

Pequea Bruderschaft Library

275 Old Leacock Rd.
Gordonville, PA 17529

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Pequea Bruderschaft Library serves the historical interests of the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Amish community. Although the library only came into being in 1979, its roots stretch back two decades or more. In the mid-twentieth century, the Amish community included several diligent historians and genealogists. They studied family Bible records, gathered memories from older church members, and spent countless hours researching property deeds in the Berks County and Lancaster County courthouses.

One outcome of their research was piecing together a more complete picture of where Amish immigrants had originally settled in Berks County before relocating to Lancaster County in subsequent generations. Those who conducted this research later spoke of the exhilaration they felt when they first visited the places in Berks County where their ancestors had farmed.

Publishing comprehensive genealogies was a practical outcome of these research endeavors. In 1957, Amos L. Fisher (1920–1986) published *The Descendants and History of Christian Fisher*, commonly known as the Fisher Book, which was subsequently updated in 1972, 1988, and 2008. The book has a broad scope and provides information on almost all the Amish in the Lancaster settlement, not only those with the Fisher surname. Meanwhile, Hugh F. Gingerich (1916–1998) and Rachel W. Kreider (1909–2015), genealogists from Maryland and Ohio, respectively, called on the assistance of Lancaster Amish historians Amos Fisher, Joseph F. Beiler (1923–2004), and Levi L. Stoltzfus (1924–1991) for help with a massive Amish-Mennonite family history project they were undertaking. By working closely with Gingerich and Kreider, the three Amish men not only contributed to what eventually appeared in 1986 as *Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies* but also gained valuable knowledge and honed their research skills. Along the way, these three men, as well as bookbinder and collector Abner F. Beiler (1917–2002), filled numerous filing cabinets with historical and genealogical information. They also gathered dozens of family Bibles, *Ausbund* hymnals brought by immigrant ancestors, European editions of Anabaptist prayer books, and other early imprints. The men shared a dream of developing a historical group to carry on their interests and preserve the things they had collected.

Beginning the Library

Abner Beiler recalled that his first discussion with Joseph Beiler about starting a library took place in October 1976. Joseph Beiler had written to John A. Hostetler (1917–2001), a professor at Temple University who had been raised Amish in central Pennsylvania, to ask whether Hostetler thought it would be prudent and possible to start a library. Hostetler's immediate and positive



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response encouraged Joseph and Abner Beiler and others to continue collecting, with a view to someday beginning a library.

The first meeting of what became the library's trustee board was held on May 15, 1979, at the home of Abner F. and Katie (Fisher) Beiler (1914–1981). Others present were Joseph F. Beiler, Amos L. and Susie (Fisher) Fisher (1921–2009), and Levi L. and Sarah (Beiler) Stoltzfus (1927–2017). The group examined a fire-resistant room, measuring seven by nine feet, that Abner had built on his property and determined it was an adequate temporary location for their collections. Abner Beiler, Amos Fisher, and Levi Stoltzfus agreed to serve as trustees,¹ began working on a charter, and decided to fund the library via freewill donations rather than through memberships.



Abner Beiler's home at 176 North Hollander Road, Gordonville, housed the Pequea Bruderschaft Library until 1990. (Photo courtesy of Steve Nolt)

At the second meeting, on July 2, 1979, they settled on the name Pequea Bruderschaft Library, approved the library's charter, and spent the balance of the meeting reviewing research into Zook, Rickenbach, and other family histories. In August, Abner and Katie Beiler were appointed to review the large book collection of the late Jacob R. Fretz (1886–1974) of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. The Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania, which was the custodian of the materials, offered Pequea Bruderschaft Library the opportunity to select titles from the Fretz collection to fill gaps in their own collection. These books gave the library an early boost, which the trustees greatly appreciated.

¹ The library founders worked as equal partners, but when they opened a bank account for the library, they had to designate offices. Amos Fisher agreed to be named president; Abner Beiler, secretary; and Levi Stoltzfus, treasurer. These titles then appeared in the library charter but were never used otherwise.

The Library Grows

As more books were collected, purchased, and donated, the collection outgrew the seven-by-nine-foot space that had housed it on Abner Beiler's property. Beiler then converted two rooms in his house into a functional library space, and on January 4, 1983, library supporters moved the collection into those rooms. Beiler was insistent that this move should be temporary, and that a larger, firesafe location be built elsewhere. Nevertheless, the library remained in his home for nearly eight years. During those years, he enjoyed meeting people from all walks of life, Amish and non-Amish alike, who came to his home to use the library. He assisted visitors with their research and created a card catalog for the collection. He also organized topical files from the many clippings and individual papers that were donated to the library. In 1984, the library expanded its board of trustees to five members. Three years later, that number was increased to seven and the library became a tax-deductible nonprofit corporation.

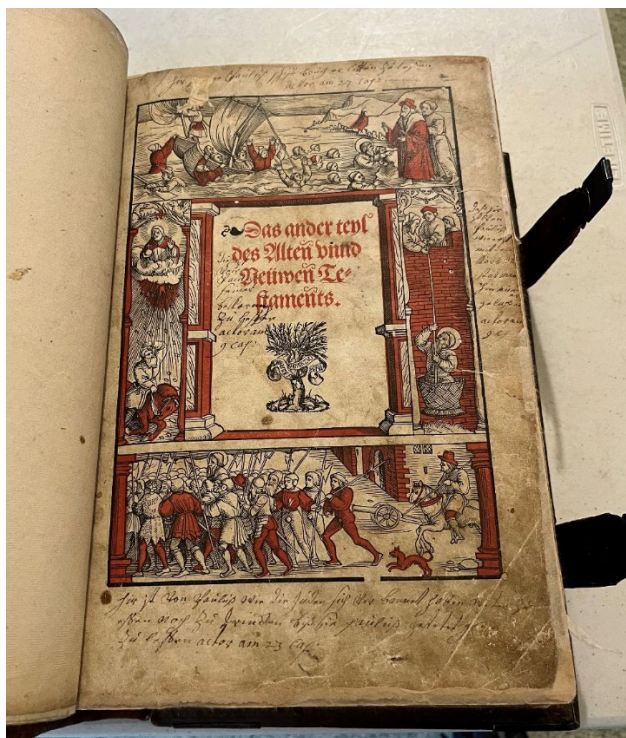
During the 1980s, the issue of better space for the library repeatedly came up. Finally, a decision was made to build a new facility along Old Leacock Road on land next to the Gordonville Bookstore. The building went up in summer and fall 1990 and, on November 21, the library was moved from Abner Beiler's home. The facility is a twenty-two-by-thirty-two-foot building, with half the floor space being a fireproof vault with two fire-resistant doors. The building is leased to the library by Gordonville Bookstore.



Pequea Bruderschaft Library, constructed in 1990. (Photos courtesy of Steve Nolt)

Today, Pequea Bruderschaft Library holds books, bound periodicals, archival materials, and historical objects on behalf of the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County and related communities. Among the many family Bibles in the collection is the 1776 Saur Bible of Christian Stoltzfus (1749–1832), the progenitor of the Amish Stoltzfus families. A significant recent (2023) acquisition is the 1531 Froschauer Bible of Jacob Esh, an immigrant of 1786, which was inherited

by his son Christopher Esh (1778–1830), who served as a minister in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, and has many descendants in the Lancaster Amish community. In addition to family Bibles, the library has most editions of the *Ausbund*, the *Unparteiisches Gesangbuch*, the *Ernsthafte Christenpflicht*, the writings of Menno Simons, and other works.



Title page of the 1531 Esh family Froschauer Bible acquired by the library in 2023.
(Photo courtesy of Steve Nolt)

Genealogies are a sizable and frequently consulted section of the library. The library also includes complete runs of many periodicals, including the *Lancaster Gemeinde-Brief* and newsletters from other Amish settlements, Pathway periodicals, and serials ranging from *Farming Magazine* to *Pennsylvania Folklife*. The library also holds a wide range of Amish settlement directories, Pathway Publishers' books, books by Amish author Linda Byler, and historic Amish schoolbooks, including the Scott Foresman textbooks used prior to the development of the Pathway Readers and the Strayer-Upton mathematics series that was a mainstay of early Amish school curricula.

Archival collections include the records of Gordonville Print Shop and its founder, Andrew S. Kinsinger (1920–1995), and the voluminous historical and genealogical research notebooks of Christian (C. P.) Stoltzfus (1928–2020). The library also has a number of material culture items, such as nineteenth-century show towels and several hats, bonnets, and other articles of clothing from generations ago, including examples of colorful wedding scarves worn by Lancaster Amish brides in the nineteenth century. Two unique objects are a sidesaddle that Amish leader "Tennessee John" Stoltzfus (1805–1887) gave to Catharine Hooley (1807–1884) before they married in 1826,

and the suitcase that Jonathan B. Fisher (1878–1953) used on his several trips to Europe and his 1934–1935 voyage around the world. The piece of luggage complements Fisher’s travel notebooks, diaries, and autograph books, which the library also holds.



The sidesaddle given to Catharine Hooley by “Tennessee John” Stoltzfus in 1826. The saddle is believed to have been made by Lancaster saddler Emanuel Schaffer (1793–1864). (Photo courtesy of Steve Nolt)

Publications and Programs

A separate undertaking, but one associated with the library’s origins, was Joseph F. Beiler’s publication of historical material in *The Diary*. Beiler started *The Diary* in 1967, and for the first fifteen years or so, its principal focus was on genealogy and early Pennsylvania Amish settlement history. Issues also included lists of contemporary births, deaths, marriages, baptisms, ordinations, and households migrating from one community to another. Over time, *The Diary* gave more space to “Community Notes” sent in by scribes in hundreds of settlements. After Beiler stopped editing *The Diary*, it was published for many years by Don Carpenter. It is now owned by *The Budget* of Sugarcreek, Ohio.

During the 1980s, a major project of Pequea Bruderschaft Library was the researching and publication of *Early Amish Land Grants in Berks County, Pennsylvania*. This forty-four-page oversized book, first released in 1990, contains detailed maps showing the property locations of seventy-seven immigrant and second-generation Amish families in Berks County, with abbreviated genealogies. It is currently available from Masthof Press.

The Nicholas Stoltzfus Homestead (<http://nicholasstoltzfus.com/>), located near Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, is a restored house museum with close ties to the Pequea Bruderschaft Library. The

home of immigrant Nicholas Stoltzfus, it was abandoned and slated for demolition in 2002 before being saved by a group of Amish historians and non-Amish Stoltzfus descendants. Although numerous partners have been crucial to the homestead's restoration, individuals associated with the library have been involved throughout the process. A library object on permanent loan to the homestead is the wooden trunk Stoltzfus brought to America when he immigrated in 1766. Pequea Bruderschaft Library purchased the chest in 1985 from a descendant in Missouri, and it was on display at the library until being moved to the Stoltzfus homestead.

Pequea Bruderschaft Library is open on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Call 717-768-8218 or 717-768-3512 to arrange visits at other times. The library holds quarterly meetings, which are open to the public, on the last Tuesday evenings of January, April, July, and October. Thirty or more people are typically in attendance. A quarterly newsletter, also titled *Pequea Bruderschaft Library*, has been published since 1992. Individuals may subscribe by writing to Benueel Riehl, 130 Centerville Road, Gordonville, PA 17529.