God Be With You Till We Meet Again: The Finesville Story
Pastor Rick Paashaus
2026



Long Ago and Not So Far Away

It's hard to imagine the villages and byways along the Delaware River from Durham and Riegelsville in Pennsylvania to lower Pohatcong Township in New Jersey as bustling, thriving communities. Now quiet side roads and tiny villages, in the 1750's the towns on both sides of the River were filled with activity. Iron ore dug from the valley along the Delaware was turned into cannonballs in local furnaces, including Chelsea Forge in what is now Finesville. In fact, the boat in which our first President crossed the River on Christmas night in 1776 was built nearby in Durham. The Musconetcong Gorge that spilled into the Delaware was a significant center of activity for the Continental Army, President George Washington, and diverse industry even before the Declaration of Independence celebrated our nation's freedom. Notably, during the American Revolution, Chelsea Forge provided the Continental Army with weapons to defend Valley Forge in Pennsylvania. Finesville, Durham, and Riegelsville in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania were significant to the birth of our United States.

The story of Calvary Bible Fellowship Church of Finesville, New Jersey began there as well.

John and Philip Fein were German immigrants who settled in the Musconetcong River Valley of New Jersey more than 250 years ago. They purchased large parcels of land, including the acreage where the village of Finesville now stands. In 1751 the Chelsea Forge, a charcoal/iron forge was built as a center of activity for farmers and landowners who lived in the upper Delaware Valley. Recognizing the significance of this forge, the Feins smartly took title to the business as well as hundreds of acres surrounding Chelsea Forge. Their forward thinking perspectives set the tone for settlers and businesses still to come.



A number of mills were built along the Musconetcong River, all owned and operated by the Fein brothers and their families. Philip Fein created a dam that provided water power to run a sawmill,

linseed oil mill, and gristmill for the little village. When the gristmill burned to the ground it was rebuilt as a paper mill, which developed into the largest of the business establishments in the area.



John and Philip's businesses and properties were passed on to their sons and their heirs. The village of Finesville grew to be a prosperous community, much of it centering on the paper and knife mills. Locals simplified the German "Fein," anglicizing it to become "Fine" and, thus, Finesville. Before long the town included a store run by Philip, and a hotel operated by John. A woolen factory functioned for a while as did a knife manufacturing business. The initial business, Chelsea Forge, is still present along the Musconetcong and is now a thriving antique and specialty shop just west of the village's center.

By the early 1800's the village of Finesville included several stores, a school, and the cutlery factory in addition to the mills. Beautiful stone homes and quiet farms could be found just off the road that ran from Riegelsville to Warren Glen. Life was good (and busy!) there along the beautiful Musconetcong River.

But one thing was missing from the bustling little town.

Families who owned, operated, and served in the businesses and lived in the community needed a place of worship.

In 1835 a union church was erected east of town for the use of Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, and the Christian Church congregations who all shared the facilities. The groups sometimes met together but typically alternated their use of the sanctuary. The "Christian Church" participated in this shared ministry after they organized in 1835 and continued to be part of the union church for 44 years. In the late 1870's the Christian Church began building their own sanctuary for worship.


United Methodist Church Finesville

Interestingly enough, the Christian Church was a non-denominational group that rejected what they termed "man-made doctrine" and believed in Scripture alone as the basis for their faith. Born of the Revivalist Movement, the Christian Church was committed to expository preaching and teaching rather than the creeds and dogma of the main line denominations of the day. It is interesting that their focus was not far removed from the focus of the Bible Fellowship Church today.

In 1878 the congregation began meeting on their own at their new building beside the one room school across from the Musconetcong River. A solid church family, the Christian Church of Finesville was thankful for their welcoming meeting house in the center of the village. Their Greek Revival style architecture fit in well with the community and raised eyes heavenward with the tall windows, high ceiling, and beautifully fenced in landscaped lawn. A fellowship hall and Sunday School rooms downstairs reflected their priorities of family ministry and community outreach. Thick stone walls and

simple interior lighting, even a balcony overlooking the sanctuary made a statement that the Finesville Church was built to last and to make impact on generations for years to come.

The Christian Church in their New Meeting House



The gentle little village of Finesville, New Jersey is relatively unchanged from what it has been for the past 100 years or so. Cross the Delaware River on the Riegelsville Bridge and less than a mile east you'll drive along the Musconetcong River until you see beautifully maintained stone farms, freshly painted Victorian homes, the stone-walled Union cemetery, lovely gardens and a small herd of "Oreo Cows" (Belted Galloways that stand out with their distinctive black and white sides.) Today as you leave the tiny village you'll find the only active church in town, Finesville Bible Fellowship.

The field stone and stucco church building has not only been a meticulously maintained slice of the village history but also continues to be the only community church, a welcome ministry where folks still walk and drive to sing, hear the scriptures, pray, worship, and fellowship together. As it has been since building began on the sloped hillside across from the Musconetcong in 1878, this is the place Finesville's families gather. Like her community, Finesville Church is sweet, gentle, family-like; a place where people still sing "Amazing Grace" and "Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus," where they can shed a tear, find comfort in the Word, draw close to the Savior. Its home.

Worship in the welcoming sanctuary is not complicated. Their young new Pastor, Brandon Olbrys, welcomes folks, listens to their praises and prayer requests, and teaches clearly from the Scriptures. Unencumbered with complicated technology, professional worship leaders, or extensive programs, Sunday morning's include singing hymns and worship songs with simple accompaniment, the Doxology, and study of the Word.

But there's one element of worship that is unique to the little church. Every service, for as far back as local folks can remember, ends with an acapella rendition of the familiar hymn, "God Be with You Till We Meet Again."

There's a story there. Always a story.

Long before Finesville Church was a ministry of the Bible Fellowship or even the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, when the stone was gathered from the fields to provide the little meeting house to build the "Christian Church," a man named William G. Tomer was part of the original congregation that gathered there.



Finesville School Class 1908



Tomer lived along the Narrows on the winding road just east of the Delaware River in the town of Carpentersville. He taught school both in Carpentersville and in the one room schoolhouse in Finesville. When the Christian Church congregation began meeting in the 1870s, William was asked to serve as their Choir Director, a position he held for many years.

Having served in the Civil War including Sherman's March to the Sea, Tomer was thankful to be back home to the peaceful village, the tiny school house (which is next door to the church), and especially the familiar congregation he loved.

Somewhere around the time the building was completed and the sanctuary first held their worship services, William G. Tomer decided to write a hymn for his much beloved congregation. Based on the etymology of the word, "Goodbye," which William recognized as a familiar contraction of the salutation, "God Be With You," he wrote the first verse and melody of what became known worldwide as the hymn, "God Be with You 'Til We Meet Again." In 1878 a quartet comprised of Ella Tomer, Flora Tomer Lee, William Tomer, and Alonzo Sailer sang that beautiful and simple hymn at the conclusion of a Sunday service at the Finesville Christian Church.

Later Rev. Jeremiah Rankin from Washington DC took Tomer's verse, added a chorus and three more of his own, and both copyrighted and published the hymn under his name, crediting William G. Tomer with the melody. Tradition and early local records attribute the first verse (without the chorus) as well as the melody to William.

In 1949 after dwindling attendance and decline in population in the mill town of Finesville, the white stucco church was closed and stood vacant, a sad reminder of those earlier days of worship and fellowship for the village's people.

But, that was not the end of the story!



William Tomer's Grave
Philipsburg Cemetery

Downturn and then Revival…The Dilt story

The Rebirth of Finesville Church 1954-1997

Author: Pete Dilts, Finesville, New Jersey (unaltered and unedited)

The following account is provided just as it was written. The author has passed away. It is a valuable account of one man's memories, though sometimes from a very biased perspective; and it is a helpful part of our history. I only wish the author who reflected on the "worst of times" could have had even a glimpse of what the Church he loved is like today in the "best of times!" Here is Pete Dilts' story.

He had been converted to Christ for only a short time, yet this man Peter, married with two small boys, sat morosely on his front porch. Why the furrowed brow? Why did he wear the expression of perplexity? Surely he should be rejoicing in his new found faith for after all, now he was a new creation in Christ!! Jesus Himself said, "I have come that you may have life more abundantly!"

Peter was greatly disturbed that he could find no satisfactory place to worship…Oh, there were plenty of churches, most of them beautiful and well established. The ministers of these churches were well established also, perhaps to the point of complacency. Where were the ministers and the people of these churches when Peter was seeking the Saviour? And wanting answers to the many questions he had about this thing called salvation?

He had made appointments with a few of the ministers, all from different denominations….One by one he spoke with each of them, asking many questions about the saving power of Jesus, what exactly did His death on the cross mean to mankind? What about the rapture of the church? Can people know for certain that they are bound for heaven? And so the interviews went…with the pastors skirting the difficult questions with their knowledge of theology. They seemed ill at ease, very uncomfortable, very complacent, embarrassed at times because they knew so very little about the new birth.

In his mind, Peter pictured the kind of church he wanted. One that would resound the singing of the old time favorites. A preacher who would preach about being saved, about heaven and hell. One that would be concerned about the lost souls all around us. One that would exude the knowledge of Jesus by his love for the brethren and compassion for the down and outer. Peter attended a church at present, just like the one he was now praying for, but his concern was for the people in this immediate area, and his present church was too far away. There were so many, men, women and children who were unaware that Christ could change their lives, that He would forgive all sins, and give them the gift of eternal life.

The assembly of God church, that he currently attended was zealous for souls, the minister preached dynamic messages, and the members were encouraged to go out and witness to others about the saving power of Jesus. In fact, it was the faithful witness of two men from that church that led to Peter's conversion. Because of that experience, he was convinced that the people in this area had to hear God's plan of salvation. It was so plain, so simple that the local ministers and lay people stumbled right over it.

Days merged into weeks but that nagging thought remained, "How could it be accomplished? How could that church ever be opened for worship again? Who would ever come to such a setting and preach?"

One day, as Peter sat on his front porch, his gaze settled on the old abandoned Christian church just a few yards from his home. This old church had been out of service for many years. The former members who in the past had kept it going, either passed away or retired from being active members.

Peter prayed and thought much about the possibility of God using that building again. During the ensuing days many doubts crept into his mind. The work required would be mountainous, the money needed, astronomical!! And how to go about finding a man who would preach? One of God's promises always came to mind during these periods of doubts, and that was, "With God all things are possible, only believe." With that biblical reminder foremost in his mind he continued to seek God in prayer, somehow, the people in this area had to hear the gospel message.

The daily routine of life continued for the next few days quite normally until late one afternoon….Peter was returning home from work when suddenly what he had to do next came into his mind. He could

hardly wait to get home and into the house to start writing a letter. Tom whom? He didn't know. To where? He didn't know that either, but one thing he did know was that he had to write!!!

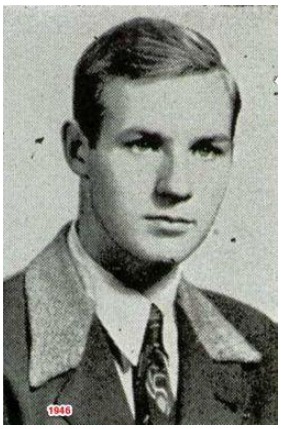
Peter wrote, telling of his desire to hear dynamic messages being preached, to hear the old time gospel hymns, and to see people get saved. After four or five pages of fast writing imploring someone to send a preacher, even it was only once a month.

Upon completion of writing, he felt a tremendous sense of relief…Then, not knowing where to send it, he put it in an envelope and placed it on the mantle. Now all he had to do was locate an address.

Some time later, he visited a few of the elderly former members of that no vacant church. He received a mild shock and was greatly surprised to learn of their reluctance to even discuss such an idea….The church had died a slow death while they were attending, now the attitude was to leave it rest in peace. He had been so certain that they would embrace the idea to be able to worship in their church again. They looked upon Peter as an intruder into the past that had been buried. Each one that he had visited made them feel extremely unwelcome.

Sadly enough, Peter had just had his first introduction to what Christians ought not to be…Now he was in a quandary again, not knowing what to do or where to send the letter. Meanwhile, unbeknown to those involved, there was another force at work. Silent and effective, this force was a mover and shaker of events, as it has been since the dawn of time.

Peter only thought he was alone with concern for the area's lost and in his praying about that defunct building. There was a young man named Russel Allen who was about to graduate from an Allentown Bible School.



Russell lived in Phillipsburg and he chose to come home the "back" way to avoid traffic. This route took him to Riegelsville, across the bridge and through Finesville. As he drove through town, he took notice of the old church. How it stood there…barren, bare and empty…He began to pray about seeing God bring that church to life again. And along with that possibility, that God would direct his path to be pastor when it happened. "After all," he reasoned, 'graduation is only two months away and he'd soon be looking for a pastorate." Observing the terrible run down condition of that bilding, his dream of ever coming to fruition seemed very remote indeed. Being a man of deep faith however, Russ Allen believed God. And where the Word tells that "with God all things are possible," he believed that as fact.

Late one afternoon Peter arrived home from his place of employment. As he entered the house, his wife Kitty greeted him with the announcement that some men were waiting in the living room to talk with him. After Peter had entered the room, the men introduced themselves as Russ Allen, Austin Shelley, and Jansen Hartman. Little did Peter know then what a significant role two of those men would play in his life. As the four "brothers" began to get acquainted, Russ Allen related his story and experience….

"After passing and praying about the possible opening of that church many times, I decided it was time for some kind of action. One Saturday I drove to Finesville, parked my car at the lower end of town, and started walking and knocking on doors asking if anyone was interested in seeing the church open for services again. Not one person exressed the slightest interest, in fact, several appeared annoyed at such an absurd query."

Russ continued his story…."As I drew near to the other end of town, and becoming more discouraged with each step, I looked ahead and saw one more sitting on top of a small rise on the road. I determined that house would be the last in this 'visitation endeavor.'" He drudged on up the hill and reluctantly knocked on the front door. Katy, who answered the knock, told us later, "I opened the door and there stood the most dejected young man who also effectively blocked out the light." At six foot two inches tall and weighing nearly 300 pounds, he could indeed block the light. As this woman of the house, confronted him with a questioning gaze, Russ asked the now familiar question, but this time after so many refusals, even his phraseology was negative,

Russ in this manner…"You wouldn't be interested…" voiced his question.

Katy stared at him for a few moments, stunned into momentary silence as she connected the letter Peter had written to this visitor. Russ told us later that he didn't know what to expect. He said, "I thought she was getting ready to slam the door in my face." Swiftly recovering from the shock of what was happening, Katy told him not to move, that she would be right back! Some time after that, Russ related, "I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if she was coming back with a gun or an irate husband."

Upon her return however, she presented to him the letter Peter had written days before. All thoughts of bad things about to happen were quickly erased as Russ opened the letter and began to read. Halfway through the letter tears of incredible joy coursed down his cheeks. What a transformation had just taken place, a few moments earlier he had trudged up the hill toward that "last house" with lagging steps…a timid knock on the door….the wait, while his mind was filled with many doubts…a little fear…the letter…and now this!!!

The tears of joy came when he realized that God had heard his prayers of many weeks. And from the letter, he learned that Peter had been seeking the Lord for the very same thing at the same time!! Another promise of God came to mind that caused rejoicing is found in Ro. 8:28 which tells us that "All things work together for good to those who love God." Yes, God had heard their prayers, and started the wheels of prayer answering machinery into motion, and brought the two concerned men together in a most unusual matter. Russ then asked for and received permission to take the letter to Allentown to show his mentors. And that accounts for the three men waiting to talk to Peter when he arrived home from work.

Peter too, was glad and excited also about how this meeting came about. He saw first hand, the sovereignty of God at work. But at the same time he was very cautious, realizing that Satan is a master of deception. He questioned these three brothers extensively. They answered each question patiently and thoroughly until Peter had the assurance that they were indeed from God. They settled into the business of the future for that very small group.

It was decided and agreed upon that Peter and Kitty would open their home for the first ever prayer meetings. It became an urgent mission to search out and invite Christians to attend those meetings. It turned out to be an agonizingly long process. One of the firs to join the group was Sherid Adams, a zealous, born again Christian, whose sincere prayers accomplished much. Another local couple was the late William Mull Sr. and his wife Hazel. He was a man of deep faith, who literally walked and talked with God. He taught the adult Bible class, helped make important decisions at our meetings, and proved himself capable at nearly every project required at the church. His wife, Hazel, was a Godly woman who possessed many spiritual assets and had a positive influence on many. She also was an inspiration to all in the congregation with her ability at the piano.

The primary mover within this group was Jansen Hartman, head of church extension. Though his home was in Reading, PA, many miles from Finesville, yet he was there among us many times. He organized meetings, gave us needed supplies, preached on occasions, stirred us up and into action by his bountiful energy, zeal, and compassion. This was no small task since the men of our group all lived in different areas and each worked full time jobs. The Lord used Jansen greatly and when a solid core of believers were committed to seeing the old church resurrected, Janson and Co. started negotiations to buy the property.

One of the greatest obstacles that Jansen encountered was the former members' stubbornness in signing off, with attitudes such as theirs its small wonder that the church closed its doors on them.

Jansen and his staff would not be stymied however, in his single mindedness to start another church. He organized tent meetings, to be held for a week at a time on the church lawn. These were well attended by people from various areas who heard excellent messages by the ministers from the conference.

The name of the conference at that time was "The Mennonite Brethren in Christ." The name "Mennonite" had a certain stigma attached to it and was a very real hindrance to the work. The conference leaders were well aware of this problem and worked long and hard to finally win approval for the present name, "Calvary Bible Fellowship Church." That change took place in 1959.

People from all walks of life began to get saved; nothing spectacular, just one here, one there, but it was happening. Most of those that got saved went their own way, but occasionally one would stay and be added to our group. We started a series of cottage prayer meetings, taking turns having the group use their homes for prayer. Soon there was a strong nucleus of believers who were ready to take on a long term mortgage.

Eventually we received permission to occupy the building….we were elated!!! But that was the beginning, and seemingly never ending restoration of that old building. But the men and women had a mind to work and so it went, day after day, week after week. There were two floors and an attic, and the only area that didn't need restoring was the attic. The main room on the ground floor was piled high with accumulated junk. There was one path through this maze, if one picked their way carefully. The large room, a kitchen of sorts, was a rotting mess of plaster, decayed wooden floors, a badly leaking roof and everything covered with mildew. After the truck loads of junk from the ground floor Sunday School area had been taken away, a floor, consisting of wide wooden thick boards with very wide cracks was revealed. These cracks served as convenient recepticals for the sweepers as they cleaned up after one of their "feasts."

Waiting beneath those wide cracks were the "church" mice. Each one was a small but energy efficient garbage disposal unit. They grew content and fat, almost to the point of belligerency. Their obesity however, didn't inhibit their prolific life style….their numbers increased. Then, without any warning, (how do your warn mice?) the church closed, the crumbs stopped falling through the cracks, and they were faced with a hard decision. Turn Methodist or starve!! The Methodist church was only a few yards down the road, and they did indeed experience an influx of rodents.

Russ Allen organized the start up of Sunday School classes and preaching services. Attendance to these services were almost nil by the local townspeople and children. It became a necessity to "go after them." On a Sunday morning, one could see Sherid, Peter, and Mrs. Allen, (Russ' wife) leaving in their cars, all going in different directions to pick up children, bring them back to the church, teach them, and after the worship service, take them home. One of those children, coming from a very poor home environment, is now fifty years of age. He owns and preaches in a church located in Easton, PA.

There were no pleasant surprises uncovered in the building. Everything had to be scrubbed, painted, or replaced. Even so, the walls, upstairs and down, retained that drab, smoky green color. The credit for this was placed upon the "smoking furnace." This old, huge wood furnace was a pitiful excuse for a stove. It literally devoured wood and managed to produce a fifty percent mixture of smoke and heat. The sanctuary, (if one may call it that,) was certainly not conducive to worship. The smokey paint made it gloomy, the wooden folding chairs were uncomfortable, the old furnace never warmed the sanctuary very much so everyone kept their wraps on. The furnace smoked so badly that a haze filled the room. Some times during the cold months Pastor Allen had to cut his sermons short or become asphyxiated by the smoke and soot.

The only source of water in the building came from a cistern, pumped up by a pitcher pump, (which had to be primed each time) a rusted tin sink that drained out into the back yard. The water was not fit for drink, nor were there any toilets. When we had special meetings, and the visitors would ask directions to the bath room, our reply was "Anywhere out back." Some of those people never showed up again. Those who remained probably inherited the pioneer genes from their ancestors.

The work required to make the building resemble a welcoming church never ended. Removing old wide plank flooring, pouring cement, erecting scaffolds, inside and out, replacing window panes, sanding, painting, building, replacing went on for years.

Without the support of Conference supplying pastors, special speakers, and work hours, in all probability it would not have succeeded. The core of that small church were the ones she developed into teachers, members of the official board, faithful workers, visitation program, and anything else they were called on to do.

It was during the early days of organization that Sherid's wife, Shirley and Peter's wife, Kitty, received the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, and became very active within the church. They cleaned the church, taught the children, and did secretarial work. Kitty developed into a soprano soloist, and sang on special occasions. During these times also, the children of the church families had to dress their best. The girls wore their prettiest dresses, while the boys had to wear white shirts, ties and jackets. Since two services were held on a Sunday, this became a difficult task that few people realize. Especially trying to round them up on a warm summer evening. Once inside, the scowling faces out numbered the smiling ones.

The late William Mull Sr. became the adult Bible teacher. His love for the Lord was evidenced in the way he taught and handled the Word of God. During our business meetings, he was a quiet but stabilizing force, with his deep faith in God accompanied by his accumulated wisdom. His wife Hazel was equally indispensable as she taught how to sing parts and skillfully played the piano at every service.

The Conference proved time and again a valuable source of help and supplies. They knew when one of the larger churches were remodeling and it was during one of those times that the congregation heled move in pews that were donated. Our church changed pews three times, which resulted in having the ones in use today. We could not afford a new piano, so we always accepted used uprights from anyone who offered them. But even with tuning their life expectancy was short and it seemed as though we were involved in the mighty struggle to move pianos up and down those stairs all too frequently. On one particular occasion, it was decided to remove a window from the auditorium and shove the old piano out and down onto the sidewalk. After a near super human effort, it was raised to the window level and pushed out. As Sherid said later, "When that piano hit the cement sidewalk, it gave out one great "BONG!!!" and died."

The other outstanding incident happened when we were attempting to move an upright piano up the steps….We had picked this instrument up at someone's home in Holland township's rolling hills…After many grunts, groans, and strained muscles, we did load it on the truck, drove to the church, unloaded it, wrestled it into position and by that time we were ready to collapse. Russ Allen though had different ideas. Without hesitation, he had us assume our positions with him at the rear with the intentions of pushing that thing up those stairs. At a certain command, we tugged and pushed in unison. Half way up we came to an abrupt halt. We gave it all we had left but could not move it upward even a fraction. Russ had maintained his position at the rear and soon realized that he was the only one that kept it from coming back down. He was in a desperate situation that called for desperate measures. With perspiration popping from his reddening face he blurted, "Brethren, let's pray!" It may not have been the shortest prayer known but it was brief…it had to be. The situation appeared helpless, and we appeared helpless….But on the next command to "heave" that piano went up the stairs so fast we couldn't turn the corner at the top…We crunched a large hold in the plaster, but kept going on to the top. There we stood in wonderment and amazement, realizing what God had just done. This incident was so etched in our minds that it served as a rather humorous testimony for years after.

For the young, the years creep on slowly. For the older folks, the years pass all too swiftly, be that as it may…, the end of the year always comes at the same time. So whether time passes slowly or swiftly pass it must with its people, Pastors and events into the annals of history…

For the first twenty five years, the congregation experienced many pastors. We were a young church, we needed an older type pastor that had experience in dealing with people. Instead they sent us young men just out of school….Finesville was the proving ground. If they did well, if they displayed some potential, then they were transferred to larger churches. If they failed, eventually they were removed to work in other Christian fields. A few left the ministry, and were happier doing secular work. Today of course we have the democratic system of choosing a candidate and voting.

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It has always been difficult to attract the residents of Finesville into any of our meetings. We've had special meetings when both flights of stairs were blocked with people waiting to be seated. They were lined p out onto the sidewalk, extra chairs had to be brought up from the Sunday school's area and set up in the aisles. On one occasion, a window pane got broken because the younger folks were sitting on the window sills. Many people were saved…they came from a wide spread are, but hardly a one from Finesville proper. Forty two or forty three years, with the Methodist Church breathing its last few gasps of breath…., our church's doors are still open in welcome to them, but they still will not come in. The question remains unanswered today as it has for many years….WHY?

Over the years, there have been occasions when the work failed, people left and the church came close to locking its doors. But in each occurance, there was always a faithful remnant who remained. They would meet in the building where they would study the Word and plead with the Lord. And God, who called the church into existence, would not let it fail.

It seemed as though God would put that small remnant to the test. Did they really want a church or were they just playing with words? After a period of humbling, the Spirit searched the inward parts of people involved to see if their motives were pure, and He would yet again send another preacher to revive the work. Slowly the people would drift back in.

There were long stretches of time when the work was hampered. The joy of salvation, worship, testimonies, and hearing the word of God was nearly non-existant. We, at those times, had a "form of

Godliness but denied the power." There were two or three persons who opposed every program set forth. It was therefore impossible to achieve a harmonious atmosphere. We seldom were of one accord, of one mind, or of spiritual unity. An evangelistic preacher, who was slated to preach for a week, told us before the third evening service started, that something was hindering the operation of the Holy Spirit. Those times of opposition occurred all too frequently and we found it vitally necessary to plead the blood of Christ against the power of darkness.

But God, who would not have us despondant always, would refresh us from time to time with the arrival of Jansen Hartman. He would then proceed to preach a Spirit filled message, and administer communion. He preached the crucifixtion of Jesus so poignantly, that it brought tears to the eyes even of the most stoic.

Lest this writing has led you to believe that we were a most sorrowful congregation, allow please a correction of the course. Much depended on the leadership. At certain intervals God would place into our midst a Pastor and his wife who seemed to exude the sweet presence of Jesus. God gifted them with an aura that was contagious. People who met them came to know them, loved and respected them in return. Our church suffered withdrawal pangs for a long, long time afterward when they were transferred to a larger church. But again, let me point out, a very small percentage almost always took the opposite view. This tiny, cantankerous group has not attended our church for many, many years….During those years, we've lived through several experimental pastors. Some were called, some were not. Finally a man and his wife arrived and settled in for approximately fourteen years.

This pastor was a Godly man who had a great grasp of the scriptures and knew how to deal with people's problems. He instituted several different programs that succeeded and kept things on an even keel for many years. After eleven or twelve years, it happened again…the enexorable lack of attendance to nearly all the programs, one after another were shut down. People began to leave, this removed a number of children from the church. Their programs also ceased…Attendance to the worship service dwindled, as did the joy of worship. Without the sound of the children's voices, without the sound of their laughter, the void they left was irreplaceable.

Relentlessly the situation grew worse until the crises called for a vote by the members. The vote was one hudred percent in favor of the Pastor's removal. As mentioned previously, he was a Godly man and he received the decision as from the Lord and moved on.

During the pastor-less months that followed, Sunday morning services and prayer meetings continued. Guest speakers and a few men from the church filled the gaps adequately. Meanwhile, a committee was appointed to interview pastoral candidates. Over a period of weeks perhaps months, a candidate was selected and voted in.

Possessing a rather dynamic personality, and seemingly unlimited energy, he brought vibrant life to a badly faltering Christian fellowship. For the first four years, many changes were instituted inside and out. The entire sanctuary was repainted and for the first time, curtains were hung at each window. The rooms downstairs were repainted, a new run installed, ceiling fans and other things too numerous to list.

Much of the old and odd pieces of furniture were thrown out. A board of deacons was appointed and thusly the work and responsibility was delegated out and organization was in!! Attendance gradually increased in every meeting and during the gulf war, over one hundred people came to worship and to ease their minds about the future…Not knowing how widespread the war might become, citizens were downright afraid.

This may have been an opportunity to have capitalized on that fear and to have introduced them to the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who can assure them of a secure future. But sadly enough, this was never mentioned, in any of the sermons.

During the fifth and sixth years, the atmosphere within the church took a drastic down turn. The leadership was accused of dishonesty and coverups, of lies and so it went…this element served as an incubator of gossip, exaggerations, factions and division within the church family. Since the members no longer trusted the leadership, respect went out the window also. What remained was the exact opposite of brotherly love, being of one mind, one accord, and spiritual unity. Looking ahead to the dismal prospect of failure, the leadership abruptly walked away from the work, citing burn out.

Again….the church found themselves in that all too familiar position, quite deeply in debt and deserted. This time however, there was a brother in our midst who possessed all the credentials necessary to "Stand in the gap." Having been in the past a pastor in Cherryville, and more recently, returned from serving in Africa for years, William "Bill" Mull very aptly manned the "helm," preaching sound sermons and visiting the wayward, reasoning with the reluctant to return to the Church.

During the ensuing months, two positive things occurred that are worth noting: The church, not having to pay a pastor's salary and benefits, climbed out of debt…a decided plus…secondly, many, many Christians were praying that this time the church would receive a pastor that was God's choice.

The system of selecting candidates, then voting for one, may not be such a desirable privilege upon reflection….Each candidate to be enterviewed and to preach will certainly put his best foot forward in that he will don his best suit, select his best sermon, and say the things the committee wants to hear. Being earthly creatures, we can and have been influenced by outward manifestations. In times like these one cannot but recall the scripture found in Prov. 3:5-6…"Trust the Lord with all thine heart; Lean not unto thine own understanding; In all thy ways, acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths."

God did indeed heard the cries and sighs of His people, in His sovereign grace He extended His love yet another time and placed a man of God into the Finesville Church.

This pastor didn't turn things upside down, he didn't change much of anything….He didn't arrive on the scene with a rush of exuberant energy or personality, no…none of these characteristics. But he did usher in a "something" that had been missing in the fellowship for a long time.

This element didn't arrive with a "bang." But at the end of two years with Byron (Widger) as pastor, we're beginning to figure it out. Why does the interior of the church look so pretty? Why are our brothers and sisters in the Lord hugging each other more often? Why is there an atmosphere that is so conducive to worship? Yes…, there is a board of Elders now that are respected, there is a board of Deacons that are in the process of being revitalized. These things are necessary and good, but the element that has been missing, but is now present is love. 1 John 4 says it so well, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has beheld God at any time, if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us." AMEN

And Now, the Song Goes On

Since 1954 the Finesville Church has stood as a testimony of God's grace to folks not just from Finesville, but also from nearby villages like Riegelsville, Milford, Alpha, Bloomsbury, Phillipsburg, and more. Our worship is vibrant and the fellowship is sweet. The congregation and community love being together.

And, on any given Sunday *even today*, you can expect to conclude the worship service with the singing of "God Be with You Till We Meet Again." It is a 150 year old tradition that still expresses the heart of one very special church family.

Always a Heart for Missions

It would be easy for a small church in a tiny village to become ingrown. Why, even Riegelsville, Philipsburg, Alpha, and Milford seem like a world away to those who huddled in peace and safety along the Musconetcong. They worked the mills, grew their crops, schooled their children, and took care of their families. That was the epicenter of life for Finesville and the little church that worshiped there.

But, hearing the call of the Kingdom to go into all the world and preach the Gospel challenged their thinking and resulted in action. While most of them would live and die there along the Riegelsville-Warren Glen Road, the congregation had the foresight to teach their children the Scriptures, equip them to share the Gospel with those near and far, and give generously of their limited incomes to send missionaries across the world to further the cause of the Kingdom.

And so, from the little white church across from the Musconetcong, missionaries were commissioned to go tell the message of Christ around the world. People who may never see even New York or Philadelphia gave to support some of their own who would serve from Africa to Mongolia, caring for handicapped kids and college students here in the States, and do support work around the world. Some of those who ministered or are still ministering were these:

Bill and Addy Mull



An ordained pastor, Bill Mull and his precious wife Addy were active members of Finesville Church and were supported by the congregation as they served with African Inland Mission in Kenya, Mozambique, and the Seychelle Islands. They, their four sons and five daughters had significant impact overseas as well as in the church and community. Bill was a valued elder at Finesville and assisted where needed with pulpit and teaching beside Pastor Byron. They went to Glory in 2003 and 2006.

Rick and Donna Warner



Donna Robbins grew up in the Finesville Church where her mother, Arlene, was the organist. As a teenager Donna felt the call to serve and had a heart for Mongolian Refugees. She met her husband-to-be, Rick Warner, when they served together short term in Mongolia and they married in 1993. The Warners and their two daughters gave hands-on help to the needy, living a nomadic lifestyle with refugees. They completed their Mongolian work in 2000. Donna's sister Kay is an active and much appreciated member of the Finesville Church Family.

Jeff and Emmy Ort



While Jeff grew up in Warren County he met his Mississippi bride, Emmy, at Handi-Camp in New Jersey, a facility provided for the care and ministry to handicapped kids in need. They married in 1993 and Finesville Church supported them as they began service with BCM International at Big Sky Camp in Bigfork Montana. Now they and their 7 children (of varying ethnicities and some disabilities) are involved in "Child Bridge" in Montana.

In recent years since the Mulls have passed on and the Warners and Orts are self-supporting in their ministry endeavors, Finesville Church has supported BFC missionaries from other areas, including:

Mark and Jasmine Campbell



With hearts for young adults in need of the Gospel, Mark and Jasmine serve with Disciple Makers at East Stroudsburg University in Pennsylvania. From one-on-one discipleship to small group studies and showing hospitality to students, the Campbells are making unique impact.

Alex and Shara Hartranft



From the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, Alex has a passion for church-planting with relatively unreached people groups. Working with the African Inland Mission, like the Mulls did long ago, Alex and his new bride Shara will serve in Chad, Africa where he has already participated in ministry.

Chris and Beckie Merrick



Working directly with the Board of Missions of the Bible Fellowship Church, Chris and Beckie travel near and far organizing and serving with small group, short term mission teams doing construction, repairs, maintenance and planning with missionaries and churches. They also serve with CMTS (Christian Missionary Technical Services) as well as Samaritan's Purse and the Operation Christmas Child ministry.

Nelson Randolph



Nelson's passion for Samaritan's Purse and Operation Christmas Child is contagious! Finesville has worked beside Nelson and his wife Robyn to pack hundreds of boxes. (In fact, this very day Nelson is celebrating the packing of their 500,000 box!) Even the local Boy Scouts get involved in the project.

Feeding the Hungry

Until it closed its doors in 2014, the Finesville United Methodist Church at 150 County Road 627 provided a Food Pantry for lower Warren County. Needy families from Finesville, Alpha, and other nearby villages came for help. A committed group of volunteers from the area worked with the County and State to provide food for the elderly, families in need, and unemployed. As church membership and attendance dwindled, the United Methodist leadership decided to close the church. This would certainly mean the end of the Food Pantry that was so deeply needed.

Becoming aware of this upcoming closure, Pastor Byron Widger spoke with several of the leaders of the Pantry including Judy May and Suzanne Welter. Both women had started attending the Bible Fellowship Church where Byron pastored.

In that conversation Pastor Widger asked if the Food Pantry would be interested in relocating to Calvary Bible Fellowship Church just east of the United Methodist Church. He offered the limited space that was available (including the furnace room and closets) and told them he'd be glad to work with them to reestablish the Pantry at our facility. When the ladies said, "Yes" and asked, "When would you like us to begin?" Byron enthusiastically answered, "This week sounds good!"

And with the help of the Pantry staff that remained from the Methodist Church and additional volunteers from Finesville Church, the new location began to provide needed food that very same month.

Now, 12 years later Finesville Church hosts a booming Food Pantry for needy families and individuals from southern Warren County. NorWesCap (North Western New Jersey Community Action Program) offers food from USDA, New Jersey, and local farms and organizations for free or for a tremendously reduced price that the Food Pantry acquires and distributes. Giving from the congregation and local donors makes this possible.

In addition several individuals gather non-food items including clothing, household items, even toys for families in need and invite our clients to "shop for free" and take what they need for their home and family.



What committed people from one little country church can do when they work together is astounding. In 2025 food was provided for 1,359 adults and 654 children from 709 households (many of these coming for food twice a month). Elderly folks come as do low income families and those out of work. Children come with their parents. Handicapped individuals are helped. Our volunteers are amazing.

Though the Pantry is not directly a ministry of the church, our Pastor and volunteers are making significant impact on folks from the community as they put into action Jesus' words, "If you've done this for the least of these, you've done it for me."

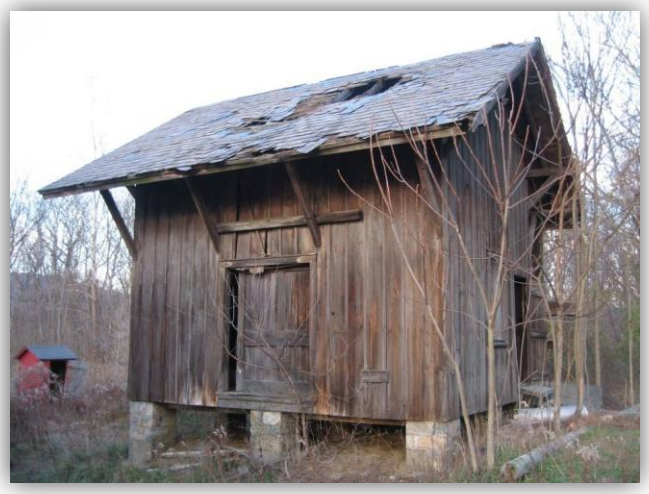
Even a Freight Depot Speaks



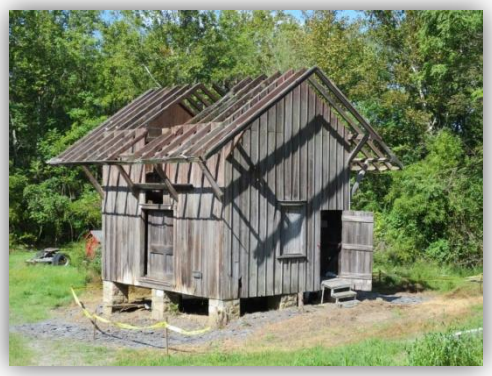
From Finesville to Milford, paper mills have been significant to the area's economy from the 1800's. Hundreds of jobs were provided for those who made everything from bulk paper to cardboard to specialty papers for the tri-state area. The Riegel Paper Company built and operated a large mill along the Musconetcong River just a mile east of Finesville Church in 1893. The mill changed hands several times from Riegel to Warren Glenn to Hughesville and finally FiberMark who took ownership in 1997. The mill was closed and abandoned six years later in 2003.

Ten years after that the owners of the mill were still involved in law suits and other legal proceedings with the EPA and governmental agencies. The buildings were neglected and decaying.

On the grounds of the FiberMark Mill one structure captured the eyes and imagination of Pastor Byron Widger and several members of the Finesville Church family. There was just something about that little building. The freight depot was built before the turn of the century and managed the material for the Hughesville Paper Mill. All raw materials brought to the mill and finished items sent from the mill were transferred from the railroad to and from the mill floor via the little 12' x 16' freight depot.



In an effort to work with the community to save the little Freight Depot as a historical building and to provide a storage facility for the church, Finesville's Pastor Byron and others from the congregation negotiated with the owners of the Paper Mill in the spring of 2013. The owners gave the building to Finesville Church as long as they would remove it from the site and rebuild it on their land.



With a great amount of time, effort, and both church and community the project began. Pastor Byron and the hard-working men and women marked the individual pieces of the Depot on site, removed it piece by piece, and relocated it to the land behind the Church. Many of the rotted boards were authentically replaced with new wood.

After much shared effort Finesville Church now was the proud owner of the beautifully restored 100+ year old Freight Depot from along the rails at the nearby Paper Mill. The Pohat Land Use Board was a

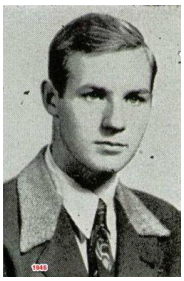
great help in giving approvals and waiving fees to see this task come to fruition. Neighbors and church members helped remove trees, pour foundations, excavated, raised walls, painted, electrified, and finished the project.

On May 31, 2015 the church family invited neighbors and friends to come celebrate the completion of the project. They called it "The Freight Awakening." An 11:00am service of dedication and appreciation was followed by a community luncheon.



To this very day the little Freight Depot is a reflection of the tie between Finesville Church and the nearby community. Historians recognize the depot as part of the story of life along the Musconetcong and often tours of the county's historical buildings include the sturdy little shed. It's much more than a place to store the church's lawnmowers and snow shovels. It's a statement of respect for our past and our tie with the community for both now and the future.

Our Shepherds: Pastors from the Past and Present



1954-1956 Russell T. Allen
Pastor Allen served under the Board of Church Extension as the first pastor of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church of Finesville. His initial pay was $100 per month. He and his wife Dorith (Dee) moved to town with their children Cheryl and 2 year old son, David T. (now Executive Director of the Bible Fellowship Church.)

1957-1958 Reynold D. Gardner
A young minister, Pastor Gardner served under the Board of Church Extension as well. He was only at the church one year before he was moved to another location. BFC records show that he was involved in the denomination at least into the 1960's.



1959-1960 Alva C. Cassel
As was the norm in the 50's and 60's, the leadership of the denomination "stationed" novice pastors to the smallest churches for a year or two. Finesville was blessed to have Alva and his wife Laura appointed to serve them. With Alva's gentle teaching and Laura's gifted music ability, they impacted the congregation.



1961-1962 Robert E. McIntyre
After studying at Berean Bible School and Wheaton College and then serving with the Church Extension Ministry in Jersey City, NJ, Pastor McIntyre was stationed for one year at what now was called "Calvary Bible Fellowship of Finesville." Bob grew up in the Royersford Church.

1963-1966 Bruce E. Ellingson



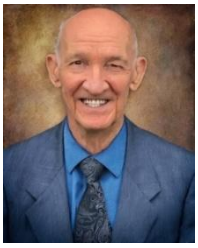
A Wheaton College and Westminster Seminary graduate with a passion for theology and expository preaching, Bruce and his wife Carolyn (Cassel) Ellingson ministered in Finesville for three years. His first church, Bruce loved the ministry and people there before being called to serve at the Lebanon Bible Fellowship Church.

1967-1969 Jansen E. Hartman (supply)



During a particularly difficult time in the life of the congregation, Rev. Jansen Hartmanbrought peace and stability to the church he helped start in Finesville. His depth of biblical teaching, wise counsel, and loving care was necessary for the future of the church. Some of the congregation still remembers the impact he made.

1970-1971 Harold E. Weaber



Harold served in the Jersey City, NJ congregation before being appointed to pastor at Finesville for one year. Another graduate of Berean Bible School, Pastor Weaber ministered with the Bible Fellowship Church for a total of 35 years.

1972 Supply pastors provided leadership during a year's interim.

1973-1986 D.Thomas Phillips



After serving in the US Army, Tom and his precious wife Marge gave loving leadership to the Finesville Church family for 13 years. A quiet, gentle man, Tom taught, preached, and ministered to the church before he was called to the staff of Red Hill BFC.

1987-1988 David H. Jones

David began ministry as a youth pastor with the Reading Bible Fellowship Church in Pennsylvania before being called as pastor to the Finesville Church. It was a difficult time of transition for the congregation and Pastor Jones moved to other ministry. Following his departure, ministers like Donald Straub, Bill Mull, and missionary teacher Philip Morrison helped fill the pulpit as the church regrouped for future ministry and sought to call a pastor who would renew the vision and strength of the work in Finesville.

That pastor brought new life and joy to Finesville. He was none other than…

1995 – 2023 Byron B. Widger



After much discussion and prayerful consideration regarding the future ministry of Calvary Bible Fellowship of Finesville, the Lord graciously led the elders and congregation to call Pastor Byron Widger to come lead the flock here. Byron, his lovely wife Jenifer, and their three children were a tremendous blessing to the church and community. Young families increased the size of the congregation and new life was breathed into the ministry. Byron's gentle spirit, love for our neighbors, heart for the Word, grace, and wisdom had their

impact. New folks came. People were baptized. The Freight Depot made a statement to the community. Children and teen ministries made impact. The church was renewed, stabilized, and blessed. To God be the glory.

During Pastor Byron's ministry the posted name of the church was changed from "Calvary Bible Fellowship Church of Finesville" simply to "Finesville Church." While fully committed to the Bible Fellowship Church, noting that we were now recognized as the *only* church available to and identifying with the village of Finesville, the title on our sign welcomes neighbors and friends to worship and ministry at their community church.

2024-Present Pastor Byron's retirement announcement was both sad and knowingly expected by the congregation. Elders Bert Roling and Pastor Rick Paashaus led the church family through a positive interim period as a Pastoral Search Committee prayerfully sought a Shepherd for the flock.

A Shepherd for Today…and Tomorrow: Pastor Brandon Olbrys



In the Spring of 2024 Pastor Brandon Olbrys became aware of the search for a pastor at FinesvilleChurch and made inquiry about the position. It undoubtedly was the work of the Holy Spirit on behalf of both the Olbrys Family and Finesville Church. Pastor Ron Kohl interviewed Brandon and told his story in the Bible Fellowship Church "One Voice" Magazine. (www.BFCOneVoice.com) Here are portions of that interview:

Brandon Olbrys had everything that would suggest to others that he was living a successful life: wife, children, good job as a high school athletic director, successful baseball career. He'd known nothing but success, all the way to coaching one of his teams to a New York State title. He pitched NCAA Division 1 level at Charleston, was voted New York State Class D Coach of the Year, led his team to five consecutive division championships. But something was missing. There was a God-shaped hole in his life that would not go away.



In 2020 the Lord called both Brandon and his wife Stefanie to himself and the trajectory of his life was changed forever. With his conversion came a strong call to ministry. Being discipled by the pastors of a solid Bible Church and then working toward a degree at Reformation Bible College, that call to ministry was strengthened and clarified. He felt led a rural, smaller church in a community where he could preach, teach, disciple, and shepherd. He and Stefanie wanted to be within driving distance of their parents in Upstate New York. He wanted to be part of a strongly biblical church where he would have opportunity to do expository preaching. Brandon said, "I want to be in a small church, in a small community, and I want someone to walk alongside me, because this can be a very isolated call…to walk alongside someone who has done it was a huge pull to me." Pastor Rick was and is honored and humbled to listen to, pray for, and serve as a sounding board for this very special young brother and friend.

For the entire unabridged article see www.BFCOneVoice,com "New Pastor at Finesville. June 2025."

In an amazing joyful work of God's grace, Brandon Olbrys was unanimously called by the congregation



to serve as pastor of Finesville Church in July 2024. He, his wife Stefanie (an elementary school teacher in a school just a short distance from the parsonage in Alpha, NJ), and their three wonderful children have become an integral part of Finesville Church. They are loved, valued, respected and cared for. Since their arrival, the church (already doing well under the ministry of Pastor Byron) has seen increased attendance of folks of all ages. Wonderful baptisms in the Musconetcong River across from the church have been celebrations of joy.

New members have been added and the work of the Lord in the little church with the Freight Depot along the Riegelsville Warren Glen Road is healthy, excited about the future, thankful and blessed…looking forward to all the Lord has in store as His Gospel is proclaimed and lives are touched there in the southern tip of Warren County, New Jersey.

May Jesus Christ be praised!









Resources:

- Kenopsia Explorers, S8E5 Abandoned History, YouTube
- Part Time Explorer, Ghost Towns and Ruins, YouTube
- Old Riegel Paper Company, MillPictures.com
- Written documents, Pastor Byron Widger
- James Wright, Northampton County Historical and Genealogy Society, Easton PA
- This Historical Marker Database, Pohatcong Township
- NJ Register of Historic Places
- The Rebirth of Finesville Church 1954-1997 Pete Dilts, Finesville, New Jersey
- www.BFCOneVoice.com "New Pastor at Finesville." June 2025
- www.BFCOneVoice.com "A Hymn Story." December 2024
- Verbal input from Judy May, Michael Maslonka, Ken Huff, Barbara Groogan, Woody Kulp, Keith Thornton, and others
- Pohatcong: The Prologue, A History of the People of Pohatcong. 1981
- The History of Warren County, James Snell. 1889
- Newspaper "The Express", James Wright, Easton PA
- The Pohatcong History & Heritage Society, 2012 House Tour
- Bible Fellowship Church Historical Records