

Stauffer Mennonite Church

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Stauffer Mennonite Church, a small Mennonite branch, began in 1845 as a schism from the Lancaster Mennonite Conference on the question of the treatment of an orphan child adopted by one of the members. Bishop Jacob Brubaker of Juniata County, and Jacob W. Stauffer and Jacob Weber, preachers of Groffdale, could not concur in the decision of the bishops of the conference. Stauffer wrote a book of 430 pages of small format in self-defense and as an attack on the bishops of the conference. Its title is *Eine Chronik oder Geschicht-Büchlein von der sogenannten Mennonisten Gemeinde. Zum Dienst und Lehre für alle Liebhaber der Wahrheit, durch die Gnade und Segen Gottes. Aus Geschichten, Vorfällen, Begebenheiten oder Exempeln, und aus heiliger Schrift zusammengezogen* (Lancaster 1855, 1859, Scottdale 1922). Jacob Stauffer and Jacob Weber became the leaders of the new group, their membership being mostly in East and West Earl townships of Lancaster County and in Snyder County, Pennsylvania. The Pike meetinghouse (on the Lakes-to-Sea Highway, east of Hinkletown) was granted to the new group. It was later enlarged and in the 1950s was their chief meetinghouse. Subsequently the following bishops also served: Michael Brubaker, David Stauffer, and John Stauffer, of Snyder County; Samuel Weaver, Moses B. Weaver, Aaron Sensenig, Jesse Bowman, John A. Weaver, and Weaver Zimmerman, the bishop in the 1950s, from the Pike congregation.

In the spring of 1887 a group from four different Stauffer communities started a utopia near May City, Osceola County, Iowa, with Jesse Bowman of Ontario as the leader. This lasted about 27 years, and had 30 members at its peak. Elam C. Martin served as its bishop. In 1916 John A. Weaver led a schism from the Bowman group in Pennsylvania on the extent of shunning, dividing the congregation 101 to 102. In thirty years the old group dwindled to 40 members. Through social contacts of the young people with the young members of the Groffdale Old Order Mennonites many of the Iowa group, who settled near Myerstown, as well as those in Lancaster County, joined the Groffdale Old Order Mennonite group.

Another schism, called the Rissler schism, occurred in 1860-80, because this group believed that all their children should be church members and in the order of the church by the age of twenty-one. This group, by losing their children, is now almost extinct.

In the early 1950's a three-way split occurred in Snyder County. The smallest group had three members, all Risslers, who meet in the home of the deacon, Moses R. Rissler. A larger group of 60 members used the German language, prohibited automobiles, and had few conveniences. Their bishop was Weaver Zimmerman, and their minister Martin S. Weaver. This group was known as the Weaver Mennonite Church. The third or Bowman group also worshiped at the Pike meetinghouse and at Loveville in St. Mary's County, Maryland. It had 224 members. At the Pike meetinghouse the ministers were Jacob S. Stauffer, bishop, and Joseph O. Brubaker, preacher. At Loveville the ministers were John M. Brubaker and Harry Stauffer. Three additional small groups in the Selinsgrove rural area of Pennsylvania were headed by Phares Stauffer, Aaron S. Martin, and Titus B. Hoover as bishops, and Jacob B. Stauffer, Noah W. Hoover, and Ira S. Martin as ministers. Locally the larger faction worshiping at the Pike meetinghouse was called Weaver Mennonites, the smaller one Stauffer Mennonites, and both were often called Pike Mennonites. All told, the descendants of the 1845 schism, now divided into six groups, numbered barely 300 members in the 1950s.

The children of this group dressed plainly from childhood, somewhat like the Old Order Amish, the girls wearing aprons and bonnets, although the bonnets were slightly different.

The boys' clothing resembled that of the Amish, except that it had buttons instead of hooks and eyes. From the age of sixteen to twenty-five the boys often indulged in wild behavior and lost their plainness. Frequently they bought cars and were lost to their own church. The prosperous farms of the group had no tractors nor conveniences. They had no Sunday schools. Their worship services lasted about three hours.

See also Old Order Mennonites, Pennsylvania

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