

# Home Town Slants

## The Yoder Family of Elkhart County . . .

LAST AUG. 21 in Studebaker park there was a reunion of the Yoder family. A gathering of a few dozen. But we wonder what would have happened if all the Yoders in Elkhart county had come?

Just how many there are bearing the time-honored name in this section we can't say. But the new telephone book gives a hint. The Yoders far outnumber the Smiths (of all people!) in Goshen, Middlebury, Dunlap and Wakarusa. In Elkhart, they trail the Smiths by a small margin. But they're catching up, with an increase of from 41 to 50 Yoder listings here since the last phone book was issued.

As a comparative newcomer to the area, your columnist was particularly curious as to what extent the folks bearing this name are inter-related. He didn't get too clear an answer, beyond establishing that there seem to be several distinct lines of descent. But he uncovered some other facts that may interest you.

N. P. Springer, assistant to the librarian at Mennonite Historical library, Goshen college, tells us he has been unable to trace the origin of "Yoder." He knows only that there have been variations in the spelling, such as "Toder" and "Joder." The name is of German-Swiss derivation.

"Memoirs of Indiana," written in 1893, gave us our first good clue. Looking at a copy in Elkhart public library, we came upon an account of one Jacob Yoder, who seems at that time to have been a leading citizen of Goshen.

"For generations, the family have been members of the Amish Mennonite church and were originally from Switzerland," says the biographer.

"They fled on account of religious persecution to America, and sought a home in Pennsylvania, where asylum had been offered them by the great lawyer and benefactor, William Penn. The Yoders settled in Lancaster county and were peaceable, law-abiding, thrifty, industrious farmers . . ."

The account goes on to detail the genealogy leading up to birth of Jacob Yoder on Sept. 2, 1814. Jacob went to Wayne county in Ohio at the age of 23. In 1847, he came to Indiana and settled on a 180-acre farm near Goshen, later enlarged to 600 acres.

Mr. Yoder . . . "has been remarkably successful as a husbandman," says the book.

More up to date help was given us by Huber Yoder, 1721 Prairie ave., principal of the

Nappanee grade school. Mr. Yoder's uncle, A. B. Yoder, a retired United Missionary minister at Wakarusa, is now compiling history of that branch of the family. He is past his 80th birthday.

The first ancestor of whom Mr. Yoder has record is John Yoder, who emigrated to America from Germany in 1713. One of three sons of a widowed mother, he settled in Bucks county, Pa. Family history records that he was the first, or at any rate one of the first, to bring China dishes to this country.

John Yoder, big and powerful, was known as "Strong John." He slung 100 pound sacks about with ease. Once, in a fight, he threw an adversary in a grain sack.

John's sons, Casper, Jacob and Abraham, all were Revolutionary war soldiers.

Abraham's line has been traced to a grandson, Peter, who settled in Ohio. One of Peter's eight children, Henry B., was Huber's grandfather. Henry settled in Wakarusa.

Huber Yoder is a first cousin of the later Ford Yoder, Truth photographer until his death last month. Ford was Huber's only relative of that name in Elkhart. However, Huber says he is related to all the Yoders in Wakarusa.

It is clear that the Yoders have been prominently identified with Mennonite church congregations.

The Mennonite archives show that in 1866, John C. and Tobias Yoder helped to organize the Yoder Corner congregation in Lagrange county. They also served as ministers.

This, so help us, is what we know about the Yoders of northern Indiana.

R. W. S.