

THE HISTORY OF TURKEY RUN MENNONITE CHURCH



ESTABLISHED IN 1803

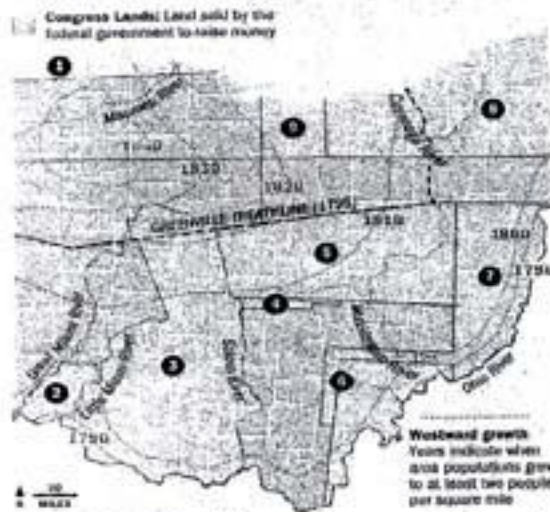
THE HISTORY OF TURKEY RUN MENNONITE CHURCH

Dedicated
to all those who have faithfully served
the Lord in the Turkey Run Congregation
in the past,
those who are currently serving,
and to those who will serve until He returns.

Researched and Recorded by:
Carl and Leota Wesselhoeft
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The origin of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church must be seen in the context of the westward expansion of the United States.

According to R.R. Frash in the *History of Bremen and Community* (reprinted from the *1934 Centennial Book* with permission), around the year 1710, the Wyandot tribe, coming from the region near Niagara Falls, settled along the Hockhocking River at the present site of Lancaster. It was called Tarhe Town since it was ruled by old chief Tarhe (the Crane) who was a noble and honest Indian chief. The town consisted of at least one hundred wigwams and about five hundred warriors. After the Battle of the Fallen Timbers in



the Treaty of Greenville signed on August 3, 1795, by General Anthony Wayne, William Henry Harrison and Indian representatives, the Wyandots and Delawares agreed to

relinquish their claim to the southern and eastern regions of what is now Ohio and to remove to the northwestern quarter of the state.

In the January 1932 issue of the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, John S. Umble writes of the arrival of the early pioneers. Soon pioneers began to filter into the forest wilderness along the Ohio River tributaries from their original settlements in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Kentucky. In order to encourage immigration into the interior, Congress in 1797 employed Ebenezer Zane to open a wide path through the woods from Wheeling, West Virginia, through what is now Zanesville, Lancaster and Chillicothe, Ohio, to Maysville, Kentucky. This stump-obstructed trail became known as Zane's Trace.

With the arrival of the settler, the real conquest of the forest began. They were forced to protect their livestock and many times their own lives against bears, wolves and panthers, while wild turkeys, deer, squirrels and raccoons sought to destroy their growing crops struggling to come to maturity among the blackened trunks of the deadened trees in the so called "clearing". The forest was so dense that in some cases it was necessary for them to "blaze" the trees from the cabin to the corn field or the spring. "Blazing" was cutting a piece



After leaving their Fairfield County property and going through the difficult process of clearing the land, a small cabin would be built, and then expanded as the need for space increased.

of bark off two sides of a tree to mark the direction of a path or road. Some of the settlers came down the Ohio River by flatboat and then followed the Hocking River upstream. After examining possible locations for settlements, they chose the hill country of Perry and Fairfield counties (Perry County was not organized until 1817; therefore, Mondaycreek Township was at first in Fairfield County) in preference to the more level and fertile bottom lands. The latter tended to be swampy and malaria infested in those days before they were drained, according to an article written by Rev. James Steiner. In the hills they sought out springs near which they built their cabins. But many times, evidently, even these springs were not to be trusted, for there were severe and repeated epidemics of typhoid which took a heavy toll in lives, to which the many graves of young adults and especially children are a silent witness. This fact, together with the difficulty of making a living in that hilly terrain accounts in large measure for many of the survivors moving into the northwest part of what would become Ohio after that area was purchased from the Indians by the State in 1817.

To convey a rough idea what things were like before Monday Creek Township even was organized, here are some excerpts from the *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties* compiled by A.A. Graham in 1883.

Monday Creek Township, when the white settlers first came, was as wild a part of the county as any other, if it did not excel in this particular. Not only the deer, but panthers, bears and wolves were very numerous. Rattlesnakes, copperheads and other venomous serpents abounded, and were killed by the hundreds. Men yet remain in Monday Creek, less than seventy years old, who have heard the dismal howl of wolves at dusk of

evening, in close proximity to the cabins of the lonely settlers. No person seems to be able to satisfactorily characterize the depressing effect on all produced by the howling of the wolf.

Bears would come into the gardens, yards and pig pens, and thought nothing of carrying off a good sized fat hog. The wild beasts were, indeed, a terror. Some persons affect to doubt whether a panther was ever killed in Perry County; there is no room for doubt. The early settlers of Monday Creek killed many a panther, and there are men yet living who have seen dead panthers brought home by their fathers, which they had killed not far away.

Robert Nixon, one of the early settlers, was once out hunting deer, and had no dog with him. He came upon a large bear, and believing that he could kill the animal, took good aim and fired. The bear was wounded, but instead of falling took after the hunter, and exhibited an unusual fleetness; so much so, that Nixon had to run for his life, and yet Bruin was fast closing the distance between them. Realizing fully the condition of affairs, Mr. Nixon as he ran, uttered loud and repeated outcries for help. Timothy Terrel and sons were rolling logs not far away, and, at the time, had a large log about half way up a skid. Mr. Terrel shouted to the boys to let the log go, and all hurried in the direction from whence the alarmed outcries proceeded. They soon came upon the frightened and fleeing hunter and pursuing bear. The opposition was too formidable, and Bruin beat a retreat. Terrel himself had a similar adventure of his own. He was also hunting deer, and this time had no dogs along. Probably bears were becoming scarce, and were seldom encountered. However, he came upon a bear, and an unusually large one. He thought he could kill him and fired, Bruin, who was wounded and terribly enraged, immediately took after the lone hunter. Terrel said that he soon discovered that the bear was a good runner, and he proceeded without useless delay, to put himself in "light running order." He hastily threw away his gun, pouch and every weight but a knife. The bear persisted and the race was a long doubtful one. Going up hill the hunter would gain on the bear; but on descending ground the bear made long strides and gained on the hunter. Terrel says Bruin would blow and snort every jump, as he struck the ground behind him, evidently getting short of breath as well himself. Bruin at length gave up the chase, and retired in the direction of his lonely haunts. Terrel afterward gathered up his gun

and other accouterments, but no doubt he took a dog or two with him, and other assistance.

The young Terrels, the oldest boy of fifteen or sixteen, were left home one Sunday while their parents went to church, some miles away. Two large dogs were left with the youngsters. During the absence of the father and mother, a large bear with two half grown cubs came into the meadow near the house. The eldest boy seized the ax, the next older a hatchet, and a little girl armed herself with a hammer. One of the cubs was killed while crossing the meadow fence into the woods and the big dogs chased the other two away. The boys had seen their father dress bears, and they thought they would try their hand. They succeeded nicely in dressing it, and a large piece of it was in the dinner-pot cooking, when their father and mother returned, not a little astonished to learn what had been going on in their absence.

John Mackin and his sons were at work in a clearing, when they saw a huge roll of snakes, of several different kinds, including rattlesnakes, blacksnakes and others, all lapped and twisted together, rolling around over the ground. The senior Mackin took a shovel, filled it with red hot coals from a heap, and threw them into the bunch of snakes. They "broke ranks" without receiving orders, and ran in every direction. The Mackins only succeeded in killing two or three of them. To see bunches of snakes of different species, coiled up in this way, was not an uncommon occurrence when the country was new; but "the seed of the woman has bruised the serpent's head," until it is a rare thing now to see a poisonous snake of any kind, even among the hills of Monday Creek.

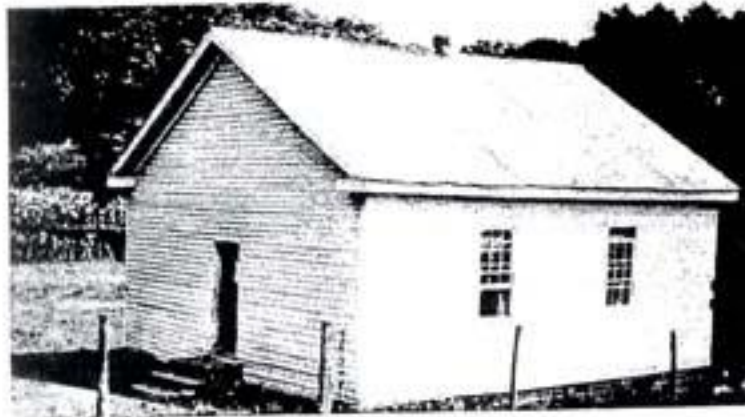
Historical Records About Turkey Run Mennonite Church

John C. Wenger in his book *The Mennonite Church in America* mentions Mennonites coming to Fairfield and Perry Counties after the Revolutionary War. As early as 1798 the first settlers came, locating south and east of Lancaster near Bremen. At first the settlement seemed to prosper, but after 1817 when the Indians sold their last reservation in north-west Ohio to the State and lands became available there,

quite a number of families moved to what would become Allen County near the present town of Elida where farming conditions were more favorable.

Then in the same book, J. C. Wenger states that at the time of his writing in 1966 "All that is left of the once thriving settlement is the small Turkey Run congregation near Bremen, Ohio with 13 members in 1964, and now known as the Messiah Conservative Mennonite Church." When in 1978 Bro. Wenger came to Turkey Run for the first time and served as speaker for the 175th anniversary we shared a chuckle with him about the fallibility of men and their reports. (The explanation for this misunderstanding is the fact that while most of the congregation remained as Turkey Run but changed conference affiliation from Ohio Conference to Conservative Mennonite Conference, the three families who moved to Carbon Hill, Ohio, from Turkey Run did not immediately withdraw membership from Ohio Conference.)

A. A. Graham in his *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties* written in 1883 records the following about the Turkey Run congregation in Mondaycreek Township of Perry County, Ohio. "The Mennonite Church was organized at an early day and for many years worshipped in a log building, which was also used as a school house. About 30 years since a new and more commodious house was erected. Regular services are maintained. There is a Sabbath (Sunday) school in connection with the congregation."



The new and more "commodious"
Turkey Run Meeting House built in 1858

From the *History of Perry County* by Clement Martzloff published by Ward and Weiland, New Lexington, Ohio, in 1902: The Mennonite Church in Mondaycreek is the only representative of that denomination in the county. The exact date of its origin is unknown. Its members were mostly German and among them were many of the first settlers of that community. The date of its beginning is certainly before 1830.

In their book *Mennonite Church History* published in 1902, J. S. Hartzler and Daniel Kauffman list Turkey Run as the oldest Mennonite church still in existence in Ohio. They give the date as 1803 and list the names of the first settlers as Stemens, Goods, Brennemens and others among which the Beerys, Weltys, Huffords, Funks, Kagays and Coffmans should be mentioned.

Grant M. Stoltzfus in his book *Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference* published in 1969 uses the information

given by Hartzler and Kauffman as given above. He also quotes in his book an article on "Visit to Ohio" (*Herald of Truth, Feb. 15, 1884*) by Anna Horning of Shambaugh, Iowa. After visits in Allen, Hardin and Franklin counties she returned to Fairfield County where, "I had a happy meeting with my brother Samuel S. Good whom I had not seen for nearly twenty-two years. Here we had an interesting meeting in the old Turkey Run Church where we used to meet in our young days. Here father and mother, brother and sister and dear friends bowed together in prayer. Most of them have crossed the river of death and some have removed to other counties and states. There is only a small flock here, but they still have the same promise that God will be with them."

Stoltzfus also has a picture of the Turkey Run Meetinghouse erected in 1858. He states that "services alternated between Turkey Run and the nearby Pleasant Hill Meetinghouse."

It may well have been that these two groups were regarded as one congregation. Having services on alternate Sundays distributed the chore of traveling to church more evenly, especially during the months when the roads became almost impassible.

In his book *Ohio Mennonite Sunday Schools* published in 1941, J. S. Umble states that it is practically certain that Henry Brenneman started a singing school at Pleasant Hill about 1860. (Local information would place the singing school at Sugar Hill where the school was named Sugar Hill School or the Brenneman School.) There was never a church building in that location, but there is a cemetery known as



Henry Brenneman, 1791-1866

Sugar Hill Cemetery. Three of the early graves are of Barbara (Beery) Brenneman, wife of Henry Brenneman and two of their young children. All three died of smallpox in 1838.

Henry and Barbara (Beery) Brenneman were the parents also of Susanna who married Henry Shenk in 1840. They had nine children.

One of the sons of Henry and Susanna (Brenneman) Shenk was John M. who wrote the hymn and tune of "Come Heaven Bound Pilgrim" naming the tune "Rebecca" for their only daughter.

John M. and Frances (Good) Shenk are ancestors of our noted speaker, Myron S. Augsburg.

One of the early Mennonite settlers coming into the Fairfield County community was Henry Stemen, son of Christian Stehman. Henry Stemen was born May 26, 1775, in Pennsylvania. He moved to Rockingham County, Virginia, with his parents and there married Mary Beery, daughter of Nicholas Beery, Jr. and Mary Keller. Henry Stemen and his bride moved back to Pennsylvania soon after their marriage.

and from there in 1803 to Rushcreek Township in the eastern part of Fairfield County in the west part of Rushcreek Township, near his wife's brothers and sisters. Meanwhile, they had several children; among them was Nicholas of whom we will learn more. Settling in the woods Henry helped clear timber where Lancaster and Bremen are now located. His name appears on a list of voters in Rushcreek Township in 1804. In 1821 he leased a small plot from the land he lived on to the trustees of the Pleasant Hill Mennonite Church "for the purpose of a German and English School house and a house of Public Worship for the "Menonests and Baptists (commonly called Dunkards)."

It may well be that the beginning of Mennonite work dates back to the arrival of Henry Stemen and his leadership ability. The first worship services were held in homes or barns, the settlers being compelled to provide food and shelter for their families. The land on which they settled was federal land on which they first settled as squatters, their residence on the land preceding their obtaining title to it by several years, *History of Bremen* by R. R. Frash 1934.

In 1809 the church took counsel and by lot chose Henry Stemen to the ministry in the Mennonite Church. He shared this office with John Good. Grant Stoltzfus in his book *Ohio and Eastern Conference* writes, "The congregations in the Ohio and Eastern Conference were richly blessed in the past century and a half through the ministry of a number of effective leaders." One name he mentions is that of Henry Stemen. In 1820 Henry was ordained to the office of bishop and was responsible for the leadership not only of the Franklin-Fairfield-Perry County congregations but also for

the congregations springing up in Allen County. Grant Stoltzfus continues, "His travels on horseback (he was reputed to keep fine horses and care well for them) took him to Wyandot, Seneca, Williams and Fairfield counties. A day's journey was often many miles through the almost pathless forest and swimming his horse across bridgeless, swollen rivers while he knelt in the saddle. On these tiresome trips he preached, baptized, held communion services in churches or in private residences with a congregation or with an isolated Mennonite family far from a congregation of their own faith. He preached funeral sermons over the graves of those who had been quietly laid away months before without a burial service because no minister could be summoned in time for the burial. He ordained bishops, ministers and deacons in the churches under his charge." He was one of the most eloquent preachers of that day and made great inroads upon the unconverted communities. His meetings were always conducted in the German language in the 46 years of his ministry. One other aspect of Henry Stemen's ministry must yet be mentioned. He was called upon to perform wedding ceremonies. Among others he performed a double wedding ceremony in November, 1821, uniting Joseph Beery and Magdalena Welty as well as David Commel and Eve Welty in holy matrimony. The brides were sisters.

On one occasion Henry Stemen rode with General Harrison. When they crossed the Sciota, near the present site of Columbus, the General remarked that he believed the slavery question would some time result in war between the North and South. Bishop Stemen was of the same opinion. In later

years he related the incident to his grandchildren and looked upon it as a prophecy.

In 1855 Bishop Henry Stemen gave up his bishopric office, preaching an eloquent sermon on the occasion. That sermon has been described as "full of solemn warnings concerning the future trials of the church, but with a dominant note of victorious hope." As if his work was at last ended, Stemen, nearly blind and quite feeble with age and the exposure incident to pioneer life, succumbed to an attack of malaria fever a few months later. (Grant Stoltzfus p.58-60)

Henry and Mary's son Nicholas was born May 11, 1802, in Pennsylvania and immigrated to Fairfield County in 1803 with his parents. According to the *Stemen Family History*, "He, too, was one of the noble men of his day. Nicholas was a good and successful farmer and a strict disciplinarian, yet possessed of a kind and appreciative heart, tenderly devoted to his children and relatives. He was a financier and a natural arithmetician, being able to compute mentally the most difficult problems more quickly and more sure to be correct than when computed by others with paper and pencil. He was of more than ordinary intelligence and was a member of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church, being a faithful deacon in that congregation for many years. He died in 1878 at the age of 76. He married Catherine Beery, his second cousin, born in 1802 in Virginia from where she moved to Fairfield County in 1816. She died in 1877 about one and a half years before her husband.

It is to this Nicholas Stemen that Joseph and Magdalena (Welty) Beery deeded the property on which the Turkey Run

Meeting House was erected in 1858. That building with a small addition built in 1940 is the fellowship hall in the present church building. However, the property had been used as a burial ground long before 1858 and a log building had stood on the premises serving as a church and school.

Families continued to arrive rapidly, and the settlement grew. Isaac Blosser came in 1811. In 1816 the Mennonite Church in Fairfield gained an important accession to membership from the old home in Rockingham County, Virginia. In that year George Beery, fifth son of the pioneer immigrant, Abraham Beery, followed his cousins across the mountains to make his home with the Mennonite congregation of his cousin's husband, Henry Stemen. He and his wife with their seven children made the long trip by team and wagon over the mountains from Virginia to Fairfield County, Ohio. His eldest daughter, Barbara, and her husband, Henry Brenneman, parents of the well known Brenneman brothers, accompanied them to their new western home. Henry's brother, Jacob, followed them in 1828.

George Beery's wife was Susan Funk, sister of Joseph Funk, noted singing-school teacher, of Singers Glen, Rockingham County, Virginia.

Henry and Barbara (Beery) Brenneman were the parents of John M., George, Henry B., and Daniel Brenneman and as reported in January, 1932 in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, John M. and George became leading Bishops in the Ohio Conference for many years, while Henry B. became deacon in the Elkhart, Indiana congregation and was a prominent Sunday School worker. Daniel was the founder.

of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church. Susanna, Anna and Catherine were the daughters of Henry and Barbara (Beery) Brenneman.

As before mentioned, in the spring of 1816 Henry Brenneman with his bride of a few months, immigrated to Rushcreek Township in Fairfield County, Ohio where they were of the early pioneers. All their children were born in Fairfield County. He prospered there, and his success influenced others of his relatives to come from Virginia and join him. He acquired and kept in cultivation two farms, in addition to operating a sawmill and gristmill. So great was the demand for his "Super-Fine-Flour" that he had to run the mill day and night, his sons John and George taking their turns as millers.

A grandson says of his grandfather that he was a fine old gentleman. This was also the testimony of his neighbors. He was a good reader and often read to his family out of the mammoth volume of the *Martyr's Mirror*, a German classic published at Ephrata, Pennsylvania, in 1814. Henry was also a good footman, having twice made the trip over the mountains between Fairfield County, Ohio and Rockingham County, Virginia, his boyhood home. This information is taken from the *Huber Family History* which was researched and recorded by Martha Huber Good in 2001.

The Beery family contributed greatly to the establishment of the Mennonite Church in the Lancaster-Bremen area. Most of the early Mennonite settlers in this area were either descended from or related by marriage to the immigrants, Nicholas and Abraham Beery who had arrived in

Philadelphia in 1727 and 1736 respectively. Abraham Beery's sons were Abraham, Nicholas, John, Jacob and George.

George, son of Nicholas, was the first of the Beery's to arrive in Fairfield County, Ohio. He came, a seventeen-year old boy in 1800. Instead of following Zane's Trace from Wheeling to Lancaster, he took the earlier route down the Ohio River by flatboat to the mouth of the Hocking, then up that river to the falls of the Hocking, where Logan, Hocking County, now stands, and from there up the river to Lancaster. During the summer of 1800 and the following winter he cleared land at so much per acre. He returned to Virginia in the spring but came back to Fairfield in the fall of 1801. By clearing land and working for others, he finally saved enough money to enter eighty acres on Raccoon Creek near Bremen in 1807. Others of the family must have moved to the area south of Bremen before that because of Henry Stemen it is said that he moved to the west part of Rushcreek Township south of Bremen near his wife's brothers and sisters. Some of Nicholas's sons were "Dunkards" founding a congregation south of Bremen. There must have been cordial relations between Dunkards and Mennonites for when Henry Stemen in 1821 leased a small plot from the land he lived on to the trustees of the Pleasant Hill Mennonite Church, it was for the purpose of "a house of Public Worship for the Menonests and Baptists (commonly called Dunkards).

Abraham and Elizabeth (Gouchenour) Beery were the parents of Jacob Beery. Abraham was born in Pennsylvania, son of the immigrant Nicholas Beery. Abraham was listed

by the assessors in 1781 as a non-juror, meaning that his religious convictions required him to refuse to take an oath in declaring his taxable property. As a result he was taxed double on his property.

Abraham and his brothers, Nicholas and George, because of their religious convictions of non-resistance, could not serve in the military forces. For not reporting for duty, each was fined 3.10 pounds as one of those "who did not meet and exercise in order to learn the art military" in accordance with the resolves of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania.

As the best land in Pennsylvania was taken, the sons and daughters of the original settlers moved on to Rockingham County, Virginia. However, in Virginia they encountered slavery and became convinced that it was not right to hold others in bondage. That according to the *Nicholas Beery History* was one reason why they migrated to Ohio, a free state, admitted to the Union in 1803.

Abraham Beery's son Jacob emigrated from Virginia in 1806 with his wife Mary (Good) and three sons Joseph, Samuel and Jacob who were born in Rockingham County, Virginia, between 1801 and 1806. They settled in Fairfield County east of Lancaster, Ohio. Joseph, Samuel and Jacob homesteaded land in Mondaycreek Township, now Perry County, Ohio. (Perry County was carved out of Fairfield, Licking and Washington counties in 1817.) Samuel's deed to his land is dated September 1824 and is signed by President James Monroe. Samuel Beery was known as Knob Sam because he built his log house, largest in the vicinity, on a high hill within sight of the Turkey Run Mennonite

Church. He married Mary Moyer (known as Polly) and they had twelve children. A photograph taken in 1854 shows the family and helpers in front of their house on the knob.



Samuel Beery house "on the knob".
Courtesy of Landy (Beery) Gobes

Samuel, Mary and three of their daughters' graves are in the Turkey Run cemetery.

Joseph Beery married Magdalena Welty and had at least one daughter, Susannah. They owned the land on which the Turkey Run Church and cemetery are located. Joseph and Magdalena deeded the land to Nicholas Stemen, elder in the Mennonite Church, and his successors in office on November 12, 1858. That was the year in which the present fellowship hall was built, replacing the log building which had been used for worship and school.

An *Atlas of Perry County of 1875* shows the properties of Samuel and Joseph Beery and the Mennonite Church and cemetery plot. That atlas also shows the farm of Benjamin Huber who was pastor of Turkey Run at that time.



Sunday School work was established early but not without initial opposition because some associated it with picnics and other activities that brought the Sunday school itself into disrepute. Mennonites were by no means the only religious group that expressed initial reservations about the Sunday School. But as mentioned earlier A. A. Graham stated that there was a Sunday School at Turkey Run and Umble lists

the following names as either officers or teachers: George Stemen, Nicholas Stemen, Joseph Beery, Christian Beery, Henry Brenneman, Benjamin Huber, Jacob Good, Mary Beery and Noah Brenneman. This is a compilation of names taken from reports over several years because Joseph Beery died in 1879, while Jacob Good did not move to Turkey Run until 1910.

Benjamin Huber was born in 1860 in Perry County two years after Joseph and Magdalena Beery had deeded the Turkey Run church and burial grounds in 1858 to elder and Deacon Nicholas Stemen and his successors. Nicholas Stemen was the son of Henry and Mary (Beery) Stemen. The grounds were used as a burial ground long before this. The earliest legible inscriptions are for four graves of children: Joseph and David Huber who died in 1827 and 1835 aged thirteen months and eighteen days respectively and Catherine and Daniel Beery who died in 1836 and 1838 aged twelve weeks and an illegible age. The earliest legible grave inscription at the Sugar Hill cemetery dates back to David Funk who died in 1831, age one month. The folks at Sugar Hill were members of the Turkey Run congregation since there was only a school at Sugar Hill, also known as the Brenneman School.

It is interesting that the earliest still-legible graves at Pleasant Hill date back only to 1863, Barbara Kagay aged 67 years. So of the three cemeteries the oldest graves that can still be read are at Turkey Run.

The middle years of the 1800's saw a continued migration of Fairfield and Perry county Mennonites to cheaper and more

promising virgin lands in Northwest Ohio. Peter Stemen, deacon in the Pleasant Hill church, moved at the age of sixty-six with his sons John and Christian Stemen to Allen County purchasing a farm not far from the present Salem church. Only four years later in 1841, Peter Stemen's father Christian Stemen came with Peter's brother Bishop Henry Stemen, two of the bishop's sons-in-law, Samuel and Henry Sherrick, deacon John Sherrick, David Campbell, John Burkholder and Joseph Lamem (Lehman). All these except Joseph Lamem had families and upon arrival in Allen County at once organized a congregation. It is but natural that the Fairfield-Perry Mennonite settlement felt this serious drain on her population. One reason for this exodus was economic. With the completion of the Ohio Canal in 1825 land prices had risen sharply and farmers in the hilly portion of Fairfield and Perry counties were drawn to cheaper and more easily cultivated land up north. Another reason was that there were those who still preferred the German language for use in church services while others would have liked to have the services in English. It should be noted that Bishop Henry Stemen is said to have always preached in German but he, too, was one of those who moved to Allen County, so it is unclear how much the language problem contributed to the migration. For us today it is difficult to appreciate the significance of the language problem. We must remember that all these people were, at the most, second or third generation immigrants from Europe, and that in the absence of public schools the immigrants' language was perpetuated in the family setting. Furthermore, there were at the frontiers many others fluent in the German language like the Lutherans, the German Reformed and the

German Baptists (Dunkards) so that for some years there was no great felt need to give up the mother tongue.

Another difficulty for us is to put ourselves into the frame of mind of the frontier people. They had come from the east looking for opportunities, new land and no doubt also eager to get away from the institution of slavery. New lands and opportunities were constantly opening up to the north and west. The people had an optimistic and adventurous spirit while the farmer's rootedness to his soil and home had not yet developed. They had just left home and farm in Virginia or Pennsylvania, so the hills in the Fairfield-Perry landscape became for many something of a way station to the opportunities and wide open spaces further to the north and west.

Those migrations continued for the next years. In 1853 preacher George Brenneman who was ministering to the Pleasant Hill-Turkey Run congregation moved north and with him several families of friends and relatives. Two years later John M. Brenneman whom Bishop Henry Stemen had ordained to the oversight of the congregation also moved to Allen County where Bishop Stemen formally installed him as bishop of the congregation there. Then another Brenneman brother, Daniel, became minister of the Pleasant Hill-Turkey Run congregation. When John F. Funk of Elkhart, Indiana, visited the area the congregation was still meeting in the two meeting houses on alternate Sundays and most of the preaching was done by "the youthful, but eminently able pastor, Daniel Brenneman". However, he soon left the ministry for which he had been ordained.

During the Civil War (1861 – 1865) Mennonites and Dunkards experienced severe trials. While many members of the mainline denominations followed the call to arms as their ancestors had responded during the Revolution, Mennonites and Dunkards suffered many indignities because of their non-resistant convictions. Some of them were drafted, and they became divided on the question of hiring substitutes or paying the three hundred dollar fine or exemption fee. So there were those who, unable to stand, yielded and enlisted. Besides these outward pressures, misunderstandings and bitterness within the church caused others to move to Mennonite congregations in Allen, Putnam and Van Wert counties.

In spite of the members who had left, a fine group of active workers still remained, but there was a lack of overall leadership. Bishop Henry Yoder who in 1885-86 visited Fairfield and Franklin counties made the following comment. "Many of the young people go to other churches and so the Mennonite church seems to be decreasing. May God grant that the glorious doctrine of our church-the doctrine for which our forefathers fled from one city to another, and from one country to another, for which thousands laid down their lives at the stake, on the cross and at the block, may still have its divine influence on the hearts and souls of many and lead them to be faithful followers of the meek and lowly Jesus."
(G.M. Stoltzfus p.94)

In 1865 Bishop George Brenneman was called back to his home congregation to conduct an ordination service at Turkey Run. The lots for minister fell on Noah Brenneman

and Christian C. Beery and for deacon on Henry B. Brenneman, brother of bishops John M. and George and of Preacher Daniel Brenneman. These three newly elected candidates were ordained at Turkey Run. Deacon Henry B. Brenneman moved to Elkhart, Indiana, a few years after his ordination to assist John F. Funk's publication work. "Brother Henry", as he was called was for many years very active in Sunday School work. Preacher Christian C. Beery also left Turkey Run for work in a growing Mennonite community in Kent County, Michigan, Preacher Noah Brenneman apparently moved to Franklin County, Ohio so that Turkey Run was once again left leaderless.

John F. Funk visited the congregation again in 1879. The aged Deacon Nicholas Stemen and Joseph Beery who had given the land for the church, had both died the year before. Funk preached a number of sermons in various churches, spending ten days in the community. The Fairfield-Perry congregation by that time numbered only between forty and fifty members. Benjamin Huber, the only minister, could not preach in English, and by that time the congregation strongly desired visits from English speaking ministers. Interest was so great during Funk's visit that the church buildings were filled to capacity. One night the crowd at Turkey Run was so great that the floor gave way and sank to the ground below. Since there was no basement under the building the service continued without serious interruption.

In the late 1800's both Mennonite and Dunkard churches were in a sad state of decline in spite of the heroic efforts of the aged resident German preacher Benjamin Huber and various visiting ministers like C. B. Brenneman of Allen



Benjamin and Mary C.
(McCormick) Huber

County and J. J. Warye and Christian Byler of West Liberty. When Benjamin Huber died in 1906 and B.B. Stoltzfus was placed in charge of the congregation, only eight members remained. His untiring efforts stemmed the decline and doubled the membership during the three years of his ministry, but in 1909 for the sake of his children he deemed it best to return to West Liberty.

At that time God's call came to Jacob and Malinda (Huber) Good of Allen County to take over the leadership at Turkey Run. Malinda was one of Benjamin Huber's daughters. Jacob Good, a farmer, at the time 38 years of age with a young family, considered the call. A granddaughter remembers his account of how he knew God's leading. He said that he wanted to know God's leading and observing a bird sitting nearby he asked God to confirm the call by the direction the bird would fly when it took off. Well, the bird flew south-east in the direction of Turkey Run, and Jacob felt in his heart that God had confirmed the call. Jacob and Malinda and their descendents were to leave the influence of their ministry at Turkey Run for the next century. Jacob was the youngest son of Abraham P. and Rebecca (Rhodes) Good who being a farm family in Rockingham County, Virginia and caught up in the Civil War immigrated to Allen County, Ohio after a brief stay in the Fairfield-Perry area.

The following accounts on the life of Abraham P. Good are taken from the *Huber Family History* compiled by Martha Huber Good in 2001. They are recorded here to remind us of our Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage.

During the Civil War both the North and the South attempted to draft Mennonites and Dunkards into the army to fight for their respective causes. Abraham was one of those who helped people having a conscience against enlisting to escape from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. One account is given of a group who refused to take up arms. Some ninety Dunkard Brethren and Mennonites met at Weaver's church late one night in the spring of 1862. They were about to be drafted. Their plan was to flee through West Virginia toward freedom into the Ohio Territory, where many of their brethren had already gone.

These men chose as their guide, the mountain hunter, Abraham P. Good. This capably backwoods man knew the ridges of the Shenandoah Mountains like the back of his hand. Some called him "Sawmill Abe", others called him "Bear Abe" because he had sometimes shot bears at close range in their dens, or if no bear was in evidence when he arrived at a den, had holed up there himself for the night.

Abraham led this group heading north-west over steep mountains to the Potomac River, where they were stopped by Confederate scouts who demanded they dismount and hand over their horses and guns. One of the men in the group instructed his men "Oh, brethren, pray mightily to

God, He will deliver us." Reluctantly the men gave up their mounts, but they carried no guns.

This group was escorted back to Staunton, Virginia, herded on a train and sent to Richmond, Virginia to be imprisoned. As they were called before the examiner of the War Department and stated their reasons why they do not take up arms, the officer became impressed and commanded the Dunkard and Mennonite brethren to be set free. In October of 1862 exemption for conscientious objectors was enacted. This law provided for hiring substitutes for service by paying conscription fees of \$500.00 into the public treasury, of which many families took advantage.

John M. Shenk, son-in-law of Abraham P. and Rebecca (Rhodes) Good related the following story regarding the reason for Abraham and Rebecca's leaving Virginia. Abraham had made at least two trips from Virginia to Ohio while the Civil War was in progress. This fact became known to the authorities in Richmond, and they sent word to Harrisonburg that Abe Good should be brought to Richmond "dead or alive". A confederate officer, along with a small detachment of troops, went to the Good homestead and confronted Abe. The officer asked him if he had been to Ohio and Abe replied that he had made two or three trips to Ohio during the course of the war, but that he had not carried war news. The officer informed Abe that he had orders to take him dead or alive to Richmond. Abe knew that if he went to Richmond he might well be executed, so he told the officer, "you must take me here" and lay down on the couch. The officer pulled his revolver and put it in Abe's ribs (hard enough to leave a bruise) backed away and then poked the

revolver in his ribs again. The officer then stated that if he must execute a man, there must be another officer present for a witness. So he sent a soldier to bring in another Confederate officer. When the officer arrived he said "Mr. Good, what is the problem here?" Abe said, "this man has come to take my life because I had been to Ohio during the war." Abe further explained that he had been to Ohio to visit friends, but that he had never carried any war news. The second officer said "I have known Mr. Good my entire life and can vouch for him, if he says he never aided the Union cause, it is so." This was enough to convince the first officer that there was no reason to carry out the execution.

Shortly after this incident Abe and Rebecca decided they must leave Virginia and sold their belongings.

About eight months before the close of the Civil War, Melchior Brenneman, who had served as a cavalryman in the Southern army, decided to desert the service. Together with Abraham P. Good, George Brunk, Sr., and Simon Cooper they equipped themselves with horses and wagons, loaded with some provisions and placed their wives on them. They started over the mountains, the men walking through the night and resting during the day, until they crossed the line into the Union Territory where they separated, Abraham Good and wife and George Brunk and wife going to Fairfield County, Ohio and then on to Allen County. This concludes information taken from the *Huber Family History*.

Jacob A. Good, youngest child of Abraham and Rebecca, was born in 1872 in Allen County, Ohio. He left the home farm in the care of his eldest son Pearly E. Good and came to

Turkey Run in 1910, buying from Levina Beery Cummans 45 acres of the farm formerly owned by her parents, "Knob" Sam and Mary (Polly Moyer) Beery. Samuel Beery's mother, Mary Good Beery was a sister of Rebecca Rhodes Good's mother, Elizabeth Good Rhodes. Both were sisters of Bishop Daniel Good of Rockingham County, Virginia.



Jacob and Malinda (Huber) Good home on the "knob"

Jacob A. Good was ordained to the ministry at Turkey Run in 1915. Under his

leadership membership at Turkey Run had doubled by 1928. He continued to serve the congregation faithfully until just before his death in 1945. Three of Jacob and Malinda's children, Bertha, Ellis, and Laura, remained in the area as members at Turkey Run and for many years selflessly served the Lord there.



Some of the Turkey Run Membership In 1934

John Umble lists the following officers of the Turkey Run Sunday School in 1932: Superintendents were Clarence Brenneman and C. A. Norris; Secretary was Ervin Huber; Treasurer was Malinda Good; Chorister was Laura Brenneman; John D. Allen was Superintendent of Young People's Meeting.

In 1938 several brethren came to the area from West Liberty, Ohio searching for a place to begin a Summer Bible School. Two of the brethren were Joe A. Yoder and Freeman Fisher. When they arrived at the parking lot of the Turkey Run Church they met Minister Jacob A. Good who had felt the leading of the Lord to, for some reason, go to the church that day. They were thankful to meet each other in this way. When Brother Joe asked about a place to hold Summer Bible School the Minister responded with "what about the church building?" It was the end of the search and the beginning of plans for the first Turkey Run Summer Bible School. In the following summer, June 1938, came Superintendent Joe A. Yoder with teachers Freeman Fisher, Tressie Kaufman, Allie Mae Hostetler, Ruth Plank, Esther Smucker, Helen Hostetler, Christina Smucker and others for two weeks at a time, staying in community homes, and teaching grades Kindergarten through adult classes every forenoon. In 1939 the Ira and Laura Plank family as well as Roy and Fannie Detweiler moved to Turkey Run from West Liberty, Ohio. They were a welcome addition to the congregation. The Summer Bible School continues to the present time, 2003,



with some changes but the central attraction is that the Bible is taught.

A 1940 Turkey Run
Summer Bible School
Photo.

The Women's Sewing Circle has also been an important ministry of Turkey Run. During the great depression when most of the area found making a livelihood difficult, Bertha Good Norris was ironing with her flat iron and thinking to herself. Surely there is someone poorer than we are that we could help. The idea came to her that if each of the women brought a dime they could buy cloth for the backing of a quilt and with their own scraps of material they could make a quilt and so they began. One quilt was made and donated to the Old People's Home at Rittman, Ohio. The Sewing Circle still goes on and many comforters, kits and bandages have gone to many parts of the world through different relief agencies.

In 1940 under Jacob Good's leadership an addition was built to the 1858 building to make room for Bible School and Sunday School classes.

Roy Detweiler served as Deacon at Turkey Run until 1955 with William Miller as Minister after the death of Jacob Good in 1945. In 1955 the Marion Good (son of Pearley Good, grandson of Jacob A. Good) and Norman Brunk families joined the congregation when they moved to Turkey Run from Allen County, Ohio. From 1955 to 1965 Marion Good served as pastor and Norman Brunk served as Deacon until they moved to Carbon Hill, Ohio.

In 1955 Carl and Leota (daughter of Ellis and Kathryn (Stemen) Good, granddaughter of Jacob A. Good) Wesselhoeft were ordained and commissioned at Turkey Run for missionary service in Somalia under the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions, Salunga, Pennsylvania. They served in Somalia until 1965. Donald and Doris (daughter of Ellis and Kathryn (Stemen) Good, granddaughter of Jacob A. Good) Plank were ordained to the ministry at Turkey Run in 1965. For several years Donald Plank and Carl Wesselhoeft served as co-pastors.

Under the leadership of Donald Plank in 1965 Turkey Run changed affiliation from Ohio Conference to Conservative Mennonite Conference. Since then the congregation has faithfully supported Rosedale Bible Institute/College, Rosedale Mennonite Missions and the Conference financially and with prayer. The contributions these institutions have made to the congregation are also greatly

appreciated. To the ministry, this relationship provided encouragement and a structure for accountability.

Over the years Turkey Run has supported Wycliffe Translation workers and the world wide radio ministry of Heralds of Hope and others. But to list the names of those who served and the places where they served would take time and space. Canada, Central America, Kenya, Turkey, Germany, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others come to mind. But there were also many who faithfully served at home, teaching Sunday School classes, cleaning the church, mowing the cemetery and the multitude of other jobs that needed to be done and without which the service abroad would also not have been accomplished and which so often are overlooked and unheralded.

For many years the church had men taking turns conducting a weekly service in the Perry County jail. When Vernon and Rosa Nisly moved into the community, they took responsibility for this and are now, though no longer at Turkey Run, in full time prison ministry.

In 1976 on Easter Sunday Robert Fisher were licensed to the ministry at Turkey Run and two years later was ordained. Robert is the grandson of Freeman Fisher and great-grandson of Jacob A. Good.

In 1978 the congregation celebrated its 175th anniversary with J. C. Wenger of Goshen, Indiana, bringing two messages.

In the minutes of the elders' meeting of March 21, 1985, this entry was found: Proposed starting a building fund. And that is what was done. By 1991 enough financial resources had accumulated to begin the building of a new sanctuary. Think of it! Until then the church had not had any indoor plumbing. The Lord gave the church a spirit of unity and a will to work so that the greatest part of the labor was contributed by the members of the congregation. To God be all the praise and glory!

In the fall of that year the first service was held in the new building, the old part becoming a fellowship hall. Help in this endeavor from the Conservative Mennonite churches and many volunteers also with financial help was greatly appreciated. Mike Bender of the congregation served as building coordinator, his wife Ruth also being a great-granddaughter of Jacob A. Good.



Turkey Run Meeting House in 1991.
Courtesy of Martha (Huber) Good

As Carl and Leota (Good) Wesselhoeft approached retirement age, the need was felt for younger leadership. The responsibilities as senior pastor of Turkey Run, effective June 6, 1999, was moved from Carl Wesselhoeft to Robert Fisher. Steve Swartz officiated in this transition as overseer.

Meanwhile membership at Turkey Run increased and the church was blessed with young families and children so that the average congregational age was in the twenties. This led the elders in May of 1999 to propose the building of an addition to the church which was to provide room for recreation, education/evangelism, and hospitality. This vision was presented to and accepted by the congregation and plans were formulated to complete this project in part by the fall of 2003 to coincide with the bicentennial memorial celebration on October 26, 2003. Ground for this project was broken in May of 2003 and by July the addition was under roof. Mike Bender gave much appreciated planning, leadership and coordination to this project with the encouragement and help of his father Wilbur Bender. The congregation happily contributed many hours of voluntary work.

To provide continued and younger leadership the need for additional ministerial help was felt. In January of 2002, Steve Swartz and Elmer Jantzi came to discern the will of the congregation. After prayer and waiting on the Lord, the Lord through the voice of the church called Mike and Ruth (Wesselhoeft) Bender to assist Robert and Bethany (Kempton) Fisher in the ministry of the Word. Mike was licensed to the ministry in January 2002.

So the history of Turkey Run goes on. Future chapters in that history will have to be written by those who follow.

Officers at Turkey Run for the year 2003:

Pastoral team- Robert Fisher, Mike Bender,
and Carl Wesselhoeft

Elders- Richard Fisher, Jerry Bennett,
Roger Hoffecker

Treasurer- Marilyn Fisher

Worship Coordinator- Mike Roy

Sunday School Coordinator- Michelle Roy

Summer Bible School Coordinator- Becky Plank

The history is above all else the history of people who sought to serve the Lord and His Kingdom in their generation and were loyal to the calling they felt the Lord of the Church gave them. Ultimately, all praise, glory and thanksgiving belongs to Him who gave the call and by His grace enabled this history to be written by the lives of His people. He who proved faithful for the past two hundred years will also prove faithful in the future.



Turkey Run Meeting House 2003