

“Our Christian Duty”

Piety, Politics, and Temperance in Berne, Indiana, 1886-1907

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There is some bad looking blood brewing at the usually quiet and modest town of Berne, between the energetic followers of those championing the anti-saloon cause and those personally interested in antagonizing this movement...It is evident that all is not lovely, and that the public may hear more of the troubles that are emanating from these conflicting sources.

The [Decatur, Indiana] Democrat, June 4, 1903

The city of Berne, located in northeast Indiana, about thirty miles south of Fort Wayne, was established in 1886 after six individuals, including four second-generation Mennonite immigrants, petitioned for its incorporation.¹ At the time, Berne was home to four saloons and 341

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¹Petition of June 9, 1886, *Register of Orders Paid by the Treasurer of Adams County 1886-1896*, Berne City Building, Berne, Indiana; Mennoniten Gemeinde, *Gliederverzeichnis der Mennoniten Gemeinde bei Berne, Indiana* (Berne, Ind., 1898); Mennonite Church, *Sunday School Records, 1877-1890*, Historical Room, First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana. Within this paper I have attributed the designation of “Mennonite” only to those people whose names I found in one of the above mentioned church records. Since many of the early Mennonite settlers were related by blood and marriage, several family names are common throughout the history of Berne. Of these, Baumgartner, Habegger, Lehman, Liechty, Nussbaum, and Sprunger were numerically predominant. Although these names may denote an individual’s Mennonite ancestry, their membership in the church is not a given. Those whom I designate as having a “Mennonite last name” are people who are not found in these books, yet share the same name as one of Berne’s founding Mennonite families. It is possible that these members could have split from the church or were not yet baptized into it.

people, nearly half of whom were Mennonites. By the turn of the century, its size had tripled due to the business generated by a branch of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad and by its own internal growth.² In 1902, oil was discovered a few miles north of town. Scores of speculators and transient workers flooded the community. Caught off guard by this influx of unfamiliar working-class men, members of the local Mennonite church felt their quiet community was spiraling out of control. As saloon owners prospered and church folk petitioned for prohibition, violence ruled. Within a period of four years, the Mennonite editor of the town newspaper was beaten three times, two Mennonite women engaged in a fistfight with a “stock buyer,” and one house was dynamited.³

The Mennonites of Berne faced a difficult choice. They could resettle elsewhere, accept the presence of saloons in their town, or fight against them. A rising second generation of Berne’s Mennonites chose the last of these options. Establishing connections to ecumenical religious organizations (most notably the Indiana Anti-Saloon League), filing lawsuits against saloon owners, and running in local elections, the members of this generation sought to restore order to the town. In the process, however, they also made critical decisions concerning the way in which they engaged the broader world. Embracing the temperance movement allowed Berne’s Mennonites to recast their traditional belief in social and political separation from “the world” as a belief in abstaining from the “worldly” practice of consuming alcohol. In doing so, they found a way to affirm their separateness and sense of piety even as they began utilizing new mechanisms of political and legal power that were granted by the state. In this manner, Berne’s Mennonites used the temperance movement as a path to acculturation in mainstream American society.

²Claren Neuenschwander, *The Founding of Berne, Indiana (1871-1872)* (Berne, Ind., 1997), 10. Also see David L. Habegger and Karen C. Adams, *The Swiss of Adams and Wells Counties, Indiana, 1838-1862* (Fort Wayne, Ind., 2002); “History of Berne” article series, *The [Berne, Indiana] Witness* (hereafter *The Witness*), 1897; N. G. Fankhauser, *Thirtieth Anniversary Souvenir Edition of The Witness: Berne, Indiana, September 3, 1926* (Berne, Ind., 1926); *Berne Centennial* (n.p., 1952). Copying may have taken place between these sources, but the variety of authors and the breadth of time between their publications give hope that the information they share in common is accurate.

³Fred Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne, Ind. Not a Novel, but a Real History. Truth Stranger than Fiction* (Berne, Ind., 1913), 42, 26-35.



Brenneman Saloon, c. 1890s. By 1890, Berne's Mennonites perceived the town's growing number of saloons as a threat to their calm, ordered lives.

Courtesy of the Heritage Room of the Berne Public Library

Finding their start in the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement, Mennonites embraced such iconoclastic beliefs as believer's baptism, the separation of church and state, personal nonviolence, a rejection of church hierarchy, and the refusal to take an oath.⁴ Holding these unpopular beliefs as central expressions of their faith made Mennonites social outsiders throughout much of Europe. Without a formal church hierarchy, lay leaders usually determined individual congregations' relationships to the state. They based these decisions upon a mixture of motivations ranging from pragmatism to strict religious devotion. Some chose death, persecution, or banishment when confronted with official intolerance and unsympathetic neighbors; others chose voluntary migration, adaptation of their beliefs, or a complete acceptance of the social order.⁵

Threatened by those in power during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European Mennonites sought to be "Die Stillen im Lande" (the quiet in the land) throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They tended to their own communities and stayed away from urban power centers. This self-imposed and externally enforced separation aided in the development of a "dual kingdom" or "two kingdom" theology which specifies that the "kingdom of God" (the church) is called out from the "kingdom of earth" (society). Mennonite historian James Juhnke notes that Mennonite communities exhibited "a decisive dualism of church and world, reluctance or refusal to become involved in public life, and a rejection of worldly pride accompanied by a premium upon humility."⁶

⁴Throughout much of post-Reformation Europe, Anabaptists were viewed as socially disruptive, if not seditious. The refusal of baptism within the state church was a rejection of the entire social order. At a time when membership in the church meant membership in society, remaining unbaptized was tantamount to anarchy. Although Mennonites accepted the government as being ordained by God to maintain authority in a "fallen" world, they also believed that they were not of this world and that their first allegiance was to God rather than the state. Furthermore, Mennonites rejected a formal church hierarchy due to its association with state-sponsored churches and because they felt it placed an artificial barrier between God and the believer. Concerning oath taking, Mennonites believed in a literal interpretation of the New Testament mandate to let your yea be yea and your nay, nay. For a fuller account of Mennonite belief and practice see John H. Yoder, ed. and trans., *The Schleithem Confession* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1977). Written in 1527 and largely attributed to Anabaptist Michael Sattler, this book was a confession of faith that gave focus and clarity to the Anabaptist movement and later, the Mennonite Church.

⁵For a general overview of Anabaptist and Mennonite belief and practice see Cornelius J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and the Mennonites*, 3rd ed. (Scottsdale, Pa., 1993).

⁶James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1989), 33.

During the early nineteenth century, hundreds of Mennonites from northeast Switzerland, the Palatinate, and Bavaria settled across the Midwest from Ohio to Iowa.⁷ These immigrants chose to leave Europe for many reasons, among them the turmoil caused by the Napoleonic wars, a series of poor harvests, and the threat of mandatory military service. Like other German-speaking immigrants, especially those with strong church affiliations, Mennonites often came by way of chain migration. After establishing themselves in the United States, immigrants wrote back to relatives in Germany or Switzerland, tempting them with opportunities for cheap land and the freedoms provided by a democratic government.⁸

German-speaking immigrants often arrived with only marginal assets, and their new circumstances compelled them to develop original techniques for agricultural and domestic production.⁹ Like other settlers on the American frontier, they struggled to recreate the familiar world they remembered, while also seeking to change and improve it. This struggle often led to new forms of sociability and a blending of heritages and inventions as they walked the path between the known and the unknown. Mennonites who came to the United States adopted new social and religious practices, such as public education and the hiring of

⁷Samuel F. Pannabecker, *Open Doors: The History of the General Conference Mennonite Church* (Newton, Kans., 1975), 39.

⁸Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1988), 33-34. For a discussion of chain migration in the German context see Linda Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana, Ill., 1996), 12. For a discussion of its Mennonite context see Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 38-42; Grant M. Stoltzfus, *Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference From the Colonial Period in Pennsylvania to 1968* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1969), 44. For an excellent overview of the reasons for German immigration and the acculturation process, see Walter D. Kamphoefner, “German Emigration Research, North, South, and East: Findings, Methods, and Open Questions,” in *People in Transit: German Migrations in Comparative Perspective, 1820-1930*, eds. Dirk Hoerder and Jörg Nagler (Washington, D.C., 1995), 19-34; Dirk Hoerder, “From Migrants to Ethnic: Acculturation in a Societal Framework,” in *European Migrants: Global and Local Perspectives*, eds. Dirk Hoerder and Leslie Page Moch (Boston, Mass., 1996), 211-62. For more detailed information on specific groups of nineteenth-century Mennonite immigrants see Melvin Gingerich, *The Mennonites in Iowa* (Iowa City, Iowa, 1939); J. C. Wenger, *The Mennonites in Indiana and Michigan* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1961); Grant M. Stoltzfus, *Mennonites of the Ohio and Eastern Conference From the Colonial Period in Pennsylvania to 1968* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1969); Willard H. Smith, *Mennonites in Illinois* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1983).

⁹Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 8.

professional pastors.¹⁰ Mennonite historian Willard H. Smith notes that during this time, “Mennonite beliefs and practices were in a state of flux, changing from the rigidly traditional to more progressive forms.”¹¹

Most European Mennonites had considered themselves beyond the pale of public service or even civic involvement, since this often required an oath of loyalty to the government. While those who immigrated to North America initially preserved this separation, a few grew increasingly willing to become politically involved after the American Revolution and the enfranchisement of all white, landowning males.¹² In the early nineteenth century, some Pennsylvania Mennonites not only voted, but also were elected to minor public offices.¹³ Other Mennonites, however, fell more closely in line with the view of Ohio deacon David Metzler that politics was “an idolatrous Babel business.” Writing to a Pennsylvania bishop in 1846, Metzler argued that Ohio Mennonites saw the act of electing or hiring a person who would be required to take an oath or use the sword as tantamount to doing so oneself.¹⁴

The majority of opinions likely lay between these two poles, neither embracing political involvement nor completely shunning it. Asked in 1867 whether serving as a public road supervisor violated “the principles of a nonresistant Christianity,” church officials responded that the

¹⁰William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin, “Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History,” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles, and Jay Gitlin (New York, 1992), 9-10. For a discussion of a flexible interpretation of the immigrant frontier experience, not necessarily bound by spatial or temporal limitations, see Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 7-8. For a discussion of this struggle in a specifically Mennonite context see Royden K. Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Urbana, Ill., 1993); Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 128.

¹¹Smith, *Mennonites in Illinois*, 39.

¹²Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 145. Eighteenth-century Mennonites who settled in southeastern Pennsylvania near much larger groups of Lutherans and Reformed Germans (also called Pennsylvania Dutch) were more likely to become politically involved at this time than other Mennonites. James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt contend that “politics within the Pennsylvania German milieu could appear less a compromise with an evil world than an expression of participation in a friendly ethnic community.” J. Lehman and Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War* (Baltimore, Md., 2007), 23.

¹³J. Lehman and Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*, 23.

¹⁴David Metzler to Jacob Hostetter and Christian Herr, September 2, 1846, quoted in Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 147. As noted before, most decisions concerning religious protocol were made at the local level. Nevertheless, an informal structure of church leadership developed in some areas throughout Europe and the United States. For an early history of Mennonites in the United States see Richard K. MacMaster, *Land, Piety, Peoplehood: The Establishment of Mennonite Communities in America, 1683-1790* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1979).

answer depended on the wording of the state law, but that in any case, “great caution is necessary.”¹⁵ Toward the end of the century, opinions still varied on the ethics of service to one’s city, state, or country, but some were taking steps toward political involvement through voting and local office holding.

In 1852, a group of roughly eighty emigrants from the canton of Bern, Switzerland, traveled to the United States. After passing through two previously established Mennonite communities in Ohio, the emigrants ended their journey in Adams County, Indiana, within ten miles of a smaller Mennonite congregation named the Baumgartner Church. Due to their close proximity, these two groups communicated often and provided each other with mutual aid.¹⁶

The Mennonites who arrived in Adams County in 1852 built their first permanent building between 1856 and 1860, a few blocks away from what would become Berne’s business district, and named themselves the “Münsterberg Church” after their home church in Switzerland.¹⁷ The act represented a clear break from their past. No longer living as tenants with an insubstantial hold on their land, the congregation saw their church as a spiritual and physical foothold in their new homeland. Constructing this building “was a fairly radical new step,” according to local historians David L. Habegger and Karen C. Adams, “for it would have been possible for them to divide into more congregations so that they could continue to worship in their homes, as was being done in Switzerland and as the Amish continued to do.”¹⁸ As Pickle notes of other German religious groups in the nineteenth-century Midwest, the new church “played a vital role in providing a center for the immigrants’ cultural and communal life.”¹⁹

¹⁵Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 156. Schlabach quotes from the *Minutes of the Indiana-Michigan Conference, 1864-1929* (Scottsdale, Pa., [1930]), 12. The Indiana-Michigan Conference was alternately known as the Indiana Conference.

¹⁶David Baumgartner to “Friends in the Fatherland, 1849,” *Brief Historical Sketches of Seven Generations: Descendants of Deacon David Baumgartner, who was born in 1735*, comp. and trans. S. H. Baumgartner (Indianapolis, 1908), 7-8, 13, 21.

¹⁷Naomi Lehman, *Pilgrimage of a Congregation: First Mennonite Church Berne, Indiana* (Berne, Ind., 1982), 23.

¹⁸Habegger and Adams, *The Swiss of Adams and Wells Counties*, 100. In Europe, meeting in members’ homes was practiced in order to serve as a visible distinction in contrast to worldly churches that owned church buildings and lived within the state’s precepts, but also because Mennonites were simply not permitted by authorities to build such a building.

¹⁹Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 78.

Strong community ties did not guarantee a robust economy. The Mennonites of Adams County remained isolated from trade and commerce. Fort Wayne, the nearest commercial market, was a three-day journey, and the closest general store was nearly ten miles away. When the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad made plans to lay a track through Adams County in 1871, two farmers from the Münsterberg congregation, John Hilty and Abraham Lehman, contacted the railroad and suggested that the track run through their properties. With the added influence of county commissioner Josiah Crawford, the railroad scrapped its plans for building a station further south in exchange for a deed to the land required for building a switch and depot.²⁰ Secure in this victory, Hilty and Lehman brought in two more Mennonites—surveyor Christian Stauffer and carpenter Jacob Reusser—to draw up plats for the land and construct a platform.

Despite further construction and steady population growth during the 1870s, Berne remained unincorporated and was considered by visitors to be an isolated outpost. Passing through the area in 1872, Susanna Ruth Krehbiel noted that “the Swiss in Berne I found were far behind the times—they had just acquired the railroad, only one store, and a few houses. One could hardly trudge through the freshly plowed earth covered with melting snow across the street from the depot to the store.”²¹ Yet within a decade the town boasted a drug store, hotel, stockyards, and grain elevator, while the population stood at roughly two hundred.²²

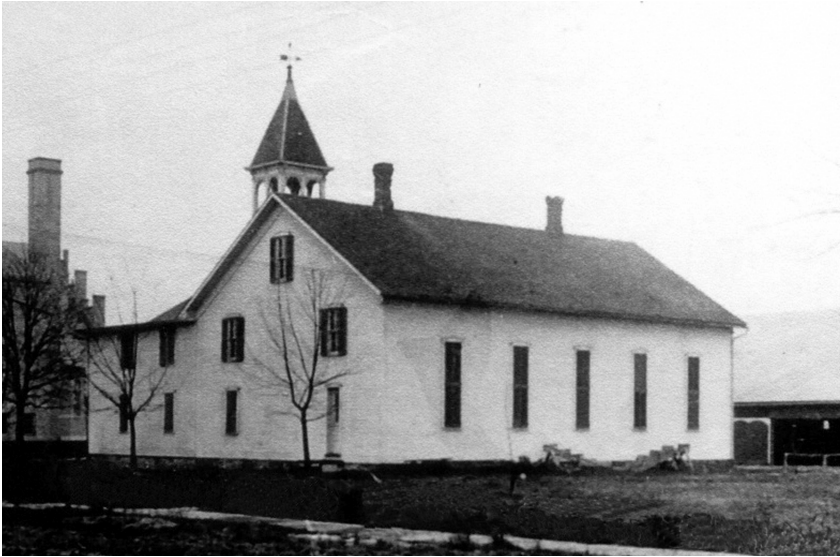
Due to the lack of records dating from before 1877, it is difficult to ascertain how Mennonites reacted to Berne’s growth. Town historian Claren Neuenschwander states that “there were those in the conservative community who were opposed to having a town in their midst.”²³

²⁰Nineteenth-century Mennonites, by and large, had few qualms about improving their economic situation or increasing their interaction with the marketplace as long as it did not compromise their religious beliefs or lead to ostentatious displays of wealth. For a discussion of Mennonite socioeconomic attitudes see Schlabach’s chapter “Land, Wealth, Community” in *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 33-59. For a general study of Russian Mennonites’ relationship to the broader world in the 1870s, due in part to their proximity to the railroad, see James C. Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms: The Political Acculturation of the Kansas Mennonites* (Newton, Kans., 1975). For an in-depth look at the Russian Mennonite interaction with the marketplace in two small communities in Manitoba and Nebraska, see Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market*.

²¹Quoted in N. Lehman, *Pilgrimage of a Congregation*, 44.

²²Neuenschwander, *The Founding of Berne, Indiana*, 10.

²³*Ibid.*, 3.



Old Mennonite Church, c. 1900 and New Mennonite Church, 1912. The architecture of Berne's Mennonite churches reflected the community's growing prosperity and engagement with the outside world.

Courtesy of the Heritage Room of the Berne Public Library

Although he does not clearly state the identity of this “conservative community,” the term probably applies to members of the Mennonite congregation, particularly considering the general distaste that many nineteenth-century Mennonites had for urban areas. Neuenschwander goes on to state that these conservatives opposed the perceived “moral corruption [that] usually pervaded centers of population.”²⁴ Keeping with the idea of a separation between the church and the “fallen world,” it is possible that some of these rural Mennonites were skeptical of the improved communication and access to distant places that the railroad would bring. They may have viewed this development not so much as a boon to the local community but more as a sordid purveyor of worldliness and modernity. Nevertheless, Berne continued to expand and was soon home to nearly a dozen Mennonite businesses including two lumber companies, a hotel, a jewelry store, and a bank.²⁵

During the late nineteenth century, the temperance movement took hold as a fundamental criterion of religious and political identity in the United States. Historian Richard Jensen has asserted that “from the 1830s to the 1930s no debate at the local level agitated this country more, year in and year out, than the question of controlling alcohol.”²⁶ The issue divided society along many lines, including those between Protestants and Catholics, native-born citizens and immigrants, men and women, and urban and rural dwellers. As a result, the temperance movement inspired the creation of many religious and secular organizations that linked alcohol consumption to moral and economic problems and the harmful effects of immigration and urbanization.

In Indiana, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) pioneered one of the first grassroots temperance initiatives during the 1870s, and by the early 1880s its temperance societies existed in dozens

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Fankhauser, *Thirtieth Anniversary Souvenir Edition of The Witness*, 13, 42, 68-69.

²⁶Richard J. Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago, Ill., 1971), xii, 58. See also Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York, 1970), 69-77; Frederick Luebke, *Germans in the New World: Essays in the History of Immigration* (Urbana, Ill., 1990), 84-85. In general, I have chosen to use the word temperance instead of prohibition since it was often unclear as to whether the individuals and organizations discussed in this paper wished to control the sale of alcohol, restrict its consumption, or outlaw its production and distribution entirely.

of towns from Evansville to Fort Wayne.²⁷ In 1893, a professional reform organization named the Anti-Saloon League was founded in Ohio, and by 1900 its Indiana branch had become the state's premier temperance organization. The league's phenomenal success relied on a blend of central planning and grassroots cooperation. One of the main components of this combined approach was the organization's willingness to provide local church congregations with lobbying and legal help.²⁸ Claiming to represent "the Church in Action Against the Saloon," the Anti-Saloon League built steam through local, state, and national initiatives. For their part, many churches came out in support of the temperance movement and its message that "the saloon must go."²⁹

Mennonite attitudes toward alcohol consumption transformed from ambivalence to wide-scale support of temperance during the nineteenth century.³⁰ Although visiting saloons was always frowned upon due to the presence of gambling and prostitution, many early nineteenth-century Mennonites had considered moderate drinking in the home to be acceptable, as long as it did not lead to drunkenness or alcoholism.³¹ In fact, Pennsylvania Mennonite Abraham Overholt had estab-

²⁷Charles E. Canup, "The Temperance Movement in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 16 (June 1920), 114-18. For a concise account of the WCTU's national efforts, see Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years that Changed America* (New York, 1996), 35-45. For a more complete account of this organization's national and international programs, see Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The WCTU in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991).

²⁸Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis, 1968), 494-98; Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*, 207. For a broader account of the development of the Anti-Saloon League and how its professionalism and use of new technologies affected the development of interest group lobbying and the temperance movement in general, see K. Austin Kerr, *Organized for Prohibition: A New History of the Anti-Saloon League* (New Haven, Conn., 1985). For an account of the league's relationship with other temperance organizations including the WCTU, see Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933* (Chicago, Ill., 1998).

²⁹Jack S. Blocker, *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston, Mass., 1989), 102-103. This quote was the title of an Anti-Saloon League pamphlet modeled after a catechism's question-and-answer format. For a discussion of the importance that local church congregations held in the Anti-Saloon League's tactical strategy and the financial help these churches provided this organization see Ernest Hurst Cherrington, *History of the Anti-Saloon League* (Westerville, Ohio, 1913), 61-62; John Marshall Barker, *The Saloon Problem and Social Reform* (Boston, Mass., 1905), 211.

³⁰Raymond Currie, Leo Driedger, and Rick Linden, "Abstinence and Moderation: Mixing Mennonite Drinking Norms," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 53 (October 1979), 266-68.

³¹Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 167.

lished a distillery under the name "Old Overholt Whiskey."³² This relationship with alcohol started to change as the result of larger trends in nineteenth-century religious life that connected temperance to Christian virtue. To a people who prided themselves on their piety, self-restraint, and thrift, abstinence from alcohol became a functional as well as a moral commitment. Writing about the Russian Mennonites who immigrated to Kansas in the 1870s, Juhnke notes that "[t]emperance had special appeal as a religious and moral crusade which involved the Mennonite conception of their own social status. Mennonites were not afraid to differ from society, but to reject the temperance movement would have been to contradict their belief in their own moral superiority."³³

Mennonites expressed their feelings on temperance through church publications that were distributed at the conference level. In the late nineteenth century, the two largest conferences in North America were the General Conference Mennonites (GC) and the (old) Mennonite Church (MC). GC Mennonites emphasized the autonomy of the local congregation and, as a result, some of their churches tended to be more progressive on social and political issues. MC churches were more hierarchical in their organization and more conservative in their practices.³⁴ Two of the largest English-language publications for these conferences were *The Mennonite* and *The Gospel Herald*, respectively. Both stressed the importance of temperance for personal morality and social improvement, yet they often proved inconclusive in their assessment of the role that Mennonites should play in the temperance movement at large.

The First Mennonite Church of Berne was a GC church whose members would have subscribed to *The Mennonite*. The magazine had been established in 1885 by the Eastern District of the GC in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, but in 1902 the GC assumed control of the paper itself and transferred its publication to Berne.³⁵ From the begin-

³²Harold S. Bender and Sam Steiner, "Alcohol," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A4385.html> (accessed January 12, 2010).

³³Juhnke, *A People of Two Kingdoms*, 44. See also Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 170-71.

³⁴Edmund Kaufman and Henry Poettcker, "General Conference Mennonite Church (GCM)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/G4647ME.html> (accessed May 20, 2010).

³⁵N. B. Grubb, "The Origin and Development of the Mennonite," *The Mennonite*, January 2, 1902, p. 2.

ning, *The Mennonite* printed various articles on temperance from Sunday school lessons, biblical injunctions against gluttony, and encouragements for "clean living" aimed at young adults to testimonials from former drinkers. The magazine's June 1887 issue featured the story of a Pittsburgh bar owner who came home to find his children pretending to run a saloon. The six-year-old was "tending the bar" for his two brothers and a neighbor boy. The siblings were drunk and stumbling around the backyard, while the third boy was passed out under a tree. This episode demoralized the bar owner so much that he sold his business and gave up drinking.³⁶ Stories like this appeared in *The Mennonite* throughout the 1880s and 1890s and continued apace when the publication relocated to Berne.

Most of these articles were sentimental warnings about the potential evils of alcohol consumption and did not necessarily call on readers to take legal or political action against the liquor interest. Political activism remained a contentious issue for Mennonites into the twentieth century, and *The Mennonite* was probably unwilling to take a strong position due to the GC emphasis on congregational autonomy. In 1903, the publication ran a story on a symposium of Mennonite leaders titled "The Proper Attitude of Mennonites Toward Government." Two members of the five-man panel agreed that voting was the "bounded duty" of all Mennonites; one considered it right when "corruption in politics can thereby be removed"; while the remaining two advised against voting since it might violate precepts of swearing oaths and nonresistance. The editor, for his part, judiciously staked out a middle path, writing that "[t]hose who do not believe in voting are, to say the least, just as scriptural as those who vote."³⁷

Similarly, members of the MC debated the efficacy of Mennonite participation in the temperance movement. Their publication, the *Herald of Truth*, initially had little to say on the issue of temperance; it was not until *Herald* founder John F. Funk hired assistant editor John S. Coffman in 1879 that the publication began taking a harder line on the alcohol question.³⁸ From the early 1880s until his death in 1899,

³⁶"Playing Saloon," *The Mennonite*, June 6, 1887, p. 135.

³⁷H. G. Allebach, "Editorial," *The Mennonite*, January 30, 1903, p. 4.

³⁸James William Clemens, "Changes in the *Herald of Truth's* Support for Temperance and Prohibition" (senior thesis, Goshen College, 1976). See also Ralph Smucker, "Mennonite Attitudes toward Alcohol, 1870-1920" (senior thesis, Goshen College, 1961).

Coffman tirelessly promoted the virtues of abstinence and argued that the political support of temperance legislation was morally justified.³⁹ Many did not agree with Coffman's line of reasoning, as evidenced by letters published in the *Herald*. For some, temperance was either a personal or communal choice and had few political implications.

Articles and letters in both *The Mennonite* and the *Herald of Truth* indicated a consensus that personal abstinence was the Christian ideal, while opinions were split on the issue of political participation in the temperance movement. While Coffman's editorializing resonated with many of his readers, they did not necessarily apply their convictions toward political activism. For some Mennonite farmers, their rural locations may have acted as a natural barrier to civic participation; other congregants may not have perceived saloons as a threat to their moral universe. Those who were politically minded had a host of acceptable choices available to them as to how they might engage the issue. Since the GC emphasized local autonomy, town congregations had the latitude to participate in social and political initiatives drawing them closer to mainstream United States society.⁴⁰ As a result, Berne's Mennonites were on the leading edge of a twentieth-century development that witnessed the denomination linking personal abstinence to political participation.

At its core, the Mennonite decision to embrace temperance entailed questions about which kingdom they should try to improve, and whether or not it was possible to improve both. As we shall see, the Mennonites of Berne increasingly saw temperance as a question not only of personal morality, but also of the propriety of working to improve society through secular means. The attitudes of this community represent a crystallization of how some people of this faith tried to rectify their dual kingdom theology with political participation.

Embodying the Berne Mennonites' shift toward engagement with broader society was nineteen-year-old Samuel F. Sprunger. Sprunger, part of the emerging second generation of Mennonites in Berne, had been only four years old at the time of his family's immigration to the United States.⁴¹ He had no firsthand knowledge of Europe or of the conflicts with the world experienced by his elders. In 1868, this second-gen-

³⁹Smucker, "Mennonite Attitudes toward Alcohol, 1870-1920," 10.

⁴⁰Bender and Steiner, "Alcohol."

⁴¹N. Lehman, *Pilgrimage of a Congregation*, 36.

eration Mennonite was chosen by lot to lead the Münsterberg Church, located about six blocks from Berne's growing business district.⁴² Ordained by Christian Baumgartner, minister of the Baumgartner Church, Sprunger held this post until 1903.⁴³ Historian Theron Schlabach's concept of the Mennonite "quickenings" best describes the perceptible shift in attitudes to the outside world during the period of Sprunger's service to the church.⁴⁴ After the Civil War, Mennonite groups began looking to other denominations in the United States for examples of church organization. Many churches, including the Mennonites, began founding Sunday schools, mission societies, and colleges. Schlabach reasons that these and other organizational developments allowed Mennonites to find common ground with American Protestants during the late nineteenth century.

Prior to Sprunger's installment as pastor, the consumption of alcoholic beverages appeared to be a common practice in this Mennonite community. Church historian Naomi Lehman claims that at this time "[n]early everybody kept wine and cider in the cellar at home."⁴⁵ In fact Baumgartner, the pastor who had ordained Sprunger, used to stop at a saloon prior to his Sunday sermon. This practice did not bother the congregation as long as it did not lead to drunken preaching.⁴⁶

As a young pastor, Sprunger chose the cause of temperance to galvanize the younger members of the newly established First Mennonite Church of Berne. His church was located downtown, across the street

⁴²Eva F. Sprunger, *The First Hundred Years: A History of The Mennonite Church in Adams County, Indiana, 1838-1938* (Berne, Ind., 1938), 23-24. The practice of choosing a minister by lot is explained in Sprunger's book. In short, members of the congregation nominated candidates. Afterward, a special Sunday was designated for the lot to take place. On this date a number of books corresponding to the number of candidates were laid out on a table with a slip of paper placed in one. Candidates then filed past, selecting one book each. The candidate who chose the book with the slip in it was "chosen" as the new minister. Hereafter, Samuel F. Sprunger will be referred to by last name only, all other Sprungers will be identified by first initial and last name.

⁴³N. Lehman, *Pilgrimage of a Congregation*, 61.

⁴⁴For a more in-depth explanation of this concept see Schlabach, "Reveille for Die Stillen Im Lande: A Stir Among Mennonites in the Late Nineteenth Century: Awakening or Quickenings? Revival or Acculturation? Anabaptist or What?" *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 51, no. 3 (1977), 213-26. See also Schlabach's chapter "The Quickening at Century's End," in *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 295-321.

⁴⁵N. Lehman, *Pilgrimage of a Congregation*, 350.

⁴⁶Sprunger, *The First Hundred Years*, 33-34.

from the old Münsterberg building, and was composed of members of the former Baumgartner and Münsterberg congregations. Born and raised in the United States, these younger members were, on the whole, engaged with society and open to new attitudes and practices.⁴⁷

This group's attitudes toward temperance may be viewed as an expression of Schlabach's quickening and Jensen's assertions about pietistic religious groups' crusades against alcohol. Through the temperance movement, young Mennonites reinterpreted their traditions of piety and collectivism to emphasize personal abstinence and to engage in a communal fight against those who sold alcohol.⁴⁸ They recognized the expediency of taking up a popular cause, combining it with a moral dimension, and using it to implement local political change. In doing so, they found a way to remain true to their faith while connecting themselves to a broader American culture.

While these ideological changes were taking place among the Mennonites, Berne continued its steady growth through the platting of more land and the establishment of new businesses. By the time of its incorporation Berne was home to four saloons. For some in the community, this ushered in the specter of drunkenness, violence, and public indecency, and led to a growing concern over the alcohol issue. Although the Reformed Church and the small, rural Evangelical Mennonite Church also had members worried over the presence of saloons, First Mennonite Church quickly became the leader in articulating and implementing the temperance position in Berne.⁴⁹

During the winter months of 1886, nine Mennonites established the Christlicher Mäzigekeits-Verein von Bern (Christian Temperance Society of

⁴⁷For a discussion of the cultural flexibility of immigrant groups and how these groups adapted (rather than assimilated) to U.S. culture, see Kathleen Neils Conzen, et al., "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the U.S.A.," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 12 (Fall 1992), 3-41.

⁴⁸See Conzen, et al., "The Invention of Ethnicity," for a more detailed analysis of how symbols of ethnicity were reinterpreted as a process of adaptation. For a discussion on how some late nineteenth-century Mennonites were beginning to view the American political order as "an instrument for God's purposes," see Schlabach's section "Mennonite progressivism and politics," in *Peace, Faith, Nation*, 163-72.

⁴⁹This Reformed Church was located a few blocks away from First Mennonite. It was a predecessor to Berne's United Church of Christ. The Evangelical Mennonite Church was an offshoot of a local Amish congregation and was earlier called the "Egli Amish," after its founder Henry Egly. See E. E. Rupp and Stan Nussbaum, "Evangelical Mennonite Church (United States)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/E936.html> (accessed May 20, 2010).



Fred Rohrer, one of Berne's most dedicated temperance advocates, at the office of *The Witness* with his employees. Rohrer stands on the far right.

Courtesy of the Heritage Room of the Berne Public Library

Berne, or CTSB) and met several times to discuss the town's "awful situation."⁵⁰ The most important decision resulting from these meetings was a plan to incorporate Berne and thereby establish control over the sale of liquor licenses. After winning a majority of votes in a plebiscite, four Mennonites and two non-Mennonites drafted a petition for the town's incorporation, which was accepted on December 20, 1886. At this time, Berne had 330 residents, of whom eighty-two were males of voting age.⁵¹

Chief among the CTSB's members was second-generation immigrant Fred Rohrer, one of the strongest proponents for temperance in the Mennonite church and the larger community, founder of Berne's weekly newspaper *The Witness*, and author of the book *Saloon Fight at Berne*.⁵²

⁵⁰Fankhauser, *Thirtieth Anniversary Souvenir Edition of The Witness*, 10.

⁵¹*Register of Orders Paid by the Treasurer of Adams County 1886-1896*; Sprunger, *The First Hundred Years*, 129; Mennoniten Gemeinde, *Gliederverzeichnis der Mennoniten Gemeinde bei Berne, Indiana*; Mennonite Church, *Sunday School Records, 1877-1890*.

⁵²*Saloon Fight at Berne*, which highlights Rohrer's personal involvement in the crusade against the saloons, was written at the request of the Indiana state superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League, E. S. Shumaker, and includes a forward by James Franklin Hanly, governor of Indiana from 1905 to 1909. It details Rohrer's perspective on the struggle of the CTSB to eject the saloons from Berne. I have attempted to corroborate Rohrer's narrative with local newspapers and a number of secondary sources.

While Sprunger preached the virtues of temperance within the church, Rohrer took the fight to the streets, allying the CTSB with national temperance organizations.⁵³ Although church chronicler Eva Sprunger claims that some in the church “did not sanction” Sprunger’s decision to join the CTSB, it was not long before the cause was not only accepted in the church but became one of its animating concerns.⁵⁴ Forty years later, Rohrer claimed that “it was due to [Sprunger’s] untiring preaching of temperance and shunning of the place of intoxicants that sentiment was built up.”⁵⁵

The CTSB was one of many voices in the temperance choir during the 1870s and 1880s throughout the Midwest. During these years, temperance organizations sponsored a slate of proposed prohibition amendments to state constitutions (Iowa in 1880, Michigan and Wisconsin in 1881, and Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio in 1882) as well as the implementation of local option laws, which allowed cities and counties voluntarily to become dry.⁵⁶ Although Indiana had no local option law on the books at this time, city governments did have the power to control the sale of liquor licenses.

After Berne’s incorporation, the first order of business for the CTSB was to assert control over the newly formed town board of trustees.⁵⁷ Charter member D. C. Sprunger, describing this undertaking as “Our Duty as Christians,” claimed that “it is not enough that we personally shun intemperance, but that it is our duty as Christians to do what we can to keep this drink evil under control.”⁵⁸ For these Mennonites, this “duty” came by way of the ballot box. On March 30, 1887, Berne elected its first trustees, treasurer, clerk, and marshal. All three trustee posts went to pro-temperance Mennonite candidates, as did the uncontested

⁵³Ibid., 13.

⁵⁴Sprunger, *The First Hundred Years*, 130. In May 1887, the CTSB began holding its meetings at First Mennonite Church. Prior to this they were held in the upstairs hall of a downtown Mennonite-owned clothing store. See N. Lehman, *Pilgrimage of a Congregation*, 351.

⁵⁵Fankhauser, *Thirtieth Anniversary Souvenir Edition of The Witness*, 16.

⁵⁶Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*, 69-70.

⁵⁷Of the CTSB’s nine charter members, three petitioned for Berne’s incorporation. See Christlicher Mäzigeits-Verein von Bern, “Record Book of Membership of Christian Temperance Union, 1886-1959,” section 4, box 1, Historical Room, First Mennonite Church, Berne, Indiana.

⁵⁸Sprunger, *The First Hundred Years*, 130.

position of treasurer. Non-CTSB members took the unchallenged positions of clerk and town marshal.⁵⁹

Once in office, the Mennonite civic leaders quickly addressed the matter of "intoxicating liquors" with a three-page ordinance covering the legal age at which one could sell "spirituous, vinous, and malt liquors" and the quantities in which alcohol could be sold. The ordinance also implemented a steep yearly fee of \$100 per license.⁶⁰ Unfortunately for the CTSB, gaining power was easier than maintaining it. In the following election, pro-temperance Mennonites took the third district, but lost the first by a single vote and the second by three.⁶¹

Two years later, the town trustees once again passed a liquor ordinance. This new law was perhaps a compromise between pro-alcohol and temperance forces, in that it maintained the \$100-per-year license fee for selling liquor and a \$50 fee for selling wine and beer, but also allowed for the immediate issue of liquor licenses.⁶² (Previous applicants had had to pay the fee one year before they were issued a license.) Although the buy-in cost was maintained, the law was a win for applicants seeking to begin making money from their new ventures.

Compounding the setback of having to negotiate with the town's liquor interest instead of passing ordinances by fiat, CTSB members shared a growing suspicion that the county government was ambivalent about their temperance crusade. "No matter how often we filed complaints against the liquor sellers," Rohrer noted, "and no matter how overwhelming and conclusive the evidence would be, it was an utter impossibility at that time to get a conviction in any court in Adams County against any violator of the liquor laws."⁶³

Rohrer's distrust of the county government on issues relating to alcohol was well founded. The county courthouse was located in Decatur, the largest town and thus the largest voting base in the county. Decatur was a Democratic stronghold and a substantial part of its popu-

⁵⁹Christlicher Mäzigekeits-Verein von Bern, "Record Book of Membership," 4; Petition of March 30, 1887, *Register of Orders Paid by the Treasurer of Adams County 1886-1896*; Mennoniten Gemeinde, *Gliederungsverzeichnis der Mennoniten Gemeinde bei Berne, Indiana*.

⁶⁰Petition of April 26, 1887, *Register of Orders Paid by the Treasurer of Adams County 1886-1896*.

⁶¹Ibid., May 2, 1887.

⁶²Ibid., April 29, 1889.

⁶³Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 12.

lation did not support temperance.⁶⁴ As far back as 1885, *The [Decatur] Democrat* had kept abreast of temperance developments in many towns around Indiana, and the issue remained a staple of its news stories for the next several decades. One November 1885 issue, in a section titled “County News: Berne” warned: “As a pointer, we would advise a certain party to be more careful on the liquor matter, hereafter.”⁶⁵ As vague as this statement may be, it shows that “the liquor matter” in Berne was an issue of countywide interest even prior to the foundation of the CTSB. As the decades passed, *The Democrat* generally leaned toward criticizing, rather than complimenting, Berne’s temperance movement.

Rohrer stated that the CTSB continued to work throughout the 1890s “as a leaven in the community and gradually changed the public sentiment in favor of temperance and against saloons, so that by ten years later the number of saloons decreased to three while the population more than doubled.”⁶⁶ However, the decade also saw a decline in the number of CTSB members running for trustee positions in the town. Unable to create or maintain harsh laws and penalties through direct involvement in city politics, the organization began exploring other avenues for exerting control over Berne’s saloons.

In 1902, an oil boom in southern Adams County resulted in a large influx of young men to work the wells. Speculations ran wild. A story in the December 2nd issue of *The Witness* noted the founding of the Berne Oil Company and its desire to raise \$8,000, and included the tantalizing suggestion that the stock could be worth twice the cost.⁶⁷ Rohrer claimed that “[h]ouses could not be built fast enough.”⁶⁸ Along with the town’s carpenters and masons, local saloonkeepers also saw an increase in business. For many workers, these establishments were places where they could not only drink alcohol and engage in leisure activities, but also purchase all of the basic amenities of home, including food, shelter, and companionship.⁶⁹ The presence of large numbers of strangers likely

⁶⁴Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*, 31.

⁶⁵*The [Decatur, Indiana] Democrat* (hereafter *The Democrat*), November 6, 1885, p. 2.

⁶⁶Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 12.

⁶⁷*The Witness*, September 4, 1902, p. 1.

⁶⁸Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 12.

⁶⁹Madelon Powers, “Decay from Within: The Inevitable Doom of the American Saloon,” in *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History*, eds. Susanna Barrows and Robin Room (Berkeley, Calif., 1991), 113; Behr, *Prohibition*, 50.

reawakened old fears of "worldly" behavior ushered in by the creation of the railroad twenty years earlier. This, in turn, amplified the CTSB's fight to banish saloons from Berne.

The CTSB's stepped-up activity implies a class anxiety that may have been at work. Although the society had existed in Berne before the oil boom, the arrival of poor, transient laborers who patronized the town's saloons likely added to consternation over the alcohol issue. Berne's second-generation Mennonite immigrants, who had prospered in construction, banking, and commerce, believed themselves to be a part of an established middle class. It is reasonable to assume that many wished to distance themselves from the poverty and presumed ignorance of their parents, many of whom had kept wine or hard cider in their homes. In this regard, the CTSB mirrored the class aspects of the national temperance movement, which was largely composed of Protestant, middle-class, and native-born individuals who were generally distrustful of immigrants and the poor.

As noted previously, the Adams County government was inclined to drag its feet in enforcing the moral wishes of the vocal and aggressive CTSB. However, beginning with the passage of the sweeping Nicholson Law in 1895, and culminating nine years later in the victory of pro-temperance Republican James Franklin Hanly for state governor, municipal and county governments increasingly found their authority usurped by state law.⁷⁰ Within this context, a new plan for ousting the saloons from Berne was formulated on September 3, 1902, when Rev. E. G. Saunderson spoke in town on behalf of the Indiana Anti-Saloon League of Indianapolis.⁷¹ At a separate meeting held later that evening, Saunderson, Rohrer, E. M. Ray (of the Evangelical Mennonite Church) and two other Mennonites discussed the enforcement of the local option

⁷⁰Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 495-96. For a more complete account of the Nicholson Law, which specified everything from the type of building in which alcohol could be sold to the "moral character" of the proprietor, and all subsequent temperance legislation passed in 1901, 1905, and 1907, see Canup, "The Temperance Movement in Indiana," 140-46.

⁷¹The Anti-Saloon League regularly employed preachers to spread the word of its activities to a wide variety of denominations in order to compel voters to support any local, state, or national candidate with a commitment to temperance. Also in line with the league's emphasis on grassroots initiatives, this organization encouraged the use of the "local option" to eject saloons from cities and towns. See Cherrington, *History of the Anti-Saloon League*, 60-61; Canup, "The Temperance Movement in Indiana," 140-41; and Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest*, 207.

provision made possible by the Nicholson Law.⁷² The provision empowered residents of a town to prevent saloons from obtaining a liquor license by filing a petition or remonstrance with the county government.⁷³ The remonstrance had to be signed by the majority of registered voters living in the town and filed with the county auditor three days before the regular session of the board of commissioners. Once these conditions were met, liquor licenses could not be issued legally for two years within the town limits.⁷⁴ Under the local option law, the CTSB had the state-sanctioned ability to shut down Berne's saloons and force the county's hand to comply with their demands.

The CTSB quickly formed a coalition of interested church folk and within three days compiled remonstrances against each of Berne's saloons.⁷⁵ With this document in hand, the Berne delegation went to the Adams County Board of Commissioners with the intent of revoking the saloons' liquor licenses. For this work, the CTSB lined up three lawyers to represent their cause, including Charles J. Orbison, attorney for the Indiana Anti-Saloon League. On the side of the defense sat Evans Woolen, attorney for the state Liquor League. After much legal wrangling, during which the defense suggested that all of the people on the petition should be subpoenaed for questioning, the commissioners accepted the legitimacy of the remonstrance and required Berne's saloons to close shop.⁷⁶ Although *The Witness* was exultant over this

⁷²Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 13. For a more detailed account of Indiana's laws at the turn of the century, see Joseph Rowntree and Arthur Sherwell's *The Temperance Problem and Social Reform* (New York, 1900), 298-99.

⁷³The term "remonstrance" was used widely in newspapers and temperance literature at this time. In this context, it referred to a written petition that was signed by members of a given municipality and addressed to a county government expressing their desire to make the sale of alcoholic beverages illegal.

⁷⁴Canup, "The Temperance Movement in Indiana," 140-41.

⁷⁵Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 13; Adams County Board of Commissioners, *Adams County Commission Record Q, March 1902-May 1903*. Several members of the Evangelical and Reformed churches in Berne also supported temperance even though their congregations were roughly one-eighth the size of First Mennonite. Even though Mennonites counted for nearly half of the votes on the remonstrance, the support from these churches in gaining signatures was also important, since many Mennonites lived on farms outside the town's borders and could not be counted as registered voters. See Fankhauser, *Thirtieth Anniversary Souvenir Edition of The Witness*, 27-32.

⁷⁶*The Witness*, December 5, 1902, p. 1. Adams County Board of Commissioners, *Adams County Commission Record Q, March 1902-May 1903*, 340-61.

development *The Democrat* reported sympathetically on the plight of saloon owner Jacob Brennaman who, the paper noted, had no other option than to move back to Europe: "Mr. Brennaman is a good citizen and Berne and the county will miss him should he determine to locate elsewhere permanently."⁷⁷

Although remonstrances were in place for each of the three saloons in town, a new one had to be filed each time a new or existing saloon owner petitioned for a license. Continuing the campaign, therefore, required morale, money, and time. Sprunger gave the morale, the CTSB produced the money, and Rohrer supplied the time. Under the leadership of Sprunger, whom *The Witness* described as "a general who could inspire all his followers with his enthusiasm and conviction," and with the financial backing of twenty-one Mennonite church members, the CTSB amassed \$10,500 (over \$230,000 in 2010 dollars) for the purpose of maintaining the fight against the saloons.⁷⁸ Due to these efforts, Berne's saloonkeepers began considering other options. Within a few months two private clubhouses—the "Dry Town Club" and the "Berne-Adams Club"—had appeared in town. Each club member was given a key to a building where a large supply of liquor was kept. Dues were collected on a regular basis in order to buy more liquor. Since these were private organizations and not businesses, Berne's liquor men felt they had finally managed an end run around the remonstrance campaign. Greeting the presence of these "blind tigers" with dismay, the CTSB also viewed this development as a test of their moral resolve.⁷⁹ Rohrer commented: "When you take the devil by his horns he is going to do some lively kicking."⁸⁰ In contrast, the Decatur press enthused: "The Berne-Adams looks like a winner."⁸¹

Over the summer months of 1903, several men from Berne applied for liquor licenses at the county courthouse. In direct violation of the local option law, the board of commissioners approved their requests.

⁷⁷*The Democrat*, March 5, 1903, p. 2.

⁷⁸Fankhauser, *Thirtieth Anniversary Souvenir Edition of The Witness*, 16; Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 17. The inflation adjustment was made with the Bureau of Labor Statistics (CPI) Inflation Calculator, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm (accessed November 12, 2010) and only provides inflation statistics as far back as 1913. This is a low estimate.

⁷⁹Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 22-23, 65.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 17.

⁸¹*The Democrat*, March 19, 1903, p. 2.

When the CTSB learned of this development they were advised by the commissioners to take up the matter with the circuit court. Now more intent than ever on bending the county government to the temperance society's will, Rohrer began biking the ten miles to Decatur on a daily basis to confront the commissioners with a remonstrance even before a new license could be granted.⁸² Patronized in the press for his persistence, Rohrer wrote: "I felt that I was an unwelcome guest at the court house, and as the Decatur papers by that time began to make fun of me and ridiculed me and roasted me, I felt somewhat annoyed."⁸³

Rohrer's chagrin over this editorial scorn was quickly supplanted by a much more serious concern. On the night after his third trip to Decatur, someone cut a hole in one of his home's downstairs window screens and slipped a stick of dynamite through it. The explosion tore open the floor and ceiling, causing his wife Margret to be thrown "from the bed to the middle of the room." Minutes later, a second stick of dynamite blew up the front porch. It was later determined this was meant to kill Rohrer as he came downstairs to investigate the first explosion. Although the attack resulted in no fatalities, a specter of violence settled over Berne.⁸⁴ *The Mennonite* broke the news to its readers in highly biblical language, stating that "[t]he attempt was made by sons of Belial [the devil] in the spirit of hateful persecution against a conscientious and fearless defender of righteousness as opposed to sin and social iniquity."⁸⁵ Even *The Democrat* was empathetic: "The attack was one of the most cowardly ever attempted in the county and is denounced in strong terms by every fair minded citizen. No clue has yet been found to the cowards, but the officers will use every possible effort to run them down and if successful the guilty ones should and will be punished severely."⁸⁶

The Mennonites of Berne were now faced with a choice. They could end the fight immediately and extend forgiveness to the perpetrators, attempt to compromise with the town's liquor interest, or continue their crusade for temperance. The decision was simple. They had come

⁸²Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 26-27.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵H. G. Allebach, "Editorial," *The Mennonite*, September 24, 1903, p. 4.

⁸⁶*The Democrat*, September 17, 1903, p. 1.

to see the temperance movement as a central component of their religious identity. To end the fight or compromise their position in any way would have constituted a betrayal of their sense of piety and moral certitude. Thus, the dynamiting of Rohrer's home was not viewed as a warning to stay out of politics or as a reminder of their fundamental separation from worldly society, but rather as a test of their religious convictions. Responding to the attack, Sprunger called on his Mennonite congregation to give Rohrer a vote of condolence, confidence, and support. Rohrer stated: "With a few exceptions the vote was unanimous...over a thousand people were present."⁸⁷ Although the unanimity of the vote may be exaggerated, it is clear that the Mennonites of Berne supported the editor of *The Witness*.⁸⁸

Buoyed by the support of his church, Rohrer hired an armed detective from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency to spy on Berne's saloons and bring the perpetrators to justice.⁸⁹ Although nothing came of the investigation, Rohrer's decision to bring in Pinkerton—an agency known for its vigilante law enforcement—shows just how far the CTSB was willing to take the law into its own hands for the purposes of moral victory, and raises important questions about the group's commitment to nonviolence. Using every method of influence at their command, Rohrer and the CTSB heightened their offensive tactics against their opponents and maintained a strict division between the righteous "drys" and the immoral "wets." In response, *The Democrat* accused *The Witness* of publishing a "tirade" against a Berne business owner, Peter Soldner, for not signing the CTSB's remonstrances: "[*The Witness*] undertakes to not only carry the fight personally against Mr. Soldner but his business is thus threatened if he does not choose to join those who are waging war on the saloon...Mr. Rohrer would feel justly indignant were he threatened with business chastisement because he favors any certain thing."⁹⁰

⁸⁷Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 58.

⁸⁸N. Lehman, *Pilgrimage of a Congregation*, 179.

⁸⁹Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 107-108. Founded by Allan Pinkerton in 1850 under the name the North West Police Agency, the Pinkerton agency made its name infiltrating railroad unions and providing intelligence and security to the industrial elites. See Frank Morn, *The Eye that Never Sleeps: A History of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency* (Bloomington, Ind., 1982), 25.

⁹⁰*The Democrat*, June 11, 1903, p. 4.

Shortly after the dynamiting episode, Rohrer met with the three saloon owners in what he referred to as “a council of war.”⁹¹ Accompanied by the county sheriff, Rohrer once again demanded that the saloons close their doors. Brandishing accounts of thirty-three violations of the remonstrance compiled over the summer months of 1903, Rohrer threatened to haul them in front of a grand jury if they did not immediately capitulate. In an attempt to strike a compromise, the saloon owners suggested that the CTSB buy them out. The society convened a special meeting at the Mennonite Church to deliberate on the saloon owners’ proposal. Understanding that their decision was of much larger than local concern and could potentially have national implications, the CTSB reasoned that to compromise would set a negative precedent for the temperance movement; respect for the law was more important than reconciliation. Accordingly, the CTSB decided that the most principled course of action was to take the saloons to court.⁹² Chastising the group for its decision, *The Democrat* recommended that they use their \$10,500 war chest to pay saloon owners to shut down their operations: “The church and the christian spirit is supposed to be behind this reform enterprise, and they should now demonstrate a fraternalism, and show the solidity of their christianity.”⁹³

The lawsuit’s outcome was distressing for the CTSB. Of the thirty-three reported violations, the grand jury handed down only six indictments and a minimum fine was imposed on each saloonkeeper. Despite this setback, the group’s legal struggle continued and finally resulted in the subpoena of over sixty suspected patrons of the Berne saloons on November 18.⁹⁴ Angered by having to appear before court, several of these men visited Rohrer in his office to verbally assault him. Louis Sprunger took this abuse a step further and accosted Rohrer in the post office, knocking him to the floor. *The Democrat* blamed the violence on Rohrer, claiming that he told L. Sprunger, “your’ drunk and I won’t talk to you.”⁹⁵ Whether or not this exchange took place, Rohrer once again found himself the target of physical violence. Two Mennonite women

⁹¹Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 36.

⁹²*Ibid.*, 36-38.

⁹³*The Democrat*, September 17, 1903, p. 4.

⁹⁴Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 40-41.

⁹⁵*The Democrat*, November 26, 1903, p. 3.



“They Hammered Away, He on Me and They on Him.”

Rohrer's account of Berne's temperance battles, published in 1913, includes this colorful depiction of the violence that followed his efforts to close the saloons.

Fred Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne, Ind. Not a Novel, but a Real History. Truth Stranger than Fiction* (1913)

who were also at the post office at the time came to Rohrer's assistance. Helena Liechty “jumped on the fellow's back and pulled his hair and scratched him with all her might,” while Salome Luginbill “rushed up in front of him and...punched his nose.” Menas Wulliman eventually broke up the scuffle, whereupon Rohrer returned to his office. An hour after this incident, Abe Bagley, the president of the town council, visited Rohrer's office. According to Rohrer, Bagley “grabbed me around the waist, jerked me off my stool and knocked me on the floor.” Along with Bagley, a mob of other saloon patrons assembled outside the door with plans to beat him up and drive him out of town. Fortunately for Rohrer, the town marshal appeared and ordered the men out. After dispersing the crowd, the marshal advised Rohrer to spend the night in Decatur and called the sheriff to escort him out of town. Rohrer returned the next morning with a well-armed bodyguard. He proclaimed in his book that

he had felt “like an ox between a yoke on one side and an altar on the other—ready for service or sacrifice.”⁹⁶

Berne’s temperance situation changed dramatically after Hanly was elected governor in 1904. His win put one of Indiana’s most vocal prohibitionists in the highest elected position in state government and solidified the temperance movement’s influence at that level. Furthermore, the passage of the Moore Amendment widened the power of the Nicholson Law to include the option of filing blanket (rather than individual) remonstrances in a given city or township. Heartened by these developments, Rohrer and the CTSB attempted to repeat the actions of twenty years ago and install pro-temperance men on the town council. At the state level, the Mennonites of Berne had a choice between two different anti-alcohol platforms: the Republican Party or the Prohibition Party. While the latter might appear to have been the obvious choice for a community interested in combating saloons, the Prohibitionists also supported women’s suffrage, which was unacceptable for the Berne Mennonites.⁹⁷ As a result, most voted a straight Republican ticket. After the dust settled on election day, the CTSB’s drive to boost voter turnout was rewarded with Berne’s precincts reporting a fifty-percent increase in votes for Republican candidates, when compared to 1900 totals, for every position from governor to attorney general.⁹⁸

In early 1906, Rohrer, accompanied by two of the new town trustees, traveled to Decatur and informed the prosecuting attorney and the judge that if the illegal saloons in Berne were not shut down imme-

⁹⁶Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 42, 45-46, 49-50, 55.

⁹⁷*The Witness*, November 11, 1904, p. 5. Arguably, this was also the reason why the Anti-Saloon League, as opposed to the WCTU, was more involved in aiding Berne’s temperance crusade.

⁹⁸*Election Record 1, November 1890-November 1916*, Adams County Office of the Clerk, Decatur, Indiana, 200-201, 264-65. In general, I avoided correlating Berne’s county and state vote tallies for any given political party with the voting habits of Berne’s Mennonites or the activities of the CTSB. This was done for three reasons: 1) While it is clear that Mennonites were involving in local elections, is not clear to what degree they voted in county or state elections. 2) Since the CTSB was affiliated with the bipartisan Anti-Saloon League, which supported any candidate who supported temperance, it is possible pro-temperance individuals could vote a split ticket. 3) It is possible that all of Berne’s citizens voted for any given candidate for other reasons than their position on temperance. Nevertheless, I employed the voting records for the 1904 election because the Hanly-led Republican ticket was so strongly in favor of prohibition and Berne’s voting patterns were so different from prior years that it was evident something had changed in this town’s pro-temperance voting habits. Prior to 1904, Berne’s precincts were strongly Democratic yet the returns for this year’s election showed a marked increase for state Republican Party candidates across the board.

diately, they would appeal directly to Governor Hanly. The owners were once again called into court and advised to plead guilty to two cases of operating without a license. If they consented to these charges, the court guaranteed that all remaining charges would be dropped. After the owners pleaded guilty, the judge required each to pay \$100 and serve thirty days in the county jail. Due to the defendants' strenuous objections, the judge then removed the jail time from the sentence in exchange for a promise that they would immediately shut down their “blind tigers” and never engage in selling alcohol again. Of Berne's three remaining liquor retailers, two left town shortly thereafter.⁹⁹ Rohrer attributed the CTSB's triumph over the saloons to a combination of Hanly's victory at the state level, the election of CTSB-friendly candidates at the town level, and the will of the Lord.¹⁰⁰

The last remaining saloon in Berne was transformed into a restaurant that began specializing in the sale of a drink named “Hop Cream.”¹⁰¹ Two years later, under the vigilant scrutiny of the CTSB and the local government, this restaurant was closed after Indiana's legislature passed a search and seizure bill that permitted local authorities to check places of business for illegal goods. On the premises of this restaurant were found large quantities of beer and whiskey. On March 9, 1907, under the direction of the county sheriff, the last quantities of alcohol intended for retail sale in the town of Berne were carried out into the street and drained.¹⁰² Berne remained dry until the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1932. The fight against Berne's saloons had lasted over twenty years, cost a small fortune, and divided a community. Writing years later in *The Witness* of the CTSB's effort in closing a bar owned by Sam Kuntz, Rohrer editorialized, “We not only fought him good and hard but even took possession of his ground and removed the mortgage he had on it.”¹⁰³

Clearly, “the alcohol question” went deeper than trying to stop a few men from sitting around a bar. Rather, this was a struggle for Mennonites to assert control over Berne and give the congregation a stake in political and civil society. Furthermore, the scorched-earth poli-

⁹⁹Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 82-83.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰³*The Witness*, February 13, 1912, p. 4.

cy employed by the CTSB shows to what degree this fight was an emotional issue, rooted in deeply held feelings of identity.

Fred Rohrer's home stood at the intersection of Berne's Sprunger and Washington streets. The former was named after one of the founding Mennonite families of Berne, the latter after one of the founding fathers of the United States. Rohrer, and by extension the Mennonite community of Berne, stood at the intersection of these two traditions. On the one hand, these Mennonites professed to be the bearers of a tradition that emphasized humility, separation from society, and the rejection of political involvement. On the other, they founded the town of Berne, embroiled themselves in a heated legal battle against Berne's saloons, and ran for political office.

Over the course of fifty years, the adjustments made by the first generation of Mennonites to their new physical surroundings slowly gave way to the social and political acculturation of the second. Like other pietistic German-speaking congregations, Berne's Mennonites adapted to American society by blending familiar traditions with material and religious innovations. Through a combination of piety and political activism, they affirmed traditional religious beliefs of separation from worldly practices even as they engaged in political activities that integrated them into broader society. In short, these Mennonites found a way to stand with a foot in both kingdoms.

Yet integration had its limits. While the temperance movement expanded the parameters of what Berne's second-generation Mennonites considered correct moral and political behavior, it did not alter the trajectory of what was essentially a bid for local political power. Berne's Mennonites did not attempt to impose their temperance ideals on surrounding towns and counties, nor did they take leading roles in the state or national temperance crusade. In fact, several years later, Sprunger's successor to the pastorate, J. W. Kliever, declined an offer by the Anti-Saloon League to run for state senator. Only Rohrer, that irrepressible booster, capitalized on Berne's unique circumstances by writing his book *Saloon Fight at Berne*, which was lauded by E. S. Shumaker, the state superintendent of the Anti-Saloon League as the temperance movement's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.¹⁰⁴ In the final analysis, the Mennonite foray into temperance politics served less as a springboard to further temperance activism and more as a baptism into political participation.

¹⁰⁴Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 5.

During their temperance crusade, Berne's Mennonites had sought to restore order to a town that they thought was spiraling out of control. Nevertheless, the leniency of Sprunger's pastoral leadership and the CTSB's adaptation of new techniques (in this case, remonstrances and votes) did not restore Berne to the days before saloons but instead created a new era of Mennonite political participation. By encouraging voter registration, the CTSB helped a generation of church members to see themselves not just as Mennonites, but also as members of political organizations and parties. From this time on, it would be difficult to make the claim that one could not have both a Mennonite and a political identity—as demonstrated by Berne's rising voter turnout throughout the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁵ Berne's temperance crusade is simply the most conspicuous aspect of a clear denominational shift toward embracing temperance as both a moral and political issue across the United States.¹⁰⁶

Mennonite political involvement was also aided by the democratic process itself. No longer subjects of a prince or king, congregants joined a process which encouraged popular involvement in politics and grassroots reform. Like other pietistic groups that used their faith to facilitate political participation, the Mennonites of Berne found that they could be both good citizens and good Christians through the temperance movement. Embracing this cause, which clearly had its share of enemies, allowed them to feel a sense of continuity between their Old World status as pious outsiders and a new sense of their own importance in American politics and society.

Giving credit to the Lord for the outcome of their political and legal struggle, Rohrer closed his book by stating: “And, remember, had God not been in this movement against the saloons in Berne I would never have lived through it to tell the story.”¹⁰⁷ These Mennonites were longer passive martyrs dying for their faith at the hands of magistrates; rather, they believed that God had preserved them to do his holy work.



¹⁰⁵[Adams County] *Election Record I, November 1890-November 1916*.

¹⁰⁶Bender and Steiner, “Alcohol.”

¹⁰⁷Rohrer, *Saloon Fight at Berne*, 146.