



# Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

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

## AUGUSTA COUNTY, BRUNK REVIVALS, AND ANNUAL MEETING

In this issue we spotlight Augusta County, with several Mennonite churches, a Beachy Amish church, and two former churches from the Old Order Amish and the Beachy Amish. In the last issue of *Historian*, Autumn 2015, page 9, the Editor misidentified a photo of the Stuarts Draft Old Order Amish church building in Augusta County. In order to properly identify the various Anabaptist meetinghouses in Augusta County and set the record straight, the Editor took a trip to these respective church buildings and did further reading and research. On the following two pages you will read about and see photos from an exploratory journey into the rolling hills and beautiful farm country of Augusta County, Virginia.

In a second feature for this issue, Dr. Gerald R. Brunk wrote an essay for *Historian* about leading singing during the Brunk revival campaigns in the 1950s. Gerald's essay provides a unique perspective on singing among former Russian Mennonites in Canada when the tent revivals toured the various provinces. Dr. Gerald Brunk, a former history teacher of the Editor, is one of the Officers of the Shenandoah Mennonite

Historians.

In this issue we provide a summary of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians annual meeting in November 2015. Finally, we include an update on the Virginia Mennonite Conference history book project, and we spotlight two recently published books.

**14th Annual Kennel Charles Anabaptist Lecture**  
**Monday, February 8, 2016, 7:00 p.m.**  
**EMHS Auditorium**

Speaker: John E. Sharp, History and Bible Faculty,  
Hesston College, Kansas

Lecture: "The Story of Orie O. Miller, 1892-1977,"  
based on Sharp's 2015 Herald Press  
book about Orie Miller. All are wel-  
come to attend!



John E. Sharp

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## Augusta County Churches

by Elwood E. Yoder

### STUARTS DRAFT OLD ORDER AMISH CHURCH

In 1942 a group of Amish families moved from Kempsville, Virginia, to Augusta County. There had been a schism among the Amish in Kempsville, which is located in Princess Anne County, in the Virginia Beach area. The more conservative group moved to the Stuarts Draft area and by 1943 they erected a meetinghouse, shown in the photos on the next page. Families from nearly a dozen other communities soon joined the Amish in Stuarts Draft.<sup>1</sup>

The Amish of Stuarts Draft featured German in their sermons and singing, they conducted a Sunday school every other week, and by 1960 had a membership of 99.<sup>2</sup> In the early years the Amish of Stuarts Draft did not allow the use of the automobile or the telephone. Due to families moving away to other communities and the establishment of a nearby Beachy Amish Mennonite Church, in 1986 the Amish church closed its doors and the building remains vacant to this day.<sup>3</sup>

### MT. ZION AMISH MENNONITE CHURCH

A Beachy group was organized in 1954, with issues that included wanting to be more open to reaching out to unchurched people, and the use of automobiles, which the Beachy church approved of. The Mt. Zion Amish Mennonite Church (Beachy) was organized out of the Stuarts Draft Old Order Amish church and a meetinghouse was built in 1955.<sup>4</sup> Mt. Zion was conservative in the early years, and retained the German language in public services until 1985.

Due to the emergence of another Beachy church nearby and a large exodus of families to Tennessee, numbers dwindled, and in 2015 the church was closed (see article in last *Historian*).

### PILGRIM CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

In 1968 the Pilgrim Christian Fellowship was formed in the same community as the Mt. Zion Amish Mennonite Church. With a membership in 2015 of 110, the church runs a school which meets in a large building next to the meetinghouse. There are ten Beachy Amish Mennonite churches located across the state of Virginia, with Pilgrim Christian Fellowship being the only Beachy church in Augusta County.

### VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE CHURCHES

Greenmonte Fellowship, Augusta County, is among six Virginia Mennonite Conference churches in Augusta County, including Lynside, Mountain View, Springdale, Staunton, and Waynesboro. Greenmonte, initially called East Bethel from 1952-1957, moved to its current location near Greenville, Virginia, and took the name Greenmonte because of its proximity to Greenville and the Blue Ridge Mountains. Greenmonte had been a missions outreach of the Southern District churches of the Virginia Mennonite Conference. In 2015 Greenmonte was a member of Mennonite Church USA and had a membership of 84.

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1. Elmer S. Yoder, *The Beachy Amish Mennonite Fellowship Churches*, (Hartville, OH: Diakonia Ministries, 1987), 362.

2. Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia, 1900-1960*, 2 (Verona: McClure Printing Company, 1972), 526-527.

3. Harvey Yoder blog, "We Wept When We Remembered (Mt.) Zion," July 23, 2015, <http://harvyoder.blogspot.com/2015/07/we-wept-when-we-remembered-mt-zion.html>.

4. Elmer S. Yoder, *The Beachy Amish*, 362.



**Stuarts Draft  
Old Order  
Amish build-  
ing, 2480 Tin-  
kling Spring  
Road, Augusta  
County, Vir-  
ginia, Decem-  
ber 29, 2015.**  
Photos by Editor



**Mt. Zion  
Amish Menno-  
nite building,  
1012 Guthrie  
Rd., Augusta  
County, Vir-  
ginia, Decem-  
ber 29, 2015.**  
Photos by Editor



**Pilgrim Chris-  
tian Fellow-  
ship, 240 Twin  
Hill Rd., Au-  
gusta County,  
Virginia,  
December 29,  
2015.**  
Photos by Editor



**Greenmonte  
Mennonite Fel-  
lowship, 1661  
Cold Springs  
Rd., Augusta  
County, Vir-  
ginia, Decem-  
ber 29, 2015.**  
Photos by Editor



## Singing Revival

by Gerald R. Brunk

From the very beginning of Brunk Brothers Tent Revivals in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in 1951, singing was as much a part of the meetings as the preaching. The brothers Lawrence and George Brunk II made up the worship duo with Lawrence leading the singing and George the preaching.

The type of songs were primarily gospel and spiritual, although there were some traditional hymns as well. Prior to the sermon, Lawrence would lead the audience of thousands in as much as fifteen minutes of singing, preparing everyone for the message to come. Soon after the campaigns had started, Lawrence compiled 109 songs into a booklet entitled *Singing Revival*. These song books would be placed in a slot on the back of the chairs, and were used in the tent meetings for the next thirty years.

Using no pitch pipe or tuning fork, Lawrence would lead the audience in inspirational singing. Since he had a deep bass voice, he would frequently shift from the melody to the bass in his leading. He liked to pitch "We Have An Anchor" low enough so that at the end of the refrain he would go very low with "grounded firm and deep, (holding deep) in the Savior's love." He would sometimes invite the young people to come to the stage before the service, and he would lead them in singing.

There were also certain songs for special occasions. The opening song was often "Come We That Love the Lord." Prior to the sermon, he would lead "Break Thou the Bread of Life." During the offering he would frequently lead "Jesus Paid It All," and during the invitation "Just As I Am." If there happened to be a downpour of rain on the tent during the service, we would sing "There Shall Be Showers of Blessing."

Lawrence was also creative in his song leading. Two of the favorite and frequently led songs were "Power in the Blood" and "Rolled Away." When he came to the refrain in the former, he would have the audience sing "power" four times, holding up four fingers and pumping them in the air. When he led the latter, he would divide the audience into four sections from the front to the back of the tent with the last section in the back singing "Every burden of my heart rolled away, thus symbolizing the rolling of burdens out the back of the tent. Lawrence would often spend so much time in the song service that George would tell him he wasn't leaving enough time for the sermon! Never before or since has this writer seen anyone who could get an audience to sing like he could. By the time the singing was done, the audience was indeed well prepared to receive the evening message.

After Lawrence left the campaigns in 1953, numerous persons picked up the song leading responsibility. Of these, the one who joined the staff and traveled with the trucks and house trailers for a time was I. Mark Ross. He too was a dynamic song leader, and led many of the same songs that Lawrence had led.

Until the tent meetings were held in western Canada among the Russian Mennonites, all of the singing, including special music, was without instrumental accompaniment. But when the campaigns came to Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, a piano was brought into the tent. However, it was used only by special music groups who were accustomed to singing with accompaniment, and not in congregational singing. At first it took the Russian Mennonites some getting used to singing without instruments, but they came to sing and enjoy the four-part harmony. It was during this time that the writer began doing the song leading. When he

was a student at Eastern Mennonite College (now University), his father had instructed J. Mark Stauffer to teach him how to lead singing, so he took the course in choral conducting under Stauffer, and also studied music under Earl Maust.

One of the songs that was not in *Singing Revival* was “Beautiful Stream,” but the writer knew that it was a favorite of Russian Mennonites, so he led it in the German as “Ich weiss einen Strom,” and they sang it more lustily than any of the other songs. Two songs that were unfamiliar to them were “I Would Not Be Denied” and “Open the Wells of Grace and Salvation.” But once they had learned them, they requested that they be sung with frequency. On one occasion when the campaign was in Altona, Manitoba, B. Charles Hostetter and the Mennonite Hour men’s quartet attended the meeting and participated in the service giving the audience an example of high quality a cappella men’s music.

What a blessing it was for this writer to lead thousands of people in singing gospel songs!

However, one Sunday night in Dolton, South Dakota, he had one of the most embarrassing moments in song leading. In front of some 5,000 persons he got up to lead the familiar “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder.” But instead of beginning with “When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound,” he began it with the words of the title. Obviously the song ground to a halt, and it was necessary to start it over again. After the meeting was over, a good brother came up to him and said, “Gerald, the Lord lets these kind of things happen to us to keep us humble.” The truth is, he was not only humbled; he was humiliated!

The writer is forever grateful for the opportunity of leading singing in Brunk Revivals, for it has enabled him to be involved in many occasions of congregational song leadership since then.



Photo from James Rush

## Virginia Mennonite History Book

A fund-raising banquet took place at the Trissels Mennonite Church, November 14, 2015, 6:00 p.m. The purpose of the meal and program was to raise money for the Virginia Mennonite Conference history book project. After a good offering at the event, it can be reported that over \$25,000 is already raised in two accounts, dedicated to the costs of producing the book. The two accounts are held by the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and the Virginia Mennonite Conference.

The program after the meal included a set of photos of over seventy meetinghouses in Virginia. With a theme of "On Ramps and Off Ramps," the Editor gave details of various Mennonite churches that joined the Virginia Conference and when, if at all, the churches left the Conference. More details about the book will be forthcoming from the Book Committee in 2016, which includes Timothy Jost, Jim Hershberger, Eunice Geil Showalter, Harold Huber, and Elwood Yoder. The author of the book will be Steven Nolt, recently named Young Center Senior Scholar at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania.

## Harmonia Sacra Singing 2016

The 114th Harmonia Sacra singing took place at Weavers Mennonite Church, January 1, 2016, 7:00 - 8:45 p.m. The sanctuary and balcony were full with 340 singers from fifteen states and three countries. Sam Showalter and Marvin Slabaugh were Moderators. Approximately 20 different song leaders selected hymns from the *Harmonia Sacra* song book, which dates to 1832. Most singers sang from the Legacy Edition song book though song

numbers were announced in both the long book and the easier-to-sing-from Legacy Edition.

The new Weavers history book was highlighted at the event and books were sold afterwards. Many young people attended the event, which bodes well for the future of Valley Harmonia Sacra singings.



The Editor signed a copy of the recently released Weavers history book for Violet Showalter Ropp, from Ontario, Canada, at the 114th Harmonia Sacra singing at Weavers Mennonite Church, January 1, 2016.

## Weavers History Book

The Weavers Mennonite Church history book was released on Sunday morning, November 29, 2015, at the Weavers church. The 360 page book was also highlighted at the 114th Harmonia Sacra singing at Weavers Church, January 1, 2016.

Copies of the book can be purchased at the Weavers Church office in Shady Oak, 2501 Rawley Pike, Harrisonburg, Virginia, during normal business hours. Call 540-434-7758 for more information. Cost of the book is \$20.00.

## Beldor History Book

James Akerson has written a sixty-eight page history book of the Beldor Mennonite

Church, Elkton, Virginia. Akerson, current pastor of the congregation, wrote the book in 2012, and produced an updated edition in 2015. The Middle District of the Virginia Conference had established a missions outreach in the Elkton area in 1935. Many have since served at Beldor over the years, which is what the book lists.

The book includes an overview of the church's beginnings, and then provides details about the service of eleven Beldor pastors. Akerson then includes detailed lists of members, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and numerous church workers. Akerson lists thirty-three members at the church as of August 31, 2015.

A feature of the book is over four pages that list musical groups which have sung at the church. Many of the singing groups are gospel or bluegrass in style. The Editor well remembers performing music with the gospel bluegrass band Daphna Creek at Beldor on Easter Sunday mornings in 2005 and 2007.

Congratulations to James Akerson for writing and producing this important history book of the Beldor Mennonite Church. Copies can be purchased from Akerson, by sending him an e-mail at james.akerson@gmail.com.

### *Warwick River Tide*

On October 16, 2015, the Editor interviewed Nelson and Kathryn Baer, at their home near the Warwick River Mennonite Church, Newport News, Virginia. The Editor sought information about Eva Weber Carper for an article that will be published in the Virginia Conference *Pathways* publication.

During the interview the Editor learned about the long history of *Warwick River Tide*, a sister Mennonite publication to the *Historian*, produced since 1945, out of the Newport News area. While the *Historian* is in its 24th

volume, the *Tide* is in volume 68. Twice in the past seventy years, it was thought the *Tide* would cease publication, but each time a new Editor was found to keep the newsletter going. Editors of the *Tide* since 2011 have been Nelson Baer and his daughter Jeanette Baer Showalter.

The most recent edition of *Tide* is eight pages, filled with stories, news items, obituaries, and announcements for the Mennonite churches in the Tidewater area of Virginia. Congratulations to Nelson and Jeanette for continuing this long tradition of a community newsletter. A complete set of *Tide* can be found in the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives, Harrisonburg.

### **SVMH Annual Meeting**

On Saturday morning, November 14, 2015, the twenty-fourth annual business meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians met in Village Hall at VMRC, 9:30 a.m. Eighteen persons attended. Chairman Jim Hershberger moderated the meeting, Gerald Brunk reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting, and Pete Burkholder gave a Treasurer's Report. Pete reported a checking balance of \$512.61, a shares account balance of \$4255.89, and a balance of \$8118.63 in the Virginia Mennonite Conference history book fund. Lois Bowman, Jim Hershberger, and Pete Burkholder were reelected to two year terms on the SVMH executive committee.

The main speaker for the meeting was Penny Imeson, Director of the Harrisonburg Rockingham Historical Society. She spoke about the Museum's goals of collecting, preserving, and sharing.



**Greenmonte Mennonite Fellowship is located at 1661 Cold Springs Road, Augusta County, Virginia. Formed in the 1950s as a Southern District missions church of the Virginia Mennonite Conference, the congregation has 84 members and 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.

Officers of the Historians:

Chair, Jim Hershberger

Treasurer, Sheldon "Pete" Burkholder

Secretary, James Rush

Lois Bowman

Gerald R. Brunk

Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

Forthcoming *Historian* Topics in 2016:

- Book review of Bowman family history
- Showalter history tour to Europe
- What churches should include in the Virginia Conference Archives

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 Greenmonte Mennonite Church, Augusta County, Virginia, taken by the Editor in 2015.

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 [jameslrush@comcast.net](mailto:jameslrush@comcast.net), phone 540-434-0792, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22802.

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