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Events

Saturday, Oct. 3: Snitz Fest Apple Festival, at 1719 Herr House, 10 am – 4 pm
Saturday, Oct. 17: 9 am – noon, Pennsylvania German folk art class on fraktur at the Society
Saturday, Oct. 31: 9 am – 5 pm, benefit book auction, Ben Blank book collection, at White Horse fire hall
Monday, November 9: 7 pm, quarterly meeting, “Indians of Southern Pennsylvania” with Dr. Marshall Becker and Darvin Martin, Willow Street Mennonite Church
Saturday, November 14: 9 am – noon, Pennsylvania German folk art class on basket making at the Society
Friday, November 20: 6-9 pm, opening reception of contemporary Pennsylvania German folk art sale (information forthcoming)
Thursday, Nov. 26: Society is closed for Thanksgiving
Friday, Dec. 11: 6:30 pm, Benefit Book Auction at the Society of rare and used books

Akron Mennonite Church Marks 50 Years, Publishes History Book
by Gerald W. Kaufman

This September, Akron Mennonite Church (AMC) celebrated its semi-centennial. Having been birthed by a 13 year-old mother church — Monterey Mennonite Church (later Forest Hills Mennonite) — AMC was established to provide a church home for Monterey members living in the Akron area. Both churches have served as “interlopers” who settled in this community from other parts of the U.S. and Canada. They also welcomed local Mennonites who were seeking a more progressive Mennonite church experience than was available elsewhere at that time.

Although AMC was initially made up of a core of MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) workers, it also included persons who had moved to this community pursuing careers or business opportunities. Twenty-six of the 46 charter members were from outside of Lancaster County. Some attending AMC came to work at other church-related agencies like MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) and MDS (Mennonite Disaster Service). Over the years, many AMC members have had overseas experiences as missionaries or development workers.

Earlier in history, a degree of tension existed between local churches affiliated with what was then called the Mennonite Church story.

Celebrate Epiphany with January 9 Field Trip to Boar’s Head & Yule Log Pageant

On Saturday, January 9, 2010, join us for a field trip to St. Peter’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, north-east of Philadelphia, for their performance of the renaissance religious pageant, Boar’s Head and Yule Log Festival. Extend your enjoyment of the Christmas season and dispel those post-holiday blues by taking in this tour, centered on a timeless and colorful Epiphany reenactment which dates to the 12th century.

The Boar’s Head and Yule Log drama is a processional celebration that includes costumed kings and queens, Beefeaters (traditional guardians of the King), lords and ladies, knights, woodsmen, jesters &
WHAT’S GOING ON

Sunday, October 25, Fanny Crosby Story
Historic Boehms Chapel is sponsoring a 4 pm program by Debi Irene Wahl, of Act 1 Productions, “Seeing in the Darkness,” about Fanny Crosby, including congregational singing of many of her best-known hymns. Free and open to the public; offering will be received for the performance. More information at execdirboehms@dejazzd.com or 717-872-4133.

Saturday, November 28, Illustrated Landscape Lecture in Franconia
John Ruth will present a visual celebration of rural life in the triangle defined by the Schuylkill, Delaware and Lehigh Rivers. The presentation, “Our Land: A Memoir in Pictures,” begins at 7:30 pm at Franconia Mennonite Meetinghouse on Route 133. Free with offering to support the Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania. Info at www.mhep.org

Sunday, December 6, Advent Service in Historic Boehms Chapel
Program of Lessons and Carols at 3 pm with soloist, James Landis, and pianist, Joanne Swords-Wang. Free and open to the public. More information at 717-872-4133 or execdirboehms@dejazzd.com

Tour of Lancaster Homesteads Still Open
Space is still available on the Sat., Oct. 17, field trip, “Trail of the Conestoga: Lancaster Homesteads.” This tour retraces the origins in northern Lancaster County of pioneers who migrated to Canada in the early 19th century. Family names include Eby, Martin, Weber, Bowman, Gingrich, Eberly, Brubaker, Bricker and Hershey. Tour visits local Indian sites as well as homesteads and meetinghouses dating to 1727 and 1740, concluding with a catered meal at the former Kreider Restaurant near Manheim. Cost is $60 for members, $70 for nonmembers. Contact Dorothy at the Society to register.

AMC Marks 50 Years - Continued from page 1
Ohio and Eastern Mennonite Conference (now Atlantic Coast Conference), including Akron Mennonite Church, and the surrounding Lancaster Mennonite Conference community. According to historian, John Ruth, the presence of these new churches was destabilizing to some of the local congregations, and the out-
siders were viewed as “startling, if not downright offensive.” Indeed, some of our members recall hearing the term “rebels” when referring to people at AMC. Fortunately, time has softened the edges on both sides. Whatever hurt feelings might have existed earlier are now all but gone. For the most part, goodwill and cooperation now exist among all the local Mennonite churches.

Central to the theology of AMC has been a deep commitment to peace, justice, and nonviolence. This theme has been woven into the fabric of AMC from the beginning. The congregation has also emphasized simple living. One of its prophets, Doris Jansen Longacre, expressed that view eloquently in her best-selling book, The More With Less Cookbook published in 1976. In 1979, a sequel, Living More With Less, was published posthumously. While that spirit of simplicity is still present at AMC, the influence that emerged in the broader American culture since then has muted some of her earlier influence. Nonetheless, members remain committed to these important themes.

Although our membership has grown from 46 to 466 in 50 years, we now have an average attendance of 270 for worship on Sunday. That number includes children and visitors. Our demographics reveal that the average age for our members is increasing significantly while at the same time we are not attracting as many young families as we once did. For many years, new members came to AMC because we were somewhat unique in our Mennonite neighborhood. Prospective members now have many other Mennonite churches from which they can choose. A lack of loyalty to the Mennonite “brand” takes some prospective members to new, independent churches. Also, the attendance numbers may reflect a reduced affiliation with the institutional church.

That aside, we pause at the 50-year mile marker on our pilgrimage to take stock. Indeed, the anniversary book that I have titled, Pilgrims on a Journey (2009, available from the Society), tells the story of a people who have attempted to be faithful to Christ’s call to follow him in all of life. A DVD of interviews produced by Bob Wyble gives first-person accounts of our history and is included free with the book on the inside back cover. True to our pilgrim nature we have been—and continue to be—a people on the move. In some ways we live with a packed suitcase. We have lived many places and traveled a great deal. There is nothing to suggest that will change. Indeed, our pilgrimage is both geographic and spiritual. We value inquiry. Finding answers might take us to a new place—literally and figuratively.

We began our journey in the Brownstown Fire Hall. Within three years we built a new gathering place on a hill called Akron. From our high place above the Conestoga Valley, we can look down on the tidy farms of our plain Mennonite and Amish neighbors. Over the years we have learned to respect each other. We are all a part of a theological and historical continuum. Indeed, many of our neighbors are descendants of Mennonite settlers who came to this community in the early 1700s. Whether being here 300 years or 50,
acrobats, pages, shepherds, the Holy Family and the Three Kings with their gifts. Christmas music is performed throughout by soloists, the choir, and musicians, sometimes accompanied by congregational singing. This English festival honors the birth of Christ overcoming the wild boar, symbol of evil. Like our Thanksgiving turkey, roast boar was a staple of medieval banquets. The presentation of a boar’s head at Christmas came to symbolize the triumph of the Christ Child. In like fashion, a yule log lighted from the last year’s ember evokes symbolic meaning in the procession. Children and adults alike will revel in this rich and vibrant pageant of exquisite melodies.

Our day-long field trip leaves in the morning to visit our sister organization, the Mennonite Heritage Center, in Harleysville, Pa., to view their exhibits about Mennonite arts and culture in eastern Pennsylvania. After a brunch buffet at the Franconia Heritage family restaurant we will continue on to St. Peter’s for an afternoon presentation of their 19th annual festival. After the performance, which begins and ends in candlelight, we will board our bus for home, arriving back at the Society in the early evening.

Cost is $70 for members, $80 for non-members, with a group discount of $5 for four or more. Price includes noon meal and comfortable, coach bus transportation, as well as heritage center and pageant admissions. For more information or to register, contact Dorothy at the Society, (717) 393-9745 or dsiegrist@lmhs.org. Your reservation is confirmed once payment is received.

Nov. 9 Quarterly Meeting - Continued from page 1

In a program chaired by Darvin Martin, active member of the Society’s Genealogy and Education committees, who co-leads a field trip to Lancaster Indian sites, our presenter will be Marshall Joseph Becker, professor emeritus of anthropology at West Chester University and author of several books about Pennsylvania Native American history and cultures.

The Susquehannock were one of three major Native American groups who once occupied parts of the Commonwealth; each group reacted to the arrival of Europeans in different ways. Native people’s adaptation to change will be the focus of this illustrated lecture.

AMC Marks 50 Years - Continued from page 2

we know that pilgrims have no permanent earthly home. We also know that no journey is ever static. On the weekend of September 26-27 we paused for a moment on our journey to sing, to reminisce, to preach, to fellowship, and to eat manna—much like Moses and the pilgrims did on their way out of captivity and into the Promised Land. Former members from all over the country came “home.” Former members from Pilgrims Mennonite Church and Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster came back to AMC—their mother church—to celebrate our anniversary. We had sent them on their way in 1977 and 1985 respectively.

We enjoyed wonderful music from musicians including Kristin Sims and the men’s quartet, Spare Parts.

Associate member Nancy Heisey, now a professor at EMU and former president of the Mennonite World Conference, preached on Sunday morning. She gave a contemporary interpretation of the passage from Colossians 1:1-8 that was used for our first worship service on October 4, 1959.

It has been a good journey because we have attempted to be faithful to the call to follow Christ—what Menno Simons called nachfolge. Good because we have been an affectionate community for each other. Good because we are never quite satisfied with where we are. New missions await us. While we can’t predict where that will take us over the next 50 years, we know that the “Gentle Shepherd leads us and that He will help us to find our way.”

Four generations of the Lefever family pictured at this year’s 29th annual Bookworm Frolic, an important fundraiser for our educational programs. Grandmother Miriam ran the food wagon in the early years of the sale, son Kenn has been involved for the last 15 years, grandson Kenn, Jr., has been bringing his daughter, Elizabeth, for the last several years, continuing a family tradition of service. We are most grateful!
Half-day Adult Folk Art Classes Offered

The Society is offering classes this fall in two traditional Pennsylvania German folk arts: fraktur (decorated script) and basket-making. Each class is taught by a local master artisan, and will include an overview of the craft’s role in PA German culture and history, as well as opportunity to produce your own sample.

Fraktur class is taught by Emily Smucker Beidler on Saturday, October 17, and will include viewing fraktur examples from the Society’s collections. Students will work on a fraktur bookplate of their own. On Saturday, November 14, students will learn basket-making from skilled craftswoman, Cindy Seaton, and will work on a square muffin basket to take home with them. Both courses run from 9 am to noon, and cost $30 for members, $35 for nonmembers. Basket class has an additional materials cost of $35. To register for either class, contact Peggy at perb@lmhs.org or 393-9745.

In Memoriam

During the past few months the Society bid farewell to two persons of great significance in the life of the Society. K. Varden Leasa, 1948-2009, died at home in August after a one-year battle with an aggressive brain tumor. Varden was a passionate student of Pennsylvania German dialect who mastered the language well enough to teach it at the Society for some years. Varden was a lifelong student of history, political science, and languages, including Spanish, Russian, and German, as well as Pennsylvania German. Varden was a long-time member of the Table Singers and Foresingers under the direction of Glenn Lehman, and a member of Frazer Mennonite Church.

Intensely interested in genealogy, Varden was the family historian, occasionally reenacting historical figures. Varden was highly regarded in the fields of genealogy and local history, writing articles for Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage and other genealogy publications. He contributed enormously to the life of the Society through his study and writing, by assisting library patrons with family history searches, and through researching and leading tours for the Society. He is sorely missed.

Earl Groff, 1916-2009, was described at his funeral as one of the “towering members” of his local congregation and of Lancaster Mennonite Conference. A big man with a booming laugh, Earl was a self-educated historian and lifelong learner. Last year we honored him as one of the founding members of the Society and a history advocate concerned that the Mennonite Church remember its heritage. Earl was a driving force for preserving and renovating the 1719 Herr House, where he served as its first curator for many years. Earl was a Charter member on the Camp Hebron Board, Charter member of Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society and a Life Member on the Board of Eastern Mennonite Missions. He also served in various conference leadership capacities. Earl planned his own funeral service, revised several times due to his longevity. He was the 6th generation of Groffs laid to rest in Mellinger Mennonite cemetery, to the strains of “Amazing Grace” on the bagpipe.

The Society was blessed this summer through the volunteer service of Anya Zook, pictured above with volunteer coordinator, Peggy Erb; Anya is a student at Messiah College who volunteered with us, entering genealogical data. We appreciated having her intern with us this summer, and deepen her own Mennonite roots.

Some of you will soon be receiving a membership invitation from us, including the option of a free book; other can find this same offer on our web site. As we stand on the verge of special opportunities and unique 300th anniversary outreach, we encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to join with the Society and help keep us on stable financial footing, so that the services you value will continue to enrich your life and that of your future descendants.

The seasons change into autumn and I am reminded of the turning wheels of time.

As we mourn the passage of two persons instrumental in the life of our Society (see “In Memoriam,” below), we look forward in anticipation to exciting new ventures next year that will mark 300 years since the first arrival of our German Mennonite ancestors. These anniversary activities—from field trips to commemorative bike rides, from ecumenical worship services to county proclamations with elected officials— are described on our web site at www.lmhs.org.

In the midst of these exciting plans, now more than ever, we need your support.

Many of you are connected to our work by ancestry: one-fifth of the U.S. population is of German ancestry, and nearly 40 percent of Lancasterians are of Pennsylvania German descent, while six percent of our current population still speaks the dialect commonly known as Pennsylvania Dutch, but more precisely called Pennsylvania German. Our Society continue to be one of the few sources nationally for PA German language materials and instruction.

Others of you associate with us because of a common heritage and beliefs. Because you value our preservation of your church or faith history. Because you know that arts and culture organizations like ours give meaning to your life—and are especially threatened during times of economic downturn.

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October Is Family History Month

Autumn brings genealogists in the United States the opportunity to celebrate October as Family History Month, according to Ancestry.com. Here are some suggestions for family activities:

Prepare an Old Family Recipe in memory of a relative. Treasured recipes and food memories may be the primary remembrance of our female ancestors, who were less likely to leave other written historical records. Even if you don’t have your mother’s or grandmother’s handwritten recipe book or card file, you probably remember many of the ingredients you watched lovingly added to the concoction. Once you have the recipe, why not preserve or re-create decorative recipe cards to pass on for future generations to enjoy, as a reminder of great-grandma.

Review, Label, and Share Photos, a great project when families gather over the holidays. Photographs evoke memories of time, place, and experience. Why not get a group together, pass the pictures, share the stories, and, while you’re at it, label these treasures at long last? Make sure you’re using acid-free storage boxes (for sale at the Society) and labeling the paper photos with archival-safe pencils or markers.

Start a Journal. What enduring legacy do you want to leave to your descendants? What do you want them to know of your life and your thoughts? A journal can prompt you in years to come to remember what you’ve experienced, and can be a legacy for those who come after you.

Interview your Relatives. Start with Mom and Dad and then move on from there. Try to collect stories, not just names and dates, and be sure to ask open-ended questions. For more interesting questions, see: www.therecemembersingsite.org/. Write down everything you have learned from your family and begin to enter the information in a family tree chart. We have new, attractive designs for sale at the Society bookstore. Enjoy the journey of discovery as you celebrate October as Family History Month!
August 2010 Society Tour to Europe: Space Available

by Sam Wenger

There is still time for you and your friends to join us for this unique tour of Germany and Switzerland scheduled for August 7 – 18, 2010. This very special tour also features the world renowned Passion Play in Oberammergau, Germany.

The deadline to secure your place on this tour and to assure an excellent seat at the Oberammergau Passion Play is December 31, 2009. Historic Anabaptist features of this tour in Germany and Switzerland will be well-worth the trip. Sam Wenger and Ruth Wenger are your tour hosts.

This tour commemorates the 300th anniversary of immigrants who settled Lancaster County in 1710. Special features on this tour will be the places of origin in Switzerland and the known places of refuge in Germany of these early settlers who included Christian and Hans Herr, Hans Funk, Martin Kendig, Martin Meili, Jacob Miller, and Wendel Bowman. The European sites of the other early 18th century Lancaster County and Franconia-area families such as Groffs, Oberholzers, Brackbills, Stauffers, Wengers, Graybills, Landis/Landes, Ebys, Derstines, Baumgartners, and others will also be spotlighted on this tour.

Tour guide, Sam Wenger, recently traveled to these European homelands to conduct further research and determine specific tour routes to be included. The places of Swiss origin for the 1710 group have been identified in the Zürich region of the canton of Zürich. Both are located along Lake Zürich that separates the two regions. In Germany, a special tour is planned of the Kraichgau area, where Mennonites were first received by land owner, Lord von Venningen, as refugees to rebuild the farms of the area after the devastating 30 years war, which ended in 1648.

In Germany, our tour begins in the village of Dühren and includes a visit to the village of Steinsfurt where, in 1661, Mennonites got caught attending an illegal meeting. The immediate ancestors of the Meili and Miller immigrant families, who were also among the first families to come to Lancaster County, initially came to Dühren at a Hof referred to as Bletcherhof. Our tour also includes visits to Weiherhof and Ibersheim, where Swiss Mennonites, largely from the Canton of Bern, were received during the 1671 and 1710/11 Swiss exile periods. Mennonites departed for Pennsylvania from these two sites during the early 18th century.

More interesting features of this tour can be found in the official tour brochure, available at our web site (www.lmhs.org/Home/Get_Involved/Field_Trips) or by mail from the Society. You can also request a brochure and/or speak with someone about the tour by contacting Doug Enck or Lindy Witman at MTS Travel (800) 874-9330 or Sam Wenger at (717) 859-2357. Tour registrants will receive a 100-page detailed booklet outlining specific sites and historical information as a handy reference to be used before, during and after the tour. Remember, the deadline for signing up for this tour is December 31, 2009. Please join us for this most memorable experience.

Mennonites Join in Worldwide Gathering

Anabaptists from around the world gathered in Asuncion, Paraguay, on July 14-19, for Mennonite World Conference (MWC), held every six years, and hosted this year by eight Germanic, indigenous and Hispanic Mennonite church conferences in Paraguay. Simultaneous translation of Spanish into English, French and German, as well as several local indigenous languages, was provided by bilingual volunteers.

African Danisa Ndlouv, bishop of Mennonite church conferences in Paraguay. - Continued on page 5