



# Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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*A quarterly periodical dedicated to the history and culture of Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, USA*

## SHOWALTER HERITAGE TOUR IN EUROPE

In this issue we highlight a trip to Europe by the Showalter family. Jan Suter Showalter has written a delightful overview of a group of American Showalters meeting their distant Schowalter relatives in Europe.

Harold Huber has provided a list of important items that congregations should deposit in the Archives for future reference. This sometimes tedious task pays off huge benefits when the day comes that someone wants to investigate and write a history of the congregation.

Evan Knappenberger has written a review of Bernie Bowman's new book about his mother, Oma Wenger Bowman. Knappenberger, a seminary student at EMS, provides enough of an introduction to make readers want to buy the book and read it.

At the passing of the distinguished Virginia historian James O. Lehman, February 5, 2016, we reflect on his passing, the nature of the historian's trade, and the way one generation learns from another. As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:10, each generation builds on the foundation laid by the previous generation. For around four decades, James O. Lehman investigated,

wrote, and taught Virginia Mennonite history. He also had the wisdom and foresight to pass on his vision and passion to the next generation. This essay is reflective about his work, while the Winter, 2014, *Historian*, gave details about his accomplishments.



James O. Lehman (1932-2016) showed letters from the Martin Burkholder collection to students from EMHS, December 20, 2010, in the Virginia Mennonite Archives, where he served as Archivist.

Photo by editor

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## Showalter Family Heritage Tour

September 29 - October 5, 2015

by Jan Suter Showalter

From Shanghai, Tibet, New York City, Ohio and Virginia we came; twelve members of the Irvin Showalter Family, to spend a wonderful week in Switzerland and Germany to learn about family heritage and meet with very special distant Showalter cousins.

The idea for this trip began in 1999 when Cousin Richard Showalter, then President of Eastern Mennonite Missions, traveled to Germany to speak at a youth convention. While there he met Inga Showalter and wrote, "After the introductory formalities she looked at me mischievously and blurted out, 'I can't believe that after eight or nine generations you still have a Showalter nose! We are ninth cousins. My dad, (Otto Showalter) is interested in family history, and he sent me to meet you and tell you that.'"

From that story, an idea grew to have a Showalter/Showalter Reunion in Germany, and it became a reality in the fall of 2015. Those attending were brothers Don, Richard and wife Jewel, their daughter Rhoda and husband Keith Miller, Nathan and wife Chris and son Eli, and cousins Sam and Jan (Suter) Showalter, Elva Showalter Rhodes and Miriam Showalter Wenger.

Our headquarters for the first four days was the convention facility at Bienenberg Seminary in Liestal, Switzerland, where we had comfortable inexpensive accommodations and delicious food. We were privileged to have as our teacher/guide, Dr. Hanspeter Jecker, professor, historian, and professional Anabaptist guide, who has a wealth of information about Anabaptist history and the history of many Anabaptist families.

On day one we headed for Zurich where we learned about many early Anabaptists; their beliefs, where they lived and taught and where and how they were persecuted. It was there that Felix Mantz was drowned in the Limmat River. We hiked up to the Anabaptist cave near Baretswil on a beautiful autumn afternoon. From this area Anabaptists could flee for safety over the mountain into another Canton. Our group enjoyed singing and praying together there. Our Showalter ancestors probably became Anabaptists sometime between 1650 and 1720, the time of Pietism, and would have used a Bible called the *Froschauer Bible*, printed by the Reformed Church in Zurich (two years before the Luther Bible). We were privileged to see one of these Bibles and an ancient *Martyrs Mirror* in the Bienenberg museum.

On day two we drove through beautiful country side which looks much like western Virginia, to the Strengelbach community where it is believed the Showalters lived before 1752, when they fled to America because of Anabaptist persecution. We stopped briefly in the town of Kolliken, ancestral home of the Suter family, then traveled south to the beautiful Emmental region where most of the early homes were Anabaptist. We toured Trachselwald Castle where many Anabaptists were imprisoned and tortured. We visited a farm that had served as an Anabaptist hideout and has been preserved by descendants, and then traveled back to Bienenberg by way of Langnau, where we saw the first and only Mennonite congregation still in the Emmental region.

On day three we began by touring Bern where Anabaptist persecution was great. We stopped by the Castle of Thun, where many Anabaptists were imprisoned. And it was here that our guide, Hanspeter was tried as a con-



Elva Showalter Rhodes (left) and her 9th cousin, Inga Schowalter, 2015.  
Jan Suter Showalter

scientific objector in 1974 and served six months imprisoned in the castle. Although his position was not well supported by the Swiss Mennonites at that time, his pastor encouraged him.



Dr. Hanspeter Jecker, tour guide, with the Showalters, 2015.  
Jan Suter Showalter

From the castle we followed Lake Thun south to Beatenberg where we marveled at the spectacular beauty of the Alpine Peaks, especially the Eiger, Jungfrau, and Mönch.

On day four we headed to the Jura

Showalter/Schowalter cousins in Deutchof, Germany, 2015.  
Jan Suter Showalter



Elva Showalter Rhodes (left), Miriam Showalter Wenger, Jan Suter Showalter, and Dr. Sam Showalter, in the Alps, 2015.  
Jan Suter Showalter

Mountain area where many Anabaptists fled persecution and where many Swiss Mennonites still live. We visited the Sonnenberg Church with its interesting museum which included a wooden press for drying potatoes needed during rapid departure in times of persecution. Hanspeter told us that Anabaptists over the years have served the health needs of their neighbors in many compassionate ways, and many of these neighbors were moved to faith because of the care they had received. We



later took a steep trail to another Anabaptist cave and ended the day in Basel where we bid farewell to Hanspeter, our Swiss teacher and new friend.

On day five we traveled to Deutschof, Germany where we had the great pleasure of meeting many Showalters, our 8th and 9th cousins. Deutschof is a tiny town of about twelve houses and a Mennonite church. Cousin Thomas and his wife Anne had planned a wonderful day of touring, with lunch in a vineyard, demonstration of a large tractor/grape picker, tour of a winery, a farm and a farm market. We also attended a choral concert and ended the day at a New Wine Festival where we enjoyed eating Flammkuchen and Kraut dishes.

On Sunday, day six, we worshipped at the Deutschof Mennoniten-Gemeinde church, where we were able to sing along in English with many of the German hymns. When the twelve American Showalter Cousins sang "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," (606), many joined us singing in German and it seemed that "heaven came down and glory filled my soul." Cousin Richard Showalter in his article for *Mennonite World Review* says, "Separated by an ocean for 2 1/2 centuries, we are still one family of faith with one living Lord, who is the same yesterday, today and forever." (And some still have the same crooked Showalter noses.)

We highly recommend this type of historical and educational touring experience to other Anabaptist families.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Suter Showalter (for Sam Showalter, Elva Showalter Rhodes, and Miriam Showalter Wenger)

## The Historian's Trade

*A tribute to James O. Lehman*

by the Editor

When James Lehman came to study at Eastern Mennonite High School in 1949, he hardly knew that most of his adult years would be spent in Virginia. Such is the direction of history, often filled with surprises, bends in the road, and unexpected God-directed changes.

James O. Lehman became a historian of great distinction in the Virginia context. Always an Ohio boy at heart, where he grew up, the educational institutions in the Shenandoah Valley drew him to Harrisonburg, where he learned, developed, and perfected the historian's trade.

An important book in Virginia Mennonite history is Lehman's history book about Lindale Mennonite Church. *Lindale's Song*, 1998, is a key reference for anyone hoping to learn about Virginia Mennonite history.

As for Virginia Mennonites in the Civil War, or as Lehman learned from locals in the Shenandoah Valley, the "War Between the States," the most important reference book is *Mennonites, Amish, and the American Civil War*. Finished in 2007, Lehman worked with Steven M. Nolt, a historian whom he helped to secure to write a new history book about Virginia Mennonite Conference.

In 2011, Lehman rode with two Virginia men to meet Steven Nolt at a restaurant in Lancaster, Pa., in order to outline the contours of a new book and to invite Nolt to write the book, which he agreed to author. Nolt plans to begin writing the book in 2017, and without a doubt he will read and rely on Lehman's books and articles.

The historian's trade relies on the work of earlier writers and collectors of materials.

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**WHAT TO SEND TO THE VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE ARCHIVES**

BY HAROLD E. HUBER, VMC ARCHIVIST

People often ask, “What kinds of records should congregations send to the VMC archives?” The following list attempts to answer that question. Generally, the items higher on the list are a bit more important than those nearer the bottom.

1. Weekly Sunday worship bulletins
2. Weekly, monthly or quarterly newsletters, including birthday and church calendars.
3. Quarterly or annual church business meeting reports and minutes.
4. Minutes and accompanying paperwork from permanent or temporary committees.
  - a. Church Council
  - b. Pastoral or elders’ team
  - c. Temporary pastoral transition committees (minutes and correspondence).
  - d. Other standing committees, such as outreach, music, MYF, Kingdom Kids, stewardship, etc.
5. Women’s activities and minutes.
6. Mission and vision statements
7. Membership rolls, directories.
8. Budget and financial records (monthly, quarterly, annually)
9. Constitutions/organizational guidelines; relationship to Virginia Mennonite Conference.
10. Significant correspondence (if sensitive, we can mark “restricted”)
11. Brochures and promotional materials, including programs and special events.
12. Newspaper clippings of members’ activities, and obituaries of members. Pencil in name of newspaper and date of clipping.
13. Photographs (leaders, groups, church building, etc.) with documentation of who appears on photo).
14. Records of church anniversaries and other papers of historical value.
15. Copies of legal papers, contracts and real estate matters and other official documents.
16. Occasional taped (or CD copy) of a Sunday morning worship service.
17. Records of non-church activities, such as child care program, food pantry, etc.

Don’t be overwhelmed by the length of this list. You can probably sense which items are most important. But keep in mind the types of records a historian would need in writing a history of your congregation.

If you have questions, call Harold Huber at 540-432-4169 on a Monday or Thursday, 9-12, 1-3.

(This list is based on a checklist created by James O. Lehman in 2007. It is still available from the Archives).

Harold E. Huber, VMC Archivist

## Book Review

## A Tribute to Oma Wenger Bowman and Her Valley Wenger Ancestors

by Bernard D. Bowman. Lot's Wife Publishing, Staunton, Virginia, 2015; 154 pages.

Reviewed by Evan K. Knappenberger, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, January 2016.

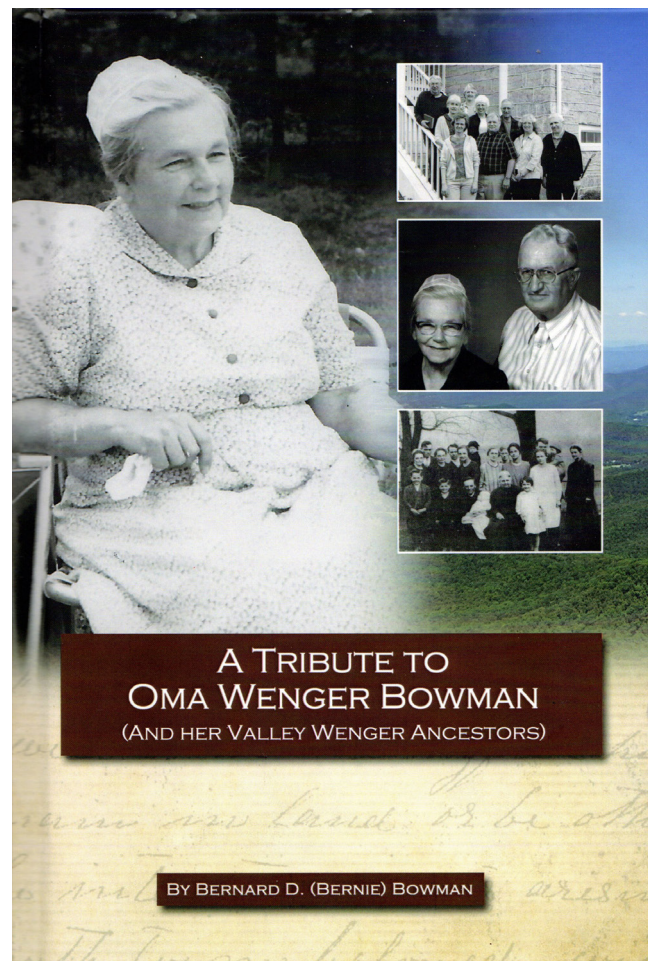
Bernie Bowman, a semi-retired businessman, graduate of Eastern Mennonite University and genealogist-historian, did much research and reflection for his 2009 genealogy on his paternal ancestors, George and Barbara Bowman. But more recently, Bowman became interested in his other roots: a rich Shenandoah Wenger heritage. After finding evidence of Bowman-Wenger crossovers on both paternal and maternal sides, and after attending the Wenger family reunion at EMU several years ago, Bowman undertook his second serious historical project – a search into the stories and places of his mother, Oma Francis Wenger Bowman, and six generations of her ancestors to the first Shenandoah Mennonite Wenger, Joseph G. (1747-1812).

The result of Bowman's toiling is an interesting mix of family stories, reconstructed historical geographies, and local history. It involves some of Rockingham's favorite families other than the Wenger clan: Grabill, Huber/Hoover, Mauck/Mack, Ziegler, Good, Geil, Driver, Heatwole, Weaver, Suter, Lehman/Lahman/Layman, and of course Bowman. He also manages to reflect deeper than the genealogical surface in several acts of historical imagination, taking us on journeys into the past with figures like Ephraim Mauck Wenger (1815-1893) at Weavers church in the nineteenth century.

Lastly, there are some worthwhile personal anecdotes and family storytelling that tie the book up nicely.

Aside from a few clerical errors and typos, the book is well put-together and provides interesting pictures and maps. Among its strengths is the inclusion of transcribed and photocopied first-hand source documentation. The layout in chronological order is helpful for those doing historical work, but may be less so for those interested in reading Oma Wenger Bowman's part of the story.

As someone interested in past neighbors and relations of the Wenger clan, as well as in the history of area Mennonites, I found Bowman's book a quick read and even sometimes amusing. This is perhaps the real strength of the work that is both approachable and well-researched. As a tribute, it passes its mark into the realm of local history.



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Lehman knew how to investigate and read from the letters of Bishop Martin Burkholder in the early 19th century. It was Lehman who helped spearhead *The Bishop's Letters* book that was compiled by the editor in 2011. In the process he shepherded the process of transliterating old German letters into contemporary German, then having them translated into English.

Those who write history rely on the research and interpretations of those who went before. Lehman understood the importance of Lewis J. Heatwole's *Church Record Book*, locked deep in the Archives because of its great importance to Virginia Mennonite history. Lehman lifted the story of Virginia Bishop Jacob Hildebrand out of the primary sources, even taking trips to Richmond to find the materials he sought.

Lehman served as a late twentieth century keeper of Virginia Mennonite studies, working as Archivist for Virginia Mennonite Conference, and for many years he served as head librarian at the Hartzler library, Eastern Mennonite University. Lehman helped organize the boxes of the distinguished historian of Virginia Mennonites, Harry A. Brunk. Brunk wrote the seminal two volume history of Virginia Mennonites, with Volume I having been recently reprinted by conservative Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley.

The Virginia Conference Archives, currently located on the first floor of the Hartzler Library, Harrisonburg, is neatly organized and arranged, largely due to Lehman's care and excellent management. Lehman understood that if researchers could find boxes of materials, open the lid and read a list of folders in the box, it would greatly facilitate historical research, the layering of knowledge and interpretations from one generation to another, as

the Apostle Paul wrote.

Lehman assisted with many projects, such as when he worked with Bishop Glendon Blosser and James Rush, along with author Gloria Y. Diener, to produce a wonderful overview of Virginia Mennonite History, *People of Peace*, in 2010.

In the fall of 2008 James Lehman gave a lecture about Virginia Mennonites, sponsored by the Valley Brethren Mennonite Heritage Center, at Mt. Pleasant Church of the Brethren, Harrisonburg. To the editor's knowledge, Lehman's thirteen distinctive understandings of Virginia Mennonites has never been published. The lecture was unassuming, and some may even have thought slow for a Sunday afternoon lecture. This editor, however, has often returned to Lehman's key points for his own work, and shall never forget that afternoon of listening to Lehman's speech. Eight years ago Lehman seemed to be realizing that he was summarizing a career of work in Virginia Mennonite studies. In the next several years after the lecture in 2008, Lehman encouraged the editor in a number of concrete and clear ways, eventually turning over the *Historian* after he had guided the quarterly journal from 2002-2013.

By God's grace, the Apostle Paul wrote, we lay a foundation, like a wise builder. Others will build on what we have done. Each one should build with care, Paul concluded (1 Cor. 3:10). James Lehman did this in his career as a historian, through his many books, and then looking out for the next generation of thinkers and historians. In the years to come, others will reinterpret understandings and uncover new resources. James Lehman has laid a solid layer on the historical foundation established by others before him, and those who follow will surely read his writings, shall the Lord tarry, as one who mastered the historian's trade.



Harrisonburg Mennonite Church is located at 1552 South High Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Formed out of Chicago Ave. Menn. Church in 1972, HMC is a member of the Harrisonburg District of Virginia Mennonite Conference, and has a membership of 565. HMC is a member of Mennonite Church USA.

Photo by editor

The *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* is published quarterly by the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, established in 1993.

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Forthcoming *Historian* Topics in 2016:

- History of Mt. Carmel School
- 1948 Revival at Eastern Mennonite College
- Riverside Mennonite Church, Harman, West Virginia

If you have an idea for an article or picture for the *Historian*, contact the Editor at [elyoder@gmail.com](mailto:elyoder@gmail.com).

Past issues of the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* can be found in PDF format at [http://mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net/Shenandoah\\_Historian.html](http://mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net/Shenandoah_Historian.html)

On the cover is a photo of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia, taken by the Editor in 2012.

An annual individual membership fee for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians is \$10.00 per year, which includes a subscription to the *Historian*. Additional family memberships are \$5 each. Send membership fees or inquiries to James Rush, e-mail at [jamesrush@comcast.net](mailto:jamesrush@comcast.net), phone 540-434-0792, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22802.

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians  
780 Parkwood Drive  
Harrisonburg, VA 22802