

Life and Ministry of Elder Valentine J. Krehbiel of First Mennonite Church of Christian By David Habegger

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Swiss Mennonite Cultural and Historical Association
March 11, 2012, at 2:30 p.m. at First Mennonite Church of Christian, Moundridge KS

To understand the history of Valentine J. Krehbiel, as well as that of the two churches he led as Elder, the First Mennonite Church of Halstead and the First Mennonite Church of Christian in Moundridge, we need to go back to the beginning of the Anabaptist movement. The Catholic Church and the State Church in Switzerland believed babies needed to be baptized shortly after birth to be cleansed of sin they inherited as offspring of Adam and Eve who disobeyed God. There were those who disagreed with that belief as they read in Scripture that baptism was to be for those who accepted Jesus as their Savior (Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15). Conrad Grebel led the movement in Canton Zurich. An early follower, Felix Mantz, was the first of a number of persons who were put to death by drowning as punishment for being re-baptized. Those who received baptism as adults were called "Anabaptists", which is the Latin word for rebaptizers. As he was being drowned, Felix Mantz sang, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit", the same words Jesus spoke from the cross.

Anabaptism was eradicated in Canton Zurich, Switzerland, and no Mennonite Church exists there today. However, the Anabaptist movement had spread into Canton Berne, Switzerland where several Krehbiel families lived. Anabaptists, in this Canton were frequently rounded up, taken to the border of the country and warned never to return. Valentine's ancestors were forced out of Switzerland in 1671 into Germany.

The Halstead Church and the First Mennonite Church of Christian have roots back to Weierhof, Germany. In 1682 a Krehbiel family acquired the 500 acre land of a closed monastery. Documents exist from the first Krehbiels who obtained this land to say that the children could inherit the lease.

Valentine was born March 19, 1843, in Weierhof, Germany, the ninth child of 13. In 1844, Valentine's family moved to Kleinschwabhausen, Bavaria. A Mennonite church was organized and Valentine's father, Johannes, was chosen to serve as a deacon.

Valentine was born March 19, 1843, in Weierhof, Germany, the ninth child of 13. In 1844, Valentine's family moved to Kleinschwabhausen, Bavaria. A Mennonite church was organized and Valentine's father, Johannes, was chosen to serve as a deacon.

In 1851 Valentine's family came to America to avoid military service for their sons. They crossed the Atlantic in 35 days and arrived at the end of July on the ship Splendid, which was powered by sails. The family first settled in Ashland, Ohio for a year then moved to Donnellson, Iowa. Here Valentine was baptized at age 14, earlier than most young people. His father died at age 57 so children had to help with the farm; Valentine was 16.

In 1859 the Donnellson congregation invited other Mennonite churches to a meeting to begin mission work. Valentine's father, as a Deacon, joined with the other ministers in the church in writing a letter to other Mennonite churches. That meeting was the beginning of the General Conference Mennonite Church.

Christian Krehbiel, Valentine's second oldest brother moved to Summerfield, Illinois where a Mennonite Church had been started in 1859. The land there was better than in Iowa, and St. Louis was a good market for what was produced, so Valentine, with his mother and the younger children moved there in March 1860. Jacob, the oldest brother, soon came as well. When an additional minister was needed he, with others, was nominated. He was chosen by use of the Lot and installed. During this time, ministers were usually chosen by Lot. Mennonites used the Lot extensively to choose ministers (Deacons, Preachers and Elders) after several were nominated. For the lot Bibles or hymnals were used to determine who should serve. The one who picked up the Bible with a marker inside was believed to be God's choice. An Elder officiated at all baptisms, communion services and weddings. In 1864 the Sommerfield congregation asked for an additional minister. Both Christian and Valentine were nominated with a number of others. Christian was chosen.

On April 6, 1862, Valentine married Susanna Ruth. While living in Summerfield they had five

children. Two died in infancy. The fifth one was stillborn and was buried in same grave as daughter Maria who had died April 13, 1869.

In 1865 a Sunday School was organized in the Sommerfield congregation. Valentine was chosen as Superintendent. He was 22 years old.

In 1873 Christian Krehbiel traveled to the newly formed state of Kansas with several Mennonite men from Russia. They went to explore the possibility of purchasing land from the Santa Fe Railroad on which to settle families coming to America. The U.S. government, desiring to see the land settled, gave the Railroads large portions of land to sell so they would have money to build the railroad. Some railroad agents traveled to Russia to invite Mennonites to settle in Kansas.

These men liked what they saw in Harvey and McPherson counties so signed an agreement to purchase a specified number of acres before the first of April, 1874. All land purchased before that date would be given a 56% discount from the railroad's appraisal price.

On January 6, 1874, 30 men from Sommerfield IL and Russia came with Christian Krehbiel to Kansas to purchase land. The land closer to Halstead was more favorable because of access to the stores and railroad there. Christian let others take first choice so he ended up buying land 13.5 miles north of Halstead. His land was adjacent to that of Christian Voran and Christian Hirschler. A few years later, the portion of land where the three sections of land belonging to the three men named Christian joined became the site for the village of Christian, Kansas. Since Valentine did not purchase his land in 1874 he received only a 36% discount.

Learning what other men had done, Valentine reevaluated his situation and then decided he too should move to Kansas. In March 1875 the family moved to Kansas with others with the names of Haury, Ruth, Bachman, and Bartel. Valentine purchased land 8 miles north and 3 west of Halstead in Section 19 of Garden Township, 315 acres for \$1036.05.

Christian wanted the Mennonite families who were making a move to start a church, so he brought a possible constitution with him. David C. Wedel wrote about a meeting in Halstead on March 21, 1875, when the First Mennonite Church of Halstead was organized. An election of a minister was then held on March 28, 1875. Valentine was chosen, this time without the Lot. Christian then ordained Valentine at their Minister. The congregation numbered 43 members. There were 52 participants counting the children.

Many Mennonites from Russia also come to this area in 1874. C. Henry Smith reports 5,300 souls came here. Although they spoke Low German in their everyday conversations, High German was used in Worship. Thus both the Low Germans and the Schweitzers used the same Martin Luther Bible in High German. Many Swiss also spoke High German.

Valentine was age 34 when chosen as minister. He had only a 6th grade education and no formal training for preaching. At the same time he became a pastor he also needed to build a house and barn and plant crops as did the other church people. His resources for sermon preparation would have been the Bible and a hymn book.

The houses that the Swiss emigrants built might have been similar to the ones they had in Germany. There the house, barn and toilet were all in one building. The manure pile was right outside the house. At this time they had no knowledge about germs, but they knew that when they drank water, people got sick. So they planted vineyards and drank wine and beer instead. Valentine's son, Peter Paul, had problems with alcoholism. After they learned about germs and the best place for a well, many people gave up wine and beer.

Valentine lived 11 miles from Halstead which meant that getting there from home took about two hours by farm wagon. Some Services were held in their homes or in township school houses. As a minister, Valentine purchased a large church record book in which he listed all the families, all important dates, and wrote the history of the congregation.

The Christian Church members at its beginning had been members of the Halstead church. The services for the Halstead congregation were held in two places at the outset, a meeting in Halstead and then another in the Liberty School house in Garden Township. Meetings were also held in some homes in the north. Then when the church grew in numbers a building was erected in Christian and the Halstead Church members divided into two congregations with Valentine being the Elder in both churches.

Wilhelm Galle, an unmarried Mennonite Minister and Elder came to Kansas from Iowa. When he came, he was accepted as a Preacher but since Valentine was the Elder, Wilhelm did not have that status. He became the teacher in a German speaking school that was started. In time Wilhelm and Valentine came into conflict. David Haury in his history of the Western District refers to their relationship as "personal antagonism". This caused increasing problems.

Worship services were held not only in Halstead but also in homes and in a school house in Garden Township. German non-Mennonite families also lived in the area. Their children attended school with the Mennonites and also attended some of the worship services. Some Mennonites saw these folks as Christians so began to think they should be welcomed as members of the church without needing to be baptized as adults, Galle was willing to accept them as members without being baptized as adults, but Valentine said they would have to be rebaptized as believers which had been the Anabaptist's emphasis. That issue was not resolved until near the end of Valentine's life.

In February 1888 the First Mennonite Church of Christian had church meetings to discuss the question. Only men attended the meetings. Valentine tried to get those who differed from him to accept his position. After several meetings half of the group walked out of a meeting. That broke Valentine's heart, and he thought he had failed by not convincing them that they should follow the Anabaptist's Biblical position. In his large church record book, he wrote "massen austritt" [Mass Exodis] in red ink beneath the name of each member who had walked out. Then Valentine resigned as the minister and did not serve for 1 ½ years. He was 48 years of age when he resigned.

The conference had a committee to work on church problems, so some time later Christian Krehbiel talked with the leaders of both sides of the issue to bring closure to the conflict. Then Valentine and Wilhelm with their Deacons were brought together. Christian called upon Wilhelm Galle to speak first. Galle confessed that things had been said that were "out of order". A similar confession was made by Valentine Krehbiel and members of the First Mennonite Church of Christian. Now they were reconciled so each extended the hand of fellowship. This was followed by a time of prayer and the singing of a hymn.

After the reconciliation meeting, Valentine again attended sessions of the Kansas Conference. He was elected to serve as President of the Conference for 1889-1890, and he attended the first session of the newly formed Western District Conference in 1892 as a delegate.

Arlene Krehbiel's Bethel College term paper about her grandfather Valentine Krehbiel's life reported that he had a bout with the flu in 1901 which developed into dropsy and deteriorating health, but he continued going to church. When his health continued to worsen, Valentine wrote out sermons so that people at church could read them. On May 18, 1902, he preached his last sermon on John 16:14-18.

Valentine Krehbiel died July 21, 1902 at 59 years of age. He was buried in the cemetery of the First Mennonite Church of Christian. A large monument was placed at the head of his grave.

Summary of Valentine Krehbiel's Life

March 19, 1843 Valentine Krehbiel born in the village of Weierhof, Germany.
1844 The Krehbiel family moved to Kleinschwabhausen, Bavaria.
In July 1851 The Krehbiel family came to America and settled near Ashland, Ohio.
In the spring of 1852 The Krehbiel family moved to Donnellson, Iowa.
October 25, 1857 Valentine was baptized at age 14 in the Donnellson Mennonite Church.
December 20, 1859 Valentine's father, Johannes, died.
March 1860 The Krehbiel family moves to Sommerfield, Illinois and united with the church there.
April 6, 1862 Valentine, age 19, married Susanna Ruth, age 20, the daughter of Jakob and Barbara Strohm Ruth
Dec. 30, 1862 daughter Barbara Anna was born to Valentine and Susanna.
In the Fall of 1864, when Valentine was 21, he was placed in the lot for the Summerfield Church ministry.
His brother Christian was also nominated and he was selected by the lot.
In 1865 the Summerfield Church started a Sunday School and Valentine was selected to serve as the Superintendent. He was 22 years of age.
Apr. 13, 1865 a son, Jacob Herman was born to Valentine and Susanna. He died May 15, 1865.
May 17 1866 Martha Clara was born.
Apr. 13, 1869 Martha Clara died. In 1869, sometime after Martha died, Susanna gave birth to a still born child who was buried in the grave of Martha Clara.
Sept. 11, 1870 Kathryn Emma was born.
June 29, 1873 Peter Paul was born.
In 1874 The village of Christian, KS is started by Christian Voran, Christian Hirschler and Christian Krehbiel
March 24, 1875 The Valentine Krehbiel family, father and mother and 3 children had moved to Kansas. Valentine purchased half of Section 19 in Garden Township, 315 acres.
March 28, 1875, Easter Sunday, Valentine was elected and ordained at age 32 to serve as the minister of the newly formed First Mennonite Church of Halstead, Kansas.
Jan. 8, 1876 Valentine was ordained as the Elder of the First Mennonite Church of Halstead.
1876 It was decided to have worship services in Garden Valley School every 3rd Sunday.
Dec. 26, 1876 Sunday School classes started in the First Mennonite Church of Halstead., then Sunday School classes were started in the north when they did not have a worship service
1876 Minister Johann Rupp and wife, Maria Hirschler, of Washington County, Iowa arrive.
Jan. 1877 A meeting of church members in the north asked for permission to erect a church Building in the village of Christian. Christian Krehbiel donated land for it.
March 4, 1877 The church building in Christian, Kansas was dedicated.
March 1877 It was decided that both the Halstead and Christian groups should have two Deacons.
April 22, 1877 David Ruth elected and ordained to serve as a Deacon in the Halstead church.
April 29, 1877 Jacob Vogt and Daniel Krehbiel were elected to serve as Deacons in Christian, Kansas. They were ordained on May 6, 1877.
In mid-1877 David Goerz was elected as a minister in the Halstead Mennonite Church.
December 14, 1877 Valentine is a delegate to the 1st session of the Kansas Conference meeting in the district school house, representing the Halstead Church.
Jan. 1, 1878 the newly built church building in Halstead is dedicated in A.M.
Jan. 1, 1878 David Goerz is ordained as a minister in the Halstead Mennonite Church. in afternoon.
March 26, 1878 the decision was made to divide into two congregations with Valentine Krehbiel as the minister of both.
Nov. 6 & 7, 1878 the 2nd session of the Kansas Conference is held in Berne, IN and Wadsworth, Ohio. Valentine is a delegate from the Christian Church. He was one of **five persons elected to serve on the Kansas Conference's School Committee.**

October 1879 Wilhelm Galle arrives in Kansas and builds a house in Christian. He begins serving as a Preacher in the Christian church. He became the teacher in the German School.

Sept. 1880 Preaching services began in Garden Township by Valentine Krehbiel, Christian Krehbiel, William Galle, and David Goerz taking turns.

March 1883, Garden Township Church recognized as independent from Halstead and Christian churches.

1883-1884, 1885-1886, and 1895-1896 Valentine serves as President of the Kansas Conference.

1883-1884, 1886-1888, and 1897 Valentine Krehbiel serves the Kansas Conference as a Reiseprediger, (a traveling preacher)..

1884 Valentine Krehbiel is elected President of the Leisy Orphan Aid Society and served in this capacity until he died. Jacob Leisy purchased a farm and children from Kansas City, Chicago and the State of Kansas were kept here and some placed in Mennonite homes. The Valentine family kept various boys from the farm in there until he died.

July 4, 1884 Mother Susanna Krehbiel, wife of Christian, died at age 42 after giving birth to her 11th child, Prisca.

May 16, 1886 Valentine Krehbiel marries Maria Dester.

May 30, 1887 Fifteen members of Halstead and Christian churches meet in Bachman School to start Garden Mennonite Church, independent of their parent churches.

Nov. 19, 1887 David Goerz asked to be released as minister as the family was moving to Newton

In 1888 a group of people meet in Moundridge to talk about forming a new congregation that would include persons baptized as infants. Valentine Krehbiel then led business meetings for several weeks to discuss this issue. In February there was a Mass

Exodus from the meeting of those who refused to follow Valentine Krehbiel's leading.

Feb, 1888 After the Mass Exodus Valentine Krehbiel resigned as the pastor of the Christian Church. He was 48 years old..

Jan. 2, 1889 The mill at the Little Arkansas River has a Post Office named Valentine Krehbiel.

Oct. 26-27 1892 The last session of the Kansas Conference was held and the first session of **the Western District Conference followed. Article 2 of the Constitution has "The Conference is no lawgiving, but a counseling body and thus does not feel obligated to prescribe rule to the congregations regarding their internal matters."** Thus the West Zion and Garden Township churches were accepted in spite of their views on baptism.

In 1895 Valentine was elected to serve on the Program Committee of the WDC.

In 1897 Valentine was elected to serve on the Committee for Itinerant Preaching.

May 18, 1902 Valentine Krehbiel preaches his last sermon to the First Church of Christian.

June 3, 1902 Valentine makes his Last Will and Testament.

July 21, 1902 Valentine Krehbiel died at the age of 58 years and 4 months. He was buried in the Christian Church Cemetery. A sizeable stone was erected on his grave.