



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Elwood E. Yoder, Editor

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Stuarts Draft Amish Church 75th Anniversary

James D. Hershberger has written an essay which celebrates the history of Stuarts Draft Amish Church, Augusta County, Virginia. Started in 1942, this Amish church thrived for decades until it closed in 1986. James D. Hershberger, from Stuarts Draft, Va., has included an overview of the only Old Order Amish high school in the United States.

Also in this issue you will learn about an upcoming presentation by John Ruth, a November lecture by Darvin Martin, and you will read an essay about Virginia Mennonite men during WWI.

Finally, on the front and back are photos of Mennonite congregations in Jamaica, started by Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions. The Editor is seeking to find and scan good photos from the history of the Virginia Mennonite Mission Board. If you have high quality action photos of people involved in VMBM, would you please share them with the Editor, who has been commissioned to help prepare for VMM's Centennial in 2019 (elyoder@gmail.com).



Paul J. Yoder (left), James D. Hershberger (center), and Joseph Longacher discussed their ideas for a new and forthcoming history book about Virginia Mennonite Conference, 2013.

Photo by Editor

IN THIS ISSUE:

- *CELEBRATING 75 YEARS: STUARTS DRAFT AMISH CHURCH ANNIVERSARY*, BY JAMES D. HERSHBERGER
- *VIRGINIA MENNONITE MEN DURING WWI*, BY ELWOOD YODER
- JOHN RUTH PRESENTATION IN HARRISONBURG
- REQUEST FOR VMBM CENTENNIAL PHOTOS
- DARVIN MARTIN LECTURE AND ANNUAL MEETING OF HISTORIANS

Waterloo Mennonite Church, Kingston, Jamaica, as pictured during Jamaica Mennonite Conference, 1997. (upper photo).

Photo by Editor

Celebrating 75 Years Stuarts Draft Amish Church Anniversary July 4, 1942

by James D. Hershberger, Stuarts Draft, Va.

The Shenandoah Valley looked inviting to that first Amish family, minister Eli Yoder, wife and children, to set foot and take up permanent residence in the Shenandoah Valley. This would become the first and only Old Order Amish Church known in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia planted on July 4, 1942, a peace church, during the time of that terrible World War II.

The 75th anniversary was held on September 17, 2017 attended by the children and “youth” of the church families. It drew Lloyd and Esther Troyer from Alaska as well as Sanford and Martha Yoder, long time missionaries by colonization from Costa Rica and many others.

The Stuarts Draft Amish Church can be thought of as the mother and grandmother founder of at least fifty “daughter” Amish or Mennonite churches including today’s three Mennonite Church plants in Costa Rica. The clip clop of that Standardbred horse approaching the first Stuarts Draft Amish Church service may have trotted further than the pioneers ever dreamed. Who would have thought Costa Rica, when observing the barefooted little Amish girls and boys seated on unpainted wooden church benches while swinging their feet as they listened to preachers Eli M. Yoder, Simon M. Yoder and Bishop Simon Schrock as they expounded the gospel? One of the youngsters after completing his Conscientious Objector to War I-W service became a world recognized missionary medical doctor who specialized with leprosy patients.

A local community policeman’s wife mused why the low crime rate in Stuarts Draft? She thought likely the presence and influence of the Amish were a part of the answer. It was also observed that community people more



**Stuarts Draft Amish Church, Augusta County,
Virginia, with adjoining high school annex.**

Photo James D. Hershberger

actively regularly attended the local churches after the Amish arrived. Perhaps daily Amish life spoke eloquently by devoted living and neighborliness without extensive verbal evangelizing?

Today’s progeny fondly looks back to reflect on the Amish Church, its dedicated founders, tracing back to the Anabaptist free Church born in 1525 and on back to Jesus and the New Testament church, and we thank them for passing the torch. In the 1500s the Anabaptist Christians were persecuted to death by both Catholic and Protestant Churches alike because they would not take up arms and kill their fellow man for the sake of God and country. The peace church legacy continues. On a trifold were the names of members who were veterans of faith and conscience. Rufus Beachy, Sam Yoder, and David E. Hershberger (who worked on the Skyline Drive out of Camp Luray) were conscientious objectors to War serving in Civilian Public Service camps during World War II. Others were I-W peace

veterans during the Korean and Vietnam wars and then there are those who believe in nonviolence and have participated in the humanitarian Conservative Anabaptist Service Program, and given service for Jesus the Prince of Peace. Today we have first generation Mennonite families originating from other denominations as well as multigenerational families passing on the torch at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Mennonite Church.

Can traditional people take initiative and be progressive at times? Not only did this Old Order Amish Church have Sunday school, summer Bible school, have high moral standards, use tractors and modern farm equipment as well as horse and buggy but they also

did not tolerate the use of alcohol and tobacco. When the Augusta County School Board told the Stuarts Draft Amish you must send your children to high school, they responded in 1950 by building the Stuarts Draft Amish High School addition to the still extant Amish Church House. To our knowledge this was the first and only Old Order Amish High School ever in the world, right here in the beautiful Shenandoah Valley. Out of the 73 boy students an amazing 22 became ordained Mennonite ministers. It seems as though out of the 144 students still living almost all remain active in churches. And all because some humble

spiritually wide awake Amish people wanted their children to be followers of Jesus.

Spare time was channeled into cutting up beeves for the hungry overseas as well as a Grundy, Virginia, orphanage. An Amish family would sometimes donate an entire cow to Mennonite Central Committee for relief across the Atlantic which the church people would



Apple Cutting at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Mennonite Church, affiliated with the Beachy Amish churches, Augusta County, Virginia, 2015.

Photo James D. Hershberger

cut up at Stuarts Draft Community Cannery. Sweet corn was also processed and sent for relief. Every fall the local Pilgrim Christian Fellowship Mennonite Church as well as community people still slice about 30 bushels of apples by hand one evening per week for about 7 weeks. All ages from preschoolers, teenagers, and youth to grandparents work joyously side by side all evening snitzing apples. After being dried in a specially designed dryer and stored, the apple snitz are sent to the needy in Haiti.

Other Amish spare time activities included youth hymn sings in homes, and "cottage

meetings,” where the Amish youth would visit a community widow or family, sing hymns and have a short devotional. Christmas caroling was a favorite each winter.

This is written by one of those who listened to the preaching of the excellent story telling Amish ministers as he sat barefooted on the wooden bench during those peaceful summer Sunday mornings while glancing through the open church doorway at the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. Some prefer elaborate massive ornate cathedrals but I would opt for this simple idyllic setting for a meaningful worship service. Singing the slow-tuned Ausbund Hymnal 400-year-old songs written by Anabaptist Christian martyrs while sitting in dungeon prison cells are still deeply touching as I reflect back on the goodness and faithfulness of God.



**Apple Cutting at Pilgrim Christian Fellowship
Mennonite Church, Augusta County, Virginia, 2015.**

Photo James D. Hershberger

Virginia Mennonite Men in World War I

by Elwood Yoder

Most of the approximately twenty-five Virginia Mennonite Conference men who were drafted a hundred years ago in WWI went in as conscientious objectors and ended up at Camp Lee, near Petersburg, Va. Aldine Brenneman, for instance, grew up near Newport News, got drafted in September, 1917, and went to Camp Lee where he spent over a year as a conscientious objector. For his refusal to cooperate, Brenneman spent twenty-six days in the guardhouse. He was harassed, threatened, and finally, near the end of the war, he was furloughed to a farm in Rockingham County, Va. There he met his future wife, Sallie Hartman, whom he jokingly called his “spoils of war.” Ordained by lot in Virginia Conference in 1932, Brenneman was in a strategic pastoral position to counsel young men about conscientious objection during the Second World War.

Both my grandfather John J. Yoder and my wife’s grandfather, Jonas Hege, were drafted by Uncle Sam. Though neither were from Virginia, John and Jonas were “absolutists,” who refused to put on a uniform, march, or work in the camps, for which they received punishments such as whippings and being put in a summer day sweatbox to break their will. Approximately 2,300 American Anabaptist men took “absolutist” positions in WWI.

In pursuit of alternative WWI stories to the “absolutist” pattern, I took a detour into the Zion Mennonite Church cemetery on a lazy Sunday



Brenneman family about 1945. From left, Merna, Aldine, Rosalyn, and Sallie Brenneman.

Photo from Merna Brennman Shank

morning in early June, 2018. I knew that Frank Caplinger, from our congregation in Broadway, Va., had taken care of horses for the U.S. Cavalry during WWI, but I was uncertain whether Frank had served as an enlisted man or worked as a non-combatant. I wondered how and where Frank had fit in.

As I walked through the wet grass to find Frank's tombstone, I remembered a remarkable statement from 1916 that was written by Virginia Conference ministers before the U.S. entered the war. The ministers had passed a statement at Zion Church, which opposed entering the war in Europe, and pleaded for exemption for their young men should they be drafted.

This forward-looking ministerial statement is in the Minutes book of Conference, but virtually forgotten today.

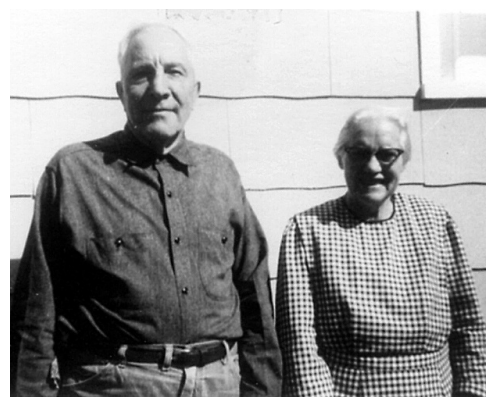
Frank Caplinger had been unique. Raised in the mountains of western Virginia, he attended Valley View Mennonite Church in Criders for a time, but then moved his family to Broadway and was a long term member at Zion. It was when I

looked down at the ground in front of Frank's tombstone that I was startled with an answer to my question.

The U.S.

military had come to the Zion cemetery after he passed in 1978 and placed a Veteran's marker in front of his tombstone, indicating that Frank had enlisted at age twenty-one and served as a Private First Class in the U.S. Army. After bowing my head in respect and praying for the morning services, I turned and went in the front door of the church, grassy wet shoes and all.

If you want to learn more about conscientious objectors during WWI, visit the Voices of Conscience traveling exhibit, to be hosted at Eastern Mennonite University, October 1 – November 17, 2018.



Frank (1895-1978) and Wilda (1902-1996) Caplinger, Zion Mennonite Church.

Photo from James Rush



Camp Lee, Virginia, Conscientious Objectors 1918

Photo from EMU Archives



Correction: In the last issue of *Historian*, page one, the Editor misidentified the man on the right. The man on the right is Lewis Strite and Menno Suter (now identified) stands beside Strite.

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

John L. Ruth Video Presentation October 21, 2018

This fall a ninety minute documentary entitled “Is There a Lesson? Forty-five Years with John Ruth and TourMagination,” will be introduced in a dozen American Mennonite communities. Locally it will be premiered by the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians on October 21, 2018, 7:00 p.m., in the Park View Mennonite Church sanctuary, Harrisonburg. Woven by John and Jay Ruth from four decades on the trail of Anabaptist history and life on four continents, the colorful program moves from still photography of the 1960s through film footage to video from John’s last of over sixty tours. Interpreting its colorful story by the twinned motifs of sword and song, the video allows former travelers to review the experience, while sharing it with those who were never able to do so. Admission is free, though an offering will be received.

Photos requested for Virginia Mennonite Missions 2019 Centennial

The Editor has been asked to help collect good photos of Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions in the past 100 years. Next year is the centennial celebration for VMBM, which was organized in 1919. The Editor has been looking through Mission Board photos in the Virginia Conference Archives, and has many photos, but would like more. If you have missions related photos, with good resolution, and information about who and what is in the photo, would you please contact the Editor (see e-mail on back of *Historian*) and allow

your photos to be scanned for the Mission Board’s Centennial next year? We are especially looking for U.S. mission photos such as Knoxville, Richmond, and Staunton.

Audrey Shank in Jamaica (top), Missions group from Dayton, Va., visits Albania in 2002(center), and Keener family in W.Va. missions.

Photos from Virginia Mission Board Collection in the VMC Archives.



Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians Lecture & Annual Meeting

Saturday, November 10, 2018

9:00 AM, EMHS Auditorium

801 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg

All are welcome, free of charge

Darvin L. Martin began to construct his own family tree by the age of ten, and at that time could not have even dreamed about the future ways science would enable us to connect everyone into a world family tree. Always passionate about history, particularly local history not found in common textbooks, Martin blended a career of scientific research with the pursuit of his own ancestry, seeking to determine the cultural, religious and societal norms that shaped the choices of his forebears. Martin has degrees in both agriculture and analytical chemistry, a combination which oriented his interests towards scientific instrumentation, eventually leading him to the Swiss homeland of his ancestors. For the last decade Martin has worked in product management and technical sales for two separate Swiss companies focused in the agricultural, environmental and pharmaceutical industries. He has also chaired the Lancaster Family History Conference since 2003.

Martin first embraced the idea of using DNA to trace family history while reading Brian Sykes' book, *The Seven Daughters of Eve*, in 2002. During his second year of chairing the Lancaster Family History Conference, Martin invited noted genealogist Megan Smolenyak to describe the upcoming world of DNA analysis and how this applies to family history. Soon after, Martin began his

own epic DNA journey. Eventually the time would appear when anyone could quickly, with little cost, find a genetic connection to anyone else on the planet. That time has now descended upon us as more and more people have decided to look within their own bodies to expand their genealogies beyond the standard paper trail. Martin initiated a DNA pilot project through the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society in October 2010, which has currently tested over 300 individuals and is providing the basis for specifically constructing family lineages from before the time of surnames. The project was renamed "Mennonite and Amish Immigrants to Pennsylvania" in order to channel interest in these particular families, but it is open to anyone no matter what connection they have to these families.

Martin will outline some of the findings from this project, as well as looking into the variation of DNA found within descendants of Mennonite families who settled in the Shenandoah Valley and other early American pioneers, and those who lived here even earlier—the Native Americans. Martin will describe which tests to take (depending on your interest), how to get tested, and how to interpret results.

**Darvin L.
Martin,
historian,
lecturer,
scientist,
and author**





Alpine Mennonite Church, Kingston, Jamaica, 1968. The Alpine Church was a missions outreach of the first Mennonite church in Jamaica, Good Tidings Mennonite Church, established by Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions. Virginia Mennonite Missions agency will celebrate its Centennial in 2019.

Photo from VMC Archives

The *Shenandoah Mennonite Historian* is published quarterly by the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, established in 1993.

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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 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.