



Central
District
Conference

A conference of
Mennonite Church USA

focus

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KNOWING CHRIST'S LOVE—ANSWERING GOD'S CALL

Oak Grove celebrates 200 years

A 200-year timeline, 200 comforters, and countless stories and hymns marked the 200th anniversary of Oak Grove Mennonite Church, Smithville, Ohio.

The congregation was formed in 1818 by Amish families who had settled in Wayne County. Through its history, Oak Grove has affiliated with different Amish and Mennonite groups and for a time remained independent. It has been part of Central District Conference since 1970 and it also is affiliated with Ohio Mennonite Conference. It became one of the early voices calling for the integration that is now Mennonite Church USA.

Through 2018, Oak Grove marked its rich history of serving God's mission locally and around the world. Three major celebrations gave opportunities for different kinds of celebrating.

Celebration of history, April 14-15

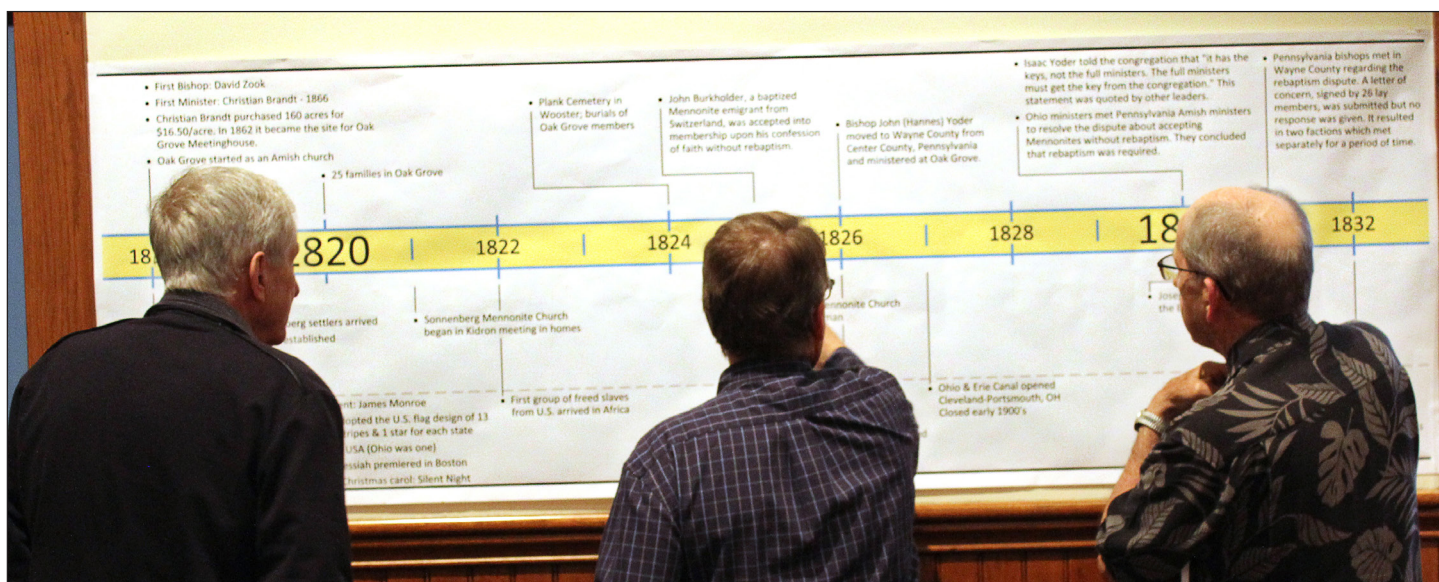
A two-century timeline of Oak Grove history was unveiled and a short booklet of personal sketches by historian Levi Miller was released. Jason Kauffman, archivist of Mennonite Church USA and native of Dalton, Ohio, was the speaker for sessions during the weekend. The timeline put the congregation's history into the context of what was happening in the world and in the wider church through the 200 years.

Celebration of music, July 14-15

Pianist George Bixler presented a recital concert on Saturday evening. On Sunday afternoon a congregational singing sampled hymnals used at Oak Grove.

Harvest Home celebration, October 13-14

Former member Byron Kauffman, now resident



Bob Schloneger (left) and John Zook (right) receive introduction to 200-year timeline, created by Art Neuenschwander (center). For a better sample of the timeline visit www.oakgrovemc.org/bicentennial-celebration-at-oak-grove-mennonite-church

Photos by Paul Miller unless otherwise noted.

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of West Liberty, Ohio, directed a choral music program. A Sunday School reunion filled Saturday afternoon. Sunday worship was led by Mark Schloneger, currently pastor of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Fellowship, Goshen, Ind. As the son of Oak Grove members Bob and Enid Schloneger, Mark's early childhood years were spent in the congregation. His roots also include his great-great-grandfather, Jacob S. Gerig, who served as minister and bishop of the congregation from 1896 until 1955.

The congregation today

Douglas Zehr is the Oak Grove pastor, which has about 380 members and 170 active participants. Miriam Zehr, associate pastor, is minister of worship and Christian education.

Strengths of the congregation include the diversity of the congregation and its strong sense of identity and tradition. Members have a commitment to service, both as individuals and as a congregation. There is strong awareness of and frequent participation in Mennonite Disaster Service projects.



Oak Grove Mennonite Church took its name from the wooded setting of its first meetinghouse, built in 1862. The current meetinghouse is the second for the congregation; it was built in 1905 when church membership had grown to more than 500.

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Mary Miedel placed the final knot in the 200th comforter completed in June 2018 as part of the congregation's celebration. Donna Kindy (left) observes Mary's technique.



Photo by Art Neuenschwander

Pastors Douglas and Miriam Zehr took a ride in a horse-drawn buckboard with Oak Grove member Mahlon Schmucker, who set a personal goal of growing a beard and dressing the part for the bicentennial.



Dan Jaquet (left) and Loren Hostetler compared notes from the "Places We've Served" map.