



# 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*

## CONSCIENCE IN THE COURTROOM

In 2006 E. Daniel Burkholder published a book that detailed a court case between the Old Order Mennonites of Virginia and the Rockingham County School Board in the matter of compulsory education for Mennonite children.

In *Conscience in the courtroom: history of the Mountain View Mennonite school system, Dayton, Virginia, 1968-2006*, Burkholder writes about the court case and provides a history of Old Order Mennonite schools in Rockingham County, Virginia. A copy of the book can be purchased at Burkholder's Buggy Shop, Dayton, Virginia, from E. Daniel Burkholder, who works at the buggy shop. Burkholder is a sixth generation descendant of Virginia Bishop Martin Burkholder, 1817-1860.

Burkholder has also published *Carriage Makers of Rockingham County, Virginia, 1820-1997*. Both books can be found in libraries at EMU, JMU, and Massanutten Regional Library. David Jost, a young Mennonite historian from Rockingham County, has reviewed the book for this issue.

In this issue of *Historian*, Rebecca Suter Lindsay, great-granddaughter of Emanuel

Suter, contributes another Civil War era poem. In "The Oath," 2014, Lindsay details the tension that Mennonites faced when they were required to sign an oath of loyalty to the Union after accepting General Sheridan's offer to transport them safely to the the north.

Carol Moser offers further details about the 1864-1865 connections that Mennonites made through the *Herald of Truth*, a new periodical that emerged at that time. Moser lectured on Valley Mennonites at the Hildebrand Mennonite Church, April, 2013.

The Editor provides two more vignettes about the Civil War era. Sheldon "Pete" Burkholder reports on an important EMALA meeting that took place in November, 2014. Finally, see details herein about an EMHS Kennel Charles Anabaptist history lecture by Regina Wenger on January 19, 2015.

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*Conscience in the courtroom : history of the Mountain View Mennonite school system, Dayton, Virginia, 1968-2006*

a book review by David Jost

Mennonite scholars have showed increased interest in Old Order communities in recent years, and E. Daniel Burkholder's *Conscience in the Courtroom* brings a valuable contribution.<sup>1</sup> It concentrates on legal struggles over mandatory school attendance that led to the establishment of Old Order Mennonite schools near Dayton, Virginia.

The state's ultimately unsuccessful effort to compel Mennonites to attend until the age of seventeen anchors the story and Burkholder describes the trials in detail. Quotations from the court, letters, and thick appendices bring historical heft and will please those who value primary sources for historical flavor, though certain pieces may feel like minutia for some. A concluding series of chapters detailing the Mountain View school system's development and policies and histories of particular schools will certainly interest anyone wanting a deeper understanding of Old Order education.

The Wenger and Cline Old Order Mennonite congregations slowly developed frustrations with public schools throughout the early twentieth century, particularly at the middle school level. Sex education, revealing clothing, emphasis on competitive sports, and evolution in the curriculum were major issues. During the same period, compulsory school attendance entered the state constitution and laws, and enforcement became stricter. In 1968, legislators made it a misdemeanor to not

send children under age seventeen to school. The Rockingham County School Board had allowed Mennonites to trickle out of school, but state government pressure ended this custom, and it tried to compel Mennonites to attend with notices that charges could be pressed and fines assessed. For the Wenger and Cline congregations, this posed terrible moral problems, as they conscientiously objected to sending students to public high and middle schools.

The Mennonites responded in several ways. The Wenger congregation created a new middle school that became known as the Mountain View School and eventually grew into a system with four schools, eleven teachers, and over a hundred and fifty students. Both congregations sought exemptions with the aid of a sympathetic out-of-state attorney and an interdenominational committee that supported Amish religious freedom. A series of letters, pleas, court cases, setbacks, and triumphs ensued, which Burkholder documents thoroughly and with excellent commentary.

Burkholder depicts all parties sympathetically and moderately. *Conscience* portrays a well-intentioned school board that feels bound by law. At some points, it is actually difficult to not feel more critical than Burkholder is, particularly when it was clear that the county board refused to grant exemptions the year after state-level officials had. Further explanation of the county board's motivation in denying the exemption request would be helpful, as perceived pressure from higher-ups and funding are main reasons presented. *Conscience in the Courtroom's* Old Orders are shown as convicted and ardent, albeit a bit awkward (Mennonites attempting to thank a judge for a favorable verdict with carts of food until advised not to was a

<sup>1</sup> *Conscience in the courtroom : history of the Mountain View Mennonite school system, Dayton, Virginia, 1968-2006*, by E. Daniel Burkholder, was published in Dayton, Virginia, by the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society and Books of Merit Publishing, 2006, 282 pages.

highlight). With a deep sense of the history and kindness towards all, Burkholder tells a valuable chapter of the Old Orders' experience trying to live faithfully in a complex world.



**Pleasant View Old Order Mennonite Church, Dayton, Virginia, 1994**

Photo by Elwood E. Yoder



**Riverdale Old Order Mennonite Church, Dayton, Virginia, 2013**

Photo by Elwood E. Yoder



**Oak Grove Old Order Mennonite Church, Dayton, Virginia, 2013**

Photo by Elwood E. Yoder

**Mountain View Mennonite School, Harness Shop Road, Dayton, Virginia, 2009**

Photo by Elwood E. Yoder



## Aunt Mag Speaks:

### The Oath

So there we were, standing before  
a camp table, confronted by lean-jawed  
officers in blue. On the table lay a journal  
with pages lettered in skilled script;  
beside it a quill and bottle of ink—  
all that stood between us and freedom.  
That, and conscience.

In the sober stillness, Father stared, pondering  
the tenet. Emanuel shifted from foot to foot.  
The children clung to Elizabeth's skirt.  
Is the prohibition against swearing an oath  
an absolute, drawing the wrath of God?  
Should it now separate us from safety?

Beyond the camp, ready to carry us to  
freedom, waited a locomotive, spewing steam  
and belching smoke, a fearsome beast, but  
not so frightening as what lay behind.

Should we now retrace the long trek of empty  
stomachs, drinking water fouled by carcasses,  
night in an open field with cold cracking our lips,  
brittling our bones? And to what? A farm  
in ashes and certain starvation?

I willingly signed. I was only committing to  
paper what I had long held in my heart.  
The officer ripped free the oath and handed  
it over. I considered that slip of paper more  
valuable than the silverware I had hidden in the  
outhouse at home. I read the words and faced reality:  
I was now Margaret Suter, "refugee sent north."

Rebecca Suter Lindsay wrote this  
poem about her great aunt Margare  
ret Suter. Margaret Suter lived from  
1832-1922, and was thirty-two when  
faced with signing an oath of loyalty  
to the Union, October 10, 1864.

Margaret Suter lived for many  
years as a single woman in the home  
of her brother and his family, Eman  
uel Suter. She attended and is buried  
at the Weavers Mennonite Church.  
Margaret was a tailor and was known  
for her many acts of kindness and  
charity to family and friends.

Rebecca Suter Lindsay wrote a  
feature article about the Civil War  
refugee train, with many details, in  
the previous issue of *Shenandoah  
Mennonite Historian*, Autumn, 2014.  
She lives in Crestview Hill, Kentucky.

An internet copy of the previous  
issue can be found at

[http://mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net/Shenandoah\\_Historian.html](http://mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net/Shenandoah_Historian.html)

## *The Herald of Truth* in 1864-1865

by Carol Moser<sup>1</sup>

In many ways *The Herald of Truth*, which providentially began publication in January 1864, continued on a wider scale, the communication among leaders and the broader church community as people began to spread across the country which is indicated by the letters published in *The Bishop's Letters*.<sup>2</sup>

Emanuel had letters published in January, 1865 after he was settled in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Suter's letters also appeared again in April 1865 expressing his thankfulness for the hospitality of the brethren and longing to return home; in October 1865 describing their journey back home to Virginia; and in February 1866 describing the trip that he and Christian Brunk took in April and May 1865 visiting the Virginia diaspora and others from Pennsylvania west to Illinois and even into Canada. The editor of *The Herald of Truth* encouraged anyone who had news of "our brethren in Virginia" to share that with the paper so that the readers, many of whom were constantly asking for any word about the brethren in Virginia, could share that news.

The December 1864 edition of *The Herald of Truth* included a letter from D. H. Landes describing his family's journey from the Valley as part of the wagon train, ultimately arriving in Fairfield County, Ohio. The March 1865 *Herald of Truth* contains a letter describing a Jan-Feb trip that D. H. Landes, Daniel Brenneman and others took through Ohio and Michigan, ministering to the brethren. In July 1865 D. H. Landes had a letter published in *The Herald of Truth* stating, among other

things, his intention to return to Virginia in the Fall of the year.

While Deacon Frederick A Rhodes remained in the Valley, he subscribed to the *Herald of Truth* in July 1865, shortly after communication between North and South was restored. In Nov 1865 and Feb 1866 the *Herald* published his letters describing the journey he and Bro. Joseph Driver took September - November 1865 visiting the brethren in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Canada, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

Bishop Jacob Hildebrand was an avid reader of *The Herald of Truth* and contributed articles to it from time to time, finding it much easier to write one letter to John Funk and yet be able to communicate with the friends he had met across the broad audience of the church in the United States and Canada, in both the English and German languages.

### Newton M. Burkholder

While conducting research for an article on The Burning, 1864, for the previous issue of *Historian*, the Editor discovered an eye-witness account of the October 6, 1864 burning around the Broadway, Va., area. The author was N. M. Burkholder.

Through further research, and from materials sent to the Editor by Lois Bowman, it appears there was a family of Burkholders who lived in the Fort Lynn area of Rockingham County who were not related to the Peter Burkholder Mennonite family.

Newton M. Burkholder (1844-1900), joined the Confederate ranks as a soldier at the age of seventeen. Newton Burkholder was a dentist. His father was John Burkholder (1809-1898), and both Newton and John are buried at the Cooks Creek Presbyterian Cemetery, Rockingham County. John Burkholder's

<sup>1</sup> Carol Moser, great-granddaughter of Virginia Bishop Jacob Hildebrand, contributed these additional details about Civil War correspondence after reading the Editor's article about the Sesquicentennial in the previous issue of *Historian*.

<sup>2</sup> Elwood E. Yoder, *The Bishop's Letters: The Writings, Life, and Times of Virginia Mennonite Bishop Martin Burkholder, 1817-1860* (Shenandoah Mennonite Historians, 2011).

father was Martin Burkholder (1767-1869), and his father was Jacob Burkholder (ca. 1738-1806 or 1807). Both Martin and Jacob are buried at the Antioch United Church of Christ Cemetery. Further research needs to be done to find out if these Burkholder family lines connected in Europe. It is surprising to learn that there were two Martin Burkholders living in Rockingham County in the early 19th century!

## SVMH Annual Meeting

The 2014 Annual Business Meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians took place November 8, 2014, 9:30 AM, at VMRC, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Thirty-four people attended.

SVMH Treasurer reported that the current balance in checking is \$248.51 and \$4251 in savings. The Virginia Mennonite History Book Fund book account stands at \$6111. President Jim Hershberger conducted an election that resulted in Gerald Brunk, Elwood Yoder and Jim Rush being reelected to another two year term on the SVMH executive committee.

The main feature for the annual meeting came from historian Dale MacAllister who presented a slide illustrated lecture entitled "The Burning of the Shenandoah Valley and the Refuge Wagon Train which occurred from September 26 – October 8, 1864 – Sheridan's 1864 Valley Campaign." An active question and answer period followed.

The members took action to implement a yearly membership fee of \$10 which includes a subscription to the quarterly *Historian* and \$5 for each additional household member for membership in the SVMH.

## Eastern Mennonite Associated Libraries and Archives

by Sheldon "Pete" Burkholder

EMALA, Nov. 15, 2014, Groffdale Mennonite Church, Lancaster Co., Pa.

The EMALA librarians and archivists met for their fall meeting at Groffdale Mennonite Church, Leola, Pa., for the purpose of unveiling a memorial stone placed there in memory of the Swiss immigrant widow, Barbara Schenk Burkhalter (Burkholder), and her six children. The stone had been placed about fifteen years ago by the Peter and Margaret Huber Burkholder reunion, but documents found in the years since, both in Switzerland and the US, made a re-engraving essential. Original stones for the widow and possibly son Peter (bishop, Va.) are preserved, but not descriptive. Stones for son Christian (bishop, Lancaster Co.), and daughter Anna Musselman remain beside the new stone.

After a short business meeting, the group went into roundtable to discuss new discoveries and newly published books available at the various libraries represented. Lloyd Weiler presented slides of the East Earl churches and cemeteries, including Groffdale. Dale Burkholder gave brief notes about the discoveries leading to the documentation of the immigrant family, as well as more recently, Barbara Burkhalter's Schenk ancestry (his book detailing such, is imminent – well, maybe a year or two). In the cemetery, as a group we sang, "Christ is Full of Love and Power," an acrostic by Bishop Christian Burkholder, set to an old German tune. We sang first in German, then English. After a luncheon, Romaine Stauffer presented her slides showing the Burkhalter documents,



previously presented (and in article form), to the Lancaster Historical Society.

Harold Huber represented EMU's library, and Pete Burkholder, representing both SVMH and the Virginia Burkholders, attended. Sheldon Burkholder took the photo shown above at the November 15, 2014 event. The second line from the bottom is of most interest to Virginia Mennonites. It reads "Peter, May 7, 1743-1812, m. Margaret Huber, moved to Harrisonburg, Va."

## Civil War Carved Bench

On November 15, 2014, the Editor met with Bob Weaver and was able to see the wooden bench that a Union soldier carved his initials onto while camped in the Weavers Mennonite Church during the Civil War.

Bob Weaver is the sixth generation in his family to attend Weavers Mennonite Church. His great, great, great grandfather, Samuel Weaver, was sexton of the meetinghouse from whom the church was named. Samuel Weaver's son-in-law, Samuel Coffman, was minister and Bishop during the Civil War. His son-in-law, Lewis (L. J.) Heatwole, attended for most of his life and was Bishop as well. His daughter, Elizabeth Grove was the mother of Virginia

Weaver, Justus Heatwole, and Annie Heatwole. Bob Weaver's parents are Richard and Virginia Weaver. Many items from the first two Weavers Mennonite Church buildings have ended up in Bob Weaver's home in Hinton, Virginia.



Bob Weaver shows a bench and wooden chair from the 1827-1881 Weavers Mennonite Church log church. The lantern hung and then fell from the ceiling in the second Weavers frame meetinghouse (1893). The initials in the Weavers bench was etched by a Union soldier who camped in the church during the Civil War.

Photos by Elwood E. Yoder





Regina Wenger will deliver the 13th Annual Kennel Charles Church History Lecture at Eastern Mennonite High School, January 19, 2015, 7:00 PM, in the school Auditorium. Regina Wenger will speak about her research on Amos D. Wenger, her great-grandfather, in a lecture entitled "Illumination in the West: A. D. Wenger's Theology of Revival, Dispensationalism, and Mission." The public is welcome to attend this free lecture.

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 2015:

- Mennonite Teachers in One and Two-Room Schools In Rockingham County (Va.) Public Schools, by Harold D. Lehman
- Lambert Mennonite Church, 1913-2014

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 Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Dayton, Virginia, in a photo by Elwood E. Yoder, from 1994.

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

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