

THANKSGIVING In Modesto

by Lorraine Frantz Edwards*

So often my mind recalls the admonition of John Heisey in the February 1988 issue of *Mennonite Family History*: "Get out of town; visit the old homestead; locate those old cemeteries; worship in local churches." I've traveled several places since then—and shared some of my unique experiences with readers of *MFH*. Thanksgiving 1990 was another memorable occasion!

On Sunday, November 18, I returned to Modesto, California, and was again a guest in the home of my Old German Baptist Brethren (OGBB) friends.

I had the privilege of initiating the brand-new "work room" of Lowell and Doris Beachler. Over fifty years' collection of genealogy near my bed; ancestors' pictures on the wall; antiques and collectibles on display.

I slept in the antique bed of a third cousin twice-removed who passed away in recent years—at the age of ninety-seven. Beautiful old quilts kept me warm at night.

During the day I sat at my computer (resting on an antique table from the former Whittier Old German Baptist Brethren Church) and watched my hostess and her mother quilting another lovely bedcover destined to be an heirloom. Some people

may question my patience and skill on the computer, but I marvel at the delicate stitches and the devotion that keeps these ladies at a quilting frame for hours.

Between delicious home-cooked meals, I documented volumes of information regarding Old German Baptist Brethren and Church of the Brethren families. The six children watched the computer screen with fascination.

Prior to a sumptuous Thanksgiving dinner, we all attended an OGBB worship service. I was surrounded by bearded gentlemen in black flat-brim hats, frock coats, and women with white prayer bonnets and uniform dress. In a simple sanctuary, seated on wooden pews, the congregation heard a message that was straight from the Bible and straight from the heart.

Several families had been invited to share Thanksgiving dinner with my host and hostess. We were seated around an old dining table that had experienced years of family gatherings. Nearby were elegant old china cabinets full of priceless old dishes and collectibles. The "home-cooked" traditional Thanksgiving dinner tasted delicious. (I can't remember a better meal!)

Some readers may have deep roots in a community, rock-solid families, and "traditional" holiday gatherings. My immediate family is "fractured." The void in my life is beautifully, picturesquely, gratifyingly filled as I become acquainted with "cousins" through genealogical research.

On Friday, dozens of OGB Brethren gathered at the church for a funeral. A beloved ninety-two-year-old sister was reverently remembered. Later, at the cemetery, I witnessed a truly remarkable custom. The casket was lowered into the ground and

the liner "sealed." The men in the congregation took turns shoveling the dirt into the grave. I'm told this is the last loving thing that the family and members do for their beloved.

During fellowship at the cemetery a distant "cousin" approached me and discussed our mutual family ties. Separately, another OGBB "cousin" invited me to her home for dinner that night.

A member of the Modesto Genealogical Society joined us for dinner and contributed to a spirited conversation. She shares my love for the OGBB—and genealogy!

Again referring to John Heisey's admonition to "Get Out Of Town:" During my trip, I visited in three separate homes with 1) a widowed aunt, 2) a widowed uncle, and 3) a first cousin. I count my blessings that I have the health and transportation to travel and visit.

There aren't enough superlatives to describe the numerous joys experienced during my 700-mile trip. Perhaps it sounds "corny" to take pleasure in seeing a pumpkin pie created from an actual pumpkin, hot croissant rolls "made from scratch," homemade pancakes and French toast, and fresh-made apple butter. California does not have the same beautiful trees (and autumn foliage) seen in many northern states. However, there were pretty fall colors on acre upon acre (mile after mile) of fruit and nut trees.

Above and beyond the smell of fresh-baked pies, rolls, and turkey—more attractive than autumn foliage—is the warmth and love given me by my "extended family," the OGBB. This story is an extension of the Thanksgiving morning sermon: **THANKS LIVING!**

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Letters To The Editors

In Oct. 1988, you printed my query for help to find the family of my Uncle Dan Warkentin's mother, Elisabeth Lohrenz. A wonderful man from Sacramento, Calif.—James Davis—got right on it and this spring, HE FOUND THEM! I want to thank him publicly.

Linda Stelting of Abbotsford, B.C., who is a daughter of Tina Dirksen, Uncle Dan's cousin, sent a beautiful chart showing the descendants of Johann Lohrenz and his two wives. She and Uncle Dan have corresponded and he is very pleased. Thank you for your help again and **THANK YOU, JAMES DAVIS!**

-Helen Pennell, Fort Dick, Calif.

research the genealogy of my grandfather John Jacob Schowalter. I subscribed and in the Oct. 1984 *MFH*, the article by Martha F. Jones on "The Search for the Schowalters" stimulated my interest even more in the project.

Now after six years of research and much correspondence, I have in printed form the new book, *The Biographical Genealogy of John Jacob and Magdalena (Funk) Schowalter, 1859-1990*. Thank you!

-Matilda M. Jantzen, Newton, Kan.

Thanks to my query in the Oct. 1989 *MFH*, I now have a photograph of the homestead of my gt-gt-gt-grandfather Leonard German/Garman located in Lancaster Co., Pa. This homestead burned in 1920. My query also produced a

map pinpointing the exact location of this homestead (two different replies).

My wish now is to locate a genealogy on my Stauffer line—Great-grandfather Amos Stauffer—who was born in 1826. The son of Joseph Stauffer (ca1803-1880), he moved from Lancaster to Indiana.

-Mary Jane Spolaric, 33 Marian Dr., Tonawanda, NY 14150

I've been a subscriber since *MFH*'s beginning and it is still one of my favorite genealogy publications. This is a publication to be proud of! I just wish that I could find people in my local genealogy group with Mennonite roots so that I could share it. Keep up the good work!

-Evelyn Schleusener, Laurens, IA

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Front Cover

Daniel Holly was born in 1761 in Mülhofen which belonged to France until the French Revolution in 1792 (Reign of Terror) when the Hollys lost all their possessions and fled for their lives after seeing their buildings go up in flames. This trouble and sorrow is said to have caused Daniel Holly's hair to turn white overnight. Later he lived on the Rhine near Langsdorf in Hessen, where relatives and friends helped him get a new start. He was very successful, acquired a nice fortune, had friends among gentry and nobility, and was highly respected and honored. His portrait was painted in 1816 and hung in the city hall in Darmstadt, Germany. See the "Kin" article on pages 128-129 in this issue. Courtesy: John Halm Holly.

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