

MAH News & Notes

Michiana Anabaptist Historians (established 1992)

Fall 2011

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Rachel in her Junior year at Goshen College during the 1929-1930 school year.

Reflections Of A Centenarian

Rachel Weaver Kreider, long-time genealogist and observer of church life, will be present, Lord willing, to reflect on her observations of church life in the Anabaptist family over the 102 years of her life. Best-known for her work on the famous “Gingerich-Kreider” work, Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies, Rachel is an avid reader and has maintained a keen interest in the life of the

church. In the form of an interview by Loren Johns, she will reflect on life in the 1920s, her memories of the village of Pashan in LaGrange County, Indiana, and on her work on the landmark Gingerich-Kreider genealogy, published in 1986. There will be time for questions from, and conversation, with the audience. A select bibliography of Rachel’s writings will be available.

This meeting, sponsored by the Michiana Anabaptist Historians, is open to the public. It will be held at the Evergreen Gathering Room at 9:00 a.m. on October 22, 2011.

Fall 2011 Public Meeting

Saturday,
October 22, 2011

Doors open at 8:30 a.m.
for coffee and browsing

Program at 9:00 a.m

Evergreen
Gathering Room
Greencroft Center
Goshen, Indiana

*Sponsored by Michiana
Anabaptist Historians*

Directions: Enter the Greencroft campus from 15th Street at the southernmost drive (angles off 15th, not perpendicular). The first and largest building in sight (straight ahead) will be Evergreen. Park to the left. Enter the building, walk straight through its first lobby, and find the auditorium on your right.

Report on Annual Spring Meeting

Michiana Anabaptist Historians:

Saturday, March 19, 2011 • 8:30-11:00 a.m. • Oaklawn Psychiatric Center, Goshen, Indiana

by Wanda Hoffman, Secretary

Ruby Bontrager welcomed the group. Loren Johns led the group in prayer. A short business meeting was held.

1. Minutes of the Fall Meeting, October 2, 2010 were summarized by Secretary, Wanda Hoffman.
2. Ezra Miller presented the Treasurer’s report.
3. Unfinished business: Election of new Secretary and Membership Coordinator whose terms were due in October 2010. Wanda Hoffman and Helene Hoover have consented to continue in the respective offices. The group affirmed the slate with a show of hands.

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Joseph John's Descendants Visit Johnstown, PA

by Floyd R. Miller

On June 7, 2011, a group of 26 people left northern Indiana on a Cardinal bus to tour Johnstown, PA, and the surrounding area. Many of the people on the tour were descendants of Joseph Johns, the founder of the town. The last pick-up was at 7:00 A.M. at 5 & 20 Restaurant south of Shipshewana. Most of the group was from northern Indiana but a few were from other states. With Orla Schlabach in the driver's seat, Liz Lehman as tour director of Cow Bell Tours, and Loren Johns as tour guide, we headed for PA. We stopped for lunch break at the Somerset exit, then arrived at the Flight 93 Memorial near Shanksville by mid-afternoon. We toured the temporary memorial, saw the construction of the permanent memorial, and toured the Memorial Chapel. Enroute to Geistown we drove by the former Joseph Borntreger / John Johns farm. This is the farm that Joseph (Sep) Borntreger left when he moved to Goshen, Indiana, in 1841, among the very first group of Amish to move to that area. At that time he sold the farm to his uncle Joseph Johns, who eventually sold it to his son, John.

We also drove by the Blough Mennonite Church and cemetery on our way to a motel near Geistown, just above Johnstown.

On Wednesday morning we drove to St. Michaels where the reservoir and dam had been before

the "1889 Flood of Johnstown". We toured the Johnstown Flood National Memorial and walked to the breast of the dam. We drove down the valley through Johnstown to Westmont, which is on the hill to the west of town. We stopped at the Grandview Cemetery to see the unknown plot where 777 unidentified victims of the flood were buried. We ate our noon meal in the restaurant at the top of the inclined plane overlooking Johnstown. We rode the trolley down the incline where Orla picked us up with the bus to go to the City Hall to see the three high water marks from the floods, to the Joseph Johns statue in the city park, to the site of Joseph Johns' first cabin, and the Johnstown Flood Museum.

Joseph Johns founded Johnstown in 1800 after clearing several acres of timber with his axe. He and his sister Veronica (later Christner) immigrated to the U.S. as teenagers, arriving in Philadelphia (without parents) on Sept. 1, 1769. After living in Berks County, Pennsylvania, for several years, they both got married and moved to what is now Somerset County, PA. After farming near Berlin, PA, for 18 years, Joseph bought the land for a town that would later be named in his honor. Besides being the grandfather of Sep Bontrager, Joseph Johns is an ancestor of most of the Mennonite and Amish-related Bontragers in the U.S.

Our last day in the Johnstown area included a tour of the Joseph Johns farm near Davidsville. The Hunsbergers, who live on the farm today gave us a tour of the farm, farmhouse and the cemetery on the hill. Five generations of Johnses are buried in the cemetery as well as some others. The farmhouse is used as a bed & breakfast known as the Schantz Haus.

At the restaurant we went to for lunch we were met by a reporter for the Johnstown Tribune-Democrat who wanted a few words with us, since most of us were descendants of the founder of the town. The first part of the afternoon was spent at the Heritage Discovery Center. Loren did a lecture at Laurel View Village while the rest of us were free to go on a walking tour of the town. It rained awhile so the walking was cut short.

Thursday evening Loren had another lecture sponsored by the Johnstown Area Heritage Association which most of the group attended.

Friday morning we found a copy of the Tribune-Democrat outside our room with a picture of Loren and a story about our group. Leaving Johnstown we drove through Southmont on our way to the highway. The drive home concluded our four-day tour which included many stories and much visiting among the group. It was a very interesting and enjoyable trip.

Looking Ahead With MAH In 2012

Both the Spring and Fall Public Meetings will focus on Western LaGrange County history. Emma Mennonite Church, Emmatown, Shipshewana, and Topeka and settling of Amish in the area will all be on the agenda. It will be both interesting and informative!

Book Review

by Loren Johns

Growing Up in an Amish-Jewish Cult (Trilogy) by Patricia Hochstetler
(Winona Lake, Ind.: Baker Trittin Press)

Delusion (Book One, 2007) • ***Deception*** (Book Two, 2007) • ***Deliverance*** (Book Three, 2008)

This is a fascinating, interesting, and sad story in three small volumes. Fascinating because of the heart strings that it pulls. It is a story of a family, actually several families, that got pulled under the influence of a Jewish/Amish preacher whose power and control of his flock became increasingly pathological over the years.

Born in Elkhart, Indiana, to an Amish mother and a Pentecostal father, the author tells the story of how her parents and siblings secretly left Elkhart County to join a group of Amish in the “Lael Colony” in southern Tennessee — a group led by a Jewish-Amish man named Mack Sharky and called the Elder. In these three books, she tells her story from the age of four until the age of 16, when she and her family escaped the colony to return to Indiana.

What started as a near paradise for a four-year-old, happy with the lush woods and streams, with seemingly endless opportunities for exploring and playing, deteriorated

into a life of abuse at the hands of a leader whose ego got the better of him. This is a story about a community living under a man’s increasingly paranoid control, fearful but trapped.

So how did this Mack Sharky gain control over these God-fearing Amish? He quoted the Bible at



length and spoke with confidence and authority. That is pretty much the long and the short of it. His directives to the community seemed reasonable, if a bit odd, at first. For instance, he insisted that his followers observe the Old Testament laws concerning “kosher” foods, avoiding all pork. Over the years, he grew more and more controlling, to the point of giving some of the community members new names, prohibiting sexual rela-

tions between married couples, and excommunicating teenagers, separating them from their parents and sending them away from the community alone.

The last book tells the story of the author’s difficult and slow assimilation to life back in Indiana following their escape. As good as it was to be out from under the control of the Elder, adjustment to a new way of life was itself a difficult journey. It turned out that it was easier to get the child out of the cult than it was to get the cult out of the child!

The books are easy to read. This is a true story full of heart-aching challenges to pull the reader along and ask, “What will happen next?” Unfortunately, the books could have used more careful editing, since at least one story is told more than once. On the other hand, the books illustrate well the importance of “discerning the spirits” to see which are of God (1 John 4:1) — difficult as such discernment often is!

Annual Spring Meeting Report — *Continued from page 1*

The first speaker was current CEO of Oaklawn Center, Laura Nofziger. She took the group on an eye-opening, chronological journey from 1910 to the present, highlighting significant events that have shaped the development of care of persons with mental illness.

Beverages, fruit and pastries were served by Oaklawn for the 22 attendees.

Dale Raber shared how belief in culturally appropriate care led to the development of programs for the Amish. A building called Rest Haven was built on the Oaklawn campus to house adults in need of “crisis stabilization.” It opened in July of 2002. In response to an identified need, Pleasant Haven opened to provide “extended care” for males of the Amish community.

That building is across the road from the Goshen Oaklawn campus. The Horizons of Hope program opened in 2007 to serve “extended care” needs of Amish women. That building is on the Goldenrod campus. The Poplars opened in 2010 on the Goshen Oaklawn campus to serve younger aged Amish.

The meeting closed after a meaningful question and answer session.

Ruby's Musings

by MAH president Ruby Bontrager

In June I went on a four-day history tour to Johnstown, PA. Loren Johns, Professor of New Testament at AMBS in Elkhart, IN and a g-g-g-g grandson of the founder of Johnstown, Joseph Shantz was our excellent guide. I learned about the beginning the the town and also more about the famous Johnstown Flood of 1889 and the breaking of the dam. Elsewhere in this newsletter Floyd Miller who was also on the tour has an article about the trip as a whole, but I am commenting on my personal reflections about the dam and of course the flood which caused the dam to break.

According to history, this event was considered the second worst disaster in the United States up to that time. This flood, and the damage to property and loss of life was huge.

The dam was public property until the Fishing and Hunting Club of wealthy elites bought it as their own private retreat, a place to come for weekends as a get-away from their professions/businesses. The Army Corp of Engineers would routinely check the dam to make sure it was okay. They had told the owners it needed repairs more than

one time. When the Club bought it and it was again checked by the engineers they were told unless they repaired it, a disaster was waiting to happen. They responded by telling the Engineers to stay out of their business. They took out the large culverts at the bottom of the dam, which seemed to be in disrepair. The culverts were needed to release pressure when there was lots of rain etc, but they didn't replace them with new ones. So when this terrible storm was passing through with so much rain, the pressure built until the dam broke.

As we watched the two films about this event, I was deeply struck with the horrible flooding and loss of life in the valley of Johnstown. And it seemed like it could probably have been avoided if the warnings from the Army Corps of Engineers had been heeded. How senseless and shameful it seemed!

In my mind I kept comparing this disaster with other events in our country. I particularly thought of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and the flooding in New Orleans. The levees were not built to withstand such a storm and

flooding which they experienced in 2005. But have we now spent the monies to repair and build them to the necessary standards which are needed?

Do we as a country learn lessons from our past, our history? I don't think we do very well.

The tragedy of nuclear disasters doesn't seem to deter us from building more nuclear towers. Gas spewing into the ocean doesn't makes us search seriously for other energy sources. Wars we engage in constantly are one area in which we do not seem to ever learn it's futility. We continue to maim and kill as an effort to gain some sort of peace.

I was deeply touched that Wednesday as we watched the films. I was saddened anew by our country's lust for power and prestige without regard for the welfare of all of our population, young and old alike.

My prayer is that as believers and followers of Jesus we set our hopes on Him and in a desperate situation we do not give in to despair, but rather, focus on Jesus' deep love for us. Embracing Jesus' love will shape how we live our lives!

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