

Preserving a Heritage . . . telling a story!

Germantown

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The Newsletter of the Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust

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Roman and Marianna Stutzman: Following God's Leading

"Where does God want us to be?" That question provided the guidance and sense of direction for Marianna and Roman Stutzman throughout their lives. In 1952 they left their home in Elkhart, Indiana, and went to Kansas City, Missouri, for a summer vacation of voluntary service under the Mennonite Board of Missions. They ended up staying for 20 years because they were confident that's where God wanted them.

As the summer of 1972 approached they received the sense that it was time to leave Kansas City, so in their prayers they asked God, "where next?". Then, out of the clear blue, Marianna said, a letter arrived from the Mennonite Board of Missions saying there would be an opening in Germantown where Melvin Gingrich had begun a Mennonite Information Center. Would they be open to a call to run the Information Center? "We got goose pimples as we always did in leadings like that," said Marianna. So in September 1972, they moved to Philadelphia.

The Information Center, which had been open only a few months, provided the focus for their ministry. Its basic purpose was to provide information and guidance to Mennonites who came to visit the historic Meetinghouse, to give them an introduction to the ministry of the congregation and to what life in the inner city was like. The Center stocked informational pieces to give to visitors. Picture postcards of the Meetinghouse, books about Mennonites and issues important to Mennonites were sold there. The Stutzmans gave tours of the Meetinghouse and told the story of the witness of Mennonites in Germantown down through the years as well as how they and the very small congregation were providing that witness today. And they often introduced the visitors to people they met on the street.

The Information Center also became a focal point for learning to know the mostly African-

American residents of Germantown. It was located in the front room of the 6117 building on the side of the cemetery opposite the Meetinghouse. Having formerly been a store, it had large windows in the front so passers-by could easily see what and who was inside. People of the neighborhood stopped to look and then came in to visit. They quickly became comfortable with Roman and Marianna and a strong relationship developed between them and the people of the community. Once Marianna's purse was snatched and several who saw the incident caught the man who had taken her purse and returned it to her.

Many local people came to consider the Meetinghouse as their church even though they didn't always attend regularly and never joined. They came to regard Roman as their pastor and came to the Information Center to visit with him. Some who received public assistance invited their social workers to go with them to meet Roman. Marianna described their role in the community as that of a bridge to build relationships.

One of Marianna's projects was the Ladies Aid Society she formed for the women of the community that met regularly for Bible study and fellowship in the Meetinghouse. They eventually focused their energy on closing a liquor store across the street from the Meetinghouse. Some of the men who patronized the store supplied liquor for underage youth who then did their drinking in an empty factory building just down the street from the Information Center. When a young man was found murdered the women mobilized for action. Under Marianna's leadership they developed a petition for the store to be closed and then secured enough signatures from the people of the community that succeeded in closing the store. Marianna said that even people who patronized the store regularly signed the petition because they recognized the damage it was doing to their community.



Roman and Marianna Stutzman in front of the Meetinghouse

The Stutzmans worked hard at building relationships with those who could support the work at Germantown. They began the "Friends of Germantown" newsletter and developed a mailing list of potential supporters. Through publicity, tours were planned and people came as individuals and sometimes by the bus load to see the Meetinghouse, Wyck House and other historic sites in Germantown. Work continued on the restoration of the 6133-35 property (now the Stanley R. Fretz Center), including the development of the museum in the basement where slide shows would be presented that told the Germantown story and Mennonite history in several different ways.

Though the Stutzmans stayed in Germantown fifteen years and began with an open-ended commitment to be administrators of the program and the Information Center, another opportunity which they felt was clearly from God,

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The Witness of Our Germantown Property

The historic Meetinghouse is a witness to who we are as Mennonites and to what we believe. But what of the property surrounding the Meetinghouse -- the cemetery, the grounds and the two apartment buildings? Five Board members -- Greg Weikel, Joe Miller, Jim King, Ray Hacker and Lamont Woelk -- and Executive Director, Randy Nyce, met Saturday morning, November 22, to explore and reflect on how these might be a part of our witness to the neighborhood surrounding the Meetinghouse and beyond.



The old loom has been donated to Mennonite Central Committee Resource Center in Ephrata, PA, and is already in use by them. Greg Weikel, Joe Miller and Randy Nyce are loading the loom onto Jim King's truck for hauling to Ephrata

Chairperson, Jim King, who had invited all Board Members to attend the meeting, introduced the morning with questions based on two passages of scripture. The "delightful inheritance" of Psalm 16:6 posed the questions, "What are the assets of our inheritance?" and "What message do they bring out?". Jim challenged the group to seek to discover what treasures we have. The pruning for greater fruitfulness of John 15:2 posed the question, "What pruning should be done to foster the growth of our witness?" and Jim challenged the group to ask what is valuable and what can be discarded.

The group then set out on tour, first going through the Fretz Center. The two vacant apartments above the office suite are light and spacious and offer excellent living accommodations. Both were being redecorated and have now been rented. The office suite has four rooms plus a small kitchen and bathroom and was noted for its orderliness. The large front room contains the library and has space for meetings and a reception area. The office room is neatly arranged with all the necessary office equipment and the archives room has been rearranged for more efficient use of the space. The one vacant

room could be used as another office.

The basement of the Fretz Center is used for storage and contains the lawn, yard and snow removal equipment and other tools and supplies. Also stored there are chairs and pews once used in the Meetinghouse and several pieces of furniture once used in the apartments as well as a large old loom that was part of the museum display. Several boxes of items belong to tenants. A major attraction is the old hand-dug well that was cleaned out during renovations in the 1970's and was included in tours when the basement contained the museum. In later discussion the group agreed that the basement needs a thorough cleaning with appropriate "pruning" of some items and should be made presentable so the well can be part of tours again.



Looking down into the old well beneath the Fretz Center are, left to right, Greg Weikel, Ray Hacker, Joe Miller, Lamont Woelk, Randy Nyce.

The basement and front room of the 6117 building are basically storage areas containing lumber, maintenance tools and supplies and some things left over from the time the Information Center was located in the front room. The front room has since been rented to Jacob Fisher, our former maintenance person, who does construction work.

The grounds are fairly well kept although the cemetery is deteriorating. The rear of our property has debris and overgrowth that needs to be cleaned out. The area behind 6117 and the adjacent corner of the cemetery could be developed into a pleasant and safe area for tenant mothers and their small children. The flower beds in front of the Meetinghouse need attention. The earth banked against the north side of the Meetinghouse needs to be removed to eliminate water damage being done to the interior wall.

The Pastorius Street lot is clear and is used occasionally as playground by neighborhood



Jim King and his son, David, and Ken Hochstetler and his son, Caleb, spent January 2 trimming trees in the cemetery. Here Ken is trimming and Caleb and David are stacking the trimmings to be tied into a bundle for trash removal.

children and for parking on street cleaning days. It has a fair-sized underground room that needs to be filled. Debris from cleaning up behind the Meetinghouse and cemetery could be used for fill.

The tour finished with a walk around the block on which the Meetinghouse is located and the one across the street from the Meetinghouse. The block behind the Meetinghouse is composed of row houses, some in good repair, some deteriorating and a couple of vacant ones. There were areas of trash and debris. The block across the street contains single family dwellings, apartment buildings, some businesses and the Settlement Music School building all in excellent repair.

The group then met for reflection and offered the following:

- We should have a master plan for development of our property
- Cleanup can be done before such a plan is developed, including trimming trees.
- The Fretz Center basement needs to be cleaned up soon.
- Work groups from area churches could help with the cleanup.
- The area behind 6117 should be developed as a safe sitting and play area for tenant mothers and their children.
- Several artists and some white families are moving into the neighborhood.
- Our property, well kept, would be a witness and model to the community.

A detailed written report of the tour and reflections was prepared and referred by the Executive Committee to the Property Committee for implementation. ✱



Second Heritage Bike Ride

On Saturday, October 18, seventeen bikers retraced part of the approximate path that Mennonite settlers had traveled from Germantown (now part of Philadelphia) to Skippack 300 years ago. This was the second in a series of three Heritage Bike Hikes planned and sponsored by Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania and Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust.

As the Germantown settlement, established in 1683, filled up some of the Germantown settlers and newly arrived Mennonites looked for more available land farther north. In 1702-03 the first Mennonites moved 20 miles north to the Skippack area and established the settlement around what is now the Lower Skippack Mennonite Church. Skippack is the second oldest Mennonite community and congregation after Germantown, in North America. The con-

gregation was established in 1717 and the first meetinghouse were built by 1720.

The bikers met at the Lower Skippack church and included a young couple and their two-year-old daughter who rode on a seat on the back of her mother's bike. Joel Alderfer, Curator of the Mennonite Heritage Center in Harlyesville, gave an introduction to the history of the Skippack settlement.

The bikers traveled on public roads about 3 miles from the Lower Skippack Church to the Perkiomen Bike Trail along the Perkiomen Creek, then followed the trail to where the Creek flows into the Schuylkill River, a total distance of 13 miles. The group made several stops at historic points along the way. Andy Ness, a GMHT Board member, spoke about the specific historic interest of each spot. They included the Skippack Church of the Brethren

established in the 1840's and the town of Collegeville, site of Freeland Seminary (now Ursinus College) established by progressive Mennonite Ministers Abraham and Henry Hunsicker in 1848. One interesting, though not Mennonite, site was the 1810 grave of John Hall who was buried standing up across the road from his farm so he could watch over it after he died. The brick arch over the grave is still visible.

The first Heritage Hike two years ago was from Salford Mennonite Church to Lower Skippack Mennonite Church, retracing the path Schoolmaster Christopher Dock traveled between the two meetinghouses in the years 1718 to 1771 when he taught in both places. A third Heritage Bike Hike is being planned for 2005 and will continue on to Germantown from where this year's Hike ended.

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A Community Hymn Sing For Christmas

With candles providing soft light and beautiful greenery adorning the Historic Meetinghouse, 46 people gathered on the evening of December 20 for a Christmas service of carols, hymns and Scripture readings. Richard Lichty, pastor of the Germantown Mennonite Church, served as worship leader welcoming the worshippers and introducing the service. David Rempel Smucker, GMHT Board mem-

ber, led the singing of Christmas hymns. Persons in the audience interspersed readings of the Christmas story from Scripture throughout the service.

David led the group in singing several other hymns of Mennonite origin or connection. Levi Rempel Smucker played the cello and Monica Medina played the violin providing prelude music and accompanying several of the hymns.

The service closed with just candle light as everyone held a lighted candle and sang "Silent Night," a moving conclusion to a lovely and inspiring service.

Following the service everyone gathered in the back room for refreshments and visiting. The GMHT Program Committee who planned the service intends to make this a regular event each Christmas. ✱

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opened to them. They learned to know Mary Haines, the owner of the Wyck House, an historic Quaker house in Germantown just a block down the street from the Information Center. Mary, an 80-year-old descendant of the original Quaker owners, still lived there. Roman and Marianna became her friends and gave here needed assistance and counsel. She wanted the house to be preserved as an historic building after she died, so she formed a board composed of friends and relatives, mostly Quakers, but including a couple of Mennonites. She invited Roman and Marianna to move into Wyck House and live with her. After two years of living in one of the Corporation owned apartments they

moved to Wyck. Eight months later Mary moved to a retirement center and a few months later she died.

The Wyck Board offered Roman and Marianna full employment as caretakers and keepers of the history. So after only three years at the Information Center they resigned to work for the Wyck Board. Marianna said the move seemed like an opening from the Lord because it helped to bring the witness of both Wyck and the Meetinghouse, of Quakers and Mennonites, together.

During their years in Germantown Roman served as part of the pastoral team of the Germantown congregation, serving as elder part

of that time. They remained involved in the work of the Corporation and the Information Center and Roman attended Board meetings regularly until they left Germantown.

Once again they sensed God calling them. In 1985 they moved back to Goshen, Indiana, to live in retirement, having spent almost 35 years in active service where they felt God had wanted them to be.

Much of the information in this article is from an interview Leonard Gross conducted with Marianna Stutzman in July 2002. The tape and a printed copy of the interview are now part of the collection in the archives of Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust.

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Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust

2004 Board of Trustees

The Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust is an inter-Mennonite organization with representatives from the following constituent bodies recognizing that the historic sites of the oldest Mennonite settlement in North America have meaning to all Mennonites.

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Newsletter

- Editorial Committee: Executive Committee
- Design and Printing: Sir Speedy Printing, Lansdale, PA

Calendar of Events

April 24:

Spring Board Meeting

October 23:

Fall Board Meeting

October:

Peace Building Institute
Date to be set

December 18:

Christmas Eve Service at
the Meetinghouse

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