

MISSISSIPPI - MEXICO - CALIFORNIA

TRIP DIARY

October 5 through 19, 1965

Edgar Stoesz

OCTOBER 5: The Pennsy arrived at Fort Wayne on time permitting me to catch the bus for Goshen. Here I happened to meet C. L. Graber who joined me for breakfast and took me to Goshen College in time to participate in Mary Oyer's music chapel. After checking in with Atlee Beechy I discussed the Haiti cannery with Paul Derstine and conferred with Lester Glick. After a luncheon with Professors Glick, Bishop and Kauffman to discuss community development in Appalachia I met with Atlee Beechy at 1:00 to discuss his forthcoming Haiti assignment. In the mid-afternoon I addressed thirty social work and sociology students. In the late afternoon I met with Harold L. Swartzendruber at Mennonite Mutual Aid and joined their family for supper. The early evening was spent at the Willard Smiths where Dan Wests and John Yordy were discussing Mexico. Later in the evening I addressed the Annual Meeting of the Conservative Mennonite and Amish Aid Society which met at the home of George Cross. I was impressed with the large number of Directors in attendance (in excess of twenty) and generally was given the impression that they were interested in MII. Finding local motel accommodations exhausted, I spent the night with the Lester Glick family.

OCTOBER 6: The first 2 1/2 hours were spent in consultation with the MRSC staff in Elkhart. In the late morning I departed from South Bend for Jackson, Mississippi. My transfer at Memphis was delayed for several hours permitting me to watch several innings of the World Series. In Jackson I was greeted by Jake Friesen who had already been in Mississippi for approximately one month. Since we were unable to arrange meetings with informed people in Jackson we decided to retire early after a telephone conversation with Dr. William P. Davis of the Committee of Concern. He told us they had collected over \$150,000 in contributions and services (including MDS) which had permitted them to participate in the rebuilding of thirty churches. Five more are now under construction with five yet to go. This inter-faith Committee is looking for new projects after this church project has been completed.

OCTOBER 7: We were joined for breakfast and for the day by Titus Bender of Meridian. Thereupon we drove to Canton and ten miles beyond to the Valley View Community Center which had been almost completed under the leadership of Larry Scott of the Philadelphia five year Meeting of Friends. First we toured the Center and then we had a visit with Chester, the sole remaining Quaker who was soon expecting to return to his home in Colorado. Before returning to Canton for dinner we visited one of the community churches built by the Committee of Concern. In the afternoon we met with Rev. Harris, pastor of a Baptist church in a neighboring "company" town. Then we went to Methodist minister McCree who is involved in the Delta ministry, (NCC), Project Head Start, Madison County Movement, etc. McCree impressed us as a very able person but one who had also grown somewhat impatient. In the late afternoon we had some concluding discussions after which Titus Bender returned to Meridian and Jake and I attended a meeting at the community center to promote participation in the upcoming Agricultural Stabilization Committee elections. Seventy percent of the people in this County are Negro but there is no Negro representation on this important ASC Committee which determines cotton acreage allotments and other agricultural subsidies. The Negro leaders in charge of this meeting put a great deal of emphasis on the need for the Negro to help himself. They were told that they were

living in a new day. "Yesterday you were told what to do, today we can participate in the decision." This meeting was also addressed by Mr. Art Emory, who is the Tennessee representative of the National Sharecroppers fund and who has a great deal of enthusiasm over the role which co-operatives can play in helping to eliminate white economic suppression.

OCTOBER 8: Jake Friesen and I drove to Greenwood where we first of all visited the Baptist church built by the Committee of Concern and then visited with the pastor, Willie MacCaskill. MacCaskill, who we estimated to be in his late thirties, has six children and staying with them is his mentally ill widow sister and six children. The load is obviously heavy. Among other things we learned that a significant number of the members of his church are land owners. Much of this land is of marginal quality but generally permits a family to eke out a minimal living.

Next we stopped in Greenwood to buy a paper published by a pair of young Catholic girls. Before we knew it we were swept away with their hospitality and found ourselves having coffee with the staff including Father Nathaniel and Father Daniel. After some talk about co-operation and the OEO (which the Catholics have helped to influence in Mississippi considerably) we were on our way.

Our next stop was a Rev. Cherry at Benoit. Rev. Cherry, according to Dr. Davis, is Chairman of the largest Baptist association in the world. Here there appeared to be a limited vision and an outdated approach. He was interested in a community center for his people but had nothing further to offer by way of facility or leadership.

Our last stop in the late afternoon was with Amzie Moore in Cleveland where we also met Delta Ministry worker Mr. Brooks. Along with visiting the newly constructed community center we also had a very enlightening discussion on the Civil Rights Movement. These men are of the opinion that little is happening and one senses considerable fear that a coalition of the conservative Negro (more specifically those who have obtained some professional stature which could be jeopardized as a result of radical involvement) and the moderate white will fritter away the progress gained. We pleaded for some acceptance of the less activist position such as our own. Late that evening we returned to Jackson for night.

OCTOBER 9: As Jake suggested, this turned out to be our Sabbath. We were not able to arrange any significant appointments in Jackson and had to wait around for two important engagements on Sunday. Thus we used the day to do some work brought in our brief cases, rest and watch the third game of the World Series.

OCTOBER 10: We were joined for breakfast by Dr. Davis, President of the Southern Baptist Association Seminary and Chairman of the Committee of Concern. He had many kind things to say about Mennonites and our Mississippi efforts. I was surprised to discover that the Committee of Concern is still receiving funds (\$2,000 that week). Davis impressed us as a church leader who is making a very positive contribution from a more moderate position. He encouraged us to move in the direction of Canton where he is well acquainted. Further he advised us to work on a center charter which allows for an integrated board. Davis has his critics and limitations but I feel we will not go far wrong if we remain in communication with him. He has kept faith with the powers that be while at the same time working toward progress.

Then we drove to the Baptist church beyond Canton where our meeting with the Center Board was to take place. Church had been announced for 10:00 a.m. and didn't get started until 11:30 when our meeting was to have begun. The intervening time was spent visiting with eight men who were digging a grave for a funeral which was to be that afternoon. Numerous times then and later I had to remind myself that I was in rural Mississippi and not Haiti. Finally at 1:00 p.m. a thin board quorum was present and we proceeded to introduce ourselves and explain our readiness to help them with operating an effective Center program. When asked what they intended to do with their Center, they could only say they felt it should be used for education. For the details it was clear they would need to look to others. They were as though they had been given an airplane without flying lessons. They concluded by unanimously asking the Friesens to come and help them after which we rushed off to Jackson in time for me to make my flight.

After a two hour stop over in New Orleans I boarded the two hour flight to Mexico City where I was met by Paul and Barbara Stone, Roger Springer, Wayne Miller and John Hirschler. The session with the MCC workers concluded in the early hours.

OCTOBER 11: I was met for breakfast by the three MCC men whom I had left hours earlier. Thereupon Roger Springer and I boarded the bus for the three hour trip to Atlacomulco. Here we found the workers were in the field and so we visited with Cecil Graber's parents and also visited the market. After dinner we went to inspect potato, bean and corn projects in surrounding villages. One was impressed with the obvious progress which had been made in terms of community acceptance since my visit one year ago. In the evening we were joined by Benton Rhoades of Agricultural Missions and Max Leythrop, a Wycliff agricultural missionary. The evening discussion was both stimulating and enlightening.

OCTOBER 12: During the morning and early afternoon we heard a thorough report of the project. It was heartening to note that our assistance in one year has expanded from 15 co-operators in three outlying areas to forty co-operators in eight villages. Also heartening was the evidence of community acceptance. In the middle afternoon we went to visit some projects in San Lorenzo. The already bad roads were made almost impassible by a rain. In the evening we returned to the City where the Stones had a reception for the Heifer Project guests who were in the city for meetings on the morrow. After a very enjoyable social hour we returned to the Ganese Hotel for the first full night in a fort night.

OCTOBER 13: After a breakfast meeting with Gerald Nofsinger I joined the HPI Executive Committee for its quarterly meeting. For lunch we were the guests of APEI which is a group of wealthy business men with philanthropic interests. In the evening Jerry and I had a meeting of summary with Cecil Graber and the HPI men.

OCTOBER 14: The HPI group went on a field trip to the village of Ajusco where we visited several projects - one of which was a 4-H Club. On the return we skirted the city and used the occasion to leave the group which went to Atlacomulco where we had just been. I returned to the hotel and made arrangements to take a late afternoon flight to Los Angeles. In L.A. I discovered that the newly crowned Dodgers were to arrive in one hour. So, silly guy that I was, I joined this screaming, sign waving crowd of 10,000 to catch a glimpse of the athletes as they filed by.

OCTOBER 15: The early morning was spent catching up with brief case work, telephoning a few friends in the area and then an 11:00 a.m. flight to Eureka via San Francisco. The flight was rough and no meal was served so I arrived a bit weary but glad to see Bruce Harder who had preceded me by several days. The two hour ride to Hoopa gave Bruce an opportunity to brief me on his observations and activities to date. After supper we sat around the uncleared table and talked for two hours before retiring for the night.

OCTOBER 16: Bruce and I joined unit leader John and Susan Loewen for breakfast followed by a free discussion of unit problems. Thereupon we had a similar meeting with hospital administrator Peter Kriger. After dinner Bruce went to make some contacts in Hoopa while I met with Elizabeth Friesen who is just completing a two year laboratory assignment in Hoopa and soon to begin another term at Hospital Albert Schweitzer. Later I joined Jim Elias on an unsuccessful fishing expedition which however gave us a good opportunity to talk. Later we had a visit with Charlie Whitson, Chairman of the Hospital Board. After supper we had another session with the unit to air problems and make plans for the future. This was followed by a late evening of summary at the Peter Kriger home.

Basically no major problems were unearthed. It seemed to be a situation where "the little foxes were destroying the vine". Some clarification was needed and also some mediation but in the main the unit was much appreciated both in the hospital and in the community and while not without difficulty they seemed to be having a good experience.

OCTOBER 17: Bruce and I attended the Presbyterian Church where we were pleased to see our members active and appreciated though not dominant. After dinner Bruce gave a good summary of our observations and recommendations after which our stay was concluded by a period of devotions.

Thereupon we went to the air strip across the street where Dr. Wright was prepared to take us on the one hour scenic flight to Redding. After a short but informative visit we got a rental car and proceeded to find the Job Corps Conservation Center where we made an appointment to see the Director, Mr. Latimore. Being within four miles of the Shasta Dam we went to see this scene just as the sun was setting. In addition to serving a very useful purpose this spot is also very scenic with Mt. Shasta in the background and a herd of tame deer in the foreground.

OCTOBER 18: At 8:00 a.m. we met with Center Director Latimore. Ninety Job Corps men alternate between a week of classroom work and a week of work in the forests. The Center has a staff of twenty-six members. We observed the excitement which often accompanies a new venture. Contrary to what we had heard earlier, they were not experiencing any difficulty with filling their positions. The sub-professional needs were adequately and logically met through promotion of responsible Corps men and from the community labor market. There appeared to be no need for MCC assistance.

At Mr. Latimore's suggestion we stopped in to see Richard Millar who is supervisor of the Conservation Center at Willows. In addition to his other responsibilities, Millar is also responsible for a Job Corps Center which was twice the size of the one we had visited near Redding. Here they were likewise able to meet their staff needs without outside assistance.

We also took the occasion to speak to Mr. Miller about the need for a forestry camp patterned somewhat after the CPS experience. He informed us that they presently had need for six to eight junior technicians but they would need to work as individuals and could not be grouped. This we felt ruled out further MCC consideration.

The afternoon was concluded with a meeting with Mr. Jack Mislner who is located in the regional office of the Bureau of Reclamation in Sacramento and responsible for the Job Corps operations related to the Bureau of Reclamation. He gave us a sympathetic hearing but no more encouragement than we had received earlier in the day.

We had just enough time to leave Bruce at the bus station in time to catch a bus for Reedley.

OCTOBER 19: I took a morning flight from Sacramento to Philadelphia via Denver where I was to have had a stop over lunch with the Goodville agents in that area. Since each of them seemed to have other pressing commitments the luncheon did not materialize but I had extensive conversation with both agents in the Denver area and felt my stop over had been most worthwhile.