



Shenandoah Mennonite Historian

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Editors: Harold and Ruth Lehman

A PROGRESS REPORT FROM THE VALLEY BRETHREN-MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTER BOARD

By Cal Redekop

It has been some time since the last VBMHC report, so it will not be a surprise if our members and interested people are wondering whether the organization is still functioning. The fact is, even though there has been apparently no progress, the board has been actively meeting and planning, and some significant developments are beginning to take place which can now be released. Only a few highlights of the many developments can be noted in this article.

One interesting aspect of the board functioning itself is the meeting-place for the monthly meetings—we meet at a different Brethren or Mennonite meeting-house each month. This not only acquaints the board with the setting and nature of the various congregations, but it also expands our awareness of the history of each, thereby enhancing our deliberations and decisions. It has been a most interesting experience. My choice for the most interesting meeting-place is the Flat Rock Church of the Brethren meeting-house in Shenandoah County.

On May 6-9, Norman Kraus, Paul Roth, members of the Program Committee and Mark Riddle traveled to

Indiana to visit Menno-Hof, to meet with that center's resource leaders and share an initial program and site design for them to critique and assist us in our planning. They returned and subsequently have been leading us in envisioning the nature and scope of VBMHC. This committee also presented for adoption the basic goals and activities, (a master plan), for the center. After intense discussion, this proposal was adopted at the June 12 meeting. This Master Plan cleared the "log jam" and is now the baseline for all the subsequent planning and action.

In anticipation of this Master Plan, and as a result of it, the following concrete decisions and actions are now being processed:

- 1) The board has approved the printing of a brochure to be used in publicizing the organization and its activities and gaining membership. The theme of the brochure is: *Journey of Faith—Battles of Conscience*.
- 2) The board has approved the publication of *Southern Claims Commission* documents dealing with the Civil War and Brethren and Mennonite experiences. These records are vital to the narrative of a promotional

video, the writing of a drama, and the story-line for Heritage Centers. They will also be published and sold as a part of the educational activities of VBMHC.

- 3) The board has approved and signed a contract with Burton Buller to produce a 7-8 minute video that will be used in introducing VBMHC and for fund raising purposes, as well as in educating people to the Brethren and Mennonite history of the Valley.
- 4) The board has approved and signed a contract with Liz Beachey to produce a drama that will be used in the center as well as in the valley churches, to tell the story of *Journey of Faith—Battles of Conscience*.
- 5) The board is creating a business plan that will provide the basis for launching a feasibility study to see if there will be financial support for the vision. If both are positive, then the major decision of either moving ahead full speed, or pursuing some modified plan, will need to be made. The decision on a site will be made at this stage. We are not sure how soon we will be at that stage, but it is becoming more hopeful and "foreseeable" all the time.
- 6) The board has authorized the search for an interim program director who will help the board to begin enacting some of the facets of the planned center.
- 7) Finally, VBMHC and the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians are planning a significant joint meeting on Saturday, October 27, at 7 PM at Shady Oaks, Weavers Mennonite Church. Gail Nardi will present a very interesting report on her research on Valley Mennonites. The video produced by Burton Buller will also be shown. There will be a session for open dialogue, questions and debate regarding the plans and vision. You are sincerely invited and strongly urged to attend. Refreshments will be served.

Please contact Cal Redekop, Pres. 433-4930, or Paul Roth, V. Pres. 896-5001, for more information, or suggestions you would like to share.

July 9, 2001

Old Order Tour Planned

Reserve September 8, 2001, 1:30 – 7 p.m. for learning about the history and life of some Mennonite groups southwest of Harrisonburg. Harvey Yoder, who is acquainted with these communities, will be our tour leader.

We will meet at the Weavers Mennonite Church at 1:30 to hear some background of the 1900–01 division within the Mennonite Church and discuss Mennonite architecture. Then we'll travel by bus to the Bank Mennonite Church and cemetery. We'll see the Riverside School, and Old Order School, and we'll visit the Pleasant View Old Order Church and cemetery with Lewis Martin of the Showalter group. At the Mt. Pleasant Old Order Church ("Horning" or Weaverland Conference), we'll hear from minister Elvin Shenk. A delicious meal at Janet Shenk's will conclude our day.

The cost for the day's activities is \$33 for SVMH members and \$36 for non-members. Come learn more about our Mennonite neighbors and invite others to join us.

Fill out the enclosed registration slip and send it along with your check as soon as possible. Direct your mailings and questions to Jim Rush, 780 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Phone 540-434-1792. jjagrush@aol.com

L.J. Heatwole, A Granddaughter's View

The life story of L.J. Heatwole (1852-1932), a bishop in the Middle District of the Virginia Conference is now available. Copies of the book may be purchased for \$18.00 from :

Grace S. Grove
Apt. 143
1501 Virginia Avenue
Harrisonburg, VA 22802

Call 564-3779 to reserve a copy now of:

L.J. Heatwole, A Granddaughter's View
By Grace S. Grove

A Historical Sketch of the Peake Mennonite Church

By Lloyd S. Horst

Beginning and Growth of the Work

Work in the Peake community was begun in the schoolhouse that stood on land near where the new church was later built.

In 1910 S.H. Rhodes and J.S. Martin held a series of meetings in which there were 18 confessions, 12 of whom were received into church membership in the Mennonite Church by water baptism. At that time services were held twice a month.

In 1912 Christian Good held meetings and there were 20 confessions. Sixteen of these were received into church membership. It is reported that one of these, Winfield McDorman, called Bro. Good in the night requesting to be baptized immediately. Bro. Good came that night, gave the necessary instruction, and baptized him in War Branch.

The First Church Building

In November, 1922, the Middle District Ministerial Council elected a committee composed of Joseph W. Coffman, Joseph A. Brunk, and Kent Shank. Joseph W. Coffman reported that the people were elated over the prospects for a new church house. Ad McDorman of the Peake community helped the committee do the solicitation and the sum of \$1300 was either collected or pledged. On May 23, 1923, the Rockingham County School Board sold a parcel of land to the Mennonite Church for \$25.00. An additional eleventh of an acre was purchased from D.A. and Nora Cline for \$10.00.

On June 7, 1923, a meeting of the congregation was held and the name Peake was chosen and the names of the trustees announced. They were L.K. Smith, G.H. Good, and Oscar Rhodes. Much of the labor was donated. J.E. Kurtz had general supervision. William Rhodes, a carpenter, made and donated the pulpit.

By August 19, 1923, the new church house was ready for dedication. Bishop Lewis Shank of Broadway, Virginia preached the dedication sermon. The afternoon service began at 1:00. Sister Laura (Suter)

Wenger talked to the children. Then former Sunday School superintendents Gabriel Good, F.B. Showalter, J.D. Hartman, Daniel Blosser, and J.P. Wenger gave short talks on the topic, "Who is Responsible for the Future Destiny of our Young People?" These were followed by discussions by Joseph W. Coffman on "Lukewarmness," Harry A. Brunk on "Blessings of the Christian Life," and A.W. Hershberger on "Heaven or Hell, Which?" In the evening S.H. Rhodes held a consecration meeting, featuring the dedication of the people. At the time of the dedication there were 38 or 40 members. The congregation decided to have services every Sunday. The next year, 1924, William Jennings held revival meetings, after which 20 persons were baptized and 7 were reinstated.

Problems—Bad and Good

The Peake Church was not without some problems. In 1928 J.S. Martin reported that "the programs at the Presbyterian Church (Mt. Olive) are drawing many away."

Problems related to receiving blacks in the church were acute. Mrs. Shoemaker, who was black, was a member, and there were several applicants who were black. The following year at Communion, the Shoemaker girls were present but they were not served. At the time four of the brethren who were white did not commune. It is not clear why. This problem is hard for us to understand today, but the church needed to comply with the strict state laws on segregation. The old way of dealing with the segregation problem was to instruct, baptize, and have communion separately.

The next major problem surfaced in 1937. J.S. Martin reported that the Church of God Pentecostal "is undoing our work." This problem has continued through the years.

The success at the Peake continued to decline and the questions were asked: "What should be done?" "Should the Peake Church be absorbed by the Mt. Clinton Church?" "Should the work at the Peake be discontinued?" In 1950 the Middle District Council asked the bishop and pastor to make a study and to report. The work at the Peake continued.

One of the faithful members and a worker in the Peake Church was Jacob Smith. He was overtaken by the Pentecostal movement, withdrew his membership from Peake, united with the Pentecostal church, and became a minister. One day soon after Bro. William Jennings had another series of revival meetings at the Peake Church, I met Jake Smith on a street in Harrisonburg and stopped and talked with him a while. In the course of our conversation he said he appreciates preachers who are filled with the Spirit. Then he said Bro. Jennings was filled with the Spirit but Early Suter, one of our Mennonite ministers was not. So I asked him how he determines when one is filled with the Spirit. His answer was that Bro. Jennings did not use his notes when he preached and Early Suter did. Therefore, Early Suter was not filled with the Spirit.

Bro. Jennings was a wonderful evangelist. Before conducting a children's meeting, he would step down from the pulpit, take a Sunday school quarterly from the table, and say, "We're not going to chew gum during the children's meeting." Then he would say, "I'll pass this quarterly around and you put your gum on it. Then I will lay it on the table and you can come and get it after church if you know which gum is yours." The quarterly was pretty well dotted with chewing gum. After the service, a number of children would go and get chewing gum.

Attendance continued to decline at the Peake. The question as to what to do at the Peake came up again. By this time there was a new set of church leaders, and their focus was on Rawley Springs. On November 20, 1963, action was taken by the West Valley District Ministerial Council that the work at the Peake Church be transferred and integrated with the work at Rawley Springs for the indefinite future.

On May 12, 1964, a meeting was held at the Peake Church to discuss whether to continue attending services at Rawley Springs or to have services at the Peake. There were 29 people present—8 adults from the Peake community, 11 children, and 10 workers. After discussion, all those present from the Peake community voted to have services at the Peake. However, when asked how many would be willing to attend there, only a few hands went up.

On November 7, 1964, the West Valley District Ministerial Council took action to close the Peake

Church and encourage the community people to attend at Rawley Springs. This was done for several years.

On July 1, 1967, the question of the feasibility of reopening the work at the Peake was raised. The chairman of the West Valley District Ministerial Council called on Bro. Olin McDorman to speak because of his having been contacted by various individuals who were wondering what was planned for the church there. He reported that not as many Peake people were going to Rawley Springs as had formerly attended services at the Peake. After some discussion, action was taken to begin regular services at the Peake Church in the near future. Not everyone was pleased with this action, so another meeting of the ministerial body was called for July 1, 1967. Bro. Olin McDorman, who had been appointed pastor for this work and who had been close to this work much of his life, reported that some of the community and others outside of the community expressed the desire that the work be reopened. Action was taken to reconfirm the action of July 1, 1967, to reopen the work at the Peake.

On Sunday, October 15, 1967, I preached at the Peake on "A Model Church—What I Expect of this Congregation," using Acts 9:31 as the text. There were 54 persons present. I feel the Peake Church has fulfilled my expectations.

On March 7, 1970, Bro. John Risser reported that Bro. Arlin Snider had been given deacon responsibility at the Peake and was therefore given voting privileges in the West Valley District Ministerial Council.

On July 4, 1970, Bro. Olin McDorman reported to the West Valley District Ministerial Council that attendance had increased at the Peake and that the congregation was feeling the need for more room, especially for Sunday school and summer Bible School. It was proposed that a 14-foot addition with a basement be added to the side of the existing church building. Action was taken to approve the proposed addition. Rest rooms and the porch were added later.

The Sewing Circle

The first meeting of the Peake Sewing Circle was held on June 11, 1973, at 7:30 p.m. at the Harold and Bertha Campbell home at Mt. Clinton. There were 15

women and 3 children present. The officers, chosen by ballot were: Alice Horst, President; Louise Heatwole, Vice President; Bertha Campbell, Manager; Evelyn Batterman, Assistant Manager; Doris Benner, Secretary; Anna Lee Burkholder, Treasurer; Susan Heatwole, Song Leader. Everyone was in favor of "Peake Sewing Circle" for the name.

Workers at the Peake

Sunday School Superintendents—This is not a complete list and includes those who served from 1948 to 1964, They are Earl Arbogast, James McDorman, Joe Bowman, John Andrews, Irvin Burkholder, Simeon Heatwole, Nelson Heatwole, and Nathaniel Keeler.

Ministers—J. Snively Martin, L.H. Jones, E. Paul Good (1942-1946) James Shank (1947-1957), Dewitt Heatwole (1958-1959), Oliver Keener (1960-six months), Olin McDorman (1960-1963, 1967-1971), Chester Heatwole (1971-1988), Lloyd Hartzler (1989-1990), James Goering (1990-), Jay Rohrer(1997-).

Deacons—Paul Hege (1948-?), Branson Conley (1959-1963), Arlin Snider (1970-1977), and Franklin Burkholder (1977-).

Bishops—L.J. Heatwole, Christian Good (1914-1915), S.H. Rhodes (1919-1956), D.W. Lehman (1947-1957), Lloyd S. Horst (1958-1982), Lester Heatwole (1982-1988), and Edwin Campbell (1988-).

-Reprinted from *Life Lines*, January-February 2000.

"History cannot prove the miraculous; if we believe miracles to be impossible, no amount of historical evidence will convince us."

-C.S. Lewis, Miracles

"The real historian is troublesome when we want to romance about 'the good old days.'"

-C.S. Lewis, Miracles

*"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time."*

-Henry Wadsworth Longfellow,
The Psalm of Life

History of Zion Hill Mennonite Church 1925 – 1969

By Patricia Heatwole

The history of Zion Hill dates back to the early summer of 1925. Leonard Jones was pastor at Gospel Hill and he was responsible for getting the work started. Each Sunday morning Charles and Dillie Lam got up bright and early to allow plenty of time to walk across the mountain to the Gospel Hill Church. The Lams walked three miles with eight children. As they would pass Grandma Lam's house she would join them and they would walk together.

Because of the interest of the Lam family, Leonard H. Jones had a conviction to start work on the east side of the mountain for these folks. He talked it over with the Lams and they agreed to have Sunday school at their home to see if the community folks were interested in a church. Early in the summer of 1925 the first services were held on the woodpile across from the Lam home. Sunday school started at 2:00 in the afternoon. There seemed to be a real interest in a church so the services were continued. In the fall Charles Lam turned over a room in his home for the services. The house had only two rooms and with eight children in their family, things were quite crowded. On Sunday everything was cleared out of the room and Charles brought in benches he had made from blocks of wood from the woodpile and laid boards on them.

Charles and Dillie Lam were some of the first members. Paul Burkholder and Ernest Gehman were the first superintendents or workers. Bro. Ernest Gehman was going to school at EMC at the time and had an interest in the work and gave of his time there.

Ernest Gehman was interested in building a church, so he took it to the Ministerial Council of the Middle District. The Council said that if you can get Everett Donovan interested in it, then they would be in favor of building a church. Everett Donovan was not attending services, but much to their delight, he was very much interested. Shortly afterwards Everett, his wife (Ressie), and two daughters (Ruby and Velma) became members.

A building committee was appointed in January 1926, to begin the plans for a church. They were: Everett Donovan, Eli Brunk, Daniel Wenger, Robert Showalter, and D.A. Blosser. They were to find a suitable building site and to be responsible for the erection of the church house.

Here is the action taken from the Quarterly Meeting of Ministers and Deacons, May 29, 1926, at the Weavers Mennonite Church.

L.H. Jones reporting—One series of meetings held at Sparkling Springs. 80 in Sunday school. Prayer meeting is being held. A committee appointed to investigate the advisability of locating a church house near Sparkling Springs gave their report which was as follows. See need of church, think if it is built the cost would be lower than first planned. Most members seem steadfast and many not able to attend other services. The report was accepted and the committee retained for further investigation.

Luther May donated a tract of land near the center of the community for the church. Because of the lay of the land, more land was needed north of the plot so that the church could be built parallel with the hill. John Wampler owned the land north of the May tract and Everett Donovan was to talk to Wampler about obtaining the land. John Wampler was of another denomination and Everett was hesitant about asking him. When Everett got to the Wampler place, John was out in the field plowing and he dreaded even asking him. But he did and John very willingly donated all the land that was needed. The committee canvassed the community and almost everyone was interested and gave a donation. The collections from the group had accumulated and it was used as a beginning for a church building fund.

In the summer of 1927, the building project got under way. As soon as the roof was on, they laid loose boards on the joist and gathered up nail kegs to make benches and services were held there each Sunday afterwards. Two actions taken from the Quarterly Meeting of Ministers and Deacons are as follows:

July 26, 1927—L.H. Jones reporting. After visiting about 25 homes with Bro. Gehman, we were convinced with the need of more work among members to see that they get in vital touch with God and church... Bro.

Gehman reported work at Sparkling Springs encouraging. 16 members from Sparkling Springs at school (EMC). A number of applicants at present.

May 28, 1927—L.J. Jones reporting. Church about completed.

Late in the summer of 1927, the church was dedicated. Bro. J.W. Hess preached the dedication sermon. He used Psalm 127:1 as his text: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain." The church was more than filled for the service.

Opportunity was given for someone to suggest a name for the church. Kitty Donovan said she wanted it to be Zion Hill. Kitty was a member of the Mt. Zion Church of the Brethren. She was dissatisfied and became interested in the work at Zion Hill. She named it Zion (after Mt. Zion church of the Brethren) and Hill (because it was built up against a hill). Charles Lam wanted it to be named Zion Hill. A few people wanted it to be called Laurel Hill. At the beginning the work was referred to as the Sparkling Springs church. New people trying to find the church would go to Sparkling Springs hunting for the church, and so because of the confusion the name was changed to Zion Hill.

The first trustees of the church were Link Ray, Robert Funk, Robert Showalter, John L. Heatwole, and William Wenger. The church started out with five Sunday school classes—the brethren class, sisters class, young people, children, and the cradle roll. Bro. Gehman taught the children's class.

The following are additional minutes taken from the Quarterly Meeting of Ministers and Deacons.

February 29, 1929—The Sunday school report was reported by Melvin Jasper Heatwole and Dan J. Blosser, Jr., and John Garber.

September 19, 1930—A.W. Hershberger reporting. Meetings held at Zion Hill this fall by Lewis Showalter. Covered territory in visitation. Had good interest in meetings. About 20 members and several families moved in.

November 26, 1938—A.W. Hershberger reporting. Had meetings at time of our last quarterly meeting. 18 confessions, 15 received into church, 6 by water baptism, 8 received from other denominations, and 1 repledged.

December 7, 1940—Sunday afternoon cottage meetings are being conducted. A group from EMS is assisting in this work.

Up until 1963 Zion Hill belonged to Middle District. On October 1, 1963, the district officially split into several different districts. Zion Hill then belonged to the Central District. As the church grew, it became necessary to enlarge the facilities. A building committee composed of Dwight Heatwole, M.J. Heatwole, Leonard Lam, and Merlin Harman were responsible for working out the plans and seeing that the work got done. Wilbur Layman and Abe Hershberger were the contractors. The building started on the first of May, 1962. M.J. Heatwole issued the first check May 11, 1962, and the second check December 31, 1962. The total cost was \$2,671.70. Central District contributed \$820.81 and the rest came locally. On December 30, 1962, (Sunday morning) everyone went to the basement for a dedication service. Bro. Glendon Blosser preached the sermon. At the time of the dedication, we were debt-free.

Two classrooms, furnace room, and auditorium were added in the basement. Children's church was started for all under the intermediate age during the Sunday school hour. Merlin Harman took over as children's superintendent, and Dwight Heatwole stayed upstairs with the adults. In 1967 the church again needed room to expand. A building committee composed of Dwight Heatwole (Chairman), Merlin Harman (Treasurer), Boyd Burkholder, and Sidney Lam, was appointed to be responsible for the work.

This time the new addition consisted of restrooms, a new classroom in the basement, a mother's room, youth boy's classroom upstairs, and a new entrance into the church. When Dwight and Fannie Heatwole started coming to Zion Hill in 1956, they took over the youth group and became their leaders. One interesting project that the youth did was on June 10, 1967. The youth walked up and down the roads in the community and picked up beer cans that littered the roads. Then they took their small stake-bed truck (Glendon Blosser's truck) with three-foot racks about

three quarters full to the Lindale Mennonite Church to join the other youth groups who were in the project. The Zion Hill youth tied with the Trissels youth. A few of the other activities the youth have done are softball games, basketball games, Halloween parties, Christmas caroling, Easter caroling, revival meeting caroling, mystery suppers, New Year's watch night services, and outings.

Ministers with pastoral charge at Zion Hill from 1925-1969 include Leonard Jones, A.W. Hershberger, Henry Keener, Harold Eshleman, Hiram Weaver, Paul Good, and Glendon Blosser.

Sunday School superintendents who served at Zion Hill between 1925 and 1969 include Paul Burkholder, Ernest Gehman, Dan J. Blosser, John Garber, Earl Grove, Irvin Burkholder, Menno Brunk, Wayne Driver, Sidney Schaefer, Harold Eshleman, John Harmon, Dwight Heatwole, Merlin Harman, and John Petersheim.

The first wedding in the church was on May 9, 1964, when Sharon Lam and Boyd Burkholder were married. Bro. Glendon Blosser performed the wedding. Afterwards the reception was in the basement. The first funeral was on August 19, 1968. Bro. Glendon preached the sermon in remembrance of Robert (Bob) Smith. The second wedding was on February 19, 1965 when Donna Lam married Fred Shaver. Bro. Glendon also performed her wedding and the reception was in the basement. There have been some other interesting events at Zion Hill. Joseph Heatwole (Dwight Heatwole's father) preached his first sermon here. Henry Keener was pastor here until he died. The last time he preached, he preached sitting down because he was too weak to stand up. Clyde Stutzman and Earl Showalter both preached their last messages here.

--Condensed from a paper written for an American history class, dated May 2, 1969.

"The past inhabits and defines us—and often haunts us. We need to go back to it, to sift it, in order to know who we are and how we became what we are."

-unknown

Martin's Store

By Ruth Burkholder Hartman

I could write a book about my experiences at Martin's Store, a 25-year period. In the late fall of 1945 I heard that Lewis and Cora Martin were planning to open a plain clothing store in Park View. They bought the old building that Mason Kline had used for a garage. They remodeled and added to it in the back. It made an attractive place for business.

Since my desire to work in a store was still strong, I went to see the Martins about the possibility of employment. I was hired and started to work in February of 1946. Renovation on the building was still in progress but bonnet making could begin in the Martin home. What I really wanted to do was to be a salesperson in the store, but in the course of conversation the possibility of me having charge of the sewing and altering department was introduced. I did not really object to the idea as that was also a talent that I had cultivated. I was to make the bonnets and alter men's clothing and convert suits into the standard plain garb.

As time went on we did a volume of business with clerical suits and also with ladies' bonnets. It was not unusual to have 25 suits waiting to be changed to the clerical style. Each suit took the best part of a day. The flow of prominent churchmen and laymen kept business brisk, especially when there was a church-wide meeting at the college like the General Mission Board or General Conference. At one of these meetings we sold and I fitted 50 suits. Some preachers even insisted on having their suit finished by the time they were ready to return home. Those were the days when I went to work at 5:00 a.m., hardly took time for lunch, and worked late in the evening.

-from Memories of a Lifetime, 2000, pp. 16, 17

Membership:

To become an active member of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and to receive future copies of this newsletter, send name and address and year 2002 dues (\$10 per couple, \$6 per single) to:

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