

Hettie Kulp Mininger and Annie Funk

Two Women Dedicated To Mission Work

by Joel Alderfer

This article is based on the research done for the current exhibit in The MeetingHouse, *When This You See, Remember Me: the Experience of Mennonite Women*.

Hettie Kulp Mininger (1874-1965), Bucks County

Hettie B. Kulp was born near Doylestown, the daughter of Isaac L. Kulp (1849-1915) and Catharine Bergey Kulp (1847-1906) of the Doylestown Mennonite Congregation. Her parents had a market stand in Philadelphia, where Hettie worked. The Kulp family became promoters of Sunday School and mission work in the Franconia Conference area. In 1882, Isaac Kulp was one of the founders of the Sunday School in the Doylestown Meetinghouse.

Hettie joined the Doylestown Congregation in 1895. A year later she heard Mennonite evangelist John S. Coffman of Elkhart, Indiana, while on his first preaching tour through the Franconia Conference. Through this experience, Hettie became interested in (Old) Mennonite mission activities and in Mennonite higher education promoted at the new Elkhart Institute, where Coffman was president.

Hettie then attended the Elkhart Institute in Indiana for two years and graduated with the Class of 1900. While at Elkhart, she visited the young Mennonite Home Mission in Chicago which encouraged her interests. She became part of a new generation and a network of young, tireless church workers who were brought together for the first time at the new denominational headquarters at Elkhart. Here she was exposed to a wider sphere of Church leader-

ship and activity, that gave her a vision for mission work. In a letter, April 1, 1899, from Elkhart, Indiana, Hettie wrote to a friend back home in Bucks County:

Last evening we had services at the church. Brother Hershey Leaman from the Chicago mission was there & gave a short mission talk & today he came here to see me... He rather expects to go to Philadelphia [mission] until next fall, if he can get someone to take his place at Chicago. He said we need young people all over, to give themselves up for the cause of Christ. He says he knows it's hard to give up everything & not know where your money is to come from, but he has done it... Oh I think our eastern people ought to wake up on mission work. When the work is started in Philadelphia why, you people go down & help all you can. I know you will enjoy it... I only wish I could be there too, but I can't be at two places the same time. But, where the Lord leads, let us follow.

Meanwhile, back home, Hettie's father became one of the founders and promoters of the Mennonite

Home Mission in Philadelphia in 1899. He helped to select the site for the mission, and helped to refurbish it for mission activities. When Hettie returned home, she helped at the Mission by teaching Sunday School, and worked in her father's grocery store in Philadelphia. Hettie later wrote in 1949:

It was in the summer of 1900 that I went to Philadelphia to work in my father's grocery store... We would spend our Sundays and often Wednesday or Thursday evenings at the mission, helping... teaching Sunday School classes and so forth.

Once a week Sister Amanda [Musselman] would drill us in memorizing Scripture. She was very exact in this, and if we would leave out one word, she would correct us... This was valuable experience for us all and prepared us for our future work. It was here that I first met Brother Mininger [future husband] who was then...helping out at the mission. We were both interested in soul winning, and...got our first lessons in mission work. Later we went to Kansas City, where...we could put into practice the lessons



The Busy Five at Elkhart Institute in 1900. Back row: Lizzie Richert (Johns) and Hettie Kulp (Mininger). Front row: Marietta Metzler (Lehman), Katie Leighton (Ruch) and Olivia Good (Hondrich). At Elkhart, Hettie was exposed to a wider circle of Mennonite friends, church leaders and church work. Source: Archives of the Mennonite Church (J. S. & Hettie Kulp Mininger Collection).

learned at the Philadelphia Mission.

After a short courtship, Hettie and Jacob D. Mininger, who had also worked at the Philadelphia Mission for several years, were married in 1904. While he was still single, J. D. had applied for a mission position at the Mennonite Old People's Home in Rittman, Ohio, but was told that a married couple was needed. He replied that this could soon be arranged. When mission activist and administrator M. S. Steiner of Elkhart discovered that Mininger's prospective wife was Hettie Kulp, whom he had known at the Elkhart Institute, the job was open to both. They were soon married.

For several years, from 1904 to 1908, they worked at the Old People's Home in Rittman, Ohio, and then moved to near LaJunta, Colorado with Hettie's father Isaac B. Kulp, who had just moved there after his wife's death. Here they attempted farming and ranching, but were not happy with that lifestyle. They still desired to be in mission work, and after J. D.'s ordination in Colorado in 1911, they accepted an assignment at the Kansas City, Kansas (Mennonite) Mission. Here they worked tirelessly as superintendents from 1912 until J. D. Mininger's death in 1941. Here Hettie's busy life included caring for



Hettie Kulp, circa 1900, about the time she returned home from the Elkhart Institute to Bucks County, PA. She is wearing the new plain dress of the mid-western Mennonites.

the sick, feeding the hungry, visitation, clothing distribution, Sunday School teaching, hosting many visitors, as well as caring for her own family.

After "J. D." died, Hettie went to live with her son Paul M. Mininger (president of Goshen College) in Indiana, and later with her daughter Ruth Mininger Brackbill, longtime teacher at Eastern Mennonite School in Harrisonburg, Virginia. During these retirement years, she carried on an active letter writing and prayer ministry. She died in 1965, aged 91, at the home of her son, Dr. Edward Mininger, in Goshen, Indiana.

Sources

1. Ruth, John L. *Maintaining The Right Fellowship* (Scottsdale, PA, 1984), 408, 417-18.
2. Unpublished, undated typescript, *Hettie Kulp Mininger, 1874-1965* by Russel Krabill, Elkhart, Indiana, in the J. D. & Hettie Kulp Mininger Collection, Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, IN.
3. Letters from Hettie B. Kulp, Elkhart, IN, to Maggie Moyer, Blooming Glen, PA, 1899-1900. Transcribed by Sam Steiner, Waterloo, Ontario, 1993. Copies in Mennonite Historical Library & Archives, Harleysville, PA.
4. Mrs. J. D. Mininger, *Memories of Philadelphia Mission in October 1949 Missionary Messenger*, pp. 4.



Hettie Kulp and J. D. Mininger with their family in the late 1930s. From left to right: Ruth Mininger Brackbill and Maurice T. Brackbill, long-time teachers at Eastern Mennonite School in Virginia; Dr. Edward and Mabel Mininger of Elkhart, IN; Hettie and J. D. Mininger; Ruth and Paul M. Mininger, president of Goshen College and pastor Goshen, IN.