



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

Volume 22, No. 1
Winter, 2014

Published by the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians
Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

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

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

After twenty years of publishing the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, we pause in this issue to survey past issues, recognize former editors, and introduce the new editor.

On October 2, 1993, a group met in the West Dining Hall of Eastern Mennonite College and launched a new organization called the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians. An exploratory committee included Linden Wenger, James Rush, and Laban Peachey. Their recommendation to establish a local historical group was accepted by those at the meeting. Randy Shank and Lois Bowman were appointed to complete the first executive committee of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians.

Randall Shank served as the first editor of the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*, 1994-1997. Shank reported on the growing vision among the officers of the Historians to establish a heritage center in the Valley to better tell the story of Mennonites to visitors. In 1994 Shank wrote that the Historians had established a Planning Committee to draw up plans for such a center.

In 1998 Harold and Ruth Lehman assumed the editor's role of the *Historian*. For the next four years the Lehmans wrote articles, invited guest writers to submit articles, and published

regular news items on the work of the Shenandoah Historians. In 1999 they reported a decision to move ahead and establish a Heritage Center in Harrisonburg.

In 2002, James O. Lehman began as editor of the *Historian*. Lehman worked as editor for twelve years, faithfully publishing quarterly issues on the history and culture of Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley. Lehman applied his professional skills as a librarian, historian, and archivist to the task of writing new material, condensing what had been written before, and sifting through mountains of archival materials to bring to light that which has been significant to Mennonites in Virginia. James O. Lehman served his readers in an outstanding way, and deserves good thanks for editing the Shenandoah Mennonite Historian. Thank you Jim!

IN THIS ISSUE:

- OVERVIEW OF HISTORIAN EDITORS
- JAMES O. LEHMAN'S ERA AS EDITOR
- 2013 ANNUAL MEETING OF SHENANDOAH VALLEY MENNONITE HISTORIANS
- MY VIRGINIA ROOTS, BY ELWOOD YODER
- NEWS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

RANDALL SHANK
EDITOR 1994-1997

HAROLD AND RUTH LEHMAN
EDITORS 1998-2001

Randall Shank served on the initial team of officers for the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians, serving as the first editor for the new *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*. Shank wrote that the purpose of the Historians organization is to “bring together persons interested in Valley church history, to collect historical information about churches, families and individuals, and to assist the church community and individuals to tell the story of their past.”

By 1995 the Historians had written a Constitution and By-Laws. The guidelines call for an annual meeting, membership dues, and an Executive Committee with six officers, including the editor.

In the first issue Shank wrote an overview article about Shenandoah Valley pioneer Peter Burkholder Jr., 1783-1846. Shank noted in the article that Peter Burkholder Sr had moved to the Valley in 1790 with his family, settling near what became the site of the Trissels Mennonite Church.

In the second issue Shank announced the first of many tours to be conducted by the Historians organization. On Saturday, September 17, 1994, a tour bus went to Page County to visit the 1754 Jacob Strickler house, the “White House,” built by Martin Kauffman Jr., the Mauck Meetinghouse, and the historical marker for the John Rhodes family massacre in 1764.

By 1996 Shank wrote about a Task Force that had been organized to consider the possibility of a Shenandoah Valley heritage center. By the summer of 1997, it was clear from the news articles in the *Historian* that a heritage center would be established and built.

Many thanks to Randall Shank, then of the Trissels congregation, for editing and helping to successfully launch the *Historian*!

Harold and Ruth Lehman took over as editors of the *Historian* in 1998. The Lehmans began their tenure by outlining the purposes of the *Historian*. They published the Minutes of the October 25, 1997 Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, in which Steve Shenk took over as chairman for Laban Peachey, who had served in that capacity from the beginning of the organization. A very nice article on John W. Wayland rounded out their first issue.

The Lehmans produced a fine overview history of the Park View Mennonite Church in the second issue, a preliminary look at a book-length history of the congregation that Harold published in 2003. The Lehmans produced other congregational history essays in the *Historian*, including Morning View, Lindale, Pike, Zion Hill, and the Peake Church.

They also produced a series of articles on Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole, written by Grace Suter Grove, from the Mary E. Suter manuscript on Lewis J. Heatwole. Ruth wrote an extensive article on Deaconesses in the Middle District of Virginia Mennonite Conference. Eunice Geil Smith (today Eunice Geil Showalter) wrote an essay about the Trissels Church cemetery. Eunice noted that Alicia Showalter Reynolds (1970-1996) was the 8th generation Showalter buried at Trissels, with the oldest grave in the cemetery dating to 1798.

Towards the end of the term of Harold and Ruth Lehman, a steady series of news articles from a variety of contributors outlined progress on the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center. It became clear that the Heritage Center would spin off from the Historians and become its own organization. Many thanks to the Lehmans for their fine work on the *Historian*!

JAMES O. LEHMAN EDITOR 2002-2013

James O. Lehman created an index for his very first issue of the *Historian*. After eight years of publishing, Librarian and Archivist Lehman saw the need to print an index so that articles could be found and accessed. The Index was laid out in subject and topical headings, and included every article written from 1994-2001.

When James Lehman took over as editor he served on an Executive Committee of the Historians that included Michael Shank, President, Harold D. Lehman, Vice-President, Elroy Kauffman, Treasurer, James Rush, Secretary, and Lois Bowman and Cal Redekop. In his first issue Lehman wrote about the 100th anniversary Harmonia Sacra singing at the Weavers Mennonite Church, January 1, 2002. Editor Lehman also reprinted an article written by Lewis J. Heatwole about the Harmonia Sacra singing in 1920, that was printed in the local newspaper.

Two further articles in the first issue, Winter, 2002, revealed the continued development of the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center. The Historians and Heritage Center Board and guests held a joint meeting in late 2001 to discuss the emerging vision. Al Keim also wrote about the donation of the Turner Mill to the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center.

In the second issue James O. Lehman edited, he revealed the growing interest among Virginia historians in the letters of 19th century Bishop Martin Burkholder. Lehman created a list of all the letters in the collection of the Virginia Conference Archives, a number of which were written in German.

In the summer of 2002 Lehman wrote about the Middle District missions work into the mountains of West Virginia. Lehman went on to include information about 19th century Northern

District work into the highlands of West Virginia to the north and west of Rockingham County. All this before the Mennonite Church called this missions! Preachers from the home base churches would leave for days, and sometimes a week or more, to preach, conduct funerals, and baptize folks in the mountains. Lehman reported on a bus tour to the West Virginia Missions stations,



In the late 1800s Mennonite ministers preached regularly in small schoolhouses like Vaughn's School House, near Lost River, West Virginia. This photo comes from *History of Expansion of the Mennonite Church in Northern District of Virginia Conference*, written by Zion Mennonite Church members Helen Trumbo Shank and Ida Showalter in 1946.

slated for September 28, 2002, led by Bishop Glendon Blosser, with stops to hear from Dr. Samuel and Kathryn Bucher, Robert Wenger, and Joe Mininiger.

In the next issue, Autumn 2002, Jay B. Landis wrote a summary of the trip to West Virginia. Landis enjoyed singing "Glory Gates" from the 1911 *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*, at the Roaring Run Mennonite Church. Roy and Eula Good met the tour group to tell of their years of living and raising their family in Job, West Virginia. Jay Landis concluded his summary by stating that the tour served to enlarge their vision of the church in West Virginia.

In the summer of 2003, Editor James O.



Archivist James O. Lehman, left, showed letters in the Martin Burkholder Collection to high school history students Nick Seitz and Rachel Pleasant, December, 2010, in the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives. Lehman managed the archives as staff for Virginia Mennonite Conference. The Archives of the Virginia Conference are located on the first floor of the Hartzler Library at Eastern Mennonite University. Photo by Elwood E. Yoder

Lehman featured the mission work of the Northern District in the mountains. The Shenandoah Mennonite Historians sponsored a tour from Brocks Gap to Wardensville, W. Va. The tour hosts were Michael Shenk and Pat Turner Ritchie. James O. Lehman featured the historical work of Ida R. Showalter's term paper on the history of the Northern District, including numerous photos of mission churches.

Beginning in 2004, and over the next number of years, Editor James O. Lehman introduced and reviewed the various volumes of the *Unionists and the Civil War Experience in the Shenandoah Valley*. These volumes were published by the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center and the Valley Research Associates. The books were assembled and written by David S. Rodes and Norman R. Wenger, with Emmert F. Bittinger, Editor.

In 2006 Editor Lehman conducted significant research on the former Mennonite community in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. Greenbrier had been an early 19th century location for a Mennonite community, but little had been preserved in writing that historians could examine. Lehman used the work of Thomas Whanger of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, whose ancestors were from Greenbrier County. Whanger and Lehman wrote an essay together in the 2006 *Historian* outlining a letter that Peter Burkholder Jr. had written in the early 1830s, in which the Middle District Bishop made a case for printing an *English Mennonite Confession*. In

1837, Joseph Funk, in Singers Glen, printed and published the *Burkholder Confession*.

One of the most significant features of James O. Lehman's twelve years as editor of the *Historian* was to produce a "Directory of Mennonites, Amish, and other Anabaptist Groups in Virginia." Lehman began this important insert in 2004 and produced it every other year until 2012. Using a variety of sources, Lehman assembled what is probably the most comprehensive available listing of Anabaptist groups in Virginia.

In 2012 Lehman printed an essay written by Colleen McFarland, archivist for Mennonite Church USA, in which she expressed the perspective that working in an archives is a ministry. For James O. Lehman, long-time librarian, archivist, and historian, indeed, serving and working in an archives and as an editor has been a ministry. Thank you Jim!

TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING OF THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY MENNONITE HISTORIANS

On November 9, 2013, thirty-four persons gathered in Village Hall of Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, Harrisonburg, Va., for the annual meeting of the Shenandoah Historians. Chair Jim Hershberger conducted the business of the day, including a Secretary's report given by Gerald R. Brunk (in the absence of Jim Rush), and a Treasurer's report from Elwood Yoder. Hershberger noted that *The Bishop's Letters*, a 2011 book published by the Historians, continues to sell. One copy was recently purchased by the Library of Virginia in Richmond.

Three officers were elected, with Jim Hershberger being reelected to another term as chair, Sheldon Burkholder taking over as Treasurer, and Lois Bowman. They join Jim Rush, secretary, Gerald R. Brunk, and Elwood Yoder, editor, as the six officers for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians.

The major part of the program included a panel of persons who gave suggestions for an upcoming new history book about Mennonites in Virginia and surrounding states. Each panelist commented on their ideas for the content, scope, and characteristics for the upcoming volume.

A joint History Book Committee was established in February, 2011, by the Virginia Mennonite Conference Historical Committee and the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians. Timothy Jost and Harold Huber, Virginia Mennonite Conference Archivist, represent the Virginia Mennonite Conference Historical Committee, while Jim Hershberger, James O. Lehman, and Elwood Yoder represent the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians. Stephen Nolt, Professor of History at Goshen College, has been engaged as the writer for the new book. He plans to begin research and writing in 2016.



A panel discussed their ideas for the content, scope, and layout of an upcoming Virginia Mennonite history book, November 9, 2013. From left, Paul J. Yoder, James D. Hershberger, Joe Longacher, Jim Good, Lois Bowman, and Glendon Blosser. Photo by Elwood E. Yoder

“MY VIRGINIA ROOTS”

by Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

A few years ago, I was pleasantly surprised to discover the name of my paternal grandfather in Harry A. Brunk's *History of Mennonites in Virginia, 1900-1960*. I also discovered that Harry Brunk mentioned my father's work as a teacher during the late 1940s in the Kempsville Amish Mennonite School, Kempsville, Virginia. My grandfather, a minister in the Beachy Church, helped start the school.

My grandfather Simon L. Yoder assisted in the formation of the Beachy Amish Mennonite Church in the late 1920s. Soon after his marriage to Lydia Yoder in 1922, the Somerset County, Pennsylvania, couple took a lengthy trip to Virginia and stayed with relatives in Kempsville. After fourteen years of farming, Simon and Lydia decided to seek financial improvement elsewhere, so in 1936 they moved their growing family to Kempsville, Virginia, about ten miles from the ocean in the Virginia Beach area.

Simon and Lydia farmed in Kempsville, along the Princess Anne Road, from 1936-1953, before moving again and helping to pioneer a new Beachy settlement in Montezuma, Georgia. My father used to tell stories of him and his brothers driving their family tractor up and down the beach along the ocean, long before commercialization changed everything.

Harry Brunk mentions Simon L. Yoder as one of the ministers of the Kempsville Beachy Amish Church during the 1940s and early 1950s.¹ When the Beachy group discovered they needed to send their older children to school in the late 1940s, they built the Kempsville Amish Mennonite School in 1947. Brunk notes in his

Virginia Mennonite history book that the Beachy church hired three teachers for classes in the fall of 1947.² For the next three years, the 4th, 5th, and 6th grade teacher was Elmer S. Yoder, my father.

Elmer S. Yoder spent formative years growing up in Virginia, from age ten to twenty-four. By 1950, after teaching for three years without a high school or college degree, his desire for more education took him to Harrisonburg for summer school at Eastern Mennonite College. At the end of the summer of 1950 Elmer moved to Hartville, Ohio, where he married Esther Yoder (both sides of my family are Yoders) and began work as a teacher and principal at Lake Center Christian School.

After a few years, my father Elmer S. Yoder began teaching history and geography in the Louisville Public School system, Louisville, Ohio. I too am a long time high school teacher of history and geography. My father wrote twelve books and coauthored two more, many of them focused on local congregational histories. Elmer S. Yoder (1925-1927) also started and edited *Heritage*, the historical publication of the Stark County Amish and Mennonite Historical Society. I was pleased to write up his lifetime accomplishments for the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia, (www.gameo.org) after his passing in 2007.³

I learned new information about my grandfather's Virginia story when I read an article about Amish Mennonites in Georgia, in the October 29, 2012 issue of *Mennonite World Review*.⁴ Kelli Yoder conducted interviews among Amish Mennonites in Montezuma, Georgia, where my grandparents and family moved to in

² Brunk 1972, 524.

³ http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/yoder_elmer_s._1925_2007/

⁴ "Settled in the South: Amish Mennonites grow quietly in George," by Kelli Yoder, *Mennonite World Review*, October 29, 2012, page 1.

¹ Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, Volume 2, 1972, 528.

Elmer S. Yoder (1925-2007), back row far upper right, attended the Eastern Mennonite College summer school in 1950. Elmer S. Yoder had taught for three years in the Kempsville Amish Mennonite School, Virginia. History teacher Harry A. Brunk is standing in front row, far left. Historian Grace Showalter is in the fourth row, fifth from the left.



1953. She writes that when Cold War military bases began expanding in Norfolk and land began to become commercialized, threatening their way of life, they moved to Georgia. My grandfather and other men drove to South Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee, before settling on Montezuma, Georgia, several hours drive south of Atlanta. Every year, my parents drove my siblings and me to the red dirt soil of Georgia to play with and visit with dozens of cousins in a tightly-knit farming community. My father was the only one of a large family to leave the Beachy Amish and join the Mennonites.

I grew up in Hartville, Ohio, but since leaving home for Eastern Mennonite University, I've lived in Virginia for over thirty years. It took my detailed study of Brunk's history book of Virginia Mennonites to rediscover my southern roots, deep in the farming soil of the Virginia Beach area.

I've been teaching high school World History, U.S. History, and Bible classes for the past thirty-three years, working in four different schools,

though most recently at Eastern Mennonite High School. A significant event for me began in 2007 when leaders at Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia, asked me to write their congregational history, on the 125th anniversary of the church in 2010. James Rush worked closely with me on the book and was an invaluable guide in the process. Another significant event that got me into Shenandoah Valley Mennonite history was being asked to read and study the letters of Bishop Martin Burkholder, which ended up in a volume called *The Bishop's Letters*, 2011.

My wife Joy (Risser) and I are the parents of three young adult children. Our family has attended the Zion Mennonite Church since 1989. I look forward to the privilege of editing the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian*.



Elwood Yoder, 2012



Paul J. Yoder and Holly Scott talk after the annual meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, November 9, 2013, at the Village Hall, VMRC, Harrisonburg, Virginia. Photo by Elwood E. Yoder

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 2014:

- Feature on Abraham B. Burkholder (1850-1941)
- New picture discovered in archives of Northern District Lewis Shank (1855-1942)
- Focus on 1919 in Valley Mennonite History
- Overview of Mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net

The Lindale sign on the front of the current issue is featured in recognition of the outstanding work of former Editor James O. Lehman, 2002-2013. James and his wife Dorothy Lehman have attended Lindale Mennonite Church for over forty years.

If you have an idea for an article or picture for the *Historian*, contact the Editor at elyoder@gmail.com.

Cost of an individual membership is \$6.00 per year, or \$10 per couple. Send membership fees or inquiries to James Rush, at e-mail jamesrush@comcast.net, 540-434-0792, or 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22802

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians
 780 Parkwood Drive
 Harrisonburg, VA 22802