



Sapling of Peace Oak Planted at Sonnenberg Village

On May 3, 2025, James Hershberger visited the Heritage Center and Sonnenberg Village. He spoke with Wayne Liechty about his travels in Switzerland and told of finding the “Peace Oak” in Salm, France, and how he envisioned a Peace Oak tree growing in Sonnenberg Village. Hershberger donated a 7-inch sapling to be planted in the village, where it will grow to become a symbol of appreciation to God for enabling humanity with the ability and calling to a life of seeking Christ’s way of peace and redemptive love for all peoples of the earth.



In 1712 a group of Jesus’ followers in France were evicted from St. Marie in the Alsace because of their faithfulness to God and their non-violence convictions. These people moved to Salm and founded the Salm Amish Mennonite Church. In the 1790s, at the time of the French Revolution, France desired to build a larger army for King Louis XIV’s quest to conquer adjoining countries. King Louis XIV ordered Anabaptists to get out of France, and subsequently informed the quiet Amish Mennonite men in their peaceful community in the mountains to become armed and prepared for military participation.

The leader of the Amish Mennonite group, Bishop Jacob Kupferschmidt, was alarmed and invited an official to share a meal with them. During the cordial atmosphere, Bishop Kupferschmidt, with his *Ausbund* in hand, led in singing “ein ganz langsammes lied.” The slow-tuned Gregorian-chant-style hymn’s lyrics, proclaiming Christ’s teaching on peace and nonresistance, touched the official. On leaving, he shook the Bishop’s hand and said, “You take care of your farms, and we will take care of the war.” He recorded, “I have seen no one as warm and congenial as these Anabaptists. I took leave of them early, crying, regretting not to have been born in the midst of these good citizens.” A petition was officially approved by the governing Convention in Paris, resulting in the issuance of a document exempting the Mennonites from military training. One of the six signers was the infamous Maximilien Robespierre.



In 1794, in celebration of God’s answer to their prayers, Bishop Kupferschmidt is believed to have planted a small oak tree at the edge of his woodland and called it the “Peace Oak,” a witness to future generations. In 2023, the tree was so large that it took four people stretching fingertip to fingertip to reach around the trunk.

Sources: James Hershberger; Eastern Mennonite University; Garreth Brandt Blog; and AI.

JAMES HERSHBERGER, an avid amateur historian from Augusta County, Virginia, first heard the story and saw the aging Peace Oak during a visit to Salm while touring Anabaptist historical sites in Europe.

The tree, now so large that it takes four people stretching fingertip to fingertip to encircle its trunk, reminded him of another oak not far from his home in the Shenandoah Valley, beneath which General Stonewall Jackson was said to have led his men in prayer before a Civil War battle. Until that oak fell down several years ago, people would collect its acorns to plant “Jackson prayer trees” of their own. Standing beneath Bishop Kupferschmidt’s Peace Oak in France, Hershberger was similarly inspired to grow new trees—albeit ones symbolizing peace, not war—from the historic oak.

“I thought that it was just such a wonderful story, and that we should have some American Peace Oaks,” says Hershberger, who belongs to a Beachy Amish congregation in Augusta County.

In the years since, Hershberger has received several batches of acorns gathered during the autumn from beneath the French Peace Oak and has begun, through a process of trial and error, to establish a second generation of these trees in North America.

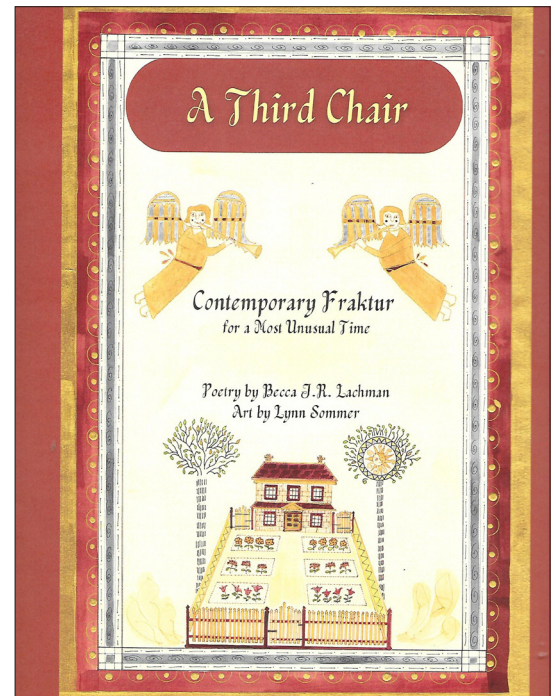
Source: *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Autumn 2010.

Heritage Center Gift Shop

New Books by Local Authors: Becca Lachman, Lynn Sommer and Lorie Troyer

Becca (Rossiter), Lynn (Sommer) and Lorie (Lehman), all grew up in the Kidron area.

Poet Becca J.R. Lachman and fraktur artist Lynn Sommer collaborated in publishing a beautiful chapbook, *A Third Chair*, culminating in a gathering of Becca's exquisite and evocative works along with Lynn's vibrant and stylized illustrations. The collection of nine works debuted at the 2023 Mennonite Arts Weekend in Cincinnati, Ohio, and was awarded "Best of Show" at the Majestic Galleries' 2024 exhibit "art hi[STORIES]" in Nelsonville, Ohio. Fifty copies of the 200-copy limited edition are signed by both Becca and Lynn and available in the Heritage Center Gift Shop.



Watering Our Roots

Stories with history and photos from living in a Historical Village for a decade

Lorie Troyer



Lorie Troyer,
Author

Lori Troyer's book, *Watering Our Roots: Stories and History from a Decade of Living in a Historical Village*, is available at lorieslifethoughts.com. Lori and her husband, Marv, have lived in the Lehman House in Sonnenberg Village for a decade. The book includes a large collection of photos with historical and personal stories about the establishment and growth of Sonnenberg Village, the Kidron Community Historical Society's historical village located on Hackett Road just north of Kidron.

A Third Chair and *Watering Our Roots* would be worthy considerations for your personal libraries and gift-giving opportunities. Find Becca's book at the Heritage Center Gift Shop and Lorie's at lorieslifethoughts.com.

Sonnenberg Village Stop #8 on Wayne County Bureau's 2025 Drive-It-Yourself Farm Tour October 11 and 12 | Noon to 5:00 pm

According to the Farm Bureau's event flyer, the annual Farm Tour, a favorite among visitors, provides a unique look into Amish and Mennonite agricultural traditions through self-guided stops, storytelling, and hard-to-describe farm equipment viewing. It's a rare opportunity to connect past and present in one of Ohio's most scenic rural landscapes.

BBQ ham sandwiches, Trail and Swiss sandwiches, fresh fruit, fry pies, candy, and beverages will all be available for donations that support the Kidron Community Historical Society and the Sonnenberg Village.

Sonnenberg Village

2025 Sonnenberg Village Festival

Sonnenberg Village Festival coordinators had everything in place for a successful event on August 9. Despite the heat, attendees appreciated the gentle breeze on a sunny day.

Christa Wolf directed *Treasure Island*, a play featuring 29 children ages 8-14. Her students participated in costume and set design, prop construction and transitions, along with acting. Piggybacking the play with the festival appeared to be a win-win situation.

The Orrville Community Band performance was lively, and buggy and golf cart rides were a hit, along with inflatables for the children.

Nik's Barbershop judged and provided prizes to four winners: Zach Schloneger, Bruce Steiner, unidentified festival guest, and Al Keim.



Two teams competed in the Cornhole Tournament. The winning team members were Dean Steiner and Steve Lehman.

Fiddle Contest winners were: Open Class, first place, Kerry Varble, Salem; second place, Joe Lautzenheiser, North Lawrence; third place, Mike Gerber, Millersburg; and fourth place, Kay Lorson, Dover. Class A ages 12 and under: first place Madeleine Witulski, Bowling Green; second place, Tessa Underwood, Sterling; third place, Juniper Wargo, Uniontown; and fourth place, Julia Witulski, Bowling Green. There were no entries in Class B ages 13-18.

Artisans explained their blacksmithing, wool weaving, basketmaking, and print shop crafts while Vic Schantz provided guitar music in the Tschantz Cabin, and



Dave Tschantz talked to visitors about the history of the cabin.

Julie Kirby and staff were available to explain the mission of Hope's House, located in the Bixler House, providing exposure for the foster community.

A full menu and beverages were served from the food trailer and the lemonade stand with Rob Gregory's Band Organ playing in the background.

Lorie Troyer offered signed copies of her book, *Watering Our Roots*, which chronicles her decade-long residence at Sonnenberg Village. Other books provided by the KCHS Heritage Center were also available.

The lively Honeytown evening concert in the Gerber-Nussbaum Barn concluded the festival.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Wayne County Farm Tour Stop #8
October 11, 12 | noon - 5:00 pm
Sonnenberg Village

Orrville Community Band
Dec 6 | 2:00 pm
Sonnenberg Village Welcome Center

Christmas In the Country
December 12 | 6-9:00 pm
Lehman's west parking lot
Across the street from Heritage Center

"It's a Wonderful Life"
Produced by Christa Wolf
Dec 12 & 13 at 7:00 pm | Dec 14 at 2:00 pm
Sonnenberg Village Welcome Center

Sonnenberg Village Festival
August 8, 2026

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Nonprofit Organization Postage Paid Wooster, Ohio 44691 Permit No. 228

Address Service Requested



FALL 2025

Kidron-Sonnenberg Heritage Center

13153 Emerson Road • Kidron, Ohio

OPEN APRIL through OCTOBER • SATURDAYS • 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

CLOSED NOVEMBER, DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY, and MARCH

The Heritage Center is closed November through March, but welcomes appointments to visit the museum and Sonnenberg Village.

Call and leave a message at 330-857-9111 for information or to schedule an appointment.

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.

Administration

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Kidron Community Historical Society Membership

Annual memberships are due in January and expire on December 31. Contact the Heritage Center if uncertain of your membership status.

Name _____

Address _____

Type of Membership _____ New Renewal

Membership Fee \$ _____ General Donation \$ _____

Would you like a receipt? Yes No *Thank you!*

Individual Annual Member \$30

Husband and Wife Annual Member..... \$45

Organization Annual Member..... \$50

Individual Life Member \$300

Heritage Club Member \$1000 or more

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