

Speech for Boehm's Chapel Day, June 22, 1997  
Willow Street, Lancaster Co., PA  
James A. Galloway

### **Boehm Women's Faith**

Good afternoon members of Boehm's Chapel Society, Boehm cousins and friends.

I am going to talk today about Boehm women's faith. Webster defines faith as (1) reliance or trust in a person, (2) belief in a religious doctrine, and (3) loyalty and sincerity.

My discussion will cover the lives of three women from the places where Boehms settled after leaving Lancaster County - one representative from each location - Stevensville, Ontario, Germantown, OH, and Luray, VA.

#### **Barbara Herr Nissley Boehm**

The most noted of the Boehm women was probably Barbara Herr Nissley Boehm, who was married to Abraham Boehm, brother of Rev. Martin. In the year 1770, Abraham and Barbara were living on Camargo Road just off what is now U. S. 222, and just north of Quarryville, PA. They built a new house on their farm that year, which still stands today. Abraham planted orchards beginning in 1768 and Barbara, herself, developed a new and delicious strain of apples by the grafting method. Her first tree was by her garden gate, and so was known as the "Gate Apple." Neighbors came from miles around to sample this fruit grown by Barbara, who was referred to as "Mama Boehm," so in time the apple also became known as the "Mama Boehm." This fruit eventually became famous everywhere in inhabited North America. Today the "Mama Boehm" is still grown in certain parts of our country, but is not shipped because the apple is delicate and bruises easily. So, after 227 years, this apple is still being produced.

Things went well for Abraham and Barbara until January 19, 1781 when Abraham was arrested and convicted of a misdemeanor for aiding and abetting British soldiers during the Revolutionary War. Abraham spent 429 days in jail and was fined 750 pounds and court costs. During this time Barbara, now known as "Mama Boehm," kept the faith in her husband's ability to turn adversity into final triumph. In 1787 Abraham and Mama Boehm sold their farm and orchard and joined a covered wagon train taking the "trail of the Black Walnut" to Upper Canada. A trek similar to this was just reenacted earlier this month, June 1997, with ceremony both here at Boehm's chapel and the Hans Herr house.

Now, Mama Boehm was over 58 years of age and Abraham over 67 when this trek took place and a new life beginning. Their youngest son, Martin (age 15), went along. A land grant of 250 acres was received from the Crown and they became "United Empire Loyalists" (U. E. L.). They were pioneers in the frontier along the Niagara River south of Niagara Falls. Mama Boehm's faith in her husband and son and in God built a new dynasty of Beams in Ontario, Canada. When Abraham died in 1799, the Beams held title to over 1,400 acres. One descendant donated land for a Mennonite church and cemetery in the new town of Stevensville, Ontario and today, in 1997, one of the pastors is a Beam.

After Abraham's death, Mama Boehm was, after 11 years on the frontier, anxious to return to Pennsylvania to visit the rest of the family. Mama Boehm was invited to stay in the U. S. and live with her daughter, Barbara, and son-in-law, Jacob Boehm, at the farm known as "Cherry Crest" on Cherry Hill Lane, just east of Strasburg. Mama Beam never returned to Canada but died in Paradise (township, that is!) in 1822 at age 93.

This great lady's faith created a great heritage for those coming after and to this day!!

Today the Strasburg railroad tracks bisect what was then, and still is, Cherry Crest farm. You may see that two of the railroad coaches honor the Beam farm, the "Cherry Crest" and the "Cherry Hill."

### **Rev. Ella Beam**

Chapter two of the Beam women's faith begins in Soudersburg, PA, where my 3rd great-grandfather, Martin Boehm, grandson of Rev. Martin operated a farm until 1824. That year, this Martin moved his family to Keedyville, MD and moved again in 1831 to Germantown, OH. One of the sons of this family was Abraham Hershe Kagey Beam who in adulthood became a United Brethren minister in Germantown, OH. One of A. H. K.'s daughters, Sarah Ellen, became a convert to the United Brethren faith after the family had moved to Bartholomew Co., IN. A. H. K. conducted church services in his new home, which he built in 1860, just outside Columbus, IN. The road that fronted this 160 acre farm was named "Beam Road" in honor of this family. The 1860 house was torn down in August 1972 to make way for commercial development.

Sarah Ellen was born in 1853 and at the age of 20 accepted the Christian faith and was baptized and became a member of the local church. From that time on she took quite a leading part in the church activities. As a result of her newfound faith in the Lord, she devoted the remainder of her life to Christian endeavors. She accomplished a great deal and did much good for the church and the community. She served many years as Sunday school teacher and class leader, then Sunday school superintendent. She received a quarterly conference license December 8, 1906, became a member of the annual conference in 1908, and was ordained minister in 1920. After being ordained, she became known as Rev. Ella Beam and was minister for the United Brethren church in five different churches in southern Indiana. We must remember that Rev. Ella Beam became a minister before the days of "women's lib." Her father, A. H. K. Beam had faith in his daughter that she could reach her goals, and Rev. Ella had faith in God and herself that she would not falter in dedicating her life to Christ. Rev. Ella died March 24, 1939 in Elizabethtown, IN at age 85.

### **Sister Anna Beahm Mow**

Chapter three - the Virginia Beahm lineage women of faith - Sister Anna, as she was called. Dorothy Garst Murray, a noted author from Roanoke, VA, writes in her biography on sister Anna: every once in a while there flashes across the vast heavens of humanity a limited number of human beings who shine a little brighter, twinkle more audaciously and leave the universe a warmer and lovelier place for their having been. Most such persons have some unique characteristics. They refuse to be squeezed into the earth's mold. They are drawn to people and people are drawn to them. They appear to have a secret for living which is a bit beyond ordinary human knowledge. They appear to be truly "at home" in the universe.

Such a person was Anna Beahm Mow. Born in 1893 into a family of Church of the Brethren ministers- her father being Rev. I. N. H. Beahm, her grandfather being Rev. Henry Abraham Beahm and six Beahm uncles, all ministers for the Church of the Brethren, it was natural for this girl to grow into the faith. I. N. H. Beahm wrote in his diary July 31, 1895: Annie is 2 years old today. She is not large, but she is precocious of mind. She is pert and learns fast. Little did he dream that his precocious small Annie would one day be the author of ten books and the reader of probably 10,000 more. Little did he dream that she would become a teacher of such impact that many of her students would feel she made the deepest impact on their lives of any teacher they ever had. Little did he know that one day her scholarly endeavors would cause her name to be followed by seven academic degrees and that she would be chosen Virginia's mother of the year in 1973 - that citation being presented to her in Richmond by governor Linwood Holton and be included in the 11th edition of "Who's Who Among American Women," the 1975-76 edition of "Personalities of the South," the 1979 edition of the "World's Who's Who of Women," the "Dictionary of International Biography" and several other lists of those who have made notable contributions to the contemporary scene. And to imagine that someday she would be having tea in the home of Malcolm Muggeridge, one of the 20th century's most prolific writers and scholars, would have been beyond his wildest comprehension.

In her late teen years, Anna felt a definite leading in the direction of becoming a missionary, preferably among the children of India. But Anna's family had little or no money to send her to college, but where there's a will there's a way was more than a mere copybook maxim for this strong-minded young woman. She had the will; she had absolute faith that if God wanted her to go to India as a missionary, a way would open up. It did, step by step. In the fall of 1914, Anna obtained a job at Bethany Theological Seminary in Chicago, which was enough to pay her school expenses for her freshman year. The following three years were spent at Manchester College in Indiana, from which she graduated in the spring of 1918. Anna's tuition was paid for by grants from Brethren churches and her work at the college.

In the fall of 1918 Anna returned to Bethany for graduate work. This is when Anna met her husband to be - Baxter Mow - a Rhodes scholar at Jesus College, Oxford University in England - returning to Bethany to take further graduate work while teaching a class in Hebrew. They married March 30, 1921 and both graduated that spring. The Mows had a rising hope that their joint dream of an assignment to the Indian mission field would be realized. But it was not to be - yet. Instead they were sent to the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia to carry out a "home mission." Soon Anna and Baxter were located in Rappahannock county in a little mountain village named Smedley. They set up housekeeping in a five-room log house for which they paid \$1.00 per month out of their salary of \$23.00 per month (when it was paid).

The church house was a community-owned one and was used by both Baptist ministers and Brethren ministers. On Sundays when the Baptist ministers preached, they gave a good "dressing down" to the Brethren; and when some of the more conservative Brethren preached, they gave it right back.

Although there were some theological differences between these two sects, there was one thing on which there was unanimous sentiment. The hole in the side wall of the church was a mighty

handy place through which they could spit their tobacco juice on Sunday mornings. And the members of one denomination seemed to be about as adept as the other in hitting that hole squarely from a good distance. Their years in Smedley served as an excellent preparation for the forthcoming years on the Indian mission field.

In September of 1923 Anna and Baxter received a notice from the general mission board of the Church of the Brethren that there was an opening for them to go to India. They had to be ready to sail in a matter of weeks. Their dream was to be realized. For the next 17 years they served as missionaries north of Bombay. Their three children were all born there - a daughter and two sons. In 1940 the Mows returned to the United States and to the Brethren seminary where they taught for 18 years. The Mows retired in 1958 and spent their time leading retreats, teaching and writing, making their home in Roanoke, VA.

Dorothy and I interviewed the Mows October 13, 1983 when Anna was 90. We were served home made cookies and spiced tea, as well as being presented with four of Anna's books. Several of these books have forewords by Eugenia Price, the well-known author of historical novels.

Both Anna and Baxter are gone now, but their children have kept the faith by taking careers to help mankind!

Move over, Rev. Henry Boehm

And let these Boehm/Beam/Beahm women share in the spotlight!!