



Bank Church, 1893-1965

Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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A Virginia Mennonite Deacon's Activities in 1867 Frederick A. Rhodes (1819-1900)

Some verbal snapshots from 140 years ago. Life was different at that time! Be sure to read far enough to observe that the good deacon served on a jury trial. Note the disposal of the case and the language used. Did Virginia Mennonites commonly use language like that? Our thanks to Minnie Carr for supplying the diary and helpful comments along the way.

John S. Coffman, Virginia Man, Becomes the Pioneer Mennonite Evangelist

Another look at Virginia's famous son from sources not commonly available to most people, such as the paper written by Raymond Carr, Jr., son of the above mentioned Minnie Carr, and Coffman's first biographer, Menno Simons Steiner, a good friend of John S. Coffman.

A Virginia Mennonite Deacon's Activities in 1867

Frederick A. Rhodes (1819-1900)

Frederick A. Rhodes, a significant Middle District deacon for nearly 50 years kept a diary from Jan. 1 to Oct. 28, 1867 at the age of 48. We get interesting glimpses of life 140 years ago.

Here are snatches from the diary—interesting “snapshots” of the life of a deacon at that time. Frequently, only portions of that day’s entry are noted. They appear in Rhodes’ grammar and spelling. Editor added most punctuation marks. Most clarifying comments in brackets were by Minnie Carr.

Jan. 1 – had company – John and Joseph Driver, Gabriel D. Heatwole. Enjoyed ourselves very much with singing.

Jan. 2 – I was at dunker preaching.

Jan. 3 – I passed the day with writing for the *Herald [Herald] of Truth*.

Jan. 7 – hauling sawlogs. Wrote a letter for Canaday [Canada]. Enjoyed singing.

Jan. 9 – breaking flax and Margaret [age 23] and Mary [age 18] went to town. Mother got her coverlids out of the loom.

Jan. 12 – I went to the factory.

Jan. 15 – no company today [apparently that was unusual].

Jan. 17 – coldest day this winter. I dug a grave of John Write child.

Jan. 20 (Sun.) – went with Christian and Betty [Shank?] to Brennemens buring [burying].

Jan. 21 – come home from Christian Shanks.

Jan. 22 – breaking flax; girls sucking [shucking?] corn.

Jan. 26 – Had Samuel Coffman [bishop] for the knight.

Jan. 27 (Sun.) – Me and brother Coffman went to the Bank [church] to meating. Speaker Coffman. Joseph and John Driver for the knight. [boy friends of Maggie (age 23) and Fannie (20)]

Jan. 29 – breaking flax and seuching. Company off and on throu the day.

Feb. 4 – wrote a letter [to] Ohio.

Feb. 10 (Sun.) at the bank Church and line horse [Lindhorst?] was baptized. John Gile [Lower (Northern) District] speaker text 3 John.

Feb. 17 (Sun.) at home; I was reading

Feb. 18 – me and boys chucking corn. The girls was spinning; mother putting carpet on the loom.

Feb. 22 – hauld rock in the roade.

Feb. 24 – girls went to Coakleys to the weddind Mary [age 18] went to singing to Thomases School house. Company Joseph and John Driver.

Feb. 27 – Mother and the girls was seutching flax.

Mar. 1 – Making plank fence; Boys at school.

Mar. 2 – we was all at the bering [burying] at the bank church. Elizabeth Bright was buried. Coffman and Sollomon Garber [Dunker?] speakers.

Mar. 3 (Sun.) was at the bering of David A. Heatwole child [Rufus] at Shanks graveyard.

Mar. 8 – to Joseph Weavers for dinner. I was in mysrie with boils all the time.

Mar. 11 (Mon.) – me and Coffman to baptize old uncle David Heatwole [Potter John’s father].

Mar. 14 – suffering with boils very much.

Mar. 19 (Tue.) – was at Weavers Church Counsel meating text Mathew 18 Chapter. In the knight we all went to rushvill to meating.

Mar. 25 – me and Simeon [Mrs. Rhodes’ brother] went to settle church matters but did not get threw between A. Burkolder and Elizabeth Swartz.

Mar. 29 – we met at Hildabrand Church with Brethren for to hold conference and everything past off smoothly; me and a portion of the Brethren staid at Jacob Hildabrands.

Mar. 31 (Sun.) - we held communion at Hildabrands Church Speaker Samuel Coffman.

Apr. 6 (Sat.) I went to the Church to instruct applicants for baptism.

Apr. 7 (Sun.) – at the bank church at the baptizing.

Apr 13 – I went to Ben Byerly to praise [appraise] the hinton land for the benefit of David Lary heirs.

Apr. 14 (Sun.) we were at home and the girls was at trinity [Mt. Horeb] at the Singing and in the evening their was a good many youngsters hear.

Apr. 18 – fair and warm I was plowing with three plows Hugh [Brunk] and Gabe [Heatwole] helpt me.

Apr. 21 (Sun.) – went to Brennaman Church to big meeting speaker D. W. Landes Samuel Coffman Hildebrand text Luke 22 chapter Corinthan 11.

Apr. 25 – me and Simeon went to A. Burkholder and Swartses to seattle difficulties [see Mar. 25] and we got the matter fixt after hard work.

Apr. 26 – all day I was at the plaster mill.

Apr. 28 (Sun.) – we all went to Weavers church to big meeting Speakers C. Brunk, S. Coffman, John Guile text 22 Luke and Corinthen.

Apr. 29 – me and William soad plaster [lime].

May 2 – the girls was ccouring [scouring] the church today.

May 4 (Sat.) – old brother Guile with us all knight.

May 5 (Sun.) – we all went to the Bank church at the big meeting Speaker John Giule, Daniel Heatwole, text 28 Luke, Sam Coffman text 1 Corrinthen 11 Ch.

May 11 (Sat.) – I was summonsed on the jury I went to town to tend cort.

May 13, 14, 15 – to town to tend cort.

May 16 (Thur.) – I was in town on the jury and I was locked up all knight in the tavern; next morning we desided and sent the niger to the penitentiary.

May 19 (Sun.) – me and the girls was at the Bryery Branch meeting Speaker J. Driver.

May 24 – me and David A. Heatwole took the cattle to the mountain.

May 25 – Mother at Pets at a wool picking today.

May 27 (Mon.) we had lots of company from Pa. Samuel Godshall, John Gross, John L. Groose, Aaron Tyson, Daniel Heatwole, D. H. Landes, Michael Shank.

May 28 – we were at the Bank church; the Pennsylvania preachers were their -- text Mathew 8 chapter 30, 31, 32, 33 verse.

May 29 – the Pennsylvania preachers had meeting at Weavers today.

May 30 – Mother went down to Brannamans Church with the strange preachers. I went to the mountains to salt cattle.

May 31 (Fri.) – Mother was at Hildabrands at preaching the Pa. preachers had meeting their today.

June 2 (Sun.) – at the bank church text 17 chapter of Luke Speaker D. H. Landes and S. Coffman after dinner preaching at Sillings text 33 psalm Speaker S. Coffman.

June 4 – we were all at the burying at Beavercreek Margaret Long was buried; Speaker George Wine.

June 7 – we went to the burying old uncle David Heatwole was buried [Potter John's father]

June 9 (Sun.) – I was at home; all the girls was at singing and lots of youngsters came along home.

June 17 (Mon.) – I was at Harrisonburg at cort and rote a letter for Pennsylvania.

July 6 – we was at Joes harvesting with five cradles.

July 11 – we hauled wry. Boys went fishing.

July 15 (Sun.) – me and Coffman went to Briery Branch to meeting.

July 21 (Sun.) – I went to Weavers Church.

July 28 (Sun.) – we was at the Bank Church.

Sept. 1 (Sun.) – I was at the Pike church.

Sept. 10 – the girls was fixing for fannies weding.

Sept. 12 – fanny was married and their was lots of folks hear [married to Joseph N. Driver]

Sept. 13 – girls went to infair down on the river.

Sept. 27-29 – Weavers Church Conference; big meeting; John Brennehan present to administer sacrament.

Oct. 4 – past my time away in writing a letter to Jon F. Funk and writin in the Record Book concerning church matters.

Oct. 20 (Sun.) – Bank Church; John Evers spoke.

John S. Coffman, Virginia Man, Becomes the Pioneer Mennonite Evangelist

J. S. Coffman became "famous" as a revival speaker and the pioneer Mennonite evangelist. Others had laid the groundwork and he reaped a harvest of holding many revival meetings.

Raymond Carr, Jr., a senior at Turner Ashby High School wrote a fine research paper on Coffman for English 12 in March 1960. By permission we depend considerably on Carr's paper. Quotations from his paper are indented in smaller print. Footnotes are by the author.

John S. Coffman introduced one of the greatest evangelistic movements that has ever taken place in the Mennonite Church. His sermons were short, to the point, and well delivered. He chose themes not touched by others and presented ideas which challenged his listeners and supplied them with spiritual food.¹

Coffman's great-grandparents were Isaac and Esther from Pennsylvania, who settled in Shenandoah County, then Greenbrier County, VA, now West Virginia. Their son Christian and Anne (Wenger) Coffman, were the parents of Samuel Coffman, who became bishop in the Middle District. John S. was the oldest son of Samuel and Frances (Weaver) Coffman. [see the summer issue of *SMH* regarding the Greenbrier settlement.]

John Samuel Coffman was born Oct. 16, 1848.

"Never again did I enjoy such a blessed feeling and have such a bright token at the birth of any of my other children as I witnessed at this time."²

The godly lives and the spiritual training set forth by the parents did much in molding the character of the child. He was a mother's boy. It was from her

that he sought advice. He enjoyed quiet games—running foot races, building dams, making water wheels and corn stalk horses.

After his father Samuel was ordained minister [July 11, 1852, and bishop in July 1861], his father's ministerial duties took him away from home on many occasions. This meant that John, being the oldest, had to assume a goodly portion of the home responsibilities.

There were no free schools at the time; education was at a premium. It was David A. Heatwole [father of L. J.] who, more than any other Mennonite, kindled a desire in the minds of young people for education [see *SMH*, Autumn 2003]. Heatwole opened a night school for neighborhood boys. L. J. Heatwole and John S. Coffman and others took advantage of it. When Heatwole wanted to build a schoolhouse Samuel Coffman gave \$20 to help; as did his successor in the Middle District bishop office, Martin Burkholder.

John was talented and loved singing. In early summer of 1864, "one evening at twilight, while out in the home orchard, conviction seized him, and convinced him of the need of salvation. Said John, 'For the first time I felt that I was a sinner. I was so burdened that I cast myself down under the tree and prayed to my God for help and to the Lord for salvation.' On July 4, 1864, he was baptized in Muddy Creek near the Bank Mennonite Church."³

The Civil War was on the threshold of its most terrible time for Virginians when several months later Gen. Sheridan's troops came through with their destruction.⁴ Raymond Carr also interviewed Mrs. E. F. Rhodes, niece of John S. Coffman, and obtained the following details.

¹Coffman is known for preaching often on the seven ordinances of the Mennonite Church that he and Daniel Kauffman championed—baptism, communion, footwashing, prayer veiling for women, anointing with oil, holy kiss, and marriage.

²Carr quotes from M. S. Steiner, *John S. Coffman: Mennonite Evangelist*. (Spring Grove, PA: Mennonite Book and Tract Society, 1903), 13.

³Steiner, 16-17.

⁴Detailed in John Heatwole, *The Burning*, Rockbridge Pub. 1998.

The Civil War was robbing the land of its wealth, men and boys. Families were not allowed to enjoy a quiet meal for weeks. The Coffman family was no exception. A number of times soldiers rushed in and carried away the meal. Once they ransacked the house trying desperately to open a desk where the maple sugar was kept. To the utmost joy of the Coffmans, their attempt was futile and the precious sugar was retained. Another time they were warned that the house was going to be burned. Quickly the possessions were carried to safety. Mrs. Coffman begged the soldiers not to destroy their home. In answer to her prayer they spared it but burned the barn.

When the opportunity came, John S., along with many other Mennonites and Dunkers [Church of the Brethren] went along with Sheridan's troops northward to safety across the Pennsylvania line. He was deeply impressed with the need to believe in nonresistance to war.

At the close of the war he gave his parents a glad surprise. His sister Mary saw him coming through the orchard [the same orchard where he was convicted of sin] and one by one the family ran out to meet him. It was a happy meeting amid sad and changed surroundings. His little sister Sarah⁵ had grown so much during his two years of absence that he asked of his mother, "Whose child is that?" The countryside was a picture of destruction, for war had played havoc with the beautiful, well-kept farms. John, along with others, formed a carpenter's gang which did more than rebuild houses and barns. In the evenings they mended broken spirits and saddened hearts by singing songs of hope and cheer.

During his construction work Coffman fell about thirty feet and was picked up for dead; but God, having a definite plan for his life, spared it. While his broken arm was mending he read and studied, thus preparing himself for the work that the Lord had purposed for him to do later on. At an apple cutting Elizabeth Heatwole, three years his senior, was assigned to him for a partner. He was pleased with the selection and the incident developed into a partnership which began with marriage vows when he had reached his twenty-first birthday. Bettie's birthplace was at the foot of Mole Hill on a farm adjoining the one where she and John set up house-keeping [1 1/2 miles northwest of Dayton.]⁶

John farmed a small farm at the foot of Mole Hill, taught school and singing schools and

attended Bridgewater Normal [now Bridgewater College]. As for teaching Steiner reports [p. 23] that John won the reputation of being "one of the liveliest teachers in the county."

At the age of 26, on July 18, 1875, John was ordained to the ministry. He began to seek opportunities to preach and spread the gospel, one such example being the time he went along with Uncle Gabriel Heatwole to Pendleton County, WV. They left home May 14, 1877 and returned home June 4. During the day they grafted fruit trees "and in the evening they preached in school houses to appreciative congregations. Though aggressive in wanting to preach, he was cautious and regarded the opinion of others. [Virginia Mennonites were bound by tradition that no one preach more than three nights at one location and John was careful about that.]

But it wasn't long "until his qualifications as a true spokesman for God became known to churches of other states." Congregations in the West opened correspondence with him and urged him to locate with them. He had almost decided to locate with a Mennonite congregation at Cullom, Illinois, when John F. Funk, editor of the *Herald of Truth*, Elkhart, IN urged him to become assistant editor of the *Herald* at a salary of \$500 per year. He accepted the offer and on June 17, 1879 they left the Shenandoah Valley for Indiana.⁷

Coffman proved to be a great stimulus to the editorial staff of the periodical. The church here was in need of help and they found it in John Coffman. They were divided on questions of having Sunday school, English sermons, evening services and revival meetings. Because of the confusion in the church many of their young people were going to other denominations for worship and fellowship. These conditions grieved Coffman. Here was a large field to harvest. His convictions for evangelistic work were so great that he spent much time in praying and fasting.

⁷Steiner, 27-29.

⁵Sarah, was the mother of Mrs. E. F. Rhodes, Carr's informant.

⁶Carr's sources include Mrs. E. F. Rodes and Steiner, 19-20,

His first major series of revival meetings occurred at Bowne, Michigan. After this tentative beginning, other invitations began to reach John S. In time we find him holding meetings at Masontown, PA, Cullom, IL, Somerset County, PA, Grantsville, MD, Sterling IL, Medina County, OH and many more places.⁸

In 1889, in revival meetings held at West Liberty, Kansas, George R. Brunk I came to the Lord and was baptized by Coffman. George, in turn, after ordination also began to hold series of meetings. In 1900 he successfully challenged Virginia churches to accept series of revival meetings. He held a series at Weavers Church, then a very successful one at Lindale.⁹

John S. Coffman, however, in the 1880s had a burden for his home community in Virginia regarding a series of revival meetings longer than the prescribed three days allowed at that time. So did others. In 1888, two lay persons, P. S. Hartman and C. H. Brunk went to bishop Samuel to see if he wouldn't permit his son John S. to come to Virginia to hold a series of meetings. Samuel replied, "I can't say yes. I won't say no."¹⁰

John S. came and held a series of meetings December 9-17, 1888. At least 44 people registered their commitment to the Lord and baptism was scheduled for December 30. But there was trouble. John S. had broken the Virginia rule of no more than three nights in a row at one location. When Bishop Samuel, called on Northern District bishop, Abraham Shank, to come and help with the baptism, he refused. In fact, he declared "in positive language that he knew it [the 1888 meetings] to result in a great deal more harm than good." Another minister claimed that converts had not "come under the rules and regulations

of the church," a claim denied by numerous descendants who are faithful Mennonites!

Despite strong criticism, but with the approval of many who rejoiced at seeing young people taking a stand for the Lord, Bishop Samuel went ahead with the baptism.¹¹ [See back cover for the list.]

John S. became a strong voice for what became known as the (Old) Mennonite Church, a much larger group than the more liberal General Conference Mennonite group. Amish Mennonite churches also began to get interested in Coffman's work. So did the "Swiss Mennonite" Chippewa congregation [now Crown Hill Mennonite] where he held a significant ten-day series of meetings in 1893. There the leadership was a bit divided, one pulling for the congregation to join the General Conference Mennonites, the others pulling for the (Old) Mennonites. Coffman's series of meetings became a strong influence for that congregation to cast its lot with the (Old) Mennonites.¹²

John S. and Bettie raised seven children, shown in a photo below recently acquired by the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives.



COFFMAN FAMILY. Seated: John S., Barbara (Mrs. Dillman Gingrich), Bettie, (Mrs. John), Daniel. Standing: Anna Saurers (family friend), Samuel F. (later a Canadian minister and bishop), Jacob, Fannie (Mrs. J. C. Landis), William P., Ansel

Coffman kept a diary, now in possession of the Archives of the Mennonite Church at Goshen. In it one can sense the deep piety and prayer life of

⁸Steiner, 37-41.

⁹James O. Lehman, *Lindale's Song* (Harrisonburg: Lindale Mennonite Church, 1998), 48-50.

¹⁰Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, Vol. I. Published by author, 1959, 347.

¹¹Lehman, *Lindale's Song*, 43.

¹²James O. Lehman, *Crosswinds: From Switzerland to Crown Hill*. (Rittman: Crown Hill Mennonite Church, 1975), 47-51.

the man, his love of the church, concern for souls, and his struggle with being away from home so much.

Besides evangelistic work, John was quite involved in the Mennonite Tract Society. In 1894 he wrote a tract "*Christianity Teaches Peace*." He poured his heart and soul into creative work for the *Herald of Truth*, his work in evangelism, his encouragement to churches to have a Sunday School, his interest in missions, and late in life, into Christian education.

When Dr. H. A. Mumaw opened up Elkhart Institute for young people Coffman's eager interest surfaced immediately and he became very involved in the early health and welfare of this promising attempt at higher education. He gave the main address at the dedication of the Institute. The famous classic was entitled, "The Spirit of Progress," an eloquent plea for the world's need to learn peace.¹³ He worked hard to raise money and convince Mennonites of the need for education. Some opposed him, however.

His health began to break the last several years. He was an humble man with a very tender conscience. The last time he visited Virginia, it is said he preached at the Bank church where he had been ordained. He preached "one of the most heart searching sermons" that the people had heard. It was a rare glimpse.

His theme was "Patience in suffering." After "enumerating some of the trials common to man, he asked the question whether they could endure them in patience, and then proceeded to give tests more and more difficult, until he mounted up to the thought, 'and can you give up health, home, friends, yea life, if need be, and die with false accusations heaped upon you, and be buried away in oblivion—all with the patience and good graces of a redeemed soul? Yes, by His grace, I can. Christ did the same for all of us.'"¹⁴

Despite increasing pain and trying dieting, medicine, and prayer the "thorn in the flesh" was not removed. To no avail he also went to the

Battle Creek sanitarium. As late as May 1899 he attended the Ohio conference and filled some appointments. Several weeks later he went to the Illinois conference and took a prominent part. At Sterling he conducted a short series of meetings. On June 11 he preached at Elkhart on the theme "Our Helplessness." But still he praised God that it was no worse.

A few weeks before his death on July 22, 1899, he wrote A. D. Wenger,

"I am glad that the church (Mennonite) has wakened up to the necessity of establishing her institutions and doing vigorous evangelistic and mission work. I think I have lived for this, and if He could use me just a little I am satisfied. I am willing to stay and work, but have also a desire to depart."

The news of his death spread rapidly. Three days later local friends and ministers from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois gathered for the funeral. The local Mennonite church could not hold the crowds, so an overflow meeting was held at the Elkhart Institute. Simultaneously, at the same hour in Virginia a meeting was scheduled at Weavers Church for Virginia friends and relatives.¹⁵

Concluded his good friend, Menno Simons Steiner, "That a life so rich in good deeds, so sacrificial in every purpose, so devoted and powerful in leadings others to forsake a life of sin and accept a life of righteousness, so sanctified in conduct and consecrated in purpose, should be so soon cut off and the work begun left for others to perfect is a mystery." (p.139)

J. O. Lehman

¹³Published in Steiner, pp. 112-130.

¹⁴Steiner, 134-35.

¹⁵Steiner, 134-39. Some sources say the Virginia service was held at the Bank Church.

Baptismal Class of 1888

Research by Herman L. Burkholder, Ruth L. Burkholder and edited by David L. Burkholder in 1996. Bracketed numbers indicate ages and other bracketed information means it was material not found in the L. J. Heatwole church records. Used by permission.

John [H.] Barnhardt - [29]	Amos Rhodes - [15]
Adeline V. Brunk* - [16]	John H. Rhodes - [19]
John D. Brunk - [16]	William H. Rhodes - [27]
Nora [B.] Brunk - [13]	Jacob [L.] Shank - [18]
Aldine C. Burkholder - [15]	James Shank - [15]
John D. Burkholder - [15]	Bettie Sharpes - [16]
[Maggie Burkholder], Mrs. Emanuel Swope - [16]	William Sharpes - [14]
Solomon Custer - [36]	[Leanna], Mrs. Abraham [i.e. Abram] Swartz - [40]
Dewitt R. Good - [17]	John R. Swartz - [24]
Hetty S. Good - [17]	Marietta Swartz - [Mrs. Martin Burkholder] - [16]
Solomon R. Good - [17]	William P. Swartz - [23]
Jacob D. Hartman - [18]	Emanuel J. Swope - [21]
[Bettie Hartman], Mrs. William H. Rhodes - [14]	Emanuel J. Suter - [20]
Abram [Abraham] D. Heatwole - [16]	[Hettie Heatwole], Mrs. Emanuel J. Suter - [19]
Aldine J. Heatwole - [26]	Irenaus Suter - [18]
Edward [H.] Heatwole - [18]	Laura [E.] Suter - [15]
Jacob A. Heatwole - [17]	Mary Suter [Mrs. John Sharpes] - [15]
Lydia Frances [Fannie] Heatwole** [Mrs. Reuben Joseph Swope] - [21]	William [C.] Showalter - [19]
John Hildebrand - [15]	Clement [D.] Wenger - [14]
Rebecca Koogler - [19]	Perry Wenger - [18]
Adam Linhoss - [39]	Robert E. Wright - [18 twin]
Lillie F. Minnich - [15]	Emma D. Wright - [18 twin]
	Lydia Weaver - [13]

*Adeline Virginia Brunk went to Turkey as a missionary. She died December 11, 1907, and was buried in Turkey.

**Records indicate baptism for Lydia Frances [Fannie] Heatwole (Swope) took place on October 16, 1888. Including her with this list, however, makes the 45 persons indicated in several sources.

Have you renewed for 2007? \$6.00 for individual, \$10 for couple. Send to Jim Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802

SHENANDOAH MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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