



The work of  
Mission Interests  
Committee in  
northwestern  
Ontario



# God Gave the **INCREASE**

ROBERT STAUFFER

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INCREASE**

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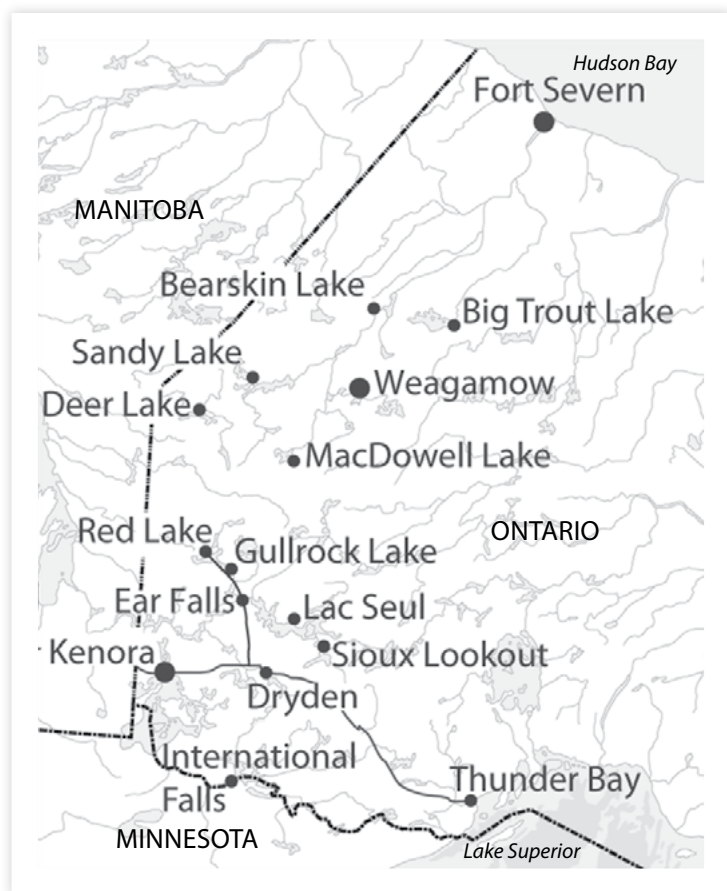
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# NORTHWEST ONTARIO



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# INTRODUCTION

*God Gave the Increase* is the result of Mission Interests Committee's (MIC) desire to document some of the early years of their work in Red Lake, Ontario, especially Ezra and Nannie Peachey's term there. The purpose of writing this book is to record historical facts about the work, but it is more than that. The committee desires to share with others some of the marvelous ways God worked in human vessels who answered God's call to this part of His vineyard. Instead of giving an exhaustive account of all who served there and in what capacity, this book is a compilation of inspiring accounts that MIC hopes will inspire others to joyfully dedicate their lives and talents to carry out the Lord's Great Commission.

The first part of this book tells the stories of various individuals who were involved in MIC's work in the North. In these chapters you will read of the Holy Spirit moving in people's hearts, calling them first to receive the Lord Jesus, burdening their hearts for the souls of men, and then motivating them to work for Him in northern Ontario. The second part of the book recounts a variety



of experiences encountered by MIC workers during their service in the North.

These relatively few accounts represent the greater work of God as He deeply stirred the hearts of many Amish and Amish-Mennonite people in the 1950s and 1960s. When God moved these souls to deeper personal conviction and purpose, this resulted in a burning desire to help others find the abundant life in Christ Jesus.



MIC began as an entirely Amish entity. Its first mission venture was the opening of Hillcrest Home in Arkansas in 1953. At that time and throughout the initial meetings concerning the work in Canada, the members of the committee were all Amish and did not drive automobiles. Some of the Amish settlements represented by MIC, however, were already accepting the use of electricity and the telephone. Many of these groups later affiliated with Amish-Mennonites or Beachy Amish, and accepted the use of the automobile.

Throughout this book you will find references to Amish, Amish-Mennonites, and Mennonites. It is not the intent of MIC or the author to elevate one group above another. People from all these groups were involved in the work in Canada. Some workers went to the field as members of the Amish church and returned home as Amish. Other mission personnel who were members of less conservative churches worked harmoniously with their more conservative counterparts within MIC. Most of the native people

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of the North were not concerned with the different applications of Biblical principles and were content to refer to the various Anabaptist workers simply as Mennonites. This was most likely a consequence of Northern Light Gospel Mission's earlier efforts in planting churches.



Some of the people you will read about in this book have already passed on to their eternal reward. Others are still living, some in the twilight years of their lives. I am grateful to all who so willingly provided the information from which these chapters were written. Much effort has been taken to portray people and incidents as accurately as possible. I thank all who supplied notes, reports, newsletters, and photographs to make this book possible. Many hours were spent on the telephone both interviewing and corroborating the information given. It is my desire that *God Gave the Increase* will not only be interesting, but also inspiring to you. At whatever stage of life you are, may you be thrilled to follow the Master wherever He may lead you. To God be the glory, great things He has done!

—*Robert Stauffer*

# PROLOGUE

This prologue provides some of the historical background for the work of MIC in Canada. It tells of some of the open and closed doors faced by those who were attempting to answer God's call on their lives. Most of the information in this prologue was taken from a report compiled by Daniel Beachy, an early board member of MIC, who graciously permitted its use here.



In 1955, a mission conference was held at Clinton Christian School near Goshen, Indiana. The conference lasted from Wednesday, August 17, until Friday evening, August 19. It was the sixth year in a row that this conference had been held. These conferences were sponsored by a group of believers who later became the Woodlawn Amish-Mennonite Church.

Over the three days of the conference, both lay members and ministers shared numerous topics that emphasized vision and

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missions. The Holy Spirit was moving people to a greater commitment to missions.

On Friday afternoon Harvey Graber had a topic, “Why Not Enter the Field?” suggesting the possibility of opening a boarding school for indigenous children in northwestern Ontario.

As a single man, Harvey had spent parts of several summers working with Northern Light Gospel Mission (NLGM) in Loman, Minnesota. NLGM’s founder and leader, Irwin Schantz, was expanding that outreach northward to Red Lake, Ontario. Through him, Harvey learned firsthand of the need for someone to provide schooling for native children. No educational institution in Red Lake, governmental or otherwise, had opened its classroom doors to the indigenous children. Irwin was hoping someone would meet this need.

Harvey Graber’s topic caught the attention of the assembled group, which included members of Mission Interests Committee. That year, the committee was comprised of Daniel Beachy and Harry Weirich from Indiana, Yost Miller from Ohio, Mahlon Wagler from Kansas, and Henry J. Yoder from Oklahoma.

At the conclusion of the Friday evening service, these men called a committee meeting to weigh the challenge Harvey had laid before them that afternoon. The committee invited former MIC participants with local and out-of-state ministers to join the meeting in an upstairs room. The meeting went past midnight, although not everyone stayed until it concluded.

A decision was reached in that meeting to consider starting a boarding school for indigenous children in northwestern Ontario,

Canada. Later in the summer, MIC asked three ministers who had been present at the conference to solicit direction from Irwin Schantz. These ministers were to seek and investigate possibilities for working in the area of northwestern Ontario where Schantz already had experience in working with the indigenous people.

The three ministers, Elam Hochstetler and Daniel S. Bontrager from Indiana, and Willie Wagler from Kansas, left by airplane and flew to Loman, Minnesota, on October 24, 1955. Irwin Schantz assisted them by flying them into Ontario. They would return on October 27.

The report that these men sent to MIC of their investigative trip indicated many opportunities among the native people for missions, but acquiring land for a school was not a simple matter, as it would have been in the States. The area in consideration was on a reservation for indigenous people, making real estate difficult to acquire. Also, the concept of a boarding school was not understood by those living on the reservation, and they questioned the need for it. Ontario law did not require children living on the reservation to attend school.

During the investigative trip, no clear understandings had emerged. There was confusion about international ownership of a property and working relationships on the ground. The information the men had received was vague. Although the possibility of mission work remained, there had been no definite developments; consequently, there was no feasible recommendation to offer. However, the trip members were not ready to suggest dismissing the endeavor.

Upon receiving their report, MIC continued to consider this

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undertaking. They engaged in many telephone conversations among themselves and with their contacts in the Red Lake, Ontario, area.

The next MIC meeting was held at the Elam Hochstetler residence in Goshen, Indiana, on February 14 and 15, 1956. Henry Yoder from Oklahoma chaired the meeting. Committee members, along with other ministers, former MIC committee members, and other local interested persons were present for parts of the meeting.

Discussion about the possibility of a boarding school occupied much of the afternoon of the second day. It was helpful for the group to discuss the uncertainty that the October investigative trip had revealed. The three men who had taken the trip had little encouragement to give. At one point, the committee almost dismissed the idea of a school completely. The practical possibilities seemed too few.

Some of the younger persons present were more optimistic, and after prayer, the group made the decision to try again. Willie Wagler commented that perhaps they had been looking into the wrong end of the telescope! It was decided that Elam, Daniel, and Willie would make another investigative trip. They left Sunday evening, February 19, 1956.

On their second trip, the men still did not find an acceptable location, but they reached a clear enough understanding with the Red Lake officials that it seemed feasible to continue the pursuit. MIC continued to dialogue with Canadian officials about the undertaking.

At the same time, God was preparing couples who were willing to go to Canada and teach in the school. The venture was in motion again.

Correspondence with officials in Red Lake continued. Concrete planning began. Yost Miller, a builder from Millersburg, Ohio, drafted some building plans for a boarding school with dormitories upstairs and classrooms and living quarters on ground level.

On May 1, a group drove to Red Lake to check on possible locations and other details. The group consisted of two MIC committee members: Harry Weirich from Goshen, Indiana, and Mahlon Wagler from Kansas. They were joined by a former committee member, Ananias Beachy, from Kalona, Iowa, and two others, Moses Beachy from Goshen, Indiana, and Lloyd Gingerich from Plain City, Ohio. The group succeeded in finding a few possible locations for a school building. With the exception of Lloyd Gingerich, who stayed in Ontario to help Irwin Schantz, they all returned to the States on May 11.

Among the possible locations was a parcel of land on Skookum Bay with an empty gold miner's living quarters on-site. That building could be used to house a family. Another nearby building could be used for storage. The tract was large enough for a school building, and among all the possibilities so far, this seemed the most ideal.

While still in Ontario, the five brethren reported some of their findings back to MIC. Upon returning home, they presented a more comprehensive report. The possibility for a boarding school now seemed less feasible. They recommended that a regular elementary school for indigenous children be pursued instead of a boarding school.

MIC immediately attempted by telephone to rent the miner's house. They hoped to build a new two-room building, with

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a basement and indoor plumbing, on the premises, about five hundred feet from the miner's house. Their attempt was not completely successful, but renting the property still seemed possible.

Yost Miller and his family from Millersburg, Ohio, had committed to going to Red Lake for the summer of 1956 to lead the construction project with the help of volunteers. On May 6, 1956, Yost and Fanny Miller with their four children had come to Indiana with plans to continue to Red Lake, Ontario, for the building project.

The updated report from the MIC members who had traveled to the North was positive overall, but MIC still did not have complete clearance from the Canadian officials to begin the project. Yost called the contact person in Red Lake again to confirm the project before leaving Indiana but didn't make any headway. After several days, Yost began calling the officer in Ottawa, Ontario. Nothing seemed to be ready.

The Miller family continued their stay in the Goshen/Middlebury area, living in the basement of a friend's house. When time permitted, Yost worked part-time with Daniel Beachy and contractor David J. Miller.

After more phone calls to Ottawa produced no results, Yost made a trip by bus to Ottawa. He was able to get enough information and a clearer understanding of the necessary procedures for moving forward.

Later that month, Elam Hochstetler, Daniel Bontrager, Yost Miller, Dan Beachy, Harvey Graber, Harry Weirich, and Moses Beachy had a meeting at Harry's home to review and weigh the latest information from Yost and his Ottawa contact. Yost had



discovered that many businesses rent existing properties and only a few own land themselves. Even the Red Lake Bank was on rented ground. Numerous residents in Red Lake were actually squatters, not landowners. Yost had discovered that the property MIC wanted to purchase did not have a clear title, and he was uncertain how to proceed.

In light of these things, it was decided to wait longer for satisfactory clearance from Ottawa. It also became clear that it might be easier to acquire land in the Red Lake area after living there for a period of time.

Finally, after four weeks in Indiana, Yost received enough satisfactory information by telephone to feel comfortable to go north. He and his family left by train on June 4, arriving in Loman, Minnesota, on June 6. Irwin Schantz accompanied them across the border.

# TIME LINE OF MAJOR EVENTS IN MIC'S WORK IN THE NORTH

- 1955–1956** MIC develops a burden and vision for a school for indigenous children in Red Lake, Ontario. First buildings are completed and school opens in fall of 1956.
- 1956–1963** Red Lake Indian School is in operation in Red Lake, Ontario.
- 1963–1964** The church at Red Lake Indian School experiences revival and rapid growth.
- 1964** Periodic Bible schools are held at school facilities for approximately eight years.  
Mission outreach expands to Lac Seul and Hudson with the David Herschberger family.
- 1966–1968** The David Mosquito and Elijah Stoney families move back to Bearskin Lake.

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- 1968** Ezra Peachey begins flying a small airplane in order to minister on reserves when requested.
- 1971** Mission outreach expands to Sioux Lookout with the Wayne Schrock family.
- 1975–1988** Red Lake Christian School operating under Believers' Fellowship.<sup>1</sup>
- 1981** Mission outreach expands to Sioux Narrows with the Lorne Kuepfer family.
- 1988** Mission outreach expands to Kenora with the Melvin Stoltzfus family.

### MIC Field Directors

- 1956–1960 Harvey Graber
- 1960–1986 Ezra Peachey
- 1986–1998 Wayne Schrock
- 1998–present Darrell Nisly

<sup>1</sup> The work MIC started in Red Lake with the Indian school and church was officially incorporated in 1972 as Believers' Fellowship. This name became commonly used to identify the work in Hudson, Sioux Lookout, Sioux Narrows, and Kenora. In Red Lake, though, the "Indian School" term stuck for many years, since that is how it was first identified.

## PART ONE



# THE WORK BEGINS



# 1

## IN THE BEGINNING

Yost and Fannie Miller and family

“Well, we are another step closer to Red Lake,” Yost Miller said to his wife as he settled back in the bus seat. “Are you comfortable?”

“I will be fine,” Fannie replied quietly as she cradled two-year-old Ellis in her arms. “These bus seats are more confining than the seats on the train. I hope our little boy can get a good nap.”

“I’m relieved the border crossing went so smoothly,” Yost added. “I got the feeling our family was something of a novelty to those officers.”

“It appeared that we were somewhat unusual,” Fannie agreed. “We sure got a lot of stares. I wonder how many Amish families have entered Canada through this entry point.”

“Oh, I would guess some Amish have come across to fish,” Yost ventured, “but the immigration officer acted as though it was something out of the ordinary to have a whole family come for several months.”

Turning in his seat, Yost observed that Clarence, six, and Esther, four, were asleep. He caught the eye of his eight-year-old son, Nelson, sitting across the aisle. “What do you think of Canada?” he asked.

“The trees are so different,” Nelson answered. “In Ohio most trees have large limbs. Here, the trunks are straight like telephone poles, and the limbs are very thin. I wonder what the difference is.”

Yost nodded his head. “Perhaps it’s because the growing season is much shorter up here and the weather gets bitterly cold.”

The Miller family had left their home in Millersburg, Ohio, in early May of 1956 and traveled to Indiana. They had committed to spending their summer leading out in the construction of the school that was planned for Red Lake, Ontario. In Indiana, Daniel and Viola Beachy had shared their home with the Millers as together they tried to get clearance for the project from the Canadian officials. In spite of many phone calls, nothing seemed to be certain enough to proceed. As they waited, Yost had worked part-time in carpentry until they were reasonably sure they would be able to build the school. Then Yost and his family had traveled by train from Indiana to International Falls, Minnesota. There they had purchased bus tickets to Kenora, Ontario, where they would stay overnight. Another bus ride would transport them to Red Lake. They were not sure what would await them at the end of their travels.

“Welcome to Red Lake,” Irwin Schantz said to the Millers as they pulled into the settlement at last. “The house where we live is called the Howey House. We are happy to have you stay with us. Our accommodations are nothing fancy, but we welcome you to

share what we have. We have been praying for Mission Interests Committee in their plans to start a school for native children. Until now, these children have had no opportunity here in Red Lake to get even a basic education. For some reason, the provincial authorities have little interest in opening the public schools to them. I believe there are parents here who will welcome the opening of a school for their children.”

The next day Yost constructed beds so that his family wouldn't have to sleep on the floor. Then he began investigating the property where MIC hoped to construct the school.

“It appears it may be next week before it works in other people's schedules to check out the site,” he reported to Irwin on Friday morning. “In the meantime, is there something I might be able to do for you?”

Irwin thought for a minute. “Yes, there is,” he said presently. “We have purchased property to build a house for our family. It is along the road that winds north out of town toward Forestry Point, where the government has a fire-fighting base. Would you be willing to start digging the footer for our house if you have spare time? As much as we would like to get started, though, I don't want to take you away from the purpose for which you came.”

Yost began the hard work of digging dirt to prepare to pour the footer for Irwin's house. That Friday night he wrote in his little diary, “Mosquitoes and flies are real bad.”

Prior to coming to Red Lake, Yost and the MIC leaders had frequently contacted authorities in Red Lake and in Ottawa about acquiring land. Making progress from a distance had been slow at best. Now, living in Red Lake and working face to face with the



land agent, Yost was soon able to work things out. By early July Yost had a letter in hand describing terms for leasing a property on Skookum Bay that included an abandoned miner's house.

A local insurance agent, Jack Dunn, was interested in MIC's efforts to open a school. Jack was instrumental in working out some details, and by Monday, July 9, Yost was ready to proceed. He went to the bank in Red Lake and got a \$2,100 loan to purchase the house located on the leased property. The Yost Miller family and Lloyd Gingerich then moved into the miner's house. In the following days, Yost prepared a revised building plan for the school.

Lloyd, from Plain City, Ohio, had come to Red Lake several months earlier intending to help build the school facilities. When those plans were delayed, he worked alongside Irwin Schantz. The months were not wasted. He and a Northern Light Gospel Mission (NLGM) staff person, Sadie Yoder, befriended local indigenous children, and on May 20 they started a Sunday school for those children. When the weather was nice, Sunday school classes were held on a large, flat area of bedrock across the bay from NLGM headquarters. Throughout the summer, more and more children attended this time of singing and Bible stories. Workers who came later to help build the school got involved in this Sunday school outreach during their time in Red Lake. By fall, about two dozen children were coming to Sunday school regularly. Through wise use of their spare time, Lloyd and Sadie did much to convey the mission's goodwill and love for the native people.

After moving into the miner's house, Yost and Lloyd needed to get the property surveyed. To do that, they cleared paths through

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the forest for the surveyors to get proper sightings.

Once the boundaries of the property were established and the site for the school determined, the real work began. Lloyd and Yost began clearing trees from the building site on August 14.



^ The Red Lake Indian School was located west of the town of Red Lake, close to the Forestry Service. It was at the lake's edge, allowing the Indians to come from all directions with their canoes.

Yost ended up driving into town quite often to arrange for an excavator, cement mixer, and the delivery of building materials. On August 18, a lumberyard owner, Earl Smith, brought his equipment and dug the basement. On August 21, Yost wrote in his diary, "Started building forms for basement walls."

One day Yost and Jack Dunn went to Manitou Falls to look

at some barracks that were available free of charge to anyone who would tear them down. The buildings had been erected for workers when a hydroelectric dam was being constructed in the area. Volunteers spent many hours salvaging lumber from the barracks to use in the school's first buildings.

"Would you drive me over to Gustafson's sawmill?" Yost asked a worker one morning. "We need to purchase more lumber to frame the school, and I have a list here of what I need."

Yost was in for a pleasant surprise when he met the big Swede who owned the sawmill. "Good morning, Mr. Gustafson," Yost greeted him. "Do you still have some lumber for sale?"

"Reckon I got a few sticks left," the friendly man replied, a big smile on his face. "What will you be a-needin'?"

Yost went over the lengthy list of lumber that was still needed for joists, rafters, studs, and sheeting. "I guess this is more than a few sticks," he said, smiling.

"I think ve can help you out," replied the lumberman, "and I'll tell ya someting else. I hears ya gonna have school for dem Indian kids. I reckon it's a shame that the regular school here won't be havin' 'em. I likes what yous are doing and I wants to help my little bit. Tells you what, those one hundred twenty 2 x 4 x 10s are on me. Reckon I's can help that much."

"Why, thank you," Yost replied. "I didn't expect you to give us anything for free. God bless you for your generosity."



Many work crews came from the States. Men with last names

like Glick, Lapp, Stoltzfus, Shetler, Yoder, Troyer, Miller, and many more made the trip to Red Lake to work for a week or two. The accommodations were nothing fancy. A secluded spot on the shore of Red Lake provided the bathing facilities. The men wanted to work, and the project proceeded smoothly.

One day Irwin Schantz's son, Chris, drove Yost 268 kilometers down to Vermillion Bay and then west on the Trans-Canada Highway to Kenora. They came home loaded with plumbing and heating supplies. God provided workers with the skills needed to do the plumbing and heating installation.

One night Yost and Fannie had a long conversation before they drifted off to sleep.

"The building is coming together quite rapidly," Fannie said, speaking softly to avoid waking the children. "I didn't know you knew how to do so many things."

"I know that God has had His hand in all of this," Yost acknowledged. "Sometimes I wonder what my mother would say if she saw what was happening here."

"Why do you say that?"

"When I was still a teenager, my heart was not in farming. Daddy was already gone, and Mother was trying to guide our family the best she knew how. One day I told her about my desire to learn carpentry instead of pursuing farming. I know that really concerned Mother."

"How did you know that?"

"She told me. Mother said if I did not farm, I would never amount to anything. In her mind, carpentry was outside what we as a people were known for doing."

“Was that discouraging for you?” Fannie asked.

“Somewhat,” Yost answered. “While I knew she meant well, I just couldn’t seem to get excited about farming all my life. I tried farming for ten years, but I couldn’t seem to make a go of it. During those years, I got books on engineering and learned how to properly construct a building. I studied a lot. Some people thought I was wasting my time. But God had given me that interest, and I decided to apply myself to learn what I could about the building trade.”

“It blesses me,” Fannie interjected, “to see you leading these groups of men week after week. I feel so proud, no, that isn’t the right word, grateful, yes, grateful to be your wife. I am so happy to be here with you this summer in this project.”

“I am happy, too, that you and the family are here! And there’s something else that’s special to me this summer. Remember how I’ve told you about working in the Civilian Public Service camps before we were married?”

Fannie nodded.

“That is where I really became acquainted with Mennonites and learned what they believe. The way they understood the Bible and lived out those principles in everyday life had a tremendously positive influence on me. That is when I became aware that my life and my body belong to the Lord. I am bought with a price. God wants us to glorify Him with our bodies and our lives. After all these years, it is such a joy again to be working together with Mennonites who have come to help build the school.”

Silence reigned for a few moments as Yost reflected on years gone by.

“Something else comes to mind . . . I don’t know whether I ever told you about it.”

“What’s that?” Fannie wanted to know.

“During my teenage years when I knew I didn’t want to farm, I also got excited about body building.”

“Body building?” Fannie was surprised.

“Yes, I signed up for a Charles Atlas body-building course. It was one of those self-help things advertised back then to help a person develop a muscular body. I am ashamed now to have gotten involved in something that was so attractive to the flesh. My time in CPS with those Mennonite men led me to understand that my life is not about bringing attention and glory to myself, but to the Lord. Realizing that, I renounced my involvement in things like body building. Now there is a deep satisfaction and gratefulness in my heart for the Lord’s leading in my life. It feels so right to be here, using our time and energy to further His kingdom.”

“Thank you, dear, for sharing those things with me. Truly, God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform.”

“Thank you for listening,” Yost added. “You are God’s precious gift to me, and I thank Him for you and the four children He has given us. But now I’m thinking I should get some sleep. Goodnight, sweetheart.”

The work on the school building progressed rapidly. Some workers who had come earlier in the summer returned later to help more. They came from many states, stretching from Pennsylvania to Oklahoma.

One happening of that summer is forever etched in the minds of the Miller family. One warm day when they and their visitors