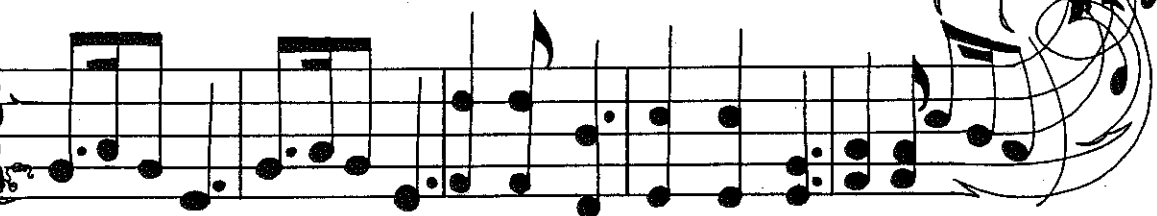


Shenandoah Mennonite

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Virginia Mennonites, Joseph Funk, Eastern Mennonite School And Racial Questions

What could all the above have in common? That's what this issue of the newsletter is about. All had something to say about either slavery or the race question. Mennonites in Virginia were the only Mennonites found in the Confederate States during the U. S. Civil War.

The famous Joseph Funk, known for his music, had something to say about slavery when his daughter and son-in-law purchased a slave in the 1840s. Virginia Mennonite Conference records indicate only one action regarding slavery during the Civil War. Eastern Mennonite School students in the 20th century helped begin the congregation that became known as Broad Street Mennonite Church. What was it like in a segregationist culture to begin a church, and what did the EMS Board of Trustees have to say about enrolling "a person of color?" These are the questions this issue explores.

JOSEPH FUNK LETTERS

In the Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives records the first known references to slaves or relationships to persons of color appear in the Joseph Funk letters to his daughter Mary. Joseph Funk was the eleventh child of preacher Henry and Barbara Showalter Funk, likely from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and a grandson of the well-known Bishop Heinrich Funk of eastern Pennsylvania.

Joseph had married twice and lost both wives through death by 1833. He had 14 children, five by his first wife and nine by his second wife. He remained a faithful Mennonite all his life and in Virginia is most famous for his music, along with translation and publishing work. He became known as "the father of song in northern Virginia."¹

Through his writings we have a wonderful insight into this faithful Christian and dedicated Mennonite churchman. "How often did my heart burn with a desire that our life and conversation were in accordance with the scripture truths which we pretend to maintain." And he was generally very tolerant of other Christians, except for his intense disagreement with the Church of the Brethren Elder John Kline over the mode of baptism.

"How much good would result, if all the different denominations, who agree in all the fundamental principles of Christianity, would lay aside their disputes about external things of minor importance," wrote Funk at one point.²

Harry A. Brunk, *History of Mennonites in Virginia*, Vol. 1 (Harrisonburg: Pub. By author, 1959), 112.

² Quoted in James O. Lehman, *Lindale's Song* (Harrisonburg: Lindale Mennonite Church, 1998), 11.

His second wife and all his children, however, did not join the Mennonites. Funk attended services at Weavers Mennonite, at Brennemens Mennonite Church (the forerunner of present-day Lindale), and not infrequently he attended the New Erection (Cook's Creek) Presbyterian Church, where some of his children joined.

JOSEPH FUNK

"Father of Song in Northern Virginia."

—WAYLAND

1777—March 9, Born.

1786—Moved to Virginia

1816—Published "Choral Music"

1832—Published first edition, "Genuine Church Music"

1847—Published fourth edition, "Genuine Church Music" at his own plant at Mountain Valley.

1850—Issued fifth edition, name changed to "Harmonia Sacra."

1837—Translates the "Mennonite Confession of Faith."

1851—Translates and publishes, "A Mirror of Baptism." A book written by his grandfather Bishop Henry Funk.

1852—Starts his private music school at Mountain Valley.

1857—Writes and publishes, "The Reviewer Reviewed."

1859—Issues the first number of, "The Musical Advocate."

1860—Ten editions of his "Harmonia Sacra" have been issued.

1862—December 24 he dies.

Born in the midst of one war, and died in the throes of another, yet he was a man of peace. He sought to elevate the cultural and spiritual standards of the state and nation.

"The Patriarch of the South's Rural Singers."

—JACKSON

Compliments of

THE SHENANDOAH PRESS

JAMES L. RUEBUSH, *Manager*

Great-great grandam of Joseph Funk

He was an excellent writer of English letters by the 1830s. His collection of letters to his daughter Mary and husband

John Kieffer, who lived at Miami, Saline County, Missouri, during the years 1837-1848, provide us a few interesting comments about slavery and his attitude toward persons of color.³

After Joseph had lost his wives, he hired girls to do the housework. According to his letter of Nov. 7, 1840, he was particular whom he hired. He wanted girls who were "trusty and well disposed," someone who could "go through with the work."

He reported to daughter Mary that he had now "hired a free, coloured woman, who is both able and willing to work, and can turn her hand to any housework, and does the work in a nice, clean, and decent manner. She can also weave, which suits us very well." Her name was Lucretia and Joseph's son Joseph and wife Elizabeth liked her so well they hardly wanted to part with her when Joseph wanted her as a housekeeper.

However, on March 22, 1841, he wrote Mary that he had "dismissed Lucretia, the coloured woman, as we found we could do without her; moreover it was not so agreeable to have her in the house as a white woman. How much better would it be if the black race could live separate from the white."

Funk's account book on page 10 mentions that Lucretia began work on Monday the 19th of October 1840, and that she left on March 1, 1841, and worked for him 19 weeks. But in that time she lost five weeks and two days, leaving 13 weeks and four days. He paid her \$0.75 per week,

which is the same wage (\$3.00 per month) he paid another housekeeper.

Another daughter, Hannah, was married to Jacob Bear, both of whom attended the Presbyterian church. Joseph was happy with the marriage until some half dozen years later. On March 26, 1847, he wrote to Mary that he had recently visited Hannah and that they were getting along well. But, alas, there was a problem or two. Son-in-law Jacob "seems to get along in the word [world] fast, but I am afraid that he is too much attached to the world.

"He met with a severe occurrence last fall: he has purchased a Negro man, (a thing which, I am very much opposed to—O the unhappy Negro Traffic! --) and after he had him perhaps a year, the negro, one evening last winter resisted, and struck him down with some weapon which he picked up, and beat him leaving him, as he thought—it is supposed,—for dead and run off; but he recovering again, and after a little time was found and taken in the house; when immediately a physician was sent for, and he recovered. The negro made his escape; but in about 3 months after [that] he was taken up and is now sold to go the south. How much better it is never to meddle with slavery to those who are clear of them."

Joseph went on to say he did not write "with unfriendly feeling against your sister and brother—Hannah and Jacob—No unpleasant feeling exists between us, the [they] treat me with the utmost kindness and filial respect—and I them as lovely and dear children; I only stated facts in friendship: I suppose you know that they do not live in town any more, but live about one mile from town, where they have bought a handsome farm and live on it."

³ Gary McFarland Gloyd, a "fourth great-grandson" did a fine manuscript copy of these letters, entitling his manuscript, "Joseph Funk: Man of Letters." The Virginia Conference Archives, housed in the EMU Archives, has the original letters and a copy of Gloyd's manuscript in I-MS-4, Joseph Funk Manuscripts.

HANDWRITTEN MINUTES OF VIRGINIA CONFERENCE

The Virginia Conference Archives (housed in EMU Archives) has three handwritten church records that give conference minutes from the 1860s. All three are virtually the same except for minor differences in spelling, wording and capitalization. All of them say that the resolution having to do with slaves was passed in the "30 & 31 of April 1864 meeting" when conference met at the Hildebrand Mennonite Church in Augusta County. These handwritten copies were done by:

Deacon Jacob Geil (1828-1917)

Deacon Frederick A. Rodes (1819-1900)

Bishop Jacob Hildebrand (1816-1899)

We reproduce here Bishop Hildebrand's copy. He was the Augusta County bishop. (Virginia Conference in those days had three districts and three bishops). Hildebrand was baptized in July 1843, and five months later ordained a minister on December 3, 1843. On May 8, 1847 he was ordained bishop at the age of 31. Here's the way Bishop Hildebrand wrote the resolution:

"Resolved that in as much as it is against our creed & deciplen to own or trafick in Slaves our Members is not pirmittet to hire Slaves unless said Slaves owner or master will give his Slave free to receive the hire of his laber during the time we imploy him; But where Neighbors work together and help each other with their hands under such surcumstanses they are permitted to imploy Slaves. [I-MS-3, Jacob Hildebrand Collection]

Bishop Hildebrand's first cousin, Jacob R., who was a deacon, served as secretary of that session of conference. Conference took action in October 1883 that minutes should be published. Jacob R. was one of the committee members named to carry out that task.

PUBLISHED MINUTES

Here is the way Virginia Conference Minutes stated the issue in its publication:

*Hiring Slaves.—The subject of hiring slaves was introduced by Bishop [John] Geil. Decided that inasmuch as it is against our creed and discipline to own or traffic in slaves; so it is also forbidden for a brother to hire a slave unless such slave be entitled to receive the pay for such labor by the consent of his owner. But where neighbors exchange labor, the labor of slaves may be received.

*A footnote in the published record says: "Some individual cases point to the fact that long before this, decided action had already been taken on the question of slavery by the Virginia conference."

Several things may be noted here. This is the only record in the sparse minutes of Virginia Conference before or during the Civil War that speaks to the slavery question. It may be observed that this action was taken more than a year after President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation of Jan. 1, 1863, which announced that slaves in border states and in states "still in rebellion be forever free." The action taken by Virginia Mennonites implies that slaves were still not free in Virginia.

NOW THE 20TH CENTURY

HISTORY OF THE COLORED MISSION OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

By Ernest Swartzentruber

[Reprinted and abridged from
Missionary Light, 3(April 1943), 1,
3-4]

The Mission for Colored in Harrisonburg is the first of its kind to be established by our branch of Mennonites, south of the Mason and Dixon line. It was a new experiment. Policies needed to be reckoned with. It has been gratifying to see the interest in the work as the church became better acquainted with the race from a new angle.

It was in the early thirties that students of Eastern Mennonite School began to have occasional cottage prayer meetings in homes of colored folks in the city. These meetings grew in size and frequency. In the fall of 1935 Ernest G. Gehman was appointed by the Virginia Mission Board to take charge of mission work in Harrisonburg. John R. Mumaw and Moses Slabaugh constituted the rest of the Harrisonburg Mission Committee.

Near the beginning of the year 1936 a store building on the corner of Gay and Federal streets was rented and renovated for use as a mission hall.

[Slabaugh told the editor on Nov. 2, 1997, that it was a former beer joint that was terribly dirty, so they "scraped and cleaned and soaped and mopped" and rinsed—sloshing everything down a hole in the sagging center of the floor! They first called it the Gay Street Mission.]

Services were conducted in this building for both white and colored, with Sunday school in the morning for whites, and in the

afternoon for the colored. This proved unsatisfactory, so a United Brethren Church on Chicago Avenue was rented in November 1936 for work among the white race. Early in 1937 Moses Slabaugh was appointed as superintendent to be responsible for the work at both places. The work of the Colored Mission was still carried on largely by the Y.P.C.A. of the School. It was at the beginning of this year that the writer [Swartzentruber] was asked to teach a class of boys in this Sunday school.

There was no provision for preaching services in the morning. Sunday school was conducted in the afternoon, and children's meeting in the evening was followed by a gospel message given by mature students or other Christian workers.

As late as the year 1938, there was sentiment expressed in Conference in favor of closing the work. But the Mission Board decided to try the work for another year. This trial was so blessed of the Lord that the work has not been closed.

Then it was decided to appoint a superintendent for the Colored Mission. In September of that year the writer was asked by the Executive Committee of the Mission Board to assume that responsibility. It was also recommended to conduct Sunday school in the morning. This was begun Oct. 1 and has been continued since.

Then a delegation from the colored churches of Harrisonburg came and requested that the Mennonites discontinue their work. They said that the people were being well-churched by the three churches of the city.

At a meeting of Conference and Mission Board officials and other interested persons, it was reported that the colored population of Harrisonburg was about 1000, and that the regular church attendance of the three colored churches combined was not much over 100. So, it was concluded that there were at least a few left who were not so well-

churched! Assurance was also given at this meeting that applicants for church membership would be received.

Soon a request was made for permission to have a series of meetings conducted. In the early part of the work the matter of inviting colored folks to accept Christ was rather discouraged because of problems connected with church membership for them. Ernest G. Gehman held the first series of meetings, beginning Dec. 25, 1938. There were some confessions and some instruction was given, but for divers reasons none of this group was baptized at this time. The doctrines as taught by the Mennonite Church seemed too new to them. Some were received after the second series of meetings, conducted in May 1940 by Bro. H. Frank Leaman.

On Dec. 1, 1940, two members were received by baptism and two by confession. This was the beginning of the Colored Mennonite Church of Harrisonburg, which has since doubled its number.

Beginning early in the year 1939 preaching services were held on Sunday nights. A minister was secured for each Sunday evening by the superintendent. In the fall of 1940 Bro. Aldine Brenneman was appointed pastor and served in this capacity for two years. Bro. Warren Kratz was appointed to succeed him in the fall of 1942.

The Summer Bible School has had a large place in the work. The first one conducted in July of 1939, had an average attendance of 53 and plenty discipline problems. The following year the behavior was much better, and the average attendance was 66. In recent years the children look forward to Summer Bible School almost as we used to look forward to Christmas. In 1942 an extra building was rented to provide classroom space. An average attendance of 91 was reached.

Rowena Lark, a colored sister of Washington, D. C., has been a great help. She was present for part of the first series of meetings and has been present on a number of different occasions since. Her practical children's meetings are always appreciated. She has supplied much of the interest and life for each session of Bible school. Two of her daughters have also helped out in Bible school work, as well as Martha Bosley and Thomas Steward of Lancaster, Pa.

Paul Brubaker, Esther Mellinger, Mary Hoover, Earl Delp, Ruth Garber Erb, Charles Hertzler, Rhoda Benner Hertzler, and others have spent considerable time in this work, and have left definite impressions in the lives of the people.

At the Mission Board Meeting in 1942 the solicitation of funds for a building lot was authorized. In December a lot was purchased on the corner of Broad and Effinger streets. Actual building does not seem possible immediately, but money is being placed into the treasury for this purpose. [Remember this was written in the spring of 1943.]

We praise the Lord that He has solved the major problems [Virginia Conference in 1941 "solved" these problems] connected with church membership, and the work in general so far. As we look into the future, one of the major unsolved problems is the securing of a Christian education for the colored youth. Our God is able to solve this problem also.

We praise the Lord for His continued blessings in the work. Sunday school attendance has been very good this winter. The older girls particularly are showing an increased interest, and are swelling the size of their class.

Feb. 28 was a day which all of us will long remember. In the morning we had preparatory and baptismal services. Mrs. Roberta Webb was received into church fellowship. She had been a member of the Baptist Church but, having been baptized by immersion, she desired to be received by the mode of pouring.

She taught public school for a number of years, and is at present employed at the Nursery School. We trust that she will be a valuable worker and live witness for the Lord. In the afternoon we were strengthened by a communion service. Six members were present besides the workers.

We appreciate your intercession for the work among the colored.

Again we look to Moses Slabaugh and the 1997 interview. In the summer of 1937 Moses and Mary Slabaugh reported average attendance of 54 in the colored mission and 27 at the white mission. As superintendent he was paid \$12 per month for house rent and "if that wasn't enough" they were promised more "as seems right!"

Also when Moses went to a Middle District deacon to borrow chairs for use in the mission, the deacon asked with some concern: "Would these chairs be used by colored children?" *Ed.*

CONFERENCE AND EMS/EMC DECISIONS

In the annual conference meeting in October 1924, someone raised the question "How shall we adjust ourselves to present state laws with applicants for membership who are of the question of color?" The question was referred to the bishops who were to report before the close of this conference.

Their answer? First, it was recognized that "there exists an unscriptural race prejudice" and that it is "especially pronounced" in the South. After making a few references to scripture they recognized that "this is a delicate subject and that great wisdom, tact, and forbearance" are necessary.

Then they passed a resolution that people of color should be welcomed to

"share with us in common all the benefits of the Gospel, but that we oppose close social relation and marrying between the colored and white races." Bishops should be careful "to follow a course most conducive to the spiritual welfare and peace and unity of the congregation, the first consideration being that souls shall not be turned away from the light."

Meanwhile, the "colored mission" had begun. Swartzentruber mentioned membership "problems." Now, conference dealt with them in some detail in July 1941!

"In view of the general attitude of society in the South toward the intermingling of the two races and inasmuch as we desire to adopt a practical working policy with the view of promoting the best interests for both colored and white, . . . we propose the following:

1. **Aim:** build a colored congregation "under a separate but auxiliary organization" of conference.
2. **Baptism:** have the bishop administer baptism and "after extending the right hand of fellowship, the applicant should be greeted by a colored brother or colored sister."
3. **Salutation and Feetwashing:** In line with the present practice of "making a distinction between the sexes in the observance of feetwashing and of the kiss of charity, we do not recommend the practice of these two ordinances between white and colored."
4. **Communion:** Recommend the use of individual cups at the communion table, and only colored and regular workers take communion.

On May 14, 1945, the board of trustees of Eastern Mennonite School took action. Should "colored students be admitted?" After lengthy discussion they decided:

"that whereas there are implications in the race question that have been long in forming and deeply set in the values of the inhabitants of this state and community of which we are a small minority and therefore unable to change at once, we feel that at this time it would be unwise to admit such students in the co-educational institution. However, we express our heartfelt sympathy for our colored brethren and sisters with their educational problems and are ready to open up such measures of opportunity for them as such opportunities are expedient and possible."

Since the school was very much controlled by conference at that time, one might expect that the issue would land back in the lap of conference. It did. On June 10, 1948, when John L. Stauffer was still president, they raised the question whether "Negro students" may be enrolled.

Conference discussed it and "passed the buck" back to the board of trustees and the administration. They thought that the question of enrolling students of other races should be "left in the hands of the Committee on Administration who shall consider applications on the basis of individual merits."

Meanwhile, John R. Mumaw became Acting President on July 1, 1948. Committee of Administration minutes show that on

Sept. 20, they passed an action permitting Willis Johnson "as a part-time day student," allowing him to register for one high school Bible course.

For second semester, on Jan. 26, 1949, they favored admitting Ada Webb "as a day student, pending a favorable response in an interview by the Acting President." The 1948-49 *SHENANDOAH*, the school annual, pictures Ada with high school "Special Students." Now the door had opened a crack!

Before we become aghast at the above, remember this was the South and harsh segregation ruled, even at Harrisonburg. This was six years before the 1954 Supreme Court decision on desegregation and a decade before local public schools went through a major hassle to desegregate. Actually, the 1948-49 enrollment actions took courage!

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