



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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FEATURING LONG-TIME CHURCHMAN GLENDON BLOSSER

Who will speak on the topic:
**“OAKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS:
STRIVING FOR THE FAITH:**

Giving special emphasis to the development of three Virginia Mennonite groups that are no longer a part of Virginia Mennonite Conference (MC-USA).

They include the development of the Old Order Mennonite group (1901), the transition of the West Valley district into the group today called Southeastern Mennonite Conference (1972) and the formation of the Cornerstone group of churches (early 2000's).

This **ANNUAL MEETING OF
SHENANDOAH MENNONITE
HISTORIANS** will occur on

**Saturday, Nov. 13, 9:00 a.m. at
VMRC Village Hall.** The business meeting will take little time.

It does not appear that anything is developing with the idea of merging Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians with Crossroads: the Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center.

Here and There!

DAYTON MENNONITE CHURCH EVENT

In recognition of the imminent return of Willard and Eva Eberly to Bari, Italy, a group of about 230 persons gathered at the Dayton Mennonite Church on the evening of July 23 to enjoy a “Mid-Summer Night Mediterranean Celebration.” Everyone enjoyed the meal that included a variety of Italian pizza, fruit, salad and dessert.

Thereafter, we gathered in the sanctuary to view the multi-media presentation of the Italian ministry in which both the Eberlys and former Italian missionaries participated.

Mary Reitz

PEACE OAK IN FRANCE

On pages 5-6 we are indebted to James D. Hershberger for the two pages regarding the “peace oak” in France which was planted as a tribute to the government “Mandate” granting relief to French Anabaptists from military service by several kinds of useful civilian work or by paying a fee. Thus the idea of paying a fee for exemption from military service became known in Anabaptist, Mennonite and Amish circles, including the American Civil War.

The photo on p. 5 shows four men with hands clasped surrounding the huge tree trunk.

W T N D O W S . . .

Into Martin Burkholder's Life and Witness

Henry D. Weaver did a fine article in the Mennonite periodical, *Christian Monitor*, in the September 1932 issue, on the topic of "Weavers Mennonite Church." There he makes the following statement about Bishop Martin Burkholder:

Bishop Martin Burkholder was the first to preach here in the English language. It is said he would often preach a sermon in German, and immediately preach the same sermon over again in English. This practice served a good purpose, in that it bridged the Church over this period of unrest due to the antagonism to English preaching, and resulted in satisfaction to all.

What a fine contribution that was to Virginia Mennonites. How better to bridge that great hurdle the church needed to cross. We today can hardly imagine today what a hurdle that was for Mennonites to slowly leave the language they had used so long and loved so well as German. It had to happen everywhere in America that somehow congregations and conferences needed to leave German for English. Some Mennonites almost believed that God's language was German!

At many places it did not go so smoothly to clear that hurdle. The same article also says, "It appears that prior to this time very little other than the German language was used in preaching, there having been much objection to English preaching." Weaver says that credit needs to go to Bishop L. J. Heatwole and "Uncle Pete Hartman" for their keen memories that were able to give details of many of the incidents that H. D. Weaver uses in his *Christian Monitor* article. That same article in the *Monitor* by Weaver will serve well in doing a history of Weavers planned for the next two years..

Further comments need to be made about the changeover to English. Bishop Martin learned well from his father, Bishop Peter Burkholder, who already in 1837 got the well-known Joseph Funk to translate the Mennonite Confession of Faith into English, then Peter and Joseph Funk published it. That really was the first major event to help Virginia Mennonites to think about the language change that Bishop Peter foresaw as needing to be done. His stated reason for having the Confession of Faith put into English was to let the people around the Virginia area know what Mennonites believed. That was a most commendable goal. And it got published widely.

Joseph Funk played no small part in Virginia Mennonites turning to English. He had a printing press by 1847, but already before that time he was publishing English. Harry A. Brunk, in his *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, vol. 1, (pages 125-128) outlines more thoroughly how significant it was for Funk and Burkholder to go to the expense and trouble to have this done. Funk was "conscious of the profound erudition that was required to bring out a fluent English translation of an ancient work." (p. 127) As is now obvious, Funk did well. He knew that Burkholder's "profession as a writer is but humble." Funk stated that he had been called on by the Church to do this translation, so much of the work was on Funk's shoulder. But a great deal of credit goes to both men for getting this accomplished. Funk also published other works that helped to grease the skids of turning to English.

Martin Burkholder simply helped the difficult process of Virginia Mennonites turning to English.

jol

Work on Martin Burkholder Letters

Almost fifty years ago Virginia Burkholder urged her husband Warren to do something with a collection of letters that had been handed down through four generations of Burkholders. In 1962, then, Warren turned some fifty letters over to Grant M. Stoltzfus, who deposited them in the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives.

The letters had been written to Martin Burkholder (1817-1860) during the 1840s and 1850s. Rebecca Burkholder kept her husband's correspondence after his early death in 1860 at the age of 43. Bishop Burkholder had written numerous letters during the last decade of his life, and he received letters from bishops, ministers, and deacons in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Ontario. Virtually none of the letters that Martin Burkholder wrote to the ministers in the other states have survived.

Rebecca gave her husband's letters to Samuel Burkholder, her son. Samuel then gave them to Walter, his son, and Walter gave them to Warren, his son. Many of the letters were written in old German script and so were little used or studied in the decades since they came to the Archives. In 2004, Amos B. Hoover, from Ephrata, Pennsylvania, transcribed the old German into regular German. Hoover, a Mennonite historian, also made written comments about many of the letters. In 2010, Virginia Conference Archivist James O. Lehman obtained Professor Emeritus Ervie L. Glick to translate the letters into English.

In March, 2010, James O. Lehman and Jim Rush approached me about reading the letters, now in English, and investigating their value and content. After some study and reading of the letters, and learning more about the 1850s, I have concluded that at least three findings emerge from these important letters. **First**, Bishop Martin Burkholder was progressive in his call for a general conference of Mennonites in the east during the 1850s. He actively sought to bring a unity of churches among scattered Mennonites.

Burkholder, ordained bishop at the age of 30, actively travelled throughout the east coast Mennonite communities seeking support for the idea of a general conference. He travelled to Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Ontario, Indiana, Illinois, and West Virginia. After Burkholder died at the age of 43, in 1860, it would be almost forty years until his dream of a general conference became a reality.

A **second** important finding in the letters is the discovery of details about Virginia Bishop Samuel Shank, Sr., Martin Burkholder's father-in-law. Bishop Shank, from near Broadway, Virginia, travelled with Martin Burkholder on at least two trips to Ohio, Indiana, and Ontario during the 1850s. Heretofore we have known little about Bishop Shank, but we learn considerable details from the letters.

A **third** discovery in the letters is the way in which English permeated the rest of the Mennonite Church in the east through the Virginia Mennonites. With the sale and distribution of Joseph Funk's English hymnal, written about in the letters, and the early adoption of English by Virginia Mennonites, Burkholder and Shank, along with others, led the way in getting English into use in Mennonite communities to the north of Virginia. At least two minister letters to Burkholder begin in English, but then abruptly switch to German, probably relieving stress from the writer who reverts to his mother tongue.

The Burkholder letters are a historical treasure for the Virginia Mennonite Conference and the wider Mennonite Church. Now that these letters are in English we learn details about the thinking of Mennonite ministers all across the east coast. These letters are more than personal correspondence; rather, they are the statements of Bishops and ministers who are writing to Virginia Bishops Martin Burkholder and Samuel Shank, Sr., about church matters of the day. Letters in the 1850s were usually meant to be read aloud among others, and they often were, so they also contain much spiritual encouragement and counsel.

Perhaps you can imagine these letters from distant ministers being read to visitors in the Burkholder house, the red and white house at the CrossRoads Heritage Center grounds.

The Virginia Mennonite Historical Committee has encouraged me to move ahead with a publication that would include the most important letters, along with a biography of Martin Burkholder's life, especially during the 1850s. During the first week of August, 2010, I made a research trip to the Archives of the Mennonite Church USA in Goshen, Indiana. I found one additional letter, an aging, yellowed, single sheet of paper, written on both sides, probably with feather quill pen, by Virginia Bishop Martin Burkholder, to Bishop Jacob Zimmerman of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The 1853 letter gives great insight into the thinking of the 36 year old Virginia bishop as he promoted the idea of a general conference of Mennonites.

I hope to have a biography and the most important letters published in a booklet by the end of May, 2011. In June 1, at the Lindale Mennonite Church, you will be able to get a copy of these letters and read the biography of Burkholder that I have been working on. A special part of the event at Lindale, June 1, will be a musical rendition of a song that Bishop Burkholder wrote in 1858. This event at Lindale Church will be the last in the year-long cycle of historical celebrations promoted by the Virginia Conference to celebrate 175 years of conference life.

Elwood E. Yoder

John M. Brenneman's Call For a General Conference of American Mennonites

Well-known Ohio bishop in the 1850-70 era, John M. Brenneman shines brightly in American Mennonite history. Widely known in Ohio and Indiana Conferences, he did much traveling to encourage smaller churches in the

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Midwest, he ordained John F. Funk, helped begin the *Herald of Truth*, encouraged missions, had great respect for conferences, and early on called for Sunday schools and encouraged Mennonites to turn from German to English. He pushed out Mennonite horizons tremendously.¹

John S. Coffman is usually labeled the first major Mennonite evangelist, but Coffman modestly says, No, it was Brenneman who was "the forerunner," the first Mennonite evangelist.

At least one letter has surfaced in the Burkholder collection that shows JMB had contact with MB before Burkholder died. In the 1860s after Burkholder's death, JMB did much of the kind of thing Burkholder had done, spending much time on the road visiting churches and preaching. In 1867 he attended Virginia Conference when the topic of divorce came up. Virginia Conference, it turned out, took a liberal view that it was permissible for a divorced person to re-marry again.² Within a year or two Ohio and Indiana conferences disagreed and took a more conservative position, and Brenneman was sharply criticized for agreeing with the Virginia position.

Then the meek Brenneman apologized for awkwardly agreeing with Virginia Conference. Very clearly, said JMB, if there had been a **general conference among Mennonites** to discuss the issue, he could have been spared the humiliation of having his best thinking "publicly and unceremoniously rejected by his fellow ministers." Thus he called for the same thing that Martin Burkholder and Samuel Shank, Sr. had campaigned for nearly a decade and a half earlier!

Only now are we beginning to realize to what extent the very able Virginian Martin Burkholder and his fellow traveler Samuel Shank Sr. were forerunners of both John M. Brenneman and John S. Coffman.

jol

¹James O. Lehman, *Seedbed for Leadership*, Elida: Pike Mennonite Church, 12-21.

²At this same conference the Virginia Conference took action against allowing the Sunday School.

Growing Peace Oak in the Shenandoah Valley

A Living Memorial

Prelude

Those were troubled times. King Louis the XIV the “most ‘Christian’ king” was on the throne and intent in extending the holy catholic faith and upon extending his glorious French power over more of Europe. Other European countries made alliances and built up militaries to block his encroachments.



It was 1712 and in the midst of the warfare, the bloodbaths, and the suffering King Louis XIV ordered the Anabaptists out of France. If these peaceful innovative farmers and weavers maintained their God was a God of peace and love who would not permit them to take up arms, the directive was clear and cold, “Get out!”

Thus a small number of the followers of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, (a group of Amish Mennonites) who had been evicted from St Marie in the Alsace in 1712 for their faithfulness to God found refuge in the remote higher elevations of the Vosges Mountain range. In the little independent principality east of France in the high mountain community of Salm these refugee God loving Christians founded the successful Salm Amish Mennonite *Church. The high elevation with short seasons narrowed farming possibilities but they survived and rejoiced in their tranquil lifestyle. They also had the opportunity of helping their mountaineer neighbors with herbalist veterinary services and in gaining their friendship. Among the family names were Kupferschmidt and Augsburgers. Are the valley Augsburgers descendents or relatives?

The Story

According to a story handed down through the generations, a large army was desired at the time of the violent French Revolution. One day a French military officer came up through the mountains informing the men they would need to be armed in preparation for military duty. The Amish men and youths told him you really need to speak with our bishop. Accordingly he went to the bishop’s home. Amish bishop, Jacob Kupferschmidt invited the officer in to have lunch with them. Discreetly he whispered to his wife, “Take ample time to prepare the meal.”

While they waited during lunch preparations and during a lull in their discussion, the bishop asked the officer if he could sing one of their songs for him. Upon the officer’s assent, Jacob reached up, retrieved his beloved Ausbund hymnal from the kitchen mantel and sang “*ein ganz langsammes lied*” a Gregorian Chant style, a very slow-tuned hymn.

After listening intently to the hymn extolling Christ’s teaching on peace and nonresistance, tears flowed down the man’s cheeks. When the meal was over the officer arose from his chair, shook the bishop’s hand and said, “If you take care of your farms we’ll take care of the war.” With a song the venerable man of God had won an unofficial variance for his congregation, which was later officially approved when several Amish leaders visited the governing Convention in Paris. The result was the issuance of a document which did exempt the Amish from military training. It is notable that the mandate was issued by the Committee of Public Safety and that of the document’s six signers, one was the infamous politician, Maxmilien Robespierre. In 1794, in commemoration for God’s answer to their prayers and the military exemption, Bishop Kupferschmidt reputedly planted an Oak tree at the edge of his woodland which he called the “Peace Oak.”

Public Welfare concludes that the following written circular should be released.

The Mandate

The National Committee for the Public Welfare

From the 18th of August 1793
Second year of the French Republic

The Anabaptists of France, Citizens! have sent several of them to represent to us that their reverence for God and their moral teaching forbid them to bear weapons, and to desire of us that they might be given, in the armies, some other (type of) service.

We have recognized in them, simple hearts, and therefore believed that there should be a good national disposition of all (kinds of) virtues for the common good. We therefore invite you to show to the Anabaptists the kind of gentleness and mercy that will prevent their persecution, and to allow them such service in the armies as they desire, such as work on entrenchments or roads or wagoning, or actually allow them to pay off this service requirement monetarily.

Signed: Couthon, Barere, Gerault, St. Just, Thuriot, Robespierre



Peace Oak Seedlings to take root in the Shenandoah Valley

What a beautiful story and living peace monument I thought! Why couldn't we bring to America a part of that beautiful faith legacy and heritage? Accordingly we have planted acorns from beneath that very Salm Peace Oak tree at the EMU Lehman Auditorium lawn and at Crossroads Valley Brethren and Mennonite Heritage Center.

There are monuments to men of war but we trust these seedlings will become trees as living monuments to something no man can put his hands, much less his arms around – Peace.

As we take a cursory look at history, there have been men of war, the generals, and the admirals.

But there have also been men who have listened to a much higher calling – a calling from God - a calling that says you cannot kill your fellow man; a calling that reaches out to all peoples, all races throughout all parts of the earth. A calling that says we are all a part of God's creation. May I suggest these people of God, these people of peace and redemptive love are the real people of valor. They are the people even when they were the minority were the people of uncommon courage.

Today we can be thankful that there have been a people who would not go to war.



James D. Hershberger

Stuarts Draft, Virginia

*Note: The term "Amish" was first used in 1711 by someone who wanted to refer to that segment of the 1693 Swiss Brethren faction derisively.

Elwood E. Yoder, *We're Marching to Zion: A History of Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Virginia, 1885-2010*. Broadway: Zion Mennonite Church, 2010. Pp. 303. \$20.00

Writing a congregational history is not an easy task. Records are often sparse, especially in early years, and accurately depicting leaders is challenging, particularly in recent years.

These realities cause difficulties in describing conditions during the congregation's beginning. Writing recent history becomes a matter of perspective and can cause feelings. No one is completely objective. Yoder has done a remarkable job of capturing the broad history as well as many minute details of this vibrant congregation located almost on the outskirts of Harrisonburg, and at the heart of Northern District of Virginia Mennonite Conference, a regional conference within Mennonite Church USA.

He does not shy away from naming shortfalls of leadership, but does so respectfully with a measure of grace.

The congregation's official beginning dates from 1885, when preacher Samuel Shank gifted two acres to the three trustees of the new meetinghouse. However, Yoder began his story in 1777, with a chapter on early Mennonite farmers who migrated from Pennsylvania to settle in the Shenandoah Valley.

Likewise, he ends his tale with a look at the few remaining farmers in Zion's congregation. They now number five households out of a total membership of 205. The author depicts Zion's story as a hymn of praise to God. He places much emphasis on the congregation's musical gifts.

Those outside the congregation may find the early chapters the most interesting. They include stories of Northern District circuit riders preaching in the hills as far west as Baker, WV, and on through time to the formation of Zion in 1885. They built a meetinghouse to supplement Trissels Mennonite Church. Those within Zion will likely take greater pleasure in the later chapters where they might find their names, faces and stories woven into the history.

Yoder does an excellent job of placing Zion events in their cultural and historical context. He notes U. S. presidential transitions, as well as milestones in Northern District and the broader Virginia Conference which met at Zion three times in the late 1800s, as well as 1944, 1945 and once more in the 1950s.

He describes the national Mennonite General Conference meeting at Harrisonburg in 1919, and makes passing references to proceedings in the larger denomination. However, the text is light on analysis of how these and other religious and cultural trends helped to shape Zion.

The book's five appendices may be useful to future historians, particularly the list of ministers, the real estate transactions and the leadership table, 1961-2009. One additional helpful thing would have been a list of the many photographs and illustrations. The volume is very heavily sprinkled with photographs.

The author demonstrates the core of Zion theology and practice and how it has been and continues to be centered in Christ. His description reminds one of Hebrews 12:22, "But you have come to . . . Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem the city of the living God . . . [and] to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant . . ."

Yoder has done Zion, and the broader church, a service in documenting this rich slice of congregational life and church history.

Steve Carpenter

“PREPARED TO KILL AND DIE FOR MY COUNTRY”

SMH has always dealt with history, but it has ignored current history. Here's a thoughtful page of events that are historic for the last couple years

FROM MILITARISM TO PACIFISM

Scott Smith, peace delegate for the Greensboro Mennonite Church, North Carolina has a strong testimony for turning away from a military career to adopt a peace position. From an article in the April 2009 *Connections* and the editor's conversation with him on July 25, here are some excerpts.

Most of my life I've been a Christian professional military man. My interest began early. In my senior year of high school I was in the Marine Corps JROTC. I graduated from the Naval Academy as a 2nd lieutenant in the Marine Corps. I went on to flight school at Pensacola, FL After receiving my wings I reported to Camp Pendleton, CA, where I transitioned to Cobra attack helicopters.

Later I left active duty and returned to North Carolina. Within a year I joined the Army National Guard and began flying Hueys and Cobras, then transitioned to Apache helicopters

which I flew for 12 years until retirement in 1999. I also activated for Desert Storm in Iraq. I was prepared to kill and die for my country.

When the U. S. invaded Iraq in 2003 I was less certain than Pres. Bush was that Iraq was really a threat, but I gave tentative approval. The “shock and awe” campaign, followed by victories and the fall of Baghdad aroused my patriotism. Later, when no WMD's were found and no Iraqi support was demonstrated for al-Qaeda, I felt utterly betrayed by the Administration. I thought, **“You don't send thousands of people to their deaths on the basis of what you SUSPECT but on what you KNOW!”**

This outrage began a long period of soul-searching and scripture reading. By March 19, 2006, I realized I had become a Christian pacifist. Thereupon a burden lifted, one I did not know I'd been carrying. I was filled with a joyous inner peace. The burden was the tension between my beliefs on the use of violence and Christ's teachings.

In 2007 I searched for a peace church and settled on the Mennonite church for three of its core values: peace, separation of church and state and the centrality of Christ. I looked for the closest MC-USA church and began attending at Greensboro. If my country should call again I will be unable to serve that “god” again.

Scott Smith

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