

Thoughts From a West Coast Cousin

“Stories are the sparks that light our ancestors lives, the embers we blow on to illuminate our own.” (Jane Kirkpatrick, *A Flickering Light*) Your current story will one day be the history your grandchildren will wonder about and will travel all the way back to 1766 when Nicholas Stoltzfus immigrated to America from Zweibrucken, Germany.

In 2001 this West Coast cousin visited my family heritage and stood in the overgrown yard at the Nicholas Stoltzfus House. I was overcome with the feeling of freedom and love I could imagine my ancestors felt 250 years ago. I could imagine Nicholas’ relief and gratitude for this new world. He, whose parents were Lutheran, had adopted the Amish way—the Anabaptist way of living what Jesus Christ taught, resulting in persecution (and martyrdom for at least one of our relatives in the Old World).

Now ‘our generation has the opportunity to highlight our Anabaptist-faith heritage for’ our children and future generations’ when we accept the invitation to preserve the Nicholas Stoltzfus House and build an authentic barn on the property. This will preserve not only the environment Nicholas lived in in the

1770’s but most important, it will present our Christian spiritual heritage of love, forgiveness and commitment that carried them through life.

There are probably none of us who don’t have a recollection or a personal ‘memory of a “barn-raising”. I think of it as the trademark of our heritage, the essence of lending a helping hand when needed.

Nicholas died in Berks County in 1774, the progenitor of over 1 million Stoltzfuses in America today. We’re a big family! Consider the spirit of a barn-raising where everyone pitches in and does their part. If only 80 of us pitch in \$500, we’ll make it! Donations are tax deductible! If we all pitch in even a small donation, we will be helping the NSHPC to accomplish a Stoltzfus idea:

- Telling the European side of the story regarding their embracing of the Gospel which culminated in persecution and immigration to Berks County (Over 70 Amish families lived in Berks County).
- Telling the story of the influence of the Gospel through the Nicholas descendants worldwide.
- Having a wall of the museum to be



The house I saw in 2001.



The house after months of work.

used so descendants may identify their place in the family tree.

- Mark the early settlements and expansion of these communities of faith throughout our nation.

With gratitude, your West Coast cousin,

Edna

Edna (Stoltzfus) Cooke

(The Stephen R and Priscilla Stoltzfus family has a reunion at the House in August. Edna’s husband, Roger, has sketched the House for the notepads.)



Stoltzfus Family Trip for Lydia’s Birthday

We drove rather than fly to celebrate Lydia’s 80th with her brother, Bob. We explored the “Stoltzfus Spread” along the way, visiting 12 Stoltzfus homes, staying with 5. What superb hospitality!

We showed the Zach and Jack DVDs and booklets: *The Revealed Life of Nicholas Stoltzfus and First Amish Mennonite Communities in America*.

Our first night was with Neil and

Mattie Stoltzfus in Johnson City, Tennessee. They said they had no idea all this was going on.

After a hearty omelet breakfast we crossed Tennessee to the Bethel Springs, home of John Stoltzfus. His mother Lydia with family saw the videos, then bought many of the items we had along.

Lydia’s husband, Emanuel Stoltzfus,

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Stoltzfus Family Trip for Lydia's Birthday *(continued from page 1)*

was killed in an accident years ago. Sons do saw mill or related work. We stayed overnight with Nathan, Elizabeth, and the adopted children, Javan, Matthew and Kaylyn. She makes a wonderful breakfast the next morning, and home-schools the children. We had a friendly game of checkers before we left.

Next, Amos and Hannah moved to Drasco, Arkansas, 30 some years ago where he did maintenance work for the schools. Their son Myron, was very interested in the story. We stopped at their

daughter Hannah's neat bakeshop on the way. The meals and their hospitality was worth driving the dirt Five Mile Loop Road to the house!

Our last stop before heading for Tucumcari was in Claremore, Oklahoma, with Allen Z Stoltzfus in the home he built. We were unable to meet his wife, Bethany, a paralegal, who worked late that evening. Their children, Zachary and Sarai, contented themselves while Allen watched the videos.

After a wonderful weekend with Lydia's brother Bob and wife Ruth we made our way to Meade, Kansas through

snowy roads to the home of Clayton and Kim Stoltzfus. Kim knew the internet Stoltzfus sites. After a potato soup lunch we went on toward Emporia.

Dinner was with Alberta Brinkman and her cousins, Lee and James Stolfus.

Thursday, February 25, we left Emporia for Barnett, Missouri, where we spent a few hours with Stanley and Melissa and their newborn. G-G Grands Aaron M and Elizabeth, had lived west of Morgantown, Pa. Thanks to Stanley, we stayed overnight with the pastor, Jeff Jarmon, Shirley, and 3 children.

Then on to Advance in eastern Missouri with the J Omar and Nancy (Beiler) Stoltzfus family. We found the children's activities interesting.

Next we looked up David Stoltzfus at Hopkinsville, Kentucky. He has a welding shop and sells stoves

Last we stopped briefly with Wilmer and Thelma Stoltzfus family, their family, at Clarkson, Ky, then made our way home by Saturday at 5:30. Never severely hampered tho' we saw a lot of snow, but the warm hospitality and the keen interest in the Stoltzfus story made the trip memorable.



In my Lifetime: I'll soon turn 90

Alberta Stolfus Brinkman rode in the back seat with Amos Fisher discussing genealogy while her husband Jerome sat in front with the driver, Isaac Mast. This was in the 1970's, the first of many visits of hers to the Stoltzfus House. She has successfully urged cousins to visit also, and has tied them to their heritage in many ways. In 2009 she made memorial contributions to the Barn fund for these four who died that year:

- Helen Crabtree Pace (January 12)
- Barbara Fowler Lamborn (April 5)
- Beverly Merwin Stolfus (June 15)
- Mary Pace Knight (September 29)

Her cousin, Bill Stolfus (and wife Ann) also made a donation to honor a grandson, Adam.

"I hope to see the barn completed in my lifetime, I will soon be 90," she wrote.

Well, her hope got a boost recently, and when Alberta learned of it she told this story: She has attended Flying Farmer events. Her first husband, a pilot, died when a passenger in a small plane that crashed, leaving her with two small children at the age of 28.

Christian David Stoltzfus (known as airplane Christ) placed an ad in the Flying Farmers magazine in 1957. Fifteen years later when Alberta was in Pennsylvania she and her second husband, Jerome Brinkman, drove to Airplane Christie's home (Coatesville) and found him in his office at the airstrip. Immediately he had Alberta meet his wife, Irma, and they



Lydia Kurtz with Alberta in her home.

struck up a friendship renewed many times.

Later Alberta received inquiries from Isaac Mast. He had hoped to write a book on the Nicholas Stoltzfus Family. When Alberta asked how he came to contact her, he told her it was Irma that gave her name.

The term "Stoltzfus Spread," encompasses many families like Alberta's.

Who Else?

I recall learning from Oscar Sweitzer of the Schlegel family occupying the Stoltzfus House. When in 2002 I found Pauline on Front Street, Reading, along with son Harold and daughter, Joyce, they brought out the 1982 Reading Eagle photos of the House. They had moved from there in 1988, the last family to occupy the house. I can still feel the fondness Pauline expressed for those years. Pauline passed away March 6, 2010.

Scott Stoltzfus, (nicholasstoltzfus.com), received this message from daughter Iva:

My sisters and I are daughters of Harvey and Pauline Schlegel, the last residents of the Stoltzfus house. My sister and her daughter are visiting from Arizona for our Mother's burial on Wednesday. We have driven by and they were very impressed with the property. I have been there several times for the auction, but they have not seen the inside of the home since they moved away about 25

years ago. They both lived in the home for several years with our parents.

They have expressed an interest in seeing the inside of the home. They have many fond memories of living there and I think would be most impressed with the changes you have made, as am I every year I come to the auction.

They came at 3:30 with many fond recollections. As they viewed the outside basement steps on Jack's video one recalled falling down them! At one time 10 people lived in the house. Joyce, front in blue, would go for the mail with her dog.

Who else? Who else besides Stoltzfus and Smucker descendants may have ties to the House? How about the Martin Riegel family that lived here when the Union Canal was begun. And the Madieras. Did Jacob add the second story? Why did he own



the house if he lived elsewhere? Then there was Templein, Gass, Gring, and Sheidy (who sold to Textile Machine Company). Where are their descendants?

Let me know: Paul S Kurtz, 709 S Locust Street, Elizabethtown, PA 17022 717)367-3906 Psku04@embarqmail.com.

The research by Isaac Mast (1922-1998) is reported by the Amish historian, Levi Stoltzfus (1924-1991) in the *Revealed Life of Nicholas Stoltzfus*, which is available at the Stoltzfus House.

In my Lifetime (continued from page 2)

Her great-grandfather Simeon listened to his brother Isaac when he returned from Kansas, he saw crops superior to those of Union County. Simeon died before going, but Alberta's grandfather accompanied the widow, Magdalena Hartzler, then lived through years of drought, chinch bugs, and grasshoppers. Unlike many of the family, he remained in Kansas developing meat markets. A partner urged the change in the name to Stolfus since the "tz" was hard for the natives to grasp!

The Barn at the Nicholas Stoltzfus House may well be an anchor for the threads, both conscious and unconscious, that tie the spreading Stoltzfus' together. Alberta has felt that thread, it tugged her many times as in the case of Airplane Christ. That is why she hopes to see the Barn in completed her lifetime!

Close to a Decision to Build

We received recently \$17,000, bringing the fund to \$85,000, closer to the \$120,000, which will trigger the permit to build application.

This caused the Committee, meeting March 17, to consider the idea that possibly if we go ahead now with this amount more persons will become involved and we can build the barn. Gathered around Chairman Mose Smucker's dining table were Merle Stoltzfus, Carol Wilson, Betty Stoltzfus, Lydia and Carl Good, Ben Riehl, Sam Stoltzfus, Brian Smoker, David Esh, Roy and Lorraine Smoker, Amos Zook, and Paul Kurtz

Merle began the discussion noting that we needed to hear from David, our builder. How does he feel about going ahead? His response was cautious. Going ahead assumes there is significant donated material and volunteer labor. Yes, we know of the possibilities, but it would be unfortunate if building needed to halt before sufficiently protected.

The motion to stick to the original goal passed. We are close!

**The Nicholas Stoltzfus House
Preservation Committee**
1700 Tulpehocken Road
Wyomissing, PA 19610

The Stoltzfus House and other artifacts of the Stoltzfus family are being restored and preserved as an example of the humble attitude of obedience, forgiveness and their willingness to share and help others in need.

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Elverson, PA
Permit No. 113

Barn Fund Update

-Merle Stoltzfus-

Statistics have a boring reputation. However they have a way of telling a story unavailable to more interesting venues. This short update will give you numbers and percentages. You do the interpretation. Hopefully you'll find it more interesting than boring. Maybe you'll become inspired to become part of the statistics.

The cash gifts to the barn fund total \$85,683 which is 71.4 % of our goal (\$120,000). The \$85,683 cash donations have been given by 133 different family members. There have been 173 gifts with 29 family members giving more than one gift. Of the estimated 1 million descendants of Nicholas, .013 percent has given a gift. If the remaining 999,867 descendants hear and give 4 cents each, we'll be over our goal.

You can easily give electronically on our web site.

The opportunity continues to join the 133 family members who recognize the joy of honoring our parents and remembering the faith and lives of our forefathers. May the primary preservation become a teaching tool for our children and their children "to remember the example of lives lived with a humble attitude of obedience, forgiveness and willingness to share and help others in need; all to the glory and honor of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NSH Mission Statement).

\$34,317
Still Needed
to reach \$120,000 GOAL

\$85,683

Cash Gifts (71.4% of goal)
Given by 133 different family members. Of an estimated one million Nicholas descendants, .013% have given a gift. If the remaining 999,867 descendants give 4 cents each we will be over our goal.

Nicholas Stoltzfus House 8th Annual Benefit Auction Saturday, May 8, 2010

'Bring Something ~ Buy Something'

8:00 - Breakfast ~ Sangor Chor ~ Heritage Events

9:30 - Auction 11:00 - Quilts



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Auctioneer: Moses Smucker - AU4088 717-278-6532