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C O N G R E G A T I O N A L H I S T O R Y

of

Amish Mennonite Church

at

Stuarts Draft, Virginia

Mennonite History and Thought

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May 10, 1957

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Congregational History of Amish Church

Stuarts Draft, Virginia

In the year of 1942 on July 2 the first settlers arrived in Stuarts Draft, Virginia, from Norfolk, Virginia. Eli M. Yoders with their family of five children were the first settlers. Eli is an ordained minister since 1933. Next were Noah Yoders, an elderly couple with no children, and Peter Kinsingers, also an elderly couple without children, both retired farmers; they moved on small farms.

In September of the same year Simon D. Schrock with his wife and eight children came. Simon was born in Meyersdale, Pa. in 1890. When he was five years old his parents moved to Oakland, Maryland where he lived until he was 24, he went to Norfolk, Va. Here he stayed, and four years later he was married to Sadia Yoder. On May the 13, 1934 he was ordained to the ministry, and exactly a year later he was ordained bishop.¹

clarity?
These people came from Norfolk largely because of a split in the Amish church there, when the majority of there members started a Beachy church because they wanted the cars, and also because of war out posts and Military actions ~~going~~ going on. So two years after the split all the remainder Amish moved to Stuarts Draft, Va. Here they had their worship services in the home of Simon Schrocks until a year and a half later when their church house was completed.

The Amish church at Norfolk was a branch from the Somerset, Pa. Amish church. The nationality of there people is a mixtar of Swiss and German. Most of them live the simple life of farming; many have big dairy farms, while some have poultry farms and orchards. The

women are keepers of the home.²

The greatest difference of this Amish church and the Beachy Amish in Norfolk is that they use cars while at Stuarts Draft the horse and buggies are used. They however do not affiliate with the church in Norfolk but with the Amish Church in Somerset, Pa.

In April 1943 Simon M. Yoder with his wife and seven children came, and in the same year many more came from Norfolk and Bellville, Pa. From then on the congregation grew very rapidly. Families moved in from Delaware, Kansas, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and other places. In 1951 the congregation had approximately 54 families. The church claimed and held its young people which numbered approximately 60 by this time.

In May 25, 1947 Simon Yoder was ordained minister. The congregation now had two ministers and a bishop. In April 28, 1949, the community was greatly shocked by the sudden death of Bishop Simon Schrock, which occurred from a heart attack while getting on the bus in town. His age was 59; he was much thought of by every one who knew him for his excellent pious christian character, and for the way he served as Shepherd of the flock.

In that fall of 1949 another minister Alvin D. Miller, born in 1915, with his wife and seven children moved in from Oklahoma. Then they had three ministers. In April 1950 Simon Yoder was ordained bishop for the congregation.

All worship services are held in German. Church services are held every other Sunday and Sunday school on the in-between Sunday. Ministers always have charge of Sunday school. The New Testament

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is used and read for their Sunday school lessons, each class having its own assignment. A little German song book named "Lieder Sammlung" is used in all services. They have no chorister, but men and boys lead out in songs whenever they feel like it. All part singing is forbidden in worship services. Probably this is the reason the young people sing English and in four parts whenever they meet on Sunday afternoons and other times. Baptismal services are held in regular Sunday Morning services for those who had joined the class and received instruction in the Dordrecht confession of faith. Marriages usually take place on Thursday mornings in church, which is conducted same as regular church services. Following the church services dinner and supper is served in the home of the bride, where usually from 100 to 200 guests are invited.

Communion services are held twice a year and feet washing is observed as an ordinance. Counsel meeting is held a week or two before communion which is also partly as a preparatory service.

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Customs of plain clothing are strictly observed. A mild form of shunning is kept with excommunicated persons. After the Sermons the Ministers asks for two or three testimonies to his sermon from the ministers and older laymenbers.

In such services as communion and funeral all women and girls are dressed in black. After the boys become married they are expected to grow a full beard. Between each counsel meeting and communion service there is a special day set aside to be kept as prayer and fast day, also Good Fridays and Acention Days are always hept for prayer and fast days. Special church services are

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held on Christmas Days and Thanksgiving Days. Whenever a minister from another community of the same denomination comes to visit, special church is made for him. They never have any services in the evening, other than singings on Sunday evenings for the young people. These singings are held in the homes; all songs are sung in unison and in German, after the last song a devotional period is conducted by one of the appointed leaders. These leaders are three middle aged men of whom one is always supposed to be present. This is the main activity of the young people. Sometimes they have planted relief projects, which gives them more opportunities for social evenings together. Relief work such as sewings is done among the women, and sometimes among the young people. Mission activities and interests are not thought or emphasized.

The church house is a plain frame building, it does not face the road, but stands parallel with the road. It is without basement or electric. The children's Sunday School classes are held in the women's cloakrooms, while the rest are in the main part of the building. The women go in at one end and the men at the other end of the building. For heating they have three stoves, one in the nursery and one in the middle of each side in the auditorum. Coals have been used for heating but now changed to oil.

In September of 1949 an addition was builded on to the church house about half as large as the old part. This was soon filled up too. In 1951 they decided to have their own high school so they build another room to the side of the church house, which is

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used for the school. On Sundays the walls are opened and the school room is also used as part of the church. Their elementary age children all go ~~to~~ the public schools.

During these years approximately 23 members left the church and joined with the Mennonites or some related branch. Some of these felt they were misused in the church and others wanted more mission activities. Unfortunately in December of 1954 a split came into the church when Minister Alvin D. Miller with almost half of the members started a new Beachy Amish Church. This was caused for various reasons. The majority of people went because of their convictions for more evangelistic and mission work, and because some felt that ~~that~~ Simon Yoder was teaching too strong on shunning.³ Perhaps a few went for more liberty in material things such as the use of cars and phones.

All the ministers are dairy farmers, and receive no ministerial support from the church. The chief concern~~s~~ of their labors is for the good of the church and to keep it at peace.⁴

Most farmers have dairies and some have chickens, hay and corn are the main crops of the field. Most own their own farms and are economically well off. The community has high respect for the Amish. The church has stayed the same as it was from the beginning, and has now normal growth.

BY TERM PAPER

- ¹ Mrs Simon Schrock
² Eli M. Yoder
³ Mrs Elmer Miller
⁴ Eli M. Yoder

Bibliography

1. Interview with Mr. & Mrs. Moses M. Schrock, Staunton, Va. Route 2. on April 27, 1957
2. Interview with Mrs Simon Schrock, Staunton, Va. Route 2. On May 4, 1957
3. Interview with Eli M. Yoder, Fishersville, Va. on April 26, 1957 Minister and first settler.