



# 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*

## Mark Cephas (M. C.) Showalter Sr.—Entrepreneur in Business and Mission

Trissels Pastor Harold N. Miller wrote our first essay about Mark and Amanda Showalter’s ministry in the Northern District during the mid-twentieth century. Pastor Miller’s account was read at Trissels church in October 2017.

In December 2017, the Editor drove to Salem Mennonite Church, Baker, West Virginia, and took current pictures. This is the church where Mark ministered. Salem has received scant attention in the *Historian*, and has been missed from several of our recent Directories of Virginia Mennonite Churches. Watch for an updated Directory of Virginia Mennonite Churches in *Historian* during 2018, three years since our last Directory.

In this issue also read an update of the Historians annual meeting, an article from Ken Eshleman, and a plea from Jenny Snyder for more information about Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church.



Salem Mennonite Church, Baker, West Virginia,  
Dec. 21, 2017

Photos above and below by Editor



Mark (1895-1978) and Amanda Hege (1891-1980) Showalter, April 1961, at Amanda’s 70th birthday celebration.

Photo from Duane Showalter

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## Mark Cephias (M. C.) Showalter Sr.--Entrepreneur in Business and Mission

by Harold N. Miller

In August 2017, a young lay leader in Trissels Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia, called the congregation to pray about some possible priorities or “strategic goals.” The first two goals included supporting families with youth and children and reaching out to meet needs in the community.

Two weeks later the Trissels Strategic Planning team met to talk about these priorities and about feedback from a day of prayer. One decision was to tap into the experience of the older generation—look at what Trissels has done in these areas in the past; how they have done these things well in previous generations.

A few weeks later, one of the team members had fun having a conversation with a Trissels member, Mark Showalter Jr., about what his father M. C. did to meet the spiritual and physical needs in the surrounding community, particularly in the highlands of West Virginia.

Mark Showalter Sr. (M. C.) started a feed mill business near Broadway in the early 1930s (during the Depression) and then a metal shop (now Broadway Metal).

Then the Northern District (of Virginia Mennonite Conference) asked M. C. to be superintendent of the Sunday school program at the Salem Mennonite Church (out in the hills near Baker, in Hardy County, West Virginia). For decades Northern District ministers from the Broadway area had traveled to a couple of schoolhouses in that area, preaching and giving pastoral care. In 1927, the Salem church building was built. Sunday School was held every week; a preacher would

come every other Sunday.

So on Sundays this busy businessman would get in his car and drive forty miles, past Chimney Rock and Brocks Gap—much of it a narrow, one lane, red-dirt road in those days. Mark

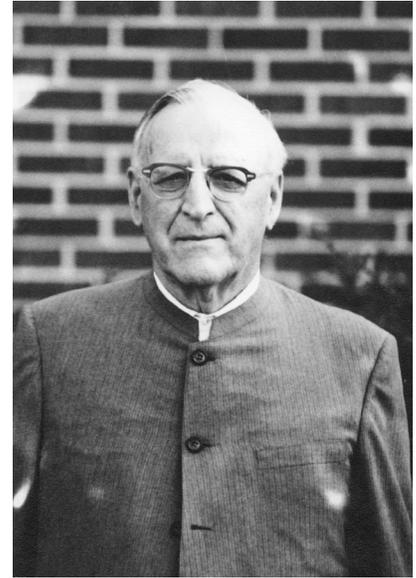
Jr. remembers dust coming up through the floor boards as he rode with his father every week (from when he was a small boy into his teen years). Sometimes his older sisters would come too, to teach Sunday school.

One of them, Fannie Heatwole, says the roads were so dusty, particularly in

West Virginia, that they could “about spit mud balls” by the time they arrived. After lunch, they would spend the afternoon visiting homes in the community.

And the Salem congregation was thriving. In 1948 (when Mark Jr. was 15), the building was enlarged by adding two Sunday-school rooms. Fannie remembers attendance being around 100 in the late 1940’s and having 30 in her primary (youngest) Sunday school class.

Mark Showalter not only went himself, but helped others go. When Summer Bible School teachers headed out to the mountain churches, they would stop at the mill to fill up their car with gas. M. C. also had a Ford car parked by the mill. It was known as the “preachers’ car” because persons preaching in the mountain



Mark C. Showalter (1895-1978) served Northern District churches and the wider community for many years in the mid-20th century.  
Photo from Duane Showalter

churches would use it.

M. C. did more than reach out to meet spiritual needs. The people in the highlands were poor and didn't have much of a way to make money. One family near Mathias was even less able; the father had only one leg. M. C. saw a way to give them an opportunity to earn a living where they lived. After the family built a brooder house, M. C. provided a wood-burning brooder stove, chicks, and feed for the chicks. After fourteen weeks, M. C. marketed the birds for the family, and paid them. Actually, the metal-works business started as a way of making brooder stoves and feeders and waterers for these growers. Soon M.C. was contracting chickens for more and more families and had many trucks taking feed to all the brooder houses.

For over twenty years, every Sunday, after running his businesses all week, M. C. traveled out to Salem (except for the three winter months each year when services were cancelled). Mark's sister Fannie wrote: "He worked as hard physically and mentally on Sunday to further God's kingdom as he did during the work-week."<sup>1</sup> One of Mark's strongest gifts was his love for people and enjoyment in meeting them and doing visitation.

Families around Salem were moving to the Winchester area for jobs. In 1953 one of the members at Salem, Maude Parker, got married and her new husband moved her to Stephens City. M.C. felt like a father to Maude, and couldn't forget about her. He made a trip to Stephens City to hunt them up. Maude remembered that M. C. told her husband Robert that he couldn't take one of his girls like that. He saw a need to provide for Maude & Robert's spiritual welfare, and so he started having "cottage meetings" in homes in



Salem Mennonite Church, Baker, West Virginia, about 1950, from Ida Showalter's photo collection.

VMC Archives

Stephens City every two weeks. A year later, in July 1954, Robert committed his life to Christ and was baptized, becoming the first member of an emerging church.

In the next months, Mark made contacts with more people who were members of the Mennonite Church and lived in Stephens City, Winchester, or Strasburg. In 1954 M. C. ended his involvement at Salem in order to give his time to the work in Stephens City. The group first met in the post office basement, then rented a church building. In March 1957 M. C. was licensed as a Minister at age 62.

In 1958, Mark and his wife Amanda built a house in Stephens City. Most weeks they would go there on Wednesday, and after doing visiting, return to their home in Broadway on Thursday, and then return to Stephens City on Saturday and come back home on Sunday. In 1960, the church built their own building.

In 1964, after ten years at Stephens City Mennonite Church, and at the age of 70, M. C. retired from the work there and gave the torch to another. What fruit those years of sacrificial ministry bore: between the years of 1954 and 1963, 51 people were baptized!

Sources: Interview with Mark Showalter Jr. on Sept. 11, 2017; two articles by Fannie Heatwole in *George B. & Elizabeth Blosser Showalter Family Records*, 2008; phone conversation with Fannie Heatwole on Sept. 13, 2017; *We're Marching to Zion, A History of Zion Mennonite Church*, Broadway, Virginia, 1885-2010 by Elwood E. Yoder, pp 137-138; Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online ([gameo.org](http://gameo.org)), Salem Mennonite Church (Baker, West Virginia, USA).

1. Fannie Heatwole, in *George B. & Elizabeth Blosser Showalter Family Records*, by Thelma Estep Showalter, 2008, p. 563.

## Annual Meeting of Shenandoah Mennonite Historians

The 2017 Annual Meeting took place on November 11 at Village Hall in Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community. Forty people attended. President Jim Hershberger presided over the meeting, Pete Burkholder gave a Treasurer’s Report, and Elwood Yoder reported on the Virginia Mennonite History Book Project. Jim Hershberger, Lois Bowman, and Norman Wenger were elected for a two-year term on the SVM Executive Committee.

Timothy Jost presented an account of a a trip he and his wife Ruth took to Poland in the summer of 2015. His talk included locations, history, and both personal and general Mennonite family histories from Poland. Timothy serves as Chair of the Virginia Mennonite Conference Historical Committee.



James Rush (left) and Michael Shenk II attended the Annual Meeting. Both men have been members of the Historians since the beginning in 1993, and Rush serves currently as Secretary and manager of the membership lists and distribution of the *Historian*.  
Photo by Editor



Eugene Stoltzfus (left) and Micah Jost attended the Annual Meeting at VMRC on November 11, 2017.  
Photo by Editor



Timothy Jost spoke to the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians Annual Meeting, November 11, 2017, above and lower right.  
Photos by Editor

The EMHS 16th Annual Kennel Charles Anabaptist Lecture will feature Nathan Hershberger and Kaitlin Heatwole, who will speak about their three years of MCC service in Iraq. All are invited to their lecture, 7:00 P.M., Monday, February 12, in the EMHS Auditorium.



## Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church

by Jenny Snyder

Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church was built in 1870 on land given by Jacob W. Harshbarger and his wife Elizabeth. The location of the little church was approximately 2.5 miles west of Mt. Sidney, Va. In 1887 a deed was made between Jacob W. Harshbarger and his wife Elizabeth, Jacob Landes, John W. Landes, and Joseph S. Harshbarger, trustees of the other part.

The church building today can be seen on Route 745 (Salem Church Road, Weyers Cave, Va.) about one mile on the left heading NW. The building still stands but is in disrepair and behind it are several tombstones from parishioners from years ago. Having always been aware of this scary little building I never knew a history of its beginnings or life. It has always stood empty in my lifetime and until recently I never gave the building or its purpose a second thought.

While researching my Harshbarger family history (my maternal grandfather was Jesse Linn Harshbarger), I discovered a name for this little church, Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church, and also a connection with it and my Harshbarger ancestors. This cemetery can be found as Seawright Spring Mennonite Cemetery online at [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com)

Behind the church is a small cemetery. The following list of graves is from information submitted by Ralph Coffman in 1958 which can now be found in records at the Historical Society in Augusta County Virginia. All of the graves are tied to the Harshbarger family. Joseph Harshbarger and Anna Harshbarger being the parents to Lydia Landes (wife of Jacob Landes) & Jacob Harshbarger (wife is Elizabeth), Jacob & Elizabeth being the parents of Joseph S Harshbarger (wife is Hettie M).

Jacob Harshbarger	b. May 12, 1832 - d. August 4 1907
Elizabeth Harshbarger	b. 1827 - d. February 18 1892
Joseph S. Harshbarger	b. October 12 1855 - d. October 7, 1906
Hettie M. Harshbarger	b. August 23, 1856 - d. August 12, 1927
Joseph D. Landes	b. May 9 1847 - d. June 17, 1938
Mary M. Landes	b. May 4 1842 - d. October 10 1914
Joseph Harshbarger	b. Dec. 13, 1801 - d. Nov. 27, 1867
Anna Harshbarger	b. September 18, 1808 - d. June 9, 1872
Jacob Landes	b. June 15, 1823 - d. Sept.10, 1898
Lydia Landes	b. August 19, 1824, - d. August 14, 1898

I have become aware of several graves that are unmarked. For some time after the closing of the little church some of the Harshbarger family would mow and take care of the grounds around the building and it is believed that somewhere in our Harshbarger family is a list of the unmarked graves in this little cemetery.

One grave known for sure was a Ward Yoder, born in 1916 and died December 9, 1916 (5th child of Levi and Anna Harshbarger Yoder).

Anna Harshbarger Yoder was born Hettie Anna Harshbarger daughter of Joseph S. Harshbarger and his wife Hettie M. Harshbarger. Hopefully one day this list will be found and turned over to the genealogical or historical societies of Augusta County for safe keeping.

Going into my Harshbarger family research I knew that I had Mennonite ancestors but I didn't know who they were or when they existed. I contacted several Harshbarger cousins and got what information I could. I discovered that the land that Mt. Pleasant Church is on was owned by my great-great grandfather Jacob W. Harshbarger. I was told that Jacob's father Joseph Harshbarger was a Mennonite pastor but I haven't found any information to back



Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church, fall 2017  
Photo by Jenny Snyder

up this. However I have found that Jacob Wenger's son Joseph Samuel was ordained as a Mennonite minister.

In *History of Mennonites in Virginia* by Harry A. Brunk, (Vol. 1 pp. 393 – 397, page 319 & page 423, and in Vol. 2 page 232) I did find mention of Mt. Pleasant Church that backed up the information that the land was donated by Jacob W. Harshbarger and his wife Elizabeth for the church in 1870. It was not deeded until February 5, 1887. Also I found in this book that a Joseph Harshbarger, b. October 12, 1855, was ordained as a minister June 2, 1867, and was a pastor at Mt. Pleasant. Due to the birth date this Joseph was actually Joseph S. Harshbarger, the oldest son of Jacob W. & Elizabeth Harshbarger.

Most of those buried in the cemetery at Mt. Pleasant I can list into my family tree. This little church is a big part of my Harshbarger family and to find out as much as I can about the history of the congregation is important to me. I want to know the importance of this little church during its time. It seemed such a vital part of the Harshbarger family as well as the small community on Naked Creek.

So where would any records to who started this little church be? Who were the organizing parishioners? Exactly how much land was originally deeded for the church and cemetery? Who were the minister(s) of the little church while it was an active church? Who actually built the church, did the Harshbarger's build and then donate building and land or was the church built by the congregation?

If the church was formed in 1870 and was disbanded in the late 1940s it would have existed seventy some years. From what was written in the Brunk book, the need for a Mennonite church was needed as the area built back up after the Civil War but then by the 1940s it was noted that the church "failed

to stage a comeback" with only two members left. The church was closed but it never offers any clue as to where any records may have been forwarded to. One of the remaining two parishioners was my Great Aunt Roxie Harshbarger. Roxie was an older sister to my grandfather Jesse Linn Harshbarger.

I know the cemetery's upkeep was done by the Harshbarger family but the church itself was sold without notice to the family which did raise some anger in the sale/transfer. I worry for the unmarked graves, especially if we cannot find the lost documentation of those graves that my uncle kept. The current landowner seems to just let it stand as it is but don't seem to do anything to maintain the structure's stability. Someone seems to keep the cemetery mowed but where exactly are those unmarked graves? Does the landowner's lane run over them? It would be nice to somehow show the history of the little church to those that pass by. I also can say that many of the Harshbarger descendants travel to Virginia just to see this little church and their ancestor's tombstones. Joseph Harshbarger and his wife Anna were the first Harshbargers to settle in Augusta County (migrating from Rockingham County). To find out more on the history of the congregation and building from its conception until its disbandment would be a huge part of my Harshbarger family history. I worry once the building crumbles to the ground the cemetery will be also deteriorate and this part of Mennonite history as well as Harshbarger history will be gone.

If anyone reading this document can help me with research please contact me at [thepawpatch@gmail.com](mailto:thepawpatch@gmail.com) or write me, Jenny Snyder, 125 Shutterlee Mill Lane, Staunton VA 24401.

## Harold and Arlene Eshleman

by Ken Eshleman

In late September 2017, retired professor Kenneth Eshleman completed a biography of his parents, Harold and Arlene Eshleman. Harold pastored both Chicago Avenue and Park View Mennonite congregations and taught in the public schools of Rockingham County for forty-three years. Arlene served as secretary, hostess, and caregiver.

*Harold & Arlene: Ministers to Many* weaves together family records, oral history, church and government documents, stories from ninety-five interviews and published sources. The result, according to Kenneth Weaver, “truly reflects Harold and Arlene’s lives and



Arlene and Harold Eshleman, 1983.

Photo from Ken Eshleman

ministry and the context in which they lived.”

The book opens with four historical chapters. Harold’s immigrant ancestor, Ulrich Eshleman, emigrated from Bern, Switzerland in 1754. Arlene’s ancestor, likely Jacob Hütwohl, was from South Germany. Both

Harold and Arlene lost a parent in childhood, Harold at the age of four and Arlene at nine. Harold’s mother, Cora (Grove) Eshleman encouraged her son to complete high school and college (Eastern Mennonite School and Bridgewater College). Arlene graduated from high school at EMS and earned a certificate from Dunsmore Business College in 1928.

Although classified as IV-E for two months in 1944, Harold was not drafted and was ordained to the ministry in March 1945. At

Chicago Avenue (1947-66), Harold and his congregation pushed for greater congregational autonomy from the bishop-dominated system of that era. He played a leading role in founding the Mt. Vernon church in Grottoes in 1953-54. During these years, the issue of dress led to tension between Chicago Avenue and more conservative bishops and congregations.

Harold’s long teaching career saw him moving from a one-room school where he taught all subjects to three-room Dale Enterprise where he taught for 28 years and then to two large schools where he taught only seventh graders. In addition to preaching and teaching, Harold helped his community resolve sewer and water problems from 1940 to 1982. He served on the executive committee of the Virginia Board of Missions for twenty-seven years. In retirement, he organized a much appreciated class for mostly Laotian immigrants at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.

The chapter on Family Life draws on letters and Arlene’s diaries to provide readers with a view of Harold and Arlene’s relationship especially in the 1959 to 1961 period. The couple combined church and community service with parenting three children and welcoming six grandchildren into their home for visits especially at Christmas time.

The biography includes ninety-three pictures, three appendices (including one that lists all the marriages Harold performed), a bibliography, index, and extensive endnotes.

The author began the process of research, writing and editing in June 2014. As with most authors, he received valuable assistance from many persons. Copies of the book may be obtained by contacting the author at 717-795-8268 or keshlem@comcast.net. The price is \$15.95.



**Salem Mennonite Church is tucked away in the remote regions near Baker, West Virginia, along Parker Hollow Road. Salem is a member of the Mountain Valley Mennonite Churches. Salem began in 1868 and left Virginia Conference in 2002. Current pastor is Craig Good.**

Photo by Editor, December 2017

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

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

*Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* issues from 2014-2017 can be found at [mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net](http://mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net). This site includes a link to over 1,300 photos related to Mennonites in Virginia, provides a way to subscribe to *Historian* online, and connects readers to the Editor's history blog.

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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