

SHERKSTON BRETHREM IN CHRIST:::

The original church of log was the first Mennonite Church in the area, and stood on the old Sherkston road, which is said to have been an Indian trail, and the church is now the Sherston Brethren in Christ.

The Church property at Sherkston was deeded by Samuel Sherk to the Mennonite Society in 1828, with George Zavitz and Peter Sherk as Trustees. It is clear that soon after the deed of the property was received in 1828, by the Mennonite minister and the Deacon, who were the Trustees of the Congregation; that the log building was erected for a Church. This became the first Mennonite house of Worship in Bertie Township, and served for thirty years.

In 1853 the first church was replaced by a brick church and then it in turn was replaced by a cement block structure in 1917.

inf. from Audrey Miller Laurie.

CHURCH AT SHERKSTON

The church property at Sherkston was deeded by Samuel Sherk to the Mennonite Society in 1828 with George Zavitz and Peter Sherk Trustees. At this time, or soon after, there was also a place of worship on the Niagara River Road not far from Chippewa. A log church west of Stevensville was known as the black Creek Church. The brick church at Sherkston was built about 1853. This was replaced by a cement block structure in 1917. It is not known when the first building on this site was erected but probably it was the time the land was conveyed to the Church (1828) or earlier.

Burkholder 1935

(deed)

"A memorial to be registered according to an Act of Legislature of the Province of Upper Canada of a Deed of bargain and sale bearing date the 15th day of May in the year of our Lord, 1828, and made by and between Samuel Sherk of the township of Bertie in the county of Lincoln in the district of Niagara and province of Upper Canada, of the one part, and George Zavitz of the said township, yeoman, and Peter Sherk of the township of Humberstone in the county of Lincoln district and province aforesaid, yeoman, of the other part.

Whereby said Samuel Sherk for an in consideration of twenty pounds of current money to me by the said George Zavitz and Peter Sherk in hand paid and the receipt thereof is acknowledged and confessed and have granted, bargained, sold, aliened and confirmed unto the said George Zavitz and Peter Sherk and their heirs forever.

All and singular that certain piece or parcel of land lying and being situated in the township of Bertie in the county of Lincoln the district of Niagara and the Province of Upper Canada.

Being composed of part of Lot number 35 in the first concession of the said township of Bertie, containing by measurement two acres which said two acres are butted and bounded as follow ..(which said piece or parcel of land is to be reserved by the said George Zavitz and Peter Sherk and their heirs for a burying ground for the Mennonite Society forever).

To have and to hold the same with the appurtenances freed and discharged from all incumbrances whatsoever.

Unto the said George Zavitz and Peter Sherk and their heirs to the sale and proper use benefit and behoof of the George Zavitz and Peter Sherk and their heirs forever.

Which said deed of bargain and sale is witnessed by Joseph Sherk, yeoman of the township of Bertie aforesaid and Isaac H. Johnston, Schoolmaster, of the township of Humberstone aforesaid,

In the memorial thereof is hereby required to be registered by us the Trustees thereby named.

United our hands and seals at Humberstone aforesaid the day and year first above written, signed, and sealed in the presence of

"George Zavitz"

"Joseph Sherk"

"Peter Sherk"

"H. Johnston "

The leader of the Bertie congregation from an early date was George Zavitz. He was a son of the Jacob Zavitz who came to Canada in 1788. This minister (d. 1858) was held in high esteem by his followers who called him "the peacemaker". His leadership was recognized in both the Black Creek and the Sherkston congregations. Collaborators in Sherkston were his brother John and his son-in-law John Hershey.

John B. Hershey (1816-1904) was most active in his ministry

there, that through the Grace of God the church would increase very fast.

They have a good comfortable brick meeting-house, a fine, situation, and a fruitful soil; and I know they would be very thankful if some such one should move there, and they would also be willing to assist him if he was in need of it. Should anyone desire to visit the place in view I would be very happy to go with him. I live 16 miles north-east of Buffalo, and one and half miles north of Harris Hill in Erie Co., N.Y.

John Lapp"

It is known that John Lapp served west of the river in the capacity of Bishop in 1864. Appointments for the autumn communion had been made for John M. Brenneman, Indiana, to be present at Clarence, Erie County, New York; Bertie, Welland County, Ontario; Cayuga, Haldimand County, Ontario; and the Twenty, Lincoln County, Ontario. Circumstances prevented Brenneman's coming and Bishop Lapp proceeded to conduct the special services at each of the appointments. At Sherston it was a midweek service. Lapp's intense interest in this congregation and in the families west of the river was constant during the remainder of his life. It was not only at the special occasions semi-annually but at frequent intervals that he served the church here. His last public service was conducted in this country. While called to take charge of a funeral at Black Creek, he became seriously ill, and death followed at his home a few days later.

As seen in an earlier record, Bishop Lapp endorsed the use of the English language. This was not generally granted by the conference of Ontario before 1890. However, there was a continuance of German preaching in Bertie long after the language was out of general use in the community. This has been given most frequently as the reason for the decline in the church. Also the decade of dissension and the break which took form at the Twenty in the Annual Conference of 1889 had their effect in the remotest congregations. In Welland County, Jonas Zavitz, Abram Sherk, and Nelson a few other families preferred the conservative viewpoint. The ministers Nelson Michael and Gilbert Bearss with the greater part of the congregation in Bertie favored the action of the conference for a more general use of English preaching, and of Sunday schools and evening services. As there was only this one place of worship in Welland at that date, the membership was weakened by the division of 1889.

It is conclusive that the harmony of the congregation in Bertie was not repeatedly disrupted to the extent that it was at the Tweny, yet there were influences being exerted there that did not prove strengthening to the organization. Some time in the fifties Daniel Hoch of the Twenty was invited to do evangelistic work in the churches of the peninsula. His labors among them were at least sufficiently general to bring him recognition. Nothing is known of a definite immediate organization resulting. Evangelistic efforts by the Methodist society had been fairly regular for some years previously. Young people of Mennonite homes were among the interested attendants at those special spiritual assemblies. The foundations of what came to be strong religious bodies were laid in this manner. Particularly was this true with the Methodist, the United Brethren, and the Evangelical Societies of the Niagara Peninsula.

OTHER MENNONITE GROUPS

THE MENNONITE BRETHERN IN CHRIST

Evidently the ministerial efforts of Daniel Hock of Lincoln, John Steckly of Markham, and Menno Bowman of Waterloo left some results in Bertie Twp. Some are of the opinion that the latter man had a

for the Mennonite Church during the life of George Zavitz. The congregation at Bertie was under the supervision of Bishop John Lapp after the death of George Zavitz. The home of John Hershey was open to the ministers from Clarence, New York, who came occasionally and also attended the semi-annual meeting. Many a Scriptural discussion continuing late into the night is credited to these men. Doubtless they did not have the advantages of Church periodicals then to help them in points of doctrine.

Hersey lived on a farm east of Ridgeway and gave the land for the cemetery. His intentions were to have a church built there, probably in the sixties at the time of the erection of the brick church at Sherkston. His plan lacked support and never developed. He used English in his preaching. Later in life, however, he was quite inactive as a minister. His closing years were spent with his daughters at Fort Erie until his death in 1904.

The first deacon at Sherkston was probably Peter Sherk. We learn of him first as a Trustee of the church property in 1828. He is thought to have been a man of decided influence and renown in his time. Upon his death in 1853 his son Benjamin succeeded him to the office of deacon. Benjamin Sherk (1836-68) served the congregation during a period of comparative strength.

Before 1860, the first log church was replaced by a brick meeting house. The labors of George Zavitz tended toward peace during the years preceding his death in 1858. It was unfortunate that after the close of his life the seeds of discord began to manifest. Early experiences in the new church found John Zavitz advanced in years, and a feeling favoring the leadership of John B. Hershey was not strong enough to be unanimous.

John Zavitz (1798-1872) was a minister of amiable disposition, seventeen years younger than George. After the death of George, he took a leading part in the guidance of the little flock at Black Creek, though he lived in Bertie. Since he performed baptisms and marriages, he was regarded as bishop by a number of those who remembered him. This is not fully verified since other ministers at Black Creek are said to have baptized at the river. John Zavitz sometimes preached in English. His sermons were appealing because of his sincerity in manner and presentation.

In 1865, Bishop John Lapp, an active minister at Clarence Center, New York, east of Buffalo, had served many times in the Bertie congregation. By agreement in the Sherkston congregation he was requested to assume the responsibilities of leadership. That he was deeply concerned for the welfare of this group is shown by his call in the HERALD OF TRUTH, March, 1865, for pastoral help. The letter reads as follows:

"Harris Hill, Jan. 31, 1865

To John F. Funk:

Now there is a place for anyone who is thus changing his residence, or has been thrown out of a situation and a home by the above-mentioned recent calamities in Virginia, at Shirk's Crossing in Canada, about 12 miles from Buffalo, where he would very welcome and acceptable indeed. This is a small congregation of Mennonite Brethern there, who have as yet no minister but are longing for a man to break them the bread of life. I believe if such a man who has the gift of God to speak, both in the German and English language, should settle