

naturally--staying in the community, following the usual occupation of farming, joining the church of their fathers, and helping to maintain a community that placed a premium on good moral character. Hard work, thrift, good management, and financial independence were considered to be next to godliness. It became easy for the community to promote a rather sheltered, semi-isolated life from the rest of the world, a community that leaned a bit toward exclusiveness against outsiders not of like faith or character. This created something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand it helped to carve good character--fine, upright people of integrity who contributed to an excellent community spirit. The other edge of the sword sometimes had tendencies to purge the community of "undesirable outsiders." It was not uncommon for them to consider it more important to shield themselves and their children from outsiders than mixing with and witnessing to them.

Origin of the Name "Sonnenberg"

The pioneers of the community came from the Jura Mountains of Canton Bern, Switzerland. In the northwestern section of Bern, near the French border, was a community that had for centuries been known as *Sonnenberg*. From that community many emigrated to this area in Wayne County, Ohio. In honor of their former home they named this community *Sonnenberg*. The rolling land of the northern and eastern part of the community reminded them of the Jura Mountains and foothills. For a long time Sonnenberg, Ohio, became the destination of many emigrants from Sonnenberg in the Bernese Jura. In time a larger number left Switzerland than stayed. Today, after 150 years, there are flourishing Mennonite churches at Sonnenberg, Switzerland, and at Sonnenberg, Wayne County, Ohio.

Sonnenberg in Wayne County, Ohio, never had a post office nor even a village by that name. The nearest thing to it was the Sonnenberg store at what formerly was known as Sonnenberg Station, now Kidron Station, along Road 98 at Sugar Creek. For years this served as one of the several country stores of the community as well as a shipping point for freight and a passenger station for the Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad, now the Norfolk and Western, which runs through the Sugar Creek Valley.

Defining the Boundary Lines

This community never became exclusively Mennonite. Throughout its history there have always been a number of residents who were not Mennonites but who liked living among them. They recognized it as a stable community with little criminal activity--a comfortable, safe, and pleasant place in which to raise one's family.

prospecting for this time. If we have another "vision" we will report it through the *Gazette* in due time. --Pasha

Sonnenberg Station

A little bit of "Pasha's" vision did come true. The Sonnenberg valley did get a railroad. Grading began in the summer of 1906. Work progressed slowly since it took so much grading. In the winter of 1908-09 Sonnenberg residents were still expectantly waiting for it. This Wheeling and Lake Erie Railroad had various names. It was first called the Wabash Cutoff and then Sugar Creek and Northern Railroad. Since Dan Kirchhofer lived nearby he watched its progress with anticipation. By March 1909 he announced, "Sure enough, Tyrol has a railroad!"⁵² (Tyrol was the former name of the Sugar Creek Valley.) By August of that year, through trains began running. By September 1910 Jacob Bixler was building a warehouse on the south side of the tracks near the junction of the railroad and Road 98 (what is now called Kidron station--formerly Sonnenberg station).

On this occasion Kirchhofer's wry comment on the developing of a station was, "It seems no name big enough can be found so the R. R. company has called it Mt. Eaton Road siding, as this is not even the so-called Mt. Eaton road, San Francisco siding might have been just about as appropriate."⁵³ From the beginning freight was unloaded there. Shortly thereafter it became a flag stop for passengers. Bit by bit the station developed further and by 1913 plans were laid for an elevator and warehouse, as well as a scale. Kirchhofer occasionally notes the number of passengers getting on the

train. He notifies us that from early 1912 to March 1913 Orrville had sold 1,266 tickets to people coming to Sonnenberg station.⁵⁴ That does not include passengers coming from other stations.

On the north side of the railroad tracks another small building was erected. In time this became the David Zuercher barber shop, a popular gathering place for the young fellows of the community. "There were quite a few more cut-ups than just the shaves and haircuts!"⁵⁵

Obviously, the railroad received considerable use. By the fall of 1913 Sonnenberg had a general store and later that winter John Wyss received word that he would become ticket agent. The railroad was set back a bit in the spring of 1913 when a tremendous flood caused some washout. In that well-known flood Sugar Creek was said to have been four feet higher than ever known previously.⁵⁶ Numerous bridges in the Sugar Creek Valley were washed out. Three years later the people of the valley again had some excitement when a 15-car train wreck occurred near the Amstutz cheese factory at Benville.

With a train going through Sonnenberg Valley the community had another economic asset. For many years passengers used the train even for short trips such as to Orrville. The Sonnenberg store under the management of John Wyss flourished and prospects looked good for further development of Sonnenberg into a village. But the automobile gradually decreased the need for passenger service at Sonnenberg and the station did not expand further. Eventually the store closed too.

Wyss experienced numerous robberies in his general store. For this reason he kept a watchman who boarded and roomed upstairs. It was Jim Quinlan, a transient, who had lost a leg on the railroad earlier in life. Later, when the store was vacated, Quinlan moved into the building formerly used as a barber shop. "Here he made his home for many years, a familiar figure in that part of the community. One Sunday morning neighbors found the building ablaze and were unable or too late to save the life of Jimmy."⁵⁷

The elevator and warehouse remained in use. L. E. Sommer & Son of Kidron purchased the station buildings so that they would have a railroad outlet. The warehouses and large modern elevator (that replaces the old one that burned in 1963) are in constant use today. Sonnenberg station never obtained a post office. Thus while the community was widely known as Sonnenberg, it never had a post office by that name.

As noted earlier Jacob Bixler built a warehouse in 1910. He became a livestock shipper, as well as a meat packer at his home just north of Sonnenberg station (farm now occupied by Clarence Nuss-