

ABOVE, Present view of Blooming Grove from the hill, showing the Meeting House (1828) to the left, and the more recent Museum to the right.  
 BELOW, The Meeting House, the weather boards and tin roof were added about forty years ago.

## BLOOMING GROVE, THE DUNKER SETTLEMENT OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA\*

BY RUSSELL WIEDER GILBERT

DURING the period of Napoleon's insistence upon military service for those under his political control, America again became the haven for many Germans from Württemberg and other sections of southwestern Germany. George Rapp, a leader of the Separatist movement and the magnetic preacher from Iptingen in Württemberg, boarded a boat on the Rhine in July, 1803, with his son John and Doctor Friedrich Conrad Haller, landing in Baltimore early in September.<sup>1</sup> With their trend toward celibacy and their emphasis upon a community of goods, vinedresser Rapp and the Harmonists established Harmony in Butler County, Pennsylvania (1804-1815), New Harmony on the Wabash in Indiana (1815-1825), and Economy in what is now Ambridge, Pennsylvania (1825-1868).<sup>2</sup> The arrival of two ships gave the Harmonists the needed support: the *Aurora* on July 4, 1804, in Baltimore with about 300 passengers; the *Atlantic* on September 15, 1804, in Philadelphia with 269 aboard, including Frederick Reichert, who was finally adopted by Rapp and called Frederick Rapp.<sup>3</sup>

John and Gottlieb Heim, two bachelor weavers (thirty-four and thirty-seven years old respectively, five and a half feet tall, yellow hair) from Möhringen, Württemberg, who had been imprisoned in 1803 for refusal to bear arms, were released upon the promise to leave Germany. Anxious to come to America, they joined a large company of nonconformists, leaving their home on June 9, 1804. George Kiess, a fifty-two-year-old farmer from Möhringen, related the story of the trip in his diary.<sup>4</sup> Two weeks were consumed

\*A paper read before the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Historical Association, at Selinsgrove, October 17-18, 1952.

<sup>1</sup> See Federal Writers' Project, *The Harmony Society in Pennsylvania*, Beaver County, Pennsylvania, 1937, p. 6; also John S. Duss, *The Harmonists, A Personal History* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1943), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence S. Thurman, curator of Old Economy, wrote an article on the Harmonists for *PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY*, January, 1951, pp. 57 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See William John Hinke and Ralph Beaver Strassburger, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers* (Norristown, Pa., 1934), Vol. 3, pp. 149 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Arthur D. Graeff has the original diary. Quotations from it are based upon his translation in "Pennsylvania Bound," *'S Pennsylvanisch Deutsch Eck*, The Allentown *Morning Call*, July 31, 1943.

in going along the Enns River, through Saxheim to Frankfort-on-the-Main and then down to the Rhine, and finally from Mayence to Utrecht and Amsterdam in Holland. Another week passed before the 270 passengers, largely from Württemberg,<sup>5</sup> could sail on the ship *Margaret*, chartered by the Philadelphia firm of Brinker and Bartow and mastered by Captain Edward C. Gard(e)-ner. According to Graeff, the *Margaret* sailed westward on July 3, 1804; Joseph H. McMinn, who wrote a history of Blooming Grove in 1901, stated that the emigrants boarded the ship on the evening of July 3 and sailed on the morning of July 12.<sup>6</sup> Included among the passengers were farmers like Kiess and many skilled workers, such as a tailor from Möhringen, a printer from Waldeck, a weaver and dyer of silk from Ludwigsburg, a musician from Stuttgart, a stonecutter from Unterhausen, a clerk from Heilbronn, an architect from Westhof in Hesse, and a sixteen-year-old Jewish clerk from Kreuznach.<sup>7</sup>

An African negro was the first person to greet the writer of the diary on the ship. Kiess related the experience: "I shook hands with him because I considered him one of my brothers, who was a child of the same mother as mine and on whom God desired to work out his plan of salvation."

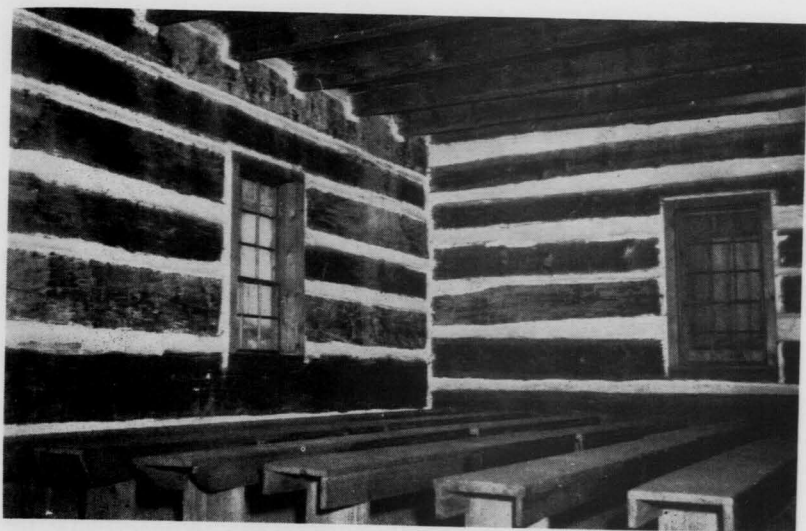
The *Margaret* passed the lighthouse of Dover. Kiess recorded the reaction: "It was a beautiful sight to see the rising sun shine on the white shores of England. . . . The thought that we are looked upon as no better than sheep for the slaughter affected me very much. But on His account we overcome, on His account who loved us all. . . ."

A violent storm beginning on Wednesday, July 18, and continuing throughout Thursday and Friday not only caused seasickness for most passengers but also fear in the heart of Kiess, who wrote: "O God, have mercy upon us! . . . the one side of the ship nearly touches the water, and the other side rises up like a mountain. A gust of wind blew my grandchild out of the cradle."

<sup>5</sup> Included are a few from Holland and several from Sweden.

<sup>6</sup> McMinn, *Blooming Grove, A History of the Congregation of German Dunkers Who Settled in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, 1805* . . . (Williamsport, Pa., 1901), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> See Hinke and Strassburger, *op. cit.*, pp. 153 ff. Other types of workers were listed: architect, cooper, miller, carpenter, stocking weaver, soap-boiler, tobacco box maker, shoemaker, blacksmith, baker, butcher, distiller, geometer, ropemaker, glassmaker, turner, bookbinder, schoolmaster, and a doctor from Holland.



*Interior of the Meeting House.*

After the storm had subsided, Kiess wrote: "The board on the ship is very poor for weak people [<sup>s</sup>]. . . . We are living in a crowd of people who try to get their livelihood by stealing it from their fellow creatures. . . . Some of our fellow travelers caused me such sorrow. There are some persons amongst them like cannibals."

Their appetites were satisfied somewhat by the fruits and vegetables which the natives gave them when the passengers spent the night of July 27 on the island of St. Michael, one of the Azores. ". . . after giving us three cheers they [the natives] left us again, swinging their handkerchieves over their heads."

The vastness of the universe had produced in Kiess a feeling of humility and of man's littleness, and so on the morning of Sunday, August 12, in mid-ocean he "awoke and thought of these words—'Shall I be with you on Tabor?' . . . With a hasty glance I thought over all of the days of my life and considered them nothing but days of suffering and misery. And besides, I thought of my own perdition and the losing of my God-like image. This brought forth in me the desire to take part in the holiness after much suffering through the mercy of my Saviour."

<sup>s</sup> McMinn, *op. cit.*, p. 13, added that "the food was poor, the water bad, and the beer sour."

On August 30 all began to sense that they were close to the land of their dreams, for the *Margaret* had met an American ship, seven days out of Richmond, Virginia. A bird caught in the mast on September 1 was likewise a welcome sign. An exchange of greetings with the American schooner *Thomas* on September 3 reassured them. The thirteenth of September saw the entrance of Delaware Bay. The diary recorded the spirit of the group on September 15: "We sailed along the shores of the Delaware. It was a beautiful sight. We seemed to breathe in the freedom of the country through the air, and a quiet peace and joy touched my heart." On the next day, as they sailed past Newcastle and Wilmington, the "fine farms, the beautiful woods and green fields and the splendid trees drew our attention." On September 17, the *Margaret* arrived at the quarantine hospital called "the Lazaretto," off Tinicum Island, and docked at Philadelphia late in the afternoon of the next day. According to McMinn,<sup>9</sup> all "were on the way for one hundred and one days, sixty-eight of which were spent huddled together upon an overcrowded emigrant ship at sea." Even though McMinn's estimate may not be infallible, one must marvel at the persistence and endurance of these American ancestors. The Dunkard Brethren entertained the Kiess party in Philadelphia.

Throughout the diary, Kiess expressed his religious moods and thoughts. On the voyage the Dunkard convert devoted much of his time to the religious tracts given to him by the Quaker interpreter on board the *Margaret*, writings which developed the Quaker doctrines on the Inner Light: "The principles . . . were nearly the same as mine, and they called forth the ambition in me again which I had after my conversion. I wish that I could spend the rest of my days in such company and at last reach the fial [final or fill?] of my desires on this earth which I have been trying to reach. Lord, Thy will be done!"

Instead of going to Butler County and joining the Harmonists, a good number who crossed the Atlantic on the *Margaret* stayed in Germantown during the winter of 1804-1805, waiting to establish their own colony under the leadership of Dr. Haller, an educated German pietist, who, according to his gravestone in the

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* Officially the ship was reported to have been sixty-three days out of Amsterdam.

Blooming Grove cemetery, was born November 5, 1753, and died October 14, 1828. Some believe that the division between the Ambridge group and Haller's followers developed from a disagreement on celibacy.<sup>10</sup>

The Quakers had established the "Quaker Hill" settlement in Loyalsock Township, Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, in 1802. It was a Quaker interpreter, one must remember, who influenced the travelers on the *Margaret*, especially the diarist Kiess, in their religious thought. It was a Quaker speculator, Jesse Willits, of Berks County in Pennsylvania, who persuaded Wendel Harmon, the financier of Haller's group, to buy approximately 422 acres called "Hopewell" for 316 pounds, seventeen shillings, and six pence (about \$1,500), a cost of \$3.65 per acre. Although others were mentioned in the title purchase, the deed was made out to Harmon on May 31, 1805.<sup>11</sup>

In the spring of 1805, Heim, Ulmer, Staiger, Waltz, Kiess, Jung [Young], Harmon, Gross, Bühl, Scheel, Burghardt (Bertsch?) and families,<sup>12</sup> an approximate total of fifty, left Germantown, went through Reading, Pottsville, Mount Carmel, Bear Gap, and Danville. Having crossed the Susquehanna at Danville, they followed the Indian trail to Mahoning Creek and then traversed the Muncy hills to the Loyalsock Creek, and finally the Sheshequin path to Quaker Hill.<sup>13</sup> Below Quaker Hill they founded a settlement called Blooming Grove, the destination they intended to reach, a gem of a valley about seven miles north of Williamsport and about two and a half miles long and about three-fourths of a mile wide. May 20, 1805, seems to have been the date when they saw their new home. The view must have been an awesome one, for as late as August 10, 1942, the Williamsport *Sun* reported: "The entire valley was a dense forest of principally white pine, many trees reaching one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet in height. . . ."

<sup>10</sup> Concerning Rapp and the question of celibacy, see Duss, *op. cit.*, p. 11 and p. 16; also Federal Writers' Project, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> See Lycoming County, Deed Book E, pp. 274 f. Willits seems to have received the patent for the land in the last decade of the eighteenth century: see Rolls Office, State of Pennsylvania, Patent Book No. 25, p. 281.

<sup>12</sup> See the marker of the Pennsylvania Historical Commission and the Lycoming County Historical Society (1930) before the Dunkard Meeting House of 1828.

<sup>13</sup> For the route see McMinn, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

The origin of the name is uncertain. The woods may have been blooming with dogwood and rhododendron (great laurel) blossoms or perhaps with mountain laurel. Many claim that the settlers themselves called the spot Blooming Grove (Blumengrofe). Some say that the neighbors on Quaker Hill coined the name. It would seem more likely that the name is a mixture of German and English, *Blumen* plus *grove*, characteristic of Pennsylvania German, a possibility which would indicate an origin some time after settlement. According to McMinn, Blumengrofe was accepted in 1841, for the term appeared in an inscription on the fly leaf of a German Bible given to Isaac Kurtz by his schoolteacher Christopher Kiess.<sup>14</sup>

Hidden in the hills of central Pennsylvania, Blooming Grove gained little attention, whereas the fame of Economy "spread throughout America and Europe."<sup>15</sup> Economy was only about two years old in 1826 when there came to it Friedrich List, the famous German economist, and Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar, the son of Karl August (the friend of Goethe and Schiller). Nikolaus Lenau, the German poet (1802-1850), regained his health at Economy; and Lord Byron knew enough of Economy to describe and praise the celibacy of the Harmonists in the fifteenth canto of *Don Juan*. Dr. Wilbur H. Oda stated that Governor Ritner of Pennsylvania and Presidents William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor "either visited Economy or came into contact with it directly or indirectly."<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between Blooming Grove and Economy is interesting. Even though relatives lived in both places and even though a few from each visited in the other camp, a marked hostility existed at times. One need look only at a few wills of residents in the Blooming Grove area. Christopher Rall wrote in 1833: "If there is any more property left, my Son Martin shall be the heir for it with this condition: If he moves from Economie and begin house keeping for himself (for I am not willing to have been Rapps Negro), but, should he or none of his children move out of Economie within the space of ten years from this date and begin house keeping for himself, he hath no right of heritage any

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> Duss, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>16</sup> See Oda, "The Influence of the Economy Settlement," *The Pennsylvania Dutchman*, October, 1952, p. 7.

more. But if he still remain in Economie where he is now, he shall receive hereditary five dollars."<sup>17</sup>

John Stump revealed the same feeling toward Economy in 1834: ". . . my Son John shall receive one hundred and fifty Dollars, upon this Condition, if he or his Son Jacob will move out of Economy and stays out. for, in Economy shall come nothing. . . ." <sup>18</sup>

Economy practiced a community of goods under Rapp's leadership, whereas Blooming Grove under Haller's guidance ignored it. Dr. Haller was the spiritual force behind Blooming Grove and the unity of its fifty original citizens. A winter in Germantown had influenced Dr. Haller, too pietistic for Europe, to become a Dunker; his leadership had transformed a small band of "reformed Lutherans," pietists in spirit, into believers in immersion.<sup>19</sup> He became their judge, lawgiver, teacher, scholar, linguist, and "physician who distinguished himself . . . in the epidemic of 1813-15."<sup>20</sup> What a contrast between the highly educated Dr. Haller and the simple vine-grower Rapp!

Duss stated that "the segregation of the Blooming Grove group from the main body" removed "some discordant elements" from the Rapp Harmonists,<sup>21</sup> and added: "The disaffected, who in our modern jargon 'could not take it,' found fault with the Rapp leadership, the communal economy and the rigid equality of reward extended to all alike. Some of these flocked to Dr. Haller's Lycoming County settlement where no community of goods was enforced."<sup>22</sup>

The clearing of the forest and the construction of simple huts were the primary tasks of these settlers. They probably worshipped in their modest homes at first, but one can be certain that soon a primitive log building served them as church and school. The year 1828—Dr. Haller died October 14 at the age of seventy-four—marked the erection of the present meeting house, a structure thirty feet wide, forty feet long, and twelve feet high, made of "flat-hewn logs, with joints chunked and daubed," with huge girders "counter-hewn, and the lumber [white pine] all worked

<sup>17</sup> Lycoming County, Will Book A, p. 264.

<sup>18</sup> Will Book A, p. 276.

<sup>19</sup> McMinn, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> Duss, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21 f. The tone of this quotation is somewhat similar to the mood of the two wills.



out by hand.”<sup>23</sup> Only the weather boards and the new roofing of some forty years ago alter the original appearance. The size of the logs attests to the existence of towering pines and fertile soil; the candleholders and the old hinges on the door reveal the skilled ironmaster; the plain spineless benches show common men and women of vigor and backbone. Children survived the rigors of an hour-long sermon by sleeping under the benches on a hard floor or by absorbing nourishment from mothers who relied for physical support upon the inner walls of their church. Here, as everywhere among the Pennsylvania Germans, education and religion were combined. Opposition to the school law of 1834 produced the establishment of a private school under German teachers.

The 1834 will of Leonhard Ulmer, which granted “Coverleds” to his wife and land on the Allegheny Mountain for \$300 and “a yock of oxen” to his son,<sup>24</sup> contained a codicil authorizing two executors “. . . to give Deeds, especially, there is no deed given yet for the Ground on which our meeting house stands (which Ground I did give as a present to our German Society) and also for the burial Place for which I did get paid for. And it is my earnestly Will and desire that there shall be Deeds given for the two Pieces of ground. . . .”<sup>25</sup> The will makes it clear that Ulmer gave the ground for the meeting house and sold the land behind it for use as a cemetery.

Most of the leaders who followed Dr. Haller were men without academic training. The Dunkers of Blooming Grove selected Gottlieb Heim, then David Young (Jung), then Christian Reisch, then Frederick Weinman.<sup>26</sup> Christian (“Christly”) Heim, who died March 30, 1879, at the age of seventy-nine,<sup>27</sup> was the last regular pastor. Of the leaders without academic training, “Christly” was by far the outstanding one. In thick and large ledgers he wrote in German script his intensely serious sermons, a key to his fine character, to his intelligence, and to his strict attitudes. He insisted, for example, that women should not wear “store” hats but rather caps and bonnets. He baptized Dr. Ernst Max Adam, who had come to Blooming Grove in 1838, according to

<sup>23</sup> McMinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 f.

<sup>24</sup> Will Book A, p. 280.

<sup>25</sup> A, p. 281, January 17, 1837.

<sup>26</sup> McMinn, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.



*Log house with new tin roof.*

McMinn.<sup>28</sup> After Christly's death, men like Dr. Adam, John Schaefer, another Gottlieb Heim, and Abraham Beidelspacher led the worship.

In the corrected copy of his book in the James V. Brown Free Library of Williamsport,<sup>29</sup> McMinn has written in long hand under the name Adam the words, "Autobiography disappointed me."<sup>30</sup> Dr. Levi Ulmer and Charles Bidelspacher, translators of the Adam autobiography, however, have praised it. The reason for McMinn's reaction may lie in Adam's failure to present an adequate picture of life in Blooming Grove. *Meine Lebensgeschichte* is the interesting story of a German emigrant in his struggles to find peace of mind and soul on American soil.<sup>30a</sup> In

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>29</sup> The present writer appreciates the courtesy and help of the librarian, Miss Katherine W. Bennett.

<sup>30</sup> McMinn, *op. cit.*, p. 53. Adam began to write his autobiography, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, on July 6, 1869. He never completed it, for he closed with his mother's request in 1844 to visit her in Germany during her fatal illness and with a lengthy description of the trip and the reception in his home. He wrote it in a clear Roman script on 185 pages (7¼x10½ inches). It is now in the possession of Mrs. Raymond Shaheen (*née* Heim), South Williamsport, Pa.

<sup>30a</sup> The writer plans to present a picture of the life and character of Dr. Adam in an article, entitled "The Unpublished Autobiography of Dr. Ernst Max Adam, Settler in Dunker Blooming Grove," which will be published in *Susquehanna University Studies*, V, No. 1, Selinsgrove, Pa., May, 1953. According to the autobiography Dr. Adam was born in Meissen on November 20, 1801. McMinn stated that he was born in Dresden in 1807.

spite of varied experiences in Pennsylvania, the spirit of *Wanderlust* and discontent did not leave him, and so he resolved to go south to Florida, hoping to find peace with God as a hermit either in a cave or in a wilderness. Having failed to gain companionship among strangers who did not understand his tongue, fearful of dangers which lurked everywhere, and mindful of his friend's [Abele's] earlier pleasant warning, Dr. Adam finally turned in his tracks and faced north on the sands of North Carolina.

Pennsylvania again lent her hand to his inner growth. Pastor Abele, interested in chemistry, resigned his rural pastorate in order to manage a drugstore in Williamsport, and invited Dr. Adam to go to the city. The doctor's practice there introduced him to those "who were conspicuous through special dress, almost in the manner of the Quakers . . . members of a peculiar religious denomination who were known as Bloominggrovers or Anabaptists. . . . one of their number [Bühl] made a lasting impression on me." In fact, Bühl influenced him to attend a Dunker service conducted by Jung in a simple private home in Williamsport. Later Dr. Adam recorded, "When I had returned to Williamsport [from a sick call], I thought that I had never met people who attracted me as much as these." He expressed his enthusiasm for these Dunkards to Bühl: "It is my firm belief that whoever resides with you in Bloominggrove must live in Paradise." His faith in them produced action: he moved into a house on the Hauser farm. "I now lived as a hermit in a neat little house all by myself and separated from the tumult of the outer world"—but it was hardly "a cloister without any care," for "I felt the burden of my sins more than ever." Later, a home on the Gross farm served as the abode for his influential activities. Blooming Grove became the crowning point of his inner development.

Ephraim Shafer, Williamsport, remembers Dr. Adam as a queer, peculiar person. Mrs. Sue Heim Little, Newberry, Pennsylvania, remembers Dr. Adam as a Saxon educated in Berlin; as an eccentric bachelor who did not like women and children, who placed apples and pears along the "Doctor's Path" in order to check on the honesty of children, and who said that sweet corn was fit for little swine; as one who exerted "a Kaiser-like power over everyone in the community" and who wore a black skullcap above piercing blue eyes and a Vandyke beard; as a doctor who

made medicine from calamus root. The doctor of Adam's day usually followed the practice of bleeding or bloodletting at least once a year; he gave patients calomel and jalap as effective purgatives. Some in Blooming Grove may have sought the help of Martin List, the powwow doctor with a reputation for stopping the flow of blood. The Blooming Grove Museum exhibits a few items which belonged to Dr. Adam: tooth extractor and forceps, cupping lance and cups, lance for bloodletting, cancer medicine, small pliers, and balances for compounding medicine.

According to Dr. Adam's will, written October 14, 1870, and giving September 15, 1880, as the date of his death, his two houses in Williamsport were to be sold at public sale, and the money was to be "sent as a voluntary gift to the Diaconessen Institute at Jerusalem in Palestine."<sup>31</sup> He continued: "Should this will be contested out of a sordid motive, then I appoint the North German Consul at New York to be my Executor, the more as I never acquired the North American citizenship, but still maintain my connection with Saxony as a subject."<sup>32</sup> Dr. Adam gave an original loan of one thousand dollars as a present to another Christian Heim,<sup>33</sup> Mrs. Little's father, who it seems took care of Dr. Adam during the latter's illness. A codicil to Adam's will, dated December, 1878, states, "It would please me, if the contents of all the vessels in my apothecary's shop be buried in a deep hole in my garden." The purpose of avoiding dangerous misuse of the contents was achieved but not by the method nor in the place specified. Mrs. Little recalls how men removed the floor boards of Dr. Adam's small home on the Gross farm and how she then helped to throw the bottles with their contents into the cellar.

Mrs. Little remembers the worship services of Bidelspacher, Gross, and Schaefer, all of whom used a book of sermons by Hofacker, from which they read each Sunday. Could it be that Dr. Adam brought this book with him to Blooming Grove, for his autobiography enthusiastically praises the spiritual truths of these sermons, read by him in the Williamsport home of his loyal friend Abele, formerly the Lutheran pastor in a small community two miles from Millheim? No, from Pastor Abele he purchased the book which had attracted him "with a peculiar irresistible force."

<sup>31</sup> Will Book 4-D, p. 472.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 473.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* This Christian Heim was the son of Jacob Heim.

For worship the leader read one line of a hymn and then the group sang, and so it continued—an antiphonal alternation of speech and song. Most of the women wore sunbonnets; only a few came with white caps. After the service the women went out first.

Gradually the Dunker church in Blooming Grove lost its members. The young people seemed to leave in order to establish homes elsewhere. Many had gone to the West. Those who stayed in the area joined Evangelical and Baptist churches, especially the latter, because of beliefs similar to those of the Dunker group. *The Home Mission Monthly Baptist* (November, 1891),<sup>34</sup> printed a picture of the twelve surviving members of what the editors claimed was the first organized German Baptist Church of North America. The jubilee or fiftieth anniversary meeting of the Eastern Conference of the German Baptist Church was held at Williamsport on Sunday, September 20, 1891. The Reverend J. C. Grimmell, General Secretary of German Missions, preached the sermon. He reviewed the activities of a young man twenty-eight years of age, the Rev. Konrad Anton Fleischmann,<sup>35</sup> “[riding on a pony] all the way from Reading, where he resided”:

When he arrived at Blooming Grove, Fairfield and Anthony Township, he received a welcome that amply repaid the inconveniences of the long ride. Jacob Michaelis, also a young man, had, upon Fleischmann's advice, gone over the same road from Reading as a colporteur. Here in Lycoming County he found the spiritual field ripe for the harvest, so that at his request Brother Fleischmann came to aid in the work of ingathering souls, happy in the experience of redeeming love and regenerating grace. . . . On Tuesday, February 7, 1841, twenty-nine happy converts stepped into the flowing stream in Hepburn Township, then called Blooming Grove. In the same months there were baptisms in Fairfield and Anthony. We are happy to have with us six of those constituent members of the first [German] Baptist church of America. . . .

Men and brethren, pause a moment. Can you hear the derisive sarcasm of an unfriendly world as it said: “Aha!” the German Baptists have come to America; they have founded three little churches out in the backwoods of

<sup>34</sup> Vol. XIII, No. 11, published by the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Temple Court, Beekman Street, New York.

<sup>35</sup> Concerning Fleischmann, see McMinn, *op. cit.*, pp. 62 ff.

Pennsylvania. Oh, how our God has turned that sneer into honest and increasing respect.

Eighteen hundred and forty-one showed three churches in the forests of Pennsylvania; 1891 points to over two hundred churches and 16,000 members, in twenty-two States, Ontario and Manitoba. . . .<sup>36</sup>

The Rev. Mr. Grimmell said, "Justice requires me to state that Brother K. A. Fleischmann was not the first German Baptist in America, nor the converts in Lycoming County the first of our tongue who were baptized in this country."<sup>37</sup> He insisted, however, that no such church organization existed among the German Baptists in America before 1841.



*Iron hinge on door of the Meeting House.*

It should be mentioned that the Dunkers of Blooming Grove gave Fleischmann the privilege of using their church. The strength of a newly established German Baptist group undoubtedly competed favorably with the single Dunker church of Blooming Grove and even reduced the latter's fading vitality. Some Blooming Grove adherents left to found a colony near Bucyrus, Ohio, from which Jacob G. Heim proceeded in 1874 to start a new Pennsylvania German venture for his large family at Dawson, Nebraska.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 34. *The Home Mission Monthly Baptist*, p. 306.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308. The Rev. A. von Puttkammer, then 85 years of age and present at the gathering, was baptized in Lawrenceville, Steuben County, New York, in 1836. About a dozen persons from Germany became Baptists in New York at the time of Fleischmann's emigration (1839).

<sup>38</sup> See G. M. Ludwig, "The Influence of the Pennsylvania Dutch in the Middle West," *Pennsylvania German Folklore Society Yearbook*, X (1945), p. 15. It was at Dawson where the history of the Heim family, prominent at Blooming Grove, was printed. Some descendants of the Heims are now living in Ontario, Canada.

Economy and Blooming Grove have breathed their last, but history must preserve their records. The Harmonists gained recognition in Pennsylvania and elsewhere for their communal society through wealth and power; the Blooming Grove Dunkards lost their way through the insurmountable handicaps of small numbers, poverty, and remoteness. Economy produced a few imprints by the Rapp press under John Christoph Müller,<sup>39</sup> but Blooming Grove hardly competed through its one known publication. "Christly" Heim had the brochure of Christoph Schütz, entitled *Schrift-gemässes Zeugniß von der Wiederbringung aller Dinge*,<sup>40</sup> reprinted in Philadelphia by King and Baird, 9 Sansom Street. "Blooming-grove [one word], 1855" appears on the title page. The theme is the restoration of all things, a doctrine at variance with orthodox Christianity. According to this belief, everyone will be saved ultimately. The preface states that there are those "who make the foolish assertion that the devil will rule as a powerful prince over many thousand millions of poor damned spirits and souls, and that therefore the devil's kingdom shall remain without end beside Christ's. How great is the disgrace which is added through a teaching falsely attributed to Christ! for then Jesus' kingdom would appear as small and insignificant, in contrast to the devil's mighty empire, as a drop of water to the great ocean."<sup>41</sup> The preface answers those who believe that the teaching is "dangerous food for the common folks, because they would become more secure and godless," by pointing (1) to "the terrible, indescribable pain of the thousand-year-old punishment of hell, where each one will be tortured until he will have received the last blow his deeds warrant" and by pointing (2) to the thought that "all who finally are saved from the torment of condemnation cannot possess the victor's crown in all eternity, because they were merely

<sup>39</sup> See Oda, *op. cit.*, where the Economy imprints between 1826 and 1830 are listed.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Saur's *Der Hoch-Deutsch Americanische Calender*, 1739, advertised four reprints of works by Schütz: *Geistliche Correspondenz*, *Guldene Rose*, *Von der Ewigen Weisheit*, and *Von der Absonderung*. Dr. Oda lists eight of his works, exclusive of the Blooming Grove imprint. Dr. Oda states that Schütz lived near Frankfurt around 1728, and that he seems to have left the church and joined the Separatists.

<sup>41</sup> Preface, p. 9.

the conquered but never the conquerors."<sup>42</sup> The Universalist Church holds the same doctrine today.<sup>43</sup>

Was the belief accepted by the entire Dunkard settlement, or was it merely the point of view of Christian Heim, who therefore insisted upon republication of the Schütz work? The answer is uncertain.

The church building of 1828, the old cemetery behind it, and the recent stone museum are evidences of the Blooming Grove settlement. The museum houses about one hundred and seventy items, many reminiscent of the nineteenth century. The word handmade must be applied to the flax brake, swingle, or hatchel; to the shovel, plane, splint box, wooden and metal locks, last and shoes; to the coopered dipper, liquor container, and meat tub; to the straw hat, bread and charcoal baskets, butter ladle and barrel. Lanterns, lard lamp, spinning wheels, reels, flail, turnip cutter, apple peeler, lard-cutting machine, sausage stuffer, corn cutters, wool cards, shingle splitter, candle molds and snuffer, wagon jack, water pipe auger and rimmer, crocks and bottles, a model cider press, salt box, pewter hot water bottle, collection plate, cooper's tools, drafting instrument, dinner horn, soap made by



*Handmade chair in museum.*

Dr. Haller, music box, piano made by Christly Heim, bier, grain sickle, mallet, maul, and Christly Heim's pipe, whetstone, cane, compass, and tuning fork—these and other articles one may see in the museum.

The term "stool pigeon" is common today, but few see its origin in a practice of years ago. It is derived from the effort to trap and kill the "wild pigeons" which flew in unbelievable numbers through North American skies during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including the Susquehanna River valley. The

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Concerning this belief and the Universalist Church, see J. L. Neve, *Churches and Sects of Christendom* (Burlington, Iowa, 1940), pp. 565-567.



pigeon net, the basket, and the pigeon netter's stool in the Blooming Grove Museum attest to the activity in the Williamsport area.

In the study of Pennsylvania or United States history one may read about *wilde Tauben* or wild pigeons. Peter Kalm in his *Travels in North America*, originally published in Stockholm in 1756 and translated into English in 1770,<sup>44</sup> as well as Mittelberger, mentioned *wilde Tauben*.<sup>45</sup> The rather general term probably refers to the species *Columba migratoria*. Washington Irving, Fenimore Cooper in *The Pioneers*, and Parkman in *The Oregon Trail* knew about the wild pigeon. For the Pennsylvania German *die wilde Dauwe* (usually in the plural) designated the passenger pigeon, *Ectopistes migratorius*.<sup>46</sup> In Kentucky in the early decade of the nineteenth century, Alexander Wilson and John James Audubon had estimated the number in flocks at several billions or more each day.

In the Blooming Grove area many pigeons were taken with nets. L. Frank Koch and Ephraim Shafer, both from the Williamsport district, whose backgrounds are tinged with the Blooming Grove atmosphere, described to the writer the customary technique. The bough house, a common sight, built of pine brush or hemlock branches, was a shelter or tent large enough to house several or more men. Nearby, perhaps sixty to one hundred feet away, was a piece of ground which had been cleared of snow or weeds, then covered with buckwheat chaff and sprinkled with grain. Shafer said that corn was used. Koch pictured the process:

The net, about twelve feet square [the size of the net, made of flax, varied in the same and different areas], was spread on the ground, with the edge next to the baited chaff pinned to the ground with wooden pins or hooks. The other edge was fastened to a spring pole or prop with a rope in such a way that when the tension was released by pulling a trigger with a string from the bough-house, the net spread over the baited chaff as quickly as a flash. Beside the boughhouse was a pole with a short

<sup>44</sup> A recent English version of two volumes was published by Wilson-Erickson, Inc., in 1937 in New York.

<sup>45</sup> See William J. Rupp, *Bird Names and Bird Lore Among the Pennsylvania Germans*, Pennsylvania German Society *Proceedings and Addresses*, Vol. LII, 1946, pp. 32 and 51 f.

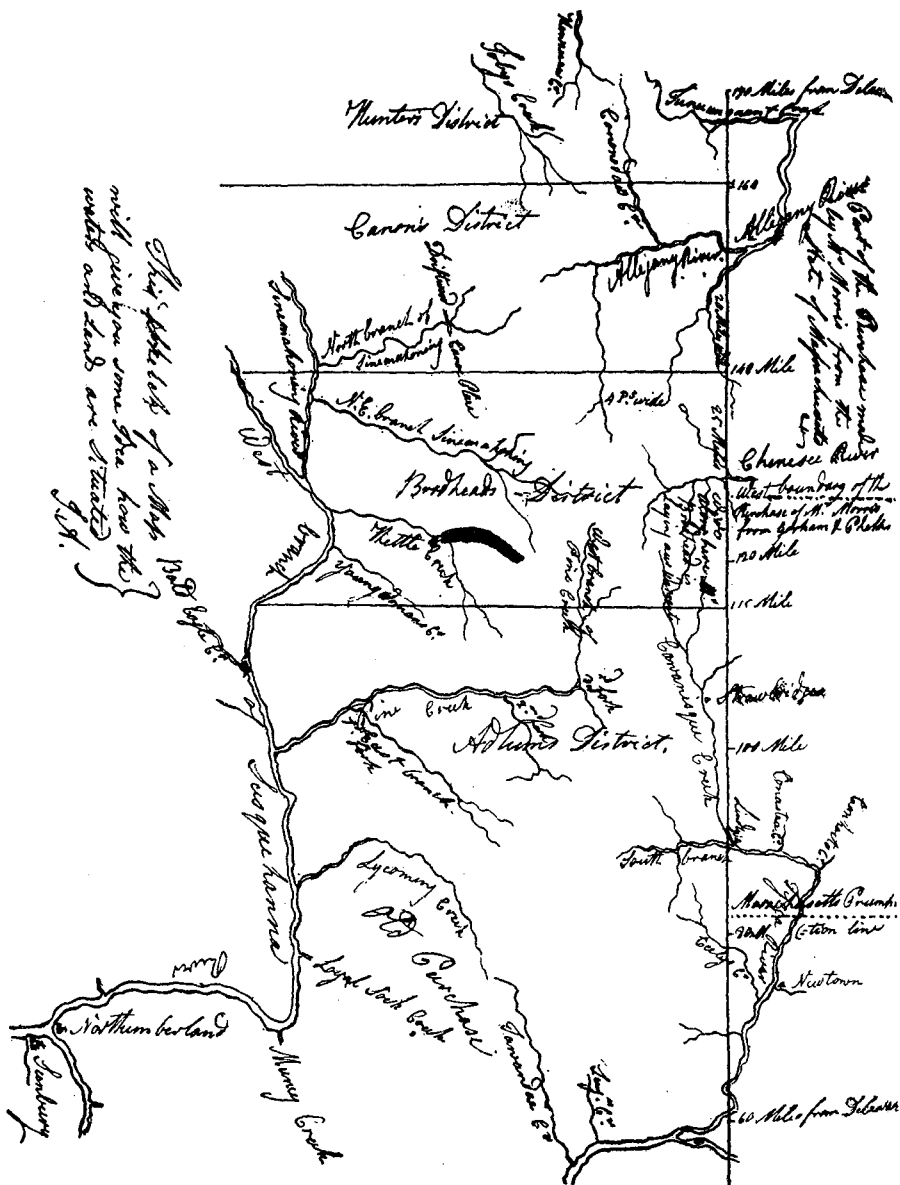
<sup>46</sup> For an excellent presentation of the subject, see Rupp, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-137; also "Wild Pigeons," *Eck*, Allentown *Morning Call*, April 1, 1939.

crossarm on top, fastened near the center with a bolt or nail. On one end was a small board about the size of a man's hand, called the stool. To the other was tied a stout cord so that the arm could be pumped up and down in see-saw fashion from the bough house [Shafer mentioned a piece of board which was swung on a hinge].

Soon after daybreak, after the helpers had strewn grain on the chaff, a live pigeon, the stool pigeon or "stooly" which was to be used as a decoy, was blinded by sewing its eyelids together with fine thread and was securely tied with both feet to the stool. Moving the stool pigeon up and down like a pump handle caused it to flap its wings. Both Koch and Shafer gave the impression that the fluttering stool pigeon was used to attract initial attention. Another pigeon, a flyer, kept in the bough house and tied by its feet to a long string, was then tossed in the air and pulled down. It seems, however, that most hunters used the reverse order. By properly releasing the prop which held the net, the operator in the bough house caught the hungry birds by the hundreds. As the heads peered through the coarse mesh, the men rushed from the hidden bough house in order to wring or crush the necks of the birds. Netting pigeons required skill and patience, for the flyer had to be released, the "stooly" worked, and the net sprung at exactly the right time. Koch and Shafer related how the layers of flying pigeons were so thick that one could not see the sky. Hunters often boasted about the number killed with one shot. The flutter of wings and a cloudy sky were signals for sport and food.<sup>47</sup>

The reason for the extinction of the *wilde Daurwe* is problematical. One must admit that they were a romantic reality. According to Koch, they began to decrease about 1876 and vanished in the early eighties. Even though the sturdy, steady inhabitants of Blooming Grove were hardly *wilde Daurwe* in spirit and in numbers, they, too, were a romantic reality. Like their feathered visitors from the sky and like their numerous human competitors in Economy, they disappeared as a unit, only to be remembered in the pages of history.

<sup>47</sup> For additional information on the passenger pigeon, see Ernest Harold Baynes, *Wild Bird Guests*, 1931, sixth printing, originally written about 1915; also John C. French, *The Passenger Pigeon in Pennsylvania* (Altoona, Pa., 1919). French's book mentions Blooming Grove.



Sketch of the Six Districts, by John Adlum.

Courtesy, Historical Society of Pennsylvania