



GRAEBER RD TRIP REPORT

LEWISTOWN, PA



3/11-15/2016

Day 1 – Friday March 11

The Graeber Rd. Lewistown Traveling Team was packed and ready to go on Friday morning. We had eight travelers this year: John Batchelder, Rebecca Christopoulos, Minnie Alvarez, Tracy & TA Laman, Brandy Hall, and Carys Martin would be flying to Baltimore, MD and driving to the farm. Bob Winland would meet us at the Garrett's as he was already in the neighborhood.

All those flying from Houston except John met at Hobby airport for a nonstop flight to Baltimore. John took an earlier flight and was ready with the 12 passenger rental van when the "Sensational Six" (named by a fellow airline traveler) arrived about 2:00 PM eastern time. The plan was to grab some lunch and get on the road early enough to arrive at our destination about supper time. The group decided that we should eat at G&M near the airport and after a prayer of thanks for the food and for safety on our trip, everyone enjoyed lunch served by the same waiter we had last year! Carys ordered the special flavored tea and promptly acquired her new nickname "Sweet Raspberry" Martin. Lunch was provided by a generous family from Graeber Road. Thank you! There was great discussion about the work ahead. Everyone was full of anticipation and hopefulness that this would be a successful trip and that we were putting our faith into action. We were all looking forward to the trip and it was finally underway.

By the time we were through with lunch, the afternoon traffic was beginning to build so we loaded up and headed north. All went well until we were about 30 miles outside of the city when the rental van quit. We were in the left lane on a nice uphill incline and the driver was able to coast *almost* all the way off the road and out of the lane to the left shoulder of I-83 somewhere between Baltimore, MD and York, PA. Almost immediately a woman (presumably a nurse) stopped to see if we had a medical situation – Love those nurses! We thanked her and returned to the business at hand. John overruled the group's plan to stop traffic and attempt to push the 12-passenger van full of luggage uphill and off the road. Instead everyone was asked (ordered) to stand in the median while John tried to get help. The nearest landmark (an exit) was too far away to see so John headed up the road on foot to get close enough to the sign to read the exit number while the group enjoyed the vocal and hand signal frustrations of the drivers in traffic that was now backed up all the way to Baltimore.

OK – time to go to Plan B. Call roadside assistance – Check! Get the major run around – Check!

We experienced some great help from two kind souls; Byron Paris– a TSA agent, and TFC Coburn a Maryland State Trooper. Both stopped to see what they could do to help. As it was about to get dark, they took the "Sensational Six" to a nearby exit where there was a food market and an Exxon station while John remained with the vehicle to wait for Avis Roadside Assistance to send a replacement vehicle. The food market was only open until 8:00PM so the S-Six moved over to the Exxon station and before long they had the run of the place. The convenience store worker Mike took great care of them and made a comment that he had never experienced anything like that before and would be telling the story for years to come. He provided the group with a case of bottled water and a deck of playing cards and cleared off a place for them to hang out and play nertz.

Five hours and many calls to Roadside Assistance later...

Wayne the tow truck driver arrived with a smaller van and after transferring the luggage and finishing the paperwork, it was off to pick up the travelers and get back underway. It's amazing how tasty coffee, string cheese, and pork rinds taste after sitting out on the side of the interstate half the night. We finally

arrived at the Garrett farm in Belleville, PA after midnight and everyone was directed to their rooms for a short night's rest. The normally 3 hour drive had taken over 9 hours. It was not exactly the way we had planned the first day but despite the difficulties, the group remained upbeat. We met and were assisted by some special people and our group demonstrated Christian behavior throughout the trip. Compared to the difficulties experienced by the apostle Paul, our trip was a breeze!

I feel compelled to reveal at this point that I was already getting pushback from the group on my desire to educate them and keep them informed on my new project of backyard chickens. More on this later...

Day 2 – Saturday March 12

The group was up with the chickens (so to speak) as we were scheduled to meet some of the members of the Lewistown congregation and canvas the neighborhood inviting people to ***Friends and Neighbors Appreciation Day*** on Sunday. The new travelers in our group experienced the hospitality of the Garrett kitchen and we all enjoyed reconnecting with Bill and Donna and catching up on the latest happenings in central PA. They asked about Allen & Janice, Troy, Roy, Roger & Linda, and Clay & Lauryn. We continue to build relationships with the church and it reminds me that we will all be together one day.

Before long we heard the familiar “Five Minutes!” (that means now) from Donna keeping us on schedule. We loaded everyone in the van and followed Bill & Donna to the first of many Amish bakeries we would visit for fresh doughnuts then on to the church building in Lewistown where we met the Morrisons (Barb, Christi, Randy & Justin), Mark Campbell, and Don Roarabaugh. Justin Morrison is nearly complete with his studies at Sunset International Bible Institute in Lubbock, TX and is planning to return to the Lewistown area to work on evangelism.

We split up into teams and headed out into several neighborhoods. The Lewistown church had printed up flyers to hand out or to leave on peoples' doors. The group decided we should knock on doors and try to talk to as many people as possible instead of just dropping off the flyers. This would take more time and would mean we would not be able to reach as many homes, but the idea was that having a conversation would be more effective than just leaving a flyer. It was a beautiful day – sunny, breezy, and warm and for many it was the first time ever doing this kind of work. To everyone's surprise, people were very pleasant. Some seemed interested, some quickly said they already worshipped elsewhere, and some were mostly tolerant. Only one encounter was reported to have had the stereotype of what most people fear – the angry resident saying **“Not Interested!”** and shutting the door in the face of the person trying to invite them to worship. Many had never heard of the church of Christ but were willing to hear about it and appreciated the effort being made to reach the community and for invitation. It was surprising and encouraging for the first time door knockers to realize that generally, people respected what we were doing and that much of the apprehension they felt initially was overcome by the reception they received. We talked to dozens of people and handed out hundreds of flyers in several neighborhoods all around Lewistown. A lesson learned was that it may be more effective to give people more warning – invite them sooner – as many already had plans.

We concluded our work and headed to a local eatery for lunch. Of all the restaurants in Belleville we chose the finest – Richie's OIP (Original Italian Pizza). Sandwiches, salads, pasta & pizza were enjoyed by all and it was not long before we were heading back to the farm for the afternoon.

Bill had alerted Isaac, the neighboring Amish farmer that several on our team wanted to come help with the evening milking and other chores. Minnie was excited about getting to walk around “the neighborhood” especially downhill. She kept saying, ***“Who is pushing me!”***

Several new milk maids were born on this trip and everyone enjoyed interacting with the four little Amish girls. Tracy reconnected with them when she started playing the hand stacking game she had taught them last year and Brandy was taken in by them and the litter of 10 puppies they were eager to show her. TA and Carys got to ride in Bill’s ATV and spent some time enjoying the Kishacoquillas creek that runs through the Garrett property on its way to the Juniata River then on to the mighty Susquehanna before emptying into Chesapeake Bay near Baltimore.

I had a nice conversation with Isaac while he shared the milking of cow after cow with his wife. They sat opposite each other on individual milking stools and he gripped the milk pail between his knees while they each milked the same cow. Sometimes they each milked the udders on their respective sides and sometimes she took the front two and he took the back two depending on the cow and how much milk there was in each cow. When the pail was full and brimming with foam from the force and speed at which they were milking, Isaac poured half of it in a stainless steel bucket for Fannie the oldest daughter (5 years old) to take to the bulk tank and then return for the other half. He commented that she would be milking as soon as she was strong enough. She already helped by cleaning the cow’s udders before milking and applying disinfectant after her parents finished milking each cow. The other three girls, ages three, two and one, played in the barn and ran little errands to help out. All were dressed in identical homemade outfits and spoke Dutch. Isaac said they would learn English when they started school.

He was curious about Texas and especially about Houston. He was more than surprised when I described living in Needville as being similar to Belleville – small town with agriculture as the main industry. Houston however was another story. He wanted to know where all those people got their food (and milk!) I told him that not many people in Houston were farmers and that much of the food had to be purchased in stores. ***“What happens if the delivery trucks can’t keep the stores supplied?”*** he asked. Good question! We talked about how organic products were all the rage and that some farmers in his valley had gone all organic. He said he thought it was all in people’s head and asked if anyone of our group could tell the difference and Rebecca said she could. I don’t think she convinced Isaac.

It was eye opening to see this family working together and to think they milked these cows twice a day every day. There were two hired helpers (teen agers) but no lights or electricity. None of the kids had any apparent attention or discipline problems. They responded to us in a curious but respectful manner and I think we seemed as foreign to them as they were to us. I discussed our work with the church in Lewistown with Isaac and our desire to spread the gospel to the lost but his response was that he rarely if ever goes to town. The Amish are very religious and they had held services at his house earlier in the day. They have a special wagon full of chairs and other items they use for the assembly and take turns hosting the services. They are so committed to their tradition that they would be ostracized if they left the “old order” for the “English” ways.

Before we knew it we were loading up to have dinner with Don and Esther Roarabaugh. Don is the new preacher and has been working with the Lewistown congregation for about a year. Much of that time has been getting to know the members, getting moved into and renovating a house, and nursing Esther through two hip replacements. Esther’s brother Ray was staying with them and helping with the house. After snacking on cheese, sausage, and crackers, we had a delicious meal of baked ziti (Esther’s Italian

family recipe), salad and garlic bread. After dinner and dessert, someone started talking about favorite hymns and before long the evening turned into “singing night” at the Roarabaughs. It was obvious to all of us that it had been way too long since this lovely couple had enjoyed singing in four parts. The joy that came from this event was a highlight of the entire trip. A big part of our visit was to encourage the brethren and we all received a blessing of encouragement that night at Don and Esther’s.

All good things must come to an end and we were soon heading back to the farm to get ready for worship on Sunday. I think there were likely some sweets eaten around the Garretts’ kitchen and lots of stories being told before we all called it a night. I was getting the egg count from our three backyard hens every day from Tracy and sharing the news with the group. They shared my excitement I’m sure!

Day 3 - Sunday March 13

We had to remember to set the clocks ahead and (almost) everybody got up in time to have a hearty breakfast of bacon, **eggs**, toast, scrapple, and more baked items like cinnamon raisin bread, whoopee pies, and moon pies. We had the Saavedra’s in mind as the twins were due to arrive soon. The weather had turned cooler and damp with intermittent rain but all was sunny with our group. Once at the building, Bob taught the adult class. He combined our recent devotional from Troy and sermon from Eddie on being Salty & Sweet and did an excellent job of adding the unique Bob perspective.

We got to hear brother Roarabaugh preach and his message and style were well received by all assembled. John led singing and there were nearly 50 in attendance. There were some visitors who were invited by members. We did not have any from the door knocking campaign but our prayer is that seeds were planted and that God will bless the work that was accomplished.

After the worship service we all enjoyed the fellowship meal of roasted pork, sides, and desserts. Our group once again helped in the preparation, set up, serving, and cleanup. What a joy it is to work together with Christians! Even common tasks become memorable when they are shared by those who love the Lord.

After lunch we departed for the farm and were led by Brandy “The Navigator” Hall on an unscheduled tour of the Big Valley. Bob prevented us from crossing the Ohio line and turned us back in time to salvage the rest of the afternoon. Brandy only missed one turn on Dry House Road! Minnie said all the farms looked alike – they all had cows, barns and silos and there were plowed fields everywhere.

That afternoon some took naps, some visited on the porch, some continued to eat baked goods, and some walked up the hill in search of a cell phone signal to call home. When evening came we all headed back to the church building for the evening gathering. The Lewistown group has been going through the Dave Ramsey series on financial stewardship and there were several members of the community there which provided additional opportunities to make contacts for potential Bible studies.

After the evening session with Dave, **“CHEETAH! RUN!”** (you had to be there...) we headed back to the farm and this time everyone was acutely aware of the turn on Dry House Road. We arrived without incident (unless you consider running over thousands of worms on the roads an incident). The rain brought the worms out in force!

The travelers did a respectable job of wiping out most of the leftovers from lunch, eating Brandy's pies, and telling tales well into the evening before heading off to bed. John was on "interesting chicken fact number 52" which helped everyone feel sleepy.

Day 4 Monday March 14

Monday was our day to tour the valley with our capable guides Bill & Donna Garrett. It was refreshing to see that I am not alone when it comes to figuring out there is more than one way to get somewhere.

Bill: "Why are we going this way?" **Donna:** "This is the way I like to go."

Donna: "Turn right here." **Bill:** "Don't you mean left?" **Donna:** "Of course – turn left right here!"

We had an enjoyable morning touring Swarey's Apple House, the cloud covered mountain, the Purple Martin Bakery, Peachey's Furniture Shop, the Amish dry goods store, and the rustic furniture store. We made it home for lunch and had a few more stops to make after lunch including Peight's store. During the drive we saw several cemeteries that contained Mennonite, Amish, and other former residents of the valley. Some of the older headstones were simple slabs of rock with hand chiseled inscriptions.

TA and Carys got to see a real millstone that was displayed in a farmer's yard. They will never read Matthew 18:6 the same again: **"but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."**

One last stop was to pick up some cinnamon raisin bread from the Purple Martin Bakery. They were sold out but the gracious baker said she would make a fresh batch that could be picked up that evening. Bill has a great rapport with all his neighbors and it was evident to us that they appreciated the Garretts.

Bob made his exit after lunch as he was driving his rent car back to Ohio for the return trip.

There was an incident with Bill's two dogs and a neighbor's prize 4-H champion rooster that I will not go into to protect the innocent and because this is a matter still under investigation, but let's just say for the record that Myles the young Labrador is not on Donna's happy list right now. Their other dog, a 7 month old Akita named Bull, claims he had nothing to do with the rooster incident but I am not fully convinced. Bull does not have a good poker face – he looked guilty to me!

We did learn that watching Brandy, TA and Carys running with the dogs trying to convince them to go home could be very entertaining for those of us riding in the van! Minnie – you should have joined them since you liked the walking so much! You would really like running.

With the dogs secured, our next adventure was to drive to State College PA – home of the Penn State Berkey Creamery for what Bill said was the finest ice cream available. When someone challenges Blue Bell we have to respond...

He was right! The ice cream was great – even the no sugar added version that RC & JB enjoyed. After eating dessert first, we headed to Lewistown for a meal at the other Italian restaurant (also Richie's OIP) provided by a generous couple from the Lewistown congregation. Thank you!

We tried to make it an early evening as we were scheduled to get on the road early on Tuesday for the return to Texas. It is always surprising how fast the time goes on a trip like this. Between seeing and experiencing all the new things, working, praying, and worshiping with fellow Christians, spending lots of time together, and strengthening relationships, before you know it it's time to leave.

It is more than encouraging to see the growth of the Lewistown congregation. The addition of Don & Esther has been a positive thing for the congregation and having Justin return from his studies will provide even more support. The congregation is a loving and caring bunch and have recently supported each other through the loss of two members. There are several in the congregation that have significant health issues but there were some in attendance that have recently recovered and were able to be back in worship. It was good to see Bill Garrett healthy after his surgery two years ago and Donna seemed to be refreshed by our visit. They are such gracious hosts and generous people and we were glad to bring them a few treats from Texas on this trip. It would be a joy to host them at Graeber Road if the Lord wills one day. It was also great to see how the trip strengthened and encouraged the travelers. The mutual benefits we received shows the value of this kind of activity.

Everyone was packing to go and made sure to leave room for the fresh bread.....

Day 5 Tuesday March 15

We were up and ready to go on schedule (8:00 AM) which was pretty good for this group 😊.

We stuffed all the luggage into the van and got everyone in a seatbelt for the drive down the valley and on to Baltimore. The weather was still cool and overcast but there was a chance of clearing later in the day. Our destination was the Baltimore Inner Harbor area for lunch and a little sightseeing before getting to the airport for a 6PM flight home. We found a safe place to park the van full of luggage (and bread) and found some lunch at Miss Shirley's Café. We had a couple of hours to walk around the Inner Harbor area, visit the Maryland Science Center, and the National Aquarium. Soon we were loaded up in the van and headed to BWI Airport for our flight home. John dropped the S-Six off at the airport and went to the offsite rental car return to discuss our experience with an Avis manager. I told the group that despite how I felt about the experience, they would know that they were dealing with a Christian.

I am happy to report that everyone from the man who checked in the van to the person at the desk and the manager were very accommodating and the church received a substantial discount on the rental.

Much to the relief of the group, John received the final egg report while on the way home and he finally stopped showing off phone pictures of eggs and chickens.

Thanks to everyone for your prayers, donations, and support. The traveling team were the ones who went but we know that many people were praying for us and that several generously provided for many of our meals.

I hope this report provides a sense of how the trip went and we are all available if you need any additional information.

Yours in Christ

John Batchelder (with input and edits from the group) 3/22/2016