

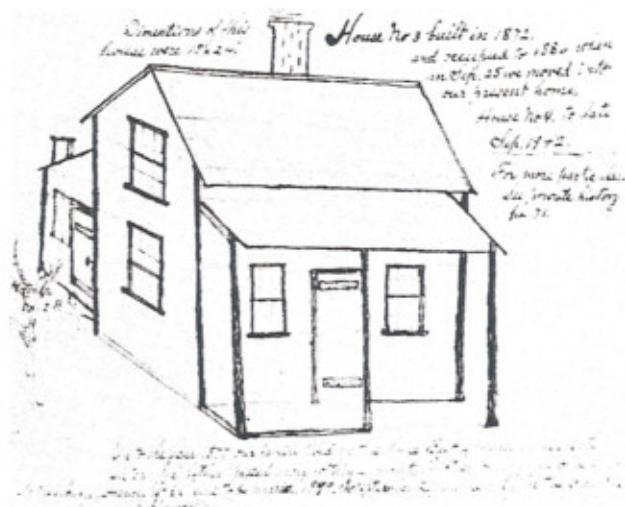
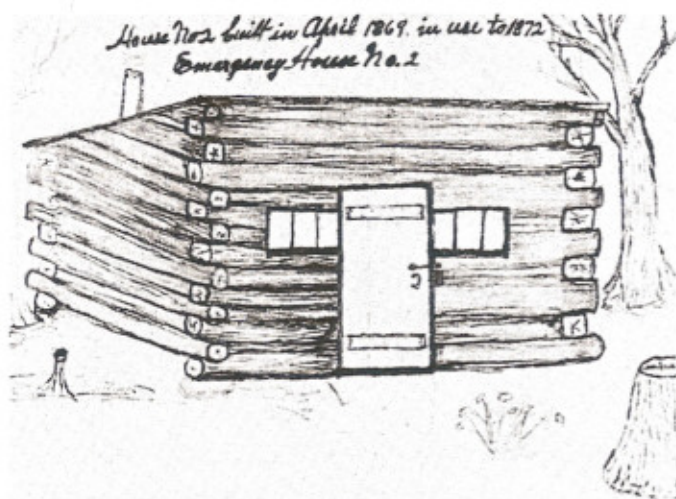
# WELCOME BACK FROM THE ATTIC

## YESTERYEAR AROUND CALEDONIA STATION

No. 11

1977

### THE RUEHS FAMILY



### A RICH GERMAN HERITAGE

A native of Wismar, Macklenberg, Germany where he was born January 30, 1855, Frederick W. Ruehs came to America with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Johann Ruehs in 1867. The Ruehs name was originally spelled Ruesz before coming to America. The family settled in Paris township and Fred W. Ruehs received his first education in a school at Burton and Breton Road. Life was hard that first year even though work was plentiful, especially cutting timber and making cord wood. Their first place to stay was no more than a cold shack. Winter was approaching and furniture was scarce. One bed had been purchased but the children had no choice but to sleep on the floor, a cold floor. They also had three chairs and a kitchen range or "cook stove" to heat that cold house. At times the bread was frozen hard and could not be sliced. Occasionally the German leather boots were frozen stiff and difficult to put on. Prices of victuals were extremely high that year. Dressed pork cost \$10.00 per hundred-weight; flour \$4.00 per hundred pounds; potatoes a dollar per bushel, to mention a few items. The following spring they were employed at the magnificent salary of \$16.00 per month, plus free use of another small shack.

Two years later the family loaded its belongings on a hay-rack and set out for the homestead, an eighty acre farm with virgin timber, purchased for \$650.00, where the Ruehs family have resided ever since. Fred W. Ruehs recalled the move very vividly. His mother and sister rode the wagon amid the household furnishings. The family cow was tied to the back. Fred, his father and his brother Henry walked along side of the wagon, occasionally getting a little rest by hopping on the rack for a short ride. A week after the Ruehs family moved to Caledonia township, their cow became "homesick" for the old place in Paris township and disappeared. Months later the family found the cow on a farm about two miles from the home the family had occupied in Paris township.

The following quotations are notes made by Fred W. Ruehs on sketches of the early Ruehs' homes — "This shanty, 12 ft. x 12 ft., was built the first week in April 1869 of Basswood boards a foot wide or more. The little tree on the North West corner served as a post. Short was the useful life of this home. A heavy wet snow of ten inches fell around the 20th of April, the day before Easter, broke the roof down so it rested on the two bedsteads

that it contained. We had to move out, although it still snowed. A few days before we had built a log stable 12 x 24 for a chicken roost. This was fixt up in a few hours (only ½ of it was used) because there were not boards to cover the whole." And so the stable became their home and tomorrow was Easter.

The second house was referred to as the Emergency House No. 2 and it was occupied until 1872 when house No. 3 was built.

Notations about house No. 3 were – "Up to the year 1877 our family lived in this house. Dimensions of this house were 18 x 24. But a change came. Both sister and father passed away within a month. Mother, Henry and I were left. Another change, Henry left in June to be married, 1879. In September Liza (Elizabeth Fischer) came and filled this vacancy. All happy again." His father Johann had passed away in the spring of 1878 after hewing the home for his family out of the forest.

Soon after the Ruehs family arrived the railroad went through and Caledonia became established. At one time as a boy he hauled wood to Dutton and sold it to the railroads to burn in the locomotives. The wood was cut into four foot lengths and every member of the crew alighted from the train to assist in tossing a load of wood into the locomotive tender.

Fred once planned to be a teacher but the death of his father changed his plans and instead he became an outstanding farmer. Quotations from his journal about farming include, "The year 1942 for Michigan was wet. It was so rainy and wet that hardly one crop was secured without rain. Some of it spoiled. And a big crop it was. Wheat and oats grew while in the shock. Securing the corn crop was kept up all through the winter."

Fred W. Ruehs became interested in the affairs of the township when he was still a young man and he was highway commissioner in the days when there were few roads and only four bridges in the township. Later he became drain commissioner for his township and in 1906 was chosen to serve on the County Board of Supervisors, a post he held until 1914. Fred then retired from politics to devote his time to his farm and to the Caledonia Co-operative Creamery, which he served as president twenty years after taking a leading part in its organization.

When Fred W. Ruehs had begun to establish a home of his own, life in general was undergoing tremendous social and economic changes. There was a vast system of new improved roads. Telephone com-

munication was becoming quite common – rates were twelve dollars per year. In 1901 or 1902 Free Rural Mail service was inaugurated.

Down the road a mile from the Ruehs homestead is St. Paul's Lutheran Church, a landmark in Ruehs' life. In June 1879, just after the Lutheran Church was completed, Henry Ruehs, brother of Fred, was married in the first ceremony in the edifice. Then in September of that year, at the age of 24 years, Fred W. Ruehs married Elizabeth Fischer, who lived only a mile and a half down the road, in the church also. When Ruehs first worshipped with the congregation, the church was an old school house located on what the early settlers had christened "Holy Corners" because the Lutherans were worshipping on one of the four corners and a Mennonite church stood on another of the corners. Over the years the Mennonite church has gone, but the Lutheran Church has been on one of the corners ever since. Replacing the old log church with plank benches, was a structure erected in 1878 which was later replaced by an attractive new brick structure on the opposite corner. For many years Fred W. Ruehs was the Church's oldest living member and he was always one of the most regular attendants. Even at the age of 93 one might have seen him walking to church on Sunday. He served as church secretary for sixty years, and in the old days when the services were conducted in German, his minutes were written in German.

One time when asked what contributed to his long healthy life span he said he didn't really know but laughed when he recalled the following story. "When I was 35 or 40 I had a very bad stomach and one day when a friend and I were walking back on my farm and came to the fences and of course we jumped over. Well my stomach pained me a great deal and of course jumping made it even worse and my friend turned to me and said, "Ruehs, you'll never live very long in the condition you're in."

In his later years, the aged Ruehs could not only speak but write German and English with equal fluency. He retired from active farming at 85 but when the weather was pleasant he could be found discussing current world affairs with some of his neighbors or even climbing into trees to pick apples. He was known to spend time reading and translating his German hymnbook into English. He also had beautiful penmanship that never gave away his age and passed many hours by composing poems or writing in his diary.

Mr. and Mrs. Ruehs, who were married almost 60 years, had eight children who at one time all resided within two miles of the homestead. When Mr. Ruehs was 94, the land owned by him and his children amounted to more than eight hundred acres. Two of the Ruehs' children, Paul and Clara, still reside at the home which is now a centennial farm. The others are Mrs. George Hermann, Mrs. Godfrey Waldeck, Mrs. A. P. Marutz, Ernest W. Ruehs, Walter Ruehs and Mrs. Carl Peters.

FRED RUEHS,  
93 years old



### CALEDONIA MENNONITE CHURCH

(Editor's Note: This story is taken from John Christian Wenger's book, "The Mennonites in Indiana and Michigan", published in 1961 by the Mennonite Publishing House. The church was located on the northwest side of Kraft Avenue and 84th Street.)

The first printed reference to the Caledonia Mennonite Church is found in the 1864 "Herald of Truth" in which Preacher David Sherk of Ontario reported his visit to Kent County in October 1863. He left Berlin (now Kitchener, Ontario) on October 13 and took the train to Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was welcomed by the "only brother in the vicinity", who lived in Kent County, about sixteen miles from Grand Rapids. The brother's name was Johnson and he and three "sisters" (Mennonites) from "our community" have settled in Kent County. Sherk reported that one sister had lived more than ten years in Kent County as of that date; her husband was dead. Only one Mennonite preacher had visited the Kent County Mennonites from 1853 to 1863, Jacob Hallman, "several years ago". Johnson "grasped us by the hand and with tearful eyes wished us God's blessing and happiness. This brother located in Kent County the spring of 1863." The two widows of the community bore the names Detweiler and Kinzie. They requested that Preacher Sherk serve them communion. When he got to the home of Widow Detweiler two persons requested baptism, and one desired to be reinstated to full membership in the Mennonite Church. At a meeting held in the Johnson home the next day all these requests were fulfilled; also baptism, Lord's Supper,

and feet washing were observed "in the presence of a number of attentive hearers and spectators". Another note in the "Herald of Truth" for 1864 reported that there were now seven members of the church in Kent County. Elias and Polly (Clemens) Bowman are reported to have moved from Ontario to Kent County in 1863. Polly was a native of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Another 1863 settler was Amos Clemens, also a native of Bucks County, but who came from Ontario to Michigan; his wife was Mary Wismer. Other early settlers included Abraham and Esther (Blough) Hershberger (she was a native of Somerset County, Pennsylvania); Joseph C. and Anna Bowman of Ontario; and John and Mary Leatherman.

The first ordained men in the congregation were Preacher Abraham Detweiler and Deacon Martin Good. D. H. Landes of Fairfield County, Ohio, visited Kent County, Michigan, January 22, 1865. He met Deacon Martin Good and Preacher Detweiler. "They are making preparations to build a meeting house there." He also reported that "more members are still moving there". Landes said: "We attended one meeting there at Bro. Martin Good's house." Daniel Brenneman speaks of visiting in 1865, "the newly organized church in Kent County, Michigan." The 1866 "Herald of Truth" speaks of "Martin Good's meetinghouse". The first deed was granted on June 1, 1865, by Martin Good to the West Caledonia Burial Society. (Liber 36, page 491.) The second deed was granted October 10, 1867, by Martin Good to David Martin, deacon in the "Old Mennonite Church or Society of Caledonia", for a consideration of

\$1.00, "in trust for church purposes". This plot was located on the southeast corner of Section 18 of Caledonia Township, on the northwest corner of the intersection of what is now Eighty-fourth Street with Kraft Avenue. The "Good" meetinghouse evidently took its name from the member on whose land it was built, Martin Good.

By the year 1867 the Caledonia congregation consisted of over forty members and was served by Preachers Abraham Detweiler and Henry Wismer (ordained by John M. Brenneman April 30, 1866), and by Deacon David Martin. In 1867 John M. Brenneman not only met with the congregation in the Caledonia meeting house, but also held a meeting in "Bro. Wismer's schoolhouse". At this point the future of the congregation looked bright. But John F. Funk recorded in his diary for 1871 that on March 25 Abraham Detweiler was silenced for improper and disorderly conduct; possibly Funk meant, not immorality but undue exuberance and emotional excesses associated with revivalism; we do not know. We do know that in 1873 Preacher Henry Wismer had united with what is now the United Missionary Church. John Moyer, who was probably born about 1825, was ordained deacon in 1869, and served for some time. Peter D. Steiner was ordained preacher in 1875, but in a few years moved to the state of Ohio. From 1879 until 1886, there was no ordained preacher in the congregation.

In the year 1889 J. S. Hartzler, then an alert young minister of thirty-two, "at the request of Bro. Christian Wenger . . . visited the Caledonia Church in Kent County. This is the largest church visited thus far. They have one minister who preaches German (Jacob Hahn) and two who preach English (C. C. Beery and Christian Wenger) . . . A cold wave has gone over both these churches (Caledonia and Bowne) from which they are now recovering, and by the earnest work of the ministers and laity the effects will soon disappear." Hartzler reported that the young people were inclined to follow the world's "follies and vanities" and to stand outside the church. The "Herald of Truth" for 1880 had reported that there were living about twelve families in the Caledonia Church. Preacher Beery seems to have been ordained about 1885, Wenger in 1886, and Hahn moved into the community in 1889. All three of these ministers terminated their service with the Caledonia congregation in the year 1897. At that point there was a great upheaval in the life of the Caledonia Church.

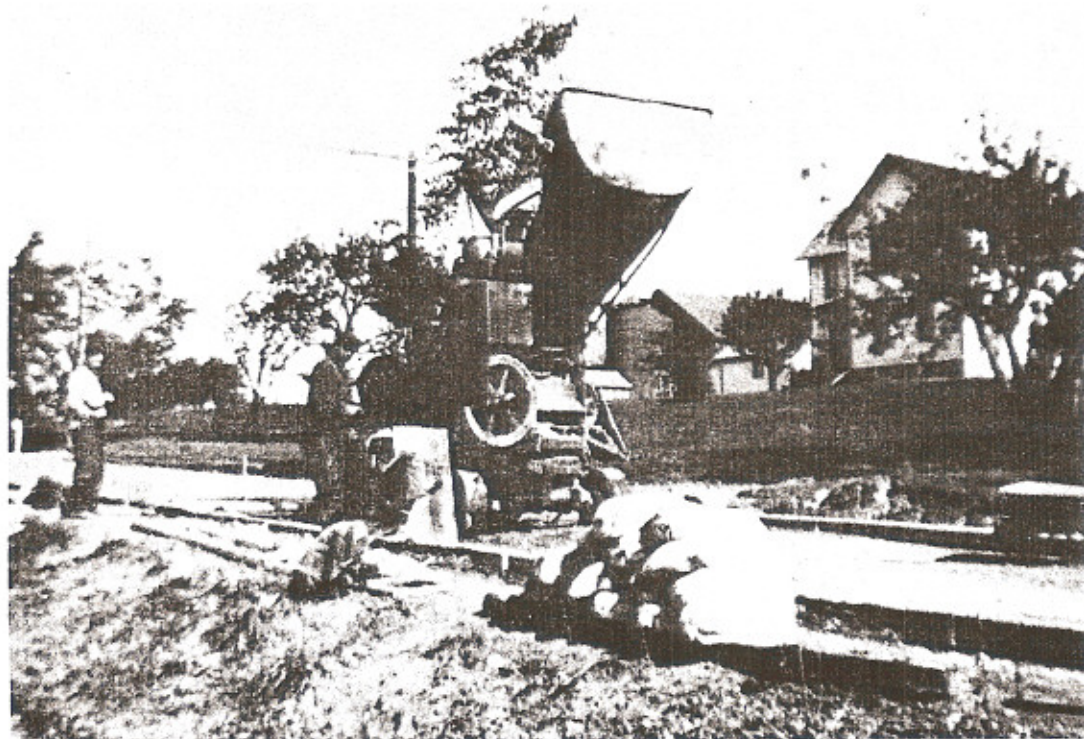
The trouble, which came to a head in 1897, involved a struggle between Bishop John F. Funk and Preacher Christian G. Wenger. Funk went to Caledonia in June of that year to give communion to the congregation. Funk felt that it was his obligation to uphold the standards of the church, while Wenger was more inclined to allow the congregation to follow its own course in reference to garb and other matters of church discipline. Wenger "raised a big issue" over Funk's alleged requirements for the women to wear bonnets. Funk in turn regarded Wenger and his wife as "stumbling blocks in the church for years". He charged that Wenger avoided teaching Mennonite doctrine. He also claimed that Wenger intimidated the church, "so that neither the members nor his fellow ministers ever dared to say anything to him". The break came at the close of the Sunday-school session on Sunday, June 20, 1897. Wenger asked the Caledonia Mennonite Sunday School to elect another superintendent, saying, "I am separated from this church". Thereupon nearly the whole Sunday school walked out, including the young people. Twenty-one members remained after Wenger and his group withdrew. Perhaps the most acute issue was the wearing of the prayer veiling by the women of the church. Wenger was inclined to regard this item as a cultural matter, while Funk was just as certain that it was a part of the religious practice of the denomination.

The Caledonia congregation never rallied after this blow. Had the members known in 1881 that this trouble was to come, they would no doubt have decided not to build their new meetinghouse, which in January 1881 was "not entirely finished". In 1907 a woman named Salome Good reopened the Caledonia Mennonite Sunday School which had been closed for ten years. The date of opening was May 12, and fifteen were present. On June 2 there were present twenty-five children, plus seven teachers and other adults, making a total attendance of thirty-two. The "Gospel Witness" of 1907 reported: "The place was once supplied with three ministers and the church filled with people. In 1897 the devil came into the church and after some time there were left only a few old people and one young sister with a family. The church is now in the hands of the heirs but is not for sale. The sister married to one of the heirs has now opened a Sunday school. On May 12 fifteen were present and June 30th, thirty-five." The 1908 "Herald of Truth" reported: "Here still remains the nu-

cleus of a church, a small membership, mostly old people, and here also are the descendants of members, who from early childhood had the principles and practices of the Mennonite people implanted into their minds and hearts. . . . A young brother ought to locate there and be their preacher! 'Who will go?'" Even as early as 1901 the "Herald of Truth" reported: "This congregation has passed through many severe trials, and only a small number remain." At that point Preacher Isaac Weaver of Bowne was holding services every four weeks. The membership in 1905 was reported in the "Herald of Truth" as down to thirteen. J. P. Miller served communion both in 1905 and 1906. The 1909 sessions of the Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference appointed Aldus Brackbill of the Bowne congregation to take charge of the work at Caledonia "for another year". In 1909 the "Holy Corner (Caledonia) Sunday School" was reorganized on April 4 Joseph Mishler of the Bowne congregation then served the tiny group as deacon. It was probably only a few years after this until all services ceased in the Caledonia congregation, and one by one the last old people who were members there passed away.

The following Mennonite names appear in the cemetery of the Caledonia congregation: Beery, Blough, Bowman, Detweiler, Dirstein, Eby, Eyman,

Fischer, Good, Hahn, Hershberger, Hilty, Lehman, Martin, Miller, Moyer, Schantz, Schultz, Sherk, Wenger and Wismer. The 1881 meetinghouse burned to the ground in the year 1923. So all that is left of the onetime Caledonia congregation at Holy Corners is the old Mennonite cemetery. Two Brubaker families moved from Caledonia to Elkhart about the year 1900. The congregation probably never recovered from the shock occasioned by the loss of its two ministers in the early 1870's, Abraham W. Detweiler and Henry Wismer, and by the withdrawal of a third, the able Christian Wenger, in 1897. As early as 1891 the matter of the wearing of the prayer veiling in the Caledonia congregation was discussed in the Indiana Conference, but was evidently handled with such patience and love that both Preacher Wenger and the congregation were satisfied. But it was a different story in June 1897, when John F. Funk, a man of iron will, clashed sharply with Christian Wenger, who was equally firm. Funk reported in his diary for June 19 of that year that he had "another talk with Christ Wenger . . . found him a very scheming and tough man to handle." The fact is that within ten years Funk himself was relieved of his bishop oversight for the very qualities which he found so trying in Christian Wenger.



BUILDING KRAFT AVENUE



**Mr. and Mrs. Fred Ruehs  
25th Anniversary, 1904**

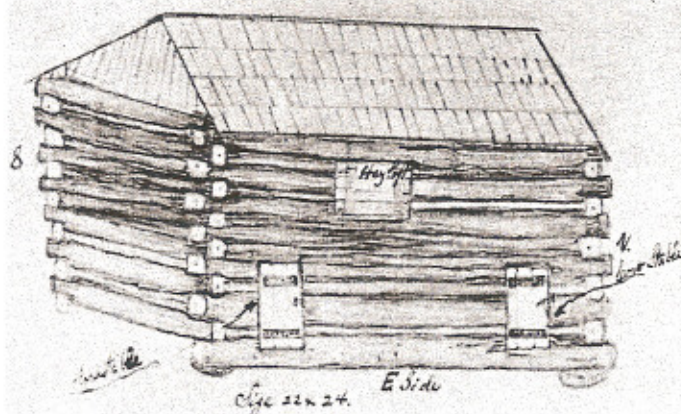
Top row: Anna (Waldeck), Ernest W., Bertha (Hermann), Paul, Emma (Marutz), Walter  
Front row: Henrietta (Peters), Mr. and Mrs. Fred Ruehs, Clara



**Mr. and Mrs. Fred Ruehs  
50th Anniversary, 1929**

(Left to right) Top row: Ray Waldeck, Geodfrey Waldeck, Herb Waldeck, Norm Ruehs, Gerald Waldeck, Elsa Hermann  
Adolph  
2nd row: Edward Ruehs, Paul Ruehs, Lucy Ruehs, Madge Ruehs, Doris Ruehs Schnurr, Anna Waldeck, Etta Peters  
with baby Alice Peters Schwass, Clara Peters, George Hermann, Rev. Marutz  
3rd row: Eunice Marutz Melleman, Margaret Ruehs Eldred, Mrs. Fred W. Ruehs (Elizabeth), Fred W. Ruehs, Emma  
Marutz, Bertha Hermann, Gertrude Hermann Middlebush  
Bottom row: Ernie W. Ruehs, Albert Waldeck, Gilbert Ruehs, Genevieve Datema, Clyde Peters, Walter Ruehs holding  
Gladys Ruehs Adams

*Stable or Barn built in 1871. Served until 1879.  
At that time spring of 1879. A frame barn 40 x 52 was built.*



This is the sketch of the original Ruehs stable or barn, 22 x 24, built in 1871. This building was used until the spring of 1879 when a larger 40 x 52 frame barn was built.



**Holy Corners School about 1912**

This picture was taken on the Northeast corner. You can see horse sheds and the roof of the old parsonage in the background.

(Left to right) Back row: George Schultz, Julius Fischer, Edwin "Mike" Karrer, Leonard Timm, Jane Wenger Hunt (teacher), Clara Ruehs, Esther Schriefer, Henrietta Ruehs Peters, Hazel Braag Marvin, Nettie Karrer Dodge  
2nd row: Arthur Fischer, Martin Schriefer, Walter Schriefer, Albert Beuising, Floyd Karrer, Lloyd Karrer, Clara Martin Karrer, Dorothy Wenger, Margaret Schultz, Magdalene Schultz Hogson, Hilda Beuising  
Front row: Paula Schriefer, Noreen Braag, Nellie Schultz, Fritz Schultz, Schultz boy, Lamone Bedford, Elsie Schultz Robart, Marie Schultz, Katherine Martin Noffke, Edna Beuising



#### Holy Corners School

This picture was taken on the Northeast corner, looking west. The Mennonite Church can be seen in the background where the cemetery now is. The Maple tree in the picture still stands in front of the parsonage.

(Left to right) Back row: Martin Schriefer, Henrietta Peters, Hazel Braag Marvin, Esther Schriefer, Nettie Karrer Dodge, John Fischer, Ben Schultz, V. Pierce Schantz (teacher), Carl Peters, Julius Fischer, George Schultz, Dick Schultz

2nd row standing: Walter Schriefer, Albert Beuising, Floyd Karrer, Arthur Fischer

3rd row (kneeling): Edwin Karrer, Clara Ruehs, Leonard Timm, Magdalene Schultz, Freda Schultz, Clara Martin Karrer, Fritz Schultz, Dorothy Wenger, Lloyd Karrer

Front row: Minnie Schultz, Edna Beuising, Marie Schultz, Kathryn Martin, Hilda Beuising, Noreen Braag, Lamone Bedford, Paula Schriefer, Nellie Schultz, unknown



Materials and information for this issue of "WELCOME BACK" were furnished by Paul and Clara Ruehs.

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