

THE HISTORY OF TURKEY RUN MENNONITE CHURCH IN OHIO

Established 1803



THE HISTORY OF TURKEY RUN MENNONITE CHURCH

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

First Edition
Researched and Recorded by
Carl and Leota Wesselhoeft 2003

Second Edition
Revised and Updated by
Rob Fisher and Nancy Hugus 2026



Table of Contents

Mennonite Beginnings	1
Native Americans	2
Westward Expansion	3
Mentions in Earlier History Books	6
Early 1800s: In-Migration of Mennonite Families	7
Neighboring Churches and Cemeteries	16
Mid-Late 1800s: Out-Migration, Decline and Determination	17
1900s: Incoming Family Connections and Growth	23
1900s: Outreach, Building and Celebrations	28
2000s: Who are we now?	34
Covenant of Membership	41
Record of Ordained Men Serving	42
1858 Deed	46
Reference List	48

Mennonite Beginnings

Mennonites are one of several groups that came from the Anabaptist movement during the European Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. The movement's most distinctive tenet is adult baptism versus infant baptism which during the Middle Ages was a foundational ritual both culturally and in the Roman Catholic church. Adult baptism is an opportunity for Christians to knowingly affirm their faith. The first occasion of this occurred near Zürich, Switzerland on January 21, 1525. In the early years, converts participated in a second baptism, which was a crime punishable by death under the legal codes of the time. The practice of "believer's baptism" contributes to the Anabaptist conviction that the church should be a community of believers who have made a public commitment of faith, and should be separate from government control. Anabaptists also believe in a way of life that opposes war and all violence in social conflict. In addition, historically they have refused to swear oaths, including those to civil authorities. For these teachings they were severely persecuted during the Reformation and beyond.

Menno Simons was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1524 in Holland. He left the Roman Catholic Church in 1536 and became a leader in the Anabaptist movement. It is for him that the Mennonites are so named.

Due to the initial brutal persecution in Switzerland and Holland, Mennonites fled to what is now Poland, Ukraine, France, Germany, and eventually to North America. Seeking religious freedom, the first Mennonites crossed the ocean in the 1660s. In 1683 the first permanent Mennonite settlement was founded alongside the Quakers in Germantown, Pennsylvania. In the 1770s Mennonites moved into and settled the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. From these two states ventured the first Mennonite pioneers into the Northwest Territory.

Native American Inhabitants

For centuries Ohio has been filled with abundant natural resources: navigable waterways, rich soils, abundant wildlife, wood, salt, flint, coal, iron, oil and gas. These resources attracted early cultures such as the Adena and Hopewell mound builders and later other Native American tribes of the Eastern Woodland Culture.

Two tribes from north of the Ohio region joined together as the Wendat in the mid-1600s to fight the Iroquois Confederacy in the Beaver Wars. Pushed from their region, the Wyandot Indians spread throughout the Ohio area during the 1700s. Tarhe Town along the Hockhocking River near the present site of Lancaster was ruled by Chief Tarhe and contained about one hundred wigwams and five hundred inhabitants. Other tribes living in the Ohio area included the Delaware, the Miami, and the Shawnee who had a large village at Chillicothe.

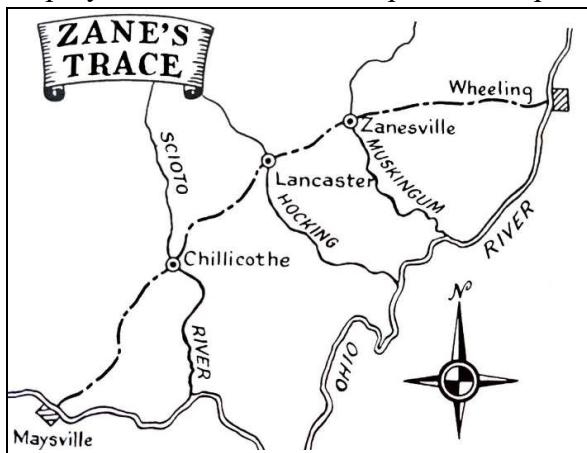
The Wyandot and other Indian tribes allied with the British during the Revolutionary War. Even after the official end of the War in 1783, Indian raids on European settlers continued in the Northwest Territory with British support. The clashes culminated in the 1794 Battle of the Fallen Timbers on the Maumee River near what is now Toledo. The Legion of the United States won a decisive victory over the Northwest Indian Confederation. The subsequent Treaty of Greenville was negotiated by General Anthony Wayne, who led the federal government delegation. Chief Tarhe and other Indian leaders signed it on August 3, 1795. In the treaty 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 1817 Treaty of the Maumee Rapids, the Indians ceded most of their land in northwestern Ohio to the state.

Westward Expansion of European Immigrants

The origin of Turkey Run Mennonite Church is part of the story of the early westward expansion of the United States by European settlers. The Northwest Territory in which the early pioneers settled was federal property from 1787 to 1803. The pioneers first lived as “squatters”, because their residence on the land preceded their obtaining title to it by several years.

Soon after the 1795 Treaty of Greenville, pioneers began to stream into the forest wilderness along the Ohio River tributaries from settlements in Pennsylvania, Virginia and Kentucky. An early point of entry into Ohio for pioneers was to float down the Ohio River on flatboat, then travel up the Hockhocking River in canoes. After examining possible locations for settlements, some chose the rolling hills of southeastern Fairfield/Perry County area in preference to the more level and fertile creek valley bottom ground. 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 order to encourage immigration into the interior, in 1797 Congress employed Ebenezer Zane to open a wide path through the woods.



It ran 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 settlers, the real conquest of the forest began. Trees had to be girdled, cut, and/or burned to clear ground for crops. Wild turkeys, deer, squirrels and raccoons destroyed these crops struggling to come to maturity among blackened tree trunks. Settlers had to protect their livestock and many times their own lives against bears, wolves and panthers. The forest was so dense that in some cases it was necessary to blaze trees from the cabin to the cornfield or the spring. "Blazing" was cutting a piece of bark off two sides of a tree to mark the direction of a path or road.

In the hills the settlers sought out springs near which they built cabins. However, it seems many times these springs were not to be trusted, for there were severe and repeated epidemics of typhoid (which is caused by contaminated water). The numerous graves of young adults and especially children bear silent witness to a heavy toll on lives. This menace, together with the difficulty of farming the hilly terrain, accounts in large measure for many of the survivors migrating on to the northwest part of what would become Ohio.

To convey an idea of pioneer life in our area in the early 1800s, following are 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.

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.

The young ones in the Terrel family, 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.

*Map of Ohio
when the
state was
admitted to
the Union
in 1803*



Significant Dates

- Northwest Territory existed 1797 – 1803.
- Fairfield County established 1800.
- Ohio attained statehood 1803 (formed out of Northwest Territory).
- Rushcreek Township set off 1803.
- Perry County formed in 1817 from Fairfield, Licking and Washington Counties.
- Monday Creek Township organized 1823.
- Village of Bremen platted 1834.
- Land deeded to Turkey Run Mennonite Church 1858.

Mentions of Turkey Run Mennonite Church in Earlier History Books

The Mennonite Church in America by John C. Wenger, 1966

Wenger wrote of Mennonites coming to Fairfield and Perry Counties after the Revolutionary War ended in 1783. “As early as 1798 the first settlers came, locating south and east of Lancaster near Bremen. At first the settlement seemed to prosper. However, the aforementioned challenges caused many to seek a different location. When land became available in northwest Ohio after 1817, quite a number of families moved to what would become Allen County near present-day Elida where farming conditions were more favorable.”

History of Fairfield and Perry Counties by A.A. Graham, 1883

Graham recorded the following about the Turkey Run Mennonite congregation in Monday Creek 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.”

History of Perry County by Clement Martzloff, 1902

According to Martzloff, “The Mennonite Church in Monday Creek is the only representative of that denomination in the county. The exact date of its origin is unknown. The 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.”

Mennonite Church History by J.S. Hartzler & Daniel Kauffman, 1902

These authors list Turkey Run Mennonite Church 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,

Brennemans and others among which the Beerys, Weltys, Huffords, Funks, Kagays and Coffmans should be mentioned.

Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference by Grant M. Stoltzfus

This 1969 publication uses the information from Hartzler & Kauffman as given above. He also quotes in his book an article by Anna Horning of Shambaugh, Iowa on “Visit to Ohio” (published in the *Herald of Truth*, Feb. 15, 1884). She had visits in Allen, Hardin and Franklin counties before going to Fairfield County. She wrote,

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 . . . There is only a small flock here, but they still have the same promise that God will be with them.

Early 1800s: In-Migration of Mennonite Families



Landis

According to the writer, John S. Umble, the first Mennonite settler in Fairfield county was Martin Landis Sr. Landis visited the area in 1798, returned with his family in 1799 and settled south of Lancaster. He built a two-story meetinghouse of hewed logs that was in use for decades by the Mennonites and also for preaching services of other denominations. This North Berne group of Mennonites is thought to have dissolved piecemeal into Dunkard and River Brethren groups.

Stemen (Stehmann)

Another Mennonite settlement began in the eastern part of Fairfield County. The 1803 beginning of Turkey Run Mennonite Church

coincides with 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 as part of proving their claim to the land. The first meetinghouse for this group also was of log construction, thought to be 24'x24' in size.

Henry (Heinrich) Stemen, son of Christian and Hannah (Baer) Stehmann, was born May 26, 1775 in Pennsylvania. He moved to Rockingham County, Virginia with his parents and there married Mary Beery, also born in 1775 as daughter of Nicholas Sr. and Mary (Keller) Beery. Henry and his bride moved back to Pennsylvania but then migrated to Ohio in 1803 with the first four of their eleven children. They settled near his wife's relatives in the west part of then Richland Township (in eastern Fairfield County). Henry was one of many who helped clear timber where Bremen and Lancaster are now located. His name appears on a list of voters in Rushcreek Township in 1804, the year after that township was formed.

In 1809 the Turkey Run/Pleasant Hill Mennonite Church took counsel and by lot chose Henry Stemen to the ministry. He shared this office with John Good, but no information has been found about Good's service. Stoltzfus wrote, "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." The 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. Stoltzfus wrote:

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.

Stemen was one of the most eloquent preachers of that day and made great inroads upon the unconverted communities. His meetings were always conducted in German during the 46 years of his ministry.

In 1835 Bishop Henry Stemen gave up his bishopric office, preaching an eloquent sermon on the occasion. That sermon has been described by Stoltzfus as “full of solemn warnings concerning the future trials of the church, but with a dominant note of victorious hope”. Stemen died of malaria only a few months later.

Henry and Mary’s son, Nicholas, was born May 22, 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 correctly 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.

Nicholas married Catherine Beery, his second cousin, born in 1802 in Virginia from where she moved to Fairfield County in 1816.

Beery (Bieri)

The Beery family contributed greatly to the establishment of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Most of the early Mennonite settlers in this area were either descendants of or related by marriage to the

immigrants, Nicholas Bieri and Abraham Bieri. These men arrived in Philadelphia in 1727 and 1736 respectively.

Nicholas Bieri's children:

1 John, 2 Magdalena, 3 Barbara, 4 Catharina, 5 Susanna,
6 Margaret, 7 **Abraham** (2nd generation), 8 **Nicholas Sr.**, 9 George.

Abraham (2nd generation), the son of immigrant Nicholas Bieri, was born 1736 in Pennsylvania. Abraham married Elizabeth Gouchenour and their children were:

1 Abraham (3rd generation), 2 Nicholas Jr., 3 John, 4 **Jacob**,
5 George, 6 Madalena, 7 Christian.

In a 1781 assessors record, Abraham (2nd gen.) was listed as a non-juror, meaning that his religious convictions kept him from taking an oath to declare his taxable property. As a result, he was taxed double on his property.

Abraham (2nd gen.) and his brothers, Nicholas and George, because of their religious convictions of non-resistance, would not serve in the military forces. For not reporting for duty, each was fined £3.10 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 rapidly filled, the sons and daughters of the original European Bieri 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 which was admitted to the Union as a free state.

Nicholas Beery Sr. (to be distinguished from his nephew Nicholas Jr.), the son of immigrant Nicholas Bieri, was born 1739 in Pennsylvania. He married Elisabeth Keller by whom he had twelve children. After her death in Virginia, he married Mary Good by whom he had four more children.

George, born in 1783, son of Nicholas Beery Sr., was the first of the Beerys to arrive in Fairfield County, Ohio. He came via the river route in 1800 as a seventeen-year old. During that summer and the following winter, he cleared land for pay by the acre. By working for others he saved enough money to enter eighty acres on Raccoon Run near Bremen in 1807. He, with Peter Stemen and others, founded the Dunkard congregation near Bremen. One of the first schools in the area was said to be held in George Beery's kitchen with Christopher Welty as the teacher. In 1834 George Beery platted and named the village of Bremen on land he owned, including a lot donated "for a school house and house for Religious Worship." George was described as "forward looking and always ready to help in anything that would help to develop the community." *Bremen: 1834-1934*.

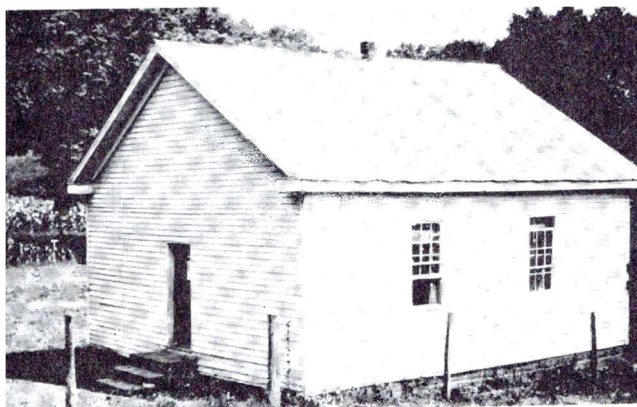
Nicholas Beery Sr. moved from Virginia in 1805 with most of his large family, joining George and two other sons already in Fairfield County. Also a daughter, Mary Beery, had married Henry Stemen while yet in Virginia and preceded her father to Ohio. A slave owner while in Virginia, Nicholas Sr. became convinced this bondage was wrong and freed his slaves before coming to Ohio. Nicholas Sr. purchased a large tract of land in Rushcreek Township. He settled on Raccoon Run, a tributary west of Rush Creek, where he built a sawmill and gristmill in 1806, the first in the township.

A cousin, Isaac Blosser, came in 1806 or 1811 with his three brothers. He was the son of John and Catharina (Beery) Blosser, grandson of Nicholas Bieri. Isaac's name is found as a Trustee in the 1821 lease of land for a school and church by Henry Stemen, his cousin's husband.

Jacob Beery, son of Abraham (2nd gen.) relocated to Ohio in 1806 with his wife Mary (Good) and their sons who had been born in Rockingham County, Virginia between 1801 and 1806. Jacob's deed to his land in Monday Creek Township is dated September 1823 and is signed by President James Monroe. The sons, Joseph, Samuel and Jacob Beery, also all homesteaded land in Monday Creek Township.

Samuel Beery was known as "Knob Sam" because he built his log house, largest in the vicinity, on a high hill west of and within sight of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church. He married Mary Moyer (known as Polly) and they had twelve children. The graves of Samuel, Polly and three of their daughters are in the Turkey Run Mennonite Church cemetery. Some of this family property was purchased from Samuel's daughter by her cousin, Jacob A. Good, who came in the early 1900s to pastor the Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Later, an acre of Knob Sam's property was deeded to the Turkey Run Mennonite Church.

Joseph Beery married Magdalena Welty in 1821 in a double wedding ceremony officiated by Henry Stemen. Joseph obtained property from his father Jacob which included the plot upon which the Turkey Run Mennonite Church and cemetery are located. On November 12, 1858 Joseph and Magdalena Beery deeded 1.14 acres to Nicholas Stemen as trustee in the Mennonite church, and to his successors in office.



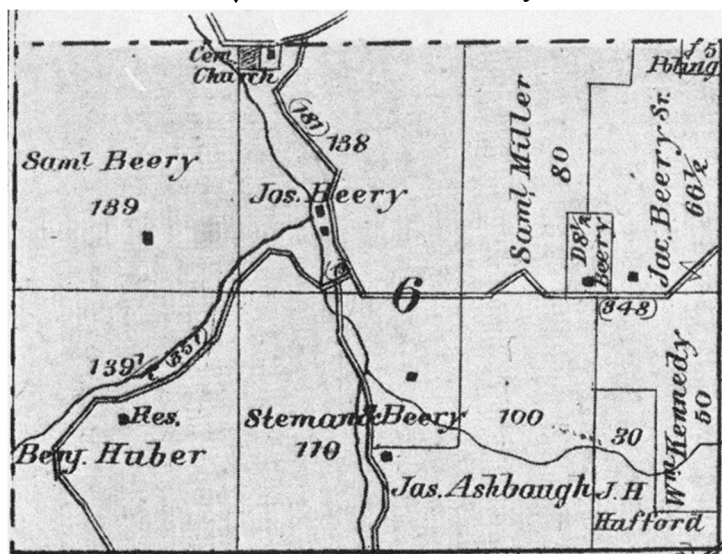
1858 Meeting House (Picture from ~ 1900)

Nicholas Stemen was the son of Henry Stemen and a cousin to Joseph Beery. Copies of these deeds may be found in the church history files.

In this same 1858 year a church building 24' x 26' was erected by the Turkey Run Mennonite congregation replacing the log structure which had been used for worship and school. Proof of a structure existing on the same site prior to the 1858 Turkey Run building was found during the 1991 building expansion. Hand hewn foundation sandstones were discovered buried south of the 1858 building, that were not part of the 1858 building. One of these stones, worn to measure 40"l x 11"w x 20"h, was engraved and now is positioned at the church entrance. That 1858 meeting house with an addition built in 1940 stands yet, contained within the present church building and functions now as the fellowship hall.



An *Atlas of Perry Co. Ohio 1875* shows the properties of Samuel Beery, Joseph Beery, the Mennonite Church and cemetery plot in
 ↓ Section 6 of Monday Creek Township.



This map also shows the farm of Benjamin Huber who was pastor of Turkey Run Mennonite Church at the time the *Atlas* was published.

Abraham Bieri's sons:

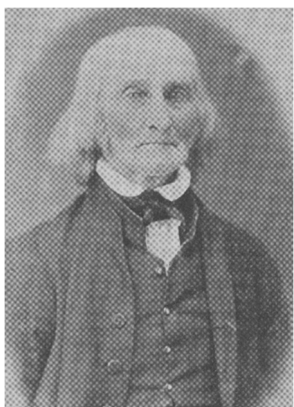
1 Abraham, 2 Nicholas Sr., 3 John, 4 Jacob, **5 George.**

George Beery was the fifth son of the pioneer immigrant, Abraham Bieri and cousin to Mary (Beery) Stemen (wife of Henry). George married Susan Funk, who was sister of Joseph Funk, the noted singing-school teacher, of Singers Glen, Rockingham County. In 1816 George and Susan with their seven children made the long trip by team and wagon over the mountains from Rockingham County, Virginia to Fairfield County, Ohio to make their home with the pioneer Turkey Run Mennonite congregation. The migrating family included George Beery's eldest daughter, Barbara, and her husband of a few months, Henry Brenneman.

Brenneman

Henry Brenneman acquired and kept in cultivation two farms, in addition to operating a sawmill and gristmill on Rush Creek. So great was the demand for his "Super-Fine-Flour" that the mill operated day and night, with his sons John and George taking twelve hour shifts when the water flowed high enough in the creek to revolve the mill's water wheel. Henry prospered and his success influenced others of his relatives to move from Virginia to Ohio including his brother, Jacob, who came in 1828.

A grandson says of his Grandfather Henry that he was a fine old gentleman. This was also the testimony of his neighbors. Henry 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 also was a strong traveler, having twice made the trip on foot over the mountains between Fairfield County, Ohio and Rockingham County, Virginia, his boyhood home.



In his book, *Ohio Mennonite Sunday Schools*, Umble states that it is practically certain that Henry Brenneman started a singing school at Pleasant Hill around 1860. Local understanding would place the singing lessons at Sugar Hill, where the Brennaman School was renamed Sugar Hill in 1941 for its location within a forest of sugar maple trees.

Henry Brenneman 1791-1866

All of the children of Henry and Barbara (Beery) Brenneman were born in Fairfield County. Among them were four brothers who became well-known in Mennonite history. All four were ordained in the Turkey Run/Pleasant Hill Mennonite Church: John M. in 1844, George in 1852, and Daniel in 1857 as ministers, and Henry B. in 1865 as deacon. John M. preached for four years, George for two years and Daniel for seven years in the Turkey Run/Pleasant Hill congregation before each moved away. John M. and George became leading bishops in the Ohio Conference. Daniel was the founder of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church in 1883. Henry B. became a deacon in the Elkhart, Indiana congregation and was a prominent Sunday School worker.

Susanna, Anna and Catherine were daughters of Henry and Barbara (Beery) Brenneman. Susanna married Henry Shenk in 1840. They had nine children, one of whom was John M. Shenk. He married Frances Good, daughter of Abraham P. and Rebecca Good, and later became a bishop. John wrote both the words and music of “Come Heaven Bound Pilgrim” naming the tune “Rebecca” for their only daughter. This hymn is included in the *Sing His Praises* hymnal compiled by and for Turkey Run Mennonite Church.

Neighboring Churches and Cemeteries

History shows that family connections in the early days could transcend religious affiliations as the pioneers helped each other establish community institutions. In an 1821 deed, Henry Stemen leased “four pole square” in the southeast part of his property “unto said Isaac Blosser, Abraham Hoffort and Peter Stemen Trustees or their successors in office a small lot of ground being a part of the Tract of Land that Henry Stemen now lives on . . . During the term of Twenty years . . . for the purpose of a German and English School House and a house of Public Worship for the Menonests and Babtists (commonly called Dunkerts).” Transcribed in *Bremen: 1834-1934*.

About 1835, the Mennonite congregation built a meetinghouse on Pleasant Hill, on the old Henry Brenneman homestead southeast of Bremen. Later this church was moved across the road just north of the present Pleasant Hill cemetery. In 1858, the year in which Joseph and Magdalena Beery deeded land, a building was erected at the Turkey Run location. Log-cabin churches are thought to have preceded these buildings in both locations.

Stoltzfus states in his book, *Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference*, that “services alternated between Turkey Run and the nearby Pleasant Hill Meetinghouse.” This suggests that these two groups were regarded as one congregation. Since roads often were impassable, having two meetinghouses and gathering in each on alternate Sundays would allow more people to attend regularly.

The Turkey Run Mennonite Church grounds were used as a burial place long before the 1858 building. The earliest legible inscriptions are on graves of four children: Joseph Huber who died in 1827 age thirteen months, his brother David Huber in 1835 age eighteen days, Catherine Beery who died in 1836 age twelve weeks, and her brother Daniel Beery in 1838 age twenty-one months.

The earliest legible grave inscription at the Sugar Hill cemetery dates back to David Funk who died in 1831, age one month. Three other early graves are of Barbara (Beery) Brenneman, Henry's wife, and two of their young children. All three died of smallpox in 1838. The people at Sugar Hill were part of the Turkey Run Mennonite congregation since there was only a school located there, also known as the Brenneman School.

The earliest still legible gravestone at the Pleasant Hill cemetery dates back to 1863 for Barbara Kagay aged 67 years. Of the three cemeteries, the oldest grave markers that still could be read in the

Year 2000
are in the
Turkey Run
Mennonite
Church
cemetery.
(pictured here)



Mid-Late 1800s: Out-Migration, Decline and Determination

The middle years of the 1800's saw a significant out-migration of Fairfield and Perry county Mennonites to northwest Ohio. Records show that in the 1830s John Stemen, then Christian Stemen, then Peter Stemen, Deacon in the Pleasant Hill church, all moved to Allen County purchasing land near the present-day Salem church. On came Peter Stemen, Jr. and other Fairfield County neighbors. In 1841 Peter Stemen's father, Christian Stemen, migrated with additional relatives and friends. All these brought their families and upon arrival in Allen County at once organized a congregation. This movement was a severe loss to the Fairfield-Perry Mennonite settlement.

There were multiple reasons for this exodus from southeast to northwest Ohio; a key one being economic. With the completion of the Ohio Canal in 1832, the hilly farms of the early Mennonite and Dunkard settlers no longer were so well situated for the growing and marketing of crops as the more fertile and easily farmed lowlands now nearer the canals. However, to obtain land more suited to agriculture was suddenly difficult as land prices rose sharply. Some of the settlers in southeast Fairfield and Perry counties were able to sell their hill farms and buy land near Canal Winchester where a Mennonite congregation existed for about 50 years. Others were drawn to cheaper and more easily cultivated land farther north.

Another aspect to consider is the frame of mind of the frontier people. They had come from the east looking for opportunities, land and often also eager to get away from the institution of slavery. New lands and opportunities were continuing to open up to the north and west. The people had an optimistic and adventurous spirit and had not yet developed a farmer's rootedness to soil and home. Having left Virginia or Pennsylvania not long before, the hills in the Fairfield-Perry landscape became for many something of a way-station in their quest for opportunities and the wide open spaces of the west.

There also was the beginning of disagreement about the language spoken during church gatherings. A strong conservative group preferred to keep the familiar German language while many others thought the preaching should be in English. Today it is difficult for us to appreciate the significance of the language problem. We must remember that these pioneers were, at the most, second or third generation immigrants from Europe. In the absence of public schools, immigrants' languages were perpetuated in the family setting. Furthermore, there were at the frontier many others fluent in the German language such as the Lutherans, the German Reformed and

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

Those out-migrations of family groups and leaders continued for many years. In 1853 preacher George Brenneman, who was ministering to the Pleasant Hill/Turkey Run Mennonite congregation, moved north and with him several families of friends and relatives. His brother, John M. Brenneman, had been ordained to the oversight of the congregation by Bishop Stemen, but in 1855 he also moved to Allen County. There Bishop Stemen formally installed John M. as bishop of that congregation. It was during the ministry tenure of their brother, Daniel Brenneman, begun in 1857, that Joseph Beery deeded the land and the 1858 Turkey Run meetinghouse was constructed. When John F. Funk of Elkhart, Indiana visited our area, the congregation was still gathering in the two locations of Pleasant Hill and Turkey Run on alternate Sundays and most of the preaching was done by “the youthful, but eminently able pastor, Daniel Brenneman”. In 1864 Preacher Daniel moved away to Elkhart County, Indiana.

During the Civil War (1861-1865) both the North and the South drafted men in a broad age range into the army to fight for their respective causes. While members of the mainline denominations followed the call to arms as their ancestors had during the Revolution, Mennonites and Dunkards suffered mistreatment because of their non-resistance. In October 1862 exemption for conscientious objectors was enacted. This law provided for hiring substitutes for service by paying conscription fees of \$500 into the public treasury. As Mennonites were drafted, they became divided on the question of hiring substitutes or paying the fine or exemption fee. Some yielded and enlisted, some paid the conscription fee but were subject to scornful actions, others fled to the Ohio Mennonite communities in Allen, Putnam and Van Wert counties.

The following account concerning Abraham P. Good is taken from the *Huber Family History*. It is recorded here to remind us of our Anabaptist heritage of non-resistance.

Abraham was one of those who helped people escape from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia during the Civil War. One account is given of a group who rebelled against fighting, and at least ninety Dunker Brethren and Mennonites who 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.

Abraham led this group heading north-west over steep mountains to the Potomac River, where they were apprehended by the 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 escapees gave up their mounts, but they carried no guns.

This group was sent back to Staunton, Virginia, herded on a train and sent to Richmond, Virginia to be imprisoned. As they were called before the examiner for the office of the War Department and stating their reasons why they do not take up arms, the officer became impressed and commanded the Dunkard and Mennonite brethren to be set free.

John M. Shenk, their son-in-law, related the following story regarding Abraham and Rebecca's reason for leaving Virginia.

Abe Good 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 would 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 second officer arrived, he said "Mr. Good, what is the problem here?" Abe said, "This man has come to take my life because I have 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 with Confederate officers, Abe and Rebecca Good decided they must leave Virginia. In mid-1864, they with three other families loaded a wagon with provisions and traveled over the mountains by night until they crossed the line into Union territory. The Abraham P. Good family came on to Fairfield/Perry County area, but after a few years moved to the Allen County Mennonite group. Four decades later, their youngest son returned to Perry County.

In 1865 Bishop George Brenneman was called back to his home congregation to conduct an ordination service at Turkey Run Mennonite Church. The lots for minister fell on Christian C. Beery and Noah Brenneman, and for deacon on Henry B. Brenneman, brother of Bishops John M. and George Brenneman and of Preacher Daniel Brenneman. These three newly elected candidates were ordained at Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Deacon Henry B. Brenneman moved to Elkhart, Indiana only 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 Beery also soon left Turkey Run Mennonite Church for work in a growing Mennonite community in Kent County, Michigan. Preacher Noah Brenneman moved to Franklin County, Ohio so that Turkey Run Mennonite Church was again left leaderless.

Benjamin Huber was born in 1830 in Perry County. He united with the Mennonite church early in his life. In 1858 Benjamin married Mary Catherine McCormick and they had seven children. About 1855 he was ordained deacon and in 1870 he was ordained to the ministry at Turkey Run Mennonite Church. He served faithfully as the only minister for 36 years. Huber was conservative and preached only in German. During his tenure there was a growing desire in the congregation for visits from English speaking ministers. Huber also farmed ground directly south of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church as shown in the *Atlas of Perry Co. Ohio 1875*. One of their daughters, Malinda, married and moved away, but later returned with her husband to serve Turkey Run Mennonite Church.



Benjamin and Mary Huber 1896

John F. Funk visited the congregation again in 1879. Funk preached in various churches in English, spending ten days in the community. The Fairfield-Perry Mennonite congregation at that time numbered between forty and fifty members. Interest was so great during Funk's visit that the church buildings were filled to capacity. One night the crowd at Turkey Run Mennonite Church 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 preacher Benjamin Huber and various visiting ministers like C.B. Brenneman and Moses Brenneman of Allen County, and J.J. Warye

and Christian Byler of West Liberty. When Bishop Henry Yoder visited Fairfield and Franklin counties in 1885-86 he 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)

1900s: Incoming Family Connections and Growth

When Benjamin Huber died in February 1907, only eight members remained of congregation. J.J. Warye of West Liberty conducted funeral services for Preacher Huber and remained a few days to hold meetings during which seven people confessed Christ. B.B. Stoltzfus began making regular trips that year to preach at Turkey Run and Pleasant Hill. In 1908 he was ordained and moved to Perry County. His untiring efforts stemmed the decline and increased the membership. However, as with other leaders, for the sake of his family, Stoltzfus left for northern Ohio in 1909. Stoltzfus, Warye and other ministers did continue to visit the congregation, conducting evangelistic services and Sunday school meetings for years

At that time God's call came to Jacob and Malinda (Huber) Good of Allen County to take up the leadership at Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Malinda was the youngest of Benjamin Huber's children. Jacob, born in 1872 in Allen County, was the youngest of the ten children of Abraham P. and Rebecca (Rhodes) Good. This is the Abe Good family that fled from Virginia to Ohio under the duress of the Civil War as previously recorded. Jacob and Malinda married in 1893 and had seven children.

When Jacob Good considered the call to ministry at the age of 38, he was a farmer with a young family. A granddaughter remembers his account of how he knew God's leading. Observing a bird sitting nearby, Jacob asked God to confirm his call by the direction the bird would fly when it took off. Well, the bird flew southeast in the direction of Turkey Run, and Jacob felt in his heart that God had confirmed the call. The significant influence of this decision and the ministry of Jacob and Malinda Good and their descendants has been evident for a century at Turkey Run Mennonite Church.

Jacob Good left his farm in Allen County in the care of his eldest son, Pearley E. Good, then age 16, and came to Turkey Run Mennonite Church in 1910. He purchased from his second cousin, Levina Beery Cummans, 45 acres of the farm formerly owned by her parents, "Knob" Sam and Mary "Polly" Beery. Levina's paternal grandmother, Mary Good Beery, was a sister of Jacob's maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Good Rhodes. Both these women were sisters of Bishop Daniel Good of Rockingham County, Virginia.



In 1915 Jacob A. Good was ordained to the ministry at Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Under his leadership the church membership 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 of Turkey Run Mennonite Church and for many years they also selflessly served the Lord.

Jacob and Malinda Good with granddaughter Garnieta ~ 1935

In 1939 two families moved from West Liberty, Ohio to the Turkey Run area, adding to the church membership and leadership. Ira and Laura (Kanagy) Plank came with their five sons, as well as Roy and Fannie (Bontrager) Detweiler. Roy served as Deacon at Turkey Run Mennonite Church until 1955 during the tenure of two ministers.

After the death of Jacob Good, Turkey Run Mennonite Church called William and Fern Miller from Meadville, Pennsylvania. Will and Fern (Yoder) Miller married in 1934 and reared two children. He was ordained as minister in 1945 and served as such for a decade. William became too progressive in some ways for the congregation at that time, and so was asked to step down in 1955. The Millers continued to live in the Bremen area, but both the Will Miller and Roy Detweiler families left to attend St. John's Mennonite Chapel, a small mission church in the Hocking Hills area.



Will and Fern Miller

In 1955 two more families came to the Turkey Run Mennonite congregation from Allen County in northwestern Ohio: Marion and



Marion Good

Erma (Sibold) Good and also Norman and Clara (Hartman) Brunk. Marion was the son of Pearley E. Good and a grandson of minister Jacob A. Good. Marion and Erma married in 1945 and had nine children. Marion Good was ordained as minister in 1956 and Norman Brunk was ordained as deacon in 1958.

During his tenure, Marion worked to implement more conservative standards among the members than had been practiced historically. In particular, Marion pressed the congregation to join the Non-Conference movement which began in the 1950s in the Mennonite Church. This was a much more conservative direction than most of the Turkey Run church members were comfortable with going. Realizing the congregation was not willing to follow his lead, Marion Good with Norman Brunk, their families and a third family, left in 1963 to establish Carbon Hill Mennonite Church in Carbon Hill.

Doris Good was fourth of Ellis and Kathryn Good's five daughters, and a granddaughter of Jacob A. Good. She married Donald Plank in 1951 and they had three children. Donald was the fifth son of Ira and Laura Plank (who came in 1939). He was ordained at Turkey Run Mennonite Church in 1964 and preached three years. Donald resigned in 1967 and then attended a Mennonite church near Gallipolis, Ohio.

The Ohio Conference, to which Turkey Run Mennonite Church belonged, had begun moving in a more progressive direction than the congregation was ready to accept. Under Donald Plank's leadership, the church changed affiliation in 1964 from the Ohio Conference to the Conservative Mennonite Conference, which was a better fit with the congregation's practices at that time. The congregation since then has supported

with prayer and finances the renamed
Rosedale
Network of
Churches,
Rosedale Bible
College, and
Rosedale
International.



Donald & Doris Plank with daughter Donna ~ 1954

Leota Good was the second daughter of Ellis and Kathryn (Stemen) Good, and a granddaughter of Jacob A. Good. She married Carl Wesselhoeft in 1952 and they had seven children. Carl had emigrated from Germany via Sweden to Canada as a farm worker after World War II. Through his Mennonite host family, he came to know the Lord and began to attend the Ontario Mennonite Bible School where he met fellow student Leota. Additional study and training was



completed at Eastern Mennonite College in Virginia. In 1955 Carl was ordained and they were commissioned at Turkey Run Mennonite Church for missionary service in Somalia under the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions. They served in Somalia for a decade, organizing a school and medical service, and offering the spiritual truths of our one true God.

Carl & Leota Wesselhoeft ~ 1968

Upon the Wesselhoefts' return from Somalia in 1966, Carl and Donald Plank became co-pastors of Turkey Run Mennonite Church for two years. Carl then carried the load as sole minister for nine years. When Rob Fisher was called in 1976, they served as co-pastors until Carl's retirement in 2004. Carl also gave additional service to the Conservative Mennonite Conference as a member of the Ministers Fellowship Committee (1978-1980), the Rosdale Bible College Board (1989-1996), and the Conference Executive Board (1997-2003).

Marcella Good was the oldest daughter of Ellis and Kathryn Good. She married Dale Fisher in 1948. Dale and Marcella were the first to have their wedding in the Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Previously in the community, marriage vows were made in the bride's home or in the officiating minister's house.

Robert Fisher is the fourth of Dale and Marcella Fisher's six children, a grandson of Freeman Fisher (who came to teach in the first Summer Bible School), a great-grandson of Jacob A. Good, and a great-great grandson of both Abraham P. Good and Benjamin Huber. In 1981 Rob married Bethany Kempton and they have three children. Bethany's mother, Lois, attended Summer Bible School as a child and is in the photograph on page 30.



Rob and Bethany Fisher 2022

In 1976 Robert Fisher was licensed to the ministry at Turkey Run Mennonite Church and ordained on Easter Sunday March 26, 1978. He served as co-pastor with Carl Wesselhoeft and later Mike Bender. Rob continued in the capacity of pastor until his own retirement in 2016. During this time, he also contributed to the Conservative Mennonite Conference as a member of the Rosedale Mennonite Missions Board (1995-2002) and then the Rosedale Bible College Board (2008-2015). With quiet graciousness his service continues. In 2017 Rob took on the position of Overseer for the Turkey Run Mennonite congregation which he still holds, and in 2023 he began a three-year term as Chairman of the Rosedale Historical Committee.

1900s: Outreach, Building and Celebrations

Sunday School

The Sunday school movement in the United States developed during the early 1800s. The initial concept was to teach literacy and morals to factory children of poor classes, most of whom worked. Classes were held on Sundays because it was the only free day in a six day work week. As public education became available, the Sunday school

focus changed to providing systematic Bible study, particularly for the unchurched. Groups such as the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union and the American Tract Society organized for this purpose outside the traditional church structure.

Protestant denominations began to form their own Sunday schools in the 1850s. The first permanent Sunday school in the “old” Mennonite Church was begun in the South Union congregation near West Liberty, Ohio by Preacher David Plank in May 1863 with the consent of Bishop Jacob Kanagy and the unanimous vote of the congregation. During the decade 1865-75, Sunday schools were started in every state with Mennonite congregations in large part due to the urging and support of John F. Funk and John S. Coffman.

Oral tradition at one time held that a Sunday School was organized at Pleasant Hill and Turkey Run even earlier in 1860, but there are no written records to support this idea. Author A.A. Graham wrote in 1883 that there was a Sunday School at Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Umble lists the following names as either early Sunday school officers or teachers: George Stemen, Nicholas Stemen, Joseph Beery, Christian Beery, Henry Brenneman, Mary Beery, Noah Brenneman, and Benjamin Huber.

A “Sunday School Convention” was started in the 1930s by the three churches that existed then in Monday Creek Township to recognize the importance of Sunday School. Ebenezer Baptist, Turkey Run Mennonite, and Maxville United Methodist Church each took a turn hosting this annual gathering that was held the first Sunday in May. A noon potluck lunch was followed by a joint service during which each church gave a presentation. Recitations and special songs came before a short message given by the host preacher. An offering was collected and sent to a mission agency. A record book of these gatherings was kept and circulated among the churches for the 80 years of this cooperative event.

Summer Bible School

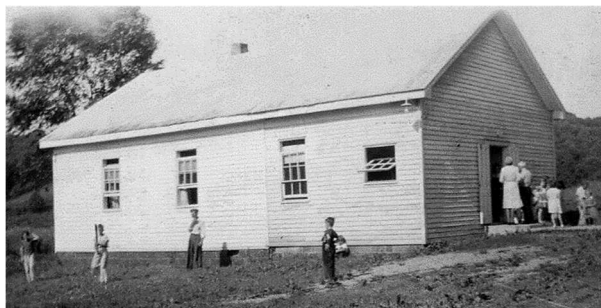
In 1938 several brethren came to the area from West Liberty, Ohio searching for a place to begin a Summer Bible School. Two of the brethren were Joe A. Yoder and Freeman Fisher. When they arrived at the parking lot of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church they came across minister Jacob A. Good who had felt the leading of the Lord to go “for some reason” 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, Jacob Good responded with “What about the church building?”



Turkey Run Mennonite Church Summer Bible School 1940

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 they stayed in community homes and taught classes for kindergarteners through adults every forenoon. The Summer Bible School continues to the present time with some changes, but the central feature is that the Bible is taught at every level.

In 1940, under Jacob Good's leadership, a 24' x 15' addition to the 1858 building was constructed at the north entry to make room for



Sunday school and Summer Bible School classes.

Building expansion has occurred again several times since for the same joyful reason.

Sewing

The Women's Sewing Circle also has been an important ministry of Turkey Run Mennonite Church.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s when most of the area found making a livelihood difficult, Bertha Good Norris (daughter of Jacob A. Good) while ironing with her flat iron, thought, "Surely there



Bertha Good Norris

is someone poorer than we are who we could help." The idea came to her that if each of the women brought one dime, they could buy cloth

for the backing of a quilt and with their own scraps of material they could piece a quilt, and so they began. One quilt indeed was made that year and donated to the Mennonite Old People's Home at Rittman, Ohio – the first of many. The Sewing group still meets in the autumn, winter and spring. Many hundreds of comforters, kits and bandages have gone to various parts of the world through different relief agencies, chiefly Mennonite Central Committee and Christian Aid Ministries of Ohio.

Missions

In earlier decades, Turkey Run Mennonite Church was on the receiving end of outreach efforts by Mennonites from other Ohio communities. Now we are excited to be able to send people and financial support to missions near and far. In recent decades Turkey Run Mennonite Church has supported various Wycliffe Bible translation workers, the world-wide media ministry of Heralds of Hope and other international ministries. In the 1960s member families took turns monthly dropping off tracts to homes in Logan on Sunday afternoons. Another monthly Sunday afternoon activity for some years were visits to the nursing home in Logan, again shared among the member families. Some of the church men took turns conducting a weekly service in the Perry County jail for several years. A number of our young adults have participated in short-term international missions through REACH, a one-year discipleship and missions program begun in 1992 by Rosedale International.

There also were and are many who serve faithfully “at home”. Most amazing is that the ministers of Turkey Run Mennonite Church have been and continue to be bi-vocational, that is working an occupation full-time to support their families while giving innumerable hours to preaching, teaching and administration in the church. The multitude of other jobs such as teaching the children, maintaining the cemetery and grounds all are completed voluntarily by the church members.

Celebrations and Building

On the basis of the founding of Turkey Run Mennonite Church in 1803, the congregation celebrated its 175th anniversary in 1978.

J.C. Wenger of Goshen, Indiana, a well-known preacher, professor and author in the Mennonite faith, spoke during the three services held on September 16 and 17. A fellowship dinner and hymn sing were part of the Sunday celebration.

Meeting House 1986



The above photo shows the “lean-to” rooms added on the south side of the building in 1966, the second addition to the original 1858 structure. This section was replaced 25 years later in the next building expansion. In the minutes of the Elders meeting of March 21, 1985 this entry is found: “Proposed starting a building fund.” And that is what was done. Enough financial resources had accumulated by 1991 to begin building a new sanctuary. Think of it! Until then the church building had not even had indoor plumbing.

The Lord gave the congregation a spirit of unity and a will to work so that the greatest part of the labor was contributed by the members of Turkey Run Mennonite Church. Mike Bender of the congregation served as building coordinator. Help in this endeavor also came from the Conservative Mennonite churches; their many volunteers and financial aid were greatly appreciated. While this may be called the third addition, the result more than doubled the space in which the congregation could gather. The 40’ x 90’ addition included a

sanctuary and spacious foyer and was built as an adjoining “L” to the original 1858 building which became our fellowship hall. In the fall of 1991 the first service was held in the new sanctuary.

Meeting House 1991



Since the original 1.14 acres gift in 1858 by Joseph Beery, the land bordering the church and cemetery had continued in private ownership. In 1994 Carl and Leota Wesselhoeft gave three acres of their adjoining property that surrounded Turkey Run Mennonite Church. In 2022 Caroline Plank gifted $\frac{3}{4}$ acre from her property to allow ongoing use of the entire church parking area.

Meanwhile, in the 1990s, membership at Turkey Run Mennonite Church increased and the church was blessed with young families. This led the elders in May 1999 to propose constructing another significant addition (the fourth) to the church building to provide more room for recreation, education/evangelism, and hospitality. The congregation again accepted this vision and challenge.

Plans were formulated with the goal to complete the project by October 2003 to coincide with the coming bicentennial celebration. Ground for this project was broken in May 2003 and by July the 40' x 60' multipurpose room was under roof and a 24' x 15' north entry/classroom extended the 1940 addition. Mike Bender gave much appreciated planning, leadership and coordination to this project with

the encouragement and help of his father, Wilbur Bender. The congregation again contributed many hours of volunteer work.

Meeting House 2004



The Turkey Run Mennonite Church bicentennial celebration was held on October 25 and 26, 2003. Anniversary events on that Saturday included hayrides and other outdoor activities before the evening Gathered Worship. Members of the congregation wore period costumes while portraying some of their own ancestors during storytelling and historic readings. Myron Augsberger was the speaker at the Saturday evening and Sunday morning worship services. In his life he served as a pastor, evangelist, professor, author and former president of the Eastern Mennonite College. Carl and Leota Wesselhoeft researched and wrote the first edition of this *History of Turkey Run Mennonite Church* as part of the bicentennial memorial.



2000s: Who are we now?

Our Leaders

As well as expanding the building, a need was felt during the turn of this century for additional younger ministerial leadership. In January 2002 Steve Swartz as Overseer and Elmer Jantzi came in to discern

the will of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church people. After prayer and waiting on the Lord, the congregation called Mike and Ruth (Wesselhoeft) Bender to the ministry of the Word. Ruth is the daughter of Carl and Leota (Good) Wesselhoeft, a great-granddaughter of Jacob A. Good, and a great-great-granddaughter of Benjamin Huber. Mike moved from Hartville in northeast Ohio to marry Ruth in 1978. They are the parents of nine children.

Mike Bender was licensed to preach in 2002 and ordained in 2006. Initially, he served as co-pastor with two men: Carl Wesselhoeft until his retirement in 2004, and with Rob Fisher until his retirement in 2016. After the retirement of the two pastors, Mike carried the load as the only pastor for five years. To assist, the elders and retired pastor took regular turns with the preaching schedule in addition to their other church duties.



Mike and Ruth Bender 2022

Todd Smith married Alasyn Snouffer (who grew up in Turkey Run Mennonite Church) in 2003 and they became members officially in 2006. They have two children. The ordination of Todd Smith was transferred from another denomination in 2020 as Minister of Evangelism, a new role within Turkey Run Mennonite Church. This however only formalized the outreach ministry to which he is called and in which he boldly shares the Gospel.

Jim and Melissa (England) Miller moved from Texas to Lancaster, Ohio in 2017 and found their way to Turkey Run Mennonite Church in 2020. Melissa grew up in Fairfield County, while Jim hails from

California. They married in 1988 and have three children. The Millers are one of several families who in the 2000s have come from other denominations to Turkey Run Mennonite Church. For here can be found a treasure: a community of believers who are firm in their faith



Jim and Melissa Miller 2026

and stongly supportive of one another. In 2021 an effort was made again to discern the thoughts of the congregation about another minister.

Through this process the Lord called to Jim and Melissa Miller. Jim began serving in leadership in 2022 and was ordained in 2023.

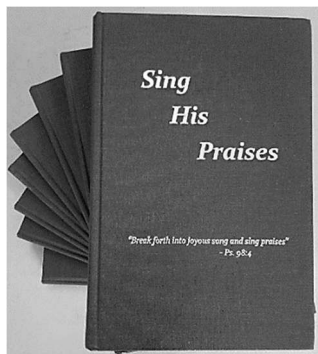
Our Music

When the Mennonite church was forming in Europe, religious music was sung in a slow unison style. The Protestant Reformation of the 1500s brought not only a rediscovery of doctrine, but also a new freedom of musical expression. The words of the many hymns written at that time served to teach and preserve the important doctrines of the Church. The hymn music written was a new venture in harmony.

Joseph Funk, a member of the Mennonite church in Virginia, was an enthusiast of three- and four-part harmony. He taught singing schools, composed and published during the first half of the 1800s. On these foundations, the music of the Mennonite church in North America is known for its rich tradition of four-part, acapella singing.

The gift of wonderful musical talent flows through the historic family lines at Turkey Run Mennonite Church and is shared in the weekly Gathered Worship, the uplifting hymn sings and other special events. For decades, acapella singing was the only format practiced. Musical instruments were first brought into the worship time in the 1970s.

As new songs and musical styles were introduced there was a desire to preserve in usable form the music sung throughout two centuries at Turkey Run Mennonite Church. To this end the Elders presented a proposal to the congregation in 2017 to compile our own hymnbook. The congregation voted approval of the idea. The massive size of such a project was rather daunting, and it was not until 2020 that a hymnal committee formed and Donna Fisher agreed to serve as project manager. Through their great efforts, our *Sing His Praises* hymnal was published in 2022 and placed in the church pews the first Sunday of 2023.



Our Building

Once again the membership at Turkey Run Mennonite Church has increased in the early 2000s and the church is blessed with young families. Several believers are baptized in the Turkey Run creek most years, adding to the membership.

In 2017 the elders proposed and the congregation approved the addition of classrooms to our current building. A percent of the weekly offering was set aside in a building fund for the seven years during which various plans were designed and submitted to the regulators for approval. The actual construction of a 36' x 40' west extension and a 24' x 41' east extension each for classrooms and restrooms took place in phases throughout 2024-2025 with final inspection approval granted in early 2026.

For this project we again were blessed to have Mike Bender serve as building coordinator, in addition to his and other members of the

congregation giving hours of hands-on labor. Think of it! Eight members meeting faithfully in 1906 grown to the need for five building additions over the course of 80 years. May these physical facilities provide a place where the faithful serve to further the kingdom of God Who has granted us this abundance.

Meeting House 2026



Our Lifestyle

In the 1900s a renewed interest in the faith of early Anabaptists was fostered by the scholarly work of both Mennonite and non-Mennonite historians. This activity offered fresh insights for renewing church life while also accenting the disparity between 16th-century Anabaptist ideals and the North American Mennonite beliefs and practices. Now, instead of withdrawing from the world as did previous generations, Mennonites in these days are finding new ways to interact with the world in witness and service.

At the same time during the second half of the 20th and into the 21st century, it must be said that Mennonite cultural distinctiveness is steadily disappearing. While the individual dress and home accoutrements of the Turkey Run Mennonite Church members are becoming more like the society around us, our Covenant of Membership stands firm in the core tenants of the Mennonite faith.

A practice begun in 1996, each year the baptized followers are asked to read and sign in pledge the statement of belief which is found on the next page.



Interior of 1858 Meeting House ~ 1980.

Some yet remember the admonition painted on the wall at the front of the 1858 sanctuary: "Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness". The history of Turkey Run Mennonite Church is above all else a history of people who have sought to serve the Lord and His Kingdom in their generation and remain loyal to the calling they felt the Lord of the Church gave them. Ultimately, all praise, glory and thanksgiving belong to Him who gives the call and who by His grace enables His church history to be written through the lives of His people. Our God Who proved faithful for the past two hundred (plus) years will prove faithful in the future.

Turkey Run Mennonite Church Covenant of Membership

Realizing my guilt before God, I have confessed my sins to Him, and received the Lord Jesus Christ, who bore my sins on the cross, as my personal Savior, and I acknowledge Him as Lord of all my life.

I accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, and my final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

I trust in the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives in my heart, to keep me, guide me, and lead me in the way of purity and holiness.

I willingly have submitted to water baptism as a symbol of identification with Him, and as a symbol of being baptized into His body.

I will spend time regularly in Bible reading, prayer, and reflection concerning my personal life, relationships, attitudes, and speech as measured by the example and teaching of Jesus.

I recognize my responsibility to be regular in my attendance at the services of the church and to pray regularly for the work of this church, for its pastors, elders, and members, that the witness of all may be to the glory of God and to the salvation of souls.

I recognize all our earthly goods are a trust from the Lord. I will seek to avoid excess in my standard of living, help others in need, and give to the work of the Lord a tithe or more.

I will work to avoid over-extension of myself in the daily activities of life, to have time to give to the life of the church. This will include sharing my gifts and volunteering my abilities and services, practicing hospitality to all.

I accept singleness, marriage and children as gifts from God. I believe marriage is permanent, and accept God's order for families, and male/female roles.

I will attempt to be a peacemaker in all areas of life. I commit myself to reconciliation in situations of strife and misunderstanding.

I recognize the congregation as a community of God's people, and will seek to care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of each one as I have opportunity.

I will be accountable to the congregation, and those God places in leadership.

Record of Ordained Men Known to Have Served the Turkey Run / Pleasant Hill Mennonite Church

Henry Stemen 1775-1855	Minister 1809-1820	Bishop 1820-1855
John Good (? - ?)	Minister 1809-?	
Peter Stemen 1771-1844	Deacon 1809-?	
John M. Brenneman 1816-1895	Minister 1844-1848	Bishop 1849-1855
George Brenneman 1821-1889	Minister 1852-1853	Bishop 1854
Daniel Brenneman 1834-1919	Minister 1857-1864	
Nicholas Stemen 1802-1878	Deacon 1858-1878	
Christian Beery 1831-1900	Minister 1865-1866	
Noah Brenneman 1831-1914	Minister 1865-1866	
Henry B. Brenneman 1831-1887	Deacon 1865-1866	
Benjamin Huber 1830-1907	Deacon ~1855-1869	Minister 1870-1906
Nicholas Stemen 1829-1896	Deacon 1887-?	
Daniel F. Beery 1842-1911	Deacon ? - ?	
Ben B. Stoltzfus 1861-1931	Minister 1907-1909	

Record of Ordained Men Known to Have Served the Turkey Run Mennonite Church

Jacob A. Good 1872-1945	Minister 1915-1945	
Roy Detweiler 1898-1980	Deacon 1939-1955	
William A. Miller 1897-1970	Minister 1945-1955	
Marion E. Good 1922-1997	Minister 1956-1963	
Norman H. Brunk 1924-1987	Deacon 1958-1963	
Carl J. Wesselhoeft 1929-2023	Somalia Mission 1955-1965	Minister 1966-2004
Donald W. Plank 1928-2021	Minister 1964-1967	
Robert J. Fisher 1952-	Minister 1976-2016	Overseer 2017-present
J. Michael Bender 1958-	Minister 2002-present	
Todd A. Smith 1973-	Minister of Evangelism 2020-present	
James E. Miller 1964-	Minister 2023-present	

Mennonite Leadership Structure

Titus 1:5-10

Leadership among North American Mennonite churches in the 1800s and early 1900s was a threefold ministerial order. Traditionally there was one bishop, one or more preachers, and one or two deacons, depending on the size of the congregation. All three offices were lifetime ordinations.

Bishops served as spiritual leaders, providing guidance and oversight to congregations. Mennonite bishops administered the ordinances of baptism, communion, ordination, and were responsible for church discipline. The bishop also presided at meetings, shared pastoral tasks with preachers and deacons, and kept church records.

Deacons focused on care of the congregation such as first described in Acts 6:2-5. Their duties included service to needy members, visiting the sick, helping to arbitrate difficulties between members, reading Scripture and offering prayer at worship gatherings, and assisting in baptism, communion and feet-washing observances.

In the mid-1900s, this threefold leadership pattern began to change among Mennonites in the United States. Congregations began calling pastors to replace preachers. The office of deacon declined in usage, though it is still recognized by our conference. The office of bishop was renamed as a superintendent or overseer in many conferences. The Conservative Mennonite Conference made official their transition from bishops to overseers in 1986, in part to encourage a more collaborative leadership structure than previously existed.

The selection of an overseer is made by the Turkey Run Mennonite Church leadership but is subject to approval by the Rosedale Network Executive Board. The overseer serves as a pastor to the pastor, as an advisor to the leadership team and the congregation, and as a link between the congregation and the Rosedale Network of Churches.

Record of Bishops / Overseers Known to Have Served the Turkey Run Mennonite Church

While in the Ohio Mennonite Conference (begun 1843)

Roy S. Koch	19?? – 1965	Bishop
of South Union Mennonite Church, West Liberty, Ohio		

While in the Conservative Mennonite Conference (begun 1910)
now known as Rosedale Network of Churches (renamed in 2023)

Alvin Swartz	1965	Bishop
of Riverside Mennonite Church, Au Gres, Michigan		
Andrew Farmwald	1966	Bishop
of United Bethel Mennonite Church, Plain City, Ohio		
David Showalter	1967 – 1973	Bishop
of United Bethel Mennonite Church, Plain City, Ohio		
Mark Peachy	1974 – 1977	Bishop
of Shiloh Mennonite Church, London, Ohio		
<i>None</i>	1978 - 1983	
Willard R. Mayer	1984 – 1987	Bishop
of Shiloh Mennonite Church, London, Ohio		
Melvin L. Shetler	1988 – 2001	Bishop/ Overseer
of Maple City Chapel, Goshen, Indiana		
Alvin L. Yoder	1994 – 1997	Overseer
of Shiloh Mennnonite Church, London, Ohio		
Steve P. Swartz	1998 – 2012	Overseer
of London Christian Fellowship, London, Ohio		
Melvin L. Shetler	2013 – 2016	Overseer
of Maple City Chapel, Goshen, Indiana		
Robert J. Fisher	2017 – present	Overseer
of Turkey Run Mennonite Church, Logan, Ohio		

1858 Deed

As found in Perry County Records Office in Book 3 Page 581

Know all Men by these presents that we Joseph Perry and
 Magdalena Perry of the County of Perry in the State of Ohio on Council
 relations of the sum of one dollar in hand paid by Nicholas
 Stearns Elder of the said Mononite, to have and to hold unto the said
 said and do hereby grant and convey unto the said Nicholas Stearns
 Elder so expressed and his successors in office to be used by the
 said Mononite Church as a Meeting house site and Rectory or
 Parsonage ground, the following premises situate in the County of
 Perry in the State of Ohio and in the District of Lehigh and
 bounded as follows: Commencing at the North west corner
 of the East half of the North west quarter of section No 6, Twp.
 in Town ship No 14, Range No 16, Section from thence
 East 1/2 bearing one and a half rods thence south 8 1/2 degrees
 and a half Rods thence north 1/2 to twenty one and a half rods
 thence North 8 1/2 degrees and a half rods to the place beginning
 containing about one acre and twenty two and a half rods be
 the ground more or less to have and to hold said premises unto
 the said Mononite Church and to his successors, administrators and assigns
 forever and the said Joseph Perry for himself and his
 heirs hereby consent with the said Nicholas Stearns Elder
 of the Mononite Church and his successors in office that
 he is lawfully seized of the premises aforesaid that the premises
 are free and clear from all encumbrances whatsoever and
 that the said former grantor and defend the same unto the said
 said Mononite Church and to his successors, administrators and assigns
 forever for testimony whereof the said Joseph Perry and
 Magdalena Perry have hereunto set their hands and affixed
 their seals this 12 day of November in the year of our Lord one
 thousand eight hundred and fifty eight

in presence of
 James H. H. { The State of Ohio }
 Cynthia Shulock { Perry County }
 Joseph Perry
 Magdalena Perry

Be it remembered that the said James H. H. and Cynthia Shulock
 County Clerk and Clerk of the said Perry County appeared before me
 Magdalena Perry and acknowledged the signing and delivery
 of the above conveyance to be their voluntary act and deed
 and the said Magdalena Perry at the same time acknowledged by me
 separate and apart from her joint husband and the contents of said
 instrument made known to her by me she then declared that she
 did voluntarily sign said and acknowledge the same and that she
 is still satisfied therewith this 12 day of November A.D. 1858
 James H. H. Clerk
 Cynthia Shulock Clerk

Transcription of Deed

As found in Perry County Recorders Office in Book 3 Page 581

Know all men by these presents that we Joseph Beery and Magdalena Beery of the County of Perry in the State of Ohio in consideration of the sum of one dollar in hand paid by Nicholas Stemen Elder of the Mennonite Church have bargained and sold and do hereby grant and convey unto the said Nicholas Stemen Elder as aforesaid and his successors in office to be used by the said Mennonite Church as a Meeting house lot and cemetery or burying ground the following premises situated in the County of Perry in the State of Ohio and in the District of Chillicothe and bounded as follows viz. commencing at the Northwest quarter of the East half of the Northwest quarter of section No 6 six in Township No 14 fourteen of Range No 16 Sixteen from thence east $21\frac{1}{2}$ twenty one and a half rods thence north $8\frac{1}{2}$ eight and a half rods thence west $21\frac{1}{2}$ twenty one and a half rods thence north $8\frac{1}{2}$ eight and a half rods to the place of beginning containing about one acre and twenty-two and a half rods be the same more or less to have and to hold said premises with the appurtenances unto the said Nicholas Stemen Elder of the Mennonite Church and to his successor or successors and assigns forever and the said Joseph Beery for himself and heirs doth hereby covenant with the said Nicholas Stemen Elder of the Mennonite Church and his successors in office that he is lawfully seized of the premises aforesaid that the premises are free and clear from all encumbrances whatsoever and that he will forever warrant and defend the same with the appurtenances unto the said Nicholas Stemen Elder and to the Mennonite Church forever. In testimony whereof the said Joseph Beery and Magdalena Beery have hereunto set their hands and affixed their seals this 12 day of November in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty eight. Signed, sealed and acknowledged in the presence of James Rap and Cynthia Sherlock, The State of Ohio, Perry County. (Joseph Beery seal, Magdalena Beery seal)

Before me James Sherlock a Justice of the Peace in and for said County personally appeared the above named Joseph Beery and Magdalena his wife and acknowledged the signing and delivery of the above conveyance to be their voluntary act and deed and the said Magdalena being at the same time examined by me separate and apart from her said husband and the contents of said instrument made known to her by me she then declared that she did voluntarily sign seal and acknowledge the same and that she is still satisfied therewith this 12 day of November 1858. Received Dec 13, 1859. Recorded Dec. 16 1859. James Sherlock JP

Reference List

Britannica Encyclopedia Online. www.britannica.com
Accessed March 2025.

Bender, Harold S. "Germantown Mennonite Settlement (Pennsylvania, USA)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956.

Bender, Harold S. "Rockingham County (Virginia, USA)." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1959.

Bender, Harold S., Cornelius Krahn, Nanne van der Zijpp and Marlene Kropf. "Sunday School." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989.

Bremen Centennial Commission. *Bremen: 1834-1934*. 1934.

Coffman, Barbara F. *His Name was John: The Life Story of an Early Mennonite Leader*. 1964.

FindingMyPlaceInTime.wordpress.com blog. "The Relationship to Rush Creek Mennonites". September 2024.

Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, gameo.org
Accessed many articles March 2025 – July 2026.

Good, Martha Huber. *Huber Family History*. 2001.

Graham, A.A. *History of Fairfield and Perry Counties, Ohio*.
Compiled 1883.

Reference List continued

King, Elouise Good. *Abraham P. Good and Rebecca Rhodes Good Family*. Compiled 1998.

Lake, D.J. *Atlas of Perry Co. Ohio 1875*. Compiled 1875. (The Historical Society of Perry County 1976 Bicentennial Reproduction.)

Martzolff, Clement L. *History of Perry County Ohio*. 1902.

Steiner, Rev. James. "Mennonite."

Stoltzfus, Grant M. *Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference; from the Colonial period in Pennsylvania to 1968*. 1969.

TouringOhio.com . Accessed March 2025.

Umble, John. "Early Sunday Schools at West Liberty, Ohio." *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, (6-50). 1930.

Umble, John. "The Fairfield County, Ohio, Background of the Allen County, Ohio, Mennonite Settlement, 1799-1860." *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol VI. January 1932.

Umble, John S. *Ohio Mennonite Sunday Schools*. 1941.

Wenger, J. C. "A Fresh Burst of Gospel Preaching." *Gospel Herald*. March 14, 1972.

Wenger, John C. *The Mennonite Church in America*. 1966.

