

250th Anniversary of the Amish Stoltzfus Family Landing in Philadelphia, October 18, 1766-2016



On Aug. 20, 1766, the Amish Stoltzfus family sailed from Cowes, England, on their way to Pennsylvania, having left Rotterdam on the ship Polly with Robert Porter captain. They arrived in Philadelphia two months later; an estimated 181 were on board.

By 1752, when Berks County formed, nearly 70 Amish families lived here. The Stoltzfuses joined these Amish families in 1770 or 1771 after four years in Leacock Township, Lancaster County. Nicholas' died at his home on Tulpehocken Road in what is now Wyomissing in 1774.

What is this thing we call "Amish"? "It" came to Berks County in the 1700s, and Nicholas Stoltzfus found "it" by 1750 in Zweibrucken, West Germany.

"I had the opportunity to be among that kind of people and got used to them and was among them and had opportunity to work, yes, and to even marry among them was my decision," Nicholas wrote.

The Nicholas Stoltzfus House Preservation Committee is planning these events to commemorate the

impact of this immigration and to benefit the Nicholas Stoltzfus House restoration:

On Tuesday, June 7, at 6 p.m. J Myron Stoltzfus of Stoltzfus Meats will sponsor a benefit dinner in the White Horse Fire Hall, 111 White Horse Rd, Gap, PA 17527, serving a ham and fresh-cut green bean dinner along with other dishes for \$15. Zach Stoltzfus will personify Nicholas. He prepared a CD on the life of Nicholas, including his Saxony ancestry. Currently studying at Florida State University, he in the past assisted Dr. Randall Fegley in teaching at Penn State Berks.

Then on Friday, September 30, an abbreviated Berks Amish Heritage Tour, sponsored by the Nicholas Stoltzfus House Preservation Committee, will begin at the Wyomissing Farmers Market located near the Stoltzfus House at 8 a.m. The cost of the tour is \$65. Breakfast will be available at the market starting at 7 a.m. with lunch at noon. The parking lot is built on the property Nicholas owned, and most of the stand holders are his descendants.

What George M. Leader did for the Amish

By Samuel Stoltzfus

To start this story correctly, one must go back 1932 when Franklin D. Roosevelt became president in the midst of the depression. In the following years many had no jobs, so the government decided to build consolidated schools to make more work. Also at that time, the townships were given \$100.00 for each one-room schoolhouse they closed, and money was provided to build consolidated services.

At the time, there were some 10 one-room schoolhouses in East Lampeter Township, Lancaster County, all staffed by certified teachers, and they were serving the local population with proper education as was deemed good at that time. Then in 1937, the East Lampeter School Board decided to build a consolidated elementary school and do away with the one-room schoolhouses. then busing the scholars all to one location, thus providing much more opportunities for education.

At this time, 21-year-old George Leader was working for his father on his farm and in their chicken hatchery. At times George would assist his father delivering baby chicks to Lancaster County farms; many of their customers were Amish. Thus, George became acquainted with Amish way of life and the well-kept farms. George was born in 1918 on his father's farm, so he and his seven siblings knew what farm work was. From 1939 until 1946, George served in the Navy. In 1949 George bought his own farm and operated a hatchery until 1955 when he became the governor of Pennsylvania.

The storm soon broke in East Lampeter when the residents became aware of how this new school system was going to raise their taxes and cause many changes in their rural lifestyle. They formed a committee with an Amish bishop involved, hired a lawyer, and filed a lawsuit in the Lancaster Court. They lost. Then they appealed to the higher court in Philadelphia and lost there. The only thing accomplished was that the building was delayed several months. The Amish Bishop went back to his farm and church work. Then in 1938-39, the East Lampeter Township Amish built two one-room schoolhouses and operated them.

During World War 2, the local farmers with children in high school were facing a real labor shortage. When schools opened in the fall, the children's help was needed to harvest the crops. Recall a large part of the food production was needed to feed the troops plus farm commodity prices went up during the war, so farmers did best to produce as much as possible. Thus Harrisburg lawmakers worked out a vocational system where high school students could work at home on the farm four days, keep a diary of the work done, and then attend classes one day. It was accepted. Thus the farmers had their help. It's not known how widespread this plan was or how long it was in place, but it had its day.



Amish fathers group around their spokesman, Aaron Beiler, second from right, in Morgantown, Pennsylvania, on March 16, 1960, as they await the constable to take them to jail in West Chester, Pennsylvania. They will serve five days in prison for violating the state's compulsory school attendance law by refusing to send their children to public schools in nearby Honey Brook, Pennsylvania. Beiler is state committee chairman for the Amish and was not one of the nine Amishmen jailed. (AP Photo/Paul Vathis)

Now let us move to Leacock Township In the fall of 1951. Leacock Township decided to take advantage of this federal money and started proceedings to build a new four-room elementary school in Intercourse. Up to that time, Leacock Township had been operating their 11 schools mostly with their own tax money generated within the township. Then when Leacock Township accepted money to build the new elementary school, Harrisburg then warned all townships to must make sure all scholars attend until age 15. So as the sun rose in February 1950, the move was made to prosecute parents who didn't send their 14-year-olds to school. This became a real nightmare in the Amish communities. From 1952 until 1955 some 200 parents of 14-year-olds in Leacock. Upper Leacock, Salisbury, and Bart townships served jail time for not sending their 14-year-old scholars to school. But note, no one went to jail in East Lampeter Township, as they issued work permits as all townships had done up to late 1949.

The scenario was the same. The sheriff would come serve the warrantor notice that the offender must appear at the hearing before Squire Getz in Blue Ball. Although pleading not guilty, they were fined \$3.00, and if the fine wasn't paid, then the sentence was given: three days in the county jail. The sheriff would haul them to the jail. Suddenly these peaceful, busy, plain folk farmers with fall farm work to do were lawbreakers. The neighboring farmers would then help with the harvest or haul manure for the one family whose father was in jail. In one family I

knew, all the family knew what was coming when the officer came to serve the notice, and the father had to leave for the hearing. The dad would get the German Prayer and leave and serve his jail sentence.

School attendance until age 15 really started in late 1940 when State Superintendent Fred Hass insisted the Pennsylvania School Code must be enforced regarding enrollment until age 15. As long as he was in office, the prosecutions continued. Then in 1955, George Leader ran for Pennsylvania governor and promised if elected to do something for the Amish and their school problems. George knew that the Plain Folks were not against education but didn't want the high school influence. Dr Swan even noted the farm youth are better educated for life's challenges than most high school graduates.

Now note, George was a staunch Democrat, and he won the election for Pennsylvania governor in a full-blooded Republican state. It was nothing short of a miracle. The day George took office, Fred Hass resigned. Then progress was made as Dr. Swan was appointed to fill Hass's vacancy. Through Swan and George's brother Henry, the vocational plan was brought before the Harrisburg lawmakers and was approved - another miracle. There had been lots of opposition. One lawmaker said it was the most ridiculous plan he ever heard of. Known as the Pennsylvania Model, it was soon in gear in Upper Leacock Township in late 1955 and in Leacock Township in early 1956 and was accepted in most of the state and is still so today. The plan called for 28 hours of farm work duly recorded in a diary and three hours of classroom work until students reached the age of 15.

So again through George Leader, the Pennsylvania Plain Folk can attend school till through eight grades or until age 14. And also through George was the decision not to destroy the Nicholas Stoltzfus house; thus the Stoltzfuses have a heritage preserved.

If you would like more information or are interested in donating, please contact Paul Kurtz by email at psku04@ptd.net, by phone at 717-808-7785, or by visiting nicholasstoltzfus.org.

President's Message

I have been chairman of the Stoltzfus House project for about 12 years and have worked with the George Leader family since then. For those of you not knowing the history between the Amish and the Leader family, I will to the best of my knowledge try to explain it to you.

I was a young boy going to a public school in the 1950s. The Amish leaders were jailed for not cooperating with the Pennsylvania School Board about going to high school and other issues. George Leader ran for the office of the Pennsylvania governor and promised the Amish he would straighten out the mess with the public school system if he won. He did, in fact, win and and kept his promise. New laws were created to allow the parochial school system that we know today.

After George's political career, he went into the nursing home business and through the course of years eventually bought Country Meadows in Wyomissing, Pa. Next to the property was an old, stone house, and the Leader family contacted an excavator to demolish it. However, before that took place, they found out the house had historical interest to the Amish. Through research it was determined that it belonged to Nicholas Stoltzfus at one time, and a group of people were very interested in preserving the house. When the Leaders found out its historical status, they canceled the excavator. Before I was involved, certain people worked with the Leader family, and they were given the right to preserve the property in any way they saw fit, with the Leaders in control to veto anything that was not up to their standards. Over the years, the house was preserved, and a stone barn was built for an eventual caretaker of the property, with the upstairs planned as a heritage center or a room for special events. The barn is still waiting for funds to be finished.

Michael Leader, the son of George Leader, told me that after the barn was erected, he would give the deed to the property to the Nicholas Stoltzfus House Preservation Committee at no charge. On May 2, 2015, Michael Leader kept that promise, and the Leader family gave us the deed for the property at the annual auction. We are also talking to the Leader family about a pavilion to be built on the property with the understanding that if we supply the labor, they will supply the materials. So I challenge you! Somewhere there are people who will help us financially, so we can complete the project. My deepest respect goes to Michael and Karen Leader and the Leader family for working with us in a very respectable manner.

May God bless you all,
Moses B. Smucker



David Leader, son of the late Gov. George Leader, presents the deed to the Nicholas Stoltzfus House to Paul Stoltzfus Kurtz, member of the Nicholas Stoltzfus House Preservation Committee on May 2, 2015. Photo by Bill Uhrich

The Nicholas Stoltzfus House
 Preservation Committee
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 Wyomissing, PA 19610

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The 14th annual Benefit Bring and Buy Auction for the Nicholas Stoltzfus House will be held at 9:30 a.m. May 7. Bring something to donate, or buy something to support the preservation of the Stoltzfus House. Breakfast will be served at 7 a.m. with fireplace cooking demonstrations beginning at 9 a.m. A quilt auction begins at 11 a.m.

Send a copy to a friend.

The Stoltzfus House in the News

The Reading Eagle published five stories this year on the Stoltzfus House.

On April 23, Bruce Posten interviewed Paul S. Kurtz regarding the May 2 auction to benefit the Stoltzfus House. The article featured a photo of Kurtz by Bill Uhrich.

On May 3, a story ran in the Eagle accompanied by a photo by Uhrich detailing the presentation of the deed to the Stoltzfus House by Michael Leader to the Stoltzfus House Preservation Committee.

Uhrich wrote in his May 17th column about George Leader's relationship with the Amish.

In the Berks County section of the Eagle on May 19, Michele Napoletano Lynch featured the history of the Stoltzfus House in her popular "Floor Plans" column with photos taken by Uhrich during the auction on May 2.

On July 1, the Eagle reported with a story by Posten and a photo by Uhrich of the Amish Sing held at the Stoltzfus House the night before.