

Another version of the Dirk Willems event. From the 1879 edition of the magazine, *The Sunday at Home*, published by the Religious Tract Society, London, reprinted by David Luthy, DIRK WILLEMS, Pathway Publishers, 2011, p. 22.



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LOST-- But in God's Care!

or

ONE LAST OLD AGE FLING!

His name was Willis.

He lived in the Kidron, Ohio, area all his life.

With his wife, Sarean, they had raised a large family. Along with being successful farmers, emphasis had always been upon service to God and the church, plus a strong promotion of good family life.

Now Willis was nearly 87. Sarean had died at age 70. The ravages of time and aging took their toll on Willis. He experienced some child-like ways, but he retained a strong curiosity. Much of his memory had taken flight. He needed to be watched and helped.

In his eighties the family managed to have him stop driving, afraid he might not find his way home. That was not easy, because for much of his life, he was usually in charge for much of his life. Eventually he obeyed.

That is, until Saturday Oct. 22, 1994.

As he looked around that morning and fed his curiosity, he had noticed that a daughter Marjean, who lived nearby had left the keys in her car. He ate lunch with wife, Mercie, then he left the house at 1:00 p.m., climbed into Marjean's car and drove less than a mile to the home farm. There he nosed around the buildings, as was his habit.

Daughter-in-law Rozella, who lived nearby, knew he was not to be driving a car. She spotted him and watched what he would do. When he left the home farm place she saw that he might just possibly drive past their place. She dashed out to the road and waited. When he came she urgently tried to flag him down.

Happily he smiled at her, waved back, and continued on his way over the first hill and disappeared. No one managed to follow him to see where he was going.

When he reached the first crossroad, did he continue westward, or did he turn left and go southward? Or turn right and go northward? A good guess is that he went northward. When he got to the Lincoln Highway, (route 30), did he perhaps turn right again and head eastward toward the cities of Massillon and Canton?

Only God knows. So, what next?

Rozella, to whom he waved, called husband John at Shantz Organ in Orrville, who dashed home, went next door to the Air Parts business hangar and got Brian Stoltzfus to immediately take John in the air in a small plane to search for the car with which he had taken off.

For 40 minutes they flew and searched all around the area, but with no success. Local police were soon called. They said, "Unless it is an emergency situation, no APB (all points bulletin) goes out for up to 72 hours." And to drive around to look for him, where would one begin? Which way would one go when there are so many crossroads only about a mile from each other?

As dusk fell the questions intensified. Is he nearby, or far away? How far had he gotten? What direction had he taken? What will he do in the dark with no compass but his own partial disorientation.

Will long-time driving habits stand him in good stead when he comes to a stop sign or a stoplight? How rusty had his driving habits become? Would he endanger himself or others? Where would this "fling" end?

Questions. No answers!

Prayers and prayer chains in Ohio, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina quietly began placing the emergency before the Lord. Children, grandchildren and many friends became involved, whether Mennonite, Presbyterian, Church of the Brethren, or Lutheran.

Night fell and deep into the night there was no word. Troubled sleep came slowly or not at all. Where might he possibly be that night?

What kind of night was he having? How long would the car keep going and what would he do when he ran out of gas. What about food? He had only a few dollars in his wallet.

Finally, at almost midnight, a phone call came to relatives at Kidron. On the other end of the line were the police from Erie, Pennsylvania, three hours away from Kidron.

In a routine check of a high-crime area the police had spotted him sitting in the car at the end of a narrow dead-end street that ended at the junkyard gate. Willis explained later "There was a fence there and I couldn't go farther anymore!"

How far had he traveled? He had burned up almost all the gasoline in the tank. Erie, PA is about 160 miles from Kidron. Only the Lord knows what routes he took!

Police found him somewhat disoriented, but able to give his name, the area he was from and his phone number. In his pocket they found a wallet with a driver's license that was just two weeks away from expiration! They promised Willis they would take care of him until family members arrived. They took him to the police station.

At midnight John, Rozella, Paul and Ron left by car to fetch him, taking along a pie (his favorite dessert) and headed for Erie. They found him at the police station. The half dozen cups of coffee given to him by the police kept him awake. In fact, it "wired" him so high that he ignored the pie and stayed awake the whole way home.

It was "totally a miracle of the Lord," said the police.

Very recently a policeman had been killed at the location they found Willis. It was "drug alley" and in the slums. Police, in their routine check of this high crime area, found him before the "druggies" had.

Except for the protection of the Lord, how would he have survived the entire night? The Lord had sent a guardian angel and no harm befell him. Prayers had been answered in the positive.

Oh, by the way, who was Willis?

He was my father.

James O. Lehman

WHAT EARLY HISTORIANS SAID ABOUT VIRGINIA MENNONITES

DANIEL RUPP, AN ORIGINAL HISTORY OF THE RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS. Philadelphia: J. Y. Humphreys, 1844, pp. 487-501.

Christian Herr, Mennonite bishop, there proclaims that Mennonites are direct descendants from the Waldensians. Scholarship has since shown that Mennonites did not descend from the Waldenses.

Herr says that Mennonites own the 1727 Confession of Faith, adopted in 1632 at Dordrecht. This often-used 1632 Confession of Faith commonly became known as the Dordrecht Confession and became the basis of later confessions. Rupp only partially quotes from it.

Apparently editor Rupp investigated further and got a letter from Shem Zook "who is well-informed in the religious statistics of the Mennonites." Zook said the Mennonites numbered about 120,000.

He thought they were found in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Indiana and New York. Either Bishop Herr or editor Rupp remarked that estimate to be too high (as does the *SMH* editor).

Zook gives further details. Pennsylvania has about 95 ministers and 180 worship places, Virginia has 30 or 40 ministers and about 35 places of worship. In Maryland, Ohio, Indiana and New York there were probably 85 ministers and 130 places of public worship.

In all America, said Zook, there were about 230 or 40 ministers and about 400 places of public worship and the total membership is estimated to be between "fifty and sixty thousand members." The whole Mennonite population might exceed 120,000, Zook conceded, but not that many "communicating members."

Furthermore, Zook pointed out that Mennonites were "distinguished above all others for their plainness in dress, economy in their domestic arrangements" and were known to be "frugal, thrifty, and withal very hospitable. They take in strangers and treat them kindly without charge."

They also "suffer none of their members to become a public charge," concluded the editor, along with his Shem Zook comments.

For 1844 that is a very interesting quotation of statistics from Zook, because information about the number of Mennonites in that time period is basically non-existent.

jol

EARLY HISTORIANS . . .

Daniel K. Cassel, **HISTORY OF THE MENNONITES**. Philadelphia: Pub. by author, 1888, pp. 136-142

In the section on Mennonites in Virginia, Cassel gives some Civil War stories. We sample a few of that Cassel includes, the first one being the experience of Abraham Blosser of Dale Enterprise. He sought his exemption when he learned a mail route was available from a lame Methodist preacher.

Blosser offered the preacher \$1,000 for his route on the condition that it would exempt him from military duty. When the news got out that a "crippled preacher" sold his route to a man of sound health for exemption from fighting, that roused "public disapprobation" Blosser soon discovered.

So he applied for and got another mail route, one that served as a continuation of the route he had purchased. The Post Office had a few days earlier concluded that the two routes could be done by one carrier. That satisfied the public when they learned that the "poor crippled preacher" had been paid \$1,000 for his route.

Harrisonburg people had a local attorney, Algernon S. Gray, who was a member of the Confederate Congress. Gray knew "all about these defenseless people and it seemed the Lord guided his tongue" in explaining to fellow congressman about these Mennonites. He showed Peter Burkholder's 1837 confession of faith to the Confederate Congress.

Besides being honest these people were "frugal, industrious, and generally farmers, who have the best land in the renowned Valley of Virginia in their possession, and that they were thus the producers of a great source of provisions to feed the army."

He advised Congress that these people should "stay unmolested on their productive farms" and let them help feed the army. He also warned that if these peaceful people were forced into the army they would be "utterly useless." We have already tried that, he told the Confederate Congress, and "they were a dead drag there. They would suffer death before they would fight."

We are "badly in need of just such farmers as these people are." Gray's "argument prevailed, and the Confederate Congress passed an act that the Mennonites, Dunkards, Quakers and Nazarites should be exempted from military duty by paying five hundred dollars Confederate money into the treasury."

So the nonresistant people were happy with that provision for exemption. But when General Sheridan and his troops came in late summer of 1864 with orders to destroy as much of this Valley "breadbasket" of the Confederacy, everyone suffered from all the burning. Then Cassel makes a statement not usually found in other histories.

"Strange to say" and something he could not account for, "a much greater percentage proportionately of the property belonging to the non-resistants in the Valley of Virginia was desolated by fire than that of the secessionists," and that "nearly all of the burned property was that of non-resistants." The same is true, said Cassel, of the stock driven away and destroyed.¹

Cassel notes further information he got from Abraham Blosser of Dale Enterprise on April 26, 1886. Regarding numbers of Mennonites – Rockingham County 500, Augusta County about 60, Pendleton, Randolph and Tucker Counties, West Virginia 35, Hardy County, WV 40, Shenandoah County, VA 8, Page County, VA 5,

¹Cassel cites no source for that information. Other histories do not corroborate that conclusion.

Frederick County 25. In round numbers that totals about 700 says Cassel. He also lists bishops and ministers names.

After this he notes Bishop Samuel Coffman and preacher Christian Brunk going to Upshur County, WV, where Bishop Coffman received a man into the church. On their way home as they came through Pendleton County they held a well-attended service.²

COMMENTS FROM *THE HERALD OF TRUTH*

John F. Funk began this significant early magazine for Mennonites at the beginning of 1864. Already by the end of the first year he began getting reports from Virginia on their experiences during the war when news back and forth North and South did not flow so readily.

He thought it of “deepest interest” to publish something regarding Virginia Mennonites who had for a long time “been surrounded by the terrible vicissitudes of war.”

In a piece on “Our Brethren in Virginia” he noted the large exodus of Mennonites and others who came out with General Sheridan on the huge wagon train of “600 army wagons” in the fall of 1864.

Funk had learned that up to the time of their departure Virginia Mennonites “lived in comparative security of life and person. They were not molested nor injured by the rebels as long as they maintained their peace-loving principles and did not show fight.” They had been allowed to pay a commutation fee of 500 dollars to be exempted from military duty.

²Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, Vol. 1, Harrisonburg: Pub. by author, mentions visits by these early evangelists to Pendleton County, but not Upshur County, WV.

During the war “They were undisturbed in their worship and held their meetings regularly.

They had not suffered “any actual want of the necessities of life, although on the journey from there they had scarcely anything to eat except what the soldiers kindly gave them” as they left Virginia with the huge wagon train. Of course, now General Sheridan’s troops “laid waste the entire country” was the report.

Another letter writer, Daniel H. Landis, in a letter of Oct. 30, 1864, characterized the last four years as living “in somewhat disturbed and uneasy state of mind” but not “subjected to as much suffering” as others farther south. Of course, now since the end of September, things were different.

Worship was not always possible as frequently as before because “some of our churches were destroyed,” said minister Landis. The churches had been thriving, a “great many added to the Church in the last few years.”

Now it was painful to think of so many empty seats with the leaving of so many people. One other minister, Christian Brunk, also left in the exodus of people that fled north.

On the second of October 1864 Landis and his family left home for Harrisonburg. The next day they went northward with the wagon train after having loaded “all our clothing and bed-clothing on a U. S. Government wagon drawn by six mules. They had abandoned their furniture and many other things “with our houses and no one to take care of them.”

As they traveled with the wagon train they “traveled slowly down the pike, stopping often,” and sometimes for quite a while but they did not know why. Rain at New Market soaked some of their things. And so they traveled; sometimes they found bridges burnt. On October 8 they

arrived at Martinsburg, where they boxed up their goods and loaded them on a train. On the 10th they took the passenger train to Wheeling,

On the 11th they walked the bridge over the Ohio river to Bridgeport, then the four miles to Bellaire, where they took the train for Zanesville and got good lodging. The next day they took the train for the Bremen, Ohio, Mennonite community and church. Thus we have the story of one Virginia family's exodus to the north and out of the Confederacy. (HT, Nov. and Dec. 1864)

MAJOR TRIP BY EMANUEL SUTER AND MINISTER CHRISTIAN BRUNK

On Aug. 14, 1865, the potter Emanuel Suter and the minister Christian Brunk from Edom, VA wrote an extensive letter to *HT* on their major travels near the end of the war.

On Oct. 5, 1864, they left Virginia homes and moved to Lancaster, PA. By the end of March 1865, they moved their families to Cumberland County, PA. After the families were comfortably settled, the men left "for a journey to the west." Often they traveled by train. Along the way they often had different traveling companions. They made many friends and frequently held meetings.

Leaving their families at Cumberland, they went to Mt. Joy, Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, then to Columbiana and Mahoning counties in Ohio. There they were glad to see some Virginia friends. They attended three meetings then proceeded to Orrville, OH, where they went to two meetings, then headed for Zanesville, OH, and spent the night with Gabriel Suter.

The next day it was on to Bremen, OH, where they met more Virginia friends—John Rhodes,

Pre. David Landis, Abraham Heatwole and "many other brethren and sisters residing here."

After three meetings they went on to Lancaster, OH, from which they went by stage to Columbus, where they again "took the cars" (train) to go to Osborn in Green County, OH, to visit that "small flock" with John M. Greider as minister.

Then they separated, with Brunk going to Henry County, IN, and Suter and Abraham Heawole heading for Montgomery Co., OH. They met again at Greenville, Darke Co., where they hoped to meet bishop John M. Brenneman who was to travel with them farther west. But he had already left. After Allen County, OH, it was on to Elkhart Co., IN, and that large congregation.

After several meetings they moved on to Geneseo, Henry Co., IL, and walked nine miles to Daniel Drivers and Abram Funk. They visited Noah Brunk in LaSalle Co., The next day it was on to Chicago and staying with John F. Funk. Next it was Osceola, IN, to visit Pre. Daniel Brenneman.

On Monday the 22nd of May they started for Preston, Waterloo Co., Canada. Then they took the cars for Toronto, there meeting two New York brethren, who were also on their way to the Wideman's Meeting House for Conference on the 26th. Suter and Brunk were happy to see so many people from different parts of the country and to form their acquaintance. They were "much interested" in the "discourses" by several bishops and greatly enjoyed the Canadian conference.

After Conference they were happy to attend seven meetings. On the 29th they were delighted to visit "the grandest cataract in the world" (Niagara Falls) and meditate on the "grandeur and magnitude of the Creator's work." The following Monday (June 5) they began their trip home in VA. They got there on June 10 and found their property in much better condition than expected.

BOOK REVIEW

David Luthy, *DIRK WILLEMS: His Noble Deed Lives On*, Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publications, 2011. Pp. 82. \$8.95.

Of the subject of this book, author Luthy says, "Willems, the Dutch Anabaptist Martyr of 1569 is one of my heroes. I have been inspired by his kind deed—rescuing his pursuer from drowning."

No doubt some of us, along with Luthy remember first seeing this sketch in the *Martyrs Mirror*, portrayed as one of the many Anabaptist martyrs in that tome by Dutch artist Jan Luyken (p. 741). The frequent appearance of Luyken's etching in recent years led Luthy to research its popularity and appearances. He observes that "253 uses of it have been documented since 1940" and nearly 400 items relating to Willems are housed in the Heritage Historical Library, Aylmer, Ontario, with which he is associated. This book is the result of his interest and research.

The story of Dirk is well-known to most of us. He was a citizen of Asperen, Holland, who because of his Anabaptists beliefs, was captured and imprisoned by the town officials in the winter of 1569. Later, taking an opportunity to escape, he fled the prison (located in a castle) crossing a moat that surrounded it. But his flight was discovered.

Quoting from *Martyr's Mirror*, "He was hotly pursued by a thief-catcher, and as there had been some frost (freezing weather), Willems ran over the ice, getting across with considerable peril. The thief catcher following him broke through, when Dirk, perceiving that the former was in danger of his life, quickly returned and aided him in getting out, and thus saved his life." Dirk's reward for his "noble deed" was to be returned to prison, from where he was eventually condemned to be burned at the stake. This occurred very painfully on a windy day in 1569. (Motley's *Dutch Republic* says it was May 16, reports Luthy *Dirk Willems*, 2011, p. 23)



Luthy makes the point that since Dirk was a native of Holland, it should be "no surprise that his name and good deed are remembered there... He has become a 'folk hero' with even a street named after him in Asperen."

One section of the book depicts artistic portrayals of the Willems scene. In the past 50-60 years according to Luthy, "more than 20 known modern renderings of Dirk rescuing his pursuer have been made." He describes 23 of them and reproduces eleven. Two artists, Norman Kraus and Anna Mae Pellman, live in the Harrisonburg area.

Willems's "noble deed" not only inspired visual representation of the act, but verbal as well. A significant number of poems have been written and preserved over the years which pay tribute to Dirk. Some of these are lengthy and tend to be a bit grandiose; others are much shorter and succinct in their response.

One section *Dirk Willems in Cyberspace*, notes this "first known entry into cyberspace of the etching occurred in the spring of 1995 at Goshen College.... Dirk has indeed gone worldwide." The last section of the book is labeled, *Dirk Willems: Here, There, Everywhere*.

Luthy suggests that "the image has been so frequently reproduced that it has become "etched" into people's minds." This is a hardcover book of only 82 pages, but is attractive and well done. May Dirk's noble deed continue to live in our minds.

Jim Good

SHOWALTER FAMILY HISTORY

Sometime during 1750, a ship sailing under the name *Brotherhood*, from Rotterdam, Holland, docked at Philadelphia. This ship carried, among others, a family of 13 with the name Scho(n)walder and other variant spellings. The name means "guide in the woods."

Parents of this large family, all of whom survived the long and difficult trip, were Jacob and Maria Showalter, as the name was spelled after they migrated. They were among the earliest Showalter immigrants to America, and likely progenitors of the first Showalter settlers in the Shenandoah Valley. Initially, the family settled on a large tract of land along the Lehigh River in Northampton County, PA, where Jacob and Marie spent the rest of their lives.

Credit for migrating to Virginia lies with 7th son Daniel, who gave up farming in Chester County, PA. He moved to Rockingham County in 1788, and bought a 350-acre tract a mile west of the village of Broadway and south of present-day route 259. That farm remained in the Showalter family five generations until Moab Showalter sold it in early 1888 and moved his family to Maryland. Court records show it being sold to David Hoover and Joseph Shank. Although that property is no longer in Showalter hands, some of the surrounding farmland has remained so.

The patriarchs of the five generations of Showalters who lived on the homestead include Daniel, his son Joseph, Joseph's son Daniel, Daniel's son Michael, and Michael's son Moab, the fifth generation member. The first three of those patriarchs are buried in the Trissels Mennonite Church Cemetery and the fourth, Michael is buried in the Weavers Church Cemetery.

Older and younger brothers of Daniel followed him to the Valley. Valentine, nicknamed "Felty," came about two years later. He is thought to have settled in the Mole Hill area west of Harrisonburg. Little of his record remains extant. In another two years Ulrich followed his older brothers to Rockingham County in 1792, where he bought a piece of land from Daniel. However, his sojourn lasted only about 15 years, when he sold out to Christian Rhodes and returned to PA.

The property that Daniel acquired for his farm is traversed by Cedar Run, a steady-flowing stream that empties into the North Fork of the Shenandoah River. The cement base of a windmill, built by one of Daniel's successors, to pump water to the house and barn can still be seen near the Run. A nearby spring which feeds into Cedar Run provided the water for the pump and a springhouse as well. The original

buildings on the farm were built up-hill from the spring, thus the need for a pump.

One existing photograph shows probably the original two-story 12' by 24' house, being moved off its foundation ca. 1918, prior to be taken elsewhere. It had a chimney on the south end and a seven-foot deep basement wall, constructed of beautiful hand hewn limestone, tightly fitted and without use of mortar, that served as the house foundation and provided a cellar.



Mark and Duane Showalter in front of cellar wall.

There is also a photo of a somewhat later farm scene showing a "modern" house, barn and outbuildings which appears on p. 700 in the book, *George B. and Elizabeth Blosser Showalter Family Records*. The photo caption identifies it as the old Showalter Homestead near Broadway taken about the year 1888. However, some question the accuracy of that date. They suggest a time closer to 1930, as it appears the old house was not moved before 1918.

On a sunny spring morning in March 2012, the writers and several other history buffs gathered on the original homestead site to recall some of its story. The group included Mark Showalter and his son, Duane, Omar Showalter, Gerald Crider, Carl Hoover, and the current owners and residents, Ross and Meg Clem.

The record of that gathering and a number of photographs taken that morning help to revive, in a small way, the earlier records and remembrances which exist in the memories of current Showalters. More research needs to be done to complete the record of this large and influential Valley family.

Jim Rush / Jim Good

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Apologies: the winter issue *Directory* inadvertently missed McGaheysville Mennonite Church, Southeastern Mennonite Conference, where about 35 people attend. Ministers are Eugene King and John Swartz; deacon is Nelson Rodes.

RELATING TO THE FRONT PAGE ARTICLE, "LOST"

THE WILLIS AND SAREAN (AMSTUTZ) LEHMAN FAMILY at their 45th Wedding Anniversary, November, 1974; Willis was born Nov. 8, 1907, Sarean's birth was Feb. 10, 1909. On this family photo he was 67 and she was 65



**Names: Front row seated, left to right: Donovan, Willis, Sarean, Bonnie, Steve
Standing: James, Chester, Maurice, Paul, John, Marjean, LuAnne**

There was one more birth, Kenneth, who was extremely disabled with meningocele and never developed beyond baby stage. He died on his seventh birthday, Oct. 13, 1941.

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TIME TO RENEW MEMBERSHIP. INVITE A FRIEND--GIVE A GIFT TO A NEW PERSON!

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