

*The Troyer and Kramer Families:
Ezra and Amanda (Kramer) Troyer*

by Sharon Troyer

MY TRIPLE-GREAT-GRANDFATHER, Christian Nissley, arrived in America, October 12, 1804. Like many Europeans, Grandfather left his German homeland to escape the servitude endured by the common people of that time. Most of the rural countryside was owned by rich nobles and dukes who passed their holdings on to their heirs. To survive, the lower class eked out a bare existence as servants and farm

laborers on the large estates of these aristocrats. Should they meet master or mistress on the street, they were expected to scrape and bow before their superiors. Christian Nissley left that behind for freedom in America.

Sometime after arriving in the United States, Christian joined the Amish Church, married, and was later ordained a minister. We Troyers and Kramers are linked to Grandfather



Ezra Troyer residence near the 500 block of Independence Boulevard in Virginia Beach, circa 1958. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer

Christian through his son, Abraham, whose daughter, Elizabeth, married Emanuel (Monie) Troyer, January 25, 1898, in Reno County, Kansas. Their oldest son, Ezra, became my grandfather.

Known by their Pennsylvania German names as Monie and Lissie, the couple had seven children. Monie had a wanderlust most of his life and the family moved frequently. As natives of Holmes County, Ohio, they lived in Missouri and Kansas and Exeland, Wisconsin, and twice at Middlefield, Ohio, before moving in 1925, to Moyock in northeastern North Carolina. Two years later, Monies moved several miles north, across the state line to Hickory, Virginia.

A blacksmith by trade, Monie was also skilled at turning out hand-made knives. He forge-hammered and tempered the blades from old truck springs and crosscut saw steel, finishing them with riveted and carved wooden handles. Monie found ready sales for his products at Norfolk city's curbside market on Brewer Street. According to a former helper, the blades had a reputation for holding a keen edge.

Though he developed a tremor with advancing age, Monie still managed a delicate task now and then. Once while repairing a pair of eyeglass frames, he held the soldering iron in his shaky hand. At the precise time in the tremble, the tip touched the broken pieces and the job was done.

Monie and Lizzie lived at South Norfolk the last few years of his life.

He died there, December 13, 1935, and is buried at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite cemetery. Lizzie then went to live with her namesake daughter, Lizzie and son-in-law, Dan



Amanda and Ezra Troyer, circa 1968.
Courtesy of Sharon Troyer

Kramer and family until her death December 5, 1947.

Monie and Lizzie's oldest son, Ezra, my grandfather, married Amanda Kramer two days before Christmas, 1928. The oldest of their twelve children—six girls and six boys—is my father, Joe, who married Catherine Swartzentruber, October 6, 1953. I am the oldest of their three girls and four boys. While all that information may seem insignificant to some readers, I know most Amish and Mennonites enjoy playing the "Mennonite game"—learning who is related to whom.

The Depression years of the 1930s were difficult for the Troyer family. Sometimes there was barely enough food, and that was often less than

nutritious. Living in the Deep Creek area, Ezra worked for a local farmer for ninety cents an hour; however, he was docked ten cents per hour on rainy days. Occasionally, Ezra made a little extra income blacksmithing or turning out a cart or buggy wheel. A strip of flat steel was heated in the forge, curved into a circle, the ends hammered rather than welded, and attached as a rim for the wooden wheel.

Ezra and Amanda were members of the small Deep Creek Old Order Amish community that existed then in the Shilleigh and West Roads area of Chesapeake. At age thirty-six in 1934, he was ordained to the ministry. While he may not have been as eloquent a speaker as some, Ezra's clear, high-pitched voice kept his audience awake. Once someone asked his daughter, Mary, "Why does your dad talk so loudly?"

Mary, in the presence of the questioner said, "Dad, someone wants to know why you talk so loudly?"

Without lowering his voice a half-tone, Grandpa replied, "So the people can hear me!"

Though Ezra staunchly defended church standards and Christian doctrine, there was one Amish tradition with which he disagreed. That involved the practice of excommunicating for several weeks anyone who had committed a gross sin, regardless of the circumstances. Someone who knew him well says Grandpa felt when a sin was voluntarily confessed, the erring brother or sister needed to be

treated with compassion, rather than as an unrepentant wrong doer.

By the mid-1940s the Amish Church at Deep Creek had dwindled to two or three families. Ezra, Amanda, and their children began attending services with the congregation at Kempsville. By 1946, they bought a car and became members of the church there. A year or two later they moved from Deep Creek to a farm on Landstown Road, owned by Menno L. Yoder. The place, between Princess Anne and Salem Roads, was later owned or leased by Winn Nursery.

While much closer to Kempsville than formerly—here Ezra's children could attend Kempsville Mennonite School seven miles away—the family did not move into the heart of the church community until the early 1950s. At that time the family bought a chicken farm on the south side of Holland Road, between present Edwin Drive and Baxter Road. Baxter then was mostly a footpath, however, a barely passable lane came in to a number of small houses for a couple hundred yards from Princess Anne Road.

Besides the two large ground-level chicken houses, there were living quarters on the second story fronting Holland Road. Directly beneath was the feed storage room, later also used for sorting and crating eggs. In the early years Grandpas raised broilers, but switched to laying hens after broilers became unprofitable. Along with egg

sales at the house, the family also served customers along a regular door-to-door delivery route. As the children grew older and moved away and Ezra's health began to fail, one of the chicken houses was shut down. He then worked part time sharpening saws.

Our house was next door to Grandpa, and I well remember getting off the school bus, the shop door standing open and the harsh scrape of file against metal as Grandpa whetted a dull saw blade. Now and again, he would stop to gaze at us and the traffic going by.

Grandpa usually took an afternoon nap, and I particularly recall my aunts telling us children, "Now play quietly, Dawdy's sleeping." I'm sure they must

have forgotten how difficult it is for children at play to be quiet.

Ezra Troyers faced their first separation of a family member, October 16, 1965. Sixth child and second son, Robert, twenty-six, went Home to be with the Lord. He had a cerebral hemorrhage while out hunting, and lived only a few hours longer. Robert left behind his wife, Arlene, and three small daughters, Lilly Joy, Faith Amanda, and Martha Ann. Robert and Arlene's son, Robert Lee Jr., was born several months later.

Grandpa's health continued to deteriorate. He became bedfast several months before dying of cancer June 11, 1969. Since then daughters Mary,

Robert Troyer, 1959. Courtesy of Harold Overholt



Clara, Martha, Edith, and Grandma Amanda have all gone to be with Grandpa and Robert in Glory.

Year by year, real estate development—commercial and residential—had crept closer to the Troyers on Holland Road. The desire for less crowded surroundings grew more appealing. In 1971, after selling the property there, Grandma and our family moved to rural Buckingham County, near Farmville, Virginia.

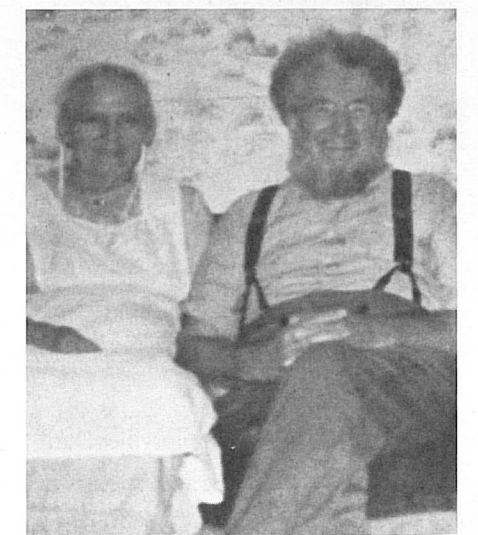
For more than a decade she stayed busy piecing quilts and quilting for other people. However, by the late 1980s, Amanda Troyer had too become a victim of the dreadful cancer that had taken her husband and three daughters. As the illness progressed, she required more care and moved in with her son Calvin's family at Stuarts Draft. There, various members of the extended family cared for Grandma until her Home-going in May 1991. She is buried in the Farmville Mennonite Church cemetery.

DANIEL D. KRAMER AND ELIZABETH (TROYER) KRAMER FAMILY

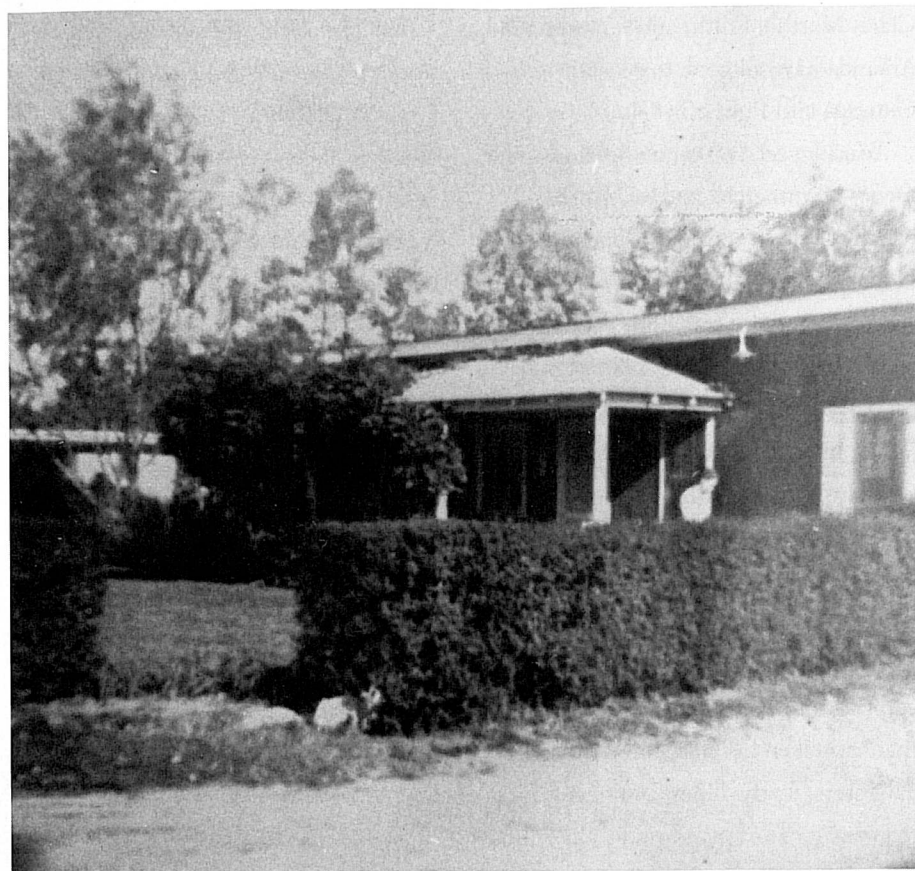
It is uncertain whether Monie Troyers unmarried children knew the Daniel Kramer family before the Kramers moved to Norfolk County in 1927. However, they apparently lost no time in getting acquainted. The Troyers lived twenty miles away at Moyock, North Carolina, or were in the process of moving to Hickory, Virginia, five or six miles closer to the Deep Creek Amish community.

There was considerable interaction between the Moyock, Hickory, Deep Creek, and Kempsville Churches. Though travel was usually by horse and buggy or hired taxi, young Dan Kramer chose a third option—their bicycle. He rode a two-wheeler from the West Road area to court Monie Troyer's daughter, Lizzie. On one of Dan's visits, as the pair enjoyed each other's company on the porch swing, a chain broke, dumping them onto the floor. A longstanding family joke held that "she fell for him." During this same time, Monie's son, Ezra, was seeing Dan's sister, Amanda—usually called Mandie. Both couples were married December 23, 1928, in a double wedding at Deep Creek.

The Depression of the 1930s was a difficult time for Dan and Lizzie Kramer. Like other couples, finding enough money to support a growing family turned into a constant struggle.



Dan and Lizzie Kramer. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer



Former Dan Kramer residence, circa 1958, located near Mount Trashmore in Virginia Beach. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer

Dan tried his hand at farming—a dairy for a time, but that proved unsuccessful. Later, he worked on a pony ranch.

In 1944, they moved to the Kempsville area and joined the church there. For a number of years they lived just west of Witchduck Road and a couple hundred yards north of present Aragona Boulevard. The tumbledown house set just off the lane that led to the Alpha Peachey home. Great-grandma, Lizzie Troyer, was living there with Dans at the time of her death in 1947.

After the move to Kempsville, Dan began working as block and bricklayer. Besides working for Noah Hershberger for a time in the early 1950s, he worked with his brother Noah Kramer at

Kramer Construction for many years. Several of Dan's sons also took up masonry work.

Regular hourly wages brought in a steady income, but it was not until December 1953, that Dan and Lizzie Kramer realized a long-held dream. That year they bought a property, also along Holland Swamp Road, directly across from Ezra Troyers. This place was also a poultry farm and processing plant, however, no longer in operation.

The Kramers decided not to use the chicken house, but with a lot of hard work, the old butcher house would become their residence. They rolled out the huge old boilers, cleaned, put in partitions, fixed up the exterior, and painted. Finished, the Dan Kramer

family had a nice place of their own. Lizzie loved people and enjoyed sharing her hospitality. She often invited guests for Sunday dinner. Her green thumb showed itself with lovely houseplants and well-kept flower beds.

By the mid-1960s, as more of the Kempsville Mennonite Church families were leaving the area, Dan and Lizzie decided to move to Massey on Maryland's Eastern Shore. They sold their four-acre Holland Road property for \$14,000—a fair price then, but a pittance compared to the 1995 value of the same land today.

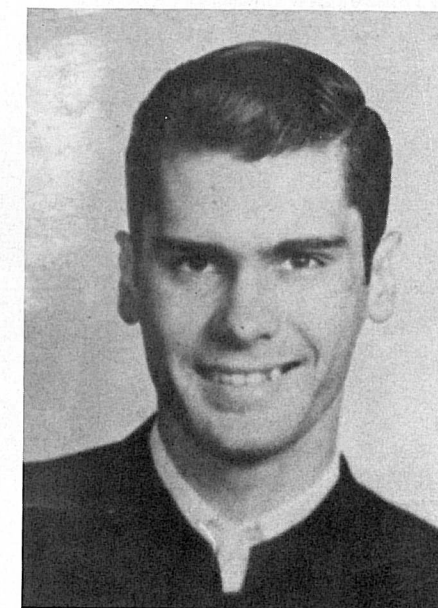
Clarence H. "Curly" Byler, owns an office complex a scant quarter-mile from Dans' former property. He reported to Leroy Miller that "two or three years ago, eight acres here along Holland Road sold for two and three-fourths million dollars."

Growing older, Dan and Lizzie concluded they needed to be closer to some of their married children. In 1972, they left Maryland and moved to Franklin, Kentucky, near their son Alvin's family, and daughter Miriam, the Mark Stoltzfuses.

Lizzie was stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage June 6, 1974, while cooking supper and only lived fifteen more hours. Eighteen months later, Dan suffered what was believed to have been a heart attack January 25, 1976, and joined his wife and their two adult children, Mary and Johnny, in Glory.

Daughter Mary, twenty-seven, passed on after major cancer surgery in February 1958. She had married

Richard Short just thirty-four days earlier. Johnny drowned with Noah Hershberger nine years later on January 20, 1967, when their snowmobile broke through ice on an Ohio lake. Both Johnny and Mary were committed Christians and left radiant testimonies for Jesus.



Richard Short, husband of Mary Kramer. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer



Mary and Clara Kramer, circa 1955. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer