

Vol. 21, No. 2

Quarterly Publication of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians

Spring 2013

REBIRTH ?

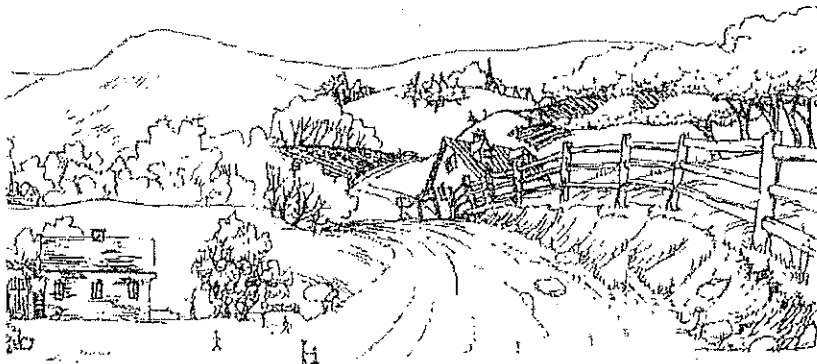
What better way to finish my last year of editing the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* than to re-publish samples of the wonderful sketching that Jonathan Gehman did for us when I edited the *Lindale Lines* beginning with the late 1980s and the *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* beginning with 2002?

Gehman's individual sketches and cartoons have brightened the lives of many children and adults. One of the editor's favorites was when he produced the above heading. It typifies Jon's free spirit and humor, his far-ranging abilities, his interests in music, nature, birds and life.

And he did these sketches for free, sometimes at a moment's notice or suggestion. I'm sure I took advantage of his willingness. My apologies! I received many comments over the years about his light-hearted and serious sketches. In these three issues of *SMH* 2013, we return once more to his sketches for the current generation to enjoy.

As the sketch below from the *Lines* of July 2002 reminds us, the stones, the flowers, and the winding road sneak around our hearts and take us to unknown/unseen/unexpected/adventures and bends in the road. We are reminded that life has twists and turns, and grass, trees and flowers as we explore and move on. Thanks Jon for brightening our lives along the way! Blessings.

jim lehman



Sketches from
Various
*Shenandoah
Mennonite
Historians*
and / or
Lindale Lines

In June and July 1895 the readers of the local newspaper, the *ROCKINGHAM REGISTER*, were presented several installments about the Mennonites on the front page. It was entitled simply as follows: THE MENNONITES.

The author modestly listed himself "By a Mennonite." Specifically written for the newspaper it was supposed to be three articles. Unfortunately, only two are available, due to a gap in the microfilming of the series. Perhaps one issue was missing when the microfilming was done.

Since the writer does not identify himself, we can only guess who the writer was. Few, if any could write in the fanciful and wordy language style the writer used. So, we guess the new young bishop Lewis James Heatwole (L. J. Heatwole) to be the writer. He could and did write in this kind of style. He handled English well, but it tended to be overblown and wordy.

THE MENNONITES

By a Mennonite

"History is, in a certain sense, but the philosophy of teaching by the recorded example of others, and is the great diversity and multiplicity of human acts and human aims, the majority of these are apt to strike the casual observer as being either highly interesting and attractive, or repulsive in a degree to excite feelings of scorn and contempt.

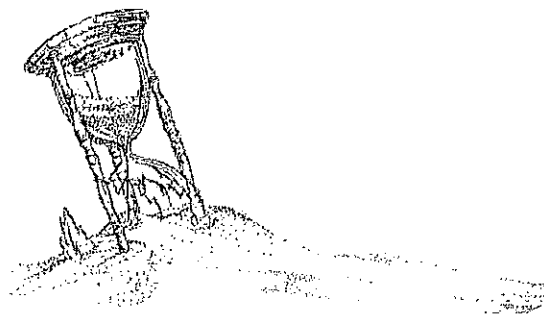
"Though the virtues and failings of humanity are thought to be pretty evenly divided as a whole, the fact is, nevertheless, to be recognized that in the mind of every rational man and woman who has passed the meridian of life there lies the imprint of deeds and purposes that were prompted by the noblest heroism and a spirit of martyr-like self-denial that are in their way as beautiful and pathetic as any that have ever been recorded by the historian's pen."

"Or had one but the time and inclination to gather up the hundred or more little incidents that make up the thread of the humblest of lives, a tale might be told and a volume written in each case of the highest devotion to principle, of sacrifice rendered and duty well done for the common cause of humanity, that would place the individual; with the rank and file of such of the world's great men upon whose brows the diadem of honor has long glistened and the written pages of history caused stars of glory to shine.

"What may thus be said of individuals may also apply with equal force to religious organizations. Such as have sprung from the smallest of beginnings and are of the humblest origin are known to display the noblest qualities of Christian manhood and womanhood, or achieve the grandest successes in face of the direst of life's extremities.

With respect to their humble and obscure beginning, and the well-nigh insurmountable difficulties that long stood in the way of their progress in the religious world it is the writer's purpose in this treatise to deal with that class of people whose denominational name stands at the head of this article.

It has long been a principle with this people to make no parade of their doctrine and their form of worship has always remained free from any semblance of ostentation. Their custom from time immemorial has been to go about things in a quiet way, and unlike most other denominations, they never made it a rule to publish an account of their work or the number of their communicants.—



Hence for centuries they have come but little into public notices, and have lived in comparative obscurity to the outside world. Whatever history has been written concerning them has usually been done by their bitterest enemies, and even since their settlement in Rockingham county the alleged peculiarity of their faith has been the subject of much unfavorable comment and ridicule.

Much as has been said and done in the past derogatory to their religious faith and general habits in life, after all no people have, perhaps, had higher testimonials, or had nobler tributes paid them by such as have never embraced their doctrine than the Mennonites.

In this connection reference might be made to the memorable address of Algernon S. Gray before the Confederate Congress, at Richmond, Va. in September, 1861, which led to the passage of a bill exempting Mennonites from military duty during the Civil War. And nothings seems more beautiful and touching than the ably written pamphlet, "The Mennonites," by E. K. Martin, Esq., of the Lancaster, Pa, bar.

Of all the productions of tongue or pen we have read nothing conveys the higher tribute to a single people than the address of Samuel W. Pennybacker of the Philadelphia bar, and delivered at the Academy of Music, in that city, October 3d, 1883. — In chapter XXV, "History of Rockingham County," as it appears in the Register of August 13th, 1885 a most praiseworthy notice appears with reference to this people.

"And lastly, the testimony, in behalf of the honesty and integrity of the Mennonites as made by O. B. Roller, of Harrisonburg, counsel for the defence during the *habeas corpus* trial in case of Caddie B. Suter, March 28d, 1894, is still held in grateful remembrance by the numerous representatives of this class who were present when the address was delivered.

"The original home of this sect appears to have been on the banks of the Rhine, with the

present boundaries of the Canton, of Zurich, Switzerland, where as early as 1525, Crabel, one of the earliest of the German reformers, founded a religious colony, having for its most distinctive mark baptism upon confession of faith, and in this the main interests of the community lay, not so much dogma as in discipline.

"Hence, the evangelical life was reduced to a law that recognized not only a separation, but a distinction from the world.— With respect to this distinctive or outward form of religion, the *principle* became the first and primary rule of all their actions, while outward form itself placed them in the attitude of sober singularity before the world. The principle is recognized by every true Mennonite as that which settles and establishes character, while again the outward form is simply used to give external force and expression to character. Based upon these early principles it became necessary for all people of this sect to establish themselves in clans or communities to themselves.

"From these small beginnings there gradually spring into existence at various point in Switzerland, France, Germany and Holland large flourishing colonies of these people, when in the beginning of the second quarter of the sixteenth century the great struggle for religious liberty began to convulse all Europe, the iron hand of persecution was laid most relentlessly upon all these communities that had adopted the creed of Crabel.

"Death and desolation being carried into all their dwelling places, they fled from one end of the Rhine Valley to the other before heir persecutors. So rigorous was this persecution and so effectually was it carried out that hundreds perished by the sword or were drowned or burnt at the stake. There is scarcely a family name among the Mennonites of today that can not be traced back to some ancestor who was burned at the stake or otherwise tortured to death by reason of his faith.

“The tradition is generally accepted that out of this first and most awful persecution visited upon this people, only a remnant escaped with their lives, and it was in the year 1537 that one Menno Simons, who was formerly a Catholic priest, collected together these disciples of Crabel, and in addition to the principles already espoused by them, taught them the anti-war spirit; that church and state should be recognized as separate institutions, and that religious tolerance be granted to all orthodox believers.

“ It was this little handful of fugitives that were first known as and bore the name of Mennonites. For twelve years previous they had been known as Baptist, but with Menno as their leader and pastor, they gradually came under the designation of Mennonites, and ever since their followers have been termed as Menists, or Menniats, or Mennonites.

“From 1660 to 1710 the Mennonites suffered persecution from the hands of their Protestant brethren, because they openly refused to have their children held to the baptismal font as soon as they could be carried there by the nurse—claiming that the age of discretion was the proper period to receive the holy ordinance.

“For this reason many were exiled into Russia and Austria, and it was during this period that America, and especially the State of Pennsylvania, became an asylum for this people. Rather than abandon the principles of their faith they faced the perils of a voyage across the Atlantic, and endured the privations of pioneer life, that a refuge might be found where that religious toleration and liberty of conscience might be enjoyed that had been so long denied them in the Fatherland.

The first authentic notice we have on any settlement of this people in America is that of a body of some 25 members who located at Germantown, Pa., October 6th, 1683. These are said to have come from Altoona, in the Canton of Holstein, in North Germany, under the advice and solicitation of William Penn. This colony is said to have increased rapidly through subsequent immigration, and its members soon came under the observation of their neighbors as being very simple in their habits and mode of life; that they were clothed in plain, modest apparel, were slow to abandon the customs of their forefathers, and did not readily adopt modern innovations of any kind.



“Their first meeting-house was erected at Germantown in the year 1708, and is said to have been a quaint structure built of logs and was severely plain both inside and out.

“Among the first Mennonite ministers who are said to have been ordained and preached here, and who were also the first to preach in America are the names of William Rittenhouse, Dirk Keyser and John Minnich. Owing to the war-like disposition of the Indians at many points during the colonial period, no settlement of Mennonites appears to have been made anywhere beyond the boundaries of Pennsylvania.

“Up to a few years prior to the breaking out of the Revolutionary War there were thirteen congregations in the State of Pennsylvania, forty-two meetinghouse, fifteen bishops, and fifty-three subordinate ministers. Since the close of the War for Independence the boundaries of the fold have been enlarged to the North, the South and the West, until at the present time the adherents of Menno, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, 175,000 in the United States and 25,000 in Canada.

“From the best and most reliable accounts obtainable our beautiful Shenandoah Valley was first settled from the Potomac river southward, mainly by Pennsylvanians, beginning with the year 1782.

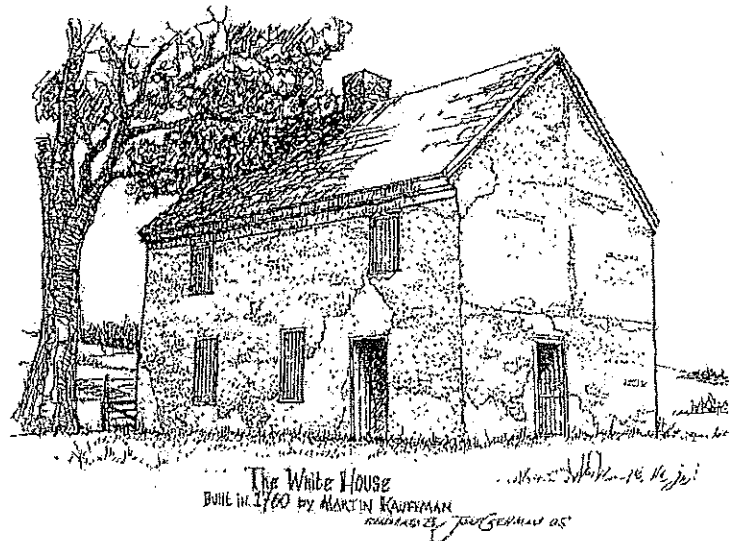
“At this time there were still a goodly number of Indians residing in the valley, and during a period of 28 years the whites were left undisturbed by them, but by the time the settlements had been pushed as far north as the forks of the Shenandoah, near the present site of Strasburg, which was in the year 1754, the Valley Indians suddenly disappeared beyond the Alleghany mountains.

“After this sudden and unlooked-for departure of the Indians, the Mennonists, as they were then called in contradistinction to the Calvinists first entered the Valley. Finding it already occupied by settlements as far north as Strasburg, they appear to have made their first halt near what is now Woodstock. Others in following the main

branch of the Shenandoah found comfortable homes in what is now Page county, opposite to the Powell’s Fort Gap.

“From 1754 to 1780 a regular stream of emigration was kept up from Pennsylvania to that part of our Valley now comprised by the counties of Page and Shenandoah, where prosperous Mennonite settlements were formed. The first ministers of whom we have any mention were two in the Shenandoah settlement by the names of Stauffer and Craybill, and one in the Page settlement by the name of Rhodes.

“These pioneer Mennonites are said to have never had any meeting-houses built especially for worship, but services were held regularly in private houses and in the German language only. As a people they were very tenacious in the preservation of their language, religion, customs and habits and were remarkable for their strict



adherence to all the moral and religious observances required by their sect. Their children were early instructed in all these principles, and were strictly prohibited from engaging in the dance, the shooting-match, and other amusements do common with the young people of those days.

“As stated before, the resident Indians of the Valley had removed from this section in the spring of the year 1754, but during the period covered by the French and Indian wars (from 1755 to 1774), frequent marauding parties of Indians entered the Valley for the purpose of plunder and murder, when unfortunately the aforementioned minister Rhodes, together with nearly all his family, were murdered and their home reduced to ashes.

“Kercheval, in describing this act of savage fury in his “History of the Valley,” states: ‘Mr. Rhodes was standing in the door when he was shot and fell dead. Mrs. Rhodes and one of the sons were killed in the yard. One of the young men (another son) was at the distance of about one hundred and fifty yards from the house in a corn field. Hearing the report of the guns at the house he ascended a pear tree to see what it meant, where he was discovered by an Indian and instantly killed. The third poor young lad attempted to save himself by flight and to cross the river, but was pursued and killed in the river.

“The place is called Bloody Ford to this day. Mr. Rhodes eldest daughter, Elizabeth, caught up her little sister, about sixteen or eighteen months old, ran into the barn and secured the door, but not succeeding, he with oaths and threats ordered her to open it. On her refusal, the fellow ran back to the house to get fire, and while he was gone Elizabeth crept out at an opening on the opposite side of the barn, and with her little sister in her arms ran through a field of tall hemp, crossed the river, reached a neighbor’s house, and thus saved herself and little sister.

“After plundering the house of such articles as they chose to take along with them, the Indians set fire to all the buildings and left the dead body of Mr. Rhodes to be consumed in the flames.’ The same author states that this outrage was committed in the latter part of August, in the year 1766, about ten years before the Revolutionary War.

“During the Colonial period this Mennonite settlement near Woodstock was made up a class whose education was extremely meager and the language exclusively German. Hence, no records were kept, either of their families or of their religion. For this reason little is known to the present generation, more than that the older ones all died and now lie in unnamed graves in the section in which they lived, while their children, as a rule, pushed on up the North Fork of the Shenandoah and formed settlements within the limits of what is now Rockingham county, and occupied the section where are now located the towns of Timberville, Broadway, and Turleytown, the latter place being reputed as being the oldest town in Rockingham county.

It will be remembered that all this section was at that time still territory known as Augusta county, and embraced the whole of the Northwest, now including the States of West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and that it was not until the year 1778 that the present county was organized named after a distinguished English officer, the Marquis of Rockingham.

By the time the county was duly organized and the county-seat established at Harrisonburg, two years later (1780), some 80 Mennonite families had located mainly along the northern border on the river as far up as Cootes’ Store, and in the Linville’s creek valley as far south as Greenmount and Edom.

Before we continue in two more issues of *SMH* with the names of early settlers, early ministers, history and worship patterns of Virginia Mennonites we make a few comments about the accuracy of this newspaper article and the one that followed in the July 2, 1895 issue.

It seems clear that the writer of these newspaper articles had done very careful and thorough research. Other sources confirm much of what the writer claims. Again, we would guess L. J. Heatwole as the author. No other persons come to mind who were so well known in 1895 for their knowledge of the Mennonites.

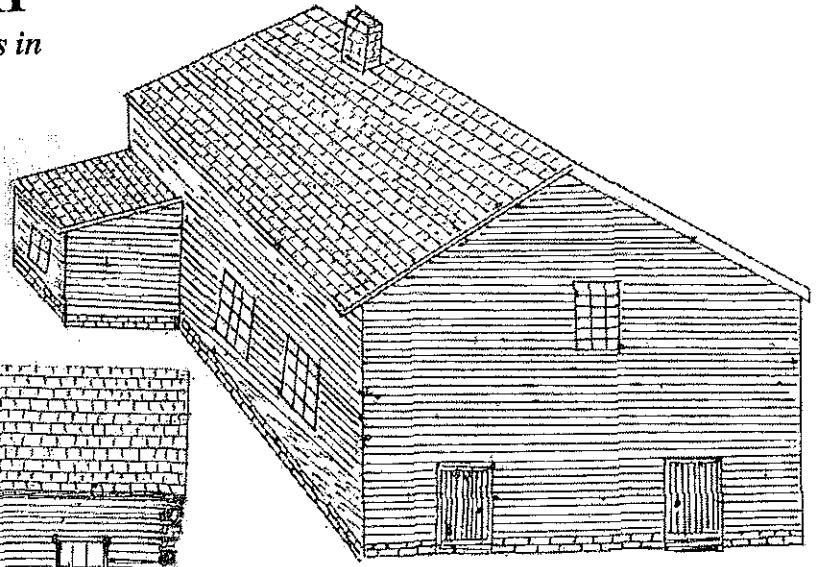
James O. Lehman

L. J. Heatwole

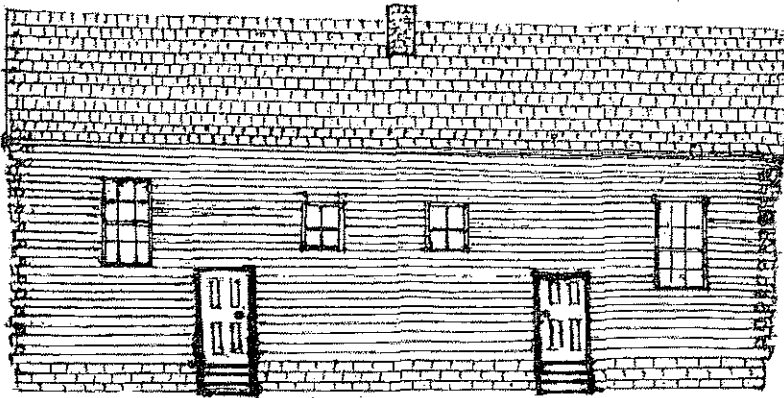


PLACES OF WORSHIP

Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia, Vol. I*

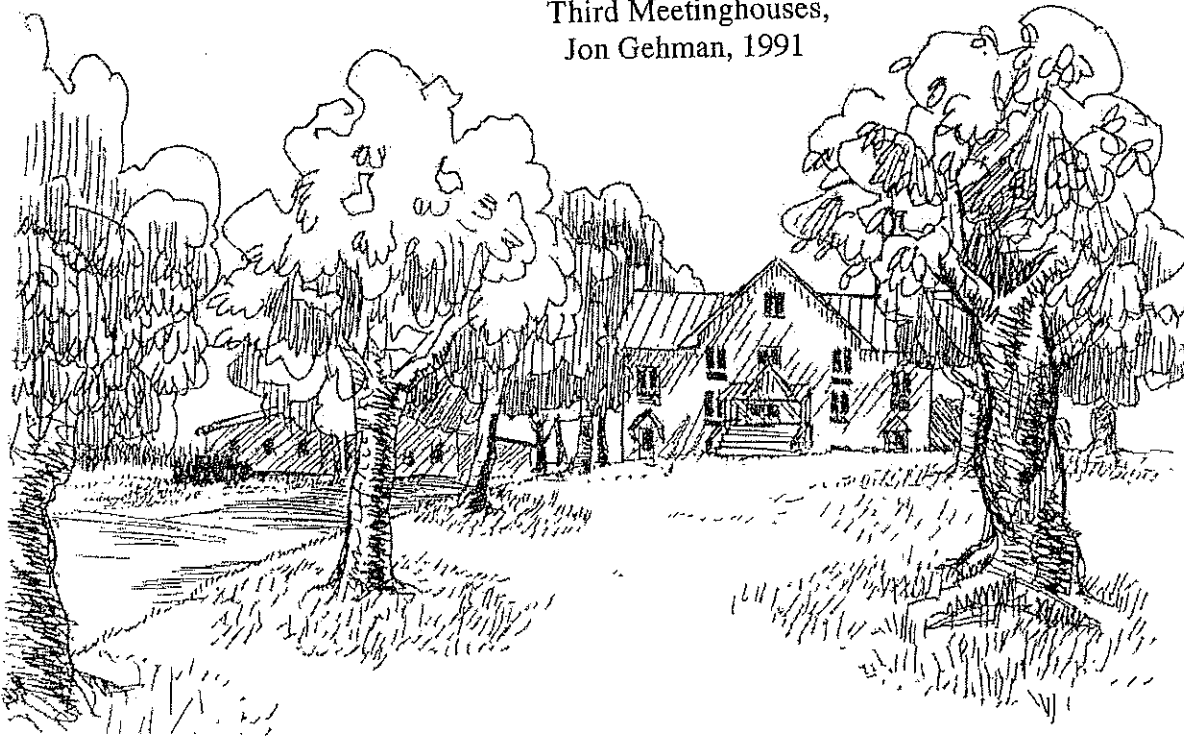


Trissels Church (1823-1900)



Bank Church (1849-1893).

Lindale – First, Second and
Third Meetinghouses,
Jon Gehman, 1991



Of Books and Reading

When I was young I read books voraciously, except there was such a limited number available to me out on the farm and no book-mobile visiting the area.

Today there are millions available but time and ability available for only a tiny number. to see and read. Plus I deal with the hazard of my right eye tiring quickly when I read.

I have a weekly rendezvous with books going through my hands as I work for BookSavers and search for ISBN numbers to categorize them

Of course, an extremely huge majority do not appear to be worth the effort to try and read. Thus I choose selectively.

In this and several more issues of *SMH* I'll share some examples of books enjoyed this winter. Some are novels but many of those

appear to me like pulp fiction and not worth the time and effort.

* * * * *

Lori Wick, *Just Above a Whisper*.
Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 300 pp. ISBN: 0-7394-5592-3

A love story set in Tucker Mills, Massachusetts in 1839. "A tender story of the power of faith over fear and the tie that truly binds." Develops slowly but surely. They finally do get married.

Reese Thackeray an indentured servant, slowly and gradually falls in love with bank owner Conner Kingsley. Both are in their twenties. She's a skinny six feet tall woman with red hair and he's a big broad six foot six. Both eventually accept God's larger plan for their hearts and lives.

It makes for an intriguing love story skillfully developed. For a while it keeps one guessing, but the reader hopes it results in a relationship and marriage. It does. But names for the baby must wait!

Shenandoah Mennonite Historian Editor: James O. Lehman lehmanj@myvmrc.net Sketches: Jon Gehman

Membership: SHENANDOAH VALLEY MENNONITE HISTORIANS, \$6.00/yr. individual; \$10/couple

Membership Contact: James Rush 434-0792 jameslrush@comcast.net

Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians

780 Parkwood Drive

Harrisonburg, VA 22802

Elwood Yoder
1181 Sharon Lane
Harrisnoburg, VA 22802