



People Connections:

*A Look at the Family Relationships of Some of the
Early Members of the Evangelical Mennonite
Society*

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Introduction

The present-day Bible Fellowship Church had its origin among the Mennonites of southeastern Pennsylvania. A small group of members in one of the Mennonite conferences in the area desiring a closer relationship with God advocated revival in the church. They began holding prayer meetings to further God's work. The controversy this eventually provoked in the Mennonite group in which it occurred resulted in these members leaving their original church and forming a new group called the Evangelical Mennonite Society (*Evangelische Mennoniten Gemeinschaft*) in 1858.

It has long been known that members of some of the key families which started this new group were closely related and held key leadership positions in the church for many years. There were people from other families, however, who joined the Evangelical Mennonites in the early years of the group who for one reason or another have remained relatively obscure. Members of those families were also sometimes related to other members of the new church. Furthermore, even some of the family relationships of the more well-known families have remained unexplored over the years.

It is the goal of this paper to look more closely at the family relationships of the Evangelical Mennonite church members during the earliest years of the church. We will focus on the years from the beginning of the church in 1858 until 1880 which is just after the Evangelical Mennonite Society merged with the United Mennonites of Canada and Indiana to form the Evangelical United Mennonites. The Evangelical Mennonites became the Pennsylvania Conference in the new group. A few years later after another merger, the Evangelical United Mennonites became the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.

Mennonite Background

Mennonites began arriving in Pennsylvania in the late 17th century. The first Mennonite congregation was established at Germantown in present-day Philadelphia. In a few years, other Mennonite communities were established in places like Skippack, Franconia, Lower Salford, and other locations in what would become Montgomery County (at that time still part of Philadelphia County). Eventually Mennonite communities and churches spread to portions of what is today eastern Berks, Bucks, Chester, Lehigh, and Northampton counties. The Mennonite churches in this area became known as the Franconia Conference. Farther west, Mennonites also established communities and churches during the early 18th century in what is today Lancaster County. Those churches became the Lancaster Conference. It is the Mennonite churches of the Franconia Conference which are of interest to us for this present study.

In 1842 John H. Oberholtzer became a minister of the West Swamp Mennonite congregation in Milford Township, Bucks County, which was one of the congregations of the Franconia Conference. Oberholtzer advocated certain reforms in the church which did not sit well with the majority conservative element in the conference. In 1847 Oberholtzer attempted to have the conference consider for adoption a proposed constitution he developed. The attempt to have this

constitution considered was rejected, and Oberholtzer and his followers in the conference were removed from conference membership. After that, Oberholtzer, along with the clergy and membership who supported him, formed a new Mennonite conference.

The Upper Milford Mennonite Congregation

When John Oberholtzer established the new Mennonite conference in 1847, virtually the entire Upper Milford Mennonite congregation in Upper Milford Township, Lehigh County, joined the new conference. At that time the Upper Milford congregation had three preachers, namely, Johannes Schantz (1774-1855), Johannes Gehman (1771-1848), and Joseph Schantz, the son of Preacher Johannes Schantz. Samuel Kaufman was the deacon of this congregation. At that time the Mennonite churches of the Franconia Conference and John Oberholtzer's new conference typically had two preachers and one deacon.

Johannes Gehman died in 1848, so it was necessary to select a new minister to replace him. This selection occurred the following year. The two men under consideration were Samuel Stauffer and William Gehman. According to available evidence, the congregation took a vote in which William Gehman garnered the most votes. After the results of the vote became known, John Oberholtzer called for the two men to pass through the lot to decide which man would be the new minister. During this procedure, the lot fell on William Gehman who became the new minister.

William Gehman



William Gehman (1827-1918)

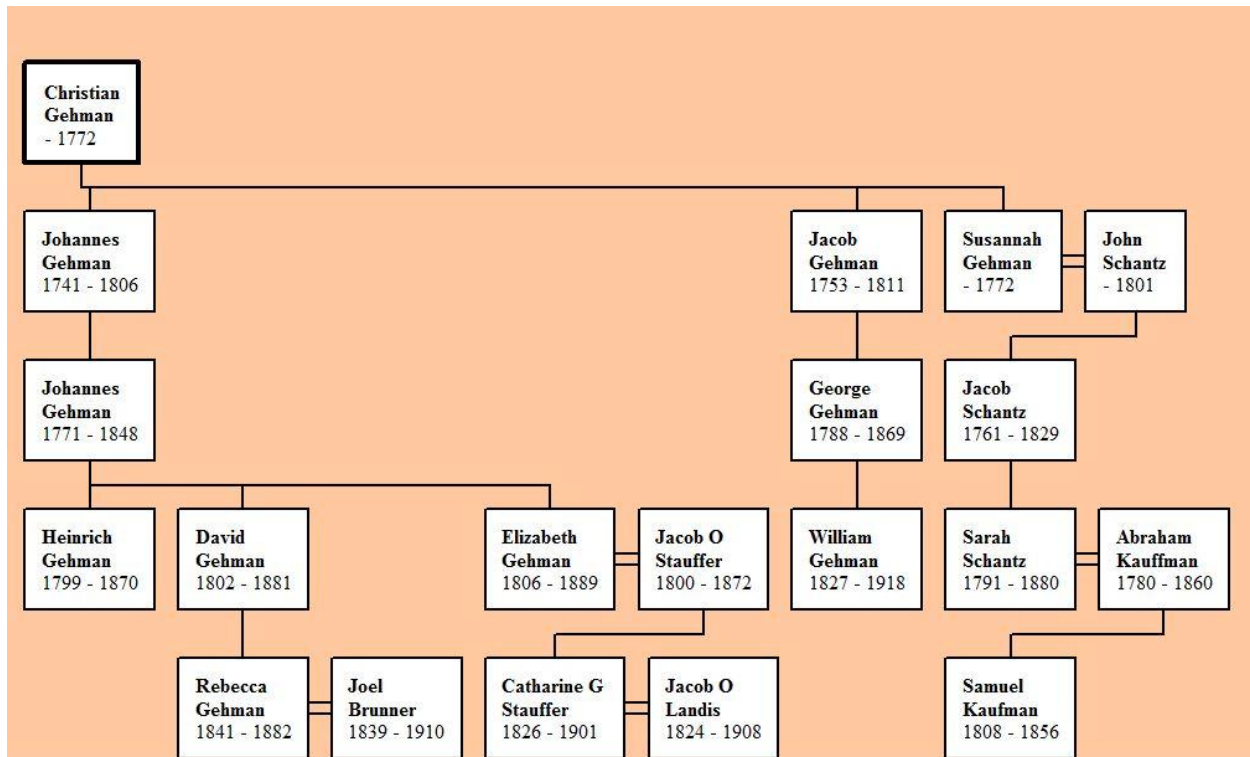


Chart No. 1. Gehman family connections.

William Gehman was a relative of the deceased minister Johannes Gehman. Christian Gehman, who immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1732, settled in Hereford Township, Berks County. This township borders Upper Milford Township. Christian Gehman was a Mennonite. Two of his sons, Abraham and Johannes, became Mennonite ministers. Abraham moved to Rockhill Township in Bucks County and became one of the ministers in the Rockhill Mennonite congregation. Johannes remained in Hereford Township and became a minister in the Upper Milford Mennonite church. Johannes' son, Johannes Gehman, later became a minister at Upper Milford as well and is the man whom William Gehman replaced as minister.

At some point after his first wife died, Christian Gehman remarried to a woman named Magdalena. All the children of this second marriage were Lutheran which suggests that, unlike his first wife, this second wife was Lutheran and not Mennonite. Jacob Gehman, one of the sons of this second wife of Christian Gehman, was William Gehman's grandfather, and Jacob's son, George, was William Gehman's father. Thus, George Gehman, William Gehman's father, was a first cousin of the minister Johannes Gehman who died in 1848.

Samuel Kaufman

As already mentioned, Samuel Kaufman was the deacon of the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation at that time. He was the son of Abraham Kauffman and Sarah Schantz both of whom were to become original members of the Evangelical Mennonites. We also know that

Samuel Kaufman supported the prayer meetings that William Gehman started in the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation because the author of Kaufman’s obituary, David Gehman, tells us that brother Kaufman “*liebte dem Gottesdienst und den Gebetsversammlungen beizuwohnen*” or in English “loved to be present at the worship service and the prayer meetings.” Samuel Kaufman no doubt would have joined the Evangelical Mennonites had he lived long enough to see that church established, but he died at age 47 on January 29, 1856 of typhoid fever.

Samuel Kaufman, through his mother’s Schantz connection, is a second cousin of Catharina (Schantz) Rhoads, who with her husband, Owen Rhoads, became a member of the Evangelical Mennonite congregation in Upper Milford (i.e., Zionsville). See Chart No. 2.

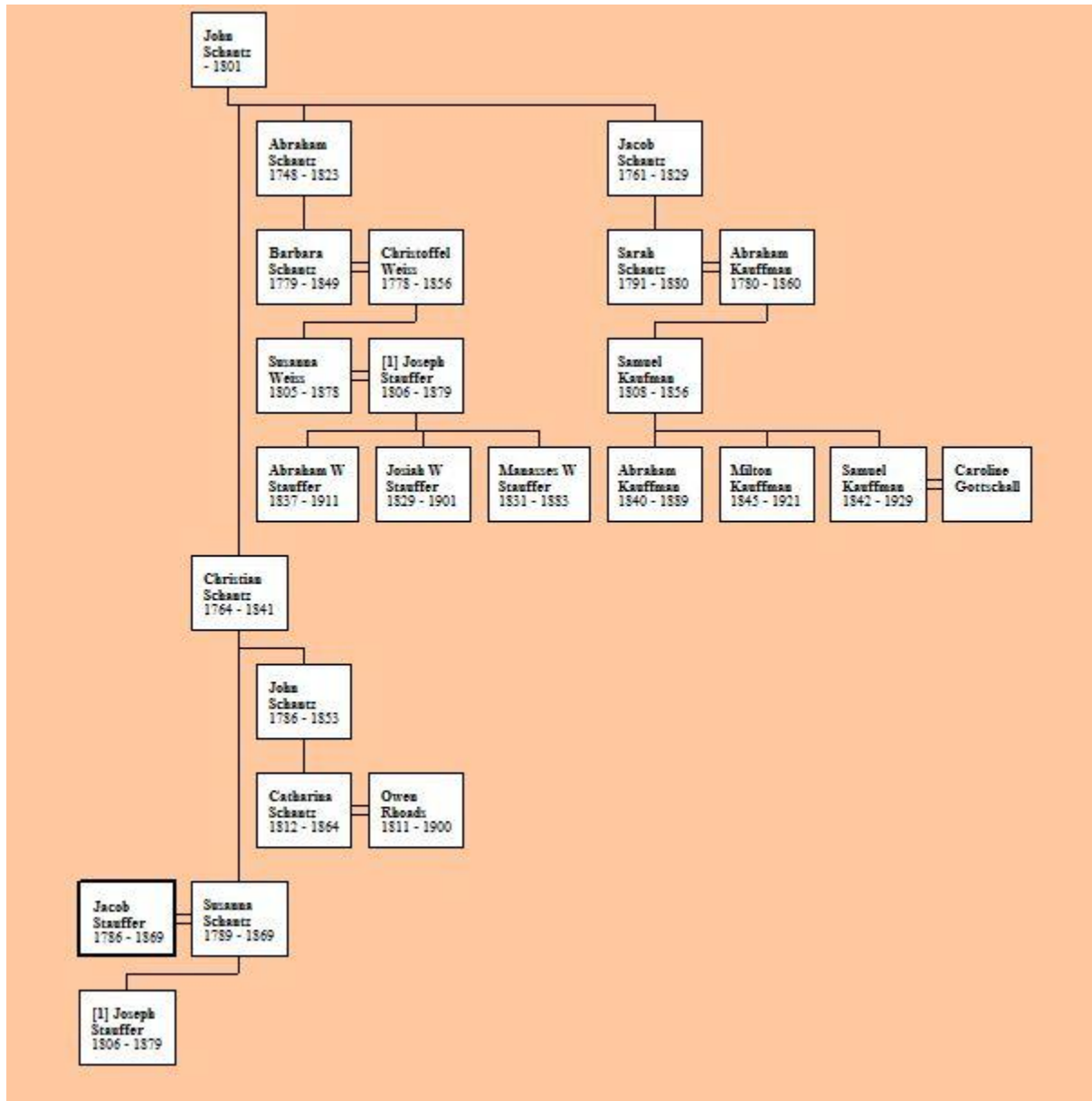


Chart No. 2. Family connections of Evangelical Mennonite members through the Schantz family.

Although it would be desirable to have stronger evidence, there is a strong possibility that Samuel Kaufman is a descendant of Christian Gehman of Hereford Twp. See Chart No. 1. Christian Gehman's daughter, Susannah, married a man named John Schantz. Susannah had died prior to the probate of her father's estate in 1772. Four children are named as heirs of Susannah's portion of Christian Gehman's estate: Jacob, Christina (or Christian—the documents in Christian Gehman's estate file are inconsistent on this name), Veronica, and Anna. The only known man named John Schantz who lived in the general area at that time and who would be old enough to have been the husband of Christian Gehman's daughter died in 1801 in Upper Milford Twp. His birth year is unknown. John Schantz's will mentions a widow, Catharina, and six children, some of whom are consistent with the names of the children of Susannah named in Christian Gehman's estate papers and some who are not. A potential problem with assuming that this man married Christian Gehman's daughter is that his eldest known child, Abraham, was born in 1748. Susannah Gehman, although we do not know her birth date, would almost certainly have been too young to be the mother of this child, and at any rate Abraham is not named as one of her children in her father's estate papers. Abraham Schantz was still living at the time of his father's death in 1801 (he died in 1823).

A reasonable explanation consistent with John Schantz (d. 1801) marrying Susannah Gehman does exist. Abraham Schantz (1748-1823) could be a child of a previous marriage. Perhaps other children from that same marriage died young which would at least partially explain the large gap in birth dates between the birth of Abraham in 1748 and the birth date of the next child (Jacob Schantz) for whom we have a known birth date (1761). If this hypothetical first wife died relatively young—perhaps sometime in the 1750s, John Schantz could have married Susannah Gehman, Christian Gehman's daughter, after that. Susannah (Gehman) Schantz would then have given birth to four children, Jacob (b. 1761), Christian (b. 1764), Veronica, and Anna. Anna Schantz is not mentioned in John Schantz's will written in 1799, but she may have died prior to that. With Susannah (Gehman) Schantz dying prior to 1772, it should not surprise us if John Schantz took a third wife, who would then be the woman named Catharina mentioned in his will. That leaves two other children whom John Schantz named in his will, Johannes and Magdalena. They could have been children of either John Schantz's first or third wife in this hypothetical scenario. We have no birth or death dates for them.

The evidence available in my view is too incomplete at the present time to say with certainty that John Schantz (d. 1801) was the man who married Susannah Gehman, Christian Gehman's daughter. It is likely, however, that that is the case. If that turns out to be true, then Samuel Kaufman is a second cousin once removed to David Gehman, his brother Henry Gehman and even Rev. William Gehman, all of whom would be among the original members of the Evangelical Mennonite church when it was established in 1858.

Additionally, Samuel Kaufman married Esther Musselman, a daughter of Christian Musselman and Elisabeth Geissinger. This connection ties this Kauffman family to many of the other early members of the Evangelical Mennonite Society. We will look at the Musselman family later in this paper.

The Formation of the Evangelical Mennonite Society

There must have been something about William Gehman that attracted people to him. Here was a man who grew up in a Lutheran family and at some point had a conversion experience, and evidently as a result of that, he decided to join the Mennonites. By 1849 when he was selected to replace the recently deceased minister Johannes Gehman, it is unlikely that he had been a member of the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation for very long—perhaps only two or three years or maybe not even that long. He was also very young, turning 22 the same year the congregation selected him as preacher. Mennonites in this area of Pennsylvania did not normally select someone so young as their preacher. Thus, one would think that these two facts, namely, his lack of longtime roots in the congregation and his youth, would make it unlikely for him to become a preacher for the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation.

Yet, one source who describes William Gehman's selection as preacher tells us that the congregation held an election in which Gehman garnered a majority of votes against a man named Samuel Stauffer. Clearly Gehman had impressed many in the congregation to such an extent that they thought he would be a good preacher.

The election held by the congregation was probably intended to produce nominees to participate in the lot to choose the new preacher which at that time was the normal way Mennonite preachers were chosen. Most likely anyone who received votes would have become a candidate and then the lot would have been used to choose a preacher from among those candidates. In this case, only two men received votes, and William Gehman was finally chosen by lot to be the preacher.

Gehman advocated the use of methods used by some of the revivalist denominations which had not been practiced among Mennonites. Within a few years he began to hold prayer meetings for the membership of his congregation. The prayer meetings probably began in 1853 because in May of that year the conference of bishops, ministers, and deacons discussed this issue. At that time the conference gave its approval for the prayer meetings to continue.

By 1856 more questions arose about the appropriateness of the prayer meetings William Gehman conducted. A special meeting of the five bishops of the conference was held to discuss the prayer meetings and the bishops agreed unanimously to revoke the permission to hold prayer meetings that was granted in 1853. The conference held in November of 1856 confirmed this decision of the bishops.

William Gehman and his adherents did not want to discontinue the prayer meetings. Within two years Gehman and other ministers sympathetic to his views were removed from the conference, and they started a new group which they called the Evangelical Mennonite Society.

The First Evangelical Mennonite Conference

The new Evangelical Mennonite Society initially contained three congregations which were

represented by seven men at the first conference of the church held in September 1858 at the home of David Musselman in Upper Milford Township.

It is sometimes stated in the historical literature of the Bible Fellowship Church that the Evangelical Mennonite Society began at this first conference of preachers and deacons held on September 24, 1858.

A better explanation of this conference, however, is that the Evangelical Mennonite Society had already been formed prior to the time the conference was held, and this first conference was the effect, not the cause, of the establishment of the Evangelical Mennonite Society. In other words, the three congregations that comprised this new group were holding regular services prior to the first conference. There is definite evidence showing that the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite congregation began holding regular worship services at least as early as June 13, 1858—more than three months before the September conference. While we do not have documented evidence in this respect for the other two congregations, it is reasonable to believe that those other congregations, since they were in a similar situation, also began at about the same time the Upper Milford congregation began.

The Elders and Preachers Attending the First Conference

The three congregations represented at the first conference were from Upper Milford Twp. in Lehigh County, Haycock Twp. in Bucks County, and Bangor in Northampton County. Four elders and preachers attended the first conference. They were William Gehman, William N. Shelly, David Henning, and Henry Diehl.

We have already looked at the Gehman ancestry of William Gehman. In addition, William Gehman married Anna Musselman, the daughter of Jacob Musselman (1802-1888) thereby connecting him to the Musselman family of Upper Milford Twp.

David Henning does not appear to have a Mennonite background or a family relationship with other families in the Evangelical Mennonite church.

Henry Diehl was from a family associated with the Flatland Mennonite church in Haycock Twp., Bucks County. His father was George Diehl and his mother was Catharine Rosenberger. Catharine was a descendant of Henry Rosenberger, an immigrant, who lived in Franconia Twp., Montgomery County and was a member of the Franconia Mennonite church. One of Henry's sons was John Rosenberger (1724-1808) who lived in the vicinity of present-day Hatfield. John Rosenberger had a son named Henry Rosenberger (c. 1751-1824) who lived in Hatfield and later moved to Rockhill Twp., Bucks County. This latter Henry Rosenberger was Catharine Rosenberger's father.

Catharine Rosenberger was related to a man named Joel Rosenberger, a minister who joined the Evangelical Mennonites in 1873. Joel Rosenberger first became a preacher with the Johnson Mennonites of Montgomery County. He attended several of the Evangelical Mennonite conferences in the 1860s and early 1870s as an advisory member of those conferences until finally in 1873 he is listed in the Evangelical Mennonite semi-annual conference minutes as a

preacher with that group. He continued as a preacher with the Evangelical Mennonites and later Mennonite Brethren in Christ for many years.

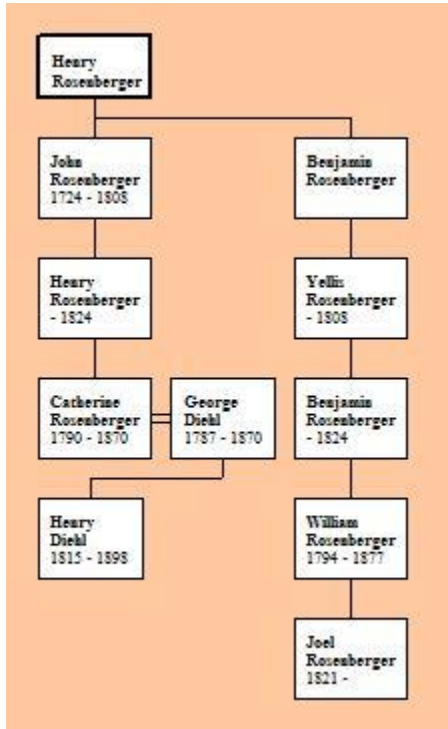


Chart No. 3. Relationship of Henry Diehl and Joel Rosenberger.

Joel Rosenberger is also a descendant of the immigrant Henry Rosenberger of Franconia Township. His lineage goes through Henry Rosenberger's son, Benjamin Rosenberger of Hatfield Township who died about 1777. One of Benjamin Rosenberger's sons was Yellis Rosenberger who lived in Rockhill Township and died in 1808. Yellis Rosenberger had a son named Benjamin Rosenberger who lived in Springfield Township and died in 1824. Benjamin Rosenberger's son, William (1794-1877), lived in Rockhill Township and was the father of Rev. Joel Rosenberger. Thus, Catharine (Rosenberger) Diehl was a third cousin to Rev. Joel Rosenberger and Catharine's son, the preacher Henry Diehl was a third cousin once removed.

William N. Shelly married Sarah Geissinger, the daughter of Philip Geissinger (1782-1857) of Milford Twp., Bucks Co. Philip Geissinger was a grandson of the immigrant Philip Geissinger (1701-1791) through the immigrant's son Daniel. This means that Shelly's first wife, Sarah Geissinger, was a second cousin of the Musselman children of Upper Milford Township, Esther (Musselman) Kaufman, David Musselman, Jacob Musselman, and Henry Musselman, who were some of the original members of the Evangelical Mennonites when the church was first established. We will take a closer look at the Musselman family later in this paper. Sarah Geissinger was never a member of the Evangelical Mennonites since she died in 1856 while her husband was a preacher (by 1856 he had become a bishop) at the Bowmansville Mennonite congregation in Brecknock Twp., Lancaster County.

William N. Shelly was also a brother of Levi N. Shelly who become a member of the Upper Milford congregation of the Evangelical Mennonites after he purchased David Musselman's farm in Upper Milford Township in 1866.

The Deacons Attending the First Conference

The Evangelical Mennonite Society appears to have patterned its initial organization after the Mennonite conference from which it separated. As such, each congregation had one deacon, and all those deacons attended the first conference in 1858. The original deacons were David Gehman of the Upper Milford congregation, Jacob Gottschall of the Bangor congregation, and Joseph Schneider (Joseph B. Taylor) of the Haycock congregation in Bucks Co.

David Gehman was a son of Rev. Johannes Gehman (1771-1848). He was a second cousin of William Gehman and a brother of Henry Gehman, another original member of the Upper Milford congregation of Evangelical Mennonites. See Chart No. 1 above. In the 1840s he was listed as a *Baumeister* (building master) along with Abraham Geissinger during the renovation of the Upper Milford Mennonite church building. Gehman and Geissinger kept track of the donations and expenses related to the renovation in a ledger book. When the Evangelical Mennonites were later established, David Gehman was one of the original members, and prior to the construction of the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite church building in 1859, meetings of that congregation were held in an upstairs room in the building where his store was located in Hosensack, Pennsylvania.



David Gehman's Store in
Hosensack, Pa.
Photograph from 1996

Jacob Gottschall (1809-1881) is a descendant of Jacob Godshalk (1670-1763), the first Mennonite bishop in America. The younger Jacob Gottschall's father was Herman Gottschall (1767-1840). Herman's father was John Godshalk whose father was Herman Godshalk (ca. 1698-1785). The elder Herman Godshalk was the son of Bishop Jacob Godshalk, the immigrant. Interestingly, Jacob Gottschall, the Bangor congregation deacon, is a second cousin once

removed to Anna Fly, the first wife of Solomon Y. Hottel who would later join the Evangelical Mennonites as a member of the Coopersburg congregation. See Chart No. 4 below.

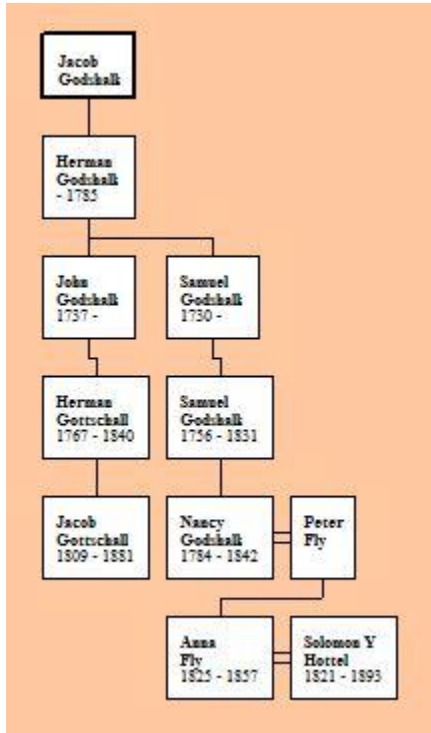


Chart No. 4. Relationship of Jacob Gottschall to Solomon Y. Hottel's first wife.

Jacob Gottschall is listed as a deacon at the first conference of the Evangelical Mennonite Society, and in a letter David Gehman wrote to Daniel Hoch of Canada in July 1860, Gehman, describing the conference held in May 1860, says Gottschall is a deacon (*Vorsteher*). By November 1861, however, Gottschall is listed among the preachers of the conference. By 1866 he had moved to Michigan and was no longer affiliated with the Evangelical Mennonites. We will briefly discuss two of his daughters later in this paper.

The remaining deacon, who represented the Haycock congregation, is listed in the account of the first Evangelical Mennonite conference in 1858 as Joseph Schneider. For years after the first conference he continues to be listed in the German minutes of the various conferences under that same name. In English, this man is known as Joseph B. Taylor. He is the brother of Lewis B. Taylor who later became a preacher with the Mennonite Brethren Christ.

The Taylor brothers have a family relationship to another early Evangelical Mennonite family. Levi N. Shelly, the brother of William N. Shelly, married a woman named Mary Bleam. She was a daughter of John Bleam (1800-1883) and Mary Zetty (1798-1877). Mary Zetty, in turn, was a daughter of the West Swamp Mennonite preacher Christian Zetty (1766-1843) and a granddaughter of the immigrant Abraham Zetty (d. 1793).

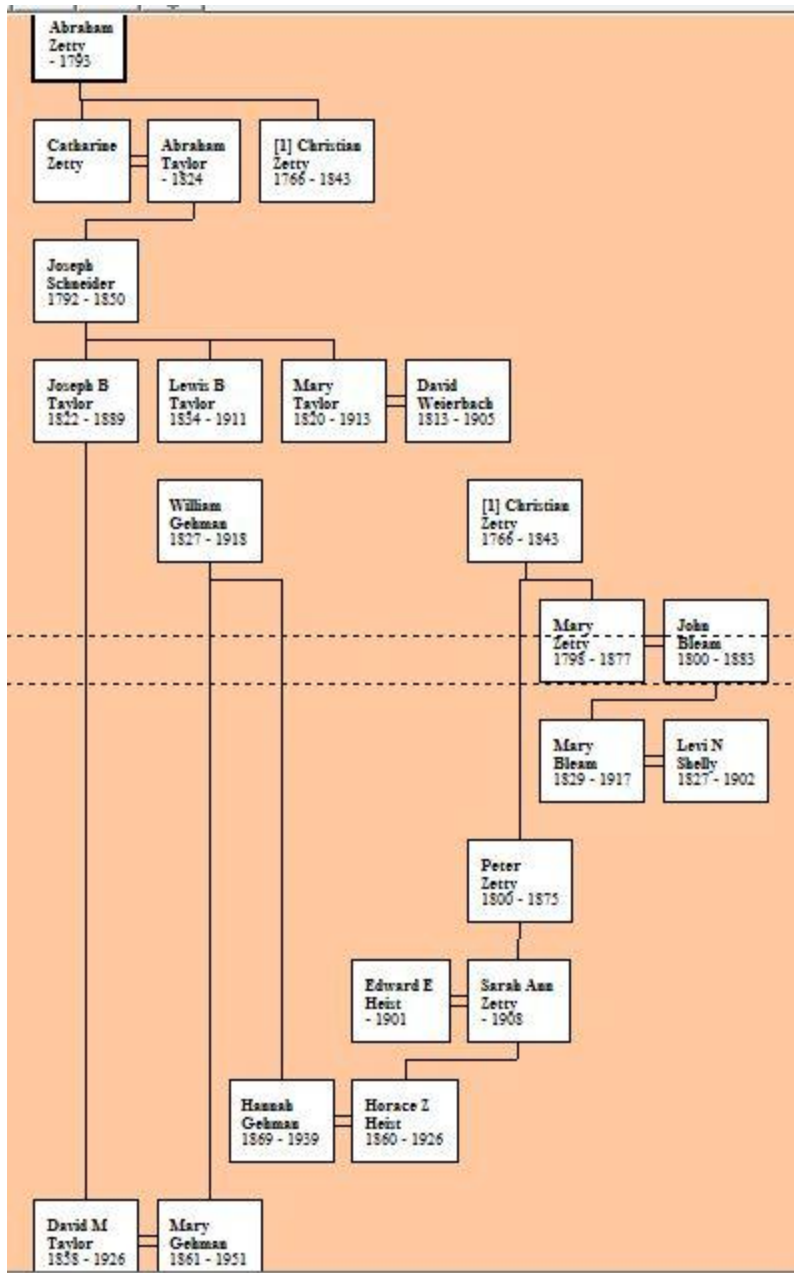


Chart No. 5. Relationship of Joseph, Lewis, and Mary Taylor to Mary Blean, Levi N. Shelly's wife.

Abraham Zetty, the immigrant, also had a daughter named Catharina who married a man named Abraham Taylor. Abraham and Catharina Taylor had a son who used the name Joseph Schneider (1792-1850) and married a woman named Hannah (or Nancy) Beidler. Joseph and Nancy Schneider were members of the Springfield Mennonite congregation and are buried there. Two of Joseph and Nancy Schneider's children were the Haycock deacon Joseph Schneider (Joseph B. Taylor) and Rev. Lewis B. Taylor. Therefore, the Taylor brothers were second cousins of Levi Shelly's wife, Mary Blean.

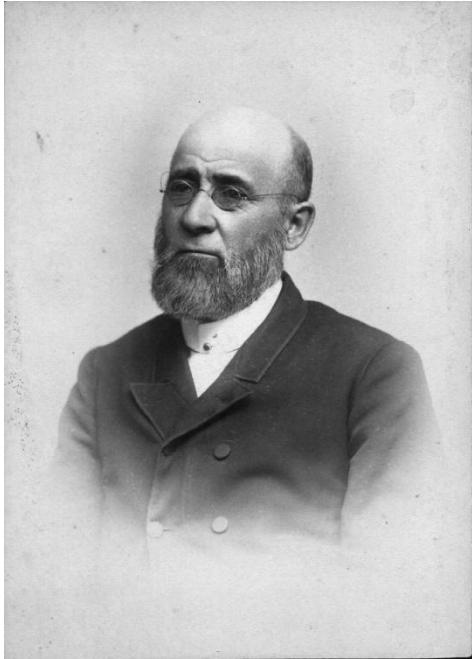
To take this Zetty connection a step further, a man named Peter Zetty (1800-1875) who was a son of the West Swamp Mennonite minister, Christian Zetty (1766-1843) and therefore a brother of Mary Zetty, wife of Abraham Taylor, mentioned above, had a daughter named Sarah Ann Zetty (d. 1908). Sarah married Edward Heist (d. 1901). Although Sarah came from a Mennonite family, her husband was Lutheran, and this family was a Lutheran family. Like the Shelly family, they were originally from Milford Township in Bucks County and like Levi Shelly moved to Upper Milford in the 1860s. After they moved to Upper Milford Township they were members of Zion Lutheran Church in Old Zionsville. One of their sons, Horace Z. Heist (1860-1926), joined the Upper Milford congregation of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ in the 1880s.

The Taylor brothers, Joseph and Lewis, were therefore second cousins once removed to Horace Z. Heist and their children were third cousins of Horace Heist. Interestingly, one of Joseph B. Taylor's sons, David M. Taylor, married Mary Gehman, a daughter of William Gehman, and Horace Z. Heist married Mary's sister, Hannah Gehman.

The Haycock Congregation

During the year after the first Evangelical Mennonite church preachers conference in September 1858, we find a man becoming a preacher with the Evangelical Mennonites who would be an important leader in the group throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. That man was named Abel Strawn.

The Strawn family of Bucks County was originally of Quaker origin. Abel Strawn's father, Joel, however, married a woman from a Bedminster Township, Bucks County, Mennonite family named Catharine Fretz (1805-1889). The religious affiliation of Joel Strawn and his wife prior to the organization of the Evangelical Mennonite Society is unknown, but he and his wife became affiliated with the new Evangelical Mennonite group very early in its history. The Fretz Family History states that they were members of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Joel and Catharine Strawn are buried at the Calvary Bible Fellowship cemetery in Coopersburg as is their son, Abel Strawn and his wife, Joel's unmarried sister, Mary R. Strawn, and a brother Joseph and his wife Lydia. This shows the likelihood that all these Strawn family members eventually became members of the Evangelical Mennonite congregation (Calvary Bible Fellowship today) in Coopersburg.



Abel Strawn

The earliest documentation showing a connection of Abel Strawn with the new Evangelical Mennonite group is in May 1859 when he witnessed the signing of the deed in which the trustees of the Haycock congregation, Joseph Schneider and David Weierbach, purchased property for the Haycock congregation. Witnessing the signing of this deed does not by itself prove that Strawn was a member of the church at that time, but it does prove that at a minimum he was familiar with the church and its trustees. Additionally, at least one source tells us that Strawn became a minister with the Evangelical Mennonites sometime in 1859. If he was selected as a preacher that year, it is probable that he was a member prior to that. The federal census the following year, shows that he and his wife, his parents, and his unmarried aunt all lived in Haycock Township. In March 1862 Abel Strawn and his father, Joel, signed an unusual legal agreement with the trustees of the Haycock Evangelical Mennonite congregation in which the trustees agreed to allow Abel and Joel Strawn use of the Haycock church building once every four weeks to conduct religious services, and the two Strawns, father and son, would determine which preachers would preach there on those Sundays. After considering all this, it is very likely that Abel Strawn, his wife, Hannah, and his parents were original members of the Haycock Evangelical Mennonite congregation when it was founded in 1858.

Abel Strawn had some relatively distant family ties to other early members of the Evangelical Mennonite Society. Through his Fretz ancestry Abel Strawn is a descendant of an eighteenth-century Mennonite immigrant to Montgomery County named Hans Meyer. Elder William N. Shelly and his brother Levi N. Shelly are also descendants of Hans Meyer through their Beidler ancestors. The immigrants John Fretz and Jacob Beidler both married daughters of Hans Meyer. As a result, these Shelly brothers are third cousins to Abel Strawn's mother and third cousins once removed to Abel Strawn himself.

A more obvious and much closer family connection exists between Abel Strawn and the Brunner

family of Upper Milford Township. In 1850 Strawn married Hannah Brunner, the daughter of John William Brunner (d. 1878). Hannah had a brother named Joel Brunner who joined the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite congregation and a sister named Lucy Brunner who later married the Evangelical Mennonite preacher Jonas Musselman. Additionally, some of Hannah's other siblings were involved in the Evangelical Mennonite church as well.

Before we move on, it is appropriate at this point to look at the Taylor family once again. We mentioned that the early trustees of the Haycock congregation were Joseph Schneider and David Weierbach. So, who was David Weierbach? Weierbach married a sister of the deacon and trustee Joseph Schneider (Joseph B. Taylor) and Rev. Lewis B. Taylor, so he was a brother-in-law of the Taylor brothers. See Chart No. 5.

The Upper Milford Congregation

The Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite congregation was the most important of the original three congregations. At this point we will examine some of the families that were members of this congregation.

The Musselman family of the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation has already been mentioned in conjunction with William Gehman, Samuel Kaufman, and Joel Brunner. We will examine this family further here. Several siblings from the Musselman family of Upper Milford Township were original members of the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite congregation when it was established in 1858. This family would have a profound effect on the leadership and direction of the Evangelical Mennonites and later the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.

Christian Musselman was born in 1760. His grandfather, Jacob Musselman, the immigrant, settled in Milford Twp., Bucks County. Jacob's son, also named Jacob Musselman, moved to Allen Township, Northampton County, where there was a small Mennonite community. He was Christian Musselman's father, so Christian Musselman grew up in Allen Twp.

Christian Musselman married Elisabeth Geissinger, a woman from the Saucon Mennonite congregation in Upper Saucon Twp. He also purchased land in neighboring Upper Milford Twp. in 1790 and became part of the Upper Milford Mennonite congregation.

Elisabeth Geissinger, Christian Musselman's wife, was the daughter of Johannes Geissinger (1739-1811) who was the son of the immigrant Philip Geissinger (1701-1791). It may be of interest to note that Elisabeth's sister, Anna, married George Clemmer who settled in Hereford Twp., Berks County. George and Anna Clemmer were the parents of Christian Clemmer who became a minister and bishop in the new Mennonite conference started in 1847 by John Oberholtzer. Christian Clemmer was one of the five bishops who took part in the decision to revoke the permission to hold prayer meetings in May 1856.

Christian and Elisabeth Musselman became parents to 8 children, four of whom joined the

Evangelical Mennonites. Interestingly, the four children who joined the Evangelical Mennonites were the four youngest in this family. They were Esther Musselman, the widow of the deceased deacon Samuel Kaufman, Jacob Musselman, David Musselman, and Henry Musselman.

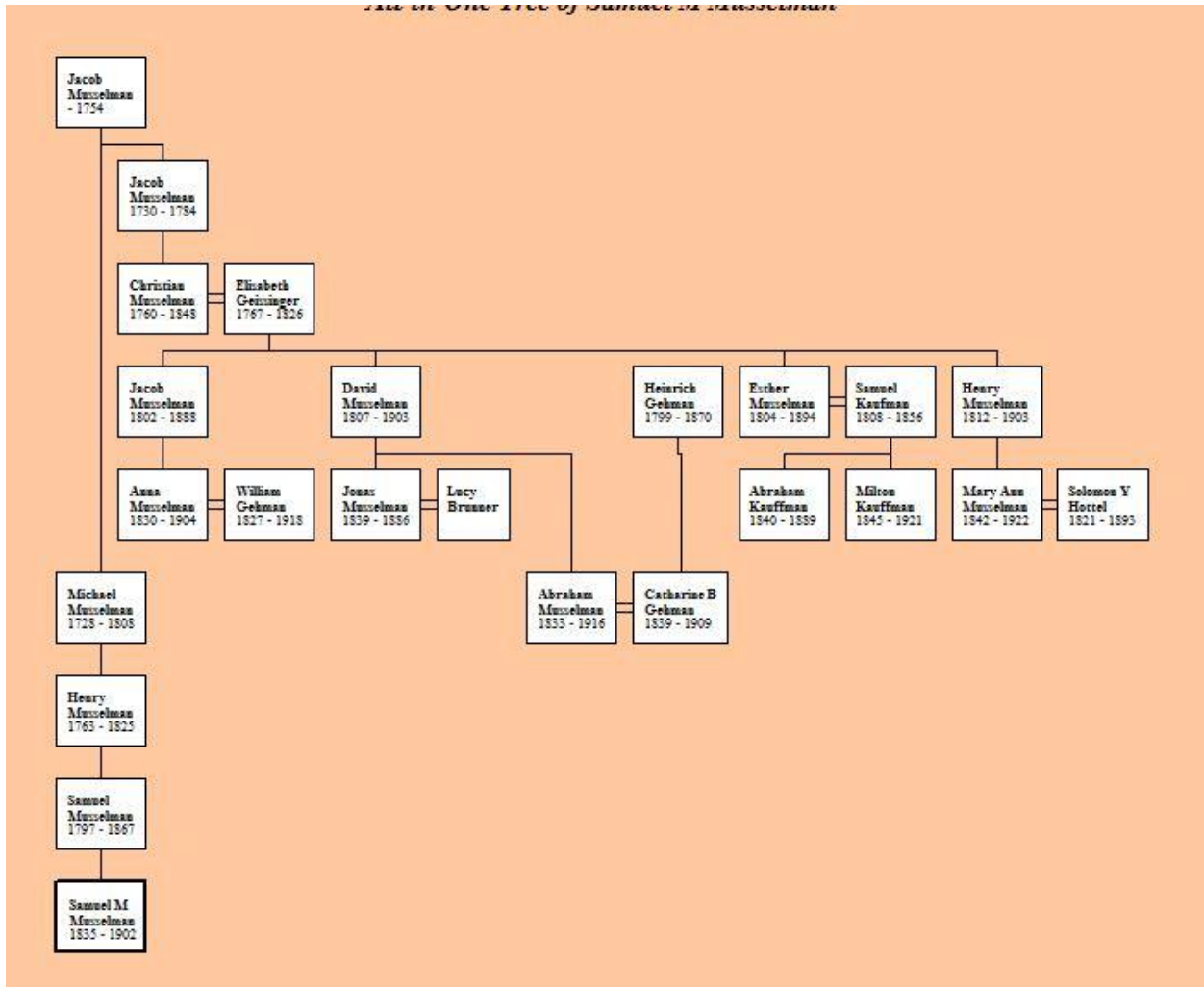


Chart No. 6. Musselman family.

Jacob Musselman (1802-1888) had one child who lived to adulthood: Anna Musselman who, as we have already seen, married William Gehman.

Henry Musselman (1812-1903) married Catharine Geissinger. Henry and Catharine were second cousins. They lived in Springfield Township, Bucks County, and are buried at Calvary Bible Fellowship church in Coopersburg. Henry Musselman was instrumental in the founding of the Evangelical Mennonite church in Coopersburg in 1869. One source states that Henry Musselman and his son John G. Musselman, who by that time also lived in Springfield Township, began holding Sunday school meetings in Henry Musselman’s barn and that these meetings were the origin of the Coopersburg congregation.

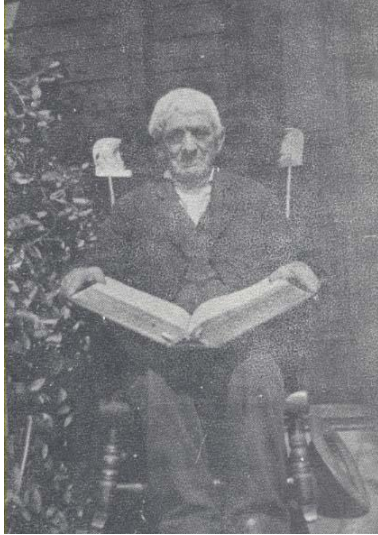
Esther (Musselman) Kaufman, the widow of the Upper Milford Mennonite deacon Samuel

Kaufman, joined the new Evangelical Mennonite Society when it was formed. Some of her children became members of the new group as well. Her son, Abraham Kauffman, born in 1840, is mentioned as a preacher among the Evangelical Mennonites in a letter David Gehman wrote to Daniel Hoch of Canada in July 1860. In that letter, Gehman named the preachers who attended the May 1860 conference, and Abraham Kauffman was one of those preachers. Another son, Milton Kauffman, was initially a member of the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite church and later became an active member of the congregation in Coopersburg. It was on Milton Kauffman's land on Chestnut Hill where the first camp meetings of the Evangelical Mennonites were held. Samuel Kauffman, another son of Esther (Musselman) Kaufman, was a member of the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite congregation for a time. Evidence shows that two daughters of the Bangor deacon and preacher, Jacob Gottschall, lived in the area in the 1860s. Caroline, who was one of those daughters, married Samuel Kauffman. This couple soon moved to St. Joseph County, Michigan, the same county to which Caroline's father moved, and at that point they no longer had a connection with the Evangelical Mennonites.



Three brothers (l to r): Rev. Abraham Kauffman (1840-1889), Milton Kauffman (1845-1921), and Samuel Kauffman (1842-1929)

The fourth Musselman sibling to join the Evangelical Mennonites was David Musselman. In fact, it was in David Musselman's home on the present-day Church View Rd. in Upper Milford Township where the very first conference of the church was held in September 1858. Musselman later sold this farm to Levi N. Shelly and moved to another farm in the township.



David Musselman (1807-1903)

David Musselman had several children. The most significant of these for Bible Fellowship history was Jonas Musselman. Jonas Musselman was one of several young men from the Upper Milford congregation of the Evangelical Mennonites who became a preacher in the new conference in the 1860s. Three of his sons would become preachers and two of those later became presiding elders of the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.



Jonas and Lucy (Brunner) Musselman

As noted previously, Jonas Musselman married Lucy Brunner. Some of Lucy's siblings also joined the church. We have seen that Lucy's sister, Hannah, married Abel Strawn who became one of the earliest preachers with the Evangelical Mennonites. She also had a brother, Joel Brunner, who, according to family sources, was converted at one of Edwin Long's tent meetings in Quakertown in late 1858 under the influence of the preacher Jonas Y. Schultz. Joel Brunner and his family lived in Upper Milford Township and joined the Evangelical Mennonite church in Upper Milford where he and his wife are buried.

Joel Brunner soon married Rebecca Gehman, one of the two surviving children of David Gehman. Joel Brunner took an active part in the activities of the Upper Milford congregation for many years. Some of his children and grandchildren were also members of the Zionsville congregation (the later name for the Upper Milford congregation) for many years.



Joel Brunner and his family about 1900

At this point we will take a closer look at the Gehman family—children of the Mennonite preacher Johannes Gehman (1771-1848). David Gehman had a brother named Henry (or Heinrich) Gehman (1799-1870). The families of both of these men were probably among the original members of the Evangelical Mennonite Society—certainly David Gehman was an original member since he was a deacon representing the Upper Milford congregation at the first conference. Both David and Henry Gehman married Bechtel women. David Gehman married Susanna Bechtel, the daughter of Abraham and Elizabeth Bechtel of Hereford Township. Henry Gehman married Elisabeth Bechtel. Jacob Musselman (1802-1888), William Gehman's father-in-law, also married a woman named Barbara Bechtel. Unfortunately, we have so far been unable to identify the family or families to which Elisabeth and Barbara Bechtel belong. Perhaps they were sisters, but until we can discover the family each belongs to we will not know. Nor will we know exactly how they are related to David Gehman's wife, Susanna. What we can say with certainty at the present time is that the wives of Henry Gehman and Jacob Musselman were not sisters of Susanna Bechtel, the wife of David Gehman.

Of Henry Gehman's children, John B. Gehman became a member of the Upper Milford (or Zionsville) congregation. Additionally, three of Henry Gehman's daughters married into Evangelical Mennonite families. Susan Gehman first married a man named Joseph Kriebel who died in 1859. She soon remarried to Lewis B. Taylor (1834-1912), who later became a preacher with the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, and was a brother of Joseph Schneider (Taylor) the deacon of the Haycock (and later Quakertown) congregation.

Henry Gehman's daughter, Catherine, married Abraham Musselman, thereby tying this family to the Upper Milford Township Musselmans. Abraham Musselman was the brother of the preacher Jonas Musselman and a son of David Musselman.

Another of Henry Gehman's daughters, Elisabeth, married the Preacher Joseph L. Romig, another of the young men in the Upper Milford congregation who became a preacher in the conference in the 1860s. Elisabeth (Gehman) Romig died in 1866 at age 32.

Anna Gottschall, a daughter of the Bangor congregation deacon and preacher Jacob Gottschall, is shown as living in Henry Gehman's household in the 1860 census. She also appears on Upper Milford congregation membership lists beginning in 1865 when those lists began. After the death of Joseph Romig's first wife, Anna Gottschall married Joseph Romig. Romig, however, died in 1869 and Anna (Gottschall) Romig never remarried. She continued to live in Upper Milford Township and later Emmaus until her death in 1914. Joseph Romig and both of his wives are buried in the Zionsville Bible Fellowship Church cemetery.

David and Henry Gehman were the only children of the preacher Johannes Gehman who joined the Evangelical Mennonites, but their sister, Elizabeth, married a man named Jacob O. Stauffer. This Stauffer family lived in Milford Township, Bucks County. They were members of the West Swamp Mennonite church. Their daughter, Catharine Stauffer (1826-1901), married a man named Jacob O. Landis (1824-1908). Jacob and Catharine (Stauffer) Landis were members of the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite congregation. It may be of interest here to point out that Catharine's brother, John G. Stauffer, was the printer in Milford Square and later in Quakertown who published a German newspaper which was published under various names including *Bucks County Patriot* from 1867 until he sold the paper in the 1880s. At one point the Evangelical Mennonite conference had the minutes of their conference published in Stauffer's newspaper.

In the previously mentioned letter to Daniel Hoch of Canada in July 1860, David Gehman mentions a man named Abraham W. Stauffer as a preacher with the Evangelical Mennonites. Stauffer is first mentioned in the conference minutes of the November 1861 conference of the Evangelical Mennonites. Stauffer appears to have come from the Upper Milford congregation of the church. Abraham W. Stauffer was a preacher in the conference for only a few years, then he disappears. As such he remains a rather obscure figure today. Stauffer was the secretary of both semi-annual conferences in 1862. The following year he expressed a desire to be a traveling preacher, but there is no evidence that he ever began work as a traveling preacher. He is listed as absent in the minutes of the November 1865 conference, and after that we never hear of him again.

So, who was Abraham W. Stauffer? There are two men listed in the Upper Milford congregation membership list for 1865 that are almost certainly brothers of the preacher Abraham W. Stauffer. Their names are Josiah W. Stauffer (1829-1901) and Manasses W. Stauffer (1831-1883). These men are brothers and they did have a brother named Abraham W. Stauffer. Their parents were Joseph Stauffer (1806-1879) and Susanna Weiss (1805-1878). None of these people are buried in the Zionsville Bible Fellowship cemetery and none of the three Stauffer brothers remained with the church for very long. The parents and Josiah W. Stauffer are buried in the Upper Milford Mennonite cemetery. Manasses Stauffer is buried in the Emmaus Moravian cemetery, and Abraham W. Stauffer is buried in Philadelphia. However, Joseph Stauffer had a brother named Jesse Stauffer who appears to have had a longer-term relationship with the Upper Milford Evangelical Mennonite congregation, and who with his wife and some children are buried in the Zionsville Bible Fellowship cemetery. Jesse Stauffer would have been an uncle of the preacher Abraham W. Stauffer.

It turns out that Abraham W. Stauffer and his brothers are Schantz descendants which means that they are related to the Kauffmans and to Owen Rhoads' wife.

Through his mother, Susanna (Weiss) Stauffer (1805-1878), Abraham W. Stauffer is a descendant of Abraham Schantz (1748-1823) a son of John Schantz (d. 1801) mentioned above. Through this line he is a second cousin once removed to the deacon Samuel Kaufman and to Catharina Schantz, the wife of Owen Rhoads.

Through his father, Joseph Stauffer, Abraham W. Stauffer is a descendant of Christian Schantz (1764-1841), a brother of the above-mentioned Abraham Schantz, and is a second cousin once removed of Samuel Kaufman (1808-1856) and a first cousin once removed of Catharina (Schantz) Rhoads, the wife of Owen Rhoads. See Chart No. 2.

Other Early Evangelical Mennonite Members and Families

Another man who joined the Evangelical Mennonite Society in the 1860s was Samuel M. Musselman. Samuel M. Musselman is first listed as a preacher with the Evangelical Mennonites in the minutes of the November 1866 semi-annual conference of the church. He came from a Springfield Township, Bucks County, family.

Samuel M. Musselman is consistently listed in the conference minutes of the Evangelical Mennonites and later Mennonite Brethren in Christ for about 20 years. In the 1886 annual conference minutes he is listed as one of the elders in attendance, and in the same year he is listed among the preachers "that are willing to travel this year according to the directions of the Conference and our Discipline." The minutes of the 1887 conference list him as absent from the conference. Then in 1888 he attends conference again, but the committee for examining evangelists reported that "Samuel Musselman received neither approval nor assignment. A well-founded complaint against him is the reason. He shall not preach for our denomination until the Conference deems it proper." The following year, 1889, he is absent again, and the minutes state, "Samuel Musselman, for well-founded reason, did not get permission by the last Annual

Conference to preach anymore for our denomination, nor in the name of the same, until the Conference finds his service satisfactory. Since he has made no effort, or shown any improvement of the relationship and has not come for a long time, therefore, we consider him no longer a member of our denomination.” Thus ended the preaching career of Samuel M. Musselman with the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.

Samuel Musselman died on October 28, 1902 in Quakertown while awaiting a trolley at the corner of Broad and Main Streets. He had been visiting Rev. Samuel Landis in Quakertown.

Samuel M. Musselman’s father was also named Samuel Musselman (1797-1867), and his mother was Susanna Meyer (1800-1885), a daughter of Samuel Meyer (d. 1832) who was a preacher at the Saucon Mennonite church. Through his Musselman ancestors, Samuel M. Musselman is a second cousin once removed to the Upper Milford Musselman siblings who joined the Evangelical Mennonites. See Chart No. 6.

Through his mother’s Meyer ancestors, Rev. Musselman is related to Catharine Landis (1855-1917), the wife of Henry B. Shelly (1854-1941) (son of Levi N. Shelly mentioned above) of the Upper Milford Mennonite Brethren in Christ congregation. Susanna Meyer’s (1800-1885) brother, Samuel Meyer, a deacon of the Saucon Mennonite church, had a daughter named Anna, who married a man named Jacob M. Landis. Jacob and Anna Landis’ daughter, Catharine Landis, married Henry B. Shelly (1854-1941). Therefore, Samuel M. Musselman is a first cousin once removed to Catharine (Landis) Shelly (1855-1917).

Samuel M. Musselman’s sister, Susan, also joined the Evangelical Mennonites. Susan Musselman (1831-1919) married Michael Y. Landis (1826-1890). In 1869, Michael Y. Landis became the first deacon of the newly established Upper Saucon congregation of the Evangelical Mennonite Society (today this congregation is the Calvary Bible Fellowship Church in Coopersburg, PA). He served in that capacity until 1880.

This marriage of Susan Musselman and Michael Y. Landis ties into another Evangelical Mennonite member. We will examine those family connections now.

A man named Abraham Yoder (1747-1820) married a woman named Maria Sell (1750-1827). Among this couple’s children was a daughter, Barbara Yoder (1790-1862), a son, Jacob Yoder (1792-1865), and a son, John Yoder (1777-1866).

Abraham Yoder’s daughter, Barbara Yoder (1790-1862), married a man named Jacob W. Landis (1790-1869). Michael Y. Landis (1826-1890), the Upper Saucon congregation’s deacon, was the son of Jacob W. and Barbara (Yoder) Landis.

Abraham Yoder’s son, Jacob Yoder (1792-1865), married Elizabeth Meyer (1797-1858). This couple had a daughter named Barbara Yoder (1819-1895) who married David Young (1816-1877). David and Barbara Young were the parents of Levi Young, another young man who joined the Evangelical Mennonites as a preacher for a few years in the 1860s. Levi Young was a first cousin once removed to the deacon Michael Y. Landis.

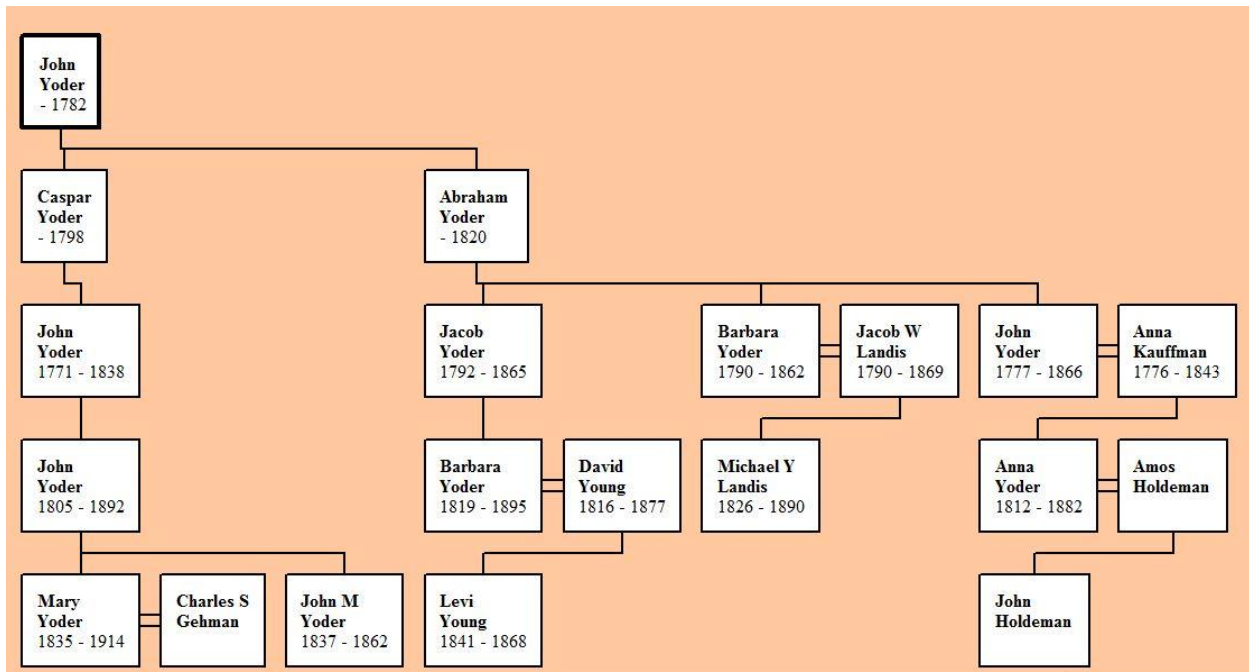


Chart No. 7. Evangelical Mennonite family ties through the Yoder family.

Levi Young had contact with the Evangelical Mennonites at least as early as March 1862 when he heard Eusebius Hershey preach at protracted meetings at the home of Charles S. Gehman in Upper Saucon Township, Lehigh County. In his diary, he mentions attending the semi-annual conference of the Evangelical Mennonite Society in June 1863 and again in October 1863, but he does not appear to be a preacher at that point. Young is first mentioned in the minutes of the June 1864 conference which reported that he had accompanied Eusebius Hershey on a mission trip to Canada in the previous six months. He apparently became a preacher in November 1864 because the November 1864 semi-annual conference minutes state that “consent was granted to have him ordained to be a servant of the Word of God,” and a resolution was passed stating in part, “That brother Levi Jung be licensed to visit families and to preach the Gospel wherever opportunity is given.” The following year, the conference minutes reported that Levi Young had withdrawn from the Evangelical Mennonites. He died on August 14, 1868 at age 26.

Since we are looking at Levi Young, it may be of interest to mention another of his family relationships even though it does not strictly fall within the realm of Bible Fellowship history. Levi Young’s obituary in the August 20, 1868 issue of *Der Reformer and Pennsylvania Advertiser* states that Jonas Y. Schultz and John Haldeman of Ohio presided at his funeral. We know who Jonas Y. Schultz was, but who is John Haldeman, and why would a preacher from Ohio speak at Young’s funeral?

If we look at Abraham Yoder’s (1747-1820) son, John Yoder (1777-1866), mentioned above, we find that John Yoder married a woman named Anna Kauffman (1776-1843). That couple was a Mennonite family which moved from the Lehigh Valley to Ohio. One of their children was Anna Yoder (1812-1882). Anna Yoder married Amos Holdeman, and they had a son named John Holdeman. John Holdeman was Levi Young’s second cousin. He was the founder of a

church called the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. That church is often referred to simply as the Holdeman Mennonites. John Holdeman, the founder of that church, was the man who preached at Young's funeral.

Levi Young's 1863 diary mentioned protracted meetings held at the home of Charles S. Gehman in March 1862. Charles S. Gehman, and presumably his wife, were members of the Evangelical Mennonite Society for a brief time in the 1860s. The semi-annual conference minutes of November 1864 report that Charles S. Gehman was the ordained elder of the Upper Saucon congregation. This is the first time we hear of a congregation in Upper Saucon Township. The term "ordained elder" refers to the office of deacon which we can infer from the fact that in the minutes of future conferences Charles S. Gehman is listed among the deacons. The minutes note specifically that Gehman was acknowledged as a member of the conference. That implies that he was not a member of the conference, and therefore not yet a deacon, at the previous conference.

This new Upper Saucon congregation was probably formed as an Evangelical Mennonite congregation sometime after the June 1864 conference. The new congregation apparently selected Charles Gehman as its deacon soon after that, and he would have begun attending the conferences as a member at the November 1864 semi-annual conference. This new Upper Saucon congregation would not last long. The minutes of the June 1867 semi-annual conference report that "Because the Saucon brothers and sisters withdrew themselves from the conference because of differing viewpoints, it was decided that we cross out their names from the Conference and Members Book and do not consider them members anymore of our Conference."

Levi Young clearly knew Charles S. Gehman's family well. He was also related to Charles S. Gehman's wife, Mary Yoder (1835-1914). Levi Young was a third cousin to Mary Yoder. Levi's friend, John M. Yoder (1837-1862) was a brother of Mary Yoder, and Levi Young died in the home of their father, John Yoder (1805-1892).

We will conclude this examination of families with a brief mention of Solmon Y. Hottel. After the death of his first wife, he married Mary Ann Musselman who was a daughter of Henry Musselman mentioned previously, thus he became part of the Musselman family. Since his mother is Susanna Young and is a descendant of the Mennonite immigrant Valentine Young, it is likely that he is related to the preacher Levi Young. However, I have yet to determine Levi Young's complete Young ancestry, so the exact relationship, if any, remains unknown.

Concluding Observations

Not all the early members and families of the Evangelical Mennonite church were related in some way to other families in the church. The group was mission-minded from the beginning. In its early days, this manifested itself in what today we would call home missions. The group's preachers sought places to preach the Gospel to interested people. Many of the lay people helped spread interest in the Gospel and this new church as well. The result was that even in the earliest years in the history of this new church, new families who did not have a Mennonite background or a family relationship with existing families joined the church.

From the beginning, though, there was a significant core of members and families, almost all of whom came from a Mennonite background, who were related in varying degrees to other members of the church.

It is not unusual for children to join the church of their parents, and certainly that has happened frequently in the Bible Fellowship Church and its forerunners over the years. In this study, however, we see that several key families that were early members of the Evangelical Mennonites were represented by two or more siblings even though their parents had no connection at all with the church.

Probably the most obvious example of this is the Musselman family. Christian and Elisabeth Musselman, the parents, both died before William Gehman became a preacher at the Upper Milford Mennonite church. They did not live to see the prayer meeting controversy or the subsequent separation of the Evangelical Mennonites from John Oberholtzer's Mennonite conference. Nevertheless, four of this couple's adult children joined this new church probably right at the beginning of its formation. Although we do not have positive proof, these children likely participated in the prayer meetings that were held by William Gehman prior to the formal separation and formation of the Evangelical Mennonites in 1858. Other examples of siblings joining the Evangelical Mennonites independent of their parents are the brothers David and Henry Gehman along with their niece, Catharine Stauffer. Samuel M. Musselman and his sister, Susan Landis, are yet another example. The Brunner family, Shelly family, and Taylor family provide further examples of this phenomenon.

These families provided a core of leadership from which church outreach could occur. For example, Henry Musselman, the youngest son of Christian and Elisabeth Musselman, is said to have held church services in his barn in Springfield Township which resulted in establishing in 1869 what is today Calvary Bible Fellowship Church in Coopersburg.

Henry Musselman's son, Henry G. Musselman, was likely involved with the Haycock Evangelical Mennonite congregation and later the Quakertown congregation when it was formed in 1872. In 1875 he purchased a carriage factory in Springtown, Bucks County. Suddenly in the following year, the semi-annual Evangelical Mennonite conference minutes relate that there was a new Evangelical Mennonite congregation in Springtown! Certainly Henry G. Musselman must have had a major hand in bringing that result about.

By 1879 when the Evangelical Mennonites merged with the United Mennonites, the church had grown, but it was still very small—having only about six congregations. But a foundation had been laid, and much of that foundation revolved around the core families that were related to each other in various ways. These core families would provide important leadership at all levels of the Pennsylvania Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ in the future. Many of the preachers of the Pennsylvania Conference would come from these families or would marry into these families well into the twentieth century. All of the presiding elders in the Pennsylvania Conference from the time of the merger with the United Mennonites until the 1940s would come from this group of families. This leadership would preside over a time of significant numerical growth so that eventually the Pennsylvania Conference would be the largest conference in the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church.