Sonnenberg Village

Restoration and Homecoming Meld Interest In Old and New

It was a long haul, but thanks to Weaver Commercial Construction, Ivan Mast, and a little pull by Clarence Steiner, the Sonnenberg Church arrived safely at Sonnenberg Village on May 15. We also owe thanks for the patience of the landowners over whose terrain we had to pass.

The classrooms inside the church have been removed and we are now clearing the basement ceiling for new wiring, and heating and air conditioning duct work. Work is also proceeding quickly on the bathroom addition. On a related note, we have been given an easement by Central Christian School so that we may install a gravity sewer system instead of a pump system. We have already begun to run the necessary lines to include water lines from the well installed last fall.

Meanwhile, work is proceeding on the Lehman House; we expect the living quarters to be finished by the end of this year. AEP is running a larger power line to the village and wiring will begin shortly on the Saurer Blacksmith Shop. Also, natural gas lines are being extended to the Welcome Center, the Saurer Blacksmith Shop and the Tschantz Log Cabin in time for winter.

Many people have been stopping at the village. Visitors are always welcome to view the progress and share any memories they may have of the buildings.

Maintaining the Heritage Center is also a priority for the KCHS. Recently the balcony and sidewalks were pressure washed and the balcony stained.

Many homecoming guests were eager to take a stroll down the village lane and visit the historic structures at Sonnenberg Village. Ada Amstutz and Harlan Neuenschwander were among many who shared memories of the Sonnenberg Church.

All five of the structures that have been moved or rebuilt at the village were open at the sixth annual Sonnenberg Homecoming held August 10, and hosts were available to answer questions. A section of mud-filled wall and exposed beams, and the remodeled upstairs were features in the Lehman House that were of interest. The Tschantz Log Cabin is furnished with period and Sonnenberg pieces, and Floyd Saurer’s tools have been returned to where he left them when he closed his blacksmith shop in the mid 1960s. Across the drive, people walked through the front doors and into the sanctuary of the Sonnenberg Church, the most recent arrival at the village.

All the while, music under the tent featured foot-tapping bluegrass tunes by Barb Mast, Sue Corfman, David Gedalecia and Butch and Sandi Suttle. Ice cream, hotdogs and coney dogs, homemade pie and more was available at concession stands for the picnic-perfect day.

At 1:00 the umpire of the Akron Black Stockings clarified the 1860-era rules of old-time baseball with the crowd before the first pitch for the game between the Kidron Nine (Amish) and the Stockings. Kidron United (English) met the Stockings in the second game. The Akron Black Stockings beat both teams, ending the day of fun at Sonnenberg Village with friends from near and far.
Personalized Quilts Are a Treasure

Ruth Steiner, Art Neuenschwander, Shirley (Neuenschwander) Hochstetler and Wayne Liechty display one of the two quilts recently donated to the Kidron Community Historical Society by Jeanne (Hammer) Hoefling of Champaign, Illinois.

These quilted treasures were gifts to my parents and me in the early 1950s during my father’s ministry. They traveled with us from Ohio to Connecticut, Brazil and Illinois, and have now found their way back home to Kidron, after 60-plus years. The quilting was done by Mennonite women in Salem, Oregon, and Kidron, and I am grateful to everyone who was a participant. – Jeanne (Hammer) Hoefling 7/27/2013

The above note was given with the quilts to Clayton and Ruth (Geiser) Steiner when they visited with Jeanne (Hammer) Hoefling in Champaign, Illinois, on July 27, 2013. Ruth and Jeanne were neighbors and classmates, and have maintained their friendship for more than six decades. The quilts were first shown to Clayton and Ruth in 2009. At that time, Jeanne wondered what to do with them when she no longer could keep them and the suggestion was made that the Kidron Community Historical Society would be interested in including them in their collection.

Since Jeanne’s husband died, she has moved and downsized. When Ruth contacted Jeanne about a visit in July 2013, Jeanne asked if they would take the quilts back to Wayne County, and so it is that they have returned to Kidron and have been accessioned at the Heritage Center.

Jeanne provided some details regarding when the quilts were given to the Hammers. She remembers that on January 19, 1954, prior to the family’s move to Connecticut, the Wooster Mennonite Church held a farewell for them (p. 111 of Sonnenberg: A Haven and A Heritage by James O. Lehman) and a quilt was given to the Hammers by Bishop Rudy Stauffer on behalf of the Wayne County community.

The larger quilt has blue blocks and white sashing embroidered with names of Sonnenberg Church families (see page 3). The block created by Mr. and Mrs. George Geiser has “1950” embroidered on it. The Hammer family moved to Kidron in September 1950 so their son and daughter, Don and Jeanne, could attend Sonnenberg Mennonite School. For a few months, they lived in the Aaron Steiner apartment by the church. They then moved to Peter Geiser’s older home on the west end of Kidron, the place the Hammer family called home until they left for mission work in Brazil in late 1954.

The quilt with red blocks, initiated by Arvilla Schlabach in Salem, Oregon, was given to Jeanne. The year “1954” is embroidered on three blocks. Howard, Dorothy and Jeanne left for Brazil in December 1954. Sixteen of the 30 blocks have names of girls from the Kidron, Sonnenberg and Wooster community. The others are from Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Virginia and Oregon.

Upcoming Events

October 18, 2013
Central Christian School
Community Service Day Volunteers

October 19, 2013
Kidron Two-Room Schoolhouse Reunion
Kidron Community Center

April 25 – December 28
2013 Exhibit: Sonnenberg: The Early Years

2013 Heritage Center Exhibit

Sonnenberg: The Early Years

Textiles, furniture and housewares are among the items displayed in the 2013 exhibit open through December 28.

Hammer’s Link to Kidron

Jeanne (Hammer) Hoefling’s father, Howard Hammer, was an evangelist with Christian Layman’s Tent Evangelism (CLTE) which was organized and based in Kidron. Paul Neuenschwander and his family were involved with major roles of support which included traveling to the sites and working at the campaigns.

CLTE was established in the early 1950s and active for more than a decade. A number of Wayne County men served as trustees and many others supported the ministry.

Mennonite Tent Revivals by James O. Lehman (2002, Pandora Press) chronicles the story of CLTE/CLEA and can be purchased at the Heritage Center.
Roger Geiser, founder of the Kidron database which contains thousands of family records unique to the Kidron-Sonnenberg community.

Celia Lehman recently conducted an interview with Roger Geiser after long believing that Roger should be recognized for his significant leadership in establishing the genealogical department at the KCHS’s Heritage Center.

In the early 1990s, when plans were being formalized for building the Heritage Center in Kidron, Roger Geiser believed it was important to include a genealogical department, and offered to start that endeavor to bring added foot traffic through the center’s door.

At that time, Roger was keeping his family records in a three-ring binder. To undertake the task for the entire community, he recognized that it would be imperative to establish a computer database for the collection of Kidron-Sonnenberg genealogical records.

Laura Geiser, Roger’s daughter-in-law, entered the first 250,000 names, while Roger continued to gather data. Marie (Hostetler) Yoder, daughter of Al and Mary Hostetler, entered the next 250,000 names. A number of other people assisted along the way, including Leora Gerber, who has helped for 20 years, concentrating her efforts on local births, deaths and marriage records.

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Address Service Requested

The Kidron Community Historical Society of Kidron, Ohio, founded in 1977, operates under the nonprofit charter granted by the State of Ohio. Your tax deductible gifts will help secure the future of the Historical Society and give you a part in preserving the heritage of this unique community.

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Send checks to Kidron Community Historical Society • Box 234 • Kidron, OH 44636

Kidron-Sonnenberg Heritage Center
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APRIL through DECEMBER • THURSDAY and SATURDAY
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