

The Founding of Calvary Bible School - Calico Rock, AR
By Steve L. Yoder, Nappanee, IN (Retired Bishop – Maple Lawn Amish Mennonite)

September 18, 07

The first bible school board meeting was held on April 3, 1969 at Meyersdale, PA. The board members were, Yost Miller, OH, Willie Wagler, KS, Ervin Hershberger, PA, Steve Yoder, IN, and Jonas E. Miller, OH.

We held over 25 board meetings up through 1975. I attended all but two at which times I had a proxy attending. On Aug 13, 69 the Beachy Ministers meeting was held at the Maple Lawn Church at Nappanee, IN. Here the names of Calvary Messenger for the church publication and Calvary Bible School for the school were finalized. The first bible school session was held from December 29, 1969 to February 6, 1970.

I have examined the minutes of all these meetings. I found no statement of purpose for the school other than that mentioned under the heading -- Calvary Bible School Background, below. Neither did I find a constitution, nor any discussions about writing one. All decisions made by the board concerning rules and regulations were reflected in the annual brochures which were handed to all prospective students.

Below are all parties who worked together to decide whether something could be worked out that we could use that empty school building at Culp, AR. Simon Gingerich represented the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities. Chester Slagle represented the South Central Mennonite Conference. Manasses Bontrager represented the Bethel Springs Mennonite Church. Dr. John Grasse represented the Arkansas Mennonite Camping Association. The Beachy Bible School Board represented the Beachy Churches. Above this, since bible school of this type was new for the Beachy Churches, the board could not execute a deal, or even make a sure or permanent decision on purchasing, renting, or leasing the property without permission of the Beachy Ministerial Body. They meet annually. So, to work things out was no small matter. All the above had a joint meeting at the Bethel Springs Church on January 16, 1971.

Simon Gingerich asked us to make an offer. Our board said we have no offer. We are here to see what proposition may be offered us. The buildings were too small for us. We were now in our second year of bible school. Presently, we were just renting it. We told them we are still looking at properties elsewhere.

The records reveal some very interesting happenings. At a meeting on August 6, 1970 Steve suggested we offer them \$5,000.00 for the property. After some discussion there was unanimous voice to do so. This action was never again mentioned at a board meeting.

Eventually the question arose, who really owns this property? On January 29, 1972 the Bethel Springs Church was seeking the deed to the school property. They began to realize that if they have no deed, they can't sell it. We were offered a 30yr lease of the school at a dollar per year. But it was very difficult to decide how repairs, remodeling, or other improvements would be handled.

Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities was rather scattered on their opinion of a price for the property. Simon Gingerich at one time said it should be worth a lot of money since it is so remote. This is exactly why we felt they will not find another buyer. Their first offer to us was \$20,000.00. In late 1970 Gordon Schraag said there has been a suggestion of selling to us at \$5,000.00, but it needs approval by Elkhart. But a call to Willie from Simon Gingerich of Elkhart suggested they might sell at \$7,000.00.

On Feb. 19, 1971 Sam and Mae Lenerd offered us 25 acres of land free, if we want to build a new school. At one point they offered us \$1,000 to help buy the school if we come together on a price. Later, we gave the owners an offer of \$3,000.00. On April 3, 1973 the ministerial body approved purchasing the school property at that price. They also approved \$10,000.00 for remodeling. The board immediately had several contractors look it over and decide whether it were better to tear it down and start over, or to build onto it. Building onto it was recommended. This addition measured 24' x 60' and three stories high.

After a long search for the deed it was found in the office of Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities. The Arkansas folks found out that MBMC owned it and if we bought it the proceeds would go to them. Now, since the Arkansas folks would get nothing out of it they cared little whether we pay for it or not. They just wanted us to have it. Our board also had a different attitude about its purchase. We contended that this is just handing a property from one not-for-profit organizing to another. There should be no exchange of money. Consequently, after a few more discussions, I walked into the office of Attorney Ernest Bennett at Elkhart, who was executive treasurer of MBMC. I handed him a dollar bill and he signed the deed and handed it to me.

CALVARY BIBLE SCHOOL

BACKGROUND: The Beachy Fellowship ministers noticed that each year there are more of our youth attending Mennonite Bible schools. They reasoned among themselves that we could have our own school. Several of our ministers were, in fact, teaching in the schools alluded to above. Therefore, at the next annual Beachy Ministers Meeting the idea was presented and accepted, and a board was appointed. This first board was an investigation board. The thinking of the board was that the school should be centrally located.

Brother Yost Miller of Millersburg, OH and I, having been appointed to this new board, had looked into several possibilities. Then one morning, we had planned to check county by county through Ohio, seeking for a large empty building for sale. He got into my vehicle at his home and we started out. At the first town my vehicle would not shift. I could not get it to move. Yost went down the street to a garage for a mechanic. They were too busy to look at it. Later he went to another garage. They would fix it but it would be 3-4 days before they could get to it. Finally he took off, making another attempt at finding a mechanic, to at least look at it. I sat there praying. When he returned, he reported, "no success!" So I said crawl in. He asked what are we to do? I said I'm going home. How will you go? I'll take you home first. I turned the key, put it in gear and took off. It shifted perfectly. I drove home convinced that we were not supposed to continue our search. The transmission lasted another 10 years then I junked the car.

HUNTING SCHOOL PROPERTIES:

Below are some of the school properties we investigated. I was to most of them and recall some of the obstacles we encountered.

Belmont, IL Aug 23, 1971: this was one of the first ones and we spent much more time and gave more attention to this one than any of the others. We had an option on this one, but eventually gave it up.

Jackson Township Central School: 10 miles east of Fort Wayne, IN.

The Armstrong School: 10 miles north-east of Evansville, IN.

Pleasant Valley Lodge: at Attica, near Wabash, IN.

Old School at Wapekong, IN.

Most of these buildings were much too large and needed a lot of repairs and work to fix them suitable to our needs. Year by year we were renting the buildings at Culp, Ark. and conducting bible school there.

HISTORY: Let's go back a bit further. Mae Strubhar of Kansas (whom I knew well) taught school in the foothills of the Ozarks, in Arkansas. During the 1941-1942 school year and for the next 4 years she and another girl taught at the Cold Water and Casteel schools. This last school was very primitive. About this time there was a desire locally (around Bethel Springs, in the Culp area) for a Christian day school. Why a Christian day school?

The Baxter County School Superintendent was quite easy to work with, but there were some objectionable things. One was that these Christian girls (Mennonite teachers) could not be patriotic enough for the public school system. Then too, the school board considered it illegal to hold Bible studies. There were also other problems. Some parents could not see why the teachers didn't let the boys smoke cigarettes at school.

Consequently, the church folks started holding school at the Bethel Springs Mennonite Church, calling it the Bethel Springs School. After several years, they had all grades, 1 through 12. Mae was one of those early teachers here. Once this looked like a success the church was given a property across the road for a new school. Since the Dr. Grasse cabin was on this property when we first came here, we assume it was he who donated the property. During the 1945-46 school year the local men started building on the school property. This same year the mission house burned down. There was no original official blue print for the new school building. So as the building rose new suggestions were given and new plans developed. It became larger, more convenient and modern, as time went on. The burning of the mission house added to the financial burden of the local church and community.

FINANCIAL CRISES: At first the local folks gave all the money they had to start building the school. The South Central Mennonite Conference was also helping the church; however, their funds were soon depleted. People came from Oregon, California, Kansas, and other states to assist in the work but funds for the material were not sufficient. With no mission house rooms, and the Bethel Springs church full, they were pressed for space. Consequently, they called upon the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, at Elkhart, IN, for financial assistance. As soon as one room was ready the high school students were moved in. Next, for the 1947-48 school term four teachers were placed on the third floor in one of the teacher's quarters. Mae was also one of these. They had no bathroom yet, nor electricity, but it was much better in many ways than what they had experienced in the small public schools. Each room had its own un-vented LP gas wall heater. Mae taught here until 1965 when the school closed.

MISSION FARM: Sometime during this era (probably the mid 50's) a brother from Virginia gave a 160 acre farm to the mission. I have no name nor exact date when this took place. The mission asked Clifford Strubhar Mae's brother, a single man, to come

and see whether he could make something profitable of it. The farm lies in a valley east of the Culp post office/store slab. (Is it still there?) From here you go uphill a short distance then turn left and down sharply.

It is interesting how sometimes when one wants to help a mission, his deed becomes a burden. The place was run down. The house needed a lot of work before it was livable. Some farm equipment was purchased. Clifford tried some truck farming. A field of peanuts did quite well. Eventually, the mission managed to build a large broiler house on the farm. Now it became profitable. When I first became aware of it, Floyd Miller, living there, had bought it from the mission. The driveway was steep and dangerous on icy mornings. In later years there was too much work there for the Millers, so they sold the farm. He had been a great help to us in the first years of Calvary Bible School. He kept a watchful eye on the grounds while the school was not in operation.

RIVER BRIDGE: During this time there were some changes taking place. The Christians and others, who liked the Mennonite teachers, left the public schools. They were now very small. As soon as the bridge was in over the White River, by Calico, the Baxter County public school board decided to bus the mountain children down to Calico Rock. I have no recollections nor written information on what was the cause, but after the 20th anniversary of the Bethel Springs School, it was closed. That last year they had only 35 students. In the middle of that school year Mae married Sam Lenhart, a widower. They often visited us as we were preparing for the next school term. In our early years Route 5 was being rebuilt. Some curves were being taken out and many hills and sharp dips were improved. During this time we sometimes had to go up Route 5 to Norfolk and cross the river by ferry. Now, one would cross several fields then up over the mountain to reach Bethel Springs.

ARKANSAS: Yost and I reported our experience in Ohio to the board. Now we got word from Willie Wagler, a Kansas board member. He was contacted by Manasses Bontrager who was pastor at the Bethel Springs Church in Arkansas. There was an empty school building at Culp. When arriving at the location, we found the building with all the details he had described. The size though, was only half what he had guessed it to be. To be sure the location and the facilities would work for us, we just rented it for several years. It was still being used by the local sewing circle, the camping association, and sometimes for an out-of-state family outing. A new mission house had been built and was often used for missionaries at home on furlough.

At first we felt our eastern members will say, it is way too far south-west! Route 5 is extremely hard to transverse. It's too far from a doctor and too far from town. NO WAY! But the Lord knows what he is doing! Later, we learned that the distance from town is a plus. The mountains are a cherished attraction for both teachers and students. To our surprise, none of the above objections are mentioned by those who go down as teachers or students. The location is a big hit in many ways. To God be the glory!
Submitted by Steve L. Yoder