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History of Weavertown Amish Mennonite Congregation

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## I. Origins

The Old Order Amish in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania are descendants of the Amish group which originated in Berne, Switzerland in 1693 under the leadership of Jacob Amman. This group had broken away from the Mennonite Church because of differences of opinion on church discipline. <sup>1.</sup>

The Amish are a rural people. They have a high regard for the customs and beliefs of their forefathers. Because of this, they have clung to the manner of worship, styles of clothing, and traditions of past centuries. <sup>2.</sup> They do not use electricity. They have no tractors or other modern equipment. They use horses and carriages for transportation instead of automobiles. Church services are held every two weeks in the homes of members of the church. Services are conducted in the Pennsylvania German language.

In 1910 there were eight Old Order Amish congregations spread throughout eastern Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The Weavertown Amish Mennonite Congregation has its origin in this Amish group. It is a result of a schism which took place in 1910. This schism was due to a controversy concerning meidung (shunning). Meidung is the practice of refusing to have spiritual and social contacts with persons who have been excommunicated. This includes things such as eating with them and dealing with them in business. This practice is based on I Cor. 5:9-11 and on Article XVII in the Dortrecht Confession of Faith.

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1. C. Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites (Newton, Kansas, 1957), p. 129.

2. John A. Hostetler, Amish Life (Scottsdale, Pa., 1960), p. 6.

The dissatisfactions of certain people regarding the practice of meidung can be traced to what is known locally as the Moses Hartz Geschicht (story).

Moses Hartz (1819-1916)<sup>3</sup> was ordained to the ministry in the Lower Pequea district of the Old Order Amish Church in 1855.<sup>4</sup> "On the day of his ordination, Hartz (not being of Amish descent) said, 'he was going to see how the Amish made preachers' and at the end of the day he proved to be the one ordained."<sup>5</sup>

Moses Hartz's son Moses was a millwright and worked in a plant which used machinery. This caused some dissatisfaction in the church. Moses Jr. withdrew from the Amish Church and went to the Mennonites for which he was excommunicated by the Amish Church without the consent of all the ministers. Moses Hartz Sr. refused to shun his son for which his office as minister was revoked. After several years of contention he and his wife made application to join the Conestoga Mennonite Church. They were accepted on a confession in 1896. The ministers in the Amish Church were undecided whether they should excommunicate Moses Sr. and his wife. A meeting was held of all the Amish ministers of Lancaster County to decide the matter. All were present, about thirty in number, except David Beiler. It was decided not to excommunicate them. When David Beiler heard what was done he was not willing to accept the decision of the group. Through his influence the decision was reversed and Moses Hartz and his wife were excommunicated. This marks the beginning of what is known today as the strict meidung. From this point on, excommunication and meidung were practiced not only in cases in which church members were living in sin,

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3. C. Z. Mast and Robert E. Simpson, Annals of the Conestoga Valley (Scottdale, Pa., 1942) p. 82.

4. John P. Mast, Drast von den Amischen Gemeinen in Lancaster County (Kutztown, Pa., 1950) p. 7.

5. Otto J. Miller, History of Millwood Mennonite Church District

but also when they would leave the Amish Church and go to some other church.<sup>6.</sup>

A number of members of the Amish Church were dissatisfied with this procedure and refused to practice meidung on persons who were excommunicated for this reason. The church leaders would not tolerate this laxity. Christian J. Beiler (1850-1934), a spokesman for the dissatisfied group, told the Amish ministers that if they, the ministers, would tolerate the opinions of this group and not force them to practice the strict meidung, they in turn would tolerate the views of the ministers and of those who believed in the strict meidung. The Amish ministers were not willing to do this,<sup>7</sup> so in 1909 a group of about 35 families decided to withdraw from the Old Order Amish Church and start a church of their own.

## II. Organization

Besides Christian J. Beiler, other early leaders of the dissenting group were Christian L. King (1861-1950), Jacob Kauffman (1851-1911), Eli Kauffman (1854-1925), and John A. Stoltzfus (1870-1957).<sup>8.</sup> In the fall of 1909 the group began having meetings about every three or four weeks. The meetings consisted of singing, Bible reading, and exhortations by the leaders. None of the leaders were ordained ministers, so after about six meetings they asked some ministers from Belleville, Pennsylvania (Mifflin County) to help them organize a church. In Belleville there was also a group who was leaving the Amish Church, but this group included three ordained ministers named, S. W. Peachey, C. D. Peachey, and Bishop John P. Zook.<sup>9.</sup> Because of the two Peachey leaders in Belleville

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6. a. Sarah Stoltzfus, Lancaster, Pa., Personal Interview.  
b. J. D. Guengrich, "Copy of an Old Manuscript" (Centuria, Mo., Nov., 1912)

7. Christian E. Beiler, Ronks, Penna., Personal Interview.

8. David Lapp, Leola, Pa., Personal Interview.

9. Mattie S. Lapp, Leola, Pa., Personal Interview.

the church in Belleville became known as the Peachey Church. Since these ministers helped the Lancaster group to organize, this group also was known as the Peachey Church. Later it was sometimes called the John A. Church, for Bishop John A. Stoltzfus. After the church house at Weavertown was acquired it became known as the Weavertown Amish Mennonite Church. After the church joined the Beachy Affiliation it became known as a Beachy Amish Mennonite denomination.

The first church service of the Peachey Church in Lancaster County was held at the home of George W. Beller, near Gordonville, Pennsylvania on February 27, 1910. The ministers S. W. Peachey and J. P. Zook from Belleville, Pennsylvania were present.<sup>10.</sup> For about a year the Belleville ministers came to Lancaster once a month to hold services. Communion was held on November 4, 1910 and again on April 28, 1911. At this second Communion Service two ministers were ordained by Bishop John P. Zook. They were Christian L. King and John A. Stoltzfus.<sup>11.</sup> Beginning at this time church was held every two weeks.

Ordinations <sup>12.</sup>

- Christian L. King (1861-1950)
  - ordained minister April 28, 1911
  - ordained bishop April 24, 1913
- John A. Stoltzfus (1870-1957)
  - ordained minister April 28, 1911
  - ordained bishop April 25, 1926
- Moses P. Riehl (1876-1955)
  - ordained deacon October 22, 1911
  - ordained minister October 11, 1925
  - expelled from church 1934
  - (later received into Christian King Church)
- Daniel B. Stoltzfus (1893-1955)
  - ordained minister May 7, 1922

(On March 15, 1925, Bishop Christian L. King and minister Daniel B. Stoltzfus together with a small portion of the congregation, withdrew from the Peachey Church and started a fellowship of their own. This group later disintegrated.)

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10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Anna Mary Yoder, Kinzer, Pa. and Daniel M. Glick, Smoketown, Pa. Church records.

- George W. Beiler (1884-1959)  
ordained minister April 24, 1927  
ordained bishop March 16, 1958
- Aaron B. Stoltzfoos (1881-1960)  
ordained deacon June 24, 1934
- Elam Kauffman (1907- )  
ordained minister June 21, 1936  
ordained bishop April 3, 1960
- Aaron Glick (1903- )  
ordained minister November 15, 1953
- Christian E. Beiler (1908- )  
ordained minister August 16, 1959
- Gideon Stoltzfus (1931- )  
ordained deacon December 4, 1960
- John S. Stoltzfus (1928- )  
ordained minister January 13, 1963

When the Peachey Church started in 1910 there were a total of 35 families<sup>13.</sup> or about 85 members. There has been a steady increase through the years.

year	number of members
1910 - - - - -	85
1925 - - - - -	129
1940 - - - - -	157
1945 - - - - -	209
1961 - - - - -	336

Most of this increase is due to accepting young people into the church through water baptism. Most of these young people are children of parents who are members of the Weavertown Church. Some are children of parents who are in the Old Order Amish Church.

Quite a few members are received into the Weavertown Church by transferring memberships from other churches, mostly the old Order Amish Church. At the same time there are about the same number leaving Weavertown Church and going to other churches, mostly Mennonite churches. Between the years 1944 and 1962, 133 members were taken in at Weavertown Church from other

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13. Hannah Smoker, Smoketown, Pa., Personal records.

churches. In the same period of time 130 left the church for other churches.<sup>14.</sup>

The Weavertown Congregation is today a member of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Affiliation. This affiliation is made up of a group of churches which split off the Old Order Amish churches and began working together. The name Beachy is derived from Mose Beachy of Meyersdale, Pennsylvania who helped to start many of these churches. The first minister's meeting in which these churches officially organized was held at Salisbury, Pennsylvania on August 6, 1958.<sup>15.</sup> The 1962 Mennonite Yearbook lists 31 congregations in this organization.

### III. Worship

For a number of years after the Peachey church started, services were held in the homes as had been the custom in the Old Order Amish Church. In 1928 two men from the Peachey Church bought a church house which had belonged to the Brethren, formerly known as German Baptists,<sup>16.</sup> "thinking perhaps the Amish Mennonite Congregation would consider using it."<sup>17.</sup> The church house was located several miles east of Bird-in-Hand, Pennsylvania. The vicinity was called Weavertown although it wasn't really a town, only a few scattered houses. The church house was bought for the sum of one thousand dollars. "The Brethren sold it at this low price because they were only too glad to see it would continue to be used as a church building."<sup>18.</sup>

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14. Yoder.

15. Elam Kauffman, Ronks, Pa., Personal Interview.

16. Barbara Ann Lapp, "The History of the Weavertown Amish Mennonite Church Building" (High School research paper, Lancaster Mennonite School, 1960), p. 1.

17. Ibid. p. 2

18. Ibid. p. 3

At first the Peachey congregation did not agree to using the church house for services. When it was agreed upon, the congregation shouldered the cost.<sup>19</sup>

On July 22, 1928 Sunday School was held in the church house. (Sunday School had been organized prior to this time and held in a schoolhouse, see page 8). From then on, Sunday School was held in the church house every other Sunday. Church services were still held in homes on the alternate Sundays until April 6, 1930, when these too were held in the church house.

This building was adequate until 1962 when it became too crowded. Another church house was built near Cains, Pennsylvania, twelve miles east of the Weavertown building and named Pequea Amish Mennonite Church. To divide the congregation the suggestion was made that each family should attend the church that was closest to his home. This suggestion was generally followed. The first time the congregation was divided the attendance at Weavertown was 203. At Pequea it was 136.

Church services are still conducted primarily in the Pennsylvania German language; however Sunday School, Young People's Meeting, and some special meetings are sometimes conducted partially or wholly in the English.

Luther's translation of the German Bible is used.

A German hymn book called Unparteiische Liedersammlung is used. This book was published in Iowa in January, 1892 and republished by L. A. Miller, Arthur, Illinois in 1940. The songs were taken from the Ausbund, the Unparteiischen Gesangbuch, and from other sources.

The use of the prayer book, Die Ernsthafte Christenpflicht, has been gradually discontinued.<sup>20</sup>

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19. Ibid. p. 3.

20. Elam Kauffman.

#### IV. Church Activities

##### Sunday School

The Sunday School of the Weavertown Congregation has its origin in the German School which was held on Saturday afternoons for two winters. The dates are December 12, 1925 to March 20, 1926 and January 1, 1927 to March 19, 1927. German School was held in the Kauffman School House near Gordonville, Pennsylvania. The leader was a lay member of Weavertown Church, David Lapp (1880- ). The purpose of this school, as it was announced, was to learn to read German, but some of the people had visions of it developing into a Sunday School. The adult classes used the German Bible as their textbook. The children classes used the Neues A.B.C. Buch fur Sonntags Schulen. The program included a German spelling class. The attendance at the first meeting was 48. The highest attendance for which there is record is 70.

On May 13, 1928 a Sunday School was organized by the ministers of the Peachey Church. It was held at Kauffman's School House on Sunday mornings on the alternate Sundays of Church services. On July 22, 1928 Sunday School was held in the Weavertown Church House for the first time. Attendance was 115. The Sunday School lesson was Matthew 11 and 12. The Sunday School Teachers were:

- David Lapp - older brethren class
- Dan S. Stoltzfus - younger married brethren class
- Daniel M. Glick - boy's class
- Reuben Smoker - next class to Testament class
- David S. Smoker - next class younger
- Aaron K. Riehl - A B C class

The superintendent was George Beller, a minister. David Lapp was assistant superintendent. Today both these offices are filled by lay members.

Average attendances

1930 - 130  
1959 - 370

In 1960 the Sunday School was getting too large for the church house at Weavertown, so it was divided. One group continued at Weavertown and the other group met at a Grange Hall near Honeybrook, Pennsylvania. In 1962 when the new church house was built at Pequea, the Sunday School which had met at the Grange Hall moved to Pequea. The first time Sunday School was held at Pequea the attendance there was 136. At Weavertown the attendance was 203. <sup>21.</sup>

Several German books which are still used some in the children's classes in the Sunday School are Neues ABC Buch fur Sonntags Schulen, Biblische Erzahlungen fur Anfanger, and Biblische Erzahlungen fur Unterklassen. For the youth and adult classes the Bible is used.

Young People's Meeting

Sunday evening August 14, 1955 was the first Young People's Meeting held in the Weavertown Church. The meetings were organized by the ministers of the Weavertown Church with the help of the congregation. The meetings were to be held once a month. The program included devotions, children's meeting, several topics or open discussion, and a period of singing from the Church and Sunday School Hymnal. <sup>22.</sup>

Summer Bible School

July 9-20, 1962 Summer Bible School was held for the first time at Weavertown Church. (There was a Bible School at Pequea Church at the same time.) The superintendent was Sylvan Kauffman. Assistant superintendent was Daniel Ebersole. There were thirteen classes ranging from nursery to adult. The Bible School was conducted in the English language.

Herald Press Bible School materials were used in the children's classes. The youth class used the booklet, Youth and the Christian Life, and II Timothy. The adult class used the Dortrecht Confession of Faith and the book of James. The enrollment of the Bible School was 213. The average attendance was 217. The attendance consisted mostly of people from the Weavertown Congregation but also included Mennonite and Old Order Amish people from the community and Fresh-Air Children from New York City.<sup>23.</sup>

Revival Meetings

In January, 1962, a series of Revival Meetings were held at the Weavertown Church. These were the first of their kind. The evangelist was Jake Hershberger from Norfolk, Virginia. The meetings were well attended by neighboring Amish and Mennonite people as well as Weavertown people. There were quite a few responses to the invitation, most of which were confession of sin and rededicating lives to God.

Youth Activities

In 1948 a missionary project was organized by Aaron Riehl. This activity consisted of using an acre of land to raise vegetables. The vegetables were sold and the profit used to donate to mission causes. In 1948 the project was held on the farm of Mrs. Anna Smucker. The first officers were: president-Paul Smucker, vice-president - Wesley Stoltzfus, secretary - Vernon Glick, and treasurer - Melvin Lapp.<sup>24</sup>

In about 1943 a mixed chorus was organized by Aaron Riehl, a married man. This activity consisted of chorus practices every two weeks on Saturday evenings. Aaron Riehl was the director. The song books used were

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23. Sylvan Kauffman, Bird-in-Hand, Pa., Personal letter.

24. Yoder.

Church Hymnal and Favorite Radio Songs by Virgil O. Stamps. This was an informal chorus open to any young people who cared to attend. Programs were given in homes of sick people, Mission Churches, and places like the County Home. "The purpose was to have the young people become more interested in Spiritual activities. I think it did accomplish spiritual values in many ways." 25. This activity was discontinued early in 1949 when Aaron Riehl transferred his membership to the Conservative Conference. In the Spring of 1950 26. two men, Christian Kauffman and Simeon Kauffman met with the ministers and decided to again organize a mixed chorus for the young people. The purpose was "to get our young folks more interested in singing and to have some spiritual activity for them. I think the purpose was very well accomplished." 27 The first leader, Wesley Stoltzfus, was taken from the youth group. This practice has continued. This chorus was conducted in much the same way as the previous chorus except that programs were not given in churches. This activity has continued to the present. The books used now are Church Hymnal and Songs of the Church. The interest shown by the youth fluctuates somewhat but in general is good.

Bible Study was organized in about 1953 by the youth themselves under the leadership of Dan L. Lapp. This activity consisted of a meeting every two weeks on Wednesday evening in which there was a period of Bible study, led by a member of the youth group, and a prayer meeting. The Bible study usually consisted of open discussion on a portion of the Bible or a particular subject. The meetings were held in private homes. Several years

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25. Aaron Riehl, Quarryville, Pa., Personal letter.

26. Wesley Stoltzfus, Alto, Ky., Personal letter.

27. Simeon Kauffman, Gordonville, Pa., Personal letter.

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later these meetings were held in cooperation with the church at which time it was decided that the ministers should take turns to attend the Bible Studies. The ministers did not take charge of the meetings. They continued to be youth activities held in private homes. This activity continues to the present with good interest by the majority of youth. I think it has done much to stimulate Spiritual growth among the youth.

On September 1956 a Tract Band was started by Homer Schrock, a youth from Somerset County, Pennsylvania who was serving his I.W. service near Lancaster. The first officers were Homer Schrock-president, Ruth Petersheim-secretary, treasurer, Ray Lapp and Naomi Petersheim in charge of the mailing list. "The purpose of it being started was first because of the constraining love of Christ. I believe that this was the main reason, to quickly tell others and literature is one of the most effective ways in distributing tracts. Secondly it has been started as a useful activity for energetic people. To give them something to do and give their attentions to something constructive and lasting." 28. Meetings are held once a month at which time tracts are prepared for distribution and for the mailing list. At present there are 135 people on the mailing list. The monthly goal in tract distribution is 4,000. These are distributed in four cities: Reading, Pennsylvania; York, Pennsylvania; Chester, Pennsylvania; and Wilmington, Delaware. The tracts are distributed by small groups of young people on the city streets on Friday evenings. There are an average of about 25 response cards a month received from the tract distribution. Most of these cards are from the cities where the tracts are distributed, but there are always some from other states as well. The interest of the

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28. Floyd Stoltzfus, Bird-in-Hand, Pa., Personal letter.

young people in this activity is not as intense as it was at first, but many still have a good interest in it.<sup>29</sup>

### Relief Work

The Weavertown Congregation helps the MCC with their canning projects and clothing projects.

Senior Sewing Circle was started in November 1937 by Katie Beiler, Paradise, Pennsylvania. The first meeting was held at her house. There were 27 present. The officers elected were Katie Beiler-superintendent, Sallie Stoltzfus-assistant superintendent, Anna Glick-secretary, Hannah Smoker-treasurer. The purpose of the sewing circle was to sew for relief. The average attendance the first year was 37. The total amount of pieces finished the first year was 74. This included garments, quilts, and comforts. At first sewing circle was held in homes. Beginning in 1952 it was held in the church basement. The average attendance for 1962 was 64. The number of pieces finished in that year was 2,137. Special projects of the sewing circle include doing the mending for a local children's home and sewing in three hospitals, one day a year in each. The interest shown by the women in the sewing circle is excellent. They respond well when special needs are presented.<sup>30</sup>

Junior Sewing Circle was organized in 1934. Emma Stoltzfus played an important part in starting it. When it first started Millwood (Mennonite) congregation and Weavertown had it together. In July 1939 they were separated. The attendance at the first meeting was 31. The first time Weavertown had theirs separately the attendance was 23. The first officers were Emma

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29. Ibid.

30. Savilla Kauffman, Bird-in-Hand, Pa., Personal letter.

Stoltzfus-president, Mary Yoder-secretary, Melba Shetler-secretary, and Elsie Stoltzfus-treasurer.<sup>31</sup> The average attendance in 1962 was 25. At first sewing circle was held once a month on Saturday afternoon. At present it is held on a week day evening. The interest of the girls in this activity is fair.

### Missions

Through the years the Weavertown congregation has furnished workers for mission organizations of other churches. In 1955, Weavertown, along with other Beachy churches organized a mission organization of their own called Amish Mennonite Aid (A.M.A.). The board of trustees was Jake Hershberger, Norfolk, Virginia, Elam Kauffman, Ronks, Pennsylvania, and Norman Beachy, Somerset County, Pennsylvania. The first project was a mission in Berlin, Germany. The first workers sailed on April 20, 1956. They were Mr. and Mrs. Joe Roth from New York and Anna Mary Stoltzfus from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The first year the work was under the Evangelical Hilfwert, but in August 1957 the A.M.A. bought some property and Freidensheim was established. It began as a relief agency for refugees, but when refugees discontinued coming from East Berlin this work was discontinued. The mission work includes working with children and youth, Sunday School, Bible School, craft classes, and Bible Study. On March 12, 1963 Lewis Overholt was ordained a minister to serve at this place. The first converts at this church were Mrs. Ackel and her son Herbert. They were accepted into the church fellowship by baptism. They had been baptized as infants.

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31. Rachel Lapp, Kinzer, Pa., Personal letter.

In May 1962 A.M.A. started another project in El Salvador. The first workers were Harvey and Katherine Kauffman, Ben Stoltzfus, John Glick, Wayne Shrock, and Elmer Hershberger. This project includes an agricultural program with the men, and working with the women in teaching them to prepare and preserve food. It is hoped that in the future this will lead to a program of spiritual aid.

At the same time, work was started in Belize, British Honduras. This city suffered severe destruction during a hurricane. The work includes relief and spiritual aid. Plans are also being made for a hospital. The first workers at this place were Lester and Sarah Gingrich.

In 1961 the E.C.A. (Eastern, Conservative, Amish) advisory board was organized. This is a combination of the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, Conservative Mennonite Mission Board and the A.M.A. The Eastern and Conservative boards had been working together before, then in 1961 they asked the A.M.A. to join them. They all three work together but each sponsors their own program.<sup>32</sup>

#### V. Way of Life

The people in the Weavertown Amish Mennonite Church have made some cultural changes since they left the Old Order Amish Church, but they have also retained some of the traditional practices.

Their dress is distinctive but not as "plain" as that of the Amish.

As early as 1928 automobiles were used by church consent.<sup>33</sup> Since then, most mechanical appliances and machinery have come into use.

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32. Elam Kauffman.

33. Mattie S. Lapp

The people are still largely rural but some are moving off the farms to towns. Of the first members of the Peachey Church, 30 of the 35 (86%) heads of households were farmers. The others were day laborers, miller, poultry dealer, and thresher. Today of the 102 heads of households of both Weavertown and Pequea, 55 (53%) are farmers. Other occupations include carpenter, mechanic, lumberman, sales clerk, truck driver, florist, marketing, blacksmith, butcher, horse dealer, and lawn caretaker.<sup>34</sup>

The educational status of the people is also changing. Of the original members of the Peachey Church, probably none had more than what would today be comparable to a sixth grade education. Today, of the 50 young people of high school age of Weavertown and Pequea, 24 have, or are attending high school, 8 are taking high school correspondence courses, and 18 never attended high school.<sup>35</sup> (These figures are approximate.)

May the concern of the members of the Weavertown Amish Mennonite Congregation always be to conform their "way of life" to that of Jesus Christ.

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34. Research by Lila Yoder, Kinzer, Pa., and Verda Kauffman, Bird-in-Hand, Pa.

35. Research by Lydia Beiler, Ronks, Pa., and Katie Stoltzfus, Honeybrook, Pa. and Verda Kauffman.

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