

# Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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## WEST VIRGINIA MISSIONS OUTREACH TOUR

By Jay B. Landis

“Let me tell you a story,” said our mothers and fathers, “about the time . . .” and all of us children listened up to hear how it used to be when they had accidents, or shoveled deep snows or performed unusual deeds.

Our craving for stories continues, and we pick up books about the past, or, if we have the chance, sometimes go to see for ourselves where the stories were acted out. This fall’s Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians tour provided such an opportunity.

The West Virginia Mission Outreach Tour planned for Saturday, Sept. 28, was popular enough to fill Richard’s Tour Bus’s 47 seats and include a waiting list. Jim Rush planned the itinerary and arranged all details of the day’s journey.

There was much to be learned, and our storytellers began about the moment our tires hit Route 33.

Resource persons riding the bus gave continuous guide service with Glendon Blosser’s comfortable coaching: Minnie Carr, Lloyd Horst, Mary Catherine Deputy Brubaker, Roy and Kathy Good, Richard and Virginia Weaver and others. Their accounts prepared us for the places we would later visit and learn more about from current residents around these West Virginia landmarks and churches.

We were handed the 1924 map of Middle District Mission Points by L. J. Heatwole, picturing churches from “Home Base” Harrisonburg with “E. M. School” and Weavers Church west-ward across four mountain ranges through Pendleton and Randolph counties. We traveled a very different Route 33 than the missions pioneers like Martin Burkholder and Sam Coffman used near a hundred fifty years ago on their way to hold services in schoolhouses or groves of trees in 1858

Minnie Carr handed out portraits of three of her great-grandfathers who were active early in the work: "Potter" John Heatwole, Bishop Samuel Coffman and Frederick A. Rhodes, all 19<sup>th</sup> century Virginia Mennonite Conference leaders. Minnie recounted "Potter John" Heatwole's now well-known stories about hiding out from Civil War scouts in hollow trees and haystacks and his trek backward in the snow to throw his chasers off the track.

Mary Deputy Brubaker listed interesting facts about early workers Henry Keener, J. Early Suter, Rhine Benner, and Hiram Weaver, and her grandfather Mervin Deputy, all of whom held meetings or gave longer terms of service.

Mary recommended Virginia Crider's book about Rhine Benner's work, entitled *Allegheny Gospel Trails*, published in 1971. A handout listing West Virginia Mennonite Churches from the 1960 yearbook includes 19 churches with a total membership of 336. These Middle District churches were served by bishops Daniel W. Lehman and Lloyd Horst. Lloyd modestly admitted that he believed he had preached in all 19 of these churches except one.

After a rest stop at beautiful Mouth of Seneca, the tour continued on to Randolph County and the site of the mission at Job. Roy Good was able to brief us on his family life with his parents Paul and Eula Good. Later Roy and Kathy raised their family in this same general area while serving the community. Richard and Virginia Weaver told stories of their years in and around Job.

Richard recalled the miracle of how the Lord stopped the rain so that he and the evangelist could make the journey to the home of Lee Bennet, a backslider who wanted to be reunited with the Lord and the church.

Lloyd Horst remembered how Eula Good taught him to eat puffballs. At Harman we

stopped at Riverside Mennonite Church to hear a word from Robert and Lois Burkholder Wenger, who are pastoring this church.

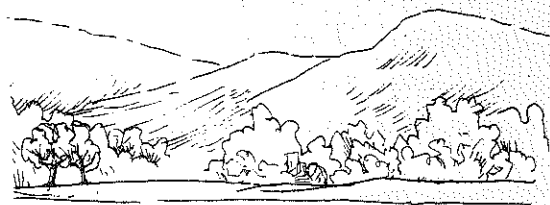
Here Dr. Samuel Bucher and his wife Kathryn described the many years of the clinic at Harman, which included 2000 babies delivered (11 sets of twins, a set of triplets), including a 14-pound baby boy, "ready to be vaccinated.," Dr. Bucher joked.

Joe and Eleanor Mininger told of their life in Harman, having come from Franconia Conference in Pennsylvania in 1958. Glendon led us in prayer for the witness in this community before we left for Canaan Valley where we enjoyed lunch in the resort dining room.

On the return trip near Onego we turned off Route 33 to Roaring Run where Nelson and Florence Driver Heatwole were waiting to greet us. Nelson welcomed us into the Roaring Church where we raised the roof singing "Glory Gates" from the 1911 *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*.

Nelson recounted many stories of the history and life of the Roaring community and the church's witness there. At the Heatwoles' home we were most cordially invited in for delicious refreshments and a relaxing time of fellowship before our return across the mountains.

This was a tour to increase our appreciation for Mennonite brothers and sisters of the past century and a half in Virginia Conference who answered a call to serve their neighbors and extend the Kingdom of Christ. It serves as well to enlarge our vision of the church in West Virginia today.



# West Virginia Missionary Lands in Jail

*On the recent tour to West Virginia, the name Rhine Benner came up a number of times. Not only did he walk over four mountains several times to the Valley, he went through very difficult experiences during World War I. Here, from his own description and from the well-documented senior seminar paper, "The United States vs. Mennonite Ministers" by Joseph L. Lapp, and the Rhine Benner Collection (I-MS-55 in Virginia Conference archives at EMU which include court proceedings) are some of the details why Benner and Bishop L. J. Heatwole were taken to court and fined heavily. Ed.*

By the summer of 1918 the U. S. had been in World War I for over a year. Patriotism had become highly inflamed. Both sides claimed God was on their side. German soldiers wore belt buckles that said "Gott mit Uns" (God with us). Billy Sunday, the famous U. S. evangelist declared, "If you turned hell upside down, it would be stamped 'Made in Germany.'"

On May 16, 1918, the U. S. passed the Espionage Act that anyone who obstructs the sale of war stamps and bonds, or incites insubordination, refusal to serve in the military, or disloyalty may be fined up to \$10,000 or imprisoned for 20 years or both!

False reports circulated around Job, West Virginia where Benner and his family lived, that purchasing war bonds and stamps was compulsory. Benner, not knowing what to do, contacted Bishop L. J. Heatwole here in the Valley. Heatwole then sent a letter quoting Mennonite General Conference, "Do not aid or abet war in any form . . . contribute nothing to a fund used to run the war machine."

Benner says he got on his horse and rode "almost day and night for 4 days" to tell West Virginia Mennonites how to respond in the upcoming mass meetings scheduled to be held in voting precincts. Realizing he couldn't reach them all, he also wrote a number of letters, advising them not to purchase "Liberty bonds and War Savings Stamps."

Because it was falsely reported that attendance was compulsory at these mass meetings, Benner attended but he refused to buy any.

When he was leaving the meeting he overheard one man say, "He ought to be hung," and another one said, "He ought to be shot."

The news about what Mennonites were saying quickly ascended official lines and got to the Department of Justice in Washington. Letters that Benner wrote were retrieved for evidence. Benner stayed close to home, knowing there was "a lot of talk."

In mid-July 1918 the train stopped at Job and a U. S. marshal came to arrest Benner and take him to Elkins. Rhine telegraphed Virginia brethren about his plight. On the train the marshal told Benner he was puzzled about "you Midianites" not wanting to fight, for Midianites in the Bible were "wonderful fighters!" He was soon told these were Mennonites, "the church of the Savior" who took the teachings of Christ literally!

Benner sat in a jail cell for three nights and two days, but was treated better than other prisoners. His bond was set at \$2,000. Virginia brethren, Jacob Wenger, H. B. Keener and Simon Brunk went to Elkins to bail him out, but failed because they hadn't taken cash. A local Mennonite deacon and another man then posted bond to release him.

But passions ran high at Job. Many felt Benner should get the maximum sentence. Trial was set for Sept. 18, 1918 at Martinsburg, WV. Bishop L. J. Heatwole also was indicted and had

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To face the same fate as Benner because he had advised him. Quickly the word spread far and wide. The U. S. Attorney's office saw this as an opportunity to observe the "anti-war activities of the Mennonites" which they had been carefully watching.

Aaron Loucks from Scottdale, PA and other Mennonites, along with "an array of United States Clerks, marshals, bailiffs, messengers, jurymen and a lobby crowded with witnesses, spectators and curiosity seekers were on hand at 2:30 p.m. on Sept. 18 for the trial. Judge Alton Dayton presided. Senator George N. Conrad served as attorney for Benner and Heatwole. Because of the threat of mob violence Benner and others did not lodge in Martinsburg, but with Maryland Mennonites.

District Attorney Stuart W. Walker addressed the court and read the indictment by the Grand Jury of the "violation of the Espionage law" and that the penalty was \$10,000 "with another \$10,000 for both." But he admitted that the circumstances called for "some degree of clemency." He recommended that the defendants plead guilty.

Attorney Conrad then addressed the court, saying he knew these men personally as ministers of the gospel.

"Both represent a denomination whose people have for centuries stood for the principle of non-resistance in time of peace as well as in time of war." Neither man intentionally broke the law so they should have the "fullest degree of clemency."

District Attorney Walker accepted their guilty plea, then said, The "honor and dignity" of the U. S. government "has been violated only

technically." They were following the creed of their church, "a creed which I myself am not able to understand." He thought the "dignity" of the law could be preserved by a fine of \$1,000 each plus costs.

Thus the trial ended. Total costs came to \$2,270.97 and Virginia Mennonites paid most of the fee.

A week later Bishop L. J. Heatwole wrote to Judge Dayton, pleading for clemency. He explained that he had been a minister for 40 years and for 30 years as a weatherman for the government "free of charge." He thought this was a "strange kind of gratitude" from the government for his service as a weather observer! But District Attorney Walker was harsh in his reply. He said it had been a "flagrant violation" of the law and these who broke the law "pretended" to do so "under some religious theory."

*Mennonites across the country underwent many incidents, from a mob cutting off a bishop's hair with horse clippers to having yellow paint thrown at their meetinghouse. Two Hutterite men died from their treatment in prison. A General Conference Mennonite congregation excommunicated the deacon's son who enlisted in the army, fought in Europe and was badly wounded. The local press then virtually "crucified" the congregation for excommunicating a "hero." The editor has seen numerous documents in the National Archives in Washington, D. C. which indicate that the Department of Justice tried unsuccessfully to lay its hands on the "Mennonite Conspiracy."*

*The Mennonite Weekly Review has just begun publishing in serial form the book by Gerlof Homan, AMERICAN MENNONITES AND THE GREAT WAR. Here is much more about Mennonite experiences during that "war to stop all wars," as President Wilson called it. Far too many Christians endorsed this war with great enthusiasm—the war that caused Mennonites and Hutterites a lot of grief in various communities. Everyone drafted had to go to an army camp, so it wasn't easy to take a stand as a conscientious objector. Ed.*

# “TRANSFORMING HISTORY INTO LEGACY”

By Phillip Stone

The conjoint annual meeting of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center enthusiasts brought a good-sized group together at the Bridgewater Church of the Brethren on September 21.

It was a pleasant evening that included a fine dinner, a brief business meeting of the Shenandoah Mennonite Historians and a major speaker, Dr. Phillip Stone, president of Bridgewater College.

After dinner and for a period of time before the speech a quartet of fellows from the now-disbanded “Full Table Singers” (a group of Mennonite young men) provided some excellent music. A number of people joined the group after dinner as we then met in the large sanctuary of the Bridgewater Church of the Brethren.

“Transforming History Into Legacy: What is the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Story?” was the theme of Stone’s address. He noted that doctrinal disputes are no longer as important between the two groups as they once were.

Stone paid tribute to the Anabaptist movement begun in 1525, and noted the early days of this significant minority movement during the Protestant Reformation in Europe. Eventually many Anabaptists became known as Mennonites.

Mennonites paid dearly for their faith as the *Martyrs Mirror* outlines thousands of them dying for their faith as they “protested” against the prevailing state churches of the time in Europe. He compared the beginning nearly two centuries later of the Brethren who broke from the Protestant tradition, not the Catholic.

The Brethren group (known for a long time as “Dunkers”) arose out of the Pietist

Movement, many of them coming from the Reformed Church. It is interesting how these two groups began in diverse ways and came to similar positions of faith. Mennonites in the Netherlands befriended the emerging Brethren whom they saw as fellow believers in adult baptism. Both groups began a major exodus to America in the early decades of the 1700s, first to eastern Pennsylvania, from which some soon migrated to the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Both became strongly rooted in the counties of Rockingham and Augusta.

Stone listed a number of faith and life positions held by the two groups who settled side-by-side and intermingled somewhat freely.

Both groups emphasized living a simple life, adult baptism, and a strong belief in nonresistance (refusal to participate in war). Plain dress was significant to both, thus they presented a “peculiar dress” in contrast to the secular society around them. They became the “quiet people of the land,” good citizens of the community and country. For a long time both saw higher education as a distraction to their way of life.

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They did not move into towns and did not own slaves. For their stand during the Civil War they paid a price. That's when the martyrdom of Brethren Elder John Kline occurred.

Why should we care about heritage? There are three reasons for doing a heritage center:

1. It is local history and genealogy – an interesting background
2. To show respect for the parents of the faith and to preserve the memories of their lives
3. Remembering is a way of commitment and renewal and keeping the covenant of faith.

A living vibrant resource center can be an expression of our faith. It may be "living the Kingdom of God in a new way in a new day."

## News From the Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center

By Al Keim, Interim Director

The VBMHC has had several busy months since I last reported. Our play "Jordan's Stormy Banks," written by Liz Beachy, and performed at the Court Square Theater in Harrisonburg, was a sellout.

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We hope to produce the play next year in a larger setting where more people can see it.

The Burkholder Myers house was moved during the summer to our 10 acre campus on the ridge west of Garbers Church Road. It is now sitting on its new basement foundation and is being closed in for the winter. Within a few weeks we will have a consultant advising us regarding how best to restore it to its 19<sup>th</sup> century ambience.



The Board of Supervisors has just rezoned the Turner's Mill property. As soon as the County Health Department approves our water and sewer plan we will be able to begin work at refurbishing the mill and getting it into working condition again.

We have just launched a fund raising campaign for annual funds for the year 2003. We need about \$100,000 to carry out the ongoing development of our various projects during the next fiscal year.

In January we will begin our capital campaign whose goal is \$600,000. Nearly \$200,000 has already been contributed toward that goal. Brenda Wilberger of Timberville has been hired to lead the fund campaign.

As an organization we have much to be thankful for. The year 2002 has been an eventful one, packed with new developments and the realization of some long-deferred dreams. This is Kingdom work which we believe will bring God glory and revive His people.

## Book Review

By Nate Yoder

Lehman, James O. *Mennonite Tent Revivals: Howard Hammer and Myron Augsburger, 1952-1962*. Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2002, xxxiii+ 318 pp. Upwards of 100 photos and illustrations and comprehensively indexed. \$27.00.

Recent celebrations have honored two major Mennonite evangelists, George R. Brunk II and Myron S. Augsburger. Both moved from community to community with large tents and Augsburger, for some years, did city-wide crusades. Eastern Mennonite Seminary's September 2002 celebration of Myron and Esther Augsburger's ministries provided the setting for the public release of Lehman's history. Both the Augsburger celebration and the earlier Brunk event marked the passage of fifty years.

In his book Lehman briefly sketches the work of the Brunk brothers George and Lawrence as backdrop to the development of Christian Laymen's Evangelistic Association. After the Brunks' 1951 crusade at Orrville, Ohio, local laymen organized themselves to support additional work of this type.

During the 1950s, the CLEA sponsored first Howard Hammer, and then Myron Augsburger. Here for the first time is the brief life story of evangelist Howard Hammer.

It was the CLEA which provided the institutional platform on which Augsburger emerged as an evangelist and spokesperson within and beyond the Mennonite Church.

Lehman's study focuses on the supply side of tent revivalism. His primary subjects are those who committed their effort and money to this means. The book provides an

insider's attention to institutional structure, staff relations, mechanical and logistical detail, geography and chronology.

Lehman has numerous personal ties to those for whom the tent crusades were deeply formative. A native of Kidron, Ohio, which was also home base for CLEA, his previous books include congregational histories of Sonnenberg Mennonite, home of a number who figure in his story, and Pike Mennonite, the church in western Ohio where Myron Augsburger was raised.

His close ties to the Paul Neuenschwander family are evident. Because of that family's involvement in managing the equipment for the crusades, they were important historical sources, and their support in helping to fund the writing of the history was crucial.

One of the ironies of the book has to do with the question of just how significant the tent ministry was. Lehman borrows a metaphor from Paul Toews, a historian of the Mennonite experience in America, who refers to the tent revivals as a sort of "meteorite," implying possibly a fleeting importance.

Lehman writes that that his own work is the account of a "short-lived initiative in mass evangelism" (xiii). The CLEA of which he writes was "one of two evangelistic meteors that streaked across the American sky," the other being that of the Brunks. He does not include the story of Augsburger's years of city-wide crusades after 1962.

Whatever questions such metaphors imply about the enduring importance of these revivals, the testimonies which Lehman records make clear their impact on the lives of individuals and communities. While acknowledging certain reactions against revivalist tactics and scholarly analysis, Lehman presents at face value the account of persons who point to these events as pivotal to their own spiritual development.

By Lehman's own definition, he has written a largely sympathetic narrative account, leaving much of the more critical synthetic analysis to others.

He does report criticisms of the revivals which others raised on both pastoral and theological grounds alongside accounts of laudatory testimonies.

He traces the efforts which persons associated with CLEA made to maintain accountability with the denomination's institutional structures and leaves unanswered the more direct challenge which some raised about the individualistic nature of such ventures.

Lehman provides a narrative of a structure which did play a key role in the mid-century shift many Mennonites made toward broader evangelicalism. His attention to how the CLEA interacted not only with the Brunks but also other more localized evangelistic efforts helps to cast the story in its broader context.

In addition, his commitment to place the collection of print and oral sources in an archive for other researchers is a significant noteworthy contribution to understanding of these mid-century developments.

## **John Ruth, well-known storyteller, to speak at EMHS on December 7 at 7:00 p.m.**

His topic will be: "Lancaster Mennonites and "The Right Fellowship:" The Historic Glory and the Historic Problem.

Everyone is welcome!

It's time to think about renewing membership or becoming a member for 2003. Dues: \$10 per couple, \$6 per single.

Contact James Rush, Membership Person at 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802, or call (540) 434-0792.

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