



Bishop Martin Burkholder house, built 1864

Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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THE IRONIES OF HISTORY

or

Fighting Wars While “Celebrating” the Civil War

Researching and writing history turns up ironies, sometimes at unexpected places, or at times when people don't think about it. Take right now for instance. It is major news when a local person dies in one of the current wars (it should be news—every person in God's sight is special). At the same time now, people want to “celebrate” the War Between the States when on a given day hundreds and even thousands died. Each one of those was also precious in God's sight. Times were very different then. People came to expect many deaths.

Now, looking back 150 years ago, hobbyists spend much money or time to re-enact battles or study strategies used in fighting or buy magazines and books in print. That war has become almost a plaything. Or note what the local paper does every day in the obituaries. A flag is placed in the death notice if that person served in the military. When a person dies, do you think God's first question is to inquire in what regiment, what company or what kind of fighter plane he/she flew? Hardly! Hence, we live with irony. While we fight war, we reminisce about a past war!

But then we must realize we live in a war-like culture. If we don't have a war going, somehow we soon find ourselves embroiled in one, the price of having become the policemen of the world. President Dwight Eisenhower, three days before he laid down his presidential duties, gave an oft-quoted speech warning against the U. S. becoming wrapped up constantly in a military-industrial complex, where military might becomes the primary way to settle disagreements. Or think about politicians calling for ever greater freedom in carrying concealed weapons at many places. Regrettably, that is too much where we find ourselves. Look at the monies going for past, present and future wars and the health costs of the wounds of war.

Ed.

Buildup Toward a Civil War

The spring issue of *SMH* gave ample documentation to the increasing signs that the U. S. might be headed toward a war between the states. Apprehension ran high. Dunker Elder John Kline from the Broadway area kept a diary and he feared that indeed war might come. Secession of some of the states was a very bad sign. Kline, already on Jan. 1, 1861, said "secession means war, and war means tears and ashes and blood." Mennonite bishop Martin Burkholder, before he died in December, was very alarmed at the signs. The local papers had plenty to say. War could only mean terrible things for Shenandoah Valley people.

As noted previously, things changed drastically overnight after April 15, 1861, when Pres. Lincoln called for 75,000 troops. That was the last straw. Much local public opinion immediately swung dramatically and drastically from pro-Union to the opposite direction. Many began calling for Virginia to join the Confederacy.

Look at the local *Rockingham Register* newspaper. "We have heard that some of our peaceful, orderly, law-loving fellow citizens, the Germans will vote against it (secession) or not vote at all. We cannot believe this. They love their country and desire its peace and welfare too much to do this . . . Let not a vote be cast to give Lincoln this encouragement."¹

May 23, 1861, became an historic day with relation to the Mennonites and what it meant for them. We have more than enough sources to point that out. One excellent illustration, at least for Augusta County Mennonites, is to follow what the Bishop Jacob Hildebrand family did, because we have a partial diary on how the Civil War affected them. First, of all, we must introduce the Hildebrands.

¹Quoted in Samuel Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy*, Scottdale: Herald Press, 1967, 24-25

The Hildebrand Family

Conrad Hildebrand and wife Susanna emigrated from the Palatinate in Europe in 1732 to Lancaster County, PA. Their children settled in that general area, except for two sons, Henry and Conrad who went to North Carolina in the 1760s. There the Mennonites largely lost sight of them. In western NC the town of Hildebran in Burke County was named after the Hildebrands. One of Conrad's grandsons, Waightsell, was in the Confederate army.

One obscure reference in the May 1866 issue of the *Herald of Truth*, p. 43, does mention a Mennonite church in North Carolina. Christian Shenk of Harrisonburg, VA met a soldier during the Civil War who said his name was Gennings and that his father was a member of a Mennonite Church "that had moved from Virginia some years ago." The church, it was claimed, had four ministers. People there were exempted from bearing arms during the war "by the Governor of North Carolina, by paying a commutation fee."

Mennonites in the Carolinas

Vague and somewhat inconclusive mention has been made a number of times about Mennonites in the Carolinas in the 1700s, but careful research has not uncovered a lot of solid information. One source mentions a Hans Stauffer who migrated to Carolina in 1710 and refers to "many and large congregations." No one has found these congregations of the 1700s. Neither this source nor Roger E. Sappington's scouring of numerous Moravian and Baptist sources has turned up much.²

Some apparently settled near New Bern, NC in 1711 but an Indian attack scattered them. From the 1730s to the 60s some settled along the Pedee River in South Carolina. One source names them "Pure Baptists" or Mennonites with three churches. Some

²"Mennonites in North Carolina" *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. 1, July 1927, p. 69; Roger E. Sappington, "The Mennonites in the Carolinas," *MQR*, Vol. 42, April 1968, pp. 96-116.

were named Kolb but there are many puzzles. Reference is made to Martins, Keeners, Fishers, Beilers, and Masts perhaps in Randolph County, NC. The Mast family is especially named. Again, vague disappearance or uncertainty prevail. Quakers, Moravians, Dunkers and Mennonites were named as nonresistant sects. Little more is known until long after the war, when the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren in 1899 established a mission among Negroes in Avery County near the Tennessee line. In the 20th century some VA Mennonites settled in North Carolina, as we know.

Hildebrands to Virginia

In 1795 Henry Hildebrand (1758-1849) grandson of Pioneers Conrad and Susanna, came to Augusta County, VA with his wife Margaret Musselman (1762-1832). Henry had a brother John who moved to Cherokee Territory in Oklahoma, and later to Tennessee.

Our line of interest is the Henry and Margaret Hildebrand line. One of their sons, Jacob, Sr. (1782-1862) married Anna Barbara Breneman, daughter of the pioneer and large land owner along Linville Creek in Rockingham County, Abraham Breneman. As his will indicates, Jacob Hildebrand, Sr. became prosperous. Already in July 1823 he gave a schoolhouse so German school could be held for the Mennonites. Did he fear that all the English speaking people among whom the Mennonites were settled, would convince people of his church to become English? One might draw this conclusion.

Two or three years later (1825-26) the Hildebrands built the first Hildebrand meeting house five miles northwest of Waynesboro. Jacob Sr. and Barbara Hildebrand's son, Jacob Jr. (1816-1899), married Magdalene Gochenauer on Aug. 22, 1839. Four years later, in July 1843, Jacob Jr. was baptized a Mennonite at age 26. He must have showed promise. Five months later, on Dec. 3, at age 27 he was ordained a minister and within four years, on May 8, 1847, at the age of 30, he was ordained bishop of the small Augusta County Mennonite Church at Hermitage.

Bishop Jacob's first cousin, Jacob R. Hildebrand (1819-1908), was married to Catherine Rodefer. They were also faithful Mennonites and he was a church trustee who became a deacon during the Civil War. They had three sons in the Confederate army. Ironically, the two Jacobs had a brother John, whose son Henry joined the Union Army in the Illinois Cavalry. We do not know if these cousins were ever in battles against each other! This issue will deal with Bishop Jacob. We leave Jacob R. for another time.

Bishop Jacob Hildebrand

Fortunately, he kept a diary in 186 that has survived. Though comments made on many days were very brief, we learn interesting details. At the beginning of the year, Jan. 4, the good bishop says "Had Preaching at the Church as the Preasident requested to have prayer." Lincoln had been elected in November but did not take office till March 1861, so his president was James Buchanan. On Jan. 6, he preached at the Hildebrand church, apparently the only time that month a regular service was held.³

Since Bishop Martin Burkholder had died in December 1860, the Middle District bishop position was vacant until mid-year 1861 when Samuel Coffman was installed. During that half-year interim the other two district bishops, the "upper district" (Augusta) and the "lower district" (Northern District) officials to hold the communion services in the Middle District and sometimes to preach. Hence, in February Jacob went to Rockingham to preach at Breneman's Church and Weavers.

Then he noted that on April 18 war "commenst," and volunteers soon left Waynesboro. Two days later he held a service at Hildebrand Church and added eight new members. On April 26 Virginia Mennonite Conference met at Hildebrands but no minutes were published. As usual, on the Sunday after confer-

³In those days it was not unusual for a church to meet only once or twice a month for services.

ence met, they held a communion service. On April 28 the concluding service of conference had 38 members communing and Joel Wheeler became a member. In the summer and fall Wheeler worked for the bishop as his threshing rig manager.

Two weeks later in May the bishop made another trip to Middle District, taking the new member Joel Wheeler with him. They went to the "Dry River Church" (Bank) where he "administerd sacrement to about 220 members." The next weekend he again went to Rockingham to the Pike Church (110 members). Then came Thursday May 23. Bishop Hildebrand made sure he was home that week! On that "clear and pleasant" day he says "**I was at Waynesboro votet for Seesetion.**" That makes him the only Mennonite bishop known to have voted in favor of Virginia seceding from the Union.

On Sunday the 26th of May he was back in Rockingham, this time to Brenemans Church to administer the sacrament to 117 members after he preached on Hebrews 12. On June 2 he took Joel Wheeler with him again when he went to the Mount Piskey meeting.

It is not known why the young bishop from Augusta County did all these spring meetings, that required so many trips to Rockingham. Perhaps it was because the other bishop, John Geil, was up in years. It is easy to imagine Bishop Hildebrand and Joel Wheeler having many conversations about war news and the pressures of the times.

Next we receive the startling news that on June 9, 1861, Hildebrand held a worship service at the church and "organized a Sunday school." This was a very early attempt to hold Sunday school among Virginia Mennonites. The following Sunday, June 16, once more, he mentions Sunday school. then the record falls silent about that new development. Most likely they were aware that many Mennonites were not ready for such an innovation. Nowhere else do we know of Sunday school being held in Virginia this early.

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Were There Changing Loyalties?

Since the bishop voted for secession, does that means his loyalties changed? It appears so. On June 13 he notes that the president called for a day of fasting and prayer and Hildebrand again held church that day. It is easy to discover that this was not Abraham Lincoln's call. That leaves us to conclude that it must have been a call for prayer by Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy. The diary never made any comment about a change of loyalties!

On Aug. 5, at a time when the busy bishop often failed to record anything in his diary, he suddenly says he sent a petition to Governor Letcher. Oh good, I thought. Now perhaps we can learn what his theology or thoughts about war may be. But that was not the case. I managed to get a copy of the petition from the State Library.

Eager perusal of the petition brought disappointment. Nothing about the Mennonite position on the war. The petition pleaded that the governor give Joel Wheeler 60 days off from military duties so he could run the threshing rig! At the end are 36 names, including the bishop, his aged father, as well as Hildebrand Deacon John Grove and minister Peter Shumaker and many others from this "densely populated and very productive neighborhood."

Joel, the rather new member, had apparently sometime in June or July gone off to war. (He was not the only Hildebrand Mennonite Church member that had gone to war.) The petition promised that at the end of 60 days when threshing was done, that Wheeler would again report back to military duty. This is all fascinating what the petition says. We know the bishop was extremely busy. For a while he had two threshing rigs to look after and to schedule around the community. Obviously, the good bishop was well-known, respected and an active member of the neighborhood.

Back to his diary. On Nov. 6, election day, he wrote, "I was at lechion. I votet for Davis and Coffman." Obviously, his Confederate loyalties were clear.

How heavily was he pressured to vote that way? One could cite many examples of extreme pressures from neighbors in Rockingham County who had insisted on neighbors voting for secession. What we do not know is whether there were similar pressures on how to vote at election time.

More on May 23, 1861

That was decision day for more people than the bishop. Later, after the war, when many appealed to the Federal government for compensation for having serious destruction by General Sheridan's northern troops, their appeal often noted whether they voted for or against secession; their remuneration varied according to how they voted on May 23.

Everyone seemed to be under heavy pressure to vote for secession as the newspapers had swung very clearly in favor of secession. Some Mennonites did not vote for or against secession thinking this might be helpful. They included Samuel Shank, Samuel Coffman, Daniel J. Good, Peter Blosser, David C. Breneman and John Geil. Half of these men were church leaders. Secession was seen as unholy rebellion.⁴ Minister Samuel Shank later declared that the U. S. was his government and that the other "was not a government at all but a rebellion."

Perhaps most outstanding are those who voted against secession despite the heavy pressures. When we understand what the final vote was, it is clear why the pressures. In Augusta County 3,130 favored secession and only 10 were against, while in Rockingham County 3,010 favored secession and 22 dared to vote against it. Fourteen of nineteen voting districts did not have a single vote against secession.

In Rockingham County Mennonites were decidedly more Unionist. Voting against secession took courage because it was a voice vote. Jacob Wenger of Greenmount claimed he was one of eleven in his precinct voting against secession. He may have

⁴Horst, *Mennonites in the Confederacy*, 26; James O. Lehman and Steven M. Nolt, *Mennonites, Amish and the American Civil War*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

known upwards of half the dissenting votes, quite a few if them probably Mennonite, in Rockingham. Also voting against were Henry and Joseph Beery.

Later testimony showed that John Brunk, David Driver, Daniel P. Good, Abraham D., Gabriel D. and Simeon Heatwole, David E. Frederick S. and Henry L. Rhodes, Jacob Shank Jr., Emanuel Suter and Noah Wenger all voted in favor of secession. Many did so after receiving death threats if they didn't vote that way. John Brunk, for example, said that even the "most resolute" Union men were intimidated. As sexton for Weavers Church he had "frequently" concealed fugitives and gone with them at night to make their escape north.⁵

National Archives records have been carefully combed and are very helpful in helping us to understand how Unionist many Rockingham Mennonites were.⁶ Here are some samples:

- Vol. II: Jacob Geil – did what he could to aid Union men, 339
Jacob Shank – threatened on account of Union sentiments, 380
Anthony Rhodes – "always a Union man" named Henry Beery,
David Rhodes, Samuel Shank as "outspoken Union men, 563
David C. Breneman – "threatened to be shot because of Union sentiments" 313
Isaac Wenger – sympathized with Union cause; harbored refugees and helped them to escape, 459
A.D. Brunk – constructing a barn for Isaac Wenger – Mennonites and Dunkards were opposed to secession; claimed Isaac Wenger "marched all the hands he had at work on his barn and on his farm" to go to polls and vote against secession, 461
- Vol. IV – Abraham Breneman, Jr. – he and his father both desired the success of the Union cause. Father aided "Union people to go North; by doing so was arrested several times by the "rebels." 420
Abraham Shank – Mennonite minister; was threatened "in common with other Union men" on account of sentiments, 286
George Brunk – stays with the Union all the time "from the beginning to the end" "rebels" brought him two Union soldiers to take care of, 563

⁵Horst, *Ibid*; Lehman and Nolt, *Ibid*.

⁶*Unionists and the Civil War Experience in the Shenandoah Valley*, Researched and Compiled by Norman R. Wenger and David S. Rodes from the Southern Claims Commission Records, National Archives. Five volumes published.

150 Years Ago: Reluctant Cooperation in the Stressful Summer of 1861

That's what Samuel Horst called it regarding that summer's activities. Virginia's prewar militia system required men between 18 and 45 to drill, unless one paid a nominal fine of fifty or seventy five cents. Conscientious scruples were not recognized. So, when war came, the militia were called, but now it was not so easy to pay an exemption fine. Captain Bright of the 58th Virginia Militia Regiment wrote Governor Letcher on June 6, 1861, about having quite a number of men with conscientious scruples.¹

The well-known visit by military officials to Weavers Church one Sunday morning in June is a familiar story. People learned first-hand this meant an important decision that would touch most families.² Young John S. Coffman watched in the next weeks as men came to the home of preacher Samuel Coffman (his father) to say goodbye. He overheard some say they wouldn't shoot people but they had to go to a military camp. What other alternative was there?

It is believed that most men that summer responded to the call and that they were with the army during the summer of 1861. The *Rockingham Register* of July 5, 1861, carried a piece of strong advice entitled "To the Tunkers, Mennonites, and Others Opposed to War." Yes, war was not consistent with Christianity. But one of the first laws of nature is the right to defend oneself. Then sarcastically, it said. Why don't peace people "go the second mile?" Go twice as long as the government asks. If one son is asked for, send the second one too. At the least, go into service and be *shot at*, even if you cannot shoot others!

A month later (Aug. 9) in the same newspaper, "Justice" came to the defense of the nonresistants. It had been suggested that those with "religious scruples" be taxed two or three dollars a day. "Justice" pointed out that would reduce hundreds of farmer and others to poverty, because the peace people of the Valley were not "fat farmers."

Nor did they take scruples of conscience lightly. They were "part and parcel" of the faith of peace people. They would rather die than fight. Worshiping God according to conscience "is a liberty above all others." If kind reason wouldn't change their faith, neither would harsh measures. Then came the warning, "Beware that we provoke not the Majesty of Heaven to anger, and thereby cause Him to overwhelm us with swift destruction for our sins."

Before the end of July many men found themselves in camp. Jacob Wenger from the Greenmount area landed in the guardhouse because of refusal to shoot. L. J. Heatwole, as a teenager, heard stories of threats of being court-martialed or shot, a tactic that changed few minds. It seems many men were not overwhelmed by their plight. In fact, sometimes they would get together in the evening, when off duty, and sing familiar church hymns. Specifically mentioned were the hymns "O For a Closer Walk with God" and "Am I a Soldier of the Cross."

¹Horst, *Ibid*, 28.

²Barbara S. Coffman, *His Name Was John*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1964, pp. 26-28.

Military officials soon began looking for some noncombatant duties for these people. Samuel Brunk was assigned to the Baltimore Railroad. Joseph Nisewander made shoes. Henry L. Rhodes and Henry Brunk became teamsters. After a few months Brunk's conscience nagged him about his work for the military. So, he left camp and went into hiding. Henry A. Rhodes obtained a mail route. Quite a few went AWOL (absent without leave). A few ended up in military service. Now and then a name did not show up on a muster roll, or no record could be found on what was made of their case.

By the time autumn came, many of those encamped were returned to their homes, being allowed "to help with the fall planting." Of course, the understanding was that they would return to camp after that was done.³ However, that became a good excuse not to return to militia service. Church officials began to insist that going into military service disqualified them for church membership. If they volunteered they were held under censure by the church. Then their choices were to go into hiding or go north. It didn't take long for various hiding places to develop. But that called for a "cat and mouse" game as they tried to avoid being found.

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BOOK REVIEWS (by the editor)

Elwood E. Yoder, *The Bishop's Letters: The Writings Life, and Times of Virginia Mennonite Bishop Martin Burkholder, 1817-1860*. Harrisonburg: Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, 2011. Illustrated, 147 pages. \$10.00

Just released this summer on June 1, as a part of the 175th anniversary of Virginia Mennonite Conference, this volume breaks major new ground. Little documentation exists about the 1850s time period and even less was known about this major Virginia Mennonite church leader.

For decades a group of letters called the "Martin Burkholder Letters" sat in the Virginia Mennonite Archives. Actually, they are letters written to Martin, not by him. He was very busy preaching, not only at home in the Middle District, but he traveled widely, which the railroads made possible. The more than 70 letters are a mirror of the times and a mirror that reflects a dynamic minister who preached the Word "fervently and with power." as he traveled from eastern Pennsylvania to Indiana and Illinois, and several major trips to Ontario, Canada. The letters reveal that oftentimes, he took with him Samuel Shank Sr. from Broadway, a minister not well known at all before this either. So, we learn much more, not only about two church leaders almost unknown, but also what the preachers emphasized as they sowed the Gospel seeds.

Yoder has mined these letters very carefully and well. He summarized important things learned from the letters, then he published 35 letters, so the reader can sense directly what other church leaders are saying. He points out Burkholder's burden and challenge that a general conference be formed and what response other ministers had to this suggestion. Some letters are in English, some in difficult handwritten German script, which were transcribed by Amos Hoover from Ephrata, Pennsylvania and translated by Ervie Glick from Harrisonburg. The book deserves wide circulation. It is a first look at a little known time period of Virginia Mennonites. One letter that Martin wrote in 1853 has been found. It emphasizes that God's "grace is a treasure."

³Horst; Lehman & Nolt.

Leroy Beachy, *Unser Leit: The Story of the Amish*. Two volumes. Millersburg: Goodly Heritage, 2011. Highly illustrated by the author, 996 pages. \$75.00, plus shipping.

Here is a most unusual two-volume book set, with carefully written history and over 300 illustrations done by the same person. Leroy Beachy, a friend of the editor for nearly 60 years, has worked on this excellent history for two decades and made many trips to Europe. He speaks with the authority of one who has seen the geographic locations personally. Very helpfully, he includes both a name index and an events index in each volume.

He documents very thoroughly, which is much appreciated since he offers a new version of the emergence of the Amish from the Anabaptist movement. He attempts to be "even handed" regarding both the strengths and spiritual weaknesses that he saw.

Predictably, he will cause a stir, for he doesn't find Jacob Amman to be the founder of the Amish, but the "true" founder emerged 20 years earlier in the person of Ulrich Müller, a "far gentler person" than the "fiery" Jacob Amman.

Located more in the Zurich area than in Bern, Müller and others led a simply amazing rapid growth of Anabaptism from the Reformed Church. Beachy claims that people with more than 200 family names left state church membership to join the persecuted Anabaptists.

Even more remarkably, Beachy draws his conclusions from clues surrounding Müller's life and ministry, clues such as government complaints

about the "Anabaptist problem." Müller wrote nothing that has survived, nor is there any known description of his character or teaching by others. Born 1634, clues about him disappear from the records by 1699.

Volume 2 deals with the Amish coming to America and them being set apart, not so much with outward appearance but "an inner mentality shaped by Bible-based discipline. The last chapter deals with the 1900s resulting in dozens of divisions, hence a falling away from what was once seen as earnestly "contending for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Romans 12:9).

In this splendid and thoughtful history, gentle irony emerges when compared with present-day Amish. Müller and fellow ministers led a virtual explosion of evangelism among Reformed Church members in the late 1600s. Today, there has been great dispersion in the U. S., not so much because of evangelism, but because of large families moving to new Amish communities, often for agricultural reasons.

Book Note

Elmer Schrock, *The Amish in the Shenandoah Valley: The Story of the Amish Church at Stuarts Draft Virginia, 1942-1986*. Union: Yoder's Select Books, 2008. Prbk. 105 pages, illustrated. \$6.85.

The story of the Amish moving from Norfolk, VA and elsewhere to Stuarts Draft, VA to "live a quiet and peaceable life and be good neighbors." Quite readable and well illustrated with color photos. A bit unusually this community built a meeting house. Old Order Amish thinking eventually gave way to Beachy Amish and Pilgrim Fellowship developments. No Old Order Amish churches survive in this area.

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