

**Two Centuries of  
Struggle and Growth  
1763–1963**

**A History of Allegheny Mennonite Conference**

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"first settlers," we read that they already had neighbors by such common Mennonite names as Miller or Blough.

Another story should be written of this rapid immigration, for there are mysteries locked in it which have never been revealed by the historian's pen. The earliest tax assessment lists of Brothers Valley Township of Bedford County, an area which at that time included nearly all of present Somerset County, reveals the names of 135 family heads and single freemen, with as many as 94 landholders. In the first assessment list made in 1772 for the 1773 taxes appear the names of Cable, Fisher, Fry, Miller, Rhodes, Rice, Smith, Thomas, Bowman, Brunner, and Wingart. Some of these we know, however, to have belonged to the Tunker group. Familiar-sounding names in the second assessment list in 1773 include those of Michael Bekley, John Dillinger, Jacob Good, Jacob Gable, Jacob Huffman, Joseph Mishler, William Tice, George Shoemaker, Caspar Shrok, Solomon Kissonger, Frederick Keever, Philip Shaver, Lewis Rose, and still others that may have had Amish or Mennonite connections.<sup>3</sup>

In 1767 the extension of the Mason and Dixon Line had made this region part of Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> In 1768 the Six Nations (Iroquois) finally relinquished all claims to the Penn heirs to the lands south of the Kittanning River (including southwestern Pennsylvania) in the treaty of Fort Stanwix for the sum of 10,000 pounds. By 1769 the provincial government by proclamation had officially opened this territory to white settlers. On Feb. 23, 1769, the Penns published an advertisement for sale of land at the rate of five pounds (from \$20 to \$25 in current evaluation) for 100 acres, with a penny per acre "quit rent."

Samuel, Solomon, and Rachel Adams, for whom present day Adams Township of Cambria County is named, were the first white people "to locate, improve and till the soil" within the present limits of Cambria County.<sup>5</sup> In 1769 Charles Campbell took out a warrant for land on the site of present Johnstown. During this time Chief Pontiac was arousing the Indians as far west as the Mississippi against the English settlers. He had been an ally of the French and was not willing to accept the results of the French and Indian War. Settlers were being massacred in many places. Many fled back to the eastern part of the state. At this time two of the Adamses were massacred, Rachel near the present town of Geistown known today as Rachel Hill and Samuel near Sandy Run, close by the town of Elton. A small stream flowing into Johnstown, Solomon Run, carries the name of the other one of the trio, who lived many years afterward and who had a part in laying out the Frankstown Road (U. S. Highway 22) which was once recognized as the main road to Frankstown on the Juniata.

Sometime in the 1770's and perhaps earlier, the first Mennonites to settle in the region of the present Allegheny Conference arrived in the vicinity of Meyersdale. Doyle claims that Jacob Saylor and Peter Fahrney were in the area shortly after 1768.<sup>6</sup> These two men were the first ministers of the Mennonite faith in southwestern Pennsylvania.

In the year 1780 the first Mennonites came to northern Somerset County. Christian Miller ("Schmidt" Miller), an Amishman, purchased a beautiful tract of land from the Shawnee Indians near the Maple Spring Church of the

Brethren near Jerome (Calvin Thomas farm). Miller was known far and wide for his skill as a blacksmith and welder. Ten years later, Jacob Blough, the first Mennonite, arrived here. He was a brother of the Christian Blough of Berlin. He had come here after his service in the Revolutionary War. His grave, which is located near the Quemahoning Reservoir on a part of his original farm, can be seen just off Route 601 between Hollisopple and Jerome. His son, Jacob, was ordained minister in 1804 and bishop in 1814, the first Mennonite minister and bishop of the Johnstown District. His farm on which the first Mennonite Church was erected in 1836, now the Merbil Farm (formerly the Wesley Yoder farm) also has a small cemetery plot in which this Jacob is buried.

In 1789 the first Mennonite families began to trickle into the valley of Jacob's Creek in Fayette County near what is today the Scottdale community. One is made to wonder again, however, whether the first four families listed in Edward Yoder's excellent history of Westmoreland County Mennonites,<sup>7</sup> were really the first, for in scanning the tax lists of 1783 in the Pennsylvania Archives, one notes such apparently Mennonite names as Miller, Johnson, and Shetler.

To the east in Mifflin County, John Zook, the first settler, bought land in the Kishacoquillas Valley in 1792. Settlements by white people had been made there, however, as early as 1755.

In 1793 Joseph Schantz, another Amishman, who had first settled in Berlin, sold his plot of ground, and purchased a large tract of ground (formerly the Campbell tract) at the site of the old Indian village of Connumah. Here in 1800 he laid out a city which later was named after him, Schantztown (Johnstown). It is the only city of its size (112,000) that has ever been founded or named after an Amishman or a Mennonite.

To the north, in Butler County, Abraham Ziegler and his group took over the old Harmony Colony in 1815. This settlement seems never to have had any direct organic connection with the Mennonites of southwestern Pennsylvania. As a Mennonite community it became extinct by the end of the century shortly thereafter.

Farther to the north and east, in Centre County, another group of settlers from Lancaster County located on territory near Howard as early as 1789 on land granted to them by the Federal government. Some of these early settlers, not in the true nonresistant tradition, had taken part in the Revolutionary War and were awarded grants of land such as were given at the time to veterans of the Revolutionary War. This church, too, was destined to become extinct, though some efforts were made by its last minister at the time when the Allegheny Conference was formed, to become affiliated with the Conference, seemingly with the hope of perpetuating the work.

The church begun in Clearfield County through the early settlement of John Brubaker in 1839, had a more successful career, though it, too, eventually ended its career in 1962 as a Mennonite congregation.<sup>8</sup>

Thus by 1840 the roster of settlements had been completed, and the churches of the Allegheny Conference area had been launched for better or for worse. Table 2 shows in chronological order the settlements and events

21. Waterman-Watkins History, *op. cit.*, p. 484
22. Ammon Kaufman derived this from an interview with the late Dr. E. C. Saylor of Meyersdale, who had made a study of the Seiler-Saylor history.
23. Salisbury Centennial Souvenir Book, p. 40.
24. Minute Book of the Quarterly Meetings of the Springs Mennonite Church. Early records compiled by D. H. Bender, H. H. Blauch, Ed Miller, and N. E. Miller, pp. 3, 4. In custody of Springs Church.
25. A History of the Wilhelms and the Wilhelm Charge. The Historical Committee of St. Paul's Reformed Church, Wilhelm Press, Meyersdale, Pa. 1919. p. 39.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Minute Book of the Springs Quarterly Meetings.
28. Edna Beiler, "Minding God in Casselman Valley," *Southwestern Pennsylvania Conference News*, Vol XI, No. 2 (Nov.-Dec., 1953).
29. Information given by Ed Miller, Inwood, W. Va., Aug. 1, 1962. Miller was one of the signers of the petition circulated by Simon Miller. Tub mills common in an earlier day were a kind of turbine with water falling straight down into a kind of tub with fins.
30. Articles of Agreement, in custody of Homer Yoder, Springs, Pa.
31. This statement is based on the fact that at least once it was referred to in the *Herald of Truth* as the "John Folk" Church.
32. Interview with Aaron Miller, son of the late G. D. Miller, August, 1962.
33. Minute Book of the Springs Quarterly Meeting.
34. One year earlier collections were decided upon and there is some indication that this may have been the year of the first Quarterly Meeting, instead.
35. From the personal records of Ed Miller. Evidently at this time the church was being referred to at times as the "Chestnut Spring Church".
36. J. S. Coffman, in the *Herald of Truth*, Vol. 23, No. 23 (Nov. 15, 1886).
37. Minute Book of Springs Quarterly Meeting.
38. J. S. Hartzler and Daniel Kauffman, *Mennonite Church History*. Mennonite Publishing House. pp. 230, 231.
39. Minute Book of the Springs Quarterly Meeting.
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. From a letter by Paul E. Bender, January, 1951.
43. *Herald of Truth*, May 1, 1894.
44. It seems there is some difference of opinion as to this event. A. C. Walls who was present on that occasion "peeping in a window," says the wedding took place in the afternoon of the dedication day. The above in the text is taken from the Kaufman manuscripts.
45. History of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Conference, pp. 51-71.
46. Ed Miller, "Trip to Gortner with a Model T," from the private collections of poems and writings of Ed Miller, and from a personal interview, August, 1962.
47. History of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Conference.
48. Personal interview with Ed Miller, August, 1962.
49. From the personal records of Ed Miller.
50. Interview with M. B. Miller, Aug. 24, 1962.
51. Southwestern Pennsylvania Conference Minutes, 1928, p. 6.
52. The term "upon confession of faith" refers to those who had previously been baptized, and "reclaiming" refers to members who had left the church and were received back into fellowship.
53. In a talk given by C. M. Helmick at Johnstown Bible School.
54. Minute Book of the Springs Quarterly Meeting (Nov. 3, 1929).
55. News note in *Southwestern Pennsylvania Conference Mission News*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (Nov.-Dec., 1947).
56. Ressler Tressler, in a symposium on "Our Mission Sunday Schools." *Ibid.*, Vol. III, No. 4 (March, 1939).
57. *Ibid.*, May 18, 1938.
58. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, No. 5.

Table 4  
CASSELMAN VALLEY MINISTRY

Name	Deacon	Ministry	Bishop
Jacob Seiler (Saylor), 1715-1793		X	
John Seiler (Saylor), 1740-1822		X	
Peter Fahrney (Forrey, Forney) <sup>1</sup> ?		X	
Joseph Gunty <sup>2</sup> ?		X	
Henry H. Blauch, 1828-1904			1853
John Folk, 1822-1898	1856		
Jonas Blauch, <sup>3</sup> 1830-1906		1862	1885
David Keim, 1832-1915		1870	1875
William C. Livengood, <sup>4</sup> 1845-1921	1874		
David Maust, <sup>5</sup> ?-1929		1882	
D. H. Bender, <sup>6</sup> 1866-1945		1887	1912
H. M. Gelnett, <sup>7</sup> 1866-1930		1887	
G. D. Miller, 1862-1941		1891	
David W. Maust, 1857-1929	1891		
J. L. Kinsinger, 1869-1944	1898		
Ed Miller, <sup>8</sup> 1876-		1899	
Issac K. Metzler, <sup>9</sup> 1888-	1912	1916	1924
N. E. Miller, 1880-1930		1912	1912
M. B. Miller, 1892-		1920	1938
A. C. Walls, 1887		1927	
Chester M. Helmick, <sup>10</sup> 1899-		1929	
W. E. Haning, 1879-1931	1929		
Roy Otto, 1902-		1930	1938
Robert Dayton, 1894-1953		1930	
Simon J. Maust, 1876-1943	1931		
Sherman Tressler, 1894-	1932		
Ressler Tressler, 1897-1956		1937	
Roy L. Kinsinger, 1900-		1937	
Elmer Miller, 1903-	1942		
Newton Weber, <sup>11</sup> 1897-		1921	
Alva Yoder, 1908-	1943		
Walter Otto, 1907-		1944	
Paul E. Bender, 1925-		1949	
Darrel D. Otto, <sup>12</sup> 1930-		1949	
D. L. Swartzentruber, 1895-		1952	
Milton Beachy, <sup>13</sup> 1910-	1948		
Allen Lehman Longenecker, <sup>14</sup> 1914-		1953	
Vernon Yoder, 1926-		1957	
Claude R. Beachy, <sup>15</sup> 1927-		1957	
Abner Miller, <sup>16</sup> 1909-		1957	
Meivin Beiler, 1917-		1958	
Alva D. Tice, 1926-		1958	
Henry E. Yoder, 1918-	1958		
Norman Teague, <sup>17</sup> 1925-		1959	
Mahlon Miller, 1931-		1961	
George Townsend, 1933-		1962	
Allen Beachy, 1936-		1962	
James Burkholder, 1934-		1963	

<sup>1</sup> affiliated with the United Brethren Church, 1808.

<sup>2</sup> affiliated with the United Brethren Church, 1808.

<sup>3</sup> moved to Westmoreland Co., Pa., 1865, and later to Johnstown District where he was ordained bishop.

<sup>4</sup> relieved of office, 1889.

<sup>5</sup> relieved of office at his own request, 1890.

<sup>6</sup> moved to Scottdale, 1906, and to Hesston, Kans., 1909, where he was ordained bishop.

<sup>7</sup> ordained at Rockton. Admitted from Clearfield Co., Pa., 1893.

<sup>8</sup> affiliated in 1926; affiliated later with General Conference Mennonites.

<sup>9</sup> ordained deacon and minister at Martinsburg; ordained bishop at Rockton; moved to Glade as pastor and bishop. 1935.

<sup>10</sup> district in 1954 for further schooling. Later moved to Nebraska then to Indiana.

<sup>11</sup> ordained in Ontario, 1921. Served at Springs, 1941-43.

<sup>12</sup> moved to Goshen for further schooling, 1949; later moved to Arizona and to Colorado.

<sup>13</sup> ordained in Beachy Amish Church. Transferred membership to Casselman Church, 1952 and accepted as deacon. 1953.

<sup>14</sup> ordained at Marietta, Pa., 1953. Served as pastor at Pinto, 1954-61.

<sup>15</sup> moved to Indiana.

<sup>16</sup> moved from district in 1958.

<sup>17</sup> ordained in Johnstown District, 1959. Served as Meyersdale pastor, 1960-62.