of ten to twelve years of age I heard the problem discussed pro and con during visits in the homes of friends and relatives. Since there seemed to be no possibility of effecting a change in this as well as modifications of some of their cultural practices, some of the members began to think of starting a new settlement elsewhere. By the summer of 1892 sentiment had become sufficiently crystallized so that a party consisting of Shem Swartzendruber, Joe C. Gingerich and Will Kreider undertook an exploratory tour across the state of Iowa. They traveled by team and wagon seeking a suitable place to locate a new colony.

#### *The Investigating Tour*

The party got under way after harvest in 1892, and entered upon what was then considered, by the people of the community, as a rather venturesome undertaking. They were equipped with a camping outfit and, as I recall the story, were prepared to sleep in the covered wagon most nights.

I have not been able to locate a log of their journey. In fact, I am not sure that they kept a detailed or even a sketchy record of their travels and the day by day happenings. However, through the conversations and discussions during the Sunday visits in the homes of friends and neighbors, we learned something of their experiences and of the route of their travels. Some of their adventures especially intrigued us boys.

One night, so the story goes, after the horses

had been taken care of and the men had bedded down for the night, a sudden wind and rain storm struck the community where they were encamped and carried away the canvas covering of their wagon. The horses were set free, and the wagon was started down the hill on a rather precarious journey, to what might well have become a very tragic destination. By the time the slumbering occupants were thoroughly awakened and realized what was going on, their improvised "pullman" was gathering momentum for its run down the grade. The adventurers, Swartzendruber, Gingerich and Kreider, very scantily and indecorously clad, climbed out of their "berths" pell-mell, and brought the runaway vehicle under control before it met with disaster. After some difficulty they retrieved their horses and continued their journey.

There is no detailed record of their route available but I recall hearing them talk of Polk, Tama, Dallas, Guthrie, Grundy, Carroll, Webster and Wright counties. I am not sure that their itinerary took them through all these places, but Wright County seems to have been the place which they thought would be best suited to establish the new settlement. So it was finally decided that "this is the place." In Wright County, they said, the soil was good. There is a saying that an Amishman can determine the quality of soil by his sense of smell! They reported land comparatively cheap, plenty of good water and friendly people.

This favorable report set the people of the community astir as were their ancestors when they left their homes in Pennsylvania in the 1840's to begin life anew in Johnson County, when that part of Iowa was being settled. During the fall of 1892-1893 a number of families were ready to make the move. But before any of them would risk an investment in land, they wanted to be assured that a church of their faith would be established. This could not be accomplished unless a minister could be found to accompany the group. For a time it looked as though the plan for the projected colony would have to be abandoned. At that juncture Solomon Swartzendruber from Inman, Kansas, appeared in Iowa, his former home, looking for a location. He was an able minister and an ordained Bishop in the Amish church. After much consultation he decided to locate in a new colony.

#### *Beginnings of the Settlement*

Some time during the early winter of 1892, Shem Swartzendruber, C. S. Yoder and Will Kreider went to Clarion and purchased each an eighty-acre farm. During the same winter Solomon Swartzendruber, John Gunden and Sol Yoder also purchased land in the same community, and in the spring of 1893 all of them, with the exception of John Gunden, moved to their newly purchased farms, southwest of Clarion.

Soon after their arrival a church was organized and meetings were regularly held in what was

then known as the Gillette school house in Dayton Township. At last, in 1898, a church was built one mile east of the Dayton Center School. A cemetery was located on land owned by D. K. Yoder, and later by Joel Swarzendruber. In this plot were buried my twin brother, Sam, Mrs. Jonas Yoder, Mrs. Will Kreider and several infants that were stillborn or died soon after birth. This cemetery was vacated when the farm on which it was located passed out of Swarzendruber's possession and the new owner expressed a desire to have it moved. The remains of those who were buried there were taken up in 1941 and removed to the family burial ground north of Kalona, Iowa, which is near their former home.

*First Impressions of the New Home*

This change of location opened wide new vistas for us boys. Wright County was then, as it is now, a beautiful place. The level landscape stretched on and on for miles. One often sought vainly for some object on which to rest his eyes, only to find nothing but an empty horizon. The unbroken prairie lands were covered with native grasses and became in the springtime, literally a sea of flowers — phlox of various colors, wild roses and to us, it seemed, countless other species. As soon as the prairies were dry in springtime, the evening skies were often aglow with fires the farmers set to burn away the waste of the former year and make way for the new growth that came

with the warmth of the season. Prairie chickens, turtle doves, wild pigeons and meadow larks filled the morning air with their unforgettable melodies. He saw, too, for the first time, the jack rabbits, the long-eared denizens of the plains. Fifty years later I saw specimens of the same rabbit family, hopping across the wide pampas of Argentina.

Here, too, on the Iowa prairie we encountered the wild winds that swept unchecked across the open plains, and in winter time filled the willow groves that surrounded the prairie homes, with snow that was often banked as high as tree tops. I presume it was considered good that the new colonists who came from the hills and timber-sheltered places of southeastern Iowa, should at once become acquainted with the varied types of weather of the new land to which they came. One March morning, a few weeks after we arrived, we rose to see the air filled with snow as we had never seen it before. By the time the storm subsided, the drifts in the grove were as high as the house in which we lived. During the spring months, the winds swept up clouds of dust that turned the noonday into twilight and filled one's ears and nostrils with the good Iowa soil.

One of the most exciting episodes that came out of one of those gales was when Sol Yoder's hat blew away. Sol's mood was never very exhilarating when the atmosphere was filled with flying dust, but on this particular occasion it affected him



differently. A sudden blast of wind lifted his hat high in the air, where it circled around a few times like a bird trying to get its bearings and then sailed away across the field where we were working. Like a dutiful youngster that wanted to be helpful, I took off after it, when I heard him calling, "Let it go, another one will be coming along pretty soon!" To find Sol in such a state of mind under such circumstances was worth the inconvenience of a first rate dust storm!

Not only did those new colonists discover dust storms, they also discovered what a real tornado is like. It struck several miles north from the place where we lived. The following Sunday, father and Will Krieder took us children to see the wreckage. We had never before seen such a demolition of buildings, machinery, uprooting of trees, and destruction of fences. They pointed out to us the place where one man was caught by the storm and killed when he went to get his smokepipe. By some of the anti-tobacco users, especially the women, this was considered a called strike, *Divinely called*, against the use of tobacco.

#### *Wright County Soil*

That spring these newcomers learned also how sticky the good, black soil of those northern counties is. All of them had to refurnish and re-equip their plows and cultivators with new shares, mouldboards and shovels, casehardened and highly tempered. After that first year they always

plowed in the fall when there was less moisture in the soil and their implements scoured well.

They also discovered the "nigger-heads," rocks of various sizes — some very large — which rode in on the glaciers that invaded the country countless ages ago and were scattered widely across the landscape. They were the original "hitchhikers" that had "thumbed" their way from the icefields of the north to a more salubrious environment in the temperate zone. When the ice sheets were driven back by the onslaught of the warming rays of the sun, these boulders were left stranded and became for the most part unwelcome intruders into a strange environment from which they could not extricate themselves. Contact with them drew very unappreciative and crude remarks from the later invaders who came to till the soil and prepare seed-beds for growing grain. The old-timers, who had received many a "wallop" in the ribs by the plow handles, or had broken plow shares or harness or machinery when their plows or cultivators struck one of the "wanderers," as geologists rightly call them, had developed what might well be called a "nigger-head" vocabulary which profusely colored their language when they discussed the subject.

Then, too, there was another class of objectionable factors that grew out of the life of the country. The Indians to which we youngsters were more or less accustomed in our Johnson County

homes were missing. Each year from our earliest childhood we had seen groups of them that came from their homes in Tama County with their squaws, papooses, ponies, dogs, and little boys who entertained the visiting crowds with their skills with bows and arrows and extracted many a coin in return for their showmanship while they were encamped in the woods on the Scurlock hill south of Sharon Center. Instead of these children of a fading race, there were clouds of mosquitoes, ravenous and blood thirsty, worse and less controllable, but not as deadly as the Indians during their wildest times. They not only worked at night, but in daytime as well, and made life a nightmare.

Here, too, we discovered new friends — the Fletchers, Dalgrens, Fishers, Swaungers, Whites, Henleys, Frakes, and others to whom we strangers were more or less a curious set. But the country baseball, "shinny," a crude form of hockey, and other activities are great social levelers and equalizers — we soon had many friends.

Along with other things we discovered a new body of reading material, much of which was considered by our elders, especially our mother, as being quite unorthodox. We boys, Sam and I, were in that period of our lives when excitement and adventure of certain sorts appeal to such youngsters. We had previously acquired some knowledge of the life activities of the James Boys, the Younger Brothers, the Dalton Gang, and

Quantrell and his men. Now we discovered this material for sale on the book-shelves and ten-cent counters of the local drug stores. It was not long until we had invested such money as came into our possession in what we considered the beginning of a very interesting library. We, however, soon discovered that all of this type of literature was on the proscribed list. Our mother had never studied the history of the Middle Ages or of the Reformation and knew nothing of the Inquisition or the Index. But she had very set ideas about the kind of literature she did not want her boys to read, and had compiled an index of her own. As the result of what we considered a very unfortunate attitude on her part, we frequently found that our library had been raided and our books confiscated. Then the fires of the Inquisition burned again and volume after volume went up in smoke!

We came to Wright County when a large part of the country was still native, unbroken prairie, much of which was unfenced. Roads, such as there were, usually followed the higher ground, crisscross across the sections. Father had bought the Morton place some five miles southwest of Clarion. At that time the land had not been drained. During the wet season the ponds, that resembled the Buffalo Wallows of the Great Plains, were filled with water and croaking frogs that stirred the evening air with their unmelodious melodies. These water holes became in winter-

time good skating places — when they were filled with water. In summertime they became swimming pools where the youngsters of the community battled with the swarms of mosquitoes for possession of these insect-infested premises.

But the coming of settlers frequently disturbs, and disrupts, and sometimes destroys, the beauty which nature bestows upon the country. During the first year of our residence in the country, the county put a large drainage ditch through our land and the adjoining farms. Here we boys had our first contact with the work oxen which were used to move the capstans from place to place. We also became familiar with the ox-drivers, whose language, while on duty, was heavily loaded with strong words. I presume a muleskinner would consider it an insult to be credited with having anything in common with those who handle oxen, but after having become familiar with the vocabularies of both, I really cannot see any difference.

#### *Expansion and Growth of the Colony*

Many visitors came to see what the country is like during the summer and fall after the first settlers arrived. Most of them were people who were interested in the new settlement and were exploring the possibility of joining the colony. A number of families purchased land — Joe C. Gingerich, Eli Swartzendruber, Eli Miller, John Gunden, Abe Swartzendruber, Daniel Gingerich, and D. K. Yoder — and the following spring, 1894,

moved into the community. Later the same year, Mrs. Christner and her two daughters, Susan and Leah, arrived from Ontario, Canada, and took up their abode with the D. K. Yoder family. In the spring of 1895 another group of families consisting of S. M. Bender, Jacob Swartzendruber, Joel Swartzendruber, John Fisher, and Jonas Yoder came and acquired farms southwest of Clarion.

Whatever growth the Amish community made after that came about through marriages. Over a period of years the following couples were married and lived for a longer or shorter time in the community: Ike Swartzendruber and Barbara Swartzendruber, Paul Dlugosh and Eva Ratzlaff, Joel Guengerich and Lena Yoder, George Reber and Sarah Kreider, Eli Kauffman and Maude Swartzendruber, Joe Eiman and Alice Yoder, John Kisor and Lovina Gingerich, Fred Gingerich and Katie Leichty, Edward Pletcher and Dora Swartzendruber.

The days when the new immigrants arrived with their car loads of live stock, farm machinery, household furnishings and other equipment were great days for the boys of the community. Those occasions provided opportunities to stay out of school to drive the cattle from the railroad station to the home of the newcomer and to eat a good meal at the restaurant or at tables loaded with good Pennsylvania Dutch food which the women had prepared at the home of the new arrivals.

But the greatest day of all was the one when my father's (C. S. Yoder) steam engine arrived. It came loaded on a flat car which was set out on the siding close by the depot. A large crowd gathered in the railroad yards to see how this unloading would be done. I recall with what pride I looked upon my father, Shem Swartzendruber and Will Kreider, who knew just what to do to get it off the car. But the greatest thrill came when father went up town to get some supplies and left me, a thirteen year lad, to "fire-up" and "oil-up" the engine and get it ready for the road.

At that time a good deal of threshing in the community was still done with horsepower-driven machinery. Clarence Conklin, a neighbor of ours, had a J. I. Case threshing machine which was equipped for horsepower. This was changed for use with steam power and father's steam engine and Conklin's separator did the threshing for the community that fall.

#### *The Depression of 1893*

These new immigrants had just occupied their homes and were becoming acquainted with their new neighbors and the country when the Cleveland Depression struck. Prices fell appallingly, and hard times set in. It seems that people are never ready for such a shock. The next year — 1894 — was dry and crops were poor. Father sold his farm and rented some farming land for the year 1895. That season there was an abundant

amount of rainfall and crops were good. The population of Wright County had perhaps never before seen such a large crop of small grain. The threshing season lasted until Christmas. Though horse powered threshing equipment had practically gone out of use within the previous few years, during this year of the "Big Crop" every kind of threshing machinery available was brought into action and steam outfits were shipped in from as far away as Illinois, to help save the grain that was in danger of being spoiled by the abundant rains that continued throughout the season.

But prices were low. One day, in 1895, father sent me to Eagle Grove with a load of oats, fifty bushels, for which I received one dollar and fifty cents — three cents per bushel. The next year, which was election year, prices were at the bottom. Corn sold for seven and eight cents per bushel. Many farmers used it for fuel, which was cheaper than buying coal. In the mornings, when we boys went out to do chores, the whole country smelled like pop-corn. Many people went into bankruptcy. Some of them left the country after dark with such of their furnishings and equipment as they could haul, and left the rest with a profane blessing upon the head of their landlords, some of whom had threatened to dispossess the tenant of all his possessions. Some landlords actually did!

But there were landowners who were considerate of the plight of their tenants and shared with



them their losses or otherwise helped them through the difficult times to the day when conditions changed and prosperity returned again. During those years long lines of corn cribs grew up around the fringe of the towns where we lived. They were built by people who had money or credit, and were filled with low priced corn which they held for higher prices which they were sure would come again. Their conjectures were correct. In 1899 and 1900 corn sold at a good profit.

I recall, also, very clearly the long lines of idle men who traveled the roads, "rode the rods" or the "Blind Baggage" or boxcars as they went from place to place seeking jobs, or begging for food and clothing. Some of them, no doubt, joined up with the great crowd of the destitute, "the unwanted," that drifted hither and yon because they liked that kind of life. At night they slept at school houses, or by haystacks, straw-piles, in corn cribs or grain bins or in the grass by the wayside. They gathered such food as they could acquire by begging or otherwise, and cooked it in the "Jungles" along the way. Our school was located a short distance from the Mason City and Ft. Dodge railroad and almost every morning during the winter months there was evidence of someone having slept in the house during the night. In a way this was not too unacceptable, because the house was always warm the following morning when the teacher and pupils arrived.

The enthusiastic Kansas-Nebraska-Colorado immigrants that followed the highways to the west a few years earlier with their hopes "Nebraska or Bust" inscribed on their canvas-covered wagons, now came drifting back along the same route after having lost everything in the financial debacle and drouth of the Great Plains, except that a few salvaged a spark of their humor and substituted for their former motto the word "Busted!"

As a rule the people of the community were not unsympathetic with these "busted wayfarers" and shared with them their plain, home-produced food of which there was plenty. But they had little time or substance to give to those who traveled through the country to put on a show. One day, a young man, dressed in full cowboy regalia and outfitted with a new hand-tooled saddle, a highly ornamented bridle, leather chaps, spurs and a new Winchester, rode into the yard of the place where I was working. The outfit would have met all the specifications of my boyish desires a few years earlier. We had just come in from following the corn plow back and forth along the corn rows that seemed almost endless. We were hungry and dirty and were in the process of getting washed up for dinner. Our caller ordered his meal and horse feed much the same as one would order it at a public eating place and Livery Barn.

When my employer discovered that our prospective guest was not interested in work of any

kind, he informed him that his dinner would cost him twenty-five cents. He then left in what could not have been construed as a very happy mood. The good county folk had a hard time to make a living but they were always ready to help those who were actually in need. This youngster that was turned away that time, was the harbinger of a new day and a new vocation — the “Dude Ranches” and the modern “Dude Ranchers.”

The hard years of the Depression made a profound impression on us, my twin brother Sam and me. We could no longer play the role of care-free boys, but were obliged to assume responsibilities that usually come to youngsters at a more mature period in their lives. My father was caught in the depression and had to start anew in a small way. We boys secured places where we worked for board during the winter, feeding cattle and doing chores. There was much snow and ice but we were up from early morning until late in the evening to get our work done. As a result my brother Sam's health broke from which he never recovered. He lingered on another year and died.

By that time my “Dream world” was badly shaken. My boyhood plans to become an engineer or a horse-dealer collapsed. My problems were not only unsolved but new ones were added. The farm with its toil, early and late, had no attraction for me. Boys who had to leave their homes during those hard years and work long hours for the low

wages their employer could afford to pay, will not soon forget those days.

I was fortunate to secure a place to work on a farm for seventeen dollars per month, which was then considered good wages. I am sure, though, that the good man who hired me, had in mind my father's need, rather than my reputation as a hired hand. I drew two dollars of my wages, when I started to work that spring. With that I bought a pair of "plow shoes," a pair of overalls, and two shirts. When I quit working at the end of nine months, I drew the balance of my wages — one hundred and fifty dollars — and gave it to my father to help him get started again.

#### *The Dawn of a New Day*

Following the election of 1896 some hopeful signs began to appear along the horizon. McKinley was elected to the office of President of the United States, after what was probably one of the most intense, and to us youngsters, exciting campaigns in the history of American politics. The major object of the 1896 presidential campaigners was educational, although the speeches were not free from epithets and language colorations that usually mark such oratorical efforts. The Republicans laid the blame for the hard times on the doorstep of the Cleveland administration and the Democratic party. They insisted that prosperity and the full dinner pail for the laboring man would come by way of a High Protective Tariff and the

then prevailing Gold Standard. The Democrats offered to remedy the situation by resorting to the Free Coinage of Silver and a Tariff for Revenue.

One wonders whether such an array of oratorical talent was ever brought into action in all the campaign history of the country. At Clarion, as in many other places, where auditorium space was not available or adequate, a tent was put up on a plot adjoining the county jail and was not taken down until after the election. It must have been a "Republican Tent" for as I recall now, only orators of that persuasion spoke from its platform. William Jennings Bryan, the "Great American Commoner," championed the cause of the "Common man" and traveled from one end of the country to the other, stopping at cities, villages and hamlets along the way expounding his doctrines to the crowds that collected to hear him.

This contest became more interesting to us youngsters than anything we had ever seen. Here were great orators — some of them — delivering their arguments, well seasoned with invectives to inspire the voters and win them to their cause. We, my brother and I, walked the five miles to town one evening each week during the campaign to march in the Torchlight processions and listen to what these "Apostles of Democracy" had to say. The town of Clarion contributed some of the oratorical talent to this campaign. Rev. John Rowan was rewarded for his

services with the consulship in the Falkland Islands off the east coast of the southern tip of Argentina. John Denison, a young lawyer, campaigned for the cause represented by William Jennings Bryan. He was later nominated for the office of Lieutenant Governor of Iowa. I clearly recall the morning when the Honorable John Rowan and his family left Clarion to begin their long trip to the bleak islands of the south Atlantic. He wore a long Prince Albert coat and a "stove pipe" hat which were then marks of standing in the political forum, and impressive to a country lad.

With the election of McKinley a new optimism arose and now that the first flickerings of the dawn of better days appeared, the people took courage and girded up their strength for the future. The bankers, who were for the most part "Gold Standard" men, assured the farmers that the price of corn would go up to eighteen cents per bushel. Business, they said, and happy days were just around the corner. The year following, it appeared that the depression had about spent its force. Prices gradually rose. The Spanish-American War in 1898 added excitement to the scene and people found courage to cheer as the troops marched away to take part in the conflict.

During the depression I had dropped out of school. Hence any occupation that required an education seemed too remote to even be considered. But I was always fond of books, and in

spite of the long hours of toil on the farm I found time to read. Our venture in setting up a library had, as already noted, not fared too well. There was, however, one section that withstood the censorship of the "Inquisition." Among the books that survived were such titles as: *Kilpatrick and His Cavalry, With Lee in Virginia, A Troopers Adventure in the War for the Union, American Statesmen and Patriots*, and a small collection of United States Histories. These and other books were read and reread during rainy days, holidays and Sundays, and influenced my thinking a great deal. I discovered that boys by the sheer power of their will, rose out of seemingly impossible situations to positions of influence and honor. I thought that perhaps a boy who came out of the depression era in which I grew could do it too.

During the summer of 1897 most of my Sundays were spent at home with my ailing twin brother while the rest of the family attended church services at the little school house a few miles away. This provided long hours when we were alone and could discuss our plans. I confided in him my dissatisfaction with the farm and my interest in the legal profession. He had plans also for his future which were as difficult and seemingly impossible as mine. We promised to help each other. If someone with our present-day view of what to do with boys, who had plans as hopeless as ours seemed to be, could have

listened to our conversation he would likely have sent for a psychiatrist. The next spring, 1898, on a mild March day, when the first stirrings of summer were in the air, Sam left us. A few days later we laid him away in the little cemetery near the plot where the church was later built.

But it was not only the books I read that influenced my thinking and gave direction to my life. Sam Bender, the man for whom I worked nearly two years, was not only a successful farmer but he was also deeply interested and well versed and read in the affairs of the community and the state. During the long winter evenings, or when we worked together, we discussed the problems of the day. One of his brothers had gone west to Nebraska where he established himself as a lawyer and, if I recall correctly, served as County Judge. Others to whom I owe much were my teachers, Jim Ross and Will Boyer, with whose help and encouragement I secured a license to teach and later entered high school. Another person who gave me courage to go on was John Denison, a young lawyer and orator of outstanding ability. He was one of Bryan's men during the 1896 campaign. It was through the influence of these men that I turned from the traditional Republicanism of the family and entered the Democratic fold, because I then believed that it championed the cause of the "Common people," who, Bryan and his cohorts told us, constituted the great reservoir of



common sense, good judgment, and moral strength in the population of our country. I believed that, off and on, with varying fidelity for forty years, when I returned to the fold in "sackcloth and ashes!"

I presume that my interest in politics dates back to my childhood when, in 1884, I saw the torch-light processions at the Boone School, near Sharon Center, and heard the Republicans sing:

"We'll hang Grover Cleveland on a sour apple-tree." A few evenings later we heard the Democrats threaten to do the same thing to Blaine!

My first experience in politics took place when I was twenty-one. John Denison called on me one day and informed me that I was chosen a delegate to the Democratic County Convention. From then on I was regularly appointed as a delegate to county, state and congressional conventions and was several times offered the nomination for county and other offices. And lastly and belatedly, but not of least importance, I found my way into the Ministry to which I have devoted more than fifty years of my time, serving for a number of years as pastor but most of the time in official connections with the organizations and institutional interests of the church. The last thirty-nine years were devoted to the cause of education at Goshen College, where I served as president and later as professor. And now, living in the glow of the sunset, I share, with some reservations, the philosophy of one of the Great American poets who said;

I am done with the years that were, I'm quits!  
I am done with the dead and old.  
They are mines worked out, I've delved in their pits,  
I have hoarded their grains of gold.

Now I turn to the future for wine and bread,  
I have hidden the past adieu.  
I laugh and lift hands to the years ahead,  
Come on, I am ready for you!

But my life is not empty, nor are the "Mines worked out," nor have I "bidden the past adieu." What I have gleaned during the days that are gone is deeply built into my life and has made me what I am, and will sustain me during the years when the Shadows length until the "trail runs out and the gates of the Homeland swing wide!"

#### *Community Social Life*

I am sure that the youngsters of the present time would consider the social activities of our youth very drab and uninteresting. Moving pictures, the "silent" kind, without color, made their first appearance in our community some years after the Spanish-American War. Rural telephone lines were hardly known, radio and television were unheard of. When, in 1900, the high school professor announced to his Physics class that wireless messages were being sent, he added that it would probably never have any useful value but would be a plaything for a few who could afford such luxuries. "Horseless carriages" appeared here and there. The phonograph was little

known. The first time I saw one was the time when Ringling Brothers' Circus showed in Clarion in 1893. A small one, of the cylinder type, equipped with ear phones, was set up on the sidewalk and people were charged ten cents to listen while a record was being played.

Instead of the movies there were the *Stock Company Shows* — the King-Perkins Company and others — which came regularly each year to the country towns to entertain the “show-going” people. Dancing and card playing were, by churchgoing people, considered bad. Cigarette smoking was not common but pipes from the corn-cob type to the French briar and the Meerschaum were widely used. Each grocery store had, in addition to the stock of supplies, a shelf loaded with many brands of plug chewing tobacco. Spit-toons were considered standard equipment in stores, offices, depots, hotels and all public places, as well as in many homes. How well I remember those ample ones at which the tobacco chewers aimed as they sat around the stoves during the winter and discussed the issues of the day, recounted the events of the past, or just sat. Some of them slept!

But let no one think that life was uninteresting and dull. There were spelling and ciphering matches which would now be given the more dignified name “Rapid Calculation Contests” at the country schoolhouses. These affairs were not

only interesting and entertaining but also educational. There were box-suppers to which the girls of the community brought lunches in home decorated boxes which were sold at auction to the highest bidder, followed by games of various kinds. In the spring there were May Basket hangings throughout the neighborhood, and in the summer there were baseball games and "shinny" — a crude form of hockey, adapted to the needs of country boys, and other activities that amply satisfied the youngsters of the community. Sometimes horse racing and boxing matches took place, the latter with frequently vicious aspects!

Each town had its baseball team which played teams of neighboring towns in what would today be called leagues, which developed some remarkably skillful players. The ones that come to the writer's mind now are John Goslin and Bert Fisher of Clarion, both of whom were outstanding pitchers. The Big League games were too far removed to receive much attention from us country boys but the local ones were most exciting.

The Literary Societies held at the school houses throughout the rural areas stirred the ambition and interest that country boys needed to develop their public speaking talents and furnish entertainment for people of the community. The debating contests were preceded by a program of recitations or essays on chosen or assigned subjects. Following a brief but noisy recess the debates took place

on such ponderous subjects as "Free Coinage of Silver at the ratio of 16 to 1 vs. The Gold Standard," or "A High Protective Tariff vs. A Tariff for Revenue Only." They also discussed questions dealing with art, science, religion and various other subjects. Among the "various" subjects was "Shall Bachelors be Taxed to Support Old Maids?"

Fortunately, there were in the community some old debaters who took part in these forensic activities. They had acquired their training in the forum of experience during their lives on the frontier and never lost their interest in such affairs. Among them were Will Henley, Jim and Tom Shillington, who were considered masters of the Old School of Oratory and were well versed and skilled in parliamentary procedure. From our association with them, we country boys learned a great deal and out of that group came a number of good debaters and parliamentarians. Several of them became ministers, teachers, and college professors. One became a judge, another a college president.

There were no automobiles and as a consequence the radius of a country boy's travels were limited. But bobsleds filled with hilarious youngsters and drawn by horses or mules went from place to place in wintertime without danger of missing a curve or of wrapping the vehicle around a tree or of falling asleep and hitting the abutments along the way. There were no head-on collisions, broken bones or cracked skulls, but there

were sometimes frostbitten noses, hands or feet.

There were other types of amusement. Rabbits were plentiful and sometimes we got a prairie chicken. In the fall and spring, ducks and geese made their perennial flights. On a nice warm spring day, a group of us boys decided to go duck hunting along the Iowa River. As we strolled along the ponds bordering the river, we noticed some objects in the water that looked like curled-up corn husks. With nothing else to shoot at, I fired on the water, and several fish turned up their white undersides and rose to the top, stunned and helpless. This changed the object of our expedition altogether, and we came home with a good mess of fish. I do not know now whether there was a law against such unorthodox fishing, but I'm sure the legal aspects of this affair are no longer a threat to the security of any members of the party that may live within the boundary of the state. About the moral implications I am not so sure! We were taught to be law abiding.

The crowning achievement of my years in Wright County was my graduation from Clarion High School in 1901. Professor May, who was then Superintendent of the city schools, was one of those great hearted souls who made a country boy feel that he is wanted. Miss Anderson, who later became Dean of a Girl's College in California, taught the English and Latin courses and Miss Rundall taught Mathematics and some of

the Science courses. All of them were good teachers. Hugh Carr was janitor of the school.

Of the class of fifteen who graduated that June evening in 1901, eight at this date still survive. One of the teachers, Miss Anderson, lives in California. Since that time I have graduated from a State University, a College of Law, and several Seminaries, but there was never a graduation as impressive as was the first one at Clarion. We had great plans for our lives, but judging from the present world situation we didn't do very well.

*Demise of the Wright County Settlement*

Such were the conditions, the life and times, during the years when a venture in colonization which gave such great promise of success finally broke and disappeared. It is altogether possible that the economic upheaval of 1893 to 1898 had some bearings upon the colonists. Some sought homes elsewhere, Oklahoma lured several in 1901.

That, however, was not the chief reason for the discontent that existed among them. They liked the country, their neighbors and their homes. They were good farmers and produced good crops. They held, in their religious beliefs, much in common with other evangelical groups of the country. What theological differences there were between them and the other groups gave them no trouble, and created no problem for them. It was out of the social customs which they had carried over from the past and now found difficult and

undesirable to maintain, that dissensions grew that would not heal, which finally brought about the dissolution of the colony.

Among the first ones to move away from the community was Sol Swartzendruber, their leading and ablest minister. With the weakening of their spiritual leadership, other problems arose and disintegration set in. Year by year other families left. The last ones to go were the C. S. Yoder, Joe Gingerich, Sam Bender and Eli Swartzendruber families, who left in 1910. The Yoders moved to Chappell, Nebraska, the Gingerichs and Benders to southeastern Iowa, the Pletcher family to Manson, and the Swartzendrubers to Missouri.

About the only remaining evidence of the existence of this colony is the large, frame barns with their distinguishing features that mark the place where members of that group had one time lived. A roof called a "Fore-bay" or "Fore-chute" was built over the entrance of the building under which their livestock could find shelter during bad weather and which also kept the snow from piling up against the doors.

After leaving Wright County, they, all of them, took up residence in Mennonite communities where the questions or problems that had caused the dissatisfaction in the Wright County settlement, did not exist, and most of them were absorbed into that faith.

SANFORD CALVIN YODER