



# 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*

## ABRAHAM B. BURKHOLDER

Abraham B. Burkholder (1850-1941) helped pioneer a significant missions effort into the highlands of West Virginia in the late 19th and early 20th century. Working out of the Middle District home bases churches of the Virginia Mennonite Conference, Burkholder often traveled by horse, carriage, and later automobile from his Harrisonburg farm into the Appalachian Mountains to the west.

Bishop Martin Burkholder (1817-1860) had first traveled into the highlands, preaching and teaching, and Bishop Samuel Coffman picked up that mantle after Martin Burkholder's untimely death in 1860.

It was Abraham B. Burkholder, and a group of other dedicated ministers, however, who took up the challenge to travel often and regularly to the highlands of West Virginia.

Abraham B. Burkholder lived to be almost 92 years of age, and during his work in the ordained ministry of more than sixty years, he served in some ways as a "pioneer missionary," like a first century apostle, traveling many miles, preaching hundreds of sermons, and helping to build up a number of Virginia Mennonite Conference congregations.

In this issue Sharon (Burkholder) Shenk has written an overview of Abraham B. Burkholder's life. Sharon is a great-granddaughter of Abraham B. Burkholder and Sharon's father Lyle Burkholder, from the Waynesboro, Virginia, area is probably the last living grandson of preacher Abraham B. Burkholder.

You will also find a group of photographs that feature the life of Abraham B. Burkholder, submitted by Sharon Shenk. Sharon and her husband Alan Shenk live in Waynesboro, Virginia.

It has been the editor's privilege to teach Ranita and Rachel Shenk, Sharon and Alan Shenk's daughters, as history and Bible students at Eastern Mennonite High School, Harrisonburg, in recent years. Both Ranita and Rachel, great-great-granddaughters of Abraham B. Burkholder, have been excellent students, and quite interested in the study of history!

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## ABRAHAM B. BURKHOLDER 1850-1941

By Sharon (Burkholder) Shenk

Abraham B. Burkholder was born in Rockingham County, Virginia, in 1850 and lived most of his life in the area just outside of Harrisonburg. Although not as well-known as his Uncle Bishop Martin Burkholder, he also was an influential minister. He was ordained to the ministry in the Mennonite Church on July 15, 1877, and served in the Harrisonburg area and also made numerous trips by horseback to Mennonite mission churches in West Virginia.

Abraham married Nancy Weaver in 1871 and was the father of ten children: Joe, Maggie, John, Reuben, Nannie, Perry, Amos, Emanuel, Mary, and Ella. The family homestead was located near Stone Spring. The house is still standing today, and now houses United Bank, located at 1980 South Main Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia. His children scattered: Joe, Maggie and Ella moved to Ohio, and Nannie



to Illinois. John, Amos, and Ella remained near Harrisonburg. Reuben moved to the Madrid area of Augusta County, Virginia, near Hildebrand Church.

Perry married Mattie Showalter from the Waynesboro area and began farming near Springdale Mennonite Church. One of Perry's sons, Lyle Burkholder, is still living in that area. During an interview, Lyle stated that later in life Grandpa Abraham Burkholder would come to stay with them for four or five days at a time. One Sunday, he remembered that he preached at Springdale with his eyes and Bible closed, and that he quoted a lot of scripture by memory. When Lyle was growing up, he says



The house above is the Abraham B. Burkholder homestead, undated, located south of Harrisonburg, Virginia. United Bank of Harrisonburg now uses the house that was once the Burkholder house. The bank is located at 1980 South Main Street, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Photo above from Sharon Burkholder Shenk; photo at left by Elwood E. Yoder

the Burkholders often met for a July 4th picnic and family reunion on the Samuel Showalter farm which was the home place of his mother. Grandpa Abraham enjoyed fishing with several grandsons on the South River which bordered the Showalter farm as part of those family gatherings.

Lyle also recalled hearing stories about his grandfather's trips to West Virginia to preach in the Job and Harman areas. He says he would leave on horseback on Friday afternoon and come home on Monday. He believes it would have been about seventy-five miles each way. Many services were held in school houses. One

time he preached a funeral sermon for a woman who had died during the winter. However, since it was so cold, it was several months later until a preacher could come out to have a funeral. By then the deceased woman's husband had remarried, but he became very emotional and had to be comforted by his new wife sitting by his side.

Abraham also had some interesting experiences growing up during the Civil War. Lyle says his Grandpa Abraham Burkholder would have been 14 or 15 years old when several battles took place here in the Shenandoah Valley. One day as Abraham was riding a horse



Abraham (1850-1941) and Nancy (1853-1917) Burkholder family, in an undated photo from the late 19th century. Abraham was a grandson of Mennonite Bishop Peter Burkholder Jr. The Burkholder family lived on a farm just south of Harrisonburg. Burkholder served in the ministry for over sixty years, ordained in 1877. He was active in the West Virginia Middle District mission work. Photo courtesy of Sharon Burkholder Shenk, great-granddaughter of Abraham Burkholder.

near their farm, a soldier came riding up to him with an old worn out horse and demanded that he exchange horses, which he did. Another day he was riding his horse, and was wearing a new straw hat. A soldier approached him and snatched his new hat right off his head. The Burkholder family lived close to one of the Confederate Army camps and Abraham related how they could hear the soldiers mourning after one of their officers had been killed.



**Abraham B Burkholder family. Front row from left, John, Nannie, Abraham, Nancy, Maggie, and Joe. Back row Reuben, Amos, Ella, Emanuel, and Perry.**  
Photo from Augusta County, Virginia, about 1915.  
Photo from Sharon Burkholder Sherk

Abraham's first wife Nancy died at the age of 64. He then married Lydia Weaver from Ohio. He lived until age 91, and is buried in the Weavers Mennonite Church cemetery. Many of Abraham's ancestors were ministers. Abraham's son Perry, was a minister at Springdale and took his turn as circuit preacher for other churches in the Southern District of the Virginia Mennonite Conference.



**Abraham B. Burkholder (right) fishing with his family in the South River with his family, near Springdale Mennonite Church, Augusta County, Virginia.**  
Photo from Sharon Burkholder Sherk

The Burkholder family is grateful for the blessing of a Christian heritage.



**Abraham B. Burkholder (left) with his second wife Lydia (Weaver) Burkholder (center).**  
Photo from Sharon Burkholder Sherk

**Abraham B. Burkholder family reunion, Augusta County, Virginia, July 1937. Abraham B. Burkholder is seated, left.**  
Photo from Sharon Burkholder Sherk



**Perry and Mattie (Showalter) Burkholder homestead near Waynesboro, Virginia, 1929, with children Lyle, Sylvia, and Merlin. Perry was one of Abraham B. Burkholder's sons.**  
Photo from Sharon Burkholder Sherk

The Abraham B. Burkholder photos in this issue of *Historian* can be found online at [www.mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net](http://www.mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net). Find the collection of photos labeled Southern District of the Virginia Mennonite Conference

## HARMONIA SACRA SOCIETY: PRESERVING THE LIFE AND TRADITION OF JOSEPH FUNK

By Stephen Lowe

Sacred music culture has changed in the one hundred and eighty-two years since Joseph Funk published *Harmonia Sacra* in 1832. Today we see multiple genres making up sacred music. We have hymns with choruses and without, we have gospel and spirituals, and we have Christian rock and pop. All of which would have never existed without the work of Funk, the father of southern gospel music.

Born on April 6, 1778, Joseph was the grandson of Henry Funk, the first Mennonite bishop in the United States. Originally from Bucks County Pennsylvania, Funk moved to Rockingham county Virginia with his family as a young person. He would remain a lifelong resident of the county until his death on Christmas Eve of 1862. He married for the first time on Christmas day 1804 to Elizabeth Rhodes. That same year he would build a log cabin on the property given to him by his father-in-law; this would become the village of Mountain Valley (renamed Singers Glen in his honor in 1860) where some of his descendants still live today. Funk fathered five children with Elizabeth until she suddenly died leaving him a widower. Then a year after Elizabeth's death, Funk remarried to Rachel (Britton) Funk. Joseph and Rachel had nine children before tragedy struck again. In 1833 Rachel died, sending Joseph into depression which he never fully recovered from.

During his life Funk was a farmer, a printer, a composer, and a compiler of music. His first compilation was *Choral Music*, a German language hymn book printed in Winchester, VA. He then published *A Compilation of*

*Genuine Church Music* in 1832. This would eventually be renamed *Harmonia Sacra* in its fourth edition. Funk was also a composer. Although he never placed his name on any of his work, he is accredited with composing multiple hymns in his *Harmonia Sacra*, one of which is "Protection," now "Foundation" (How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord...), which first appeared in the 4th edition of *Harmonia Sacra*. One of the most unique things about *Harmonia Sacra* is that it is written with melodic parts. This means that each part is its own melody. These stacked on top of the other melodies create a harmonic sound. This varies from a majority of church music today which is written in harmonic chords. He also, for some unknown reason, did not include an alto part in his books until the 11th edition of *Harmonia Sacra*. The book was never used as a hymnal, but was used instead to teach the art of singing to those who wanted to learn. Funk conducted singing schools all over the state of Virginia. He is even believed to have taught music to students at the University of Virginia. There are now 27 editions of *Harmonia Sacra*. Twenty-five of these editions are in the traditional long or elongated style. Two of them are in a more modern vertical style, these are called *The Legacy Edition of the New Harmonia Sacra*, or as the common *Harmonia Sacra* singer calls them the Legacy Edition. Not only did he publish music, but he published an English translation of the *Virginia Mennonite Confession of Faith*, an English translation of *A Mirror of Baptism*, and the *Reviewer Reviewed*.

Today Mennonites, and others, unite around the singing of *Harmonia Sacra* to "lift their glad voices in triumph on high," and to enjoy the community around the book. Sadly as Mennonites have marched into the 21st century, the traditional singings have grown smaller in attendance of those of us not in plain



dress. That is why a group of people have united to promote *Harmonia Sacra*. The *Harmonia Sacra* Society is a recently formed society created to preserve the art of *Harmonia Sacra* Singing, Funk, and any artifacts related to him or to his family. The society right now is striving for 501(c)(3) status (or the ability to accept tax deductible donations) and is looking for support in the Mennonite and other Anabaptist groups. If you are interested in the society and want more information, or have artifacts or money you would like to donate, please contact Sam Showalter at 540-433-9225 or at his mailing address, 183 Grandview Dr., Harrisonburg VA 22802.

Dr. Samuel Showalter (right) and his grandson Stephen Lowe, met the Editor at the Joseph Funk house, Singers Glen, Virginia, February 22, 2014. Stephen Lowe, 15, is a sophomore history student of the Editor at Eastern Mennonite High School, Harrisonburg.





John Ruth read from his newly published memoir, *Branch: A Memoir with Pictures*, at the Park View Mennonite Church, November 17, 2013, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Photo by Elwood E. Yoder

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

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#### Forthcoming *Historian* Topics in 2014:

- New picture discovered in archives of Northern District Bishop Lewis Shank (1855-1942)
- Overview of website called [Mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net](http://Mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net)
- 150 years since the Valley Burning - an article and poems

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)

The photo of Weavers Mennonite Church on page one reflects the church home of Abraham B. Burkholder, featured in this issue.

Cost of an individual membership is \$6.00 per year, or \$10 per couple. Send membership fees or inquiries to James Rush, e-mail [jamesrush@comcast.net](mailto:jamesrush@comcast.net), phone 540-434-0792, or U.S. mail 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22802

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