

Three Churches in Three Southern Townships

By WILMER J. ESHLEMAN

Byerland, the Oldest Mennonite Meetinghouse in the United States

SOMETIMES with the assistance of the talented brush of the artist our thoughts are carried to distant lands, towns, hamlets, or scenes of peace and tranquility in some far-off countryside, as we admire—sometimes a bit jealously perhaps—the contented mind of the artist who was able to capture the peaceful scene of beauty.

We suppress a desire to pay a visit to these places of distant beauty and resolve to press onward in the mad rush of what we now call civilization, never dreaming of the spots of beauty so near to us, where it is possible to go and commune with nature, thereby drawing a curtain and closing off the world of atom bombs and the mad rush for existence. There we could live for a while in the past, yes, the golden past, where contentment reigned.

It is a spot such as this that exists about three miles south of Willow Street, Pennsylvania, in Pequea Township, known as the Byerland Valley, that salutes a rising knoll upon which is perched the Byerland Mennonite Church in simplicity surrounded by a royal grove of maple trees. This is an historical community in Lancaster County and dates back to 1736, when Hans Boyer received a grant of 200 acres of land as follows:

TO ALL PEOPLE to whom these presents shall Come, Martin Kendrick & John Heer of Lancaster County in the Province of Pensilvania Yeomen Send Greeting KNOW YE that the sd. Martin Kendrick & John Heer for the Consideration of twenty Shillings to them paid by Hans Boyer of the Same County Yeoman, the receipt whereof they

do hereby Acknowledge HAVE Granted, bargained and Sold and by these presents DO grant bargain & Sell unto the sd. Hans Boyer, The Quantity of two hundred Acres of Land being part of five thousand Acres Granted by Warrant from the Commissioners of property bearing date the twenty Second day of November one thousand Seven Hundred & Seventeen unto the sd. Martin Kendrick & John Heer TOGETHER with all the rights members & Appurtenances Whatsoever thereunto belonging, And the Reversions and Remainders thereof. TO HAVE & TO HOLD the sd. two Hundred Acres of Land and premises with the Appurtenances unto the sd. Hans Boyer and his heirs. To the Use of him the sd. Hans Boyer his heirs and Assigns forever Under the Yearly Quitrent and other ones to the proprietaries And the sd. Martin Kendrick & John Heer for themselves their heirs Executors and Administrators do hereby Covenant and grant to and with the sd. Hans Boyer his heirs and Assigns That they, the said Martin Kendrick and John Heer, have not done Committed or wittingly or willingly Suffered any Act Matter or thing whatsoever whereby the said two Hundred Acres of Land and premisses or any part thereof is are shall or may be Impeached Charged or Incumbred in Title Charge Effare or otherwise howsoever. In Witness whereof the sd. Martin Kendrick & John Heer have hereunto Set their hands & Seals. Dated the Twentieth day of October In the Year of our Lord one thousand Seven Hundred & thirty Six.

Sealed and Delivered
in the Presence of
Michael Graft
John Funck

Martin Kindig (Seal)
Hans Herr (Seal)

It is important to note that the signatures on this deed are those of the first pioneer settlers of Lancaster County. It is now in the possession of the Rev. James Hess.

THE ORIGINAL PENN GRANT

John Penn Thomas Penn & Richard Penn Esq.
true and absolute Proprietaries and Governors in
Chief of the Province of Pennsylvania and Counties
of New Castle Kent and Sussex on Delaware To

all unto whom these Presents shall come send Greeting. *Whereas* in and by a Warrent from the late Commissioners of Property under our Lesser Seal bearing date the Twenty second day of November in the year of our Lord 1717 the quantity of five thousand Acres of Land was granted to be surveyed unto Martin Kundigg and Hans Heer among the Surveys then made on Conestogo and Pequea Creeks in the County now called Lancaster. In pursuance of which said Warrent there was Surveyed in part of the quantity therein mentioned on the Tenth day of May Anno 1719 a certain Tract of Land within the said County *Beginning* at a white Oak by the said Pequea Creek at a Corner of John Farrer's Land and extending thence by the same North North East fifteen perches to a Post and South by East thirty six perches to a Post and North North East eighty perches to a post and North seventy eight degrees East forty four perches to a black Oak thence by Ulrich Hooper's land South East by East eighty perches to a Hickery tree, thence by Widow Hooper's Land South Sixty perches to a post South Six degrees. East thirty two perches to a Post and South three degrees East two hundred and one perches to a Post thence by vacant Land, West by North Sixty five perches to a White oak and South by East twenty eight perches to a post by the aforesaid Creek thence up by the same on several Courses two hundred and eighty perches to the place of Beginning containing two hundred and ten Acres and the Allowance of Six Acres on each hundred for Roads and Highways as in and by the Survey thereof remaining in our Surveyor General's Office and from thence certified into our Secretary's Office may appear. *And Whereas* in and by one Deed poll bearing date the twentieth day of October Anno 1736 for the consideration therein mentioned the said Martin Kundigg and Hans Heer did Bargain and Sell all their Right and claim of and in the Same Tract of Land unto Hans Boyer of the County Aforesaid. *Now* at the Instance & Request of the said Hans Boyer that we would be pleased to Grant him a Confirmation of the said Tract of Land according to the Situation & Survey aforesaid *Know Ye* that in Consideration of the premises and the sum of

Twenty one Pounds Lawfull money of Pennsylvania to our Office paid by the said Hans Boyer the receipt whereof We hereby Acknowledge & thereof do accept & forever discharge the said Hans Boyer his Heirs & Assigns by these presents and also of the yearly Quitrent hereinafter mentioned and reserved. *We Have Given Granted Released and Confirmed.* And by these Presents for us our heirs and Successors *Do Give Release and Confirm* unto the said Hans Boyer and his heirs the said two hundred & ten Acres of Land as they are now set forth, Bounded and Limited as aforesaid with all Mines Minerals Quarries Meadows Marshes Savannahs Swamps Cripples Woods Underwoods Timber and Trees Ways Waters Water Courses Liberties Proffits Con? Advantages Heriditaments and Appurtenances whatsoever to the said two hundred and ten Acres of Land belonging or in any wise appurtenanting and Lying within the Lands or Limits aforesaid (Three full and clear fifth Parts of all Royal Mines free from all Deductions and Reprisals for Digging and Refining the same and one fifth part of all other Mines or oar Delivered at the pits mouth only excepted and hereby reserved.) And also free leave Right and Liberty to and for the said Hans Boyer his Heirs & assigns to Have hunt fish and fowl in and upon the hereby Granted Land and premises or upon any part thereof *To Have & To Hold* the said two hundred and ten Acres of Land and Premisses hereby Granted (Except before Excepted) with their Appurtenances unto the said Hans Boyer his Heirs and Assigns. To the Only use behoof of the said Hans Boyer his Heirs and Assigns forever. *To Be Beholden* of us our Heirs and Successors Proprietaries of Pennsylvania as of our Manor of Conestogo in the County of Lancaster aforesaid in free and common Soccage by Fealty only in Lieu of all other Services *Yielding And Giving* therefore to us our Heirs and Successors at the Town of Lancaster in the said County at or upon the first day of March in every year from the first day of March last past one English Silver Shilling for each hundred Acres and in proportion for the Ten Acres or value thereof in Coin Current according as the Exchange shall then be between our said Province and the City of London to such

person or persons as shall from time to time be Appointed to Receive the same *And* in case of non payment thereof within Ninety days next after the same become due that then it shall and may be Lawfull for us our Heirs and Successors our and their Receivers or Receiver into and upon the hereby Granted Land and premisses to Re Enter the same to hold and possess until Quitrent and all Arrears thereof together with the Charges Accruing by means of such non payments and Relntry aforesaid be fully paid and Discharged. *In Witness* thereof the said Thomas Penn by Vertue of all powers and Authorities to him Granted by the said John and Richard Penn and of his own Right hath Caused the Great Seal of the said Province to be hereunto Affixed at Philadelphia this Twenty Sixth Day of November in the year of our Lord one Thousand seven hundred and thirty nine Thirteenth year of the Reign of King George the Second over Great Britain etc., and the Twenty second year of our Government.

Jno Penn

Entred in the Office for Recording of Deeds for the City and County of Philadelphia in Patent book A Vol. 9 pa 125 The 30th Day of November Anno Domi 1739.

Witness my Hand & Seal of my Office

C. Brockden Reg.

It is quite interesting to note that this land was in possession of Hans Herr and Martin Kendig originally and proves a statement recently told me by C. H. Martin to the effect that the above mentioned were the first real estate agents in Lancaster County.

Hans Boyer emigrated to this country in the early part of the eighteenth century, and in 1736 purchased 200 acres of land, which were a part of a tract of 5,000 acres that was granted to Martin Kendrick and John Heer in 1717.

Hans Boyer set about establishing central headquarters for a new community at the site of the present homestead and farm of the Rev James Hess. This industrial center consisted of a tannery and bark mill which ground the bark. In this bark mill

were stones of the same order used in a grist mill, and it appears as though these stones were turned by horsepower.

Because of the importance of the industrial headquarters of Hans Boyer this community was commonly called Boyerland, and so in a short time the whole beautiful valley became known as Boyerland or, as it has come down to us today, Byerland.

The roads around Byerland were no doubt cut through the forest in various directions to accommodate the heavy Conestoga wagons hauling bark, hides and leather. At first a road bore off west from the one that now runs north from Byerland Church to Baumgardner's Station. This went directly through the farm of the Rev. James Hess and came out on the north side of the bridge at Keyport's or the Burnt Mill, on the road which runs from West Willow to Marticville. Another road passed the house of the Rev. James Hess, running north through his field to join the other road running east and west (going to Marticville), thus forming a T. At this T is the historic spot where a log meetinghouse was built in 1748, which is now the oldest Mennonite meetinghouse *still standing* (near Linesville) in the United States.* It housed the third oldest Mennonite congregation in Lancaster County.

In the April session of the Lancaster County Court in 1850, with Judge Ellis Lewis presiding, a petition was presented to close the road running off the Byerland-Baumgardner road as far as the meetinghouse—a distance of about two miles. This court granted permission and the road was closed.

The road from the house of the Rev. James Hess was kept open, and when the bridge on the West Willow-Marticville road was demolished, all traffic was detoured over this old road, but when the present bridge was erected in 1932, the remainder of the road through the Hess farm was closed. As the Mennonite meetinghouse stood at the junction of roads in the center of the Hess farm, there was never a graveyard at that spot. Many families had their own plots, while the main body of the congregation buried in a graveyard known as "Old Byerland Cemetery," which is located a half-mile east of the present Byerland Church,

* It antedates the old Landisville meetinghouse by four years, according to "Mennonites of Lancaster Conference," by Martin G. Weaver, Scottdale, Pa., 1931, opp. p. 192.

on the present farm of Martin Mylin. An old deed in the possession of the Rev. James Hess, which is dated August 4, 1869, mentions a graveyard which we assume to be this one, and, judging by this as well as the apparent age of the graves, the first one dating back to 1795, it seems justifiable to consider it one of the oldest graveyards in Lancaster County.

In this cemetery one of the most remarkable tombstones in Lancaster County stands, bearing the following inscription:

In memory of
Susanna Müller
Wife of Peter Müller
She was born March 1756
Married 1773
2 sons 8 daughters
She died November 22, 1815
Aged 59 years, 8 months and
23 days
She followed the profession
of a midwife
Helping to bring into the world 1,667
children

In volume 41, page 168, of papers read to our Society, M. Luther Heisey also has made reference to this remarkable woman.

The little log meetinghouse served the Byerland Mennonite congregation for about one hundred years when on April 25, 1848, Jacob Breneman and Henry Curley, the elders of the church, received permission by an Act of Assembly to sell the lot on which the little log meetinghouse stood to Benjamin Bear, and a new stone church was erected near the site of the present Byerland Church.

At that time the roads instead of forming a T, as at present, cut across the corner and was located on the south side of the church, instead of running along the west and north as is the position today.

We do not know how long the little log meetinghouse stood on its original site, but years later Benjamin Good bought the little meetinghouse and moved it about three miles east to his

home at Linesville, where it stands today. It has never outlived its usefulness. Today it is used as a wash house and shop by Mr. Rineer, who owns the property formerly in the name of Benjamin Good.

The new stone church served as a place of worship until 1879, when it was taken down and the present brick church erected. On the north side of the church is a stone bearing the following inscription:

ERBAUET
DURCH DIE
BRUDERSCHAFT
DER MENNONISTEN
GEMEINDE
IM JAHR 1848

REBUILT
1879

This present church is surrounded by a grove of maple trees that in the summertime spread their shade silently over this peaceful spot, as the industrious members, including the pastor, earnestly till the soil in the surrounding countryside. Whether it be in the soil or in the church, their motto remains the same: "They sow good seed in order that they may reap abundantly."

I think we of our Society should say a word more about the little log meetinghouse which has served mankind in one way or another since 1748, or over a period of almost two hundred years. It would seem as though it deserves a well-earned rest as it has done very well. What could be of a more sentimental value than for the Byerland Mennonite congregation to move the little meetinghouse to the present churchyard and place it beneath the protecting shade of the maple trees, thus restoring it as an enduring monument of their faith. I am sure it would be a benefit to the congregation and an honor to the quiet Byerland Valley. As it is the oldest Mennonite meetinghouse still standing in the United States, the congregation owes to posterity its restoration.

In 1891 the Byerland Mennonite Sunday School was organized by David Eshleman (the father of H. Frank Eshleman, Esq.), who

became the first superintendent, with Aaron B. Harnish as assistant. Mr. Harnish was later ordained to the ministry.

It might be well to add that after more than half a century of law practice, Hon. H. Frank Eshleman has returned to the land of his boyhood, and lives at his country estate, known as Millvale. Millvale is less than a mile from Byerland where on a bright Sunday morning it is not uncommon to hear Mr. Eshleman's rich bass voice, which once flowed in eloquence before the Bar, now singing "Faith of Our Father's" in the same place where he worshipped in days gone by.

The story of Byerland would not be complete without some description of its present pastor, the Rev. James Hess. Rev. Hess descends from a long line of Lancaster County ancestry and is the eighth generation of his family in this country. The first generation was Hans Hess, who died in 1733, and whose grave is one of the oldest in Lancaster County. It is located in the Hess graveyard about one-fourth mile west of Boehm's M. E. Church, near Baumgardner's Station. Just north of the village of Baumgardner's is a high pinnacle and on the top of this is located the Hess graveyard, in which about a dozen tombstones remain. There is a large tree in the center. Among these stones is a rough stone carved by unskilled hands as follows:

First generation — 1733 HANS HES
the lineage follows:

Second generation — Michael Hess, April 22, 1715, March 5, 1760.

Third generation — David Hess, June 19, 1746, September 3, 1815.

Fourth generation — David Hess, July 9, 1784, March 16, 1873.

(Both Davids are buried near Sickman's Mill in Conestoga Township.)

Fifth generation — John Hess, July 31, 1809, March 15, 1888.
(John Hess is buried at River Corner.)

Sixth generation — Benjamin Hess, March 5, 1861, November 1, 1918.

(Benjamin is buried at Byerland.)

Seventh generation — Aaron R. Hess, May 24, 1885.

Eighth generation — Rev. James H. Hess, December 11, 1911.

Devil's Half Acre

After leaving the Byerland Valley and going east into Providence Township to the Smithville Road and turning south for a mile, we climb a steep hill, which was named Mount Carmel in years gone by. On the top of this hill a road bears off to the left and, about the distance of a city block away, there stands a little frame building which was also used as a church in the past. In contrast to peaceful Byerland, this church had a stormy and turbulent past; the name of Mount Carmel is forgotten and today it is known as the Devil's Half Acre.

It appears that in the 1830's the Mount Hope Methodist Episcopal Church was organized near the Buck at the home of Thomas Smith. Shortly after the organization a fourth-acre of ground was purchased from Henry Harmon for \$10, and thereon a meetinghouse was built. It was a rough-sided building about twenty-five by thirty-five feet in size. It had open seats. The first trustees of this church were Thomas Smith, Christian Lefevre and S. Crawford.

Later in 1856 the Methodists built their present brick building at Mount Hope, which is southwest of Quarryville, and the little building near Buck was sold in 1863 to William Johnson on behalf of an infant United Brethren congregation near Smithville. The meetinghouse was moved to Mount Carmel which is south of Smithville. This congregation had purchased one-half acre of land from a Dr. Frick and here was erected the building purchased from the Methodists.

The conduct of some of the members appears to have been like that of the western frontiersmen, and in 1871 the church burned to the ground under very suspicious circumstances. The faithful members, however, let bygones be bygones and collected money for a new building. This building was erected in 1872, but when the treasurer was called upon for the money to pay for the building, he could not produce it because, he said, he had hidden the money in a hornets' nest for safe-keeping and the mice had eaten the nest and the money too! Great doubts and arguments arose as to the size of the mice, and as to whether they were four-legged or two-legged, and the small congregation was split wide open. The faithful members continued against these many ob-

stacks and the new church was dedicated by Rev. Keys and Rev. Riges.

Jacob Eshleman and Henry Reese were the first superintendents of the Sunday School and the first Pastor was Rev. Lewis Peters, who was followed by the Reverends Corsey, Lee, Carpenter, R. Kaufman, A. Kaufman, I. Baltzell, H. H. Stehman, J. G. Smoker, Shellenberger, Dunkelberger, and Stehman.

One of the members who survived in more recent years was Frank Finnefrock, a member of the old Lancaster Police force.

During the last services in this church some boys removed the steps from the entrance on the east end of the building, and when the minister came out of the church at night, he fell down and broke his collar-bone. And so because of this kind of antics the name of the congregation and also of Mount Carmel was forgotten, and every one referred to it as the Devil's Half Acre.

There was one grave, that of a child, at the east end of the church, but today the gravestone has been removed and the whereabouts of the grave has been lost.

Due to financial and other embarrassments the congregation disbanded and today you may still see the little building on the Devil's Half Acre now used as a tobacco shed! Before the advent of the automobile people avoided passing it at night because it was said to be haunted, and many wild tales were told concerning it. These have today subsided and are forgotten but still at night one of the loneliest places in southern Lancaster County is the Devil's Half Acre.

Marticville M. E. Church

The history of the Marticville Methodist Episcopal Church in Martic Township is not so ancient as the cemetery adjoining. Ellis & Evans (page 974) state that this cemetery antedates the French and Indian War. According to information from the present pastor, the Rev. James E. Mast, the oldest tombstone is that of Johannes Guth (John Good) who was buried in 1739.

Ellis & Evans (page 974) also state that this graveyard was first used by the Pequea silver miners who worked the mines in what is now Pequea Township.

The church was organized in 1836 and met in private homes. Later a Sunday School was organized and it met in the school-

house which stood opposite the present home of Aaron Martin. It appears that the little church was built in 1861 on the property that is presently the home of Aaron Gochenaur. Because of its small size it was called the "Salt Box Church."

From 1863 to 1874 the congregation met in Huber Hall in Marticville, when the present church was built on land purchased from Eli Eshleman. The first trustees were as follows:

Henry Brooks
Samuel Bookman
Matthais Myers
Henry Charles
Abraham Charles
John D. Sensenig