

Opening comments

A dozen years ago when we were planning for our centennial celebrations at Mountain View, a group of us gathered once a month on a Sunday evening taking a decade at a time to review our congregational church history.

It was a time of great learning for me since I only came into Mountain View in 1996 – 93 years after the first Mennonites arrived in the Creston area of Montana. I was fortunate that in the Sunday evening group there were a number of persons who had lived much more of that history than I did.

As I did research on the church's history, I soon learned that I'm not versed in researching history. I basically collected facts and stories. Who came? When? Why? There were very few records in the early years of the church. And it was easy to make assumptions that I later discovered were wrong because I didn't understand the historical context.

I puzzled for a long time about what happened to John and Katie Eicher who came in 1903 but didn't appear to have moved away but were never on the membership list of the church.

And I didn't understand why Reuben's history of the church thought it worth noting that in 1913 the visiting preacher, preached in English – until I discovered that German was the preferred language for all things church and Sunday School was begun for the purpose of teaching the children German.

Which is to say, that I can share some stories, but I can't pretend to understand the deeper history that lies in these hardy adventuresome settlers with a recent background of immigration to a new country.

There is so much more to learn. And I appreciate with a greater reverence those who do a thorough job of relating history.

So I will begin my stories with Katie Murer Eicher.

Katie

Katie Murer Eicker is buried in the Creston Cemetery, a simple cemetery used heavily by the early members of Mountain View Mennonite Church – a couple miles from our church. There is no marker on her grave.



We know very little about Katie. But we know this much. Katie died of Tuberculosis at the age of 32 in 1906. Her death certificate records that she died in the Creston area.

Katie and her husband John Eicher had moved to the Creston area three years earlier in 1903 with two other families:

- 1. Jacob and Mary Roth's family. 2. Lee and Barbara Neuschwander family

They were all related. Mary Roth and John Eicher were siblings. Barbara Neuschwander was the daughter of the Roths. The Eichers' niece.

They all came from the Fairview Mennonite Church in Albany, Oregon and their arrival in the Creston area of the Flathead Valley was the actual beginning of a church because they immediately began meeting on Sundays. The summer of 1903 – however that is not the date we remember as the beginning of the church.

Local story-teller Robert Gatiss wrote a book of memories and recorded this about the Mennonites.

I watched the Mennonites come first when I was a young boy, and on through the years... These were new people to us who kept pretty much to themselves, but ready to help a neighbor in trouble. They took no part in the outside world, but they didn't force theirs onto me or anyone else, and

I respected them for that. They became good friends.... In general, they had limited funds and were looking for low-cost land. They seemed to come from all directions...

at first they met in the Mountain Brook School for worship. Then they had a cabin east of the Kauffman place for a while. Next - to a small log cabin 3/8th mile east of Creston, where they met until 1913, when they purchased one acre of land and built a small church.



We don't know how these three families learned of Creston, Montana nor why they left the Fairview congregation. Reuben Kauffman who arrived in Creston as a 9-month old baby in 1911 was our church historian for many years. He wrote a short history of the congregation for the 75th anniversary. He records that they left the Fairview congregation because of some "church difficulty."

I begin the history of the congregation with Katie Murer Eicher because between 1903 and 1909 many of her sisters' families and even her father moved to Creston – perhaps because of her illness. But ten years later in 1913, when the church formally established itself as Mountain View Amish Mennonite church, and Katie had died 7 years earlier, 11 of the 20 people who formed the church were Katie's relatives.

We have no pictures of any of these first three families -



Peter & Fannie Sutter moved to the area in 1904 – Fannie is a Murer – Katie's sister

Roy and Anna

8 years after the first families arrived in Creston and many of Katie's relatives had moved there, in 1911 Roy and Anna Kauffman arrived in Creston with their 9-month old baby, Reuben. They were not intending to stay. Elaine Kauffman, Roy and Anna's granddaughter wrote a paper about her grandparents for a school project. She explained their arrival this way.

During the winter of 1910 and '11, Roy had influenza quite severely and it settled in his lungs. It appeared they might need to leave Iowa for the sake of his health. Their Amish landlord was loud in his praises of the mountain air of Montana and was sure it would be good for the healing of his lungs. It seems he knew Jacob Roth, who had moved to the Flathead Valley from Oregon some years before. They bought special, round-trip train tickets at tourist rates (\$25 each) planning to return to Iowa after three months, which ought to be long enough rest and sufficient time to see how the mountain air would treat Roy's asthmatic lungs.

... they learned to know the little community of Mennonite families already living in the valley. Roy and Anna liked it – the valley was beautiful, Roy felt well, and by the end of the first month they had decided to stay. They purchased 40 acres of land with buildings on it, some essential furnishings, equipment, and livestock, and began the business of setting up housekeeping, planting a garden, and planting crops.



- ***Roy & Anna Kauffman (Wedding picture)***

In the years following their decision to stay, others of Roy's family began moving to Creston, including his parents. Roy and Anna Kauffman eventually had 15 children and the larger Kauffman family would be a very big part of the church up to the present. When the church formally organized in 1913, 9 of the 20 signers would be relatives of Roy and Anna. The other 11 signers were relatives of John and Katie Murer Eicher. 2 Family groupings.

Mountain View was established as a church for 2 family lines of established Mennonites.

One of the stories I've heard is when Roy and Anna arrived and were waiting for Jacob Roth to pick them up, Anna was afraid to go out on the street because of the Indians. At that time the United States government was putting energy into encouraging people to settle this new state of 1889 named Montana. But Montana was inhabited already.

The name "Creston" where the Mennonites settled and where the church remains to this day, is an old English word that means "ridge on a hill that curves downward at the ends" – signifying a settlement on a crest. But the name "Kalispell" which is the name of our town is a Salish one meaning, "flat land above the lake." Kalispell and Creston lie north of the Flathead Lake, the largest fresh water lake west of the Mississippi, and the Salish Flathead tribe populated the area. The Salish population was still a big part of the valley at the time.

The Mennonites did not relate much to the native population until the Mennonite Board of Missions (now Mennonite Mission Network) began a voluntary service unit much later in the town of Browning on the Blackfoot Reservation which is 2 hours east of the church. Then, at that time, the church would try to support the work of the Voluntary Service effort, visiting and helping in Browning, and often hosting the VSers on Sundays.

The Mennonite group gathering in Creston was part of the settlement effort of the government to replace the native population.

1913

And so in May of 1913 Frank Roth and Andrew Bachman (representing the two family lines) were appointed to look for a place to build a meeting place. Two weeks later at another group meeting they reported they had found an acre of ground they could purchase for \$150.

It was decided to purchase it and build a meetinghouse. As I mentioned earlier, 20 people signed on. Daniel D. Kauffman and Frank Roth (again representing the two family lines) were elected to be the building committee.

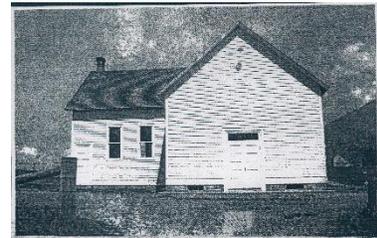
They chose a name at the meeting: Mountain View Amish Mennonite Church.

They established dues for members: \$5 for a married couple and \$2 for a single person. And 3 months later they dedicated the church building. They invited Isaac Mast from Minot South Dakota to preach the dedication sermon and to stay for a revival meeting resulting in 5 confessions and applicants for church membership – all young adults of established Mennonite families in the area.



The 1913 building (expanded in 1929)

- *1958 – 1962 built a new building back from the intersection*



In 1913 there were two ordained men, one from each of the family groupings. Jacob Roth & Daniel D Kauffman (D.D. Kauffman)

Jacob Roth was an ordained bishop and is often given credit for starting the church. Between 1903 and 1913 before the church was formally organized he was the only ordained leader present. And the group met in four different buildings – 2 of which were owned by Jacob Roth

But if we say the church began in 1913 when members signed on, then it seems Daniel D. Kauffman had a big part in it. D. D. Kauffman was Roy

Kauffman's father who was an ordained Mennonite minister and moved to Creston in early 1913. By 1914 all of his children had relocated to Creston, Montana.

Three years after the church was organized, Bishop Jacob Roth traded his Montana land for land in Texas. His journey is a story of never settling anywhere for long, – born in Ontario, grew up in Iowa, settled married life in Nebraska where he was ordained a **deacon**, a move to Colorado in his 40s where he was ordained a **minister**, when drought hit Colorado they moved to Albany, Oregon where he and Mary were charter members of the Albany Amish Mennonite Church and he was ordained **bishop** – Then to Kalispell in 1903 where they lived until 1916 and moved to Texas. Later he moved back to Albany where he was a minister in the Harrisburg Amish Mennonite Church. (Two of their infant sons remain in Kalispell, buried in the Creston cemetery – no record.)

This was an era when these settler folks were on the move. In 1934, 20 years after establishing the church, only a few of the original signers were still on the membership roll. Others had moved on. Even the ministers had left: Daniel D. Kauffman had moved to New York. Jacob Roth to Texas. Remaining in the church twenty years later were Roy and Anna Kauffman, And Katie Murer Eicher's sister, Fannie Sutter, and nephew John Bachman. But by 1919 (6 years later) the membership of the church had stabilized at 60-70 people – as it would remain for the next couple decades. Children grew up. New families came and others left.

1930s - Three family-lines were dominant: The Frank Lapp family had eight boys and three girls; The Joe N. Birky family had eight boys and four girls; and the Roy Kauffman family had eight boys and seven girls. Of the 68 names on the membership list in the late 30s , 41 of them were Kauffman, Birky or Lapp. Others, through marriage, were related to these three families. Those family lines are still part of the congregation.



- Roy & Anna Kauffman family

I have summarized the first 30 years of the church. A lot of other things happened during that time, of course – which deserve their own story:

- the beginning of the sewing circle in 1916.



MOUNTAIN VIEW SEWING CIRCLE at J.J. Kauffman place, 1919 or 1920. Left to right: Nancy Lapp, Mary Kauffman, Verna Shoemaker, Grandma Early, Mrs. Morgan, Lizzie Snyder, Anna Kauffman, Amanda Hoylman, Lilla Hoylman, Barbara Hoylman, Lena Lapp, and Mattie Snyder. Sitting: Clara Kauffman, and Frances Lapp. Children unidentified.

- The war years of the first World War. As a peace church Mt View did not want their boys to go to war. One young man, however, couldn't avoid the draft, or didn't want to, and lost his church membership.

-The arrival of John G. Hochstetler as pastor in 1928 who would, along with his family, be a big part of the church for the next 40 years until he left to start a church in Hamilton (3 hours south).



- ***John & Emma Hochstetler***



on the church door
- 1944 Young folks

- ***The youth group 1944***

- The creation of the youth group in the 1930s.



- ***Getting ready to go to conference in 1926 (Alberta/Saskatchewan) Roy & Anna Kauffman in center***

- A change of conference affiliation in 1916 and again in 1923.

I want to jump into the 1940s.

World War II had begun in 1939 with the United States attempting to remain neutral. But in late 1941 the United States entered the war. For Mennonites, who as a faith-community believed it unlike Jesus to participate in war, this new war effort and military draft was a challenge. In World War I Mennonite young men had been drafted and many were forced into service. (most at Mountain View were not that age or got farm deferments)

But by WW II Mennonite church leaders had worked with government leaders to prevent young people serving in the future, and in 1940, before the US entered the new war, a “Selective Service and Training Act” was passed. This Act provided that “conscientious objectors” to war could do other work of national importance rather than serve in the military. The peace churches responded by beginning Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps approved by the US government for alternative service.

Fortunately for Mountain View, CPS Camp No. 55 was opened by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in September 1942 at Belton, Montana (a half hour drive from our church at the entrance of Glacier National Park) – it began with 31 assignees from other CPS camps. The camp continued in operation until October 1946 with a high population of 207 men serving there during the heavy fire season of 1945.

When I came to the church in 1996 the church was still hosting CPS reunions when many men would come to the area with their grown children and grandchildren to remember their time in CPS.

The CPS website describes the work at Belton:

CPS men working at Glacier National Park provided manpower for forest fire pre-suppression and suppression, fire hazard reduction, tree disease control, as well as limited maintenance of camp grounds, trails, roads, buildings and related work.



- **CPS camp 55**

In 1941 pastor John G. Hochstetler at Mountain View had been ordained a bishop. This was fortunate for Mountain View at a time when baptisms, communion and weddings could only be officiated by a bishop. Being at a distance from other Mennonites this often made ministry at

Mountain View difficult.

Soon after John Hochstetler was ordained a bishop, the conference (Alberta Saskatchewan Conference) sent Daniel D. Brenneman as an assistant pastor. Dan had been born in Nebraska but grew up in Alberta.



- **Dan Brenneman family**

He was not a pastor but felt a deep call to come help the church in Creston and the conference ordained him for that purpose in which he continued for the next 30 years until his death. His son Clifford, grandson Cal, great grandson Zach, and now 3 of his great great

grandchildren are still part of the congregation.

During the years of CPS camp #55, these pastors John G. Hochstetler and Dan D Brenneman adopted the camp as part of their ministry and took turns going to the CPS Camp to hold worship services.

Also many men from the camp visited Mtn. View for worship. Ray E. Horst, who was later director of the Mennonite Voluntary Service program which would follow CPS, served at Belton. He once wrote about his experience:

"Many of us at Belton had opportunity to learn to know members of the Mountain View Mennonite Church at Kalispell, Montana. Kalispell was an

isolated Mennonite church that was several hundred miles from the next closest church...In the Kalispell community we were introduced to eating bear, moose and elk meat for the first time. We had many times of fellowship and sharing together. The church experienced some difficulties. The pulpit was blown up at one point and the building was painted with much graffiti because they were peace people and known as conscientious objectors. ("Our CPS Stories" Elkhart, IN: Prairie Street Mennonite Church, 1996. pp 39-44.)

A clock still hangs on a wall in our church with a bullet hole in it from a drive-by shooter. The church's peace position was not appreciated by some in the community and there are a number of stories of how the church was targeted during the war years. The church stood firm in its peace stance and generally was reluctant to talk about that era thinking that people who acted out in that aggressive way were probably embarrassed about what they did.

In my estimation, CPS was a blessing to the church. For an isolated congregation relationships were built across peace-church groups that lasted a long time – and some of those relationships were of the amorous kind. Where does one find a Mennonite spouse in a church consisting of a few intermarried families?

We once made a list of over 20 weddings that took place between young people who had both grown up in the congregation. That kind of dynamic can only go on so long and then everyone is related.

CPS took young men from Mountain View to other parts of the country – and brought young men to Mountain View for worship. The sewing circle which was begun in 1916 was very active in helping the CPS camp.

One of our first ventures was Camp Kits for the C.O.s who weren't able to obtain them from their home congregations.

Another project was mending for the Belton C.P.S. Camp #55 and making tea towels for them.

...at the August meeting it was decided to can fruit and vegetables for the Belton C.P.S. Camp. This was done with the result of 398 quarts of fruit and vegetables and 3 quarts of jam.

At our September meeting we received a thank you card from Sister Della Burkholder at the Downey, Idaho C.P.S. Camp for the kitchen towels - we had sent 1 ½ dozen. We also made caps for the kitchen help.

The “Alpine Echo” a newsletter produced by the youth group at that time tells interesting stories giving insight to happenings in the church as well as the young people’s war experience and CPS camp nearby:

Now that we have a CPS camp not so far distant, the girls seem to find plenty of new things to look at, especially when they visit said camp. The boys of said camp seem to like to have the girls visit camp too, especially some of them. We boys enjoy visiting camp too but don’t seem to get the attention the fem’s do. I wonder why??? Or do I??? Anyway we all enjoy the C.P.S. camp and the campees, and they like to see us once and a while. (Paul Kauffman)

To give a little feel for that era - Jeff Buller who became a long-term member at Mountain View, served at Belton and wrote his story:

In 1942, my life took a change, as my "Uncle Sam" told me what to do and where to go. On the 9th of October, 1942, I was drafted to report to Belton, MT for C.P.S. I served there for 3 1/2 years working on the upkeep of trails and fire control maintenance in Glacier National Park... During my term in CPS I met Priscilla Mast, daughter of Silas and Elma Mast. We were married on May 11, 1947 and worked and lived on her parent's farm for the first few years of marriage.

Berniece Kauffman also found a mate at Belton: Adolf (Gus) Reimer. However, Gus was a General Conference Mennonite and marrying him was considered marrying “outside the church.” It resulted in Berniece’s excommunication from Mountain View.

Rueben Kauffman served in CPS in Terry, MT. While there he met his wife Sadie Miller when they both participated in a Bible School there.

Paul Birky went to Roseberg, OR where he served in CPS in a mental hospital. There he met and married Evelyn Lais who belonged to the Zion Mennonite Church. This resulted in Paul's brother, Ezra, meeting Evelyn's sister, Margery and marrying her. They all settled in the Kalispell area and were dedicated participants at Mountain View.

Roy Kauffman thought he had too many sons at home during a time when other local families were sending their sons off to war. So he sent his son, Paul, to work in Bloomfield where farm workers were needed. Paul also worked there on the railroad. There Paul met Esther Borntrager whom he married and later brought back to Kalispell.

Service was in the blood of young men because they were often forced to go somewhere. But Ruth Kauffman also wanted to serve and became involved in the Portland, OR Mission. While there she met her husband Dan Stutzman who was from the Harrisburg Amish Mennonite Church in Oregon. That relationship led to Aldine Kauffman meeting his wife, Mabel Eash who was from the same congregation.

CPS enriched the blood of Mountain View.

Another interesting story of this era is that the US government wanted to begin a fire jumping crew, but all the young men were at war. For a while they resisted using COs believing them to be cowards and unable to do the difficult and dangerous work of fire jumping. When they finally began the program with COs these hardy farm boys proved them very wrong. 2 of Roy and Anna Kauffmans' sons, Norman and Dave, were among those first smoke jumpers.

(Some of the early histories of smoke jumping purposely avoided mentioning the contribution of conscientious objectors in starting the program – embarrassing)

There is much more history of the church, of course.

- The years of the Voluntary Service unit in Browning was another big commitment for Mountain View and full of stories.

But I want to conclude with a story about another significant era.

Glenn Roth and Duane Oesch, both members of Mountain View were ordained to assist Dan Benneman as he aged. But Duane soon moved to North Dakota leaving Glenn as pastor when Dan Brenneman died. Glenn's years were transition years as a church council was formed and leadership expectations changed. He resigned after serving 16 years. Ray Landis eventually came for 15 months as an interim and made it a priority to develop some young men in the church to assist him: Dwight Hooley, Brent Kauffman and Joe Brenneman.

Dwight Hooley became pastor when Ray left. Dwight was an evangelist at heart. He had grown up in this church, (an insider – as was his wife Sharon.) I've heard stories of the Sunday 11 (13?) new people were accepted into the church (all outsiders in the community.) Dwight was so excited about the potential for growth he worked with a group of leaders to come up with a plan to hire a second pastor so he could do more outreach.

A third of the church voted for the plan, but it wasn't enough to move forward. Soon after the vote, Dwight announced his resignation. I'm sure there were many reasons for the vote (finances, vision differences, breakdown of Mennonite-ism) so I'm not here to pass judgement. And Dwight, being a young adult, was not always treated well or respected by a church of elder relatives. But during the five years Dwight was pastor the congregation began a transition away from being a group of relatives. - away from being an insular Mennonite family group. The bubble of in-grown-ness had been burst even though the plan did not go through.

Today the congregation has wide spread of people with differing backgrounds – Catholic, Methodist, Church of Christ, Lutheran, Southern Baptist, and unchurched. Our interim pastor who just completed three years came from a Presbyterian background. The challenge before the congregation is to develop a sense of identity no longer built on family line or faith background – discovering instead that Anabaptism can be attractive. But it isn't always easy going in an environment of Christian nationalism and evangelical fundamentalism.

Last Sunday I gave some of this history to our congregation – a group of people I've come to deeply love and appreciate. They have recently adopted a new organizational structure that has tried to do away with an institutional mindset –

built instead on participation and discernment. I think it is a very healthy congregation that works and worships together with enthusiasm and dedication and is appreciated in our community.

But it is a smaller group, smaller than the church has been since the early 1900s. With them I celebrate the rich history of our congregation but sometimes fear that while we are a group with diverse backgrounds we have also inherited a insular mindset that also lives in the minds of our neighbors. Have we inherited patterns that are more exclusive than we think we are or want them to be?