

Forgotten history

East Union Christian Church building funds growing

By Jim Smith
When the old church building at East Union burned last October, a letter to The Mercury lamented the fact that a large part of Nicholas County's history went up with the consuming flames. But the vast significance of the East Union Christian Church — the people rather than the building — is one which is most fascinating, and one which represents a largely forgotten part of Kentucky history.

Brethren born German religious dissidents known as the Dunkers. These Dunkers originated in the German province of Wittenstein in the early eighteenth century. They were concentrated around the small village of Schwarzenau which served as an asylum for religious dissenters of all types.

Around 1768 several of these Dunkers became involved in a deep theological struggle from within their own ranks. Eight of them decided that they could no longer, in good conscience, remain within the established churches of Germany nor become complete individuals in religion. So, after much prayer and Bible study, this small group of eight received baptism from one another and a spiritual movement known as the Brethren was born. These Brethren, or New Ties (new baptists) believed in a strict on heart-felt religion and the leading of the Holy Spirit. They practiced adult, three-fold immersion baptism, liberal observance of the Lord's Supper (including footwashing), allowed only the New Testament as their authority and followed a course of nonresistance and loving pacifism.

Lived a simple life
Because of extreme persecution, the Dunker Brethren were forced out of Europe, and by 1775 they had migrated

to the very tolerant colony of Pennsylvania. They lived a very simple agrarian life, as still evident in such remaining sectarian communities as the Amish, or the "old school" Pennsylvania Dutch.

By the end of the eighteenth century there were Dunker settlements all along the eastern seaboard. Interestingly enough, none of the Dunker settlers took part in the American Revolution. Despite their overt sympathy with the founding fathers, they held dearly their belief in loving, pacifist nonresistance.

Early Nicholas County families
family names familiar to Dunker families migrated from Virginia into the area of Nicholas County now known as East Union. They built their first church building right at the present cemetery now lies.

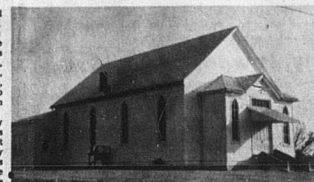
These early Nicholas Countymen were total sectarians; they spoke the German language, they read from the German Bible, and they conducted all of their religious services in German. The family names of these early German settlers have now become common names in this area. Names such as Blount, Shroff (Shroff), Cokeran (Ackeran or Ackerman), Kerns, Berry, Barr, Booth, Alexander, Banta and Hoelzer were familiar to the Dunkers as they are to most modern day Nicholas County residents.

A manumscript from Nicholas County historian Jim Thomas provides us with the closest thing available to a first person account of life in the early Dunker settlement of East Union. Says Thomas: "My mother told me when she was about six years old she went to the East Union church, with her grandmother. When they were near the church, they washed their feet in the creek and put on their shoes, which they had carried in their hands from home. ... Being thus 'diked out' they went on to the church where they found the men seated on one side and the women seated on the other. When the preach-

ing was over a number of pious (sic) such as automobiles, placed on a real estate tax bill when it is sent to the taxpayers. Personal property tax bills are now separate from tax bills for real estate.

Settlements across America
The early Dunker settlement at East Union was riddled by internal conflict. There is evidence of unfaithful ministers, and theological heresy. Specific, pointed controversies surrounded the battle over the various manners of observing the Lord's Supper, the direction one should bend when being baptized (forward or backward?), and over the doctrine of universalism or the final salvation of all souls from Hell. Finally, in 1828 the East Union Dunkers were divided and expelled from the orthodox Brethren faith. All of the other five Brethren settlements in Kentucky were communicated with the East Union church.

At the same time the Dunkers were experiencing so many internal difficulties, the information imparted by Barton W. Stone and Alexander Camp-



A view of the East Union Church before it burned.

bell was rapidly gaining support in the area. Peter Hon, perhaps the most famous Dunker minister and leader, is credited with bringing the East Union Dunkers into the fold of the Campbellite movement. By 1839 they had begun to participate actively at the reformist meetings at Concord and Cane Ridge. It is interesting to note that many of the old Dunker traditions, such as footwashing, were still practiced at East Union well into the 1890's.

It is also interesting to note that the famous Dunker leader, Peter Hon, a man who shared stumps with such men as "Hacon" John Smith, entered into a unique arrangement following the death of his wife. After his wife Elizabeth died, Hon contracted with Mary Ann Wright of Bath County for marriage in 1866. She was to receive no part of his estate, but \$50 a year until she died, and one riding coil to boot.

With the death of Peter Hon in 1858, and the combined mingling of the Dunker ways with the "secular" world,

the unique identity of the German settlers at East Union was effectively destroyed.

The last original meeting house at the fork of Somerset Creek either burned or decayed. By 1873 the trustees had moved the site from the banks of the Somerset up the hill about a fifth of a mile. The structure they erected burned in 1886. They rebuilt on the same spot in 1897 and that building lasted until it was destroyed in the fire of October 4, 1980.

Church will rise again!

The East Union Christian Church now has 37 members on its rolls, with an active membership of only 12. However, in a period of less than four months, while holding services in member's homes without the benefit of a minister, these 12 persons have raised nearly \$33,000 to rebuild their church. They have received the majority of the money through donations; but have also worked diligently in several projects. Many local businesses and individuals have pledged or donated such furnishings as pews, a pulpit, and a piano. When one considers that less than 50 years ago a completely distinct German community existed at East Union, the mind is quite begoggled. And when one considers the resilient history of the East Union Christian Church, it seems a safe bet that they will rebuild... soon.

(Editor's note: This article is deeply indebted to the research of David Barry Eller, a former graduate student at Bechtel Theological Seminary, Oak Brook, Illinois. Most of the information contained herein was extracted from his Master's thesis, "The Brethren Settlement Along Hinkston Creek," the Ministry of Peter Hon: A Study in Kentucky Church History."

JAN
15
1981

Our 114th year, No. 3

Carlisle, Kentucky 40311, Thursday January 15, 1981

25 cents per copy

County's unemployment rate set at 5.6 percent for the month of November

The Department for Human Resources released its November unemployment statistics for Kentucky last week, and showed Nicholas County to have the seventh lowest rate of unemployment in the 17-county Bluegrass region. Nicholas was listed as having 109 persons out of work, from a civilian labor force of 3,077, for a 5.6 percent rate of unemployment. As in previous months, the Bluegrass region had the state's lowest jobless rate, 5.6 percent. The Lexington metropolitan area rate was 4.2 percent of the labor force, or 7,400 people. Statewide, Woodford and Union counties posted the lowest unemployment

County revenue increase could be substantial if proposed bill should become law

County governments could increase their revenue substantially if a bill approved by a legislative subcommittee becomes law. The bill would allow sheriffs, county clerks and jailers to invest funds in "safe" investments such as government bonds and insured accounts in banks or savings and loan associations. The interest earned from these investments could then be turned over to the county as excess fees. Local government bodies can already invest their idle funds but sheriffs, clerks and jailers cannot. The subcommittee on county finance of the Interim Joint Committee on Counties and Special Districts approved the proposed legislation at a meeting here Jan. 4. The bill will be recommended to the full committee in February. Another bill approved by the subcommittee would require sheriffs to turn their excess fees over to fiscal courts when they make their annual statement. It also sets March 15 as the final date that county clerks and jailers would have to file their fiscal statements and pay their excess fees to their fiscal courts. The subcommittee also approved a bill that would have personal property tax bills when it is sent to the taxpayers. Personal property tax bills are now separate from tax bills for real estate. Subcommittee Chairman Rep. Marshall Davenport, R-Somerset, said the reason for the bill is "a lot of people are getting out of paying taxes on automobiles." The bill would not combine all tax bills in one, a maneuver objected to by the real estate industry. Rather, it would place the tangible and intangible personal property on only one real estate tax bill. Also included in the bill is a section that would provide up to \$6,000 to sheriffs as an incentive to collect more taxes. Sheriffs who collect 98 percent or more of the real property taxes due would receive \$6,000 as an operating expense. The amount drops to \$3,000 increments to zero for those who collect 94 percent or less of the taxes.

Unemployment fund running out of money in Jan. or Feb.

An article in the 1980-81 Interim Legislative Record reported that members of the Kentucky Legislative Interim Joint Committee on Labor and Industry continue to hear loud news about the state's unemployment insurance trust fund. Rick Crawford, director of the division of unemployment insurance, told the committee recently he expects the fund to run out of money sometime in late January or February. Because of that, Crawford said, arrangements have been made to borrow money from national banks. Crawford said the state trust fund balance stood at \$83 million, and that he expected about \$20 million to be paid out in November and \$27 million in December. Since first quarter tax collections will not arrive until April 1981, Crawford said, the first months of the year should see the fund badly depleted. Crawford also cited statistics showing benefit payments this year are running more than twice the amount of last year. In October 1980, \$22.5 million was paid out of the fund, compared to \$10.6 million in the same month of 1979. Claim applications were also up considerably, Crawford said, from 125,000 in October 1979 to 227,000 a year later. The number of persons who have used up their eligibility period has also doubled. Benefits may be extended for 6 weeks, with a 13-week extension.

Parents training session held

The Title I program of the Nicholas County School System sponsored a parents training session on Dec. 17 at the Nicholas County Elementary School. The purpose of this session was to show the parents ways in which they can help their children at home to overcome problems in reading and math. Teachers from each of the two areas developed games and teaching aids the parents can make at home that will help their children. All materials to make these games and teaching aids were provided by the Title I program. Training sessions are held each year in December and are open to all parents of Title I children as well as other interested parents. For more information on this or any other part of the Title I program, contact Bill Gaultie at the Nicholas County Board of Education.

Chevroleters omitted
In the outline which accompanied the picture of the Nicholas County Junior Faculty Chevroleters last week, the names of one of the Chevroleters was not listed. The young lady omitted was Miss Melissa...

Local girls to be eligible for scholarship pageant

The Metropolitan Woman's Club of Lexington is making preparations for their annual Miss Lexington Scholarship Pageant to be held on April 1, at the Opera House in Lexington. To be eligible to try out for the pageant, a young woman must be between the ages of 17 and 26 (as of Sept. 1, 1981) and a resident of Bourbon, Clark, Fayette, Franklin, Harrison, Jessamine, Nicholas, Pendleton or Woodford County. Scholarships in the amounts of \$1,000, \$600, \$300, \$200 and \$100 are awarded respectively to the top five contestants. For more information on tryouts which will be held on Feb. 7, contact Mrs. Donna Griffin, 606-274-2488, or Mrs. Beverly Spiker, 606-275-2379, by Monday, Jan. 26.

Chief Justice favors juries setting sentences

Chief Justice John Palmero of the state Supreme Court favors a rule change that would give Kentucky juries the authority to fix sentences in criminal cases, but he doesn't consider a change all that important. Palmero was speaking to the legislative committee on judicial administration. Palmero says that a great deal of blame has been expressed about the issue by attorneys, especially defense attorneys.

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'Dividend hour' is just that VA warns

Regardless of where you get the information, the Veterans Administration does not pay dividends on lapsoed insurance policies. Manufacturing companies, banks, veterans organizations and even veterans groups are now circulating what the VA calls the "old dividend hoax." It promises that veterans of World War II can collect a dividend based on their policies in force. The VA has been plagued for years by an annual influx of queries and applications for the non-existent dividend. This has occurred annually since 1948. The hoax is fueled anew every few years by the mysterious distribution of official-looking "applications" and is signed by "Capt. Proctor" who is supposed to be with the VA Insurance Center in Philadelphia. The form says the dividends are available for the taking even if the veteran never paid his policy since his name is in service records. *Please turn to page 10