

A Sturdy Sapling in the Trans-Appalachian West: The Origins and Development of the Holmes County Amish Community, 1809–1846

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Abstract: For five states carved out of the Northwest Territories, the first half of the nineteenth century was a frontier era, replete with the first European settlers and the development of the first towns. As with any historical narrative, it is necessary to “reach” on either side of that era to provide context to the era in question. It is with this chronological connection in mind that the earliest history of what is known today as the Greater Holmes County Amish settlement is examined, specifically the arrival and growth of the Amish in the Walnut Creek area on the east side of Holmes County. The theme of this article is the “chain of migration” that describes the trans-Appalachian migration of the Amish into the Ohio country. The links in this chain include the kinship and familial connections, coupled with information and encouragement that bridged the divisions brought about by families and individuals moving from Pennsylvania into Ohio. The consequence of these linkages was the redevelopment of a common ecological space that was sustainable and viable, and it is these networks that defined the initial shape of the settlement itself during its early development in and around Walnut Creek. In turn, these early settlement patterns still influence the social and cultural makeup of the Greater Holmes County Amish settlement today.

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Introduction

In 1896, the Sugar Creek (Ohio) *Budget* printed an item of local interest. On the Noah Mast farm, a massive apple tree was “still well preserved, which was planted 86 years ago last spring. The trunk of the tree measures 9 ft. and 10 inches in circumference.... It is supposed that the tree had no less than fifty bushels of apples on it last season.”¹ Twenty-one-year-old Jacob Miller and his wife, Dorothy, had planted the tree after transporting it over three hundred miles from the family farm in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to their new home along the Sugar Creek in Tuscarawas County, Ohio. The couple had migrated with Jacob’s parents, Jacob Sr. and Anne Miller, his brother Henry and his wife and young family, and a cousin, Jonas Stutzman, in May 1809. Whether the tree they brought was from some particularly hardy stock or whose fruit was especially tasty, we will never know, but the tree physically connected their past and future as they constructed a new community in the trans-Appalachian West.

¹ “Sugar Creek,” *The Budget*, November 19, 1896, p. 1; digital copy available at the Ohio Amish Library, Berlin, Ohio.



A study of the interactions of ordinary families and individuals like the Millers with their kin and neighbors offers an important window on the development of community in the context of migration. As such, it reveals as much about America as it does about the Amish. Historical studies about life in the trans-Appalachian migrations are far less advanced than those of the trans-Mississippi West. Early historians of the American West often minimized the role of this “first step” west.² It is only in the last three decades that there has been more intentional study of this region. Much of this increased scrutiny of community development in the trans-Appalachian region has focused on the emergence of agrarian economic and political communities, rather than on the study of kinship networks and the interaction with the land.³

Historians use the term “chain of migration” to describe these trans-Appalachian settlements. For the Amish, as for any group, the links in that chain were the emotional and material support to migrate, coupled with information and encouragement that bridged the divisions that moving brought. This process often reunited kin and former neighbors in new locales, bridging the difficulty of the move.⁴ Although migration initiated separation, the Millers and their community thrived due to the familial and kinship connections and the availability of measurable land. The result was a set of deeply linked Amish households within a common ecological space that was sustainable and viable. It was these familial and kinship networks that dictated the shape of the settlement, and in that sense, they dictated the history of the community as well.

John Mack Faragher has suggested that historians of the frontier have emphasized those who moved and kept moving ever westward. Faragher argues that the “really American part of our history” is those people who settled and stayed, sinking deep roots into the land. In this sense the Amish are “really American.” Many of the families still live on the same land that their ancestors settled over two hundred years ago. In the act of settling and rooting, “posterity and landed possessions, family and land” shaped the Amish community, as it did for settlers across the spectrum of the trans-Appalachian migration.⁵

This history is drawn from a larger work that gives attention to the European background and trans-Atlantic immigration of the Amish families who came to settle in Holmes County, and includes an extensive discussion of the role of the natural environment in community identity, and the relationship of American Indians and the Amish and of both groups with their environment.⁶ This article is focused on the role of thick community connection and kinship networks in the early development of the Holmes County, Ohio, Amish settlement.

From the Rhine Valley to the Ohio Country

The ancestors of the Amish families who would settle along the Walnut and Sugar Creeks of eastern Ohio—the Joders (Yoders), Gerbers, Stutzmans, and Müllers (Millers)—had been deeply

² Faragher, *Sugar Creek*.

³ Specht, “Women of One or Many Bonnets?” 28–29.

⁴ Gjerde, *The Minds of the West*, 89.

⁵ Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 52.

⁶ Yoder, “Eight Pounds of Good Washed Wool.”

shaped by the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, as well as by an Anabaptist renewal movement of the late seventeenth century led by Jakob Ammann.⁷ In addition to the persecution they had faced for their religious beliefs, they had also experienced the economic pressures common to many rural residents of the Rhone Valley in the eighteenth century and had responded, with many of their Lutheran and Reformed Church neighbors, by immigrating to the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania across the Atlantic.⁸

One of the larger groups of Amish migrants arrived in Philadelphia on October 8, 1737, aboard the *Charming Nancy*.⁹ On the ship were Jacob Müller and his wife, Barbara, and their four or five children, including a son Johannes (anglicized as John) born ca. 1730.¹⁰ The Millers settled near a gap in the Blue Mountains in Berks County.¹¹ Here Johannes (or Hannas as he became known) grew up, married, and settled on land of his own. In 1750 his wife, Magdalena, herself an immigrant, had their first child, a daughter named Barbara, and in 1752 their first son, also named Hannas (anglicized as John), and in 1756 another son, Jacob. John and Barbara had eight additional children, all of whom lived to maturity.¹²

In North America, the lives of the Millers and their neighbors continued to be shaped by the possibilities and limitations afforded by larger events. In the 1760s, following the global Seven Years' (French and Indian) War, the Six Nations (Iroquois) relinquished the rights to their land in southwestern Pennsylvania. The Penn family began selling these acres in what would become, in 1795, Somerset County, to eastern residents, including Amish families in Berks County. By 1800 the resulting Somerset Amish settlement was growing quickly, so much so that residents were looking for land farther west and hearing that in the "Ohio Country" land could be had for two dollars an acre.

When the Amish moved to the Ohio Country, they moved onto land that had been measured and quantified by the US federal government. Thomas Jefferson had proposed surveying the country before formal occupation.¹³ The western land was surveyed into squares, rather than the "metes and bounds" that had been used in most places in the East. The metes and bounds survey, or indiscriminate survey system, as it is sometimes known, used physical features and the contours found in the geographical layout of the land to define real property and that created a jigsaw puzzle approach to land usage and ownership in the East.

On May 20, 1785, Congress passed an ordinance stipulating that the best way of "disposing of lands in the Western Territory" was to divide "said territory into townships of 6 miles square, by

⁷ J. Miller, *Both Sides of the Ocean*, 11–12.

⁸ Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys*.

⁹ Most of the earliest Amish settlers to Ohio traced their family lines to someone on this ship; see J. Miller, *Both Sides of the Ocean*, 211.

¹⁰ J. Miller, *Both Sides of the Ocean*, 209. A John Miller arrived in Philadelphia on the ship *Phoenix* in 1749. Family historians and genealogists have concluded that they are the same person, and that Hannas had returned to Europe for some reason, perhaps to find a wife.

¹¹ Horner, "Jacob Miller: From Berks County to Somerset County."

¹² G. Miller, "John 'Hannes' and Magdalena Miller."

¹³ For a much broader discussion of this process, see "Simple Arithmetic" in Linklater, *Measuring America*, and T. White, *The Mapping of Ohio*. See also Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 52.

lines running due north and south, and others crossing these at right angles.”¹⁴ This created what is often called a Cadastral map of square spaces and lines that had no regard for contours or previous landscapes and facilitated the commoditization of land.¹⁵ Surveying gave the possibility of individual ownership and unique identity. The solid and square boundaries gave clear shape to each family’s farm, something that was foreign to the Amish experience in Europe and Pennsylvania, where the land had been measured in metes and bounds.

The Amish who settled in Ohio did not name their properties as they had in Pennsylvania. Names like “Piney Tract,” “Three Hills,” “Cherryburgh,” and “Millers Choice” identified their properties in the East, a practice that may have derived from European practices of naming estates and farms for identification.¹⁶ Land in Ohio was geographically identifiable through the survey, a series of numbers indicating location. Property could be identified and found on a map well before white settlers saw it.

The Road West

It is in this landscape that the Amish community in Holmes County, Ohio, developed.¹⁷ In the late spring of 1807, Jacob Miller Sr. and two other Amish men, Abraham Gerber and John Miller, set out from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to scout the western land for a new settlement. Arriving at New Philadelphia, Ohio, on the Tuscarawas River, they followed an Indian trail to the valley of the Sugar Creek where they found open meadows and small patches of woodland.¹⁸ The three men were interested in selecting their own land but were acting as agents for many of their fellow Amish. Jacob Miller decided on land along the Sugar Creek, while Abraham Gerber selected land four miles west of Miller, at the confluence of the Walnut Creek and Hochstetler Run. John Miller filed on his choice about a mile north of Gerber, then stood in proxy and filed for two additional quarter sections, one for his brother-in-law and one for his cousin (see Figure 1).¹⁹ That the men did not choose adjacent parcels indicates that they had long-term plans in mind. The community would grow, and those spaces were needed for family and close kin to settle on. It is the boundaries of the ecological space that allowed these kinship and familial connections to shape the settlement along the Sugar and Walnut Creeks.

¹⁴ *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1785*, 375.

¹⁵ C. White, *A History of the Rectangular Survey System*; Linklater, *Owning the Earth*; and Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 49–50.

¹⁶ J. Miller, *Anniversary History of the Miller Family*, 46.

¹⁷ Cayton and Hobbs, *Center of a Great Empire*, 2–8, argues that Ohio embodied the major themes in the history of the Atlantic World from the middle of the eighteenth through the middle of the nineteenth century.

¹⁸ Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 377.

¹⁹ Berry and Berry, *Early Ohio Settlers*, 196. Gerber did not move until several years after the others in this party, so he is not located on the map.

Figure 1*First Ten Households, 1809–1810*

What led them to the Sugar and Walnut Creek valleys is a mystery today. There is no archival material that indicates their preference for this area, nor any previous connections to this land that are obvious. While purely conjecture, it is possible that Andrew Ellicot, one of the initial surveyors of this land, may have had contact with the Amish when he led a survey that extended the Mason-Dixon Line through the Somerset community.²⁰ The network of trails by the previous occupants of the land played a role in their selection as well. New Philadelphia had the first ferry crossing south of Ft. Laurens and the Greenville Treaty Line. The valley of the Sugar Creek is the second

²⁰ Linklater, *Measuring America*, 74.

broad valley west of the crossing.²¹ It had everything the men needed: open areas that did not need clearing, potable water sources in the springs that emanate from the hillsides, and most importantly, enough available surveyed land that their family and kin could join them.²²

There are no extant letters or diaries that explicitly describe how the Amish thought about the land. What is implicit is the attention that they paid to it, both in the pattern of their settlement and their individual selections. First and foremost was the need for water, both for potable use and for its future potential for powering mills. Of the forty-five sections claimed from 1809 through 1814 that can be identified as Amish, all are within one-half mile of a creek or watercourse. Waterpower was essential to the development of mills: grist mills for grinding cereal grains, and sawmills for producing sawn boards for such basic needs as planks for coffins, furniture, and the building of solid houses and barns. The southern exposure of hillsides was important because it received more sunlight and often had better growing conditions.²³ Yet while access to water and good growing conditions were important, it was their kinship and familial connections that determined where the men settled and that shaped the future parameters of the community itself.

Surely, as the men returned home to Somerset County, Pennsylvania, word of the “Ohio land” spread rapidly, and families had to decide whether they could, or should, move west. The move may have had more official “sanction” for young people, especially young couples, with the support and encouragement of Bishop Jacob Miller Sr., who would be the first to move. With a resident bishop in place, church services and functions—including future ordinations of leaders, and weddings, and funerals—could happen. The religious life of the community could go on. The culture, beliefs, and connections of the group could move with them as it had moved across the Atlantic and Pennsylvania in their previous migrations.

In the late fall of the following year (1808), after the harvest was over, Bishop Jacob Miller and his two youngest sons, Henry and Jacob Jr., left for their Ohio land. Henry had the deed that his father filed for him, while the younger Jacob, upon arrival, immediately filed for a quarter section adjacent to his family. The three men built a cabin and Henry stayed the winter, while his father and brother returned to Somerset County to prepare their families for the move west.²⁴ The following spring, the Millers packed their belongings, dug up the apple sapling, and headed west to their new lands in Ohio.

There is no record of what that journey was like. When the first history of Tuscarawas County was written seventy-five years after the event, it recorded that they “traveled with a wagon and six

²¹ I am grateful to Wayne R. Miller for many discussions about the exact nature of the selection of this valley. It is also from him that I received much of my information about the ferry crossings and trail networks of the area.

²² Johnson, *Order Upon the Land*.

²³ Some residents today claim that this exposure gives ten extra days of growing season per year. Amish farmers pay particular attention to this and often prepare the fields on this exposure first to take advantage of the extra time.

²⁴ Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 378. The reason that Henry stayed is likely to protect their claim from other settlers, or perhaps to prepare the cabin for his family, since he was the only one who had young children.

horses and reached their destination on a Saturday night.”²⁵ This was an extended family moving with all the necessities for life in an isolated settlement. The group consisted of Jacob Miller Sr. and his wife, Anna, their son Jacob Jr. and his wife, Dorothy, who were newly married, and Henry’s wife, Barbara, and their three young children. Also accompanying them was Anna Miller’s nephew, Jonas Stutzman.²⁶ The Millers left two married sons, one of whom, John J., and his wife, Catherine, would join the others in Ohio within a short time. Their other son, Benedict, remained in Pennsylvania after being chosen as a church leader in the Amish church in the place of his father.²⁷

The route that the Millers and Stutzman followed, earlier known as the Great Indian Trail, was first cut into the land by an expedition led by Colonel Henry Bouquet in 1764. After crossing the Allegheny at Pittsburgh, they followed the western banks of the Ohio River south to East Liverpool and then the widened path to New Philadelphia, the county seat of the new Tuscarawas County.²⁸ From there, they turned their team and wagon directly west about six miles to the place where their land, rude cabins, and Henry Miller awaited them.

Their wagon carried the necessary tools to build their homes, farm the land, and establish a new life in a new community. In the small number of extent inventories attached to early estates, one gets a perception of what was necessary for life on the frontier.²⁹ Axes, guns, and hunting supplies, tools, cooking utensils, and garden seeds were all in the wagon, sharing space with Barbara and Henry’s three children under three years of age. They brought barrels for food storage, a cookstove, and few precious household items. Anything that could be made in Ohio was left behind, although certainly a few keepsakes were taken along. Also included would have been the family Bible, their book of hymns, *The Ausbund*, and a large book that detailed their persecuted past, *Martyrs Mirror*.³⁰ These items, along with the apple tree, reminded them not only what they

²⁵ *History of Tuscarawas County*, 324.

²⁶ A historical marker for Jonas “Weiss” Stutzman (1788–1871) is located on County Road 114, several hundred yards from its intersection with State Road 39. Stutzman’s grave is located at James Jaberg Cemetery, Walnut Creek, Ohio. Stutzman was known for his belief that Christ would soon return and he built an oversized chair for Christ to sit in comfortably. This chair was donated by Stutzman’s descendants to the Ohio Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center and is now on display in the center’s Behalt Cyclorama.

²⁷ D. Miller, “Jacob Miller (1754–1835).”

²⁸ Tuscarawas County was formed in 1808 from parts of Muskingum County.

²⁹ The earliest such inventory is that of David Hochstetler less than five years after this move. For more, see “Will of David Hochstetler, 1819,” box 1, file 33, Yost Miller Papers: Amish Documents 1796–1871, Ohio Amish Library, Berlin, Ohio. The Yost Miller archives represent the largest collection of primary source documents available on the early years of this community. The materials were discovered sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s on a shelf in a woodshed covered in dust. The handcrafted, wooden, dovetailed box with sliding cover was used by both Yost and his son Benjamin as a storage cabinet. Subsequently, the collection was divided and sold at a public auction, bought by several individuals, and put into private collections. A few years later, the largest such collection was donated to the Ohio Amish Library. The collection is archived where feasible in files and box numbers and noted as such in this work. In a few cases, it is archived by the title of the document.

³⁰ These three books make up much of what the early Amish would have read. The Ohio Amish Library has numerous copies that can be traced to the early settlers.

had left behind, but also what they hoped to continue in their new settlement. An inscription in John Miller's Bible recorded the journey itself:³¹

John J. Miller was born in the year of ouer Lord 1778 April 19. I was born in Barcks County Pennsylvania and when I was fore yours of Eage My father mouft to Sumerset County of Pensnylvania in Elik lick township and in the year of ouer Lord 1800 I mouft to Mareland with my companion and thar I lived ten years than came to the state of Ohio.

The trip to Ohio was long and arduous. By horseback, the journey took at least seven to fourteen days, depending on weather conditions and the stamina of the horse. By wagon, the journey took from four to six weeks with most of the adults walking to lighten the load.³² In the only account that has been found to date about the journey west, Adam, the son of John J., recorded the stories and memories that he heard from his mother, including the fact that in the wagon "she had a small box made for him, just large enough to fit crosswise into the large country wagon, into which he was snugly placed away." The four oldest children were crowded into the most convenient places that could be found for them in the wagon.³³

The disruption and unfamiliarity that came with migration was not limited to a new environment. Inscriptions in John Miller's Bible provide examples of momentous events compounding the challenge of reconstituting family life on the frontier:

Died on 14th of October 1822 My beloved wife Catrena being the mother of eight children the years or her life being thorty-six years five months and nine days.

Earlier, he had recorded the births of his children, paying special attention to his sons, Adam, John, and Jacob, of whom he wrote:

January 22th 1810 ther was a son born unto me in the Sain Boc and his nam is
Adam Miller

August the 6 1814 ther was Born unto me tha thord Son in the sine of Taurus and
his name is John Miller

³¹ John Miller's Bible is in the hands of the Horner family, who are descendants of Miller. The inscriptions and records in this Bible were copied and reside in the David I. Miller Collection, File 76, Casselman River Area Amish and Mennonite Historians, Grantsville, Maryland.

³² There are many contemporary accounts that record some of the hardships of the journey; for more, see Dwight, *A Journey to Ohio in 1810*.

³³ A. Miller, *Hostetler*, 19–20; and J. Miller, "The Mennonite Boy Converted," 7. Adam Miller left the Amish and became a minister in the Methodist Church and later trained as a physician at New York University. He died in Chicago in 1901. He is critical of his Amish roots but does offer some biographical information that is helpful.

October the 6 1818 ther was Born un to Me the and his sine is ----or water and Is
Jacob Miller³⁴

His daughters are recorded but not with the detail with which he recorded his sons. In recording the births of his sons, he included the astrological signs they were born under, a practice common in America at the time. Almanacs were popular then and it appears that John received or had access to such periodicals. Certainly, he and his fellow Amish would have consulted such almanacs, for they provided meteorological and astronomical data, along with a plethora of other items such as the zodiacal signs and phases for the best time to plant or to wean a calf.³⁵ Despite living in seemingly isolated communities, the Amish engaged the wider world through these almanacs and various newspapers, calendars, and other periodicals that were readily available at the time.³⁶

Coming early in the life of the settlement, John's story reveals not only the hardships that came with migration, but also how familial connections shaped that move. He was thirty-three years of age in 1811 when he moved to Ohio to join his father and two younger brothers. He had lost his first wife after their second daughter was born, remarried a short time later, and had three more children with his second wife. John was the third John Miller to settle in this fledgling community, something that may have caused some confusion. His cousin John, who had scouted the land in 1807, lived just north of "Jacob's John," and a great-uncle, "Broad Run John," settled just east of Jacob Miller Sr. along the Broad Run Creek.³⁷

The deep network and connections of this community allowed labor to be shared, which made life easier, and gave shape and identity to the settlement. Like most such developing communities in the trans-Appalachian migration, this migration did not create a culturally isolated place. Rather, the frontier forced people to bring the mechanisms of their culture with them. They settled near each other, helped each other, and built the networks that eased the transitions in the chain of migration. While migration initiated separation from their old community, the new community thrived as a result of the familial and kinship connections that moved with them. These networks resulted in a collection of deeply linked Amish households within a common ecological space.

The Landscape of the Community

Deep and vibrant kinship connections wove the tapestry of this community as interactions happened along the boundary lines formed by the networks of family and kin. By the spring of 1811, twenty months after Jacob planted the apple sapling, there were nineteen adults and fourteen children in ten households in this community. Three children had been born in Ohio, joining the eleven who had traveled west with their parents. Church services were held regularly. Life was

³⁴ David I. Miller Collection, file 76, Casselman River Area Amish and Mennonite Historians. "Sain Boc" is most likely the "sign of the buck," with *buck* being the Pennsylvania Dutch word for *ram*.

³⁵ Sagendorph, *America and Her Almanacs*, 118.

³⁶ The Yost Miller papers include a number of receipts that Yost saved for periodicals like this.

³⁷ Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 386–87. John was the first in this community to use his middle initial (J.) to differentiate himself from the other Johns, a practice now very common among the Amish.

difficult on the frontier, yet also full of family and the hope of a growing community. Eight more families would make the journey west in 1811 (see Table 1) and two church districts would form. In his cabin on the Walnut Creek, twenty-three-year-old Jonas Stutzman was preparing to bring his bride, and both his father and brother planned to move as well that year.³⁸ About five miles west of the Millers and just west of where Gerber had staked his claim, Stutzman found the small but strong Walnut Creek flowing through some natural meadows. It would provide space not only for him but also for his parents, siblings, cousins, and friends coming from Pennsylvania. For Stutzman as well as the Millers, kinship connection was the single largest factor in the choice of land, and that in turn informed the subsequent choices of later Amish migrants.

Table 1*Settlers from 1809–1814 in Order of Arrival*

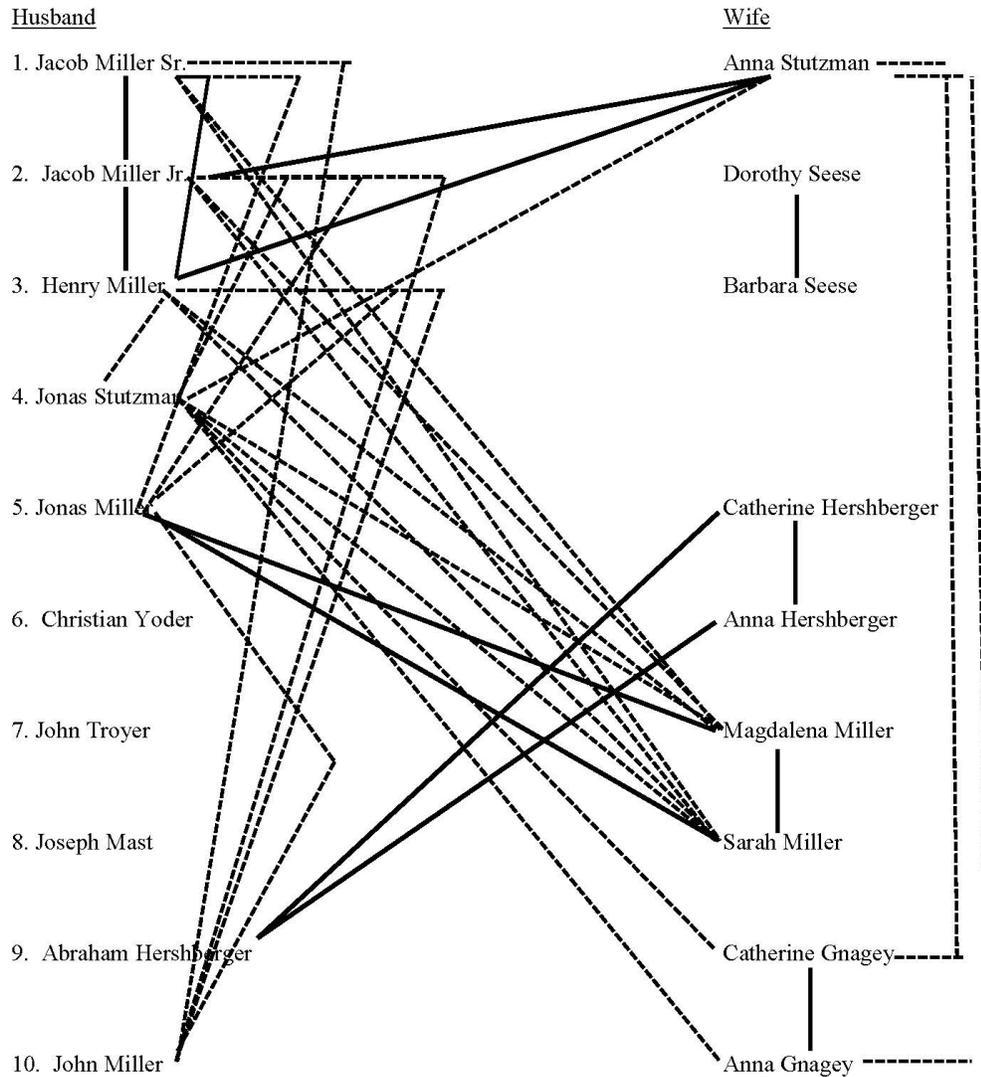
Year	Settler	Year	Settler
1809	1. Jacob Miller Sr. 2. Jacob Miller Jr. 3. Henry Miller 4. Jonas Stutzman	1812	19. Abraham Gerber 20. Jacob Mast 21. David Hochstetler 22. Solomon Hochstetler 23. Jacob Zook 24. Christian Seese 25. Joseph Hochstetler 26. Benjamin Hochstetler 27. Stephen Yoder 28. Daniel Yoder 29. John Yoder 30. John Burkholder
1810	5. Jonas Miller 6. Christian Yoder 7. John Troyer 8. Joseph Mast 9. Abraham Hershberger 10. John Miller	1813	31. Samuel Weaver
1811	11. Christian Fry 12. Christian Hershberger 13. John J. Miller 14. John Miller 15. Jacob Stutzman 16. Paul Stutzman 17. Jost Stutzman 18. David Troyer	1814	32. Daniel Miller 33. David Miller 34. Jacob Miller 35. Elizabeth Miller 36. Isaac Miller 37. Emanuel Miller 38. Solomon Miller 39. John Bontrager 40. Christian Bontrager 41. Jacob Troyer 42. Joseph Troyer 43. Moses Beachy 44. Conrad Keck 45. John Yoder 46. Peter Hostetler

Connections such as these formed the lines along which the community developed. All of the first ten households had some familial connection with others in the community (see Figure 2).

³⁸ Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 388.

Fifteen of the nineteen adults had nuclear or first-level (parent, child, or sibling) connections in the community. Jonas Stutzman, whose parents and siblings would move in 1811, had eleven second-level familial (first cousin, uncle, or aunt) connections in the community.³⁹ Eight of the nine adult women had a sister in the community. The lone exception was Jacob Miller Sr.’s wife, Anna, who had two daughters-in-law and several nieces by this time.⁴⁰ The eight sisters came from four families, something that must have eased their loneliness and workload.

Figure 2
Familial and Kinship Connections of First Ten Households



Note. Solid lines represent first-level connections (sibling, parent, child, but not in-laws). Dashed lines represent second-level connections (cousin, uncle, aunt, etc.).

³⁹ Christian Yoder, John Troyer, and Joseph Mast were the only adults who did not have immediate family in the community, but each of their wives did, and all of them would have siblings move within two years.

⁴⁰ The author has mapped out the genealogies of each of the nineteen adults. For more, see Gingerich and Kreider, *Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies*.

When Jacob Sr. and his sons selected their land, they chose sections that shared a common corner. Jacob Sr. and his wife, already older than most of the settlers at fifty-five, built their cabin on the younger Jacob's property and in 1815 conveyed their deed to Jacob Jr.⁴¹ Jonas Stutzman saved several sections around his land, so that when his father and brother came west they could settle on adjoining property, with the three sharing a common corner like the Millers. These familial boundaries shaped the settlement. While the desirability of land was important, family and kinship connections were the boundaries that created the landscape of their world. The sheer density of connections become increasingly difficult to map as the community grew. It is safe to say that every household in the first twenty years of this community had some kinship connection in the community.

By 1820, there were at least sixty Amish families living in this ten-square mile area. In the late summer of that year, several strangers appeared in the community asking questions of the people. The inquisitive strangers were enumerators, or "government men," who had come to count the people in the decennial census, the fourth in the history of the United States.⁴² The census for Sugarcreek Township in Tuscarawas County and for Berlin Township in Coshocton County provides the basis of this first official look at the community. These were adjoining townships that in 1824 became part of the new Holmes County, with its county seat at Millersburg, seven miles west of the Walnut Creek.⁴³ While Amish settled in outlying townships, these townships represent the bulk of Amish households in 1820.

The differences in handwriting and the organization of information indicate that two different enumerators counted these townships. The enumerator in Sugar Creek Township carefully recorded every category, using a dash or a small checkmark for nil, and filling in each blank. His handwriting was distinct with an almost calligraphical flair to it.⁴⁴ The Berlin Township recorder wrote much more plainly and used a dot for nil. He drew a double line between the larger categorical groups (i.e., male, female, etc.), and did not bother with any of the categories relating to non-whites, or the number and field of work that persons were engaged in.

The numerical data reveals a young, vibrant, exclusively white community, generally at least one generation removed from immigration. Of the 207 households counted in both townships, sixty, or about 30 percent, can be identified as Amish. Assuming the enumerators followed the normal travel routes, Amish families had neighbors who were not Amish; still, Amish families with common surnames were often near each other, indicating the focus of those familial and kinship connection in the settlement. The largest consecutive block of Amish surnames was in Berlin Township, where twelve Amish families were numbered consecutively.

⁴¹ D. Miller, "Jacob Miller (1754–1835)," 2.

⁴² The census of 1820 was dated August 7 that year. The enumerators had thirteen months to complete their work. Many of the individual enumerator's books have been scanned and are available through a variety of online and print mediums. For this work, I have used ancestry.com as the primary means to access the census.

⁴³ Holmes County Historical Society, *Holmes County Historical Sketches*.

⁴⁴ For their work, enumerators were sworn in as Assistant United States Marshals.

Only three women are listed as heads of households among the 207 households counted. In one case, the enumerator placed a “w” above one of these names, indicating a widow. The three do not appear to be Amish, given their names and locations within the census. However, through familial reconstitution we know that there were widowed or unattached women in the Amish community.⁴⁵ There are three Amish households recorded that include older women over forty-five years of age living with younger couples between twenty-six and forty-five. Widows and single women lived within the extended family structure, a practice common for the Amish even today.⁴⁶ The Amish averaged two people more per household than the surrounding community.⁴⁷ While the largest part of that difference was their higher birthrates, the extended familial structure played a part in this as well. Among families with traditionally Amish names, only four were comprised of a male and female with no children living in their household. Of these couples, one was in the twenty-six to forty-five age group, and the other three were forty-five or older.

The average age of both townships was relatively young, with only fifty-two women and seventy men over forty-five, while the Amish had seventeen men and seventeen women over forty-five. There were however, 272 children under sixteen years of age among the Amish, or 57 percent of their population. There were thirty more boys than girls—a situation that would cause some of the men to look outside this community for wives in the future. Linguistic boundaries are also evident in the enumerators’ work. In these two townships, there were nine Yoder households; the enumerators spelled the name four different ways.⁴⁸

The argument that the “frontier is productive of individualism” is not descriptive of the Amish experience. In the case of the Holmes County Amish community, the wilderness precipitated strengthening kinship connections, which led to more connections rather than isolation. The survival and growth of the community was directly linked to the formation of a “socially concentrated community” that was deeply rooted and connected.⁴⁹ No one was alone in this community: everyone had family or kin, and it was those familial and kinship networks that forged the boundaries of interaction, which created a landscape with contour and thickness.

Family Life in the Community

The landscape formed by the spatial dimensions of the land and marked by the familiar pathways of familial and kinship networks is evident in the preserved archival material, not only in the documents that are preserved, but also in why and how they were kept. They help define much about family and daily life in this community. Nowhere is this more evident than in the life of Yost Miller. Yost, his two wives and eleven children, had deep attachments to all the other families in

⁴⁵ Yost Miller’s future second wife, Maria (Follmer) Hochstetler, was widowed at this time.

⁴⁶ It appears that young married couples may have lived with their parents until they were able to move to their own farms, a practice common among some of the Amish today.

⁴⁷ The average size for the non-Amish households was 5.81 people, while the average for the Amish households was 7.85.

⁴⁸ Variants were Yotter, Yoter, Yetter, and Yoder.

⁴⁹ This is a term coined by John Hostetler. See Weaver-Zercher, *Writing the Amish*, 111–15.

the Amish community, connections that stretched across the Atlantic and spanned many generations.

Around 1800, in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, Yost Miller married Gertraut Yoder, whose family history closely resembles that of the Millers. Like his parents and grandparents, Yost had eleven children, but only three sons and two daughters lived to reach maturity, and only four would marry and have families of their own.⁵⁰ Gertraut died ca. 1830 and six years later Yost married Maria Follmer, who died in 1846. Yost's grandfather Hannes died in 1798 and his father in 1802. The thirty-two years from his grandfather's death to Gertraut's death represent an amazing amount of loss for Yost. He lost his grandparents, parents, at least three siblings, five children, and his first wife.⁵¹

Yost and Gertraut had their first child in 1802, a daughter named Sarah. The next two children were sons, Jonathon (b. 1804) and Isaac (b. 1806). They, along with Michael (b. 1816), Yost (b. 1818), and Magdalena (b. 1820), are recorded as having died "single," or in the case of Isaac, "young." These vague designations do not give us exact years of death, but they were not infant deaths, as was the case with Yost and Gertraut's youngest child, Elizabeth, who died at or shortly after birth.⁵² "Young" usually referred to a preteen or adolescent child while "single" may refer to someone of marriageable age, in most cases post-adolescent.⁵³ It is likely that the five who died did so after Yost and Gertraut's move to Ohio, since there are six weathered grave markers that are unreadable in the cemetery near where Yost is buried.⁵⁴ The fourth child, a daughter, Susanna (b. 1808), a dwarf, remained single until her death in 1884. Dwarfism is most often caused by a genetic disorder, which may have been the cause of death for the others. Only Sarah, Susanna, Elias (b. 1810), Benjamin (b. 1813), and Solomon (b. 1821) lived to adulthood.

That Yost was well respected in the community is indicated by his appointment as executor for his father's, and his grandfather's, wills at the relatively young age of twenty-six.⁵⁵ There are other indications of this respect as well: in 1809, back in Pennsylvania, the Amish church decided to call another minister to replace Jacob Sr. after his move to the Sugar Creek. Using the process that had developed through their European and American experience, the officiating ministers, led by a bishop, sat inside a room with a window as each member of the church passed by and gave the name of the man they thought was qualified to lead. Any man who received at least one vote could potentially be called to the ministry. After tallying the votes, the officiating minister—in this case likely Jacob Sr.—informed the men of their prospects and asked them to move forward to a separate bench. The bishop placed songbooks, in equal number to the men called, on a table. Another minister removed the books from the room and placed a small slip of paper in one of the books, shuffled the books, and returned them to the room. Each man went forward by age and

⁵⁰ Cross, *Ohio Amish Genealogy*, 10.

⁵¹ J. Miller, *Anniversary History*.

⁵² Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 956.

⁵³ Examining early records, the hinge point between "young" and "single" seems to be about fifteen years of age.

⁵⁴ Beachy, *Cemetery Directory*, 96.

⁵⁵ "John Miller," box 1, file 8, and "John Miller," box 1, file 10, Yost Miller Papers.

chose a book. The bishop opened to the prescribed page, and when the lot (slip of paper) was found, that man was ordained.⁵⁶

This process was, and still is today, very guarded. Only the officiating ministers were to know the tally of the votes cast. That is why the survival of a small slip of paper with five names, including that of Yost Miller, and the tally of votes cast per man, is so unique.⁵⁷ Of the sixty votes cast that day, Yost received forty-two. Seventy percent of his fellow church members believed he had the qualities of a leader, the ultimate vote of confidence for any Amish man. The next closest was Hannas Gnagey with ten votes. Three other men received fewer than ten votes, including Yost's cousin Benedict, the son of Bishop Miller, in whose book the lot was found that day.⁵⁸ We will never know whether Yost would have moved west if he had been chosen. We do know that Yost was respected enough by his community to be given the largest number of votes.

All of Yost's living siblings moved west to the lands along the Sugar Creek and Walnut Creek from 1810–1814.⁵⁹ Yost bought his first Ohio land in 1814, as evidenced by the tax receipt in the archives from October of that year, received by the tax collector, Samuel Laffin, “of Yost Miller by the hand of Jonas Miller.”⁶⁰ Yost bought this land, 169 acres, from his cousin John J. Miller, who we met earlier in this work. While most of the early settlers chose their own land after traveling west and evaluating the possibilities, Yost seems to have bought his land “sight unseen” or based on a map, since there are no indications that he traveled west prior to his move with his family in 1816.

The household of Yost and Gertraut, and later Yost and Maria, can be tracked through three censuses: 1820, 1830, and 1840.⁶¹ In the 1820 census, the enumerator recorded eight people living in the Yost Miller household, five males and three females. In addition to Yost, there were three males under ten years of age—Elias, Benjamin, and one of their brothers who later died—and a male from sixteen to twenty-six years old—most likely Jonathon, who was sixteen that year and had not yet died.⁶² The three females were Sarah, Susanne, and Gertraut. Sarah was eighteen and not yet married, while Susanna was twelve. Yost and Gertraut had a young, and often ill, family that suffered a great deal of trauma in these years. If the children died after their move as is supposed, it meant that Yost and Gertraut suffered the loss of three sons in those first four years

⁵⁶ This is one of the most dramatic services in Amish church life; see Hostetler, *Amish Society*, 105–111.

⁵⁷ The original paper was discovered in 1916 among the papers of Jonas B. Miller, a direct descendant of Benedict Miller. It is archived at the Casselman River Area Amish and Mennonite Historical Society in Grantsville, Maryland.

⁵⁸ Benedict had bought land along with his father and three brothers in Ohio but decided to stay in the Somerset community where he served as bishop until his death in 1837. Why Benedict choose to stay while his father moved is not known, though one may speculate that Benedict felt some obligation to stay after he was ordained.

⁵⁹ Yost's youngest brother, Elias, had died in an accidental shooting when a loaded gun misfired. Another brother, Solomon, died a few weeks after moving to Ohio when he was struck by a tree limb. Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 396.

⁶⁰ “1814 Tax Receipt,” box 1, file 16, Yost Miller Papers.

⁶¹ Wrightson and Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village*.

⁶² 1820 Census. See note 42.

after moving west. The hardships of frontier life, coupled with these deaths, made life difficult in Ohio—especially for Gertraut, whose parents and fourteen siblings were one of the few extended Amish families that did not move to Ohio.⁶³

Ten years later, the 1830 census shows four males and four females in the household. The males are the three living sons and Yost. Susanne is recorded properly, as well as their ninth child, Magdalena, who was ten years old in 1830 but likely died shortly after this census. There is a woman in the household who is categorized as forty to fifty years old. This must be Gertraut, yet the census taker apparently placed her in the wrong age category.⁶⁴ There is one unknown female recorded from twenty to thirty years of age, most likely a niece or a member of the extended family who lived with the family and aided Gertraut in the daily household needs. The two families counted on either side of Yost and Gertraut in this census were Yost's siblings, with large families of their own.

The 1840 census reveals a significantly different household. After Gertraut's death, Yost married Maria Follmer in 1836. There are three males and three females recorded in this census—Yost, young Samuel, and Solomon, who was nineteen years old. The females are Maria, Susanne, and a female between fifteen and twenty. This could be daughter Magdalena, who was twenty that year, although it is thought that she died before this census. Alternately this could be someone to assist Maria or someone boarding with the family. In any case, this was a blended family, with deep connections to most of the other families of the community.

Familial and kinship connections are also reflected in the will and estate inventory of Yost Miller's neighbor, David Hochstetler, whose widow (Maria Follmer) would, years later, marry Yost after Yost's first wife died, further connecting their respective families. David Hochstetler's father and mother were both born in Europe and had lived in Berks County before moving to Somerset County. David married Elizabeth Schrock and together they had three children. Around 1806 Elizabeth died and David married Maria Follmer.⁶⁵ David and Maria and their two teenaged children moved to Ohio in 1812, along with the eldest son, Joseph, who had married. The two households settled on adjoining quarter sections one valley north of where Yost would settle. David's nephew, Solomon Hochstetler, settled in an adjoining section as well, giving name to the small stream that flowed through their land: Hochstetler Run.⁶⁶

In October 1818, David Hochstetler, ill and near death, wrote his will. Hochstetler named his “two trusty friends Yost Miller and John Schrock Junr. to be my executors over all my Estate.” He dictated that his “surviving wife” be provided for by giving her the use of the “moveable Estate” for “as long as she remains my widow, but as soon as She Mar[r]ies or dies it shall be appraised[d]

⁶³ Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 402.

⁶⁴ It is unlikely that Yost would have had someone so close to his age living in the household unless it was a close family member, of which there is no record.

⁶⁵ Follmer was likely from a Lutheran family and joined the Amish after marriage.

⁶⁶ Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 388–89. The community ostracized Solomon for fifty years because of suspicions in Pennsylvania that he had caused the death of his six-month-old niece in a fit of jealous rage over a woman. On his deathbed, another man confessed to the murder, whereupon Solomon was finally baptized and received into the church.

by two disinterested men.” The youngest son, David, was charged with taking care of his widowed stepmother by giving her “liberty to live on the premises as long as she remains my Widow,” and that he must “mentain [maintain] her in decent manner in meat and trink [drink] and in all cases whatsoever.” Further, she was to be given a cow and their “Cook and Kitchen furniture.” David was then given the most expensive item in the moveable property, a wagon, for which he was to pay seventy dollars to settle any debt that the estate had incurred.⁶⁷

With the deep connections to the land, it seems unusual that the family land is not mentioned in the probate process. We know that son David took ownership of the land.⁶⁸ The oldest son, Joseph, had made claim to his section when they had moved to Ohio. Elizabeth was not likely to inherit or own the land, since she was a woman. The land was to stay within the family, so the younger son moved into the family home and assumed the care of the land and the family. With the land went the obligation to provide and care for his stepmother and sister. This obligation to family and kin was as important a part of the inheritance as was the land or chattel.

On January 16, 1819, the three children of David Hochstetler met and divided the “moveable estate” that his widow did not need. Yost recorded each item, which sibling received the item, and the agreed-upon price that each would pay the estate. Drawknives, chisels, hammers, saws, even a mousetrap—for which David paid twenty-five cents—were among the items divided that day. The most expensive item was the windmill, which David bought for fifteen dollars. It stood over a hand-dug well and pumped water into a cistern for potable use. Reflective of the fact that David was taking over the family farm, he bought forty-five of the seventy-seven items that were sold; while Joseph, who was more established, only bought twenty-seven pieces. Elizabeth ended up with five items. She bought several small tools, a cow skin, a flour barrel, and a hog. Perhaps the hog was an investment in the future, since she married later that year.⁶⁹

What is absent in the inventory and will is mention of any intellectual material. There are no Bibles or books sold that day, nor are any such items mentioned in David’s will. This is true of all the extent inventories for the early years of this community. It is not that they are absent in the community; rather, these items were treasured, and passed down from generation to generation with no mention in the probate records. They were too precious to be sold.

In addition to the familial connections that it affords, this inventory, because it is the earliest one that we have from this community, allows a glimpse into the life of the families who came to Ohio. Only ten years after the beginning of the community, and only seven short years after the Hochstetlers had moved to their new land, life had already changed.

Alongside Hochstetler’s estate inventory is an undated document that pertains to this estate settlement. It is an itemized list in German of twelve items that Elizabeth received as dowry, in addition to the items divided in 1819. On the list are plates, two beds, sundry cookware, a new

⁶⁷ “Will of David Hochstetler,” Yost Miller Papers. The wagon was likely the Conestoga wagon that had carried the family west to the Ohio frontier. It was by far the most expensive farm item, or moveable estate item, in the early years.

⁶⁸ “Plat Map,” Yost Miller Papers.

⁶⁹ “Inventory,” box 1, file 33, Yost Miller Papers.

chest, a corn hoe, and two cows. The new bed is assessed at sixteen dollars and the cows at twelve dollars apiece.⁷⁰ The “new chest” was not given a monetary valuation, likely since it was homemade. Her father had many woodworking tools, a necessity on the frontier, which he used to build furniture like this chest for the family. In most instances, a daughter would have received her chest in her early teens to keep the items she was collecting for her marriage. The total valuation without the chest was \$43.08. This is a significant dowry, equivalent to a half section of land at the time the family moved to the frontier. These things, along with her hog and other items, are what Elizabeth took into her marriage.

Who wrote this dowry list? It is not in the hand of Yost Miller.⁷¹ Before the items are noted, the scribe says, “Elizabeth Hochstetler daughter of David Hochstetler received the following items as a part of her leaving home.”⁷² It is not likely that David wrote the list, since he did not write the will itself, and it appears after his death. The handwriting does not match that of the younger David, who signed his father’s will as a witness. Most likely Maria or Elizabeth wrote this document, and if so, makes it the only extant document from these early years written by a woman. Another woman who had a signatory role, Elizabeth Troyer, in 1836, was unique in that she did not use the typical “x” for her mark but rather used an “E,” indicating that she knew how to write, at least on a rudimentary level.⁷³

Maria Follmer Hochstetler remarried in 1823 to Daniel Frey. Together they had one son, the above-mentioned Samuel, born in 1827, when Maria was forty-three years old. Frey, who emigrated from Germany in 1819, was twenty years Maria’s senior. He had five children from his first marriage, all born in Germany. One daughter remained in Germany and only one of his children moved to Holmes County, Ohio, with him. Sometime after 1830, Daniel Frey died, and Maria was once again a widow.⁷⁴ In 1836, she married Yost Miller and spent the last ten years of her life living in the Walnut Creek Valley. When one maps out her first- and second-level relationships through her three marriages, she had connections to nearly everyone in the community. She had one biological child, and, if one counts Yost’s eleven children, nineteen stepchildren. She had eight biological grandchildren from her son, Samuel, and seventy-nine step-grandchildren in the Holmes County community at the time of her death in 1846.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ “Elizabeth Hochstetler,” box 2, file 69, Yost Miller Papers.

⁷¹ Having spent hundreds of hours reading and copying Yost’s handwriting, I am comfortable in asserting that the document was not written by Yost Miller. It is likely that Jacob Stutzman, who witnessed the will, was the scrivener for Hochstetler.

⁷² “Elizabeth Hochstetler,” box 2, file 69, Yost Miller Papers. Translation by author.

⁷³ “John Blank,” box 1, file 54, Yost Miller Papers.

⁷⁴ Frey, *Samuel D. Frey Family History*, 4–5. Another of Frey’s children moved to the community after Samuel’s death.

⁷⁵ Gingerich and Kreider, *Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies*. I did not count Frey’s children who had not moved to this area.

The Future of the Community

By 1840, thirty-one years after the Millers and Stutzman arrived, the Amish community radiated outward from the Walnut Creek in all directions for at least ten miles, and there was no more unclaimed land within the confines of the community. One hundred forty patent deeds had been issued by the United States to Amish landholders in this community, including some that were personally signed by Presidents Madison and Monroe.⁷⁶ By this time, there were about 250 Amish households in the area roughly bounded by the county line to the north, the Sugar Creek to the east, Martins Creek to the west, and a Dunker (German Baptist Brethren) community to the south. Within these boundaries much remained the same as family, community, and the ecological space shaped daily life, even as the era of settlement ended. Yet their identity had subtly shifted as these factors combined to create a landscape that was tightly connected to the family farms and the deep bonds of kinship and familial connections extended across the community.

In Walnut Creek Township's one hundred sections, the 1840 census counted 120 households, about seventy of which were Amish. On many of these sections, there were already two generations living and working together. More substantial houses and farm buildings took the place of cabins as families prospered and grew. Nearly all the families were connected in some familial or kinship links to others within the community. There were many non-Amish families among them, but the Amish had rooted deeply in these valleys and hills. Of the ninety familial networks that had migrated to this settlement by 1840, seventy had come from Somerset County. Most of the remaining households had moved from other areas of Pennsylvania and Ontario, and a few had emigrated directly from Germany.⁷⁷

One of those from Germany was Peter Brenneman, who, with his wife, had seven children ages fourteen to twenty-five when they arrived in 1836. They settled about a half-mile west of Yost's blacksmith shop and home. Within the first four years of their arrival, three of their children married within this community.⁷⁸ The family was embracing the new community. The 1840 census records eight people in the Brenneman household: two females and six males. Six of the eight, the men, were all employed in "agriculture."⁷⁹ This was the first census that recorded the number of adults in the household who could read or write. In the Brenneman household, all could read and write, something that was not true of the majority of the households in the community. Brenneman is representative of someone who engaged the community from a different perspective, yet quickly became an integral part of it. He had likely been Amish, or at least of some Anabaptist persuasion, in Germany. It does not appear that there was any resistance to his participation and by all appearances, the Brennemens were an accepted part of the community.

⁷⁶ In May 2009, at the bicentennial celebration of the arrival of the first Amish in Holmes County, the Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center hosted an "Amish Pioneer Homestead Tour." In preparation for the event, the author identified and visited most of the early settlers' original home sites. In several cases, families had preserved these deeds and were willing to show them.

⁷⁷ Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 433.

⁷⁸ Gingerich and Kreider, *Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies*, 53. The eldest daughter, Maria, married Yost's nephew, and a son married Yost's cousin.

⁷⁹ 1840 Census. (For this work, I have used ancestry.com as the primary means to access the census.)

When Brenneman died in 1844, Yost Miller was instrumental in assessing his estate. This inventory of moveable chattels is quite complete and appears to include the entire farmstead, including the animals. It is easy to follow the assessors to the various buildings on the farm, beginning in the shop or shed area where they assess tools and some basic farm items. Here one finds the tools and detritus that made the farm run. “1 lot of old horseshoes,” a “shoe iron,” several “garden hoes,” and other various tools are found here. Next, they move to the barn, where there were harnesses and a “plough,” along with eleven pigs, nine sheep, three head of cattle, an “old horse,” and a “two year old colt.” They also included “a piece of wheat [and oats] in the field,” crops that had been planted but not harvested. Next, they moved into the house, where they found an “old cupboard,” a “copper coffee pot,” a “small kegg with whiskey,” and a “tub with lard.” Brenneman also had a “sausage machine” and a “meat chop[p]er,” indicating that he may have brought German sausage-making expertise to the community.⁸⁰

It is evident that this family was able to establish a rather robust farm and household, considering the inventory of goods accumulated in the ten years since their move. Since the family was older and brought more means to the community, perhaps they were able to engage and grow more quickly. Brenneman represents the end of migration into the community from other areas. While there would be some families and individuals who would move from Pennsylvania during the next few years, the land was all claimed and, by 1845, the physical and familial boundaries were solidifying. Of the seven children, only two would remain in this community. The five who did not stay moved farther west and helped establish new Amish communities in Iowa.⁸¹ In this way, this second generation of Amish-Americans would forge another link in this chain of migration that linked two continents and two worlds. Only the oldest son, John, who was listed as “insane” in the 1850 census, remained in the community; otherwise, the Brenneman name “moved” farther west.⁸²

The Amish conveyed land and chattels from generation to generation in a way that perpetuated life together in a larger kinship circle. This is revealed in the relationship and agreement between Yost and Benjamin.⁸³ Yost and Maria gave over farm operations to Yost’s son Benjamin at a time when they wanted to “slow down,” or perhaps were no longer physically capable of doing the farm work themselves. When this happened in April 1841, Yost was sixty-five years of age. There is no indication that he was in ill health or in any way incapacitated. This transaction allowed for a continuation of the landscape in as seamless a way as possible.

The conveyance of the family farm of 264 acres, in two tracts, was laid out in the following language:

⁸⁰ “Estate of Peter Brenneman,” box 2, file 14, Yost Miller Papers.

⁸¹ Gingerich and Kreider, *Amish and Amish Mennonite Genealogies*, 49.

⁸² In an 1856 census of handicapped people in Holmes County, John is listed as being “insane 20 years—cause unknown.” This coincides with the family’s emigration and ocean voyage. John was left in the care of his sister Maria who married Yost’s nephew Solomon I. Miller. Leroy Beachy recalls his grandfather speaking of his memories of John chained in the basement of the Miller home. John died in the early 1890s. For more, see Beachy, *Unser Leit*, 427.

⁸³ “Agreement between Yost Miller and Benjamin J. Miller,” box 2, file 3, Yost Miller Papers.

the said Yost Miller doth and by these presents do sell two Certain Tracts of Land to said B. j. Miller the one being the Northeast quarter of section sixteen Township nine and of Range four, the other is part of the northwest quarter of section aforesaid containing one hundred and four Acres be the same more or less situate in Walnutcreek Township aforesaid, for which said B. J. Miller is to allow twelve hundred dollars beside the reserves for said Yost Miller and Mary his wife during their natural life as mentioned hereafter

A payment was due every year. With the sale went the right of Yost and Maria to continue to live on, and be provided for, by the land:

further doth said Yost Miller reserve the little house he lives in at present for his and his wifes resident during their lifetime or as long as may be convenient for them to live separate, further is said B. J. Miller to keep and support them in health and sickness in every aspect whatever in a decent Christian like manner

This was advantageous for both the parents and the child. The right to the farm was not necessarily the endowment of the eldest son, as is true in many other cultures; rather, it seems to have been guided by what was mutually beneficial for the entire family. Along with the freedom to live in the “little house,” he also asked for “cellar rights,” which indicates that there were at least two dwellings already added to the farm.

Yost specified a long list of provisions for the duration of his and Mary’s “natural life,” including meat, eggs, flour, wool, firewood, milk, and butter, and, of course, the two gallons of whiskey and “the eight pounds of good washed wool.” With the elders knowing that they would be provisioned and cared for, they could offer the land at a lower price. This gave the succeeding generations a better start in farming. The preservation of agreements like this reveals a great deal about the self-sufficiency of these family farms. Here they were able to produce much of what was necessary for life on the frontier. If Benjamin were to “be called of[f] to death” before Yost, Yost would then be responsible to “rent out the place or farm it himself for the support of said B. J. Miller’s family.”⁸⁴ The farm would be kept in the family: it was the deepest connection in the landscape for the family.

Yost also wanted to make sure that his fourth child, daughter Susanna, who suffered from dwarfism and remained single all her life, was cared for:

further is said B. J. Miller to keep and support them in health and sickness in every aspect whatever in a decent Christian like manner, and is further to give Susanna Daughter of said Yost Miller liberty to keep her home on the said premises as long as she choses to have it.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ “Agreement between Yost Miller and Benjamin J. Miller,” box 2, file 3, Yost Miller Papers.

⁸⁵ “Agreement between Yost Miller and Benjamin J. Miller,” box 2, file 3, Yost Miller Papers.

Susanna outlived her brother Benjamin and after his death was cared for by Benjamin's son Adam until her death in 1884, seven years after her brother.⁸⁶ Familial care extended through this community. If there were widows or single women unable to provide for themselves, they lived within an extended family structure, as did Susanna. These extended familial connections were crucial in the network of interactions since they provided the network of support for the members of the community.

Elias, Yost's oldest living son, who was three years older than Benjamin, would have been the natural choice as heir to Yost's position and the farm. Yet there is very little mention of him in Yost's papers, except for a small note in the undated section of the material. The note is either a receipt or a charge account for items Elias purchased from a local store.⁸⁷ The only other record of Elias is his grave alongside his wife, Barbara, which gives some indication of this enigmatic son of Yost: Elias and Barbara were buried together, not in a family graveyard, but rather in two lonely graves alone on a hillside outside the fence of a family cemetery.⁸⁸ Elias was estranged from the Amish church due to alcoholism.⁸⁹

Yost Miller died on Tuesday, May 12, 1846, at seventy years of age. A receipt dated October 1845, when Yost bought a three-year subscription for three dollars, suggests that he was still active and had no expectations of death.⁹⁰ Perhaps it was a periodical or an almanac that many of the Amish would have consulted, or simply the local newspaper, like his subscription to the "German Paper." That he was also still actively involved in estate settlements is evidenced by the last mention of him, an acknowledgement by one Jacob Glick that he had:

recd. Of Benj. J. Miller Agent of the estate of Yost Miller died the sum thirty nine dollars and thirty seven cents being the full amount of my wifes share out of the moveable property of the estate of Albright Gindlesperger of Tuscarawas County died. I therefore aquit and ever discharge the said Benj. J Miller of said share.⁹¹

Evidently Yost was holding money in escrow for the estate of Glick's father-in-law and Benjamin finished the work in the same fashion that Yost had finished the estate of his grandfather after his father's death, ensuring that the next generation would continue along the same boundaries as the previous generation had.

That the land was not transferred in the probate process shows that familial transactions were in place that made providing and caring for extended family a part of the inheritance. This silence shows that the strong threads of deep familial and kinship connections, and the spatial dimensions

⁸⁶ Beachy, *Cemetery Directory*, 65.

⁸⁷ "Elias Miller," box 2, file 70, Yost Miller Papers. Elias is also mentioned in "Contract of William Gerber," box 1, file 57, Yost Miller Papers, where he appears as a signatory.

⁸⁸ Beachy, *Cemetery Directory*, 83.

⁸⁹ All the family histories and the legends speak to this condition, as did Leroy Beachy in a personal interview. I was initially skeptical, but it does seem that the pieces fit this interpretation.

⁹⁰ "Subscription," box 2, file 18, Yost Miller Papers.

⁹¹ "Jacob Glick," box 2, file 20, Yost Miller Papers.

of the family farm, were the framework and fabric of community. Family connections were the central tenet in the way that these agreements worked.

Conclusion: Sturdy Saplings

As Jacob Miller Jr. watched the small apple sapling flourish and grow, he had reason to believe that the community would be much like that tree. They had planned for that to happen. That the tree would yield “no less than fifty bushels on it” nearly one hundred years later was not as foreseeable, but that yield was representative of the Amish community that developed.⁹² Over two hundred years after the first Amish moved to the hills and valleys along the Sugar and Walnut Creeks, their descendants still live here. While much has changed, much remains the same. On the hill that rises above the spot where Yost Miller settled, at what has become the center of this settlement, is an orchard of apple trees. The life cycle of these trees, and the past they reflect in the seeds of the fruit, are emblematic of the journey taken by the first Amish settlers of the valley and hills that surround Sugar Creek and Walnut Creek. This settlement is as deeply rooted as the trees, which originated long in the past. Today there are approximately 38,000 Amish living within fifty miles of where Miller planted his apple tree. One-seventh of all the Amish in the world call the Holmes County area home.⁹³

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⁹² “Sugar Creek,” *The Budget*, November 19, 1896, p. 1; digital copy available at the Ohio Amish Library, Berlin, Ohio.

⁹³ Hurst and McConnell, *An Amish Paradox*.

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