

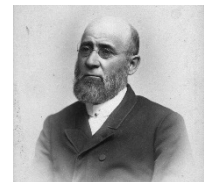


By C. Robert Roth

Presented to the Historical Society of the Bible Fellowship Church at Grace Bible Fellowship Church Quakertown, Pennsylvania on October 29, 2022

Grace Bible Fellowship Church of Quakertown had its beginnings in the revival movements which swirled in the Mennonite communities of southeastern Pennsylvania. Several young Mennonite preachers were influenced by the revivals and the preaching of itinerant evangelists like Daniel Hoch of the New Mennonites of Canada and Edwin Long of the American Tract Society.

When the Bible Fellowship Church began in 1858, 164 years ago, as the Evangelical Mennonite Society (EMS), a meeting house was already there in the Quakertown area. This meeting house had been built by two men Abel Strawn and Joel Brunner.



Abel Strawn

These two men were not, however, among the seven men who created the EMS. The seven men who formed the new association on September 24, 1858, represented three congregations. From Bangor, Northampton County were Preacher David Henning and Deacon Jacob Gottschall; from Upper Milford Township, Lehigh County, were Elder William Gehman and Deacon David Gehman; from the Quakertown area were Elder (former bishop) William N. Shelly, Preacher Henry Diehl, and Deacon Joseph Schneider.



Flatland Mennonite Church Building

William Shelly had been a bishop among the Overholtzer Mennonites and preached at the Flatland Mennonite Church. He was among the bishops who rescinded the right to hold prayer meetings in 1856. This permission had been first granted in 1853 at an

Overholtzer Mennonite preacher's conference at which Daniel Hoch of Canada had been present. For unspecified reasons, Bishop Shelly changed his mind and sought to defend the prayer meetings and was excommunicated in May of 1858. The rest of the evangelical prayer meeting "gang" was given until the October 1858 preacher's conference to submit to the decision of the bishops. In defiance, the seven men formed the Evangelical Mennonite Society in September 1858. The others were excommunicated or kept off the record by the October conference.

The very first semiannual preachers' conference of the Evangelical Mennonite Society was held in the Evangelical Mennonite Meeting House in Haycock Township on the first Tuesday in November 1859.



Probable Site

Meanwhile, Edwin Long had been holding tabernacle meetings again in the Quakertown area along with Jonas Yeakel Schultz during the winter of 1858-59.

Tent meetings were held in Quakertown from 1951-1954 under the auspices of the Christ For Quakertown committee. It is interesting to note that a sermon title for one of the meetings was "Movies, gossip, dancing, criticism, smoking and other worldly pastimes."

About the year 1868, Jonas Musselman purchased a farm on the California Road north of Quakertown. He began to hold meetings in homes and halls and meeting houses in the area. One of those in whose home he held meetings was Jacob Horn. Musselman's following grew. Meanwhile, the numbers in the more remote Haycock meeting house declined. The last semiannual preachers' conference to be held in the Haycock meeting house was in June of 1869.



Jonas Musselman

It seems the two groups decided to pool their resources. Together they purchased a piece of land on Third Street in Quakertown near the new railroad station. A charter was signed in 1872. The name at the top was Jonas Musselman; at the bottom was William N. Shelly. The name of Henry Diehl appeared near the top and the name of Joseph B. Taylor near the bottom. The name of Jacob Horn

appears near the top with Henry M. Smith. These two, along with Jonas Musselman, were the trustees of the new congregation.

By 1878 rule of the preachers' conference had come completely under the control of men who came out of the Upper Milford congregation as had Jonas Musselman. The conference passed a resolution that no one could be a member of the conference who owned a life insurance policy. All members were given until October of 1878 to relinquish their association with their life insurance company or be removed from the preachers' conference. The record says that William N. Shelly and Henry Diehl of Quakertown chose their life insurance company and therefore they were stricken from the roll of preachers. Now, of the three original men from Quakertown among the seven founders of the EMS, only Joseph B. Schneider remained.

In 1880 Quakertown was placed on a circuit with Hatfield. The Quakertown congregation remained, until 1934, on a circuit usually with Hatfield and/or other stations.

A crisis arose in 1895. At a quarterly conference held in Hatfield, the assembled body elected a group of trustees for the Quakertown congregation which were unacceptable to the people in Quakertown. Their pastor at the time was M.A. Zyner. He appealed to the Annual Conference, which was meeting in Reading, Pa. He evidently brought his protest to the conference and found himself charged with



Wilson Steinmetz

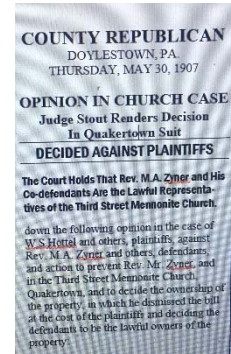


Beulah Chapel today

disloyalty, etc. Conference expelled Zyner and Wilson Steinmetz was assigned to the Quakertown-Hatfield circuit. The congregation at Quakertown refused to allow Steinmetz into the church on Third Street. Those who were loyal to the conference subsequently erected a small meeting house they called Beulah Chapel around the corner on Juniper Street.

The Beulah Congregation decided to take the Third Street Congregation to court to regain their lost meeting house. The case was designated "The Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church (Beulah) versus the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Quakertown (Third Street)." The group that retained the building on Third Street reverted to the original name of the association/society. In their defense, the

Evangelical Mennonites referred to the charter of 1872 which required the approval of a pastor by the congregation. They also note that the people who came over from the Haycock meeting house were not “very poor as stated in the plaintiff’s bill.” Rather, they said some were “financially well-to-do.” The defendants insisted on local autonomy in the election of trustees, rejecting the authority of the quarterly conference in Hatfield. Furthermore, they also rejected the authority of the annual conference at Reading. They argued that this was a violation of their 1872 charter. The judge decided in favor of the Evangelical Mennonites and ordered the Mennonite Brethren in Christ to pay court costs.



Annual conference considered an appeal to the ruling, but an Allentown lawyer, after looking carefully at the case, recommended that the M.B. in C. not try to reverse the decision. In 1908, the M.B. in C. purchased the building back and sold Beulah Chapel to Benjamin Hottle of the Springfield Church of the Brethren. Soon some of the “Evangelical Mennonites” returned to the M.B. in C.

Why did the M.B. in C. thrive, and the Evangelical Mennonites fade away? One can only guess. The M.B. in C. congregation was on a circuit and had paid preachers who could devote their whole time to ministry. Some of these had Gospel Herald training. Essentially, M.A Zyner was a layman. The M.B. in C. had guidance of a presiding elder. The relationship to Hatfield may have provided support. Perhaps the Evangelical Mennonites squabbled among themselves. Who knows? What we do know is that a very able lay leader from Hatfield moved to Quakertown and became the dominant force in the congregation. His name was Henry H. Bergey, better known as H.H Bergey. He had been delegate in 1901, 03, and 04 while living in Hatfield.



H.H. Bergey

From 1906 to 1953 H.H. Bergey was delegate to Annual Conference. From 1906 to 1933 he was Sunday School Superintendent. H.H. also served as class leader, Sunday School teacher and trustee. As the historian of the congregation, he told the story because he lived most of the story. His steady hand kept the church on the straight and

narrow. He worked closely with the presiding elder and the annual conference. For many years he was a member of the trustee board.

A church parsonage was built next to the church on Third Street in 1914.



A major step was taken in 1934 when annual conference assigned Herbert W. Hartman (Pictured) to



Quakertown. He had been in the Gospel Herald Society, most recently in Jersey City, New Jersey. The Hartmans worked diligently to build the congregation. He was married to Dorothy Brunner, daughter of Charles (C.H.) and Catherine Brunner. Shortly after their arrival in Quakertown, they, the Hartmans, purchased a new Plymouth. The rumor was that the Brunners had purchased it for them. This makes sense when one considers the subsistence levels upon which men lived in the Gospel Herald Society.

Era R. Keiper was, as a long-time Sunday School Superintendent, a tireless promoter of the Sunday School. It was under his leadership that Sunday School contests became a part of every year. The Sunday School members were divided into two teams and were challenged to attend every week and invite others to attend. He also made Rally Day (the beginning of the new Sunday School year) a special event. There would be a short parade around the block to draw attention to the church and would end in a special program that Sunday in the church. Most memorable were his “object lessons.” Often times those were presented at a Sunday Evening Service. One that immediately comes to mind is the “Tator Family.” He took several potatoes and gave to them names such as Imitator, Agitator etc. to present Biblical truths in a down-to earth manner.



Era R. Keiper



When George F. Yost (Pictured) succeeded Hartman in 1946, he began almost immediately a fund for the expansion of the church facility.



Grace Church, 27
S. Third Street

January 28, 1953 - Approval given to borrow \$32,000.00 from Quakertown National Bank for a \$45,000.00 building project to begin by August.

April 4, 1954 - Church addition was dedicated.

Franklin B. Hertzog (Pictured), who succeeded Yost in 1951, supervised the actual construction. Part of the time during the construction, the congregation met in the Benner Hall in Richlandtown. Yost remained with the congregation upon his retirement in 1951.



The posters shown are examples of Era. R. Keiper's work.

Sunday School continued to grow as that is where the emphasis was placed as opposed to attendance at the worship service. It appears that this was also the practice in the conference. The first recorded number I could find for average worship service attendance at Grace was a listing for 1971. Average attendance for Sunday School at Grace reached a high of 194 in 1959.



Sunday School Superintendents

1872-1882	Worman Stoneback	1965-1978	Allen Marlin Gehman
1882-1883	William Hixson	1978-1983	C. Robert Roth
1883-1884	David Bausler	1983-1984	Richard Yoder
1884-1887	H.B. Musselman	1984-1991	Donald Brensinger
1887-1890	Noah Moyer	1991-1996	Daniel Olsen
1890-1905	Titus G. Taylor	1996-1997	Glen Doelp
1905-1906	Walter Baringer	1997-1999	Michael Flack
1906-1933	H.H. Bergey	1999-2005	David Marks
1933-1954	Era R. Keiper	2005-2008	Daniel Istrate
1954 - 1955	Phares Mumbauer	2008-2013	Steven Smith
1955 - 1956	Phares Mumbauer/H.P. Shelly	2013-2018	Edward McDermott
1956 - 1961	Clarence R. Roth	2019 -	Warren Skuret
1961-1965	John M. Stengele		

The Annex was a half twin house next to the parsonage that afforded some additional Sunday School rooms.



In 1967 the Official Board, as it was known at that time, felt the need to consider the possibility of relocating. Attendance had grown to a point where more space was needed, and it was concluded that adding on to the existing building was impossible. On September 7, 1967 a farm property was purchased on North Old Bethlehem Pike. On September 23, 1972, under the leadership of Pastor Bert N. Brosius, the Official Board authorized the purchase of additional property adjacent to the initial purchase. At this point the Board started plans for the possible move to the farm property.



On May 29, 1974, the Grace Church membership authorized the signing of a construction contract with Abram Horst, Inc. in the amount of \$297,500.00. It took a huge step of faith for the church to take on such a financial commitment at the time. \$200,000.00 was financed. Concerns were raised on how such a large amount was going to be paid. It was during those concerns that Phares Mumbauer stood up and said, “the people that will pay for this are not yet part of our church.” On July 2, 1974 the contract was signed, and groundbreaking took place on July 14, 1974.



Groundbreaking Service took place on July 14, 1974.

Construction began on August 6, 1974.





On February 13, 1978, the parsonage was purchased at 53 Kenwood Circle, Quakertown, PA.





Grace Bible Fellowship Church Quakertown, PA October 2022

Grace Church Pastors



Photo Not Available



Photo Not Available

Jonas Musselman
1872-1876 1877-1882 1876

Samuel Musselman
1876 -1877 1882

Abel Strawn
-1884 1886 -1887

Abraham Kauffman
1884-1886

George Campbell
1887-1890 1896-1898 1890 -1891

J. E. Fidler
1891-1892 1892- 1895

A. B. Gehret

M. A. Zyner



Photo Not Available



Wilson Steinmetz
1895-1896

W. K. Ziegler
1898-1900

J. C. Roth
1900-1903

W. S. Hottel
1903-1905

L. F. Haas
1905-1908

E. E. Kublic
1908-1908 (six months)

R. L. Woodring
1908-1911

O. S. Hillegas
1911-1914

Grace Church Pastors



M. W. Ettinger R. W.
1914-1916 1916



Dickert
-1919 1919



W. F. Heffner J. B. Layne
-1925 1925



-1930



E. H. Musselman H. W. Hartman
1930-1934 1934



-1946 1946



G. F. Yost F. B. Herzog
-1951 1951



-1953



A. G. Woodring
1953-1955



Donald T. Kirkwood
1955-1958 1958



David E. Thomann
-1965 1965



Donald R. Knauer
-1970



Bert N. Brosius
1970-1989 1989



David E. Gundrum
-2000 2000-2002



Leland Stauff
Co-Pastor 2004-2005 2004 -



Dennis L. Lawrence



Ronald L. Kohl

Name and Name Changes

- 1853 – Evangelical Mennonite Church
- 1879 – Evangelical United Mennonite Church
- 1883 – Mennonite Brethren in Christ
- 1935 – First mention of “Grace”
- 1948 – Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Pennsylvania was ratified
- 1959 – Grace Bible Fellowship Church

Dates and Actions Old Bethlehem Pike

- September 7, 1967 - Farm property on Old Bethlehem Pike purchase in the amount of \$22,500.00 approved with an indebtedness of \$15,000.00.
- September 23, 1972 - Authorization given to purchase additional 4 1/2 acres of land adjacent to farm property.
- December 30, 1973 - Authorization to develop plans for new building
- March 10, 1974 - Congregation authorized offering for sale 17.17 acres of farm.
- May 29, 1974 - Resolution approved to sign construction contract (\$297,500.00) with Abram Horst Inc., New Holland, PA
- July 14, 1974 – Groundbreaking Service
- August 6, 1974 - Construction began
- May 4, 1975 - First service was held in church building on North Old Bethlehem Pike.
- May 18, 1975 - 1811 Old Bethlehem Pike N church building dedicated.
- May 20, 1981 - Sunday school rooms and Fellowship Hall added to original building.
- March 28, 1982 - Addition dedicated
- 1984 - A kitchen and garage added to the existing church building.
- April 1999 – Sanctuary Renovated

Presentation compiled by taking excerpts
from:

"In The Heart of Quakertown"
By James D. Roth

"Remembering Those Who Led"
By Dr. Harold P. Shelly, Jr