

**Interview with Henry Yoder, Goshen, Indiana, June 30, 2000**

About Yoder's journey in the Old Order Amish, Beachy Amish, Conservative Mennonite, and Mennonite Church, 1920s-1950, in Maryland and Pennsylvania.

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Interview typed out by Dennis Stoesz  
Mennonite Church USA Archives-Goshen, Goshen, Indiana

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Dennis Stoesz:

**Introduction**

At the Archives, we have some Beachy Amish documents of the 1920s and 1930s when this church began, and so I wanted to acquaint myself further with the Beachy Amish story. In talking with you, with whom I also attend East Goshen Mennonite Church, I learned you had some knowledge and experiences in this church. So I thought I would ask you to tell me more.

Henry Yoder:

**1. Yoder Public School, 1890s-1980s, Grantsville, Garrett County, Maryland**

Maybe I'll start with the Yoder School. There was a Yoder Public School that started in Garrett County in Maryland in the 1890s. My paternal grandfather, Moses D. Yoder, donated land for this school to be built. It was located about one and a half miles from the town of Grantsville. Yoder was a minister in the Old Order Amish Church, and was quite strict on the ban. Moses D. Yoder married Caroline Beachy (born 1850) in 1871: she was my paternal grandmother. I believe George L. Bender, who later was the treasurer of Mennonite Board of Missions, Elkhart, Indiana, taught here in Garrett County from about 1890-95. He may have taught at the Yoder Public School, although I have not

found enough documentation on that. My father, Ed. M. Yoder (Edward M. Yoder, born 1878), went to school there, and so did I did (born 1918), for seven years.

I actually lived about a mile from this Yoder Public School when I was growing up. Many years later I served as the janitor of this Yoder school for 32 years. And my spouse, Esther (Eash) Yoder, was the principal of this Yoder school. When I was growing up, we also lived near the Conservative Mennonite meeting place at Maple Glenn. The church building had been built in 1881 and had served as a meetinghouse for the Old Order Amish Church until 1896. Maybe I should begin my story there.

**2. Old Order Amish Church, Maryland and Pennsylvania, 1881-1896, and the beginning of the Conservative Mennonite "Marylanders" Church, Maryland, 1896**

It was back in 1881 that four church meeting houses were built by the Old Order Amish community of this area, two in Garrett County, Maryland and two in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. The names of these meeting places in Maryland were Cherry Glade, at Bittering, and Maple Glenn, at Grantsville. In Pennsylvania, the two church buildings were known as Flag Run, at Niverton, and Summit Mills, at Mechanicsburg. Joel Beachy was bishop of the church and he was more liberal than Moses D. Yoder. Joel was the father of Caroline who married Moses D. Yoder.

It was in 1896 then that a split took place in the Old Order Amish church because of four part singing, and the use of the ban / shunning. The "Marylanders" as they were known sang four part harmony, while the group in Pennsylvania did not. This group became known as the "Conservative Amish Mennonite Church", and they kept the two church meeting places in Maryland: Maple Glenn and Cherry Glade. Joel Miller was bishop of this church.

All the 1881 Church Buildings in Maryland and Pennsylvania are quite historic, since it really was built by the Old Order Amish group, and then was used by the Beachy Amish and Conservative Mennonites as well as by the Old Orders.

**3. Old Order Amish Church, Somerset County, Pennsylvania, 1896-1927,  
and Beachy Amish Church Beginnings, 1927**

After the 1896 division, the Old Order Amish kept meeting in the two church buildings in Somerset County: at Flag Run and at Summit Mills. Church was usually held every other Sunday, and was also held on an alternating basis between the two meeting places. My grandparents, Moses D. and Caroline (Beachy) Yoder attended this church.

It was many years later, during the 1920s, when another division occurred in this Old Order Amish group. It so happened that one Sunday a group of persons, including Moses D. Yoder (who were to remain as part of the Old Order Amish Church) decided to meet in the meetinghouse that was not on the schedule for that Sunday. Possibly it was at the Summit Mills church, I am not completely certain which. People in buggies actually met each other on the road going in opposite directions that Sunday, and they may have wondered what was going on. It was unannounced.

Moses M. Beachy was the young minister and leader in the Beachy Amish church, who lived on the Pennsylvania side of the line. We lived just 2-3 miles away from his farm on the Maryland side. There were also some connections between this group in Somerset County, and that of John A. Stoltzfus' church in Weavertown, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. They had automobiles and telephones, like the Beachy Amish did in Somerset County.

My parents became part of this new Beachy Amish church. I was born in 1918, and was about 9 or 10 years old when this division took place in my community. I grew up in this church and joined it when I was sixteen or seventeen years old. I did not hear

my parents talk openly about the 1927 split, except sometimes when company would come.

There were a lot of marriages between Beachy Amish and Old Order families, and the church split also split up families. For example, my grandparents stayed with the Old Order group, and my parents went with the Beachy Amish.

As for numbers, there may have been a few more people who stayed in the Old Order Amish church than the ones who were part of the new Beachy Amish church. After the division, or shortly before, Joe Yoder, a nephew of Moses D. Yoder (also of the Old Order church), was ordained a minister and/or bishop of the Old Order Amish church. Moses D. Yoder (1847-1927) had been ordained a bishop in 1895. [Paton Yoder, Tradition and Transition, page 279; Steve Nolt, A History of the Amish, page 233]

I remember that sometimes shunning was practiced by the Old Order group when it came to threshing time. Shunning prevented Old Order members from eating with persons who had left and joined other churches. Usually the Old Order and the Beachy Amish each had their own threshing machine, and did the harvest work separately. Amos Yoder, an Old Order Amishman, had a threshing machine, and it was used by the Old Order members. And Mose Beachy's machine was used for threshing by the Beachy Church members. The threshing crews, however, consisted of members from both Beachy and Old Order Amish churches, as well as others. For example, Mr. Simon Tice. He had left the Old Order Amish church during or after the 1896 "Marylanders" split and had ended up in the Mennonite Church. And so a meal times, a special place was given him so he would not be eating with any Old Order Amish members. Beachy Amish and Old Order Amish members, however, could eat with each other. This was because at the time of their 1927 split, it so happened that these two groups came to mutual understanding with each other

that a certain time would be given for families or family members to choose which church they wanted to attend, without having families or individual members be shunned as a result of choosing one church or the other.

#### **4. Beachy Amish and Old Order Amish Church, 1927-1950s**

The Beachy Amish and Old Order continued to use both meetinghouses, Flag Run and Summit Mills. They would just use them alternately every other Sunday. After a few years, the Beachy Amish started to have Sunday School, and would hold their Sunday School at both churches when neither the Beachy Amish or the Old Order Amish would be holding a church service that Sunday.

The first bishop of the Beachy Amish church was Moses M. Beachy (1874-1946), who lived on the Pennsylvania side. He had been ordained a minister on May 19, 1912, and bishop, October 1, 1916, in the Old Order Amish church. [See article on him in the Mennonite Encyclopedia Vol. 5, 1990]. Moses Beachy got calls from several places to start Beachy Amish Churches, like at Norfolk, Virginia. Eli Tice was the next Beachy Amish Bishop, after Moses Beachy.

It was only in 1950 that the Beachy Amish built a new meetinghouse in Somerset County, the Mountain View Christian Fellowship. It was built about half way between the two other churches at Flag Run and Summit Mills, near West Salisbury. My brother, Noah Yoder, was minister there, plus three others, Eli Tice, Norman Beachy and Mose Beachy. Noah Yoder had been ordained in 1940.

#### **5. Conservative Mennonite Church, 1941-46**

It was in 1941 that my call to the draft came, and I went to register at Norfolk, Virginia. I was deferred on a farm in Virginia, where I worked for about three months.

Later I was deferred for farm work on the Menno J. Yoder farm, in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. I also worked for the Rural Electric Association, and boarded at home.

It was during the time I spent in Somerset County that I joined the Conservative Mennonite Church. By now, this church had built the Oakdale Church in Somerset County, Pennsylvania besides their two meetinghouses in Maryland: Maple Glenn and Cherry Glade. I liked this church's four part singing. This singing attracted me, and was different than the much slower tunes sung in the Beachy Amish churches. One of my best chums in Yoder School had also been part of this Conservative Mennonite Church. I was 23 years old, and this was around 1941.

I then asked for a church letter from the Beachy Amish church, and received one. I then took this letter to Chris W. Bender who was the bishop of the Conservative Mennonite Church. I also remember that my official acceptance into the Conservative church was delayed for two Sundays because I had got a haircut from a barber who belonged to the Mennonite Church, and the haircut was not quite satisfactory.

During this time I also took correspondence courses for high school. Other members of this church were also doing this. Later I was deferred on another farm, and that is where I became acquainted with the farmer who also was a mortician, and had a mortician business. I thought of becoming a mortician, but the Conservative Mennonite Church, of which I had become a member, did not approve of me getting further education, which I required to do this work.

There was quite a spread from conservative to middle to liberal views in the Conservative Mennonite Church. I think this is how this church helped solve tensions within the group. Each of the four churches were slightly different, and members could choose which church they wanted to go to for worship. The two more liberal churches

were Oakdale, in Somerset County, and Cherry Glade, in, Maryland. Maple Glen, near Grantsville, Maryland, was more conservative than those two churches. Later Cherry Glade also took over the Dry Run mission church, in Garrett County, Maryland. Alta Schrock attended that church, as did my nephew, Vernon Yoder, when this Dry Run Church was still a mission station under the Allegheny Mennonite Conference. Eventually, however, this church became the most conservative. They also built a school and gymnasium in the geographic area of the Cherry Glade Mennonite Church. Then the Maple Glenn Conservative Church stood sort of in the middle between the liberal Oakdale and Cherry Glade churches and the more conservative Dry Run church.

One person I remember who left the Old Order Amish church and joined the Conservative Amish Mennonite Church was Allan Wengerd. In the 1920s I remember him driving his car on the way to one of the Conservative Mennonite Churches in Maryland while we would pass him with our horse and buggy (or three-seated spring wagon) on our way to the Flag Run or Summit Mills in Pennsylvania.

I also know that Paul Peachy was part of this Conservative church, and that he also went on to College at Harrisonburg, Virginia. This church struggled with persons going to college. Even attendance in public high school was frowned upon, although one was allowed to take high school courses through correspondence, which I myself did.

#### **6. Mennonite Church, 1946-**

My parents always had Mennonite Church magazines in their home, like the Youth's Christian Companion, Gospel Herald, and Herold der Wahrheit. My father stopped subscribing to the Gospel Herald when Paul Erb became editor. My parents also supported the Mennonite Board of Missions, and Mennonite Central Committee. They knew A. J. Miller of the community, and the book on Feeding the Hungry in Russia, 1921-

25 in their home. I also attended a Young People's Institute. The family would also attend special events in the local Springs Mennonite church.

Some members of my family had turned to the Mennonite Church. My sister, born in 1906, joined the Springs Mennonite Church in about 1932-33. And my youngest brother, born in 1921, also became Mennonite.

It was on March 16, 1946, that I helped take cattle on a cattle boat from United States to Greece. My brother Edwin had made his trip in December 1945. [These relief efforts after World War II were sponsored by the Church of the Brethren Service Committee]

It was in fall 1946 that I decided to go to school at Eastern Mennonite School at Harrisonburg, Virginia. I had already taken a special Winter Bible Term at EMS in 1945. It was when I was at EMS (now called Eastern Mennonite University) from 1946-47, that Dean C. K. Lehman recommended that I could transfer my membership to a Mennonite Church. At some point during that school year, 1946-47, my membership was transferred from the Conservative Mennonite Church to the Banks Mennonite Church in Virginia. I had visited Banks Mennonite, and maybe that is why it was transferred there. During my school year I also attended the Sunday School and chapel services at Eastern Mennonite.

After one year at EMS, I decided to take a teaching position at Johnstown, Pennsylvania, where I taught for three years, 1947-50. It was here that I also met Esther Eash. I also remember attending summer classes at Goshen College in 1948. I remember Miriam Charles taught "Teaching of Reading" and Walter Yoder had a music class. I forget who was the teacher for my other class I took.

It was during this time, 1947-50, that I asked to have my membership transferred from the Banks Mennonite Church to the Springs Mennonite Church. The other three



church groups in this Somerset County area tended to see this church as too liberal: the Old Order Amish Church, the Beachy Amish Church (Flag Run, Summit Mills and Mount View Christian Fellowship) and the Conservative Mennonites (Oakdale). Today the Old Order Amish have four church districts and four bishops in this area, and fill the two church houses each Sunday at Flag Run and Summit Mills. Two districts use the buildings one Sunday, and the other two districts use the church building on the next Sunday.

After Esther and I got married, we moved to Grantsville, Maryland, where I bought some farm property from my sister and brother-in-law. Esther was a teacher and principal at Yoder School, and I served as janitor there for 32 years.

It was during this time that Springs Mennonite asked us to help out at the Oak Grove Mennonite Church. It was located five miles west of Grantsville. We were members of this church from 1950 until 1995 when we moved to Goshen, Indiana. This Oak Grove church had begun on April 14, 1900, and celebrated its 100th anniversary this year. This church was part of the Allegheny Mennonite Conference.

Dennis Stoesz:

#### **Pilgrimage through four churches**

As I listened to you, Henry, I think you have been part of a special pilgrimage in attending four different churches: Old Order Amish, Beachy Amish, Conservative Mennonite, and then the Mennonite Church. I think this would give a person a unique perspective. Thank you for sharing your faith journey.

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