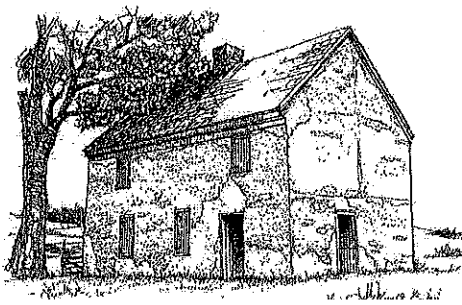


Shenandoah Mennonite Historian



The White House, built 1760 by Martin Kauffman
Sketch by Jon Gehman '05; See p. 5



Interior View of Elk Run Church
See page 6

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EARLY PAGE COUNTY VIRGINIA MENNONITES

Why Review Early Page County Mennonite History?

What we have known heretofore about the earliest Mennonite settlers in Page County was found in Harry A. Brunk's volume one of *History of Mennonites in Virginia, 1727-1900*, published privately by Brunk in 1959. As time goes on some things have been uncovered to which Brunk may not have had full access, or additional sources have turned up. So in this issue we take another good look at Page County, located on the eastern side of the Massanutten Mountain.

In reviewing Brunk and other materials not covered by him, one's first impression is that Brunk did a **remarkable** piece of work in his time. Much of it does not need a lot of major alteration. This issue of *SMH* tells the basic story with some alterations, additions and improvements.

The first volume of Brunk's history is out of print, or may not be found in the libraries of people interested in Virginia's earliest Mennonite settlement.

Nonetheless, our account relies considerably on Brunk. We list a bibliography of sources consulted, but refrain from doing specific documentation. Sources tend to overlap and don't

always agree fully. We have tried to work carefully and extensively to present what seems correct to us.

Sources consulted

Harry A. Brunk's invaluable account.

Handwritten minutes, "Mill Creek Church Book," March 1798 to Feb. 7, 1824.

Several interviews with Gary Bauserman, President of the Page County Heritage Association, Luray, VA, September, 2011.

Jennie Ann Kerkhoff, *Old Homes of Page County, Virginia*, Luray: Lauck and Company, Inc. 1962.

Richard A. Pence, compiler of numerous sources, *The Mill Creek (Mauck's, Hamburg) Church*, Hamburg, Page County, VA, from INTERNET.

Robert B. Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia*. Revised and extended by G. W. Beale. Richmond: Pitt & Dickinson, 1894.

Sem C. Sutter, "Mennonites and the Pennsylvania German Revival" a major paper done at the Univ. of Chicago, 1973. Obtained from Goshen College by permission.

EARLY SETTLERS, PIONEER LIFE

Mennonites were among the first white settlers in the Shenandoah Valley, coming from Switzerland and the Palatinate via Pennsylvania. The first ones are believed to have come as early as 1726. It first seemed that Virginia might be free from marauding native Americans (usually called Indians) that Pennsylvanians experienced. Virginia seemed peaceful. Unfortunately, that situation changed as Virginia Mennonites suffered tragic raids in the mid 1700s.

Land speculators became involved in the earliest Page County settlers. Jacob Stover obtained two five-thousand acre plots and he invited Mennonites, Lutherans and Calvinists to occupy his grants. Another speculator, Joist Hite, purchased considerable acreage and he invited a number of families to "New Virginia." In 1730 Hite moved to the Valley, bringing with him 16 families some of whom were Mennonite.

The earliest settlers near Luray found themselves in an array of changing counties, as boundary lines changed from 1726 to 1831. Early settlers thought they lived in Orange County, but before long it was Augusta, then Frederick, followed by Shenandoah. Finally, Page County was formed in 1831. For the researcher, imagine pursuing the earliest records with such an array of counties!

Brunk names early "probable" Mennonite settlers in the Page area to be Abram Strickler, Joseph Rhodes, John and Abraham Brubaker, Henry Sowter, Ludwig Stone, John Bomgarner, Henry Bromback, Nicholas Berry, Hans Root and Hendricks Pomgarddiner, plus the three mentioned as being of the brotherhood by Martin Kauffman, Sr., Jacob Borner, John Holman and Daniel Stover. In addition the Page County deed records list Blossers, Millers, Goods, Heistons, Algiers, Lineweavers, Thompsons, Gochenours and others.

At the Mauck meetinghouse (better known as Hamburg) appears a sign that lists early Mennonite ministers being John Roads, Martin, David and Michael Kauffman, Jacob Strickler and Abraham Heiston.

Early settlers plowed, planted, tilled and harvested crops, and built mills. Sometimes attics were used to store grains. Inventories, sales records and "appraisement of Martin Kauffman's estate in 1749" provide illustrations of ownership of livestock, personal property, tools, pottery, stills to make liquor, grains, implements, a Bible, a few books and various other personal property. Thus we have some glimpses of pioneer life.

WORSHIP, CHURCH LIFE

For many years Mennonites held services in homes. As wealth increased, some larger homes appeared with large rooms and movable partitions.

Very early, however, a possible exception among eighteenth century Mennonites was the building of the Mill Creek Church known for many years as the Mauck Meetinghouse in the village of Hamburg two miles west of Luray. This is now the place where annually a large gathering of people sing from the *Harmonia Sacra* on the first Sunday of August.

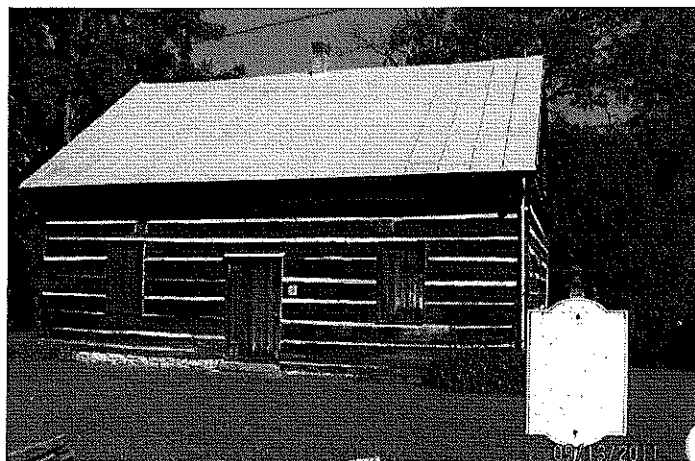


Photo of Hamburg Meetinghouse

Brunk believes the Hamburg building may have been built under the auspices of the Mennonites in the first half of the 18th century, perhaps as early as 1740. The balconies are believed to have been added later when slave-owning Baptists used that place of worship.

For many years Virginia Mennonites were characterized as being somewhat of a distant arm of Pennsylvania Mennonites. That may have been helpful when troubles came.

Mennonite beliefs may be summarized as follows: war was wrong, they sought to be non-resistant, and refused to take legal oaths or to have a paid ministry. They insisted on adult baptism, promoted simplicity of dress, life, and religious worship. Baptism was by sprinkling or pouring.

Church and religious life may have suffered on this frontier according to two Moravian testimonies that survive. They indicate spiritual lethargy among the Mennonites. A Moravian missionary toured the Valley in 1748. His diary recorded a visit to the Massanutten settlement of "Menisten." He claimed they were in a "bad condition" because "religious earnestness and zeal is extinguished."

A year later another Moravian preacher, "Brother Joseph" visited. He thought the Mennonites in Page County to be a "dead place" spiritually. He lodged with minister John Rhodes, describing him as "a good pliable man, but without life." Did these testimonies perhaps lean a bit toward exaggeration? Eventually when Mennonites learned Moravians wanted to unite and control all local churches, they shied away from the Moravians.

MARAUDING NATIVE AMERICANS

"Indian raids" they were called in the language of the day. One raid in 1758 killed John Stone, and soon his wife and son. Soon thereafter

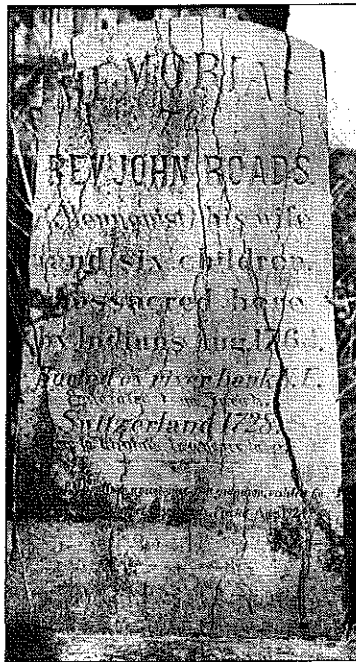
it was Jacob Holtiman's wife and children. Most likely these were Mennonite families.

The most terrible massacre befell the preacher John Rhodes family. Eight Indians led by an unscrupulous white man crossed the Massanutten Mountain in August 1764. Possibly between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m. they arrived at the Rhodes home. The family consisted of 13 children, but two sons Joseph and Daniel and two married daughters lived elsewhere.

Upon the arrival of the raiding group preacher Rhodes came to the door to see who had come. He was shot in the doorway. His wife, Eva Albright Rhodes, and a son were killed in the yard. Another son in the cornfield climbed a pear tree to see what excitement was happening. He was soon shot from the tree. Another son tried to escape by jumping into the nearby Shenandoah River, but he was soon killed. That place in the river became known as "bloody ford."

Daughter Elizabeth, age 12, scooped up sister Esther, about 15 months, and fled to the barn and locked the door. A native American tried to follow, but then headed for the house to get fire to burn the barn. Meanwhile, Elizabeth and Esther made it out the door on the other side of the barn, and frantically ran through the hemp patch. They hurried 12 miles to their oldest brother's home and safety.

After setting fire to the house, the marauders took two daughters and two sons as captives. Their retreat was so fast, that the children could barely keep up. Finally, the weak seven-year-old boy couldn't keep the pace, so he was killed. The two girls, seeing their brother killed, refused to go on. So they were likewise killed. The murderers went on with one Rhodes boy and kept him captive for three years. They headed for Ohio country. When a new Indian treaty developed, the boy was released to go home. Kerkhoff called this time period "a period of terror and fear."



The complete wording is as follows:

MEMORIAL
TO
REV. JOHN ROADS
(Mennonist), his wife
and six children,
massacred here
by Indians Aug. 1764

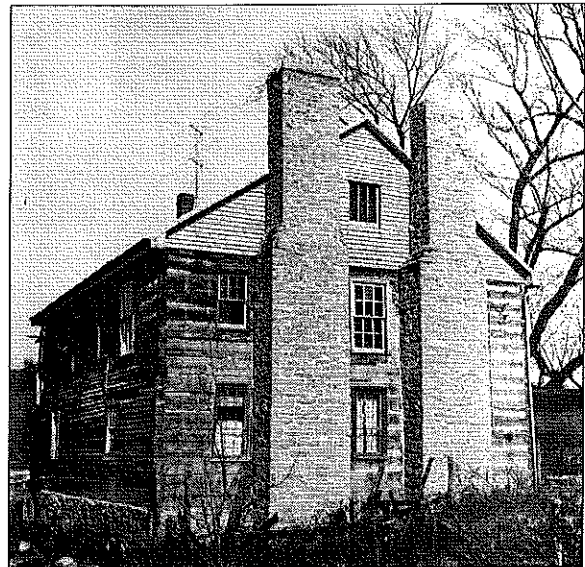
Buried on river bank N. E.
Emigrated from Zurich
Switzerland 1728

Came to Virginia two years later

P(hilip) M. Kauffman a great-great-great grandson
Assisted by P. S. Rhodes and other descendants
Erected Aug, 1924

It is reported that the next day after the massacre, sad and sympathetic neighbors gathered at the burning embers, found the partially burned body of Preacher Rhodes and the other bodies and buried them on the bank of the nearby river.

Two years after the massacre, a new house was built on that site. Kerkhoff carries a fine photo of that building which stood until 1992 when a lightning strike started it on fire and it burned to the ground. It is now difficult to get to that spot.



Kerkhoff, p. 205 PHOTO OF RHODES HOUSE, built 1766.

To reach the spot, one needs to drive down a long stony lane. As one gets closer to the spot where the house stood, one must walk through tall grass and weeds, only to see a few remnants of where the house stood. It is not accessible to tourists. To find the site, one needs a guide like Gary Bauserman.

The location is four miles west of Luray on route 615. The 1766 house had a fine rounded cellar for the storage of food. It is said of John Rhodes when the massacre occurred, the marauders were looking for money. They never found any money because money and valuables were stored in the cellar.

As if raids by marauders was not enough difficulty for the early Mennonite settlement in Virginia! The church in Page County underwent significant internal changes, beginning about the same time as the trouble from the marauding bands that struck and killed a number of people.

DYNAMIC CHURCH CHANGES

Around 1760 repercussions began to filter into Page County of the First Great Awakening in New Virginia. Converts of George Whitefield, called "New Light" preachers came to the Valley and the "staid" Mennonites in the Mill Creek settlement became quite agitated by the revival sweeping through the land. Bishop Martin Boehm from eastern Pennsylvania was called in to give counsel. He was accepted joyfully. Boehm had a great change in 1761 in his own life before he came to Virginia, ten years before he joined with Philip Otterbein and helped form the United Brethren Church. It is said of him that he inferred that Virginians lacked religious zeal and enthusiasm, but that he brought "light and salvation" to Virginians.

Changes were set to happen in this time period, for in 1760 Martin Kauffman built the famed White House. In time he began holding services on the second floor of this house, It is said of Kauffman that he may eventually have preached in perhaps as many as four locations, some of them house churches.

Martin Boehm apparently was inspired by changes he saw happening here in Virginia. Also in the late 1760s an aggressive Baptist John Frontz, representing the "New Light Baptists," came and convinced many Page County Mennonites to become interested in the Baptists. Some say he planted a "Mennonist Baptist Church". One of his first converts was said to be Martin Kauffman, who gave him access to the White House for holding services on the second floor. Koontz could preach in both English and German, Semple says. That would have appealed to Mennonites.

Semple also reports that the Baptist preaching stirred up great displeasure, some even calling it the "works of Satan." Mennonites sent word to Pennsylvania, the mother church, calling for help. In a short time "four or five" Pennsyl-

vania preachers came, says Semple. Probably one of them was Peter Blosser (see Winter 2011 issue of *SMH*). He came "to boost the sagging, scattered brotherhood." Page County Mennonites welcomed him and gave him "full reign to preach" and debate with the Baptists. Spiritual ferment from revivalism and perhaps other tensions resulted in Martin Kauffman, Jr. eventually starting a new church to meet in the upstairs where he lived, the famed White House near the river and the bridge for route 211.

The Revolutionary War brought tensions between Baptist and Mennonites. Baptists became ardent patriots and freely took the oath of allegiance and many joined the army. Martin Kauffman wanted to keep most of his Mennonite principles. Rather than calling them Mennonite Baptists as James Ireland did, it is likely best to think of the followers of Martin Kauffman as simply followers of Martin Kauffman and not identify them as either Baptist or Mennonite. They may have numbered as many as sixty or seventy members at most.

Members of the Kauffman Church were basically gathered up around the personality of Martin Kauffman, Jr. Family tradition says that Martin was a small man with a great voice. During the Revolutionary War Kauffman clearly stood against owning slavery, against participation in war and he shunned the legal oath. Predictably, a movement largely built around a personality will eventually face disintegration. As that happened a number wanted to join the Baptist movement—a cause for awkwardness. It is said of Martin himself that he tried to rejoin the Baptists but was unable to do so.

Finally, in 1801 Kauffman and a number of his dwindling flock left for Ohio, at New Lancaster in Fairfield County, south of Columbus and eventually formed the Pleasant Run Church. Martin Kauffman, Jr. returned to Virginia and died here in the Valley in 1805.

For 1809, one of the ministers listed at Pleasant Run in Ohio was Martin Coffman

(Kauffman), apparently a son of Martin Kauffman Jr. The Kauffman name was spelled interchangeably with Coffman. The 1798-1824 Mill Creek Church minute book in February 15, 1800, speaks of the "Church of Christ Mill Creek Church meeting at the Absalom Hursts." After "divine worship" the business session reported the acceptance of "orderly" members of the Martin Coffman Church into the Mill Creek Church. Sometimes they met in a home but the normal meeting place was at the Big Spring meeting house.

Ironically enough, nowadays the Mennonite church in Page County meets at the historic Big Spring Church!

WHAT ABOUT THE ELK RUN MEETING HOUSE?

A few photos and plaques in the Luray Caverns Museum, at first seemed puzzling. One finds interesting wording on a plaque that the Luray Caverns Corporation purchased from a Modisett family. It includes a photo of the Elk Run Meeting House. Here is the wording.

This meeting house was purchased from the Modisett family by the Luray Caverns Corporation, and moved to the Luray Valley Museum at Luray Caverns in 2008. It was built circa 1825 for a Mennonite congregation headed by the Strickler family. Abraham Strickler and his family represent one of the oldest Mennonite communities in the U.S. They arrived in the Shenandoah Valley around 1726. Abraham's great grandson Jacob Strickler (1770 - 1842) lived at what is now the present day Modisett homestead. He was a farmer, Mennonite minister, a parochial school teacher, and a famous American folk artist known especially for his fraktur.

Page County Mennonites at that time no longer seemed to have much interest in Mennonite principles because so many had become Baptists. Harry Brunk makes a very brief passing reference in a few lines (p. 41) to the Elk Run Brethren Church that involved a few Mennonites but does not explain further.

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For what congregation was Elk Run built around 1825? And the description regarding Jacob Strickler (1770-1842) who "was a farmer, Mennonite minister, a parochial school teacher and a famous American folk artist known especially for his fraktur" is of interest. The official Virginia Mennonite Conference Record of Credentialed Persons (leaders) names one Jacob Strickler, with the date 1748 and a question mark behind the date. Who is this Jacob Strickler, named as the great-grandson of pioneer Abraham Strickler, who is credited with coming to the Shenandoah Valley in 1726?

Furthermore, what is meant that he was a "parochial school teacher?" There does seem to be evidence that the named Jacob Strickler did fraktur art. Is this a case of a genealogist not being certain of all his/her facts?

Sem Sutter, in his excellent study on Mennonite involvement in the First Great Awakening, gives us a possible solution on the 1825 date. He outlines a considerable tolerance by some Mennonite to the revival movement in the late 1700s and early 1800s. He suggests that the 1825 schism in Virginia that lasted some five or six years before resolution, may be the answer to the brief information about an 1825 meetinghouse possibly being built by Virginia Mennonites. Virginia Mennonites had just begun to build places of worship. Trissels was first in 1823, followed by Pike, Brenemans and Hildebrand in Augusta County in 1825-26.



Inside view of Elk Run.

Credit is given to Martin Kauffman, Jr. for beginning the Elk Run congregation, but by that time he presumably held both Mennonite and Baptist views. The Elk Run church struggled under the named Jacob Strickler (the one not named in the Virginia Conference records). When Strickler died in 1842, Brethren (Dunker) leaders John Kline and John Wine organized a Brethren Church but that church died out by around 1870. Thereafter, one record names the nearby Mt. Zion church building as replacing the Elk run meetinghouse.

We return to the 1825 schism over revivalism in Virginia.

THE 1825 VIRGINIA SCHISM OVER REVIVALISM

Harry Brunk goes into a little detail about the 1825 schism that came to Virginia Mennonites. Sutter gives considerable detail how Mennonites were considerably influenced by the First Great Awakening Revival movement, the influence of the Baptists, followed by the influence of the Evangelical Association, and the fact that numerous Mennonites became involved in the leadership and otherwise in the rise of the United Brethren Church, along with Mennonite leaders, Martin Boehm and Christian Newcomer.

Worship practices and the building of meetinghouse were front burner topics in 1825, says Brunk. Friction had developed between Virginia bishops Henry Rhodes and Henry Shank over meetinghouses, the former favoring them and latter opposing their construction. That may have been a secondary issue.

The "open clash" came over the preaching and views of Mennonite deacon Frederick Rhodes. These were changing times but Mennonites were sensitive about revivalism. Young Rhodes who favored meetinghouses, had been attending the newly organized United Brethren revival meetings. Then the record claims that he changed his preaching style.

Frederick was accused of becoming loud and boisterous in his preaching like the United Brethren. About 40 persons, including bishop Shank, signed a letter calling for action to be taken against Frederick Rhodes.

Mennonite opposition to revivalism was based on the tendency to emphasize emotional experience more than ethics and church discipline. One need only peruse Christian Newcomer's journal to see how dramatically emotional the former Mennonite minister, now a United Brethren minister, had become! Newcomer related more and more to the Evangelical Association but he moved freely among a number of churches and house fellowships, including Mennonite ones.

Lancaster Mennonites were called for help and Martin Boehm and others came when this whole affair developed. As noted earlier Boehm had become more emotional in his preaching and in 1777 he was excommunicated from the Mennonite group. So, was he "help" or did he feed the fires in Virginia of more emotionalism and the interest in the new United Brethren group. Quite a number of Mennonites, sympathized and cooperated with the revivalist movement without ever leaving the Mennonite Church.

After five or six years, during which time Bishop Henry Rhodes died, (the one in favor of building meetinghouses), the problems were largely solved when Bishop Henry Shank wisely and congenially agreed to go along with the majority view even if he was basically against meetinghouses.

So peace came to Virginia Mennonites when Shank agreed to go along with the majority. By that time the so-called Virginia schism was settled.

As for Page County while some settlers headed for the West, it is said that other older people stayed in Page County.

GENEALOGY ANYONE?

ANNUAL MEETING

Nov. 12, 2011

Reserve Saturday November 12, for the annual meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians.

Come at 9:30 a.m. to Village Hall on the VMRC campus to hear Peggy Landis share her research into her Suter family history.

Her great-grandfather, Emanuel Suter was an important layman in the Valley until his death in 1903. He wrote for various Mennonite

periodicals, kept a fine diary of his own life and events in the churches from 1864 on (now located at the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives). He was a major local potter and was very interested in seeing VA Mennonites adopt the Sunday school. He was secretary of Virginia Mennonite Conference for 15 years.

His descendants are business leaders, ministers, teachers and many others who contributed to the growth of the church.

We would like more genealogical studies to publish in *SMH*.

Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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