

DANVILLE, PENNA.

I have long had a desire to attend worship services with the little group of believers at Finger, Tenn., so on a return trip from delivering a load of brick to Muskogee, Okla. I took time to stop there. This is the report.

They have moved in from Dela., Lancaster Co., Pa. and from Ohio and Ind. They consider themselves a plain group of people, but are trying out a different approach from the normal. They have no set of standards, but each family lives according to the dictates of their conscience, instead of the conscience of an ordained leader.

They have no ordained men, as such, but in every group there will always emerge a few men of extra capabilities, to decide policy, for them. Somewhat in the order of the Plymouth Brethren, who began in the last century.

Scripture says in Ezekiel, that if the people of the land take a man and set him up as a watchman, then he is responsible; and logically, and theologically that is what is needed to make men leaders. Victor Stoll is mutually considered as the leader of the group, and he shows such qualities and is adept at teaching, and has the moral qualities as required in Holy Writ. Other men stand by him, and together they go before the group.

I did not count them by number at the assembly, but 70 people would be conservative guess. They are in the process of building a new house of meeting, as they had been renting old closed buildings, but they are in a bad state of repair, and they did not think it wise to invest capital in that which does not belong to them.

They are building in a wooded area, of which there are many in that area, more than cleared. It should be beautiful in the summertime. Not along a much-traveled road, but not too far from one. Rt. 45 is near.

They have erected the basement and are meeting in a part of that. The other part is where they hold their Day School.

Most of them have large

families, and if each family has ten people, five families make 50. Most are of the Anabaptist persuasion, although I did see a Japanese man there, who came from Hawaii. He is a member.

They do not have Sunday school as such. The English language is used entirely, and the small children are fast forgetting the Dutch. They sing for about 30 mins. in the morning, without a man up front. The one who selects the song leads out.

After that John Beachy got up and read a chapter from Luke's gospel and commented on it for 30 mins., after which Wm. Mast read a story to the children. Then Victor Stoll spoke a little longer, against the sin of covetousness. Apparently someone had accused him of it, and he gave a public defense. Admitting that he had such tendencies, but was warring against them. After he took his seat, he called for testimony or word of exhortation from anyone who cared to. Quite a few responded.

But not all those who moved in the area intending to find a means of employment and freedom of religion, are attending the services at this time. In every case there are those who expect to escape what is troubling them in their present home, and hope a new start, and a new location will do it; only to find their trouble went right with them. For man is his own worst enemy, and if he not yet learned to live at peace with himself, he certainly has no peace with his surroundings.

"It takes about two years for a man to learn to talk, and about 50 years to learn to keep silent."
John Renno

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Feb. 11—I just had a week of revival meetings at Belleville, Pa. But not what you think; what I mean is memories were revived and acquaintances renewed. I was getting work done on my trailer, and stayed there and did some work myself. I felt like Rip-Van-Winkle, things have changed so much.

I ate breakfast at the restaurant which seems to be a regular hangout for the old and retired Mennonites, the Charloia. You could expect to see Whalley John, Norm Kanagy, Roy Peachey, Willie Byler, Joe Stayrook, Henry Johnnie, Tommy Stutter, and others who happened to drop in. Like the old country stores, with the pot bellied stove, it's much more interesting than the modern news media, for there you get the latest local news with that personal touch.

And the Amish seem everywhere, I suppose if they would all move away, Belleville would almost come to a halt economically. They work at the sale barn, the feed mill, and the lumber yards; for there are just too many there now for agriculture to accomodate them.

Noah Yoder now has a family of grown children and he works where he can find work. He's the local handy man, and he helped me repair my truck floor. My good bud-die, Kore Peachey, also helped, working for nothing and even providing taxi service, to visit old friends, like Bennie Peachey and Menno Sam.

I stopped to see my brother Joshua twice, and it is likely he will be buried by the time you read this, for he neither eats nor drinks anymore, just lying on his bed breathing with his mouth wide open and if you drop some water in, he will choke. He seems completely oblivious to his surroundings.

You would think he was dead, but for his heavy breathing!

The trouble began back in '79 when he was baptizing the youth, for he was ordained Amish bishop. He could not complete the baptismal vows. Steadily he kept getting worse mentally; he was strong enough physically and became hard to control, for he lost all moral responsibility, and if he could not have what he wanted, he would try to get it. The blood ceased to circulate to the memory part of the brain, through hardening of the arteries. John Renno

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May 1984—This is a report of an unusual experience that has befallen me.

On March 8, 1984 I was enroute to Baltimore, Maryland coming from Evansville, Indiana. The weather got real bad, cold and snow blowing, roads getting icy and many unfortunates were ditched. I decided I do not have to operate in this kind of weather. I pulled into the 76 truck stop at the interchange of Rt. 35 and I-71. I wanted to get a room but they did not have any there anymore. So I spent the afternoon in my truck, which has a chair and a bed in it.

At 5:00 I decided to walk about 300 feet to the restaurant. The last thing I remember was I was near the door, but that's it; I never knew I fell, but apparently I did. About 20 minutes later I

opened my eyes and saw a colored man standing over me, asking if I was alright, I thought I was, but my mind was very hazy. I said I was cold laying on the ice, for the temperature was about 15. They had me covered with blankets, but nothing between me and the ice. Soon an ambulance came and took me about 12 miles to Washington Courthouse, Ohio.

I was trying to figure out what happened and where I was, and why. Then I heard them speaking on their radio about a truck driver they were bringing in from the 76 truck stop, then I remembered I had pulled in there. I was glad that at least my truck was safe, for I thought maybe I was involved in an accident along the road. I was very weak, I could not get up or do anything but lay there. I knew my name, and phone number, but not much more.

They of course thought I had had heart failure and checked me out but could find no reason for my disability. I was sore from falling so hard, but had no bump on my head, so I was not knocked out. They admitted me, for I was in no shape to leave; I called my wife, to tell her what I knew which was not very much, and spent an uncomfortable night. Many tests revealed nothing, except that my white blood count was extremely low, 2.7 per cubic millimeter, and 5 to 10 is normal.

Prior to making this trip I had a lump under my lower jaw, which the doctor said was a virus infection, and I laid around for a week.

In two days my son came and got the truck and delivered the load, and his wife brought me home; my daughter, who works at a hospital, insisted I take further tests. So I was admitted at Bloomsburg Hospital for a week, and with many tests, discovered nothing except the white count was still low, and that I did not have any cancer, or tumor.

Still later I went to a chiropractic nutritionist, and he told me exactly what was wrong. This doctor said my liver was not functioning properly, which caused the low blood count, and also low blood sugar, and because of that I passed out, and not because my heart stopped for a little which is what the other doctors said.

At this time I think I'm much improved, and about ready to get back into my truck.

John Renno

DANVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

Jul. 16—We had a very interesting visitor recently, Ralph Hostetler, the Blue Green Manna man from Muscoda, Wis. He is formerly from Ill., and of the group that is better-known as the "sleeping preacher" church, although they call themselves the Amish-Mennonite church.

He is a good salesman, for he is thoroughly convinced that his product is superior to any other.

There was an interesting meeting of the 6th annual Juniata District Mennonite Historical Society, held at the Buffalo Mennonite Church on July 14; and dealt specifically with the Old Order Amish who once lived in Union Co., Pa. Through dissension and misunderstanding they all left the area, but today there are 9 different plain groups there again. Although no Old Order Amish, a good-sized New Order is there. They have everything modern except the automobiles.

Nicholas Stoltzfus came from Germany and he was not born a Mennonite but married such a girl around 1736 and from him all the Stoltzfuses come.

The Amish and others had much trouble with the Indians, and many lost their lives; one woman who lost her husband walked all the way back to Lancaster. The Amish at that time had the yellow top carriages. Simeon Stoltzfus had a winery, and at one time his house burned, with many wine barrels in the cellar, and the wine ran down the drain pipe down the creek, so that many could get a free drink downstream.

But there never was a consolidated

church unity there, for in 11 years they had only 2 communion services. Elias Rheil was ordained bishop and he was a very gifted man, a worker in brass as well as a fluent speaker; but somehow he did not have the gift of leadership, for he was deposed.

Although there were many things to cause dissension, the one that brought it to a head was the fact that Christian Stoltzfus had a windmill business and advertised his business on the side of his wagon, and the bishop refused to deal with it, which cost him his office.

Union Co. looks about like Lancaster Co. We took a bus tour in the p.m. We saw the oldest building in the county, a log barn, built by a Dunkard family. The house they had they burned down when they knew the Indians were making a raid, and buried their kitchen utensils, and fled for their lives.

After the trouble had died down, they searched for their stuff, but could not find it until one day they were cradling grain, and at noon they stuck their scythe in the ground, and one inadvertently happened to hit the stove. The Indians did not burn the barn, hence it still stands.

We also took a tour through a buggy museum at Mifflinburg. At one time there were 20 different buggy shops there. This museum consists of several buildings, with old buggies on display, also sleighs and many tools that were used at that time. At first they made everything by hand, but later they installed a New Holland engine (with those big fly wheels) like the one I grew up with, and this stirred my emotions. I would like to have one in my front yard.

John Renno

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We attended a new type of Mennonite church near Elverson, Pa., the Hopewell Mennonite Church where Merle Stoltzfus is the pastor. Much music makes it tick, and they are growing in number; they already have around 500 in attendance.

Only two congregational songs were sung traditionally, the rest were words from Scripture, mostly the Psalms and from Isaiah, which were sung with much repetition. These words were written on plastic film then projected on a screen. There was much singing. There was a short preaching service by the pastor.

I wanted to see my father's oldtime friends and close confidant, Aaron Esh. He was born in 1888, a year after my father was born, and they were ordained to the ministry about the same time, and were both bishops, in the same affiliation. My father died in 1969, but Aaron is still living and has not missed being in church on Sunday for 57 years. He was not always at home, but always at church somewhere.

I also stopped to see one of my old schoolmates, Sadie Peachey. She was married just recently; she took care of her aged parents, but now they are gone, and she is happily married to Ebersol, the chairmaker, near Leola. Sadie is the dau. of Bish. Jake Peachey, who was the son of Dea. Jake Peachey near Allensville, where most of the Amish and Holdeman Peachays at Belleville trace their lineage.

We also stopped at Ben Smokers' (the son of Jake Smoker), whose wife was the dau. of old Pre. Levi Kanagy. I wanted to consult him concerning the ongoing result of the split of the Amish back in 1966. There are now 5 different factions from that.

John Renno

DANVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA

Sept.--We were to Belleville, Pa. to visit a few of the elderly. My Aunt Jemima Renno, the widow of Uncle Dave, has now been bedfast for 3 years. At this point she hardly recognizes anyone. She is very well provided for by her single daughter Sylvia. She provides much tender, loving care. They live in their own little cottage on a back alley, on top of the Belleville Hill.

Oliver Peachey, who live in their own home at the Valley Haven Rest Home, seem to be getting along fairly well. Ollie said he thought he would never reach the age of 16, but now he suddenly is 60 years beyond. He claimed he is in the hospital as much as out. He has poor circulation in his legs. His wife is Bernice, who used to have the dry goods store at White Hall.

My Aunt Annie Zook seemed very well and happy. She said last Sun. afternoon she had 23 visitors and the last one did not leave until 5 minutes before 8 o'clock and she was very tired. She likes visitors, but enough is enough.

We had dinner at the Peachey's Meat market, which has advanced far beyond the imagination of the original butcher. They now employ about 50 people, many part-time. They used to insist that all the women who work there wear the devotional covering, but they had to change that.

John Renno

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December 2--In this area a special wedding was solemnized at the Grace Baptist Church at West Milton, Pa. when Loretta Ulmer became the bride of James Showalter. About 75 were present. Both bride and groom come from large families, and to have invited all the uncles and aunts would have made a very large assembly, so they cut it down to just the immediate families, and a few chosen friends.

James Showalter is the son of Nathan Showalter, from Harrisonburg, Va. This area is heavily populated with so called plain folks, but no Old Order Amish. They are all of the Mennonite extraction, of many different shades, caused by various misunderstandings in times past.

The Showalters are no legal members of any particular denomination; as a result of the varied misunderstandings, they prefer to meet with small groups in private homes, for intimate fellowship. During the times of the Anabaptists they were called (Winkle Predicht). This means a preaching service held in a corner, not legally recognized by an official delegation. In fact, the local church has been kept alive all down through church history by these means.

The Charles Ulmers are members of the Grace Baptist Church. This church, however, also has no legal members on a roster, and no constitution or by-laws. The Dutch would term it (the Du vee du vit Gma) which means do as you please church.

Harrisonburg, Va. is 250 miles south of Milton, Pa. How did the two find each other? Two years ago my was married to Judith Ulmer, the

older sister of Loretta. Nathan Showalters, and the Jon Rennos have very much in common and they were invited to this wedding. That is why we were invited as special guests to this special wedding.

Another things the Showalters and Ulmers have in common is their occupation. They are both farm families, and large operations, along with large families. They are both simple folks, living very frugally. The children were taught by precept and example, to improvise, and make the best out of what you have, for you cannot have everything others have.

The pastor that officiated the ceremony was David King, pastor at West Milton. Although he has a Mennonite name, he is not of this extraction, he comes from New York state and was not even raised in a Christian home.

The vows that were exchanged were different also. The bride and groom read special scripture quotations to each other and to those present, relating to marriage, with the pastor joining in at times. This was not a ring ceremony. After the ceremony the party sat down and preaching began.

Another special feature of this wedding was a Gardener family, neighbors and close friends of the Showalters. They have five small children, very well trained to honor and respect authority. In spite of modern day farming methods, this man milks 200 cows every day; 20 hours of every day is spent in milking cows. No, he does not do it personally, he sees that it gets done; plus raising the feed for his cattle. John Renno