

HABS No. 0-297
OH-2406

HABS
OHIO
79 ZOAR
1-

Maps and General History
Zoar
Tuscarawas County
Ohio

Quoted from

"A BRIEF HISTORY OF ZOAR"

By

Howard A. Sarbaugh

Zoar, Ohio

Location of Zoar

Zoar is located seven miles north of Dover; ten miles north of New Philadelphia, the county seat of Tuscarawas County; fifteen miles south of Canton, the county seat of Stark County; fifteen miles south of Massillon; and seven miles east of Strasburg.

It is located along the Tuscarawas River, three miles below Fort Laurens State Park, at Bolivar, and 14 miles north of Schoenbrunn Memorial State Park, at New Philadelphia.

The Origin of the Society

It was in the year of 1816, a group of people in Wurtemberg petitioned the German Government to establish a community of their own, but were flatly denied their request. They soon planned to establish a community in the New World, where they could worship God as they wished.

They named themselves the "Separatists", because they separated themselves from their Mother Church and the State. The settlement in the New World they called "Zoar", because it is a Biblical name of a town where Lot was permitted to take refuge in his flight from Sodom. Zoar was a city described in Genesis as "a little one" on the shore of the Dead Sea. The Separatists thought that this name represented the religious character and the purpose of their colony.

The Settlement

Zoar was settled in 1817 by a group of about two hundred and twenty-five German Separatists from Wurtemberg, Baden and Bavaria, who had been imprisoned and otherwise persecuted because of their refusal to accept baptism, confirmation and other ordinances of the State Church. Their belief was similar to that of the Quakers, and was derived from one of the same sources--the writings of Jacob Boehme.

The group of Separatists, who founded Zoar, chose as their leader, Joseph Bimeler, a man of unusual ability and an able leader. In his name, they purchased a tract of 5,500 acres of land in Tuscarawas County, Ohio, at \$3.00 per acre. The first log cabin was erected in Zoar in December, 1817.

DATA NOT COMPILED AND NOT GUARANTEED
BY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

OHIO

99-ZOAR

-2-

By the spring of 1818, other buildings had been erected and the women and children were brought to Zoar from Philadelphia, where they had been housed and fed during the winter by the Quakers. Their transportation to Ohio was paid with money contributed by English Quakers.

The Establishment of a Communistic Society

The Separatists at first had no idea of forming a Communistic Society. They expected to own their property individually, but having among them a certain number of old and feeble people, and many poor who found it difficult to earn a living, and to safeguard these, the leaders decided to establish a community of goods. The Society of Separatists of Zoar or the "Zoar Society", as it was commonly called, was organized April 19, 1819. In return for their work the members received food, clothing and a home. No money or other property was owned individually but was in charge of officers elected by the Members.

The Industries of the Zoar Separatists

The Zoarites soon began to build the various kinds of industrial plants necessary for the success and development of the Society, so they would not need to be dependent upon the outside world for a living.

The Zoarites built such factories as a grist mill, woolen mill, silk mill, iron mill, pottery, tannery, brewery, wagon shop, shoe shop, bakery house, tin shop, foundry, planing mill, watch shop, weaving shop, and other needed buildings.

One of the rare "oddities" of the Zoar Society was the raising of silk worms, which enabled them to produce their own silk. At one time, it is said, they produced all the articles regarded as necessities except rice and coffee.

The Abolition of the Society in 1898

The Zoar Society was a successful organization until 1898. The people became very disheartened the last few years of the Society because they became more familiar with the ways of the outside world, and had a desire to work for themselves and own their own property. Alexander Gunn, a wealthy hermit, encouraged the Zoarites to carry on their Communistic Society, but was vigorously opposed by the village schoolmaster, Levi Bimeler, (a descendant of Joseph Bimeler), publishing a paper "Nugitna", which meant "Anti Gunn", was also an immediate cause of the abolition, which he printed in 1895.

The Commonwealth of the Society was equally divided among the members of the Society by three disinterested persons employed by the Society. At the division of the Society, the property was valued at \$2,500,000.00, with each member receiving about \$2,500.00 in property and cash. It is said to have been the most successful Communistic experiment ever conducted in the United States.

OHIO

79. ZOAR

-3-

The Flower Garden

Across the street from Bimeler's Home is found the famous "Zoar Flower Garden". This is a tract of land in the center of the village, and is one of the beauty spots of Ohio. The Garden was laid out exactly like the New Jerusalem, as revealed in the twenty-first chapter of Revelations. In the center of the Garden is an Evergreen Tree, which represented the Tree of Life.

There are twelve paths leading to the center of the Garden or the Tree of Life, which represent the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. On the east are three paths; on the north three paths; on the south three paths; and on the west three paths, with cross paths connecting each path that leads to the Tree of Life. Around the Tree of Life is a path, that has on the outer edge, twelve evergreens equally divided, which represent the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. The Zoarites kept this garden landscaped, trimmed and weedless. On one corner was the village spring, which is still used by the public, the water of which is piped from a nearby hill. The Garden was surrounded by a fence, using stone pillars as posts.

--0--

Historic American Buildings Survey
William A. Bohnard, District Officer
9815 Newton Ave., Cleveland, Ohio

**DATA NOT COMPILED AND NOT GUARANTEED
BY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**