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A Thread of Continuity: Quilting in Wayne County, Ohio, Mennonite Churches, 1890s–1990s

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From the late 1930s through the 1960s, when quilting declined among most Americans, Mennonite women increased their quilting. Because they maintained a strong tradition of quilting, Mennonite women were able to produce large numbers of quilts wanted for sale at bazaars and auctions when demand for them rose beginning in the 1970s. By preserving and expanding their tradition of quilting, Mennonite women created the groundwork for an effective system of money-making in support of worldwide Mennonite missions and service. They also provided a rich source of new quilts for late-twentieth-century quilt lovers. This paper focuses on the formation and transformation of Mennonite women's Sewing Circles in Wayne County, Ohio, from the 1890s through the early 1990s. It is based on archival research and oral history interviews with women's sewing groups in five Mennonite churches.

Introduction

Quilt lovers usually appreciate Mennonite quilts for their beautifully executed traditional patchwork and applique, but for Mennonite women quilting provided a way to be actively involved in an evolving worldwide mission and service project.¹ From their founding in the 1880s, Mennonite women's sewing groups produced the material aid—mostly in the form of new handmade clothing—that helped to support Mennonite missionaries and their clients, as

well as institutions like hospitals, orphanages, and senior citizens' homes that served Mennonites and their neighbors. During the late 1930s through the 1960s, the Sewing Circles decreased the amount of new clothing they sewed, focusing instead on collecting and refurbishing used clothing.² This left time during the monthly work-meetings for the women to produce more quilts. These quilts were often sent to Mennonite institutions as material aid or were given to local people in need of help. Quilts were also sold to members and non-members or quilted specifically for paying customers. The money was used to support Sewing Circle activities or forwarded to Mennonite institutions.

Making plain or fancy tops at home for the Sewing Circle to finish not only allowed busy farmwives to make a useful and valued contribution to the emerging world-wide Mennonite service and mission agenda, it also provided many women with a culturally acceptable leisure activity and some women with community recognition and respect. Working as a Sewing Circle group around the quilt frame at church—whether stitching a fine quilt for sale or on contract for a customer or stitching a utility quilt or knotting a comfort for relief work—provided women with the opportunity to talk with one another about religious and community issues in a way that was not possible when the focus of the work meeting was the efficient sewing of clothing and bed-linens.

This study focused on the formation and transformation of Mennonite women's Sewing Circles in Wayne County, Ohio, from the 1890s through the early 1990s. It is based primarily on archival research and oral history interviews with women's Sewing groups in five Mennonite churches: Kidron, Oak Grove, Orrville, Salem (Kidron), and Sonnenberg (see figure 1).³ Research reveals that from the late 1930s through the 1960s, when quilting activity declined among most American women, Mennonite women increased their quiltwork. Because of this, they had the skilled designers, top-makers, markers, and quilters available and a training system in place to sustain the levels of production needed to provide quilts for the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale and other auctions beginning in the 1970s. By preserving and valuing quilts through their mid-century drop in popularity, Mennonite women created the groundwork for an effective system of money-making that reinforced their

Figure 1. Map of Wayne County, Ohio, showing the Mennonite churches included in this study. Orrville Mennonite Church and Kidron Mennonite Church are located in towns; the other churches are in rural areas. Map copyright Valerie S. Rake

own and community perceptions of appropriate female behavior, behavior that supported worldwide service while remaining removed from worldly influences.

*General Organizational Patterns
of Mennonite Sewing Groups in Wayne County*

The Wayne County Mennonite churches included in this study belong to one of two conferences: the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church. Members of these

churches were part of the general movement begun early in the twentieth century but accelerated after the 1950s to redefine Mennonite identity in a way that allowed acculturation into American society. The new identity emphasized missionary and service work in the United States and foreign countries rather than distinctive dress and rural isolation. It re-emphasized pacifism but accepted the need for members to be politically and socially involved in their communities.

Both conferences support a number of organizations that enable members to meet spiritual, social, evangelical, and charitable goals. Three of these organizations are important in this study. Women's Sewing Circle groups were called the "Women's Missionary and Service Commission" (WMSC) in the Mennonite Church and "Women in Mission" (WIM) in the General Conference.⁴ The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is an international agency that coordinates the efforts of Mennonite, Brethren, Apostolic, and Amish congregations interested in relief work. Congregations, individuals, and groups—including women's Sewing Circles—make donations of cash and material aid to MCC, which distributes it worldwide through service projects and non-proselytizing missions.⁵

The Mennonite Sewing Circles in Wayne County, which I studied in 1997, follow a common organizational pattern. Each group meets regularly once a month, occasionally calling an additional meeting to complete a special project or attend to business matters. While two groups (Sonnenberg and Orrville) initially met just for a half-day in the afternoon, most groups meet from 9:00 A.M. or so until 3:30 or 4:00 P.M. Members spend the morning on various sewing-related activities. Currently, quilting and knotting comforters are the main activities; in the past, machine sewing of new clothing predominated. Sack lunches, or occasionally a carry-in (potluck) lunch, are eaten at noon, followed by a business and devotional meeting. After the meeting, the women return to work for several hours.

Almost all of the groups initially held their meetings in members' homes because early Mennonite churches were too small to allow the women to set up sewing equipment or to store equipment and supplies between meetings. Now the Sewings hold their meetings in the churches, which have fellowship halls with tables

and plenty of workspace. The churches also have closets or large cupboards constructed specifically so the women can store fabrics, sewing machines, and quilt frames between meetings, though sometimes unexpected spaces—like the men’s bathroom at Salem (Kidron)—have also been used.⁶

Support of Mennonite missions and providing service to “the needy” are the explicit focuses for the Sewing Circles. Initially, the Circles were often able to meet both of these goals by producing a steady supply of bedding, clothing, and occasionally other household items for distribution to missions, missionary families, and congregational and conference leaders. Now that Mennonite leaders receive regular salaries and MCC relief programs rely as much on cash donations as on direct material aid, the production of fine quilts for Mennonite fund-raising events meets many of these needs. An implicit focus—and one that shows up clearly in the oral histories—is Christian fellowship among the women of the congregation. The primary activities during Sewing day in the past were producing hand- and machine-sewn clothing, head coverings, pillowcases, and sheets; and mending and packing used clothing donated to the Circles by members of their congregations.⁷ In the last four decades, cutting comfort patches, knotting comforters, and quilting quilts have taken up more and more time. Embroidery and other crafts have sometimes been added to the mix as a way to attract younger women to meetings.

Business meetings, now and in the past, are generally brief and involve discussion and formal or informal agreement about which relief and mission projects to support. Treasurer’s reports are a common feature, as is a financial offering. The money collected from these offerings is primarily used to support the Circle’s activities—paying for fabric, notions, patterns, thread, batting, and occasionally sewing machines, tables, or other pieces of equipment. Sometimes the money is used to pay dues and buy devotional supplies from conference organizations. Most groups regularly hold additional offerings to raise money for special projects like purchasing shoes or gifts for mission children or contributing to the support of a female missionary or missionary family.

The devotional part of meetings includes a prayer, usually some hymn singing, and a talk by a member about a religious topic. All

the groups welcome missionaries home on furlough as speakers; a regular speaker at all the groups was Kidron native Vesta Sommer, who served as a missionary in Nigeria from the 1950s through the 1970s. Miss Sommer returned home on a regular basis to visit family, speak to groups, raise money, and gather together clothing and bedding to take back with her.⁸

The Establishment of Mennonite Sewing Groups in Wayne County, through the 1930s

The earliest known reference to Mennonite women's sewing groups in Wayne County appears as a note in historian James Lehman's *Sonnenberg: A Haven and Heritage*. Lehman claimed that the congregation at Salem Mennonite church outside Kidron established a "Nähverein" in August 1887.⁹ Members of the Salem (Kidron) Sewing told me that the Sewing was established at their church the same year the church itself was founded, in 1886. While none of the women remember attending those early meetings of course, the belief that they have always had a Sewing is very much part of the group's sense of their own history.¹⁰ In the 1890s, Salem (Kidron) women probably sent clothing to the Mennonite Orphan's Home—then located in Orrville but later moved to West Liberty, Ohio.¹¹

In the early 1900s, the sisters at Oak Grove Mennonite Church, near Smithville, established the second Wayne county Sewing Circle. This organization was evidently somewhat controversial within the congregation. Several sources indicate that two young single women attempted to organize a Sewing Circle sometime between 1900 and 1905. Male leaders of the congregation prohibited the group and may have censured the young women for suggesting such a "worldly" activity. In spite of this opposition, some evidence suggests that even without an official organization, the women at Oak Grove were sewing as a group at least as early as 1902. In 1905, Lydia [Mrs. C. Z.] Yoder, with help and encouragement from other women, was able to found an official Sewing Circle at Oak Grove Mennonite Church. Mrs. Yoder may have been more successful than the younger women because her husband was a leader

of the Oak Grove congregation and president of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities. With Mrs. Yoder at the helm, congregation members could feel sure that Mennonite standards of religious and social behavior would be upheld.¹²

Oak Grove WMSC records reveal that by November 1905 the Oak Grove Sewing Circle was holding regular monthly meetings in the homes of group members. The members sewed clothing, mostly, but also produced some bed and household linen. In December 1920, the Young Women's Missionary Circle was formed to "take up the Relief Sewing." Through the 1920s and probably up until 1933, the senior and junior women's groups met on alternate months. Both engaged in similar work, though they maintained separate leadership structures and financial records until they recombined due to lack of attendance at the younger women's Sewing.¹³

Two other Wayne County congregations founded Sewing Circles in the late 1910s, as more conservative Mennonites became comfortable with formalized church groups and activities. In 1918, the Orrville Mennonite congregation established a Sewing Circle to produce clothing for war sufferers. A Mothers Meeting had been formed at Orrville Mennonite in April 1916 to provide fellowship, devotional talks, and bible-study to married women in the congregation. Several male congregational leaders attended the Orrville Mennonite Mothers Meeting on April 4, 1918. Evidently responding to a request for material aid in an article in *The Gospel Herald*, a Mennonite newspaper, the men urged the women to transform the Mothers Meeting into a Sewing Circle. Two motions were made and passed: that the women support a missionary in the field, and that the women sew items for war sufferers, as per the request in the newspaper article. The group organized committees to find out what items were required, to purchase the necessary supplies, and to conduct meetings.¹⁴ After several more meetings with the men, the group was formally re-organized as a Sewing Circle. The Orrville Sewing Circle met at least once a month. Meetings generally consisted of singing, prayer, a devotional, and the distribution of pre-cut clothing fabric for sewing at home.

The Swiss Mennonite congregation at Sonnenberg established its Sewing Circle in September 1919. A Sewing Circle member

who was born around 1910 remembered that when she was in her early teens, she went with her mother to early meetings of the Sonnenberg Sewing Circle:

It was [started by] an older lady in our church. Well, maybe she wasn't so old at that time. . . . She started at the church, just informal. There must have been need someplace. . . . I think we first cut our own garments. And yet it seems to me she got them somewhere, unless she cut them at home and brought them to church. We just gathered up in the front of the church, a few ladies. It was very small at first. And then she'd pass out these garments for the women to take home that were there.

Early records of the Sonnenberg Sewing confirm that the group held only devotional and business meetings at the church. They thought that doing the actual sewing at home was more efficient than hauling sewing machines back and forth. In addition, the group wanted to emphasize the devotional aspects of the meeting, because "God's blessing upon the alms and upon the garments is worth more, in a sense, than the garment it's self [*sic*]." ¹⁵

Because of this structure, the Sonnenberg Sewing attracted both women with time to sew and also those whose family commitments prevented their involvement in anything more than a monthly devotional meeting. An elderly group-member recalled:

[my mother] didn't take any [garments to sew] because there were eight children in our family. . . . They felt like it [sewing] was more for those that didn't have so much work at home, didn't have a big family. So ladies took the garments along home, made them, and the next month they'd bring them back again. ¹⁶

In 1936, Kidron Mennonite Church was founded as a daughter congregation of Sonnenberg Mennonite Church. The new congregation was more liberal than its parent congregation, though less so than its elder sister at Salem (Kidron). Women who had been active in the Sonnenberg Sewing continued to meet as a sewing group in their homes until they could move into their large space in the new church building when it was completed in 1937. ¹⁷

On July 6, 1938, the Kidron group divided into senior and jun-

ior Sewing Circles. The minutes suggest that the younger women thought they were not being given the chance to lead. An initial proposal was made to create a committee composed of both an older and younger woman to lead the entire group. The younger women, however, opted to form a separate organization that would meet at the church on the same day as the senior women. Sewing projects, leadership structures, finances, and business meetings were organized separately; however, "it was also desired by the elder sisters that the [devotional] program be held together. One month one circle give [*sic*] the program and the next the other circle." The junior women included in their minutes the statement that:

This circle was not organized because we could no longer work together but that we together might bring more honor and glory to God. May the prayers of the elder sisters and others as well follow us in what ever tasks we undertake to do that we may always do the first things first. May we keep in mind it is not always how much we get done but how it is done and in what kind of spirit it is done. May the Lord bless our work.¹⁸

The two groups continued to meet separately-but-together at least through 1972, though eventually they merged because of a general difficulty in finding enough women willing to take on leadership roles in the seven women's and girl's organizations that were formed at Kidron Mennonite.¹⁹

During the early years of their organization, Sewing Circle members spent most of their time sewing clothing items and some bedding for local families, domestic and foreign missions, and Mennonite orphanages and homes for the aged. Making comforts and quilts was a regular though not frequent activity. For example, in July 1915, the Oak Grove Sewing made a comforter for the Sommer family, along with an assortment of clothing.²⁰ Only once in the early years, on April 3, 1919, did the Orrville Sewing Circle knot a comfort.²¹ Later, in March and November of 1928, the Orrville Sewing paid for batting, fabric, and yarn for comforters out of their treasury; the minutes did not note where these particular comforters were sent.²² Oak Grove sent two quilts, along with a comforter and three dresses, to the Canton mission in April 1913.²³ This group did not work on a quilt again until September 1914. The quilt fin-

ished in 1914 was pieced by Sister John Conrad and donated by the Circle to Sister P. R. Lantz, whose husband was a leader of the Wayne County Mennonite community.²⁴ In 1930, the “Yoder sisters” donated tops, batting, and backing for two quilts “for the Russians,” presumably immigrant Russian Mennonites in Canada. On the day the tops were completed, twenty-five pieces of clothing were also finished and shipped to the Mennonite Central Committee Material Aid distribution center in Scottdale, Pennsylvania.²⁵ Group members recalled that quilt- and comfort-making were not big activities at the Sonnenberg Sewing until the early 1930s. By this time, that group had lengthened its devotional-only meeting to an all-day work-session held in members’ homes, where space could be made for several sewing machines, cutting areas, and a quilt frame.²⁶

For the most part, these quilts and comforters were utility items. The stitching on quilts was not fine. Comforters were often made of heavy wool fabrics and sometimes had wool battings. Wool comforters were often encased in a “comforter cover,” a large cotton bag (similar to a modern-day duvet cover) that was sometimes tied loosely to keep the comforter inside from shifting. The comforter cover kept the difficult-to-laundry wool fabrics clean and could easily be removed and washed.²⁷ Quilts and comforts were distributed to local families with a need of some kind, to Mennonite missions and the MCC, and occasionally to individuals. Some of these were people like Brother and Sister Lantz who can be identified as local church and community leaders; others, like Sister Bixler, who received a quilt in May 1935, are more difficult to identify.²⁸

In contrast to the relatively limited quiltwork engaged in by early Mennonite Sewings, prodigious amounts of clothing and other kinds of bedding were often produced. For example, at their August 5, 1913, meeting, the Oak Grove Sewing Circle produced 24 sheets, 24 pillowcases, 6 pads, 6 mattress slips, and 2 tablecloths for the mission in Youngstown, Ohio.²⁹ On April 1, 1924, the same group made 12 girls’ dresses, 14 boys’ waists [shirts], and 2 petticoats for the Canton mission.³⁰ While the quantity of linens and clothing produced at these meetings was unusual, the range was not, nor were the destinations.

Lydia Smucker, in a report commemorating the 50th anniver-

sary of the Oak Grove sewing circle, recalled that in the beginning:

each circle had to get its own order for the Sewing by writing to some mission, asking it to send an order for what was needed. . . . The mission workers would send a list of needs as they found them, giving only the ages of boys and girls, and then we would cut the garments according to age size.³¹

Other circles operated in a similar way. At their April 3, 1919, meeting, the Orrville circle made ten boys' shirts and knotted one comforter.³² Beginning in the 1920s and continuing through the 1930s, the Orrville Sewing regularly purchased fabric cut into different-sized items of clothing from a Mennonite-operated cutting room in Elkhart, Indiana. This clothing was generally sewn at home and then sent to the Mennonite hospital in India, to Russian Mennonite immigrants in Canada, to the Mennonite-managed tuberculosis hospital in LaJunta, Colorado, and to the American Friends Service Committee for distribution where needed.³³ During the 1930s, Orrville also began using money from its treasury to purchase items needed by local families. For instance, at their August 1933 meeting, the women "decided that we would use \$2.50 for pillowcases, sheets, and a blanket for [the] Jacob Miller [family]."³⁴

After their November 1935 meeting, the Kidron Sewing Circle was able to send a very large bundle of assorted clothes—ranging from children's underwear to men's overcoats—to Russian Mennonite émigrés in Canada. This bundle included both newly made clothes and used clothing that the sisters had refurbished, several comforts and quilts, a blanket, a feather cover, and a pillow.³⁵ Kidron Sewing Circle also sent items to India, to Philadelphia, and to domestic institutions like the Mennonite mission in Lima, Ohio. Like all the groups, the Kidron Sewing also made clothing and bedding items and gathered household items for local families. In February 1937, the members made a bed pad for "Mrs. Begly" and also did other sewing for the Begly family, "the Circle only doing the sewing, Martha brot [*sid*] the material."³⁶

Occasionally, the groups would engage in non-sewing relief activities as well. For instance, as early as 1913, the Oak Grove Sewing Circle had begun its regular pattern of holding several meet-

ings a year at the Rittman Old Folks Home to clean and sew for the residents there.³⁷ Lydia Yoder brought canning jars to the Oak Grove meeting in September 1913. Members took them home to fill when they did their own canning. The filled jars were returned to the Sewing and then sent on to the Canton mission. Similarly, the Kidron Sewing spent most of a meeting in November 1935 “snitzing” ten bushels of apples and one of peas for drying.³⁸

The Sewing Groups in the Middle Years (late 1930s through 1960s)

Members of Mennonite women’s groups in Wayne County remember their purposes during the middle years of the century (the 1930s through the 1960s) primarily as “an outreach of helping the poor.”³⁹ They were “to do for others [and] to study the history of Mennonite missionaries.”⁴⁰ They were also to “fellowship with each other [and] promote a mission spirit.”⁴¹ During devotional programs, they shared books written by missionaries and worked through yearly devotional guides provided by the Mennonite conferences. Mennonite Women’s sewing groups continued to produce clothing for women and children and sometimes for men, though the volume was much lower than it had been. They also began, much more frequently, to refurbish used clothing donated to the Sewings by church and community members. During these years, the Sewings also began to produce an increasing number of quilts and comforts. As before, all of this “material aid” was used to further the goals of Mennonite service missions in the United States or in foreign nations. Switching to an emphasis on gently used and refurbished clothing allowed the groups to continue supplying clothing to Mennonite institutions while freeing time at Sewing Circle meetings for other projects, including fine quiltwork (see figure 2).

A member of the Oak Grove WMSC remembered that they “sewed clothing for orphanages or a mission in Canton . . . homeless people or whoever came for assistance.”⁴² A member of the Sonnenberg Sewing remembered providing clothing and bedding for the Mennonite children’s home in West Liberty, saying: “seems to me there was a need there sometimes.”⁴³ At their October 12–

Figure 2. Women at Kidron Mennonite Church work on an embroidered quilt in March 1956. Photo copyright Celia Lehman.

13, 1954, meeting, the Sonnenberg Sewing had an extraordinarily productive meeting. The women sewed receiving blankets, skirts and blouses, pajamas and nightgowns, dresses, sheets and slips. They finished four comforters and eight baby quilts. They also received donations of five new quilt tops, thirty feed sacks, and a large, uncounted assortment of new and used clothing and household linens.⁴⁴

Several groups remember making quilts during these years, sometimes for local families in crisis, sometimes for new or visiting clergy:

often, we'd make a quilt, like when we would have special needs [in

the community]. And the ministers that would come to have meetings, we would quilt for them. The ministers at that time weren't paid like they are now, and it was a kind gesture to give them a quilt.⁴⁵

While making quilts was becoming more popular, most quilts were not fancy: "it may have been a crazy quilt or just squares like a nine-patch or something like that, put together."⁴⁶ The women of Kidron Mennonite appear to have had one or two quilts in the frames each month, as well as one or two comforters, even before they were able to move into their large space in the basement of the new church building. For instance, in December 1936, the secretary of the Kidron Sewing recorded: "1 big quilt and one comfort was made, 1 comfort was made over for Will Hofstetter. 1 small quilt was made and one small quilt was started for earnings."⁴⁷ All the sewing groups "stockpiled" quilts and comforters for later giving. For example, in November 1937, the Kidron Sewing completed five comforters. They noted in their minutes that: "2 [were] for the Lima rescue mission, one was made over for Clyde Budd, and the two were not yet decided as yet where they would be sent."⁴⁸

In December 1959 the Orrville Sewing created two separate work committees as a response to the increased demand for quilts. The sewing committee bought fabric and patterns or pre-cut fabric blanks for sewing clothing while the quilt committee located quilt tops and set up frames for quilting at each meeting.⁴⁹ Other Sewing Circles also established quilt committees or increased the size of their sewing committee to meet this growing need for quilt tops.

Beginning in the late 1930s, some groups started to use quilts as a way to earn cash that could be used to support mission projects or to purchase additional materials. Sometimes, completed quilts were sold to members or non-members. In general, however, quilting was done on something of a piece-rate basis. The Sewings charged a certain number of cents per yard of thread used in the quilting. In February 1938, the sisters at Kidron Mennonite "decided that the Circle will make quilts for any family in this congregation that wishes to have some made and do not have the time or room at home, by paying for the thread at 1/2¢ per yard. It will be done free of charge for those who can't afford to pay us."⁵⁰

As other groups set their policies about custom quilting, the pre-

vailing rates increased. The two groups at Kidron Mennonite agreed in 1943 to charge 1¢ per yard for members and 1 1/2¢ for non-members. They raised their prices to 1 1/2¢ and 2¢ in 1948, a range that prevailed through the 1950s. In 1961, Sonnenberg Sewing Circle agreed to charge 3¢ per yard. Salem (Kidron) met this rate in 1966, charging 2 1/2¢ per yard for members and 3¢ per yard for non-members. In the spring of 1968, both the Sonnenberg and Salem (Kidron) groups voted to charge 4¢ and 5¢ per yard for members and non-members. The groups all charged extra for marking and binding quilts, ranging from \$1.00 to \$2.00 for either job, depending on the complexity of the pattern and whether the quilt edge was scalloped.⁵¹

Custom quilting prices in Wayne County may have been somewhat low. For comparison, in *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*, Marie Webster noted that the going rate in 1915 for this kind of work was 2 1/2¢ per yard, a price not reached in Wayne County until the 1960s.⁵² On the other hand, with thread available at 4¢ to 15¢ per 200-yard spool during these three decades, a decent though certainly not spectacular profit was possible. For instance, in the late 1930s, with thread at 4¢ per 200-yard spool and quilting at approximately 1¢ per yard, each spool of thread used potentially earned a profit of \$1.96. In the late 1960s, with thread at 15¢ per 200-yard spool and quilting at 5¢ per yard, the potential profit was \$9.85 per spool.⁵³

Available financial records do not reveal how much Sewing Circles actually earned from custom quilting and quilt sales. Financial reports note payments ranging from \$1.25 to \$20.00 "for quilting." Sometimes, the customer is named in the financial records, sometimes she is not. In some cases, it appears that payment was made when the quilt was completed; in others, payment seems to have come in installments. For the most part, women provided their own quilt-top, back, and batting; when the Circles provided the back and batting, they generally passed the cost of these items on to their customers.⁵⁴ Occasionally, a group would be willing to coordinate the production of an entire quilt; in this case, their overall profit may have been lower. For instance, in November 1961, the Sonnenberg Sewing Circle completed work on four quilts for Mrs. Frank Dixon. They received payment of \$13.23,

which the treasurer noted was the balance due on a total of \$63.23. Their cost for these four quilts amounted to \$59.23, which included the quilting itself (approximately 250 yards per quilt at 3¢ per yard), \$7.00 for muslin, and \$20.00 to Susan Welty, a well-known top-maker who was a member of the Sewing Circle. If Mrs. Welty donated her work piecing the tops and binding the quilts—which was sometimes done—the group made a profit of \$24.00. If Mrs. Welty actually kept her share of the money, the profit was only \$4.00. Mrs. Dixon paid \$27.00 for an unspecified number of quilts in 1963.⁵⁵ As a frequent customer, she may have been charged a special rate.

Quilts generally received one of four designations in the minutes: they were made for one of the missions or the MCC, for the Circle, for “earnings,” or for a named individual. Sometimes, it is difficult to tell whether the quilts for individuals were gifts; were sold to or “custom quilted” for a customer or group member; or were, in fact, given as relief. For example, in November 1939, the women at Kidron finished up three quilts that had been worked on for several meetings and put three more in the frames. One of the completed quilts was “for earnings,” one was “for the Circle,” and one was for “Mrs. Keller.” “Quilt earnings” for that meeting were recorded as \$3.30.⁵⁶ Was that money from Mrs. Keller or did she receive her quilt as relief? Was the quilt made “for earnings” sold for \$3.30 to a buyer not named in the minutes? Presumably the one made for the Circle was kept until there was a need for it or until a sufficiently large bundle of clothing and bedding had been gathered to be shipped to a mission or the MCC (see figure 3).

After World War II and increasing through the 1950s and 1960s, the MCC’s need for material aid in the form of clothing declined. In the 1920s and 1930s, the MCC had focussed its efforts on Russian Mennonites uprooted by World War I, the Soviet revolution, and economic depression. In the early 1940s, the focus expanded to include other Europeans suffering the effects of World War II. In the late 1940s, the focus expanded yet again to encompass victims of violence and poverty worldwide. By the 1960s, MCC workers in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East found that their clients either did not want western-style clothing or preferred to develop their own clothing industries. In the 1970s, Sewing

Figure 3. Volunteers at the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale prepare a tied comforter for sale. While this comforter was made in 1992, it strongly resembles the many comforters sent to the Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite missions as material aid throughout the twentieth century. Photo copyright 1999, *The Daily Record*, Wooster, Ohio.

Circles began to divert some of their used clothing to second-hand shops established as a way to raise money for the MCC.⁵⁷ A “Thrift and Gift” shop was established in Orrville to receive donations from Wayne County Mennonites. It was staffed primarily by unpaid volunteers, many of them recruited through the Sewing Circles.⁵⁸

While the MCC distributed less clothing during these years, it still requested a steady supply of blankets and quilts in styles and weights appropriate to a variety of locations. In 1962, the MCC sent a message to Sewing Circles saying that it had shifted its focus to new areas of need, away from “cold winter countries, primarily in Europe, to countries with warmer climates and away from western civilization.” Workers urgently requested bedding, sheets, and fabric yardage, though the message did not describe the types of bedding needed.⁵⁹ A directive from the MCC to the women’s Sewing Circles explained some of the MCC’s material aid needs for 1968:

35,000 lightweight blankets and quilts are requested for Bolivia, Burundi, Congo, Honduras, India, Tanzania and Vietnam. While these countries have hot and humid weather, they have cool nights part of the year. 20,000 heavyweight (3 1/2 pounds and up) blankets and comforters are needed in Hong Kong, Jordan (East Bank) and Korea. The comforters may be wool or Dacron filled. Wool blankets also are acceptable as fillers. All sizes of bedding can be useful and in most cases dark colors are more practical.⁶⁰

In addition to direct donations of bedding and limited amounts of clothing, the MCC needed increasing amounts of cash. In 1968, John Hostetler, Director of Material Aid at the Mennonite Central Committee offices in Akron, Pennsylvania, wrote an additional memo to Sewing Circles to acknowledge that many volunteer workers were requesting cash rather than material-aid donations. He noted that many of the MCC's clients did not want or need Western clothing and bedding, but did need money to help rebuild their lives. Hostetler told Sewing Circle members that people in some areas—specifically, Jordan, Tanzania, and Korea—welcomed the quilts, other bedding, and western-style clothing that Sewing groups were used to providing, and requested group members to continue sending these items. He also urged them, however, to donate cash or participate in fund-raising projects for the new programs that were being developed.⁶¹ Beginning in the 1950s in Pennsylvania, and in 1966 in Wayne County, Relief Sales were organized to help meet the MCC's need for cash. Relief Sale organizers specifically encouraged the Sewing Circles to donate quilts and other handcrafts.

*The Sewing Groups in "Modern" Society
(late 1960s through 1990s)*

By the late 1960s, Wayne County Sewings had become primarily quilting groups. Other projects—ranging from collecting used clothing to coordinating the creation of a variety of "kits" to provide supplies and sundries to school children, prisoners, or new moth-

ers—were engaged in each month. These activities, however, took a back seat to the production of quilts and comforts.

Making quilts and comforts to sell or doing “custom quilting” continued to be a common fund-raising project for all the groups at least through the late 1970s. Group members raised their prices for custom quilting during the 1970s from 5 ¢ per yard of thread in 1970 to as high as 15 ¢ in 1980.⁶² In 1971, a majority of the women at Salem (Kidron) voted to continue quilting for other people.⁶³ Not all custom quilting was accepted, however. In December 1977, the president of the Kidron Sewing asked members if they would piece and quilt two quilts for “a lady” who had contacted the group. The group decided not to accept the project but recommended that individual women could volunteer to do the work on their own. A similar discussion was held and the same decision reached at Orrville Mennonite in 1981.⁶⁴

The reluctance to accept custom quilting projects is directly related to the groups’ preference for producing quilts for sale at the growing numbers of auctions and bazaars. Even in their early years, these events drew large audiences of non-Mennonite and Mennonite quilt lovers willing to pay premium prices for “traditional” Amish and Mennonite quilts. A quilt made for sale at auction produced a much larger donation for the MCC than one sold directly by a Sewing Circle, with its limited circle of clients (see figure 4).

The Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale

The establishment of the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale in Kidron in 1966 and the subsequent development of other sales and auctions had a significant effect on Sewing activities. The Relief Sale—patterned after similar sales organized in Pennsylvania, Kansas, and Illinois—features an auction and also counter sales of donated handmade and purchased crafts, food, toys, and other items. Net proceeds of the Mennonite Relief Sales are donated to the Mennonite Central Committee and sometimes to other special projects. Donations from the first Ohio sale totaled approximately \$5,000 and rose to \$20,000 in 1970. In 1995, Relief Sale organizers sent \$190,000 to the MCC. The annual quilt auction regularly offers 200 to 300 full-size and baby quilts, wall hangings, and comforters. The success of the Relief Sale inspired other Ohio Mennonite or-

Figure 4. The large crowd in the quilt auction tent at the 1989 Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale is not unusual either in its size or in its make-up of Amish, conservative and non-conservative Mennonites, and non-Mennonites. Photo copyright 1999, *The Daily Record*, Wooster, Ohio.

ganizations—such as Central Christian High School in Kidron, Sunshine Children’s Home in Maumee (near Toledo), and Adriel School in West Liberty (north of Dayton)—to organize similar auctions.⁶⁵

While some Sewing Circles responded to the call for donations to the Relief Sale the first year, no special effort was made to distinguish Relief Sale quilts from others. At their June 1, 1966, meeting, the Salem (Kidron) Sewing voted to donate a quilt they had already completed to the “relief auction” to be held later that month.⁶⁶ The Kidron Sewing did not contribute to the first sale, but members were making plans in December 1966 to contribute to the second sale.⁶⁷ The women at Orrville Mennonite, a group generally more inclined toward mission-study than sewing during their meetings, contributed a quilt, apparently for the first time, to the third sale in September 1968.⁶⁸ The Sonnenberg Sewing con-

tributed for the first time in 1969, though they supported that sale in a big way, contributing four quilts and two comforters.⁶⁹

Impact of the Relief Sale on Sewing Groups

During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, quilts became an increasingly significant factor in the financial success of the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale. In the 1970s, income from the quilt auction accounted for an average of 24 percent of the gross income of each sale; in the 1980s, it accounted for 31 percent. Between 1990 and 1995, income from the quilt auction provided nearly 36 percent of Relief Sale income. As a result of this success, sewing groups began to focus their efforts more specifically on making quilts for the Relief Sale and other auctions. Quilt committees sought ways to increase the production of salable quilts by sponsoring the creation or purchase of fancy quilt-tops. They established tighter schedules for completing quilts and expressed concern about the need to develop fine quilting skills in younger women and girls. For most circles, the major emphasis, in terms of time spent at meetings, became quilts. Not all quilts were intended for sale at the Relief Sale quilt auction or the other sales that sprang up in its wake, but the activity of quiltmaking subsumed nearly all other activities.

Oak Grove Sewing members noted that “as things developed, then, of course, the Relief Sale became an important part of the work that we did.”⁷⁰ Salem (Kidron) Sewing members said that in the last several years, they had completed “between 275 and 300 small [and] large comforters and quilts in a year’s time.” They listed over a dozen charitable and service organizations, both Mennonite and non-Mennonite, that had received quilts from them. This group, the most prolific I talked to, acknowledged that they make more quilts now than fifteen years ago because “there weren’t as many sales for this and that, you know, for the benefits [auctions] of all these different homes.” When asked whether they would have made as many quilts for direct material aid had the sales not been seeking donations, they replied that they “would have done other things, probably, in the community” though “there was always quilts.”⁷¹ Sonnenberg WMSC members said that:

the quilts we used to make were more practical, while now they’re

more fancy. . . . They go for sale and we get a big price for them and then the money goes for the purposes of relief.

They made a distinction between plain and fancy quilts:

We are providing materials for relief. Even though we do the fancy quilts we also do knotting of comforts, which are sent to MCC and are relief itself, so we are doing the dual [purpose] . . . at this point.

But members also agreed that “it was probably about that time, that we started supplying the quilts for the Relief Sale, that the change [toward making fancier quilts] started.”⁷²

Almost as soon as Mennonite women’s groups began sending quilts to sales, they began to note in their minutes how much the various quilts sold for. All the groups shared a desire to donate quilts that would attract a high price at auction. In October 1968, “Esther A.” reported on the second Relief Sale to the Kidron Sewing, stating that “the interest was good and quilts sold from \$15 to \$100.”⁷³ The Kidron Mennonite Women’s Council noted that the quilts donated by their Sewing to the 1974 Relief Sale sold for a combined price of \$720. In 1980, Kidron’s donation of six large quilts, one large wool comfort and three crib quilts brought in a combined total of \$2,350.⁷⁴ Sonnenberg’s donations to the 1976 sale received a total of \$800; the next year, their two quilts (a blue whole cloth and a Lone Star) brought in only \$345. In 1979, they donated two crib quilts and two full-size quilts, bringing in a total of \$520.⁷⁵ In September 1972, the Salem (Kidron) Sewing recorded that the quilt they had donated to the Relief Sale was originally sold for \$40, then “it was put back and sold with the bed on which it was displayed for \$120.” In their 1994 Annual Handbook, Salem (Kidron) reported that in the previous year, they had donated three quilts and one comforter to the Relief Sale, for a total of \$1475; one quilt to the Adriel School auction, which sold for \$200; and one quilt to the Bluffton College Auxiliary Sale, which sold for \$400.⁷⁶

Members evaluated past sales when making decisions about future projects. For example, the Salem (Kidron) Sewing discussed a letter from the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale Committee in the summer of 1969 describing high-selling items and styles and voted to send a striking red-and-white quilt to the next sale.⁷⁷ The Orrville

group held a similar discussion after a member attended an evaluation of the 1982 relief sale. She reported that pieced baby quilts were among the items that sold well. Context suggests that this particular comment was probably about items sold in the needlework tent, a separate selling area with less expensive items sold for a marked price rather than at auction.⁷⁸ The executive committee of the combined Kidron Mennonite women's groups discussed salable items at its meeting in January 1971. Members noted that both twin- and king-sized quilts seemed to sell well.⁷⁹

The demand for quilts that could command high prices required Sewing Circle quilt committees to locate and sometimes purchase distinctive quilt tops. In June 1989, the quilt committee of the Orrville Sewing "reported that they will need to buy a nice quilt top for the relief quilt. They asked if anyone knew of one they could buy."⁸⁰ Available financial records suggest that this group regularly paid skilled top-makers—apparently members—between \$45 and \$125 for tops to be quilted for the Relief Sale.⁸¹ In autumn 1987, the Sonnenberg Sewing began work on a "small antique quilt top [that] was found in the sewing cupboard." They agreed to sell this quilt at the next Relief Sale. Antique quilts—especially if their provenance was known, as was the case with this quilt—generally sold for high prices.⁸²

Other popular quilt tops were plain cloth with elaborate quilting designs, embroidered blocks, and applique patterns. In early spring 1970, the Salem (Kidron) women decided that "the 'old' quilt top and one with plain back and front will be prepared for the sale by our ladies."⁸³ While further descriptions of these quilts are not available, whole-cloth quilts often brought high prices at auction. Several times in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Kidron, Orrville, and Salem (Kidron) Sewings produced quilts made of embroidered blocks. This required a special effort, since volunteers were needed to embroider the blocks as well as to quilt the finished top.⁸⁴ Pieced tops tended toward the more elaborate patterns like Giant Dahlia or used nostalgic fabrics like feed-sack cloth (see figure 5).⁸⁵

Large, fine-stitched quilts of the kind that would have been donated to a sale generally took at least two to three meetings to complete, more if the quilting design was particularly ornate. The demand for quilts sometimes forced a change in the usual once-

a-month schedule. The Salem (Kidron) WIM held quiltings seven of the eight weeks of January and February 1975 to complete several quilts, at least one of which was given to a missionary family, and to begin at least one for the Relief Sale. The minutes-taker caught a sense of the quilt committee's pressure when she recorded that: "the quilt now in the frame is to be finished by the end of the month."⁸⁶ This sense of urgency persisted the entire winter that year.

Similar pressure was felt at most groups. Early in 1982, the Orrville Sewing completed a quilt for the Relief Sale in less than one month. In November 1981, the quilt committee chairperson volunteered to set the Relief Sale quilt up in her home "to speed up the work." Arrangements were finalized in December; in January, the quilt was set up. The completed quilt, a Dresden Plate pattern, was ready for display at the meeting held the first week of February.⁸⁷ Sonnenberg also made a special effort "to get our quilts finished for the relief sale" at a meeting in May 1980 which two "Amish ladies" also attended.⁸⁸ In the mid-1970s, Kidron Mennonite Sewing members struggled to find time to complete nice quilts for both the Relief Sale and the Sunshine Children's Home auction. Some years they declined to send a nice quilt to the smaller Sunshine Home auction; other years, they scheduled special meetings to enable them to finish more fine quilts.⁸⁹

At the November 1974 meeting, Salem (Kidron) Sewing members discussed the apparent decline of fine quilting skills. They noted that "with the fine quilters decreasing in number and so few of the younger women learning to quilt, it is taking longer to complete the work assignments."⁹⁰ The Kidron Women's Council had had a similar discussion in 1973, hoping "to get more younger ladies involved by offering a variety of projects."⁹¹

Knotted comforts and long-stitch quilts—where the running quilting stitch is not expected to be as small or as even as in a fine quilt—had long been a major element in the Sewing Circles' material aid donations to the MCC and other agencies. Though all the women worked on them when needed, comforts and long-stitch quilts were generally the province of older women no longer able to do fine needlework or of girls and younger women who had not learned how to quilt. Beginning in the early 1970s, Salem (Kidron)

Figure 5. Auctioneer with a Double Wedding Ring quilt at the 1991 Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale. Pieced, appliquéd, and whole-cloth quilts of all kinds are popular donations to the Relief Sale from Sewing Circle groups and individual quiltmakers. Photo copyright 1999, *The Daily Record*, Wooster, Ohio.

minutes record that long-stitch quilts and knotted comforters as well as fine-stitch quilts were made during the annual summer meeting at which the Junior Missionary Sisters—junior high and high school girls—met with the adult women.⁹² The production of long-stitch quilts at the joint meeting suggests that the women recognized these traditional events as an opportunity to interest younger women and girls in quilting and to begin training them in fine stitching skills. Similarly, in 1975, Kidron WMSC decided that certain quilts should be set aside for “new learners making the long stitch.”⁹³

Available rosters and oral histories suggest that—unlike most other women’s groups, both in and outside of Mennonite communities—involvement in senior Sewing Circles has remained fairly consistent throughout the twentieth century, even as Mennonite women became more and more likely to work at least part-time outside the home.⁹⁴ Each congregation has tended to have the same number of women attending each month. Younger women—though fewer in number because of their family obligations—have maintained a steady presence in all the groups and sought to bring others into the organization. This sustained membership has enabled the Mennonite Sewings to provide what is arguably the core resource for the success of the Relief Sales and other benefit auctions and bazaars that are such a critical part of modern Mennonite mission and service projects.

Conclusion

Aside from some initial controversy about the creation of one group, Mennonite women’s Sewing Circles found ready acceptance in Wayne County congregations. Quiltmaking was one of several activities engaged in at Sewing Circles and was the only one that increased rather than decreased in importance. Sewing Circle activities enabled women to participate in Mennonite relief and missionary work while fulfilling their primary responsibilities as farm-women, mothers, and wives. Because Mennonite women continued to make quilts—thus nurturing and preserving quilting skills—in 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, they were able to step gracefully into the productive challenge posed by the Relief Sale and other

auctions. As Mennonite communities and the world around them changed, quiltmaking provided a consistent and increasingly valued way for the women to contribute to the MCC and other Mennonite service projects. As the quilt committee chair at Salem (Kidron) pointed out:

Most of us around here . . . , we helped out neighbors. Well that was then. Now our world's getting bigger. And we are more aware of more poor people . . . and more homeless people. And so the demand [need] . . . there is no end to our demand. I mean, we help out. . . . Our world's getting bigger and bigger.⁹⁵

Notes and References

1. James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890–1930*, The Mennonite Experience in America, ed. Theron Schlabach, vol. 3 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), and Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930–1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community*, The Mennonite Experience in America, ed. Theron Schlabach, vol. 4 (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), provide valuable information about Mennonite life and religious change during the twentieth century.
2. While the official name of the women's sewing groups has shifted over time, the name consistently used in all the archives and oral histories is "Sewing Circle" or often simply "the Sewing." From 1933 to 1954, the official name for most of the groups was some variation of "The Ladies Sewing Circle." I believe the popular usage of "the Sewing" to describe these groups is a direct, casual translation of the German noun "Näherein," which could be translated as Sewing Circle or Sewing Society. I will use "the Sewing" or "Sewing Circle" as general terms for these groups.
3. There are two churches named Salem Mennonite Church in Wayne County. I designate them as Salem (Kidron) and Salem (Wooster) based on their proximity to larger communities.
4. In August 1997, as I was completing my oral history research with the Sewing groups, the two conference organizations merged into a single entity called simply "Mennonite Women."
5. Juhnke, 124–25; Toews, 26–31. Buelah S. Hostetler, *American Mennonites and Protestant Movements: A Community Paradigm*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, ed. Leonard Gross, vol. 28, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987), 18.
6. "Minutes," 4 December 1968, Salem (Kidron) Women in Mission Rec-

- ords. Records in possession of group leaders, hereafter cited as "Salem WIM Records."
7. Head coverings, also called caps and prayer veils, are the small white net bonnets that conservative Mennonite and Amish women wear. Until the 1950s, all Mennonite women were expected to wear them after turning 12 or 13 years old. In 1997, only the oldest women in the congregations I studied were still wearing them. They are still common in more conservative congregations. See Donald B. Kraybill, "Mennonite Women's Veiling: The Rise and Fall of a Sacred Symbol," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 61:3 (1987): 298-320.
 8. James O. Lehman, *Sonnenberg: A Haven and a Heritage* (Kidron, OH: Kidron Community Council, 1969), 271. See also Minutes Book for 1976 through 1982, Sonnenberg Mennonite Women's Missionary and Service Commission Records for continued mention of Vesta Sommer's visits. Records in possession of group leaders, hereafter cited as "Sonnenberg WMSC Records."
 9. Lehman, 121, 136.
 10. Members of Salem (Kidron) WIM, interviewed by author, tape recording, Dalton, OH, 4 June 1997, hereafter cited as "Salem (Kidron) interview."
 11. Melvin Gingerich, "The Mennonite Women's Missionary Society," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 37:2-3 (1963): 113-14.
 12. Mrs. A.L. [Lydia] Smucker, "Early Developments of the Ohio Sewing Circle and the Early Days of the Oak Grove Circle," typescript, December 1955, Oak Grove Mennonite's Women's Missionary and Service Commission Records. Records in possession of group leaders, hereafter cited as "Oak Grove WMSC Records." See also Elaine Sommers Rich, *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness, 1683-1983* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 186-90. See Grant M. Stoltzfus, *Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference: From the Colonial Period in Pennsylvania to 1963* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1969), 220, 253, and Gingerich, 118-19, for similar accounts that do not suggest controversy, but do mention that the initial attempt to establish a Circle at Oak Grove failed for lack of institutional support. See Stoltzfus, 219, for information on C. Z. Yoder.
 13. "Minutes," 7 December 1920, Oak Grove WMSC Records.
 14. "Minutes," 4 April 1918, Orrville Mennonite Tina Royer Circle/Women's Missionary and Service Commission Records. Records in possession of group leaders, hereafter cited as "Orrville WMSC Records."
 15. "Report of the Sonnenberg Sewing Circle: Organized September 16, 1919," typescript, undated but internal evidence suggests it was written late summer 1920, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Church Archives, Kidron Mennonite Church, Kidron, OH, hereafter cited as "Kidron Mennonite Records."

16. Members of Sonnenberg WMSC, interviewed by author, tape recording, Kidron, OH, 9 July 1997, hereafter cited as "Sonnenberg interview."
17. "Minutes," 6 October 1937, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
18. "Minutes," 6 July 1938, Dorcas Sisters Records, Kidron Mennonite Records. The Junior Sewing Circle at Kidron Mennonite soon changed its name to "Dorcas Sisters."
19. *Ibid.*, 1 March 1950, and throughout 1948–1953. See also "Minutes," 25 October 1965, and "WMSA Questionnaire," April 1969, Women's Council Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
20. "Minutes," 6 July 1915, Oak Grove WMSC Records.
21. "Minutes," 15 April 1916 to 5 February 1920, Orrville WMSC Records.
22. *Ibid.*, 7 March 1928 and 7 November 1928.
23. "Minutes," 1 April 1913, Oak Grove WMSC Records.
24. *Ibid.*, 1 September 1914.
25. *Ibid.*, 3 November 1930.
26. Sonnenberg interview.
27. Nearly all of my oral history interviews with individual Mennonite women cited these characteristics. See "Minutes," 6 November 1935, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records, for the production of comforter covers.
28. *Ibid.*, 1 May 1935 and 6 November 1935.
29. "Minutes," 5 August 1913, Oak Grove WMSC Records.
30. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1924.
31. *Ibid.*, Smucker, "Early Developments of the Oak Grove Circle."
32. "Minutes," 3 April 1919, Orrville WMSC Records.
33. *Ibid.*, 1925–1930 and 1933–1944.
34. *Ibid.*, 2 August 1933.
35. "Minutes," 6 November 1935, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
36. *Ibid.*, 3 February 1937.
37. "Minutes," 7 May 1913, Oak Grove WMSC Records.
38. To schnitz food is, roughly, to cut it into small pieces, usually in preparation for drying. "Minutes," 2 September 1913, Oak Grove WMSC Records, and "Minutes," 6 November 1935, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
39. Sonnenberg interview.
40. Salem (Kidron) interview.
41. Members of Smithville WMSC, interview by author, tape recording, Wooster, OH, 16 May 1997.
42. Members of Oak Grove WMSC, interview by author, tape recording, Smithville, OH, 2 July 1997, hereafter cited as "Oak Grove interview."
43. Sonnenberg interview.

44. "Minutes," October 12–13, 1954, Sonnenberg WMSC Records.
45. Sonnenberg interview. See also Members of Kidron WMSC, interview by author, tape recording, Kidron, OH, 2 July 1997.
46. Oak Grove interview.
47. "Minutes," 2 December 1936, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
48. *Ibid.*, 10 November 1937.
49. "Minutes," 3 December 1959, Orrville WMSC Records.
50. "Minutes," 2 February 1938, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
51. "Minutes," 3 November 1943 and February 1957, Dorcas Sisters, and "Minutes," 2 February 1938, 1 September 1948, 4 June 1952, 2 July 1952, 7 January 1953, September 1958, August 1959, and 3 April 1968, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records; "Minutes," 2 February 1966 and 1 May 1968, Salem WIM Records; "Minutes," November 1961, Sonnenberg WMSC Records.
52. Marie D. Webster, *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them* with a biography of the author by Rosalind Webster Perry (Santa Barbara, CA: Practical Patchwork, 1990; originally published Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1915), 107–09.
53. Thread prices were calculated based on figures taken from Sears, Roebucks Fall/Winter catalogs from 1910 through 1988. Prices recorded were for 150, 200, 400, or 800 yard spools (availability varied by year) of 6-cord white thread, generally available in boxes of 6 or 12 spools. See Jenny Yearous, "Stitches in Time: The Development of Sewing Thread in the Nineteenth Century and Beyond," in *Uncoverings 1998*, ed. Virginia Gunn (Lincoln, NE: American Quilt Study Group, 1998), 155–78.
54. See, for instance, "Minutes," 3 March 1943, from the WMSC Records and "Minutes," 1 March 1950, Dorcas Sisters Records, Kidron Mennonite Records, and "Minutes," 2 September 1965, Orrville WMSC Records.
55. "Treasurer's Report," November 1961, June 1963, October 1963, and December 1963, Sonnenberg from the WMSC Records.
56. "Minutes," 1 November 1939, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
57. Toews, 199–208; John H. Unruh, *In the Name of Christ: A History of the Mennonite Central Committee and Its Service, 1900–1951* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1952); "Mennonite Central Committee: A Snapshot," Mennonite Central Committee Homepage, available from <http://www.mennonitecc.ca/mcc/misc/Snapshot-at-75.html>, internet, accessed 26 January 1999.
58. "Minutes," 7 April 1971, Salem WIM Records; "Minutes," 6 Decem-

- ber 1978, Sonnenberg WMSC Records; "Minutes," 3 December 1980, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
59. "Mennonite Central Committee Material Aid Program," typed and reproduced information sheet, 1962, Salem WIM Records; "WMSA Handbook," 1965, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
 60. "Summary of MCC's Material Aid Needs," typed and reproduced information sheet, 1 May 1968, Orrville WMSC Records.
 61. "Are Material Aid Supplies Needed?" typed and reproduced information sheet, 1968, Orrville WMSC Records. For an introduction to the evolution of MCC projects, see Unruh, *In the Name of Christ*, and Keith Graber Miller, *Wise as Serpents, Innocent as Doves: American Mennonites Engage Washington* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).
 62. "Minutes," August 1971, Orrville WMSC Records; "Minutes," 5 March 1980, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records. By the mid-1990s, Mennonite Sewing Circles were no longer quilting for other people, though they still occasionally sold a quilt. Groups affiliated with other churches that continued to offer custom quilting charged 35¢ to 40¢ per yard. Some independent quilters reportedly charged as much as 50¢ per yard.
 63. "Minutes," 5 May 1971, Salem WIM Records.
 64. "Minutes," 14 December 1977, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records; "Minutes," 2 April 1981, Orrville WMSC Minutes.
 65. Relief Sale financial figures taken from the records of the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale Board, 1966 through 1995, primarily annual financial reports and minutes. Records in possession of group leaders, hereafter cited as "OMRSB Records."
 66. "Minutes," 1 June 1966, Salem WIM Records.
 67. "Minutes," 7 December 1966, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
 68. "Minutes," 1 September 1968, Orrville WMSC Records.
 69. "Minutes," 12 February 1969, Sonnenberg WMSC Records.
 70. Oak Grove WMSC interview.
 71. Salem (Kidron) WIM interview.
 72. Sonnenberg WMSC interview.
 73. "Minutes," 2 October 1968, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
 74. "Minutes," 24 September 1974, Women's Council Records, and "Minutes," 6 August 1980, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
 75. "Minutes," 8 September 1976, 14 September 1977, and 11 July 1979, Sonnenberg WMSC Records.
 76. "Minutes," 6 September 1972, and "Annual Handbook," 1994, Salem WIM Records.

77. *Ibid.*, "Minutes," 2 July 1969.
78. "Minutes," 7 October 1982, Orrville WMSC Records.
79. "Minutes," 29 January 1971, Women's Council Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
80. "Minutes," 5 June 1989, Orrville WMSC Records.
81. See, for instance, *Ibid.*, "Financial Report," 3 September 1981 to 6 August 1982, and Arlene Steiner to Orrville WMSC, handwritten bill for sewing and embroidery work, marked paid on 11 November 1979.
82. "Minutes," 14 October 1987, Sonnenberg WMSC Records. For the reception of antique quilts, see "Ohio Relief Sale Nets \$42,000," unidentified news clipping in Relief Sale 1972 folder, OMRSB Records, and "Kidron Relief Sale Raises \$200,000.00," *Daily Record* [Wooster, OH], 3 August 1987, D1.
83. "Minutes," 1 April 1970, Salem WIM Records.
84. *Ibid.*, 7 June 1972; "Minutes," 5 September 1974, Orrville WMSC Records; "Minutes," 5 February 1976, from the WMSC Records; and "Minutes," 22 January 1980, Women's Council Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
85. Brief descriptions of quilts can be found in the sale catalogs produced by the Ohio Mennonite Relief Sale Board beginning in 1982. OMRSB Records.
86. "Minutes," 8 January 1975, 5 February 1975, and 5 March 1975, Salem WIM Records.
87. "Minutes," 5 November 1981, January and February 1982, Orrville WMSC Records.
88. "Minutes," 7 May 1980, Sonnenberg WMSC Records.
89. "Minutes," 23 July 1974 and 7 July 1976, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
90. "Minutes," 6 November 1974, Salem WIM Records.
91. "Minutes," 25 September 1973, Women's Council Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
92. "Minutes," 2 August 1972, Salem WIM Records.
93. "Minutes," 4-5 November 1975 and 3 December 1975, from the WMSC Records, Kidron Mennonite Records.
94. See J. Howard Kauffman and Leo Driedger, *The Mennonite Mosaic: Identity and Modernization* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991) for a thorough statistical exploration of the Mennonite movement to a "modern" lifestyle more in line with the rest of U.S. society than with their Amish co-religionists.
95. Salem (Kidron) WIM interview.