

Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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50 YEARS—AND COUNTING!

1954 and the mid-fifties was a dynamic time among Virginia Mennonites. They were very busy in evangelistic work, church-planting and institution-building. At least three Virginia Mennonite Conference congregations and one major institution are celebrating their 50th anniversary this year. Others developed a year or two earlier or later than 1954. This issue highlights the mid-fifties, as well as attempts to list ALL the kinds of Mennonites and Amish found in the state of Virginia.

VMRC - VIRGINIA MENNONITE RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

In July VMRC, as it is popularly known, celebrates 50 years since the "Virginia Mennonite Home" was dedicated on July 4, 1954.

To highlight the occasion, Nancy Bondurant Jones has written a fine history that is very generously sprinkled with photos. Entitled *Ageless Legacy*, it captures the beginnings and development of what eventually became VMRC, and becomes our source except for what is noted otherwise.

The 15,000 square-foot steel, concrete and brick "HOME" cost \$142,692, contained 38 resident rooms, and began to receive residents July 6. By late that year the *Missionary Light* reported that 20 persons were calling this "home," and "adjusting themselves splendidly."¹

¹ "Your Old People's Home," *Missionary Light*. 14(Nov.-Dec. 1954), 10.

Finally, a dream had come true. Minister George B. Showalter, gave \$1,000 for "a home for the aged" in his will in 1921, and the dream lived on in son Mark (known as M. C.) who gave \$6,000 in October 1945 to the VA Mennonite Mission Board for a "home for the elderly."

They were ahead of their time. Not until 1951 was a board appointed and a corporation formed. From these small beginnings, began today's VMRC, spread over 43 acres and staffed by 450 employees whose task it is to reduce and eliminate, if possible, the "three plagues of loneliness, helplessness, and boredom" of the 750 residents of VMRC. Today's annual budget, says Curt Stutzman, is over 15 million.

Guided by the steady hands of boards, administrators and staff—Earl Schrock, Earl Greaser, Elbert Detwiler, Ronald Yoder and countless others, VMRC has attempted with compassion and quality to provide VMRC's "core values of service, integrity, community, and Christian spirituality and compassion," says Ronald Yoder, current president.

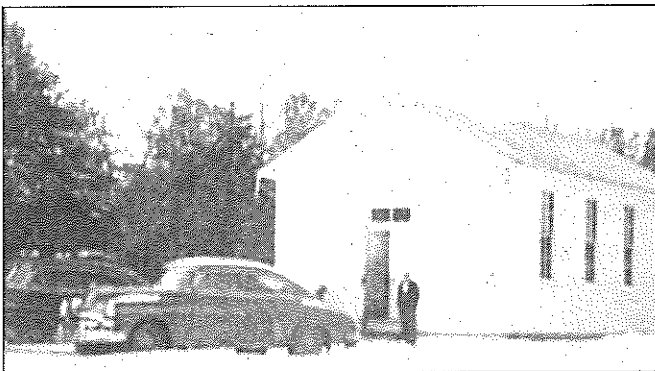
MT. VERNON MENNONITE CHURCH

Excitement filled the air on May 15-16 as Mt. Vernon's 100 current attenders were joined by 200 guests from 10 states to honor 50 years of history. Hubert and Mildred Pellman were recognized as the "founding leadership couple" of the Grottoes church. Celebration included food, fellowship, singing favorite songs, sharing memories and a historical video. Compiled by long-time pastoral couple, Eugene and Alice Souder, each person also received a free 32-page history with 150 photos (many in color) and a time-line. Copies are available from Souder (540-249-4368 *Mt. Vernon Echoes* and weekly church bulletins provided historical details.

Tim Martin, associate pastor in the early '80s, preached Sunday morning. Other pastors and assistants who were involved over many years included Ronald Martin, Herb Schultz, Frank Nice, Glenn Brubacher, John Miller, G. Irvin Lehman, Jason Yoder, Milford Lyndaker, John Keim, Darrel and Sherill Hostetter, and Millard Osborne. Current pastors are Al and Rose Huyard.

A skit detailed how Harold Eshleman, then pastor of Chicago Avenue Mennonite (now Harrisonburg Mennonite), discovered a vacated church building after visiting Carrie Morris during a healing service.

Eugene K. Souder



Mennonites purchased the building pictured above in 1954 and began services on Jan. 3, 1954. It was enlarged in 1962 to increase seating capacity

to about 140. Located near the WW II Civilian Public Service camp at Grottoes, the building had been in use by the Church of the Brethren as a mission church and during WWII, CPS men attended and assisted. They had left a deep impression upon Grottoes people.

The Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church at Harrisonburg was considered the "mother church." Tent meetings, revival meetings and the reopening of this building brought good community interest. Membership in 1962 was 32 and attendance stood at around 65. The current membership is 77.¹

STEPHENS CITY MENNONITE CHURCH

Fifty years ago Mark and Amanda Showalter decided to make themselves available to the Spirit of God at work in the lives of Maude and Robert Hartley and his parents at Stephens City, VA. The Showalters knew Maude from Salem Mennonite Church. When she moved to Stephens City the Showalters kept in touch and began "cottage meetings" (home Bible studies) with the Hartleys.

When the group became larger they rented the basement of the post office and later moved up the street to the old Episcopal Church, now known as The Lighthouse, a Full Gospel Church.

In January 1960, Mark asked the Northern District Council for permission to build a church house. By November 20, 1960, the first service was held with 104 in attendance. Mark and Amanda worked for ten years before passing the torch to Glenn and Velma Horst.

Other pastors in the 50 years were Jeff Landis, Dan Smucker (interim), Ed Miller, Al and Rose Huyard, Norman Yutzy (interim), and Phoebe Hershey (interim). Present pastors, Jim and Aldine Musser, moved from Vermont three years ago.

(continued on page five)

¹Hubert Pellman, *Missionary Light*, 14(Nov.-Dec. 1954), 13-14; "Getting Acquainted With Our Churches . . . Mt. Vernon," *Valley Mennonite Messenger*, 1(Sept. 27, 1962), [2]; *Mennonite Church USA, 2003 Directory*. Newton: Faith & Life Resources, 111.

MENNONITES AND AMISH IN VIRGINIA

Periodically the question comes up, "How many Mennonites and Amish are there in Virginia and who are the different groups." The word "Anabaptist" needs to be included because there are those who prefer to emphasize that heritage. In other words, how many members are there in the different groups who are the spiritual descendants of the Anabaptist movement? Numbers in brackets indicate membership.

To put such a list together requires analysis of three up-to-date directories, plus a few other sources, because a few are not mentioned in any of the directories. Here are the sources used:

Mennonite Church Information, 2004. Harrisonburg: Christian Light Publications.

Anabaptist (Mennonite) Directory, 2004. Harrisonburg: Sword and Trumpet.

Mennonite Church USA, 2003 Directory. Newton: Faith & Life Resources.

David Luthy, *Amish Settlements Across America: 2003.* Aylmer: Pathway Publishers

Interviews: Everette Burkholder, Lewis Martin, Rachel Smith, Allen Swarey, Ana Karim, Harold Huber

VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE, a member of MC USA denomination. It includes a total of 8,870 members in 67 congregations. Virginia has 47 congregations and 7,749 members. The 20 churches outside of Virginia include 1,121 members. They are located in West Virginia, North Carolina, Washington, D. C., Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky.

The Virginia congregational list is too long to list here; see the *MC USA Directory* for the list, or contact the offices of Virginia Mennonite Conference, who can also furnish an email address for nearly all the congregations.

BEACHY AMISH CHURCHES [337 members]

Faith Christian Fellowship, Catlett, VA [50]

Faith Mission Fellowship, Free Union [94]

Farmville Christian Fellowship, Farmville [41]

Gospel Light Mennonite Church,

Charlottesville, [20]

Kempsville Amish Mennonite, VA Beach [69]

Light of Hope Christian Fellowship,

Wytheville [38]

Mount Zion Amish Mennonite Church,

Stuarts Draft [25]

BIBLICAL MENNONITE ALLIANCE [141]

Blue Ridge Christian Fellowship, Burnt Tree

Grange, Radiant [9]

Calvary Mennonite Fellowship,

Harrisonburg [106]

Oak Hill Mennonite, Cumberland [26]

CHARITY MINISTRIES [12]

Dayspring Christian Fellowship, Amherst [12]

CONSERVATIVE MENNONITE CONFERENCE [95]

Dayspring Mennonite Church, Midland [39]

Providence Mennonite Church, VA Beach [33]

Trinity Mennonite Church, Prospect [23]

CORNERSTONE CHURCHES [938]

Cornerstone of Albermarle [38]

Cornerstone of Augusta [225]

Cornerstone of Rockingham [675]

Periodic contact is also maintained with

Cornerstone churches in FL, MO, PA and SC.

MOUNTAIN VALLEY MENNONITE CHURCHES [340]

Bethel Mennonite, Broadway [65]

Dayton Mennonite, Dayton [185]

Faith Mennonite, South Boston [30]

Morning View Mennonite, Singers Glen [60]

An additional congregation is Salem

Mennonite of Baker, WV

MT. PLEASANT (Weaverland Conference)[140]

A group who often call themselves Old Order Mennonite, but who drive cars

Mt. Pleasant Mennonite, Dayton [140]

NATIONWIDE FELLOWSHIP CHURCHES

[158]

Pilgrim Mennonite Church, Amelia [116]

Pleasant Valley Mennonite Fellowship

Harrisonburg [42]

OLD ORDER AMISH CHURCHES

[Number of members not given]

Pearisburg (Giles County)

Charlotte Court House (Charlotte County)

Gretna/Long Island (Pittsylvania County)

OLD ORDER MENNONITES

Who use horses and buggies. There are two groups since the separation that occurred in 1953. They have several meetinghouses, but both groups worship, have ownership, hold funerals and bury in the cemetery at the historic Pleasant View Mennonite Church northwest of Dayton. They worship on alternate Sundays at Pleasant View. Historically, they have been known by the name of their bishops, but at this time both have bishops named Wenger, who are first cousins.

Group 1 – known sometimes as Cline-Showalter-Wenger group, has 450 members. They purchase electricity from the utility company.

Group 2 – long known as the Wenger group. They obtain generators and run them with diesel motors to produce their own electricity. They have 325 members.

SOUTHEASTERN MENNONITE CONFERENCE [577]

Bank Mennonite, Hinton [108]

Bethany Mennonite, Briery Branch [62]

Bethesda Mennonite, Broadway [37]

Ebenezer Mennonite, South Boston [45]

Front Royal Mennonite, Front Royal [26]

McGaheysville Mennonite, McGaheysville [43]

Mount Hermon Mennonite, Stanardsville [56]

Peake Mennonite, Hinton [63]

Pike Mennonite, Harrisonburg [85]

Rawley Springs Mennonite, Rawley Springs [52]

Three additional churches are found in WV, plus two in Puerto Rico

UNAFFILIATED CONGREGATIONS [225]

Bethel Mennonite, Gladys [80]

Broad Street Mennonite, Harrisonburg [17]

Hildebrand Mennonite Church is in process of adopting the name Olive Branch Christian Church [35]

Richmond Mennonite Fellowship [20]

Timberville Mennonite, Timberville [45]

Wills Ridge Mennonite, Floyd [28]

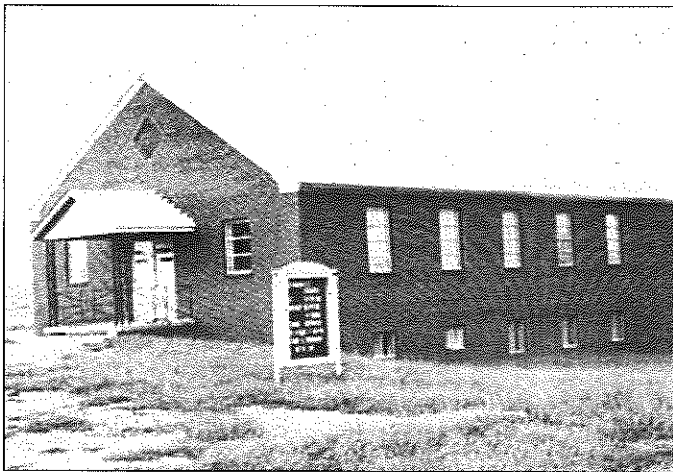
IN SUMMARY:

Virginia Mennonite Conference	
(Virginia congregations only)	7,749
Beachy Amish	337
Biblical Mennonite Alliance	141
Charity Ministries	12
Conservative Mennonite Conference	95
Cornerstone Churches	938
Mountain Valley	340
Mt. Pleasant (Weaverland Conference)	140
Nationwide Fellowship	158
Old Order Amish (est.)	125
Old Order Mennonite	
Group 1	450
Group 2	325
Southeastern Mennonite Conference	577
Unaffiliated with any Conference or Alliance	<u>225</u>
TOTAL	11,612

James O. Lehman, Archivist, Virginia Mennonite Conference

(Continued from page two)

On September 11 and 12, 2004, Stephens City Mennonite plans to celebrate 50 years of worship and service to our Lord, Jesus Christ. Our focus for the weekend is I Corinthians 3:10-11, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid which is Jesus Christ."



Anyone is invited to attend the weekend events which will be held on the church property along U. S. 11. We are in the process of constructing a pavilion and hope to hold the Saturday evening fellowship meal, time of singing and reminiscing in the new space. The pavilion will be dedicated to Grover and Virgie Buracker, who are among the first members of the church who still have children and grandchildren in attendance.

Please bring stories, pictures related to SCMC's history that you'd like to share, food to share for the fellowship meal and a lawn chair or blanket to sit on for the evening celebration.

Sunday morning, our overseer, Sam Weaver, will share a message. Both meetings will include congregational singing and music by a mixed ensemble from SCMC. For more information about the weekend, call (540) 869-5037 or email: scmc@visuallink.com

Aldine Musser

LYNSIDE MENNONITE CHURCH

In late fall 2004 the Lyndhurst Church, Lyndhurst, VA plans to celebrate its 50th anniversary. This congregation began as a result of a division that occurred in the Mt. View Mennonite Church south of Lyndhurst. Former pastor, Roy Kiser, wrote a 100-page history of Mt. View, *Mission in the Mountain*. Chapter 5 is titled "The Rocky Road Through Division." Disagreements arose between ministers, Silas Brydge and Frank Hatter, centering somewhat on youth activities. There were 161 members at Mt. View at the time and 103 "either became part of the new group" at Lyndside, or they moved their membership elsewhere or "were lost to the church."²

But the Lord knows how to pick up the pieces after church trouble despite the damage to attitudes of church families. The new group met at the Sherando schoolhouse until the new Lyndside Mennonite Church was formed and a new meetinghouse built in Lyndhurst and dedicated on Dec. 5, 1954.

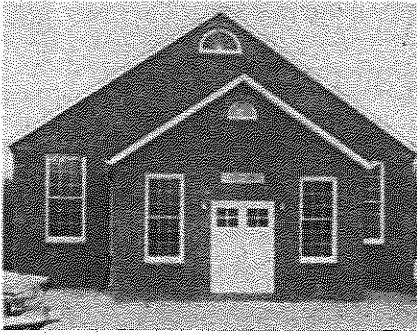
Viola Tisdale published a long and enthusiastic letter in *Missionary Light* on how the new church was faring under the leadership of Silas Brydge, who from the beginning appealed for the new group to be in Virginia Conference. Summarized here are major ideas from Viola.

The all-day dedication program found 215 people present at the morning Sunday school. Truman Brunk of Denbigh, VA served as bishop. B. Charles Hostetter preached that morning. Paul Brydge reported from the building committee and Vance R. Brydge gave the treasurer's report. John R. Mumaw, president of EMC, gave the dedicatory address. The day ended with a communion service.

Lyndhurst people became super-busy building the new structure. The foundation was dug Aug. 18, the first block laid five days later and the first service in the new cinder block and brick building with a full basement, was held already on Nov. 14, with 179 people present.

²Roy D. Kiser, *Mission in the Mountain*. Lyndhurst: Mountain View Mennonite Church, 1975, 50-57.

³Viola Tisdale, "Lyndhurst," *Missionary Light*. 15(May-June 1955), 6-7



"The Lord has certainly blessed this congregation in every way, allowing this church to be completed in such a short time," said Viola.

A number of Virginia Conference ministers visited and spoke in the early months. Now there were two Virginia Conference churches a few miles apart. Reconciliation, confessions and eventual healing followed.

In January 1955 the women of the congregation formed the "Lynside Service Sisters' Circle" with Edna Willis as president.

Remarkably, from Nov. 14, 1954 (the first service) until May of the following year, the average Sunday school attendance was 162, found in ten classes. Wednesday night Bible study and prayer meeting continued to grow with 60 to 70 people attending. Mountain View recovered and began to thrive too. When Myron Augsburg spoke to young people in their church basement on Feb. 5, there were 70 present, says Kiser (p. 58).

When Viola Tisdale wrote again to *Missionary Light* in the summer of 1956, she rejoiced that in 1955 the average attendance was 185 and in mid-1956 the average had climbed to 204. Membership today stands at around 75. Late this fall (2004) Lynside is planning to mark their 50th anniversary.

OTHER FIFTIES EVENTS

Augusta Mennonite School was going full speed, as was the "**Mennonite Hour.**" **Mission work in Sicily** moved along with Lewis Martin. **Jamaica** was being eyed as a place for mission

work. **Richmond** included two mission efforts, one for Gentiles and one Jewish. **National Heights Mennonite Church** (now First Mennonite) prospered under Ralph and Osie Ziegler.

The "**Rock of Ages,**" radio broadcast under John Shenk and sponsored by the Warwick Church was going out over a powerful Richmond station. **Philos Farm** near Penn Laird began as a "Negro" orphanage. Land had been purchased for tent meetings and Bible conferences at what is now **Highland Retreat**. A camping program began in the late fifties.

The **Valley View Church** (now Stuarts Draft) planned a new church building. **Woodland Tabernacle** occupied its new one in 1954, and the **Bethel Church** dedicated its new building in 1956. The VA Conference report booklet lists 1953 as beginning dates for **Chestnut Ridge** (Ohio), **Mountain View**, Hickory, NC, **Park View**, Harrisonburg, and **Word of Life** (Norfolk). The "**Church at Sea**" (witness among sailors) was going strong under Lloyd Weaver, Sr. and wife Sara. Harry Kuhns and Amos Hostetter witnessed each Sunday at "**Convict Camp #8,**" Linville, VA. **Mennonite Evangelistic Crusaders** (for tent meetings) had big plans for 1956 with evangelist Don Augsburg and song leader Norman Yutzky.

ANNUAL MEETING / TOUR

The July 17 Civil War tour by the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center takes the place of the annual tour usually planned by SVMH.

The **Annual Meeting of SVMH** will occur at the Park View Mennonite Church on September 18th a breakfast meeting at 8:30 a.m. Al Keim will speak on the CPS (Civilian Public Service) program during World War II. **Mark your calendars for Sept. 18!**

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the issue was printed we have acquired more information for the Mennonite and Amish groups in Virginia (pages 3-4).

Two Beachy Amish churches were missed—Pilgrim Christian Fellowship, Stuarts Draft [135], and Oak Grove Church, Aroda [101]. That brings the Beachy Amish count up to [573].

Under “Affiliated Congregations” the Richmond Mennonite Fellowship membership count is 30.

Thus, as far as is known now, the final total for Virginia Mennonites and Amish would be 11,858, keeping in mind that the Old Order Amish count is an estimate.

Concerning the Old Order Mennonites named on page 4, the implication was left that all burials occur at Pleasant View. Most of them do, but the Riverdale worship location has a young cemetery with a small number of burials. Also, the Oakdale worship location has some burials, though not all are Old Order.

To elaborate a bit further, the Cline-Showalter-Wenger group (called Group 1 on p. 4) meets for worship on an alternating basis at Pleasant View and Oak Grove. But, so does the Wenger group (Group 2). They alternate with each other at the two worship locations.

However, Group 1 has a third worship location in the last two years. On some Sundays worship is held at their Spring Hill School (across from the Nazarene Church) and the phone book gives that address as 8744 Nazarene Church Rd., Bridgewater. This group also has the Riverdale Church just west of Dry River. Hence, this group on some Sundays worships at three locations.

The other group (Group 2) is building another schoolhouse in the old Burkholder Orchard area and also has plans to eventually hold services there some Sundays, thereby giving them three places of worship also.

Sources: information from Harvey Yoder, Joseph Burkholder, Ana Karim, and *Mennonite Church Information*, 2004. Christian Light Publications).