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A History of the Amish Mission Board:

The Missions Interest Committee

Class II

Protestant Christianity
Professor C. Norman Kraus
By Noah Hochstetler
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I. Introduction

The Mission Interest Committee (henceforth M.I.C.) is an official mission board of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Church. It serves this constituency along with Amish Mennonite Aid (A.M.A.) a related board. The former serves primarily the western states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Indiana, and Ohio, while the A.M.A. serves primarily the eastern states. There is considerable overlapping without conflict. Each have their own projects, but both draw from the entire constituency for financial and personal support. As the subject of the M.I.C. is the focus of this paper, the A.M.A. will be considered only in a very minor way.

The M.I.C. is an outgrowth of a spiritual awakening in the Old Order Amish Church (O.O.A.). During the mid and late 1940's there was widespread evidence of new spiritual and mission interest among the Amish (O.O.A.) Church. Mid-week prayer and Bible study groups sprang up throughout various states: Johnson Co., Iowa, 1946; Goshen, 1948; Partridge, Kansas, 1949; Holmes Co., Ohio, 1951, Plain City, Ohio, 1951; and one in Pennsylvania, and one in Etna Greene, Indiana in 1952. Before this, there were no organized meetings other than those supervised by "The Church". These groups were mostly stimulated by young people, but about one-half had the support of one or more ministers. It seems that the forces from without, of C.F.S., Herald Press periodicals and contact with other churches, and the teachings from within of young ministers who studied the Bible were strong factors of influence.¹

¹ Graber, Harvey, "Spiritual Awakening in the Old Order Amish Church", A research paper, Goshen College, 1956. p.

But as there was no unifying organization between the groups, each group had to struggle separately. Some went underground or were extinguished.

"The first man to give any church-wide leadership to the mission movement was, ironically, Russel Maniair,² a Mennonite by faith, and Catholic by birth, whose attention was first drawn to Protestantism by a newspaper picture of some Amish people."² Converted through the stimulation of an Amish man, he felt spiritually indebted to the Amish people. To strengthen the scattered interest which he found, he arranged the first Amish Mission Conference, at Kalona, Iowa, in August 1950. A consecration sermon by J. D. Graber stimulated a response in thirty-two young people who were willing to enter some type of service. Apparently due to the newness of such conferences no organization took place there.

A second conference was held in Southern Michigan the following August. Seven states were represented. Here eight men were elected "apparently to plan future conferences and give some type of organization to the mission movement."³ An itinerant "Amish Mission Bulletin" kept the various members informed as to the interests and ^oopposition of missions in the various communities.

II. The M.I.C. Organized

"The third conference was held at Clinton Christian Day School near Goshen on August 17, 18, 19, 1952. For the first time, a slight amount of planning a program was done before the day of the first session. Eighty-nine attended from out of state."⁴ By this time, the main points of opposition from the O.O.A. were three: the movement was headed by a non-Amishman; it was held in English; and it was too interdenominational.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The necessity of formal leadership by their own members was apparent. "A group of seventeen ministers and laymen were selected to nominate and help vote for a new body of committee members," according to the "Business Section Minutes" of that conference, but it seems now to the then-elected assistant chairman that all ministers ^{present} were invited and a few laymen were present. The offices and terms of offices were partially established. The minutes state, "The function of the committee shall be as a general board." All decisions were made with a "carried motion" or a majority vote. The committee members were:

David L. Miller,	Partridge, Kansas,	Secretary
Eli Holmuth,	Mitchinson, Kansas,	Treasure
Andrew A. Miller,	Holmesville, Ohio,	Chairman
Daniel Beachy,	Hillersburg, Indiana,	Ass't Chairman
David Yoder,	Kalona, Iowa,	3rd Member

The first two offices above, were to be held separately and indefinitely. The last three were to shift positions yearly with the chairman's term expiring and a new 3rd committee member elected.

III. The N.I.C. at Work

A. Publication.

Since December 1951, Russel Moniaci had been publishing his "Amish Mission Endeavor" and mailing it to all Amish ministers. Before the N.I.C. was formed, it was felt by numerous brethren that he lacked tact, and discretion in his approach to the Amish people which tended to break communication with the Amish rather than persuade them for missions. Accordingly, at the first meeting after the August organization in December 1952, the issue of publication came up for discussion. The committee agreed that they should publish their own paper.

Harvey Graber, Nappanee, Indiana, then a second year student at M.M.C. was elected unanimously to be the editor. The "Witnessing" was to be a two-four page paper, of evangelistic and missions-persuading content. Chairman A. A. Miller was to be responsible for printing. After these decisions were made, R. M^onaici was invited to come to the meeting that evening and hear the decisions. He was taken by surprise. Although he felt the Amish should assume responsibility for the movement, he also believed that the leadership was not yet prepared. But the decision was made, and not without a great deal of reluctance he agreed to turn over his accumulated mailing addresses of Amish ministers and interested people.

In April 1953, the first issue came out with a mailing list of 240 addresses. By January 1955 it was almost 700. In January 1956, the M.I.C. agreed that editor Graber should begin publishing serially, an "apologetic" of the mission cause and salvation, which he had written some months previously. It extended for five issues. "Witnessing" was mailed, beginning with that issue, to all Amish addresses. The list included about 6300 addresses which had been gathered by interested persons in the various communities.

Because of Harvey Graber's responsibilities at Red Lake, Ontario, he resigned in 1958. Yost Miller stepped up from associate editor to editor. Due to decreasing interest shown by the difficulty of collecting material for publication, a merge, at the change of editorship was proposed to "Herald der Wahrheit", Kalona, Iowa. When this failed, the last issue was published in 1961. As the prime witnessing agent of the mission movement to the Amish people. This periodical had served its purpose well. However, it seems that the church division of the mid-fifties which brought the mission movement almost entirely within the Beachy Amish circle, decreased the effect-

iveness of the paper. But if the paper could have continued within the new group, it would probably have served a good purpose.

B. Colonization, Gulfport, and Hillcrest,

As a result of interest shown in various communities to resettle and colonize, the Amish Mennonite Colonization Committee was found in 1958 as a subsidiary of the M.I.C. The motivations were primarily economic and evangelistic. This committee, to which the M.I.C. serves as an advisory board has done notable work in locating new committees and operating a revolving fund for financing farms. Several projects include the Orange, Virginia Church Community, and the group at Grove City, Minnesota.⁵

Apparently the first direct mission work of the M.I.C. was the partial support of John Benders at Gulfport, Mississippi. They assisted Ed Miller who was serving there under the South Central Mennonite Conference. The Amish Church in Kansas and the M.I.C. built a house for them in 1952, and then gave them some support until they moved away in 1957.

The Hillcrest Home for the Aged was opened August 2, 1953 by the M.I.C. It is owned by the county, self-supporting and operated and staffed by the M.I.C. It opened with a seventeen bed capacity and a staff of a married couple as administrators, two I-W's and five single girls. Mr. and Mrs. Eli Helmuth have served as administrators since its opening. They are responsible to the M.I.C. for home management, which serves closely as an advisory board.

The home was enlarged in 1957, to a forty-eight bed capacity and an increase of personnel to six I-W's and eight girls. That year Helmuth Hall was also built for staff quarters. Two new cottages for administrative staff are presently being built. Present plans include expansion

⁵ This information is from the M.I.C. secretary by correspondence.

⁶ This is from the "Amish Missions Bulletin" 1951-52, and M.I.C. minutes, 1957.

and renovation of the main building, coming to the cost of \$330,000. Two thirds of this expense is met by the Hill Burton fund and one-third by the county. The M.I.C. pays rent to the county on a guest per month basis.⁷

The goals of the project, according to the missions secretary seem to be: rendering Christian service; social and spiritual development of individuals through unit life; and witnessing. The staff's relations to the community are excellent. There is some visitation work and tract distribution at present.

C. Missions in Canada.

By 1955, there was considerable interest in several communities to open mission work in a real sense. At the Amish Christian Fellowship meeting held in August 1955, near Goshen, Indiana, ~~Harvey~~^{Harvey} Graber who had worked among the missions in Minnesota under the Northern Light Gospel mission made a proposal: The director of the above work, Irvin Shantz has invited us to build a mission Indian school at Red Lake, Ontario, 285 miles from the Minnesota-Canadian border; are we interested? The M.I.C. appointed Bishop ^Elam Hochstetler to lead discussion with the entire group. The majority favored by vote to open a new non-local type of mission. The M.I.C. met with the ministers present and after discussion elected a study committee. Bishop Hochstetler, ministers W. W. Wagler, Kansas, and Daniel S. Bentrager, Goshen, went to Canada. A Red Lake Indian School seemed feasible. On February 15, 1956 an M.I.C. meeting held at the Hochstetler home, which was attended by many local people, accepted the project by a two-thirds vote. A building

⁷ This section is mostly from M.I.C. minutes, and correspondence with the mission's secretary.

committee was elected at a special committee meeting on February 27, 1956. That summer, Lloyd Gingerich, Plain City, Ohio opened the first Sunday School there among the Indian children. Services were held in the open-air until the basement of the two-room school house was fitted for worship later that summer.

The school opened in the fall of 1956, with an enrollment of about 40 children. Harvey Graber served as the first principal and taught along with Lloyd Gingerich. Other principals since have been Moses Beachy and Ezra Beachy. Amy Byler and Susie Borntrager have also taught there. Four young men have served their I-W, V.S. there: Moses Mast, Oklahome, Mahlen Misly, Kansas, Andrew Miller, Maryland, and this writer. Besides the school activity, the work there has included Sunday School, Bible School, Church, youth activities among Indians, craft classes, labor provision for Indians, building houses for Indians, and considerable visitation.

The school was closed in 1963 because of local and government attitudes, according to the missions secretary. The government pushed for integrated schools; the local people seemed pricked that a foreign (!) mission board was doing what was their responsibility; the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches seemed jealous of M.I.C. successes. The M.I.C. could adjust quite easily because of the heavy financial duties of the school, knowing that at other places the government was supporting church operated schools. The efficiency of the mission dollar was also under scrutiny.

Mr. and Mrs. Moses Mast opened a work of visitation, Bible school and Sunday School in late 1960, at Ignace, a small mixed-nationality town 120 miles south-east of Red Lake. In later summers Bible schools were also held in neighboring communities. Paul Miller's, formerly workers at Red Lake serve

presently ~~as principal~~ ^(where he is principal) at a Round Lake school, 175 miles north east of Red Lake, which is on an Indian Reservation. They have some connection with an Evangelical Mission there.

D. Interpretations and predictions,

The M.I.C. is usually quite modest with regard to initiation of projects and the issuance of executive orders. The conviction for new projects usually stem from interested sources other than ~~the~~ ^{the} committees. But when such convictions are expressed, ~~the~~ committee usually lends a listening ear. When problems come up on the field which affect sentiments of the ~~home~~ ^{home} churches, the M.I.C. remains aloof. An example of this is the need of an ordained minister at the Red Lake Mission, expressed as early as 1957. It is a question whether the Beachy Amish Mennonite Church would ordain any by means other than the lot. To this writer's knowledge, this above problem is no nearer ~~resolved~~ ^{resolved} than it was in 1957.

The merits of the committee as an advisory board are well established. Homes for the aged in Warsaw, Indiana and Orange, Virginia have benefited from their advise. The relationship of the committee to the Red Lake missions has frequently been that of an advisory function, ^{keeping} these on the field in contact with sentiments of the home churches. More modest is the committee's attempt to make the home churches aware of needs on the field, especially those needs of cultural adjustment.

What can be expected for the M.I.C. in the future? To this writer, the question is intimately tied to the merger of the mission movement with the Beachy Amish Mennonite Church. Will the vigor of the movement be lost as the movement merges with a group less spiritually dynamic? The new denomination does have mission interests but it is more confused with the transmission of their total culture. A second factor, as this writer see it,

involves communication between the mission program and the supporting constituency. The two projects of Arkansas and Red Lake have monthly newsletters, but there is no centralized source of information, and the M.I.C. is doing little to publicize the mission program.

If the mission interest can remain dense enough in the diffusion of the mission movement, resulting from its merge with Beachy Amish thought and life, and if the doors of communication are opened a little ^{further} ~~here~~, it seems that the future of the M.I.C. should be marked with progress.

Appendix

Mission Interests Committee Personnel

I. Pre-M.I.C. conference-planning and contact committee elected at Nottawa, Michigan, Amish Mission Conference, 1951.

A. J. Beachy, Kalona, Iowa, Secretary-Treasurer
 John D. Miller, Hutchinson, Kansas
 Eli Helmuth, Hutchinson, Kansas
 Daniel Beachy, Millersburg, Indiana
 Moses Beachy, Plain City, Ohio
 A. A. Miller, Helmesville, Ohio
 Ben S. Troyer, Dover, Delaware

II. First M.I.C. - "a general board"
Elected at Goshen, 1952.

David L. Miller, Hutchinson, Kansas, Secretary
 Eli Helmuth, Hutchinson, Kansas, Treasurer
 A. A. Miller, Helmesville, Ohio, Chairman
 Daniel Beachy, Millersburg, Indiana, Ass't. Chairman
 David Yoder, Kalona, Iowa, 3rd Member

III. Second M.I.C.
Elected at Kansas, 1953.

Daniel Beachy, Millersburg, Indiana, Chairman
 Eli Helmuth, Hutchinson, Kansas, Treasurer
 David L. Miller, Hutchinson, Kansas, Secretary
 A. A. Miller, Helmesville, Ohio, Ass't. Chairman
 Yost Miller, Millersburg, Ohio, 3rd Member

IV. M.I.C. 1954

Harry Weirick, Middlebury, Indiana, Chairman
 Mahlen Wegler, Partridge, Kansas, Secretary-Treasurer
 Daniel Beachy, Millersburg, Indiana
 Yost Miller, Millersburg, Ohio
 Henry J. Yoder, Oklahoma

V. M.I.C. 1955

Daniel Beachy, Millersburg, Indiana, Chairman
 Mahlen Wegler, Partridge, Kansas, Secretary-Treasurer
 Y. E. Miller
 H. D. Weirick
 H. J. Yoder

VI. M.I.C. 1956

H. J. Yoder, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 Y. H. Miller
 H. D. Weirick
 H. J. Yoder

VII. M.I.C. 1957

D. L. Miller, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 Alvin Beachy, Plain City, Ohio
 H. D. Weirick
 H. J. Yoder

VIII. M.I. C. 1958

David L. Miller, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 Daniel S. Bontrager, Goshen, Indiana
 Alvin Beachy
 H. D. Weirick

IX. M. I. C. 1959

D. L. Miller, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 D. S. Bontrager
 Alvin Beachy
 H. D. Weirick

X. M. I. C. 1960

Alvin Beachy, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 B. S. Bontrager
 Y. H. Miller
 Roman Mullet, Sugarcreek, Ohio

XI. M. I. C. 1961

D. S. Bontrager, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 R. Mullet
 Harvey Hochstetler, Nappanee, Indiana

XII. M. I. C. 1962

Y. H. Miller, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 H. Hochstetler
 Sanford Yoder, Mission Home,
 R Mullet Virginia

XIII. M. I. C. 1963

Roman Mullet, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 S. Yoder
 H. Hochstetler
 Ervin Hershberger

XIV. M.I.C. 1964

H. Hochstetler, Chairman
 M. Wagler, Secretary-Treasurer
 S. Yoder
 E. Hershberger
 David L. Miller

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Wagler, Mahlon, Partridge, Kansas, personal correspondence with
the writer Jan 6, 1964. Mr. Wagler was secretary-treasurer
of the M.I.C. from 1954 to the present, 1964.