

A Brief History
of
Zoar



By

HOWARD A. SARBAUGH

Principal of Zoar School

Secretary of Zoar Historical Society

December 21, 1931

Price 15c



JOSEPH BIMELER'S HOME

HISTORICAL POINTS

BIMELER HOME

There are many buildings and relics of community days to be found in Zoar today. Perhaps the most noted of these is the Bimeler Home. This is a large brick mansion standing on the main street of the village. It is so named because it was the home of Joseph Bimeler, the leader of the Society. It was built in 1833 and completed in 1835, and is still in the possession of the Bimeler family.

This building, of red brick and grey sandstone, is quite the most imposing in the village. It is a monument to the painstaking, skillful, and artistic work of the Zoarites. So well was it built that it stands today as solid as the day it was built. The woodwork bears the original paint, and is no-where cracked or peeled. The floors are level and smooth; the door panels are painted in pleasing colors and artistically decorated. In the center of the building is a wide, winding stairway. Standing at the bottom of the stairway one can see, a large six pointed star. This star—red, blue and yellow, of simple, beautiful design, was the emblem of the Zoarites. Everyone wore one of these emblems as a badge on his clothing. The design was made by Joseph Bimeler, himself.



ZOAR HOTEL

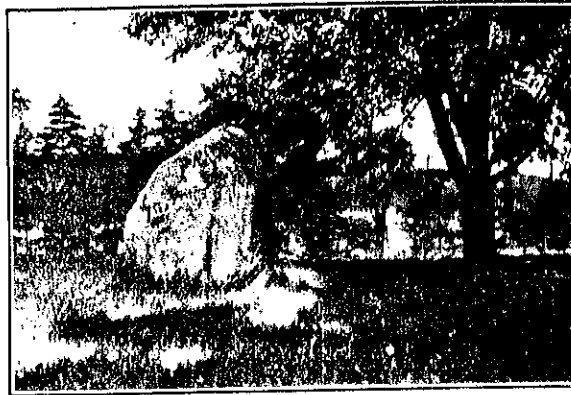
THE ORIGIN OF THE SOCIETY

It was in the year of 1816, a group of people in Wurttemberg 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 Wurttemberg, Bade 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.



GUNN'S MONUMENT

"GUNN'S MONUMENT"

Alexander Gunn, known as the Hermit of Zoar, was an outstanding figure in Zoar, while the Zoar Society existed. After accumulating a large amount of money in Cleveland, he lived a retired life. He kept a few records of himself which he wished to review from time to time. In April of 1901, he became very ill and readily journeyed to Germany, but soon died, and his body was cremated. The ashes were sent to Zoar in the month of August and buried on the hillside, near the present cemetery, beneath four buckeye trees which he planted several years before his death, as his final resting place. The only marker of his grave is the large boulder given by his friends.

Mr. Gunn came to Zoar only after a careful investigation and study of the Society's activities, with which he was well pleased. He became interested in a club which was known as the "Three Leaf Clover Club" which he wanted to become a member of. This was a religious club and later Mr. Gunn was accepted in the club and therefore changed its name to the present name, "The Arimathaea Club," a Biblical name. There is only one surviving member living who belongs to the "Three Leaf Clover Club" and "The Arimathaea Club." The club was formed in 1885.



ZOAR FLOWER GARDEN, 40 YEARS AGO

There are twelve paths leading to the center of the Garden or the Tree of Life, which represents the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: On the east 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. This garden was surrounded by a fence, using stone pillars as posts.

The Garden has been restored in the past year by the Zoar Historical Society. This is also one of the projects the Zoar Historical Society is interesting the State of Ohio to purchase and make a State Park thereof, in commemoration to the Zoarites, who conducted one of the most successful communistic experiments in the New World.



THE DAM

THE INDUSTRIES OF THE ZOAR SEPARATISTS

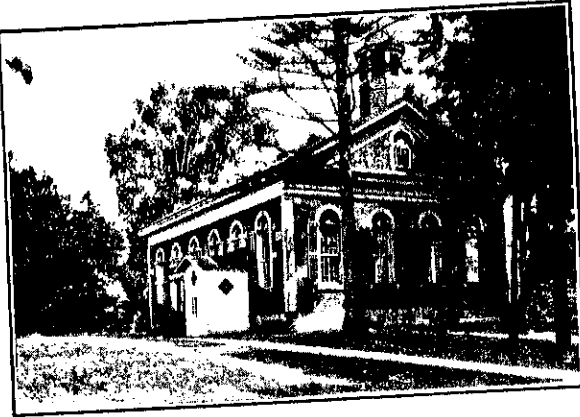
The Zoarites soon began to build the various kinds of industrial plants necessary for the success and development of the Society, so they would not need to be dependent upon the outside world for a living.

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, (the descendant of Joseph Bimeler), publishing a paper "Nugitna," which meant "Anti Gunn," was also an



THE CHURCH

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 Three Dollars per acre. The first log cabin was erected in Zoar in December, 1817. 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.



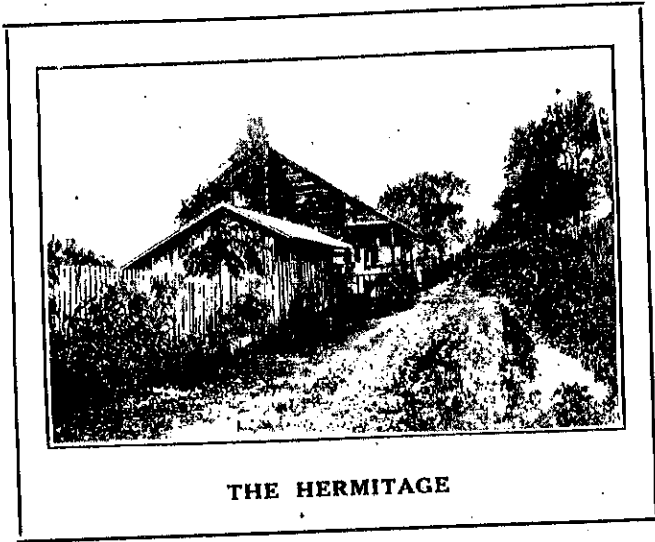
ZOAR FLOWER GARDEN, TODAY

Under the house are large, deep, vaulting cellars. To go into them reminds one of the dungeons under the ancient castles of England and Germany.

Many fine pieces of Zoar made furniture are to be found throughout the house. The building is being used as the "Museum" of the Zoar Historical Society. This is one of the projects the Zoar Historical Society is endeavoring to interest the State of Ohio in to purchase.

"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.



THE HERMITAGE

"THE HERMITAGE"

The Hermitage is another old cabin which is still standing but is not open to the public. This is one of three original cabins erected in Zoar in 1817. Alexander Gunn used this cabin the latter years of the Society, as his lodging place, while in Zoar. There are many other old buildings standing, as the brewery, cider mill, steam laundry, blacksmith shop, a part of the gigantic cow barn, bakery, flour mill, woolen mill, silk house, church and the school building.

Mr. Gunn lived only in this cabin through the day as a lodging place, and secured his meals and sleeping quarters at the local hotel. Mr. Gunn had a very cheerful disposition and had a very strong personality. He liked to be with Nature at certain times of the year. He always raised flowers and could be often seen working in his flower garden, which he had in the rear of his cabin. The building is made of logs and still has the original tiles on the roof, which were made in Zoar in 1819. There can be seen a small outbuilding on the south side of the Hermitage which was used for a summer kitchen. Mr. Gunn can be seen sitting on the front porch in the above picture.

Note

This is only a brief resume of the "Separatist Society of Zoar," which existed from 1817 to 1898. The purpose of the writer is to instill into the hearts and minds of the public the true facts of the "Zoarites," who have attracted much attention the World over.

Howard A. Sarbaugh
Zoar, Ohio, December 21, 1931

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 valuated at \$3,500,000.00, 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.

ZOAR FROM 1898 TO 1931

The people after the division had a very difficult task in earning a living and learning how to live. Some of the people were very ignorant as to the ways and modes of living, but soon learned through trial and error. The industries of the Society soon ceased to operate and everyone went out into the world to seek a livelihood and enjoyment. Every man, woman and child felt that a new era had come and led them out of bondage and made them a new man, woman and child.

There was a new industry established near Zoar in 1911 which was known as the Zoar Fire Clay Company, and afforded work for fifty men. This plant is still in operation.

The Zoar Flour Mill continued operation until the last ten years, successfully.

There are still members of the disbanded Society attending Church and sitting in the pew which they occupied during the Society's existence.

The School is again under the leadership of one of the descendants of the Separatists Society and there are a few of the descendants' children still attending the school.

In 1917, Zoar celebrated its One Hundredth Anniversary in a most elegant way that the present people knew best in honor of those brave men, women and children who went out into the world to seek religious freedom, contentment and enjoyment.

The Zoar Historical Society was formed January 28, 1930, by Howard A. Sarbaugh, a descendant of the Zoar Society. The purpose of the Society is to stimulate interest in the study of local history and to locate, mark, and commemorate historic places in our community; to memorialize the events of preceding years, and to preserve property of a historical nature. The Society has made a remarkable advancement under the leadership of its President, Paul Ricker, a descendant of the Zoar Society, in restoring the famous "Zoar Garden" and the preserving of relics, which are in the Society's Museum located in the Bimeler home.

The Zoar Historical
Society
Zoar, Ohio

December 21, 1931

H. A. Sarbaugh, Sec.,
Zoar, Ohio.

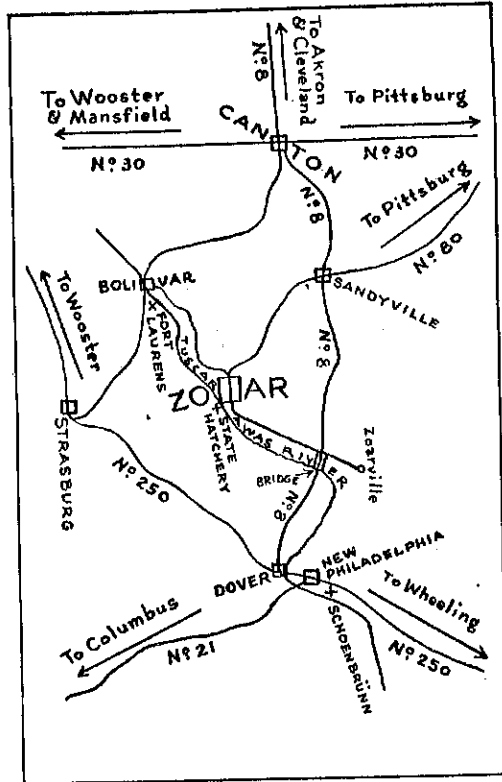
Dear Sir:—

We have read your brief history of Zoar, and have found it to be accurate and true.

We approve and sponsor this book as "A Brief History of Zoar."

Yours very truly,

Paul Ricker, President
Roy Stone, 1st Vice Pres.
Jacob Sturm, 2nd Vice Pres.
Edgar Ruof, Treasurer.



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, which affords scenery that can be found nowhere in Ohio.