

THE HISTORY OF THE WEAVERTOWN AMISH
MENNONITE CHURCH BUILDING

Prepared for the John Horsch Mennonite
History Essay Contest

- I. The building is constructed.
- II. The building is used by the Brethern.
- III. The building is used by the Amish Mennonites.

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MENNONITE CHURCH BUILDING

In the latter eighteen hundreds the German Baptists, now known as the Brethern, felt they needed a new church building. The majority of the congregation wanted it to be built at Bareville. A few thought it should be built at Bird-in-hand. Jacob Denlinger wanted it built on his farm near Bird-in-hand and said he would give a tract of land as a gift. A Resh family cemetery, which had originated in 1829, was located in the immediate vicinity of the free lot. This was considered an advantage to having it built at Bird-in-hand. Samuel Denlinger and Adam Ranck, two who preferred Bird-in-hand as the location for the church, offered to finance the entire construction if it would be built there. On March 26, 1888, Jacob Denlinger gave a tract of land as a voluntary gift for the sum of one dollar to the trustees for the purpose of erecting a German Baptist Church. The trustees at this time were Samuel Denlinger, Adam Ranck and Abraham Myer.

In 1888 the brick building was constructed with Peter Sowers as contractor. The basement was excavated and the walls of the first floor were built by voluntary labor. Two large potbellied stoves were installed for heat. The cost of the construction was fifteen hundred dollars plus plenty of trouble because so few wanted the building located there. The building was known as the Bird-in-hand German Baptist Church.

This building, being larger than most of the other Brethern churches in the locality, was used quite extensively for their love feasts. The benches were made a way in which they could easily be converted into long tables with a bench on each side. Every third bench was made so the back could be swung up to form the table. The other benches had backs which could be transferred to either side of the bench. This was so the benches could be made to face the tables. In the basement there were two large built-in iron kettles in which the food for the feast was prepared. Sleeping quarters for those who came from a distance was provided on the second floor. This floor was divided into two rooms equipped with beds.

A few years after the church building was erected, Adam Ranck withdrew from the church and wanted back the money he had invested in the project. Some say Samuel Denlinger then also withdrew, however others think he did not. This left the congregation to pay the expenses after all.

After 1920 the German Baptists discontinued using the building with the exception of about once a year to keep it tax free. During this time funerals were held there occasionally.

Some folks say Jacob Miller wanted to buy the building and change it into a tobacco shed. Others say he wanted to change it into apartments. Which ever it was, the Brethern were not willing to sell it for any such purpose.

Two Amish Mennonite brethern, thinking perhaps the Amish Mennonite congregation would consider using it, bought it from

the Brethern trustees, Phares Getz, Abram Hess, and Martin Steffy, in 1928. They paid only one thousand dollars for it. The Brethern sold it at this low price because they were only too glad to see it would continue to be used as a church building.

At this time the Amish Mennonites were still holding their services in homes and did not agree to having them held in the building as yet. When it was agreed on that the building should be used, the congregation shouldered the cost. They appointed John Stoltzfus, Jacob Blank, and Issac Glick as trustees. On July 22, 1928, they held Sunday school in the building for the first time. Prior to this time they had been holding German classes in a schoolhouse on Saturday afternoons. Church services, however, eree continued being held in homes until April 6, 1930. They had church services one Sunday and Sunday school the next. The name of the building was changed to Weavertown Amish Mennonite Church.

In 1930 eighty square perches of land was added to the lot. This was bought from Jacob Miller for \$112.50.

In the course of time the potbellied stoves were removed and a coal furnace was installed.

Evening meetings were very uncommon but occasionally a visiting minister would come and an evening meeting would be called for. Since there was no electricity, the janitor had to hang lanterns. One particular summer day an evening meeting was announced. As the visiting minister was speaking and the evening deepening, some folks began to wonder why the janitor hadn't hung

the lanterns. The janitor, however, was undisturbed and quite confident that the preacher would discontinue preaching before dark. But the preacher, being rather longwinded, continued preaching and by the time the closing song was announced, the people could scarcely manage to read the words. After 1946 this kind of problem no longer existed because the building was wired and the janitor could just flip switches which is a good bit easier than hanging lanterns.

In 1950 the building underwent an extensive remodeling program. The pulpit was changed from the north to the east side. The elevated seats along the sides were removed. Cloak rooms, a council room, lavatories, running water and an oil burner were added. The basement was cemented and a main entrance was inserted in the west side. The remodeling was done by one carpenter and voluntary labor. During the three months this program was in progress, services were held regularly in the building.

In August, 1952, a small room was built in the basement to accommodate the ladies' sewing circle supplies.

A public address system was installed in 1953. This was also connected to the Kanagy Convalescent Home so that the Home could receive the benefit of the church services.

In 1959 most of the interior was replastered. Church services were not cancelled while this job was in process.

The Amish Mennonite congregation has been growing steadily and the building is no longer adequate for the size of the congregation. On March 20, 1960, a new Sunday school will be started at

the Honey Brook Grange Hall splitting the group now assembling at the Weavertown church building. At the present time, however, these two groups will continue meeting together for church services every second Sunday at Weavertown.

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