THE Nicholas Stoltzfus HOMESTEAD
www.NicholasStoltzfus.org

Winter 2026/2027

The Homestead

A Publication of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead Preservation Committee
A non-profit 501(c)(3) organization

Wagon Train and Pavilion Dedication Connect Past and Present at the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead

By Nic Stoltzfus

On Saturday afternoon, October 3, 2026, nearly 120 family members, friends, neighbors, and visitors gathered at the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead for the dedication of the new Beiler-Renno Pavilion. The weather was mild, with a light breeze dancing over the Homestead flowers and puffy early autumn clouds rolling by.

The ceremony marked the culmination of years of planning, volunteer labor, family cooperation, and financial support from descendants and friends of the Homestead. The event represented a convergence of heritage, community, and history, made even more meaningful by the arrival of an Amish wagon train that had journeyed from Lancaster County specifically to participate in the celebration.













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Members at Large: Joseph Miller, Elam Fisher, Mervin King, Jerry Stoltzfus

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SAVE THE DATES!

January 23rd, 2027, 6:30 pm
Ausbund Hymn Sing
Levi & Mary Zook, 85 E. Main St, Leola, PA

April 3rd, 2027
Berks History Center & Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead Berks Amish Tour

May 1st, 2027
Annual Benefit Auction & Gathering



Image of Moses Smucker at the Pavilion Dedication. Mose is a former chairman of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead Committee and participated in the first wagon train to the Homestead which took place in 2007.



"Wagon Train and Pavilion Dedication" Continued

A Wagon Train from Lancaster County

For a period of two days, horse-drawn wagons traveled along a route that, in many ways, symbolically retraced the paths once taken by Amish and Mennonite settlers generations ago as they spread throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. This trip connected current descendants with the landscapes, communities, and family narratives that continue to influence the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead and the wider Amish heritage in Berks County.

The caravan commenced on the first day of October; it originated in Leacock Township, Lancaster County, near Gordonville, east of Intercourse. Participants journeyed northward by horse and wagon, following rural roads through eastern Lancaster County into Berks County. The group included about sixty Amish men, women, and children. They traveled northbound in nine wagons and approximately a dozen on horseback.

For a few of the participants, this was not their first wagon train trip to the Homestead. Almost two decades ago, Ben and Ruthie Lapp, their daughter Leona, and several grandchildren took part in a wagon train organized by former board president Moses Smucker. This wagon train—which took place in August 2007 and was featured in that year's fall newsletter—was roughly the same size as this one, but the weather was very different! The 2007 journey began wet and rainy, while this one started warm and sunny.

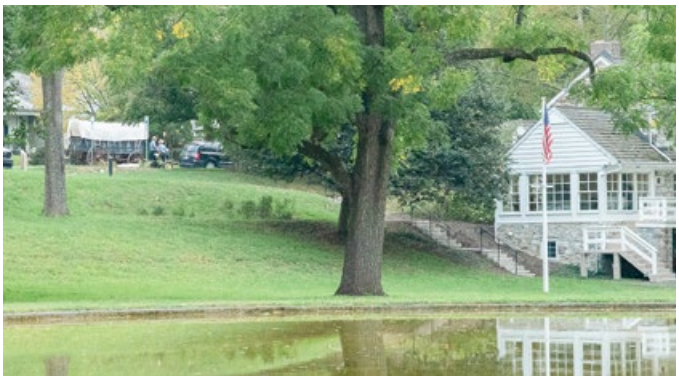
After traveling for about an hour, the wagon train stopped at the New Holland Sale Stable for a rest. As auctioneers sold cattle, people came by to speak with the wagon train. Tom Longenecker, a member of a Lancaster County Brethren congregation, was so excited about the wagon train that he went home, hitched two of his wagons to his four Clydesdales, and joined them the next morning!

The wagon train camped overnight on an Amish farm in the Narvon area before continuing north. Along the way, local residents stopped to watch the unusual sight. Drivers pulled off the roads to take photographs, wave, and share the experience on social media. For many spectators, it was a living reminder of Pennsylvania's agricultural and cultural heritage.

One observer recalled the famous 1976 Bicentennial Wagon Train that traveled across the country during America's two-hundredth anniversary celebrations. Seeing the wagon train pass through Berks County brought back cherished childhood memories of that historic event.

The caravan continued along Maple Grove Road and eventually entered the Reading, Shillington and Wyomissing area on the afternoon of October 2. As it traveled through town, the route intentionally connected several sites important to Stoltzfus family history.

The wagons passed the historic Stone House, the former John and Barbara Stoltzfus Schmucker residence, on Museum Road before proceeding through Wyomissing. The caravan traveled along Parkside Drive, North Park Road, Spring Street, and Crossing Drive before making its way toward the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead.



As the group entered the final stretch of the journey, the wagons turned onto Tulpehocken Road and traveled past Country Meadows before descending toward the Homestead grounds along the Tulpehocken Creek.

The wagon train provided glimpses of old-fashioned cooperation in a modern setting. Young Amish men wearing bright yellow safety vests helped direct traffic and temporarily stopped vehicles at intersections to allow the wagons to pass safely. Motorists responded with patience, waves, thumbs-up gestures, and smiles.

Several community organizations assisted the travelers along the way. The train stopped at Nolde Forest during the journey, while Cumru Township Fire Company Station 42 provided water for the horses after receiving a request from organizers.

After arriving at the Homestead, participants settled in for the weekend. Board member Joe Miller and his family provided breakfast on Saturday morning, while an Amish volunteer supplied pulled-pork barbecue later that evening. Many wagon train participants camped overnight on the property, extending the fellowship beyond the dedication ceremony itself.

"Wagon Train and Pavilion Dedication" Continued

Building the Beiler-Renno Pavilion

While the wagon train captured public attention, its destination was equally significant.

The Beiler-Renno Pavilion grew out of a long-standing vision to create a gathering place where families, visitors, school groups, businesses, and community organizations could enjoy the Homestead property together. Located in the front of the barn and overlooking the historic stone house, the structure enhances the site's ability to host educational programs, reunions, historical events, and fellowship gatherings.

The pavilion's construction reflected the same spirit of cooperation that characterized traditional Amish barn raisings.

On August 29, 2026, volunteers gathered for a day-long frolic to erect the pavilion's main frame. Despite an early challenge involving mechanical failure of a piece of equipment, help arrived through Fisher Rentals, allowing work to continue. B&D Builders worked alongside volunteers, including Homestead board members and members of the Beiler and Renno families.

Throughout the day, hammers rang, friendships were strengthened, and history was made. Executive caretaker Esther Stoltzfus provided lunch in the barn, serving haystacks to workers and volunteers. The meal created an opportunity not only for rest but also for fellowship and the sharing of family stories and local history.

Additional volunteer workdays followed. On September 5, volunteers returned to install roof boards and gable posts. During mid-September, Bunker Hill Masonry led the installation of stones collected from the foundation of the Jacob Beiler barn, a structure dating to the 1740s in northern Berks County.

Those stones became one of the pavilion's most meaningful features. Rather than serving merely as decorative masonry, they physically connect the new structure to the earliest generations of Beiler family history in Pennsylvania. Visitors today can place a hand on stones that once formed part of a building associated with descendants of immigrant Jacob Beiler, who arrived in Pennsylvania in 1737.

A few additional stones from a historic Stechly structure were also incorporated into the foundation work, creating another connection between the pavilion and the region's early settlement history.

By September 19, the Beiler stones had been laid, the cedar shingle roof completed, and picnic tables delivered. One week later, pointing work and landscaping were finished thanks in part to assistance from Howard Stoltzfus Construction Company.









The pavilion was largely completed in time for its October dedication, though plans remained underway for future enhancements, including exterior log work and a kitchen equipped with a stove, refrigerator, and hot water.

The project represented a true family effort. Numerous descendants, volunteers, sponsors, businesses, and friends contributed labor, materials, financial support, expertise, and encouragement. The result stands as a testament to what can be accomplished when a community works together in service of preserving its heritage.

The Dedication Ceremony

The dedication ceremony began at 10:30 a.m. on October 3 under clear autumn skies.

Elam and Esther Stoltzfus welcomed attendees and opened the program with reflections on both the journey that brought the project to completion and the opportunities that lie ahead. Esther shared that one aspect of the pavilion she most anticipated was the opportunity to plant additional flowers around the area. Her comment drew enthusiastic applause from those gathered, a reminder that visitors have come to associate the Homestead with her care, hospitality, and beautification of the grounds.

Ben Riehl, chairman of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead Preservation Committee, shared the history of the pavilion project and the story behind its development.

Isaac Beiler spoke about immigrant Jacob Beiler and explained the significance of incorporating stones from the historic Beiler barn foundation into the pavilion. Simon Renno shared the story of immigrant Joseph Renno and the family's connection to the region, including the historic log cabin built around 1760 along Jungle Road.

Neal Stoltzfus reflected on the legacy of the Stoltzfus family and the importance of preserving places that tell the story of community building.

He described the Homestead as part of a larger story involving many families who helped shape the Northkill settlement. He recalled the influence of historian C. Z. Mast and genealogist Abner Beiler, whose work nurtured an appreciation for local history and family heritage. Neal also highlighted the lifelong commitment of his parents, Ruth and Christian Stoltzfus, to community service, historical preservation, and supporting projects that benefited future generations.

His family's sponsored table bears the inscription, "Quiet Builders of Community," honoring lives dedicated not to recognition, but to service.

Michael Leader, son of former Pennsylvania Governor George Leader, also participated in the dedication ceremony. The Leader family effectively donated property to the Homestead in 2016; this was in large part due to the compassion that Michael's father had for the Amish. In

Wagon Train Participants

Leaders: Daniel King & Amos Zeiset

3- Horse Covered Wagon: Amos & Leah Mae Riehl; Eddie Zimmerman

2- Horse Wagon: Omar & Sylvia King

2- Horse Wagon: Ben & Ruthie Lapp and daughter Leona

2- Mule Wagon: Chris & Anna Beiler, daughter Ruth, and children; Leroy & Esther Beiler and two children

2- Horse Wagon: David & Sadie Mae Esh, son Sam; daughter Lena, David Fisher, and children

2- Horse Wagon: Friends Willie Fisher and John King

3- Horse Wagon: Dave & Anna Lapp and daughter Dorothy

Conestoga Wagon: Eli Petersheim, nephew Allen King, Ben & Anna Riehl, and Linda King

4- Horse Wagon: Amos Jay King and friends Liz King, Jimmy & Marian, Alvin & Mary Jane, Verna King, Susan, and Sam & Anna King

Horseback Riders

Lead Rider: Sam Lapp, Matthew Stoltzfus, Raymond Stoltzfus, Lee Allen Fisher
Raymond Lapp, Allen King, Anna Ruth King
Lydia Ruth King, Ada Lapp, Mandy Stoltzfus
Sylvia Stoltzfus, Lill Lapp





"Wagon Train and Pavilion Dedication" Continued

the mid 1950s, Governor Leader played an important role in ensuring that the Amish one-room school houses met Pennsylvania's educational requirements. Michael quoted his father in his speech: "I always admired William Penn and the Quakers who made this a commonwealth where religious freedom would exist, and I made sure that it would prevail for Amish families."

The service concluded with several meaningful traditions. Following recognition of supporters and sponsors, Bob Petersheim offered a prayer of dedication. Board member Mervin King then read the Lord's Prayer in German, connecting attendees with the language spoken by many of the region's earliest settlers.

The gathering closed with the singing of the Lob Lied, translated as the "Praise/Love Song," before Elam Stoltzfus offered final remarks.

Following the ceremony, attendees enjoyed refreshments that included pumpkin mini whoopie pies from Lil's Bakery at the Wyomissing Farmers Market, which was coincidentally celebrating its own anniversary weekend.

Looking Forward

The wagon train and pavilion dedication represented much more than a single weekend event.

Together they demonstrated the enduring power of family heritage, historical preservation, and community cooperation. The wagon train connected modern participants with the journeys of earlier generations. The pavilion provided a permanent place where future generations can gather to tell those stories, celebrate family connections, and strengthen relationships.

Just as immigrant families such as the Stoltzfuses, Beilers, Rennos, and many others built communities in southeast Pennsylvania nearly three centuries ago, their descendants continue to build community today.

The Beiler-Renno Pavilion now stands beside the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead as both a practical gathering place and a symbol of that continuing legacy, reminding all who visit that history is not merely something preserved in books. It is something lived, shared, remembered, and passed on from generation to generation.



Picnic Table Dedications

Eight picnic tables have been placed at the pavilion area through the generosity of families and supporters. Their inscriptions honor heritage, faith, family, and community:

"In Loving Memory of David H. Esh"
Donated by Moses Esh and family.

"Quiet Builders of the Community, In celebration of the lives of Ruth W. and Christian U. Stoltzfus. Donated by their family."

"Honoring Governor George M. Leader who arranged release of the Amish fathers from jail in 1956."

"In honor of my 6th great grandfather, Jacob Beiler, who emigrated from Switzerland in 1737. Thank you for passing on a Godly heritage. Nolan Byler"

"In Memory of Elmer & Rebecca Stoltzfus and Monroe & Naomi Yoder"
Parents of Elam and Esther Stoltzfus.

"In Memory of the Renno-Stoltzfus-Smoker Heritage"
Donated by Jerry and Lorraine Stoltzfus.

"In Memory of Ephraim and Salome Renno"

"With loving thanks to our Dad: LeRoy J. Sitlinger, for our unique Nicholas Stoltzfus connection".
Donated by the LeRoy J. Sitlinger Family.

This pavilion stands as a testament to the generosity, vision, and volunteer spirit of those who continue to preserve and share the rich heritage of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead.



Special Recognition

The Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead Committee extends sincere appreciation to the many individuals, families, businesses, and organizations whose contributions made the Beiler-Renno Pavilion project possible:

Allan Blankenbiller, owner of the land where the Joseph Renno cabin stood and donated the logs

The Mark Hix Family, owners of the Jacob Beiler property and donors of stones from the original barn foundation

MK Builders and volunteers, who carefully relocated the original Renno logs to the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead

B&D Builders, pavilion contractor (Dan Glick)

Custom Concrete (Amos Glick), for foundation walls and concrete flooring

Bunker Hill Masonry (Levi Ebersol), stone masonry work

Windy Valley Exteriors, roofing installation

Mike Allgyer and Ryan Allgyer, Allgyer Enterprises

ASI (Eli Beiler and Ben Riehl), electrical work

Red Hill Plumbing (Emanuel and Steve Fisher)

Bingaham & Hess Law Firm (Thomas Rothermel)

Borough of Wyomissing

Amos Fisher Contractor and Elam Fisher

The Ruth and C.U. Stoltzfus Family

Howard Stoltzfus Construction

Windy Valley Woodworks/Finch - picnic tables (Merv Esh)

Country Meadows and the family of Governor George M. Leader

The Renno families

The many volunteers who assisted with moving logs, stones, trees, and countless other tasks.

Honoring Past Leaders

We also recognize and thank those who helped guide and preserve the vision of the Homestead through the years:

Abner Beiler, Levi Stoltzfus, Chris Kurtz, C.Z. Mast, Aaron Petersheim, Paul Kurtz, Lamar Mast, Sandy Kauffman, Chris P. Stoltzfus, Mose Smucker, David Esh, Pud Sam Stoltzfus and many others whose dedication laid the foundation for today's accomplishments.











Chairman Ben Riehl sharing about the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead at the dedication ceremony.

A Brief History of the Homestead

The following remarks were delivered by Ben Riehl, Chairman of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead Preservation Committee, during the dedication of the Beiler-Renno Pavilion on October 3, 2026.

It all started when this house was abandoned and slated for demolition in 2002 before being saved by a group of Amish historians and non-Amish descendants. Due to the new Route 222 road construction in the nineties next door, the house had become more isolated and had deteriorated to the point where its future was questionable.

On a tour by Paul Kurtz and Lamar Mast, it was the general opinion that this house should be preserved. This 1½-acre property in the seventies was owned by Tulpehocken Farms, which had bought it back in the 1920s or 1930s and owned a lot of farms in the area.

The last occupants of the house were the Schlegel family, who moved out in 1988, after which the house was unoccupied for 14 years.

In 2000, Country Meadows Retirement Community, owned by George Leader, bought the property and had applied for a demolition permit to destroy the eyesore, a house overgrown with weeds and used as a druggie hangout on this dead-end road.

The excavator, Michael Allgyer, was scheduled to do it. Then he got a phone call that he was supposed to hold off because there was some interest in the house by some Amish who found out that Immigrant Nicholas Stoltzfus owned it in 1770.

In 2001, Pam Shenk, president of Tri-County Heritage Society, and The Pequea Bruderschaft Library board, which included Aaron Petersheim, John F. Stoltzfus, and Pud Sam, decided to preserve the house for our future generations. Chris P. Stoltzfus and his wife Mary later moved onto the property in an old house trailer and lived there for a number of years. Chris did a lot of work on the house while living there.

We will give Paul Kurtz a lot of credit for making it happen to restore it. He got the idea of raising funds by having an auction, so he approached Mose Smucker, auctioneer, to have a benefit auction. The first one was in 2003, and it poured down rain all day with mud everywhere. It was not a nice mowed lawn like today.

In 2009, Paul Kurtz had an idea that we needed a barn on the property to replace the original barn that was here with the house, for living quarters, room for storage, restrooms, and a heritage room to tell stories. The original barn was destroyed around 1920. When we decided to build, we had no idea how the original barn looked, so we went by the architecture of the other old barns in the Berks County area, most of which were Swiss-style bank barns.

After we had built the barn, seven years later we received pictures of the farm from Scott Gring from a western state whose great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather lived on the farm in the 1800s. You can look at the pictures in the house.

On auction day, May 10, 2008, we had the groundbreaking for the barn, but we had to wait another three years to have enough funds to start construction, which required $60,000.00.

In July 2011, we had a barn raising with the main contractor, Dave Esh Builders, and the framework was done by Riehl's Construction. By then we had to wait for more funding to finish the barn, which required around $150,000.00 total for the barn. In 2018, seven years later, we finally finished the apartment downstairs because a fellow from Florida by the name of Nic Stoltzfus wanted to move up to the homestead to write a book about Nicholas Stoltzfus. We got Aaron Beiler, a contractor from Honey Brook, to finish the apartment for Nic.

Two years later, in 2020, Nic's parents, Elam and Esther, also from Florida, moved up to the homestead. After that, the homestead's picture changed with physical improvements, which you can see for yourself around here. Give Elam and Esther a hand!

Now about the pavilion. Ever since we owned the property, we thought it would be nice to have one on the property because there are groups coming here from all over for family vacations, picnics, etc., to have an outside place to visit and eat. Earlier, we had asked Michael Leader from Country Meadows about sharing one. After years of discussion and waiting for enough funding, we were able to start construction this summer, with our neighbor Country Meadows contributing some funds to help. I want to thank everyone who helped make this dream come true with donations and volunteer work.

A Great Christmas Gift



"Amish Family Records - Lancaster, Pennsylvania" is a masterful collaboration that preserves centuries of heritage through a stunning collection of 123 rare family records, bookplates, and ornate fraktur artwork. Rooted in Jack Parmer's thirty-year curation and brought to life by Elam Stoltzfus's meticulous genealogical research, the book features exquisite illustrations by artist Emily Smucker-Beidler and insights from the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead. Spanning the 18th and 19th centuries, these recovered archives offer scholars and descendants a profound window into the religious life and artistic expressions of the Amish community. This collection serves as a vital bridge to ancestral roots, celebrating the enduring stories and "ink, color, and careful stitch" of Pennsylvania's Amish rich cultural history.

Beautiful and very helpful.
-- Beth Bontrager, Mennonite historical library

The quality of this book is outstanding in all regards! The content, production, and especially the printing execution are superior, a real pleasure to view, read and handle, this volume will add to my collection, and be highly regarded for its outstanding work.
-- Roy Schreffler

"German Lutherans to Pennsylvania Amish: the Stoltzfus Family Story"

A Beautiful Book

Few genealogy books are as charming as this book. Scores of photos taken in Germany and Berks County by Elam Stoltzfus add to the book's interest and beauty.
-- Jack Brubaker, reporter for Lancaster Newspaper

A Must for Stoltzfus Descendants

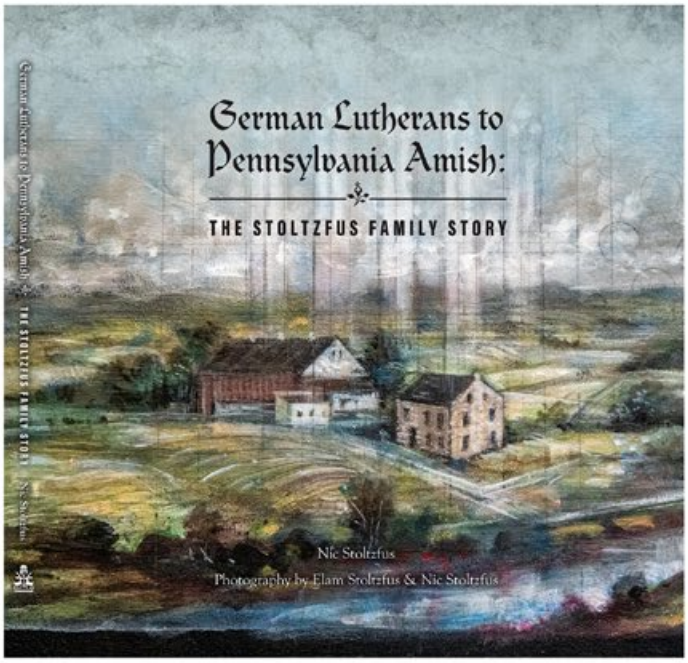
This book is a must for Stoltzfus descendants, but it is also for anyone interested in the dynamic religious and political environment from which so many Pennsylvania German immigrants came in the 1700s. I highly recommend it!
-- Steve Nolt, director of the Young Center for Anabaptist & Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College

Richly Illustrated

Richly illustrated, this book surrounds the core Stoltzfus family story with easy-to-read historical context. Stoltzfus' primary source research shines through in this story told with an arresting mix of human interest and careful documentations.
--Marco Bottini, Embassy of Switzerland to the United States in Washington, D.C.

Great Book

This is an excellent book. I'm ordering one for each of my adult children.
-- A. Ernest Stoltzfus



These books can be purchased at www.Masthof.com or at the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead and local bookstores and www.Amazon.com

Legacy Maker

PA AUCTION CENTER

Grit and Family Ties: The Multi-Generational Legacy of PA Auction Center

By Nic Stoltzfus

In Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, auctions have long been more than marketplaces. They are gathering places where neighbors reconnect, families spend time together, stories are exchanged, and traditions are carried from one generation to the next. For the Stoltzfus family, those same values helped shape the story of PA Auction Center, a business whose foundation rests not only on hard work and entrepreneurship, but on family, faith, and resilience.

From an early age, Christian "Chris" Z. Stoltzfus was immersed in the world of horses and farming. Growing up on the family farm, he helped care for horses, learned the differences between breeds, and assisted his father in hitching the buggy for Sunday church services. As a young man, he worked with horses professionally and regularly attended horse sales and mud sales throughout the region.

It was at those auctions that Chris discovered something that would shape his future. He was fascinated not only by the sale itself, but by the auctioneer's ability to bring people together. A great auctioneer could make bidders smile, encourage participation, and turn a routine sale into an event that people looked forward to attending.

Chris eventually became an auctioneer at the New Holland Sales Stable, where he developed a reputation for connecting with crowds through humor, energy, and genuine hospitality. One of his most memorable contributions grew from his understanding that many people attended auctions for reasons beyond buying and selling. Families and friends often gathered there to catch up on local news and spend time together.

Recognizing the importance of community, Chris helped launch a special Independence Day event featuring free ice cream. What began as a simple gesture of hospitality transformed an ordinary auction into a family outing. People lingered longer, children enjoyed the festivities, and the event became a celebration of fellowship as much as commerce. The tradition proved so popular that similar "Ice Cream Sales" eventually spread to auctions throughout the region.




Dairy and Livestock Sales

3rd Special Ice Cream Sale

for Christian Z. Stoltzfus on
Fri., July 4th, 2003
Held at New Holland Sales Stable

Home Phone 610-273-2801
Consignments Call By July 1st

Sale Day 717-354-4341
Tack Sale 1:00 PM

Ponies - Riding Horses - Draft Cross Starting at 1:30 P.M.
Standardbreds - Saddlebreds - Morgans Starting approx. 5:00 P.M.

4 yr. Reg. Haflinger - Sire is Midas - Dam is Arnika NTF broke to ride and drive.

Horses We Ever Put Together . . .







The values that drove Chris throughout his life were rooted in lessons learned at home. As a boy, he watched his mother quietly guide the family through difficult times when his father faced health challenges. Rising early each morning and keeping both the family and the farm moving forward, she demonstrated determination, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to those she loved. Her example left a lasting impression on her children.

That resilience would be tested again when Chris purchased Quarryville Auction Center (now PA Auction Center) in 2008. The early years were challenging, and many would have questioned whether continuing forward was worth the effort. Instead, Chris relied on the determination he had witnessed growing up and pressed onward.

Rather than remaining a one-man operation, PA Auction Center became a true family endeavor. Over time, Chris's four sons Ivan, Leon, Elmer, and Raymond became involved, each contributing their own talents and perspective.

Today, the business reflects a shared family commitment rather than the work of any one individual. Chris has established an ownership structure that gives each of his four sons an equal role in the future of the company while allowing him to gradually pass leadership to the next generation. The arrangement reflects values that have long been important within the family: fairness, shared responsibility, cooperation, and mutual trust.

While the business has changed over the years, the principles behind it remain remarkably consistent. The same determination demonstrated by Chris's mother, the same perseverance Chris showed in overcoming setbacks, and the same emphasis on family relationships continue to guide the Stoltzfus family today.

Through faith, hard work, and an enduring commitment to one another, the Stoltzfus family demonstrates how values passed from generation to generation can become a lasting legacy. Their story is not simply one of business success, but of a family whose strength has always come from the bonds they share and the lessons they continue to pass on to those who follow.

The Legacy Makers Program supports the launch of the Berks County Amish Heritage Series, beginning with the expanded second edition of ***German Lutherans to Pennsylvania Amish: The Stoltzfus Family Story***. The first edition is nearly sold out, and we are seeking eight more Legacy Makers so we can print the next edition and establish the foundation for future volumes.

If your Stoltzfus-founded business would like to be considered as one of the remaining Legacy Makers, we would be glad to hear from you.

Printing The Ausbund, Part 6: Origins

By Elam Stoltzfus

"The Ausbund is not to be considered a holy book like the Bible, but the influence of the Ausbund on the Anabaptists during the first 250 years can not be measured. ….Singing can put our hearts to peace. It can, if we let it, dispel the poison of bitter and depressing thoughts and inspire our hearts to well up in faith and praise to God."

~ Benuel S. Blank, The Amazing Story of the Ausbund

With the 1922 Kutztown Publishers 2,000 copies finally bound and ready for sale, the Amish Book Committee sold these Ausbund hymnals to people all across the country. By 1935, there were not many books left from the 2,000 that were printed 13 years earlier. The big question again loomed: who will print the Ausbund for us? Because of the difficulty in printing the 1922 edition, the Committee decided to look for a new printer.

Fortunately, there was a successful printing operation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and the Committee decided to use Lancaster Press for their next Ausbund printing. Before proceeding, the Amish Book Committee met with the Diener-Versammlung (the ministers and leaders) to seek their support and direction.

Lancaster Press wanted to have new Ausbund plates made by electrotyping the text of the hymnal. Electrotyping is a chemical method that forms metal parts for reproduction. This became a standard method for producing plates for letterpress printing in the late 1800s. However, this was a costly process to prepare the printing for the 1935 edition.

Lancaster Press asked the Committee for $1,530.61 for the electrotype process. Once again we find the Committee short on funds with the question, "Who will pay for this process?"

The Committee came up with a plan to cover the cost of electrotyping and printing: they would split the cost 15 ways and ask different Lancaster Amish districts to raise the funds. The Committee asked each district for $142.05 each, and 13 districts sent money for the costs.

The money raised from the Lancaster church districts, along with a gift from the will of Amos B. Fisher of $2,130.70, provided the Committee with enough funds for Lancaster Press to print 2,000 copies of the Ausbund in 1935.

Lancaster Press was a smaller press like Kutztown Publishers, so they also sent them to another company to bind the Ausbund. For several years the printed books were transported to Reading for binding. Later the binding was completed in Philadelphia.

From 1935 to 1994, Lancaster Press printed 22 editions of the Ausbund. During this period, the Committee placed an order for a new Ausbund every year. Every few years the orders kept getting larger and larger. By 1994, the Committee placed an order for 9,000 books.

Over the course of the 20th century, Lancaster Press printed 123,000 Ausbund hymnbooks. Let's stop for a moment and think about what it would look like if we stacked all those Ausbund on top of each other. Each Ausbund is approximately 2 inches thick. Combined, these 123,000 books would soar to the height of 20,500 feet. That is 306 feet taller than Mt. McKinley (20,310 feet)!

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On September 25, 1935, the Amish Book Committee purchased the Ausbund plates from Lancaster Press for $1,530.61. It was from these 32 metal plates that all 900 pages of the Ausbund were printed. They were housed in eight pine boxes, and the Committee was responsible for keeping the plates in order in each box so there wasn't a mix-up of pages at the printer. Each time Lancaster Press printed another run of the Ausbund, the Committee brought these eight heavy pine boxes to the press for another print run. Today, the Committee still owns these plates that they purchased nearly 90 years ago, and they keep them in a metal safe in Lancaster County. When I was taking pictures of these plates for this article, Eli King (present-day Committee member) and I moved one of the pine boxes to a shelf by the window so I could get a better picture. My oh my, was that box heavy! Each box weighs approximately 120 pounds, so that means that the combined weight of all eight boxes is about half a ton. I thought back to the early years when the Committee transported these boxes some ten miles or so to the city of Lancaster for printing. Did they have to have a team of horses to pull these boxes? Or did they hire a driver with a sturdy truck to haul all that weight?
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Over the near-sixty-year period that Lancaster Press printed the Ausbund, there was a steady demand for more German books. The Committee published these six books: the Heilige Shrift (Holy Bible), Neues Testament (New Testament), Unparteyisches Gesang-Buch (Impartial Songbook), Gebet Buch (Prayer Book), Lust=Gärtlein (collection) and the Ausbund. According to Steffie F. Stoltzfus' ledger, many large orders came from the Midwest (especially from L.A. Miller in Illinois), and the Ausbund was the book in highest demand.

This time was not without its struggles: it cost money to grow the operation and the Amish Book Committee needed extra workers to fulfill orders and handle the shipping. The Committee lost some of its key leaders, too. Steffie F. Stoltzfus resigned from the Committee in 1939 and moved to Maryland. Four years later, Committee member (and my great-grandfather) Christian L. Fisher was killed in a hit-and-run buggy accident on Route 30. Despite these losses, the Committee was able to maintain four ministry members, leaders with integrity and honesty.

Today, the Amish Book Committee remains in the same mission as its founding over a hundred years ago: to provide German books for Anabaptist communities at a low cost. The original founders of the Committee learned all the skills it takes to publish a book: how the printing process worked, how to manage book inventory, how to pack and ship books across the country, and how to manage a successful non-profit organization that stands the test of time. Their efforts kept alive German singing which is a key piece of our Amish heritage, worship, and way of life.

In 1994, Lancaster Press stopped printing the Committee's books and the book binder in Philadelphia went out of business. In the next article, we will find out what the Amish Book Committee did to solve the problem of who to print and bind the Ausbund and other books.

Resources cited:
History of the Amish Book Committee by Benuel M. Fisher, Stephen F. Stoltzfus journal & ledger, Jacob Lapp financial ledger, Wikipedia







Berks County Amish Historical Tour with Berks History Center

April 3rd, 2027

This tour uncovers the little-known story of the first Amish settlement in America, right here in Berks County, Pennsylvania. In 1733, the first Amish families began establishing a church community in the area, paving the way for about 80 families over the next 40 years. Early family names included Burkey, Sieber, Detweiler, Kauffman, Yoder, Kurtz, Mast, King, Hochstetler and more.

The tour highlights key historical sites, starting at the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead.

What You'll See:
Key Locations: The tour includes important homes and places near Wyomissing, Shillington and Berks County.
Scenic Routes: You'll travel through areas like Irish Creek, western Hamburg, and south of the Blue Mountains in northern Berks County.
Historic Sites: Stops include old graveyards and the locations of historical homes like the Schmucker house, Zug/Zook farm, Koenig land, Detweiler home, the Hochstetler home and many more.

While the Amish left Berks County by the early 1800s for places like Lancaster and central Pennsylvania, their origin remains here in Berks County.

Where: Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead, parking is available across the street at the Berks Parks & Trail parking lot

Time: 8:00 AM tour of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead, light breakfast, welcome, Nicholas Stoltzfus house will be open to tour)
8:45 AM bus departs Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead to tour Berks County Amish Homesteads. (tour is approximately 6 hours in length)
Approximately around 12:00 PM break for lunch, local restaurant (TBA).

Cost: $100.00 per person, includes a lunch and tour guide & packet.
Make checks payable to Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead.

For more information : Call 484-878-2916 or email NicholasStoltzfusHomestead@gmail.com

Tour guides: Elam Stoltzfus, Ben Riehl and Nic Stoltzfus











2027 Calendar of the Stoltzfus Homestead

The perfect Christmas gift!

Collection of 12 photographs of the Homestead by Elam Stoltzfus

Funds from the sales will support the ongoing efforts to maintain the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead

8.5 x 22 inches

Order online at: www.NicholasStoltzfus.com

Instructions: Please fill out the form below and enclose your check, written out to "**The Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead**," include a check and mail it to this address:

The Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead, 1700 Tulpehocken Road, Wyomissing, PA 19610.

Orders will be processed weekly for the 2027 calendars

Name: _____ Address: _____

City _____ State_____ ZIP _____ Ph#_____

Your Donation Amount: ☐ **$20.00 per calendar** ☐ **$18.00 for 5 or more - # of calendars** ☐ **$ Amount** _____

plus $7.00 for shipping and handling GRAND TOTAL _____



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Preservation Committee
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Wyomissing, PA 19610

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Share a copy with a friend!



The Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead is accepting bookings for family reunions, company outings, or youth group events. Call Elam or Esther Stoltzfus at 484-878-2916 to reserve.

Annual Benefit Auction
& Gathering
Saturday, May 1st, 2027
All Are Welcome!

THE Nicholas Stoltzfus
HOMESTEAD

The mission of the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead is to share our Amish history and faith heritage in Berks County and Beyond.

To learn more about the Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead, please visit www.NicholasStoltzfus.com

Or visit our Facebook at facebook.com/NicholasStoltzfusHomestead