

Oldest Mennonite structure near El Reno

By Kent Ruth

Mennoville Mennonite Church — built in 1894 eight miles north of El Reno — is the oldest existing structure pertaining to the Mennonite faith in what is now Oklahoma.

The congregation, organized in 1891, was the faith's first in the state. It, in turn, was something of a spiritual legacy of the Mennonite mission and industrial boarding school, which opened at nearby

Darlington (see) in 1881 — the initial missionary effort by any church group on behalf of the Indians of western Oklahoma.

The Mennoville church itself is a 30x40-foot rec-

tangle with gabled entryway — a virtual prototype of the small, early-day rural church building.

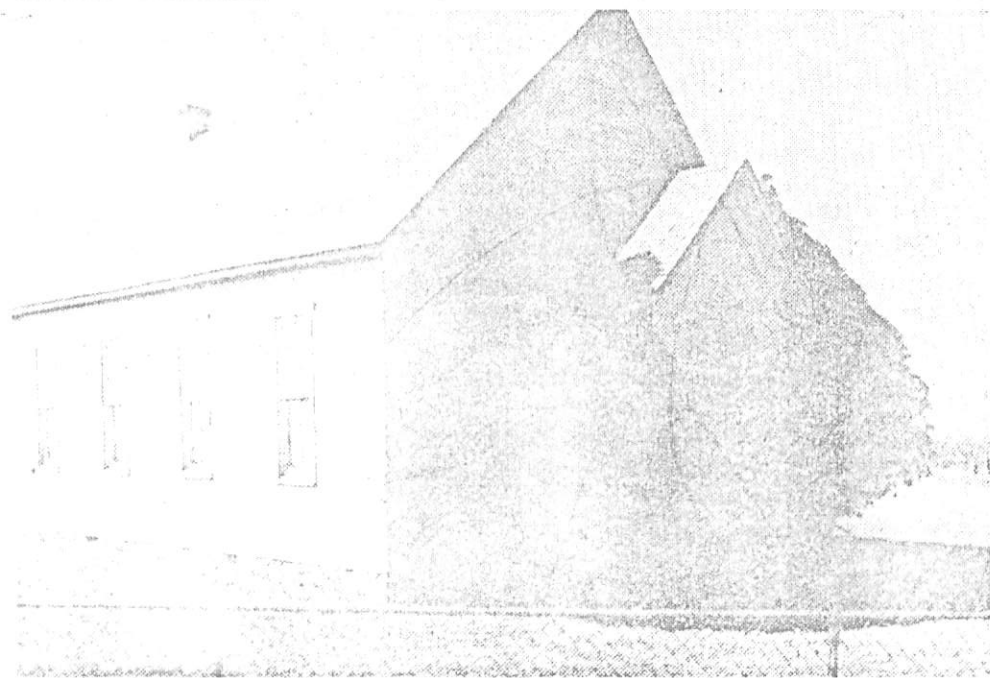
It stands as a modest memorial to the faith of 12 pioneering Mennonite families of Swiss, German, and German-Russian stock, who came from

families participating. It had 27 charter members. The Rev. Joel Sprunger was chosen to be the first minister.

Until 1894, the congregation met in the various

church homes. Then a two-acre site for church and adjoining cemetery was purchased — for \$10 — and a Mr. Wilking was hired to erect the simple frame structure that still

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Mennoville Mennonite church north of El Reno.

WINDOW ON THE PAST

Berne, Ind., to claim land when this area was first opened to white settlement.

Interestingly enough, the section line running along the east side of the churchyard — present US 81 — was the dividing line between Old Oklahoma, opened by "run" in 1889, and the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian Reservation, similarly opened in 1892.

The congregation was organized in 1892, with 16

Mennonite mission established in 1881

(Continued)

stands.

It was apparently completed by Dec. 24, 1894. An early chronicler states: "We celebrated the first Christmas in the Mennonite Church. We even had a tree."

Services were held at Mennonville until 1953, when a shrinking farm population cut membership to the vanishing point. For six years the church was unused.

Then in 1959 the congregation was officially disbanded, and the building turned over to the Western District Conference of Mennonites, which now cares for both building and cemetery.

An historical marker, unveiled in 1972, hails the

church as "a continuous reminder of the rugged faith of pioneers in this area."

In recommending Mennonville for the National Register the Canadian County Historical Society called attention to the

church's "rich history of service in this pioneer neighborhood and down through the years..."

The Society also pointed out that Mennonite influence in the area went back another 10 years or so — to the middle 1870s when the General Confer-

ence began investigating the possibility of Mennonite mission work among the Indians.

Initial contact was made with Quaker Indian Agent John Miles in 1877 at Darlington. The Mennonite mission and industrial school were opened

in 1881 — the first for the Plains Indians of Oklahoma. It was this group of mission workers that helped organize the congregation in 1891.

Cost in 1894 of the new silent church building is not known. Much of the la-

bor was donated.

It is recorded, however that the stones used in the foundation cost \$6. Mennonville's half-century-plus role in the life of this agricultural community would seem to be profitable return indeed on that modest investment.

MENNONITE CHURCH CEMETERY

Canadian Co., Okla.

Located seven miles north of El Reno, Oklahoma,
on U. S. Highway 81

Surveyed by Mr. and Mrs. Tom Rukes
El Reno, Oklahoma 1968-1969

Mennonite Church Cemetery (Canadian County, Oklahoma) Located seven miles north of El Reno, Oklahoma on U. S. Highway 81.

Surveyed 1968-9 by Mr. and Mrs. Tom Rukes

ROW 1

Marion M. BRODERSON
Born Jan. 22, 1910
Died Nov. 24, 1956

Jewel E. BRODERSON
Born March 3, 1911
Died *Oct 4, 1996*

Edward W. MITCHELL
1885-1951

Helena A. MITCHELL
1879-1960

John V. COOK
Sgt., 15th Co., 1 Mech
Regt AS, World War I
Born Jan 4, 1887
Died June 12, 1953

F. William BORNHOLDT
1864-1936

Emma BORNHOLDT
1866-19 *July 1947*

Bessie BORNHOLDT, dau
of F.W. & Emma Bornholdt
Born Dec 1898
Died Aug 1901

William SCHWARBURG
Born Dec 17, 1833
Died Feb 9, 1913
Aged 79 yrs., 1 month, 23 days

Elizabeth SCHWARBURG, wife
of Wm. Schwarburg
Born Dec 2, 1829
Died Dec 21, 1906
Aged 77 yrs., 19 days

ROW 2

Alsie Pearl FEES, dau
of I.O. & M.F. Fees
Born July 13, 1898
Died July 19, 1898

Herman T. BRODERSON
Born Sept. 8, 1907
Died Jan 12, 1934

Arthur E. Cook (Father)
Born Nov. 9, 1880
Died Dec 16, 1945

John V. COOK (Brother)
Born Jan 4, 1887
Died June 12, 1953

James Monroe COOK
Born Jan 25, 1848
Died March 12, 1927

Angeline HOWARD COOK
Born March 1, 1860
Died Feb. 29, 1948

Mennonite Church Cemetery (Canadian Co., Okla.)

J. C. BRODERSON
Born May 8, 1873
Died March 29, 1907

Enno A. SCHMIDT
Born Sept 16, 2850
Died Jan 18, 1924

Thomas BRODERSON
Born Nov 15, 1843
Died Sept 30, 1913

Hilke SCHMIDT
Born Jan 26, 1864
Died Oct 19, 1930

Stella P. BRODERSON
1885-1932 *July*

Hannah M. SCHMIDT
Born Aug 9, 1900
Died Dec 23, 1924

Albert T. BRODERSON
1878-1963

George W. SCHMIDT
Oklahoma, Pvt., 133 Inf.
34th Div., World War I
Born April 26, 1895
Died Dec 7, 1949

GIRARD, Louise - Leon
Brother & Sister
1910-1918

Feb
Ida C. WEHMULLER
Born April 30, 1881
Aug 27, 1902

ROW 3

Ada MESCHBERGER
1898 -

Mother WEHMULLER, A.
Born Jan 3, 1852
Died July 19, 1926

Lois MESCHBERGER
1900-1968
Aged 68 yrs., 1 mo., 1 day

Father WEHMULLER, F. W.
Born Dec 24, 1848
Died April 15, 1936

Dina MESCHBERGER
1858-1954

Ida Caroline WEHMULLER, dau
of F.W. & A. Wehmuller
Born April 30, 1881
Died Aug 17, 1902

Dina MESCHBERGER
1858-1954

Maria JANZEN

Jacob MESCHBERGER
1857-1942

Mennonite Church Cemetery (Canadian Co., Okla.)

ROW 4

Violet Marie COOK
Born April 27, 1933
Died Oct 11, 1933

Eleanor Lorene COOK
Born April 30, 1925
Died April 3, 1926

Benetichd ZWEIACHER
Born 1831
Died Jan 19, 1910
(Ruhe Sanfd)

Marie E. ZWEIACHER
Born April 23, 1906
Died Dec 13, 1907

Etta ZWEIACHER
Born July 21, 1885
Died Feb 28, 1963

Jacob ZWEIACHER
Born Dec 3, 1881
Died Jan 16, 1962

Enno J. ZWEIACHER
Born July 21, 1915
Died Sept 23, 1963

Carl C. ZAIS
Born Dec 16, 1877
Died --

Emelie ZAIS
Born Jul 24, 1882
Died Dec 26, 1956

ROW 5

Katie HOLLINGSHEAD, wife
of A. L. Hollingshead
1891-1920

Albert Leroy HOLLINGSHEAD
1884-1965

Martha EICHOLZ
1911-1920

Milton HOLLINGSHEAD
1855-1926

Phoebe HOLLINGSHEAD
1855-1936

Lydia WIEDMAN, dau
of John & Rosa Wiedman
Born Feb 19, 1875
Died Sept 27, 1900
Aged 25 yrs., 7 mos., 8 days

John P. WIEDMAN
1845-1920

Rosa WIEDMAN
1855-1938

E. A. REEVES
1862-1941

Etta REEVES
1870-1948

Mennonite Church Cemetery (Canadian Co., Okla.)

Row 6

Henry SUTT
Born Nov 5, 1820
Died May 8, 1902

Infant Daughter of
Dietrich & Anna LECK

Dietrich LECK
1886-1949

Lucille NEUENSCHWANDER
Born April 9, 1914
Died April 12, 1914

Lorrin A. PALMER
Born Nov 2, 1926
Died March 25, 1927

Children of J & M SPRUNGER

Oscar J. SPRUNGER
Born Aug 17, 1900
Died June 21, 1901

Eldon C. SPRUNGER
Born Nov 21, 1894
Died June 29, 1905

Rosa A. SPRUNGER
Died May 16, 1892