



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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

Relief Aid in Virginia

Gary Smucker's feature article about relief aid in Virginia demonstrates the way a variety of Mennonite groups have cooperated for decades to help others who are in need. The Beachy Amish Mennonite Community in Kempsville, Va., which Gary Smucker mentions in his article as contributing to the relief efforts, included the Editor's paternal family.

This story of relief through canning meat had its origins after World War II, but it remains strong today with the Relief Center meat canning operation in Hinton, Va. Several years ago the Editor took a group of Eastern Mennonite High School students to the Hinton center to cut up meat. Many thanks to Gary Smucker for writing this article and for collecting the photos.

In order that our new and long-term members can understand the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, a non-profit organization now in its twenty-fifth year, we'll include a series of articles during 2018 about our activities, tours, and initiatives.

**Mennonite Relief Center Building, Hinton, Va.,
Easter morning, April 10, 2018 (upper photo).**

Photo by Editor



Lewis Strite (right) and Menno Suter stand beside the Virginia Portable Canner in the 1940s, with the chimney removed for travel.

Photo from Dean-Kaylor Studio, Harrisonburg, Virginia, as found in the Mennonite Central Committee Photograph Collection, Akron, Pa.

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Relief Aid in Virginia

by Gary Smucker

Peter Dyck was upset. It was 1945 and he was on the dock in Rotterdam, Holland counting the broken glass jars arriving from North America sent by the Mennonites to feed the hungry people in Europe after World War II. Around twenty-five percent of the jars were broken in transit—food that should have been going to feed the hungry.

Earlier Peter had an exchange on the docks about the food. A Red Cross official turned to him and said, “I didn’t know that almost half the people of the United States and Canada are Mennonites.”

Peter realized he was joking. He laughed and asked, “What made you say that?”

The official replied, “Because almost half of all the relief supplies coming to Holland these days are from the Mennonite Central Committee.” The outpouring of love and generosity made Peter grateful and happy for the people who would receive the aid, but he was upset by the damaged jars (Dyck).

Lewis Martin was upset when he visited the docks in Holland in 1945 too. He witnessed the broken glass jars of food intended to feed the hungry. It is not hard to imagine the disgusting sight of food wasted and spoiled in transit, and Lewis thought about the hungry who needed that food. He had visited food distribution sites in Holland earlier.

Lewis Martin was still upset when he returned to his home in Park View near Harrisonburg, Virginia. But he thought much about the problem and developed a plan to help. He was quoted as saying, “Something has to be done to make a better way to send food to the needy.” He went to Shenandoah Equipment Co., and worked with some of the employees and others to plan and build

a portable canner to preserve food in metal cans using a two-ton truck chassis. Menno Suter was one of the men with expertise to help build the equipment. Lewis Martin had the resources to build the canner because he



Cutting meat at the Mennonite Relief Center, Hinton, Va., 1990s. At left is Dan Smucker.
Photo from Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives

was the owner of Shenandoah Equipment Company (Smucker).

The Virginia Mennonite Mission Board supported the idea of the canner, but they passed a resolution saying that the ownership of the canner remained with Lewis Martin (Virginia Mission Board Minutes). They contributed money for the canning supplies and for the operation (Virginia Mennonite Mission Board, Executive Committee).

One of the employees who worked on building the canner at Shenandoah Equipment was Dan Smucker, Jr. Lewis Martin asked Dan if he would be the manager of the canner. Dan and two Civilian Public Service men were on the staff by the time the canner was ready for operation about November 1, 1945. Landis Martin was responsible for making and fixing

the labels on the cans and preparing cans for shipment, and volunteers worked with him too (Smucker).

The portable canner set out on a rigorous schedule of canning operations around November 1, 1945. In Rockingham County it visited the Joseph Heatwole farm in Bridgewater, the Lewis Martin farm in Sparkling Springs, the John Alger farm in Broadway, and the Shenk Hatchery in Park View. At the Shenk Hatchery location, farmers from Augusta County brought contributions for preservation (Lehman).

During the Christmas holiday season the canner was taken to Tidewater Virginia. In Kempsville, the Amish farmers volunteered and contributed to the operation.

The canner then moved to the Mennonite community in Fentress, with contributions from the Deep Creek community. By the time the operations finished in Fentress a total of 46,000 cans of food had been preserved since the start in November.

The canner was then moved to the Mennonite colony in Warwick County (Newport News) where the Warwick River Church and Providence Church members volunteered and contributed food. The Times-

Herald newspaper published an article on January 16, 1946 about the canning operation along with a photo of the volunteers cutting meat and another photo showing the canner operation with staff and volunteers. A photo, unpublished at the time, shows Lewis Martin with the staff and officials with the canner behind (Times-Herald Newspaper).

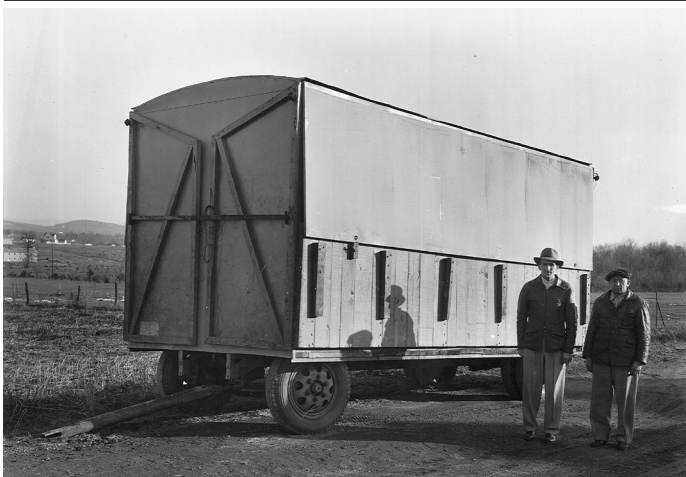


The Virginia Canner set up to can meat in the 1940s, with Dan Smucker (left), Lewis Martin (middle), and Wayne Henard, MCC Director of Material Aid.

Photo from Dean-Kaylor Studio, Harrisonburg, Virginia, from the Mennonite Central Committee Photograph Collection, Akron, Pa.

A truck drove from Ohio, picked up the canner, and moved it to Rittman, Ohio to the Apostolic Christian Church. Dan Smucker reported that the Apostolic members brought so much food for canning that it was difficult to cut off the canning operation to move to the next planned site which was the Oak Grove Mennonite Church in Orrville, Ohio (Smucker).

Someone had to start working at 5 a.m. to build the fires to be ready for the staff



The front view of the portable canner packed to travel, 1940s. Lewis Strite (left) and Menno Suter.

Photo from Dean-Kaylor Studio, Harrisonburg, Virginia, as found in the Mennonite Central Committee Photograph Collection, Akron, Pa.

and volunteers when they came to work on the canner. In the early years, coal fires were used to heat the caldrons and pressure cooker (Smucker). A Times-Herald newspaper article tells about the canning process: "All meat is deboned and cut into relatively small pieces before being processed....(It) is pre-cooked briefly in a large vat and then put in cans and heated in another vat until it reaches approximately 180 degrees. The cans are then sealed and cooked under fifteen pounds of pressure for about two hours. The meat is then cooled and packed for shipment" (Times-Herald Newspaper).

The canner continued operations some

years under the auspices of the Virginia Mission Board with Lewis Martin retaining ownership. He donated the canner to the Mennonite Central Committee at some point. A portable canner was also built in Kansas in 1946 and donated to MCC. The builders of the canner in Kansas had the blueprints from the Shenandoah Equipment Co. to help in their planning (Henard). MCC replaced the canners several times as new technology became available. The canner built in Virginia



The 1940s canner set up to can meat.

Photo from Dean-Kaylor Studio, Harrisonburg, Virginia, as found in the Mennonite Central Committee Photograph Collection, Akron, Pa.

in 1945 was donated for the use of the Mennonites in Paraguay by MCC (Dyck).

Canning operations continue today with different areas of the world still in need of food relief. In 1994 the Mennonites of the Shenandoah Valley opened the Mennonite Relief Center, a permanent site in Hinton, Virginia, which accommodates the MCC portable canner and other relief efforts. The Relief Center is a cooperative effort by diverse Mennonite groups in the Shenandoah Valley. Material aid and time are donated

Volunteers work at the Mennonite Relief Center, Hinton, Va., March, 2010.

Photo by the Editor



by the Southeastern Conference, the Virginia Conference, Old Order groups, Pilgrim Fellowship churches, and others. Once again Virginia Mennonites led the way and the Relief Center became a model. Other communities in North America built similar facilities based on the success of the one in Hinton (MCC Newsletter).

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Upper photo, right: Eastern Mennonite High School seniors volunteered on a snowy day at the Mennonite Relief Center, Hinton, Va., March, 2010.
Photo by the Editor

Middle photo, right: Building the Mennonite Relief Center, Hinton, Va., 1994.
Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives

MCC meat canning truck.
Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives



Back to the Origins

by Elwood Yoder

In September 1994, the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians sponsored its first tour, taking a full bus load of participants to Page County, Virginia. This was the first of over a dozen tours the Historians have sponsored since the organization began in 1993. During 2018, beginning with this article, we include a series of reflections on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Historians.

Linden Wenger and James Rush led the Page County Tour, September 17, 1994. They took participants to the Jacob Strickler house, showed various sites regarding the 1764 death of eight members of the John Rhodes family, and the historic Brubaker Cemetery. Wenger and Rush showed tour members the 1760 White House, home of Martin Kauffman, Jr. Two more stops included the Mauck Meetinghouse and Walbrook, the former Brubaker home.

The Editor, a 37-year-old history teacher in 1994, went along on the Page County Tour and took notes which he found for this essay. James Rush and the Editor both had photos from the day. Several key photos were missing, however, and so on a recent brisk and snowy Saturday, the Editor drove through the New Market Pass along Lee Highway near the South Fork of the Shenandoah River and took a few more photos to complete the essay.

This first tour by the Historians began with the origins of Shenandoah Valley Mennonites who lived on the east side of the Blue Ridge Mountains. With the energy and excitement of the brand new Historians organization, and the good leadership of Linden Wenger and James Rush, the Page County Tour was a grand success that led us back to the origins of 18th century Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley.



Martha Shank Whissen at the Walbrook House, on the Page County Historians Tour, September, 1994.

Photo by the Editor



Linden Wenger (standing right) spoke at Walbrook House in 1994. Others in photo include James Rush, Helen Shank, Mary Deputy Brubaker, Evelyn Mumaw, Eula Showalter, Esther Wenger, Helen Peachy, Gerry Rush, Ida Showalter, Michael Shenk, and James O.

Lehman. Photo by the Editor



Tour members ate at Mimslyn Inn, Luray, Sept., 1994.

Photo by James Rush



Gary Bauserman, a descendant of Mennonite preacher John Rhodes who was killed in 1764, spoke to the Tour at the Jacob Strickler House, with Linden Wenger, left.

Photos by James Rush



Mauck Meetinghouse, built late 18th century, used by Mennonites before they migrated west of the Blue Ridge Mountain.

Photo by Editor



Linden Wenger (center) and Laban Peachey (right) in the Mauck Meetinghouse, on the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians Tour, September 17, 1994.

Photo by James Rush



Memorial near site of John Rhodes family massacre, Page County Virginia, along Lee Highway near the South Fork of the Shenandoah River. Placed by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR), an irony in Mennonite history.

2018 Photo by Editor



John Rhodes memorial, Brubaker Cemetery, and The White House, also known as Kauffman House, center (and below). The White House was built about 1760, and served as a residence and a meetinghouse.

2018 Photos by Editor



Large scale copies of these photos can be viewed at www.flickr.com/photos/mennonitearchivesofvirginia/albums



Mauck Meetinghouse, near Luray, Virginia. Pictured above are participants on the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians tour September 17, 1994. Harmonia Sacra singing events have been held annually at the facility since 1922. The building is located at 223 Hamburg Rd., Luray, Virginia.

Photo by James Rush

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

Shenandoah Mennonite Historian issues from 2011-2018 can be found at mennonitearchivesofvirginia.net. This site includes a link to over 1,340 photos related to Mennonites in Virginia, provides a way to subscribe to *Historian* online, and connects readers to the Editor's history blog.

An annual individual membership fee for the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians is \$10.00 per year, which includes a subscription to the *Historian*. Additional family memberships are \$5 each. Send membership fees or inquiries to James Rush, e-mail at jameslrush@comcast.net, phone 540-434-0792, or U.S. mail to James Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22802.

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